

ODYSSEUS' BOAT?

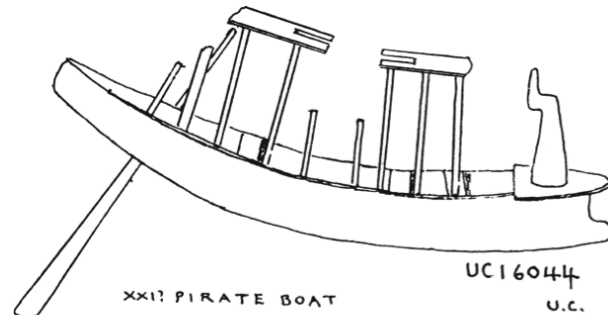
NEW MYCENAEAN EVIDENCE FROM THE EGYPTIAN NEW KINGDOM

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In 1920, at a site called Gurob, near the Faiyum oasis in Middle Egypt, pieces of a small wooden ship model were discovered in a shallow and otherwise empty tomb (see Map 1).

Incorrectly assembled but perceptively labeled as a “Pirate Boat” by the overseer of its excavation, the incomparable Flinders Petrie, the model was paired in antiquity with a *pavois* for carrying as well as a wheeled cart, signifying its use as a cultic object. Following two brief mentions in print by Petrie, in 1927 and 1933, the model was largely forgotten until the turn of the



Petrie 1933: 74 fig. 85

millennium, when it was “rediscovered” in the Petrie Egyptological Museum and republished by in 2013 by Professor Shelley Wachsmann of Texas A&M University. Wachsmann, an authority on seafaring in the Bronze Age Mediterranean, saw in this small, broken model a representation of a Helladic oared galley, an important vessel type which came into use at roughly the same time as the tumultuous transition between the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean – a dating supported by radiocarbon testing of the object, which returned a 2σ calibrated age range of 1256 to 1054 BC (see Table 1 for chronology, and the Institute for the Visualization of History, Inc.’s Gurob page, <http://www.vizin.org/Gurob/Gurob.html>, for images of the ship-cart model).

So why does this ship-cart model, found hundreds of miles from Greece, matter to us? And what is this ostensible connection to Odysseus noted in the title of this lecture?

In order to properly understand these questions, some background is required, both on piracy and naval warfare in the Late Bronze–Early Iron Age transition, and how these events and the tales of Odysseus in *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are intertwined. I’ll present this background, and work back to the Gurob Ship-Cart Model, in concert with relevant passages from Homer. In this case, those passages primarily come from the “Second Cretan Lie” of *Odyssey* 14.199–359, and the retelling of a portion of this false *ainos* to Antinoos in *Odyssey* 17.

Seaborne Threats and Refuge Settlements

Seaborne threats to coastal polities are well documented in the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean long before the transition from the Bronze to the Iron Age, around the end of

the 13th century BC. Like all sailing in the ancient Mediterranean, piracy was a seasonal pursuit, and in many cases the same groups seem to have partaken in it on an annual basis.

Two texts in particular which will be discussed more fully in a bit, one a Hittite document and the other a letter from the Amarna archives, speak of “often raiding the land of Cyprus and taking captives” and of sea raiders who “year by year seize villages,” respectively. Additionally, the Tanis II rhetorical stela of Ramesses II, which will also be discussed shortly, refers to a piratical group called the *Sherden* as those “whom none could ever fight against” – a reference which likely means that they, too, had been raiding coastal settlements for several years prior to that point.

These seaborne threats seem to have increased in number and severity as the Bronze Age reached its end. In the Aegean and the East Aegean–West Anatolian Interface, scenes of naval warfare appear for the first time on Mycenaean pottery in Transitional Late Helladic IIIB–C or in LH IIIC Early, while Linear B tablets from the last days of Pylos *may* – and I stress the *may* here – communicate an effort to coordinate a large-scale defensive action or evacuation in response to a heightened threat from the coast. Three well-known sets of tablets, commonly grouped together, are relevant here. The first, known as the *o-ka* tablets, list the disposition of military personnel – both “watchers” and *e-ge-ta* (= ἠπέτας) – assigned to the task of “guarding the coastal areas,” perhaps in the city’s waning days. The second relevant record is comprised of three texts (PY An 610, An 1, and An 724) commonly grouped together and referred to as “rower tablets” for their references to *e-re-ta* (= ἐρέται) ‘rowers’ being called up to man what was most likely a fleet of galleys. The third, a single tablet (Jn 829), records the collection of bronze from Pylian temples for the purpose of forging “points for spears and javelins” – another martial reference, and a further suggestion of increased military readiness in response to an increasing coastal threat.

If indeed they do reflect a palatial response to a coastal threat, it is possible that they catalogue efforts to coordinate either a general evacuation or an evacuation of palatial elites who sought to escape as their situation became precarious late in the LH IIIB. Some scholars have suggested that Mycenaean elites may have fled to the Cyclades in advance (or in the wake) of the LH IIIB2 destructions, based in part on the appearance of a fortified mansion on an acropolis at Paros on Koukounaries in the transitional LH IIIB2–IIIC Early (*see Map 2*). A third possible purpose of the Rower Tablets, perhaps more likely in light of concurrent evidence from around the eastern Mediterranean, may have been to call up crewmembers in preparation for a direct – and ultimately failed – naval action against an existential seaborne threat.

