

## HERAKLES THE NAVIGATOR\*

### Introduction:

Civilization-bearing is a key aspect of the mythology of Herakles. One of the ways in which Herakles is able to dominate nature and establish civilization is through the technology of navigation. This particular manifestation of the hero, dubbed by modern scholars, “Herakles the Navigator,<sup>1</sup>” reclaims land for agricultural purposes, founds cities, and travels to the far reaches of the earth in order to defeat monsters that threaten civilization. The Greeks also credited Herakles with the construction of the first sea-going vessel and associated him with practical navigational technology including eponymous headlands

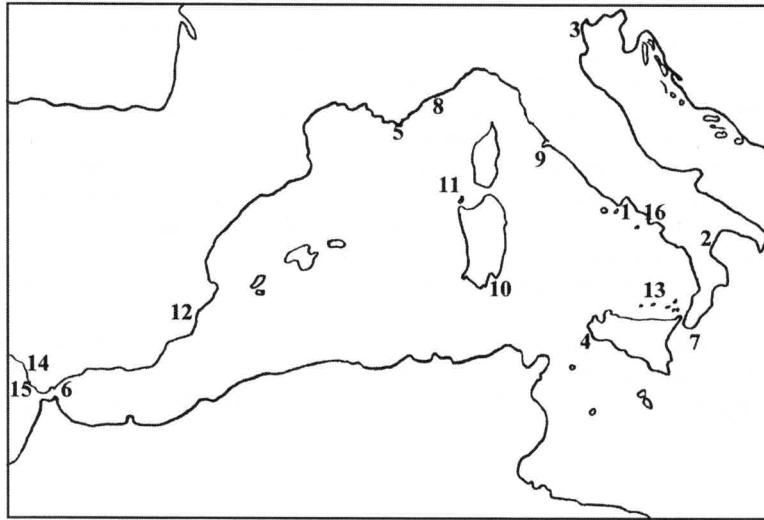


FIGURE 1: Herakles Sites in the Western Mediterranean.

1) Herculaneum. 2) Herakleia (near Policoro) Italy. 3) Heraclia (Iesolo, Italy). 4) Herakleia Minoa. 5) Heracleia Caccabaria. 6) Pillars of Herakles. 7) Herakleion (Capo Spartivento). 8) Monoikos (Monaco). 9) Porto Ercole. 10) Porto Malfatano. 11) Asinara Isle. 12) Escombreras Isle. 13) Alicudi Isle. 14) Saltes Isle. 15) Erytheia Isle. 16) Petra Herculis (Scoglio di Rovigliano).

\* **AUTHOR'S NOTES:** In ancient Mediterranean antiquity, Heracles had essentially three manifestations, each with its own particular features. There was Greek “Herakles,” Etruscan “Heracle,” and Roman “Hercules.” In this article, I refer to this deity as “Herakles” except when specifically discussing his Etruscan manifestation, “Heracle,” or his Roman manifestation, “Hercules.”

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All translations of Latin and Greek are by the author.

<sup>1</sup> Bayet 1926:186–192; Kajava 1997:59–62; LaCroix 1974:45–58.

and islands that were used as points of reference in coastal navigation some of which were endowed with manmade beacons. Herakles was also perceived as a protector of mariners, and for this reason, a number of harbors of refuge in the western Mediterranean were named after him. This article analyzes the literary and iconographic evidence of Herakles the Navigator in order to illustrate that, as a part of his broader function as a bearer of civilization, Herakles was an inventor, patron, and protector of ships and navigation.

### Herakles: Navigator And Oikist:

In Greek, Etruscan, and Roman seafaring cultures and religious traditions Herakles the Navigator was perceived as a bearer of civilization. Among the peoples of the Mediterranean, one of the earliest manifestations of this type of deity was the Phoenician sea god Melqart<sup>2</sup> who was subsequently syncretized with Greek Herakles. The two gods shared the attributes of hero, mariner, and city founder.<sup>3</sup> Melqart was the primary Phoenician colonization deity<sup>4</sup> in whose honor,<sup>5</sup> upon founding a colony, the Phoenicians customarily erected sanctuaries, as they did at Carthage,<sup>6</sup> at Gades,<sup>7</sup> and possibly on Thasos.<sup>8</sup> Under the Greeks, many former sanctuaries of Melqart belonged to Herakles<sup>9</sup> and under the Romans to Hercules.<sup>10</sup>

An important aspect of Herakles' role as a navigator in Greek culture occurs when he slays the monster Geryon in order to steal his cattle (the tenth labor). Herakles' success in this endeavor is contingent on navigation, for in several versions of this myth, Helios gives him a gigantic cup in which to sail to the western Mediterranean in order

<sup>2</sup> Bayet 1926:188–192; Bonnet 1988; Kajava 1997:62; LaCroix 1974:54–55; Lipinski 1992:285–287; Picard 1964.

<sup>3</sup> Täckholm 1965:189–190.

<sup>4</sup> Lipinski 1992:285–287.

<sup>5</sup> Lipinski 1992:285.

<sup>6</sup> An alternate reading of Diod. Sic. 20.14.1 states that the Carthaginians called “Herakles the one who aids colonists” (Greer 1971, vol. 10:177).

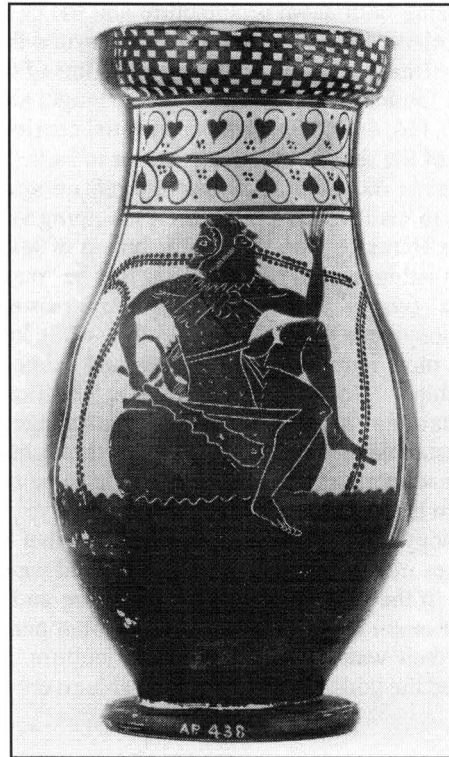
<sup>7</sup> Mierse 2000.

