# 1. The Early Church[1]

A number of Christian texts from the first centuries offer glimpses of sea or sailor. Gathered here are some of the more obvious. They offer no uniform picture. The early Church presented a fragmented scene, each grouping convinced of its orthodoxy. Between periods of persecution different groups dominated according to the preference of the Roman emperor. What texts survive were written largely by what are now considered the orthodox at the expense of heterodox material. Other groupings, the Arians, Monophysites and Nestorians, tended to spread eastwards, the latter reaching China,[2] and perhaps Sri Lanka; rendering their writings as they crossed inland Asia unlikely to contain much of maritime interest.[3] What history remains is not for the faint-hearted.[4]

A map of religious expansion combined with the pattern of trade indicates where to look for encounters between seafarer and Church. So, despite 'evidence of early Byzantine trade extending from Ireland in the West to Manchuria in the East',[5] Christian distribution makes the Mediterranean the sea of interest. The first four of the great patriarchal sees (Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople, Jerusalem) were important ports. The involvement of Christians in the corn trade is explicit in the texts; the passenger experience, if it appears at all, seldom adds more than references to port of embarkation and destination, sometimes between islands, often to major cities.[6]

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1   I am grateful to the Hon. Editor of the *Mariner's Mirror* for permission to use in this chapter material previously published in the *MM* in November 2010.

2   Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity*, *passim*.

3   Winstedt, *The Christian Topography of Cosmas Indicopleustes*.

4   See e.g. John, Bishop of Ephesus, *The Third Part of the Ecclesiastical History passim*. John, sixth-century Monophysite bishop of Constantinople, described the appalling treatment of unbelievers and non-Monophysite Christians. His *History* refers throughout to the Monophysites as 'the orthodox'.
Neil B. McLynn, Christian Controversy and Violence in the Fourth Century, 15-44.

5   Marlia Mundell Mango, Beyond the Amphora . . . , 87.
For a general introduction to trade see Marlia Mundell Mango,Byzantine trade, 3ff.

6   Tassos Papacostas, *The Economy of Late Antique Cyprus*, 114f. offers Epiphanius of Salamis finding a Paphos-bound ship in the fourth-century, and Archbishop Paul of Crete stopping at Crete en route from Egypt to Constantinople in the sixth-century and other examples.

## Ships and the clergy

References to ships appearing occasionally in Christian literature add little to the discoveries of maritime archaeology.[1] Imperial galleys feature largely;[2] the work-horse of the merchant fleet, the ΔΡΟΜΩΝ, less so.[3] Kingsley and Decker mention as developments of the period the reduction in the number of mortise-and-tenon joints on 'shell-first' vessels, greater reliance on iron nails, increasing use of pitch rather than lead for sheathing hulls, and 'an overall shift toward frame-first ships', details seldom found in religious texts.[4] Technology sometimes required Church assistance: in the early fifth century, Bishop Silvanus of Troas was called upon to assist in the launch of a ship or raft (πλαντήν) for conveying 'enormous pillars' which was stuck on the shore at Troas. He approached the shore, prayed, touched a rope, and exhorted 'the rest to vigorous exertion', the ship shifting at first pull.[5]

Clergy of one sort or another are easier to spot than lay Christians and appear in a variety of situations. At the quayside, so different from today's secure docks, clergy and ships can be seen together. The Cypriot saint Athanasius Pentaschoinites saved a ship in peril.[6] Athanasius (296 –373), Bishop of Alexandria, 'when the sea rose against the city of Alexandria . . . accompanied by all the priests went forth to the borders of the sea, and holding in his hand the book of the holy Law he raised his hand to heaven', his prayer causing the sea to return to its place.[7] In *The Age of the ΔΡΟΜΩΝ* Pryor and Jeffreys offer a ritual from the time of Leo VI (886-912), here performed with a military expedition, which probably reflects earlier usage, when all the standards of the δρομωνες were blessed during a celebration of the Liturgy by the priests, 'and by a lengthy prayer to God for the successful venture of the *stratos* against the enemy . . .'.[8] There might well have been a nearby chapel. In Constantinople St Daniel the Stylite, down from his pillar, took up residence in the quayside chapel of St Zacharias.[9]

St Melania the Younger (383 – 410), surely in a class of her own, a Roman lady of aristocratic descent and very rich, adopted the ascetic life, founding a monastery on the Mount of Olives. She took her entourage to a nearby ship and informed the captain she was hiring him, his crew and his vessel, insisting, despite adverse winds, they sail for Sicily. The winds presaged a

