

“ECHOES FROM THE DEEP” – A HUGE ACADEMIC MYSTIFICATION

(book review by Piotr Nykiel)

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In “The Gallipolitan” (issue 133, Winter 2013, pp. 63-64) Steve Weinman has published an enthusiastic review of the book “Echoes from the Deep” by Selçuk Kolay, Okan Taktak, Savaş Karakaş and Mithat Atabay (publisher: Vehbi Koç Foundation, Ayhan Sahenk Foundation; ISBN 9789756959701, hardback, 284 pages + DVD).

On first glance the book really does look impressive and in some respects it is indeed a pioneering publication. However, academic diligence and honesty require us to draw attention to some serious factual and workshop errors, as well as to certain questions of an ethical nature which Weinman has omitted. It does not appear that he passed over these as a result of inattention or partiality. Rather the authors of the above mentioned book managed to “pack” their product in such a way that a reader who is not familiar with the exploration of the shipwrecks in the Dardanelles area is unable to impute them anything.

In the Preface (pp. 15-19) Selçuk Kolay writes (in a very vague way) about the bureaucratic difficulties his team faced at the preparation stage for the underwater works. Let us mention here that in 2011 Dr. Piotr Nykiel (Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Turkish Studies Dept., a former diplomat and a member of The Gallipoli Association, The Society for Military History and Gallipoli & Dardanelles International) as the principal investigator and a academic head of the team of Polish divers from the Shipwreck Expeditions Society (led by Piotr Wytykowski and Roman Zajder, both members of the Explorers Club) applied through the Embassy of the Republic of Turkey in Warsaw for permission from the Turkish authorities for underwater exploration in the Dardanelles.

In accordance with the formal requirements the Polish team forwarded to the Turkish side the academic project which included information on the names of the shipwrecks to be examined and on the nature of the proposed exploration.

The above mentioned academic project focused on the following shipwrecks and research objectives:

- The battleship *Bouvet* – the definitive determination of the circumstances of the ship's loss – which according to Dr. Nykiel's hitherto research – was not a collision with a sea-mine. Page | 2
- The battleships HMSs *Irresistible* and *Ocean* – substantiation of the damages inflicted by the coastal artillery and proving that the reason for the sinking of both ships was not only the explosion of a sea-mine.
- The submarine *Saphir* – substantiation of the shipwreck's present condition.
- The passenger-cargo ships *Halep* and *Kios* – finding the wrecks and substantiation of their present condition (both ships were sunk on August 25, 1915 in Akbaş Bay by the British submarine *E 11*).
- The battleship *Barbaros Hayrettin* – substantiation of the shipwreck's present condition.
- The destroyer HMS *Louis* – undertaking an attempt to locate the ship's stern.

Unfortunately, the Polish team has to date not receive any answer whatsoever to its application. Meanwhile, as Kolay writes (p. 16), exactly in 2011 the team he was a member of, had intensified its archive and underwater research which resulted in the publication of the book and a documentary film covering all the shipwrecks planned to be examined by the Poles (all bar those from Akbaş Bay – but this question will be discussed separately in one the following paragraphs of this review).

As no clear evidence is present, it is hard to say whether the overlap of the efforts undertaken by both sides was coincidental or not. However, the doubts are fueled by the fact that a year after the Polish team submitted its first application, the Turkish Embassy in Warsaw suggested to its principal investigator that an application be made once more (despite not receiving any formal answer to the first one), but this time as a co-project with a Turkish university. Following these instructions, in the autumn of 2012 Dr. Nykiel signed an agreement on cooperation with the Faculty of History of the 18th of March University (Onsekiz Mart Üniversitesi) in Çanakkale and applied once again. As was already mentioned, this application still remains unanswered. The 18th of March University, already at the moment it signed the agreement with the Polish side,

must have known it would not keep its obligations, because for a year archive and underwater research on the very same shipwrecks was conducted by a Turkish team, a member of which was the assistant professor of this university and co-author of the reviewed book, Dr. Mithat Atabay. It should be stressed here, that the Polish team's principal investigator was not informed at any stage and by anyone whatsoever that the research planned by himself was or would be carried on by a Turkish team. Leaving the moral and ethical assessment of this situation to the readers, let us discuss the most essential weak points of the reviewed book.

