

**S. II. 1. – EUROPEAN SHIPBUILDING AND SHIP REPAIRS OVERSEAS:  
THEORETICAL APPROACHES AND THE CASES OF AFRICA AND THE PACIFIC  
(PART 1)**

**Chair:** Catia Antunes

**Discussant:** Erik Odegard

**Panel Abstract**

European countries used their overseas settlements for shipbuilding and ship repairs during the Early Modern period, a phenomenon that has deserved little attention by current historiography. This lack of interest is particularly strange as European shipbuilding and ship repairs overseas were particularly important for the development and maintenance of the European presence overseas. However, it carried further, deeper and longer term implications for Europeans and non-Europeans alike. Shipbuilding and ship repairs overseas imposed a great demand on local natural resources (timber, tar, and pitch, iron for nails), manufactured goods (sails, furniture), specialized and general labour. Shipyards, dockyards, harbours and wharfs were spaces where European, African, 'American' and Asian knowledge and know-how were used, exchanged and adapted to meet diverse demands and circumstances. This panel (part of a twin-panel proposal) looks into the theoretical implications of overseas shipbuilding and repairs, having the specific cases of the West Coast of Africa and the Pacific as cases in point, whilst the twin-panel will concentrate specifically on Asia.

**Keywords**

Shipbuilding; Ship Repairs; Overseas; Africa; Pacific

# *Theoretical Insights into Overseas Shipbuilding and Ship Repairs*

CATIA ANTUNES (Leiden University)

## **Abstract**

European overseas shipbuilding and repairs contributed significantly to the efficiency of the European empires during their maritime expansion overseas, as well as during their imperial moment. This paper will address the direct and indirect theoretical implications of looking at empire building from the perspective of shipbuilding, with particular emphasis on the deployment and economic efficiency of empire, the management of diversity (especially workforces), the exploitation of localized natural resources and the circulation, adaptation and renewal of maritime knowledge.

## **Biography**

Catia Antunes is professor of Global Early Modern Economic Networks: Merchants, Entrepreneurs and Empires at Leiden University, The Netherlands.

## *European and African Shipbuilding and Repair in Precolonial Western Africa: An entangled history of Challenges and Strategies*

FILIPA RIBEIRO DA SILVA (International Institute of Social History)

### **Abstract**

Port-to-port navigation and transportation in shallow river estuaries along the western coast of Africa posed challenges to Dutch and other European merchants and military in what concerned shipping capacities, ship design and shipbuilding. To cope with these challenges, Dutch, Portuguese, English and other 'nations' of merchants present in the various coastal regions of the African continent, had to adopt a variety of strategies ranging from the transport of pre-fabricated boats of small dimension to the coast on board heavier ships, recruitment of personnel specialized in ship repair and building, to the acquisition, either temporary or permanent, African boats and resort to recruitment of African boatmen, and in this way be, at least in part, dependent on African shipbuilding techniques and African navigational skills to operate in the African commerce.

In this paper I will analyse and compare the different strategies and policies adopted by European private merchants, commercial companies and States active in various regions of western Africa (i.e. Senegambia, Sierra Leone Gold Coast, Slave Coast, Ivory Coast, Loango Coast, and the Angolan Coast) in terms of ship building and ship repair, and in what regarded the use of African shipping skills to overcome the difficulties posed by African geographical, social and politico-military aspects.

The analysis is based on notarial acts from the Amsterdam Notarial collection housed at the City's Archive. This source will be complemented by information obtained in travelogues, journals of voyages, and collections of correspondence exchanges between European merchants and their commercial agents based in Africa, between officials of the Portuguese Crown and central institutions, and between officials of private commercial companies on African ground and headquarters in Europe. The analysis of these source materials is done on the basis of the most relevant secondary literature so far published in the field.

### **Biography**

Filipa Ribeiro da Silva is Senior Researcher at the International Institute of Social History and specialist in the comparative history of European exchanges in Africa.

## *The Concepts of Ton and Tonnage (tonelaje y tonelada) in the Spanish Pacific: a Technological Interpretation of the Manila-Acapulco Galleons*

IVAN VALDEZ BUBNOV (Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico)

### **Abstract**

This paper presents the results of original research on the concepts of ton and tonnage in the Spanish shipbuilding industry in South East Asia from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. It focuses on the fundamental principles of shipbuilding technology: the volumetric systems of measurement in use in the Spanish Pacific, and the peculiarities of the systems for measuring cargo capacity in the Manila-Acapulco trade route. The historiography of transpacific commerce implicitly assumes that these systems were equivalent to those in use in the Spanish Atlantic world. This paper aims to demonstrate that the Spanish shipbuilding industry in Asia operated with different technical considerations during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and that the process of imperial standardisation begun in Peninsular Spain in the 1590s finally reached the Philippines in the mid-eighteenth century.

### **Biography**

Ivan Valdez-Bubnov is a PhD graduate of Queen's College, University of Cambridge and associate professor in Global History at the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico.