

Exceptional Ancient Ships

ANCIENT MAXI - SHIPS

Length (m)	Width (m)	Nb levels	Nb oarsmen Per side	Nb of ships	Owner	Date of construction	Observations	Source (see Biblio)
70?	20?	3?	13	5	Demetrios Poliorcetes & Ptolemy II	301 BC	Demetrios' flagship, also used for marriage of his daughter Stratonice at Rhosos (Pieria Antioch)	[6] p121 [9] p159
70	20	3	15	1	Demetrios Poliorcetes of Macedonia	ca 288 BC	Captured by Ptolemy I, in 285 BC and destroyed.	[4] p41 [6] p280 [9] p161
70	20?	2	16	1	Demetrios Poliorcetes of Macedonia	288 BC	Demetrios' flagship against Lysimachus. Seen in Rome in 149 BC by Polybius.	[4] p40 [6] p280 [9] p162
110-120?	15-25	1	4 or 8	1	Lysimachos of Thrace	ca 280 BC	"Leontophoros": supposedly a double hull with 2 coupled "4" or "8", 1600 oarsmen (possibly 2 or 4x100 oars) + 1200 soldiers.	[4] p39 [6] p171 [9] p166
70-80?	16	3	18	1	Antigonos Gonatas of Macedonia	ca 258 BC	"Isthmia": Antigonos Gonatas' flagship against Ptolemy II. Ship "of Delos".	[4] p41 [6] p185 [9] p168
?	17.4	3	20	1	Ptolemy II of Alexandria	ca 260 BC	With largest number of oarsmen: 7 on the lower level, 7 on the middle level and 6 on the upper level	[3] p107 [6] p178 [9] p169
?	20?	3	30	2	Ptolemy II of Alexandria	246 BC	Largest seagoing galleys ever built. Double hull with 2 coupled "15"?	[3] p107 [6] p178 [9] p170
130	17.5	3?	40	1	Ptolemy IV of Alexandria	ca 220 BC	Double hull with 2 coupled "20"? 4000 oarsmen + 3250 soldiers & sailors. Mainly a deterrent?	[2] p289 [3] p108 [4] p40 [6] p180 [9] p172
62	20?	3?	20	1	Hieron II of Syracuse	ca 240 BC	"Syracusia" did only one trip from Syracuse to Alexandria. First cruise ship?! Payload 2000 t	[4] p98 [3] p185 [9] p102
130	45?	-	-	1	Ptolemy IV of Alexandria	ca 220 BC	"Thalamegos", floating royal palace. Probably never went out of her home port.	[2] p289
97.5	20	3?	30	1	Caligula	ca 40 AD	Used for transporting the Vatican obelisk. Payload: 1300 t.	[3] p189 [4] p46 [8] p104 [9] p102
71.3 & 73	20 & 24	2-3?	18	2	Caligula	ca 40 AD	"Nemi I" & "Nemi II", replicas of the "18" of Delos. Used for naval games on the Lake of Nemi.	[4] p43
55	>14	-	-	1	?	2 nd c. AD	"Isis", for transporting grain between Alexandria and Rome. Payload: 1 200 t (or 20 to 30 000 amphorae).	[3] p186

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OTHER ANCIENT SHIPS

Length (m)	Width (m)	Nb levels	Nb oarsmen Per side	Nb of ships	Owner	Date of construction	Observations	Source (see Biblio)
30	5	1	1	many	Greeks	ca 1100 BC	Pentecontoros (50 oarsmen)	Wikipedia
20	2,6	2	2	many	Greeks Phoenicians	ca 700 BC	Bireme (140 oarsmen)	[4] p63
35 to 40	4,8	3	3	many	Greeks Phoenicians	ca 500 BC	Famous Greek trireme of the Medic Wars (170 oarsmen + 30 sailors)	[4] p22 & 63
35	5	3	5	many	Romans Carthaginians	ca 400 BC	Famous quinquereme of the Punic Wars (270 oarsmen + 120 soldiers)	[4] p108 [2] p337
35 to 40	9 to 10	-	-	many	Romans	ca 0	Cargo « 10 000 amphorae » transporting wine and oil. Typical wreck at La Madrague de Giens	[3] p173

PM: OTHER GALLEYS

Length (m)	Width (m)	Nb levels	Nb oarsmen Per side	Nb of ships	Owner	Date of construction	Observations	Source
45	9	1	5	many	Maltese galley	ca 1450 AD	250 oarsmen + 350 soldiers & sailors	[10] p109...
23	3 to 4	1	1	many?	Viking	ca 320 AD	Nydam ship with 30 oarsmen	Wikipedia

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Length is overall, Width is excluding outriggers.

Number of levels: Nb of superimposed levels of oars/oarsmen (max of 3 levels) ([4] p38).

