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UNDERWATER ARCHAEO TOURISM. A LIQUID FRONTIER¹

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Abstract:

The sea is the last frontier on our planet. This blue universe of silence, beauty and fragility hides a semi-unknown world in a pure liquid state. With their multiple resources, the oceans are a field of excellence for tourism, particularly with regard to the potential of underwater archaeotourism (archaeological tourism). With tourism being the largest industry in the world, ocean-based archaeotourism has been gaining adherents and has become not only a differentiating product but also a fundamental one for advancing both knowledge and science.

Portugal, with its long Atlantic coast and maritime history, presents itself as an excellent space in which to develop this phenomenon. From the Modern Age and the Portuguese Expansion to the contemporary postcolonial era, there is a whole genealogy of submerged archaeological sites and artefacts that can be integrated into cultural tourism and, as part of this, underwater archaeotourism.

Thus, this reflection will seek to summarise the main products of Portuguese underwater archaeotourism around the world as well as foreign products in Portuguese territorial waters with a view to furthering knowledge that may contribute to promoting and conserving a unique heritage. Concentrated within humankind’s last frontier on Earth, a liquid frontier in different shades of blue and smelling of sea breezes, lies a legacy that can open up new perspectives for research, creativity and sustainability

¹ Editors’ note: Working papers from the V CHAM International Conference are preliminary research drafts intended to stimulate discussion and critical comment. They are not peer-reviewed. Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the contents and for any errors. Conclusions should also be considered provisional. Comments and suggestions are welcome and should be directed to the authors.

in relation to an inheritance that continues to be an essential dimension of the Portuguese identity: the sea!

Keywords

Underwater Archaeotourism – Heritage – Tourism – Travel – Colonial Empire

*Not only did the sea make,
as Portugal will do.
The sea is the difference
that still constitutes our strength.*
Telo 2009

Introduction

Archaeological heritage, as a witness to and heritage of the past, is part of cultural tourism and is on the global political agenda, having been restored and promoted, reconsidering and redimensioning the history of Human Beings within the contemporary global world in which we live. Within this contemporary heritage interest, underwater archaeology has aroused a growing interest on the part of the largest industry in the world, namely tourism. Through a tripartite combination of archaeological heritage, tourism and the sea, a new tourist product has emerged, that of maritime archaeotourism, a segment of cultural tourism based on a historical legacy through which Human Beings may recover a common memory.

Portugal, as a nation with archaeological remains which point to an extremely rich diversity and antiquity, is a central place for this tourist segment, since it has a vast maritime coastline that gave rise to an empire on a global scale that crossed the oceans and then returned to the quays of Europe. Throughout these centuries-long and multi-continental voyages, the storms when sailing towards the unknown produced legacies and remains immersed within the foam of the waves and of time, crystallising into legends and narratives to fill the compendiums of history.

Today, Portugal has one of the largest exclusive zones in Europe of more than 1 700 000 km² – which corresponds to about 18 times its land area – a characteristic that enables the development of oceanic research, providing the deepening of a maritime influenced culture, history and identity. Among such aspects, underwater archaeotourism has been gaining ground, perhaps because it constitutes a time capsule only accessible through transposing the solid frontier of the earth into the liquid frontier of the sea.

Corpus

Consubstantiating this transversal tendency in various States, a set of tools for research, protection, enhancement and promotion of oceanic archaeotourism has emerged and been integrated within the auspices of a common dynamic: The 2001 UNESCO Convention on the *Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage* which sets out the basic principles for safeguarding the heritage sunken in the waters of the blue planet. The tentacular nature of this convention has made it possible to create a set of transnational mechanisms aimed at deepening knowledge about underwater heritage, and conserving and promoting it in a resilient and sustainable manner. This path of international cooperation in 2016 led to the emergence of the UNESCO CHAIR “The Ocean’s Cultural Heritage”² led by CHAM – Centre for the Humanities – which aims to link the various humanities subjects to the history of the oceans and their cultural heritage.

