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Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Phoenix*, Vol. 60, No. 1/2 (Spring - Summer, 2006), pp. 21-47

Published by: [Classical Association of Canada](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20304579>

Accessed: 11/11/2011 09:50

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TRADERS, PIRATES, WARRIORS: THE PROTO-HISTORY
OF GREEK MERCENARY SOLDIERS IN THE
EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

NINO LURAGHI

*For the colleagues and students
of the Department of Classics,
University of Toronto*

THE FACT THAT GREEK MERCENARY SOLDIERS had been serving for a number of powers in the southeastern Mediterranean during most of the archaic age hardly strikes a reader engaged in general readings on archaic Greek history. Among the most authoritative treatments of this period O. Murray's *Early Greece* devotes only a few pages to mercenaries serving in the army of the Saite pharaohs, in a chapter on economy in sixth-century Greece, while R. Osborne's *Greece in the Making* barely mentions the existence of Greek mercenary soldiers at all. As a matter of fact, according to the common view, mercenary soldiers did not become a significant factor of Greek social and political history before the fourth century. Their emergence is generally seen as a sign of a widespread social and economic crisis, to some extent a consequence of the Peloponnesian War, which caused many people to remain under arms for a long period of time, damaging the productivity of their estates and inadvertently transforming them into professional fighters. Poverty and the impossibility of facing it by the traditional means of colonization would have produced a generalized social crisis and a surplus of men ready to earn a living by the unappealing profession of arms. At the same time, urban aristocracies supposedly became more and more estranged from the idea of defending their cities personally and increasingly entrusted this task to professional soldiers recruited from abroad. Such a general view underpins standard works of reference on Greek mercenaries, such as H. W. Parke's *Greek Mercenary Soldiers* and more recently M. Bettalli's *I mercenari nel mondo greco*, and is set out synthetically in André Aymard's influential article on Greek mercenaries.¹ This interpretive framework, which links the presence of

Previous versions of this article were presented in 2003 to the School of Historical Studies of the Institute for Advanced Study (Princeton), Princeton University, Brown University, University of Toronto, and York University. All the audiences deserve the author's gratitude for their patience and their encouraging and helpful feedback. Stephanie Dalley (Oxford) and Maynard Maidman (York) have read an advance version, providing invaluable help on all matters Near Eastern and beyond. Robin Fleming (Boston College) offered illuminating insights into the history of early mediaeval England. Susanne Ebbinghaus (Harvard) has discussed in depth the theses presented here, while her own research project on *orientalia* in the Samian Heraion (see Ebbinghaus 2005) provided much food for thought. All dates are B.C. unless otherwise specified.

¹ Parke 1933; Bettalli 1995; Aymard 1967. Perhaps this orthodoxy is about to be overturned; see van Wees 2004: 41–42, where the cornerstones of the traditional interpretation, including the

Greek mercenaries to structural factors specific to late-classical Greece, is probably responsible for a tendency to underestimate the importance of mercenary soldiers among the Greeks of the archaic age. Bettalli's recent monograph characterizes mercenary service in archaic Greece as an elite phenomenon, involving only a small number of aristocratic warriors. The factors that induced them to migrate abroad and find employment as mercenaries ranged from restlessness to defeat in civil strife and exile. Bettalli also subscribes to a view authoritatively put forward by Aymard, according to which the existence of people ready to leave their hometown to enroll as mercenary soldiers has to be seen as the symptom of some sort of crisis, most often of an economic nature; this view involves the assimilation of mercenary service abroad and colonization as two parallel means of relieving the pressure of a growing population without modifying the structure of land ownership.² Philip Kaplan's recent article, while trying to highlight the importance of mercenaries for archaic Greek history, still follows the logic of previous scholarship. To explain the existence of mercenaries some sort of crisis seems to be required, and Kaplan conjures up the unsettled conditions that accompanied the emergence of the polis during the archaic age.³ In terms of numbers of warriors involved, moreover, Kaplan regards mercenary service in the archaic period as a limited phenomenon.⁴ To sum up: the scholarly consensus seems to be that (a) some sort of socio-economic crisis is required to explain the availability of professional soldiers and (b) mercenary service among the Greeks of the archaic age was an elite phenomenon.

When seen in a broader comparative perspective, however, neither of these two propositions rests on particularly firm foundations. It is certainly true that poverty regularly figures in the background of mercenaries, from antiquity to modern times. However, more than economic crisis, it is structural and comparative poverty that seems to be conducive to mercenary service. Throughout European history, there are many cases of mercenaries coming from marginal areas, often in the mountains, on the fringes of more organized and richer polities: the Swiss are only the most famous example of a more widespread phenomenon. In these cases, going abroad to serve as a mercenary is a response to a structural condition, not to a specific situation of economic crisis.⁵ We ought not to forget that the Greeks of the archaic age were indeed living on the fringes of much larger

relationship between the Peloponnesian War and the increase in numbers of mercenaries in the fourth century, and the very idea that mercenary service among the Greeks became really widespread only during the fourth century, are effectively called into question.

²Bettalli 1995: 24–27.

³Kaplan 2002: 230; cf. Aymard 1967.

⁴Kaplan 2002: 241: "To be a soldier of fortune, one must not only be able to afford arms, one must also be trained to use them. In addition, one must have the education to function in a foreign society and to make contact, directly or through officers, with the sort of people who are likely to hire mercenaries."

⁵See Kiernan 1965: 122 on the provenance of mercenaries in the late Middle Ages: "Altogether, a striking number of these recruiting grounds lay in mountainous regions on the fringes of Europe,

and better-organized polities, which constantly produced the kind of centralized wealth that makes it possible to hire mercenaries. Seen in this perspective, the real preconditions for the existence of Greek mercenaries were not much different in the fourth century than in the seventh.

As for the idea that mercenary service among Greeks in the archaic age was an elite phenomenon, involving only a small number of upper-class individuals, at first sight the evidence that supports this view is rather convincing. The poets Archilochus and Alcaeus may have served as mercenaries, as certainly did Alcaeus' brother Antimenidas, who probably fought in the army of Nebuchadnezar II that conquered Ashkelon in 601.⁶ Archilochus, Alcaeus, and Antimenidas would all qualify as upper class, and the same is usually maintained of the East Greek mercenaries who inscribed their names on the colossus of Ramses II at Abu Simbel in 593, since they were literate.⁷ A further illustrious case is Pedon, who served under Psammetichus I in the mid-seventh century and was richly rewarded by the pharaoh—although no one knows how rich he was when he left Greece for Egypt.⁸ Yet such evidence does not prove the point. The presence of upper-class individuals as officers, and even in the rank and file, of a mercenary army, is an absolutely normal phenomenon, for which historical parallels can easily be found: for instance the cases of Swiss and South-German (*Landsknechte*) infantry in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.⁹ In neither of these cases would anyone think of qualifying mercenary service as an elite activity: upper-class individuals simply formed a minority in a world in which social hierarchies were quite volatile anyway.

In this connection, it is crucial to distinguish between the phenomenon itself and its perception and depiction from the point of view of the soldiers of fortune themselves. The use of words such as *epikouroi* or *xenoi* to designate mercenaries points to a tendency to assimilate mercenary service to aristocratic reciprocity and gloss over the disqualifying fact that the mercenary soldier was in a relationship to his employer that made him dangerously similar to a hired worker;¹⁰ this should be interpreted as evidence that Greek mercenaries subscribed to the ideology of the archaic aristocracy, which they clearly did. Witness how Alcaeus describes

inhabited by alien peoples such as Celts or Basques. In an age when the cultivators of the settled plains had been disarmed by their noble 'protectors,' these sturdy, needy hillmen were still ready for war." On the economics of mercenary service in Switzerland, see Marchal 1991: 21, and compare Roy's explanation of the economic and demographic implications of mercenary service in classical Arcadia, Roy 1999: 347–349.

⁶On Antimenidas and his adventures in the Levant, see Alcaeus fr. 48 and 350 L.-P. and Kaplan 2002: 235.

⁷Haider 1996: 107–108. The inscriptions are republished in Haider 2001.

⁸Haider 1996: 100–101 and 2001: 200–201.

⁹See Baumann 1994: 13–47.