In the Preface (p. 16) the authors claim that starting from 2011 they had conducted intense primary source research at archives in Turkey, Great Britain, France and Australia. Unfortunately, an attentive reading of the book, particularly of its descriptive part concerning the historical background and that of the individual shipwrecks, raises huge doubts in this respect. Pictures of the entrances to The National Archives in London and of the Musée de la Marine in Paris are indeed reproduced on page 17, but the book's content questions whether any of the authors ever crossed the thresholds of those institutions. Not even a single catalogue number of any document from those archives is to be found either in the footnotes or the bibliography. A photograph of files from The National Archives concerning the patrol boat *Lundy* was published on page 177, but photocopies of those documents can be easily obtained via the Internet (which was successfully done in 2011 by the authors of the report of the First Polish Diving Expedition to the Dardanelles). In the documentary film (the DVD attached to the reviewed book) Kolay mentions that he had conducted intense and very fruitful primary source research in The National Archives, relating to the British submarine *E 11*. If so, why have none of the documents found by him been quoted in the book? The whole chapter on this particular ship was based on seven, very well-known and readily available books. So, what was the point of research at The National Archives?

A sheet of plans of the battleship *Bouvet*, reproduced on pages 80-81 (unfortunately without mentioning the source) might be considered a sign of the authors' presence in the French archives. But one couldn't be more wrong! A full set of those plans is also available in the Internet (it can be ordered via <http://www.servicehistorique.sga.defense.gouv.fr>).

The bibliography of the reviewed book contains the catalogue numbers of a mere seven documents from the Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet Arşivi in Ankara. Thus, it seems the primary source research in Turkey was limited on the part of the authors to that particular archive – *nota bene* the documents they used were produced in 1930s and 1940s (and if so, already in the Latin alphabet) and they concern only the ships' scraping. Nowhere in the text on the circumstances of the ships' losses in 1915 was a single archive document used.

So, the source base of the reviewed book consists of printed memories and monographs, all of them readily available and very familiar to every historian. And it should be stressed that even their selection is very poor. The absence of some essential titles, which doubtlessly should have been used by the authors, is most clearly visible (we shall draw attention to this aspect again in the following paragraphs). Thus, it is hard to not gain the impression that the descriptive section of the book "Echoes from the Deep" was hastily scrawled and based almost exclusively on the private – and let us say once again, poor – library of its authors.

In the chapter "From salvage to imaging" (pp. 25-29) Savaş Karakaş discusses the state of exploration of the shipwrecks in the Dardanelles area to date. As the last foreign project carried out on these waters he mentions the Australian expedition "Beneath Gallipoli", led by Tim Smith in 2010. However he does not say a word about the First Polish Diving Expedition to the Dardanelles carried out in 2011 by the Shipwreck Expeditions Society under the academic leadership of Dr. Nykiel. The official report of this expedition as well as a 20-minute long documentary film are available at the www.navyingallipoli.com, www.divers24.pl and www.shipwreckexpeditions.com.pl web sites.

On page 29 Karakaş admits that in his first documentary film [*Derinlerdeki Tarih*, 1998] he had wrongly identified the wreck of HMS *Louis* as a "water supply ship". Unfortunately there is no information in the reviewed book that the "Beneath Gallipoli" team was the first one to identify this vessel correctly in 2010 (cf. Tim Smith, *Project Beneath Gallipoli* [in:] "The Gallipolitan", No. 126, Autumn 2011, pp. 37-45). Seemingly, there is no word on the fact that these findings were confirmed a year later by the Polish team (let us only state here that in 2011 the Turkish divers to whom the

Poles spoke were still convinced that it was a wreck of a “ship carrying the water desalination unit”).

