

Research Article

From Ancient to Medieval Periods of the Mediterranean World: Trading Patterns & Dynamics

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Abstract

This research explores a comparative analysis of the Ancient and Medieval Periods of the Mediterranean World. The chronological framework of this work spans from approximately 3000 BC to 1500 AD. This examination can shed light on the experiences of seafaring communities and interpretations surrounding their development alongside the thrill of increased connectivity and maritime exploration. Facilitated trade growth has been linked to political stability and empire expansion, as demonstrated by the Greeks and Romans. Maritime innovations and the development of writing and currency drove the exchanging of goods. Ancient trade, characterized by sophisticated boatbuilding utilizing sewn boats and galleys to support a thriving slave trade, faced the threat of piracy on the open sea. The Medieval period demonstrated the organization of merchant colonies, credit systems, and legal frameworks such as feudal laws. Commercial expansion resulted from the development of coinage and banking. The advancement of maritime technology saw improved ship designs and sails, notably the lateen sail, enabling longer voyages and a stronger sense of navigation. Maritime law, taxation, and the rise of merchant communities played crucial roles in sustaining trade networks. These periods are interconnected through the sea's vital role in the advancement of power, wealth, and cultural exchange, with trade routes and craft evolving in response to ever changing environmental, social, and political shifts.

Keywords

Silk Road, Currency, Piracy, Warfare, Coinage, Tariffs, Merchant Colonies, Credit Systems, Maritime Innovations, Maritime Strategy

1. Introduction and Defining Termonology

Human contact is an ever-evolving concept. Through trade and the exchange of ideas, goods, language, people, and religion, identities are established and influenced. Patterns are formed and disassembled. The written word greatly impacted the logistics of trade and communication, expanding the realm of accessibility for those eager to take advantage; this additionally allowed for surviving letters to

provide records of goods, quantities, costs, and partnerships. Evolution of more uniform language and currency to streamline efficiency of large scale trade demonstrates a wide-spread network of communication. Colonialism in the ancient period spurred exploration and expansion, in turn motivating maritime developments. These developments provided a foundation for future centuries, developing

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merchant communities and legislative frameworks; the rise of feudalism in the medieval period led to an international guide of customs. These maritime laws and regulations provided an additional layer of complexity for merchants, who adapted to structures that varied throughout city states and unified regions. Perpetually in flux, prominent attributes characterized contrasts throughout the rise and fall of periods. How do the dynamics and patterns of trade compare and contrast between the ancient and medieval periods of the Mediterranean World?

When the ancient period is referenced, it is referring to approximately 3000 BC [Before Christ]- AD [Anno Domini] 500, with the medieval period following from 500 AD to 1500 AD. This is marked by the fall of Rome's Imperial period, which lasted from 31 BC - AD 476. From 500 AD to 1500 AD, the thousand year period of the medieval times encompasses the Roman Empire's fall and the Ottoman Empire's rise. The medieval period, resting between the Roman empire and the rebirth of the Renaissance, directly translates to 'of the Middle Ages'.

2. Dynamics of Ancient Trade in Mediterranean

During the Ubaid Period, from 5000-4100 BC, ancient Mesopotamia provides the earliest evidence of local trade [1]. By the Uruk period, from 4100-2900 BC, the structure had expanded to a long-distance network [1, 2]. Interconnected with the creation of Cuneiform in about 3200 BC, detailed communication expanded through this network [1, 2]. During the Agricultural Revolution in 10,000 BC, domestication of animals led to the refinement of the wheel and accessible roads for carts and transportation [2]. The revolution is widely referred to as the foundation of civilization, encouraged by the expansion of trade connectivity. "The five aspects that define civilization - surplus food, a division of labor, urbanization, government, and a writing system - all developed or were further encouraged by trade" [2] (p3). Hieroglyphs and cuneiform tablets dating to 3,300 BC depict trade regulations, cost comparisons, receipts, and complaints on products [3]. The Rosetta Stone, copied from the original from approximately the 3rd century BC, depicts Greek translations [3].

