

West meets East: At the Borders of the *Oikoumenē* and Beyond

Lecture 7 – The Ptolemies:
Elephant hunting and gold mining

CLAH6007

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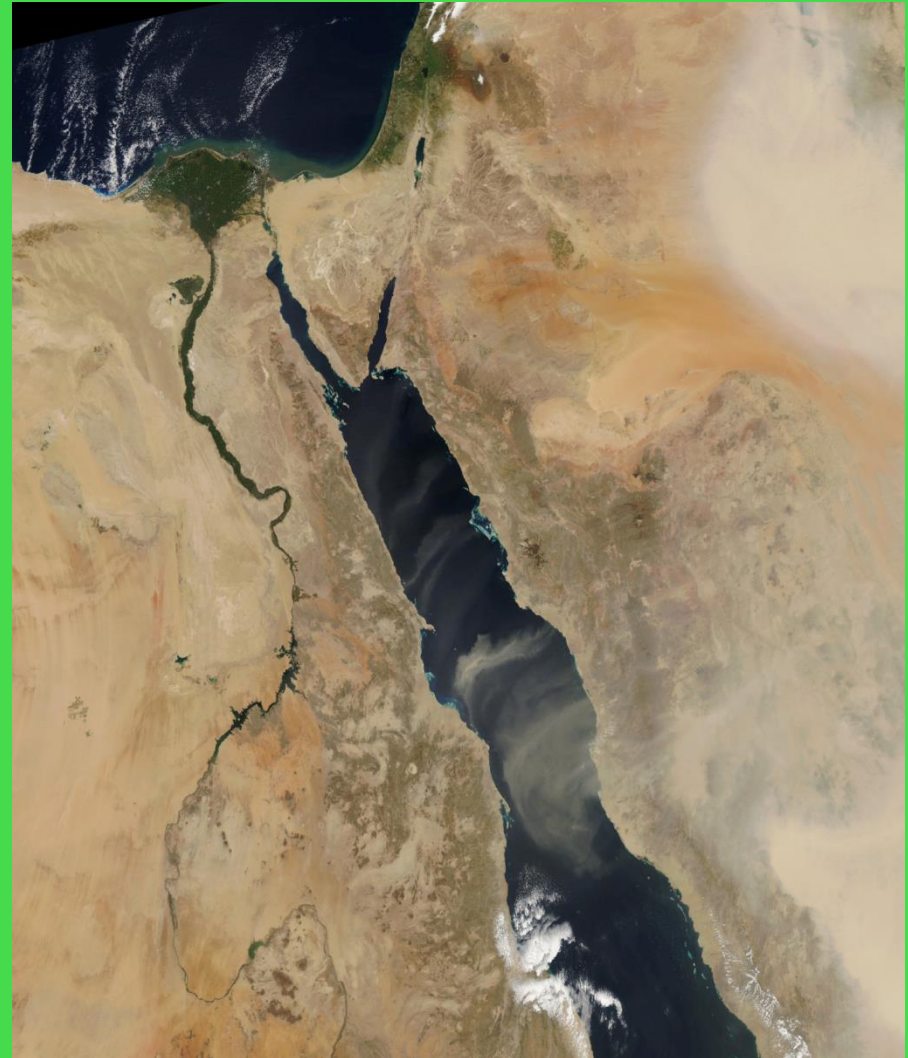
Ptolemies and Egypt

- Ptolemy I Soter takes over as Satrap in 323 BC.
- After Ipsos (301 BC) he (again) seized part of Koile Syria and captured part of south-east Asia Minor.
- Ptolemy II Philadelphos (r.285-246 BC), becomes co-ruler then sole ruler from 283 BC.



The Eastern Desert and Red Sea

- Nile River as a divide between western and eastern deserts.
- Eastern Desert broadly extends from the Suez down into modern Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea.
- Hyper-arid region with sporadic rainfall and occasional flash floods.



The Hunt for Elephants

Soter's Elephants

- Capturing Perdiccas' elephants in 321 BC (Diodorus Siculus 18.33-36)?
- Defeat of Demetrius at Gaza and capture of 43 elephants (Diodorus Siculus 19.82.3-4, 84.4).
- Lack of overland access.



