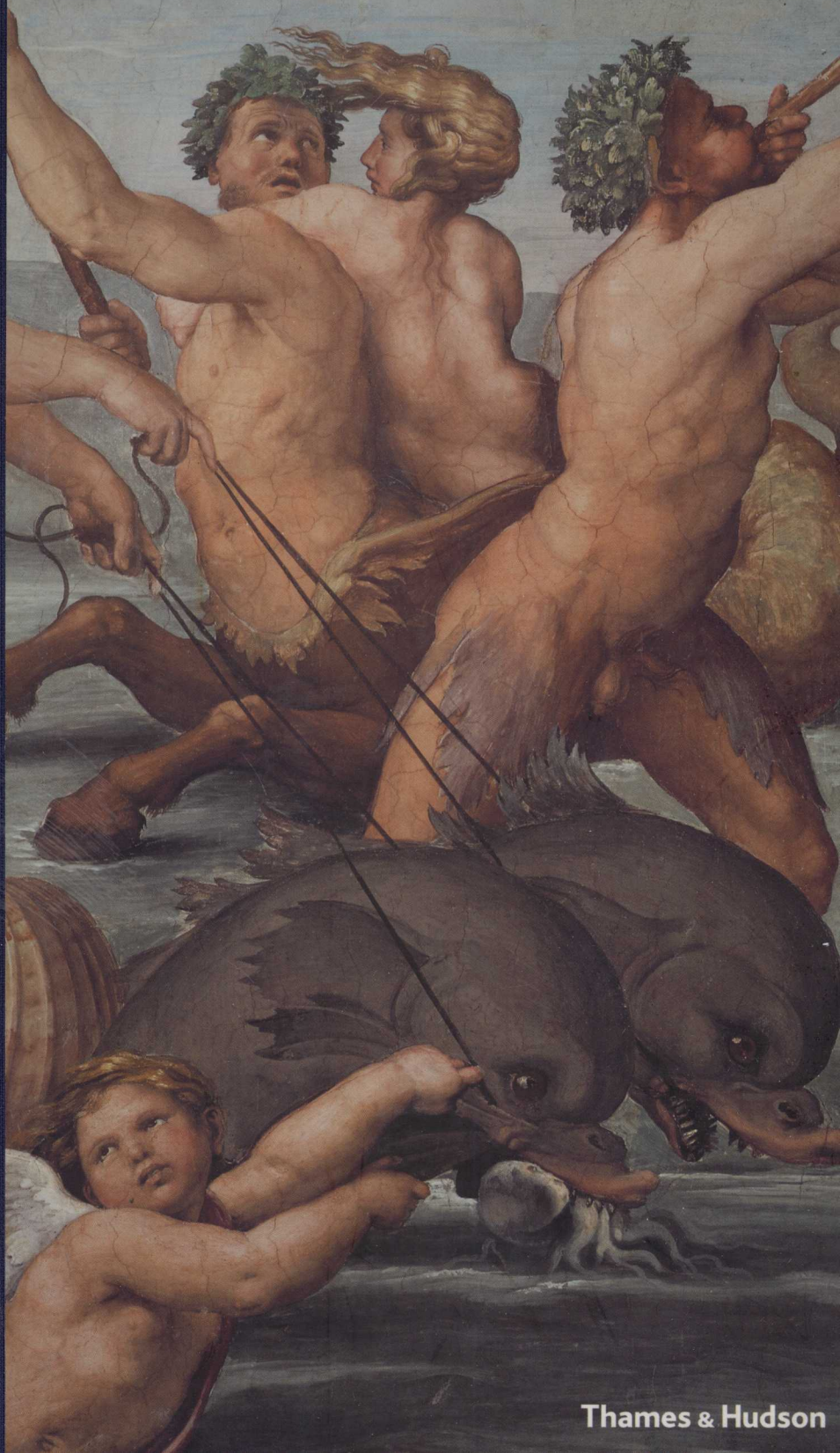


Charles Avery

*A
School
of
Dolphins*



Thames & Hudson



30805694



of Dolphins



Thames & Hudson

ADZGUB

On the cover: details from 'The Triumph of Galatea' by Raphael, in the Villa Farnesina, Rome, 1511 (Photo Scala, Florence)

