

Maritime Archaeology in Sri Lanka: Twenty five years old and a new beginning

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Introductory note

This paper is presented in two parts, each being written by different authors. Part 1 is an account by one who introduced maritime archaeology to Sri Lanka, who retired from active work in 2004. Part 2, by one of the new generation of maritime archaeologists takes the narrative forward from 2004 to the present. The views expressed in each part are those of the writer concerned and the views of one do not reflect those of the other.

PART: 1 From the beginnings to 2004

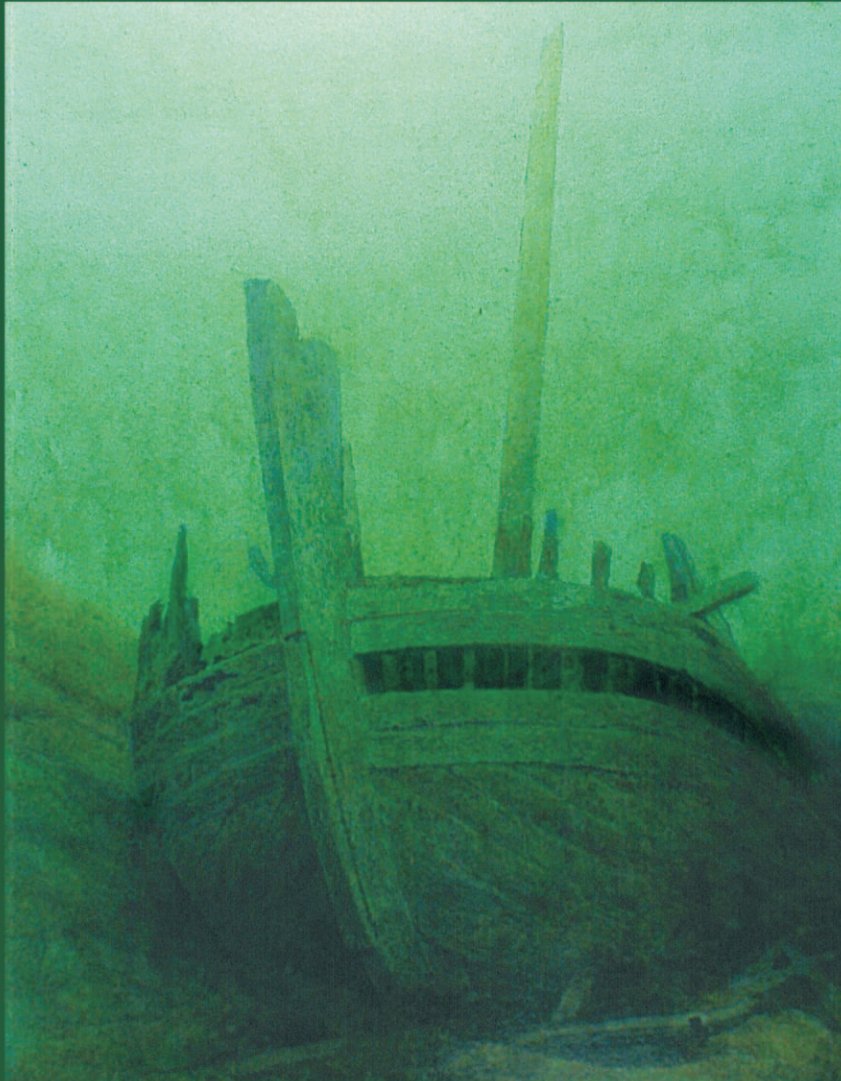
Maritime archaeology in Sri Lanka: first exposure

The Archaeological Department came face to face with maritime archaeology quite suddenly and unexpectedly in the early 1960s, when a team of divers, including Jonklaas, Wilson and Clarke, discovered a hitherto unknown wreck in the Great Basses, containing among other more archaeologically important material - sacks of silver coins minted in Surat, India. Wilson and Clarke had completed a successful book on Australia's Great Barrier Reef and come to Ceylon as the 'Clarke-Wilson Expedition' to write a similar book on the reefs here in the early 1950s. The book, 'The Reefs of Taprobane' was completed and published in 1957, but the country and the seas around it persuaded both to settle down here. They teamed up with local sports divers who were mostly interested in corals and fish, but it was a matter of time for them to discover archaeological material. Clarke (1964) states that they were diving off Swami Rock since 1956, before their attention was diverted to Wilson's more exciting discovery of a shipwreck with a cargo of silver coins in the Great Basses (Fig. 1). From Throckmorton (1964) we know that the discovery was made by Wilson when he was filming (the Sinhalese film 'Ranmuthu Duwa' in which the wreck features) in 1961. Throckmorton was surveying a Roman wreck in Greece, when he heard of the find and wrote to Clarke and Wilson asking if they knew of any Roman ships in Ceylon. He says: 'In reply I got a cable asking if I could come to Ceylon to help them and *the Ceylon Department of Antiquities* survey an interesting wreck' (emphasis mine).

The Department had no idea at all about maritime archaeology and was no doubt relieved that a recognized maritime archaeologist happened to be available. Throckmorton conducted a survey and study very much in keeping with the prevailing standards, and published his work both in book form and in academic journals. Clarke, a writer of fiction, wrote several popular books, drawing upon Throckmorton's research. The difference between

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