# Contents

Acknowledgments .......................... page viii
List of abbreviations ......................... ix
List of references to Greek terms .......... xi
Maps ............................................. xii

Introduction ................................ 1
1 Coming to terms ........................... 6
2 Classical modes and patterns of exchange 15
3 The juridical place of maritime traders 27
4 The level of wealth of maritime traders 34
5 Official attitudes toward maritime traders 43
6 Unofficial attitudes toward maritime traders 54
7 Archaic modes of exchange and the personnel involved, c. 800-475 B.C. 62
8 Conclusion: then and now ............... 75

Appendix 1: Emporoi and nauklēroi: their attested states of origin 82
Appendix 2: Cohesion of maritime traders 85
Appendix 3: The dikai emporikai .......... 89
Appendix 4: Catalogue of emporoi and nauklēroi 93
Bibliography .................................. 133
Indexes
  1 Index locorum ............................. 149
  2 General index ............................. 157
CHAPTER 1

Coming to terms

INTRODUCTION

This chapter addresses several questions. In the Greek world of the classical period what sorts of people engaged in inter-regional trade? Was there a clear division of labor, whereby some earned most of their living from long-distance trade and still others engaged in it as a sideline activity?

I argue that in the classical period there was a clear division of labor. One group, composed of those called *emporoi* and *naukléroi*, derived most of their livelihood from inter-regional trade. (These two words are commonly and somewhat misleadingly rendered in English as “traders” and “shipowners”; in his 1935 article Finley [333–6] rightly pointed out that *naukléroi* may have regularly engaged in *emporía* themselves.) The second group consists of various sorts of people who engaged in *emporía* from time to time but who did not rely on it for most of their livelihood.

That in brief is the general picture. Can we be more specific? Yes and no. On the one hand we can mention other traits that usually seem to characterize those called *emporoi* or *naukléroi*. On the other, as Finley (1935: 320–2, 333–6) showed, the ways in which these words were actually used prevent us from claiming that, because someone is called an *emporos*, then by definition he must have made a career of wholesale trade in goods, carried by him on someone else’s ship, that were owned but not produced by him. Again and again in the ancient sources appear people called *emporoi* who fail to meet one or another of these criteria. But even if we abandon any pretense to lexicographical exactitude, it nonetheless remains important to ask what those called *emporoi* normally had in common, what those called *naukléroi* normally had in common, and what *emporoi* and *naukléroi* normally had in common. This chapter takes up where Finley left off,

1 This article, published by Moses Finley at age twenty-three, was only his second on the ancient Greco-Roman world. There followed a hiatus of almost two decades before he next published on an ancient topic. See further Shaw and Saller in Finley (1981: ix–xxvi and 312).
Coming to terms

adding or clarifying a number of crucial distinctions he either omitted or failed to discuss adequately. The first section deals with *emporoi*; the second, with *nauklèroi*; and the third with yet others who engaged in *emporia*.

**EMPOROI**

The traits that *emporoi* almost without exception appear to share I term “primary characteristics.” “Secondary characteristics” apply to *emporoi* in the majority of cases. Primary and secondary characteristics differ only in the number of exceptions tolerated. There can be very few exceptions to a primary characteristic; there can be more to a secondary characteristic, but one still must be able to say that “usually” or “normally” the secondary characteristic applies. Beyond both primary and secondary characteristics are of course yet other features shared by many *emporoi*, but these need no special designation.

