The Stormy Seas of Cyprus

A Game of Epic Wanderings and the Hunt for Helen

Development Report by John Franklin, Art by Glynnis Fawkes

INTRODUCTION

As a longtime history gamer, I have used complex board games at the University of Vermont since 2012, with very good results, to enhance student comprehension and appreciation of ancient texts and periods. (Our Ancient Warfare Gaming Workshop now includes three editions: Peloponnesian War, Alexander the Great, and the Roman Revolution).

Meantime, while researching *Kinyras: The Divine Lyre* (CHS 2015), I collected many myth-variants relating to the adventures of Helen and Paris on their journey to Troy, sometimes with the jilted Menelaus in pursuit. These tales were developed in a special branch of Greek epic concerned with what I call the Eastern Wandering—a 'theater' which more broadly recalled the Aegean migrations to Cyprus and the surrounding lands in the twelfth and eleventh centuries BCE (see further 'Lady Come Down' in *Classical Inquiries*). The underlying storytelling system is illustrated in The Poetics of Eastern Wandering Chart (it also works, with geographical changes, for the Wandering of Odysseus). The singers relied on a limited set of story elements that could freely recombined, by the principle of formulaic composition, within a fixed sequence that may be analyzed as Motivation-Voyage-Arrival-Encounter. Such a structure is ideal for adaptation as a game: oral epic and games alike produce variable outcomes within well defined thematic parameters.

Here I will introduce the game's systems, as currently developed or envisioned, and discuss their relationship to the poetics of Wandering—both what they reflect faithfully, and compromises introduced for gameability. Most of the basic concepts are now in place, but development and play-testing still has a ways to go. Meantime Glynnis' drawings and graphic design should set prospective players drooling.

DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

The game is for two to four players, with one representing Paris and Helen, the other Menelaus (and, if more than two players, his agents—perhaps Odysseus and Talthybius). It lasts for up to twenty-four two-week turns (though it may end sooner: see below) to reflect sources that have Helen and Paris linger in this region for one year to avoid pursuit. Two-week turns also well match the scale of the game and average sailing times.

The victory objectives model three distinct motives:

1) Paris and Helen attempt to evade Menelaus, who seeks to recover Helen. Although no variant ever has Menelaus succeed, the game must make this outcome possible. In that case, the game continues with the roles of Paris and Menelaus inverted. Another factor here is the willingness or unwillingness of Helen (see below).

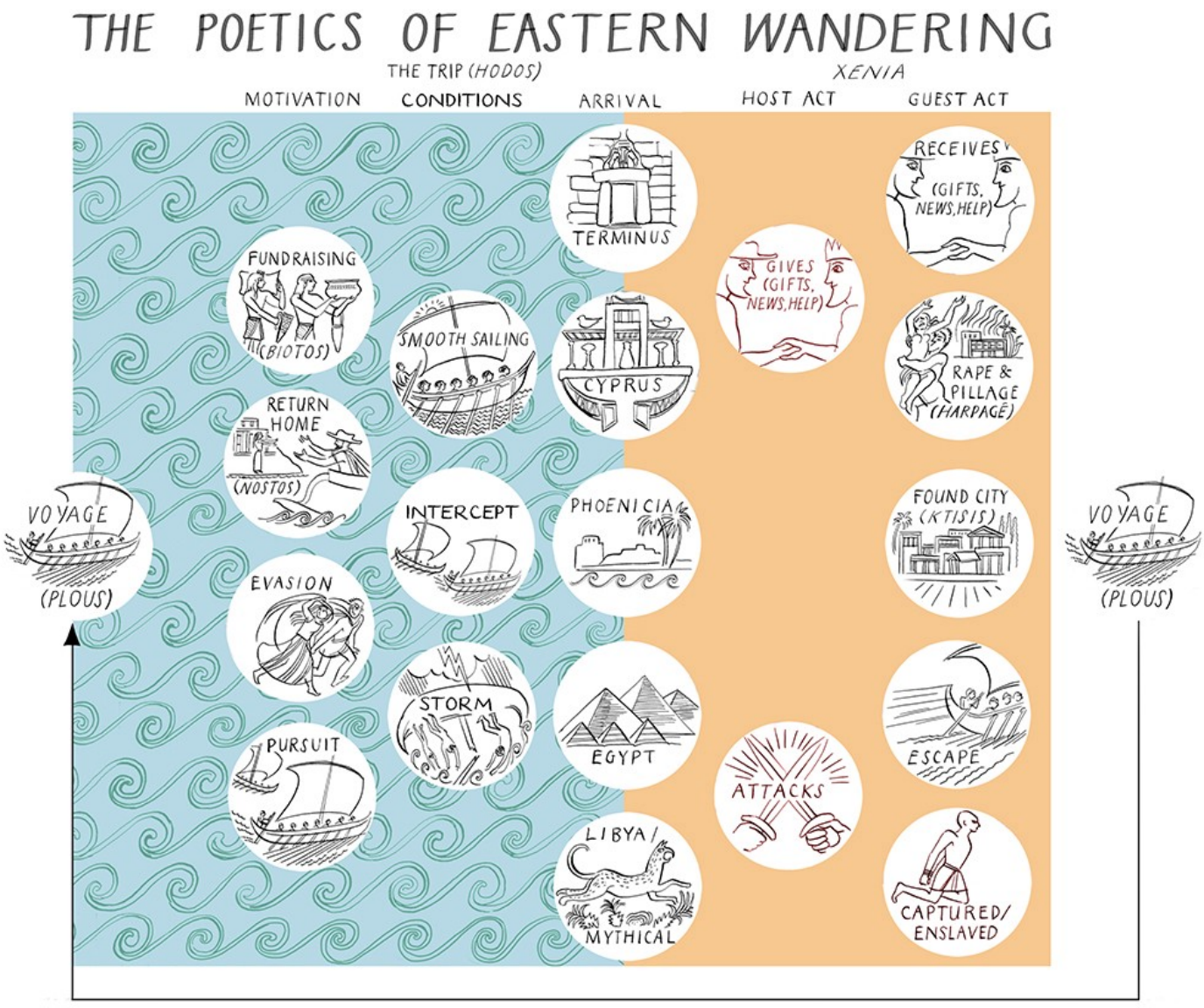
2) The Wandering myths generally agree that noble travelers, whatever other purpose they may have for their journey, accumulated valuable, fame-inducing gifts through the custom of guest-friendship (*xenia*). These often seems to be as important as possession of Helen herself.