<sup>8</sup> This idea is based on Herodotus (2.44) who notes that the Phoenicians built a temple to Herakles at Thasos as many as five generations before the birth of the son of Amphitriton “when they settled there having voyaged in search of Europe.” Although the excavators of the Herakleion on Thasos found no evidence of the Tyrian cult of Melqart, this does not disprove the notion of Herodotus that there had been a Tyrian presence on Thasos that predated the Parian colonization in the first quarter of the seventh-century BCE; see also Berquist 1973:15, 27–29, 35; Padilla 1998:41, n. 29; Bonnet 1988:346–371.

<sup>9</sup> *LEX* II.2:col. 2650–2652. s.v. “Melqart.”

<sup>10</sup> Mierse 2000; Peretti 1979:159; Just. *Epit.* 44.5.2: “for when the Gaditani in a dream were ordered from Tyre, whose origin they share with the Carthaginians, they brought with them the sacred belongings of Hercules and founded a city at Gades” (*Nam cum Gaditani a Tyro, unde et Karthaginiensibus origo est, sacra Herculis per quietem iussi in Hispaniam transtulissent urbemque ibi condidissent...*)

to kill the monster (Fig. 2).<sup>11</sup> After this triumph, en-route to his home in Greece, Herakles becomes the mythological oikist of several cities<sup>12</sup> including the eponymous settlements and colonies of Herculaneum,<sup>13</sup> Herakleia<sup>14</sup> (near Policoro, Italy), Heraclia<sup>15</sup> (Iesolo, Italy), and Herakleia Minoa<sup>16</sup> in Sicily.



**FIGURE 2:** Attic Black Figure Olpe, Southern Italy (520–510 BCE). Herakles the Navigator sailing in the cup of Helios. Permission courtesy of Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (inventory 03.783).

<sup>11</sup> For Herakles' voyage in the cup of Helios, see Apollod. 2.5.10; Ath. 11.469D (citation of Peisander, *Frg. Ep.* 5); Athen. 11.470C–D (citation of Pherecydes, *FHG* i.80, J.1.66); Macrobian. 5.21.16 and 5.21.19.

<sup>12</sup> LaCroix 1974:37–39 provides a lengthy list of cities founded by Herakles (see also Dion. Hal. 1.44). Plin. *HN* 3.34 notes that a city by the mouth of the Rhone was originally named after Hercules (Barruol 1978). Likewise, in Roman mythology, during this same journey, Hercules kills Cacus thereby civilizing the area that becomes Rome (see pp. 10–11).

<sup>13</sup> Fig. 1.1. *BATL* Map 44, F4.

<sup>14</sup> Fig. 1.2. *BATL* Map 46, E1.

<sup>15</sup> Fig. 1.3. *BATL* Map 40, D1.

<sup>16</sup> Fig. 1.4. *BATL* Map 47, C4.

### **Herakles' Relationship To Shipbuilding And Navigation:**

Herakles also fosters civilization through the invention of shipbuilding. For the ancient inhabitants of the Mediterranean littoral, shipbuilding was a characteristic feature of civilization and one of their highest technological achievements. A ship was the most complex machine of the time and a product of specialized skills and accumulated knowledge encompassing both naval architecture and the expertise required to navigate on inland waterways and offshore beyond the sight of land. In Nonnos' *Dionisiaca* (40.443–468) Herakles himself tells the story of the Phoenicians' foundation of Tyre and that he taught men how to build the first ship (40.444, 449), "Build me an unusual chariot to tread on the sea... a chariot of the sea, a boat, the first ever to sail..." (Τεύξατέ μοι ξένον ἄρμα Βατῆς ἁλός / δίφρον ἁλός, σχεδίην πρωτόπλοον . . .).

In addition to his invention of the first sea-going vessel, Greek authors also credit Herakles with the establishment of safe navigation on the open-sea. In Isthmian 4.57, Pindar notes that he "made the sea lanes safe for voyages" (ναυτιλίαισί τε πορθμὸν ἡμερώσας).<sup>17</sup> Likewise, in Euripides' eponymous drama (*Herakles* 400–402), he is said to have "penetrated the most remote bays of the sea and calmed the waves for men in oared ships" (Ποντίας ἁλὸς μυχοὺς εἰσέβαινε, θνατοῖς / γαλανείας τιθεὶς ἔρετμοῖς).<sup>18</sup> It is during his voyage to slay Geryon that Herakles establishes his Pillars,<sup>19</sup> known throughout antiquity as the limit of safe western navigation and thought to be the northeastern and southeastern limits of the Strait of Gibraltar.<sup>20</sup>

The mythology of Herakles also demonstrates that his civilization-bearing attributes include the domination of inland waterways<sup>21</sup> which directly results in the establishment of agriculture and inland navigation. In Greco-Roman myth, river gods were often perceived as nourishing because their waters were used for agriculture. In addition, the Greeks portrayed the gods of the larger navigable rivers as ominous and

<sup>17</sup> The scholiast of this poem notes that this means Herakles cleared the seas of monsters and pirates (LaCroix 1974:52–53).

<sup>18</sup> Similarly, in Sophocles (*Trach.* 1011–1013) Herakles states, "Greeks, most unjust of men, in whose behalf I wretchedly destroyed myself after I purged the world of monsters in all the forests and many on the sea..." (Ἕλληνας πάντων ἀδικώκατοι ἄνδρες, οἷς δὴ πολλὰ μὲν ἐν πόντῳ κατὰ τε δρῖα πάντα καθάρων, ὠλεκόμαν ὁ τάλας . . .).

<sup>19</sup> Fig. 1.5. *BATL* Map 26, E6.

<sup>20</sup> For ancient and modern discussions of the Pillars of Herakles, see Ps. Scylax 1 and 111; Strabo 3.1.2, 3.1.7, 3.5.5; Peretti 1979:154–164; Salowey 1994:78–79.

<sup>21</sup> Salowey 1994.

threatening because they required appeasement before being crossed or navigated upon. Untamed rivers represented the savagery of nature, and through his potamocracy,<sup>22</sup> Herakles performs numerous feats of hydraulic engineering as he installs civilization and becomes “a hero of land reclamation.”<sup>23</sup>

For the hand of the maiden Deianeira, Herakles defeats Acheloos<sup>24</sup> (Fig. 3) the god of the eponymous river that forms the boundary between Acarnania and Aitolia in southwestern Greece (Ovid, *Met.* 9.1–88; Strabo 10.2.19). In this contest, Herakles breaks off one of the horns of Acheloos which is an etion for his domination of nature as well as



FIGURE 3: Red Figure Stamnos, Caere (520–510 BCE). Detail (side A), Herakles overcoming Acheloos. Permission courtesy of British Museum (inventory E 437).

<sup>22</sup> “Potamocracy” coined by Salowey 1994:81.

