Ships And Maritime Landscapes

Proceedings of the Thirteenth International Symposium on Boat and Ship Archaeology, Amsterdam 2012
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Edited by
Jerzy Gawronski
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& Joost Schokkenbroek

ISBSA 13

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Contributors and participants of the ISBSA 13 at the replica of the Batavia in Lelystad, October 10th 2012.
The Thirteenth International Symposium on Boat and Ship Archaeology (ISBSA 13) was held in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, from October 7th-12th 2012, at the Royal Navy Complex Amsterdam adjacent to the National Maritime Museum. The meeting was jointly organised by the Office for Monuments & Archaeology of the city of Amsterdam, Het Scheepvaartmuseum (The National Maritime Museum) in Amsterdam, the Netherland Cultural Heritage Agency and The University of Groningen. Over 200 scholars of archaeology, history, ethnography and anthropology gathered to discuss current global research issues related to the use and development of boats and ships.

The thirteenth edition of ISBSA had as general theme ‘Ships and Maritime Landscapes’ and focused on questions about the relationship between the physical landscape, the shipbuilding industry in a particular area and ship design. From their very start in 1976 the triennial ISBSA conferences had as their main purpose “to bring together all those involved in the study of the form, structure, function and operational performance of ancient boats.” Although choosing a theme outside the direct scope of shipbuilding, the organisers of ISBSA 13 were well aware of the fact that ships and the technology of building ships are specialisms that deserve their own platform. Therefore, methodology of shipwreck research, experimental archaeology and ethnography of ships were kept as core elements of the conference programme. Simultaneously, current developments in maritime archaeology were integrated in the programme with the aim to discuss and understand ship technology and technological change in a wider context.

After three decades of methodological progression, maritime archaeology developed from the 1990s a broader perspective exploring the intricate information value of ships more fully. New approaches were formulated to understand and apply maritime data. Among other things the notion of the maritime cultural landscape was introduced, which was derived from landscape archaeology and allowed a more coherent and integral approach, in which the boundaries between underwater and land-based sites were less distinct. Within this wider spatial context shipwrecks are not to be considered as isolated material entities but as exponents of complex patterns of production and communication within and between communities and societies, on a local, regional or global level simultaneously. The process of designing, building and using ships was a complex social activity and therefore ships are closely connected to the economic, social, political and cultural mechanisms of a given society. Ships exemplify in a concrete material way the spatial relations and interaction in trade, technology, power and culture. In discussing the current state of maritime archaeology, one of the focus points is the meaning of ships for our understanding of the functioning of societies. It is exactly this wider context which makes ships so relevant as new sources for the study of human behaviour and social changes.

In order to achieve a balance in the conference programming between these two diverse approaches – the technological and the social domains – and to facilitate as much as presentations as possible in the five-day programme it was decided to programme parallel sessions. Beside sessions on topics related to the maritime landscape, there was a simultaneous series of papers in which a broad array of other themes was addressed, like regional watercraft, ship construction and typology, material applications and design, outfitting and propulsion, reconstruction and quite a substantial section on current research.

The programme included next to 90 papers also 26 poster presentations on a variety of subjects and two venues outside the conference complex at the navy yard. On Tuesday evening October 9th the French Institute (Institut Français, Maison Descartes) organized for the ISBSA participants a showing of the film Les voitures d’eau on the building and navigation of wooden two-mast ships in Canada in collaboration with archaeologist and CNRS research coordinator Eric Kieth. On Wednesday afternoon October 10th a symposium...
excursion was organised to Lelystad in the province of Flevoland. After a short session at the Province House the programme included a visit to the workshops and depot of the Department of Ship Archaeology of the Netherlands Cultural Heritage Agency, the replica of the Batavia and the exhibition Schipbreuk at New Land Heritage Centre.

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Organising Committee