Flotsam and Jetsam - March 1998

South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology--University of South Carolina

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Underwater Archaeology

Book Review
By Chantalle Michelle Brunson, SCIAA Intern


This book is an excellent overview of the history of worldwide research, discoveries, and methods in underwater archaeology. Uniquely, this volume gives equal weight to contributions made to the science from commercial and amateur sources as well as professional underwater archeologists. It is arranged as an alphabetic list that encompasses copious and easily read accounts of shipwrecks, maps, charts, diagrams, and legislative provisions (such as the Abandoned Shipwrecks Act signed by President Reagan in 1987). Illustrations and photographs in both black-and-white and color lend to the reader’s concise understanding of the sites’ history, methods of research, and current status. Absent however, are the trademark photos of South Carolina’s murky waterways—a method still to be mastered with future state-of-the-art technology!

The volume includes not only divisions of underwater (including inundated sites like towns) and nautical or maritime (strictly shipwrecks—both submerged underwater and buried on land) archeology, but is further subdivided into topics such as boat, steamboat, and beached shipwreck sites. Sources for further readings are listed after each topic and various institutions for advanced education and research opportunities are covered. These include, but are not limited to, East Carolina University, Texas A&M University, The Aegean Maritime Museum, and The South Carolina Institute of Archeology and Anthropology.

Topics in the volume are thoroughly explained and any terminology that may cause the reader to stumble can be found in the glossary of nautical terms at the end of the book. As a budding underwater archeologist, I was particularly interested in the authors’ definitions of research terminology such as benthic bioturbation, baseline trilateration, and hydraulic probing. Shipwrecks such as Sutton Hoo in Suffolk, England, the H.L. Hunley, and the Titanic were of personal interest as well. This book is an essential reference guide to the library of those who have an interest in the history of our world that is preserved underwater.

1998 SPRING SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

FIELD TRAINING COURSE
The 1998 SCIAA Underwater Archaeology Field Training Course has been scheduled for the following two weekends: April 3, 4, and 5 for classroom and pool work. We start at 6:00 PM on Friday evening until Sunday at 4:00 PM. You need to bring all your diving gear plus a scuba tank (filled for the pool session on Saturday afternoon).

On April 18 and 19 we will continue the training in the Cooper River mapping shipwreck sites. This will be low visibility work, so be prepared and bring a flashlight and spare batteries. You need two full tanks for each river day and your warmest wetsuit! In order to pre-register for the course you should send a $70 deposit to us before March 23. We will then send you maps and directions to the course.

As the first weekend coincides with the Cooper River Bridge Run in Charleston, it might be wise to book accommodations well in advance. The classes will be held on James Island over the first weekend and the diving on the second weekend will be in proximity to the town of Goose Creek. Let us know if you need any ideas or information about motels in the area. We can be reached at our Charleston office at (803) 762-6105 or e-mail: harris@cofc.edu

COOPER RIVER HERITAGE TRAIL
The following days are scheduled for fieldwork on specific sites in the Cooper River:

March 5-9: Strawberry Shipwreck and Landing
March 20-26: Pimlico Barge and Shipwrecks
April 15-22: Mepkin Abbey Shipwreck and Landing

Any interested volunteers (especially SCIAA Field Training Course certified divers) should contact Jim Spirek in the Columbia office at (803) 777-8170 or Lynn Harris in the Charleston Field Office at (803) 762-6105.
Book Review
By John Pennington, SCIAA Intern


For anyone interested in a fairly complete and entertaining primer detailing at once nautical history and American shipwrecks, I would recommend this book. The oft-called “father of underwater archaeology” culls essays from 12 members of the underwater archaeological community to create a book that is not only informative, but a very good read.

In Chapter 1, Margaret Leshikar details the ins-and-outs of indigenous American watercraft. In skin boats and canoes, reed rafts and dugouts she carries us down the waterways of pre-Columbian America and shows us a wealth of technology and navigation, ending with a description of some early Viking craft and their forays into North America.

Chapter 2, written by Roger Smith, is as much a history of Columbus’ voyages and exile as it is a history of his craft. Beginning with a brief explanation of mostly Portuguese and some early Spanish sailing tradition, Smith guides us through the development of the caravel, followed by a concise history of the four voyages that Columbus made to the New World and the modern archaeological investigation of the craft associated with each.

Donald Keith, in Chapter 3, highlights the early exploration of the Americas, beginning with cartography and followed by detailed descriptions of the excavations of the Padre Island wrecks, those in Bahia Mujeres, Highborn Cay, and others. The chapter ends with a good chart of “Vessels Lost in the New World 1492-1520.”

