Men of Sea. The making of an Identity

Los hombres del mar. La creación de una identidad

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Abstract

This paper pretends to deal with the identity of the people who sailed the sea –specifically professional sailors– in Antiquity. Although we don't deny singularities into the different Men of Sea who lived in this period, there are some aspects that are common to every sailor concerning their conditions of life and work regardless of their very different origins. In fact, their life-style clashed directly with the earth based society. These features shaped an identity that is more evident to recognize when we use ancient sources, which writers always came from the highest hierarchies of their societies or acted as speakers of these, that usually scorned the sailors because of the terrible fear that sea aroused on them, the nature of their economic activities, their different customs and the liberty that enjoyed Men of Sea because they could pollute the established order. In fact, we can speak of a mariner identity in opposition to the earthly-based society.

Keywords: navigation; sailors; identity.

Resumen

Este artículo tiene como objeto la identificación de las gentes que navegaban el mar en la Antigüedad, en particular de los marinos profesionales. Aunque no se niegan las singularidades de los diferentes hombres del mar que vivieron durante este período se pueden observa diversos aspectos comunes a cualquier marino con respecto a sus condiciones laborales y vitales y a pesar de sus diferentes orígenes. De hecho, su estilo de vida chocaba directamente con la sociedad basada en la tierra. Estos rasgos conformaron una identidad que es más fácil reconocer en las fuentes antiguas, siempre escritas por portavoces de las élites antiguas, debido a que los escritores así lo estimaban al despreciar a los marinos debido al terrible miedo que el mar implicaba, la libertad que disfrutaban, la naturaleza de sus actividades económicas, sus costumbres diversas y en especial la libertad que encarnaban y que podía contaminar al orden establecido. De hecho, se insiste en una identidad del marino opuesta a la de la sociedad terrestre.

Palabras clave: navegación; marinos; identidad.

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The origins of the navigation are as remote as the rising of mankind. Since the great Paleolithical migrations, the dominion of sea or at least a basic knowledge of seafaring was a necessity for many peoples. The early Mediterranean societies were not excluded of this reality. The early Neolithic Cyprus' colonization (VIIth mill. BC) can be considered a first example, but this use was extended to every Mediterranean coastal population from this moment onwards with a very precise turning point. We can consider the Bronze Age as the time where both archaeological records and texts confirm the beginning of the maritime specialization, that is, the appearance of sailors as distinctive professionals. The fluvial shipping in Mesopotamia and Egypt[1] and the early Cananean and Aegean naval activities –mainly Minoan and Mycenaean–, are some of the most important first examples of this reality. We can ascertain the existence at the IIIrd mill. BC, and especially for the IInd mill. BC, of established commercial waterways as it's evidenced through the Ulu Burun[2] and Cape Gelidonya[3] wrecks[4]. The disappearance or extreme weakening of most of the Oriental empires as a result of the terrible irruption of the enigmatic Sea Peoples around 1200 BC marked a new direction. Afterwards Phoenicians rose as the most important seafaring power. As the heirs of previous traditions, the Phoenicians sailed through the whole Mediterranean and for the first time they connected in a steady and lasting way both Mediterranean edges into a single seafaring network on a regular basis[5]. This intense naval activity allowed them to deal with some peoples as Tartessians, Etrurians, Egyptians, Greeks and many others through commerce, knowledge and colonisation. One of the more important consequences of their labour of colonisation was the creation of the then colony of Carthage that continued their labour in Occident after Phoenician city-states fell in the VIth century BC. While this happened

1 On Egypt, see JONES, D. *Ancient Egyptian boats*. Texas University Press: Austin, 1995; and on Mesopotamian navigation POTTS, D. T. 1997: *Mesopotamian Civilization: The material foundations*. Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1997, pp. 122-137.

2 BASS, G. F. "A Bronze Age Shipwreck at Ulu Burun (KAS): 1984 Campaign". In *American Journal of Archaeology*, 90, 1986, pp. 269-296; BASS, G. F. "The Bronze Age Shipwreck at Ulu Burun, Turkey: 1985 Campaign". In *American Journal of Archaeology*, 92, 1988, pp. 1-37; BASS, G. F. "The Bronze Age Shipwreck at Ulu Burun: 1986 Campaign". In *American Journal of Archaeology*, 93, 1989, pp. 1-29. PULAK, C. 1997: "The Uluburun Shipwreck". In: SWINY, S., HOHLFELDER, R. L. & SWINY, H. W. (Ed.). *Res Maritimae. Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean from Prehistory to Late Antiquity. Proceedings of the Second International Symposium Cities on the Sea (Nicosia, October 18-22, 1994*. Atlanta: American Schools of Oriental Research, pp. 71-81.

