

Conference Report

Between Continents: 12th International Symposium on Boat and Ship Archaeology

The 12th ISBSA meeting, 12–16 October, 2009, had been perfectly organised by Nergis Günsenin and her team from the University of Istanbul. On Sunday there was a chance to visit the Yenikapı site. During the construction of a new railway station and tunnel the remains of the former harbour, the *Portus Theodosiacus*, were discovered. Constructed during the reign of Theodosius I (376–395 AD) it remained in use up to the 11th century. In an excavated area of 58,000 m² a total of 34 vessels were unearthed. Twenty-four of these are being documented by Istanbul University, while the rest are being studied by the Institute for Nautical Archaeology from Texas A&M University. The participants had a chance to see the remains of the last unexcavated wreck with its impressive timbers (Fig. 1). As the hull has been distorted there was a lively debate about which of the longitudinal timbers could represent the keelson. This outdoor event was followed by a welcome reception at the Pera Museum, where the rest of the conference took place.

George Bass opened the conference with a lively paper by about the early days of nautical archaeology in Turkey, when new techniques for excavating under water were developed. The foundation of the Museum for Underwater Archaeology in Bodrum goes back to the first campaign in 1960, because there was no local museum capable of storing the recovered artefacts. It initiated the collaboration between the INA and Turkey which continues to this day. The newly-discovered ships from Yenikapı were also presented in several papers. Nergis Günsenin introduced the various harbours of Istanbul from Antiquity to medieval times. Some of these places are well recorded, and landing or loading facilities are still nearby, while the knowledge of others like the Yenikapı site was lost.

Ufuk Kocabaş's paper was devoted to the new excavation. *Portus Theodosiacus*, as it is known from Latin sources, was probably the largest harbour in the area in the Early Byzantine period. It was situated at the mouth of the ancient river Lycos which gradually silted up the basin, though other events such as *tsunamis* may have contributed. Some of the ships sank complete with their cargoes, which were not salvaged, while others had probably been abandoned. These wrecks present plenty of information about the evolution of shipbuilding in the Byzantine period and Fred Hocker,

who chaired this session, admitted that several of the ideas put forward up till now needed to be revised.

Though systematic research is still going on, it is already obvious that there was not a linear development in ship design in the Mediterranean. The Tantura wrecks in Israel from the 5th and 6th century AD were skeleton-built, while some of the Yenikapı wrecks of the 8th and 9th centuries still had their bottom planks edge-joined with dowels. There are also three oared vessels 20 m long, possibly warships, the first examples from this period. The paper by Işıl Özsait Kocabaş dealt with Yenikapı wreck 12, dating to the 9th or 10th century. Its dimensions as found were 7 × 2.3 m; the reconstructed hull measures 8–8.5 × 2.8 m. All surviving strakes were fastened to each other by dowels. The cargo consisted of amphoras of the Ganos type, typical of the Sea of Marmara area. Thus it presents a lateen-rigged, probably undecked, coastal vessel. The Yenikapı wreck 17, which was the topic of Evren Türkmenoğlu's paper, is about of the same size as wreck 12. Its date is not fully established yet, but the 8th–9th century is most likely. At this wreck no hints of edge-fastening of the strakes were observed; the hull seems to have been built frame-first. These two wrecks already show the potential of the Yenikapı site. The excavations will be published in a series of its own, and the first two volumes in English and Turkish have already been compiled under the editorship of Ufuk Kocabaş (*The 'Old Ships' of the 'New Gate'. YeniKapi'nin Eski Gemileri* vols 1 (2008, reviewed in this issue) and 2).

There were several other papers dealing with Byzantine wrecks, such as that by Frederick van Doorninck, raising the question of the identity of the home port of the 11th-century Serçe Limanı wreck. As the ship's cooking-ware and food-storage jars were produced in Syria, the vessel most likely hailed from this area. But older wrecks were also discussed. Mark Polzer spoke about a Phoenician wreck off Baja de la Campana, Spain, dating to the 6th century BC. Though the site had been looted, most of the cargo was recorded: elephant tusks, some with Phoenician inscriptions, lead ore, tin and copper ingots, personal possessions of the crew, victuals, and a fluted stone pedestal which was part of an altar, perhaps part of the ship's furniture. Marc Guyon and Eric Rieth, as well as Sabrina Marlier and her team, presented Gallo-Roman river-boats from southern France.



Figure 1. Participants at ISBSA 12 discussing the timbers of the last Yenikapı wreck. (Timm Weski)

Eyal Israeli and Ya'acov Kahanov described hull details of the frame-first construction of the Tantara E wreck, dating between the end of the 7th and the beginning of the 9th century AD. A much younger wreck off Akko, Israel, which could be connected either to the siege of the town by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1799 or with the Anglo-Turkish-Austrian fleet in 1840, was introduced by Deborah Cvikel. An interesting point was raised by Yusuf Alperen Aydin, who spoke about anchor production for the 18th-century Ottoman navy. Though sailcloth was produced by local manufacturers, the smithies were unable to produce anchors of the necessary size, so they were imported, mainly from France. Though the speaker did not mention it this was part of the treaty between these two states against the Holy Roman Empire.

Though the Mediterranean was the main focus of the conference, there were papers from other regions. Julian Whitewright, as a member of a larger team headed by Lucy Blue, talked about ethnographic studies along the eastern coast of India. Jeng-Hong Chen tried a reconstructing of a 17th-century AD Taiwanese junk using contemporary illustrations and descriptions. Emrah Erginer's paper focused on the revival of the kayaks of Izmir, which were widely used as harbour craft and fishing vessels up to the 1940s, but were totally gone by the 1990s. The re-creation of a mid-2nd-millennium-BC Egyptian ship and its trial on the Red Sea was explained by Cheryl Ward and David Vann.

The successful trial voyage of *Sea Stallion*, a replica of Skuldelev wreck 2, from Roskilde, Denmark, to Dublin, Ireland, in 2007 and back in 2008 was presented by Søren Nielsen, who also showed a short film about it. The question of Viking-Age seafaring

was also the aim of Anton Englert, who analysed the actual travel-speed of reconstructed wrecks. Apart from comparing passage notes he also distributed a questionnaire about the wellbeing of the crew.

In a former harbour of Oslo, Norway, 15 wrecks of the 16th/17th century AD were recently discovered during construction work, and had to be excavated under great time-pressure. Hilde Vangstad demonstrated how time could be saved by making only a photographic record of the timbers on site, leaving the detailed recording to a later date. Morten Raven showed how the documentation of ships' timbers had changed during recent decades. Polyester sheets and waterproof pins of various colours have been replaced by 3-dimensional digital recording. A paper by Nigel Nayling and Toby Jones introduced a software programme developed by institutions from different countries which was used to record the medieval Newport ship in Wales.

The academic sessions were supplemented by films about various projects which were shown in the evening. A visit to the newly-opened Naval Museum was followed by a short walk to the temporary store of the vast collection of rowing boats, including a 17th-century galley, which will soon be displayed in a new wing of the museum. After the last paper there was a clear vote for Amsterdam as the location for the next ISBSA. The post-conference excursion visited one of the last traditional wooden shipbuilding yards at Amasra, on the little-known Turkish coast of the Black Sea. Once again it was a well-attended and interesting meeting.

Timm Weski
München, Germany