

# A Cypriot Votive Ship Relief at The Ringling Museum of Art

Luigi Palma di Cesnola found thousands of antiquities while he was American Consul on Cyprus (1865-1876). He sold most of his collection to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In 1928 John Ringling purchased nearly 3,300 antiquities from the Met's collections at auction, most of which were from Cesnola's excavations.

Today these objects are in The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art (RMA) in Sarasota, Florida. Among them are votive reliefs said to have been found in a temple at Golgoi.



Luigi Palma di Cesnola with sculptural reliefs and temple boys he found on Cyprus, ca. 1874; Bank of Cyprus Cultural Foundation Archive, no. PBE 0228, after Marangou, Anna G. 2000. *The Consul Luigi Palma di Cesnola 1832-1904: Life and Deeds*. Nicosia: The Cultural Centre of the Popular Bank Group (page 15).

Of five relief plaques in the RMA collection, the one that is the subject of this poster (see central image) depicts the starboard stern of a ship (inv. no. SN28.1887). As preserved, it measures 17.4 cm in height, 11.4 cm in width, and 3.4 cm in thickness. It is the only known sculpture thought to come from Golgoi that represents a large seafaring vessel. Shown at right is another votive relief from Golgoi that remains in the Met's collection today. It depicts the port side stern of a riverine boat. Unlike the RMA fragment, its HELMSMAN stands and holds a pole or a steering oar that has no built-in protective HOUSING for its LOOM (SHAFT).



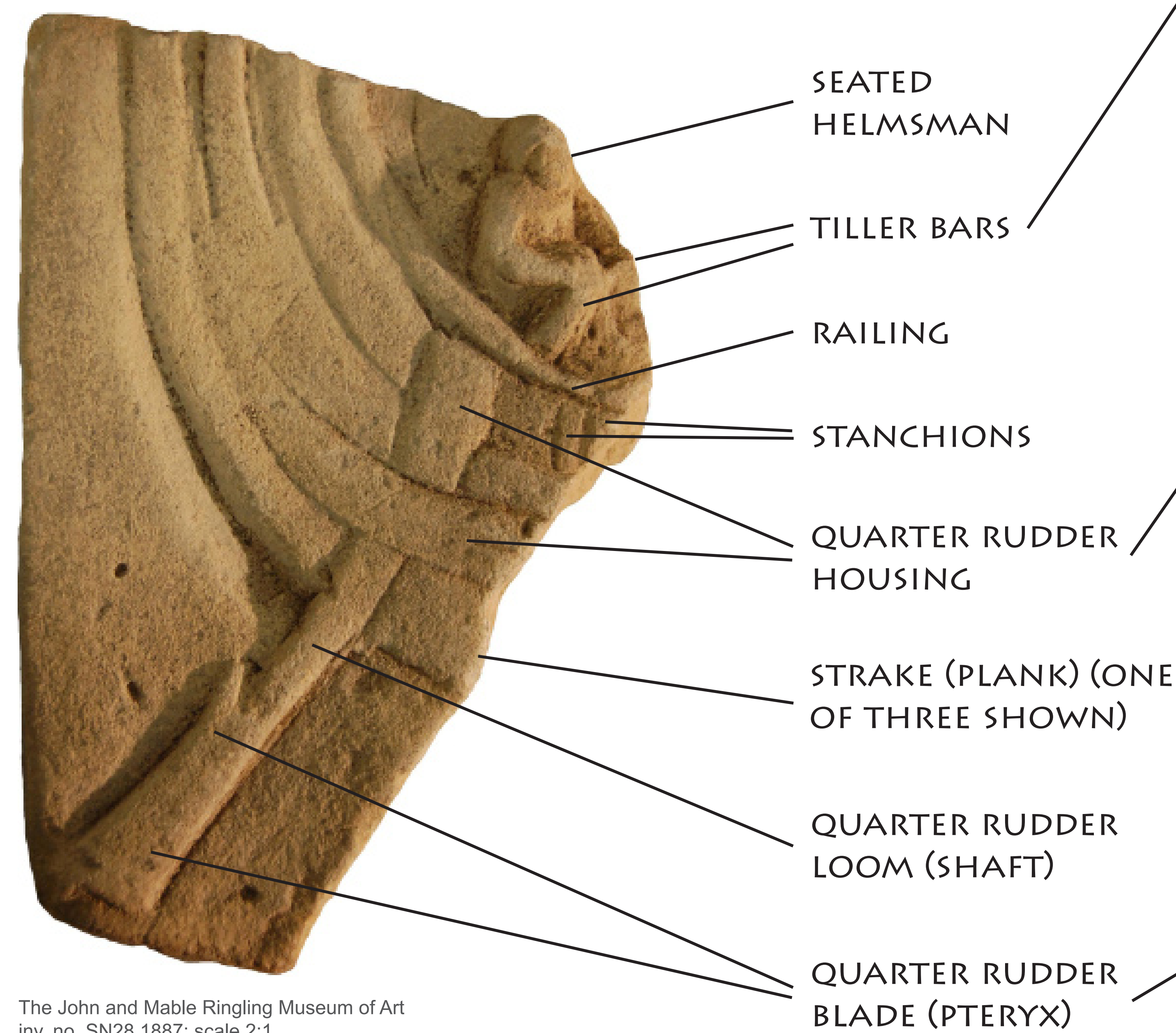
Limestone votive relief fragment depicting a helmsman with a pole or steering oar held over the port side and standing behind a seated person in the stern of a riverine boat with partial eye (?) and Cypriot Syllabic inscription above; height 11 cm; public domain image, Metropolitan Museum of Art acc. no. 74.51.2366.

