

## Before the Somali Threat: Piracy in the Ancient Indian Ocean

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Piracy off the coast of Somalia has been a threat to international shipping since the second phase of the Somali Civil War in the early twenty-first century. In fact what we are witnessing today may appear as the latest manifestation of a phenomenon which already existed in antiquity. This paper aims to collect all surviving evidence relating to ancient piracy in the Indian Ocean and offer the best possible account. As the reader will soon appreciate there is almost no written evidence beyond the meagre quantity of Greek and Latin texts. Thus this paper deals mostly with the piracy encountered by Mediterranean seamen and merchants in the Hellenistic, Roman and early Byzantine periods.

### 1. The Greek and Roman presence in the Indian Ocean: a brief history

Very few Greeks sailed across the Erythraean Sea<sup>1</sup> before Alexander the Great's expedition in Asia. Herodotus alludes to the fact that around 520 BC Scylax of Caryanda (a Greek city in Asia Minor) was sent by the great king Darius I of Persia to follow the course of the Indus River and discover where it led.<sup>2</sup> Scylax descended the river as far as its mouth. He then sailed westward across the Indian Ocean, entered the Red Sea and finally reached the Gulf of Suez. The entire journey took thirty months. However remarkable this voyage was, it does not seem to have led to a regular sea trade from Egypt to north-west India. The name of Nearchus is widely renowned. He was one of the officers in the army of Alexander the Great. His celebrated voyage from what is now Pakistan to the north of the Persian Gulf after Alexander's expedition in India in 325 BC is preserved in Arrian's account of India entitled the *Indica*.<sup>3</sup> Again this extraordinary achievement was not followed by regular sea traffic between India and the north part of the Gulf which belonged to the Seleucids – a dynasty founded by Seleucos, one of Alexander's successors – from around 310 BC until the mid-second century BC.

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<sup>1</sup> The modern western Indian Ocean bore several names in the antiquity: 'Erythraean Sea' (Greek: *Erythra thalatta* ; latin : *mare Rubrum*) or Indian Sea (Greek : *Indikon pelagos* ; Latin : *Indicum mare*) are the most common. The modern Red Sea was generally called either 'Arabian Gulf' or 'Erythraean Sea'. The Arabo-Persian Gulf was called 'Persian Gulf' as well as 'Erythraean Sea'.

<sup>2</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, IV, 44: 'But as to Asia, most of it was discovered by Darius. There is a river, Indus, second of all rivers in the production of crocodiles. Darius, desiring to know where this Indus empties into the sea, sent ships manned by Scylax, a man of Caryanda, and others whose word he trusted; these set out from the city of *Caspatyrus* and the *Pactyic* country, and sailed down the river toward the east and the sunrise until they came to the sea; and voyaging over the sea west, they came in the thirtieth month to that place from which the Egyptian king sent the above-mentioned Phoenicians to sail around Libya (i.e., Africa). After this circumnavigation, Darius subjugated the Indians and made use of this sea. Thus it was discovered that Asia, except the parts toward the rising sun, was in other respects like Libya.' (trans. A. D. Godley).

<sup>3</sup> Arrian of Nicomedia (ca. AD 85 – ca.160) was a Greek historian and philosopher. He served as an equestrian officer in Noricum and was appointed to the Senate, either by Trajan or Hadrian. The *Anabasis of Alexander* is considered one of the best sources on the campaigns of Alexander the Great. His other works include *Discourses of Epictetus* and *Indica*, all written in Greek.

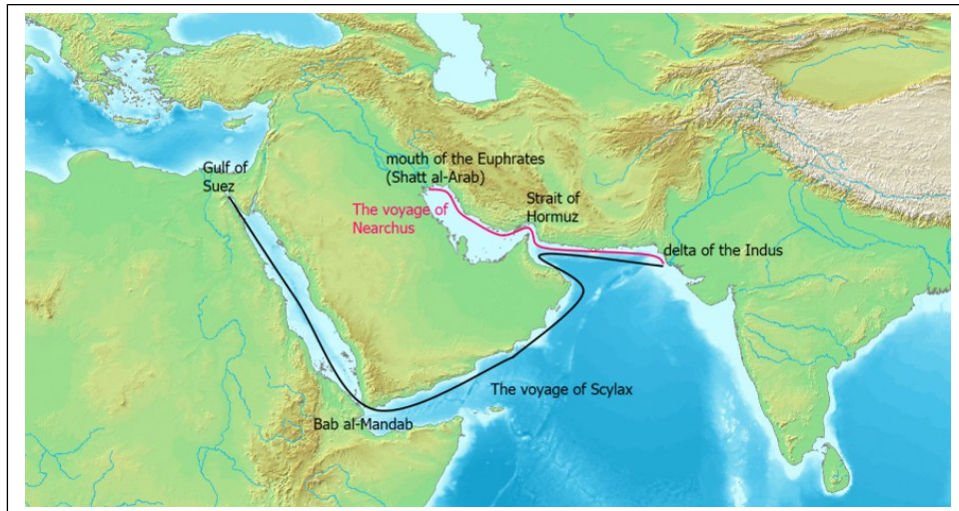


Figure 1. The voyages of Scylax and Nearchus. Note that the former's route is merely hypothetical .

In reality the Greek presence in the Indian Ocean really began with the reign of Ptolemy II (reigned 283–246 BC). At some point this powerful sovereign needed a great number of war elephants which he could not obtain from Indian kings, for his Seleucid enemy Antiochus would have opposed to such an attempt. To cope with this issue Ptolemy II decided to have African elephants captured and trained for warfare in Egypt, which was an extraordinary undertaking. He sponsored expeditions and founded hunting bases on the coast of Sudan and Eritrea to transport elephants by ship to Egyptian Red Sea ports. His son and successor Ptolemy III (reigned 246–222 BC) energetically continued his father's work. We know from reliable sources that his men went hunting elephants in the area of Bab al-Mandab and beyond, along the Somali coast. During the reign of Ptolemy V (reigned 204–180 BC), Kharimortos, a Ptolemaic officer whose name has miraculously survived in a papyrus, attained Cape Gardafui around 200 BC. Here was probably established the furthest hunting base.

Indeed from the late third century BC elephants played a decreasing part in Hellenistic battles, for they were not as efficient as they were in previous decades. The Ptolemaic explorations, however, had opened the way to sea trade. In the early second century BC merchants were probably heading to Eritrea, northern Somalia, and even Aden, in order to load aromatics (mostly frankincense and myrrh).

In the last third of the second century BC (probably in 118 BC), the Greeks were taught how to use the monsoon winds, as we are told by the geographer Strabo quoting the scientist Poseidonios (*ca.*135 – *ca.*51 BC). The latter reported on the voyages of Eudoxus of Cyzicus to India.<sup>4</sup> This Eudoxus, a Greek citizen serving the Ptolemies, learnt the direct route to India from a shipwrecked Indian sailor who ended in the Gulf of Suez after he lost his way (Strabo was sceptical about the truth of this story). During the second century BC and before Eudoxus' travels, Greek and Indian ships would meet and exchange goods at Aden (called *Eudaimôn* by the Greeks). Attempts to sail beyond Aden were undoubtedly rare. Unlike Indian or Arabian seamen, the Greeks needed the expertise of a local pilot to

<sup>4</sup> The Indians and southern Arabians had probably known these winds for a long time, but their discovery was ascribed by the Greeks to a navigator called Hippalus or Eudoxus, depending on the sources (*Brill's New Pauly*, s.v. 'Monsoon').

learn how to use the monsoon winds. Once they had succeeded in that, they were able to bypass the Arabian ports and establish direct commercial links with India. Whether or not the story of Eudoxus is true, by 70–50 BC there was a marked increase in the number of Greek ships sailing across the Red Sea and Indian Ocean to Indian ports, as we are informed by several inscriptions (below, p. 24) and Strabo as well.

Indeed shortly after Octavian's (the future Augustus) victory at Actium in 31 BC and the annexation of Egypt, many more merchants would sail to India:

The entrance of a Roman army into Arabia Felix under the command of my friend and companion Ælius Gallus,<sup>5</sup> and the traffic of the Alexandrian merchants whose vessels pass up the Nile and Arabian Gulf (= the Red Sea) to India, have rendered us much better acquainted with these countries than our predecessors were. I was with Gallus at the time he was prefect of Egypt, and accompanied him as far as *Syene* (= Aswan) and the frontiers of *Aithiopia* (= the kingdom of *Meroe*,<sup>6</sup> in Nubia), and I found that about one hundred and twenty ships sail from *Myos Hormos* (= Quseir al-Qadim<sup>7</sup>) to India, although, in the time of the Ptolemies, scarcely any one would venture on this voyage and the commerce with India.<sup>8</sup>

Strabo singles out only India, but ships plied also from Egypt to India, East Africa and South Arabia as well. They left from and returned to *Myos Hormos* and *Berenikê* (Bender el-Kebir / Medinet el-Haras<sup>9</sup>), the latter being a major port of trade which Strabo ignores there. Merchants heading for Africa left Egypt in July. After they crossed the strait of Bab al-Mandab, they reached Cape Gardafui. *Rhapta*, in the vicinity of Dar es Salaam, was their final stop. As for merchants involved in Indian trade, they also started their trips in July so that they could reach Bab al-Mandab in September, at the right time to be carried by southwest monsoon. They sailed either to the mouth of the Indus (*Barbarikon*<sup>10</sup>) and north-west India (*Barygaza*, i.e. Broach / Bharuch, on the Gulf of Cambay<sup>11</sup>) or to south-west India (*Mouziris*<sup>12</sup> – where a shrine of Augustus stood, as we can see in the *Tabula Peutingeria*<sup>13</sup> – and *Nelkynda* (Nirkunnam?<sup>14</sup>)).

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<sup>5</sup> In 25 BC.

<sup>6</sup> Viz. the Biblical kingdom of Kush (Pleiades location: <http://pleiades.stoa.org/places/805630>).

<sup>7</sup> Pleiades location: <http://pleiades.stoa.org/places/786069>.

<sup>8</sup> Strabo, *Geography*, II, 5, 12 (trans. H. C. Hamilton).

<sup>9</sup> Pleiades location: <http://pleiades.stoa.org/places/785986>.

<sup>10</sup> Undetermined location (<http://pleiades.stoa.org/places/59734>).

<sup>11</sup> Skt.: Bhṛgukaccha (<http://pleiades.stoa.org/places/59737>).

<sup>12</sup> The exact location of *Mouziris* is still not known to us: Cranganore / Kodungallur (18 miles north of Cochin) has been often suggested (<http://pleiades.stoa.org/places/50146>).

<sup>13</sup> The *Tabula Peutingeriana* (Peutinger Map) is an illustrated *itinerarium* showing the road network in the Roman Empire (<http://www.cambridge.org/us/talbert/talbertdatabase/prm.html>). The original model must have been created in the 4th century with the aid of sources that reach back to the 1st century (*Brill's New Pauly*, s.v. 'Tabula Peutingeriana'). It covers Europe, North Africa and parts of Asia. The map is named after Konrad Peutinger, a German 15th–16th-century humanist.

