Roberto Gallardo: Patrimonio Cultural Marítimo de El Salvador. Registro de Pecios (The Maritime Cultural Heritage of El Salvador. Shipwreck Recording)

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This publication gathers ten of the eleven most important findings so far identified within the development of the project “Record and Documentation of the Maritime Heritage in El Salvador”.¹ This project, resulting from the cooperation between UNESCO and several national entities, is framed within a context in which underwater archaeology in the country, and in most Central America, requires the strengthening of protection policies as well as the implementation of initiatives to consolidate the real scientific value of archaeological remains in maritime contexts, as opposed to the economic value and current related practices that threaten their integrity and safeguarding. The publication aims to work as a tool for the dissemination of maritime archaeological heritage in El Salvador and contribute to the enhancement of its study and protection.

In the first part, the author recognizes and discusses the archaeological, historical and cultural potential of the Salvadorian coast, mostly to point out its close relationship with the peoples in the territory from prehispanic times to today, expressed either as a source of resources through fishing or as a place for trading and transport relationships, with a particular emphasis on the period between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Navigation during this period is characterized by a transition from sailing ships to steam ships, and from the latter to diesel-powered boats; the shipwrecks documented and presented in this publication are an evidence of this episode in history.

After introducing the main aspects for understanding the current situation of underwater archaeology in El Salvador, the author dedicates a chapter to describing the ten shipwrecks studied within the project: the sail boats *Kirkdale* and *Burcklay Castel*, the steamers *SS Colón*, *SS Columbus*, *Cheribon*, *Douglas*, *SS San Blas*, *PSJ-1* and *SS Honduras*, and the

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diesel-powered boat *Andén*. All of them wrecked along the Salvadorian coast due either to running aground on reefs or ashore on sandbanks from where they could not be towed. Each chapter is divided in subsections in which historical information on the ships found is provided as well as related data on the current conditions of the shipwreck sites, the research advances on their identification and their record and documentation. Yet, the structure for the presentation of data differs from chapter to chapter to fit the available information in each particular case. This, added to the fact that the scope or depth of investigation for each shipwreck is different, gives the reader the feeling of incomplete data when not so many details are offered.

One of the most outstanding sections in this book comes from the historical research on the recorded shipwrecks; the extensive data-collection from different sources is clearly evident, particularly the vast number of press releases from the period. This is how the functions, routes and most important events for some of these ships can be reconstructed. However, it is important to point out that these fragments might be suitable for those more interested in the study of navigation dynamics from the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. On the other hand, this cannot be considered a constant in all chapters; the historical data for some of the shipwrecks are sometimes insufficient, which reveals that the recording and documentation are still in process.

One more aspect to highlight is the author's narrative as a participant in the many visits to the wreck sites within the framework of the recording and documentation project. In most cases, the ships' remains were found on the coastline, which makes them visible during low tides. According to the author, oral traditions have been fundamental for the development of this research; he strongly emphasizes that outreach to the neighboring populations has been paramount for both the remains' locations and the local values appropriation assessment through the identification of currently developing dynamics.

Finally, this book is a good example of what is being done in El Salvador so as to evaluate and safeguard the material remains of the history of navigation in Salvadorian territory. The actions taken so far, as well as those projected and recommended for the future, demonstrate the interest from the scientific community in strengthening the technical, legal, academic and professional skills to carry out the study of and research into the maritime archaeological heritage of El Salvador.

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