Press Release

The biggest museum of ancient boats opens its doors on the pisan Lungarno in the Medicean Arsenals

**5000 square meters and a millennium of Mediterranean history**

**After 20 years of research and restoration, Pisa's Museum of Ancient Boats finally opened its doors to the public**

*47 sections divided in 8 thematic areas, 7 boats from the roman age, 4 of which are intact*

*and have been salvaged with cutting edge technologies for an innovative exhibition itinerary*

*among 800 finds that recount 1000 years of history*

*The museum's concession has been granted to Cooperativa Archeologia which supervised in the later years the archeological site and the restoration of boats and finds*

Almost 5000 square meters of exhibition area and 47 sections divided in 8 thematic zones which host seven boats of the roman age, datable between the 3rd and the 7th century A.D., of which four are essentially intact, along with 800 finds for a musem capable of recounting a millennium of trades and mariners, routes and shipwrecks, navigations, boat life and the history of Pisa: on the 16th of June, at the Medicean Arsenals, on Lungarno Ranieri Simonelli, Pisa's Museum of Ancient Boats has officially opened its doors to the public, the biggest of its kind, after 20 years of research and restoration. Minister Bonisoli, who inaugurated it, has called the boats on display ' a unique find which recounts an important piece of our history'.

The museum's concession has been granted to Cooperativa Archeologia which supervised the latest years of archeological excavations and the restoration of boats and finds, under the scientific direction of Andrea Camilli, who is in charge of the project for the Archeology, Arts and Landscapes Superintendence of Pisa and Livorno. The exhibition is open to the public on Friday, Saturday and Sunday between 10.30am - 6.30pm and on Wednesday 2.30pm - 6.30pm (for infos and contacts: [info@navidipisa.it](mailto:info@navidipisa.it), tel +39 050 8057880. For schools and groups: [prenotazioni@navidipisa.it](mailto:prenotazioni@navidipisa.it) and tel +39 050 4702. All informations on [www.navidipisa.it](http://www.navidipisa.it/)). The museum contains also a bookshop, and a caffetteria, an educational area on the upper floor suited for meetings and conferences, a breastfeeding and nursery area for moms, besides, obviously, a ticket office and an information point. In the next weeks a catalogue dedicated to the exhibition will also be available.

The inauguration's announcement was given by Andrea Muzzi, Archeology, Arts and Landscapes superintendent of Pisa and Livorno, together with Pisa's Major Michele Conti. It's a fundamental step in a path that begun in 1998, when the remains of the first boat were found near the San Rossore's train station. That jumpstarted the excavation site as well as the restoration operations due to the important and constant effort of MiBAC and of an heterogeneous group of professional archeologists and renovators.

The Museum, set up inside the Medicean Arsenals on the pisan Lungarno, displays boats of the roman age and the related, restorated finds in the Yard of the Ancient Boats. The adjacent complex of San Vito will soon hosts the Restoration Center for the Wet Wood, a structure of international recognition in terms of restoration and organic substances, which is, at the moment, hosted within the excavation site. The new structure will, simbolically, provide support for the onerous maintenance costs of the museum and will enrich it with its work.

Four intact boats are on display: flagship boat Alkedo with 12 rowers, 'I' Boat, a big fluvial ferry, a second boat with the bridge and the mast clearly visible and a small merchant ship. Besides these, the museum also hosts more partially restored boats and the reconstruction of a portion of the excavation site. The rediscovered loads, which include personal belongings of the travelers, with thousand of ceramic fragments, glasses, metals, elements of organic material like baby toys or clothing as well as the rests of a dead mariner with his dog, are also on display: a mosaic that collects one thousand years of trades, navigations, routes and daily life aboard and shipwrecks.

The exhibition starts with the story of the city of Pisa, halfway between archeology and myth, and continues with the etrurian and the roman times, the latter of which ended with the arrival of the Langobards. It then proceeds with a focus on the relationship of the city with water, from the catastrophic floods to the management of the soil among drains and centuriation, including the Port of Pisa and all of its activities. After the restoration of the sites, the exhibition continues with the full display of the boats, which occupy two naves ot the arsenals and then moves on to the sections that recount the navigation techniques with a small planetary, to understand how the old ones used to navigate with the help of the stars, while an electronic monitor of the arrivals and departures of the ships display the main routes of the Mediterranean ports. The exhibition path ends with an excursus on the harsh life aboard, for both the mariners as well as the passengers, from the clothing to the luggages, along with food habits, cults and superstitions.

The project of excavation and restoration of the ancient boats of Pisa represents one of the most interesting and rich excavation sites in recent years. The peculiar conservation conditions of the find enclosed in layers of clay and sand required a considerable effort in terms of economy, organization and technology, with labs, warehouses, cutting edge technology and logistics made available for the research and devolved to the recovery of the more than thirty wreckages found along with their related materials. The Yard of the Ancient Boats therefore became a center of labs, warehouses and technologies that witnessed the collaboration of tens of universitary and research institutions, both italian and foreign.

