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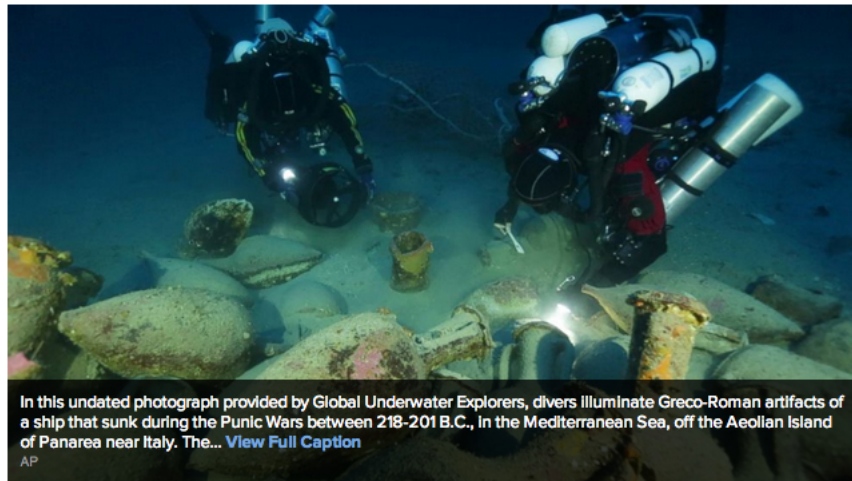
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Ancient Shipwreck Discovered Near Aeolian Islands

GAINESVILLE, Fla. — Oct 27, 2014, 2:38 PM ET

By JASON DEAREN Associated Press



In this undated photograph provided by Global Underwater Explorers, divers illuminate Greco-Roman artifacts of a ship that sank during the Punic Wars between 218-201 B.C., in the Mediterranean Sea, off the Aeolian Island of Panarea near Italy. The... [View Full Caption](#)

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The divers descended 410 feet into dark Mediterranean waters off Italy, their lights revealing the skeleton of a ship that sank thousands of years ago when Rome was a world power. A sea-crusted anchor rested on a rock. The ship's cargo lay scattered amid piles of terra cotta jars, called amphora.

Highly trained technical divers with a Florida-based group called Global Underwater Explorers — GUE for short — are helping Italian researchers to unlock an ancient shipwreck thought to date to the second Punic Wars between Rome and Carthage. Able to descend hundreds of feet further than most divers, they aid the archaeologists by swimming about the wreck fetching artifacts — as no robotic submersible can.

On this dive, they swam past the large amphora used to carry wine, olive oil and other cargo on Mediterranean trade routes centuries ago — feeling as if they were transported to another time.

"It felt very much like a ghost ship awaiting the boarding of ancient mariners," said Jarrod Jablonski, one of the divers with the exploration group based in the Florida community of High Springs.

Many of these divers honed their deep-water diving abilities in Florida's labyrinths of underwater caves. Now GUE provides the technical divers needed to access cargo and other artifacts from a ship thought to have sailed around 218-210 B.C. — when Rome and Carthage were fighting for naval superiority in the Mediterranean.

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Called the Panarea III, the ship was discovered off the Aeolian island of Panarea in 2010 by American researchers using sonar and a remotely operated submersible in waters about 40 miles north of Sicily.

Archaeologists said the ship is a wooden vessel about 50 feet long that could have hit rough seas and broken up on rocks before plunging to the sea bottom — possibly a wealthy merchant's cargo ship or one used to supply the Roman military.

"This shipwreck is a very important occasion to understand more about daily life on the ancient ship as well as the real dynamics of ancient trade," said Sebastiano Tusa, an Italian archaeologist who is studying the site. "Of course, there are other similar shipwrecks that can offer similar study cases. But this has the peculiarity to be in a very good preservation condition."

The ship was so far underwater that it has been safe for centuries from looters and entanglement in fishing gear.

As Jablonski and seven other GUE divers explored the wreck in September, Italian archaeologists shadowed them in a small submarine, shining a bright light on the trove of Greco-Roman artifacts. As researchers in the sub pointed to objects, the divers retrieved them, swimming to the sub's window for viewing. A thumbs-up, and the items were attached to balloons and sent to the surface.

At such depths, diving is tricky work.



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GUE divers use specially prepared mixes of gases, which eliminate the problem of diving so deep. But the gases must be balanced carefully at each depth, or they could die or become extremely sick.

The divers must slowly descend. They can only work for about 30 minutes before making a 4-to-5 hour ascent to protect against illness.

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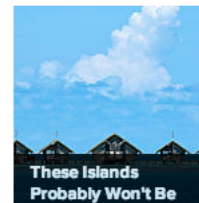
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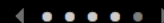
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