Robert Grenier teaches us as much about the theories and logistics of early Basque whaling as he does about the boats that he has excavated. In Chapter 4, we learn of the practice and prey of the Basque whalers, including the rations “for cider or wine, [which] could reach the equivalent of three bottles a day per man.” If only we could convince a grantor of that necessity!

Roger Smith rejoins us in Chapter 5 for a quick history of early Spanish and Portuguese treasure shipping, wrecking, and even salvaging. With some of the best pictures so far, we are given tales of the loss of two Spanish vessels carrying quicksilver and of the tragic fate of the Concepcion.

In Chapter 6, J. Richard Steffy leaves behind the legacy of Spanish and Portuguese domination for a more American (okay, British) perspective on our maritime history. The subject is the history of the 13 colonies; but, for me, the rest of the chapter was eclipsed by the description of the Brown’s Ferry vessel.

Kevin J. Crisman, in Chapter 7, gives us the highlights of the French and Indian and preceding wars, and of the many vessels associated with them. It is here we find our first glimpse of fresh water craft. We are told that “the absence of roads across the interior of the continent meant that an army and its supplies could move only by water.” This fact has left us a very rich fresh water underwater heritage.

At last we see our America unfold when, in Chapter 8, John Sands writes of the “Gunboats and Warships of the American Revolution.” Detailing as many battles as ships, he shows us the history of our first war as a nation, giving due credit to the French navy in their role as allies in the naval war of the Atlantic.

Kevin Crisman rejoins us, along with Kenneth Cassavoy, in Chapter 9 to give us an almost year by year account of The War of 1812 and the great American frigates and schooners that fought for control of the Great Lakes.

Antebellum charm and splendor rule Chapter 10, as Joe J. Simmons, III gives us the history of the steamship. Here we are left to wander the grand decks of the great ferryboats as we steam down the waterways of America.

Chapter 11 opens in Charleston on the dawn of The Civil War as Gordon P. Watts, Jr. writes of the birth of the iron vessel. There is, among other things, a short history of submarines, a piece on the Hunley, and a bit about Confederate “David’s” (one is currently being sought after below Tradd Street in Charleston).

At last, Paul Forsythe Johnston completes the list with Chapter 12’s account of “The End of the Age of Sail.” While it is really a summary of the later few subjects, this still makes for an apt synopsis of our great American sailing tradition.

Finally, George Bass, along with Captain W. F. Searle, closes the volume with an epilogue detailing the great and horrible stories of the Breadalbane, the Titanic and the Andrea Doria.

Much of the information is rather dated. We in South Carolina will be particularly sensitive to the information about the Hunley (which was, as of this work, “still a mystery”) and others; but despite this fact, indeed sometimes because of this fact, Ships and Shipwrecks of the Americas is a very entertaining book with a lot of good information. My only real complaint is that, as in many things written by North Americans, “The Americas” seem to be comprised of lands from only the Caribbean northward.
Two Interns Join the Underwater Archaeology Staff

**Chantalle Michelle Brunson**

Chantalle joins our staff for the Spring 1998 semester as an intern nearing completion of a Bachelor of Science degree in Anthropology from the College of Charleston. In addition, she has five more classes to complete towards a Bachelor of Science degree in Marine Biology from the College of Charleston. She has 10 years of experience working in Marine Biology for the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, Atlantic Littleneck Clam Farms, Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection: Marine Fisheries Division, and Quantech Marine Sciences Group. These positions involved offshore work on a 110-foot research vessel, and interviewing recreational fishermen at South Carolina boat landings, fishing piers, and charter sites. Diving experiences included changing of intake filters on the Folly River for the Clam Farm.

For the last three-and-a-half years, she has been conducting Marine Recreations Fisheries Statistical Surveys (MRFSS) sponsored by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), going to school full-time, and raising her three-year old daughter, Kristen. She is a sports enthusiast and an active participant in the Chinese Martial Art of Kung Fu.

**John Pennington**

John Pennington is a veteran of the US Army and the US Navy, interested in the anthropological study and science of public education. He is an Anthropology major and plans to double major in Geology at the College of Charleston. Joining SCIAA's Underwater Archaeology division as an intern, he hopes to learn as much as possible about archaeological method and administration paperwork, in addition to understanding the problems and concerns of public education.

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**VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!**

**SANTA ELENA SITE**

**MARCH 30 TO MAY 22, 1998**

Stanley South and Chester DePratter will be continuing their long-term excavation project at Santa Elena beginning March 30. As usual, they are looking for energetic, hard-working volunteer crew members to assist with their excavations. Volunteers must stay for at least one full week. Housing is provided. If you are interested, contact Chester DePratter or Lisa Hudgins at (803) 777-8170 or 734-0566.