<sup>14</sup> Pleiades location: <http://pleiades.stoa.org/places/50165>.



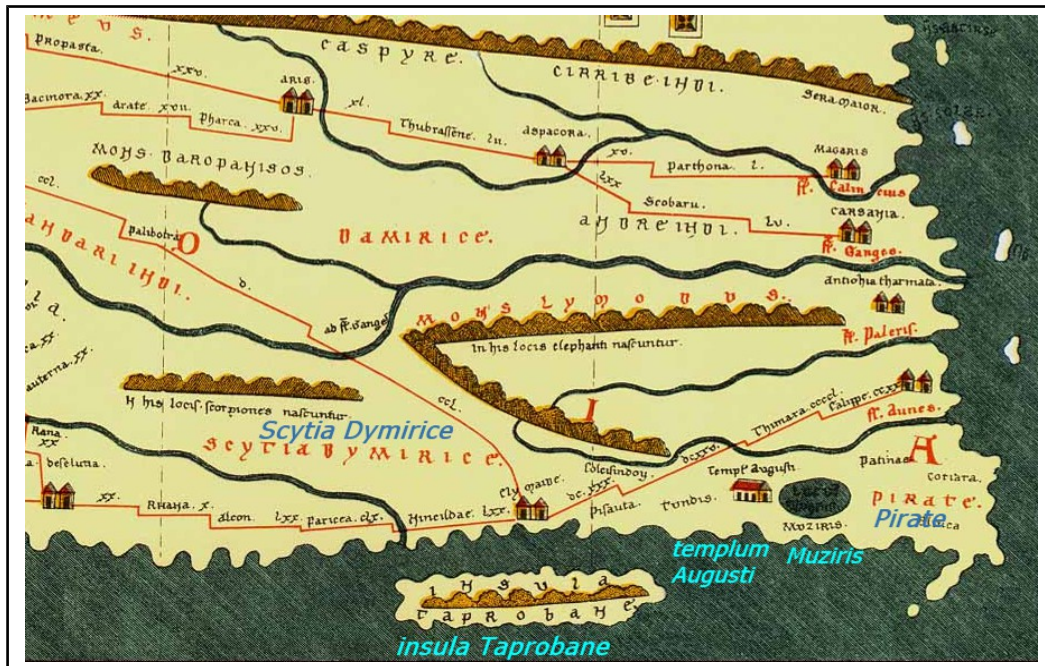


Figure 2. India in the facsimile of the *Tabula Peutingeriana* drawn by Konrad Miller in 1887.

Claudius' Principate (AD 41–54) probably witnessed closer relationship between Mediterranean people and Taprobane (Sri Lanka) as we hear from Pliny the Elder, even if Alexandrian sailors are likely to have reached this island before Annianus Plocamus' adventure.<sup>15</sup>

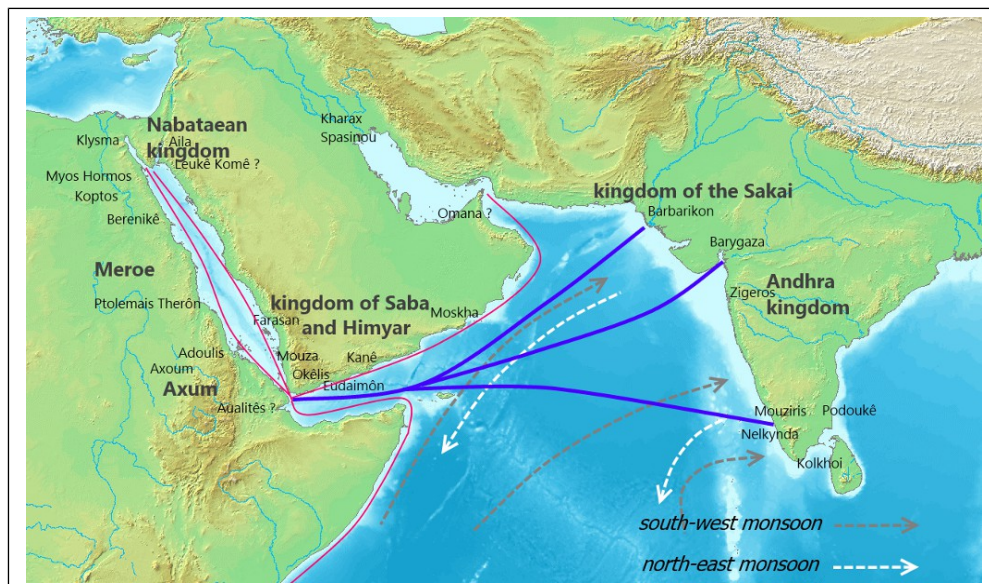


Figure 3. Indian Ocean commerce in the first century AD (the roads are displayed merely as an indication) .

<sup>15</sup> See Pliny the Elder, *Historia naturalis*, VI, 84–5: a freedman of Annianus Plocamus who farmed the customs of the Red Sea on behalf of Rome's treasury, while sailing along the coast of Arabia, was driven by northern monsoon winds, passed *Carmania* (Baluchistan) and finally landed at *Hippuros*, a port of *Taprobane*. The freedman was entertained with hospitality by the local monarch, where in six months time he acquired a thorough knowledge of their language. The king sent an embassy to learn more about the Romans.

Rome faced serious problems in the East in the third century. In AD 260 the Emperor Valerian was defeated and captured by the Sassanian king Shapur I. After he died in captivity in Bishapur (= Shapur<sup>16</sup>), the ruler of Palmyra, Odaenathus, campaigned as far as Ctesiphon (near modern-day Baghdad). When Odaenathus was assassinated, his wife Septimia Zenobia took power, ruling Palmyra on the behalf of her son. She then rebelled against Roman authority and took over Syria, Phoenicia and lands as far to the west as Egypt, establishing the short-lived Palmyrene Empire. In 272, the Roman Emperor Aurelian finally restored Roman control and Palmyra was sacked. In Egypt meanwhile a Nubian tribe called the *Blemmyes*<sup>17</sup> occupied Thebaid, in Upper Egypt (a region to which *Berenikê* was closely connected) until they were defeated in the late-third century.

Those events, and surely many others which are largely unknown to us, caused the Indian Ocean trade to change. In particular, the northern Red Sea ports, *Klysma* (Qolzoum / Suez) and *Aila* (Aqaba) became more important than *Berenikê*. The most notable fact was, however, the development of Axum and its port of *Adoulis* (= Zula, in today's Eritrea<sup>18</sup>), which was for this inland kingdom a window on the Indian Ocean world. Axum held supremacy in the southern Red Sea area in the third century, as it is proven by many inscriptions discovered in Yemen, in which the name *Habashat* (= the Abyssinian, or Axumites) appears. There is no doubt that Axum – which embraced Christianity in the mid fourth century BC – played an important role in the Indian Ocean commerce, along with the Arab, Persian, Indian and Mediterranean merchants. From then on the Indian Ocean trade had become a shared business.

## 2. Overview of ancient piracy in the Indian Ocean

### a) Piracy before the Greco-Roman penetration

As I explained earlier, the present article focuses on the piracy which targeted the ships importing goods from the Erythraean area to the Mediterranean world via ports such as *Berenikê*, *Myos Hormos*, *Aila* etc. Due to the dramatic lack of evidence, we have almost nothing to say about the piracy which existed prior to the Ptolemaic era and whose victims were non-Mediterranean merchants. There is little doubt however that some parts of the Indian Ocean had for long been infested by sea robbers targeting local traffic. Sadly this type of piracy appears to us only through a couple of vague allusions.

The most explicit document (the least obscure would be more accurate) was written by the historian Diodorus of Sicily. He reports how a certain merchant named Iamboulos, whose name may disclose a Nabataean origin, discovered a group of marvellous islands (the 'Islands of the Sun') in the Erythraean Sea (= Indian Ocean). The whole story was allegedly related by Iamboulos himself. Much has been said about this narrative in which reliable data seem to have been incorporated into a philosophical utopia. Be that as it may, let us examine the beginning of this amazing story:

There was a certain Iambulos who from his boyhood up had been devoted to the pursuit of education, and after the death of his father, who had been a merchant,

<sup>16</sup> Pleiades location: <http://pleiades.stoa.org/places/922740>.

<sup>17</sup> A link with today's Bedja – an ethnic group inhabiting Sudan as well as parts of Eritrea and Egypt – has been postulated (*Brill's new Pauly*, s.v. 'Blemmyes').

<sup>18</sup> Pleiades location: <http://pleiades.stoa.org/places/39271>.

he also gave himself to that calling; and while journeying inland to the spice-bearing region of Arabia he and his companions on the trip were taken captive by some robbers. Now at first he and one of his fellow-captives were appointed to be herdsmen, but later he and his companions were made captive by certain Ethiopians and led off to the coast of Ethiopia. They were kidnapped in order that, being of an alien people, they might effect the purification of the land.<sup>19</sup>

Assuming that this Ethiopian raid is not entirely fictitious but partly based on some historical reality, we are able to recognize a form of local piracy. There was a trading traffic between the two sides of the Bab el-Mandeb area which pre-existed the Greek penetration in the Red Sea, as we hear from solid evidence.<sup>20</sup> These Ethiopian robbers seem to have acted as pirates: they crossed the strait up to the opposite coast to plunder a particular place.

## **b) Pirates and Mediterranean merchants**

The written evidence allows us to distinguish three forms of piracy which Mediterranean ships happened to encounter.

### **i. Attacking ships at sea**

This form of piracy has probably become the most commonly known to the general public, since Somali pirates started threatening international shipping in the Gulf of Aden. Attacks on ships and hijacking have been made popular by various media: television, books, films.<sup>21</sup>

We are informed by the historian Diodorus of Sicily of such attacks committed, for example, by Nabataean pirates. Diodorus borrowed this piece of information from an author named Agatharchides of Cnidus, who composed a first-class treatise devoted to the Erythraean Sea. Agatharchides' *floruit* dates back to the second half of the second century BC: 'As for the chronology of his life, little more can be said than that if in his exile in old age is, as seems probable, to be dated to 145 BC, then he probably was born sometime before 200 BC.'<sup>22</sup>

In reality it is Agatharchides' sources that deserve our attention. He mainly referred to authorities going back to the mid- and late-third century BC (e.g., some Ptolemaic explorers). He also invoked the authority of 'eyewitnesses' whose identity remains problematic: 'Scholars have generally assumed that Agatharchides used the term 'eyewitness' to indicate information he obtained from contemporary merchants and travellers familiar with the countries surrounding the Red Sea.'<sup>23</sup> Although the Nabataean piracy reported by Diodorus' anonymous source cannot be precisely dated, it is likely to be related to the growth of the Alexandrian commerce in the Red Sea.<sup>24</sup> As I said above, we are

<sup>19</sup> Diodorus of Sicily, *The Library of History*, II, 55, 2–3, trans. S. M. Burstein (*On the Erythraean sea*, Agatharchides of Cnidus, translation and notes by Stanley M. Burstein, London, 1989).

<sup>20</sup> See P. Schneider, 'Fauces Rubri maris: the Greco-Roman Bab al-Mandab', *Orbis terrarum* [Stuttgart], 12, 2014 (forthcoming).

