CEDAR FORESTS, CEDAR SHIPS

ALLURE, LORE, AND METAPHOR IN THE MEDITERRANEAN NEAR EAST

Sara A. Rich

Contents

PART I

Forests, Trees & Timber
The Realities and Relations of Wood

List of Figures

I feel that I have grasped a plank in the sea. ... Wood is a pleasant thing to think about. It comes from a tree; trees grow and we don't know how they grow. For years and years they grow, without paying any attention to us, in meadows, in forests, and by the sides of rivers – all things one likes to think about. ... I like to think of the tree itself: first the close dry sensation of being wood; then the grinding of the storm; then the slow, delicious ooze of sap. I like to think of it, too, ... a naked mast upon an earth that goes tumbling, tumbling, tumbling all night long. ... Even so, life isn't done with; there are a million patient, watchful lives for a tree, all over the world, in bedrooms, in ships, on the pavement, lining rooms, where men and women sit after tea, smoking cigarettes. It is full of peaceful thoughts, happy thoughts, this tree.

The Mark on the Wall, Virginia Woolf

With august gesture the god shows us how there is need for a whole world of torment in order for the individual to produce the redemptive vision and to sit quietly in his rocking rowboat in mid sea, absorbed in contemplation.

Birth of Tragedy, Friedrich Nietzsche

Insofar as we recognize ourselves – and therefore what is also not ourselves – we will be able to reconstruct its Dasein and begin to see with its eyes and grasp with its tentacles. This attempt to cross from our world into its is, admittedly, a 'metaphorical' enterprise, but it is not 'transcendental.' We are not attempting to vault out of the world but to relocate into another's. Our concern is not with a 'theory' but with a 'fable,' with leaving the real world for a fabulous one.

Vampyroteuthis infernalis, Vilém Flusser & Louis Bec

Preface

This is a book about trees, the stuff they can make, and the relationships between the two. The first seeds of this book were sown at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and they sprouted and flourished at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven. Cornell University and the Cyprus-American Archaeological Research Institute provided seasonal nourishment through periodic fertilizing rains while the seedling became a sapling. At Maritime Archaeology Trust, the tree was allowed to fully develop, with the assistance of occasional pruning at the University of Wales-Trinity St. David. Finally, the tree was felled, and at Appalachian State University, its form was hewn into a ship of sorts. Funny how both ships and books are 'launched.'

Following my doctoral defense in Leuven in 2013, I made a traitorous return to fiction. After crunching more numbers than I'd been used to for awhile, a novel and several short stories were published that fall under the vague category of 'speculative' or 'weird' fiction. It seems that most of my life has been an attempt at balancing my scientific and artistic engagements, and this book is no exception. I fear though that more than a few readers will wonder how the speculative fictions I have written are methodologically different when the aim is creative literature or academic literature. It is true that elements of creativity and science permeate both, and that often the divisions between them, like so many other bifurcations, are more than a little hazy.

At the short-lived climax of my art career, my sculptures were largely composed of found objects. These discarded objects (carcasses, keys, leaves, fabrics, music boxes, rail spikes, scraps of letters) accumulated and amassed and ruminated until I was able to incorporate them into a multi-sensory, multi-dimensional, multi-media narrative, i.e., an assemblage. My fiction writing works much the same way: a theme, a setting, a protagonist, a conflict, a distortion of time, a great deal of research and writing, assembled into a narrative. And in fact, so does my nonfiction, academic writing; in the case presented here, the theme and protagonist are the same: cedar wood. The difference then between my academic and creative pursuits is in the objects being assembled, and possibly, the intention and how the audience is to receive them.

This book is certainly an assemblage in process and product. It has been formed of an unpublished manuscript originally written for the series World Forest History (ANU Press), my doctoral dissertation, philosophical snippets, word play, and the idioms and ideas of many authors whose experience and scope has benefited this text beyond imagination. Whole or in part, I hope that this book will contribute something to the way those of us thinking about 'old stuff' (or new stuff or any stuff) understand, relate to, and relay it – as fundamentally more than a set of qualities, a network of relationships, or a series of accidents – and how viewing things in this way can lead to a meaningful, if unusual, acknowledgment of the unique realities of non-human objects.

Prologue

An Object-Oriented Archaeology
(or, Redefining the 'Archaeological Object')

In an age of ecological awareness we will come again to think of art as a demonic force, carrying information from the beyond, that is, from nonhuman entities such as global warming, wind, water, sunlight and radiation. ... The trouble is, all this art is a translation, a metaphor for something. There is a profound ambiguity in the notion of interpretation, which Socrates notes. What is a just interpretation? What is justice, when it comes to a work of art?

Timothy Morton, Realist Magi*c,* 2013, 21-22

Object potency and speculative fictions

If your house were on fire and you could only take one thing with you, what would it be? This classic conversation starter is evidence that human and non-human thing relations have special and distinct qualities, to the point that it's difficult to choose only one 'thing' that you would want to save from a hypothetical fire. Companion animals go without saying, but the photo album? the heirloom? the holy book? These objects might be considered irreplaceable and thereby uniquely worthy of rescue. But suppose objects could rescue themselves. I had a friend in college whose house burned down in the middle of the night. She did not have the option to take anything with her when she escaped, save her own life and her pajamas. But when going through the rubble, her copy of the Talmud was still perfectly intact, surrounded by a pile of ash. She could not decide whether to attribute this event to divine providence, sheer coincidence, or an ability of the object to spare itself because of how much it meant to her. This object was an important part of her identity, her ontology. But could she have also been a part of its ontology? And if so, could this implicit relationship between two separate objects have been enough to spare it from the fire as she had spared herself?

Archaeologists and (art) historians are surrounded at all times by collections. Libraries, archives, and museums house the evidence that we are one of a few species enamored with the material.[1] Octopi collect, dogs hoard, monkeys learn token values, and humans wonder, what is this power that objects have over species like ours, that makes 'things' so desirable?[2] For humans at least, possession and ownership, whether measured by

---

[1] See, e.g., Olsen *et al.*, *Discipline of Things*, 2012; Olsen, *Defense of Things*, 2010; Buchli, Material culture, 2008, 179; Gosden, Science a foreign country, in Boivin *et al.*, Comments on A. Jones, 2005; Chapman, *Fragmentation in Archaeology*, 2000; Akin, Passionate possession, 1996; Lucas, Forgetting the past, 1997; Stewart, *On Longing*, 1984. For the problems associated with academic hoarding behavior, see Schreiber *et al.* (eds), *Massendinghaltung in der Archäologie*, 2015.

[2] Cf. Gell, Technology of enchantment, 1992, 46, 48. In Stewart, *On Longing*, 1984, 153-154, a difference is proposed between human and rat collections: namely, hoards made by rats and mentally ill people are intrinsic and untied to seriality or acquisition. This categorical difference is dependent on preconceived (and

the acreage of farmland or the length of one's bibliography, are associated with the establishment of identity, prestige, knowledge, security, and power. But in this lauded symbiotic relationship of mutual constitution, objects and owning them 'make' people as much as people make objects and deem them worthy of ownership.[3] By comparison, here the emphasis is not just on the objects people make and own, and how we apply value to them like price tags, or how they change us in turn, but how, through processes of mutual possession, we can actually become 'possessed' by certain objects or materials, 'spirited materials' such as cedar forests and cedar ships.

