

UNDERWATER FINDS OF SHIP AND BOAT MODELS¹

Objects from the seabed can be classified according to their find context. On the one hand there are finds recovered from shipwrecks and underwater structures, while on the other there are objects without such contexts, which are usually more difficult to interpret and to date. Of the latter, a considerable number are chance finds, making it impossible to further investigate their place of discovery. We can imagine them having been lost by accident or having been consciously thrown into the sea from ships as an emergency measure or as rubbish.

Curiously, a small number of such objects have the shape of ships or boats of terracotta or bronze, and seem to be of cultic character. They suggest that religious ceremonies may have been conducted on board ships and boats, which involved the dedication of objects to marine deities. Ten possible examples from the Mediterranean are known to me at present, and are listed in the following short catalogue.

Nos. 1/2:

Two terracotta models, one from the sea outside Amathus in Cyprus, the other probably from the same location². The city is known for a number of terracotta models found mostly in Archaic graves³, but the models discussed here date from the Late Cypriote period, i. e. 1600-1050 BC.

No. 3:

A terracotta model from the area of Lake *Sirbonis*/Sabhat al-Bardawil on the northern coast of Sinai⁴. It seems to represent a logboat and has been dated to the 13th/12th centuries BC.

Nos. 4/5:

Two terracotta models found off the Lebanese coast near Tyre. They have been identified as Phoenician and probably date from the beginning of the first millennium BC⁵.

No. 6:

A terracotta model found at Gytheion, the naval harbour of Sparta⁶. The dating of this well-known warship model is disputed; it is commonly believed to belong to the period around the late first century BC or the early first century AD, but an Archaic date has also been suggested⁷.

No. 7:

A bronze model of a warship found during investigations of the harbour at Knidos⁸, probably of Hellenistic date.

No. 8:

A fragment of a Roman terracotta lamp discovered in the harbour area of Fos-sur-Mer⁹.

No. 9:

Another terracotta lamp found in the sea near *Puteoli/Pozzuoli*, of Knidian production and dating from the second half of the first century AD¹⁰. Its top is decorated with a representation of Isis and Sarapis, and its *tabella ansata* carries the inscription *EUPLOIA*, the epithet of Knidian Aphrodite.

No. 10:

A bronze lamp shaped like a warship from the third-century AD shipwreck of Aghia Ghalini off the southern coast of Crete; it is the only example found in a wreck¹¹.

Although these models all belong to different periods and backgrounds, it is possible to consider them, for the present purpose, as one group on account of their shared significance. This approach appears justified on the basis that one can frequently observe different religions sharing similar kinds of rituals.

An example within the framework of the present topic is, for instance, the custom of placing ship and boat models in graves, which is common to Mesopotamia, Egypt, Cyprus, Crete and other regions. The background for this practice surely differs, but the act itself is the same. This holds true also for the postulated practice of dedicating ship and boat models at sea.

A small number of written sources can potentially provide some indication as to the background of this practice.

The Roman author Apuleius (2nd century AD)¹² can be cited as a reference to ships sunk for cultic reasons. He mentions a festival of Isis at Kechreai held at the beginning of the seafaring season, in the course of which the priests fill a full-scale ship with offerings and set it adrift on the sea.

Sunken ship models occur in Apollodoros' *Bibliotheka* (1st or 2nd century AD)¹³, which records the story of Kinyras, King of Cyprus, who pledged to

provide fifty ships to aid the conquest of Troy. Only one of these ships, however, was a real, large-scale vessel, while the others were made of clay with clay figures inside and were put out onto sea. Perhaps it is not too far-fetched to see in this account traces of an actual magical act performed by the king in order to ensure the success of the Greek expedition.

If we look again at the ship models listed above, we notice that they can be tentatively divided into two groups, ignoring for the present any problems with dating. One group of five objects from the southeastern Mediterranean belongs to the second or the beginning of the first millennium BC (**nos. 1 - 5**), another group of five models (**nos. 6 - 10**, if we include those of Aghia Ghalini and Gytheion) to the Hellenistic period and the time of the Roman Empire. Three of these later models are lamps (**nos. 8 - 10**). The ship model from the Aghia Ghalini wreck (**no. 10**), however, may not really fit in here, as it could easily have been carried on the ship for some purpose other than dedication at sea.

Now we turn to the deities possibly associated with these ship and boat models.

