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AGATHARCHIDES
OF CNIDUS
ON THE ERYTHRAEAN SEA

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BOOK 1

1. He (sc. Agatharchides) says that Ptolemy, the successor of the son of Lagus,¹ was the first to organize the hunting of elephants as well as other similar activities.² Animals which had been separated by Nature he³ brought together by design to live in one place⁴ . . .

2a.^a He says that the Erythraean Sea did not receive its name⁵ from the fact that the mountains on the western side of the Arabian Gulf shine like burning coals, when they are struck by the brilliant and fiery rays of the sun; and that the sand dunes, which extend for many stades along the coast on the eastern side, are bright red.

It is not at all true that it has been called 'Red' from this

¹ I.e., Ptolemy II, the son of Ptolemy I whose father was named Lagus.

² Ptolemy II's role in organizing the hunting of elephants was noted by his son and successor Ptolemy III in *OGIS* 54, lines 10-3. The literature on Ptolemaic elephant hunting is considerable. Important recent studies are Desanges, 'Les Chasseurs d'elephants', pp. 31-50; Walter Krebs, 'Die Kriegselefanten der Ptolemäer und Aithioper', *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Universität Rostock*, Gesellschafts- und sprachwissenschaftliche Reihe, XVII (1967), pp. 427-47; Fraser, I, 177-80; and Scullard, pp. 123-45. Fragment 80b suggests that Agatharchides singled out Ptolemy II's interest in the exotic rather than military considerations as the main factor motivating his activities in the Sudan and along the Red Sea; cf. Strabo 17.1.5, C789 for a similar interpretation.

³ Cf. below Fragment 80. The evidence for the collection of animals was collected by Harry M. Hubbell, 'Ptolemy's Zoo', *Classical Journal*, XXXI (1935), pp. 68-76. The description by Callixenus of Rhodes (*FGrH*, 627 F 2; cf. Rice, pp. 86-99) of the great procession in honour of Dionysus staged in Alexandria in the 270s B.C. by Ptolemy II indicates that a wide range of Asian, European and African animals including ostriches, a rhinoceros, giraffe and a variety of antelopes and wild cats were then to be found in his collection.

⁴ Omitted at this point is an objection by Photius that elephants were used in war by kings before Ptolemy II.

⁵ A brief summary of Agatharchides' discussion of the origin of the name of the Erythraean Sea is contained in Pliny, *HN* 6.107. Modern discussion of the problem is reviewed in Müller, *GGM*, I, 111 and Woelk, pp. 90-2.

^a 2b. He (sc. Artemidorus) says that some men say that the sea derived its name 'Erythra' from the colour it manifests as a result of reflection either from the sun when it is at its zenith or from the mountains which have taken on a red hue from the searing heat. For both explanations are plausible.

phenomenon. For even if the channel is narrow¹ because of the mountains and dunes, which overhang the whole gulf on either side, and if the reflection from them onto the strait does cause the sea to resemble the land, this illusion is visible to all, but the phenomenon is not understood by everyone. Still, this is not the reason, he says, that the sea obtained its appellation even if many of his predecessors believed this.

3. Such is the first, even if it is not the correct, theory of the cause. The second is similar. There, he says, when the sun rises, it does not, as in our region, cast bright rays onto the strait but rays that are like blood. The effect of these rays is to cause the sea to appear blood red to observers, and from that it has been named 'Red'.

4a.^b Third is the Argive theory, which is, he says, remarkable for its audacity but devoid of sense. For those historians who agree with Deinias² and avail themselves of the freedom of poetic licence assert that Perseus, after coming to Aithiopia from Argos - Aithiopia was then called Cephonia³ - to free the daughter of Cepheus, then travelled from there to Persia and gave the Persians their name through one of his descendants. He also engendered a son named Erythras, and from this person the name was given to the sea. Such is the Argive phantasy about the Erythraean Sea.

5a.^c The fourth and true account, however, is one which he learned

¹ In fact, the width of the Red Sea varies from c. 16 miles at the Straits of Bab al-Mandab to almost 230 miles at its widest point near Massawa on the Ethiopian coast (*Western Arabia and the Red Sea*, B.R. 527 London, 1946), p. 58.

² Translating the text as emended by Reinesius (cf. C. Müller, *GGM*, I, 112), 24) on the assumption that the historian in question is to be identified with the Deinias who wrote a history of Argos in the second half of the third century B.C. (cf. *FGrH*, 306 F 7; 3b, p. 31-2).

