





## RIEN DE MEIJ

The author of this book is both a renowned maritime expert and a lover of the early Greek literature. He describes the ancient Greek ship through a number of themes, such as the Theoretical ship and the Essential ship.



RIEN DE MEIJ

# PERIPILOUS

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN

WITH A FOREWORD BY

JOHN HANLON

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*Argo by Konstantinos Volanakis (1837-1907)*

This book is dedicated to my grandchildren; Bas, Jelte, Mila and Jessy.

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## Foreword

In March 2013 Rien de Meij, the author of this book, joined 40,000 other people from around the world on a journey through Ancient Greek classics. It was an online version of the popular Harvard University masterclass, *The Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours*, taught by the distinguished Dr. Gregory Nagy of the Classics department. The experience later inspired de Meij—a devotee of ancient Greek classics, and a man with a worldwide reputation in the shipping industry—to author this book about the vessels that sailed the seas during the era of the ancient Greeks. As a participant in the course, I became familiar with de Meij’s ideas, as he frequently posted them on the Discussion Board. That de Meij was a devotee of ancient Greek classics soon became evident. Moreover, he quickly established himself as an astute commentator on the ships sailed by the Greeks of antiquity. De Meij continued and refined his observations at the Kosmos Society, a website created by the CHS as a companion to the original course.

It was clear that de Meij’s comments came from a seaman’s perspective. How could they not? The author is a man who knows the sea, just as he knows ships. He’s spent his entire career either sailing on them or as an internationally recognized professional designer of them. He’s also served on maritime search and rescue teams, worked with companies to improve navigation technology, and even served as a reserve officer in the Netherlands Royal Navy. So, it is clear why the influence of the sea permeates everything de Meij writes in this book.

You will discover that the author describes a variety of ships. Some played a greater role than transporting people, goods and booty. As he writes,

*...the ancient Greek ship and the sea through which it moves, can be the metaphor and metonym for everything that is important in life.*

In this work, the author elaborates on the above idea by describing, for example, how the Greeks reserved some ships strictly for sacred journeys. Others had more worldly functions, like the Essential ship. A variety of others were admired for attributes like their elegance or efficiency. As he discusses these vessels, de Meij makes deft use of the depictions of ships found on the pottery and other artistic remnants of ancient times. Many of them appear in the illustrations that grace this book.

In addition to his informed comments about the seagoing craft of ancient times, our veteran sailor will take you on his recent Mediterranean voyage where he sails a small craft on waters travelled by Odysseus. The journey ends in modern-day Ithaca, where, I’m pleased to report, that his arrival was more peaceful than that of Odysseus.

John Hanlon, Edmonton Canada

February 19, 2021

## Introduction

In this book you will find the stories of people who sailed their ships through the ancient Mediterranean. It is about sailors who crossed the wine-dark sea [*oinops pontos*] for an exploration, or for a home-coming journey. It is about how they entered dialogue with anyone they met, and built “thalassocracies”, seaborne empires.

My interest for these matters was raised already at early age when I enjoyed sailing my boat over the lake near the house where I grew up. During summer breaks I read my brother’s prose version of the *Odyssey* and wondered who the sailors and builders of those ships were. How could it be that they were so antagonistic to the gods which they resembled most? What was the role of women, parents, children? How could this 2500-year-old poetry contain metaphors that appeal to people up to today?

Many years later, I was given the opportunity of making a journey to Ithaca on board of a sailing ship. My wife and two friends, Hennie and Peter, joined me. The travel was inspiring and the story of it is contained in the two parts which are the chapters 1 and 24 of this book.<sup>1</sup>

In the years after that, I had some time for reflection and continued reading the stories about ships and the sea that ancient Greek writers have to offer. The recount of myth and history, the pieces of art and the fragments of poetry which make the content of this book, illustrate that even though little is known about the ancient Greek seafarer, with study and inspiration some of it can be brought back to life again. I am deeply grateful to all who joined me on the journey to recall them.<sup>2</sup>

After the travelogue of our sailing journey to Ithaca, the book continues with a discussion on the ship of Theseus, as that is the logical point of departure for any story on ancient Greece. It is the story of the “theoretical ship”; the ship that is used to sail the journey that is known as a *theōriā*; a ‘sacred journey’ that leads to the achievement of a mystical vision. The traveler on board of the ship has a vision both on the ship and on where it is going.

One thousand year after the journey of Theseus, the execution of Plato’s Socrates was delayed because this same theoretical ship had to stay in port. The weather was too bad for the ship to leave on her annual trip to Delos and while she was in port no executions were allowed. When his followers doubted that this ship was the same ship as the ideal ship in which Theseus had sailed to Delos—because every nail and piece of timber had been replaced since—Socrates answered: “*theoretically it is still the same ship*”. After that, the theoretical ship stayed the metaphor for ideas that do not die, and the word “theory” started to develop towards its modern meaning. The question of whether an object is still

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<sup>1</sup> The first and the last section of this book, the story of our sailing trip through the Ionian Sea, is based upon notes made available to me by Hennie Harinck and illustrated with photographs taken by my wife Joke.

<sup>2</sup> “We are all Greeks. Our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts have their root in Greece.” [Shelley, P.B. 1820]

the same object after all its components have been replaced is known as the Paradox of Theseus.

The ancient Greek ship and the sea through which it moves, can be the metaphor and metonym for everything that is important in life. The concept of the Essential ship is discussed in the context of the fragments of a beautiful kratēr made by the so-called Dipylon Master. The vase—a grave-marker and one of the high points of the Geometric period—is decorated with scenes of a funerary event; a corpse's procession showing the deceased passing silently through the streets of Athens on a bier flanked by mourners. Everything suggests that the deceased was a *naucraros*: a member of the Athenian maritime nobility.

The section below the handles of the vase shows an elegant vessel with a slender hull, a curved keel contour and a large stem with horned stem post. The representation of the ship is embedded in a compartmentalized system of metopes and triglyphs and surrounded by the decorative theme of the meander. The artist decided on dimensions, aspect, and relative placement of the various elements on basis of essence rather than in attempt for realistic representation. Everything that matters is reduced to its essential ingredients, and the decorative theme of the meander is the binding element.

Next the Sacred ship, the Crowned ship, the Straight-horned ship and other themes are discussed and demonstrated by examples from ancient art and literature. After that, the book continues the narrative in a chronological way where such a thing is possible. The described geographical locations reach from India in the east, to the Fortunate Islands in the west.

The recount of the Greek maritime history starts in 594 BCE. The situation for the average person had become extremely grievous. The poor, along with their wives and children, were in slavery to the rich. All the land was in the hands of a few. The time was there for a savior to arise: a strong man trusted both by the poor and the rich and his name was Solon. In his legendary role of lawmaker and mediator, he became the first “people's champion”.

Later Cleisthenes—a member of the aristocratic Alcmaeonid clan—assumed leadership over Athens. He is credited with increasing the power of the Athenian citizens' assembly and for reducing the power of the nobility over Athenian politics. He installed isonomic institutions—assuring equal rights for all citizens—and became the founding father of the Athenian democracy. He changed the four traditional tribes of Solon, which were based on family relations, into ten tribes according to their area of residence. A ship was then named for each of the ten tribes that he created. The political structure of Solon's 48 wealthy ship-commissioners [*naukraria*] was replaced by a people's assembly consisting of 50 demarchs.

This recount of history culminates in a description of the Persian Wars; a train of events that ends in September 480 BCE, with a decisive Greek victory at Salamis. The victory of the states that had been threatened by the Persian expansion policy was sealed with an agreement on collective defense, whereby its independent member states agreed to a mutual defense in response to a potential repeated attack by the Persians.