Of course, certain kinds of objects[4] are more coveted than others based on their perceived value. Raccoons and magpies are attracted to shiny things; dogs are attracted to objects by their smell; people seem to be attracted to objects by their possession: how they have been possessed (historical), how they can become possessed (economic), how they can remain in possession (mnemonic).[5] A history of past possession increases an object's value so that the provenience of a work of art factors into its monetary worth. Likewise, the provenance of the archaeological object gives it contextual value as a primary source record. But the archaeological object's findspot is really only one part of its history or narrative of possession. The materials used for an object's construction also have a provenance, and knowing this, as Eliade has said, 'is equivalent to acquiring a magical power [...] by which [it] can be controlled, multiplied, or reproduced at will.'[6] In other words, an understanding of both the object and its material source provides necessary insight into, not just its 'substance' or its 'essence', but its ontology – its way of being, its reality.[7]

On the other hand, even given the archaeological object's mnemonic value and its intrigue as substance and essence, it is still just time-traveling rejectamenta made either pristine or forgotten again. As Lucas wrote, archaeological objects 'are not constituted within a network of desires or social existence but outside the social or cultural system.'[8] What is once possessed is also consumed, and what is consumed is eventually disposed of, so perhaps we have to look beyond the 'social existence' to get at the essence, the 'being *qua* being' (ὂν ἢ ὄν), of disposed and forgotten objects.[9] Ancient objects incite

---

out-dated) notions of quality and aesthetic exclusivity.
[3] Hodder, *Entangled*, 2012, 23-27, 30-34; Chapman, *Fragmentation in Archaeology*, 2000, 37; Tilley, *Metaphor*, 1999, 76. This familiar and perhaps overused adage is justifiably criticized in Olsen *et al.*, *Archaeology*, 2012, 8.
[4] Hodder defends his use of the word 'thing' over 'object' because 'object' stems from the polarization of subject/object, it implies an objectivity, and it denotes 'to get in the way' (*Entangled*, 2012, 4-5, 7-9). For similar and other reasons, Bogost uses 'unit' (*Alien Phenomenology*, 2012, 23-25). I prefer the word 'object,' while also opposing any subject/object duality, simply because 'a thing' has taken on a recent colloquial connotation that refers to a habit or turn of phrase that has become fashionable; likewise 'not a thing' refers to an un-trendy habit. Since I'm discussing several millennia of a material and its power to make long-lasting myths, it seems best to avoid using terminology that could be interpreted as a passing catch phrase.
[5] Especially relevant is Baudrillard's discussion of antiques in *The System of Objects*, 2005, 77-90; but also, Lucas, Forgetting the past, 1997; Meskell, *Object Worlds*, 2004.
[6] Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, 1963, 14-15.
[7] Cf. Olsen, *Defense of Things*, 2010. For a synthesized discussion on ontology-oriented approaches to archaeology and material culture, see: Witmore *et al.*, Archaeology and New Materialisms and comments, 2014; Alberti *et al.*, Worlds otherwise, 2011.
[8] Lucas, *Archaeology of Time*, 2005, 129.
[9] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IV 1, 1003a21, 24, 31; on the overplayed 'social' in archaeology, see Webmoor and Witmore, Things are us, 2008; Olsen, Material culture, 2003; Dolwick, Social and beyond, 2009; Dolwick, Search

a special sense of wonder, far beyond their common use as a means of access to the human-social spheres of the past. Acknowledging this wonder is to acknowledge 'a void, the opening for a tunnel that leads somewhere more viable. ... To wonder is to respect things as things in themselves.'[10] Archaeological objects conjure memories that were never ours, and even more arbitrarily, mnemonic value, as a social and individual construct, is neither stagnant nor universal, as it constantly changes over, through, and across [time + space = *place*] in collusion with evolving landscapes (cultural, physical, ideational, etc.), and yes, even seascapes and shipscapes and all the others.[11] Because 'place now has nothing to do with good old reliable constancy,' like the infinite places they populate, objects themselves are also never stagnant, never stationary.[12] They are in a constant state of flux in one way or another: where there is mass, there is energy; where there is construction, there is decay; where there is contact, there is interaction; and there is always contact, but it's not often what we think of as 'social.'[13] More often, contact between objects is vicarious, imagined, withdrawn, imperceptible, or unnoticed.

But to clarify, 'objects' (as opposed to 'material culture') need not be limited to those human-made or even those measureable by mass or composed of matter.[14] Here, an archaeological object could just as easily refer to the long-dead Ramses II or his *ka* or his *ba* as to a statue of the pharaoh, his mummified remains, or his cartouche. In one of his now-famous 'liturgies', Latour is noted as defining an actor 'as anything that has an effect on other things' and could include 'neutrinos, stars, palm trees, rivers, cats, armies, nations, superheroes, unicorns, and square circles,' a definition that can equally be applied to an object.[15] Using Latour's actors and merging Husserlian and Heideggerian intentional and withdrawn objects (respectively), object-oriented ontology (OOO) recognizes (at least) two different kinds of object: *sensual* and *real*. Sensual objects, like Husserl's intentional objects, are exposed and received by the senses – they are felt, seen, imagined, smelled, heard, tasted. Real objects, like Heidegger's withdrawn tools, have a unified, specific (real) set of qualities but are withdrawn from any and all access.[16] As a real object, I am even withdrawn from myself because what I know and feel and sense (or intend) about myself is not the same as my real self, whose essence, totality, is

---

of the social, 2008; Webmoor, Taking things seriously, 2007.

[10] Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*, 2012, 126, 131; cf. Witmore *et al.*, Archaeology and the New Materialisms and comments, 2014; Pétursdóttir, *Concrete Matters*, 2013; Olsen *et al.*, *Discipline of Things*, 2012.

[11] Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, 2007, 94, 170-172. In similar terms, 'Space and time are contained in places that have their own space-time rather than space containing place' (Tilley, *Metaphor*, 1999, 178; similar sentiments are found in Tilley, *Materiality of Stone*, 2004).

[12] Morton, *Dark Ecology*, 2016, 11. Morton also contends that *place* cannot be seen as humanocentric.

[13] Ingold, Materials against materiality, 2007, 7; Dolwick, Social and beyond, 2009; Dolwick, Search of the social, 2008; Latour, Pragmatogonies, 1994.

[14] See, e.g., Oldenziel, Object/ions, 1996, 66, who questions the role of matter particularly in postmodernity.

[15] Harman, *Prince of Networks*, 2009, 106, 188-189; Latour, Pragmatogonies, 1994; Miller, Materiality, 2005; Miller, *Stuff*, 2010. Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*, 2012, 38-39, coins the term 'Latour liturgies,' but I can't resist footnoting a musical example of a Latour-type liturgy, which can be found in Sonic Youth's song 'Side 2 Side' on their album *NYC Ghosts & Flowers*, released by DGC on 6 May 2000. Whether or not Sonic Youth was familiar with Latour (who started writing liturgies in the 1990s), I don't know, but I imagine their liturgy to have originated in free association poetic practice instead.

[16] For a fascinating and fair reading of Heideggerian phenomenology in relation to archaeology and objects, see Olsen, *Defense of Things*, 2010, 63-88.

ultimately and infinitely inaccessible.[17] And mereologically, I am not just one thing, but a palimpsest composed of many other things (cells, organs, memories, mitochondria), some of which live lives apart from mine (mites in my eyelashes, bacteria in my guts), and each of which has its own reality, perceived or not.[18] As a real object, fire has direct effects (chemical, physical, aesthetic, psychological, etc.) on whatever experiences its burning, scalding, heating, or charring – what Harman calls 'vicarious causation'; on the other hand, the sensual object fire is an ever-shifting ideal, a psychic abstraction, identified as fire by its lucid properties (sensual qualities) and perceived symptoms based on memory, imagination, ideation, fear, awe, angle, distance, etc.[19] But the sensual object is not limited to the human sphere, rather to interactions between any two objects. Whether the object is real or sensual, these interactions and modifications create a kind of object reality.[20]

At and after points of contact, new objects are made through these relations, vicarious causations, and the combinations and changes they induce – so every modification or relation is also an object: once a tree, now a log, soon to be a ship timber; once a ship, now an archaeological site, soon to be a series of wood samples in a laboratory. One might justifiably wonder if the piece of wood that came from a forest tree a few thousand years ago, became a ship timber, and is currently undergoing laboratory analysis is the same piece of wood at all. We humans often say things like, 'I was a different person then,' or 'I'm a changed woman.' Other objects, like Plutarch's ship of Theseus, also experience such changes, on physical and metaphysical levels. An object-oriented approach would claim that the ship of Theseus, the changed woman, and the repurposed tree are the same as real objects and different as sensual objects. Because no object can be reduced to its parts, they must be the same; yet if they are experienced differently by other objects, and they are, then as sensual objects, they are different. Object realities are paradoxical.

