

~~Suggestions for amending articles 10 and 11 of the society's constitution were taken.~~

~~Remarks by Christian Pfister, FCMH representative to the ICMH and John Barzman, who had been asked by the ICMH meeting in Oslo to raise the question, led to a brief discussion on the possibility of greater participation by French members in meetings and activities of the ICMH, and greater circulation of information about the two organisations and about the International Maritime Economic History Association among each other's constituencies. The new Board was asked to look into ways of improving the situation.~~

~~It was announced that the projected conference in Le Havre, 24-26 May 2001, on 'Port Environments', would be open to guests from outside France. [See notice in this Newsletter]~~

~~John Barzman.~~

Maritime History in the Maltese Islands

Maltese maritime history has a long tradition initiated by non-academic historians and folklorists. Although not scientific in their research methods and with no theoretical pretensions, these *dilettanti* have provided us with numerous descriptive accounts and chronicles related to the maritime past of this archipelago. Today, some of us are just starting to rediscover some of these popular works and to appreciate them as worthy primary sources.

In declared opposition to this *popular form of history*, from about the 1960s, academic historians, characterized by a new 'positivist approach', have come to prevail in Malta's maritime history, as in all other areas of Maltese historiography. The greater number of these scholars have contributed to the construction of Malta's naval history with works which deal with the Order of the Knights Hospitallers of St. John, which ruled Malta, as a naval fortress on the *Frontiera Barbarorum* (the sea frontier dividing the Christian West from the Moslem East).

Others have narrowed their research to concentrate on Malta as the key British naval base in the Mediterranean, during the nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries. Accordingly, Malta's maritime history has

generally been approached from a geostrategic perspective which has also come to dominate the Islands' political and constitutional histories.

During the rule of the Order of St. John (1530-1798), the short period under French occupation (1798-1800), and the long period of British control (1800-1964), Malta was governed by these great Powers which had naval mastery of the seas at the time: hence the inseparable relationship between the naval, political and economic aspects in Maltese historiography.

Furthermore, the history of Maltese trade has also been intertwined with the Islands' maritime, naval and political history: the merchant class having been one of the most pivotal elites in Malta's power structure. Nonetheless, it is only recently that the maritime trading sector has become the focus of serious inquiry by Maltese and foreign historians.

The maritime and naval harbour infrastructure; maritime insurance and banking, the Chamber of Commerce and other maritime institutions, have become major topics of study. Nonetheless, the general historical outlook taken by these works is very much institutional and elitist. It totally ignores the common people, notably margining those social groups whose livelihood was intimately tied up with maritime activities.

A new type of maritime history, concerning itself with the social and cultural dimensions, and with class and gender issues, is still in its inception. In contrast to established traditional historians, who utilise exclusively written official records deposited in the state archives, the Chamber of Commerce and other maritime institutions, the younger generations of historians are experimenting with the use of alternative sources.

Malta's maritime culture is saturated with visual and oral sources which await the attention of researchers. The fisher folk (and other sea-dependent) communities, with their oral testimonies, songs, story-telling and immediate household environment and personal belongings (including their labour accessories, paintings and photographs), are themselves living testimonies of the human relationship with the Sea.

Also of utmost interest are the hitherto ignored collections of marine votive paintings which replenish Maltese churches and chapels. These paintings (a proportion of which dating over three hundred years),

depicting maritime experiences, beliefs and perceptions of the Sea, are a veritable hoard for maritime historians.

John Chircop

Conference Standards

As mentioned above, during the discussion in the General Assembly on the subject of ICMH sanction given to other conferences, Jo Stanley made the suggestion that we should set out some criteria for what constituted a conference which we could sanction. Because nobody else is likely to initiate discussion of this, here are some off-the-top-of-the-head suggestions, produced simply to invite other people's opinions.

A conference will be eligible for ICMH sanction if:

- It deals only or mainly with issues in maritime history, which is defined in the widest terms and with no chronological restriction.
- Its Call for Papers makes it clear that contributions are to be based on original research and of a standard which would be acceptable to a refereed journal.
- Papers are to be presented in a major European language
- There is a reasonable anticipation that a minimum of 24 papers will be presented. Gatherings involving fewer papers may be sanctioned, but should use some title other than conference - eg seminar, mini-conference, colloquium etc.
- Preliminary details are made known to ICMH at least six months before the closing date for proposals of papers.

Women and the Sea Network

~~The *Women and the Sea Newsletter* has now been put on the National Maritime Museum website (www.nmm.ac.uk) and is apparently proving popular there, partly on grounds of economy and partly because it is so much better for illustrations. The 'hard copy' version of the Newsletter will not be continued, and the information will in future be available only on the web. There is also a Discussion Group - www.nmm.ac.uk/cgi-bin/dcforum/dcboard.cgi.~~