After that the hero of this story is the Athenian Strategos Kimon (510-450 BCE), a conservative and aristocratic leader. He is remembered for his sound economical insight, and for his support to the development of the fleet and a mostly direct democracy. He was committed to a good relationship with Sparta. He supported the religious values of Athens by having the southern walls of the Acropolis build and by preparing her for the build of the Parthenon and other religious buildings. He supported the rise of the talented radical democrat Perikles as the new leader of Athens, despite he must have remembered how the father of Perikles, Xanthippes, had prosecuted his own father, Miltiades. After the death of Kimon, the Hellenes would not be military successful anymore, but, incited by the popular demagogues, they would instead fight their former allies.

Much of what I describe considers the male species of humanity. To compensate for this, I also included the stories of Kalypsō, Pênelópê, Dido, Sappho, Xanthippe, Elpinike and The Women of Troy.<sup>3</sup> They tell us the part of history and myth that Odysseus and Achilles, Kimon and Perikles, Socrates and Aristotle tend to forget in their strife for reason and argumented dialogue [*logos*].

No one could tell a story like this by his own. At the end of this book, I therefore acknowledge the debt that I owe to all that inspired and supported me on this journey. None of them should be supposed to agree with my arguments, let alone share responsibility for any of my errors or abundancies. I tried to make due reference when I used or paraphrased text written by others.

Rien de Meij, Zeewolde, the Netherlands

March 18, 2021

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<sup>3</sup> Add Penthesileia, Medea, Klytaimnestra, Antigone and Iphigéneia.

## 1 Ithaca

Much had happened before to all of us.

*“We had seen the cities of many people and learned to know their visions, but now we had set to sea, to find Ithaca. The voyage was long and full of adventure, full of discovery. We met no Laestrygonians and Cyclopes, wild Poseidon—we did not encounter them because we did not carry them inside our souls and our souls did not set them up in front of us”<sup>4</sup>*

Our journey to Ithaca starts in the region of Epirus, at the place where the coast of Albania moves over into the *nomos* of Thesprotia. Our minds filled with fire, travel, cautiously picking up the rhythm of the seas, that morning when we set out from Corfu.



*Figure 1:1 - J. drying our clothes while sailing off the coast of Thesprotia.*

When we arrive at the Thesprotian coast, a fisherman guides us into the small harbor of Sayiãdha. It is a small village within a dramatic, barren, landscape, with clouds leaning against mountains.<sup>5</sup> We decline the friendly invitation for a shared meal and enjoy the diner on board of our own ship.<sup>6</sup> A large Maltese yacht is bobbing up and down the rhythm of German schlagers. The next morning, we take an early dive and swim outside the harbor

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<sup>4</sup> Cavafy, C.P. 1992.

<sup>5</sup> The adjective “barren, unharvested” [*atrýgetos*] is a Homeric epithet of the sea and of the sky. According to some it means “restless”. [Homeric *Iliad* 17.425, *Odyssey* 6.226]

<sup>6</sup> “There Pheidon, king of the Thesprotian, entertained me (Odysseus) hospitably without charging me anything at all, for his son found me when I was nearly dead with cold and fatigue, whereon he raised me by the hand, took me to his father’s house and gave me clothes to wear.” [Homeric *Odyssey* 14.319]

where the old man of the sea—now wearing an enormous pair of glasses—repairs his nets.

We leave the small port behind us and wonder at the trembling mirages that rise above the horizon. Closing-in to them, they are lines of hundreds of blue and black jerrycans, their refraction breaking through the water surface like irregular teeth.



*Figure 1:2 - J. checking the fishing nets at the port of Sayiādhā.*

Sailing aloof of Sivota, we are entirely on our own when we drop anchor between the Sivotan Islands, on the south side of a small bay.<sup>7</sup> The Maltese yacht selects another bay, just around the peak of the promontory. No party this evening. The sunset is a festival which we greet in joy and admiration. Joke rows our dinghy towards the sun. All we see and hear is in wonderful harmony with all that lives.<sup>8</sup>

Two days later, we circumnavigate the isle of Paxos; rolling over the long swell of the Mediterranean, along a harborless coast fenced by white cliffs and mast-high caves, cathedral-like portals and a wide variety of geometric shapes. Bold stone masses that slide down to the waterline. Against noon we arrive at Mongonissi where our boat finds anchorage between a white catamaran and a blue yacht with four bronzed Italians.

We sail on a boat that can accommodate up to eight people. The ship has two cabins and a cockpit with two benches, a table, a tiny kitchen, a skipper's corner with control equipment, and a small bathroom. The boat has a genoa and a mainsail. With the help of a navigational computer, we know our location, the depth of the sea, the direction in which we sail relative to north, and the speed of our ship in knots. The computer automatically adjusts the rudder steering angle and keeps us on the right heading. Sometimes it feels as

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<sup>7</sup> See Chapter 17 for the story of “The battle of Sybota”.

<sup>8</sup> See Figure 17:4.

if we are Phaeacians, sailing on a ship that sets course autonomously, for unknown destination, driven by the power of thought.<sup>9</sup>

If I can, then I prepare Greek salads—with bread and olive oil they always taste well. The hot meal that I make is a success: moussaka from the oven which burns on propane gas. While sailing along, I bake eggplant and cook potatoes. The béchamel sauce is wonderful. You are always hungry at sea. Next, we take fresh stores in Lakka, a village on the northern end of Paxos.<sup>10</sup> In the evening we return to buy bread and we dine at the waterfront with tzatziki, fish and walnut cake. The owner is English, from London; she lives on Paxos for 25 years and does not want to share the story of her life. Too many tourists ask her for her past. Bye-bye.

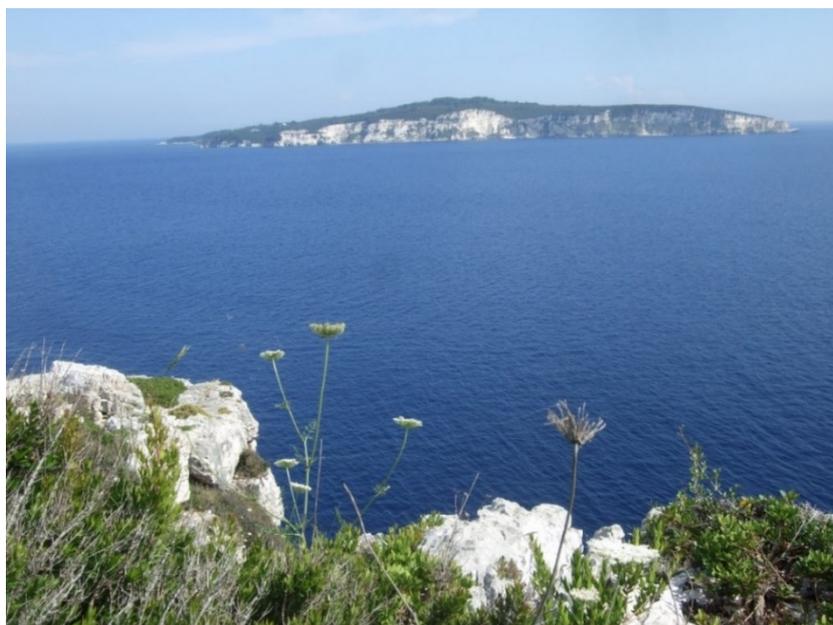


Figure 1:3 - Overview of the strait that separates Paxos from her sister Antipaxos.

I never thought you could live so comfortable on a sailing boat, but there are always grades in luxury and taste. In the port of Lakka, we see a Greek who lives with an entourage of women and servants. He likes to launch his waterscooter on his own and races his speedboat over the ultra-aquamarine water, in which small and large flounders fly over the sandy bottom: their small eyes protruding like beads. In the morning, the lime-white

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<sup>9</sup> Here the Homeric *Odyssey* 13.81f refers: “The ship held steadily on its course, and not even a falcon, raptor that he is, swiftest of all winged creatures, could have kept pace with it”. In our own journey, it took eight days—and support of modern technology—to travel from Corfu (the land of the Phaeacians) to Ithaca (the land of Odysseus), while Odysseus traveled this route within the dreamy cover of a single night.