3) Since the Hunt for Helen was an immediate prequel to the Trojan War, some variants present a geo-political aspect, with Homer himself indicating that the eastern lands were inclined to favor Troy. An important episode from the lost *Kypria* has Menelaus (sometimes with Odysseus and Talthybius) travel to Cyprus to solicit ships for the armada. King Kinyras, after promising to contribute fifty vessels, made forty-nine of clay, and threw them into the harbor. His reluctance to join the Greek cause was probably due to his being an agent of Aphrodite, protectress of Paris and Helen.

I wanted the game-system to interweave these motives so that the players are rewarded for courses of action that generate narratives akin to the epic tales. The easiest way to do this is to assign victory points to specific objectives, for instance possessing the real Helen, exiting the NW map-edge with her (either for Troy or Sparta), gathering treasure, sacking cities, establishing alliances, and so on. I decided to use the term *Kleos points*, since the various objectives would confirm “fame” in different ways. Kleos also provides the game’s economic engine, since it is often necessary to ‘spend’—actually sacrifice—collected gifts to induce the gods and other off-board characters to intervene in various ways via Action/Event cards (see below).

The game ends after twenty-four turns, at which point players reckon up their Kleos. Alternatively, a player can exit the NW corner and force such a reckoning; if she has more Kleos than her opponents, the game ends and she wins. If not, she is eliminated and the other players carry on. The Paris and Helen player will not exit the board immediately because she cannot be sure, at the outset, that she possesses the real Helen, rather than an Eidolon or phantom-double (as in Euripides’ *Helen* and other accounts). As the game progresses, players attempt to determine the location of the real Helen (see

below). But even possession of the real Helen does not itself guarantee victory; one may still win by amassing enough Kleos for other objectives.



THE BOARD

We distorted the geography of the eastern Mediterranean somewhat to reflect the Greeks' Cyprocentric view of the region. This idea is clearly seen in Menelaus' description of his own (post-Troy) Wanderings, a passage which also encapsulates one of the game's main objectives, gathering wealth (*Odyssey* 4.81–85):

> *For having truly suffered much and wandered far*
> *I brought [much wealth] aboard my ships and came back after seven years,*
> *wandering through Cyprus and Phoenicia and the Egyptian people*
> *Aithiopians I reached, Sidonians, and Eremboi—*
> *even Libya . . .*

Here Cyprus is of equal story-telling stature to Phoenicia, Egypt, and Libya. Accordingly the board magnifies the island, while compressing the Egyptian-Libyan coast to fit the playing space and create a kind of sailing circuit (*periodos*). The place-names are a work in progress. The relatively few destinations found in Homer were fleshed out by those of later mythological sources and ancient geographers, along with some personal favorite sites of the Late Bronze Age. The game world is thus a hybrid of the epic worldview and (very) partially the political landscape of the age in which the tales were believed to have transpired. The Egyptian delta worked best by extending the movement grid into the adjacent land area; note that one can reach Egyptian Thebes (as Menelaus and Helen did after Troy) by reaching the bottom-most delta-circle and spending an additional 16 movement points. Proteus' island is also just off the delta (a day's voyage from Egypt, Homer says).

