

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

Lecture 8 – The Ptolemies and the Erythra Thalassa

CLAH6007

Dr Matthew Adam Cobb

Erythra Thalassa

- Greek - *Erythra Thassala* – Red Sea - Latin - *Mare Rubrum*.
- **Arrian *Indica* 38.3** (Indian Sea), **43.2** (Great Sea). **43.7** (*Erythra Thassala*).

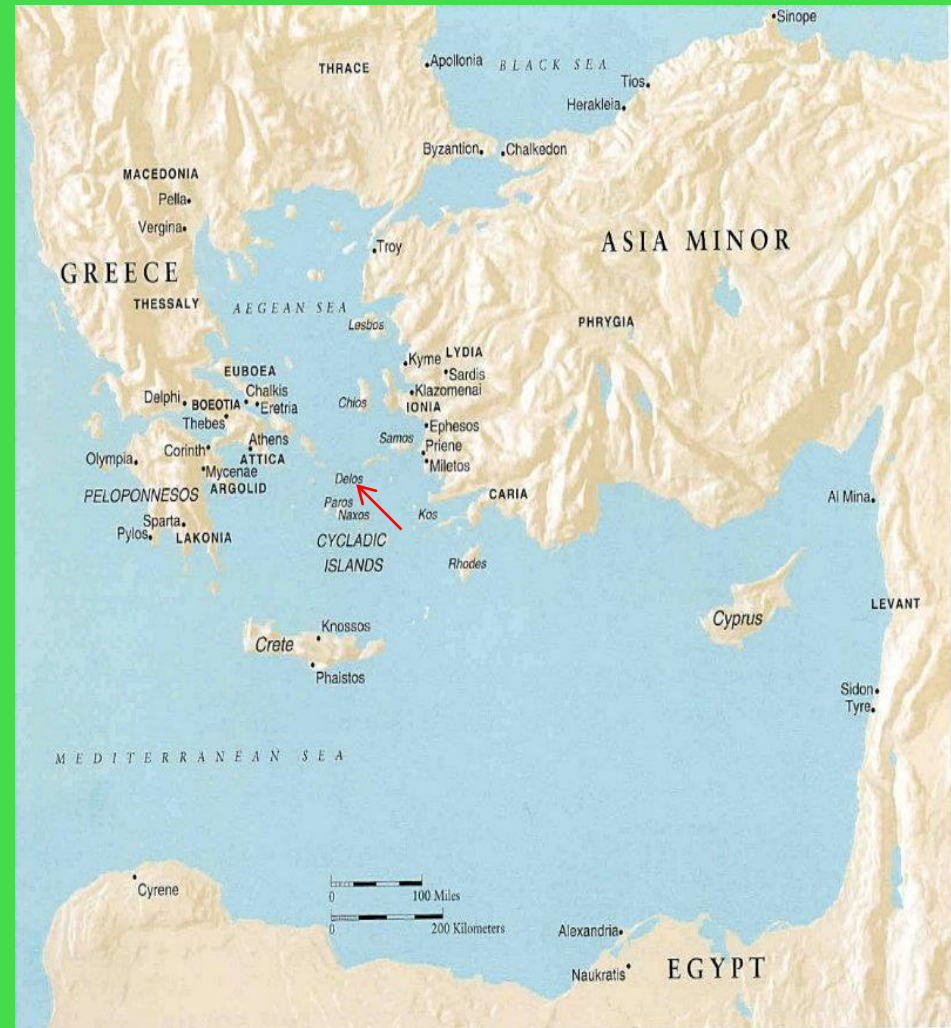
“They said that in this island [Organa] the tomb of the first ruler of this territory was shown; his name Erythres, and hence came the name of the sea.” – **Arrian *Indica* 37.3.**



Trade with East Africa

Ivory Trade

- IG XI 2163Aa7 - 279 BC – 8 drachmae a mina.
- IG XI 203A71 - 276 BC - 5 drachmae per mina.
- IG XI 287A118 - 250 BC – 3.5 drachmae per mina.