<sup>10</sup> Plutarch writes the following myth related to the island of Paxos: “Epitherses, a teacher, was sailing towards Italy on a merchant ship. The passengers were dining when the ship sailed close to Paxos. That is when the Egyptian captain, Thamus, heard three times a cry coming from Paxos: ‘...the great God Pan is dead’. He repeated what he had heard to Tiberius Caesar, who demanded an official research on whether Pan might still be living on Paxos”. [Plutarch, *On the Failure of Oracles* 17]

seabed shows the traces of an octopus that pushed his way over the white sand, halting at regular intervals.

It is a pleasure to wake up at Mongonissi. With the feast of the previous evening still fresh in memory, I take a morning walk and spot a real land tortoise—what a strange feast it was. Only after longer observation it turned out to be about the marriage between a British woman and an Albanian man. On the dance floor, this translates into wonderful 30-minute Albanian songs and dance, while the bride dances with her English friends at Amy Winehouse music (No Rehab), drinking white wine. Hennie and Joke are invited to open the dance with the two beautiful male dancers! The main waiter performs a fire dance himself. Magic. We meet other sailors. A burning cake is served on the dance floor because of the birthday of the bride's sister. Her husband watches the party, drinking and smoking, while his baby sleeps in the little chariot.

We sail to Antipaxos and it looks like Tahiti. The small beach where we drop our anchor is heavenly. Peter builds a stupa of white pebbles. Joke signs her name in the fine sand.

To Lefkas we sail in a formidable trip through wind and weather. Strong headwinds prevent us from setting out full sails. Hennie is dizzy, after a night of interrupted sleep on the rolling ship. She spends most of the day in the cockpit, on the couch amidships. Rien, Joke and Peter safely navigate the boat to Lefkas, after having spent a sleepless night on the benches outside, regularly checking that the ship's anchor did not break out of the sandy seabed of Emerald Bay.

They watch the rosy dawn rise above the Greek mainland (see Figure 17:3). The entrance to the Lefkas Channel is a deceitful one.<sup>11</sup> We glide back and forth over the water, passing shallow cliffs and sandbars until Rien spots the entrance, which lies hidden behind some sand dunes.<sup>12</sup> We wait for the pontoon swing-bridge to open at 3:00 p.m. We are all tired and are happy with the luxury of Lefkas Marina where we take a rest and enjoy the calm water.

We tap electricity and water. Evening: art photography of a Polish lady and lamb-leftika on a terrace with life music. Next morning a Lefkas' town walk, but only after Rien and Peter cleaned the boat by spraying her with fresh water. Not a highlight this place but crowded in the Greek way: men on terraces drinking coffee, women carrying children and groceries. The Archaeological Museum of Lefkada is closed, but we admire the black and white photographs of donkeys on the beach and of men with large noses, and women who are hand-spinning—pulling out the fibers and twisting them—and a boat with a small sail. At the Salt Lake a megalomaniacal project was started once, but now it is frozen in good

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<sup>11</sup> R commented Odysseus' style: "*My friends, I am speaking this way because I do not know which place is west and which place is east*". [Homeric *Odyssey* 10.190]

<sup>12</sup> At this treacherous location, Octavius confronted the combined forces of Mark Anthony and Cleopatra in what would become known as The Battle of Actium (31 BCE).

intentions.

Next follows a surprise-tour in millionaire-style. By Jove, the Greeks know what beauty is. Onassis knew what island he bought. We sail around Skorprios Island and spot the beach-hut that was once used by Jacky Onassis. The island has roads, various houses, jetties, beaches and parks. Amidst the contours of mainland and small islands, you stay in constant awe by the always changing *tableau vivant*. Hundreds of sailing boats hang around in this area, one of the most beautiful sailing spots in the world.

We feel extremely decadent when we enjoy our wonderful *moussaka*, flushed with cool Mythos beer. Dinner at sea! Meanwhile, a bean soup simmers on the fire. We have noticed that you must prepare your food a few hours in advance. If then the appetite presents herself, it is a matter of warming up and serving. We sail into the far end of the Nidri Bay to make sure that we do not have to spend the night awake.

After a quiet night, we heave anchor and sail even deeper into the muddy shallows of Ormos Vlikho. With our dinghy we then sail to the east coast of the bay. Expedition Dörpfeld. Walking along the wooded banks, passing colorful gardens and a spread of several small hotels. After a few kilometers to the left, a path that leads to the grave that Rien and Peter respectfully clean. Dörpfeld has been lying here for 75 years, looking out over Nidri where Aristotle and Jackie often went out for dinner.

Peter makes photographs and lays paraphernalia on the grave; a sprig of green and a wildflower.<sup>13</sup> Half an hour later, Angelos S., who lives in the nearby house, will tell us that the house of Dörpfeld—with a view over Skorprios—has been sold to a Greek shipping company. The contents have been moved to the Archaeological Museum in Lefkas-town.

In the afternoon we sail to the island of Meganissi, where we are warmly welcomed and moor at the jetty with the stern of our ship directing towards the shore—Greek style. We are right below the hill of Spartachori, which is a surprisingly prosperous and aesthetic village with a world-class view.

The wind does what he wants—*Vento volente*. Headwinds, winds rushing down the slopes of the steep coast, stormy weather—it is all there on the way to Ithaca where we moor with gusty tailwinds in the port of Frikes.<sup>14 15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Paraphernalia* is a Latinized plural of Greek *parapherna*: “beyond (*para*) the dowry (*phernē*)”.

<sup>14</sup> “Then he gathered his clouds together, grasped his trident, stirred it round in the sea, and roused the rage of every wind that blows till earth, sea, and sky were hidden in cloud, and night sprang forth out of the sky. Winds from East, South, North, and West fell upon him all at the same time, and a tremendous sea got up, so that Odysseus’ heart began to fail him. ‘Alas’, he said to himself in his dismay, “whatever will become of me?” [Homeric *Odyssey* 5.291f]

<sup>15</sup> This way the words of Eratosthenes come to fulfilment in an unexpected way. Eratosthenes (Geographer and *polymathēs*, 275-194 BCE) concluded: “You will find the scene of Odysseus’ wanderings when you find the cobbler who sewed up the bag of winds”.

The katabatic winds roll down the mountains because of thermal conditions and stop acutely at 6 p.m. Quite soon after, we will be locked-in by a flotilla of tourist boats.

In the hot noon hours, we walk to Stavros, where the bust of Odysseus adorns the square in front of the church—make a wish to Odysseus—still a kind of god!



*Figure 1:4 - The grave of Wilhelm Dörpfeld, overlooking the Ormos Vlikho and Nidri.*



*Figure 1:5 - Ithaca. View from Exogi towards Lefkas.*

Everything here breathes Odysseus and his tales. A beautiful island with only 2000 inhabitants, not counting the tourists. It is an unspoiled island that depopulated in 1953 after the earthquake. Still many dilapidated houses; nothing here is older than 50 years or it must be the graves.

During our walk back to the ship, a local man shows us a short-cut and takes us along the winding goat paths that lead to Frikes. He chats with Peter in confidence and as a friend. He shows us the houses which foreigners bought and estimates the price of a house that needs serious renovation at € 20,000 which includes a lot of land. We invite him on board to join us for dinner. He smokes continuously and confides that he has not been drinking for seven years but would not refuse the cans of beer which we offer him on this sweltering day.

He had already prepared a joint along the way and seems nervous. He grows sativa to come to rest. As an alternative to alcohol. He has traveled a lot, to India and Thailand. The misery there was “psychologically” a heavy load to him. Not married, no children. Too bad. He would have liked it now, but as a young man he did not favor it, all that responsibility. He is thin, has decayed teeth and dark edges under the nails. Laughs shyly and with routine he swipes the wasps away from our plates. It is time for him to leave, after stories about the earthquake, his brother the doctor and his house on the road to Exogi.

