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# THE PERIPLUS OF THE ERYTHRÆAN SEA

TRAVEL AND TRADE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN  
BY A MERCHANT OF THE FIRST CENTURY

TRANSLATED FROM THE GREEK AND ANNOTATED

BY

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so-called Mountain Island, about two hundred stadia seaward from the very head of the bay, with the shores of the mainland close to it on both sides. Ships bound for this port now anchor here because of attacks from the land. They used formerly to anchor at the very head of the bay, by an island called Diodorus, close to the shore, which could be reached on foot from the land; by which means the barbarous natives attacked the island. Opposite Mountain Island, on the mainland twenty stadia from shore, lies Adulis, a fair-sized village, from which there is a three-days' journey to Coloe, an inland town and the first market for ivory. From that place to the city of the people called Auxumites there is a five days' journey more; to that place all the ivory is brought from the country beyond the Nile through the district called Cyeneum, and thence to Adulis. Practically the whole number of elephants and rhinoceros that are killed live in the places inland, although at rare intervals they are hunted on the seacoast even near Adulis. Before the harbor of that market-town, out at sea on the right hand, there lie a great many little sandy islands called Alalæi, yielding tortoise-shell, which is brought to market there by the Fish-Eaters.

5. And about eight hundred stadia beyond there is another very deep bay, with a great mound of sand piled up at the right of the entrance; at the bottom of which the opsiian stone is found, and this is the only place where it is produced. These places, from the Calf-Eaters to the other Berber country, are governed by Zoscales; who is miserly in his ways and always striving for more, but otherwise upright, and acquainted with Greek literature.

6. There are imported into these places, undressed cloth made in Egypt for the Berbers; robes from Arsinoe; cloaks of poor quality dyed in colors; double-fringed linen mantles; many articles of flint glass, and others of murrhine, made in Diospolis; and brass, which is used for ornament and in cut pieces instead of coin; sheets of soft copper, used for cooking-utensils and cut up for bracelets and anklets for the women; iron, which is made into spears used against the elephants and other wild beasts, and in their wars. Besides these, small axes are imported, and adzes and swords; copper drinking-cups, round and large; a little coin for those coming to the market; wine of Laodicea and Italy, not much; olive oil, not much; for the king, gold and silver plate made after the fashion of the country, and for clothing, military cloaks, and thin coats of skin, of no great value. Likewise from the district of Ariaca across this sea, there are imported Indian iron, and steel, and Indian cotton cloth; the broad cloth called *monachê* and that called *sagmatogênê*, and girdles, and coats of skin and mallow-colored cloth, and a few muslins, and colored lac. There are exported from these places ivory, and tortoise-shell and rhinoceros-horn. The most from Egypt is brought to this market from the month of January to September, that is, from Tybi to Thoth; but seasonably they put to sea about the month of September.

7. From this place the Arabian Gulf trends toward the east and becomes narrowest just before the Gulf of Avalites. After about four thousand stadia, for those sailing eastward along the same coast, there are other Berber market-towns, known as the "far-side" ports; lying at intervals one after the other, without harbors

6. **Molochinê**, or **mallow cloth**, was a coarse cotton cloth dyed with a preparation of a variety of the hibiscus native in India. This purplish cloth must have corresponded closely to the coarse blue drills still in demand on this coast.

6. **Lac**.—McCrinkle notes that the Sanscrit is *lākshā*, a later form of *rākshā*, connected with the root *ranj*, to dye. The Prakrit form is *lakkha*. It was used by women for dyeing the nails and feet, also as a dye for cloth.

The lac insect (*Tachardia Lacca*, Kerr) is native in India and still practically confined to that country.

According to Watt (*Commercial Products of India*, pp. 1053 ff.), it yields two distinct products: a dye and a resin. The dye competed on favorable terms with the Mexican cochineal until both were displaced by manufactured aniline, when the resin *shellac* again became more important.

The resin is formed around the young swarms as they adhere to the trees; the lac being a minute hemipterous insect living on the plant-juices sucked up by a proboscis.

The dye is taken from the bodies of the females, which assume a bright red color during the process of reproduction. For a complete account of the product and its uses see Watt.