On the endpapers: one of the 17th-century Dutch tiles on the walls of the kitchen of the Musée de l'Hospice Comtesse, Lille

On the title page: a silver coin from Syracuse, Sicily, 5th century BC

First published in the United Kingdom in 2009 by Thames & Hudson Ltd,
181A High Holborn, London WC1V 7QX

www.thamesandhudson.com

Copyright © 2009 Thames & Hudson Ltd, London

All Rights Reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any other information storage and retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-500-23861-5

Research by Anthony Ashby
Picture research by Georgina Bruckner

Designed by Derek Birdsall RDI
Typeset in Monotype Poliphilus with *Blado Italic* by Shirley & Elsa Birdsall

Printed and bound in Italy by Editoriale Bortolazzi-Stein

6	PROLOGUE <i>Man & Dolphin: Species in Harmony</i>
	I
20	MYTHS, LEGENDS, & THE ORIGINS OF DOLPHIN LORE <i>The Boy on a Dolphin - Arion & the Dolphin</i>
	II
40	GODS & DOLPHINS <i>Cupid on a Dolphin - A Raphaelesque Interlude - A Mannerist 'Dolphinarium' - Venus & Cupid with a Dolphin - Neptune & the Dolphin - Neptune's Marine Family: Amphitrite & Triton - Oceanus - Thetis - The Nereids - Galatea - Fortune - Europa - Dionysus & the Pirates - The Dolphin 'Psychopompos' - Apollo, God of the Sun</i>
	III
108	THE SYMBOLIC DOLPHIN: EMBLEMS, HERALDRY, & ATTRIBUTES <i>The Trident - The Anchor - The Dolphin in Early Christian & Renaissance Art - Heraldry, & the Dauphins of France - Venice, from 'La Serenissima Repubblica' to 'Hello Venezia' - Venetian Decorative Arts - 'Rule Britannia!'</i>
	IV
172	FOUNTAINS & FURNITURE: THE DOLPHIN IN A SUPPORTING ROLE <i>Fountains - Dolphins in Furniture & the Decorative Arts</i>
206	EPILOGUE <i>The Thames, the Hudson, & the Dolphin</i>
210	<i>Dolphins in Literature</i>
218	<i>Further Reading and Sources</i>
220	<i>Acknowledgments for Illustrations</i>
222	<i>Index</i>

A School of Dolphins

Charles Avery

A School

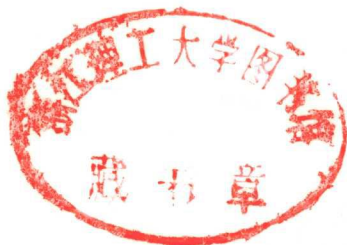




30805694



of Dolphins



Thames & Hudson

10721150

On the cover: details from 'The Triumph of Galatea' by Raphael, in the Villa Farnesina, Rome, 1511 (Photo Scala, Florence)

On the endpapers: one of the 17th-century Dutch tiles on the walls of the kitchen of the Musée de l'Hospice Comtesse, Lille

On the title page: a silver coin from Syracuse, Sicily, 5th century BC

First published in the United Kingdom in 2009 by Thames & Hudson Ltd,
181A High Holborn, London WC1V 7QX

www.thamesandhudson.com

Copyright © 2009 Thames & Hudson Ltd, London

All Rights Reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any other information storage and retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-500-23861-5

Research by Anthony Ashby
Picture research by Georgina Bruckner

Designed by Derek Birdsall RDI
Typeset in Monotype Poliphilus with *Blado Italic* by Shirley & Elsa Birdsall