The evening is brightened up by sailors of a noisy flotilla company. They are slowly getting intoxicated by the punch that Rien helped to prepare; in the afternoon he assisted the punch girl to get the taste right.<sup>16</sup> They gracefully donate the remainder to us, which we then share again with the Albanians who are constructing a wall near the harbor. No Greeks, but Albanians. The poorer you are the harder you must work. For a long time, we listen to the sounds that fill the night.

The next day starts with a sunrise swim on the seaward side of the jetty.<sup>17</sup> We then rinse ourselves with fresh water, eat muesli with Greek yoghurt and honey, spread slices of bread and go on the road to Exogi.

We do the Happy Wanderer thing to Exogi and find a beautiful path winding up the mountain. Joke climbs like a young kid, with pleasure and without effort. I sweat and gasp, a deficiency in physical condition. Breathless views close by and far away.<sup>18</sup> Euphoria when we have found the excavation of the alleged palace of Odysseus.

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<sup>16</sup> “She put a drug [*phármakon*] into the wine from which they drank. It was against grief [*penthos*] and against anger. It made one forget all bad things. Whoever swallowed it, once it was mixed with the wine into the mixing bowl, could not shed a tear from his cheeks for that day.” [Homeric *Odyssey* 4.220]

<sup>17</sup> It was a dive into the “wide bosom of the sea” [*thalassés eurea kolpon*]. [Homeric *Iliad* 18.141]

<sup>18</sup> Towards Lefkas we see the shore side of the Leucadian cliff where, according to Virgil, Aeneas took a break and, according to local tradition, Sappho committed suicide by jumping down the heights.



*Figure 1:6 - The bust of Odysseus at Stavros.*



*Figure 1:7 - Exogi: view from the School of Homer.*

Walls of cyclopathic stones the size of a large blanket box. Yellow cards give names to the various locations: “waiting room for the throne”, and so on. It is an aesthetic excavation, as you imagine it—clichéd. We take along a few insignificant fragments, of which we hope that they are not essential in the imaging, or, rather, in the ceramic reconstruction of the past. It is not hard to guess why Odysseus, or someone else, built a palace here.

Is this the most beautiful thing that we have ever seen?<sup>19</sup> The gardens are full of pears, pomegranates, and the most delicious apples. There are luscious figs and olives in full growth. Rien intuitively chooses the path that leads us to the School of Homer, a ruin with some pens and enclosures for goats.

In the distance below, we see a bay bordered by white beaches that can be reached only by boat. This is a magical looking island with a timeless landscape. Earthquakes erase the traces of civilization every half century; that humbles men. And so are the people here, extremely gentle and calm. What makes that vista so fascinating? The drastic depth perhaps. Add; the dazzling blue and white—not forgetting to mention; the emptiness of the country. Sparingly cultivated, but intensely overgrown.

Only poetic spirits thrive here, so much is clear. And then the animals. The cats in Exogi gather in front of the village house, near the church with bright blue dome and the bell tower that is accessible by stairs. Well cared for—and quite varied in color of coat. On the other islands, most cats were thin, dirty with orange spots and lime-green eyes. Here we see a colorful collection.

On the way to the pyramid—an architectural whim of a foreign villager—a curious butterfly circles above our heads and lands on the head of Joke. We return at about half past four, the time at which siesta begins to end. An older man approaches us for a conversation. He built this house himself and lives at Ithaca for half a year after having lived for 60 years in Australia where he went after the earthquakes of 1953.

Joke is always the first to wake up. She makes coffee and prepares breakfast. Rien follows her quickly and goes for a swim. Hennie and Peter are a bit later. The morning dive feels extremely healthy and softens the joints. The wind is blowing strong! The flotilla will not leave port. The harbormaster—in his motorboat—helps a *perfect* English family to clear themselves from the moored flotilla. We follow and are on our way to Kioni, our last stop before we will arrive at Vathi, the capital of Ithaca.<sup>20</sup> But first you will have to take your time to read about the people that sailed this sea before us.

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<sup>19</sup> “This kind of thing, as I see it in my way of thinking, is the most beautiful thing [*kharis*] in the whole world.” [Homeric *Odyssey* 9.3-11]

<sup>20</sup> “Meanwhile, the ship was speeding ahead, just as a team of four stallions drawing a chariot over a plain speeds ahead in unison as they all feel the stroke of the whip, galloping along smoothly, with feet raised high as they make their way forward, so also the prow of the ship kept curving upward as if it were the neck of a stallion, and, behind the ship, waves that were huge and seething raged in the waters of the roaring sea.” [Homeric *Odyssey* 13.81-92]

## 2 In the beginning

### 2.1 The Byblos ship

*Lyric nightingale,  
on a night like this, by the shore of Proteus,  
the Spartan slave-girls heard you and began their lament,  
and among them—who would have believed it?—Helen!*

*“Helen”, by George Seferis.<sup>21</sup>*

In the Sparta of the Greek heroic age it was *en vogue* to show off with luxury goods that were imported from Egypt. We know this from the Spartan queen Helen, the wife of Menelaos, who received fashionable presents from Polybos, the Egyptian king of Thebes, and his wife Alkandra.<sup>22</sup> When Helen is visited at her home by Telemachos, Homēros offers us a view on the interior of her palace:

*“Helen came down from her high-vaulted and perfumed room, looking as lovely as Artemis of the golden distaff herself.Adraste brought her a seat, Alkippe a soft woolen rug, while Phylo fetched her silver work-box which Alkandra wife of Polybos had given her. Polybos lived in Egyptian Thebes; he gave Menelaos two baths, both of pure silver, two tripods, and ten talents of gold; besides all this, his wife gave Helen some beautiful presents, to wit, a golden distaff, and a silver work-box that ran on wheels, with a gold band round the top of it.”<sup>23</sup>*

Egypt was famous for her prosperity, literally for her flesh pots. The country exported grain, wine, oil, linen, leather, papyrus, and glassware. It was a transit area for products from east Africa and India, such as spices and war elephants. The abundance of the Egyptian empire is conveyed on the floor mosaic in Figure 2:1, which has the Nile as the center part.<sup>24</sup>

A cabin boat sails through an imaginary Egyptian landscape. The stem of the cabin boat is ornamented with a horse-shaped protome. The prow of this *hippos thalamegos* may have been decorated with an *oculus*: “The Eye of Horus”. The arched roof of the cabin is covered with tiles, suggesting that the size of the superstructure may be significant. The stern curves forward and the umbel in which it ends, develops into a beautiful, curved, shape,

<sup>21</sup> Seferis, G. 1995. In poetry the words “by the shore of Proteus” may indicate the elusive character of the matter.

<sup>22</sup> The Greeks say she went to Troy, but according to the Spartans—who always remain *laconic*—she never went to Troy; that was a phantom, an empty tunic. See page 123, for the interpretation of Euripides, in his tragedy “Helen”.

<sup>23</sup> Homeric *Odyssey* 4.120-134. The name Polybos derives from *poly-* (“many”) and *boús* (“cow, beef”) So the name Polybos means: “he who owns many cattle”.

<sup>24</sup> Detail from a first-century BCE floor mosaic, the original of which is kept at Praeneste (Palestrina), 431 x 585 cm, Italy, Museo Archeologico Nazionale de Palestrina.

representing the bud of a lotus flower, or is it the umbel of a papyrus plant?

Hunters have their eye fixed on the hippopotamus—their envisaged prey. Fishers are working a net while oarsmen row the boat. A helmsman works the two steering-oars.<sup>25</sup>



Figure 2:1 - Egyptian Nile boat (first century BCE).

A further idea on the wealth and maritime power of the Bronze Age Egyptian Empire may be given by the heritage of Queen Hatshepsut, the Foremost of Noble Ladies and fifth pharaoh of the Eighteenth Dynasty (1507-1458 BCE). Hatshepsut encouraged international trade and operated a class of seagoing ships that is known as the Byblos ships. The name of this type of ship was based on the trade on which these ships were most commonly run, which was the transport of high quality timber from Byblos to Egypt. An artist impression representing the Byblos ship is shown in Figure 2:2 below.

