

SCYLAX IN PHILOSTRATUS' LIFE OF APOLLONIUS OF TYANA*

The description of Apollonius' Indian journey is formally based on the memoirs of a certain Damis. But it is clear that this description does not reflect the actual experience of Apollonius in India, nor is it even certain that Apollonius was ever there. In general, Philostratus shows very limited concern with geographical and historical truth; however, the story of Apollonius' Indian journey contains details of geography and natural history, presented in a realistic manner.¹ They must have come from the author's reading. Philostratus shows no clear sign of using Ctesias and Megasthenes, the two most famous writers on India, while he explicitly mentions Nearchus, Orthogoras, and Scylax.

Orthogoras, about whom we know next to nothing,² is cited twice, both times together with Nearchus.³ Since both of them appear in conjunction we need not assume that Philostratus read both or either. Some work related to Alexander's campaign must have been used. Whether it was Nearchus or a secondary source, many of Apollonius' adventures take place in farther India (around the Ganges), not reached by Alexander's army. Hence Philostratus needed a source other than the historians of Alexander. A relatively obscure book containing not too well known information would have been especially welcome. Scylax is cited by Philostratus only to be criticised,⁴ but this is not an uncommon way of dealing with a really important source of information.

Many details of Philostratus' narrative may point in fact to its dependence on Scylax. Two of them were already referred to by me – the

* Originally designed as an Appendix to my "Scylax' Circumnavigation of India and Its Interpretation in Early Greek Geography, Ethnography and Cosmography, I", *Hyperboreus* 4 (1998): 2, 211–242, see especially 230 n. 48. English quotations from Philostratus are given in F. C. Conybeare's translation in the Loeb series.

¹ Some of these details seem to be adequate indeed; see J. Charpentier, *The Indian Travels of Apollonius of Tyana* (Uppsala 1934) esp. 47–51, 56.

² *FGrHist* 713 F 1–5.

³ 2. 17; 2. 53. In 2. 17 the manuscript tradition has "Pythagoras". The same mistake appears in *Ael. NA* 17. 8.

⁴ 3. 47: "As to men that are shadow-footed or have long heads, and as to other poetical fancies which the treatise of Scylax recounts about them, he said they didn't live anywhere on the earth, and least of all in India".

comparison of an Indian river to the Ister and including the hippopotamus among the Indian fauna.⁵

While describing India and adjacent regions, Philostratus regularly compares various phenomena found there to those of well-known parts of the oikumene. This is a typical device of early Greek geography and ethnography, attested in Herodotus as well as in fragments of Hecataeus and Scylax. Philostratus' comparisons repeatedly involve the data that are most surprising for an author of the third century AD (as Philostratus) or a traveller of the first century AD (as Apollonius) and that belong to the world well known to a mariner of the late sixth century BC, of Carian provenance (as Scylax) in particular. I give below a list of such cases.

3. 5: The vines that grow in the Ganges valley "are small, like those of the Lydians and Maeones".⁶

2. 8: "... like the mountain of Tmolus in Lydia".⁷

3. 55: "... just as in Caria the flocks are fed on figs".

2. 1: "... on the shore of which the Carians live".

3. 55: "But the Indians of Carman are a gentle race, who live on the edge of the sea so well stocked with fish, that they neither lay them by in stores, nor salt them as is done in Pontus".

The two following cases are especially striking since they are clearly anachronistic.

3. 50: "... and ferry-boats resembling those of the Tyrrhenes".

The maritime power of the Etruscans reached its height in the second half of the sixth century BC. By the time of Apollonius, the Etruscans had been for centuries the subjects of the Romans. It is most unlikely that the comparison came from the diary of Damis or was invented by Philostratus.

2. 20: Taxila "is about as big as Nineveh".

Nineveh was ruined in 612 BC, but its fame lasted among the Greeks for a long time. Strabo 16. 1. 3 knows a tradition (not from Herodotus), according to which Nineveh "was much greater than Babylon", and a sixth-century traveller could see the ruins of Nineveh.

Neither of these cases points unambiguously to Scylax, but their total is impressive.

Apollonius started for India from Babylon. Some details of Philostratus' description of Babylon (1. 25) go back, I feel, to quite an early source. One of

⁵ *Op. cit.*, 229 f.

⁶ For the vine in India see K. Karttunen, *India in Early Greek Literature* (Helsinki 1989) 207 ff.

⁷ Cf. 2. 10: "... as we may see at Athens also in the vestibule of the Parthenon, and in several places in Phrygia and Lydia". Philostratus lived for a long time in Athens.

them is worthy of special note. There was no agreement among the ancient writers as to the length of the walls of Babylon. The figure given in Herodotus is 480 stadia (1. 178). The subsequent writers somewhat reduce this value, giving figures that range from 360 to 385 stadia. Philostratus gives again 480 stadia, but his figures for the height and the breadth of the walls differ from those in Herodotus and are more realistic.⁸ One may suspect that identical information ultimately came from a source common to both Herodotus and Philostratus.