3 BASS, G. F. et al: *Cape Gelidonya: A Bronze Age Shipwreck*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1967.

4 On Bronze Age navigation, see KNAPP, A. B. "Thalassocracies in Bronze Age Eastern Mediterranean trade: making and breaking a myth". In: *World Archaeology*, Vol. 24, N. 3, 1993, pp. 332-347.

5 AUBET, M. E.: The Phoenicians and the West: Politics, Colonies and Trade. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. On the Greek and Roman voyages to the Iberian Peninsula, see the introductory paper of DE HOZ, J. "Viajeros griegos y romanos en la Península Ibérica. Del comercio marítimo y la curiosidad intelectual". In: ARCAZ POZO, J. L. & MONTERO MONTERO, M. (Ed.) *Mare nostrum. Viajeros griegos y latinos por el Mediterráneo*. Madrid: SEEC, 2012.

in the West, in the Oriental basin the leading role on the dominium of sea was taken on by democratic Athens during the so-called Athenian Thalassocracy which lasted until the Peloponnesian war. Later, Punic power was halted because they were confronted by the most improbable seafaring people, the Romans. The traditional Roman refusal for navigation didn't prevent them for unifying for the first time the whole Mediterranean Sea, which became the *Mare Nostrum*, under a single command. During seven centuries they didn't just control these waters but they developed internal maritime waterways that articulated their territories from a military and a tributary point of view and built up a massive exchange network which can be considered both private and public; in fact, we can say that their most impressive naval development was the imperial *annona*[6]. Unfortunately, sea activities don't let enough remains as terrestrial movements do, as vehemently Donald Moore said[7], but we can rely on increasing underwater archaeology evidence as long as epigraphy and iconography. Ancient sources are sometimes pretty discouraging because of the usual distrust that Sea, navigation and sailors meant to the normative society's speakers –especially during Roman supremacy– but they still offer fundamental data to interpret the maritime world.

Sailors were never fully appreciated by the earth-based population because of several reasons as we can see in the Graeco-Roman sources: the particular conditions of their work, the irrational fear provoked by the sea into their fellows and the perennial bad consideration that commerce aroused on Antiquity, in spite of the impressive revenues obtained by sea trade[8]. About this last preconception, Homer provides an early proof when Odysseus is scorned by the Pheaecian Euryalus with these words:

> Nay, verily, stranger, for I do not liken thee to a man that is skilled in contests, such as abound among men, but to one who, faring to and fro with his benched ship, is a captain of sailors who are merchantmen, one who is mindful of his freight and has charge of a home-borne cargo, and the gains of his greed. Thou dost not look like an athlete (*Od*. VIII, 159-164).

6 Some worthy introductions to naval history in Antiquity are STARR, C. G. *The influence of Sea Power on Ancient History*. New York: Oxford University Press; DE SOUZA, P. *Seafaring and Civilization. Maritime perspectives on world history*. London: Profile Press, 2002 and ABULAFIA, D. *The Great Sea: A human history of the Mediterranean*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

7 MOORE, D. "Maritime aspects of Roman Wales". In: *Studien zu den Militärgrenzen Roms II. Vortrage des 10. Internationalen Limeskrongresses in der Germania Inferior*. Köln: Rheinland Verlag, p. 31.

8 In Roman times this idea was very alive and even senators were forbidden to use maritime commerce as a way of increasing their wealth. Of course, a lot of senators broke the law. D'ARMS, J. H. *Commerce and social standing in ancient Rome*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981. About denigration of commerce, see some other examples as Hesiod *Op.* 236-237 and 682-694, Cicero *Verr*. II, 5, 167 or Jerome *Ep* 14.9. On this subject, ROUGE, J. 1966 *Recherches sur l'organisation du commerce maritime en Méditerranée sous l'Empire Romain*. Paris: S.E.V.P.E.N., pp. 19-21.

In a later date, the closeness of cities to sea was considered by some of the elite main thinkers as a moral disadvantage, so Aristotle said that "the visits of persons brought up under others institutions are detrimental to law and order, and so is a swollen population, which grows out of sending out abroad and receiving in a number of traders, but is unfavourable to good government" (*Pol*. VII, 5, 3), and Cicero said about Rome foundation that

> He [Romulus] made an incredibly wise choice. For he did not build it down by he sea, thought it would have been very easy for him… because maritime cities are exposed to dangers which are both manifold and impossible to foresee… maritime cities also suffer a certain corruption and degeneration of morals; for they receive a mixture of strange languages and customs, and import foreign ways as well as foreign merchandise, so that none of their ancestral institutions can possibly remain unchanged. Even their inhabitants do not cling to their dwelling places, but are constantly being tempted. Far from home by soaring hopes and dreams (*De rep.* II, 3-4)[9].

