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Publication Info
Published in Legacy, Volume 7/#2-8/#1, 2003, pages 13-13.
http://www.cas.sc.edu/sciaa/
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The International Handbook of Underwater Archaeology Embarks on Maiden Voyage

By Christopher F. Amer

Last September, Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishing released The International Handbook of Underwater Archaeology (Figure 1, cover of the Handbook). The profession and public alike have eagerly awaited the release of this milestone publication. It has been more than 35 years since Dr. George Bass completed excavation on the Cape Gelidonia wreck that heralded in the age of archaeology underwater. Underwater research is now a confirmed sub-discipline of the field of archaeology. However, while the growth of archaeological research of both submerged prehistoric and historic sites has been rapid, the literature published on the work has not kept pace with new developments in the field. Carol Ruppe and Jan Barstad, the editors of this 881-page tome, designed the Handbook to fill that literature gap. The Handbook’s appeal is widely varied, from underwater archaeologists to maritime historians, educators to scientific specialists, and from graduate students to the general public. The editors have adopted a “geographic and topical approach” and include in the 48 chapters perspectives on technology, law, and public and private institutional roles and goals, as well as a look to the future of the sub-discipline.

On January 16, 2003 Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishing hosted a book launching reception that was held in conjunction with the 36th Annual Conference on Historical and Underwater Archaeology in Providence, Rhode Island. The reception, attended by well over 150 people, included many of the book’s chapter authors. The function provided archaeologists attending the conference with an opportunity to meet some of the movers and shakers in underwater archaeology today, while allowing authors to sign copies of the book for each other and the public.