SHIPS IN HOMER'S EPIC WORKS

Homer's epic works marked the beginning of European literature. They are an inexhaustible source of wisdom and inspiration, of undying importance to the cultural history not only of Europeans, but of mankind as a whole. In addition, Homer's epos is also a source for history. Owing to our expanding knowledge through other domains of science, this written source can be re-read many times and it may reveal legitimate variants to existing solutions in history, which appear to be unexpected at a first glance.

The Iliad and The Odyssey are known to have been collected and ordered in the court of the Peisistratidae in Athens in the 6th century BC. However, it has also been established that the grammarians who studiously copied the epic works at that time, observed to the utmost the authenticity and even the archaic nature of the language, style and terminology of the poems. This has allowed experts on Homer to claim with a high degree of certainty that the two poems were created before and during the 8th century B.C. However, the poet narrates about events that took place much earlier, notably about the Trojan War in the 13th century B.C. and about the time after it until the 8th century B.C. Thus, in spite of the "stopped" time in the two poems taken separately, the two of them represent time in a vertical scale, i.e. there exists a sequence of actions and of events, moreover in the so-called "dark ages" for the ancient history of the Aegean world. In other words, Homer's epos has gathered and preserved a part of the real history of this civilization between the 13th and the 8th century B.C. shrouded by myth.

The aim of the present work is to shed light on these dark ages by comparing what Homer said about shipping during the period in question with what is known from archaeology. My noble intention is to try and disperse the fog of the myth in discovering the historical truth.

The aim formulated necessitated to review several problems briefly, with a view to greater clarity and convenience in our work:

1. Oars and oarsmen
2. Mast and sail
3. Navigation of the ship
4. Anchors

The information extracted from Homer's epic works in this way allows to make internal cross-sections of the mythological evidence and to come to interesting observations.

Oars and oarsmen.

The ship with oars and oarsmen appeared even in Book I of the Iliad. Having been forced by the gods to return the captured Chryseis, Agamemnon gave orders for a good ship with twenty men on board to be launched[1]. The Catalogue of Ships mentions that the oarsmen or seamen (the term is the same ἐρέτης) are archers[2] In this case they number 50, on another occasion - 120[3]. After a quarrel with Agamemnon, Achilles intends to take his ship and his men back home rowing[4]. When there is no wind, the sailors row, but with a fair wind they can take a rest happily[5]. In The Iliad Homer refers to the ships as having many oars, using the term πολυκλήις[6], which suggests that this was a ship with many pins to which the oars were attached.

In The Odyssey, too, rowing was the principal way for moving these ships[7]. The ship of Telemachos has twenty oarsmen[8], similar to the ship which the candidates for Penelopeia's hand wished to make an attempt on Telemachos' life[9]. The ship offered to Odysseus when he was sailing from the island of the Phaiacians had "two-and-fifty... best oarsmen"[10]. The oarsmen in these ships are seated in rows, on benches one behind the other[11]. The oars are attached to the boards of the ships by means of leather straps[12]. Undoubtedly, Homer identified the ships in The Odyssey as ships with oars (νῆες ἐπήρετμοι[13]).

It is interesting to note the cited information about the way of rowing: the oarsmen being seated on benches. As Thucydides explains[14], the ships in Homer's epic works had no deck. The seats for the oarsmen were actually parallel benches from one board to the other, on which the oarsmen sat facing the stern. This is how they formed one series for each board. It is the only position in which rowing while the sailor is seated could be effective. This type of rowing is more efficient than the "canoe"-type paddling: facing the bow and paddling with a short paddle in the seamen's hands, which was practised in the pirogues in the Aegean basin from the 3rd to the middle of the 2nd millennium B.C[15]. It is also important that the oars were attached to the pins by means of leather straps tied in knots. Such pins can be seen to this day on traditional fishing boats. They are short wooden pins hammered vertically into the board. This mode of attaching the oars to the boat preceded the Corinthian innovations in the 8th century B.C. which subsequently spread to Greece in the 7th and 6th centuries. One of these was the new method

of fixing the oar to the ship: through round holes in the board, in which the oars were lying and rotating during rowing[16].