Of somewhat similar nature to lac was the "kermes-berry" produced on the Mediterranean holm-oak; whence the dye known as carmesin, cramoisi, crimson or carmine; or, by another derivation, scarlet; or, referring to the pupa-stage of the insect, vermiculum or vermilion.

These insect dyes were used separately, or, associated with murex, as an element in the so-called "Tyrian purple."

6. **Tortoise-shell**.—This was a great article of commerce in the Roman world, being used for small receptacles, ornaments, and for inlaying furniture and woodwork. It is one of the most frequently-mentioned commodities in the *Periplus*. The antiquity of the trade is uncertain, but this seems to be the "shell" brought from the Land of Punt by Queen Hatshepsut's expedition in the 15th century B. C.

6. **Rhinoceros**.—The horns and the teeth, and probably the skin, were exported from the coast of Abyssinia, where Bruce found the hunting of this animal still a trade and described it (*Travels*, Vol. IV).

7. **Avalites** is identified with the modern Zeila, 11° 20' N., 43° 28' E. It is 79 miles from the straits of Bab-el-Mandeb. The ancient name is preserved by the village Abalit, on the north shore of

This condition is corroborated by the known Arab infusion in the negro peoples on the whole coast, which is of far earlier origin than the Mohammedan colonization.

Who were the natives and what was their language, as mentioned in the *Periplus*? Rev. J. Torrend, S. J., in a paper read before the Rhodesia Scientific Association, included in its Proceedings (V, 2, Buluwayo, 1905), analyzes the languages of the coast and finds a striking similarity between the speech of the Tana River, which empties below the island of Lamu about  $2^{\circ} 40' S.$ , and that of the lower Zambesi ( $18^{\circ}-19^{\circ} S.$ ). He gives a long comparative list of words in these so-called Pokomo and Cizimba tongues, evidently identical. He quotes Dr. Krapf and other German philologists as saying that the Pokomo is the aboriginal language of the coast, and that the modern Swahili is derived from it; and he himself believes that the Cizimba is even more primitive, and that it gives the key to most of the modern dialects of the southern coast. Father Torrend, full of the Sofala-Ophir theory, argues that the language was brought from the Tana River to the Zambesi, not by land because the modern tribes are of peaceful disposition, but rather by sea, and particularly by sea-traders, assuming such to have come from Arabia. The assumption is certainly far-fetched, as it is hardly likely that any traffic, however busy, would have brought this negro language and transplanted it 1500 miles down the coast to a different tribe. The suggestion is rather that this branch of the Bantu race migrated southward within historical times, through the African rift-valley, and that the modern tribes of the lower Zambesi, said to be speaking to-day the most primitive language, are their descendants, while those who remained on the Tana have had their speech modified more notably by later contact with the outside world.

The name *Cizimba*, borne by the modern dialect, suggests the *Agisymba* of the Roman geographers; which was known to them through the report of an adventurous youth, Julius Maternus, who marched for four months southward from the Garamantes (Fezzan), and brought back word of a region abounding in rhinoceros, inhabited by negroes and bearing that name (Ptolemy, I, 8, 5). It seems not an unreasonable assumption that he did reach the head-waters of the Nile and found somewhere in that great rift-valley the ancestors of this Bantu tribe which later migrated southward and formed, among other confederations, the so-called *Monomotapa* of the mediæval geographers.

This rift-valley of East Africa is a striking feature of its topography, and must have had a great bearing on its early trade. A good

description is given by Prof. J. M. Gregory, (*The Great Rift Valley*, London, 1896). It is a natural depression beginning at the lower shore of the Red Sea between Massowa and the straits, taking a south-westerly direction through Abyssinia to the British and German East African possessions, including lakes Rudolf, Nyanza, Tanganyika and Nyassa, and running almost to the Zambesi. While it is unlikely that this valley was ever at one time under the control of any Arabian power, it is probable that the tribes inhabiting it were in more or less regular commercial relations with the North, and that it was a more important avenue of trade than the sea-coast with its broad unhealthy swamps. It is indeed quite possible that the Mashonaland gold, which lay at no great distance south of the valley, might to some extent have found its way along this natural trade-route by exchange from tribe to tribe; and it is entirely unnecessary, in disproving the antiquity of the Mashonaland ruins, to attempt to disprove the manifest fact of early Arab influence and infusion along the East African coast. Neither is it necessary to deny the general infiltration of early Arabian culture in two directions from the head-waters of the Nile, southward down the rift-valley, and westward through the Sudan toward the Gulf of Guinea. In fact this general spread of culture, folk-lore and religious beliefs and practices, is too well attested to admit of denial.

