# APOLLONIUS IN INDIA: THE *VITA APOLLONII* AND THE INDOGRAPHIC TRADITION

*Abstract: This article examines Philostratus' engagement with the Indographic tradition in books 2 and 3 of the* Vita Apollonii. *A number of interconnected arguments are presented here. The main argument is that Philostratus carefully adapted details from the Indographic and paradoxographical traditions, allowing him to make witty allusions, both explicit and oblique, to them. This also allowed him to parody the critical doxographic habit of later commentators. Similarly, he sought to invert expectations when it came to the presentation of Alexander and the mythic heroes Dionysus and Heracles, as well as India more broadly. In doing so, Philostratus was able to present a utopian land of the Sophoi (within India) grounded in time and space that could ironically act as source of true Hellenism which Apollonius spread to the West (rather than Alexander spreading it to the East).*

*Keywords: Philostratus, Indography, Paradoxography, Megasthenes, Ctesias*

Sometime during the AD 220s or 230s Philostratus the Athenian wrote an account of the life and deeds of the (in)famous Apollonius of Tyana in eight books known as Τὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον or the *Vita Apollonii* (henceforth *VA*).[1] The historical Apollonius, who lived during the first century AD, had become connected with a series of positive and negative traditions by the second and third centuries.[2] The hostile tradition presented him as a wizard (μάγος) and charlatan (γόης), but by the Severan period (if not earlier) a more positive tradition had also developed painting Apollonius in a (semi-)divine light.[3] At Tyana a cult to Apollonius was set up by Caracalla (co-emperor from AD 198–211, sole emperor from AD 211–217) and he was purportedly worshiped alongside Jesus Christ, Abraham and Orpheus in Alexander Severus' (r. AD 222–235) private cult

[1] Billault (2000) 29–31; Bowie (2009) 29; Elsner (2009) 4; Jones (2002a) 759–67; Kemezis (2014a) 78–6. On the letters attributed to Apollonius see Penella (1979); Flinterman (1995) 70–4; Swain (1996) 395–6. On the title of the work see Boter (2015).

[2] For a discussion of the historical Apollonius see Dzielska, trans. by Pieńkowski (1986); Francis (1998) 419; Whittaker (1906) 2–10. Flinterman (1995) 86–7 has observed that it is not completely impossible that the historical Apollonius actually visited India. On this latter issue see also Festugière (1943) and (1971); Puskás (1991) 118.

[3] Cassius Dio (78.18.4) referred to him as a wizard (μάγος) and fraudster (γόης), while Lucian impugned the reputation of Apollonius in his attack on Alexander of Abonoteichus (*Alex*. 5). For the view that Moeragenes presented a positive version of Apollonius, albeit one emphasising him as a μάγος, see Raynor (1984) 222–6; Flinterman (1995) 69–70; Swain (1996) 384. On his presentation by Christian authors, see Rohrbacher (2016) 98.

chamber, though this later claim may be largely fabricated.[4] It was in the context of these variant traditions that Philostratus wrote the *VA* with the supposed aim of correcting the slanderous accusations made against Apollonius. Instead of being viewed as a charlatan, the narrator suggests that Apollonius should be understood as 'advancing towards wisdom and overcoming tyrannies in a more godlike manner than Pythagoras'.[5]

In Philostratus' eight-book account, Apollonius engages in extensive travels both within and beyond the Mediterranean world. His mission is to seek true wisdom, restore Hellenic values and confront tyrannical Roman officials and emperors (as well as advising tolerable ones).[6] It is, however, books 2 and 3 which are the primary focus of this article. In book 2 Apollonius and his constant companion Damis—whom he met at Old Ninos in book 1—go to Taxila and meet the philosopher-king Phraotes.[7] During their journey to Phraotes they encounter some minor wonders and various allusions are made to the itinerary of Alexander. It is in book 3 that the most fantastical anthropological, zoological and natural wonders are encountered as Apollonius and Damis travel between the Hyphasis and Ganges Rivers to meet the Indian Sophoi. After conversing with these Sophoi for some time and learning great wisdom, they return west via the Indian Ocean in a voyage paralleling that undertaken by Nearchus, admiral of Alexander's fleet.[8]

The purpose of this article is to examine the construction of Apollonius' adventures in India by Philostratus. Earlier notions that Philostratus merely collated an undifferentiated patchwork of fantastical details about India to form a simple backdrop have since been abandoned in favour of the view

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[4] On the cult at Tyana see Cass. Dio 78.18.4; also, Philostr. *VA* 8.31.3. On his worship by Alexander Severus, see *Hist. Aug. Alex.* 29.2. The notion of Apollonius as a θεῖος ἀνήρ persisted after the Severan period as seen from the claim that Aurelian (r. AD 270–275) was visited by his apparition and persuaded to spare the city of Tyana (*Hist. Aug. Aur.* 24.2–9, 25.1). It should be noted, however, that the imperial biographies in the *Historia Augusta* are of variable reliability. For example, Rohrbacher argues that the life of Alexander Severus is panegyrical in tone and lacking in veracity. The claim about a private chapel may have been adapted from the biography of Marius Maximus. Moreover, Aurelian's visitation by Apollonius, and the sources that the author cites for this, are likely reminiscent of 'the notebooks of Damis or the tablets of Dictys', i.e. literary inventions to lend authority to the account relayed. See, Rohrbacher (2016) 6–9, 96–8, 120.

[5] '…καὶ θειότερον ἢ ὁ Πυθαγόρας τῇ σοφίᾳ προσελθόντα, τυραννίδων τε ὑπεράραντα…' – *VA* 1.2.1. I leave aside the question of whether we should understand the narrator of the *VA* as Philostratus himself.

[6] Kemezis (2014b) 157, 190–5 argues that Philostratus deliberately stresses Apollonius' connection to the late Julio–Claudian and Flavian periods in order to place his adventures in a world of 'tyranny and resistance'. The fundamental importance of travel as a means of creating the image of an ideal philosopher is also pertinent: Meyer (1917) 371–424; and Elsner (1997) 23–37.

[7] On the view that Old Ninos is a reference to the Syrian Hierapolis, see Jones (2002b).

[8] On parallels with Arrian's *Indika*, see Robiano (1996) 501.

that he was careful and discriminating.[9] Indeed, it will be argued that Philostratus selected, adapted and omitted details from these works as a means of both parodying earlier Indographic and paradoxographical texts, while also going a step further and parodying those later authors who engaged in critical doxography. Furthermore, Philostratus was able to demonstrate his erudition through allusions to these texts (including narratives by Ctesias and Megasthenes, authors not directly cited), while also inverting expectations when it came to Alexander and the mythic figures of Heracles and Dionysus. In the *VA*, indeed, Apollonius not only surpasses their achievements but also locates an untainted form of Hellenism in a utopian land occupied by Indian Sophoi which, as Abraham's recently argued, is vital to his mission in the Mediterranean.[10]

It is not within the scope of this article to give a full treatment of wider debates on the veracity and genre of the *VA*. Suffice it to say, the arguments circle around whether the work should be regarded as an attempt by Philostratus to produce a biography/hagiography of Apollonius or alternatively a fictitious piece of entertainment akin to the novel or pseudo–documentarist literature.[11] Particular focus has been given to whether Damis was a real historical figure or merely a literary invention by Philostratus.[12] The position taken in this article is that the *VA* was intended as a humorous and erudite piece of fiction by a leading author of the late Second Sophistic. It has been credibly suggested that Philostratus' reference to the memoirs (ὑπόμνημα) of Damis is analogous to Antonius Diogenes' use of "discovered" wooden tablets in his fictional work

[9] Anderson (1986) 214–15 assumes that Philostratus used paradoxographical texts for their 'own sake', '[snatching] at the flimsiest reasons for doing so'. He ((1996) 616) also states that 'we are looking at a very shakily constructed composition whose inequalities seem to proclaim fumbling and characteristically incompatible material'. *Contra* Eshleman (2017) 195, who questions whether Philostratus was 'blindly recycling classical tradition.'. See also Kemezis (2014a) 71 and (2014b) 164; and Elsner (1997) 35.

[10] Abraham (2014).

[11] On questions of genre, see Anderson (1996) 613–16 (hagiography); Rabiano (1996) 489 (a fusion of influences); Boter (2015) 1–7 (encomium); Billault (2009) 3–19 (use of biographical style); Billault (2000) 105–38 (borrowing techniques from the novels); Whitmarsh (2007) 413 ('sloping from biography into encomium, even hymn'); Schirren (2005) 69–211 (philosophical biography); Eshleman (2017) 184 (use of dialogue). On the desire for plausibility, see Rommel (1923) 8–45. For a stronger emphasis on the fictional nature of the text, see Bowie (1978) 1652–99; Dzielska, trans. by Pieńkowski (1986); Francis (1998); Kemezis (2014a) 65–6; Kemezis (2014b) 156, 159; Reardon (1971).

[12] Anderson (1986) 155–73, 191 suggested that the memoirs of Damis may be genuine and even identified its transmission with a later Persian text the *Marzuban–nameh*. Grosso (1954) 333–532 felt the *VA* should be regarded as a valid historical source. However, there have been plenty who question the existence of Damis, notably Meyer (1917) 371–424; and Bowie (1978) 1653–62. More generally on Damis, see Flinterman (1995) 79–88, who thinks that it is unlikely that Philostratus wholesale invented this tradition.

*Wonders Beyond Thule* (and perhaps also to the Trojan pseudepigrapha).[13] It is likely that most readers recognised Damis as an invention of Philostratus. This is regardless of whether they viewed the work as fiction or as hagiography.[14] Thus, it is appropriate to see Philostratus' use of the Indographic tradition in books 2 and 3 in light of this interplay between fiction and historical tradition.