One of the most widely known feats of ancient trade is the Silk Road. The routes connected China to Central Asia, West Asia, India, the Eurasian Steppe, the Byzantine Empire, and Europe. Eastern areas were not widely known by ancient historians and geographers, and trade largely focused on western India [4]. Around the 5th/4th century BCE, the first Greek to identify China was recorded, claiming identification of the previously unknown location of the producers of silk [4]. This is supported by Herodotus Vol two, where he describes Aristean of Greece traveling East as far as Issedones [5]. Lack of communication and political

development resulted in travel between various political regions viewed as more hazardous and complex [3]. Transnational relations were dependent on beneficial political shifts and intensive communication. Developmental politics and economics associated with the rise of the Han and Roman empires spurred the Silk Road; stability in political and religious rules encouraged regular use of known routes [3]. Ethno-national expansion and conquest moved people and ideas, resulting in the emergence of empires and linked identities [3]. Subsystems categorized the movement of goods, with many traders limiting business to within specified empires [3]. The earliest evidence of maritime transport regulations and legal structures originated in Athens [6]. With minimal state interference, sea trade did not exclude private dynamism, and founded motives in supporting expansion and prosperity of maritime merchant communities and individuals [6].

Iconography of Egyptian boats from Ancient Times depict raft structures and rail lashings [7, 8]. Reed-bundle boats with obsidian remains attest to Mediterranean trade between Crete, Cyprus, and Malta before 6,000 BC [9, 10]. Early records of East Asian boatbuilding techniques on the Yangtze river depict skin-craft, reed bundles, and dugout- the latter infiltrating burial practices with the vessels used as coffins [3]. Large, plank-built trading vessels were constructed in the Middle East and Mesopotamia predating 3,000 BC, while islanders of Southeast Asia were evolving from dugout boats to the outrigger [3]. Increased priority on vessels is interconnected with community development and identity since the earliest form of boat. This demand propelled larger vessels for large-scale trade, which in turned required more sailors, builders, and organization [3].

Dramatic shifts in boatbuilding acted as differentiation between periods; stronger vessels capable of carrying loads of timber and metals stimulated the birth of the Bronze Age and use of metal tools in construction [3]. Johnstone elaborates on the link between maritime evolution and identity, "Boats became ships... the first great island state came into existence [on Crete]" [11] (p67). Infiltration into artistic expression and quasi-mythical records affirm this evolution, taking for example the 50-oared galley recorded in Jason and the Argonauts voyage for the golden fleece [3, 12]. The myth records the familiarity felt from the Black Sea to the Aegean, supporting accounts of exploration, juxtaposed by the dangers presented at sea: Casson records that along Asia Minor's northern shore the vessel "met the usual problem that confronted a strange ship in those days: attacks by natives whenever it tried to put in for the night or for provisions" [3, 12, 14]. Support was provided for trade relations through harbors predetermined as safe by previous sailors and merchants. Bronze Age vessels in the Mediterranean are referenced in textual evidence being constructed through sewn methods [8, 15]. During this time, painted motifs of Cypriot boats have been determined to illustrate animal skins sewn along a wooden frame [16] (p70-

73). Evidence of sewn boats was intertwined with mythological recordings; Odysseus' boat in Homer has been identified as a boat of sewn construction, over later building techniques of mortise and tenon [8, 14, 15, 17].

3. Warfare and Linguistic Developments

Taking to the water opened up not just power through trade, but power through force. Offensive and defensive strategy infiltrated a new medium- the open sea. The formation of a navy was of increased priority [6]. Themistocles of Athens, a prominent figure in maritime development, engaged in communal efforts to create a secured harbor for the expansion of commercial shipping [6]. Between 561 and 461 BC, he established a harbour at Piraeus for mass exchange, and constructed an impressive navy to ensure the security of the harbour [6]. This navy was incredibly powerful, and consisted of 100 Triireis [6].

