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ARCH 2250: Island Archaeology
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Pillagers and Plunderers:

An Archaeological and Theoretical Approach to Piracy in the Islands of the Mediterranean

From the Balearics to Cyprus; and its Suppression from Ramesses to Pompey

Introduction

> As for the foreign countries, they made a conspiracy in their islands. All at once the lands were on the move, scattered in war; no country could stand before their arms…they desolated its people, and its land was like that which has never come into being…They laid their hands upon the lands to the very circuit of the earth, their hearts confident and trusting: Our plans will succeed![1]

Pirates have always been elusive characters in the maritime world. Their swift ships have allowed these thieves at sea to escape detection, and their island lairs have provided refuge from the punishments of society. But pirates are equally elusive in temporal terms. The same ships that allow pirates to evade authorities disappear quickly into the bottoms of the sea, and the pirate settlements soon become settled by more lawful inhabitants. The Mediterranean Sea, rich in piracy throughout history, has provided virtually no evidence that corsairs were ever a problem in the ancient world. Archaeologists, therefore, are grateful for the abundant textual records that discuss the depredations of pirates beginning in the earliest times of sea travel. These texts along with an optimistic archaeology can be used to understand the origins of pirates, the reasons for their illicit behavior, their effects on ancient trade, and, ultimately, how their deviant behavior is suppressed. From the perspective of island archaeology, the Mediterranean Sea provides an ideal place of study.

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[1] Year 8 Inscription, Medinet Habu

In historical texts and romanticized fiction alike, pirates and islands have been inextricably linked. Pirates subsist as bandits of the sea, who, like any marauders, need not only vulnerable prey but also a relatively isolated hide-out. Pirates have evidently practiced their dark and sullen craft since the dawn of recorded history. The epigraph above, taken from the mortuary temple at Medinet Habu serves as an early reference to piracy. The Egyptians were clearly preoccupied with the mysterious Sea Peoples, a "conspiracy" of raiders who threatened the Nile Delta throughout the New Kingdom until their defeat by Ramesses III. Ramesses recognized the connection of pirate and island, an insight which helped him mount a successful strategy to rid the Mediterranean of the Sea Peoples.

Later texts from other parts of the Mediterranean also remark upon the affiliation of pirates with islands. Odysseus' fictional tale of his five day excursion from Crete to Egypt, resulting in his "eager companions'" plundering of the beautiful fields, presents the earliest reference in the ancient Greek canon to the geographical preference for islands as places of origins for corsairs. In literature and popular culture, the primary requirement for a romanticized pirate is a desolate island for the concealment of treasure. Robert Louis Stevenson alone is largely responsible for the "X-marks-the-spot" and "one-legged-thief-with-parrot" image of pirates. The very title of Stevenson's 1883 children's novel, *Treasure Island*, underscores the importance of islands to the pirate ideal, and the recent "Pirates of the Caribbean" movie trilogy ensures that this connection will endure. Although the association of pirates and islands can be attributed to recent events in popular culture, as well as to simple commonsense marine banditry, archaeology can also explain why pirates chose to lurk near islands.

With civilization came commerce, and with commerce came pirates. And pirates flocked

to islands just as surely as ancient agriculturalists migrated to river valleys. Islands tend to provide everything a pirate needs and were "naturally as important to piracy as to other forms of seaborne traffic" (Horden and Purcell 2000: 388). Though pirates were essentially sea people, as seen by the Egyptians, even people accustomed to spending the majority of their time at sea required a harbor to use as a base for their depredations. Though coastal mainland sites could and did serve as adequate seats for pirate groups, the inherent isolation and bounded-ness of many islands provided sea bandits perfect lurking grounds, far from settled communities and the jurisdiction of mainland governments. Islands also served an advantageous position for corsairs in that major trade routes necessarily followed coastal areas, often using stepping-stone islands to cross large expanses of sea. These routes could not be avoided, because of prevailing winds (Ormerod 1924: 16). While many of these stepping-stone islands were unsuitable for major settlements of agricultural societies, they were acceptable to marauders who hunted for their resources afar. Indeed, these stepping-stone islands and rocky promontories would naturally conceal any marine raiders, allowing them to wait for other ships to pass out in the open (Ormerod 1924: 15).

The isolation of islands would also provide vulnerable settlements for attack. Thucydides observes that the oldest settlements were located as far inland as possible, both on the islands and the mainland, in order to avoid the coasts and the pirates who lurked there (Ormerod 1924: 38). But often this strategy did not provide sufficient security, even on the largest islands. Pirates could benefit from all sizes and varieties of islands. The same isolation that assisted pirates in their hiding could and often did bring about the end of early, as well as established, settlements. Pirates would thus exploit the benefits and burdens of island life – whereas the isolation and

depauperation of some islands was a disadvantage for lawful inhabitants, pirates would seek out such areas for their bases.

Therefore, the Mediterranean's geography would seem to be ideal for pirates (Semple 1916). Many of the islands of the Mediterranean are inherently isolated from the mainland (Broodbank 2000; Evans 1973), and the jurisdiction of law. Even the most skilled seamen had to return to land at the end of the day, especially during winter, when navigation was impractical (Ormerod 1924: 18). Thus, pirates tended to lurk in waters that were clustered with islands. The Cyclades, then, along with the numerous groups of islands in the Aegean Sea were especially favorable for pirates. Ormerod (1924: 19-26) outlines the importance of numerous islands to the Mediterranean corsair. Strabo (XIV, 635; Ormerod 1924: 20) describes Tragia, lying in the Aegean Sea, as harboring pirates, and, indeed, pirates captured Julius Caesar nearby in 76 BC.

Even a cursory glance at a map of the Mediterranean, and specifically, the Aegean, reveals a dotted landscape of small islands; however, zooming in even further, one can make up a seemingly infinite number of tiny islets and promontories. Ships, compelled by prevailing winds and currents to travel past these small islands would often be almost surrounded, and one can imagine even the bravest of captains feeling anxious traveling through such a channel. The Kythira Channel, in the Ionian Islands had a terrible reputation for pirates throughout history (Ormerod 1924: 20). Though the Mediterranean islands awarded the pirate with the perfect hunting ground, islands did not provide the only means for shelter, as the king of Alashiya (Cyprus) was forced to remind the Egyptian pharaoh in one of the Amarna correspondences (written two centuries before the inscription at Medinet Habu) that the Lukki (likely the Lycians) were not islanders and "year by year, seize villages in my own country" (EA 38). In addition, the

Tyrrhenians, sheltered by the Apennines (mountains creating island-like protection on the mainland), were notorious for their pillaging by land and sea. Regardless, pirates generally sought out islands, and islands clearly assisted their work.