I argue that *emporoi* shared two primary characteristics. If we exclude army and slave traders, then virtually without exception those called *emporoi*:

1. **Carried on interstate trade.** Hasebroek (1933: 1–3) correctly insisted that this feature is what basically distinguished *emporoi* from *kapeloi* (retail sellers). Finley (1935: 333 and 328 n.37) claims one exception to this rule, “one instance where the *emporoi* were also shopkeepers in the Agora,” but this exception is at best a very tenuous inference from Thuc. 3.74.2, in which a fire set to houses around the agora of Corcyra destroyed many goods belonging to *emporoi*.²

2. **Relied for much (or probably most) of their livelihood on interstate trade.** This primary characteristic, to which I find no recorded exception, is a neglected but extremely important one, for it not only serves to distinguish *emporoi* from all sorts of other people engaging in *emporia*, on whom see 13–14 below; it also points to the only sense in which *emporoi* had a “profession” – a word that, at least when applied to *emporoi*, has created a certain amount of confusion.³ The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “profession” in its most general sense as “any calling or occupation by which one habitually earns his living.” But even in this broadest sense “profession” fails to encompass what *emporoi* did for a living. Sailing

---


³ I do not claim that reflections on language can either “solve” or “dissolve” the question of whether there was a “merchant class” in ancient Greece. That is a sociological question, the answer to which depends on one’s notion of “class.” But the various notions cannot even be properly discussed in their ancient Greek context until certain prior clarifications are made.
conditions forced most *emporoi* to limit their trade by sea to half a year or less. Since most *emporoi* were not wealthy, most of them probably found it necessary to continue working in the off season as well. Our ignorance of the sort of work *emporoi* did outside the sailing season in no way alters the ironic result – that for half the year or more most *emporoi* probably did not earn their living by the activities that prompt us to call them *emporoi*. Still, they clearly must have earned a very important part of their livelihood by sea trade, else they would have chosen a less risky line of work and remained ashore year-round.

There is no firm way to distinguish the following secondary characteristics from the primary ones just mentioned. In the face of source limitations one is obliged to speculate, relying more on general considerations than on specific evidence. I argue that (again, with the exception of army and slave traders) those called *emporoi usually or normally:*

1. **Traveled by sea.** The geography of the Greek world guaranteed that long-distance trade would normally be by sea. At the same time Xenophon’s claim that “Athens receives much merchandise by way of land” disqualifies trading by sea as a primary characteristic of *emporoi*, although one wonders with Gauthier just how important was the land trade to and

---

4 On the dates of the sailing season see Casson (1971: 270–3 and nn.1–5). *Emporoi* could continue sailing between Rhodes and Egypt year-round ([D.] 56.30), but the northern grain and timber routes used by most of the *emporoi* trading with Athens, for instance, were closed for more than half the year.

5 As I argue in Ch. 4.

6 For references to the threat of seas, wars, and pirates to trading with Athens, for instance, were closed for more than half the year.

7 As I argue in Ch. 4.

8 As I argue in Ch. 4.

9 As I argue in Ch. 4.
from Athens. Finley (1935: 328 n.37) lists other references to land trade and traders but omits the following:

a. Pl. _Ple._ 289e: someone characterizes _emporoi_ (among others) as “travelling from city to city both by sea and by land.”

b. Diod. Sic. 11.56.3: Themistokles in 471/0 B.C. meets two Lynkestians (nos. 45 and 46 in the Catalogue) who are said to be “engaged in trade and… therefore familiar with the roads.”

2. _Traveled in someone else’s ship_. This applies to virtually all of those who share the secondary characteristic of travelling by sea.⑩ Therein surely lies the basis for the phrase found throughout both the literary and inscriptions evidence – _hoi emporoi kai hoi naukléroi_. And, if a shipowner engages in _emporia_, our sources distinguish between his _naukléria_ (shipowning) and _emporia_ (trading).⑪

Why? It cannot be that _naukléroi_ do not do what _emporoi_ do, which amounts to depending on interstate trade for much of one’s livelihood. For, as has been mentioned earlier and will be explored at 12–13, that description applies to many shipowners as well. It must be that _emporoi_ do not do what _naukléroi_ distinctively do; and that, as 12–13 shows, can only be shipowning.⑫

3. _Owned the goods they traded in_. Only two recorded cases possibly qualify as exceptions. One is that of Timosthenes (no. 24), who may be the agent of Phormion II (no. 23).⑬ The other is that glaring exception to so many rules, the slave agent Lampis II (no. 13). His owner, Dion, may also have owned the goods Lampis II carried and traded in (on which see item 2 of no. 13). Whether many seagoing agents carried the goods of others depends on the level of business organization in classical Greece. At 36–40 below I argue that the rudimentary level of business organization precluded enterprises run by wealthy entrepreneurs who dispatched agents to do their trading.

