

The sea as a place of no return in ancient Greece

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Abstract

In this paper I shall explore a hitherto neglected dimension of the Greeks' complex relationship with the sea: its use and perception as 'a place of no return' and an 'away-place'. These terms are used in modern waste management to denote places where people throw things away permanently and thus expect never to deal with them again. Literary and archaeological sources will be reviewed with a view to exploring the occasions on which sea-dumping was regarded as a socially acceptable action, the kinds of objects that were permanently disposed of, as well as the range of different types of people who committed their unwanted items to the depths of the sea. I shall also discuss which qualities of the sea may have made it ideal as a place of no return in the eyes of the ancient Greeks and how far the 'garbology' approach contributes to a new understanding of the sea.

Keywords

Ancient Greece; sea; perception; away; dumping place; waste.

Introduction

The recognition of the sea as a distinct realm, complementing and contrasting with other natural features of the Greek landscape and the realm of divine powers is attested to by, among other ancient authors (Aeschin. *ag. Ktesiphon* 96; *A. Pers.* 73; Pausanias after Bradley 2000: 26, fig. 26), Hesiod (*Th.* 126–32), who wrote in his story of the origin of the world that the earth produced the heaven, mountains and sea, and also by Homer who talked of the division of power between Zeus, Poseidon and Hades, with Poseidon getting the sea (Hom. *Il.* 15.189–93; *h. Nept.*). Much scholarly attention has been focused on the use and perception of this special territory by the ancient Greeks. Book-length treatments include Lesky's (1947) monograph, in which he explores changing attitudes towards the sea from the Dark Ages to the Hellenistic period on the basis of literary evidence, as well as Parker's archaeological study of 1992, in which he discusses the significance of shipwrecks in the history of seafaring. Greek antiquity plays a minor role in Braudel's (2001),

Horden and Purcell's (2000) and Kopidakes' (2002) treatments of the Mediterranean Sea across time, and only a few papers on ancient Greece are included in the collection of essays edited by Vryonis (1993b).

Noteworthy are the treatments of the sea as a place for colonizing, trading and exchanging (Parkins and Smith 1998; Broodbank 2000; Hornig in press) and as a world to be exploited for its natural resources (Warnecke 1999: 333; Horden and Purcell 2000: 190–5, 425–6, 576–7). In addition to its economic value, the political and military significance of the sea in ancient Greece has been extensively discussed (Ahlberg-Cornell 1971; Starr 1989). Research into the technological manifestations of the relationship of the Greeks to the sea (Blackmann 1982; Werner 1997; Agouridis 1998: 181; Gianfrotta et al. 1997) has in recent decades benefited from the relatively new discipline of underwater archaeology. The divine connotations of the sea and its significance in Greek religious practices have also been extensively discussed (Wachsmuth 1967; esp. 201–76; 336–9), as has the great range of characteristics attributed to the sea in myths (Buxton 1994: 97–104) and vase-paintings (von Bothmer 1993; Pekáry 1999).

Yet, one aspect has hitherto not been the object of scholarly attention: the perception and use of the sea as a permanent disposal place or away-place, an appropriate locus to dispose of those objects that one never wishes to deal with again (Lund and Lund 1993: B.3; cf. Hoffmann 1989: 13). This discussion will be based on a survey of literary and archaeological data, with two main aims in mind. On the one hand, I shall address the issues of immediate relevance for this paper, such as the kinds of substances cast into the sea, the types of people who might use the sea as a place of no return, and the scale of such use. On the other hand, I shall also explore those properties that made the sea a perfect 'away-place' in the understanding of the ancient Greeks. Images of the sea as a place of no return as presented in myth, tragedy, comedy, historic treatments and forensic speeches will prevail in the discussion, owing to the imbalance in the availability of literary and archaeological data. Consequently, this paper focuses on what the ancient Greeks said they were doing and what they perceived themselves to be doing, rather than on what they actually did. To provide a setting for this more theoretical discussion, a brief introduction into the complex relationship between the Greeks and the sea is provided.