What is a Pirate?

> Enemies are those upon whom the Roman people has declared war publicly or who have themselves declared war upon it: the rest are termed bandits or pirates.[1]

Before proceeding, a definition of piracy is in order. Certainly pirates came in many distinctive forms in ancient times, and different societies would have viewed corsairs in contrasting lights. Just as the pejorative term "terrorist" is employed in current conflicts by polemicists on all sides, so too, what modern historians would likely call established, or "civilized" societies of the ancient world were seen as barbarians or pirates by other states who suffered their attacks. Philip de Souza, therefore, is skeptical of accusations of piracy, proposing the most basic definition of pirates as "armed robbers whose activities normally involve the use of ships" (2000: 1). He underscores the fact that pirates seldom identify themselves as such; their victims give them the label. Thus, the definition of pirate has changed across time. Ormerod is also careful to distinguish between piracy and other acts of war, which he classes as privateering (1924: 60). Ormerod, however, affirms that today's definition of pirate has remained largely unchanged since the Roman Empire.

Indeed, the English word "pirate" derives from the Latin *pirata* and the Greek *peirates*, meaning "one who makes attempts or attacks on ships" (Ormerod 1924: 59). However, the Greek *peirates* only appears in the mid-third century BC in an Attic inscription from Rhamnous describing a ransoming and exchange of prisoners (de Souza 2000). Although this event took

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[1] Ulpian, *Dig*. 49.15.24

place during a time of war between Ptolemaic and Macedonian forces, the inscription seems

unrelated, establishing *peirates* as a plunderer who does so of his own volition. Before the term

peirates first appears, the Greeks seem to have used *leistes*, probably equivalent to today's

"bandit." Although the tenth-century Byzantine lexicon *The Suda* (1454 and 474) attempts to

distinguish *peirates* from *leistes* (both meaning bandit, but the former meaning at sea and the

latter meaning on land), both Polybius and Achilles Tatius use the two words in the same

context, suggesting that they are synonyms (de Souza 2000: 7-9). The Greeks did seem to have a

word equivalent to the English "pirate," *katapontistes*, literally translated as "one who throws

into the sea." This word, however, was rarely used regularly in texts. The Latin language has

similar ambiguities regarding words for pirates and bandits, but when necessary, Greek and

Roman authors alike would use adjectives or qualifying phrases to make their meaning apparent.

Though the language used to describe the various types of plunderers in the ancient

Mediterranean may not seem vital to the purpose of this paper, the distinction between robbers at

sea and those on land is obviously crucial in order to address piracy from the perspective of

island archaeology. Unfortunately, scholars widely disagree as to the definition of piracy. Philip

de Souza goes as far as to claim that those who plunder coastal settlements, even if the attackers

themselves use ships, cannot be said to practice piracy (de Souza 2000: 17), which would

instantly disqualify the Sea Peoples whose tale began the current paper. However, other

complications arise, especially when landlubbers take to the sea to expose further victims to

raids. Such situations introduce a temporal quality to pirates. Indeed, a group of peoples can be

established and lawful for a few centuries and take to piracy the next, after catastrophes and in

times of need. These same peoples, of course, will do whatever they need to survive, and may

offer themselves for profit as mercenaries during war. Though popular belief might give the

impression that a pirate only plunders for his own benefit, troubled people would often accept

any offer from a nation to fight for profit. However, a definition of pirate specifies that he acts

without commission from a sovereign nation. Thus, the answer to the question "What is a

pirate?" depends not only on geography but on time. If the state of piracy fluctuates so easily,

more questions arise. Does the existence of a powerful society necessitate the existence of a

scavenging group? In other words, is piracy a natural phenomenon, in which the suppression of

one group of plunderers during brief periods creates a vacuum that is soon filled by another

collection of corsairs? We have seen that the Mediterranean provides countless coves and islets

as the ideal settings for piracy to thrive, but did the sea also create the perfect place for piracy to

become established, remaining an inevitable danger throughout ancient history? The answer to

these questions may lie in the very islands and coasts that became both the targets of and bases

for piracy.

Origins of Piracy

> For the Grecians in old time, and of the barbarians both those on the continent who lived near the
> sea, and all who inhabited the islands, after they began to cross over more commonly to one
> another in ships, turned to piracy, under the conduct of their most powerful men, with a view both
> to their own gain, and to maintenance for the needy, and falling upon towns that were unfortified,
> and inhabited like villages, they rifled them, and made most of their livelihood by this means.[1]

In order to understand the questions posed in the previous section, the origins and

beginnings of piracy must be analyzed. Of course, the farther back in time one examines the

history of piracy, the more scant the written sources become. Because some scholars rely solely

on textual records, the evidence of piracy as defined above is severely lacking (de Souza 2000:

15) before the first millennium BC, when Homer first uses the term *peirates*. Ignoring de Souza's

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[1] Thucydides, I, 5

earlier comment that pirates are only those who plunder other ships at sea, we can certainly

extend the origins of piracy to the second millennium BC, based on Egyptian sources, which

though they may not explicitly describe piracy as a concept, outline events involving seafarers

plundering the coasts of the Levant, as well as Cyprus and Egypt. Before the Amarna Letters,

documented evidence of piracy disappears into the disintegrative powers of the Earth, but as long

as ships carrying valuable cargoes passed across the Mediterranean, piracy must have existed in

some form. Indeed, terrestrial trade was dangerous throughout the Near East, due to land bandits

hiding in the rugged wadis and mountains (Astour 1995).