The size of these ships is determined by the number of the oarsmen. In the Iliad they are 20, 50, 100 and 120, while in The Odyssey they are only 20 and 52. It seems that the notion from The Iliad about mythical gigantic ships with 100 or 120 oarsmen acquired a more realistic form. The relatively small size of these ships is suggested by the numerous cases when they were easily taken out to the land, even if there was no special need of this[17]. The sailors of these ships were simultaneously oarsmen and warriors. This was noticed even by Thucydides[18]. Rowing as the principal way of ship navigation was used when the ship was sailing off, when there was no wind and when the ship was coming to lie along the wharf.

Mast and sail.

Agamemnon's ship from Book I of The Iliad has a mast and a sail; the mast was fixed with ropes, while the sail was hoisted when the wind was fair[19]. As was mentioned already when the oars were discussed, the sailors in the sea could rest only when the wind was fair.

This information is more detailed in The Odyssey. When a fair wind started blowing, the wooden mast was hoisted, fixed with ropes and then the sails were unfurled using leather straps[20]. The two ropes of the mast are taut towards the bow and towards the stern[21]. The sail is taken in when the ship enters the harbour[22]. When Odysseus was building a raft, it becomes clear that the mast had a cross-yard as well[23]. The existence of this yard confirms that a sail was indeed used with this mast, because without it the sail would not have been taut under the thrust of the wind.

There are numerous references to masts and sails in The Odyssey[24].

It is important that in both poems this type of sail belonged to the ships with oars discussed earlier. There is no specific reference to ships with sails only or with oars only. Even though no details have been given about the shape and size of the sail, it is clear that it was of a particularly elaborate configuration, if it had to rely on fair winds. No manoeuvring was possible with this sail, and likewise it was impossible to travel at an angle against the wind.

The term used in ancient Greek texts for a ship's sail is ἱστίον, usually in the plural. However, it is obvious that these ships had only one functional sail, if they had only one mobile mast with two supporting ropes and one yard.

Navigation of the ship.

In The Iliad there is only one reference to the helmsman of the ship[25]. This indisputably suggests that independent navigation existed. All the more that when a ship sailed, it must have had a helmsman and some system for steering.

Some information about this steering system can be found in The Odyssey, where a famous navigator was said to have been a skilful helmsman with the oar, too[26]. Odysseus fled from the ship by going down the stern oar[27], i.e. the steering system consisted in an oar lowered from the stern to some depth in the sea. It looked like a tail and served for navigation. This is why in all cases the helmsman is always standing on the ship's stern[28].

The steering oar was the first and the least sophisticated steering system, which existed throughout the Middle Ages as well. It was a compulsory element for ships using sails as well.

Anchors.

There are two references to ship anchors in The Iliad. The first case concerns the lowering of the anchor in the harbour[29], while the second case refers to the lifting of the anchor before the ship sails off[30]. In both cases the term εὐνή, meaning "stone, bed", has been used. It is different from the classical ἄγκυρα. Actually, the anchor was made of stone, and because the stone was flat, it rested on the sea bottom.

When Odysseus went to the Cyclops, he discovered such a good wharf that it was even unnecessary for the ship to cast anchor or to be tied to the shore[31]. In that case the poetic exaggeration can be understood from the context of the poems, though something else is important: the term εὐνή was used to denote "anchor", the same term being used in The Iliad to denote a stone anchor. The term ευνή is also used when Telemachos' ship cast anchor in a bay in Ithaca, before he went to the city itself[32].

In The Odyssey there are two other cases[33] where anchoring of ships is referred to, but in neither case the term for anchor has been used. In one of the passages the ship is said to be riding at roadstead, while in the other case the term for anchor rope - δεσμός - has been used. In this poem, too, the term ἄγκυρα is not used. This means that ships with sails and oars in Homer's epos used stone anchors only.

From everything stated so far, it becomes clear that the ships in The Iliad and in The Odyssey navigated with 20 to 50 oars and with a rather simple sail,

hoisted onto a mobile mast which was fixed by means of a bow rope and a stern rope. These ships were steered with a stern oar, and they used stone anchors. According to Thucydides, they were built in the old piratic fashion, as during the Trojan War[34]. In addition to food for the crew, these ships carried other cargo as well - usually looted. Their sailors were both oarsmen and warriors, the captain was their commander as well. These were universal ships for piracy, war and trade.

