

LIFE IN THE EASTERN DESERT OF EGYPT

Unit 2 – Elephant Hunting

HPAH7006

Impetus for Elephants

- Alexander encounters elephants at Gaugamela (sort of) in Mesopotamia (331 BC) and at the Hydaspes (modern Jhelum River) in the Indus region (326 BC).
- Internecine struggles among Diadochi after the death of Alexander the Great (323 BC).
- Possible acquisition by Ptolemy I of elephants after Perdiccas' defeat (321 BC). Certainly after the Gaza (312 BC).



Increasingly Hostile Relations

- ▣ Ptolemy II sent explorers to investigate sources of elephants in East Africa, as would Ptolemy III Euergetes (r. 246-222) and Ptolemy IV Philopator (r. 221-204).

“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.



Stations and Ports

- Arsinoe (Gulf of Suez region), Philotera (?), Berenike (Cape of Ras Banas) and Ptolemais-of-the-Hunts (Baraka delta region).
- Hunting parties would depart from Koptos (Qift) or Apollonopolis Magna (Edfu).
- Stations were necessary for collating water in cisterns, monitoring the routes, and protecting travellers



Capturing and Taming Elephants

- ▣ Among hunting parties there were the hunters, as well as trainers, mahouts (elephant-drivers) and also tame elephants.
- ▣ Indirect testimony from Megasthenes (pertaining to India) and Juba (North Africa). - Megasthenes - *Arr. Indica* 13-14; Juba - *Plin. HN* 8.8.25

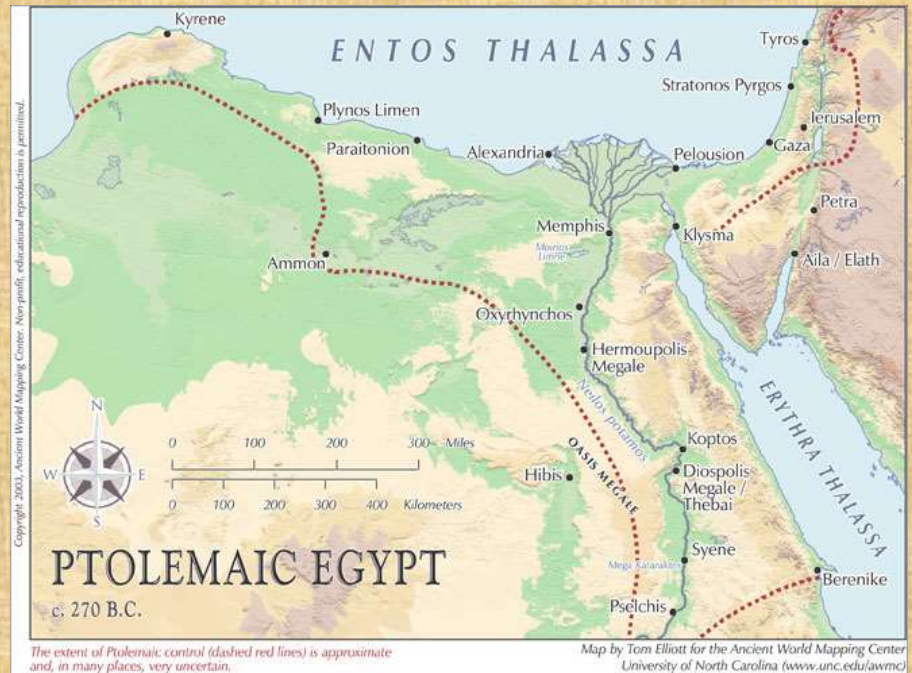
Approach:

- Corral;
- tame female elephants to entice males over the temporary bridge;
- wild elephants worn down from deprivation;
- riders entered with other tame elephants and after a brief battle subdued the wild ones

Returning North

- Captured elephants coaxed onto the *elephantēgoi*.
- voyage could be dangerous - potential for vessels to get trapped on rocks or sandbanks.
- Temporarily corralled at Berenike - journey across the Eastern Desert.
- Journeys up the Nile, most likely to a major base at Memphis

“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.



Decline of Elephant Hunting

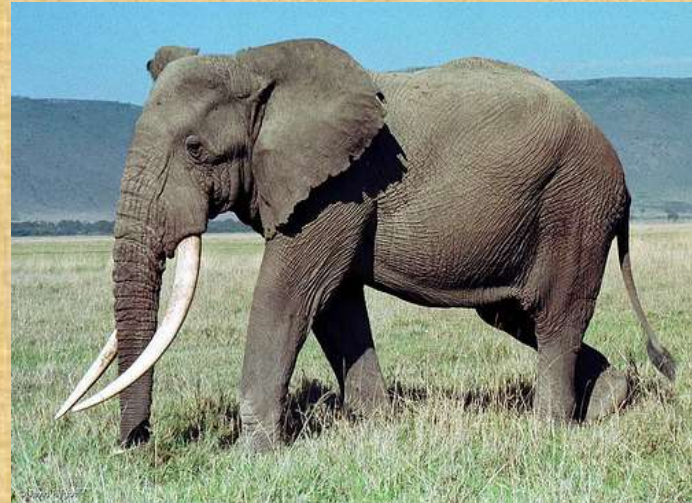
- Burstein (1989), 10-11 (battle of Raphia); contra Fraser (1972) who argues Ptolemy V put their elephant hunting on a more organised basis due to the need to replace the elephants lost.
- Revolt in the Thebiad - Manning (2010), 17 – see also PBerlin Dem. 15527 - Eide et al (ed.,) (1996), 596-600, for the difficulties caused in the south by the uprising.
- Elephant breeding in Egypt successful enough imports no longer needed - Sidebotham (1986), 4.
- Decline in elephant numbers along the coast areas – lack of impetus after Seleukids can no longer access Indian elephants – Cobb (2016).



“...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.**

Addendum: Forest or Bush Elephants?

- ▣ Debate over whether elephants used by the Ptolemies were Forest or Bush:
 - *Loxodonta Africana* – African Bush elephant
 - *Loxodonta cyclotis* – Forest elephant
 - *Elephas maximus* – Indian elephant
- ▣ Modern DNA analysis versus literary testimony.



Loxodonta Africana



Loxodonta cyclotis



Elephas maximus