

Honor Frost Foundation

Supporting Maritime Archaeology in the Eastern Mediterranean

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Trinacria Soundings Project

TSP| REPORT

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LONDON - MARSALA - ROME - BOSTON - HFF 2013



1. Introduction

The Trinacria Soundings Project (TSP) is an historiographical initiative to collect, study, preserve, promote and disseminate unique and original documents and testimonies from participants of early underwater archaeology research in Sicily. This report presents the results of the first phase of research (2013–2014) that has focused on Honor Frost's pioneering work at the seminal Punic ship excavation at Marsala in the 1970s.

Archival research was conducted within personal and institutional collections, and first-hand testimonies from participants and contributors of the Punic ship project were recorded to create audiovisual records of local oral histories. Many of these resources have remained until now comparatively difficult to access and regrettably considered less worthy of attention by local academic institutions. The emerging picture illustrates the socio-cultural, technical and scientific contexts within which Frost was able to carry out her experimental investigations of the unique military vessel. It also sheds light on the often challenging and complex political environment within which she worked and the vicissitudes of carrying her project to completion.



Fig. 1 – Contact sheet images of the 1972 field season at the Punic shipwreck site. Honor Frost Archives (London)

2. Historical background

Sicily was among the first regions to attract interest from archaeologists keen to probe the underwater realms for testimonies of the ancient maritime past. Located at the trans-regional crossroads of the Mediterranean basin, the island has been involved in long-distance maritime exchanges since prehistoric times. Indeed, the Punic vessel excavated by Frost off the coast of Marsala over forty years ago, acknowledged as among the most significant sites of the maritime archaeological world, stands witness to the island's millennial connection to the cultures of the Levant. One of the first Mediterranean efforts to establish underwater archaeological research centers occurred in Sicily, in 1958, when Pier Nicola Gargallo set up the Istituto Mediterraneo Internazionale di Archeologia Subacquea at Siracusa, just one year after Nino Lamboglia established the Centro Sperimentale di Archeologia Subacquea at the Istituto di Studi Liguri in the north of Italy. Over subsequent decades, in collaboration with Gerhard Kapitän and others including Peter Throckmorton, a series of important surveys and excavations took place along the Sicilian littorals.

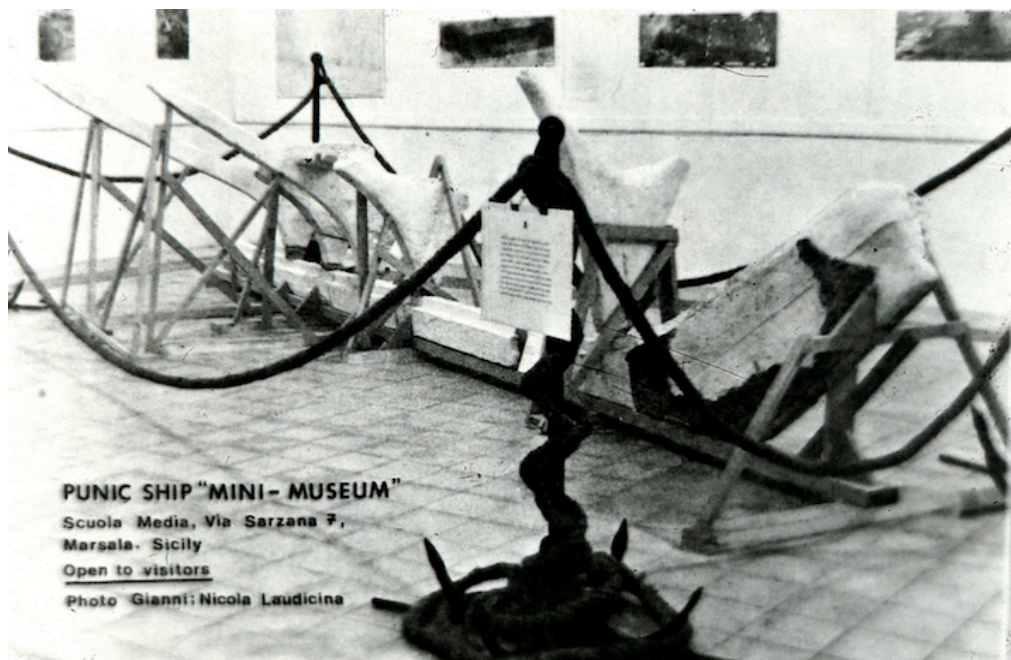


Fig. 2 Punic ship mini-museum set up by Honor Frost at a local middle school in Marsala. Pietro Alagna Archives (Marsala)

The TSP project showcases the work of the first generation of researchers who, equipped with aqualungs and adapting oceanographic tools, began to conduct systematic submarine archaeological investigations in the Mediterranean region over half a century ago. Within this fervent context Honor Frost first arrived in Sicily on invitation of Kapitän in 1969. The following year the British School of Rome and the local Soprintendenza Archeologica appointed her to direct the excavation of the Punic ship remains at Marsala, discovered at the end of her first survey field season.