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1   Séan McGrail, Renaissance and Romano-Celtic Ship Design . . ., 439ff.
    Lionel Casson, *Ships and Seamanship in The Ancient World,* 148ff. I am grateful to Professor McGrail for these references.
2   Robert Gardiner (ed.), *The Age of the GALLEY*, 90-100, 215f, 218f. I am grateful to Professor McGrail for this reference.
3   John H. Pryor and Elizabeth M. Jeffreys, *The Age of the ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, passim.
4   'New Rome, New Theories on Inter-Regional Exchange', 13.
5   Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, book VII, ch. xxxvii.
6   Tassos Papacostas, The Economy of Late Antique Cyprus, 115.
7   *The Chronicle of John, Bishop of Nikiu*, 84.
8   *op. cit*., 493.
9   Elizabeth Dawes and Norman H. Baynes (trans.), *Three Byzantine Saints*, 46.

violent storm; this and the many people on board led to a shortage of water and imminent danger. The crew blamed the wrath of God. Melania, disagreeing, interpreted it as a sign that God wished them to sail elsewhere, and over-ruled the captain. The ship arrived safely at a 'certain island' where the locals were being held to ransom. Melania acceded to the local bishop's plea that she pay the sum outstanding and all were freed, departing for Africa with little more said of ship or crew. The episode illustrates what a large fortune and a strong personality could achieve, her quayside walk and talk to the captain a reminder of the intimacy of fifth-century ports.[1]

## Christians and trade

Many early Christians were associated with the sea in some way. Obvious examples were Marcion and Tertullian. Marcion (d. 160), according to Hippolytus a ship owner and son of a bishop, excommunicated for heresy in 144, organised his own church with followers widely spread in such trading cities as Corinth, Lyons, and Rome. Tertullian (c. 160 – c. 220), a native of Carthage, another who in later life veered from orthodoxy, spoke of collections being made at Christian meetings for distribution to the poor and needy, among whom he included the shipwrecked.[2]

There are a number of reasons why there should be an association between Christians and the sea. The Mediterranean in the Roman Empire was a link between its many parts. Paul's Epistles show early Christian communities spreading from port to port. Second, where Christians were landowners they might attract the *munus navicularium*, a legal obligation to contribute ships or money to the shippers' guild (*corpus naviculorum*), effectively a state merchant fleet under the direction of various diocesan (the diocese was an area of secular Roman administration) shippers' guilds.[3] Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430) refused a gift of land because it was burdened with the shipping liturgy or duty.[4] Third, by the third-century Christians had an interest in maritime economic activity, partly because, with its low status, and perhaps fairly low returns, it was an occupation from which they were not excluded; also, because a church, holding members' money in its treasuries, could issue letters of credit to be honoured by the church at the port of destination. Hollerich cited a third-century letter in which a group from Alexandria, probably Christians, contracted with a shipper (ναυκληρος) in Rome for his services to sell grain there.[5]

By the time of Athanasius of Alexandria there was a very heavy

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1   Elizabeth A. Clark (trans., ed.), *The Life of Melania the Younger*, 42-3.
2   *Against the Heathen*, 81. Cp Lactantius (c. 240 - c 320), *Divine Institutes*, 427f, which lists redemption of captives, protection of destitute widows and children, care for the sick, and burial of strangers and the poor.
3   Michael J. Hollerich, The Alexandrian Bishops and the Grain Trade, 190.
4   Cited in Hollerich, *op. cit.*, 202.
5   Hollerich, *op. cit.*, 189. See also Walter Ashburner (ed), *The Rhodian Sea-Law*, clxxix-clxxx.

involvement of the Alexandrian church's ships in the grain trade.[1] There were serious penalties for any who delayed the delivery of grain, to Rome by more than one year, or Constantinople by two.[2] Behind one of Athanasius's periods of exile, in this instance to Gaul, lay an accusation by enemies swearing to having heard him threaten to prevent the corn supply reaching Byzantium.[3] The Theodosian Code refers to the Alexandrian grain fleet, its maritime expeditions encouraged by the award of four per cent of the grain carried as cargo and a thousand *solidus* paid for each thousand measures.[4] Bulk deliveries received further rewards.

The Theodosian Code mentions the conduct of the industry as overseen by the Guild of Shipmasters.[5] It provided for delay due to bad weather or other disaster. John, Bishop of Nikiu, told of a ship from Alexandria laden with imperial grain which was wrecked, and its cargo lost. The provincial governor, arresting the captain, had him beaten but finding no money on him, concluded that the wreck had not been for personal gain. John recorded a decree of the Emperor Maurice that a captain should not be punished or made to pay compensation in case of shipwreck, the loss to be borne by the imperial revenue.[6] The Roman church, too, was involved and, especially after the collapse of Roman secular authority, needed to import much grain if the citizens were not to starve.[7] The evidence suggests that when Christian congregations were intimate enough for all to know their bishop, and for each bishop to be on corresponding terms with other bishops, the Christian travelling by sea might be passed from congregation to congregation. This is not the same as saying that the bishops had a concern for the maritime apostolate. For example Cyprian (d. 258) wrote: 'Let us know plainly who has been substituted in place of Marcion in Arles, that we may know to whom to direct our brethren and to whom we should write . . .'[8] The reception of travelling Christians appears in a letter from Celerinus to Lucian: '. . . all the confessors who have come thence from you hither. To meet them, the women themselves went down to the harbour and supported them in the city'.[9] It may be that Christian sailors were received in a similar way.