Further evidence for a growing threat from the sea at this time can be seen in settlement changes and destructions around the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean, including at Odysseus’ fictive home port of Crete, which had been a key node in the international network that characterized the Late Bronze Age in the Eastern Mediterranean. Settlements across Crete appear to have been abandoned or destroyed at the end of the Late Minoan IIIB, while new sites with larger, more concentrated populations were founded in defensible areas of the island, both inland and on coastal hilltops. The inland refuge settlements seem to have been a reaction to a new, or more

serious, threat from the sea. The coastal hilltop settlements, on the other hand, were primarily founded on rocky promontories overlooking the water. These not only provided for early warnings of approaching ships, but they may have been used as bases for seaborne raiding of exactly the type claimed by Odysseus in his Cretan Lie.

Crew Size and Ship Capacity

The number of vessels outfitted by Odysseus may seem like a rather ineffective “fleet” at first blush (Hom. *Od.* 14.248):

ἐννέα νῆας στεῖλα, θοῶς δ' ἔσαγειρ ε το λαός.

Nine ships I fitted out, and the host gathered speedily.

However, it is important to consider two points here. Preliminarily, we must note that “raiders and pirates in this period tended to operate in relatively small groups, whose basic tactic would be fast sweeps to gather up what could be easily taken, whether human captives, livestock, or portable loot.”¹ Second, and of critical import, we must consider the type and potential capacity of the hero’s ships.

It is around this time, the end of the Late Bronze Age, that new maritime technology appears to have been introduced in the Aegean. The Mycenaean ascendancy in the 14th and 13th centuries BC was accompanied by the introduction of the Helladic oared galley, a long, narrow, light vessel propelled primarily by rowers and designed specifically for speed.

The Helladic oared galley represented a true break with prior ship design, as typified by Minoan sailing vessels and Cycladic craft like those depicted on the famous miniature fresco from the West House at Akrotiri. As such, it has rightly been called both “a strategic inflection point in ship architecture” and “the single most significant advance in the weaponry of the Bronze Age Eastern Mediterranean.”²

Sometime around the LH IIB–IIIC transition, the galley – whose invention has been called “the single most significant advance in the weaponry of the Bronze Age Eastern Mediterranean”³ – began to be outfitted with the brailed rig and loose-footed sail. This system consisted of lines attached to the bottom of a sail and run vertically through rings sewn into the front of the sail, which were also called “fairleads,” possibly Homeric κάλοι (cf. Hom. *Od.* 5.260, 12.318). From there, they were run over the yard and to the stern. Using this system, sails could be easily raised, lowered, and otherwise manipulated in a manner similar to a set of Venetian blinds.

¹ Dickinson 2006: 48.

² Wedde 1999: 465

³ *Ibid*

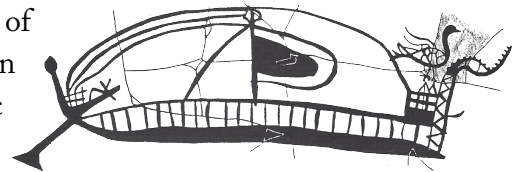
⁴ Hom. *Il.* 1.141, 300, 329, 433, 485; 2.170, 358, 524, 534, 545, 556, 568, 630, 644, 652, 710, 737, 747, 759; 5.550, 700; 8.222, 528; 9.235, 654; 10.74; 11.5, 824, 828; 12.126; 13.267; 15.387, 423; 16.304; 17.381, 699, 945; 18.31; 24.780; *Od.* 2.430; 3.61, 360, 365, 423; 4.646, 731, 781; 6.268; 8.34, 51, 52, 445; 9.122; 10.95, 169, 244, 272, 332, 502, 571; 11.3, 58; 12.186, 264, 276, 418; 13.425; 14.308; 15.218, 258, 269, 416, 503; 16.325, 348, 359; 17.249; 18.84; 21.39, 307; 23.320; 24.152.

This new rigging was a technological revolution in Mediterranean seafaring, and the loose-footed sail would become a mainstay of eastern Mediterranean sailing vessels for the next two millennia. To this point, sailing craft had relied on large square sails held fast by upper and lower yards. While clearly an advantage over oared propulsion alone, this boom-footed squaresail’s use was limited almost entirely to downwind travel.

The manipulation of the sail made possible by the addition of brails and removal of the lower yard (boom), on the other hand, allowed for much greater maneuverability, as well as the ability to sail in directions other than downwind. Another advantage of the loose-footed sail, of course, was that it provided a better environment for shipboard combat, which seems to have begun around this time, as “warriors would not be obstructed by [the lower yard] as they moved about the decks, throwing spears, shooting arrows, etc.”

Thus, once outfitted with the brailed rig, the Helladic oared galley became an ideal vessel for rapid travel and lightning-fast raids on coastal settlements.

Further, painted pottery provides evidence for the use of *pentekonters*, or galleys rowed by fifty men (twenty-five on each side), as early as the 13th century. A Late Helladic III C pyxis from Tholos Tomb 1 at Tragana features a



ship with twenty-four vertical stanchions, thereby separating the rowers’ gallery into twenty-five sections. Stanchions supported the superstructure and partial decking on galleys, while also serving to divide the rower’s gallery in ship representations.



A Late Helladic III B larnax from Gazi on Crete features a large ship with what appears to be twenty-seven stanchions, which could signify a ship crewed by even more than fifty men – though, as the “horizontal ladder” motif used to represent rowers’ galleries on Late Helladic ship depictions also seems to have served to address a certain *horror vacui* on the part of Mycenaean artists, it

seems more likely that the Gazi painter intended to portray a *pentekonter* than a ship with fifty-four oarsmen.

