

THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA AS A LINK IN THE FLOW OF IDEAS

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Abstract: The author noted that in a number of ancient cultures around the Mediterranean you can meet surprisingly similar elements. Archaeological monuments (forms of architecture, paintings, works of art, handicrafts, etc.) show the transfer of ideas from the Middle East and Egypt to Greece. Greece passed on its intellectual achievements to Etruscans and Rome. The discussed intellectual achievements concern among others, the way of life, forms of worship, science, philosophy, a number of technologies.

Keywords: ancient world, Mediterranean Sea, Middle East, Egypt, Greece. Etruscans, Rome, ideas

In ancient times, a number of exceptionally original cultures were formed around the Mediterranean Sea. States and cities were created, and palaces, temples, harbours and markets were built there. The kings and their families living in the palaces, as well as their families, wanted to live comfortably and that is why they brought various luxurious goods for their needs. On this occasion, they employed selected artists and craftsmen who came to their countries and possessed unparalleled qualifications. The scale of the phenomenon can be illustrated by the case described in the Bible, when apostles after receiving the “gift of languages” go to public places and teach there in an extremely wide range of languages¹. Those converted to Christianity were to take the new religion to their countries. Marriages with women from other cultural backgrounds, such as the Hittites with Egyptians, sometimes entailed the arrival of entire courts, and with them the service. Occasionally whole peoples were also resettled, as exemplified by the presence of the Israelites in Egypt Pharaohs, and centuries later the deportation of their descendants to Mesopotamia. Emigration and temporary displacement of people was accompanied by the transfer of knowledge, skills, beliefs, customs, artistic tastes. There were priests working at the temples, who linked their cult activities to observations of the world and scientific works. By contacting priests of other religions, they could exchange not only customs, but also specific knowledge. The great Greek colonization, as well as the somewhat forgotten Phoenician colonization, resulted in the creation of settlements around the Mediterranean Sea in the Bronze Age, inhabited by peoples other than those found in the interior of the continent. People who moved there contacted the natives, traded with them and, at the same time, took over their customs. The Mediterranean Sea connected the Phoenicians with the Egyptians, the Greeks with the peoples of the Middle East, or later the Romans with the inhabitants of North Africa and Asia. Armies also moved. An example can be Athenian soldiers sent to Egypt to fight Persian invaders². There for several years about. 460 BC, tens of thousands of Athenian

¹ Dzieje Apostolskie 2, 1–14.

² Wallace 1936, p. 252.

soldiers fought on the Egyptian side. Those who returned later brought with them not only war booty, but also their impressions, observations, achievements in the field of acquired knowledge. Despite the passage of thousands of years, the preservation of the ruins of old buildings or fragments of objects, we can see that people of antiquity by contacting each other not only exchanged goods, but also a wide range of intellectual achievements. In the following article the author intends to show selected examples of transplanting ideas to other cultural circles around the Mediterranean Sea.

Information about the still prehistoric, half legendary contacts of Greeks with other peoples can be seen in mythology and in Homer's works. The brave men set out on a journey into the unknown, hoping for material improvement and social advancement. The mythical Argonauts, who in the Bronze Age were supposed to get on a boat and try to find happiness far from home, are examples of such gold prospectors. Undoubtedly, there were many similar hikers, as well as their travel routes. This probably caused that in literature we meet almost fantastic routes, which they were supposed to travel to a distant destination³. The golden fleece was a ram's skin, which is still lined up in streams in Georgia, and then the particles of gold are shaken out of it. Travelling for gold was accompanied by meetings with other peoples. No less colourful adventures and meetings were to be experienced by the literary Odysseus. Travellers returning home could tell for years what they had seen, experienced and learned. Probably in this way a whole range of skills and behavioural patterns were transferred to distant areas. In the classical period, young Greeks travelled to distant cities for both education and sporting events. Today, we can try to indicate in which fields it is possible to show the journey of ideas in the light of archaeological sources. There are not enough written sources for these epochs. What is worse, the texts concern selective phenomena and are burdened with the risk of deliberate falsification in order to elevate some events or figures, and to diminish others. A significant part of intercultural contacts, meetings of people from different civilization circles took place near seaports. Important port cities include Ugarit from the Bronze Age, Milet from the time of ancient Greece and hellenistic Alexandria. These meetings could start with trade and later lead to the exchange of ideas, knowledge and various practical skills. The transfer of philosophical ideas entailed the transfer of various technologies and skills, such as the production of metals or glass melting, the production of medicines or pharmaceutical and medical qualifications. In similar circumstances, in the 8th century B.C.⁴, writing skills and professional terminology were passed on in many fields, or later techniques of aqueduct construction, irrigation of fields, or many seemingly small techniques related to agriculture and breeding, including animal domestication. With the Greek and Phoenician colonisation, civilisational achievements such as marine navigation, mathematical calculations, beer, wine and olive oil production spread. Settlement took place along the shores of the Mediterranean and entered the continents only to a small extent⁵. The ideas and technologies transferred along with the settlers were watched by the indigenous people in port towns and passed on, probably often without the participation of newcomers. We do not know the old music today, but it is no coincidence that the same musical instruments were used by a number of consecutive peoples. For example, harps or flutes were used by Sumerians, later by the Israelites, as evidenced by the psalms of King David. Their images can also be found on Greek vase paintings. It is known that the Greeks borrowed its name from the peoples of the East together with the harp around the 5th century B.C.⁶. The name of the harp was borrowed from

³ Żmudziński 1999, p. 19–24.