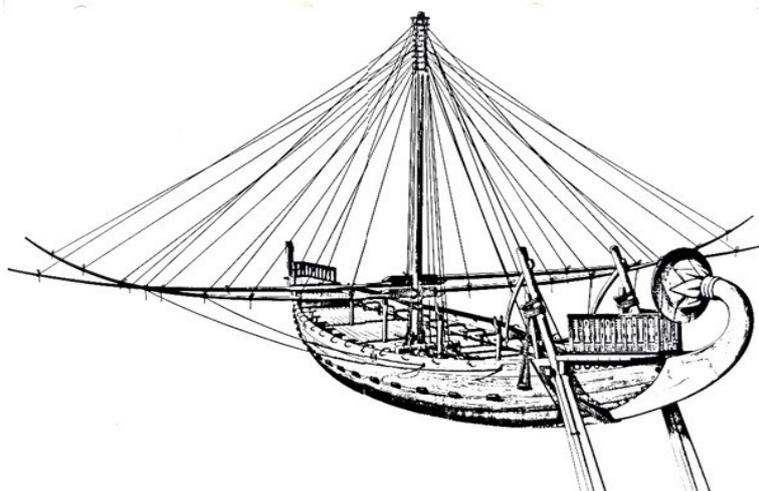


Figure 2:2 - Egyptian seagoing vessel (c. 1500-600 BCE).

The sail was hung from a yard—a spar along the head of the sail. A second spar, the boom,

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<sup>25</sup> “The *skáphos thalamegos*, or *hippos thalamegos*, depicted in the Nile mosaic is a luxurious vessel, probably royal, sailing on the Nile and used for hippopotamus hunting in the Nile Delta, as part of the games held during the flood festival. [Friedman, Z. 2015]. See also footnote 485.

would hold the foot of the sail. The material of the sail, papyrus [*byblos*], was not strong enough to carry the weight of the boom, and for also that reason the boom was suspended from several lifts. The sail was set and reefed by lifting and lowering of the yard. A hogging truss, supported by forked stanchions, connected bow and stern and served to absorb the longitudinal bending moments induced by the overhang of the fore- and aftbodies of the ship. The Byblos ships were built in such a way that they could be dismantled and transported over land. See Figure 2:3.

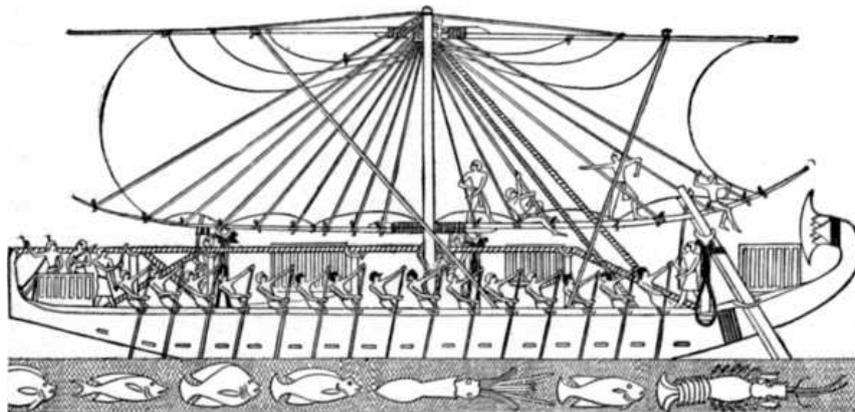


Figure 2:3 - Ship sailing for Punt (relief from the temple of Queen Hatshepsut).

The fishes on the relief swim from left to right, except the sepia, or squid. It suggests that the artist may even have never seen the sea: he was handed over drawings of the ship and the fish and applied the lines into his engravings. As he could recognize neither the fore nor the aft of the squids, he made them swim into the wrong direction.

Also on some of the Greek Geometric vases, lines have been drawn that could be interpreted as hogging trusses: the fifty-oared, long-ships could not be built without them, because the overhanging extremities would have exerted undue longitudinal strain on the keel. Much later, in Classic Greece, this technique was refined into the *hupozōmata*; cables that were rigged along the centerline of a trireme, from the forward to the aft extremity and just below the main beams.<sup>26</sup> In the description at page 198, Thucydides mentions that vessels of Corcyra (ancient Corfu) had to be undergirded to make them seaworthy and ready for battle.

Apart of trade along the Syro-Canaanite littoral, Queen Hatshepsut also organized Red Sea expeditions, operating Byblos ships in trade missions to Somalia. These missions meant to exchange Egyptian goods for gold, myrrh and ivory, live trees in baskets, ebony, short-horned cattle, and animal skins, but also for “natives and their children”. The ships loaded goods in the Land of Punt, a mythical land in the Horn of Africa, for transport towards Thebes, the ancient capital of Egypt which is nowadays known as Luxor. The transports passed through the Red Sea until they were discharged for further transport

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<sup>26</sup> “For this light is the belt of heaven, and holds together the circle of the universe, like the under-girders [*hupozōma*] of a trireme.” [Plato, *Politeia*. b.10]

over land and reloaded into river ships that brought the valuable cargo to Thebes. Here the transport ended in festivity, delivering the Puntian trade and tribute to the Egyptian royalty.



Figure 2:4 - Egyptian funerary river boat.<sup>27</sup>

The Byblos ships also crossed the Red Sea for destination Eilath, in the Gulf of Aqaba. There they loaded bitumen, copper, carved amulets, naphtha, and other goods that were transported over sea and over land to Thebes.

In c. 450 BCE, Herodotus visits Egypt, and describes in detail the remarkable construction of a local type of ship; the *báris*. Egypt was destitute of proper ship's timber [*xýla néia*], hence the *bárides* were built of acacia wood; a wood that is short and less suitable for boat-building.<sup>28</sup> The builders of the *báris* cut planks two cubits long and arranged them like bricks.<sup>29</sup> The construction and structure of the boat was analyzed by Alexander Belov (2018), based on the archaeological find of a 90 feet long ship of similar construction. The find dates to around 712 to 332 BCE.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Egyptian funerary river boat. Funerary bark model, 12th dynasty, 1985-1795 BCE, sycamore fig tree, British Museum EA 9525. Displayed at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Photograph by courtesy of H  l  ne Emeriaud.

<sup>28</sup> Noah's ark was built of acacia wood; "gopher wood" [*xylon tetragonon*, squared timber], *Genesis* 4.14.

<sup>29</sup> "The boats in which they carry cargo are made of the acacia, which is in form most like to the lotus of Cyrene, and its sap is gum. Of this tree they cut logs [*xýla*, timber] of two cubits length and lay them like courses of bricks, and build the boat by making these two-cubit logs fast [*g  mpos*; 'peg, nail, bond']; to long and close-set stakes and having so built they set crossbeams [*zyg  *, crosspiece, pair of timbers] athwart and on the logs. They use no ribs. They caulk [*kalaphatein*] the seams [*harmonia*]; means of joining, fastening] within with byblus. There is one central rudder, passing through a hole in the boat's keel. The mast is of acacia-wood and the sails of byblus. These boats cannot move upstream unless a brisk breeze continues; they are towed from the bank; but downstream they are thus managed: they have a raft made of tamarisk wood, fastened together with matting of reeds, and a pierced stone of about two talents' weight; the raft is let go to float down ahead of the boat, made fast to it by a rope, and the stone is made fast also by a rope to the after part of the boat. So, driven by the current, the raft floats swiftly and tows the '*baris*' (which is the name of these boats), and the stone dragging behind on the river bottom keeps the boat's course straight. There are many of these boats; some are of many thousand talents' burden." [Adapted from Herodotus, *The Histories* 2.96]

<sup>30</sup> Belov, A. 2018.

