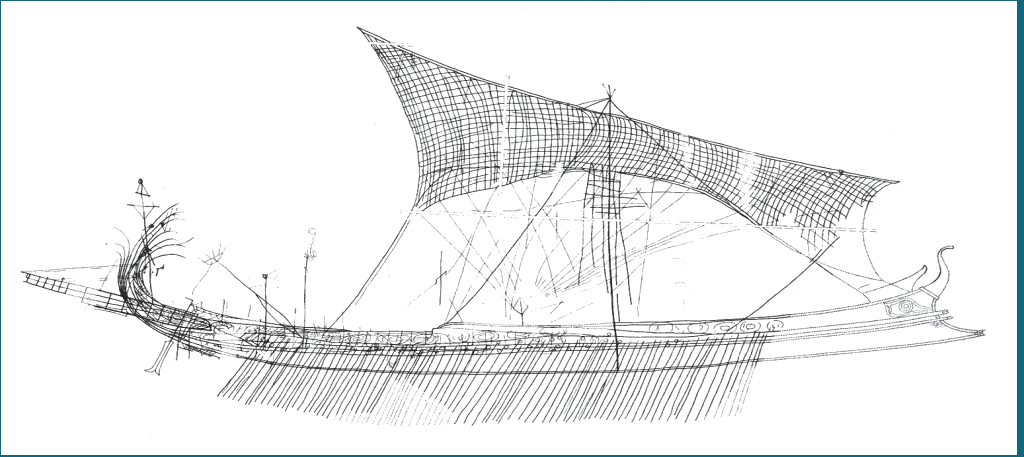
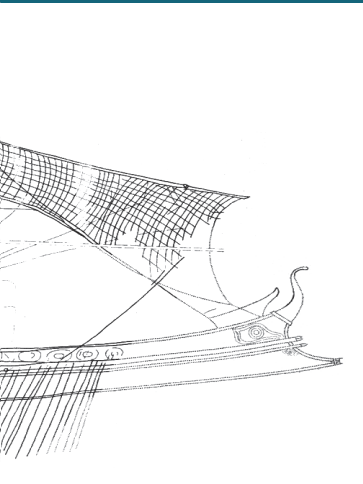




# Sailing from Polis to Empire



## Ships in the Eastern Mediterranean during the Hellenistic Period



EDITED BY EMMANUEL NANTET  
WITH A PREFACE BY ALAIN BRESSON



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Cover image: Delos, House of Dionysos, Room L, Eastern Wall (1st century BCE): graffito of an Hellenistic warship with 85 oars (drawing by Dominique Carlini in *Récit d'une aventure : les graffiti marins de Délos : Musée d'histoire de Marseille, 18 décembre 1992 – 22 mars 1993*, Marseilles, Marseilles Historical Museum, 1992). All rights reserved.

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# 1. The Hellenistic Merchantmen

## A Contribution to the Study of the Mediterranean Economies

*Emmanuel Nantet*

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Although numerous scholars have explored the Mediterranean economy of the last centuries BCE, their research has included hardly any data about shipwrecks. This can be explained not only by the lack of such data, but likewise the lack of conferences dedicated to this issue. The impact of shipwrecks on the Hellenistic sea trade is therefore a gap in our collective knowledge. The purpose of this book is to suggest some approaches to the study of this issue.

Since Rostovtzeff,<sup>1</sup> many scholars have shown an interest in the sea trade during the Hellenistic period. But like Finley,<sup>2</sup> most of the economic analysis of the Greek world deals primarily with the Archaic and the Classical periods.<sup>3</sup> The economy of the Hellenistic period suffers from a lack of rigorous analysis. Fortunately, some studies have been dedicated to the Hellenistic economies, but almost all of them focus on a kingdom<sup>4</sup> or a city. Of course, the royal power and the *polis* constitute the principal framework in which economies were strongly embedded. Nevertheless, this regional approach tends to overlook the

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1 Rostovtzeff 1941, 2:1248–71.

2 Finley 1985.

3 See recently, Harris et al. 2016, who focus on the Classical period.

4 Préaux 1939; Chankowski and Duyrat 2004.

Mediterranean scale.<sup>5</sup> This is why a group of scholars, including Zosia H. Archibald, John K. Davies and Vincent Gabrielsen,<sup>6</sup> undertook to organize a series of three conferences to explore the Hellenistic economies.<sup>7</sup> These conferences produced many case studies about the various issues at hand. The work does not rely on regional areas, which would limit the discussion, but on a thematic and comparative approach. Moreover, they rely both on written and archaeological evidence. These conferences have produced many fruitful works, which have improved our knowledge of this issue.