According to these texts, the sailors were considered as rootless because of their constant movement and contact with different kinds of societies, so they could behave as bearers of destabilizing news regarding the established hierarchy and their political system[10]. There are more examples in later times. So, the sophist Claudius Aelianus in one of his letters addressed to a farmer he affirmed this dichotomy between land and see when he referred to a fellow farmer who had decided to leave land aside in search of benefit by the sea:

> Keeping an eye out for juicy profits and thinking of striking it rich all at once, he said good-bye to those little goats and his former pastoral life… the profit of a voyage out and back inflames and fires up his imagination, and he does not think of storms, opposing winds, the ever-changing sea, or unseasonable weather. As for us—even if we work hard for little gain, nevertheless the land is much steadier than the sea, and since it is more trustworthy, it offers more certain prospects (*ep*. 18).

In this way, in the Later Roman Empire, Synesius of Cirene paraphrased Homer when affirmed that:

> I do not live near the sea, and I rarely come to the harbour. I have moved up country to the southern extremity of the Cyrenaica, and my neighbours are such men as Odysseus was in quest of, when he steered from Ithaca, to

9 On this perception prolonged during a long, long time see HORDEN, P & PURCELL, N. *The Corrupting Sea. A study of Mediterranean History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

10 RAUH, N. K. *Merchants, sailors and pirates in the Roman world*. Brimscombe Port Stroud: Tempus, 2003. RAUH, N. K., DILLON, M. J. & MCCLAIN, T. D. "*Ochlos Náuticos*: leisure culture and underclass discontent in the Roman maritime world". In: HOHLFELDER, R. L. (Ed.) *The Maritime World of Ancient Rome. Proceedings of 'The Maritime World of Ancient Rome'. Conference held at the American Academy in Rome 27-29 march 2003*. Michigan: Ann Harbor), 2008, pp. 197-242.

> appease the wrath of Poseidon, in obedience of the oracle: Men, who know not of the sea, nor eat food mixed with salt (*Ep*. 148)[11].

Earth-bounded society usually didn't appreciate at all the sailor environment and this reality was reflected in the perception of the sea workers. The sea was terribly feared because the certain risk of death. So, *e.g.*, the Christian author Tertullian defined it as *sic et mari fides infamis* (*De Pall*. 2), and even Roman laws encouraged the writing of a testament before travelling by sea[12]. The references about this topic are innumerable, but let's finish with an eloquent sentence of Lucretius that refers to the lack of empathy that sea work aroused into their fellows: "It is sweet, when, down the mighty main, the winds roll up its waste of waters, from the land to watch another's labouring anguish far, not that we joyously delight that man thus be smitten, but because it is sweet to mark what evils we ourselves be spared" (*De rer. Nat*. II, 1-5)[13]. To die at sea because a shipwreck was a straight disgrace, as a result of the certain possibility of not finding the corpse with the metaphysical implications this fact arose because it was thought that the soul perished when someone got drowned[14].

This dichotomy was emphasized by the nature of sailors' work, far different and more specific than earth-based occupations. The knowledge required to navigate was hard-worked[15]. Their labour was conditioned by the basic tool they used: the vessel, which undoubtedly represented one of the highest technological achievements of Antiquity[16] and in consequence required a very specific knowledge to be able to handle it rightly as it is observed in the particular vocabulary utilized by them[17] that was clearly out of reach and comprehension by the landlubber population. Analogous to this particular knowledge, the learning of all the orographic and nautical fundamentals was basic to make possible not only the success in their works but also their survival. The currents, the dangerous and calm

11 Upon Homer *Od*. XI, 119-125.
12 *Dig*. XXVIII, 1, 24.
13 Impressive testimonies of troubled maritime voyages in Antiquity are found, for example, in Synesius of Cirene *Ep.* 5 and Gregory of Nazianzus *Orat*. 18.31.
14 On this see, Homer (*Od.* IV, 497-506) and Synesius of Cirene (*Ep*. 108-118). LINDENLAUF, A. "The Sea as a place of no return in Ancient Greece". In: *World Archaeology*, 35, 3, 2003, pp. 416-433. FERNÁNDEZ NIETO, F. J. "Morir en el agua, morir en el mar. Creencias, conductas y formas morales en la Grecia antigua". In: FERRER ALBELDA, E., MARÍN CEBALLOS, M. C. & PEREIRA DELGADO, Á. (Ed.) *La religión del mar. Dioses y ritos de navegación en el Mediterráneo antiguo*. Sevilla: Universidad de Sevilla, pp. 91-106.
15 Definitively the best recent work on ancient navigation is MEDAS, S. *De Rebus Nautica. L'Arte della navigazione nel mondo antico*. Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2004. On the relationship between sea and the Romans, see the recent book of MALISSARD, A. *Les romains et la mer*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2012.
16 Above this, see PRYOR, J. H. *Geography, technology and war. Studies in the maritime history of the Mediterranean 649-1571*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988 and more specifically, MCGRAIL, S. *Boats of the World. From the Stone Age to Medieval Times*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
17 MEDAS, *De Rebus*… p. 32.