Three representative concepts of the sea

Perhaps the most famous reference to the relationship between the Greeks and the sea is Plato's (*Phd.* 109B) likening of the Greeks to frogs around a pond. Plato's simile illustrates the defining role played by the sea in the way that the ancient Greek mind perceived the geography of Hellas (Fig. 1). The sea was at the centre of the Greek world while the land formed its fringe. Accordingly, the pattern of colonization around the Mediterranean – and the Black Sea as its extension – shows that significant settlements tend not to have been founded more than twenty-five miles inland (Finley 1963: 3). Plato's metaphor also highlights that the sea was an integral part of ancient Greek life and a mediating and unifying agent, aspects that are all well attested in other literary and archaeological sources (cf. Olshausen 1999: col. 1126).

Plato's simile did not cover all the essential aspects of the sea, but these can be singled

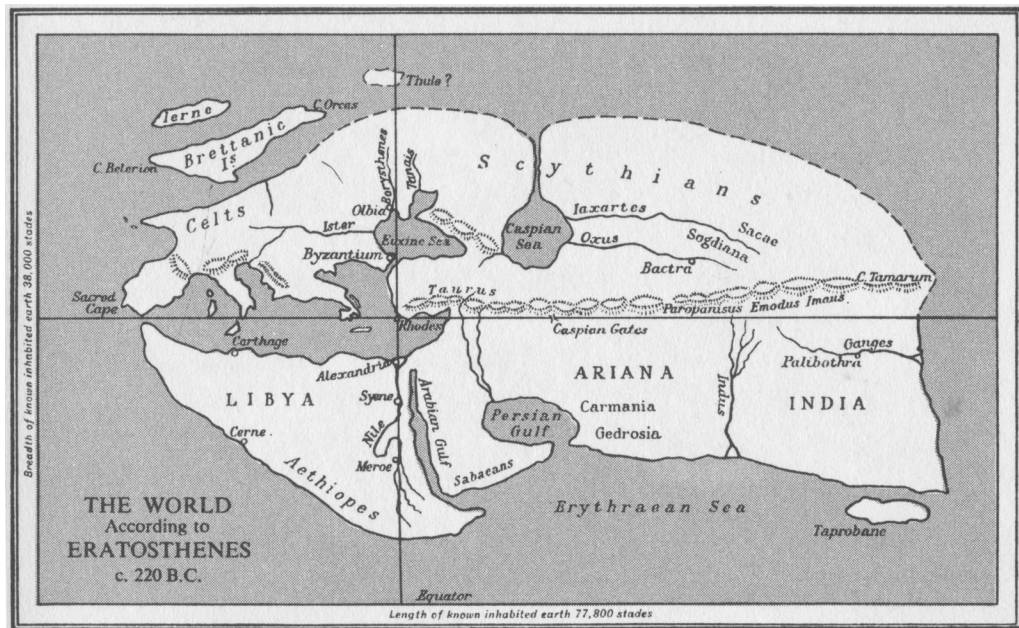


Figure 1 Simplified reconstruction of Eratosthenes' (c. 275–194 BC) map of the world, based on north–south and east–west lines intersecting at Rhodes (after Dilke 1985: fig. 4). © Thames & Hudson.

out in a comic scene on a Boeotian skyphos depicting Odysseus on what appears to be a raft made of *amphorae* (Plate 1). This scene highlights a whole range of characteristics that the ancient Greeks attributed to the sea: its dangerous, savage and corrupting nature when whipped into a roiling turbulence by storms like Boreas; its association with Poseidon (whose symbol is his trident), who was believed by some literally to have lived in the sea, for part of his life at least (Hom. *Od.* 5.381), while others believed that the sea was under his power (cf. above); its richness in fish, which not only diversified the ancient Greek diet (Lesky 1947: 17–20), but was a source of income (Horden and Purcell 2000: 195); its association with trade in general, signified by the *amphorae* on which Odysseus stands.

Another selective emphasis was placed by Semonides (*fr.* 7.27–42 (West 1992), Lloyd-Jones 1975: 56–7, 70–3), a poet of the second half of the seventh century BC, who stressed that the sea had more than one character. This characterization of the sea as a place with many different properties can already be found in the Homeric epics, where it is described using a variety of terms (including *thálassa*, *pélagos*, *póntos*, *sálos* and *hals* (Edwards 1914: 225–6; Lesky 1947: 8–13, 157, 295; Warnecke 1999: 330) and as having several colours (Lesky 1947: 161–3; Hermann 1969: cols 358–447). The sea's ambivalent nature also becomes apparent in early literary references where most of the inhabitants of the sea are described as creatures that are half human and half beast (Lesky 1947: 109–11, 139–42; Warnecke 1999: 331; Simon 1981: pl. 21). We can also see this in the metaphorical associations between the ambiguous substance of wine and the sea, attested in literary testimonies since Homer as well as in vase-paintings (Lissarrague 1990: 107–22). Many contradictory dynamics were ascribed to the sea, and it was thought to be benevolent yet



