



Homeric Seafaring (Ed Rachal Foundation Nautical Archaeology Series)

Samuel Mark

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In this comprehensive history of Homer's references to ships and seafaring, author Samuel Mark reveals patterns in the way that Greeks built ships and approached the sea between 850 and 750 b.c. To discuss and clarify the terms used by Homer, Mark draws on scholarly literature as well as examples from recent excavations of ancient shipwrecks.

Mark begins by emphasizing the importance of the household during a period in which chiefs ruled and Greek nobles disdained merchants and considered seafaring a necessary but less than distinguished activity. His chapter on Odysseus's construction of a ship includes discussions of the types of wood used. He concludes that most Greek ships were of laced, rather than pegged mortise-and-tenon construction. Mark goes on to discuss characteristics of Homeric ships and their stern ornaments, oars, quarter rudders, masts, mast-steps, keels, ropes, cables, and planks.

Mark reaches several surprising conclusions: that in an agricultural society, seafaring was a common activity, even among the nobles; that hugging the coast could be more treacherous than sailing across open sea; that Homeric ships were built mainly to be sailed, instead of rowed; that sea battles were relatively common; that helmsmen were crucial to a safe voyage; and that harbors were little more than natural anchorages. Mark's discussion of Homer's geography covers theories that posit Odysseus sailing in the Adriatic and Mediterranean Seas and even on the Atlantic Ocean.

As befits a study whose subjects are partly historical, partly archaeological, and partly myth and legend, Mark's conclusions are tentative. Yet, this comprehensive and meticulous study of Homer's references to ships and seafaring is sure to become a standard study on the subject.

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