Indeed, history and fiction were not treated as diametrically opposed categories in Graeco–Roman literature and what was important in both historical narrative and fiction was believability.[15] As Kemezis notes, the narrator needed to present the reader 'with a set of credibility-building devices that simultaneously add substance to fictional belief and emphasize the self-conscious fictionality of that belief.'[16] It may be that the claim in the *VA* that the author was part of Julia Domna's literary circle was one such example of credibility-building.[17] Ultimately, whether the work was intended to be taken as a serious biography/hagiography or as fictional entertainment, it is clear that believability was a vital element. The salient point for the purposes of this article is that Philostratus' description of India played on an erudite audience's familiarity with the Graeco–Roman Indographic and paradoxographical tradition.[18]

*Philostratus and his Sources*

Any exploration of Philostratus' engagement with this tradition is complicated by the fact that many of the works that he drew upon now exist only as fragments in the works of later authors. This difficulty is further exacerbated by his practice of not always citing the authors that he drew upon, including Ctesias, Onesicritus and quite probably Megasthenes.[19] Disentangling these fragments or epitomes and connecting them to earlier

[13] *VA* 1.2–3. See Elsner (1997). On pseudo–documentarism, see Ní Mheallaigh (2008).

[14] Morgan (1993) 187; Bowersock (1994).

[15] Morgan (1993); Francis (1998) 421, 425; Kemezis (2014a), 7; Schirren (2005) 15–68; Reger (2009) 250–1; Gyselinck and Demoen (2009) 108–14.

[16] Kemezis (2014a) 65.

[17] *VA* 1.3.1. Kemezis (2014b) 162, 167. *Contra* Swain (1996) 385–6. Morgan (2009) 276–8 argues that the Emesan Julia Domna is the presence behind the solar 'agenda' in the *VA*. He suggests its aim was to rehabilitate solar worship through Apollonius and distance it from the opprobrium connected to Elagabalus. Cordovana (2012) 71 describes Philostratus as a 'spokesman for a new idea of imperial power under the Severans'. See also Hanus (1995) 82–3.

[18] For the importance of earlier works like those of Herodotus, Ctesias, the Alexander historians and Megasthenes on the development of Imperial era discourse about India (histories, geographies, encyclopaedias, etc.) see Parker (2008); Romm (1992); and Karttunen (1997a) and (1997b). In this regard Philostratus was no different: Bernard (1996); Jones (2002b); Priaulx (1873).

[19] Flinterman (1995) 83.

works is not a straightforward task.[20] For example, there has been some debate about whether sections 2.35–42 of the *Bibliotheca Historica*—which have traditionally been regarded as an epitome of Megasthenes—in fact solely derive from this author.[21] Muntz has argued that Diodorus Siculus did not mechanically abbreviate Megasthenes. Instead, it is suggested that while borrowing from him, Diodorus, nevertheless, engaged with other writers like Eratosthenes.[22]

Despite these challenges, we are fortunate that most Roman-era Indographers tended to be very explicit in citing their sources. This allows for some confidence in identifying the origins of different ideas about India, including those deriving from Ctesias, Megasthenes, Nearchus and Orthagoras.[23] Thus, even when Philostratus is not explicit about his sources, it is possible to examine other Indographic accounts to determine from where he may be deriving his ideas. The *Indika* of Ctesias—surviving through fragments and a summary by Photius—is one of the clearest examples of a work utilised by Philostratus but not directly cited. At the opening of book 3, when Apollonius crosses into the land of the Sophoi (in the heart of India), the reader is immediately presented with fragrant trees, peacock–fish, giant worms which produce a flammable liquid and the horned-asses (i.e., unicorns whose horns were made into drinking vessels that rendered the user immune from sickness).[24] All of these elements featured in Ctesias' description of India.

*Allusion and Inverting Expectations – Apollonius in India*

Since it is possible to discern the Indographic and paradoxographical works which Philostratus drew upon (if not always specific authors, then at least a general class of literature), we can ask the following question: how does Philostratus' selection, omission and arrangement of material from these traditions connect to his wider aims in the *VA*? It is argued in this paper that one of the most important of these aims relates to the Second

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[20] On the fragments of Ctesias, see Lefant (2004). On those of Megasthenes, see Stoneman (2022) 15–16.

[21] On Megasthenes, his reliability and transmission, see Schwanbeck (1846); T. S. Brown (1955); Karttunen (1997b) 69–94.

[22] Muntz (2012) 21–37; also, Parker (2008) 43. However, Stoneman (2022) 12 argues that Eratosthenes himself was heavily reliant on the work of Megasthenes. On the more recent move away from the "lex Volquardsen" notion that Diodorus only ever relied on one source at a time, see Baron (2013) 13–14.

[23] On Ctesias, see Photius; Arr. *Anab*.; Ael. *NA*; Plin. *HN*. On Megasthenes, see Arr. *Indica*; Strab.; Ael. *NA*; Plin. *HN*. On Nearchus, see Arr. *Indica*; Strab. On Orthagoras, see Ael. *NA*.

[24] *VA* 3.1–2. See Ctesias Frag. 45 §45 = Photius; Megasthenes Frag. 15b = Ael. *NA* 16.20. Whitmarsh (2007) 419 notes that digressions on history, botany and ethnography often feature at the start of books in the *VA*, which he suggests functioned as 'pauses, waymarking the narrative...' and that they 'underline the narrator's intellectual authority'.

Sophistic practice of offering an opposing view to those traditionally given, particularly through explanation or critique.[25] This inversion connects to the practice of alluding to great mythic and historical Greek figures whom Apollonius can then surpass in his travels through India. This aim of surpassing great figures is a wider feature of the *VA*, as we have already noted with Pythagoras.[26] It has also been observed that Apollonius' travels in the Mediterranean world and India frequently parallel narrative elements from the *Odyssey*. In these parallels Apollonius is represented as superior to Odysseus in both prudence (Aeolus and bag of winds) and bravery (Charybdis).[27]

When it comes to Apollonius' journey to India (book 2), comparisons with Alexander the Great loom large. Apollonius visits or has the chance to comment upon many key locations from Alexander's itinerary. In these contexts we see sustained engagement with the "Alexander tradition" (on the different branches of the Indographic tradition, see appendix 1).[28] Apollonius and Damis traverse the Caucuses (Hindu Kush), travel across the Cophen River near the city of Nysa, and allude to Aornos, but because it lay off their route they do not go there.[29] With regards to Aornos, Philostratus does not simply mention the mountain site in passing but devotes additional space to providing an explanation for its name (meaning "birdless"). He rejects the account that the reason there are no birds is that they cannot fly as high as 9,000 feet (the height given for the summit), instead explaining that a cleft sucks in passing birds, drawing a parallel with the Athenian Acropolis.[30] This presents a clear example of the Second Sophistic practice of critiquing earlier theories, as well as pointing to engagement with Arrian's account, or at least the Hellenistic sources used by Arrian.[31]

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[25] Bernard (1996) 489.

[26] *VA* 1.2.

[27] See van Dijk (2009) 176–202; Kemezis (2014) 174 also notes Apollonius' favourable comparison to Heraclitus, Anaxagoras, and Thales.

[28] Robiano (1996) 499; Elsner (1997) 30–1; Parker (2008) 2; Kemezis (2014) 174; Whitmarsh (2012) 464; Eshleman (2017) 193. On Apollonius surpassing Alexander in his intellectual pursuits, see Downie (2016) 72.

[29] *VA* 2.2–4, 2.7.3, 2.8, 2.10. On the Alexander Tradition and the Caucasus, see Arr. *Anab*. 3.28–30; 4.22; 5.3–6. On the Cophen River, see Arr. *Anab*. 4.22. On Nysa, see Arr. *Anab*. 5.1–2; Curt. 7.10; Plut. *Vit*. *Alex*. 58.5–9. On Aornos, see Arr. *Anab*. 4.28–30; Curt. 8.11. It had become commonplace to refer to the Hindu Kush as the Caucuses. Some ancient authors noted the distinction (e.g. Arrian), but other sources point to confusion (notably the Alexander Romance tradition); on this see Stoneman (2008) 77–8. On the role of the "Caucuses" as a crossing point into the fabulous world of India, see Hanus (1995) 90. On the tradition surrounding Nysa, Dionysus and Alexander's visit to the site, see Arr. *Anab.* 5.1–3; Robiano (1996) 500.

[30] For a discussion of Aornos, its meaning and its appearance in the Indographic tradition (including by Philostratus), as well as issues with the Athenian parallel, see Bernard (1996).

[31] Robiano (1996) 502.