Linguistic developments and lingua francas of Latin and Greek developing with the empire's movements acted as the foundation for various dialects [3, 15]. The prominence of Latin in the Mediterranean persisted from ancient times into the Medieval period, sustained through religious texts, records, and education [3, 15]. Expanding into regions independent from the Roman empire, Germanic and Slavic languages incorporating Latin into their respective dialects aided trade and reliability in communication- within the realm of literate individuals [3]. Towards the end of the Ancient Period, literary development embodied rise past the Dark Ages, visible through Greek language and writing [15]. Trade with the Phoenicians moved ideas of technology and writing into societies. Early uses of trade receipts, cargo manifests, and partnership records flourished, and later transitioned into compositions of technological literature and Homeric poetry [19]. However, it should be noted literacy prioritization was limited in rural agricultural dominated Archaic Greece [3].

4. Colonialism and Piracy

Colonialism peaking in Greece around the eighth century BC was largely motivated by the quest for fertile areas suitable for cities' overflow [6, 18]. Areas rich in high-demand materials were claimed in hopes of dominating the trading field [6, 18]. As a result of advancements and structured systems of city-states formed in ancient history, emphasis on seafaring and maritime trade increased drastically throughout the Medieval period [6]. Syracuse was formed in approximately 850 BC by Corinth, and flourished as a maritime center of shipbuilding, trade, and port city for a sizable fleet of merchant vessels [6]. Meanwhile, Syracuse was forming corporations between the Greek poleis, called *Amfiktioniai*, with the intent to ensure the safety of seabound cargo, vessels, and individuals [6]. Thriving colonies

increased political strength and relations, and provided growing navy powers with secure, geographically beneficial spaces [6, 18]. Taxes enforced by political figures enriched and correlated to expansion of maritime routes; the port city of Piraeus in Athens recorded taxation of two percent of cargo value between connected ports, while foreign exchanges were taxed six percent [6, 19]. Written loan contracts between bankers and shipowners increased security of the vessel and cargo alike, while banks received both capital and interest rates based on the quantity of stolen or damaged product for their own security [6, 19]. As a result, interest on long-distance exchange, for example a voyage from Piraeus to Crimea and back, was taxed anywhere from 22.5 to 30 percent, excluding capital [6]. A loan had limitations of fifty percent of the cargo's overall value, including slaves [6].

With growth in maritime movement, economic pirates formed a parasitic relationship with increases in wealth and exports. Geographical properties of islands supported characteristics of piracy's development [20]. The pirates and privateers of the first century BC defending polities were so consistent they were viewed as an organized attack on the development of Roman authority [20]. Launching campaigns against pirates expanded territories and wealth, which projected power to neighboring areas [20]. Royal luxuries acquired through plunder, tribute, and trade were moved in limited quantities; incense, metals, textiles, spices, and silk were not moved in bulk to avoid devastating loss to piracy [3]. Increased reliance on maritime routes encouraged pirates and led to fluctuations in security, thus controlling accessibility [3]. With piracy a continuous threat, societies evolved to maximize safety of their people [20]. In the third century BC, political enforcement through fines controlled Ceos' women through bans from lone travel in Greece to limit their capture by pirates [20]. The female dominant characteristic of enslaved people persisted through the following centuries and was consistent throughout the Medieval period [20]. "The medieval traffic in slaves was overwhelmingly a traffic in women" [42] (p149).

5. Dynamics of Medieval Trade in Mediterranean

In relation to categories of material evidence for the dynamics of medieval trade, the generality of text can be categorised into three groups, managing business relations, managing market details, and managing transactions, including courtroom testimonies [22, 23]. In written accounts, the majority of material are records on managing transactions, while the subject of records of communications are frequently a combination of market details or business relations [22, 23]. These letters of communication reassured business associates that had a lull in trading, or individuals extending offers to potential partners [22, 23]. Looking at the

business process of the Geniza merchants, examples of their framework are visible through correspondence. An example of this is R. Abū 'Alī's letter to b. Nissīm of Fustat before his arrival:

R. Abū 'Alī Hasan...sends you kindest regards...When you write to me, mention him with greetings. He is a friend of yours and speaks of you all the time" [22] (p90, 9).