<sup>23</sup> Salowey 1994:81. The creation and control of potable fresh water is also a key element of the civilization-bearing nature of Herakles. Several myths feature Herakles’ ability to produce fresh water from the earth; while in the Garden of the Hesperides, for example, he slakes his thirst by kicking a rock from which a spring arises (Ap. Rhod. 4.1441–1449). For an extensive list of literary sources for Herakles and water, see Boardman 1988 s.v. “Herakles,” *LIMC* 4.1:797.

<sup>24</sup> Isler 1997 s.v. “Achelous,” *LIMC* 1.1:12–36; 1.2:19–54.

his ability to create inland navigation. That the horn of Acheloos subsequently becomes a cornucopia reinforces the symbolism of civilization bearing because it provides agricultural produce,<sup>25</sup> a distinguishing characteristic of civilization. In addition, Strabo (10.2.19) notes that, as a gift to King Oineus, the father of Deianeira, Herakles “by means of embankments and channels, controlled the irregular flow of the Acheloos and thus drained a large area of the Paracheloitis”<sup>26</sup> (παραχώμασί τε καὶ διοχετείας βιάσασθαι τὸν ποταμὸν πλημμελῶς ῥέοντα καὶ πολλὴν τῆς Παραχελωίτιδος ἀναψύξει). Although not stated by Strabo, a logical consequence of the channeling of the Acheloos would have been the creation of inland navigation. Strabo (10.2.2) does note that the river is navigable for 200 stadia (approximately 40 km) from its mouth on the eastern Ionian Sea to the inland city of Stratus, and C. Salowey hypothesizes that Herakles’ domination of the Acheloos “could be a mythological reflection of an actual management project.”<sup>27</sup> The Acheloos was by far the longest navigable river in Greece, a noteworthy anomaly for the local arid hydrographic conditions.

In Roman mythology, in addition to his feats of hydraulic engineering,<sup>28</sup> Hercules also demonstrates a civilization-bearing<sup>29</sup> connection to inland navigation. His triumph over the monster Cacus (*Aen.* 8.193–270), who lived in a cave above the area of the Tiber bank that would later become the Forum Boarium, is an action for the establishment of the city of Rome. Accordingly, a majority of scholars believe that the area of the Forum Boarium was the focal point of the city’s development.<sup>30</sup> It was the first upriver fording place, the first Tiber port, and the site of the first market; results of archaeological excavation near the church of Sant’Omobono support this hypothesis.<sup>31</sup> The Forum Boarium became

<sup>25</sup> There are many examples of Herakles’ fostering of agriculture including his killing of the monster Antaios which results in the cultivation of the Libyan desert with vineyards and olive groves (Diod. Sic. 4.17) and his numerous feats of hydraulic engineering that transform barren swampland into fertile agricultural soil (Salowey 1994:79–81). In addition, Demeter initiated Herakles into the “lesser mysteries” at Agrae (Diod. Sic. 4.14.3), and he was the first non-Athenian to be initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries (Xen. *Hell.* 6.3.6)

<sup>26</sup> The Paracheloitis is the floodplain of the Acheloos.

<sup>27</sup> Salowey 1994:78.

<sup>28</sup> Hercules is credited with excavating the strait of Gibraltar to allow the ocean to form the Mediterranean Sea (Plin. *HN* 3.4) and with building a causeway in Campania to create the Lucrine lake (Strabo 5.4.6).

<sup>29</sup> Another example of Hercules’ civilization-bearing attribute is *Ov. Fast.* 5.621–632 which describes the annual Argei ceremony in which condemned criminals were drowned in the Tiber as a sacrifice for Tiberinus. The river god required the sacrifice of drowned men who would have been his, had there not been a bridge or a ferry across the Tiber. Hercules taught the Romans to end this uncivilized practice of human sacrifice and to substitute men with cloth mannequins stuffed with straw.

<sup>30</sup> Coarelli 1994:302; Cornell 1995:68–69; Levi 1997:67.

<sup>31</sup> Cornell 1995:69.

the nucleus of Rome and Hercules its tutelary divinity.<sup>32</sup> For this reason, the Romans believed that Evander placed near the Forum Boarium the Ara Maxima, “the oldest and most venerable cult center of Hercules in Rome.”<sup>33</sup> There were several other shrines to Hercules in this vicinity,<sup>34</sup> and an important reason for the existence of the Forum Boarium and the entire Tiber port was river-borne commerce.

Although there was a pan-Mediterranean consensus regarding the function of Herakles the Navigator, the Romans syncretized their particular notion of Hercules as a deity of river navigation with that of the Etruscans.<sup>35</sup> The iconography of Heracle on a raft<sup>36</sup> made of amphoras lashed together (sometimes equipped with a sail fashioned from his lion



FIGURE 4: Etruscan gem impression (Sixth Century BCE). Heracle on a raft of amphoras. Permission courtesy National Museum of Denmark (inventory 3711).

<sup>32</sup> Coarelli 1988:112–113.

<sup>33</sup> *NTDAR* 186.

<sup>34</sup> E.g. the round temple to Hercules Victor (179–142 BCE), the Aedes Herculis Pompeiani (first century BCE), and the Aedes Aemiliana Herculis (142 CE).

<sup>35</sup> The ability of Heracle to create a flow of fresh water is also prominent, and a “Heracle of the Spring” appears on Etruscan gems and mirrors (see Bayet 1926:163–164; Schwarz 1990 s.v. “Heracle,” *LIMC* 5.1:197, 209, 242; 5.2:164–166; McDonough 2002). At Etruscan Caere Livy (22.1.10) mentions a spring of Hercules known as *Aquae Caerites*.

<sup>36</sup> Bayet 1926:186–192; LaCroix 1974:53–54, 56–58.

skin<sup>37</sup>) appears on several Etruscan gems (Fig. 4) and at least one mirror<sup>38</sup> dating from the sixth century BCE to the late Etruscan period. The Etruscan depiction of Hercle on a pot raft reveals a connection to early vessels<sup>39</sup> strikingly similar to the Greek myth of Herakles' invention of a "chariot of the sea."<sup>40</sup> Etruscan Hercle navigates the first river craft, Greek Herakles the first sea-going vessel. The gems also demonstrate that, like the Greeks, the Etruscans perceived Hercle as an inventor of inland navigation and as a dominator of rivers. In addition, Hercle's navigation on a raft of earthenware containers most typically associated with trade reveals his tutelage of river-borne commerce.<sup>41</sup> Further evidence for this concept is demonstrated by the coinage of the Etruscan city of Vetulonia where Hercle is paired with a ship's prow.<sup>42</sup> River-borne commerce was one of the key points of syncretization of Etruscan Hercle and Roman Hercules, for Roman coinage of the fourth century BCE also pairs Hercules with a ship's prow.<sup>43</sup>