Monkey Trade

- Sphinx [long-tailed monkey?], Kunocephalos [Hamadryas baboon], and Kepos [Nisnas].
- Sacred animal necropolis at north Saqqara - 169 mummified primate remains, 146 of them can be identified as papio hamadrygos Anubis (Olive Baboons), 21 as Macaca Sylvanus (Barbary Macaques), and 2 Cercopithecus (African Green Monkeys).



“Sphinxes, dogheads and cepi are sent to Alexandria from the country of the Trogodytes and from Ethiopia. Sphinxes resemble the animals as depicted in pictures... they are mischievous and so receptive of systematic training that their gracefulness in everything causes amazement...” -

Agatharchides 74a = Photius, Cod. 250.73, p.455b.

The Ἀρωματόρον lands

- ***SB 7169*** – Aromatics-bearing lands.
- ***PME 12:4.20-21*** – Spice Port (Ἀρωμάτων ἐμπόριον).
- **Strabo *Geog.* 16.4.14** – Promontory of Spices.



Ptolemaic Navy in the Red Sea

“...drawing in part upon the royal records preserved in Alexandria, and in part upon what we have learned from men who have seen it with their own eyes... Its width at the mouth and at the innermost recess is about sixteen stades [3.2km, it is actually 21.5km], but from the harbour of Panormus to the opposite mainland is a day's run for a warship.”

Agatharchides 81 = Diodorus Siculus 3.38.1-5.

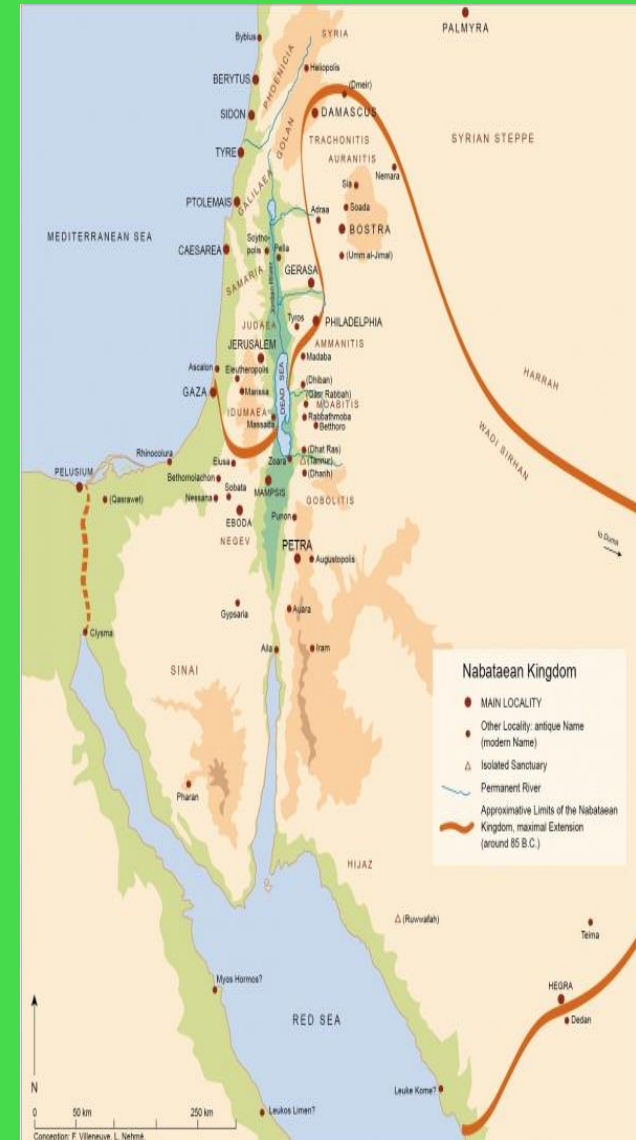
“After these places the sea is so shallow that it measures not more than two fathoms... the part of the sea just described is well suited to war ships and small oared vessels, as it is calm, undisturbed by waves from a distance...” – **Agatharchides 85a = Photius Cod. 250.83, 456b-457a.**

- Quadriremes - **Agatharchides 90a = Diodorus Siculus 3.43.4-5.**

Piracy or Economic Warfare?