Thus, as long as people can be tempted by the riches of others moving unprotected

through unknown territory, and even across well-traveled routes on the Mediterranean Sea,

raiders have remained a significant threat. Ormerod even suggests, quite contrary to de Souza's

statement, that piracy and robbery have been a form of livelihood offered by the sea since the

time when people first explored the sea in ships (Ormerod 1924: 13). Though to prove this

hypothesis would be impossible, in terms of textual evidence, for the Mediterranean Sea was first

explored in prehistory (see Ormerod 1924: 94 for a suggestion that the accounts of raids in the

Odyssey may be inspired by the earliest voyages into the Mediterranean); while on the basis of

archaeological findings, it would remain difficult because of higher, modern sea levels and a

general dearth of evidence relating to piracy across the millennia. As discussed above, however,

an analysis of early settlements being constructed progressively farther from the coasts could be

interpreted as an increase in the activities of pirates. In such an investigation, important places to

look would, of course, be the largest and first colonized islands. A search for the evidence of

piracy before the settlement of the Mediterranean islands (when the islands were utilized, but no

permanent societies had been established) would be almost hopeless.

However, the suggestion that piracy would have existed even when the first, brave explorers sailed into the unknown sea is not entirely unfounded. Certainly, when the Mediterranean Sea was first explored, no later than the 11th Millennium BC (Broodbank 2006: 208), banditry by land would have proven more profitable. But as contact and trade between islands and mainland increased, which is most clearly apparent in the finds of obsidian from the island of Melos at Franchthi Cave in the Argolid, piracy likely increased proportionally, as suggested for later periods by Horden and Purcell (2000). Thus, piracy, at least on a minor, undetectable level, may have existed during the Neolithic, as the islands of the Mediterranean were first populated.

During this initial population of the islands, an origin of the earliest form of piracy is proposed. Again, the following cannot be conclusively proven due to lack of archaeological evidence and absence of any written records. But the potential existence of piracy on a small level is highly likely. This "small level" may have involved similar actions taken by "true" pirates much later, however with fewer, less organized corsairs seizing ships, goods, and even people over smaller distances. Early in the history of seafaring, most piratical activity would have been carried out merely for subsistence, as, again, banditry by land would have been more profitable. Thus, plunderers by land would be unlikely to take to the seas simply to find new sources for pillage. Though speculating about the motivations of a society in the ancient, ancient past is treading on soft ground, if any peoples chose to explore the seas, they would have been more likely to do so in order to find arable land or better fishing areas, not to find more people on whom to prey (until those people began exchanging goods worth plundering). Indeed, in 10,000

BC, few seafarers even existed to plunder. However, when the islands of the Mediterranean began to be first settled, and boats started frequently making return trips to and from the islands, more people would have been compelled to search for better lands beyond the horizon.

The first pirates, then, would have been the people who failed to find the proper resources on which to survive beyond the mainland. When discussing the origins of piracy, we must remember that the need to plunder would not have been a choice for any society. People would have been forced to hunt in order to find whatever they lacked. While during the Neolithic, most societies turned to agriculture as a replacement for their hunter-gatherer ways of life, other societies may have chosen to do the opposite. Indeed, the adoption of the Neolithic "package" would have been a difficult choice; after all, hunter-gatherers lead a simple, stable lifestyle. They need only follow the nearest pack of wild game to insure that they continue to eat. For the agriculturalist, on the other hand, crops can fail, disease caused by domesticated animals can strike, and basic nutritional standards can even decrease. Thus, many peoples will be slow to accept the new difficulties that are inherent in an agricultural society. In fact, though the Neolithic Revolution likely began in the Levant in the 10th Millennium BC, Egypt did not become a Neolithic society until about 5500 BC, roughly when the Neolithic Revolution had already spread to Central Europe (Hikade 2008). Thus, many societies may have been reluctant to give up a hunter-gatherer lifestyle. Pirates, then, were essentially people who had failed to maintain the Neolithic manner of surviving, reverting to hunting – at sea.

However, what are some of the causes for such a hunter-gatherer relapse? Ormerod explains that "by land, the poverty of the soil had forced them to become hunters and brigands rather than agriculturalists; the same pursuits were followed at sea" (Ormerod 1924: 14).

Aristotle, echoing Thucydides (see also Plato, *Legg*., VII, 823; Ormerod 1924: 69), emphasizes

this form of piracy as a means of production. Whereas some early inhabitants of the

Mediterranean chose to be

> …fishermen and others live by the pursuit of birds or wild beasts…others support
> themselves by hunting…of different kinds. Some, for example, are brigands.[1]

This image of the pirate as a hunter who had given up the agricultural ways of civilization is

observed throughout the writings of ancient historians. One exception, however, describes the

peoples of Colchis near the Black Sea, who

> …by equipping fleets of *camarae* and sailing sometimes against merchant vessels
> and sometimes against a country or even a city, they hold the mastery of the
> sea…And since, when they return to their own land, they have no anchorage, they
> put the *camarae* on their shoulders and carry them to the forests where they live
> and where they till a poor soil.[2]

Thus, some pirates seem to have had some relationship to the earth, though the fact that they

tilled a "poor soil" is testimony to their impoverished lifestyle. Pirates seem to have originated in

rugged landscapes, where the chance of leading a self-sustainable existence was nearly

impossible. Indeed, the pirates of Colchis mentioned in Strabo had the support of the people who

inhabited the Bosporus, or Istanbul Strait, who supplied mooring places, markets, and "means of

disposing their booty" for the corsairs. Therefore, pirates were initially people who had difficulty

supporting themselves; being forced to prey on others for sustenance and profit.

  Some of the more rugged and depauperate islands of the Mediterranean could have played

a role in the origin of pirates. Many of the Mediterranean's smallest islands were later used as

bases for pirates, and these same islands may have been the sources of displaced populations who

had failed to find proper resources on which to survive. Constantikopoulou examines the

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[1] Aristotle, *Politics*, I, 1256a
[2] Strabo, *Geography*, 11.2.12

importance of mini-islands to piratical activities. Tragia and its neighboring islands, again near

the area where Julius Caesar was kidnapped; as well as Myonessos, an islet to the south of

Thessaly were popular hunting grounds for pirates (Constantikopoulou 2007: 196-199). Cythera

and its surrounding islands posed significant difficulties to the Spartans during the Peloponnesian

War, resulting in the Spartan occupation of the islands and the maintenance of a garrison

(Ormerod 1924: 22). Though the importance of islands as bases for pirates is unquestioned, the

idea that pirates may have originated as island inhabitants would be difficult to prove to say the

least. Pirates were migratory peoples, often displaced from one area to another, so that, by the

time they "settle" on an island, their places of origin are virtually forgotten. In fact, pirate

communities were unlikely to be of a single origin, as seen in the reliefs of the Sea Peoples in

Egypt (Cline and O'Connor 2003).

