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STRABO AND INDIA

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PhD in Classics
The University of Edinburgh
2015

Lay summary

Scholarship on Strabo's *Geography* has long noticed that the procedure adopted by the author in his description of India is inconsistent with the method he follows elsewhere. However, very few studies have been dedicated exclusively to the matter and this thesis proposes to fill the lacuna. By analysing Strabo's use of sources and by considering a network of concepts pervading his work, we will see that apparent inconsistencies serve a number of purposes.

In Chapter 1, it will be argued that the inclusion or omission of a given detail related to India was relevant for the political agenda underlying *Geography*. Chapter 2 will show that the author creates a literary image of India that ultimately served to support that political agenda. In Chapter 3, we will see that Strabo's description addresses ethical questions that were left unsolved by Greek philosophical schools at the time, namely, education for women and the relationship between the philosophical way of life and political compromise.

Thesis abstract

Scholarship on Strabo's *Geography* has long noticed that the procedure adopted by the author in his account of India is inconsistent with the method he follows elsewhere (Puskás 1993). On the one hand, it has been argued that, while describing the subcontinent, the author quotes so extensively from his sources that he allows practically no space for his own reasoning. Such a writing strategy is unlike the practice he normally adopts (Dueck 2000:180-6). On the other hand, after stressing that the geographical writing may only draw on reliable sources and that the reports on India are unreliable (*Geography*, 2.1.9 C 70), Strabo writes his own account on the subcontinent by drawing on authors he deemed untrustworthy (*Geography*, 15.1.1-73 C 685-720). This procedure clearly shifts from the method he follows across his work. However, very few studies have been dedicated exclusively to the matter and this thesis proposes to fill the lacuna.

In fact, within Strabonian studies, one trend has tended to analyse individual regions described in *Geography* (Andreotti 1999), while another has examined themes permeating the book (Clarke 2001 and Engels 1998). The description of India has been widely used to reconstruct relevant aspects of ancient history (Karttunen 1997 and Parker 2008). However, little attention has been paid to the author's conception of India, which will be the main focus of this thesis.

By analysing what Strabo selected from his sources and by considering a network of concepts pervading his work, we will see that apparent inconsistencies serve a number of purposes. In Chapter 1, it will be argued that the inclusion or omission of a given detail related to India was relevant for the political agenda underlying the text. In view of the literature produced at the time and the data made available today by the archaeological research on Indo-Roman trade, Strabo's account shares the ideology underlying the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*. Yet, at times, his text lies between a panegyric and a satire of the Roman Empire.

Chapter 2 will show that the author creates an image of India that served to support the aforementioned political agenda. By portraying native kings in association with luxury and corruption, the text refers to traditional Greek conception of the East and this has a bearing on the depiction of the Roman Empire. In Chapter 3, we will see that Strabo's description addresses ethical questions that were left unsolved by Greek philosophical schools at the time, namely, education for women and the relationship between the philosophical way of life and political compromise. Within this setting of philosophical reflection, the text provides a sound set of moral illustrations, *exempla*, complete with brief autobiographical remarks.

Signed declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed by me and that it contains my own work, which has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Hitesh Kumar Chavhan

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Acknowledgments

This thesis was funded by a scholarship from the Portuguese Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia.

I would like to thank Professors Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones and Andrew Erskine for their enthusiasm towards my project, their patience while reading my drafts and their illuminating suggestions that have helped immensely improve my text. Professor José Pedro Serra's continuous inspiration and support of my work, since my years as an undergraduate student at the University of Lisbon, has been invaluable. I would especially like to thank Charles Hooton, for meticulously reading all my drafts and correcting my English. Any mistakes remaining are entirely my own.

Finally, I would like to thank my friends and family for all their support.

Introduction

The text, the author and scholarship

Scholarship on Strabo's *Geography* has long noticed that the procedure adopted by the author in his account of India is inconsistent with the method he follows elsewhere.¹ On the one hand, it has been argued that, while describing the subcontinent, the author quotes so extensively from his sources that he allows practically no space for his own reasoning. Such a writing strategy is unlike the practice he normally adopts.² On the other hand, after stressing that geographical writing may only draw on reliable sources and that the reports on India are unreliable (2.1.9), Strabo writes his own account on the subcontinent by drawing on authors he deemed untrustworthy (15.1.1-73). This procedure clearly shifts from the method he follows across his work. However, very few studies have been dedicated exclusively to the matter and this thesis proposes to fill the lacuna.

Strabo's text is among the most important instances of geographical writing. Comprising seventeen books, *Geography* collects information from more than two

¹ Puskás 1993.

² Dueck 2000:180-6.

hundred named sources. The first two books make the *prolegomena*, where the author lengthily explains his method and purpose of writing. Here we can find valuable theoretical discussions on hermeneutics (guidelines on reliable sources, on how we should read them and how linguistic changes can affect interpretation) and on specifically geographical issues (such as climate, exact latitudes for locations and the calculation of distances).

The remaining fifteen books describe the world as it was known and the first continent to be surveyed is Europe. Starting with the Roman province of Hispania, the text proceeds to Gallia, Italia, Germania, Illyria, the western side of the Pontus Euxinus and Greece. While three books are dedicated to Greece and two to Italia, Hispania and Gallia are covered in one book each; regions across Germania and the western Pontus are all covered in one book. Then the text continues to Asia. Starting with the Caucasus region and the Caspian Sea, the text takes us as far east as Bactria and then back again to Armenia, Cappadocia, Phrygia and Ionia. Then we proceed far east to India and from there, we turn back again to Ariana, Persia, Mesopotamia, Phoenicia and Arabia. Finally, there is one book describing northern Africa.

The original title for such a colossal work is unknown and the author does not name himself in any of the books. Strabo's authorship is assumed on the basis of citations in ancient sources and on the information provided by the Suda, which confirms that he wrote a geographical type of work.³ In fact, Strabo's *opus magnum* was his history (now lost), which is quoted by Plutarch.⁴ But neither Plutarch nor Pliny could refer to *Geography*, which was never published.⁵

In fact, in the second century, Dionysius Periegetes'⁶ description of Africa recalls Strabo's wording in 2.5.33 and Athenaeus⁷ quoted twice from *Geography*. Later, in the sixth century, Stephanus of Byzantium, in his *Ethnika*, quoted the text around two hundred times, which suggests that Strabo's work was gradually becoming more accessible.⁸

³ Under Straton (sic). On authorship of *Geography* see Clarke 1997 and Potheary 2002. Cf. Radt 2002:vi-xxi.

⁴ *Caesar* 63,3 and *Lucullus* 28.7.

⁵ See the introduction in Roller 2014 and Dueck 2000:145-54.

⁶ *Periegesis*, 174-219.

⁷ 3.121a and 14.657f.

⁸ On the history of *Geography*'s diffusion see Engels 1999:383-98 and Diller 1975:7-19 and 25-165.

There are about thirty manuscripts. The earliest dates from the fifth century, but it is a palimpsest (in the Vaticanus gr. 2306+2061A) and only provides fragments. Two Paris manuscripts offer the best extant text. One, dating from the tenth century, contains books one to nine (Parisinus gr. 1397). The other, from the thirteenth century contains the whole text (Parisinus gr. 1393).⁹ There are some Egyptian papyri, dating from the second and third centuries, containing fragments of books 2, 7 and 9.¹⁰

The *editio princeps* was by Aldus in 1516, in Venice. This was used as a basis for the 1620 edition by Casaubon, who presented the text in 840 pages (a standard way of referring to Strabo's text has long been by indicating Casaubon's pagination preceded by the letter C, for instance C 206). The 1844-52 edition by Kramer and the 1852-3 Teubner edition by Meineke make the basis for the now widely available Loeb edition. Aly's 1968 edition was important but it only covers books one and two. The Belles-Lettres translation uses a more recent edition by Aujac, Lasserre, Baladié and Laudenbach (1969-2015). Radt provides the most recent critical edition (2002-11), together with a German translation and an extensive commentary. This edition is used in the most recent English translation, that by Roller (2014; with Roller's own amendments) and I will use it as a base throughout this thesis.

Analysing temporal references (namely expressions such as "in our times" and "before our time") throughout *Geography*, Niese concluded that Strabo was born in 64BC, an idea that was widely accepted until recently.¹¹ Pothecary has meanwhile argued that such expressions should be read with care and she proposed that the author might have been born between 64 and 50 BC.¹² The last historical event mentioned in *Geography* is the death of Juba, the king of Mauretania, in 23AD and it is generally accepted that Strabo must have died shortly after.

Other biographical information is equally supplied by Strabo's work only. The author declares Amasia to be his hometown (13.1.66). His maternal family were initially close to Mithridates V Euergetes and to Mithridates VI Eupator, but later fell in disgrace, under political circumstances (10.4.10 and 12.3.33). Strabo is a Roman cognomen (although ultimately derived from a Greek word meaning "squinter") and

⁹ For manuscripts containig Strabo's text see Radt 2002:vi-xxi and the introduction in Roller 2014.

¹⁰ Radt 2002:vi-xxi. See also Dueck 2000:145-54.

¹¹ Niese 1878.

¹² Pothecary 1997.

this suggests the author's (or his family's) close relationship with a Roman citizen who granted them the cognomen as well as Roman citizenship. Who exactly this Roman citizen was is not known.¹³

Strabo classes himself as one of the most travelled scholars ever (2.5.11) and he refers to some influential intellectuals as his teachers. Aristodemus of Nysa, a specialist in Homer and a grandson of the great Posidonius of Apameia (14.1.48), taught Pompey's sons and led two schools of rhetoric, one in Nysa and one in Rhodes. Xenarchus of Seleucia taught Peripatetic Philosophy in Rome, where he was a tutor to Augustus himself (14.5.4). Tyrannion of Amisus, a grammarian, organized Cicero's library at Antium (12.3.16).

Geography's date of composition has long been debated. According to some scholars, Strabo wrote under Tiberius, because he mentions a number of events that took place under this latter emperor. Namely, he informs us that some Alpine tribes have started paying tribute to Rome, which only happened in year 19AD (4.6.9). It was also believed that Strabo would have written in his old age, during a period of around two years, an idea that was principally based on the fact that the work is well structured. Strabo starts new themes in each book by often reminding what was said in the previous book. Descriptions of countries are clearly divided into different sections and it is generally accepted that the author himself must have divided the work into seventeen books.¹⁴ But Aly proposed that the composition period must have been much longer, given the exhaustive amount of details that the text supplies.¹⁵

According to other scholars, the text contained two recensions. The core text was written sometime between the late republican and the early Augustan periods, as it describes a political situation that reflects the framework of this time gap. At a later stage, Strabo could have revised his old draft, in order to update information. It is thought that it would have been difficult for an author to write such a big and well structured work in his old age.¹⁶

Within Strabonian studies, one trend has analysed individual regions described in *Geography*. We can thus find studies by Andreotti about the Iberian

¹³ Dueck 2000:6-7. See also Pothecary 2002.

¹⁴ Niese 1878.

¹⁵ Aly 1957:397.

¹⁶ See discussion in Lindsay 1997.

Peninsula or Bellido's translation of passages referring to the Peninsula,¹⁷ Biraschi's translation of Strabo's books on Italy and Musti's work on southern Italy,¹⁸ as well as Syme's work on Anatolia.¹⁹ Another trend has examined themes permeating the seventeen books. Aujac has studied the scientific theories endorsed by *Geography*, Thollard studied the concept of barbarism in passages dealing with the Iberian Peninsula and Gaul, Clarke has studied the conception of space and time and Engels has researched the representation of Alexander.²⁰

Strabo's information on India has been widely used to reconstruct relevant aspects of ancient history²¹ and there is now an Italian translation of book 15 with extensive commentary by Biffi.²² However, little attention has been paid to the functioning of India as a literary theme permeating *Geography*, which will be the main focus of this thesis.

The purpose of this thesis

In books one and two, Strabo indicates a number of methodological guidelines that he deems crucial for geographical writing. One of the parameters much emphasised is that only reliable sources can be used in such an undertaking.²³ As a clear example of unreliable authors, he says that those who have written accounts of India are simply falsifiers, ψευδόλογοι (2.1.9). In fact, throughout his work, when he deems his sources untrustworthy, he tends to limit the amount of information he quotes from them to a minimum. In his own account of India (15.1.1-73), however, he extensively uses the very sources that he had classed as untrustworthy earlier.²⁴

Such a discrepancy has been noted by most scholars. Surveying the sources for book 15, Dueck notes that, while the author is suspicious of Alexander's historians, he had to admit that they were his "only sources supplying a thorough and extensive survey of India." Having to choose between completely dismissing these inaccurate

¹⁷ Bellido 1945, Andreotti 1999.

¹⁸ Biraschi 1988 and Musti 1988.

¹⁹ See the essays collected under Syme 1995.

²⁰ Aujac 1966, Thollard 1987, Engels 1998b and Clarke 2001.

²¹ Karttunen 1997, *passim*; Parker 2008, *passim*.

²² Biffi 2005.

²³ *Geography*, 2.1.1.-2.1.9 and in 15.1.10.

²⁴ For studies covering the sources for book 15 in particular see Puskás 1993, Aly 1957 and Vogel 1874. As noted by Engels 2008:156 Strabo similarly classes Herodotus as untrustworthy (for instance in 11.6.3-4), but he uses much information and literary devices that can be traced back to Herodotus.

reports, and using them with precaution, he opts for the latter. But he does so in a way that book 15 “is in fact a series of quotations almost without any authorial connecting passages. Many topics are repeated in various parts of the book, for the text is organised according to sources and not according to themes...” Because of this, Dueck notes, this book “has its own character in terms of style, or better, the lack of it.”²⁵

While partly agreeing with this conclusion, I would like to argue, throughout this thesis, that the inclusion of such a great amount of information deemed unreliable by the author serves a variety of purposes. To start with, book 15 may display more authorial features, serving Strabo's own agenda, than we think. In the process of quoting, ancient authors often relied on memory. Far from copying the original text word for word, they could make a number of alterations to the quote, consciously or not, in order to make the original passage suit their current purposes. The original could be adapted to convey a variety of intellectual and political agendas. Distinguishing between the genuine quote and the author's own rendition of it is a difficult task; often in the cross-examination between texts where apparently the same passage is quoted, variations of vocabulary and phrasing are found; in the place of the original text, we actually find interpreted versions of it. Certainly circumstances favoured such flexibility, for there were no academic rules determining how to quote; the author might have read the text from intermediate sources, which is to say, from already altered versions of the original.²⁶

Thus, at least to some extent, Strabo's India could be as much the result of his own writing, as it is a compilation of data he collected from his sources. From a slightly different angle, we can say that, not having sufficient data to write an accurate and updated account of India, the author comes to terms with unreliable sources. His particular mixing and matching of details from his sources constructs a space that is entirely his own creation. As we will see in this thesis, through a process of selection, the author makes this virtually abstract entity, “India”, convey his ideological agenda.

In addition, Strabo's subject matter, which he calls “geography”, was a highly polysemic concept, allowing for the inclusion of a diversity of subjects ranging from cartography to mythology. In books one and two, he attempts to clarify his

²⁵ Dueck 2000: 180-6.

²⁶ Gorman and Gorman 2007, Brunt 1980 and Most 1997. See also Engels 2008:156-7, on how Strabo makes errors in his quotations from Herodotus.

understanding of geography. Were he to follow the scientifically oriented guidelines established there, he would have no data to describe India as a whole, for available sources focused on one part of the country only (the valley of the Indus river, which he knew was only a lesser part of the subcontinent) and included fabulous stories that clearly aimed at praising the Greek conquest of Asia under Alexander. However, as we will see throughout this thesis, Strabo's conception of geographical writing made these fictional stories relevant for his purpose.

For sure, the miscellany of information on the subcontinent we find compiled in book 15 has been extensively used by classicists and indologists approaching different aspects of Indian history and relations between the Mediterranean and Asia.²⁷ But not much has been said about the functioning of Strabo's India according to his way of writing geography. As acknowledged by recent scholarship, Strabo's work brings out a broad programme, which is chiefly compromised with political ideology and clearly follows a literary syllabus.²⁸ Within this multifaceted programme, I would like to argue, the author's India should not be seen as an exception within his work, but as a paradigmatic instance of it, in the sense that it reflects some core features of his conception of geography.

From a variety of approaches that could be adopted, I decided to understand Strabo's text on India by taking into account the political agenda and the philosophical programme underlying his work. By analysing what Strabo selected from his sources and by considering a network of concepts pervading his work, we will see that the apparent inconsistencies we have mentioned earlier serve a number of purposes.

In Chapter 1, it will be argued that the inclusion or omission of a given detail related to India was relevant for the political agenda underlying the text. In view of the literature produced at the time and the data made available today by the archaeological research on Indo-Roman trade, Strabo's account shares the ideology underlying the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*. Yet, at times, his text lies between a panegyric and a satire of the Roman Empire. Chapter 2 will show that the author creates an image of India that served to support the aforementioned political agenda. By portraying native kings

²⁷ For most comprehensive recent studies, see Parker 2008, Tomber 2008, Karttunen 1989 and 1997 and Thapar 2003.

²⁸ A variety of contemporary approaches to Strabo's work, ranging from Philology to Gender Studies can be found in Dueck *et al.* 2005.

in association with luxury and corruption, the text refers to traditional Greek conception of the East and this has a bearing on the depiction of the Roman Empire.

In Chapter 3, we will see that Strabo's description addresses ethical questions that were left unsolved by Greek philosophical schools at the time, namely, education for women and the relationship between the philosophical way of life and political compromise. Within this setting of philosophical reflection, the text provides a sound set of moral illustrations, *exempla*, complete with brief autobiographical remarks.

Before we proceed, I will briefly review literature on India that was available at Strabo's time, trends within the scholarship studying such a *corpus* today and my contribution in that field. I will then introduce Strabo's description of India by indicating its main topics and by briefly considering its relation with other descriptions in his work.

India in Greek literature

From Scylax to Strabo, India was described by several Greek authors. One trend within the scholarship has studied their texts in order to assess the historical accuracy of the information they provided. Works by Lassen, Schwanbeck and McCrindle were early instances of such an influential trend.²⁹ Their research compared the classical texts with information contained in Indian literature, at an age that saw Sanskrit become part of ancient languages studied across Europe. In the 20th century, with a larger knowledge of Sanskrit literature, there were works by Stein, Breloer, Majumdar and André & Filliozat.³⁰ Karttunen's very comprehensive and illuminating work remains a landmark.³¹

In recent decades, archaeological research has made astonishing discoveries relevant to the subject. Sites in Egypt and India have been identified as ports belonging to that intricate network of the Indo-Roman trade. Together with coins and vestiges of commodities, papyri, ostraca and graffiti are bringing more and more textual information, in classical as well as in Indian languages.³²

²⁹ Lassen 1827, Schwanbeck 1846, McCrindle 1877.

³⁰ Stein 1922, Breloer 1929, Majumdar 1960 and André & Filliozat 1980.

³¹ Karttunen 1989 and 1997.

³² See, for instance, Sidebotham 2011, Tomber 2008, Tomber and Begley 2000, Seland 2010, Weerakkody 1997.

Another trend in the scholarship, however, has focused on themes and topics pervading classical and Indian literature. We can thus see, for instance, Sedlar and McEvelley's work on philosophical and literary themes.³³ Doniger has researched the conception of women in both parts of the world.³⁴ Such studies have sometimes explored influences, with classicists searching for Greek influences in India and indologists looking for Indian influences in Greece.³⁵

Yet another trend, inspired by M. Foucault's and E. Said's influential work, has focused on the so-called archaeology of concepts. Vasunia has studied, for instance, the conception of classical culture in colonial India,³⁶ whereas Parker has written about the conception of India in the imperial period in ancient Rome.³⁷

Being part of this latter trend, it is my intention to study the image of India in Greek literature, by focusing on one of the most prolific of ancient sources, Strabo's *Geography*. In fact, this text has been regarded as a major source for the classical knowledge of India and, as such, it has been continuously analysed by the scholarship researching a variety of historical aspects. My work, however, clearly falls into literary criticism and leans towards a close reading, in the sense that it endeavours to understand the making and the functioning of the concept of India within Strabo's text.

The very first ancient source on India was **Scylax** of Caryanda, who undertook a sailing trip down the Indus, under Darius I.³⁸ His journey must have taken place *circa* 519-516 BC, but his text has been long lost and we can only have an idea of what it contained. Describing the native society, he reported differences between the king and his subjects.³⁹ But, more famously, he reported monstrous races in the country: Pygmies, Shade-footed and Long-headed men. Such creatures already featured in Greek literature since Homer, but Scylax was the first author to locate them in India.⁴⁰

³³ Sedlar 1980. McEvelley 2002.

³⁴ Doniger 1999.

³⁵ Thundy 1993, Alonso 2008.

³⁶ Vasunia 2010 and 2013.

³⁷ Parker 2008.

³⁸ *FGrH* 709 T3a. cf. Herodotus, 4.44. For Scylax's journey see Panchenko 1998 and 2003.

³⁹ *FGrH* 709 F5. Aristotle, *Politics* 1332b21-27.

⁴⁰ *FGrH* 709 F 7a and F7b.

Hecataeus of Miletus wrote a survey of Asia and Africa in his *Περὶ ἤγησις*, now lost, which contained some information on India. In the extant fragments, we can find toponyms, ethnonyms⁴¹ and information on plants.⁴² Hecataeus recorded some marvellous features as belonging to Ethiopia (the Pygmies and the Shadow-foot people), but later sources located these in India.⁴³

The first surviving text describing India is by **Herodotus**. Throughout the *Histories*, he includes important remarks on India. For instance, the Indians appear as important allies in the Persian army, due to their stature and military skills; the text provides details on their war equipment.⁴⁴ As the Indians supplied the largest tribute (and that in gold) to the Persian Empire, Herodotus thought that he should inform the readership about the provenience of their wealth. Just before he does so, he allows space to describe the country and its people (3.94-106).

We are told that India lies towards the extreme east of the inhabited world and it is the most populous nation in the world (3.94). However, it contains many different tribes, who speak different languages and have different cultural habits (3.98). The southerners, he says, are almost as black as Africans, for, he proposes, their semen is black (3.101). Some of them are nomads, cannibals and have sex in public (3.38, 3.99-101), some live off of fishing (3.98) and some rely heavily on a millet seed (3.100). The northerners were exceptionally wealthy and the Persians conquered them, not because they did them any harm, but because of their exceptional wealth (7.9). The country's gold came from mines, rivers and from the dust unearthed by ants (3.106 and 105).

Addressing the climate, Herodotus says that it is unbearably hot in the morning and at evening it is really cold (3.104). In terms of flora, there are wild trees producing wool of exceptional quality (3.106). In terms of the fauna, animals are bigger than elsewhere (3.106). He mentions the camels (3.103), the hunting dogs (1.192 and 7.187), the horses (3.106) and crocodiles (4.44). The text famously gave picturesque details on the gold mining ants that remained famous throughout antiquity (3.102-5).

⁴¹ As the city of Argante in *FGrH* 1 F 297 or the Calatiai in F 298. See Nenci 1954.

⁴² Cf. the Indus cardoon *FGrH* 1 F 296.

⁴³ *FGrH* 1 F 327, F 328a and F 328b.

⁴⁴ 7.65, 7.86, 8.113, 9.31-2.

Herodotus briefly addresses the sources for his knowledge of India. When referring to the gold digging ants, he mentions that some of these can be seen at the Persian court (3.102) and the knowledge of these animals comes from the Persians (3.105). When describing the Indian camels, he says that he will only mention features that might not be known to his readers (3.103). This suggests that he had access to much more information than he included in his account.

Ctesias of Cnidus wrote *Indika*, the first monograph on India.⁴⁵ To some extent, his text was based on personal experience, as he worked as a court physician in Persia until 398 BC. He reported that he himself had seen seven Indian natives, who were all fair-skinned, unlike the majority of Indians who were reported by his sources to be dark-skinned (F45:19). He tasted Indian cheese and wine and wrote that they were very sweet (F45:48). The king of India had sent scented oil from a local plant to his Persian counterpart, and Ctesias, who sensed its perfume, wrote that it was so unique that he could not compare it with any other perfume (F45:47). He reported that he had seen the Persian king using a sword, made of Indian iron, to miraculously ward off clouds and hurricanes and that he himself possessed two swords made of the same metal (F45:9). He classed the Indian unicorn's huckle-bone as the most beautiful thing that he had ever seen (F45:45). For most of his information, Ctesias said he relied on eye-witnesses knowledge of his sources. However, he had to be selective and report only some of the prodigies they observed in India, fearing that otherwise his readers might find his account totally unreliable (F45:51).

In fact, Ctesias' *Indika* was to become famous for the inclusion of wonders. It is worth mentioning at least some of them here, because they were all mentioned by later authors, including Strabo. Being the last inhabited country on the edges of the world (F45:4), Ctesias supplied striking details on its climate. At this location, he said, the sun is ten times larger than elsewhere and the excessive heat kills a vast number of people by suffocation (F45:12). There is neither rain, nor thunder, nor lightning and the hurricanes occur frequently (F45:18). There is a great number of silver and gold mines on mountains, which, in addition, produce sardonyx, onyx, and other seal-

⁴⁵ For Ctesias' fragments see the Belles-Lettres edition by Lenfant 2004 and the English translation by Nichols 2011. On the everlasting influence of Ctesias' *Indika* see Vofchuk 2006 and Romm 1988. On his history of Persia see Llewellyn-Jones and Robson 2010.

stones (F45:11 and 26); one of the gemstones works as a magnet and attracts other gems and precious stones (F45:6).

In terms of landscape, apart from describing the Indus as exceptionally large (F45:1), Ctesias reports a river of honey (F45:29), a river that brings down amber (F45:36), a spring that fills with liquid gold and at the bottom of which there is iron (from which Ctesias' aforementioned swords were fabricated; F45:9), a spring on which nothing floats (F45:49) and a fountain whose water makes one speak the truth (F45:31).

Describing the fauna, Ctesias reported the wall-destroying elephants, small monkeys, big roosters (F45:7), parrots (F45:8) and large and fierce dogs (F45:10). But more famously, he reported the *martikora*, a hybrid beast that devours humans and other animals as well (although its name in the native language means man-eater); it has a human face, but the body of a lion; the mouth contains three rows of teeth; the tail has a stinger, that can inflict a fatal wound, which it can fire, as if it were an arrow (it later grows back naturally; F45:15). He also reports griffins that inhabit the mountains and pose a threat to gold hunters (F45:26), a bird whose excrement, if eaten by humans, causes sleep and, subsequently, death (F45:34), a unicorn whose horn has healing properties (whose huckle-bone Ctesias found to be exceptionally beautiful; F45:45) serpents (F45:33) and crocodiles (F45:46).

Ctesias wrote that the Indians are extremely just (F45:16 and 20), loyal to their kings and show disdain for death (F45:30). They do not suffer from conditions such as headache, ophthalmia, toothache, cold sore and live up to 120, 130, 150, and some even 200 years (F45:32). Ctesias described Indian culture with some detail, but later authors citing his work only recorded the wonders he included (F45:16 and 20).

Famously, Ctesias reported a number of marvellous races. Pygmies were very small and black men, who spoke the same language as other Indians (F45:21), followed the same laws and were equally very just; being very skilful archers, three thousands of them took part in the royal army (F45:23). The Dog-headed men understood (but did not speak) the Indian language and communicated by barking as dogs; they too were extremely just (F45:37 and 40-43). The Black men abstained from water and cereals and did not pass excrement, only urine and vomit (F45:44). The White-haired

men were covered in white body hair up to the age of thirty, when the hair began to turn black; their ears were so long that their arms are covered with them (F45:50).

After Ctesias, writing monographs on India by including bizarre phenomena became a much popular literary trend. Many authors wrote their own *Indika*, but we are only left with some surviving fragments.⁴⁶

Aristotle's knowledge of India came essentially from the authors mentioned above. He quoted Scylax to refer to Indian politics and mentions seven Indian animals, by clearly drawing on Ctesias.⁴⁷ Knowledge of the country was soon to suffer a change after the expedition there undertaken by Aristotle's most influential disciple, Alexander. Unfortunately, the texts produced by Alexander's companions have not survived and we are left with fragments coming from a variety of sources.⁴⁸

Nearchus gave some information on climate, namely, that, on the plains, it rained in the summer but not in the winter.⁴⁹ He described the country's rivers and pointed out that the sea can become unnavigable because of on-shore winds.⁵⁰ As for the flora, he reported sea plants,⁵¹ honey producing reeds, cotton and trees giving large shades.⁵² As for the fauna, he mentioned the parrots, apes, elephants and tigers, as well as the legendary gold-mining ants, whose skins he said he saw, and great quantity of dangerous reptiles, particularly big snakes.⁵³

Apart from describing the natives' physiognomy (he designated them as black, lean and lanky), he gave some picturesque details on clothing (they made use of tunics, over-garments, sunshades, ivory earrings and sandals of white leather with high and colourful heels, so that the wearer might look taller).⁵⁴ Apart from local diet, he supplied many details on war equipment for infantry. He mentioned that the philosophers in the country took part in public affairs and were believed to cure diseases with divine help. But the natives did not suffer from many diseases, due to

⁴⁶ Jacoby collected some of these. Cf. *FGrH* 709-721.

⁴⁷ For Aristotle and India see Bosworth 1993 and Karttunen 1997: 97-99.

⁴⁸ For Alexander's historians see as well as Pearson 1960, Pédech 1984, and Zambrini 2007.

⁴⁹ *FGrH* 133 F18. For Nearchus, see more in Zambrini 2007 and Pearson 1960: 150-87.

⁵⁰ *FGrH* 133 F18, F20 and F33.

⁵¹ *FGrH* 133 F34.

⁵² *FGrH* 133 F6, F11 and F33. Reeds producing honey (F19) might refer to sugarcane; see Karttunen 1997:140-1.

⁵³ *FGrH* 133 F9, F22, F7, F8a, F10b, F10a, F12.

⁵⁴ *FGrH* 133 F11; see also F19, which, according to Karttunen (1997:219), contains the earliest reference to genuine silk in Greek literature. See below note 83.

their simple way of life (which included the absence of wine in their diet) or due to the favourable climatic conditions.⁵⁵

Onesicritus reported the excessive heat, abundance of water and the humid air, which, he thought, was more nourishing and made animals bigger. Apart from describing the rivers, their flooding and the hippopotamuses, he described the Indian coastline and the island of Taprobane. He reported poisonous and healing drugs, cinnamon, nard and aromatics.⁵⁶

As for the people, Onesicritus discussed the causes for the natives' dark skin colour and reported their longevity and healthiness, which he thought was the result of their frugality.⁵⁷ He described strange customs of two regions: Cathaia and the country of Musicanus.⁵⁸ Having met the philosophers in person, he recorded their outfits, diet, everyday activities, training in endurance, scope of their studies, some of their ideas and the honours they receive from their fellow countrymen. Two of them played a key role in his account: Calanus and Mandanis.⁵⁹

Writing thirty years after the death of Alexander, **Aristobulus** said that he had not seen any of the biggest animals so much talked about; the crocodiles in the Indus were neither numerous nor dangerous. But the country had crustaceans, large scorpions, a vast number of serpents, big and small, against which it was hard to guard.⁶⁰ He provides some details on rice production and roots and drugs that can be used as medicines.⁶¹ In addition, Aristobulus reported customs such as polyginia, widow-burning and supplied some information on the philosophers' diet, outfit and everyday activities.⁶²

Cleitarchus probably did not travel to India, but his account of the country, based on Onesicritus' and Nearchus' reports, gained much popularity. He famously

⁵⁵ *FGrH* 133 F11, F23, F10a and F10b.

⁵⁶ *FGrH* 134 F8, F26, F22 and F12. Cf. Zambrini 2007 and Pédech 1984: 331-405.

⁵⁷ *FGrH* 134 F22 and F24.

⁵⁸ *FGrH* 134 F21 and F25.

⁵⁹ *FGrH* 134 F17a and F18.

⁶⁰ *FGrH* 139 F38. For more on Aristobulus, see Auberger 2001:366-451.

⁶¹ *FGrH* 139 F35 and F38.

⁶² *FGrH* 139 F41 and F42.

reported the salt mines that refill naturally⁶³ and described a procession in which carts carried trees and birds.⁶⁴

Some information from Alexander's historians is preserved in **Theophrastus'** work. His book on history of plants contains an excursus on Indian species.⁶⁵

The Seleucid ambassador **Megasthenes**, who travelled to India shortly after Alexander, supplied numbers for the calculation of the country's size (east to west 16,000 stadia and north to south 22,300 stadia). Distance from Indus to Palibothra could be measured with some certainty, for there was a royal road. He added some knowledge of the Taprobane, namely, he reported that this island was richer in gold and pearls than mainland India; it was divided by a river and its inhabitants are called the Palaiogonoi. He reported that the Ganges was much larger than the Indus and confirmed that there were gold mines.⁶⁶

Addressing the country's history, he said that the Indians never invaded any country because of their sense of justice. The only foreigners who invaded the country were Heracles, Dionysus and the Macedonians. In terms of culture, Megasthenes reported the natives' simplicity and sense of justice. He gave some details on dining habits (for instance, the local diet is based on rice and there is one dinner table for each person). He gave many details on Palibothra, the Indian capital, which was walled by a wooden construction and perforated to allow shootings of arrows through the holes. The city was surrounded by a ditch, that worked as sewage, for which he gave precise measurements.⁶⁷

More famously, he reported the division of the society into seven classes: philosophers, farmers, shepherds, craftsmen, warriors, overseers and advisors to the king. He reported many wondrous phenomena, such as the gold digging ants and the cranes that fight Pygmies. In addition, he reported a variety of monstrous races such

⁶³ *FGrH* 137 F44. This might refer to the salt Range in Punjab that contains large deposits of rock salt. The salt was an important source of income in the country but the salt deposits do not replenish themselves (Karttunen 1997:251-2).

⁶⁴ *FGrH* 137F 36. For Cleitarchus' influence in antiquity see Prandi 1996.

⁶⁵ *Historia plantarum*, 4.4.4-11.

⁶⁶ *FGrH* 715 F6b, F6c, F 26, F 9a and F 13a.

⁶⁷ *FGrH* 715 F 14, F11a, F32, F2, F 18a and F 18b.

as mouthless, noseless and one-eyed men, men who sleep in their ears and men whose toes are turned backward.⁶⁸

Megasthenes' successor, **Deimachus**, wrote a book on India as well, but we are left with very few fragments dealing with a type of bowl-stand, yellow pigeons, the size of India and marvellous races.⁶⁹

Eratosthenes attempted to calculate the exact size and shape of the country, relying on reports written by travellers. He calculated that the south of India would be 15000 stadia away from the country's northern boundary, as reported by Patrocles.⁷⁰ He thought that, in terms of geometric figures, India should be rhomboidal in shape because, according to reports, the eastern and southern sides were bigger than the other two in a way that the south-eastern corner of the country projected itself towards the ocean.⁷¹ Taprobane should be at a distance of 8000 stadia far from Ethiopia. As sources reported two harvests a year across the country, Eratosthenes thought that there should be two rainy seasons as well.⁷² The country's affluent status prompted Eratosthenes to say that the natives there, alongside the Romans at west, were among refined barbarians (ἀστείοι).⁷³

The description of India in Strabo

Although Strabo refers to India several times during the course of the *Geography*, he devotes book 15 to an extended description of the country. The description starts with methodological remarks stressing the difficulties of describing India (15.1.1-5). He explains that his account will essentially draw on his most reliable source, Eratosthenes. In addition, however, he proposes that we should be indulgent with sources (δεῖ δ' εὐγνώμονως ἀκούειν) that he had deemed unreliable before (2.1.9).

⁶⁸ *FGrH* 715 F19a, F 23a and F27a.

⁶⁹ *FGrH* 716 fragments 1 to 5.

⁷⁰ Cf. Strabo 2.1.2. For Eratosthenes' text see Roller 2010. Cf. Aujac 1966: 147-69.

⁷¹ Cf. Strabo 2.1.22. Karttunen (1997:104-6) argues that this clear-cut picture of the boundaries of India according to Eratosthenes is problematic. The northern frontier is correctly identified as being formed by the mountains, but these are thought to take an exact direction from west to east, whereas in reality they border the country diagonally. It was known since Herodotus (4.44) that Indians inhabited both sides of the river Indus and the boundaries of their country would be the desert (in the west, north and east) and the sea (in the south). Yet ancient geographers tended to prioritise rivers, not peoples, as natural boundaries of countries. This is why, for instance, the Nile was thought of as boundary between Asia and Africa, although it was well known that Egyptians inhabited both sides of it.

⁷² Cf. Strabo 15.1.14 and 20.

⁷³ Cf. Strabo 1.4.9.

He first provides numbers for the calculation of the country's size: southern and eastern sides of India measure 16.000 stadia each; northern and western counterparts measuring 13.000 stadia. But these numbers were estimated only (15.1.10-11).⁷⁴ The exact location of India, in terms of latitude, was an issue of serious debate (2.1.2 and 2.1.14), but there was some consensus regarding the country's shape (imagined to be rhomboidal) and boundaries: the river Indus in the west, the mountains in the north and the ocean at east and south (2.1.22). We are briefly given some details on Taprobane (15.1.14).⁷⁵

The text addresses some scientific theories about water, regarded as a ubiquitous element in the country. Rivers being plentiful, Strabo explains, their exhalation (*ἀναθυμίασις*) causes the summer rains, while their rising irrigates the fields and grants rich agriculture (15.1.13).⁷⁶

Comparing the Indian rivers with the Nile, the author records that the latter is thought to be less fertile because it runs across many climate zones and its water is absorbed throughout a great extension of land, whereas Indian rivers stay in one climate zone only and the surrounding lands receive much more moisture and become exceptionally fertile. Due to the rivers' course and the warmth of the rain water (caused by the sun), India produces everything in bigger numbers (15.1.23).⁷⁷ Due to the moisture, Strabo conjectures, the land should become porous and therefore particularly liable to earthquakes. This could be the reason why Aristobulus found so many abandoned cities and villages. Due to earthquakes, riverbeds change their course, frequently becoming too distant and much below the city level (15.1.19).⁷⁸

⁷⁴ According to Karttunen 1997:103, these numbers give a distorted scheme (see the schematic map of India on page 105): "What is actually the southern end, was carried to the southeast so that it was not much further south than the mouth of the Indus and clearly further east than the mouth of the Ganges".

⁷⁵ Onesicritus was among the first Greek authors to report this island. His knowledge came from information he collected in northwest India (there was some sea trade between this region and Ceylon). Eratosthenes' account came from Megasthenes, who drew on information he gathered in central India. However, Taprobane remained involved in mystery until traders from Roman Egypt started reaching the island on regular basis in the first century AD. For an in depth study of classical accounts of Ceylon, see Faller 2000; see Weerakody 1984 and Karttunen 1997:338-344 for brief summaries on the matter.

⁷⁶ See explanation of this idea in Aristotle (*Meteorology*, 1.9.346b) and Strabo's understanding of it in Aujac 1966:256-8. Throughout *Geography* Strabo does not pay much attention to the rains as climatic feature, but he feels that in India they had extraordinary characteristics.

⁷⁷ See Dueck 2012: 84-90 for theories on climate zones, as first imagined by Parmenides. Strabo first mentions these in 2.3.1 and 2.5.34.

⁷⁸ See Aujac 1966: 230-6. Water as a cause for earthquakes is an idea that dates back to Democritus and Aristotle (*Meteorology*, 2.8. 366b 9-15).

Water was equally important for considerations about skin colour. The text mentions three theories addressing the issue. Theodectes, who endorsed the traditional view, thought that the sun, being closer to the Ethiopians, burns their skin and makes them black. Onesicritus rejected this idea for thinking that the sun is not parallel but perpendicular to the earth and therefore it is equally distant from all peoples; at any rate the sun on its own could never affect the foetus, protected as it is inside the womb. Instead, he thought of the rain as a cause, because foreign animals taken to India changed colour and became darker.

Strabo thinks that those who propose as a cause the sun as well as water reason better. Ethiopians should be black due to the sun and lack of water in their country. Indians are not as dark because of the combination of the scorching sun with profusion of water. Such climatic combination develops into inborn features, through transmission of the sperm in the womb (ἐν δὲ τῇ γαστρὶ ἤδη κατὰ σπερματικὴν διάδοσιν τοιαῦτα γίνεται οἷα τὰ γεννῶντα). In addition, through logic we assume that the closer the sun, the more its heat will be felt; yet perception makes it clear that the earth is but a small point compared to the sun, which, therefore cannot burn some humans more than the others (πρὸς αἴσθησιν λέγεται, οὐ πρὸς λόγον; 15.1.24.).⁷⁹

Authors agreed that the country was exceptionally good for agriculture (15.1.16). In the summer, linen, millet, sesame, rice and *bosmoron* are sown, whereas in winter wheat, barely, pulse and other things are produced (15.1.13).⁸⁰ Aristobulus

⁷⁹ In antiquity, India was often confused with Ethiopia. However such a confusion was never accepted by geographically oriented scholars, as Strabo (see Nedungatt 2010). Herodotus, in his account of Scylax of Caryanda's journey to India, mentioned that the Indus, together with the Nile are the only two rivers breeding crocodiles (4.44); this might have contributed for the confusion between the two countries. Likewise, the dark complexion of Indians and Ethiopians remained a scholarly issue throughout antiquity. Scientifically oriented writers, as Strabo, understood the difference between these two peoples, yet more often both ethnic names were used interchangeably (see Karttunen 1997:211-2 and 124-5). For influence of climate on personality and civilization see Isaac 2004: 55-97; see below note 110 and discussion in chapter 3.

⁸⁰ See Karttunen 1997: 142-7. Different millets grew in India and it is hard to tell whether the Greek sources mean the *panicum*, *setaria* or *sorghum* varieties. Wheat (*triticum vulgare*) and barely (*hordeum vulgare*) were well known in the country and they caused no special wonder to Greeks as they were common staples in the West. Sesame (*sesamum orientale*), originally from South Asia, was introduced in the Mesopotamia and after that it became well known in the West. Together with its oil, it was used as medicine throughout the ancient world. Alexander's companions understood well the importance of sesame in India and Strabo records when it was sowed, its religious and culinary uses (15.1.61). Also, different pulses were known in the country, but the Greeks only knew the chick pea and Strabo records here that the Indians cultivate "edible species unknown to us", ὄσπρια καὶ ἄλλοι καρποὶ ἐδώδιμοι ὧν ἡμεῖς ἄποροι. As for flax (Karttunen 1997:135), the reference here that it was cultivated in the summer is correct. Although it was more often used for its seeds and oil, its fibers have been mentioned in local literature as well. Rice was cultivated in India since early times, it is well attested in local literature and

supplied details on the production of rice, while Megillus⁸¹ and Onesicritus informed about the production of *bosmoron* (15.1.18). Nearchus wrote about cotton, the “tree wool”(15.1.20-1),⁸² silk⁸³ and honey (15.1.20-1).⁸⁴

Strabo centres his description of India around the two river systems dominating the local geography: the Indus and the Ganges. Interlaced within the listing of rivers, mountains, plants and animals, there are details on local politics and culture. Contents are displayed with some repetition. Namely, if mentioning a plant, the text immediately identifies its different species and names the regions where they can be found. As he describes each of these regions, the author reminds us of the species of the same plant that happens to grow there. Here we learn what each source might have said about the matter.

The Indus basin is described by referring exhaustively to Alexander’s journey. Places along the river are described in the order in which they were explored by the Macedonian expedition. Although the sources are Alexander’s historians, they are very rarely named in this section, where impersonal expressions like “some say” and “they say” are used extensively.

Alexander, we are told, learnt that the upper end of the Indus was prosperous, full of rivers (its tributaries), mountainous, fertile and temperate, whereas its southern end was waterless and unbearably hot. Accordingly, he started by conquering the upper region because it was richer. Besides, it would be easier to cross the rivers there than further down when they all joined to make the great bed of the Indus (15.1.26).⁸⁵

Strabo quotes Megasthenes (15.1.53 and 15.1.60) who observed that the rice was a staple food in the country. It became well known in the west only after Alexander’s expedition and it was one of the products exchanged by merchants in the Indian Ocean. However, rice was then basically used as medicine and its cultivation was only introduced in the west in middle ages. Megillus, quoted here, is an otherwise unknown author. As for the *bosmoron*, in spite of the details given by Onesicritus, it has not been identified yet; it could be either a kind of millet or a variety of rice.

⁸¹ On Megillus, see Dueck 2015.

⁸² Cotton, understood as a “wool” bearing tree of India, fascinated the Greeks since Herodotus (3,106 and 7,65) and Ctesias (F45, 41). It has been used in India since at least second millenium BC and from here it was taken to the Near East; it has been argued that it could have been cultivated in Africa as well (Karttunen 1997:133-4). The *Periplus* mentions that Indian cotton could be purchased both in Africa and in India (see, for instance §14 and §39).

⁸³ Nearchus was probably the first classical author to mention silk. He thought it was obtained from plants; its actual animal origin was understood much later and it is first attested in Pausanias (6.26-9). See Karttunen 1997:135 and 218-9. However, similar fabrics were known in the classical world much before, as the so-called Coan silk described by Aristotle (*Historia Animalium* 5.19).

⁸⁴ This could be either sugar-cane or reed honey (see discussion in Karttunen 1997:139-41).

⁸⁵ Cf. *Geography* 1.1.17 where Strabo explains that geographical knowledge is an essential skill for military strategy: the Romans lost battles against Germans and Parthians due to their ignorance of local

After crossing the Indus, the Macedonians easily crossed the Hydaspes. Between the upper course of these two rivers was the city state of Taxila, described as big, very rich and well ruled (μεγάλη καὶ εὐνομοτάη καὶ ἡ περικειμένη χώρα συχνή καὶ σφόδρα εὐδαίμων).⁸⁶ After the Hydaspes, Alexander crossed the Acesines. In this region was the country of Porus, which was large, fertile and contained forests rich in wood for shipbuilding. This region was famous for its numerous apes (15.1.29)⁸⁷ and fierce dogs (15.1.31).⁸⁸

Meanwhile, Alexander learnt that the lower Indus was not as inhospitable as he had previously heard and, accordingly, the army continued the journey southwards along the Indus. This part of the country was inhabited by tribes such as the Sybae, Sydracae and the Malloi, who caused a deadly wound to Alexander (15.1.33). The kingdom of Musicanus was famous for its long lived people and excellent laws (15.1.34).⁸⁹

As for the Ganges, the sources agreed that it was the biggest river in the world (15.1.35). However, not much was known about the country it washed, although sources had reported some fabulous phenomena: gold mining ants,⁹⁰ democratic

geography. Alexander, as depicted here, is much more intelligent: his geographical awareness allows him to cross mighty rivers in the right place; later, after reaching the river Hypanis, he will turn back and travel down the Indus, as he learns that the regions by the mouth of this river were not as unbearably hot as previously thought (15.1.33). Note that Strabo does not mention clearly that Alexander turned back from the Hypanis as a consequence of the decision of his army.

⁸⁶ See Widermann 2003 and Karttunen 1990; in fact, at Alexander's time, Taxila was an important city, renowned for its philosophical school.

⁸⁷ See Karttunen 1997: 176-8 on Indian monkeys.

⁸⁸ See Schneider 2009; the ferocity of Indian dogs, as reported by Alexander's companions, was a well known *topos* in classical literature.

⁸⁹ See Karttunen 1997:121-4 and 231-2 on climate and Indian medicine as causes for health and long living.

⁹⁰ See Li Causi and Pomelli 2001-2 for a recent comprehensive survey on the gold digging ants. These were first described by Herodotus (3,120) and remained the most favourite *topos* relating to India in classical literature. According to Karttunen 1989:171-80, gold mining ants appear in both Persian and Indian literature in connection with northwestern India. Probably the story was invented by gold merchants trading in this region or came from the country where the traded gold came from (probably Ladakh, Central Asia or Siberia). Giant ants (although not in connection with gold) feature in Chinese literature as well and are likely to be of the same origin. Nearchus and Megasthenes probably reported stories they heard in India.

cities,⁹¹ fierce tigers⁹² and ebony (15.1.38).⁹³ Palibothra, the Indian capital, was located by the Ganges and it was described by Megasthenes as a well-fortified city (15.1.37).⁹⁴ A letter by a certain Craterus to his mother reported that Alexander had travelled all the way to the Ganges. Craterus described this river as exceptionally large and inhabited by monsters (15.1.35).

Strabo relies primarily on Megasthenes to describe the society, but he quotes Onesicritus, Aristobulus and Nearchus, by always naming sources for each content. His description of different social strata is interwoven with a large account on elephants (15.1.42-3)⁹⁵ and remarks on the gold mining ants (15.1.44), when animals were already mentioned in the section dedicated to the country's geographical features. As he quotes what Aristobulus wrote about the philosophers he met at Taxila, Strabo fits in what his source had overall reported about the city (15.1.56-7),⁹⁶ although Taxila had already been described in the previous section.