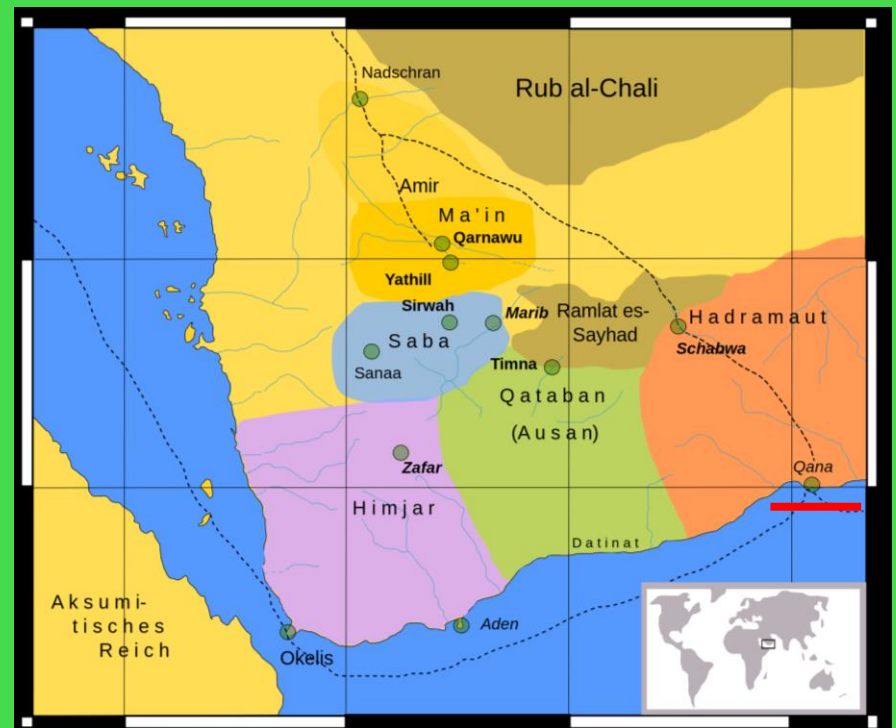
- Nabataean piracy in the Red Sea as a reaction to the growing seaborne commerce coming from Egypt - Bowersock (1983).
- Vibrant overland trade till first century AD?

“After one has sailed past this country the Laeanites Gulf [Gulf of ‘Aqaba] comes next, about which are many inhabited villages of Arabs who are known as Nabataeans... Now in ancient times these men observed justice and were content with the food which they received from their flocks, but later, after the kings in Alexandria had made the ways of the sea navigable for the merchants, these Arabs not only attacked the shipwrecked, but fitting out pirate ships preyed upon the voyagers, imitating in their practices the savage and lawless ways of the Tauri of the Pontus; some time afterward, however, they were caught on the high seas by some quadriremes and punished as they deserved.” – **Agathrachides 90a = Diodorus Siculus 3.43.4-5.**



Middlemen?

- *P. Cair. Zen 59536* – “Minaean frankincense”.
- Zayd’il bin Zayd - Memphis - importer of myrrh and calamus.
- Sabaean merchants – *Larimnum* - Agatharchides 5.103a + b.
- Minaean inscription 2nd C BC – Delos - M 349.
- Fluctuation of Frankincense prices on Delos.
- Qana’ (Kane of the *PME*) – Koan amphorae.
- Khor Rori (Moscha Limen of the *PME*) imitations of the Athenian tetradrachmae (head/owl series).
- Bust of Athena found at Jabal al-Lawdh (c.3rd -2nd century BC).



