

Börstö 1 Finds report for May and July 2023 - D. Cleasby, MAS Maritime Archaeologist

The Suomen Meriarkeologinen Seura (MAS) conducted 2 field camps in the Saaristomeri area in 2023, in May and in July. The camps were organised by Markku Luoto. The archaeologist responsible for project in May was Finnish Heritage Agency (FHA) staff member Riikka Alvik, since the usual maritime archaeologist for MAS, David Cleasby, was in the UK dealing with family matters. The archaeological responsibility for the July field camp was performed by David Cleasby. The passages below relate to finds recovered, which only occurred on *Börstö 1*. This wreck has been named due to its proximity to the local same named island, but the actual identity of the wreck is at present unknown, and a key aim of the project. It should be noted that MAS only raises finds if the possibility is agreed in the license permit stage with the FHA, or if specific items are targeted in advance with the FHA, or if new items are discovered on site and considered by the onsite maritime archaeologist to be of significant cultural value. In the latter case direct permission is gained for each item from members of the Finnish Heritage Agency by sending pictures of the items digitally and gaining permission to raise. In the May fieldwork, Maritime Archaeologist Riikka Alvik was actually on site, with Yann Irissou as the archaeologist underwater and in July David Cleasby performed both roles.

May 18-21st 2023 Field camp exploring *Börstö 1* (#MV 1648)

https://www.kyppi.fi/palveluikkuna/mjreki/read/asp/r_kohde_det.aspx?KOHDE_ID=1648

Several finds were raised by MAS divers on the *Börstö 1* wreck, with Maritime Archaeologist Yann Irissou, aided by MAS divers, retrieving them underwater. Finnish Heritage Agency staff member, Riikka Alvik had authorised the raising of the objects, recorded the dives, documented the finds and provided appropriate on-site conservation care. Riikka Alvik also dealt with on-site storage and subsequent transportation to the Collection and Conservation centre in Vantaa. The retrieval of finds was carried out due to the vulnerable nature of their position. Cultural materials had been removed illegally from this Protected Wreck in previous years. Items had been identified by previous and subsequent photographic recording to have been moved and also removed, particularly square bottles from the aft cabin and tripod ceramic pots from the deck cabin, among others. A piece of gold inlay for a snuff box had been identified and recovered from a prominent open position in the hold in 2020, and seemed to have been removed illegally from the back cabin and left by its would be thieves. In 2022 a similar piece of gold was found in one of the back windows, presumably in a position where thieves had been planning to recover it to the surface at the end of a dive. It is unknown what other objects had been removed by previous thievery. Correspondingly the deck areas, the deck cabin, the aft cabin, the visible areas in the holds and the several sailor's chests in the deck cabin were inspected for signs of disturbance, and also if finds had been unearthed and therefore visible for thieves to steal.

Finds from the deck cabin and hole under the mid-hatch

(NB all *Börstö* finds codes for 2023 are SMM52023)

- copper vessels.
- two three-legged cauldrons.
- one wooden vessel.



**2021
2030** United Nations Decade
of Ocean Science
for Sustainable Development



Tieteellisten seurain
valtuuskunta



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



The Protection of
the Underwater
Cultural Heritage



Tripod ceramic pots down in the mid hold August 2022. Image: T. Kerola

Finds from the aft cabin.

- A broken faience bowl and the parts of a wooden box were lifted from the aft cabin.
- In the aft cabin, part of a human skeleton was visible among the sediment. Thankfully they did not seem to be obviously disturbed. There was no research objective to be gained by touching or removing the bones. There are very strong legal protections concerning the disturbance of bodies lost at sea. Since the body was there for so long there was no reason for a police investigation which may occur in much more modern wrecks. The ethical dimension that this is their final resting place deserves the maximum protection. For those new to the wreck this was the 4th skeleton found, 3 being excavated before and currently undergoing new avenues of research (which will be described in our final report)



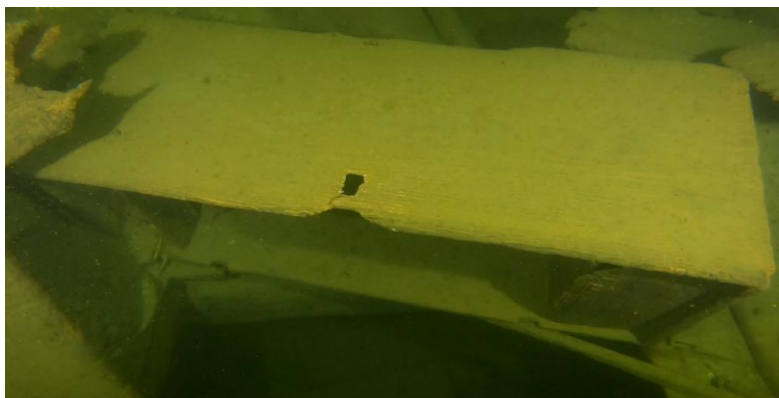
Back cabin area, showing human remains, amongst other objects
Image: T. Kerola

