

## **Soldiers at Sea, c. 1450-1650: Close-Quarter Combat Practices in the Fleets of Northern Europe**

R.C.A.W.F. Warming, doctoral student,  
Department of Archaeology and Classical Studies,  
Stockholm University/CEMAS

A command of the sea is vital for any maritime nation. Throughout most of recorded history, this has been achieved through the use of marine soldiers and close-quarter combat technologies at sea. However, in the Early Modern Period, naval warfare underwent paradigmatic changes in terms of naval organization, shipbuilding and artillery in Northern Europe, sparking what is often termed the 'Military Revolution at Sea'. While the transformative impact of the 'Military Revolution at Sea' is widely recognized, scant attention has been paid to the practices of marine soldiers of that era, including appertaining boarding and anti-boarding technologies. This aspect of naval warfare represents a notable research gap within both historical and archaeological literature, and constitutes a valuable opportunity to study innovation processes within significant military and societal transformations.

Drawing primarily upon practice theory and new materialism, this PhD project aims to assess for the first time how close-quarter combat (CQC) was conducted in the fleets of Northern Europe in c. 1450-1650 and how these practices were transformed in the context of the 'Military Revolution at Sea'. The project investigates the cultural dimensions of naval warfare and the significance of CQC at sea as a sociotechnical practice, proposing a tripartite framework that encompasses analyses of (1) ship superstructures, (2) boarding and anti-boarding technologies, and (3) marine infantry forces. These three aspects are investigated through an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates historical, archaeological and iconographic sources, and a selection of uniquely preserved shipwreck case studies, including *Griffin/Griffin-Hound* (1495), *Mary Rose* (1545), *Mars* (1564) and *Vasa* (1628). By illuminating the enduring significance of CQC and associated material culture within naval warfare dynamics, this research contributes a fresh perspective to the understanding of warfare at sea in the Late Middle Ages and Early Modern Period, enriching also the broader discourse on military revolutions and innovation processes.

In this half-time seminar, I will provide an overview of the ongoing PhD project, focusing on the background for the research, its progress (including initial results) and plan ahead. With the timely publication of [a report](#) from last year's fieldwork on *Griffin/Griffin-Hound* (1495), I will present the initial results concerning this shipwreck in more detail.