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Citation for the original published paper (version of record):
Bröchner, J. (2025). Time, kairos words, and contexts of ancient entrepreneurship. International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research, 31(11): 134-150.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/IJEBR-04-2024-0412

Time, *kairos* words, and contexts of ancient entrepreneurship

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Received 29 April 2024
Revised 2 October 2024
18 December 2024
19 March 2025
Accepted 11 April 2025

Abstract

Purpose – This study engages with the development of *kairos* and other ancient Greek words for time in contexts of ancient entrepreneurship, seen in the perspective of modern entrepreneurship process research.

Design/methodology/approach – With a primary focus on the societies of Homer, Aristotle, and Augustine as contexts, the development of varying senses of *kairos* and its derivatives is brought into relation with modern studies of entrepreneurial processes. Three ancient narratives of voyages in the Mediterranean Sea are analysed for how captains use opportunities and for relations between captains, crew, and passengers.

Findings – Two *kairos* derivatives, *kairios* and *eukairia*, are particularly relevance for entrepreneurship. As a locational concept, kairios in the Iliad refers to attacking a deadly spot. It is with Aristotle that kairos is narrowed and refers to only a point of time. A term of rhetorical design, *eukairia*, is later translated into Latin as *opportunitas*. Under Christianity, *kairos* remains temporal but takes on new senses. In the three voyages, captains discover opportune winds, leave and reach harbours, sometimes repeatedly, and the destination may have to change. Conflicts between passengers and captain, whose capability is stressed or questioned, or between passengers and crew, arise.

Research limitations/implications – The analysis of the voyages, which illustrate subjective opportunities, indicates that within process studies of entrepreneurship there should be more awareness of relationships between entrepreneurs, their employees, and their customers.

Originality/value – This study explores the changing meanings of *kairos* words in specific entrepreneurial contexts.

Keywords Opportunity, Entrepreneurship, Timing

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

Taking a process view of entrepreneurship implies a concern with time and timing, as argued by Johnsen and Holt (2023), who distinguish between two facets of time: world time and human time. This distinction may have ancient roots, bridging more than seven centuries between how Aristotle and Augustine thought about time. Even earlier, the concept of *kairos* surfaces, although at first not in a temporal sense. In a Scopus search in the disciplines of economics, management and social sciences, Rothgang and Lageman (2021) found *kairos* to have occurred in 243 publications. One *kairos* derivative, *eukairia*, matches Latin *opportunitas* and is thus of particular interest for studies of entrepreneurship. Timing in the context of entrepreneurial opportunities has emerged as an important dimension (Dimov, 2020; Wood *et al.*, 2021).

Recently, a temporal entrepreneurship typology formulated by McMullen *et al.* (2024) includes how consumer desire evolves, which is a contextual matter. Social, spatial, and institutional contexts of entrepreneurship are important (Welter, 2011). When following the history of *kairos* words throughout antiquity, focus here will be on three contexts of special relevance for entrepreneurship. First, there is the society of Homer and Hesiod in the age of Greek colonization, around 700 BC, followed by a focus of conditions in Classical Athens

International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research
Vol. 31 No. 11, 2025
pp. 134-150
Emerald Publishing Limited
e-ISSN: 1758-6534
p-ISSN: 1355-2554
DOI 10.1108/IJEBR-04-2024-0412

during the age of Aristotle (late fourth century BC) with well-developed institutional structures, including a mercantile court that allowed settling conflicts from risky ventures. The third age is when the Roman empire has adopted Christianity as state religion, the age of Augustine around AD 400.

Time, space, place and context interact in shaping entrepreneurship. Space can be a metaphor as when Hjorth (2004), inspired by de Certeau, explored how management may create space for entrepreneurship within organizations. Space for entrepreneurship can be literal, as when it refers to seas as spaces for risky naval ventures, typically the Mediterranean for ancient societies. Ancient voyage texts allow identifying certain permanent and fundamental features of entrepreneurial behaviour, as well as revealing aspects of entrepreneurship seldom encountered in current literature but which might inspire further studies of, e.g. customer roles.

Process thinking has relations to entrepreneurial opportunity, a concept that has been treated extensively during many years (Gartner *et al.*, 2017). Shane and Venkataraman (2000, p. 220) presented influential definitions of entrepreneurial opportunities and of the field of entrepreneurship. In retrospect, Shane (2012, p. 14) emphasized that "entrepreneurship should be seen as a process and not as an embodiment of a type of person". Still, Hjorth *et al.* (2015, p. 601) had to say that "there have been few sustained and explicit attempts to bring process thinking to bear in the field of entrepreneurship studies", criticizing the Shane and Venkataraman (2000) article for its "individual – opportunity nexus".

The purpose of this study is to follow the development of *kairos* and other ancient Greek words for time in contexts of ancient entrepreneurship, seen in the perspective of modern entrepreneurship process research. The intended contribution is therefore to throw new light on Greek *kairos* and its derivative words, explaining the link to the Latin nautical metaphor of *opportunitas*, and to identify both recognized and less explored aspects of current entrepreneurship in descriptions of ancient voyages in the Mediterranean Sea. What are the constants of entrepreneurship throughout the ages, and which aspects of entrepreneurship processes can be emphasized as meaningful for studies in modern contexts?

