

ΤΡΟΠΙΣ VII

TROPIS VII

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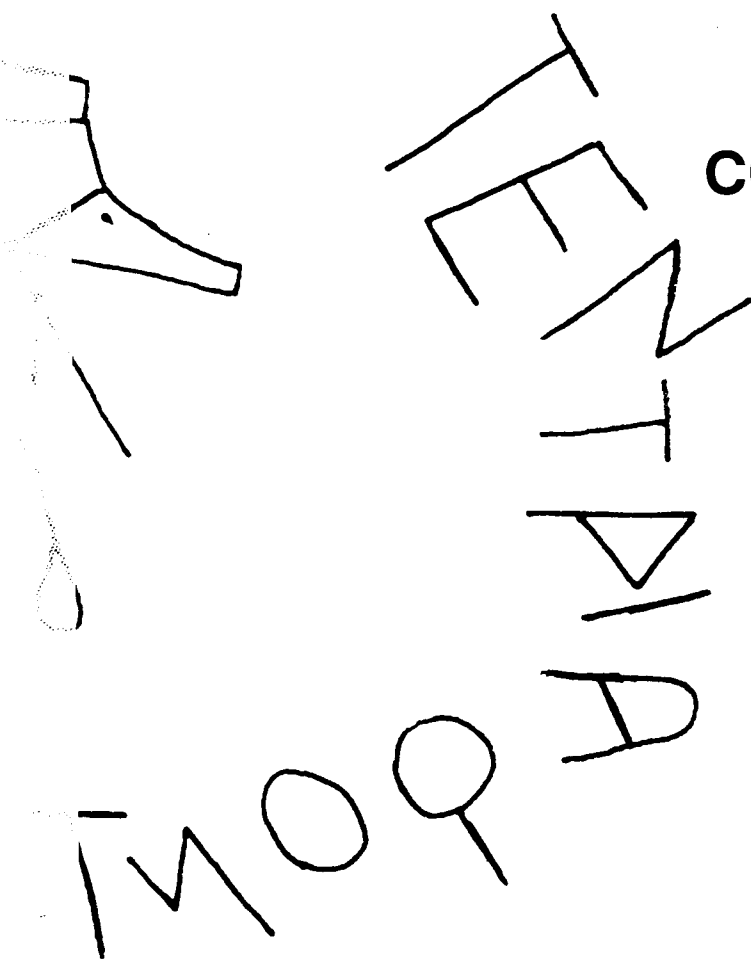
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OBSERVATIONS ON THE «ISIS SCRAFFITO» AT NYMPHAION¹

In 1982, Nonna Grac and a team of archaeologists from the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg uncovered a cult complex at the ancient Bosporan city called Nymphaion (Fig. 1).² In a room on the upper terrace of the slope where the complex was built, the excavators found fragments from a large plastered wall surface originally decorated with seven different horizontal registers.³ The third register from the top was dominated by a large warship depicted in white on a yellow background (Figs. 2a and 2b). The ship, which was almost a meter and a quarter in length, was drawn on the left side of the register in a unique «scraffito» technique whereby the artist made the image by scraping away a thin surface of yellow stucco to reveal a white layer of plaster beneath. The edges between the yellow and white layers indicate that some parts of the image were made while the yellow stucco was still soft, and that others were scratched through the yellow layer after the stucco had become hard (cf. Fig. 3).⁴

According to the excavator, fragments of statues, cult vessels and a sculpted altar seem to date the first use of the complex to the last quarter of the fourth century.⁵ Artifacts recovered from the plastered room indicate a period of continued use during the second quarter of the third century, at which time the plastered wall surfaces were covered with graffiti. These include the names of Pairisades II (king from 284/3 to 245) and a previously unknown brother named Satyros, the goddess Aphrodite (who is invoked numerous times), Apollo (his name appears at least once), a number of different men and sketches of more than 80 ships, numerous animals and human figures, some in combat.⁶ Thereafter, following the middle of the century, the complex was destroyed, perhaps by an earthquake, and when it was later rebuilt, lost its function as a cult center.⁷ The excavation here has not yet received a final publication, and this complicates our efforts to understand the context of the warship scraffito — an image which dominates the decorative program of its room and serves as the focal point of this paper.

Let us begin by acknowledging some fundamental questions about the warship and its context. First and foremost, we need to know the intended scale of the image. For example, were the intricate details of its rendering intended to imply size and grandeur or grace and elegance? To put it another way: was *Isis* one of the big Hellenistic classes like a «20», or a smaller class like a «3», or was she somewhere in between, like a «9» or a «5»? An answer to this question might help us to appreciate why a galley named for Isis was painted at Nymphaion in what appears to be a cult center of Aphrodite.⁸ Did the ship, for example, convey some religious meaning to those who saw her in this room, or was she intended for something else? Attempts to address questions like these must start from the details of the cult complex and include an understanding of both the graffiti and the artifacts found within. Since all these details have not yet been published, some answers will have to wait. Others, however, can be discussed now, based on what has been published, and on a few excellent photographs kindly sent to me by Mrs. Sonja Boriskovskaja, Curator of Classical Antiquities at the Hermitage.⁹

A review of the literature on this scraffito¹⁰ logically begins with the excavator N. Grac, who concluded from the three levels of oarports along the hull that the vessel was a trireme. The name «Isis» inscribed at the bow indicated to her an Egyptian origin for the vessel, while she felt that the regal names Pairisades and Satyros scratched near the ship corresponded to Bosporan kings from the Spartocid dynasty in the first half of the third century BC. Since she knew of no other evidence to indicate the worship of Isis along the north coast of the Black Sea this early, she rejected the idea that the scene reflected the cult's introduction. She concluded instead that the scene depicted one of a series of diplomatic exchanges with Egypt such as one known from a letter in the Zenon archive.¹¹

Alerted to Grac's initial publication by H. Frost, L. Basch presented his view of the warship in the 1985 *Mariner's Mirror* and repeated his conclusions in a short Appendix to his *Musée imaginaire de la marine antique*.¹² He was struck by the fact that the main wale did not line up correctly with the warship's ram, that the vessel's superstructure appeared to be so massive, and that there was no clear indication of an outrigger or an *epotis*. He concluded that the vessel made best sense as one of Ptolemy II's supergalleys, i.e., one larger than a «ten», perhaps even a «twenty», built on a Phoenician design, with a ram and *proembolion* that were structurally non-functional, serving primarily as status symbols.¹³

A few years ago, J.S. Morrison also discussed the scraffito in his book *Greek and Roman Oared Warships*.¹⁴ He felt, first of all, that the vessel could **not** be named «Isis» because figural bow plaques or name devices were generally preferred to written names, seamen being illiterate.¹⁵ If the name is derived from the figural plaque at the bow, then it should be something like «Dioskouros» not «Isis». The name «Isis», he argued (p. 209), was added later – like the bird over the deck – and perhaps had something to do with the tutelary deity worshipped at the stern.

Freed from the implications of the name «Isis», Morrison saw no reason to posit some diplomatic exchange between Nymphaion and Egypt; he concluded that *Dioskouros* probably served as the King's flagship, appeared to be of Phoenician design, and corresponded in size to a medium class, like a «5» (214). The name, he felt, commemorated the Black Sea port of Dioskourias (cf. Fig. 1) where the vessel may have been constructed.

Most recently, Y.G. Vinogradov has put forward an ingenious and complicated argument to explain the *Isis* image, which he views quite correctly as only a part (perhaps the most important one, but still only a part) of the entire scene placed on the wall.¹⁶ He feels that the warship was contemporary with other graffiti scratched on the wall and that many, if not all, of the images were part of a simple unified theme. This theme represented an Egyptian state visit to Nymphaion in winter/early spring 254 BC led by the *Dioiketes* Apollonios, who is mentioned frequently in the Zenon archive. He interprets *Isis* as a supergalley (cf. p. 289), the flagship of the fleet (293), which is depicted in the midst of a ramming strike against a much smaller Syrian vessel (276).¹⁷ He believes that this image alludes to an unrecorded naval battle in which the Ptolemaic fleet was victorious (280), and introduces much convincing evidence to show the interest of Ptolemy II in the Black Sea region during the mid-third century. He argues that Apollonios visited the region to assure the Bosporan kings that Ptolemy's interests were peaceful (299-300) and part of a general policy of benefactions bestowed on Greek cities of the region. A new inscription from nearby Chersonesos reveals that the cults of Isis, Serapis and Anubis were officially introduced at about this same time, and he suggests it may have occurred during this same state visit.¹⁸

And finally, O. Höckmann describes this image in detail, as part of his general treatment of the figural graffiti scratched into the plastered surface of the cult room.¹⁹ After urging that the image should not be construed as a technical drawing with details drawn to scale (305: the ship's highly curved

keel best indicates this point), he divides the image into three figural zones and describes each in detail: the hull (308-314), the intermediate zone (314-17), and the superstructure (218-19). He concludes that the vessel was a large one, a «9», originally measuring some 58 m in length (321), with three levels of oars and crenellated fighting platforms at bow and stern (319).²⁰ The artist has shown *Isis* in port (312), not in action, and her elaborate decorations stem from the fact that she was on a diplomatic mission (309).²¹ He leaves to his colleague Vinogradov all considerations of the context of the state visit (cf. p. 303).