According to Megasthenes, Indian society is divided into seven strata (ἑπτὰ μέρη; 15.1.39-52).⁹⁷ The first stratum is comprised of the philosophers (15.1.39). The

⁹¹ See Arora 1991 and 1992 for an analysis of different political regimes in ancient India as described by classical authors. Although monarchy was the standard political system, it is known that some regions adopted oligarchical regimes (the so-called *gana /sanghas*).

⁹² See Karttunen 1997:170-4. Greeks and Indians did not distinguish between tigers and leopards. In both countries' literature, both animals symbolised wilderness and terror and were associated with different deities. Both animals could be found in the Middle East, but were rarely seen in the west, as they were hard to capture and carry for long distances. Although there are scorpions in India, they are not winged (Karttunen 1997:217-8). Indian dogs were mentioned by Ctesias and Alexander's companions. Their fierceness, often exaggerated, is attested in both Greek and Indian literature (Karttunen 1989:163-7).

⁹³ Ebony, extracted from many different trees, is a well attested sacred wood in India. It was described by Theophrastus in detail (*Historia Plantarum*, 5) and it became one of the products exported from India to the west (Karttunen 1997: 132-3).

⁹⁴ See Chakrabarti 2001 for a survey of cities in the Gangetic plain and their relations with each other; what Megasthenes says about Palibothra (Pataliputra) is confirmed by excavations done so far in Patna City. Remains of the wooden walls of the ancient city have been uncovered at Bulandibagh. Likewise, the *Arthashastra* (2.3.8) confirms the existence of cities fortified by wooden walls.

⁹⁵ See Rollié 2006; the Greeks had a practical and scientific curiosity towards the elephant, as this was one of the war animals in eastern armies. In India there were different myths and fairy tales involving elephants.

⁹⁶ According to Malinowski 2001, in Strabo we can find a distinction between paradoxography (account of extraordinary things that nonetheless are meant to be real) and teratology (completely unreal stories that he includes in his work for entertainment and for didactic purpose). See discussion below in chapter 4.

⁹⁷ Cf. Karttunen 1997:82-7 gives a survey of the most important interpretations of this very controversial passage in Megasthenes. Different Indian sources and foreign travellers have given different descriptions of the caste system throughout history. According to the Indian tradition, in theory there should be four social groups (the priests, nobility, farmers and artisans) but in reality there were at least five. Indeed local tradition considered the so-called untouchables as being outside the caste system but

second rank is formed by the majority of population, the farmers (15.1.40). Shepherds and hunters make the third rank (15.1.41). Fourth come the artisans, tradesmen and cleaners. Fifth is the position of warriors who are looked after by the king. Civil servants who police the country make the sixth rank and king's councillors make the seventh (15.1.46-9).⁹⁸

Strabo offers a long excursus on the philosophers, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3. Sources reported differences between philosophers who live on the mountains and those who lived on the plains (15.1.58). While some of these are called Brahmins (whose philosophical views are similar to those proposed by Greek thinkers)⁹⁹ some are called Sramans, who practise asceticism and do not have a specific set of philosophical ideas.¹⁰⁰ Onesicritus' conversation with two of these men, Calanus and Mandanis, is reported with some length (15.1.63-5).¹⁰¹ Another group was made by the so-called Pramnae, who are fond of criticising other philosophers (15.1.70-1).¹⁰²

Strabo stresses that there is much contradiction between sources (15.1.68). Additionally, there was a tendency for writers to transfer wondrous phenomena traditionally ascribed to the Caucasus (anciently imagined as lying at the edge of the world) to India, which was now conceived of as the easternmost region (11.5.5).¹⁰³ But

they would certainly be classed as an additional social class by foreigners. Megasthenes would have noticed the discrepancy between theory and practice and he would have made his own interpretation.

⁹⁸ The text provides a good number of details on administrative matters. For instance, about the army, we learn that ox-teams are used for carrying war equipment and food for animals and men (including food for drum-beaters, gong-carriers, machinists and their assistants). At battle, chariots drawn by oxen take two combatants and one driver; the elephants take three bowmen and one driver. Animals go without bridles. Horses are led with halter only so that their legs are not irritated by harness. Stalls and equipment are royal property.

⁹⁹ For similarities between ancient philosophical ideas of Greece and India, including possible influences, see McEvilley 2002, Ruzsa 2002 and Sedlar 1980.

¹⁰⁰ According to Megasthenes, the forest dwellers used bark of trees as clothing. According to Karttunen 1997:135 this must refer to a bark-cloth used by Indian ascetics, which is well attested in India but among classical authors it was only reported by Megasthenes.

¹⁰¹ Alexander's encounter with the Indian sages became a *topos* throughout antiquity. Most writers, as Strabo, only report the interview between the Brahmins and Onesicritus. This latter, being a philosopher himself, would have translated somehow what he heard from these men to his king and companions. Yet other authors (as Plutarch, *Alexander*), report an interview between the Brahmins and Alexander himself. Towards the end of antiquity Palladius of Hellenopolis gave the fullest account of this fictional interview (*Letter on the Races of India*). See Stoneman 1994 for a collection of different versions of this *topos*. See Stoneman 1995 as well.

¹⁰² It is not known for certain who exactly were these philosophers reported by different Greek travellers: they could have been Hindu, Buddhist or Jaina wisemen. For a comprehensive discussion on this matter see Stoneman 1995 and 2003 and Karttunen 1997: 55-63. See below chapter 4.

¹⁰³ This confusion could have some geographical plausibility. As Karttunen 1997:106 explains, the Greeks thought of the Himalayas, the Hindu Kush, the Caucasus and the Taurus as forming one single mountain range, which could be named synecdochically after its different parts. Strabo himself in

because of the trade between the classical world and India, which took place by land and sea, much more of the country was becoming known at his time than before, πολὺ μᾶλλον καὶ ταῦτα ἔγνωσται τοῖς νῦν ἢ τοῖς πρὸ ἡμῶν (2.5.12).¹⁰⁴

Now that we have reviewed the main elements of Strabo's description of India, we will briefly consider what he says about other less known parts of the world about which there was not much information. It will become apparent that he supplies more information for some of these regions than he does for others. As it will be argued across this thesis, within the political and the philosophical framework of *Geography*, some regions were more important than others and this made the author limit the amount of information he supplies in each case.

In book 2, Strabo explains that the inhabited world, οἰκουμένη, is a temperate zone. India being its easternmost region, the Iberian Peninsula makes the westernmost area. A parallel running through Ierne (Ireland) marks the northernmost boundary and a parallel passing through Meroe in Ethiopia marks the southernmost limit. Beyond these two latter points lie regions that are inhospitable due to the excessive cold (in the north) or heat (in the south); they might contain isolated inhabited places but these are irrelevant for the geographical research, because they are inhabited by people who can barely communicate with the rest of humanity (2.5.34-5).¹⁰⁵ Apart from their remoteness, such areas are defective and inferior in terms of resources: τὰ ἄκρα τῆς οἰκουμένης... ἀποτεύγματα... ἐλαττώματα (17.2.1).¹⁰⁶

The northernmost places that Strabo includes in his survey are Britain and Ierne (1.4.2-3). Britain is conceived of as a largely flat and woody island. Wet and misty, sun here is visible for few hours a day only. Natives live as nomads in forests, building huts and enclosures with fallen trees. There are many tribes, often at war with each other. Apart from tin (3.2.9), gold, silver and iron are among the land resources.

11.1.2-4 refers to the Taurus as a continuous mountain range dividing the whole Asia horizontally in a northern and a southern side.

¹⁰⁴ For the sea route see 2.5.12. and 17.1.13. For the land route see 2.1.15, 11.5.8 and 11.7.3. See below, Chapter 1, for more details on trade.

¹⁰⁵ See Romm 2010 and Dueck 2012: 68-98 for a survey of different ways of dividing the world in antiquity.

¹⁰⁶ This idea portrays a shift in classical thought. Traditionally people living in the edges of the world were idealised in rather utopian manner, it was only at a later stage that they started being perceived as barbarians. See discussion in Romm 1992:45-82.

Abundance of cattle supplies plenty of milk. Yet, the inhabitants are neither able to practise agriculture and gardening, nor to produce cheese: ἀπείρους δ' εἶναι καὶ κηρείας καὶ ἄλλων γεωργικῶν; that said, grain is produced (4.5.2).

Strabo mentions that the local princes are in friendly terms with Rome, but the Romans under Caesar could have easily defeated them and taken away an enormous booty (4.5.3).¹⁰⁷ However, the text mentions twice that the Romans were happy receiving a tribute from Britain and never intended to keep it under immediate political control, for they thought that expenditure with military personnel and devices would be greater than profit they could ever obtain from the land. Accordingly, the author reasons that geographical research does not need to study much about this country and its inhabitants, who are not strong enough to benefit or attack the classical world: πρὸς τε τὰς ἡγεμονικὰς χρείας οὐδὲν ἂν εἴη πλεονέκτημα τὰς τοιαύτας γνωρίζειν χώρας καὶ τοὺς ἐνοικοῦντας (2.5.8).¹⁰⁸

At a short distance north from Britain lies the island of Ierne. Described as a wretched place in terms of living conditions, due to the cold, Ierne is said to be inhabited by savages: ἀγρίων τελέως ἀνθρώπων καὶ κακῶς οἰκούντων διὰ ψῦχος (2.5.8). But the author feels that, apart from such brief remarks, he should not provide more information due to lack of evidence. In fact, sources described the natives as being even more savage than Britons, to the extent of practising cannibalism; men would have sex in public with their mothers and sisters (4.5.4).¹⁰⁹

Pytheas of Massilia had famously reported that there was an island beyond Ierne, called Thule, but he was the only source reporting such a discovery (1.4.2-3).¹¹⁰ Strabo thinks that Pytheas made some sense when he said that on this Thule, located in the frigid zone, there is excess of rain and lack of sunshine; additionally, he made sense when he reported that the natives are not able to practise agriculture and to keep domestic animals and their diet is extremely limited (4.5.5). However, Strabo classes

¹⁰⁷ See full account in Caesar, *De Bello Gallico*, 4-5.

¹⁰⁸ See also 2.5.34. See Stewart 1995, for perceptions of Britain during the late Republic and the Empire.

¹⁰⁹ See Bianchetti 2002; the cannibalism mentioned here might not come from Pytheas or from any account by travellers. It could be an idea based on the assumption, by prominent geographers, that the confines of the world should be inhabited by savages.

¹¹⁰ See also 2.5.8. For the most comprehensive recent study on Thule see Mund-Dopchie 2009. Wijsman 1998 gives a clear survey of geographical and political meaning of Thule, which has been associated with different places by different scholars (Fedotov 1982 suggests that Thule is Greenland). See Aujac 1988 as well.

as nonsense other features of Thule as described by Pytheas, namely that on this island there is no actual land, water or air as such, but a substance on which one can neither walk nor sail: τόπων ἐκείνων ἐν οἷς οὔτε γῆ καθ' αὐτήν ὑπῆρχεν ἔτι οὔτε θάλαττα οὔτ' ἀήρ, ἀλλὰ σύγκριμά τι ... μήτε πορευτὸν μήτε πλωτὸν ὑπάρχοντα (2.4.1). As Pytheas was credited for having written much fiction about well-known places in Europe, which had granted him the fame of the greatest falsifier (ἀνὴρ ψευδίστατος), Strabo thinks that his account of an otherwise unheard place must be false (1.4.3).¹¹¹

Assessing the world's northernmost limits, Strabo reasons that it would be impossible for humans to survive in places above Ierne (2.5.8.), for even northern Britain is only sparsely inhabited, due to the cold (1.4.4). Yet, for the sake of theory, he allows that there might be inhabitable land up to 4000 stadia north of Britain, but at any rate not beyond this point (2.5.8).

Strabo reveals that he is reasonably acquainted with the southern limits of the temperate zone, as he has travelled in Africa (2.5.11).¹¹² He could observe that what is traditionally meant by the place name Ethiopia has its southern boundary at Syene and Elephantina (17.1.3). After this point there is desert about which not much is known. It was thought that, at the extreme south, the continent was bathed by the ocean, but the African coast facing the southern ocean remained unknown (17.3.23).

Describing the country, the author records that everything in Ethiopia is smaller: people, animals and plants (17.2.1). The natives go naked and eat grass, twigs of trees, flowers and roots - there being neither fruit nor oil to cook food (17.2.1). Due to the sterility of the soil, the disadvantage of climate and their great distance from the civilised world, the natives have few means of subsistence and live as nomads (17.1.3). They hunt elephants, lions, panthers and snakes (17.2.2). But Meroe, the royal seat, is prosperous, surrounded as it is by mines of copper, iron, gold and precious stones (17.2.2). Some of the local merchandise is shipped, via the Red Sea, to Coptus (17.1.45 and 17.1.13).

¹¹¹ As it is well known, however, Thule soon became a legendary space symbolizing the ultimate remoteness (Virgil, *Georgics* 1.30) and the philosophical challenge for Roman expansion (Romm 1992:121-3 and Mund-Dopchie 2009:59-84).

¹¹² See Dueck 2000:15-22; throughout his description of the world, Strabo rarely says explicitly which places he visited. This has led some scholars to say that he only visited those places he explicitly says he visited (Weller 1906) and others to say he visited most places he describes (Waddy 1963).

As with the Britons, the Ethiopians are few in number. They are scattered around the territory and are not prepared to fight organised armies (17.3.5). Certainly, whenever they attempted to fight the Romans, they were defeated and are now in a peaceful state, guarded by Roman troops (17.1.53. and 17.1.12). Accordingly, their land is being progressively assimilated within the Roman Empire (17.3.24). In the past, the Ethiopians have been conquered by the Egyptians (16.4.4. and 17.1.5), although sometimes they too managed to invade their most famous neighbours (16.2.31).

In terms of culture, *Geography* reports that the Ethiopians worship their corrupt kings, who are chosen after their personal beauty, courage, pasturing skills or wealth. If a king happens to have some bodily imperfection, those close to him mutilate themselves in the same fashion and are happy to die with him. Formerly the priests held much authority and were even able to depose kings, but this state of affairs changed after a revolution led by monarchy, during which the priests were slaughtered (17.2.3). Describing local religion, Strabo remarks, in this country, the dead are either thrown in the river, or buried around temples or in the house; the relatives swear an oath by them, which is the most sacred. The natives largely believe that there are two gods: one is immortal and the cause of everything; the other is mortal and his nature is not clearly perceived. But the Ethiopians who live closer to the intemperate zone do not conceive of a god at all and express hatred towards the sun by insulting it for its excessive heat: τῶν δὲ πρὸς τῇ διακεκαυμένῃ τινὲς καὶ ἄθεοι νομίζονται (17.2.3).

According to Strabo, Homeric poems convey accurate information about the Ethiopians (1.2.3). The *Odyssey* made clear that they are the farthestmost of men and it suggested that, while some Ethiopians live in the east, some live in the west.¹¹³ Strabo thinks that this was well pointed out because, in a way, Ethiopians are divided by the Nile (1.2.25). Another explanation could be that the ancient Greeks used imprecise names to refer to distant peoples: they called Scythians those living towards the north of the planet, Celts and Iberians those who lived towards the West and Ethiopians the men who were imagined to live in the south. But this latter term denoted both the natives of the country south of Egypt and those who lived south of Carthage (1.2.27). In fact, sailors who attempted to explore the African coast, both from Carthage towards the west and from Red Sea towards the South, were forced to turn back because of a

¹¹³ *Geography*, 1.1.6, 1.1.13 and 1.2.24. *Odyssey*, 1.23.

variety of accidents; yet they called Ethiopians the farthest peoples they managed to reach. Homer, guided by such reports, named Ethiopians peoples living on both extremes of the African continent, without knowing whether there was any inhabited piece of land linking them (1.2.26).¹¹⁴

Following the same reasoning, the author thinks that Homer was being reasonable when he said that Menelaus visited Ethiopia (1.1.16). In fact, Menelaus might have reached places in Egypt that were then regarded as Ethiopian territory, the frontiers of both countries back then not being the same as the ones at the time of writing. The fact that some places in Ethiopia are named after the Greek hero further confirms this theory (1.2.32). It was probably Menelaus who learnt about the sources of the Nile and transmitted this information to the Greeks (1.2.23). He may have visited the western Ethiopians as well, who lived below Carthage (2.5.15). Some of the Ethiopians even today have fish as their staple food and these would be the mythical Ichthyophagi reported by Homer (16.4.4). The mythical Lotophagi could denote those of the Ethiopians who rely on the moisture they extract from the lotus, as there is no water in their territory (3.4.4. and 17.3.9).

Geography describes the Iberian Peninsula in much more detail. We are told that the region is now part of the Roman Empire and we learn the precise number of Roman *praetores*, *quaestores*, *legati* and legions that are currently involved in the administration of this country (3.4.20). But the text supplies details on diverse ethnic backgrounds of Iberians as well as their ancestral customs.¹¹⁵

In terms of resources, the southern part of the Peninsula is extremely wealthy: the land is fertile, rich in copper, silver and gold and locals explore these resources with skill.¹¹⁶ They export grain, wine and olive oil among many other products (3.2.6). There are hardly any dangerous animals (3.2.6). There are many cities (3.2.1) some of which were founded by Greeks (3.4.6). One of them, Gades, exceeds all the others in everything, including education, philosophy and laws (3.1.8). The Turdetanians who inhabit this region are the wisest in Iberia and they have writing records of their history, poetry and law (3.1.6); they excel in gentleness and civility (καὶ τὸ ἡμέρον καὶ τὸ

¹¹⁴ For further discussion on Homer's Ethiopia and its influence in later literature see Nadeau 1970.

¹¹⁵ For an in depth analysis of Strabo's depiction of the Iberian Peninsula see Cardoso 1994, Andreotti 1999 and Counillon 2007. See also Pérez 1991 for Strabo's understanding of major rivers (namely Tagus and Guadiana) as boundaries between different nations.

¹¹⁶ *Geography*, 3.1.6, 3.2.3, 3.2.11 and 3.2.8.

πολιτικὸν); at the present, they have been so completely Romanised they do not even remember their ancient language anymore (3.2.15).

The wealth of this country, we are told, was already known to Homer, who had heard reports by the Phoenician merchants and sailors operating in the area (3.2.14). For this reason, Homer imagined the land of the blessed to be located in the Iberian Peninsula. He could confirm in his inquiries that many of the heroes in their return from Troy came to Iberia looking for gold because they had lost everything at war. This is why there are many signs of Odysseus' journey across the Peninsula (3.2.13). As a cause for the abundance of gold, Posidonius suggested that when the local forests burn, the gold underneath boils and comes to surface; accordingly, he proposed that the country should not be associated with the underworld (as in Homer) but with Pluto (3.2.9).¹¹⁷

However, the northern and western parts of the Peninsula are described as miserable. Lusitania, in the west, is fertile and rich in gold dust (3.3.4), but it is inhabited by brigands who loot their neighbours and cause tribal wars (3.3.5). Sources recorded that the Lusitanians are treacherous, practice human sacrifice, make divination after it, cut off prisoner's hands and offer them to the gods (3.3.6).¹¹⁸

People inhabiting the north of the peninsula are, among many others, Callaicans, Asturians, Cantabrians, Vasconians and those who live in the Pyrenees; Strabo mentions that he would better not list them all, as he should not bore the reader with their barbarian sounding names. They live on mountains and have simple life (ἅπαντες δ' οἱ ὄρειοι λιτοί). They sleep on the ground, eat goat's meat, sacrifice horses and prisoners, make bread with acorns, drink beer, use butter instead of olive oil. The text gives details about their eating etiquette and attire (3.3.7), but we are told that the land is not suitable for agriculture due to the cold (3.4.16). The natives live on instincts (πρὸς ἀνάγκην καὶ ὀρμὴν θηριώδη μετὰ ἔθους φαύλου ζῆν) and some of them do not conceive the idea of god (ἔνιοι δὲ τοὺς Καλλαϊκοὺς ἀθέους φασί; 3.4.16).¹¹⁹ Due to their remoteness, they are wild and intractable (3.3.8).

¹¹⁷ See Andreotti 1995 and 2007 for implications of this utopian enough description of southern Iberia within the broader network of Mediterranean empires.

¹¹⁸ Strabo's northern Iberia is analysed in more detail in Alonso-Núñez 1992; See Lambrino 1957 for the description of Lusitania.

¹¹⁹ Thollard 1987 gives a full analysis of the notion of civilisation and barbarism in book 3.

As a principle, the inhabitants of the Peninsula are described as insincere and warlike. Divided into petty nations, they do not aim to reach any major goal in life apart from self-sufficiency (τοῦτο δὲ τὸ αὐθαδές... τὰ μικρὰ τολμῶντες, μεγάλοις δ' οὐκ ἐπιβαλλόμενοι). This is why they have been somehow easily defeated by successive conquerors: Tyrians, Carthaginians, Celts, Greeks and Romans (3.4.5). Remoteness had made most of the Iberians hard to reach by land and sea. Yet, Augustus subdued them all and Tiberius controls the region by keeping three legions there. At the time of writing, the natives had lost their savage ways and lived a civilised existence (3.3.8). However, the Romans took more than two centuries to dominate the whole Peninsula, as different nations fought the common enemy at different, unpredictable times and places, using guerrilla techniques. This is very different from what happened, say, in Gallia. In fact, in this latter country, the natives joined and fought the common enemy together and openly at battles. As the Romans were better equipped, they easily conquered all Gauls at once (4.4.2).¹²⁰

We would expect the amount of information that Strabo supplies for each region to depend on the quantity and quality of sources available. Large quantity of reliable sources would make possible a lengthier description, whereas scarcity of trustworthy sources would force the account of a region to be limited to a minimum. However, this is not always the case. In fact, the author gives a lengthy description of the Iberian Peninsula, for which he had reliable sources, such as Polybius and Posidonius. Conversely, he describes the British Isles very briefly, due to the lack of information. But he does offer an extensive account of India, a country for which his sources were all untrustworthy.

As we have seen above, the two areas in the extreme north and south of the inhabited world are classed as relatively irrelevant for the geographical writing. Strabo thinks that, living under harsh climatic conditions, the inhabitants cannot engage in any economic activity that could generate large profits and allow participation in international affairs. Accordingly, the natives could neither harm nor benefit the rest of the humanity. Their political and social organisation is fragile and they are far from holding systematic educational or philosophical systems. By contrast, across

¹²⁰ See Martínez 2006 for a comparison between Strabo's and Pompeius Trogus' Iberia; according to both authors, this is a promising land full of riches, but its people are warlike by nature.

Geography, both India and Iberia are described as rich in terms of land resources. Both Indians and Iberians are depicted as fully engaged in political and economic affairs within the network of the Roman Empire. Both nations provide instances of learning and philosophical enquiry, although both are associated with some traces of barbarism.

This suggests that, for geographical writing, a region's economic and political importance is more relevant than the quality of sources available for its accurate description. Indeed, due to their little significance in economic and political terms, Strabo's text describes the Ethiopians very briefly and, similarly, it covers Ierne and Britain in few lines only. By the contrary, as we will see throughout this thesis, within the political (and philosophical) framework of Strabo's *Geography*, India was certainly more important than Ethiopia, Britain, and, to some extent, than the Iberian Peninsula. Accordingly, Strabo had to dedicate significant amount of space to it, even if that implied quoting unreliable sources. Next, in Chapter 1, we will further analyse such issues by addressing Strabo's concept of geography and the place that such a concept allocates to India.

Chapter 1. India and Strabo's concept of geography

In this chapter, we will see that Strabo's selection and ordering of data related to India conveys a political programme, whereby his text eulogises the Roman impact across the globe. Particularly, it will be argued that the author decided not to emphasise India's role within the Roman economy, due to political constraints.

Section 1.1 will show that, according to the methodological guidelines Strabo explains in books 1 and 2, geography should only study countries that were economically and politically relevant at a global scale. Within this theoretical setting, describing India was crucial because the country supplied luxury products and held diplomatic relations with Hellenistic kingdoms and with the Roman Empire.

In fact, in 1.2 we will see that India was economically important at Strabo's time and that his text supplies invaluable information on the subject. As we will see in 1.2.1 even his contemporary poets, such as Vergil, Horace, Propertius and Ovid, frequently mentioned Indian luxury products that were regularly reaching Rome through sea trade. A comparatively full account of the sea trade with India can be found in the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, which is subject of 1.2.2: here we find lists of exchanged products, tax payments, sailing manoeuvres and local politics.

In 1.2.3 we will see that Strabo certainly provides data for our understanding of the trade linking India and Rome, but he does so only in passing remarks. These appear only in books 2 and 16, when we could expect such an important issue linking Rome with the subcontinent to be fully covered in the description of India in book 15. Why was Strabo so reluctant in providing full details on the trade, when, according to the methodological principles we have seen in 1.1, the trade was the most important feature that made India important at a global scale?

Section 1.3 will show that, due to political reasons, Strabo's account of India in book 15 had to be parsimonious in its coverage of economic aspects. As we will see in 1.3.1, contemporary writers, such as Vergil and Horace, regarded the Indians as enemies who should be conquered so that their riches could supply Rome with additional profits. But suggesting that the Romans should annihilate distant nations in order to take possession of their wealth was a problematic idea. Indeed, as we will see in 1.3.2, Augustus' official text describing the emperor's career and service to people, the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, repeatedly stresses that the relations linking Rome and other nations, particularly India, were peaceful.

Section 1.3.3 will show that Strabo's work draws on the ideology conveyed by the *Res Gestae* and it can be read as a panegyric to the Roman Empire and to Augustus. The author arranges the contents in such a tactful way that his description of India in book 15 emphasises the peaceful relations linking Rome and India. On the contrary, book 16 betrays a critique of the Roman Empire. This latter book shows that the war that the Romans fought against unwarlike Arab merchants was unjust and it was solely motivated by ambition for wealth - namely for the profits from the trade in Indian luxury items.

In fact, in book 15 the author barely mentions the Indo-Roman trade and thus fails to reveal the subcontinent's importance within the Roman economy. Such an omission stems from political reasons, in the sense that the Indo-Roman trade was associated with the recent, morally condemnable war that the Romans had started against the Arab merchants. We will note here that ambition for wealth appears as a morally condemnable impulse, both in Strabo and in his contemporary poets.

We will conclude that it was not necessarily due to his prejudice against the *Periplus* type of sources that Strabo did not provide full details on the sea trade (as scholarship has argued).¹²¹ What could be said about sea trade and about India's role in Roman economy was determined by political reasons. Inclusion or omission of details in book 15 is not random (as suggested by scholarship),¹²² but conveys the text's political framework.

¹²¹ Cf. Whittaker 2004:158.

¹²² Cf. Dueck 2000:180-6.

1.1. Defining geography

In ancient as in modern times, there has never been agreement on what “geography” should be. Space, place, time and nature are much used concepts, but there is no consensus about what they should mean.¹²³ As explained by Clarke, the Kantian idea according to which geography studies space, while history studies time is problematic. Indeed, not only space and time are experienced simultaneously by the human mind, but also geography is located in a certain period of time, while history cannot but happen in space. Another assumption has been that geography studies the present, but in fact it often examines the past in order to fully make sense of the present characteristics of a given place. In addition, time determines space, in the sense that we measure distances by referring to the amount of time needed in order to travel from one location to the other. This suggests that geography may be as paired with time as it is with space.¹²⁴

Today, among different trends within the discipline, Physical Geography studies environmental and social phenomena by using the scientific method of problem-solving through observation, measurement, experimentation, hypothesis testing and theorisation based on regularities discovered. The so-called scientific method, far from being deemed an infallible source of knowledge, is seen as an approximate model, engaged as it is bound to be with economic, political and social structures.¹²⁵

Human Geography studies texts and endeavours to understand, using much literary theory, conceptions of the world they imply. Geographical texts and maps, as impartial as they may aim to be, are discovered to disclose cultural, economic and political bias shared by the writer and his readership; poems and novels, as emotive and fictional as they may be, are found to draw on some specific preconception of the world.¹²⁶

¹²³ For an overview of problems regarding definition of Geography see Clifford *et al.* 2009.

¹²⁴ Clarke 2001: 1-16.

¹²⁵ See Clifford *et al.* 2009, chapter 1. For problems regarding different aspects of science and scientific method see Inkpen 2005, Bird 1989 and Harré 1981.

¹²⁶ See Duncan and Duncan 1988 and Duncan 1990 for geographical understanding of literary texts; Said 1995 for the literary understanding and political compromise of geographical texts; for maps and their political compromise see Harley 1988 and Pinder 2003.

In antiquity, varieties of texts featured themes we would accept as geographical. On the one hand, there was a scientific trend, whereby spatial features were described by addressing some specific issues.¹²⁷ Texts within this orientation rely on mathematics (in order to provide measurement of distances between sites and calculation of size and shape of countries), astronomy (latitudes are calculated through observation of constellations, length of the longest day in different countries and the shadow cast by sun-dials located at different places on a given day) and a number of ethnographic theories (they examine how different climates, at different latitudes, determine human appearance and culture).¹²⁸

On the other hand, there was a trend we can broadly call literary in the sense that it neither followed a specific method to describe places nor did it approach issues systematically. It relied on traditional beliefs and personal experience, but occasionally scientific data could be incorporated. We can trace this trend back to the Homeric poems, which describe the world with no mathematical or ethnographic concerns; there was no pretence for systematic description of places regarding local climate, culture and politics. Places were essentially part of a mythological scenario, but their descriptions included empirical features, based on remote experiences and beliefs passed down through generations. On the contrary, the *περίπλοι*, written centuries after the Homeric poems, relied on actual sailing experiences; they provided lists of sites in order of appearance along a coastal journey; they included distance in units of measure between places, topographies and passing references to climate and culture.

Much geographical information was included in historiographical texts, but only as a backdrop to the historical narrative.¹²⁹ Description of places could appear sparingly and was based on pre-existing records of local features, the author's own travels and hearsay; but accurate measuring and calculation of distances were not part of the programme. The Hellenistic period saw the emergence of two new genres. With chorography, geographical information appeared in independent monographs containing as many details as possible on nature and culture of a single region; examples of these are the *Αιγυπτιακά* and *Ἰνδικά* type of texts written by many authors.

¹²⁷ For an updated survey of ancient geography see Dueck 2012 and Prontera 2011.

¹²⁸ Dueck 2012: 68-98.

¹²⁹ Recent scholarship has shown that history and geography were barely distinct subjects in antiquity. Apart from Clarke 2001, see Marincola 1997:12-19 and 1999 and Engels 2007.

The *περίοδοι γῆς* were similar monographs, but their scope was to survey the whole earth.

Finally, relying on all these genres, but compiling extraordinary phenomena only, there were the catalogues of wonders dating back to the third century BC. Editors only included phenomena that had been supposedly observed by travellers (as opposed to complete inventions) and they always named the source from which excerpts would have been taken.¹³⁰

Consisting of such diverse texts, geographical writing at Strabo's time was undergoing a critical phase. Definition of contents, methodology and purpose was open to debate. Texts reflecting such a debate did not survive, but in Strabo's work, we can have a glimpse of the ideas and theories that were at stake. Essentially, there was much disagreement between those who followed the scientifically oriented trend (as Eratosthenes) and those following the literary tendency (as Polybius and Strabo himself).

For Eratosthenes, the content of geographical writing had to be the whole earth. The method to undertake such a task implied the study of mathematics, astronomy, ethnography and the critical reading of accounts containing information on different parts of the world; fictional texts were to be discarded as they aimed at entertainment, not instruction, and therefore did not convey factual substance. The purpose of geographical discipline was to study the earth for the sake of knowledge; this implied dismissing preconceptions, including traditional beliefs and forms of conceiving the world. For instance, political frontiers between countries should be irrelevant, for they were outcomes of political agreements; instead, geographical writing should study natural features functioning as boundaries between regions (1.4.7). Division of the world between Greeks and barbarians made no sense either, for this was a by-product of cultural conventions (1.4.9).

In sheer disagreement, Strabo regarded literature and tradition as essential components of the geographical understanding of the world. In books 1 and 2 he explains his standpoint by addressing a number of issues concerning definition of his subject matter and the method. The guidelines he presents in this section are relevant

¹³⁰ Callimachus was probably the first scholar compiling wonders. See discussion in Vanotti 2007:27ff, Dueck 2012: 1-8 and 64-67 and Schepens and Delcroix 1996. Cf. Giannini 1963, 1964, 1966 and Hardie 2009.

for his conception of India and I would like to highlight essential points of his reasoning.¹³¹

1. General purpose of geographical writing is to describe the world. Several authors, dating as far back as Homer, have accomplished such a task (1.1.1). However, knowledge of the world is a continuous process and it is the task of a geographer to add fresh details to what was previously known. This end will be fulfilled if we succeed in providing even a negligible level of new information (ὄν καὶ μικρὸν προσλαβεῖν δυνηθῶμεν), for the most part of the work still needs to be done (πολὸν μέρος ἔτι τοῦ ἔργου λείπεσθαι); Strabo feels he will be able to accomplish this aim because at his time Romans and Parthians have discovered places that were unknown to his predecessors (1.2.1). In particular, as sea trade between Rome and India was flourishing, he might be able to provide new details on the subcontinent as well (2.5.12).

2. There are direct and indirect sources of information. Strabo explains that descriptions in his work rely on his own travels across the continents. Having visited lands and seas from Armenia to Sardinia and from the Euxine to Ethiopia, he considers he has travelled more than any scholar before him. This experience was combined with what he heard and read (2.5.11).¹³²

Autobiographical data scattered across his work give no indication that Strabo ever visited India. But he travelled in Egypt, from where ships sailed to the subcontinent. He accompanied Aelius Gallus there, whose mission was to subdue the Arabs. With such a military expedition, the Romans ultimately aimed to control part of the Indian trade, the Arabs being most important intermediaries in the commercial transactions between East and West. Strabo felt he had some knowledge of the subcontinent, for he was intimate with the political milieu that dealt with eastern trade and he learnt, from merchants in Egypt, about the state of affairs of the region (2.5.12). He mentions in passing that he saw one of the gifts sent by an Indian king to Augustus;

¹³¹ See Aujac 1966 for Strabo's use of scientific ideas and Dueck 2000 for his use of a variety of literary genres, ranging from historiography to poetry.

¹³² Such a statement, however, has been subject to much debate. Indeed, while describing the world, Strabo will rarely confirm that he has visited the place he is describing. Waddy 1963 suggests he could have visited most places he describes, while Weller 1906 believed he only visited those places he explicitly declares to have visited.

this is to say, he was a witness to the diplomatic relations established between the two parts of the world (15.1.73).

For the most part, however, his account on India relies on indirect written sources (15.1.1.-6). We can understand Strabo's relation with his sources if we consider an image he uses to illustrate the knowledge acquisition process. He compares the way we understand space to the way we conceive of an apple. First, he says, the senses (αἰσθήσεις) experience the scent, feel to the touch, colour, shape, size and flavour; then the mind combines all sensible details into one idea (ἐκ δὲ τούτων συντίθησιν ἡ διάνοια τὴν τοῦ μήλου νόησιν. 2.5.11). Without such a direct and personal experience even great scholars are bound to make mistakes and have distorted ideas of reality (2.4.2). However, the mind is fallible and, in terms of geographical experience, even if we had easy access to the whole earth, we would only know well places that are nearer to us (1.1.16). Better knowledge will be achieved if, going beyond personal experience, we hear reports from travellers and accounts from scholars as well and proceed to cross-examination. This would be a safer way of knowing than relying on the sight of a single observer (2.5.11).¹³³

3. There are, however, different types of indirect sources. First, there are contemporary writers, who render information on a number of regions that were previously unknown (2.5.12 and 1.2.1.). Secondly, there are ancient authors who reveal such a higher degree of knowledge that it is difficult for us to detect any mistakes in their writings; such is Eratosthenes, Posidonius, Hipparchus and Polybius (1.2.1). Thirdly, there are unreliable authors: those who addressed matters they were unable to fully understand; their books are full of easy to detect misconceptions and they sound as if they made mistakes willingly. Yet sometimes they are taken into account by authorities such as Eratosthenes (1.3.1). Therefore, we should not discard them completely, for sometimes it is fair to consider information coming from unreliable sources, if they happen to provide details on important places for which there is not much information (ἐν ἧ χάριν εἰδέναι δεῖ τοῖς καὶ ὁπωσοῦν ἀπαγγεῖλασιν ἡμῖν τὴν τῶν τόπων φύσιν. 2.1.23).

¹³³ For relation between travelling and geographical writing see Adams and Lawrence 2001, Ellis and Kidner 2004, Pretzler 2004 and Cosgrove 2008.

As pointed out by Roseman, Strabo tends to rely on a number of theoretical principles to judge his sources, although he values autopsy. For instance, Pytheas had reported that Massilia and Byzantium lay at the same latitude and that there were living conditions at a latitude much further north from Massilia. Eratosthenes and Hipparchus had accepted his report, on the grounds that it was based on personal experience. But living conditions at such a latitude were thought to be inexistent by Strabo's sources describing areas north of Byzantium. Accepting the theoretical principle that there should be symmetry between the two ends of the continent, Strabo deems Pytheas' account unreliable. Moreover, his other sources, Posidonius and Polybius, were unaware of the northern Atlantic and only supplied data on the ocean around Cadiz. In reality, the harsher conditions under the continental climate at the eastern end were unmatched in the west, where the maritime breeze provided a milder climate. Yet, Strabo draws on Pytheas, at least partially and reluctantly, to describe the British Isles. This recalls the Stoic attitude of valuing empirical data over axioms, much cherished by geographers, but the author did not have many sources available to describe that region of the world (1.4.3 and 2.4.1).¹³⁴

Strabo faced similar issues when writing on India, as we will see throughout this thesis. Texts describing the country reported features that clearly defied reason, but they were based on autopsy. The author ends up quoting them extensively, but always with caution.

4. Strabo gives guidelines on how we should read the sources. Reliable authors are not free from mistakes and it is fair to accept some of their ideas while combining them with other authors' thoughts on the matter (2.1.8). Two sources contradicting each other on a given subject should not be discarded if disagreement is the only fault. On the contrary, they should both receive recognition, as they might shed light on complicated subjects (1.2.13). Omission of details is not necessarily the result of author's ignorance; if the subject matter was well known at the time of writing, there was genuinely no obligation to state what was obvious (1.2.30).

We can see these principles at play in Strabo's description of India. He gives contradictory accounts regarding different aspects of Indian geography, including topography (he gives measurements of local rivers, according to different sources),

¹³⁴ See discussion in Roseman 2005b.

climate (his sources could not agree whether there was one or two rainy seasons in the country) and society (his sources having different accounts on local customs from different regions within the country). The variety of details included here makes Strabo's report the most comprehensive account on India to have survived. Yet his all-inclusive, perchance patronising attitude here contrasts with his dismissal of the sources for Britain.

5. Fiction is a valid source for geographical knowledge. Although it aims to please the reader, fiction is not necessarily an outcome of ignorance (1.2.30). Underneath a range of poetic structures, factual elements can be uncovered (1.2.19). Thus, for instance, Homeric poems convey accurate geographical knowledge; but as we often fail to interpret the archaic language and the poetic license, we fail to unearth the geographical reality they conceal; in addition, since the time of writing there has been change in places and history, which blurs our understanding of matters (1.2.17).¹³⁵ Menelaus' supposed visit to a country as distant as Ethiopia may stem from literary devices aiming to impress the listener with the extent of the character's adventures across the world (1.2.34); but the reference to Ethiopia shows that there was awareness of this distant place; countries' boundaries being changeable, Menelaus, in his journey through Egypt, could have reached borderlines that back then were conceived as belonging to the Ethiopian kingdom (1.2.32).¹³⁶

This principle should allow Strabo to use indographic texts without any methodological concerns. He classed most indographers as falsifiers, but we should presume that they too could conceal truth underneath the blatant fictional appearance of their texts. One such example would be the famous tale of the gold mining ants told by Herodotus, which had become the quintessential feature of Indian geography.¹³⁷ In

¹³⁵ See Biraschi 2005 for Strabo's understanding of Homeric poems. Crates of Mallos was the most influential Hellenistic scholar to interpret Homer scientifically and Strabo follows his reasoning in theory, but does not always agree with him in detail. See discussion in Asmis 1992 and Porter 1992.

¹³⁶ Here Strabo is following information he collected from one of his contemporary grammarians, Aristonicus, who in his commentary to the *Odyssey* Book 4 recorded a large number of interpretations of Menelaus' travels. According to Aristonicus, Crates of Mallos held the opinion that Menelaus could have circumnavigated Africa, which would explain his long return journey from Troy to Sparta. Strabo thinks that this would be possible but the hypothesis is not needed, for accidents in the Mediterranean could easily be the cause for Menelaus' wanderings. It should be noted that Strabo takes such theories under consideration, even if he ultimately finds them unconvincing. Similarly, in 1.2.32 Strabo explains that Menelaus could not have brought riches from India to Sparta (as some scholars were tempted to say), because Homer had no knowledge of the subcontinent. For relations between ancient literature and geographical knowledge see Grafton 1992 and Morrison 2001.

¹³⁷ Herodotus, 3.102-5.

spite of his apparent criticism of this story, Strabo does mention the ants with some detail and this suggests that he ultimately considered the story to supply some truth: there should be gold in India, for this was reported by a number of sources (15.1.37, 44 and 69).

Across *Geography*, Strabo quotes literary texts extensively, sometimes even after he has already provided accurate information on places drawing on non-fictional sources.¹³⁸ In book 15, we can read passages from Sophocles and Euripides that the author himself acknowledges that are not directly related to the country he is describing. To some extent, we can notice a tendency towards comprehensiveness, which gives an encyclopaedic character to Strabo's work.¹³⁹ But considering his minimalist approach in describing Britain, we can say that fiction is included in a selective manner. India and the North Atlantic being relatively unknown areas at the time, the author tells us more about the former than the latter, although both places were involved in an aura of myths and legends.¹⁴⁰ Some literary references seem to be more relevant than others for Strabo's overall purpose.

6. Geographical research relies on a number of disciplines. Geometry provides shapes and measurements of places. It takes for certain what happens to be said by astronomy, a science that, by observing the stars, particularly the sun, calculates the position of places in terms of their latitudes within the globe. Astronomy in turn relies on natural philosophy (*φυσική*), which, being a perfect science, depends on no other discipline; some of its tenets are: the universe is a sphere; the earth, a motionless sphere, lies at its centre; the axis passing through the earth and the whole universe is the same and is static; all bodies tend towards the centre (2.5.2.). Other important geographical disciplines are botany and zoology (1.1.16).¹⁴¹

This is a particularly important guideline, for some sources can be deemed irrelevant for not showing basic knowledge of the disciplines mentioned above. Strabo finds that *περίπλοιοι* writers are not good sources, because they show ignorance in terms of mathematics and astronomy:

¹³⁸ For Strabo's use of poetry see Dueck 2005.

¹³⁹ For the comprehensive character of Strabo's geographical writing see further discussion in Engels 2007.

¹⁴⁰ For perceptions of India, Britain and the North Sea in antiquity see Romm 1992: 140-9.

¹⁴¹ For the relevance of astronomy in ancient geography see Dueck 2012: 68-98, Aujac 1966 and Evans 1998.

οὕτως δὲ καὶ οἱ τοὺς λιμένας καὶ τοὺς περίπλους καλουμένους
πραγματευθέντες ἀτελῆ τὴν ἐπίσκεψιν ποιοῦνται, μὴ προστιθέντες ὅσα ἐκ
τῶν μαθημάτων καὶ ἐκ τῶν οὐρανίων συνάπτειν προσῆκεν.¹⁴²

The author occasionally engages in theoretical debates, as for instance, when he attempts to calculate the exact latitude at which India should be located. There was a consensus in his sources regarding the country's climate and conditions for agriculture, but its exact location on a world map was under dispute since at least the Hellenistic times (2.1.2).¹⁴³ After much consideration he concludes that India should be placed in a position more towards south than that shown on traditional maps, because in terms of its climate, this country was more similar to Ethiopia than to Britain. Calculating exact locations of places was a major challenge for scholars in antiquity, but Strabo thinks that his calculations are more accurate than the ones attempted by as prominent predecessors as Eratosthenes and Hipparchus.

Similarly, drawing on Aristotelian meteorology, he proposes that India should be vulnerable to earthquakes. This should be so because all his sources mentioned the abundance of rivers and rains in the country; he thought that the waters would make the soil porous and the air circulating in the hollows should cause the earth to shake (15.1.19).¹⁴⁴ Also, he makes considerations on how the climate determines peoples' skin colour and hair (15.1.24). Concern, or mere curiosity towards these ideas provides some scientific character to Strabo's work.

7. Geography can only address readers who would know basic principles of the aforementioned disciplines. One must have seen a globe and circles that are drawn on it, the position of equator and the tropics, the zodiac and the movement of the sun through it, etc. One must know mathematics (and understand the horizons and the arctic circles), geometry (to understand the shape of a circle, differences between a globe and a plane) and astronomy (to understand the stars of the Great Bear). Naturally, the reader does not have to know everything within these disciplines, for that would

¹⁴² 1.1.21.

¹⁴³ On this problem of classical geography see Shcheglov 2005 and Aujac 1966: 147-69. Strabo here addresses a variety of scientific theories dating back to Parmenides, Aristotle, Eratosthenes, Polybius and Posidonius.

¹⁴⁴ 15.1.19. See Aujac 1966: 230-6. Water as a cause for earthquakes is an idea that dates back to Democritus and Aristotle (*Meteorology*, 2.8. 366b 9-15).

be the task of a scholar (1.1.21). Geography addresses the general public and the political leader. This latter means someone who is educated and has taken the customary curriculum for free men or for those pursuing knowledge (1.1.22).

8. Not everything important for each discipline is relevant for geography. For instance, while astronomy inquires all continents and seas within the entire globe, geography only surveys that quarter of the globe, located on the northern hemisphere, where humans happen to live. Within this quarter only the area comprised between Ireland and Ethiopia and between Iberian Peninsula and India is to be researched. This is the *οικουμένη*, the set of inhabited lands par excellence. There may be humans living beyond these boundaries and, naturally, in the other three quarters of the globe, but they are too far away to communicate with those inhabiting the *οικουμένη*. Geography surveys that region only where humans live close together in such a way that they can interact with each other (2.5.8).

Although this might seem very restrictive a scope, Strabo is following the universalistic approach he so admired in Polybius. The purpose of his geography is to survey the whole *οικουμένη*, as opposed to the single region, which would be the task for chorographers. The boundaries he establishes for the *οικουμένη* are assumed to be changeable. In the same way that, through the Roman interference, Iberians and Gauls have become important within the *οικουμένη*, in the future other people living on the edges of the earth can become more central, by their improvements in communication and commerce with the Romans.¹⁴⁵

9. Defining an element for each place is much like a paradox, in the sense that it catches our attention immediately for being spectacular and unexpected (*ἄ καὶ παραδοξίαν ἔχει τινά*, 1.2.29). When describing countries, striking features that happen to be particularly useful, memorable or entertaining (*τὸ πραγματικὸν καὶ εὐμνημόνευτον καὶ ἠδὺ διατρίβειν*, 1.1.23) should always be mentioned. *Minutiae* and doubtful elements should be left aside. A great extension of land is to be described, but there is only space for generalities regarding each country, although sometimes specific details can be provided if they happen to be useful for the politician or the philosopher (1.1.23).

¹⁴⁵ However, to some extent, Strabo's own geographical survey has been seen by some scholars as a collection of chorographies, regional accounts. For discussion on this see Dueck 2000: 45-49.

At any rate, the author insists, geography is selective in nature. A chorographer of India would describe this country taking it as a unit in itself and provide full details on everything. A geographer surveys the whole οἰκουμένη, by including those details that are important for us to understand what each place is in relation to the others (1.1.16).

10. Natural advantages of a place should always be detailed, as these are permanent (διαμένουσι, 2.5.17). Remarkable human achievements should be mentioned as well, for over the course of time they become defining elements (καὶ τούτων δὲ τὰς πλείω χρόνον συμμένειν δυναμένας, 2.5.17); this is the case with political systems, commerce and flourishing of arts and intelligence (2.5.18). As example of this, in book 9 we can read that the town of Thespieae is visited by a good number of people every year, although originally there was nothing remarkable to be seen; visitors only came to see a statue of Eros by Praxiteles that was given by the sculptor as a gift to a local courtesan, who in turn donated it to the town to be publicly displayed; the text mentions in passing that, over the time, whereas nearby towns have disappeared, Thespieae still remains on the account of the famous work of art (9.2.25).

