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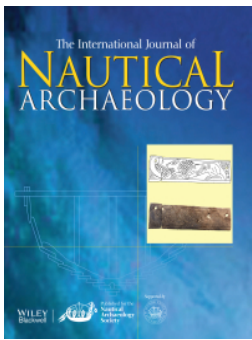
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OBITUARY

Patrice Pomey 15 August 1943–7 March 2021 A Life Spent Sailing Ancient Seas



Patrice Pomey left us at dawn 7 March 2021, aged 78, struck down by the illness against which he had battled for several years. With his death, the scientific community has lost one of the grand masters of nautical archaeology, a discipline that he contributed to establishing and that he conducted at the highest levels. The sudden and unexpected decline in his health prevented him from enjoying the publication of the proceedings of the 15th International Symposium on Boat and Ship Archaeology in Marseille 2018 of which he was co-editor (2021). A loyal member of this worldwide community of archaeologists and historians impassioned by boats of all chronological and geographic horizons, it had been his wish to see the conference take place in France for the second time. In 1994 he had organized ISBSA 7 on the little isle of Tatiou with his friend and alter ego for ship structure of the Middle Ages, Éric Rieth. The Marseille edition celebrated 50 years of maritime and nautical archaeology conducted by the research unit Patrice had joined when recruited by the CNRS, the Institut d'Archéologie Méditerranéenne, later the Centre Camille Jullian, which he directed from 2000 to 2007. Let's not forget that it was in the Phocian city that Patrice took his first underwater 'steps' as an archaeologist, working for the protection of underwater cultural heritage. He directed the Direction des Recherches Archéologiques Sous-Marines (later Département des Recherches Archéologiques Subaquatiques et Sous-Marines) from 1984 to 1991 and toiled for the 1 December 1989 law which protects maritime culture. Above all, in Marseille he directed one of the most exhilarating enterprises of his career: the excavation of two Archaic

Greek boats at Place Jules-Verne in 1993 and the construction, 20 years later, of a sailing replica of one of them, named *Gyptis*.

Patrice published only a few articles in the *IJNA* and these only from the 2000s,¹ but these articles, some of which provide readers with wide-reaching syntheses, are evidence of the extent of his knowledge and interests. They are mentioned here with the themes and ideas developed since the early days of his research and for the *longue durée* of his career.

After three years of study in the footsteps of his father, an engineer elected to the Académie des Sciences, Patrice decided to radically change direction, turning to History of Art and Archaeology at the Sorbonne. An avid sportsman, he was a fencing champion and spent his summer holidays spearfishing. He was naturally drawn to diving, a booming sport following the invention of scuba. He therefore turned to the Direction des Recherches Archéologiques Sous-Marines, which had just been created by the Ministry of Culture in 1966. His meeting with its first director, André Tchernia, propelled him towards a speciality that had previously been shunned as overly technical: the study of the hulls of ancient ships. At this point Patrice found the vocation that he would follow throughout his scientific career. As one of the first French archaeologist-divers, Patrice devoured all the available publications on the subject, gaining experience until he was able to co-direct the two wreck excavations that are considered the foundation of French underwater archaeology: Planier 3 (1970) and La Madrague de Giens (1972–1982). Having written a Masters dissertation on ship construction in the Roman period and a study of ship iconography from the Corporations Place of Ostia while at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, he joined the Ecole Française in Rome from 1971 to 1974. Unable to take on the Fiumicino ships for his doctoral research, a project that many years later he handed on to me, he turned to the iconography of the *naves onerariae*. He became a master of interpreting all types of ancient ship portrayals, from which he could draw evidence and knowledge of types, shapes, and propulsion and steering systems. His note on the Byzantine mosaic of Kelenderis (2006)², which he interpreted as one of the earliest portrayals of a boat rigged with a lateen

sail, is one example among many of his research in this field. Meanwhile, his vision was not limited to the iconography – by comparing images to ancient texts and wreck remains the traditional sources gained a new significance and were used to confirm or complete results obtained from excavations. The most accomplished example of this is the comparison he made between the ship with two masts seen on the 3rd-century mosaic from the baths of Themetra (Chott Meriem) in Tunisia and the structure of La Madrague de Giens wreck, which provided the general appearance of this late Republican ship.

Patrice used his practical know-how and his encyclopaedic knowledge of ancient ships to elaborate theories and ideas which nourished and continued to feed scientific debates. A summary of these can be found in *L'archéologie navale* which he wrote with Éric Rieth (2005), an English version of which is in press (Texas A&M University Press). Among many examples is the classification of Greco-Roman merchant sailing vessels into two structural types, 'Hellenistic' and 'Romano-Imperial', and the concept of the 'principles and process of construction'. This enables ship structure to be understood both in immaterial terms – the concept behind the shapes and structures – and material – the construction itself – to bring to light major issues, such as the processes of transition in techniques, varying between rupture and evolution over long periods, or survivals; notably, the change from a longitudinal shell-based concept and shell-first procedures to the transversal frame-based concept and frame-based procedures, without forgetting the numerous variants and mixed methods. The co-authored article 'Transition from shell to skeleton in ancient Mediterranean ship-construction: analysis, problems and future research' (2012) represents the conclusion to research started in his youth, shaped during ten years of excavation on La Madrague de Giens wreck, enriched by multiple discoveries in the Mediterranean, and fed by discussion with his colleagues and closest friends, firstly his two co-authors Yak Kahanov and Éric Rieth, but also Richard J. Steffy, Lucien Basch, B at Arnold, and many others.