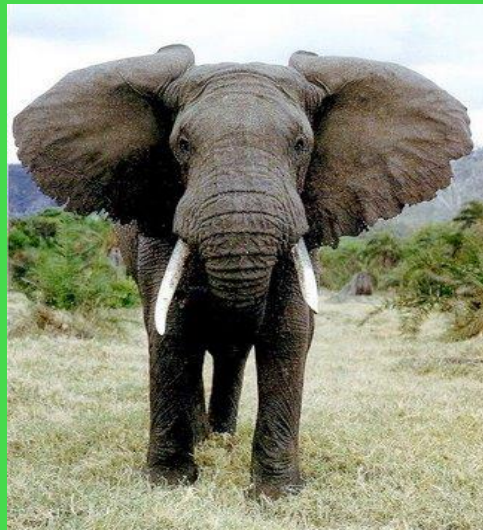
“Thus, too, on this occasion, since Ptolemy wisely predicted what would result from the setting up of the spikes, he rendered the power of the elephant useless. The final outcome was that, after most of the mahouts had been shot down, all the elephants were captured.” – **Diodorus Siculus 19.84.4.**

“Elephants, when tamed, are employed in war, and carry into the ranks of the enemy towers filled with armed men; and on them, in a very great measure, depends the ultimate result of the battles that are fought in the East. They tread under foot whole companies, and crush the men in their armour.” – **Pliny NH 8.9.27.**

Philadelphos' Hunting Parties

- Expeditionary parties sent out under Satyros and Eumedes.
- Foundation of a number of Key ports – Philotera, Ptolemais Thêrôn and Berenike.

“He [Agatharchides] says that Ptolemy, the successor of the son of Lagos, was the first to organise the hunting of elephants as well as other similar activities.” - **Agatharchides 1.1 = Photius, Cod. 250.1, 441b.**



“He built a great city for the king with the illustrious name of the king, the lord of Egypt, Ptolemy.” – **Pithom Stele line 23.**

“The African elephant is afraid of the Indian, and does not dare so much as look at it, for the latter is of much greater bulk.” - **Pliny NH 8.9.27.**

“...men of later times, having become eyewitnesses, perceived that the Nile was filled by summer rains, when Upper Ethiopia was flooded, and particularly in the region of its farthest mountains, and that when the rains ceased the inundation gradually ceased. This fact was particularly clear to those who navigated the Arabian Gulf [Red Sea] as far as the Cinnamon-bearing country, and to **those who were sent out to hunt elephants or upon any other business which may have prompted the Ptolemaic kings of Egypt to despatch men to there.**” – Strabo *Geog.* 17.1.5.

- Inscription at Adulis (recorded by Cosmas Indicopleustes *OGIS* 54) – reference to Ptolemy III's army including 'Aithiopian' and 'Trog[l]odytic' elephants.

Elephants in Combat

- Charles (2008) argues Forest elephants were not normally equipped with turrets, unlike Indian elephants.
- Reference to use of turrets on Forest elephants – Polybius and the battle of Raphia (see below) and the *Bellum Africum* 30.2; 41.2; 86.1.



“A few only of Ptolemy's elephants ventured to close with those of the enemy, and now the men in the towers on the back of these beasts made a gallant fight of it, striking with their pikes at close quarters and wounding each other, while the elephants themselves fought still better, putting forth their whole strength and meeting forehead to forehead. The way in which these animals fight is as follows. With their tusks firmly interlocked they shove with all their might, each trying to force the other to give ground, until the one who proves strongest pushes aside the other's trunk, and then, when he has once made him turn and has him in the flank, he gores him with his tusks as a bull does with his horns.” – **Polybius 5.84.2-5.**

Stations in the Eastern Desert

- Major route between Apollonopolis Magna (Edfu) and Berenike Troglodytika.
- Cairns (stone-markers) laying out the route.
- Remains of five Ptolemaic stations along these tracks.
- Towers, cisterns and internal rooms, notably at Barramiyyam and Bir Samut.