Plate 1 Side B of a black-figure skyphos from Thebes, Boeotia. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, inv. AN G. 249 (V. 262), fifth–fourth century BC. © Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

also terrible. These two potentials were associated throughout antiquity with beliefs about origins, creation and birth, such as the Aphrodite myth (Simon 1959), and also of ending, destruction and death. These characteristics will form the focus of the discussion in the following paragraphs.

The sea as a place of no return: literary sources

One of the best-known stories portraying the sea as a place of no return is that of Polykrates (Hdt. 3.40–3), who was tyrant of Samos at the end of the sixth century BC and to whom the construction of the earliest datable harbour is attributed (Hdt. 3.60). In an attempt to avoid the jealousy of the gods that might arise from his streak of constant good luck (Hdt. 3.40.2–3), and the subsequent shameful death that he was sure to incur as a result, Polykrates devised a clever plan that would instead bring him misfortune (*enalláx hai eutycháti*) and true sadness (*málista ten psychén algézein*). He threw into the sea the thing that was dearest to him (*tó eón toi pleístou áxion*), a ring. In Herodotos' version of the story, Polykrates' main motive for casting his precious ring into the sea was his desire to be permanently rid of it (cf. Davidson 1997: 288–9; but cf. Burkert 1987: 45; Kraus and Ihm 1996 [1913]: 433). Herodotos' choice of the verb *apobálllein* stresses the dimension of separation – in contrast to *riptein*, a term introduced by Herodotos only when it became evident that Polykrates' plot would not be successful and that the sea would serve only as a temporary away-place – and indicates that the sea was regarded as the ideal place for things which are to be disposed of irretrievably. The subsequent recovery of the ring in the body of a fish does not negate this assumption. Herodotos clearly states that only those people who are always lucky, like Polykrates (*eutychéon tá pánta*), are able to get things back from the sea (*heuriskein*; Hdt. 3.43.1). Yet the shocked reaction of Polykrates' friend upon the retrieval of the ring indicates that this was a highly unusual event if not a bad omen. The belief that the resurfacing of objects that had been thrown into watery bodies

was a bad sign was quite widespread in ancient Greek society. It is central to the rite, described by Pausanias (3.23.8), of throwing barley meals into a small lake known as the Water of Ino in order to predict the future during the goddess' festival: if good luck was in store for the thrower, the water would 'keep them under.' However, if the water rejected the cakes and sent them up to the surface, this was regarded as a bad sign.

The motif of the sea as the ultimate place of no return can also be seen in the story of the discovery of the wooden cult statue of Hermes Peripheraios: the Thracian fisherman were so scared by this piece of driftwood, which they could not use for firewood, that the only option they could think of was to throw it back into the sea, so that it would not 'return' (*POxy* 661.45–50, col. 2, Kerkhecker 1999: 190–1). When the wooden log nevertheless reappeared, they realized that it was special and worshipped it as the image of Hermes. As in the story of Polykrates' ring, the recovery of the disposed object was regarded as a significant event and a divine sign, although here without any negative connotations.

The act of *katapontízein*, *katapontóein* or *embállein*, of throwing unwanted things into the sea, was not restricted to individuals, but was also practised by *polis* authorities. Diogenes Laertios' (5.77) account of the treatment of the bronze statues of Demetrios of Phaleron (for other ancient descriptions of this event cf. Str. 9.1.20; D.Chr. 37.41; Plu. *Mor.* 820E) is just one example. He noted that some of the bronze statues of the formerly highly esteemed Athenian leader had been melted down into chamber-pots, while others had been thrown into the sea. This action is without doubt a symbolic political statement, aiming at the erasure of Demetrios' name from public memory. The permanent removal of these statues from view by casting them in the sea can thus be interpreted as a punishment comparable to the Roman *damnatio memoriae* (Vittinghoff 1936; Born and Stemmer 1996; Hedrick 2000), with the disposal of the statues of unpopular politicians in the River Tiber (Donderer 1991–2: col. 222). If Diogenes Laertios' account of events is correct, the notable difference between the Greek and the Roman methods of disposal relates to the choice of the parts of the statue that were disposed of. While the Romans tended to throw away only the heads of sculptures and seem to have reused the torsos (1991–2: cols 199–201), the Athenians rid themselves of the entire statue, regardless of its material value. This would imply that the Romans had a much more practical and economic approach than the ancient Greeks or that there was a difference between Roman and Greek understandings of the significance of the bodies of statues.

