

Dragon Sea: A True Tale of Treasure, Archeology, and Greed off the Coast of Vietnam

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Treasure hunters are seemingly necessary for archaeologists. The new "treasure", vintage Chinese porcelain, is giving a financial backing to the recovery of details of ships sunk in the South China Sea during the period from roughly 700 AD to the 19th Century. The book demonstrates the interaction between the financial backers, the archaeologists (often added to give cover to the main aim of loot), the marine operators with ships and equipment to be paid for and the pure looters.

Dragon Sea: A True Tale of Treasure, Archeology, and Greed off the Coast of Vietnam (Hardcover)
by Frank Pope (Author)

Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

This intense look at the fierce competition in what first-time author Pope slyly calls "the extraordinary underworld of shipwrecks" focuses on the effort in the late 1990s to recover a hoard of precious 15th-century porcelain from the sunken Hoi An ship in the Dragon Sea, a stretch of "typhoon-torn" water off the coast of Vietnam. Pope is equally adept at illuminating "the peculiarly powerful allure of shipwrecks" that drives the Hoi An team as he is in explaining the larger and more difficult context of modern excavation efforts, where "maritime archeologists who were regularly leading excavations around the world could be counted on the fingers of one hand, but the number of looters, souvenir-seekers, and well-equipped treasure-hunters was in the high hundreds." But Pope's strength in detailing the Hoi An story comes from his fascinating in-depth portraits of the main players in what became an unprecedented and expensive recovery effort: Ong Soo Hin, a Malaysian businessman who helped launch the project; Mensun Bound, the director of Oxford's Maritime Archaeological unit;

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and Dilip Tan, the operations manager under "nightmarish pressure" to finish the project. Pope expertly shows how the same ocean that can terrify and enrich can also "lay bare the very nature of man." (Jan.)