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978-1-107-67851-4 - The Mediterranean in the Ancient World: Second Edition

J. Holland Rose

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AN ALEXANDRIAN GRAIN SHIP

From a Sidonian sarcophagus, probably of the second century A.D.

(From Dr G. Contenau: *La Civilisation phénicienne*, Payot, Paris, Editeur.)

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PREFACE

In this book I make no attempt to construct a naval history of the Mediterranean peoples; for the materials are scrappy and often untrustworthy. Besides, we cannot fully appreciate the motives which actuated the ancients in sea affairs. Our confidence, born of age-long experience and advance in craftsmanship, was wanting to them; they looked on even the usually placid summer Mediterranean with the inner dread of children seeking to cajole a monster with toys. Also, naval questions were then often decided by motives which are incomprehensible to us. Religion prompted Agamemnon to sacrifice his daughter in order to ensure the raising of a wind which would bear the Greek armada Troy-wards; and, 600 years later, an eclipse of the moon induced the highly cultured Athenians to let slip the last opportunity of escaping from the death trap at Syracuse. Can we ever fully understand naval policy working in such a limbo?

There were other complicating and little known factors, such as the inadequate man-power of the city States of the Greeks and Phoenicians, also the difficulties of ensuring a steady supply of seasoned timber and metals for construction, of providing food and drink against a long voyage, and of building up a reserve of oarsmen sufficient to make good the wastage of even an ordinary campaign (see Thucydides, VII, 14). Is it surprising that the

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Greek city States and even Carthage, which relied on mercenaries, often wavered in face of these costly and man-devouring demands? They knew well enough the potent effects of sea control, witness the statements of Herodotus concerning Minos, Polycrates, the Aeginetans, and the crises in the invasion of Greece by Xerxes. Thucydides, who also hailed in Minos the first of sea powers, rightly discerned in that seaman-statesman, Themistocles, the saviour of Greece from Persia. As his tactics at Salamis conduced to that momentous victory, I have described them fully as illustrating his skill in utilizing the peculiarities of his coast-line against an eastern despot who ignored them. Nevertheless, Athens showed little intelligence or steadiness in her subsequent use of the trident; she threw away two fleets and armies on the mad Syracusan venture, and at Ægospotami was ruined by a fairly obvious trick practised by her less clever enemy. Rhodes is the only Greek State that deserves credit for acting consistently as a sea power; for she not only maintained her fleets steadily and skilfully, but adapted her general policy wisely to naval resources and commercial needs. Of Rhodes, however, we know too little to reconstruct adequately that fragment of Greek life.

The same may be said of the elusive annals of Tyre and Sidon; while their offspring, Carthage, however great in commerce, failed utterly at her first clash with a people quite unused to the sea.

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Here again I have sought to expand my narrative; for it concerns the sphere of national character, which is too often left out of count in naval affairs. Indeed, I regard this First Punic War as (next to that of Xerxes) the greatest of the ancient world, both in respect to the war fitness of the two opposing peoples, and to the immeasurable greatness of the results obtained by victorious Rome. On the other hand, I pass over the Peloponnesian War, because, contrary to the initial assertion of Thucydides, I consider that its results were little more than local and temporary, except in so far as it weakened the Greek race.

While I have not sought to write naval history, I have tried to explain the natural advantages favouring early man in his long struggle with the sea; also to point out the salient facts in the development of the ship—from the four days' effort of Odysseus to the great Alexandrian corn ship in which St Paul was wrecked. I have also dwelt on topographical factors, especially the immense importance of the command of the two chief straits, the Hellespont and Messina. In fact, the supremacy of Rome was assured by her firm grip of those key positions, which others had neglected or toyed with loosely. Both in her central position, in her vast reserves of strength and in her ultimately intelligent and persistent use of it, she is the only State of antiquity which deserves to rank as a great and efficient sea power. The others failed in one or

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more of the factors making for supremacy. Accordingly, I have traced in some detail her maritime progress, which dwarfs that of the city States of Greece and Phœnicia, or that of the Hellenistic monarchies. Yet, after winning political supremacy, even she relaxed her energies until the pirates' grip on her foreign corn supplies compelled her to adopt those persistent efforts at sea which alone can exert lasting influence on civilization. How greatly that influence of Rome rested on sea control has, I believe, never been adequately set forth; and to contrast it with the relatively weak and fitful efforts of earlier peoples is my chief object. I have tried to interest not only classical scholars but also the general reader.

In this difficult inquiry I have received valuable advice and criticism on different parts of the subject from the following Cambridge men: Professor F. E. Adcock of King's College, Professor F. C. Burkitt of Trinity College, Professor A. B. Cook of Queens' College, and Messrs H. H. Brindley and M. P. Charlesworth of St John's College, and E. H. Warmington, now of King's College, London; also from Mr H. T. Wade-Gery, sub-Warden of Wadham College, Oxford, and the Rev. A. M. Perkins. While not accepting all their conclusions, I tender to them heartfelt thanks; but, of course, the responsibility for the narrative rests

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on me alone. My thanks are due also to Dr Georges Contenau and his publishers, Messrs Payot, for permission to reproduce as frontispiece the Alexandrian grain ship taken from his work, *La Civilisation phénicienne*.

J. H. R.

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November 1932

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Thanks are due to most of my critics, especially Dr Jules Sottas for his complete review in the *Mariner's Mirror* of July 1934 (pp. 338–348). But some asked too much. Specialists in bristling row demanded full treatment of their own topics, *inter alia*, Egyptian, Minoan and Phœnician navigations, and the Hellenistic period. My aim (as I clearly stated) was not encyclopædic but selective—to set forth in the more important periods or crises the sea influences which told most on the development of the Mediterranean peoples. It was not my duty to delve deep into the details of early shipping and commerce (still only dimly known), to prove the existence of fleets during the Roman Empire, to discuss the “difficulties in Roman Spain” or “the superior seacraft of the Saracens”. (See also Note added on p. 70.) The same critic charged me with writing a defective history, though he agreed with me that “the materials are scrappy and often untrustworthy”. That is why I did not “attempt to construct a naval history”, but did attempt “a difficult inquiry”. (See pp. vii–x.) I have altered details at points where it seemed desirable.

J. H. R.

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