Printed and bound in Italy by Editoriale Bortolazzi-Stei srl

6	PROLOGUE <i>Man & Dolphin: Species in Harmony</i>
	I
20	MYTHS, LEGENDS, & THE ORIGINS OF DOLPHIN LORE <i>The Boy on a Dolphin - Arion & the Dolphin</i>
	II
40	GODS & DOLPHINS <i>Cupid on a Dolphin - A Raphaelesque Interlude - A Mannerist 'Dolphinarium' - Venus & Cupid with a Dolphin - Neptune & the Dolphin - Neptune's Marine Family: Amphitrite & Triton - Oceanus - Thetis - The Nereids - Galatea - Fortune - Europa - Dionysus & the Pirates - The Dolphin 'Psychopompos' - Apollo, God of the Sun</i>
	III
108	THE SYMBOLIC DOLPHIN: EMBLEMS, HERALDRY, & ATTRIBUTES <i>The Trident - The Anchor - The Dolphin in Early Christian & Renaissance Art - Heraldry, & the Dauphins of France - Venice, from 'La Serenissima Repubblica' to 'Hello Venezia' - Venetian Decorative Arts - 'Rule Britannia!'</i>
	IV
172	FOUNTAINS & FURNITURE: THE DOLPHIN IN A SUPPORTING ROLE <i>Fountains - Dolphins in Furniture & the Decorative Arts</i>
206	EPILOGUE <i>The Thames, the Hudson, & the Dolphin</i>
210	<i>Dolphins in Literature</i>
218	<i>Further Reading and Sources</i>
220	<i>Acknowledgments for Illustrations</i>
222	<i>Index</i>

PROLOGUE

Man & Dolphin: Species in Harmony



A fresco of c. 1500 BC from the Greek island of Thera, the missing parts restored. In covered pavilions on two galleys passengers elegantly seated opposite one another converse happily above the heads of the serried ranks of oarsmen, while prettily striped dolphins sport round them in a calm sea.

*Where the dolphin loves to follow,
Weltering in the surge's hollow,
Dear to Neptune and Apollo;
By the seamen understood
Ominous of harm or good;
In capricious, eager sallies,
Chasing, racing round the galleys . . .*

Aristophanes, *The Frogs* (translated by John Hookham Frere)



Our idea of the dolphin is today most likely derived from childhood visions of the creature in benign captivity in dolphinariums. There it is to be seen at close quarters, performing clever tricks, leaping from the water and plunging back into it to circle mysteriously in the depths: it responds to and communes happily with human beings. Later in life, as fortunate tourists, we can sometimes further our distant acquaintance with dolphins when cruising in the Mediterranean or other seas, as they skip in whole schools alongside ships, seeming to rally joyfully round the bows even of a powerful motor vessel. Their curious behaviour was brilliantly encapsulated (around 434 BC) by the Greek playwright Aristophanes in his comedy *The Frogs*, in which he puts the words above into the mouth of the dramatist Aeschylus. More prosaically, several centuries later, Pliny described the same noteworthy behaviour: 'It is not afraid of a human being as something strange to it, but comes to meet vessels at sea and sports and gambols round them even when under full sail.' The sudden appearance of dolphins literally 'out of the blue' was generally construed as benign and protective to the vessels that they chose to sport alongside.

A similar belief continued for a millennium or more, but dolphins were also thought to presage danger. On Saturday 27 May 1458, Gabriele Capodilista was cruising down the coast of Dalmatia in a Venetian galley, and just after they had passed Cataro (Kotor) they were becalmed and had to rely solely on the oarsmen. In the evening 'there appeared a huge quantity of dolphins which, as the sailors say, are ambassadors of some change of fortune at sea'. This proved to be true, for on the Sunday morning the dreaded scirocco rose, blowing against them from the south and 'lashing the sea into great waves that repeatedly broke over the prow and sides of the galley: about fifty of the biggest dolphins drew near, but the crew were not pleased because they feared even greater danger, seeing as they could not even find anywhere to shelter from the force of the contrary wind and they had to entrust themselves instead to the mercy and grace of God.'



