



Éric Rieth: Pour une histoire de l'archéologie navale. Les bateaux et l'histoire

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► To cite this version:

Giulia Boetto. Éric Rieth: Pour une histoire de l'archéologie navale. Les bateaux et l'histoire. Journal of Maritime Archaeology, 2020, 15, pp.507-508. 10.1007/s11457-020-09261-1 . halshs-02560709

HAL Id: halshs-02560709

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-02560709>

Submitted on 2 May 2020

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Journal of Maritime Archaeology

ISSN 1557-2285

J Mari Arch
DOI 10.1007/s11457-020-09261-1



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Classiques Garnier, Paris, 2019, 431 pp, 58 line drawings and b/w photos, 36€, ISBN 978-2-406-08847-9, ISSN 2118-8181

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Recognized expert in the field of medieval and modern nautical archaeology, Emeritus Researcher at the French Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) and responsible for the Department of Ship Archaeology of the *Musée de la Marine* in Paris, Éric Rieth is the author of the seventeenth volume of the prestigious collection *History of Technology*. This volume entitled *Pour une histoire de l'archéologie navale. Les bateaux et l'histoire* (For a history of nautical archaeology. Boats and history), thoroughly prefaced by Patrice Pomey, is dedicated to the historiography of nautical archaeology, and to the different ways in which ships, as civil and military tools of work, were considered as objects of history. Chronologically, the study extends from the sixteenth century to our time.

The author begins by taking us to sixteenth century Venice. It is in the context of the Venetian Renaissance and the dynamic environment of the shipyards of the *Serenissima* that the first book dedicated to nautical archaeology, and in particular to the ships of Greco-Roman times, was conceived by Lazare de Baïf, ambassador of Francis I of France in Venice. De Baïf's book, published in 1536 in Paris, focused on the question of the rowing system in ancient galleys, and was based largely on written sources and some limited iconographic documents available at his time. According to Rieth, De Baïf's book very probably reflected the Venetian preoccupations of the moment in a technical environment open to innovation. One of the most important Venetian inventions concerned the introduction of the galley *a scaluccio*, in which each oar was operated by several rowers, instead of the galley *a sensile* where each rower operated one oar.

The question of the rowing system of Greco and Roman galleys will dominate the debate in subsequent centuries, particularly in mid-seventeenth century France when galleys were still part of the navy, although in a secondary role due to the development of artillery onboard warships. Always bearing in mind the intellectual and technical context of the time in order to better understand, from the historiographical point of view, the intellectual or technical influences behind contemporary thinking in the field of nautical

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archaeology, the author retraces the contributions of two members of the French navy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Barras de la Penne and André François Bourreau-Deslandes. But Rieth did not overlook the contributions of scholars from other professional environments, and underlines the original contribution of Julien-David Le Roy, an expert in ancient Greek monumental architecture.

The author focuses on the evolution that affected nautical archaeology from the second half of the nineteenth century which resulted in a deep renewal of this discipline, integrating into the debate new fields of research and new sources, as well as revised interpretations of traditional sources. In particular, the author discusses the contributions to the renewal of the discipline due to two notable figures, Augustin Jal, who first perceived the importance of the Medieval Age, and Admiral Pâris, who opened the way to the vast comparative field of nautical ethnography. The author also underlines the renewal of philological studies paving the way to new critical interpretations of ancient written sources, and the introduction of photography that permitted the exact reproduction of the rich corpus of ship images, including graffiti.

Another of the merits of the volume is an assessment of the fundamental role of Scandinavian scholars in the further development of nautical archaeology. In Northern Europe, due to the limited amount of written and iconographic documents, archaeology played the main role from the beginning. Excavations of some famous shipwrecks found in Nydam, Gokstad and Oseberg stimulated new lines of theoretical and methodological thoughts. This Scandinavian heritage is still alive today.

In the Mediterranean, archaeological sources came to the forefront in the middle of the twentieth century when underwater archaeology allowed archaeologists to directly study ship remains underwater. Nautical archaeologists finally developed their own paradigms and methodologies, studying boats and ships through their tripartite dimension as defined by Keith Muckelroy in 1978.

Finally, Rieth penned a rewarding reflection on the current issues of the discipline. In particular, he considers the question of the “technical thinking of the ship” which situates nautical archaeology in its appropriate place in the history of technology. He also looks ahead to the future, considering researcher and data connectivity, the increasing importance of numerical tools for the survey and reconstruction of ships, and the development of technical devices opening research access to deep water environments.

In conclusion, this is an excellent, readable volume putting in evidence the long history of nautical archaeology, the evolution of its questioning and the set of concepts and practices that define it as a fully scientific discipline. Although the author shows a clear penchant for Northern Europe somehow understating the contribution of the Mediterranean in the development of nautical archaeology, reading this book is highly recommended for any archaeologist interested in studying boats and ships of all kinds and periods.

Funding No special funding for this study.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest The author declares that I have no conflict of interest.

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