

# VASA I



THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF A SWEDISH  
ROYAL SHIP OF 1628

THE NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUMS OF SWEDEN ANNOUNCE A NEW MONOGRAPH SERIES

# VASA, A SWEDISH ROYAL SHIP OF 1628

**ON THE 10TH OF AUGUST, 1628**, only hours into its maiden voyage, the Swedish Royal Ship *Vasa* heeled over and sank in the middle of Stockholm harbour. Armed with over 60 bronze guns on two full gun-decks, it was the most powerful warship in northern Europe and had been built as part of King Gustav II Adolf's program of military reorganisation and expansion. He planned to establish Sweden as the dominant power in the Baltic and a significant player on the European stage, and for this he needed a large and modern navy.

**IMMEDIATE ATTEMPTS TO SALVAGE** the ship came to nothing, as did an inquest to determine who was at fault. A lingering impression was left that the master shipwright had designed the ship badly, and that the king had chosen too heavy an armament, but no one was punished. Salvors working from a diving bell did succeed in recovering most of the ship's guns in the 1660s, but afterwards the slowly decaying hull was largely left in peace in the cold, dark waters of the harbour.

**IN THE SUMMER OF 1956**, Anders Franzén relocated the ship off Beckholmen Island in 27 meters of water. The navy decided to raise the ship, and divers spent five years preparing and reinforcing the remains. On 24 April, 1961, the ship returned to the surface. The hull could be pumped free of water and mud to float on her own keel for the first time in almost 333 years.

**ARCHAEOLOGISTS THEN SPENT** five months carefully excavating the interior, four decks high. Working in mud sometimes hip-deep, they recovered



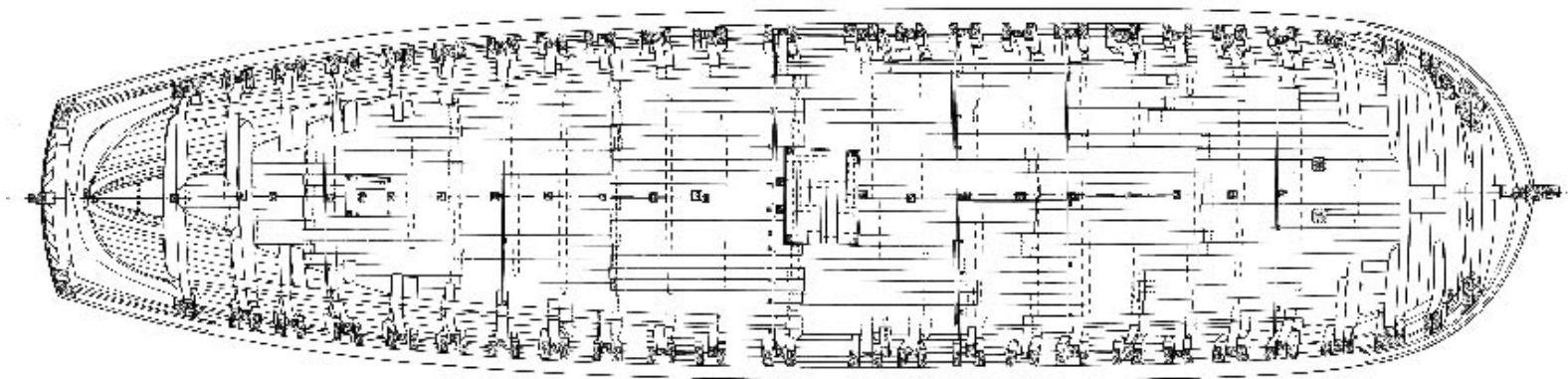
Archaeologists dismantle a barrel in the hold of the ship during the excavation in the summer of 1961. Photo: the Maritime museums archive.

over 19,000 objects, from large pieces of the ship's structure to a broad spectrum of the tools, clothing, weapons, eating utensils, and coinage of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. This collection, together with the ship itself, is a remarkable survival from the turbulent period of the Thirty Years War and provides a unique opportunity to study many different aspects of Swedish and northern European culture.

**SINCE THE SHIP WAS RAISED IN 1961**, it has been conserved, restored, and placed on display in a museum that attracts over 800,000 visitors from around the world every year, but it has not yet been published in a scientific manner. This series of monographs will provide a definitive presentation of the

The lower gundeck at the conclusion of the excavation, with the gun carriages in place at their ports. The massive riding bits were for belaying the anchor cable. Photo: the Maritime museums archive.

complete find in its chronological, geographical, technological, economic and historical context. Each volume will combine thorough description and analysis of the archaeological material with discussion of the relevant historical documents and comparative finds in a style accessible to the general reader and useful to the specialist. Illustrations will include black-and-white and colour photographs, as well as large-scale plans of the ship structure



Plan view of the hold, showing the ballast deck, the bulkheads separating the space into nine different compartments, and the lower components of the complex rigger system needed to distribute the heavy load of the gun decks (drawing J. Wallin).

where appropriate. An international team of authors has been assembled under the general editorship of Dr. Frederick M. Hocker, a specialist in the shipbuilding and maritime archaeology of Europe in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. The find will be presented in a series of volumes, each addressing a different aspect of the material and its context. Themes to be covered include:

*Seamanship in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century:* how *Vasa* was rigged and sailed.

*The machine of war:* the ship's armament and military function within the context of the strategic and tactical thinking of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century.

*Building the ship:* from the establishment of the specification through the selection and felling of timber to the construction and outfitting of the hull

*A shipboard community:* *Vasa*'s crew, both as individuals and as a social group, and the space in which they lived and worked.

*From royal propaganda to national icon:* the symbolic impact of *Vasa*'s decoration and its role in the projection of royal power, as well as the cultural significance of *Vasa* since its recovery.

**THE FIRST VOLUME**, *The Archaeology of a Swedish Royal Ship of 1628*, establishes the context for the rest of the series. Written by Prof. Carl Olof Cederlund, one of the original excavators, it presents the background to the *Vasa* story, a detailed description of the site and the origins of the modern *Vasa* Project. The preparations for salvage, the archaeological background, the conduct of the excavation of the interior, and the post-salvage excavation of the wreck site are all discussed in detail. The work also presents an overview of the find material and

its excavation context. The volume is well illustrated with hundreds of original excavation photographs and drawings, new photographs and drawings of specific finds, and fold-out plans of the structure of the hull as raised.

**THE SERIES IS BEING** published by the National Maritime Museums of Sweden and distributed by Oxbow Books, of Oxford, England. For further information, contact Oxbow Books at Oxbow Books, Park End Place, Oxford, OX1 1HN, United Kingdom E-mail: [oxbow@oxbowbooks.com](mailto:oxbow@oxbowbooks.com) or the Vasashop at the *Vasa* museum, Box 271 31 102 52 Stockholm. E-mail: [butiken.vasa@maritima.se](mailto:butiken.vasa@maritima.se) tel: +46 (0)8-519 548 83



A sailor's jacket in coarse wool, dyed dark blue/black, found essentially intact in his sea chest. One of over 3000 textile finds from the ship. Photo: Maria Ljunggren/SMM.



A few of the thousands of items found on board: a small box with wooden combination lock in the lid, small items on the lid of the wooden box in which they were found, a gaming board, and a fine quality boot. Photo: Johan Jonson/SMM, Hans Hammarsköld and the Maritime museums archive.

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