³ Named after Cepheus, the father of Andromeda who was saved from a sea monster by Perseus (Ps. Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 2.4.2). The location of this exploit on the coast of the Mediterranean at Joppa led some classical historians to claim that Cepheus ruled an empire extending from the Sudan to Syria prior to the Trojan War (cf. Pliny, *HN* 6.182).

^b 4b. Some people maintain that Erythras was the son of Perseus and ruled these areas.

^c 5b. Ctesias, the Cnidian, however, reports that its origin is the red and rust coloured water that empties into the sea, but Agatharchides, the compatriot of Ctesias, says that he learned from a certain Boxus, a Persian by nationality, that a certain Erythras, a Persian, after a herd of horses had been stampeded to the sea by a lioness that had been driven mad by a gadfly and from there had crossed to an island, built a raft and became the first person to cross over to the island. When he saw that the island was completely suitable for settlement, he brought the herd back to Persia. Then he sent colonists there and to the rest of the coast and caused the sea to be named after himself.

ANIMALS

68. Since we have recorded the principal facts concerning the tribes and their ways of life that seemed to be extraordinary, we shall describe in turn the animals that live in the lands we are discussing.

69. The lions in Arabia are less hairy and bolder. They are uniform in colour just as are those in Babylonia. The sheen of their mane is such that the hair on the back of their necks gleams like gold.¹

70a.^a As for the lions called 'ants', most are no different in appearance from the others, but they possess genital organs that face in the opposite direction from those of other lions.²

71a. The leopards are unlike those found in Caria and Lycia. Their bodies are large, and they are much better able to endure wounds and pain. In strength, moreover, they surpass the others by as much as a wild animal does a domesticated one.³

71b. The Carian and Lycian leopards are not bold, nor are they strong jumpers, but they do have long bodies. When wounded by spears and lances, however, they fight back and do not yield easily to the iron.

...

¹ The incomplete comparison of Arabian lions with something else (Aithiopian lions?) that begins this fragment indicates that it is incomplete, Photius having excerpted only what struck him as unusual. The basis for Agatharchides' views about the relative size of Arabian lions is unknown. The similar comment in Diodorus 2.50.2 is of no value as supporting evidence since it is ultimately derived from Agatharchides; cf. E. Schwarz, 'Diodoros', *RE*, V (1905) col. 672. The Babylonian lion was probably, as Woelk, p. 172, suggested, the Persian sub-species, *F. leo persicus*.

² Fragment 70b indicates that Agatharchides used the term 'ants' to refer to a type of lion. Later writers, however, influenced by the 'gold-guarding ants' of the Greek legendary geography of India assumed the reference was to similar creatures in Aithiopia (cf. Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 6.1; Heliiodorus, *Aithiopika* 10.2.6; cf. J. R. Morgan, 'History, Romance and Realism in the *Aithiopika* of Heliiodorus', *Classical Antiquity*, I [1982], p. 240).

³ Fragment 71a is incomplete as is made clear by Aelian's version in Fragment 71b. Caria and Lycia were well known sources of leopards (probably the Anatolian subspecies *Panthera pardus tulliana*) in the late Hellenistic period and early centuries A.D. (cf. George Jennison, *Animals for Show and Pleasure in Ancient Rome* [Manchester, 1937], pp. 24, 137-40).

^a 70b. The region abounds in elephants and in the lions called 'ants'. These have their genital organs facing rearward and are golden in colour, but they have a smoother coat than those in Arabia.

72a.^b The rhinoceros is not inferior¹ to the elephant, although it is not as tall. Its colour is similar to that of cheap boxwood² as is the texture of its skin. On the tip of its nostrils it bears an upturned horn³ that is nearly as strong as

72b. There is an animal which is called 'rhinoceros' because of a feature that is characteristic of it. In courage and strength it is similar to an elephant but shorter in height. It has an extremely tough skin and is the colour of box-wood. On the

¹ I.e. in length as is clear from Fragment 72c and Pliny *HN* 8.71.