In this context, two tales attested to in Pausanias' *Description of Greece* are of relevance. The first is told as an explanation for the annual rites at the Dipolieia or Diipolia, a feast in honour of Zeus Polieus: a priest of Zeus Polieus, known as the ox-slayer, had cast aside the weapon with which he had killed the sacrificial ox that had dared to eat from the wheat and barley reserved for Zeus and then ran away (Paus. 1.24.4; 1.28.10). The axe itself was then brought to trial on the charge of murder, while in another version of the story the axe was thrown into the sea (Porph. *Abst.* 2.28–9 after Aktsele 1996: 33–4). In the second story, the Thasians indicted the bronze statue of Theagenes, a highly successful athlete from Thasos, because it had fallen on top of one of his enemies, who would come daily to flog the statue, killing him. As in the previous story, the 'lifeless thing' (*ta ápsycha*) was found guilty of murder, sentenced to banishment and dropped to the bottom of the sea (Paus. 6.11.2–9; cf. D.Chr. 31.96; Graf 1985: 302).

The stories have many common points. They both represent the sea as place where pollution can take place, a belief which also underlies the practice of holding law courts at the water's edge for those individuals whose alleged crimes made it improper for them to set foot on land (Arist. *Ath.* 47.3–4; for further references cf. Rhodes 1981: 645–6). Both stories illustrate that irretrievable deposition in the sea was seen as a punitive measure, an idea already noted in the story of the permanent disposal of the statues of Demetrios. They also point to belief that the ceding of instruments of death into the sea was one, if not the, most effective way to free a particular community from pollution. That the casting of inanimate objects in the sea was indeed a standard procedure is also attested to in the Aristotelian *Constitution of the Athenians* (57.4; for further references, cf. Wachsmuth 1967: 309, with n. 1345; Rhodes 1981: 649). This disposal method became a problem only if what was meant to be lost to humanity for ever needed to be reclaimed, as in the case of the statue of Theagenes. Pausanias reports the relief of the Thasians when they heard that fishermen had miraculously recovered the statue.

The sea was not imagined as a place of permanent safekeeping only for lost and unwanted artefacts, but also for people. It was believed that polluted humans were frequently taken by the sea and some of the creatures associated with it (Wachsmuth 1967: 265–71). The sea's ability to deprive humans of their burial by keeping hold of their corpses will have contributed to the sea's reputation as a corrupting or deadly place (for references, see Lesky 1947: 36, 213–14; Wachsmuth 1967: 211, n. 657). The moment when, after a shipwreck, humans became part of the cosmos of the sea is well captured in a scene on a geometric vase painting (Plate 2). Only a specific group of people – mythical male figures suffering from despair, grief, fury, and shame, particularly sexual humiliation (Loraux 1985: 18; van Hooff 1990: 74) – appreciated this aspect of the sea and deliberately selected it to as their final 'away-place'. It is possible to explain such a choice by those committing suicide as a wish to unify themselves with the sea (Versnel 1981: 154). Yet it seems far more plausible to explain their selection of the sea with the perception of it as a territory that lay beyond human reach and its association with the *kólpos* (female bosom, lap, gulf) of Thetis, which acted as a refuge for gods in the Homeric epics (*Il.* 6.135, 18.390, cf. Apollod. 1.3.5, 3.5.1).

The sea was also held in high esteem by those who had to dispose of other humans, either alive or dead, permanently. One thus cast one's enemies (Hom. *Il.* 21.34–59) or disfigured and unwanted children (Hom. *h. Ap.* 316–20; Hdt. 4.154.2–3) into the sea in the hope that one would never have to deal with them again. Victims of murder were also thrown into the depths of the sea to cover up the marks of a crime (Antiphon, *On the Murder* 39). This was, however, deemed by the majority of Greek society as an unjust denial of the individual's right to a burial, and thus considered a horrendous and socially unacceptable crime (cf. Lindenlauf 2001b). Even the Cynics, the philosophical fringe group who espoused the disposal of corpses into rivers instead of being buried (D.L. 6.79), would have probably rejected such an action, as the motive behind it was not to feed the fish but to escape punishment for murder.