¹⁰The euphemistic nature of most words designating Greek mercenaries is well discussed by Kaplan (2002: 230–234). Euphemistic designations are extremely common in the history of mercenaries; cf. for example the name *Reisläufer*, "travelers," used by Swiss mercenaries in the early modern age.

his brother's deeds or how Pedon characterizes the prize he received from the pharaoh. However, this does not imply that all or even most mercenaries were upper class—and incidentally, this way of “disguising” the nature of mercenary service, far from being typical only of the archaic age, is also clearly recognizable in the relations between Cyrus the Younger and his Greek *condottieri*, in which the language of aristocratic reciprocity figures prominently.¹¹ After all, we ought not to forget that what made Greek soldiers attractive for foreign employers was almost certainly their use of hoplite weapons and tactics, and hoplites would be rather less effective if fighting either alone or in small numbers: from this point of view, it seems unwise to interpret mercenary service among Greeks in the archaic period as an elite phenomenon of marginal quantitative relevance.¹²

One further point mentioned by Kaplan as suggesting an aristocratic background for archaic Greek mercenaries has to be considered: that is, the ability to afford the weapons and the training to use them. Even here, a closer look may suggest a more nuanced interpretation. How exactly one should define the economic background of those citizens who could afford the hoplite armor in the archaic polis is a matter for debate. Most scholars would assume that the hoplite phalanx included what we might anachronistically call the middle class, that is, not only the richest members of the community. This consensus may be in need of revision,¹³ but the point is not decisive in our perspective. More importantly, it has to be pointed out that the reasons that should have restricted the pool of potential mercenary soldiers among the archaic Greeks, as outlined by Kaplan, are not specific to archaic Greece: the weapons or the time to learn how to use them did not become significantly less expensive in the late classical age, when everybody would agree mercenary service was a mass phenomenon.¹⁴ On the one hand, it is clear that, while a complete panoply was normally necessary to fight in the front rows of a phalanx, soldiers in the rear rows may have been less than lavishly outfitted.¹⁵ On the other, in ancient Greece as in many other times and places, professional soldiers were certainly ready to invest in their weapons rather more than normal citizens and had more occasions to acquire them, for instance as booty. To conclude the negative part of the argument, there does not seem to be any decisive reason to subscribe to the view that in the archaic period conditions would not favor the existence of large numbers of mercenaries among

¹¹ See Herman 1987: 97–101.

¹² See Bettalli 1995: 101–105 for some judicious reflections on this point. This is not the place to discuss the recent attempts by Hans van Wees (2000 and 2004: 169–183) at downdating the introduction of the closed formation to the end of the archaic age. The present author would tend to share the skepticism of Schwartz (2002), whose conclusions seem strengthened by the early depiction of a phalanx on a Cypro-Phoenician silver bowl discussed below (and not considered by van Wees).

¹³ See now van Wees 2001.

¹⁴ The little evidence available concerning the cost of the panoply is assembled by Franz (2002: 351–353). See also Jarva 1995: 148–149, suggesting that the cost of weapons in archaic Greece may be generally overestimated by scholars.

¹⁵ The suggestion has been advanced many times; see recently Jarva 1995: 125–126 and 138.

the Greeks and that therefore archaic mercenaries were just a small number of aristocrats.

On the positive side, a closer look at the evidence suggests that the phenomenon was indeed widespread during the archaic period. Even if we restrict our attention to the best known case, that of the East Greek and Carian mercenaries serving the pharaohs of the XXVI (Saite) dynasty (664–525), literary evidence points to figures that run in the tens of thousands for the number of soldiers involved.¹⁶ But there is more. Alcaeus' verses about his brother Antimenidas have been joined by a growing body of evidence from the Near East, showing that, from the mid-seventh century to the third quarter of the sixth, Egypt was far from being the only employer of Greek and Carian mercenaries. There is now reason to believe that, by the late seventh century, Greek mercenaries were serving not only in the Egyptian and Babylonian armies,¹⁷ but also in those of Tyre and of the kings of Judah. They had been settled in various fortresses in southern Palestine: Ziklag, Timnah, Mesad Hashaviah, Arad, and in Tell Kabri, southeast of Tyre. Their presence is attested by large quantities of Greek pottery and weapons, and also by archival documents from Arad mentioning the apportioning of wine and oil to some seventy-five Greek mercenaries.¹⁸ The documents probably date to the year 597, just before the fortress of Arad was destroyed, presumably by the Babylonian army of Nebuchadnezzar II, in the same campaign that led to the first siege of Jerusalem. Both in the case of Tell Kabri and in those of the Judean fortresses, we have to do with small contingents of soldiers. However, taken together these cases suggest that, at least from the mid-seventh century, Greek mercenaries must have been quite a common sight in the eastern Mediterranean.

To sum up, such evidence as has been brought to bear so far on the problem of Greek mercenaries in the eastern Mediterranean shows that this phenomenon was probably more widespread than is often assumed. In view of what has just been said, a reassessment of the historical significance of Greek mercenaries in the archaic period seems both feasible and desirable. It is easy to see how such

¹⁶Hdt. 2.152–154, 163. Archaeological evidence is available in Haider 1996: 92–112 and various contributions in Höckmann and Kreikenbom 2001. It is generally assumed that the Carians of southwestern Anatolia, not known as a seafaring people, became involved in mercenary service because of their contacts with the Greeks who inhabited the coastal portion of their land. Note however that Carian mercenaries may be mentioned as forming part of the palace guard of Jehoiada of Judah (about 837–800; 2 *Kings* 11.4, 19); see Ray 1995: 1189.

¹⁷As a matter of fact at the battle of Karkamish, the decisive victory of Nebuchadnezzar II over the Pharaoh Necho II in 605, Greeks may have been fighting on both sides; see Haider 1996: 93–94. Niemeier (2001: 19–20) republishes the archaeological evidence that has been plausibly connected with the presence of Greek mercenaries in the Egyptian army. Cf. above, 23, n. 6 on Antimenidas in the Babylonian army just a few years later.

¹⁸Evidence on Greek mercenaries in Phoenicia and Palestine is collected in Haider 1996: 75–76; Niemeier 2001: 15–18; Wenning 2001; Niemeier and Niemeier 2002. The ostraca from Arad are published in Aharoni 1981: 12–28; see also 145 on the likely size of the military units involved. They refer to Kittim, the name used in the Bible for Greeks and Cypriots. Since Cypriot mercenaries are not attested otherwise, even in later times, the Kittim of the Arad inscriptions must be Greeks.

a reassessment could have important ramifications for central aspects of archaic Greek cultural history; for instance, given the proportions of the phenomenon and the fact that upper-class Greeks, while most probably not making up the majority of Greek mercenary troops, were certainly involved, mercenary service might turn out to be a major vehicle in the transmission of artifacts, ideas, and knowledge between the cultures of the eastern Mediterranean and of Greece.¹⁹ Mercenaries coming home after having served abroad are well attested, and reflecting on their potential influence on the economy and society of East Greeks of the sixth century opens up new and fascinating avenues of research.

This reassessment must start at the beginning and that is the goal of the present paper, which will discuss what could be called the proto-history of Greek mercenaries, a phase in which evidence is scanty and sparse, at times even controversial. The focus of our attention will be an area generally called North Syria, between Phrygia to the northwest, Urartu to the northeast, Phoenicia and the kingdom of Israel to the south, and the River Euphrates and Assyria to the east, an area which had been a part of the Hittite Empire for much of the second millennium and in the early Iron Age was known to its neighbors as the lands of Khatti and Aram. After the collapse of the Hittite Empire in the thirteenth century, most of this area was probably for a short time under the control of the former Hittite provincial capital, Karkamish, ruled by a dynasty that was related to the old royal dynasty of Khattusha.²⁰ Then gradually the region became a complex and fragmented system of smaller independent states, normally centered around one major city but including also some smaller ones, and ruled by kings. They are often called Neo-Hittite kingdoms, but this definition is to some extent misleading, because it suggests an ethnic homogeneity that is highly doubtful. In terms of material culture, the North-Syrian area was a mixture of Hittite heritage and Aramaean influence coming from the south. The languages used in the inscriptions of these kingdoms were Semitic Aramaic or Indo-European Luwian, sometimes accompanied by a parallel text in Phoenician, and there is no neat border between an Aramaic and a Luwian zone. Most prominent among the North-Syrian kingdoms, besides of course Karkamish on the Euphrates, were Hamath on the Orontes, Sam'al (modern Zincirli), Pattina or 'Unqi in the Amuq plain with its center at Kunulua (modern Tell Tayinat), and farther to the south, in the Syrian-Aramaean area, Damascus. Unlike the Phoenician cities, the Syrian kingdoms were land-oriented, so to speak: some of them did not have access to the sea, and even those which did do not seem to have been particularly interested in asserting themselves as sea-powers or in developing sea trade.

In this political world of medium powers continuously busy forming alliances and fighting against each other, a bigger player started intruding toward the middle

¹⁹ See Kaplan 2002: 241–242; cf. Childs 2001: 124.

