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## About the location of *Ptolemais Thêrôn* (Ptolemais of the Hunts) in the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*: a short note

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### Résumé

Dans un article publié en 2011, M. Bukharin remet en cause l'interprétation communément admise d'un passage du *Périple de la mer Érythrée*, dans lequel Ptolémaïs des Chasses est localisée par rapport à un lieu dit τὸ πέρασ τῆς ἀνακομιδῆς. La confrontation avec un papyrus du 1<sup>er</sup> siècle ap. J.-C., dans lequel il est question de difficultés pour entrer dans le lagon de Bérénice à cause de vents contraire, contient le nom ἀνακομιδή. Ce papyrus invalide l'interprétation de M. Bukharin, conforte l'interprétation habituelle et indique que τὸ πέρασ τῆς ἀνακομιδῆς était vraisemblablement un expression en usage chez les professionnels de la mer Érythrée.

### Abstract

In an article published in 2011, M. Bukharin challenges the commonly accepted interpretation of a passage from the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, in which Ptolemais of the Hunts is located with reference to a place called τὸ πέρασ τῆς ἀνακομιδῆς. The comparison with a papyrus of the 1st century AD, in which someone reports great difficulty in entering the lagoon of Berenice because of contrary winds, contains the name ἀνακομιδή. This papyrus invalidates M. Bukharin's interpretation, supports the usual interpretation, and indicates that τὸ πέρασ τῆς ἀνακομιδῆς is likely to be an expression in use among Erythraean sea professionals

In a previous article about Ptolemais I dealt with the question of Ptolemais' location<sup>1</sup>. However I deliberately excluded from this section the interpretation of a problematic passage from the *Periplus* defended by M. Bukharin, for discussing it would have exceeded the limits of the paper<sup>2</sup>. In the meantime the "L'appel du Large 2" meeting gave me the opportunity to address this issue again and properly reflect on M. Bukharin's ideas<sup>3</sup>.

### 1) The enigmatic phrase τὸ πέρασ τῆς ἀνακομιδῆς

*Ptolemais Thêrôn* is the first *emporion* and harbour after Berenikê reported by the anonymous author of the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*. However the location of this place raises a serious problem, since an expression which has by no means a clear sense turns up in the text :

Μετὰ δὲ τοὺς Μοσχοφάγους ἐπὶ θαλάσσης μικρὸν ἐμπόριον ἔστιν, ἀπέχον † τὸ πέρασ τῆς ἀνακομιδῆς † σταδίου περι τετρακισχίλιους, Πτολεμαῖς ἢ τῶν θηρῶν λεγομένη (...)<sup>4</sup>.

In his translation L. Casson decided to rule out the words between *cruces*, making the English text read as follows : "Beyond the Moschophagoi, about 4000 stades distant ... on the sea is a small port of trade called Ptolemais Thêrôn."<sup>5</sup>In the second part of his commentary (*Commentary B. Textual, lexicographical, grammatical*), L. Casson justifies himself by explaining that this phrase did not belong to the original text :

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<sup>1</sup>Schneider 2019, p. 15-20.

<sup>2</sup>Schneider 2019, p. 18, n. 6.

<sup>3</sup>This paper is dedicated to the memory of Jehan Desanges who kindly read this paper not long before he passed away.

<sup>4</sup>*Per. Mar. Rubr.* 3 (text from L. Casson's edition).