4. _Did not produce the goods they traded in_. No doubt throughout the classical period many farmers and craftsmen continued to follow an older

⑩ Finley (1935: 333–4 and 329 n.43) claims that “some _emporoi_ unquestionably did own vessels,” but both the cases he cites are questionable: τὰ _πλοῖα_ τὰ _αὐτῶν_ in D. 8.25 and τὰ _πλοῖα_ τὰ _αὐτῶν_ τῶν ἰδίων ἑμῶν _ναύσι_ in _Iouk._ 17.17 might simply be telescoped versions of “the ships on which they sailed and carried their goods…”

⑪ For example _Andok._ 1.137 and _IG II_ 135 (after 434/3).

⑫ Why, then, one might ask, if the activities of a _naukléros_ so often include _emporia_ and not vice versa, did the Athenians in an honorary decree (_IG II_ 360) choose _emporoi_ (the word with fewer connotations) to describe Herakleides of Salamis in Cyprus (no. 60), who is almost certainly a _naukléros_? (See further item 2 of no. 60.) At 51–53 below I argue that this very revealing abnormality can be explained only by its appearance in an official setting, where it further confirms what we already knew about attitudes of the Athenian polis towards foreign _emporoi_ and _naukléroi._

⑬ On Timosthenes see further item 3 of no. 23, and no. 24 _in toto_.

Coming to terms
Maritime traders in the ancient Greek world

pattern of trade, hawking their goods along the coast in small vessels, as Hyperbolos, the Athenian abused as a lampmaker who entered politics, may have done. Were these called emporoi? They never are in the surviving evidence, and there is a good reason why. Such people were viewed by contemporaries as deriving most of their income from farming or from lampmaking and so were called “farmers” (γεωργοὶ) or “lampdealers” (λυχνοπωλεί) despite taking to sea to sell their goods. This is not to say that an emporos could not have produced things in the off-season that he peddled on the first leg of his sea travels. But my guess is that such a person was termed an emporos if he derived most of his livelihood from trade in goods he did not produce, such as timber or grain from the northern Aegean or Black Sea areas.

I claim further that two other characteristics of emporoi are not primary or secondary characteristics, since too many exceptions exist to the rule that emporoi:

1 Remaining emporoi year-in, year-out. The Oxford English Dictionary defines “profession” in part as something one “habitually” does for a living. Our evidence seldom reveals whether an emporos or a naukléros continues to go to sea year after year; we usually see the emporoi and naukléroi in the Catalogue at only one point in their lives, but the following exceptions are instructive:
   a An unnamed retired emporos (no. 8) says he engaged in foreign trade “for a long time.” ([D.] 33.4).
   b Nikoboulos (no. 22) mentions his career in what may be sea-trading (D. 37.54), and other passages (D. 37.6, 10, 15, 25) suggest that he has not yet retired. On him see further Millett (1991: 193–6).
   c Pyron of Pherai (no. 42) is described by Isokrates (17.20) as one who “was accustomed to sail to Pontos.” Nothing more is known of Pyron, who possibly qualifies as a long-term emporos on the strength of this passage alone.

14 Aristophanes (Eq. 135) alludes to Hyperbolos’ sailing in a σκῦφος to hawk the lamps he made. We will find no solid information in a passage compounding comic sarcasm with the ambiguity of σκῦφος (on which see Ehrenberg [1974: 121]). Even in its seaworthy sense σκῦφος (“skiff”) refers to a vessel too small for coastal trade (Casson 1971: 329–31 and 336–8). For further references in the plays and scholia to Hyperbolos’ lampmaking, see PA 13910; on Hyperbolos’ background and career see further Davies (1971) no. 13910 and Connor (1971: 152–5).

