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**Caption:** Eric Seelig saws a large beam at his business on Thursday in Lafayette. Seelig will take his expertise to Morocco to help build an ancient weapon to be used on a Discovery Channel show.

Cliff Grassmick/Daily Camera

# Back in time: Locals called to build Greek 'superweapon' for Discovery

A local carpenter and a civil engineer took off for Morocco on Saturday to help reconstruct an ancient catapult for a Discovery Channel show.

Eric Seelig, who runs Lafayette's Three Elements Timberworks Inc., and Dave Burnett, an Erie civil engineer, have two weeks to replicate the "Archimedes Claw," reputedly used to demolish Roman ships during the Second Punic War.

"I just love building stuff out of wood, and who gets to build something like that?" Seelig said earlier this week.

The claw was a 70-foot-long "superweapon" that supposedly flipped hefty vessels on their way to attack the walled city-state of Syracuse.

How the weapon worked and looked varies among historians, complicating Seelig and Burnett's job. Seelig said it was constructed with the same mortise and tenon joints his framing company uses to build high-end homes in ski towns.

Even with modern knowledge and technology, Seelig said he's not sure how -- or if -- the Archimedes Claw worked.

Some historians describe it as a catapult with a large fishing line on the end. The hook snagged the ship, lifted it out of the water and smashed it against the walls, according to Philadelphia's Drexel University.

Seelig wonders how Archimedes kept the long "boom" from snapping under the weight of the ship.

The federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration was less strict in 218 B.C., he joked.

"I think it was embellished," Seelig said. "The Greeks called it their great weapon that turned the Romans back; the Romans said, 'We could've defeated them if only they didn't have that great weapon.'"

He hopes to find out the truth during the filming of the show, expected to run in October. Alex Kiehl with London-based Darlow Smithson Productions, who is making the show for Discovery, said this will be the first time the claw has been rebuilt to scale and tested.

He said the "Superweapons of the Ancient World" program will also feature a battering ram, which is a wooden post designed to smash walls, and a wheeled siege tower.

Seelig heard about the opportunity in a timber guild newsletter and was among the handful of experts chosen last month. He's the claw's lone carpenter, working with two professors and two engineers, according to Darlow Smithson.

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LEARN MORE

Drexel University's link to Archimedes --

[www.mcs.drexel.edu/crorres/Archimedes/contents.html](http://www.mcs.drexel.edu/crorres/Archimedes/contents.html) Click on "Archimedes Claw."

Click on "Sources" for historical accounts of the weapon.

Archimedes Claw

Greek writer Plutarch's accounts of the claw:

"Often there would be seen the terrifying spectacle of a ship being lifted clean out of the water into the air and whirled about as it hung there, until every man had been shaken out of the hull and thrown in different direction, after which it would be dashed down empty upon the walls."

Who was Archimedes?

A Greek mathematician, physicist and inventor famous for his work in geometry, physics, mechanics and hydrostatics, according to Encyclopedia.com.

"He invented machines of war so ingenious that the besieging armies of Marcus Claudius Marcellus were held off from Syracuse for three years," the Web site says.

-- Camera staff