The shipwrecks explored by the Turkish team are discussed on pages 62-261. As far as the technical details, history of service and the circumstances of the sinking of the particular vessels are concerned, the data provided in this section of book are in most cases correct. However, the complete lack of information on the present condition of the wrecks is a gross oversight. The authors have limited themselves only to reproduce underwater photographs and 3D sonar images and to provide them with very laconic and often inaccurate captions. We may only conjecture that no effort at compiling a professional inventory of the shipwrecks was made (it is hard to consider as such the observation in the attached documentary film, saying the condition of the “lighter” described in the book on pages 240-243 is worse than in 2010). Maybe in the case of vessels lying in the deepest places it was technically impossible to made such an inventory. Yet this was feasible regarding those shipwrecks lying at a depth of up to 30 meters, something which was proved by the Polish team in 2011 through the compiling of a detailed inventory of *Lundy*, *HMS Louis*, *SS Milo*, a barge located on 40° 17' 140"N 26° 13' 286"E (in “Echoes from the Deep” described on pages 238-239), the battleship *Mesudiye* and the passenger-cargo ship *Tenedos* (cf. “Report of the Gallipoli Expedition 2011” on: www.navyingallipoli.com/teksty/report2011_eng.pdf).

While showing the underwater pictures of the battleship *Mesudiye* (pp. 62-69) the authors did not even attempt to identify some sections of this ship, or to determine the caliber of the ammunition lying around the wreck. In photograph No. 27 (p. 67) we can clearly see, after all, a fragment of the amidships superstructure with its characteristic porthole. Then in picture No. 29 (p. 68) there is a 234 mm shell from the ship’s main artillery (despite the fact that those guns were dismantled at the moment she sunk, their ammunition was left aboard the battleship, something which was proved by the Polish team by identifying the shells found on the wreck; cf. www.navyingallipoli.com/teksty/nurki2011ang.pdf).

In describing the final mission of the French submarine *Saphir* the authors did not make use of one of the most important sources, i.e. the memories of a surviving member of her crew, Francis Gutton (*La dernière plongée (Conférence donnée à Toulon aux Heures de l'Académie du Var le 10 janvier 1969)*, Toulon, no date of publishing). It

is a shame they did not, as this source sheds a slightly different light on the circumstances of the *Saphir*'s loss.

On page 83, in the section relating to the fate of the battleship *Bouvet* there is a vintage photograph No. 47. The authors claim it was taken on March 18, 1915 from the deck of the *Bouvet*, shortly before she sunk. Unfortunately this is not the case. This picture was published during WWI as a propaganda postcard with an incorrect caption, suggesting it had been taken in the Dardanelles. But in fact this photograph shows the vessels from the 1st Battleship Squadron of the main forces of the French Navy in the Mediterranean (a careful analysis of this picture allow us to distinguish, among all, the destroyer *Casque* and the so-called “half-dreadnoughts” of the “Danton” class, i.e. ships that never participated in operations in the Dardanelles area).

The expert opinion by Dr. Larrie D. Ferreiro and Sean Kery relating to the reasons of the *Bouvet*'s sinking (page 84), repeats in principle the observations and basic points presented by Dr. Nykiel in his book *Wyprawa do Złotego Rogu. Działania wojenne w Dardanelach i na Morzu Egejskim (sierpień 1914 – marzec 1915) [Expedition to the Golden Horn. Military Operations in the Dardanelles and on the Aegean Sea (August 1914 – March 1915)]*, Wydawnictwo Arkadiusz Wingert, Kraków – Międzyzdroje 2008. On the sonar picture published in the reviewed book (No. 59 on p. 91) we can see a major hole on the starboard amidships (noticed by the authors too) and most probably made by a sea-mine explosion (the hull plating is bent inwards). This damage must have led to the ship's starboard list, which we can see in the photographs taken on March 18, 1915 and reproduced on page 85 (pictures No. 48 and 49).

