

WRECKS AND TEXTS: A JUDEO-ARABIC CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The excavation and publication of the Yassiada 7th-century shipwreck constitute milestones for nautical historiography as they showcased research methodologies and a framework of inquiry that nautical archaeologists and historians implement to this day. One of the methodological features that stands out in the exemplary study of the Yassiada material is the use early medieval texts, especially the maritime legal compilation known as *Nomos Rhodion Nautikos*, to supplement and contextualize the rich material record. What happens when the material record is much more fragmentary or even entirely absent? Can we ask the same kinds of questions and what are the limits of the answers that documents can provide? In this paper I present a 12th-century Indian Ocean shipwreck described in a remarkable legal document from the famous document repository known as the Cairo Geniza. Asking questions akin to those posed to the Yassiada material about shipbuilding, navigation and the organization of shipping, I examine the extent and limits of Judeo-arabic textual information and its contribution to the study of the maritime traditions of the Indian Ocean.