The examples from Tyre (**no. 4/5**) and Sabhat al-Bardawil (**no. 3**) may be connected with the worship of the Syrian god *Baal Sapuna/Zaphon*¹⁴, known in the Greek world as *Zeus Kasios*. A ship belonging to this god is mentioned already in a papyrus of the 19th dynasty (12th century BC) from Memphis¹⁵. The historian *Prokopios* (ca. 500-560 AD) reports that, in his Greek guise, the god received a ship made of stone as a dedication from a merchant on the island of Kerkyra¹⁶; votive anchors with inscribed dedications to him were found at the Hispanic coast near Cape Polos¹⁷. His main cult center was Mons Casius/Gebel al-Aqra in northern Syria, with a subsidiary cult at *Mons Casius/Ras Qasrun* (Katib al-Gals) on the northern border of Lake Sirbonis/Sabhat el-Bardawil, where the logboat model is said to have been found (**no. 3**).

One of the female protectresses of seafarers is *Aphrodite Euploia*, who is known to have had a sanctuary at Knidos in the Hellenistic period. It is noteworthy that of the second, later group of ship and boat models one example was made at Knidos (**no. 9**) and a second, bearing the goddess' epithet, was found in the harbour of this city (**no. 7**).

For the other models one may consider a link with Isis (*Pelagia* or *Pharia*), who — as mentioned above — is known to have received full-scale ships as dedications.

Although we cannot be certain that the same explanation holds true for all of the examples, it nevertheless seems likely that most of the models were used in some sort of cultic activity on board a vessel. Concerning the question of how such rituals were conducted, G. Kapitän has pointed out the equipment that would have been required, such as *louteria*, offering cups and altars, which have been mostly discovered in shipwrecks¹⁸. Perhaps the above-mentioned ship and boat models at least partly constitute the remains of offerings given in the course of such ceremonies.

In addition to these models, there are also other kinds of objects that can be interpreted in a similar way. One example is from a written source recording an offering thrown into, and later retrieved from, the sea: a golden tripod, said to have been dedicated by Helen on her return from Troy, and found later by fishermen from Kos, Miletos or other regions. The story is referred to in several versions by Diodorus Siculus (1st century BC), Valerius Maximus (1st half of the 1st century AD), Plutarchos (ca. 46-ca. 120 AD), Diogenes Laertios (3rd century AD), and others¹⁹.

As for archaeological finds, a bronze statuette of a Syrian god may provide a parallel case, as it was discovered in the sea between Selinus and Sciacca on the south coast of Sicily²⁰. It probably dates from the beginning of the first millennium BC.

The small number of ship and boat models I have discussed here is, of course, a very limited base for interpretation, but appears perhaps more significant if one takes into consideration the slim chances of ever finding such objects.

Much work has been done in the past on the types of these models, on the use of ship and boat models as lamps, and on marine deities. It would also be of interest to look further into possible ethnological parallels²¹. There are thus more aspects to the subject than it has been possible to cover in this article. My intention has been to look for a general explanation of the occurrence of ship and boat models in underwater contexts. Even if the interpretation given here may not necessarily apply to all the objects discussed, it should be kept in mind as a possible explanation for any future finds.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- Göttlicher, Modelle A. Göttlicher, *Materialien für ein Corpus der Schiffsmodele im Altertum* (Mainz 1978)
 MIMA L. Basch, *Le musée imaginaire de la marine antique* (Athens 1987)
 Parker, Wrecks A.J. Parker, *Ancient Shipwrecks in the Mediterranean & the Roman Provinces*, BAR International Series 580 (Oxford 1992)
SIMA Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology
 Wachsmuth D. Wachsmuth, *Pompimos ho daimon. Untersuchungen zu den antiken Sakralhandlungen bei Seereisen* (Berlin 1967)