Such a review as this reveals that a *communis opinio* has yet to be reached on many important issues. For Grac, the magnificent warship was a trireme named «*Isis*» and thus Egyptian in origin: for Basch, she was an Egyptian «supergalley» of Phoenician design with a functionless ram and *proembolion*; for Morrison, the vessel derived her name «*Dioskouros*» from her bow plaque and, based on her design, was a Phoenician-style «5» built at the Eastern end of the Black Sea; for Höckmann she was a supergalley, perhaps a «9», and for Vinogradov, she served as the flagship of the Ptolemaic fleet that had recently defeated a Seleucid force in an unrecorded battle of the mid-third century. Her presence at Nymphaion was either connected with the visit of an Egyptian embassy on a political mission (Grac, Basch, Vinogradov), or simply represented the flagship of the Bosporan fleet (Morrison). In light of such conflicting views, I feel emboldened to offer my own opinion. At the very least, I would like to correct a few erroneous statements that have been made and urge future investigators to adopt a different approach than the one which has dominated past investigations.

Let us start with the ship's name, which I believe must have been «*Isis*», in spite of the general view, stated recently by Morrison, that ships' names were only indicated by figural bow plaques (Fig. 3). To the contrary, I think there is ample evidence to show that names *must have been* written on warship hulls as early as the fourth century, and if we accept as generally reliable the tradition of the «Themistocles Decree», the practice would date as early as 480 BC. First, there exist numerous Athenian vessels with abstract names not easily represented by figural plaques. For example, how would we represent the name «*Buoyant*» (Κουφοτάτη: *IG II² 1629 col. a 1*) or «*Competent*» (ΙΚΑΝΉ: *IG II² 1611 col. b 72*)? And what plaque would catch the difference between the attested names Ναύκρατις («*Ship Conqueror*», *IG II² 1609 col. II 99*) and Ναυκρατούσα («*Conquering Ship*»: *IG II² 1622A col. b 157*)? I remain unconvinced that a «conventionalized emblem that made

possible easy recognition»²² would have served the needs of a unique name, painted on the hull. While it is certainly true that a bold bow device would be useful in an age that had no telescopes, the need to designate each ship as unique applies when the vessels are in port or in the shipyards as well as when they are at sea.

This point is amply demonstrated by the Themistocles Decree, which supposedly describes the Athenian procedure used in 480 to assign crews to the ships that would resist Xerxes at Artemision and Salamis.²³ According to this decree, the different crews were listed on white notice boards beneath the names of the ships to which they were assigned.²⁴ If ships' names were written on public lists to indicate where each citizen would serve, and if the crews were expected to read their assignments from these boards, then how can we accept that figural plaques were required on warships because the crews could not read (cf. n. 15)? Can you imagine the chaos as 40,000 men tried to find their way to 200 Athenian vessels designated *solely* by figural plaques?

Furthermore, how is it possible that the Athenians knew the name and builder of a warship recorded in their naval inscriptions as «*captured*» from the enemy, unless these names were written somewhere on the ship's hull?²⁵ And finally, it is surely significant that there was a special Greek term — the *ptychis* or *ptyche* — for the place where the warship's name was inscribed.²⁶ The obvious conclusion from this evidence is that warships' names were written on a place at the prow called the *ptychis*, precisely where the name appears on the Nymphaion scraffito. We have no reason, therefore, to doubt that «*Isis*» represents the name of the warship.

The same conclusion is implied by the high quality of the letters (note the flaring apices) which look like the work of a professional engraver (Fig. 3).²⁷ This same care is extended to their placement, just outside the inscribed guidelines at the prow — a further indication that these letters were part of the original decoration and were intended to represent the name of this galley.²⁸ But even if this were not so, how can we doubt that the artist intended the viewer to connect this beautifully lettered name in some way with the warship? My first observation, therefore, is as follows: either the ship's name was «*Isis*» or, at the very least, the galley had some special connection with the goddess. The artist probably intended to convey both meanings.

Let us turn our attention to the graffiti scratched on the plaster which

include the names of Pairisades II (king from 284/3 to ca. 245) and his previously unknown brother Satyros.²⁹ This in itself is important as a dating element, but what I find equally striking is the difference in appearance between these casually inscribed names and the precisely carved «Isis». The striking difference in appearance leads one to ask when and why these additional names were added to this carefully executed image. Were the graffiti (i.e., the names, texts, ships, animals and human figures) part of the original plan for the room or does their presence indicate their addition at a later date (or dates) and/or a change in the room's original function? As for the dating implications of the names Pairisades and Satyros, the most we can say is this: the *Isis* scraffito was begun with great care while the yellow plaster was still soft. The graffiti on this register were made, for the most part, with much less care or different hands after the surface layer had hardened.³⁰ The *Isis* image, therefore, precedes the graffiti in date, but by how much — a day or years — we cannot say.

In light of this evidence, my next observation is cast as a warning to anyone hoping to understand the artist's (or artists') intent: we must be careful to separate the original elements of the image from those added at a later time. The problem, of course, involves determining precisely what is original and what is not. In what follows, I take it as axiomatic that the original artist(s) employed the highest level of care in rendering the image and that he/they oversaw the drawing of the warship until its completion. Features of the image that were executed with less care were likely to have been added without the oversight of the original artist(s), and do not necessarily reflect his/their original intent. Perhaps the best way to proceed is to separate the details into three categories based upon the care with which they are executed: 1) those which are clearly original, 2) those which may or may not be original, and 3) those which are clearly additions from a later time. I list my impressions below, not to provide iron-clad distinctions, but rather to indicate where I feel meaningful distinctions can be made so that we can discuss them:

Table 1: Original elements of the *Isis* scraffito (Fig. 5)

1. Triform ram which is connected to the hull with large nails or spikes.
2. Bow plaque framed by an elaborate border showing one of the Dioskouroi alongside a horse; this plaque was added after the wave pattern was drawn.
3. Wave pattern along the waterline indicating the vessel's «boot-top».

4. *Proembolion*; a small figure (a bearded man's head with hair in a bun? a winged sphinx?) appears on the end of the *proembolion*.³¹
5. Carefully lettered name «Isis» on the *ptychis*.
6. *Stolos* decorated with a portrait head (Serapis?).³²
7. Stylized *ophthalmos* (eye) at bow.
8. Elaborate running decoration on or near the hull's caprail.
9. Animal-(horse-?) headed brackets or supports.
10. Thick white deck (with deck beams or under-supports) pierced by two openings (hatches?) with covers or steps indicated underneath.
11. Carefully drawn thole pins or fastening points.
12. Course of vertical uprights.
13. Elaborate stern with feather pattern (perhaps emphasizing the wing at the helmsman's position).
14. Wing surrounding the helmsman's position.
15. Small *naiskos* with Ionic columns.
16. Seven-branched *aphlaston* with a large central boss.
17. Four oval items, perhaps barrels or containers, with similar central designs (other interpret these objects as shields).
18. Elevated platform or covering at the bow and stern, each supported by two very slender bird-(goose-?) headed stanchions or uprights.
19. Steering oars and tiller.

Table 2: Questionable elements of the *Isis* scraffito (Fig. 6)

- A. The oarports (of which the placement and connection with the wale(s) and *epotis* have been carelessly indicated).
- B. The horizontal divisions between the oarports along the hull (which have been carelessly indicated).

Table 3: Later additions to the *Isis* scraffito (Fig. 6)

1. The oars emerging from mid-ship oarports.
2. The eagle clutching a trident above the warship's deck.
3. The odd animal (an elephant?) above the warship's bow.
4. The human face and raised stick-like arm above the forward-most of the containers on the deck.
5. Lightly incised head above the aft deck platform or covering.

