

# The World According to Cosmas Indicopleustes – Concepts and Illustrations of an Alexandrian Merchant and Monk

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This paper is designed to give an insight into the person commonly called Cosmas Indicopleustes and his work, the Χριστιανική Τοπογραφία (henceforth referred to as *Christian Topography*). We will take a look at the lavishly illustrated manuscripts, the cosmological model propagated therein, and Cosmas' knowledge about parts of what we call the Far East—China, India and Sri Lanka. Moreover, we will examine whether Cosmas can be interpreted as a transcultural person according to Wolfgang Welsch's definition. Welsch developed his concept of transculturality from 1991 onwards,<sup>1</sup> feeling that under the pressure of a constantly growing globalization, the common notion of "culture", earmarked by Herder as a homogeneous, spherical and closed entity,<sup>2</sup> should be revised. Welsch does not think the concepts of multiculturalism and interculturalism to be fruitful alternatives, since, in his view, they perpetuate the notion that different cultures are somehow antagonistic, even though a peaceful *modus vivendi* is desired. Welsch proposes that, nowadays, formerly homogeneous cultures permeate each other, and in this sense living in this world has become transcultural.

It is not the scope of this paper to evaluate Welsch's theory as a whole.<sup>3</sup> He has, however, always stressed that transculturality is not only a phenomenon among a great multitude of people, but also a category at the individual level;<sup>4</sup> moreover, despite the fact that it is universally existent today, he claims transculturality has been there since ancient times.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, it seems legitimate to examine whether Cosmas Indicopleustes fits his concept.

## 1. Cosmas – a mysterious person

Trying to trace Cosmas as a person has always been difficult. While there is a wealth of images of authors from antiquity or late antiquity—be they

realistic or fictitious—nobody seems to have even tried to depict Cosmas. Ulrich Harsch, who in 1997 started a tremendous website with electronic texts of various kinds—called *Bibliotheca Augustana*<sup>6</sup>—gives the picture reproduced here as figure 1, when referring to Cosmas.



Fig. 1: ‘Cosmas’ as depicted in the *Bibliotheca Augustana*; courtesy of Ulrich Harsch.

Professor Harsch adds the following caption, though: “*Monachus anonymus (effigies Cosmae non exstat)*” (an anonymous monk (a picture of Cosmas does not exist)). We will be able to clarify the identity of this person later.

Furthermore, there is quite a controversy about the name of this intriguing author; it started in the seventeenth century, when the Dutch scholar Isaac Voss claimed that Cosmas was not the real name of the author of the *Christian Topography*, but rather a nickname, prompted by his preoccupation with cosmological matters.<sup>7</sup> It is hard to prove or disprove this statement, but it is a fact that the name Cosmas—as well as the epithet *μοναχός*, which makes him a monk—only occurs in one of the manuscripts dating from the eleventh century.<sup>8</sup>

Also, his other, even more famous epithet, Ἰνδικοπλεύστης (the one who sailed to India), is doubtful. At any rate, it is a scholarly invention, based on the portions of his work in which he displays some knowledge about India. Unfortunately, he does not say anywhere that he actually visited the subcontinent—there is only one episode in which he relates that he embarked on a sea voyage to India, but owing to stormy weather and superstitious beliefs, the passengers convinced the captain that he should

break off the journey and hasten to the nearest port, which happened to be in Africa (*Top. Chr.* 2.30).<sup>9</sup> Usually, the author openly tells his readers when he has visited a place he describes, but not so about India. For Sri Lanka, he explicitly mentions a merchant named Sopatros who provided him with information for a substantial portion of his narrative.

Since we will never find out if he was in India, or what his real name was, and since both Cosmas and Indicopleustes are possibly appropriate denominations, we may as well continue naming him in this way.

All the information we get about Cosmas is gleaned from his work. According to it, he wrote the *Christian Topography* about twenty-five years after he visited the Ethiopian city of Adule in the year that the Axumite king, Caleb Ella Asbeha<sup>10</sup>, went to war against the Himyarites in Southern Arabia. This campaign started sometime between the years 522 and 525, which suggests that the *Topography* was written between the years 547 and 550 (*Top. Chr.* 2.54-63).<sup>11</sup> Also, the fact that Cosmas mentions two eclipses appears to corroborate this, as he is probably referring to the solar eclipse on February 6<sup>th</sup> and to the lunar eclipse on August 17<sup>th</sup> of the year 547.<sup>12</sup>

From *Top. Chr.* 2.1, in which he addresses a certain Pamphilus, at whose request he began his work on the *Christian Topography*, we learn that Cosmas considers Alexandria his own city—whether he was born there, we do not know, but at least around the year 550 his life seems to have been centred there.<sup>13</sup> From the same passage we learn that Cosmas seems to have been a somewhat elderly man at that time; at least he was suffering from several diseases that might intimate old age:

[...] ἐνοχλῶν ἡμῖν περὶ τούτου οὐ διέλειπες, ἀσθενῶν ἡμῶν τυγχανόντων τῷ σώματι, ταῖς τε ὄψεσι καὶ τῇ ξηρότητι τῆς γαστρὸς πιεζομένων, καὶ συνεχῶς λοιπὸν ἐκ τούτου ἀσθενείαις συχναῖς περιπιπτότων [...]

[...] and never ceased to importune us about this work, enfeebled though we were in body, afflicted with ophthalmia and costiveness of the bowels, and as the result suffering afterwards from constant attacks of illness; [...]<sup>14</sup>

In the same paragraph, Cosmas also tells us something about his education. He clearly did not take pride at all in worldly erudition:

[...] ἄλλως τε δὲ καὶ τῆς ἔξωθεν ἐγκυκλίου παιδείας λειπομένων

καὶ ῥητορικῆς τέχνης ἀμοιρούντων καὶ στωμυλῖαι λόγων ἢ κομπῶ  
 χαρακτῆρι συνθεῖναι λόγον οὐκ εἰδότες, καὶ ταῖς τοῦ βίου πλοκαῖς  
 ἀσχολουμένων.

[...] while besides we were deficient in the school-learning of the  
 Pagans, without any knowledge of the rhetorical art, ignorant how  
 to compose a discourse in a fluent and embellished style, and were  
 besides occupied with the complicated affairs of everyday life.

This statement seems to be true, judging from the language and style displayed in the *Christian Topography*. While there are numerous passages of either confused content or reiterating thoughts, both of which defy any precepts of ancient rhetorical art, these incongruities are also found on the grammatical level. We cannot expect classical Attic grammar from an Alexandrian writer of the sixth century A.D., but Cosmas' sometimes very long (and not always coherent) sentences are not a sign of a particular language variety, but of a lack of rhetorical training. Whenever he uses absolute nominatives, employs incongruent case structures or confuses singular and plural, it is hard to tell whether these are colloquialisms or errors that went unnoticed by a rhetorically unskilled mind.<sup>15</sup>

However, there is another sort of learning that the Christian whom we call Cosmas regarded as much more valuable than the "pagan" way of instruction—his authorities are the Bible and a certain bishop who deserves our attention:

Αὐτὸς οὐδὲν ἤττον ἐνοχλῶν ἡμῖν οὐ διέλειπες, ὡς λόγον ἡμᾶς ἔγγραφον  
 ἐκθεῖναι [...] οὐδ' ἐξ ἑμαυτοῦ πλασάμενος ἢ στοχασάμενος, ἀλλ' ἐκ τῶν  
 θείων Γραφῶν παιδευθεῖς, καὶ διὰ ζώσης δὲ φωνῆς παραλαβὼν ὑπὸ τοῦ  
 θειοτάτου ἀνδρὸς καὶ μεγάλου διδασκάλου Πατρικίου, [...] μετέδωκε  
 θεοσεβείας καὶ γνώσεως ἀληθεστάτης, ὃς καὶ αὐτὸς νυνὶ ἐκ θείας  
 χάριτος ἐπὶ τοὺς ὑψηλοὺς καὶ ἀρχιερατικούς θρόνους ἀνήχθη τῆς ὅλης  
 Περσίδος, καθολικὸς ἐπίσκοπος τῶν αὐτόθι κατασταθεῖς.

Nevertheless you ceased not pressing us to compose a treatise [...],  
 not as communicating opinions and conjectures of my own framing,  
 but what I had learned from the divine scriptures, and from the living  
 voice of that most divine man and great teacher Patricius, [...]. Patricius  
 propagated the doctrines of holy religion and true science, and has now  
 by the grace of God been elevated to the lofty episcopal throne of all  
 Persia, having been appointed to the office of Bishop Catholic of that  
 country. [*Top. Chr.* 2.2]

As stated earlier, it may be uncertain whether Cosmas was indeed a monk; that he was a Christian is beyond doubt. That he was an adherent of Nestorianism

is very likely—not only do his cosmological ideas have a Nestorian foundation, as we shall soon see, but his outright veneration for Patricius is telling. This person, a convert from Persian Zoroastrianism, is better known as Aba I. (or with the Syriac honorific title: Mar Aba). He followed and propagated the teachings of Theodore of Mopsuestia and Nestorius and was “Bishop Catholic” (i.e., patriarch) of the Assyrian Church of the East at Seleucia-Ctesiphon between 540 and 552.<sup>16</sup> Along with Thomas of Edessa, who translated Aba’s Syriac speeches into Greek, he gave lectures on Theodore and Nestorius in Alexandria, and it seems that Cosmas attended them. Patricius and Thomas had to withdraw from that city speedily, though—Nestorianism had been banned as a heresy at the Council of Ephesus in 431, and Alexandria was a strictly anti-Nestorian city.<sup>17</sup> In fact, Nestorius’ main opponent at the Council was the Alexandrian patriarch Cyril. The fact that Cosmas attended these heretic lectures and did not give up his ardent veneration of Patricius/Mar Aba clearly shows that his support for Nestorianism was indefatigable. This, of course, made him a member of a minority group in a somewhat hostile environment, and it may well have been the main reason for the author of the *Christian Topography* to hide so cautiously behind his work.