<sup>5</sup>Casson 1989, p. 51

“These words, grammatically unsound, are probably an intrusive gloss to supply the starting point of the distance of 4000 stades. For ἀνακομιδή here must mean ‘return’ (...) and the ‘end of return’ would be Berenikê.<sup>6</sup>”

Actually L. Casson followed H. Frisk's opinion, according to whom τὸ πέρασ τῆς ἀνακομιδῆς was an explanatory gloss of the verb ἀπέχον<sup>7</sup>. As such these words had to be removed from the edited text. S. Belfiore, who authored the latest commented translation of the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, shares these conclusions.<sup>8</sup> Looking back to earlier commentators, attention must be paid to the long note by C. Müller<sup>9</sup>, who already regarded this expression as a corrupted reading. He also mentioned – and criticized – the emendations suggested by his predecessors (ἀπέχον τῆς πέραν τῆς ἀνατολικῆς ; ἀπέχον τῶν πέραν τῆς ἀνακομιδῆς ; ἀπέχον τῆς τῶν πέραν ἀνακομιδῆς – the third one was severely judged). In his opinion, this now unintelligible expression was originally intended to avoid a confusion between *Berenikê* of the Trogydites (in Egypt) and another *Berenikê* located in the southern Red Sea area (according to Pliny the Elder<sup>10</sup>). Thus C. Müller suggested two heavy corrections in which he restored the name Berenikê – showing preference for the second one – : ἀπέχον [ἀπὸ Βερνίκης] τῆς ἀνά Κοπτικήν ; ἀπέχον [Βερνίκης τῆς κατὰ] τὸ πέρασ τῆς ἀνωκομιδῆς.<sup>11</sup>

Today it is widely agreed that this passage either contains a corruption, or is an explanatory gloss. In addition, almost all commentators acknowledge that τὸ πέρασ τῆς ἀνακομιδῆς points to *Berenikê* in Egypt. Yet M. Bukharin, who reviewed almost all academic literature dealing with this question, expresses doubt about these opinions and pushes forward an alternative interpretation.

#### b) M. Bukharin's interpretation

To M. Bukharin's eyes indeed, all previous commentators were mistaken (this was the reason why he methodically examined their hypothesis and conclusions). Contrary to the rest of scholars, he contends that the place lying 4000 stades from Ptolemais must be searched south of Ptolemais instead of north: in other words, he rejects the idea that the *Periplus* refers to *Berenikê* on the Egyptian shore of the Red Sea. There is no need to recap the main arguments presented in his paper, which can be easily accessed by the reader. For now it suffices to say that, in his opinion, this southern place must be identified to Anfila Bay, where the obsidian-producing area mentioned by the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* lies<sup>12</sup>. M. Bukharin's statement implies that the reference point lying 4000 stades south of Ptolemais was not a precise spot (such as a town, a village, a promontory, a lookout, an altar ...) but an anonymous and vague area. To better understand Bukharin's point of view, let us quote a passage where the main points of his reasoning are concentrated :

To sum up, adding the distance from Ptolemais of the Hunts to Adulis (3000 stadia), from Adulis to the island of Oreine (200 stadia) and from the island of Oreine to Anfile Bay (...) (800 stadia), one arrives at 4000 stadia from τὸ πέρασ τῆς ἀνακομιδῆς to Ptolemais of the Hunts. However, ἀνακομιδή here is not to be understood as "the attainment of the point of departure on the way back", but as "the end of sailing from" or "the start of

<sup>6</sup>Casson 1989, p. 245.

<sup>7</sup>Frisk 1927, p.104: “Les mots ressemblent plutôt à une glose à Βερνίκη, provenant soit d'un lecteur égyptien pour lequel Βερνίκη était le point extrême vers le sud de l'Égypte, soit d'un glossateur postérieur qui, donnant comme Fabricius à ἀνακομιδή le sens faux d'importation ou de voyage vers le nord, a par là voulu indiquer le point de départ de l'auteur. »

<sup>8</sup>Contrary to Casson, S. Belfiore translates the problematic words: “Oltre i Moscofagi, a circa 4.000 stadi di distanza [il termine del ritorno], c'è Ptolemais detta Theron ('delle Cacce')”. In his commentary, however, he points out that “L'espressione τὸ πέρασ τῆς ἀνακομιδῆς appare corrotta e non risolta in modo soddisfacente dalle proposte degli editori (v. Müller 1855, 258); Frisk 1927, 104 la riteneva piuttosto una glossa (ad ἀπέχον, con riferimento a -Βερνίκη), e come tale dovrebbe essere espunta.” (Belfiore 2013).