²⁰ For this and what follows, see Hawkins 1995a: 1299–1304.

of the ninth century, the Assyrians. Centered on the so-called Assyrian triangle, in the upper valley of the Tigris, the Assyrians had not been able to make their political influence felt beyond the Euphrates since the end of the so-called Middle Assyrian kingdom in the twelfth century. From the late tenth century, the Assyrian kingdom started a powerful phase of expansion that brought it in due course to dominate the whole of the Near East, including Babylon and even Egypt. By the second half of the ninth century, the Assyrians had reached the Euphrates and King Ashurnasirpal II and his successor Shalmaneser III campaigned repeatedly in the North-Syrian area. After a number of rebellions in the conquered lands and a period of stagnation in the first half of the eighth century, the next wave of Assyrian westward expansion came in the second half of the eighth century, when King Tiglath-pileser III conquered all the Syrian kingdoms one after the other and transformed them into Assyrian provinces.²¹ Under Sargon II, even Cyprus recognized Assyrian supremacy.²² Finally, Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal briefly occupied Egypt in the second quarter of the seventh century.²³

At the same time as the world of the North-Syrian kingdoms started experiencing this increasing intrusion by the Assyrians, Greeks seem to have arrived on the coast of the Levant. The earliest Iron Age Greek vases from the Levant may date as far back as the mid-tenth century, but until the mid-eighth century they remain very few and are mostly of rather high quality. The assumption that they had been brought there, probably directly from Greece, by Phoenician traders seems the most reasonable.²⁴ Both the amount of Greek pottery and its pattern of distribution change dramatically around the mid-eighth century. There is one site in particular at the mouth of the River Orontes that is most relevant in this connection. It is generally referred to by its modern name, Al Mina, because it is not known for sure what it was called in antiquity.²⁵ It was found accidentally by a famous Near Eastern archaeologist, Leonard Woolley, the discoverer of Ur. Woolley intended to trace "connections, if such existed, between the early civilizations of the Aegean, in particular that of Minoan Crete, and the more ancient cultural centres of hither Asia."²⁶ In other words, he was looking

²¹ On the difference in Assyrian imperial policy before and after Tiglath-pileser III, see Parpola 2003: 100–101.

²² According to the reconstruction offered in Na'aman 2001, Sargon sent an expedition to Cyprus in 707, at the urging of the king of Tyre, to whom the Cypriot kings had refused to continue to pay tribute.

²³ Note that Egypt may have remained in the Assyrian sphere of influence longer than is often thought; see Smith 1991. I owe this reference to the courtesy of Stephanie Dalley.

²⁴ For a recent inventory of Greek Geometric pottery from the Levant, see Luke 2003: 31–42.

²⁵ However, we may know what the place was called by the Assyrians; see Zadok 1996, who suggests identifying Al Mina with Ah-ta-a, a place mentioned on the recently published fragment of the stele of Tiglath-pileser III from Iran, Tadmor 1994: Stele II B 12'. The suggestion is accepted in Parpola and Porter 2001.

²⁶ Woolley 1938: 1.

for a Bronze-Age harbour, and admittedly the mouth of the River Orontes is a reasonable place to look. However, Woolley found something different: a fairly modest settlement, with a sequence of phases of occupation extending from the second quarter of the eighth century to the fourth century. In the earlier strata, from the eighth century to the early seventh, roughly one half of the pottery found was Greek, and about a third of the remaining was Cypriot.²⁷ Unfortunately, no tombs associated with the settlement have been found, and so we lack important evidence that might have helped us determine the origin of the people living in Al Mina between the second half of the eighth century and the beginning of the seventh. Recently, some scholars have doubted the presence of Greeks at Al Mina and in general denied that Greek traders were active in the Levant before a much later period. It has to be recognized that an excavation conducted with more modern criteria could have yielded clearer evidence as to the ethnic origins of Al Mina's settlers. However, the arguments brought against the idea that Greeks were among them often seem to derive more from *a priori* assumptions than from the evidence, such as it is. The fact that at Al Mina local building materials and techniques were used can hardly be taken as evidence of ethnic origins,²⁸ and in any case, the presence of local people in the settlement would be hardly surprising, especially if Luke is right to suggest that Al Mina was under the political control of the kingdom of 'Unqi. It is certainly possible that non-Greek pottery is underrepresented in the inventory of finds from Al Mina because it was kept by the excavator less frequently than Greek pottery was, but this cannot be a reason to reject the evidence altogether.²⁹ The fact remains that the amount and proportion of Greek pottery of all kinds, not only of high quality, sets Al Mina clearly apart from all other settlements of the Levant and makes the presence of Greeks at least a very strong probability.³⁰ At any rate, the conception of Al Mina as a Greek colony, comparable to the Greek foundations in the western Mediterranean,

²⁷ On Al Mina, see now the comprehensive study of Luke (2003). On the early levels and their pottery, see especially Boardman 1990 and 1999a, and Kearsley 1995 and 1999. Kearsley has lowered the date of the earliest Greek pottery from the site by half a century, but this lower chronology could have unacceptable implications for the chronology of other sites in the Levant; cf. Fantalkin 2001. For more reasons to suspect that the current chronology of Greek Geometric pottery might be in need of a revision upwards, see Ridgway 2004: 19–22.

²⁸ Compare Bonatz 1993: 129–130; Luke 2003: 23–24; and Kearsley 1999: 127–128. Cf. Wilson 1976: 400–401 on the impossibility of distinguishing Scandinavian settlements in early mediaeval England based on the building technique.

²⁹ Ironically, it has seldom been remarked that the same explanation could apply to the absence of Greek cooking ware from the record of Al Mina; see Waldbaum 1997: 8.

³⁰ Even J. Waldbaum, who is in general very skeptical about the presence of Greeks in the Levant, admits (1997: 6) that the amount and proportion of Greek pottery at Al Mina “may have some significance” as an indicator. Note also Luke 2003: 44: about 1,500 known Greek Geometric imports from Al Mina as opposed to about 200 sherds from its hinterland and some 190 from the rest of the Levant.

although almost certainly wrong, long dominated the scholarship,³¹ which posed the questions where did these Greeks come from and what were they doing there.

An answer to the first question took a long time for scholars to find. Since Woolley was not an expert in Greek pottery, he entrusted the publication of his finds to other scholars and the result was that a comprehensive publication of the finds never appeared. However, improved knowledge of Greek Geometric pottery since the 1950s enabled John Boardman to recognize that most of the early Greek pottery from Al Mina came from the island of Euboea with a much smaller proportion from the Cyclades and the Greek cities of Asia Minor.³² If this second provenance is more or less what one would expect, the first was viewed earlier as rather surprising. However, the progress of archaeological research in Euboea itself and also in southern Italy, where the Euboeans founded in Campania the first Greek settlements of what was to become known as Magna Graecia, showed that precisely in the eighth century the Euboeans had been at the forefront of Greek expansion in the Mediterranean, in terms of both trade relations with the East and of trade and settlement in the West.³³ Indeed, Boardman went so far as to assign to Al Mina a key role in the diffusion in the Aegean and in the western Mediterranean of objects from northern Syria, mostly bronzes, ivories, and seals, whose distinctive style would be the main source of inspiration for the rise of the orientaling style in Greek art. This explains also what interested the Euboeans in Al Mina: trade. As a matter of fact, Al Mina figures regularly in discussions of Greek ports of trade or emporia, settlements abroad that were not city-states. Interestingly, the archaeological evidence provides satisfactory answers to the question of what the Greeks acquired in the Levant, but it is not nearly as eloquent as to what the Greeks sold. One might guess that, among other things, the Ionians were already trading slaves, as they did later according to the "Lamentation over Tyre" in the book of Ezekiel (27:13).³⁴

Before leaving Al Mina and the Greek traders in the Levant in the eighth century, it is worth stressing that so far no other settlement has produced a record that closely matches that of Al Mina. The presence of Greek traders has been suggested for other settlements slightly farther to the south, especially Ras el-Bassit and Tell Sukas, where eighth- or early seventh-century Greek pottery has been found. However, nowhere is the proportion of Greek vases in this early period in the same range as at Al Mina. Greek traders were very likely active at

³¹ See references in Luke 2003: 1–3.

³² See now Boardman 1999a, with references to his earlier works.

³³ See Ridgway 1992 and Giangiulio 1996: 498–503, emphasizing the connection between early Euboean presence in the Levant and in the West.

³⁴ See Liverani 1991 and, in general on the "Lamentation over Tyre" and its origin, Greenberg 1997: 568–569 with references. A further possibility, suggested to me by Stephanie Dalley, is that the Greeks exported silver, extremely scarce in the Near East. Of course, the two are not mutually exclusive.