waterways, in brief, the appropriate routes[18] required a very specific familiarity that was transmitted from generations to generations of sea workers. The precise abilities developed for doing this work possible were associated with the peril implicit that certainly separated earthly population from sailors and helped to shape an identity. In fact, navigation's season was rigidly established since an early date because of this uncertainty. Hesiodus[19] was the first author to talk about chronological limits fit to sail, from the end of spring till the beginning of autumn, and even if these limits were extended later, Roman law did not allow sailing during winter time[20]. Of course, there were exceptions because in some areas favourable maritime conditions permitted to navigate, as Ahiqar Palimpsest (475 BC) demonstrated concerning Egypt under the domination of the Persian Empire. This tributary document records all the vessel entries in an unknown Egyptian port where navigation was just stopped during the months of January and February [21]. On the other hand fishermen could work during this period and it was also encouraged travelling by sea during these months in case of food shortages[22] or military needs[23].

Because of these uncertainties, religiosity and superstition were commonly linked with sailors and navigation in Antiquity and, as in later times happened, these features constitute a part of their identity[24]. We can observe that some superstitious rituals began even before of navigation itself. Shipbuilders tried to attract good luck on the vessels through some practices as putting some coins inside the hole where the mainmast was going to be fitted onto, or

18 On ancient maritime routes see ARNAUD, P. *Les routes de la navigation antique. Itinéraires en Méditerranee*. Paris: Éditions Errance, 2005.

19 Hesiodus *Op*. 663-665.

20 *CTh* XIII, 9, 3, 3 and *CJ* XI, 6, 3, and see also Vegetius IV, 38. On this, see ROUGE, J. "La navigation hivernale sous l'empire romain". In: *Revue de Études Anciennes* 54, 1952, pp. 316-325 and MEDAS, *De Rebus…* pp. 34-40. On maritime dangerousness, see HOLLAND ROSE, J. The Mediterranean in the Ancient World, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933, pp. 153-154 and 177-180; THIEL, J. H. *Studies on the History of Roman sea-power in republican times*, Amsterdam: North-Holland publishing company, 1946, pp. 1-31; REDDÉ, M., GOLVIN, J. C. & GASSEND, J. M. Voyages sur le Méditerranée romaine, Paris: Éditions Errance, 2005, pp. 5-7 and 11-43; PITTIA, S. "Circulation maritime et transmission de l'information dans la correspondance de Cicéron". In: ANDREAU, J. & VIRLOUVET, C. (Ed.) *L'information et la mer dans le monde antique*, Rome: École Française de Rome, 2002, pp. 199-203.

21 YARDENI, A. "Maritime trade and royal accountancy in an erased customs account from 475 BCE on the Ahiqar scroll of Elephantine". In: *Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research* 293, pp. 67-78. STAGER, L. 2004: "Dos pecios fenicios en alta mar de la costa norte del Sinai". In: PEÑA, V., MEDEROS, A. & WAGNER, C. G. (Ed.) *La navegación fenicia. Tecnología naval y derroteros*. Madrid: Cefyp, pp. 188 and 191.

22 Some examples: Suetonius *Claud*. 18 on the time of the emperor Claudius and Paulinus of Nola *Ep*. 49.1 at the beginning of the fifth century.

23 *E.g.* Libanius *Or*. 59.137 praised the emperor Constans because of his travel to Britain in the middle of the winter of the year 343 to suffocate grave barbarian raids.

24 IGLESIAS GIL, J. M. "La inseguridad en la navegación: de los fenómenos naturales a las supersticiones y creencias religiosas". In: FERRER ALBELDA, E., MARÍN CEBALLOS, M. C. & PEREIRA DELGADO, Á. (ed.) *La religión del mar. Dioses y ritos de navegación en el Mediterráneo antiguo*. Sevilla: Universidad de Sevilla, pp. 133-139.

laying some propitiatory ornaments in the prows as ox horns, painted eyes, or divine statues or *caducei* in the case of Punic vessels[25]. Even the very name of the ships reflected this search for good omen as epigraphy proves, for instance, in the case of Roman navy ships, although this custom was known from older as it is shown by the mythical Argo ship crewed by the Argonauts. To provide names of gods to the Roman warships as Pollux, Minerva, Fortuna, Neptunus or Vesta was not uncommon, as also to name ships after favourable abstract concepts as *Providentia*, *Victoria*, *Salus* or *Spes*[26].