Continuing with the itinerary, Apollonius and Damis observe elephants crossing the River Indus and recount seeing the elephant "Ajax". It is claimed that Alexander captured the creature from Porus and dedicated it to Helios.[32] Next, Philostratus has the pair cross the River Indus at a point where it was 40 stades in width and reports that it acts like the Nile, in the process challenging ideas about the Nile's inundation.[33] They were led to the city of Taxila, which is a major focal point after the crossing of the Hindu Kush in the Alexander tradition, both in terms of subsequent political-military activity, but also cultural and philosophic engagement with the Indian world.[34] It is perhaps unsurprising that a significant portion of book 2 is set in this city. In this context the Greek character of the philosopher-king Phraotes can be emphasised, notably at a Greek–style *symposion*.[35] Additionally, the visit to a temple in Taxila allows for an extended *ekphrasis* on art depicting the achievements of Alexander and Porus, as well as a philosophic discussion about mimicry.[36]

Subsequent to these events, Apollonius and Damis visit the site of Porus' battle with Alexander.[37] After crossing the Hydraotes (Ravi River) and passing several tribes, the pair reach the Hyphasis (Beas River) and 30 stades beyond that the altar marking the eastern extent of Alexander's campaign. It is at this point that they see a bronze tablet stating that Alexander stopped here—a likely boast by the Indians beyond the Hyphasis that he got no further.[38] Philostratus' primary audience would probably have known the tradition about Alexander setting up twelve large alters to the gods in order to demarcate the extent to which his army travelled East.[39] It is at this point that Apollonius surpasses Alexander by travelling further into India and reaching a place where no Greek had ever

[32] *VA* 2.12, 14–15. It is interesting to observe the discrepancy in the Alexander tradition between Nearchus and Onesicritus regarding the habits of elephants, specifically whether they are good swimmers. The former (correctly) claims they are, the latter says they are not: Stoneman (2019) 124. Interestingly here Philostratus seems to follow Nearchus.

[33] *VA* 2.18–19. On the Indus, see Arr. *Anab*. 5.3–8; Robiano (1996) 500.

[34] *VA* 2.20. On Taxila, see Arr. *Anab*. 5.8; Curt. 8.12–14; Plut. *Vit. Alex*. 59.

[35] *VA* 2.27.1. Eshleman (2017) 185–6 notes that while the *symposion* is clearly Hellenic in character, references to whole lions and tiger loins remind the reader of its exotic Indian setting. Moreover, some of the banquet's "un-Greek" features (food, wine and entertainment) can be contrasted with the subsequent more philosophical banquet hosted by the Sophoi (*VA* 3.26–33).

[36] *VA* 2.20–22. See Platt (2009); and Karttunen (1989).

[37] *VA* 2.42.

[38] *VA* 2.43. Eshleman (2017) 184.

[39] Arr. *Anab*. 5.29. Whitmarsh (2012) 467 notes the parallel between the physical boundary marker—the *stêlai* at the edge of Alexander's Empire—and the segmented textual space, where a boundary is crossed as one enters book 3.

gone to before, namely the citadel of the Indian Sophoi located halfway between the Hyphasis and the Ganges.[40]

His "anabasis" into the interior of India exceeds that recounted about Alexander by historians such as Arrian.[41] Indeed, it is possible that not only is Apollonius made to rival Alexander, but that Philostratus himself is rivalling Arrian in his knowledge and his claim to fully glorify an insufficiently acknowledged Greek "culture hero".[42] In the narrative it is said that Alexander was not able to advance to this place due to contrary signs from the gods.[43] This is likely an allusion to the Mutiny at the Hyphasis discussed by several of the historians and biographers on Alexander.[44] These omens were in fact a way for Alexander to save face, since he could not convince his army to travel further east and had to acquiesce with their desire to return westwards.[45] Interestingly, Philostratus presents the tradition about these omens at face value: no allusion is made to a mutiny. This may have been to preserve his reputation and potentially to magnify Apollonius' special nature by being permitted to cross over. There is no reason to think this omission was a result of ignorance, given Philostratus' evident familiarity with Arrian's work or the Hellenistic sources he drew upon.

At the same time as surpassing Alexander spatially by traveling further into India, Apollonius is also represented as surpassing Alexander in terms of wisdom since, unlike Alexander, he meets the true Indian Sophoi.[46] It is specifically stated by Phraotes that Alexander never met the true Sophoi but only the Oxydrake, a warlike tribe who claim to be conversant with Philosophy but know nothing of virtue.[47] Apollonius' journey to India for wisdom could be understood by the reader as representing something superior to Alexander's travel for conquest. For example, Iarchos admonishes the Greeks for glorifying the sackers of Troy. Instead, he praises King Ganges, son of the River Ganges, for being far superior in having founded 60 cities—the establishing of cities being much better than

[40] *VA* 2.33, see also 2.44 and 3.13.

[41] Robiano (1996) 493.

[42] Robiano (1996) 493–6.

[43] *VA* 2.33.1; 3.10–14.

[44] Arr. *Anab*. 5.24–28; Curt. 9.2.2–9; Diod. Sic. 17.93–95; Plut. *Vit*. *Alex*. 62.1–7. On Arrian's allusion to Alexander's unlimited desire for conquest (reflected in his speech to the mutineers) and to Dionysus and Heracles, see Romm (2008) 98–9.

[45] Anson (2015) 65–74. He also critiques the argument that Alexander engineered the mutiny after realising the extent of India and the distance to the "Eastern Ocean".

[46] For the wider aim of searching for wisdom in the *VA*, see Whitmarsh (2012) 463. He suggests that the whole text can be thought of as a 'philosophical *voyage initiatique*, a rewriting on a global scale of Socrates' quest for knowledge as described in Plato's *Apology* (and similarly culminating in a courtroom).'

[47] *VA* 2.33.

sacking them.[48] It may even be that Apollonius' search for wisdom could be understood in relation to Alexander's purported search for wisdom (and immortality). However, there are difficulties with pushing this suggestion too far. The best evidence we have for the association of Alexander and the pursuit of wisdom comes from the Romance tradition, as well as related Arabic and medieval sources, but dating presents difficulties.[49] Apollonius' search for wisdom in India might be more confidently paralleled with Pythagoras' derivation of knowledge from the Brahmans, albeit via Egypt, and other contemporary and slightly later claims that place figures such as Democritus of Abdera and Socrates in encounters with Indians, whether in India or in Greece.[50]

Apollonius' ability to walk in the footsteps of Alexander and then surpass him, both spatially and possibly in his search for wisdom, is arguably an example of Philostratus' manipulation of the Indographic tradition to suit his purposes. Knowledge of the northwest Indian subcontinent and Indus Valley greatly increased with Alexander's campaigns. Alexander and his associates are said to have encountered various Indian wise men during his campaign in these regions.[51] One of the most important instances is the meeting of Onesicritus with Calanus and Mandanis (near Taxila), which in some later traditions is transformed into a meeting of Alexander with these figures.[52] Other encounters include the killing of those responsible for encouraging local rulers like Sabbas and tribal groups like the Oxydrakae to resist, as well as the important questioning of the Gymnosophists by Alexander (which is alluded to by

[48] *VA* 3.19–21. Note that Iarchos claims to be a reincarnation of the former, i.e., the king, not the river. On the tradition of criticising Homer, see Flinterman (1995) 104. On Iarchos' claim that the Greeks are 'too much in thrall to Homer', see Downie (2016) 75.

[49] The earliest version of the Alexander Romance that survives is from the third century AD, but its origins can perhaps be traced back to the third century BC (see R. Stoneman, Alexander Romance. *Oxford Classical Dictionary*). On Alexander's "scientific goals" and as an inventor and sage, see Stoneman (2008) 68–9, 107–27.

[50] *VA* 8.7.4. Democritus of Abdera is said to have visited Ethiopia and India (Diog. Laert. 9.7.35), while Aristoxenus purportedly claimed that Socrates encountered an Indian in Athens, the latter mocking his philosophical approach (Euseb. *Praep. evang.* 11.3). On the transmission of Indian ideas to Pythagoras via Egypt, see *VA* 3.19.1; Eshleman (2017) 191; and Puskás (1991) 118.

[51] On the fascination with Indian sages in Alexander legends, see Karttunen (1997b) 55–67. He also notes that the term Gymnosophist does not appear in any of the extant fragments of the contemporary Alexander historians, but later became a more common name for them.

[52] Notably in the Late Antique *On the Life of the Brahmans* by Palladius, This work post–dates Philostratus' *VA* by about two centuries, although it appears to share similarities with a second-century AD papyrus forming part of a collection of cynic diatribes – Stoneman (2008) 97–103. For a short summary on Onesicritus, see Stoneman (2022) 19–20.

Strabo, Plutarch and in the Romance tradition).[53] Onesicritus' account undoubtedly influenced the way in which Philostratus presents Apollonius' encounters with both the Sophoi of India in book 3 and the Gymnoi of Ethiopia in book 6. However, as we shall see, Philostratus deliberately avoids having "Gymnosophists" in India (the Gymnoi having been expelled from India long ago).[54]

Apollonius, like Alexander, will find wise men in Taxila. In his case this includes the philosopher-king Phraotes who had been brought up by the Indian Sophoi.[55] Phraotes is presented as living a philosophically simple life in a non-extravagant palace (comparing favourably to that witnessed in Babylon).[56] Within the palace are images of Alexander and Porus, including representations of their various exploits.[57] Phraotes can converse well in Greek, engages in athletics and dines in a modest way.[58] His Greek habits can be framed as taking place in a "Greek" environment for Taxila is said to be laid out like a fortified Greek city, paralleling Athens in its orderly rows of houses.[59] The distinction between Apollonius and Alexander is that the former surpasses the latter in his journey into India. In doing so Apollonius will encounter the true wisdom.[60] By contrast, Alexander had to turn back (failing to find true wisdom) and subsequently campaign down the Indus Valley against men whom Phraotes describes as violent and unconcerned with justice—despite their pretentions otherwise. Thus, Apollonius is excused from meeting them (and upsetting the narrative by having Apollonius travel down the Indus rather than across the Hyphasis), for among these people he will not learn true wisdom.[61]

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[53] Strab. 15.1.43, 1.63–5; Plut. *Vit. Alex.* 59, 64–5, 69. On the conflict with the Malli and Oxydracae, see Bosworth (1996b) 133–65. The surrender of the Oxydracae involved acknowledging Alexander as the heir to Dionysus and as the natural ruler of India (p. 165).