Of course, piracy was not merely an island phenomenon. The Western Mediterranean was

especially conducive to the development of mainland piracy. Although piracy was common on

mainland Greece even into Thucydides' time, the frequency of such activities was diminished

with the rise of the mercantile states (Ormerod 1924: 96). However, in Italy, many tribes before

the foundation of the Roman Republic took to the sea as pillagers, according to contemporary

historians. Greece had long been hesitant to expand westward, through fear of the Tyrrhenians.

However, the Etruscans had no reason to become pirates, and likely became mariners out of

defense against the Greeks. Thus, when describing the Tyrrhenians as pirates, we must remember

our definition. The Greeks likely viewed the Tyrrhenians as pirates, and the Etruscans likely saw

the Greeks in a similar light.

Another tribe that was often accused of engaging in piracy also inhabited the northern

shores of the Tyrrhenian Sea. There, in the rugged Apennines and Maritime Alps, the Ligurians

preyed on the Etruscans to the south, as well as the Gauls to the north. However, as Rome began

asserting control over the Italian Peninsula, the Ligurians often sided with the Carthaginians in

the Punic Wars, bringing their roles as pirates into question. The tribes along the coast of the

Adriatic Sea, too, raised problems for the Romans. The peoples of the mountainous Illyrian and

Dalmatian coasts were active marauders by land and sea (Ormerod 1924: 166). These coasts

ensured the existence of piracy in its numerous islands that surrounded the harsh mainland. Not

only did the region cause difficulties in traveling due to its geography (ships were forced to hug

the coast when crossing this part of the sea); the Greeks avoided the area because of the Illyrian

pirates who infested the waters. Like the Ligurians, the Illyrians began to protect themselves

during the Republic, often becoming enemies of the Romans and ceasing to be pirates, under

Ulpian's definition. By the time that the first kingdom of Illyria was established in the third

century BC, the Illyrians could no longer be viewed as pirates, though the Romans accused

Queen Teuta of supporting Illyrian "piracy."

Cilicia, in Southern Anatolia, however, was unquestionably a nest for pirates, since its

early settlement, especially during the Late Republic (Ormerod 1924). There, on the slopes of the

Taurus range, which stretches into Lycia and even forms some of the islands of the Aegean,

groups of people resorted to banditry by land and sea as a means of survival in their rough

territory. Cilicia, though poor in resources, was plentiful in its supply of timber, facilitating the

construction of ships. The Romans, in a sense, allowed piracy to thrive in Cilicia, after the defeat

of the Carthaginians, the strongest naval power in the Mediterranean. Rome was forced to take

responsibility of the seas, though it focused on the nearest waters, the Tyrrhenian and Adriatic

Seas. Cilicia became the strongest harbor for pirates, along with the island of Crete until

Pompey's clearing of the seas in 66 BC. Though some mainland pirates such as the Cilicians

existed, most did not remain pirates in the Ulpian sense, siding with enemies of Rome for their

own survival. Thus, rugged areas, including mountainous regions and islands seem to cause

societies to become impoverished and perhaps resort to piracy. By the Republic, however, many

pirate societies understood the need to "diversify" from their impoverished origins.

From Poverty to Profit

> Even the wealthy, the aristocratic and would-be intellectuals took to piracy in order to gain a
> reputation. Pirates had bases and strongholds everywhere. The fleets which called there were
> remarkable for more than the strength of their crews, the skill of their helmsmen, the speed and
> dexterity of their ships, suited to their purpose. More appalling than their terror was their
> disgusting extravagance, with gilded sails and purple awnings and silver-coated oars, as if they
> reveled and plumed themselves upon their evil-doing. The Roman empire was disgraced by their
> flutes, strings and drinking along all the coast, by their seizures of imperial personages and by their
> ransomings of cities.[1]

Pirates must have had little desire to remain indigent hunter-gatherers. The nature of

many of the pirates discussed so far was not unchanging. Indeed, "piracy seldom exists in pure

form: few are willing or able to live entirely from the profits of raiding" and "one season's

predator is next season's entrepreneur" (Horden and Purcell 2000: 157-8). For a time, corsairs

could be true pirates, the enemies of all established Mediterranean societies, and for another, they

could side with an enemy of another society, as another means of survival. Thus, pirates always

seem to act in their own benefit. If the origin of pirates was rooted in a need to survive by

"subsistence plundering," many of them soon realized that they could profit by selling their

booty, as we have already seen in Strabo's description of the support of the pirates of Colchis. By

Plutarch's time, pirates had learned so well how to profit from their illicit activities that even

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[1] Plutarch, *Pompey*, 24

wealthy individuals would join pirates for the reputation and adventure.

In addition to profiting from employment as privateers in the defense of polities, pirates engaged in another form of redistribution, so far not discussed: the trade in human beings (Horden and Purcell 2000: 387-8). Slavery during the Middle Ages sheds light on the importance of the Mediterranean to the slave trade during ancient times. From a meeting between a monk and Magister Nicetas, ambassador to the Arabs of Crete from the Byzantine emperor Leo VI (AD 886-912), we learn of the seizure of women from Lesbos by Cretan pirates. The redistribution of population across the Mediterranean in medieval times, particularly in Provence and Catalonia, reveals one of the many effects of the slave trade. Evidence of slavery in the Mediterranean before Christ, can be traced to Homer, in the Odyssey's description of Phoenician traders from the island of Syros seizing the mother of Odysseus' swineherd Eumaeus. The Roman slave-trade involved millions of human beings, maintaining the population levels throughout much of Italy. Thucydides writes that the largest number of slaves of any city-state other than Sparta was centered in the territory of the island of Chios. In addition, the centrality of Delos within the Cyclades resulted in its importance as a slave-market. As far as the relation between pirates, slavery, and islands; during the third century BC, women in Ceos (Kea) were forbidden to roam near the shores of the island, in order to avoid their seizure from pirates. On Majorca, women captured by pirates were bought at five times the going rate for men, due to a gender imbalance in the island's population (Horden and Purcell 2000: 388-391). The role of piracy in the slave trade, then, provided a profitable means of redistribution, beneficial to the producer and the consumer (but usually not so for the slave).