## 2.2 The Minoan empire

Minos was the primordial King of Crete. His empire—the eponymous Minoan territory—covered Crete, the Cyclades, and Caria in the southwest of modern Turkey. Being a son of Zeus, Minos was entitled to this empire. He was the first ruler of the sea, a thalassocrat [*thalassokrátōres*] who cleared the sea of pirates.<sup>31</sup> He was a benevolent conqueror, a generous founder of cities to which he brought peace and prosperity. He introduced new techniques and established laws which he received from Zeus. In the Homeric *Odyssey*, Minos is called a glorious son of Zeus, with which he converses. He issues judgment amongst the deaths, sitting at the gate of Hādēs.<sup>32</sup>



Figure 2:5 - Reconstruction of the Minoan palace at Malia, Crete.<sup>33</sup>

He had some less benevolent sides too, including the capability of excess and an inability to control his temper. The bad Minos and the good Minos, however, are one and the same persona; the two aspects of his character providing the coherence that was required to become a Bronze Age cult hero. In this, he compares to other Bronze Age heroes such as Achilles, Odysseus and Theseus. The epic hero Achilles, in his grief for the death of Patroklos, says: “Twelve noble sons of Trojans will I behead before your bier to avenge you”. Odysseus kills his twelve slave maidens [*gunaiikes*] in a cruel and unjust way. The founder of Athens, Theseus, could kidnap your daughter and burn your city down.

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<sup>31</sup> “Minos is the earliest of all those known to us by tradition who acquired a navy. He made himself master of a very great part of what is now called the Hellenic Sea and became lord of the Cyclades islands and first colonizer of most of them, driving out the Carians and establishing his own sons in them as governors. Piracy, too, he naturally tried to clear from the sea, as far as he could, desiring that his revenues should come to him more readily”. [Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War* 1.4, 1.8.2]. “When Minos was in his prime, his name terrified great nations.” [Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 9.439-516]

<sup>32</sup> “There I saw Minos, radiant son of Zeus, who was holding a golden scepter as he dispensed justice among the dead. He was seated, while they (= the dead) asked the lord for his judgments [*dikai*]. Some of them (= the dead) were seated, and some were standing, throughout the house of Hādēs, with its wide gates.” [Homeric *Odyssey* 11.568f]

<sup>33</sup> According to local tradition, Sarpedon, the brother of Minos and the son of Zeus and Europa, governed here.

Homeric poetry describes Crete as the *ekatompolis*, the island of hundred cities,<sup>34</sup> or, alternatively as the *ennikonta pólis*, the island of ninety cities.<sup>35</sup> Renaissance cartographers took this literally and did considerable effort to gather the 100 names from ancient Greek and Latin sources. Abraham Ortelius (1527-1598) was one of those 16th-century cartographers. In a supplement of his work the “Theatrum Orbis Terrarum”, the *Parergon* (1584), he lists the 100 toponyms and carefully divides them into names that he is certain of, and names that he is less certain of.

Gerard Mercator (1512-1594) was the famous cartographer who developed the eponymous Mercator projection. On his maps, he represents sailing courses of constant bearing as straight lines which he called *loxodromes* or “rhumb lines”.<sup>36</sup> His map of Crete, titled “The Island of Kandia with some islands from all over Greece” shows a small schematic drawing of the Labyrinth, located at the roots of a mountain in the Nomós of Heraklion and denominated as the *Laberinto*.<sup>37</sup>

The Minoan focus on the sea was expressed through art and culture that originated from Crete and the Cyclades. The first example is the motif of the octopus, an animal known for its complex ever-changing quality. It will change its color to look like the soil underneath it.<sup>38</sup> It tears its arms off when someone plucks it from its bed and the stones come up along with it.<sup>39</sup> The octopus regrows its lost arms and it is worse than that: when an octopus is hungry it will eat its own autonomous arms.<sup>40</sup> And it relates to the sea. No wonder that this versatile mollusk [*malákia*] became the symbol of Minoan regenerative

<sup>34</sup> “The famous spearman Idomeneus led the Cretans, who held Knossos, and the well-walled city of Gortys; Lyktos also, Miletus and silver-shining Lykastos that lies upon the chalk; the populous towns of Phaistos and Rhytion, with the other peoples that dwell in the hundred cities of Crete. All these were led by Idomeneus, and by Meriones, peer of man-slaughtering Arēs. And with these there came eighty ships.” [Homeric *Iliad* 2.649].

On his way back from Troy to Crete, this grandson of Minos got involved in a discussion between Thetis and Medea, as to which of these two goddesses was the most beautiful. He chose Thetis, and the insulted Medea shouted that all Cretans were liars and cursed Idomeneus' offspring.

<sup>35</sup> “There's a land called Crete, in the middle of the sea that looks like wine. It is beautiful and fertile, surrounded by the waves, and the people who live there are so many that you can't count them. They have ninety cities. Different people speak different languages, all mixed together.” [Homeric *Odyssey* 19.174]

<sup>36</sup> Loxodrome: derived from *loxós*: “oblique” + *drómos*: “running”.

<sup>37</sup> These maps of Mercator and Ortelius, together with similar maps of Frederic de Wit and Vincenzo Maria Coronelli, are at display in The Nautical Museum of Crete in Chania.

<sup>38</sup> “Have the temperament of a complex octopus, who always looks like whatever rock he has just clung to.” [Theognis of Megara 215]

<sup>39</sup> “While he was thus in two minds a wave caught him and took him with such force against the rocks that he would have been smashed and torn to pieces if the owl-vision goddess Athena had not shown him what to do. He caught hold of the rock with both hands and clung to it groaning with pain till the wave retired, so he was saved that time; but presently the wave came on again and carried him back with it far into the sea – tearing his hands as the suckers of an octopus are torn when someone plucks it from its bed, and the stones come up along with it—even so did the rocks tear the skin from his strong hands, and then the wave drew him deep down under the water.” [Homeric *Odyssey* 5.430–433]

<sup>40</sup> “It was a common belief that the octopus would eat its own ‘foot’ when it was starving.” West W.D. commentary p. 289 comments: ‘The starved man squeezing his swollen foot would lead on to the octopus who nibbles his foot for lack of food’. [Nagy, G. 2019]

power.<sup>41</sup>

The Marine style on Crete appears towards the end of the Minoan period. The motifs of the reversed octopus first appear on seals and later as a decoration on clay coffins [*larnakes*], suggesting that the marine-style decoration had a meaning that was both symbolic and ritual.



Figure 2:6 - Minoan larnax (14th–12th century BCE).

On the mainland the octopus appeared on Late Helladic, Mycenaean, pottery. In a shaft grave at Mycenae gold foil ornaments were found in the shape of shrines, naked goddesses, octopuses, butterflies, rosettes: symbolic ornaments that were to be stitched onto ritual costumes. Quite possibly both the pottery and the gold foil ornaments were Minoan imports or imitations?

The *lárnaks* is a small ceramic coffer often used as a container for human remains. They were decorated with octopuses, squids, fish and even ships. The painted decorations mix conceptual motifs that relate to the sea (octopuses, squids, fish, and dolphins) with creatures from marshes and rivers (reeds, palms, papyri, ducks). These last motifs are inspired by Egyptian or Near Eastern prototypes in which rivers equal fertility.

Another example is the *lárnaks* which is maintained at the Archaeological Museum of Rethymnon, Crete, and represented in Figure 2:7. The paintings on this coffer show papyrus flowers on the left panel and on the lid, and a reversed octopus on the right.

The fishes painted on the interior surfaces of some of the larnakes indicate the sea, maybe as a symbol for the beyond. The symbolism of the octopus on the outside of the coffin may relate to the idea of regeneration after death. The image on the purely Minoan vase in Figure 2:8, which does not yet show any Geometrical influence, shows the Minoan octopus as very lively and covering the entire surface of the vase.

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<sup>41</sup> “The images of the octopus, do not only refer to the realm of the sea, but also to the re-generative power of this mollusk.” [Marinatos, N. 1993 p. 142]



Figure 2:7 - Clay larnax decorated with papyrus flowers and an octopus (left).

