

stars constantly pointed out the same part of the world. When they happened to be driven from their course, they found, that, in order to recover it, they had only to direct their ship in such a manner, as to bring her into her former position, with respect to those stars which they saw regularly every night.

Antiquity gives the honour of this discovery to the Phœnicians, a people equally industrious and enterprising. The Great Bear would probably be the first guide which these ancient navigators made choice of. This constellation is easily distinguished, both by the brightness and peculiar arrangement of the stars which compose it. Being near the pole, it hardly ever sets, with respect to those places which the Phœnicians frequented. We know not in what age navigators first began to observe the northern stars, for the direction of their course. But it must have been in very ancient times. The Great Bear is mentioned in the book of Job, who seems to have conversed much with merchants and navigators. The name by which that constellation was known among the ancient inhabitants of Greece, and the tales which they related about its origin, prove that it was observed for the direction of navigators in very remote ages.

But the observation of the stars in the Great Bear was a very imperfect and uncertain rule for the direction of a ship's course. The truth is this constellation points out the pole only in a very vague and confused manner. Its head is not sufficiently near it, and its extremities are more than forty degrees distant from it. This vast extent occasions very different aspects, both at different hours of the night in the same season of the year, and in the same hour in different seasons. This variation would be considerably increased, when it came to be referred to the horizon, to which the course of navigators must necessarily be referred. They must have made an allowance for this variation by guess; which could not but occasion great mistakes and errors, in those ages, when they were guided only by practice instead of geometrical rules and tables, which were not invented till many ages after.

It must have been long before navigation arrived at any tolerable degree of perfection. There is no art or profession which requires so much thought and knowledge. The art of sailing is of all others the most complicated, its most common operations depend upon various branches in different sciences.

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