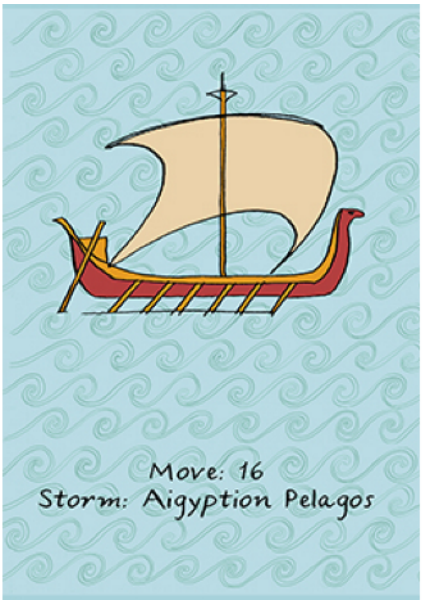
MOVEMENT SYSTEM

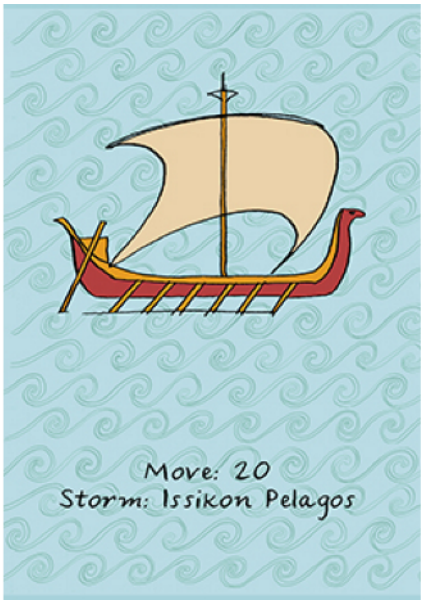
The game is unusual in using purely naval movement, and the players are encouraged to keep on the move, reflecting the station-to-station pattern of epic Wandering tales (in the case of Paris and Helen, standing still will bring Menelaus down on them). So I wanted the movement system to have some depth and give a colorful impression of sea travel in the region. Fortunately W. M. Murray published a handy study of wind patterns around Cyprus, which he presented in three-month (i.e. seasonal) increments. These data underlie the game's Wind Tables, which show the shifting movement-point costs for each of eight compass-directions (diagonal costs are adjusted for the hypotenuse).

Observe that these patterns, with prevailing winds from the northwest, north, and northeast throughout the year, show that Homer was describing a natural sailing circuit, with a 'clockwise' voyage east and south easier than a return to Greece. Here is a fundamental real-world basis for the protracted adventures of the Eastern Wandering theater. But movement in the opposite direction is facilitated by a second wind pattern caused by warmer temperatures along the coasts. This phenomenon is reflected in the lighter-colored coastal sea area, which is not governed by the Wind Tables but has its own moderate movement-point costs.

Each turn players declare whether or not they will move, and write down their intended destination. These declarations are binding.

Each moving player then draws from the Voyage/Plous deck. These cards serve several functions. The first is to randomize storms—one of the most common traditional devices in epic Wandering tales. If the card indicates a storm in the area within which a player is setting out, the intended voyage is interrupted and the player undergoes the outcome specified by rolling on a Storm Table; this always involves a change of location (sometimes drastic) and often damage or loss of ships and/or gifts and characters. A storm can be modified through Action/Event cards (normally Divine Weather, which can diminish or augment a storm), or through one of several Expert Helmsman cards (e.g. Phrontis).



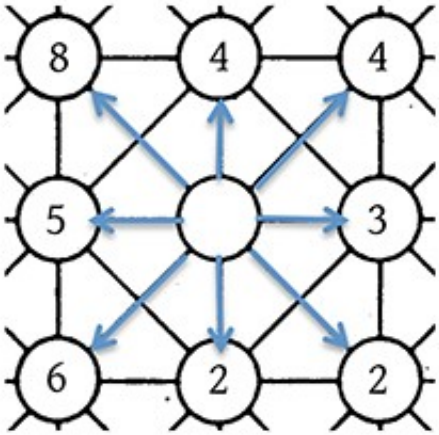


If no storm is indicated, the card grants the player a certain number of movement points for that turn (varying from 16 to 24, with 20 most common); this amount can be enhanced (or impeded) through Divine Weather cards. The player must then attempt to reach the declared destination by the shortest route possible.

