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# **Ships' Names and their Significance in Greco-Roman Period**

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## **Abstract**

The process of naming ships began thousands of years ago and was originally based on fear and superstitions, as a safeguard from peril. Technically ship which carries a name is as seaworthy as one without a name; however, the name would reflect the ship's characteristics. The Ships' name is considered an accurate reflect of what the boat is all about. In antiquity, ships were decorated in order to be protected from evil, to impress their viewer and to supreme their beauty. Most of ancient civilizations called their ships after gods' names to honor their ships and please their gods, in addition to protect their ships during sea voyages. and to gain some protection from the elements that were always endangering sailors. The oldest surviving records are those for naval vessels. There seem to be a constant difference in naming warship and merchant vessels.

## **1 Naming Ships in Greek Period**

Argo "Swift" was the earliest Greek ship known name, it was in the fourth century B.C. The galley built and commanded by Jason and it was in the tale of Troy. Argo is masculine but this is exceptional to the fourth century and for the history of naming ships, because most ship names were feminine. Unfortunately, it is the only ship name recorded till practically the end of 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C then for a half century from 377-322 B.C.

The Athenian navel preserves about 300 names given to galleys in the fleet, practically all the type involved are triremes. A handful of quadriremes are represented and there were no distinctive nomenclature to the bigger crafts.

Greek warships were named in literature and inscriptions according to the number of oarsmen: εικοσορος (twenty), τριακοντορος (thirty), and πεντηκοντορος (fifty). The τριηρης has three files of oarsmen each side. Greeks also used to name their ships after adjectival derivatives such as Artemisia, "Ship of Artemis", Aphrodisia "Ship of Aphrodite", or epithets or cult titles (e.g., Polias "Guardian of the city" and it was an epithet of Athena, Tauropole "Huntress of Bulls", an epithet of Artemis). Very much the same concept lay

behind of common nouns and adjectives that served as names as Lampra, which means “gleaming”, Chryse “golden”, Aktis “ray”.

Also names appeared on one aspect of the ship such as Anthousa “blooming” and Nea, “new”. Figure of mythology was very rich source for naming ships. The choice of these names was never haphazard accounting for almost one out of every four names recorded. Names of sea nymphs such as Nereis, Thetis, Amphitrite, seat of the famous oracle, Idaia, Mount Ida where Cybele lived. In case of Athena, with names like Demokratia the goal might be political but for private ship owner they might choose their own names or those of their home towns, regions, or countries. Greeks already began to use the names of towns or important locales, especially those with political implications, such as sites of victories (Hattendorf, 2007.P 606). Certain names clearly had political importance such as Krete; the island which Athens had important contacts. Naukratis; the chief trading city in Egypt, Persis; was reminder of Athens' great defeated enemy, Persia. Enna; a key town of Sicily, the name may be the result of Sicily's ruler, Dionysius the Elder, visit. Simaitha; named after a stream just north of Syracuse, perhaps recalls Athens' monumental naval venture, the expedition against Syracuse. (Casson, 1995. P. 353, 354).Greek pantheon is well represented as Apollo, Artemis, Aphrodite, Demeter, Dionysus, Hermes, and Poseidon.

A whole host of names recalls the ship's ability and its sureness to succeed. A great favorite was Nike “Victory”, Nikosa “Winning”. In addition to the healing deities such as Hygieia and Iaso to beneficial services, render (Casson, 1995. P. 352). Asklepios, The god of healing was also popular; they thought he would keep a vessel sound (casson, 1994. P 110: 111). Others honored the city's culture (Techne “art”, Tragodia “tragedy”, Komodia “comedy”, etc.) as well as the great traditional festivals as Olympias “Ship of the Olympic Games and Nemeas” Ship of the Nemean Games .About ten percent of ships bore geographical names. The famous dispatch galleys, the Salaminia and Paralia (as the paralos is called in the documents) recall the first island which witnessed Athens great naval victory over Persia. Other geographical names celebrate the districts of Athens like Sounias, Eleusis, and Pallenisor islands like Ionike, Hellas, and Europe, Other names were chosen for religious reasons such as Delias honored Delos, the island sacred to Apollo and Delphis, Delphi And after all those names, It is true we lack evidence for Homeric Greeks naming their ships but this does not necessarily mean they lack feeling for them and see them only as inanimate objects (Mark, 2005 P 152).

## 2 Naming Ships in Roman Period

In the Roman period, sailors of the imperial navy often recorded ships in their tombstone. We know over 80 names of galleys, particularly those attached to the two major fleets based at Misenum and Ravenna. The names reveals, as in order matters connected with the sea, the Romans followed in their predecessors footsteps.