As I indicate in Table 3, I *do not* believe that the oars emerging from the mid-ship oarports are original to the scraffito. I would place in this same category the eagle and trident inscribed above the deck, the animal (elephant?) above the warship's bow, and the human face with raised arm above the forward-most of the containers on the deck. I am also doubtful about the oarports and the horizontal indications of secondary wales, but I have to admit that they may be original.³³ My main reason for excluding these details from the original plan of the *Isis* galley is the quality of execution (cf. Fig. 7). The lines between the oarports are less surely drawn than those indicating the vessel's decks; certain oarports in the mid-ship section are not indicated with closed circles; the eagle, though large, is much less carefully rendered than the wing near the tiller, the *naĩskos* or the Dioskouros and horse; and the human figure above the forward-most oval, looks cartoon-like when compared to the carefully rendered head on the bow plaque. Although Y. Vinogradov believes that these details are contemporary with the original drawing and that they follow the same thematic program, to me, their crude appearance blatantly detracts from the obvious care and attention lavished on the original image and indicates their addition at a later date, after the original image had been completed.³⁴

We might now profitably consider the small size of the ram, and the likelihood that this galley is indeed a trireme and thus too small to represent the flagship of a major Ptolemaic fleet. My reasoning is as follows: if this vessel is an Egyptian galley, as we might infer from the name «*Isis*»,³⁵ then we can reasonably compare her ram to other Egyptian rams known from the Hellenistic period — the Athlit ram and the weapons on the Actian War memorial at Nikopolis.³⁶

While we are forced to compare most of the details of the *Isis* galley to other images, this is the only instance where we can compare a detail of the scraffito to surviving physical evidence from actual Ptolemaic warships. In my opinion, the evidence resulting from this comparison is unambiguous and, therefore, decisive. This *Isis* ram is neither that of a «6» or a «9» like the rams at Nikopolis, nor that of a «4» or «5», like the Athlit ram but, rather, it comes from something smaller. I say this because of its rear or «after» profile, which lacks the massive rectangular trough and after cowl curvature seen on the Athlit and Actian weapons (Fig. 8). In contrast, the front or forward profile of the *Isis* ram compares favorably to the much smaller fragment of a ram in the Piraeus Archaeological Museum which, based on its original size and weight (perhaps 85-90 kg.), probably comes from a trireme.³⁷ It is the same profile that we see on a still smaller ram (weighing 53

kg.) in the Deutsches Schiffahrtsmuseum in Bremerhaven. It is also worth noting that the relationship between the length and height of the fins on the «*Isis*», Bremerhaven and Piraeus rams is similar, having a square-shaped, compact appearance, in contrast to the more elongated driving center of the Athlit ram (cf. Figs. 8 and 9).

Perhaps one might object that the image was not intended to represent a blueprint view of the vessel and therefore we should not expect the artist to be overly concerned with details of the ram. This might be so, if he had showed no interest in the weapon. To the contrary, it seems that the artist has lavished particular attention on the bow of the vessel (cf. Fig. 3), and that here he has taken great pains to represent many details accurately. If he has depicted such minutiae as the bolt heads attaching the ram to the hull, and the ornate volutes above and below the back ends of the fins, surely he has rendered the accurate profile of the ram itself — and this profile resembles that of a smaller class of warship, like a trireme. If I am correct, then the *Isis* galley is an unlikely candidate for the flagship of a victorious Ptolemaic fleet.³⁸ She is too small. And if she is not the imposing flagship that most take her to be, then how does this affect our interpretation of her elaborate details? And how does this impact our view of her visit to the Cimmerian Bosphoros?

Before piling up too many questions, let's focus on the galley's size and elaborate decoration. If we assume, for the sake of argument, that the image represents a sacred galley, then what implications does *this* have? How, for example, were sacred galleys used?³⁹ Unfortunately, aside from this image, we have no direct evidence for Ptolemaic Egypt, but enough information does survive from Athens and Corinth for us to see how sacred triremes were utilized there. Dating back to the early fifth century, the Athenians designated two of their crack triremes — the *Paralos* and *Salaminia* — as special duty vessels and called them *ιεραὶ τριήρεις* («sacred triremes»). These vessels were fully functional warships that were specially outfitted at state expense and used for various tasks.⁴⁰ The Athenians used their sacred triremes in battle, they sent them to deliver official notices to their allies, to carry ambassadors, to fetch generals on overseas missions when they were recalled to Athens, and to convey official offerings to major festivals like those at Delos and Olympia.⁴¹ During the fourth century, other were added to the fleet. One, the *Ammonias*, was designated to take the officials (τὰς θυσίας) to Ammon in Egypt.⁴²

Apparently Athens was not the only state who designated her best triremes as sacred for special purposes. Before Timoleon's force departed for Sicily in 344, the Corinthians chose the best galley from their fleet, designated it a sacred trireme and named her «Demeter and Kore». Why? The priestesses of Persephone were told in a dream that the goddesses intended to sail with Timoleon to Sicily.⁴³ If officially sponsored cult images, sacred paraphernalia and state offerings were conveyed aboard sacred ships, then such ships must have brought Serapis from Sinope to Egypt during the reign of Ptolemy I, and carried Asklepios' snake from Epidaurus to Rome in the late 290s.⁴⁴ In light of the evidence from Nymphaion, it seems perfectly possible that our image represents one of these sacred triremes.

Let me briefly summarize what has been established thus far. First, the artist (or group of artists) has depicted a Ptolemaic warship that is either called «Isis» or is somehow in the service of the goddess (and perhaps both). Second, the image was completed before (whether days or years we do not know) the name Pairisades, and it is the name, not the image, which can be dated to the second quarter of the third century. Third, the vessel is most likely a trireme if we may judge from the size and shape of her ram. Her oarports, on the other hand, may or may not be part of the original drawing, but if they are, then the artist was not as concerned with their precise placement as he was with other details like the figural plaque at the bow, the wave design at the boot-top, the animal-headed brackets and stanchions, the wing at the helmsman's position (Fig. 10), or the elaborate border along the caprail. Indeed, the vessel's *decorative details* seem to be the artist's main concern. If these observations are basically sound, then we should admit the possibility that the artist was depicting a sacred galley and therefore was more concerned with religious symbolism than with lining up the wales and the ram, or with depicting the correct line of the outrigger, or with indicating the existence of the starboard *epotis* or cathead. For these reasons, I agree strongly with Höckmann's statement (1999, 305) that this image cannot be viewed as a technical drawing with all the details shown accurately to scale.

If we hope to arrive at a plausible explanation of this image based on religious symbolism, then we must try to explain why an image with connections to Isis was placed in a cult center for Aphrodite at Nymphaion. First, recent discoveries allow us to reconsider the earliest dates for the region's contracts with Egypt as well as for the local introduction of Isis cults.⁴⁵ Among the archaeological indicators, we find «Ptolemaic rings, Alexandrian pottery in the Hadra style, [and] works of fine art and

numismatics» that suggest links between Egypt and the north coast of the Black Sea as early as the reign of Ptolemy II.⁴⁶ Perhaps the most striking piece of evidence is a black basalt statue found at Pantikapaion, Pairisades' capital. The statue depicts Arsinoe, the wife of Ptolemy II, in the Egyptianized guise of Isis. That it was presented by Egypt and displayed by the Spartocids (i.e., the ruling dynasty) at their capital «is, unquestionably, significant at the state level».⁴⁷

There is more. A new inscription from Chersonesos (located some 240 km to the southwest; cf. Fig. 1) reveals that the cults of Isis, Serapis and Anubis were officially introduced there by a member of the local aristocracy named Charmippos at roughly the same time that our image was made at Nymphaion.⁴⁸ It is actually possible, therefore, that the *Isis* galley was the means by which these cults were introduced to the Tauric peninsula (Crimea).⁴⁹ In other words, considering the small size of her ram and the elaborate nature of her decoration, it is reasonable to assume that *Isis* was indeed a sacred trireme whose main purpose was to convey sacred images and objects of Isiac cult on overseas journeys.⁵⁰

We might suspect that Aphrodite's priests agreed to display the image of the galley in Aphrodite's sacred space because they felt Isis had certain powers that were possessed by their own goddess. To judge from the numerous ship graffiti in the complex, we can see that the local Aphrodite was closely connected with seafaring. This same characteristic is shared by Aphrodite and Isis at Delos where both receive the epithet «Euploia», or «Goddess of Fair Sailing».⁵¹ This same theme is also reflected in two departure notices scratched into the wall above and to the left of the stern of the *Isis* ship. One says simply: «We're departing on the 7th of Kalamaion». The other: «We're departing on the 20th of Thargelion.»⁵² The reference may be to actual voyages or to special cult days for seafaring rites like those celebrated at Corinth, Ephesus and Byzantium.⁵³ Whatever the truth about these notices, the graffiti may hint at the connections that explain the decision to depict the *Isis* galley in Aphrodite's cult space.

In other respects, a religious interpretation for this image accords well with the striking way in which the galley is depicted, particularly with those numerous details which, except for the ram at the bow, de-emphasize the vessel's function as a warship. Note how the artist renders the protective wing of Horus at the helmsman's position with the same beautiful care that he uses to indicate feathers on the stern, the Ionic columns of the *naïskos* and the horse-headed-brackets and stanchions topped with goose heads

(Figs. 7 and 10).⁵⁴ At the bow, he carefully inscribed the name «Isis» on the *ptychis*, and laid out the details of the bow plaque, being careful to make sure that the god's characteristic star-tipped cap could be seen (Fig. 3). In so doing he helped the viewer understand how Isis, like Castor and Pollux, protected sailors from harm.⁵⁵ Near the stern, he drew four shield-like objects (Fig. 5 at 17), probably not as shields — which would be incongruous on a sacred galley — but perhaps as containers for cult objects or for Nile water, utilized in the cult on a daily basis.⁵⁶ And finally, at the bow and stern, he painted structures that were supported on slender uprights topped by goose-heads, a bird often used in Isis iconography (Figs. 4 and 9).⁵⁷ Since heavy fighting decks seem out of place in such a context, has our artist painted something like canopies or sun shades?⁵⁸ Or was he simply more interested in the elegant stanchions than the proper proportions of the wooden structure and its supports?