This paper is organized as follows. Beginning with the various senses associated with the *kairos* group of words, dealing with those relevant to entrepreneurship issues, the analysis traces the Greek word *eukairia* into the Roman sphere of *opportunitas*. Three ancient voyages across the Mediterranean Sea will be analysed to add depth to how the temporal and spatial contexts can be understood, before concluding, when also the relevance for current debates on objective versus subjective opportunities is explained.

Kairos, its derivatives and other Greek words for time

Entrepreneurship researchers usually interpret *kairos* as the right, critical, or opportune moment, and often opposed to *chronos*, linear time (Capelleras and Greene, 2008; Doganova and Eyquem-Renault, 2009; Araujo and Easton, 2012; McMullen *et al.*, 2024), and a related concern with *kairos* is found in studies of innovation processes (Garud *et al.*, 2011; Otto *et al.*, 2024). In this simplified standard account, it is sometimes said also that Kairos in Greek mythology was the youngest son of Zeus (Gartner *et al.*, 2017; Rothgang and Lageman, 2021). But the reality according to modern classical scholars is more complex. It has usually been overlooked by management writers that *kairos* is the central member of a family of words, developing over a long time, and the relations between the *kairos* words and the Latin concept of *opportunitas* will be studied in the following, with a focus on issues that are relevant to entrepreneurship.

There are not just two but three Greek words for time: *chronos*, *kairos* and *aion*. While *aion* (Keizer, 1999) is mostly used for the lifetime of an individual, which is the span of human time, or for an in(de)finite period of time, the difference between uses of *chronos* and of *kairos* are far from clearcut. In fact, *chronos* may refer to a single point of time in actual usage, as already by Homer in the *Iliad* (15.511), where it stands for "once", and there are later examples of

chronos referring to a point of time, as is found in Herodotus' *Histories*. Even later, Plato uses *chronos* (*Laws*, 738d: "in a fixed time") and Euripides does so in his tragedy *Ion* (v. 1349) for the time that is now. Nevertheless, despite these examples to the contrary, briefly just hinted at by Smith (1969) in a footnote, *chronos* is mostly used for time in general.

Homer, Hesiod: *kairos* and *kairios*

The Homeric use of a *kairos* term, the adjective *kairios*, always concerns frontal attacks, with little stealth; the warriors exercise brute and precise force by design. Homer, who never uses the noun *kairos* itself (despite what is claimed by Sipiora, 2002, p. 2) has *kairios* four times in the *Iliad* (4.185 Pandarus almost kills Menelaus, 8.84 Alexander kills Nestor's horse, 8.326 Hector almost kills Teucer, 11.439 Socus hits Odysseus), and then only in battle scenes, where it refers to hitting a decisive, fatal point of the opponent's body. This adjective appears to have had no temporal meaning for Homer, being almost exclusively spatial (Trédé-Boulmer, 2015, p. 23ff.; Dickson, 2019). "Upon closer inspection space turns out to be everywhere in the Homeric epics, mostly in the form of small details carefully inserted whenever the action needs them" (de Jong, 2012, p. 25). Nevertheless, much the same can be said of how the author(s) of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* indicate time: "are remarkably precise in giving us temporal markers" (Allen, 2003, p. 67).

Entrepreneurial attacks on competitors have seldom been studied by researchers, perhaps avoided for ethical reasons, bordering on taboo, and at least because of difficulties of gaining access to data. What is mentioned by researchers is speed of attacks and of secrecy (Chen and Hambrick, 1995), and victim firms have been found to be less competitively aggressive, carry out simpler repertoires of actions, and carry out competitive action (Ferrier *et al.*, 1999). Santos and Eisenhardt (2009) propose that power is the underlying boundary logic and indicate soft-power strategies by which entrepreneurs compete in highly ambiguous markets. Stambaugh *et al.* (2011) drew on the resourced-based view of the firm and developed four strategies for resource-based attacks: dominate, defeat, skirmish, and war. Based on a study of firms in the US solar industry, Hannah and Eisenhardt (2018) formulated three ecosystem strategies: bottleneck strategy, component strategy, and system strategy.

Going back to Homer, there is only little evidence of how entrepreneurial ventures were thought of in an agricultural society, centred on households and not yet monetized. As highlighted by Ulf (2009, p. 87), the *Odyssey* (3.72) appears to consider maritime traders as dubious, Nestor guardedly asking Telemachus whether he was travelling *katà prêxin*, where "praxis" means "business". The *Iliad* is about societies at war (Ulf, 2009, p. 83 ff.), and warfare would be attractive for those who sought risky adventures.

Probably almost contemporary with Homer about 700 B.C., Hesiod in his *Works and Days* (Hesiod, 1978, line 694 with commentary) is the first author to use the word *kairos* itself, in a phrase about observing due measure (see also Trédé-Boulmer, 2015, p. 56: *kairos* as the à-propos, associated also by other early writers with *metron*, the right measure). There is nothing temporal in *kairos* when Hesiod uses it.