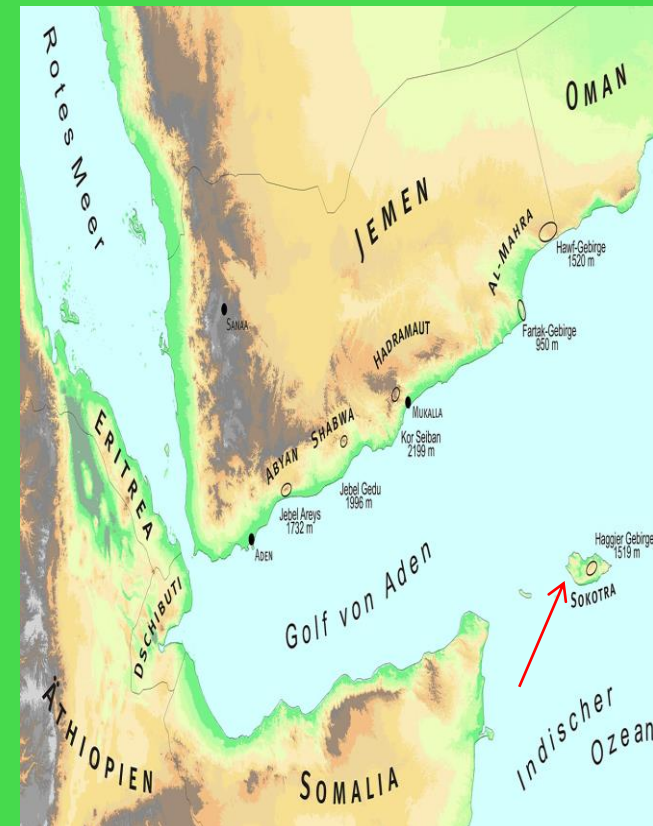
“Immediately adjacent is the tribe of Sabaean, the greatest people of Arabia and the possessors of every sort of good fortune... Fragrance pervades the whole coast, providing a pleasure to visitors that is greater than what can be seen or described. For by the sea itself balsam grows in abundance and cassia... myrrh and frankincense, cinnamon palm and calamus and other such trees...” **Agatharchides 99a = Photius, Co. 250.96, 458a.**

Socotra

“...Fortune Islands... In these islands one can see riding at anchor merchant vessels from neighbouring countries. Most of those encountered there are from the port Alexander built on the Indus River. Not a few, however, come from Persia and Carmania and the whole nearby region.” **Agatharchides 5.105a = Photius, Cod. 250.103, 459b.**

“...Dioscuridês... the inhabitants very few in number live on one side of the island, that to the north, the part facing the mainland; they are settlers, a mixture of Arabs and Indians and even some Greeks, who sail out there to trade... The island is subject to the aforementioned king of the frankincense-bearing land...” **PME 30-31.**

“In the island, again, called the Island of Dioscoridês, which is situated in the same Indian sea, and where the inhabitants speak Greek, having been originally colonists sent to there by the Ptolemies who succeeded Alexander the Macedonian, there are clergy who receive their ordination in Persia, and are sent on to the island, and there is also a multitude of Christians. I sailed along the coast of this island, but did not land upon it. I met, however, with some of its Greek-speaking people who had come over into Ethiopia.” – **Cosmas Indicopleustes, Christian Topography 3.178-79.**