<sup>9</sup>Müller 1855, p. 258.

<sup>10</sup>Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis historia*, 6, 170. On this *Berenikê*, see Desanges 2008, p. 67-70.

<sup>11</sup>See Frisk 1927, p. 104 : « Des corrections proposées pour apporter remède à cette corruptèle (on les trouve chez Müller ad. loc.) aucune ne satisfait.”

<sup>12</sup>*Periplus Rubri Maris*, 5

the way back". This place had no special name— it was interesting for the author of the *PME* for its one peculiarity: the presence of obsidian there. It was for this reason that he designated the 'nameless' reference point for the calculation of the distance to Ptolemais of the Hunts with such an unusual notion, τὸ πέρασ τῆς ἀνακομιδῆς.<sup>13</sup>

In order to strengthen his demonstration, M. Bukharin adds that in the *Periplus* the prefix *ana* applies to a southbound sailing (from Egypt to the Bab al-Mandab Straits and beyond)<sup>14</sup> :

These fragments show that the verb of motion prefixed by ἀνά in the context of navigation in the ancient Erythraean Sea means 'to sail from (Egypt)' in the *PME*, corresponding exactly to the sense of the notion τὸ πέρασ τῆς ἀνακομιδῆς as the 'end point of sailing from (Egypt)', or 'the end point of delivery from (Egypt)'. (...) Rather than seeing the informations on τὸ πέρασ τῆς ἀνακομιδῆς as a later insertion or a gloss, it should be viewed as a piece of data dating to the Ptolemaic times.<sup>15</sup>

No doubt M. Bukharin's original analysis is of interest but has some weaknesses. In particular, even if one is willing to accept that in the *Periplus* the prefix *ana* carries the idea of an outbound journey, there can be no question that the noun ἀνακομιδή means "return" (see below, p. xx). Thus Bukharin's interpretations of this word, particularly when he suggests "end point of sailing from", may far from being convincing. In addition, one can hardly share the author's view that τὸ πέρασ τῆς ἀνακομιδῆς is a kind of indefinite place (the obsidian producing area), since the *Periplus'* measures constantly relate to identified spots. On the other hand, M. Bukharin is right in reconsidering the status of this expression, which may not be rejected as a mere corruption or additional gloss.

Coming to my point of view, I think that the expression τὸ πέρασ τῆς ἀνακομιδῆς belonged to the technical language used by the "Erythraean Sea professionals", viz. the *emporoi* and sailors who plied the Erythraean Sea. This milieu is documented by the *Periplus* and to a lesser extent by Pliny the Elder. This idea is supported by an important piece of evidence, namely the papyrus *P.CtYBR inv. 624*, to which I turn now.

### c) The *Periplus* in the light of the Yale papyrus

In fact this enigmatic expression may be satisfactorily enlightened by this document which, to the best of my knowledge it has not been taken into consideration by previous commentators, including L. Casson and S. Belfiore. Neither did M. Bukharin take it into account, for no mention of this document turns up in his article. The Yale papyrus was recently edited and published by M. Peppard with a translation and an excellent commentary. In spite of several lacunae and obscure words, the general meaning of this letter sent by a slave to his master can be grasped. The former, who apparently was engaged in the Red Sea and Horn of Africa business, first informs the latter of his late arrival at Berenikê and then addresses him several requests<sup>16</sup>. The document is dated to year 1 of Emperor Nerva Caesar Augustus, *Pauni 11*, which corresponds to June 5, 97 AD, making this papyrus more or less contemporary with the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*— in addition, it emanates from the same professional milieu. Substantial data relating to the "Indo-Roman" trade can be retrieved from this piece of evidence<sup>17</sup>, but with respect to the present study,

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<sup>13</sup>Bukharin 2011, p. 227. One must notice that, like a number of scholars, Bukharin locates Ptolemais Theron in the vicinity of today Aqiq.