Gary Reger, in fact, outlines the economic benefits of piracy, especially in relation to the

Delian slave trade. According to Reger, pirates did not merely plunder and kidnap for their own good; rather, they looked to local economic centers as places to sell their booty and captives (Reger 1994: 262). In the third century BC, pirates ransomed captured citizens from Asia Minor to Delos, which though not yet an active slave market, still had high demand for people. Delos profited so much from the actions of pirates that its inhabitants even honored Boukris, a notorious pirate who raided Attica, disposing "many citizens and others from the city" on Crete, as a *proxenos*, or friend of the state (Reger 1994: 262). Reger, then, views pirates as part of the economic revival of the third century BC (Reger 1994: 263), as simply another provider for the consumer of the ancient Mediterranean.

Horden and Purcell propose a similar economic benefit of piracy. Though, at first thought, the depredations of pirates may seem to reduce trade, causing a major decline in redistribution, Horden and Purcell interpret such upsurges in piracy as indicating an actual resurgence in connectivity and communication across the Mediterranean. Eras of boosted piratical movement do not reflect a "dark age" of trade; rather, piracy increases when more merchants exist to plunder. If a decline in redistribution had occurred in the Mediterranean, piracy could not have flourished, either. Horden and Purcell even suggest that the devastation of coastal or island settlements by pirates is a sign of resilience, rather than collapse (Horden and Purcell 2000: 157). If the Greek Dark Ages, for example, were characterized by piracy, then perhaps the period was not so dark as to put an end to all communication across the sea. However, Horden and Purcell do ignore any possibility that pirates could have emerged from displaced, impoverished societies that were forced to hunt. During times of decreased trade, some people may have been desperate, becoming pirates scavenging for what they could. In this

sense, the destruction of a coastal village would have been independent of the level of trade at the time. In fact, if a pirate attacked a settlement, it could suggest that he had no merchants to plunder. We must understand, then, that piracy has always existed, though not necessarily with the same impulses. Although it may have flourished as a "professional way of life" (Stanislawski 1973: 402) during increased periods of exchange, piracy certainly did not disappear in turbulent times; it merely, resurfaced as the only possible way of life for some unfortunate people.

The Suppression of Pirates?

> For behold we can see that [Augustus] Caesar has provided us with a great peace, that there are no longer any wars or battles or great brigandage or piracy; at any time we can travel and journey from sunrise to sunset.[1]

Though piracy may have at times held economic benefits for most parties involved, when the divergent deeds of the predators at sea became overwhelming, a powerful leader would often step forward to curb the crisis. Indeed, because pirates may have always existed in the Mediterranean, their most common documentation occurred when historians or scribes honored the ruler who eradicated the problem. The most attested suppression of piracy took place during the Late Republic, under Pompey; and, indeed, this dismissal of piracy became his claim to fame. However, if Pompey did successfully eliminate piracy, why would Augustus later claim to have provided a "great peace" without "brigandage or piracy?" Surely either Pompey or Augustus exaggerated his claim. In fact, Epictetus does note in passing that *great* piracy was no longer of a concern (Braund 1993: 199). Indeed, though records of the eradication of piracy are attested from Ramesses III to Pompey and after, many such claims are merely political in nature and only slightly founded on truth.

Such a political motive for the suppression of piracy was recorded, as one might expect,

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[1] Epictetus 3.13.9

at the time of the first written evidence for the existence of sea peoples, dating to the pharaohs of

Egypt's 19th and 20th Dynasties. On the same walls that describe the island conspiracy of the

foreign countries are carvings of Ramesses III riding his chariot to defeat the invading Sea

Peoples in the Nile Delta. These carvings at Medinet Habu depict the pharaoh triumphantly

riding his chariot in a land battle, while Egyptian ships attack boats operated by men, women,

and children, possibly displaced populations from depauperate islands (Sardinia and the Aegean

have been proposed as origins for the Sea Peoples; see Cline and O'Connor 2000: 111-116).

Though Redford (2000: 13) insists that both land and sea battles took place, others suggest that

no large-scale battles were ever fought; merely lesser conflicts over a longer period (Cline and

O'Connor 2000: 110). Indeed, Egypt had been pestered by attacks from pirates for centuries,

dating at least to the Amarna Period, as well as the reigns of Ramesses II and Merneptah. Some

scholars have even suggested that the depictions of Ramesses III defeating the Sea Peoples were

copied directly from a monument constructed during the reign of Merneptah (Hikade 2008).

Whether or not Ramesses III defeated the Sea Peoples is unknown, but he had all the reason to

prove so. The Sea Peoples were fierce fighters who had destroyed hundreds of settlements along

the Levant, even causing the fall of the Hittite Empire (Cline and O'Connor 2000). The depiction

of a lion hunt between the carvings of the land and sea battles attests to the respect the Egyptians

must have had for the Sea Peoples as fighters, comparing them to the strongest animals (Cline

and O'Connor 2000: 130). Thus, Ramses III's claim of suppressing the Sea Peoples, whether

factual or not, would have garnered him much power in the midst of an otherwise unsuccessful

reign.

 Another potentially mythical account of the eradication of piracy, and perhaps the most

famous, occurred during the legendary rule of Minos, the king of Crete. One of history's most interesting of ironies was that the earliest attempt to clear the Mediterranean Sea of pirates was undertaken by an island thalassocracy that would itself later turn to piracy. The fact that piracy had not been thwarted until the rise of the thalassocracy of Crete makes sense in light of the fact that Minos would have been the first ruler to have any fleet or control of the seas. Though Ormerod (1924: 80-1) insists that Thucydides' account has been "abundantly proved by excavation," the promotion of sea travel, acquisition of wealth, and settlement in fortified cities could have been effects of denser populations on Crete (Braund 1993: 202). Of course, the alleged suppression of piracy during the rule of Minos would have had positive consequences for the thalassocracy and the king himself, causing his imperial rule to be "all the more acceptable" (Braund 1993: 202).