The corn ships may be glimpsed in contemporary hagiography. John the Almsgiver (560–619), a later Patriarch of Alexandria, received 'news . . . that two of the Church's fast-sailing ships, which he had sent to Sicily for corn, had cast anchor in the harbor . . .' at a time when the population faced famine.[10]

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1   Hollerich, *op. cit.*, 197f. See also Marlia Mundell Mango, Beyond the Amphora . . . , 96f for details of the fleet and its trade.

2   Section 14.15 and 14.16. *The Theodosian Code*, 416f.
    See also Emin Tengström, *Bread for the People*, *passim*.

3   Mango & Scott, *The Chronicles of Theophanes Confessor*, 52.

4   Section 13:5:7. *The Theodosian Code*, 392.

5   Section 13:5147. *The Theodosian Code*, 393.

6   *The Chronicle of John of Nikiu* (CIII.2-3),165.

7   Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 134.

8   Cyprian, *Letters*, Letter 68(5).

9   Cyprian, *Letters*, Letter 21(4).

10  Dawes & Baynes, *Three Byzantine Saints*, 223.

Their fortuitous arrival was credited to his sanctity. The same account records:

> the ships of the Church of which he was head [Alexandria] met with such a violent storm in the Adriatic that the crew were forced to jettison the whole cargo; and all the ships were there at the same time. And the weight of their freight was exceedingly heavy . . . waterproof garments and silver and other valuable goods, so that the weight of what was lost was estimated at thirty-four hundredweight, for there were more than thirteen ships each carrying 10,000 artabes. Directly they reached Alexandria and cast anchor, all the ship masters and captains took refuge in the church . . . The next day . . . the [Saint said] to them all '. . . do not be cast down by this mishap to the ships'.[11]

The cause of concern here, prompting the seeking of sanctuary, would be the possibility of attracting those Theodosian penalties for late or non-delivery of the corn. While Christians must have been involved in other maritime business, it is the corn trade which dominates.[12]

## Metaphors and their sources as maritime indicators

With such an involvement, and with churches in all the major ports and trading cities, images associated with the sea abound in the writings of the Fathers. Peter Anson, quoting Hippolytus (c. 170 – c. 236): 'The world is a sea in which the Church, like a ship, is beaten by the waves but not submerged', and Clement of Alexandria (c. 150 – c. 215): 'Let the dove, or the fish, or the vessel flying before the winds, or the marine anchor, be our signets', argued that early bishops had a concern for the maritime apostolate, a view unsupported by his quotations. [13] Alain Corbin used the Fathers to illustrate what he perceived to be the view of the sea shared by the ancients.[14] His particular interest seems to have been in their use of language derived from biblical Flood texts, of which there is no shortage, but he missed the theological sense, despite being aware that the Fathers used the ocean as a metaphor ('To attempt to fathom the mysteries of the ocean bordered on sacrilege, like an attempt to penetrate the impenetrable nature of God, as St Augustine, St Ambrose, and St Basil repeatedly pointed out'), offering instead a view of the ocean (its lure) for which it was never intended.[15]

The maritime metaphors of the Fathers derive as much from their classical education, common experience, and the Bible, as from a knowledge of shipping.

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11  Dawes & Baynes, *Three Byzantine Saints*, 239.
12  The population of Constantinople has been estimated as some three or four hundred thousand requiring
    31,200 tons of wheat, the equivalent of 624 annual shipments in merchant ships capable of carrying 50 tons. See Sean Kingsley and Michael Decker, New Rome, New Theories . . ., 2, 4. Kingsley and Decker refer to 'far-flung trading interests and activities of the clergy at this time . . .'.
13  P.F.Anson, *Church Maritime*, unpublished typescript, copies held by the AoS in and Rome. It was not Anson's practice to give references for his quotations.
14  Alain Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea*.
15  *Ibid.*, 2. Other examples occur throughout the book and seem to derive from a diet of undigested 17th-century authors.

In some the sea is hardly mentioned. There is no obvious metaphor in Prudentius (348 – c. 410), for example, except for a charming phrase in a preface where he wrote that God to the 'port of old age steers my declining days', a contemporary literary convention with no particular Christian association.[1] Tertullian used a metaphor drawn from pagan culture and classical education.