“The opening of the Pisa's Museum of Ancient Boats, inside the restored Medicean Arsenals, now completely visible, is the conclusion of a main phase of initiatives carried on by the Minister of Culture that started with the lucky archological finding by Stefano Bruni in San Rossore – declared Andrea Muzzi – Since that moment, the completion of the excavation, the studies and the complex processing managed by the Restoration Center of the Wet Wood and the planning of the exhibition's design by Maurizio di Puolo and Anna Ranghi, supervised by Andrea Camilli, have been fundamental. I have the honor of ending this task, which has been continually funded by the Ministry, a job in which I believed since my very first day in Pisa. I would like to sincerely thank the coworkers who preceded me, starting from those who passed me the baton, as well as several institutes who collaborated and continued to supply their fundamental support following their respective roles, from the General Direction to the Regional Direction and later, following the result of the recent reform, the Regional Secretariat.”

The Ancient Boats Museum displays several features: it's the archeological museum that was missing in Pisa, a versatile museum in continuous transformation due to the continuation of the researches and a place which uses an accessible yet diversed language, suited for everyone. The huge planning required a constant sinergy and a multiannual collaboration with the authors of the exhibition design. “We are proud of the ending of the phase that in 20 years involved more than 300 people with the most different skills: archeologists, architects, art historians, renovators and technical personnel of the superintendence – said Andrea Camilli. There's a huge satisfaction in the fact that a state structure was able to complete an amazing project like this one: almost 5000 square meters, innovative from an exhibition standpoint as well. This is the biggest existing museum dedicated to ancient boats. The exhibition, moreover, revolves around a type of language that can attract the public to the archeology. We got rid of the 'find fetish', removing as much as possible any visible barrier that separates the visitor from the object, making it appearently touchable. The flood's area, where an entire wall reveals the materials found after a catastrophic flood with the usual deposit boxes is also an indication to research. The language of the museum was not created to impress but uses a multilevel communication system that doesn't exceed into multimedialism and re-contextualizes the narration with historic and scientific accuracy.”

**The boats**

**(1) Alkedo (the seagull)**, the flagship of the pisan fleet, a 12 rowers pleasure boat with the shape that reminds a warboat; it still has its name encarved into a tablet (Alkedo = seagull), displayed in the opposite window. Next to it, there's a life-size reconstruction of a warboat (liburna)

**(2) “I” Boat (V cen. A.D.)**, Big river ferry with a flat bottom entirely built with oak wood and strengthened on the outside with iron bands; the boat, manouvered between the two banks through a rope system, was moved from the bank with a winch whose central axis was found during the excavations (and now displyed next to the boat)

**(3) “F” Boat,** a lintres-type boat, smaller ships used for a quicker and more comfortable movement of goods. Similar to a pirogue, it was created in order to be navigated with a single side row, just like the actual boats in Venice (samples displayed of II e III cent.A.D.)

**(4) “D” Boat**, with the bridges and the mast still visible. This big fluvial boat was found upside-down and its restoration required a thorough and elaborated work. This is a huge fluvial boat that was used to transport sand down the Arno river: a large hatch allowed the loading of the sand. The ship moved with a sail (it still includes the original mast) and was towed from the banks with horses or oxes. The skeleton of a horse, still harnessed, was found beneath the boat.

Other boats: **“E” boat**, partial, cargo boat of medium-big size; **“H” Boat** , a small fluvial boat with a flat bottom: cargo boat type of medium-big size that commuted between Campania and Spain with a load of amphoras (including pork shoulder in brine) (II cen.. B.C.).

Reconstruction of the ”**A” boat** yard, cargo boat of huge size (more than 40 meters long, half of it has been recovered) (II cen.A.D.). It carried a load of flat-bottomed amphoras which contained fruit jams. Due to its size, it's been displayed by reconstructing a part of the excavation site, thus showing it while being restored.

**The exhibition areas in details**

The exhibition of the Ancient Boats of Pisa takes place within the halls and naves of the Medicean Arsenals of Pisa and is divided into eight sections.

**I. The city between two rivers**

The first hall in the museum is dedicated to the story of the city of Pisa, halfway between archeology and myth, and continues with the etrurian and the roman times, the latter of which ended with the arrival of the Langobards

**II. Land and waters**

The relationship of the city with the territory and the water: the floods, the organization of the land among channels and centuriations, the Port of Pisa, the caves and the cercamic labs, the fishing, the agricolture, the wood and the effects of these intense productions provoked on the territory, already in the ancient age, its hydrogeological instability.

**III. The fury of the waters**

The plain of Pisa was subjected to disastrous floods for centuries: they were catastrophic for the territory but, due to the archeological excavations, they allowed the tracing, in details, of centuries of history made of boats, finds, stories and trades. It also features a deepening on the excavation methods in an archeological site within a humid environment.