Tell Sukas and Ras el-Bassit from the mid-seventh century, and perhaps some may have been there even earlier, but this cannot be more than speculation at present.³⁵

Trade was certainly not the only activity in which Greeks were engaged in the Levant in the second half of the eighth century. We are lucky enough to possess a small but extremely explicit corpus of documents, mostly emanating in different ways from the Assyrian court, which throws a clear and consistent light on Greek activities. The first one is a letter sent by an Assyrian provincial officer to King Tiglath-pileser III, probably around 738–732.³⁶ The text appears to be rather difficult to read as published translations diverge significantly:

To the king my lord (from) your servant Qurdi-Ashur-lamur.

The Ionians came (and) attacked the cities of Samsimuruna,³⁷ Harisu, and [x x x]. A cavalryman came to the city of Dana[bu] (to report this). I gathered up the available men and went (after them). (The Ionians) did not get anything. When they saw my troops, they got into their boats and [disappeared] into the middle of the sea. After my [departure . . .].

. . . he is [in the har]bor³⁸ of the city³⁹ of [x x x]. As for me, before I go up to the city of [x x x] I shall build up (the defenses) of the city of [Dan]abu. All the Itu'ayan (troops) that I have and the Itu'ayans who are coming, I shall settle there.⁴⁰

To the king my lord your servant Qurdi-ili-lamur.

The people of the land Iauna came. They have done battles in the cities Usi, Harisu, and . . . He (*sc.* the ruler of Iauna?) has come to the king's city. The soldiers *are free of tax obligations*. He is *detained in* . . . I have come back. *Let no one . . . until the forces [arrive] in the ships . . . in the middle of a rebellion . . .*

They came up . . . the Itu'a (troops) . . . *into my presence*. Let them [*bring*] the Itu'a (troops) (and) make them go inside.⁴¹

Here for the first time we meet a form of what will be for centuries to come the name of the Greeks in the Near East: *Iaunaya*, obviously derived from the early form of the name of the Ionians, *Iavones*.⁴² The three "cities" they had

³⁵The evidence for Tell Sukas is summarized in Riis 1982. For Ras el Bassit, see Courbin 1986, 1991, and 1993.

³⁶First published in Saggs 1963: 77–78. For the date of the letter, see Lanfranchi 2000: 15, n. 31. I am particularly grateful to Stephanie Dalley for her advice on this text. In her view, Parker's translation and Parpola's transliteration, on which the translation is based, are far too optimistic. In the following notes some of her conjectural readings will be mentioned. Italics in the translations indicate uncertain readings.

³⁷Samsi[muruna], S. Dalley.

³⁸He is (?) [in the har]bor (?), S. Dalley

³⁹Country, S. Dalley.

⁴⁰Translation Parker 2000; transliteration by S. Parpola.

⁴¹Translation Saggs 2001.

⁴²See Brinkman 1989 and Rollinger 1997. Rollinger (2001: 237–243) offers a comprehensive inventory of references to Ionians in the Assyrian sources. Add now the place-name Ia-u-na that appears in a letter from Nimrud recently published in Saggs 2001: 166–167.

attacked must have been rather minor settlements: of the two names preserved on the tablet, one is not known in any other source, but the other appears again in documents of later Assyrian kings, which suggests that it was situated not far from the Phoenician city of Sidon.⁴³ Qurdi-Ashur-lamur, if this reading of his name is correct, appears in other documents from Nimrud; he was either an Assyrian provincial governor or, more likely, a high-ranking military officer in charge of relations with the kingdom of Tyre, which was in this period an Assyrian protectorate.⁴⁴

It is purely by chance that we hear about this raid by Ionians in Phoenicia, but in all likelihood this was not an isolated episode. It has been astutely observed that Qurdi-Ashur-lamur's letter reads as if this were not the first time he was confronted with the reprehensible initiatives of the Iauunaya.⁴⁵ Nor was this their last appearance on the coast of the Levant. This we know thanks to the so-called Annals of Sargon II, inscribed on the walls of his palace in the newly founded capital Dur Sharrukin (modern Khorsabad). One part of their entry for the seventh year of Sargon's reign, 715, reads as follows:⁴⁶

In order to [conquer the Ionians, who live] in the midst of the sea, who since long [in the past] used to kill the inhabitants [of the city] of Tyre (and) [of the land] of Que and to *interrupt* commercial traffic, I attacked them at sea [with ships *from the land of*] *Hatti* and destroyed them all, big and small, with my weapon.

This is a very fragmentary text, but most of the supplements are based on other texts from Dur Sharrukin, and can be regarded as reasonably trustworthy:

Sargon, . . . the expert warrior, who like a fisherman in the midst of the sea caught the Ionians like fishes and gave peace to the land of Que and to the city of Tyre.⁴⁷

Palace of Sargon, . . . who caught like fishes the Ionians, who live in the midst of the sea.⁴⁸

I caught like fishes the Ionians, who live in the midst of the sea of the sunset.⁴⁹

Palace of Sargon, . . . who caught like fishes the Ionians who live in the midst of the sea.⁵⁰

According to the Annals of Sargon, the Ionians had made a habit of attacking Phoenicians and Cilicians (Que is both the name of the Assyrian province

⁴³ For the location of Samsimuruna, and also for the reading, see Parpola 1970: 303. Harisu has not been identified yet; see Parpola 1970: 152.

⁴⁴ See Lanfranchi 2000: 15 and n. 30. The new reading of the name in Saggs 2001 would exclude the identification of the sender of our letter with the Assyrian officer known from other documents. See, however, Van Buylaere 2002, offering sensible reasons to retain the reading as Qurdi-Ashur-lamur, which Saggs himself (1963: 77–78) originally did.

⁴⁵ Parker 2000: 75 and Rollinger 2001: 239.

⁴⁶ Annals, lines 117–119. Translations of the inscriptions of Sargon are based on Fuchs 1994.

⁴⁷ Sargon Cylinder, line 21.

⁴⁸ Inscription on a colossal man-headed bull, line 25.

⁴⁹ Little Annals, line 15.

⁵⁰ Threshold inscription, type 4, line 34.

corresponding to Plain Cilicia and of the capital of that province), jeopardizing commercial traffic. This sort of activity upset the Assyrians, and certainly not out of philanthropic feelings. Since the Late Bronze Age, the Phoenician cities had been in a relationship of mutual dependence with the great powers inland, Egypt and Babylon in particular, supplying them with luxury items such as ivory and textiles, but also with timber and metals. In the ninth century, Assyria increasingly took over the role that had once belonged to Egypt, entering into a kind of symbiotic relationship with the Phoenician cities.⁵¹ The Ionians seem to have disrupted this system sufficiently for the current beneficiaries, the Assyrians, to decide to intervene directly. Sargon had ships built somewhere on the North Syrian coast (which the Assyrians mention by the archaic name of “land of the Hittites”) and from there moved against the Ionians and, as he says, caught them like fishes in a net, or, as the *Annals* say in a less poetic way, slaughtered them to a man. The shorter allusions to this episode in other inscriptions from various parts of Sargon’s palace add a fascinating insight into how a land power perceives a seaborne enemy: the Ionians are like elusive animals of the waters, and Sargon is like a fisherman who lifts them out of their element into an environment where they are defenseless.⁵² Obviously, the land these Ionians came from lay beyond the borders of the world which the Assyrian king either knew or was interested in conquering. It actually marked the boundary of the Assyrian-dominated *oikoumene*.⁵³ It is reasonably clear what was happening. Ionian Greeks were operating in the Levant, attacking probably both ships and coastal settlements, in a word, practicing a rudimentary but rather common sort of sea power: piracy. It is harder to tell exactly where they had their bases. A number of reasons suggest that we must exclude Cyprus.⁵⁴ The coast of Rough or Western Cilicia, where we know that Greek settlements existed from very early on, is probably the best candidate.⁵⁵ The area lends itself to this sort of activity, so much so that Cilician pirates would become legendary in the Hellenistic period.

Sargon’s victory, which was not necessarily as devastating and conclusive as his own propaganda tells us, was not the last chapter of the story.⁵⁶ Certainly

⁵¹ See Frankenstein 1979: esp. 269–273. This explains also the markedly different treatment meted out by the Assyrians to the Phoenician and North-Syrian cities respectively and the fact that Phoenicia was never turned into an Assyrian province.

⁵² For a fascinating investigation of this image in Greece and the Near East, see Ceccarelli 1993: esp. 39–42 for Assyrian parallels.

⁵³ Rollinger 2001: 240.

⁵⁴ See Lanfranchi 2000: 14; *contra* Elayi and Cavigneaux 1979, whose interpretation however cannot stand in the light of Fuchs’s new edition of Sargon’s texts.