#### **Herakles' Association With Navigational Waypoints And Beacons:**

Ancient Mediterranean mariners used a wide range of maritime landmarks such as rocks, islands, and headlands as navigational waypoints.<sup>44</sup> They associated these features with several navigational gods and goddesses including Herakles. In the eastern Mediterranean, Poseidon was the deity most typically connected with navigational landmarks.<sup>45</sup> In the West, however, landmarks named after Herakles appear frequently in both the literary and the archaeological record (Fig. 1). The sanctity of navigational landmarks lay in the belief that their tutelary divinities provided guidance, protection and, in the case of imminent disaster,

<sup>37</sup> Furtwängler 1965, vol. 2 with plate 19 (1964):36–40. Servius *Aen.* 8.299 states, "As already noted above, however, Hercules navigated to Geryon in a bronze ship using his lion skin as a sail" (*ad Geryonem autem, sicut iam supra (cf. 7.662) dictum est, navi aenea navigavit tergo leonis velificans*).

<sup>38</sup> Gerhard 1966:3:331 (no illustration provided).

<sup>39</sup> Casson 1995:5 notes that the pot raft was one of the earliest vessel types. In addition, Diod. Sic. (4.41.1) claims that before the Argo, there had been only rafts and small boats.

<sup>40</sup> Nonnos *Dion.* 40.441; see page 8.

<sup>41</sup> There is also a connection between Herakles, Hercle, and Hercules and sea-borne commerce. The coinage of Vetulonia also pairs Hercle with marine symbols such as the trident, dolphin, and anchor (See Cristofani 1999:177 with figs. 14–15. For Herakles/Melqart as a deity of commerce, see Aubet 2001:150–158 who notes (157) that "the functions of the sanctuaries to Melqart in the west consisted in serving as a bond uniting Tyre with the Mediterranean trading centers...").

<sup>42</sup> Bayet 1926:192; Cristofani 1999:177 with figs. 14–15.

<sup>43</sup> Hill 1976, plate 1.2.

<sup>44</sup> Medas 2004:71–80. Morton 2001:173–206.

<sup>45</sup> Morton 2000:192–193 (with fig. 1).

salvation of those at sea.<sup>46</sup> The landmarks were important to navigation because they functioned as highly visible waypoints located along well-traveled sea routes. When approached from seaward, headlands and offshore islands appear over the horizon before the mainland<sup>47</sup> which is evidence for their use as tools of navigation. Depending upon atmospheric conditions, a number of promontories and islands in the Mediterranean are visible at a distance of up to 50 nautical miles (93 km).<sup>48</sup> Prior to the era of modern navigational technology, highly visible landmarks functioned as natural points of reference; they were the primary “road signs” of the sea at which mariners took departure, made landfall, and fixed their position during a voyage. In antiquity, such navigational landmarks often remained unembellished by architecture. Others were enhanced with conspicuous structures such as a columns, altars, or temples (sacred to an eponymous navigational deity) erected both to sanctify and to improve the natural conspicuity of the landmark.

#### Headlands Associated With Herakles:

A number of prominent headlands in the western Mediterranean were sacred to Herakles. Herakleia Caccabaria<sup>49</sup> east of Toulon, has been identified as the modern, Cap de Cavalaire, a topographic feature which the *US Navy Sailing Directions (Enroute)* notes forms the western side of the mouth of the Baie de Cavalaire.<sup>50</sup> Built on a similarly prominent headland was the Campanian city of Herculaneum<sup>51</sup> which Strabo (5.4.8) calls the “the citadel of Herakles” (φρούριον Ἡράκλειον). That the city was built on “a promontory jutting out into the sea” (ἐκκειμένην εἰς τὴν θάλατταν ἄκραν ἔκον) suggests a conspicuous point of land visible from seaward and therefore used as a waypoint in coastal navigation.

The Pillars of Herakles were among the most celebrated of sacred headlands. Although the ancient sources are not in agreement as to their location,<sup>52</sup> general consensus identified them with the prominent headlands at the eastern end of the Strait of Gibraltar: Calpe, the rock of

<sup>46</sup> For Herakles as a savior of those in distress at sea, see Kajava 1997.

<sup>47</sup> Morton 2001:188.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Fig. 1.5. *BATL* Map 16, C3.

<sup>50</sup> National Imagery and Mapping Agency 2000:121.

<sup>51</sup> Fig. 1.1. *BATL* Map 44, F4.

<sup>52</sup> The fourth century BCE Periplus of Pseudo-Scylax (1 and 111) mentions two pairs of pillars, one in Europe and a second in Libya, (for commentary, see Peretti 1979:154–157, 365). Strabo’s geography of Spain provides a lengthy analysis of the Pillars (3.1.2 and 3.1.7) and is indicative of the widespread confusion surrounding them. Strabo initially places the Pillars in their traditional location at the eastern entrance to the Strait of Gibraltar. In his subsequent discussion of Gades (3.5.5), however, he states, “Some of us are of the opinion that the headlands in the strait (i.e. of Gibraltar) are the Pillars, others that they are at Gades, and still others that they lie even further outside the strait than Gades.”

Gibraltar and Abila at Cueta, Morocco.<sup>53</sup> In antiquity these headlands designated the limit of safe western navigation established by Herakles. Their bold topography and strategic positions adjacent to important shipping lanes necessitate mention as waypoints even in modern sailing directions.<sup>54</sup> In antiquity, navigational headlands often supported shrines where the ancient mariner came ashore in order to sacrifice to the eponymous deities.<sup>55</sup> This was true at the Pillars of Herakles where the Athenian astronomer Euctemon notes<sup>56</sup> the presence of “altars and temples to Herakles” and that “foreign ships land there to obtain favorable omens by offering sacrifices to the god.”<sup>57</sup>

One of the most prominent headlands sacred to Herakles (Capo Spartivento) that functioned as a waypoint in coastal navigation was the Herakleion of southern Italy.<sup>58</sup> Strabo (6.1.7) notes that, as one sails east from Rhegion, it is “the last cape” of Italy (ὁ δὴ τελευταῖον ἀκρωτήριον). Although there is no evidence that this headland was ever embellished by sacred architecture, Strabo’s remark emphasizes its significance as a point of landfall and departure. Moreover, Strabo highlights the headland’s navigational function because he designates it as the fixed point at which a vessel voyaging from Italy to Greece altered course. The Herakleion was vital to mariners because it was where they picked up the favorable southwest wind<sup>59</sup> with which they could sail<sup>60</sup> first to Cape Iapygia (Capo Santa Maria di Leuca) and then across the Ionian Sea to western Greece<sup>61</sup> via the shortest, hence most desirable route.

