

## INTRODUCTION

The Mediterranean coast was an unrivalled and privileged theater where navigation was used as a leading force for the development of cultures and human migrations.

The exchange of goods was the driving factor that led civilizations to advance in commerce and the wellbeing of their citizens, but it was also used for military purposes.

The growth of maritime sciences and the conquest of the known world developed from East to West with two chock-points in the Mediterranean controlling access to this sea: the 'Ponto Euxino' (Black Sea) and 'Pillars of Hercules' (The Strait of Gibraltar).

Little by little, the different cultures that coexisted in Iberia merged until they became the 'Hispania' of the Roman Empire. The Visigoth, Muslim and Christian Spain continued expanding its maritime links until the Kingdom of Aragon reverted the traditional east-west flow of maritime activities.

With Aragonese territories established throughout the Mediterranean Sea and Castile extending its domains beyond the Atlantic Ocean, Spain steadily became a mighty maritime power.

## **CHAPTER I – THE DAWN OF NAVIGATION. SEA ROUTES.**

### **The Sea in the History of Mankind**

For primitive societies, the sea was an obstacle but, at the same time, a natural barrier which provided security as well as provisions. The large amount of deposits of seashells all around the Mediterranean coasts are a faithful testimony that the sea was one of the main means of subsistence of old civilizations.

With the dawn of navigation, transport and fishing became human activities of paramount importance and the coast ceased to be a barrier. Commerce and relations with other people followed suit. As a result, rivalries inevitably emerged and piracy and naval warfare appeared for the first time.

With improvements in navigation techniques, the acquaintance of coasts and beaches and the study of streams, currents and wind directions, new sea routes were established as well as the need to protect them. The sea became a domain susceptible to both, possession and exclusion.

The Age of Discovery opened up the whole world to the colonial empires which battled for the control of new lands and their wealth.

Three distinctive activities were usually conducted at sea: fishing, trade and war, but in the last centuries we can add two further undertakings: sports and scientific research. The famous sentence by Pompey the Great: 'to navigate is necessary, to live is not' is very enlightening, although he obviously referred to mankind, and not to specific people.

Located between two historic seas, the Atlantic and Mediterranean, and with nearly 3,300 kilometers of coast, Spain was a maritime nation called to be a naval power with an important merchant marine. Today, the Spanish economy is dependent on the sea, since maritime shipping represents 90% of all the transport activity.

### **Origins of Navigation**

The origins of navigation go back to the time when mankind had the need for transport and the requirement to search for new means of subsistence.

From the first attempts to 'float' with logs tied together and other wooden artifacts, men endeavored over the centuries to master the art of navigation. Keels to aid stabilization, tar to seal hulls and metal gadgets to tie wood planks together were some of the new techniques which, little by little, made navigation a safe way of travelling.

But the real conquest of the sea started with the use of sails to take advantage of the wind as a means of propulsion. Once the main ins and outs of navigation were substantiated, ships began specializing and two basic models were developed: merchant and battle ships, the former with heavy and paunchy hulls,

and the latter longer and lighter vessels with naval rams to inflict as much damage as possible. Egyptian, Phoenician, Greek and Roman warships were the precedents of future galleys, whose name derives from the 'galleries' or rows of oarsmen used to propel the boat.

From lakes to rivers and, then, to the sea, the early years of navigation flourished in the Nile and the rivers of Mesopotamia. Time came to prove that sea lines were the fastest and most effective means of communication between far away regions and the need to protect those sea lines was essential.