

Cultural biographies, cognitive landscapes and dirty old bits of boat: ‘theory’ in maritime archaeology

Joe Flatman

School of History and Archaeology, Cardiff University, PO Box 909, Cardiff CF10 3XU, UK

Advances in the use of archaeological theory by maritime archaeologists are proposed after a brief review of recent literature on the subject. A disparity in theoretical discussion between maritime and ‘mainstream’ archaeology is noted and reasons for this discussed, before two areas are explored where mutual advances might be made: an ‘engendered’ maritime archaeology and ‘Marxist’ perspectives. The paper concludes by considering the development of specific theoretical approaches unique to the maritime sphere.

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Introduction

To paraphrase Binford (1962), ‘all archaeology is theoretical, or it is nothing’. Ironically, given Binford’s role in the predominantly processual phase of archaeological thinking, this perception is more strongly associated with developments within archaeology broadly known as ‘post-processualism’, a term that unifies a plethora of different perspectives^[1] (see for example the numerous different approaches and critiques within Wylie, 1985; Leone *et al.*, 1987; Shanks & Tilley, 1987; Baker & Thomas, 1990; Patterson, 1990; Hodder, 1991a; Hodder, 1991b; Johnsen & Olsen, 1992; Knapp, 1992; Shanks & Tilley, 1992). The problem is that maritime archaeology is still perceived—at least by some—to be engaging in antiquarianism, with a greater interest in the material remains uncovered (particularly precious or technologically significant artefacts) than the use of these materials to help to understand the societies which created them. Despite an ever-growing body of literature by numerous ‘maritime’ archaeologists that is explicitly ‘theoretical’—including formal connection with mainstream academia such as the special maritime sections of *Antiquity* (64, 1990), and *World Archaeology* (32, 2001)—a broad impression of theoretical uniformity remains.

Theory is used in maritime archaeology: any refutation of this fact is implicitly theoretical in

itself. Certain schools within the sub-discipline even admit to a specific theoretical standpoint, US ‘shipwreck anthropologists’ having both a general consensus to basic approaches and also a better understanding of why they dispute other perspectives (Gould, 1983; Gould, 1997). Meanwhile, work mainly within Scandinavia and Britain focuses on two areas within which there is now steady theoretical debate: the multivariate expressions of the ship-as-symbol (Cederlund, 1994; Cederlund, 1995; Crumlin-Pedersen & Munch-Thye, 1995; Wedde, 1996; Wedde, 2000; Adams, 2001; Gibbins & Adams, 2001), and the nature of the ‘maritime cultural landscape’ (Myhre, 1985; Westerdahl, 1992; Jasinski, 1993; Westerdahl, 1994; Hunter, 1994; Cederlund, 1995; Crumlin-Pedersen & Munch-Thye, 1995; Maarleveld, 1995; Firth, 1997; Jasinski, 1999; McErlean *et al.*, 2002). Numerous individuals of diverse background and location also continue to make consistent and thought-provoking contributions,^[2] and there is also a considerable body of work within the focus of particular regions such as the United States (Gould, 1983; Gould, 1997; Babits & Van Tilburg, 1998; Gould, 2000; Ruppé & Barstad, 2002), and Australia (Veth, 1998; Veth & McCarthy, 1999; Casella, 2000; Rodrigues, 2002; Gibbs, 2003). The ‘problem’ is subsequently a subjective one, in many ways explained by the unique historical and demographic circumstances of maritime archaeology (often avocational in character and focused more

on the methodological advances necessary to allow successful fieldwork [sic] under water than on theoretical critique), by the people involved within maritime archaeology (often working outside academia and its long-running theoretical debates, or else relatively junior in position), and by the numbers of individuals concerned (still tiny in comparison to land archaeology). This situation is only accentuated by high-profile television programmes and exhibitions like the London Science Museum's recent (2003) *'Titanic—the Artefacts'* exhibition, which reinforce the public perception that maritime archaeology is primarily focused towards artefact recovery. In Britain, in particular, the legislative infrastructure for underwater archaeology is also partly responsible, in that the law encourages artefact-focused work of this nature, particularly by amateur custodians of protected wreck sites (Firth, 1999).

Just as the pioneers of maritime archaeology in the 1960s had to fight for official recognition and find ways of undertaking good quality underwater fieldwork within an at best ambivalent 'mainstream' archaeological discipline (Bass, 1966: 15–22), what would now seem required is a shift in emphasis, a more tacit adoption of self-consciously theoretical, intellectual perspectives. Along with other developments, this is as much about helping to define where the sub-discipline does *not* want to go as to re-define the myriad ways in which it might. Particularly valuable is the direct contribution of maritime archaeology to broader debates within archaeology, such as the impact of social agency upon technological development (Pfaffenberger, 1988; Dobres, 1999; Dobres, 2000; Barrett, 2001; Dobres & Robb, 2001). The nature of maritime material culture is such that if wider perspectives are considered, it is one of the richest sources of evidence about human experience in existence (Adams, 2001), and attempts towards this have of late garnered greater academic attention. The maritime session of the British Theoretical Archaeology Group meeting in December 2002 was notable both for the depth of theoretical engagement and the levels of attendance.

