

Mediterranean Sailing Rigs in the First Millennium AD

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Over the course of the first millennium AD the sailing rigs of the ancient Mediterranean tell a remarkable story of technological continuity, variation and change. Continuity is to be found in the enduring use of the loose-footed brailed square-sail which is still being depicted in the iconographic record in the early 7th century AD. Variation may be noted to this form of sailing rig via adaptations such two-masted rigs, artemon foresails and mizzen masts, with a proliferation of such variation in the first half of the millennium. Finally, change can be charted through iconographic material documenting the introduction of the lateen rig, and the ongoing use of the sprit-rig. Recent archaeological discoveries at Yenikapi and from the Ma'agan Mikhael B shipwreck have given us tangible archaeological evidence for some of this change, to go alongside the iconographic material that has formed the mainstay of our understanding thus far. This paper aims to provide an overview of the technological continuities and changes which occur within Mediterranean sailing rigs across the first millennium AD, and which sees the eventual abandonment of the square-sail in favour of the lateen/settee rig. In doing this it will highlight the critical role of archaeological evidence as a means to fully understand the detail of the technological processes that are sketched out by the iconographic record.