15 Neither of the exceptions listed by Finley in (1935) 336 n.67 refers to emporoi who produced the goods they traded in. Heraclides 60 (fbr. 611 Rose) refers to a γεωργοῖς (“farmer”) who sells his own products, while Pl. Grg. 174d in fact distinguishes the suppliers (emporoi and kapeloi) from the maker (diemiosargos) of goods.

16 Normally in the classical period producers who sold their own goods are identified by their craft or by the goods themselves and not by the blanket term, autopolos. Finley (1935: 336) rightly notes the rarity of that word, in spite of Heichelheim’s claim to the contrary (Heichelheim 1964: 115 4). See also Finley (1935: 336 n.68).
d The unnamed Athenian in *P Oxy.* 2538 probably spent more than a few years as an *emporos*; see his son’s description of the father’s occupation in item 2 of no. 61.

e Lykon of Achaia (no. 47), as he is first described in [D.] 52.3, sounds very like a long-term *emporos.*

These examples together with the very nature of an *emporos’* work suggest that many may have remained *emporoi* year after year. It would take more than a season to establish a reputation as someone a bottomry lender could rely on; it would take time to understand the ins and outs of bottomry contracts themselves and to learn with which ship captains to risk one’s life at sea. It would also take time to make helpful contacts in, for example, Pontos, and to learn how to decipher the many rumors heard there and elsewhere about where one could get the best price for one’s cargo. Here the exceptions threaten to prove the rule: we know of only two people in the entire Catalogue who for certain did not remain *emporoi* or *nauklēroi* for most of their lives. Yet Leokrates probably remained an *emporos* for some five years, and Andokides probably engaged in *nauklēria* and *emporia* for even longer.

Many, then, continued to work as *emporoi* year-in and year-out. Does long-term trading therefore qualify as a primary or as a secondary characteristic of *emporoi?* Probably neither: enough people may have been short-term *emporoi* to disqualify year-in and year-out trading as even a secondary characteristic.

One further point: confusion surrounds not only the sense in which *emporoi* constitute a “profession,” but also the sense in which they were “specialized.” In one respect of course they were: most of our evidence concerns *emporoi* who traded above all in grain. But an *emporos* regularly

---

87 All the preceding examples refer to *emporoi,* but certain *nauklēroi* too engaged in trade for more than a single year and probably for even longer. The *nauklēros* Heraclides of Salamis (no. 60) traded actively for at least the period 330/29–328/7 B.C. (see item 2 of no. 60). The speaker in [D.] 56 accuses the *nauklēros* Dionysodoros (no. 33) and his partner the *nauklēros* Parmeniskos of reaping the profit from an unpaid loan for yet a second year ([D.] 56.14.45). The speaker clearly has in mind further loans rather than further *emporia* or *nauklēria,* but Parmeniskos at least ([D.] 56.29–30) continued to trade throughout these two years.

88 See [D.] 34.30.

89 Hasebroek (1928: 10–11, 21, 89–90) thought most *emporoi* illiterate; he is proved wrong by Harvey (1964a). This appears in a revised and expanded version as Section 9 of Harvey (1964b); cf. Lombardo (1988: 181–7) and esp. W. V. Harris (1986). On the use by Greek merchants of writing in the archaic period, see Coldstream (1977: 299–301) and W. V. Harris (1996). The lead tablets found at Beresan (Chadwick [1973]) and Pech Maho (Chadwick [1990]) are further evidence of merchants’ literacy, if the inscribers were in fact *emporoi.*


91 No. 40; see esp. item 2.

92 No. 41; see esp. item 2.

93 On the importance of the trade in grain with classical Greece, see 15–26 below.
returning from Pontos to Athens with grain might just as regularly take with him on the outward trip a variety of goods for sale. And after returning to Athens with the grain, he might use his profits to buy still other goods that he transported to another polis and sold there. Circumstances might further prompt the *emporos* who regularly sold grain at Athens to forsake both the grain and Athens, if he could get a better price for other goods elsewhere.  

