

Belitung Shipwreck

Underwater | Java Sea, Indonesia | sank about 830 CE | Grades 6-8

Name _____ Date _____

An Arab-style ship that sank around 830 CE was carrying about 60,000 pieces of Chinese pottery and gold treasures.

Read the story

Around 830 CE, a ship sewn together with rope, built in the style of Arabian or Persian ships called dhows, was sailing from China toward the Middle East. It carried a huge cargo from Tang dynasty China.

The ship struck a reef near Belitung Island and sank. Its cargo stayed on the seabed for more than 1,100 years. In 1998, fishermen diving for sea cucumbers found the wreck.

The cargo included about 60,000 ceramics, especially Changsha bowls painted with birds, fish and words. There were also gold cups, silver boxes and bronze mirrors. One bowl has a date on it that matches 826 CE. The wreck proves that ships were sailing all the way between China and the Arab world during this time.

How it ended

The ship hit a reef and sank. It lay hidden until 1998. Its recovery raised questions about how shipwrecks should be studied and who should own their treasures.

Key words

- dhow: a type of sailing ship used in the Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea
- ceramics: objects made from fired clay, like pottery and bowls
- Tang dynasty: a time of Chinese rule from 618 to 907 CE

Wow facts

- The ship's planks were sewn together with rope instead of nails.
- One bowl is dated to the year 826 CE.
- The wreck is the largest single collection of Tang dynasty gold ever found in one place.

Talk about it

1. What does this shipwreck tell us about world trade 1,200 years ago?

2. Should treasure from shipwrecks be sold or kept in museums? Why?

Try this

Draw a map of Belitung Shipwreck as it looked at its busiest. Label three things people did there.

Quick quiz

Circle the best answer.

1. What was most of the cargo?

- A. Chinese pottery
- B. Spices only
- C. Steel
- D. Paper money

2. How was the ship held together?

- A. Sewn with rope
- B. Welded steel
- C. Glued plastic
- D. Nails only

3. Where is most of the cargo now?

- A. Singapore
- B. London
- C. New York
- D. Lima

Go further

Open ruinscape.live/belitung-shipwreck/ for photos, the Then and Now picture where there is one, and links to museum collections and research. On the globe, Lyra Kael can fly the class there and answer questions.

Answer key (for teachers)

1. A. About 60,000 ceramic pieces were found.
2. A. Its planks were sewn together with rope.
3. A. It is at the Asian Civilisations Museum in Singapore.