The letter's intent is to refresh the memory of the recipient, and his connection to the sender [22]. For a merchant from Geniza mainly trading with Egypt, his product traveled great distances with letters recording his ownership of his goods and instructions on distribution to an agent [22, 24]. Letters to merchants from one another instructed meeting locations and topics to discuss [22-24].

6. Trade Standards and Feudalism

Trading standards required to be upheld distinguished a professional identity from a public societal identity, with correspondence demonstrating the distinction [22]. These letters explain errors in judgement or deals that went amiss, with roles of the process elaborated [22]. The structure did not demonstrate a fixed and rigid outline, but rather an abstract system where traders could join at various steps of the assembly, from flax prior to its harvest to fully hackled flax ready for transportation [22, 23]. If items were purchased from the government, the seller was required to produce certifications of authenticity and coordinate officer payments- a process only available to those with substantial ties to the authorities [22]. Various markets distinguished the quality of accessible goods, depending on whether consumers lived outside or inside a metropolis; this demonstrates contrasting physical identities based on materials, whether rural or urban [22]. Low-quality flax juxtaposed costly fabric dyes, including brazilwood, al-Andalus crimson, and Indian Indigo [22]. Correspondence records the process of manufacturing yarn to trade from Jerusalem to Tyre to produce cloth with the material [22]. Letters provide scholars with perspective comparisons; one seller documents a demand for crimson dyestuff from Andalusī, while another explains that the increase in cost resulted in a lack of market for the product in Jerusalem [22]. No specific location was designated as a center hub in Shām; sellers visited numerous large production centers of in-demand products [22]. Weather influence was documented in written messages: Yeshū ā b. Ismaīl communicated preferences to limit trade with Rashī due to extreme difficulty traveling back during the end of the sailing season [22, 25]. Seasonal coordination was necessary; a complaint from Palermo, Italy records consistent demand for prime products, while higher priced exports such as spices and dyes should delay shipment, prioritizing positive payout over loss of investment and capital function [22, 25].

Feudalism, the medieval government structure prior to the

development of the nation-state, spurred the development of an international guide of customs [26]. Without state intervention, private ordering of goods increased [21]. Sources support the theory that suppliers discouraged an international, governed structure of law, and rather acquired an individual body of law, or followed local customs and regulations, enforced by district governments courts [26, 27]. Credit was used in the trading sphere to connect merchants, and ensure consistent trade in the community [27]. Individuals would inquire into reputability of prospective associates through the credit system [27]. Written sources evidence the employment of brokers and agents, and support the concept of government and court regulated trading structures [26, 27]. Maritime law varied throughout the medieval world, and shipwrecks resulted in legal disputes through various port cities; the majority of cases ruled in favor of local laws:

In Lu'beck law, two different rules existed: one laid down half the freightage for salvaged goods, whereas the other stipulated full freight. A third rule was available through the Hanseatic statutes, according to which half freightage was due if the ship wrecked in the first half of the journey and a freight pro rata itineris [in proportion to the distance travelled] if the vessel foundered in the second half [28] (p144-145).

7. Merchant Colonies and Coins

Shaping identity, merchant colonies boomed in port cities and trading hubs during reliable transnational trade, and mining colonies developed with metals in increased demand [3]. Opportunities for more diverse investments developed a more widespread freedom among merchants [6]. Banks became popular in trade transfers to minimize risk of moving large sums of coins [29]. At the beginning of the eighth century AD, the first maritime bank was established by Emperor Nikiforos; fixed interest rates and readily available loans for shipbuilding provided a propitious economic shift [6]. Nonprecious metals circulated societies, maintaining liquidity in regional markets [30]. Precious metals traveled between international centers, and developing monetary structure implemented by political figures simplified taxation of transport [30]. Integrated with social conditions and lapses in security and structure, piracy increased, from privateering to traders exchanging selling for robbing [29]. With pirates a threat on the high seas, insurance, taxes, and tolls developed at faster rates than state-wide distribution [29].

