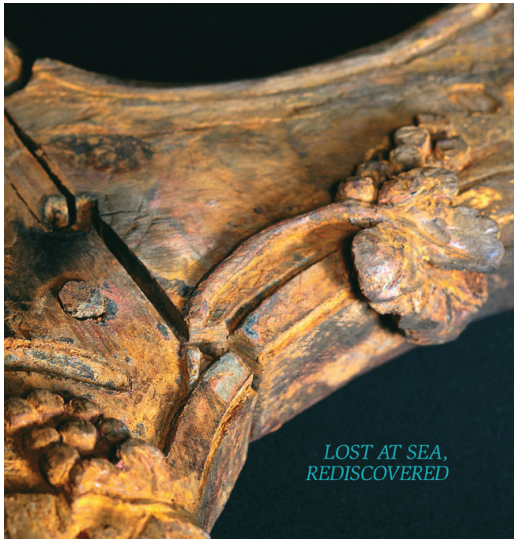


Eero Ehanti, Johanna Aartomaa, Irma Lounatuori & Erik Tirkkonen (eds.): *Lost at Sea, rediscovered*. The Maritime Museum of Finland / National Board of Antiquities, Kotka 2012.



The publication *Lost at Sea, rediscovered* is an interesting excursus of the Maritime Museum of Finland's exhibition *Spoils of Riches – the Stories of the Vrouw Maria and the St. Michel*. However, when the exhibition ends, it will be very positive that the publication is not an actual exhibition catalogue. *Lost at Sea, rediscovered* is written by twelve authors and the articles present different and general aspects of preservation, cultural heritage and – of course – the amazing findings of the shipwrecks *Vrouw Maria* and the so-called *St. Michel*.

For the reader unfamiliar with the *Vrouw Maria* and the *St. Michel* findings – the *Vrouw Maria* and the *St. Michel* were two Dutch-owned merchant ships, lost respectively in 1771 and presumably in 1747, in the Finnish Archipelago Sea. The ships are both exceptionally well preserved lying on the seabed at a depth of about 40 metres. The ships' cargo includes, among other things, porcelains, pocket watches, paintings and a variety of merchandise that was supposed to go to St. Petersburg. The wrecks were discovered in 1958

(the *St. Michel*) and in 1999 (the *Vrouw Maria*).

The publication starts with a foreword by the museum director of the maritime museum of Finland, Tiina Mertanen, who rightly describes the book as a relevant story about the development of Finnish maritime archaeology from the 1950s until today. This story is also interesting from the Scandinavian perspective – maritime archaeology started a rapid development after Second World War. When the *St. Michel* was found in Finland, the *Vasa* had just been found in Sweden. In Denmark, scuttled ships from the Viking age were found and salvaged outside Roskilde. Since then, there have been huge developments of maritime archaeology techniques, but also in the theoretical debate and how we look at the underwater cultural heritage in general.

After Tiina Mertanen's foreword come three short articles by Riikka Alvik about the *St. Michel* and the *Vrouw Maria*. Alvik gives a brief introduction of how and when the ships were lost. She continues with general data of the ships and their discovery. In the third and last of Riikka Alvik's articles, 'The merchant vessels *St. Michel* and *Vrouw Maria* and their cargo', she goes deeper into the ships' contexts and history. The text about the cargo gives us valuable information about specific artefacts and trade during the 18th century and also about research in archives. Alvik's knowledge of the 18th century wrecks is impressive and it is very obvious that she has carried out a lot of research and fieldwork related to the wrecks.

Another fascinating article, written by Hannu Matikka, is 'The Snow *Vrouw Maria*', providing detailed information about the rigging and hull structure of the *Vrouw Maria*. This article, together with Alvik's works, is of general interest for archaeologists. The same applies for Maija Matikka's 'Protection of underwater cultural heritage in Finland'.