<sup>14</sup>H. Frisk made this observation long before Bukharin: « Il faut comprendre τῆς ἀνακ. non (...) au sens de 'importation vers le nord' mais plutôt de 'importation vers le sud', ἀνά, ἄνω etc. indiquant en Égypte et dans la mer Rouge la direction vers le sud, κατά etc. au contraire celle vers le nord. » (104)

<sup>15</sup>Bukharin 2011, p. 227-228. However, as Jehan Desanges recalls (personal comm.), the same prefix may point to the opposite direction, as the result of a different point of view. See Strabo, 2, 5, 18, about the Persian and Arabian Gulfs (ὁ δὲ Περσικὸς καὶ Ἀράβιος ἀπὸ τῆς νοτίας ἀναχέονται θαλάττης).

<sup>16</sup>See Peppard 2009, p. 193-196.

<sup>17</sup>See, in particular, De Romanis 2020, p. 56-58.

we just need to focus on lines 1-7, where the sender informs the recipient that the boats have managed to safely call in at Berenikê. The following lines are reproduced from M. Peppard's edition :

[ 14-18 ] . . .[.] .εσ . . . .  
παρα [ 10-12 ] ρ . κυρια .[ 4-6 ]  
τὰ πλοῖα ἀκινδύνως τὰ ἐν τῆι  
ἀνακομιδῆι καθορμισθῆναι εἰς τὴν  
ἱερωτάτην Βερενεΐκην, ἄνεμοι γὰρ  
ἀντίοι εἰσι, καὶ τὰ πλοῖα ἔστη ἀπ[ὸ] ὥρῶν  
πέντε τοῦ εἰσελθεῖν. Ἐν πλείτταις

The editor translates the text as follows<sup>18</sup>: “[*lacuna*] safely the boats, which during the return trip were brought into harbor at most-holy Berenike<sup>19</sup>. For the winds are against us, and the boats stalled from entering for five hours”.

Notwithstanding the lacuna and the unclear genitival group ἀπ[ὸ] ὥρῶν πέντε<sup>20</sup>, the general meaning of these lines is not a subject of debate : contrary winds kept a certain number of boats (one of them carrying the sender) from entering (εἰσελθεῖν) the harbour of *Berenikê* ; eventually they were safely brought into the port (καθορμίζω<sup>21</sup>). To put it in other words, a group of boats had to wait several hours before they could enter the 400-500 m. channel connecting the sea to the lagoon and reach the harbor.<sup>22</sup> This natural feature was common to both *Berenikê* and *Myos Hormos*, the latter also having a windy entrance, according to Strabo.<sup>23</sup>

Let us now consider the noun τὰπλοῖα, joined to the expression τὰἐντῆἀνακομιδῆι, which functions as an attributive (thus this part of the sentence may be rewritten τὰἐντῆἀνακομιδῆῖπλοῖα). According to Liddell-Scott's dictionary the noun ἀνακομιδῆ was used in four meanings : 1) "a carrying

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<sup>18</sup>Peppard 2009, p. 197.

<sup>19</sup>Peppard 2009, p. 196, comments on this feature. He finally (and convincingly) states “that it is possible that the author does not refer to any particular gods or religious activities in Berenike ; rather, he invokes the port city itself. Berenike might be ‘most-holy’ because it saved him and his ships on this occasion, just as it had saved thousands of other ships over the centuries in its harbor sanctuary”. No doubt the feeling of relief can penetrate into the toponymy : compare with the “Saviour harbour” (ὁ τῆς Σωτείρας λιμῆν) located on the Red Sea coast somewhere north of Ptolemais *Thêrôn* (Strab. 16, 4, 7) : “Then there is Savior Harbor, so called by some commanders who happened to have been saved from great dangers.” Σώτεια was frequently used as an epithet of protecting goddesses, such as Τύχη.