[54] The parallel is most obvious when Apollonius asks Iarchos and the other Sophoi various questions. However, this is far more reverential in tone (not a series of riddles or paradoxes) and there is no obvious connection to Alexander's riddle contest with the ten Gymnosophists. Powers (1998) 82 notes that four separate versions of this riddle-session survive, three nearly identical (*P. Berol* 13044; Latin epitome in the Metz collection; and Plut. *Alex.* 64) and one different (beta–recession of the *Alexander Romance* 3.5–6).

[55] *VA* 2.31.2.

[56] *VA* 2.25–6. On Apollonius' stay with Vardanes, see Jones (2002b) 192–3.

[57] *VA* 2.20. This appears to parallel the *Letter to Aristotle about India* regarding the claim that Porus accompanied Alexander after the latter's victory, see Stoneman (2008) 76.

[58] *VA* 2.27–8.

[59] *VA* 2.20.2, 2.23. For this ethnocentrism, see Whitmarsh (2012) 468–9. On the excavations at Taxila and attempts to connect these findings with Philostratus' description, see Bernard (1996) 505–18; Stoneman (2019) 461–70.

[60] The *Alexander Romance* presents Alexander as having various adventures beyond the Hyphasis before ultimately being compelled to return west, accept his mortality and face his death – Romm (2008) 100–1.

[61] *VA* 2.33.1.

Philostratus terms the false philosophers met by Alexander as Oxydrakae rather than true Sophoi.[62] Stoneman has commented upon the confusion among some later writers who conflate the Gymnosophists that urged local rulers to resist Alexander with the Oxydrakae tribe (who also engaged in violent resistance).[63] Philostratus in some respects does emphasise parallels and contrasts between India and Ethiopia (in terms of geography, natural features, flora and fauna), especially at the beginning of book 6.[64] However, the placing of Gymnoi (Naked-ones) in Ethiopia and the omission of any reference to the Gymnosophists (Naked Philosophers) in India seems like a deliberate choice rather than an error. In fact, Philostratus is at pains to make a clear distinction between Ethiopia and India.[65] By omitting any reference to Gymnosophists in India, Iarchos can recount to Apollonius how the Ethiopians were expelled from India due to the religious pollution incurred by the murder of Ganges, son of the River Ganges.[66] In doing this, Apollonius can meet these Ethiopian Naked-ones in book 6.[67] Here he will prove to Thespesion that Indian philosophical wisdom is superior to that of the Gymnoi of Ethiopia.[68] He ceases to be a disciple of the Sophoi of India, but now becomes a master and teacher of Gymnoi in Ethiopia.[69]

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[62] He is possibly influenced by the Alexander tradition which distinguished the Indian philosophers near Taxila from the fighting Brahmans of the lower Indus valley, although later both are referred to as Gymnosophoi: Karttunen (1997b) 60.

[63] Stoneman (1995) 100–3 suggested that Philostratus' familiarity with the Alexander Romance, in which the Brahmans/Gymnosophists and Oxydracae are conflated, implies he made the same error. See also Stoneman (2008) 93; and Powers (1998) 81–2. More generally on the issue of potential confusion in the ancient sources between Ethiopia and India, see Karttunen (1989) 134–8; Schneider (2004) and (2016); Mayerson (1993).

[64] See Hamus (1995) 93–4.

[65] Romm (1992) 82 notes that the bizarre wonders (zoological, ethnographic and geographical) of both lands are such that they sometimes get fused together in ancient literature. However, here it seems that Philostratus is making a very deliberate distinction. Indeed, this is clearly part of a rhetorical strategy regularly used by epideictic orators who can take lessons learnt from elsewhere to educate a new audience: Elsner (1997) 24.

[66] *VA* 3.20.1–2. It has been noted that Philostratus was not alone in referring to the Indian sages as Sophoi since both Strabo and Arrian used this term at different points in their work: Karttunen (1997b) 56. He also notes that the *VA* contains more contemporary information about the Indian sages and is not solely reliant on Hellenistic material. Interestingly, Pliny the Elder (*HN* 6.35.190) places the Gymnetes in Ethiopia.

[67] Technically, Philostratus terms these Ethiopians as Gymnoi rather than Gymnosophoi, which may be a deliberate choice to further emphasise the superiority of the Indian Sophoi over the ascetics of Ethiopia. Also, it would help to avoid confusing his readers who would normally have associated the Gymnosophists with India. It has been noted that Philostratus and Heliodorus are the only Greek writers we know of to place a community of Naked Sages in Ethiopia: Morgan (2009) 273. Strabo (15.1.70) does mention the term Gymnētes as a subdivision of the Pramnae: Karttunen (1997b) 56.

[68] *VA* 6.10–22.

[69] Hamus (1995) 94.

It is also in this context that Onesicritus' encounter with the Indian Gymnosophists forms something of a model for Apollonius' encounter with the Ethiopian Gymnoi. If we accept Flinterman's suggestion that the representation of the Ethiopians as Gymnoi was meant to demonstrate the superiority of Pythagoreanism (Indian wisdom) to Cynicism (Ethiopian wisdom), we may then see another clever choice on the part of Philostratus.[70] Indeed, it is worth noting that Onesicritus' encounter with the Gymnosophists on behalf of Alexander is often seen as a vehicle for his own Cynic ideas.[71] That said, more recently Stoneman has argued that Onesicritus' report reflects a genuine encounter with Indian intellectuals rather than being purely a vehicle for his own Cynic ideas.[72] Either way, by adapting and inverting allusions to Alexander's encounters with Indian philosophers (which loom large in the Alexander tradition), Philostratus is able to have Apollonius surpass him both spatially and in the search for wisdom, in the process setting up later plot points in book 6.

*Megasthenes, the VA and the Utopian Realm of the Sophoi*

As we have seen, numerous allusions to the Indographic tradition surrounding Alexander the Great are present in the *VA* but drawing connections with the *Indika* of Megasthenes has proved more controversial. Certainly, Philostratus does not directly mention him. However, it would be spurious to assume that naming a source is a prerequisite for its use by Philostratus,[73] a point that is abundantly clear in the case of Ctesias' *Indika*. Many of the weird and wonderful creatures mentioned in book 3 of the *VA* derive, as already noted, from his work, either directly or at least through transmission by later writers. Indeed, in the case of Megasthenes' work there are reasons to think that such links exist, even if they are more oblique.

A few scholars have highlighted potential connections between Megasthenes' work and the *VA*. Belousov has observed that Iarchos' claim that the universe consists of basic elements—water, air, earth, fire and aithēr—overseen by an all–encompassing deity can be connected to Megasthenes' *Indika*.[74] However, he notes that in his account water is referred to as the primordial element (i.e. it precedes, rather than being coeval with, the other elements), suggesting this idea potentially derives either from Hermeticism or Neopythagorean writings influenced by

[70] Flinterman (1995) 87.

[71] On Onesicritus and the Cynic tradition, see Powers (1988); and McEvilley (2002).

[72] Stoneman (2019) 294.

[73] For an example of the adoption of such a premise, see Panchenko (2002) 5.

[74] *VA* 3.34. Belousov (2014) 788. Rabinovich (1985) proposes that this might reflect a Greek conceptualisation of the Upanishadic concept of the Universal Brahmin.

Hermetic ideas.[75] By contrast, Puskás argues that Philostratus' exclusive use of the term Brahmans—in relation to the Indian Sophoi—best suits an association with Hindu Brahmanism.[76] She further suggests that this is a deliberate contrast to the tradition deriving from Megasthenes where the Brachmanes and Samaneans are distinguished from each other (the latter, Puskás argues, are deliberately omitted).[77]

For our purposes, it is first worth considering how Philostratus potentially interacts with the geography of Megasthenes. In book 2 of the *VA* Apollonius has followed the itinerary of Alexander and then travels further by crossing beyond the Hyphasis. He does not, however, travel to the kingdom centred on the Ganges, but instead goes to a vague region between the Hyphasis and the Ganges. This is of interest as Megasthenes' account, in contrast to the earlier Alexander tradition on India, shifts the focus away from the Indus to the Ganges region where the Prasii reside (the centre of the Mauryan Empire). It is also notable that Philostratus does not mention Palimbothra (Pataliputra), which is the greatest city in India according to Megasthenes.[78] Instead, the "Greek-style" city of Taxila is said to be the greatest (despite being situated in the weaker kingdom)—a city ruled by Phraotes the philosopher-king.[79]

On the face of it, it is tempting to assume that this implies ignorance or indifference to Megasthenes' *Indika*. However, there are reasons to assume this was a deliberate choice on the part of Philostratus. By placing the citadel of the Sophoi in a vaguely defined region neither connected to the Hyphasis nor the Ganges, Apollonius can be presented as travelling to a region where no previous Greek hero or even (demi-)god has gone before (or, indeed, ambassador in the case of the Ganges region).[80] Philostratus goes out of his way to justify Apollonius not going to this region, which can be compared to the clever justification for not having Apollonius follow Alexander's itinerary down the Indus. No mention is made of any philosopher caste in the kingdom of this region and, indeed, Apollonius rejects this king's offer to accompany him back to his realm since he will not learn true wisdom there.[81]

Despite eschewing the geographic focus of Megasthenes' account, Philostratus, nevertheless, adapts and inverts aspects of his description of Indian society to suit his purposes. In Megasthenes' *Indika*, it is the

[75] Belousov (2014) 788–91. See Strab. 15.1.59.
[76] *VA* 1.2.
[77] Puskás (1991) 119–20.
[78] Megasthenes Frag. 33a = Arr. *Indica* 10.5–7; Frag. 33b = Strab. 15.1.36.
[79] *VA* 2.12.2.
[80] It is worth noting that there is also a confused tradition, as seen in Plutarch's biography (*Alex*. 62), about Alexander having reached the banks of the Ganges—his army only reached the Hyphasis (Beas) River.
[81] *VA* 3.26–9, 3.31–3.