**2. Sold to retailers.** Emporoi normally may have sold their grain to retailers at poleis like Athens, but they regularly may have used the profits from the sale of grain to buy in Athens other goods that they carried home and sold directly to consumers in the off-season.

Having disqualified these last two criteria as primary or secondary characteristics of *emporoi*, we are left with the original six. So, if we exclude army and slave *emporoi*, then for the classical period at any rate we can say that the word *emporoi* in its commercial sense refers to those who relied on interstate trade for much or probably most of their livelihood, normally trading in goods, carried by them in someone else’s ship, that were owned but not produced by them.

**Nauklēroi**

The word *nauklēros*, at least in its commercial sense, has a single primary characteristic to which I find no exceptions: it refers to one who was the owner of a seagoing merchantman.

---

24 See further Hasebroek’s excellent comments (1928: 83–4) and the references in n.20 above.

25 The ancient authors show as much interest in *emporoi* after they deliver the grain and leave Athens as do Hollywood directors in minor actors who leave the set: both *emporoi* and actors vanish abruptly from sight and mind. Finley (1935: 316 n.66) found what he thought were four references to retail trading by *emporoi*, but two of these (Thuc. 3.74.2 and GDI iv 875 n.32) are questionable.

26 Cf. Finley (1935: 335–6, esp. his items 3–4, 6–8). For the most recent treatment of the term *emporoi*, see Vélissaropoulos (1980: 35–7).

27 In n.64 (1935: 333) Finley lists a number of cases in which the word *nauklēros* and its cognates are used to refer metaphorically to something other than shipowning. These cases he calls ‘the only exceptions’ to the non-metaphorical, commercial use. In fact in at least six other instances these words do not refer to shipowning: Aesch. *Sept*. 652, where *nauklēroin* means “to steer” or “to guide”; *nauklēria* means something like “means of transport” in Eur. *Hel*. 1519, and “crossing” (or “sailing” or “voyage”) in *Hel*. 1589 and *Akr.* 256; a *nauklēros* drives a chariot in Eur. *Hipp*. 1224; the only example from prose works is well away from shipowning but perhaps retains an element of “commerce”: in Isae. 6.19 a woman *nauklērēi* (“manages”) a brothel. (To put it more accurately, she manages a tenement house in which prostitutes are lodged.)

28 See Casson (1971: 314–15) and Vélissaropoulos (1980: 48–9) for sensible remarks. On 77–86 Vélissaropoulos discusses the principal roles and their titles among the crew of a merchant vessel. Finley (1935: 333) agrees that the work *nauklēros* has “a definite and exclusive meaning, namely shipowner. But even here there are variations within that meaning.” Finley’s word “variation” nicely
Was year-in, year-out nauklēria (shipowning) a primary or a secondary characteristic of nauklēroi? Given his investment in a ship, one usually remained a nauklēros for more than a trading season or two, unless pirates, storms, or wars deprived him of it within that time.\(^5\)\(^9\) Karzef (1972: 52) notes that the fourth-century Kyrenia merchant vessel that he uncovered in 1968/9 was at least eighty years old when she sank; it therefore might have stayed in the same family through three generations of nauklēroi. Long-term shipowning therefore probably qualifies as at least a secondary characteristic of nauklēroi. More uncertain is whether emporia, long- or short-term, also qualifies as a primary or a secondary characteristic of nauklēroi. The sparse evidence is unhelpful: only ten nauklēroi in the Catalogue are said to engage in trade, and even fewer (five) are said to borrow on bottomry; but many others may have done both, and of no nauklēroi in the Catalogue can we say with certainty that he did not trade.\(^3\) The stringent standards for primary characteristics probably disqualify the practice of emporia as a primary characteristic of nauklēroi. Rather than quibble over whether it constitutes even a secondary characteristic, we should attend instead to the vital point (vital at least for historical if not for terminological purposes) that in the classical period nauklēroi undoubtedly carried on emporia more regularly than did any other group of people except emporoi.