After archaic Greece

In the fifth century BC, Herodotus (2013) in his *Histories* (3.64.3) still uses *kairios* like Homer did for a mortal hit (when king Cambyses mounting his horse accidentally pierces his thigh with his sword, dying after twenty days) and elsewhere (1.125.1) in the more general sense of "apt, suitable" for a course of action, in this case when Cyrus found a way to persuade Persians to rebel against the Medes. Herodotus does use *kairos* twice also in the sense of "proper time"–time for finding the enemy (4.139.3), again for time for action (8.144.5), otherwise in a more general temporal sense.

As the atemporal uses differ widely from the "right time" that modern management authors associate with *kairos*, it is worth looking at the etymology of the word for clues to its original

meaning. The two major etymological dictionaries of ancient Greek (Chantraine, 1999; Beekes, 2010) state that the origin of *kairos* is unknown, while Trédé-Boulmer (2015, p. 52f.) argues in her careful and detailed analysis that scholars should consider the Indo-European reconstructed root **ker*- "cut", a root that also lies behind the English verb "shear". Misled by an unsupported etymology (Onians, 1951, p. 346), White (1987), Bartunek and Necochea (2000), as well as Gartner *et al.* (2017) and more recently Rothgang and Lageman (2021), have associated *kairos* wrongly with the art of weaving, ignoring the currently accepted distinction of the accents of the two words *kairós* and *kaîros*, today thought to be etymologically unrelated. The exact meaning of the unusual word *kaîros* with its circumflex accent on the first syllable is unknown, although it is understood as a weaving term concerning a thread to which the warp is attached.

Successively over the centuries, precise location is replaced by precise timing in the ancient Greek uses of *kairos* words. In Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, there are 57 instances where he uses *kairos*; more than 3/4 of these refer to a temporal sense (Trédé-Boulmer, 2015, p. 210).

Before reaching Aristotle in the mid-fourth century BC, it should be clarified that the personified Kairos is not considered a God in Greek popular mythology; instead, it is a learned construction. Ion of Chios, lyric poet and author of many tragedies, composed already in the mid-fifth century BC a hymn for Kairos (Jennings, 2007) where he was deified as youngest son of Zeus, as stated by the second-century AD traveller Pausanias (5.14.9) when mentioning that Kairos did have an altar at Olympia. Finding another Kairos altar not far from Olympia, Pausanias (8.25.9) also quotes Antimachus from his now lost *Thebaid*, c. 400 BC, who claimed that king Adrastus had two horses, swift Kairos and Areion.

Aristotle and his age

Schumpeter (1986, p. 57f.) in his *History of Economic Analysis* dealt at length with "Greco-Roman Economics" and Aristotle's theory of value. A paradigmatic example of how this Aristotelian issue has occupied management researchers over the years concerns the theory of value in Book V of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle, 2009; Meikle, 1993; Theocarakis, 2006). Even more influential in management research in recent years has been the Aristotelian virtue of *phronesis*, practical wisdom, in Book VI, as underlined by Tsoukas and Cummings (1997, p. 663) who argue that "The point about rediscovering Aristotle is that he thought *differently*, not greater or less than modern social scientists." While Aristotle himself did not link his concepts of *phronesis* and *kairos*, it remained for Heidegger to attempt to do so (Maggini, 2001; Risser, 2002); according to Kirkeby (2009, p. 69) "it is obvious to define phronesis as *the sense of the event*", having explicitly linked event to *kairos*, the right moment.

Aristotle is often quoted for his use of *kairos* in two passages in earlier books of his *Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle, 2009). As translated by Ross:

> Since "good" has as many senses as "being" (for it is predicated both in the category of substance, as of god or of reason, and in quality, i.e. of the virtues, and in quantity, i.e. of that which is moderate, and in relation, i.e. of the useful, and in time, i.e. of the right opportunity [*en chronoi kairos*], and in place, i.e. of the right locality and the like), [. . .] (I.6.3, 1096a)

Furthermore, Aristotle in another passage (II.2.4, 1104a) says that one has to go to the individual sciences and that there is no general science of what is the good, contrasting with Plato's unitary view of the good. Different application fields of *kairos* therefore belong to different sciences – and his prime examples are medicine and navigation. Taking this second passage by Aristotle as his starting point for introducing "kairology" as a concept in management philosophy, Kirkeby (2000, p. 232 ff.) defines it as an approach that "does not elevate itself to a scientific discipline, not even to a technê". And he sees it as opposed to "any 'kairologic' that pretends to predict the future by way of logic or mathematical means". This is in line with the *Metaphysics* (I.5, 985b30), where Aristotle rejects quantitative approaches to *kairos*, as when Pythagoreans stressed the seventh day as a medically critical point of time.