philosophers who come to the gates of the king every year for a great assembly (σύνοδος) and are either rewarded or compelled to keep silent depending upon the accuracy of their prophesies.[82] However, in the *VA* it is the king who travels to the great citadel of the Indian Sophoi to seek advice, being permitted to stay for only one day.[83] Here the king is subordinate to the philosophers. This emphasis on the superiority of philosophical wisdom to political power in India seems to parallel the wider narrative which represents Apollonius, the apogee of Greek religious and philosophical culture, as superior to (Roman) political power.[84] It could be argued that this fits into a wider utopian tradition of placing pious and wise council above the normal exercise of political power. One can point to parallels such as Euhemeros' *The Sacred Inscription* where the Panchaean king cedes the administration of justice to a pious class of priests.[85] Or to Pliny's description of the people of Taprobanē (Sri Lanka), where the elected Sinhalese king is given 30 advisors, the majority of which need to consent to any imposition of capital punishment, and who themselves can be overruled by an appeal to a panel of 70 judges.[86]

There is no reference to the castes or classes in the *VA*. Nevertheless, it has been plausibly suggested that the conditions required to become a philosopher may ultimately be traced back to, and be a transmutation of, ideas from Megasthenes.[87] The fact that philosophers are few in number and most highly esteemed appears in both accounts.[88] Perhaps of greatest significance, however, are the officials mentioned by Megasthenes (the third out of six groups of city commissioners) who scrutinize births and deaths. This is for taxation purposes and to record how they took place.[89] In the *VA* Philostratus uses this idea for a loftier purpose. Only a few people ever train to become philosophers in India as they must be pure. They are subject to scrutiny to determine that they have not committed any

[82] Megasthenes Frag. 33 S = Strab. 15.1.39–41.

[83] *VA* 3.23, 3.26.

[84] Kemezis (2014b) 190.

[85] Here we have a fictional account, sometimes taken to represent a real place by later authors. On this, see Diod. Sic. 5.41–46, 6.1. For the placement of these utopian locations within real geographic contexts, see Sulimani (2017) 237, 240.

[86] Here we have a real island, given a semi–utopian ethnography. On this, see Plin. *HN* 6.24.84–91. For parallels between Pliny's description of a journey by a freedman of Annius Plocamus to the island of Taprobanē and to Iambuolos' journey to the Island of the Sun, see Ehlers (1985) 78.

[87] See Karttunen (1997b) 72. However, he criticises Breloer's (1939) bizarre suggestion that it was not Apollonius but Megasthenes who 'sich vier Monate in dem Kloster des Candragupta (!) in den Aravalli–Bergen aufgehalten hat'.

[88] Megasthenes Frag. 33 S = Strab. 15.1.39–41 – compare Phil. *VA* 2.30.1.

[89] Megasthenes Frag. 34 = Strab. 15.1.50–2. For a brief comment on the city officials more broadly, see Stoneman (2022) 119. He suggests that a fair number of the details given by Megasthenes correspond with elements of the *Arthaśāstra*.

disgraceful conduct nor their ancestors up to the third generation. Information about their parents and their grandparents can be obtained from witnesses and publicly available documents, for when any Indian dies his conduct during life must be recorded by a special magistrate.[90] The task of recording deaths, births and conduct—associated with one of the groups of city commissioners mentioned by Megasthenes—is similarly performed by magistrates in Philostratus' *VA*. However, in the latter case the intense scrutiny also offers a means for the philosophers in India to check the credentials of would-be disciples. This ultimately underscores the true integrity of Indian philosophers in the *VA*.[91] Eshleman suggests that Philostratus may have been influenced by Plato's stipulations in the *Republic*, but this need not be mutually exclusive.[92]

If Philostratus' construction of the wisdom and geography of the land of the Sophoi parallels features seen in the discovery utopian tradition, his treatment of the history of India also allows for an engagement with the Golden Age utopian tradition—which depicts a time prior to societal corruption.[93] I would argue that Philostratus achieves this by challenging the notion of the development of Indian civilisation which is particularly attributed to Megasthenes, or at least his account is the clearest surviving example of it. In fragments linked to Megasthenes, India is initially presented as a land of scattered villages, making them easily conquerable by Dionysus who came from the west. He founded cities, established religious practices and taught the Indians viticulture—reigning over them for 52 years and being deified after his death. Several generations later Heracles comes and again conquers the Indians, subsequently founding many cities including Palimbothra (Pataliputra), the greatest of them all. Diodorus, in what is generally thought to be a fragment of Megasthenes, notes that the inhabitants of the hill country of India claim Heracles to be an indigenous figure who conquered swaths of India, while the fragments of both Strabo and Arrian also allude to Dionysus and Heracles as

[90] *VA* 2.30.1–2.

[91] It is possible that (in addition to Megasthenes' account) Philostratus' creation of a system of examining people's conduct and ancestry in order to become a philosopher was influenced by the Athenian practice of *dokimasia*—a system for vetting individuals about to become citizens or hold public office. On the *dokimasia*, see MacDowall (2005) 79–87. However, on the plausibility of the notion that the requirements needed to become a philosopher derive from Megasthenes, see Breloer (1939); Karttunen (1997) 72.

[92] Eshleman (2017) 186. Several ideas from Plato's works influence Hellenistic era Utopian literature: W. E. Brown (1955); Winston (1976); Dawson (1992). It is worth considering that such Platonic influences on the *VA* could be both direct and indirect.

[93] The utopian categories include the retrospective (Golden Age), discovery, foundation, and inaccessible present utopia. On the "discovery" utopia, see Parker (2008) 193–4.

conquerors, though in these cases noting the varied potential origins for these figures.[94]

Exactly when these myths developed is not clear. Dionysus is connected to Nysa in some early literature, though this city is not necessarily placed within India.[95] In Euripides' *Bacchae*, Dionysus is said to have wandered around the East, including Bactria, but India is not mentioned.[96] Indeed, among the known pre-Alexander Indographers, such as Hecataeus, Herodotus and Ctesias, India appears timeless and ungrounded in specific history. It seems to be around and just after the conquests of Alexander the Great that India is presented with a more detailed history, one that is grounded in Greek myth.[97] A number of cities are presented as foundations of Dionysus and Heracles, while Alexander's achievements are compared to these gods, most notably his capture of the rock of Aornus, which Heracles purportedly failed to capture.[98] Strabo asserts that tales about Dionysus' and Heracles' expeditions to India were created to spread the glory of Alexander's achievements.[99] Hence, Megasthenes may not necessarily have been the originator of these myths, but he does seem to be the first to fully develop a chronological depth to Indian history within this mythic framework. Strabo explicitly connect him with its propagation, and it is detailed in more depth than in any of the Alexander historians.[100]

Consequently, Philostratus' engagement with the stories connected to Dionysus and Heracles could derive from the Alexander tradition or from Megasthenes' elaboration, but most probably from both. For Philostratus

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[94] Megasthenes Frag. 1b = Diod. Sic. 2.38.3–6, 39.1–4; Frag. 1c = Plin. *HN* 6.21.59; Frag. 46 = Strab. 15.1.6–8; Arr. *Indica* 7–9. On the invasion tradition, and the variant version that India was neither invaded nor invaded other lands, see Stoneman (2022) 96–9.

[95] Hom. *Il.* 6.132–3; *Hymn Hom. Bacch.* 26.5–6. See, in particular, *Hymn Hom. Bacch. 1* where Nysa is located near the streams of Egypt; likewise, Hdt. *Hist.* 3.97.2, where Nysa is in Ethiopia.

[96] Eur. *Bacch.* 15.

[97] Stoneman (2022) 95 asserts that Cleitarchus was the first to describe Dionysus as a conqueror of India; see also Parker (2008) 47. Kosmin (2014) 37–46 connects Megasthenes' elaboration of a foundation myth (Dionysus and then Heracles) for Indian civilisation with an apparent need by Seleucus to ideologically justify his frontier agreement with the Maurya and his failure to hold on to Alexander's Indus territories. The purpose of the mythic narrative was to establish a point in time whereby a now civilised and urbanised India becomes unconquerable. More generally on the distortions caused by *interpretatio Graeca* and Megasthenes' drawing upon Greek conceptions of the ideal state, see Karttunen (1989) 97–8. On the potential syncretic identification of Dionysus and Heracles with Shiva and Krishna, see Flinterman (1995) 101. On a more cautious note, Karttunen (1989) 210–19 observes the methodological problems with previous attempts at identifying these gods. He also states that Dionysus' and Heracles' connection with India seems to derive from the time of Alexander's campaigns.

[98] Arr. *Anab.* 4.28–30.

[99] Strab. 11.5.5.