Fig. 3 The *carretto* used to transport timbers of the Punic ship to conservation vats. Pietro Alagna Archives (Marsala)

3. Project Dates

The archival fieldwork and oral history collections were carried out in Marsala, Sicily (Fall 2012 and early Spring 2013), London and Rome (early Spring 2013), and Cambridge, MA, USA (Spring 2013). The project was developed in six phases:

Phase 1 – Feasibility study (October 2012)

- Preliminary review of Dr Alagna's uncatalogued archives at Marsala.

Phase 2 – *Pre-catalog of Alagna collection and Marsala resources* (October 2012 & February/March 2013)

- Video interviews with Dr. Romano Pietro Alagna
- Video interviews with fieldworkers and Marsala area participants on Punic ship project and their families
- Documentation of locations of fieldwork venues and project's home base



Fig. 4 Honor Frost and her co-workers during wood conservation processing in the lab. Honor Frost Archives (London)

Phase 3 – *Research and study of collected materials*

- Cataloguing and archiving of Alagna collection

Phase 4 – *Cross-referencing with related archives* (Winter 2012/13–present)

- Honor Frost Archives, London, U.K. (February–March 2013)
- H. E. Edgerton Collection, MIT Cambridge MA, USA (Winter 2012/13)
- Michael Katzev archives, Maine, USA (materials related to Punic ship project: consulted and delivered to HFF (London), February 2013)

- Harry Tzalas archives, Piraeus, Greece (materials related to Punic ship project: consulted at HFF (London), February–March, 2013)
- British School at Rome institutional archives, Rome, Italy (March 2013)

Phase 5 – *Publication and Dissemination*

- Day seminar at Cantine Pellegrino, Marsala (March 9, 2013)
- Lectures and conference publications (see list below, 2013)
- Monograph (bilingual English and Italian) including selected archival documents (pending)
- Dedicated bilingual website for public dissemination (pending)

Phase 6 – *Future project plans*

- Punic ship timber plaster–cast moulds: study and exhibition
- Documentary film for project and exhibit promotion



Fig. 5 The principal shipwright, Vito Bonanno, nicknamed “il Vichingo” by Honor Frost. Honor Frost Archives (London)

4. Research questions

The Trinacria Soundings Project aims

- to contribute a focused and analytical review of the early development of maritime archaeology in Sicily through personal testimonies and collections which have remained until now comparatively difficult to access;
- to document the early phase of maritime archaeology, both through its socio-cultural as well as its technical history;
- to provide the means by which to better understand the discipline's trajectory from a merely antiquarian approach to its current status as a well-established, scientific field of research;
- to provide insights into early experimental methods of recording and study that later proved to be important points of reference for future standards of research.



Fig. 6 Honor Frost with Harold E. Edgerton, conducting sonar surveys of the Marsala shipwreck site in 1971. Honor Frost Archives (London)

5. Methodology

The TSP's contribution to the history of archaeology combines oral history as well as archival study methods, and documents a unique confluence of local expertise and international collaborations. A digital database of documents (text and visual) is being completed, supplemented by audiovisual recordings of the personal interviews listed below. Archive correspondence reviews and interviews have been conducted in French, English and Italian.

An estimated 10,000 unpublished documents, including official and private letters, photographs and drawings, personal notes and correspondence, were inspected, and are in the process of being analysed, scanned and systematised into a preliminary database. About a dozen of Frost's collaborators, from shipwrights and workers to friends and scholars involved in the fieldwork and conservation phases of the Punic ship project over four decades ago, were contacted and interviewed using digital audiovisual equipment.

Archival research sites consulted:

- **Alagna archives** (Marsala): personal collection of Frost's lifelong friend, Romano Pietro Alagna of Marsala, who was Frost's legal executor in Sicily and who ensured the survival and success of the Punic Ship Project at many levels. Pietro Alagna is also responsible for the design of one-to-one plaster-cast moulds of the original Punic ship timbers, which have also been made available for study.
- **British School at Rome:** containing official and casual correspondence between the BSR, the Sicilian Soprintendenza archeologica, Frost and other contributing researchers, as well as personal letters.
- **Harold E. Edgerton Collection at M.I.T.** (Cambridge, MA, USA): in relation to experimental archaeological sonar surveying experiments conducted in the Marsala lagoon and coastal area in 1971.

- **Michael Katzev archives** (Maine, USA): Katzev's contributions as consultant on the recording, conservation and reconstruction phases of the Punic ship remains for museum display, based on his experience as director of the contemporaneous Kyrenia ship project. Katzev's materials related to the Punic ship project were consulted and subsequently brought to the HFF London office.



