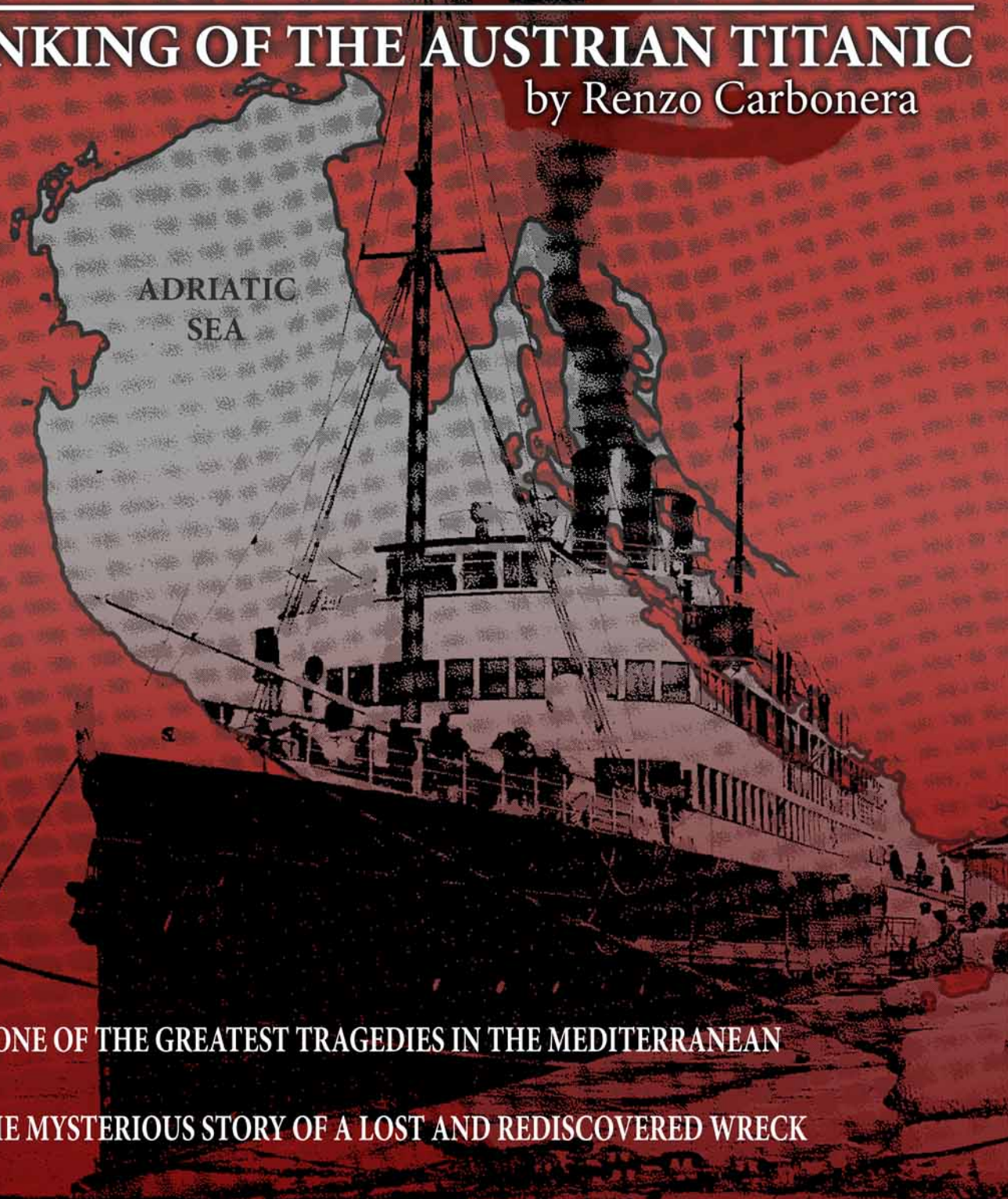


THE MYSTERY OF THE BARON GAUTSCH

THE SINKING OF THE AUSTRIAN TITANIC

by Renzo Carbonera



ONE OF THE GREATEST TRAGEDIES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

THE MYSTERIOUS STORY OF A LOST AND REDISCOVERED WRECK

A SYMBOL FOR THE FALL OF A GREAT EMPIRE

THIS IS THE STORY OF THE AUSTRIAN TITANIC, THE BARON GAUTSCH.

THE IMPERIAL NAVY'S MUCH ENVIED OCEAN LINER

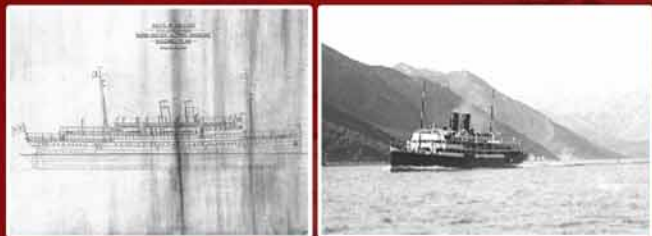
A STORY THAT BEGAN WITH THE START OF FIRST WORLD WAR

AND STILL HAS TO COME TO AN END

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The luxury ocean liner Baron Gautsch was the pride of the Austrian merchant fleet. It was the best, the safest and the fastest means of transport of the Habsburg Empire and was rightly considered the Austro-Hungarian Titanic.



On the 13th of August, 1914, the United Kingdom and France declared war on Austria, having declared war on Germany a week earlier. Skirmishes between the Empires officially became what was to be known as the "First World War".

That same day, the Baron Gautsch was sailing towards Trieste packed with reserve soldiers, wealthy tourists and notables returning to Vienna because of the imminent war. At 14.45, the liner hit a mine and sank off the coast of Istria in less than five minutes.

Of the 240 official passengers and 66 crew members, 177 died. But the vessel was overcrowded and military or public administration employees did not need to be registered on board. Official figures spoke of over 500 deaths, mainly unrecognizably burnt corpses, making it the largest marine tragedy in the Mediterranean.

Only 68 bodies were ever recovered, including that of Second Officer Tenze, in command at the time of the disaster, who was found with a bullet in his head.

Was the disaster the result of sabotage or a mine laid just a few hours earlier by the Austrian Navy itself? And what was the Baron Gautsch carrying?

A certain Giuseppe Messineo of Turin – a high-ranking officer in the Italian army, who lost his wife and three children in the wreck – claimed damages of 200,000 Austrian crowns in family jewels. That is almost 10 million dollars in today's value.

But the mystery of the Baron Gautsch does not end here. There are tales of huge quantities of gold reserves from the bank of Kotor, the last outpost of the Empire, which was to be brought to Vienna in the event of war. Apparently, they disappeared and were secretly transported by the Baron Gautsch. Both the Nazis and Tito used the rumours surrounding this vast treasure – which has apparently never been recovered – to construct a thick smokescreen.



Today, the Baron Gautsch is considered one of the most beautiful wrecks in the world, a wreck that still hides secrets, as the two lower decks, covered in mud and shells, are extremely dangerous and partly unexplored.

It was the beginning of the end for the oldest European Empire, a symbol for millions of people on both sides suffering the most terrible war humanity had ever faced. But it was also a gift for the media, which immediately turned its spotlights on the trial.

Since then, the wreck of the Baron Gautsch has played a role in the century's most momentous events, like the Yugoslav Republic and Civil War, the Iron Curtain, the Third Reich. The ghost ship continues to sail, despite lying 40 metres below sea level for the last 90 years.

RUNNING TIME: 53 MINUTES

FORMAT: HDcam

A production by:

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