[100] Strab. 15.1.7.

these stories need to be challenged and inverted. Civilisation is not presented as being brought from outside but in fact originates in India.[101] Dionysus and Heracles are not explicitly represented as city founders in India. Instead, Ganges, son of the River Ganges, is said to have diverted the flooding of his father into the Erythraean Sea, allowing the earth to produce plenty for life;[102] having done this, he subsequently founded 60 cities in India.[103] When Dionysus and Heracles are presented in the *VA* it is as failed conquerors: together, they attempt to capture the citadel of the Indian Sophoi with siege engines and the aid of Pans, but the Sophoi, beloved of the gods, were able to use whirlwinds and thunderbolts to drive the invaders away.[104] Moreover, the Heracles mentioned is said to be the Egyptian one (rather than the Theban), while the origin of this Dionysus is left open, since earlier in the *VA* differing traditions are given for his derivation.[105]

By freeing Indian history of its subordination to that of the Greeks or others, Philostratus achieves a number of important aims. First, Apollonius surpasses Dionysus and Heracles upon entering the citadel of the Indian Sophoi, the latter having failed to capture this place. This could be seen as an even grander step for Apollonius than surpassing Alexander. Secondly, by freeing Indian history from this Greek conquest myth, the territory of the Indian Sophoi can become an independent source of wisdom and virtue (although of a rather Hellenic character).[106] A land that has maintained its

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[101] This freeing of Indian history from Greek myth is perhaps ironic, if one accepts Kemezis' (2014b) 172 claim that Philostratus is not interested in 'rooting Apollonius' Greek world in a history independent of the sage himself', which he contrasts with Apollonius' engagement in Roman contexts.

[102] On the meaning of Erythraean Sea (Red Sea) and its equation with the Indian Ocean, see Cobb (2018) 5.

[103] *VA* 3.20.1–3.

[104] *VA* 2.33.2; 3.13. Images of Dionysus' conquest of India appear more frequently in second- and third-century Roman art, especially on sarcophagi: Cimino (1994) 128–30.

[105] Phil. *VA* 2.9.1–2. It is said that the Greeks believe that the Theban Dionysus went to India, while those Indians living near the Caucasus (Hindu Kush) say that it was the Assyrian Dionysus, although he knew of the Theban Dionysus. Those who live in the region between the Indus and the Hydraotes and the land extending as far as the Ganges say that Dionysus was born a son of the River Indus. It is notable that Heracles/Hercules and Liber Pater/Bacchus/Dionysus were significant gods associated with the Severan household. As Cordovana (2012) 58, 72–3 notes, these rulers built monumental structures in Rome (Cass. Dio 77.16.3) and Leptis Magna.

[106] It is worth highlighting Megasthenes' (Frag. 46 = Strab. 15.1.6–8) claim that the Indians never sent an expedition to a foreign land nor were they conquered except by Dionysus, Hercules and more recently by the Macedonians. With Philostratus' emphasis on the failure of Dionysus and Hercules to capture the citadel of the Sophoi, and the fact that Alexander never came this far, these Sophoi can be regarded as completely independent and untainted. On the need to Hellenize Indian wisdom, see Flinterman (1995) 102–3. On the notion that speaking Greek is a sign of inward virtue, see Reger (2009) 254.

Golden Age virtues by not being subject to conquest and degradation. This fits quite well with Abraham's argument that Apollonius rediscovered a vibrant Hellenism in India untainted by imperialism (note the importance of the failure of Dionysus and Heracles). Thus, on his return Apollonius becomes the rejuvenator of Greek culture in the Mediterranean world.[107]

Indeed, the Greek character of this wisdom has already been demonstrated in connection with Phraotes the king of Taxila. More importantly, the Indian Sophoi who dwell on the citadel near the city of Paraca converse in Greek, show a detailed knowledge of Greek myths and, indeed, offer a different way of interpreting the Trojan War, as well as the figures of Minos and Tantalus.[108] These features fit nicely into the Second Sophistic practice of correcting or offering alternative explanations for traditional tales.[109] The Sophoi are also said to have set up ancient statues to various Greek gods among others, their citadel is compared to the acropolis of Athens and they present themselves as living on the *omphalos*.[110] Additionally, as Downie notes, the Sophoi see self-knowledge—the quintessential Socratic goal—as merely the starting point of their philosophy rather than its ultimate goal. Consequently, they are 'more "Greek" than the best of them'.[111]

Peripheries at the edge of the *oikoumenē* can often be identified as fabulous utopias, as noted in the case of the utopian discovery tradition, an association that Romm has also observed with Golden Age utopias.[112] By giving India its own history, untainted by conquest and imperialism, the Golden Age of Hellenism can be rooted in time and, through Apollonius' travels, anchored in space. This ultimately allows it to become a centre for Greek wisdom, with Rome as the "uncivilised periphery" and Greece represented as corrupted, though not yet irreparably, by the latter.[113] Ironically, Philostratus achieves this by perpetuating the idea of India as

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[107] Abraham (2014) 465–80; also, Kemezis (2014b) 168–70, 177–9; and Morgan (2009) 278–9. Whitmarsh (2012) 475 suggests that the critique of Rome's imperial aspirations is 'hinted at rather than explicit'. For the various incidences of restoration mentioned in the *VA*, see Whitmarsh (2007) 416 n. 12; Swain (1996) 387. See also Downie (2016) who discusses how Apollonius' new Hellenism (derived from India) reforms the Greek world (especially Asia Minor – book 4).

[108] *VA* 3.19, 3.25.2–3.

[109] Bernard (1996) 489. Probably the most provocative inversion of expectations would be the claim by the Sophoi that Tantalus should be honoured, not condemned.

[110] *VA* 3.13–14. The unique qualities of the wisdom of the Indian Sophoi are underlined by the fact that it is usually Apollonius who confounds the expectations of others, but this is reversed, here it is the Sophoi who are the 'object of wonder': Whitmarsh (2007) 428.

[111] Downie (2016) 73. See also Eshleman (2017) 189.

[112] Romm (1992); Parker (2008).

[113] Abraham (2014) 469–78.

near the edge of the *oikoumenē* where the marvellous and freakish exist.[114] This is evident in book 2 when Apollonius and Damis, following the highlights of Alexander's itinerary, encounter a number of zoological and ethnographic anomalies such as men five cubits tall (7½ft), elephants carrying their young on their tusks while fording rivers, and lionesses who commit adultery with leopards.[115] This latter example of inter-species union is something usually associated with the more extreme natural and climatic features found at the edge of the earth, since such unions are not normally possible in the centre of the *oikoumenē*.[116]

The fabulousness of the land of the Sophoi in book 3 is made even more emphatic than the previous itinerary followed in northwest India. Having now passed the point reached by Alexander, Apollonius enters a rather vague world somewhere between the Hyphasis and the Ganges.[117] As we already observed, book 3 opens with a litany of natural and zoological wonder, many accrued from Ctesias' *Indika*, as well as other descriptions of women who are both black and white (being sacred to Aphrodite), monkeys who collect pepper from trees and the *drakontes* which are hunted by means of magical charms and axes in order to obtain the supernatural stones in their heads.[118] The wonders at the citadel of the Indian Sophoi serve important social or spiritual purposes. These include a fiery crater which offers a means by which Indians can purify themselves from accidental crimes and Jars of Winds and Jars of Rains used by the Sophoi to control the weather. Moreover, the Sophoi's practice of levitation serves ritual purposes in the worship of Helios.[119] These wonderous features

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[114] Romm (1992) 91–8 notes that typical Indographies and paradoxographies feature catalogues of wonders which often lack aetiological and teleological explanations. Such lists present aggregated claims often in a matter of a fact tone, a simple assertion of their existence which to leads the reader to 'swallow whole' that which would seem incredible if presented piecemeal. Even post-Alexander, such features continued to dominate literary accounts, with bodies of existing myths continuing to exist alongside new accounts that resulted from direct exploration.

[115] *VA* 2.4, 2.14.1–2.

[116] For such 'miscegenic freedom', see Romm (1992) 88–91; also, Arist. *Gen. an*. 746a29, 746b7–13; cf. Diod. Sic. 2.51.2–4.

[117] Eshleman (2017) 195 n. 67 argues that Abraham's (2014) inversion of centre and periphery is problematic, preferring instead Downie's (2016) emphasis on the continued centrality of the Greek world, but with India offering a corrective perspective.

[118] *VA* 3.3–8. On Philostratus' account of pepper collecting monkeys and parallels with Indian folklore (the *vānaras*), as well as later Portuguese descriptions of the Maler (hill–peoples), see De Romanis (2015) 144–50. No surviving fragment of Megasthenes indicates a direct description of pepper collecting monkeys, but the large size of these animals in India is commented upon (Frag. 13 S = Aelian *Hist. Anim*. 17.39).

[119] *VA* 3.14.1–3, 3.15.1. Sherwin–White and Kuhrt (1993) 97 suggested that these marvels would have been interpreted as threatening, serving as a justification for the Seleucid's failed conquest of the Mauryan Empire. *Contra* Parker (2008) 45–6 who notes that marvellous notions, in fact, often sit comfortably alongside idealistic, semi–utopian

which relate to physical and spiritual wellbeing are arguably paralleled in certain utopian accounts. Among these are Iamboulos' *Island of the Sun* and Euhemeros' *The Sacred Inscription*—in these we find references to purifying and therapeutic springs or rivers and animals whose blood has healing properties.[120]

In outlining the catalogue of wonders associated with the edges of *oikoumenē*, Philostratus alludes to various features that his contemporary readers would recognise from earlier Indographic literature. Furthermore, by adapting and inverting some of the geographic, historical and ethnographic claims seen in the Alexander tradition and Megasthenes' *Indika*, Philostratus is able to tie the land of the Sophoi into various utopian (Golden Age and discovery) themes. As such, Apollonius will discover a superior form of (Hellenic) wisdom which can them be used to rejuvenate the Greek world. It is because the citadel is at the edges of the *oikoumenē* in a land untouched by imperialism that Philostratus can find this untainted wisdom.[121] At a meta-level this could represent the ultimate inversion of the theme of Alexander spreading supposedly "Greek" customs and values to India and the East, notably exemplified in the writings of Plutarch.[122] It may have been deliberately unclear to what extent a contemporary was meant to find this humorous or take it as a laudation of Apollonius.[123]

*Parodying Doxography*

So far, it has been suggested that the profusion of geographic, ethnographic, zoological and paradoxographical material allowed Philostratus to demonstrate how well versed he was with Indographic literature. Moreover, it enabled him to invert expectations when it came to the representation of Alexander, Dionysus and Heracles, ultimately with the goal of presenting the land of the Sophoi (within India) as a utopia grounded in time and space. One that could ironically act as source of true Hellenism to be spread westwards (inverting the idea that Alexander supposedly spread it eastwards). Finally, it is argued in this section that Philostratus parodied the doxographic habits—the practice of naming and often critiquing earlier authors—of later Indographers.

