



Book Reviews

THE POOLE IRON AGE LOGBOAT BY JESSICA BERRY, DAVID PARHAM AND CATRINA APPELBY (EDS)

Archaeopress, Oxford, 2019. 121pp, 82 black and white and colour figures, 10 tables, pb, ISBN 978-1-78969-144-3, £30.00

As the title suggests this relatively slim, paperback volume is focused on the discovery, analysis, conservation and display of the Poole Iron Age logboat. The preamble to this volume not only informs us of the chance discovery of the boat (by dredging and then local divers) and the continued drive to get the boat conserved and on display, but also sets out the lofty and laudable goals of this volume – to bring together leading specialists to investigate the boat remains to their fullest. A goal that has been achieved in part, but that has some notable omissions.

Poole is the largest natural harbour in the UK and the scene is set via a thorough overview of the Iron Age harbour and trading port, painting a picture of coastal settlements manufacturing goods including salt, pottery, Purbeck marble and lathe-turned shale to trade with the Continent. The scale and importance of trade in the harbour is evidenced by the unique Iron Age moles or quays – impressive structures topped with monumental slabs of local Purbeck marble – an imposing site with which to greet visiting merchants.

The archaeological history of the boat sets out clearly and concisely the issues around both the initial recording and forensic re-recording of the logboat, and the potential difficulties in reconstructing the shape of the original craft as built from the archaeological remains as they currently exist.

The woodworking chapter provides a detailed appraisal not only of the woodworking technology but of the parent tree and its probable location – sourced from deciduous wildwood in the hinterland of Poole harbour. From the selection of this unusually large oak tree by a senior woodworker to the difficulties in transporting the boat to water, the entire chaîne opératoire of boat production is thoroughly considered and engagingly investigated.

Goodburn goes on to consider the propulsion, handiness and load carrying capacity of the boat, based on his work on the Cranbourne reconstruction and its subsequent trips in various local

harbours. One could ask for nothing more from this well-illustrated, thorough investigation of the ancient logboat's construction.

The following chapter details the laser scanning of the boat and the subsequent digital reconstruction and 'repair' of the 3D scan data into a functioning digital model of the boat. This process is a tour de force of the potential analytical power of 3D computer modelling in archaeology, providing detail and insights that are not possible with pencil, grid paper and spreadsheet. The digital reconstruction is well represented and discussed, with plenty of raw data provided in tabular form.

Although the different approaches (digital and traditional) are each of great interest, the book would have benefitted from an attempt to bring together the different insights offered. This aspect of the analysis, and indeed the book as a whole, would have been enhanced by a concluding synthesis chapter to the volume, bringing together the different researchers work into a coherent interpretative narrative.

The book is somewhat inward looking and would be enhanced if the Poole logboat had been considered in more detail against the larger British corpus, with more thought given to the original users of the boat and the boat's socio-economic role in the past. The twin analytical thrusts of the boat's construction (Goodburn) and carrying capacity/efficiency (Tanner) would only have been enhanced by a fuller consideration of both the artefact's use life/biography and the input that the reconstruction work, both physical and digital, has had on this understanding.

The conservation of the Poole logboat was a somewhat long and tortuous journey, beset by bad luck and often a lack of funds. Hutchings and Spriggs lead us through the highs and lows of repeated attempts to stabilise the boat in conservation, a journey which culminated in the first large-scale deployment in Britain of sucrose impregnation. There is an excellent discussion of the relative merits of polyethylene glycol (PEG) versus sucrose impregnation and the potential pitfalls to be avoided when using sugar.

British Sugar provided the large volume of treatment solution required, utilising a solution more commonly used in the manufacture of fizzy drinks. This, along with a converted, donated road tanker, provided the infrastructure required to conserve the boat. The muscle to move it from one tank to another was provided by the local rowing club. In places, this story describes the best of a local community mucking in to safeguard their heritage.

A full and honest account of the budgetary issues that beset the conservation process and the problems these sparked with the sugar conservation are given. Although ultimately a success,

project level issues certainly caused a bumpy ride. There is a fascinating account of the drying chamber constructed at Poole Museum and overall, despite a challenging journey, the conservation process of sucrose impregnation and subsequent controlled air drying is declared a success, with relatively little shrinkage and a 'pleasing surface appearance' achieved – and all on an extremely tight budget.

The final chapter outlines the history of the display and interpretation of the logboat, which ends with the conserved artefact forming the 'binding object', uniting the museum's 'People, Places and Maritime' themes. A fitting conclusion for both the boat and the book. This is a genuinely fascinating story that follows the investigation, conservation and display of one of the largest logboats ever encountered in this country, whilst also tracing the changing nature of archaeological research and museum practice over the course of half a decade.

Michael Bamforth

Research Associate, University of York

Honorary Research Fellow, University of Sheffield

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