



The Ocean Below: Human Experiences and Material Culture of Freediving across Time and Space

THURSDAY, 7 December 2023, 9:00–17:30

Humans have been diving with and without technological aid since prehistory; some recent evidence seems to push the limits even beyond our species, suggesting that also Neanderthals would not see the surface of the sea as a limit to their action. Freediving for pearls, corals and sponges is well attested in the Persian Gulf as early as the third millennium BCE, and the practice was also known in the Mediterranean, the Americas, and Asia. Engaging with the underwater realm was not exclusive to pearl divers. Fishermen and coastal inhabitants may have experienced diving more often than we think, harbour builders may have required underwater expertise, and painters and poets borrowed underwater imagery for their art.

But what evidence do we have for these ancient activities? How, as archaeologists, can we approach the subject of underwater engagement? A long and tiresome argument for not approaching the issue has been the lack of evidence – especially the material evidence – and that the marine engagement was probably limited to its surface. We disagree. We believe the evidence is there and needs to be put into the right context, reframed, or simply looked at from an aquatic perspective.

This workshop brings together experts from a wide range of disciplines and diverse competences that share one very distinctive element: their interest in the sea and the complex ways humans have engaged and continue to engage with its depths. By addressing the evidence from an interdisciplinary perspective – ranging from human physiology to ethnography and zooarchaeology – we hope to establish a baseline for current and future research on the underwater space as a place of past human action.

WHERE:

Polish Centre of Mediterranean
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online

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More information on [PCMA UW website](#)



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across Time and Space.

PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION 9:00–9:30

Mari Yamasaki and Emilio Rodríguez-Álvarez

Material culture – The archaeological evidence for freediving in antiquity 9:30–11:00

Hakan Oniz
Ancient divers and divers' weights in the Eastern Mediterranean

Ceyda Öztosun
Ancient lead weights from the Turkish Mediterranean Coastline

Maria Michel (online)
Freediving as a fishing method in the archaeological context of Cyprus

COFFEE CHAT 11:00–11:30

Literary and Ethnographic approaches 11:30–12:30

Eirini Kapogianni
Emerging from *lethe*. Divers in ancient literature and their role in our understanding

Emilio Rodríguez Álvarez
Thinking as a freediver. The mindset, taskscape, and operational chain of apneists in preindustrial societies

LUNCH BREAK 12:30–13:30

Bioarchaeology and the evidence of diving 13:30–14:30

Camilla Tettamanti
Physiology and forensic considerations in freediving

Canan Çakırlar
Bioarchaeological and biomolecular evidence for the historical exploitation of different marine habitats in the Mediterranean

Iconography and cognition – The experience of diving on the mind and its material/symbolic outcomes 14:30–16:45

Tomasz Michalik
Vision[s] of the past. Short introduction to eye-tracking as a tool for research on perception of underwater heritage

Followed by eye tracking experiment (c. 30 mins)

SHORT COFFEE CHAT 15:30–15:45

Andrew Shapland
Underwater encounters in Bronze Age Crete

Mari Yamasaki
The imagined dive. Bathtubs, larnakes and basins as keys to the conceptualization of underwater spaces

CONCLUDING REMARKS 16:45–17:15

Mari Yamasaki and Emilio Rodríguez-Álvarez