**Those Other than Emporoi and Nauklēroi**

Five categories of people other than emporoi or nauklēroi also engaged in emporia:\(^3\)

suits the puzzling case of the slave agent Lampis ii (no. 13), who is repeatedly (item 2 of no. 13) called the nauklēros of a ship he may or may not own. Casson (1971: 316 n.70) thinks Hégesstratos (no. 5) both the owner and captain of his vessel: "In Demosthenes 52, a rascally nauklēros, caught redhanded attempting barratry, is drowned, and his equally rascally associate then tries to talk the proreus [first mate] and sailors (32,7) into abandoning ship. No captain is mentioned, which seems to suggest that the drowned man had commanded his own vessel . . . ."

\(^5\) See n.6 above for examples of nauklēroi and emporoi who lose lives, ships, or other property to pirates, storms, or wars.

\(^6\) Possibly no. 5 (D. 32,2, 12, 14–15); no. 15 (D.) 34,36–7); no. 21 (D. 35,52–3, 55); possibly no. 23 (D.) 49,31, on which see also item 3 of no. 23 and 36–7; nos. 33 and 34 (see item 2 of no. 33); no. 47 (see item 2); no. 47 (lines 14–16 of IG ii 174); no. 48 (lines 15–21 of IG ii 178) [ML no. 80 = Fornara no. 149]); no. 60 (see item 2).

\(^3\) Possibly no. 5 (D. 32,2, 12, 14–15); no. 18 (D. 35,53); possibly no. 21 (D. 35,52–3, 55, on which see also n.35 in the Catalogue); nos. 33 and 34 (D.) 36–7).

\(^3\) In the second section of Ch. 2 I claim that at least three nauklēroi – Lampis i (no. 2), Dion (no. 15), and Phormion ii (no. 23) – probably did not go to sea with their ships, but that in no way precludes their engaging in trade through agents. There is no evidence that either Lampis or Dion did so, and the evidence for Phormion’s involvement in emporia is both meager and ambiguous. (On Phormion’s emporia see esp. item 3 of no. 23 and 36–7.)

\(^3\) This list extends and corrects Hasebroek’s (1928: 13–15), which is full of errors.
Maritime traders in the ancient Greek world

1. Those who import goods for their domestic and/or business use: Diodotos' family imported grain from the Thracian Chersonese for its own consumption; a farmer in Theodosia imported saltfish from Pantikapaion for his farm-workers (D. 35.32, 34); and Demosthenes accuses Meidias of importing fences, cattle, and door posts for domestic use, as well as pit-props for the silver mines he leased (D. 21.167 and schol.).

On occasion these goods may have been imported duty-free or as outright gifts. The Erythraians for instance (Syll.3 no. 126) grant the Athenian general Conon duty-free imports and exports (surely for his private use), while in other grants the duty-free clause explicitly applies to goods “for his own acquisition” or “for his own household.” To Conon’s son Timotheos goes a gift of timber from Amyntas, King of Macedonia; and Demosthenes is alleged to have received a gift of 1,000 medimnoi of wheat a year as a bribe from the rulers of the Bosporan state (Din. 1.43).

2. Those who finance a trip abroad by taking with them a shipload or more of goods. Examples include: (a) the son of the prominent Bosporan Sopaios, who sent the youth abroad with money and two shiploads of grain (Isok. 17.3–4). (b) Another young man from Pontos who financed his trip to Athens with a shipload of saltfish (Diog. Laert. 6.9). (c) The philosopher Plato, who is said to have paid for his stay in Egypt by selling olive oil (Plut. Sol. 2.8).

3. Soldiers who engage in emporia on military expeditions. Thucydides (6.31.5) mentions that soldiers as well as merchants took goods for barter and sale on the Sicilian expedition.

4. Pirates who engage in emporia by transporting and selling the goods or people they capture.

5. Farmers or craftsmen who engage in emporia by traveling in order to sell elsewhere the goods they themselves grew or made. (In this chapter see further 9–10 and nn.14–16.)