

The Dover Boat: Steady as She Goes!

Ole Crumlin-Pedersen's paper in *IJNA* 35.1 discusses the decision leading to the first theoretical reconstruction of the Dover Bronze-Age Boat, while offering suggestions for a fresh interpretation. Such thoughts by those not closely involved in the process are essential in order to develop our understanding of prehistoric boat-design processes and building techniques.

The structure at the missing end was and still is a source of serious debate among the reconstruction's committee of experts, and a further puzzle is why the vessel was partially destroyed. If recycling were practised, why was she not repaired? Perhaps the greatest problem, however, is the small number of finds of prehistoric boats, and the even smaller number of practical reconstructions, leading to too much reliance on the experiences of those who have built and gone to sea in them. Crumlin-Pederson puts too much emphasis on lessons learned from *Tilia Alsie*, the reconstruction of the Hjortspring Iron-Age boat. The Dover Boat was based on two quarter-logs, giving it thickness and rigidity which cannot be denied, and means that comparisons with much more flexible, more developed boats are not helpful. Another problem is the different effects of sewing, stitching and lacing, all involving materials no longer used, whose strength and flexibility are difficult for us to calculate, given that modern efforts are almost certainly less skilled than those of the original builders. Many

suggestions go beyond the archaeological evidence. Even an actual value for withy strength would not justify an increase in the length of the Dover boat without real structural evidence.

Resorting to guesswork more than is absolutely necessary is not helpful, whether it is done by those closely involved or by outside commentators. Without doubt, models built to a large scale and to well-reasoned formats would settle many of the questions raised both in Crumlin-Pederson's paper and within the Dover Boat report (Clarke, 2004). It is to be hoped that a better understanding of the views and evidence leading to the present theoretical reconstruction will be an antidote to some of the theories and diversionary interpretations which always abound at this stage in understanding a prehistoric boat's technology and performance.

I am grateful to Crumlin-Pedersen for making me think again about my provisional conclusions. While I do not regard *Tilia Alsie* as a useful comparator, I congratulate him on the superb technical quality and honesty of the report on her building. It sets the standard. Full-scale trials are the best way to discover the sea-going and other capabilities of the Dover Boat, and it is to be hoped that enough agreement can be reached for this to become a feasible, and useful, exercise.

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