



The content is published under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0 License.

Unreviewed Mixed Matters Article:

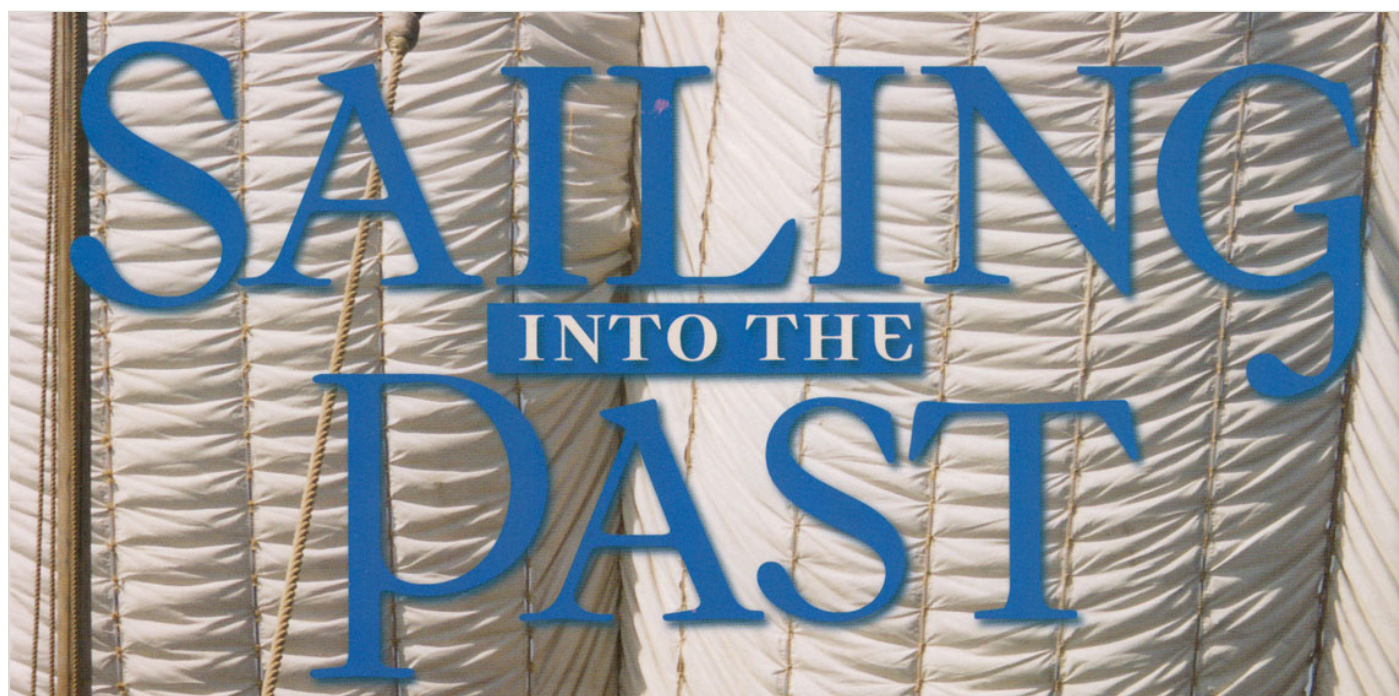
Book Review: *Sailing into the Past: Learning from Replica Ships* by Jenny Bennett (ed)

Persistent Identifier: <https://exarc.net/ark:/88735/10023>

[EXARC Journal Issue 2012/1](#) | Publication Date: 2012-01-15

Author(s): Roeland Paardekooper ¹ 

¹ EXARC, Frambozenweg 161, 2312 KA Leiden, the Netherlands.



There must be hundreds of wooden ship replicas across the world, not only the 'Viking ships' in Scandinavia, but – as the book *Sailing into the past* shows, there are many medieval and more recent ones. Just search on the internet and you will find some which are built for tourism , education, or a hobby which has become more serious. It is one of the most popular fields in experimental archaeology too. Some ships take a single archaeological find as

example, others are built following the tradition of a specific type of ship, such as the medieval cog like vessels from the Hanse area.



Present day sailors will be happy to read this attractively designed book with a multitude of pictures. For historians and archaeologists, this is a nice introduction into the subject. A close reader will see not only the good about ship replicas, but as well the challenges this field faces.

Some of those ships are seaworthy, others not – this depends on changes in the original structure or modern regulations. What we see today is a ship which looks like the original ('visual replica') which might partly be constructed like the original (a 'structural replica') but is not used like the original. But with any (re)construction, many of us like to know how life was back then, but actually living in that era would mean most of us would be either dead, badly nourished or suffering several diseases, so how far should the 'authentic experience' go? The best reason for such ships is the attention they raise for those who built and sailed them in the past.

Do not let the title misguide you: there is a book with the same title dating to 1986, edited by Crumlin-Pedersen & Vinner; a proceedings of a conference on this theme in the Roskilde Viking Ship Museum, bringing together the cream of reconstructed ship builders of those days.

In the 2009 book, thirteen authors are brought together to tell about their experiences with constructing and sailing wooden ship replicas. Practical knowledge (sometimes anecdotal only) gives the readers some more feeling about how it could have been like to sail a Greek Trireme or a Bezaisen, a Japanese coastal sailing trader. The book is meant more to enthuse than inform.

