

# **GENDER ROLES OF THE DEITIES AT SEA IN ANTIQUITY**

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

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Submitted to the Undergraduate Research Scholars program  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the designation as an

**UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOLAR**

Approved by  
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May 2016

Major: Anthropology

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## **ABSTRACT**

Gender Roles of the Deities at Sea in Antiquity

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This thesis seeks to research and establish the significance of gender as it relates to the roles of Greek and Roman deities in the lives of seafaring citizens. Greek and Roman mythology has provided a long-standing area of interest in academia, along with Classics in general. This thesis will focus on providing broader knowledge of ancient religion at sea and the influence of major gods, such as Poseidon, as well as lesser deities. I intend to read and analyze primary sources, secondary scholarship, and archeological evidence to help develop an accurate understanding of various deities particularly important to life at sea and the role gender played in the power or position maintained by each god or goddesses.

## **DEDICATION**

To my fiancé, parents, brother, and Ethel.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I would like to thank Dr. Deborah Carlson for introducing me to the Glasscock Scholar Program and all of her help with the thesis.

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Daily life in ancient Greece and Rome developed around a well-established system of religious ideology as well as a system of myths that are still deeply ingrained today. Gods and goddesses were believed to control all aspects of life for the ancient people. Guidance from these deities would have been invoked on occasions ranging from birth to death to harvest and to war. For dangerous seafaring adventures, the blessing and protection of gods was critical and religious rituals were necessary. This can be seen in literature from ancient sources, like that of Homer in the eighth century/seventh century B.C or Virgil in the first century B.C. While maritime rituals and religion have been examined in secondary literature, the differences in roles between the female goddesses and male gods have yet to be analyzed. Investigating how the gender of deities affected their role and/or power in the lives of seafaring Greeks and Romans will provide a keener understanding of the role of ancient religion at sea, generally, and the potential role of deity gender, more specifically. The primary focus of this paper will be to explore maritime deities invoked for protection upon embarkation, amidst trouble at sea, and following safe passage, but my scope will also include other gods/goddesses associated with rituals or prayers offered during seafaring journeys.

### **Background**

The stories and characters behind Greek and Roman myths have fascinated people throughout time. Children's literature, adolescent history classes, and high school English curricula introduce Ares, the Greek god of war and violence, and Aphrodite, the goddess of love and

beauty. Complete with twisted love stories and epic battles, Greek and Roman mythology has always been an enticing subject to study and read. The study of ancient civilizations reveals the impactful role of religion and its incorporation into every aspect of daily life. Ancient Greek and Roman religion was extremely ritualistic and complex. Greek philosopher, Theophrastus, commented, “one must sacrifice to the gods for three purposes: to give honor, to show gratitude, or because of one’s need of good things.”<sup>1</sup> Greek statesman and orator Demosthenes notes “It is proper for a person who is beginning any serious discourse and task to begin first with the gods.”<sup>2</sup> Likewise, historian and pupil of Socrates, Xenophon, states “For all things everywhere are subject to the gods and they control all things equally.”<sup>3</sup> Statements like these demonstrate the overall reach the gods and goddesses maintained in lives of ancient people.

The influence of the sea and the necessity of ships are evidenced throughout Greek and Roman life. Ancient literature including the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid* relay hundreds of stories centered upon a seafaring existence. The risks associated with travel by sea were well-known, but still seen as an inescapable necessity of life. Throughout antiquity, merchants, traders, seamen and loved ones at home would certainly have invoked the gods and goddesses for protection. Sacrifices were made at the onset of a voyage. Facing the perils of an unknown sea, one of Alexander’s commanders “sacrificed bulls to Poseidon, poured a libation upon the sacrifice, and threw the golden cup and mixing bowls into the deep as thank-offerings, at the same time praying that the expedition might fare well.”<sup>4</sup> Once at sea, sailors continued to invoke the blessings of the gods for safety. When a sailor named Herostratus of Naucratis encountered a

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<sup>1</sup> Theophrastus, *On Piety*, frag. 12; Mikalson 2010: 24