17. **Palm oil.**—The word in the text, *nauplios*, is corrected to *nargilios*, a word which appears in modified forms in other Greek geographers. This is the Sanscrit *narikela*, *narikera*, Prakrit *nargil*, "cocoanut," and the appearance of the word on the Zanzibar coast is of course a confirmation of Indian trade there. (See Lassen, *op. cit.*, I, 267.) The Greek word was *koix*, whence the adjective *koukiophoros*, Latin *cucifera*, from which the Periplus, § 19, coins the Greek adjective *koukinos*.

This palm oil was from *Cocos nucifera*, Linn., order *Palmeæ*; probably native in the Indian archipelago, and carried by natural causes as well as Hindu activity to most of the tropical world. It is one of the most useful plants known, providing timber for houses and ships, leaves for thatch and fiber for binding and weaving, aside from the food value of the nut, fresh and dried, and the oil. As a medicine also it was of importance to the Hindus, the pulp of the ripe fruit being mixed with clarified butter, coriander, cumin, cardamoms, etc., to form their *narikela-khanda*, a specific for dyspepsia and consumption. The nut was described by Cosmas Indicopleustes in the 6th century as *argellion*: and by Marco Polo in the 13th century (I, 102; II, 236, 248) as *Indian nut*. (See also Watt, *op. cit.*, 349-363.)

circumference. (14) In the city there are five palaces, ten *li* distant from each other. (15) In the palace buildings they use crystal to make pillars; vessels used in taking meals are also made. (16) The king goes to one palace a day to hear cases. After five days he has completed his round. (17) As a rule, they let a man with a bag follow the king's carriage. Those who have some matter to submit, throw a petition into the bag. When the king arrives at the palace he examines into the rights and wrongs of the matter. (18) The official documents are under the control of thirty-six *chiang* (generals?) who conjointly discuss government affairs. (19) Their kings are not permanent rulers, but they appoint men of merit. (20) When a severe calamity visits the country, or untimely rain-storms, the king is deposed and replaced by another. The one relieved from his duties submits to his degradation without a murmur. (21) The inhabitants of that country are tall and well-proportioned, somewhat like the Chinese, whence they are called *Ta-ts'in*. (22) The country contains much gold, silver, and rare precious stones, especially the "jewel that shines at night," the "moonshine pearl," the *hsieh-chi-hsi*, corals, amber, glass, *lang-kan* (a kind of coral), *chu-tan* (cinnabar?), green jadestone (*ching-pi*), gold-embroidered rugs and thin silk-cloth of various colors. (23) They make gold-colored cloth and asbestos cloth. (24) They further have "fine cloth," also called *Shui-yang-ts'ui*, (*i. e.* down of the water-sheep); it is made from the cocoons of wild silk-worms. (25) They collect all kinds of fragrant substances, the juice of which they boil into *su-ho* (storax). (26) All the rare gems of other foreign countries come from there. (27) They make coins of gold and silver. Ten units of silver are worth one of gold. (28) They traffic by sea with *An-hsi* (Parthia) and *T'ien-chu* (India), the profit of which trade is ten-fold. (29) They are honest in their transactions and there are no double prices. (30) Cereals are always cheap. The budget is based on a well-filled treasury. (31) When the embassies of neighboring countries come to their frontier, they are driven by post to the capital, and on arrival, are presented with golden money. (32) Their kings always desired to send embassies to China, but the *An-hsi* (Parthians) wished to carry on trade with them in Chinese silks, and it is for this reason that they were cut off from communication. (33) This lasted till the ninth year of the Yen-hsi period during the emperor Huan-ti's reign (= A. D. 166) when the king of *Ta-ts'in*, *An-tun* (Marcus Aurelius Antoninus) sent an embassy who, from the frontier of *Jih-nan* (Anam) offered ivory, rhinoceros horns, and tortoise shell. From that time dates the (direct) intercourse with this country. The list of their