Arab Middlemen

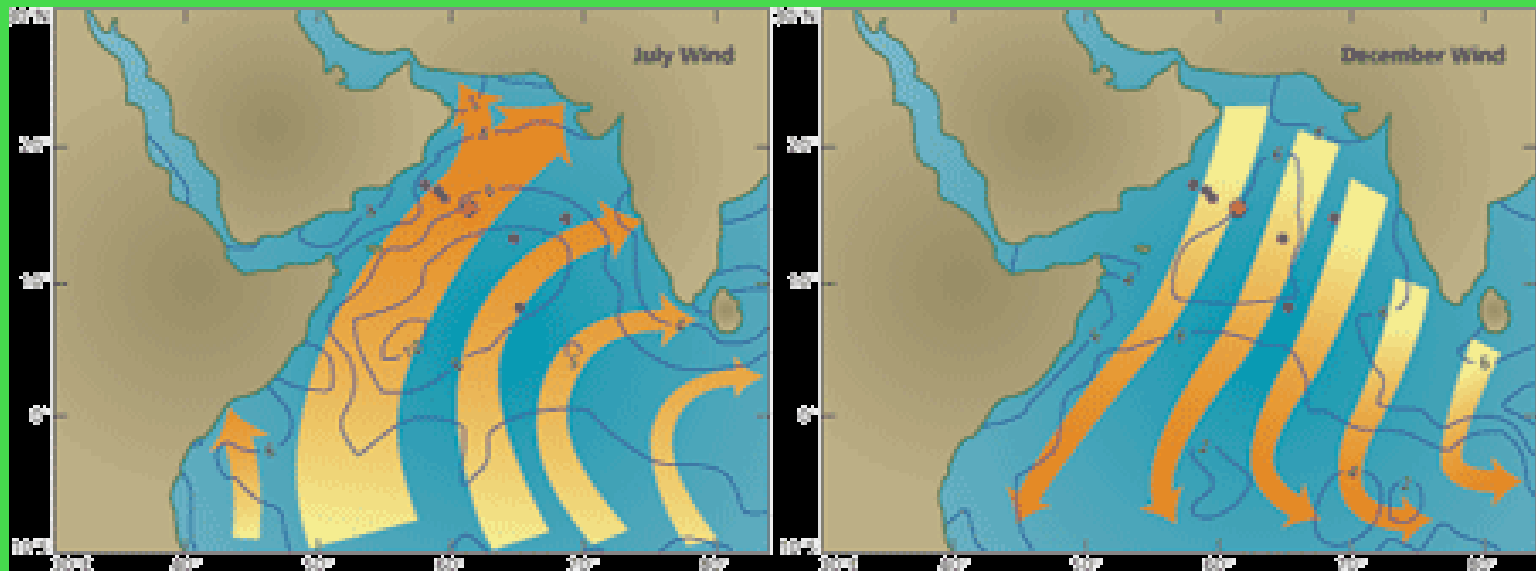
- Moscha Limen - Koan vessels, Athenian tetradrachms, Indian Red and Black wares (third-first centuries BC).
- Fragrant plants coming via the sea from India - **Theophrastus *Enquiry into Plants* 9.7.2.**
- Paneion at El-Kanaïs records that Apollon offered up Indian myrrh for the safe return of his father.

“Eudaimon Arabia [prosperous Arabia], a full-fledged city in earlier days, was called Eudaimon when, since vessels from India did not go on to Egypt and those from Egypt did not dare sail to the places further on but came only this far, it used to receive cargoes from both...” – **PME 26.**

Discovery of the Monsoon?

- Eudoxus of Cyzicus - **Strabo *Geog.* 2.3.4-5.**
- Hippalos - ***PME* 57; Pliny *NH* 6.26.100, 104-05.**
- Conspiracy of silence by Arab merchants?

“The whole coastal route just described, from Kane and Eudaimon Arabia, men formerly used to sail over in small vessels, following the curves of the bay. The ship captain Hippalos, by plotting the location of the ports of trade and the configuration of the sea, was the first to discover the route over open water.” – ***PME* 57.**



The Scale and Scope of Ptolemaic Trade in the Indian Ocean

- Roman period trade as more systematic, civilian and commercial than the Ptolemaic period? - Sidebotham 2011; Tomber 2008.
- Ptolemaic commercial activity comparatively insignificant? - Warmington 1928; Fraser 1972; Whittaker 2004.
- Ptolemaic royal monopolies? - Raschke 1975; McLaughlin 2010.

“So Eudoxus sailed away with presents; and he returned with a cargo of perfumes and precious stones (some of which the rivers bring down with the sands, while others are fortified by digging, being solidified from a liquid state, just as our crystals are). **But Eudoxus was wholly deceived in his expectations, for Euergetes took from him his entire cargo...** And when he arrived safely in Egypt, inasmuch as Cleopatra no longer reigned but her son in her stead, **he was again deprived of everything, for it was discovered that he had stolen much property.**” – Strabo *Geog.* 2.3.4.