<sup>2</sup> Demosthenes *Epistula* 1.1; Mikalson 2010:32

<sup>3</sup> Xenophon *Anabasis* 2.5.7; Mikalson 2010: 166

<sup>4</sup> McCartney, 1933: 9

significant storm, he and his fellow crew “hastened to the statue of the goddess (Aphrodite) and implored it for safety, whereupon the sun shone again.”<sup>5</sup> With the expansion of Rome and its growing population, an increasing dependence on foreign grain developed. Wheat was a critical component of the diet of the people of Rome. Because wheat was such a mainstay to the survival of the people, the trade of grain became one of the few areas of commerce important to the state. Based on estimates of the average consumption of grain, Rome required more than a quarter of a million tons of grain per year. Thousands of ships would have been required to transport this massive quantity.<sup>6</sup> The Greek and Roman economies were intertwined with overseas trade as they required the import of grain to satisfy the needs of their people. In addition, diplomatic relationships spanned the seas. Wars with neighboring entities required ancient people venture out to sea for battles. Death at sea was a common happenstance and would be a pressing thought on any sea traveler’s mind. Hesiod, a Greek poet, comments, “it is a bad business to meet with disaster among the waves.”<sup>7</sup> The ancient people would have been particularly worried about dying at sea because their belief system condemned an unburied body to wander the earth forever. In an effort to soothe seafarers’ anxiety, cenotaphs, empty tombs for a person whose physical remains could not be recovered, were introduced at the end of the seventh century B.C.<sup>8</sup> For protection in the face of the ongoing dangers associated with sea travel, ancient people would have turned to the gods and goddesses “in hopes of propitiating the gods so as to ensure a safe and successful trip.”<sup>9</sup> Prayers and sacrifices were performed prior to leaving on any voyage. Elizabeth Greene analyzes fifteen embarkation scenes from Homer’s *Odyssey*. She notes six steps that comprise the “ideal embarkation scene” with an offering to the

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<sup>5</sup> McCartney 1933: 10

<sup>6</sup> Rickman 1980: 261-263

<sup>7</sup> Hes. *Op.* 685-93

<sup>8</sup> Streuding 2014, 2

<sup>9</sup> Streuding 2014, 4

gods constituting one of the steps. In nine out of the fifteen scenes, when a proper sacrifice was offered, successful voyages were completed. In the remaining six examples without proper sacrifices, bad weather, shipwrecks and other disasters occurred.<sup>10</sup> In addition to these sacrifices made at embarkation, other dedications and votive offerings were typically presented after a safe voyage as a way of giving thanks.<sup>11</sup> Sanctuaries erected at port cities offer additional insight into the gods revered for providing protection at sea.

Gods and goddesses were obviously revered for their perceived power to protect citizens at sea. It is interesting to consider the power of female goddesses given the diminished role of women in ancient Rome and Greece. Fifth century Athens began the seclusion of women in their homes and out of any public sphere.<sup>12</sup> While Roman women were not as secluded as the ancient Greek women, Roman men maintained total control over the political and economic sphere. Understanding how goddesses attained these positions of power, even power over male god counterparts, will provide interesting insight into the general role of these supernatural beings to ancient seafaring civilizations.

## **Objectives**

The goal of my thesis is to develop a better understanding of the different roles gods and goddesses played with respect to their importance in the lives of ancient seafarers preparing for, during, and after maritime journeys. I intend to determine if there are patterns that suggest gender specific roles among deities based on the particular human needs. For example, are male gods prayed to for protection while female goddesses are prayed to for comfort at sea? Are

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<sup>10</sup> Greene 1995: 223-227

<sup>11</sup> Streuding, 2014, 5

<sup>12</sup> Katz 1992, 73

invocations to male gods for success at naval war more common than to their female counterparts? Is one gender called upon more with bequest for safe and fruitful trade voyages? I will examine the portrayal of gods and goddesses with a concentrated focus on the role, if any, that gender may play in their perceived powers. Through my examination of these occasions when the powers of the gods are invoked, any gender disparity in the interaction between individual gods and goddesses will be noted.

## **Methodology**

### *Ancient sources*

Ancient literature contributes great insight through various authors' examples and perceptions of the roles of the gods at sea. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are two meaningful examples of ancient sources that proved useful. Looking at Homer's portrayal of gods like Poseidon and Athena and how Homer describes their interaction with his characters provides thought-provoking evidence. Reading the *Aeneid* and examining the roles of Juno and Neptune offers another example of a pertinent literary source. Not only do ancient sources furnish examples of the deities at work, they also afford insight into ancient rituals and prayer requests to the gods. I began my analysis of these ancient sources by searching for instances of divine intervention in the epic works of Homer and Virgil. While analyzing ancient sources can be enlightening, I was careful to avoid interpreting the stories and events as factual evidence. However, I use the stories to examine the potential mindset of the ancient people and their attitudes toward the perceived powers of the respective gods and goddesses.