So how did Aristotle look at time – and change – in general? It is a fundamental tenet of Aristotle that nature is subject to change, although he has sometimes been thought to prioritize stability (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002); a theme in his *Politics* (Book V) is how to avoid revolutions, a special kind of organizational change. Aristotle discusses time in Book IV of his *Physics* (Aristotle, 1936, IV.10.11, 218b21), and as stated by Ross, "it is only the awareness of change that makes us aware of the lapse of time" (Aristotle, 1936, p. 63). Coope (2005, p. 5) interprets Aristotle here as claiming that time is not a kind of change, but that it is something essentially dependent on change, while Johnsen (2023) might go too far when saying that for Aristotle, time is change. In the same vein, sorting out the role of time in organizational studies, Holt and Johnsen (2019, p. 1569) find that time "ultimately, is affirmed as the medium of change and transformation". More in line with the *Physics*, Chia (2014, p. 10) argues that taking "change seriously from a process-philosophical perspective implies that organization in itself must be construed as an exceptional albeit temporary human accomplishment; an island of relative stability fashioned out of an underlying sea of change."

As shown by Bitros and Karayiannis (2008), it is meaningful to identify widespread entrepreneurship in ancient Athens, despite an economy primarily based on agriculture; they emphasize the role of the entrepreneur as venture capitalist and the financing of the export-import trade. The detailed survey of the classical Athenian economy by Economou (2024) reinforces this observation. There were other possibilities for investors, not least acquiring agricultural properties, but the typical ventures that attracted investors keen on exploiting risk were maritime ventures.

Thus, high risk ventures in antiquity were typically associated with shipping and maritime loans, not with the development and exploitation of innovative technologies. From fourth century BC Athens, there remain five court speeches attributed to Demosthenes, Aristotle's exact contemporary, with investors accusing captains of fraudulent practices. Unlike the vocabulary in Demosthenes' political rhetoric, these five speeches (32–35, 56) fail to include any *kairos* words. The conspicuous absence of *kairos* in these five judicial speeches could be explained by their narratives that concern past actions; on the other hand, the political speeches where *kairos* does occur are deliberative, aiming at what should be done, and concern desirable future world-states.

Engaging in shipping and maritime loans, often relating to transports of cereals, olive oil and wine, meant that variable weather conditions in the Mediterranean and in the Black Sea generated major risks for investors; unethical behaviour of captains was another risk. For maritime ventures, the space (in its literal sense) for entrepreneurship is the sea, and the place for entrepreneurship is the ship. It is not about managers who create a "space" for entrepreneurship within their organizations, as in the case portrayed by Hjorth (2004). The cultural importance of the Mediterranean context is great, shaping the societies along its coasts and islands during thousands of years (Abulafia, 2011; Broodbank, 2013).

The link to *opportunitas: eukairia*

Cicero (1914) is the Roman author who points out that *eukairia* corresponds to Latin *opportunitas* in his *On the Ends of Good and Evil* (3.45), written in 45 BC. He never uses the simple Greek word *kairos*. This member of the *kairos* family, *eukairia*, occurs twice in the New Testament (Matthew 26:16, Luke 22:6) and is translated as *opportunitas* in the Vulgate.

It is as a part of ancient rhetorical practice (Gastaldi, 2023) that the noun *eukairia* is encountered, derived from *kairos*, *eu*-meaning "good", first appearing in early fourth-century BC Athens in speeches by Isocrates (12.34.3, 15.311.2) and his rival Alcidamas (1.33), both belonging to the generation before Aristotle. Alcidamas argued that extempore speeches were superior to written ones. The improvising rhetor should prepare for varying circumstances, as to structure of a speech but not fix the actual words to be used, according to his short treatise *On those Writing Speeches* or *On the Sophists* (Alcidamas, 1982, ch. 33). Dimov's (2021) distinction between "opportunity" as the content of entrepreneurial intention and opportunity

as external conditions for entrepreneurial success constitutes a modern parallel: Isocrates emphasized opportunity when balancing internal and external qualities of his speeches, while Alcidamas had his focus on the actual external circumstances for and during a speech. Isocrates according to Trédé-Boulmer (2015, p. 275) has two senses of *kairos*, one of which is related to internal (within the text of the speech) appropriateness, unlike Alcidamas, who only thinks of the listeners then and there.

In his *Phaedrus* dialogue, analysing the psychological aspects of rhetoric, Plato (2022), who was slightly younger than Isocrates and Alcidamas, uses *kairos* (in the plural) at 272a4, immediately (272a6) followed in the same sentence by *eukairia* and its opposite, *akairia*. At this point in the dialogue, Plato has Phaedrus listening to Socrates expounding a theory of rhetoric as persuasion. As translated by Emlyn-Jones and Preddy:

> [. . .] grasping the right occasions [*kairous*] for speaking and holding back, and again for speaking concisely and with tearful appeal and exaggeration and, for all the forms of speeches he may learn, distinguishing the right and wrong moment [*eukairian/akairian*], [. . .]

The Liddell-Scott-Jones *Greek Lexicon* translates *eukairia* as "good season, opportunity" (for passages from Isocrates and Alcidamas) and for the passage from Plato, "appropriateness", where Trédeé-Boulmer (2015, p. 265) prefers "occasion décisive".

