

Report on the ICOMAM annual conference in Rio de Janeiro, August 2008

August 2008 saw the first ever ICOMAM annual conference in South America, being held in Rio de Janeiro from August 24-29. The theme of the conference was 'Making strategies for a positive future'. To make the general theme more tangible, three sub-themes were also given: 1) 'New worlds of arms', 2) 'Military and naval power and the making of states' and 3) 'Military heritage from the sea'. Whereas some papers dealt with museum organization and management, most papers dealt with practical museum and collection matters ranging from the enlightening of special collections and objects to the presentation of results of museological, historical and scientific research.

In all, there were five days of conference sessions (Monday through Friday 24-29 August), that were all located at the School for Naval Warfare in Rio de Janeiro, all made possible by the splendid work of Admiral Armando de Senna Bittencourt and his staff, securing the cooperation of the Brazilian Ministry of Defence, i.e. the Brazilian Navy and its facilities. Although a five-day conference seems like a lot of hard work for the attendants, in all fairness it must be said that formal sessions ended at lunchtime and were followed by educational trips to different museums and military locations.

For the most part, the sessions stayed within the given sub-themes. Most dealt with museums presenting themselves or elaborating on museum management or cooperation (7). Arms were the subject of another 5 papers. Lectures on the link between nations and naval power (3) were balanced with those on military heritage items recovered from the sea (3), while two papers focused on military music and naval paintings

respectively. Most papers were delivered by active directors, curators or researchers in the museum field, ensuring the professional level of the proceedings.

The ICOMAM Executive Board convened twice during the conference, and a plenary session was held on the last day (29th). Among other matters, the future programme was communicated and the winner of the 2008 Justus Lipsius Award was announced. During the conference, Robert Smith showed the first issue of the digital ICOMAM-magazine. Presenting a whole array of interesting items from museum agenda's to in-depth articles on museum objects, it is a promising start. Funds will be needed to continue this initiative.

Next to taking part in the conference sessions, which were on average attended by some 25 members and approximately 35 – 45 listeners, conference participants enjoyed many varied excursions and visits organized by our Brazilian colleagues. These included tours of the Naval Museum (25th), the Airspace Museum (26th) the Military Museum Count of Linhares and the Army Historic Museum (28th) and the National Historic Museum (29th), and visits to the impressive Santa Cruz, São Luis and Copacabana fortresses. Receptions, including the wonderful opening reception on Fiscal Island (24th) with many refreshing *mojitos* against the splendid backdrop of the port of Rio, were also part of the programme. Companions meanwhile, were entertained visiting among other landmarks the Corcovado and Sugar Loaf mountains, as well as the Botanic Gardens and the Imperial city of Petropolis.

Highest praise must go to Armando de Senna Bittencourt and his colleagues of the Naval Museum and Naval Cultural Heritage Office and the officers, NCO's and sailors of the Naval Academy, who not only

immaculately organized the conference, but also showed us the warmth and passion of Brazilian hospitality. Once more, ICOMAM wishes to thank all organisers and participants for their efforts that made the 2008 Rio de Janeiro conference a memorable success.