

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

Lecture 15 – Philostratus *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*

CLAH6007

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Understanding the VA

- **First issue:** deliberate selection, omission and creation of details by Philostratus from earlier Indographies and paradoxographical works (“marvel-writings”)
 - Contra Anderson (1996) ‘we are looking at a very shakily constructed composition whose inequalities seem to proclaim fumbling and characteristically incompatible material’
- **Second issue:** serious response to VA or a complicity between reader and author, acknowledging the work’s fictionality.

Apollonius the Man / θεῖος ἀνὴρ

- Historical Apollonius of Tyana (c. reign of Tiberius to reign of Nerva).
- Pythagorean philosopher or magician (*magos*)
 - Lucian *On Alexander the False Prophet* 5
 - Cassius Dio 78.18.4 – *magos* and *goēs*.
 - Moeragenes – cf. Raynor 1984.
- Something more than human:
 - Caracalla sets up cult shrine of Apollonius at Tyana – Phil. VA 8.31.3; Cassius Dio 78.18.4.
 - Worship, alongside Jesus Christ, Abraham and Orpheus, by Alexander Severus - *HA: Alex.* 29.2.



Philostratus *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*

- VA written c. AD 220s to 230s.
- Philosopher not magician:
 - powers of prescience (1.2.2, 4.43.1-2)
 - Spotting demons and exorcism (4.10, 4.20.2-3)
 - Reviving the apparently dead (4.45)
 - Houdini-esque chain removal (7.38.2)
 - Teleportation (8.5.4, 8.10)
- Philostratus' sources of information: shrines, reports, his will and letters (collated by Hadrian), Maximus of Aegeae and Moeragenes, "memoirs" (*upomnēma*) of Damis (1.2-3).

"Yet though he lived in times that were neither ancient nor modern, people do not know him for the genuine wisdom which he practiced philosophically and sincerely. Instead, they single out only this or that of his deeds, while because of his association with Babylonian magicians, Indian Brahmins, and the Naked Ones of Egypt, some think him a sorcerer and misrepresent him as a philosophic imposter, but in this they are wrong." – **Phil. VA 1.2.1** .

Apollonius' Wanderings

- Book one – upbringing, philosophic education, time at court of Vardanes.
- **Book two** – highlights of Alexander's itinerary, meeting Phraotes king of Taxila.
- **Book three** – enters land between Hyphasis and the Ganges rivers, Indian marvels, meets Iarxus, gains great wisdom, return journey similar to that of Nearchus' fleet.
- Book four – travels to Greek cities of mainland and coast of Asia Minor, faces trial before Tigellinus.
- Book five – departs from western edge of *oikoumenē* and travels from Libya (i.e. Africa) to Sicily, Athens to Egypt.
- Book six – meets Naked Ones of Ethiopia, debate with Thespesion.
- Books seven and eight – showdown with Domitian.

Areas of Debate

- **Genre:**
 - Biography
 - Hagiography (Anderson 1996)
 - Fiction / novel (Bowie 1978)
 - Various influences, *apologia* (esp. VA 8.7.1-50), panegyric, dialogues.
- **Historical veracity:**
 - Historical source (Grosso 1954)
 - Historical Damis (Anderson 1986 and 1996)
 - Fiction (Bowie 1978; Dzielska 1986; Reardon 1971)
- **Francis 1998** (building upon work of Morgan 1993 and Bowersock 1996) - history and fiction not diametrically opposed – blurring of reality an invention in VA.

Methodological Issues (1)

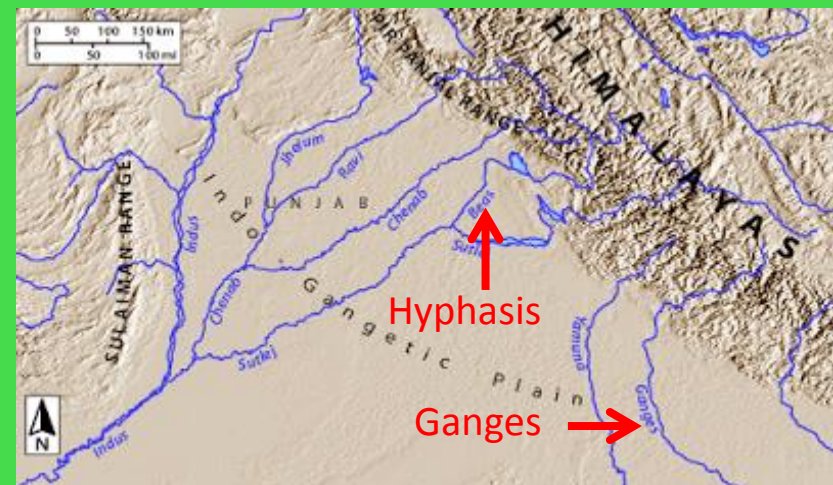
- **Intention:**
 - Philostratus intention? - to provide an accurate account of the master (VA 1.2.3).
 - Sincere faith of the Severans?
- **Reaction:**
 - Hierocles (via Eusebius) and Eusebius – do they fail to realise the work was intended to be fictional
 - Believability in fiction – Morgan (1993)
 - Either way Philostratus India needed to appear credible – India the land of the incredible - worm which produces an incredibly flammable liquid (3.1.2; Ctesias Frag. 45 §46 = Photius), unicorns (3.2.1; Ctesias Frag. 45 §45 = Photius), and gold digging griffins (3.48; Ctesias Frag. 45h = Aelian NA 4.27)