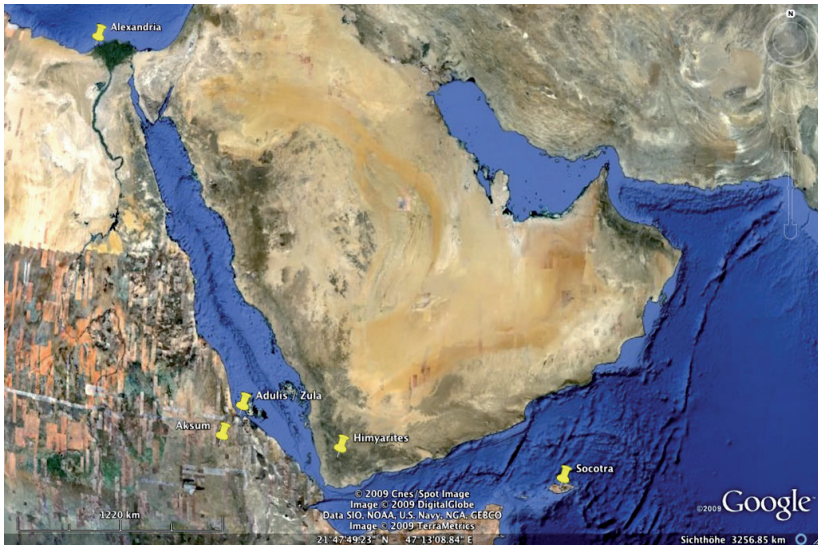
Whether his religious attitude is a sign of transculturality in Welsch’s sense is debatable. Put simply, it can be said that Cosmas was influenced by at least three religious systems—non-Christian beliefs (which he openly rejected), orthodox Christian beliefs (be they pre- or post Chalcedonian, i.e., mono- / miaphysite or not) and Nestorian (Christian) beliefs. If he had been an openly confessing Nestorian and, more importantly, had antagonized Christian orthodoxy (as he did with “pagan” beliefs), there would have been nothing transcultural about him in this respect, since an important point in Welsch’s concept is that features of different cultural entities are not only known to an individual subject, but are at least partly accepted. But Cosmas is more subtle and never disparages orthodoxy, to such an extent that neither Photius, who did not like the *Christian Topography* owing to linguistic and cosmological reasons,<sup>18</sup> nor Montfaucon, who procured its first modern edition in 1706, took note of the inherent Nestorianism.<sup>19</sup> It can be argued that Cosmas did not see a great difference between his favoured sect and official Christianity, as did the fathers of the Ephesian Council,<sup>20</sup> all the more so, if indeed he called Mary the “Mother of God” (which is not a Nestorian practice)<sup>21</sup> and if he really became a monk (because there were definitely no Nestorian monasteries anywhere in the vicinity of Alexandria).<sup>22</sup> Seen from this perspective, his religious attitude would indeed show transcultural traits.

There is yet another side to Cosmas, though. As he states himself, he used to be a merchant in his former life; as such, he has travelled to the

Aksumite Empire in Ethiopia, as mentioned before. Explicitly, he also mentions having sailed around the island of Socotra (*Top. Chr.* 3.65) and having ventured into what he calls “three gulfs”:

Ταῦτα δὲ παραλαβὼν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, ὡς εἴρηται, ἀνδρός, ἦτοι καὶ αὐτῆς τῆς πείρας, ἐσήμανα· ἐμπορίας γὰρ χάριν ἔπλευσα τοὺς τρεῖς κόλπους, τὸν τε κατὰ τὴν Ῥωμανίαν καὶ τὸν Ἀράβιον καὶ τὸν Περσικόν, καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν οἰκούντων δὲ ἢ καὶ πλεόντων τοὺς κόλπους ἀκριβῶς μεμαθηκώς.

Having learned these facts from the Man of God, as has been said, I have pointed them out as coincident also with my own experience, for I myself have made voyages for commercial purposes in three of these gulfs – the Roman, the Arabian and the Persian, while from the natives or from seafaring men I have obtained accurate information regarding the different places. [*Top. Chr.* 2.29]



*Fig. 2: The Arabian peninsula, the Aksumite Empire and the “three gulfs” mentioned by Cosmas.*

The bodies of water Cosmas refers to are the Mediterranean, the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. These two aspects—devout Nestorian Christian doctrine combined with a vast personal travelling experience—are the two parameters we must keep in mind to further understand Cosmas’ work. It

should be noted, however, that Cosmas himself does not see a dichotomy between these two “worlds”, as might be expected. Convinced by the speeches of Mar Aba, he still does not belittle or conceal his mercantile past, but finds the knowledge he acquired back then to be in keeping with his newly won convictions.

Another important detail from this short passage should be highlighted: So far, it has only become clear that Cosmas thought highly of the city of Alexandria (*Top. Chr.* 2.1) and may have associated it with notions of home. By referring to the Mediterranean Sea as a “[gulf stretching] towards the Roman Empire” ([κόλπος] κατὰ τὴν Ῥωμανίαν), he reminds us that Egypt then formed a part of the Byzantine Empire. ‘Romania’ (Ῥωμανία) was one of the contemporary terms the Byzantines used when referring to their empire, as does Cosmas on four occasions.<sup>23</sup> He also uses the adjective Ῥωμαϊκός (Roman) and always speaks of ‘Romans’ (Ῥωμαῖοι or Ῥωμεῖς) when he refers to Byzantine subjects. With Ἕλληνες (Greeks), he only refers to the ancient or Hellenistic Greeks and almost always uses the word in the sense of ‘pagan’.<sup>24</sup> This is also in keeping with Byzantine terminology. It may be argued that the use of Byzantine phrases does not necessarily prove Cosmas to have been a legal subject of the Emperor of Constantinople,<sup>25</sup> but it certainly does show that he was influenced by Byzantine culture.

## 2. The *Christian Topography*

Within the mental framework mentioned above, Cosmas unfolds much more than the title of his work may suggest. The *Christian Topography* is not only a travelogue of places that might be interesting to a Christian, but it comprises both cosmology and geography. Its major aim is to propagate a “truly” biblical view of the world.

The first edition of the work seems to have comprised five books, the first of which sought nothing less than to demolish the view that the world is spherical and that there are Antipodes—a conviction that most learned people at the time shared, no matter whether they professed to be Christians or not. It was first proposed by ancient Greek scholars whom Cosmas regarded as pagan.

The second book explains the shape of the universe that Cosmas considered to be true. The world order and measurements of the earth are based entirely on texts from the Bible. Cosmas’ concept is quite unique and deserves some consideration. We will take a look at it in the next section.

Book 3 quotes many texts in favour of the cosmological model outlined before. It stresses the authority and harmony of the scripture, while book 4 sums up the biblical shape of the universe and aims at refuting the spherical concept. Finally, book 5 quotes and discusses at length passages from the Bible that describe the tabernacle of the Jews and the texts from the patriarchs, prophets and apostles that, in Cosmas' view, allude to it.

The publication of this work seems to have aroused severe criticism, for which there was good reason, as we shall see. Since some of these doubts had been raised by fellow Christians, Cosmas felt obliged to answer to a few crucial questions and therefore published an extended version of the work.

In book 6 of the new edition he tried to prove that the sun is much smaller than the earth. As we shall see, this point is essential for his cosmological concept as a whole. Book 7 brought forward arguments against the theory of a professing Christian, who claimed that heaven was an ever-revolving sphere, but nevertheless not indestructible. The first point is crucial also to Cosmas' cosmos; the second is a matter of belief and of biblical interpretation.

Book 8 presents an interpretation of the Prayer of Hezekiah. It discusses the impact that the retrogression of the shadow on the sun dial had on the Babylonians and the impact that Isaiah's prophecies had on the Persian ruler, Cyrus.

Since there is no apparent physical reason why anything should be in motion in Cosmas' universe, although the sun, the moon and the planets can be seen moving, Cosmas gives an answer to all critical voices concerned with this issue in book 9. He simply ascribes the motion of the heavenly bodies to the hard work done by angels.

For all those who were still not satisfied, Cosmas, in book 10, quotes from the works of the Church fathers to show that his doctrines are in keeping with the official teachings.

The *Christian Topography* could have stopped at this point, since the concept as a whole had been explained sufficiently and the critical questions had been answered—perhaps not to the complete satisfaction of those who had raised their doubts, but certainly to the extent that Cosmas was willing and able to deal with them. Still, the ten books described above are not all that is featured in the codices; there seems to have been a third edition, probably posthumously, of Cosmas' *Topography* together with



two of his works that are otherwise lost, a *Geography* and an *Astronomy*. Horst Schneider, in an article from 2006, argues that the two additional books we have in our edition of the *Topography* are excerpts from the *Geography* and the *Astronomy* respectively.<sup>26</sup> Book 11 supports this claim, because it features a description of animals and plants from Africa and India, as well as an account of the island of Sri Lanka.

On the other hand, book 12, which demonstrates how several old pagan writers bore testimony to the antiquity of the Old Testament scriptures, is difficult to accept in the context of an astronomical treatise. It certainly was not intended to be part of the *Topography*.

Since several differences between the codices, in which the *Christian Topography* is extant, have been mentioned, a few words should be written about the nature of these manuscripts. The oldest of them is the *Vaticanus graecus* 699. It was written in uncial characters in the ninth century at Constantinople; it is currently kept at the Vatican library. It only contains books 1 to 10.

The other two extant codices are both from the eleventh century. The *Sinaiticus graecus* 1186 was written in Byzantine minuscules, probably in Cappadocia, and is now located in the library of St. Katherine's monastery on the Sinai Peninsula. Of the three this codex is the best preserved and contains books 1 to 12.<sup>27</sup>

The *Laurentianus Plut.* IX. 28, also in minuscules, was probably written at Iviron monastery on Mount Athos and is now at the Laurentian library at Florence. Like the *Sinaiticus*, it contains books 1 to 12.