NOTES

- 1.I would like to thank Miss Alexandra Villing, Mr. Stuart Rae, Mr. Michael Wedde and Mr. Gerhard Kapitän for helpful suggestions and support in the creation of the English version of this contribution.
- 2.No. 1: Limassol, private Collection of Nicos Kirzis, L. 45cm;
 K. Westerberg, *Cypriote Ships from The Bronze Age to c. 500 BC*, *SIMA Pocketbook 12* (Gothenburg 1983) 14f. no. 8, 82 fig. 8;
 No. 2: Limassol, private collection of Phr. Nicolaidès, L. 26cm;
 K. Westerberg, *op. cit.* 16 no. 11, 85 fig. 11; *MIMA* 257 fig. 554.
- 3.K. Westerberg, *op. cit.* nos. 20. 24. 31-40. 42f. 47f. 50f.
- 4.No. 3: Haifa, National Maritime Mus., inv. no. not given, L. 36cm;
MIMA 56 fig. 92.
- 5.No. 4: Location unknown, L. 28cm;
MIMA 305f. fig. 645;
 No. 5: Location unknown, L. 28cm;
MIMA 305. 307 fig. 646.
- 6.No. 6: Sparta, Mus. Arch., inv. no. 5712, L. 58cm;
MIMA 428. 432ff., fig. 936-943; A. Delivorrias (ed.), *Greece and the Sea*, Exhibition Cat. Amsterdam (Athens 1987) 229f. no. 126. This model has already been interpreted as a votive offering by O. Höckmann, *Antike Seefahrt* (Munich 1985) 158 and A. Delivorrias, *op. cit.* 229
- 7.O. Höckmann, *op. cit.* 99; *id.* Some thoughts on the Greek Pentekonter in: *Tropis III* (Athens 1995) 215 note 20.
 In J.S. Morrison, J.F. Coates, *Greek and Roman Oared Warships* (Oxford 1996) 238 No. 37 the later date is given preference
- 8.No. 7: Location unknown, L. unknown;
 P.F. Johnston, *Ship and Boat Models in Ancient Greece* (Annapolis 1985) 122 no. Hell. 37.
- 9.No. 8: Istres, Mus. du Vieil Istres, inv. no. not given, L. not given;
 C. Beurdeley, *L'Archéologie sous-marine. L'Odyssée des trésors* (Paris 1991) 112 fig. 90. Because of the circumstances of excavation it is not entirely clear, whether this object was found in a place, which was in fact under water in ancient times.
- 10.No. 9: London, British Mus., inv. no. GR 1862.4-14.1 (lamps Q 2722), L. 63cm;
 D.M. Bailey, *A Catalogue of Lamps in the British Museum 3, Roman provincial lamps*, London (London 1988) 339f. fig. 20, 28, 138, 151 pl. 80; *Varen, Vechten en Verdienen. Scheepvaart in de Oudheid*. Exhibition Cat. Amsterdam (Amsterdam 1996) 43 fig. 75, 48 Cat. No. 48.
- 11.No. 10: Rethymnon, Arch. Mus., inv. no. not given, L. ca. 28cm;
 Göttlicher, Modelle 88 No. 534 pl. 42, 534; *MIMA* 452 fig. 996; for the wreck see Parker, *Wrecks* 62 No. 68.

12. Apuleius XI,5,5; XI,16,4-8.
13. Apollodoros' Bibliotheka, Epitome 3, 9; this version is recorded also by Eustathios 827, 38ff. (M. van der Valk, *Eustathii Commentarii* 3, Leiden 1979, 139) and *schol. T* (H. Erbse, *Scholía Graeca in Homeri Iliadem* 4, Berlin 1974, 126f. No. 20b).
14. Wachsmuth 395f. note 1819-1825; E. Lipinski (ed.), *Dictionnaire de la Civilisation phénicienne et punique* (Turnhout 1992) 60f. s.v. Baal Saphon (Bonnet); I. Cornelius, *The Iconography of the Canaanite Gods Reshef and Ba'al*, *Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis* 140 (Göttingen 1994) 151f. no. BR 11 note 7.
15. *Papyrus Sallier* IV verso 1,6; W. Helck, Ein Indiz früher Handelsfahrten syrischer Kaufleute, *Ugarit-Forschungen* 2, 1970, 35f.; for further references see the preceding note.
16. Prokopios, *de bello gothico* IV, 22.
17. Wachsmuth, 396 note 1825.
18. G. Kapitän, *Louteria* from the sea, *IJNA* 8, 1979, 97-120; *id.*, Archaeological evidence for rituals and customs on ancient ships in: *Tropis I* (Athens 1989) 147-162; I. Radic, Three more *louteria* finds in the eastern Adriatic, *IJNA* 20, 1991, 155-160. New finds of *louteria* were made in the Sicilian shipwreck "Ognina 4", see H.G. Martin, Ognina 4, *Vorläufiger Grabungsbericht*, DEGUWA-Rundbrief 10, 1995, 21f. Small clay altars and offering vessels from the Gela shipwreck dated to the sixth century BC were mentioned by R. Panvini during a 1995 convention, the 10th Rassegna di Archeologia Subaquea held at Giardini/Naxos.
19. Plutarchos, Solon 4; Valerius Maximus, IV, 1, 7, for the further mentioned ancient authors see B. Snell, *Leben und Meinungen der sieben Weisen* (Munich 1938) 108-113.
20. Palermo, Mus. Arch. Regionale, inv. no. 3676, H. 36.2cm; S. Moscati (ed.), *The Phoenicians*, Exhibition Cat. (Venice 1988) 48, 422, 424, 655 no. 423; C. Bonnet, Melqart. Cultes et mythes de l'Héraclès Tyrien en Méditerranée, *Studia Phoenicia* 8 (Leuven 1988) 266f. fig. 21. A connection of the statuette with the worship of Baal Sapuna is likely, regardless of the actual find context and date.
21. Wachsmuth 130 note 214; 450 note 2142 for instance refers to a similar Arabian custom, according to which a jug decorated like a ship, filled with bric-a-brac and adorned with candles, is presented as an offering in the hope of freeing a becalmed ship.