However, much more provable and less mythical accounts exist that point to more likely events in the suppression of piracy. Generally, empires were more successful at eradicating piracy than were single rulers, especially the Athenian empire, which was able to place a stronger hold over the nearby islands that were known for their pirates, often by inhabiting such islands with more stable populations (Constantakopoulou 2007: 196-199). Indeed, many small islands which were prone to the threats of piracy formed alliances with each other in periods of increased piratical activities in order to defend themselves better. The incorporation of the islands of Calymnos and Cos, attested from a funerary epigram dating to the late second or early third century AD, strengthened their alliance against Cretan pirates (Constantakopoulou 2007: 187). The island of Rhodes also built an imperial identity in its fights against pirates during the fourth century BC (Braund 1993: 203). Braudel (1972: 149) describes a much later attempt to suppress

piracy on the islands of the Mediterranean:

> To rid the coasts of corsairs waiting for a good chance, or taking fresh water, is called in the correspondence of the viceroys of Sicily, "limpiar las islas," "cleaning up the islands," that is checking the moorings of a few dozen islets which were all classic places for an ambush.

However, as more defenses against pirates became recorded, more rulers, especially during the Hellenistic period, attempted to identify with the actions of Minos centuries earlier. During the Hellenistic, Philip II of Macedon and Athens may have even vied for the role of pirate-suppressor, with Philip challenging that without his guardianship of the sea, Athens had no chance of keeping the seas safe (Braund 1993: 203). Later rulers soon caught on, including Alexander and Dionysius I of Syracuse, defining or strengthening their power on the pride of their attempts at defeating pirates once and for all.

Roman leaders of the Late Republic followed suit, realizing that eradicating piracy was a way of boosting their popularity among the masses. Though the famous story of Julius Caesar's kidnapping by pirates and his later retribution by crucifying his captors can be taken as more of a personal vendetta, as opposed to a large-scale suppression, his actions certainly paved the way for his later partner in the First Triumvirate, Pompey. Indeed, Julius Caesar was one of the few senators to support Pompey's appointment as commander of the campaign against pirates. At the time, the Senate strongly distrusted his intentions (Seager 2002: 40). However, in 67 BC the piratical threat against Rome was so strong that the Senate risked giving Pompey absolute power and creating another dictator similar to Marius or Sulla (de Souza 1999: 161). Indeed, piracy by this time had become so widespread that the early strategy of campaigning against specific targets when needed was no longer satisfactory. A number of crises had occurred on many of the vulnerable islands of the Aegean, including Tenos since the First Mithridatic War between 88 and 84 BC, as well as Delos and Aigina both in 69 BC (de Souza 1999).

However, from Pompey's first strike on the pirates, we see that his strategy was still deeply rooted in targeting specific regions, rather than the claims made by Cicero that Pompey cleared the entire Mediterranean Sea. Pompey first focused on securing the vital grain sources, which would have immediately won him favor with the Roman masses:

> In spite of the unsuitability of the weather for sailing he crossed to Sicily, checked out the coast of Africa, took his fleet to Sardinia and established military and naval garrisons to guard these three granaries of the State.[1]

Though Pompey began his military expedition in the Western Mediterranean, the fact that he only spent forty days there indicates that the likelihood of a thorough operation was small (de Souza 1999: 168). Pompey's siege against the Cilician pirates was equally brief, lasting forty-nine days, leading de Souza (1999: 168) to describe Pompey's "clearing" the seas of pirates as a "rush job." Pompey, however, did have a unique strategy that may explain the relative success of his campaign. Prior naval generals, including Metellus Creticus who had fought the pirates of Crete, had "exercised the rights of the victor over the vanquished"[2] Most Roman historians who describe Pompey's greatness place his clemency on an equally commendable level (de Souza 1999: 170). According to Plutarch, Pompey avoided putting any prisoners to death, and Appian writes that the general was able to distinguish between "wicked" pirates and others who were driven by poverty. Indeed, Pompey solved the pirate problem by offering the Cilician pirates land in exchange for their ships, settling the impoverished people in surrounding cities of Cilicia, as well as Achaia (de Souza 1999: 170). Even some of the Cretan pirates, whom Pompey never himself threatened, surrendered to his legate Octavius, rather than face the wrath of Metellus. Thus, in three months, Pompey emerged as Rome's most talented, and merciful, naval general,

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[1] Cicero *Leg. Man.* 34
[2] Florus 3.6.6

now with the power of all of the state behind him.

However, later outbreaks of piracy prove that Pompey's claim to fame was largely an exaggeration; he did not eradicate all piracy from the Mediterranean. Augustus would later claim that he too freed the sea from pirates, while Vespasian defeated the piratical forces of Anicetus in AD 69 (Braund 1993: 195). Indeed, evidence exists for pirates lasting long into the Roman Empire and of a number of emperors lauding their own victories over the bandits at sea. Piracy, then, seems to have existed at all times and to have been a constant threat to the Mediterranean. If its suppression ever occurred, piracy was only foiled within limited areas, only to thrive elsewhere. As already discussed, an almost unlimited number of coasts and islands existed to serve as sanctuaries for pirates. However, a leader could garner much support and power by claiming to have restored safety to the seas when merely "cleaning up" a few islands or coasts.

Detecting Piracy with Archaeology

The natural distrust that scholars have for such texts describing leaders who claim to have ridded the seas of pirates raises the question of whether piracy can be detected in the archaeological record. If a text describes where pirates thrived, can archaeologists follow this virtual pirate map to test this question? In the Western Hemisphere, underwater archaeologist Barry Clifford was successful in tracking down the notorious pirate ship *Whydah* off the coast of Cape Cod by examining textual sources for pirate shipwrecks (Clifford 2002). Can similar tactics be employed in the Mediterranean? Some scholars, however, remain adamant that all evidence of piracy in the Graeco-Roman world is textual and that ancient pirates did not leave any distinguishable trace in the archaeological record (de Souza 1999: 2). Indeed, pirates, by their very nature, were a "mixed" culture of multiple ethnicities and origins, carrying stolen booty that

defined the cultures on which they preyed, rather than their own. Other difficulties arise in their

migratory characteristics and the pirates' lack of a true "home." However, pirates did have bases

among the islands of the Mediterranean, and perhaps the quality of islands as closed regions with

definable boundaries can assist the archaeological study of their pirate cultures (Evans 1973;

Keegan and Diamond 1987).