<sup>21</sup> For instance, 'Captain Phillips', starring Tom Hanks, released in 2013; 'Hijacking', directed by Tobias Lindholm, released the same year.

<sup>22</sup> Burstein, *Erythraean Sea* (n. 19), p. 17.

<sup>23</sup> Burstein, *Erythraean Sea* (n. 19), p. 17.

<sup>24</sup> A different view has been defended by Burstein, *Erythraean Sea* (n. 19), p. 151, n. 3, believing that Agatharchides refers to the beginning of the Ptolemaic activity in the Red Sea (i.e., the quest for African war

aware of a trading traffic which may have begun in the late third or early second century BC:

After one has sailed past this country the *Laianitês* Gulf (= the Gulf of Aqaba) comes next, about which are many inhabited villages of Arabs who are known as Nabataeans. This tribe occupies a large part of the coast and not a little of the country which stretches inland, and it has a people numerous beyond telling and flocks and herds in multitude beyond belief. In ancient times they led a just life and were satisfied with the livelihood provided by their flocks, but later, after the kings in Alexandria (i.e., the Ptolemies) had made the Gulf navigable for merchants, they attacked those who suffered shipwreck. They also built pirate vessels and plundered sailors, imitating the ferocity and lawlessness of the *Tauri*<sup>25</sup> in the Pontus (= the Black Sea).<sup>26</sup>

Similar information is offered by Strabo, who borrowed it from Artemidorus of Ephesus, a Greek geographer who flourished about 100 BC. Artemidorus, however, was a reader of Agatharchides treatise, which explains why we do not get any remarkable new detail other than the following: the small crafts used by the pirates (Greek: *skhêdia*: 'raft'; 'float') would attack the ships when they left the Egyptian ports. Unlike Diodorus, Strabo (or Artemidorus) ignores the fact that the Nabataeans also attacked castaways.

Then to the *Ailanitês* Gulf (= the Gulf of Aqaba), and to Nabataea, a country with a large population and well supplied with pasturage. They also dwell on islands situated off the coast nearby; and these Nabataeans formerly lived a peaceful life, but later, by means of rafts, went to plundering the vessels of peoples sailing from Egypt.<sup>27</sup>

The Mediterranean cargo ships could encounter a similar kind of piracy around the strait of Bab al-Mandab and off the western Indian coast (below, pp. 12–19).

## ii. Plundering shipwrecks

The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* is a most famous text describing the sea routes connecting *Berenikê* to a series of Arabian, East-African and Indian ports. The anonymous author also lists the main commodities offered to Alexandrian merchants in various places of trade. There has been much dispute about the text's date, but a mid-first-century date (around AD 70) is now the most commonly accepted. Although the *Periplus* is certainly a blend of personal experience and second-hand information, it provides invaluable insights into what the ancient Mediterranean knew about people and countries all around the Indian Ocean.

Having presented the 'African route' the author moves on to the 'Arabian line', viz. the passage from *Berenikê* to *Mouza* (al-Mukhā / Mokha<sup>28</sup>), where vessels heading for India

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elephants): the Nabataean piracy would have been contemporary with the reign of Ptolemy II (see Glenn Bowersock's different opinion below, p. 20).

<sup>25</sup> The *Tauroi* were a people settling on the southern coast of the Crimea peninsula, between the Crimean Mountains and the Black Sea (Pleiades location: <http://pleiades.stoa.org/places/226779>).

<sup>26</sup> Diodorus of Sicily, *The Library of History*, III, 43, 5 (trans. C. H. Oldfather).

<sup>27</sup> Strabo, *Geography*, XVI, 4, 18 (trans. H. L. Jones).

<sup>28</sup> Pleiades location: <http://pleiades.stoa.org/places/39390>.



would put in, *Okêlis* (maybe Khor Ghurayrah / Shaykh Sa'id on the Arabian side of the strait of Bab al-Mandab<sup>29</sup>) and *Eudaimôn* (Aden). Ships leaving Egyptian ports (*Myos Hormos* and / or *Berenikê*) first sailed eastward up to *Leukê Komê*: 'Such a course took a vessel past the mouth of the Gulf of Suez and Gulf of Aqaba to the coast in the vicinity of 'Aynūnah.'<sup>30</sup> From *Leukê Kômê* the route went down along the Arabian coast. At this point the anonymous author warns sailors against the many dangers in this part of the voyage:

In fact, to set a course along the coast of Arabia is altogether risky, since the region with its lack of harbours offers poor anchorages, is foul with rocky stretches, cannot be approached because of cliffs and is fearsome in every respect.<sup>31</sup>

The words of the *Periplus* have been corroborated by recent reports. L. Casson quotes Alan Villiers who, having sailed northward along the Arabian coast from *Mouza* / al Mukha, emphasizes 'the ubiquitous reefs, more dangerous here than reefs elsewhere.'<sup>32</sup> This is the obvious reason why the anonymous author advises sailors to use the central passage through the Red Sea up to the 'Burnt Island',<sup>33</sup> as it is free from danger:

This is why, when sailing down this sea, we set a course from Arabia down the middle and put on extra speed as far as *Katakekaumenê* ('Burnt') Island, immediately beyond which there is a succession of shores with peaceful inhabitants, animals at pasture, and camels.<sup>34</sup>

If, unfortunately, some ships were washed ashore, they may have the misfortune to meet the merciless *Kanraitai*, a tribe living south of the Nabataeans at some distance from the eastern Red Sea shore. Unlike the peaceful Fish Eaters living on the coast, the *Kanraitai* would plunder the ships and enslave the survivors:

Immediately after this harbour (viz. *Leukê Kômê*) begins the country of Arabia, extending lengthwise far down the Erythraean sea (= the Red Sea). It is inhabited by a variety of tribes speaking languages that differ, some to a certain extent, some totally. The coastal area is, similarly, marked by clusters of the mean huts of the *Ichthyophagoi* (= Fish Eaters), while the area inland has villages and pasturage inhabited by people, speaking two languages, who are vicious : they plunder any who stray from a course down the middle and fall among them, and they enslave any who are rescued by them from shipwreck (...). *Kanraitai* is their name.<sup>35</sup>

### iii. Attacks on vessels at anchorage

This form of piracy is similar to the previous one in the fact that raiders did not use crafts to

<sup>29</sup> Pleiades location: <http://pleiades.stoa.org/places/39279>.

<sup>30</sup> L. Casson, *The Periplus maris Erythraei*, text with introduction, translation and commentary, Princeton, 1989, p. 143. Note that the location of *Leukê Kômê* has been much debated (some scholars have preferred to locate it further south).

<sup>31</sup> *Periplus maris Erythraei*, 20 (trans. L. Casson).

<sup>32</sup> Casson, *Periplus* (n. 30), p. 147.

<sup>33</sup> It has been identified with the volcanic island of Jabal al Ta'ir (see Casson, *Periplus* (n. 30), p. 147). Pleiades location: <http://pleiades.stoa.org/places/39345>.

<sup>34</sup> *Periplus maris Erythraei*, 20 (trans. L. Casson).

<sup>35</sup> *Periplus maris Erythraei*, 20 (trans. L. Casson). This name does not occur elsewhere.



come closer to their victims: assaults were launched from inner or coastal areas. Such a case is reported by the author of the *Periplus*, which takes place on the African side of the Red Sea, at *Adoulis*. At a time when *Adoulis* was not yet under the full and direct control of Axum, some Mediterranean merchants happened to be attacked by ‘Barbarian’<sup>36</sup> plunderers:

It [i.e. Adulis] is on deep bay extending due south, in front of which lies an island called *Oreinê* (= Dissei), that is situated about 200 *stadia* from the innermost part of the bay toward the open sea and, on both sides, lies parallel to the coast ; here, at the present time arriving vessels moor because of raids from the mainland. Formerly they used to moor at the very outermost part of the bay, at the island, called *Didôros* Island,<sup>37</sup> right by this part of the coast; there is a ford crossing to it by which the *Barbaroi* dwelling roundabout used to overrun the island.<sup>38</sup>

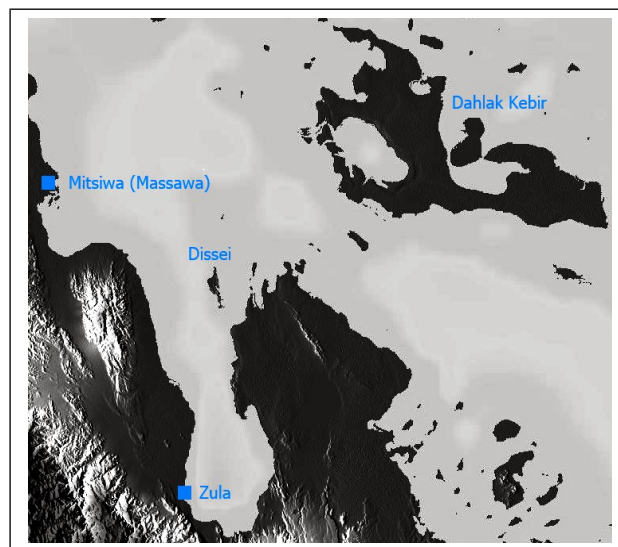


Figure 4. The area of Adulis (Zula). The distance as the crow flies between Mitsiwa and Zula is 60 kilometres.

### c) A serious threat?

Due to the complete lack of statistical data, damage caused by Indian Ocean piracy can by no means be estimated.<sup>39</sup> Similarly no sound conclusions can be drawn from the scarce allusions that have survived. Closely related to the author’s point of view, they are of very little worth from the historical perspective, as the following example clearly shows:

The Arabs wear turbans or else go with their hair unshorn; they shave their beards but wear a moustache – others however leave the beard also unshaven –. And strange to say, of these innumerable tribes an equal part are engaged in

<sup>36</sup> This name applies to the inhabitants of the *Barbarikê khôra* (= country of the *Barbaroi*), on the African side of the Red Sea; this area was also called *Trôgodytikê*.

<sup>37</sup> Undetermined location.

<sup>38</sup> *Periplus maris Erythraei*, 4 (trans. L. Casson).

<sup>39</sup> In contrast there have been some recent attempts to estimate the cost of Indian Ocean piracy in modern times. See, e.g., M. Pearson, “‘Tremendous Damage’ or ‘Mere Pinpricks’: The Costs of Piracy”, *Journal of Early Modern History*, 16, 2012, pp. 463–80. The author suggests that ‘the cost of piracy was a minor imposition as compared with many other charges and dangers, some of them predictable, others not.’

trade or live by brigandage.<sup>40</sup> Taken as a whole, they are the richest races in the world, because vast wealth from Rome and Parthia accumulates in their hands, as they sell the produce they obtain from the sea (= pearls) or their forests (= 'forests' of frankincense and myrrh trees) and buy nothing in return.<sup>41</sup>

We have other very general statements which emphasize the crossing of the Indian Ocean as a risky undertaking. I would like to give the reader two examples so that he could realize that we really lack material to assess the piratical threat.