Approaches to the material evidence

The changes required to make maritime archaeology more theoretically engaged are some of the simplest to undertake, even if the theoretical concepts underpinning these changes may be confusing, and although consequences will result that may

cause concern. A 'post-processual' appreciation of maritime archaeology will render it 'messy', raising more questions than answers, provoking dispute, pushing the imagination, requiring an acknowledgement of multiple ways to perceive evidence within more than one possible conclusion. However, while there are examples of post-processualism which may have gone too far in this respect (Tilley, 1991b), this does not necessarily mean an inevitable descent into hopeless relativism or intellectual anarchy: 'All opinions about the past are not as good as each other . . . even if one accepts that interpretation . . . demands a "softer" science, an interpretative and 'poetic' text can still be judged. Archaeological writing differs from fiction because it is a dialogue between an 'author' and real physical material remains' (Rönby, 1995: 128).

'Post-processual' perspectives are not nihilist, but instead—precisely because they challenge so many assumptions—are tied to rigorous archaeological approaches and evidence. Profoundly materialist at heart, they continue to evolve (Hodder, 1991b; Tilley, 1991a). Within this comes the welcome acknowledgement of critique, such as Gould's statement that 'it remains to be seen whether or to what extent maritime archaeologists will embrace the post-processual approach' (Gould, 1997: 110).^[3] Such critique itself should provoke the internal dialogue between different approaches that by and large has been dangerously lacking within maritime archaeology, and within which specific concerns can be raised.

Alongside alternative theoretical approaches also exist alternative methodologies, questioning the whole practice of field archaeology (Hodder, 1997). While concerned with appropriate tools and techniques since its institutional conception, and willing to embrace sometimes radical new technologies, maritime archaeology has of late been slower to deal with the 'theoretical' side of methodology. Debate on fieldwork is often focused around technical discussion, implicit within which are a set series of 'correct' ways to execute underwater archaeology based on the objective recovery of available evidence.^[4] Hodder (1997) demonstrates the dangers of making such assumptions on land, and, given the particular working conditions of much maritime archaeological work—often performed under water in poor visibility on a small area of a site at a time, reducing individual awareness of the 'big picture'—such concerns are of even greater relevance. Paradoxically, maritime archaeology also has much to gain from its environment

in this respect. So long as 'publishing' is perceived of as the dissemination of evidence through a broader spectrum of access than the mere printing of hard copy, then developments in remotely-operated technology and the use of 'television presence' (Ballard, 1990: 35)—together with divers and submersibles manipulating their buoyancy in order to avoid touching a site except where chosen—demonstrate the ability to 'fly' around a submerged site, sampling evidence in a form more open to multivariate interpretation. This is particularly true when the unique advantages of underwater work are assisted by advanced internet resources offering 'realtime' video streaming, in which individuals thousands of miles from an archaeological site can contribute to an active discussion and even control vehicles on the seabed (<http://www.jasonproject.org>; Ballard, 1985: 52–57; Ballard, 1990: 32–35; Ballard, 2001: 196–233, 257). Such 'remote access' technology, wedded to ever more sophisticated computer modelling packages, is now creating 'virtual' sites which can be understood and explored from every angle. 'Publishing' in this sense becomes truly interactive, the ultimate expression of postmodernist personal interpretation, an interpretative leap greater than anything possible by land archaeology that not only offers advances within academia but also increased public access (Dibble *et al.*, 1999; Redknap, 2002; Fernie & Richards, 2003; Lock, 2003).

'Engendering' maritime archaeology

Archaeology has made huge leaps of understanding in the use of engendered critique. Maritime archaeology has not, despite considerable movements on this front within the allied discipline of maritime history (Gero & Conkey, 1991; Spector, 1991; Wylie, 1991; Dommasnes, 1992; Wylie, 1992; Conkey, 1993; Roberts, 1993). Underlying assumptions within maritime archaeology frequently utilize perceptions of gender relations in seafaring developed from the 18th century onwards (that women never went on board ships, played only a small role in influencing maritime societies, and that once on board, all the men fitted into a set stereotype of behaviour) with demonstrable flaws (Voss, 2000b: 180), 'gender' often disappearing within a uniform record (Claassen, 2000: 176–178).

As the chapters in Creighton and Norling (1996) demonstrate, women were on board ships, both as women (acknowledging their feminine role) and dressed up as men (repressing their femininity), in a variety of contexts well into the 19th century, and

also profoundly influenced shipboard society from shore-side. Perhaps more importantly for archaeology, such works also demonstrate the flexibility of gender forms on board ship (Bolster, 1996; Creighton, 1996; Dugaw, 1996; Rediker, 1996). To perceive gender as a series of binary opposites—between male and female, hetero- and homosexual—is a risky way of approaching archaeological evidence given the level of gender mutability in both the past and the present. Maritime archaeology has only recently begun to acknowledge this (Adams, 2001: 304–306). It is dangerous to assume that women did not go to sea in antiquity, that vessels were inherently masculine domains, or that crew structures and hierarchies were in any way similar to those of today: 'Gender is a fundamental component of seafaring, as it is of all human society . . . just how distinctive sailors and shipboard societies really were, in what ways and why, remain points of disagreement' (Creighton & Norling, 1996: vii, ix).

Even if it can be specifically proven that women were—or were not—on board a specific archaeological example of a vessel (how this would be possible remains unclear, short of skeletal evidence), this does not mean that women did not influence the society in question. All societies are 'gendered', given that 'gender', although largely connected with 'feminist' perspectives due to the historical development of its study, involves *all* of society. An analysis of all-male communities on board Viking warships provides as much information on gender roles as examples of vessels being 'taboo' to women among Oceanian societies, both being different *engendered* perspectives. Relationships 'with' gender are created through such acts, and any appreciation of shipboard societies—and subsequently of wreck assemblages—needs to be aware of such impacts.