All three manuscripts provide us with a set of beautiful illustrations. Since these sets of drawings are very similar in all three codices, it is evident that they have been copied from a common source. In many instances the illustrations are alluded to in the text, so it is very probable that even the first edition was embellished with them—whether by Cosmas himself or by somebody at his request cannot be determined and is irrelevant.

A first category of illustrations is one that concerns biblical scenes and serves to make the text of the quotations from the Scripture more intelligible to the readers of the *Topography*; colourful examples include the picture of Elijah's ascension, or of Moses receiving the law on Mount Sinai. To Cosmas' worldview, Moses' encounter with God on Mount Sinai was crucial, as we will see in a short while.



Fig. 3: Unknown artist, *The Conversion of Paul*, Codex Sinaiticus graecus 1186, fol. 126v, 11<sup>th</sup> century, probably from Cappadocia, now at St. Katherine's monastery, Sinai.



Fig. 4: Unknown artist, *The Conversion of Paul*, Codex Vaticanus graecus 699, fol. 83v, 9<sup>th</sup> century, from Constantinople, now at the Vatican library.

The depictions of St. Paul's conversion highlight the grade of similarity and difference between the codices. The miniature in figure 3 shows the scene in the *Codex Sinaiticus*. When comparing the corresponding miniature from the *Codex Vaticanus* (figure 4), it will be noticed that Paul is travelling from Jerusalem to Damascus in both illustrations, but the first scene, which shows Paul still at Jerusalem, is missing in the *Vaticanus*. Paul is recognizable in both codices, although his face looks different; and looking at the second person from right in figure 4, we recognize the face of the *monachus anonymus* that Professor Harsch added to his online text edition in the Bibliotheca Augustana (cf. figure 1).<sup>28</sup> The person is neither anonymous nor a monk, though; the caption in the *Codex Vaticanus* identifies him as Hananias, the man who took care of Paul when he was blinded and stayed at Damascus for three days.

All of the pictures among the first category may have been adapted from illustrated versions of the scripture that Cosmas probably had at hand. The illustrations of the second category are completely different and definitely Cosmas' own inventions, since they are specially designed for the purpose of enhancing Cosmas' cosmological theories, to which we will turn now.<sup>29</sup>

### 3. Cosmas' cosmos

In order to understand the drawings of Cosmas' cosmological model, it is important to consider both its intellectual roots and its biblical basis. As Cosmas states clearly several times, it was the lectures of Mar Aba / Patricius that sparked the general ideas for his concept.<sup>30</sup> A few of these ideas can be directly traced back to the works of Theodore, the Bishop of Mopsuestia (modern day Yakapınar in Turkey) from 392-428.<sup>31</sup> He was the teacher of Nestorius and was declared a Nestorian heretic posthumously in 553. He also was one of the exponents of the exegetical school of Antiochia, which continued to flourish in Edessa and Nisibis. Other than the Alexandrian school, which propagated a mostly allegorical interpretation of the Bible, Theodore and his forerunners and followers favoured an almost strictly literal interpretation.<sup>32</sup> This is what Cosmas extensively does as well.

The three crucial texts Cosmas chose as a foundation for his model of the universe are Genesis 1, Exodus 25f. and Hebrews 9. The relevance of the passage on creation in Genesis 1 is evident. Cosmas focuses especially on Genesis 1.1: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" and stresses that God created only these two categories and that therefore

there could not be anything else. Also, Genesis 1.6-8 is essential for Cosmas' construct:

(6) And God said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." (7) And God made the firmament and separated the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament. And it was so. (8) And God called the firmament Heaven.

The passages from Exodus and Hebrews are not as readily available for cosmological purposes as the ones from Genesis, and they have to be viewed in the context of each other: In Exodus 25f., Moses receives instructions on how to construct the sanctuary in which the Lord is to be venerated, i.e., the tabernacle, together with its interior parts and devices, such as the ark of the covenant, the table for the shewbreads, candlesticks, and curtains. The most important verses for Cosmas from Exodus 25f. are the following:

(25.8) "And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. (9) According to all that I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it. (23) And you shall make a table of acacia wood; two cubits shall be its length, a cubit its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. [...] (30) And you shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before me always. [...] (26.31) And you shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet stuff and fine twined linen; in skilled work shall it be made, with cherubim; (32) and you shall hang it upon four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, with hooks of gold, upon four bases of silver. (33) And you shall hang the veil from the clasps, and bring the ark of the testimony in thither within the veil; and the veil shall separate for you the holy place from the most holy."

The aim of the passage from the letter to the Hebrews is to show that valid covenants have to be ratified by the shedding of blood, the ultimate offering of blood being the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. By way of argumentation, the author of the letter cites a few examples from earlier Jewish tradition, among them the sprinkling with blood on the tabernacle and all devices for worship by Moses. Central to Cosmas are the following lines:

(9.21) And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. [...] (23) Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but

the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. (24) For Christ has entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.

Taken at face value, these verses are designed to mean that heaven, the most holy place, was in need of a greater offering—namely Christ—than its counterpart on earth, the holy tabernacle, for which an offering of the blood of calves and goats was sufficient. Cosmas takes literally the word ‘copies’ of Hebrews 9.24, meaning ‘effigies’ (the Greek text has “ὑποδείγματα”, in the sense of ‘παράδειγματα’, ‘patterns / paradigms’), and concludes that the instructions given to Moses in Exodus 25f. for the building of the tabernacle are in fact based on the shape of the universe. Therefore any cosmological model had to look like the tabernacle, or perhaps like the ark of the covenant, which is the most holy place within it. In the following words, Cosmas sums up his synthesis of the three biblical texts:

Εἶτα μετὰ ταῦτα προστάττει αὐτῷ σκηνὴν ἐπιτελέσαι κατὰ τὸν τύπον, ὃν ἐώρακεῖ ἐν τῷ ὄρει, ὡσανεὶ τύπον οὖσαν παντὸς τοῦ κόσμου. Ἐποίησεν οὖν τὴν σκηνὴν κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν μιμήσασθαι θέλων τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου οὕτως: τριάκοντα πηχέων τὸ μῆκος καὶ δέκα τὸ πλάτος, καὶ μεσολαβήσας καταπέτασμα μεσόθεν ποιεῖ αὐτὴν χώρους δύο, καὶ ἐλέγετο ἡ πρώτη Ἅγια, ἡ δευτέρα ἡ μετὰ τὸ καταπέτασμα Ἅγια ἁγίων. Τύπος δὲ ἦν ἡ ἐξώτερα τούτου τοῦ κόσμου τοῦ ὀρωμένου, κατὰ τὸν θεῖον Ἀπόστολον, ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς ἕως τοῦ στερεώματος, ἐν ᾗ ὑπῆρχε τράπεζα κατὰ τὸ βόρειον μέρος καὶ ἐπάνω τῆς τραπέζης δώδεκα ἄρτοι, τύπον ἐπέχουσα τῆς γῆς, καρποὺς παντοδαποὺς ἔχουσα μηνιαῖον ἓνα, ὡσανεὶ τοῦ ἐνιαυτοῦ δώδεκα.

He then afterwards directed him to construct the Tabernacle according to the pattern which he had seen in the mountain – being a pattern, so to say, of the whole world. He therefore made the Tabernacle, designing that as far as possible it should be a copy of the figure of the world, and thus he gave it a length of thirty cubits and a breadth of ten. Then, by interposing inside a veil in the middle of the Tabernacle, he divided it into two compartments, of which the first was called the Holy Place, and the second behind the veil the Holy of Holies. Now the outer was a pattern of this visible world which, according to the divine Apostle, extends from the earth to the firmament, and in which at its northern side was a table, on which were twelve loaves, the table thus presenting a symbol of the earth which supplies all manner of fruits, twelve namely, one as it were for each month of the year. [*Top. Chr.* 3.51]

Graphically, Cosmas expresses his theory with the following image:



*Fig. 5: Unknown artist, A sketch of Cosmas' pattern of the universe, Codex Sinaiticus graecus 1186, fol. 65r, 11<sup>th</sup> century, probably from Cappadocia, now at St. Katherine's monastery, Sinai.*

In line with Cosmas' interpretation of the scripture, heaven and earth are contained in a box; the earth (γῆ οἰκουμένη) is positioned at the bottom, seemingly resting on a stretch of ocean (ὠκεανός), while heaven stretches out in a watery curve above. The visible part is closed off from the invisible part by the firmament (στερέωμα). The image is not to be understood in such a way that the earth floats on top of the ocean, but that the earth and the ocean are at the bottom of Cosmas' construct, and the land is encircled by the waters.