However, among the numerous works about Hellenistic economies, very few mention the ships.<sup>8</sup> Only the conference on Hellenistic Economies at Liverpool in 1998 dedicated a paper to this issue<sup>9</sup> and so far, Gibbins' article seems to be the only study focusing on Hellenistic shipwrecks. His paper is well documented and offers a useful appendix that consists of a list of sixty-four Hellenistic 'shipwrecks'<sup>10</sup> relying on the data gathered by Anthony Parker. Although Gibbins' study is entitled 'Hellenistic Shipwrecks', it focuses only on the amphorae that the ships were carrying. Almost nothing is said about the hulls, apart from a few details about the hull of Kyrenia,<sup>11</sup> and a brief mention of the hull of Apollonia (discovered off the coast of Libya) in the appendix.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, Gibbins does not write a word about the Ma'agan Mikhael shipwreck despite the fact that he deals with Classical shipwrecks — his article is very focused on the Aegean and Cypriot areas.

The second and third conferences about the Hellenistic economies did not include any contributions about ships either; despite this, they were mentioned from time to time,<sup>13</sup> which shows how significant they are for our understanding of the sea trade. All the other contributions

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5 For example, Scheidel et al. 2008.

6 And Graham J. Oliver at the first conference.

7 Archibald et al. 2001, 2005, 2011.

8 Note a well-documented exception: Bresson 2016, 86–88.

9 David Gibbins, 'Shipwrecks and Hellenistic Trade,' in Zofia H. Archibald et al. (eds.), *Hellenistic Economies* (London/New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 273–312.

10 Ibid. 296–304, table 10.A1.

11 Ibid., 288–89.

12 Ibid., 297 (n°7).

13 For example, Bresson 2011, who often discusses shipping issues. Two recent chapters by this author provide interesting contributions to the study of maritime trade in the Hellenistic period: Bresson 2018a and 2018b.

to these conferences that discussed underwater remains dealt only with transport amphorae — for example, when Mark Lawall mentioned shipwrecks, he focused on amphorae cargoes only.<sup>14</sup> Even though these studies about transport amphorae are quite useful, the ship is systematically omitted: the resulting publications do not neglect data collected from underwater archaeology, but they deal mainly with cargoes, not hulls.

The ship, as a vital tool for commerce, is therefore missing from the global analysis, despite the fact that the study of the ship could contribute a great deal to our understanding of Hellenistic maritime commerce. Indeed, it allows us to measure the scale of trade. This must be understood in its geographic context.<sup>15</sup> Firstly, the sea trade relies on three kinds of maritime routes. The regional one, which joins Ephesus to Piraeus for example, or Alexandria to Rhodes, is well documented by various sources. However, our knowledge about the inter-regional route, which connected distant harbours of the Mediterranean such as Pozzuoli and Alexandria, relies almost exclusively upon written evidence. As for local routes, which linked harbours that lay only a few nautical miles apart, it is very hard to identify these. Nonetheless, the importance of short journeys must not be overlooked. In addition to these varying geographical scales, we also need to take into account the quantitative ones.<sup>16</sup> Were these amphorae embedded in lively or less active networks of trade? It is tempting to suggest that the bigger ships were carrying merchandise on long-distance trade routes between large and significant harbours, and that smaller ships were just redistributing the goods into the secondary harbours. This situation was certainly common, but it was not always so.

Thus, this inquiry about the varying nature of the sea trade raises many questions: how were these ships built? How big were they? How much could they carry? What merchandise did they convey? What was their navigation area? Where did these ships sail to and from? Was the situation different in the Eastern and the Western waters? A close examination of these ships will therefore contribute greatly to our understanding of Hellenistic economies.

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14 Lawall 2005, 191.

15 Nantet 2016, 171–73.

16 *Ibid.*, 173–75.

So far, most scholars who have dealt with Hellenistic ships have not focused closely on economic issues.<sup>17</sup> Since there were almost no shipwreck remains in the Eastern Mediterranean, there was very limited information about cargoes; only iconography and written evidence was available, so architectural features and legal issues have been to the fore. Whereas research on the Western Mediterranean put technical and economic issues at the heart of maritime studies,<sup>18</sup> those focusing on the Eastern region have answered different questions. This lack of interest in sea trade among the scholars who have studied Hellenistic ships in the Eastern Mediterranean was also not conducive to the analysis of Hellenistic economies.

Above all, this situation reflects a lack of knowledge. Very few shipwrecks have been excavated in the Eastern Mediterranean, since they are much more numerous in the Western part of the sea.<sup>19</sup> The difference between the Eastern and Western waters was more pronounced in the Hellenistic period.<sup>20</sup> During the last few decades, when conferences about Hellenistic economies were held and when ship experts wrote scholarly studies about navigation in the Eastern Mediterranean, almost no underwater remains of this period had been discovered in that part of the sea. But during last decade, the situation has changed slightly, because more shipwrecks have been discovered in the Eastern Mediterranean. Publications about Hellenistic underwater discoveries off the Eastern Mediterranean coasts are therefore more numerous.<sup>21</sup>

These new discoveries could have been published in the Tropis conference proceedings, organized by Harry Tzalas of the Hellenic Institute for the Preservation of Nautical Tradition.<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, even without them, these proceedings gather together many useful interdisciplinary studies about ships, relying on written and

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17 Casson 1971 (2nd ed. 1995); Velissaropoulos 1980, who focuses mainly on maritime law; Basch 1987, who analyses the iconography to understand the architectural features of the ships; Murray 2012, who deals with military ships.