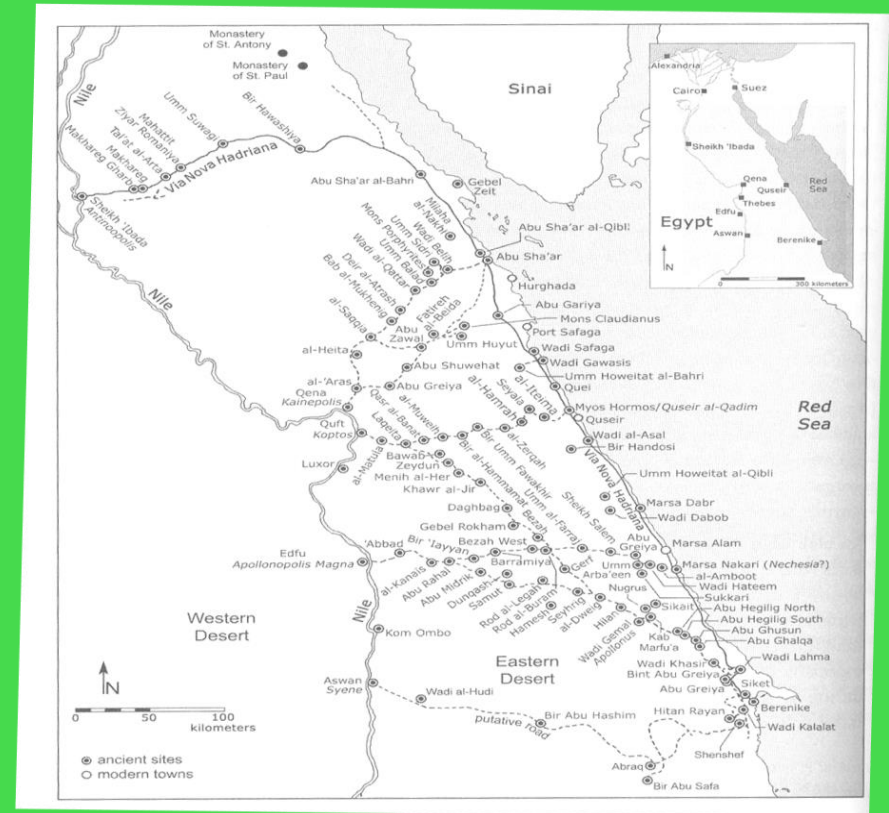


Image from Sidebotham (2011).

“The city [Berenike] has no harbour, but on account of the favourable lay of the isthmus has convenient landing-places. It is said that Philadelphos was the first person, by means of an army, to cut this road, which is without water, and to build stations, as though for the travels of merchants on camels, and that he did this because the Red Sea was hard to navigate, particularly for those who set sail from its innermost recess.” – **Strabo *Geog.* 17.1.45.**

How to Capture an Elephant

“They dig the ditch five fathoms broad [30ft], and four deep [24ft]... within the enclosure they leave some three or four of the females... the hunters, perceiving the entry of the wild elephants, some smartly remove the bridge, others hurrying to the neighbouring villages report that the elephants are caught in the enclosure... But when they think they are sufficiently distressed, then they erect the bridge again, and enter the enclosure; and at first there is a fierce battle between the tamed elephants and the captives... And that they may not toss their drivers nor do them any injury, they make an incision in their necks with a sharp knife, all round, and bind their noose round the wound...” – **Arrian *Indica* 13-14.**

“It was formerly the practice to tame them by driving the herds with horsemen into a narrow defile, artificially made in such a way as to deceive them by its length; and when thus enclosed by means of steep banks and trenches, they were rendered tame by the effects of hunger; as a proof of which, they would quietly take a branch that was extended to them by one of the men. At the present day, when we take them for the sake of their tusks, we throw darts at their feet, which are in general the most tender part of their body...” – **Pliny *NH* 8.8.25.**

Mahouts and Tamers

- Sufficient tame elephants for hunting?
- Sufficient mahouts and those skilled at elephant taming?
- Expedition of 231 men in 223 BC - ***W, Chr. 451***.

“...an elephant calf that was given as a gift to Ptolemy II, the one whom they call Philadelphus. It was trained on the Greek language and understood those who spoke it. Before the example of this beast, it had been believed that elephants comprehended only the language of the Indians.” – **Aelian NA 11.25**.

“...he made there fields and cultivated them with ploughs and cattle... he caught elephants in a great number for the king, and he brought them as marvels to the king, on his transports on the sea...” – **Pithom Stele Line 24**. cf. *W, Chr. 452* – Nov/Dec 224 BC.