When navigation season was going to be initiated, it was opened by special overture ceremonies with the same objective of assuring Gods' favour. A very good example of this is provided by Apuleius when he describes a ceremony of this kind in Cenchreas and conducted by Caeres' Pastophores:

> And calling together their whole assembly, from his high pulpit began to readout of a book, praying for good fortune to the great Prince, the Senate, to the noble order of Chivalry, and generally to all the Roman people, and to all the sailors and ships such as be under the puissance and jurisdiction of Rome, and he pronounced to them in the Grecian tongue and manner this word following, 'Ploiaphesia', which signified that it was now lawful for the ships to depart ; whereat all the people gave a great shout, and then replenished with much joy, bare all kind of leafy branches and herbs and garlands of flowers home to their houses, kissing and embracing the feet of a silver image of the goddess upon the steps of the temple (Apul. *Met.* XI, 17)[27]

Every sea travel was accompanied by some rituals that were rigidly observed whenever it was possible. Dr. Luis Ruiz Cabrero has gathered a good collection of literary, textual and archaeological references from the Phoenician, Greek and Roman worlds about such ceremonies that can be divided into three important phases: *embaterion* or embarkation;

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25 BELTRAME, C. *Vita di bordo in età romana*. Rome: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 2002, pp. 70-81 on Roman examples while RUIZ CABRERO, L. "La marina de los fenicios, de la creencia en la vida a las naves de la muerte". In: MORENO ARRASTIO, F., PLACIDO SUÁREZ, D. & RUIZ CABRERO, L. (Ed.) *Necedad, sabiduría y verdad: el legado de Juan Cascajero*. Madrid: Universidad Complutense de Madrid, p. 100 gives Greek and especially Phoenician and Carthaginian examples. See also LÓPEZ-BERTRAN, M.; AGNÈS GARCIA-VENTURA, A. & KRUEGER, M. "Could you take a picture of my boat, please? The use and significance of Mediterranean ship representations". In: *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, 27, 4, 2008, pp. 341–357.

26 A very complete list of Roman navy ships' names appears in SPAUL, J. *Classes Imperii Romani. An epigraphic examination of the men of the Imperial Roman Navy*. Andover: Nectoreca Press, 2007, pp.74-83. Of course, as Spaul show there were also other names related with geography (*Syria*, *Rhenum* or *Tigris*) or different concepts (*Pax*, *Pietas*, *Clementia*), but they have been found in lesser numbers. About Roman navy, see STARR, C. G. *Roman Imperial Navy 31 B. C. – A. D. 324*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993 and REDDE, M. *Mare Nostrum. Les infrastructures, le dispositif et l'histoire de la marine militaire sous l'empire romain*. Rome: L'École Française de Rome, 1986.

27 See also Virgil *Aen*. V, 770-776. Beltrame*, Vita…* pp. 74-77 offers abundant archaeological and textual data of this kind of ceremonies for the Roman times.

during the voyage and finally *aprobaterion*, the disembarkation[28]. An instance of the first group is found on Thucydides (VI, 32, 1-2), when he narrates a prayer recited by the captain of a fleet and sung by every sailor and harbour worker. It has been corroborated by a Phoenician-Cypriote votive cow scapula found in Tel Dor (Israel) [29]. During travel, it was common use to make libations to revere Gods as, *e.g.* Telemachus did in the Odyssey to honour Athena (*Od.* XV, 257-258), and container used for libations like this one have been found in such an early date as the XIVth BC as shown in the Cape Gelidonya shipwreck[30]. During navigation, this ritualism continued alongside with certain superstitious practices as avoiding sex or cutting the hair aboard. A death happened during the voyage was a terrible omen which only could be purged by the expulsion of the corpse off the vessel[31]. At the moment of disembark, it was almost compulsory to present as signs of gratitude offerings to the sanctuaries as *exvoti* like anchors or ships' prows, boat's miniatures, fishing hooks or foodstuff for sacrifices or libations to grateful deities because of their assist in some dangerous circumstances[32].

An additional proof of specific ritualism related with sailors is found at the funerary level. For instance, the existence of anchors and ships' replicas inside the tombs or represented graphically outside[33], the use of ships as burial places or as coffins[34], or the find of beach sand covering sailors' graves placed far away from the coasts –as it probably happens in the graves found in the necropolis of La Joya and Las Cumbres in South West Spain

28 In the Greek case before proper navigation, it was usual to make an appeal to oracles to get favourable omens. DOMÍNGUEZ MONEDERO, A. "Los oráculos, guía de la navegación y la colonización". In: FERRER ALBELDA, E., MARÍN CEBALLOS, M. C. & PEREIRA DELGADO, Á. (Ed.) *La religión del mar. Dioses y ritos de navegación en el Mediterráneo antiguo*. Sevilla: Universidad de Sevilla, pp. 67-90.