Homer has designated these ships everywhere with the term νηῦς (pl. νῆες). However, in the Odyssey there is the notion of yet another ship, albeit only for the sake of comparison. It was a flat-bottomed cargo ship - φορτίς[35]. This type of ship was not unknown in the Aegean world. As suggested by the studies[36], it appeared in the 10th century B.C. images along the coasts of Asia Minor, in the 9th century B.C. images from the Island of Crete, and then in Greece. The design and construction of this ship are different and they are a function of its purpose: to transport cargo. This ship navigates mainly with sails, because large distances cannot be covered with oars only. Consequently, a new type of ship was discovered in The Odyssey, which seems to have been unknown in The Iliad and epoch it reflected.

It is known that Alcaeus[37] from Lesbos was the first to use the term ἄγκυρα, which was towards the end of the 7th century B.C. The meaning of the new word for "anchor" is "anchor, support", i.e. it is perceived in the sense of an anchor with one or with two arms. This anchor was made of wood, with a stone or lead transverse stock.

The appearance of a new type of anchor indisputably speaks also about the appearance of the new type of ship for Greece. In my opinion, the new ship was the φορτίς from The Odyssey. If this is so, then the fact that the term ἄγκυρα is lacking in Homer's epos, means that when it was created (before and during the 8th century B.C.), the ships specialized for trade only were not yet very widespread in the Greek world. And when Alcaeus used the term at the end of the 7th century B.C., that meant that the novelty in shipping and in the economic life of the Hellenic ethnic community had already been completely accepted. In other words, the time from the 8th to the end of the 7th century B.C. was a period of propagation and of acceptance of the trade ship in the Greek world, being also a period when active and regular sea trade started. The compiler Strabo[38] adds to the picture by stating that ἄγκυρα was invented by the Scythian Anacharsis. It is obvious that Anacharsis simply stood for the name of a culture-hero from a non-Greek ethnic cultural community, therefore it is pointless to seek in what century Anacharsis invented

the two-arm anchor. Rather, the information may be associated with the appearance of the new type of sailship in the 10th century B.C. in Asia Minor, and probably in the Western Black Sea area as well[39].

The archaeological dating of the stone anchors[40] from the Eastern Mediterranean and from the Western Pontic coasts refer them generally to the second half of the 2nd millennium B.C. If it is applied to the ships with sails and oars of the νηῦς type, which have the same stone anchors as well, it proves that these were indeed the ships from the Trojan War in the 13th century B.C.

The appearance of the other type of ship - with sails - for the time being in the 10th century B.C. and its gradual propagation into the Greek world, was reflected in The Odyssey in the 8th century B.C. The merchant ship with sails φορτίς took over the trade functions of the universal ship with sails -νηῦς. Then the ship with oars and sails remained for military need only, and hence it developed some new military properties: speed and manoeuvrability. According to Thucydides' narrative[41], this happened first in Corinth in the 8th century B.C. when the penteconters, the improved variant of Homer's ships, appeared for the first time. These ships were considered to have been the vessels with which the Great Greek Colonization was performed. A logical question arises: what kind of anchors did they have? The most plausible answer seems to be: ἄγκυρα, because more sophisticated ships needed sophisticated anchors as well, and such anchors had already been invented. Thus, it seems that the Greeks profited from the more frequent occurrence of merchant ships by borrowing the two-arm stone or lead stock in order to apply it in their innovations in the ships and to disseminate it together with the Great Greek Colonization.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the following may be stated briefly:

1. Ships in Homer's epos were of the all-purpose type (piracy, war, trade) and were of the νηῦς type. These ships were with oars and sails, and they sailed in the second half of the 2nd millenniun B.C. until about the 8th century B.C. They had stone anchors of the εὐνή type.

   Thus, the dating of the stone stocks from the Eastern Mediterranean should be extended to the 8th century B.C. This type of conclusion is also suggested when the stone anchors from the Western Black Sea regions are examined[42].

2. A new type of ship (φορτίς) became known in Hellas in the 8th century B.C. It was for transporting cargo, especially for commercial need. It was from this ship that the Greek penteconters, and later the trieris, borrowed the more sophisticated anchor of the ἄγκυρα type.

