אוניברסיטת חיפה
UNIVERSITY OF HAIFA
جامعة حيفا

Archaeo-Diplomacy in the Eastern Mediterranean Basin

The National Center for Marine Archaeology

Pioneering Israel's First Center for Marine Archaeology, Education and Public Outreach

Academic Year 2025–26

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With over 10,000 years of continuous human activity, Israel's coastline is home to the world's richest and most extensive maritime and cultural heritage. Now facing serious threats from climate change and coastal development, this historic setting urgently requires protection and systematic documentation before these "treasures" are irretrievably lost to erosion and human activities. The establishment of the first-ever National Center for Marine Archaeology represents a critical intervention to safeguard these invaluable archaeological resources for future generations.

Marine archaeology is the next frontier of studying the past and the center aims to revolutionize marine archaeology and cultural heritage research through strategic partnerships with leading institutes in Israel, friendly countries in the Middle East, and partners in North America. By uniting Israeli and international researchers and leveraging state-of-the-art technology, the center will be at the forefront of this exciting field. Through rigorous scientific inquiry, mentorship of emerging scholars, and active public engagement, the center will establish a holistic and forward-thinking framework for uncovering the hidden stories of our maritime past.

A RACE AGAINST TIME: PROTECTING ISRAEL'S UNDERWATER HERITAGE

Israel's Mediterranean coast tells the incredible tale of 10,000-years of human maritime history. From ancient villages now resting beneath the waves to Bronze Age shipwrecks filled with Canaanite treasures, each discovery reveals how people lived, traded, and built along these shores. The coastline features remarkable sites like the Phoenician harbors mentioned in the Bible, well-preserved Roman and Islamic shipwrecks, and medieval Crusader fortresses. These underwater time capsules connect directly to historic coastal cities - from the ancient port of Tel Dor to the grand Roman port-city of Caesarea.

Unfortunately, this priceless maritime heritage faces unprecedented challenges in the modern era. The accelerating pace of coastal development, driven by Israel's expanding need for modern harbors and marine infrastructure, coupled with the looming threat of climate change, poses significant concerns for preservation. These pressures have created an urgent and moral imperative to protect and manage these rare cultural assets, so that they can be enjoyed by future generations.

ESTABLISHING ISRAEL'S PREMIER MARINE ARCHAEOLOGY CENTER AT THE HAIFA PORT

To address these pressing challenges, the University of Haifa seeks to partner with interested parties to establish the National Center for Marine Archaeology. The Center, strategically located at the Haifa Port, will be Israel's premier center for marine archaeology. As the first such center of its kind in the Middle East, the Center will serve as a hub for interdisciplinary research, education, and cultural heritage preservation along the eastern Mediterranean seaboard.

At the heart of the Center's transformative research agenda are cutting-edge digital laboratories for underwater cultural heritage that will leverage AI and VR technologies for data acquisition, analysis, curation, and public exhibitions. By fostering regional collaboration among researchers and institutions, the center not only promises to elevate Israel's global standing in maritime archaeology but also aims to improve diplomatic relationships with neighboring countries. Moreover, the project will create a significant cultural and economic opportunity for Haifa while playing a critical role in preserving Israel's offshore cultural heritage against the mounting challenges of coastal development and climate change.

University of Haifa is ranked

11th

worldwide

in marine archaeology by UNESCO.

WHY THE UNIVERSITY OF HAIFA?

Home to the School of Archaeology and Maritime Cultures (SAMC), Israel's largest and most comprehensive research institute in the field, and the Recanati Institute for Maritime Studies, the University of Haifa is optimally poised to establish the National Center for Marine Archaeology. Our holistic approach, linking archaeology with natural, exact, and computational sciences, will ensure groundbreaking discoveries and insights.

The new Center will leverage the University of Haifa's specialized archaeological expertise and create synergies with the world's foremost archaeological and technological institutions:

- **Israel Antiquities Authority**, providing access to national archaeological resources and expertise.
- **UC San Diego's Qualcomm Institute,** bringing cutting-edge technology and computational resources to both terrestrial and underwater archaeological research.
- **Technion**, strengthening its interdisciplinary approach by combining engineering and scientific expertise with archaeological studies.

Experts from each of the partner institutions will serve on an academic planning council that will oversee the Center's operations.

