

# 2,500-Year-Old Greek Ship

## Raised off Sicilian Coast

Maria Cristina Valsecchi in Rome

An ancient Greek ship recently raised off the coast of southern Sicily, [Italy](#), is the biggest and best maintained vessel of its kind ever found, archaeologists say.

At a length of nearly 70 feet (21 meters) and a width of 21 feet (6.5 meters), the 2,500-year-old craft is the largest recovered ship built in a manner first depicted in Homer's *Iliad*, which is believed to date back several centuries earlier.



The ship's outer shell was built first, and the inner framework was added later. The wooden planks of the hull were sewn together with ropes, with pitch and resin used as sealant to keep out water.

Carlo Beltrame, professor of marine archaeology at the Università Ca' Foscari in Venice, said the boat, found near the town of Gela, is among the most important finds in the Mediterranean Sea.

"Greek sewn boats have been found in Italy, France, Spain, and Turkey. Gela's wreck is the most recent and the best preserved," Beltrame said.

### **After 25 Centuries**

The Italian Coast Guard helped archaeologists pull the wreck to the surface last month.

A floating crane lifted the main segment, a 36-foot (11-meter) chunk, and dragged it to land. The remains were then plunged into a tank of fresh water to remove the salt from the wood.

"The vessel was a mercantile sailer, probably used to sail short stretches along the coast, docking frequently to load and unload," said Rosalba Panvini, head of the Cultural Heritage Department of Sicily, who directed the raising operations.

Recovered artifacts—including cups, two-handled jars called amphoras, oil lamps, pottery, and fragments of straw baskets—reveal details of the ship's journey before it sank, Panvini said.

"The vessel stopped in Athens, then in the Peloponnese Peninsula," Panvini said. "It sailed up the western coast of Greece, crossed the Otranto Channel, coasted along Italy, and pointed to Sicily."

The ship was headed for Gela, then a Greek colony. About a half mile (800 meters) off the coast, a storm probably tilted the ship. The ballast broke the hull, and the vessel went down, where it lay on the muddy seabed for 25 centuries.

In 1988 two scuba divers discovered the remains and informed the Sicilian Cultural Heritage Department.

It took 20 years to recover the whole vessel, which will now be sent to Portsmouth, U.K., to be restored before it returns to Gela. Officials hope to display the restored ship in a planned new sea museum.