

DUTY OF MEMORY: WRECKS IN GREECE

Stefano Benazzo

Traditional Boat Association of Greece

2018



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The photos are by Stefano Benazzo unless otherwise specified. The photos on pages 25 and 35 are by Annika Barbarigos. The photos on page 13 are by Matina Rassia. The photos on page 48 are by Captain Manos Vernicos. The photo on the cover, by Stefano Benazzo, was taken in 2018 in the Island of Chios.

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This book pays tribute to the men who designed, built and worked on the traditional boats and the ships shown here, symbols of the myriads stranded and sunk along the Greek coasts and elsewhere, our maritime heritage.

Stefano Benazzo, Photographer of wrecks

Why am I a Photographer of stranded wrecks? The answer lies in the interaction of many circumstances: I sail since 50 years; I have used cameras for 50 years; wrecks give me emotions; shooting them has become a passion; but above all I feel the duty of memory towards the naval architects, the builders, those who repair ships, the sailors, the fishermen, the tug people, the emigrants, those who save the sailors, their families. I learnt to listen to the voices of wrecks and of the sailors who were on board. Instead of dying slowly and alone, wrecks bear witness to their own obstinacy, their perseverance, their pride - although not many people listen to them. I write about them or photograph them because he who is remembered continues to live.

Wrecks convey piled up experiences and knowledge, and recount real situations; every ship carries with her the memory of her crew. They cannot be brought into museums, they are often in unreachable places and will

disappear in a few decades; they are successfully reclaimed by nature, and often become part of it.

I consider wrecks as images of peace, life, and serenity; they let one imagine the experiences, the suffering, the courage, the fears and the dreams of the sailors and of their families: I strive to stir up those emotions by creating an interest in the wrecks. My images are symbols of countless people and situations; they make us dream, imagine and remember, they express the sense of duty, the hardships, the capacity to work and risk which characterize the unknown sailor, the fisherman, the professional diver, those to whom no monuments are dedicated, those who do not appear in history books, those who worked without asking why and how.

Wrecks have often fascinated people, but they embarrass and sometimes arouse morbid attention; they symbolize our mistakes and our pains. My goal is to erect an ideal monument to the Unknown Sailor - not to explorers or Admirals - that will remind us of the central role of men and the way they work together.

Every ship has brought her contribution to history, even if only in a fragmentary way. A wreck is therefore not only what remains of a vessel; it is a stone in the mosaic of history, and has value as part of History.

I found wrecks in Southern Atlantic, in Africa, in the USA, in Western and Northern Europe. They are usually in places difficult to reach, where some basic conditions prevail: no men, no roads and no commercial use for their remains; they are hermits, but not by their own choice. As I do not work on an encyclopedia, their selection is arbitrary; I am an archeologist of the present, with dreams, phantasy and immense curiosity. Nowadays, practically everything has been explored, crossed, navigated, dived in, climbed upon: I am lucky to have befriended wrecks. Nevertheless, shooting them does not transform someone in a wreck Photographer: one must love them and restore their lives, distinguish their voices from the sounds of surf, of ice breaking loose from icebergs, of seals, sea lions, cormorants, penguins all around, and the eternally blowing wind. The sea represents seventy percent

of the Earth, but we know so little about it. Stranded wrecks are on a magic boundary between sea and land: that adds to their mystery.

Even in countries with centuries-old cultural heritage, wrecks are not protected; on the contrary, they are neglected although they belong to our culture. Usually, the museums protecting maritime heritage have no interest in them; indeed, they bring no tourism, no money, no votes; humanity is inclined to remove them from memory; the traditions and manual capacity of shipbuilders are sometimes respected, but wrecks are politically unsavory, as are ancient boatyards, although in some countries sea, river and canal transport was for centuries the backbone of economy.

In Greece, I was able - thanks to the Traditional Boats Association of Greece - to find many ships and some of the still extant fishing boats; they will live forever in my images and in our memory, like the sailors and fishermen who worked on them. I heartily thank the Association and Annika Barbarigos.

The Man Who Does Not Let Us Forget

There are men who listen to the soul of trees. Others can hear the whisper of old deserted houses. Some claim that a landscape talks directly to their heart. Stefano Benazzo communicates with hulls.

He considers them – and I believe he is right – as living beings, organisms which are manmade and which receive life from the hand of the craftsman. It is this life that he wants to protect; this life is what interests him.

In Greece, the photographer became witness to a revolting crime. Our country used to have the largest fleet of wooden fishing boats in Europe. They were about 17,500. During the last twenty years at least 12,500 of them have been lost and the destruction continues.