Figure 2:8 - Minoan clay bottle showing an Octopus (right).<sup>42</sup>

Later, the Greeks of the mainland would adapt the Minoan art. When the Mycenaean Greeks moved into the palace of Knossos, the sober Helladic vase decorations on the mainland became livelier—showing stylized floral and marine decorations—while in the same period the designs on Crete became more geometrical and abstracted. But let me not be in a hurry.

### 2.3 The ships from Aegina

Just south of the Greek mainland, not far from Athens, lies the island Aegina. Located at the northwestern end of the island, there is a city, also named Aegina, with a famous little harbor. The main sanctuary in the town of Aegina was the temple of Apollo. The remains of the foundations are still there, but only one upright column, named Aegina Colonna, still stands at Cape Colonna. The temple is dated from around 500 BCE. The Temple of Aphaia is situated on the elevated eastern side of the island.<sup>43</sup>

Even before the archaic period, the Aeginetans were using boats to travel far and trade goods. At display in the small museum is a splendid storage vessel dated from 1800-1650 BCE, which is decorated with four amazing boats from the Mycenaean period. An image

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<sup>42</sup> Minoan clay bottle showing an Octopus (c. 1500 BCE). At display in the Archaeological Museum of Herakleion, Crete.

<sup>43</sup> Aphaia is a goddess of Aegina. She is said to have arrived from Crete, where she was called Britomartis-Diktyнна (“the one who disappears, hidden in nets”). Saved with the help of nets from a pursuit by Minos and other men, she was forced to flee by sea. After nine months—it took this long to escape the love of Minos—she came to Aegina, and other lands, where she was worshipped as a goddess. When she came to shore on Aegina, her name Britomartis became Aphaia (“the one who shows herself”). [Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 2.30.3 and Antonius Libanius, *Metamorphosis* 40]

of the vase is presented in Figure 2:9. below.<sup>44</sup>



Figure 2:9 - Matt-painted storage vessel of the Middle Bronze Age.<sup>45</sup>

The painted scenes on this and other vases of Aegina, betray the importance of the sea in the lives of the people of Aegina. A flotilla of four ships in procession occupies the central zone of the vase. They are crescent-shaped, with a curved stem bifurcation that compares to the stems of the ships represented in the Thera flotilla (Figure 2:12) and on the Agia Triada sarcophagus (Figure 4:3).<sup>46</sup> The decorations are framed by geometric motifs. Are these near-pharaoic river ships the prototype of the ancient Greek ship?

Around the middle of the second millennium BCE, the ships of Aegina traded local products to the Cyclades, Crete, and to mainland Greece. Strabo tells us that Aegina was colonized successively by the Argives, the Cretans, the Epidaurians and the Dorians.<sup>47</sup> Homēros mentions Aegina as the place from where Diomedes led some Achaean Youths to Troy, “and with them came 80 ships”.<sup>48</sup>

The people of the island developed their sea power and Aegina became a maritime power

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<sup>44</sup> The ancient Greek painter plays with the ratio of length and depth of the ship: the length seems compressed, the depth magnified, and the size of the steering-oar may be exaggerated. This reinforces the crescent-shaped appearance of the four ship representations and it allows them to remain in perpetual pursuit of each other.

<sup>45</sup> Town IX 1800-1650 BCE. National Archaeological Museum of Aegina.

<sup>46</sup> Wachsmann, S. 2010.

<sup>47</sup> Strabo, *Geography* 8.6.16.

<sup>48</sup> Homeric *Iliad* Rhapsody 2, in the *Catalogue of Ships*.

[*thalassokratia*], building her own boats and exporting pottery and high-quality metal-working products. By about 650 BCE, the *polis* Aegina was the first city in the Greek homeland to facilitate trade using coins. The Aeginetans used the sea turtle as an emblem for their coins. The coins with this motif (an animal sacred to Aphrodite), spread out over a large part of the Mediterranean, with Aeginetan ships reaching as far as Egypt and the Black Sea.

Was it jealousy or greed, which made Athens take side against Aegina? Anyway, the Athenians claimed that the Aeginetans stole two kneeling statues of the goddesses Damia and Auxesia, which belonged to the Epidaurians and were very sacred to them.<sup>49</sup> The story of the statues, and their role in the enmity between Aegina and Athens, is told to be as follows. The people from Epidaurus, having problems with their crops, had obtained authorization from Athenians to use some olive trees, which were sacred trees, since there were none yet in Epidaurus, and they made images of the two goddesses with these trees. Their land was fertile after that; therefore, they had an agreement with the Athenians about the images.

When the people from Aegina stole the sacred images from them, the people of Epidaurus stopped the agreement and told the Athenians to deal with Aeginetans who had robbed the images. The Athenians tried to get the images back, but it ended badly for them. After that failed attempt, the Aeginetans decided that nothing Attic should be brought to Aegina.<sup>50</sup> And this was the beginning of the Aeginetans' long-standing debt of enmity against the Athenians.

Herodotus mentions Sostratos, a particularly wealthy Aeginetan trader [*emporos*] who operated in the sixth century.<sup>51</sup> Sostratos had close connections with Etruria; modern Toscana. He may have once dedicated a marble anchor that was found in Etruscan Tarquinia to the "Apollo of Aegina".<sup>52</sup> In Etruria, numerous pieces of Attic pottery from the second half of the sixth century, were found with the signature SO. Probably they were the commodity of Sostratos.

At the end of the sixth century BCE, the oligarchic Aegina was an established sea power. Around 488 BCE, the Aeginan fleet defeated the Athenians and in the period between 488

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<sup>49</sup> The Aeginetan statues were kneeling, probably as birth-goddesses. The *aition* ("cause", one of the first expressions addressing causal relations) for this was that they fell on their knees when the Athenians tried to carry them away unsuccessfully. At Troezen, Damia and Auxesia, Cretan girls were stoned to death in a revolt, and honored in the Lithobolia (stone-throwing festival). [Richardson, N.J. 2015]

<sup>50</sup> Summarized from Herodotus, *The Histories* 5.82–89.

<sup>51</sup> "Now this (Tartessus) was at that time an untapped market; hence, the Samians, of all the Greeks whom we know with certainty, brought back from it the greatest profit on their wares except Sostratos of Aegina, son of Laodamas; no one could compete with him." [Herodotus, *The Histories* 4.152.3]

<sup>52</sup> Thomson de Grummond, N., Simon, E. 2006.

and 481 BCE, the Aeginan fleet remained superior to the Athenian fleet.<sup>53</sup> Considering the threat posed by the ever-expanding Persian Empire, Aegina protected its own trading position by adapting a pro-Persian attitude. This position brought Aegina in direct opposition of Athens.

The Athenian *stratēgós* Themistoklēs then persuaded the Athenians to build 200 ships [*triremes*] for the war with non-democratic Aegina,<sup>54</sup> which he would station at covered slipways [*neós oikos*] at the three natural harbors of Piraeus: Zea, Kantharos and Mounichia.<sup>55</sup> In 480 BCE, the year of the Battle of Salamis, the Aeginetans balanced their interests and sided with the Athenians in their fight against the Persian domination. With their experience at sea and their contribution of 40 ships, they contributed significantly to the Greek victory over the Persians. Herodotus tells of the images of the Aiakidai being sent for in a naval mission [*naustoleîn*] from Aegina, before the start of the battle. The sacred images would protect, as well as be protected.

After the victory at Salamis, the relations between Aegina and Athens firstly improved. Doric Aegina was an ally of Sparta and under Kimon, a “philo-Laconian”, Athens conducted a pro-Spartan policy. About 20 years later, the alliance between the rivals failed. Athens wanted to put an end to the economic competition of Aegina, around 460 BCE, she attacked, forcing Aegina to surrender at around 458 BCE. Athens demanded a large tribute from Aegina and forced the island to join the Delian League.<sup>56</sup> To complete the humiliation, the image of the sea turtle which graced the Aeginetans’ coins, was replaced by that of a land turtle, a tortoise. This symbolically indicated the end that had come to the naval power of Aegina.

