

LIFE IN THE EASTERN DESERT OF EGYPT

Unit 4 – The Erythra Thalassa

HPAH7006

Pharaonic Activity

- ❑ Crossing the ED and sailing down the Red Sea to reach “Punt”.
- ❑ Punt a nebulous locations – East Africa above the Bab el-Mandeb? Southern Arabian Peninsula?
- ❑ Earliest recorded expedition sent out by Sahura (2458-2446 BC);
 - Periodic ones sent out under different Pharaohs, e.g. Mentuhotep III (2004-1992 BC); Hatshepsut (1508-1458 BC).



- ❑ Remains from the site of Mersa Gawasis.



Royal entourage from Punt, delivering gifts to the court of Queen Hatshepsut. Relief from the temple of Deir-el-Bahari. Ca. first half of the Fifteenth century BC.



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.**



Ptolemaic Establishment of Ports

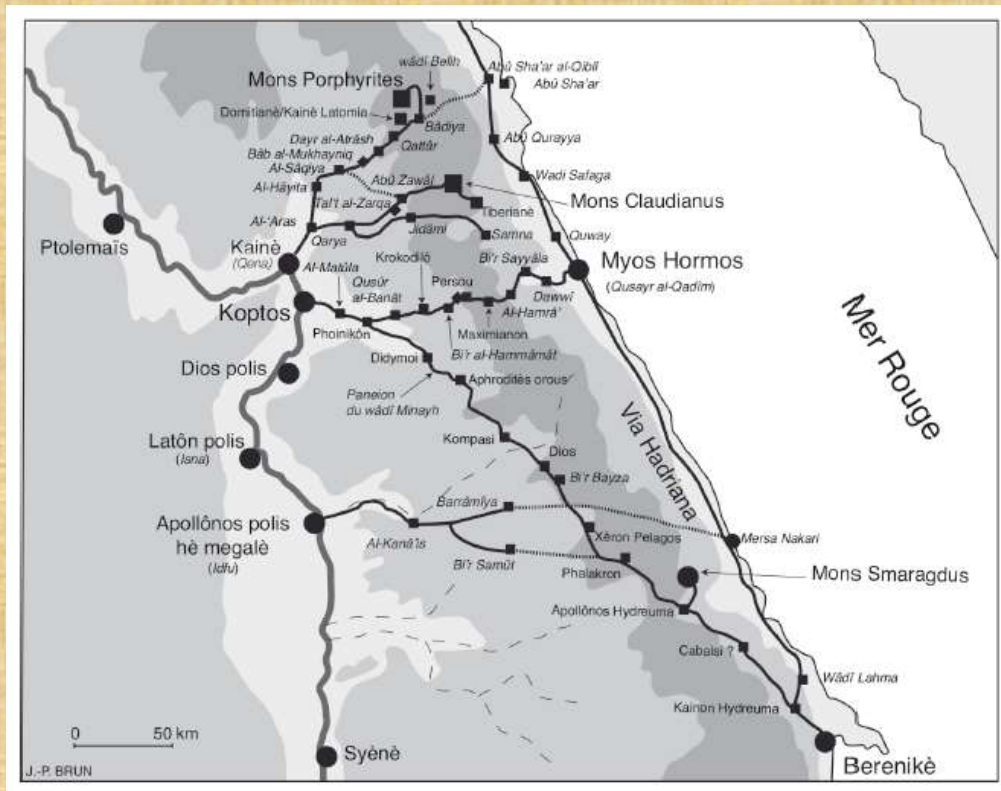


Ports

- Arsinoe; Philoterias; Nechesia; Berenike
Trogoditika; Myos Hormos



Canal to Suez
(re)excavated by
Ptolemy II
Philadelphos.



Tracks leading from Edfu and from Koptos.

Evidence for Exchange

- Evidence from Delos relating to incense and ivory trade.
- Sacred animal necropolis at north Saqqara.
 - *Papio hamadryas anubis* (Olive Baboons)
 - *Cercopithecus* (African green monkeys)
- Loan agreement relating to the Spice-Bearing (Ἀρωματόφορος) land.

“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.

Egypto-Arabian Contact

- ▣ *P. Cairo Zen.* 59536 – “Minaean frankincense”.
- ▣ Zayd’il bin Zayd - Memphis - importer of myrrh and calamus.
- ▣ Sabaean merchants – Larimnum - Agatharchides 5.103a + b.
- ▣ 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).



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.**

Nodes

“...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.”

Agatharkhides 5.105a = Photius, *Cod.* 250.103, 459b.