In an attempt to avoid a humanocentric approach to objects (favoring a *hylocentric* one instead), and acknowledging the risk of exposing myself as a philosophaster, I try to steer away from the much-studied social framework of things as utilitarian devices caught up in networks of exchange and being shellacked with meaning that, while often resisting the label, does in fact rely on a subject-object duality: human subjects act as ventriloquists putting words into the mouths of ancient objects, imposing meanings

---

[17] On the inaccessibility of real objects, see Morton's discussion of the cinder block in *Realist Magic*, 2013, 42-56; this will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5. These concepts are also explained from an archaeological perspective in Normark, Water as a hyperfact, 2014; and Pétursdóttir, *Concrete Matters*, 2013. For a critical review of OOO and speculative realism, see Cole, Call of things, 2013; and Obscure objects of desire, 2015.

[18] Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, 2007, 108.

[19] Harman, *Speculative Realism*, 2010, 127-131, 150-157; Road to objects, 2001.

[20] Harman, *Quadruple Object*, 2011; Witmore, Realities of the past, 2012. Latour refers to object networks as being strung together by a kind of all-penetrating plasma. Instead, Harman focuses on the creation of new objects through contact (Harman, *Speculative Realism*, 2010, 163). In Latour's famous analogy of the NRA's 'Guns don't kill people, people kill people' slogan, he says that the network connecting the person to the gun creates the potential for the person to use the gun to kill, to extend and intensify his own network to connect (in a deadly manner) to another object; the gun is a transition point. Harman says, however, that the combination of gun and person creates a new object: a person holding a gun, and this new object has a new (potential) agency. Cf. Webmoor, Taking things seriously, 2007, 571.

and functions onto them with eyes trained to human accessibility only.[21] We must recognize that '[h]uman expressions do not so much make history as make history human,' an exercise that seems disproportionate to our place in the universe.[22] Likewise, sentiments such as, 'The roulette wheel spins and the outcome is unpredictable, but human hands spin the wheel,' are predicated on the idea that humans are to be credited for past existences and realities, not just for history;[23] the 'roulette' can only represent the sometimes random and always limited insights humans rely upon to wonder about time long gone and the object realities (human or otherwise) that went with it. So instead of a history, I want to focus on object ontologies, acknowledging the state of being that resides at the core of all objects – whether a stick of wood, a sea, a religion, a rock, a text, or the relation between all these things.

Hermeneutics, in its original capacity, was the act (or art) of interpreting divine messages. These messages are typically seen as verbal in nature; however, messages can and did also come in the form of other experiences built of materials:[24] the shape of a rock, cloud, or tree; the molecules that compose a smell; the design of a flock of birds; the behaviors of bees and ants; the patterns of the stars, planets, and seasons; a musical beat. This variation of practice suggests that, aside from the modern theoretical applications in phenomenology, hermeneutics is not necessarily humanocentric at the core.[25] A similar sentiment is found in the Tom Robbins novel *Skinny Legs and All*: 'A longing for the Divine is intrinsic in *Homo sapiens*. (For all we know, it is innate in squirrels, dandelions, and diamond rings, as well.)'[26] Although we often assume ourselves to be the only entities to hold the interpretive role, we can also recognize that, on some level, objects can interpret and respond to messages sent by other objects, and that the messages come in a variety of (non)forms.[27]

A related issue though, is how much of this message-sending, -receiving, and -reacting is intentional. The vast majority of our (hermeneutic) interactions as Homo 'sapiens sapiens' is ironically unknowing, unintentional, and therefore, without primary agency. While non-human animals can certainly decide to enact change (intentionality or purposeful action) and thus can have primary agency, 'inanimate' objects like

---

[21] Tilley, *Metaphor*, 1999, 75-76; Skibo and Schiffer, *People and Things*, 2009; Hodder (ed.), *Meanings of Things*, 1989; DeMarrais, Gosden and Renfew (eds), *Rethinking Materiality*, 2004. Others note the same tendency: Olsen *et al.*, *Discipline of Things*, 2012; Fahlander, Differences that matter, 2008, 127-134. See also the commentary compiled in Boivin *et al.*, Comments on A. Jones, 2005, 182-183; arguments set forth in Miller, Materiality, 2005, and Miller, *Stuff*, 2010; Bogost on social relativism versus scientific naturalism: *Alien Phenomenology*, 2012, 13-15; and on plant-human relations, Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 2013, 29, 33.

[22] Brown, Preface, 1995, vii. On the need for a 'less anthropogenic-centred study of the world' in maritime archaeology, see: van de Noort, *North Sea Archaeologies*, 2011, 2.

[23] Abulafia, *The Great Sea*, 2012, xxxi.

[24] Cf. Ingold, Materials against materiality, 2007, 3-4.

[25] Compare Ihde's 'material hermeneutics' (recent trajectories described here: http://humanitieslab.stanford.edu/symmetry/816) with Hodder, Interpretive archaeology, 1991. Hodder's former process of hermeneutic interpretation sets up a hierarchy of subject-object, and his interpretations are based on 'judgments' of self and other, a binary and humanocentric system rather opposite of what he asserts in Hodder, *Entangled*, 2012. On phenomenology and anthropocentrism, see Dolwick, Search of the social, 2008, 30-35; Olsen, *Defense of Things*, 2010, 63-88.

[26] Tom Robbins, *Skinny Legs and All*, 1990, p. 168 (New York, Bantam Books).

[27] Plants have even been known to eavesdrop: Schaefer and Ruxton, Plant-Animal Communication, 2011, 197. See also: Kohn, *How Forests Think*, 2013, 31-35, 159-168; Meskell, *Object Worlds*, 2004, 48.

trees (even though plants live), boats, and bedrock are understood as having only the potential to cause such change without the ability to decide for it themselves.[28] This 'potential for agency' can be summarized by the portmanteau *potency*, which will be used throughout this work, as I think it evokes well the latent if hesitant or ignorant causal power of all objects, humans included.[29] Similar to Spinoza's *conatus*, Normark's *polyagency*, or Bennett's *thing-power*, this word equally avoids the pitfall of fetishism but also that of personification or anthropomorphizing, the arbitrary (not metaphorical) assignment of human characteristics to non-human objects that serves to 'elevate' their status, an effort that still clings to the human-invented hierarchy of being where the upper layers are by our invitation only.[30] Bennett criticizes her own word choice in that thing-power does not adequately describe the processuality of objects, that they are always on the move.[31] Despite a stubborn resistance to access, no object is inert. The stone that causes you to trip and fall, and at which you curse (recognizing for a moment that the fault lies in the stone's potency before admitting it was also due to clumsiness or the vagaries of dusk), may or may not have volition or agency in and of itself, but that is irrelevant to its potential to effect change. It is potent, as is the wine that causes intoxication (substance:psyche), the landscape that inspires poetry (phenomenon:art), the water that brings forth drowning (life-giving force:death), and the constructs that generate myth (thing:ideation).[32] Again quoting *Skinny Legs and All*, an object-oriented treatise if there ever was one,

> The inertia of objects is deceptive. The inanimate world appears static, 'dead,' to humans only because of our neuromuscular chauvinism. ... We regard the objects that polka-dot our daily lives as if they were rigid, totally predictable solids, frozen inferiorly in time and space. Yet, how can we be so sure that we know what things are doing when we aren't looking at them?[33]

Philosopher Graham Harman claims that applying an 'object-oriented model holds great promise for many domains of knowledge, but especially for the various disciplines in the humanities.'[34] As in some 'symmetrical archaeologies,'[35] I will try here to apply

---

[28] Gell, *Art and Agency*, 1998. See discussions in: Fahlander, Differences that matter, 2008, 134-136; Meskell, *Object Worlds*, 2004, 50-55; Miller, Materiality, 2005; Olsen, *Defense of Things*, 2010, 11; Witmore, Symmetrical archaeology, 2007, 551-553; Ingold, Materials against materiality, 2007, 11-12.