   Thus, the dating of the appearance of the wooden anchor with stock in the eastern part of the Aegan basin would be transferred back in time from the 7th to the 10th century B.C. as has been proved for the Western Black Sea coast[43], for the Western Aegean coast - at least to the 8th century B.C.

3. If the proposed hypothesis about the direct connection between the merchant sailer φορτίς and the wooden anchor with arms ἄγκυρα is confirmed in the future as well, it would support the idea that The Odyssey reflected most generally the time from the 10th to the 8th century B.C. whereas The Iliad reflected the time from the 13th to the 10th century B.C. i.e. while The Odyssey praised the birth of a new age, The Iliad sang about the glory of a retreating age. Both ages are linked by the ships with oars and sails using stone anchors - the ships in Homer's epic tradition.

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NOTES

1. Il. I, 308-309 (Paul Mazon; Amais-Hentze).
2. Il. II, 718-720.
3. Il. II, 510.
4. Il. IX, 358-363.
5. Il. VII, 4-6.
6. Il. VII, 87-88; VIII, 239; XIII, 742.
7. Od. VI, 269; IX 73, 99, 103-104, 179-180, 471-472 ' XII, 146-147, 168-172; XI, 125, 639-640; XV, 549-553; XVI, 353 (Victor Bérard).
8. Od. I, 280-281; II, 212.
9. Od. IV, 669.
10. Od. VIII, 35, 48.
11. Od. IV, 578-580; IX, 103-104; XIII, 76, 21-22.
12. Od. IV, 782; VIII, 37, 53.
13. Od. IV, 559; V, 141.
14. Thuc. I, 10, 4 (Budé).
15. Basch, L. *Le musée imaginaire de la marine antique.* Athènes, 1987, p. 77-84.
16. Chamoux, F.La civilisation grecque à l'époque archaique et classique. Paris, 1963, p. 164-173.
17. Il. I, 485-486; II, 150-151 IX, 43-44; 358-363; 680-681; VIII, 500-501.
18. Thuc. I, 10, 4.
19. Il. I. 432-436; 477-486.
20. Od. II, 420-426; XV, 289-291; IX, 77-78.
21. Od. XII, 409.

22. Od. III, 9-11; XV, 496-498.
23. Od. V, 254.
24. Od. IV, 360-362; 577-579; 781; XI, 1-8; XII, 402.
25. Il. XXIII, 315-317.
26. Od. III, 279-283.
27. Od. XIV, 350.
28. Od. II, 416-418; V, 255; XII, 152; XV, 285.
29. Il. I, 432-436.
30. Il, XIV, 75-78.
31. Od. IX, 137.
32. Od. XV, 497-498.
33. Od. IV, 780-785; XIII, 96-101.
34. Thuc. I, 10, 4.
35. Od. V, 249-250; IX, 321-323.
36. Basch, L. *Op. cit.*, 159-190.
37. Alcaeus. apud Heracl. Alleg. 5 (*Lobel-Page*).
38. Strabo. 7, 303 (Maineke).
39. Basch, L. *Op. cit.*, 159-190; Porozhanov, K. On the dating and belonging of stone stocks found along the Bulgarian Black Sea coast. -*MPK*, 3, 1988, 33-38 (in Bulgarian); Porozhanov, K. Sur l'apparition du bateau à voile du littoral thrace de la mer Noire. - In: *Tropis II*, Ship construction in Antiquity. Second International Symposium. Delphi, 1987. Athens, 1990, 277-281.
40. Dan E. McCaslin. Stone Anchors in Antiquity: Coastal Settlements and Maritime Trade Routes in the Eastern Mediterranean ca. 1600-1050 B.C. Göteborg, 1980. *Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology*, vol. LXI, 51-52; Porozhanov, K. Dating of stone anchors with holes from the Bulgarian Black Sea region - achievements and problems. - *Archaeology*, 1989, no 1, 6-13 (in Bulgarian)
41. Thuc. I, 13.
42. Porozhanov, K. Dating of stone anchors (op. cit.).
43. Porozhanov, K. On the dating and belonging (op. cit.).