Kairos after Aristotle

Arriving at the age of Alexander the Great, whose tutor was Aristotle, *kairos* is only about timing. Alexander's favourite sculptor, Lysippus, made his image of Kairos, running, with wings, winged feet, and long hair; the long hair is for catching him when he runs past. In an epigram by Posidippus (1918), composed about 270 BC, Lysippus' statue of Kairos is talking (Prauscello, 2005). Here, Kairos is made to say that he is quick as the wind, and that those who meet him must grab him by the hair. There are recent overviews of this and other depictions of Kairos by Baert (2017) and by Trédé-Boulmer (2015) in her analysis, all emphasizing a fleeting opportunity.

The history of how various senses of *kairos* have developed does not end with Aristotle's strictly temporal point of time. The word occurs frequently in the New Testament (Boer, 2013), where *kairos* does not necessarily refer to a short period of time (Goldhill, 2022, p. 93 ff.). Jesus says that the time (*kairos*) is fulfilled (Mark 1:15); twentieth century theologians, following Paul Tillich (Bianchi, 1970; Earle, 2017), have taken "sign of the times" (Matthew 16:3, note the plural of "time") as a fundament for discussing the relation between the Church and contemporary society. Several examples of how *kairos* is understood in Paul's epistles have been collected by Gotsis and Drakopoulou Dodd (2002) in their analysis of eschatology, theology of the end times, in Pauline economic thinking. For Agamben (2005, p. 68) in his commentary on Paul's *Letter to the Romans*, the "most beautiful definition of *kairos*" is what Potter translates in his edition of Hippocrates (2022, p. 301) as "time is that within which the opportune moment is that within which not much time exists". This is the contorted sentence introducing the first Hippocratic precept, a text that is suspected to be a very late addition to the *Corpus Hippocraticum*, perhaps as late as from the second century AD and in that case more recent than the Pauline letters. It is seldom that the biblical uses of *kairos* emerge in entrepreneurial studies although the links between Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Tillich have been identified (Saghaug and Pattison, 2018).

Discussing improvisation, Ciborra (1999) is an early author on the relation between *kairos* and entrepreneurial action, referring to both Aristotle and Heidegger's "moment of vision". Many of the instances of the word in the New Testament foreshadow the long range of senses of *kairos* in Modern Greek, from the common use of *kairos* referring to weather and also to shorter or longer periods of time (Babiniotis, 2019).

An early example of reference to the *kairos* concept in economics is in the work of Ruhland, who belonged to the historical school of German economists (Senn, 2005). In his system,

where he was mostly concerned with economic policy, Ruhland (1903, p. 39) wished to replace what he called the historical-chronological method with the historical-kairological method. This is expressed in his kairological approach by relating earlier developments of economic theory and economic conditions to the wider setting in their societies, thus with an emphasis on the context of an era. Although Ruhland brings up a translation of Posidippus' Kairos epigram, he appears to be more influenced by contemporary theology. Prioritizing issues related to agriculture, Ruhland is far from thinking about entrepreneurial opportunities.

It is necessary to proceed to late antiquity to find the roots of what Johnsen and Holt (2023) posit as a distinction between world time and human time. This is a confrontation, acknowledging the influence of Ricœur (treating time and narration), between an Aristotelian view of time (as in his *Physics*, although Ricœur used his *Poetics*) and a human time. Human time reveals "how each action the entrepreneur performs during the storyline springs from reflections on the past, attention to the present, and images of the future" (Johnsen and Holt, 2023, p. 616), which is not far from what Augustine wrote about time in Book XI of his *Confessions* (Augustine, 2016; Knuuttila, 2001; Chia, 2002; Schatzki, 2006). While Augustine wrote his *Confessions* around the year 400 AD, another important North African convert to Christianity, Synesius, went on a difficult voyage along the Libyan coast. This will be the third voyage to be considered in the following.

Three ancient voyages

The usual explanation for Latin *opportunus*, underlying our "opportunity", is that it originally referred to a favourable wind that would take a ship into the harbour (*portus*). Seeing the entrepreneurial process as a journey (Sørensen *et al.*, 2007; McMullen and Dimov, 2013; Davidsson and Gruenhagen, 2021; Mets, 2022; Johnsen, 2023; Johnsen and Holt, 2023) is a characteristic expression of the process view of entrepreneurship. Journeys by sea are voyages, but fewer entrepreneurship authors resort to a voyage metaphor such as "the incorporation of work and family influences in the entrepreneurial voyage" (Wiklund *et al.*, 2019). Wood and McKinley (2020) proposed to see entrepreneurship as involving several steps on a voyage toward opportunity, rather than defining opportunity as a starting point.