Beyond gender, there exists a requirement specifically to identify women within the maritime archaeological record. Even if women were not directly involved in sailing and shipbuilding, they had related associations to life at sea, particularly among small, specialist, fishing or merchant groups. Within such communities women regularly became *de facto* heads of households when their husbands were at sea, worked on small boats or in related trades, or accompanied their spouses on voyages (Angelos, 1994; Geddes, 1996; Honeyman, 1996; Norling, 1996; Stevenson, 1996; Stig-Sørensen, 1996; Weinstein, 1996).^[5] However, as Dommasnes (1992: 2) has demonstrated, understanding of the place of women within 'maritime'

societies has often been explicitly biased against their full involvement, assessments of the Oseberg queenly ship burial turning away from women towards 'male' roles within the vessel—the carvers, shipbuilders and sailors. The entombed queen was until recently evaluated only via modern associations with 'feminine' activities, rather than by her probable real involvement in socio-political power, ideology, control, leadership and ritual—perhaps even warfare, values more usually associated with men (Stig-Sørensen, 1992).

While not to deny the general predominance of men in shipboard contexts, maritime archaeologists must accept that while women and gender differentiation may not be distinctly visible within the archaeological record, this does not mean that women were not present or had no influence on board vessels. Many assumptions need to be challenged: who says shipboard societies were always male dominated? What proof for this exists? How can archaeology continue to perceive so many different cultures across time and space in such androcentric ways if shipboard societies and the causes of change and innovation on board ships offer an analogy for society as a whole? Would a reinterpretation of existing evidence 'reveal' women and variable gender in more contexts? Were there early divisions of labour among prehistoric 'water-based' societies? To what extent did shipboard societies liberate or imprison individuals within socially-created gender forms? Such approaches balance and broaden understanding of the whole of society, and of its interactions (Smith, 1990; Stig-Sørensen, 1992).

Such questions initiate more fundamental debates about shipboard society, power, hierarchy, division of labour and social relationships (Claassen, 2000: 181–183), and about other minority groups distinct by race, class or gender (Bolster, 1996; Creighton, 1996; Tabili, 1996; Casella, 2000; Claassen, 2000; Voss, 2000b). For instance, maritime archaeology needs to come out of the closet, acknowledging the existence of homosexual or bisexual crew on board vessels. The maritime past has usually been interpreted in a strictly heterosexual manner (Gilbert, 1977: 98; Dowson, 2000: 162). Within this, narratives have inherently implied the superiority of heterosexuality and the implicit dangers of homosexuality, particularly its threat to the chain of command on board ship. Maritime archaeology not only needs to accept that variance in sexuality may have been present on board ancient ships, but also that homosexuality may have been of value to shipboard life and

organization. This is through both bonds of trust, loyalty, and other values encouraged on board, particularly under moments of threat and stress (Neale, 1985: 122; Claassen, 2000: 177), but more broadly in terms of the role of homosexual friendships leading to group bonding during training (Burg, 1984: 122).

The most obvious analogy for such behaviour is in the well-documented evidence for military discipline within Spartan society, which—like much 'Classical' society—acknowledged what modern society calls 'homosexuality', to the extent that in some circumstances modern socio-sexual differentiation was not present (Brandt, 1932; Hodkinson, 1983; Cantarella, 1992; Cohen, 1992; Hindley, 1994; Hamilton, 1996; Ogden, 1996; Hubbard, 1998; Hindley, 1999; Parker, 2001). Such 'ritualised' homosexuality is also known in ancient Rome (Veyne, 1985), and may have been present in early Scandinavia, where Solli (1999) suggests a link between homosexuality and Norse mythology, with obvious implications for the understanding of Nordic society and its diverse maritime cultures (Sawyer, 1991; Clark, 2003).

In a specific maritime context, Burg (1984: xvi–xviii) has highlighted the particular 'climate of toleration' of homosexuality in 17th-century 'Atlantic' buccaneer culture. Burg draws analogies to archaeology in the collection, extraction and organization of his data, which is so sparse, requiring aggregate collections understood in archaeological terms in order to produce 'plausible explanations for behaviour among [otherwise] inaccessible population groups'. This makes his analyses of particular relevance to maritime archaeology, given that the greatest problem of archaeological analyses of such social phenomena will always be the paucity of evidence. Perhaps most interestingly, Burg demonstrates the unique nature of these 'vagabond' communities of young men, noting that at this time—prior to regular naval impressment—these may have been a specific 'lifestyle' choice among volunteer crews, a preference rather than an expedient (Burg, 1984: 48, 53–54, 56–57). If the choice to sail on 'blue water' pirate vessels was deliberate, and one of the motives for this choice the appeal of a homosexual-tolerant community and associated lifestyle, then such evidence is of profound importance in the understanding of the real nature of the 'maritime cultural landscape'. The unique relationships and lifestyles of Burg's 17th-century pirates have few direct land-based analogies and may be a uniquely 'maritime' culture, borne of the specific

circumstances of life in that particular, singular maritime sphere.