Methodological Issues (2)

- Identifying the works used by Philostratus:
 - Names Nearchus, Orthagoras and Scylax
 - No mention of Ctesias or Megasthenes
 - Problem of identifying fragments – cf. Diodorus Siculus *Bibliotheca Historica* 2.35-42 – Muntz 2012
- Citation of earlier writers - Ctesias (Photius summary; also Arrian, *Anab*; Aelian *NA*; Pliny *NH* et al), Megasthenes (Arrian, *Ind.*; Strabo; Aelian *NA*; Pliny *NH* et al), Nearchus (especially Arrian, *Ind.*; Strabo) and Orthagoras (Aelian *NA*).

Apollonius and Alexander

- Surpassing great figures – Pythagoras (VA 1.2), and Odysseus (Van Dijk 2009).
- Alexander's itinerary – book 2.
- Surpassing Alexander in geographical distance – crossing the Hyphasis (VA 2.43) - Alexander can go no further (VA 2.33.1, 3.10-14).
- Search for wisdom superior to conquest – (VA 3.19-21).



Gymnosophists and the Oxydrace

- Surpassing Alexander in the search for wisdom - Alexander never met the true Sophoi but instead the Oxydrace, omission of Gymnosophists (VA 2.33)
 - cf. Strabo 15.1.63-65 also 15.1.43; Plutarch Alex. 58 64-65, 69.
- Phraotes the Philosopher king (VA 2.20-31).

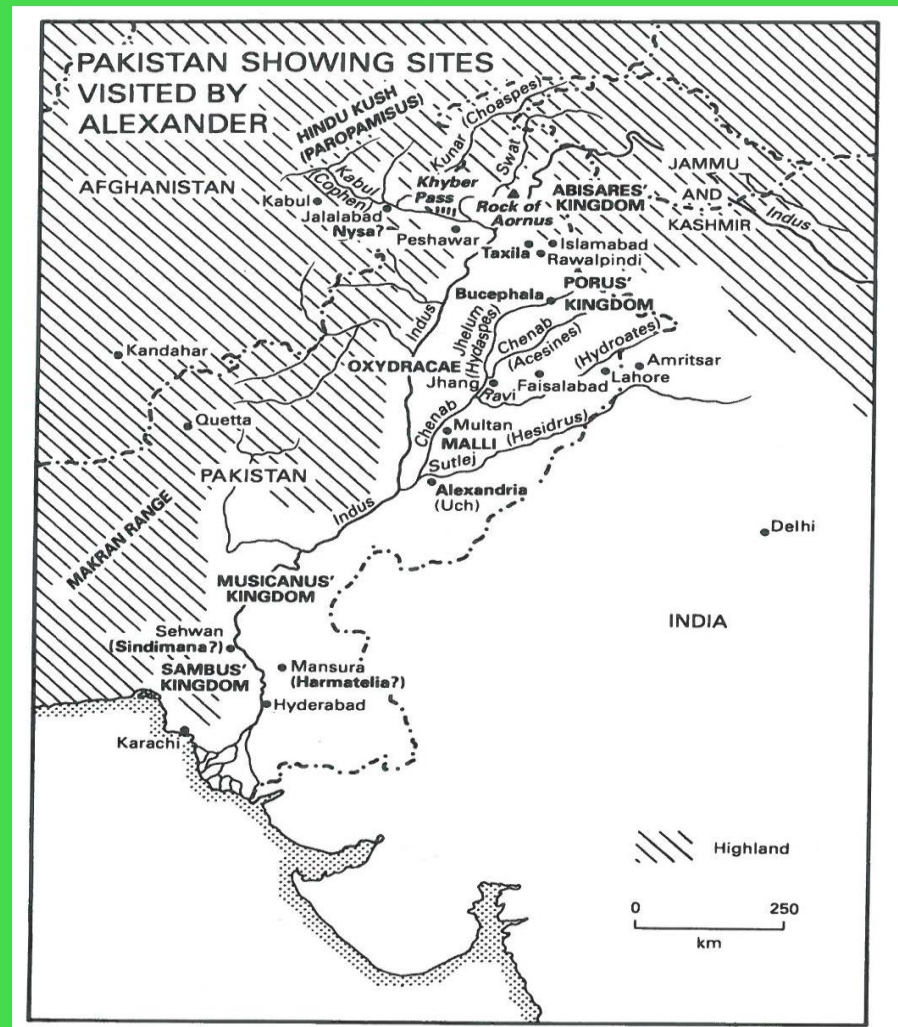


Image from Stoneman (1995)