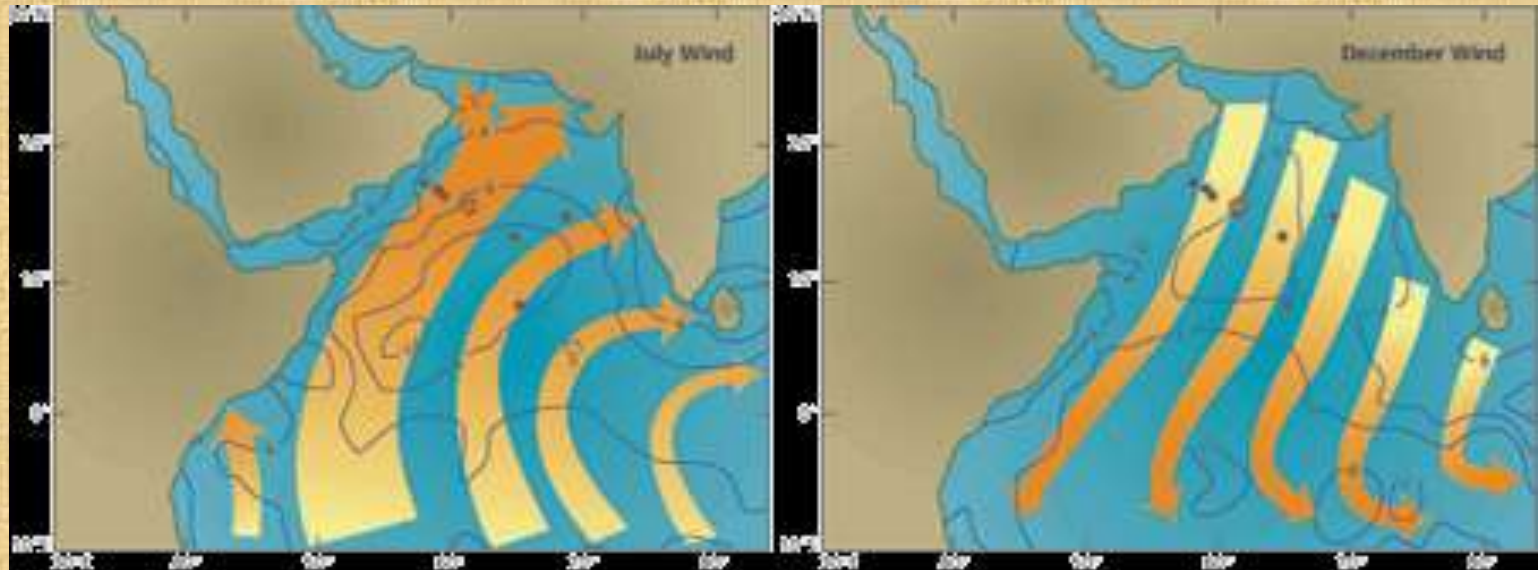
“Eudaimon Arabia [prosperous Arabia], a full-fledged city in earlier days, was called Eudaimon when, since vessels from India did not go on to Egypt and those from Egypt did not dare sail to the places further on but came only this far, it used to receive cargoes from both...” – *PME* 26.



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.



Value of the Trade

“...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).

Roman Annexation

- “Roman” period began with Octavian’s (i.e. Augustus, who receives this title in 27 BC) annexation of Egypt in 30 BC.
- Participation by a range of ethnic groups with the Roman Empire – Graeco-Egyptians, Italians, Palmyrenes, etc. – along various other international merchants (Indian, Arabians, Persians, etc.)
- Muziris Papyrus (P. Vindob G 40822) - Verso mentions a consignment of ivory, cloth(?) and nard weighing 3.5 tons – other goods possible including pepper and malabathron – total cargo about 9.3 million sesterii (equivalent) on value.

Ship Construction

- ▣ The square-rigged merchant in the Mediterranean - capacity from 75 to several hundred tons (at extreme end 1000 tons).
- Shell of planks held together by thousands of closely-set mortise-and-tenon joints, and sets of frames that were inserted afterwards
- Brail-rings, a deadeye, various sheaves from rigging-blocks, and several fragments of sailcloth - S/S (Egyptian) and Z/Z (Indian) material.
- *O. Krok. 41* – wagon with shipbuilding wood.
- Koptos Tariff - tolls paid by shipbuilders' servants and artisans – also on components such as masts and yardarms.



Image from Sidebotham (2011)

Goods Traded

IMPORTS

- ▣ Spices and aromatics – pepper (esp. black), cassia, frankincense, nard.
- ▣ Textiles – silks, Seric skins, cotton cloth.
- ▣ Precious gems – beryl, opal.
- ▣ Woods – teak, ebony.
- ▣ Animals (exotic pets and food)
- ▣ Slaves

EXPORTS

- ▣ Heavy/bulky items – non-precious metals, e.g. copper.
- ▣ Crafted goods – bronze-wares, glass, reworked imports (?).
- ▣ Foodstuffs and drink – wine, olive oil, maybe garum?
- ▣ Mediterranean red coral.
- ▣ Gold and silver crafted wares.
- ▣ Peridot (chrysolithon / topazos)
- ▣ Gold and silver craft wares and coins.

Foreign Merchants at the Red Sea Ports

Arabians at Myos Hormos and Berenike:

- Dedications by merchants from Eudaimon Arabia (Aden) in 1st c AD.
- South Arabian graffiti, and writing on sherds.
- South Arabian utilitarian wares (e.g. calcite beehive vessel)

Indians at Myos Hormos and Berenike

- Rice (kernels and chaff) found at Berenike
- Utilitarian and domestic wares – personal baggage?
- Arikamedu style cooking ware (Myos Hormos)
- Cooking pots (Wheeler Type 24), casseroles dishes (Wheeler Type 25), flanged casseroles and lids (Wheeler Type 28-29) – southeast Indian in origin (Berenike)
- ▣ Indian scripts and symbols found in Eastern Desert (e.g. svastikas)
- ▣ Names of Indians – Kanan and Cātan – Brahmi script (Myos Hormos) – Brahmi script (Berenike); Halaka, Vinhudala [=Visnudatta], and Nakada [=Nagadatta?] – ostrakon list good (oil, meat, wine) – Prakrit southwest, south central India (Myos Hormos).