A trail of evidence demonstrates a gradual, pivotal shift: the birth of coin-based economies in the Mediterranean. Between 1,000 BC and 1 BC, encompassing the Metal Ages, evidence supports the origin of metal currency in Lydia in the early seventh century BC, with an accelerated adoption by the ancient Greeks [31]. During the following century, distinct variations of coinage emerged throughout the Aegean [31]. Numismatic analysis depicts inscriptions of quality,

weight, and projected value [31]. Variances emerged between Greek poleis, with art history, metallurgy and identity intertwined through visual subjects: gorgons, amphora, beetles, pomegranates, and wheels were subjects of Athenian design [31]. Economic fluctuations impacted values with shifts between intrinsic and overpriced worth [31].

Evidence of coins from ancient Greece demonstrate a smaller quantity of circulation, mainly local and regional distribution [32]. Development in technical advancements during the Medieval period continued to be central to minting methods from the early to the later Middle Ages, while ancient coins of varying density and models evolved into thinner design and more uniform formation [32]. More intricate designs were implemented; geometric and uncomplicated shifted to details of subjects and motifs, often with text [32, 33]. Subjects shifted from dots and shapes to taking advantage of its widespread contact through propaganda of rulers and imperial messages [32]. More homogenous style and method increased quantity of production towards the Later Middle Ages [32]. Coin distributions was a direct result of developing trade [34]. State or local currency of nonprecious sheet metal were largely irrelevant to large-scale transactions of silver in a propulsion towards standardization of value in wide-spread currency [34]. Though in use, bartering and product exchange was predominant over a monetary structure, which developed more gradually over centuries, eminently in the Near East [31].

8. Slavery

Mediterranean history cannot be written without the inclusion of slavery; slave-trade in ancient times circulated peoples between maritime-linked cultures. Arabic and Latin sources record maritime trade networks used to transport slaves from the Black Sea to Cairo and Genoa, Venice from the thirteenth to fifteen century AD [36]. These sources outline the foundation of medieval slavery as grounded in religious beliefs over racial differences [36]. This is not to say slavery distribution and political incorporation was not highly influential until the medieval period; Herodotus records mass movement from northwestern Greece 150,000 slaves shipped to Italy from Epirus in the second century BC [5]. This movement occurred following mass enslavement of Aegean island peoples by the Persians throughout the fifth century BC [5]. Predating the Medieval Period, slaves were already dominant in the bartering systems in establishment; around the first century BC, Gaul traded slaves for Roman Dressel 1 amphora, a consequence of increased demand of wine, developing as an aristocratic symbol at the time [20]. The slaves were prioritized as a practical trade medium for manpower in response to agricultural increase and inflation [17, 20, 37]. Larger Greek islands such as Chios had the second highest quantity of slaves than any other polis after Sparta in the fifth century BC [5, 20]. Climates supporting an

agricultural, labor centered community kept slaves in continuous demand [20]. Increase in the import of manpower determined rates of export of local product [20]. Wars in the Medieval period had repercussions of increased religious prisoners and slave trade, juxtaposing proportionally more limited distribution in periods of peace [20]. Interconnectivity of moving people and piracy paralleled developments of maritime exchange, encouraged by local geography:

Islands were naturally as important to piracy as to other forms of seaborne traffic. This is most clearly the case with the form of redistribution most characteristic of the Mediterranean pirate, the trade in human beings" [20] (p388).

Maritime networks largely contributed to the expansion of slavery through warfare and religious conquest. Increased demand for slaves in agriculture-centric regions kept the slave trade an economically beneficial business for merchants:

The sea-borne migration of unfree female labour anticipated...mediterranean slaves... were employed on the plantations of Crete and other islands- a dress-rehearsal, so to speak, for their introduction on to the plantations of the New World" [21] (cited in 20 p389).

Structures of 11th century AD medieval serfdom alongside ancient slavery practices flourished, with an emphasis on the former [13]. Declines in state power during late antiquity increased the difficulty of slave management, and resulted in an increase of uprisings and revolts [13]. In the tenth century AD, a societal pivot referred to as the feudal revolution saw a plummet in agriculture-centric slave use [13]. Though the transition from slave and owner to serfs and lords or nobles was widespread, slavery did not cease to exist by any means. "There was a "continual and central presence of slavery in societies worldwide between 500 ce and 1420 ce" [38] (p153).