What is striking in this picture is the altitude that the earth rises up to, and this is probably the most unique feature in Cosmas' universe. In section

2, we have already learned that the motion of the sun, the moon and the planets is ascribed to the work done by the angels, but there was one more problem to solve. If the sun always remained in the closed system that Cosmas established, how could there be anything like night? Cosmas was not the first cosmographer who faced that difficulty,<sup>33</sup> but he is one of the few in the western world who solved it by postulating that a huge conical mountain existed in the north around which the sun was forever circling. When the sun was behind the mountain, the shadow it cast created night on earth. This can be seen in a second, much more detailed, and very beautiful sketch featured in the *Codex Sinaiticus*:

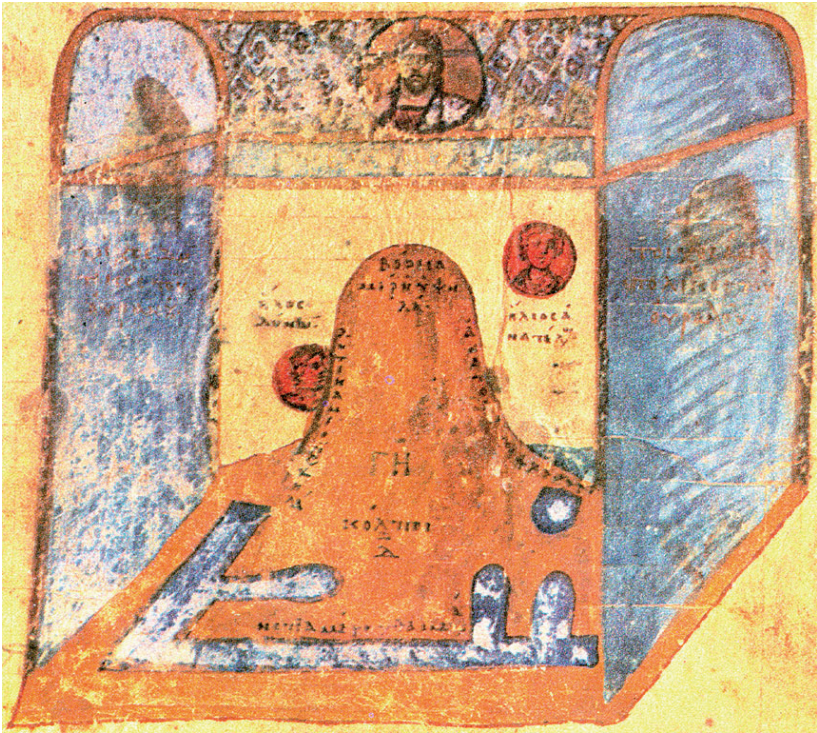


Fig. 6: Unknown artist, A more detailed sketch of Cosmas' pattern of the universe, *Codex Sinaiticus graecus* 1186, fol. 69r, 11<sup>th</sup> century, probably from Cappadocia, now at St. Katherine's monastery, Sinai.

The sun appears twice in this sketch—once rising (ἥλιος ἀνατέλλων) to the right of the “northern highlands” (βόρεια μέρη ὑψηλά), and once setting (ἥλιος δύνων) to the left of them. There has been some

speculation about the sources of this concept. In this form, it may be his own invention, but one should be aware that Cosmas, unskilled as he may be in rhetoric, is not at all unlearned. The list of authors from whom he quotes comprises some twenty four pages in the edition of Wolska-Conus; many of these authors are Christians, and most have written in Greek, but Cosmas has also dealt with Syriac, Armenian and Latin works, and is obviously well-read in the classics: Aristotle is quoted fairly often. For astronomical and geographical writings, Cosmas references Aratus, Cleomedes, Ephorus, Eratosthenes, Eudoxus of Cnidus, Geminus, Hipparchus, Marinus of Tyre, Moses of Chorene, Pappus of Alexandria, Pliny the Elder, Posidonius, Ptolemy and Strabo. What might be of interest here is that he also preserved a fragment from Pytheas of Massilia. In his work *On the Ocean*, Pytheas claims that the inhabitants of the far north showed him the dwelling place of the sun (τὴν ἡλίου κοίτην), i.e., at least in Cosmas' reading, the place where the sun spends the night (*Top. Chr.* 2.80). What must have been clear to Cosmas is that wherever the sun went at night, that place had to lie in northern regions.

The idea that the sun hides behind a mountain reminded Beazley of an "Indian concept,"<sup>34</sup> probably Mount Meru or Sumeru, a feature of Hindu, Buddhist and Jain cosmology. Mount Meru, which is located either at the centre of the earth or at the North Pole, is extremely high with an altitude of 84000 yojanas, i.e., something between 378,000 to 756,000 miles (608,202 to 1,216,404 km). Even the sun and all the planets revolve around it. The analogies to Cosmas' northern mountain are striking indeed, and he exhibits good knowledge of Indian matters elsewhere as well.<sup>35</sup> From a transcultural perspective, this makes Cosmas special. His intellectual horizon obviously has its foundation in the Greek lore of the ancients; he utterly rejects the religious parts of it, but accepts cosmological considerations whenever they fit into his system. This system, in turn, has been influenced by thoughts from the schools of Antiochia, Edessa and Nisibis and has apparently been augmented by ideas from regions further east. We will return to this connection later.

Other than that, it is clear from figure 6 that Cosmas assumed that God resided in the uppermost part of the heavens, above the firmament, and that he really imagined the earth to be surrounded by, not floating upon, the ocean. The image denotes four gulfs (κόλποι Δ), which brings us to Cosmas' concept of the shape of the earth.



Still basing his notions on the biblical texts quoted above, Cosmas says:

Περίξ δὲ τῆς τραπέζης κύκλω κυμάτιον στρεπτόν σημαῖνον τὴν θάλασσαν, τὸν λεγόμενον Ὠκεανόν, εἶτα καὶ περίξ τούτου πάλιν κύκλω στεφάνην παλαιστοῦ σημαίνουσαν τὴν πέραν γῆν, ἔνθα ἐστὶ καὶ ὁ παράδεισος κατὰ ἀνατολάς, ἔνθα καὶ τὰ ἄκρα τοῦ οὐρανοῦ τοῦ πρώτου τοῦ καμαροειδοῦς τοῖς ἄκροις τῆς γῆς πάντοθεν ἐπερείδεται. The table [i.e., the table for the Shewbreads, which, as we learned above, Cosmas regarded as the Mosaic model of the earth] was all round wreathed with a waved moulding symbolic of the sea which is called the ocean, and all round this again was a border of a palm's breadth emblematic of the earth beyond the ocean, where lies Paradise away in the East, and where also the extremities of the first heaven, which is like a vaulted chamber, are everywhere supported on the extremities of the earth. [*Top. Chr.* 3.52]

Combined with what he had read in the works of geographical authors, had heard from sailors and fellow merchants, and had seen for himself (this is where his personal experience begins to play a part in his universe), Cosmas draws a map of the earth:



Fig. 7: Unknown artist, Cosmas' map of the earth, *Codex Sinaiticus graecus* 1186, fol. 66v, 11<sup>th</sup> century, probably from Cappadocia, now at St. Katherine's monastery, Sinai.

Cosmas' earth is flat in the sense that it is not spherical. The high elevation in the northern part is there, but it cannot be seen from a bird's-eye view. And the earth is not circular but rectangular. This may be striking at first, but it is a logical deduction from the dimensions of the table for the shewbreads given in the Bible. Cosmas himself explains it in this way:

Καὶ ὁ Μωϋσῆς δὲ διαγράφων ἐν τῇ σκινηῇ τὴν τράπεζαν, τύπον ὑπάρχουσαν τῆς γῆς, τὸ μήκος αὐτῆς δύο πήχεων προσέταξε γενέσθαι, καὶ τὸ πλάτος πήχεως ἑνός. [...] Ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐκ τοῦ Μωϋσέως μεμαθηκότες πείθεσθαι τῇ θείᾳ ὄντως Γραφῇ. Moses, likewise, in describing the table in the Tabernacle, which is an image of the earth, ordered its length to be of two cubits, and its breadth of one cubit. [...] Having learned, moreover, from Moses that the earth has been extended in length more than in breadth, we again admit this, knowing that the scriptures, which are truly divine, ought to be believed. [*Top. Chr.* 2.19]

A little later in the same book (*Top. Chr.* 2.47 and 48), Cosmas gives figures for the earth's dimensions from China in the east to Cádiz in the west, and from the northerly Hyperboreans to Ethiopia in the south. He arrives at the rather unsurprising conclusion that the ratio of length and breadth is 2:1 and, therefore, correlates with Moses' figures.

Apart from that, the four gulfs already mentioned in figure 6 include the three already alluded to in section 1, viz. the Mediterranean, the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, augmented by the Caspian Sea, which Cosmas does not claim to have visited. Part of the Mediterranean and its coastline are readily recognizable in figure 7, while most parts of Northern Europe, Africa, Arabia and Asia have been neglected. The ocean in this image clearly surrounds the earth and separates it from paradise, which is located at the eastern end. The flowery "paradise in Eden" (ἐν Ἐδέμ Παράδεισος) is a reality for Cosmas, although he stresses that it is separated from the earth by a stretch of impassable ocean. Consequently, the four main rivers of the world, the Phison, identified as Ganges/Indus (which Cosmas thought to be one and the same, cf. *Top. Chr.* 2.81), the Nile, the Euphrates and the Tigris, which have their origin in biblical Paradise, have to wend their courses under the ocean into the earthly realms.

#### 4. Cosmas and the Far East

It has been mentioned that, when describing the shape of the earth, Cosmas drew on what he either had seen himself or was informed about

by others. Indeed, his travelling experience as a merchant is remarkable. So, as a final point, let us see what Cosmas has to tell us about the east of the real world.

Whether he ever reached India is uncertain, but that he had good sources on trade routes and on matters of local flora, fauna and geography is a fact. Most of the material relevant for our purpose comes from book 11 of the *Christian Topography*, that is, from the book which is, in all probability, an excerpt from Cosmas' otherwise lost *Geography*. The texts relating to the Far East are embellished with illustrations of a third category. They are neither taken from illustrated Bible editions, nor designed to visualize theories, but were adapted from what Cosmas had actually seen in various places. A few of them may serve as examples.

In *Top. Chr.* 11.8, Cosmas presents the picture of a “choirelaphos” (χοιρέλαφος), which literally means ‘pig deer’ or ‘hog deer’:



Fig. 8: Unknown Artist, The χοιρέλαφος – ‘hog deer’, Codex Laurentianus Plut. IX.28, fol. 268v, 11<sup>th</sup> century, probably from Iviron monastery, Mt. Athos, now at the Laurentian Library, Florence, Italy.

What Cosmas has to say about this animal is quite laconic:

Τὸν δὲ χοιρέλαφον καὶ εἶδον καὶ ἔφαγον.  
The hog-deer I have both seen and eaten.