The business model of voyages was and is peculiar in that the consumers are stakeholders enrolled (Mitchell *et al.*, 2021) onboard as passengers from the outset of the venture; the entrepreneurial challenge for captains was initially to choose the optimal time of departure and then to ensure delivery of the contracted service. The large ships sailing from Egypt to Italy would have grain export as their main source of revenue, while at the same time transporting even hundreds of passengers. Applying the Greek terms, the organization consisted of an entrepreneurial core, where there were the three roles of trader (*emporos*), shipowner (*nauklêros*), and captain/pilot (*kybernêtês*); sometimes, these could form partnerships or the same individual could exercise more than one role (Reed, 2003, p. 6). Then there was the crew.

Useful from an entrepreneurial viewpoint, there are three descriptions of difficult voyages in the Mediterranean Sea spanning three centuries, beginning with Paul sailing to Rome, Lucian's voyage narrative, and finally, Synesius' attempt to reach Cyrene. While these three Greek texts all abstain from using *kairos* words, the situations and actions narrated allow understanding how captains recognized and exploited opportunities. Obviously, "*time* is a crucial feature of narratively organized accounts" (Tsoukas and Cummings, 1997, p. 667). Six types of entrepreneurial narratives have been identified by Burnell *et al.* (2023), the three voyages come closest to being pivot narratives, where entrepreneurs describe how they have changed their strategies; however, the three voyages have been chronicled by passengers, not by the captains.

Time and space were intertwined: the geography of the sea for ancient captains navigating in the Mediterranean was spaces generally understood as sailing time, durations, rather than measured as distances, as they sailed without being dependent on maps or nautical instruments (Arnaud, 2014). Moreover, technical parameters of the Greek merchant ships and their naval routes have been outlined by Economou and Kyriazos (2024, pp. 201–206).

Paul's voyage to Rome

Ancient seafarers in the Mediterranean faced many dangers (Casson, 1995), and the storms faced by Paul in *Acts* 27:1–28:13 on his way as a prisoner from Caesarea on the Palestine coast to Rome led to a succession of changes of ship and shipwreck near Malta (Praeder, 1984; Beresford, 2014). Of interest from an entrepreneurial viewpoint is the reliance on multiple ports before reaching final destination, for each port the captain having to identify an opportune wind in order to choose time of departure; they first sailed northward along the coast to Sidon, and then set out again, passing westward north of Cyprus and landed at Myra (now Demre) on the southern coast of present-day Turkey.

In Myra, Paul with other prisoners, their guarding centurion and his soldiers had to board another ship, coming from Alexandria and sailing for Italy. Wind directions were now more difficult; after many days, they approached Knidos on the west coast of Turkey but continued, passing the east end of Crete, and landing at the Fair Havens on the south coast of the island. It was now October, after the usual sailing season, and Paul protested that their continued voyage was going to be disastrous (*Acts* 27:10). He was overruled by the centurion, who followed the advice of the pilot and the shipowner; given that Fair Havens was thought to be unsuitable to winter in, "the majority recommended" that they should depart and sail westward along the southern coast of Crete to the harbour of Phoenix. As a mild south wind began blowing, they followed their plan and set out but soon found themselves in a storm that brought them southward under the small island of Cauda (today Gavdos), where they strengthened the ship and lowered the sea anchor to prevent reaching the sandbars of the Libyan coast.

In subsequent days, they threw cargo overboard followed by ship equipment. Finally seeing land but fearing that the ship would be dashed against the rocks, the sailors dropped four anchors, and then attempting to escape, they let the lifeboat down into the sea, pretending that they were going to lower more anchors. Another intervention by Paul, who told the centurion and the soldiers that unless these sailors stayed aboard, the ship could not be saved. As a result, the soldiers intervened, cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it drift away. Later, the sailors discovered land; the ship made for the beach, but it struck a sandbar, ran aground and was wrecked. After three winter months in Malta, they left in another ship, put in at Syracuse and stayed there three days, then set sail and arrived at Rhegium on the Italian mainland. The next day the south wind came up, and on the following day they reached Puteoli, and after a week there, they finally came to Rome. One of the entrepreneurial lessons from Paul's voyage is that conflicts between captain/entrepreneur, passengers/consumers, and crew/employees can be critical for the outcome of a venture.

From Alexandria to Athens instead of Rome

The voyage from Alexandria described about a hundred years later by Lucian (1959, 2020), in his *The Ship or the Wishes* dialogue (Sections 7–10) was also complicated by storms (Casson, 1950) and ended first in Athens rather than Rome. The capability and age, implying experience, of Heron the pilot, were emphasized. The Isis left Alexandria with grain for Rome, carrying many passengers and supported by a huge crew, but found itself because of the prevailing wind direction east of Cyprus after six days, almost close to the Lebanese coast, but was then able to sail north of the island and westwards along the southern coast of today's Turkey. They met a dangerous storm when coming close to the small islands off today's Cape Gelidonya but were able to continue through the Aegean Sea to reach Piraeus and Athens, which meant a fundamental change of destination and considerable delay. Anyhow, the grain cargo would be possible to sell in Athens. The original plan which had to be abandoned was to pass south of Crete and the Peloponnese in order to continue to Rome. Nevertheless, the text repeats a high view of the Heron's capability as pilot. The voyage of the Isis is interesting not least because it includes a change of entrepreneurial goal due to the successive development of adversary circumstances.