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ideas about Indian society. Moreover, Guez (2009) 247–8 argues that 'wonderland' India offers a useful backdrop: 'a universe literally filled with wonders' which can, nevertheless, be regarded as less significant than the truer philosophical wonders interesting Apollonius.

[120] Diod. Sic. 2.57.3, 2.58.2–4; 5.44.3.

[121] Eshleman (2017) 195 suggests that the 'extraordinary landscape' Apollonius travels through serves to underscore his exceptionality and the 'universality of his message'.

[122] See Plut. *Mor*. Also Plut. *Alex*.

[123] On this point, it is interesting to note that a few generations later Sossianus Hierocles and Eusebius took the work quite seriously; the former choosing to present Apollonius as a superior competitor to Jesus Christ in his *Philalethes* (not surviving in its own right), the latter attacking the Apollonius, as presented by Philostratus, in his *Reply to Hierocles*.

As Guez has noted, the narrator in the *VA* frequently appears in the guise of a serious historian.[124] Similarly, various protagonists are presented as taking a critical, as well as sometimes credulous, stance to what is reported about India, including Apollonius, Damis and Iarchos. This is often in a way that is meant to supposedly reinforce its validity. However, these seemingly earnest efforts by the narrator and some of the characters in fact appear designed to be ridiculed.[125]

One can see this most explicitly with claims deriving from Nearchus and Orthagoras, writers associated with Alexander.[126] The validity of Nearchus' and Orthagoras' comments about the Acesines (modern Chenab) River—that it joins with the Indus and that it is inhabited by 70-cubit (107 feet) long snakes—are said to 'correspond to the facts', presumably as relayed by Damis.[127] Later in the *VA*, before setting out to sail down the Indus and return to Mesopotamia in the manner of Nearchus' historical voyage, both Nearchus and Orthagoras are cited again.[128] This time Damis' account is used more explicitly to validate Orthagoras' claim that the pole star is not visible at this point in the Red Sea: 'and Damis agrees so we ought to trust its credibility…'.[129] This is immediately followed by a sequence of claims about the bronze land of the Oreitae, the habits of the Fish-eaters and a fearful mermaid.[130] The juxtaposition of these claims is likely intended to underscore their absurdity. It also seems likely that Philostratus' intended readers are meant to scoff at the narrator's desire to report the claim that pearls are created from the petrified fat of

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[124] Guez (2009) 243–4. Whitmarsh (2012) 467 has noted that in rejecting 'fanciful stories' the narrator aligns himself with 'Thucydidean rationality'. Kemezis (2014b) 150–2 also notes similarities to political historians (citing Cassius Dio and Herodian as parallels) in terms of constructing narratives on a grand chronological and spatial scale.

[125] On the Herodotean appeal to autopsy in the *VA*, see Elsner (1997) 29. Also, Rommel (1923) 8–45; Bowie (2009b) 61.

[126] Strabo (2.1.9) is dismissive of several earlier Indographers, at one point referring to them all as liars. Nearchus is regarded as at least being able to stutter out some truth and is presented in a somewhat less negative light, whereas Deimachus is represented as the worst liar, followed by Megasthenes. However, in book 15 when Strabo (15.1.2) launches into his own account on India he moderates his contempt, encouraging the reader to treat these earlier accounts with indulgence. See Romm (1992) 96–9. Strabo's earlier 'obligatory scepticism' allows him the authority to selectively utilise these accounts at later points in his work: Gyselinck and Demoen (2009) 110.

[127] *VA* 2.17.1 – '…τοιαῦτα εἶναί φασιν, ὁποῖα εἴρηται…'. In this instance, the translation is from Jones (2005), rather than my own. Additionally, Jones (2005) 169 n.10 notes that the text has been emended from Πυθαγόρᾳ to Ὀρθαγόρᾳ.

[128] For a discussion of the historical details of Nearchus' voyage, as well as Alexander's crossing of the Gedrosian desert, see Bosworth (1996b) 166–85.

[129] *VA* 3.53: '…δοκεῖ καὶ Δάμιδι, καὶ χρὴ πιστεύειν ὑγιῶς…'. Knoles (1981) 49–53 argues that the testing of Damis' statements against external traditions offers a means of reinforcing his authority; *contra* Kemezis (2014a) 74.

[130] *VA* 3.54–6.

oysters, since 'even Apollonius did not consider this story childish' (ἐπεὶ μηδὲ Ἀπολλωνίῳ μειρακιώδης ἔδοξεν).[131]

The arbitrariness of accepting some claims about India while rejecting others is brought out quite cleverly at various points in book 3. It provides a kind of parody of the standard scepticism presented by later commentators.[132] This, as we have noted, is a prominent feature of the doxography of writers on India going back to at least the fourth century BC.[133] A good example of this is the last detailed conversation between Apollonius and Iarchos presented in the *VA*. Here the topic turns to the fabulous beasts, men and natural features of India. The narrator notes that this conversation should not be left out for 'one might benefit from neither believing nor disbelieving all the details.'[134] Apollonius asks if the stories about the martichoras, the liquid gold spring, the magnetic stone, the people who live under the ground, pygmies and shadow feet were true. Iarchos responds that for all the animals, plants or fountains which Apollonius has seen, he need say no more. It is now up to Apollonius to describe them to others. This statement would no doubt bring to mind the litany of wonders described at the beginning of book 3.[135] However, the martichora and the gold spring are denied, the magnate stone is confirmed, the pygmies live underground and dwell across the Ganges, and it is also at this point that Iarchos is made to denounce Scylax for propagating the stories about the Shadow-feet, Long-headed ones and other creatures since they live nowhere in the world and especially not in India.[136] This critique

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[131] *VA* 3.57.1–2. On the use of verb *plattein* in this wider passage of the *VA* and the possible implication of ambiguous functionality, see Gyselinck and Demoen (2009) 113–14. Of additional relevance here is Whitmarsh's (2012) 472–3 comment about the higher wisdom of the narrator whose intellectual authority is often shared with that of Apollonius.

[132] On the accepting or rejecting of stories and explanations as a means to gain authority and add credibility, see Gyselinck and Demoen (2009) 109.

[133] Megasthenes Frag. 20 = Strab. 15.1.6–7. Megasthenes urges the reader not to believe old stories about India, especially regarding its purported invasion by Semiramis. Similarly, Megasthenes rejects the Ctesian gold–guarding griffins, although he appears happy to elaborate upon the Herodotean gold–digging ants (Frag. 39 = Strab. 15.1.44). See T. S. Brown (1955) 29, 33.

[134] *VA* 3.45–49: '...καὶ γὰρ κέρδος ἂν εἴη μήτε πιστεύειν, μήτε ἀπιστεῖν πᾶσιν'. Gyselinck and Demoen (2009) 110 regard the statement on neither believing nor disbelieving all the details as a 'programmatic motto' for the entire *VA*. They also posit a distinction between the author and the narrator, the latter being ignorant of the former's literary trickiness (p. 114). Guez (2009) 246–50 suggests that this passage sums up the right attitude for the model reader, neither childish acceptance of everything nor the opposite extreme of disbelieving all details like a 'fanatically Thucydidean reader'.

[135] It is worth noting here Strabo's (2.1.9) critique of Deimachus, Megasthenes, Onesicritus and Nearchus (amongst others) for talking about Pygmies, Reverse-feet and other such creatures in India.

[136] *VA* 3.47. What is known of Scylax is limited. The most significant reference to him is made by Herodotus (*Hist.* 4.44.1–3), who reports that he was tasked by the Persian king

may of course seem all the more absurd when one notes that the Shadow-feet appear in book 6 of the *VA* as one of the tribes living in Ethiopia, along with other strange beings such as the Androphagoi (Man-eaters).[137] A more credulous reader might be willing to acknowledge that unicorns and *drakontes* with magical stones existed in India,[138] while also accepting the dismissal of creatures like the martichora and peoples like the Shadow-feet, but others will have seen the irony in such a spurious distinction.[139]

*Conclusion*

Philostratus clearly invested a lot of effort in his presentation of India in the *VA*. Various allusions are made to earlier Indographic and paradoxographical texts that an educated reader might discern. By adapting this material, Philostratus was also able to invert his readers' expectations when it came to the land of India and the presentation of Alexander and the mythic heroes Dionysus and Heracles. In doing so, Apollonius was able to enter the utopian land of the Sophoi—albeit a land that has now been grounded in space and in an alternative version of mythic history—to uncover an untainted form of (Hellenic) wisdom. This wisdom could then be spread back to the West in what would appear as an inversion, perhaps meant as parody, of some narratives about Alexander's spreading of supposedly "Greek" customs and practices to the East. It is likely also that the critical doxographic habits of later commentators are being parodied by Philostratus, as seen in the seemingly naïve attempt by the narrator, Apollonius, Damis and Iarchos to vouchsafe certain paradoxographical ideas, while critiquing others.