This means that he probably visited the area to which this species was endemic. If the hog-deer lived in India, then Cosmas would rightfully bear his epithet 'Indicopleustes'. But currently this conclusion cannot be drawn. So far scholars have suggested three animals that Cosmas may have referred to (Winstedt 1909, 351): Two of them, *axis porcinus*, with the promising English name 'hog deer', and *axis maculatus*, or 'spotted deer', do live in India, but do not resemble Cosmas' drawing in the least. The third, *babyrousa*, also bears a promising name: *babi* is the Malay and Indonesian word for 'pig' and *rusa* means 'deer'. This *genus* of pigs is (and in all probability always was) present only in the Indonesian islands of Sulawesi, Lembah, Sula, Malenge and Buru.<sup>36</sup> Even though there are some similarities between this animal and that of Cosmas' sketch (figure 9), it is hard to believe that he travelled as far as central or eastern Indonesia.

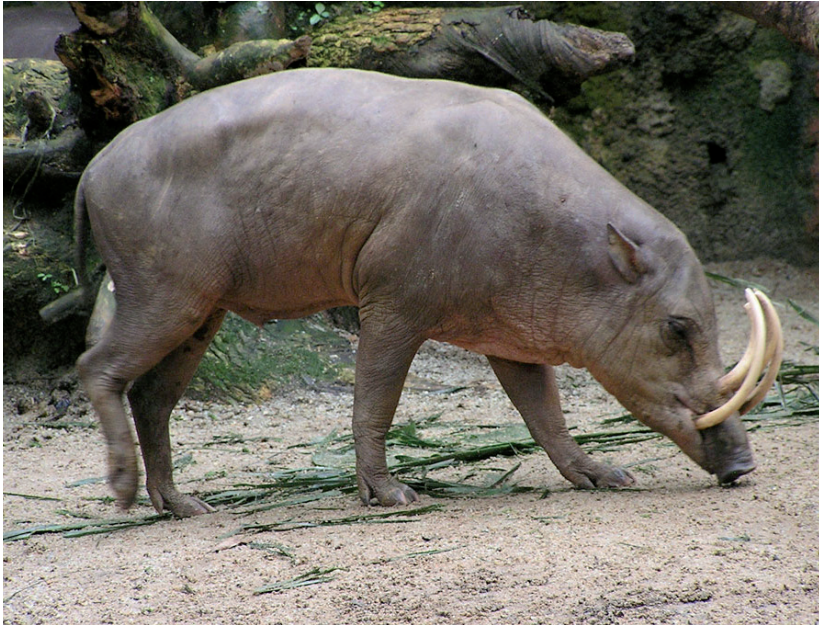


Fig. 9: *The sus babyrousa* – 'hog deer'.

Another possibility of finding the χοιρέλαφος that Cosmas saw and ate would be to travel to a different continent—Africa. The common warthog (*phacochoerus africanus*), or the desert warthog (*phacochoerus aethiopicus*), which is the subspecies Cosmas is most likely to have encountered, looks very much like the illustration in *Top. Chr.* 11.8 (figure 10). Perhaps Adule in the Aksumite Empire was the place where the merchant had the chance to taste the meat of a χοιρέλαφος.



Fig. 10: The *Phacochoerus africanus* – warthog; courtesy of Patrick Giraud.

There is another exotic illustration that has caused some controversy—one commonly called *Gazelle and Palm Trees*. This picture is notoriously misplaced in the codices. In the Vatican manuscript, it appears in the description of Cosmas’ Adulitic adventure (*Top. Chr.* 2.55), while in the Sinaitic and the Laurentian codex it is erroneously placed in book 6, chapter 34 (talking about the different climates of the earth). Most scholars have thought that this picture belongs to book 11 and claimed that the confusion arose when the compiler who formed the present edition of the *Christian Topography* from the (no longer extant) “Complete Works” of Cosmas made a mistake.<sup>37</sup>

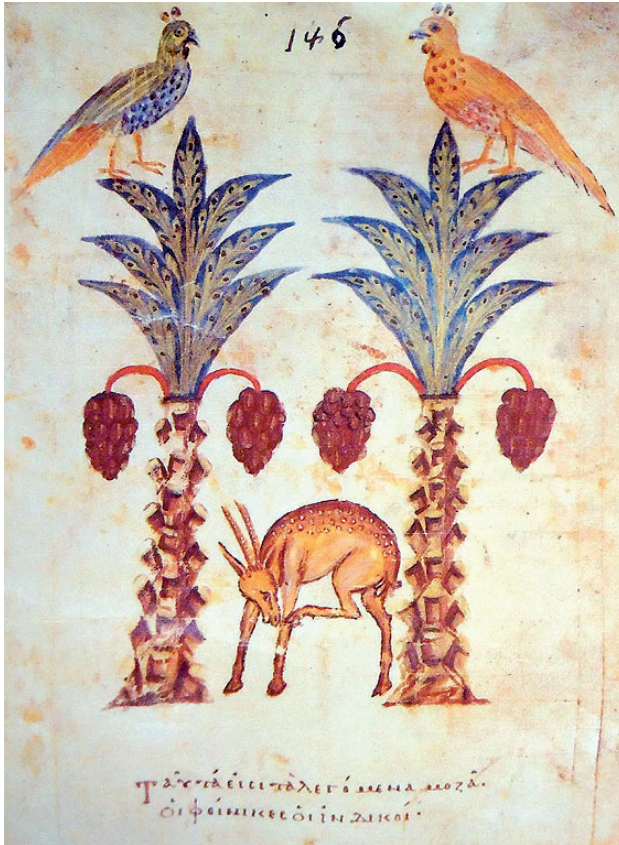


Fig. 11: Unknown artist, *Gazelle and palm trees*, *Codex Sinaiticus graecus 1186*, fol. 146r, 11<sup>th</sup> century, probably from Cappadocia, now at St. Katherine's monastery, Sinai.

The picture's caption reads:

ταῦτά εἰσι τὰ λεγόμενα μοζά, οἱ φοίνικες οἱ Ἰνδοίκοι  
These are the so-called 'mozá', the Indian date palms

If Cosmas indeed saw these trees and, moreover, heard the word 'mozá' in connection with date palms, it could for the first time be said that the epithet 'Indicopleustes' contains some truth. In modern India there are no date palms, but in the Indus Valley, which now belongs to Pakistan,

and was in Cosmas' time regarded as a part of India, date palms grow abundantly. In the Makrān region, the major part of which belongs to Balochistan, one of the most highly praised varieties of dates is called 'mozāti'. This could be the etymon for Cosmas' word 'mozá'.<sup>38</sup>

Dates were perhaps one of the commodities Cosmas traded in; another with which he was familiar was silk, one of the most significant import goods of the Byzantine Empire.<sup>39</sup> In *Top. Chr.* 2.45f. Cosmas describes in some detail the origin of silk and the trade routes along which it could be imported:

Αὕτη δὲ ἡ χώρα τοῦ μεταξίου ἐστὶν ἐν τῇ ἐσωτέρῃ πάντων Ἰνδία, κατὰ τὸ ἀριστερὸν μέρος εἰσιόντων τοῦ Ἰνδικοῦ πελάγους, περαιτέρω πολὺ τοῦ Περσικοῦ κόλπου καὶ τῆς νήσου τῆς καλουμένης παρὰ μὲν Ἰνδοῖς, Σελεδίβα, παρὰ δὲ τοῖς Ἑλλησι, Ταπροβάνη, Τζίνιστα οὕτω καλουμένη, κυκλομένη πάλιν ἐξ ἀριστερῶν ὑπὸ τοῦ Ὠκεανοῦ, ὡσπερ καὶ ἡ Βαρβαρία κυκλοῦται ἐκ δεξιῶν ὑπ' αὐτοῦ. Καί φασι οἱ Ἰνδοί, οἱ φιλόσοφοι, οἱ καλούμενοι Βραχμάνες, ὅτι ἐὰν βάλῃς ἀπὸ Τζίνιστα σπαρτίον διελθεῖν διὰ Περσίδος ἕως Ῥωμανίας ὡς ἀπὸ κανόνος τὸ μεσαίτατον τοῦ κόσμου ἐστὶ, καὶ τάχα ἀληθεύουσιν. (46) Πολὺ γὰρ ἀριστερὰ ἐστὶν, ὡς δι' ὀλίγου χρόνου βασιταγὰς μεταξίου γίνεσθαι ἐκ τῶν ἐκεῖ, ἐκ διαδοχῆς ἐτέρων ἐθνῶν, ἐν Περσίδι διὰ τῆς γῆς, διὰ δὲ τῆς θαλάσσης πάνυ πολλὰ διαστήματα ἀπέχουσα ἀπὸ τῆς Περσίδος. Ὅσον γὰρ διάστημα ἔχει ὁ κόλπος ὁ Περσικὸς εἰσερχόμενος ἐν Περσίδι, τοσοῦτο διάστημα πάλιν ἀπὸ τῆς Ταπροβάνης καὶ περαιτέρω ποιεῖ ἐπὶ τὰ ἀριστερὰ εἰσερχόμενός τις ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ Τζίνιστα, μετὰ τὸ καὶ διαστήματα πάλιν ἱκανὰ ἔχειν ἀπὸ τῆς ἀρχῆς ἐξ αὐτοῦ τοῦ Περσικοῦ κόλπου, ὅλον τὸ Ἰνδικὸν πέλαγος ἕως Ταπροβάνης καὶ ἐπέκεινα. Διατέμνει οὖν πολλὰ διαστήματα ὁ διὰ τῆς ὁδοῦ ἐρχόμενος ἀπὸ Τζίνιστα ἐπὶ Περσίδα, ὅθεν καὶ πλῆθος μεταξίου αἰεὶ ἐπὶ τὴν Περσίδα εὐρίσκεται. Περαιτέρω δὲ τῆς Τζίνιστα οὔτε πλέεται οὔτε οἰκεῖται.