*Scholarly articles and archaeological evidence*

Along with ancient sources, I examine secondary sources written by more modern academics. Articles like “The Composition of the Argo Metopes from the Monopteros at Delphi” and “The Cult of Aphrodite in Miletos and Its Colonies” are examples of fruitful articles. From articles like these, I was able to use existing research to expand upon the specifics of my topic. I also look into archeological evidence provided by examining excavation reports from sanctuaries, temples, and shipwreck sites. These artifacts serve to offer insight into which gods and/or goddesses may have been involved with various sea related activities. More emphasis is placed on archaeological finds that bear specific dedicatory inscriptions. These inscriptions allow for more factual data versus inferential data. Combining the archaeological evidence with literary evidence permits a more in-depth analysis.

## CHAPTER II

### DISCUSSION OF LITERARY SOURCES

A brief discussion of attitudes toward gender in ancient society provides a logical starting point for examining and understanding the impact of gender roles among the deities within the religious ideology of ancient Greece and Rome. In ancient Greece, women were always under the control of a male guardian called the *kyrios*. As women were expected to stay out of the public eye, her *kyrios* would represent her in court or in a public setting. A woman's ability to influence decision-making was tied to her ability to influence her *kyrios*. A Greek woman could not enter into contracts, make loans, or sell property but instead had to rely on her *kyrios* to act on her behalf.<sup>13</sup> If a woman inherited property from her father, she was merely attached to the property and could not control the property. Women were expected to remain secluded in their homes. Even within one's own home, the women and men would be divided into separate quarters. In Xenophon's book *Oeconomicus*, we find two insightful examples of Greek attitudes toward women remaining indoors. Xenophon defines the reason for segregation as assigned by nature.

“I believe that the god arranged that the work and supervision indoors are a woman's task and the outdoors are the man's. For the god made man's body and soul better able to endure the cold and heat of travel and military service, so that he assigned to him the outdoor work. But the god endowed the woman with a body less able to endure these hardships and so... I believe that he assigned the indoor work to her.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Sealey 1990

<sup>14</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 7.22-23

“For it is better for a woman to remain indoors than to go outside, and it is more disgraceful for a man to remain inside than to take care of the work outside.”<sup>15</sup>

The one exception to the diminished role of women was the Greek city of Sparta. The Spartan women had immense freedoms and options. They had the capabilities to own property, marry multiple men, speak openly and function without a chaperone. However, men from other Greek cities frowned upon this aberration. Pericles, an Athenian statesman living between 495- 429 BC, addressing a female’s virtue, says “great will be your glory in not falling short of your natural character; and greatest will be hers who is least talked of among men, whether for good or for bad.”<sup>16</sup> It is not uncommon to see negative views of women in ancient Greek literature. One of the most telling stories about the male’s negative views on women is in Hesiod’s two stories of Pandora in his books *Works and Days* and *Theogony*. Zeus asks Hephaistos to create a woman from clay and with help from Athena creates an exceptionally beautiful lady. However, her inner quality left much to be desired. Upon Zeus’s instructions,

“Pallas Athena put on the finishing touches, and the quicksilver messenger put in her breast lies and wheedling words and a cheating heart” and Hermes gave her “a bitchy mind.”<sup>17</sup>

Hesiod describes Pandora as the origin of the female race and goes on to compare her to drones.

“From her is the race of female women, a great infestation among mortal men, at home with Wealth but not with Poverty. It’s the same with bees in their overhung hives feeding the drones, evil conspirators. The bees work every day until the sun goes down, busy all day long making pale honeycombs, while the drones stay inside... stuffing their

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<sup>15</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 7.30

<sup>16</sup> Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*

<sup>17</sup> Hesiod, *Works and Days* 96-98; 87

stomachs with the work of other. That's just how Zeus... made women as a curse for mortal men."<sup>18</sup>

This is a very pessimistic view of women. By comparing women to drones, Hesiod is commenting on women's unproductive nature. Semonides of Amorgos takes a similar viewpoint and describes women as "the worst plague Zeus has made."<sup>19</sup> Many more instances of women's perceived inferiority can be cited through ancient Greek literary records.

Ancient Rome has many similarities to the ancient Greek world with regard to women. Like the Greek women, Roman women were under the influence and control of the head of the household. In the Roman world, this person was called the *pater familias*. However, if a Roman woman's *pater familias* died and she was not married or under control of her husband, she became *sui iuris*, or independent.<sup>20</sup> She still maintained a guardian but merely as a formality. In this way Roman women had more independence than their Greek counterparts. However, Roman men controlled politics and business keeping the women essentially powerless except in rare cases. One exception is Eumachia the Fuller, a priestess from Pompeii, who erected and dedicated a building to herself.<sup>21</sup>

Based on these cultural attitudes about the inferiority of women, one would expect to see examples of more powerful and frequently worshiped male gods especially in the male dominated areas of sea travel, naval warfare and commerce at sea. The purpose of the rest of this

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<sup>18</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony* 594-605

<sup>19</sup> Semonides *Fragments*: 96-97

<sup>20</sup> Sealey 1990, 96-109.