Eero Ehanti continues with the chapter 'Lost at Sea', which gives us a fascinating voyage into the 18th century and the rococo salons in St. Petersburg. Ehanti is the project manager of the *Spoils of Riches* exhibition and his chapter visualises the display at the museum. The extensive text is

based on historical sources setting the archaeological finds in very interesting contexts, such as the rise and fall of the Dutch republic, Russia in the 18th century, and Baltic and Dutch–Russian trade. Another notable story is the text about arts in the Netherlands and what might have happened with the paintings that were on board at the *Vrouw Maria*. In this context, Krista Vajanto’s articles ‘A rococo skirt, silk stocking and printed cotton’ and ‘Colours from beyond the sea’ are worth mentioning as good examples of how to tell interesting stories about a society from archaeological artefacts.

Eero Ehanti comes back later in the publication with the article ‘The Vasa of the Finns? On conservation of shipwrecks’. This is a hypothetical article where he discusses how to make a conservation of the *Vrouw Maria*, if salvaged.

Instead of salvaging a shipwreck there are, however, many other ways to go and expose the find for the public. Researchers and students at the Department of Media in Aalto University School of Art and Design have as a good example of such an alternative way of creating a virtual simulation of the *Vrouw Maria*, presented in the article ‘Re-discovering the Vrouw Maria’ (by Lily Díaz, Tommi Horttana, Mikko Hovi, Svetlana Maras, Markku Reunanen and Ferhat Sen). A general description of the background is given to us in the article ‘The *Vrouw Maria* underwater project’ by Juhani Kostet and Sallamaria Tikkanen.

Among more specified articles are Leone Montonen’s and Kari T. Steffen’s ‘Microbial degradation affecting the condition of the *Vrouw Maria*’ which helps us to understand more about why some shipwrecks are better preserved than others in the Baltic Sea and what might increase degradation of the *Vrouw Maria* in the future.

An unusual perspective of the maritime landscape is presented by Sallamaria Tikkanen in ‘The *Vrouw Maria*’s unheard soundscape’, partly based on Svetlana Maras’s results presented in the article ‘Recreating the underwater soundscape in the *Vrouw Maria* virtual simulation’. Why study the underwater soundscape? Tikkanen asks herself this question and her answer is ‘out of curiosity, of course, but also because the underwater world is a hot topic’. I wonder whether this perspective is relevant when discussing protection of cultural heritage under water. It is more likely important for making simulations and visualisations of maritime landscapes for visitors in museums.

My general impression of the publication is,

unfortunately, not very good. Not because of the authors, but because of the structure and the absence of some relevant illustrations and data. For instance, there is no overview map showing where the *Vrouw Maria* and the *St Michel* sunk; and there is actually no illustration at all of the *St Michel*. Why?

In my view, *Lost at sea, rediscovered* is a loose series of essays that are not actually related to one another in a logical way. The initial impression is that the aim of the publication is to tell the stories of the *Vrouw Maria* and the *St Michel*, but the essays are dealing with so many other and different topics that the main goal is lost – particularly when nearly no effort is made, or have been given, to an archaeological presentation of the *St Michel*.

The *Vrouw Maria* and the *St Michel* are two fascinating shipwrecks of great maritime archaeological and historical value. The ships themselves and their cargos give us important information about the trade between Russia and the Netherlands in the 18th century.

When studying shipwrecks it is, of course, desirable to compare evidence from different source materials, mainly because they complement each other but also because they can tell different stories. Therefore, it would have been essential to read more about the interaction between the historical and archaeological sources. Because archaeology has received such a subordinate role in this publication, the reader gets the impression that it mainly aims to illustrate the historical sources rather than critically examining them.

The publication has, however, also advantages. The essays themselves are well-written and interesting and give a broad picture of how successful project as ‘the *Vrouw Maria*’ has been implemented.

Tiina Mertanen ends her foreword with a question how the countries of the Baltic Sea can make use of the uniquely preserved underwater cultural heritage. I think that *Lost at Sea, rediscovered* is one of the many ways to make use of the underwater culture of the Baltic Sea.

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