Further, Babylon appears in Philostratus as a royal residence. Apollonius enjoys there the hospitality of the king Vardanes, who also subsequently supports Apollonius' expedition to India by providing camels, money, special signs, and a letter of recommendation (1. 40; 2. 1; 2. 17). There was indeed at the time of Apollonius a Parthian king named Vardanes. His short reign ended c. 45 AD. But Babylon, quite an insignificant or even desolate place at that time (Strab. 16. 1. 5; Plin. 6. 121 f.), was hardly his residence. Nor, as far as we know, did this Vardanes ever have a brother named Megabates (as *Vit. Apoll.* 1. 31). Furthermore, Philostratus does not call Vardanes the Parthian king, he calls him 'the Mede' (1. 21).⁹ This might be interpreted as a matter of style, but 'the Mede' is how the Greeks of the sixth-fifth centuries BC would call one of the Achaemenids; and it was the Achaemenids who had a royal residence in Babylon; and one Megabates was an Achaemenid, a cousin of Darius I (Hdt. 5. 32); and this Megabates gave offence to a Carian captain, named Scylax (Hdt. 5. 33).¹⁰

We have thus in Philostratus a story about a traveller to India supported by a mighty king who has a residence in Babylon and who is called the Mede: is it not patterned on the story of Scylax and Darius?

The description of Apollonius' journey in Ethiopia also contains both anachronistic details and comparisons with the phenomena of Asia Minor. Two characters of the story, Timasion and Thrasybulus, are said to be from Naucratis (6. 2; 7). Naucratis was of a modest significance in the Roman epoch, but it was the only Greek city in Egypt at Scylax' time. The springs of the Nile are located within the region of the cataracts (6. 1; 22; 26). No

⁸ Herodotus speaks about a wall of fifty royal cubits' thickness and two hundred cubits' height, whereas Philostratus gives three half plethrons for height and about a plethron for breadth. An argument can be made (not essential for the present purpose) that both these sets of figures go back to a different interpretation (or misinterpretation) of the same units.

⁹ And Media is the most important unit of his geography of Asia beyond Euphrates (2. 1).

¹⁰ This Scylax of Myndus is almost certainly our Scylax, since Myndus was the closest polis to Caryanda which is characterized by Strabo as "a harbour, and also an island bearing the same name, where the Caryandians lived" (14. 2. 20; H. L. Jones' transl.).

Hellenistic or Roman geographer could locate them there, but Herodotus 2. 28 cites a corresponding view; furthermore, Strabo 17. 1. 52 seems to imply that Herodotus was not the only Greek writer to speak about the springs of the Nile in that region. The cataracts of the Nile are compared with the Lydian Tmolus (6. 23). The Nile at the cataracts is said to be “quite as big as the Marsyas and the Maeander at their first confluence” (6. 26).¹¹ The comparison of the same part of the Nile with the Maeander appears also in Herodotus 2. 29. The point of comparison is different (“winding like the Maeander”), but it should be emphasized that Herodotus describes the part of the Nile that he never saw himself (as he specifies a few lines above) and that it was not an Egyptian from whom Herodotus could pick up a comparison with the Maeander.

What, then, brought Scylax to the region of the cataracts? Herodotus rightly connects the expedition of Scylax with establishing maritime routes between several parts of the Persian Empire (4. 44), and it is likely that Scylax did not sail from India to Egypt directly, but turned first to the Persian Gulf and Babylon to have a meeting with Darius, as Apollonius came to Babylon to see Vardanes (3. 58). Now the first place visited by Apollonius in Ethiopia was Memnonium. A number of ancient authors locate Memnonium in Thebes. This famous city was destroyed by Cambyses (Strab. 15. 1. 46), and what Philostratus describes as the scenery for Memnonium is a ruined city (6. 4). Thebes was a bit south of the shortest route connecting the Red Sea coast and the Nile (Strab. 17. 1. 45). It was quite a reasonable enterprise of a man sent by Darius to re-explore this way. The subsequent, relatively short, journey to the cataracts could be due to Scylax’ curiosity.

One cannot be sure that Philostratus had direct access to Scylax’ book. His descriptions of Apollonius’ journeys do not convey that sense of scale and distances which must have been found in Scylax’ own account. Even his India is not shown as a really big country. However, the lack of interest in space could be a peculiar feature of Philostratus’ taste, and in any case his task was to portray Apollonius driven by desire to see the sages rather than distant lands.

Whatever was the immediate source of Philostratus, the likely conclusion remains that not only Scylax’ data were used to fill the narrative, but the very story of Apollonius’ Indian journey was patterned on the story of Scylax and Darius.