29 Ruiz Cabrero, *La marina*… pp. 101-104

30 Ruiz Cabrero, *La marina*… pp. 105-109. Some other examples in a later date are the decanters found in the Phoenician wrecks Tanit and Elissa found in the Sinai waters, Stager, *Dos pecios*…, pp. 183-184 and the bronze *Kyathoi* found in the Greek wreck in Cala Sant Vicenç (Pollença, Majorca), although the excavators just suppose it was used for symposiums in the ship. NIETO, X., SANTOS, M. & TARONGI, F "Un barco griego del s. VI aC en Cala Sant Vicenç (Pollença, Mallorca)". In: PEÑA, V., MEDEROS, A. & GONZÁLEZ WAGNER, C. (Ed.) *La navegación fenicia. Tecnología naval y derroteros*. Madrid: CEFYP, p. 209. For Roman times, see Beltrame, Vita…, pp. 75-76.

31 Beltrame*, Vita…* p. 73.

32 Ruiz Cabrero, *La marina*… pp. 100, 102, 104, 107-109 and 111-112; REMEDIOS SÁNCHEZ, S. "El papel del templo y la aristocracia en la estructura social de los yacimientos fenicios peninsulares en la época arcaica". In: ECHEVERRÍA REY, F. & MONTES MIRALLES, M. Y. (Ed.) *Actas del V Encuentro de Jóvenes Investigadores. Ideología, estrategias de definición y formas de relación social en el mundo antiguo*. Madrid: Cirsa, pp. 115-116; ROMERO RECIO, M. "Recetas para tratar el miedo al mar: las ofrendas a los dioses". In: FERRER ALBELDA, E., MARÍN CEBALLOS, M. C. & PEREIRA DELGADO, Á. (Ed.) *La religión del mar. Dioses y ritos de navegación en el Mediterráneo antiguo*. Sevilla: Universidad de Sevilla, pp. 107-118..

33 As seen in some Carthaginian funerary inscriptions: *CIS* I, 3140, 3189, 3 and 4901-4902. Ruiz Cabrero, *La marina*… p. 115.

34 ADAMS, J. "Ships and Boats as Archaeological Source Material". In: *World Archaeology* 32, 3, 2001, p. 294.

and dated at the VIth century BC–[35] are clear proofs of self-recognition. We can add some textual testimonies. One of most impressive appears in the Bible by the prophet Ezekiel who personifies the fall of Tyre in a single sailor through a touchy lament for the death of one of the men of sea (*Ez*. XXVII, 28-36). For the Roman Age, the *Anthologia Graeca* provides very interesting testimonies about tombs of sailors or fishermen remembering disgraced deaths at sea. Although most of the poems reflect a sinister view of their fate[36], there is a very interesting kind of verses that reflects the proud custom of some of these sea workers of being incinerated with their vessels so that they could be carried rightly to Hades. One of the most fascinating is the following one:

> Glaucus, brought up on the shores of Thasus, he who conducted those crossing by ferry to the island, skilled ploughman of the sea, who even when he was dozing guided the rudder with no uncertain hand, the old man of countless years, the battered remnant of a seafarer, not even when he was on the point of death quitted his old tub. They burn his shell on the top of him, that the old man might sail to Hades in his own boat" (*AG* IX, 242) [37].

Of course, during Roman Age besides this emotive testimonies there were also frequent funerary inscriptions of merchants, *navicularii* and sailors, whatever military, *classiarii* or related with commerce or fishing, *nautae* and *piscatori*, which, in general, were far more prosaic than Glaucus' epigram. In spite of traditional distrust from terrestrial society[38], the men of sea showed a true satisfaction and pride that can be interpreted as a conscience of membership to a particular group.

Certainly, sailors' life conditions supposed a vivid contrast with the earth based population. The permanent errant lives of the ships' crews involved an evident physical and social isolation, where vessels were conformed as miniature societies in themselves where, in spite of the quarrelsome and troublesome sailors' character –perceptible through their foul-

35 RUIZ MATA, D. & PÉREZ, C. J. "Aspectos funerarios en el mundo orientalizante y colonial de la Andalucía occidental". In: FÁBREGAS, R., PÉREZ, F. & FERNÁNDEZ, C. (Ed.) *Arqueoloxia da morte na Peninsula Iberica desde as orixes ata o Medievo.* Xinzo de Limia: Biblioteca Arqueohistórica Limiá, 1996, pp. 171-221.