9. Naval Narrative

Shipbuilding techniques in Greece shifted from the prioritized speed and agility of warships to enforced, deeper hulls designed to maximize cargo capacity [6]. During the early 15th century AD, Greeks were viewed among the highest skilled galley builders [6]. Early in the Medieval period, boatbuilders distinguished warships from merchant vessels, called holkades, through replacing the prow ram with a rounded bow [3]. Not built for speed, they were built with a priority of stability and larger volume for trade, the largest recorded being a grain carrier belonging to King Hieron II of Syracuse in the 3rd century BC with a capacity of 1,700-1,900 tons [3]. These techniques varied depending on location and geographically available resources, as well as economic feasibility. A prominent attribute of ancient to medieval comparative study is that of shell versus frame-first vessel construction. "Extended the principles of... new

approach to ancient Mediterranean shipbuilding, and concluded that ancient ships were built shell-first" [14, 39] (p235). From the ancient to the medieval period, watercraft were in a state of continuous adaptation. Investing in the maritime industry and combining efforts into developing and improving vessels to better suit their interests and variations in geographical conditions, it can be assumed that the expansion of trading networks in the Mediterranean was linked to shifts in boat building techniques and methods. Extended voyages, increased cargo, and more hazardous

conditions could not be taken on without developed skill, experience, and watercraft. For frame-first vessels, the design and geometry of construction must have been predetermined. For fixed construction techniques of these craft, recordings and plans of vessel construction allowed for further replication, another factor aiding the expansion and evolution of maritime trade [14]. The transition was gradual, with a period of overlap between the two techniques, as seen in Figure 1.

