

DONALD PRELL



*Sailing with Byron  
from Genoa to Cephalonia*

# Sailing with Byron from Genoa to Cephalonia (1823)



DONALD B. PRELL



*Strand Publishing*

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## Sailing with Byron from Genoa to Cephalonia (1823)

Early in June of 1823, Lord Byron instructed his banker, Charles F. Barry, to charter a ship to take him from Genoa to Greece.<sup>1</sup> By June 18<sup>th</sup>, Barry with the assistance of Captain Roberts, had settled for a vessel in the port of Genoa, which bore the name *Hercules*.<sup>2</sup>

I have engaged our Northern friend for Two Hundred & Thirty Pounds. He promises to make a great many alterations & in fact to do everything you can wish to have done .....<sup>3</sup>

Although the *Hercules* was already committed for a trip to Leghorn, its Captain promised it would be available as soon as it returned to Genoa, which occurred the end of June. Edward Trelawny, who had been invited by Byron to join him on the voyage, immediately began to supervise the construction of stalls on the ship to hold the horses Byron planned to take with him to Greece.

The 138 ton *Hercules* was a small ship relative to other Brigs constructed in the early 1800s. Its skipper, Captain J. Scott made alterations to the ship for Byron's accommodations but modifications to other cabins were to be at Byron's own cost. The cost of constructing the stalls for the horses was to be reimbursed by Byron.

Count Pietro Gamba described the departure from Genoa in his 1825 *Narrative*:

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of July we were aboard: Captain Trelawny, the physician, eight domestics, and myself formed his suite. Lord Byron had likewise given passage

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to a Greek named Schilitzy, of Constantinople, coming from Russia. We had five horses aboard, arms and ammunition for our own use, two one-pounders, belonging to his schooner the Bolivar, which he left at Genoa. The uncertainty of the course he was about to pursue, and the information he had received from various quarters, induced him to carry his supplies in specie. He had ten thousand Spanish dollars<sup>4</sup>, in ready money, and bills of exchange for forty thousand more. There were, likewise some chests of medicine sufficient for a thousand men for a year.<sup>5</sup>

### Boarding the *Hercules*:

Lord Byron  
Count Pietro Gamba  
Edward John Trelawny  
Dr. Francesco Bruno (a recently graduated physician)  
Prince Constantine Skilitzy (Schilitzy, Schilizzi)  
Benjamin Lewis (Trelawny's American Negro groom)  
William Fletcher (Byron's valet)  
Lega Zambelli (a defrocked priest, Byron's Maestro di Casa)  
Giovanni Baltista "Tita" Falcieri (Byron's gondolier)  
Vincenzo Papi (Byron's coachman)  
3 to 4 other unnamed servants  
Byron's Bulldog Moretto  
Byron's Newfoundland Lyon  
Trelawny's Hungarian cavalry horse  
Byron's four horses (one of which was Lady Blessington's Mameluke)

The full complement of passengers and crew were waiting for wind to take them on their way to Leghorn, but there was only a dead calm. According to Count Gamba, "Byron went on shore with Barry, his banker, and Mr. Trelawny, to the Lomellina, one of the most beautiful villas in the environs of Genoa, about six miles from the city. Lord Byron dined with us there, under a tree, on cheese and fruit." They slept aboard the ship.

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Gamba's account of July 15<sup>th</sup>:

We were able to clear the port about sunrise. We remained in sight of Genoa during the whole day. The weather was delightful, the sun scorching, and the wind light. We enjoyed the sight of the magnificent amphitheatre, which Genoa presents to the view at some distance from land. Towards midnight a strong westerly wind arose; we made head against it for three or four hours, but in the end the captain was obliged to steer back to the port of Genoa. The horses, unaccustomed to the sea, and badly accommodated, caused us serious inconvenience. They broke down their divisions, and kicked each other. We re-entered the port at six in the morning. Lord Byron passed nearly the whole night on deck. Those of his suite who were not affected with seasickness assisted him in his endeavours to prevent greater mischief amongst the horses. He did not feel himself unwell till towards morning, when we entered the port. I was half dead with sickness the whole night. When able to rise, he said to me, "You have lost one of the most magnificent sights I ever beheld. For a short time we were in serious danger; but the captain and his crew did wonders. I was the whole time on deck. The sight is not new to me, but I have always looked upon a storm as one of the sublimest spectacles in nature." He appeared thoughtful, and remarked, that he considered a bad beginning a favourable omen.

The whole day was spent in repairing damages. His Lordship wishing to visit his palace at Albaro, which he had left in the care of his banker, I accompanied him. His conversation was somewhat melancholy on our way to Albaro; he spoke much of his past life, and of the uncertainty of the future. "Where," said he, "shall we be in a year?" It looked like a melancholy foreboding; for on the same day of the same month, in the next year, he was carried to the tomb of his ancestors.<sup>6</sup>

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Trelawny's account of July 15<sup>th</sup>:

On the 15<sup>th</sup> we weighed anchor at daylight, several American ships, in compliment to Byron, sending their boats to tow us out of the bay, but made very little progress; we lay in the offing all day like a log upon the main under a broiling sun, --- the Italians skipping about, gesticulating, and chattering like wild monkeys in a wood. The Pilgrim sat apart, solemn and sad, --- he took no notice of anything nor spoke a word. At midnight the sea breeze set in and quickly freshened, so we shortened sail and hauled our wind. As soon as the old tub began to play at pitch and toss, the noisy Italians, with the exception of the Venetian gondolier, Battista, crept into holes and corners in consternation. The horses kicked down their flimsy partitions, and my black groom and I had to secure them, while the sea got up and the wind increased. I told Byron that we must bear up for port, or we should lose our cattle --- "Do as you like," he said. So we bore up, and after a rough night, re-anchored in our former berth; as the sun rose the wind died away, and one by one the landlubbers crawled on deck. Byron, having remained all night on deck, laughed at the miserable figure they cut; they all went on shore, and I set to work with two or three English carpenters to repair damages. In the evening we took a fresh departure, and the weather continuing fine, we had no other delay than that which arose from the bad sailing qualities of our vessel.<sup>7</sup>

Averaging only twenty miles per day it took five days to reach Leghorn, on the afternoon of July 21<sup>st</sup>. Then two more days to complete taking stores on board, which included ample feed for the five horses for the anticipated ten to fifteen days of sailing.

Two additional passengers now boarded the ship. Captain George Vitali, who had been granted passage to Greece by Byron and a Scotsman, James Hamilton Browne, a man with strong Hellenic sympathies who had asked to join Byron's



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entourage. Browne was knowledgeable about the Ionian Islands and it was on his recommendation that Byron decided to sail to Cephalonia instead of Zante.

An engaging account of the voyage is Browne's *Narrative*. This appeared in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine in January of 1834. That it was never republished in book form, for the enjoyment of a wider audience, is a pity.