Likewise, places mentioned in myths are visited even when they fall in ruins; this is because they are perceived as related to legendary figures of a glorious past (2.5.18). Such an emphasis on the intimate relationship between the past and the present identity of places will be of crucial importance for Strabo's conception of India. India was a space in ruins in the sense that existing literature did not allow a clear understanding of the country's natural and social features. Nonetheless, more than a physical entity that could exist for its own sake, India represented the extent of Alexander's legendary expedition and of Augustus' influence over the world, as we will see below. Here we can certainly refer to the reasoning by Clarke, according to which "a place, as experienced by people, has a significant past, the stories which are told about the place and its inhabitants. This is what gives it a distinctive identity."¹⁴⁶

11. Natural and human phenomena result from a variety of causes that the geographer should take into account, but to study them in detail is the work for a philosopher (2.3.7-8). This principle is essential because it gives specific focus to the geographical writing. While Polybius, as a historian, intends to explain at length the

¹⁴⁶ Clarke 2001:18.

causes for the Roman expansion, Strabo prefers to address the present situation of the Roman Empire, in a typically geographical turn.¹⁴⁷

To some extent, *Geography* accepts the environmental determinism as a cause for human behaviour (2.5.26-33). People living under favourable living conditions (temperate climate, fertility of the soil, and abundance of water) develop organisational skills to explore the land resources and achieve profits, but over the time they may become idle and lose the prosperity they once achieved. People living under inhospitable conditions (extreme heat or cold, arid soil, scarcity of water) develop resistance and bravery to face the elements but not the skills to make the most of land resources. These two natural dispositions can be improved through communication with more balanced and civilised peoples. Success or failure of each nation may be caused by diverse combinations of natural conditions conjugated with different levels of interaction with other countries.

These guidelines regulate information that the geographical writing should include. After determining the quarter of the globe to be described, the text further limits its scope to the οἰκουμένη, the most densely inhabited area within that quarter. Here too, not every type of detail regarding each country is relevant, only the remarkable aspects should be recorded.

Remarkable features are those seen as particularly useful, memorable and entertaining. Strabo gives at least two examples of the utility of geographical knowledge. Romans, in their military campaign in Arabia, were deliberately misled by a local guide and the expedition resulted in a total fiasco (17.1.53). They were misguided by natives and lost a good number of battles at other parts of the world (1.1.17). It is clear that a basic topographical knowledge (size, shapes, distances, locations and natural advantages) is essential for an empire to expand. A very useful subject at the time of writing was certainly India, involved as this country was in the trade of highly valued luxury items.

The author gives many examples of places that are memorable for their historical and moral importance. Demosthenes mentioned that the opulent city of Olynthus now had nothing left to be seen; yet, Strabo adds, this and similar places are

¹⁴⁷ However, for the intimate relation between History and Geography see discussion in Clarke 2001:1-76. Cf. Dueck 2000:52.

visited, not because of what they are, but because of what they were and what they represent. Apart from strictly geographical characteristics, the argument goes, remarkable laws and actions make the identity of places and as such they should be recorded, so that future generations can imitate what is good and avoid what is bad (2.5.17).

Similarly, as he uses Alexander's historians as main sources and refers to the Macedonian expedition so extensively, Strabo's description of India is a narrative of Alexander's journey in the country.¹⁴⁸ He records that according to the local sage, Mandanis, Alexander is the only philosopher in arms (μόνον γὰρ ἴδοι αὐτὸν ἐν ὅπλοις φιλοσοφοῦντα, 15.1.64). Several times we are reminded of his bravery at battle, his generosity towards his allies, mercy towards the defeated and respect towards local traditions. Across *Geography*, Macedonian conquests are seen as one of the most extraordinary achievements, for they extended geographical knowledge to an unprecedented scale (1.2.1). Strabo finds the best occasion to emphasise this idea when he describes the farthest country reached by Alexander.

Places can be remarkable due to the entertainment they provide. This is the case with India, a nearly fictional space that was always a source for incredible stories. Apart from the marvels Strabo could find in Herodotus and Ctesias, there were continuing stories about large size animals, fabulous riches and incredible trips to the subcontinent. In addition, the author's tendency towards comprehensiveness plays an important role in the recording of apparently entertaining aspects. If, as we have seen above in points 4 and 5, even unreliable writers might shed light on some geographical aspect regarding distant places, indographers should not be discarded only because they are ψευδολογοί or ἰδιῶται. Herodotus and Ctesias, as fictional as they might sound, could add something new to the knowledge of such a distant place that India was.

In a word, geographical definition of a place, far from consisting of the sum of its physical characteristics, is made by its relevance within the inhabited world, its utility for the current state of economic and political affairs, its capacity to become an example to be remembered and its entertaining character, if any. A place is the result

¹⁴⁸ In antiquity India was generally associated with Alexander (see Stoneman 2008: chapter 5). For Alexander's role in Strabo's *Geography* see Engels 1998b.

of the way it interacts with other places and the way it is remembered across the time. As we will see below, India, in Strabo's version, symbolises the Greek genius par excellence, in the sense that it was primarily the stage for Greek (as opposed to Indian or Roman) achievements in the past.¹⁴⁹

1.2. Geography and economics: the Indian commodities

This section will show that Strabo decided to report some of the most relevant aspects implied in the trade with India, even if very briefly. Before we analyse his text in particular, we will approach the historical context by considering three important types of evidence. We will start by seeing that archaeology today provides a rich picture of the logistics involved in the commerce between east and west. Next, we will see that Augustan poets frequently associated India with a set of luxury items and there was a generalised feeling that the wealthy and ultimately the state were lavishing far too much money in purchasing such articles.¹⁵⁰ Then, the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* will be considered. Although written after Strabo's lifetime, this latter text is the only surviving account of the practicalities implied in the east-west trade.

In comparison, it will become clear that details recorded by Strabo, however scarce, make more historical sense than some of the information rendered by the *Periplus*, which is entirely due to the two texts' different nature. Strabo's was a scholarly survey based on literature, whereas the *Periplus* supplies empirical information collected by those who were personally involved in the sea trade. Certainly, *Geography* supplies a wider range of details than the Augustan poetry, although this is hardly surprising when literary texts are at stake.

However, it will be noticed that Strabo does not mention the trade of Indian merchandise where it could feature most prominently, in the description of India in book 15. He refers to it, throughout *Geography*, in passing remarks. Considering the methodological guidelines we surveyed earlier, the east-west trade was an excellent example of interaction between nations and, for this reason, it should have merited a more in-depth treatment. India, in spite of being located at the outskirts of the classical

¹⁴⁹ Clarke 2001:1-75.

¹⁵⁰ For an analysis of different aspects of the representation of India in texts and artefacts of the time see Parker 2008 and Whittaker 2004: 144-162.

world, held significant commercial relations with the very centre of the οἰκουμένη. Yet, when describing the country, the author decides not to give a thorough account of its participation in the Roman economy.

This will become particularly striking once we consider that, at the time of writing, the demand for eastern goods had become so impressive that authors associated India quintessentially with trade. Nevertheless, as we will see later, what could be said about the matter in a world survey was determined by political constraints.

1.2.1. Archaeology of the eastern trade

Over the last few decades, scholarship has drawn attention to the fact that economy in the ancient Mediterranean was largely connected with trade routes operating across the Indian Ocean.¹⁵¹ Greeks and Romans successively engaged with eastern trade, to the extent that at the Imperial period military measures were undertaken in order to come to terms with the commodities commerce controlled by Arabs.

In the first century, the Indian Ocean was economically important for a variety of political entities. The Pandya kingdoms in Southern India, the Parthians and Scythians in the North, the Arabs, the Egyptians and the Ethiopians were commercially linked with each other through sea routes. Trade between India and the Mediterranean followed two main itineraries.¹⁵² By sea, merchandise from the subcontinent entered the Persian Gulf and proceeded via the Euphrates to Antioch or Gaza;¹⁵³ alternatively, Indian goods were carried along the Red Sea, to be unloaded along the Egyptian coast and then dispatched, via the Nile, to Alexandria. There was a land route connecting Northern India with the Mediterranean.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Sidebotham 1986b.

¹⁵² For surveys of Indo-Roman trade see Tomber 2008, Young 2001, Ball 2000 and Lunde and Porter 2004.

¹⁵³ For this route in particular see S. Ratnagar 2006, Davidde *et al.* 2004, Sedov 1994 and Avanzini 2008.

¹⁵⁴ See McLaughlin 2009:90-2 for a fuller account of the way this route was organised, within the broader context of northern and central Asian trade routes. Strabo is one of the main sources for our understanding of the way these routes were connected with the Caspian and Black seas. However, as Karttunen 1997:336-8 says, compared to the sea trade, the land trade is nowhere near as well known and it was probably not as important. There are few textual evidences and even fewer archaeological findings. We can say for sure that there were certainly roads connecting the Persian Empire to India; these were used by Alexander and commerce must have taken place there.

From the two sea routes, the Persian Gulf was controlled by the Arabs and therefore the Romans much preferred the alternative Red Sea option, which they could control from Egypt.¹⁵⁵ Two major ports in this country were particularly important for the trade. Berenike was founded in the mid-third century BC by Ptolemy II, most likely to come to terms with the sea trade.¹⁵⁶ Myos Hormos, at current day Quseir al-Qadim, provides remains from the first century BC but was most probably founded before this date.¹⁵⁷

Most archaeological findings at these sites can be traced back to India and include food (rice, black pepper, coconut, mung bean) wood (teak and sandalwood), ivory, textiles (cotton), Tamil-Brahmi and Prakrit-Brahmi graffitos, gems (agate, amethyst, sapphire), pearls and pottery.¹⁵⁸ At Berenike, the most spectacular discovery has been an Indian pottery vessel containing 7.5kg of black pepper.¹⁵⁹ Some of the foodstuffs, namely mung beans and coconut, were not considered luxury and are not mentioned in ancient texts reporting the trade; it is thought that they might have been imported by resident Indians.¹⁶⁰ Vessels found at both sites are likely to come from one specific region in Southern India.¹⁶¹

The most representative site in India where Roman vestiges have been discovered is Arikamedu. Findings include lamps, glass vessels, beads, coins and pottery from Italy and eastern Mediterranean, dating from about 10 BC to 50 AD. Findings at Pattanam include Roman glass and large quantities of Roman amphorae, mostly for wine; as these imports come from a variety of places, it is thought that this was the site of an international port, very likely the Muziris mentioned by our sources.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁵ Seland 2011.

¹⁵⁶ For excavations at Berenike see Sidebotham 2011, Sidebotham and Zych 2010 and Cappers.

¹⁵⁷ Peacock 1993, Peacock and Blue 2006 and 2011.

¹⁵⁸ For a complete list of findings see Tomber 2008:83-7. Traditionally it was assumed that this trade consisted of luxury products bought by Roman merchants. This view has been largely challenged because some of the products, like pepper, became fairly widespread and accessible across the empire (Whittaker 2004: 163-80), whereas others were used for medicinal and religious purposes (Sidebotham 1986:15, McPherson 1995: 79-82).

¹⁵⁹ Cappers 2006.

¹⁶⁰ Tomber 2008:71-76.

¹⁶¹ Tomber and Begley 2000, Saraswati and Behura 1966.

¹⁶² Cherian et al. 2007 and Shajan et al. 2004.

All this commerce was made possible by a number of circumstances.¹⁶³ Since the Second Millennium BC commerce was carried through slow coastal journeys. Since the Hellenistic times, Arab, Persian and Greek traders discovered a faster, open sea route, as they came to understand the functioning of the monsoon winds blowing across the Ocean.¹⁶⁴ At the time of Augustus, monsoon cycles were fully understood by the Romans as well. Such knowledge made possible a systematic navigation, with a set schedule determining specific times of year for ships to depart from Egypt, reach their destinations and return.

After Augustus annexed Egypt in 30 BC, sea trade became safer. Piracy at sea was controlled and military outposts were created to protect merchants in land. Increasing Roman influence in the East propitiated diplomatic relations between Indian kings and the classical world.¹⁶⁵

At the same period in India conditions were favourable for the sea trade. Commercial transactions had become sophisticated and included trade loans and agencies.¹⁶⁶ Scythian invasions from Central Asia had compelled Chinese and Northern Indians to invest more in sea routes than in the land itineraries that had been used traditionally for the commerce. Political changes in Southern India favoured the sea trade as well.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ There was a land route as well and Strabo is among the main sources reporting the way these routes were connected with the Caspian and Black seas (*Geography*, 11.5.8). However, compared to the sea trade, the land trade is nowhere near as well known and it was probably not as important. There are few textual evidences and even fewer archaeological findings. We can say for sure that there were certainly roads connecting the Persian Empire to India; these were used by Alexander and commerce must have taken place there. Archaeology suggests that this trade dated as early as the fifth millennium BC. See Karttunen 1997:336-8, Salles 1998 and McLaughlin 2009:90-2.

¹⁶⁴ Very likely Posidonius knew about the monsoon winds, judging by his account of Eudoxus Cyzicus, who famously sailed from Egypt to India by using an open sea route indicated to him by an Indian guide. Posidonius shows that there was some knowledge of the north-west orientation of India as well, which could have encouraged traders to sail the 12th parallel latitude from Africa. See references in Strabo (2.3.4-8) and Pliny (6. 57). For the ancient understanding of the monsoon cycles see Tchernia 1997 and Dihle 1964.

¹⁶⁵ Whittaker 2004: 144-162. Cf. Pliny, 6. 101.

¹⁶⁶ Thapar 2002: 245-53.

¹⁶⁷ Champakalakshmi 1996: 26-7 and 93-4.

1.2.2. Eastern luxury in Augustan literature

Classical literature produced at the time when this trade was thriving associates India with wealth.¹⁶⁸ The association dates back at least to Herodotus (the gold mining ants) and Ctesias, but it was emphasised by the developments in eastern trade. Thus, for instance, Propertius in one of his poems explains how profitable would it be for Augustus to conquer India:

Arma deus Caesar dites meditatur ad Indos,
et freta gemmiferi findere classe maris.
magna, Quiris, merces: parat ultima terra triumphos;
Tigris et Euphrates sub tua iura fluent;
sera, sed Ausoniis veniet provincia virgis;
assuescent Latio Partha tropaea Iovi.
ite agite, expertae bello, date lintea, prorae,
et solitum, armigeri, ducite munus, equi!
omina fausta cano. Crassos clademque piate!
ite et Romanae consulite historiae!¹⁶⁹

In this poem, India is surrounded by a sea rich in gemstones, most probably pearls, *gemmiferi maris*. It is inhabited by wealthy people (*dites*) and subduing them would grant large profits (*magna merces*) to the Romans. Located as it is at the extremities of the world (*ultima terra*), travelling there would imply covering long distances. But India's association with extensive land journeys, so insistently repeated in the literature produced by Alexander's companions, has been replaced here by a context of communication by sea (note the frequent association of India with sea: *freta, maris, lintea, proris*). Travelling there now implies, by default, taking a sea route, an idea that clearly shows awareness of the sea trade we mentioned earlier.

Other texts produced at the time associate specific commodities with specific places. According to Virgil, Arabia gives incense, while India gives ivory: *India mittit ebur, molles sua tura Sabaei*.¹⁷⁰ The idea is repeated elsewhere, but with a variation to include ebony as the typical produce of the subcontinent, while Arabia remains famous for the incense: *sola India nigrum fert hebenum, solis est turea virga Sabaeis*.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ Parker 2002.

¹⁶⁹ Propertius 3.4.1-10. Heyworth 2007 edition.

¹⁷⁰ *Georgics* 1.57.

¹⁷¹ *Georgics* 2.116-17.

However, Ovid says that India produces incense: *narrare... et domitas gentes, turifer Inde, tuas*.¹⁷² In another poem he mentions that India produces balm, while Euphrates brings the incense: *tura nec Euphrates nec miserat India costum*.¹⁷³

Ivory, used as it was to make intricate personal objects and furniture is mentioned a few times in Horace. In one of his odes the poet laments, satirically, that his modest dwelling is not covered in ivory, gold or columns coming from the end of the world in Africa:

Non ebur neque aureum
mea renidet in domo lacunar;
non trabes Hymettiae
premunt columnas ultima recisas
Africa, ...¹⁷⁴

Although poor, the poet is happy spending a quiet life in his Sabine farm. Similar idea appears in another poem, where he says that it is not worth wasting time in wars for the sake of glory (*honor*); as life is short, we might as well have some wine and listen to a girl playing the lyre made of ivory.¹⁷⁵ In this latter connection, ivory seems to be associated with beauty and seduction, an association frequently made by poets at the time. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Apollo held a lyre inlaid with Indian gems and ivory, *gemmis et dentibus Indis*; even before convincing his listeners of the divine beauty of his music, Apollo charmed them with the striking appearance of his lyre.¹⁷⁶

Virgil compares the blushing on the princess Lavinia's face with a stain of crimson dye on Indian ivory:

Indum sanguineo veluti violaverit ostro
si quis ebur, aut mixta rubent ubi lilia multa
alba rosa, talis virgo dabat ore colores.¹⁷⁷

India and products coming from there appear associated with beauty, seduction and refinement. Propertius wrote that no one can resist the charm of a girl

¹⁷² *Fasti*, 3, 719-20.

¹⁷³ *Fasti*, 1, 341.

¹⁷⁴ *Odes*, 2.18.1-5. Bailey 2013 edition.

¹⁷⁵ *Odes*, 2.11.

¹⁷⁶ 11.167.

¹⁷⁷ *Aeneid*, 12.67-71. Conte 2009 edition.

fastening her hair with an Indian jewel, *Indica quos medio uertice gemma tenet*.¹⁷⁸ In another poem, a lover was about to lose his girl to a wealthy man, but he just managed to have her back; unable to give her gold or Indian pearls, which he could never afford, he convinced her with his sweet words:

hanc ego non auro, non Indis flectere conchis,
sed blandi carminis obsequio.¹⁷⁹

Ovid, describing Athis, the son of a nymph of the Ganges, says that his striking beauty was enhanced by his rich attire which, apart from a *chlamys* with the golden fringe, consisted of jewels; his hair was myrrh-scented:

diuite cultu
augebat, bis adhuc octonis integer annis,
indutus chlamydem Tyriam, quam limbus obibat
aureus; ornabant aurata monilia collum
et madidos murra curvum crinale capillos;¹⁸⁰

Athis is a composite figure combining elements from different regions of Asia. Combination of a fabric that was meant to come from Phoenicia (the *chlamys*) and a perfume thought to come from Arabia (the myrrh) provides cosmopolitan refinement to this Indian youth. Such a mishmash is reminiscent of the context of sea trade, a phenomenon that particularly favoured refinement of the wealthy through the combination of commodities from different parts of the world. Reference to the rich clothes (*diuite cultu*) is a common place feature addressing the overall Asian extravagance. But the recurrent references to gold, traditionally associated with India, could provide a specifically Indian quality to this Athis: apart from the gold bordering the purple cloak (*limbus aureus*), he is covered in gold necklaces (*aurata monilia*) and wears a coronet that could easily be imagined to be golden as well. Note that, in the same text, the Apollo we mentioned earlier would seem to be more modest, for although he wore the same cloak as Athis, no gold is specially mentioned to be part his attire; instead, his hair is said to be golden, but the adjective used there was *flauum*,

¹⁷⁸ 2.22.

¹⁷⁹ 1.8A.

¹⁸⁰ *Metamorphoses*, 5, 49-53.

not *aureum*. Athis certainly stands for the idea of Asian, particularly Indian extravagance made possible by the wealth that was imagined to be abundant in the country.

Adornment was certainly associated with India. According to Alexander's historians, the most striking feature of the native fashion for men was the dying of hair and beards and to wear multi-coloured garments. Megasthenes mentioned that they wore colourful clothes embroidered with gold and precious stones. These indications, recorded by Strabo,¹⁸¹ are absent from this image of Athis. Ovid composes an image that is new within the classical indography. To make his Indian youth, he replaces that native and relatively grotesque fashion of dying the hair and wearing colourful clothes with cosmopolitan refinement, associated with sea trade, of Roman upper classes. In fact, he preserves the quintessential symbol of India, the gold, as part of his composition, while combining it with riches that were known to come from other regions (the purple and the myrrh) and clothes that are associated with the classical world (the *chlamys*).

In another famous poem by Ovid, the death of an Indian parrot makes her owner Corinna to be sad.¹⁸² The poem invokes the whole universe to second her grief. The exotic pet was part of Corinna's charm and, perhaps, the symbol of love, if in fact it was given to her by her lover the narrator. Whereas the Athis and the beloved girls we saw above were adorned with Indian commodities, Corinna possesses an Indian, exotic, pet. Possession of some oriental items seems to stand for refinement in a context of love and seduction, in the sense that Corinna's identity is associated with her exotic pet. In another context we saw above, Indian items (ivory and ebony) were associated with rich houses and were opposite to the poet's humble farm.

Wealth and refinement were implied in moralising ideas about life and death. Horace, wondering what poetic living would be, readily assures that it would not consist of seeking profits from harvests in Sardinia or from India's gold and ivory: *non aurum aut ebur Indicum*.¹⁸³ In one of his epistles he shows that most men are fools; as idle as they are (*impiger*), they are ready to sail as merchants to the end of the world

¹⁸¹ 15.1.30, 15.1.54; cf. 15.1.71.

¹⁸² *Elegies*, 2.6.

¹⁸³ *Odes*, 1.31.6.

(*extremos Indos*); in order to escape poverty (*pauperiem fugiens*), they are happy to face a number of perils at sea:

impiger extremos curris mercator ad Indos,
per mare pauperiem fugiens, per saxa, per ignes;¹⁸⁴

These texts give a glimpse of the role played by the commodities trade within the Roman economy. For those planning to escape poverty or to become wealthier, India was among the countries to be dreamt of. Reaching the subcontinent involved distant journeys, potentially perilous sea trips, but the profits would be great. Wealth was always important to display one's social status, but Indian commodities were associated with refinement and as such they belonged to an altogether different type of wealth. At another level, commodities have a role in personal life and imagination, associated as they are with the conception of love. Indeed, consumption of eastern goods not only granted social recognition, it granted a life full of love. Sweet words, says Horace, could grant love too, but not everyone can be a poet.

1.2.3. Indian trade according to the *Periplus*

The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* is the most complete account of eastern trade to have survived. Written between the first and the third century, it describes a number of trading centres across Egypt, Ethiopia, Arabia and India.¹⁸⁵ Details on sailing techniques and goods to be exchanged at each port are given special attention. In passing, the text mentions aspects of local politics, administration, culture and religion.¹⁸⁶

The most striking feature is the meaning of the country name “India” which, since Herodotus and Ctesias, was designation of the region washed by the river Indus, imagined to lie towards the very edge of the known world. Alexander and his companions came to know by experience that, further east and south from this region, there was still vast extension of land, inhabited by a good number of wealthier peoples; they heard that even further, somewhere in the southern sea, there was an island,

¹⁸⁴ *Epistulae*, 1, 45-6.

¹⁸⁵ Text edition by Casson 1989. For the date of composition see Robin 2005: 41–65.

¹⁸⁶ For the most comprehensive updated information about archaeological findings in Egypt and India, see R. Tomber 2008 and Székely 2008.

Taprobane, supposed to be among richest parts of the world. Later, Megasthenes and Deimachus travelled further east to the basin of the Ganges; they still called “India” by and large to all these lands, for the fact that there was a common culture.¹⁸⁷

The *Periplus* reports regions situated on the western, southern and eastern coasts of the subcontinent. But according to this account, “India” is not the Indus basin. It is now a country located further south from this river, a vast extension of land comprising many rivers and various kingdoms. Each of such realms includes a number of places relevant for the trade. Below I will consider some of these, as well as the merchandise exchanged at each trading post and then compare the information given here with the details provided by Strabo and other Augustan authors.

The current day Gujarat region, on the western coast of the subcontinent, is conceived as the first Indian kingdom a ship from Egypt would approach. This country was ruled by a certain Mambanus (§41)¹⁸⁸ and included Barygaza, the most important trading centre in the whole subcontinent.¹⁸⁹ Local merchandise comes from inland cities of Ozene, the capital Minnagara and from areas further north.

Following products from the Roman Empire could be sold at Barygaza (§49): aromatics (storax, yellow sweet clover), coral, metals (copper, tin, lead, gold and silver Roman coins),¹⁹⁰ minerals (topaz, realgar, sulphide of antimony), unguent (of the cheap quality and not much), raw glass, textiles (clothing with no adornment, clothing of printed fabric, multi-coloured girdles) and wine (preferably Italian, otherwise Laodicean and Arabian).¹⁹¹ Highly valued luxury products could be sold specifically to be consumed by the local royalty: very expensive silver vessels, expensive clothing with no adornment, fine unguent, fine wine, slave musicians and slave girls.

Barygaza exported spices (long pepper, costum, spikenard),¹⁹² medicines (lycium), textiles (cotton, silk and molochinon cloths, silk yarn), ivory, minerals (agate, onyx) and aromatics (bdellium). Some of these, the text explains, were

¹⁸⁷ For a history of name “India” see Karttunen 1989:157-60 and 36-7.

¹⁸⁸ Mambanus is thought to be the Saka king Nahapana. See Raschke 1978:631-2 and 755.

¹⁸⁹ For the importance of Barygaza, most probably current day Bharuch, see Tarn 1951:260.

¹⁹⁰ MacDowall 2003, Turner 1989 and MacDowall and Jha 2003.

¹⁹¹ Tomber 2007a.

¹⁹² Apicius, writing under Augustus and Tiberius includes pepper, costum, spikenard and other spices in many of his recipes. Apart from seasoning, spices were widely used as medicines; pepper is counted among drugs to cure gynaecological diseases in the Hippocratic corpus (*On women's diseases*, 1.81). See Parker 2008: 150-4 and Miller 1969: 6-10.

originally taken there from other parts of India. From Ozene came onyx, agate, cotton and molochinon garments and ordinary cloth (§49). From the North came the nard, costus and bdellium (§48) and from Minnagara came the cotton cloth (§41).

The text supplies a large number of details on sailing in the region. For instance, we learn that Barygaza is located at the mouth of a river called Nammadus. This river, in turn, empties into a gulf which is so narrow that it is particularly hard for ships to navigate. These would normally tend to sail along its right hand coast (which is dangerous because there is a long and rocky reef), or along the left hand coast, which is formed by a promontory (this is dangerous because of the currents around it; in addition, the sea bottom being rocky and rough, it can cut the anchor cables). This latter route works out better. However, once the gulf itself is managed the mouth of the river on which the city stands is hardly visible because the land is low; once it is found it is hard to sail into the city harbour because the water is made of shoals (§43). Fortunately fishermen working for the local king are there on their large boats (called *trappaga* and *kotymba* in local language) ready to pilot the merchant ships into their final destination; these are taken into certain harbours, to specific stopping places (§44). We learn that those who sail from Egypt to India do so around July, which is named Epeiph in local language (§49). As a sign that they are approaching Barygaza, there would be serpents to be seen in the sea.

Some historical information provided here is dubious. Alexander's expedition is said to have been taken place here, which is an obvious mistake (§41). We are told that this region was once ruled by Greek monarchs Apollodotus and Menander (§47). This might be a reference to the Indo-Greek kingdom, which indeed expanded beyond the Indus basin, but its exact frontiers are not actually known.¹⁹³

Lands below Barygaza make the southern part of India, known in local language as Dachinabades (our text informs that this name derives from the local word for "South", "Dachanos").¹⁹⁴ Inland is an arid and mountainous country inhabited by wild beasts (leopards, tigers, elephants, enormous serpents, hyenas and different types of monkeys). The coast, which extends vertically in north-south direction, has important market-towns, ruled by different kings (§50).

¹⁹³ Cf. Fussman 2005 and Seland 2010.

¹⁹⁴ This is an approximate Greek form to render the Sanskrit "dakshin", the South. See Casson 1989:210.

The kingdom of Cerobothra includes Muziris,¹⁹⁵ a major market-town which is busy hosting ships from Arabia and Egypt (§54). The goods to be sold here are (§56): coral, medicines (orpiment), metals (copper, lead, tin, great amount of money), minerals (sulphide of antimony, realgar, topaz), peridot, raw glass, textiles (clothing with no adornment, multicoloured cloths) and wine. Muziris exports ivory, medicines (nard from the Ganges), minerals (diamonds, sapphires, transparent gems of all kinds),¹⁹⁶ spices (pepper and malabathrum¹⁹⁷ in great quantity), textiles (silk cloth in great quantity), tortoise-shell and pearls (fine and in great quantity).

Further south comes the Pandian Kingdom. Its main inland city is Argaru, the only place where pearls can be bought. They come from pearl-fisheries (where prisoners are put to work) along the coast in the region. Argaru exports muslins too, that are called Argaritic (§59). Still further down in the sea is Palaesimundu, the island previously known as Taprobane; it produces pearls, transparent stones, muslins and tortoise-shell (§61).¹⁹⁸

Sailing details in this section are fewer but there is a range of important remarks. For instance, the text warns us that the town of Calliena is now better avoided; it used to be an important lawful market-town, but is now blocked to the Greek merchants, so that the ships appearing at the harbour will be forcibly taken up to Barygaza under guard (§52).¹⁹⁹ Further down along the coast, there are pirates operating around Cheronesus (§53). We learn that the Egyptian ships should take significant amount of wheat for the shipping staff, as this is not a staple food among native Indians (§56). Some place called Cape Comari is sacred to a local goddess; natives, both men and women, come here to consecrate their lives to her and live in celibacy (§58).

¹⁹⁵ The so-called Muziris Papyrus confirms some of this information. See Casson 1990 and Rathbone 2000.

¹⁹⁶ Gorelick and Gwinnett 1988.

¹⁹⁷ Malabathrum is thought to be Greek rendition of the Sanskrit *tamalapatram*, literally the dark tree leave. This is the leaf of laurel looking *Cinnamomum tamala* or other trees. Its shape is similar to the bay leaf, but it tastes much of cinnamon and was used in classical world to make a fragrant oil, the *oleum malabathri* and to flavour food and wine. According to Apicius, any kitchen should have malabathrum (*De re coquinaria*, 1, 29, 30; 9,7). See Casson, 1981:241.

¹⁹⁸ For in depth surveys on classical knowledge of Taprobane see Faller 2000 and Weerakkody 1992 and 1997.

¹⁹⁹ This is most likely related to the rivalry between the neighbouring realms of Sakas and the Andhras. See Casson 1983.

In addition, we hear, formerly ships used to sail along the coast from Egypt and Arabia into India. But a certain Hippalus, after analysing the sea and the winds, discovered a way of sailing open sea, by using a southwesterly at certain time of the year. As a result, ships can now sail from two ports in Egypt into any of the two Indian ports of Barygaza in the North and Limyrike in the South (§57).²⁰⁰

At the eastern coast of India, Masalia produces muslins and Dosarene has ivory.²⁰¹ Beyond these regions there are barbarians, some having flat noses, some horse faces and some long faces, some being cannibals (§62). Further east comes the mouth of the Ganges and the city of the same name; it sells malabathrum, spikenard, pearls and fine muslins. Gold coins can be found here too and the region is said to have gold mines (§63).

Opposite the Ganges, the island of Chryse is the easternmost part of the inhabited world and it has the best tortoise-shell (§63).²⁰² Further north is a land called This and its major city Thinae²⁰³ supplies raw silk, silk yarn, silk cloth to northern and southern India, using the Ganges as the main route. This country is of no easy access, located as it is at the northernmost part of the world (some say it ultimately borders the Pontus, Caspian Sea and the lake Maeotis in the far north); few men ever travel here (§64).

In sum, the text focuses particularly on information relevant for merchants. It numbers goods to be exchanged at different ports for different types of markets (distinguishing items for royalty), highly valued luxury products and less expensive commodities, items to be taken to India from Egypt (multi-coloured textiles and coral) and from Arabia (myrrh and frankincense), items to be taken from India to Africa and to Egypt. In addition, we are briefly informed about changing political powers over different kingdoms, names of the kings and some administrative matters. Apart from instructions for sailing, we are briefly given the history of sea routes to the subcontinent. As we will see below, most of these details are absent, not only in poetic texts mentioning eastern trade, but, somewhat surprisingly, even in Strabo's scholarly review of India.

²⁰⁰ On the monsoons see Tomber 2008:15-18.

²⁰¹ Ray 2006.

²⁰² On Chryse, literally the Golden country, see Casson 1989:235-6 and Meulen 1974. According to most scholars this might refer to the island of Sumatra.

²⁰³ Thinae apparently refers to China. See Needham 1954:168-9.

1.2.4. Strabo's version of eastern trade

Augustan poets give a vague idea of sailing and trade. Without ever mentioning practicalities implied in the commercial networks operating in the Indian Ocean, they concentrate on the idea that some luxury products coming from the East were widely consumed by the wealthy at Rome. In this connection, we find India associated with some commodities in particular and generally with wealth. Strabo's geographical survey gives details on eastern trade, namely the different routes, main commercial sites, exchange products, administration and taxes. However, these data appear as passing references here and there, while we would expect them to be a major part of his description of India in book 15.

In a passage where he remarks on the advancement of geographical knowledge under the Romans, Strabo mentions that merchants from Alexandria have been travelling to India and trading merchandise from there since the time of the Ptolemies. Nonetheless, back then few ships undertook the journey, whereas today 120 ships set sail to the subcontinent every year; they sail down the Nile, reach the Red sea and then proceed to India; therefore geographical knowledge of these places is now greater than before, *πολὸ μᾶλλον καὶ ταῦτα ἔγνωσται τοῖς νῦν ἢ τοῖς πρὸ ἡμῶν* (2.5.12).

In his chapter on Egypt, we learn that, according to Cicero, Ptolemy XII Auletes (Cleopatra's father) received 12.500 talents as annual tribute. The fact that such a great amount of wealth was gathered (*τοσαῦτα προσωδεύετο*) yearly even by such a mediocre ruler is supposed to prove that Egypt is unquestionably a wealthy region. The author thinks that now under the Romans, the country's income should be considerably greater, because affairs are administered efficiently and trade with Arabia and India has greatly increased:

*ὅπου οὖν ὁ κάκιστα καὶ ῥαθυμότατα τὴν βασιλείαν διοικῶν τοσαῦτα προσωδεύετο, τί χρὴ νομίσαι τὰ νῦν διὰ τοσαύτης ἐπιμελείας οἰκονομούμενα καὶ τῶν Ἰνδικῶν ἐμποριῶν καὶ τῶν Τρωγλοδυτικῶν ἐπηυξημένων ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον;*²⁰⁴

²⁰⁴ 17.1.13.

Once again, difference between past and present seems to be striking. As an evidence for this, we learn that under the Ptolemies, less than twenty ships navigated the Red Sea and advanced very little beyond the straits at its mouth. In comparison, now large fleets are sent to the extremities of Ethiopia and India; they bring back valuable merchandise to Alexandria, from where it is shipped to other countries. The state collects taxes twice; once when the merchandise reaches Egypt and then when it is exported elsewhere; the more expensive the product, the heavier the tax.

Merchandise from India and Arabia reaches the Mediterranean by two routes, both along the Red Sea: it can be taken up to Leuce Come and to Petra (both in Arabia) and from here to Rhinocolura in Phoenicia before it reaches other countries.²⁰⁵ Alternatively, it is taken from India and Arabia to the Egyptian port of Myos Hormos; from here it is taken on camels to Coptos and then, via the Nile, to Alexandria (16.4.24). Coptos and Myos Hormos are indeed the most important sites for this trade. Coptos, the main trading centre for commodities, receives merchandise from India, Arabia and Ethiopia. Nonetheless, there are other important sites to take into account. Berenike has good landing places, but no harbour. In olden days, Egyptian merchants travelled in this region directed by the stars and carrying supplies of water. But under Philadelphos, a road connecting Berenike to Coptos was built, complete with stations for water supplies (17.1.45).

Strabo does not provide anything similar to a list of products exchanged in the eastern trade. But he shows some awareness of the functioning of local markets. He mentions that according to his sources, most cassia comes from India and not from Arabia as was sometimes believed (16.4.25).²⁰⁶ Ivory and tortoise-shell, thought to come directly from India, to a great extent come from Taprobane, together with “other goods” (2.1.14). According to sailors, he says, Taprobane is considerably south of India, ἐκ τῶν περιπλευσάντων... τῆς τε γὰρ Ἰνδικῆς νοτιωτέραν πολὺ τὴν Ταπροβάνην. The island is located opposite Ethiopia and has the same climate as this latter country (2.5.14).

²⁰⁵ For better understanding of these two branches of eastern trade see Seland 2011.

²⁰⁶ Cf. Herodotus, 3.107 and 110.

The *Periplus* repeats that there are serpents on the Indian coast, whereas Strabo records that, according to sailors, there are spouting whales in India; these do not appear in great numbers and can be scared off with trumpets (15.2.13).

According to the *Periplus*, the Indus region is now a Scythian (as opposed to Indian) kingdom. This must refer to the peoples coming from Central Asia, who invaded the region around the first century BC.²⁰⁷ Strabo does recognise the proximity between Scythians and Indians a number of times, allowing us to see how different people are distributed across different regions in Asia.²⁰⁸ He records that according to some of his sources, Greeks from Central Asia in Bactria conquered parts of India (11.11.1), after revolting from the Seleucids (15.3.7); this could match the information provided by the *Periplus* referring to the rule of Indo-Greeks in current day Gujarat. Strabo mentions that Alexander built altars to Heracles and Dionysus in memory of his expedition (3.5.5-6) and the *Periplus* reports some monuments in Gujarat that Alexander would have built. The Indian philosopher who came in a diplomatic mission to Augustus is said to be from Bargosa, which in turn is likely to refer to Barygaza remarked by the *Periplus*.

Apart from the sea route, Strabo mentions the land route as well. He says that, after the Indian rivers, the river Oxus is the largest river in the world (11.7.3). It is easily navigable and Indian merchandise packed over the mountains is brought down through it into the Caspian Sea, from where it is carried along other rivers as far as the Pontus (2.1.15, 11.7.3). The Aorsi buy Indian and Babylonian merchandise in Armenia and in Media. They carry it on camels and they are so rich that they wear gold ornaments, ἐχρυσοφόρουν δὲ διὰ τὴν εὐπορίαν (11.5.8).

We should note that, when giving these details, the author would never name his sources. He cites Cicero in connection to the Egyptian wealth, but not necessarily in connection with the Indian trade. Occasionally he reports what some “navigators say” (ἐκ τῶν περιπλευσάντων in 2.5.14). By contrast, in his chapter on India, he systematically names his sources for virtually every detail he records. He mentions that due to the flourishing of eastern trade, we know more of the places involved than ever before (πολὸν μᾶλλον καὶ ταῦτα ἔγνωσται τοῖς νῦν ἢ τοῖς πρὸ ἡμῶν in 2.5.12). Yet

²⁰⁷ Casson 1989: 46.

²⁰⁸ 2.5.14, 7.3.8, 11.1.7, 11.6.2.

in his criticism of sources in 15.1.4, he deems traders' accounts of the subcontinent (we can only think of *Periplus* type of texts) irrelevant for his current enterprise, as they are written by laymen who do not know anything about the history of places (ιδιωται καὶ οὐδὲν πρὸς ἱστορίαν τῶν τόπων χρήσιμοι).

Indeed, this is hardly surprising considering what Strabo says about περίπλοι writers, namely that they leave their works incomplete, for they do not address basic matters related to mathematics and astronomy, μὴ προστιθέντες ὅσα ἐκ τῶν μαθημάτων καὶ ἐκ τῶν οὐρανίων συνάπτειν προσῆκεν (1.1.21). As noted by Whittaker, in antiquity scholarly prejudice against traders was common.²⁰⁹ One of Claudius Ptolemy's sources, Marinus of Tyre, thought that traders should not be trusted because, while travelling to different countries, they are completely focused on their business, do not care for deeper knowledge of places and often exaggerate what they see.²¹⁰ Dio Chrysostom says that they only ever communicate with people who live on the coast, who are unlearned natives.²¹¹ However, Strabo records partially what he learned from sailors in Egypt, as we saw earlier.

Most probably, there are two types of flaws Strabo would have found in the περίπλοι. On the one hand, as we can appreciate after reading the *Periplus Maris Erythraei*, they tend not to provide updated information regarding local history and geography, considered crucial by the author. We have seen above that the *Periplus* does not take into account the academic tradition regarding the meaning of the place name “India”, with its obvious connection with the Indus river. As detailed as it might seem today, the *Periplus* would have sounded as an unenlightened text that does not approach what was known about the Indus region in scholarly circles. In addition, it certainly does not give fresh details on geographical features such as climate, topography, fauna and flora and only marginally does it mention aspects of local culture and history.

On the other hand, the περίπλοι provided information that would clearly sound inaccurate to Strabo. In the vast indographic corpus, Alexander was always known to have conquered the Indus region only. But the *Periplus* never mentions

²⁰⁹ Whittaker 2004: 158.

²¹⁰ Ptol., *Geog.*, 1. pr. 11. 7.

²¹¹ *Orat.*, 35. 18–24.

Alexander in connection with the Indus and conceives the Macedonian expedition to have taken place in a region further south from the Indus basin.

Strabo had read in one of his sources, Craterus, that Alexander had travelled further east from the Indus, as far as the Gangetic plain.²¹² He promptly classed this as an incredible reference that could not be confirmed in any other source, παράδοξα φράζουσα καὶ οὐχ ὁμολογοῦσα οὐδενὶ (15.1.35). Accordingly, he found that it would make no sense to believe that Alexander's successors in Bactria had now conquered much more of India than the Macedonians, as he could read in Apollodorus of Artemita (15.1.3).²¹³ The *Periplus* could be grouped within these latter type of sources, for it believes that Greek monarchs came to rule much further east and south beyond the Indus.

Dismissing this type of sources, Strabo's own account of the eastern trade lacks crucial information. It does not provide a full list of products exchanged between the classical world and the East. Particularly, it never mentions that there are products being exported from the Roman Empire into the East, which causes the impression that Rome was only importing commodities, not exchanging goods. The *Periplus* reveals a number of ports on western, southern and eastern coasts of the subcontinent, whereas Strabo does not mention any of the ports and his account of the country only covers the northeastern area. Nevertheless, the author was aware that beyond this region, there was much more of (even the better part of) India to be seen (ἀρίστη δ' ὁμολογεῖται πᾶσα ἢ τοῦ Ὑπάνιος πέραν: οὐκ ἀκριβοῦνται δέ, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὴν ἄγνοιαν καὶ τὸν ἔκτοπισμὸν λέγεται πάντ' ἐπὶ τὸ μεῖζον ἢ τὸ τερατωδέστερον, 15.1.37).

One of the few autobiographical remarks we can find in *Geography*, relates to the eastern trade.²¹⁴ The author says that he has travelled extensively enough in Egypt (συναναβάντες μέχρι Συήνης καὶ τῶν Αἰθιοπικῶν ὄρων 2.5.12). After inquiry, he discovered (ἰστοροῦμεν) that local merchants were successfully involved in the trade with India. In the process of such an extensive travel and investigation, Strabo must have collected more details on this subject, that were not included in his work.

²¹² *FGrHist* 153 F2 = 721 F 11. This is probably a pseudography drawing on Megasthenes. See discussion in *FGrHist* IIB Komm. 540.

²¹³ In 11.11.1. Strabo gives more details on the emergence of the Bactrian kingdom and its extension as far as China. See discussion in Narain 1957:12-3 and Tarn 1951:72-4.

²¹⁴ For an assessment of auto-biographical references across *Geography* see Potheary 1997, Waddy 1963, Weller 1906 and discussion in Dueck 2000:15-22.

References we collected in Augustan poetry conceive the eastern trade rather simplistically as a one way process, namely the coming of luxury items to Rome. Given the literary nature of these texts, they do not provide any details on ports and sea routes and repeatedly mention some commodities only. Strabo delivers more information than the poets, although still not as systematically as the *Periplus*. Lying between these two types of sources, references about trade scattered throughout *Geography* are neither vague nor simplistic, but reveal awareness of a range of details that were not included. Methodological reasons, as we have seen above, made the author to be suspicious of *περίπλοι*, which were perhaps his only sources for the sea trade in Indian Ocean.

It appears that an openly economic assessment of the Indian trade would have conflicted with the ideological scheme of Strabo's *Geography*. Indeed, in his assessment of the three continents forming the *οικουμένη*, the author explains that Europe is self-sufficient, for it produces everything that is necessary for life. Africa and Asia bring forth perfumes and pearls, but these are superfluous; to a great extent, both these latter continents are made of inhospitable and barren lands - only exception being India, which is fertile and affluent. From an ideological point of view, the self-sufficiency of Europe could hardly be conciliated with the flourishing of commodities trade, for the latter meant that the Romans were active in buying those luxury items that were classed as superfluous (2.5.26-33).

According to Whittaker, political reasons would have led Strabo, Pliny, Arrian or Pausanias to rely almost exclusively on earlier, Hellenistic sources on India, while dismissing updated information provided by merchants and traders. By contrast, writers such as Claudius Ptolemy would make use of *περίπλοι* to write their scientifically, rather than politically oriented works.²¹⁵ In the next section we will see that the eastern trade certainly had a number of political implications, some of which must have limited what could be said in terms of India's relevance for Roman economy.

²¹⁵ Whittaker 2004.

1.3. Geographical writing as a political enterprise

In this section, we will see that, for political reasons, trade in Indian merchandise could not be openly mentioned in Strabo's account of India in book 15. The author certainly acknowledges the outstanding role played by eastern goods within the Roman economy, but this was a delicate subject and his text shows awareness of the limitations imposed by the imperial discourse.²¹⁶

Before we return to *Geography*, we will consider the political implications of India as made apparent by the literature produced at the time. It will be noted that Augustan poets frequently depicted the Indians as enemies who should be conquered by the emperor, so that their wealth could make the Roman Empire prosper. But the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* shows the Indians regularly sending diplomatic missions to Augustus. Just as this latter text, Strabo's survey, using a careful process of selection and omission of details from sources, conceives Augustus as a peaceful sovereign and stresses the diplomatic ties linking Rome with India. In this respect, it reads as a typical panegyric.

By contrast, we will next see that Strabo depicts the Romans in a rather satirical manner when he reports the conflict that opposed them against the Arabs. Indeed, the text mentions that merchants in Arabia controlled the trade of Indian riches and the Romans, attempting to restrain their monopoly, fought an unjust war that was motivated by profit and were defeated due to the ignorance of local topography. But this episode of recent history is not mentioned in the account of India in book 15, where the diplomatic relations linking Rome and India are given all the focus.

1.3.1. Augustan poetry

In Augustan poetry, India was conceived as a nation threatening the Roman Empire and was associated with war. To some extent, this could remind us of Herodotus, who included Indians as allies of the Persians, fighting the Greeks at Plataeae (9.31- 2). Indians and Greeks seemed to make a natural pair of opposites and we can see this again in the literature produced by Alexander's companions. In their expedition to the Indus valley, the Greeks fight the natives and conquer a good number of territories.

²¹⁶ See Clarke 2001 Chapters 4-6 for a thorough account of Strabo's conception of the Roman world and imperial ideology.

Such an opposition, however, was a delicate matter and textually needed to be approached with care. Already at the Hellenistic period, India had become politically important, for it symbolised the Greek influence across the world. It was associated with the Macedonian expedition and there were diplomatic relations between the Seleucids and the Mauryan Empire. The whole subcontinent had become economically relevant as well, due to the sea trade we approached earlier.

We will start this section by considering political implications of India in Augustan poetry and in the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*. In comparison with these texts, as we will see below, Strabo's *Geography* shows awareness of different associations India could take, but it is influenced by the poetic image of the country that was popular at the time of writing.

In Virgil's epic, Aeneas' shield displays the battle of Actium at its centre. Augustus, with his Italic army is shown being supported by the senate, the people of Rome and the household deities. He fights Antony, whose barbarian army bears strange weapons and is protected by all sorts of monstrous gods: *Hinc ope barbarica variisque Antonius armis ... omnigenumque deum monstra*.²¹⁷ In this latter group Indians are depicted, fighting alongside the Egyptians, Arabs, Bactrians and Ethiopians. They are all under Cleopatra, in a state of affairs that is worded as shameful, *sequiturque nefas Aegyptia coniunx*.²¹⁸ Such an army is ultimately to run away fearfully from the Romans, *omnis eo terrore Aegyptus et Indi, omnis Arabs, omnes vertebant terga Sabaei*.²¹⁹ Fighting for Antony and Cleopatra, the Indians and other nations belong to a semantic group stressed with negative attributes: barbarian, monstrous, shameful and weak.

A typical process of amalgamation is apparent, whereby different nations forming the enemy front are all conceived as being homogeneous in their vices and virtues.²²⁰ Enemies of Augustus come from very different parts of Africa and Asia; yet they are all said to revere monstrous deities and hold strange instruments; they are morally condemnable, fighting as they are under a female and perverse monarch; in spite of their ferocity, they are weak and unruly. By contrast, Augustus presents a well

²¹⁷ *Aeneid*, 8.685 and 8.697.

²¹⁸ *Aeneid*, 8.688.