I hope that by now, I have demonstrated how the religious context of this image suggests a different kind of interpretation than has been attempted by past scholars. One might further advance this interpretation by pursuing certain questions that still remain unanswered. Why, for example, is the *Isis* galley placed on the left side of the wall, with a long stylized papyrus or lotus border underneath, and with nothing to balance her on the right? Is the artist's original plan for this space unfulfilled?⁵⁹ Can we detect Isiac symbolism in the small details of the decoration, like the inclusion of Apollo's name or what appear to be a row of ankh symbols scratched beneath the stylized border on the right side of the stuccoed wall (Fig. 11 at 1 and 2)?⁶⁰ One might also ask why the name «Isis» appears nowhere among the wall's graffiti. Does this scraffito record the start of what eventually proved to be an unsuccessful introduction of the cult at Nymphaion?⁶¹ And finally, might Apollonios and Euphronis, whose names were scratched into the yellow register, be the same two brothers from Chersonesos honored by the Olbians at roughly this same time for their benefactions? The name Euphronis is rather rare in inscriptions from this region, and appears only twice in the same context with the name Apollonios — at Nymphaion and at Olbia, where his relationship with his brother is clearly stated.⁶² If so, then it would seem that three prominent men from Chersonesos (Charmippos, Apollonios and Euphronis) helped to guide the introduction of Isis and her fellow gods to the Crimea and Bosphoran kingdom of Pairisades and Satyros.

We will hopefully know more about the peculiarities of the Nymphaion complex when it is fully published, but until that time, I urge caution to those who attempt to interpret this marvelous scraffito. I do not claim to have all the

answers, but I do feel that my approach presents a reasonable starting point from which others might explore related questions and problems. I have simply tried to show that we must explore alternate interpretations if we hope to discern what is going on here. We can all agree that the Nymphaion fresco represents an important new source of information for the history of the Black Sea and Mediterranean regions.⁶⁴ What remains to be demonstrated, however, is precisely what this new source has to tell us.

I conclude with this brief summary of my interpretation. Sometime during the reign of Ptolemy II, perhaps during the 250s when it seems that the king displayed an interest in the Black Sea and its north coast, a sacred delegation arrived in the Bosphoran kingdom and introduced the cults of Isis, Serapis and Anubis. These cults were officially welcomed at some places like Chersonesos where an altar was dedicated by a member of the nobility named Charmippos. At Nymphaion, the priests of Aphrodite reflected their interest by commissioning a new fresco for their cult space. What happened next is unclear and bears further scrutiny. If the cult indeed took root, it left few signs of this fact beyond the enigmatic graffiti subsequently scratched on the wall in Aphrodite's complex.

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NOTES

1. Following the presentation of this paper at Pylos, O. Höckmann kindly sent to me a copy of his article on the *Isis* galley (Höckmann 1999) that had just been published in the journal *Ancient Civilizations from Scythia to Siberia*. As chance would have it, two other important articles were published alongside Dr. Höckmann's piece in the same journal (Vinogradov 1999 and Vinogradov and Zolotarev 1999). I wish to express my sincere thanks to Dr. Höckmann for drawing my attention to these important discussions which have enabled me to refine, in this paper, the observations I presented verbally at Pylos.
2. Ancient Nymphaion is located mid-way along the north coast of the Black Sea near modern day Kertsch (ancient Pantikapaion). For the excavator's reports on this season's work, see Grac 1984 and 1987.
3. Cf. Grac 1987, 89; Vinogradov 1999, 271-72; and Höckmann 1999, 303-304. According to Höckmann (303) the «Left» and «Back» walls of the room were richly ornamented and together measured 5.2 m in length and 2.5-3 m in height.
4. For the best illustrations of this image currently in print, see Grac 1987, Tafeln 35-39. Höckmann 1999, 303-305 locates this image on the «Back» wall of the room (cf. n. 3,

- above) and describes the process by which it was scratched (*a scraffito*) through the surface of the colored layer. Although he has not made a systematic study of the techniques involved, he notes that some of the incised lines have irregular borders (hinting that the surface was hard when the line was scratched), while others are perfectly smooth (indicating the lines were incised, or «impressed» while the plaster was still soft). Strictly speaking, the term «fresco» refers to the application of pigments on lime plaster that is still moist. In this paper, I will use the term «scraffito» to refer to the image of the *Isis* galley in the third register, and reserve the term «fresco» for the pigmented plaster walls as a decorative unit.
5. Grac, 1987, 88 and 90 with Taf. 33.
 6. For the texts of the inscriptions scratched into the paper, see SEG XXXIV 756, XXXVIII 752, and XXXIX 701. The name «Apollo» can be read on the drawing of the «Back» wall published by Grac 1987 as Abb. 2 (cf. my Fig. 11 at 1, and below, n. 60). As for the graffiti of ships, animals and people, these are without exception less carefully drawn than the *Isis* warship, and in my view should not be considered part of the room's original decoration. For these, see Höckmann 1999, who reports (p. 303) their appearance on three walls within the room.
 7. Grac 1987, 88; Vinogradov 1999, 271 suggests the destruction was caused by an earthquake.
 8. It is now generally accepted from the content of the wall texts that Aphrodite was worshipped within the complex.
 9. The images presented by Grac 1987 are as follows: Taf. 26 (architectural remains), 27-32 (graffiti), 33 (marble altar fragment), 34 (graffiti) and 35-39 (warship).
 10. My intent is not to provide a comprehensive listing of scholarly views on this image (a rather complete bibliography can be compiled from Höckmann 1999, 305 n. 2 and Vinogradov and Zolotarev 1999, 357 n. 1) but rather to mention those scholars who are well known to the attendees of this conference, and who focus primarily on the details of ship construction that this scraffito preserves. In my original discussion of this topic, the works of Höckmann 1999, Vinogradov 1999, and Vinogradov and Zolotarev 1999 had not yet been published. In some respects, Drs. Vinogradov and Zolotarev reflect an approach that I urged my colleagues in the audience to adopt — and that is the need to consider the context as well as the details of the image.
 11. Grac, 1987, 90-95; the reference to the letter in the Zenon archive is *PLond* Vol. 7, 1973 rp r5 (dated 21 September, 254 BC).
 12. Basch 1985 and 1987, 493.
 13. Basch 1985, 148-49; and 1987, 493.
 14. Morrison 1996, 207-14.
 15. Casson 1995, 344-45 with notes; Morrison 1996, 209: «There was no practice of inscribing actual names on a ship's hull until much later (seamen being normally illiterate).
 16. Vinogradov 1999.
 17. His idea of size probably derives, in part, from Höckmann 1999, 321 who suggests that *Isis* represents a «9».
 18. Vinogradov and Zolotarev 1999.
 19. Höckmann 1999, 305-23.
 20. My major objection to Dr. Höckmann's methodology is demonstrated here. Following this cautionary comment, he calculates the vessel's size on such details as the spacing between the oarports (p. 320-21) and the height of the ram (311), and produces the following dimensions: length = c. 58 m; beam = c. 10.6 m; draught = c. 2.2. m; freeboard to upper deck = c. 6.3 m. He has done precisely what he cautions other to avoid, namely, using the scraffito as a technical scale drawing.
 21. Höckmann 1999 expresses conflicting views regarding Vinogradov's idea that *Isis* is

- shown making a ram strike against a smaller vessel to its right. In an addendum written after he had reexamined the image in 1999, he observes that the right vessel must have been inscribed while the plaster was still wet, and this causes him to admit the possibility that Vinogradov is correct. For my observations, see below, n. 59.
22. Casson 1995, 345, n. 5.
 23. For the decree, see Meiggs and Lewis 1988, 48-52.
 24. Meiggs and Lewis 1988, 49 (#23, lines 27-35): «The generals are to write up the rest, ship by ship, on white boards, (taking) the Athenians from the lexiarchic registers and the foreigners from those registered with the polemarch. They are to write them up assigning them by divisions, 200 of about one hundred (men) each, and to write above each division the name of the trireme and of the trierarch and the servicemen, so that they may know on which trireme each division is to embark».

«... ἀναγράψαι δὲ καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους κατὰ νῆων τοὺς στρατηγούς εἰς λευκῶματα, τοὺς μὲν Ἀθηναίους ἐκ τῶν ληξιαρχικῶν γρῆμματειῶν, τοὺς δὲ ξένους ἐκ τῶν ἀπογεγραμμένων παλλ[ρ]ὰ τῶι [πολεμ]μ[άρχ]ω[ι] ἀναγράψαι δὲ νέμοντας κατὰ τάξεις [εἰς] διακοσίαις ἀ[ν]ὰ ἑκατὸν ἀριθμὸν καὶ ἐπιγράψαι τῆι [τάξει] ἐκάστη τῆς τριήρους τούνομα καὶ τοῦ τριηράρχου καὶ τῆς ὑπηρεσίας, ὅπως ἂν εἰδῶσιν εἰς ὅποιαν τριήρη ἐμ[θ]ήσεται ἢ [τ]άξις ἐκ[κ]άστη...»

