

When I think about mythic heroes, for many years the first name that came to mind was Sinbad: Sinbad the sailor. In his days as an adventurer, he went on seven fantastic voyages which earned him fame for the rest of his life. Yet, now in retrospect, I no longer consider him to be the great adventurer that I saw him as in my childhood.

On his seven voyages, Sinbad encountered every obstacle one could possibly think of. He and his crew met up with: a fish so large, many mistook it for an island, an island where rocs (enormous birds (their eggs were often mistaken for buildings)) still lived, cannibals, giants, and even herds of angry elephants. On each and everyone one of his famed voyages, he was shipwrecked, alone, and faced with some hideous danger. On each and everyone, he overcame the odds, destroyed his foes, and returned home with riches beyond the imagination.

As a child, the stories of Sinbad's voyages were wildly entertaining. In each one, there was adventure, danger, money, and the hero always came home in one piece. Now that I look back at the stories, there are some parts of Sinbad's fantastic tales that bother me.

First of all, Sinbad never set out in search of adventure. These amazing things just seemed to always happen to him. He normally set out as a merchant, carrying goods from one exotic land to another. Yet, on each of these trips, something incredible happened to him and his crew, resulting in a dead crew and a fantastic story for Sinbad the sailor.

Secondly, all of Sinbad's great adventures occurred sequentially. In other words, he went immediately from one adventure to another without so much as a nap in between. This man never had a quiet boat ride in the entire span of time in which his adventures took place.

Another interesting point is the manner in which Sinbad always left and returned to his home port in Baghdad. All seven times, he left with a full crew and carrying the goods of a local merchant. Yet all seven times he returned, he was alone, the crew having died in the early part of the respective adventure. All seven times, he returned without the goods that he was to take to market, but he often returned with new riches from the island where he was stranded (and of course, kept them for himself). This leads me to believe that maybe his crew didn't die in the shipwrecks or some other accident after all.

Sinbad was a mythic hero; a hero for everyone with a love for adventure. But now, I tend to think that Sinbad the sailor may not have been the great adventure that he has been made out to be. Maybe there is more to the tale of Sinbad than we know. Maybe something was lost in the translation from Arabic. Maybe parts of the story vanished over the years. Who knows? Either way, I don't think we are getting the whole story of Sinbad the sailor.

