

New investigations of the 6th-c. A.D. “church wreck” at Marzamemi, Sicily

Justin Leidwanger

The dense maritime material record off SE Sicily offers a vibrant testimony to millennia of cultural interaction between west and east, south and north (fig. 1). Pioneering underwater work by G. Kapitän from the late 1950s onward brought this corner of the Mediterranean Sea to scholarly attention through a series of remarkable shipwreck finds, including several massive stone cargoes at Marzamemi and Isola delle Correnti.¹ Even among these rich finds, one site proved particularly intriguing and would become central to Kapitän’s efforts: the “church wreck”, named for its assemblage of partially prefabricated marble and other stone elements intended to decorate the interior of a Christian basilica. First spotted by fishermen and reported to the local authorities, the site was preliminarily surveyed in 1960 by Kapitän in collaboration with P. N. Gargallo.² Kapitän’s investigations here unfolded intermittently over the following two decades, revealing a striking material assemblage and constructing a broad narrative around the “church wreck”. Dozens of columns, capitals and bases, as well as major components of an *ambo* (pulpit), chancel screen, and probably an altar and *ciborium* were variously carved in the



Fig. 1. Mediterranean region with Marzamemi and other locations mentioned in the text.

- 1 G Kapitän, “Schiffsfrachten antiker Baugesteine und Architekturteile vor den Küsten Ostsiziliens,” *Klio* 39 (1961) 276-318; id., “Esplorazioni su alcuni carichi di marmo e pezzi architettonici davanti alle coste della Sicilia Orientale,” in *Atti del III Congresso int. di Archeologia Sottomarina, 1961* (Bordighera 1971) 296-309.
- 2 P. N. Gargallo and L. Casson, “Exploring off the coast of Sicily,” *Archaeology* 15.3 (1962) 193-97; G. Kapitän, “The church wreck off Marzamemi,” *Archaeology* 22.2 (1969) 122; Kapitän 1971 (supra n.1) 306.