<sup>21</sup> Moeller 1972

paper is to examine literary sources and archaeological evidence to evaluate which gods and goddesses were invoked at sea.

### **Literary evidence**

Examining literature from ancient sources provides key insight into understanding the roles, power struggles, and overall interaction between mortals and their gods and between various deities. In the opening lines of Homer's *Odyssey*, the reader learns that the journey of Odysseus has been plagued by Poseidon as punishment for blinding Poseidon's son, the Cyclops Polyphemus. Athena beseeches Zeus to show some mercy for the great Odysseus in his plight to return home.

“Olympian Zeus, have you no care for him in your lofty heart? Did he never win your favor with sacrifices burned beside the ships on the broad plain of Troy? Why, Zeus, why so dead set against Odysseus?”<sup>22</sup>

The stage is set for a power struggle of sorts between the god Poseidon and the goddess Athena over the direction of Odysseus' life. Perhaps Athena is aware of the limits of her power against Poseidon as she seeks the aid of Zeus while Poseidon is away and unable to challenge her request. Athena and Poseidon wage a war of powers as Poseidon seeks to drown Odysseus when he

“rammed the clouds together-both hands clutching his trident-churned the waves into chaos, whipping all the gales from every quarter, shrouding over in thunderheads the earth and sea at once.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Homer, *Odyssey* 1.72. Ed.

<sup>23</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, 5.321

Unable to counter the violent force of the storm brought on by Poseidon, Athena is aided by the intervention of Leucothea (Ino), a sea goddess who takes pity on Odysseus and provides a life-saving scarf which protects him from drowning. Through the combined forces of these female deities, Odysseus ultimately arrives safely on land. In another example in the *Odyssey*, Athena guides Telemachus as he sets sail.

“Athena led the way, assuming the pilot’s seat reserved astern, and he sat close beside her.... Bright-eyed Athena sent them a stiff following wind rippling out of the west, ruffling over the wine-dark sea... they set up bowls and brimmed them high with wine and poured libations out to the everlasting gods who never die- to Athena first of all.”<sup>24</sup>

For this important journey, Telemachus’ aid and guidance come from Athena. Later, as Telemachus sets sail to return home from his journey, he again seeks guidance from the gods “praying, sacrificing to Pallas (Athena) by the stern.”<sup>25</sup>

While the vengeance of Poseidon is manifested in violent, physical outbursts of weather, Athena reveals the measure of her influence by calming the winds and waves but, in addition, Athena brings another level of internal strength to the situation. She inspires Odysseus.

“Just as that fear went churning through his mind a tremendous roller swept him toward the rocky coast where he’d been flayed alive, his bones crushed if the bright-eyed goddess Pallas had not inspired him now.”<sup>26</sup>

On another occasion, when Odysseus has finally found Ithaca but despairs, Athena seeks to encourage his inner strength by exhorting him to show courage, to “free your mind of all that

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<sup>24</sup> Homer, *Odyssey* 2. 455-475

<sup>25</sup> Homer, *Odyssey* 15. 247

<sup>26</sup> Homer, *Odyssey* 5.468

anguish now....then we'll make plans so we can win the day."<sup>27</sup> The reader of the *Odyssey* has already experienced this aspect of Athena's powers as she inspires and encourages Prince Telemachus to rebel against his mother's suitors and seek to discover his father's destiny.

Fragmentary poems of both Sappho and Alcaeus refer to a sanctuary on the island of Lesbos in the last half of the seventh century BC, which housed a triple cult of Zeus, Hera, and Dionysus. A lengthy fragment from Alcaeus provides more specific information about the sanctuary itself, which is described as large and spacious, easily seen from the sea. No inscriptional evidence for the cults of Zeus and Hera has yet to be discovered. However, the mere mention of a place of worship dedicated to all three in the context of the ancient works of Sappho and Alcaeus serves to offer insight into an understanding of possible gender role differences among these deities. Equal representation within the framework of the erection of a sanctuary certainly supports the idea of equality among the male and female gods as it relates to power and influence.