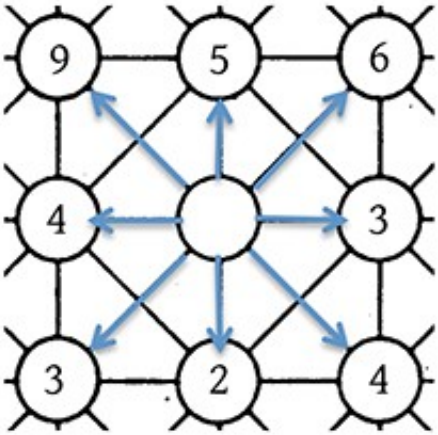
This system of simultaneous, secret voyage-plotting allows Paris and Helen to stay on the move and not be easily caught by Menelaus. Players also enjoy a certain "gambler's rush" from choosing destinations, since a low-value Voyage/Plous card may prevent the player from reaching port—something best avoided, since ships forced to remain at sea are more susceptible to storms in the following turn (*two* Voyage/Plous cards are then consulted for storm locations).

Wind Tables

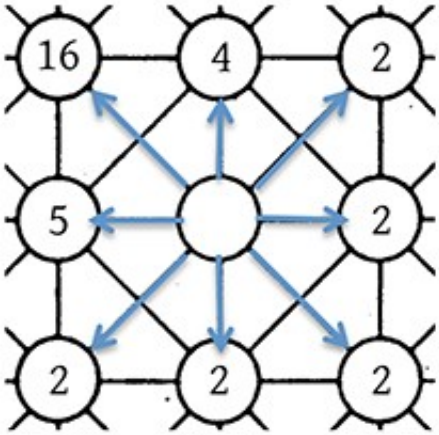
December–February



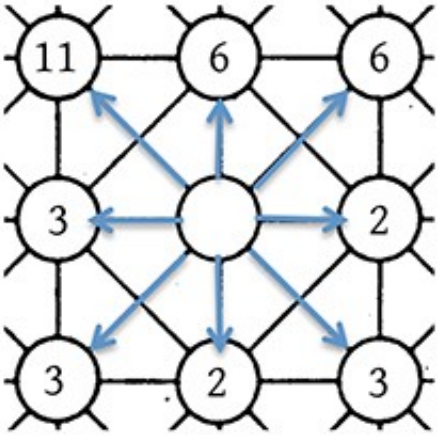
March–May



June–August



September–November



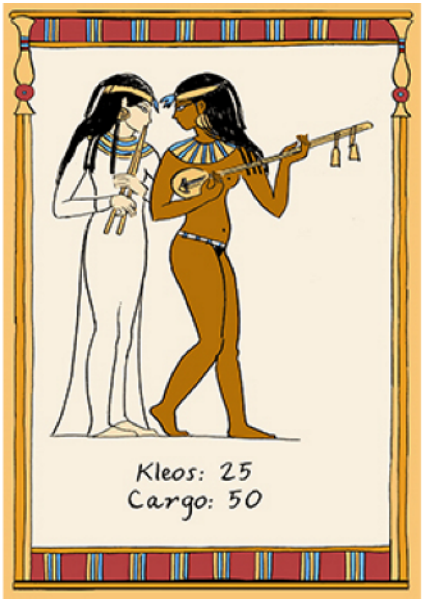
XENIA DECK

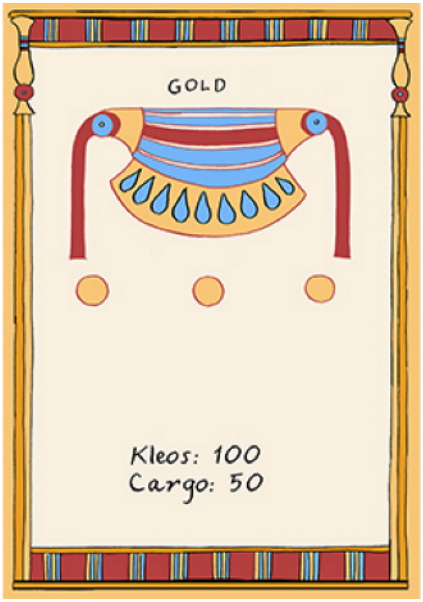
Upon reaching a destination, a player draws from the Xenia deck the number of cards specified for that location (a number will be printed next to each site on the map: some sites are richer than others). The usual outcome is that the player adds to her supply of gifts, and thus her Kleos. However, occasionally a host will attack the guests, typically because they have fallen in love with Helen. This is one of two mechanisms for the Helen-Eidolon system (see below).