From Alexandria westwards

A later voyage reported by Synesius soon after AD 400 along the North African coast, from Alexandria and planned to reach Libyan Cyrene, also suffered from storms as in Paul's travel to Rome, as well as conflict between the captain and the passengers (Synesius, 1926, pp. 80–91; 2003, pp. 6–19; Kahanov, 2006). In Synesius' long letter to his brother, there is a detailed description of the voyage, which took place in October after the main sailing season. With more than fifty passengers and a crew of a dozen sailors, the ship sailed early one morning from Alexandria, the land breeze being the opportune wind for leaving the harbour, although not sufficient to round the Pharos lighthouse until after a couple of attempts (which Synesius saw as a bad omen, that already the initiation of a voyage was difficult). This morning breeze did not last long before they met the northwest wind. Once out of the harbour, the captain chose to sail westward close to the coast, but after a while they observed rocks above water. Then a south wind came, and the captain could gain distance from the coast, despite protests from Synesius, who wished to continue westwards immediately. This was followed by a strong north wind, which could have thrown them against the shore, but now allowed them to sail westward. "This is the art of navigation!", the captain asserted and explained how he had anticipated the north wind.

During the night, the wind increased to a storm; one passenger, a soldier, drew his sword and threatened the captain who was reluctant to act before there was an imminent danger of loss of life. The storm subsided, and they arrived at a harbour surrounded by the desert, thus no local resources available, and spent two days there waiting for a favourable south wind. After this interval, they could set sail again at daybreak, but when the northwest wind struck, they "faced problems with the sail" when the yard broke and fell; ultimately, the storm subsided, and they approached offshore rocks. Then a small boat came to their help, and they were guided into Azarium, a small harbour not conclusively located but probably less than halfway to Cyrene. Here it was possible to find seafood to eat, and the local population was helpful. The normal time for sailing from Alexandria to Cyrene was four days, and now they had spent 17 days and still not reached the originally intended destination. Again, as in Paul's voyage, there were conflicts between captain/entrepreneur and passengers/consumers.

Modern parallels and differences

These three narratives contain elements sometimes paralleled in current research on entrepreneurship and can be interpreted as historical constants, permanent features of entrepreneurial action. Dodd *et al.* (2023, p. 1860) argue that studying entrepreneurs on the edges of land and sea, where two ecosystems meet, help us in repositioning "how we view the people of entrepreneurship". Contributing to a broadened view of involved people, the three narratives emphasize consumer/passenger relations with captains/entrepreneurs and also with staff/crew.

Furthermore, Wood *et al.* (2021) have defined three temporal dimensions of entrepreneurial endeavours: initialization, pace, and chronology. Initialization is the point in time that an entrepreneur envisions is appropriate for incipient entrepreneurial action. For all three voyages, it is the captain's discovery of a favourable wind which is the opportunity for leaving harbour.

There is the distinction between first-person and third-person opportunities (McMullen and Shepherd, 2006): opportunity for one captain may not be the same opportunity for another captain. It is possible, however, that Synesius' captain was also the shipowner, or that it was a case of two individuals, which translates into the question of who was the entrepreneur or were the entrepreneurs (Dimov, 2007).

Besides objectively measurable wind, it is a question of skills, experience, the properties of the ship, attitude to uncertainties, consumers/passengers' opinions, and the captain must exercise judgement before leaving the point of origin. Weather may change during the voyage, necessitating changes of plans, potentially also choice of a different port than the one initially

aimed at, testing the captain's entrepreneurial resilience (Korber and McNaughton, 2018). Winds that change are the main source of risk at sea in the Mediterranean; sailing from Alexandria in the summer season was affected by the prevailing northerly winds; in the Mediterranean Sea and regardless of season, currents were usually feeble and tides too faint to be significant in comparison to winds (Casson, 1995, p. 273). Suggesting how to teach recognition of entrepreneurial opportunities, White and Hertz (2022) bring up the Latin etymology of *opportunitas*, while thinking that it is a question of waiting for the tide, a quantitatively predictable future condition, rather than waiting for favourable winds, a more uncertain condition. Later in the year, seasonal wind conditions could force "vessels to stop at intermediate ports for days or weeks or even months", and Paul as mentioned had to spend the winter at Malta (Casson, 1995, p. 291; *Acts* 28.11). The Synesius voyage was probably not made in summer, as there is mention of rain (Kahanov, 2006). If entrepreneurial storytelling is mainly about salvation or emancipation (Brattström and Wennberg, 2022), the three tales are about salvation.

Once having set sail, the entrepreneur/captain relies on Bayesian decision-making with its subjective base and the successive adding of new information (Sarasvathy and Berglund, 2010, p. 165 f.; Lohrke *et al.*, 2018). An obvious parallel is the "pilot-in-the-plane principle" as a type of effectual logic and non-predictive control: where human action is the predominant factor shaping the future (Sarasvathy, 2009, pp. 91–95).