Although this area of research has some shortcomings at the level of theoretical sustainability, mainly due to the lack of studies and statistical data on archaeotourism itself and especially on the activity of diving (closely linked to nautical and underwater archaeology), governments and institutions have been concerned with the matter, as shown by the proliferation of bodies and agents³ and the range of transnational cooperation agreements/protocols concerning maritime heritage. This multiplicity of instruments focuses mainly on the development of legislation, management, supervision

² The Chair is pioneering in the area and several countries have associated themselves with it (Cape Verde, Spain, Colombia and Brazil), as well as various entities from diverse fields. The aim of this network, led by the NOVA University of Lisbon, is to highlight the importance of principles such as the sharing of knowledge, social solidarity and the establishment of bases for the development of best practices in accordance with UNESCO principles. See Online available at: https://issuu.com/cbc_unesco_pt/docs/patrimonio_subaquatico_nov16

³ Namely: Association of Portuguese Archaeologists (AAP), Professional Association of Archaeologists (APA), Portuguese Association for the Promotion of Diving (APDM), European Committee for Standardization (CEN), Centre for Humanities and the respective UNESCO Chair for the Oceans (CHAM), Centre for Research in Human Paleocology (CIPA), National Centre for Nautical and Underwater Archaeology (CNANS), Portuguese Centre for Underwater Activities (CPAS), Division of Nautical and Underwater Archaeology at IGESPAR (DANS), Directorate General for the Maritime Authority (DGAM), Directorate General for National Buildings and Monuments (DGEMN), Regional Directorate for Culture of the Azores (DRCA), Environmental Impact Study (EIA), National Strategy for Sustainable Development (ENDS), Mission Structure for Maritime Affairs (EMAM), Ocean Studies Group (GEO), International Committee on Underwater Heritage (ICUCH), Assembly of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), Institute for the Management of Architectural Heritage (IGESPAR), the Archaeological Institute of Nautical Archaeology (INA), Portuguese Institute of Archaeology (IPA), Portuguese Institute of Architectural Heritage (IPPAR), Portuguese Institute of Cultural Heritage (IPPC), Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning (MAOTDR), World Tourism Organization (WTO), Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI), National Strategic Plan for Tourism (PENT), Coastal Management Plan (POOC), Archaeological Park Management Plan (POPA), Plan for Tourism Planning for the Azores (PROTAA) and Legal Regime for Territorial Management Instruments (RJIGT).

and education with a view to guiding and exploiting this fragile tourism product. On the other hand, the interest of tourist agents, such as tourist entertainment or diving companies, who provide the close connections between tourists and visitable sites, has created the need for incisive monitoring in order to guarantee their preservation as well as to channel part of such income to the actual conservation of underwater archaeotourism. As it is known, the inclusion of tourism in the field of (underwater) archaeology leverages local coastal development, by attracting and fixing new tourist flows, with specific market niches, through the offer of a differentiated tourist product implemented with clear concerns for planning, sustainability and the dissemination of heritage.

As far as the *corpus* of underwater heritage of Portuguese origin in the world is concerned, there are a number of archaeotourism centres that are largely the result of scientific research and the development of techniques and specialities that enable recovery and work on discovered remains.

On this blue planet, underwater archaeology of Portuguese origin took its first steps in the late 1970s (between 1977 and 1980) when the *S. António de Tanna* (sunk in Mombasa in 1697) was the target of excavations under the responsibility of the National Museums of Kenya and the Institute of Nautical Archaeology.

In Portugal, such action would only begin in the 1980s with the intervention works at the site of the wreck of the *S. Pedro de Alcântara*, a Spanish ship which sunk off the coast of Peniche in 1786. In 1995, during the construction of the underground in the *Cais de Sodré* area in Lisbon, the bottom of a large vessel was located in the mud of this riverside area, with Iberian characteristics from the end of the 15th and early 16th centuries. In 1996, an underwater excavation of a boat dating from the second half of the 15th century was started in one of the channels of the Ria de Aveiro. Also in 1996, during the opening of ventilation ducts for the Lisbon underground, in the area of *Praça do Município*, the remains of a vessel, named *Corpo Santo* were found, a few metres away from the *Cais do Sodré* ship. In 1997, underwater archaeological work began in the Tagus estuary, in front of the *S. Julião da Barra* fort, on the ship *Nossa Senhora dos Mártires*, which had been shipwrecked in 1606. The remains from this intervention work formed part of the exhibition of the Portuguese Pavilion at the *Expo'98* World Trade Fair in Lisbon. At the same time, in 1997, in the Azores, in the Bay of Angra do Heroísmo, two ships were discovered during prospecting works for the construction of a marina: *Angra C* and *Angra D* where more than eighty shipwrecks have been recorded since the 15th