⁵⁵ On the two Samian colonies of Nagidos and Kelenderis, mostly considered lairs of pirates rather than full-blown colonies (which makes sense if one looks at their location, on a steep coast without a hinterland), see Shipley 1987: 41 with further references and Haider 1996: 85.

⁵⁶ Scholars have long debated whether a man called Iamani (Ia-ma-ni, *Little Annals* 95) or Iadna (Ia-ad-na, *Annals* 246), who usurped the throne at Ashdod in 711 and was expelled by Sargon, should be considered a Greek: the name does look similar to the Assyrian name of the Ionians (Ia-am-na-a-a).

Ionian pirates were not normally the kind of enemy an Assyrian king bothered to mention in his royal inscriptions. However, thanks to the work of the Babylonian historian Berossos, living in the early third century, we know that Sargon's successor, Sennacherib, fought against Greeks in Cilicia. According to one version, Sennacherib defeated there a Greek army; according to another he turned to flight a fleet of Ionians off the coast of Cilicia. Whatever happened, these events can easily be connected with Sennacherib's campaign in Cilicia in 696.⁵⁷ The story, which ultimately seems to go back to good cuneiform sources,⁵⁸ receives indirect confirmation from Sennacherib's royal annals, where in the year 694 Ionian sailors are mentioned.⁵⁹ Sennacherib had captured and then enrolled them forcibly in the Assyrian army, according to a traditional Assyrian custom. It would be particularly interesting to know if the land battle can be taken seriously or should be regarded simply as a duplication of the sea battle. After Sennacherib's reign, we have no more information for clashes between Assyrians and Ionians.⁶⁰

Discussions about the presence of Greek traders on the coast of the Levant devote surprisingly little attention to these episodes, in spite of the fact that, in the archaic Greek world, the line dividing trade from piracy was clearly a thin one, and the same people could easily fall on different sides of it on different occasions.⁶¹ In the Homeric world, when some persons of consequence arrived by sea in a new place, after being treated to the rituals of guest-friendship they would be asked, formulaically, "are you traveling for your own business, or are you pirates?"⁶² As Thucydides observed (1.5.1–2), this question implies that being taken for a pirate was not considered offensive, and actually there is abundant evidence that raiding and piracy were perfectly compatible with the ethos of Homeric warriors—indeed, they were seen as manifestations of prowess.⁶³ Interestingly, what was really taken as an offence was to be considered a professional trader,⁶⁴ which is why in the Homeric formula the first alternative is phrased so tactfully, "are you traveling for your own business?" rather than directly "are you traders?" Nevertheless, a

Classicists seem more inclined to think that Iamani was a Greek (see, e.g., Haider 1996: 81–82), although occasionally some Assyriologists voice the same opinion (see, e.g., Mayer 1996: 480–481). However, recent research seems increasingly inclined to consider Iamani the Assyrian form of a Semitic personal name: see Lanfranchi 2000: 13, n. 20; Rollinger 2001: 245–248; and Radner 2000.

⁵⁷ On these events, see Berossos *FgrHist* 680 F 7,31 and Abydenus *FgrHist* 685 F 5,6. See further Lanfranchi 2000: 24–29 and Rollinger 2001: 241–242.

⁵⁸ See Dalley 1999.

⁵⁹ See Frahm 1997: 117 and Lanfranchi 2000: 28, n. 92.

⁶⁰ It is difficult to be sure what exactly lies behind Esarhaddon's claim to have received tribute from the kings of the land of the Ionians; see Rollinger 2001: 243.

⁶¹ See, for example, Mele 1979: 43–44 and Tandy 1997: 74.

⁶² Hom. *Od.* 3.72, 9.253; *H. Ap.* 453.

⁶³ See Jackson 1995: 97–98; de Souza 1999: 17–19; and Crielaard 2002: 265, with further references.

⁶⁴ Maynard Maidman points out to me similar attitudes to traders in the Old Testament: see Hosea 12:8 and Greenberg 1997: 585.

Homeric nobleman would on occasion man a ship with his *betairoi* and embark on an overseas expedition whose goals definitely included trade.⁶⁵ As early as the ninth century, this social configuration is epitomized by an extremely rich burial from the Iron Age necropolis at Lefkandi, in Euboea, where the ashes of the deceased were laid in a bronze cauldron and accompanied by weapons, by a number of precious objects of Near Eastern provenance, among which were a North Syrian cylinder seal, and by a set of stone weights.⁶⁶ But no example can illustrate this point better than the people of the Ionian city of Phocaea, famous traders whose story is told by Herodotus (1.163–7). When the Persian general Harpagus laid siege to their city, around 540, they decided to relocate en masse rather than surrender. They first tried to buy some small islands off the Turkish coast from the people of Chios, but the Chians were afraid that a Phocaeen port there would cut them off from trade, and so refused to sell the islands. Thereupon the Phocaeans sailed west to Corsica, close to one of the trade routes that linked Etruria and Carthage, and started engaging in piracy to an extent sufficient to trigger a massive reaction by Carthaginians and Etruscans, who attacked the Phocaeans with their war fleets and put an end to their industry.

If the last part of the story recalls the dealings of the Assyrian kings with the Ionians, the first portion seems to belong to a different chapter of Greek history, one devoted to Ionian trade in the archaic age. However, the two belong together, and the Phocaeans are not an isolated case: those Greeks who were most famous as traders in the archaic age regularly enjoyed a more dubious reputation too, as pirates. Prominent members of this class are the Samians and the Aeginetans and, incidentally, at least the latter were probably slave traders.⁶⁷ In general, slave trade must have been an obvious component of the activities of these kinds of raiders-traders.

It is time to draw a preliminary conclusion. Greek traders based on the coast of North Syria and Greek pirates attacking Cilicia and Phoenicia were at the very least closely related and, in many cases, probably the same people.⁶⁸ They came mostly from Euboea and the Cyclades, less often from Asia Minor. The Assyrians called them “Ionians,” which is the only feasible common name for Greeks from those areas.⁶⁹ That they were not called some transliterated form of “Hellenes,” as

⁶⁵ See the classical formulation in Humphreys 1978: 165–167.

⁶⁶ Popham and Lemos 1995.

⁶⁷ See Shipley 1987: 41–46 and Figueira 1981: 202–214, respectively.

⁶⁸ Rollinger 2001: 256. The pre-modern world offers interesting historical parallels for this mix of trade and piracy; for a particularly obvious case, the Vikings, see, for example, Boyer 1992: esp. 137. In general terms, it seems that the study of the Greeks in the Mediterranean context of the Iron Age would profit from extended comparison with the history of the Vikings, especially in the ninth and tenth centuries A.D. I am very grateful to Robin Fleming for suggestions and clarifications on this topic.

⁶⁹ Rollinger (2001: 248–249) is certainly right to caution that “Ionians” of the eighth century may not have been the same as in the late archaic age; however, it seems perverse to assume *a priori* that they were not, considering that—as we have seen—the archaeological evidence is compatible with the notion that the lamnaya of the Assyrian documents actually came mostly from areas that would

the Greeks as a whole later called themselves, is extremely interesting but perhaps not surprising.

In all likelihood, this milieu of Ionian trader-pirates active in the Levant during the second half of the eighth century is where the roots of the phenomenon of Greek mercenaries lie. The presence of Greek mercenaries in the eastern Mediterranean is reasonably well documented from the second quarter of the seventh century onwards. According to Herodotus, Pharaoh Psammetichus I owed his throne to Ionians and Carians, who used to raid the Delta as pirates. Psammetichus hired them as mercenaries and was thereby able to defeat his rivals (2.152). Herodotus' report offers a telling example of how easily raiders could turn into mercenaries. The presence of Ionian mercenaries in Egypt from the time of Psammetichus is confirmed by a statue dedicated by Pedon. Whatever the gift of the city really means,⁷⁰ Pedon had obviously served in Psammetichus' army, probably as a high-ranking officer.

Scholars have sometimes wondered how a petty king reigning in the Egyptian Delta should have gotten the idea of hiring mercenaries from Asia Minor, and the conclusion has often been that the mercenaries were supplied by his friend King Gyges of Lydia, who, as we know from Assyrian documents, sent him troops probably in the 640s.⁷¹ However, this view depends too heavily on the Herodotean perspective, which is strongly influenced by Egyptian nationalism and leaves the Assyrians completely out of the picture. As a matter of fact, we happen to know that Psammetichus, like his father Necho, started his career as a vassal of Assyria and owed his power to the support of Ashurbanipal more than anything else.⁷² Haider's suggestion that Psammetichus might have become familiar with Greek and Carian mercenaries serving under the Assyrians is attractive, to say the least.⁷³ It is true that we have no straightforward evidence for the presence of Greek and Carian mercenaries in the Assyrian imperial army, but they may have served in the provincial armies, about whose composition we know much less.⁷⁴ As it happens, a rather garbled piece of evidence could

qualify as Ionian at a later stage. One is rather inclined to speculate that the name "Ionians" included all the Greeks from Asia Minor, as it often does in Herodotus.