Some archaeologists have proposed evidence of such ancient pirate ports on the islands of

the Mediterranean. The most likely candidate for such a discovery would be on the island of

Crete, one of the Mediterranean's largest islands with the longest history of piracy. In fact,

preliminary excavations at the harbor of Phalasarna in West Crete have provided circumstantial

evidence that the town may have been a Cretan pirate nest (Bower 1988; Hadjidaki 1988; Frost

and Hadjidaki 1990). Though searching for ancient pirate ports is difficult because of rising sea

levels, West Crete is a useful area to investigate because of its unique tectonic activity: the site

has been uplifted six to nine meters higher than its level 2,000 years ago (Hadjidaki 1988: 466).

Based on textual information that describes pirate harbors across Crete (but that does not specify

the location of any pirate outposts) and a 19th Century AD map, Hadjidaki rediscovered the

harbor in the late 1980s. Pottery shards have dated the site to the 4th Century BC. The port in

some ways resembles a Phoenician trading port, but the presence of military towers points to a

more likely Greek origin. Hadjidaki surmises that the port belonged to pirates due to the presence

of military structures with no separate commercial harbor. In addition, the lack of consistency in

the shape or style of the harbor fortifications also points to a pirate origin. Human presence

seems to disappear after the 1st Century BC, leading archaeologists to hypothesize that the port

was destroyed during the attacks of Metellus Creticus. Though the Phalasarna excavation is

potentially an exciting discovery of the only evidence of a Greek pirate harbor, the archaeologists are working off of self-described "circumstantial" and negative evidence that the harbor must have belonged to pirates because no evidence has been found to prove otherwise.

Indeed, much of the archaeological evidence of piracy is founded on such negative evidence. However, a number of projects have been undertaken to discover evidence for piracy. The Rough Cilicia Regional Archaeological Survey Project has been conducting such a search since 1999 in an attempt to trace a better understanding of the history and trade of the area, mostly after the highest period of piratical activity (Rauh 1999). What sort of material culture could such a project discover that would hint at an existence of pirates? Thanks to Pompey, we know where the pirates settled, thus a survey of those sites may provide examples of armament or weaponry that the pirates may have used. The fact that pirates had no local culture may be seen in a presence of a mixed material culture of booty seized by the pirates. Because the Rough Cilicia project covers a six hundred square mile region of unexplored archaeological terrain (Rauh 1999: 54), a comparison of coastal areas (where pirates would have spent the majority of their existence) with the inland region (where Pompey would have settled the pirates) may reveal differences and changes in material culture.

Surveys of other regions could also benefit the archaeological search for ancient piracy. Crawford (1977) suggests that the presence of a large number of Roman Republican denarii, struck between 130 and 31 BC, found in Dacia (roughly modern Romania) was a result of the suppression of piracy and its major source for the slave trade. Crawford surmises that after the seas were largely cleared of pirates during the Late Republic, Dacia became a new source for the slave trade. Perhaps the presence of large amounts of denarii dating to earlier periods and

discovered elsewhere (such as Delos or other slave markets) could provide some proof for the existence of piracy.

Crawford's theory regarding the presence of denarii in Dacia provides possibly the best way to search for pirates in the archaeological record: by looking at the effects of piracy, rather than the existence of pirates themselves. This idea is most clearly understood in design of early island settlements in the Mediterranean. Again, we can read the observation made by Thucydides that early settlements on islands were placed farther inland to avoid the threat from pirates along the coast. But as technology improved, settlements could be constructed with protective fortifications nearer to the sea. Just as small islands would band together to defend against pirates, small populations would join in larger, protected settlements (Ormerod 1924: 40). By the Hellenistic, the presence of towers on many of the Aegean islands also points to the existence of pirates in the area. These towers were placed at a distance from a settlement, often on fertile land so as to protect the flocks during a pirate raid. The Aegean towers often had enough space to hold most of the population of the village and served as refuges during attacks. Some towers also served as signaling stations (smoke during the day or a flare at night) known as *peripolia* to warn other island settlements if a pirate ship had been spotted. Whether these towers were effective in sinking pirate ships or merely in scaring them away, is not attested in ancient sources. However, if such towers were effective in fending against pirate ships, perhaps archaeologists could search for sunken pirate ships off of the coast of the islands that were heavily guarded. Gianfrotta (1981) compiles the underwater archaeology performed in the Mediterranean to search for ancient piracy.

The archaeological search for piracy is by no means an easy one, nor is it entirely

impossible. The Phalasarna site in West Crete is an exciting discovery that will assist the archaeological search for pirates into the future. Finding most pirate sites, however, is not as simple as merely perusing the ancient sources and recent maps. The best hope that archaeology has for discovering pirate societies is through regional survey, such as the Rouch Cilicia Project. Indeed, survey is useful in tracking down pastoral societies (Renfrew and Bahn 2004: 82), which migrate seasonally, similar to the pirates' peripatetic lifestyle. The difficulty that arises, however, is that survey by sea is obviously much more difficult than survey by land. Thus, the search for pirates is a major undertaking that would involve a survey of many of the Mediterranean's small islands that were beneficial to the pirate lifestyle. Archaeologists know where to look: the difficulty is deciding for what they are looking.

Conclusions

Though the concept of pirate archaeology has much potential in the Mediterranean, why is the study of ancient pirates worthwhile? Are pirates not criminals who should be forgotten for their depredations against the civilized states? And what would be the benefit of studying their stolen material culture? Throughout history, pirates have been a largely misunderstood people. The modern image of pirates as plunderers and pillagers was not entirely valid for all such societies in all times. In fact, many pirates were impoverished peoples merely trying to survive in a world that had turned them into outcasts. Others were not even pirates in any sense of the word; only people who were unfortunate to have been in the way of larger, more successful empires. In this sense, we must remember that history is written by the winners, and pirates are always the losers.

In order to understand the complexity of the existence of pirates, scholars should come to

a consensus on the definition of piracy. Ancient historians are not always reliable on providing objective definitions of pirates. Archaeologists can help by searching areas that were unquestionably inhabited by pirates, such as Crete and Cilicia, in order to provide a definition of pirates based on material culture; perhaps pirates did have some form of unique material culture that has yet to be discovered.

