

Announcing the Texas A&M University Archaeological Diving Club

Ben Ford

The Institute of Nautical Archaeology has a long tradition of excellence in diving and underwater archaeology. The goal of the Texas A&M University Archaeological Diving Club is to build on this tradition by providing a forum for increased diving experience and the exchange of ideas and techniques. Much valuable archaeological interpretation is done "at the dredge head" and this analysis, not the technical skill of diving, should be the archaeologist's primary focus. Beyond what is required for safety, time and energy spent on the act of diving (adjusting buoyancy, struggling to remain in position, fumbling with equipment, becoming disoriented, etc.) detract from the efficiency and, ultimately, the results of an underwater excavation. Efficient, well trained, and prepared divers are better archaeologists, because archaeology is foremost in their thoughts while diving.

INA and the Center for Maritime Archaeology and Conservation (CMAC) have the benefit of many excellent divers, but even the best divers benefit from continued education and practice in diverse situations. For less experienced divers, the club will offer an opportunity to practice basic skills and learn from others with more training and dive time. Thus, the primary activity of the club will be monthly diving trips. These excursions will consist of two dives: an unstructured exploration dive and a structured skill-building dive. During the exploration dive, members will be encouraged to investigate the dive site, within the bounds of their training, fine tune their buoyancy, adjust gear, and enjoy diving. The skill dive will allow members to practice archaeological skills (e.g. hull recording, orienteering, surveying, etc.), experiment with new equipment (technical buoyancy compensators, drysuits, computers, etc.), and experience adverse diving conditions (e.g. cold and dark water). The goals and procedures for the skill dive as well as the logistics for the day will be discussed at a pre-trip meeting held during the previous week, and all dives will be conducted under the supervision certified dive masters with safety as the paramount concern.

The club will also promote the cross-pollination of ideas within INA and CMAC. Many students and members work in a single region or experience only one project during their tenure. Every site has its unique challenges and each principal investigator has their preferred methods. The club will create an environment for learning, applying and evaluating different methods for specific situations based on the experiences of its members. The goal will be to create the largest possible

"tool box" making the members more effective archaeologist.

At the time of writing, the club is in the final stages of university approval. We will hopefully have an organizational meeting mid-semester and get wet at least once before summer.

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Center for Maritime Archaeology and Conservation Lecture Series

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Visits of outside scholars are wonderful opportunities to expose our students to the newest developments in the field, alternate problem solving methods, and information on their work and skills. From these first hand accounts, NAP students have been able to learn from their lectures, profit from formal and informal conversations and exchanges of ideas, and build network for future projects and scholarly research.

The Nautical Archaeology Program (NAP) has been open to scholars, students, and other interested persons to visit our headquarters and to see and use its laboratories, libraries, offices, and classrooms. This welcoming environment has hosted many visitors despite its geographical isolation; College Station is often out of the way for scholars inside and outside the USA. The reward of the travel is the opportunity for the guest to get abreast with NAP ongoing projects, research methods, and facilities, both in College Station and Bodrum.

The professional world of nautical archaeologist is becoming increasingly complex with such factors as the development of more nautical archaeology programs and new advancements in technology making these visits an invaluable supplement to the professors and students curriculums.

Center for Maritime Archaeology and Conservation (CMAC), within Texas A&M Department of Anthropology, operating in conjunction with the NAP has committed to try to invite one or two top world specialists every year to spend some time in College Station and interact with the faculty and the students.

The first invited scholar, Mr. Mauro Bondioli, has been studying shipbuilding techniques in the Italian Middle Ages and Renaissance for over 26 years, and is a renowned world specialist with a profound knowledge of the principles, techniques and rules that guided the naval construction particularly of galleys in Italy, in the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries.

Mr. Bondioli spent a week in College Station last November, visiting the laboratories, libraries and other facilities of the Nautical Archaeology Program and gave two lectures, totaling four hours, the first directed to



Mauro Bondioli with History of Shipbuilding class. Courtney Higgins and Scott Sery in foreground.

students, and the second open to students, faculty and staff of the entire department.

The first lecture consisted on an overview of the known history of rowing craft in Italy, from its beginning to the late 16th century. The second was an account of the amazing discoveries of the archaeological field seasons carried out on the sites of the two amazing shipwrecks of Boccalama, Venice (directed by Marco D'Agostino) and the early 15th century *fusta* of Lazise (directed by Massimo Capulli).

The main purpose of his visit was the creation of an informal group for the study of Italian shipbuilding – similar to the existing Group for the Study of Iberian Seafaring (<http://nautarch.tamu.edu/shiplab/index-iberian.htm>) – involving students and faculty. The principal objective of such a group is the development of contacts between NAP students and Italian scholars that will facilitate the investigation of student's thesis subjects and facilitate an informal peer review process of their work.

One of the outcomes of Mr. Bondioli's visit was the establishment of a basic bibliography to be available – and mandatory – to all students interested in pursuing their studies on this subject. The second outcome of this visit was the establishment of an informal e-mail list where students can brainstorm and are asked to produce monthly short essays on core subjects of their research.

This teaching strategy creates an intense intellectual involvement and helps students to develop ideas, acquire knowledge, and advance their research topics at a faster rate. Furthermore, it and exposes them to the dynamics of group work and the often times counter-intuitive advantages of cooperation, such as quick and informal peer-review of ideas and share of information.

The third, and perhaps most important outcome of this visit, was the idea – presently under study – of publishing a two volume work on the world of Italian shipbuilding, from its origins to the late 16th century, directed and edited by Mauro Bondioli, one of the world greatest authorities on this subject.

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Navigational instruments as a source of historic information

The National Maritime Museum Greenwich, keeper of the world's largest, and perhaps pre-eminent collection of navigational instruments, announces a call for papers for a symposium that will explore the topic: 'using navigational instruments for historical research'. The Museum invites maritime historians, historians of science and exploration, museum curators and maritime archaeologists to use the meeting to exchange their experiences and views on the subject. The aim of the symposium is to improve our understanding of the ways in which navigational instrument collections can illuminate history and historical process.

Papers should be for a maximum of 30 minutes. Those wishing to attend, and those interested in speaking at the conference are invited to submit a proposal of no more than 250 words to Mrs Janet Norton, Research Administrator, National Maritime Museum, LONDON SE10 9NF, by 1 May 2006. e-mail jnorton@nmm.ac.uk.

The symposium will be held at the National Maritime Museum Greenwich, London, on Thursday 16 November 2006. If there is sufficient response the meeting may be extended over the morning of Friday 17 November. That evening the Annual Lecture of the Scientific Instrument Society will be given by Dr Willem Mörzer Bruyns, who holds the National Maritime Museum's 2005-07 Sackler Research Fellowship in the History of Astronomy and Navigational Sciences, and will focus on the Museum's collection of navigating instruments.

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