The first book of Virgil's *Aeneid* provides another example of the gods and goddesses at work during the important sea voyage of Aeneas. The ships of Aeneas were "under sail in open water...lighthearted as they plowed the whitecapped sea" when the wrath of the goddess Juno was stirred up.<sup>28</sup> Juno called upon King Aeolus, ruler of the wind, to "put a new fury into your winds, and make the long ships founder! Drive them off course! Throw bodies in the sea!"<sup>29</sup> Juno offers Aeolus the loveliest of her nymphs in marriage as an additional incentive to punish Aeneas and his ships. Aeolus responds that he requires nothing more than Juno's simple

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<sup>27</sup> Homer, *Odyssey* 13.411

<sup>28</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid*: 1.50-1.52

<sup>29</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid*: 1.97-1.99

request to carry out the goddess' desire. Aeolus takes orders from the Queen of the gods without incident. He does not desire any affirmation from Jupiter before acting on the matter. The word of the goddess is weighty enough. Aeolus wreaks havoc on the seas creating howling gusts of wind from all directions in an effort to destroy the ships of Aeneas. Neptune, however, became aware of the commotion and since power over the sea was his to control, he "quieted the surging water, drove the clouds away, and brought the sunlight back."<sup>30</sup> Neptune also admonishes Aeolus for stepping out of line and crossing into his realm of power but never confronts or challenges Juno for her role in the disruption of the seas. It seems reasonable to infer that the ancient people's perception of Juno's power was on an equal plane to that of Neptune.

Other literary examples highlight the influence of specific gods and goddesses in relation to the sea. Greek writer Pausanias, from the second century C.E., describes how Diomedes dedicates a Temple to Apollo to show gratitude for escape from a storm at sea.<sup>31</sup> Apollo calmed the seas and allowed for their safe return home. Throughout the work of Apollonius of Rhodes, the Argonauts are most influenced by the powers of Apollo to protect them at sea. Jason prays to Apollo Embasios.

"Now do thou thyself guide the ship with my comrades safe and sound, thither and back again to Hellas. Then in thy honour hereafter we will lay again on thy altar the bright offering of bulls-all of us who return; and other gifts in countless numbers"<sup>32</sup>

From the same writings, Jason suggests building an altar to Apollo Embasios who "promised to mark out and show me the paths of the sea."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid*: 1.193-195

<sup>31</sup> Pausanias 2.32.2, trans. by W.H.S. Jones

<sup>32</sup> Apollonius of Rhodes 1.1425-1439; McCartney 1933:5

<sup>33</sup> Apollonius of Rhodes 1.359-362; Albis 1996: 27

The Dioscuri are the twin sons of Zeus who are individually called Castor and Polydeuces (or Pollux in Latin). The *Homeric Hymn* best describes the Dioscuri's role:

“To be saviors of earthly men and of swift ships when the wintry storm winds rush along the pitiless sea. Then going up onto the stern deck, men call the sons of great Zeus... But the strong wind and the wave of the sea drive down their ship beneath the water, when suddenly appear the sons of Zeus ...and straightway they have stilled the tempests of terrible winds and have lulled the waves on the deep white sea; they are good portents to mariners.”<sup>34</sup>

Other texts highlight the significance of the Dioscuri as valued nautical deities.<sup>35</sup> As described by fourth century C.E. historian Ammianus Marcellinus, Roman Prefect Tertullus sacrificed in the Temple of Castor and Pollux to calm violent winds allowing grain filled ships to reach Rome.<sup>36</sup> References from these sources suggest the importance of Castor and Pollux as saviors for sailors.

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<sup>34</sup> *Homeric Hymn 33, To the Dioscuri*

<sup>35</sup> Szeliga 1986; McCartney 1933; Jaisle 1907; Streuding 2014

<sup>36</sup> McCartney 1933:11

## CHAPTER III

### DISCUSSION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Archaeology provides a unique opportunity as it relates to studying ancient Greece and Rome. We have an abundance of literary texts, which, in combination with the archaeological records, provide more solid evidence and a greater overall understanding of the ancient world. When looking for archaeological evidence of deities' roles at sea, one might think to first look at shipwreck remains and the potential religious figurines found on the ships. However, this proves complex as one can never really know if these artifacts are the personal items of the crew or just the ships cargo. Examining the votive artifacts at temples and sanctuaries proves to be more insightful.