I was accompanied to the ship, riding at anchor in the Roads, by Messers Jackson and Lloyd, who departed immediately after seeing me safe on board, as I was apprehensive that Lord Byron might have conceived that they had come for the purpose of catching a glimpse of him. He put to me some interrogatory relative to them, regretting that I had hurried them off.

His Lordship's mode of address. was peculiarly fascinating and insinuating --- "au premier abord" it was next to impossible for a stranger to refrain from liking him.

The contour of his countenance was noble and striking; the forehead, particularly so, was nearly white as alabaster. His delicately formed features were cast rather in an effeminate mould, but their soft expression was in some degree relieved by the mustaches of a light chestnut, and small tuft "à la houssard," which he at that time sported. His eyes were rather prominent and full, of a dark blue, having that melting character which I have frequently observed in females, said to be a proof of extreme sensibility. The texture of his skin was so fine and transparent, that the blue veins, rising like small threads around his temples, were clearly discernible. All who ever saw Byron have borne testimony to the irresistible sweetness of his smile, which was generally, however, succeeded by a sudden pouting of the lips, such as is practiced sometimes by a pretty coquette, or by a spoiled child. His hair was partially grizzled, but curled naturally. In conversation, owing to a habit he had contracted of clenching his teeth close together, it was sometimes difficult to comprehend him distinctly;

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towards the conclusion of a sentence, the syllables rolled in his mouth, and became a sort of indistinct murmur.<sup>8</sup>

Ready to sail on July 23<sup>rd</sup>, it was not until the next day before the overcrowded vessel was underway. Hugging the west coast of Italy it took seven days to reach the Strait of Messina. Having spent days at sea aboard a sailboat with individuals recently met, I am able to empathize with similar remarks made by both Browne and Trelawny.

To be in the company with Lord Byron, and in almost constant intercourse with him for a considerable period, more especially on shipboard, where it is affirmed, you will in a few days acquire more knowledge of an individual than from years of previous acquaintance, was, through the communicativeness of his disposition, equivalent to an introduction to the whole course of his life. Although occasionally affecting mystery, he yet could conceal nothing.<sup>9</sup>

You never know a man's temper until you have been imprisoned in a ship with him, or a woman's until you have married her. Few friendships can stand the ordeal by water; when a yacht from England with a pair of these thus tried friends touches, --- say at Malta or Gibraltar, -- - you may be sure that she will depart with one only. I never was on shipboard with a better companion than Byron, he was generally cheerful, gave no trouble, assumed no authority, uttered no complaints, and did not interfere with the working of the ship; when appealed to he always answered, "do as you like." Every day at noon, he and I jumped overboard in defiance of sharks or weather; it was the only exercise he had, for he could not walk the deck.<sup>10</sup>

Byron's biographers Leslie Marchand and Fiona MacCarthy chose bits and pieces from Browne and Trelawny to weave their own short three-page description of the voyage from Genoa to Cephalonia.

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From Marchand:

The now much overcrowded vessel pulled out of the harbor of Leghorn and headed south for the Strait of Messina. This was Byron's final farewell to Italy, where, he could now feel, despite his aimlessly drifting course, he had spent some of the happiest, and certainly the most productive, years of his life. He was being swept away toward Greece and an uncertain goal, partly by the inward compulsion of his own dissatisfaction, but more perhaps by the inevitable demand of circumstances and his own fame, which had combined with his weakness to drive him to do what was expected of him.

But as they passed the white houses and the villas on the coast, he grew melancholy and remained so for several days. Perhaps he could see through the olive trees on the hill at Montenero the salmon-colored Villa Dupuy, where he had once sat watching the lights of Leghorn with Teresa. Fortunately he had his own cabin, and unless he wanted company the others respected his favorite spot under the awning on deck. In outward bearing he was companionable enough, though sometimes moody.

Browne observed that during the passage Byron chiefly read the writings of Dean Swift, and supposed that the poet was thus preparing to write another canto of *Don Juan*. But, except for occasional letter-writing, Byron's pen was still now. Browne also noted that he read Montaigne, Voltaire, Grimm's *Correspondence*, and La Rochefoucauld. Byron's dinner, which he usually ate by himself on deck, consisted, Browne wrote, "of a considerable quantity of decayed Cheshire cheese, with pickled cucumbers or red cabbage, which he quaffed down by drinking at the same time either a bottle of cider or Burton ale, of which articles he had procured a supply at Genoa." He sometimes joined the others in drinking wines or liquors after the siesta, and then he was in a jovial mood until some painful recollection seemed to cloud his eyes and, overcome by emotion and sometimes tears, he would quit the company.

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The *Hercules* passed between Piombino and Elba, and, following along the tree-fringed coast, crossed the muddy mouth of the Tiber within sight of the landmarks of Rome. When they neared the island of Ponza, on which the reactionary Neapolitan government had imprisoned many of the persons who had taken part in the abortive revolution of 1821, which Byron himself had wished to join, he "gave vent to his ire, uttering the most tremendous invectives against Austria. . . ." Seeing him roused, Trelawny tried to sting Byron into writing a poem on the occasion. But after trying for a while, Byron said: "Extemporising verses is nonsense; poetry is a distinct faculty, --- it won't come when called..... You might as well ask me to describe an earthquake, whilst the ground was trembling under my feet."

They approached Stromboli on a clear night. Byron sat most of the night watching it, exchanging with Trelawny and Browne ghost stories suggested by the strange phenomenon. Though Browne noted Byron's penchant for superstitions, Trelawny was inclined to think that this was only a pose. He recorded that "he took such pains to convince me he was superstitious---that I am convinced he was not." As Byron went down to his cabin in the morning, he said to Trelawny: "If I live another year, you will see this scene in a fifth canto of *Childe Harold*."

By the time the *Hercules* reached the Ionian Sea, Byron's spirits had improved considerably. He easily established a camaraderie that was pleasing to his shipmates, particularly to Trelawny and to Browne. There was no condescension in his manner. In calm or storm he was always on deck. Trelawny complained that the ship was "built on the lines of a baby's cradle, and the least touch of Neptune's foot set her rocking." Byron, however, "was not at all affected by the motion, he improved amazingly in health and spirits, and said, 'On shore when I awake in the morning, I am always inclined to hang myself, as the day advances, I get better, and at midnight I am all cock-a-whoop. I am better now than I have been for years.'" Trelawny concluded: "I never was on ship-board

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with a better companion than Byron, he was generally cheerful, gave no trouble, assumed no authority, uttered no complaints, and did not interfere with the working of the ship; appealed to, he always answered, 'do as you like.'"