¹¹ Cf. Strab. 12. 8. 15: the Marsyas flows through the middle of the city of Apameia and then “with violent and precipitate current joins the Maeander”.

If that was the case, we may tentatively enhance our knowledge of Scylax' expedition. It seems that Scylax started from Babylon and went first north till he reached the mountain range running eastwards¹² and that he entered India via the Salang pass and Kabul valley (2. 4; 6), which corresponds well to standard scholarly interpretation of Scylax' route and which is also implied in Herodotus' placing the Pactyic country near the northernmost parts of India (3. 102, cf. 4. 44). Apollonius met the Indians already in the Kabul valley (2. 6) – apparently within the realm governed by “the Mede”, since the Indus is clearly presented as a border river (2. 17). This, again, fits well with the situation in the region in the late sixth century BC and Herodotus' account of Scylax' expedition and Darius' subsequent conquest of India in particular (4. 44). After crossing the Indus, Apollonius visited Taxila (2. 20) where he learned that the genuine Indian sages live “between the Hyphasis and the Ganges, in a country which Alexander never reached” (2. 23). After having crossed the river Hydraotes and passed by several tribes, Apollonius and people around him reached the Hyphasis near which they saw a brass column with an inscription stating that “Alexander stayed his steps at this point” (2. 43). The Hyphasis appears in Philostratus as a river worthy of special description; it is said in particular that “in breadth it approaches to the river Ister, and this is allowed to be the greatest of all the rivers which flow through Europe” (3. 1). Crossing the Hyphasis is implied but not mentioned explicitly. We have instead somewhat vague indication that Apollonius and his people “crossed the part of Caucasus which stretches down to the Erythrean sea” (3. 4), by which the mountain range separating the Punjab and the Gangetic plain is apparently meant. Indeed, after having crossed the mountain, they found themselves in the Gangetic plain, of which we have a detailed and reasonable description (3. 5). On assumption that Apollonius' route is patterned on that of Scylax, this confirms the conclusion suggested in a previous publication that Scylax made his way along the Gangetic plain rather than Sind.¹³ The subsequent account of Apollonius' way to the sea neither confirms nor contradicts my conclusion that Scylax reached the Bay of Bengal and circumnavigated India,¹⁴ since such an account corresponds to no reality whatsoever.

We are told that “Apollonius keeping the Ganges on his right hand, but the Hyphasis on his left, went towards the sea” and that this was a journey of ten days (3. 50). With the left and right as cited by Philostratus, Apollonius went from the

¹² *Vit. Apoll.* 1. 40: “You must take the road over the Caucasus, for there you will find plenty of the necessities of life and the country is friendly”; cf. 2. 1 ff.

¹³ *Hyperboreus* 4 (1998): 2, 211–242.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* and also *Hyperboreus* 5 (1999): 2, 341–345.

sea rather than towards it. Provided that left designates the west and right designates the east in the *Iliad* (12. 238 f.), one may consider the possibility that Philostratus reflects an archaic usage he found in his source. However, even if we get the correct idea of the Ganges in the east and the Sutlej (or the Beas) in the west, we are still left with just ten days journey by land, though our travellers rode the camels and Philostratus elsewhere says that camels “will travel 1000 stades a day without even bending the knees or lying down anywhere” (2. 6). More importantly, the narrative seems to imply that Apollonius reaches the sea somewhere near the mouth of the Hyphasis. Then this river might be the Brahmaputra, but the description offered by Philostratus lends no support to such a possibility. “In its later course it falls into rocky and narrow country and over precipices, and breaking its way through these to sea by a single mouth, presents a formidable danger to those who hug the land too closely” (3. 52).¹⁵ The description seems to fit the Narmada that empties into the Gulf of Cambay. According to the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* (41), in this area “there are still preserved to this very day signs of Alexander’s expedition, ancient shrines and the foundations of encampment and huge wells” (Lionel Casson’s transl.). Such a misplacement might happen because of the identity of the names for two different rivers. Onesicritus’ assertion that at midsummer noon no shadow is cast in India “beyond the Hypasis (= Hyphasis)” (Plin. 2. 183) also fits much better with the Narmada than with the Sutlej. At all events, no valuable argument for the restoration of Scylax’ route can be made out of all that confusion.

The close parallelism between Apollonius’ and Scylax’ stories enables us also to suggest a plausible date of Scylax’ expedition.