The Roman navy too, went for mythological figures and lesser deities as Cupido, “Venus' son”, Neries, “the sea nymph”, Triton, “the merman”, Silvanus, “the forest God”, Satyra, “the goat-footed. In addition to, naming their ships after names representing lightness or quickness of movement as Castor and pollux, Diomedesperseus were all doughty fighters. Danae was a courageous heroine. And Hercules and Triptolemus (who brought agriculture to the earth) performed special service for mankind. The Roman too, adopted names of appropriate animals such as Aguila, “eagle”, Lupa, “female-wolf”, Murena, “a type

of Mediterranean fish”, and Taurus, “Bull”. And names of instruments of war (Clypeus “shield” Quadriga “chariot”).

Romans also used names promoting the beneficial qualities of the Roman rules such as Annona, “grain-supply”. Pax, “peace”. Pietas, “Sense of duty”. Salus, “Soundness”. Salvia, “saver”. Virtus, “Courage”. Eirenasebasta “Pax Augusta” which were borne by the triemioliai that Rome allowed Rhodes to maintain. Geography also served the imperial navy but was different than Greek practice appeared. Many in this category are of water bodies such as oceans and rivers. Practically all major rivers in the Roman Empire had a ship and or / ships named after them such Dannuis, “Danube”, Tigris and Euphrates, Nilus, padus “Po”, Rhenus “Rhine”, and Tiberis.

The rest are commemorative as Dacicus and Parthics must commemorate the war of Dacia and Parthia. Phryx “Phrygian may refer to the legend that Rome was found by wanderers from defeated troy in Phrygia. Salamina surely was named after the famous Athenian dispatch galley; Athens’ great days in the sea. And the Liburnian Varvarina was a reminder of one of the people from whom this type of crafts was adopted. Romans only named their ships after Augustus. Naming ships after major deities became standard in the Roman navy; of every five ships, one ship was named (Casson, 1955. P. 358).

Ships were generally named after deities especially those favored by sailors, such as Isis (Figure 1) such as: “Iso pharaia” (isis from pharos) and “isis gemninana” (Figure 2) and the Dioscuri (castor and Pollux). The name and guardian deity may or may not be the same (Casson, 1994. P. 111).

The Roman pantheon is fully represented as Apollo, Neptunus, Ops (goddess of plenty), and Venus also Luciferus, the equivalent of the Greek Phosphoros “light- bringer”, one of Venus’ titles) (Casson, 1955. P. 358). There was an important evidence of naming ships, there was a sailor surviving in the Roman fleet. He was identified by the name of his ship, the Hippokampos (sea horse) which is defined as a Tesseraria, a dispatch galley.

A Hippokamposisis a small fish, but the ship’s name certainly refers to the mythical hippokampos which is hay bird, a creature with body of horse and fish tail used by different sea gods or to pull their chariots (Peacock, 2011. P 336:337).

### 3 Ships and Boats with Fiminine Names

There are two hypotheses about naming ships with feminine names:

- First, using the name of goddess which would oversee the boat on its journey
- A second idea confirms the custom comes from the way some languages incorporate grammatical gender identifiers for objects.

### 4 Significance

Boats and ships were feminine objects in most European languages, making the use of female names more reasonable; and referring to boats and ships as “she” likely also come from the foundation, in addition to, the tradition of female names can allow people to conclude the presence of a woman providing some comfort in a potentially dangerous situation in adding a traditional mothering and calming feminine element.

Naming a sea vessel is an important tradition before the inaugural launch of the ship. The majority of vessels are named after important female figures, either historical or personal, with the names often including important women in the captain's life. There is an extensive, precise ceremony that most captains follow to ward off any bad luck. The name is chosen, painted on the ship, and the ship then cast off on its maiden voyage following the blessing (john,2011,online).

## 5 Finally

Names of ships and boat are unique and different, even if a boat's name was seen hundreds of times on other boats, because each name has a special meaning to the boat's owner, each ship was given a name to emphasize its own characteristics and uniqueness.