Just as the five Demosthenian speeches already mentioned, the process descriptions in Greek of the three voyages avoid using *eukairia* or any other *kairos* words. The authors have refrained from abstract terms corresponding to "opportunity". Instead, the main focus is on narrating entrepreneurial work, and these narratives without *kairos* abstractions anticipate the feeling that "the word *opportunity* adds nothing to the more straightforward language of beliefs, actions, and results" (Foss and Klein, 2020, p. 368) and that it is necessary to disentangle the word "opportunity" from descriptions of what entrepreneurs do (Ramoglou and McMullen, 2024).

More seldom analysed in studies of modern entrepreneurship are consumer or customer interaction with the entrepreneur (Chowdhury, 2011), the entrepreneur having to defend decisions (Dimov and Pistrui, 2020), sometimes even with customers attempting to override entrepreneur decisions. Little observed by current researchers, if at all, there may occur conflict during interaction between employees and customers in a venture crisis. Employees may abandon the venture, making the crisis worse by exit, and it may be customers/passengers who prevent their exit, as Paul and the soldiers did when close to Malta. Due to their social standing and strong personalities, Paul and Synesius filled the role of key customer (Yli-Renko *et al.*, 2020) or lead customer (McBride and Wuebker, 2022), although largely ignored by the captains. Applying the stakeholder terminology developed by Mitchell *et al.* (2021), Paul wielded power despite very low legitimacy, instead claiming urgency. These are examples of more lively interaction with consumers than is outlined and categorized by McMullen *et al.* (2024) in their temporal typology, and the call by Mitchell *et al.* (2024, p. 465) for an "explicit theorization of the interactive and relational processes of [entrepreneurial] work that are required to foster the mutual confidence of entrepreneurs and stakeholders in an entrepreneurial project" would provide a framework accommodating the three voyage cases.

Concluding remarks

The narrow understanding of *kairos* in current entrepreneurship literature, with a God Kairos as a son of Zeus, strictly opposed to time as Chronos, has been shown to hide a complex semantic development. The locational meaning of *kairos* words, alternating with referring to aptness in general, is shifted into a purely temporal sense, and in the context of Christianity, this temporal sense is reinterpreted.

One reason for studying the family of *kairos* concepts in antiquity is Cicero's bridge between Greek *eukairia* and Latin *opportunitas*, leading to modern "opportunity". For the

Romans, *opportunitas* was a half-dead naval metaphor. The analysis of three ancient narratives of troubled voyages in the Mediterranean have brought up aspects, not least of stakeholder relationships, that are gaining in visibility in recent studies of entrepreneurship.

These voyages are risky processes in a geographical space. The captain can only leave harbour when there is a suitable wind, providing the starting point, an *opportunitas* to sail. Once at sea, circumstances may change, testing capabilities. The destination might be impossible to reach without first aiming for another harbour, which implies entrepreneurial resilience and waiting for another *opportunitas* so as to continue the voyage. It may be found necessary to abandon original plans for the final destination, which is a better alternative for the customers/passengers than shipwreck. If all this can be considered as historical constants of entrepreneurial work, there are also other phenomena that should inspire further process studies of current entrepreneurship. In all three voyages, conflicts arose between captains and passengers; additionally, in Paul's voyage, there was a conflict between crew and passengers. Despite the challenges of getting access to data, more empirical studies are needed of less than harmonious relationships between investors, entrepreneurs, their employees and their customers.

How relevant are the three narratives for the current opportunity debates, more precisely the question of whether opportunities are to be seen as objective or subjective? For McBride and Wuebker (2022, p. 75), the creation view of opportunities suggests that they are subjective, whereas the discovery view implies that they are objective. They argue that "transforming a completely subjective opportunity into an epistemologically objective opportunity requires changing beliefs" of stakeholders, including their rights and responsibilities "vis-à-vis the entity created to exploit an opportunity". Given how the dialogues with sometimes hostile passengers are reported in the three narratives, it is not obvious that the transformation from subjective to socially objective opportunities has succeeded. Turning to McMullen *et al.* (2024), there is a scale where high discretion in decision making for entrepreneurial action is associated with subjective opportunities, and conversely, low discretion goes with objective opportunities. The captains of the three ancient voyages appear to have had considerable scope for entrepreneurial action, which then has to be interpreted as dealing with subjective opportunities. Given the ancient sea setting with captains as entrepreneurs, it would be odd to reject the idea of opportunities as discovered; either there is a favourable wind for sailing or not, although it needs a captain's interpretation of current weather conditions. In the context of ancient voyages, this view does not contradict seeing opportunities as "worldly profit possibilities" (McMullen *et al.*, 2024, p. 21). It is important to recognize that this refers to a special case; the captains had captive passengers from the outset of a voyage, thus a business model with prior knowledge of consumer demand.

On a final note, it can be seen that the *kairos* family of words continues to add members: the adjective "kairotic" is a modern coinage, used by Wadhwani *et al.* (2020), Sarasvathy and Venkataraman (2021), as well as by other authors who focus on opportunities in entrepreneurship.

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