The study of piracy is further vital for island archaeologists. We have seen that a huge proportion of the Mediterranean islands were occupied by pirates for much of ancient history. The effects that pirates had on local and nearby populations are unquestionable. Piracy and the slave trade were a major cause of racial mixing throughout history, displacing populations from one island to another, and perhaps even this mixing of peoples would later assist the larger empires in uniting their provinces into a large, working body. The fact that piracy seems to have been a natural phenomenon (and a major cause of cultural change) that existed in the Mediterranean for millennia should be reason enough to promote its study. The study of pirates, then, would shed light on the archaeology of the Mediterranean as a whole. The topics of the origin of pirates, their benefits and burdens to maritime trade, and their suppression are all crucial to understanding the relations between societies. A careful reading of the ancient texts, as well as an archaeology focusing on islands and coasts known to have harbored pirates would be a major undertaking but one that would be well worthwhile for a better comprehension of all inhabitants of the ancient Mediterranean.

Map 1: The Mediterranean Sea (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mediterranean_sea)
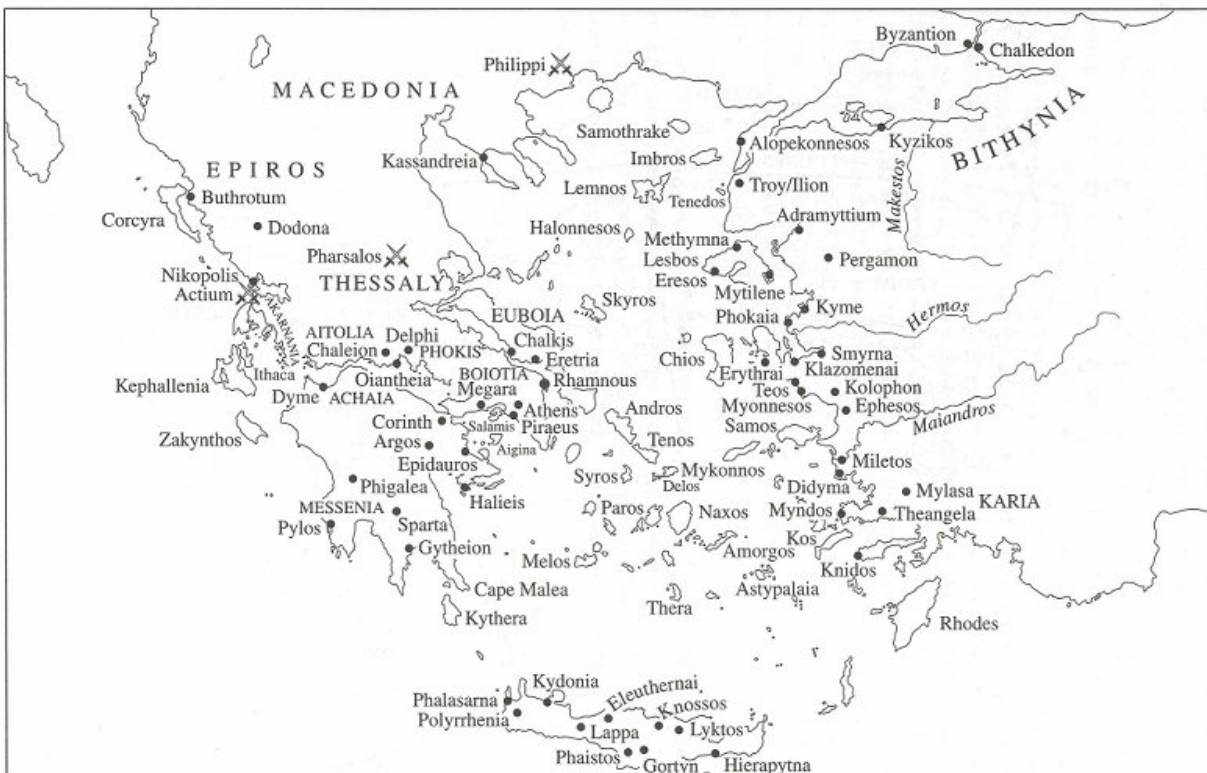
Map 2: Greece and the Aegean (de Souza 1999)
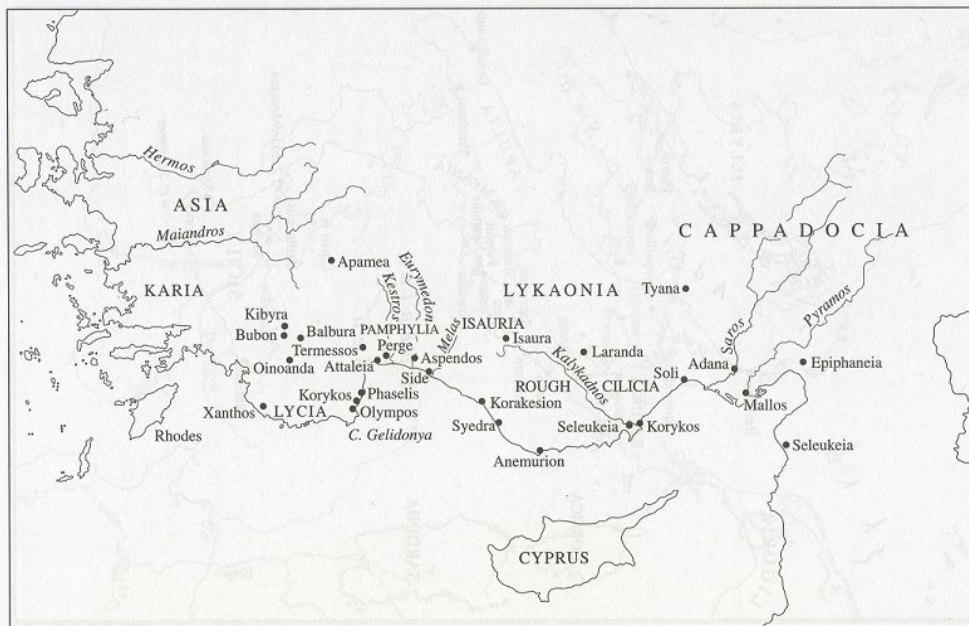
Map 3: Southern Anatolia and Cyprus (de Souza 1999)

Map 4: Italy (de Souza 1999)

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