The problems of gender differentiation being identified within available evidence are the same for maritime archaeology as for prehistory and other 'data-poor' sections of archaeology, and so are not inevitable. The suggestion that these activities are effectively invisible when on board ship is surely a construct, part of the ongoing fallacy that maritime archaeology is inherently 'different' (Tringham, 1991; Tringham, 1994; Tringham, 1995; Voss, 2000a). But in searching for the archaeological evidence of 'alternative' behaviour on board ship, maritime archaeologists would seem advised in particular to shift their attention towards the reuse of mundane items of material culture recovered from archaeological sites like prisons (Burg, 1984: 107–108). Here, items such as buttons were sometimes used as black-market 'barter' tokens for different trades—including sexual favours—an alternate sexual economy of a site reflected in the movement and position of materials around a prison, across formal boundaries (Casella, 2000: 214–215).

Conditions on board ships are certainly comparable to prisons, and indeed to other regimented and hierarchical societies like hospitals and religious orders, as reflected in the distinctive archaeological assemblages of such sites. The work by Pfaffenberger (1998) on the *châines opératoires* of different mining communities are of similar relevance, since mining communities are also controlled environments, including predominantly male populations, potentially dangerous and often clearly-delineated living and working environments (Godoy, 1984), strong social hierarchies, and a distinctive position in relation to wider communities. Eighteenth- and 19th-century prison hulks are probably the ultimate maritime reflection of this (Branch-Johnson, 1970; Campbell, 2001). Such environments strictly circumscribe both individual and group movement, as reflected in surviving remains (Nolan, 1973: 88–92, 94). Nolan also reminds us that 'this can lead to dependence on the shipboard community and so may limit social awareness and maturation', with consequences once again for surviving remains (Gilbert, 1977; Neale, 1985; Brodie *et al.*, 1999). Such considerations are just as important as the other 'scrambling' and 'filtering' devices of Muckelroy (1978: 158, fig. 5.1) wrecking flow-chart (Ward *et al.*, 1999: 561). Moving beyond processual concepts of 'use-life' (Tringham, 1994: 175), analyses of maritime archaeology—as in mainstream archaeology—

must address the way 'social interactions involving people and objects create meaning' (Gosden & Marshall, 1999: 169; Kopytoff, 1986; Ingold, 1990: 6–7; Pfaffenberger, 1992; Conneller, 1999). Material cultural objects must be understood through their *whole* existence, process and cycles of production, exchange and consumption. This is the 'cultural biography' of objects, in which 'objects do not just provide a stage setting to human action: they are integral to it' (Gosden & Marshall, 1999: 169).

'Marxist' perspectives on maritime archaeology

The first area in which Marxist perspectives are useful to maritime archaeology is within the self-reflexive requirements of archaeology itself, in the appreciation of the internal social dynamics and operation of the sub-discipline. Marxist theory places a high value on the consequences of disagreement between different groups within organizations, perceived as not only healthy but vital for the evolution of new agendas (McGuire, 1992: 248–249). Marxist perspectives also offer genuine practical potential for the 'ethnographic' understanding of the different needs of different groups within society as regards archaeology. For instance, Marxist approaches to the poor relationship between metal detectorists and archaeologists on land—a conflict analogous to the problems of amateur and professional looting and salvage underwater—understand the conflict via two points: firstly, why people engage in the archaeologically destructive 'hobby' of metal detecting, and secondly, what need such acts fulfil. Given that Marxist philosophy deems the concept of an 'undifferentiated' public a myth, McGuire (1992: 257–261) demonstrates that such different interest in the past has strong class links, metal detectorists (and also looting divers?) derived more usually from the working classes, groups with a different concept of the past and its value to those of largely middle-class archaeologists. Consequent 'watering down' of established ideals underlying archaeological activity may thus be the wrong way to engender change amongst looters. Alternative approaches that address the needs of other individuals are required instead, with the acknowledgement of numerous different legitimate interests in a 'past' serving different communities.

Recent educational initiatives within maritime archaeology in Britain certainly imply that this basic philosophy is correct. The 'Wreck Amnesty' (held during 2001 to encouraged divers, fishermen,

beach walkers and other sea-users to come forward and report items recovered from wrecked vessels), the 'Adopt-a-Wreck' scheme (to encourage local dive clubs to 'adopt' a favoured wreck dive of historical or archaeological potential and assist its long-term monitoring), and the 'Diving With a Purpose' initiative (to encourage the broader archaeological and environmental monitoring of the underwater zone) are all initiatives given the support of central government, but implemented at the local level by sports diving organizations such as PADI, BSAC and the SAA, together with avocational bodies such as the Nautical Archaeology Society, as well as by individuals. These initiatives encourage the protection of underwater archaeological sites through active participation of individuals and small groups in the monitoring, maintenance and interpretation of these same sites, largely circumventing the dangers of localized resistance to more punitive forms of protection—especially laws—felt to come from 'on high' and take people's sites 'away' from them, always a problem with legislation such as the Protection of Wrecks Act (1973) (Firth, 1999).