#### **Temples and sanctuaries**

As previously stated in the brief background, sea travel during this time period was dangerous therefore it is common sense that ancient people would seek divine intervention and protection. According to Streuding, prior to a ships embarkment, prayers and a sacrifice were offered to the gods, while a dedication of a votive offering was generally completed after their safe arrival. A votive offering is a gift “dedicated to the gods by individuals or communities after fulfillment of a previous request,” which tend to be smaller and therefore movable.<sup>37</sup> Many of these votive offerings are inscribed which can help to support evidence of their purpose. These votive offerings can be dedicated for happy occasions but tend to be used in times of stress and

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<sup>37</sup> Streuding, 2014 5-6

weakness.<sup>38</sup> Prayer and sacrifice cannot be directly supported in the archaeological record, while votive offerings are much more tangible and prevalent. A votive *pinax* is a picture painted on a wood, stone, or terracotta tablet and was typically hung in a sanctuary.<sup>39</sup> Thousands of these were discovered in 1879 near the sanctuary of Poseidon at Penteskouphia.<sup>40</sup> They were decorated with depictions of Poseidon, Amphitrite, ships and naval scenes. One in particular showed a ship loaded with pots and we can assume a merchant dedicated this after a successful voyage.<sup>41</sup> A singular terracotta *pinax* was discovered at the Temple of Poseidon at Sounion, which depicted “a warship, marines with their spears up, and a detailed depiction of the helmsman” suggesting homage to Poseidon for a successful naval battle.<sup>42</sup>

As the ruler of the sea, Poseidon receives many offerings regarding the sea but there is archaeological proof of other gods involvement in the sea as well. Hera is typically thought of as the goddess of marriage and the wife and sister of Zeus. Literary texts tend to present her as vindictive, and resentful of all of Zeus’s extramarital lovers. Excavations at Sanctuary of Hera on Samos have yielded 40 wooden boat models dating to the seventh century BC.<sup>43</sup> Streuding points out that these boats may represent cult objects but it is more likely that these boats are votive offerings dedicated to Hera after a naval victory. She points out the resemblance between these boat models and ancient Greek warships. Many votive anchors, an obvious nautical offering, were dedicated to Hera at the Italian sanctuaries at Croton and Metapontum. In addition, a figurine of Hera holding a flower-decorated ship was discovered at Perachora and Tiryns, Greece. Streuding suggests this figurine links Hera to the protection of fishing while the

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<sup>38</sup> Rouse 1902, 240-58

<sup>39</sup> Streuding 2014, 30

<sup>40</sup> Walters and Birch 1905, 51

<sup>41</sup> Larson 2007, 60

<sup>42</sup> Streuding 2014, 31

<sup>43</sup> Baumbach 2004, 163

Samian models mentioned above might suggest that Hera was the personal “protectress of the Samian fleet.”<sup>44</sup> It is interesting that Hera is honored and revered as nautical protector in archaeological finds. It begs the question: why would seafarers choose to seek protection and honor Hera over the ruler of the sea, Poseidon? This archaeological evidence highlighting Hera’s role as nautical protector suggests a lack of gender bias among mortals seeking the help of the Gods.

Alan Greaves evaluates the 1989 discovery and excavation of a sanctuary of Aphrodite adjacent to the city of Miletos, a Greek city with more overseas colonies than any other city.<sup>45</sup> Several of Miletos’ colonies were known to have temples of Aphrodite but this new find revealed artifacts dating from the seventh and sixth centuries BC in the mother city. Included in the find were terracotta figurines as well as graffiti on pottery with dedications to Aphrodite clearly reflecting that this site represented a sanctuary to this goddess. While no architectural remains of the sanctuary itself remain, there were votive deposits throughout the area which consisted of bronzes, sculptural fragments, terracottas, lamps, and pottery. Greaves’ article discusses in detail the archaeological evidence from eleven surrounding colonies of Miletos each evidencing the presence of Aphrodite temples. Many of the epithets used for Aphrodite in these finds have the sea as a common theme. Translated, these monikers include “good sailing”, “of the open sea”, “mistress, or guardian, of ships”, “foam-born” and “celestial.” Given the vital role that the sea played in the geography, commerce, and culture of the city of Miletos, it is not surprising that the nautical aspect of Aphrodite’s character is emphasized over her roles as goddess of sex, fertility and marriage. At Kyzikos, one of the colonies, the worship of Aphrodite was often combined

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<sup>44</sup> Streuding 2014, 37-38; 52; 72-73

<sup>45</sup> Greaves 2004

with that of Poseidon. In summary, the findings from this excavation in the city of Miletos serve to make it clear that the worship of Aphrodite was more important than previously thought. Alongside Apollo, Aphrodite would have to be considered one of the more important gods of the Milesians and their colonies.<sup>46</sup> In nearby Knidos, a 1972 excavation unearthed another Sanctuary of Aphrodite Euploia, which contained one of the first statues representing Aphrodite nude.<sup>47</sup> Some inference would have to be made that gender was not a determining factor in the choice of maritime deities. If gender roles bore any significant weight in the eyes of the citizens of Miletos and its colonies then one would expect an abundance of temples erected to honor Poseidon, or another male god, rather than Aphrodite. It is worth noting that the archaeological evidence supports the idea that Aphrodite and Hera were the primary protectors of seafaring for Miletos and Samos respectively.

