

Seafaring and Shipwrecks of the Baltic Sea

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The Baltic Sea is one of the best places in the world for shipwreck archaeology. A reason for this is that most of the organisms, including the "shipworm" *Terredo Navalis*, which normally destroys the wood in the oceans is missing in the brackish cold water of the Baltic.

Another contributing factor is the topography, especially along the coast of Sweden and Finland. The vast archipelagos here are difficult to navigate in with lot of small islands and reefs. Between the islands, the depth is often relatively large, and down there at 20, 30 or 50 meters, it is calm, dark and cold. At the bottom, time seems to stand almost still and ship hulls may be preserved intact for hundreds of years with the masts still standing. The absence of significant tide also mean that erosion by flowing water, which often breaks down and wears on shipwrecks, not occur in the Baltic Sea.

There is also yet another reason for the good opportunities for maritime archaeological studies in the Baltic Sea. This small northly inland sea has during long time been heavily trafficked, and the numbers of shipwrecks are because of that many. Intensive communication and more or less peaceful maritime contacts can be traced back to prehistoric times. Seafaring is a central part of the region and the Baltic countries history. The Baltic Sea is in that respect, a northern Mediterranean.

The paper will give a overview of Baltic maritime archaeology research but will also show some results from some ongoing research projects and discus shipwrecks general potential for historical research concerning mans use of the sea.

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