⁴ Braun 2008, p. 24.

⁵ Braun 2008, p. 4–6.

⁶ Braun 2008, p. 26.

the peoples of the East. It is possible that Egyptian musicians played for the inhabitants of Minoan palaces in Crete⁷. Spices were imported from the Middle East to ancient Greece⁸. It is possible that some recipes and medical recipes went with them. Thanks to the reading of texts from a number of positions in Mesopotamia, it was found that medical knowledge about herbal medicine and treatment methods from the time of Sumer to Assyria and Babylon was transferred to each other⁹. As we know, the Greeks also contacted the peoples from the Near East. To this day there are not usually preserved objects made of organic materials, but we have at our disposal the ruins of ancient buildings, sculptures, reliefs and ceramics. On the basis of such categories of monuments we can try to illustrate the transfer of various ideas around the Mediterranean Sea. People were inspired by what they encountered in other cultures and civilization circles. It concerned the way of understanding the world, depicting images, imagining gods, or planning buildings and cities. The fact that in the desert Egypt life is connected with the presence of water is obvious. Every year a flood was observed, followed by the fall of the waters of the Nile. On the shallows there were birds looking for food. During the construction of the pyramids, Heliopolitan cosmology explained the emergence of the world from chaos, the original substance of which was water¹⁰. Everything in the world developed from it. In the first transitional period in Heliopolis it was recognized that life emerged from the chaos in the form of hill¹¹. Probably it was an area of land that emerged from the falling waters of the river. The question arises, where did Greek thinkers like Hesiod¹² and Tales could find the idea that life had originated from water¹³? The author is convinced that the inspiration for these and many other philosophical theories came to Greece from Egypt. We meet borrowings of the idea of e.g. a well-organized city in urban planning. It is no coincidence that Etruscan cities were often founded on the model of Greek cities with a regular plan. An example is Marzabotto, to some extent comparable to the Greek Milet. An instrument borrowed from the Greeks, the Etruscans, a measuring instrument – a collection, helped to delineate a chessboard grid of streets. Its name *groma* is a Greek word. In Hittish architecture you can find columns in the shape of a statue depicting a man. Later, similar columns were created, such as the Kariatides in Erechtheion, at Athens in Ionian order¹⁴. The Ionic Order was invented in the Middle East. It seems likely that the Greek architects borrowed both the Ionic order and columns in the shape of human figures from the peoples of the Middle East¹⁵. Before the Greeks such columns were also known to the Egyptians. The known to us Ionic column was invented in the Middle East near Smyrna¹⁶. There, its original form is referred to as the volute capital, and then the Eolian capital¹⁷. The proto-Doric columns can be found in the times of the Pharaohs in Egypt, including the temple of Queen Hatshepsut in Deir el-Bahari¹⁸. Temples created before the Greeks differed significantly from Egyptian temples, but as we notice an important element of both their construction and decoration were borrowed from other columns. Over time they will be taken over by Etruscan

⁷ Comp.: Steel 2013, p. 461–464

⁸ Braun 2016, p. 26.

⁹ Scurlock 2005, 302–315.

¹⁰ Černý 1952, p. 42.

¹¹ Černý 1952, p. 43.

¹² Hesiod, Theogonia book 5, 20018, p. 233–269.

¹³ Tatarkiewicz 1946, p. 22.

¹⁴ Boardman 1999, p. 153

¹⁵ Comp.: Śliwa 1997, 81, drawing 58.

¹⁶ Özyar, Lebrun 2016, p. 67–85.

¹⁷ Boardman 1999, 80.

¹⁸ Compare: Schlögl 2009, drawing 21.