Another important archaeological discovery associated with maritime deities are the Argo metopes recovered at late archaic Sikyonian Treasury at Delphi. The large size of the five metopes compared to the estimated dimensions of the building suggests that these sculptured panels would have been its most prominent feature. One of the best-preserved metopes depicts a scene from the ship *Argo* with a crew on the deck as well as the Dioscuri on horseback. Because the Dioscuri figure in all but one of the myths represented on these five metopes, French archaeologist Juliette de La Geniere suggests that the dedication of this monopteros itself is connected with the Dioscuri, the sons of Zeus. Some attention has been drawn to the position of the two horsemen, separated from the remainder of the crew. Because the Dioscuri were worshipped as protectors of seafarers, the sculptor would have wanted to portray them in a

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<sup>46</sup> Greaves 2004

<sup>47</sup> Love 1973

capacity as divine saviors of the ships rather than as ordinary crewmembers of the Argo.<sup>48</sup> These tributes to the Dioscuri for nautical protection serve to balance the gender neutral attitudes of seafarers.

## **Shipwrecks**

The archaeological evidence provided by examining ancient shipwrecks opens up a rich body of potential information about the lives and practices of Greco-Roman people and their relationship with the sea. Technological advancements in underwater communication and robotics have facilitated the exploration of much deeper sites and fueled growth in the number of wreckage discoveries. However, as noted earlier, numerous challenges confront scientists attempting to analyze statues, figurines, and other religious artifacts excavated from these wreckage sites. Religious artifacts may have been carried on the ship as cargo, a component of the trading economies of the time. On the other hand, these items may just as easily constitute the personal effects of passengers and should be associated with maritime religious worship or rituals.

Carrie Atkins attempts to distinguish personal items from cargo by examining the spatial context of the artifacts. Atkins proposes one way to identify the original or intended function of relics is to assess the location of the religious objects on the ship. Atkins suggests the stern had a particular significance as the “*axis mundi*, a central location for divine communication” so that ritual items located at the stern of the ship were used for sacrifice and libation that facilitated communication between the gods and men.<sup>49</sup> Atkins associates objects in the bow as more focused on safeguarding the ship itself through divine help with navigation and protection. Two other criteria utilized in assessing the status of artifacts as the ship’s cargo or the passengers’

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<sup>48</sup> Szeliga, 1986

<sup>49</sup> Atkins, 2009: 4

personal effects were quantity and physical attributes of the object. For example, several hundred terracotta figurines discovered from a site off of Shavé Ziyon, Israel should be assumed to be cargo items headed to market. It is very unlikely that hundreds of figurines would be carried on board as sacred objects of worship for individual passengers or crew members. Variation in the finished state of materials can influence interpretation as well. Marble was shipped unfinished to protect the marble until it reached its destination where it would be finished before sale. Cargo designations would then seem more appropriate for unfinished items. Likewise, finished items that show signs of use point to personal effects.

For the purposes of her research, Atkins analyzes 32 shipwrecks dating from eighth century B.C. to mid third century C.E. Twenty-seven statuettes, figurines, and fragments were found in 15 of the shipwrecks. Males figurines numbered 10 and female figurines numbered 4. Three bronze male statuettes were identified as representations of Dionysus, Zeus, and Poseidon, all well known gods invoked for maritime protection. One of the female figurines was deemed to represent Hera and a second small terracotta statuette exhibited a stance and attributes associated with the Phoenician goddess, Astarte, a protector of seafarers. Fragments of figurines were also found in abundance and while they will never be able to be associated with a particular deity they do support the idea of figurines being carried on board for personal religious use.<sup>50</sup>

In another rescue operation conducted by the Israel Antiquities Authority off the Carmel Coast, two Roman shipwrecks were exposed. Analysis of these artifacts indicated two vessels, one from the third and one from the fourth century C.E., settled at the site. Among the objects included were anchors, pieces of hull and rigging, fishing gear and equipment, jewelry, and bronze figurines. Among the art was a well-preserved bronze figurine of Mercury (Hermes)

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<sup>50</sup> Atkins 2009

measuring 12 cm high and weighing 280 grams. The small, almost handheld size of this bronze, strongly suggests its role as a personal object of worship. As an important patron god of merchants capable of offering protection from looters and pirates, it is not surprising that Mercury would be worshipped aboard ship. Also discovered at this site was a bronze figurine of Serapis, a principal sea god in the Eastern Mediterranean whose statuettes have been found all over the ancient world. This particular figurine, 22 cm high and weighing 690 grams, was protected by marine encrustation and is almost fully preserved. Atkins describes a letter written by a young Egyptian sailor offering thanks to Serapis for survival during a sea journey. Again, the small size of this artifact and its singularity, along with the perceived power of this god, strongly support its usage as an object of personal religious ritual aboard the ship. The last bronze figurine raised from this site is female, stands 19 cm high, and weighs 525 grams. Adorned with a Corinthian helmet, she is assumed to represent the warrior aspect of Minerva (Athena) because of the classical pose of a victorious goddess.<sup>51</sup>