Unfortunately, the aft deck cabin and lower decks have been badly damaged, and flooring collapsed or even deliberately broken into to allow access to lower levels. It may be significant in that in the July 2023 dives a large modern piece of metal was recovered there that may have been used to break the flooring. The potential of these finds for cultural interpretation had been damaged by virtue of

being ripped from their original position in the wreck. If they had been kept in their original context, such as in the aft cabin or hold areas, it would have allowed tighter interpretation of their function and significance for the original crew of the vessel.

Seaman's chest

It had been obvious from dives made in 2022 and April 2023 that there was an open chest in the area of the deck cabin, near to the mid-ship hatch. Photographs had been taken of the visible contents and were used as the basis for action on the May 2023 field trip in a meeting between MAS members and Finnish Heritage Agency members. It was obvious that this sailor's chest hanging over the hatch there was very exposed with the central door gone and the left compartment half open, the right compartment mostly closed. Its aspect would have seemed inviting to the enquiry by thieves and had probably been opened by thieves, perhaps breaking the chest door off. It was not possible at this point to know if the right compartment had been visited by potential thieves. This bow structure could potentially be a shelf with 2 side partition closeable cupboards or a seaman's chest on its side. The box has a hole in the top showing surface which seems likely to be a fixing or lock feature, to which a lid was originally attached but is now missing. It is unknown if such cupboards would exist in such an open area of deck without clear other wooden structure around. Its shape and size is very similar to one other box in the hold and another currently on the deck, and allied with the fact it seems detached from other structural features would indicate it is much more likely to be a seaman's chest that is now on its side. How it got to this situation is debateable. It could have been hauled out of the hatch it is next to or from a position some 5 m further forward by thieves or been in this position at time of wrecking. Clearly it had objects still in the central section such as bottles etc. Clay pipes and other items seemed to be sticking out the left compartment. The right compartment door seemed to be mostly closed so it was unclear if objects were inside. The diving schedule on the site did not allow time to investigate the right compartment, which at least was less visibly open to the potential illegal visitor, and the task of investigating it was left to the July filed camp. The position of the chest so close to the hatch hole makes it unclear if more objects were previously in the central and left compartment, or that some had fallen into the hole due to local environmental conditions and the slight incline of the chest opening down towards the hatch hole. It was clear that these objects were either vulnerable to thieves and to being lost into the hole and required raising. The cultural value of investigating the whole context was high because the objects were clearly related to each other by being inside the same structure and contextual meaning could be applied and interpreted, whether for glimpsing the personal lives of the person or persons who used it or owned it, as well as what it could tell us about the functional roles on the ship.



Seaman's chest with probable lock position broken off, central area open
Image:
T. Kerola



Objects inside central compartment of chest. Photo: T. Kerola



Left side compartment open with clay pipes protruding. Image: T. Kerola

From the central space and the left compartment were recovered the following objects using a weighted porous basket: (NB. All Börstö finds codes for 2023 are SMM52023)

- three intact wine bottles.
- one smaller glass bottle (possibly a medicine bottle).
- a shoe piece.
- clay pipes.
- a clay pipe rack for storage
- matches and flints (for lighting the pipe).
- handgun bullets and shot.
- two wooden jars.
- glasses in a thin leather case.
- fragments of a wine bottle.
- one coin – dating and provenance not as yet published.
- buttons.
- a cutlery handle with engraved decoration.

- a pestle

Conservation of May 2023 finds.

The position of finds that were not in the chest were recorded before raising. Finds were appropriately raised using a box that drained water, prevented excessive internal movement and stopped any finds escaping. On deck they were kept in seawater, so they did not dry out, and were systematically identified, categorised and recorded. Finally, they were packaged with appropriate materials and sufficient water so that they did not react overtly with the finds and so they were not damaged in transit or allowed to dry out.



