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## Dutch East India company shipbuilding: the archaeological study of Batavia and other seventeenth-century VOC ships

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Dutch East India company shipbuilding: the archaeological study of Batavia and other seventeenth-century VOC ships**, edited by Wendy van Duivenvoorde, Texas, Texas A&M University Press, College Station, 2015, 328 pp., ISBN 1623491797 (hardback)

One of the remarkable traits of the discipline of archaeology is that the data, we collected years and even decades ago can still be valuable many years later and, in fact, may reveal much more than those who collected it could ever have imagined. Yes, our discipline improves, we have newer technologies and more sophisticated analyses, but the data remains to be shifted through, analysed and interpreted to tell a story of the past long forgotten. Dr. van Duivenvoorde's recent book, *Dutch East India Company Shipbuilding: The Archaeological Study of Batavia and other Seventeenth-Century VOC Ships*, which focuses primarily on the study of the Dutch shipwreck *Batavia*, epitomises this process in clearly demonstrating that well-collected, conserved and curated data can be revisited time and again to divulge the secrets of the past. It should stand as an example to all budding archaeologists that collections can and should be revisited to apply the latest techniques and ask new questions.

Texas A&M University Press has the formula correct. They have come a long way from the blue cover and black and white photos of Steffy's "ship construction bible," *Wooden Ship Building and the Interpretation of Shipwrecks*, to find a happy medium both professionals and enthusiasts will enjoy. The quality of the book, cover art, colour photography, tables, charts and layout are all visually appealing and provide the perfect balance to a data intense study. The book is divided into nine chapters with accompanying appendices and notes as well as the expected front and back matter. The well-regarded maritime archaeologist Jeremy Green delivers a forward that provides context about the excavation of *Batavia* and how Dr. van Duivenvoorde serendipitously arrived at the topic of study. His recount of their chance meeting and conversation in an airport in Bodrum, Turkey sets the stage for the work the author appeared destined to undertake.

The first three chapters are preparatory in nature as the author begins chapter one with a discussion about the wrecking of *Batavia* and its location by sport divers, her aims in researching and writing the publication and an outline of forthcoming chapters. In this introduction, she points out the fact that we know very little about the construction of seventeenth century VOC ships and have even fewer archaeological examples to study. Her approach to filling the gaps in our knowledge is to study the Dutch East India trader *Batavia* and other sites from the perspective of available contemporaneous technologies, including an in-depth archaeological and historical look at metallurgical processes, wood working and casting techniques, among other technologies. The second chapter

provides an overview of the history of Holland and its shipbuilding traditions, and by this point the reader is well and truly aware of the incredible contribution the author makes to our historical knowledge of Dutch shipbuilding through the introduction of translated archival materials including treatise and texts. Chapter three wraps up the background, with a nod to her colleagues of the Western Australia Museum and their work on *Batavia*. Van Duivenvoorde describes their work in detail, the data available for study, as well as the potential shortcomings of working with legacy data.

The ship construction specialists will find their fill in chapters four and five, in which the author focuses specifically on *Batavia's* construction, down to the scantlings, fasteners and waterproofing details. She also contextualises *Batavia* through comparison with other known archaeological VOC ships, such as *Vergulde Draak*, which has never before been published. One of the greatest contributions this book makes to the field of underwater archaeology is that it provides the most informative overview of extant Dutch VOC ships in one place; it is a go-to source for anyone working on Dutch East Indiamen.

Again, the author's commitment to drilling into the archives and sources for previously unknown and untranslated historical material is brought into focus in chapter six wherein she highlights texts relevant to understanding the shipbuilding process during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In an effort to answer some of the outstanding questions that have remained in Dutch shipbuilding, Duivenvoorde's sources focus on the VOC's use of double-hull planking, sheathing methods and caulking. Chapter seven includes some of the most sophisticated archaeometric analyses that have been applied to shipwrecks of this type and era through the identification and dendrochronological analysis of timbers from *Batavia*. These data, however, do not stand alone, as they are supported by more historical and archival sources about the technologies available, the types and conditions of wood used in ship construction and the social, political and economic environment in which the timber trade took place in the seventeenth century. Chapter eight provides a proposed reconstruction of *Batavia* while chapter nine wraps up the study, summarising the key points learned as a result of this five-year study, as well as acknowledging the limitations.

Dr. van Duivenvoorde's book provides maritime archaeologists and scholars with a superb example of how we might consider and apply archaeometric techniques to shipwreck sites to expand the data we collect and broaden the questions to which we seek answers.

She moves seamlessly from the scanning electron microscope to the socioeconomic and political landscape and seascape of the Netherlands and beyond to the East Indies to unravel the mysteries the VOC shipwrecks still hold. Her book can be used as a textbook in courses that focus on maritime history and archaeology, but is equally appealing to the enthusiast with its rich illustrations and imagery. It is a must-have on the shelves of any ship construction specialist and stands as an example for the type of research maritime

archaeologists all should be conducting on historic shipwrecks.

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