[29] Gell uses the term 'secondary agency' to define causality without intentionality: Gell, *Art and Agency*, 1998, 36-37. Likewise, Knappet coined 'pseudo-agency' to describe the 'agency of objects': Knappet, Photographs, skeuomorphs and marionettes, 2002. Gosden also emphasizes the importance of word choice, especially regarding the ineffective term 'materiality': Gosden, Science a foreign country, in Boivin *et al.*, Comments on A. Jones, 2005, 185.

[30] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 2010, 2-6; Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*, 2012, 6-8; Normark, *Polyagentive Archaeology*, 2004; and *Roads In-Between*, 2006. But see also Chapter 5.

[31] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 2010, 20.

[32] On the intangible/immaterial possessing just as much potency as the tangible/material, see Knappett, *Thinking through Material Culture*, 2005, 26-28. On water as material and immaterial, see Strang's discussion article and responses: Strang, Fluid consistencies, 2014.

[33] Tom Robbins, *Skinny Legs and All*, 1990, 61 (New York, Bantam Books).

[34] Harman, *Quadruple Object*, 2011, 138.

[35] Symmetrical archaeology as defined in Olsen *et al.*, *Archaeology*, 2012, 14-16, holds so precisely to the basic tenets of object-oriented ontology that the former seems difficult to distinguish from the latter. However, I find the choice of the word 'symmetrical' problematic in that despite its claims to rejecting binary (logocentric) systems of mind/matter, culture/nature, subject/object, human/world, symmetry relies on

this model, because like probably all other archaeologists and art historians, I too have a 'thirst for knowledge concerning the fate of specific objects.'[36] One resulting question is how to address this fate in a textual format such as this one, which comes with a set of expectations and limitations shared by academics worldwide despite frequent criticisms of the format.[37] It is a question less about writing the revelations of what-lies-behind the object or what it represents than how to represent it in the first place.[38] I am partial to books though, and as Deleuze and Guattari point out in the first pages of *A Thousand Plateaus*, a book has neither subject nor object; it seems to defy spatial and temporal trajectories because it is not just one thing – it is an assemblage, and in that respect, it can be regarded as inherently archaeological.[39] Within archaeology, we often speak of narratives: the origin story, the retrospective, and the biography.[40] This assemblage uses elements of all three types, and maybe a few others as well, like an anthology or a miscellany. As such, this work may be aligned with Pluciennik's 'anti-narrative' in its display of partial understandings and a lack of fixed meanings.[41] It begins in the deep past with the origins of cedar forests, broadening out to examine the extent of their allure and the people possessed and seduced by them, how ships were a material metamorphosis of this allure, and ending (more or less) in the present. Retrospect is used to detect the shifting patterns of cedar wood's and cedar ships' ability to seduce the human imagination and generate localized and enduring lore and metaphor. Biography is used in focusing on a single material in several manifestations and places. In using all three narrative forms with an anti-narrative storytelling purpose, I hope to move a little closer to a kind of ontography – an exploration into the object-beings under discussion that will make no (futile) attempt at an absolute understanding of them or their relations with each other or us but which instead tries to reveal interaction through collocation.[42] Archaeological discussions may be particularly well-suited to

---

balance between two sides; so in a symmetrical archaeology, there is still a bifurcation, it's just a balanced one. The call to create equilibrium between humans and things suggests that humans are not things, so this model still operates under a division of human and other (Descola, *Ecology of Others*, 2013, 63-76; this problem is also noted in Harman, On behalf of form, 2016; Thomas, Archaeological theory, 2015, and is a subject of discussion in Witmore *et al.*, Archaeology and the New Materialisms and comments, 2014). This is one reason why the term is not used in the present study, whose vocabulary stems more from the philosophical foundations of object-orientation rather than the recent archaeological adaptations of Latourian actor-network theory. For 'symmetrical archaeologies', see: Webmoor, Taking things seriously, 2007; Witmore, Symmetrical archaeology, 2007; Olsen, *Defense of Things*, 2010, 9-10; Dolwick, Search of the social, 2008, 21; Beyond the social, 2009, 37-38; Tuddenham, Cyborgs, 2012; Edgeworth, Enmeshments, 2014. Witmore even calls the phrase awkward in Alberti *et al.*, Worlds otherwise, 2011, 909. For another archaeological development out of OOO, see Morton's *hyperobjects* recast in Normark, Water as a hyperfact, 2014.

[36] Harman, *Speculative Realism*, 2010, 95; cf. Morton, Anthropocene, 2014.

[37] E.g., Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*, 2012, 88-90; Tilley, *Materiality of Stone*, 26-29; Pluciennik, Narratives, 1999, 667-668; Joyce (ed.), *Languages of Archaeology*, 2002; Van Dyke and Bernbeck (eds), *Subjects and Narratives*, 2015.

[38] Olsen, *Defense of Things*, 2010, 24-26.

[39] Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 1987, 3-4, 262-263. See also the preface to the present work and Hamilakis and Jones, Archaeology and assemblage, 2017.

[40] Joyce (ed.), *Languages of Archaeology*, 2002; Lucas, *Archaeology of Time*, 2005, 49-60; Adams and Rönnby, Landscapes, seascapes and shipscapes, 2013, 2-4; Meskell, *Object Worlds*, 2004, 55-58; Tilley and Shanks, *Re-Constructing Archaeology*, 1991, 18. Lucas, Forgetting the past, 1997, correlates the acts of collecting, cataloging, and narrating as those that resist closure (p. 9), so archaeological procedures and storytelling are wrapped up in the same desire to sustain memory, to possess it.

[41] Pluciennik, Narratives, 1999, 667.

[42] Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*, 2012, 38. This kind of ontograph is very different from Martin Holbraad's version as explained in Alberti *et al.*, Worlds otherwise, 2011, 908.

ontographies as they are inherently 'messy'; as Ian Bogost so aptly says, 'An ontograph is a landfill.'[43] So what better way to approach archaeology and its objects, buried under stratigraphical layers representing geological processes, biological activity, rubbish, time, grass, dirt, water?

Additionally, again in attempt to eschew a humanocentric narrative exegesis, I think that taking Fahlander's suggestion of developing a 'fiction' fits well with this task.[44] In archaeology and (art) history, we accept that our interpretations are a lie; 'we are creating history, not documenting it[;] history is what historians write.'[45] Our interpretations are fictional possibilities that open up new ways of seeing relationships and realities. We are not disproving doctrines but proving the existence of doctrinal multiplicity. Similarly, and contrary to popular thought, the aim of history or archaeology is not to reconstruct the past but to reconstruct possible past realities – place different backgrounds and things in front of the funhouse mirror instead of seeing our disciplines as portholes to a netherworld.[46] And because our understandings of place change along with the objects that populate it, getting to know these other objects is necessary for speculating on distant, foreign realities. In fact, Harman claims that 'reality is object oriented. … Contact with reality begins when we cease to reduce an object to its properties or its effects on other things.'[47] And while an object or a material cannot be reduced to or summed up by its properties, no ontograph would be complete without them (not that an ontograph ever could be complete). Describing the properties of materials like cedar wood is essential to telling 'stories of what happens to [materials] as they flow, mix and mutate.'[48] In other words, the properties of a material are not just confined to its attributes; rather these properties are in themselves entire object histories.[49] Materials are not summarized but summoned.

