

## Review essay

Bass, George. *Archaeologist Beneath the Sea: My First Fifty Years*. Istanbul, Turkey: Boyut Publishing Group, www.boyut.eu, 2013. 403 pp., photographs, illustrations, maps. US \$49.00, paper; ISBN 978-975-23-1031-5.

Steffy, Loren. *The Man Who Thought Like a Ship*. College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, www.tamu.edu, 2012. 196 pp., photographs, illustrations, maps, citations, glossary, bibliography, index. US \$35.00, cloth; ISBN 978-160-34-4664-8.

A small cadre of people formed in the early 1960s to study the remains of ships and their cargos archaeologically as sources of otherwise unobtainable information about the past. While others have conducted similar research, the group lead by George Bass at the University of Pennsylvania quickly reached a critical mass of expert scholars and supporters to become and remain the world's driving force in a new discipline – nautical archaeology. In the mid-1970s Bass's American Institute of Nautical Archaeology (AINA) established an Aegean headquarters in Cyprus, then moved it to Bodrum, Turkey. In the United States, they shifted to Texas A&M University where they were better supported than in Philadelphia.

Through the decades, while discovering fascinating and significant information about the distant past, many notable people shifted into and out of the group, including J. Richard (Dick) Steffy, while Bass remained the central driving force, scholar, fund-raiser, and mentor, even after his official retirement. To better reflect its international scope, AINA dropped *American* from their name and with constant care INA and Texas A&M have continued an overlapping synergistic relationship that has made College Station, Texas, the world center for this academic discipline.

That these two books have been published within a year is fortuitous because together they offer a broad and occasionally deep look into the group who, with their determination and intelligence, succeeded in developing field and laboratory techniques for a nascent discipline to better understand the past. Bass's volume is autobiographical, relating his life and the story of INA through his eyes. Loren Steffy's book is the story of his father, Dick Steffy, whose work and personality were so important to the development and future of nautical archaeology. Both authors also offer an insider's view of INA's more important processes and discoveries.

To extract more from Bass's publication, it helps to know more about the man. George Bass will always be known as *The Father of Nautical Archaeology*, a much-deserved title. Intelligence and dedication to scholarship were his key attributes to be a principal investigator for important archaeological research projects. Archaeology

involves the destruction of a site as an excavation proceeds. A proper site investigation, therefore, requires someone like Bass, possessing solid professional ethics and determination, to conduct the best possible fieldwork, analysis, interpretation, and publication. Even as a graduate student he quickly earned a reputation of possessing the right qualities. He stood out from others in the field, even within the expert core of INA. Bass's natural leadership abilities, honed by a short stint as an Army officer, and his focused interaction with people were important to his and INA's successes.

*Archaeologist Beneath the Sea* is much more than an update of Bass's 1975 *Archaeology Beneath the Sea*, written only 15 years after he led his first nautical archaeology site investigation at Cape Gelidonya. His new work contains much information about many important nautical archaeology sites and archaeologists, yet Bass goes beyond that; he takes the reader on a 50-year journey wherein some wonderfully able people overcame problems that would have stopped most, and solved seemingly unsolvable riddles about the past. Bass's adept writing style takes the reader into meetings, underwater shipwreck sites, laboratories, and classrooms where questions are voiced, problems solved, and knowledge discovered. One meets famous ocean explorers, politicians, and scholars along the way. By the end of the book the reader will have an understanding of the importance of nautical archaeology, an overview of what the INA team has accomplished, and an insider's view of pioneers in the field.

*The Man Who Thought Like a Ship* is an intimate view of Dick Steffy, one of those pioneers. Loran Steffy, the author and son of the subject, does a fine job of balancing Dick as a scholar and person, and presenting Dick's story in a very readable prose. The author is a well-respected investigative journalist and uses his professional abilities to present a fair and close look when others might have missed Dick's warm and thoughtful personality or let it overshadow his professional achievements.

The author follows Dick Steffy from his early years to his death and legacy. In the first pages one is introduced to him as a youngster, his Second World War experiences in the U.S. Navy, his marriage to Lucille, and his first profession in the family electrical business. Underneath his early surface life, the reader sees Dick's love of ships, their shapes, and how they were built. He made ship models from the time he was a small boy until time would not let his body do it any more.

Not satisfied with making models based on known designs, in the 1960s he began to understand that he might be able to use ship-model construction as a way at first to test theories of ancient ship construction, then as a way of analyzing archaeological evidence to discover ship design and construction techniques that had not even been considered. He approached George Bass with the idea and quickly he became a central member of the INA core of scholars.

With Lucille's blessing, he left the electrical business and dedicated his life to the study of ancient ships. By the time INA moved to Texas A&M, Steffy had such a reputation that Bass was able to convince the university that this man without a college degree was to be hired to teach graduate students and conduct research in his own laboratory. Through the following decades he was considered the highest authority on ancient and historic wooden shipbuilding and design. When an archaeologist was

studying a ship site anywhere in the world, they almost invariably contacted Steffy with questions and evidence they thought he might use or pass on to others.

One of the best aspects of this book is the personal perspective the author offers, from himself and others who knew Dick. The author was there, as a young boy sailing a 1:5 scale Kyrenia ship replica with his brother to discover secrets of ancient sailing techniques, and growing up surrounded by INA. Yet, he includes views from people who worked closely with Dick, such as Shelia Matthews and Kevin Crisman.

The reader can see Dick Steffy's passion for the people around him and his love of ships that led him to drop his, and his family's secure life to take a dangerous leap into a new profession that did not exist. He, along with Bass and the others at INA and their families, lived on the edge of defeat for a few years until they succeeded in creating the new discipline.

A few things are common, or nearly so, about these works. Both authors not only focus on their subject, but give one a better understanding of other team members of INA who through the decades influenced and were influenced by these two great men, and who themselves were important to the successes of INA and nautical archaeology in general.

The reader I think will acquire an awareness of the humble confidence of these two men. Between them they were honoured with almost every archaeology award possible, plus a MacArthur Foundation award and the National Medal of Science. Yet these books contain much evidence of their compassion toward others; for example Bass's acknowledgement of so many team members' accomplishments, and the dedication of both men to their students' education.

Together these two works offer the reader an excellent view of some of the key people who started nautical archaeology, their struggles, and their accomplishments. While one should not forget that others in archaeology, at other universities and museums around the world, have made serious contributions to the field, it is truly impressive to see what Bass, Steffy, and the rest of the INA team have accomplished in so few years. Most of today's nautical archaeology around the world is built on the foundation they created, and their discoveries and theories have now worked into the knowledge base of history.

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