[*The narrator is telling the story of a young man from Alexandria who disappeared for a while*] What had happened was this. The young man cruised up the Nile as far as *Klysmā*, and as a vessel was just putting to sea, was induced to join others in a voyage to India. Then because he was overdue, those ill-starred servants concluded that the young man either had lost his life during his cruise upon the Nile or had been made away with by brigands, who were numerous at the time.<sup>42</sup>

Those who navigate the Erythraean Sea (= the Indian Ocean, including the Red Sea) – where we must pray that the true Pharaoh may be drowned with his entire host – have to encounter many difficulties and dangers before they reach the city of *Auxuma*.<sup>43</sup> Nomad savages and ferocious wild beasts haunt the shores on either side. Thus travellers must be always armed and on the alert, and they must carry with them a whole year's provisions. Moreover, so full are the waters of hidden reefs and impassable shoals that a look-out has constantly to be kept from the masthead to direct the helmsman how to shape his course. They may count themselves fortunate if after six months they make the port of the above-mentioned city (= Adulis). At this point the ocean begins<sup>44</sup>, to cross which a whole year hardly suffices. Then India is reached and the river Ganges (called in Holy Scripture *Pison*) 'which compasses the whole land'<sup>45</sup> of Havilah'.<sup>46</sup>

Of course such excerpts are not accurate enough to be of great interest. For instance, claiming that sailing down the Red Sea from Egypt to Adulis takes six months is nonsense. Therefore Jerome is less than trustworthy when he points out the 'savage people' (pirates?) inhabiting each side of the Red Sea. There are more reliable testimonies but sadly they tend to contradict each other. While Pliny refers to the Arab pirates named *Ascitae* as if they infested the Bab al-Mandab area and were a serious threat (see below, pp. 13–15), Strabo states that 'one hundred and twenty vessels were sailing from *Myos Hormos*<sup>47</sup> to India,

<sup>40</sup> Note that this word may refer to robbery carried out on both land and sea.

<sup>41</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Historia naturalis*, VI, 162 (trans. H. Rackham).

<sup>42</sup> Lucian, *Alexander the false prophet*, 44 (trans. A. M. Harmon).

<sup>43</sup> I.e., Axum, the capital of a celebrated Ethiopian kingdom. Actually Jerome refers to Axum's port of trade, namely *Adoulis*.

<sup>44</sup> In the Greek and Roman representation of space, the strait begins in the area of Adulis, since the Red Sea shrinks beyond this place. For more details, see Schneider, '*Fauces Rubri maris*' (n. 20).

<sup>45</sup> Also spelled *Evilath*. See the description of the Garden of Eden in *Gen. 2, 11*: 'And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads. The name of the first is *Pishon*: that is it which compasses the whole land of *Havilah*, where there is gold; and the gold of that land is good: there is *bdellium* (a resin similar to myrrh) and the onyx stone.'

<sup>46</sup> Jerome, *Epistulae*, CXXV, 3 (letter to Rusticus, trans. Schaff).

<sup>47</sup> *Myos Hormos* was a port on the Egyptian Red Sea founded by the Ptolemies in the early third century BC. Following excavations carried out recently by D. Peacock and L. Blue, it has been located on the site of Qusayr al-Qadim, eight kilometres north of the modern town of Al-Qusayr in Egypt (Pleiades location:

whereas formerly, under the Ptolemies, only a very few ventured to undertake the voyage and to carry on traffic in Indian merchandise.<sup>48</sup> According to Strabo, Roman power had made the passage to India safe.

There is a point, however, which might be accepted as a sensible assumption, even if it does not rest on any kind of evidence: there is no doubt that the increasing number of Mediterranean vessels laden with money and goods which headed to India, Arabia and Africa must have incited more and more people to attack and rob merchants. As we have seen above, the Nabataean piracy appeared at the time when the Ptolemies opened the Red Sea routes to traders: this certainly did not happen coincidentally. The Roman military presence which is documented by an inscription found in the main Farasan Island (see below, p. 26) dates back to Antoninus Pius' reign, when the Indian Ocean commerce was flourishing. In other words, the maritime traffic led certainly to a recrudescence of piracy in the southern Red Sea which in turn had to be controlled by Rome as far as possible.

### 3) A geography of Indian Ocean piracy

The acts of violence against ships operating from northern Red Sea ports were concentrated in a limited number of places. In addition it is worth stressing that high sea piracy probably did not exist in the ancient Indian Ocean. As we will see below, pirates assaulting Mediterranean vessels at sea would use small crafts whose range certainly did not allow high sea activity. In addition, these pirates were to the best of our knowledge based in narrow areas (straits, gulfs) filled with islets and reefs, which places might have been favourable for attacks and withdrawals. Let us now list the piracy areas as reported by ancient documents.

#### a) The northern part of the Red Sea

##### i. The Gulf of Aqaba

For Nabataean piracy, see above, pp. 6–7.<sup>49</sup>

##### ii. Around *Berenikê*

We are told by Pliny the Elder how a kind of precious stone (*topazon*: maybe peridot<sup>50</sup>) was discovered by chance in the early third century BC:

*Topazos* is a stone that is still held in very high estimation for its green tints: indeed, when it was first discovered, it was preferred to every other kind of precious stone. It so happened that some Troglodytic pirates, suffering from tempest and hunger, having landed upon an island off the coast of Arabia<sup>51</sup>

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<http://pleiades.stoa.org/places/786069>).

<sup>48</sup> See above, n. 8.

<sup>49</sup> D. A. Agius, *Classic Ships of Islam. From Mesopotamia to the Indian Ocean*, Leiden-Boston, 2008, pp. 289–92.

<sup>50</sup> Casson, *Periplus* (n. 30), p. 94.

<sup>51</sup> In Greek geographical organization of space, the area lying between the right bank of the Nile and the Red Sea coast was a part of Arabia (hence the name Arabian Gulf given to the Red Sea).

known as *Cytis*<sup>52</sup> when digging there for roots and grass, discovered this precious stone.<sup>53</sup>

Sadly no other piece of evidence related to this piracy has been preserved. That Troglodytic pirates preyed on Mediterranean ships with their small crafts does not appear elsewhere. In addition our best sources never allude to the vicinity of *Berenikê* as an unsafe area. Either these pirates did not dare attack Greek ships, or they were eliminated by the Ptolemies, or it was a piracy of strictly local interest.

## **b) The Arabian coast of the Red Sea**

For the *Kanraitai*, see above, p. 8; for the *Kinaidokolpitai*, see below, n. 124.

## **c) Around Bab al-Mandab**

The area of Bab al-Mandab was possibly the most dangerous area to cross or to call in at.

### **i. Adulis**

As to how the merchants may have encountered native's attacks at Adulis until they moved to a safer mooring, see above, pp. 8–9.

### **ii. North-west Somalia**

Several Greek inscriptions discovered at El Kanais, in the shrine of Pan *euodos* (= favourable) express the gratitude of the dedicants for delivering them from the real dangers of the journey. Several people recorded here their safe return from the *Trogodytikê*. Most scholars assume that some were merchants on their way from the southern Red Sea (Eritrea, Northern Somalia) where they had loaded aromatics. Among several dedications the following one stands out: a stone which probably dates back to the second century BC and was found partly broken:

[I dedicate] this to Pan, helper in the hunt, propitious one, for bringing me safely from the land of the Trogodytes, where I suffered many hardships during two enterprises, from the holy Myrrh-land<sup>54</sup> and the *Koloboi*<sup>55</sup>. And you saved [us] as we wandered on the (Erythraean?) sea, by sending a fair wind to our ships when they were drifting around in the sea *etc.*<sup>56</sup>

We cannot ascertain that this anonymous dedicant was a merchant. He may have been an elephant hunter sent there by a Ptolemaic king (Ptolemy III or Ptolemy IV are the best candidates). Be that as it may, it seems that he and his fellow travellers feared the worse if they happened to be washed ashore in the country of the fierce *Koloboi*. This may explain why our dedicant thanked Pan for sending a life-saving wind.

<sup>52</sup> St John's Island / Jazirat Zabarjad Island, about 30 miles south-east of *Berenikê*.

<sup>53</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Historia naturalis*, XXXVII, 107.

<sup>54</sup> The north-west Somali coast, probably between Zeila and Berbera.

<sup>55</sup> A group of Trogodytes showing sexual mutilations as their Greek name explicitly means (*kolobos* : 'maimed' ; 'mutilated'). They lived around the Bab al-Mandab area (see Schneider, '*Fauces Rubri maris*' (n. 20)).

<sup>56</sup> F. W. Householder & D. W. Prakken, 'A Ptolemaic graffito in New York', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 76, 1945, pp. 111–16.



### iii. Around Zeila

The previous document may be corroborated by the following. The author of the *Periplus* mentions a place named *Aualitês*, which is probably to be identified with Zeila / Saylac (Somalia):

At this place is a small port of trade (...) where rafts and small craft put in. (...) Exports from this place (...) are : aromatics, a little ivory, tortoise shell, a minimal amount of myrrh but finer than any other.

To conclude he states as follows: ‘The *Barbaroi* who inhabit the place are rather unruly.’ Such a laconic observation – or euphemism, as one may call it – appears as a warning to merchants to be particularly careful when they stop at *Aualitês*.

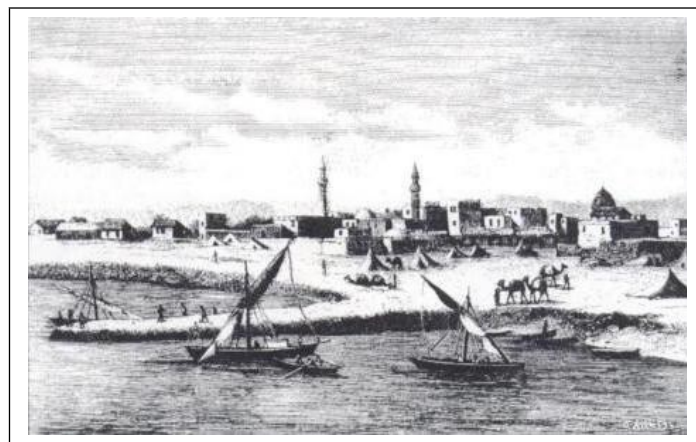


Figure 5. A 19th-century engraving of Zeila.

### iv. The *Ascitae*

We have in Pliny’s *Natural History* a topographical description of the African side of the Red Sea, in which the author quotes one of his most favourite sources, Juba of Mauretania:<sup>57</sup>

He puts forward the view that the distance from the promontory of the Indians<sup>58</sup> called in Greek *Leptê akra* (the Narrow Head), and by others *Drepanum* (= ‘the Sickel’)<sup>59</sup>, in a straight course past *Exusta <insula>* (‘Burnt Island’ = Jabal at Tair) to *Malichu insulae* (= ‘Malicha’s Islands’<sup>60</sup>) is 1500 miles (Roman miles: about 2220 km), from there to the place called *Scaenei*<sup>61</sup> 225 miles (about 335

<sup>57</sup> Juba II (about 50 BC – AD 23) was a king of Mauretania. He married Cleopatra Selene II, daughter of Cleopatra VII and Mark Antony. Juba wrote a number of books in Greek on history, natural history, geography (e.g. a monograph dealing with Arabia, entitled *Arabika*), grammar, etc. Only fragments of his work have survived. Pliny the Elder refers to him as an authority many times in the *Natural History*.