Concerned with the inter-relationships of class, social relations, hierarchy, division of labour and the role of ideology within these, the second area within which Marxist approaches have potential use to maritime archaeology is in the study of shipboard society. Questions about the very nature of shipboard life are raised through such perspectives, challenging—in a similar way to engendered perspectives—established assumptions which have resulted from modern acculturation applied unquestioningly to the past. Were crew structures always so hierarchically differentiated? What were the consequences of this upon personal status, relations, space and responsibility both on board and on land? Did such conditions change in the transition from sea-borne to land-borne society? Were there differentiated spaces or 'zones' of activity within different sections of a vessel—such as the differentiation between the open air and enclosed decks? (Aubert & Arner, 1958; Aubert & Arner, 1962; Tilley, 1994; Bender, 2001; Robin & Rothschild, 2002).^[6]

Once more, archaeological evidence often exists in relation to these questions: in some cases there is good evidence for strict shipboard hierarchy, the organization of trireme crews and subsequent consequences for personal space in relation to status being a classic example. But while a hierarchical structure may have been present aboard some ancient vessels, this should not be automatically

assumed. Maritime archaeologists may in some cases have fallen foul of 'Hornblower syndrome'—an automatic assumption of the worst excesses of abuse of power and hierarchy always being present on board ship. This tendency stems from the Forester (and O'Brien) novels' depiction of life on board Napoleonic-era warships, fed by the wealth of 19th-century accounts of naval life which survive (King, 1997; Parsons, 1998; Spavens, 1998; Hoffman, 1999; Hervey, 2002; Robinson, 2002).^[7]

Historians such as Andrew Lambert have now begun to reassess these accounts, pointing out that many accounts of old sailors—often ghost-written—deliberately emphasized bad conditions to serve political moves in the 1820s and 1830s to end both naval impressment and corporal punishment, particularly flogging.^[8] Highly politicized documents, such sources should clearly be used with care by historians and archaeologists alike when considering life at sea. Certainly, the Laws of Oleron gave medieval seamen certain rights, including the captain consulting with them prior to sailing to determine the safety of the conditions, and various other requirements were enshrined in the laws and ordinances of the Hanse towns, the laws of Wisby and the laws of Rhodian, although the penalties which captains could mete out to disobedient crew under these laws were equally harsh (Bouvier, 1856; Naish, 1914; Wood, 1914; Marsden, 1915; McMillan, 1922; Senegallia, 1940; Senior, 1952).

For most of history, merchant ships in particular also had very small crews, with little scope for class distinctions, while crews were often drawn from family members, 'lower ranks' in such circumstances frequently being of the same social class but from lower down a hierarchy of experience and maturity (pers. comm. Paula Martin). Ambiguous examples of hierarchy also exist elsewhere during the Middle Ages, such as the relationships between 'share-' or 'stakeholder' crews on board Nordic trading vessels in documentary sources, where all involved were stakeholders in the vessel, cargo, or both (Jesch, 1991; Jochens, 1996). Such variability is also depicted in contemporary iconography (Flatman, in press, ch. 5). How the chain-of-command might have been interpreted in such circumstances may have been very different (Creighton & Norling, 1996; Dugaw, 1996; Rediker, 1996; Stark, 1996; Tabili, 1996). Furthermore, although often drawn from the lowest economic, social and political levels of society, throughout history an experienced sailor has had unique and highly sought-after skills capable of

placing him or her at the top of the labour market, giving leverage with employers as regards wages, hours and conditions of work.

In a very different environment, Rediker (1987: 254–287) has noted the distinctive nature of pirate and privateering vessels and their social structure:

Contemporaries who claimed that pirates had ‘no regular command among them’ mistook a different social order—different from the ordering of merchant, naval and privateering vessels—for disorder. This social order, articulated in the organization of the pirate ship, was conceived and deliberately constructed by the pirates themselves. Its hallmark was a rough, improvised, but effective egalitarianism that placed authority in the collective hands of the crew. A core value in the broader culture of the common tar, egalitarianism was institutionalized aboard the pirate ship.

Going to sea was often clearly a ‘liberating’ experience in the past: studies of women on board early modern vessels demonstrate the extent to which society could change in these circumstances, providing levels of personal expression and ‘freedom’ impossible elsewhere (Dugaw, 1996; Rediker, 1996). There is every reason to suggest that such liberation occurred as much between classes, hierarchies and races as between sexes (Bolster, 1996). Equally, there may be analogies between sea-borne and land-borne societies for class, race and gender oppression (Tabili, 1996; Neale, 1985: 18, 21–22). *Deep Sea Sailors* by Weibust (1969) remains one of the best ethnographic analyses of shipboard culture, and his work highlights the range of encounters and situations which, while controlling of social behaviour, had the potential to be subtly subverted and made ‘individual’:

The chain of command at sea, both ordinary and occasional (‘extra-ordinary’) (Weibust, 1969: 54, fig. 14).

Living conditions, including accommodation; luggage; the slop chest; clothing; foods and meals (including tobacco and drink); and health (Weibust, 1969: 71–104).

Leisure, including free time activities; jack-knife industries; reading; fishing and fowling; games; music; dancing and shows; talk; leisure in port; swimming; rowing (Weibust, 1969: 105–156).^[9]

Festivals, including Christmas; New Year; Easter; Sunday; births and deaths; baptism at the line; ‘burying the dead horse’ (once at sea for 4–5 weeks or more on mostly British ships); and ceremonies of cheering (Weibust, 1969: 156–180).^[10]

Nolan (1973: 88–92) has similarly highlighted the types of social division on board ship that may be reflected within archaeological assemblages, both formalized and institutionalized division of labour, and also informal power structures linked to the division of labour and 24-hour day of shipboard life, which governs not only work but also meals, relaxation, leisure and possible social interaction. These formal and informal divisions were both social (for example relationships between officers and men), and physical (different eating and sleeping places), and also involved the control of communication (both technical and normative).

