

PERIPLUS MARIS ERYTHRAEI: THREE NOTES ON THE TEXT

1 *Per.* 4: As the text stands now, we read that Adulis, the principal port of the Axumite Kingdom, is

on a deep bay that extends due south, in front of which is an island called Oreinê, situated about 200 stades from the innermost [sc. part of the] bay towards the open sea (ταῦ μὲν ἐσωτάτου κόλπου σταδίους ὡς πέλαιος ἔχουσα διακοσίους) and with both its shores parallel to the mainland, where arriving vessels now moor . . . Formerly they used to moor at this innermost [part of the] bay at what is called Didorus Island right by this [part of the] mainland (πρώτου μὲν γὰρ ὥρμαι κατ' αὐτὸν τὸν ἐσωτάτου κόλπον ἐν τῇ Διδώρου λεγομένη νήσῳ παρ' αὐτὴν τὴν ἡπειρὸν).¹

This neither makes sense nor suits the geography. Didorus Island, we are told, is located 'by this [part of the] mainland', which can only be the part alongside Oreinê,² for that is the only part so far mentioned. This is confirmed by the information vouchsafed a few lines later that the town, i.e. the residential area, is 20 stades from the sea—sc. the port—'on this [part of the] mainland by Oreinê' (κατ' αὐτὴν τὴν ἐν τῇ Ὀρεινῇ ἡπειρὸν ἀπὸ σταδίων εἴκοσι τῆς θαλάσσης). Now Oreinê, as we learned at the outset, is at the mouth of the bay, no less than 200 stades away from its innermost point. If, then, Didorus Island is off the mainland that faces Oreinê, how can it possibly be 'at this innermost [part of the] bay'?

Next, the geography. All commentators agree that the bay talked of here must be Annesley Bay (or the Gulf of Zula, as it is now called).³ There is a rocky island at its mouth, Dissei Island, which nicely fits the requirements of Oreinê. There are no islands whatsoever at the bottom of the bay.⁴ There are, however, several at the mouth opposite Dissei, namely those that make up Massawa Harbor. One of these could easily be identified with Didorus.

I suggest, therefore, that ἐσωτάτου κόλπου is an error for ἐξωτάτου κόλπου. Exactly the same error occurs twice elsewhere in the short compass of the *Periplus*⁵ and in this instance could well have been induced by the ἐσωτάτου κόλπου just a few lines above. The text would then read: 'Formerly they put in at this outermost [part of the bay] at the island called Didorus Island right by this [part of the] mainland.' This makes sense and suits the geography.

¹ Citations are from the text of H. Frisk, *Le Périples de la mer Érythrée* (Göteborgs Högskolas Årsskrift 33, Göteborg, 1927), which supersedes that of C. Müller in *Geographi Graeci minores* i. 257–305 (Paris, 1853). Müller's commentary is still the best available. J. McCrindle, *The Commerce and Navigation of the Erythraean Sea* (Calcutta, 1879), offers a translation with concise commentary and W. Schoff, *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (New York, 1912), a translation with full commentary.

² For αὐτὸς δὲ as demonstrative, see

Frisk, pp. 65–6, and J. Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. iii, *Syntax*, by N. Turner (Edinburgh, 1963), p. 194.

³ Cf. Müller, McCrindle, Schoff, *nn. ad loc.*; *RE* s.v. 'Adule' (1894) and Supplbd. 7 (1940).

⁴ Müller, the sole commentator to acknowledge that there was a problem, could only suggest that, in the course of time, the island had become part of the mainland.

⁵ In 26 and 42, ἔσω of the MSS is a mistake for ἐξω; cf. Frisk, p. 110.

2 *Per.* 12, 13: The local products of the Market of Spices at Cape Guardafui included (12) *κασία και γίζειρ και άσούφη και άρωμα και μαγλα και μοτώ και λίβανος*, while those of Oponé on Somalia's eastern shore just below the cape included (13) *κασία και άρωμα και μοτώ*. *Kasia* and *libanos*, of course, offer no problem.⁶ *Gizir* and *asyphē* are mentioned by Dioscorides (1.13), and *moto* by Galen (14.72), as kinds of cassia. *Magla* is attested only here; on the basis of the context it too is generally assumed to be a type of cassia.

What about *aroma*? Müller in his *Prolegomena* (p. cvi) offered two suggestions: either it was a very special aromatic, cinnamon perhaps, or it was a corruption of *άρηβώ*, a form of cassia mentioned by Galen (14.72). Of the two, Müller so favoured the second that only it appears in his commentary, though he prudently retained *aroma* in his text. His prudence had scant effect: *arebo*, a random conjecture with no palaeographical considerations to recommend it, has become enshrined in Schoff's translation and others⁷ in *LSJ*,⁸ and has entered the literature on Rome's trade in spices.⁹

There is no need to emend to *arebo* or, indeed, to anything else. Müller's first suggestion was in the right direction, as a passage from the Digest (39.4.16.7) makes abundantly clear. It cites a rescript of Aurelius and Commodus on customs duties that includes a long list of imports from East Africa, Arabia, and India. Alongside *cinnamomum*, *costum*, *nardi stachys*, *malabathrum*, and the like, we find *aroma Indicum*. In such a context *aroma Indicum* can only refer to a specific item of export, can only be the trade name for a particular aromatic.¹⁰ If in the Digest, then also in the *Periplus*, one of whose prime aims is to describe the objects of trade handled by the ports it deals with. The *aroma* in question, considering the products it rubs shoulders with, is most likely yet another form of cassia.