‘Kynos A,’ one of several ship representations found at Pyrgos Livanaton (Homeric Kynos, north of modern Livanates), features 19 oars and schematically-rendered rowers. This vessel may also have been intended as a *pentekonter* that the artist was forced to abbreviate due to space constraints.

The *Odyssey* itself attests to vessels crewed by fifty men, with one being attributed specifically to the Phaeacians (Hom. *Od.* 8.48–54):

κούρω δὲ κρινθέντε δύο καὶ πενήκοντα
βήτην, ὡς ἐκέλευσ’, ἐπὶ θῖν’ ἀλὸς ἀτρυγέτιο.
αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ ῥ’ ἐπὶ νῆα κατήλυθον ἠδὲ θάλασσαν,

νήα μὲν οἳ γε μέλαιναν ἄλός βένθοσδε ἔρυσσαν,
ἐν δ' ἰστόν τ' ἐτίθεντο καὶ ἰστία νηὶ μελαίνῃ,
ἠρτύναντο δ' ἔρετμὰ τροποῖς ἐν δερματίνοισι,
πάντα κατὰ μοῖραν, ἀνά θ' ἰστία λευκὰ πέτασσαν.

And chosen youths, two and fifty, went, as he bade, to the shore of the unresting sea. And when they had come down to the ship and to the sea, they drew the black ship down to the deep water, and placed the mast and sail in the black ship, and fitted the oars in the leathern thole–straps, all in due order, and spread the white sail.

The “two and fifty” mentioned here were most likely fifty rowers, a coxswain, and one additional officer or crewmember. Additionally, in the *Iliad*, Philoctetes is said to have led a fleet of seven *pentekonters*, and Achilles fifty. Crews of roughly this size may also be attested in the aforementioned “rower tablets” from Pylos. Tablet An 610 records approximately 600 oarsmen, while An 1 lists thirty rowers who are likely being summoned to man a single ship, a *triakonter*. If the ships crewed by the men of An 610 were *pentekonters*, the 600–man force would be enough to man only twelve ships. Even if they were *triakonters*, like the vessel crewed by the An 1 rowers, there would only be enough to fully man twenty ships. Whether the ships sailed on Odysseus’ Egyptian raid were in fact fifty–oared *pentekonters* or thirty–oared *triakonters*, these vessel types would have carried between 360 and 450 combatants. This force would certainly have been simultaneously *large* enough to carry out a raid on a coastal settlement, and *small* enough to be highly vulnerable to encounters with organized military units – as seen later in Odysseus’ own tale.

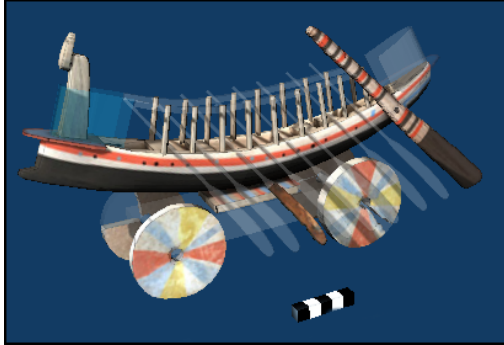
Two late 13th–early 12th c. texts from Ugarit attest to the panic small numbers of ships could create in the inhabitants of coastal targets. The first, RS 20.238, is addressed from King Ammurapi of Ugarit to the King of Alašiya (Cyprus):

“My father, now the ships of the enemy have been coming. They have been setting fire to my cities and have done harm to the land. Doesn’t my father know that all of my infantry and [chariotry] are stationed in Ḫatti, and that all of my ships are stationed in the land of Lukka? They haven’t arrived back yet, so the land is thus prostrate. May my father be aware of this matter. *Now the seven ships of the enemy which have been coming have done harm to us.* Now if other ships of the enemy turn up, send me a report somehow(?) so that I will know.”

The second, RS 20.18, is addressed from the prefect of Alašiya to King Ammurapi:

“But now, *(the) twenty enemy ships* – even before they would reach the mountain (shore) – have not stayed around but have quickly moved on, and where they have pitched camp we do not know. I am writing you to inform and protect you. Be aware!”

Colors



As can be seen in this reconstruction, made possible by the Institute for the Visualization of History, the ship-cart model was painted with a base layer of white, over which black (covering the bottom half of the hull) and red (a stripe of which appears just below the caprail and above the oarports) were added. This preserved polychromatic schema not only makes the model unique among known representations of Helladic ships, but it aligns with – and helps us visually understand – both

Homer's description of the Achaeans' ships as μέλας 'black', his reference to Odysseus' ships specifically as μιλτοπάρηος 'red-cheeked.' Odysseus' ships are also referred to as φοινικοπάρηος 'purple-cheeked,' but most noteworthy is the fact that *only* Odysseus' ships are identified by the "red-" and "purple-cheeked" epithets.

The phrase μέλαινα ναῦς 'black ship' is a common epithet in Homer, appearing 81 times in *Iliad* and *Odyssey* combined.⁴ This reference alludes to the coating of hull planking with dark pitch or asphalt, a practice known from at least the Bronze Age.

References to the use of pitch or asphalt to seal wooden ships can be seen in such diverse ancient examples as the instructions for building Noah's Ark (Gen. 6:14) and a more chronologically relevant letter from Ramesses II to the Hittite king Ḫattušili II, from the mid-13th c. BC, in which the pharaoh apparently writes that he is sending a pair of ships to the Hittite king so that his shipwrights can "draw a copy" of it for the purpose of building a replica, which they are instructed to coat with asphalt so the vessel will remain seaworthy. However, this practice is seen in physical representation for the first time on the Gurob ship-cart model.

