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# The Mazarrón II Wreck (Murcia, Spain). Management of human and natural threats

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The two Phoenician shipwrecks, Mazarrón I and Mazarrón II, discovered in 1988 and 1994 respectively, are highly significant remains of underwater archaeology. While Mazarrón I has been lifted and transferred to the ARQUA Museum in Cartagena, Mazarrón II has remained *in situ*, protected by a metal structure and meshes placed on the sediments. However, monitoring has shown that the structures are probably deteriorating as a result of human action. A project is planned to safely extract the wreck in order to display it in the ARQUA Museum in the future.

## 1. Background

Mazarrón is a town to the south-east of Murcia in Spain. Its coast is located between two capes: Tiñoso and Cope, around a Miocene coastal plain between the Almenara and Algarrobo sierras. During the 20th century, this coast was subject to alterations that have modified its morphology and this has also changed people's traditional activities. The building of the nearby leisure port caused new morphological changes and marine variations, bringing in new sand deposits that are altering both the ecosystem and the underwater archaeological sites.



Figure 1: Protective structure and security perimeter sacks around Mazarrón II

Mazarrón has an array of archaeological heritage of different types and chronological periods. This allows us to suppose that it has long been a strategic place, with human activity from prehistory to the present e.g. Cueva Perneras (Upper and Middle Palaeolithic), El Faro, La Peñica (underwater, lithic remains), Cueva de las Palomas (Upper Palaeolithic and Neolithic), Cueva de Percheles (Neolithic), Cabezo de Plomo (Chalcolithic), La Ciñuela (Bronze Age), Canal de las Salinas (underwater, ivories 4th-2nd centuries BC), Coto Fortuna (Roman Age), Roman salting factory (4th-2nd centuries AD), Castillo de Carlantín (Andalusian period), Torre Vieja del Puerto (16th century AD) or Cotos San Cristóbal and Los Perules (Industrial Heritage).

## 2. The Wrecks

Two important remains located in the area are Mazarrón I and Mazarrón II, both Phoenician era shipwrecks. They were excavated in the summer of 1988 by a team from the National Museum of Underwater Archaeology. The 'Phoenician Ship Project' was organised on the Isla Beach from 1993 to 1995, when the bay bottom was extensively prospected. Mazarrón I was excavated and transferred to the museum. The second Phoenician ship, Mazarrón II, was located in the spring of 1994. It is 8m long overall and 2m wide and carried a shipment of amphorae and metallic bullion. A kind of special box was designed to shield the ship from both natural and human actions. Archaeological remains were located on the wreck and were removed to avoid looting. They were housed in the National Museum of Underwater Archaeology (Cartagena, Murcia) from 1999 to the early years of the 21st century.



Figure 2: Partial view of the wreck from the south west

Different actions were carried out by Mazarrón's City Council in relation to Mazarrón II, the only wreck that remains underwater. An interpretation centre was created in 2009 and a congress about the ship was held in 2013. The conclusions proposed the creation of a commission to find management solutions for the archaeological relic. Created in 2014, professionals from both the Mazarrón City Council, Región de Murcia, and Ministry of Culture and Sports work together in this commission. In 2019, the National Plan for the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage Monitoring Commission considered that the extraction could not be approved based on available information. It recommended exploring other possibilities to enable *in situ* conservation. However, the scientific commission created by Región de Murcia (Autonomous Community, under the Spanish competence distribution) disagreed with this position. Both Commissions were summoned to meet and to seek an agreement.

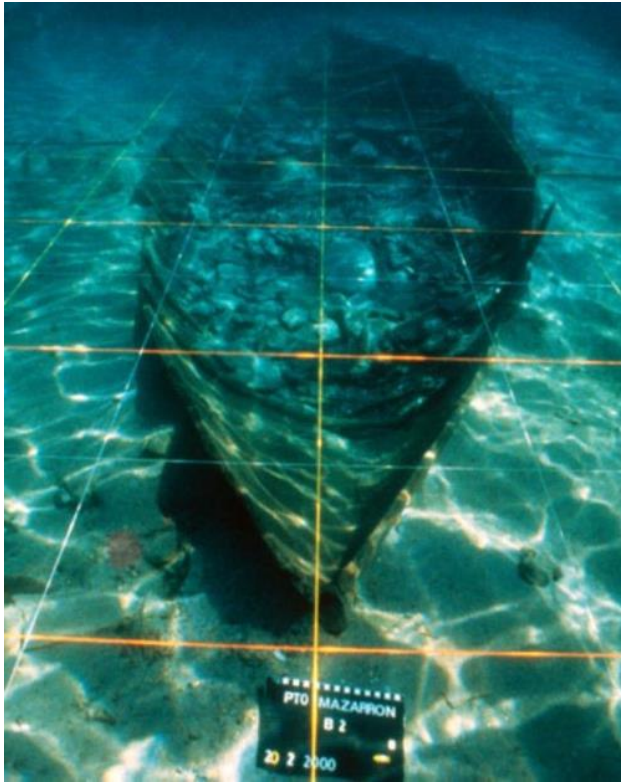


Figure 3: Mazarrón II (Museo Nacional de Arqueología Subacuática)



Figure 4: Mazarrón II close up (Museo Nacional de Arqueología Subacuática)