To conclude, one reason why the sea was conceived of as a dangerous place was its potential to bring death, to take things away, and to make things disappear. The literary sources give us the impression that the ancient Greeks believed they knew how to make use of this potential of the sea so that it would best serve their ends. All social strata, from



Plate 2 Detail from the neck of an Attic geometric oinochoe. Munich, Collection of Antiquities, inv. 8696, mid-eighth century BC. Staatliche Antikensammlungen und Glyptothek München. Photo: Koppermann.

the tyrant to the fisherman, appear to have cast all kinds of unwanted and polluted objects into the sea, including jewellery, statues and natural products. The main motive for disposing something in the sea was to be rid of it. This act of separation was made most explicit in Polykrates' symbolic disposal of his ring. In the case of polluted objects, the prevailing motive appears to have been that of protection. In the case of the portrait statues of Demetrios of Phaleron and Theagenes, excluding them from the human world was seen as a punishment, something that would make sense only if portrait statues were not regarded as lifeless things, as Pausanias suggested, but as related in some way to the individual that they portrayed. The literary testimonies also imply that disposing of something into the sea was not only a common but also a socially accepted practice, as long as it was not undertaken to deprive someone of a burial. Little information is given in the passages discussed above on the disposal procedure and the exact location of the dumping place (seashore or open sea). We may speculate that the Athenians threw the statues of Demetrios into the Piraeus (for the ports in use at this time, see Flemming 1980: 168), yet the only clear suggestion is in Herodotos' story of Polykrates. Here, Polykrates boarded a ship and waited until he was far from land to cast his ring into the sea,

indicating that he wanted to ensure that it was cast into the open sea (cf. Wachsmuth 1967: 323). The practice of casting things from a ship, especially unwanted passengers, is otherwise well attested (cf. e.g. Hdt. 1.23–4; Apollod. 1.9.23–4).

Buxton's (1994: 101) long list of anecdotes of stranded and retrieved goods, summarized under the term *Anschwemmungssagen*, implies that in practice the sea was only a temporary away-place. Consequently, although the ancient Greeks treated the sea as a place of no return and entrusted it with artefacts and people that they no longer wished to deal with, these things could still turn up at a later point in time. Before discussing this further, it is necessary to assess Buxton's body of evidence critically. For our purposes, it is compelling to make a distinction among the *Anschwemmungssagen* between those things that originated in the sea and were later found and those things that were retrieved from the sea. The first category is associated with the sea as a place of birth (cf. above), whereas the second category indicates the possibility of recovery. 'Recovery stories' appear to be far rarer and tend to explain the saving and retrieval of castaways in terms of divine protection (e.g. Danae, Perseus), fate or the extraordinary nature of particular individuals, as in the case of Arion (whose beautiful voice attracted dolphins that carried him ashore) or in the case of Theseus, who was semi-divine and believed by some to be the son of Poseidon. However, if the recovery of a discarded item (at least by the individual who had discarded it) was seen as an exceptional event in the literary sources, there is no reason to doubt that ancient Greeks believed that the sea was an ultimate away-place, a place of no return.

In addition to the sea, there were several other away-places and dumping sites, such as the earth and mountains (Hp. *Morb. Sacr.* 6.362 (Littré 1839–61)), no-man's land such as abandoned areas (*IG XII* 8.265, cf. Alcock et al. 1994: 149; Joyce and Johannessen 1993: 138; Cameron and Tomka 1993: 124–6), and points somewhere outside the boundaries of the city (for references, see Lindenlauf 2001b: 89–91). All kinds of watery places were deemed to be away-places, for example, springs (Hes. *Op.* 756–63), rivers (Ar. *Eq.* 1397–9), wells (Braun 1970: 194, 269; Shear 1993; cf. Murray 1997) and drainage systems (Donderer 1991–2: col. 228 n. 160). However, the prominent role of the sea in the literary sources indicates that it was regarded as an away-place of distinction. What may have contributed to this belief will be discussed in the following section.