Another shipwreck dating from 25-1 B.C. was discovered in a river off of Comacchio, Italy. Excavations brought to light numerous kinds of artifacts. Among these were six tiny (8 cm) lead votive temples each containing Hermes or Venus inside it.<sup>52</sup> The small nature of these votive offerings would suggest it was a personal, portable object but the fact that six were discovered may give equal value to the cargo side of the argument. In addition, these votive temples were suitable for suspension because of the round opening in the roof of the temple.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Galili, Rosen, Sharvit 2010

<sup>52</sup> Parker 1992, #1206

<sup>53</sup> Atkins 2009

The small statuettes seem to have been quite popular for sailors as many have been discovered. Off the coast of Apollonia, Israel lies a shipwreck dating to the Late Roman Period. A 13.5 cm statuette of Minerva was found with her arms stretched like she once held a spear and a shield.<sup>54</sup> This statuette is comparable in size to the statues discovered at Hof Ha Carmel A and the figurines discussed in Atkin's thesis. These small statuettes could have been the preferred personal religious item for the sailors. The previously-described excavations unearthed figurines and votive temples honoring Dionysus, Zeus, Poseidon, Hera, Astarte, Athena, Hermes, Serapis and Minerva. Evidence of the worship of both gods and goddesses on board these ships is reflected by these discoveries.

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<sup>54</sup> Grosman 1993

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

The sea is an undeniable force in the cultures of ancient Greece and Rome. Access to the sea was critical in terms of commerce, geographic expansion and naval advantage. Given the perilous nature of sea travel, the gods were constantly invoked for protection. This paper sought to examine the gods and their roles to sea travellers and to identify attitudes of gender bias among the people toward their gods as well as consider gender disparity in the interactions between deities. To accomplish this, ancient texts were analyzed for evidence of bias or sexism. In addition, archaeological evidence was reviewed to determine the prevalence of artifacts supporting worship of specific gods. Analysis of the gender roles in this strongly patriarchal society reveal women as clearly inferior citizens banished to a secluded existence with few rights and privileges. Despite the lack of stature women held in society, goddesses in ancient Greece and Rome were formidable characters with strong personalities. Goddesses maintain key roles and their powers appear to equal the powers of the gods as they are called upon for protection from embarkment to journey's end. Throughout Homer's *Odyssey*, which takes place largely at sea or with respect to the sea, the female goddesses play a pivotal role in assisting Odysseus' arrival home. Odysseus received much help from Athena starting at the very beginning of the book. Athena convinces Zeus to lend a hand in helping Odysseus get home. She has a much gentler hand when assisting Odysseus than Poseidon. Although Poseidon is angry at Odysseus and seeking revenge, there is nothing subtle in his manners. Poseidon is full fledged in his attempt to crash, and destroy Odysseus while Athena is much more delicate with her interventions. The ancient literary texts from Virgil's *Aeneid* and Apollonius' *Argonautica*

further demonstrate gods' and goddesses' influence on the sea. However, there is no indication of any gender bias between the gods. The female goddesses appear to have as much influence and capabilities as the male gods. In addition, there does not seem to be any preference among the ancient people to call upon the male gods over the female goddesses.

Looking at the archaeological evidence further strengthens the idea of gender equality among the gods. Many naval votive offerings have been discovered in various sanctuaries and temples across the Greek and Roman world. There is solid proof establishing an established relationship between Hera and Samos and Aphrodite with Miletos. Hera is suggested to be the protector of the fleet at Samos. Miletos and her colonies seem to have a greater focus on Aphrodite as their protector of seafaring than other gods and goddesses. It is extremely interesting that the two cities established their major protector of seafaring with a goddesses over a god.

If we were to see parallels between the gender roles in society and in the relations of the gods, archaeological records and literary evidence would see a reliance on male gods. However the literary evidence and the archaeological record show equal opportunities among the male and female deities. Among the deities themselves, it seems the males and females are equally powerful and influential. The ancient people implore the aid of female and male gods equally when it comes to the sea. They even establish a more arranged relationship with female goddesses as protectress of seafaring. Overall, the female deities at sea enjoy equal standing with the male deities.

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