However, we cannot agree that the damages on both sides of the *Bouvet*'s bow are a result of the dismantlement of the torpedo tubes in the 1960s, as the authors suggest (cf. the captions for photographs No. 53 and 54 on p. 88 and No. 56 on p. 90). The location and size of both holes as well as the very clearly visible outward bent of the hull plating doubtlessly indicate the damage that occurred when the compartment housing the powder cartridges of the main bow turret exploded. This detonation must have been a consequence of a fire which occurred inside the hull after the ship had been shelled by the Turkish coastal artillery. Those damages (combined with the one made by the mine) due to their size and location must have led to rapid water intake by the ship, which must have proceeded at a high speed right up until the very last moment.

The underwater torpedo tube compartments of the battleship *Bouvet* were located one deck higher than the damages shown in the above mentioned pictures. And the hull on the level of this deck is intact. The damages that occurred as a result of the above discussed explosion certainly made the dismantlement of the torpedo tubes easier. In the film attached to the book Kolay claims that dynamite must have been used to take out the torpedo tubes and this, according to him, explains the damages. Well, we have to admit that this peculiar theory does not credit its author. The hull plating around both holes is – as we have already mentioned – bent outwards. In order to cause such damage the dynamite would have had to have been detonated inside the hull and to put it there the divers would have had to have got into the wreck through the mine-hole amidships and to have swum along half of the interior of the wreck which lies at a depth of over 70 meters. Who in their right mind would have taken such a risk (especially in the 1960s when diving at such a depth was still extremely hazardous), when it would have been much easier and safer to plant the dynamite on the outer surface of the hull?

The lack of deep analysis of the extremely interesting sonar pictures of the wreck of HMS *Irresistible* is also very disappointing (cf. photographs No. 66-68 on pp. 96-97). The extensive destruction of her stern (missing plating and propelling screws) is – as the authors correctly noticed – a result of scraping activities in the 1960s. Whereas, on the starboard at the level of the engine room there are the marks of a sea-mine explosion, unfortunately omitted by the authors. This damage passes into a big square-shaped hole, which doubtlessly can be partially the effect of the activity of seekers of scrap (interested in the contents of the engine room), but partially may be a result of the explosion of the boilers flooded additionally by water. The damages to the bow section are very significant. They – exactly as was the case with the *Bouvet* – confirm that shelling by the Turkish coastal artillery (already after the ship had been abandoned by the crew) caused an explosion of the powder cartridges and ammunition under the main fore turret. Those damages turned out to be the final “nail in the HMS *Irresistible*’s coffin”. Unfortunately, also in this case, the authors have wrongly interpreted them as being the result of the dismantlement of the bow torpedo tubes (cf. the caption to picture No. 66 on p. 96). It is a shame too, that this particular shipwreck was given so short a coverage in the documentary film attached to the book (approx. four minutes of which the underwater shots are merely one minute long). The sinking of the HMS *Irresistible* had, after all, an incomparably greater impact on the course of the conflict in the

Dardanelles than the loss of several landing barges along the western coast of the Gallipoli Peninsula (coverage of their exploration takes up almost four and a half minute in the above mentioned film).

The section related to the battleship HMS *Ocean* (pages 102-105) is also enriched with sonar pictures (photographs No. 75-79). Unlike with all the other shipwrecks, the authors have not limited themselves to the description of the scrap activity, but have paid attention to the damages caused by mine as well. However, it is a shame that none of those pictures show the entire stern, since the destruction caused there by the Turkish coastal artillery had an important impact on the ship's fate (she was abandoned by her crew not only because of the collision with a mine, but also as a result of the destruction of the steering mechanism by a shell fired from one of the Turkish forts). It should be mentioned here that picture No. 79 is the only one in the whole book on which the shipwreck's dimensions and the size of some damages were marked. It is a great shame this was not done in the case of all the other wrecks. It is also hard to understand why in the discussed photograph the authors measured only the holes in those places with missing hull plating (removed in the 1960s) and not the most important damages sustained on March 18, 1915 by the mine. The complete omission of HMS *Ocean* in the attached documentary film is astonishing too.