Increasing Trade

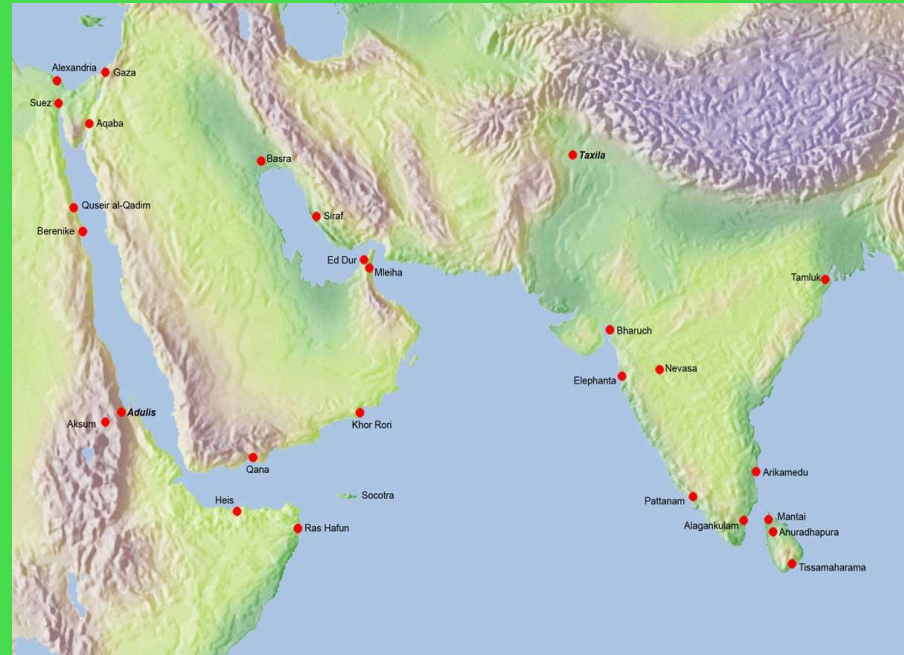
- *SB V 8036* - 'Strategos and Epistrategos of the Erythraean and Indian Seas' – either 116, 110/09, 74/73 and 45/44 BC.
- Kallimachos - 62 BC - epistrategos of the Thebiad.
- Inscription 130 BC - Soterichos, subordinate of Paos, Strategos of Thebes, tasked with extracting precious stones and monitoring shipping.

“...12,500 talents was paid annually to Auletes... what should one think of the present revenues... the commerce with the Indians and the Troglodytes has been increased to so great an extent? In earlier times, at least, not so many as 20 vessels would dare to traverse the Arabian Gulf [Red Sea]... but at the present time even large fleets are despatched as far as India and the extremities of Ethiopia...” – **Strabo *Geog.* 17.1.13.**

“...since the merchants of Alexandria are already sailing with fleets by way of the Nile and of the Arabian Gulf [Red Sea] as far as India, these regions also have become far better known to us ... when Gallus was prefect of Egypt, I accompanied him and ascended the Nile as far as Syene... I learned that as many as one hundred and twenty vessels were sailing from Myos Hormos to India, whereas formerly, under the Ptolemies, only a very few ventured to undertake the voyage and to carry on traffic in Indian merchandise.” (2.5.12).

Ptolemaic Egypt and Arikamedu

- Site has revealed 540 fragments of Mediterranean amphorae.
- C. 50% Koan, c.10% Knidian, less than 5% Rhodian (many Dressel 2-4).
- Koan stylistically date to the late 2nd C BC, and predominantly 1st C BC.
- Southern sector - Koan (20) - Knidian (11) - Indian Megalithic pottery (c. 2nd C BC).
- Popularity of Koan wine - Cato the Elder *De Agri Cultura* 112; Strabo *Geography*. 14.1.15, 2.19; Horace *Satires* 2.8.8-9; Athenaeus 1.32a.
- Koan (greenish fabrics) - Pseudo-Koan (distinctive greenish surface) - Dressel 2-4 (black-sand fabrics).