<sup>58</sup> From the first century AD onwards, the name ‘India’ (and the adjective ‘Indian’) was more and more applied to coastal peoples and countries of the Red Sea.

<sup>59</sup> *Lepte akra* has been rightly identified with the end of the Ras Banas which closes Foul Bay (Greek: *Akathartos kolpos*; Pleiades location: <http://pleiades.stoa.org/places/785968>), where the ancient port of *Berenikê* lay: the comparison carried by the toponym (‘sickle’) evokes the shape of the Ras Banas.

<sup>60</sup> Probably the Ḥanīsh Islands.

<sup>61</sup> No clear identification has been given for this toponym: according to J. Desanges, *Plinie l’Ancien, Histoire naturelle, Livre VI, 4<sup>e</sup> partie (l’Asie africaine sauf l’Égypte, les dimensions et les climats du monde habité)*, text with translation and commentary by J. Desanges, Paris, 2008), *Scaeneos* may be a corrupted form of the

km), and on from there to *Adanu Islands*<sup>62</sup> 150 miles (about 222 km) – making 1875 miles (about 2780 km) to the open sea.<sup>63</sup>



Figure 6. Aden in the first volume of *Civitates orbis terrarum*, a great city atlas, edited by Georg Braun and largely engraved by Franz Hogenberg, Cologne, 1572.

This list of places is followed by a short remark about anonymous sources that ‘have held the view that the heat of the sun makes the voyage impossible’. Whoever these authorities were, their opinion had become worthless and obsolete at a time when numerous vessels took the sea route to India. Thus Pliny moves on to a more actual and concrete problem, namely the pirates who threatened Mediterranean ships:

Moreover, actual goods conveyed for trade are exposed to the depredations of an Arabian tribe living on the islands, who are called the *Ascitae*, because they make rafts of timber placed on a pair of inflated oxhides and practice piracy, using poisoned arrows.<sup>64</sup>

The name of those pirates (*Askitai* in Greek) stems from the Greek word *askos*: ‘skin made into a bag’, for they used rafts made up of leather floats. Other ancient sources allude to such crafts in the same area without referring to piracy.<sup>65</sup> The point is that we are unable to identify the islands from which the *Ascitae* attacked the cargo ships: that they are to be located in the vicinity of Bab al-Mandab – including Aden, since the peninsula could have been considered as islands<sup>66</sup> – is the only certain statement. To make things even less clear the name *Askitai* did not refer to a specific tribe: it would apply to all peoples using this type of boat in this area. That is why some authors located peoples bearing the same name far east of Bab al-Mandab. Ptolemy is aware of *Askitai* living around the Cape *Syagros*, viz. the Ras al Fartak (Yemen):<sup>67</sup> ‘Near the *Syagron* Mountain (= Cape *Syagron*) as far as the sea are the *Askitai*.’<sup>68</sup>

We hear again of the *Askitai* from Marcianus Heracleensis, a geographer of late

Greek name *Okêlis* (Juba wrote in Greek), a place located on the east side of Bab al-Mandab (Desanges 95).

<sup>62</sup> These so-called islands are in reality the two peninsulas forming the harbour of Aden and Little Aden.

<sup>63</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, VI, 175 (trans. H. Rackham, slightly modified).

<sup>64</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, VI, 176 (Solinus, *Collection of Curiosities*, LVI, 8–9, repeats more or less Pliny).

<sup>65</sup> *Periplus maris Erythraei*, 33; Ptolemy, *Geography*, VI, 7, 46; Strabo, *Geography*, XVI, 4, 19 (see also J. Desanges, *Histoire naturelle* (n. 61), p. 100).

<sup>66</sup> See Ptolemy, *Geography*, VI, 7, 43.

<sup>67</sup> Pleiades location: <http://pleiades.stoa.org/places/39428>.

<sup>68</sup> Ptolemy, *Geography*, VI, 7, 26.

antiquity (when he exactly flourished is unknown to us) quoted by Stephanus of Byzantium, a Byzantine grammarian.<sup>69</sup> Two peoples bearing this name are reported, one of which lived next to the *Sakhalitai* (the Gulf of the *Sakhalitai* begins, or terminates.<sup>70</sup> at the Cape *Syagros* / Ras Fartak).

*Askitai* : a tribe living along the Indian Gulf<sup>71</sup> and using inflated hides to travel on sea, as reports Marcianus in his *Periplus*: '[this] tribe occupies it (*sc.* the Indian Gulf), and the tribe named *Sakhalitai* as well. There is another tribe of *Askitai*.<sup>72</sup>

Marcianus is very likely to point to the same tribe as Ptolemy. As for the second group of *Askitai*, we cannot ascertain where they lived. Maybe they are identical with the ones reported by Pliny. Be that as it may, all this evidence draws us to the conclusion that tribes using leather crafts were scattered from the southern part of the Red Sea up to Oman, some of which did not hesitate to attack cargo ships.

Piracy in this area may have lasted for a long time, as an interesting piece of evidence going back to the time of Justinian I tends to show. According to the famous Byzantine historian Procopius of Caesarea:

These *Homeritai* (= the Himyarites<sup>73</sup>) dwell in the land on the farther side of them on the shore of the sea. And beyond them many other nations are said to be settled as far as the man-eating Saracens. Beyond these are the nations of India. But regarding these matters let each one speak as he may wish.<sup>74</sup>

In the sixth century AD the name 'Arabs' had been almost replaced by 'Saracens'. These 'man-eating Saracens' are very likely to be certain fierce and merciless Arabian pirates, maybe a tribe of *Askitai*.

## v. Aden

Finally I cannot avoid quoting a much debated passage of the *Periplus*, which reads as follows:

*Eudaimôn Arabia* (= Prosperous Arabia<sup>75</sup>), a full-fledged city in earlier days, was called *Eudaimôn* when, since vessels from India did not go on to Egypt and those from Egypt did not go on to Egypt and those from Egypt did not dare sail to the places further on but came only this far, it used to receive the cargoes of

<sup>69</sup> Stephanus Byzantinus (*fl.* 6th century AD) was the author of an important dictionary entitled *Ethnica*.

<sup>70</sup> Ancient authors disagree on that subject.

<sup>71</sup> This unusual geographical name applies to the south Arabian coast.

<sup>72</sup> Stephanus Byzantinus, *Ethnica*, s.v. *Askitai*.

<sup>73</sup> 'Arab tribe, attested epigraphically from about AD 100. Himyar held the political hegemony in southern Arabia between AD 100 and 590. The centre of their kingdom was *Saphar* on the plateau south of modern Yarīm. From there the Himyarites gradually conquered the ancient Southern Arabic kingdoms of Qatabān, Saba and Hadramaut. In the mid-fourth century, Judaism and Christianity began to spread while simultaneously the attempts of the Sassanid and Byzantine empires to influence the kingdom increased (...). Repeated ruptures of the dam of Mārib ( *Mariaba*) attest to a general decline starting in the 6th cent. In 597 South Arabia became a province of the Sassanid empire (*Brill's New Pauly*, s.v. 'Himyar').

<sup>74</sup> Procopius of Caesarea, *The wars of Justinian*, I, 19, 15–16.

<sup>75</sup> Viz. Aden.

both, just as Alexandria receives cargoes from overseas as well as from Egypt. And now, not long before our time, Caesar sacked it.<sup>76</sup>

This puzzling passage has bred an abundant literature. In particular some scholars think that the Arabs in Aden forced the Mediterranean vessels to call in at their port so that they could levy taxes. To some extent using force this way is similar to piracy. However a mysterious Caesar (maybe Gaius Caesar, Augustus' grandson) attacked Aden and put an end to the prominent position of Aden in the Bab al-Mandab area.<sup>77</sup>

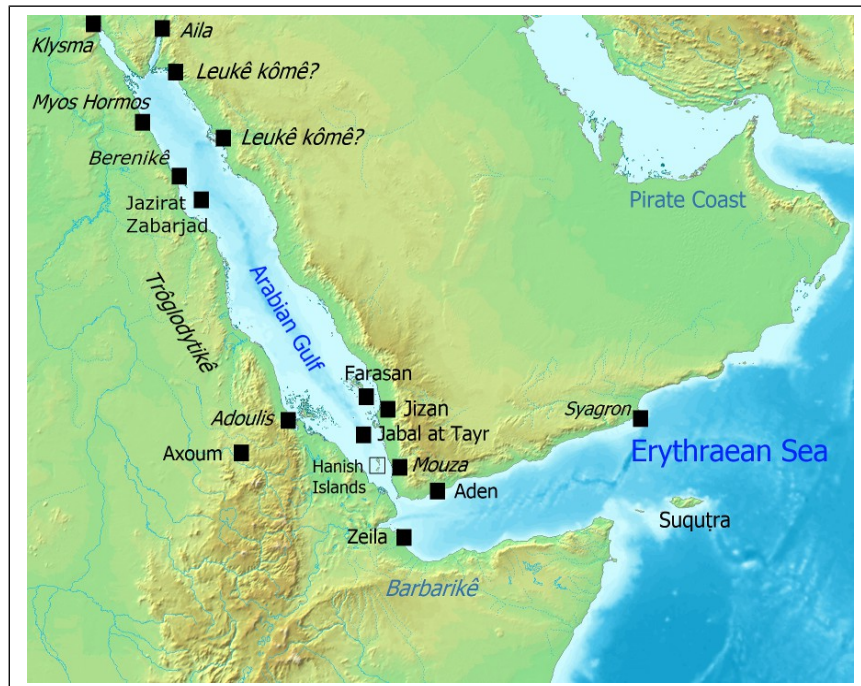


Figure 7. Piracy in the Red Sea.

#### d) South India

Let us again turn our attention to the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*. At some point the author gives a list of ports of trade which is closed with the most important one, *Mouziris*.

Beyond *Kalliena* other local ports of trade are: *Sêmylla*, *Mandagora*, *Palaipatmai*, *Melizeigara*, *Byzantion*, *Toparon*, *Tyrannosboas*. Then come the *Sêsekreienai* Islands, as they are called, the Isle of the *Aigiadoi*, the Isle of the *Kaineittoi* near what is called *Khersonêsos* (the Peninsula), around which places there are pirates, and next *Leukê Nêsos* (= White Island). Then come *Naura* and *Tyndis*, the first ports of trade of *Limyrikê*, and, after these, *Mouziris* and *Nelkynda*, which are now the active ones.<sup>78</sup>

*Limyrikê* is the author's name for what corresponds to the Malabar Coast, which begins at *Naura* and probably stops near Cape Comorin.<sup>79</sup> The area north to the *Limyrikê* was

<sup>76</sup> *Periplus maris Erythraei*, 26 (trans. L. Casson).

<sup>77</sup> See M. Mollat et J. Desanges, *Les routes millénaires*, Paris, 1988, p. 106.

<sup>78</sup> *Periplus maris Erythraei*, 53 (trans. L. Casson).