> [Y]et death is much too violent, coming as it does upon us by strange and violent means . . . That is still a violence to ships: although far away from the Capharean rocks, assailed by no storms, without a billow to shatter them, with favouring gale, in gliding course, with many crews, they founder amidst entire security, suddenly owing to some internal shock. Not dissimilar are the shipwrecks of life . . . It matters not whether the vessel of the human body goes with unbroken timbers or shattered with storms, if the navigation of the soul be overthrown. [2]

Lactantius (c. 240 – c. 320) referred to the Neptune story[3] and drew on Cicero for another concerning a man on a plank at sea.[4] Clement of Alexandria (c. 150 – c. 215) mentioned Atlas 'the first to build a boat and sail on the sea'.[5] These authors were well-educated in the pagan system before becoming Christians.

Yet some metaphors reflect a general knowledge of ship or sea. Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 315 – 386) wrote:

> Men ought to have been astonished and amazed . . . at the well-ordered movements of the stars . . . how some signs . . . some indicate . . . the beginning of navigation; and a man, sitting in his ship and sailing amid the boundless waves, guides his ship by observing the stars.[6]

> By faith, seafaring men, entrusting themselves to a tiny wooden craft, exchange the solid element of the land for the unstable motion of the waves, surrendering themselves to uncertain hopes and carrying about with them a faith more sure than any anchor . . .[7]

His *Catachesis*, aimed generally, may be supposed to use common experience in the interest of intelligibility. Tertullian probably drew from the same well when he wrote, 'Reason . . . is a thing of God . . . voyaging all the universal course of life without the rudder of reason, they know not how to shun the hurricane which is impending over the world'.[8]

The perils of the storm would have been a universal fear. Its concomitant, shipwreck, is used repeatedly, probably prompted by Paul's 'shipwreck of their faith' (1 Tim. 1:19) as much as by the seasonal storms of the Mediterranean; so, Tertullian on Apelles who 'having first fallen from the principles of Marcion . . . afterwards shipwrecked himself, in the spirit, on the virgin Philumene . . .'.[9] Cyprian extended the metaphor:

1    Prudentius, *Poems*.
2    Tertullian, *De Anima*, 52.
3    Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, 49.
4    *Ibid*. 367f.
5    Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, 1.16.75 (3).
6    *Works of St Cyril of Jerusalem*, Catachesis IX.8.
7    *Ibid*, *Catachesis*,V (3).
8    *On Repentance*.
9    *On the Flesh of Christ*.

For, indeed, if any port on the sea begins to be difficult or dangerous to ships because of its broken fortifications, do not those sailing direct their ships to other neighbouring ports where the access would be safe and the entrance advantageous and the station secure? . . . It is necessary for this situation . . . that we may receive to ourselves with prompt and benign humanity our brethren who, having avoided the rocks of Marcion, seek the saving gates of the Church.[1]

There may be a hint here of a Christian duty of hospitality to the physically shipwrecked, while the 'gates of the Church' echo the original idea of the walled part of a port, here with 'unbroken fortifications', offering a safe haven. Cyprian's *Letters* contain other examples. Of Nicostratus, removed from the diaconate for fraud, Cyprian wrote to Cornelius, 'a man banished from see and people . . . himself made a shipwreck of truth and faith, is stirring up certain ones like himself to similar shipwrecks'. [2]

Although Cyprian often used maritime imagery, it is probably Tertullian who is the master[3]:

Amid these reefs and inlets, amid these shallows and straits of idolatry, Faith, her sails filled by the Spirit of God, navigates; safe if cautious, secure if intently watchful. But to such as are washed overboard is a deep whence is no out-swimming; to such as are run aground is inextricable shipwreck; to such as are engulphed is a whirlpool, where there is no breathing - in idolatry. All waves thereof whatsoever suffocate; every eddy there sucks down into Hades . . . Let not that be in the Church which was not in the Ark.[4]

Clement of Alexandria refers to heretical baptism as 'crossing a foreign water'.[5] In short, shipwreck may be of the individual or a Church; may consist in heresy or apostasy; and the rescuing vessel may be either the faith of the individual or the Church herself, its debt to the Noah story substantial.