In addition, the University of Haifa has demonstrated a commitment to regional collaboration through strategic partnerships that transcend traditional geopolitical boundaries. Both the Haifa Laboratory for Religious Studies and the Charney School of Marine Sciences have established academic relationships with leading universities in the UAE and other nearby Arab states. The Center will play a pivotal role in expanding these initiatives, serving as a platform for dialogue, knowledge exchange, and joint research projects.

These partnerships, combined with the University's unique approach to archaeological sciences, will position the National Center for Marine Archaeology at the forefront of marine archaeological innovation and a platform for Archaeo-Diplomacy.

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR MARINE ARCHAEOLOGY

Scientific Leadership: Pioneer advances in archaeological sciences by integrating the exact sciences and enabling multi-disciplinary applications and emerging technologies for transformative discoveries.

Training and Strategic Impact: Train the next generation of marine archaeologists to lead in academia, industry, and government, where their expertise will shape policies vital to preserving marine heritage and resources.

Public Engagement: Inspire the next generation of explorers and scholars through outreach to school-aged children and teens while raising awareness of marine archaeology.

Heritage Conservation: Preserve rich marine heritage for future generations, ensuring public access to and connection with these discoveries and our shared history.

Archaeo-Diplomacy: By fostering positive scientific collaborations through the shared exploration and preservation of our collective human heritage, archaeology can serve as a powerful platform for international diplomacy.

INITIAL RESEARCH PROJECTS

The University of Haifa will push the boundaries of archaeology by excavating underwater sites from the paleolithic era to Biblical, Classical and up to Islamic times. This research will help us reconstruct and bring to life the earliest forms of globalization. Initially, the Center's research agenda will focus on never-before-explored Canaanite and Phoenician shipwrecks and cargoes, as well as the development of harbors progressed from natural anchorages in the Bronze Age to semi-artificial Iron Age harbors, and finally to fully artificial Roman and Byzantine harbors.

Outside Israel, we plan to collaborate with researchers from Malta, Germany, France, Morocco, the US, and Italy on several key maritime archaeological projects: surveying and excavating underwater Phoenician harbors in Sardinia and Malta, exploring the Atlantic coast of Morocco to identify early ocean-going cultures, excavating Roman lake harbors in France and Italy, and participating in the exploration of the maritime Silk Road sites in Tanzania.

OVERVIEW OF 6 NEW LABORATORIES

With six state-of-the-art labs covering all aspects of marine archaeology and cultural heritage, the National Center for Marine Archaeology will be the only such dedicated marine archaeology research facility in Israel and the most comprehensive center for marine archaeology in the Eastern Mediterranean.

1. **Ancient Harbors Lab** – Using an interdisciplinary approach, the lab will investigate the evolution of Canaanite, Phoenician, and Roman harbors, shedding light on trade networks, cultural exchanges, and technological advancements of ancient civilizations.

2. **Ancient Boats Lab** - Dedicated to the study of ancient maritime technology, researchers at the lab analyze the construction techniques, materials, and design of ancient vessels to reconstruct the shipbuilding traditions of diverse cultures.

3. **Submerged Prehistoric Settlements Lab -** Employing cutting-edge underwater archaeological techniques, researchers explore the hidden histories beneath the waves, uncovering evidence of ancient coastal communities, trade routes, and environmental changes at submerged prehistoric sites.

4. **Geoarchaeological Lab -** Researchers analyze sediments, soils, and other natural archives to reconstruct past environments and human-land interactions, gaining insights into climate change, sea-level fluctuations, and the impact of human activity on the landscape, thus providing a comprehensive understanding of the region's historical development.

5. **The Cultural Heritage *(Finds from the Sea)* Lab -** Examining and preserving objects from shipwrecks and submerged sites, the lab uncovers invaluable insights into the maritime trade, craftsmanship, and cultural dynamics of ancient civilizations.

6. **Underwater Mapping and Cyber-Archaeology Lab -** Deploying underwater drones, sophisticated sonar systems, and photogrammetry techniques, researchers generate high-resolution 3D models and comprehensive maps, enabling immersive virtual exploration and preservation of submerged cultural heritage for data acquisition, analyses, curation and dissemination.

The Center will also feature advanced infrastructure for marine archaeology, including a maritime workshop and diving center for underwater research, a conservation lab for archaeological finds, climate-controlled storage for artifacts, and a national archive for maritime archaeology.

OUTREACH AND EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Aligned with the University's commitment to academic excellence and social responsibility, the Center will offer enrichment programs in the sciences for students of all ages. The University of Haifa is Israel's most diverse university with over 40% of undergraduates from Arab communities. With a particular focus on talented young people from Israel's periphery, these programs aim to cultivate the next generation of scientific leaders and promote equity in educational opportunities.