The book is very accessible, background knowledge is not much anticipated. If for example you have never heard of the Skuldelev ships, those are properly introduced. Obviously many ships are left out, like for example the Kyrenia, but it is impossible to satisfy everyone with only 200 pages and still have an attractive book. In many cases, the authors were closely related to the ship projects themselves, leading to relatively optimistic stories with less detail as to what could have been done better or comparison with other similar projects. The articles have a limited set of references, good enough for those who want to learn more, but not turning the texts in hard core scientific exposés. In general, a few more links to on line information would have made the references more complete.

Four smaller articles serve as introduction. Historical novelist Richard Woodman writes about the enchantment many replica ships have. McGrail sets (re)construction in perspective, explaining the difference to experimental archaeology in a very clear manner.

Part A of the book is dedicated to ancient and medieval ships. The Sea Stallion of Glendalough

for example, built in Roskilde Denmark and described by Rikke Johansen, is a good example of a ship serving several purposes. At Roskilde, over forty years of experience with Viking ship replicas has culminated in the construction of the Sea Stallion which must have cost a fortune, just like with the previous ships they built here. It was sailed to Dublin from Roskilde and back in 2008-09 which raised a lot of attention, serving several purposes at once (research, tourism, nationalism, nostalgia to name just a few). Some see this ship and its travels as the finale, the crown on the work at Roskilde, either leading to a slower phase in research and reconstruction (and a generation shift) or to an ending. It is unclear what the future will bring, but it will surely involve building and sailing.

Part B of the book discusses ships of the Age of Discovery 1600-1750. One of the articles is about Bezaizen, Japan's coastal sailing traders. These ships date to an era when Japan was looking inward: foreign travel was banned and contact with foreigners strictly controlled. Ships were needed however for travelling within Japan's inland waters. The Bezaizen ships were well seaworthy as long as they did not sail in deep water. Compared to Japan's earlier 'international trading ships' with many ideas taken from other seafaring nations, Bezaizen are much more traditionally influenced. Since 1990, four replica ships like this have been constructed following the thought that if not now, when? As the last generation of shipwrights able to construct such wooden ships was dying out. The four ships are showcased in museums as parts of the story of the Edo Era, from money made available from infrastructural tourism projects. No good drawings exist and archaeological sources are not even mentioned. To a limited level, the replica ships are used to learn more about how such ships might have been like and how they sailed. The master shipwright behind all four ships regarded his own experience as just another link in a chain of craftsmen.

The publisher and the editor have succeeded to turn the individual articles into a complete and attractive narrative, a kind of nice series of examples, promoting replica ship building and sailing. Most of these articles read like adventure stories. Present day sailors will be happy to read this attractively designed book with a multitude of pictures. For historians and archaeologists, this is a nice introduction into the subject. A close reader will see not only the good about ship replicas, but as well the challenges this field faces.

Book information:

BENNETT, J., *Sailing into the Past – learning from replica ships*, Barnsley, Seaforth Publishing, pp. 192, 2009.

🔖 Keywords **review**
boat / ship
book

Bibliography

BENNETT, J., "The rise of the replica", *Sailing into the Past – learning from replica ships*, Barnsley, Seaforth Publishing, pp. 6-7, 2009.

WOODMAN, R., "Sailing into the past", *Sailing into the Past – learning from replica ships*, Barnsley, Seaforth Publishing, pp. 8-15, 2009.

McGRAIL, S., "Experimental archaeology: replicas and reconstructions", *Sailing into the Past – learning from replica ships*, Barnsley, Seaforth Publishing, pp. 16-23, 2009.

PALMER, C., "Measuring performance under sail", *Sailing into the Past – learning from replica ships*, Barnsley, Seaforth Publishing, pp. 24-32, 2009.

RANKOV, B., "The Trireme", *Sailing into the Past – learning from replica ships*, Barnsley, Seaforth Publishing, pp. 34-51, 2009.

JOHANSEN, R., "The Viking Ships of Skuldelev", *Sailing into the Past – learning from replica ships*, Barnsley, Seaforth Publishing, pp. 52-69, 2009.

HOHEISEL, W-D., "The Hanseatic Cog", *Sailing into the Past – learning from replica ships*, Barnsley, Seaforth Publishing, pp. 70-83, 2009.

BANGE, B., "The Caravel", *Sailing into the Past – learning from replica ships*, Barnsley, Seaforth Publishing, pp. 84-98, 2009.

BURNINGHAM, N., "Early Seventeenth-Century ships", *Sailing into the Past – learning from replica ships*, Barnsley, Seaforth Publishing, pp. 100-119, 2009.

WRIKE, P., "The Jamestown replicas", *Sailing into the Past – learning from replica ships*, Barnsley, Seaforth Publishing, pp. 120-133, 2009.

BROOKS, D., "Bezaisen: Japan's coastal sailing traders", *Sailing into the Past – learning from replica ships*, Barnsley, Seaforth Publishing, pp. 134-149, 2009.

MCMULLEN, D., and C R. BRITAIN, "The schooner Sultana", *Sailing into the Past – learning from replica ships*, Barnsley, Seaforth Publishing, pp. 150-161, 2009.

MACARTHUR, A., "HM Bark Endeavour", *Sailing into the Past – learning from replica ships*, Barnsley, Seaforth Publishing, pp. 162-177, 2009.

 Share This Page

| Corresponding Author

Roeland Paardekooper

EXARC

Frambozenweg 161

2312 KA Leiden

the Netherlands

E-mail Contact