In a way, object interpretation becomes a form of conjuring; using conjecture, we conjure possible object realities, as opposed to objective realities, from place-specific contexts. Some situations call for more conjecture than others, or ask that readers consider metaphysical possibilities that defy metrology. What is being attempted here, in this and presumably every ontograph, is a kind of science fiction,[50] but specifically a *speculative fiction*. I should confess here and now that I am also a writer of speculative fiction in the conventional literary sense, but in applying this term to academic scholarship, it can hope to be considered in the same realm with Harman's 'weird

---

[43] Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*, 2012, 59. In the second to last page of his book, Bogost is discussing the sense of wonder, and he implores, 'Let's go outside and dig in the dirt.'
[44] Fahlander, Differences that matter, 2008, 144-151; *Science Fiction*, 2001.
[45] Bennett, *Cults of the Ancient Greek Cypriotes*, 1980, 258. He continues further: 'To reify the ancient world and discuss it as if it had an objective reality which we are merely describing is to obscure the processes of selectivity, interpretation and presentation that are an indispensable part of the historian's craft.' See also Tarlow, Responsibility of representation, 2001.
[46] Harman, *Weird Realism*, 2012, 14; Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*, 2012, 31; Witmore, Realities of the past, 2012; on past reconstruction, see Tilley and Shanks, *Re-Constructing Archaeology*, 1991, 15-16. *Contra.* Hodder, Interpretive archaeology, 1991 (e.g.), which emphasizes drawing boundaries between multivocality and universality. On portholes to the netherworld, see Meskell's 'mediating window' in *Object Worlds*, 2004, 14-15.
[47] Harman, Horror of phenomenology, 2008, 17.
[48] Ingold, Materials against materiality, 2007, 14.
[49] Ingold, Materials against materiality, 2007, 15.
[50] Fahlander, *Science Fiction*, 2001.

realism,' Bogost's 'pragmatic speculative realism,' and Morton's 'realist magic.'[51] As such, this study is based on well-attested scientific phenomena and real(istic) historical entities, grounded in verifiable data (thus avoiding unbridled speculation[52]), but using elements of probability and creativity to derive *meaningful realities* from ancient objects: namely, the cedar wood used in ancient shipbuilding, but also the cedar forest landscape, the shipbuilding industry, and the acts, relations, and entities involved in seafaring and myth-making. At times, the reader may feel that I am 'barking up the wrong tree' or 'going too far out on a limb,' but Jane Bennett writes that this kind of tale is advantageous in that it 'can direct sensory, linguistic, and imaginative attention toward a material vitality'[53] – and few materials are so vital or vibrant as wood.

Seeking meaningful realities in (ship) wood

It is well-documented that in the Ancient Near East and Egypt throughout Antiquity, cedar was the ship timber *par excellence.*[54] Its mechanical properties as a wood complemented and reinforced long-standing human perceptions of the 'Cedar Mountain' as a sacred site and the 'Cedar of Lebanon' as a sacred material. Despite the religious reverence they incited, cedars were often felled and transported great distances for use in various construction projects on land and water.[55] How can these paradoxical ideas of veneration and consumption be reconciled within the reality of the object? Here I am trying to ask questions that are more object-oriented variants to the ones Tilley proposes (drawing from Kopytoff and Appadurai), which tend to focus on an object's changing utilitarian function, and which suppose a duality of subject-object and theory-praxis.[56] Therefore, I might alter his question, 'How is [the object's] meaning related to the manner of its production and the sources and qualities of the raw materials from which it was manufactured?' to 'How was the common material of cedar wood related to both the forest trees it came from and to the ships it composed? And how were these relationships reciprocated?' Likewise, I would modify 'What happens when [the object] moves from one cultural context to another? How is it redefined and put to use?' to 'How was this reciprocity and causality (between material, ship, and source) affected by and affecting the prevailing mythologies in different places?'

Because of the unique characteristics of cedar forests, these trees were often associated or identified with certain deities or simply divine characteristics in general (longevity/

---

[51] Drawing from Latour and Whitehead, Harman's speculative realism sometimes flirts with panpsychism: 'I would even propose a new philosophical discipline called 'speculative psychology' dedicated to ferreting out the specific psychic reality of earthworms, dust, armies, chalk, and stone' (Harman, *Prince of Networks*, 2009, 213; see also *Speculative Realism*, 2010, 100-101, 206-207. For the terms, see Harman, *Weird Realism*, 2012; *Speculative Realism*, 2010; Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*, 2012, 29-32; and Morton, *Realist Magic*, 2013.

[52] 'Not all interpretations are equally valid, since it is held that even if there is no ultimate empirical truth, we can still dismiss many hypotheses': Bray and Pollard in Boivin *et al.*, Comments on A. Jones, 2005, 180.

[53] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 2010, 19.

[54] Cf. Meiggs, *Trees and Timber*, 1982; Pulak, Cedar for ships, 2001.

[55] Summarized in Chatonnet, Les textes relatifs au cèdre du Liban, 2001; Semaan, Timber trade in Lebanon, 2015.

[56] Tilley, *Metaphor*, 1999, 76. The utilitarianism of an object is *contra* Harman, who says (à la Heidegger), '[P]raxis is even more stupid than theory, distorting and oversimplifying the reality of a thing even more than theory does' (*Speculative Realism*, 2010, 201). Cf. questions raised by Jones in Archaeology and materiality, 2004, 336; and discussion on subject-object in archaeology in Meskell, *Object Worlds*, 2004, 50-55.

immortality, strength/power, purity/ purification, etc.). At least some of these traits were metonymously passed on to cedar wood as a mobile contingent of the sacred forest.[57] With the forest's acquisition of the property of mobility, came souvenirs that were reminiscent of the immobile (eternal) forest. Whether the souvenir object was a cult statue, temple gate, or merchant vessel, it carried the metaphorical weight of the entire forest: the magical properties of the woods were, and to some degree still are, attributed to wooden objects. For example, cedar wood souvenirs are still found in the forested areas of Bcharre and Ehden in North Lebanon. Tourists and locals alike purchase Christian crosses and icons made of this wood because of the cedar of Lebanon's biblical fame (Figure 1). As with other kinds of pilgrimage souvenirs, cedar is still understood to hold apotropaic powers,

Figure 1. A souvenir cedar cross pendant. Author, 2016.

as was the case at certain other places in history, and possibly prehistory too, which will be demonstrated below. In part, this study considers the power of possessing a tangible object as symbolic of a more cerebral, intangible concept: the potency of the material to be 'read' as a manifestation. But it also considers that this same power emanates from the object itself, and not just from meaning layered upon it by an external force.

Although modern-day relics and souvenirs continue this ancient tradition, shipbuilding with cedar wood – creating a very mobile souvenir, if not a collection or collective metaphor for entire ontologies – appears to be a phenomenon apart.[58] It is my assertion that in the case of the ancient shipbuilding industry, source groves for ship timbers were (in places) selected intentionally, based on religious motivating factors such as mythology and cosmology related to specific forest areas, and conjured by the aesthetic and mechanical properties of the forests, the trees, and their wood. However, over time, these factors faded in importance next to ones derived from geographical and socio-economic convenience. The living memory faded, and along with it went an industry intrinsically linked with divine discourse, even hermeneutics of a sort. The ability or desire to 'read' the material (or for the material to be read) as a manifestation was lost, the object un-oriented, the hermeneutic message left uninterpreted.

---

[57] Stewart, *On Longing*, 1984, 136.
[58] Ibid., 1984, 151.

The relevance of origin: From forest to shipyard to sand and back

Particularly since the advent of maritime archaeology in the 1960s, topics of ancient Mediterranean overseas travel have been abundantly discussed using a wide variety of methodologies. The trade objects and personal belongings from famous Bronze Age shipwrecks, such as those found at Cape Gelidonya and Uluburun (southern Turkey), have been analyzed and provenanced, and the trade routes have been redrawn to reflect the complex stories that these artifacts are still telling. With a few exceptions, the ships themselves, however, have remained largely silent, despite the multiplicity of stories that every wrecked ship also has to tell.[59] Ironically, we often know more about the multitudes of amphorae, anchors, weights, metal ingots, and glass buns carried onboard, than we do about the wooden ships themselves, let alone the timber used to build them.[60]

By far, the majority of the final resting places for Mediterranean ships yield little to no wood. But as this study hopefully demonstrates, even unassuming, splintery grams of available wood can have compelling stories to tell. The anomalous trend to bypass 'scrappy'[61] wooden ship remains is particularly true when it comes to wood provenance. If ship wood is recovered at all, it is often drawn, identified, and dated, but the provenance component of this project is one of the few attempts to source East Mediterranean watercraft by using their timbers, instead of extraneous clues such as cargo, personal items, or inscriptions.[62]

However, particularly in the case of shipwrecks (as opposed to ship burials), the determination of provenance is a notoriously tricky issue due to the multi-culturalism inherent in the maritime world.[63] Cargo is traced to various ports of call, and even

---

[59] Adams, Ships and boats, 2001; Adams and Rönnby, Landscapes, seascapes and shipscapes, 2013, 2; Ward, *Sacred and Secular*, 2000; Creasman, *Ship Timbers*, 2010.