The image of the Church as ship allows the metaphor to be extended. A biblical idea is the casting of the net from the ship to catch bystanders.[6] The ship's captain might be Christ, or Christ its destination, 'the port of Christ'.[7] Equally, the captain might be the bishop, described with pastoral and gubernatorial similes: 'But now no less do we congratulate you . . . that the shepherd might be returned to feed the flock, and the pilot to govern the ship, and the ruler to rule the people'.[8] Faith fills the sails.[9] The destination is the 'anchorage of salvation'.[10] In the meantime, 'The ship which firmly

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1  Cyprian, *Letters*, 68(3).
2  See also *Ibid*, 4(22), 17(3), 21(2), 52(1), 52(2), 67(8) etc.
3  Despite Tertullian's lapse into Montanism, Cyprian called him 'My Master' - cited from Jerome in Library of the Fathers, *Tertullian*, 1842, i.
4  Tertullian, *On Idolatry*, xxiv.
5  Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, I.19.96(3).
   See also Tertullian, *On Idolatry*, xxiv.
6  Cyprian, *Letters,* 1(4).1 Cf. John 21, 4ff.
7  Cyprian, *Treatises*, XI, 259.
8   Cyprian, *Letters*, 61(1).
9  Tertullian, *On Idolatry*.
10  Cyprian, *Treatises*, I, 10.

rests upon its cable is struck but not broken by the waves'.[1] Tertullian makes an obvious connection between wind and Spirit. His maritime imagery is introduced even to passages of commentary where it finds no natural place.

> 'His glory [is that] of a bull; his horns, the horns of an unicorn . . . '[Deut. 33:17] . . . But Christ was therein signified: a 'bull', by reason of each of his two characters, - to some fierce, as Judge; to others gentle as Saviour; whose 'horns' were to be the extremities of the *cross*. For even in a ship's yard - which is part of a *cross* - this is the name by which the extremities are called; while the central pole of the mast is an 'unicorn'. [Italics original][2]

Other passages relate to baptismal teaching: the Flood, the crossing of the Red Sea, Jonah, and various New Testament texts. Tertullian, in his *De Baptismo* (VIII.12), repeats the ship image, asking if the disciples, with Jesus in Galilee, were baptised, and what the state of the baptised, his answer alluding to the calming of the storm (Lk 8: 22ff) and the walking of Peter on the water (Mtt 14: 22ff):

> Some drop a hint, sufficiently forced surely, that the Apostles supplied the place of Baptism, at the time when they were sprinkled and covered with waves in the ship; and that Peter himself, when walking on the sea, was sufficiently dipped. But to my thinking it is one thing to be sprinkled and caught by the violence of the sea, and another to be washed according to the rite of Religion. Nevertheless that ship set forth a figure of the Church, inasmuch as it is tossed in the sea, that is in the world, by the waves, that is by persecutions and temptations, while the Lord is, as it were, patiently sleeping, until, being awakened in the last extremity by the prayers of the saints, He stilleth the world, and giveth again a *calm* to his own. [Italic original]

There is no shortage in the New Testament of passages from which to cull maritime metaphors.

Some imagery is sourced from experience. It is implicit in Tertullian that he was familiar with terms used within the seafaring community; his home town, Carthage, was a significant port and he had made the journey to Rome and back. Nor was his knowledge superficial. He was aware of the effect of refraction: '. . . it was the water which was the cause of the oar seeming to be inclined or bent; out of the water, it was perfectly straight in appearance . . .', the question of the horizon, 'a vanishing point in the direction of its furthest distance. So the sky blends itself with the sea . . .',[3] and of buoyancy, 'But what, says Soranus [in answer to Tertullian's argument], if men should deny that the sea is a bodily substance, because a ship out of water becomes a heavy and motionless mass?'.[4] Tertullian had a very thorough education, and from Soranus and other classical masters may have derived some of his knowledge of the physics involved. Personal observation better explains his knowledge of ship construction.

> [Y]ou will be bold to maintain that a ship is perfect without her keel, or her bow, or her stern, or without the solidity of her entire frame. And yet

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1    *Ibid.* VIII, 199.

2    Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews*, X.
     See also, Hugo Rahner, *Greek Myths*, 328ff, 332, 345, 321, 373, 374 etc.

3    Tertullian, *De Anima*, 17.

4    *Ibid.* 8.

> how often have we seen the same ship, after being shattered with the storm and broken by decay, with all her timbers repaired and restored, gallantly riding on the waves in all the beauty of a renewed fabric . . .Besides, if a wealthy ship owner . . . thoroughly repairs his ship, and then chooses that she should make no further voyages, will you contend that the old form and finish is still not necessary to the vessel, although she is no longer meant for actual service, when the mere safety of the ship requires such completeness irrespective of service?[1]

If the Christians of Carthage were as involved in maritime economic activity as the Alexandrian and Roman Christians, then Tertullian had not far to look.[2]

Tertullian hints in this passage at the duty of the ship owner to keep his vessel in good repair, a duty obvious in itself, but also a legal obligation found in the oldest sea codes. Indeed, the preservation of the ship, and particularly life, took precedence over everything else, and lay, for example, behind the law permitting jettison, whereby cargo could be thrown overboard to save the ship.[3] The passage hints further at the responsibility of the owner as distinct from that of the κοινονια or *communitatis navis*, the community of shareholders, the whole body of persons who shared in general average if the ship perished or the cargo was lost.[4] Κοινονια would hold special meaning for Christians.