Even if we accept the view held by some that the Themistocles Decree is a fourth century forgery or third century pastiche, such a forgery would have followed procedures that were plausible to an audience that was contemporary with the *Isis* scraffito. The procedure of assigning ships and crews by names listed on whitened boards, therefore, remains unaffected by arguments regarding the fifth century authenticity of the decree.
 25. Cf. *IG* II² 1629A.145. The ship's name is not preserved, although a space for it exists on the stone. What is preserved is the name of the ship's builder, Eudokos.
 26. Pollux 1.86 includes the *ptychis* among the parts of the ship at the bow. The *Scholia in Apollonium Rhodium* 1.1089a describes these parts as follows: «Apollodoros in the «Words» termed the *aphlaston* the *akrostolion*; this is incorrect since the *akrostolion* is the tip of the *stolos*, and the *stolos* extends from the *ptyche* and belongs to the wood of the prow; the *ptyche* is the term for (the place) where the name of the ship is inscribed...»

«Ἀπολλόδωρος ἐν ταῖς λέξεσι ἀποδέδωκεν ἄφλαστον τὸ ἀκροστόλιον. οὐκ εὖ, ἐπειδὴ τὸ ἀκροστόλιόν ἐστι τὸ ἄκρον τοῦ στόλου, στόλος δὲ λέγεται τὸ ἐξέχον ἀπὸ τῆς πτυχῆς καὶ διήκον ἄχρι τῆς πύρας ξύλον· πτυχή δὲ λέγεται, ὅπου τὸ τῆς νεῶς ἐπιγράφεται ὄνομα...»
 27. Cf. Höckmann 1999, 309, n. 7: «The care with which the word has been incised, however, equals the execution of the scraffito rather than that of certainly later additions: in Grac's, Bonino's, Basch, and my opinion «*Isis*» is the original name of the ship».
 28. In an Addendum, Höckmann 1999, 356 mentions the possibility that Morrison may be correct that the name was added at a later date because the top of the «iota» intrudes into the white scraffito border. In light of the quality of the lettering (cf. n. 27 above), however, this fact merely indicates the sequence of steps by which the artist completed the *Isis* drawing, and in no way supports Morrison's basic premise that the vessel is named *Dioskouros* and thus has no connection with Egypt.
 29. Cf. SEG XXXIX, 701, 5-6; and Vinogradov 1999, 272.
 30. See Grac 1987, Abb. 2 (pp. 92-93) for a clearer version of my Fig. 2; cf. Taf. 27 for details of goats, Taf. 28 for a horse, Taf. 30 for a warship under sail, and Taf. 32 for the names «Aphrodite», «Adas» and «Apollonios». Two departure notices are discussed by Grac 1987, 90 and are illustrated in Taf. 34.2. Vinogradov 1999, 296 discusses the possibility of a third.
 31. Although I am uncertain that the image is indeed a sphinx (it looks like a man's bearded head from the photographic image; cf. Fig. 3), Höckmann 1999, 309 reports the figure as

- a winged sphinx. He has seen the original and I have not.
32. To me, the head appears bearded (or else it has a very pointed chin) and thus seems unlikely to represent Isis as Höckmann 1999, 309 proposes.
 33. The reader should beware that I am making these judgments from detailed photographs, not from an examination of the original image.
 34. As a result of this fact, I cannot accept the intricate argument constructed by Dr. Vinogradov to explain how the graffiti and the drawing of the warship contribute to a single theme. I would not rule out the possibility that more than one artist worked on the *Isis* galley, but I would argue the basic principle that the original image exhibits a higher quality of execution than the later additions. For example, one artist could have worked with a scraper while another incised the fine details with a pin-like stylus.
 35. Vinogradov and Zolotarev 1999 convincingly outline the evidence for an Egyptian presence in this region during the time the graffiti were inscribed on the wall at Nymphaion.
 36. Cf. Murray 1991, 72-75 and Murray and Petsas 1989, 95-114.
 37. Cf. Steinhauer 1998, 30 with Pinax 1. In brief, the following facts suggest to me that this ram comes from a trireme: 1) The wale indicated by the trough of the Piraeus ram is roughly the same height as the wale of the Athlit ship (21 cm as opposed to 23 cm). The compact nature of the Piraeus weapon and the height of the wales, indicates to me a warship that was designed as a ramming machine. 2) The Piraeus ram is appropriate in size for mounting on columns and walls, which is something that we know was done to trireme rams. It is also similar in size and shape to the rams depicted on the «Plutei Traiani», a sculpted relief which depicts the two rostra in the Roman Forum (cf. Murray and Petsas 1989, Figs. 59-61). 3) The ram is intermediate in size and weight (if roughly 40% of the ram is represented by the 35 kg fragment, the original weight must have been roughly 87 kg) between the Bremerhaven (53 kg) and the Athlit rams (465 kg). 4) Because of the small interior volume of this ram, it is easy to see how such a ram could be removed from its warship, and then reattached after the length of the bow timbers had been cut down, as described in Thuc. 7.36.2.
 38. Cf. Vinogradov 1999, 289 (Superschiff), 293 (Admiralschiff) and 300 (Flaggschiff der siegreichen ägyptischen Flötte).
 39. The «sacred trireme» dedicated to Apollo by Antigonos Gonatas following his victory over «the generals of Ptolemy» near Kos (Ath. 5.209e) represents another kind of «sacred» galley which is not particularly relevant in this context.
 40. In general on these vessels, cf. *RE* 37 (1949) s.v. «Paralos (8)», 1209-1211 and *RE* 59 (1934) s.v. «Θεωρίς (2)», 2238-39.
 41. Use in battle—Plut *Them.* 7.6 (at Salamis) and Thuc. 3.77.3 (at Corcyra); ambassadorial duty—*Scholia in Aeschinem* 3.162; delivering messages to allies—*Scholia in Demosthenem* 21.580; fetching generals—Thuc. 6.53.1 (Alcibiades); offerings to Delos and Olympia—Photios s.v. «Paralos» (386.24-387.5).
 42. *Scholia in Demosthenem* 21.580.
 43. Plut. *Timoleon* 8.1-2; cf. Diod. 16.66.4-6.
 44. For Serapis, see Tacitus *Hist.* 4.83-84; and for Asklepios, see Ovid *Met.* 15.622-745; Livy 10.47 and *Periochae* 11. According to Polybius (31.12.11-13.3), Carthage had special ships called «sacred transports» (ἱεραγωγῶν) which conveyed its official offerings (the «ancestral first fruits») to the mother city Tyre.
 45. Grac 1987, 93 rejected the possibility that the introduction of the Isis cult was the inspiration for this image because she knew of no other third century evidence for the cult in the region, a condition that is illustrated by Dunand 1973, Carte I (at the end of the volume).
 46. Vinogradov and Zolotarev 1999, 357 with n. 2.

47. Vinogradov and Zolotarev 1999, 365.
48. Vinogradov and Zolotarev 1999.
49. Vinogradov and Zolotarev 1999, 373 make the suggestion that Charmippos received his «charge» from the god on the *Isis* galley and discuss in detail the reasons for suspecting that the events occurred at roughly the same time that *Isis* made her visit to Nymphaion.
50. If we may accept the Homeric expression at face value, it seems that a galley brought the sacred objects to Delos when the cults were first introduced there. Cf. *IG* XI,4 1299, lines 38-39:
ὄπποτε νηϊ πολυζύγωι ἤλυθεν ἄστου Φοίβου «when he (Apollonios, the first priest of the cult) came to the city of Phoibos on the many thwarted ship» (i.e. a galley). Elsewhere in the text, the inscription makes it clear that this was a private introduction, not a state sponsored one.
51. Cf. Witt 1971, 177, n.22; and *Inscriptions de Délos* 4, 2153, line 1 (Isis Euploia) and 2132, line 1 (Aphrodite Euploia).
52. Grac 1987, 90 with Taf. 34.2.
53. Cf. Witt 1971, 178.
54. According to Paus. 10.32.16, the Phokians (at the most holy Isis shrine in all of Greece) sacrificed oxen and deer to Isis, and also geese and guinea fowl. On the zoolatry associated with the worship of Isis, see Witt 1971, 25-35.
55. Cf. Witt 1971, 70, n.4.
56. Cf. Witt 1971, 89, 91-92.
57. Cf. Witt (1971) 31.
58. A similar crenellated edge appears on the cloth-like border of a nearby votive graffito; cf. Grac 1987, Taf. 32.
59. Vinogradov 1999 addresses this question, and includes the roughly drawn graffiti to the right of the galley as symbolic imagery. Although he develops an argument explaining the scene as a sea battle between Ptolemaic and Seleucid fleets, I feel that there are serious problems with his interpretation. First, I remain unconvinced that the graffiti are contemporary with the *Isis* galley because they are so less sophisticated in appearance and layout. Second, the *Isis* galley is simply not represented in a way that indicates hostile action. I find the lack of deck soldiers and extended oars most telling. Third, if the eagle and elephant are intended to parallel the action of the vessels on a symbolic level, then the eagle should be facing the elephant, or at the very least, the eagle should be pursuing the elephant. This is a very telling sign and presumably indicates that the artist(s) who drew the animals did not feel it important that *Isis* pursued the ship in front of her. Fourth, considering the scraffito technique that produced the main lines of the *Isis* galley, it seems likely that the thick lines incorporated into the smaller ship were inscribed at the same time the *Isis* was produced (i.e., while the plaster was still soft; cf. Höckmann, 1999, 356, Addendum). But since the scene appears to be unfinished, we really have no way of determining the original plan. Perhaps the artist(s) intended to depict a flotilla of boats and ran out of time before the plaster began to dry. Whatever the answer, I remain unconvinced that the simple presence of this second ship indicates hostile action. Fifth, the relationship between other animal graffiti and names written above them is not clear, in spite of Vinogradov's attempts to explain them. Before we can accept the possibility of some connection between the texts and images, certain stylistic similarities must be established between the animals and written texts. In the absence of such indicators, there is no reason to assume that they are contemporary with one another. And finally, if I am correct that *Isis* is a relatively small galley, then the image is even less appropriate as a representation of the flagship of the Ptolemaic fleet.
60. Although Grac 1987, 89 says that Apollo's name can be seen in Taf. 32, the letters here refer to «Apollonio[s]» and not to the god. According to Grac's Abb. 2, the name does