⁷⁰ See above, 23, n. 8.

⁷¹ Bettalli 1995: 58; see also Spalinger 1976: 135 and Niemeier 2001: 18 with further references.

⁷² See Spalinger 1976: 136 and Braun 1982: 36. Psammetichus may have remained loyal longer than is sometimes thought: see Smith 1991.

⁷³ Especially since, according to Polyaeus (7.3), Carian mercenaries assisted Psammetichus from the time when he was fighting against the Ethiopian Pharaoh Tantamani, that is, from the very beginning of his reign, when, according to the Assyrian sources, an Assyrian army had defeated the Ethiopian pharaoh and reinstated Psammetichus on the throne of his father Necho; see Spalinger 1976: 136; Haider 1996: 93–94; and Niemeier 2001: 17.

⁷⁴ Cf. the case of the Itu'ayans, Aramaean troops, probably mercenaries, who seem to have served almost exclusively in the provincial armies; see Malbran-Labat 1982: 96–100 and Postgate 1980. On the structure of the Assyrian armed forces and the distinction between the imperial army and provincial armies, see, for example, Fales 2001: 71–76. Note also that Parpola's reading of one of the Nimrud letters would result in Ionians serving under Qurdi-Ashur-lamur; see Saggs 2001:

imply that Ashurbanipal's father Esarhaddon had recruited Greek mercenaries in Cilicia,⁷⁵ and Ionian mercenaries might have been mentioned in a fragmentary text dating to his reign.⁷⁶ It seems that the direct connection between Psammetichus and Gyges is not the only possible explanation for the appearance of Greek mercenaries in Egypt.⁷⁷ However, if we intend to pursue the history of Greek mercenaries in the Near East before the second quarter of the seventh century, we have to tread extremely carefully, since written sources are very scarce and only archaeology can help us further. But sometimes objects can tell interesting stories.

The first object to be considered is a Phoenician silver bowl, now in the British Museum (Plates 1–2).⁷⁸ Objects like this have been found from the Levant all the way to Latium and Etruria. This one was part of the extremely rich assemblage from a chamber tomb near the Cypriot city of Amathus. Its style indicates that it was likely made by a Phoenician craftsman based in Cyprus. In terms of chronology, it is an early example of a group that runs approximately from 710 to 675.⁷⁹ The iconographic repertoire of Phoenician metal bowls of this period is either Egyptianizing or Assyrianizing, or both. On our bowl, for instance, we see two Assyrian royal figures plucking flowers from a stylized palmette, and immediately to the right an infant Harpocrates sitting on a lotus blossom and facing an Egyptian goddess, presumably Isis. Most interesting for us is the third band, which shows an army attacking the imposing walls of a Near Eastern city. The only parallels for a narrative composition of this sort come from Assyrian royal art, from the reliefs and frescoes of the palaces as well as metalwork, all dating from the mid-ninth to the mid-seventh century.⁸⁰ Elements of the iconography recall Assyrian royal sculpture, too, such as the two men on the left cutting down an orchard that we are to understand as belonging to the

155–158 and cf. Parpola 1970: 187, and note that the ethnic name “shi-ia-na-a-a” read by Saggs is not otherwise attested. On the problem of Greek mercenaries in Assyrian service, see the excellent discussion of Rollinger 2001: 251–253 and 256.

⁷⁵ Abidenus *FgrHist* 685 F 5, from the Armenian version of Eusebius' *Chronicle* but probably going back to Berosos; see Haider 1996: 91–92.

⁷⁶ Starr 1990: text 145 line 8, dated around 671 (page lxiii); the document belongs to a group of queries addressed to the sun-god Shamash regarding the loyalty of various military contingents of the Assyrian army, some of them composed of foreign troops. The term *kitru* indicates military help, implying various levels of contact; see Liverani 1982: 59–60 and 1995: 61–62. I thank Stephanie Dalley for advice on this point.

⁷⁷ See Braun 1982: 36–37 and Haider 1996: 92–93.

⁷⁸ Myres 1933; Markoe 1985: 172–174 and plates at pp. 248–249. Two very accurate drawings have been published, one by M. Waterhouse, in Myres 1933: pl. I, Boardman 1999b: 50 and Neri 2000: 26, the other by Anne Searight, in Barnett 1977: 165 and Niemeier 2001: 21.

⁷⁹ Markoe 1985: 151.

⁸⁰ See Childs 1978: 55–56. Not much has been preserved of Assyrian metalwork; the striking frieze decoration of a silver beaker currently in the Miho Museum (Shigaraki, Japan) reproduced in Fales 2001: pl. 14, does recall the Amathus bowl, but cf. Muscarella 2000 arguing forcefully that the beaker is a modern forgery inspired, *inter alia*, by Phoenician metalwork.

city under siege, a motif often found in the pictorial narratives of the campaigns of the Assyrian kings.⁸¹ The two warriors who attack the city from the left carry pointed shields of a kind attested in Cyprus.⁸² Quite surprisingly, if we look at the group of warriors that approaches the city from the right, behind the man with a pointed helmet of Assyrian or Syrian type on his head leaning a ladder against the wall,⁸³ we see four Greek hoplites in close formation, with the full equipment of Greek heavy infantry: crested helmets (possibly with cheek-pieces),⁸⁴ spears, round shields with delicately incised blazons, and greaves.⁸⁵ In fact, this is the earliest depiction of a hoplite phalanx.⁸⁶ It is followed by four bowmen in Assyrian garb, but wearing a headgear that has no clear parallels in Assyrian iconography; finally, two horsemen, again Assyrian by their looks, followed by a chariot drawn by horses with Assyrian trappings and accompanied by a war-dog.⁸⁷ The city under siege is defended by bowmen and by more Greek hoplites.

The implications of this scene are extremely interesting. First of all, neither of the two armies, the one that attacks the city or the one that defends it, can be

⁸¹ See Cole 1997, with evidence from the Assyrian royal inscriptions and from Assyrian reliefs. The most striking parallel, his Fig. 2, comes from the bronze reliefs of the Balawat Gates, on which see below, 38, n. 89.

⁸² See Snodgrass 1964: 56–57.

⁸³ Compare the Syro-Assyrian helmet from Cyprus in Deszö 2001: 58 and pl. 47 (second half of the eighth century) and the pointed helmets of the warriors depicted on a group of Urartian helmets, whose decoration shows strong Assyrian influence: Deszö 2001: 87–89 and pl. 95.

⁸⁴ As described by Barnett (1977: 166), but it is difficult to be sure that what he interprets as cheek-pieces are not in fact Greek-style beards.

⁸⁵ The greaves are visible with some difficulty in the enlarged photograph in Myres 1933: pl. 2. A digital image taken by Susanne Ebbinghaus (Plate 2) shows them very clearly. Note that the shields may seem too small, but the engraver has probably tried to convey the appearance of hoplite shields by hiding the bodies of the warriors, from chin to hip, behind the shields. Compare the bowls from the Regolini Galassi tomb at Cerveteri (Markoe 1985: 194–196), where shields of the same size cover only half of the torsos of the Egyptian-looking warriors who carry them.

⁸⁶ Notice the interlocking legs of the warriors, visually conveying the closed order of the phalanx, a detail that does not occur, to the best of my knowledge, in other depictions of rows of warriors in Phoenician metalwork or in Assyrian art.