In the section describing the last mission of the British submarine *E 15* (pp. 106-111), just as was the case of the French *Saphir*, the authors have not used certain important sources, including the memories of the ship's commander's brother C. G. Brodie (*Forlorn hope 1915. The submarine passage of the Dardanelles*. Frederik Books, London 1956) or K. Edwards' book (*We dive at dawn*, Rich & Cowan, London 1939). The fact that the dates of death on the gravestones of the *E 15*'s commander and two other members of her crew (pictures No. 86-88 on page 109) are one day later than the date of the ship's loss and her crew's captivity also did not lead to reflection on the part of the authors.

Apparently, some reservations about the source base are aroused by the description of the Australian submarine *AE 2* (pp. 112-123). It is hard to understand why the authors did not make use of the memories of Ali Rıza Bey, the commander of the torpedo boat *Sultanhisar* (*A.E.2 Denizaltı Gemisini Nasıl Batırdım?*, Millet Yayını:

4, AKCA Basımevi, İstanbul 1947) which, after all, are the most detailed account of the *AE 2*'s sinking.

While describing the wreck of HMS *Louis* (pages 188-193) the authors did not pay attention to the fact that the remains of this ship now do not lie in the place she was originally lost. It was also omitted that due to the activity of scrap seekers the wreck is preserved only from her keel to the level of the engine room. Finally, there is no reflection on the fate of HMS *Louis*' stern, the remains of which should be looked for in the actual place she sunk (cf. „Report...”: www.navyingallipoli.com/teksty/report2011_eng.pdf). Page | 9

On pages 238-239 there is a description and underwater pictures of the landing barge found in 2010 through the use of sonar by the team of the “Beneath Gallipoli” project and inventoried for the first time a year later by the Polish team. Unfortunately no information on these facts is given. If the authors of the reviewed book had wished to make use of the report of the First Polish Diving Expedition to the Dardanelles, they could have enriched the reader's knowledge by providing them with some details relating to the reasons for the barge's loss (cf. “Report...”: www.navyingallipoli.com/teksty/report2011_eng.pdf).

It is puzzling that in a book in which the authors boast about the exploration of as many as 33 shipwrecks (including some discovered by themselves) there was no room for the Turkish passenger-cargo ships *Tenedos*, *Halep* and *Kios*, torpedoed on August 25, 1915 in Akbaş Bay by the British submarine *E 11*. What is more, those vessels are also not among the wrecks planned for future exploration by the authors. Why? Akbaş Bay is a shallow place, after all, and is located away from the Dardanelles transit route. A restricted zone, where no sailing and diving is allowed, constitutes only a small part of it. Maybe the reason is that only one of all the three above mentioned shipwrecks was explored by the Turks prior to 2011 and was wrongly identified as *Halep*. The correct identification, as *Tenedos*, was made in September 2011 by the First Polish Diving Expedition to the Dardanelles (cf. „Report...”: www.navyingallipoli.com/teksty/report2011_eng.pdf). A search of the two remaining shipwrecks had been planned within the next expedition mentioned above. It is hard to resist the impression that the lack of any information on the Akbaş Bay wrecks in the book, as well as the complete disregard on the part of its authors for not only its

achievements but the fact that the First Polish Diving Expedition to the Dardanelles took place at all, is fully conscious in its manifestation, and is closely related to the stance taken by both the Turkish authorities and the 18th of March University to the new expedition planned by the Poles.

To sum up, the main asset of the book “Echoes from the Deep” are the 3D sonar images, showing shipwrecks never before explored with this technology. However, the complete lack of professional analysis of those images reduces to a large extent the book’s (and the included film’s) value and undermines the academic competence of the project’s participants, both in regard to the underwater archeology and military history (the diving achievements of the book’s co-authors are not questioned here in any way). The descriptive section relating to the historical background and the individual shipwrecks brings absolutely nothing new to the current state of research, as the source base is extremely poor and known to all. The only thing that can be expressed is regret that such expensive research undertaken by such experienced and distinguished divers as Selçuk Kolay and Savaş Karakaş has resulted in such disappointing academic results.