Now this country of silk is situated in the remotest of all the Indies, and lies to the left of those who enter the Indian sea, far beyond the Persian Gulf, and the island called by the Indians Selediba and by the Greeks Taprobanê. It is called Tzinista, and is surrounded on the left by the ocean, just as Barbaria is surrounded by it on the right. The Indian philosophers, called the Brachmans, say that if you stretch a cord from Tzinista to pass through Persia, onward to the Roman dominions, the middle of the earth would be quite correctly traced, and they are perhaps right. For the country in question deflects considerably to the left, so that the loads of silk passing by land through one nation after another, reach Persia in a comparatively short time; whilst the

route by sea to Persia is vastly greater. For just as great a distance as the Persian Gulf runs up into Persia, so great a distance and even a greater has one to run, who, being bound for Tzinista, sails eastward from Taprobanê; while besides, the distances from the mouth of the Persian Gulf to Taprobanê; and the parts beyond through the whole width of the Indian sea are very considerable. He then who comes by land from Tzinista to Persia shortens very considerably the length of the journey. This is why there is always to be found a great quantity of silk in Persia. Beyond Tzinista there is neither navigation nor any land to inhabit.

As Pigulewskaja points out,<sup>40</sup> Cosmas was the first to stress the two possible routes to and from China: the overland Silk Road, along which Persia played a major part (even the name Cosmas uses for China, *Tzinista*, is obviously derived from Iranian *Cinistan*), and the so-called Silk Road of the sea, along which the island of *Taprobanê* (Sri Lanka) was an important entrepôt. Cosmas says the sea route is longer because China has a curved coastline, which it has, but the difference in length of the routes could be better accounted for when considering the extension of India towards the south, which Cosmas underestimates, judging from his world map (figure 7), and with the existence of the Malay peninsula, which Cosmas is not aware of at all.

His mention of the Indian philosophers as a source for geometrical knowledge in the literal sense of the word is also interesting. These philosophers likewise had the concept of Mount Meru, as mentioned above, and could have introduced Cosmas to it, whether by personal or indirect communication, or by means of written works. At any rate, it is worth noting that Cosmas not only draws on what he had seen in far-away regions, but also on what he had learned from a certain intellectual elite residing there. This shows his vital interest in other cultures and his perplexing readiness towards receiving knowledge from them. This demonstrates, again, Cosmas' rationale: his rejection of ideas originating from non-Christian beliefs, his interest in all things non-Christian, and his acceptance of whatever follows his personal view of Christianity and his cosmological model.

Being a merchant who apparently favoured sea routes, Cosmas devotes much of his text to the subject of trade between eastern Africa and the Indian region. As in the passage above, Sri Lanka, whose name *S(i)elediba*, which is a derivation of *Sihaladipa/Singhaladvipa* ('island of the Sinhalese'), Cosmas is the first to mention with certainty, plays a major role:



Ἐξ ὅλης δὲ τῆς Ἰνδικῆς καὶ Περσίδος καὶ Αἰθιοπίας δέχεται ἡ νῆσος πλοῖα πολλά, μεστῆς οὖσα, ὁμοίως καὶ ἐκπέμπει. Καὶ ἀπὸ μὲν τῶν ἐνδοτέρων, λέγω δὴ τῆς Τζίνιστα καὶ ἐτέρων ἐμπορίων, δέχεται μέταξιν, ἀλοήν, καρυόφυλλον, ξυλοκαρυόφυλλον, τζανδόαναν, καὶ ὅσα κατὰ χώραν εἰσὶ· καὶ μεταβάλλει τοῖς ἐξωτέρω, λέγω δὴ τῆ Μαλέ, ἐν ἧ τὸ πῖπερ γίνεται, καὶ τῆ Καλλιανᾶ, ἐνθα ὁ χαλκὸς γίνεται καὶ σησάμινα ξύλα καὶ ἕτερα ἱμάτια – ἔστι γὰρ καὶ αὕτη μέγα ἐμπόριον–, ὁμοίως καὶ Σινδοῦ, ἐνθα ὁ μόσχος καὶ τὸ κοστάρην καὶ τὸ ναρδόσταχυν γίνεται, καὶ τῆ Περσίδι καὶ τῷ Ὅμηρίτῃ καὶ τῆ Ἀδούλη, καὶ πάλιν τὰ ἀπὸ ἐκάστου τῶν εἰρημένων ἐμπορίων δεχομένη καὶ τοῖς ἐνδοτέρω μεταβάλλουσα καὶ τὰ ἴδια ἅμα ἐκάστῳ ἐμπορίῳ ἐκπέμπουσα.

The island being, as it is, in a central position, is much frequented by ships from all parts of India and from Persia and Ethiopia, and it likewise sends out many of its own. And from the remotest countries, I mean Tzinista and other trading places, it receives silk, aloes, cloves, sandalwood and other products, and these again are passed on to marts on this side, such as Male, where pepper grows, and to Calliana, which exports copper and sesame-logs, and cloth for making dresses, for it also is a great place of business. And to Sindu also where musk and castor is procured and spikenard,<sup>41</sup> and to Persia and the Homerite country, and to Adulé. And the island receives imports from all these marts which we have mentioned and passes them on to the remoter ports, while, at the same time, exporting its own produce in both directions. [Top. Chr. 11,15]

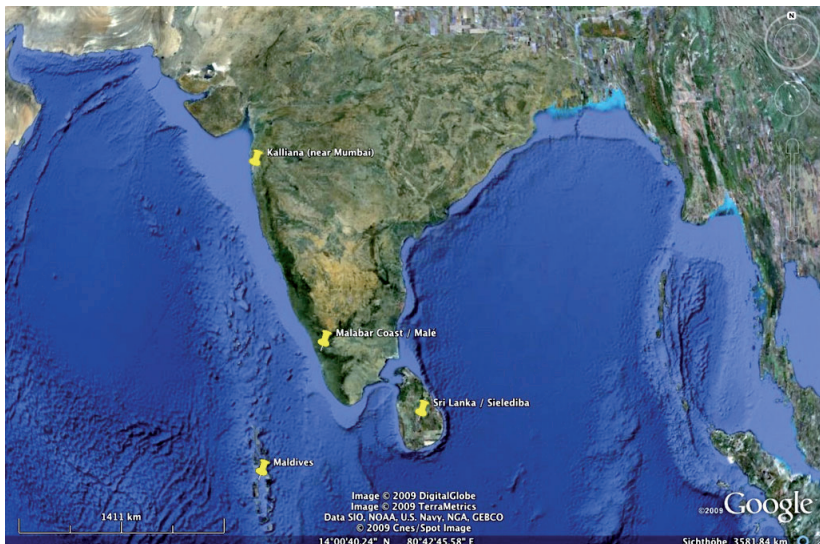


Fig. 12: India, the Maldives and Sri Lanka.

Silk and its country of origin are mentioned again, as are many other commodities with their origins and destinations. Pepper is among them, which according to Cosmas grows in *Male*. Here he does not refer to the capital island of the Maldives, but to the Malabar coast in south-western India (cf. figure 12). This stretch of land is sometimes called “pepper coast” even today.

Details like these also suggest that it is likely that Cosmas travelled to India, although he could have copied some of the data from other merchants’ logs or handbooks.<sup>42</sup> He does have an illustration of pepper vines, though, and a text along with it, both of which are so detailed and accurate that personal inspection and experience are almost a certainty:



Fig. 13: Unknown artist, Pepper tree, *Codex Sinaiticus graecus* 1186, fol. 202v, 11<sup>th</sup> century, probably from Cappadocia, now at St. Katherine’s monastery, Sinai.

Τοῦτο τὸ δένδρον ἐστὶ τὸ τοῦ πιπέρεως· ἕκαστον δὲ δένδρον ἐτέρῳ ὑψηλῷ ἀκάρπῳ δένδρῳ ἀνακλᾶται διὰ τὸ λεπτὸν εἶναι πάνυ καὶ ἀσθενές, ὥσπερ καὶ τὰ κλήματα τῆς ἀμπέλου λεπτά· ἕκαστος δὲ βότρυς δίφυλλον ἔχει σκέπον· χλωρὸν δὲ πάνυ ἐστίν, ὥσπερ ἡ χροὰ τοῦ πηγάνου.

This is a picture of the tree which produces pepper. Each

separate stem being very weak and limp twines itself, like the slender tendrils of the vine, around some lofty tree which bears no fruit. And every cluster of the fruit is protected by a double leaf. It is of a deep green colour like that of rue. [*Top. Chr.* 11.10]

As mentioned before, Cosmas paid a lot of attention to the island of Sri Lanka. His remarks on it have been extensively scrutinized by scholars in recent years.<sup>43</sup> Because of this, I would like to confine myself to a few passages that seem pertinent in our context.

In *Top. Chr.* 11.13, Cosmas tells us about Sri Lanka:

Αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ νῆσος ἡ μεγάλη ἐν τῷ Ὠκεανῷ, ἐν τῷ Ἰνδικῷ πελάγει κειμένη, παρὰ μὲν Ἰνδοῖς καλουμένη Σιελεδίβα, παρὰ δὲ Ἑλλησι Ταπροβάνη, ἐν ἣ εὐρίσκεται ὁ λίθος ὁ ὑάκινθος· περαιτέρω δὲ κεῖται τῆς χώρας τοῦ πιπέρεως. Πέριξ δὲ αὐτῆς εἰσι νῆσοι μικραὶ πολλαὶ πάνυ, πᾶσαι δὲ γλυκὸν ὕδωρ ἔχουσαι καὶ ἀργέλλια· ἀγχιβαθαὶ δὲ ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πλεῖστον πᾶσαι εἰσιν.

This is a large oceanic island lying in the Indian sea. By the Indians it is called Sielediba, but by the Greeks Taprobanê, and therein is found the hyacinth stone. It lies on the other side of the pepper country. Around it are numerous small islands all having fresh water and coconut trees. They nearly all have deep water close up to their shores.

