

Research on the perception of underwater spaces in ancient Mediterranean societies represents an almost entirely unexplored area of investigation. There have been studies on the effects that underwater immersion has on contemporary humans, whilst archaeology and philology only marginally considered this aspect of the interaction between humans and the sea.

This project aims to investigate concepts of underwater spaces in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean in the course of the second and first millennium BCE. It will consider the way submarine environments were perceived, both following the direct experience of immersion and through imagination. This will be done by analysing and interpreting the known accounts of underwater settings. It will thus consider depictions and written testimonies about ancient freedivers, but also the diverse representation of underwater landscapes and animals.

The first objective is to understand how underwater spaces were perceived in their own right and in relation to land settings. The second objective is to understand in what way the real, freediving experiences are affected the narratives of underwater realms. Finally, from a methodological standpoint, the project aims at combining archaeological and textual analysis with approaches deriving from the cognitive sciences. By bringing together real and imagined underwater spaces through the tools offered by cognitive psychology and philosophy, it will be possible to glimpse into a yet unexplored area in the field of ancient studies. This project constitutes a first attempt to understand the perception of the ancient sea from a full, three-dimensional perspective, introducing new depths to our knowledge of the ancient Mediterranean cultures.