Fig. 7 Stefano Passalacqua with the experimental underwater recording equipment designed by HF. Honor Frost Archives (London)

List of local collaborators interviewed:

Shipwreck fieldwork & project participants:

- Pietro Alagna (project legal executor; Cantine Pellegrino)
- Vito Bonanno (master shipwright; so-called "il Vichingo" and his wife Maria)
- Guglielmo Bonini (son of Diego, trawler captain)
- Angelo Gerardi (cousin of Diego & trawler machinist)
- Rossella Giglio (archaeologist, former director Museo della Nave Punica)
- Nicolò Laudicina (photographer)
- Stefano Passalacqua (factotum)

Other people in project community:

- Paola Alagna (daughter of Pietro; Cantine Pellegrino, Marsala)
- Diana Lipari (widow of Edoardo Lipari, Mozia bailiff/administrator)
- Gioacchino Aldo Ruggieri (Marsala Lions Club president)
- Ann Natanson (U.K. journalist, TIME-LIFE, Rome)
- Christopher Smith (director, British School at Rome)

6. Outreach

A seminar was held on March 9, 2013, kindly hosted by Dott. Pietro Alagna at the Cantine Pellegrino winery of Marsala, gathering former project participants and family members to share stories, recollections and mementoes from the Punic ship project days. A guided visit to the plaster-cast timber moulds, currently stored at the Cantine Pellegrino, was also organized for the group.



Fig. 8 Guglielmo Bonini and Angelo Gerardi at seminar held on March 9, 2013, at Cantine Pellegrino, Marsala.

7. Publicity and dissemination

To date the TSP project and Honor Frost's pioneering work in Sicily have been publicised and disseminated in lectures and publications as follows:

Lectures:

- EFCB, "Honor Frost e il suo progetto di ricerca in Sicilia." *Sicilia Britannica* seminar series (Associazione FareStoria). Sala Conferenze Banca Intesa San Paolo – Piazza Castelnuovo, Palermo, July 6, 2013.
- EFCB, "Il ruolo di Siracusa nella storia dell'archeologia sottomarina e della Convenzione UNESCO sulla protezione del patrimonio culturale", al Convegno "Protezione del Patrimonio Culturale Sottomarino. La Convenzione UNESCO del 2001 a cinque anni dalla sua entrata in vigore: stato dell'arte, prospettive giuridiche e tecnico-scientifiche". Area Marina Protetta del Plemmirio, Syracuse, November 18, 2013.
- EFCB, "Archeologia Sottomarina e Ricerca Scientifica: il contributo delle DONNE". Symposium on women and the sea. Area Marina Protetta del Plemmirio, Syracuse, November 18, 2013.

Publication:

- Castagnino Berlinghieri, E.F., 2013, "La Convenzione UNESCO e il ruolo-chiave di Siracusa tra ricerca e tutela del patrimonio archeologico sottomarino: il passato come risorsa per un futuro sostenibile". In *Archaeologia Maritima Mediterranea*, 9.2012: 139–156 (with English synopsis, including a photograph published courtesy of the HFF).

Conclusion and Future Work

What undoubtedly emerges from this first phase of the TSP is that Frost's excavation of the Punic ships off Marsala in the early 1970s challenged a number of institutional constraints and cultural biases. It was a time of experimentation and of considerable debate within the community of underwater archaeologists, with keen anxieties about issues of professionalization and disciplinary standards. Not all voices in these debates have been given adequate space for consideration. Frost, as an independent, free-lance scholar working outside of institutional boundaries, and as a

foreign woman operating within a decidedly patriarchal environment at the time, faced specific challenges that deserve further investigation, study and discussion.

This past year's fieldwork offered a special opportunity for historiographical analysis, and the opportunity to create digital records of documents and personal testimonies for greater dissemination. More importantly, it forms a foundation for further research to address several major questions. Our research to date underscores how Frost's Punic ship excavation project, which constitutes one of the most significant milestones of underwater archaeology in the Mediterranean region, continues to provide fertile resources for study and analysis.

The true maturity of a discipline is revealed by the existence of a critical historiography about its origins and evolution. Maritime archaeology can surely benefit from further self-reflection in this realm.



Fig. 9 The authors with Pietro Alagna. (Background: plaster-cast moulds of Punic ship timbers and site plan.)

Acknowledgements

We are delighted to thank and acknowledge the Honor Frost Foundation and its trustees, whose research grant funding enabled this project. We would also like to thank Susan Womer Katzev for giving us access to her late husband's archives and for entrusting us to deliver a portion of them safely to the HFF London offices. The MIT Institute Archives and Special Collections kindly gave permission to consult the H.E. Edgerton Collections, in Cambridge, MA (USA), as did the British School at Rome (Italy).