3 *Per.* 17: The list of exports from Zanzibar or the nearby region include: ivory in large quantity, rhinoceros horn, fine tortoise-shell, and *ναύπλιος όλέγος*. Müller retained *ναύπλιος* in his text but expressed puzzlement in his commentary ('hoc quid sibi velit, ego nescio') and in his *Prolegomena* (cviii-cix) suggested emending to *ναργίλιος*, 'palm oil,' a conjecture based, it would seem, partly on

⁶ There is no problem even why cassia, grown only in India and China, is here called a product of East Africa. African, Arab, and Indian shippers brought it there for re-export, and for centuries were incredibly successful in concealing the source of their supplies; see E. Warmington, *The Commerce Between the Roman Empire and India* (Cambridge, 1928), pp. 185-94.

⁷ Schoff translates (26-7): 'cinnamon (and its different varieties, *gizir*, *asypha*, *arebo*, *magla*, and *moto*) and frankincense'; 'cinnamon . . . (the *arebo* and *moto*)'. The most recent translation, R. Mauny's in *Journal de la Société des Africanistes* 38 (1968), 19-33, has (p. 26) 'Kasia (et ses différentes variétés, *gizir*, *asypha*, *arebo*, *magla* (sic), *moto*) et de l'encens', which seems more a rendering of Schoff's English

than the *Periplus*' Greek. McCrindle mentions Müller's emendation approvingly in his introduction (p. 16) but translates (p. 62) 'fragrant gums'; this is incorrect since the *Periplus*, when it talks of 'fragrant gums,' uses the plural *δρωμαρα* (cf. 7, 10), as do the Greek papyri (where the word in the singular is not even attested) and ancient authors in general (cf., e.g., *TLL* s.v. *aroma*).

⁸ S.v. *άρηβώ*, with no indication whatsoever that a conjecture is involved.

⁹ J. Miller, *The Spice Trade of the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1969), p. 161.

¹⁰ Cf. H. Dirksen, 'Über ein, in Justinian's Pandekten enthaltenes, Verzeichnis ausländischer Waaren', *Abhandlungen der königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin*, Phil.-hist. Kl. (1843), 59 ff. at p. 88.

palaeographical considerations but even more on the inclusion of 'huile de coco' in a list of products of Zanzibar published in 1843.

Schoff translated 'palm-oil,' claiming (p. 99) that *nargilios* appears 'in modified forms in other Greek geographers', which is not so. Subsequently 'palm oil' not only entered other translations¹¹ but became firmly entrenched in the literature on Roman trade as one of East Africa's exports to the Mediterranean world.¹² The editors of *LSJ* at first held fast (see s.v. *ναύπιλος*), but then in the Supplement they too gave way ('a prob. cj. is *ναργίλιος*'), no doubt influenced by the fact that this was the sole instance of *nauplios* as a noun. There was, to be sure, another apparent example in Artemidorus 2.14, but, following the best available editions of Artemidorus, they condemned it as a *falsa lectio* for *ναύτιλος*.

But there is one more example, and it cannot be so condemned, namely the *nauplius* in Pliny, *N.H.* 9.94. Pliny's words there, taken together with 9.88 and 103, make it perfectly clear that *nauplios* was the name given to a creature either identical with or similar to the paper nautilus; this was long ago pointed out by K. Tümpel in *Philologus* 51 (1892), 387–8. D. W. Thompson includes the *nauplios* with no qualifications in his authoritative *Glossary of Greek Fishes* (London, 1947), p. 172, citing both the *Periplus* and Artemidorus. R. Pack, editor of the new Teubner edition of Artemidorus (1963), has restored *nauplios* to the text.

In other words, the region the *Periplus* is describing exported ivory, rhinoceros horn, tortoise-shell, and 'a little nautilus shell'—a fully coherent group of products. For the export of ornamental shell to Rome and elsewhere, see Warmington, *op. cit.*, pp. 173–4.

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¹¹ G. Freeman-Grenville, *The East African Coast: Select Documents from the First to the Earlier Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1962), p. 2, translates 'and a little coconut oil'. R. Mauny, *op. cit.*, p. 28, has 'et un peu d'huile "de palme"', and then muddies the waters for fair by explaining in a note that 'Huile de palme (*nauplios*) doit être corrigé en *nargilios* . . . = noix de coco.' McCrindle, although he translated (p. 73) 'and a little *nauplius*', in his introduction (p. 26) discussed the word under the general rubric of 'Plants and their products', and there expressed his approval of Müller's con-

jecture.

¹² Tkač in *RE* s.v. 'Πάψιοι', p. 240 (1920); Warmington, *op. cit.*, pp. 216–17; M. Wheeler, *Rome Beyond the Imperial Frontiers* (London, 1954), p. 113; G. Freeman-Grenville, *The Medieval History of the Coast of Tanganyika* (London, 1962), pp. 26–7, A. Altheim and R. Stiehl, *Die Araber in der alten Welt*, i (Berlin, 1964), p. 134, by carefully citing MS readings avoided the pitfall of *nargilios*, but by careless copying introduced an object of trade of their own manufacture, 'das für uns unbekannte *ναύπιλιον*'.