Removing finds from seaman's chest, with safe, balanced raising of finds. Image: T. Kerola



Finds gathered on deck. Image: MAS

Löytöjen tutkimus



Museovirasto

Finds in the Collections and Conservation Centre lab in Vantaa. Image: Museovirasto



Conservators Liisa Näsänen (left.) and Elisa Ahverdov investigate a tankard.
Image: Riikka Alvik



2021
2030 United Nations Decade
of Ocean Science
for Sustainable Development



Tieteellisten seuran
valtuuskunta



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



The Protection of
the Underwater
Cultural Heritage

June 6th – 9th July 2023 Field camp exploring Börstö 1 (#MV 1648)

In meetings before the field trip objectives for the investigation had been agreed between MAS and the Finnish Heritage Agency. It was clear that the right-hand side compartment of the chest was partially open and may still contain finds, while there were objects in the back cabin that were in view and obvious possible targets for thieves. An assessment was made of the deck and back cabins and in the spaces revealed in the holds and levels below. It was noted that there was at least another chest in the hold that was visible and more prominently one on the deck that was starting to split open. The corner edge of another seemed to be protruding out of the surface of the deck. These were recorded and set for future monitoring. This could involve future recovery but as they were currently intact and not in danger from the elements they would not be touched, until such a point that they naturally opened or were clearly damaged through illegal tampering.

Finds were recovered with 3 dives. Maritime Archaeologist David Cleasby was given excellent diving support and advice by fellow Maritime Archaeologist/Diver Yann Irissou and Archaeologist/Scientific Diver Sami Brchisky. The first two dives prioritised the right-hand compartment of the seaman's chest. Permission had already been given by the Finnish heritage Agency to recover what was in the chest compartment, partly because the objects from the other compartments had been recovered already, and more so because the chest was a single context and all parts needed to be studied as a whole. Underwater the closed retrieval box previously used did not function as expected, so a simpler drainable basket was employed. The compartment door opened smoothly without damaging it, allowing easy access to its contents which were covered in silt. The items recovered are shown in the accompanying pdf with the onsite finds' reports. From the chest was recovered:

- a small bottle, still stoppered, with cracks in the glass, but contents still intact, possibly a cream or a medicine.
- a composite tool, made with a wooden handle. In its main length it has wood on one side and metal on the other, with the metal overlapping the end of the wood. Possibly for rubbing down of a material.
- a foot long piece of hollow bamboo, which was filled with sediment, but may have been kept to protect and store paperwork.
- The most decorative piece was the leather item below, which was later identified as a book. It was deliberately wrapped quite tight underwater, so it did not open up and lose any contents or risk destroying its spine and the whole thing coming apart. The patterning was elaborate, edged in with possibly gilding. It had no obvious identifying feature and could have been simply decorative, although the main central motif that resembles a star or a compass rose may not be just decorative but be a company logo. There was clearly some deterioration around the edges, the spine was partially crushed and there seemed to be soft pulp mush at the open edge that indicated paper that was being damaged.





Finds from
Börstö 1
seaman's
chest near the
mid-hold.
Photo: D
Cleasby



On subsequent dives the aft cabin was inspected, and several items identified as potentially needed raising as they were clearly visible to thieves. The Finnish heritage Agency was contacted and when permission was granted the following items were raised:

- an intact but empty green glass 'onion' bottle, the sort previously seen on the wreck, and characteristic of the 18th century. This was found in the aft cabin on the left if facing forward, but not in the cabin space itself but lower down under decking further forward.
- A metal object with a handle had been seen sticking out of the silt (position shown on MAS archive video), and turned out to be a coffee or teapot, made of either tin, brass or copper or a combination, as the spout seemed a different colour (awaiting conservation report), which had retained its shape but was badly decayed on the sides
- an intricately patterned metal item, possibly brass, with a floral pattern similar to Rococo, and may have functioned as a wall bracket for hanging items or a chest feature. a metal plate fragment, with a dimpled texture, possibly pewter.
- a metal object was seen in the back right of the rear cabin sticking up, with a dimpled texture, that looked interesting. It was raised and turned out to be just the fragment of a metal plate, possibly pewter.
- Permission was given to raise a cup also, but this was not found on these dives.



Finds from the rear
cabin of Börstö 1.
Photos: D Cleasby



Original position
of the onion
bottle shown
above and
raised from back
cabin, July 2023.
Image: MAS

MAS diving teams always work in pairs and every dive pair, if not every diver, needs to carry a camera to record proceedings. This is part of the conditions of conducting the research, but also simply maximises the amount of footage to use later when analysing the data, as 2 divers next to each other will often see different things. This is even more important when raising objects with one occupied with the handling of objects and the other recording. Sometimes 3 divers are needed with one

recording, one handling the finds with another assisting and ensuring the retrieval container is stable. It is essential that the process needs to record exactly where the objects came from. Raising means removing them from their context within the ship, therefore the context needs to be recorded beforehand, and allows researchers to reconstruct that context later. This bottle came from the aft cabin. The combination of the cabin space and the bottle might lead us to consider this a personally used object, as opposed to finding it in a hold with several others when it would more likely indicate cargo.