²¹⁹ *Aeneid*, 8.705-6. On this passage see Parker 2011. Cf. Gurval 1995 and Toll 1996.

²²⁰ Parker 2008:207-14.

organised effort of his own people, the senate, and the family gods. He was destined to rule over all nations.

In the *Georgics*, Indians are described as warlike and masters of archery.²²¹ Augustus is portrayed as a conqueror of the extremities of Asia and is destined to dispel the Indians from Roman territories:

et te, maxime Caesar,
qui nunc extremis Asiae iam uictor in oris
imbellem auertis Romanis arcibus Indum.²²²

Accordingly, in an imagined temple that the poet aims to dedicate to his emperor, solid gold and ivory will be used to portray the Romans fighting an Indian tribe, the Gangaridae:

in foribus pugnam ex auro solidoque elephanto
Gangaridum faciam uictorisque arma Quirini²²³

In her prophecies, Sibyl foresees the emperor extending his conquests even beyond Africa and India, going further than Heracles and Dionysus: *nec uero Alcides tantum telluris obivit... nec... Liber, agens celso Nysae de vertice tigres.*²²⁴ Alexander, traditionally associated with conquests at the edges of Asia, is not explicitly mentioned in these poems, which would emphasise the idea that Augustus is destined to be the first leader in history to rule over such faraway places.

Propertius encourages his emperor to sail to India in order to conquer this land because it is wealthy:

Arma deus Caesar dices meditatur ad Indos,
et freta gemmiferi findere classe maris.
magna, Quiris, merces: parat ultima terra triumphos;
Tigris et Euphrates sub tua iura fluent;
sera, sed Ausoniis veniet provincia virgis;
assuescent Latio Partha tropaea Iovi.
ite agite, expertae bello, date lintea, prorae,

²²¹ *Georgics*, 2.122ff. 3, 10-48.

²²² *Georgics*, 2.170-2.

²²³ *Georgics*, 3.26-7.

²²⁴ *Aeneid*, 6.801 and 6.804-5.

et solitum, armigeri, ducite munus, equi!
omina fausta cano. Crassos clademque piate!
ite et Romanae consulite historiae!²²⁵

Augustus, said to be divine, *deus*, is associated with war from the outset. He is associated with words as *arma, triumphos, tropaea, bello, armigeri equi*. The war is clearly intended to bring great material profits to the Romans (*magna merces*) and countries lying at the edges of the world are teleologically preparing (*parat*) Roman success. The cause for this war, however, is historic, for it aims to revenge the disaster that Crassus' campaign in the East was. Such an enterprise would mean a great accomplishment for Roman history, in the sense that it would repair what was left incomplete, *Romanae consulite historiae*. It would fit well a mission (called *Sacra Via* a few lines below), divinely ascribed to Rome, of ruling over the whole world.

We have seen earlier that this poem associates India with wealth and sea trade. Politically, this is a land to be conquered, not a business partner. The ships sailing there are not merchant ships but military, for they are used to the war, *expertae bello*. In another poem, Propertius thinks that India will surely submit to Augustus, as will any nation lying at the edges of the world:

India quin, Auguste, tuo dat colla triumpho,
et domus intactae te tremit Arabiae;
et si qua extremis tellus se subtrahit oris,
sentiat illa tuas postmodo capta manus!
haec ego castra sequar; vates tua castra canendo
magnus ero: servent hunc mihi fata diem!²²⁶

Once again the submission of the weak before the strong is emphasised. Arabia trembles with fear (*tremi*) before Augustus and India submits herself (*dat colla*); any nation lying at the edges of the world will ultimately submit before Augustus' subjugating hand, *capta manus*. This was determined by the fate, *servent fata*. The expression *extremis oris*, lands lying at faraway coasts, reminds us of the sea connection; but it is clear that while the *Periplus* associates the sea with trade, Propertius associates sea with war.

²²⁵ 3.4.1-10.

²²⁶ 2.10.

In some of his poems we feel that war against India is just about to start or is already taking place. This can be seen, for instance, in an elegy where the poet complains that his beloved girl is unfaithful to him now that he is away from home, although not too far. He wonders how more unfaithful she would be, were he to go as a soldier to faraway India or if his ship would lie wrecked in the Ocean:

quid si longinquos retinerer miles ad Indos
aut mea si staret navis in Oceano?²²⁷

In another elegy, we meet Arethusa writing a letter to her husband Lycotas, who has been fighting wars across the world:

te modo uiderunt iteratos Bactra per ortus,
te modo munito Sericus hostis equo,
hibernique Getae, pictoque Britannia curru,
ustus et Eoa decolor Indus aqua.²²⁸

Bactria, China, Britain and India are grouped together as countries where Romans are fighting wars. Tearful Arethusa wonders what the meaning of their marriage was and of the nights they spent together, as she has barely seen her husband. Were the Roman camps open to women, she would certainly follow Lycotas wherever he went, without fearing anything.

In the passages we considered here, the edges of the world mean war, not commerce. India was certainly a matter with political implications. Grouped together with countries that have fought Rome directly, people of the subcontinent are not conceived as allies or commercial partners, in an era that saw the eastern trade flourish.²²⁹ Similarly, as we will see below, Strabo's *Geography* and other non-literary texts may seem to refer to the subcontinent in neutral and even laudatory manner, but they too conceal political concerns of the type we have found in Virgil's *Aeneid*.

²²⁷ 2.9.29-30.

²²⁸ 4.3.

²²⁹ For political compromise in Augustan poetry see Powel 1992.

1.3.2. Imperial discourse in official texts

The *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* is an emblematic document endorsing imperial ideology.²³⁰ It was written by 19 AD, be it by Augustus himself or by hired staff. Engraved at a number of buildings across the empire, it now survives for the most part on the so-called *Monumentum Ancyranum* at Ankara in Turkey, very close to Strabo's homeland Amasia.²³¹ In this political as well as biographical summary, the emperor addresses his people in the first person and explains how he came and remained in power for so long and how his empire came to be the most important in the world.

After receiving loyalty from all regions across Italy, Augustus achieved the allegiance of Iberians, Gauls, Africans, Scythians and Sardinians, among others (§25). When victorious at civil wars, he endeavoured to save peoples' lives rather than to kill, *conservare quam excidere malui* (§§2-3). Extending the limits of every single Roman provinces, he brought all nearby countries to peace, without fighting unjust wars, *nulli genti bello per iniuriam inlato* (§26). After his victories in Asia, he restored works of art to their original places, as these had been sacked by his enemies for their private use. In addition, he freed the seas from pirates (§24).

Augustus extended his conquests well into places where Romans had never interfered before (§26) and received embassies from remote peoples. The text emphasises that the embassies came to the emperor himself, through the repetition of “*ad me*” four times.²³² Among these peoples were Indians, who had never been seen before a Roman leader until this age, but now were sending diplomatic missions frequently: *Ad me ex India regum legationes saepe missae sunt nunquam visae ante id tempus apud quemquam Romanorum duces* (§31). Under Augustus' reign, the text seems to say, all nations are to meet regularly and peacefully in Rome.

Compared to this portrayal of Augustus, the poems we read earlier would sound politically incorrect. Virgil considers that Indians are to be conquered, as they fought against Rome and would be defeated with relative ease. Propertius moves his emperor to fight against Indians, so that Rome can profit from their wealthy land resources. Elsewhere, he associates the battle of Actium with bloodshed, in sheer

²³⁰ Text editions by Cooley 2009 and Scheid 2007.

²³¹ Cooley 2009:42-3. For the different renditions of the text at the three sites where it is partially preserved see Botteri 2003.

²³² *Res Gestae* 31.1, 32.1, 32.2 and 33. The list of people we can find here nearly matches the one in an inscription celebrating triumphs, recorded by Pliny (7.26.97-8).

disagreement with the ideas we can find in the *Res Gestae*.²³³ Horace laments that apart from being involved in wars abroad, Rome is fated to engage in civil wars since the time when Romulus killed his brother; such a crime appears as an “original sin” pending over all his descendants:

sic est: acerba fata Romanos agunt
scelusque fraternae necis,
ut inmerentis fluxit in terram Remi
sacer nepotibus cruor.²³⁴

Earlier in this poem, Horace mentions that, unlike wolves, who would only fight animals of other species, Romans make war against each other, much for their enemies' delight. In another epode, he suggests that, after so much bloodshed, Romans should abandon their country altogether and take refuge anywhere their feet would take them, be it in the far North or Africa:

ire, pedes quocumque ferent, quocumque per undas
Notus vocabit aut protervos Africanus.²³⁵

By contrast, the *Res Gestae* show us a peaceful Rome, ruled by a diligent and generous leader. Since the beginning, it is stressed that Augustus helped his country out of his own initiative and at his own expense, *privato consilio et privata impensa* (§1). He fulfilled his people's essential needs by repairing aqueduct channels, building bridges and roads, namely a section of Via Flaminia (§20); when Romans suffered from hunger, he supplied food, again at his own expense, *frumentationes frumento pr[i]vatim coempto emensus sum* (§15).

Augustus' coming to power was a natural and gradual process. At first, he refused titles afforded to him by the senate and people. Later, he would only accept absolute power once he was assured that such an arrangement would not depart from ancestral customs of his forefathers, *nullum magistratum contra morem maiorem delatum recepi* (§6). Respectful of his people's tradition, he created laws to revive ancestral practices that were already in decadence (*m[ulta e]xempla maiorum*

²³³ 2.15.41-4, 2.34.59-63

²³⁴ Epode 7, 18-21.

²³⁵ Epode 16, 11-2.

exolescentia iam ex nostro [saecul]o red[uxi] §8) and rebuilt eighty-two temples (§20).

This is not the leader who would ambitiously accept Propertius' suggestion to fight the Indians for the sake of their faraway wealth. The merciful Augustus represented by the *Res Gestae* is forgiving of his enemies and would not fight the Indians out of revenge. On the contrary, he receives embassies from across the globe; note that the text repeats “*ad me*” emphasising Augustus' own, rather than Rome's genius and universal appeal; it is his courteous attitude (rather than implacable war) that seems to make possible the expansion of his empire; such a charismatic prince would not accomplish Virgil's prophecies by fighting distant nations on the grounds that they are weak and deserve retaliation for their past mistakes.

An example of a typical rhetorical exercise, the *Res Gestae* makes a panegyric of Augustus.²³⁶ By including references praising Augustus' descendants, who are depicted as no less industrious in their service to Rome, the text is a panegyric to the whole dynasty. With the new emperor a new era is meant to be born, where communication between faraway countries is unrestrained, a development in history that had never before been achieved.²³⁷

Within this idealised picture, India has a role to play. In the literature produced at the Hellenistic period, India quintessentially symbolised Alexander's achievement of making known the most unknown parts of the earth. In the Imperial period, India symbolises Augustus' influence across the world, as made clear by the *Res Gestae*.

Augustus' association with India was further emphasized in later sources. Suetonius wrote that, before Augustus' time, Indians had never been seen by any Romans at all.²³⁸ Orosius mentions what seems to be the first Indian embassy that came to Augustus. Indian and Scythian ambassadors, he says, came to meet the emperor while he was in Iberian Peninsula. After long journeys they were so exhausted that

²³⁶ Yavetz 1984. See also Seager 1983.

²³⁷ For the idealization of Augustus as a world leader see more in Bosworth 1999 and Guven 1998. Another important document of the time, the so-called “map of Agrippa”, completed between 30- 24BC, most likely represented India as part of the Roman world (Whittaker 2004: 144). However, as this document (whether a map in the modern sense or just a scheme) has not survived, it is not certain what it contained originally. See also Whittaker 1994: 14–16, Brodersen 2012 and Dihle 1964.

²³⁸ *Aug.* 21.3. See Eutropius 7.10 as well.

they could not travel any further west than Tarraco.²³⁹ Orosius notes in passing that such an encounter matches the embassies that Alexander received from Iberians while he was in Persia.²⁴⁰ A second embassy is recorded by Dio Cassius.²⁴¹ Indians came to meet Augustus (most likely around 20 BC), while he was in Samos and brought him some presents, among which was an armless man. A philosopher who later committed suicide took part in this mission.

These later sources corroborate that, throughout antiquity, Augustus was seen as a counterpart of Alexander particularly in connection with India.²⁴² He did not travel to the subcontinent as the Macedonian prince did, but he was in good terms with people from the subcontinent. He did not converse with wise men *in loco*, as Alexander did, but philosophers from the subcontinent came to see him. He did not see the wonders as a traveller in the East, but some of these were brought to him by natives. While Alexander had to travel in order to see unseen things, Augustus attracts phenomena from the edges of the world to the centre of his empire.

In sources from such different times and places, Augustus' political image is associated with India and such an association is already well represented in the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*. In this text, the emperor is associated with peace, particularly in connection with India. With his effort and skill as a political leader, he is well succeeded in making alliances even with the most distant of the countries.

1.3.3. Imperial discourse in Strabo?

We will next see that, to some extent, Strabo's work echoes the panegyric character of the *Res Gestae*, in the sense that it supplies a profusion of details confirming Augustus' administrative and diplomatic talent. However, as we will see afterwards, his geographical survey is punctuated with passages that clearly blur his otherwise flattering picture of the Roman Empire. One of such passages is certainly his account,

²³⁹ Orosius, 6.21.19-20. Cf. Nenci 1958:283-308. Sidebotham 1986 thinks that this embassy took place after Roman expedition to Arabia in 26/25BC.

²⁴⁰ A number of sources refer that Alexander received embassies from people who had never met a Greek leader before. Cf. Diod. Sic. 17.113.2 and Arrian, *Anab.*, 7.15.4.

²⁴¹ 54.9.

²⁴² For representations of Augustus as a counterpart of Alexander see Weippert 1972:215-59, Engels 1998b:152- 5, Nicolet 1991:21-2 and Romm 1992:140-9.

partially based on eyewitness, of the conflict that opposed the Romans against the Arabs.

At the conclusion of his work, after he has surveyed all inhabited lands, the οἰκουμένη, Strabo thinks he needs to mention the Romans briefly. This is so because they have conquered the best and the most famous territories across the three continents, οἱ Ῥωμαῖοι τὴν ἀρίστην αὐτῆς [οἰκουμένης] καὶ γνωριμωτάτην κατέχουσιν (17.3.24). The text actually explains how the Romans do not possess all the lands, but they rule over those that are important. Namely, they possess most of Europe, except those parts lying on the far North; as these northernmost regions were described earlier in *Geography* as barren and inhospitable, they do not seem to matter much.²⁴³ In Africa, the Romans only possess the Mediterranean coast; the rest of the continent is either completely unoccupied or inhabited by worthless and nomadic people, λυπρῶς καὶ νομαδικῶς οἰκεῖται. Similarly in Asia they occupy the whole Mediterranean coast, except for those narrow pieces of lands controlled by pirates and nomads (ληστρικῶς καὶ νομαδικῶς ζῶντων ἐν ζηνοῖς καὶ λυπροῖς χορίοις); as for the interior, it is shared by them, the Parthians²⁴⁴ and barbarians such as Bactrians, Indians, Scythians, Arabians and Ethiopians; however portions of these territories are regularly being taken by the Romans, προστίθεται δὲ ἀεὶ τι παρ' ἐκείνων αὐτοῖς.²⁴⁵

The text shows admiration for such a hegemony, taking under consideration that originally the Romans controlled only their own city. They gradually conquered Italy and then the other countries, by the means of war and educated rule, διὰ τὸ πολεμεῖν καὶ πολιτικῶς ἄρχειν. They have exceeded all former empires whose memory has been recorded, ἅπαντας ὑπερβεβλημένοι τοὺς πρότερον ἡγεμόνας ὧν μνημὴν ἴσμεν (17.3.24). We have seen above that, according to Strabo's methodological principles, geographical writing should always record memorable actions (1.1.23). Inclusion of the Romans among those whose memory should be recorded would fit

²⁴³ Strabo repeats this idea in 1.4.4, 2.1.2, 2.1.14-16, 2.5.34-5 and 3.3.8.

²⁴⁴ Strabo's acknowledgement of Parthian hegemony in the East has been much discussed, for it somehow blurs the image of Rome being the only world power (cf. *Geography*, 6.4.2. and 11.9.2). Livy (9.18.6) wrote that it is only Greek authors who ever emphasise the Parthian influence and they do this because they are ultimately not willing to admit the Roman supremacy. See discussion in Dueck 2000:110ff.

²⁴⁵ This account of the extension of Roman Empire is more critical and realistic than the one we can find in the *Res Gestae*, where it is implied that Augustus rules over the whole world (see Nenci 1958:294).

well the text's laudatory character of the Roman Empire. However, explanation for hegemony seems to be problematic, because it includes one positive and one negative aspect.

In the same passage, Augustus is the lord of war and peace (πολέμου καὶ εἰρήνης κύριος). Indeed, a number of references throughout *Geography* confirm the emperor's peaceful aura and here I would like to note those that are relevant for Strabo's conception of India.²⁴⁶

Once he was given the absolute power by his country (ἡ πατρις ἐπέτρεπεν αὐτῷ τὴν προστασίαν τῆς ἡγεμονίας), Augustus ruled his empire by giving the peaceful and prosperous regions to his people, while governing the problematic zones himself. These difficult areas are the ones inhabited by barbarians, bordered by hostile nations or barren and uncultivated lands (17.3.25). Elsewhere we can read that under his regime, roads on the Alps were made safer with the strict control of the bandits who were operating in the region (4.6.7).²⁴⁷ There are many passages mentioning that piracy across the Mediterranean has been put down under the Romans.²⁴⁸ In the western Mediterranean, it is now much safer to undertake sea trade due to the peace, πρόσσεστι δὲ καὶ ἡ νῦν εἰρήνη, τῶν ληστηρίων καταλυθέντων (3.2.5). The author was even acquainted with Publius Servilius, who fought piracy in Cilicia (12.6.2). Communication between different parts of the οἰκουμένη seems to be much facilitated because prosperous countries across the three continents are under Roman control.

Ambassadors from Britain assured their friendship to the emperor and dedicated gifts in the Capitol (4.5.3). During the civil war, Massilians had supported Augustus' enemies; yet the emperor, once victorious, granted them forgiveness and mercy (4.1.5). The Gallatae dedicated an impressive altar to Augustus, on which they inscribed the name and depicted the semblance of sixty of their people (4.3.2). The Parthian king, seeking Augustus' friendship, sent back the trophies he had previously taken from a defeated Roman army (16.1.28). Ethiopian ambassadors on behalf of their

²⁴⁶ Strabo's depiction of Augustus is reminiscent of the one we found in the *Res Gestae*, a text he might have read. See discussion in Dueck 2000:96-105.

²⁴⁷ Strabo's portrayal of Alpine tribes (marked by their habit of brigandage) matches what is said about them in *Res Gestae* 26. However, according to Strabo's own description it seems that their action essentially consisted of imposing taxes in mountain passes, which was not necessarily a crime. See Brunt and Moore 1967:71 and Cooley 2009:223.

²⁴⁸ Controlling the piracy was a major challenge for all world powers across the Mediterranean. For Strabo on piracy see de Souza 1999:200-4.

queen came to see the emperor in Samos, were given everything they requested and, in addition, were graced with remittance of their tribute (17.1.54). Works of art stolen by corrupt commanders were restored to their original places by Augustus (for instance, the Ajax that Antony had stolen from Rhoeteium and taken to Egypt; 13.1.30).²⁴⁹

Indian embassies are mentioned twice. First the text mentions that a king, named Pandion or Porus, from a certain part of the subcontinent sent some gifts, an embassy and a philosopher to Augustus; the philosopher was the one who later committed suicide by fire at Athens, just as Calanus had offered similar spectacle to Alexander (15.1.4). Later on, we are given more details. Nicolaus of Damascus met some Indian ambassadors, who were on their journey to meet Augustus, at Antioch; initially they were many, but only three had survived the long journey from their country. They brought a letter, written in Greek, which was from their king Porus, who ruled over six hundred kings, was willing to become friends with Augustus and was ready to allow him passage whenever he wished. The gifts consisted of vipers, a serpent, a tortoise, a partridge (all of extraordinary size), and an armless man;²⁵⁰ they were carried by eight naked servants in loincloths sprinkled with aromatics; a philosopher from Barygasa came along, who would later commit suicide when he thought he had reached happiness (15.1.73).

The repeated and varied reference to this episode creates an illusion of frequency of such diplomatic missions, which in turn would match the adverb of frequency, *saepe*, that we read in the *Res Gestae* §31. The two passages in Strabo emphasise that the embassy was sent to Augustus, as opposed to the Romans. Some of the vocabulary is reminiscent of a context of sea trade: Barygasa seems to refer to Barygaza, one of the major trading centres in India; the king Pandion mentioned here seems to relate to the Pandyan kingdom; the passage that the Indian king would grant to Augustus could be the passage that merchants were given at Indian ports; loincloth was among textiles exported by the Romans; aromatics were among the imports from

²⁴⁹ Augustus restoring works of art to their original places is a leitmotiv in Strabo's text. As noted by Potheary 2005 the author includes these works in the description of places where they used to belong and does not mention them when describing locations where they currently are.

²⁵⁰ Such a description is reminiscent of imperial triumphal processions, in the sense that it displays a number of wonders assumed to represent the conquered country. For spectacular representations of world cultures in Rome see Ostenberg 2009.

the subcontinent. In a word, data conveyed here seem to come from an updated contemporary source of the type of the *Periplus*.²⁵¹

Later sources reporting the embassies stress the idea that the diplomatic missions came from faraway countries. Typically, Suetonius and Eutropius mention that Scythians and Indians, who sent embassies to Augustus, were unknown peoples.²⁵² Orosius mentions that some Scythians and Indians came as suppliants and brought presents from their countries, *apud Hispaniam in occidentis ultimo supplex cum gentilicio munere eous Indus et Scythia boreus orauit*.²⁵³ However, these sources do not mention physical or cultural features differentiating these two nations; neither do they specify distinctive gifts that would represent or symbolise each people.

Strabo's recording of the gifts preserves a number of common places related to the subcontinent. As in Herodotus and Ctesias, here again we find India's association with wonder (the large sized animals and the armless man) and wisdom (the sage from Bargosa). Alexander had famously conversed with the Brahmins and had befriended one of them, Calanus. Augustus too is now associated with Indian wisdom, in the sense that he receives wise men from that country. Strabo cannot help adding that the sage would later commit suicide at Athens (a city that was traditionally associated with philosophy) and that his motivation for suicide was of an ethical nature.²⁵⁴ Thus, Athens' association with philosophy appears to be revived, for this city of classical achievements becomes the stage of a philosophical event once again (reminiscent of Socrates' death) – but now under a Roman ruler and with a display of alien, rather than Hellenic, wisdom.²⁵⁵

With the ambassadors, the whole Indian identity, entwined with wonders and wisdom, is now displayed before Augustus. Under the new leader, the text seems to

²⁵¹ Schwarz 1985.

²⁵² Suetonius, *Augustus*, 21.3 and Eutropius 7.10.

²⁵³ Orosius, 6.21.20.

²⁵⁴ Dio (54.9.8-10), apart from the Hermes and the philosopher, also includes tigers in the list of gifts.

²⁵⁵ Strabo records association of Augustus with Greek philosophers, namely Apollodorus of Pergamon (13.4.3), Xenarchus of Seleucia (14.5.4), Arius (14.5.4), and Athenodorus of Tarsus (14.5.14). Cf. Suetonius, *Augustus*, 89. Engels 2005 distinguishes nine categories of illustrious men whose biographies Strabo summarises. Among these most are philosophers of all the sects and times (followed by poets, rhetoricians, historians/geographers). Interestingly none of these are from the western part of Roman Empire and the author always refers to them in connection with their native town in Eastern Mediterranean (and not with Rome where they actually live). As a source, he might have used one of the *Περὶ ἐνδόξων ἀνδρῶν καὶ γυναικῶν* type of texts, a genre whose earliest author is Neanthes of Cyzicus, mentioned by Strabo.

say, confinement of nations at their original place is no longer a necessity. With the building of roads, suppression of piracy and Augustus' peaceful attitude, people across the world lost the main reason that made them strange, distance, and can communicate with each other. This is not to say that they lost their identity. But because they can now be seen, rather than only heard of, they are not as strange as they used to be. Both *Res Gestae* and *Geography* come to emphasise that, under the new ruler, what is extraordinary becomes more and more prosaic, due to the frequency with which it can be now perceived.

All these aspects would justify Strabo's perception that Roman hegemony had educated rule, πολιτικῶς ἄρχειν, as its main cause. Clarke refers to a spatial scheme, underlying his work, according to which Rome would appear as the centre of a circle connecting distant nations.²⁵⁶ From what we have seen so far, the text certainly conveys a "spatial universalism"²⁵⁷ whereby nations inhabiting the periphery gravitate around a centre of the world, which is formed by the Roman Empire.

However, in contrast with such a harmonious picture, *Geography* sometimes questions the legitimacy of Rome's involvement in world affairs. One of such critical moments in the text has a connection with India and for this reason we will proceed to analyse it in detail.

In his account of Arabia, Strabo reports that the local merchants were particularly active in the trade with India. Strategically, the Romans planned to conquer parts of the country in order to control the trade of eastern articles. Augustus sent an expedition there under Aelius Gallus and the author plainly explains the emperor's intentions:²⁵⁸

προσοικειοῦσθαι δὴ διανοήθη τούτους ἢ καταστρέφεσθαι: ἦν δέ τι καὶ τὸ πολυχρημάτων ἀκούειν ἐκ παντὸς χρόνου, πρὸς ἄργυρον καὶ χρυσὸν τὰ ἄρώματα διατιθεμένους καὶ τὴν πολυτελεστάτην λιθείαν, ἀναλίσκοντας τῶν λαμβανομένων τοῖς ἔξω μηδέν: ἢ γὰρ φίλοις ἤλπιζε πλουσίοις χρῆσεσθαι ἢ ἐχθρῶν κρατήσιν πλουσίων.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁶ Clarke 2001:210-28.

²⁵⁷ Clarke 2001:44-5.

²⁵⁸ For the chronology of this expedition and its importance see Jameson 1968 and Simon 2002. See references to this episode in *Geography*, 2.5.13, 16.4.22-25 and 17.1.53. Strabo gives the most comprehensive account of this expedition, which is also recorded in *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* (5, 26), Pliny the Elder (*NH* 6, 32, 160-161), Josephus (*AJ*, 15, 317) and Dio Cassius (53, 29, 3-8).

²⁵⁹ 16.4.22.

As we can read here, the emperor, impressed by their wealth, intended to have the Arabs as allies, but was ready to subdue them if needed, προσοικειοῦσθαι ... ἢ καταστρέφεισθαι. The text repeatedly emphasises that the emperor had two aims in mind, either to have the Arabs as wealthy friends or to subdue them as wealthy enemies (φίλοις...πλουσίοις ... ἢ ἐχθρῶν πλουσίων). Wealth, as opposed to any political disagreement, is specified as the ultimate cause for the Roman campaign in Arabia. While explaining the origin of the Arabian fortune, Strabo makes what can be read as a moralising statement. He stresses that the Arabs sold their aromatics and precious stones in exchange for silver and gold, but they did not lavish the fortune they had thus amassed (as the Romans did) by purchasing foreign items. Clearly motivated by wealth, Augustus and the Romans are implied here in the morally condemnable luxury trade.

The *Res Gestae* does mention the expedition to Arabia, but very briefly and with much care. We can read there that, under his command, Augustus sent an army to this region, where large numbers of people were slaughtered at the battle and a number of towns were conquered, *copiae caesae sunt in acie et complura oppida capta*. The cause for the war is not clearly stated, but the episode appears in the paragraph celebrating the successful expansion of Roman Empire under Augustus. Triumph of the Arabian expedition is the counterpart of victorious campaigns in the Alps, Iberia, Galia, Germany and Ethiopia.²⁶⁰

Certainly, as the Arabian fortune was renowned, here too the reader could guess that wealth was the cause for this war. The text explains that the region was known to be prosperous, *Arabiam quae appellatur Eudaemon*.²⁶¹ Yet it is curious that the epithet is rendered in Greek, not in Latin and we read *eudaemon* where we could

²⁶⁰ Naturally, the text does not take into account that large parts of Iberia and Gallia had been largely conquered before Augustus and the campaign in Germany in AD 9 was a complete disaster. Yet personal pronouns and first person verbs are everywhere (see Cooley 2009:218ff). Also, as noted by Ridley 1988:274, these paragraphs do not specify dates, focussing on numbering as many places as possible in order to emphasise the extent of Augustus' conquests.

²⁶¹ For the exact location of the region described as "Eudaemon" see Retso 2000 and Bowersock 1983:46. The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* mentions a town (as opposed to a region) called Eudaemon that would have been destroyed by the Romans. This reference is problematic and must relate to a mistake in the history of the text's transmission (see discussion in Seland 2005).

read *felix*.²⁶² The country's description, emphasising its economic affluence, thus appears, as if veiled, in a foreign language. By mentioning a place imagined to lie at the edges of the world and by using its epithet in Greek, the erudite language par excellence, the text succeeds in impressing the reader with much exoticism and sophistication. With such a literary device, it avoids stating the connection of Arabia with wealth directly, thus avoiding the connection between wealth and war, which would be problematic on moral grounds. Earlier in the same paragraph we are told that, while expanding his empire in every direction, Augustus never fought unjust wars, *nulli genti bello per iniuriam inlato*. This is to say, the war in Arabia must have been just.²⁶³

On the contrary, Strabo, after stressing the connection with wealth, confirms several times that the Arabs were essentially traders and therefore were not warlike people. Being hucksters and merchants as they were, neither at land nor at sea they were good at war, οὐδὲ γὰρ κατὰ γῆν σφόδρα πολεμισταί εἰσιν ἀλλὰ κάπηλοι μᾶλλον οἱ Ἄραβες καὶ ἐμπορικοί, μήτι γε κατὰ θάλατταν.²⁶⁴ The city of the Agranians was located in a peaceful country (καὶ χώρας εἰρηνικῆς 16.4.24); the king had abandoned the city and the Romans took it with ease. Shortly after, they were victorious again and killed ten thousand of the natives who were entirely unwarlike and used their weapons in a disastrous manner, ἐχρῶντο γὰρ ἀπίρως τοῖς ὅπλοις ἀπόλεμοι τελέως ὄντες (16.4.24). Elsewhere, as he mentions the affair briefly, the author cannot help repeating that these were unwarlike people (note the ἀπολέμους in 17.1.53).

In this campaign, the Romans, unacquainted with local geography, trusted Syllaeus, a minister of the Nabataeans, as a guide to lead their expedition through Arabia. But Syllaeus deceived the Romans and their leader, Aelius Gallus.²⁶⁵

In fact, Syllaeus made the Romans believe that they needed to build large ships. Yet, the text notes, as the Arabs were peaceful, it was not likely for a war to take

²⁶² At the time of writing the famous Latin epithet was not yet current, because the area was still unfamiliar to the Romans. The use of a Greek word, however, is still remarkable, for it is unique within the text (see Cooley 2009:227, Nicolet 1991:21).

²⁶³ Within the imperial ideology it was important to state that a war was just. This often implied depicting the enemy as unjust and uncivilised. See Cooley 2009:223, Brunt and Moore 1967:71.

²⁶⁴ 16.4.23.

²⁶⁵ According to Mayerson 1995 the expedition's failure was due ultimately to Aelius Gallus' inexperience. However, Syllaeus himself might have been genuinely unaware of local geography and he seems to have been highly regarded; see Sidebotham 1986a.

place at land, let alone at sea. The ships were built at the army's meeting point in Cleopatra in Egypt, from where the fleet started sailing to Leuce Come in Arabia. Here the mischievous guide led the ships through rocky shores affected by undersea rocks, shoals and tides. By the time they reached Leuce Come, the army was suffering heavily from local ailments caused by exposure to water. Many ships were lost with the entire crew, due to sailing difficulties, there being no enemies, ὑπὸ δυσπλοίας, πολέμιου δ' οὐδενός (16.4.23).

At land, Syllaes led the army through circuitous routes without roads, through barren territory, insisting that there were no roads at all; the author says that there must have been safe roads for sure, for the camel traders were long active in the area. Indeed, Strabo records, goods from India were frequently carried from Leuce Come to Petra, from where they reached Rhinocoloura in Phoenicia (16.4.24).

A few towns were conquered, but after reaching Marsiaba, the army had to desist, affected as it was with disease, hunger and lack of water. Fortunately, while the inbound journey had lasted six months, the outbound trip was completed in two months. A shortcut was made by travelling back to Egra and from there the army crossed over to the nearest Egyptian port, Myos Hormos, famous for its connection with the Indian trade.

Reading the story as narrated by Strabo, it becomes apparent that the expedition was a failure.²⁶⁶ As in a morality tale, the valiant but ambitious and ignorant Romans were defeated, not by the force of arms (for their enemy was weak) but by the wits of one of their supposed allies.²⁶⁷ Syllaes was eventually punished at Rome, but

²⁶⁶ According to Simon 2002 the expedition was a failure because the Romans were unable to understand the political changes that had taken place in the area. However, unlike most scholars, Sidebotham 1986a argues that the expedition was not necessarily a failure and Strabo's own account suggests otherwise; the invasion at stake certainly caused impact in the region, for it made the local political entities aware of the extent of Roman hegemony. "... it is safe to infer that the arrival of Indian embassies in the Roman world was the direct result of the Roman annexation of Egypt and the attack on South Arabia. Rome, a newcomer to the Erythraean Sea region, had to establish itself quickly as a power to be reckoned with". See also Marek 1993:142-3, Ridley 2003:127-8 and Jameson 1968:76-8.

²⁶⁷ This episode clearly recalls stories about geographical ignorance Strabo tells in book 1 (1.1.17). In mythical times, he says, Agamemnon's troops famously ravaged Mysia believing that they were destroying Trojan territory, which ultimately resulted in a shameful defeat. After mentioning geographical mistakes by the Persians, Libyans, Eolians and Ionians, Strabo reports that the Romans revealed similar ignorance in many regions, namely in their campaigns against the Parthians, the Germans and the Celts. In this latter case, the Romans are clearly described as ignorant of the territory they were approaching (τοῖς ἀγνοοῦσι) and their barbarian enemies easily manage to deceive them (βαρβάρων... ἐπικρυπτομένων).

in this fable, he seems to work as an instrument of divine providence stopping an injustice to take place. At any rate, the author hesitates in his judgement of this story. At the beginning of his account, he said that this campaign made people aware of many of the region's features, πολλὰ δὲ καὶ ἡ τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἐπὶ τοὺς Ἄραβας στρατεία νεωστὶ γενηθεῖσα ἐφ' ἡμῶν (16.1.24). Yet he concludes that, although it made a small contribution, this episode did not add much to our knowledge, οὐδ' ἐπὶ πολὺ πρὸς τὴν γνῶσιν τῶν τόπων ὠνήσεν ἡ στρατεία αὕτη: μικρὰ δ' ὅμως συνήργησεν (16.1.24).

The *Res Gestae* tells a different story, namely that of a successful enterprise. Here the campaign implied bloodshed, but the text makes us believe that this must have been fair and in the interest of the Romans. It certainly does not connect the expedition with wealth, which would give the impression that this war was motivated solely by economic ambition. Augustus is associated with diligence and peace, not with luxury and war. Yet in connection with Arabia and with Indian luxury trade, Strabo associates the emperor with an unjust war, considering that the Arabian expedition implied fighting people who were not warlike and had caused no harm to Rome. Likewise, in the poems we considered earlier, Augustus in connection with India was associated with war. At least there the emperor was fated to be victorious over all his enemies; note that, according to the prophecy in the *Aeneid*, Arabs and Indians would flee from a victorious Roman army. The version of the story told by the *Res Gestae* corroborates such a prophecy.

In Strabo's story of the Arabian campaign, the Romans do win a number of battles in Arabia and the natives do flee. But the Romans are victors in inglorious situations, namely after they fight natives who are peaceful and entirely unprepared for war. Motivated by ambition, they fight wealthy merchants who may be barbarians but are not belligerent. Ultimately they are inefficient at war, credulous as they were of a mischievous guide, ignorant as they were of the local topography. Such a portrayal gains particularly realistic tone, considering that the author himself claims to be a friend of Aelius Gallus, the expedition's commander. To tell us the story of a Roman disaster the narrator did not have to assess information he read in books, as he does for most part of his work. We are made believe that here he only needed to write impressions he collected from those who were directly involved in the events.

We can thus say that Strabo's work, as the *Res Gestae*, portrays Augustus as a peaceful leader. However, his narrative of a campaign whose aim was specifically to control the commodities trade is dissonant within that laudatory attitude of the imperial enterprise we can find generally throughout *Geography*. It has been noted that Strabo's repetitive mentioning of the Parthian hegemony in Asia diminishes the impact that the Roman hegemony across the world would cause to the reader.²⁶⁸ Likewise, Strabo's reference to war in connection with luxury blurs the peaceful image of the emperor he displays elsewhere. If we were to isolate and to emphasise this Arabian incident, with all its implications with India, luxury and morality, it would become apparent that, instead of a panegyric, Strabo actually wrote a satire of Augustus.

Nonetheless, this episode of recent history is not mentioned in the account of India in book 15. In this latter book, Strabo gives a clear focus to the diplomatic relations linking Rome and India, by even avoiding to mention the east-west trade altogether. This is particularly important for the political framework of his account because, throughout *Geography*, he sometimes makes a connection between trade, luxury and corruption. For instance, we can see that the author laments how, with the Roman expansion, the Scythians have started to explore the seas and, as a result, have forgotten their legendary righteousness and adopted all sorts of vicious habits by indulging in luxury. In this context, Roman expansion is held responsible for the worldwide degeneration of conducts (7.3.7).²⁶⁹ However, as he avoids mentioning the Roman involvement in trade in book 15 (and particularly the war against the Arabs), Strabo here emphasises the moral legitimacy of Rome's political involvement in India.

Discussing why the author included India in his survey, Clarke reasons that the country "represented Roman aspirations to go even further in the conquest of the world, to incorporate not only the West, but also the full extent of Alexander's realm."²⁷⁰ Elaborating on this idea, Clarke explains that "Strabo's Roman world, of interest to the cultured man of learning (ὁ φιλόσοφος), went further, to incorporate areas not yet physically conquered by Rome, but intellectually subsumed into the world of Roman knowledge."²⁷¹

²⁶⁸ See above, note 244. Cf. Dio Cassius, 54.22.1-2 and Brunt and Moore 1967:71.

²⁶⁹ See also *Geography* 6.1.13 and 6.3.4 for other instances of a direct relation between luxury and corruption.

²⁷⁰ Clarke 2001:327.

²⁷¹ Clarke 2001:328.

Partly corroborating this idea, this chapter will have shown that there were limitations in terms of what could be said about India, a country that was certainly important for the rhetoric of the imperial discourse. Strabo attempts to overcome such limitations by ordering data he collected from his sources in a way that would not be openly conflicting with the political agenda underlying his work.

As we will see in the next chapter, such an arrangement of details contributes towards a *leitmotiv* pervading the whole *Geography*: the civilising mission of Rome.²⁷²

²⁷² See, for instance, *Geography* 2.5.26 and 4.1.5.

Chapter 2. Strabo and his storytelling: a geography of untruths?

L'Inde serait donc le talon d'Achille du rationalisme géographique alexandrin.

Jacob 1995:75

This chapter will show that Strabo creates an image of India that served to support the political agenda underlying his work. By representing the natives as barbarians, the author makes the Greek and the Roman involvement in the country appear as a civilising mission. By portraying India as a wondrous space, the author emphasises the idea that the Greek and Roman expansions there made possible the discovery of an entirely unknown and extraordinary world.

In 2.1 we will see that the description of India in book 15 includes stereotypes that were traditionally associated with the barbarians. Section 2.1.1 will show that, in Strabo's India, women are associated with adultery and political instability. While women are active in military, judicial and political aspects, men, particularly kings, are passive and impotent. The author regards such a reversal of the gender roles, whereby women are active and men are passive, as a mark of barbarism. This is a conventional association that can be traced back to Herodotus and that Strabo makes elsewhere in his work (e.g. in his descriptions of Iberia and Gaul). By contrast, we will

see that Strabo's contemporary writers, Horace and Propertius, conveyed a very different picture, as they represented Indian women as unfailingly faithful to their husbands.

In 2.1.2 we will see that Strabo's text includes stereotypes conventionally associated with the Oriental barbarian. This is the case with his portrayal of Indian and Persian kings, who are frequently associated with luxury and corruption. By contrast, we will note that other authors writing on India, such as Diodorus Siculus and Plutarch, emphasised the native monarchs' heroic qualities. In 2.1.3 we will see that Strabo's reference to cannibalism in his description of India is clearly misplaced, but its inclusion in a book dedicated to the subcontinent further supplies a barbaric facet to India.

Across *Geography*, Strabo frequently describes regions by reporting the natives' ancient, barbaric customs, while he assures that such practices are no longer extant. With the Greco-Roman expansion across the world, native peoples forgot their old ways and have embraced civilisation. Within this set of ideas, is Strabo's partially barbarian India just waiting for Roman intervention in order to become fully civilised?

In 2.2 we will see that Strabo's description includes commonplaces, namely wonders, which were traditionally associated with the edges of the world. In 2.2.1 we will see how, across *Geography*, there are repetitive and varied references to Indian wonders, such as the gold mining ants and men who sleep in their ears. In 2.2.2 we will see that, being a land full of monsters and wealth, perils and rewards, Strabo's India is a space that works well as a scenario for adventure stories. This is the case with Eudoxus's story, extensively reported in book 2.

In 2.2.3 we will see that since Herodotus, India was quintessentially associated with wonders and Strabo's readership expected marvel to be part of any description of the country. The author's inclusion of wonders is a typical instance of pseudo-documentarism, a literary technique whereby fiction and fact could be combined in order to provide entertainment. Thus, to some extent, Strabo's India could easily become a scenario for a number of fictional stories.

However, in 2.3 we will see that, due to political reasons, Strabo is selective in what stories he includes in his account of India. In 2.3.1 we will see how Diodorus and Arrian accepted that there should be indigenous mythological figures regarded by

the natives as foundational heroes. Greek historians visiting the country named such figures “Dionysus” and “Heracles” for the sake of convenience, so that their Greek readers could understand things better. In fact, Dionysus and Heracles were versatile figures in the classical tradition, credited as they were for a large, often contradicting collection of deeds: killing of monsters, foundation of cults and cities and teaching of skills to the humankind.

Strabo dismisses this idea on the grounds that, as Dionysus and Heracles are originally Greek figures, their names and stories should not be implied in anything Indian (while elsewhere, he himself accepts that both figures were versatile deities). As a result, Diodorus and Arrian could trace Indian history back to many millennia, namely to an Indian Dionysus and an Indian Heracles, so to speak. Strabo’s history of India only starts with the Greek expedition to the country under Alexander the Great.

In addition, as we will see in 2.3.2, Strabo does not allow any foreign monarch’s legend to take place in his India. As shown by Diodorus Siculus, there were accounts reporting Egyptian, Assyrian and Persian kings’ expeditions to the subcontinent. Strabo, however, dismisses such accounts as fanciful and starts his history of India with the Greek expedition there under Alexander. For this reason, Strabo’s India is a space exclusively associated with Greek (and to some extent Roman) conquests of the world.

This chapter will show that Strabo’s inclusion of stereotypical features in his account of India is a literary feature that aimed at providing entertainment to readers, to some extent. However, it is not exempt from political implications. India, as represented here, is a barbarian country, only waiting for the Greek and Roman interventions to become fully civilised. A space full of extraordinary features (the wonders), India could only be reached by exceptional heroes, such as Alexander and Augustus. Strabo’s omission of the Persian involvement with India and his dismissal of the Egyptian and the Assyrian undertakings in the country further emphasises the Greek and the Roman achievement. Once again, it will become clear that inclusion or omission of data in book 15 is not random, as suggested by scholarship,²⁷³ but it conveys a political framework whereby the text praises the Greek and Roman impact across the globe.

²⁷³ Cf. Dueck 2000:180-6.

2.1. The making of barbarians

In this section, we will start by seeing that, while Indian women were praised for their legendary chastity in Augustan poetry, Strabo associates them with promiscuity. Particularly, he depicts the king's many wives as potential threats to the monarch's life, implied as they are in political intrigues. Such a description of native women confers to his India a barbarian facet because, throughout *Geography*, the author classes promiscuity and prominence of women in social and political affairs as marks of barbarism. This will become clear after we consider his portrayal of figures such as Cleopatra, Pythodorus and the Cantabrian women.

Next, we will see that, conversely, he associates Indian kings with cowardice and luxury, when other sources (such as Herodotus, Diodorus and the *Alexander's Romance*) portray them as intrepid fighters. Strabo's text recalls the traditional Greek conception of eastern despots and, as we will see next, his reference of cannibalism further associates the country with barbarism. It will thus become apparent that India, at least to some extent, is an emblematic image of the Other.

2.1.1. Barbarian men and barbarian women

Alexander's companions had reported the practice of widow-burning in India with some vivid details and, since then, authors had referred to the custom as a stock motif illustrating female devotion to love and courage.²⁷⁴ But, simultaneously, references to the custom often came with a bearing on the country's representation as a barbarian space.

Cicero, explaining that human beings can suffer the most atrocious pain without grievance, refers to the Indian women as an example of bravery.²⁷⁵ Propertius imagined Indian women as being extremely dedicated to love, in a way that their Roman counterparts had stopped being. Fortunate, he says, is that custom (*felix lex*) among the Indians, according to which, when the husband dies, his many wives compete against each other; each is fighting to be allowed to die in the funerary pyre of the deceased; not to die together with the beloved one would be a disgrace. The text

²⁷⁴ Onesicritus and Aristobulus provide the earliest reference to widow-burning in India (*FGrH* 134 F21 and *FGrH* 139 F42).

²⁷⁵ *Tusculanae*, 5.27. Daly 1990:113-33 makes a survey explaining how the widow burning in India was much praised (as a proof of female courage and loyalty), as well as criticised (as a mark of barbarism) in the West.

stresses that they are happy to suffer being burnt alive, while they unite their scorched faces to those of their deceased husbands (*imponuntque suis ora perusta viris*). In Rome, however, the race of women is shameless (*genus infidum nuptarum*) and there are no traces left of that loyal Evadne or that pious Penelope:

felix Eois lex funeris una maritis,
quos Aurora suis rubra colorat equis!
namque ubi mortifero iactast fax ultima lecto,
uxorum fuis stat pia turba comis,
et certamen habent leti, quae viva sequatur
coniugium: pudor est non licuisse mori.
ardent victrices et flammae pectora praebent,
imponuntque suis ora perusta viris.
hoc genus infidum nuptarum, hic nulla puella
nec fida Euadne nec pia Penelope.²⁷⁶

Unlike Propertius, Strabo was far from praising love affairs in India. Surely, Aristobulus, he records, heard that in Taxila women are happy (ἄσμένως) to be burned alongside their husbands; not to do this would be condemnable (15.1.62). But this picture was complicated by Megasthenes, who had reported women's condition in India with more details. His account suggested that, according to the local customs, there was no connection between love and marriage and, accordingly, there could hardly be a relation between love and widow-burning.

First of all, Megasthenes had reported that polygamy was a common practice in the country. Men can marry many wives, buying them from their parents in exchange for a yoke of oxen. They marry some women for the sake of social convenience, some for pleasure and some to have many children (15.1.54); as there is no slavery, it is convenient to have as many children as possible (15.1.59). Yet, people cannot marry anyone from a different caste (15.1.49). According to Aristobulus himself, in Taxila, impoverished parents simply marry off their daughters after parading them in the market for potential husbands to appreciate their bodies (15.1.62).

In addition, according to Megasthenes, married women may have lovers too, although only with the permission from their husbands (15.1.54). According to some

²⁷⁶ Propertius 3.13; this passage was famously commented by Montaigne in his *Essais*, 2.29. See also Diodorus Siculus' interpretation of the subject (19.33-4). For variants in this theme in classical literature see Heckel and Yardley 1981 and Szcurek 2008.

unnamed sources, Strabo adds, wives tended to kill their husbands in order to fully engage with their new, typically younger, lovers. In order to prevent this, in one region, Cathaia, a law was established, according to which, women were forced to be burnt alive at their husbands' funerary pyre. Nothing could prevent them from having lovers, only it would be of any wife's interest that her husband lived as long as possible. That said, Strabo explains that there is not enough evidence for a clear understanding of the matter because the sources fail to provide plausible explanations (15.1.30).

In a list numbering cultural θαύματα, extraordinary features concerning native customs, Strabo records habits peculiar to the royal household. According to Megasthenes, he says, the king's bodyguards are women and they live in the palace with the monarch and his many consorts. The queens clearly have some military engagement, for Megasthenes said that they go fully armed for hunting and at battles. Any of them may legitimately kill the king anytime if they happen to see him drunk; she could then marry anyone who would take the power and the male offspring of such a union would inherit the kingdom (15.1.55).