⁸⁷ Niemeier (2001: 21) writes of horsemen and archers with dress and helmets of Assyrian type, with no further references; cf. Myres 1933: 35: “the archers have long, Assyrian overcoats, and the horses have fly-whisks on their bridles in the Assyrian fashion.” The best parallel I could find for the coat worn by the archers is the warrior represented on the Neo-Hittite lion hunt relief from Sakça Gözü (close to Sam’al-Zincirli, but probably part of the kingdom of Gurgum or Kummuh; see Hawkins 1995b: 95), dated around 775–750; see Orthmann 1975: pl. 360. However, the archers depicted on the Balawat Gates also wear similar coats (scale armors?), King 1915: pl. XXI, LXXIII. Barnett (1977: 166) comments that the type of headdress worn by the archers, the second horseman, and the two royal figures in the lower register is the same as that worn by the god Melkarth in the stele of Bar-Hadad (Hazael’s son) from Aleppo (see Pritchard 1969: pl. 499), but the resemblance is not very precise. It is worth pointing out that the genies depicted in the inner register of the bowl are dressed exactly in the same way as the archers. One wonders if their appearance should not be interpreted as a sort of pastiche, in which case one might point to parallels for the puzzling headdress in figures such as the genies depicted in the Khorsabad reliefs; see Albenda 1986: pl. 38 and 114.

characterized as Greek. At the very least, the craftsman who made this bowl was familiar with the idea that Greek hoplites could be found fighting in Near Eastern armies, perhaps even on both sides of the same battle.⁸⁸ Of course, it would be particularly interesting to know who the other warriors are whom we see on this most remarkable vessel. As for the attacking army, the most convincing parallels point to North Syria and Assyria,⁸⁹ and they are not so close as to allow us to say with certainty whether this is the Assyrian army or for instance the army of some other place in the Levant. Be that as it may, our bowl strongly suggests that Greek hoplites were fighting in the Levant in the late eighth century, and not only as privateers.⁹⁰ After all, the clear and direct influence of some types of Near Eastern, especially Assyrian, helmets on Greek helmets of the second half of the eighth centuries, best exemplified by the famous Late Geometric helmet from Argos with crescent-shaped crest (Plate 3)⁹¹ and its Assyrian models (Plate 4),⁹² is also most satisfactorily explained by the assumption that Greek warriors had been present in the North Syrian area during the last decades of the eighth century.⁹³

Two last pieces of evidence should allow us to reach a slightly earlier date, and suggest a somewhat unexpected turn to the history of the Ionians in the Near East. The first one is a striking object with a very long history (Plate 5).⁹⁴ It came to light in the excavations of the sanctuary of the goddess Hera on the island of Samos, but it obviously originated elsewhere. It is a horse frontlet, made of

⁸⁸ As they in all likelihood did at the battle of Karkamish in 605: see above, 25, n. 17. In general, it is not unusual to find mercenaries of the same ethnic origin fighting in two opposing armies; see, for example, Baumann 1994: 187–206; cf. the Viking mercenaries hired in mediaeval Britain to fight Viking riders, on which see Keynes 1997.

⁸⁹ Markoe 1985: 173. The only reasonably close parallels that I could find occur on the reliefs of the Balawat gates in the British Museum, which are significantly older, dating to the mid-ninth century; however, these are the only preserved Assyrian bronze reliefs with narrative scenes. See King 1915.

⁹⁰ Greek warriors have been recognized also on a Phoenician silver bowl from the Bernardini tomb of Palestrina (dated to the second quarter of the seventh century) by Neri (2000: 23–26); cf. however Markoe 1985: 132, who thinks the bowl was actually made in Etruria under Phoenician influence.

⁹¹ Courbin 1957: 356–367 and Plate IV. The helmet was part of a panoply including the earliest example of bronze bell corselet, the typical defensive outfit of the hoplites. Based on the associated pottery, Courbin dates the grave to the last quarter of the eighth century.

⁹² The drawing depicts a detail of the frescoes of the Assyrian provincial palace of Til Barsip, from the time of Tiglath-pileser III, east of the Euphrates and south of Karkamish; see Thureau-Dangin and Dunand 1936: 50 for the intriguing suggestion that the soldier depicted is actually an Anatolian (which in their terms means North Syrian) rather than an Assyrian. Cf. the helmet of the Assyrian soldier in Barnett and Falkner 1962: Pl. LXXIII, from the palace of Tiglath-pileser III.

⁹³ See especially Dezső 1998: 37–40, who emphasizes the influence of the Assyrian army remodeled by Tiglath-pileser III on the development of Greek weaponry. On the Assyrian origin of the so-called *Kegelhelm*, see already Snodgrass 1964: 14–16.

⁹⁴ First published by Kyrieleis and Röllig (1988); best known for being reproduced in and on the cover of Burkert 1992.

bronze, of a kind that is documented in the North Syrian area: a similar one comes from the royal palace of Tell Tayinat, and another one can be seen in a rare example of sculpture in the round from Zincirli, ancient Sam'al, probably from the late ninth century.⁹⁵ Such frontlets adorned the heads of the horses harnessed to war chariots, for which the North Syrians were famous.⁹⁶ Stylistically, North Syria is the area from which our object came,⁹⁷ and this time we can tell for sure that this was the case; however, we can also tell that our object did not travel directly from North Syria to Samos. Along the left side, the frontlet bears a very carefully incised inscription. It is in Aramaic, and it says "That which Hadad gave our lord Hazael from 'Unqi in the year that our lord crossed the river."⁹⁸ In other words, this object was part of the booty taken by King Hazael from the land of 'Unqi or Pattina, a North Syrian kingdom located in the Amuq plain, whose main center, Kunulua, is identified with Tell Tayinat.⁹⁹ Hazael became king of Damascus in 842. Our object must have arrived at his capital city some years later.¹⁰⁰ But this still does not explain how it came to Samos. An object with a royal inscription describing it as booty, obviously part of the royal treasury, does not circulate easily. Yet our object is not an isolated case. Ivories with inscriptions that mark them as parts of Hazael's treasury have been found in the Assyrian cities of Kalhu (modern Nimrud) and Hadattu (modern Arslan Tash).¹⁰¹ Considering that Damascus was conquered and plundered by King Tiglath-pileser III in 732,¹⁰² it may be that the best explanation for the migrations of our objects is that they were taken from Damascus as part of the booty on that occasion.

Regrettably, the Samos frontlet comes from a non-stratified context, which means that we cannot tell exactly when it arrived in the sanctuary. For all we know, it may have been in circulation for almost a century after 732. But as it happens, a further piece of the same origin allows us to tell that this was probably not the case (Plate 6). It is a blinker, compatible in style and size with the Samos frontlet, which was excavated from the sanctuary of Apollo at Eretria, in Euboea, at the beginning of the last century.¹⁰³ The state of preservation of the Eretria blinker is not nearly as good as that of the Samian frontlet, but the two belong together, and may even have been part of the same apparatus. A radiograph made a few years ago

⁹⁵ Reproduced in Winter 1988: pl. 125.

⁹⁶ See Dalley 1985: 38–39.

⁹⁷ See the detailed discussion by Kyrieleis in Kyrieleis and Röllig 1988: 50–54.

⁹⁸ For the text of the inscription see Eph'al and Naveh 1989: 193–196.

⁹⁹ See Hawkins 1995b: 95. On the kingdom of 'Unqi or Pattina, see Harrison 2001.

¹⁰⁰ In the first years of his reign, Hazael was busy defending Damascus from two Assyrian onslaughts led by Shalmaneser III; see Hawkins 1982: 393–394; Dion 1995: 1285 and 1997: 191–204. On the historical background of the inscriptions, see Harrison 2001: 121.

¹⁰¹ Eph'al and Naveh 1989: 197.

¹⁰² Hawkins 1982: 413–414.

¹⁰³ Charbonnet 1986: 123–124.

showed that the blinker carries almost the same inscription that can be read much more easily on the frontlet.¹⁰⁴ It also came to Damascus as booty from 'Unqi in the third quarter of the ninth century, and in all likelihood it left Damascus on the same occasion as the Samian frontlet, in 732. The blinker from Eretria, excavated in the first years of the twentieth century, lacks a stratigraphic context, but luckily a second, almost identical, blinker has been found in excavations at Eretria in the 1980s, and this time with a proper stratigraphy, offering a *terminus ante quem* for its arrival in the late eighth century.¹⁰⁵ In all likelihood, then, the inscribed blinker came to the sanctuary of Apollo just a few years after the sack of Damascus.

In theory, it is just possible that two Greek traders, one from Samos, one from Eretria, had bought these two objects from some Assyrian soldiers for an amphora of wine, but this is not a very likely scenario. Horse trappings were dedicated to gods who had something to do with horses and their taming, such as Athena and Poseidon, but Apollo and Hera do not quite fit the bill. On the other hand, the military nature of our objects could put them into a category of offerings that are common in sanctuaries of all Greek gods, that is, weapons and pieces of armour, looted from the enemy and dedicated as a thank offering for the victory. On the whole, the best way to make sense of our objects' presence in the sanctuaries of Apollo at Eretria and of Hera at Samos is to assume that they were intended as dedications of weapons looted from the enemy. In this scenario, the people who dedicated them must have fought in the army of Tiglath-pileser and taken part in the conquest of Damascus.¹⁰⁶

The blinkers from Eretria and the frontlet from Samos are part of a slightly larger group of objects, which includes four more blinkers and one frontlet from Samos and two frontlets and one blinker from the sanctuary of Athena at Miletos.¹⁰⁷ They all belong together in terms of chronology and style, and it seems reasonable to assume that the two inscribed examples point to the historical context in which all these objects made their way to the Greek sanctuaries where they were found. The idea that these North Syrian horse trappings reached the Aegean during the second half of the eighth century rather than in the ninth, when they were made, is reinforced by the occurrence in the Samian Heraion of late eighth-century Assyrian horse trappings, which also seem most easily explained as dedications of Greeks who had fought in the Near East in this

¹⁰⁴The inscription was first found by Charbonnet (1986: 140–144); independently of each other, Bron and Lemaire (1989) and Eph'al and Naveh (1989) recognized that Charbonnet's reading was to be corrected and that in fact the blinker bore the same inscription as the Samos frontlet.