Clement of Alexandria used the analogy of a coin paid, 'when one and the same coin is given to a sea-captain we speak of money to pay for the passage, to a tax-collector, tax, to a property owner, rent . . .'.[5] A number of Codes specified what was involved in such a payment, that is, the passenger's entitlement. Clement referred to the corporate responsibility of the crew in the hauling of a boat,[6] or the sole responsibility in case of shipwreck of the 'pilot who has not furled the sail' and is 'punishable by law'.[7] An associated passage pointed to the responsibility of the ship builder for 'the existence of the boat, so the builder for the completion of a house',[8] the comparison making it clear that Clement is referring to a responsibility generally understood, that is, satisfactory completion. That he does not need to explain it to his audience indicates the measure of general understanding of his point.

Cyprian in using the idea of the ship builder touches on the construction of a ship.

[I]f you should say to him whom you are urging to the control over and use

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1   Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, 60.
    Cp. John Cassian, *Conferences*, 1. *praef. 3*.
2   Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 134.
3   Evidence of the law of jettison can be found in the Old Testament book of Jonah, though not in the legal portions of Scripture. See S.M.Passamaneck, Traces of Rabbinical Maritime Law and Custom, 527, 536ff (hereafter Passamaneck).
4   Walter Ashburner (ed.), *The Rhodian Sea-Law*, ccxl ff. This sea law was probably written down in the sixth-century AD but incorporated much earlier material. See Passamaneck, 536f.
5   *Stromateis*,1. 20.98(1).
6   *Ibid,* 1.20.97 (1).
7   *Ibid*. 1.17.82 (1 and 2).
8   *Ibid*, 1.17.82(4).

of ships: 'Buy your material from the choicest woods, Brother, cover your
vessel with very strong and select oak; take pains with the rudder, the ropes,
the sails, that the ship may be made and equipped; but when you have done
this, you will not see the fruit of its motions or voyages.'

Frame, rudder, ropes and sails are the key parts in the legal definition of a
ship at the point of sale.[1] The shipbuilder, unless also owner-operator of the
vessel, would receive only what he had been paid for its building.

## Early Christians and the sailor

Occasionally Christian involvement in maritime economic activity went beyond
the provision of grain ships. Theodoret (c. 393 – c. 458), born in Antioch and
subsequently bishop of Cyrrhus in Syria, mentions the fifth-century Theodosius
as building a landing stage, creating work, importing and exporting, and claims
that he was widely invoked by sailors in distress.[2] Yet those sailors are as hard
to find in the texts as the Christians serving them, despite generalisations to
the contrary. Kverndal suggests 'the pioneer missionaries of the Early Church
would seek to spread the faith whenever they put to sea' but names only 'their
great predecessor, Paul' to support his opinion.[3] Seamen tend to be invisible or
at best to occupy, as in the case of the crew of Melania's ship, a supporting role;
there is no sense of Christians seeking the sailor *qua* sailor.

Theodoret wrote about the joy of the sailors when they see the light marking
the harbour entrance on a dark night. He hints at knowledge of crewing issues
when he writes, 'When anything happens to the helmsman, either the officer in
charge at the bows or the seaman of highest rank, takes his place'.[4] He refers to
God as the great Pilot and the bishop as being at the rudder of the local church
yet gives nothing that could be understood as maritime ministry in the modern
sense; rather, he reveals what may be described as common knowledge of the
time, and in that, his writing is typical of the majority of early Christian writers.

Ambrose, in his funeral oration (378) on his brother Satyrus, told of Satyrus
travelling by sea while still not 'initiated into the more perfect Mysteries' (i.e.
before baptism). Finding himself involved in shipwreck and fearing death 'without
the Eucharist' Satyrus asked members of the faithful, whether passengers or crew
is unsaid, 'whom he knew were fully initiated, for the Blessed Sacrament, not out
of a prying curiosity . . . but to obtain aid and assistance for his faith'. Ambrose
says Satyrus wrapped the Host in a napkin, tied it round his neck and jumped into
the sea. Safely ashore, his first action was to find a church 'to return thanks for
his safe deliverance and to be fully initiated into the eternal Mysteries', Ambrose
perhaps echoing Psalm 107, 23-32. Thereafter Satyrus travelled often by sea,
not as a crew member (he was a lawyer until appointed prefect of a Roman

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1    Passamaneck, 530.

2    I am grateful to The Rev. Dr Richard Price for drawing my attention to his translation
     of Theodoret's *Religious History* (published as Theodoret, *A History of the Monks of
     Syria*, Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo, 1985, 89ff.).