As recorded in this passage, royal women, apart from being engaged in military affairs, have judicial importance, in the sense that they can decide the king's life. They have an additional political relevance, for they clearly have a role to play after each *coup d'état*. In addition, other women in the country can be part of the judicial system, at least to some extent. The text mentions that the state's overseers liaise with *ἐταίραι*, who spy on local men: the city *ἐταίραι* spy on city men, whereas those in the military camps spy on the army men (15.1.48).

In contrast to the female influence, the kings appear to have a relatively dim existence. Fearing plots all the time, they change beds every hour in order not to be killed (15.1.55). As a form of physical exercise, they devote time to being massaged and smooth their bodies with ebony sticks.²⁷⁷ As for their outfits, they are fond of adornment. They wear flowery linen and use garments with gold ornamentation, embroidered with precious stones and they take shelter in sun shades as they walk (15.1.54). Apart from kings, other native men too dye beards with many florid colours for the sole reason that they wish to beautify themselves, *χάριν καλλωπιζομένους*; the

²⁷⁷ By contrast, the Indian king in Philostratus' work is depicted as robust. His strength is said to be the result of physical exercise (as he is shown practising the javelin and the discus in Greek fashion) as well as young age (*Life of Apollonius*, 2.27.2).

text mentions that this fashion is carefully followed, by numerous people across the whole country, τοῦτο δὲ καὶ ἄλλους ποιεῖν ἐπιμελῶς συχνοῦς τῶν Ἰνδῶν. Apart from the hair, they dye their garments (15.1.30).

All this, the text concludes, is very atypical, when compared to “our” culture: Ἔχει μὲν οὖν καὶ ταῦτα πολλὴν ἀήθειαν πρὸς τὰ παρ’ ἡμῖν (15.1.56). Just before the θαύματα list, the text had mentioned that, while some of the local habits reveal temperance (ταῦτα μὲν δὴ σωφρονικά) others are not suitable for a social and civilised life: πρὸς γὰρ τὸν κοινωνικὸν καὶ τὸν πολιτικὸν βίον (15.1.53).

Across *Geography*, Strabo is critical about women’s power, for he associates it with disorder and barbarism.²⁷⁸ For example, he shows Cleopatra as the monarch who receives precious gifts from Marc Antony. But these were actually works of art sacked from various regions of the Greek world that now adorn the palaces in Egypt (13.1.30).

According to Konstan, Strabo depicts Pythodoris positively as an efficient queen (12.3.29).²⁷⁹ However, it should be noted that the text shows her permanently surrounded and controlled by men. A daughter of the king Pythodorus, she became queen jointly with her husband. When the husband dies, Pythodoris continues reigning, but jointly with her eldest son. After she remarries, she shares the throne with the new husband. As the latter also dies, Pythodoris reigns jointly with her youngest son. The text says that the eldest son and one of her grandchildren are sovereigns in neighbouring kingdoms.

Forever surrounded by so many men, Pythodoris is shown in the shadow of a traditional, patriarchal authority. Such a condition is reminiscent of the classical situation of Athenian women, whose fortune was always dependent on their male tutors.²⁸⁰ It is debatable whether Strabo, by praising Pythodoris, is eulogising an independent ruler. Indeed, the text suggests that the author is objectively commending a traditional set of family relations whereby a woman, in power *de iure*, is actually, *de facto*, under the influence of her male relatives.²⁸¹

²⁷⁸ See McCoskey 2005 for Strabo’s portrayal of women.

²⁷⁹ See discussion in Konstan 2002 and Clarke 1999:244.

²⁸⁰ Cantarella 2005.

²⁸¹ For further discussion on the topic see Parmar 2013.

By contrast, the Ethiopian queen Candace is shown acting independently and Strabo describes her as a manly woman, ἀνδρική τις γυνή (17.1.54). As her country is attacked by the Roman general Petronius, she sends him ambassadors to negotiate peace, but in vain. Next, her son is depicted fleeing from the royal capital, just before the city is razed to ground by the Romans. Candace herself gathers an army of thousands and marches against Petronius. Unsuccessful at such an attempt to regain her territories, Candace sends ambassadors to Augustus. Sympathizing with their cause, the Roman emperor concedes everything the Ethiopians requested and, additionally, even remits the tributes that had been imposed on them.

Similarly, Cleopatra is portrayed as an independent queen. Although associated with Antony, the text shows her benefitting from her lover's actions, thus making clear that she, and not Antony, is in command in Egypt. As Candace, she too has some masculine features, if we take into account that she takes part in the battle of Actium, together with Antony, τόν τε Ἀκτιακὸν πόλεμον συνήρατο ἐκείνη καὶ συνέφυγε (17.1.11). Augustus appears in the picture, saving Egypt by putting an end to an unusual state of affairs, Σεβαστὸς Καῖσαρ ἀμφοτέρους κατέλυσε καὶ τὴν Αἴγυπτον ἔπαυσε παροινουμένην (17.1.11). Not only does he win the battle, but he also restores the works of art to their original places across the Greek world. A bastion of patriarchy, Augustus restores the male authority that had been briefly threatened by female rule (13.1.30).²⁸²

Describing Gaul, Strabo reports that men and women here share tasks “in a manner contrary to us”, a feature they have in common with other barbarians: τὸ δὲ περὶ τοὺς ἄνδρας καὶ τὰς γυναῖκας, τὸ διηλλάχθαι τὰ ἔργα ὑπεναντίως τοῖς παρ' ἡμῖν, κοινὸν καὶ πρὸς ἄλλους συχνοὺς τῶν βαρβάρων ἐστὶ (4.4.3). He thus clearly implies that there is a connection between a reversal in gender roles and barbarism.

As he describes the Iberian Peninsula, Strabo further explains his ideas on gender roles. Across the Peninsula, we learn, it is women who till the ground. If they happen to be pregnant, they give birth while at work, while the husbands can rest at home (3.4.17).²⁸³ In order to illustrate this, Strabo tells the following story he heard

²⁸² Strabo tells a similar story about Aba, queen of Olbe, who was a friend of Antony and Cleopatra (14.5.10). The text does not say much about Amastris of Heracleia, who founded a city named after her (12.3.10).

²⁸³ On Iberian women see Santana 2009.

from Posidonius. A pregnant woman had been hired for digging; as she felt she was in labour, she discretely retired to some nearby place, gave birth to a child and immediately returned to work, for she was not willing to lose her daily salary. Her overseer, realising what had happened, took pity on her, gave her her wages and sent her home. Likewise, in Lusitania, Strabo records, it is women who collect bits of gold and silver from fluvial sediments (3.2.9). Native Iberian men may not be as fond of adornment as their Indian counterparts, but the text refers to those inhabiting the mountains as fashioning their hair in a female manner, βαθεῖαν κατακεχυμένοι τὴν κόμην γυναικῶν δίκην (3.3.7).

Certainly, Iberian women are an essential part of local economy. Strabo records what seems to be an example of matriarchy. In Cantabria, he says, brides receive a dowry from their grooms and, once married, pass it to their daughters, who in turn, will pass the grant to their brothers, only so that they can give it to their brides. This custom, Strabo says, falls short of being civilised, although it is not completely savage: τὰ μὲν τοιαῦτα ἤττον μὲν ἴσως πολιτικά, οὐ θηριώδη δέ. Indeed, he concludes, it has some matriarchic implications, which is certainly not a mark of civilisation: ἔχει γὰρ τινα γυναικοκρατίαν. τοῦτο δ' οὐ πάνυ πολιτικόν (3.4.18). In fact, the custom described here was in sheer contrast with the Greek tradition, according to which women did not hold the right to possess, even if their own dowries were at stake, for these were managed by a male relative.²⁸⁴

Considering the stories of Pythodoris, Candace and Cleopatra, as well as the description of Cantabrian women and the Indian queens, it becomes clear that, for Strabo, female rule means barbarism, whereas male authority means civilisation. Additionally, independent societies of women that Strabo describes, as the Bacchants living in Gaul and the Amazons, are always depicted with traces of brutality (4.4.6 and 11.5).

The Indian custom that allows the royal wives to kill their king is reminiscent of a similar tradition that Strabo openly classes as barbarian. In Latium, he says, there is a sanctuary that establishes as priest any runaway slave who would kill the current priest; once he has been made a priest, he lives anxiously and carries around a sword,

²⁸⁴ Cf. Cantarella, 2005. On women in classical antiquity see Pomeroy 1975, Lefkowitz and Fant 2005 and MacLachlan 2012.

fearing being killed himself (5.3.12). Indian queens represent similar threat to their king. Their judicial and military prominence is clearly implied with political instability, which, in turn is a feature that Strabo associates with barbarism.²⁸⁵

We have thus seen that Strabo's selection of details from sources creates an India where there is a connection between women, power and barbarism. Such a connection recalls the Herodotean text, where the reversal of gender roles and women's prominence in social and political terms are among features that define the barbarians.²⁸⁶ The prominence of royal wives, reported by Megasthenes, is recorded neither by Diodorus, nor by Arrian.²⁸⁷ Conversely, we have seen that, in Strabo's account, native men are weaker figures and, next, we will see that this is particularly the case for the native kings.

2.1.2. Oriental despots?

Certainly, Strabo portrays Indian kings as surrounded by women who are potential threats to their lives, associated as they are with courtly intrigues and *coup d'états*. Additionally, he depicts them as submissive towards their Greek and Roman conquerors, while Diodorus Siculus and Plutarch emphasised their heroic qualities. We can see this particularly in the story of Porus, a king who appears ubiquitously in our sources on India.

Native kings mentioned by sources were many: Abisarus, Sopeithes, Musicanus, Nambanus, Taxiles, Porus, Sandracotus and many others whose names are not recorded. Most of these are known in connection with geographical features of their country. For instance, about Abisarus, Strabo says that he sent an embassy to Alexander displaying large serpents: one was 80 *pecheis* long and the other 140. This is information he read in a source that he classes as the most suspicious, Onesicritus, who is described here as the chief pilot of incredible things (15.1.28). Diodorus never mentions Abisarus. Arrian, in his *Indika*, does not mention Abisarus either and in

²⁸⁵ Dueck 2000: 78.

²⁸⁶ Cf. Herodotus' account of the Egyptian women (2.35), Cyno (1.110 and 122) and Tomyris (1.205-14). For other commonplace schemata used in Strabo's ethnographical descriptions see van der Vliet 1977 and 1984, and Almagor 2005.

²⁸⁷ Diodorus (2.39), Pliny (6.23) and Arrian (*Indika*, 8) refer to a queen Pandaia, who ruled over a territory rich in pearls in southern India. However, Pandaia is a legendary figure, the daughter of Heracles. See discussion in Bosworth 1996a:91-2.

Anabasis, where he does mention the king twice, he never alludes to the serpents (5.8 and 5.20). Similarly, Sopeithes was famous for his exceptionally fierce dogs; a story reporting gruesome animal fighting in his country is recorded by Diodorus and Strabo, but Arrian in his *Indika* leaves it aside.²⁸⁸

About Porus, Strabo only records that his country was located around Hydaspes; it was a large and fertile territory, rich in wood for shipbuilding and with three hundred cities (15.1.29). Porus was captured by Alexander (15.1.30), who, after subduing his entire country, gave it back to him (15.1.3).²⁸⁹

Diodorus recorded that Porus was incredibly tall, strong, showing such an ability for fighting that he impressed the Macedonians (17.88). He had a large army (we are given exact numbers for infantry, cavalry, chariots of war and elephants) and he was supported by a king of a neighbouring area who was just as powerful. Alexander was willing to attack Porus before the arrival of his ally but Porus understood the stratagem and the Macedonians were forced to make the necessary adjustments to the disposition of the army for the battle (17.87).

Alexander successively managed to eliminate different sections of the rival army, but Porus always continued fighting. Only, once unprotected by his entourage and due to his great stature, he became an easy target for weapons that were thrown at him. Yet, he continued fighting until his many wounds made him faint and collapse upon his elephant (17.88).

More than twelve thousand men from the Indian side died at the battle and nine thousand were taken alive, compared to nine hundred men on the Greek side. Porus was still breathing and was saved by his doctors. When he recovered, Alexander gave him his kingdom back, in recognition of his valour and founded two cities in his territory (17.89). This episode took place during the archonship of Chremes at Athens and consulship of Publius Cornelius and Aulus Postumius in Rome, 326-5 BC (17.87).

Plutarch recorded similar details, without depicting Porus as heroically.²⁹⁰ His text stresses that it was incredibly difficult for the Macedonians to cross the river Hydaspes in order to face Porus. The battle was won by the Greeks due to their

²⁸⁸ On this story, see below section 2.2.1.

²⁸⁹ For Porus see also Diodorus, 17.87-89, Curtius, 8.13-14, Justinus, 12.8.1-7, Plutarch, *Alexander*, 60 and Arrian, *Anab.*, 5.3.5- 19.3. Diodorus omits the exciting story of Alexander crossing the Hydaspes.

²⁹⁰ *Alexander*, 60-2.

ingenious military strategy, but that after a long battle lasting for more than seven hours during which it was fought at close quarters (60). At the end of the battle, Alexander's horse died, causing him great distress (61). Defeated, Porus was taken as captive and, asked by Alexander how he thought he should be treated, he replied that he should be treated as a king, βασιλικῶς. Alexander was impressed by his enemy's fearless attitude and gave him his dominions back, granting him the title of satrap (60). After this, the Macedonians were so tired of fighting that they refused to continue walking up to the Ganges, as planned, and Alexander had to change his decision and return home by sailing down the Indus (62).

In the *Alexander Romance*, Porus had received a letter from his Persian counterpart Darius, instructing him to make war against the Macedonians. Alexander was impressed with the Indian army, not so much for the strength of its men as for the strength of its elephants. Yet he managed to eliminate these animals by burning their mouths with bronze. As his horse died, he started to neglect the battle and the two sides continued fighting for twenty days. Finally, Alexander challenged Porus for a single combat; here, at some stage, as Porus turned round, distracted, to see what the noise he had just heard from his camp was, Alexander killed him (3.4).

The Indians were about to carry on fighting, but Alexander assured them that he would cause them no harm, for his war was against their king only. The text explains that he thus managed to appease the natives, which was a very convenient achievement for he knew that his army would be incapable of fighting (3.4). The moral of the story is what Alexander told his army, namely that the barbarians always assemble large armies but they can be defeated by the superior intelligence of the Greeks (3.2).

In Diodorus' version, Indian kings and armies are depicted as fearless fighters, as we can see in yet another story he records. Diodorus reports that the region lying on basin of the Ganges, inhabited by the Gangaridae, had never been conquered by any foreign power. All nations feared their military strength, for they possessed the greatest number of the largest elephants. Even Alexander, who subdued the whole Asia, refrained from making war against them, because when he arrived at the Ganges, he learned about their elephants equipped for war and gave up his campaign (2.37).

Later, in his narration of the Macedonian expedition, Diodorus gives some more details on the latter episode (17.93-4). Alexander was certainly willing to

conquer all India, he says. He consulted an Indian king Phegeus (whose domain he had just invaded) about the risk of proceeding his conquests to the country beyond the Ganges. Phegeus warned him that, in order to reach that country, he would have to undertake a twelve days journey through the desert, cross the Ganges River itself which was the largest and the deepest of them all, and then face the full force of the native kings who possessed four thousand elephants.

Here Diodorus adds some picturesque details. Alexander was still willing to proceed with his campaign, but he knew that his army were tired. Their condition was so miserable that their clothes and armour were wearing out, to the extent that they had to borrow fabric and garments from the natives (17.93). Alexander knew that he could only continue his journey with the full support of his army. In order to gain his men's sympathy, he decided to let his forces ravage the country they had just invaded and amass as much wealth as possible. He then made a speech, which had been carefully prepared, in order to convince the men to proceed the campaigns further east. But the army did not accept his ideas and he was forced to give up the project (17.93).

In this episode, Diodorus emphasises the military power of a native army and, by contrast, he reports the Greek army's precarious situation as well as Alexander's failure in persuading his men. Likewise, Plutarch, even in his short biography of Alexander, recorded the Indian king's brave attitude at his downfall. Strabo never ascribes heroic qualities to native kings and, as we have seen earlier, he shows Indian kings surrounded by women, continuously fearing for their lives.

By contrast, Herodotus had long counted the Indians among the strongest in the Persian army. He recorded that the Persian general Mardonius selected all Indians available to be part of his personal entourage, due to their stature and proven worth, τοῖσι εἶδεά τε ὑπῆρχε διαλέγων καὶ εἰ τεοῖσι τι χρηστὸν συνήδεε πεποιημένον (8.113).

Diodorus thought he had to explain why the natives were so robust and he says that it is the abundance of food, pure air and the finest water that makes the Indians grow tall, strong and talented in arts (2.36). Accordingly, in the stories we read above, Diodorus always emphasised the strength, either of Indian kings or of the native army. In addition, the first thing he recorded about the subcontinent was that the elephants there were more powerful than their African counterparts; they are captured and trained for warfare and become a great asset for the local army, for they always assure

victory (1.35). At any rate, in his version, neither the possibility of acquiring more wealth nor their prince's carefully chosen words were sufficient to convince the Greeks to face a local army.

We should note that Arrian in his *Anabasis* frequently depicts the Indians fleeing from Alexander and failing to succeed in their battles against the Macedonians, due to their relative lack of military strategy (5.14-17). Yet, he praises Porus by saying that he was strong, handsome and braver than Darius; he was honourable even when he was defeated (5.18).²⁹¹ Plutarch did not refer to Porus in laudatory terms, but he recorded his brave attitude and Alexander's change of plans after learning the difficulties of proceeding to eastern India.

In Strabo's *Geography*, we find references to the local kings in connection with some local feature (e.g. dogs and serpents). But they are invariably described as being feeble, fond of ornaments and scared of their wives, who hold military, judicial and, ultimately, political power. We have seen above that such a reversal in terms of gender roles was a commonplace scheme, since Herodotus, in the depiction of barbarian societies. In what follows, we will see that Strabo incorporates some other clichés that ascribe traces of barbarism to his India.

2.1.3. The cannibals

The first thing Herodotus said about India was that the country was inhabited by a diversity of people who did not agree with each other in terms of language and culture (3.99). While some would abstain from killing any living beings, some would have raw flesh as staple food. Here Herodotus gives some picturesque details illustrating this latter practice. Whenever someone falls ill, he says, their relatives approach them by saying that, as they are being consumed by the disease, their flesh will be of no use for the community's diet if no action is taken; they will have to kill them in order to be able to eat their flesh while it is still edible. Typically, the victims would deny that they are ill, but the community would have the last word. The same procedure is applied to someone who is perceived as having reached old age: they kill them and

²⁹¹ For Arrian's laudatory treatment of Porus, in contrast with Darius III, see Briant 2003: 161-190. For stereotypes of Asian despotism see Hall 1989:79-84.

feast upon them. Men would kill men and women would kill women. As a result, no one in that region reaches old age, for one is killed at first signs of illness.

Acknowledging that such a practice would shock his readers, a few paragraphs before Herodotus tells a story to explain cultural determinism. He says that there are many instances explaining that men would naturally find their own culture to be the best. Those who, by any chance, do not think that way must be insensible (as was the case for Cambyses, who ridiculed the customs of his own people). In order to study this, Darius once summoned the Greeks who were living in his empire and asked them for what price they would eat the bodies of their fathers when they died. The Greeks answered that they would not do that for any price. Later Darius summoned those Indians who eat the flesh of their parents and asked them for what price would they accept to cremate their fathers when they died. The Indians were horrified with such an idea and asked the king not to utter such words. Herodotus concludes that only usage dictates what is right and wrong; this was already acknowledged by Pindar, who wrote “of all things law is king”: νόμος ὁ πάντων βασιλεὺς θνατῶν τε καὶ ἀθανάτων (3.38).

In fact, in ancient literature, cannibalism was a custom imagined to define the barbarians. Herodotus himself recorded that among the Massagetae, when someone becomes old, their relatives come together and kill them sacrificially; afterwards, they stew and eat their meat. This is so because they consider disease to be a misfortune and regard sacrificing the body while it is still healthy as a decent thing (1.216).²⁹² However, elsewhere Herodotus associates cannibalism with anarchy, amorality and lack of civilisation (4.106). Similarly, Ephorus mentioned the practice in connection with savagery of some Scythian and Sauromatian tribes.²⁹³

Cannibalism is mentioned several times in the *Geography*. When describing Ierne, Strabo starts by saying that there is nothing certain to relate (4.5.4). Nonetheless, he suspects that some data might be worth recording and he provides a list numbering native customs: the islanders are savages and cannibals who have intercourse in the open with their wives, mothers and sisters and consider it auspicious to eat their deceased fathers' flesh. As a conclusion, the text warns the reader once

²⁹² See also Herodotus 4.26 and 4.106.

²⁹³ Ephorus book 4, *FGrH* 70 F 42 = Strabo 7.3.9.

again that there is no evidence for what has been said, yet the information on cannibalism could be accurate, for it is practised among Scythians, Celts, Iberians and many other nations.²⁹⁴ Similarly, in his account of India, Strabo provides a list numbering the traditions of those who live on the mountains, where he mentions that some eat the bodies of their relatives and have sex in public (15.1.56).

Both references to the practice, in India and Ierne, appear in lists of θαύματα highlighting bizarre cultural and natural phenomena. They aim to entertain the reader by cataloguing the variety of wonders recorded about each country and are conveniently framed with introductory and conclusive remarks stressing the unreliability of sources. Bianchetti explains that cannibalism might have nothing to do with Ierne; it was probably not even mentioned by any of Strabo's sources. His inclusion of the custom here is likely to reflect that old literary convention associating the edges of the earth with savagery.²⁹⁵

This is the case for his reference to cannibalism in India, a custom already reported by Herodotus. But Herodotus' mention of cannibalism appears in a section where he clearly explained cultural determinism, whereas Strabo's reference of the matter confirms the association of India with barbarism. Later, in chapter 3, we will see that such an association is somewhat balanced by the country's association with wisdom. But for now, in what follows, we will see how Strabo could not help recording as many bizarre phenomena that were ever recorded about India and how he thus comes to emphasise the country's otherness.

2.2. India, the scenario for a new Odyssey

In this section, we will see that the text creates an India that works as a mythological background for extraordinary accomplishments by charismatic world leaders. We will start by considering that the author records all the wondrous features that were traditionally ascribed to the country. Precious land resources, marvellous trees, hybrid animals, fabulous races of human beings and bizarre customs, all have a role to play in this survey. At face value, the recording of such features takes the form of refutation

²⁹⁴ See also *Geography*, 11.11.8 for cannibalism among the Derbices. Diodorus (5.32.3–6) says that cannibalism is practised by the Gauls bordering Scythia and even by Britons.

²⁹⁵ Bianchetti 2002. See also Keyser 2011.

of data supplied by sources. But in the process, Strabo, unlike Diodorus, for instance, preserves the country's wondrous quality.

Next, we will see that the marvellous landscape thus created is a perfect backdrop for epic journeys by heroes such as Eudoxus. Then we will proceed to consider literary strategies, used by the author, to include such fictional material in his survey. Strabo's maintenance of India's imaginary landscape apparently contradicts the serious tone of his criticism of sources, but it suits well the political programme underlying *Geography*, as we will see in the section three of this chapter.

2.2.1. A landscape of wonders

Both Strabo and Diodorus drawing on the same sources, the latter recorded virtually no marvel, whereas the former included all wonders that were traditionally ascribed to the country. When Diodorus does refer to astonishing features, he attempts to provide simple and logical explanations, while Strabo tends to record such features in order to refute and to ridicule his sources. To some extent, as we will see below, Strabo depicted India as a wondrous reality. By comparison, other authors describing the subcontinent convey a more realistic space.

Diodorus refrained from telling the famous story about the gold mining ants. In his description of the country, when he does mention that there are all kinds of animals, of greater size and strength than elsewhere, he does not give further details on different species (2.35). We will have to read his narration of Alexander's journey to finally find some odd phenomena: India has a vast quantity of small and large, variously coloured snakes; some of these come with crests and their bites cause immediate and painful death. The Macedonians were affected by bites but they learned the cure from the natives. This said, Diodorus, unlike most authors, refrains from quoting his sources to provide further details on different species of extraordinary snakes (17.90).

Strabo recorded that the local fauna is different in every respect. On the one hand, in his sources, Indian animals were said to be the same as in Egypt and Ethiopia (15.1.13). But according to Aristobulus, animals here were generally larger than elsewhere, due to the climate (15.1.22). According to Megasthenes, animals that are tame elsewhere are wild in India and vice-versa (15.1.56). These features would

already make local scenery unlike, but Strabo was particularly comprehensive in his recording of extraordinary features.

Across *Geography*, the gold mining ants are mentioned four times.²⁹⁶ In the *prolegomena* we are told that those who had written on this and other such wonders were complete inventors (2.1.9). Nonetheless, in his account of the subcontinent, the author records some intricate details about the story. Whereas Herodotus made it appear that the ants lived around the Indus region only, Strabo says that they are reported to live in the country on the other side of the Indus basin, namely in a region that is not well known and about which numerous fanciful stories are told (15.1.37).

Later he records Megasthenes saying that the ants do dig gold in one region in particular, inhabited by the Derdae, towards the East, on the mountains; they do dig holes by heaping up the golden earth; this in turn is of such a fine texture that it needs little smelting; the ants are of the size of foxes and are strong enough to kill humans and burden beasts alike; the gold hunters scatter bits of flesh of wild animals in order to distract the ants; they then gather the earth and escape without being noticed. Nearchus says that he actually saw the skins of these animals and they reminded him of leopards' skin (15.1.44). Strabo also reports that some of his unnamed sources mentioned that the ants have wings and the gold-dust that they dig is actually brought down by the rivers, as in Iberia (15.1.69).

Likewise, Strabo gives much detail on snakes.²⁹⁷ He recorded that Nearchus was amazed by their large number in the country; some of them were big, while some were small; in either case they are hard to guard from. The big ones were hard to face due to their strength; the small ones were tricky because they went unnoticed. Yet Aristobulus wrote that he had not seen any of the huge ones that were so much talked about, apart from a large viper; Strabo here adds that he himself saw a very large one in Egypt that was from India; on the contrary, Aristobulus found that there were some really small reptiles, whose bite causes pain, excessive bleeding and ultimately death; however, due to the excellence of local drugs and roots, people could be easily saved;

²⁹⁶ On this famous *topos* in ancient indography see Li Causi and Pomelli 2001-2, Karttunen 1997:249-50 and Karttunen 1989:171.

²⁹⁷ On ancient theories about exotic animals see Bodson 1998, Nigg 1999 and Karttunen 1987. On Indian serpents see Karttunen 1989:190-2.

the crocodiles in the Indus, he wrote, were neither as numerous nor as harmful (15.1.45).

Onesicritus reported that there were extraordinary large serpents at the country of Abisarus (15.1.28). In the Indian embassy described by Nicolaus Damascenus, large snakes and vipers were reported (15.1.73). Some unnamed sources reported that there were some winged reptiles that would fly by night discharging a deadly substance, be it urine or sweat, which rotted human skin (15.1.37). Snakes that swallow oxen and stags, horns and all, had been reported by many of these sources (2.1.9).

Particularly wondrous animals were the large winged scorpions, reported by an unnamed source (15.1.37).²⁹⁸ Megasthenes reported horses with a head of a deer and having a horn (15.1.56).²⁹⁹

India was famous for its fierce hunting dogs already in Herodotus, who mentions twice that the Persians make use of them in their armies (1.192 and 7.187).³⁰⁰ Both Diodorus and Strabo recorded the famous story of king Sopeithes, who gave a hundred and fifty dogs to Alexander as a gift and both authors are equally dramatic in rendering the story.

We can read in Strabo that the native king Sopeithes let loose two dogs to attack a lion; as they were being overpowered, two more were let loose over the lion; then a servant was ordered to pull away one of the dogs; the dog, however, had to have one of his legs amputated before he could let go his grip. Alexander was not willing to let the native servant cut off the poor animal's leg, but he ended up consenting when Sopeithes promised him four other dogs for that one (15.1.31). Later Strabo adds that, according to his unnamed sources, some brave dogs would not let go the bitten object before water was poured down into their nostrils; some bite so heatedly that their eyes become distorted and sometimes actually fall out; once a lion was overpowered by a dog and a bull was actually killed, as the dog had hold on his nose (15.1.37).

Diodorus says that the locals believed these dogs to have a strain of tiger blood. The lion in Sopeithes' story was a full grown one, whereas the dogs let loose were old; the dog suffered being amputated without a whimper, until he fainted with

²⁹⁸ It is not known what these scorpions are meant to refer to. See Karttunen 1997:217-8.

²⁹⁹ On this animal, most likely the rhinoceros, see Karttunen 1989:168-71.

³⁰⁰ For dogs in Greek literature see Lilja 1976. On Indian dogs see discussion in Karttunen 1989:163-7.

loss of blood and died on the top of the lion. Alexander at first shouted at this and his guards immediately tried to stop the Indian servant; the Macedonian prince only changed his mind because Sopeithes promised him three dogs for that one (17.92).

A fanciful story about apes is partially told by Strabo but not mentioned by Diodorus. The Macedonians once saw very many apes standing on hills; thinking that they were an army of men ready to fight, the Macedonians were about to prepare for battle; it was the native king in their entourage, Taxiles, who informed them that that was an illusion, for what they could see were not men but apes; Strabo also records that these animals are very similar to humans, not only in appearance but in mentality as well. He then proceeds to explain the way they are captured by hunters (15.1.29). Later, he adds that they can be extraordinarily large, with large tails; some can be tame, refraining from any attacks to humans or thefts (15.1.37), but others can be mischievous and harmful, rolling rocks from the top of mountains in order to defend themselves from pursuers (15.1.56). Diodorus only records the way these animals are normally caught by hunters (17.90).³⁰¹

More importantly, in the *prolegomena*, Strabo said that India was associated with marvellous races: men who sleep in their ears, men without mouths, men without noses, men with one eye, men with long legs, men with fingers turned backward and Pans with wedge-shaped heads and the Pygmies who make war with the cranes (2.1.9). Given his harsh criticism of sources, we would expect him not to mention such wondrous creatures again. Yet, the list of marvellous peoples is repeated later in his own account of India (15.1.57), with addition of details.³⁰²

About the men who sleep in their ears (ἐνωτοκοίτες) we learn that they are strong enough to tear up trees. Men with no mouth (ἄστόμοι) live by the Ganges and survive by inhaling vapours of meat and odours of fruit and flowers. Men without noses (ἄρριναι) are now called men without nostrils (ἀμύκτηρες) and we learn that they have two orifices instead of a nose; a few lines below, after describing other fabulous peoples, the text comes back to them to say that their upper lip protrudes,

³⁰¹ It was previously suggested that it was native apes that inspired the stories on fabulous people. See discussion in Puskás and Kadar 1980.

³⁰² On monstrous races as literary topos in classical indography see Puskás and Kadar 1980. Karttunen 1989:140 presents a table numbering the monstrous people mentioned by Greek sources and their supposed counterparts in Indian literature. Friedman 1981 makes a good survey of the theme's continuity in the middle ages.

they eat everything including raw meat and that they only live for a short period of time. Men with one eye (μονοφθάλμοι) are now called μονομμάτοι; apart from having their eye in the middle of the forehead, they have dog's ears, erect hair and shaggy breast.

We also learn about people that are not mentioned in the *prolegomena*, namely ὠκύποδες, who have such feet that they can run faster than horses. There are wild men (ἀγρίοι) with heels in front, toes and flat of the foot behind. These latter might be the same as the men with their fingers turned backwards (ὀπισθοδακτύλοι), mentioned in the *prolegomena*. The μακροσκελεῖς, men with long legs, are not referred to again, neither are the Pans with wedge shaped heads.

In the *prolegomena*, Strabo says that the unreliable authors had revived a story they had read in Homer about the wars between cranes and Pygmies, these latter being humans three *spythamai* tall (2.1.9).³⁰³ Indeed, this refers to a famous simile in the *Iliad*. At the opening of the battle in book 3, the epic poem compares the Trojans' war cry with the clamour uttered by cranes when they are about to kill and destroy the Pygmies (3.2-6). Megasthenes, according to Strabo, reported that in India there were indeed some people, three or five *spythamai* tall, who made war against cranes and partridges; they did this either by means of destroying the eggs laid by the cranes or by shooting bronze arrows at them; the cranes in the country, as opposed to those elsewhere, do lie eggs (15.1.57).

Neither Diodorus nor Arrian mention the Pygmies. Pliny attempted to supply the story with as much coherence as possible, by providing a number of logical explanations. For this, he had to record more details from his sources than Strabo does. Indeed, Pliny says that Megasthenes mentioned both Pygmies and people who are three *spythamai* tall; both inhabit a particularly healthy place in India, sheltered by mountains where it is always spring. They must make war against cranes because otherwise the increasing number of these birds would pose a threat to their own survival. Accordingly, they organise military expeditions that last for three months. Armed with arrows and mounted on rams and goats, they go to the sea-shore and destroy the eggs and young of their enemy birds. Their dwellings are made of mud, feathers and egg-shells (7.25ff).

³⁰³ On the Pygmies see Karttunen 1989:128-30.

Strabo makes the story sound unrealistic and confusing, by rendering the most striking features only, by omitting details he might have found in Megasthenes and by referring back to instances, such as Homeric poems, that had no relation with the subcontinent. In addition, he concludes this section by going completely out of topic, for he records that Megasthenes also refers to the the gold dust in India as being carried down by rivers, just as in Iberia and that about the Hyperboreans (who would inhabit Northern Europe) Megasthenes said the same things as poets such as Simonides and Pindar, namely that they live up to thousand years (15.1.57).

Similarly, Strabo supplies a list of wondrous trees, δένδρα παράδοξα, complete with their extraordinary features (15.1.21). He records a tree whose branches bend down, with leaves as big as a shield, according to some of his unnamed sources (15.1.21); a tree with multiple trunks, giving shade like tent, reported at the country ruled by Musicanus, according to Onesicritus (15.1.21); a tree with large trunks (15.1.21); a tree giving extensive shade to fifty horsemen, according to Aristobulus, or to four hundred, according to Onesicritus (15.1.21); a tree giving pods full of poisonous honey, according to Aristobulus (15.1.21); a tree giving shade for five stadia, according to “those who exaggerate” ὑπερβέβληνται ... οἱ φήσαντες ταῖς μεσημβρίαῖς πενταστάδιον (15.1.21); a tree bearing wool, according to Aristobulus (15.1.21); incredibly large reeds (15.1.56).

When Diodorus first mentions trees, he says that there are fruit trees of every kind and immediately explains the cause for such variety: this is a fertile country, watered as it is by many rivers (2.35). When he mentions in passing that there are some strange trees, he only mentions those that are incredibly high, with thick trunks and casting large shades, without providing much detail on the size of the shade (17.90). While describing the fantastic island, located near India and visited by Iambulus, Diodorus only refers to the abundance of fruit and olive trees (2.59). In connection with Dionysus and vegetation, after he mentions that there are marvellous trees in the subcontinent, he explains that by this he means the abundance of fruit-bearing and shady trees (3.68-9).

Diodorus sees India as an extraordinary place, but not necessarily wondrous. After he reports the abundance and variety of fruit trees on the mountains and the plains, which are of great beauty (τῷ μὲν κάλλει διάφορα) he attempts to explain the

country's fertility logically (2.35). Indeed, he reports, all surrounding countries being higher and mountainous, water from the many rivers that are born there descends easily and copiously into the subcontinent (2.37). As there are two rainy seasons each year (2.36), two yearly crops can be obtained (2.35). Due to such an abundance of moisture, the local grain is of superior quality (2.36).

While telling Semiramis' story, Diodorus reports that the queen had already subdued most of Asia when she was informed about India. After learning that the country was the largest and full of extraordinary resources, she decided to make a campaign there. Numbering such resources, the text reports the two yearly crops, favourable climate, the elephants, gold, silver, iron, copper, precious stones (2.16) and the large reeds suitable for shipbuilding (2.17). Later, when Diodorus mentions that the country produces anything that is needed for embellishment, necessity and war equipment, the examples of this that he gives are silver, gold, copper, iron, and tin (2.36). Thus, he builds his India as a space full of riches, but wonder is virtually not included.

Strabo's approach to marvel is reminiscent of the tradition of wonder writing that goes back to Herodotus and Ctesias. Herodotus thought that he should describe India because, lying at the remotest east, the country supplied plentiful gold to the Persian Empire. As the gold was allegedly mined by giant ants, he felt he had to provide a full description of such animals and their prodigious occupation as miners (3.98ff). But in passing, while holding our curiosity about the gold matter, Herodotus could not refrain from reporting other extraordinary features: animals across the country, he said, were larger than elsewhere (3.106), the natives had black sperm (3.101) and wore clothes made of tree barks (3.106); the sun was the hottest, not at noon as elsewhere, but in the morning (3.104).

Concluding this section, Herodotus makes the point that the edges of the earth were allotted most extraordinary things, τὰ κάλλιστα (3.106). Ethiopia, lying on the remotest south, and Iberia, on the remotest west, were said to have astonishing features as well. Northern Europe would produce more gold than any other region of the earth; the gold there would be guarded by griffins and taken away from them by the Arimaspians, one eyed people; Herodotus admits that he has no information on how exactly they do this (3.116).

Strabo thinks that the northern and the southern edges of the earth, marked as they are by extreme heat and extreme cold respectively, were inhospitable for human living. The two regions should be seen as detrimental and inferior in comparison with the temperate zone, ἀποτεύγματα εἶναι τῆς εὐκράτου καὶ ἐλαπτώματα (17.2.1). As they offered no advantages in terms of resources, he could exclude them altogether from his geographical survey (2.5.8).

On the contrary, he portrays the extreme west as fertile and rich in gold. He goes to the extent of justifying the old tradition identifying the Iberian Peninsula with the Elysian Plains. Iberia, marked by her wealth and mild climate, could well be the blessed land imagined by Homer, who, Strabo thinks, must have been acquainted with Phoenician accounts reporting the region's many riches (1.1.4-5). Likewise for India, lying on the easternmost edge of the world, he preserves the Herodotean association with riches and wonders. In addition, as we will see next, he conceives this landscape of wonders as a perfect scenario for epic journeys.

2.2.2. The hero and his ship

Strabo, in his discussion of the southern boundaries of Africa, tells us the story of Eudoxus of Cyzicus.³⁰⁴ He is our only source on the matter and he sees the story as pure fiction, but he narrates it by supplying abundant and vivid details (2.3.4-8).³⁰⁵ As India appears, repeatedly, as the ultimate destination for the protagonist's many travels, we will first address the story itself and, then, we will proceed to analyse its function within Strabo's conception of India.

Eudoxus made the first sailing trip from Egypt to India, according to one of Strabo's favourite sources, Posidonius. Originally a man from Cyzicus, Eudoxus lived at the court in Egypt, under the Ptolemies. He was shown the route to the subcontinent

³⁰⁴ Sources Strabo read via Posidonius suggested that it would be possible to circumnavigate Africa, surrounded, as it would be by sea. The author sees this idea as problematic, for equatorial Africa, due to the excessive heat, should be inhospitable for human life and therefore prevent any sailing. His sources should be mistaken and the author finds it surprising that Posidonius, otherwise so critical of his own sources, ended up believing stories conflicting with contemporary science. Posidonius had mentioned three stories suggesting that Africa could be circumnavigated (2.3.4). A) He recorded an account he found in Herodotus, confirming that an expedition sent by Darius had successfully completed the circumnavigation. B) In a dialogue by Heraclides of Pontus, one character told the other that he had circumnavigated Africa. C) While in Cadiz, Posidonius himself had heard the story of Eudoxus, that confirmed such possibility. Cf. Herodotus, 4.42.

³⁰⁵ Modern scholars believe the story to be based on historical facts. For fuller debate on Eudoxus, see Habicht 2013, Martin 2004 and Thiel 1966.

by an Indian sailor, who had just been saved by the Egyptians after his ship wrecked in the ocean.³⁰⁶

His first trip to India was successful and Eudoxus returned with a rich cargo (which, however, was confiscated by the royal guard). Returning to Egypt after his second trip to the subcontinent, his ship was diverted to Ethiopia. Here, he was helped by the natives in exchange of commodities he had brought from the East. While waiting to go back to Egypt, he noticed the remains of an old ship that seemed to have been fabricated in the Iberian Peninsula.³⁰⁷ Once back in Egypt, Eudoxus could confirm with local artisans that the wrecked ship he had seen in Ethiopia could very likely be Iberian.

Excited by the possibility of sailing to India from the Iberian Peninsula, Eudoxus gathered all means to undertake such a journey. Departing from Cadiz, he set sail in the Atlantic until he reportedly reached a land in Western Africa, where the natives spoke the same language as the Ethiopians he had met before. However, due to political disagreement with the local king and his minister, Eudoxus had to retreat to Iberia immediately. Back in Cadiz, he once again gathered all means to reach India by circumnavigating Africa and set sail. Then he was never heard of again.

At the end of this account, Strabo displays his reasoning on the matter. Certainly, he thinks, Posidonius was a prominent scholar, τῷ δ' ἀποδεικτικῷ καὶ φιλοσόφῳ, σχεδὸν δέ τι καὶ περὶ πρωτείων ἀγωνιζομένῳ (2.3.5). But his story was too reminiscent of similar sagas, such as that by Pytheas, Euhemerus and Antiphanes. As Eudoxus' supposed achievement was said to be set in a precise time under the Ptolemies, the story could be assessed in comparison with well-known facts of the period.

In fact, Strabo asks, why was Eudoxus, a foreigner from Cyzicus, trusted by the Egyptians to undertake such an important mission as sailing the Indian Ocean for the first time? How could the Ptolemies not know how to sail the Ocean, which was already known to many? Each time Eudoxus returned from India, he was accused of treason and his cargo was taken away by the royal guard; yet, why was he trusted

³⁰⁶ Tarn 1951 believed that this Indian sailor had shown Eudoxus the coastal route to India. But most scholars believe that the monsoon route is at stake. See discussion in Raschke 1978 and Tchernia 1995.

³⁰⁷ Desanges (1978:152–3) suggests that Eudoxus' second trip back to Egypt must have occurred by 107BC. Laffranque (1963: 207) suggests a later date.

repeatedly for similar missions by successive kings? How did he manage never to be punished (for he had stolen royal property) and even escape to Iberia (as the Egyptian harbours would have been strictly guarded)? Ultimately, nothing would be impossible in each case, the author admits ("Ἐκαστον γὰρ τῶν τοιούτων οὐκ ἀδύνατον), but Eudoxus happens to be lucky everywhere (τῷ δ' εὐτυχεῖν ἀεὶ συνέβαινεν).³⁰⁸

By confronting the story with a wide range of questions it could raise, Strabo is determined to expose all its flaws. The story's pretension as piece of history seems thus undermined. However, elsewhere in *Geography*, Eudoxus' story is given some relevance. Outlining the history of the classical knowledge of India, Strabo says that Homer (and generally speaking people in the olden days) knew nothing about the country, and, according to the Eudoxus' story, at first not even the Ptolemies knew how to reach India by sea (2.3.8). That said, he mentions twice that, at some stage in the Ptolemaic period, twenty ships would sail to the subcontinent every year.³⁰⁹ He seems to admit, therefore, that there was some truth in Eudoxus' story, for the sea route from Egypt to India, so active in Roman times, was already in use under the Ptolemies.³¹⁰

Yet, as recorded in *Geography*, Eudoxus' saga reads as a short novel.³¹¹ This is so particularly because Strabo spares no details in order to make the story sound coherent enough. He explains that Eudoxus came to Egypt to promote a religious festival at his hometown and he was thus well received at court.³¹² The Indian sailor who was brought before the king could not explain, at first, who he was and where he had come from, for he did not speak Greek.

In Ethiopia, Eudoxus finds the mast of a wrecked ship that bears the engraving of a horse (a symbol that is later recognised by Egyptian artisans as being Iberian).

³⁰⁸ *Geography* 2.3.5. Jacoby classed Strabo's reasoning here as too rigorous (commentary on *FGrH* 87 F28, p. 176) and he is seconded by most scholars today.

³⁰⁹ *Geography* 2.5.12 and 17.1.13. See discussion in Raschke 1978 and Young 2001:19.

³¹⁰ Most scholars agree that Hippalus, mentioned in the *Periplus* (57) and by Pliny (6.101-6) as the pilot who discovered the monsoon route, never existed. Raschke 1978 still maintains that, as there were different sea routes to India, one could have been discovered by Eudoxus and another by Hippalus (e.g. one leading to the mouth of the Indus and the other leading to the south of the subcontinent). However, Mazzarino 1982-7 concludes that the "hypalus" word rendered in Pliny's manuscripts should be read, not as a personal name, but as a designation for a monsoon wind. Tchernia 1995 and De Romanis 1997 second the idea. Kiessling in 1913 had already pointed out that Hippalus should refer to the wind that was thought to blow from the Promontory of Hippalum; the author of *Periplus* invented the idea of there being a pilot named as such, because Hippalus was also a much frequent personal name.

³¹¹ For relations between novel and historiography see Morgan 2007. Vivero 2007 suggests that it was Strabo, or perhaps his source, Posidonius, who ended up giving the story a paradoxographical quality.

³¹² See Habicht 2013 for more details on this festival.

Before he rushes to Cadiz to start his circumnavigation of Africa, Eudoxus sensibly goes back home to Cyzicus in order to collect his property to raise as much funding as he can. In Cadiz, he puts on board a crew that is complete with singing girls and all. On the western coast of Africa, he recognises the Ethiopian language, of which he had made notes when he was accidentally diverted to Ethiopia.

Certainly, Strabo could not help recording a story, which he himself classed as fiction, with full set of details. By classifying it as fictional, while telling it all the same, he here continues the literary process whereby he emphasises India's association with wonders. India appears here as a scenario for a new Odyssey, namely that of Eudoxus' adventures.

2.2.3. Writing wonders and writing geography

As we have seen the wonders and the stories that Strabo includes in his account of India, we will now consider the literary strategies he uses in order to convey such material. In what follows, we will see that, on the one hand, the author detaches himself from the information he quotes from his sources and that, while doing so, he adopts literary techniques that were much in use among novel writers. On the other hand, his inclusion of wonders situates his text in a long line of surveys of India that he himself criticises.

Scylax, Herodotus, Ctesias, Alexander's historians and Hellenistic ambassadors repeatedly mentioned Indian wonders.³¹³ Strabo, in his methodological reasoning on sources, ridicules these authors and their writing (2.1.9). Classing them as inventors, he wonders how can we rely on accounts that report such phenomena as men who sleep in their ears.

Strabo's approach when recording wonders can be illuminated from what he says elsewhere in the *prolegomena*. Writing on his composition strategies, namely the criteria underlying his inclusion or omission of data, he explains that he will omit details that seem to be trivial and unremarkable, but he will always record phenomena that are outstanding and great, by focusing on what that happens to be useful,

³¹³ Scylax included marvel in his account, as we have seen above, but it was Herodotus' and Ctesias' description of the country that provided material for all successive indographers, in spite of criticism to which their works were subjected. For the gradual canonisation of different *topoi* see Karttunen 1989:65-102 and Parker 2010:11-65. Particularly for Ctesias' *Indika* see Nichols 2011:27-34.

memorable or entertaining: *κάνταῦθα δεῖ τὰ μικρὰ καὶ τὰ ἀφανῆ παραπέμπειν, ἐν δὲ τοῖς ἐνδόξοις καὶ μεγάλοις καὶ ἐν οἷς τὸ πραγματικὸν καὶ εὐμνημόνευτον καὶ ἡδὺ διατρίβειν* (1.1.23).

Considering this guideline, we could think that his inclusion of wonders probably aimed at entertaining his readers. Marvels had become *topoi*, stock motifs that the audience took pleasure in hearing in any reference to India.

Indeed, in order to fulfil the expectations of readership, descriptions had to obey rules. As famously explained by Quintilian (8.3.67), it would be untimely, for a would be writer, to merely state that such or such city was captured, without providing vivid details for the way such an event took place, even if there is no evidence for such details. When this or that feature was regarded to be part of a description, authors had to include it, although this could be done explicitly or implicitly, by using a variety of literary devices.³¹⁴ Thus, while Strabo refused to believe that the legendary queen Semiramis had undertaken a military expedition to India, he could not write his survey of the subcontinent without mentioning Semiramis' campaign, even if it was only in passing.

In addition, writing agendas could be comprehensive enough for authors to include, even in their scholarly works, stories they knew to be fictional.³¹⁵ This is clearly the case for *Geography* and we will next consider some of the literary strategies that the author uses in order to come to terms with the tradition associating India with wonders.

While recording marvel, Strabo certainly detaches himself from what is being said. He repeatedly uses framing devices whereby he makes clear that a) wonders he is just about to tell were not his own inventions, for they were reported by his sources; b) his sources are unreliable and c) the information he is just about to provide should not be trusted.