**IV. Navalia**

Not only the place where the boats were built, restored and repaired (the arsenals), but the boats as a whole: how boats were built in the ancient world and how they are built today, the modern techniques of excavation and renovation and the restoration of archeological wood. Reconstruction of the excavation site of “A” Boat.

**V. Boats**

The exhibition of the boats and their loads and furnitures, which occupies two naves in the arsenals, is divided in two parts: the first is dedicated to open sea boats while the second one features river boats. Exhibition of the alkedo and its life-size recontruction. Big boats and fluvial ferrys: “D” boat and “I” boat. One boat from Spain.

**VI. Trades**

Trade is one of the main reasons for navigation: the main objects are the tranportation amphoras, the storage of almost everything that was traded in the ancient world; diffusion, import and export of peculiar goods; luxury items, marbles and fine table ceramics.

All of the known amphoras in Pisa on one unique wall: shapes, contents and origins.

**VII. Navigation**

The roman boats, with oars and squared sails, used to navigate with a complex system of manouvers: the excavation site returned notable sail parts, which allow to reconstruct with much more accuracy the complex system that was at the base of the sail's structure. “A” Boat's wooden anchor, the lucky charm of the angel fish.

Orienteering with stars.

How long were the sea travels? Which were the routes and the ports used mostly? Please, check our monitor with arrivals and departures.

**VIII. Life aboard**

Travelling wasn't very comfortable, for both the mariner and the passenger. This section describes the different aspects of this harsh life: the clothing, the luggages, the storms, the boat's illumination, the cooking and the food, cults and superstitions, the daily life aboard. How was a mariner dressed like? The Alkedo's leather jacket. The luggage of the “A” Boat mariner: a small amount of cash and some personal belongings. And in the spare time? Table games and toys for kids.

**More details on the excavation**

During the excavation, the wrecks have been freed from the land using the proper method of the archeological site and from the fiberglass panels by proceeding for small steps of 50centimeters/1 meter each, tridimensionally detected and then protected again with a tissue capable of retaining humidity. In order to guarantee the necessary humidity, a spraying implant, specifically created for each boat, was installed over the finds. A fiberglass shell was later superimposed to preserve the boat during the lifting, transport and put-away. The shelled boat was finally set on a metallic frame and later raised and moved to the lab for restoration.

**The area in the ancient times and the outcome of the shipwreck**

To understand the area, it's necessary to imagine tha landscape, in roman times, just behind a delta river made particularly complex due to its ramifications and its continuous movement. Slightly upstream of the Arno, which back then was flowing in that area, there was the natural basin of the Auser river, the ancient Serchio. It was not a real port, but a portual area with anchored boats. There weren't only sea boats, but also pirogues and fluvial ships, due to the hybrid nature of the area. The Auser course was carved by the channels that coincided with the centuriation grids. This strategic organization of the territory, however, caused periodical disasters due to the river's difficulty in absorbing the floods: the water was not absorbed by the sea, and therefore came back with an extreme force, causing shipwrecks for all the boats that were situated in the roadstaed in the Auser's basin. This happened around every 80/100 years, from the Augustean age (0-15 A.D.) until the V century A.D. based on the finds in the excavation site. In this yard, the excavation consisted in, besides digging for boats and their materials, the individuation of the remains of the floods that caused the shipwreck of the boats (sediments), but also in the recognition of the different seabeds that have formed during the course of the centuries and of the turbolences that, on several occasions, devastated the flood deposits.

The materials – ceramic, wooden objects, ropes, leather, vegetable and animal remains, wrecks – have been found in the boats or in the wrecks' portions, in the boat loads or in the seabeds, presumably fallen off during transhipment from a boat to another one, following some fishing activity or the transportation of the wood. The currents made everything more difficult, by eroding the oldest layers and transporting the materials originally contained into different contexts. The exceptional state of conservation of the finds had an impact on the excavation activities which required a complete scientific documentation while trying to preserve the wood parts from the atmospheric elements. The humid environment is the only reason for the conservation of the finds: the wood, which was underwater, was able to maintain its anatomical structure due to the absence of hoxigen: the lack of this element, in fact, prevents fungus and bacteria from attacking the cellulose and the lignin, fundamental components of the cellular tissue.

**The architectural project**

The exhibition of the Ancient Boats of Pisa takes place within the halls and the naves of the Medicean Arsenals, on the pisan Lungarno, which were originally warehouses for the construction and maintenance of the galleys of the Knights of Saint Stephen, the cavalry order who fought against the saracen threat. The arsenals soon fell into disuse and became military housing first and stables later. Up until the half of the last century they hosted tne horse reproduction center of the Italian Army. The will to preserve the arsenal's structure has affected the choices of the museum, especially in halls I, II and VIII where the maintaining of the horse's cellars has imposed a narration divided in micro-chapters, just like small steps. The big spaces of the naves, instead, are the ideal location to display the restored big boats.

For more informations [www.navidipisa.it](http://www.navidipisa.it/) .

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