Flanking the model, between the pitch-covered hull and the "red cheeks," are rows of black dots, almost certainly intended to represent oarports, whose number and spacing make it probable that the vessel after which the model was patterned was also manned by fifty rowers, and thus is further evidence for the use of these fifty-oared vessels in the years surrounding the Late Bronze–Early Iron transition.

The Need for Speed (and Stealth)

The combination of small raiding parties and heavily militarized targets (with Egypt serving as an excellent example of the latter) meant that success in piratical endeavors was dependent on a

⁴ Hom. *Il.* 1.141, 300, 329, 433, 485; 2.170, 358, 524, 534, 545, 556, 568, 630, 644, 652, 710, 737, 747, 759; 5.550, 700; 8.222, 528; 9.235, 654; 10.74; 11.5, 824, 828; 12.126; 13.267; 15.387, 423; 16.304; 17.383, 639; 19.331; 24.780; *Od.* 2.430; 3.61, 360, 365, 423; 4.646, 731, 781; 6.268; 8.34, 51, 52, 445; 9.322; 10.95, 169, 244, 272, 332, 502, 571; 11.3, 58; 12.186, 264, 276, 418; 13.425; 14.308; 15.218, 258, 269, 416, 503; 16.325, 348, 359; 17.249; 18.84; 21.39, 307; 23.320; 24.152.

combination of speed, stealth, and – above all – the avoidance of conflict with professional soldiers.

Both of Odysseus' tales illustrate the catastrophe that could result from contact with regular troops (Hom. *Od.* 14.262–72 and 17.431–41):

οἱ δ' ὕβρει εἷξαντες, ἐπισπόμενοι μένει σφῶ,
αἶψα μάλ' Αἰγυπτίων ἀνδρῶν περικαλλέας ἀγρούς
πόρθεον, ἐκ δὲ γυναῖκας ἄγον καὶ νήπια τέκνα,
αὐτοὺς τ' ἔκτεινον· τάχα δ' ἐς πόλιν ἵκετ' αὐτή.
οἱ δὲ βοῆς αἶοντες ἄμ' ἠοῖ φαινομένηφιν
ἦλθον· πλήτο δὲ πᾶν πεδίον πεζῶν τε καὶ ἵππων
χαλκοῦ τε στεροπῆς· ἐν δὲ Ζεὺς τερπικέραυτος
φύζαν ἐμοῖς ἐτάροισι κακὴν βάλεν, οὐδέ τις ἔτλη
μεῖναι ἐναντίβιον· περὶ γὰρ κακὰ πάντοθεν ἔστη.
ἔνθ' ἡμέων πολλοὺς μὲν ἀπέκτανον ὀξεί χαλκῶ,
τοὺς δ' ἀναγον ζωοῦς, σφίσι ἐργάζεσθαι ἀνάγκη.

But my comrades, yielding to wantonness, and led on by their own might, straightway set about wasting the fair fields of the men of Egypt; and they carried off the women and little children, and slew the men; and the cry came quickly to the city. Then, hearing the shouting, the people came forth at break of day, and the whole plain was filled with footmen, and chariots and the flashing of bronze. But Zeus who hurls the thunderbolt cast an evil panic upon my comrades, and none had the courage to hold his ground and face the foe; for evil surrounded us on every side. So then they slew many of us with the sharp bronze, and others they led up to their city alive, to work for them perforce.

Thus, both success in piratical endeavors and the very survival of raiding parties required not only the adoption of new sailing technology, but also the development of tactics that could satisfy such a life-and-death need for stealth and celerity. One such tactic was the deliberate beaching of vessels, which allowed attackers to disembark and conduct their raid as quickly as possible. The fastest way to land, and disembark from, a vessel is to row it bow first directly up onto the beach. The aforementioned keel extensions seen on some depictions of Helladic oared galleys, on the Sea Peoples vessels in the naval battle at Medinet Habu, and on the Gurob ship-cart model may have served as beaching aids, allowing raiders' ships to sail more easily up onto land for the purpose of facilitating a rapid disembarkation. Such a technique is described elsewhere in *Odyssey*, when the Phaeacians, returning Odysseus to Ithaca, beach their vessel for the purpose of quickly offloading their human cargo (Hom. *Od.* 13.113–5):

ἔνθ' οἱ γ' εἰσέλασαν, πρὶν εἰδότες· ἡ μὲν ἔπειτα
ἠπαίρω ἐπέκελσεν, ὅσον τ' ἐπὶ ἡμισυ πάσης,
σπερχομένη· τοῖον γὰρ ἐπείγετο χέρσ' ἐρετῶν

The ship, hard-driven, ran up onto the beach for as much as half her length, such was the force the hands of the oarsmen gave her.

A Growing Threat in the Eastern Mediterranean

Traces of the sea raiders referenced in the aforementioned texts from the last days of Ugarit can be found in several other Late Bronze Age literary sources, as well. The Hittites in particular, who were not historically inclined toward maritime affairs, seem to have been forced to look to the sea with more interest in the waning years of the Late Bronze Age, possibly as a result of the threat posed by an increase in coastal raiding.