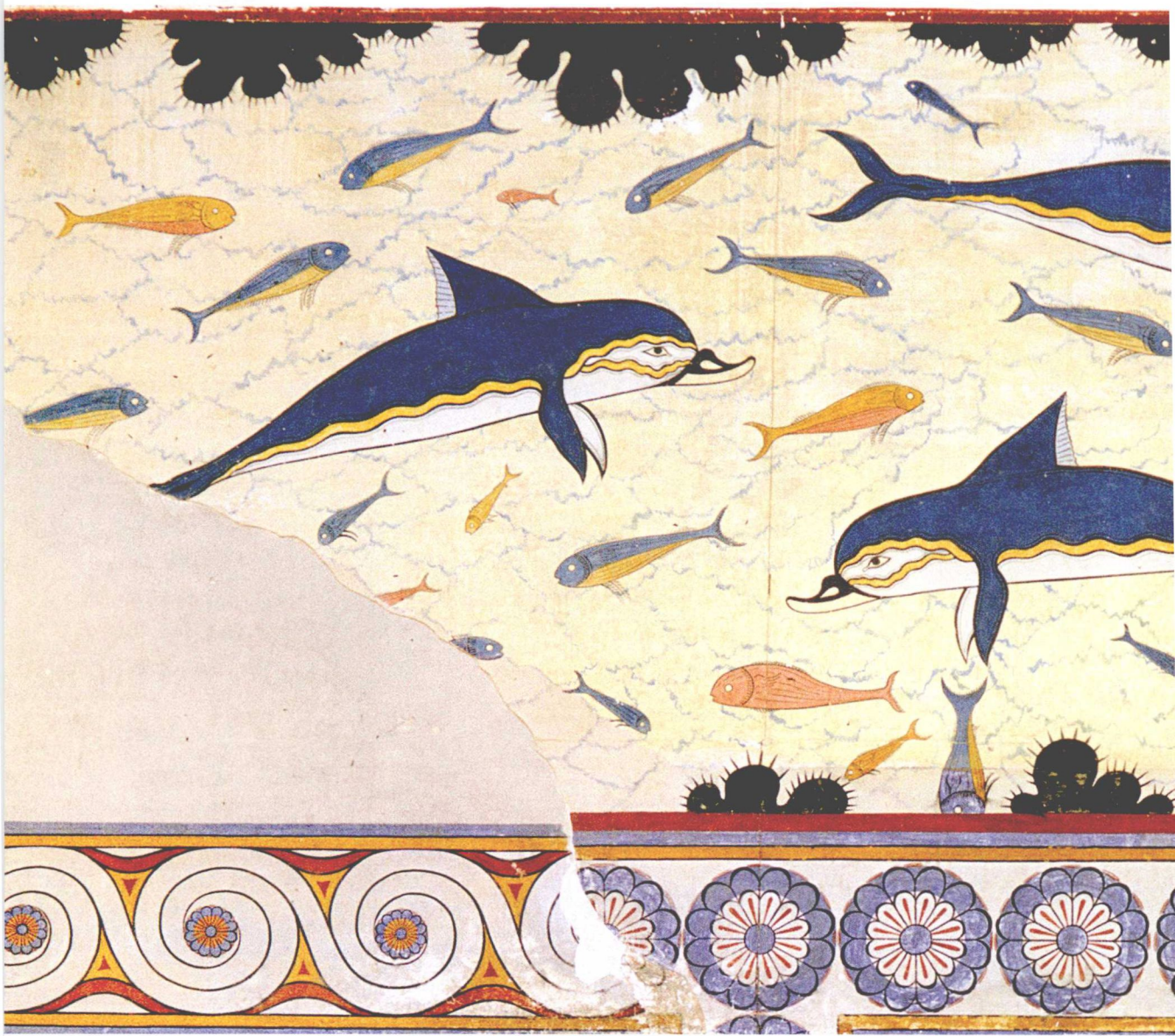


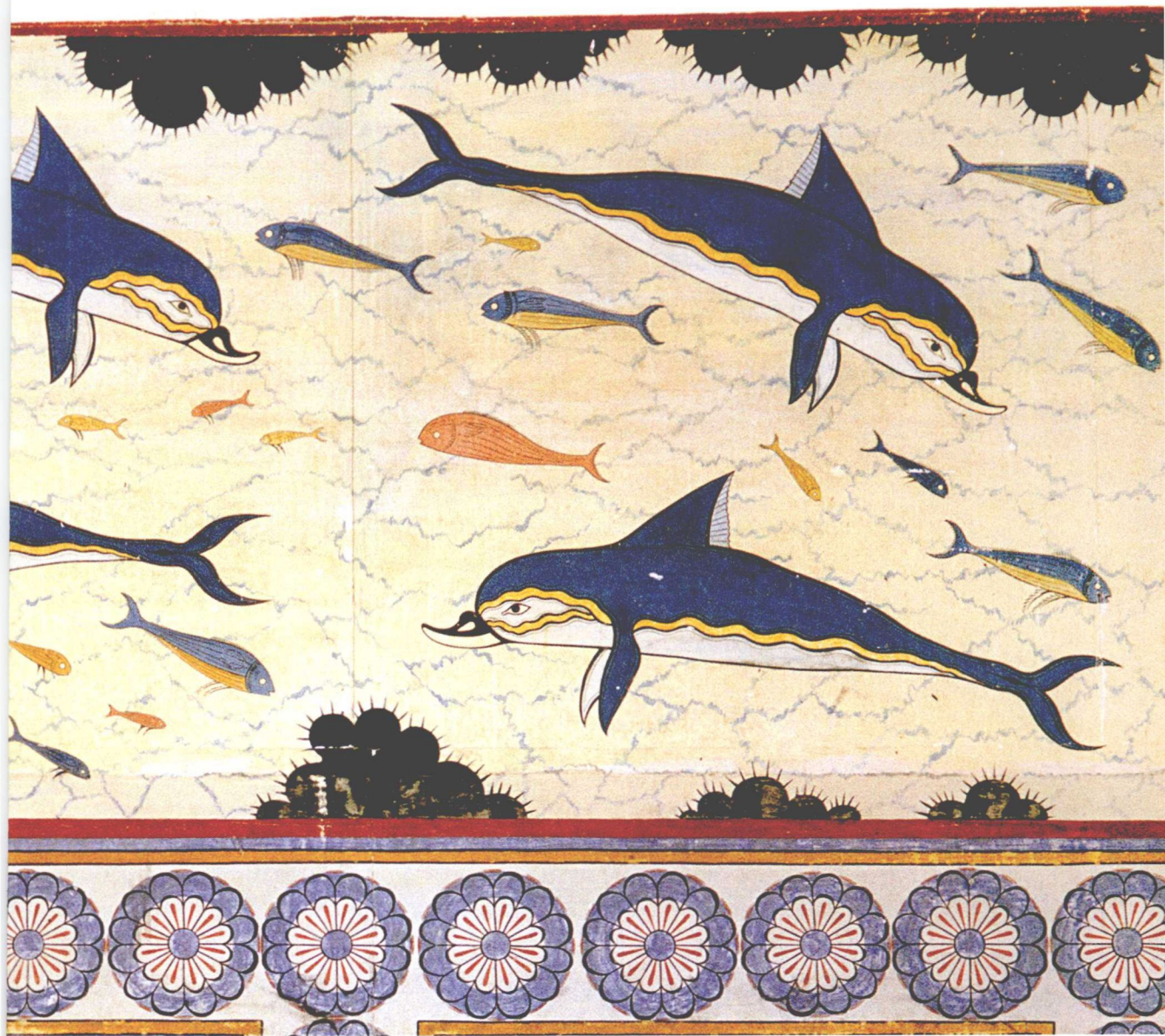
Nearly a quarter of a century later, on 13 June 1480, Santo Brasca, on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, had a similar experience: he was also sailing south with a following wind off the coast near Spalato (Split), 'where there appeared a very large number of dolphins, which came up behind the galley, jumping out of the water, which is said to be a sign of future danger. And so it came to pass.' Three days later, 'about sunrise, there appeared again some dolphins in still greater numbers than the first ones, and then suddenly there was a really great danger, such that, five miles [8 km] from Lesna, we had to turn back and take refuge between two rocks, and drop anchor about midday and wait there until Sunday morning on account of the danger caused by a terrible scirocco wind.'