It is true that Sri Lanka is a fairly big island, but not as big as the ancients thought it was. Like them, Cosmas overestimates its size, perhaps induced by local measurements and by the important role it played in trade. The numerous little islands around Sri Lanka do not exist, but it may be that Cosmas here alludes to the over 1000 little islets of the Maldives, most of which have coconut trees and fresh water. The islets on the outer reefs of the atolls are indeed close to deep water.<sup>44</sup>

Cosmas witnessed coconut trees and how they are harvested. In *Top. Chr.* 11.11, he presents us with the following picture:



Fig. 14: Unknown artist, Coconut tree, *Codex Sinaiticus graecus 1186*, fol. 203r, 11<sup>th</sup> century, probably from Cappadocia, now at St. Katherine's monastery, Sinai.

The text that accompanies the drawing of the “Indian nuts” (κάρυα Ἰνδικά) also calls them ἀργέλλια - a word already found in the passage discussed above (*Top. Chr.* 11.13). This is likely to be a derivation of Sanskrit *narikela* (meaning ‘coconut’ or ‘coconut tree’), probably by way of Sinhalese and/or Persian mediation. Apart from that, Cosmas shares first-hand information about the trees' appearance, the taste of their nuts and their contents. According to him, the Indians also make an alcoholic drink from the coconut water—here he may have been mistaken because the toddy he perhaps tasted is not made from coconut water, but from the sap of palm blossoms.

In the last few passages, as we became familiar with Cosmas as a merchant, his ardent Christian side seems to have receded. Still, it is there, even in those passages in which Cosmas deals with apparently worldly matters. On two occasions (*Top. Chr.* 3.65 and 11.14) he proudly tells us about a small group of Christians in Sri Lanka. Significantly, this is the first mention of Christians on Sri Lanka. The second passage reads as follows:

Ἔχει δὲ ἡ αὐτὴ νῆσος καὶ Ἐκκλησίαν τῶν ἐπιδημούντων Περσῶν  
 χριστιανῶν καὶ πρεσβύτερον ἀπὸ Περσίδος χειροτονούμενον καὶ

διάκονον καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν ἐκκλησιαστικὴν λειτουργίαν. Οἱ δὲ ἐγχώριοι καὶ οἱ βασιλεῖς ἀλλόφυλοι εἰσιν.

The island has also a church of Persian Christians who have settled there, and a Presbyter who is appointed from Persia, and a Deacon and a complete ecclesiastical ritual. But the natives and their kings are heathens. [*Top. Chr.* 11.14]

The fact that the Christians are all Persian expatriates—including the believers, the priest and probably the deacon—definitely has a special meaning to Cosmas. These people were from the same country as his revered teacher, Mar Aba, and they were most probably Nestorians.

## 5. Conclusions

Cosmas is not easy to gauge. Later readers judged that doubt can be cast on almost everything about him, starting from his name, that the cosmological model he propagates can hardly be taken seriously, that his digressions are on the verge of being tedious and that his language is, to say the least, a little unconventional.

I hope to have made it a little more acceptable to believe that he really visited India and therefore has a right to be called Indicopleustes. Moreover, we have seen that his cosmological model may be naive and definitely has no factual basis, but at least we have been able to understand its intellectual foundation. The fervour and persistence that Cosmas displays in propagating his concept is remarkable, if not admirable.

Cosmas is interesting in that he adhered to a Christian minority group that was not well liked in sixth-century Alexandria; despite this unfortunate situation, there are hints that, on a personal level, he was able to live at peace with both Nestorian and Orthodox concepts. Regarding his ethnicity, hardly anything definite can be said, except that he obviously felt himself to be Alexandrian and did not conceal being a Byzantine citizen either. Intellectually, he proves to have been influenced by various cultures. Imbued with Classical Greek and Hellenistic learning, he rejected the parts he considered pagan and augmented the rest with Christian notions, predominantly from Asia Minor and Syria. With literal biblical lore and concepts he may have found in Indian thought systems, he created his own, original universe. In terms of profession, it may not be certain whether he became a monk or not, but it is clear that at the time of writing the *Christian Topography*, his proficiency in Holy Writ and his exegetical ardour would have fit perfectly in a monastic surrounding.

Still, he does not see this stage of his existence in contrast with his former life as a merchant—he regards these two as a whole. While a trader, he displayed an enormous interest in commercial data from a vast geographical area as well as in the flora, fauna and cultural matters of various kinds. Undoubtedly, Cosmas was, as Travis Lee Clark put it, a “cosmopolitan and flexible thinker,”<sup>45</sup> or, to make use of a dictum by Wolfgang Welsch, “an almost paradigmatic figure of transculturality” (eine geradezu paradigmatische Figur der Transkulturalität).<sup>46</sup>

These properties, as well as the unique illustrations in the manuscripts that convey his text, still make him worth studying, even in times when northern mountains that hide the sun have become unfashionable.

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1 Welsch made his theory public for the first time in a speech delivered in Wuppertal to the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Phänomenologische Forschung on May 23rd, 1991; a version of this speech was printed as Wolfgang Welsch, "Transkulturalität. Lebensformen nach der Auflösung der Kulturen," *Information Philosophie* May 1992 (H. 2): 5-20. Several augmented papers followed. The most important ones were: Wolfgang Welsch, "Transkulturalität. Zwischen Globalisierung und Partikularisierung," *Jahrbuch Deutsch als Fremdsprache* 26 (2000): 327-351; Welsch, "Transkulturelle Gesellschaften," in *Kultur in Zeiten der Globalisierung. Neue Aspekte einer soziologischen Kategorie*, Peter-Ulrich Merz-Benz, Gerhard Wagner, eds. (Frankfurt: Humanities Online, 2005), 39-67; Welsch, "Was ist eigentlich Transkulturalität?" in: *Hochschule als transkultureller Raum? Kultur, Bildung und Differenz in der Universität*, Lucyna Darowska, Thomas Lüttenberg, Claudia Machold, eds. (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2010), 39-66. Others have taken up and supported his theory, most recently Bernd Fischer, "Transkulturelle Teilhabe," in *Transcultural German Studies, Deutsch als Fremdsprache*, Steven D. Martinson, Renate A. Schulz, eds. (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008), 55-72; Heinz Antor, "From Postcolonialism and Interculturalism to the Ethics of Transculturalism in the Age of Globalization," in *From Interculturalism to Transculturalism. Mediating Encounters in Cosmopolitan Contexts*, Heinz Antor et al., eds. (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 2010), 1-13; Hans Ulrich Seeber, "Transculturality and Comedy in Zadie Smith's Serio-Comic Novel *White Teeth* (2000)," in *ibid.*, 101-119; Luisa Conti, „Vom interkulturellen zum transkulturellen Dialog: Ein Perspektivenwechsel," in *Transkulturalität, Transnationalität, Transstaatlichkeit und Translokaltät. Theoretische und empirische Begriffsbestimmungen*, Melanie Hühn, Dörte Lerp, Knut Petzold, Miriam Stock, eds. (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2010) 173-189.

2 cf. Johann Gottfried Herder, *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1967 [originally published 1774]), esp. 44f.; Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (Leipzig: Hartknoch, 1841).

3 Although Welsch's theory received mostly benevolent responses, there are points that could be criticized. Welsch, in most of his papers, defends himself against the claim that transculturalism creates a uniform and tedious global cultural continuum (cf. e.g. Welsch 2010, 59-62). In Welsch 2000, 336, fn. 27, he acknowledges that the word 'Transkulturalität', which he previously believed to have coined, already had been used before, but still defends his use of the word as original. Silja Freudenberger in "Interculturalism, Transculturalism, and the Problem of 'Meaning'" in *Transculturality – Epistemology, Ethics and Politics*, Hans J. Sandkühler and Hong-Bin Lim, eds. (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2004), 41), while recognizing a conceptual difference between interculturalism and transculturalism, denies a "competition" between them—a point that Welsch would hardly agree with. Finally, Peter Weichhart in "Das

'Trans-Syndrom'. Wenn die Welt durch das Netz unserer Begriffe fällt" (in *Transkulturalität, Transnationalität, Transstaatlichkeit und Translokalität. Theoretische und empirische Begriffsbestimmungen*, Melanie Hühn, Dörte Lerp, Knut Petzold, Miriam Stock, eds. (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2010): 47-70) thinks that "trans"-concepts are a fashion which may have become a little exaggerated. This is no conceptual criticism, though, and he admits that the "trans"-creations may still be valuable, if they have a sound methodology.

4 For the individual level of transculturality cf. for instance Welsch's chapter "Hochschätzung der Mischlinge" in "Transkulturalität. Lebensformen nach der Auflösung der Kulturen," 16.; for a methodologically elaborated version see Welsch *Transkulturalität*, 339f. (section called "Mikroebene: transkulturelle Prägung der Individuen"), Welsch "Transkulturalität. Zwischen Globalisierung und Partikularisierung." 51-54 and Welsch "Was ist eigentlich Transkulturalität?" 45-48.

5 For transculturality as a phenomenon of antiquity see Welsch, "Transkulturalität. Lebensformen nach der Auflösung der Kulturen," 6 (doubting Herder's cultural concept even for past times), Welsch "Transkulturalität. Zwischen Globalisierung und Partikularisierung," 342f. ("Transkulturalität-schon in der Geschichte"), Welsch "Transkulturelle Gesellschaften," 55f., Welsch "Was ist eigentlich Transkulturalität?" 50-52. In the last of these articles (p. 50 with fn. 10), Welsch argues that the emergence of Greek culture cannot be understood without taking into account the impact of Egypt, Asia, Babylonia and Phoenicia. This is certainly correct. His remark "A striking piece of evidence: almost 40 % of the Greek lexicon is of Semitic origin" (Ein schlagendes Indiz: Nahezu 40 % der griechischen Wörter sind semitischen Ursprungs) is quite unsubstantiated, however. It is true that a higher percentage of the Greek lexicon as assumed previously may belong to a non-Indo-European substrate language, but there are no hints at a Semitic nature of that language so far; the quantity of lexical items with an obvious or at least probable Semitic origin is much less than Welsch assumes. For the present state of research see Robert Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, 2 vols (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

6 Bibliotheca Augustana, Litteraturae et Artis Collectio, <http://www.hs-augsburg.de/~harsch/augustana.html>. Accessed June 16, 2011.