Byron varied the monotony of shipboard by boxing with Trelawny or fencing with Pietro Gamba. Pistol-shooting was a sport he was even more attached to, and at which he had had more recent practice. Trelawny recalled: "... empty bottles and live poultry served as targets; a fowl, duck or goose, was put into a basket, the head and neck only visible, hoisted to the main yard-arm: and we rarely had two shots at the same bird." Browne observed that Byron could be cool under fire, for one day the Greek Skilitzy, being unacquainted with the hair-trigger guard on an English pistol, accidentally discharged a ball close by Byron's temple. "He betrayed no tremor, but taking the pistol out of Schilizzi's hand, pointed out to him the mechanism of the lock...."

Every day at noon, Byron and Trelawny, in calm weather, jumped overboard for a swim without fear of sharks, which were not unknown in those waters. And occasionally their exuberance found outlet in boyish horseplay. Once, according to Trelawny, they let the geese and ducks loose and followed them and the dogs into the water, each with an arm in the Captain's new scarlet waistcoat, to the annoyance of the Captain and the amusement of the crew.

It may in part have been the spectacle of such rough practical jokes, and in part also Byron's occasional outbursts of temper, that frightened the young Dr. Bruno during his first days on board. Gamba recorded that Dr. Bruno confessed later to him that "for the first fifteen days of our voyage he had lived in perpetual terror, having been informed that if he committed the slightest fault, Lord Byron would have him torn to pieces by his dogs, which he kept for that purpose; or would order his Tartar to dash his brains out." This "Tartar" was, of course, the ferocious-looking but perfectly harmless and loyal "Tita" Falcieri.

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Byron had a genuine liking for the bluff old Captain Scott, though on occasion he continued to plague him. Trelawny, like Byron, delighted in diverting himself at Scott's expense. According to Browne, Byron's "first question to him [Scott], on coming on deck in the morning, was, 'Well, Captain, have you taken your meridian?' which meant a stiff tumbler of grog; if he had, he never objected to a second, and Lord Byron almost invariably joined him in it."

According to Trelawny, Byron acquired another servant during the passage. He says: "In our voyage from Italy, Byron persuaded me to let him have my black servant, as, in the East, it is a mark of dignity to have a negro in your establishment."

As the *Hercules* plowed through the Ionian Sea, Byron's thoughts turned more and more toward the adventures ahead. Browne recorded: "The Greek Schilizzi, by way of flattery, used frequently to insinuate that his countrymen might possibly choose Lord Byron for their King, as a considerable party were in favour of a Monarchical Government; this idea did not displease his Lordship, who said he would perhaps not decline the offer, if made, adding, 'but we shall retain our own monies; and then if our appetite disagrees with the kingly authority, we shall, like Sancho, have the alternative of abdicating.'"

On August 2 they sighted the islands of Cephalonia and Zante. But though the wind drove them toward Zante, they were determined, on Browne's recommendation, to land on Cephalonia, and so tacked for that island. When Byron sighted the mainland of the Morea, he said: "I don't know why it is, but I feel as if the eleven long years of bitterness I have passed through since I was here, were taken off my shoulders, and I was scudding through the Greek Archipelago with old Bathurst, in his frigate." That night they got into the shelter of the roadstead, and the next morning anchored near the town of Argostoli, the island's capital.<sup>11</sup>

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Remembering that Trelawny's narrative ran 27 pages and Browne's narrative 11 pages, readers of Marchand and Mac Carthy are deprived of many meaningful insights regarding Byron's personality and behavior during the voyage.

Examples from Browne:<sup>12</sup>

Lord Byron entertained, or appeared to have imbibed, the most violent prejudice against the late Lady Noel. He shewed himself always affectionately anxious about the health and welfare of his daughter Ada. Alluding to her probable large fortune, he expressed a wish that it had been in his power to inhibit her from marrying a native of Great Britain---deeming his countrymen to have a greater propensity to fortune-hunting than the individuals of other nations---which might, by an ill-assorted union, tend to her future unhappiness and discomfort.

Lord Byron adverted, on many occasions, sometimes in a state of the most bitter excitement, to the unfortunate infirmity of his foot, and the extreme pain and misery it had been productive of to him. He once uttered a very savage observation on his lameness, declaring, that years before he would have caused the recreant limb to be amputated, had he not dreaded thereby to spoil an exercise in which he more especially excelled and delighted.

In the use of the pistol, Lord Byron was exceedingly dexterous, and prided himself much on this trivial accomplishment, which, by constant practice, may easily be attained by any person possessed of a calculating eye and steady nerves. In this, as every thing else, he wished to carry off the palm; and if he made a shot which he thought could not be surpassed, he declined to share farther in the pastime of that day; and if a bad one, he did not attempt to improve it, but instantly gave up the contest. His nerves were a good deal shattered; and from his firing so well even with that disadvantage, it was evident that, when younger, his aim must have been most unerring.

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Trelawny was also an excellent shot; and his Lordship and he occasionally used to kill the ducks for the cabin dinner in this way --- a wicker basket was suspended from the main-yard of the mast, containing a poor duck, with his head protruding through it. I have known both of them, from the poop, to kill the bird by hitting its head at the first fire. Lord Byron possessed several cases of excellent pistols; among others, a brace which had been the private property of his old friend, Joe Manton; and I was told he never grudged any expense in procuring those of superior workmanship. He frequently conversed about his former feats of skill at that celebrated maker's pistol gallery in London. He also boasted of having, about the time of his marriage, much to the amazement and discomfiture of Lady Noel, split a walking stick in the garden at Seaham House, at the distance of twenty paces.

His lordship was within an ace of losing his life during one of these firing matches on board. Schilizzi, who was unacquainted with the guard on English hair triggers, inadvertently discharged a pistol, the ball from which whizzed close past Lord Byron's temple. He betrayed no tremor, but taking the pistol out of Schilizzi's hand, pointed out to him the mechanism of the lock, and at the same time desired Gamba to take care, that in future he should not be permitted to use any other pistols than those of Italian workmanship.

Dinner was the only regular meal which he [Byron] partook of in the twenty-four hours. He usually eat it by himself on deck. His diet was very singular, and, in my opinion, almost could have been devised more prejudicial to health in the intense heat of summer, under a blazing Italian sun. It consisted of a considerable quantity of decayed Cheshire cheese, with pickled cucumbers or red cabbage, which he quaffed down by drinking at the same time either a bottle of cider or Burton ale, of which articles he had procured a supply at Genoa. He sometimes drank an infusion of strong tea. But ate nothing with it but a small piece of biscuit; and



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occasionally his fare at dinner was varied by a little fish, if we succeeded in taking any.

We enjoyed the most serene and beautiful weather during this voyage. In passing, the vessel approximated Porto Ercole and Piombino, the splendid scenery around which was much admired by Lord Byron; he was always on deck to view the magnificent spectacle of the sun setting over the vast expanse of waters, on the brilliant horizon peculiar to the East of Europe, and we coasted it along from Leghorn to Reggio, hardly ever being out of sight of land in the daytime. When opposite the mouth of the Tiber, we exerted all our power of vision to discern the cupola of St Peter's at Rome, which, however, was not visible through the vapour arising from the dark and dense forests which fringe the shore of the pestilential Maremma; but we could distinctly see through the glass the town of Albano, situated on the brow of the Alban Mount, and the magnificent range of mountains behind the isolated Mount Soracte, placed just over Rome, was also descried.