3    Roald Kverndal, *The Way of the Sea*, 10.

4    Theodoret, *The Ecclesiastical History* . . ., volume 3, Letters XI (253), CXXIX
     (301), LXXVIII (274), XXXI (261).

province), without fear or further danger. Ambrose reveals in this rare instance that Christians, at least those among the initiated, had access to the Sacrament at sea, and suggests how it might be carried. The translators note the custom, thought to have derived from the days of persecution when imprisoned Christians were brought the Sacrament by co-religionists, of reserving a portion of the Eucharistic Bread in private homes, or to be carried on a journey for special protection, as still widespread in the fourth century.[1] Basil of Caesarea confirms in his *Letter XCIII* (A.D.372?) that the custom was prevalent in Alexandria and Egypt.[2]

Gregory Nazianzen offers a number of opportunities to see Christian sailors. His autobiographical poem, *Concerning his own affairs*, describes a conversion experience when on passage to Athens: winter was close and sailing 'a matter of hardihood and not good sense'. The severe storm which caught his ship was followed by a lack of water, as with Melania's ship, caused by the smashing of a water jar. When mountainous seas swamped the vessel 'a confused clamour arose, cries of sailors, helmsmen, officers, passengers, all calling with one voice upon Christ, even the people who formerly knew not God'.[3] At the end of their ordeal, 'All the ship's passengers and crew went on their way praising the great Christ'.[4]

Christian sailors appear again, in Gregory's poem *On His Own Life*, involved in a late night attempt to replace Gregory in a power struggle. Soon after this unhappy event, a group of Egyptian sailors, passing the many Arian churches in Constantinople, according to Liebeschuetz, while Gregory was acting as the city's orthodox bishop, and the community he served having no church but meeting in a private house, its numbers so small 'the arrival of the corn-fleet from Egypt with its orthodox sailors produced a significant addition to the congregation', to the saint's great encouragement.[5] His Oration 34 seems to have been addressed to a delegation from Alexandria arriving on board the first grain ships of the spring, probably in the year 380. He likens them to the Israelite spies of Joseph's time, coming as they were from Egypt laden with grain.[6] If these were the sailors involved in the late-night attempt to ordain Maximus, Peter of Alexandria's preferred candidate for Constantinople's episcopal throne, against Gregory in the struggle for power, the reference makes sense.[7] Such glimpses of the early Christian sailor in a church building are rare.

Sailors may sometimes be found in contemporary hagiography as the subjects of miracles. Here, as with the church-going sailors in Constantinople, it is the sailors who approach the Church rather than the reverse. Theodore of Sykeon (d. 613) was credited with delivering two sailors from demonic

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1   St Ambrose, First Oration on his Brother Satyrus, 180f.
2   *Basil: Letters and Select Works*, 170.
3   *St Gregory of Nazianzus: Three Poems*, 35, 80ff.
4   *Gregory of Nazianzus: Autobiographical poems*, 21-25.
5   J.H.W.G.Liebeschuetz, *Barbarians and Bishops*, 158-9.
    Brian E. Daley SJ, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 18f.
6   *Saint Gregory of Nazianzen*, *Select Orations*, 334ff.
7   J.H.W.G.Liebeschuetz, *Barbarians and Bishops*, 158-9. I have been unable to trace the source from his footnote (n.18).
    Brian E. Daley SJ, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 18f.

possession. One, a local man, the owner of a small boat, 'had been put under a spell by someone and was troubled by an unclean spirit'. Trembling limbs combined with other symptoms to prevent his working, reducing him to penury. Theodore prayed over him, blessing oil for the sailor to anoint himself. He returned to the saint some days later, cured and with his affairs improved, to offer in gratitude the tackle of his boat; Theodore 'was only induced to accept it after much insistence'.[1] Another was a sea captain from Kalleoi in Pontus 'afflicted with a demon under his skin, which appeared in the shape of a mouse', a condition difficult to diagnose in modern terms. When the saint touched him he felt the demon 'running about and trying to escape'. Confining it to the man's arm, Theodore prayed, making the sign of the Cross over the arm, after which, the captain had no further trouble.