² I.e. yellow (cf. Oppian, *Cynegetica* 2.551; for *Buxus sempervirens*, the common European box tree, see Maud Grieve, *A Modern Herbal*, [New York, 1959] I, 121). The colour of the three principal rhinoceros species – the White Rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum*), the Black Rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*) and the Great Indian Rhinoceros (*R. indicus unicornis*) – varies from light to dark grey, as is implied by Strabo's (16.4.15, C774) comparison of it with the colour of an elephant. Various explanations for Agatharchides' error have been proposed (cf. Woelk, pp. 175-6), the most plausible, being the suggestion of Sir William Gowers, 'The Classical Rhinoceros', *Antiquity*, XXIV (1950), p. 64, that his source was misled by the creamy colour of the coat of dried mud that often covers White Rhinoceroses because of their habit of frequent mud wallowing.

³ The statement that the rhinoceros has only one horn is puzzling. Rhinoceroses could be found as north as Meroe in the central Sudan as well as near the Red Sea coast in Eritrea in antiquity (central Sudan: Pliny, *HN* 6.185; cf. Ursula Hintze, 'The Graffiti from the Great Enclosure at Musawwarat es Sufra', *Meroitica*, V [1979], pp. 143, 146, for evidence of its presence in the Butana, Red Sea coast: *Periplus* 4). Specimens reached Egypt as early as the mid-270s B.C. when one appeared in a great procession staged by Ptolemy II in Alexandria (Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* 5.201C = Callixenus of Rhodes, *FGrH*, 3C1, 627 F2). Both African species, however, are two horned. The problem is compounded by the fact that Artemidorus, who copied Agatharchides' description, apparently claimed to have seen a rhinoceros in Alexandria (cf. Fragment 72c). An often suggested solution is that Agatharchides ignored the comparatively small rear horn of the White Rhinoceros, which is claimed sometimes to be little more than a bump (cf. e.g. Gowers, 'Rhinoceros', p. 64; J. M. C. Toynbee, *Animals in Roman Life and Art* [Ithaca, 1973], p. 125; and Desanges, *Recherches*, p. 204). This explanation, however, is unlikely for two reasons: (1) the smallness of the White Rhinoceros' rear horn is greatly exaggerated by its supporters (cf. D. Colls, C. Descamps, M. Faure & C. Guerin, 'The bronze black rhinoceros from Port Vendres III', *Antiquity*, LIX [1985], p. 109 and (2) Hellenistic representations of rhinoceroses clearly show the two horns (Praeneste Nile Mosaic: Steinmeyer-Schareika, p. 158, fig. 58; Marisa frescoes: Peters and Thiersch, pl. X). Alternatively, Agatharchides (and Artemidorus also, if he didn't copy the claim to have seen the animal in Fragment 72c from Agatharchides) may actually have seen a Great Indian Rhinoceros in Alexandria as was suggested by Jennison, 34-5; and

^b 72c. The region also supports fierce leopards and rhinoceroses. The rhinoceroses are a little smaller than elephants, not, as Artemidorus says, 'in length to the tail', although he says that he saw one in Alexandria. . . . He adds that it is characteristic of the beast to fight with elephants about pasture, sliding under and slashing open its belly with its horn unless it is prevented by the elephant's trunk and tusks.

iron. Whenever it encounters a rock, it uses it to sharpen¹ its horn by thrusting forward with its chest, but if it meets an elephant – for with this animal it contends always over pasturage – it slides under the elephant's stomach, rips open the encircling flesh, immediately causing it to haemorrhage. Many elephants are seen that have died in this manner. But should the rhinoceros fail to reach the elephant's stomach, however, then it in turn is rendered powerless and killed by repeated blows of the trunk and tusks since the discrepancy in their strength and power is great.²

73a.^c In the country of the Trogo-dytes there is also found the animal

tips of its nostrils it bears a horn that is turned up in shape and like iron in hardness. This animal, which always contends with elephants for pasturage, sharpens its horn on some rock; and when it joins battle with the beast just mentioned, it slips under its belly and uses its horn like a knife to rip open the flesh. Attacking in this way, it causes the beasts to haemorrhage and kills many of them. But when an elephant evades the thrust under its belly and grasps the rhinoceros with its trunk, it easily defeats the rhinoceros by striking it with its tusks and overwhelming it with its far greater strength.

E. H. Warmington, *The Commerce between the Roman Empire and India*, 2nd ed. (London, 1974), p. 151. Greek familiarity with this species dated from Alexander's invasion of India in the 320s B.C. (cf. Keller, *Die antike Tierwelt*, I, 384) and occasional specimens are attested in the west. Strabo 16.4.15, C775, clearly saw one, and one is depicted on the Great Hunt mosaic at the late Roman villa at Piazza Armerina in Sicily (cf. R. J. A. Wilson, *Piazza Armerina* [Austin, 1983], p. 96, fig. 58). Conceivably, one could have reached Ptolemaic Egypt as a diplomatic gift or through the animal trade, perhaps via Mesopotamia where Chinese explorers reported the existence of rhinoceroses in the first century A.D. (in Parthian hunting parks?; cf. F. Hirth, *China and the Roman Orient* [Shanghai, 1885], p. 38).

