The MARINER'S MIRROR

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SOME OLD-TIME SHIP PICTURES.

III.

TWO FIFTEENTH CENTURY FISHING VESSELS.

By R. MORTON NANCE.

WRITING in his *Glossaire Nautique*, concerning various ancient pictures of ships of unnamed types that had come under his observation, Jal describes one, not illustrated by him, in terms equivalent to these :—

"The work of the engraver, Israel van Meicken (end of the 15th century) includes a ship of handsome appearance; of middling tonnage; decked; and bearing aft a small castle that has astern two of a species of turret. Her rounded bow has a stem that rises up with a strong curve inboard. Above the hawseholes and to starboard of the stem is placed the bowsprit, at the end

of which is fixed a staff terminating in an object that we have seen in no other vessel, and that we can liken only to a many-rayed monstrance. Two barrels are slung over the starboard side of the ship, and along her broadside are certain round holes that are not, in our opinion, gun-ports. Some arches make a framework over the deck that seems to await the cloth of a tilt. This vessel has two masts, a mainmast placed nearly amidships and a small one right forward. At the head of the mainmast is a round top." (G. N., p. 1,052).

From this careful description it is not difficult to recognise the "Fifteenth Century Trader," illustrated on page 66 of Volume I. of *THE MARINER'S MIRROR*. This particular print, out of the set of eight ships engraved by W. A., is not reproduced by Max Lehrs in his monograph on the work of the master, it also seems to enjoy the distinction of having been, alone of his ships, copied in reverse by Israhel van Meckenem, whose second-hand print, the same as that of South Kensington, was examined by Jal.

In his brief description Jal has touched upon most of the outstanding features of this vessel; but he has made no attempt to connect her with any special use or trade. Had the numerous barrels suggested to him the likelihood of its being a fishing boat, he may well have refused to believe in a fishing buss of the fifteenth century with a round-top at her mast head. But that a fishing boat is intended seems more than probable. Looking again at the "awning supports"; had they been such, surely they would have had transverse connecting battens. Is it not more probable that they were used as a means of spreading and drying nets at sea? In this case they may well have given the hint that was acted upon by the earliest fitters of defensive nettings (see Fig. 2 with similar arches from the *Grandes Chroniques de France*, Bib. Nat. MS. Français, 6,465, of circa 1450.) Or is it possible that she is not a herring buss, but a cod-fisher, and that cod-fish were themselves hung up to dry at sea on these arches? For we know that vessels at that time were making long voyages in search of this fish. Such vessels, being independent of shore drying-stations, may well have been the original *drooghers*, or dryers, although the name, as early as the beginning of the sixteenth century, was already applied to boats that preserved their herring and mackerel at sea and brought them home barrelled.

The actual kind of fishing-vessel represented in this print we may hesitate to decide; but that she is a fisher-boat of the larger sort, either a "buss" or, as suggested above, a "drogher,"

is made sure by the presence, among the ships of W. A., of another fishing-boat which we may feel safe in calling either a "hooker" or a "dogger." She is shown here (Fig. 1) in the exact outlines given by W. A., and one sees the "myke," flagstaff and turrets astern, and, forward, the back-curved stemhead, and bowsprit with bowline-comb just as these appear in the "trader." The stemhead is even more exaggerated here, and might, indeed, be taken for an unattached sail, but for the evidence of the "trader's" stem; but, allowing for the queer drawing of both, we may be satisfied that we have here a picture, drawn from another point of view, of a vessel of practically the same build as the "trader," or as we may now prefer to call her, the "buss" or "drogher."