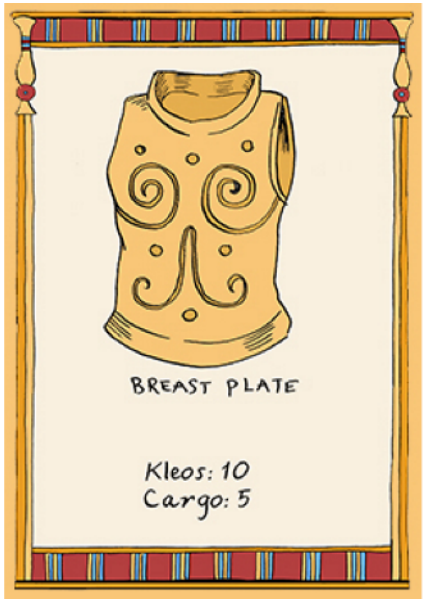
The Xenia ‘gift-cards’ depict one of the many precious items—and sometimes people—collected by epic heroes. Pride of place is given to the treasure gathered by Menelaus in his seven years of wandering in the *Odyssey*. This is complemented by luxury items (and sometimes persons) known to have circulated in the Late Bronze Age between palaces of the region. These historical exchange networks made it unnecessary to tie specific objects to locations, since any item might end up anywhere through gift-exchange.

Each gift has a Kleos value that contributes to victory, if the gift is retained, or can be sacrificed (‘spent’) to activate various Action/Event cards.

Gifts also have a cargo rating. Each ship is capable of carrying a certain amount of cargo in addition to its crew and characters. The cargo capacity of a player’s ship(s) limits what she can carry home with her. Additional ships are occasionally acquired through Action/Event cards.







HELEN AND HER EIDOLON

The phantom-doppelgänger (*eidolon*) was a traditional epic device—found in Homer himself, where they are indistinguishable from the genuine article. Similarly, in Euripides' *Helen*, Menelaus is oblivious that he is traveling with—and no doubt satisfactorily sleeping with—an Eidolon; only after a protracted recognition-scene (*anagnorisis*) does he learn the truth. Athenian audiences might well have left the theater questioning the nature of individual identity and reality itself. Still, Euripides gives divine assurance, through Kastor and Polydeukes who appear *ex machina*, that the real Helen has been discovered.

One design challenge is therefore to have the players not know, for much of the game, whether or not they possess, or are pursuing, the real Helen; yet it must also be possible to discover her true identity eventually.

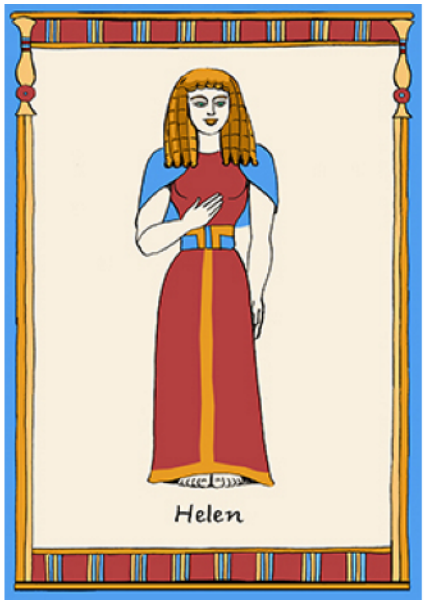
Our sources present two variants in how the Eidolon is introduced. Euripides uses divine agency (Hermes) to whisk away the real Helen to Egypt, so that Paris returns to Troy with an Eidolon, which Menelaus eventually captures and travels with after Troy. Another version has the Egyptian king (this time Proteus) replace Helen with a phantom while he is hosting the couple; Paris carries on unwittingly to Troy, while Helen remains in Egypt.

