

**THE BATTLE OF THE BOATS:  
A TRANSLATION OF A  
NEWLY DISCOVERED  
GREEK PLAY**

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The Battle of the Boats: A Translation of a Newly Discovered Greek Play by Anonymous

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The Battle of the Boats.

A TRANSLATION.

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OXFORD:  
T. & G. SHRIMPTON, BROAD-STREET.

*M. add. 109. c. 95.*



### Translator's Note.

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THE Play of which the following translation is now for the first time offered to the public, bears all the internal marks of genuine Greek Tragedy, and has been assigned by the best critics to some Author subsequent to Sophocles. Imitations of that great Poet are numerous throughout the "Battle of the Boats," and in it is contained much valuable information bearing on ancient boat-racing. My own idea is that Sophocles had the inestimable advantage of having read this Play, as there is more genius and less finish in this than in any of those of Sophocles; but had it been written later, the contrary would probably have been the case.

The argument is as follows: Two Trieremes are about to race, the one endeavouring to catch (*βουμπεῖν*) the other, to which a start is given. The crew of the second boat is in great distress, caused by the contumacy of one of the rowers. The Triararch, lamenting with the Pilot, in despair refuses to take part in the race, and takes to drinking instead. A prophet adds his voice to the gloom of the drama, and a messenger coming to announce the result of the race, begins by narrating an accident that occurred at the start, upon which the Triararch rushes out, apparently to self-destruction; and it is only after his departure that the ultimate success of his boat is announced.

## Dramatis Personæ.

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Kaptán,	. . . . .	A Triereeb.
Koran,	. . . . .	His Pilot.
Number Ten,	. . . . .	A Recalcitrant Oar.
	Prophet, (Sporting.)	
Messenger.		Chorus of Young Men.



## The Battle of the Boats.

- KAPT.** My own dear brother in the boating set<sup>1</sup>,  
Dost thou not know how that of all the woes  
Which persecute a wretched Trierarch,  
What is there left which all-subduing fate  
Will not accomplish on us two to day,  
The last survivors of our last year's crew ?
- KOX.** Ah me ! what new thing bringing hast thou come ?  
Tell me, if this at least is to be told.
- KAPT.** But for the evils of thy friends affect thee nought,  
Thou hast not heard the god-attested vow      10  
That number ten of the third bench has sworn—  
No more to train, nor raw beefsteaks to eat<sup>2</sup>,

<sup>1</sup> L. 1. A beautiful opening, evidently suggested by the opening dialogus of Soph. Ant. : or could Sophocles have copied this, as conjectured by some ?

<sup>2</sup> L. 12. Apparently some cruel atrocities practised as sacrificial rites propitiatory of the river god.



Nor to abjure the cloud-compelling weed<sup>3</sup>;  
 While number five has badly sprained his wrist,  
 And cannot hold his oar ; Ah woe is me,  
 Fate is inscrutable, and we shall lose our race !

KOX. Shall we then escape notice having taken off<sup>4</sup> ?

KAPT. But for to yield brings more disgrace on men  
 Than to fail fighting,—let us take our chance.

CHOR. Foolish is he who wrestleth with Fate. 20

KAPT. Will you not then with objurgating prayers  
 Try to persuade the infatuated ass,  
 While I to appease the jealous river-god  
 Go clothe myself in sacred flannel garb<sup>5</sup> ?

CHOR. My friend, if one may gain reply to this,  
 Though long the task and painful, I would know  
 From you the cause of all those coursing drops  
 That chase each other down your countenance ?

KOX. Ask not ! I fear to tell, nor will you joy to hear.

CHOR. Partly, for I myself being not senseless 30  
 Feel that the day is warm, I understand,—  
 But woe is in your looks, and anger keen  
 Bursts from your lips when you address the crew,  
 And something dread must be the cause, methinks.

KOX. The story of my grief were long to tell,  
 And I have little time to linger here  
 But since you wish it I will tell you all.

CHOR. By telling it one's sorrow is relieved.

<sup>3</sup> L. 13. Some herb chewed which caused the chewer to vomit smoke, I conjecture, but compare lines 70, 72.

<sup>4</sup> L. 17. An obscure passage, I have translated it literally, but it defies explanation.

<sup>5</sup> L. 24. More of the barbarous propitiation, comp. line 12.

KOX. I had a grandmother in days gone by<sup>6</sup>,  
 And oft have heard that dame respectable 40  
 Telling the wisdom of antiquity  
 In ancient saws and legends full of truth,  
 She told me once as I remember it  
 How an old woman dwelling in a shoe<sup>7</sup>  
 (For poverty, my friends, is a stern power :)  
 Had progeny so numerous, poor soul,  
 That what to do with them she could not know,  
 Most like to her I now appear to be,  
 For I am in a strait, and turning oft  
 This way and that, cannot provide escape. 50  
 My father's sire was in his youthful days  
 Extremely short, his offspring shorter still,  
 Who now is fat and cannot jump or run,—  
 I, as you see not fat, but very thin,  
 By fate some three years back came joyously,  
 Leaving the village where my grandfather,  
 And after him my father, owns broad lands,—  
 To seek the praise of skilful pilotage,  
 Which both my sires had won before my time.  
 Success and Luck attendant on my skill 60  
 Sat one on either of the rudder lines  
 As often as I steered our well-rowed ship,  
 But now the heroes of past years are gone  
 And we two only are remaining here,

<sup>6</sup> L. 39. This lengthy speech is rather more in the style of Euripides than Sophocles, but the opening speech of Deianira (Soph. Trach. 1.) is very like it in manner and design. A close inspection of this play makes me suspect plagiarism somewhere.

<sup>7</sup> L. 44. This story does not occur elsewhere in Grecian literature, it seems to be nearly connected with a tale in modern legendary lore.

I and my friend who left but now in sorrow  
 Kaptân, whom all men call renowned as stroke<sup>8</sup>.—  
 Much have we toiled, no little trouble given,  
 In choice of sons of heroes for our crew,  
 But number ten derides and mocks our pains,  
 Smokes and drinks hard, and any thing but  
 trains<sup>9</sup>. 70

But stay, I see him yonder coming in ;  
 Methinks, too, smoke is issuing from his mouth<sup>10</sup> !  
 Ah, woe is me ! I must avoid the sight !

CHOR. Nay, rather go and try Persuasion's power !

KOX. I will ; and thus I steel my wrathful heart,  
 Thinking on former triumphs and success.

SEMI-CHORUS. Shall we go or shall we stay,  
 There is safe to be a row  
 When they hear what each will say ?

SEMI-CHORUS. Koxun's speaking to him now, 80  
 He appears to turn away,  
 Anger reddens on his brow,—

CHOR. Let us stay !  
 No, for they come ! away, away<sup>11</sup> !

KOX. Alas ! what is the use of sense to you<sup>12</sup>,  
 I know full well you've coolly broken through  
 The laws which I am here to institute.

<sup>8</sup> L. 66. Comp. Soph. O. T. 8.

<sup>9</sup> L. 70. This is very obscure, perhaps the MS. is faulty.

<sup>10</sup> L. 72. See line 13 and note.

<sup>11</sup> L. 83. The Chorus, fearful of the power of No. 10's anger, suggests retirement, that it should quite leave the stage would be unprecedented, and indeed we find it speaking at line 99.

<sup>12</sup> L. 84. This dialogue in many points resembles Soph. O. T. 316, et seqq.