[60] Exceptions would be those known (or surmised) enough for reconstruction, particularly the *Kyrenia II* (Steffy, Kyrenia ship reconstruction, 1989). For ancient Mediterranean vessels based on iconographical sources, see Rankov, Olympias trireme, 2008; and Couser, Ward and Vosmer, Reconstruction from the reign of Hatshepsut, 2009. *The Phoenicia* is full-scale replica was based on a composite of the sixth-century BC Jules Verne 7 (Marseilles) and the fifth-century BC Ma'agan Michael (Israel) shipwrecks, to reconstruct a *c.* seventh-century Phoenician ship that Herodotus claims to have circumnavigated Africa; see the website at: http://www.phoenicia.org.uk/index.htm. The wood used was *Pinus brutia*, and it is of interest to note that in only a few years *Teredo navalis* has already done significant damage to the wood: Müller, Tree species and Teredinidae, 2010. For an assessment of replicas and reconstructions, see: Weski, Reconstructing ancient seafaring, 2006.

[61] Lucas, *Archaeology of Time*, 2005, 127.

[62] For the East Mediterranean, Nili Liphschitz has been developing dendroarchaeology, a provenance method that considers wood identifications in relation to species distributions (e.g., Liphschitz, *Timber in Israel*, 2007); however, this method should be used with caution and in conjunction with others (cf., Rich *et al.*, Ship in a bottle, 2016). In the western Mediterranean, dendrochronology and dendromorphology have been used to attempt provenance (Guibal and Pomey, Construction navale antique, 1998). In a Northern European context, several dendrochronologists have been using the region's long oak chronologies to provenance ship timbers: e.g., Daly, Origin of ancient timbers, 2006; *Timber, Trade and Tree-Rings*, 2007. Other ship timber provenance has been attempted through DNA extraction from the sixteenth-century AD *Mary Rose* timbers: Speirs, McConnachie and Lowe, Chloroplast DNA, 2009. The Marie-Curie funded ITN project, ForSEAdiscovery, is currently attempting multiple methods simultaneously to provenance wood from 'Iberian' shipwrecks (www.forseadiscovery.eu).

[63] Harpster, Shipwreck identity, 2013.

inscriptions may have been made by shipwrights working in foreign dockyards.[64] To make matters even hazier, a ship may have been built at one locale and purchased or commandeered at another, or owned by a person of one socio-political or ethnic identity and captained by another. In these cases, the question of 'ethnicity' becomes a moot point. Particularly problematic for this study are the nuances of international timber trade. Even if a piece of wood can be provenanced to a specific mountain range, that does not mean that the entire boat was built at the nearest shipyard; it only indicates the origin of that piece of wood. In theory, the timber could have been transported to any number of distant shipyards and the vessel constructed there. However, other provenance studies performed on ancient ship timbers have determined that pre- and early-modern Northern and Western European shipyards relied most heavily on nearby forests, so the provenance of ship timbers was indicative of the provenance of the ship.[65] Furthermore, knowing the origin of even one piece of wood can be important, if not for rewriting the history of shipbuilding, at least for learning something meaningful about its reality and its potency. As Baudrillard states, wood 'burns from within. ... [I]t is a material that has *being*.'[66]

In our language of antonyms, ships are one of the last vestiges of the ancient custom of animating the inanimate.[67] In our world, a rock is a rock, water is water, and a tree is a tree. The 'modern' human relationship with other objects is primarily based on the ways in which we can appropriate them for our own purposes. However, other human relationships have been witness to a kinship with objects, even acknowledging an embedded spiritual, or psychic, presence made tangible by the object. Even in this place we inhabit though, ships are still provided with names, an enduring recognition of object realities and potencies distinct from human will.[68] In the ancient Mediterranean, for one, ships were associated with divine entities, as was the wood used to build them. Deities who had powers over weather, celestial bodies, trees, and of course, the sea, were associated with, symbolized by, or embodied in ships and boats.[69] Particularly in the East Mediterranean, these ancient boats were often constructed, in whole or part, with wood from the notorious Cedar of Lebanon.[70] Contrary to the popular epithet though, East Mediterranean cedar forests were not only located in Lebanon, but also Cyprus, Syria, and Turkey. So an obvious question comes to the forefront: from which forests did ancient ship timbers actually originate, and why? Like so many other aspects of ancient life, the choice to use cedar wood – and from which forest it came – was both a practical and ritual consideration.

---

[64] Wachsmann, *Ships and Seamanship*, 1998, 159-160.
[65] Daly, *Timber, Trade and Tree-Rings*, 2007, 229, 236-237; Allevato *et al.*, Roman shipbuilding, 2009; *contra* Guibal and Pomey, Construction navale antique, 1998, for the late Roman western Mediterranean.
[66] Baudrillard, *System of Objects*, 2005, 38, original emphasis.
[67] Even the distinction between animate and inanimate can be 'fuzzy' if not arbitrary: Knappett, *Thinking through Material Culture*, 2005, 12-16.
[68] Casson, *Ships and Seamanship*, 1971, 351-360; Heinrich, *Ships for Seven Seas*, 1997, 7.
[69] For extra-Mediterranean examples, see: Crumlin-Pedersen and Thye, *Ship as Symbol*, 1995; and Ballard *et al.*, Ship as symbol, 2003.
[70] Pulak, Cedar for ships, 2001.

This project focuses strictly on cedar (*Cedrus* Trew) because so many ships and boats in the ancient East Mediterranean were constructed from this wood due to its notorious and incomparable qualities of durability, workability, and rot and parasite resistance. Although it is a softer wood than deciduous oak (*Quercus* L.) or terebinth (*Pistacia palaestina* Boiss.), for example, it is both strong and flexible, qualities which assume importance especially for ship timbers.[71] Of course, Bronze Age carpentry relied on stone and bronze tools to shape wood, and cedar is soft enough that this could have been accomplished with relative ease, and so the standard was set early on.[72] Because of its flexibility, cedar wood was also relatively easy to shape when green to form curved planks or a keel, or the shipwright could simply leave the de-barked trunk 'as-was' for an ideal pole-mast. Also relevant for ship timbers, the resinous sap of cedar wood successfully kept wood-boring teredo (*Teredo navalis* L.) and rot-producing fungi at bay, even after decades of immersion in teredo-ridden seawater. In short, renowned Classicist Russel Meiggs, in his essential tome *Trees and Timber in the Ancient Mediterranean World*, poetically claims that the reason Mesopotamian and Egyptian kings coveted cedar wood over fir (*Abies* Mill.), for example, was because '[a]s a tree [the cedar] was patrician, the fir plebian.'[73] From textual and archaeological records, there is no doubt that cedar wood was revered for its unique properties in marine and terrestrial building projects.[74]

Due to the nature and growth patterns of the cedars, they provided shipwrights with straight timbers of great length, strength, and flexibility because cedar has a large amount of compression wood; in other words, the trunk remains vertical despite its many horizontal branches by reinforcing itself along the grain.[75] Trees deposit dense lignin on the underside of the trunk to create vertical pressure, thereby stabilizing the horizontal branches. This process has a number of advantages for the shipwright. Trunks remain vertically inclined despite the number of branches and the height of the tree, thus ensuring long, straight planks and beams. This vertical growth is particularly the case for cedars in the thick forests of Antiquity; a healthy forest environment means competition for sunlight, and so encourages trees to great heights of up to 40m (Figure 2). By contrast, the degradation of old-growth cedar forests, e.g., in some areas of the contemporary Levant, results in trees that appear gnarled or twisted and are characterized by horizontal or split growth instead of vertical.[76] The same can be seen in garden-variety cedars, where growth is distorted because lone trees do not have to