<sup>79</sup> See Casson, *Periplus* (n. 30), pp. 213–14.



called *Dakhinabadês* (the Greek form of the Sanskrit *dakṣiṇāpatha*, a word related to Skt *dakṣiṇa*, ‘the South’<sup>80</sup>). L. Casson has offered a most plausible list of suggestions (listed in the right column) for the location of these various ports:<sup>81</sup>

<b><i>Dakhinabadês</i></b>	
<b>Ancient toponyms</b>	<b>Probable location</b>
<i>Sēmylla</i>	Chaul
<i>Mandagora</i>	Bānkot
<i>Palaipatmai</i>	Dābhol
<i>Melizeigara</i>	Jaigarh
<i>Byzantion</i>	Vi jayadurg
<i>Toparon</i>	?
<i>Tyrannosboas</i>	?
<i>Sēsekreienai</i> Islands	Vengurla Rocks
Isle of the <i>Agiadoi</i>	Goa
the Isle of the <i>Kaineitai</i>	Oyster Rocks
<i>Khersonêsos</i>	Kārwar
<i>Leukê Nêsos</i>	Pigeon Island
<b><i>Limyrikê</i></b>	
<b>Ancient toponyms</b>	<b>Probable location</b>
<i>Naura</i>	Mangalore
<i>Tyndis</i>	Ponnāni
<i>Mouziris</i>	Kodungalūr (Cranganore)
<i>Nelkynda</i>	Niranom



Figure 8. The Indian west coast. Modern names appear in red.

Interestingly we hear again of pirates based in islands, even if we are not precisely informed

<sup>80</sup> = Deccan (Casson, *Periplus* (n. 30), p. 210).

<sup>81</sup> Casson, *Periplus* (n. 30), p. 297.

about who their victims were. Similar facts are reported by Pliny the Elder, who makes clear that Mediterranean traffic to south India was under the threat of pirates operating as far south as *Mouziris*:

But the most advantageous way of sailing to India is to set out from *Ocelis*; from that port it is a 40 days' voyage, if the *Hippalus*<sup>82</sup> is blowing, to the first trading-station in India, *Muziris* (Latin spelling) – not a desirable port of call, on account of the neighbouring pirates, who occupy a place called *Nitriae*, nor is it specially rich in articles of merchandise – ; and furthermore the roadstead for shipping is a long way from the land, and cargoes have to be brought in and carried out in boats.<sup>83</sup>

Sadly the location of *Nitriae* is destined to remain unknown to us, for Ptolemy does not provide reliable information. He confirms, however, that pirates infested this coastal part of south India, when giving the following list of places:

In the country of the *Peiratae* (= pirates): *Mandagara* (113° / 14°30'); *Byzantion* (112°20' / 14°); *Khersonêsos* (114°20' / 14°50'); mouth of the river *Nanagounas* (114°30' / 15°20'); *Armagara* (115° / 14°20'); *Nitraiai emporion* (115°10' / 14°20').<sup>84</sup>

According to Ptolemy the power of those *Peiratae* must have been far from weak, since they controlled an inland area and two cities: *Olokhoira* and *Mousopattis*, the latter of which is described as a *metropolis* (capital city<sup>85</sup>). The *Tabula Peutingeriana* (picture 2) shows the people of *Pirate*. Although, strangely, they appear east of *Muziris*, this document tends to prove how famous, if not important, Indian piracy was.

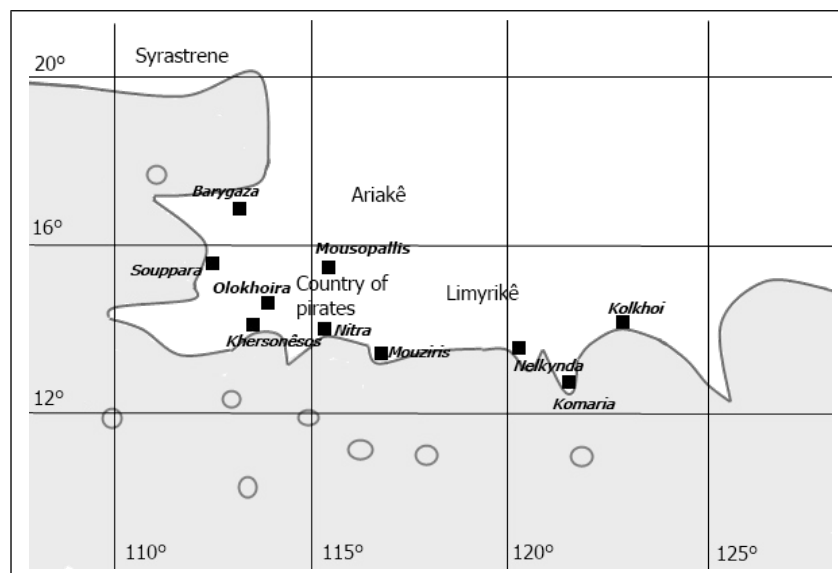


Figure 9. The west coast of India according to Ptolemy.

Ptolemy is also aware of a people living in India beyond the Ganges, which he calls

<sup>82</sup> I.e., the south-west monsoon wind.

<sup>83</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, VI, 104. Solinus, *Collection of Curiosities*, LIV, 8, reports pirates in the vicinity of *Zmirim* (this spelling is a corrupted form of *Muziris*).

<sup>84</sup> Ptolemy, *Geography*, VII, 1, 7.

<sup>85</sup> Ptolemy, *Geography*, VII, 1, 84.

*Leistai*, a word meaning ‘robber’ or ‘pirates’.<sup>86</sup> Supposing that they really were pirates, and considering the low number of Mediterranean merchants heading to far Eastern Asia,<sup>87</sup> the *Leistai* could not have been a serious threat.

### e) The Persian Gulf

The south-western part of the Persian Gulf was known to the British as the ‘Pirate Coast’, as raiders based there harassed the shipping industry from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth century. British expeditions to protect the Indian trade from raiders at Ras al-Khaimah led to campaigns against that headquarters. Finally in 1853 the sheikhs of the coast signed a treaty with Great Britain, under which they agreed to a ‘perpetual maritime truce’.

To the best of my knowledge there is no mention of piracy either in the Gulf of Oman nor in the Persian Gulf in antiquity. Several scholars have suggested that this body of sea was closed to Roman shipping, an idea mainly supported by the fact that in Roman times the knowledge of this area is far from satisfactory: for instance the description of the trade activity provided by the *Periplus* is surprisingly poor, in contrast with the east African or Indian sections. Although the latter statement is almost unanimously accepted, the former is much debated.<sup>88</sup> It is however likely that few Mediterranean ships entered the Gulf. As a consequence, few Mediterranean seamen may have been exposed to local piracy, if it existed at all.

## 4. Pirates and rulers: from connivance to war

### a) Power and piracy

The close relations that existed between states and pirates in the ancient Mediterranean world are well attested by many documents. For instance, the reader will find in Ph. De Souza’s monograph excellent insights into this question (see, for instance, the sections devoted to Etolian or Cilician piracy).<sup>89</sup> This sort of connivance for mutual benefit between local rulers and pirates may have existed in the Indian Ocean but our knowledge is limited to a few texts whose historical significance cannot be grasped firmly. In other words there are more assumptions than facts.

To begin with, it has been claimed that the Nabataean piracy was encouraged by Arab rulers. For instance, Glenn W. Bowersock thinks that sea robbery resulted from the competition between the Ptolemaic and Nabataean powers:

The emergence of Nabataean piracy was probably due to concern over the new seaborne commerce that the Egyptians<sup>90</sup> were developing as a result of the discovery of the monsoons. Ships laden with perfume and spices could proceed directly to the ports of Egypt in the appropriate seasons, and from there the

<sup>86</sup> Ptolemy, *Geography*, 7, 2, 6 ; 7, 2, 21.

<sup>87</sup> See for example G. K. Young, *Rome's Eastern Trade. International Commerce and Imperial policy. 31 BC-AD 305*, London-New York, 2001, pp. 32–4.

<sup>88</sup> It poses the problem of the ‘Arab’ (i.e., of Palmyra and Characene (a territory at the confluence of the Euphrates and the Tigris and on the northern margin of the Persian Gulf)) control of the Gulf (see Young, *Rome's Eastern Trade* (n. 87), pp. 142–3).

<sup>89</sup> Ph. de Souza, *Piracy in the Graeco-Roman World*, Cambridge, 1999.

<sup>90</sup> I.e., the Ptolemies.

goods could be conveyed to the Mediterranean. The Nabataeans must have soon realized that the new traffic by sea would mean a gradual decline in the overland commerce which had been the basis of their prosperity and their sedentarization. Any fears they may have had were well grounded, for by the mid-first century AD the overland traffic through Petra had largely dried up. The piracy of the Nabataeans should be viewed therefore in the context of the growing commerce between the spice and perfume centres of the East and the Egyptian ports on the west coast of the Red Sea.<sup>91</sup>

The events that followed the defeat of Actium (31 BC), as reported by Plutarchus, may to some extent corroborate the existence of a relationship between pirates and rulers:

When the general to whom his forces in Libya (= Africa) had been entrusted brought about their defection, Antony tried to kill himself, but was prevented by his friends and brought to Alexandria. Here he found Cleopatra venturing upon a hazardous and great undertaking. The isthmus, namely, which separates the Erythraean Sea (= the Red Sea) from the Mediterranean Sea off Egypt and is considered to be the boundary between Asia and Libya, in the part where it is most constricted by the two seas and has the least width (= the isthmus of Suez), measures three hundred furlongs. Here Cleopatra undertook to raise her fleet out of water and drag the ships across, and after launching them in the Arabian Gulf with much money and a large force, to settle in parts outside of Egypt, thus escaping war and servitude. But since the Arabians about Petra burned the first ships that were drawn up, and Antony still thought that his land forces at Actium were holding together, she desisted, and guarded the approaches to the country.<sup>92</sup>

As a matter of fact, G. W. Bowersock states that Cleopatra's undertaking was annihilated by a Nabataean king:

As another partisan of Antony, Malichus (the Nabataean King<sup>93</sup>) himself had reason to be concerned about the outcome at Actium. He succeeded, however, in securing the good will of Octavian by a master stroke. He sent force to burn the ships which Cleopatra had managed to salvage from the debacle at Actium and had beached in the vicinity of Suez.

Either the ships were destroyed by pirates who acted for the king's service, or the attack was organised by the Nabataean king, which is a case of state piracy.

Let us move on to another instance. I mentioned earlier an Indian coastal city and port of trade named *Kalliena*, in *Dakhinabadês*. In connection with this place the anonymous author of the *Periplus* adds:<sup>94</sup>

The last (= *Kalliena*), in the time of the elder Saraganos, was a port of trade where everything went according to law. [It is no longer] for, after Sandanês occupied it, there has been much hindrance (*sc.* to trade). For the Greek ships

<sup>91</sup> G. W. Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*, Cambridge, Mass., 1983, p. 21.

<sup>92</sup> Plutarchus, *Antony*, 69 (trans. B. Perrin).

<sup>93</sup> Malichus I ruled Nabataea from 59 to 30 BC.