Ptolemaic Facilities

- More limited Ptolemaic material at Myos Hormos compared to Berenike.
- Evidence for ship construction repair at Berenike – lead sheets, iron and charcoal, bronze and copper alloy nails.
- Rise in importance of Koptos – mid-2nd C BC upsurge in building activity – (5% imported ceramics) – Strabo and the pre-eminence of Myos Hormos (mid-20s BC).

Key Debating Points

- Establishment of networks and use of trade hubs?
- Evidence for Ptolemaic monopolist policy?
- Establishment and use of various ports and facilities?
- “Discovery” of the monsoon winds?
- Ptolemaic era links with Arikamedu?

Bibliography (1)

- Bowersock, G. W. 1983. *Roman Arabia*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Burstein, S. M. 1989. [Translation and editing of] Agatharchides of Cnidus *On the Erythraean Sea*. Cambridge: The Hakluyt Society.
- Casson, L. 1989. [Trans. and Comm.] *Periplus Maris Erythraei*. Guildford.
- Fraser, Peter. M. 1972. *Ptolemaic Alexandria: Volume I and II*. Oxford: At the Clarendon Press.
- Herbert, S. C. and Berlin, A. 2003. 'The Excavation: Occupation History and Ceramic Assemblages', in *Excavations at Coptos (Qift) In Upper Egypt, 1987-1992* (eds., Herbert, S. C. and Berlin, A.) Rhode Island: Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series Number 53. 13-156

Bibliography (2)

- Hoyland, R. 2002. 'Kings, Kingdoms and Chronology', in Queen of Sheba Treasures from Ancient Yemen (ed., Simpson, S. T. J.) London: British Museum Press. 67-79
- Hourani, G. F. revised and expanded by Carswell, J. 1995. *Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval Times* (Expanded Edition). Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Goudsmit, J. and Brandon-Jones, D. 2000. 'Evidence from the Baboon Catacomb in Northern Saqqara for a West Mediterranean Monkey Trade Route to Ptolemaic Alexandria', *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 86: 111-119.
- Kidd, I. G. (1988) Posidonius. Volume II: The Commentary: (i) Testimonia and Fragments 1-149. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Bibliography (3)

- McLaughlin, R. 2010. *Rome and the Distance East: Trade Routes to the Ancient Lands of Arabia, India and China*. London: Continuum.
- Mooren, L. 1972. 'The Date of SB V 8036 and the Development of the Ptolemaic Maritime Trade with India', *Ancient Society* 3: 127-133
- Raschke, Manfred. G. 1975. Papyrological Evidence for Ptolemaic and Roman Trade with India. In *Proceedings of the XIV International Congress of Papyrologists: Oxford, 24-31 July 1974*, ed. Peter J. Parsons. (The British Academy) Oxford: Egypt Exploration Society: 241-46.
- Reger, G. 2002. 'The Price Histories of some Imported Goods on Independent Delos', in *The Ancient Economy* (eds., W. Scheidel and von Reden, S.) Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 133-154.

Bibliography (4)

- Sidebotham, S. E. 1986. *Roman Economic Policy in the Erythra Thalassa 30 B.C. - A.D. 217*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- Sidebotham, S. E. 2011. *Berenike and the Ancient Maritime Spice Route*. London: University of California Press.
- Tchernia, A. 1997. 'Winds and Coins: From the Supposed Discovery of the Monsoon to the Denarii of Tiberius', In *Crossings Early Mediterranean Contacts with India*, ed. De Romanis, F. and Tchernia, A. New Delhi: Manohar: 250-276.
- Tomber, R. 2008. . *Indo-Roman Trade: From Pots to Pepper*. London: Duckworth.

Bibliography (5)

- Warmington, Eric H. 1928. *The Commerce between the Roman Empire and India*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Whittaker, C. R. 2004. *Rome and Its Frontiers: The Dynamics of Empire*. London: Routledge.