Other works of maritime history highlight another area of shipboard life little considered by maritime archaeology: that of the sailor as worker. Rediker (1987: 77–152) specifically focuses on the sailor as collective worker and the labour process at sea, and also on the sailor as wage labourer in relation to wage relations and labour power, being one of the largest and most important groups of free wage labourers of the international market economy by the 18th century, and doubtless considerably prior to that. Works such as Rediker’s are an important reminder to maritime archaeologists that maritime ‘culture’ was forged by two related ‘confrontations’: the confrontation between humans and nature (survival at sea); and the confrontation of humans with one-another (class confrontations over power, authority, work and discipline):

This encounter produced within the larger culture a sharply antagonistic tendency, a subculture or ‘oppositional culture’ shared by common seamen, with a distinctive set of attitudes, values and practices. Maritime culture then, was fractured. The corporate culture, which grew out of the struggle with nature, was cleft by a subculture of class that emerged from basic relations of production in shipping (Rediker, 1987: 154–155).

Analogous to the comments by Muckelroy (1978: 3) about the ship as most complex machine of the pre-industrial age, sailors were in this sense the first truly ‘industrial’ communities, being self-consciously working class; identifiably plebeian within a common, shared identity differentiated from mainstream society; and living and working in a single, undifferentiated and defiantly ‘industrial’ space in which the needs of the machine were paramount. Shipboard communities are also industrial in that the wellspring of identifiably ‘maritime’ culture lies in the realities of work and authority

on board ship, especially the division of labour, hierarchies and communities within this, both formal and informal, official and unofficial (Rediker, 1987: 201–202)—defined by Fricke (1973: 1) as an ‘occupational community’: ‘A seafarer rarely lives and works alone . . . whether fisherman or merchant seaman, [s/he] is at sea for economic reasons . . . the relationships derived from working and living with others, from engaging in interdependent activities, are social relationships, and form the basis for the development of an occupational community’.

Such considerations should also serve to remind archaeologists that maritime workers were a diverse social grouping—and that so too was their culture. High mortality rates and the rigours of a life at sea made these youthful communities, with most sailors in their 20s or 30s (Rediker, 1987: 156; Stirland, 2000). Relatively older members of the crew were thus valued for their intimate grasp of maritime lore and conditions, within which ‘they communicated through an oral tradition crucial to an occupation marked by many degrees of literacy’ (Rediker, 1987: 158). These were communities at once on the cutting edge of technological development in the vessels on which they lived and worked, and yet deeply tied to the past and the continuity of lifestyles at sea as providing a focus for social organization and patterns of life (Fricke, 1973: 3; Hopwood, 1973: 102).

In a different vein, the archaeologist and anthropologist McGhee (1998) has criticized the sociopolitics of maritime archaeology in relation to African Diaspora studies, particularly regarding the remains of the *Henrietta Marie* (1699), a slave-ship wreck. Hicks (2000) has also contributed to the debate surrounding the historical and maritime archaeology of slave ships, sites and settlements, the archaeologies of which have clear analogies to the material remains and social dynamics of shipboard life, and yet which have been sidelined—McGhee argues because of the guilty conscience of maritime archaeologists unwilling to face up to the more unsavoury facets of maritime culture.

Ships are often technological marvels, but their reification by nautical archaeologists has obscured the obvious: they are primarily cultural and political entities and ought to be thought of and investigated as such (McGhee, 1998: 5). Whatever the rights and wrongs of McGhee’s overtly politicized work, he forces maritime archaeology to take a hard look at its core values and perceptions, especially as regards some of the ‘dirty secrets’ of European global expansion, colonialism and

domination, in which sailors were at once both perpetrator and victim (Trigger, 1996; Gould, 2000: 330–333). ‘As the mechanism by which European empire was initiated and consolidated, these machines should be looked at within a much larger context, not simply as ends in themselves. The presumption of European seafaring omnipotence which permeates nautical archaeology must be rejected . . . Continuing in that direction will get us nowhere. We know by now that the picture is was much more complicated than that’.

Maritime archaeology has a broader duty in this respect to challenge the somewhat self-congratulatory, nationalistic theme frequently visible within the maritime ‘heritage’ industry throughout the world, particularly Europe and the USA. The museologists Matthew Hewison (1987) and Patrick Wright (1991) first highlighted this tendency, both in the sense of the general symbolism of ‘historic vessels’, and also as regards the narrower use of historic ships and their supporting museums as an ‘ideological state apparatus’ (Meltzer, 1981: 115) and the peculiar interpretations of the ‘national heritage’ these can include (Soop, 1992; Kobylinski, 1995; Butler, 1996; Gillberg & Karisson, 1996; Laurier, 1998). Vessels such as the *Mary Rose*, *Vasa* and HMS *Victory* have all been used in the past to project right-wing, broadly nationalistic agendas, in particular the glorification of warfare and the celebration of European maritime hegemony. At times, the nationalistic use of maritime archaeology has been overt: in hindsight, the recovery of the *Mary Rose* was clearly manipulated as part of a broader ‘flag-waving’ strategy of national sentiment during the Anglo-Argentine conflict of 1982.^[11] Powerful nationalistic sentiments expressed by the press during the recovery of the *Mary Rose* were both manipulated by the government and also used more mundanely to sell all manner of products, from souvenirs to lager. Similar sentiments are expressed in the hagiography of HMS *Victory* as shrine to the apogee of British naval power and dominance, and of Nelson as national hero *par excellence*. Whether morally right or wrong, such uses of archaeological remains should at least be acknowledged and discussed (Soop, 1992; Varenius, 1992; Cederlund, 1994; Adams & Rönby, 1996; Adams, 2001: 305; Adams, 2003: 31–33). Archaeology is meant to offer multiple interpretations of the past, and such interpretation is directly linked to the symbolic profile of vessels like the *Mary Rose* in the national consciousness.