<sup>94</sup> More details about the historical context (i.e., the struggle between the *Sakas* and *Andhras*) in L. Casson, *Ancient Trade and Society*, Detroit, 1984, pp. 211–24.



that by chance<sup>95</sup> come into these places are brought under guard to *Barygaza*.<sup>96</sup>

We owe L. Casson an explanation which makes clearer this obscure statement and gives a clue to understand the presence of ‘guards’:

At the time when the *Periplus* was written, the Sakas<sup>97</sup> had succeeded in wresting from the Andhras the cities of Nāsik, Junnar and Karli, all three important because they controlled the passes through the western Ghats down to *Suppara*, *Kalliena* and the other ports of the northern Konkan. And the Sakas succeeded as well in taking over *Kalliena*; Sandanês must have been the official they put in charge of this newly acquired possession. The ‘hindrance’ to trade that ensued can only have been caused by the Andhras : the highlands east of the Ghats were still in their hands, and the rulers must have instituted an embargo that prohibited Andhran goods from going to ports now in the hands of the enemy. Thus, if Greek ships by chance entered any of them, they found no goods to load aboard, and so the Saka authorities forwarded the vessels to *Barygaza*, the great Saka port, where there were plenty. The forwarding of them under guard no doubt was a precaution taken to thwart possible attacks from Andhran warships out to disrupt Sakan maritime commerce.

Should we accept Casson’s interpretation,<sup>98</sup> we have a clear case of state piracy intended to weaken the enemy, regardless of the victims.



Figure 10. Cranganore in Wouter Schouten’s *Travels into the East Indies*, 2nd edn, 1708.

There is another document which seems to show how merchants happened to be victims of political conflicts. The action takes place in the western Red Sea, in the mid-

<sup>95</sup> According to Casson, *Periplus* (n. 30), p. 216, the author alludes to the Greek ships which missed the entrance to the Gulf of Cambay and ended up south of it.

<sup>96</sup> *Periplus maris Erythraei*, 52 (transl. L. Casson).

<sup>97</sup> The *Sakai* of Greek writers were invaders from the north. Pushing steadily downwards from the Sind, they took over the area that the *Periplus* calls *Ariakê*.

<sup>98</sup> Casson, *Periplus* (n. 30), p. 215. L. Casson denies that the ‘guard’ was used by the Sakas to divert commerce intended to their Andhras rivals, a view supported by some scholars.

fourth century BC, at the very beginning of the conversion of Ethiopia (= the kingdom of Axum) to Christianity. The new religion was introduced by Frumentius, a person born in Tyre around AD 333. Frumentius and his brother Edesius were the only lucky people to survive an attack on the ship bringing them back to Alexandria, which enabled them to convert the Ethiopian king, namely Ezana.<sup>99</sup>

A certain philosopher, Meropius, a Tyrian by race, determined to acquaint himself with the country of the Indians, being stimulated to this by the example of the philosopher Metrodorus, who had previously travelled through the region of India. Having taken with him therefore two youths to whom he was related, who were by no means ignorant of the Greek language, Meropius reached the country by ship; and when he had inspected whatever he wished, he touched at a certain place which had a safe harbour (= Adulis), for the purpose of procuring some necessities. It so happened that a little before that time the treaty between the Romans and Indians (= the Axumites<sup>100</sup>) had been violated.<sup>101</sup> The Indians, therefore, having seized the philosopher and those who sailed with him, killed them all except his two youthful kinsmen; but sparing them from compassion for their tender age, they sent them as a gift to the king of the Indians (= the king of Axum).<sup>102</sup>

I can hardly imagine that these ‘Indians’ did not act (in retaliation?) under orders from the Axumite king. Whoever they might be, this assault again appears as a form of state piracy.<sup>103</sup>



Figure 11. An Axumite coin with the disc and crescent symbol, showing the name of the king Ezana. The cross symbol appears on other coins, signaling his adoption of Christianity.

In reality, however, we are far more informed about how both local and Mediterranean rulers tried to fight pirates.

<sup>99</sup> S. Munro-Hay, *Aksum. An African Civilisation of Late Antiquity*, Edinburgh, 1991, pp. 77–8.

<sup>100</sup> See above, n. 58.

<sup>101</sup> Nothing is known about the nature of this treaty.

<sup>102</sup> Socrates of Constantinople (born circa AD 380; the date of his death is unknown), *Church History*, I, 94, 4–5 (for a Latin version of this anecdote, see Rufinus of Aquileia (ca. AD 340–410), *Church History*, X, 9–10).

<sup>103</sup> Additional remark: Justinian I (AD 527–565), according to the Byzantine historian Zonaras, *Epitome historiôn*, XIV, 10, 22, urged the Axumite king (probably Kaleb /Ella Abea) to support piracy (in the Red Sea?) in order to weaken the Persian commerce. Sadly, this piece of evidence, being too vague, is not worth developing.

## b) Fighting piracy in the Indian Ocean (1): the Ptolemies; Rome

The Lagid dynasty was the first Mediterranean power to be confronted with piracy. To the best of our knowledge, the Ptolemies seem to have intervened vigorously in order to eradicate Nabataean robbery from the northern Red Sea. Such are at least Strabo and Diodorus' statements – we wish we had Arab documents to correct this biased point of view –:

Then to the *Ailanitês* Gulf, and to Nabataea, a country with a large population and well supplied with pasturage. They also dwell on islands situated off the coast near by; and these Nabataeans formerly lived a peaceful life, but later, by means of rafts, went to plundering the vessels of peoples sailing from Egypt. But they paid the penalty when a fleet went over and sacked their country. (Strabo)<sup>104</sup>  
Some time afterwards, however, they were caught on the high seas by some quadriremes and punished as they deserved. (Diodorus of Sicily)<sup>105</sup>

According to Plutarchus, as mentioned earlier, Cleopatra's ships were destroyed by Arab assailants in the Gulf of Suez. This allows us to assume that the Nabataean threat never disappeared, despite the effective Lagid military action. That may be the reason why Ptolemaic coast-guards still patrolled in the northern Red Sea in the late second century BC. It was one of these units that found the Indian mariner who was to introduce Eudoxus of Cyzicus to the direct route to India around 118 BC:

It chanced that a certain Indian was brought to the king (= Ptolemy VIII) by the (coast)-guard of the Arabian Gulf.<sup>106</sup> They reported that they had found him in a ship, alone, and half dead: but that they neither knew who he was, nor where he came from, as he spoke a language they could not understand. He was placed in the hands of preceptors appointed to teach him the Greek language.<sup>107</sup> On acquiring which, he related how he had started from the coasts of India, but lost his course, and reached Egypt alone, all his companions having perished with hunger; but that if he were restored to his country he would point out to those sent with him by the king, the route by sea to India. Eudoxus was of the number

<sup>104</sup> Strabo, *Geography*, XVI, 4, 18 (trans. H. L. Jones).

<sup>105</sup> Diodorus of Sicily, *The Library of History*, 3, 43, 5 (trans. C. H. Oldfather).

<sup>106</sup> Scholars disagree about the meaning of the Greek text (*tôn phulakôn tou Arabiou mukhou*). The word *mukhos* refers normally to the innermost part of an area (= 'recess'; 'creek running far inland', according to the *Greek-English Lexicon*). To the best of my knowledge, the *mukhos* of the Arabian Gulf always applies either to the Gulf of Suez or the Gulf of Aqaba. It is believed however by some scholars (e.g. J. H. Thiel, *Eudoxus of Cyzicus. A Chapter in the History of the Sea-Route to India and the Route round the Cape in Ancient Times*, Groningen, 1966, p. 32) that Strabo points out the whole Arabian Gulf (= the Red Sea), which implies that the coast guards patrolled as far as Bab al-Mandab.

<sup>107</sup> Strabo strongly doubted the story of Eudoxus, which he heard from the famous scientist Posidonius. Here are his arguments: 'But in the first place, what is there credible in this tale of the Indian missing his way? The Arabian Gulf, which resembles a river, is narrow, and in length is from 5000 to 10,000 *stadia* up to its mouth, where it is narrowest of all. It is not likely that the Indians in their voyage out would have entered this Gulf by mistake. The extreme narrowness of the mouth must have warned them of their error. And if they entered it voluntarily, then there was no excuse for introducing the pretext of mistake and uncertain winds. And how did they suffer all of themselves but one to perish through hunger? And how was it that this survivor was able to manage the ship, which could not have been a small one either, fitted as it was for traversing such vast seas? What must have been his aptitude in learning the language of the country, and thus being able to persuade the king of his competence, as leader of the expedition? And how came it that Euergetes (= Ptolemy VIII) was in want of such guides, so many being already acquainted with this sea?' (Strabo, *Geography*, II, 3, 5; trans. H. C. Hamilton).

thus sent. He set sail with a good supply of presents, and brought back with him in exchange aromatics and precious stones (...).<sup>108</sup>

Several decades after Eudoxus' voyage and the first use of the monsoon, some merchants dared do the return journey to India, as I stated above. There is no doubt that ships and merchants were still under threat from (Nabataean?) pirates, otherwise we would find it hard to understand why the Ptolemies set over Thebaid (= southern Egypt) an *epistrategos* in the first half of the first century BC. Among his various duties, this official was in charge of safeguarding the sea traffic in the Arabian Gulf: a series of inscriptions found in Egypt and dated respectively 78 BC, 62 BC, and 51 BC present a certain Kallimakhos as *epistrategos* of Thebaid and 'of the Indian Sea and Erythraean Sea' (this unusual geographical name is likely to apply to the whole Red Sea).<sup>109</sup>

Strabo proudly claimed that the Roman *imperium* made the sea route to India more secure and easy than it had ever been. On the contrary Pliny alluded to pirates who apparently infested the Bab al-Mandab area (above, pp. 14–15). It seems that archers were consequently taken on board to deter them from attacking vessels. Sadly we are not able to determine if such guards were hired by merchants or provided by the Roman administration.<sup>110</sup> Pliny does not bother to make this point clearer in his history of the passage to India:

The following period considered it a shorter and safer route to start from the same cape and steer for the Indian harbour of *Sigerus*, and for a long time this was the course followed, until a merchant discovered a shorter route, and the desire for gain brought India nearer; indeed, the voyage is made every year, with companies of archers on board, because these seas used to be very greatly infested by pirates.<sup>111</sup>

This fact is corroborated, though in a fictional way, in the novelistic biography of Apollonius of Tyana composed by Philostratus.<sup>112</sup> Two and a half of the eight books of the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* are devoted to the journey of Philostratus' hero to India. Its reality has been much debated among scholars, for many details in Philostratus' account seem to be merely literary fabrications. Certainly this judgment applies to the following excerpt, in which Philostratus refers to a so-called law allegedly established by the mythical king Erythras.<sup>113</sup> This historical forgery may, however, include some actual facts, namely the armed men protecting the Egyptian (= Alexandrian) ships skirting the Arabian side of Bab al-Mandab. In my opinion there is an obvious parallel with Pliny's armed archers:

I [*an Indian wise man is talking to Apollonius*] do not know any example adequate to illustrate it; but we will take that of a ship, such as the Egyptians construct for our seas and launch for the exchange of Egyptian goods against

<sup>108</sup> Strabo, *Geography*, II, 3, 4 (trans. H. C. Hamilton).