Lord Byron frequently boxed with Trelawny as an amusement, and practised fencing with Count Gamba; he was not particularly dexterous at the foils, but excelled in the other, but he could not keep up the exercise long, which had become too violent for him.

Lord Byron and Trelawny also often bathed from the ship's side in calm weather; neither of them betrayed any apprehension from sharks, which, however, are by no means of rare occurrence in the Mediterranean, as I remember, in 1817, having been told by a young midshipman, named Hay, then at Corfu, in a sloop of war, that when he was almost in the very act of leaping from the bowsprit of the vessel, which was riding at anchor between that town and the island of Vido, one of these ravenous monsters of the deep was descried close alongside, and an alarm given just in time to prevent him.

On our nearing the Island of Ionza, in which Neapolitan prisoners of state are usually confined, which was then crowded with those unhappy persons who had engaged in the unsuccessful attempt at revolution in

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1821, Lord Byron gave vent to his ire, uttering the most tremendous invectives against Austria, and the tyranny exercised by that nation over the minor powers of Italy; and recounted to me the history of the once expected rising of the Papal dominions, which should have taken effect when he resided at Ravenna, and in which he might have been called upon to act a prominent part; this insurrection was checked by the rapid march on Naples of the Imperialists, under Baron Frimont. It was not to be regretted that his Lordship had not found an opportunity of assisting in any revolt in Italy, which could only have ended in defeat and disgrace. In my opinion, the success of any revolution in that country is exceedingly problematical, being composed of many petty states, with opposite interests, which are extremely jealous of each other, or rather, I should say, are animated by mutual hate, so no union can be looked for. A partial ebullition of popular feeling may from time to time take place; but as long as no grand combination exists, or the enterprise is not supported by some great and victorious power, the cause is hopeless, and can only lead to useless bloodshed.

Lord Byron sat up nearly all night watching Stromboli: it was, however, overcast, and emitted no flame. This was considered singular, as the volcano is supposed to be in constant activity, and always ejecting matter. He narrated to me the extraordinary story of the affidavit made by the crew of a British ship, who deposed that they had witnessed the apparition of a man, well known to them, borne through the air by two other figures, and cast into the crater of Stromboli. This raised a long discussion, with many arguments, in regard to superstition in general, and tales of specters, to a belief in which Lord Byron either was, or affected to be thought prone.

He often contended in favour of the Oriental custom of secluding females, and teaching them only a few pleasing accomplishments, affirming the learned education lavished so frequently in England on the sex, only served to turn their heads with conceit, and look

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with contempt on domestic duties; that the Greeks were sensible people in not allowing their daughters to be instructed in writing, as it taught them to scribble billets-doux and practise deception. Had he to choose a second wife, he would select one born in the East, young and beautiful, whom he alone had been permitted to visit, and whom he had taught to love him exclusively, but of her he would be jealous as a tiger.

Lord Byron could scarcely be serious in such a strange idea, and perhaps was but mystifying some of our party. He used to indulge in many mirthful sallies about his increasing love of money; when he possessed little, he said that he was extremely profuse, but now that his fortune had been so much augmented, he felt an irresistible inclination to hoard, and contemplated with delight any accumulation. From this propensity he augured that a prediction once made in respect to him would be forthwith fulfilled, viz., that he would die a miser and a methodist, which he said he intended should also be the *denouement* of Don Juan.

We had some diverting scenes with our Captain during the passage. It was discovered that Vitali, one of the Greek passengers, had contrived to bring on board some cloth and other articles of merchandise, which he no doubt intended to smuggle into the Ionian Islands. The discovery arose from a ridiculous circumstance. A most abominable stench was observed by the captain to proceed from a large trunk amongst the luggage, but he did not know the owner of it; at last he ordered it to be brought upon deck and said, if no one claimed it, he would throw it overboard. Vitali then rushed forward in defence of his property.

The captain insisted on its being opened; Vitali, after many wry faces, produced the key, and behold a most disgusting spectacle presented itself to our astonished optics, in the shape of a roasted pig, in a state of decomposition. The captain was so enraged at the sight, that, with great difficulty, Vitali prevented his cloth from following the pig, which was instantly thrown overboard.

Vitali had perhaps thought that he was to find his

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own provisions, calculating on a short passage, reserved the poor little grunter for a *bonne bouche* on landing. This sordid behaviour, so unexpectedly brought to light, alienated Lord Byron, who had become rather partial to the copper captain, as he called him; and Scott was instructed, on our arrival in Cephalonia, to make a declaration to the customhouse regarding the cloth, for which Vitali, much to his annoyance, had to pay duty. The captain after this could not endure Vitali. Lord Byron dearly loved a practical joke, and it was insinuated to Scott that the Greek was addicted to certain horrible propensities, too common in the Levant. The look of horror and aversion with which Scott then regarded the poor man was indescribable, swearing at the same time, and wondering how such a scoundrel could dare to look any honest man in the face.

### Examples from Trelawny:<sup>13</sup>

A balmy night at sea, almost as light as day, without its glare. Byron, sitting in his usual seat by the taffrail, had been for hours “chewing the cud of sweet and bitter fancy;” if a tropical night like this can't soothe a lacerated mind nothing but death can; all hands were asleep, but the helmsman and mate keeping watch.

BYRON: If Death comes in the shape of a cannonball and takes off my head, he is welcome. I have no wish to live, but I can't bear pain. Don't repeat the ceremony you went through with Shelley---no one wants my ashes.

TRE.: You will be claimed for Westminster Abbey.

BYRON: *No*, they don't want me---nor would I have my bones mingled with that motley throng.

TRE.: I should prefer being launched into the sea, to the nonsense of the land ceremonies.

BYRON: There is a rocky islet off Maina---it is the Pirates' Isle; it suggested the “Corsair.” No one knows it; I'll show it you on the way to the Morea. There is the spot I should like my bones to lie.

TRE.: They won't let me do so without you will it.

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BYRON: I will, if you are with me when I die; remind me, and don't let the blundering, blockhead doctors bleed me, or when I am dead maul my carcass---I have an antipathy to letting blood. My Italians have never lost sight of their homes before, they are men to look at, but of no use under any emergency---your negro is worth them all.

TRE.: But you have your ancient page, Fletcher.

Byron said, smiling, "He is the worst of them, grunting and grumbling all the morning, and fuddled at night. They say the bones harden with age---I am sure my feelings do; nothing now that can happen can vex me for more than twenty-four hours."