#### Herakles Harbors:

In addition to Herakles’ tutelage of ships and navigational waypoints, ancient mariners associated him with safe anchorages including some of the most protected natural harbors of the western Mediterranean. A late second century CE Greek inscription of distinctly nautical character

<sup>53</sup> Fig. 1.6. *BATL* Map 26, E6. Peretti 1979:154–164.

<sup>54</sup> National Imagery and Mapping Agency 2000:6, 13.

<sup>55</sup> Semple 1927:383–386.

<sup>56</sup> Euctemon identifies the Pillars of Hercules as islands off the coasts of Europe and Libya.

<sup>57</sup> *Herculis et templa et aras/invehi advenas rates/deo litare...* as recorded by the interpolator of Avienus 358–359 (Murphy 1977.)

<sup>58</sup> Fig. 1.7. *BATL* Map 46, D6. Morton 2001:76–77, 161–162, 179. The Defense Mapping Agency 1958:223 highlights the navigational features of the Capo Spartivento by noting “this cape can be easily identified from some distance by its whitish appearance.” (This edition describes the area in more detail than subsequent editions.)

<sup>59</sup> The modern name of the Herakleion is Capo Spartivento (“the cape that divides the winds”) continues to denote a navigational function because sailors often pick their courses at points where winds shift.

<sup>60</sup> For the ancient technology of navigation by wind direction in antiquity, see Neilson 2001.

<sup>61</sup> Morton 2001:76–77.

recently discovered in southern Latium invokes Herakles as the savior of wrecked ships and seamen.<sup>62</sup> The hymn-like epigram includes epithets of Herakles such as “the savior of sea-beaten ships” (σῶτερ ἀλιτρύτων νεῶν<sup>63</sup>) and “the guardian of secure anchorage” (εὐκήλου μεδέων ὄρμου<sup>64</sup>). M. Kajava’s analysis suggests that the votive’s dedicant had survived a dangerous and life-threatening voyage by finding refuge in Portus Herculis Monoeci (Monaco),<sup>65</sup> for Herakles is invoked with the rare epithet, “Monoikos”<sup>66</sup> (Μόνουικε). Strabo (4.6.2) notes that the entire section of coastline from Monaco to Etruria is infamous for dangerous wind conditions and a lack of safe harbors with the notable exception of Portus Herculis Monoeci, the site of a prominent temple of Herakles.<sup>67</sup> Lucan (1.405–408) reinforces Strabo’s observations about this harbor,

*Quaque sub Herculeo sacratus nomine portus  
Urguet rupe cava pelagus: non Corus in illum  
habet aut Zephyrus, solus sua litora turbat  
Circius et tuta prohibet statione Monoeci.*

[Here is the sacred harbor named after Hercules where a steep cliff looms above the sea: it is protected from both the west and the northwest wind. Only the west-northwest wind sets waves against the shores of Monaco, barring vessels entrance to its safe anchorage.]

There were two additional harbors sacred to Herakles also in strategic locations. Portus Herculis<sup>68</sup> (Porto Ercole) on the central Etruscan coast was one of the few secure natural anchorages between Ostia and Pisa. The *Italian Waters Pilot* notes that this harbor provides protection from all directions except from the South.<sup>69</sup> Although in antiquity Portus Herculis maintained its status as a harbor of refuge, due to its lack of a source of fresh water and its reliance on cisterns, it never developed into an important Roman commercial port and was overshadowed by the manmade harbor of Cosa only 5 km to the east which had abundant fresh water springs.<sup>70</sup> Ptolemy (3.3.3) locates another harbor of Herakles

<sup>62</sup> Kajava 1997.

<sup>63</sup> Kajava 1997:56, line 2.

<sup>64</sup> Kajava 1997:56, line 1.

<sup>65</sup> Fig. 1.8. *BATL* Map 16, D2. Kajava 1997:79–81.

<sup>66</sup> Kajava 1997:67.

<sup>67</sup> Other References to Herculis Monoeci Portus include Strabo 4.6.3; Val. Max. 1.6.7; Luc. *Phars.* 1.405–410; Sil. *Pun.* 1.584–589; Tac. *Hist.* 3.42.

<sup>68</sup> Fig. 1.9. *BATL* Map 42, A4. Strabo 5.2.8; *It. Mar.* 499.6–7 (Cuntz 1929:79); Rut. *Namat.* 1.293.

<sup>69</sup> Heikell 2002:132–134.

<sup>70</sup> McCann 2002:11–12.

at the southern extremity of Sardinia.<sup>71</sup> Identified as modern Porto Malfatano, this excellent natural harbor is today noted for its “good shelter” and its anchorage providing “reasonably good holding ground.”<sup>72</sup> Ptolemy’s mention of Porto Malfatano reveals the strategic role of this anchorage as a harbor of refuge for vessels attempting to double the headlands of southern Sardinia. Other harbors sacred to Herakles with tentative identifications include a cove on the southwest coast of Calabria between Vibo Valentia and Medma near Capo Vaticano<sup>73</sup> and a roadstead between Nice and Tropaia near Villafranca, France.<sup>74</sup>

### The Islands Of Herakles:

Archaeological and literary evidence reveals that at least six<sup>75</sup> islands in the western Mediterranean and two outside the Pillars of Herakles on the Atlantic coast of Spain were sacred to Herakles. The geographical position of each of these islands suggests their use by ancient mariners as waypoints in coastal navigation. Whether or not endowed with a beacon, each island of Herakles functioned as an important landmark to designate a landfall, indicate an approach to a strategically important bay, river or harbor, or to fix a vessel’s position while at sea. Moreover, current naval and yachtsmen’s sailing directions highlight the importance many of these islands still hold for modern mariners.

The first mention of the island of Asinara<sup>76</sup> just off the northwest coast of Sardinia appears in Pliny (*NH* 3.7.84) as “Herculis insula.” Later sources identify Asinara with a similar toponym: in Martianus Capella (6.645) as “insulae Herculis,” in Ptolemy (3.3.8) as “Ἡρακλέους νῆσος” and on the *Tabula Peutingeriana* (3.5) as “Ins Hercul.” Because of Asinara’s bold and conspicuous topography, it functioned as a leading mark for mariners heading from the west central Mediterranean eastward through the Stretum Gallicum (Strait of Bonifacio) between Sardinia and Corsica. The US Navy *Sailing Directions for the Mediterranean* states that Asinara is “conspicuous because of its conformation”<sup>77</sup> and draws attention to the island’s four principle elevations (ranging from 214 to 408 m). Furthermore, the remains of a number of Roman shipwrecks, (dating from the late Republic to the early fifth century CE) on the west coast of Sardinia and one on the coast of Asinara

<sup>71</sup> Fig. 1.10. *BATL* Map 48, A4.