Number of oarsmen per side: Nb of oarsmen on all levels (max of 8 oarsmen per oar, [9] p100), e.g.:

- a trireme had 1 oarsman per oar and 3 levels of superimposed oars (slightly shifted) ([4] p32),
- a quinquereme had 2 oarsmen per oar on 2 upper levels and 1 oarsman on the lower level ([4] p32),
- a Maltese galley had 5 oarsmen per oar on one single level ([10]),
- Acc. to L. Casson, all ships with more than 16 oarsmen per side are double-hull ships ([3] p107), but M. Pitassi considers only the “30” and “40” and Leontophoros are,
- Acc. to W. Murray, the “20”, “30” et “40” are double-hull platforms designed for besieging port cities ([6] p178),
- Acc. to W. Murray, the Leontophoros is a double-hull ship with two coupled “8”, hence an erroneous name designating a “16” ([6] p178),

Amphora: a full amphora weighted 35 to 55 kg.

PM: dead-weight includes payload, passengers and consumables (water, food, etc.).

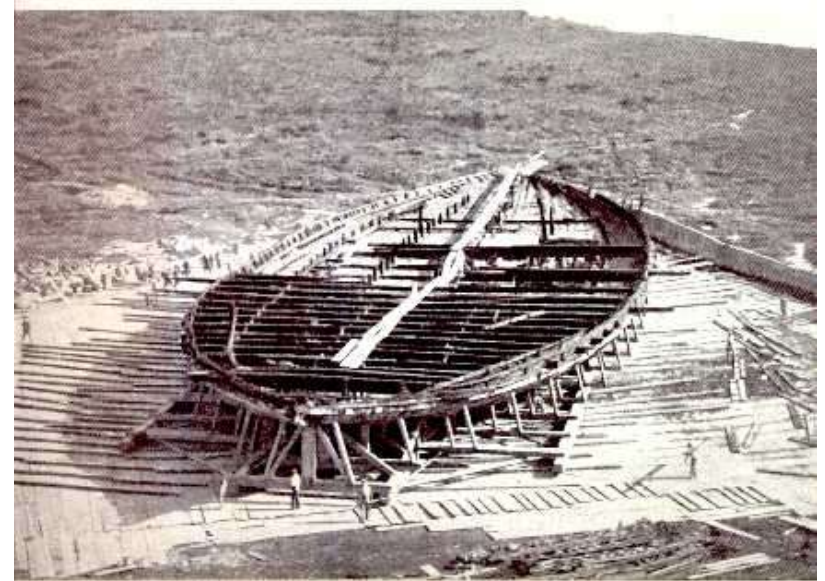
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2. BASCH, L., 1987, “Le musée imaginaire de la marine antique”, Institut hellénique pour la préservation de la tradition nautique, Athènes.
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4. GUILLERM, A., 1995, “La marine dans l’antiquité”, Que sais-je ? N°2995, éd. Presses Universitaires de France.
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9. PITASSI, M., 2023, “Hellenistic Naval Warfare and Warships 336-30 BC”, Pen & Sword Books.
10. PETIET, C., 1992, “Ces Messieurs de la religion; l’ordre de Malte au dix-huitième siècle ou le crépuscule d’une épopée”, France-Empire.

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The initial ancient references are the following:

- the “13” of Demetrios Poliorcetes and of Ptolemy II: Plutarch, Demetrios, 31 & 32; Athenaeus citing Callixenus, Philosophers' dinner, 5, 9.
- the Leontophoros of Lysimachos: described by Memnon, cited by Jacobus Palmerius (that is Jacques Le Paulmier, 1678).
- the “15” of Demetrios Poliorcetes: Plutarch, Demetrios, 20 & 43.
- the “16” of Demetrios Poliorcetes: Pliny, Nat. Hist., 16, 76; Diodorus, Hist., 20, 92; Plutarch, Demetrios, 20 & 43; Polybius, Hist., 36, 5; Titus Livius, Roman Hist., 45, 42.
- the “18” of Antigonus Gonatas, son of Demetrios Poliorcetes, offers his flagship to the temple of Apollo at Delos around 255 BC: Athenaeus, philosophers' dinner, 5, 12; Pausanias, Greece, 1, 29.
- the “20” and the “30” of Ptolemy II: Athenaeus citing Callixenus, Philosophers' dinner, 5, 9.
- the Syracusia of Hieron II of Syracuse offered to Ptolemy II: Athenaeus citing Moschion, Philosophers' dinner, 5, 10.
- the “40” of Ptolemy IV: Athenaeus, Philosophers' dinner, 5, 9; Plutarch, Demetrios, 43.
- the Thalamegos of Ptolemy IV: Athenaeus, Philosophers' dinner, 5, 9.
- the ship of Caligula for transporting the obelisk: Pliny, Nat. Hist., 15, 76 & 36, 14; Suetonius, Life of twelve Cesars, Claudius, 20; Ammianus Marcellinus, Histoire de Rome, 17, 4.
- the Nemi I & II of Caligula: no ancient reference, but two wrecks found by archaeologists in 1927-32 and unfortunately destroyed in 1944 by fire (photo of 1930 right).
- the Isis: Lucian of Samosata, The Ship, or the wishes.



Caligula's Nemi II ship on Lake Nemi (picture 1930).