These raiders may be associated with (or seen as a precursor to) the ‘Sea Peoples’ of Ramesside Egyptian fame. These heterogeneous, shifting coalitions of foreigners, whose name comes from the Egyptian Pharaoh Merneptah’s (1213–1202 BC) Great Karnak Inscription (ca. 1207 BC) and from the writings of French Egyptologist Gaston Maspero, included the aforementioned *Sherden* among their various members.

Two texts especially stand out in this regard. In the first, the Hittite king writes to the prefect of Ugarit about the *Šikala* “who live on ships,” and requests that a Ugaritian who had been taken captive by them be sent to Ḫattuša so that the king can question him about this people and their homeland:

“...I, His Majesty, had issued him an order concerning Ibnadušu, whom the people from *Šikala* [LÚ.MEŠ KUR.URU.Ši-ka-la-iu-ú] – who live on ships – had abducted.

Herewith I send Nirga’ili, who is *kartappu* with me, to you. And you, send Ibnadušu, whom the people from *Šikala* had abducted, to me. I will question him about the land *Šikala*, and afterwards he may leave for Ugarit again.”

The *Šikala* have been connected to two groups of Sea Peoples from the records of Merneptah and Ramesses III: the *Shekelesh* and the *Sikil* or ‘*Tjeker*’. The *Shekelesh* appear alongside the *Sherden* in the aforementioned Great Karnak Inscription and the Athribis Stela, two accounts of Merneptah’s battle against an invading coalition of Libyans and Sea Peoples. The *Shekelesh* also appear in Ramesses III’s records at Medinet Habu, while the *Sherden* seem to be mentioned in their place in Ramesses’ posthumous Great Harris Papyrus. The *Sikil/Tjeker*, on the other hand, are included in both of Ramesses III’s major accounts.

The second text, attributed to the last Hittite king, Šuppiluliuma II (ca. 1207–1178 BC), mentions a series of three naval skirmishes against the “ships of Alašiya,” followed by a land battle, presumably against the same people he had fought at sea:

“The ships of Alašiya met me in the sea three times for battle, and I smote them; and I seized the ships and set fire to them in the sea.

But when I arrived on dry land(?), the enemies from Alašiya came in multitude against me for battle. I [fought] them, and [.....] me [.....]...”

The latter is reminiscent of Ramesses III’s (1183–1152 BC) claims to have fought land and sea battles against migratory Sea Peoples, which would have taken place during this same chronological timeframe. Though almost always ascribed to Ramesses III’s eighth year (1175 BC), these migratory land and sea invasions were important enough to be mentioned in no less than five inscriptions at the pharaoh’s mortuary temple at Medinet Habu. A particularly relevant portion of Ramesses III’s Great Inscription of Year 8 reads:

“Those who reached my frontier [on land], their seed is not, their heart and their soul are finished forever and ever. Those who came forward together on the sea, the full flame was in front of them at the river–mouths, while a stockade of lances surrounded them on the shore. They were dragged in, enclosed, and prostrated on the beach, killed, and made into heaps from tail to head. Their ships and their goods were as if fallen into the water”

This similarity in chronology and narrative raises the question of whether Šuppiluliuma was facing repeated waves of raiders or migrant warriors, while clearly reinforcing the aforementioned threat felt from the previously distant Mediterranean coast during the Hittite Empire’s last days. Rather than belonging to the Alašiyian state, it is likely that the vessels against which Šuppiluliuma fought were called “ships of Alašiya” because they had either sailed eastward via, or launched from a captured portion of, Cyprus. While the island had long been a target of seaborne raids, textual evidence also supports the use of Cyprus as a base for launching raids against coastal polities in the eastern Mediterranean in the Late Bronze Age, much as Odysseus claims to have done from Crete in his tale to Eumaios.

Αἴγυπτόνδε

Two more relevant passages from the *Odyssey*:

αὐτὰρ ἔπειτα
Αἴγυπτόνδε με θυμὸς ἀνώγει ναυτίλλεσθαι,
νῆας ἐὺ στείλαντα σὺν ἀντιθέοις ἐτάροισιν.

And then to Egypt did my spirit bid me voyage with my godlike comrades, when I had fitted out my ships with care.

‘ἀλλὰ Ζεὺς ἀλάπαξε Κρονίων – ἤθελε γάρ που –
ὅς μ’ ἅμα ληϊστῆρσι πολυπλάγκτοισιν ἀνῆκεν
Αἴγυπτόνδ’ ἰέναι, δολιχὴν ὁδόν, ὄφρ’ ἀπολοίμην.
στῆσα δ’ ἐν Αἴγυπτῳ ποταμῷ νέας ἀμφιελίσσας.

But Zeus, son of Cronos, brought all to naught – so, I ween, was his good pleasure – who sent me forth with roaming pirates to go to Egypt, a far voyage, that I might meet my ruin; and in the river Aegyptus I moored my curved ships.

The politics of the Aegean, Anatolia, and the Levantine coast were not the only victims of seaborne attackers during the Late Bronze Age and in the years surrounding the Late Bronze–Iron I transition. Evidence from the mid–14th c. BC onward shows that the land of the pharaohs bore no special immunity to maritime marauding, either. The historical precedents for Odysseus’ raid on Egypt can be seen both *directly*, in accounts of coastal attacks, and *indirectly*, in records of defensive measures taken to combat such assaults. An example of the latter can be seen in an inscription of Amenhotep son of Hapu, a public official under Amenhotep III (1388–1351 BC), which refers to the need to secure the Nile Delta against a seaborne threat:

“I placed troops at the heads of the way(s) to turn back the foreigners in their places. The two regions were surrounded with a watch scouting for the Sand–rangers. *I did likewise at the heads of the river–mouths, which were closed under my troops except to the troops of royal marines.*”

This stationing of marines at the “river–mouths” reinforces the vulnerability of raiding parties to encounters with organized military forces.