The sea as the master of disappearance

Different away-places made unwanted things disappear in different ways. Disposing of something in the ground seems to have been done on the principle that this made things invisible, while disposing of something in the mountains or by feeding ghosts and dogs with unwanted things (Eitrem 1915: 120) was done on the principle of removing things from the world inhabited by humans (on mountains, see Buxton 1994: 81–96) and dissociation from the world of humans respectively (for the perception of dogs and ghosts, see Parker 1996: 357–8; Burkert 1996 [1977]: 77).

Qualities that the ancient Greeks found remarkable about the sea, and which seem to be pertinent to their perception of it as a good away-place, include its depth (for references, see Wachsmuth 1967: 206) and the ability of water to submerge things. The games at the festival of Ino (see above) and a variation of the kottabos-play, best described by

Kratinos (*fr.* 124 (Kassel and Austin 1983, *ap.* Ath. 666D); cf. Schneider 1922: cols 1537–8; Luppe 1992) indicate that the ancient Greeks were fascinated by this quality of water. In the game of kottabos wine dregs in the cups would be thrown at empty vinegar vessels floating in a tub, so as to hit and sink them. The sea's ability both to drown and to bury things makes it a good away-place. Other characteristics that might also have played a role are the sea's vastness and its boundlessness (for references, see Lesky 1947: 13; Wachsmuth 1967: 207). Objects appeared small in comparison with the sheer vastness of the sea, and were thus difficult to retrieve. We also find frequent references to the sea's constant movement (Meyer 1897–1909: col. 2789; Lesky 1947: 162–3), which Diodorus Siculus (13.97.5; 99.3, 5) explicitly linked to the removal and disappearance of the head of a sacrificial animal from the shore. The literary testimonies seem to indicate that the sea operated on the principles of both displacement and removal. Which of these mechanisms was the most significant in the eyes of the ancient Greeks is unclear. More important is perhaps the fact that the sea possessed a unique range of different ways to make things disappear. This distinguished it from other away-places and probably contributed to its reputation as a particularly powerful and effective place of no return.

Objects and substances continued to exist after being disposed of at sea, yet in a world totally different from, and outside, that of humans. If contact with pollution contaminates, it follows that the sea must have been regarded as a polluted and contaminating place. The perception of it as a marginal and ambiguous space, as well as its association with darkness, death and the abyss of Hades (see Wachsmuth 1967: 206–10, 216–18; Faraone 1991: 14, 28 n. 61; Gager 1992: 18) emphasize that the sea was conceived of as an unclean element. Yet, throughout antiquity the sea was also regarded as a particularly powerful cleansing agent (Wachsmuth 1967: 219–23; Jameson et al. 1993: 42, 45; Kahil 1994; Parker 1996: 226–7), and positive social values such as 'good' or 'undefiled' were attributed to it (*A. Eu.* 900; *Pers.* 576). This apparent contradiction can be explained by the traditional motif of the sea's ambivalent character or, to use Semonides' term, its two faces. It is, however, also plausible to explain this contradiction by identifying different zones of the sea to which different social and cultural values were attributed, for example deep/inaccessible, polluted parts versus accessible and harmless areas. This explanatory model is based on references that explicitly link the deep areas of the sea with darkness (*S. Ant.* 586–9 after Benardete 1993: 59) as well as the story of the disposal of a corpse in the open sea (*E. Hel.* 1245–75), suggesting a cultural 'mapping' of the distinction between the (accessible) seashore, which is to be protected from pollution, and the open sea, a dichotomy of special significance. A third possible explanation is based on literary references to fish that had consumed polluted food and Hellenistic and Roman sources that characterize the sea as a self-cleansing agent (Wachsmuth 1967: 220; Parker 1996: 360). All three explanations are based on a range of literary sources and represent different conceptions of the sea and views of how it dealt with pollution. For this study, the third suggestion certainly holds the most interest, as it allows us to add the property of self-purification to the mechanisms of disappearance, (which we have characterized above as burial, inaccessibility and displacement/removal), making the sea indeed a master of disappearance.

The sea as an away-place: the archaeological sources

I shall now briefly analyse three classes of material remains in order to evaluate how far the archaeological perspective alters and complements the picture drawn from literary sources. I shall look specifically at vase paintings, underwater finds and sewage systems with respect to the range of objects that the ancient Greeks would throw into the sea, as well as the profile of the people using the sea as a rubbish dump, the scale and social acceptability of 'sea disposal', and favourite dumping places (seashore or open sea).