appear on the wall in an area which seems to be completely preserved (cf. Höckmann 1999, Fig. 5, 1). If true, then we may have an interesting hint of Isiac influence, since Apollo is generally identified with Horus; see Witt 1971, 51. For the ankh as a symbol of Isis, see Witt 1971, 26-27.

61. The cult was not always received with overt enthusiasm. While the cult was privately introduced at Delos during the first half of the third century by a priest named Apollonios, it was first housed in a rented space. Not until the end of the century did the grandson and successor of Apollonios as priest manage to purchase land for a cult place, and then, «certain men» tried unsuccessfully to block the purchase with a law suit (cf. *JG XI*, 1299, lines 1-26). Since an entire century passed before the Delians officially recognized the cult (Vinogradov and Zolotarev 1999, 372), it too could have failed if Apollonios and his successor priests had not been so devout, persistent, and long-lived; the first priest died when he was 97 and the second when he was 61 (*JG XI*, 1299, lines 6 and 11).
62. Apollonios' name appears on the wall in more than one place while the name Euphronis appears to the right of the *Isis* galley in the main yellow register among a list of contributors (for the texts, see *SEG XXXIX*, 701; Grac 1987, Taf. 29-32). A recent study of the Olbian inscription dates it on paleographical grounds to ca. 275-250 BC; cf. *SEG XXXIX*, 702.
63. The string of letters (απολλωνιο) designating the name Apollonios occurs 175 times among the «Black Sea and Scythia Minor» inscriptions on the Packard Humanities Institute CD-ROM #6; the strings for Euphronis (εϋφρωνι / εϋφρωνη) occur only 9 times. At the very least, the possibility that these two are notable from Chersonesos deserves further scrutiny.
64. Grac 1987, 95.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

- Fig. 1: Map of Black Sea.
 Fig. 2a: Line drawing of register containing the Isis galley, left side (after Grac 1987, Abb. 2, p. 92).
 Fig. 2b: Line drawing of register containing the Isis galley, right side (after Grac 1987), Abb. 2, p. 93).
 Fig. 3: Bow detail of Isis (Photo courtesy of Dept. of Classical Antiquities, Hermitage Museum).
 Fig. 4: Bow detail of Isis (Photo courtesy of Dept. of Classical Antiquities, Hermitage Museum).
 Fig. 5: Line drawing of the Isis galley with original elements indicated.
 Fig. 6: Line drawing showing additions to Isis galley image.
 Fig. 7: Midship detail of Isis. (Photo courtesy of Dept. of Classical Antiquities, Hermitage Museum).
 Fig. 8: After ends of the Athlit and Actian rams.
 Fig. 9: A) Bremerhaven ram; B) Piraeus ram; C) Isis ram; D) Athlit ram.
 Fig. 10: Stern detail of Isis. (Photo courtesy of Dept. of Classical Antiquities, Hermitage Museum).
 Fig. 11: Detail of «Back wall» showing 1) the name Apollon and 2) ankh symbols(?) (After Grac 1987, Abb. 2, p. 93).