Although ship imagery at an inland sanctuary may seem surprising, the god Apollo, named in some of Golgoi's votive inscriptions, was known in his guise as a dolphin for the safe passage of sailors. Among Cesnola's finds is a limestone relief fragment that depicts a dolphin below a coiled snake. Its reported find location outside an entrance to a temple at Golgoi suggests that it may have been highly visible to worshippers. Antoine Hermary and Joan Mertens date this sculpture to the Hellenistic (Ptolemaic) period because the snake has an Egyptian double crown. Dress style places most of Golgoi's votive relief plaques in the same period.



Relief sculpture of a coiled snake above a dolphin on a limestone bowl fragment (possibly recut); with Cypriot Syllabic inscription; height 35.4 cm; public domain image, Metropolitan Museum of Art acc. no. 74.51.2369.

In the collections of The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art (RMA) is a Cypriot limestone votive relief fragment that depicts a ship (SN28.1887). The vessel's construction details compare with the Kyrenia Ship, a merchantman built ca. 315–310 that sank ca. 295 BCE off the north coast of Cyprus. This sculpture adds to our understanding of the ancient Cypriots' knowledge about ship construction and the votive significance of maritime imagery on Cyprus during the Hellenistic period.



The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art inv. no. SN28.1887; scale 2:1.

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The carver of the RMA limestone votive relief of a ship had detailed knowledge of ship construction and operation. The relief depicts a seated HELMSMAN protected by a RAILING and STANCHIONS. He holds two TILLER BARS. Each would have been socketed into the upper part of a LOOM (SHAFT) to control steering with a QUARTER RUDDER. Details of this ship compare closely with the Kyrenia Ship, from which one of the TILLER BARS may survive. It is made from a strong but flexible European ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) tree branch or narrow trunk.