<sup>20</sup>Peppard 2009, p. 198 : “The meaning of the temporal phrase ἀπὸ ὥρῶν πέντε is not entirely clear. The residue obscures the word that I have reconstructed ἀπό, and although I think that to be the best conjecture, the precise meaning of what the resulting phrase means - to be stalled ἀπὸ ὥρῶν πέντε - is uncertain. For example, it could mean that the boats were stalled ‘after five hours’ of trying to enter the harbor, or it could mean that they were stalled ‘beyond a period of five hours’, that is to say, ‘for more than five hours’. Since the author seems to be writing from a safe position within the harbor at Berenike, the overall sense of the phrase is this: there was a difficult entry into the harbor due to the winds, and the process lasted for five hours.”

<sup>21</sup>According to the French dictionary (Bailly) : "faire entrer dans un port, faire aborder"; according to Liddell -Scott : "to bring (a ship) into harbour; bring to anchor; pass. : to come into harbour, put in". M. Peppard notices that καθορμίζω in the passive voice appears in the papyrus *W. Chresth.* 1, 2, ll. 19-21 (246 AD). In the papyrus *P. Laur.* 1. 6, l. 4-6, dating to the reign of Trajan, (97-117 p. C.), καθορμίζω (in the active voice) is used within the context of navigation on the Nile : *naukleroï* are not allowed to sail at night or on bad weather and have to cast the anchor in designated and safe ports (τειαςμηνοκτιμηδ' ἐν χ[ειμωνιπλέων, ἀλλάκα-]θορμίζωνἐπιτῶνἀποδε[δειγμένωνκαὶἀσφαλεσ-] τάτων ὄρμων, καθ' ἡμέραν [δέπλέων -ca.-? - ]. About δεδειγμένος ("designated"), see Casson 1989, p. 272-274, quoting also *P. Hib.* 198, l. 110-122.

<sup>22</sup>For an up-to-date description of the lagoon of Berenikê and its channel, see M. A. Woźniak, "Berenike, why there? Environmental, economic and logistic conditions of the Hellenistic port/base location", to be published in the proceedings of the Red Sea 9 conference.

<sup>23</sup>Strabo, 16, 4, 5 : Μυὸς ὄρμον ὃν καὶ Ἀφροδίτης ὄρμον καλεῖσθαι, λιμένα μέγαν, τὸν εἰσπλοῦν ἔχοντα σκολίον (“Then there is *Myos Hormos* - also called the Anchorage of Aphrodite - a large harbor that has a winding entrance”). Also see *Periplus Maris Rubri*, 1.

away again, recovery"; 2) "recovery" (in a medical context); 3) "return" ; 4) "bringing up". In the context of the papyrus, the only satisfactory option is the third one, as recognized by M. Peppard : " the boats coming back" ; " the boats sailing back". The adverb ἀκινδύως, which stands between the noun and the attribute group may point to a safe mooring in the harbour. However an alternative interpretation may be : the boats having safely made the return journey. Whatever solution one prefers, there is no indication of the place the sender came from<sup>24</sup>. However, as M. Peppard rightly observed, the *Barbaroi* are hinted at in line 11, a name which points to the inhabitants of the Barbarikê. In the first century AD, the coastal regions of East Africa, from approximately *Ptolemais* to the Cape Gardafui, were called by this name which was an alternative to the older *Trôgodytikê*<sup>25</sup>. Thus one may reasonably conjecture that the boats were sailing back from Adulis, the most important East African *emporion* at this time, but a place of trade located outside the Bab al-Mandab straits is equally plausible.