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<sup>53</sup> “That island state, more predominantly maritime in its interests than Athens, seems to have kept an establishment of sixty galleys to Athens’ fifty, and in the recent hostilities Aeginetans had harried the Attic coast.” [Burn, A.R. 1966 p166]

<sup>54</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories* 7.144.2.

<sup>55</sup> *Neosoikos*: covered slipway, shipshed. Derived from *neós*, ship, and *oikos*, house, family. [Pausanias 1.29.16]. The ancient Greek word for dockyard is *néôrion*. In some cases, the *néôrion* is a classical Greek commemorative monument, designed to celebrate a naval victory. It is then a long gallery in which a ship is displayed, occasionally one of the enemies, in honor of the battle. Examples are found at the Sanctuary of the Great Gods at Samothrace, and at the sanctuary of Apollo at Delos. See also Footnote 185 for an example where ship’s prows were dedicated to the temple of Athena in Aegina.

<sup>56</sup> “The battle was fought at Tanagra in Boeotia, and the Lacedaemonians and their allies, after great slaughter on both sides, gained the victory. .... Soon afterwards the Aeginetans came to terms with the Athenians, dismantling their walls, surrendering their ships, and agreeing to pay tribute for the future.” [Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War* 1.108]

## 2.4 The ship of Theseus

The theoretical ship is the ship that is used to sail the journey that is known as a *theōriā*; a ‘sacred journey’ that leads to the achievement of a mystical vision. The traveler on board of the ship has a vision both on the ship and on where it is going. This idea is captured by the story of the sacred journeys of the mythical king of Athens, Theseus, followed by a story of the classical philosopher Socrates.

By the second part of the Bronze Age the Mediterranean was a vibrant place, full of maritime activity, enabling free exchange in knowledge and materials. The natural drive to look beyond the horizon resulted in cultural growth, wealth, trade, and migration.<sup>57</sup> The ancient Greek seafarer explored new coastlines and envisaged to enter into never-ending dialogue with anyone he met. This vision comes back to life in the story of the mythical ship in which Theseus sails to Crete and back again.

The plot of the story is well-known. In one of the variants given to us by Plutarch, the dreadful king Minos had set up a custom that at nine-year intervals, seven Athenian boys and seven Athenian girls were to be sent to Crete, basically to serve as amuse for the Minotaur: the half-man, half-bull that lived in the Labyrinths of Knossos.<sup>58</sup>

Prince Theseus of Athens, planning to make an end to this awful custom, joined the delegation of boys and girls that was ready to be sent to Crete. With the help of Ariadne, the Cretan king’s daughter, Theseus was able to stab the Minotaur in the throat and subsequently strangle him to death.

Next, Theseus managed to escape with the famous two-times-seven young people and sailed them back to Athens.<sup>59</sup> This heroic act, together with the execution of many other and equally good works, made Theseus the all-time hero of Attica and Athens.<sup>60</sup>

The Athenian youths were said to have vowed to Apollo that if they were saved from being sacrificed to the Minotaur, they would make an annual sacred journey to Delos. Thus, the myth of Theseus’ sacred journey continues to be re-enacted in an Athenian state festival held in honor of Apollo at Delos. The ritualized journey in which the two-times-seven Athenian youths sailed to Delos and back again—to celebrate that they had been saved—

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<sup>57</sup> Historical background is based on Wachsmann, S. 2008.

<sup>58</sup> King Minos, one of the epitomes of the Minoan civilization, was the first who was known to have established a *thalassocracy*. He was not only a boogiemanager, but also a first man, a son of Zeus, Cretan overlord of the Cyclades. His legacy is that he is a source of good; there is peace, the sea is clean of pirates and he is the first to establish laws. See footnotes 31 and 32.

<sup>59</sup> Plutarch, *The Life of Theseus* 10.1. “There are many stories about these matters, and about Ariadne, and they do not necessarily agree.” [Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives* Vol. I.]

<sup>60</sup> Theseus was a son of Poseidon, which indicates that he was entitled to the mastery of the seas. Through several myths, he confirms that this is indeed his position. By proving this to King Minos, he creates a paradigm for the future thalassocratic ambitions of Athens.

was called a *theōriā*. The ship itself became known as the theoretic ship [*theōris*].

The images on the François kratēr, a famous wine-mixing bowl dated circa 570 BCE—special already for the fact that it was smashed into 638 pieces by a furious museum guard—may give us an idea of the festivity.<sup>61</sup>

In Figure 2:10 we see the representation of a slender thirty-oared long-ship, a *triākóntoros*, landing on the beach, stern-first.<sup>62</sup>

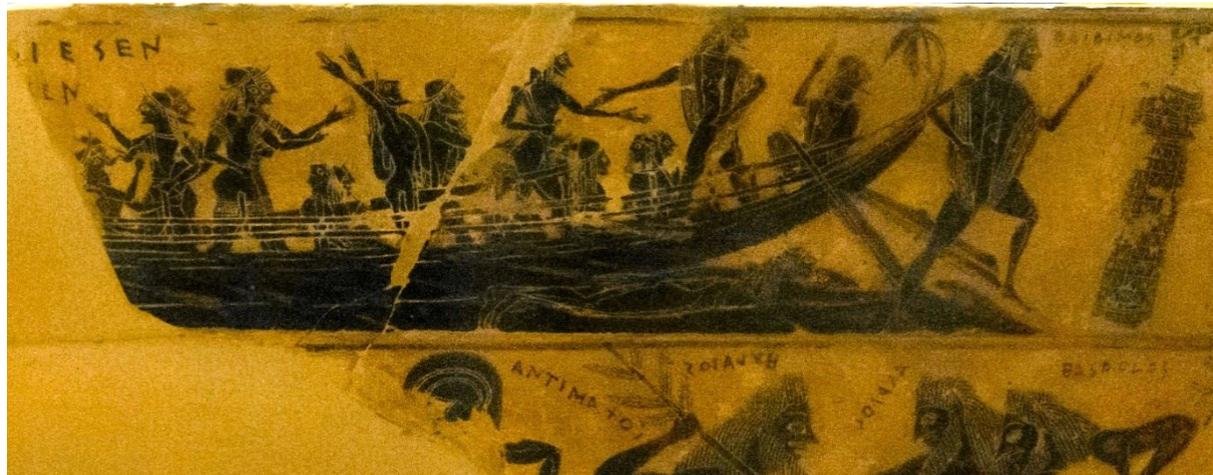


Figure 2:10 - Detail of the François kratēr: the ship of Theseus (fragment from vase).

It is the theoretical ship that sailed every year on her ritualized journey to Delos and back again.

The youths taking part in the re-enactment are shown throwing their hands in the air in praise; another has jumped overboard and swims to the shore. One has debarked and joins the Athenian youths and maidens on land. To the right (partly shown) a line of seven youths and seven maidens' dance. This dance is commonly—but some say erroneously—taken for the famous *Geranos*, the Crane Dance.<sup>63</sup>

Further to the right is Theseus, future King of Attica, playing a *kithāra* and facing Ariadne who holds a wreath and—to make no mistake about her identity—the ball of twine, given to her by Daedalus, with which she had helped Theseus to find his way out of the Labyrinth.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>61</sup> The François kratēr was made by Ergotimos and painted by Kleitias (c. 570 BCE). Collection Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Florence.

<sup>62</sup> See page 86 for an overview of the ship's types that are discussed in this book.

<sup>63</sup> Teske, R.T. 1970. Think of a winding, maze-like dance; the never-ending twists and turns follow the lines of the labyrinth, imitating the escape therefrom. Homer mentions a similar dance, but different choreography, in one line with the making of pottery. [Homeric *Iliad* 18.590-607]

<sup>64</sup> The *kithāra* was an ancient Greek musical instrument in the lyre family. The modern word "guitar" stems from *kithāra*.