The Poet had an antipathy to everything scientific; maps and charts offended him; he would not look through a spy-glass, and only knew the cardinal points of the compass; buildings the most ancient or modern he was as indifferent to as he was to painting, sculpture, and music. But all natural objects and changes in the elements he was generally the first to point out and the last to lose sight of. We lay-to all night off Stromboli; Byron sat up watching it. As he went down to his cabin at daylight, he said---"If I live another year, you will see this scene in a fifth canto of 'Childe Harold.'"

In the morning we entered the narrow strait of Messina, passed close by the precipitous promontory of Scylla, and at the distance of a mile on the opposite shore, Charybdis; the waters were boiling and lashed into foam and whirlpools by the conflicting currents and set of the sea; in bad weather it is dangerous to approach too near in small craft. The Poet had returned to his usual post by the taffrail; and soon after Messina was spread out before us, with its magnificent harbour, quays, and palaces; it was a gorgeous sight, and the surrounding scenery was so diversified and magnificent, that I exclaimed---

"Nature must have intended this for Paradise."

"But the devil," observed the Poet, "has converted it into Hell."

After some deliberation, the wind blowing fresh and fair, we reluctantly passed the city, and scudded

## *Sailing with Byron*

through the Straits along the grim and rugged shores of Calabria; at 2 P.M. we got into the vortex of another whirlpool, and the conflicting winds, currents, and waves contending for mastery, held us captive. Our vessel was unmanageable, and there we lay oscillating like a pendulum for two hours close to the rocks, seeing vessels half-a-mile from us scudding by under double-reefed topsails. The spell broken, we resumed our course. On passing a fortress called the Faro, in the narrowest part of the Strait, we had a good view of Mount Etna, with its base wreathed in mists, while the summit stood out in bold relief against the sky. To the east we had the savage shores of Calabria, with its grey and jagged rocks; to the west the sunny and fertile coast of Sicily,--- gliding close by its smooth hills and sheltered coves, Byron would point to some serene nook, and exclaim, "There I could be happy!"

Count Gamba wrote: "Nothing happened during our voyage. Lord Byron enjoyed excellent health, and was always in good spirits. On the morning of the 3d of August we cast anchor in Argostoli, the principal port of Cephalonia."<sup>14</sup>

One final excerpt from Browne's *Narrative*, which was to trigger a memory and the solution to a 150-year-old mystery.

I hope that I shall be excused mentioning a trait of the most marked kindness and condescension in Lord Byron towards myself. When at Cephalonia, I was engaged to dine either at Colonel Napier's, or the mess of the 8th regiment. After having dressed in the cabin, I came on deck, and requested the favour of Captain Scott's directing one of his men to put me ashore. The skipper, however, who occasionally indulged in deep potations, and was at these times very surly and insolent, refused the use of the boat. Lord Byron, who, the skylight being off his cabin, had overheard our conversation, instantly made his appearance, and going over the side into a small punt, which belonged to the yacht he sold to Lord Blessington at Geneva, prepared it, and returning on deck, addressed me, saying, "Now, Browne, allow me to conduct you"

I remonstrated; the day being excessively hot, and

## *Sailing with Byron*

the boat too small for me to assist in rowing it.

"Never mind," he rejoined; "I insist upon it, you shall accept my offer."

Scott, who stood by growling like a bear, amazed, then proffered his own boat.

Lord Byron exclaimed, "No! Captain Scott, Mr Browne is my guest, and I wish him and every other gentleman on board to be treated with the same respect as myself. He shall not accept it after your behaviour."

And the matter ended in his rowing me ashore in his own diminutive skiff; and after having done so, he instantly regained the ship.<sup>15</sup>

Some years ago, whilst researching details relating to Shelley's boat (the *Don Juan*) I was able to correct a mislabeling of boats by H. Buxton Forman in his *Letters of Edward John Trelawny*.<sup>16</sup> Trelawny, in his February 5, 1822 letter to Captain Roberts, ended his instructions to build for Byron (1) the *Bolivar* (2) a 17 or 18 foot tender for the *Bolivar* --- with (3) "Should you think in addition to this a little dinghy would be necessary for Lord B., build it!"<sup>17</sup> I have often wondered if Roberts had acted on Trelawny's request for a little dingy to be constructed. Upon reading Browne's *Narrative*, I knew that it not only had been built, but it was with Byron when he landed at Cephalonia.

In examining the inventories listing Byron's effects, and not finding a dingy, I have concluded that Fletcher, Trelawny and others missed it. It must have been a well-built, fine little skiff (Appendix 3), therefore I have decided it could still be in use. If it is there, it will surely speak to me as I search the shoreline on my next visit to Missolonghi.

---

<sup>1</sup> In September of 2008, I located the original Charter in the George Gordon Byron Collection, part of the Manuscript Collection at the Harry Ransom Research Center (University of Texas at Austin). The Charter came to the University in 1925, bound in a volume of manuscripts (Letters V), a part of the Miriam Lutchter Stark Library.

## *Sailing with Byron*

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Since the Charter had not been transcribed, my wife and I did so early in 2008 (see Appendix 1).

<sup>2</sup> Lloyds Register of Shipping for 1823 has an entry for a vessel named *Hercules* whose master was J. Scott. Built in Sunderland (England) the vessel was completed in 1815 and was owned by a firm named Russell & Company. She received an A-1 classification in 1821. Sunderland Museum has an index card with the following information: Hercules - Dryden Trotter – Launched 1815 – Brig – 138 tons – Lloyds 1851-2 H287. According to a survey made in 1847 the vessel was: Length aloft 65.4' Extreme Breadth 19.7' Depth of Hold 11.6' (see Appendix 4 & 5). It is an interesting coincidence that the same year the *Hercules* was built, Lord Byron and Lady Ann Isabella Milbank were married at Seaham Hall, a village only a few miles north of the Sunderland shipyards.

<sup>3</sup> Leslie A. Marchand, *Byron – A Biography*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957) p. 1077.

<sup>4</sup> The Spanish Dollar (also known as the piece of eight or the real de a ocho) is a silver coin that was minted in the Spanish Empire after a Spanish currency reform in 1497. It was used widely in Europe, the Americas and the Far East, becoming the first world currency in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century (see Appendix 2).

<sup>5</sup> Pietro Gamba, *A Narrative Of Lord Byron's Last Journey To Greece*, (London: John Murray, 1825) pp. 9-10

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11-13

<sup>7</sup> Edward John Trelawny, *Records of Shelley, Byron, and the Author*, (New York/London, Benjamin Blom, 1878 reissued in 1968) pp. 79-81.

<sup>8</sup> James Hamilton Browne, *Voyage from Leghorn to Cephalonia* (Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, January 1834) pp. 56-57

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59

<sup>10</sup> Trelawny, pp. 94-95

<sup>11</sup> Marchand, pp. 1095-1099

<sup>12</sup> Browne, various pp.

<sup>13</sup> Trelawny, various pp.