For hernias, an occupational hazard among seamen, and testicular disease, Artemios was the saint of choice. Perhaps an Arian, martyred in Antioch c. 363, his relics were brought to the church of St John Prodromos in Constantinople before 500, prompting numerous miracles. The sick, sleeping in the north aisle of the church, waited for the saint to appear, usually in a dream, then or subsequently. In miracle five a sailor cured of diseased testicles was discouraged by the crew, expecting a favourable wind, from going ashore to return thanks; he was not only able to do so but found his ship still at anchor on his return. In miracle six Isidore, another sailor similarly afflicted, was cured. Miracle fourteen took place at sea after a sailor had waited in the church for thirty days; crew members witnessed Artemios as a stranger standing next to the steersman, by whom the sick man was lying. The saint made as if to hold the tiller to assist the pilot, and in doing so trod upon the sick man's testicles, effecting a cure. Miracle twenty-seven involved a shipbuilder, Theoteknos, after time spent near the saint's tomb doing carpentry repairs while hoping for his testicles to be cured, and before sailing his own boat for Gaul. Artemios appeared to him in a dream in the guise of the sailing master; he awoke with perfectly restored testicles. Miracle thirty-two concerned the healing of a stevedore ruptured whilst loading jugs of wine. In miracle thirty-five a Rhodian ship owner, George, was cured of a double hernia by an apparition of the saint in the church latrine.[2]

The sixth-century Nicholas of Sion, not to be confused with Nicholas of nearby Myra, was another miracle worker, here associated with the weather. On one occasion he foretold a storm, seeing the devil circling a ship and cutting down the rigging. When the storm arose the crew sought his prayers, which were eventually answered. Nicholas later restored a sailor who had fallen from the mast and been left for dead. The crew, on nearing Egypt, asked the saint to come ashore in the dinghy to bless their houses.[3] Subsequently Nicholas tried to leave Askalon on a Rhodian ship bound for Constantinople; the captain explaining that they had been subject to inexplicable delays, Nicholas prayed and, the impediment lifting, they sailed. Some days later he asked to be landed at his destination. The captain explained that the wind would not permit it, but

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1    Dawes and Baynes (trans), *Three Byzantine Saints*, 170.
2    Virgil S. Crisafulli and John W. Nesbitt, *The Miracles of St Artemios*, *passim*.
3    Ihor Ševčenko and Nancy Patterson Ševčenko, *The Life of Nicholas of Sion*, 51-57.

the wind suddenly preventing the ship from going further, allowed Nicholas to disembark, prompting the crew again to seek his prayers.[1]

His contemporary, John the Almsgiver, Patriarch of Alexandria, came to the rescue of a 'foreign captain who had fallen upon evil days' with five pounds of gold. The man bought a cargo but shortly 'suffered shipwreck outside the Pharos', but without loss of ship. John, importuned again, spoke critical words, suggesting the man had been remiss in his financial dealings, but gave him ten pounds more. This time the captain managed to lose the ship, though not the crew. John, blaming the event on the ship having been acquired by unjust means, nevertheless handed over one of the church's grain ships laden with twenty thousand bushels of corn. Twenty days and nights of storm followed, the captain explaining their preservation to the steersman having seen 'the Patriarch by his side holding the tiller'. It was claimed they had come to Britain and relieved a famine, before returning with a cargo of tin, some of which through the Patriarch's prayers had turned to silver.[2] A second miracle concerned a man's prayers for the return of his son from Africa. The saint celebrated the Liturgy over the man's generous gift of gold, asking God for the safe return of the son's ship. The lad died three days before the ship, captained by his uncle, returned, when it 'suffered shipwreck', with cargo lost but ship and remaining crew safe. The Patriarch was able to reassure the father in a dream that his son's soul was saved from what would otherwise have been a 'pernicious and unclean' life, adding that, had the ship sunk, his brother also would have been lost, a thought which, when the man awoke, seems to have comforted him. There is no suggestion in the text that anyone associated with a ship might be wise to keep well away from this saint.

Finally, Daniel the Stylite was invoked by one, Sergius, who was, with other passengers, held up by a north wind at a point where demons 'used formerly to hurl stones at the passengers and continually sank their boats'. 'Those in the boat gave thanks to God and made mention of the holy man [Daniel]' and consequently were able to go on their way.[3]

These texts afford a glimpse of two communities, the Christian and the maritime, interacting. To maritime missiologists they should offer enough evidence for a reconsideration, and perhaps modification, of the concept of the early Christians as 'sea apostles'.[4] Instead, once allowance has been made for the agenda of those writing to promote the reputation of particular saints, Christian seafarers can be seen behaving like other members of the Christian community. Priests or bishops are nowhere shown as having more regard for seamen than for church members in other occupations. Instead, the assembled evidence confirms that there were Christians amongst crews, some of whom may have had access to consecrated elements of the Mass whilst at sea, and to be found when in port attending a nearby church. The very normality of this picture is important for placing the Christian seafarer in the regular life of the Church.

1   *Ibid*, 63-67.
2   Dawes and Baynes (trans), *Three Byzantine Saints*, 216ff.
3   *Ibid*. 19f.
4   Peter F. Anson, *The Church and the Sailor*, chapter one. Roald Kverndal, *Seamen's Missions . . .*, 5, and Kverndal, *The Way of the Sea*, 10.