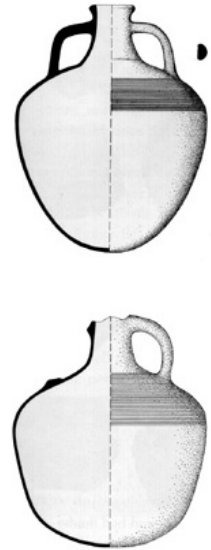


Amphoras: Silent Observers of Ancient Maritime History



A lecture by maritime archaeologist
Dr. David Switzer, Plymouth State University

Wednesday, October 29, 2008, 7:00 pm at the St. Augustine Lighthouse & Museum

Spanish sailing ships traveling to St. Augustine in the colonial period carried olive oil, vinegar, water, wine, and other goods in large ceramic jugs known to Spanish sailors as *botijas* and to modern archaeologists as “olive jars.” The use of large clay jars for shipboard storage, as opposed to wooden barrels prevalent on English and French ships, is a distinctly Mediterranean seafaring tradition. The distant ancestor of the Spanish olive jar is the ancient amphora.

Amphoras of various shapes were the sea-borne containers of the ancient Mediterranean. Maritime archaeologist Peter Throckmorton referred to them as “the jerry cans of antiquity” and “the equivalent of mass produced packaging”. Others have described them as “the 55 gallon drums of the ancient world”. As we shall see, however, plain cylindrical containers they were not. Rather, the jars exhibited curious pottery styles, each style being an indicator of the place or origin.

Before SCUBA assisted diving arrived on the underwater scene, hard hat sponge divers had been the only observers of piles of amphoras on the seabed. For the divers, the amphora mounds were just places where sponges waited to be plucked. Previously archaeologists had only examined amphoras that had been revealed through excavations on land sites. Archaeology took on a new dimension when diving archaeologists began to investigate ancient ship wrecks. Along with recovered amphoras, information was gained about how coastal freighters and deep water voyagers had been built as well as the various routes they traveled to pick up and deliver their cargos.

This presentation is about the vessels, their cargos, shipbuilding techniques, and analysis of original contents, subjects about which amphoras could have had a lot to say had they had voices. The voices have been provided by classical and nautical archaeologists and scientists from the 1960’s to the present.

Please RSVP to Sara at 904-829-0745 or shansen@staugustinelighthouse.com.
For more info, visit www.LAMPmaritime.org



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