

HARBOUR STUDIES

NAKAS (I.) *The Hellenistic and Roman Harbours of Delos and Kenchreai. Their Construction, Use and Evolution.* (BAR International Series 3099.) Pp. xiv + 170, colour figs, b/w & colour ills, b/w & colour maps. Oxford: BAR Publishing, 2022. Paper, £53. ISBN: 978-1-4073-5981-6.

doi:10.1017/S0009840X24000635

This publication is based on N.'s Ph.D. research at the University of Birmingham, and its primary aim is to study and understand the Hellenistic and Roman harbours of Delos and Kenchreai, two harbours that had wide-ranging importance in Mediterranean and Aegean contexts. In a change from the more traditional approach often seen in harbour studies, N. sets out to examine these harbours 'through the eyes of the mariners' (p. 9) and with a different type of methodology that considers the diverse types of ships using the harbours and some of the more practical elements around their docking and the handling of their cargoes.

The book comprises five chapters, opening with an introduction that sets the study and the volume into context before moving on to discuss the broader topic of research into Hellenistic and Roman harbours of the Mediterranean and Aegean. The introduction ends with a useful explanation of the methodology used. N.'s approach centres around the need to understand not only the types of ships that used the harbours but also the way in which they, and their cargoes, were managed and the space that this required. The second chapter introduces the different types of ships found in the Hellenistic and Roman Mediterranean, providing a wealth of useful information on their size, capacity and draught, and linking this to the practicalities of space and positioning requirements within harbours before moving on to discuss aspects of cargo handling in situations where this was carried out in, or outside, physical harbour environments. Aided by useful and well-thought-out illustrations and tables, this chapter does N. credit, pulling together and analysing data from a range of sources that includes shipwrecks, ancient and contemporary written sources and epigraphical evidence to make it a fascinating read. The chapter content reinforces the variety of vessels sailing in the Mediterranean and Aegean and the challenges that such diversity posed in a harbour environment. This may seem as something quite trivial but, as shown in this chapter and later in the case study examples, it is a key factor when it comes to considering not only the development of harbours but also their internal organisation and the issue of space, and how we should interpret this. The inclusion of a discussion of other types of harbour ships, such as the *horeia* and other smaller vessels, and their roles within the harbour, including towing and piloting, adds another dimension to the more practical side of harbours. How commonplace these smaller types of ships were within harbours is not known, but there are many harbours around the Mediterranean and Aegean where access was difficult, even for shallow draught vessels, and some form of assistance, especially in times of stormy or inclement weather, for both entering and exiting would have been needed.

The third chapter details the two case-study harbours, Delos and Kenchreai, examining their form, operational capacity and limitations and considering their development. Chapter 4 then discusses the findings in the much broader context of other contemporary harbours. The case study of the harbours of Delos demonstrates that physical harbour installations were not always a requirement, and their absence in the maritime landscape should certainly not be regarded as a barrier to trading nor taken as indication that trading was not

taking place. Given the importance and status of Delos in the latter part of the Hellenistic period, it was this absence that I found most surprising, but N.'s presentation of the evidence shows that a lack of docking facilities and the use of the simplest of harbour works was not a problem and that beaching and anchoring in open shallow waters, and the transshipment of cargo from ships with a greater draught to smaller vessels whilst at anchor offshore could work just as well. The two harbours make a good comparative study and show how basic the harbours of Delos seem when looking at Kenchreai with its waterfrontage area and associated storage facilities that reflect the sense of planning and organisation that would be expected of a commercial harbour. The opportunity to make more of the discussion in these areas, particularly in the context of the administration and processing of the cargoes, was not a part of the study, but it is worth remembering that these activities were also a necessary component of harbour infrastructures and something that would have been just as important to mariners in both the Hellenistic and the Roman periods.

The book concludes in Chapter 5 with N.'s cautious reflections on the study and the application of his methodology. Two appendices provide five useful comparative tables covering vessel sizes and capacities, and a listing of Greek and Latin sources.

In some respects, the book brings a breath of fresh air, adding a new perspective and dimension to harbour studies. More importantly it raises some interesting questions that are applicable not only to the harbours at Delos and Kenchreai, for instance the requirements for the handling of bulky and heavy cargoes. Here in the case studies it is hard to perceive how this could have taken place without proper berthing facilities, but N.'s suggestion that this might have been resolved with the construction of wooden jetties, or temporary piers running out from the shore, is interesting and worth more consideration. Sadly, the temporary nature of such constructions means that their chances of survival are rare, and the supporting evidence is hard to find. Also, and related to cargo handling, is the matter of enslaved people, which for Delos formed an important part of trading activities and its economy. Here it seems difficult to understand the lack of an obvious infrastructure on shore for this, or none that we can identify at present; and to an outsider the suggestion that this might have been because these people were contained onboard their transportation ships on arrival seems fraught with problems. Such an approach, aside from the practical issues surrounding such confinement, could have led to many ships at anchor at the same time and the risk of congestion.

N. has successfully demonstrated that the study of ancient harbours is not so straightforward as one might expect, and it will be interesting to see if the application of his approach at other locations changes our interpretation and understanding of ancient harbours around the Mediterranean and Aegean. At the very least his research, and this publication, certainly opens a new chapter in harbour studies, and it will be interesting to see where this leads.

University of Leicester

MICHAEL J. CURTIS
mikecurtis1956@yahoo.co.uk