

Early Watercraft, Traditional Navigation Practices, and Indigenous Maritime Landscapes in the Americas

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Session Description

This session for oral presentations covers all indigenous/traditional past and present forms of navigation and maritime landscapes in the Americas. As Leshikar (1996: 13) sustains, in the centuries before Columbus arrived in America, “...there was scarcely a populated place, where land met river, lake or sea—from North American Arctic to Tierra del Fuego—that some form of watercraft was not used by pre Columbian residents”. This means that, despite the great cultural diversity of indigenous peoples that formed part of the American population at the time of the arrival of Europeans in the fifteenth century, the use of watercraft was widely extended and constituted one of their common traits. Navigation has been postulated to be part of American native traditions since the first settlement of the continent. Furthermore, in many regions traditional watercraft, such as dugout canoes, tula boats, rafts or hide boats have continued to be in use for several centuries or until the present, sometimes adopting and adapting nautical features from European traditions producing new syncretic nautical forms. By examining the diversity of watercraft, navigation practices and maritime landscapes, the session aims to highlight the persistence and adaptation of these traditions over time. Participants will have the opportunity to engage in discussions about the technological, cultural, and historical aspects of navigation, offering a deeper understanding on indigenous mobility through the diverse waterways of the Americas. This session will provide a platform to

examine and discuss various forms of navigation, from those inferred through indirect archaeological evidence to those documented through recent ethnographic research.

Keywords

Early Watercraft; Indigenous Navigation; Water Mobility; America; Maritime Landscapes