<sup>14</sup> Gamba, p. 17

<sup>15</sup> Browne, p. 65

<sup>16</sup> Donald B. Prell, *The Sinking of the Don Juan Revisited*, Keats-Shelley Journal (Volume LVI, 2007) pp. 139-140

<sup>17</sup> H. Buxton Forman, *Letters of Edward John Trelawny*, (London, Henry Fowde, Oxford University Press, 1910) p. 1-2.



This Charterparty or agreement  
made between the Rt Hon<sup>ble</sup> Lord  
Edw Byron of the one part and  
John Scott Master of the good Brig  
or Vessel called the Hercules of the  
admeasurement of 139 Tons or thereabouts  
on the other part

Witnesseth

That the said Vessel being  
light staunch strong and in every  
way fit for the Voyage hereinafter  
~~mentioned being navigated according~~  
to Law with sufficient complement  
of Men & Boys & being a first  
Class Vessel standing At 1 at  
Lloyds is hereby engaged by His  
Lordship for two months for a  
Voyage to the Greek Islands or  
elsewhere at His Lordships pleasure  
he paying to the said Master  
the sum of Two Hundred &  
thirty Pounds Sterling for the  
use of the Vessel during the said  
term without any thing further  
as Freight or any other charge

*This Charterparty or agreement  
made between the Rt. Hon. ble Lord  
Noel Byron of the one part and  
John Scott, Master of the good Brig  
or vessel call[ed] the Hercules of the  
admeasurement of 139 - Tons or thereabouts  
on the other part*

*Witnesseth,*

*That the said Vessel being  
light staunch strong and in every  
way fit for the voyage herein after  
mentioned being navigated according  
to law with sufficient complement  
of Men & boys & being a first  
class Vessel standing A 1 at  
Lloyds is hereby engaged by His  
Lordship for two months for a  
voyage to the Greek Islands or  
elsewhere at His Lordships pleasure  
he paying to the said Master  
the sum of Two Hundred &  
thirty Pounds Sterling for the  
use of the Vessel during the said  
term without any thing further  
as Primage or any other charge*



except Pilotage & Port Charges at  
the different Ports the Vessel  
may be ordered to touch at  
one half of this money to be  
paid in Genoa previous to the  
Vessel's sailing & the other half  
at the expiration of the time for  
which she is engaged.

It is further agreed that the  
said Master shall at his own  
cost & charge lay in a sufficient  
stock of Provisions for the use of  
His Lordship's Suite as well  
as of His Stewards during the  
voyage & that during the con-  
tinuation of the term specified  
the Vessel is to be wholly at  
the disposal of His Lordship  
who may land on board her  
whatever <sup>light</sup> goods or baggage he  
may think fit & the Master  
is bound to follow the instructions  
that may be given to him in  
the same way & to all intents  
and purposes as if Lord Byron

except Pilotage & Port charges at the different Ports the Vessel may be ordered to to u ch at ~ one half of this money to be paid in Genoa previous to the Vessel's sailing & the other half at the confirmation of the time for which she is engaged. ~

It is further agreed that the said Master shall at his own cost & charge lay in a sufficient stock of Conten[t] for the use of His Lordship & suite as well as of His Horses during the voyage & that during the continuation of the term specified The vessel is to be wholly at the disposal of His Lordship who may load on board her

legal

whatsoever ^ goods or baggage he may think fit & the Master is bound to follow the instructions that may be given to him in the same way & to all intents ~ and purposes as if Lord Byron



were absolute Owner of the Vessel  
It is further agreed between the  
parties that as the Vessel is  
now about ~~to~~ to proceed to  
Leghorn for the purpose of  
discharging part of her cargo  
the Master shall use every diligence  
& speed to return to the Port of  
Genoa with as little delay as  
possible & until his arrival  
in the said port of Genoa (after  
discharging his goods in Leghorn)  
with his said Vessel & until he  
has reported her arrival to the  
receiving on board his Lordship  
to proceed immediately to sea  
the said term of two months shall  
not commence to be counted,  
and if from any unforeseen  
accident the Vessel should be  
detained at Leghorn or arriving <sup>here</sup>  
be not fit to proceed to sea  
on or before the 20 of July next  
ensuing then Lord Byron  
reserves to himself the faculty  
of cancelling this agreement  
altogether

were absolute Owner of the Vessel.  
This further agreed between the  
parties that as the Vessel is  
now about [X] to proceed to  
Leghorn for the purpose of  
discharging part of her cargo  
the Master shall use every diligence  
& speed to return to the Port of  
Genoa with as little delay as  
possible & until his arrival  
in the said port of Genoa (after ~  
discharging his goods in Leghorn)  
with his said Vessel & until he  
has reported home as to when to  
receive on board his Lordship  
& to proceed immediately to Sea.  
The said term of two months shall  
not commence to be counted,  
and if from any unforeseen  
accident the Vessel should be here  
detained at Leghorn or arriving ^  
be not fit to proceed to Sea  
on or before the 20 of July next  
ensuing when Lord Byron  
reserves to himself the faculty  
of cancelling this agreement  
altogether ~



It is further agreed that if  
Lord Byron wish to make any  
alteration on board in the dispo-  
sition of the Cabins he may do  
so at his own cost & charge  
but nothing is herein intended  
to mean that His Lordship is to  
be at any charge for alterations  
about to be made by the Captain  
merely for his own accommodation  
Inasmuch for such additional  
alterations as may be suggested  
by Lord Byron for the comfort  
return in any cabenue the Captain  
may be put to in providing proper  
accommodation for Stowes will be  
reimbursed by Lord Byron

Wm Byron

The Hercules returns from Leghorn <sup>in</sup> Liverpool  
ready for sea on 30<sup>th</sup> June from which day  
the payment is to commence on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July  
I received from Messrs Webb & Co for account of  
Lord Byron One Hundred & fifteen Pounds Sterling  
being ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> here for two months &  
agreed with further 308 L from <sup>the</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> for more  
expenses fitting up His Lordship's Cabin

J Scott

*It is further agreed that if Lord Byron wish to make any alteration on board in the disposition of the Cabins he may do so at his own cost & charge but nothing is hearin intended to mean that His Lordship is to be at any charge for alterations about to be made by the Master primarily for his own accommodation but merely for such additional accommodations as may be suggested by Lord Byron on the Vessels return ~ any expense the Master may be put to in providing proper accommodation for Horses will be Reimbursed by Lord Byron*

*Noel Byron*

*The Hercules is hired from Leghorn & refreshed ready for sea on 30th of June from which day the payment is to commence ~ on the 11th of July. I received from Messrs Webb & Co for account of Lord Byron One Hundred & fifteen Pounds Sterling being half [-----] the hire for two months as agreed on & further 308 Livres of Genoa for those expenses fitting up his Lordship's Cabin. J. Scott*