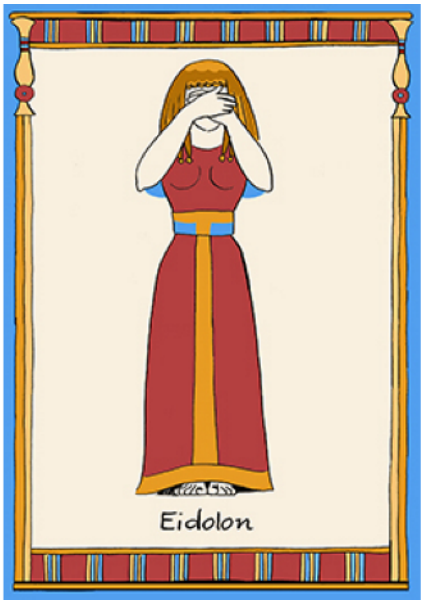
These two variants should be generalized in the game system, as are the other storytelling elements. A Helen/Eidolon swap must therefore be possible

during guest-friendship at *any* destination, or through the play of Action/Event cards representing divine intervention. But somehow a player who has been subjected to Helen/Eidolon swap cannot be allowed to turn back immediately and rescue Helen, but must carry on with the journey. Still, it must also be *possible* to rescue Helen or an Eidolon from a detaining host (as Menelaus does in Euripides).

These considerations dictated the Helen/Eidolon deck. These twelve cards have the same top side, showing Helen with her hands over her eyes (a great touch by Glynnis); only one of them has the real Helen on its hidden bottom side. At the start of the game, one of these cards is dealt to the Paris/Helen player. During the game, additional Helen-Eidolon cards will enter play as the result of hostile Hosts and divine interventions. Each new Helen-Eidolon swap creates a Hidden state (*amphikalypsis*: see States) so that it is not possible to return to the swap-scene and attempt a recovery unless or until one consults a Seer (Action/Event). Whenever a player possesses two Helen-Eidolon cards—and never before—she turns them over and compares them. If both are phantoms, she returns one to the bottom of the Helen-Eidolon deck and keeps the other. The assumption here is that, if Paris or Menelaus were confronted by two Eidolons, they would convince themselves that one was real, and so abandon the other. This process is repeated throughout the game until a player has identified the real Helen (or the game has otherwise ended). If this happens a player might wish to start planning an exit from the NW corner, since possession of the real Helen is worth many Kleos points and will often clinch victory. It may sometimes happen, however, that a player will wish to keep collecting gifts and building alliances (if another player has a big lead in Kleos).

The Helen/Eidolon system can produce some absurd outcomes. Nevertheless these are a logical extension of the storytelling system, and add a lot of fun and excitement to the game.





ACTION/EVENT DECK

This deck is a catch-all for various events or event types from the epic poems, and other actions that enhance the game's basic systems. Many cards are tied to specific locations. This means that players often Wander not haphazardly, but in pursuit of a specific destination where an Action/Event may take place or be activated. Other cards may be played without regard for location. Many of both types are paired with another Action/Event that cancels it or counteracts it in some way.

The Seer group of cards can only be activated by visiting the home palace of the appropriate seer (seers can reveal hidden characters, let a player examine an opponent's cards, etc.).

Intercept cards, which can let a passing ship be captured and result in a detention of characters (for instance Helen), can only be played in connection with an allied palace; this encourages players to cultivate these alliances (for which they receive Kleos anyway) and to be increasingly careful in their choice of routes.

Detentions result not only in travel delays, but increase the chance of a pursuer overtaking his quarry.

Amphikalypsis cards temporarily make a destination unavailable to other travellers; Menelaus was so hidden by Phaidimos of Sidon, and again by Proteus; Helen by Proteus.

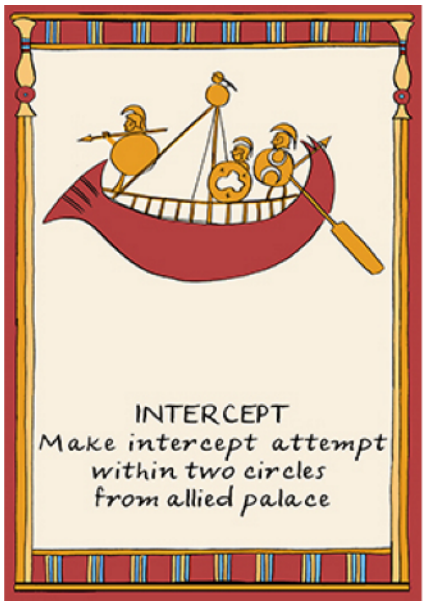
Divine Weather cards can be used to inflict or counteract a storm, and enhance or inhibit movement. They are tied to specific seas, over which various gods have jurisdiction.

Sea Peoples raids are also tied to specific seas. These Raids can result in Enslavement—comparable to detention, but resulting in the random relocation of a character and requiring an Escape card to undo.