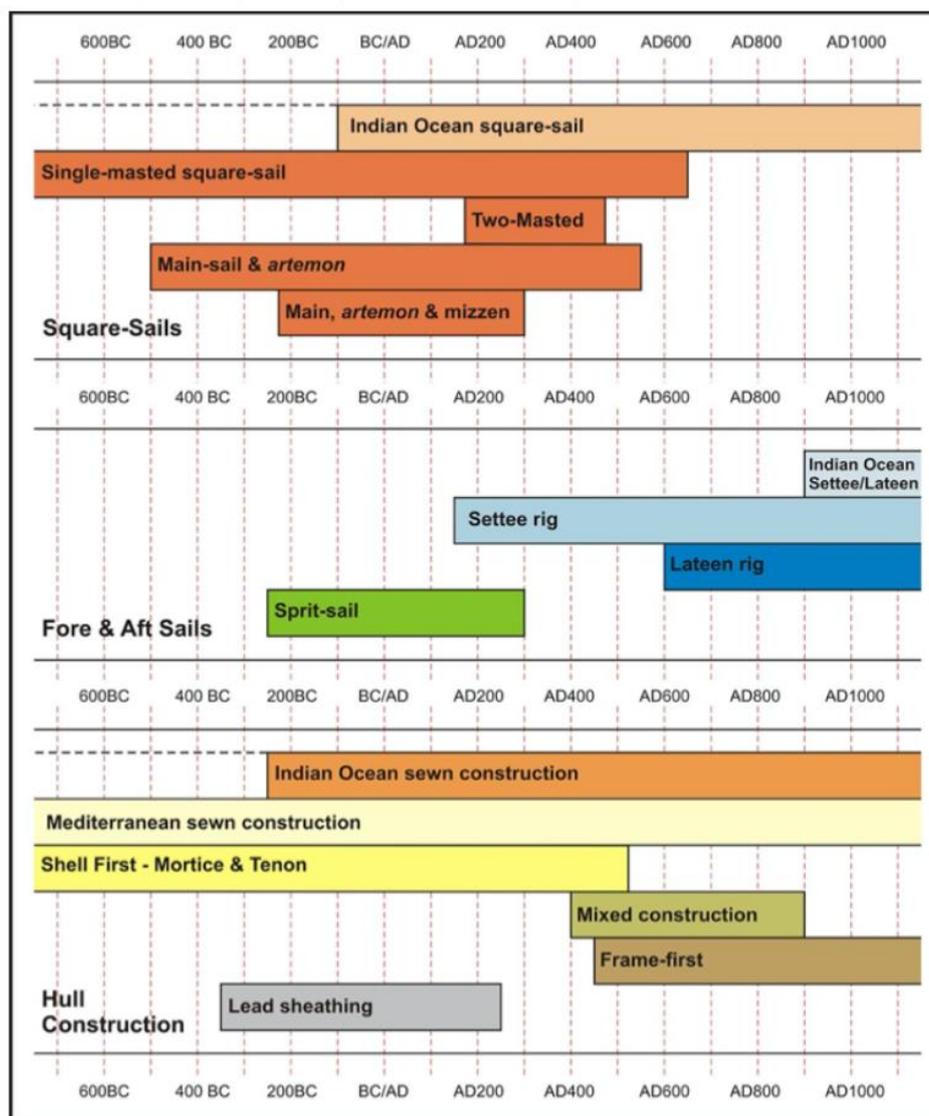


Figure 1. Based on records in iconographic, archaeological, and literary sources, spanning from 800 BC to 1200 AD in the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean [42].

Also featured in Figure 1 is the evolution of assorted sail types. Square sails are the earliest type in the archaeological record, dating back to approximately 3100 BC [40]. The square sail was dominant throughout the Mediterranean, and continued to be widely used until late-antiquity [8]. From the

second century AD onward, Arab influence resulted in the lateen sail being adopted by mariners [8, 41]. By the fifth century AD, it had become prevalent, as seen in Figure 2 [8, 41]. During the Medieval period, a drastic lack of evidence supports the theory that the square sail faded out of use

during this time, while lateen sails continued to be used [40].