“elephantēgos”

- ἑλεφαντηγός – *elephantēgos* – ‘elephant-carrier’ – cf. *W, Chr.* 452
- A sail ship not a galley, more space efficient - operating in shallow water, hence a shallow draft.
- Prevailing northerlies most of the year in Red Sea, but southerlies from the mouth of the Red Sea up to latitude 20° N from October to May.
- Journey time may vary between a week to a month.

“...but the ships which carry the elephants, being of deep draft because of their weight and heavy by reason of their equipment, bring upon their crews great and terrible dangers. For running as they do under full sail and often times being driven during the night before the force of the winds, sometimes they will strike against rocks and be wrecked or sometimes run aground on slightly submerged spits. The sailors are unable to go over the sides of the ship because the water is deeper than a man's height, and when in their efforts to rescue their vessel by means of their punting-poles they accomplish nothing, they jettison everything except their provisions...”
– **Diodorus Siculus 3.40.4-5.**

Losses at Sea

- **W, Chr. 452** – loss of *elephantēgos* at sea.

“For running as they do under full sail and often times being driven during the night before the force of the winds, sometimes they will strike against rocks and be wrecked or sometimes run aground on slightly submerged spits.” – **Agatharchides 5.85b = Diodorus Siculus 3.40.5.**

“The disasters that befall the elephant transports (*elephantēgoi*), however, arouse great pity for their victims from spectators. For **sudden waves impale the ships on rocks or drive them onto sandbars and make rescue impossible for the sailors** that man them. At first, **the sailors are depressed by great sadness**, but they do not give up hope for a good outcome since **some, who were thus stranded, have been saved by the tide which lifts them off** as the mass of water rises suddenly from the sea. But **when their supplies begin to fail, they endure a myriad of ills and then finally, they all die either from hunger or – not enduring a lengthy period of hunger – by the knife or by hurling themselves into the sea.**” – **Agatharchides 85a = Photius, Cod. 250.83, 456b-457a.**

Exhaustion of Hunting Grounds?

- The planting of bases over time stretched to the Bab el Mandeb.

“The third Ptolemy [Euergetes] also, who was passionately fond of hunting the elephants... sent one of his friends named Simmias to spy out the land; and he, setting out with suitable supplies, made, as the historian Agatharchides of Cnidus asserts, a thorough investigation of the nations lying along the coast.” – **Diodorus Siculus 3.18.4.**

“After rounding this promontory approximately towards the south, we no longer, he says, have any record of harbours or places, because the promontory is not known from here on, and the same is true of the coast next after it.” – **Strabo Geog. 16.4.14.**

- Ivory only in limited quantities until one reached Rhapta (Dar es Salaam) - *PME*.

“...indeed, of late, in consequence of the insufficient supply of ivory, they have begun to cut the bones as well into thin plates. Large teeth [tusks], in fact, are now rarely found, except in India, the demands of luxury having exhausted all those in our part of the world.” – **Pliny NH 8.4.7.**



“The mass of elephants and rhinoceroses that are slaughtered all inhabit the upland regions, although on rare occasions they are also seen along the shore around Adulis itself.” – ***PME* 4.**

“Elephant-Eaters”

- See Agatharchides fragments 54a and b, 55a, 56a and b (Burstein 1989) for tribes of elephant hunters in East Africa.