<sup>72</sup> Heikell 2002:283–284.

<sup>73</sup> Plin. *HN* 3.73. Strabo 6.1.5.

<sup>74</sup> Ptol. *Geog.* 3.1.2. Val. Max. 1.6.7. *It. Mar.* 503.3 (Cuntz 1929:80).

<sup>75</sup> In addition to the six islands discussed in this article, the *It. Mar.* 517.1 (Cuntz 1929:83) identifies another Hercules island near Siracusa about which the author can find no information.

<sup>76</sup> Fig. 1.11. *BATL* Map 48, A1. Spanu 1997; Zucca 2003:307–317.

<sup>77</sup> Defense Mapping Agency 1958:373.

itself, demonstrate that the island lay on an important west to east sea route and that it functioned as a waypoint for vessels sailing from the Iberian peninsula via the Insulae Baliares (Balearic Islands) toward the Tyrrhenian sea and on to the ports of Rome (Centumcellae, Portus, and Ostia).<sup>78</sup> Asinara was particularly important for its role as an eastward leading mark for vessels bound into the Roman port of Turrus Libisonis (Porto Torres) on the northwest coast of Sardinia at the head of the Gulf of Asinara. Turrus Libisonis was the main point of exportation for the agricultural and manufacturing produce of northern Sardinia, and the mosaic of the *Navicularii Turritani* in the Piazzale delle Corporazioni at Ostia demonstrates its significance as a commercial port during the Roman Empire.<sup>79</sup> In addition, *Lo Compasso de Navigare*<sup>80</sup> (1250–1265), an early medieval portolan and arguably the most important geographic and nautical text of the Middle Ages, provides further evidence for the navigational importance of Asinara in antiquity. The *Compasso* is the likely heir of the accumulated knowledge of ancient mariners regarding sea routes, conditions, and ports of call; it describes an east-northeast sea route from Cartagena (Carthago Nova) to the Strait of Bonifacio along which the first landfall after the island of Minorca is *Azenara*.<sup>81</sup>

A second *Insula Herculis*,<sup>82</sup> known today as Islote de Escombreras, lies directly south of the port of Carthago Nova just off the coast of Hispania Tarraconensis. Also known in antiquity as *Scombraria* due to its mackerel-based garum industry,<sup>83</sup> Escombreras marks the entrance to the small bay (the Bajo de Escombreras) at the head of which lay Carthago Nova. The US Navy's *Western Mediterranean Sailing Directions (Enroute)* notes that the island is "steep-to and hilly" and that it displays a lighted beacon.<sup>84</sup> These are good indications of Escombreras' navigational function in antiquity. Because of its topographical conspicuity, it would have aided the ancient mariner traveling from seaward in finding the entrance to the bay dominated by the port of Carthago Nova.

A third example of an island of Herakles is Alicudi<sup>85</sup> which ancient mariners used to fix their position during offshore passages in the southern Tyrrhenian Sea. Located approximately 35 nautical miles (65 km) from the north-central coast of Sicily, this westernmost of the Aeolian Islands had a number of names in antiquity, most commonly, *Ericusa*.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Spanu 1997.

<sup>79</sup> Becatti 1961, vol.4:71–72 (with plate 176); Gutierrez et al. 1998:34–35.

<sup>80</sup> Motzo 1947, corrigenda and geographical index of Dalché 1995:229–253.

<sup>81</sup> Motzo 1947:89. Spanu 1997:115–116.

<sup>82</sup> Fig. 1.12. *BATL* Map 27, E4. Strabo 3.159; Ath. 3.121.

<sup>83</sup> Plin. *HN* 31.94.

<sup>84</sup> National Imagery and Mapping Agency 2000:26.

<sup>85</sup> Fig. 1.13. *BATL* Map 47, E1.

<sup>86</sup> *BTCGI* 4:171–173.

Later sources, including Pomponius Mela, the *Itinerarium Maritimum*, and the *Ravennatis Anonymi Cosmographia* refer to the island with different forms of toponym, Hercules.<sup>87</sup> An extinct volcano, Alicudi is a steeply elevated (675 m) and conspicuously conical. For eastbound vessels, Alicudi functioned as the gateway of the course leading toward the Strait of Messina with the remaining islands of the Aeolian archipelago used as leading marks. That Alicudi (as “Heracliotēs”) appears in the *Itinerarium Maritimum*, a document providing routes and distances between landmarks, is a good indication of its function as an important waypoint for ancient mariners. In a recent study of the Aeolian archipelago, E. Castagno Berlinghieri notes that “because of their strategic position at the centre of the lower Tyrrhenian Sea, the Aeolian islands have always constituted a first “natural” bridgehead on the Tyrrhenian route for ships heading both north and south.”<sup>88</sup> From the evidence of many wrecks of merchantmen dating from the late Republic to late Roman period, she hypothesizes a well-traveled “Roman route” through the islands.<sup>89</sup> The *US Navy Sailing Directions (Enroute) for the Western Mediterranean*<sup>90</sup> further demonstrates Alicudi’s navigational importance by including a detailed image of the island viewed from the west. This is an indication of the continuing function of Alicudi as a landmark for eastbound vessels in the south central Tyrrhenian.

In his description of the Atlantic coast of Spain, Strabo (3.5.5) refers to a fourth island of Herakles located just off the Atlantic coast of Baetica.<sup>91</sup> Identified as the modern Isla Saltes,<sup>92</sup> its association with Herakles was confirmed in 1925 by the discovery of a fragment of an archaic terracotta figurine of Herakles wearing a lion skin.<sup>93</sup> Marking the mouth of the Luxia River (Rio Odiel), Saltes formed the entrance to the inland waterway leading to the Roman city of Onuba Aesturia (Huelva) located at confluence of Urium (Rio Tinto) and the Luxia rivers.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Pompon. 2.7.120 (see text of Silberman 1988:65–66 and translation and identification of Romer 1998:101); *It. Mar.* 516.3 (Cuntz 1929:83); *Rav. Cosm.* 5.23.10 (Schnetzer 1990). Ziegler 1922, *RE* 8.1:439 s.v. “Herakleia” identifies this Herakles island with the rocky islet of Basiluzzo in the Aeolian archipelago; all other evidence, however, suggests that it is in fact Alicudi.

<sup>88</sup> Castagno Berlinghieri 2003:93.

<sup>89</sup> Castagno Berlinghieri 2003:93–98.

<sup>90</sup> Defense Mapping Agency Hydrographic Center 1978:351.