---

[71] Rival, *Charpenterie Navale Romaine*, 1991, 34-36.
[72] Ibid.; Gale and Cutler, *Plants in Archaeology*, 2000, 377.
[73] Meiggs, *Trees and Timber*, 1982, 55.
[74] Pulak, Cedar for ships, 2001.
[75] Timell, *Compression Wood*, 1986; Ward, *Sacred and Secular*, 2000.
[76] Nibbi (Some remarks, 1994) claims that cedars in Lebanon never grow straight and tall as they do in Cyprus and western North Africa, and that the inherently crooked Lebanese cedars never would have been sought for shipbuilding and flag staffs and other uses requiring long straight planks or beams. Her claim, however, seems to be supported by largely outdated botanical references and few if any personal observations of actual cedar forests. Given the chance to prosper in a forested environment, cedars in Lebanon do grow tall and straight just as do cedars in Cyprus and Anatolia. As explained below in Chapter 3 and in the Epilogue, Bcharre is hardly the forest (in fact it is not a forest, but a non-reproducing grove) to act as a basis for conclusions of Lebanese cedar growth patterns. I've witnessed plenty of tall, straight 200-year old trees at Tannourine, Hadeth, Ehden, and Shouf, some of which are reproduced as figures in the Epilogue (see also Rich *et al.*, *Cedrus* in Cyprus, 2012; Provenancing cedar wood, 2016. For locations of these forests in relation to each other, see Chapter 5, fig. 31.

Figure 2. Left: modern cedar in the Cyprus Troodos that exemplifies the growth pattern of younger trees that made them ideal for shipbuilding; the tree had been growing in a competitive forest environment before the construction of the road. Right: distorted growth of middle-aged cedars at Barouk (Lebanon) display a pattern common to depleted forests where trees do not have to compete for adequate sunlight. Author, 2009 and 2010 respectively.

compete for sunlight. Additionally, compression wood in cedars is very dense while retaining great elasticity, and because of its density, it absorbs much less water than deciduous wood or coniferous timbers with less compression material. The combined forces of water-resistant compression wood and cedar resin as a preservative and sealant successfully prevented wood rot during long voyages at sea, making cedar ideal for shipbuilding and other key roles requiring quality and preservation.[77]

However, it is often assumed that cedar wood in the archaeological record originated in Lebanon, home to the Cedars of Lebanon made famous by the Old Testament and the Epic of Gilgameš. On the contrary, East Mediterranean cedar forests were not only found on the peaks of Mount Lebanon (*C. libani* A. Rich); they also abounded in the Troodos of Cyprus (*C. brevifolia* Hook. f.), the Taurus and Amanus in modern Turkey (*C. libani* A. Rich, previously identified as *C. libani* ssp. *stenocoma*), and the Syrian Coastal Range (or Jabal An-Nusayriyah) in present-day Syria (*C. libani* A. Rich). So the question of provenance is valid – without historical or scientific evidence, it cannot be assumed

---

[77] Nicholson and Shaw (eds), *Egyptian Materials and Technology*, 2000, 349-350; Pulak 2000, 24-25; Mikesell 1969; 14; Cartwright, *Cedrus libani* under the microscope, 2001, 111.

that cedar wood necessarily came from Mount Lebanon, neither that these other cedar sources played minimal roles in the timber trade or shipbuilding industries.[78]

With all of this in mind, the present study applies the results of a geochemical comparison of wood from living cedar forests with archaeological cedar taken from three ancient ships: the so-called 'Pittsburg' or 'Carnegie' boat, a funerary barge interred at Pharaoh Senwosret (Sesostris) III's pyramid complex at Dahshur in Egypt (Middle Kingdom, *c.* 1850 BC); the Uluburun shipwreck found off the southern coast of Turkey (currently dated to *c.* 1300 BC); and the Athlit Ram, the bronze ram and remaining hull timbers from a Ptolemaic warship recovered off the coast of Israel (dated to *c.* 204-184 BC). In short, whether buried in the sands of the desert or the sea, we know where these ancient ships have ended up. But until now, we have not really known where they began, or why.

The material in the metaphor

Realities of wooden ships (and by extension, what they carried, physical cargo and metaphysical implications alike) began when the first shipyard-destined tree was felled, so it is no coincidence that the forest is exactly where this study also begins. As Jane Bennett ponders, 'Perhaps the claim to a vitality intrinsic to matter itself becomes more plausible if one takes a long view of time.'[79] Beginning in the ancient groves, Part I of this volume is an in-depth research into cedar forests and wood from the prehistoric to the early modern. Fossil, archaeological, literary, and historical sources have been perused to determine relational and metaphorical patterns, which suggest that these forests and their timber were 'special'; they bore physical and aesthetic properties that contributed to the widespread idea of 'sacred trees' or 'sacred mountains' in the mythologies of the ancient world. In other words, with the potency of the cedars came a degree of responsibility for regional myth-making at least since recorded history.

From the ancient historical and literary sources of Egypt and the Near East, we know that while these forests were considered pristine, dwelling places worthy of the gods,[80] possession of timber and wooden objects made from them made these characteristics and apotropaic powers more accessible to people. In effect, this segment tries to provide a sense of how much potency these forests (and their wood) had as enduring symbols of prestige, purity, tradition, divinity, and immortality. Their powers of seduction, or 'allure,' were unmatched by neighboring woodlands.

However enduring the seductive powers of cedar may have been, even they experienced lapses in allure, as seen especially in the Greco-Roman periods, ironically, when the Aristotelian theory of substance began to consider the fluidity of object properties at different places. By late Antiquity, the prestige value of both ships and cedar had

---

[78] The issue of 'Egyptian' cedar is raised in Kuniholm, Griggs and Newton, Early timber trade, 2007, 366. It is also mentioned in Espinel, Egypt and Byblos, 2002, 114 fn. 68; cf. Bikai, Cedar of Lebanon, 2001. Lebanon's privileged role as cedar supplier is also questioned in Meiggs, *Trees and Timber*, 1982, 50, 418; Nibbi, Some remarks on the cedar of Lebanon, 1994; and Linder, Khorsabad wall relief, 1986.

[79] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 2010, 10.

[80] E.g., Chatonnet, Les textes relatifs au cèdre du Liban, 2001.

fallen by the wayside. Whether this phenomenon was due to a devaluation first in ships, then in cedar, or vice versa, are discussed in Chapters 3 and 6. However, with the rise of Christianity and a resurgence of the symbolism of the 'Cedar of Lebanon' as a metaphorical and (meta)physical entity, the trees' sacred associations rose again in certain places, as witnessed especially in Early Modern travelogues penned in the Lebanon. However, the glory days of the sacred cedar ship were never resurrected.

To determine the causes for this phenomenon and the extent to which cedar ships were regarded as sacred if not autonomous entities in the ancient world, the second part of this book moves from the forest to its floating counterpart. The many abilities of wooden watercraft from the Bronze Age to the Ptolemaic are considered, with a focus on funerary, commercial, and military examples, along with their respective metaphorical implications, including those metaphors that may have been behind their construction. Textual, archaeological, and iconographical evidence from the relevant periods is accumulated to scratch the surface of the meaningful realities of ships and their relations with the water, cargo, destination, point of departure, stuff they were made of, and many other objects interacting with them from their inception. From a financial-value perspective, shipbuilding provided employment to loggers, foresters, shipwrights, sailors, merchants, priests, and naval warriors, to name a few. But from an object-oriented perspective, cedar vessels were much more than money-makers. Their potency was so significant that they were responsible for conjuring relationships in the form of metaphors that affected entire landscapes, industries, and religions, regardless of whether the vessel in question was a 'solar barge' or a merchantman; whatever the ship type, it was effectively a cedar forest made seaborne.

In this study, Senwosret III's burial barques, with an emphasis on the Carnegie boat, will represent funerary ships, while other buried vessels known from the archaeological record of Egypt will also be examined, such as Khufu's 'solar barge' (*c.* 2500 BC) and the Abydos boats (*c.* 3050 BC). Primarily, the Late Bronze Age Uluburun shipwreck will represent merchantmen, while ample attention is also given to the boat wrecked nearby at Cape Gelidonya, Turkey (*c.* 1200 BC). The discussion of warships will be represented by the Athlit Ram, one of the very few discovered remains of an ancient rammed galley with extant structural timbers.[81] Each of the three case studies examined here, strengthened by comparisons to contemporaneous shipwreck assemblages, acknowledges sacred, cultic, and symbolic aspects to ships, seafaring, and uniquely, to shipbuilding as an industry. By considering this complex of relationships between the objects under investigation in addition to the objects themselves, cedar ships can be seen as things of unusual potency.