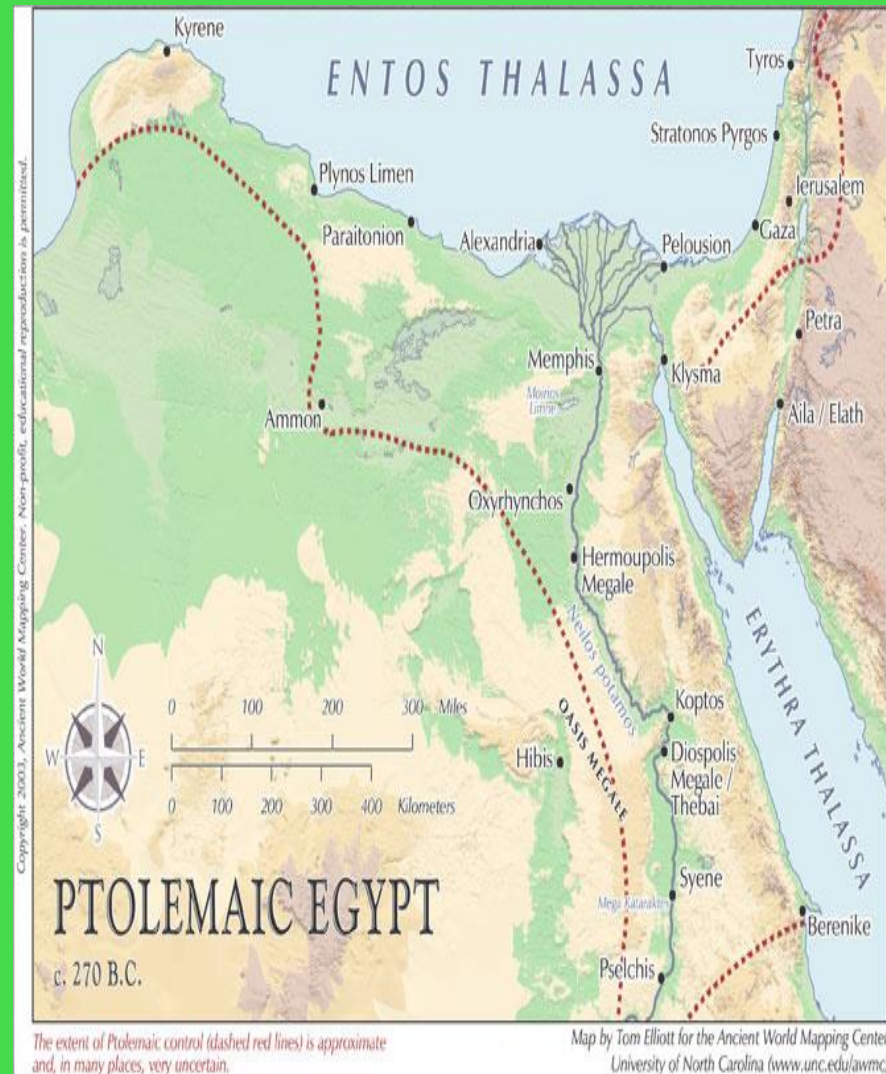
“Ptolemy [II?], the king of Egypt, urged these hunters to refrain from slaughtering the beasts in order that he might have them alive. Although he promised them many wondrous things, he not only did not persuade them but he heard that their reply was that they would not exchange his whole kingdom for their present way of life.” – **Agatharchides 5.57 = Photius Cod. 250.56, 453a.**

Elephant Bases in Egypt

“...one roll for Demetrius in charge of the supply of elephants in the Thebiad” - **W.Chr. 435.78-80** – 255 BC.

“sailed to Hieria Nesos with elephants” **BGU 10.1913.2-3** – c.250 BC.

“...there was need of it [merchant's galley] for the voyage downstream to deliver hay to the elephants at Memphis.” - **P.Petr. II 20 col. iv.** – c. 218 BC.



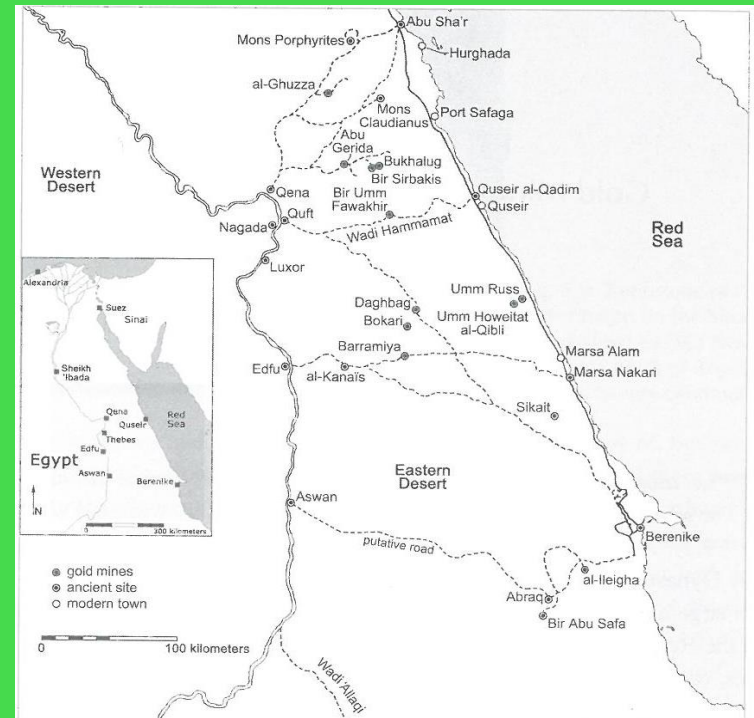
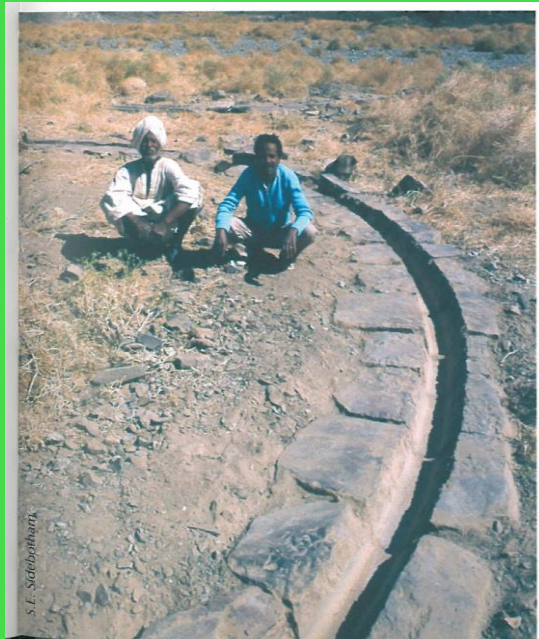
Decline of Elephant Hunting

