Igor’s Reflections (46), Shipbuilding on island of Korčula

For years in Split continue cultural event called The Book of Mediterranean. From 20 to 26 September 2015 was held the 27th. The organizers are: Literary circle Split, Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb and Split, and The Institute of the Croatian Academy of Arts and Sciences in Split.

At the opening of the event was read the introductory essay by Daniel Bučan, leading Croatian Arabist: Al-Andalus. One example of the medieval Mediterranean multiculturalism. The next days followed linguistic topics, in particular the comparative history of Croatian literature. Besides the domestic, as well as in previous years, there attended a number of participants from foreign universities: namely from Hungary, Germany, Italy, Canada ...

Also a number of books were exhibited. Professor Sonja Seferović exhibits her books about the citizens of Dubrovnik in 20th century. The first book is titled Tempi passati and the second one The Memories. Featured are many of Dubrovnik’s various professions and occupations. There are also biographies of Dubrovnik’s ex students of the University in Zagreb, as well as other members of our shipbuilding family. Here are cited a few of these names with whom the author spoke, and only the basic information.

Captain Pero Arsete compares former steam- and motor ships of today in view of international laws regarding the security in ports, protection of environment, etc. Captain Miho Sjekavica notes that once marine life possessed its charm, thank to a longer stay in the port while unloading of cargo, and acquainting oneself with the city.

Captain Ivo Jerković speaks about navigation in the past and today: ”It used to be rather difficult in past times, when ships were smaller and of the instruments only the sextant, and permanent anxiety where you are. Today with the help of satellite ship knows its position from minute to minute. However, before it was more attractive. Today ship stays in port not more than 12 hours. Working pace and automation entail fatigue and mental effort. And what remain unchanged is that ships of today with their technical and electronic equipment, while performing perfectly, still can not avoid storms and gigantic waves ... “ - Here captain Jerković with words: storm, waves ... touched the very essence of the design of the seagoing ship.

Mr Lovorko Šoletić tells about the old captains’ family Šoletić, and their shipyard, where in 1875 was launched the last large sailing ship Dvanaesti dubrovački. Mr Šoletić describes the ocean sailings with Allies convoys during the Second World War, when his father experienced torpedo attacks and shipwrecks.

Korčula’s shipbuilding in wood

Of many exhibited publications coming from the island of Korčula, herewith on purpose is separated the book: Korčula’s shipbuilding in wood. Introductory word concludes author Neven Fazinić: ”... this book let it be a contribution aiming to save the memory of shipbuilding to which Korčula thanks for the glory in the Adriatic and the Mediterranean. The Island through centuries lived from- and for the shipbuilding.”
The beginnings of Korčula’s shipbuilding date back in the tenth century, i.e. the time of the old Croatian state. In the year 1418, on island of Korčula was built a big ship of type Karaka. Around year 1830 begins construction of ships of 800 t. From 1815 to 1859 were built 145 deep sea ships, 717 coastal ships and 36 210 boats. At the same time was carried out a large number of repairs of the ships of various types and sizes. In 1936, on the island of Korčula there were acting 11 boat builders with about 120 employees.

Attention is paid to the forest. In the Statute of town of Korčula, in 1214, several articles regulate cutting of trees and collecting of tar for shipbuilding purposes. Oakwood, spruce and fir came from the continental part of Croatia, while the pine, holm and mulberry, are found on the same island. Korčula obtains her own arsenal, in which ships are built and repaired.

Korčula cast off the shipbuilders in the world, on all continents. Ivan Foretić established shipyard of his own on island of Malta, 1805, building there large schooners for British navy. Furthermore there are thirty Korčula’s shipbuilders in Constantinople and others in Romania, Russia, Italy, Egypt, Americas ... They build large sailing ships, fishing boats, sloops, barges, row- and motor boats ...

Concluding remarks

Diligence and achievements of ancestors should oblige and stimulate enthusiasm.

The old shipyards do not exist no more. Should we rebuild them, for a new life?

But the present time apparently belongs to fiberglass and mass production. Nowadays there are harbours and marinas full of various products: planing crafts, sailing and motor yachts ...

And there are ever more marinas and boats, what may rise the question of measure: is the reasonable measure exceeded? And whether there are grounds for the survival of Korčula’s shipyard. Would it be possible to find a warm home in the town Korčula or elsewhere on the island to accommodate if only one?!

Today's waterproof glues enable to attain tight joints, easier construction and maintenance of the ship. And to be aware: wood is a fascinating substance, materia prima - gift of the Creator.

Harmonious cooperation in the triangle: Korčula - Faculty of Mechanical Engineering and Naval Architecture Zagreb - Brodarski Institut, could bring new and healthy fruit.