Change of Heart, Gifts of Aphrodite, and Helen Escapes work together to give Helen the depth of character she enjoys in the ancient sources. At the start of the game, the Menelaus player decides whether Helen has eloped with Paris (willing) or has been abducted (unwilling). During the game Helen can vacillate between willing and unwilling through the play of Change of Heart and Gifts of Aphrodite, which reverse Helen's willing and unwilling states respectively. (It is assumed that Helen's eidolon can also display such moods.) Helen Escapes can only be played when Helen is unwilling. If this condition is met, she is given a ship and will attempt to exit the NW corner of the board by the shortest possible route. If this happens, players will not know until after the game is over, or until all other Helen-Eidolon cards are resolved, if this was the real Helen. Note that Helen can be either willing or unwilling with respect to both Paris and Menelaus, and can attempt escape from either (her destination will be Sparta or Troy, depending).

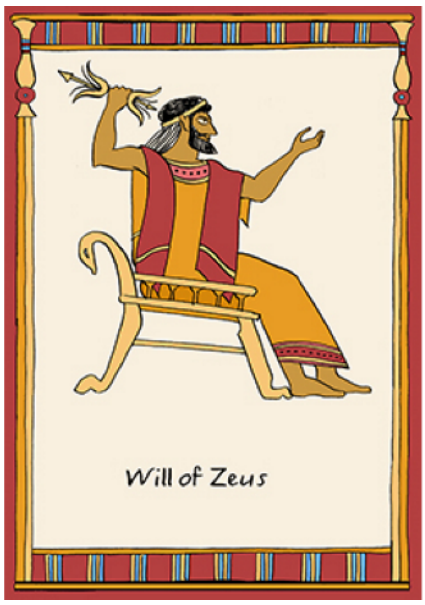

GIFTS OF APHRODITE
Helen becomes willing

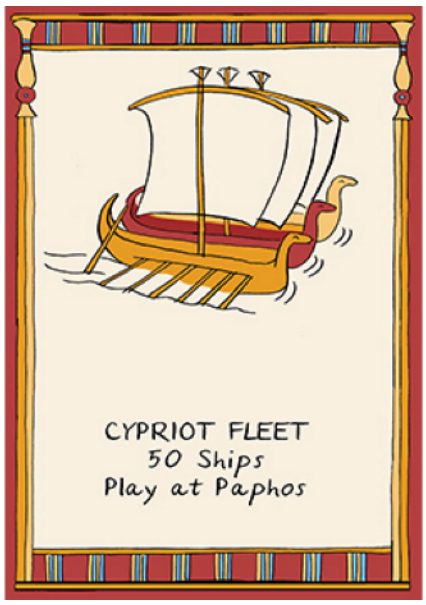

DETENTION
Character detained
at palace


INTERCEPT
Make intercept attempt
within two circles
from allied palace


LUKKA PIRATES
Make Intercept attempt
in Lykion Pelagos


SACK CITY
Make sack attempt
Must possess fleet


Will of Zeus



SYSTEMS AWAITING DEVELOPMENT

Magical Waters Deck

Whenever a player ends a turn in a coastal area without a palace, she must draw from this deck. These cards are generally hazardous, but can also bestow Kleos. They will present a combination of monstrous and supernatural encounters from epic and other mythological sources. We shall avoid using the famous episodes of the *Odyssey*, in order to maintain a distinctive Eastern flavor (and we may wish to develop a separate *Odyssey* game later).

Unfortunately we learn very little about such episodes in connection with Paris, Helen, and Menelaus. It is clear, however, that Homer regarded Libya as belonging to the same sort of fantastical realms that Odysseus explores. It seems reasonable, therefore, to adapt some of the Libyan encounters attested for Jason and the Argonauts (some scholars believe that Jason's adventures transpired in the eastern Mediterranean before being transferred to the Black Sea region during Greek colonization there). These adventures will be fleshed out with other material from Anatolian, Levantine, and Egyptian myth. Material relating to the Philistines in the Biblical narratives might also be included, since these were one of the migrating Sea Peoples (i.e. the Peleset) of Aegean and western Anatolian origin mentioned in the inscriptions of Ramses III in the early twelfth century.