Philostratus and Megasthenes

- Post-Alexander – new Indographic writings on Ganges plain – Megasthenes, Deimachus, and Dionysus (Strabo 2.1.9; Pliny *NH* 6.21.58).
- Omission, inversion and adaptation:
 - No mention of Palimbothra (Taxila greatest city VA 2.12.2)
 - Rejection of invitation from unworthy king - VA 3.26-29, 3.31-33)
 - Reversal of *synodos* – Meg. Frag. 33 = Strabo 15.1.39-41 cf. VA 3.23, 3.26
 - Philosophers are few, Meg. Frag. 33 = Strabo 15.1.39-41 – subject to scrutiny, Meg. Frag. 34 = Strabo 15.1.50-52 cf. VA 2.30.1-2.



Reinventing Indian History

- Tradition of Dionysus and Hercules:
 - Meg. Frag. 1b = Diodorus 2.38.3-6, 39.1-4; Frag. 1c = Pliny *NH* 6.21.59; Frag. 46 = Strabo 15.1.6-8; also Arrian *Ind.* 7-9.
- Ganges, son of Ganges bringer founder of cities - VA 3.20.1-3.
- Dionysus and Egyptian Heracles failed conquerors - VA 2.33.2, 3.13 (wisdom over conquest).
- Greek, Assyrian or Indian Dionysus? - VA 2.9.1-2.

“As for the stories of Hercules and Dionysus, Megasthenes with a few others considers them trustworthy...” – **Strabo 15.1.7.**

“His father had flooded India, but he diverted it into the Red Sea and reconciled it with the land. In consequence the earth produced plenty... He founded sixty cities, the most esteemed in the country, and there is nobody who thinks sacking cities is more glorious than building them.” – **Phil. VA 3.2-3.**

Centre and Periphery

- Abraham 2014 – inversion of centre and periphery? – rejuvenation of Greek culture - VA 3.19, 3.25.2-3 - *omphalos* - 3.13-14.

“And there is a story told about lionesses, that they take leopards as lovers, and receive them into the lion’s beds in the plains...” – **Phil. VA 2.14.2.**
- India still appears as edge of *oikoumenē*.
- Minor marvels in book 2 - five cubits (7½ft) men, elephants carrying elephants, illicit liaisons between lionesses and leopards - 2.4, 2.14.1-2.

“Also the origin of the proverb, about Libya, to the effect that “Libya always brings forth something new,” is said to be that there animals of different species unite...” - **Aristotle *Gen. Animal.* 746b7-13.**

A Catalogue of Wonders

- Once beyond Hyphasis catalogue of wonders begins – Book 3.
 - fragrant trees, peacock-fish, flammable worm juice, horned-asses / unicorns, pepper collecting monkeys, *drakōn* hunting, magical well, fiery crater, Jars of Winds and Jars of Rains, levitating Sophoi – 3.1-15.
- Precisely because the Indian Sophoi are at edges of *oikoumenē* that Apollonius can find untainted wisdom?

“The famous wild asses are apparently also caught in the marshes here. These creatures have a horn on their head... Apollonius says he saw the creature and admired its qualities, but when Damis asked if he believed the story about the cup, he replied, “I will believe it, if I hear that the king of the Indians in these parts is immortal...” – **Phil. VA 3.2.1-2.**

“There are wild asses in India the size of horses... They have a horn in the middle of their brow one and a half cubits in length... They say whoever drinks from the horn (which they fashion into a cup) is immune to seizures... holy sickness... poison...” – **Ctesias F45 (45) = Photius *Bibl.***

Critical Judgement

- Critical judgement and a claim to autopsy, mutually reinforcing validity and acceptability.
- Damis (in particular), Apollonius, Iarchus, and even Philostratus own authorial voice corroborate his account:
 - Nearchus and Orthogoras comments about the Acesines (Chenab) VA 2.17.1.
 - Orthogoras on Pole Star - ‘and Damis agrees so we are required to admit that all this is true’ - VA 3.53.
 - Pearls from petrified oyster fat - ‘even Apollonius did not consider this story puerile (*meirakiōdēs*)’ VA 3.57.1-2.
 - Conversation between Apollonius and Iarchus, worth recording as one might profit from neither believing or disbelieving - 3.45-49.
- Refutation of ridiculous - Scylax is condemned by Iarchus; notable silence on Ctesias and Megasthenes cf. Lucian *True Story* 2.31; Strabo 2.1.9.

Overview

- Careful selection, omission and creation of details to suit Philostratus purposes:
 - Surpassing Alexander in reaching edges of the earth and in search for wisdom
 - Even surpassing some of the gods (Dionysus and Egyptian Heracles).
 - Manipulating Megasthenes account of philosophers among the Prasii, and rejecting his history.
- Critical judgement and autopsy, efforts made to reinforce the credibility of Philostratus India – his account intended to be believable.

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