architects to decorate some tombs. Another element of the Egyptian architecture are false doors. The oldest reliefs and paintings depicting them are known from the tombs of the Old Kingdom. It was believed that the soul of the deceased could come to the gives and relatives visiting the grave. Similar images can be found in Etruscan tombs as e.g. in the so-called Augur's Tomb in Tarkwinia. Another element of Etruscan painting, which was borrowed from Egyptians, is the way of distinguishing between the sexes by means of colour¹⁹. Women had light complexion, but men had dark complexion. The image that was transferred from Egypt to Europe is sphinx. In Egypt the largest guarded the royal necropolis near the pyramids. For the Greeks sphinx is a dangerous creature of the female sex²⁰. Its image appears on the paintings on the Greek vases. In Egypt, in front of temples from the period of the New Kingdom, we meet avenues of sphinxes, and on the Delos – the avenue of the lions. They are shown on the Egyptian fashion²¹. Lions „will travel” to the graves of Greek warriors²², and later the Romans, also in Roman Dacia. There were so many borrowings from the Middle East and Egypt that in art history thandbooks is distinguished the oriental period²³. This is visible in vase painting, sculpture and relief. An example is the Greek sculpture of the Lady of Auxerre, showing a woman looking like an Egyptian lady²⁴. Greeks and Persians used to meet each other not only at battlefields, that is visible in art too²⁵. Birds with human heads were painted in Egyptian tombs. These were images of the soul. It was called “Ka”²⁶. Similar paintings can be found in Greek art²⁷. Interestingly, oriental motifs in vase painting were apparently disseminated by both Greeks and Phoenicians. On Phoenician vessels from present-day Spain we can see images of fantastic animals²⁸. These are horses with birds' heads and wings. It is easy to notice that not only fashion, the way of showing man in art, but also the way of understanding the world and the beyond were transferred. In the Etruscan tomb called Francoiș Tomb in Vulci is painted, among other things, a terrifying vision of the hereafter. The carrier to them is Charon. It has a blue skin colour, which looks like decomposing corpses²⁹. Earlier, similarly, in Lesche of Knidian in Delphi, the demon of the death Eurynomos was shown³⁰. Another example of contact between cultures can be the statue of Zeus Olympics made by Fidias³¹. It was made, like Athena Parthenos, using chryselphantine technique³². One of the raw materials was a softened ivory. It was imported and processing techniques were invented in Egypt or the in the Middle East³³. After transporting the statue to Constantinople, it was a decoration of a private collection. His appearance influenced the Byzantine images of God. Another wandering of idea is visible in the form of shining the sacral images with tinsels. One of such statues comes from the origins of Egyptian statehood of Tell el-Farha in the Nile Delta³⁴. Centuries later the ancient Greeks used to tinplate their wooden statues. These *ksoanons* were

¹⁹ Compare: Dobrowolski 1979, p. 116–117.

²⁰ Compare: Papuci-Władyka 2001, p. 92.

²¹ Papuci-Władyka 2001, p. 136.

²² Boardman 1999, p. 99, drawing. 86.

²³ Papuci-Władyka 2001, p. 90–101.

²⁴ Papuci-Władyka 2001, p. 81.

²⁵ Kawami 1986, p. 259–287.

²⁶ Breasted 1936, p. 54.

²⁷ Papuci-Władyka 2001, p. 151–15; Boardman 1999, p. 97.

²⁸ Pachon Romero et alii 2008, p. 115–159.

²⁹ Dobrowolski 1979, p. 194–196, ryc. 52, 57.

³⁰ Bernhard, 1991, p. 471–472.

³¹ Bernhard, 1991, p. 344–345.

³² Boardman 1999, p. 150.

³³ Boardman 1999, p. 51–54.

³⁴ Schlögl 2009, p. 65, drawing. 7; Ciałowicz 2012, 203–204.

not works of art, but images of gods that were worshipped and prayed to. The most famous was the statue of Diana Ephesus³⁵. Many ancient Greek traditions passed to Byzantium. One of them is decorating icons with silver “gowns”. Another phenomenon connected with the migration of ideas was religious syncretism. The Greek pantheon of deities was almost transferred to the world of the Romans. Faith in the Middle Eastern Cybele, Egyptian Isida or Iranian Mithra was also transferred to the Roman Empire. The Greeks also adopted elements of foreign beliefs. Copies of the statue of Artemis of Ephesus show that she had many breasts and her appearance was modelled on the art of the Middle East. Her cult resembled the orgiastic elements of the Mesopotamia cult of Ishtar³⁶. Similarly interesting Greek god was Asklepios. It was invented in Alexandria. He was supposed to have the appearance of Zeus and the qualities of the Egyptian deity. In a similar way, various scientific achievements were transferred, such as medical knowledge, mathematical knowledge, or skills related to navigation or various technologies. The knowledge of Mesopotamia’s scientists about astronomy is now found in the texts of the Bible³⁷. The transfer of ideas was also connected with aesthetic tastes. On the eastern shores of the Mediterranean for several centuries there was a fashion for colourful mosaics in the Greek style. Clay *megarianvases* invented in Greece were later imitated in Italy and then in the Roman provinces. This is how *terra sigillata* pottery was born. Patterns and stamps for its production were often imitated in subsequent studios. Similar phenomena can be observed in the production of olive lamps. Patterns that were liked were imitated. Lamps that look like Italian lamps (*Firmlampen*) were produced hundreds of years later in various Roman provinces.

To sum up, we can say that in the ancient world not only various types of goods were transferred on a noticeable scale, but also, of which we are not always aware of the ideas. They concerned many aspects of life, including art, religion, knowledge.

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³⁵ Akerman 1838–1842, p. 79–80.

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³⁷ Cooley 2013, p. 288–327.

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