From the body of vase paintings of which I am aware, it appears that scenes of disposal near or in the sea and depictions of the sea as a place of no return did not constitute an element of Greek iconography. There is only one obscure scene that might indicate that the sea was perceived by some as an away-place. This is on an eighth-century BC Cypriot vase and shows a creature defecating from a ship into the sea while a fish consumes his faeces (Gianfrotta 2000: 25–6, fig. 1). One possible reading of this scene is of a sea voyager relieving himself, an act that is also documented in literary sources (Plin. *HN* 30.17). The lack of vase-paintings with scenes of disposal at sea seems to confirm that, in general, neither dumping scenes nor depictions of rubbish – with the exception of food waste (Kracht 1998: 249, fig. 5; Vassilika 1998: 31, fig.; Moormann 2000: fig. 27) – were the favoured subjects in ancient Greek visual art. The ancient Greeks seem to have preferred looking at scenes of swimmers, sea battles, maritime commerce, gods and sea creatures (Engemann 1969: cols 989–90; Ridgway 1970; Vryonis 1993a: 13) rather than images of a littered sea.

The second class of material evidence, underwater finds, seems more promising for this study because of the remarkable enlargement of this body of data over the last decades in the course of extensive marine archaeology. As over 90 per cent of these finds are coastal finds – that is to say they were found within 2km of the shore and within a safe diving depth of 50m (Gibbins 2001: 280) – they could illuminate the use of the sea as a dumping place in this restricted area. For a number of reasons, however, this body of coastal finds cannot be used for the purposes of this study. This is partly due to the nature of the finds: the majority consists of shipwrecks and their cargoes (Agouridis 1998) and sunken sites (Scranton and Ramage 1967; Scoufopoulos-Stavrolakes 1985), i.e. archaeological material resulting from accidents and natural disasters respectively, but not from intentional disposal. The obsession with wreck archaeology and seafaring has even gone so far as to interpret 'isolated' finds as being part of a cargo from a shipwreck (Gibbins 2001: 305 n. 7) or in the standard way as booty being carted off to Rome (Sténuet et al. 2001: 207, 209). Harbour studies have been a small aspect of Greek maritime archaeology (Agouridis 1998: 181). Find assemblages and 'isolated finds' that cannot be related to shipwrecks are in fact rare and usually interpreted as votive deposits (Wachsmuth 1967: 407–8; Hansen 1996: 267–6, n. 65; Hornig 2001), unless they were found in ports along structures which are usually associated with everyday activities such as loading and unloading (Murray 1985: 70, 72).

Another problem, associated with the former, is that the concept of waste has not been extensively applied to the study of underwater finds (Donderer 1991–2; Babits and Tilburg 1998) in contrast to land deposits (Hill 1995). In light of dedications that were treated like waste when deposited in Greek sanctuaries (Lindenlauf 2001a) and of literary

sources that portrayed the sea as a dumping place, it is essential to develop an explicit methodology for the evaluation of the importance of these finds. When such a framework for the interpretation of rubbish deposits has been established, we shall be able to re-examine those deposits that contain votives and that we currently explain as resulting from ritual depositional activities, such as those scattered in the sea several hundred metres from the coast of Shavei Zion and between Acre and Rosh Haniqra (Raban and Kahanov in press). The concept of the sea as an away-place may also open up new perspectives in the study of *amphora* potsherds, which tend to be used for dating purposes only (Easton 1998; Gould 1998; Majewski 1998; Murphy 1998: 388; Grossmann 2001). A study of the patterns of breakage and of the spatial distribution of potsherds, for example, could provide further insights into the cultural and religious understanding of certain sections of the sea in ancient Greece (cf. Wachsmuth 1967: 407–8). Research into rubbish deposits is perhaps most productive with respect to the portrait statues of Roman emperors whose names were to be erased from public memory (*memoria damnata*) and/or whose statues had been intentionally damaged. The marble statues of Balbinus and Pupienus (?) found in the port of Piraeus appear to document this practice in Roman Greece as well (Donderer 1991–2: col. 223 n. 129). If so, then this would illustrate that the sea was used in Athens quite similarly to the Tiber in Rome, where all kinds of dirt and rubbish were disposed of (Kyle 1998: 213–41; Liebeschuetz 2000: 57), including the heads of former emperors (cf. above).