The lowered square sail covers the side where we might again look for barrels or round ports, the latter probably row-ports; but just in sight round the stern we get one barrel that is slung there, not end up like the "steep-tubs" on the quarters of W. A.'s other ships, but horizontally like the fish-barrels of the "drogher." The fender-cleats shown beneath the "drogher's" middle wale would probably have been present on this "dogger" also, just as a chainwale like that given to the "dogger" should have spread the "droghers'" shrouds. Mr. Brindley ("M. M.", Vol. I., pp. 184 and 250) has already drawn attention to the shrouds of W. A.'s ships, with the curious suggestions of an obsolete method of setting up that they give. Fig. 3 shows the various forms that these take, in which (a), occurring three times, has several short straight strokes crossing the shroud; (b), occurring twice, has a single serpentine line that winds round it; (c) shows what may be considered the complete expression of the idea tentatively suggested by (a) and (b); and (d), enlarged from the "dogger's" shrouds, gives a simpler form of (c) approximating to (a). It seems clear that they are all intended to express the same thing—either the end of a shroud wound about its standing part, or the end of a lanyard, belonging to dead eyes that have been omitted, wound round the shroud as they may be seen on some early ship-models; and, to give a modern instance, on North Sea trawlers. One other thing may be intended—a chain; but the only reason to suppose this lies in the fact that the *Kraeck* has the strokes (a) below her lower dead-eyes, probably a slip on the part of the engraver.

Above the level of the chainwale the poop here, as in at least one other ship by W. A., is clinker-built. This seems to have been a long-lived characteristic of Low-Country ship building;

the ships on Memlinc's casket of St. Ursula are built thus, and on great warships built in Dutch style during the 17th century we still find clinker-worked "castles." It is curious, by the way, that our collective name for these—"cage-work," should have found a parallel in the Dutch name *vinken-net*, i.e., "finch-net." Both names seem to imply a very light style of building in these parts.

The view chosen for this "dogger's" portrait gives us the detail of the round-stern that is lacking in the "drogher." This already approaches in shape the pink-stern of succeeding centuries, the great square tiller-hole being cut, not in an overhanging, concave counter (the fashion for large ships, shown in Fig. 4), but in the convexity of the hull beneath.

The stern-turrets in this "dogger," unlike those of the "drogher" have no visible openings through which a light could show; but of all W. A.'s ships these two fisherboats alone have such turrets, which fact, taken with the necessity of lights to a fishing fleet, strongly tempts one to look upon them as lanterns. In the picture "The Rape of Helen," by Benozzo Gozzoli, in the National Gallery and roughly contemporary with W. A.'s prints, we have two battlemented turrets on the stern of a ship (Fig. 4) both of which have little windows through which a light might show; but their position, immediately over the counter and overhanging the water, gives a strong suggestion of the bartizan turrets upon the stern of W. A.'s *Kraeck* ("M. M.", Vol. 2, p. 227), which again are an exact reproduction in wood of the *garderobes* of contemporaneous stone work. This likeness to the bartizan is noticeable in the "dogger's" turrets, and it seems likely that there too they were in use, above, as lanterns and, below, as *garderobes*.

Between the turrets again, as in the "drogher," we see a "myke," that, supporting a bare spar, still leaves a doubt as to its exact use.

The rigging of this "dogger" or "hooker" is scanty in detail; but one block is shown at the bowsprit-end (where no "monstrance" is fixed) and the two parts of the starboard brace lead in through holes in the bulwarks of the after castle in a manner more or less convincing.

On pages 106, 110 and 294 of *THE MARINER'S MIRROR*, Vol. I., are several examples of "busses," "doggers," and "hookers." The earliest of these is no older than the middle of the 16th century; but it is not difficult to recognise in these 15th century Flemish or Dutch vessels the direct ancestors of

such later, round-sterned, square-rigged fishing vessels, for such changes as we note are mainly the result of decorative features borrowed by them from the prevalent styles of ship-building. Stripped of these temporary fashions, the difference between the "dogger" of the 19th century and that of the 15th is not great; while the latter with her high stem gives the connecting link between the modern Dutch boat and the "round ship" or *byrthingr* that navigated Northern waters in Viking days.

The fish trade, first dominated by the Hanse Towns of the Baltic and afterwards by the Dutch, was so great a factor in the seafaring power of both in turn, that it would be surprising indeed had W. A. neglected to include fishing boats in his set of ships, although, from the nature of the manuscripts illustrated, fishing vessels like them are hard to find in contemporary miniatures, and only in such a collection as his could we hope to find them.