- **Special Needs Diving Program**
  A specialized diving program for children with special needs, based on a successful initiative from the Recanati Institute. This program will enhance life skills and quality of life for participants, while being open to all sectors of Israeli society, reflecting the University's diverse and inclusive community.

- **Youth Voyage into Mediterranean Archaeology (Middle School)**
  This national program will take school children (ages 9-14) on sea expeditions to explore marine archaeology and maritime civilizations. In partnership with other Israeli organizations, the University will provide hands-on archaeological activities both at sea and onshore, expanding the reach beyond Haifa.

- **Young Marine Archaeologists Program (High School)**
  Targeting high school students, this program will engage participants in marine archaeology research led by the Department of Maritime Civilizations. Students will contribute to ongoing projects and attend weekly sessions with graduate students on topics related to marine archaeology and history.

- **Young Marine Archaeologists Program (High School)**
  The center will employ cutting-edge virtual reality technology, interactive presentations, and authentic artifacts to provide visitors with an immersive experience of Israel's submerged archaeological sites.

High school students engage in a hands-on outreach activity at the University of Haifa's marine facilities by the sea.

MEASURING IMPACT

We have established five key performance targets to measure our progress and success:

Research Output: In the first three years of the new Center, increase by 25% underwater surveys aimed at identifying new marine areas containing archaeological remains along the Israeli coast. A similar 25% increase in the number of artifacts successfully extracted and preserved using new technologies. A 50% increase in maritime archaeology publications (articles, books, social media, and other web-based dissemination tools). An 80% increase in international underwater archaeology collaborations with countries around the Mediterranean.

Media Visibility: 100% of global media mentions of Israeli underwater archaeology attributed to the center within the first three years.

International Collaboration: A 100% increase in international scientific partnerships compared to pre-center collaborations at the University of Haifa.

Public Engagement: A 300% increase in public participation in the center's outreach programs.

VR Experience: 5,000 first-time visitors to the VR experience within the first year of operation.

HAIFA'S HARBOR AS THE GATEWAY:

THE FUTURE SITE OF THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR MARINE ARCHAEOLOGY

The University and the Haifa Municipality have joined forces to secure a prime location at Haifa Port for the Center. Establishing the Center at the port will greatly enhance its research agenda due to several strategic benefits:

- **Academic Synergies** – With direct access to the sea and just steps from the University of Haifa's downtown technology campus, the location will facilitate collaborations between marine archaeologists and experts in data analysis and computational methods.

- **Urban Renewal** – Situated adjacent to Haifa's burgeoning business district, the Center will be a hothouse for industry-academia joint ventures and play a pivotal role in the Haifa Port's major modernization and expansion efforts.

- **Transportation Hub** – Conveniently located along the coastal rail line, the site offers excellent public transportation accessibility, including the cable car linking the downtown area to the Technion and the University of Haifa's main campus. The location ensures convenient access for both local and international experts, as well as students taking part in outreach efforts.

Designed through a national architectural competition, the National Center for Marine Archaeology will be a landmark facility. With direct access to a deep-water harbor and a plethora of nearby resources, the center will be positioned to become a global leader in marine archaeology.

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

We invite you to partner with us on a groundbreaking project that will advance marine archaeology, enhance environmental sustainability, and foster regional and international scientific collaborations. With a mission that extends beyond mere historical preservation, we are committed to uncovering and retelling Israel's maritime story in engaging formats that will inspire the next generation. This is more than research - it is an opportunity to shape the future.

- **A landmark contribution of $20 million** will enable the University of Haifa to complete a state-of-the-art, multi-floor complex and dedicate the building in your honor.

BUDGET

PARTNER	AMOUNT	STATUS
Lead Gift	$20,000,000	Requested
Israel Antiquities Authority	$3,500,000	Requested
University of Haifa	$1,500,000	Requested
Additional donors	$2,000,000	In process
TOTAL	**$27,000,000**	

Architectural rendering of the renovated Haifa Port, designed by the municipality's architects.

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR MARINE ARCHAEOLOGY:

JOIN US IN SAFEGUARDING ISRAEL'S RICH MARITIME HISTORY AND PROMOTING REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC COLLABORATIONS.

Thank you for your consideration of this proposal.

אוניברסיטת חיפה
UNIVERSITY OF HAIFA
جامعة حيفا

Office of the President
uh-president@univ.haifa.ac.il
www.haifa.ac.il