36 Some selected examples are *AG* VII 294, 382, 532, 693; IX 82

37 Similar poems are *AG* VII, 305, 381, 505 and 635. Homer (*Od.* XI, 75-78, and XII, 10-15) and Virgil (*Aen*. VI, 162-174 and 212-235) also gives us additional references to similar practices as sailors' burials with ships' oars

38 For example, Roman navy was always considered of second class in comparison with the army, Thiel *Studies*…, pp. 11-16), Starr, *Roman*…, pp. 67-68) and GARLAN, Y. *La Guerra en la Antigüedad*. Madrid: Aldebarán, 2003, pp. 137-138). Likewise, see a particular study on identity and Dalmatian sailors in Roman fleet: DZINO, D. "Aspects of identity. Construction and cultural mimicry among Dalmatian sailors in the Roman Navy". In *Antichthon*, 44, 2010, pp. 96-110, and especially pp. 101-103. But not only was applied this category of though to the Roman world, Plato affirmed the same in *Laws* 4.707a.

mouthed and dirty language well attested by the sources–[39], there was a clear hierarchy and a discipline according to the extreme harshness of their labour, the changing weather or any misfortune, whatever technical or human as endemic Mediterranean piracy was[40]. A comic example of the supreme command of the captain is found in Synesius of Cirene when he describes his gloomy voyage to Alexandria in the vessel of the Jewish captain Amarantus. His authority was so inflexible and respected by his crew –most of them Jewish–, that when he decided to celebrate Sabbath in a moment when the ship was almost going to wreck, and even after an Arab soldier threatened to killed him, he showed no inclination to yield his beliefs till the danger became absolutely manifest (Synesius *Ep*. V, 74-103). The captain's authority was not at all petty, it was bestowed because he was judged as the most experienced person at the ship and he was absolutely essential to guarantee the success of the navigation and the mere survival of the crew. His leading role can be discerned also through the transmission of knowledge to the younger sailors as Plato (*Rep*. 488b) said[41]. In fact this responsibility sometimes provided great opportunities to ambitious and capable men as the Egyptian Ahmose who began as an apprentice repairing rigging on a ship and after becoming captain he finished his life as admiral of the Pharaonic fleet in the XVIIIth Dinasty as his autobiography alleged[42].

Their isolation had its psychological counterpart. When sailors disembarked on their destination or when they had to look for a shelter during winter, they tended to cause a lot of trouble as a way of relieving tensions and especially on their particular haven: the taverns[43]. In fact, harbours were considered from Antiquity onwards as disreputable areas, where the sailor colluded with criminals, runaway slaves, prostitutes and most of the vilest elements of the society. A satire of Juvenal provides the most perfect statement. It concerns the Consul Plaucius, who lived under Nero's rule. This man got lost at Ostia in his way to the province of *Iliricum*. There he enjoyed a rude experience, which is pretty illuminating about harbours consideration:

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39 Rauh *Merchants*…, pp. 163-166

40 On this topic, see ORMEROD, H. A. *Piracy in the Ancient World. An essay in Mediterranean History*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1997; DE SOUZA, P. *Piracy in the Graeco-Roman World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002; ÁLVAREZ-OSSORIO RIVAS, A.: Los piratas contra Roma. Écija: Gráficas Sol, 2008; ÁLVAREZ JIMÉNEZ, D. *La piratería en la Antigüedad Tardía*. Madrid: Universidad Complutense and ÁLVAREZ-OSSORIO RIVAS, A.; FERRER ALBELDA, E. & GARCÍA VARGAS, E. (Eds.) *Piratería y seguridad marítima en el Mediterráneo antiguo*. Sevilla: Universidad de Sevilla, 2013.

41 MEDAS, *De Rebus*… p. 31.

42 MCCOY, R. A. *Admiral Ahmose. The autobiography of an ancient naval commander: hyerogliphic text from his tomb at El-Kab with a translation and notes*. Ft. Lauderdale: Enchiridion Publications, 1999.

43 A satisfactory example is provided by Heliodorus *Aeth*. V, 18, 3.

> Send your Legate to Ostia, O Caesar, but search for him in some big cookshop! There you will find him, lying cheek-by jowl beside a cut-throat, in the company of bargees, thieves, and runaway slaves, beside hangmen and coffin-makers, or some eunuch priest laying drunk. Here is Liberty Hall! One cup serves for everybody; no one has a bed for himself, nor a table apart from the rest (*Sat*. VIII, 171-178).