This is not directly to attack the use of such vessels in these ways: each particular ship is, in its own way, inherently tied to these emotions, and to deny such would be political correctness of the worst extreme. Nor is it to suggest that maritime archaeology has been hijacked by a right-wing conspiracy. Rather, it is merely to state that a relatively conservative perspective on elements of maritime archaeology has been projected in the past, that such uses should be tacitly acknowledged, and that the potential exists for the misuse of such data. Maritime archaeology should be more proactive in speaking out, demonstrating that multiple different interpretations of the past exist. An alternative interpretation would promote a different view of a vessel such as *HMS Victory*: the sailors' perspective, the 'view from the underbelly' of life below decks for the majority of the crew, the relationship of individuals to discipline, of women on board, and of ways of subverting discipline and accepted social, sexual and other roles on board a ship.

Conclusion: specific maritime archaeological theories?

New theoretical approaches can be applied to all aspects of archaeology: the potential is limitless. However, within this brief assessment it has become clear that certain areas of maritime archaeology would particularly benefit from reassessment:

Perspectives upon the seascape, movements and spatial position of self within it, especially in the utilization of phenomenological approaches.

The nature of shipboard societies and their relationships to 'mainstream' society, utilizing class, race and engendered perceptions of social interaction.

Evaluation of social acts and impacts of mainstream society upon maritime cultures, such as in determination of the causes and consequences of change and innovation that demystify supposedly 'radical' technological evolutions of ship forms (Adams, 2001: 307).

The evolutions in perception and changes in theory and methodology required for such developments are by no means radical: maritime archaeology has a vast resource of data to draw upon. Problems, disagreements and differences will inevitably result from such approaches: perspectives on maritime archaeology from such viewpoints may raise more questions as they answer. But this only makes these arguments even more essential.

Maritime archaeology has to evolve in the light of such approaches. Within this comes an appreciation of intercontextuality: all the different strands which can be encompassed within such studies inter-relate in different ways and levels, allowing the evolution of further interpretative conclusions.

On the one hand, assuming that maritime archaeology is a full sub-discipline rather than just a technical specialism, it is clearly a part of the academic mainstream of archaeology. As Cederlund (1995: 11) notes, 'one of the conditions which should be inherent . . . is a multiplicity of voices and thoughts. In essence, theory for mainstream archaeology and marine archaeology is the same'. On the other hand, the appreciation of broader perspectives requires radically new and unique interpretations. It is possible to suggest that certain aspects of the maritime world are so unique to human experience that even the most radical of existing perspectives are insufficient. Specifically, the perception of certain cultures such as Oceanian ones, which in their purest form recognize no 'division' or distinction between sea and land, all life being undertaken within one uniform and holistic 'life-scape' (Hviding, 1992), is so alien to most human experience that it remains hard fully to conceive. All archaeological theories have a deep and inherent bias: they were designed to deal with land-based archaeological remains. Furthermore, existing archaeological theories were evolved by land-based, western societies. These are communities that contain within their culture-history a Judeo-Christian philosophy which defines water as chaotic, uncontrollable and fundamentally negative, a barrier more than a bridge. From the established culture-perspective, all conceptions of the sea and things related to it are defined *in relation to* the land, 'maritime cultures' being perceived as not fully 'maritime' due to established relations with shore-side, shore-based, individuals and groups. Oceanian cultures do not so much fail to have such a relationship with the land as fail to perceive of such a differentiation of environment as being particularly relevant within the totality of life experience: they see no shoreline to cross.

At its most fundamental level, maritime archaeology may thus need to develop theories capable of dealing with such diametrically-opposed perceptions, in so much as it is capable of doing this (Cooper, 1975; Frake, 1985; Gell, 1985; Noble & Hogbin, 2001). Work upon such areas helps give a radical new spin to long-running debates such as those about Pleistocene voyages to Australia (Bednarik, 1997; Bednarik, 1998; Bednarik *et al.*,

1999): 'we'—land-based, fundamentally fearful of the sea—perceive these voyages as virtually impossible: cultures that perceive of both sea and land together as a largely undifferentiated whole arguably would not (Broodbank, 1989; Cherry, 1990). Such theories also allow a better understanding of other long-distance, 'bluewater', seafaring by small groups and even individuals, and both physical and psychological demands (Lewis, 1994; Noble & Hogbin, 2001), particularly early voyages in the North Atlantic and Arctic during the period of Norse voyaging, the evidence for the extent of which is only just beginning to be appreciated (McGrail, 1989; McGovern, 1990; McGhee, 1992; Wallace, 1999; Ingstad & Ingstad, 2000; Seaver, 2000; Herbert, 2003). Going far beyond existing academic opinions, the study of such voyaging requires a number of evolutions in both practical and theoretical approaches to the evidence, broadening both internal and external horizons to

increase the scope of evidence and analyses which can be brought into play. In the evolution of such approaches, debate within maritime archaeology is thus capable of both drawing upon, and contributing to, mainstream archaeology (Bender, 2001: 75).