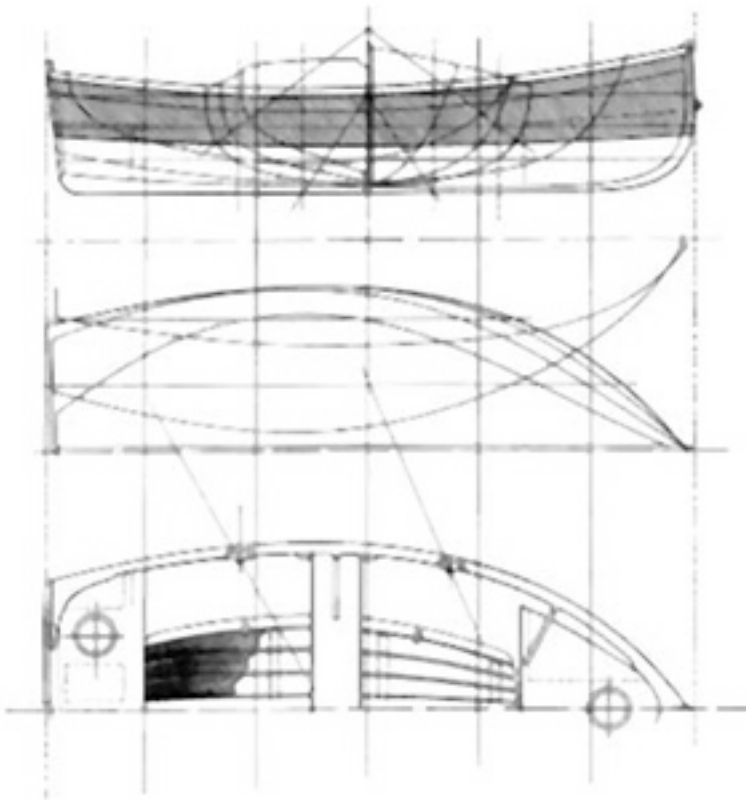
## Appendix 2

Byron took 10,000 Spanish Dollars on board the *Hercules* when he left on his voyage to Greece. A chest containing these coins would have weighed over 600 pounds. The diameter of the coin is approximately 39 mm. The weight is approximately 418.5 g (27.12 grams).



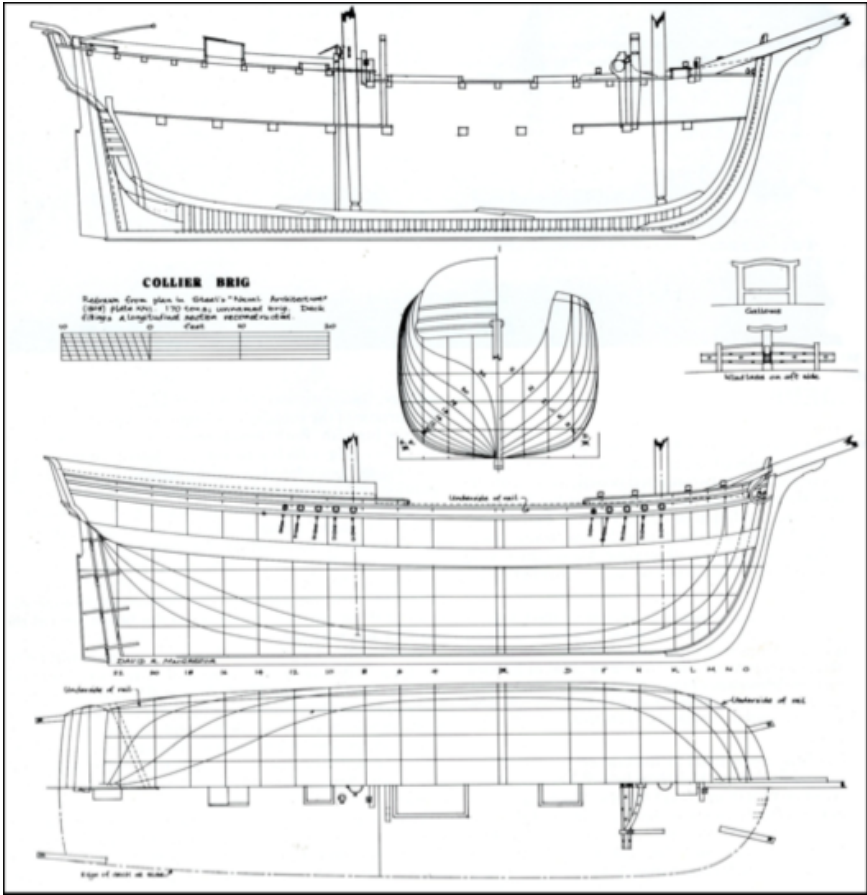
### Appendix 3

Plan of a Dingy about the size and shape of Byron's own 8' Skiff, which was aboard the *Hercules* on August 3, 1823.



# Appendix 4

Collier Brig about the size of the *Hercules*.



## Appendix 5

Abstract from Survey of the *Brig Hercules*, April 20, 1847

No. 139 Survey held at Charborough Date April 20 1847  
on the Brig Hercules Master J. Young  
Tonnage 124 Built at Amherst When built 1815  
By whom built " Owners J. Young  
Port belonging to Charborough Destined Voyage East India  
If Surveyed Afloat or in Dry Dock By Harbour

Length		Extreme Breadth		Depth of Hold	
Feet	Inches	Feet	Inches	Feet	Inches
65	2	17	6	11	0

**Scantlings of Timber.**

Timber and Space	each	Feet	Inches	Feet	Inches
Floor	10	10	10	10	10
1 <sup>st</sup> Fastenings	"	"	"	"	"
2 <sup>nd</sup> Ditto	"	"	"	"	"
3 <sup>rd</sup> Ditto	"	"	"	"	"
Top Timbers	"	"	"	"	"
Deck Beams N <sup>o</sup> . of 16	8 1/2	8 1/2	4 1/2	4 1/2	4 1/2
Hold Beams N <sup>o</sup> . of 6	10	10	6 1/2	6 1/2	6 1/2
Keel	"	"	"	"	"
Kelson	"	"	"	"	"

**Thickness of Plank.**

Outside	Feet	Inches	Inside	Feet	Inches
Keel to Bilge	3 1/2	3 1/2	Foot Waling	3	3
Bilge Planks	3 1/2	3 1/2	Bilge Planks	3 1/2	3 1/2
Bilge to Wale	3 1/2	3 1/2	Colling in Flat	3 1/2	3 1/2
Wales	4	4	Ditto Bilge to Clump	3 1/2	3 1/2
Topides	3 1/2	3 1/2	Hold Beam Clamps	3	3
Shore Strakes	3 1/2	3 1/2	Deck Beam Ditch	3	3
Plank Sheers	3 1/2	3 1/2	Colling 'twixt Decks	2	2
Water-Ways	3 1/2	3 1/2	Hold Beam Shelf	-	-
Upper Deck	3 1/2	3 1/2	Deck Beam Ditch	-	-