Such a framing is reminiscent of literary devices used in novels written at the time. Within this latter genre, it was usual for narrators to use pseudo-

³¹⁴ For relations between writing and readership in antiquity see the influential article by Momigliano 1978 and Porciani 1997. For the influence of Herodotus' way of telling stories see Thomas 2000.

³¹⁵ See Stragaglia 1999 and Schepens and Delcroix 1996 for a range of relations between paradoxography and other literary genres. Particularly for the relations between geography, history, poetry and paradoxography see Engels 2007.

documentarism.³¹⁶ This device allowed them to claim that they had discovered a text which they would then proceed to summarise or fully quote. Readers knew that the discovery was an invention and agreed to take part in the game that the narrator was about to create. In turn, the narrator would present his newly discovered text in a convincing manner, by supplying a good amount of para-textual information regarding where and when the text was discovered. For instance, in the *Journal of the Trojan War*'s prologue, the narrator claims to supply an "authentic" document telling his readers what really happened at Troy. He claims to fully quote an ancient account supposedly written by a certain Dictys, a soldier who fought at the Trojan War.³¹⁷

Authors quoted in Strabo's account had existed for real. But since he classes them as falsifiers (2.1.9), he undermines their reliability as historians and they thus acquire traces of fictionality. Is there much difference between quoting from an author who never existed and quoting from a source that one classes as unreliable? Unreliability of indographers was widely known and readers would not have been supposed to take as truth anything quoted from their accounts. To some extent, by using sources on India, Strabo could not but write fiction.

Asking for the sympathy of readers, *captatio benevolentiae*, was an essential part of texts using pseudo-documentarism. Strabo's account of India opens with a twofold *captatio benevolentiae*. On the one hand, the narrator asks us to be tolerant with his geographical method. Note that previously he had promised he would only be using reliable sources (1.2.1.), but he now realises that, in what concerns India, reliable information available was scarce. Therefore, readers are invited to forgive him for any false calculations. His reasoning, based on difficult sources, was made in good faith, in order to provide useful information and that is what matters.

On the other hand, Strabo asks us to be tolerant with his sources. Authors who described the subcontinent did so after undertaking short duration trips and there was no opportunity to double check and confirm their discoveries. Their only real mistake was that they wrote on matters as if they had actually confirmed the veracity of their findings (15.1.1-7).

³¹⁶ Ní Mheallaigh 2008.

³¹⁷ Dictys, Letter and Preface to the *Journal of the Trojan War*; translation in Frazer 1966.

The archaeological principle so dear to pseudo-documentarism, according to which knowledge comes from remote and idealised past, is utterly fulfilled in *Geography*. Unlike the narrator of the prologue to the *Journal of Trojan War*, Strabo did not find information inside a tomb, but his sources are nonetheless ancient, rare and precious. In fact, not many people had actually visited the subcontinent and scholars who visited, had done so centuries ago. The very fact that a considerable amount of information recorded by Strabo was not recorded by other authors, as Diodorus and Arrian, suggests that the sources he quotes were difficult to access.³¹⁸

In texts using pseudo-documentarism, fiction had to be created in a convincing way, namely in connection with sound reasoning and attention to detail. Devices making apparent the text's seriousness were highly valued, for they could convey fiction efficiently: the more serious the scholarly apparatus, the more convincing the fiction would be. Strabo's frequent citing from scientifically oriented authors such as Eratosthenes confers the required seriousness to his survey. His account includes instances of arid discussion about exact measurement of each side of the country, number of tributaries of the Indus, theories on skin colour of the natives, among other scholarly minutiae. Very large numbers of sources from different periods are quoted, which shows the narrator's sound knowledge of the literature that was available at the time. Some of the sources are very technical, as Gorgus, an expert in mineralogy (15.1.30).

Although he has established that his sources are untrustworthy, Strabo treats them with erudite respect. He makes sure he mentions each source by name for each detail he provides; when citing a large excerpt from one source, detail from another source can be introduced, but each time the source changes we are always informed about the author who is being quoted.

Framing devices can also be found each time Strabo includes catalogues of wonders. For instance, when describing the region beyond the Indus system, the author mentions that all his sources agree that it is better, but they do not describe it accurately, for they report all things as being larger and more marvellous (15.1.37). That said, he makes a list of strange phenomena he collected, not from one, but from a diversity of sources from different periods and cultural backgrounds. While

³¹⁸ For Strabo's use of sources on India see Puskás 1993.

apparently dismissing them, he certainly enjoys evoking such wondrous phenomena at length. A few paragraphs below, after similar framing, more wonders are listed. But this time a specific source is mentioned by name, Megasthenes, who is accused of venturing well beyond the realm of myth (15.1.57).

Using an array of literary devices, Strabo's text repeats information that was insistently included in surveys of India that he himself criticises. The consequences of this can be better appreciated if we consider, for a moment, the literary figure of repetition itself. According to Alter, repetition is a major figure of speech. In a public lecture, things that were not fully heard by the audience when they were first said are supposed to become more perceivable if they are repeated over and over again across the speech. Contents that failed to convince the audience when they were first disclosed, as it would be the case with novel matters, are more likely to persuade when they are explained again and again, after more arguments have been presented, with lexical and syntactic variations to suit the audience's diverse sensitivities.³¹⁹

Likewise, Strabo's repetitive inclusion of wonder, particularly his repetitive listing of cultural and natural θαύματα, helps maintain that age old association of India with wonders. It is not that the author believed or invited us to believe the fabulous stories he tells. Nonetheless, his account invites us to envision India through the set of images that were traditionally associated with the country. Within such a vision, he presents a space, which everyone knows to be imaginary, called India, which is made of untruths. He repeats what he read in his sources, when he could have taken part in a process of dissociating India and wonders.

In fact, we can see that, by contrast, Lucian was particularly assertive in his interpretation, not to say dismissal, of tradition. In his *True Stories*, he transferred wonders that were traditionally ascribed to India to where he thought they should really belong, namely to the realm of the wondrous. Notably, he turns the gold mining ants into two hundred feet long winged ants and calls them Horse-ants: οἱ Ἴππομόρμηκες... θηρία δέ ἐστι μέγιστα, ὑπόπτερα, τοῖς παρ' ἡμῖν μύρμηξι προσεοικότα πλὴν τοῦ μεγέθους· ὁ γὰρ μέγιστος αὐτῶν καὶ δίπλεθρος ἦν (1.16). Only, the astronauts in his

³¹⁹ Alter 2011:111-142. However, unknown regions remain associated with wonders even after they have been fully discovered and explored; see Woolf 2011 and Parker 2008: 122.

text discover such phenomena, not in India, Asia or in any other continent on earth, but on stars and planets through which they make their journey.³²⁰

Yet, Strabo's rather predictable, not to say conservative image of India seems to have a role to play in the broader, political framework underlying his work, as we will see in the next section.

2.3. Writing myths and writing history

In this section, we will see that Strabo's India is a singular space that is only to be reached by extraordinary world leaders such as Alexander and Augustus, in their mission to civilise barbarian nations. Within this set of ideas, *Geography* regards Indian antiquity as part of Greek and Roman history.

We will start by seeing that Diodorus and Arrian accepted the idea that the natives, just as the Greeks, considered mythological figures as their ancestors. Both authors, drawing on the versatility of mythological traditions, allowed the country's history to start at a very remote age. Strabo, dismissing such mythological traditions, makes his Indian history start at a much later date, namely with the Macedonian expedition.

In addition, as we will see next, the author equally dismisses stories reporting expeditions to India led by Egyptians, Assyrians and Persians. As a result, he further associates the history of India with the Greeks and the Romans, the only nations that, in his version, have reached that easternmost country, gathered knowledge of it and have actively engaged in its political affairs.

2.3.1. Greek gods in India

In Greek literature, Dionysus and Heracles were associated with extensive travels and they were implied in a range of myths narrating journeys to the end of the world. Since Alexander the Great, India too had become scenario for their adventures.³²¹ Diodorus,

³²⁰ On Lucian see Ni Mheallaigh 2007 and 2014.

³²¹ By the fifth century BC, the idea that Dionysus had travelled across the world was widely accepted (Casevitz 1995). But it was only after Alexander's conquest of India that this country, too, was included in the list of places visited by the wine god (Dihle 1987; cf. Strabo, 15, 1, 7 and Arrian, *Indika*, 5,8). Nonnus in his *Dionysiaca* will take this to the extreme by turning Dionysus' Indian adventure into central piece of his work. As for Heracles, see Hsing and Crowell 2005. Herodotus refers to his worship

Pliny and Arrian addressed this admittedly later Indian connection sympathetically, by stressing its symbolic nature, as we will see below.³²² But Strabo approaches the matter negatively, by stressing the historical inaccuracy and the political agenda endorsed by Alexander's companions. The passages he decides to quote from his sources only partially explain the mythological connections and ultimately represent India as a space associated with falsehood.

According to one mythological tradition, Dionysus was the son of Zeus and Semele. Fearing that he could be persecuted by Hera, Zeus sent him to the remote Nysa, a place unknown to gods and men alike.³²³ In this refuge, Dionysus grew up assisted by satyrs and maenads, and blessed every living being with divine charisma. Nysa became his quintessential sacred place, which he adorned by turning it abundant in ivy and vine. In his journey back to Greece, he converted all nations he met to his cult, which was always to be celebrated with wine, music and dance. In his trips around the world, he was now followed by an entourage of barbarians from different regions.³²⁴

Strabo told this story by quoting Euripides' *Bacchae*, where Dionysus said that he had travelled all across Asia.³²⁵ Based on this and other such accounts, Strabo explains, Alexander's historians found it convincing to place mythological Nysa in India.³²⁶ They alleged that natural and cultural phenomena in a certain Indian region were proof of such association. Indeed, not only ivy and vine grew there, but some of the natives could only be descendants of Dionysus himself, judging by their flowery outfits and costly processions held in Bacchic fashion, βακχικῶς (15.1.8).³²⁷ Later, the

in Egypt and Phoenicia (2.43), whereas Diodorus (4.8-36) makes an extensive survey of the hero's travels across the world. See Hartman 1965 and Karttunen 1989:210-9 for a survey of scholarly attempts to identify Dionysus and Heracles with local deities in India. For traditions on Heracles see Brommer 1986 and Padilla 1998. For Dionysus see Seaford 2006.

³²² Diodorus 3.62-4.7, Arrian, *Anab.* 5.1-3; *Indika*, 1 and 7-9, Pliny 6.21.

³²³ Homeric hymns to Dionysus (1 and 26) mention Nysa either as the wine god's birthplace or as a site where he was raised by the nymphs. See also Diodorus 3.64. For Dionysus' alternative affiliations and the location of Nysa, see below.

³²⁴ This tradition is much explored by Euripides in his play *Bacchae*, 1-63.

³²⁵ Lines 13-17 are quoted by Strabo twice in his book. See Bosworth 1996 for further discussion of this passage in Euripides. Strabo also mentions that Nysa was mentioned in Homeric poems (*Iliad*, 6.132-3), where it could be read that Lycourgos chased Bacchantes in Nysa. He also quotes a play by Sophocles, now lost, that described Nysa in a rather poetic manner.

³²⁶ Herodotus (3.97) places Nysa in Ethiopia and alternatively in Arabia (3.111). Diodorus (4.2.3) places the city in Phoenicia.

³²⁷ On the location of this Indian Nysa see Filliozat 1985. Cf. Curtius 8.10.7-18.

Seleucid ambassador to India, Megasthenes, found further evidence in native vegetation that could prove the god's passage through the country, for all the species associated with Dionysus could be found there: the wild grapevine, ivy, laurel, myrtle, boxwood, and other evergreens (15.1.58).

Similarly, according to Strabo, Heracles was associated with the country because the habits of some natives seemed to suggest the iconography associated with the Greek hero.³²⁸ In fact, one Indian tribe, the Sibae, wore skins and carried clubs in a fashion that reminded the Greek visitors of the way Heracles was traditionally portrayed at home in artistic representations.³²⁹ In addition, as the Sibae branded their animals with the mark of a club, the Greeks alleged that they could only descend from those who happened to travel there with Heracles. When Alexander seized the Aornus Mountain, his companions made up the story that it was such an impugnable enclave that not even Heracles had been able to capture it.³³⁰ A sacred cave in the area was said to be the Caucasus where Prometheus was chastised and where Heracles stopped to save the titan.

However, Strabo emphasises, there was no agreement among historians, for, while some included, others omitted such connections altogether. People through whose countries the two gods must have passed in their journey to the subcontinent did not refer to them, when such spectacular trips should have been noticed and recorded by all. Therefore, he classes these stories as fabrications by Alexander's flatterers: *πλάσματα ταῦτα τῶν κολακευόντων Ἀλέξανδρον* (15.1.9).

In fact, he explains, artistic representations of Heracles as known to the Macedonians were recent, for they were recreations based on stories told by the authors of *Heracleia*, who lived around Pisistratus' time; ancient statues certainly did not feature like iconography (15.1.9).³³¹ When describing the Caucasus, Strabo says that it was conceived by the Greeks of olden days as being the remotest place on earth and they imagined Prometheus' chastisement to have taken place there. Also, they imagined Caucasus as the furthestmost place reached by the Argonauts. However, as Alexander's historians managed to travel further east, they decided to relocate the

³²⁸ *Geography* 15.1.8. On Heracles in India see Hsing and Crowell 2005. Cf. Arrian, *Indika* 5.13 and *Anabasis* 4,28,2.

³²⁹ On the Sibae see Karttunen 1989:212.

³³⁰ On Aornus, see Bernard 1996.

³³¹ On the evolution of the figure of Heracles see Brommer 1986 and Padilla 1998.

name Caucasus to an Indian mountain. By doing so, they thought, Alexander could be more clearly credited for having extended the boundaries of the known world (11.5.5).

Quoting the same sources as Strabo, Diodorus and Arrian provided different accounts of such mythological associations. They emphasised the tradition according to which Dionysus was a symbolic deity who taught agriculture to all humankind; as such, it would be acceptable to imagine the god's passage among the Indians.

Diodorus reported that Indian wise men believed a certain Dionysus to have invaded their country from the west. After conquering the land, he had taught the natives everything that was good for living, including agriculture and city building. This is why he was locally regarded as a deity (2.38). Later, Diodorus presents a long excursus on Dionysus where he gives details on diverging traditions regarding the matter (3.62-4.7). He says that there were at least three gods named Dionysus. The most ancient of these was a native Indian wise man, who, after discovering the secrets of agriculture in his own country, undertook journeys across the whole world and shared his wisdom with all nations, thus becoming regarded as immortal everywhere. This god was said to have grown a long beard and, even at the time of writing, the Indians were known for devoting great care to growing beards (3.63). On the contrary, a second Dionysus, son of Zeus and Persephone, invented the plough and he was represented in art with horns. A third Dionysus, son of Zeus and Semele, was keen on dance, music, luxury and amusement; he promoted peace among nations and was revered in mystic cults (3.64).

However, it is at the opening of his work that Diodorus clearly shows his syncretic sympathies. Osiris, he says, was born in a site called Nysa in Egypt. In his worldwide mission to teach agriculture to humanity, he travelled to Ethiopia, Arabia and, sailing the ocean, he reached India. In this latter country, he founded a city called Nysa to recall his hometown (1.17-19).

Arrian reports that Nysa in India is said to have been founded by Dionysus, but nobody knows who this Dionysus is meant to be. He himself thinks that it is not worth investigating the matter too closely, because it was an ancient legend.³³² Then we learn that it was a native chief, Acuphis, who told Alexander that their city had been founded by the Greek god Dionysus, who gave to the city the name of Nysa in

³³² *Anab.*5.1.

memory of his nurse. According to Acuphis, Nyseans were originally Dionysus' own men, who had become weakened by age and remained in the region, while the god proceeded his journey back to Greece. As a proof of such connection, the country was the only place in Asia where ivy grew, the plant sacred to Dionysus.

Alexander was amused by what the native chief said. Although he did not believe his story, he thought he could use it in favour of his own political programme, by declaring that he had travelled as far as Dionysus. He then took the Macedonians to a mountain called Thigh, Merus, apparently in memory of Dionysus' birth from Zeus' thigh. Here the Macedonians were delighted to see ivy, which they had not seen for long and celebrated their discovery by making wreaths of it, invoking Dionysus and making merry. Arrian says that there is a story (which the reader is free not to believe) reporting that some of the Macedonian generals completely lost their wits in a truly Bacchic fashion.³³³

Arrian makes clear that he does not completely agree with Eratosthenes, who wrote that the Dionysian connection in India was a mere invention by Alexander's historians. He prefers to maintain neutrality in such matters.³³⁴ Judging by what he reports from his sources, the Dionysian connection was originally made by a native chief. Alexander clearly did not believe the story. His men seem to have been genuinely excited by the discovery of ivy and seem to endorse the Dionysian connection. Yet the whole affair is narrated in a context of entertainment, with at least some level of ambiguity. Alexander was willing to entertain his army in order to gain their favour and proceed his conquests further east. He takes the Macedonians to the mountain where they could see the plant associated with Dionysus, but the place was also ideal for hunting and spending time peacefully. The text says that it was full of groves and woodlands, an ideal scenario for amusement. In such a festive episode, it is difficult to see what the merry making party actually believed.

In his *Indika*, Arrian aims to be as neutral again (§1). He starts by reporting that the Nyseans were originally not Indian, but foreigners, perhaps Greeks, who were left there by Dionysus. This, at any rate, is what the poets say and he leaves the matter to be further analysed by Greek and barbarian thinkers. Later, he approaches the matter

³³³ *Anab.*5.2.

³³⁴ *Anab.*5.3; cf. Arrian's *Indika*, 1.7 and 5.10-13.

again, with some more details (§5). We learn that there are many accounts confirming Dionysus' conquest of India and, as a proof of this, not only the ivy grows in the country but also the locals follow some Dionysian customs. Namely, they proceed to battles to the sound of drums and cymbals and wear clothes resembling those worn by bacchants. Further down, when approaching Indian history, Arrian says that the natives were originally nomads, who wore animals' skins and ate the bark of trees. When Dionysus came to their country, he taught them agriculture and viticulture, gave them laws and founded cities. Here Arrian conjectures that Triptolemus, traditionally credited as the primeval instructor of agriculture, either did not come to India at all or this Dionysus, whoever he was, τις οὗτος, must have come to the country before him (§7).

Diodorus recorded the tradition reporting that Dionysus reigned in India for exactly fifty two years and then the rule passed to his son. His descendants continued to rule for many generations until the advent of aristocratic governments, i.e., democracy (2.38). Arrian included a chronology he found in Megasthenes, according to which, Dionysus had travelled in India precisely 6,042 years ago. Ever since, the country had been ruled by exactly 153 kings and there had been three periods during which democracy had flourished. From Dionysus' expedition to that of Heracles, fifteen generations had lapsed.³³⁵

Both Diodorus and Arrian cited Megasthenes reporting that the Heracles associated with India is not the same as the one revered by the Greeks, but some native hero who had a great number of sons who populated the country.³³⁶ Indian traditions held that this hero married his only daughter while she was a child and gave her a kingdom and the monopoly of pearls. This is why, to this day, this kingdom in particular is rich in pearls and Indian girls are marriageable at young age.

By considering these accounts, we can appreciate Strabo's minimalistic approach to the matter. On the one hand, he seems determined to explain the causes for the association between Dionysus, Heracles and India. After quoting Homer, Sophocles and Euripides, he shows how literary references could be used by historians to emphasise the achievements by political leaders. On the other hand, unlike his main

³³⁵ *FGrH* 715 F 14; Arrian, *Indika*, 9.9.

³³⁶ Diodorus, 2.39. See also 4.8-39 for his excursus on Heracles. Cf. Arrian, *Indika*, 5.

source on the subject, Megasthenes, he omitted that Dionysus and Heracles were adaptable deities that could be symbolically evoked to explain a range of phenomena.

In fact, elsewhere, Strabo acknowledges the versatile character of the Dionysian myth. As he describes the city of Priapus at the Sea of Marmara (Propontis), he explains that it was named after a deity who was honoured in the region as a son of Dionysus. The locals found the mythological affiliation fitting, as their region was rich in vine. Strabo thinks that such an identification must have taken place somewhat recently, for Hesiod does not mention *this* Priapus. Yet, most likely, he thinks, this deity is the same old Priapus revered at Orneai around Corinth, whose cult would have been taken to Marmara at some stage. Alternatively, this Priapus could have come from other parts of Greece, for he bears resemblance to some Attic deities, namely Orthannes, Konisallus and Tychon (13.1.12). Strabo thus acknowledges the cultural fact that cults could be exported far from their original places, but more importantly, that Dionysian connections could be made everywhere there was vine.

When describing the region of Katakekaumene in Turkey, the author mentions another Dionysian association. He reports that the region is famous for its outstanding wine, although it is very arid, for there are no trees, the earth's surface is permanently covered with ashes and mountains as well as rocks are black. The locals consider this to be the effect of thunderbolts and whirlwinds and they imagine their country to have been the scenario for the Typhon's myth. Strabo thinks that such a landscape should be the effect of an extinct volcano, for typically, in volcanic soil only vine would grow. Likewise, he explains, Catania in Sicily produces excellent wine, although it is located in a volcanic area. Because of this connection between fire and wine, he thinks that it is fair that some people refer to Dionysus as fire-born (13.4.11).

The author here is clearly reinterpreting the myth according to which Semele, stricken by the lightning, gave birth prematurely to Dionysus (who was then transfused into his father Zeus' thigh, as we can read in Euripides).³³⁷ Providing a scientific explanation for a traditional story, Strabo allegorises in a manner that was typical since classical times.³³⁸

³³⁷ *Bacchae*, 1ff and 90ff. Cf. Diodorus 3.64.

³³⁸ See Sasel Kos 2008, for Strabo's interpretation of myths in relation to local legends and historical-geographical reality. For the tradition of Dionysus' worldwide presence see Casevitz 1995.

What is more, Strabo accepts the traditional stories about Dionysus' travels.³³⁹ He responds to an assumption he found in Eratosthenes, according to which in olden days people did not travel far from where they lived. Strabo wonders what exactly his predecessor meant by this (1.3.2-3); if he had in mind those whose trips have not been recorded, he could be right; but certainly there are records of Dionysus (and other legendary figures) who travelled all across the world. Euripides mentioned that the god travelled among the Lydians, Phrygians, Persians, Bactrians, Medes and Arabians (1.2.20). According to Aristobulus, Dionysus was one of the only two gods worshipped by the Arabs (16.1.11). In Africa there was a city of Dionysus (7.3.6). As he describes Gaul, Strabo reports Dionysian customs there. An island at the mouth of Liger in the Atlantic is only inhabited by women; occasionally they come to the mainland, have sex with locals and return home. Once a year, they unroof their temple in the morning and reroof it by the evening; if anyone fails to bring her load she is torn apart by others (4.4.6). From all this, it is clear that Strabo was open to accept the wide extent of Dionysian myth, cults and associations.

In addition, across *Geography*, he sees mythological characters, such as Aeolus, as important for the definition of regional identity, in the sense that they are locally seen as eponymous figures.³⁴⁰ Allowing myths to be part of ethnic definition is a tendency he shares with most ancient historians and geographers. Diodorus and Arrian naturally accepted that legendary figures having similarities with Dionysus and Heracles could be held as eponymous characters in some regions of India. Both authors are critical enough to use qualifiers such as “*this* [Indian] Heracles”, as opposed to the Greek hero, or indefinite expressions such as “Dionysus, *whoever he was*”, as opposed to the one well known in Greece.

Diodorus renders at least one tradition according to which Dionysus was an indigenous wise man who was deified by his compatriots due to his charisma (3.63). Arrian, in his *Indika*, starts by explaining that the Heracles seen in India might have actually been a Phoenician, Egyptian or a native deity (§5). But he later says that this deity is regarded as “indigenous” by the locals (§8). By mentioning these ideas, both authors suggest that the native gods were conveniently named Dionysus or Heracles

³³⁹ For Dionysus' association with travels, sea and riches, see Pailler 2009.

³⁴⁰ Patterson 2010.

for the Greek audience to understand better their roles as teachers of mankind, monster killers and alleged common ancestors to Indian kings, for these were the roles frequently played by the two gods across the Greek world.

Thus, Diodorus and Arrian could refrain from saying that Greek gods had reached India. Additionally, by quoting Megasthenes where he associated Heracles with the Pandyan kingdom and pearls, both authors inform us about features that were important at the time of their own writing: the existence of Pandyan kingdom in Southern India and the pearl trade in that region. Arrian, by justifying native habits (namely the child marriage) with reference to a native hero, avoids the wonder that it would be for a Greek Heracles to have implemented customs in India.

Strabo focused on the political aspects of such mythological connections. Dionysus and Heracles, traditionally associated with travels to the end of the world, had long been implied in the narrative of the Macedonian conquests. Alexander had been identified with the two deities, both from a genetic perspective (as their descendant in royal genealogies) and from a behavioural standpoint (as a new discoverer of the world).³⁴¹ It might be interesting to note that Alexander's illegitimate son was called Heracles and he was probably expected to succeed him in the throne.³⁴² Hellenistic kings frequently associated themselves, in art, with Dionysus and Heracles. As an instance of this, we can note that a procession organised by Ptolemy II Philadelphus in Alexandria emphasised the king's association with Dionysus.³⁴³ Indo-Greek rulers made the two gods be engraved in coins, thus recalling that their genealogy could be traced back to the two gods, via Alexander.³⁴⁴ Horace, portraying Augustus as a brave victor, associated the *princeps* with Heracles in some of his poems.³⁴⁵

Although he elsewhere accepts reinterpretation of myths, Strabo makes the association of Dionysus and Heracles with India sound far-fetched and incoherent.³⁴⁶

³⁴¹ Plutarch, *Alexander*, 2. For the making of the myth of Alexander and its connection with Dionysus and Heracles see Bosworth 1996:98-132 and Bosworth 2003.

³⁴² Curtius 10.6.10-12.

³⁴³ Callixenus (*FGrH* 627 F2) = Athenaeus, 5.25-36, 196A-203E. For details of this procession see Rice 1983 and Foertmeyer 1988.

³⁴⁴ Carter 1968, Chaudhari 1983 and Mariottini Spagnoli 1967.

³⁴⁵ *Odes*, 3.3.9-12 and 3.14.1-4. See Grimal 1951:59-60 and Uhlenbrock 1986.

³⁴⁶ In 1.2.15 Strabo agrees with Polybius' idea that the gods are worshipped because people see in them the discoverers of some useful art.

By stressing that such a relationship was a forgery created by writers gratifying the Macedonian prince, he portrays Alexander's companions as unreliable historians. His India is thus marked by falsehood, in the sense that she inspires the making of false stories. Diodorus and Arrian, without forgetting the political implications, stressed the idea that it was the nature of the myths to be reinterpreted. They saw Alexander's historians as interpreters, rather than falsifiers. Strabo, who elsewhere accepts the idea, stresses the fact that India only inspires false connections and stories marked with untruths, as we will continue to see below.

In the process, Strabo's India becomes a space with no native history, because, in his version, the history of India only starts with Alexander's expedition. On the contrary, Diodorus and Arrian supplied India with much greater chronological depth, by accepting that some mythological figures, "whoever they were", were counted by the natives as their ancestors.³⁴⁷

Strabo's dismissal in this connection can be further illuminated if we compare it with what Diodorus says on writing history (1.9.3). Diodorus thinks that it is convenient for each people to state that they were autochthonous to the land they happen to inhabit, so that they can claim legitimacy to occupy their own country. They typically state that their ancestors were the first of all peoples in the world to discover everything which was useful in life, to avoid admitting any foreign influences and superior knowledge of other nations. It is also appropriate to state that such discoveries (and other major deeds) have been recorded.

In such a context, in Diodorus' and Arrian's accounts, the name "Dionysus" stood for a local deity who discovered agriculture in India and "Heracles" stood for a monster-killer type of hero who was similarly regarded as a common ancestor by the Indians. Such mythological figures confirmed the Indians' autochthonous origins, stated the birth of civilisation in India itself and supplied the country with history, namely with a genealogy and chronology allowing different epochs to be designed in a time continuum reaching back six millennia.

As we have seen above, Strabo dismisses such connections. In what follows, we will see that he equally dismisses accounts reporting expeditions to India led by a

³⁴⁷ On the subject, see discussion in Parker 2005:83-6, as well as Wolf 1982 and Mignolo 1995.

number of ancient empires. As a result, he further emphasises the affiliation of the country with Greek and Roman history.

2.3.2. The conquering heroes

Strabo fleetingly addresses stories about sovereigns who, according to some sources, would have conquered India (15.1.6). Providing a list of leaders who would have accomplished such a deed was a common practice, as noted by Engels.³⁴⁸ But authors varied in the number of leaders they decided to include in their lists. Whereas Strabo counts six kings in such connection (Sesostris, Idanthyrus, Semiramis, Tearkon, Nabucodonosor and Cyrus), Arrian, for example, listed only three. Such a decision, as we will see below, seems to carry implications for each author's portrayal of Greek and Roman hegemony over the world.

Strabo emphasises that there is evidence supporting the fact that Alexander, Megasthenes and Deimachus made journeys to India, but there is no confirmation for such undertakings by Semiramis and Cyrus. According to his sources, Tearkon, the Ethiopian, made expeditions to Europe; Sesostris, the Egyptian, and Nabucodonosor, the Babylonian, reached the Iberian Peninsula; Idanthyrus, the Scythian, conquered Asia and Egypt. Yet none of these leaders ventured as far as India (15.1.5-6).

One surprising feature in Strabo's list is that it does not mention the expedition Darius I sent to India. Herodotus had famously reported this Persian undertaking, which consisted of a sailing trip down the Indus. The fleet was commanded by Scylax of Caryanda, whose account of the journey is thought to be among the sources for Herodotus' own account of India.³⁴⁹

In fact, *Geography* does not say much about Darius, but delivers some picturesque details. For instance, we learn that, before he became king, Darius had visited Syloson, a tyrant ruling over the island of Samos. The host happened to be wearing a piece of clothing that Darius liked very much and was willing to acquire. Syloson was genteel enough to offer it, as a present, to his guest. Syloson was then sharing the rule with his brother Polycrates, who eventually deposed him. But when

³⁴⁸ Jacoby, *FrGrH* entry on Megasthenes. See commentary in Biffi (2005:144-8) about each leader mentioned by Strabo.

³⁴⁹ Herodotus, 5.121. For Scylax, who was probably among sources Herodotus himself used for his account of India, see Panchenko 1998 and 2003. See also discussion in Karttunen 1989:65-8.

Darius became king of Persia, he gave his friend the authority over Samos. Nevertheless, Syloson was such a harsh a ruler that his country was gradually abandoned by its population until it was nearly left depopulated. The situation originated a satirical saying that associated any emptied space with the despot: Ἐκῆτι Συλοσῶντος εὐρυχωρίη. Strabo also records that at this time Pythagoras, unhappy with the excesses of tyranny on Samos, decided to take refuge in Egypt; he would come back years later, only to leave again, to Italy, for good (14.1.16-7).

Essentially, Darius was the ruler who made wars against the Scythians (7.3.8). During his expedition against the Scythians, Darius exhausted his provisions while he was crossing the Desert of Getians. As a result, he was in serious danger of losing his army, but he was eventually rescued by a section of his army that had been left behind (7.3.14). In the Propontis, he decided to burn a number of cities to prevent them from helping the Scythians (13.1.22). His tomb at Pasargadade had an inscription, written in Persian and Greek, that emphasised his skills as a horseman, archer and hunter, who was able to do everything: ἰππεὺς καὶ τοξότης ἄριστος ἐγενόμην· κυνηγῶν ἐκράτουν· πάντα ποιεῖν ἠδυνάμην (15.3.8).

By not mentioning Darius' expedition to the remotest country of them all, India, Strabo refrains from providing the Persian ruler with as much talent as could be ascribed to him. On the contrary, Darius' heroic potential that one could easily imagine in a leader who subdued such a distant people as the Scythians is demeaned by his connection with Syloson's story. This latter affair associates the Persian king with luxury (the piece of clothing) and corruption (tyranny), two old commonplaces associated with the East that we could already find in Aeschylus' *Persae*.³⁵⁰ In this light, the text on the funerary inscription at Pasargadae sounds as a piece of irony, while we would expect it to be read as a genuine praise to the monarch.

Similarly, Strabo regards Cyrus as the king who established the Persian hegemony and dismisses the account associating him with India (15.3.24). Cyrus, as the story goes, would have attempted to conquer the subcontinent, but his undertaking was such a catastrophe that he barely returned home with seven of his people. Strabo evokes this story twice and in very significant moments: in the opening paragraphs of

³⁵⁰ See the discussion on this play, particularly the association of the East with despotism in Hall 1989:79-84.

his account of the subcontinent (15.1.5-6) and in the introduction of his Persian *logos* (15.2.5). Thus, at least in connection with India, Cyrus appears as a ruler who failed. His heroic potential, that we can find elsewhere in *Geography*, is undermined at the very outset of Strabo's survey of India and Persia.

Definitely, Cyrus, we learn, fought the remote Massagetae, who, we are told, would only become known in history due to his involvement with them (11.6.2). His conquests brought demographic changes across Asia, namely the migrations of peoples to different places (1.3.21, 6.1.1). In the course of his Scythian expedition, he was first defeated and had to retreat, leaving even his tents behind with all luxurious supplies; yet he later returned and killed most of his enemies; Persians keep the memory of such triumph by dancing in Scythian fashion on that date (11.8.5). The farthest city he founded was named after him, Cyra, in Bactria/Sogdiana, which was the boundary of Persian Empire. It was later razed to ground by Alexander (11.11.4).

In like manner, we learn that, according to popular belief, Semiramis attempted to conquer India, but she was defeated and came back home in flight with only twenty people and died short after (15.1.5-6). Across *Geography*, Semiramis is portrayed as an outstanding builder. She has founded Babylon, while her husband Ninus founded a city named after him. Their building programme in both cities was so remarkable that writers tended to associate the history of Assyria with the reign of the two monarchs, who ruled an empire extending across Asia. Semiramis in particular built mounds, still called after her at the time of writing (12.2.7, 12.3.37), reservoirs with ladders, walls (2.1.26, 11.14.8), fortifications with passages, channels in rivers and lakes, roads and bridges across the whole empire (16.1.2).

Diodorus gave much fuller an account of the Assyrian queen and clearly portrayed her as an efficient ruler who was brave and intelligent at war.³⁵¹ He recorded that Semiramis gradually conquered most of Asia. She decided to conquer India after she learnt about the country's extraordinary size and resources (2.16). Accordingly, she gathered a large army and built ships to sail over the country's many rivers (2.17). In order to tackle the strength of Indian elephants, she built fake elephants to cause impact and deceive her enemy (2.18). However, Semiramis made the mistake of

³⁵¹ For Diodorus' recording of Semiramis' campaigns in India, see Llewellyn-Jones and Robson 2010:38-40 and Stronk 2007.

crossing the Indus river at a point that was most disadvantageous.³⁵² Initially, she succeeded in fighting the enemies, but at a later stage, once she had lost two thirds of her army, she was forced to retreat. After she crosses the bridge she had built earlier over the Indus, Semiramis is careful enough to cut it, thus preventing the enemies from further chasing her (2.19-20). Commenting on the queen's military actions, Diodorus says that Semiramis was fond of fighting at any cost (2.21). Certainly, his text makes apparent that, while she might have failed to conquer India, she nonetheless reached this remotest country with a large army and managed to fight against the full force of native kings (2.20).

Diodorus records that the Egyptian Sesostris reached India as well (1.53-58). Since his childhood, Sesostris' father had prepared him to become a world leader. Seeking loyalty and friendship of all his people, he arranged for his son to be educated, together with all Egyptian children, at royal expense. Marked by rigorous discipline, the training included journeys to Arabia, where the young men faced wild beasts. When he became king, Sesostris revealed to be the kindest and the most organised ruler. He granted privileges to his people and divided the land equally into provinces, to be ruled by local authority.

He started his worldwide expansion with the conquest of Ethiopia. After this, he sent a fleet to India, while he himself undertook a journey by land to the interior of the subcontinent and eventually reached the Ganges. Note that Diodorus here does not mention the country's riches as the cause for Sesostris' enterprise. A conqueror of all Asia, he shows kindness towards all subjugated nations. Thus, Diodorus concludes, Sesostris conquered much more land than Alexander did centuries later.³⁵³ However, he writes, this short biography is based on the outline of the most plausible course of events, there being a variety of contradicting accounts.

In Strabo's text, Greeks and Romans are the only people who have reached India. Other nations, such as the Persians, are not mentioned in such a connection. Monarchs such as Sesostris, Cyrus and Semiramis, whose biographies appeared involved in much folklore, are also barred the access to the subcontinent.

³⁵² For a similar episode in Alexander's campaign in India, see Arrian, *Anab.*, 5.7-14. Cf. Stevenson 1997:29-34 and Lenfant 2004:22-51.

³⁵³ On Sesostris see Gaggero 1986. Apparently Megasthenes, recorded by Arrian (*Indika*, 5) said that Sesostris had not conquered India (for discussion on this and other issues regarding Megasthenes see Bosworth 1996c). On the legend of Sesostris in antiquity see Malaise 1966.

We had seen earlier in this section that, unlike Diodorus and Arrian, Strabo starts his history of India with Alexander's expedition to the country. We had seen there that he does so by dismissing the reinterpretations of Dionysus' and Heracles' myths. Here, we have seen that he applies the same dismissal for historical figures such as Cyrus and Semiramis, which in turn emphasises the achievement of Alexander's campaigns and that of the Roman involvement in the country.

As we have seen in section two, the text preserves the mythical quality of India by recording wonders. As in a typical *Odyssey*, it shows India as a scenario complete with marvellous riches and potential threats at every corner. Additionally, it is a space associated with barbarism, as we have seen in section one, which is only waiting to be approached in the course of Alexander's and Augustus' civilising missions throughout the world.

Chapter 3. From utopia to real life - Strabo's remarks on Indian philosophy

The most utopian moment of travel is when you realise that what seems most marvellous and desirable is what you almost already have at home, if you could strip away the banality and corruption of the everyday.
S. Greenblatt 1991:25

In this chapter, we will see that Strabo's selection of data from sources on India was suitable for the philosophical programme underlying his work. Section 3.1 will show that the Indian wise men, as represented here, supply a range of ideas for subjects that had been long debated by Greek philosophers: what should be the everyday conduct of those in quest for happiness? Should they indulge in sexual pleasures? What should they eat and wear? Should women be allowed to engage in philosophical enquiry?

Some of the ideas proposed by Indian philosophers seem to be perfect solutions for such questions and are particularly reminiscent of the Stoic reasoning on the issues at stake. But the text makes clear that, in Greece as well as in India, thinkers have conceived the same problems and have reached no clear-cut solutions.

Section 3.2 will show that Strabo provides a number of stories, *exempla*, illustrating good and bad moral conduct. These are biographies of native wise men providing illustrations for two much debated topics among Greek philosophers: suicide and the relation between philosophy and politics.

In 3.2.1 we will see that, throughout *Geography*, there are some stories about suicide. But it is in his book on India that the author supplies the largest amount of ideas regarding the matter, by recording what the native wise men had to say about the subject. Strabo associates the Indian sage Calanus' suicide with barbarism, while he regards his teacher Xenarchus' endurance in facing death as worthy of praise. The latter case provides a simple illustration of moral conduct that could be classed as virtuous, particularly from a Stoic point of view. Calanus' story is complex and does not allow for a clear-cut judgement of the characters' actions, but it supplies a large set of ideas on suicide.

Section 3.2.2 will show that Strabo's work endorses the idea that philosophers should take part in the political affairs of their countries. Philosophers such as Athenodorus, priests such as Moses and, specially, the wise men from India are clear illustrations of this idea, which was much cherished by the Stoics.

Additionally, the text shows how political leaders could benefit from philosophical enquiry. Alexander, portrayed as a military leader who respects and is eager to learn the principles proposed by the Indian wise men, is an instance of this notion. Similarly, Augustus is associated with Indian wisdom, although not as intimately as Alexander. But Plutarch and Arrian, who recorded that Alexander killed many of the native philosophers, supply a rather different picture.

This chapter aims to show that the ideas (allegedly proposed by the natives) that Strabo collected in his book on India address issues that were most debated within Greek philosophical tradition. Diodorus and Arrian, in a rather utopian fashion, suggested that the Indian wise men lived in a state of bliss, for they had found solutions for most, if not all such issues. Strabo's text emphasises that, while the Indian solutions seem to be perfect, they are far from being flawless. As it preserves the variety of ideas and contradictions found in sources, Strabo's account reads as a philosophical essay where questions are debated with much detail but ultimately left unsolved.

Before we proceed, I would like to make some preliminary considerations on Strabo's account of Indian philosophy. As it is well known, Alexander's historians recorded much information about the sages of India. Ever since, the country had been associated with wisdom and descriptions would be incomplete were they not to address

this quintessential feature defining the native culture.³⁵⁴ Accordingly, it should be noted that, more than anywhere else throughout *Geography*, it is in his book on India that Strabo addresses the greatest number of philosophical issues.

Relying on diverse accounts written by Alexander's historians, successive authors wrote their own reasoning on the matter by eliminating the contradictions they found in the sources. Thus, Diodorus portrays the Indian philosophers essentially as priests officiating rituals and belonging to one homogeneous social group. Strabo offers a more complicated picture, by drawing on a variety of contradictory sources. In his text, Indian philosophers belong to different groups sharing dissimilar ideas and engaging differently with their fellow countrymen.

Methodologically, Indian philosophers were an important part of Strabo's survey because the surest information on the subcontinent that he possessed was that an embassy from there had come to Augustus and it included a philosopher who had much impressed his Greek and Roman hosts (15.1.4). This native man's ideas and behaviour confirmed what Alexander's historians had written centuries before about Indian wisdom. Impressed by this, the author opens his book on India by mentioning the embassy and closes his survey by giving more details on the subject (15.1.73).

The comprehensive picture that Strabo supplies on Indian sages suits well the philosophical orientation of his work. In fact, the opening lines of his book state that geographical research is well suited to the philosopher: τῆς τοῦ φιλοσόφου πραγματείας εἶναι νομίζομεν (1.1.1). This, he says, is made clear by a number of facts. In the first place, the most prominent men who paid attention to geographical matters, such as Homer, Anaximander, Eratosthenes and Polybius were all philosophers, ἄνδρες φιλόσοφοι (1.1.1). In the second place, the erudition (πολυμάθεια) that geographical writing demands requires examination of human as well as divine matters and the knowledge of these is called philosophy: ὧνπερ τὴν φιλοσοφίαν ἐπιστήμην φασίν (1.1.1). In the third place, the multiple usefulness of geography can only be grasped by those who are able to consider life as a form of art and happiness: τὸν φροντίζοντα τῆς περὶ τὸν βίον τέχνης καὶ εὐδαιμονίας (1.1.1).

³⁵⁴ On this subject see the extensive chapter on wisdom in Parker 2008:251-307 and Karttunen 1997:55-68. Stoneman 1994 gives a very useful anthology of the classical tradition linking Alexander with wisdom.

In this paragraph, as elsewhere, philosophy is a polysemic and therefore misleading concept. But it certainly is related to a number of phenomena, ranging from poetry to environmental matters. The author's careful recording of the Indian philosophers' everyday life suggests that, in his conception, philosophy additionally encompassed aspects of daily life such as clothing and food. Certainly, his account of Indian wisdom contains more information about different philosophers' way of life than about their ideas. Elsewhere throughout *Geography*, when he mentions philosophers, he makes remarks on their behaviour, rather than on their ideas, as we will see below.

Ancient philosophy, according to Hadot, was a way of life, as opposed to an academic discipline.³⁵⁵ Ideas so extensively debated by philosophers formed what Hadot called the "philosophical discourse." "Philosophy itself" was a way of life whose ultimate purpose was to prepare one to live according to nature.³⁵⁶ Theories were important, as they provided a rational understanding of nature (a concept whose definition varied largely according to each school) but, on their own, they did not mean anything. Apart from ideas, there were actually sets of practical exercises whose purpose it was to provide a more intimate knowledge of nature.³⁵⁷ If Hadot's definition is correct,³⁵⁸ Strabo's account of India would certainly read as an illustration of the matter, in the sense that it shows the diversity of modes of life endorsed by a variety of philosophers.

3.1. Indian solutions to Greek problems

In this section, we will see that Strabo shows Indian and Greek philosophers sharing similar concerns regarding a number of issues. We will start by visualising how, by citing contradicting sources, Strabo shows different native philosophers adopting different attires and overall appearances. We should note that different trends within the classical tradition expected philosophers to look differently. But whether there was a relation at all between philosophy and appearance was a much discussed subject and

³⁵⁵ Hadot 1995a and 1995b. See also Jordan 1990, Chroust 1972 and Foucault 1984:60-63.

³⁵⁶ Hadot 1995a: 265-75.

³⁵⁷ Hadot 1995b: 85. See also Sellars 2009:107-28.

³⁵⁸ *Contra*, see Nussbaum 1994:353-4.

Strabo's account of India clearly takes part in the debate. Next, we will see that, in his account of India, Strabo approaches other controversial issues, namely, the relation between philosophy and diet (should philosophers be frugal, as it was generally assumed?), physical exercise (can physical training be a preparation for the sufferings of life?) and women (should women be allowed to study philosophy?). By quoting different sources, Strabo is able to confirm that such ethical concerns are shared by the Greeks and by the most remote of peoples in India.

Next, we will see that, to some extent, Strabo's Indians have found a solution for some of such issues and that the native society depicted here was ideal according to Greek philosophical principles. This is made apparent by the way Strabo mentions the division of society in classes, absence of slavery, unwritten laws and the natives' simple way of life, which supposedly grants them a blissful existence. However, it will be noted that, in contrast with such an eulogising picture, the text classes some native habits as threats for social and political cohesion, which clearly undermines that otherwise idealised scenario.

3.1.1. Appearance

At the time of Strabo's writing, Indian wise men had become known for their appearance, namely for their naked living, to the extent that they were often referred to in literature as "naked philosophers". But authors vary in their wording of the matter. Diodorus never mentions their appearance, probably relying on the fact that it was already well known. Arrian assumes that all sages in the country went naked.³⁵⁹

Strabo reports that different groups of philosophers adopted different appearances. The group that Onesicritus met went naked (15.1.63). But as for the mainstream philosophers, so to speak, who made the first, most honoured social class, the text never mentions that they went naked (15.1.39). We are told that they live a simple life (λιτῶς ζῶντας), as ascetics, for thirty seven years, but afterwards they retire and wear linen garments as well as gold earrings and bracelets, all with moderation: σινδονοφοροῦντα καὶ χρυσοφοροῦντα μετρίως ἐν τοῖς ὡσὶ καὶ ταῖς χερσὶ (15.1.59).

Another group, the Garmanes, are subdivided into a variety of clusters. Some, who live in the forests, make use of the bark of trees for their clothing, ἐσθῆτος φλοιῶν

³⁵⁹ *Indika*, 11.

δενδρείων (15.1.60), but we are not told what the attire of the rest of them is. As for the Pramnae, described here as alternative thinkers, in the sense that they criticise the mainstream philosophers, some live naked. But even within this group, those who live on the mountains wear deer-skins, *δοραῖς ἐλάφων χρῆσθαι* (15.1.70); those who live elsewhere wear linen garments as well as skins of fawns and gazelles, *σινδονίτας... νεβρίδας ἢ δορκάδων δοράς* (15.1.71). Apart from the attire, the text provides some details about these men's hairdress: a sophist at Taxila had his head shaved, but his fellow philosopher had long hair: *τὸν μὲν ... ἐξυρημένον τὸν δὲ ... κομήτην* (15.1.61).

The author's recording of such details suggests that he regarded clothing, or lack of it, and overall appearance as relevant enough for his description of native philosophers. Calanus, one of the naked ones, was reported as having laughed at Onesicritus' attire and he challenged his Greek visitor to strip naked if he was willing to understand his ideas:

*ιδόντα δ' ἐκεῖνον γλαμύδα καὶ καυσίαν φοροῦντα καὶ κρηπίδα, καταγελάσαντα... κελεύειν, εἰ βούλοιο ἀκροάσασθαι, καταθέμενον τὴν σκευὴν γυμνὸν ἐπὶ τῶν αὐτῶν λίθων κείμενον μετέχειν τῶν λόγων.*³⁶⁰

Elaborating on this idea, Palladius' version, which shows Alexander himself conversing with the native philosophers, reports that the young prince had to remove his crown and mantle before he could feel at ease to sit alongside his naked hosts.³⁶¹ Conversely, according to Aristobulus, one of the philosophers from Taxila changed his humble clothing for better clothes after meeting Alexander and was censured and ridiculed by the Greeks; in comparison, his fellow philosopher, who retained his attire, was much praised for the coherence of his behaviour (15.1.61).