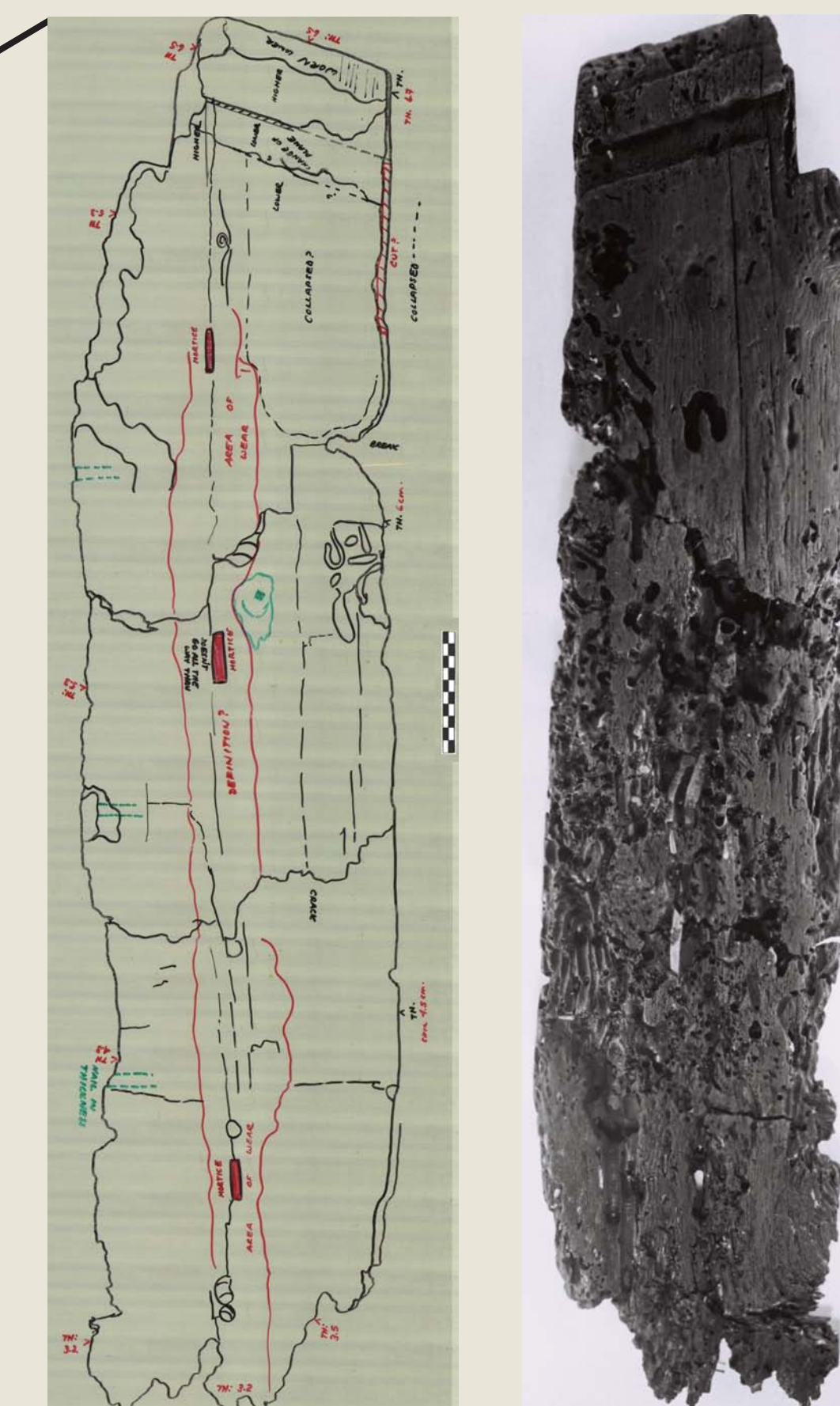
Wooden pole fragments, probably parts of a tiller bar; Kyrenia Ship inv. nos. C.11, .12, and .13; scale 1:5.

The ship on the RMA relief is especially similar to the Kyrenia Ship because its QUARTER RUDDER LOOM (SHAFT) is protected by a box-like HOUSING with side planking that extends in a winglike projection, a feature found only on seafaring merchant ships. Part of the Kyrenia Ship's HOUSING framework is shown here. Its vertical pine (*Pinus brutia*) plank is well finished, while the now fragmentary horizontal pieces are of pine, beech (*Fagus orientalis*), and poplar (*Populus nigra/Populus alba*). This HOUSING probably needed to be repaired frequently.



Wooden framework from part of the housing for the quarter rudder, front (left), back (right); Kyrenia Ship inv. no. W80 UM32; scale 1:5.

The QUARTER RUDDER from the starboard side of the ship on the RMA relief ends in an asymmetrical BLADE with a notch on the aft side. That notch was for securing a rope used to lift the heavy rudder out of the water. These features are also found on the starboard side QUARTER RUDDER, made of pine, from the Kyrenia Ship. Its upper end preserves two strap rabbets cut into the blade to secure the LOOM (SHAFT).



Wooden starboard side quarter rudder, front (left), back (right); Kyrenia Ship inv. no. W82 UM36; scale 1:5.

The high upward curve of the RMA relief ship's wide wale-like STRAKES (PLANKS) might resemble those of a warship. Possibly the carver artistically alluded to more than one kind of ship. People on Cyprus in the early Hellenistic period would have been familiar with both merchant ships, like the Kyrenia Ship, and war ships, as would have been used in the naval battle at Salamis in 306 BCE.