Be that as it may, we can say with certainty that the adjectival phrase ἐντῆ ἀνακομιδῆ refers to the inbound itinerary, i. e. from the southern Red Sea and the Horn of Africa to Berenikê, whose name is so obvious that the sender does not even mention it. On the other hand, such an expression does not occur elsewhere in the extant papyrological evidence, as far as I know. Thus I am inclined to think that it was part of the *emporoi*'s technical language. This idea is all the more plausible for the reason that another occurrence appears in the line 6, according to M. Peppard<sup>26</sup> : "The word ἀντίος is unexpected in a documentary papyrus of the imperial period. It usually appears in poetry and Ionic prose, but ἐναντίος is more common elsewhere. There is perhaps then a specific nautical usage of the word or even a literary allusion (...). It is also possible that the word is αἴτιος, which could convey a similar meaning : contrary winds would be the "reason" that they came into harbor at Berenikê. It appears though, that part of the oblique stroke of the *nu* is visible, and ἀντίος is the preferred reading."

Let us go back to the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*. If we admit that ἀνακομιδή was an idiom spread among the Erythraean Sea professionals and pointing to the "inbound journey" (terminating at Berenikê in the case of the Yale papyrus), then it is conceivable that they alternatively called *Berenikê* the "final stop of the journey", i. e., τὸ πέρασ τῆς ἀνακομιδῆς. Here the word πέρασ carries its usual meaning of "end", "limit", "boundary" (in the local sense<sup>27</sup>), of which other instances can be found in both literary sources and papyri<sup>28</sup>. As a consequence, this phrase far from being a corruption or a gloss, belonged to the original text of the *Periplus*, whose sense becomes now quite clear : the author states that *Ptolemais* lies 4000 stades from (= south of) the "terminus of the inbound journey", viz. *Berenikê*. The only remaining problem is the accusative τό instead of the genitive τοῦ, which is the usual construction of ἀπέχειν (the preposition ἀπό is alternatively used). Irrespective of this issue, the Yale papyrus fully corroborates L. Casson's statement (above, p. Xx), except for the fact that this expression may not be an "intrusive gloss". At this stage, one may wonder why, according to the *Periplus*, "the final stop of the inbound journey" was *Berenikê*, given that ships could call in at another port (λιμὴν) on the Egyptian Red Sea coast, namely *Myos Hormos*<sup>29</sup>. There is no easy answer to this question. I would cautiously suggest that this technical expression may show that *Myos Hormos* was of secondary importance at the time of the *Periplus*. This assumption is consistent with L. Casson's observation, that while Strabo's remarks " seem to indicate that in his day *Myos Hormos* was the most important", " statements in the *Periplus* point to the balance having tipped in favor of

<sup>24</sup>In Cassius Dio, 51, 25, the preposition ἐκ is used to introduce the place of origin (ἐπεθύμησεν ἀμόνασθαι τοὺς Θραῖκας τοὺς ἐν τῇ ἀνακομιδῇ τῇ ἐκ τῆς Μυσίας λυπήσαντας).

<sup>25</sup>See *Periplus Maris Rubri*, 2; 5-7. In Ptolemy's *Geography* the *Barbarikê* has different boundaries. On the sailing schedule between the Egyptian ports and the *Barbarikê*, see Casson 1989, p. 288 ; De Romanis 2020, p. 55-58.

<sup>26</sup>Peppard 2009, p. 197. This unclear word ψιττακίων (ll. 10-11) belongs to the same technical language.

<sup>27</sup>In a non-local sense, πέρασ means "limit", "end", in opposition to ἀρχή.

<sup>28</sup>For instance, Strabo, 3, 5, 5 (= Poseidonios, F26); 4, 1, 3; 14, 1, 2; *P. Oxy.* 3, 503; *P. Oxy.* 49, 3482; *SB* 20, 14199.

<sup>29</sup>*Periplus Maris Rubri*, 1 (*Myos Hormos* and *Berenikê* are simultaneously "designated harbors", *emporion* and ports)

*Bereniké*<sup>30</sup>. This impression is echoed by S. Sidebotham according to whom Berenike operated on a reduced scale after the second century BC until the advent of the Romans : “ The Roman acquisition of Egypt in 30 BC spurred Berenike’s fortunes, especially in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD.<sup>31</sup>”

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<sup>30</sup>Casson 1989, p. 13-14.

<sup>31</sup>Sidebotham et al. (2020), p. 12.