When Apollonius approached the borders of Babylon, he found there “a frontier garrison belonging to the king, which one could not pass by without being questioned who one was, and as to one’s city, and one’s reason for coming there... for *the Mede had just acceded to the throne*” (1. 21). This information is supplemented at some further point. In a conversation about the king, Apollonius is told by the interlocutor: “the kingdom, which you behold, had been lost, but he has recovered the kingdom and has restored his house, – no light task this nor easy” (1. 28). These words seem to echo the content, the spirits and even the particular emphasis found in the famous Bisitun inscription of Darius: “That kingship, of which Gaumata the magus despoiled Cambyses, that kingship from ancient times had belonged to our family” (§ 12; cf. §§ 3–4).¹⁶ Symptomatically, a recollection of Darius and his reign emerges a few lines below. Apollonius also asks: “And how many years is it since the king recovered the power?” The answer he receives runs as

¹⁵ It can be observed, however, that Strabo makes (erroneously) the Ganges empty by a single outlet (15. I. 13).

¹⁶ *The Bisitun Inscription of Darius the Great*, by R. Schmitt (London 1991).

follows: "This is the third year since, which year began about two months ago".¹⁷ Darius came to power on 29 September 522 BC. If the story of Apollonius and Vardanes is patterned on that of Scylax and Darius, one may assume that Scylax came to Babylon in November of 520 BC.¹⁸ Now Apollonius left Babylon in the eighteenth month of his sojourn (1. 22; 39). He parted "in the summer" (2. 1), which apparently means after the summer solstice, about rising of the Dog Star (Sirius), that is, in July. It follows that he had arrived at Babylon in November, which is in perfect agreement with the previous calculation.¹⁹

The most natural inference from this series of correspondences is that both the motive of recent accession of 'the Mede' and related chronology, including the length of Apollonius' stay in Babylon, came to Philostratus from Scylax.

It is difficult to see what could keep Apollonius' prototype, Scylax, in Babylon for almost eighteen months. Apollonius was kept by the king (1. 39, no reason is specified in the text). Possibly it was the case of Scylax too. While preparing his Scythian expedition,²⁰ Darius apparently consulted the Carian captain about the region of the Black Sea and the Ister. Before charging Scylax with important explorations in the most remote parts of the world, the king might have wanted to check the reliability of information he had once received from Scylax; so Darius decided to keep him in Babylon until his coming back from Scythia. Scylax became one of those "in whose word Darius trusted" (Hdt. 4. 44). He parted for India the following summer, July 518 BC.

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¹⁷ 1. 28: "τὴν τε βασιλείαν, ἣν ὀρθῶς, ἀπολωλυῖαν αὐτῷ ἀνέλαβε, τὸν τε οἶκον ἐπανήγαγε τοῦτον, οὐκ ἀπόνως οὐδὲ ῥαθύμως". – "πόστον δὲ δὴ τοῦτο ἔτος τῆ ἀνακτιθείσῃ ἀρχῆ;" – "τρίτου," ἔφη, "ἀρχόμεθα, δύο ἡδη που μῆνες".

¹⁸ Precision is beyond reach. "In the month Bagayadi ten days had passed" when Darius slew Gaumata (§ 13 of the Bisitun inscription). The month Bagayadi was probably included in reckoning, but the year 522/521 BC has an intercalary month, etc.

¹⁹ The data relating to early Achaemenids agrees with all that too; so Xen. *Cyr.* 8. 6. 22: "Cyrus himself made his home in the centre of his domain, and in the winter season he spent seven months in Babylon, for there the climate is warm"; cf. *Anab.* 3. 5. 15.

²⁰ I find convincing the arguments of those scholars who date the Scythian expedition of Darius to 519 BC; see: T. Petit, "La réforme impériale et l'expédition européenne de Darius I^{er}. Essai de datation", *AC* 53 (1984) 35–46; cf., however: J. M. Balcer, *The Persian Conquest of the Greeks 545–450 B.C.* (Konstanz 1995) 149. At all events, my dating of Scylax' voyage does not really depend on the date of the Scythian expedition.

В “Жизнеописании Аполлония Тианского” важное место занимают путешествия героя в Индию и Эфиопию. Впечатления, вынесенные из этих якобы подлинных путешествий, нередко содержат реалии, либо весьма неожиданные для писателя III в. (как Филострат) или путешественника I в. (как Аполлоний), либо и вовсе ушедшие в прошлое, однако актуальные для писателя рубежа VI–V вв. и в особенности уроженца эгейского побережья Малой Азии, каким был Скилак из Карианды – великий путешественник и автор не дошедшего до нас географического сочинения. Ряд деталей указывает на то, что Филострат не только воспользовался различными сообщениями Скилака, но и в значительной мере построил рассказ о путешествии Аполлония в Индию по образцу подлинного путешествия Скилака. На основании параллелизма двух историй оказывается возможным с большой долей вероятности подтвердить прежние выводы относительно маршрута Скилака (путь Скилака в Индии пролегал через долину Ганга, а не Синд) и предложить новые (в Египте Скилак посетил Фивы и район нильских порогов), а также указать на место и время начала экспедиции Скилака – Вавилон, июль 518 г. до н. э.