18 Pomey and Tchernia 1978; Gianfrotta and Pomey 1981; Pomey 1997.

19 For a discussion about the reasons, see Gianfrotta and Pomey 1981, 55–60; Parker 1992; Arnaud 2013, 199–200; Nantet 2016, 251–54. Also see chapter 4 in this volume.

20 See chapter 5.

21 In Israel, see the research of Jacob Sharbit and especially Ehud Galili: Galili et al. 2010; Syon et al. 2013; Galili et al. 2016a; Galili et al. 2016b. In Greece, see the survey led off Chios and Kythnos, Sakellariou et al. 2007. In Cyprus, see Demesticha 2011. In Egypt, see the study of the shipwreck of Heracleion (cf. chapter 5).

22 Tzalas 1989, 1990, 1995, 1996, 1999, 2001, 2002a, 2002b.

archaeological sources.<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, the findings of the last two international meetings, held in 2005 in Ayia Napa (Tropis IX) and Hydra (Tropis X), have not been published so far and no other conference has been organized since then.<sup>24</sup> Since the end of the Tropis conferences, the publications have scattered in national periodicals. Thus, ship archaeologists have lost a place to meet and discuss the issue transnationally. But the revival in this field seems to come from Cyprus. The island is located in an appropriate place, central enough in the Eastern Mediterranean to facilitate these international meetings. It has peaceful relationships with its surrounding neighbours. In addition, the Archaeological Research Unit of the University of Cyprus played a major role in setting up maritime conferences,<sup>25</sup> some of them attaching much importance to ships. For instance, the workshop held in Cyprus, which resulted in this book, was intended to fulfil a need among the ship archaeologists interested in the Eastern Mediterranean to meet and discuss their research. The Honor Frost Foundation conference, 'Mediterranean Maritime Archaeology: Under the Mediterranean', held in Nicosia in October 2017, also offered a place of exchange for the scholars involved in this field of research.<sup>26</sup> Although, for the past decade, the foundation has been subsidising much work by scholars from all the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean, it has recently decided to restrict its funds to Cyprus, Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria. The strong recent revival of maritime archaeology in the Eastern Mediterranean is well evidenced by a recent book by Justin Leidwanger, which focuses on the Roman period.<sup>27</sup>

Unfortunately, the subject areas are overly compartmentalized. The ship archaeologists and the experts in ancient economics organise their own conferences. These barriers explain why ships have often been neglected in previous studies of Hellenistic economies.

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23 Tzalas 2019.

24 Tropis IX. 9th International Symposium on Ship Construction in Antiquity, Ayia Napa 2005. Tropis X. 10th International Symposium on Ship Construction in Antiquity, Hydra 2008.

25 Among many meetings, one example: 'Per Terram, Per Mare. Production and Transport of Roman Amphorae in the Eastern Mediterranean', Nicosia, Cyprus, from 12 to 15 April 2013, organized by S. Demesticha, A. Kaldeli, D. Michaelides and V. Kassianidou.

26 Blue 2019.

27 Leidwanger 2020.

To meet this need, the studies gathered in this book aim to shed light on navigation in the Eastern Mediterranean during the Hellenistic period. They deal with all the parts of the Eastern Mediterranean: not only the Aegean Sea, but other seas between Asia Minor and Egypt. They use all kinds of data — literary, epigraphical, papyrological, iconographic and archaeological. The goal of the book is not to give an exhaustive analysis of maritime commerce; it is to set up the initial framework to help future scholars in their research, as more and more archaeological shipwrecks continue to be discovered and made public in the next decades.

This chapter is followed by a study, conducted by Jean-Marie Kowalski, about the role of Cyprus in the network of maritime routes (chapter 2). He demonstrates the differences between the distances given by the literary sources. The next chapter, written by Patrice Pomey, deals with the architectural type of the Hellenistic ships (chapter 3). He shows that the main change in ship evolution was the adoption of the tenon-and-mortise assemblage. The warships, once they were built, were decorated by ship painters (chapter 4). The Hellenistic period saw an increase in the tonnage (chapter 5). The comparisons between the epigraphical, papyrological and archaeological sources allow us to understand the chronological phases of this increase, and the factors that affected it. The last chapter is dedicated to Ship 17 from Thonis-Heracleion (chapter 6). The careful analysis of the architectural features by Alexander Belov shows that this ship was an Egyptian *baris* and that she may have sailed in the estuary of the Nile.

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