

Let's go Periplousing! Reading Hanno in the Elementary Greek Classroom

In the fifth century BCE, the Carthaginian king Hanno led an expedition through the Pillars of Herakles and down the western coast of Africa for the purpose of founding colonies. The adventure was commemorated on an inscription in a Carthaginian temple of Kronos and eventually translated into Greek. The text describes the strange peoples – friendly and not – and animals met by the Carthaginian expedition (including crocodiles and gorillas) as well as the exotic countryside and an active volcano.

Hanno's *periplous* makes an ideal text for the elementary classroom. It is less than one hundred lines long, divided into eighteen sentences. We devote about six class meetings to this exercise. The grammar is sufficiently straightforward, but provides an opportunity to review basic forms and essential vocabulary, to discuss the peculiarities of vowel and consonant contraction, and to become comfortable with the layers of subordination so common in authentic Greek texts. The text also allows me to introduce forms not yet met but long anticipated (subjunctive and optative). The vocabulary, also, is fairly standard. My notes were keyed to the Dickinson College Core Greek Vocabulary List of the most common five hundred words (representing about 65% of all words encountered in a non-technical text). The four page handout includes a one-page map, and a one-page biography of Hanno.

The text inspired lively class discussion on travel and ships, religion, geography, topography, and weather. The students found most intriguing the aspects of translation that the text forefronts: Hanno's expedition required the services of interpreters, and even local interpreters could not communicate with all the area tribes. Furthermore, this text was not originally written in Greek, but rather translated from Punic, giving the students a palpable

connection with the Greek translator. The act of translation is not an isolated activity, but rather it is universal, and the students could see that their Greek translator had some of the same difficulties with understanding the Punic original that they were experiencing with the Greek. This emphasizes for the students that authentic Greek is not universally polished and proofed.

Finally, it is rare that a student has the opportunity to read a Greek work in its entirety, and this yields a sense of accomplishment and success. Although it was a short text, the Greek is respectable, and my students found it challenging but not insurmountable. After reading Hanno in Greek, they handled excerpts from Arrian's *periplous* of the Euxine Sea like pros, they sailed through Homer *Iliad* book 6, and they have no fear of what awaits them in intermediate Greek. In this presentation I will discuss further my experiences with teaching this text and the challenges that it presents.