**Size of Bolts in Fastenings.**

Copper	Feet	Inches	Iron	Feet	Inches
Heel-Knee, and Dead Wood shunt	1	1	Hold Beam	3 1/2	3 1/2
Scarp of Keel N <sup>o</sup> . 1	1	1	Deck Beam	3 1/2	3 1/2
Floor Timber Bolts	1	1	Same in Iron above the Copper	3	3
Kelson ditto	1	1			
Transoms and throats of Hooks	1	1			
Arms of Hooks	1	1			

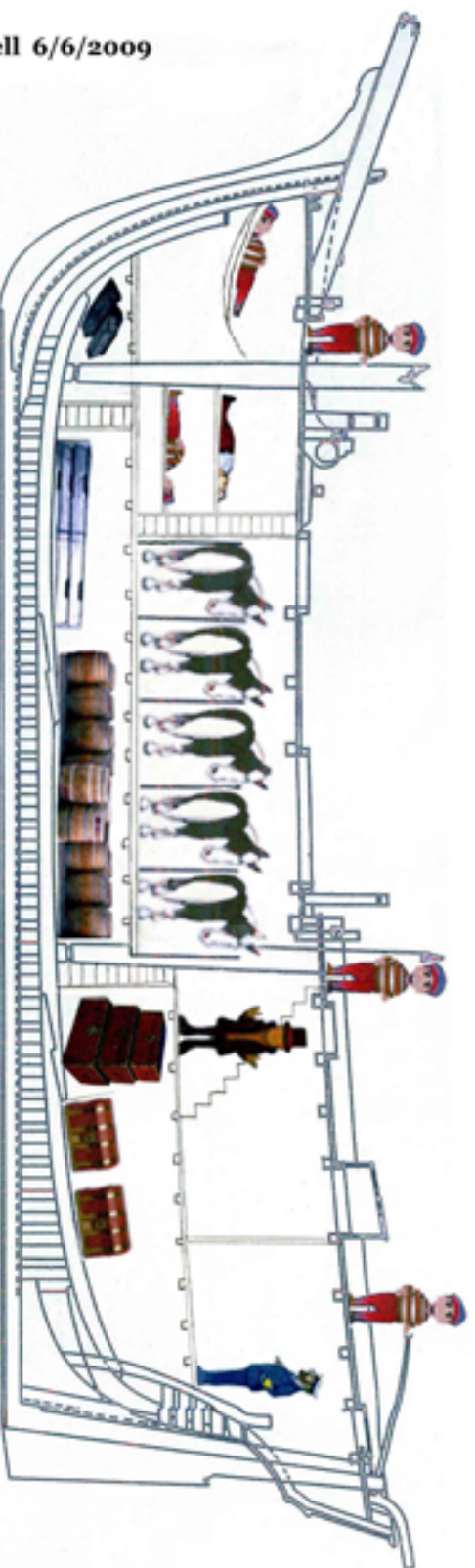
**Finishing.**—The Space between the Floor Timbers and Lower Fastenings in this Vessel is 1 1/2 inches. The Space between the Top-timbers is 2 1/2 inches. The Stem, Stern Post, are composed of English Oak the Transoms, Aprons, Knight Heads, Haws, Timbers, of English Oak and are jointed from all defects.

## Appendix 6

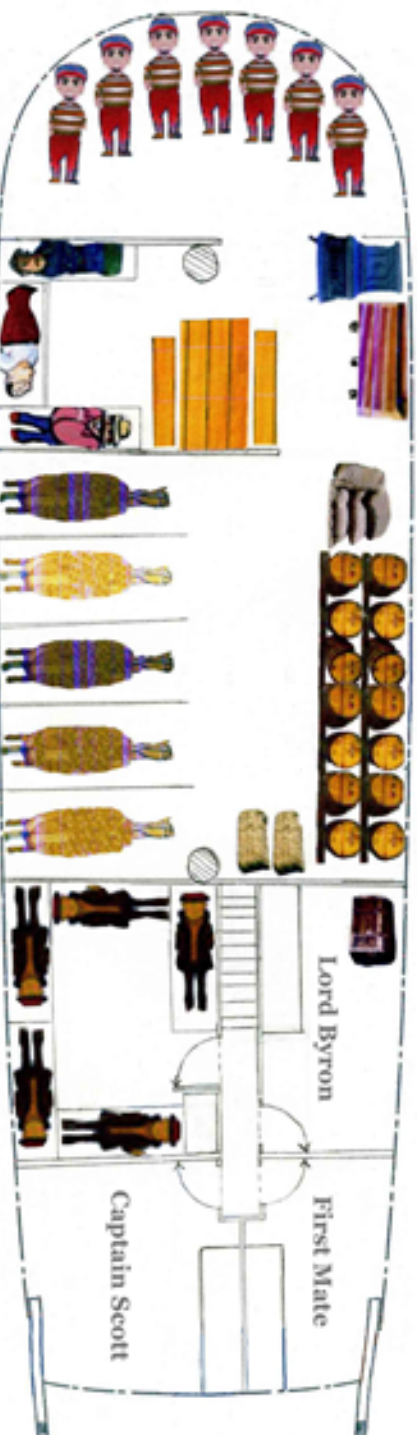
Photograph of a Merchant Brig aground.



**Brig *Hercules* --- viewed as fully loaded on July 15, 1823 (hypothetical)**



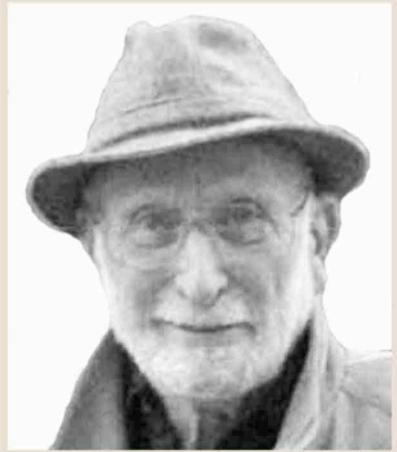
D.B.Prell 6/6/2009



Length aloft: 65.4 feet

Extreme Breadth: 19.7 feet

Depth of Hold: 11.6 feet



Donald Prell was born in Los Angeles, California, July 7, 1924. Although his primary occupation has been as a Venture Capitalist/Futurologist, he has had a long-standing scholarly interest in two diverse individuals: Edward John Trelawny and Pierre Laval. His extensive collections of books and other material by and about these two men are now housed in the Special Collections of two Universities:

The Edward John Trelawny Collection is in the Special Collections of the Honnold/Mudd Library, Claremont Colleges, Claremont, California. This collection contains one of the original Notebooks of Edward Ellerker Williams.

The Pierre Laval Collection is in Special Collections of the UCR Libraries, University of California, Riverside, Riverside, California.

A complete biography of Donald Prell can be found at [Wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donald_Prell)



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