The series of leaps that dolphins perform are of course partly occasioned by their need as mammals to breathe fresh air regularly, through a blow-hole on their back, before regaining momentum by paddling with their fins and strong tails, once back in the water. From the slow-moving and fragile craft of the olden days, their presence and antics would have been far more impressive, even awe-inspiring, than when viewed from above in the safety and comfort of a modern vessel. Aristotle in his *History of Animals* states of the dolphin: 'it appears to be the swiftest of all animals, whether marine or terrestrial. They will leap over the sails of large ships.' He repeats the surprising statement a few lines further on: 'And when they have to return from a great depth, they hold their breath, as if they were reckoning the distance, and then they gather themselves up, and dart forward like an arrow, desirous of shortening their distance from a breathing-place. And if they meet with a ship they will throw themselves over its sails.' (For Aristotle on the dolphin, see also p. 211.) It is hard to know what the height of such a leap might be, but bearing in mind the modest size of the craft of his day, it may not be impossible. In an early fresco from Thera – modern Santorini (p. 6) – dolphins indeed appear to be leaping over a ship, but this may be due rather to the artist's lack of knowledge of the rules of perspective.

The concept of a dolphin plunging dangerously downward at the end of such a leap led to its name being applied to a heavy mass of lead suspended from the bows of a war-vessel, to be dropped into an enemy ship at close quarters, to hole the hull: hence Aristophanes wrote in *Knights*, 'Let your dolphins rise high while the enemy is nearing' and 'Quick haul up your ponderous dolphins.'

*Dolphins jumping vertically out of the water –
believed in the old days to be a sign of dangers to come.*





A gaily coloured fresco from excavations at Akrotiri on the island of Thera. Dating from the Bronze Age, it is a classic example of the visual culture disseminated from Knossos on Crete. Dolphins were evidently admired for their own sake in the seaborne civilization that developed round the islands and shores of the Mediterranean Sea.

That the seafaring ancient Greeks really observed dolphins carefully and admired them for their speed and agility is indicated by some extraordinarily realistic depictions, for example on frescoes and ceramic vessels produced under the Minoan maritime civilization around Knossos on Crete. The free flight of dolphins in mid-air as they seem to skip from wave to wave, and their tendency to swim in circles, were picked up by the potter-painter of a vessel from Thera. The borderline between ceramics and sculpture is permeable, as is shown by some dolphins modelled in three dimensions on another ancient vase. Later, a goldsmith was able to hammer thin gold sheet into a creditable likeness, as a pendant for an earring or a necklace.

François Chamoux has acutely observed that the Greek artists, who excelled in the portrayal of animals, marvellously captured the shape of this interesting creature: they rendered with success the curved body, the back arched in the act of jumping, the dorsal fin in the form of a scythe, the tail shaped like a crescent moon, the beak-like snout, the alive and expressive physiognomy and the powerful and supple form. The deliberate simplification of forms accentuates the decorative character of the animal.

Dolphin behaviour was admirably conveyed with bold curving brushstrokes on this kylix by some prehistoric Picasso on the island of Thera, c. 1500 BC.





Dolphin pendant made by a Roman goldsmith in the Greek tradition.

Middle Minoan vase from Phaistos on Crete. The streamlined convex curves of dolphins plunging into the depths between shell-encrusted rocks, seaweed and waves are effectively modelled in clay.