<sup>109</sup> See Schneider, '*Fauces Rubri maris*' (n. 20).

<sup>110</sup> The statement that 'these *sagittarii* must have been official police-soldiery' is an unproven allegation (M. P. Charlesworth, 'Roman Trade with India: a Re-survey', in P. R. Coleman-Norton, ed., *Studies in Roman Economic and Social History in Honor of A. Ch. Johnson*, Princeton, 1951, p. 138).

<sup>111</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, VI, 101 (trans. H. Rackham). For a comparison with Muslims ships, see Agius, *Classic ships of Islam* (n. 49), pp. 235–36.

<sup>112</sup> Apollonius of Tyana was a Greek philosopher and thaumaturge from the town of Tyana in the Roman province of Cappadocia.

<sup>113</sup> This mythical king was the eponym of the Erythraean Sea (see, for example, Arrian, *Indica*, 37).

Indian wares. For there is an ancient law in regard to the Erythraean Sea (= Indian Ocean), which the king Erythras laid down, when he held sway over that sea, to the effect that the Egyptians should not enter it with a vessel of war, and indeed should employ only a single merchant ship. This regulation obliged the Egyptians to contrive a ship equivalent to several at once of those which other races have; and they ribbed the sides of the ship with bolts such as hold a ship together, and they raised its bulwarks and its mast to a great height, and they constructed several compartments (...), and they set several pilots in this boat and subordinated them to the oldest and wisest of their number, to conduct the voyage (...); and in the crew of this ship there was a detachment of armed men, for it was necessary to equip the ship and protect it against the savages of the Gulf (= Arabian Gulf, i.e., the Red Sea) that live on the right as you enter it (= on the east side of Bab al-Mandab), in case they should ever attack and plunder it on the high seas.<sup>114</sup>

Recently an inscription was found at Farasan and thoroughly studied by the French archeologist François Villeneuve: this dedication mentions a military detachment and a *praefectus* (Roman official) that was stationed at *Ferresan* (= Farasan) in AD 144 under the reign of Antoninus Pius (reigned AD 138–161). This unique document tends to show that the Roman power would protect and monitor the traffic as far south as the Farasan Archipelago: that the Roman garrison was – among various tasks – intended to deter local pirates from harming the Indian Ocean trade seems highly plausible.<sup>115</sup> The Roman military presence may have lasted until the late-second century according to Fr. Villeneuve.<sup>116</sup>

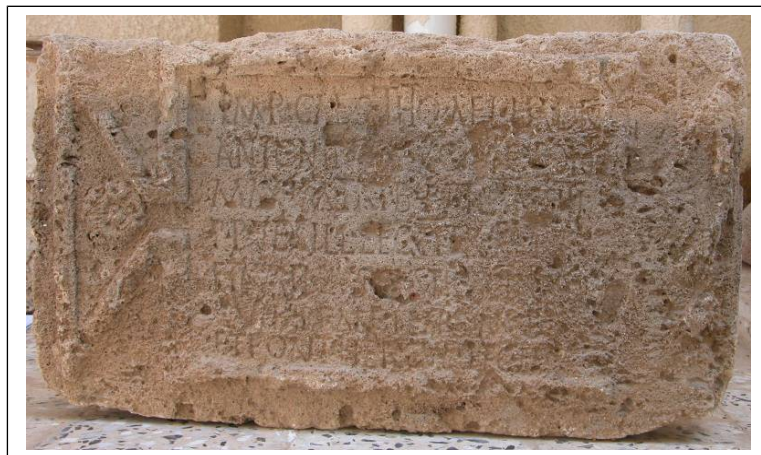


Figure 12. The Farasan inscription (courtesy of Fr. Villeneuve; photograph by L. Nehmé).

The last documented case is related to late antiquity. The Byzantines had to combat pirates in the northern Red Sea so that they could keep their customs revenues, as Benjamin Isaac explains:

<sup>114</sup> Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, III, 35 (trans. F. C. Conybeare).

<sup>115</sup> Fr. Villeneuve, 'L'armée romaine en mer Rouge et autour de la mer Rouge aux II<sup>e</sup> et III<sup>e</sup> siècles après J.-C. : à propos de deux inscriptions latines découvertes sur l'archipel Farasân', in A. S. Lewin & P. Pellegrini, eds, *The Late Roman Army in the Near East from Diocletian to the Arab Conquest. Proceedings of a colloquium held at Potenza, Acerenza and Matera, Italy (May 2005)*, London, 2007, p. 12.

<sup>116</sup> Additional remark: about the Roman military presence in the northern Red Sea (*Myos Hormos*, *Berenikê*, *Leukê Kômê*), see Villeneuve, 'L'armée romaine' (n. 115), p. 4.



At the end of the fifth century the *dux Palestinae*, Romanus, undertook a punitive expedition against the Ghassanids who had raided Palestine. Next he expelled Arabs who had taken possession of the island Jotaba (Tiran or, more likely, Jeziret el-Far'un), which controlled the Gulf of *Aila*. This is an interesting episode. At Jotaba was a Byzantine customhouse where dues on commercial shipping were collected. This was seized by a Persian bandit of Arab origin named Amorcesus. Thus far this man had lived in Arabia, where he made raids, not on Romans, but on Saracens. Now he rather than the imperial government collected dues at Jotaba. Nevertheless he became acceptable to the authorities in Constantinople by his conversion to Christianity, and he was granted an audience with Leo I (457–474) and made phylarch<sup>117</sup> of Arabia Petraea.<sup>118</sup>

### c) Fighting piracy in the Indian Ocean (2): the local rulers

As for local rulers, they did not hesitate to struggle piracy if their own economical interests were at stakes. This point is supported by several interesting pieces of evidence.

To begin with, Casson's view that the Sakas protected Greek vessels against Andhra attacks (above, pp. 21–22) shows how the former had committed to fight state piracy. There is another instance, however, in the invaluable *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*. As we saw earlier, Adoulis remained an unsafe place for Alexandrian merchants until they moved to *Didoros* Island. Even if they ensured their own security by choosing a safer harbour, I tend to believe that the local ruler, Zoskalês, also took part in making this area more secure. Let us examine the text:

The ruler of these regions, from the *Moskhophagoi* to the rest of *Barbarikê*, is Zôskalês, a stickler about his possessions and always holding out for getting more, but in other respects a fine person and well versed in reading and writing Greek (...).<sup>119</sup>

Zoskales' sway extended from the border shared with the *Moskhophagoi* to that shared with the rest of *Barbarikê*, that is, roughly speaking, from *Ptolemais Thêrôn* to Bab al-Mandab (see Figure 4). To what extent his realm comprised the mountainous country inland from the coast is unknown but certainly Zoskalês controlled a considerable territory. In addition the anonymous author relates that this greedy person wanted particular goods (silverware, gold ware fashioned in the local manner; clothing)<sup>120</sup> that he could obtain from Mediterranean merchants. Accordingly he is very likely to have protected them from excessive piracy.

As for the *Kanraitai* living in the Arabian Peninsula (above, p. 8), the text is absolutely clear: local rulers and officials (probably south Arabian kings), who were aware of the hindrance to commerce resulting from their piracy, tried to control them: 'For this reason, they are constantly being taken prisoners by the governors and kings of Arabia.'<sup>121</sup>

<sup>117</sup> In the later Roman Empire, this title was given to Arab princes who were Empire's allies in the East.

<sup>118</sup> B. Isaac, *The Near East under Roman rule*, Leiden-New York-Köln, 1998, p. 146.

<sup>119</sup> *Periplus maris Erythraei*, 5.

<sup>120</sup> See the *Periplus maris Erythraei*, 6.

<sup>121</sup> *Periplus maris Erythraei*, 20 (trans. L. Casson). For another example of territorial control (although not explicitly related to piracy) see *Periplus maris Erythraei*, 31: 'The island (i.e. *Dioskouridês* / Suqutra) is subject to the aforementioned king of the frankincense-bearing land, just as *Azania* is to Charibaêl and the governor of *Mapharitis*. Trade with it used to be carried on by some of the shippers from *Mouza* and also by

In my opinion, however, the most outstanding piece of evidence showing how local rulers were involved in chasing pirates, appears in a famous inscription known to us through a copy (the stone disappeared centuries ago), The Byzantine monk and merchant Cosmas Indicopleustes, who made several voyages in the Indian ocean during the reign of Justinian (AD 527–65), gives in his work entitled *Christian Topography* a copy of a large Greek stele that was exposed at Adoulis. When, however, Cosmas happened to see it, the stone was already lying broken and the name of the king had disappeared. Nonetheless scholars generally agree that the text lists the feats of an Axumite king who lived in the early-third century AD.<sup>122</sup> It was a time when Axum, firmly connected to Adulis, began to play a major part in the Indian Ocean exchanges. That may explain why this anonymous ruler appears as a proactive person intending to make the Red Sea routes secure (underlined passages):

The tribes of *Rhausoi* I next brought to submission; they are spread over wide waterless plains in the interior of the frankincense country which belongs to *Barbaroi*. I encountered the *Solate*, whom I subdued, and left with instruction to guard the coast<sup>123</sup>. (...) And I sent a fleet and land forces against the *Arabitae* and *Kinaidokolpitai*<sup>124</sup> who dwelt on the other side (= eastern side) of the Erythraean Sea (= the Red Sea), and having reduced the sovereigns of both, I imposed on them a land tribute and charged them to make travelling safe both by sea and by land. I thus subdued the whole coast from *Leukê Kômê* to the country of the Sabaeans. (...) Having thus brought all the world under my authority to peace, I came down to *Adouli* (= Adulis) and offered sacrifice to Zeus, and to Arês and to Poseidôn, whom I entreated to be friend all who go down to the sea in ships.<sup>125</sup>

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those sailing out of *Limyrikê* and *Barygaza* who by chance put in at it ; these would exchange rice, grain, cotton cloth, and female slaves, which found a market because of shortage here, for big cargoes of tortoise shell. At the present time the kings have leased out the island, and it is under guard.' (trans. L. Casson).

<sup>122</sup> Villeneuve, 'L'armée romaine' (n. 115), p. 6.

<sup>123</sup> I.e. in the area of Bab al-Mandab.

<sup>124</sup> The *Kinaidokolpitai* probably devoted themselves to piracy: 'Mais il n'y avait pas de raison pour que la piraterie eût diminué au II<sup>e</sup> siècle. On peut soupçonner qu'elle était en partie l'œuvre des *Kinaidokolpitai*, ce groupe de tribus dont le territoire s'étendait de *Leukê Kômê* jusqu'au nord de *Gizân* et que le roi anonyme d'Adoulis alla mettre au pas, sans doute un demi-siècle plus tard, une fois les Romains partis probablement.' (Villeneuve, 'L'armée romaine' (n. 115), p. 13).

<sup>125</sup> Cosmas Indicopleustes, *Christian Topography*, II, 61–2 (trans. E. O. Winsteddt).



Figure 13. A famous Axumite inscription written in Greek. The stele of Ezana, as drawn by Henry Salt, *A Voyage to Abyssinia*, 1814, p. 411.