century. There are references to five other shipwrecks and an important set of anchors. In 1998, a study began on the occupation of the Algarve coast during the Roman era, which led to the first underwater archaeological campaign of its kind in Portugal. This was a project to locate submerged Roman structures off Quarteira, at a depth of 8 to 10 metres, and this provided a wealth of information on submerged coastal areas.

Some emblematic examples of underwater heritage of Portuguese origin in the world are listed below, which are potential centres of aquatic (both maritime and fluvial) archaeotourism.

1. Abroad

- Namibia. Remains of a 16th century Portuguese ship found in 2008 in Oranjemund, in Namibia. This was during open air diamond prospecting work by the mining firm Halifa Mbako. Besides the remains of the ship, there are two thousand coins minted by the Portuguese and Spanish crowns; 20 tons of copper and tin ingots; bronze alloy cannons; 3 astrolabes and many other navigation compasses, 5 anchors, more than 50 elephant tusks, as well as pewter plates and the remains of candlesticks, swords, human bones and other archaeological artefacts. This would have been characteristic of a ship that was sailing to the East, of Portuguese origin and which was considered as common cultural heritage of the governments of Namibia and Portugal. Portugal did not claim ownership of the remains as a “Flag State”, preferring to safeguard and enhance them at the scientific and cultural level for the common benefit of all Humanity. The 16th-century ship is located in one of the safest places in the world, on the Sperrgebiet frontier, a high security area of Namibian diamond exploration.
- Ireland. Built in Cantabria, the *São Marcos* was the pinnacle of naval technology at the time and one of the jewels of the Portuguese fleet. In 1588, the galleon left Lisbon along with 130 other ships as part of the “*Invincible*” Armada.⁴ On the west coast of Ireland, between Mutton Island and Lurga Point, on a rough passage, the galleon crashed into the island, and broke up. In 2004, an Irish university, in collaboration with various entities, started a

⁴ Squadron assembled by Felipe II of Spain in 1588 to invade England in an attempt to neutralise its influence and reassert Spanish hegemony in the war of the seas.

project to locate the remains of the galleon and amid the tragedy, heroism and legend, the remains of the *São Marcos* are an example of the spirit of the 2001 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage, namely by being an incentive for multilateral agreements between Ireland, Portugal and Spain. It has therefore provided an opportunity for cooperation involving the exchange of information between States, with a view to better managing, preserving and enhancing our common heritage.

2. Portugal

- Between 1985 and 2008, the first evidence of river navigation in the Iberian Peninsula and the Atlantic coastline was obtained. The 6 pirogues from the Lima River (Viana do Castelo) date back (the oldest) to the Iron Age around 2000/2500 years ago and others to medieval times, between the 7th and 12th centuries and were shown in a partnership with the *Subdirección General de Museos Estatales* (Spain). This finding attests to the millennial function of crossing the river in this place, with this place name having been referred to as being part of one of the medieval pilgrimage routes to Santiago de Compostela. These vessels, made from a tree trunk hollowed out for this purpose, have been known in Europe since the Neolithic period and are of great importance to both the Portuguese and international scientific community, especially in terms of underwater archaeology. In 2021, monoxylon pirogues were classified as national interest with the designation of “national treasure”.
- Excavations in the Aveiro Ria have uncovered the remains of two vessels which were transporting ceramics, which places the Ria within the history of Atlantic navigation. In the 16th century, ships from Aveiro were to be found in Newfoundland, Ireland, England, Flanders, Brazil and the Atlantic Islands, as well as in the north of Spain. This archaeological evidence of maritime connections during the late medieval and early modern period is material evidence of Aveiro’s involvement in mercantile flows. In fact, it is known that this region has had contact with other peoples since ancient times, and boats have always played a predominant role in this. Due to the physical conditions of the Ria, with low bottoms and abundant channels, the vessels were adapted and showed various “architectural signatures” from the Ibero-

Atlantic tradition, characteristic of ships constructed in Portugal and Spain in the 15th to 17th centuries. The cargo of the vessels was red and black earthenware manufactured in the Aveiro/Ovar region, where it is possible to find practically all types used in daily life at the time: bowls, plates, jugs, pots, jars, pitchers, pans, vases, money boxes and funnels.