Analysing ancient art, Zanker shows that men of wisdom were represented according to a set of conventional features. Apart from being normally shown as old men, they could display features that tradition associated with wisdom. A famous sculpture, made twenty years after his death, showed Socrates as old, ugly, bald, fat, with thick lips and a snub nose. Such a portrayal recalls the description of his physiognomy as found in Plato's *Symposium*, where Socrates is compared to a Silen.

³⁶⁰ 15.1.64.

³⁶¹ *De gentibus Indiae et Bragmanibus* 2.19 in Berghoff edition 1967.

³⁶² His unpleasant appearance, according to the reasoning there, was meant to conceal the beauty of a perfect soul lying within. In contrast, athletes and warriors were unsurprisingly represented as young and strong. But statesmen and their sympathisers too, such as Pericles and Anacreon (whom we can see represented in a work made in 440 BC), were represented in a manner that was thought to convey beauty and virtue, fulfilling the ideal of *καλὸς κἀγαθός*, as explained in Pericles' speech in Thucydides.
³⁶³

But in 330 BC, Lysippus had to create a “gentrified” Socrates, if he were to please his patron Lycurgus, whose political agenda was to remind the Athenians of their city's past achievements. Lysippus would still portray the sage as an old man, but his Socrates is a noble citizen, hardly distinguished from other figures represented in his sculptural programme.³⁶⁴

A further development in this story comes with the Hellenistic age, when, in a realistic turn, sculpture attempts to show the process of thinking on the philosopher's face, by casually neglecting other physiognomic features. In the statues of this period, Zeno and Chrysippus, represented with creases on their forehead, seem to be thinking deep, while their hair and beards are left unkempt. The apparent carelessness reflected the fact that, for a number of thinkers at this age, social divisions made no sense and, as a result, a sage should hardly look different from a peasant or a slave.³⁶⁵

In addition, at the classical period, adult men tended to grow a beard, particularly at Athens. Shaving became popular during the Hellenistic period, but not with the philosophers. There was therefore a clear visual connection between beard and philosophy.³⁶⁶ Literature provides distinctive insight on this connection. Lucian satirically reports that the eunuch Bagoas was prevented from becoming a Peripatetic

³⁶² *Symposium*, 221e. For Socrates see figures 5 (Roman copy, bust only, from Naples National Archaeological Museum) and 6 (post-antique copy, bust only, from the Munich Glyptothek) in Zanker 1995:12; discussion in 32-39.

³⁶³ Thucydides, 2.35-46. For Anacreon see figures 12 (Roman copy, full body, from Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen) and 16 (Anacreon; Roman copy, bust only, from the Staatliche Museen, Berlin) in Zanker 1995 pages 23 and 27 respectively; discussion in pages 22-31. For Pericles see figure 15 (herm copy now in the British Museum) in Zanker 1995:27.

³⁶⁴ Figure 33 (Roman copy from the British Museum) in Zanker 1995: 59.

³⁶⁵ For Zeno see figures 53 a and b (Roman copy, bust only, from Naples National Archaeological Museum) in Zanker 1995:94-5; for Chrysippus see figures 54 a and b (full body seated statue; from the Museum für Abgüsse Klassischer Bildwerke in Munich) on pages 98-9, figure 55 (bust only, from Naples National Archaeological Museum) on page 99 and figure 56 (bust only, from the British Museum) on page 101; cf. discussion on pages 90ff.

³⁶⁶ Athenaeus 13.565. Cf. Zanker 1995:108-13 and Parker 2008: 260-4.

Chair on the ground that, among other things, he did not have a beard.³⁶⁷ Epictetus is credited for having said that he could not shave his beard because he was a philosopher.³⁶⁸ Alciphron reports that Eteocles, a Stoic, grew an untrimmed beard, unkempt head and looked dirty.³⁶⁹

In terms of overall attire, a Cynic letter written in the third century BC shows a Scythian prince wearing only a cloak as a garment and walking barefoot.³⁷⁰ Another letter shows the Cynic Crates advising the Athenians to wear a cloak only and this is what Zeno, the Stoic, is credited for wearing.³⁷¹

Certainly, whether there was a connection between philosophy and appearance was an issue debated across all antiquity. In art, after the second century BC, differences between representations of philosophers and respectable citizens (who are shown in the act of reading on their grave stelae) are scarce, because both tend to be portrayed as decent old men.³⁷² Seneca, who does not hide admiration for Demetrius, says that this Cynic role model of his went half-naked; Demetrius' meagre clothing is literally described as speaking volumes about his philosophical principles.³⁷³ Yet, elsewhere, Seneca himself deems external signs of asceticism unnecessary if they are not the result of a genuine engagement with one's philosophical views.³⁷⁴

Strabo's selection of details, when describing the appearance of Indian philosophers, is clearly part of this debate. His Indian philosophers are shown as going naked or wearing a minimum amount of clothes. But he records that Mandanis, the oldest of the naked sages, thought that there was no need for Onesicritus to strip naked in order to understand his teaching. The fact that his Greek visitor was under the command of a king who spared some time to enquire of his knowledge was a good enough start (15.1.64).

³⁶⁷ Lucian (*The Eunuch*, 8-12) shows that not all judges deemed Bagoas' physical attributes relevant for his philosophical engagement. In another text, Lucian reports that Demonax laughed at a man who thought that he was a philosopher only because he had a beard (*Demonax*, 13). See discussion in Sellars 2009: 15-19.

³⁶⁸ Epictetus, *Discourses*, 1.2.29.

³⁶⁹ Alciphron, Epistle 3.19.2-3. The opening lines of this letter give an account of how philosophers of different schools were perceived regarding their appearance and behaviour.

³⁷⁰ Pseudo-Anacharsis, Epistle 5 (Malherbe 1977:43).

³⁷¹ Pseudo-Crates, *Epistle* 18 (Malherbe 1977:69).

³⁷² Zanker 1995: 200.

³⁷³ *Epistulae Morales* 20.9 and 62.3.

³⁷⁴ *Epistulae Morales* 5.2.

Within the indographic corpus, Philostratus in his biography of Apollonius says that there are two types of “Indian” philosophers: those who live in India and those who eventually moved from there to Ethiopia. The latter are rather critical about the former, but the text says that, in wisdom, the Ethiopians are inferior to the Indians. Accordingly, their nakedness or plainness in clothing is not necessarily evidence for endurance; they lived in a country where the climate was such that it nearly forced people to go naked out of necessity.³⁷⁵ Yet, in Palladius’ text, the Indian sage invites Alexander to strip naked.³⁷⁶

3.1.2. Diet

Diodorus never mentions Indian philosophers’ diet. This is unexpected because Herodotus had famously given intriguing details on local diet. He had stated that, while some natives eat the flesh of their relatives, others killed no living beings at all and had fruit fallen ripe from trees as their staple food (3.99-100). This latter aspect could be related to philosophy because it recalled vegetarian tendencies followed within Pythagorean circles at the time. Alexander’s historians reported an array of contradicting data on the subject. But quoting them, Arrian simply reports that the Indian philosophers eat the bark of trees, which is as sweet and nutritious as palm dates, in addition to anything that happens to be in season.³⁷⁷

Strabo gives many details on Indian philosophers’ diet. He reports that, among some of them, the Garmanes, those who live in forests have leaves and wild fruits as their staple food, and abstain from wine, ἀπὸ φύλλων καὶ καρπῶν ἀγρίων... χωρὶς καὶ οἴνου. Those who devote themselves to medical inquiries, the physicians, eat rice and barley-groats, these being offered to them by everyone of whom they beg, particularly by those who give them hospitality: λιτούς μὲν μὴ ἀγραύλους δέ, ὀρύζη καὶ ἀλφίτοις τρεφομένους, ἃ παρέχειν αὐτοῖς πάντα τὸν αἰτηθέντα καὶ ὑποδεξάμενον ξενία. We also learn that they cure diseases mostly by prescribing food, namely cereals, to their patients: τὴν δὲ ἰατρῆαν διὰ σιτίων τὸ πλεόν, οὐ διὰ φαρμάκων ἐπιτελεῖσθαι (15.1.60).

³⁷⁵ *Vita Apollonii*, 6.8.

³⁷⁶ *De gentibus Indiae et Bragmanibus* 2.19 in Berghoff edition 1967.

³⁷⁷ *Indika*, 11.

Similarly, Aristobulus reported that the two sophists at Taxila were freely given by their fellow countrymen any food that happened to be in season; at the time the Macedonians were in their city, honey and sesame seeds were largely available and the philosophers made cakes of it:

τιμωμένους ἀντὶ συμβούλων, ἐξουσίαν ἔχοντας ὃ τι βούλονται τῶν ὀνίων φέρεσθαι δωρεάν... τοῦ τε μέλιτος πολλοῦ προκειμένου καὶ τοῦ σησάμου μάζας ποιουμένους τρέφεσθαι δωρεάν.³⁷⁸

The text also records that, when they came to see Alexander, they ate their dinner standing, *παραστάντας δειπνεῖν* (15.1.61).

Megasthenes reported that the mainstream philosophers abstain from animal food (*ἀπεχομένους ἐμψύχων*) during their ascetic period, which lasts for thirty seven years; but afterwards, as they retire, they eat meat of those animals that provide no help for agriculture; in any case, they abstain from pungent and seasoned food: *προσφερόμενον σάρκας τῶν μὴ πρὸς τὴν χρεῖαν συνεργῶν ζῴων, δριμέων καὶ ἀρτυτῶν ἀπεχόμενον* (15.1.59).

Abstention from one or other food item was common practice in a number of religious sects and philosophical communities across the classical world.³⁷⁹ At Pergamum, the sick who hoped for a healing vision of the god had first to observe certain rules of purity in abstaining from goat meat and cheese.³⁸⁰ At Cos, the priestesses of Demeter abstained from meat that had been slaughtered in a particular (now uncertain) manner.³⁸¹ Strabo himself records a few dietary restrictions. The priestess of Athena, he says, was not allowed to eat cheese from anywhere apart from Attica (9.1.11). Priests and priestesses of Comana, as well as all citizens in the city, abstain from swine flesh (12.8.9). Descendants of Moses established the custom of abstaining from pork (16.2.37).

Dedication to philosophy had long implied frugality.³⁸² Strabo reports that among the Pythagoreans, there was the tradition of abstaining from animal food, first

³⁷⁸ 15.1.61.

³⁷⁹ Grimm 1996: 33-40.

³⁸⁰ Inscription in Habicht 1969: 161, 11-14. Finn 2012:15-16.

³⁸¹ Inscription 154A in Sokolowski 1969. Cf. Parker 1983:52.

³⁸² Grimm 1996:40-56.

introduced by Zamolxis and still observed by the followers (7.3.5).³⁸³ Plato had recommended avoidance of refined food to his philosophically oriented athletes.³⁸⁴ A Cynic letter from the third century BC shows the Scythian sage Anacharsis saying that milk, cheese, and meat were his favourite meal, but hunger was his main course.³⁸⁵ Musonius Rufus says that slaves and farmers are often healthier than the rich because their diet is healthier; in this connection, nourishment rather than pleasure should be preferred and we should be satisfied eating basic, inexpensive food that might be in season and readily available.³⁸⁶ Crates imagined his utopian island free from any gluttonous individuals.³⁸⁷ A letter ascribed to Crates urged the Athenians to drink only water and to eat nothing that has not been earned by hard work.³⁸⁸

According to Athenaeus, Epicurus was credited with saying that he was unable to reason if deprived from appetising food.³⁸⁹ The letter to Menoeceus, however, shows Epicurus defining pleasure as satisfaction with what is easily available; in terms of diet, this clearly implies consumption of plain, as opposed expensive food. The text indicates water and bread, as opposed to fish and other delicacies, as providing enough satisfaction for hunger.³⁹⁰ Athenaeus says that the Stoics regarded lentil soup as the typical dish for the philosopher and he quotes a number of sources on the matter, including Zeno and Chrysippus. Zeno is credited with having said that the soup should take a fraction only of coriander seed as seasoning and this caused impact among his followers and opponents alike.³⁹¹ Elsewhere, Zeno was said to have raw food, bread and water as his diet.³⁹²

In *Geography*, when Calanus describes the golden age, he typically associates it with abundance of staple food: water, milk, honey, wine, olive oil, barley and wheat. The end of this state of bliss was dictated by gluttony and luxury, whereby Zeus condemned humankind to a life of hardships. Yet, he says, self-control will grant the

³⁸³ Cf. Seneca, *Epist.Mor.*,108:18, Diogenes Laertius (8.9, 8.13, 8.23 and 8.28) and Athenaeus 4.157. See also Sorabji 1993:172-4 and Grimm1996:55.

³⁸⁴ *Republic*, Book 3, 404a-404d. For conception of food in Plato's thinking see Notario 2015 and Szymanski 2014.

³⁸⁵ Pseudo-Anacharsis, Epistle 5 (Malherbe 1977:43).

³⁸⁶ Musonius Rufus, Lecture 18A. Grimm 1996:55.

³⁸⁷ Crates fragment 4 (Giannantoni 1983: Vol.1.:732).

³⁸⁸ Pseudo-Crates, Epistle 18 (Malherbe 1977:69).

³⁸⁹ Athenaeus, *The learned banqueters*, 12. 546e and 7.280a-b.

³⁹⁰ Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus*, 130-1 (edition by Arrighetti 1973:113-15).

³⁹¹ Athenaeus, *The learned banqueters*, 4.158b.

³⁹² Diogenes Laertius 7.26.

recovery of that original state of bliss, whereas arrogance will imply destruction of everything that exists:

‘τὸ παλαιόν’ φάναι ‘πάντ’ ἦν ἀλφίτων καὶ ἀλεύρων πλήρη, καθάπερ νῦν κόνεως· καὶ κρήναι δ’ ἔρρεον αἱ μὲν ὕδατος γάλακτος δ’ ἄλλαι καὶ ὁμοίως μέλιτος, αἱ δ’ οἴνου τινὲς δ’ ἐλαίου· ὑπὸ πλησμονῆς δ’ οἱ ἄνθρωποι καὶ τρυφῆς εἰς ὕβριν ἐξέπεσον, Ζεὺς δὲ μισήσας τὴν κατάστασιν ἠφάνισε πάντα καὶ διὰ πόνου τὸν βίον ἀπέδειξε. σωφροσύνης δὲ καὶ τῆς ἄλλης ἀρετῆς παρελθούσης εἰς μέσον πάλιν εὐπορία τῶν ἀγαθῶν ὑπῆρξεν, ἐγγὺς δ’ ἐστὶν ἤδη νυνὶ κόρου καὶ ὕβρεως τὸ πρᾶγμα κινδυνεύει τε ἀφανισμὸς τῶν ὄντων γενέσθαι’.³⁹³

Virtue, in this connection, is clearly associated with consumption of that type of food only that is readily available. Vice is associated with greediness and dependence on luxurious items that in turn imply effort to obtain the rare items. The same idea is repeated a few paragraphs below by Mandanis (15.1.68).

Ancient philosophers could not decide whether abstinence from some food items and frugality were essential to live wisely. In contrast with the examples of asceticism we met above, Philostratus shows his Indian philosophers holding luxurious dinner parties.³⁹⁴ Food miraculously appears on the table, each guest being produced any dish they regarded as favourite. In the same way that in his novel he deems the old association of philosophy and rough appearance as unjustifiable, Philostratus clearly dissociates philosophy with any type of abstention. His wise men suggest that more than what you eat, it is the attitude regarding what you eat that is philosophically relevant.

Taking part in this debate, Strabo’s text reflects that old indication, much generalised across antiquity, that philosophical living did imply some attention to diet. By quoting different sources, he is able to confirm that this generalised idea is shared even by the remotest of people. In his India, philosophers impose upon themselves some parsimony even when they retire (by not seasoning their food) and care for local economy (by only eating food that is not going to be of use for agriculture). Going further, as we will see below, he says that frugality is extensive to the whole

³⁹³ 15.1.64.

³⁹⁴ *Vita Apollonii*, 2.

population, which is surprising for a country that at the time of writing was associated with luxurious food items such as pepper and cinnamon.

3.1.3. Physical hardships

Strabo's text repeatedly mentions, by providing a range of minutiae, that the native wise men practise physical hardships. The so-called Garmanes, it is reported, stay in one posture (σχῆμα) all day long without moving. Strabo sees this as a way of practising endurance, in works and in determination: ἀσκεῖν δὲ καὶ τούτους κάκεινους καρτερίαν τὴν τε ἐν πόνοις καὶ τὴν ἐν ταῖς ἐπιμοναῖς, ὥστ' ἐφ' ἐνὸς σχήματος ἀκίνητον διατελέσαι τὴν ἡμέραν ὅλην (15.1.60).

Aristobulus said that the two Brahmins who dined with Alexander taught the Macedonians a lesson of endurance (καρτερίαν διδάσκειν). Lying on the ground, the older one suffered the heat of the sun as well as the rain; the text makes clear that he was lying on his back and at this time of the year it was raining because the spring had just begun. The other, younger philosopher, stood on one leg all day long, while holding a log in both hands that was three cubits in length; when tired, he changed legs (15.1.61).

Another group of men, who never visited anyone, was reported to the Greeks as excelling in practising endurance (καρτερίας ἐπιμελοῖντο οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἐν τιμῇ τε ἄγοντο πλείστη). Onesicritus, who visited them, wrote that he found them exercising different postures (σχήματα): they either stood, sat or lay naked and motionless until evening. At this stage, the text adds that it was so hot that no one could suffer walking barefoot: χαλεπώτατον δ' εἶναι τὸ τὸν ἥλιον ὑπομεῖναι οὕτω θερμὸν ὥστε τῶν ἄλλων μηδένα ὑπομένειν γυμνοῖς ἐπιβῆναι τοῖς ποσὶ τῆς γῆς ῥαδίως κατὰ μεσημβρίαν (15.1.63). The naked Pramnae, who live open air, also practise endurance, καρτερίαν ἀσκοῦντας (15.1.70). The mainstream philosophers sleep on straw mattresses and skins (ἐν στιβάσι καὶ δοραῖς); they require self-control from their visitors, who are forbidden to talk, cough and spit while in their enclosure (15.1.59)

It should be noted that the only men reported by Strabo as making exercise in India are the philosophers. Other gentlemen, as he reports, strangely prefer caring for their bodies by being massaged (15.1.54).

In fact, philosophy was associated with physical endurance across whole antiquity. Diogenes the Cynic was reported to wear a tub and to roll himself in hot sands; the same tradition reports that he used to hug icy statues; both forms of exercise were meant to harden himself.³⁹⁵ As explained by Goulet-Cazé, training in hardship was meant to prepare the philosopher for the inevitable sufferings of life.³⁹⁶ The Stoic Musonius wrote that suffering harsh weather (cold, heat), poverty (namely, hunger, thirst and hard beds) and deprivation (avoiding pleasures) was bound to harden the body as well as the soul. The patience under physical hardships trained the soul for courage, while abstinence would eventually make you achieve self-control.³⁹⁷

Strabo somehow relates to these ideas when he describes the town of Delion in Boiotia, that, as he insists reporting, had a connection with Socrates. During the Persian wars, we learn, the Athenian philosopher was fighting in the area together with his fellow countrymen. At some stage in the battle, he lost his horse but continued fighting on foot; as the Athenians started to retreat, he followed them as well. But, on his way, he happened to see Xenophon, the son of Gryllus, lying on the ground as he too had lost his horse and was wounded. Socrates carried Xenophon on his shoulders for a great distance (the text says many stadia) and saved his life (9.2.7).³⁹⁸ With this story, Strabo remembers Socrates as an example of moral virtue that, nonetheless, was made transparent by the philosopher's physical strength and endurance.

Sufferer of hardships, the Cynic sage was sometimes described as resembling Heracles.³⁹⁹ Recalling such examples generations after Strabo, Lucian, half-jokingly as usual, described Cynicism as a "manly way of living" (βίον ἀνδρικόν).⁴⁰⁰

Strabo records that many of the Indian wise men go to towns as beggars and are given food by their fellow countrymen. Namely, those of the Garmanes who are diviners and enchanters regard begging of alms as their way of survival (15.1.60). As a form of physical exercise, in Greek philosophical tradition, begging was seen as a training in unpredictable suffering, in the sense that it implied living off of the erratic generosity of fellow human beings. Also, begging was associated with an attitude of

³⁹⁵ Diogenes Laertius 6.23.

³⁹⁶ Goulet-Cazé 1986:81.

³⁹⁷ Musonius Rufus, Lecture 6.

³⁹⁸ On Socrates' endurance see also Plato's *Symposium* 220a-221c.

³⁹⁹ Diogenes Laertius 6.71.

⁴⁰⁰ *Philosophies for sale*, 7.

disdain towards comfort. Diogenes famously challenged the Olympic champion Cicermus to abandon his gymnastics for a moment and try suffering poverty, disrepute, low birth and exile, if he were willing to become truly robust. As noted by Turpin, in this story Diogenes appears as a “true Olympic victor”, in his willingness to suffer the blows of fortune.⁴⁰¹ But in the Cynic reasoning, the philosopher had the right to be sustained by the society. As everything belongs to the gods, the Cynic beggar, as their friend, is only asking what belongs to him, because friends share everything they have.⁴⁰²

We should notice that Diodorus never shows Indian wise men practising physical hardships. Arrian provides a gentler picture of Indian asceticism. He points out that, according to one of his sources, the native philosophers walk naked. But in the winter, they do so under sunshine; in the summer, as the heat is strong, they actually retreat to cooler places such as meadows and marshlands, specifically under great trees; Arrian here takes the pain of quoting another of his sources, Nearchus, to make clear that some of the trees are so large that they could give shade to an army of ten thousand men.⁴⁰³

Apart from exercises and begging, Strabo reports sexual abstinence as part of physical endurance. Some of the Indian philosophers, he says, remain in a grove in front of the city and abstain from delights of love for the thirty seven years of their asceticism, ἀπεχομένους... ἀφροδισίων (15.1.59). Among the Garmanes, those who live in forests similarly abstain from sex, ἀφροδισίων χωρίς. Women who associate with some of them equally abstain from delights of love: συμφιλοσοφεῖν δ’ ἐνίοις καὶ γυναῖκας ἀπεχομένας καὶ αὐτὰς ἀφροδισίων (15.1.60). Nearchus says that, among the Brahmans, both men and women practise philosophy and a severe mode of life, τὰς δὲ διαίτας ἀπάντων σκληράς (15.1.66). Other, unnamed writers say that the Pramnae do not have intercourse with women who study with them, γυναῖκας δὲ συνεῖναι μὴ μιγνυμένας αὐτοῖς (15.1.70).

Sexual abstinence was not advocated by the Cynics, who conceived erotic pleasure as natural and regarded marriage as an artificial institution.⁴⁰⁴ Crates was

⁴⁰¹ Turpin 2008.

⁴⁰² Diogenes Laertius 6.46, 6.49 and 6.72.

⁴⁰³ *Indika*, 11.

⁴⁰⁴ Pseudo-Diogenes, Epistle 47 Malherbe 1977:178–9. Cf. Diogenes Laertius, 6.72.

credited for having sex in public with his partner Hipparchia.⁴⁰⁵ Cercidas, a Cynic poet active in the third century BC, regarded prostitution as a natural option for anyone seeking pleasure.⁴⁰⁶ But most Greek philosophers regarded sexual abstinence, or at least modesty in this respect, as appropriate for one willing to practise self-restraint. Plato's *Symposium* shows a Socrates resisting the charms of a handsome Alcibiades.⁴⁰⁷ The Stoics praised the reduction of sexual activity to a minimum and that within the range of habits that were traditionally regarded as unproblematic. Procreation rather than pleasure should be the ultimate goal for sexual intercourse. Heterosexual rather than homosexual relations were to be preferred.⁴⁰⁸

Evidence shows that abstention from sex was a requirement for some religious practices as well. At Pergamum, visitors to the temple of Athena were asked to refrain from sexual activities with their legitimate partners for one day and with the illegitimate partners for two days.⁴⁰⁹ The Vestals at Rome abstained from sexual activities and the same was probably true for their counterparts at Alba Longa and Lavinium.⁴¹⁰

The Cynics regarded asceticism, as opposed to intellectual study, as a shortcut for the attainment of a virtuous living. They considered a severe and even provocative self-discipline as essential for training in those qualities that had been long conceived as central to the aristocratic male and ruler: self-control regarding food, drink, sexual pleasures (ἐγκράτεια), endurance of hardship (καρτερία) and frugality (εὐτέλεια). By the second century AD, a moderate version of such ascetic ideas was part of the education for élite children.⁴¹¹ But long before, Plato had clearly proposed such virtues as essential for a philosophically oriented education.⁴¹²

Strabo's Indian philosophers endorse some of these ideas, but their moderate asceticism shows closer affinities with the author's own Stoic sympathies. Unlike the Cynics, who valued detachment from material riches, as we have seen above, the

⁴⁰⁵ Crates, nos. 21–5 (Giannantoni 1983:Vol.1:713–4).

⁴⁰⁶ Cercidas, fragment 5; Powell 1925:207. Cf. Finn 2012: 22.

⁴⁰⁷ *Symposium*, 217b-219d.

⁴⁰⁸ Musonius Rufus, Lecture 12. Cf. Dillon 2004:22-5.

⁴⁰⁹ Inscription SIG³ 982. Cf. Price 1999: 176.

⁴¹⁰ Plutarch, *Numa Pompilius*, 9-10. Cf. Wildfang 2006:51-63 and Staples 1998.

⁴¹¹ Finn 2012: 22; see also Francis 1995:18 and 24.

⁴¹² *Symposium*, 201d-221c. But discussing education in *Republic* (Book 3), Plato considers that the same virtues are appropriate for women as well.

Brahmans are described as having agricultural estates (15.1.59). This recalls Chrysippus' statements on the subject, namely that there was no problem for a sage man to engage in any economic affairs that would grant his survival. In his influential work *On modes of life*, Chrysippus thought that money was a preferred device, even if ultimately indifferent, for the achievement of happiness. Additionally, he supplied details of the etiquette regarding the payment a philosopher should receive for his teaching - when Plato had famously stated that a true philosopher should never teach in exchange for money.⁴¹³

Diverging from the Cynic attitude towards sex, most Indian philosophers mentioned in *Geography* are said to abstain from sexual pleasures. In contrast with the Cynic conception of marriage as an unnecessary institution, the Brahmans are described as marrying and having children.

Strabo records that, among the Brahmans, children receive education from learned men (λογίους ἄνδρας) since birth. As they advance in age, more and more accomplished teachers take part in their tutoring (ἀεὶ τῆς μείζονος ἡλικίας χαριστέρων τυγχανούσης διδασκάλων). Giving instances of their training, Strabo records that they live a frugal life in a grove around the city. Their beds consist of straw mattresses and skins; they do not eat meat and do not have sexual relations: λιτῶς ζῶντας ἐν στιβάσι καὶ δοραῖς, ἀπεχομένους ἐμψύχων καὶ ἀφροδισίων, ἀκροωμένους λόγων σπουδαίων, μεταδιδόντας καὶ τοῖς ἐθέλουσι (15.1.59). It becomes apparent that, apart from practising physical hardships, the Brahmans receive structured education, which recalls a Stoic, rather than a Cynic way of organising learning.

3.1.4. Women and philosophy

In contrast with Strabo, Diodorus, Plutarch and Arrian never mention women in connection with Indian philosophy. This might reflect the fact that, within Greek tradition, the relation between women and wisdom was a problematic issue.

Aristotle taught that women were incapable of reasoning.⁴¹⁴ Accordingly, Theophrastus wrote that education could only supply them with verbosity and

⁴¹³ Plutarch, *De Stoicorum repugnantis*, 1043B-D. Cf. Schofield 2005: 443, 449 and Schofield 1991:18-20 and 119-27.

⁴¹⁴ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1260a. See discussion in Deslauriers 2015.

ultimately idleness.⁴¹⁵ Pythagoreans were reported to accept women in their schools, but neopythagorean texts only emphasised their traditional roles as housewives.⁴¹⁶ Plato in his *Republic* proposed that both men and women should be educated in equal terms and take part in the government of the ideal city.⁴¹⁷ Likewise, Zeno seems to have envisioned a community of men and women, but his followers eclipsed this utopia.⁴¹⁸

According to Diogenes Laertius, Crates' marriage was unconventional; his wife or, better said, partner Hipparchia wore Cynic garb and attended dinner parties customarily restricted to men.⁴¹⁹ The Epicureans are credited for valuing women's intellectual capacities; for instance, they believed that women should be allowed to choose their husbands.⁴²⁰

According to Strabo, Nearchus reported that the Brahmins share philosophy with women and they all practise a severe way of life: συμφιλοσοφεῖν δ' αὐτοῖς καὶ γυναῖκας, τὰς δὲ διαίτας ἀπάντων σκληράς (15.1.66). Onesicritus said that the philosophers have easy access to any wealthy home, where they can enter women's apartments, share meals and conversations with their female hosts (15.1.65). Megasthenes reported that those of the Garmanes who live in forests share their wisdom with both men and women and accordingly they all abstain from sexual activity, συμφιλοσοφεῖν δ' ἐνίοις καὶ γυναῖκας ἀπεχομένας καὶ αὐτὰς ἀφροδισίων (15.1.60). Similarly, sources agreed that women associate with the Pramnae, but without having sexual relations with them, γυναῖκας δὲ συνεῖναι μὴ μιγνυμένας αὐτοῖς (15.1.70).

Megasthenes seems to have supplied conflicting data. On the one hand, he recorded that women have a role to play in education because, when pregnant, they are visited by wise men who administer reason to both mother and child. In truth, the text says, they give advice on endurance and the women who listen to them carefully are believed to give birth to virtuous children:

⁴¹⁵ Stobaeus 16.30.

⁴¹⁶ Pomeroy 1975:120-148; cf. Porphyry, *Pythagoras* 19 and Diogenes Laertius 8.41-2.

⁴¹⁷ *Republic* 5,452a-457d. See also *Critias* 110b-c.

⁴¹⁸ Diogenes Laertius 7.131.

⁴¹⁹ Diogenes Laertius 6.88 and 96-8.

⁴²⁰ Diogenes Laertius 10.119 and 6.72.

λόγῳ μὲν ἐπάδειν δοκεῖν καὶ τὴν μητέρα καὶ τὸν κυόμενον εἰς εὐτεκνίαν, τὸ δ' ἀληθὲς σωφρονικὰς τινὰς παραινέσεις καὶ ὑποθήκας διδόναι· τὰς δ' ἥδιστα ἀκροωμένας μάλιστα εὐτέκνους εἶναι νομίζεσθαι.⁴²¹

Yet, he wrote, the philosophers do not share their knowledge with their wives. This is not because they think women to be incapable of understanding. On the contrary, they believe that, if philosophically instructed, both men and women are able to achieve knowledge and accordingly to regard pleasure, pain, life and death as indifferent things. However, no one achieving such wisdom would accept to belong to anyone else apart from themselves. Were women to be taught such ideas, they would certainly stop being submissive to their husbands and would surely desert them:

ταῖς δὲ γυναῖξι ταῖς γαμεταῖς μὴ συμφιλοσοφεῖν τοὺς Βραχμᾶνας· εἰ μὲν μοχθηραὶ γένοιτο, ἵνα μὴ τι τῶν οὐ θεμιτῶν ἐκφέροιεν εἰς τοὺς βεβήλους· εἰ δὲ σπουδαῖαι, μὴ καταλείποιεν αὐτούς· οὐδένα γὰρ ἡδονῆς καὶ πόνου καταφρονοῦντα, ὡς δ' αὐτῶς ζωῆς καὶ θανάτου, ἐθέλειν ὑφ' ἑτέρῳ εἶναι· τοιοῦτον δ' εἶναι τὸν σπουδαῖον καὶ τὴν σπουδαίαν.⁴²²

Strabo's selection of data from his sources reflects the thought of the Hellenistic age.⁴²³ In this period, as shown by Pomeroy, the classical ideal according to which women should not be mentioned in public, be it for blame or praise, no longer prevailed. Now many fathers passed decrees honouring the irreproachable conduct of their daughters, even at Athens, where women traditionally held less rights than in Sparta or other regions of the Greek world. There were public decrees honouring women and they tended to increase in Roman times.⁴²⁴

Aristodama of Smyrna was granted honorary citizenship by the Aetolians of Lamia in Thessalia because she happened to have praised them in her poetry.⁴²⁵ Archippe was honoured in Cyme in Asia for her generosity towards her fellow countrymen, namely for having arranged for food and wine for the entire population.⁴²⁶

⁴²¹ 15.1.59.

⁴²² 15.1.59.

⁴²³ Cantarella 2005.

⁴²⁴ Pomeroy 1975:120-148; cf. McClees 1920 and Pleket 1969.

⁴²⁵ IG 9.2.62. See discussion in Rutherford 2009.

⁴²⁶ Inscriptions 444 and 445 in J. Robert and L. Robert 1968 and inscription 3 in Pleket 1969. Cf. Pomeroy 1975:120-148.

There was a female archon in Histria in the second century BC. A century later, a female magistrate, Phile of Priene, built a reservoir and an aqueduct.⁴²⁷

These were certainly exceptional cases, but granting of citizenship and other political rights to highly ranked women is recorded all over the Greek world. In addition, common women too were gradually granted some rights. There is evidence showing that, although only with the assistance of a male guardian, women in Egypt could take part in transactions such as purchasing, selling, lending and borrowing; apart from paying taxes, they could name heirs. In some situations women could act without their guardians, namely to write petitions to the government or police on their own behalf.⁴²⁸ Another significant change was that the role of the bride's father gradually diminished and evidence shows marriage contracts being signed directly between a woman and a man willing to join in matrimony. After a divorce, the wife would normally lose the children and common property, but she would have the right to retain her dowry. At home, women had control over slaves and many of them are recorded as manumittors.⁴²⁹

As we can learn from Egyptian papyri, some women were able to sign contracts.⁴³⁰ All over the Greek world, there are reported to be poetesses (some of them conscious of the unfair limitations imposed on them by their condition), such as Nossis, Anyte, Moero and Erinna.⁴³¹ At Athens, there was less emancipation and Demetrius established the post of γυναικονόμος to assess female conduct in the city. But women in nearby Peloponnesus continued to manage their own fortunes. This was the case for three women who ran horses at Olympia (Cynisca and Euryleonis of Sparta and Bilistiche of Argos). In some regions, women engaged in athletic training and their names appear in inscriptions at Delphi.⁴³²

At the same time, however, Hellenistic queens were imagined to be associated with a number of conspiracies whereby they would have intervened in political affairs

⁴²⁷ Inscription 208 in Gaertringen 1906, 170 in J. Robert and L. Robert 1963 and inscriptions 2 and 5 in Pleket 1969. Cf. Pomeroy 1975:120-148.

⁴²⁸ Tarn and Griffith 1952:99. Préaux 1959. Pomeroy 1975:120-148.

⁴²⁹ *Papyrus Giessen 2* and *Papyrus Tebtunis* 1.104. See discussion in Parca 2012:323ff. Cf. Pomeroy 1975:120-148.

⁴³⁰ *Dryton papyri* 16, 17 and 19. See Lewis 1986:88-103. Cf. Calderini 1950:23.

⁴³¹ *Anthologia Palatina* 5.170 and 7.718 (for Nossis), 7.190 and 7.232 (for Anyte), 6.189 (for Moero) and 7.12 and 7.710 (for Erinna). See MacLahlan 2012:216-9 and Plant 2004:48-90. Cf. Bowman 1998 and Snyder 1989: 64-98.

⁴³² Inscription 63 in Moretti 1953. Cf. Harris 1972:158-9. Pomeroy 1975:120-148.

of their countries. Olympias was said to have made plots against her husband's many wives, mistresses and sons, in order to secure the throne for her own son Alexander; she was credited for having killed her husband as well.⁴³³ Afterwards, while Alexander was in Asia, Olympias was active in her rivalry against Antipater, who had been appointed as a ruler to Macedonia by Alexander himself. In the East, Laodice was credited for having poisoned her husband/half-brother Antiochus II, his wife Berenice (a daughter of Ptolemy II) and their son, in order to secure the throne for her own son Seleucus.⁴³⁴ This would ultimately lead to the Third Syrian War (246-41BC). Ptolemy II's wife/sister Arsinoe II was famed for having conspired against rival queens. But, although she only ruled together with her husband for five years until 270 BC, she was credited with having improved the state of the military in Egypt and for having expanded her country's sea power; she is the first queen consort to appear on coins beside her husband and Callimachus and Theocritus celebrated her in their poems.⁴³⁵

Strabo's frequent mentioning of the association of Indian philosophers with women certainly reflects the fact that women's status in the classical world was gradually changing. Influential thinkers and philosophical circles had extensively discussed the relation between women and philosophy.

On the one hand, the author seems to take sides with Plato, the Cynics and the early Stoics, who regarded women's participation in philosophy as natural. Therefore, across *Geography*, he mentions learned women such as Sappho (13.2.3), Hestiaia of Alexandria, who was a Homeric scholar (13.1.36) and Arate, who was the head of the Cyrenaian school of philosophy in the fourth century BC (17.3.22). Some of his Indian wise men literally assume the equality between men and women in intellectual terms, in the sense that they are represented studying philosophy with women.

On the other hand, however, Strabo takes sides with mainstream Stoics who regarded matrimony as essential for the continuation of human species. Within this latter set of beliefs, some of his Indian philosophers clearly suggest that, if women had access to a higher degree of education, there would possibly be no matrimony and this

⁴³³ Plutarch, *Alexander*, 2.4-5.

⁴³⁴ Pomeroy 1975:120-148. Cf. Pliny *HN* 1.53.

⁴³⁵ On Arsinoe II see Nilsson 2012 and Carney 2013.

would endanger the overall stability of human species. For this reason, it should be reasonable to deny them the access to philosophy.

Considering the two competing ideas, we can say that, certainly, in Strabo's India, women are regarded as capable of taking part in philosophical reflection, although not all philosophers share their ideas with them.

3.1.5. Prospects for an ideal society?

Authors before and after Strabo idealised different features of India and created different representations of the country according to their own ideological programme. Considering what we have seen so far, Strabo's selection of details from his sources creates an India that is close to a utopia, in the sense that it suits well the horizon of his Stoic conception of philosophical living.

Diodorus starts his idealised description of Indian society by saying that the natives have this one convention most worthy of appreciation (θαυμασιώτατον). They consider that under no circumstances (τὸ παράπαν) should anyone be made a slave. Aiming to provide justification for this tradition, Diodorus says that the natives believe that all should be free and they honour equality for everyone: ἐλευθέρους δ' ὑπάρχοντας τὴν ἰσότητα τιμᾶν ἐν πᾶσι. In fact, he reasons, it would be meaningless to have equality for all as a law and yet keep inequalities within the society: εὔηθες γὰρ εἶναι νόμους μὲν ἐπ' ἴσης τιθέναι πᾶσι, τὰς δ' συνουσίας ἀνωμάλους κατασκευάζειν. Venturing into the local history, he records that this convention was established by their ancient philosophers, ὑπὸ τῶν ἀρχαίων παρ' αὐτοῖς φιλοσόφων (2.39).

The philosophers (φιλόσοφοι), in Diodorus' account, are given gifts and honours, because, apart from performing sacrifices to the gods and rites for the dead, they are experienced in matters related to both divinity and the underworld (ὡς θεοῖς γεγονότες προσφιλέστατοι καὶ περὶ τῶν ἐν ᾄδου μάλιστ' ἐμπείρως ἔχοντες, ταύτης τε τῆς ὑπουργίας δῶρά τε καὶ τιμὰς λαμβάνουσιν ἀξιολόγους). But the philosophers are important for the local economy as well. As they foretell droughts, rains, the blowing of winds and epidemics, the locals make their practical arrangements accordingly (2.39-40).

According to Diodorus, the farmers, who make the most of the population, are entirely left to work in peace in the fields. No one (not even an invading army)

even thinks of causing them any harm; they are regarded as common benefactors and are exempt from any war duties and every service to state. Land, being unravaged, becomes abundant in fruits and supplies large amount of provisions. The farmers do not even come to the cities. Netheards, shepherds and herdsmen free the country from birds and wild beasts, which is a great help for agriculture, although there are still many beasts and birds who eat up the seeds sown by the farmers (2.40).

Strabo reports that according to Megasthenes, there is no slavery in the country. Nonetheless, according to Onesicritus, that was true for one region only, the kingdom of Musicanus; the phenomenon there was highly successful and Onesicritus recorded other good practices in this kingdom in particular, which he classed as excellently governed, εὐνομοσύνης (15.1.54). That said, he too records that the farmers never go to the city, neither when there is a public disturbance nor when there are other matters. They are free in their work and labour in peace even when, at the same time and place (ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ χρόνῳ καὶ τόπῳ), their fellow countrymen are fighting an invading army (15.1.40). The hunters free the country from wild beasts and from seed-picking birds (15.1.41).

Such ethnographical features, recorded by both authors, recall the notion of an ideal state, as elaborated by a number of thinkers across classical antiquity: a state divided into a specific number of classes, each devoted to its own business and thus naturally diverted from civil strife. Plato famously conceived of an ideal society as that based on individual capacities, whereby the most intelligent people should belong to a ruling class; but anyone from one class can move upwards or downwards, depending on their physical and intellectual capacities.⁴³⁶

Strabo describes social divisions several times and once he comes close to imagining an ideal state. When describing Egypt, he mentions that the society there was divided into three classes: the soldiers, farmers and the priests. These latter were engaged in sacred matters, studied philosophy and astronomy, and were intimate with the kings (17.1.3). In Caucasian Iberia, the inhabitants were likewise divided into four classes: nobility makes the first class (from which the king, the supreme judge and the commander of the army are appointed); the priests make the second class (they design legislation for their own and neighbouring countries); soldiers and farmers make the

⁴³⁶ *Republic*, Book 4:419a-435b. Cf. Erskine 2000 and Engel 2003.

third class, whereas common people make the fourth (11.3.6). Similarly, the Gauls have three divisions: the bards (who compose and chant hymns); the Vates (who perform sacrifices and study nature); druids, who study nature and moral philosophy, prevent wars and are highly regarded as judges (4.4.4).

But it is when he records Greek history that Strabo clearly associates class division with an ideal state of affairs. He recalls that, anciently, Hellen ruled over northern Greece and on his death he left the kingdom to his son Aeolus. He had sent his other sons away to colonise other regions of Greece. Dorus went to Parnassus and Xuthus came to Attica. One of Xuthus' sons was Ion, who conquered the Thracians and became so renowned for his deeds that he was called back by the Athenians to rule over their city. Here he divided the inhabitants into four tribes and subdivided each of these according to their occupations: farmers, artisans, priests and military guards. Ion was so successful in his political mission that the country was eventually named after him and those who happened to leave it for the Peloponesus, called their new homeland Ionia as well (8.7.1).

Diodorus recorded that in India no one can change classes, neither by marrying to someone from a different caste, nor by changing their occupations. To illustrate this he says that no one engaged in the military can become a shepherd and no artisan can become a philosopher: οὐκ ἔξεστι δὲ γαμεῖν ἐξ ἄλλου γένους ἢ προαιρέσεις ἢ τέχνας μεταχειρίζεσθαι, οἷον στρατιώτην ὄντα γεωργεῖν ἢ τεχνίτην ὄντα φιλοσοφεῖν (2.41). Diodorus thus implied that a wise man is only so because he happened to be born into one of the classes.

Strabo, recording the same contents from Megasthenes, says that people cannot have more than one occupation, except the philosophers, who are allowed to do so because of their excellence: οὐκ ἔστι δ' οὔτε γαμεῖν ἐξ ἄλλου γένους οὔτ' ἐπιτήδευμα οὔτ' ἐργασίαν μεταλαμβάνειν ἄλλην ἐξ ἄλλης, οὐδὲ πλείους μεταχειρίζεσθαι τὸν αὐτὸν πλὴν εἰ τῶν φιλοσόφων τις εἴη· εἶσθαι γὰρ τοῦτον δι' ἀρετὴν (15.1.49). Arrian (*Indika*, 12) imagined this to be the other way round: no one should be allowed to hold two occupations at the same time or to change from one to the other (for instance from shepherd to farmer or from artisan to shepherd); but members from any class could become philosophers, for this way of life is not soft, he says, but hardest of them all.

Strabo, together with Diodorus and Arrian, includes some elements that recall that century old utopia of a perfectly structured society, already envisioned by Plato. But whereas Diodorus imagines a society that is potentially unchanging, Strabo and Arrian allow change through flexibility or, so to speak, social mobility. Diodorus sees that perfect class division and absence of slavery as unchangeable features extensive to all India. Strabo's text makes clear that different regions in the country reflect different societies; that potentially ideal division of the society into four classes might not be extensive to the whole subcontinent. He makes clear that some of his sources reported that slavery was practised in some areas and, in this connection, Strabo refrains from giving enthusiastic reflections on freedom, as Diodorus does.

That said, Strabo too, imagines some idealised personality traits to be extensive to the entire population in the country. He reports that all natives are simple (εὐτελεῖς πάντες) and live happily (εὐπραγεῖν); they do not enjoy useless distractions and therefore they behave orderly (οὐδ' ὄγλω περιττῶ χαίρουσι· δίοπερ εὐκοσμοῦσι); they do not usually drink wine and their food consists essentially of a rice drink and a rice porridge. All these features, he remarks, make apparent their simplicity and frugality (διὰ τὴν ἀπλότητα καὶ τὴν εὐτέλειαν). It should be noted that in this short paragraph, Strabo uses compounds of the adverb εὐ four times, twice with the same meaning of simplicity: εὐτελεῖς, εὐτέλεια, εὐκοσμοῦσι, εὐπραγεῖν. He twice uses the word simplicity ἀπλότης and once temperance, σωφρονικά (15.1.53). We have found this ascetic diet before in connection with the native philosophers, but it is remarkable that Strabo allows it to be extensive to all natives. It should be noticed that, once again, as the author describes the native diet, there is no mention of luxurious food items such as cinnamon and pepper, quintessentially associated with India.

These lines could well be part of an essay on philosophical edification by the Cynic philosopher Crates, who had famously composed a hymn to simplicity, εὐτέλεια.⁴³⁷ As worded by Diogenes Laertius, simplicity implied for one to look bare, untidy, cheap and even dishonoured, but it was always to be admired as virtue.⁴³⁸

In *Geography*, in the light of such a laudatory picture of Indian society, utopian features specific to the state governed by Musicanus gain credibility, although

⁴³⁷ Crates, fragment 11, in Giannantoni 1983:vol.1:736.

⁴³⁸ Diogenes Laertius, 6.21 and 6.37.

they are quoted from a source Strabo deems unreliable. Onesicritus had reported that, although the land is abundant in everything, the locals here have a simple diet and have their meals in common, in Lakonian style; they are healthy and live long for a hundred and thirty years; although there are mines, the locals make no use of gold and silver and there is no slavery because they use their young men as a working force (15.1.34).

Going further, Strabo sees this simple way of life as leading to justice. As the natives have no knowledge of letters, he records, their laws can only be unwritten and they regulate everything from memory. People trust each other, leave their belongings unguarded, for there are no thefts of great amount. There are no lawsuits regarding mortgages and deposits and people are not litigious. All these things, he concludes, certainly reveal moderation (ταῦτα μὲν δὴ σωφρονικά) and people flourish due to their simplicity, εὐτέλεια (15.1.53).

Strabo here is clearly addressing the idea, much debated in antiquity, that actions are better than words. As he fully explains what was at stake in book 6, it is worth recalling what he says there. In olden days, he points out, crimes were sanctioned by the reasoning of judges. A man from Locri, Zaleucus, thought that it would be more accurate for states to have laws and he created the first laws ever for his fellow Locrians. He drafted the model for first contracts as well. Initially the Locrians succeeded in referring to and respecting the laws but they eventually fell in moral decline.