Another problem is that of the find circumstances, which range from controlled surveys and excavations to chance finds (i.e. finds trawled up in fishermen's nets or found by divers looking for other things). Unfortunately, the relatively high proportion of properly excavated shipwrecks is accompanied by a relatively high proportion of 'casually' found statues or parts of statues (Ridgway 1967; Beurdeley 1991: 42–7, 77–83). Statues with little to no contextual information that would allow us to reconstruct their former significance (cargo, a votive deposition or a rubbish deposition) may contribute to a fuller understanding of ancient art, but cannot be used in this study.

As with underwater finds, the 'garbology' perspective of water management in ancient Greece has not received much attention (Crouch 1993; Liebeschuetz 2000: 57–8). What can be said is that the archaeological features that we term 'sewers' were not primarily built for the carrying away of human waste, but for storm and wastewater, which must no doubt have contained a great deal of dirt from the streets. There have been limited discoveries of private households that had their wastewater drained directly into the sea (Tölle-Kastenbein 1990: 17–18). The majority of excavated sewers belong to a network of city sewers, the construction of which was overseen by the *polis* authorities. City drains carried wastewater out of the settlement, often terminating in the sea, as at Samos (Plate 3) and Iasos (1990: 172), or in other watery bodies, such as rivers, as the Athenian *cloaca maxima* (Tölle-Kastenbein 1994: fig. 15).

The archaeological data seem to confirm that the ancient Greeks perceived, and made use of, the sea as an away-place. Apart from the disposal methods of which we were already aware from the literary sources, such as disposal from ships, a number of other methods have been identified, including disposal from work areas, such as docks and moles, and dumping from sewers into the coastal areas. Owing to the lack of archaeological finds, the scale of open-sea disposal cannot be fully evaluated. The most significant



Plate 3 Samos. Drain emptying into the sea (DAI, Athens, Samos-Archive 376, 6).

difference between the literary and archaeological data lies in the range of the disposed-of objects. Whereas literary sources are more concerned with the disposal of statues, polluted objects and social outcasts, archaeological sources provide insight into the dumping of liquid waste and of debris resulting from work processes such as the loading and unloading ships.

Conclusions

For the ancient Greeks – as for so many other seafaring nations (Panoff 1970: 244; Dixon 1972: 32; Fishwick 1987; Burkert 1992: 62; Nirenberg 2003) – the sea was part of the divine order of the universe, the power realm of a distinct god, and definitely an ambiguous place. It had many different guises, one of which was the perception of the sea as a place of no return. When the sea fulfilled its powers to take life away and to make things disappear permanently, it was regarded as dangerous and corrupting. Yet, when humans used it as a place of no return for their own purposes, exploiting its depths, its vastness, its constant movements and its ability to purge itself, this aspect appears to have been viewed more positively.

The picture that emerges from the study of the literary sources is of the sea as a place littered with all kinds of valuable objects (including jewellery and bronze statues), ecological materials (pieces of wood), human remain (babies, victims of shipwrecks) and dangerous substances. These objects and substances were stored away in the sea because there was no place for them in the world of humans. This idea of separation is most explicitly addressed in the story of Polykrates and in the similarities between sea disposal

and exile. Things treated in this way were regarded as unwanted or even dangerous, i.e. refuse in the original sense of the word (Murray 1910: 358). The archaeological survey has shown that there was also a less dramatic side to sea disposal, as objects conceived of as useless and of having no value (like wastewater and potsherds) – i.e. rubbish in Thompson's (1979) framework – were cast into the sea. Sea-disposal (aboard ships and from the shore into the open sea and ports) of refuse and rubbish is portrayed as a social practice common among individuals from all social strata and even *polis* authorities. It was socially accepted, unless it deprived adults of their right to a burial.

The framework of garbology has revealed yet another example of the ancient Greeks' practical approach to natural features. It has also shown that, for some at least, the sea was not conceived of as just a single element with various faces, but rather as consisting of different zones to which different social values were ascribed. Finally, it has demonstrated how an understanding of the sea as a place of no return can radically change our understanding of underwater finds and reveal a hitherto unexplored side of the sea.

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