- From the 16th to the 20th century, at least 14 shipwrecks have been recorded in the waters surrounding the fortress of S. Julião da Barra, which has protected the entrance to the port of Lisbon for 500 years. Target of numerous lootings, this important archaeological site off the Portuguese coast incorporates a vast set of remains from different time periods. These shipwrecks at the entrance of the Tagus bar with the Atlantic were along the navigation route so that the mouth of the river was a stage for intense nautical activity which, due to the said geographical characteristics, resulted in numerous shipwrecks, such that this is particularly important in terms of Portuguese underwater archaeology.

To give an example:

- a) The ship *Nossa Senhora dos Mártires* (which sunk at the site in 1606, as mentioned above), at the end of a voyage on the India Route. The remains of the vessel were identified in 1994 and retrieved in 1996 with a view to being displayed in the Portuguese Pavilion at the Expo'98 World Trade Fair, with the work extending until 2001;
- b) The clipper *Thermopylae*, constructed by Walter Hood & Co in Scotland in 1868, was considered the fastest in the world and rivalled the famous *Cutty Sark* especially in the *Tea Route race*. For the clippers the tea route would come to an end with the opening of the Suez Canal and competition from steamships, which from the 1880s onwards would dominate this trade. The *Thermopylae* was recommissioned to transport Australian wools and after many missions under the British flag, was *acquired* by Portugal in 1896 to be transformed into a Ship for the Royal Navy School. Renamed the *Pedro Nunes*, it was anchored in the Tagus, serving as a cargo pier for coal, until it was sunk on purpose using torpedoes on 13 October 1907, on Navy Day, in front of Cascais, during a naval demonstration held for the benefit of King Carlos. The submerged remains were formally identified almost a century after the sinking and

shortly afterwards were included in the heritage fabric of the region. The technical, physical and cultural parameters associated with this wreck intersect with the history of oceanography and fisheries management in Portugal as well as with the Tagus estuary region. The plan is to create an underwater route that would allow the boat to be observed in the place that became its resting home.

- c) The salvage ship *Patrão Joaquim Lopes*, which the Portuguese government ordered from England, was, from 1859 onwards, intended to rescue ships in distress in the entrance to the port of Lisbon and save those which had been shipwrecked. In 1936, it was rammed by a barge, and was shipwrecked alongside Bugio.
- d) The trawler *Santa Mafalda*, built in 1947 in the shipyards of Livorno, Italy was delivered to the Aveiro Fishing Company (EPA) and was intended for cod fishing. It would sink in 1966 due to a rudder malfunction.

From this sample it is possible to get an idea of the richness and the challenge that constitutes this submerged universe and its touristic potential. However, in addition to this nucleus, there are other ships that, although not Portuguese, are located in national waters, such as:

- In 1759, two ships from the French fleet – the *L'Ocean* and the *Redoutable* – ran aground off Salema and Zavial, between Lagos and Sagres. Various everyday objects and artillery were recovered from the campaigns carried out in the 1980s and 1990s.
- In Santa Maria (Faro), the Odyssey Marine Exploration Company (USA) has carried out unauthorised work to recover the Spanish frigate *Nuestra Señora de las Mercedes*, sunk in 1804 during a battle with a British squadron. 249 people lost their lives along with a cargo of gold, silver, spices, personal fortunes and jewellery, among other items. Some 600,000 pieces have already been recovered. The courts forced the company to return the pieces to Spain, and Portugal was consulted on the legal framework given this patrimony was located within its waters.
- In 1917, the German submarine U-35 sank 2 Norwegian steamers, 1 Danish steamer and 1 Italian sailing boat off the coast of Sagres. In 2015 the wreckage was identified.

