

ANCIENT SHIPS

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Ancient Ships by Cecil Torr

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CECIL TORR

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Cambridge

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PREFACE.

FOR some while I have been at work upon a history of ancient shipping; and the following pages are meant to form a portion of that history. Assuming that ancient shipping means shipping in the Mediterranean between 1000 B.C. and 1000 A.D., and that a history of shipping should deal with everything connected with ships, I find that I have upon my hands a task of no small magnitude; and I do not quite know when this task will be accomplished. That being so, I am bringing out this portion of the work before the rest; this portion being tolerably complete already, and dealing with a question that may conveniently be discussed apart from any other, namely, the character of the ships themselves.

Ancient ships have already formed the subject of dozens of books and pamphlets; and I necessarily have made myself acquainted with the bulk of this literature, from Dr Assmann's latest article in the *Archäologisches Jahrbuch* back to the treatise *De Re Navali* published by L. de Baif in 1536. I do not wish to underrate my obligations to previous writers on the subject, for they have informed me of many things that I was not at all likely to discover for myself. But, taking them altogether, I have found their works more voluminous than valuable. As a rule, they have relied too much upon their predecessors. A great many of their works are nothing more than careless compilations from those of earlier date; and hardly any of them fail to repeat a few exploded

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blunders. And then a great deal of energy has been misdirected. Author after author has written as though the question was simply how he would set to work, if he were called upon to build a trireme; and accordingly there has been a crop of so-called restorations, which are principally works of the imagination, and do not always agree with the evidence on the few points that happen to be known for certain. And while many of the writers on the subject have thus contented themselves with a very slender knowledge of the evidence available, nearly all of them have shewn more zeal in collecting evidence than in sifting it sufficiently to ascertain its value.

The best of the written evidence comes from inscriptions. In digging the foundations for a building at the Peiræus in 1834, the workmen came upon a Roman or Byzantine drain, and found that it was lined with slabs of marble covered with inscriptions. These were some of the inventories of the Athenian dockyards, and a few others have come to light since then, the earliest of them dating from 373 and the latest from 323 B.C. or thereabouts. Unhappily, these inscriptions are shattered and defaced in many places; but where the reading is clear, their testimony is conclusive*.

Next in importance are the statements that occur in ancient literature: but, unfortunately, very few of these are more than passing allusions; and the only one that enters into details is open to suspicion. This is the account that Athenæos gives of some stupendous ships that were built about 400 years before his time. In my opinion, this account is not to be accepted as a description of those particular ships: but I imagine that its authors based their statements on what they knew of ships in general; so that, with due allowance for exaggerations and anachronisms, every detail is

* All these inscriptions are printed in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Atticarum*, vol. ii, nos. 789—812. The original set were edited by August Böckh in 1840 from copies by Ludwig Ross.