Additionally, in a letter to Akhenaten (1351–1334 BC) from the el–Amarna archive, the King of Alašiya responds to an accusation of Cypriot involvement in a raid on Egypt by recounting annual raids carried out by “men of Lukki” against his own villages (EA 38):

“Why, my brother, do you say such a thing to me, “Does my brother not know this?” As far as I am concerned, I have done nothing of the sort. Indeed, *men of Lukki, year by year, seize villages in my own country.*”

“He Has Destroyed the Warriors of the Great Green...”

Further evidence for such threats can be found in the formulaic Aswan stela of Ramesses II’s (1279–1213 BC) second year, in which he claims among other conquests to have “destroyed the warriors of the Great Green (Sea),” so that Lower Egypt can “spend the night sleeping peacefully.”



The Egyptians first give a specific name to these troublesome sea raiders in the aforementioned Tanis II rhetorical stela, one of twelve “triumph–hymn” stelai originally erected at Ramesses II’s capital of Pi–Ramesse and later transshipped to the eastern Delta city of Tanis. The stela tells of the “*Sherden*...whom none could withstand” who “sailed in warships from the midst of the Sea,” and claims the pharaoh

defeated and imprisoned them:

“(As for) the Sherden of rebellious mind, whom none could ever fight against, who came bold-[hearted, they sailed in], in warships from the midst of the Sea, those whom none could withstand;

[He plundered them by the victories of his valiant arm, they being carried off to Egypt] – (even by) King of S & N Egypt, Usimare Setepenre, Son of Re, Ramesses II, given life like Re.”

This recalls the catastrophe that befell Odysseus’ raiding party at the hands of the pharaoh’s soldiers, cited in part above (*Od.* 14.268–84):

ἐν δὲ Ζεὺς τερπικέραυτος
φύζαν ἐμοῖσ' ἐτάροισι κακὴν βάλεν, οὐδέ τις ἔτλη
μεῖναι ἐναντίβιον· περὶ γὰρ κακὰ πάντοθεν ἔσθη.
ἔνθ' ἡμέων πολλοὺς μὲν ἀπέκτανον ὄξεϊ χαλκῷ,
τοὺς δ' ἄναγον ζωοῦς, σφίσιν ἐργάζεσθαι ἀνάγκη.
αὐτὰρ ἐμοὶ Ζεὺς αὐτὸς ἐνὶ φρεσὶν ᾧδε νόημα
ποίησ'· ὥς ὄφελον θανέειν καὶ πότμον ἐπισπεῖν
αὐτοῦ ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ· ἔτι γὰρ νῦν με πῆμ' ὑπέδεκτο·
αὐτίκ' ἀπὸ κρατὸς κυνέην εὐτυκτον ἔθηκα
καὶ σάκος ᾧμοιῖν, δόρυ δ' ἔκβαλον ἔκτοσε χειρός·
αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ βασιλῆος ἐναντίον ἤλυθον ἵππων
καὶ κύσα γούναθ' ἐλών· ὁ δ' ἐρύσατο καὶ μ' ἐλέησεν,
ἐς δίφρον δέ μ' ἔσας ἄγεν οἴκαδε δάκρυ χέοντα.
ἦ μὲν μοι μάλα πολλοὶ ἐπήϊσσον μελήησιν,
ἰέμενοι κτεῖναι – δὴ γὰρ κεχολώατο λίην –
ἀλλ' ἀπὸ κεῖνος ἔρυκε, Διὸς δ' ὠπίζετο μῆνιν
ξινίου, ὅς τε μάλιστα νεμεσσοῦται κακὰ ἔργα.

But Zeus who hurls the thunderbolt cast an evil panic upon my comrades, and none had the courage to hold his ground and face the foe; for evil surrounded us on every side. So then they slew many of us with the sharp bronze, and others they led up to their city alive, to work for them perforce. But in my heart Zeus himself put this thought—I would that I had rather died and met my fate there in Egypt, for still was sorrow to give me welcome. Straightway I put off from my head my well-wrought helmet, and the shield from off my shoulders, and let the spear fall from my hand, and went toward the chariot horses of the king. I clasped, and kissed his knees, and he delivered me, and took pity on me, and, setting me in his chariot, took me weeping to his home. Verily full many rushed upon me with their ashen spears, eager to slay me, for they were exceeding angry.

But he warded them off, and had regard for the wrath of Zeus, the stranger's god,
who above all others hath indignation at evil deeds.

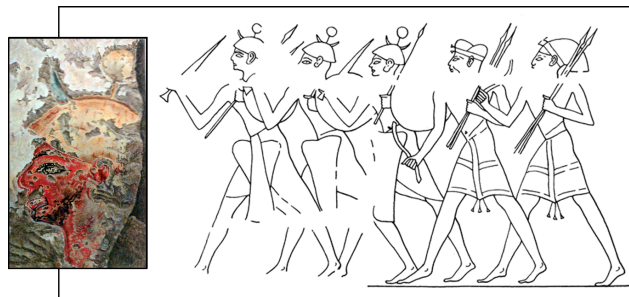
Life, Prosperity and Health in the Land of the Pharaohs (Hom. *Od.* 14.285–6):

ἔνθα μὲν ἐπτάετες μένον αὐτόθι, πολλὰ δ' ἄγαιρα
χρήματ' ἀν' Αἰγυπτίους ἄνδρας· δίδοσαν γὰρ ἅπαντες.