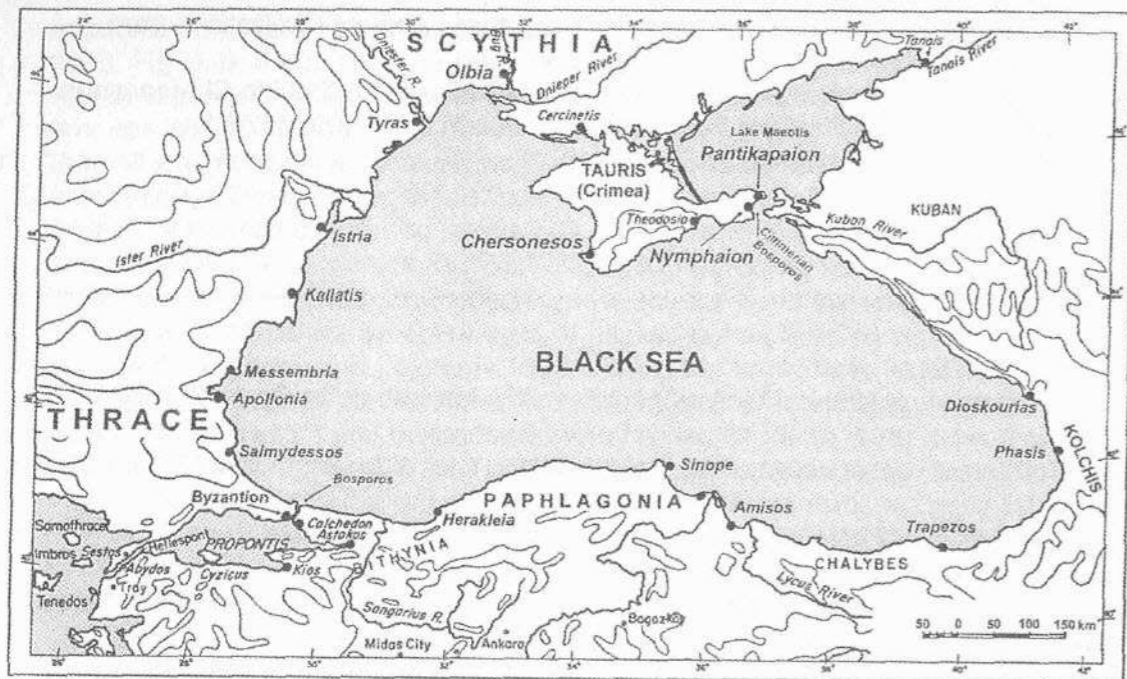


Fig. 1

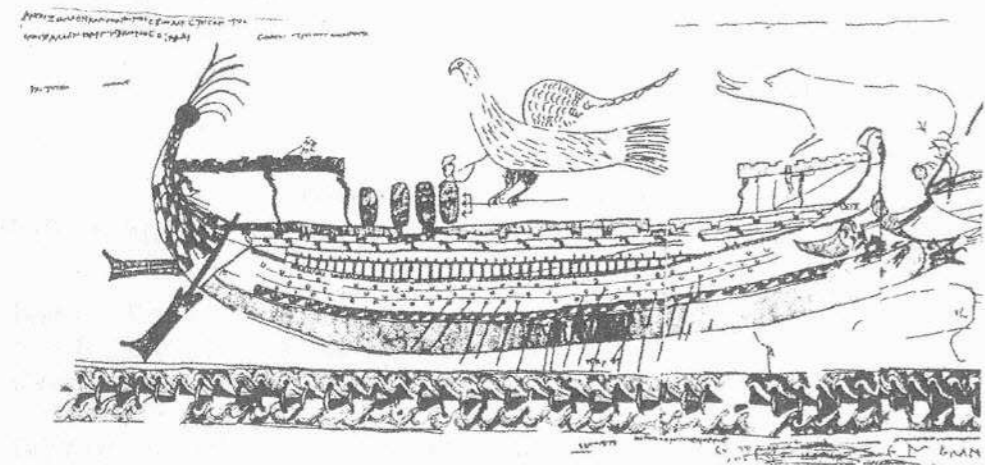


Fig. 2a

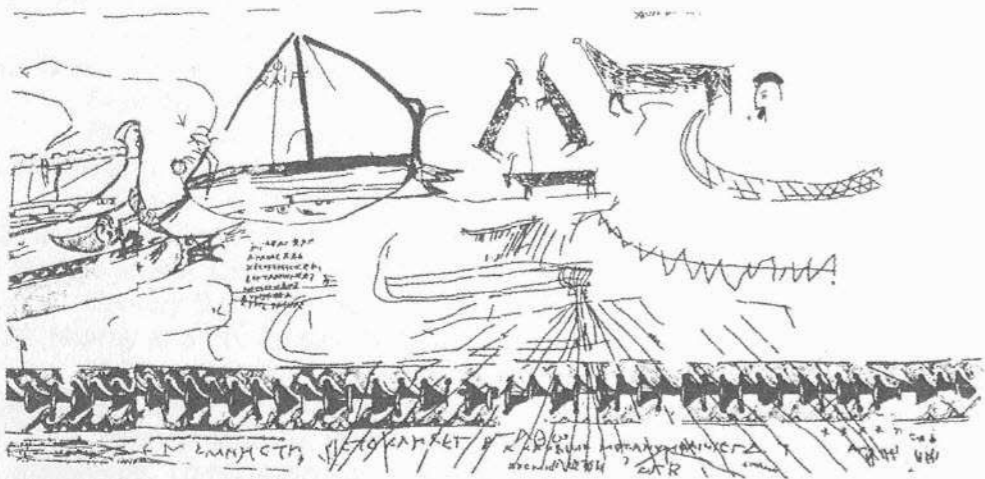


Fig. 2b

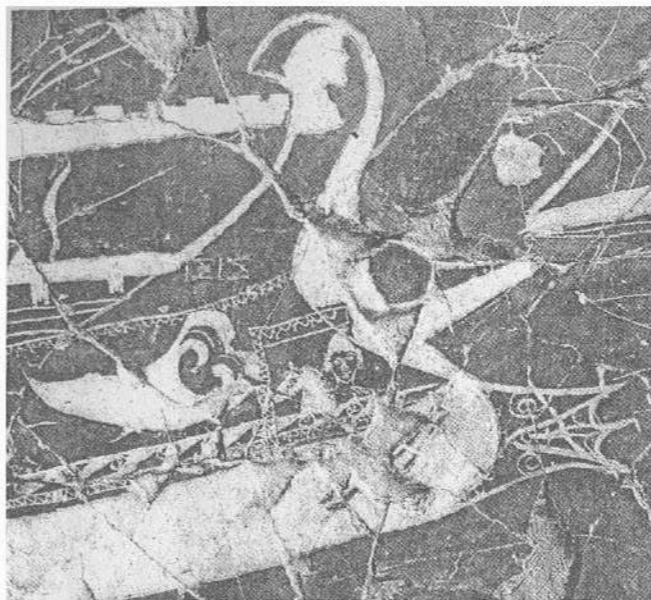


Fig. 3



Fig. 4

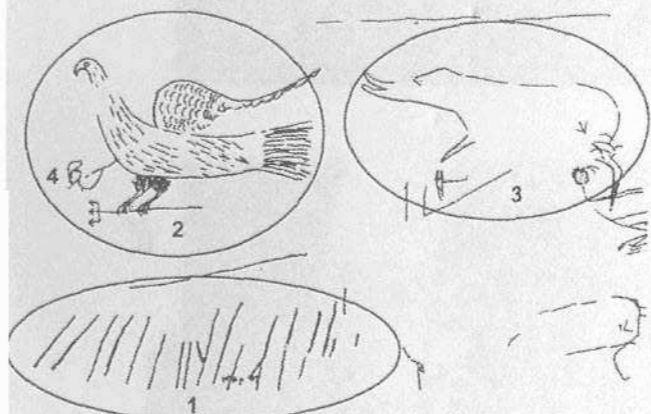


Fig. 6