*Appendix 1: The Indographic Tradition*

To understand the influence of the Indographic tradition on Philostratus' *VA* it is first necessary to consider its development. It is possible to categorise Graeco-Roman knowledge and conceptions of India into four loose chronological or thematic groups. The first of these stretches from the late Archaic to the late Classical period and reflects a time of relatively limited knowledge about India that was heavily mediated by the Persian

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Darius with sailing down the Indus and exploring the coast until he reached the upper end of the Red Sea. Despite the practical nature of the task assigned to him what is reported of his work is often connected to freakish races of people (Ektrapeloi or Freaks, Makrokephaloi or Big-heads, Monophthalmoi or Single-eyes, Otoliknoi or Winnowing Fan-ears, and Skyapods or Shadow-feet (F7a and F7b)). Indeed, it has been suggested that Scylax was more known about than known, even in antiquity: Karttunen (1989) 68–9; Parker (2008) 16. This made him the perfect target for later writers to attack so as to display their critical judgement towards their sources and ability to present credible information.

[137] *VA* 6.25. On this, see Anderson (1986) 199; and Stoneman (2022) 109.

[138] *VA* 3.1–2.

[139] Gyselinck and Demoen (2009) 111–12.

Empire. The most significant figures for this period are Scylax, Hecataeus, Herodotus and Ctesias.[140] Scylax is the only one of them who is reported to have gone to India as part of a voyage from the Indus to the Suez on behalf of Darius the Great.[141] He wrote an account about his activities but all that survive are fragmentary allusions in later works, including the *VA* where he is criticised for his stories about monstrous creatures.[142] The most significant of these writers is Ctesias who was at the court of Artaxerxes II for purportedly seventeen years.[143] He never visited India himself but claims to have seen 'Indian things' and a good number of fragments have survived in later works and an epitome by Photius. The surviving fragments cover topics ranging from geography to human, animal and plant life. Many of the fantastical creatures described by Ctesias appear in the *VA*.[144] Philostratus does not directly name Ctesias in the *VA*, but there is little doubt that he is drawing upon his account numerous times.[145]

It is also clear that Philostratus drew upon several writers that belong to the Alexander tradition on India.[146] These were accounts ultimately derived from individuals connected to Alexander's campaigns in the northwest Indian subcontinent or who happened to write around this period. Philostratus directly mentions Nearchus, the admiral of Alexander's fleet, who sailed from the Indus to the Persian Gulf. He also mentions the poorly known, but likely contemporary, Orthagoras.[147] Another source that is clearly important but not directly cited, especially for book 6 (in which Apollonius is in Ethiopia), is Onesicritus' account of the Gymnosophoi.[148] It is unsurprising that Philostratus should borrow from this tradition, given

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[140] On these figures see Parker (2008) 14–33; also, Lefant (2004) CXLIII.

[141] Hdt. 4.44.1–3.

[142] *VA* 3.47. If Aristotle (*Pol.* 1332b21–27) is to be believed, then Scylax also claimed that the Indian ruler was all-powerful. On this see Parker (2008) 16. For the transmission and later reception of Scylax, see Karttunen (1997a); also, Stoneman (2022) 17–18. For a discussion of the histories and their (fragmentary) survival, see Baron (2013) 1–16.

[143] Diod. Sic. 2.32.4; Stronk (2010) 3–11; Llewellyn–Jones and Robson (2010) 11–18.

[144] Flammable liquid: *VA* 3.1.2; see Ctesias Frag. 45 §46 = Photius; wild asses with horns/unicorns: *VA* 3.2.1, see Ctesias Frag. 45 §45 = Phot. *Bibl.*; see also Megasthenes Frag. 15b = Ael. *NA* 16.20; gold digging griffins: *VA* 3.48, see Ctesias Frag. 45h = Ael. *NA* 4.27. On these, see Lefant (2004), 172–211; also, Nichols (2011); Stronk (2010).

[145] For a collation of parallels to other works appearing in the *VA*, specifically those linked to Apollonius travels in India, see Priaulx (1873); Rommel (1923). For quotations of earlier texts that are alluded to throughout the *VA*, see Bowie (2009b).

[146] Unfortunately, most works in this tradition do not survive in their own right, but we have many fragments due to their forming major sources of information for later (Roman Imperial era) writers: Baron (2013) 12.

[147] *VA* 2.17, 3.53.

[148] On Onesicritus and his meeting with the Gymnosophoi near Taxila, see Powers (1998) 70–85; Stoneman (2008) 93; Stoneman (2019) 290–300. Onesicritus was not the only contemporary of Alexander to write about the Gymnosophoi, others include Aristobulus and Nearchus (although the latter are more interested in living habits): Powers (1998) 73.

that much of book 2 alludes to parts of Alexander's itinerary in India. It is also unsurprising given that Alexander's campaigns in India would inform so much of later Indography, even for authors like Strabo and Pliny writing hundreds of years later.[149]

The third tradition on India is associated with Megasthenes, an ambassador sent to the Mauryan court by one of the Hellenistic dynasts. Megasthenes and other ambassadors appear to have operated largely around the late-fourth or early-third century BC. There is no doubt that Megasthenes was sent to Sandrocottus' court (that is the Indian king Chandragupta), but there is some ambiguity about who sent him. Most probably it was Seleucus I, although some have argued for the Satrap Sibyrtius.[150] Other known ambassadors include Deimachus who was sent to the court of Amitrochates (Bindusara), the son of Sandrocottus. There is also a figure called Dionysius, who was sent by Ptolemy II Philadelphus to India, presumably to the court of the Maurya since he is mentioned by Pliny in the same breath as Megasthenes.[151] All three of these ambassadors are reported as having written about India. Very little is known of Dionysius or Deimachus, though Strabo comments unfavourably on the latter's credibility.[152] Unfortunately, neither of these writers have many substantial fragments attributed to them.[153] By contrast, a great number of fragments of Megasthenes' *Indika* have been identified and many later writers drew upon his account (even if he was sometimes disparaged).[154]

Finally, the Indian Ocean tradition represents knowledge deriving from Imperial-era Mediterranean trading activity with India. This appears to have had some bearing on books 2 and 3 of the *VA*. To be sure, Philostratus favours information derived from literary sources written hundreds of years before his time over contemporary accounts from merchants, something not uncommon in Roman era Indography.[155] Nevertheless, the

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[149] On this see, Romm (1992) and Parker (2008).

[150] For an argument in favour of Megasthenes being the ambassador of Seleucus I, see Kosmin (2014) 38, 261–71; Stoneman (2022) 2–4; *contra* Bosworth (1996a) 113–27, who makes the case for Sibyrtius. For an overview of this issue, see Karttunen (1997b) 71–2.

[151] Plin. *HN* 6.21.58.

[152] Strab. 2.1.9.

[153] Karttunen (1997b) 69, 93–4.

[154] Stoneman (2022) 1, 5, 8–11 notes that, despite Strabo's dismissiveness, Megasthenes' authority 'held sway until late antiquity', with his work frequently acting as a major source in Roman-era Indographies.

[155] While there are instances in which new information derived from merchants is incorporated into accounts on India, most notably in parts of Pliny's *Natural History* and in Claudius Ptolemy's *Geography*, the literary accounts on India from the Classical and Hellenistic period predominate. Indeed, there tends to be a prejudice against the supposedly untrustworthy accounts of merchants (cf. Strab. 15.1.4). Moreover, at least as far as can be judged from the surviving material, very few literary works relating to Graeco-Roman participation in the Indian Ocean trade survive from antiquity, the notable exception being

existence of a seaborne trade between Egypt and India features a number of times.[156] In one discussion between Apollonius and Iarchos a mythological explanation is given for the building of substantial vessels by the Egyptians who conduct trade with India.[157] This is likely an allusion to the large vessels that were in fact operating from Berenike (on the Red Sea coast of Egypt) and sailing to southern India. A few of these vessels may have been around 500-600 metric tonnes, potentially two or three times the size of the average vessel operating in the Mediterranean.[158] In another instance, Apollonius is confronted by the rude and ignorant king (the father-in-law of Phraotes) whose initial hostility is said to be based on false reports given by the Egyptians who come to India for trade.[159]

It is fairly apparent that traditions one to three—the literary tradition stretching from the Classical to the Hellenistic (and continued into the Roman Imperial era)—are the most relevant for Philostratus' construction of India. However, the fourth tradition is not wholly absent from his work.

MATTHEW ADAM COBB
*University of Wales Trinity Saint David,* m.cobb@uwtsd.ac.uk

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the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* (mid-first century AD); more of a technical guide relating to the availability and demand for goods at specific ports and sailing schedules, with minor asides on politics and history. For a translation and commentary on this text, see Casson (1989). For an overview of the types of evidence available for the study of Roman involvement in the Indian Ocean trade, see Cobb (2018) 18–25.

[156] On Apollonius availing himself of the advantages trade networks offered, see Reger (2009) 253, 259. He also notes that reference to these networks would have added to the sense of believability for the reader.

[157] *VA* 3.35.1–2.

[158] Sidebotham (2011), 195–6; De Romanis (2015) 133–9. De Romanis (2020) 202 points to early modern parallels suggesting that at most eight or nine of such ships would have been operating during the first century AD and by Philostratus' time perhaps only one or two.

[159] *VA* 3.32.1–2. The ethno-cultural identities of those from the Mediterranean world operating in the Indian Ocean trade is far more complex than is presented by Philostratus. See for example, the "Berenike customs receipts": Bagnall, Helms, and Verhoogt (2000b). Additionally, the "Nicanor Achieve": Tait (1930); Kruse (2018). Nevertheless, since these "Mediterranean" merchants who traded with India operated from the Egyptian Red Sea ports, Philostratus' simplified description of them as "Egyptian" is not surprising.

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