Another aspect of ship construction was subjected to Patrice's acute analysis: the sewn-boat tradition. He first considered the issue in an article that appeared in *The Mariner's Mirror* (1981) in which he reinterpreted the system used to assemble the Bon-Port e wreck, which had not been understood at the time of its original publication. By linking it to other discoveries of ancient sewn boats and drawing on ethnographic examples to cast a light on certain aspects, he tackled – without knowing it – one of the themes he would explore for many years to come. The discovery of two abandoned boats dating to the middle of the 6th

century BC in the ancient port of Marseille, one entirely sewn (Jules-Verne 9), the other larger vessel assembled with mortise and tenons and occasional ligatures (Jules-Verne 9), caused him to continue on this path. He was able to reconstruct the development of the Greek tradition of sewn boats over a millennium from the rare texts and by amassing the known wreck remains from throughout the Mediterranean. Recent discoveries of sewn boats in the Adriatic and north-west Mediterranean, in France and Spain, motivated him to write a final synthetic article, which we co-authored in 2019.

Among his many projects, we must return to the excavation of the Archaic Greek boats found in Place Jules-Verne that inspired an ambitious experimental archaeology project. With happy excursions on the Greek ship from Kyrenia replica in mind, in which he participated with his Greek colleagues, particularly Harry Tzalas, he imagined himself at the helm of the Jules-Verne boats, accomplishing the nautical archaeologist's dream of diving, not into the abyss, but into a deeper understanding of the gests and actions of both the shipbuilders and Phocean navigators.

The project was a hard struggle requiring endless determination but, in the end, his dream was accomplished with the construction of *Gyptis* using ancient principles and methods. It would not have been possible without his innate ability to lead teams, and the trust he was willing to place in young colleagues – notably Sabrina Marlier and Pierre Poveda – while surmounting difficulties thanks to his optimism skills of analysis and synthesis without equal.

The several hundred hours of sailing time achieved with *Gyptis*, following a strict scientific protocol, represent a pioneering project in the Mediterranean and provide a unique set of quantified data about the sailing capacities of a little caboteur with mixed propulsion, adapted to its navigation zone and its function. Several articles, including two co-authored with Pierre Poveda, have been published in the *IJNA*, recount this scientific adventure (2018, 2019).

To finish, I am conscious that these few lines provide an imperfect sketch of the person and of the scientific heritage left by Patrice Pomey. With Fr ed eric Guibal he also developed the first dendrochronology programme to be used to study ancient Mediterranean wrecks (1991–2001), and he took a new look at the Egyptian fleet, notably through the excavation of the carbonized remains of boats stocked in the caves of Ayn Soukha on the Red Sea, as the proceedings of a conference that he organized in Alexandria in 2010 are evidence. This took place at the end of a two-year residence at the Centre d' tudes Alexandrines, time spent with his friend and colleague Jean-Yves Empereur (2015).

I had the privilege of rubbing shoulders with this great scholar from my first steps in nautical

archaeology, having been schooled using ‘the Gianfrotta-Pomey’, the publication that he co-authored with his friend Piero Alfredo Gianfrotta, and which, still today, remains an essential work, *Archeologia Subacquea: storia, tecniche e relitti* (1981). From master to student, our relationship changed little by little to a firm friendship, until hardly a day passed without hearing his voice at the end of a phone line or opening one of his emails to start the day. The happiest days were when working meetings at his house in Aix-en-Provence would end in feasts for both palate and intellect, thanks to the presence of Monique at his side, his unwavering companion for life. The warmth of these family moments are only one memory among many others equally as enduring and wonderful that ‘the Pomeys’ were kind enough to share with me. All dearest thoughts and wishes are with Monique and their children.

Notes

1. Editor: Patrice Pomey confided to me that he regretted not publishing more of his work in English. Despite speaking and reading English fluently, I think he was shy of writing as he would likely have lost some of the style and fluidity that are evident in his French publications. It has been one of the joys of the past few years to work with Patrice to correct or translate his texts for publication in the *IJNA*, an endeavour that regularly underlined the extent of his knowledge and the high level of precision he demanded.
2. A complete bibliography of Pomey’s publications can be found in the volume dedicated to him at ISBSA 15: *De re navali: pérégrinations nautiques entre Méditerranée et océan Indien. Mélanges en l’honneur de Patrice Pomey*, G. Boetto, Éric Rieth (Eds.), Paris, CNRS éditions, *Archaeonautica* 20: 9–13.

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(translated by Miranda Richardson)