

Ancient Middle Eastern Boat Replica Scanned to Preserve it for Future Generations

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Birmingham archaeologists will arrive in Oman this week to carry out the laser scanning of a replica of an ancient Arab Dhow ship that was used in trading between the Gulf and China in the 9th Century.

The original boat was probably built on the Arabian peninsula and sailed through the Gulf and Indian Ocean via Indonesia on its way to China. It sank in the Gelasa Strait carrying a cargo of Tang Dynasty pottery and was found by fisherman in 1998. It is likely, on route, that it was trading in commodities such as ceramics and silks.

The Belitung Wreck is the oldest known shipwreck in Southeast Asian waters and the replica, called the Jewel of Muscat, represents an important part of the economic and social history of the area. The archaeological team from Birmingham will laser scan the replica before it sets sail in early 2010 on its journey from Oman, where it was built, to Singapore, where it will become a museum piece. It will also be scanned on its arrival at its destination so that experts can ascertain the exact deformation of the hull during its journey.

The scans will also provide valuable information for 3D models and the printing of 3D scale replicas so that the ship can be used as an educational tool, making it accessible to people who are unable to see the real thing.

Richard Cuttler from the University's Institute of Antiquity and Archaeology says, 'By laser scanning the boat we have the opportunity to learn what happened to these ancient boats during their journey through the Indian Ocean and beyond, what their strengths and weaknesses were, and hopefully something about the potential lifespan of the vessel.'

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For further media information

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