- Burstein (1989), 10-11 (battle of Raphia); contra Fraser (1972) who argues Ptolemy V put their elephant hunting on a more organised basis due to the need to replace the elephants lost.
- Revolt in the Thebiad - Manning (2010), 17 – see also PBerlin Dem. 15527 - Eide et al (ed.,) (1996), 596-600, for the difficulties caused in the south by the uprising.
- Elephant breeding in Egypt successful enough imports no longer needed - Sidebotham (1986), 4.

“By the beginning of spring Antiochus [III] and Ptolemy [IV] had completed their preparations and were determined on deciding the fate of the Syrian expedition by a battle. Now Ptolemy started from Alexandria with an army of seventy thousand foot, five thousand horse, and **seventy-three elephants**... The whole army of Antiochus consisted of sixty-two thousand foot, six thousand horse, and a **hundred and two elephants**... Of the elephants forty were posted on the left where Ptolemy himself was about to fight, and the remaining thirty-three in front of the mercenary cavalry on the right wing. Antiochus placed sixty of his elephants under the command of his foster-brother Philip in front of his right wing, where he was to fight in person against Ptolemy... His remaining elephants he placed in front of his left wing... **Most of Ptolemy's elephants, however, declined the combat, as is the habit of African elephants; for unable to stand the smell and the trumpeting of the Indian elephants, and terrified, I suppose, also by their great size and strength, they at once turn tail and take to flight** before they get near them. This is what happened on the present occasion; and when Ptolemy's elephants were thus thrown into confusion and driven back on their own lines, Ptolemy's guard gave way under the pressure of the animals.” - **Polybius 5.79.1-2, 82.7-8, 13, 84.5-7.**

Gold Mining in the East Desert

- Gold mining taking place in Eastern Desert since Pharaonic times.
- Main concentration of gold mining in Central Eastern Desert of Egypt.
- A number of sites had walled settlements and forts, though not always.
- Industrial ore-crushing device at Daghabag (also Bokari and Barramiya?).



Agatharchides description of Ptolemaic gold mining

- **Agatharchides 5.23b – 29b = Diodorus Siculus 3.12.1-14.4:**
 - workforce of condemned criminals and their relatives
 - bound in chains and work unceasingly – supervised by foreign guards
 - quartz-rock broken by the brute force of young men (lamps fastened to their foreheads) – subject to beatings
 - young boys enter the narrow tunnels to remove the rocks and place outside
 - those over 30 pound the rocks with iron pestles in stone mortars into fine vetch-seed sized pieces
 - these pieces are grinded by women and old men into flour like consistency
 - work naked, no respite for the sick, or injured, or aged, or “in the case of a woman for her weakness” – force to work through violence **“until through maltreatment they die in the midst of their tortures”**
 - finally quartz substance has impurities washed away and worked with sponges until there is just gold-dust – placed in earthen jar with other materials and baked for five days – resulting in pure gold.

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