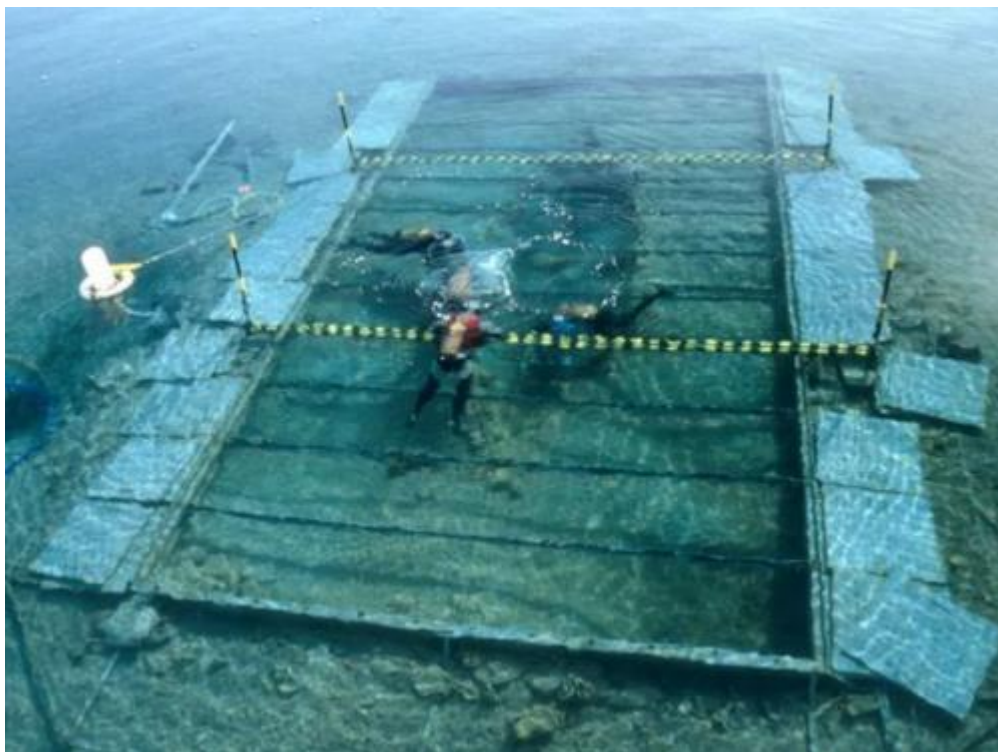


Figure 5: Construction of the protective cage for the Mazarrón II (Museo Nacional de Arqueología Subacuática)

Between 23 August and 3 September 2019, the Región de Murcia, in association with ARQUA (heir to Research Centre and National Museum of Underwater Archaeology), launched a scientific mission to determinate the wreck's state of preservation, as there were indications that the metal structure that protected it had lost stability and could collapse. The conclusions were clear: the wreck must be extracted as soon as possible because environmental conditions and human activities are endangering it. The Ministry of Culture and Sport and Región de Murcia will organise an International Conference with only one item on the agenda: to find the best solution to remove the wreck safely, in order to display it in the ARQUA Museum in the future.

### 3. Current Status

The last works related to Mazarrón II were carried out by technicians hired jointly by Región de Murcia and ARQUA Museum in December 2021. These works consisted of:

- Documentation of the site's topography and bathymetry.
- Documentation of the protection structure's condition. Through this, we know now that the protective metal structure is rusting. The sacks that help fix the structure are probably deteriorating as a result of human action and the protective meshes placed on the sediments have become uncovered





Figure 6: Geographic location of the wreck

The work carried out concluded that the site is exposed to the effects of adverse climate and human action in different sectors, as shown by the degradation of the protective structure and the security perimeter sacks. Moreover, the area is subject to strong marine currents that increase exponentially when strong storms or damage happen.

A special conference took place in the ARQUA Museum from 5-7 May, 2022. It brought together UNESCO General Director, Mr Xing Qu, representing Managing Director, Audrey Azoulay, the Spanish Minister of Culture and Sport, Miquel Iceta, and the Flooded Organic Archaeological Materials Workgroup (WOAM) (world leading in wreck extraction) and the ICOM Preservation Committee. These experts can contribute with their experience and develop a project to extract the ship and move it to the museum as quickly as possible, so that once there it can be handled, consolidated and put on show.



Figure 7: Arquatec Laboratory

The project regarding the extraction has begun. It is fully aligned with the 2001 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage. An expert monitoring committee has been created. The project includes aspects collected by current legislation, like safeguarding, prevention, scientific contribution and putting in value.

ARQUA Museum has specialised facilities adapted for this work. [Arquatec](#) is an open-plan warehouse equipped with treatment or desalination tanks, impregnation and electrolysis, washing tables, freeze dryer, cranes and elements for handling large loads and other specific equipment. It also has a large space of 260m<sup>2</sup> for training and work seminars.

The remains of the first boat (with a keel length of 3.98m) located on La Isla beach in Mazarrón are currently exhibited in the museum. Undoubtedly, the recovery of Mazarrón II and its exhibition will contribute to the study of Phoenician forms of navigation in the Mediterranean Sea.



Figure 8: Mazarrón I wreck. ARQUA Museum (Cartagena, Spain)