In an effort to limit fishing in European waters, the E.U has given great financial compensations to the fishermen who decide to give up the fishing licence of their boat on condition that it is cut to

pieces. This unpleasant task is carried on dry land by bulldozers.

The Greek government does not encourage an alternative solution that could motivate the fishermen to change the use of his boat instead of destroying it; for instance, turning it into a tourist boat.

The art of wooden boat building in Greece is over 2,500 years old. It produced hulls of grace and quality that could withstand the short waves of the Aegean: beautiful, well-made “kaikia” which sail well. They are so strong that they live for decades and can travel anywhere, even in foreign waters. Thanks to these humble vessels Greek shipping advanced and enjoys the prominence it has today.

No matter how much you try, you cannot find two identical “kaikia”. And this is because the carpenter makes each one different from the other. Sometimes he spends years to make it and in few hours his labour and a tradition of millennia is lost because it is well known

that the craftsmen who could make “kaikia” again are disappearing.

If someone watches the way these wooden boats are destroyed, he feels pain in his heart. They groan when the bulldozer “attacks” them... as if they were alive.

This is what one of the last old boat carpenters, Michalis Hatzinikolaou from Rodos, tells us: “They give money so we can break our kaikia. Shall I tell you how I feel when the bulldozer comes to crush them? Tears run down from my eyes. You know why it hurts? Because I know how a hull is made. I have a piece of timber. I touch it, I caress it, I caress it again, I listen to it, I work with it, one year, two years, every day. I am there at it continuously. And when the time comes for the boat to leave the yard I get sick. For days I do not talk to a soul. I tell myself: someone is taking away my child, my joy. Like when you marry off your little girl and you think of how you sang to her lullabies when she was a baby. You don’t make doors. You build something in which you enter and you say to it: take

me here, take me there. And it takes you. If there were no boat builders there would be no humanity because it is they who connect places. It is not captain Michalis, or captain Yannis. It is we who make them into ship-owners. The Greeks with hand sewn and oiled sailcloth reached the other side of the earth without compass, only with God and a solid wooden hull. Are we ready to forget this?”.

Stefano Benazzo does not let us forget it and for this he has our gratitude.

Margarita Pournara
Columnist
KATHIMERINI newspaper

Greek Wrecks: Victims of Time and Violence

When the Hellenic Maritime Museum asked me early in January to help Stefano Benazzo, a retired Ambassador of Italy and now photographer of wrecks, take pictures of shipwrecks in Greece, I was intrigued and challenged...and I accepted.

Until that moment, I was only aware of shipwrecks at the bottom of the sea, inaccessible to non - divers. I never thought of wrecks visible on land. Stefano changed my view. In his gentle but persistent and methodical way, thru correspondence, he encouraged me to look for material in preparation for his visit. So I suddenly found myself obsessively scouting for wrecks on his behalf.

When he arrived three months later, we worked feverishly, moving by land and by sea so he could photograph abandoned vessels for one of his next books. This way I came to discover the magical world of wrecks.

Thru Stefano I learned to look at them not as masses of rotting wood or rusting iron but to see them as living beings, to listen to their stories, to guess their past...

We found wrecks everywhere; the ones that had not sunk entirely could be seen half submerged near the coast, amphibious, enigmatic creatures. We came across wrecks stranded on shores, thrown around boat-yards or deserted near harbours. They could even be found away from the sea, half planted in the earth with herbs growing around them. Their location and degree of disintegration differed but they shared a common fate: they were all victims; victims of reversal of fortune, victims of neglect or accident, and all of them victims of time...but the most heart rending ones were victims of violence; not the violence of natural disaster but human violence.

Those broken wrecks were wooden traditional fishing boats, each one unique, and most of them fine examples of an ancient craft. They were not allowed the dignity of ageing gracefully; their lives were cut short.

They were killed. Deliberately, cruelly as only men can kill: in cold blood, legally. In fact, they were executed for a price. Their death was subsidized. The fishermen who surrendered them to the bulldozers were paid an irresistibly high amount. A program designed to reduce excessive fishing only led to the systematic destruction of our maritime heritage and proved unsuccessful.

As I discovered the beauty of wrecks, Stefano discovered the Greek traditional boats and their plight. He realized that they were an endangered species and he graciously offered to join the efforts of our Association to save them.

He returned to Greece, three months later, this time to photograph mostly remains of these sad wrecks of violence. We could locate only few. Now, when they break fishing boats, they do not cut them anymore. They brutally crush them into pieces that are thrown right away onto heaps of trash. Without visible remnants, without wrecks left behind, their memory is killed too.