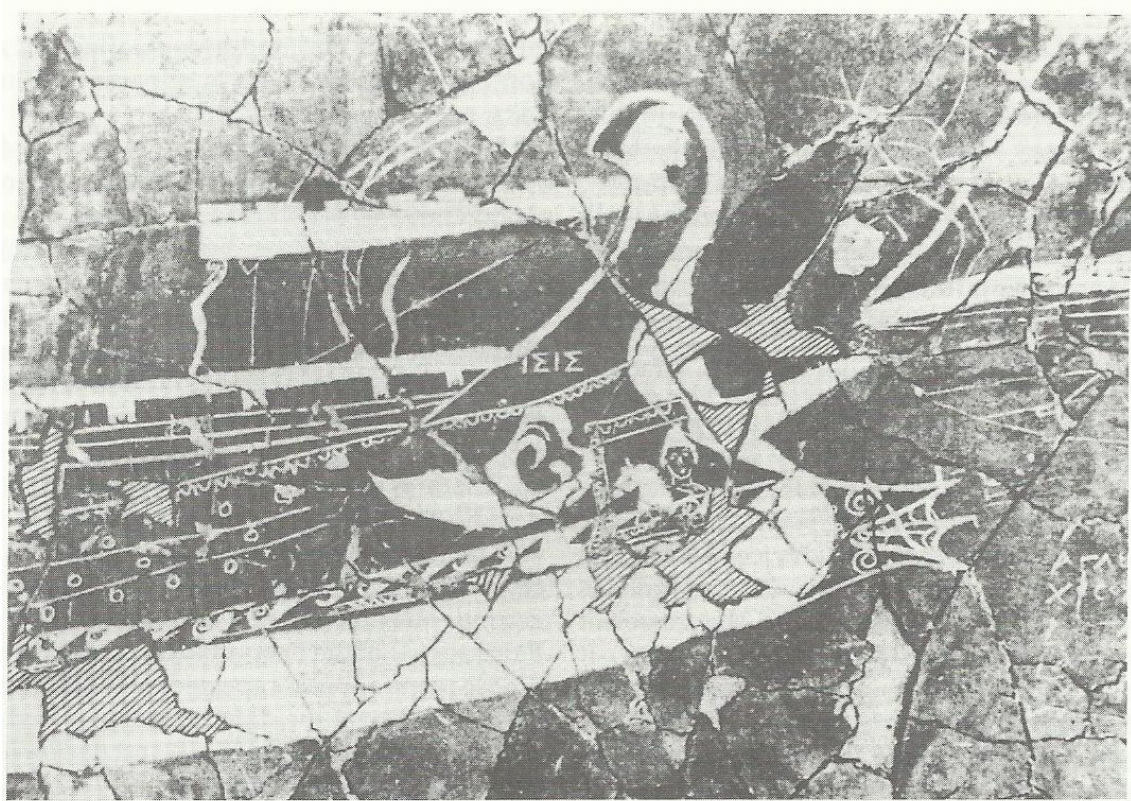


Figure 1: (Morrison, 1996, p.210)

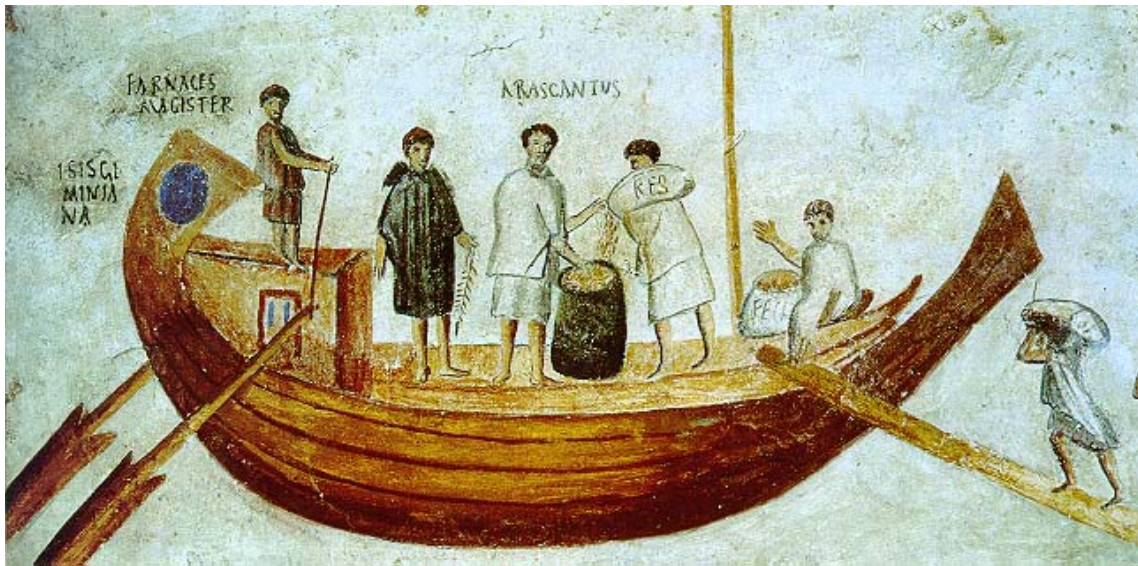


Figure 2: *Isis Giminina* – Ostia 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.

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