<sup>91</sup> Fig. 1.14. *BATL* Map 26, D4. This island is also, according to Strabo in this same passage, another possible location of the Pillars of Herakles.

<sup>92</sup> Schulten 1955:221; Tovar 1974:63–64.

<sup>93</sup> Garrido and Orta 1974:206.

<sup>94</sup> Spaar 1981:227–228. Similarly, according to the U.S. Naval Oceanographic Office 1952:122, Isla Saltes is located at the mouth of the Odiel River and forms the west side of the entrance to the Saltes Channel which leads upriver to the port of Huelva.

Strabo (3.2.4–5) notes that this region is blessed with navigable rivers, estuaries, and a network of canals that support the heavy traffic of all kinds of merchant vessels transporting not only olive oil and garum, but also the raw copper, iron, and silver from the nearby mines of Tharsis to points throughout the Mediterranean.<sup>95</sup> The low and marshy Onuba estuary would have been conducive to inland navigation; its topography, albeit on a smaller scale, resembles that of the Po delta in Italy which Pliny the Elder (3.16.120–121) calls the *atryanorum paludes* and the *Septem Maria* which was the greatest complex of inland waterways in the Roman world. During the Roman period, it is likely that navigational beacons in the form of wooden pilings were utilized either on or adjacent to Saltes in order to designate both the entrance to the inland waterways and the main channel upriver to Onuba. There is literary evidence that the Romans did in fact use pilings as channel markers in similarly shoal areas.<sup>96</sup> In *De Reditu Suo* (1.453–462), a poem written in 416 CE, Rutilius Namatianus mentions *sudes* (wooden pilings) that mark the channel through the dangerous shoals off Vada Volaterrana on the Tyrrhennian coast of Italy.<sup>97</sup>

From two additional islands associated with Herakles there is evidence of prominent navigational beacons. Material and literary sources reveal that Phoenicians from Tyre founded Gades on the small island of Erytheia<sup>98</sup> at the southeast extremity of the Lacus Oleastrum (the Bay of Cadiz) as early as the seventh century BCE.<sup>99</sup> On the eastern end of the larger adjacent island of Cotinussa,<sup>100</sup> about 18 km from the narrow strait between it and Erytheia, they built a temple to Melqart, which under the Greeks belonged to Herakles and under the Romans, to Hercules.<sup>101</sup> By

<sup>95</sup> Checkland 1967:35–55. Spaar 1981:226.

<sup>96</sup> Neilson 2002:249–250.

<sup>97</sup> Similarly, Arrian (*Indica* 41.2–4), describing the journeys of Alexander the Great in the second century C.E., mentions wooden pilings (Πάσσαλοι) used as channel markers in the muddy Oroatis River of Persia. He compares them to similar pilings in Greece marking the channel in the shallow, sandy inland waterway between the Ionian Sea island of Leucas and the mainland district of Acarnania (the site of the modern Levkas Canal).

<sup>98</sup> Fig. 1.15. *BATL* Map 26, D5.

<sup>99</sup> Aubet 1993:136–137, 232–234.

<sup>100</sup> The controversy over Gades' location either on Erytheia or Cotinussa begins in antiquity. The *PECS*, the *OCD*, and the *BATL* note that Gades was originally founded on the small island of Erytheia located just west of the island of Cotinussa. Mierse (2000) makes no mention of Erytheia and assumes that Gades was located on the eastern end of Cotinussa; Mierse later notes the presence of two islands (2004:556–557 and fig. 10). Peretti (1979:158, fig. 9a) shows that Gades is on the eastern end of Cotinussa and indicates that Erytheia and Cotinussa are one and the same. Strabo (3.5.4) gives both opinions. One source of this confusion is that, due to silting, Erytheia and Cotinussa merged into one solid land mass.

<sup>101</sup> Peretti 1979:159. Mierse 2004.

the Roman period, this temple of “Hercules Gaditanus” (known also as the “Heracleium”) became one of the principal sanctuaries of the far West.<sup>102</sup> Suetonius and Dio Cassius note that Julius Caesar visited it, and other Roman authors record its remarkable decoration.<sup>103</sup> The evidence demonstrates that the Erytheia Heracleium functioned as a navigational beacon for ships both entering and exiting the Lacus Oleastrum. In recent studies of the Heracleium, W. E. Mierse examines the writings of five Arab geographers dating from the twelfth through fifteenth centuries<sup>104</sup> who describe an “ancient statue,” perhaps of Herakles, adjacent to the structure. Two identify the ruins of a lighthouse,<sup>105</sup> and one, the ruins of a lighthouse that formed part of the temple visible from seaward.<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, Mierse assumes from Strabo’s description (3.5.9) that the Heracleium had been built on a high podium as protection from the solstitial tides that, according to Strabo, periodically swept over the low-lying island. More likely however, given its navigational function, the temple’s high podium was intended to enhance the structure’s visibility as an aid to mariners.

Another island with a similar navigational function was the “Rock of Hercules” (*Petra Herculis*<sup>107</sup>) located in the southern Bay of Naples and mentioned by Pliny the Elder (*HN* 32.17). Archaeological evidence reveals that this tiny rock-bound islet of some 5800 m squared located approximately 500 m west of the Pompeian coast and just north of the mouth of the Sarno was embellished by a temple of Hercules that functioned as a navigational beacon. D. Comardo<sup>108</sup> identifies the Rock of Hercules as the modern Scoglio di Rovigliano from which there is material evidence of a temple to Hercules<sup>109</sup> and other Roman structures dating to the first-century CE.<sup>110</sup> More revealing perhaps, is the report in a late-sixteenth-century manuscript that a one-meter-tall bronze statue

<sup>102</sup> Mierse 2000:1–2. Mierse 2004.

<sup>103</sup> Suet. *Caes.* 7; Dio Cassius 37.52; Sil. *Pun.* 3.32.

<sup>104</sup> Mierse 2004. Mierse 2000: Abu-Hamid (12<sup>th</sup> century); Yaqut (13<sup>th</sup> century); Al-Qazwini (13<sup>th</sup> century); Al-Zuhri (12<sup>th</sup> century); and Al-Himyari (15<sup>th</sup> century).

<sup>105</sup> Abu Hamid and Al-Zuhri.

<sup>106</sup> Al-Himyari. See also Mierse 2004:570–571. Although Mierse (2000:8–9) thinks that the interpretation of the Heracleium as a lighthouse “seems out of place,” and that it is “in the wrong spot” as “it does not mark the (ancient) harbor of Cádiz,” he does suggest that instead of a beacon, the structure may have been a tomb in the form of a tower, later adorned with a statue to function “as some kind of beacon.”