Finds interpretation.

The shape and size of the chest meant that it was likely to be part of the normal storage space for sailors on the vessel, rather than trade goods brought onboard for commercial reasons. It contained a mixture of what seemed personal effects vessel. The tool found in the right compartment, with its metal surface overlapping the end of the wooded handle may have been a tool for scraping leather or other materials and may indicate not just the skills base of one of the sailors but also their role on the vessel. The detailed interpretation of the finds is being undertaken by the Finnish Heritage Agency, alongside the necessary conservation processes, which can vary from material to material. For more details it is necessary to consult the forthcoming Finnish Heritage Agency report. The leather object was originally estimated on site as a book or a wallet, due to its size and the clear presence of paper sealed between its main 2 surfaces, either being book pages or a paper document placed inside. The decorative patterns in the cover which seem to be golden in colour and likely to be gilded edging, though potentially something more valuable, though unlikely. It did not have any lettering to identify its provenance and so could be purely decorative in nature. The star-like repeated motif may have some resemblance to compass directions or stars, and therefore be maritime-related in nature.

Conservation of July 2023 finds.

Once on the surface the finds were measured and photographed. They were kept in seawater and packaged firmly in containers to avoid excessive movement on transport and kept in the cool of the ship's hold until transport. However, it needs to be said that the materials used for packaging at the time were not appropriate and in sufficient amount in some cases, making use of materials on board rather than optimally sized, flexible wrapping materials bought beforehand. They were delivered safely to the Collections and Conservation Centre in Vantaa due to the assistance of Sami Brchisky. The conservator in the laboratory gave very constructive feedback to the maritime archaeologist concerning first aid for finds and packaging. This has been resulted in proactive provision of appropriate conservation materials for all future MAS fieldwork trips, whether finds are likely to be raised or not. The conservation of items has been in process and the conservation report is eagerly awaited, as is the analysis by Finnish Heritage Agency maritime archaeologists as to the precise identification and provenancing of the finds.



Conservator Elisa Ahverdov (left) unwrapping the possible coffee pot and finds in the conservation lab (right)
Image: Y. Irissou



2021 United Nations Decade
2030 of Ocean Science
for Sustainable Development



Tieteellisten seuran
valtuuskunta

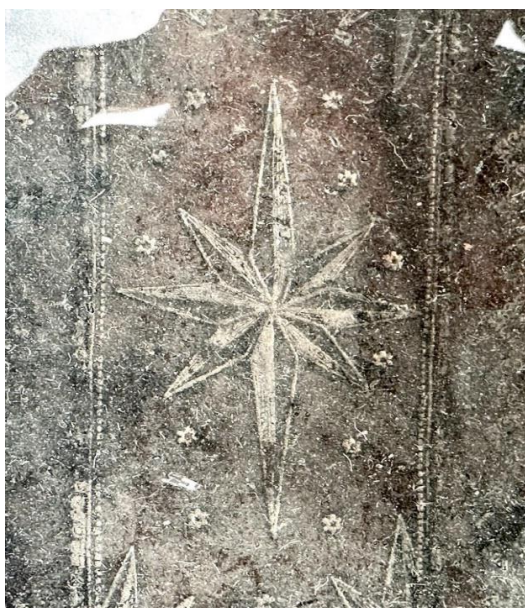


United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



The Protection of
the Underwater
Cultural Heritage

The conservation of the book/wallet has been particularly interesting. It was X-rayed and when it was delicately opened by conservators was found to be a book, with a solid spine and many pages inside. The recovery of leather items and particularly paper from underwater environments is a rare occurrence and requires the utmost delicacy. Books can contain numerous substances like different types of glue or different inks that decay and can also interact underwater. Clearly the immersion of the book in a cold, relatively anoxic environment and covered in sediment had aided its preservation. The nature and subject of the writing has not as yet been confirmed to MAS. It is clear that the interpretation of the pages is highly problematic as they have stuck together and discerning the content of one page from another is extremely difficult. It is also likely that the ink has leached from one page to another. However, on a cursory look, the writing seems to be set in dark black type, in orderly lines, rather than handwritten, and indicates a printed book. The full report on this item, whether on its content, what it might say about its owner, what clues it may give to the ship's identity and the techniques employed in its conservation are eagerly awaited and will be linked to upcoming Saaristomeri reports when it is ready.



Images of the book in its investigation and conservation stages. Images: Museovirasto



2021 United Nations Decade
2030 of Ocean Science
for Sustainable Development



Tieteellisten seuran
valtuuskunta



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



The Protection of
the Underwater
Cultural Heritage