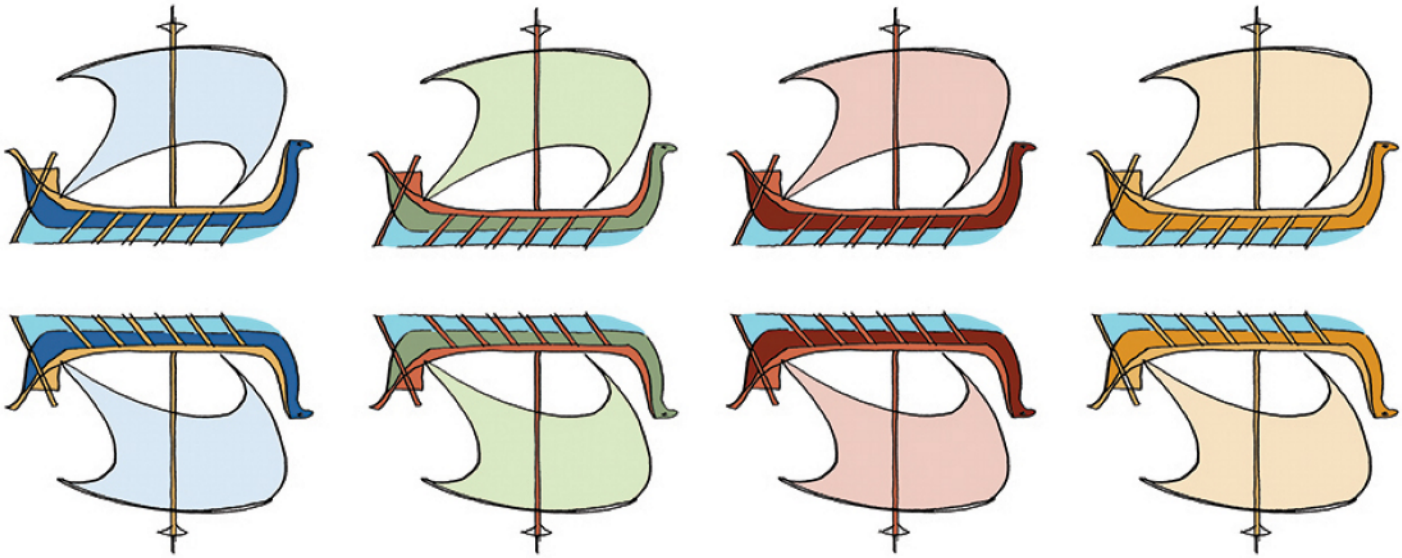
Diplomatic Alignment

Diplomatic alignments provide players with Kleos, and help limit the movement of opponents through the use of Intercept cards. Alignments are probably established through a combination of Action/Event cards and gift sacrifices. It should also be possible to reverse a diplomatic alignment, so that the board does not get too quickly carved into factions that will overly limit players' freedom of movement. Also, since divine intervention cards can cause a Helen-Eidolon to be located in any city, it must remain possible to visit a hostile city and recover her.

Battle

Since it has to be possible for Menelaus to recapture Helen, and for Paris to sack Sidon with a gift of Cypriot ships (as he does in Dictys of Crete), some system for resolving ship-to-ship battles, and the sacking of cities, is unavoidable. This will be fairly simple, perhaps a traditional odds-table based on number of ships and/or city strength; outcomes can also be affected by various Action/Event cards. But battle must be interesting and flexible enough to allow for an expansion game covering the post-Troy Aegean migrations to the region. This was represented mythologically by Greek veterans like Teukros and Agapenor who did not return home from Troy but founded cities in Cyprus; or the Greco-Anatolian migration hero Mopsos, who led a mixed host by land through Cilicia, Syria, and Phoenicia as far as Pelusium. Such an expansion would use the same board, but introduce different characters (Kinyras replaced by Dmetor, for instance; various Greek migration heroes). It

would involve larger ship numbers and involve more frequent battles and city-sackings, as well as the foundation of new cities.



Print, cut out, and glue playing pieces.

Glynnis Fawkes is a cartoonist and archaeological illustrator. She won the Society of Illustrators MoCCA Arts Festival Award for Excellence in April 2016 for a work in progress, a memoir of a first trip to Greece. She held a residency in 2015 at La Maison des auteurs in Angouleme, France and her work has been listed among the Best American Comics Notables for two years. She illustrated John Franklin's 2016 book Kinyras the Divine Lyre (Center for Hellenic Studies). She has illustrated for excavations at Troy, Knossos, Kommos, Paphos, and in Israel, Lebanon, Syria, and many other sites on Cyprus.

John Franklin is Associate Professor of Classics at the University of Vermont. He began life in music composition at the New England Conservatory (1988) before switching to Classics for a PhD from University College London (2002). Much of his research deals with the cultural, and especially musical, interface between early Greece and the Near East. He has discussed some of the

historical and literary background of *Stormy Seas of Cyprus: A Game of Epic Wanderings and the Hunt for Helen* in his 2016 book *Kinyras: The Divine Lyre* (Center for Hellenic Studies), also available online.

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