¹⁰⁵The context in which the blinker was found is described very accurately by Charbonnet (1986: 119–122).

¹⁰⁶The possibility has been suggested by Burkert (1992: 163, n. 14), Buchholz (1994: 44–45), and Childs (2001: 124, n. 50).

¹⁰⁷See Ebbinghaus 2005: 210–212. The objects are published in Held 2000: 131–134 and Jantzen 1972: 58–62. The frontlet from Miletus carries a scarcely legible Luwian hieroglyphic inscription, in which 'Unqi is apparently mentioned (David Hawkins, personal communication).

period.¹⁰⁸ A similar explanation could easily apply to a group of mace-heads of North Syrian or Assyrian provenance, also dedicated in the Heraion; in their case, there can be no reasonable doubt that they were dedicated as weapons since traders are even less likely to have been their dedicators than in the case of the horse trappings.¹⁰⁹

The presence of Greek mercenary units in the Assyrian armies in the second half of the eighth century would be moderately surprising. Typically, the Assyrians would deport to Assyria and incorporate into their armies thousands of soldiers from the armies they had defeated. By the time of Sargon II, units from the conquered lands served as such, designated with their own ethnic name. We know that units of war chariots from Samaria were serving in the army of Sargon,¹¹⁰ and that people from the Aramaean tribes on the eastern bank of the Tigris also formed part of the royal army from the time of Tiglath-pileser III.¹¹¹ Their position cannot have been significantly different from that of the Greek mercenaries in the armies of the pharaohs of the XXVI dynasty. In theory, the Greek warriors who dedicated these horse trappings might have entered the Assyrian army directly, as mercenaries, or have been made part of it after being captured in war. The second alternative is perhaps less likely, however, since these people were apparently free to travel back home, which would probably not have been possible if they had been deported.¹¹² Needless to say, our two putative Greek mercenaries came from the same areas of Greece as the traders of Al Mina, and they were Ionians, just like the pirates that Sargon caught like fishes. In case the point needs further demonstration, Herodotus' views on the first mercenaries serving for the Pharaoh Psammetichus show that a transformation from pirates into mercenaries was perfectly feasible.¹¹³

If the arguments presented in this paper are accepted, the history of Greek mercenaries begins considerably earlier than is usually thought. Its roots would lie in the activities of pirates-traders from Euboea, the Cycladic islands, and Asia Minor, who seem to have started their business in the Levant in the third

¹⁰⁸ As an interesting parallel, note the large number of ivory horse trappings of Phoenician, North-Syrian, and Cypriot origin found in Nimrud and generally thought to have arrived there in the form of tribute or booty from the campaigns of the Assyrian kings; see Wicke 1999.

¹⁰⁹ On the Assyrian horse trappings and mace-heads from Samos, see Ebbinghaus 2005: 211–213.

¹¹⁰ Dalley 1985: 34–41.

¹¹¹ See Malbran-Labat 1982: 89–101 and Fales 2001: 73–78. For Median mercenaries at the Assyrian court around 673, see Parpola and Watanabe 1988: text 6 (from Liverani 1995).

¹¹² But then, are we sure that people such as the cavalry and chariot officers from the “cavalry tablets” would not have been free to leave the Assyrian army? The definition “deportees” may not capture their status in an adequate fashion: see Fales 2001: 73–78.

¹¹³ The nexus of trade, piracy, and mercenary service suggested in this article has been—with differences in the individual social and ideological configurations—a long-term constant of Mediterranean history; see Horden and Purcell 2000: 386–388. One of the journal's referees suggests that the availability of Greeks for mercenary service abroad may be connected with the steep increase in the population of mainland Greece during the eighth century, on which see now Scheidel 2003.

quarter of the eighth century. They were the ancestors of the Greek mercenaries who fought for almost every single Near Eastern kingdom from the mid-seventh century to the age of Alexander the Great.

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PROTO-HISTORY OF GREEK MERCENARY SOLDIERS

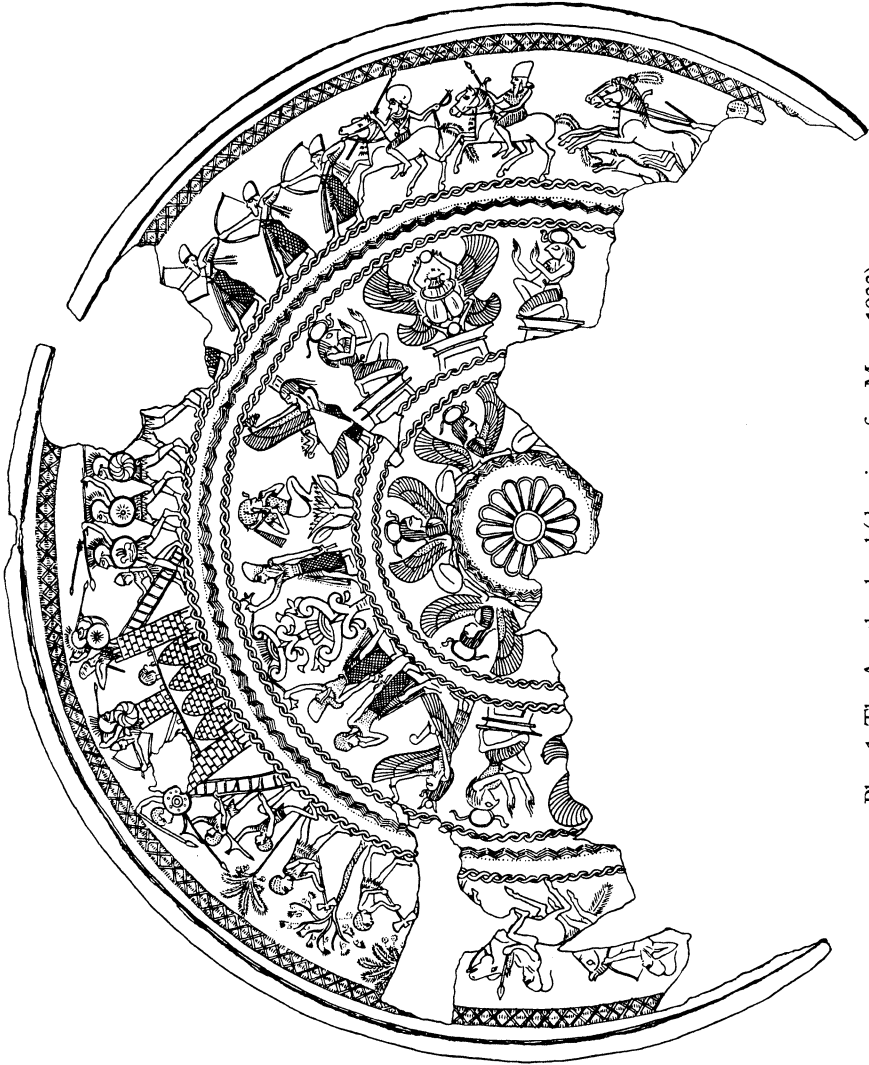


Plate 1. The Amathus bowl (drawing after Myres 1933).

PHOENIX

Plate 2. The Amathus bowl, detail.

Photograph Susanne Ebbinghaus, by permission of the British Museum, Ancient Near East Department.

PROTO-HISTORY OF GREEK MERCENARY SOLDIERS

Plate 3. Geometric helmet from Argos.
École Française d'Athènes, neg. 26353 (E. Serafis).

PHOENIX



Plate 4. Fragmentary fresco from Til Barsip (after Thureau-Dangin and Dunand 1936).

PROTO-HISTORY OF GREEK MERCENARY SOLDIERS

Plate 5. Horse frontlet from Samos.

Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Abteilung Athen, neg. DAI 1990/574

PHOENIX

Plate 6. Horse blinker from Eretria.

Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Abteilung Athen, neg. NM 5799 (Feiler).