¹ Although the manuscripts of Photius' *Bibliotheca* read 'σπῆσαι', 'shatter', at this point, the evidence of Fragment 72b, Pliny, *HN* 8.71 and Aelian, *NA* 17.44 indicate that a word with the meaning 'sharpen' has to be restored.

² References to the supposed hostility of rhinoceroses and elephants are found in various authors as late as the fifth century A.D. (cf. Pliny, *HN* 8.71; Aelian, *NA* 17.44; Solinus 30.21; Oppian, *Cynegetica* 2.551–59; and Timotheus of Gaza, *On Animals* 45.1), but close similarities in phrasology and content make it clear that all were derived from this passage of Agatharchides.

^c 73b. In these areas also are found cameleopards which are in no way similar to leopards, for the spotted character of their skin is more like that of fawns, being marked with batches of splotches, and, finally, their hind legs are lower than their fore legs so that they seem to be squatting on their tail sections which are about the height

Greeks call 'cameleopard', an animal that, like its name, has in a certain sense a composite nature.¹ For it has the spotted coat of a leopard and is the size of a camel and very fast,² and its neck is so long that it obtains its food from the tops of trees.

74a.^d Sphinxes, dogheads and cepi are sent to Alexandria from the country of the Trogo-dytes and from Aithiopia.³ Sphinxes resemble the animals as depicted in pictures except that they are completely covered with hair and are tame and gentle in disposition. They are very mischievous and so receptive of systematic training that their gracefulness in everything causes amazement.⁴

74b. Sphinxes also live in Trogo-dytice and Aithiopia. In form they are not dissimilar to the animals as depicted in pictures, differing only in their hairiness. They are gentle in character, very mischievous and receptive to systematic training.

¹ The fuller description in Fragment 73b and the reference to the giraffe's speed – giraffes can run up to 30 miles per hour – in that fragment indicates that Agatharchides' source was familiar with the animal in its natural habitat. Although a giraffe was shown in Ptolemy II's procession (Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* 5.201C = Callixenus of Rhodes, *FGrH*, 627 F 2), it was not until the mid-first century B.C. that they became common sights in the Mediterranean (cf. Toynbee, pp. 141–2; the distorted drawing in the Marisa frescoes [Peters & Thiersch, pl. VIII] was clearly based on interpretation of its Greek name 'Cameleopard'). Graffiti at Musawwarat es Sufra (Hintze, pp. 149–50) suggest that giraffes were common in the Butana. According to Pliny, *HN* 8.69, the Aithiopians called it *Nabun*, but this is an error since the animal designated by this term on the Praeneste Nile Mosaic is not a giraffe but a large antelope, possibly an eland (cf. Steinmeyer-Schareika, pp. 67, 145 figs 30–1).

² Reading τάχος as suggested by J. R. Morgan, 'Two Giraffes Emended', *Classical Quarterly*, 38 (1988), p. 269.

³ I.e. from the Nile Valley and the African hinterland of the Red Sea.

⁴ The illustration on the Praeneste Nile Mosaic indicates that it was a long-tailed monkey of some sort (Steinmeyer-Schareika, pp. 62–3, 141 figs 17–8), but exact identification is not possible (cf. Otto Keller, *Tiere des klassischen Alterthums in culturgeschichtlicher Beziehung* [Innsbruck, 1887], pp. 13–4; McDermott, pp. 67–8). According to Pliny, *HN* 6.173, 184, it was found in the upper Nile valley and exported to Egypt by sea from Adulis (i.e. Massawa).

of a cow. Their fore legs, however, are not shorter than those of a camel. Its neck rises straight up and the top of its head is much higher than that of a camel. Because of this asymmetry, I (sc. Strabo) do not think that the speed of this animal is as great as Artemidorus said, who claimed that it is not to be surpassed. It is not, moreover, a wild beast but rather a domesticated animal for it shows no signs of wildness.

^d 74c. There are also, he says, sphinxes, dogheads and cebi which have the face of a lion, the body of a panther and the size of a gazelle.