The elusive international nature and intriguing ritual clues clinging to each vessel within its presumed function – funerary, commercial, and military – can be interpreted by examining objects-within-objects. The wood making up the ship has its own story, its own origin, apart from the whole and contributing to it. To hear this mereological

---

[81]   Because warships contained very little ballast and were typically built of light woods, only the bronze rams sank on the spot (or close to it), while the rest tended to stay on the surface and drift before succumbing to the depths (Morrison, *Oared Warships*, 1996).

biography, the question of provenance is considered. By using scientific data derived from the wood to determine a possible origin, we may in turn develop a better grasp on the whole ship's reality, not just before sinking below the watery or windy sands, but as it experiences perpetual displacement.

The next chapter closely examines the results of an experimental provenance study employing strontium isotopic analysis,[82] and then it places the proposed provenances for each of the three ships in question further within appropriate (meta)physical contexts: geographical, religious, historical, etc. The contextualization attempts to ascertain why certain groves or landscapes may have been preferred as ideological sources by human storytellers and timber sources by shipwrights. Inevitably, some of those choices had to do with issues of territory and access; however, certain forests seem to have had an active part in the construction of myths related to shipbuilding, and this is further evidenced through timber provenance. Particularly during the Bronze Age in Egypt and the Near East, not only were ships and forests objects of great potency, but evidence suggests that collections of ship timbers exuded sacred meanings and symbolisms, derivative from the wood itself and its source forests. If we have trouble wrapping our minds around object-orientation now, it seems likely that these ancient shipbuilders and storytellers did not. Although 'object-fixation' in nautical archaeology has been spoken of as a bad thing,[83] ironically, taking exactly this object-fixated approach to cedar forests, wood, and ships has addressed some of the issues raised in how documenting rotting ship timbers can become relevant to the humanities or social sciences.

The final chapter is a the discussion of late Antique and Medieval-period ships and wrecks and the conspicuous absence of cedar wood found in their assemblages. This absence is surely related to the one noted at the end of Part I regarding cedar forests. However, while the forests' metaphorical presence regained its popularity, cedar ships appear to remain isolated as things of the distant past, relegated through changes in prevailing religious philosophies of dualism and occasionalism, themselves seeming heirs of Aristotle's hylomorphic model and the widespread onset of monotheism. This chapter suggests that, rather than diminished forest resources, changes in religious and philosophical bearing toward the sea and sea travel may have instigated changes in ship design and composition. Ships in general began to be constructed hastily, and artisinal qualities seem to have gradually diminished beginning in the Hellenistic and lasting through the late Ottoman period. As evidenced in the archaeological record and in contemporaneous religious and economic philosophies, seafaring and shipbuilding were not the esteemed institutions they once were. Cedars have never been easily accessible to the shipwright, but difficulty of procurement never stopped the ancient builders. Rather, it seems that during the Middle Ages, fast-growing, lower elevation trees were sought to satisfy the need for cheap, quickly-built vessels that did not have a high survival rate. Hiking 1200m up to 'God's Mountain' to bring down cedars for a ship was no longer a worthwhile endeavor where piratical and/or naval attacks were

---

[82] Rich *et al.*, *Cedrus* in Cyprus, 2012; Provenancing cedar wood, 2015; Ship in a bottle, 2016.
[83] Törnqvist, Skeleton in the dune, 2013.

imminent. While the cedar forests resumed at least some of their ancient glory (Chapter 3), this was not the case with cedar ships, which would remain obsolete.

Finally, the Epilogue details current forest conservation efforts being made to combat the effects of centuries of deforestation, current global warming trends, and parasite outbreaks, each exaggerating the other and complicating the position of the contemporary forester. As an entity with widespread potency and ability to effect change, the cedar's need to seduce governing bodies and the general public is more urgent now than ever. It is suggested here that conservation enthusiasts should perhaps better re-assess the Romantic notion of 'Nature' altogether because setting plants and woods and things apart as something else buys into the same philosophical grounds that justify their exploitation. In the meantime though, local forestry initiatives have succeeded in raising public awareness of the dangers of deforestation, global warming, and other effects of the Anthropocene, while conserving cedar forests as living heritage monuments.

In the short term, it is my hope that this study will contribute something to the fields of natural science and the humanities, and that in the long-term, that the two may continue to become increasingly less estranged from each other. To examine the space where the two fields of study meet is 'to gain a knowledge of the symbolic science [and] to open a new dimension in the crucial question of the rapport between religion [a.o.] and science.'[84] While archaeological science and theory have historically been at odds with one another, close and interdisciplinary examinations of raw materials has been proposed as a way to mend this rift, which is also a mere byproduct of the greater subject-object divide.[85] By refuting the divide's existence (or at least refusing to be imprisoned by it[86]), and that of its parent human-world divide, 'we reveal that one single theory of the past will never be sufficient[;] the true reality of the past will always be more complex than we can reconstruct.'[87] And there is always going to be a certain level of uncertainty, whether interpreting statistics, texts, objects – or all three – because that is the nature of hermeneutic messages and scientific probability alike: objects are not always utterly specific.[88] It has taken the combined forces of scientific methods, historical research, and object-oriented theories to derive just a few meaningful realities from the 'dirty old bits of boat' that had been ziplocked in the

---

[84] Nasr, Encounter of religion and science, 1984, 541.
[85] Jones, Archaeology and materiality, 2004, 327-338; Boivin *et al.*, Comments on A. Jones, 2005; Kingery, A role for materials science, 1996; Kingery, Materials science and material culture, 1996; Killick, Microscopy in material culture studies; Tite, Dating, Provenance and Usage, 1996; Webmoor, Taking things seriously, 2007, 571-575; Witmore, Symmetrical archaeology, 2007, 546-549; Dolwick, Search of the social, 2008, 17; Dolwick, Social and beyond, 2009, 26-29. On the dualism of nature-culture (science-humanities) as an epistemological device, see Descola, *Ecology of Others*, 2013, 31, 79; Stengers, Experimenting with refrains, 2008.
[86] Stengers, Experimenting with refrains, 2008, 58.
[87] Bray and Pollard, Underpinnings and consequences, in Boivin *et al.*, Comments on A. Jones, 2005, 181. Meskell equally encourages archaeologists to eschew dualisms between life and thought (*Object Worlds*, 2004, 145).
[88] Harman, Horror of phenomenology, 2008, 34; on interpretation and the barricading effect of binaries, see Tilley and Shanks, *Re-Constructing Archaeology*, 1991, 103-104.

basement of Cornell's Tree-Ring Lab for decades.[89] Just think of all the other rough old finds waiting under lock and key to have their speculative fictions written.

On that note, and as a final one, as this prologue is threatening to take over the whole book, I would like to bring in feminist theorist and biologist Donna Haraway to sum up the relations between fact and fiction in scientific storytelling:

> Etymologically, facts refer to performance, action, deeds done – feats, in short. ... Like facts, fiction refers to action, but fiction is about the act of fashioning, forming, inventing, as well as feigning or feinting. Drawn from a present participle, fiction is in process and still at stake, not finished, still prone to falling afoul of facts, but also liable to showing something we do not yet know to be true, but will know.[90]

Whether narrative or anti-narrative, being able to tell the truth depends on the precision of the question being asked; being able to tell a truth depends on the capacity for honesty of the storyteller. So with that, this story will start at the forest, succumbing to 'the mythical fascination of the first beginnings.'[91]

---

[89] Wood samples of ancient artifacts discussed here were generously provided by the Tree-Ring Laboratory at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York (USA). The term 'dirty old bits of boat' is borrowed from Flatman, Theory in maritime archaeology, 2003.
[90] Haraway, *Companion Species Manifesto*, 2003, 19-20.
[91] Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 2013, 64.