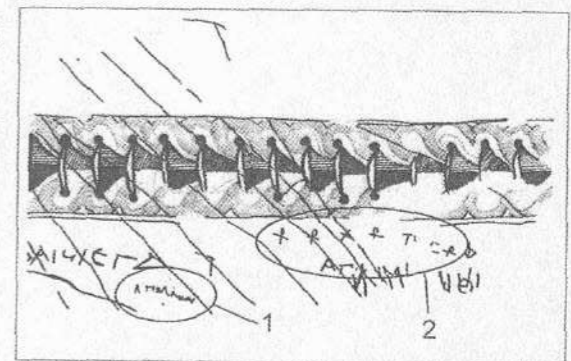


Fig. 11

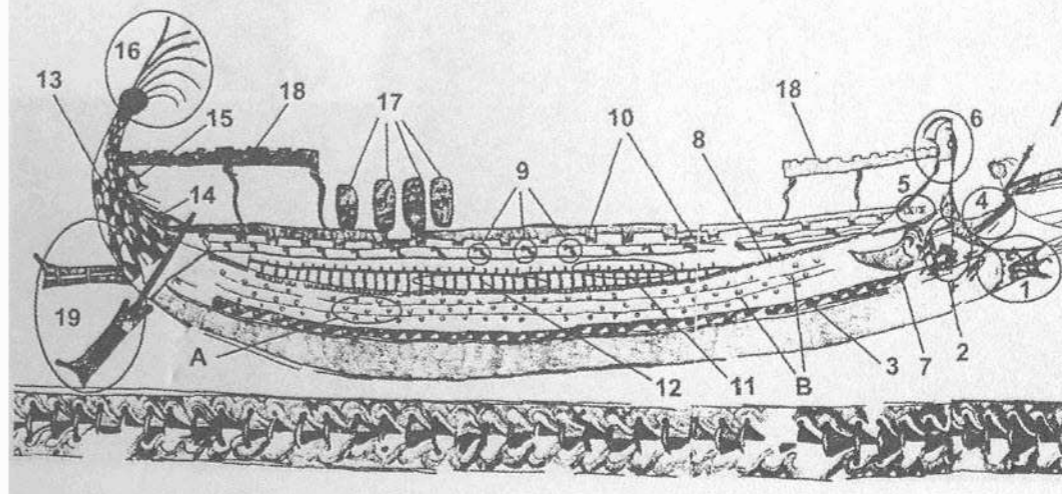


Fig. 5

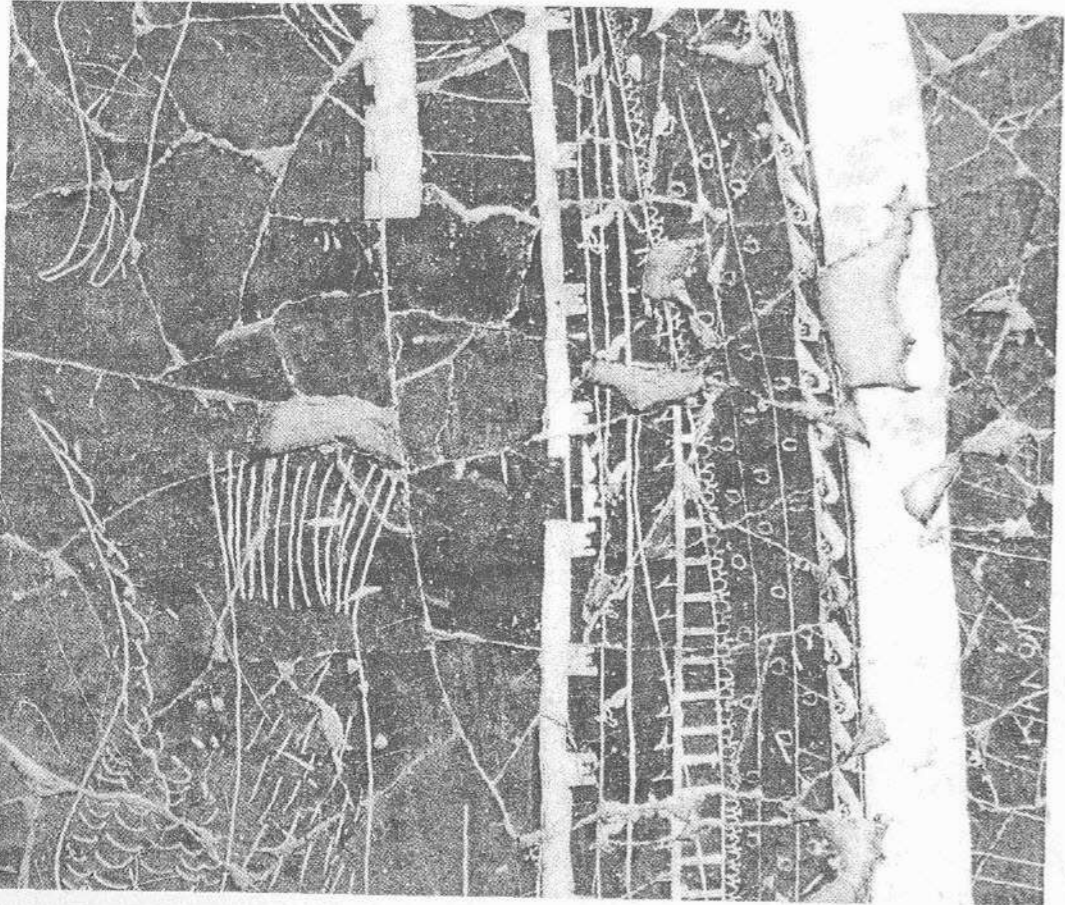


Fig. 7

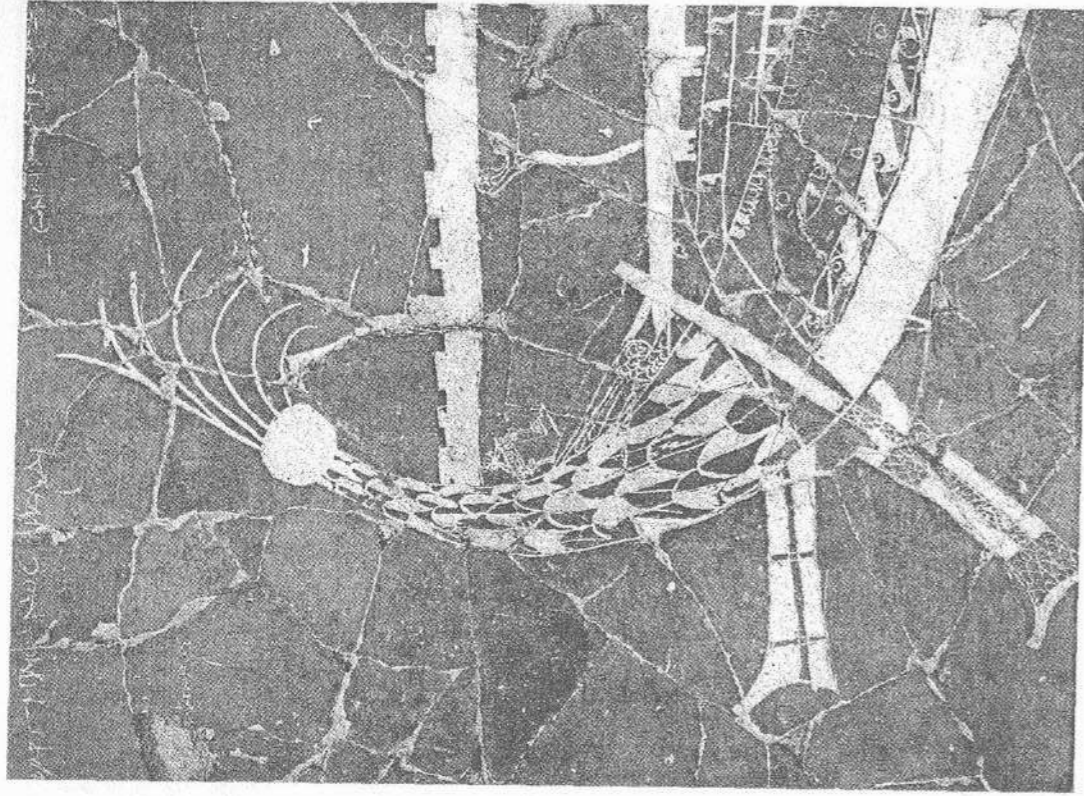


Fig. 10

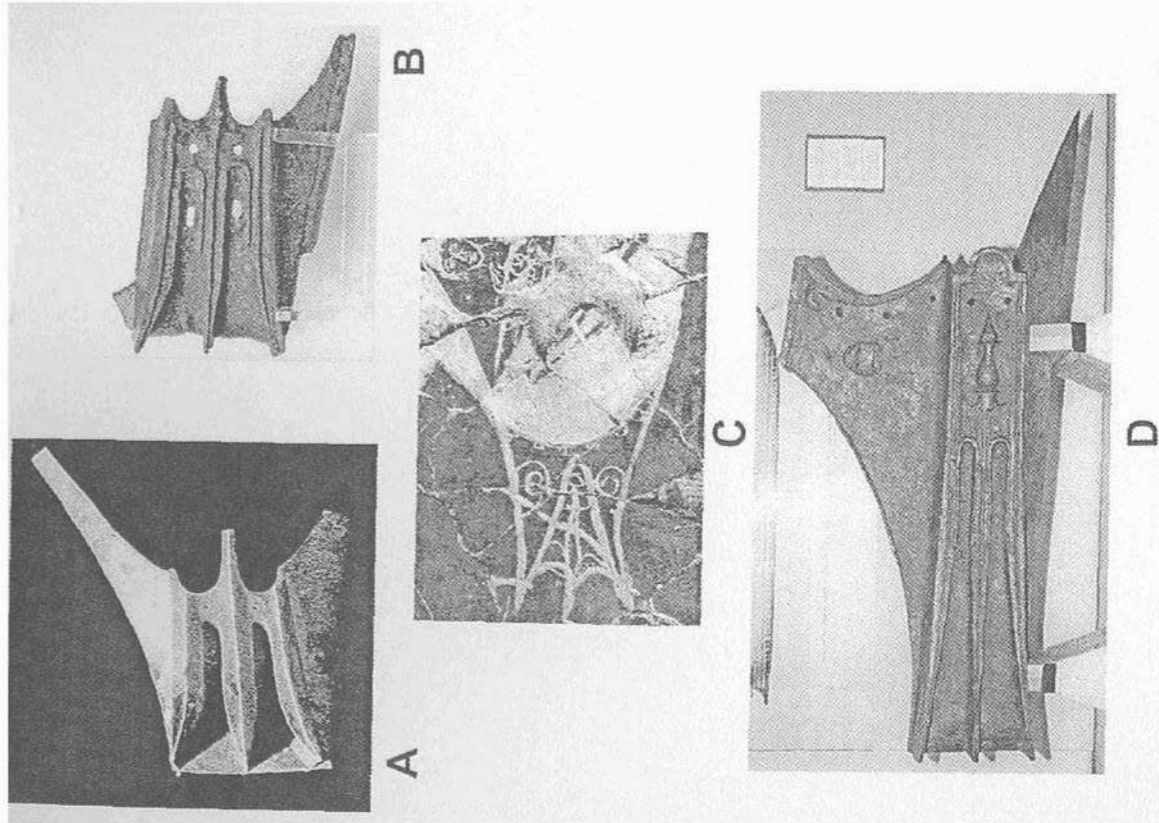


Fig. 9

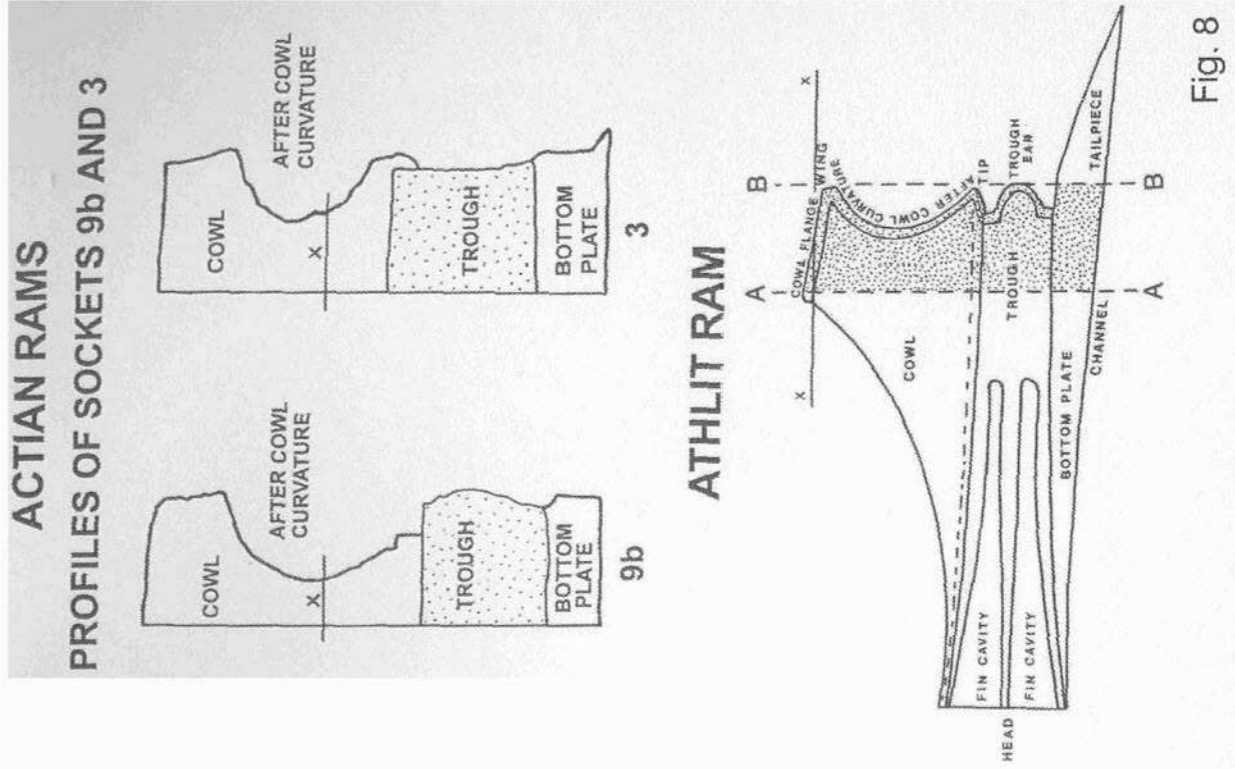


Fig. 8