There then I stayed seven years, and much wealth did I gather among the Egyptians,
for all men gave me gifts.

So why would a model of a Helladic oared galley be buried in a Middle Egyptian tomb, and to what degree does the connection to Odysseus still hold?

The Tanis II rhetorical stela marks the first of many Ramesside claims to have defeated and captured named maritime foes. Despite Ramesses II's typical bombast, though, not all of those *Sherden* who were “carried off to Egypt” languished in prison or spent the rest of their days serving the state as slave laborers, as the survivors of Odysseus' fictional raiding party were said to have done. Rather, like Odysseus himself, they appear to have been welcomed into Egypt and allowed to profit from the employment of their unique skills, which were utilized in the direct service of the pharaoh. Already in the fifth year of Ramesses II's reign, for example, *Sherden* appear as members of the Pharaonic guard at the battle of Qidš (1275 BC) against the Hittite forces of Muwatallis II – surely a place of high honor among soldiers, as well as one requiring great trust.



The place of honor afforded those *Sherden* who gave allegiance to Egypt can be seen in §75 of the Great Harris Papyrus, wherein Ramesses III addresses “the officials and leaders of the land, the infantry, the chariotry, the *Sherden*, the many bowmen, and all the souls of Egypt.” Whatever their military role by this point, it is noteworthy that *Sherden* is the only *ethnikon* employed in the pharaoh's address to his people, the rest of whom are grouped solely by rank, title, and occupation.

Like the Odysseus of the Cretan Lie, the importance of the *Sherden* within Egyptian military and society also earned them significant material benefits. This can be seen in particular in the Wilbour Papyrus, a land registry from the reign of Ramesses V covering portions of the Fayum region of Middle Egypt – including Gurob.

If the Gurob ship-cart model belonged to one of these *Sherden* or their descendant, as Wachsmann has proposed, then members of this group may have been sailing Helladic oared

galleys as they plundered the coasts of the eastern Mediterranean – a fact that would tie them even more closely to the culture that spawned Homer’s *Odyssey*.

Among those listed in this text as land owners and occupiers are 109 *Sherden*, “standard-bearers of the *Sherden*,” and “retainers of the *Sherden*.” Of the 59 plots assigned to *Sherden* in the Wilbour Papyrus, 42 are five *arourae* in size – an allocation commensurate with priests, standard bearers, stablemasters, and others of similarly high rank rather than with soldiers, who were generally allotted three *arourae* (an *aroura* is 100 square cubits, or approximately 2/3 of an acre). Further, the wealth bestowed on the pharaoh’s *Sherden* in the form of land was not limited to a temporary inhabitation of this key Middle Egyptian oasis. Rather, their significant contributions were repaid with an equally significant reward: land they could pass down through the generations.

It would be far from surprising if *Sherden* fighters, like Odysseus, also accumulated significant material wealth in addition to land. Papyrus Anastasi I, a text from the 19th and 20th dynasties that discusses proper preparation and provisioning for a mission to Canaan, lists 520 *Sherden* among a mixed force of 5,000 soldiers. This suggests that, by midway through Ramesses II’s reign, they had already become a standard component of Egypt’s northern expeditionary forces. With regular exposure to warfare most likely came regular opportunities for plunder, which could be both taken individually and divided among the conquering forces after a successful siege or battle – much in the way that *Sherden* pirates and Odysseus’ raiding crews likely divided the booty after their own successful raids (Hom. *Od.* 14.232–4):

τῶν ἐξαιρεύμην μενοεικέα, πολλὰ δ’ ὀπίσσω
λάγχανον: αἶψα δὲ οἶκος ὀφέλλετο, καὶ ῥα ἔπειτα
δεινός τ’ αἰδοῖός τε μετὰ Κρήτεσσι τετύγμην.

Of this I would choose what pleased my mind, and much I afterwards obtained by lot. Thus my house straightway grew rich, and thereafter I became one feared and honored among the Cretans.

Rather than being a benefit of Egyptian generosity, then, it seems likely that the wealth Odysseus characterizes in *Od.* 14.286 as being amassed via gifts from the Egyptians was likewise gained through a division of plunder from further raids in which he was a (now-legitimate) participant.

Conclusion

The “master myth” of the *Odyssey* is a tapestry woven from many fascinating micronarratives, each of which has its own individual grounding (or lack thereof) in historical truth. Though the stories considered here – those told by Odysseus to Eumaios and Antinoos, respectively – are portrayed as fiction within the Homeric macronarrative, several of their elements have precedent in archaeological and literary records dating to the Late Bronze Age and the Late Bronze–Iron I transition (LH IIIB–IIIC). This is not to say that the Homeric epics in their current (or

classical) form were composed in, or are entirely reflective of, this period. After all, whatever the date of “Homer,” countless elements of both *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are clearly anachronistic in their fictive setting, or are wholly appropriate to various periods within the first millennium BC. However, a later date of composition and the reflection of geography and events that fit accurately in an earlier age (in this case, in the fictive period of the epic’s setting) are not mutually exclusive realities.

