

## Hanno's *Periplus*: the Human-Animal Transition

This presentation provides an analysis of Hanno's *Periplus*, a short Greek prose text dated to around 500 BCE. A periplus is a description by a narrator of a particular coastline. The *Periplus* of Hanno presents itself as the Greek translation of a Punic account of the navigator Hanno's trip down the western coast of Africa to found colonies. Previous scholarly work on the *Periplus* has debated whether Hanno was a historical person and if his journey actually took place (Palmer 1927, Harris 1928, Mund-Dopchie 1989). Scholars have also attempted to match locations mentioned in the text with modern, geographical locations (Kaeppel 1936, Schoff 1913). To complement this work, I offer an ecocritical analysis of Hanno's encounters with the native people of Africa. By ecocritical analysis, I mean that I will focus on Hanno's interpretation of natural elements in the text, particularly animals. The transition in the text of the descriptions of native people from positive and human to negative and animal reveals a larger, ancient association between animalism and frontiers.

Hanno first moves beyond the realm of what human civilization he knows when he sails outside the Pillars of Hercules (Romm 1992, Jacob 1991). Although Hanno himself is Carthaginian and therefore African, he treats those he meets on the western coast as entirely different from his own people. With the exception of the Lixitae, who are called *φίλοι* and employed as translators (section 6), each confrontation Hanno has with native populations is complicated by differences in their physical appearance and behavior. Hanno finds the populations of southern Africa unapproachable, frequently describing them as *ἄγριοι* and associating them with animals (7, 9, 18). In contrast with the Lixitae, these populations are unappealing and difficult to approach. For example, one group Hanno encounters is described as wearing animal skins and throwing rocks (*ἀνθρώπων ἀγρίων, δέρματα θήρεια ἐνημμένων, οἱ*

πέτροις βάλλοντες ἀπήραζαν ἡμᾶς, κωλύοντες ἐκβῆναι, 9). Though these people are referred to as ἄνθρωποι, their role is that of the savage animals whose costumes they wear.

According to Hanno, the African natives become less human and more animal over time, culminating with the Γορίλλαι. The Gorillai, as the Lixitae call them, have both the appearance and behavior of animals (18). Despite being called ἄνθρωποι, they are fully transformed by Hanno's depiction into animals. According to Hanno, the Gorillai are savage (ἀνθρώπων ἀγρίων) and hairy (δασεῖαι); they also bite, scratch, and climb (κρημνοβάται ὄντες καὶ τοῖς πέτροις ἀμυνόμενοι...δάκνουσαί τε καὶ σπαράττουσαι, 18). Hanno fully dehumanizing the Gorillai by treating them as animals. He interacts with the Gorillai as a human hunter would with his animal prey. The Carthaginians round them up, kill them, and deface their bodies for trophies (Ἀποκτείναντες μέντοι αὐτὰς ἐξεδείραμεν καὶ τὰς δορὰς ἐκομίσαμεν εἰς Καρχηδόνα, 18). This scene in the *Periplus* marks the end of the transition of animalistic human to fully animal.

Whether or not a man named Hanno took a journey down the western coast of Africa, the depictions of people in this text are colored by biased associations made about people based on where they live. Hanno treats the climate and landscape in the southern parts of his voyage in a hyperbolic way (Jacob 1991), and his descriptions of his interactions with the native populations are similarly extreme. Since populations in the text become more animalistic as they approach the edges of the world, and the characterization of native people becomes overall more negative, the text presents a negative, ancient association between frontier lands and animalism.

## Bibliography

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