As Juvenal implied, sailor environment was a mixture between lust and violence overlapped through the lowest stratus of ancient world. On the other hand, this identification among underground society and sailors was even used in the controversy aroused between Paganism and Christianity as the pagan Celsus termed Jesus Christ's apostles as 'the very wickedest of tax-gatherers and sailors' to look down on the humble Christian beginnings (*C. Celsum* I, 62). Nicholas K. Rauh was right when he assumed that this aggressive behaviour served as a medium for sailors to vindicate and distinguish themselves with respect to earth-based society and so they could extend their sociological isolation as a group when they disembarked[44]. In an interesting anthropological paper Michael Seltzer dealt with the historical linking of sailors with taverns and alcohol. As he said "the sailor's life thus swings pendulum-like between spells at sea and stays on land" and "given the deprivations of life and work at sea, newly discharged sailors may use their stores of cash to obtain what has been denied them aboard the ship"[45]. In these places, sailors felt a "sense of community"[46] in a closed space that resembled in a way the ship were sailors came from. Violence, alcohol and sailors' need of self-expression were all united. In consequence, all these peculiarities fit into an identity that in its basic features remained like that almost at our time and made possible what the very Nicholas K. Rauh denominated maritime "community and culture"[47] or in an even more diachronic approach Keith Muckelroy[48] and Jonathan Adams[49] named respectively as a "closed community" and as a "ship society".

Regardless of this traditional suspicion, the Sea, the sailor and the commerce were reluctantly weighed up positively as an innate part of the ancient world. We can reinforce the celebrated Pompeius' aphorism *navigare necesse est* (Plutarchus *Pomp*. L, 2) by a vehement speech of Tiberius addressed to the Senate: '¡Hercules' sake!, not a man points out in a motion that Italy depends on external supplies, and that the life of the Roman nation is tossed day

44 RAUH, *Merchants*..., pp. 163-166; RAUH, DILLON & MCCLAIN, *Ochlos*... A general view about Greek and Roman underground society is found in SALLES, C. *Les bas-fonds de l'Antiquité*. Paris: Payot, 2004.
45 SELTZER, M. "Haven in a Heartless Sea: The Sailors' Tavern in History and Anthropology". In. *The Social History of Alcohol and Drugs: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 19, 2004, p. 65.
46 SELTZER, *Haven*..., p. 80
47 RAUH, *Merchants*..., pp. 135-168.
48 MUCKELROY, K. *Maritime archaeology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, pp. 221-225.
49 ADAMS, *Ships*..., pp. 304-306.

after day at the uncertain mercy of wave and wind' (*Ann*. III, 54)[50]. One century later, Aelius Aristides (*Or*. XXVI, 11-13) considered Rome as the centre of the world because of the affluence of commodities from all parts around the globe. The navigation was necessary to connect the different coasts and to control politically, economically, fiscally and militarily the territories subjected and it's not a fortunate chance that diverse concepts as the State, in a later date the Christian Church and the mere metaphysical existence were metaphorically assimilated in the ancient sources as a ship or a sailing experience. The fact that ships, sailors and merchants played an important role in the Ancient World is obvious, even thou the sailor as a historical figure was scorned by the dominant culture. For instance, Phoenician sailors provided the necessary interconnectivity between colonies, markets and their metropolis and likewise in a later date sailors were fundamental to achieve Greek *oukomene*[51] or *pax Romana* –and make feasible what Bryan Ward-Perkins defined as the Roman economic sophistication[52].

Conclusions

As it happens with every interpretation of the past, there are some difficulties. The main problem is that there is not a single ancient text written by a sailor. In fact, it's a problem of alterity. Fortunately the increasing underwater and earthly excavations allow knowing more and more about the ancient life of the Men of Sea and so to confirm, counter or qualify the ideas reflected by the ancient sources. The identity of the ancient sailors or men of sea according to our research is based on an open opposition to earth-based society and it is recognizable through the extremely dangerous conditions of their work and their isolation, their particular customs and their deep religiosity and superstitious attitudes, obviously encouraged because of the evident risks of their activities. These basic features were basically shared for every sailor from Antiquity onwards. Nevertheless, the seafarer was a consubstantial part of the ancient life, even if their way of living turned them into a necessary evil for the established powers. They were brave men who dared to affront the storms and the wreckages that scared most of the people, they crossed the seas and knew different customs and populations, and therefore enjoying through the waters of a kind of freedom in their

50 See also a positive view in Juvenal *Sat.* XIV, 275-283.
51 ROUGE, J. *La marine dans l'antiquité*. Paris: Vendôme, p. 212.
52 WARD-PERKINS, B. *The Fall of the Roman Empire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

maritime isolation just limited by the necessary internal discipline that got broken when they disembarked. They were easily recognisable in Antiquity as a community in spite of their differences and they were treated like that by the earthly inhabitants.

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