Stefano tried to remedy this. With talent and passion, he photographed wrecks, mostly of old wooden hulls and the vanishing remnants of destroyed fishing boats. Thru these pages, we hope to preserve their memory and to make them known to a wider public.

This year, 1.285 fishing boats have been approved for subsidized destruction; funds are now available for killing the first 763. Soon, there will be none left. If there is no change in the law now, a whole maritime tradition will disappear. The Greek seas will miss the beauty of these wooden boats and we will lose an essential part of our culture.

Help us stop this dreadful and senseless crime!

Annika Barbarigos
*Secretary General of the
Traditional Boat Association of Greece*



Georgios T, 1977, destroyed in N. Pyrgos, Evia, June 2018, photos by Matina Rassia



Hios

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Phaleron Bay



Dimitrios, Gytheion



Dimitrios, Gytheion



Hios



Daedalus, Perama



Peloponnesos



Hios



Hios



Poseidon, Phaleron Bay



Hermes, Elefsis



Kaptan Giorgios, destroyed in Koilada, Argolis, November 2012, photos by Annika Barbarigos



Arsinoe, Elefsis



Peiraeus



Peiraeus



Daedalus, Perama



Drapetsona



Lavrion



Georgios, Syros



Aeolos, Nea Peramos



Hios



Panos - Maria (1982), destroyed in N. Pyrgos, Evia, July 2018, photos by Annika Barbarigos



Mediterranean Sky, Loutropyrgos



Elefsis



Hios



Hios



Hios

40



Hios



Hios



Hios



Peloponnesos



Daedalus, Perama



Drapetsona



Hios



Panagiotis, destroyed in Koilada, Argolis, April 2015, photos by Manos Vernicos



Melody, Atalanti Island



Eleni, Koupetoris Boatyard, Salamina



Hios



Hios



Syros



Lavrion



Sirocco, Ambelakia, Salamina



Hios

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Drapetsona



Hios



Peiraeus

Stefano Benazzo

Stefano Benazzo (1949) graduated in political science in Rome. His first employment was at CBS News. During his career in the Italian diplomatic Service, he served in Bonn (1976-1980), Moscow (1980-1983 and 1989-1993), Washington (1986-1989 and 1996-2001); he was Italian Ambassador to Belarus (2001-2003) and to Bulgaria (2008-2012); he left the Service in 2012. He is a sculptor and builds models of ships, boats, cars, motorcycles, trains and of ancient wooden churches; he is vice president of a worldwide Alliance active in preserving heritage trains; he is an experienced sailor.

In his artistic career, he has made nearly 40 personal exhibitions in Italy and abroad, and participated in many collective events. He is the author of the book *Wrecks/Relitti*, published by Skira in 2017; he has published many catalogues and photo portfolios and participated in TV broadcasts. He lives and works in Umbria, Italy.

He has photographed more than two hundred stranded wrecks in six years along the coasts of four continents, and continues to do so. His paramount motivation: the duty of memory towards the sailors, the emigrants, those who save the sailors, their families. His passion towards wrecks lead him to make other books about them, gathering their images and their “confessions” about their lives and the lives of the men on board.

www.stefanobenazzo.it

Traditional Boat Association of Greece

The Traditional Boat Association of Greece was founded in Perama, Attica in 1999 by twenty-five lovers of Greek traditional boats who wanted to fight against the European regulation aimed at the reduction of fishing by subsidizing the destruction of traditional fishing boats. Since then the members have greatly increased in number and include now prominent members of the Greek and international community.

Greek traditional boats and boatyards are an endangered species. This is why the Association has been trying to stop the forces of their destruction which are the subsidized breaking of fishing boats, the persecution of old boatyards and a legislation that does not support the continuation of traditional boatbuilding or the use of traditional Boats.

In order to achieve these goals we record the still existing traditional hulls and boatyards, try to find ways to preserve them and to make known their plea to the wider public thru broadcasts and publications. We also lobby for legislation that is more favorable to traditional boats, organize forums and exhibitions, and celebrate the beauty and uniqueness of these vessels in annual boat shows and regattas.

In its endeavor to save and promote this aspect of Greek culture and maritime tradition, the Association works closely with the Hellenic Maritime Museum and the Yacht Club of Greece.

The Association is also in touch with the relevant ministries but so far has not met with any positive action that would modify the European regulation and stop the destruction of traditional boats.

Annika Barbarigos
Secretary General

Nikos Kavallieros
President

Manos Vernicos
Vice President

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All photos taken by Stefano Benazzo in 2018, unless otherwise stated

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