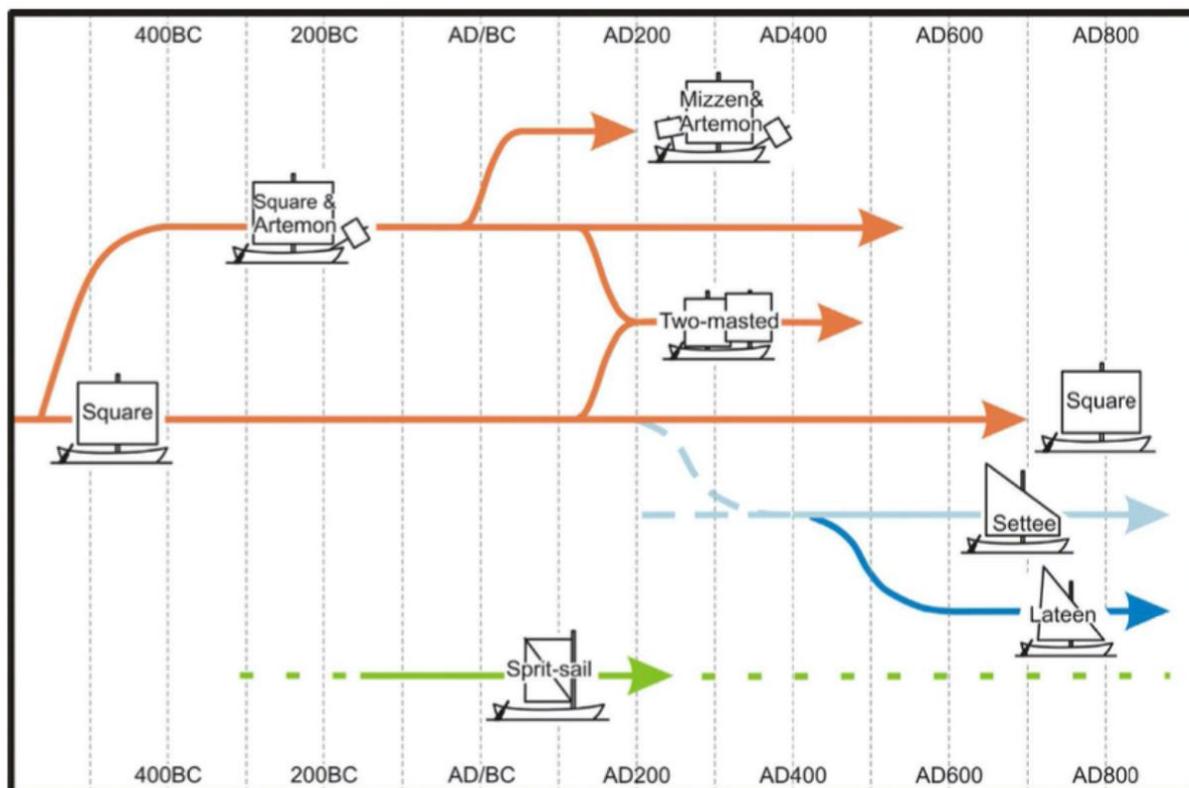


Figure 2. Evolution of sailing rigs in the Mediterranean, from 600 BC-900 AD. Speculated independent construction techniques are represented by dashed lines, while dependent, definitive techniques are represented by solid lines [42].

Lateen sails meant that a vessel was not limited to being blown before the wind, as with the square-sail structure of set mounts between the sail, yard, and deck, and could more easily navigate strong winds and difficult shorelines [8]. With greater maneuverability, these ships were not entirely dependent on favorable winds or strong rowers [8, 41]. The feasible weight limit of vessels increased, as they were no longer reliant on man-power to propel the cargo hold in seaborne merchantry [8]. This progression allowed for maritime trade to become more consistent as well as more economically viable, while contributing to the ever growing wealth of coastal regions [8].

10. Conclusion

Ancient trade dynamics saw expansion and the power of language, from Hieroglyphics to Cuneiform to ancient Greek. The agricultural revolution expanded trade connectivity routes, such as the Silk Road, widely known for its complexity and powerful influence on transnational relations. Political and economic shifts kept the severity of piracy perpetually in flux. Iconography tracked the development of watercraft as they evolved in adaptation to

environmental factors, intent, resources, geography, society, and economic conditions. Quasi-mythical records and artistic expression affirm the consistent adaptation and development, as well as portraying and depicting the cultural significance of maritime influence and identity. Powers emerged through navies and wealthy coastal groups, and control over secure ports was highly valued. Linguistic developments aided the efficiency of trade's economic structure, visible through coin implementation to make commercial trade more efficient. Taxes, maritime banks, loans, and interests all visualize economically beneficial burgeon, as well as accessibility for seafarers and merchants lacking necessary funds. The slave trade was prominent in both ancient and medieval periods, though the medieval period saw a shift toward serfdom. Piracy grew, supported by the geographical properties of islands, pillaging currency, goods, and people, predominantly women throughout both periods. Feudalism and an international guide of customs developed courts, and merchant colonies boomed with those reliant on maritime exchange. Bartering and trading saw shifts to coinage in large transactions. Nautical developments, social shifts in construction techniques, as well as sail use dramatically impacted the known world. Shell-first to frame-first and square sail to lateen sail are more distinguishable contrasting

characteristics, with their popularity tracked through literary sources and iconographic evidence alike. Extended voyages, increased capacity, and naval power were prominent developments between the ancient and medieval periods, with the growth corresponding to significance of the sea to coastal communities and maritime-centered livelihoods. There is an undertone of standardization, varying in size from local bodies of law to an international guide of customs; credit systems, coin-based economies, and widespread lingua franca further aided connectivity between peoples. As cultures saw nautical advancements, their horizons expanded and relationships developed. The movement of people, ideas, goods, language, and religion escalated influence in the arts, its quantity and variety contributing to our understanding of history and archaeology today.

Abbreviations

AD	Anno Domini
BC	Before Christ

Author Contributions

Anika Elema is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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