Further, Odysseus’ fictitious experiences have a remarkable analogue in a very real and very specific group of sea raiders, the “*Sherden of the Sea*,” who set upon Egypt in their ships around the same time Odysseus claims to have carried out his ill-fated raid. This people is of uncertain origin, but the combination of the Medinet Habu reliefs and the Gurob ship-cart model is evidence connecting them to polychromatic, fifty-oared galleys of the type both seen on Late Helladic pottery, and described by Homer in terms reserved specifically for Odysseus’ ships.

Further, their story is extraordinarily similar to the tales that make up Odysseus’ tales to Eumaios and Antinoos: years of successful maritime raiding, an ill-fated attempt to raid the Nile Delta in oared galleys, and a subsequent sojourn in Egypt, during which they were valued as a part of society and made prosperous for their efforts.

The two stories diverge as Odysseus’ seven year stay in Egypt draws to a close: while the *nostos* that makes up the *Odyssey*’s macronarrative dictates that its hero move on, those *Sherden* who settled in Egypt were able to create a new home for themselves in the land of the pharaohs, complete with wives, children, and land they could pass down through generations.

And it may be one of these immigrants, or one of their descendants, who owned and was buried with the remarkable polychromatic ship-cart model from Gurob, which stands now as one of our most unique – and most intriguing – links between the worlds of the Aegean, Egypt, and the Sea Peoples, as well as the world presented in the Homeric epics.

Thank you.

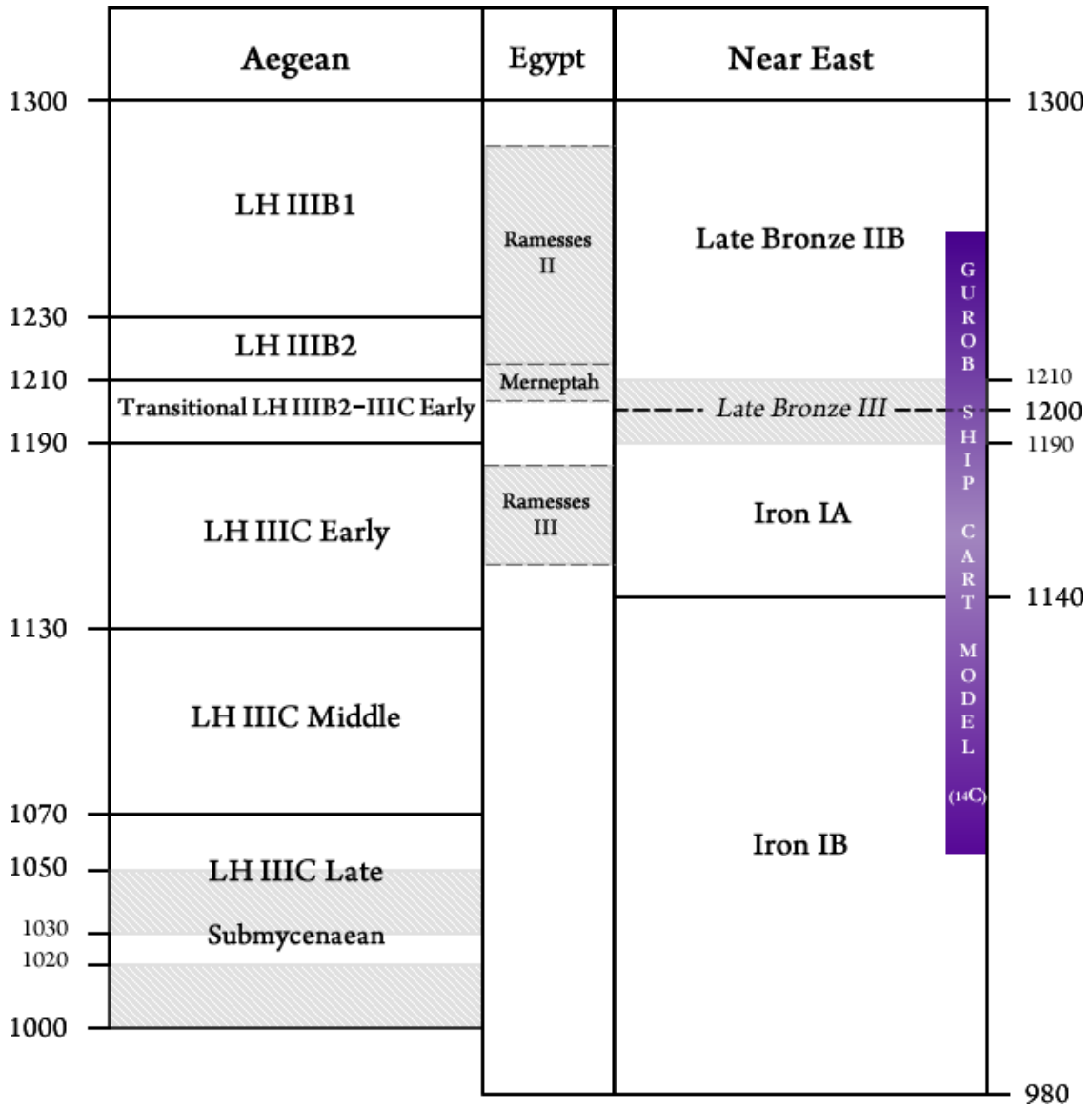
Map 1. Location of Gurob in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean world.



Map 2. Location of Paros among the Cyclades in the Aegean Sea.



Table 1. Comparative chronology of the Late Bronze IIB and Iron I, Late Helladic IIIB-C and Submycenaean, and relevant Pharaonic reigns, with radiocarbon date range of the Gurob Ship-Cart Model.



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