The nearby Thourioi wished to excel the Locrians in their legislative enterprise, but although they became renowned for the precision of their laws, they were seen to be morally inferior to their neighbours. Strabo concludes that it is not those who, through intellectual meticulousness, guard against every possible form of deceit who have better laws, but those who are able to abide by laws that are simply laid down. He quotes Plato's reasoning on the matter (*Republic* 3.13), explaining that where there are many laws there are many cases and corrupt livelihoods, just as where there are many doctors there are many diseases:

εὐνομεῖσθαι γὰρ οὐ τοὺς ἐν τοῖς νόμοις ἅπαντα φυλαττομένους τὰ τῶν συκοφαντῶν, ἀλλὰ τοὺς ἐμμένοντας τοῖς ἀπλῶς κειμένους. Τοῦτο δὲ καὶ Πλάτων εἶρηκεν ὅτι παρ' οἷς πλεῖστοι νόμοι καὶ δίκαι παρὰ τούτοις καὶ βίαι

μοχθηροί, καθάπερ καὶ παρ' οἷς ἰατροὶ πολλοὶ καὶ νόσους εἰκὸς εἶναι
πολλάς.⁴³⁹

India would provide a good instance for this debate, because there is a connection between a society with unwritten laws and the ideal of simplicity, which in turn was associated with virtue. Strabo even preserves the variations he found in his sources. In the kingdom of Musicanus, he says, there was knowledge of letters. But the locals here thought that each individual should be able to choose carefully whom to trust and suffer the consequences if, as a result, anyone happens to disrespect mutual agreements; contents of contracts can be laid down in advance and therefore there was no need for citizens to sue each other; accordingly there were no lawsuits except for murder and violence, for it was thought that it is not in each individual's power to avoid these: δίκην δὲ μὴ εἶναι πλὴν φόνου καὶ ὕβρεως· οὐκ ἐπ' αὐτῷ γὰρ τὸ μὴ παθεῖν ταῦτα (15.1.34).

All these features are resumed in a section where one of the native sages lectures his Greek visitor. Onesicritus reported that Alexander's men approached Mandanis inviting him to come to their king, who was willing to give him gifts if he obeyed to his commands, but was ready to punish in case he disobeyed. Mandanis replied that not only Alexander was not divine but also he ruled over a very small part of the world; he needed no royal gifts because once he accepted these he would be tempted never to be happy with more and more comfort; he was not afraid of threats because his country was able to give him all the food he needed while alive: μήτε δὲ ἀπειλῆς εἶναι φόβον ᾧ ζῶντι μὲν ἀρκοῦσα εἴη τροφὸς ἢ Ἰνδική (15.1.68).

Mandanis' answer to Onesicritus recalls traditional Greek ideas relating simplicity of living with freedom of speech. Like Mandanis, Diogenes was portrayed by later tradition as despising conventions and living free under the protection of no other ruler than Zeus.⁴⁴⁰ Diogenes is credited for having convinced a wealthy man, Crates, to give up his riches.⁴⁴¹ In a spurious letter dating from first or second century, Crates explains that the majority of men who possessed fortunes actually had nothing

⁴³⁹ 6.1.8.

⁴⁴⁰ Pseudo-Diogenes, Epistle 7 (Malherbe 1977:98).

⁴⁴¹ Diogenes Laertius, 6.87 and 93.

because they lived off of fear, whereas the Cynics enjoyed a greater state of peace because, although they possessed nothing, they had everything.⁴⁴²

Mandanis could not fear social marginalisation because he lived off of basics, such as water and produce of seasons, which are worded as easily granted by nature (15.1.68). Likewise, the Cynic epistle reporting the encounter of Diogenes with the athlete Cicermus shows how simplicity may turn the philosopher into a champion of freedom par excellence.⁴⁴³

Diogenes satirised contemporary society by saying that, filled as it was with so much convention and superfluous things, it had ceased to be human.⁴⁴⁴ As reported by Strabo, Calanus too, tried to teach his Greek visitor what the original order of the world used to be and how, over the times, men had lost their humanity through vice. Mandanis makes clear this idea by recalling how little one needs in order to live healthily, and without fear.⁴⁴⁵

In contrast with such an eulogising picture of Indian society, Strabo records aspects that he classes as opposite to social and political cohesion, namely the local habit of not having common meals (except in the kingdom of Musicanus):

Ταῦτα μὲν δὴ σωφρονικά, τᾶλλα δ' οὐκ ἄν τις ἀποδέξαιτο, τὸ μόνους διαιτᾶσθαι ἀεὶ καὶ τὸ μὴ μίαν εἶναι πᾶσιν ὄραν κοινήν δείπνου τε καὶ ἀρίστου, ἀλλ' ὅπως ἐκάστω φίλον· πρὸς γὰρ τὸν κοινωνικὸν καὶ τὸν πολιτικὸν βίον ἐκείνως κρεῖττον.⁴⁴⁶

Likewise, he records that, in spite of their simplicity, natives are said to be surprisingly fond of ornament, ὑπεναντίως δὲ τῆ ἄλλη λιτότητι κοσμοῦνται (15.1.54). As we have seen in the previous chapter, the author describes the kings as fond of luxury, weak and cowardly; women tended to follow immoral behaviours. Such features seem to undermine that otherwise idealised scenario we have met above. As we will see in following section, rather than a utopia, Strabo's India is more eligible to become an illustration, *exemplum*, for philosophical reflection.

⁴⁴² Pseudo-Crates, Epistle 7 (Malherbe 1977:59).

⁴⁴³ Pseudo-Diogenes, Epistle 31 (Malherbe 1977:137). Diogenes Laertius, 6.104.

⁴⁴⁴ Diogenes Laertius, 6.60.

⁴⁴⁵ Goulet-Cazé 1986:34.

⁴⁴⁶ 15.1.53.

In this section, we have seen that Strabo's description of native philosophers varies from that by Diodorus and Arrian, because it is more comprehensive. Details he records from sources, regardless of reflecting Indian reality, are responses to critical questions raised by the Greek schools at the time. Apparently, his text invites the reader to envision a perfect way of life adopted by a people inhabiting the remotest of the countries, by idealising distant savages just as Homer and Herodotus had done. However, a number of ethnographical remarks that he includes blur that utopian picture.

As we have seen above, Strabo's Indian philosophers, coming from a diversity of sources, confirm that there were never definite answers for difficult questions. But, as we will continue to see below, they could provide illustrations of admirable and less admirable attitudes towards life.

3.2. From philosophy to biography

In his description of India, Strabo includes a number of stories, *exempla*, illustrating good and bad moral conduct. These are biographies of native wise men providing illustrations for two much debated topics among Greek philosophers: suicide and the relation between philosophy and politics.

In 3.2.1 we will see that, throughout *Geography*, the author records stories exemplifying different attitudes towards death, fear of dying and bereavement. The book on India supplies the largest amount of stories approaching the matter. While the Indian sage Calanus' suicide is associated with barbarism, Xenarchus' endurance in facing death appears as worthy of praise.

As we will see in 3.2.2, Strabo's work endorses the idea that all men, particularly the philosophers, should take part in political affairs of their countries. Philosophers such as Athenodorus, priests such as Moses and, specially, the wise men from India are clear illustrations of this idea. Conversely, the text makes passing comments on political leaders' association with philosophy. Considering the way Alexander and Augustus are portrayed in connection with Indian wisdom, the former, unlike the latter, is the perfect example of a philosopher-king.

3.2.1. A way of living and a way of dying

Geography contains a number of biographical outlines depicting different philosophers' understanding of life and death. Such outlines could work well as illustrations, *exempla*, for philosophical reflection. Strabo's tutor Xenarchus illustrates an irreprehensible conduct, whereas the Indian sage Calanus' ways are difficult to judge, for they point to apparent courage as well as cowardice. Yet, Calanus' story, far from being a clear-cut illustration, is a valuable contribution towards the ongoing philosophical reflection on death, courage and suicide.

Apart from supplying details on Indian philosophers' everyday life, as we have seen above, *Geography* tells us how some individual philosophers happen to live according to their ideals. This is much different from what we can read in accounts by Diodorus and Arrian, who conceive the native sages as a group, rather than an association of different individuals. In addition to describing beliefs traditionally held by native philosophers, Strabo's text attempts to understand how each man becomes individually engaged in philosophical life, following his own capacities and interpretation of tradition, as we will see in this section.

Strabo outlines biographies of five Indian philosophers. Twice, he does so by comparing and contrasting the conduct of two philosophers belonging to the same group. Two wise men from Taxila spent time practising physical hardships in a place away from the city; when in the market, they benefitted from other citizens' sympathy towards them; the text mentions that they were allowed to take any food they wished from the stalls. One of them, when invited by Alexander to join his entourage, declined to do so. His response was much admired by the Macedonians, regarded as it was as an evidence of self-respect. But his fellow philosopher accepted the royal invitation, changed his clothes and way of living and followed Alexander until the end, being much honoured by the prince. When criticised by some for his self-satisfaction, he answered that he had already completed forty years of asceticism, implying that it was now acceptable for him to indulge in a more comfortable way of life (15.1.61).

Another philosopher, Calanus, spent time away from the city, lying naked on stones and lectured about the fall of men from the golden age to the present state, due to greediness, luxury and arrogance. But, as the philosopher from Taxila, he too joined Alexander's entourage (15.1.64). Some of the Greeks thought that, by doing so, he

should be in disagreement with his philosophical principles; he was perceived as having abandoned his country only to become a slave, a flatterer, of a foreign sovereign, when other native philosophers were happy associating with local kings only (15.1.68). His fellow philosopher, Mandanis, accused him of being arrogant and refused Alexander's invitation to join his court (15.1.64). Mandanis made clear that he was self-sufficient and needed neither comfort nor royal protection. For this reason, he was much praised by all (15.1.68).

Calanus followed Alexander to Persia, where he died "according to the tradition of his country", namely by being placed upon a pyre and burned up: ἀποθανεῖν τῷ πατρίῳ νόμῳ τεθέντα ἐπὶ πυρκαϊάν (15.1.64).

This incident had become a well-known episode in the legend involving Alexander and it was to have a new version three centuries later. Zarmanochegas, another native philosopher, took part in the Indian embassy that was sent to Augustus and committed suicide at Athens by burning himself up. The text specifies that he started by anointing himself, wore a loincloth and threw himself into the fire laughing, γελῶντα ἀλέσθαι γυμνὸν λίπ' ἀληλιμμένον ἐν περιζώματι ἐπὶ τὴν πυράν (15.1.73). The Athenians inscribed on his tomb that he had thus made himself immortal, by dying "according to an ancestral customs of his homeland": κατὰ τὰ πάτρια Ἴνδῶν ἔθη ἑαυτὸν ἀπαθανάτισας (15.1.73).

Having reported two suicides by native wise men, the author makes clear that his sources supply contradicting ideas about Indian conception of suicide. According to Nicolaus Damascenus, who reported the embassy to Augustus, the native philosophers tended to commit suicide as a release from misfortunes, but some kill themselves when they think they are the happiest, fearing that something bad might happen; this was the case for Zarmanochegas:

ποιεῖν δὲ τοῦτο τοὺς μὲν ἐπὶ κακοπραγία ζητοῦντας ἀπαλλαγὴν τῶν παρόντων, τοὺς δ' ἐπ' εὐπραγία, καθάπερ τοῦτον· ἅπαντα γὰρ κατὰ γνώμην πράξαντα μέχρι νῦν ἀπιέναι δεῖν, μή τι τῶν ἀβουλήτων χρονίζοντι συμπέσοι.⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁷ 15.1.73.

However, Megasthenes reported that suicide was far from being common practice in the country. Those who killed themselves were regarded as impetuous and immature. It was believed that different personality features would dictate different types of suicide: those who are fearless throw themselves off cliffs or stab themselves; those who are afraid of suffering throw themselves in waters; those who are suffering much hang themselves; those who are impetuous throw themselves into fire. Here Strabo adds that Calanus was believed to belong to this latter group; as a slave to Alexander's table, he showed no self-control and this is why he was much criticised:

Μεγασθένης δ' ἐν τοῖς μὲν φιλοσόφοις οὐκ εἶναι δόγμα φησὶν ἑαυτοὺς ἐξάγειν· τοὺς δὲ ποιοῦντας τοῦτο νεανικοὺς κρίνεσθαι, τοὺς μὲν σκληροὺς τῆ φύσει φερομένους ἐπὶ πλιγγὴν ἢ κρημνόν, τοὺς δ' ἀπόνους ἐπὶ βυθόν, τοὺς δὲ πολυπόνους ἀπαγχομένους, τοὺς δὲ πυρώδεις εἰς· πῦρ ὠθομένους· οἷος ἦν καὶ ὁ Κάλανος, ἀκόλαστος ἄνθρωπος καὶ ταῖς Ἀλεξάνδρου τραπέζαις δεδουλωμένος.⁴⁴⁸

Strabo recorded in passing many other ideas from his sources about the Indian conception of death. Megasthenes reported that the native sages talked too much about the subject, for they thought this to lead to piety and holiness, οὐδ' αὐτοὺς δὲ ἀπεχομένους τῶν καθ' ἄδην θρυλουμένων ὅσα δοκεῖ πρὸς εὐσέβειαν καὶ ὀσιότητα (15.1.60). As reported by Onesicritus, the naked Mandanis believed that there is no reason for anyone to be scared of dying because, once dead, men are released from flesh, so marked by old age, and are taken into a purer form of life: ἀποθανῶν δὲ ἀπαλλάσσεται τῆς τετραχωμένης ὑπὸ γήρωσ σαρκός, μεταστὰς εἰς βελτίω καὶ καθαρώτερον βίον (15.1.68). Megasthenes said that the Indians have similar ideas on the seed and the soul, but instead of rational arguments, they prefer to use myths to explain the immortality of the soul and the judgements in Hades, just as Plato did: καὶ περὶ σπέρματος δὲ καὶ ψυχῆς ὅμοια λέγεται καὶ ἄλλα πλείω· παραπλέκουσι δὲ καὶ μύθους, ὥσπερ καὶ Πλάτων περὶ τε ἀφθαρσίας ψυχῆς καὶ τῶν καθ' ἄδου κρίσεων καὶ ἄλλα τοιαῦτα. (15.1.59). Megasthenes also reported that the tombs in the country were simple and small: Λιταὶ δὲ καὶ αἱ ταφαὶ καὶ μικρὰ χώματα (15.1.54).

⁴⁴⁸ 15.1.68.

As it is well known, death and, more specifically, the suicide, was a quintessential matter within Greek thought.⁴⁴⁹ It is somewhat surprising that Arrian, otherwise so philosophically oriented, offers nowhere near as many details on suicide as Strabo does, although he felt that he could not talk about Alexander without mentioning Calanus.⁴⁵⁰ At least since Socrates, philosophers were known for accepting death courageously and ancient literature abounds with accounts of philosophical suicides. In the Hellenistic period, such stories were often used as illustration aiming at moral edification. Accordingly, as a literary feature, Calanus' story too reads like a typical *exemplum* that would suit well the ideology of many philosophical schools.

As explained by Turpin, *exempla* were meant to provide inspiration for everyday behaviour as effectively as rational arguments.⁴⁵¹ Posidonius, one of Strabo's masters, taught that theoretical principles are inefficient on their own to turn people towards a philosophical life. Rhetorical techniques leading to persuasion, comforting and encouraging were just as important. Speeches aimed at ethical improvement should supply concrete examples by referring to experiences lived by different individuals.⁴⁵² This often implied telling the story of renowned people who were traditionally admired as charismatic role models and whose biographies were well known to the audience. But the barbarians, the cowardly, women and people from lower classes, who were not, by default, expected to excel in moral conduct, could become *exempla* just as well.

Quintilian wrote that Lucretia's brave attitude in accepting her own death should be more inspiring than Cato's because women are not supposed to be as heroic as men (5.11.10). Cicero wrote that, among the barbarian countries, there could not be a place more wretched than India; yet even here some men regarded as wise easily suffer being burned to death; being able to endure pain was proper to human nature, but civilised nations devoted too much importance to comfort.⁴⁵³ Generations after, Seneca thought that Metellus Scipio, who had been always an idle aristocrat, would

⁴⁴⁹ Plato, *Phaedo* 61b-62c and *Laws* IX particularly 854a3-5 and 873c-d. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1138a5-14. Cicero, *De finibus*, 3.60-61. Cf. Minois 1999:42-55 and Cooper 1989.

⁴⁵⁰ *Anab.*, 7.3.

⁴⁵¹ Turpin 2008.

⁴⁵² Seneca, *Epistulae Morales*, 94 and 95. Cf. Turpin 2008:370 and Kidd 1988: 646-51.

⁴⁵³ Cicero, *Tusculanae*, 5.5.27. Cf. similar reasoning in Seneca, *De beneficiis*, 3.23.2-4.

become a good *exemplum*, as he preferred to commit suicide by stabbing himself to being made a prisoner by an unjust emperor.⁴⁵⁴

How people experienced fear of dying, the death itself and bereavement was important to turn them into *exempla*. The Stoics, in particular, thought that those who were about to die had much to teach about the experience of facing death.⁴⁵⁵ Accordingly, they collected stories approaching the subject that could later be used in their speeches as examples of good and bad ways of facing death. This literary trend compiling deaths of illustrious men was to become particularly strong during Nero's rule, when authors discussing moral issues were directly or indirectly related to the victims of his political regime.⁴⁵⁶

Out of his description of India, Strabo mentions suicide in connection with philosophy once, while reporting a strange set of circumstances at Adramyttium. A certain Diodorus taught rhetoric and pleaded causes at court in this city. He was close to the king Mithridates and, as his political commander during the war, he condemned the whole council of citizens in his city to death. Shocked by his ruthlessness, his opponents made charges against him as soon as Mithridates was deposed by the Romans. Eventually Diodorus came as an exile to Amasia (which Strabo once again reminds us to be his hometown) and committed suicide there (13.1.66).

It should be noted that, although Diodorus classed himself as a philosopher from the Academy, Strabo's text says that he was pretending to be so: προσποιούμενος δ' ἅμα τῶν τε ἐξ Ἀκαδημίας φιλοσόφων εἶναι. As a teacher of rhetoric, Diodorus might have defended many good causes, as the text says that he pretended to make justice, as an expert in oratory: καὶ δίκας λέγειν καὶ σοφιστεύειν τὰ ῥητορικά. But Strabo sees Diodorus' actions as example of ruthlessness, which in turn definitely undermined his claim to be a philosopher. He writes that Diodorus "cut the throats" of his enemies only in order to please the king, τὴν γὰρ βουλὴν ἀπέσφαξε τῶν πολιτῶν Διόδωρος στρατηγὸς χαριζόμενος τῷ βασιλεῖ.

Accordingly, his suicide is depicted, not as a result of a possibly genuine remorse, but as a base way of dying. We can read that, accused by many of his fellow citizens, Diodorus let himself starve to death in a shameful way: ἐγκλημάτων γὰρ

⁴⁵⁴ Seneca, *Epistulae Morales*, 24.9.

⁴⁵⁵ Cicero, *De finibus*, 3.60–61. See discussion in Schofield 2003.

⁴⁵⁶ Turpin 2008: 369. Cf. Pliny, *Ep.* 1.17.3; 5.5.5. See also Ronconi 1940 and MacMullen 1966: 46-93.

ἐπενεχθέντων ἅμα πολλῶν, ἀπεκατέρησεν αἰσχρῶς. The suicide is worded here as an evidence for lack of endurance, for Strabo writes that he was unable to face his bad reputation, οὐ φέρων τὴν δυσφημίαν.

As a contrast, we should consider what Strabo wrote about Xenarchus, his Peripatetic teacher. Xenarchus taught at Athens and Alexandria. At some stage in life, he was befriended by as important political figures as Arius and Augustus himself and was highly regarded. Shortly before his passing, he lost his sight and died of disease: μικρὸν δὲ πρὸ τῆς τελευτῆς πηρωθεὶς τὴν ὄψιν κατέστρεψε νόσῳ τὸν βίον (14.5.4). After being a renowned teacher at two influential centres of learning and after acquiring an influential social position under major political figures of his time, Xenarchus is not mentioned in connection with corruption or any wrongdoings. On the contrary, the text suggests that, even suffering from blindness and other diseases of old age, he endured pain and expected a natural death. His rectitude towards his many successes and endurance during his physical collapse, turn Xenarchus into a philosophical hero, particularly in comparison with Diodorus.

These two biographical outlines could certainly be part of *exempla*, for they provide clear instances of virtuous and immoral conduct. However, instead of representing people who were exclusively good or bad, better *exempla* depicted multifaceted characters. By showing complicated personalities, authors could illustrate a wide range of issues and cause a more realistic and memorable impression on a wide range of readers.⁴⁵⁷

Geography certainly provides a variety of multi-layered *exempla*, among which we could count the story of Calanus and that of Strabo's own family. In fact, autobiographical comments that Strabo makes have been exhaustively analysed by scholarship attempting to reconstruct the author's biography, but they too could have philosophical importance as part of an *exemplum*.

Strabo mentions that one of his ancestors, Dorylaeus, was intimate to the king Mithridates VI Eupator of Pontus - literally, we can read, he was adopted as a brother by the monarch. Nonetheless, Dorylaeus was found to be helping the Romans, as a result of personal ambition to succeed the king to the throne. His downfall dictated the ruin

⁴⁵⁷ Turpin 2008:376.

of his entire family (10.4.10 and 12.3.33). Sometime later another of Strabo's relatives, Moaphernes, became close to the king, but when the king was overthrown, he and his friends greatly suffered the consequences (12.3.33). Lagetas, Strabo's great grandfather sided with the Romans by helping the general Lucullus, out of his resentment against Mithridates who had caused much distress to the family. Upon Lucullus' success, he too was granted many benefits by the Romans. But when Pompey took over, he regarded as enemies all those who had helped his predecessor Lucullus and took away the benefits that had been granted to Lagetas, which is to say, to Strabo's family (12.3.33).

This family history outline shows different members' varied motivations and attitudes towards their monarchs. To some extent they all showed evidence of providing useful service to their country. But the political situation was ever so changeable that allegiance to one ruler implied defiance to the other. Pleasing the king of Pontus or the growing power of the Romans was certainly a dilemma. Ambitious and resentful, Strabo's ancestors frequently made wrong choices and suffered the consequences.

Such imperfections were most convenient from a literary point of view because ideally characters in an *exemplum* should not be perfect. Ultimately, according to the Stoic understanding, there were no perfect beings at all.⁴⁵⁸ Yet, as flawed as they were, Strabo's ancestors continued to engage with stately affairs after each downfall, regaining prestige under rival rulers. The author's family history recalls the importance given by the Stoics to each individual's political responsibility. In their reasoning, political affairs could have a crucial importance in the improvement of humanity. In addition, the man aspiring to live philosophically should not give up involvement in the stately undertakings of his country, which could ultimately have a bearing on his own way of living.⁴⁵⁹

Even when not worthy of admiration for any of their deeds, individuals could become instances of what not to do.⁴⁶⁰ This could be the case for Calanus, although he first appears as an *exemplum* of how to die fearlessly. After outlining the character's life story, Strabo makes clear that there are contradicting accounts of his suicide.

⁴⁵⁸ See discussion in Donini and Inwood 1999: 717–23.

⁴⁵⁹ Cicero, *De fin.*, 111.68 and Stobaeus 11.94.14. Cf. Schofield 2005: 448.

⁴⁶⁰ *Rhet. Ad Alex.* 7 1429b–1430a. Cf. Turpin 2008:367.

Quoting from diverging sources, he provides two equally spectacular accounts of the event, with more and more picturesque minutiae.

In fact, the sources agreed that at the age of seventy three, Calanus fell ill and committed suicide by throwing himself into fire, despising Alexander's own requests attempting to dissuade him from his resolution. Yet, there was disagreement in sources regarding details of this affair. According to some sources, a golden couch was placed on a pyre, Calanus laid himself upon it, covered up and suffered being burned to death. According to other sources, after a procession in which he himself took part, he shut himself in a wooden house, which was then put on fire at his command (15.1.68). As a good collector of *exempla*, Strabo takes pleasure in recording colourful details provided by both versions of the event.⁴⁶¹

Calanus was as close to Alexander as the other two men of wisdom, Diodorus and Xenarchus, were to their kings. But the text describes him as a flatterer and a slave to Alexander's table. His suicide is a spectacle of processions and displays of gold items. In this light, instead of a clear example of fearlessness, Calanus visibly appears as an illustration of oriental softness and luxury, that could only be integrated in a speech about endurance towards suffering as a counter example.

Additionally, the two diverging versions Strabo quotes confirm that Calanus decided to put an end to his life due to an illness, conforming to an ancient custom of his homeland. As a sufferer of physical hardships, in a good Cynic or Stoic manner, Calanus was less remarkable than Strabo's tutor Xenarchus, who suffered his health condition until the end. Instead, Calanus' story can be somewhat compared to that of the false philosopher Diodorus, who was similarly depicted as unable to endure suffering.

In literature of the time, some barbarian customs were regarded as evidence of bravery, nonetheless, they were given as examples of imperfection. Cicero had found it remarkable that among the Indians, apart from men, even women could be so courageous as to throw themselves into fire; but he sees the country as a barbarian nation.⁴⁶² As implied here, bravery is ultimately the result of brutality, not of an illuminated ethical learning. Similarly Strabo, as we have seen above, does mention

⁴⁶¹ Turpin 2008:370.

⁴⁶² Cicero, *Tusculanae*, 5.5.27.

the widow burning in India, but he clearly addresses the practice in a context of moral decadence and not of that of philosophical enlightenment. In fact, his text explains that the widow burning was meant to deter women from killing their husbands and then escaping with their younger lovers.⁴⁶³

Elsewhere, when describing the Iberian Peninsula, Strabo lists a good number of brave acts by natives, but he sees them as examples of barbarism, not of endurance. For instance, he says that the natives were reported to carry always a poison that would cause painless death; they would be happy taking it, be it in order to commit suicide when they are affected by adversities, be it in order to save the life of their superiors. Those inhabiting the north of the Peninsula, the Cantabrians, sing joyful tunes when they happen to be taken to their own execution at the cross. The text classes such habits as a proof of ferocity (ἀπονομία) that makes apparent the savagery of native customs: τὰ μὲν οὖν τοιαῦτα τῶν ἠθῶν ἀγριότητός τινος παραδείγματ' ἄν εἴη.⁴⁶⁴

3.2.2. Philosophers and kings

In what follows, we will see that *Geography* provides illustrations showing wise men's attitude towards political affairs of their countries and that this is the case for the Indian philosophers. The relationship between philosophy and political compromise was a much debated issue in antiquity. While the Epicureans regarded it as problematic, the Stoics (particularly Chrysippus) proposed that the wise should become kings or, failing that, advisors to kings.

As we will see below, Strabo emphasises the idea that all men, wise or not so wise, should engage in politics even if they might not provide a perfect service to the state. Biographies of the Indian sage Calanus, Xenarchus, Moses, as well as some autobiographical remarks provide *exempla* for different aspects of this issue. Equally, his text makes some remarks on politicians' involvement in philosophy. Alexander is typically represented as a "philosopher-king", who solves that age old dichotomy opposing philosophy and politics. At a different level, Augustus fulfils the same ideal, but to a limited extent.

⁴⁶³ *Geography*, 15.1.30.

⁴⁶⁴ *Geography*, 3.4.18.

Plutarch recorded that the philosophers across India offered much resistance to the Macedonian conquest, by vilifying kings who were willing to support Alexander and by inciting populations of democratic cities to rebel.⁴⁶⁵ Later, Alexander captured many of these sophists, but as they answered to his philosophical enquiries in a satisfactory manner, he eventually released them.⁴⁶⁶ While many of the native kings followed the philosophers' advice, the monarch at Taxila offered his friendship and gifts to the Macedonians because he was a man of considerable intelligence.⁴⁶⁷ Plutarch explains that, apart from the philosophers who were involved in stately affairs, there were some who lived in peace and isolation.⁴⁶⁸

Arrian recorded that Alexander in his journey fought against a city of the Brahmans, who were providing shelter to his enemies, the Mallians (ἐπὶ τῶν Βραχμάνων τινὰ πόλιν ἦγεν).⁴⁶⁹ In a different region, as he captured a rebellious city, he killed the sophists who had caused the revolt (οἱ δὴ σοφισταὶ τοῖς Ἰνδοῖς εἰσιν, ὅσοι αἴτιοι τῆς ἀποστάσεως ἐγένοντο ἀπέκτεινεν).⁴⁷⁰ The text makes clear that these are the men who were credited with wisdom (ὕπερ ὧν ἐγὼ τῆς σοφίας, εἰ δὴ τίς ἐστιν).⁴⁷¹ Similarly, as he executes the king Musicanus, Alexander puts to death the Brahmans who had caused the revolt there (κρεμάσαι κελεύει ... καὶ τῶν Βραχμάνων ὅσοι αἴτιοι τῆς ἀποστάσεως τῷ Μουσικανῷ κατέστησαν).⁴⁷²

In *Geography*, the native philosophers are implicated in political affairs as well, but they are never shown in conflict with Greek interests. On the contrary, the text says that the king of Taxila was advised by his country's philosophers to befriend Alexander (15.1.65). For this reason, he sent gifts and helped the Macedonians in their conquest of India. In return for his obedience, he was granted more gifts than he had given (15.1.29).

We can read that the native wise men, while living outside the cities, always have some bearing on political affairs. While each of them would customarily be employed for sacrifices to gods and offerings to the dead, the philosophers are all

⁴⁶⁵ *Alexander*, 59.

⁴⁶⁶ *Alexander*, 64.

⁴⁶⁷ *Alexander*, 59.

⁴⁶⁸ *Alexander*, 65.

⁴⁶⁹ *Anab.*, 6.7.

⁴⁷⁰ *Anab.*, 6.16.

⁴⁷¹ *Anab.*, 6.17.

⁴⁷² *Anab.*, 6.17.

summoned, as a group (κοινῆ), by the kings at the Great Synod once a year. It is before the king that they all (ἅπαντες) foretell the next future in terms of agriculture and politics. The text specifies that they usually pay their taxes and tributes, but those who are proven right in their predictions are made exempt from such payments: τὸν δὲ κατορθώσαντα ἄφορον καὶ ἀτελεῖ κρίνουσι (15.1.39). Even those who live in forests communicate with the kings, who, through messengers, inquire about the causes of things. In addition, it is with these men's intervention that the kings worship the gods (15.1.60).

Strabo frequently mentions men of wisdom in his work, be it philosophers or priests, who are fully engaged in political affairs. Associated with kings or on their own, they are mentioned both as rulers and responsible for revolts against an established regime. In fact, the Brahmins are local counterparts of such influential figures that we can find all across *Geography*. Together, they appear as instances corroborating that old Stoic ideal connecting philosophical living with political achievement.

As he describes Tarsus, Strabo mentions that it was the hometown of Athenodorus, a Stoic philosopher, who was preceptor of Caesar himself. After living abroad most of his life, he returned to Tarsus at old age, only to find his hometown being unjustly managed by a number of politicians. At first, Athenodorus attempted to improve the situation by giving his good advice to the rulers. But after failing in this, he used the power he was given by his pupil Caesar, overthrew the government, expelled the rulers from his city and took the power himself. When criticised and even insulted by his opponents, the Stoic philosopher always tackled issues with perseverance and humour (14.5.14)

Another philosopher, the Peripatetic Athenaeus, was engaged in the state affairs in his home country at Holmi. After he befriended Murena, he was involved in a conspiracy plot against Augustus. As the plot was discovered, Athenaeus was imprisoned but he was eventually set free by the emperor, when his innocence was proven. However, he died shortly after in suspicious circumstances, as the house in which he lived collapsed during the night (14.5.4).

Another well positioned philosopher was Strabo's own rhetoric and grammar teacher, Aristodemus, who was the tutor of Pompey's children at Rome (14.1.48). As

we have seen above, another of Strabo's teachers, Xenarchus, befriended Arius and Augustus and received great honours (14.5.4). At Tarsus, Athenodorus was succeeded by another philosopher, Nestor, an Academic who had been tutor to Augustus' much celebrated nephew and heir presumptive, Marcellus.⁴⁷³ Another Athenodorus, also Stoic, lived in Rome under the protection of Marcus Cato (14.5.14).

Venturing into the realm of legends to illustrate the relation between philosophy and politics, the author records that in olden days, Zalmoxis, a Getan, travelled much and learned astronomy with Pythagoras and with the Egyptians. When he returned to his home country, he was much honoured and esteemed as a god. He became closely associated with the king, but eventually decided to retire to a remote district full of caves, inaccessible and unfrequented by other men. Nonetheless, Zalmoxis continued to communicate with the king, whose rule, it is said, became more respected than before due to its connection with a sage whose advice was regarded as coming from gods. As a result, among the Getae, the kings have always sought the guidance of someone like this legendary sage (7.3.5).

Together with philosophers, Strabo frequently associates priests with wisdom, although he records some of their superstitious opinions and barbarian practices as well. As the philosophers, some priests were engaged in politics and are said to have organised revolts.

Addressing the strictly religious aspect of their occupation, Strabo records a number of beliefs and rituals. Priests and priestesses of Comana, as well as all citizens in the city, believed that they should abstain from pork; the story goes that one priest who neglected this custom was affected by serious disease (12.8.9). At Pedasus, it was believed that whenever something unfortunate was about to happen to the city, a beard appeared on the face of the local priestess of Athena and this happened three times; as this was reported by Herodotus, it did not need to be trusted (13.1.59). At Athens, the priestess of Athena Polias is barred from eating cheese from Attica, although, as a contradiction, she can eat cheese from Salamis, that also belongs to Attica. After dedicating a few lines of thought on the matter, the author concludes that this is probably not as illogical as it sounds, for it might indicate that in olden days Salamis and the whole island of Aigina were classed as part of Attica (9.1.11).

⁴⁷³ About Marcellus, see, e.g., Virgil, *Aeneid*, 6.884.

Alongside these picturesque references, priesthood is chiefly associated with knowledge. Strabo says that Plato only used the myth about Atlantis in his work because he thought it to be more than mere fiction. Indeed, Solon had learnt from an authoritative source, the Egyptian priests, that such an island actually existed and that it was as large as a continent (2.3.6). Egyptian priests at Heliopolis were known for concealing most of their knowledge, but in olden days they taught the Greeks how to divide the year in 365 days; later astronomers were able to translate more of their knowledge into the Greek language and were helped in the understanding of astronomic matters by Chaldaean priests. Strabo says that he himself visited the large buildings once inhabited by these ministers and the premises inhabited by Plato and his companion Eudoxus during their stay in the country (17.1.29). However, he thinks it to be surprising how the same priests could not see the causes for the rise of the Nile, which he thinks is the summer rains in Upper Ethiopia (17.1.5)

In *Geography*, the priests are variously related to political power. Among the Mylasians, they are the most eminent citizens (14.2.23). The priests of Comana were the second most distinguished after the kings and they even wore the diadem of the local goddess (12.3.32). Coming from royal lineage, they managed the temple and its six thousand servants and retained the profits from its large estate (12.2.3). Likewise, the temple of Pharnaces was under royal patronage, but the profits from its estates were retained by the priest (12.3.31). At Pessinus, the priests of the local goddess Agdistis were regarded as kings and obtained large incomes from their office; their premises were adorned by the royal household, a custom that was continued by the Romans (12.5.3).

Giving some thought on the honours received by the priests, Strabo says that the custom dates back to mythical times. Danaus is said to have discovered the springs of water around Argos and Atreus is reported to be the first discoverer of the retrograde movement of the sun in the heavens. Highly regarded as clairvoyants, such figures were honoured as kings to the extent that their original occupation as diviners was eventually forgotten. In historical times, the Egyptian priests, the Chaldeans, and the Magi acquired honours and authority due to their superior wisdom; so it would seem that in each of the gods, it is actually the discoverer of useful aspects of human living that is worshipped (1.2.15).

The priests are sometimes referred to in connection with revolts. Dorylaus, one of Strabo's ancestors, was appointed as a priest of Comana; however, he took part in a conspiracy aimed at revolting the population against the king; with the support of the Romans, he expected to be appointed as a king (10.4.10 and 12.3.33). Pompey appointed Archelaus for the priesthood of Comana; invested with such power, the ambitious Archelaus presented to the Egyptians as a prince and married Cleopatra VII; he ruled the country for six months before he was killed by the Romans (12.3.34). Menodorus, a priest of Zeus Larisaeus was put to death after being implied in the revolt of his fleet (14.1.42). Anciently in Ethiopia, the priests held the power to condemn kings to death, until one of their monarchs abolished the custom by massacring them all (17.2.3).

At the end of his work, Strabo makes a long excursus on a figure that combines all features we have seen above ascribed to philosophers and priests. Moses is principally depicted as a priest, but he is deeply involved in political terms and holds philosophical ideas that are much reminiscent of Greek ones.

Initially an influential priest who ruled over a portion of Lower Egypt, Moses was dissatisfied with the affairs there. Abandoning his country, he came to Judaea with a large amount of followers. He taught that, conceiving of divinity, the Egyptians and Africans were mistaken, for they represented gods as wild beasts, whereas the Greeks were wrong too, as they imagined the gods to take human form. But as the god should encompass everything that exists, he should not be conceived of as resembling any of the things that exist. It made no sense to carve images of god, he thought, although it would be acceptable to set aside some sacred ground and a shrine in order to worship him. But only those who practiced justice and temperance and none else might expect some gift or sign from god occasionally (16.2.35). As a result, he established a type of worship that would imply neither great expenses nor bizarre practices (16.2.36).

Moses persuaded some Egyptians to follow him and to seize Jerusalem, a territory that was not remarkable for any land resources (and therefore motivated no jealousy from neighbours). In fact, although it was well supplied with water, Jerusalem was surrounded by waterless and barren territory. Moses established a not so ordinary kind of government and surrounding nations willingly united to him (16.2.36). In

military terms, instead of arms, Moses regarded sacred things as the best defence against political conflicts (16.2.36).

Moses' successors continued his charismatic actions for some time but eventually they were overcome with superstition and tyranny. For instance, they started to abstain from meat and established the rituals of circumcision and excision. Their tyranny led people to start robbing their own as well as surrounding nations, to the extent that only the acropolis of their city was left safe from looting (16.2.37). The title of priest became that of a king and while this incited internal wars, the Romans took over. Pompey destroyed Jewish strongholds, took Jerusalem and put an end to anarchy (16.2.40). Pompey gave the priesthood to a certain Hyrcanus, whose descendant Herod eventually took the priesthood surreptitiously but was appointed as king by Antony and later by Augustus. Herodes killed some of his sons and the ones who survived were favoured by Augustus (16.2.46).

Reasoning about the matter, Strabo says that all human kind abides to common law and this is according to nature: *πέφυκε γὰρ οὕτω καὶ κοινόν ἐστι τοῦτο καὶ τοῖς Ἑλλησι καὶ τοῖς βαρβάροις. πολιτικοὶ γὰρ ὄντες ἀπὸ προστάγματος κοινοῦ ζῶσιν*. Law, however, is twofold, divine and human; the ancients particularly respected the former in preference to the latter, which is why they consulted oracles, for instance (16.2.38). The author remarks that he cannot tell what truth these things might contain (*ταῦτα γὰρ ὅπως ποτὲ ἀληθείας ἔχει*), but because they were so highly regarded, prophets gathered so much honour that they even became kings, for they were supposed to communicate with gods. This was the case for a variety of men: Tiresias, Zamolxis, Orpheus, Museus, the Indian Gymnosophists, the Magi, the Chaldaeans, the Tyrrhenian diviners and Moses. In all these cases, the beginning was good, but over the time, the teaching of such wise men fell into decadence and decline (16.2.39).

From India to Europe, stories of all such charismatic men combine wisdom and political power. Such a combination was conceived as ideal, but rarely possible to realise. The Stoic Chrysippus thought that only the wise man should be a king, because only he would be able to distinguish between the right and the wrong. Certainly, to become a king was the best thing that could happen to a philosopher, for thus he would not have to suffer being a subject of a less qualified ruler. Failing that, next best thing was for him to become an adviser to a king, not only when the monarch in question

was intelligent enough to be predisposed to learn, but also when that was not the case. Such ideas were already outlined in Plato's writing, but it was through the Stoics (particularly with Chrysippus) that they acquired impact in the Hellenistic and Imperial periods.⁴⁷⁴ It was known that Persaeus, Zeno's favourite pupil, was an adviser to Antigonus Gonatas.⁴⁷⁵ As we have seen above, great number of men of wisdom Strabo mentions, be it philosophers or priests, are described as taking part in political affairs of their countries.

It should be noted that many of the philosophers mentioned in *Geography* in such a connection are Stoics. The Epicureans famously proposed that the philosopher should not engage in politics, although they too had to acknowledge that political order was ultimately relevant for their own detached and peaceful living. The Cynics conceived the sage as a critic of the society, who was a marginal in the sense that he challenged all conventions, including those regarding stately affairs.⁴⁷⁶ In the sense that they do not abstain from participation in political affairs, Strabo's Indian wise men are closer to a Stoic conception of politics than to any other school's ideas on the matter.

Conversely, Strabo's Alexander fulfils the ideal of the philosopher king, as envisaged by the Stoics. Alexander is positively associated with Indian wisdom. The author records that, having heard much about the endurance (καρτερίας) of native men of wisdom, the Macedonian prince was curious to learn more about them. But he thought that, for some reason, it would be inappropriate for him to visit them in person. Far from disrespecting their ancestral customs by forcing them to visit him (οὔτε ἐκείνους βιάζεσθαι παρὰ τὰ πάτρια ποιεῖν τι ἄκοντας), he sent one of his men to converse with them (15.1.63). Apart from his own respectful attitude, the text emphasises that those who took part in this legendary expedition recorded many details about native philosophers and Strabo quotes their reports extensively. In fact, not only Onesicritus, who, as a Cynic philosopher, would have been naturally curious about the native sages, but also the fleet commander Nearchus (15.1.66) and Aristobulus (15.1.61-2) recorded many details about the matter.

⁴⁷⁴ Diogenes Laertius 7.122. See discussion in Rowe 2005.

⁴⁷⁵ Plutarch, *Aratus* 18-23 and Diogenes Laertius 7.6.

⁴⁷⁶ See discussion in Parker 2008: 260-4. See also Brown 1971 and Fowden 1982.

A number of other authors too recorded important data about the Brahmins and Strabo quotes them occasionally (15.1.68 and 15.1.70). But he relies heavily on Alexander's historians (namely Aristobulus, Nearchus and Onesicritus) to describe Indian philosophy. In the indographic tradition, the connection between Alexander and the Brahmins was to become so intimate that later texts show the Macedonian king himself conversing with the wise men, who have the difficult task of making him give up his ambition of conquering the world.⁴⁷⁷

Strabo never mentions the conflict between Alexander and the Brahmins, as reported by Diodorus, Plutarch and Arrian.⁴⁷⁸ The latter clearly shows Alexander acting irrationally for the sake of fame. In his text, the young prince meets the native sages in person and listens to what they have to teach, namely that a man only needs a little piece of land to live off, implying that an attempt to conquer the world could barely be philosophically sustainable. However, we are told, Alexander did not succeed in understanding their wisdom.

In Strabo's work, Augustus too realises the ideal of the philosopher king, to some extent. The author records, for instance, that Tarsus surpasses Athens and Alexandria in philosophical teaching. But contrary to these latter cities, that attract students from across the world, Tarsus sees its distinguished men leaving for other places, particularly for Rome (14.5.14-15). A number of times, as we have seen, the author mentions philosophers as friends and preceptors to highly ranked Roman figures.

However, as noted by Engels, in *Geography*, philosophers and noteworthy intellectuals are mentioned in connection with their native hometowns in Asia Minor, not in connection with Rome, where they might happen to live. Strabo regularly mentions notable figures from the Greek world, but he does not mention their counterparts in the western Mediterranean (here we should note that in his lists of

⁴⁷⁷ The Berlin Papyrus 13044, dating most probably from the first century BC shows Alexander conversing with ten Indian philosophers. This text is quoted in Plutarch (*Alexander*, 64). Similarly the *Alexander Romance* and Palladius' *De gentibus Indiae et Bragmanibus*, show the Macedonian prince being instructed by Calanus and Dandamis. These texts are instances of "mirror of princes" genre that showed kings conversing with wise men. Further examples within this genre include the so-called Letter of Aristeas that shows Ptolemy II Philadelphus conversing with seventy-two Hebrew wise men and the *Milindapanha*, that shows the Indo-Greek king Menander I conversing with the the Buddhist sage Nagasena.

⁴⁷⁸ Diodorus, 17.102-3, Plutarch, *Alexander*, 59 and Arrian *Anabasis* 7.1.-3.

illustrious men, the author is particularly keen on mentioning philosophers, as opposed to, say, statesmen from each region he describes). He clearly states that Romans were not good historians.⁴⁷⁹ In his text, sages from India do come to the emperor, but Augustus' age has created no recording of Indian wisdom. Namely, the Brahmans' way of life was made known by Alexander's companions (such as Onesicritus, Aristobulus and Nearchus) and by Megasthenes only. As private citizens, merchants under Augustus' reign are profit oriented and are far from recording further details on alien wisdom.

⁴⁷⁹ See discussion in Engels 2005.

Conclusion

In this thesis we have seen that the inclusion and, particularly, omission of details serve a number of purposes in Strabo's description of India in book 15. From his many unreliable sources, the author selects data that were ultimately relevant for his political agenda and philosophical programme.

Roman trade with India caused a great impact on the literature of the time. The poets often mentioned eastern commodities and luxury items, sometimes in order to make moralising statements. Strabo reports the most relevant aspects implied in the trade, but he does not include them where they could feature most prominently, in the description of India in book 15. But, throughout *Geography*, trade is often associated with moral degeneration. As he avoids mentioning the east-west trade in book 15, the author allows no space for mentioning the Roman involvement in it; therefore he does not have to mention the war against the Arabs, whereby the Romans intended to control the trade on Indian merchandise.

Such a set of omissions allowed Strabo to give a clean image of the diplomatic relations linking the classical world with India. In fact, he twice mentions the Indian embassy to Augustus: once at the beginning and then, again, at the end of his description. The repetition here echoes what we could read in the *Res Gestae*, which stated that embassies from India came to Augustus repeatedly.

But such diplomatic relations were not new and the text makes clear that, before the Romans, there were always the Greeks. Indian kings and their advisors, the philosophers, first welcomed Alexander. Here Strabo decided to quote extensively one of his unreliable sources, Onesicritus, who reported that the philosophers welcomed Alexander and regarded him as a courageous as well as a contemplative ruler, a philosopher who was, literally, a conquering hero. At a different level, Alexander, as Moses and other such figures, solved that age old dichotomy that conceived philosophy and politics as conflicting ideas. But relying on the same sources, Plutarch and Arrian rendered a different picture, whereby Alexander fights the native kings and kills Indian philosophers.

Related to the theme of peaceful relations linking distant and different regions, there is the leitmotiv, permeating the whole *Geography*, of the civilising mission of Rome. In fact, Strabo often starts his descriptions by reminding us of local history, namely the ancient inhabitants' barbaric customs; he would then mention in passing that, with the Roman intervention, the natives changed their ways for a civilised mode of life. The Romans and particularly Augustus assume the mission of civilising the world. Within such a set of ideas, Strabo ascribes a barbaric facet to his India, where the natives indulge in sexual licentiousness, the kings are cowardly and women rule. Such a state of affairs, it would seem, is just waiting for a Roman intervention, although Strabo is careful enough never to state that the Romans should conquer India (as the Augustan poets clearly did).

To some extent, we have seen that there is a wondrous element to Strabo's India. The author quotes a great number of cultural and natural wonders that make a perfect scenario for fantastic stories, such as that of Eudoxus, which he tells with extensive details, only to dismiss it as an instance of fiction. In *Geography*, India is a nearly mythical space that can only be reached by charismatic world leaders. As truly Herculean figures, only Greeks and Romans are destined to reach such a distant place,

by land or sea. Strabo forgets to mention the Persian expedition to India and dismisses the stories reporting campaigns led by Egyptians and Assyrians (recorded exhaustively by Diodorus). In his version India may be a stage for epic journeys, but only for Greek and Roman heroes.

From a different perspective, we can say that, as there is no native history in India (Strabo dismisses stories reporting autochthonous foundational figures), Alexander's campaigns there are the country's only past. Once again, in India as elsewhere, history begins with the Greeks.

In addition to the political agenda, Strabo's work conveys a philosophical programme. We have seen that, apart from defining geographical writing as philosophy, the author frequently outlines philosophers' life stories. This could be highly important if we consider ancient philosophy as a way of life, as Hadot has argued. Certainly, the book on India provides many biographical outlines showing how different men (and women) may live philosophically. But while Diodorus and Arrian portrayed the native sages as noble savages living naked, Strabo complicates the picture by associating Indian philosophers simultaneously with frugality and luxury. In his version, native philosophers, as other men, are admired by some and criticised by others, on equivalent terms. Failing to be a utopia, Strabo's India is a space associated with philosophical debate par excellence, where there are many questions and no perfect answers, as we have seen in Chapter 3.

Referring to *Indika* type of texts, Clarke has argued that they convey "an abstraction, a completed space, made out with the fragmentary accounts of different places that make each country."⁴⁸⁰ This is true if we consider *Geography's* book 15 as a typical *Indika*, a collection of strange and wondrous phenomena randomly put together. In fact, as we have seen earlier, India as described here is, simultaneously, full of barbarians and noble savages, wonderful trees and horrific animals. However, this thesis has emphasised that the abstractions Clarke refers to serve agendas. Particularly, Strabo's India is made out with carefully selected fragments, with contents that are relevant for his work's political and philosophical frameworks.

⁴⁸⁰ Clarke 2001:39-41.

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