- The Azores possess a unique underwater archaeological record on an international scale due to the fact that, for centuries, the natural conditions for sailing in the Atlantic did not enable a direct route to be followed. This is why its islands (particularly Terceira and its port at Angra) provided a support platform for ocean navigation undertaken by Portuguese ships from India, Brazil and Africa, and Spanish ships from the West Indies. For this reason, its waters are rich in the wrecks of vessels between the 16th and 20th centuries, constituting one of the locations worldwide with the greatest underwater archaeological potential, with the number and type of shipwrecks around 800 (Aleixo 2010, 24).
- War Graves. Underwater cultural heritage from the world wars. Despite Portugal's limited involvement in the two global conflicts of the 20th century, in the Great War the country lost about 120 ships and approximately 200 elements, spread mainly over the Western Atlantic and the Mediterranean. An example is the minesweeper *Roberto Ivens*, sunk in 1917 near Lisbon after activating a mine launched by a German imperial submarine. Most of the crew perished along with the ship.

From the examples above it can be seen that in the 1990s at the same time as significant scientific and archaeological remains began to appear in Portugal, there was a profound change of options in the area of underwater archaeological heritage, motivated by the organisation of the Expo'98 World Trade Fair. Under the theme of "The Oceans: a heritage for the future", the transnational and pluricontinental event showed the importance of this legacy, helping to boost, raise awareness, preserve, study, publicise and valorise a heritage that reinforces a sense of identity and collective memory, in reconstructing and revealing a history that everyone must safeguard.

In addition, in recent years a particular type of underwater archaeotourism has taken on importance, which is a new segment in terms of a tourism product and which is characterized by the (re)creation of underwater areas of attraction through the placement of submerged pieces purposely for the enjoyment of tourists in a kind of underwater art museum. This is the case with the:

- Underwater Art Museum, Mexico, the first of its kind (2010);

- Underwater Museum of the Canary Islands, Spain, the first of its kind in Europe (2017);
- The most recent ones: Underwater Museum in Cannes (France) and that off the island of Alonissos, in the Aegean Sea (Greece), both of which will open in summer 2021. Indeed, the latter forms part of the largest protected marine area in Europe.

Due to problems related to the looting of archaeological artefacts, many of these underwater antiquities were only accessible to archaeologists and visitors with special permission. Now, recreational divers accompanied by certified instructors can dive into the waters of these “Underwater Museums”, thereby enjoying a panoramic view of wrecks or inspiring artistic creations that offer true time travel.

Conclusion

Antiques or contemporary artistic creation are not the only treasures preserved in this type of tourism as there is also the protection afforded to rare or endangered terrestrial and marine species. What this type of cultural tourism has to offer has to be undertaken in a sustainable manner and preserved in order to protect the antiquities and the environment, so that underwater heritage can provide new revenues for local communities without placing their underwater legacy at risk. Hence the need for national directives to enter into dialogue with international directives, thereby enabling the expression of a transnational and multi-continental policy for the seas of our blue planet.

In short, underwater archaeological heritage forms an integral part of the cultural heritage of humanity and can be an indisputable resource as a significant element in the history, identity and culture of a people. In the interculturality of which today’s world is constituted, there is a pressing need to define a policy to include and enhance this underwater archaeological heritage in order to protect, promote and safeguard its existence.

In the paths of contemporaneity, cultural tourism presents itself as a means through which to access a heritage anchored in a past which can better locate us within the present, and in designing the future, that is, to investigate in order to recognise, and to safeguard in order to experience. Used as a local, national and multi-continental development strategy with full impact on global mobility, the sea – the liquid state frontier – has in underwater archaeotourism a dynamic agent for the promotion of tourism, giving value to a heritage legacy of considerable significance. A valuable route for the study,

knowledge and memory of a prolific past, underwater archaeotourism provides access to a unique collection of underwater archaeology, including archaeological collections deposited in various institutions, such as the Municipal Museum of Underwater Life and Submersed History in Lisbon.

Portugal, as a nation looking out towards the sea and, consequently, towards the future, can present itself as the stage *par excellence* for taking advantage of a resource with a potential not only for enjoyment and leisure (tourism) but also for knowledge and for stimulating research into a heritage that interests everyone. This is because the sea remains an essential aspect of Portugueseness!

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