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Notes

- [1] Such as the role of material culture as 'text', the existence of multiple valid 'readings' (interpretations) given cultural subjectivity (and deconstruction of the subjective forces impacting upon material culture), appreciation of the different levels of hidden meaning within material remains, the impact of symbolic and ideational forces, and the appreciation among archaeologists of the requirements of self-reflexive behaviour.
- [2] For instance, Hviding's ethnographic research into the relationships of Solomon islander communities with the sea reveals perceptions of 'self' and physical location different to modern western understandings (Hviding, 1992). These perceptions entertain similarities with archaeological research into ship-symbolism as indicative of cultural emphases and 'self-awareness' in Scandinavia (Crumlin-Pedersen & Munch-Thye, 1995), and also phenomenological awareness of movement, sense of location (and subsequently enlarged abilities to move across waterborne environments) within 1st millennium Aegean seascapes (Broodbank, 1989; Agouridis, 1997). In a different genre, Wedde (1996, 2000) has made great advances in the hermeneutics of ship imagery, advances which have lain down a gauntlet to all researchers in the 'archaeology' of ancient vessel iconography (Rönby, 1995: 25, 126; Martin, 1997; Martin, 2001; Hocker & Ward, 2002).
- [3] To be fair to Gould (1997), at the time he made this comment he may have been unaware of then ongoing advances in maritime theory in Europe embracing aspects of ostensibly 'post-processual' rationale, approaches that US 'shipwreck anthropologists' had dealt with under other names for some time (Gould, 1983).
- [4] The anonymous peer-reviewer of this article points out that in part this is caused by underwater methodology being used to demonstrate due professionalism and the ethical difference between what is archaeology and what is salvage or treasure hunting—in which method and theory remain inseparable.
- [5] Such specialized, single-activity villages are also often as isolated from wider society as the crews on board ship, enhanced by the fact that the women lived, worked and socialized together. A similar situation was witnessed during the coal miners' strikes of 1970–80s Britain, where women regularly became the sole economic provider for whole families with the men on extended strike. Such pit villages were similarly isolated from mainstream society by both geographic and social order (Witham, 1986; Seifert & Urwin, 1987; Wakefield, 2002).
- [6] Lambert (in *Voices of the Powerless*, Programme 2: The Napoleonic Wars: Below Decks and Boney (31 July 2003, BBC Radio 4, http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/voices2/voices_napoleonic.shtml) notes a social division between the most skilled and specialized men on board—the 'topmen' working in the rigging—and those elsewhere on board ship, with the lowest in both social status and physical environment being the unskilled men working in the hold.
- [7] The best-known example being that of William Robinson, a lower-deck sailor who used the pseudonym 'Jack Nastyface' in his account, first published in 1836 (Robinson, 2002).
- [8] Lambert (http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/voices2/voices_napoleonic.shtml) suggests that events such as the 1797 Spithead mutiny—successfully arbitrated by Admiral Lord Howe without loss of life, the mutineers main demands having been met—should also be reconsidered in the light of such critique, as the mutineers sent the [senior] officers ashore during the uprising but maintained an otherwise unaltered chain-of-command and disciplinary structure throughout the fleet, rules and orders established by the mutineers ending with the sentence: 'the greatest attention to be paid to the orders of the officers [sic]. Any person failing in respect due to them, or neglecting their duty, shall be severely punished' (Manwaring & Dobrée, 1937: 45)—hardly the act of men desperate for social freedom. Spokespersons for the mutineers at one point specifically stated that: '[we] are not actuated by any spirit of sedition or disaffection whatsoever: on the contrary, it is our indigence and extreme penury alone that is the cause of our complaint'. Manwaring & Dobrée (1937: 44) do point out, however, that this was as much a purely 'tactical measure' to ensure the immediate success of the mutiny, and was initiated by the leaders of the uprising, almost all of whom were experienced seamen of petty officer or midshipman rank, 'the flower of all that was not quarter-deck'.
- [9] Many of these are recorded archaeologically on board the *Mary Rose* (Rule, 1983: 184–201), and are also attested to on board medieval vessels in iconographic representations (Flatman, in press, ch. 5).
- [10] See also Wright (1967) and Muscat (1984) on religion at sea, which demonstrably took place on board the Armada vessels of 1588 and other Spanish imperial shipwrecks, as attested by archaeological finds of crucifixes (Peterson, 1972: 266, figs. 2–3, 269, fig. 9), and which also apparently took place on board the *Mary Rose*, finds from which include a rosary and small pouch usually suggested to have been a purse, but bearing the acrostic 'ihs'—'Jesus' (Rule, 1983: 191). The latter has important implications for the continuation of 'popular'—Catholic religion in Britain during the Reformation (Duffy, 1992).
- [11] The playwright and diarist Alan Bennett noted this tendency at the time: '[15th June 1982] Mrs Thatcher announces the surrender of Port Stanley in well modulated tones . . . Not English I feel now. This is just where I happen to have been put down. No country. No party. No Church. No voice. And now they are singing 'Britannia Rules the Waves' outside

Downing Street. It's the 'Last Night of the Proms' erected into a policy' (Bennett, 1997: 168–169). '[20th June 1982] The papers continue fatuous . . . Since the war there has been a noticeable increase in the use of military metaphor in public debate . . . the danger of such talk, of course, is that it presupposes an enemy'. In a similar vein, the left-wing politician and diarist Tony Benn noted: '[15th June 1982] the reaction is now one of tremendous enthusiasm and support for Mrs Thatcher . . . I went to the House of Commons to hear the Prime Minister's statement announcing the surrender . . . I was called, and I asked if the Prime Minister would publish all the documents and the cost in terms of life, equipment and money . . . The Tories erupted in anger because this was Jingo Day' (Benn, 1997: 537).