<sup>107</sup> Fig. 1.16. *BATL* Map 44, F4.

<sup>108</sup> Pagano 2002:165; Camardo 1998: esp. 99, n. 2.

<sup>109</sup> Camardo and Ferrara 1990.

<sup>110</sup> The Roman finds include *opus reticulatum*, *cocciopesto*, and painted plaster.

of Hercules (now lost) was found on the islet during the construction of a watch tower. The sacred nature of the island was retained from antiquity for it became the site of a Benedictine monastery in the early tenth century (abandoned in the sixteenth century).<sup>111</sup>

The location of the temple-adorned *Petra Herculis* only 500 m from the mouth of the Sarno demonstrates that it functioned as a waypoint for those navigating the Bay of Naples. More specifically, ancient mariners used it as marker for the mouth of the Sarno which supported the heavy maritime traffic of Pompeii's river port, via which Strabo (5.4.8) notes, "cargoes are both sent inland and shipped out to sea" (παρὰ τῷ Σάρνῳ ποταμῷ καὶ δεχομένῳ τὰ φορτία καὶ ἐκπέμποντι). A structure placed prominently on this islet would have been clearly visible to those navigating the Bay of Naples and, as a result, would have acted as a beacon.

Both the Erytheia Heracleium and the eponymous temple on the *Petra Herculis* compare well with the positions of other ancient temples that we know functioned as incidental and deliberate navigational devices.<sup>112</sup> In the *Imagines* for example, Philostratus (1.12.27) describes a painting of a temple on the shore of the Bosphorous that displays a lighted beacon in its vestibule as an aid to navigation "for the purpose of guiding ships sailing out of the Black Sea" (καὶ τὸν ἐπὶ τῷ στόματι πυρσόν, ὃς ἤρτηται ἐξ φρυκτωρίαν τῶν νεῶν, αἱ πλέουσιν ἐκ τοῦ πόντου). With specific regard to coastal temples on the Bay of Naples used as aids to navigation, Camardo notes that "sacred buildings located on promontories or on high ground in order to be visible from the sea scattered the entire coastline from Pompeii to Punta Campanella. These structures sanctified the boundaries between the various coastal cities, formed a network of navigational reference points, and designated hazardous points of navigation."<sup>113</sup>

<sup>111</sup> Camardo, 1998:101–111.

<sup>112</sup> Medas 2004:74–75; Morton 2001:197–206; Semple 1927. Examples of temples as navigational aids are numerous. Arrian cites as seamarks in the Bosphoros the temples of Zeus Orios and Aphrodite (*Indica* 12.2–3). On the Black Sea coast, Strabo (11.2.7) cites a monument to Satyros on the northern shore near Panticapaion (see also 7.4.4) and notes (12.3.11 and 12.4.2) that Sinope is 3500 stadia from the "Hieron" which is a temple on the "sacred cape" of Chalcedonia (modern Cape Khelidini) at the southern mouth of the Bosphoros. Likewise, in the narrow Samian strait, Strabo (14.1.14) mentions a temple to Poseidon on the mainland and a Heraion on the facing Samian shore (see also Shipley 1987) both visible from within the strait as "one sails toward the city." By applying methods still used in modern navigation by sight, an ancient mariner passing through the Samian strait was able to obtain two visual lines of position, one from each temple. He could then accurately fix his position at the point where the lines intersected.

<sup>113</sup> Author's translation of Camardo 1998:100.

**Conclusion:**

The mythology of Herakles demonstrates that navigation should be included with the other distinguishing characteristics of civilization such as agriculture, urbanization, and commercial exchange. Moreover, the technology of navigation is an important cultural metaphor for the ancient concept of civilization-bearing. Herakles' connection with navigation concerned a pan-Mediterranean perception that he was a civilization bearer who traveled to the western Mediterranean by boat. Herakles was also perceived as an inventor of shipbuilding who fostered safe navigation, and, just as Herakles was believed to protect travelers on land,<sup>114</sup> his navigational associations also allowed for him to be perceived as a protector of mariners. For this reason, the ancient mariner named after Herakles numerous navigationally significant headlands, islands, and harbors of refuge in the western Mediterranean. Particularly striking are the eight Herakles islands (six in the western Mediterranean and two on Spain's southwest Atlantic coast) whose strategic positions either marked the entrances to navigationally important bays and rivers or functioned as waypoints along well-traveled sea routes. There is a modern analogy to islands utilized as topographical aids to navigation. Along the coast of Maine there are at least five "Mark Islands."<sup>115</sup> The position and highly visible topography of each of these islands demonstrates its use as a waypoint along an important in-shore sea route. The ancient islands of Herakles and the modern Mark Islands reveal the age-old practice mariners of utilizing topography as a navigational tool. The ancient practice differs from the modern with regard to religion, for in antiquity navigational waypoints were associated with a deity of navigation who fostered navigation and who protected those engaged in this dangerous activity. In the western Mediterranean, the deity most associated with navigation was Herakles.

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<sup>114</sup> Kajava 1997:62–63 notes that Herakles was "commonly regarded as a ἡγεμών or *comes* who accompanied travelers, protecting them against troubles of any kind, and this is why people used to offer sacrifices to Heracles before setting out on a journey."

<sup>115</sup> The following Mark Islands are mentioned by Taft, Taft, and Rindlaub 2002:106 (Kennebec River), 344 (Moosabec Reach), 209 (Penobscot Bay with lighthouse: 270), 259 (Deer Island Thorofare), 324 (Winter Harbor).

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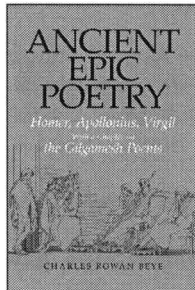
- BATL* Talbert, R. J. A. 2000. *The Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World*. Princeton.
- BTCGI* Nenci, G., and G. Vallet, eds. 1977–1984. *Bibliografia topografica della colonizzazione greca in Italia e nelle isole tirreniche*. Pisa and Ecole Rome.
- FHG* Jacoby, F. 1923–1999. *Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*. Leiden and Boston.
- LEX* Roscher, W. H. 1933 [1887–1909]. *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie*. New York.
- LIMC* *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*. 1981–1999. Zürich and Munich.
- NTDAR* Richardson, L., Jr. 1992. *A New Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome*. Baltimore.
- OCD* Hornblower, S., and A. Spawforth, eds. 1996. *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New York.
- PECS* Stillwell, R., W. L. MacDonald, and M. H. McAllister, eds. 1976. *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Classical Sites*. Princeton.
- RE* *Pauly's Realencyclopädie der Classischen Altertumswissenschaft*. 1988 [1893]. Munich.

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