

Has the Baron de Rothschild's lost ship been found?

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Ceramic bowls from the sunken ship. Credit: University of Haifa

Baron de Rothschild's lost ship was one of three carrying raw materials from France to the Baron's glass factory near Zichron Yaakov. The ship vanished without a trace in the late 19th century. Has it now been found

more than a century later?

In a new study, researchers from the Leon Recanati Institute for Maritime Studies at the University of Haifa seek to show that a shipwreck discovered at Dor Beach in 1976 may be identified as the missing Baron's Ship. Baron de Rothschild's ship was one of three [ships](#) used to carry [raw materials](#) from France to a glass factory established by the baron at Tantura. The ship vanished without a trace in the late nineteenth century. Has it now been found more than a century later?

"We know that two of the baron's three ships were sold, but we have no information concerning the third ship. The ship we have found is structurally consistent with the specifications of the Baron's ships, carried a similar cargo, and sailed and sank during the right period," explained Dr. Deborah Cvikel and Micky Holtzman, who are investigating the shipwreck.

In 1893 the Baron de Rothschild founded a glass factory at Tantura beach in order to enable the local production of wine bottles for the winery at nearby Zichron Yaakov. The factory was actually established and managed by Meir Dizengoff, the first mayor of Tel Aviv. The Baron de Rothschild even purchased three small ships to transport raw materials from factories in France to the factory at Tantura and hired Jewish crews to man the ships. Contemporary records detail the purchase of the ships and specify their models. It was also noted that the ships were damaged and required repairs. Two of the ships were ultimately sold, while the fate of the third ship remains unknown.

Dr. Cvikel and Mr. Holtzman are now proposing the hypothesis that a two-masted shipwreck off the coast at Dor (Tantura) that was first excavated in 1999 may be the missing Baron's Ship. The shipwreck was excavated underwater in 1999-2000 in a study that focused mainly on the structure of the ship, and again in 2008 in a study that focused

mainly on its contents, which included pots, earthenware, ceramic tiles, [roof tiles](#), barrels, crates, and several sacks. The present study is based on the processing of findings from the 2008 excavation.



Roof tile from Marseille found on the sunken ship. Credit: University of Haifa

Following the initial underwater excavations, the researchers concluded that the shipwreck is a two-masted schooner and dated it very roughly to 1660-1960. The present processing of the findings has narrowed this timeframe considerably. A more precise dating of the vessel itself, and

particularly of the date of its last voyage, was possible thanks to the findings on the pots, ceramic tiles, and roof tiles. In a meticulous review, the researchers found that most of these items were stamped with the name of the factory in which they were manufactured. They found a total of six different factory stamps, all relating to French factories active in the late nineteenth century. Once they found the lion motif of a company called Guichard Frères, the date on which the ship sank could be narrowed still further, since this company appears in the Marseille commercial yearbook in 1889-1897.

Accordingly, it is apparent that the ship was carrying French raw materials to Palestine for use in the new settlement at Zichron Yaakov (particularly roof tiles and ceramic tiles), and that its route passed close to Tantura in the late nineteenth century. A closer link with the Baron's ships is added by the fact that in one of the pots the researchers found the substance Barium sulfate (BaSO_4), which is known as a material that enhances the transparency and shine of glass.

"This ship could certainly be one of dozens of similar ships that plied the coasts of Palestine during this period," the researchers acknowledge. "However, there seem to be more than a few items that connect it with Zichron Yaakov, with the glass factory at Tantura, and with the Baron's Ships. Perhaps we can now conclude that the third ship was not sold and condemned to obscurity like its sisters, but sank with its cargo still onboard."

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