7 Eric O. Winstedt, ed., *The Christian Topography of Cosmas Indicopleustes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1909), 2.

8 Laurentianus Plut. IX. 28 (now at the Laurentian library at Florence).

9 All quotations from the *Christian Topography* are taken from Wanda Wolska-Conus, ed., *Cosmas Indicopleustes: Topographie chrétienne*, vol.s I-III (Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 1972).

10 Ella Asbeha ('the one who brings in the dawn') was the royal epithet of Caleb, son of Tazena, who became king of the Ethiopian Empire of Axum in 515 A.D. and is called Ἐλλατῆβίας by Cosmas (*Top. Chr.* 2.56). For further information on this king, who also was made a Christian saint, and on the inscriptions referring to him, see Wolfgang Hahn, "Der Heilige Kaleb Ella Asbeha – König des Abessinierlandes und seine Münzen," *Money Trend* 3 (2000): 60-67.

11 More on Cosmas' Ethiopian adventure can be found in Laurence P. Kirwan, "The Christian Topography and the Kingdom of Axum", *The Geographical Journal* 138, no. 2 (June 1972): 166-177.

12 The passage in question is *Top. Chr.* 6.3. See Jakob Krall, "Studien zur Geschichte des alten Aegypten, IV. Das Land Punt," 11. Abhandlung der *Sitzungsberichte der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Classe*, 121 (Vienna: F. Tempsky,

1890) 72, Ann. 2; Winstedt *The Christian Topography of Cosmas Indicopleustes*, 5, Ann. 2; Bernhard Schleißheimer, *Kosmas Indikopleustes: Ein altchristliches Weltbild* (München: W. u. J.M. Salzer, 1959), 6 (misrepresenting the date for the solar eclipse as Feb. 2nd); Wolska-Conus vol. I, 1968, 16 (erroneously referring to two solar eclipses, just like Nina V. Pigulewskaja, *Byzanz auf den Wegen nach Indien: aus der Geschichte des byzantinischen Handels mit dem Orient vom 4. bis 6. Jahrhundert*, überarb. dt. Ausg. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1969), 112).

13 Milton V. Anastos summarized the references to Alexandria found in the *Christian Topography*. Cosmas seems to have not only lived in that city, but seems to have been proud of it. Milton V. Anastos, "The Alexandrian Origin of the 'Christian Topography' of Cosmas Indicopleustes," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 3 (1946), 76.

14 All translations from the *Christian Topography* are taken from John W. McCrindle, trans. and comm., *The Christian Topography of Cosmas, an Egyptian Monk* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1897). I have corrected obvious misprints throughout.

15 For a closer look at Cosmas' language see Josef Wittmann, *Sprachliche Untersuchungen zu Cosmas Indicopleustes* (Borna-Leipzig: Noske, 1913).

16 For further information on Mar Aba- Patricius see Adrian Fortescue, *The Lesser Eastern Churches* (London: Catholic Trust Society, 1913), 82f., Oskar Braun, *Ausgewählte Akten Per-sischer Märtyrer* (Kempten: Kösel, 1915) and Schleißheimer *Kosmas Indikopleustes*, 9f.

17 See Anastos "The Alexandrian Origin," esp. 76f. The Nestorians made a strong distinction between the man Jesus and Jesus as the divine son of God and believed that there were two persons in Jesus Christ; monophysitism, the position considered "orthodox" after the Council of Ephesus and the one prevalent in Egypt at least until 518, held that Christ was one person and had only one nature, his humanity being absorbed by his deity. At the Council of Chalcedon in 451, however, monophysitism was also declared heretic and replaced by the dogma that there were two inseparable natures in the one person of Jesus Christ. However, the patriarch of Alexandria and the other bishops of Egypt refused to accept the dogmata of Chalcedon, because they seemed to represent a new version of Nestorianism to them. Until Cosmas' lifetime, the Byzantine emperors tried to enforce the orthodox (i.e. Chalcedonian) position. Even now the Coptic Church is monophysite (or "miaphysite" in post-Chalcedonian terminology).

18 Cf. Photius, Cod. 36, quoted fully in Winstedt *The Christian Topography*, 1f.

19 Cf. McCrindle *The Christian Topography of Cosmas, an Egyptian Monk*, ix.

20 Milton V. Anastos, "Nestorius Was Orthodox," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 16 (1962): 117-140, argues that Nestorius' views were not heretical, but deplores that "he was not able to present them more skillfully. The obscurity and prolixity of his style are major defects [...]." Perhaps Cosmas had a similar notion. The historical fact that Nestorianism had been declared heretical was undeniable, but if the reason for this was only a matter of rhetorical style (a feature Cosmas admittedly did not hold in high esteem), there was no reason for him to openly condemn "orthodoxy", either.

21 In *Top. Chr.* 5.244, Mary is referred to as "Mother of God" (Θεοτόκος), a term which Nestorius strongly advised against. He proposed "Mother of Christ" (Χριστοτόκος) instead. The denomination is in the Laurentian codex and in the Sinaiticus, but not in the Vaticanus. Montfaucon included it in his *editio princeps*, whereas Winstedt and Wolska-Conus mention it only in the *apparatus criticus*. McCrindle wondered "Had Cosmas in his monastery

relapsed into what was there considered orthodoxy?" McCrindle, *The Christian Topography of Cosmas*, x.

22 This is not to say that Nestorian monasteries did not exist. There were several of them in Persia, on the opposite coast in Arabia, and even in China. It is hard to believe anything like a Nestorian monastic society existed in Egypt, which was still strongly dominated by mono-/miaphysite tendencies.

23 Apart from *Top. Chr.* 2.29 also in 2.45, 2.75 and 11.23.

24 McCrindle felt obliged to explain his translation of "Ἕλληνας as 'pagans' throughout the *Christian Topography* like this: "In the days of Cosmas it was used, not so much to designate persons of Hellenic descent, as persons who clung to the old superstitions of Greece and Rome and rejected Christianity." *Ibid.*, xi.

25 For instance, owing to Byzantine influence, the Arabs continued to call the Mediterranean Sea 'Sea of Rome' (*Baḥr al-Rūm*) until the end of the nineteenth century, although they were never subjects of the Byzantine Empire.

26 Horst Schneider, "Kosmas Indikopleustes, Christliche Topographie: Probleme der Überlieferung und Editions-geschichte," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 99/2 (2006): 605-614.

27 For more details on the codices see Wolska-Conus, vol. I, *Cosmas Indicopleustes*, 45-50.

28 In an e-mail to the author on March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2011, Prof. Ulrich Harsch confirmed that he took the portrait of the "anonymous monk" from Cod. Vat. gr. 699, fol. 83v. He says that he electronically removed the halo (which is missing in fig. 1) to give a less saintly appearance to the *monachus anonymus*.

29 Travis Lee Clark argues in his dissertation that the "narrative" images were as important to Cosmas' intentions as the "cosmological" ones and rightly points out that they were not later additions, but native to the text of the *Christian Topography* (p. 162). Still, it is quite possible that Cosmas had models he could draw on for the "narrative" images, while his "cosmological" sketches must be as original as the theories he developed. See Travis Lee Clark, *Imaging the cosmos. The Christian Topography by Kosmas Indikopleustes* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 2008) 162.

30 Apart from the passage quoted above, Cosmas refers to Mar Aba-Patricius on three other occasions; in *Top. Chr.* 2.29, where he claims to have received information on geographical matters from him, in *Top. Chr.* 5.1 in the context of the description of the tabernacle made by the Jews in the wilderness, and in *Top. Chr.* 8.25 as a source of information on Babylonian cosmological models.

31 For instance, the notion that the universe consists of nothing else than heaven and earth, which we find as a central hypothesis in Cosmas' works, is very strong in Theodore's commentary on *Genesis* 1. Eduard Sachau, ed. and trans., *Theodori Mopsuesteni fragmenta Syriaca* (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1869), 4, 6, 18.

32 For more information on Theodore of Mopsuestia and the School of Antiochia see Schleißeheimer, *Kosmas Indikopleustes*, 10-15.

33 *Ibid.*, 30f.

34 Charles Raymond Beazley, *The Dawn of Modern Geography* (London: Murray, 1897), 41.

35 However, this is not the only way to explain this part of Cosmas' cosmology; it has also been postulated that the Babylonians and even the ancient Greeks had the notion of a mountain behind which the sun hid at night, or at least the idea of an impressive range of mountains somewhere in the north Schleifheimer *Kosmas Indikopleustes*, 29f.

36 Don E. Wilson and DeeAnn M. Reeder, eds., *Mammal species of the world: a taxonomic and geographic reference*, Volume 1 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 637.

37 See for instance, Wolska-Conus, *Cosmas Indicopleustès*, vol. 1, 173f.

38 Cf. Ralph Hughes-Buller, ed., *Imperial gazetteer of India: Provincial series: Baluchistan* (Calcutta: Superintendent of Gov. Print, 1908), 36: "Throughout Makrān the staple food is dates. [...] Though all the trees belong to the species *Phoenix dactylifera*, they are distinguished locally into more than a hundred kinds, according to weight, size, and quality of the fruit. All trees are known either as pedigree trees (*nasabī*) or non-pedigree trees (*kuroch*). Among the former the best varieties are *mozāti*, *āp-e-dandān*, *haleni*, *begam jangi*, and *sabzo*." I must admit that, when I first saw the word  $\mu\omicron\zeta\acute{\alpha}$  next to the image of the tree, my impression was that this was a rendering of Arabic (and Persian) *moz*, meaning 'banana' (in fact, this is the etymon of Linné's scientific name for 'banana', *Musa*, and the banana-like plants, *Musaceae*). Later I discovered Winstedt had come across that idea already (1909, 16). On closer inspection, however, the plant Cosmas depicts does not so much resemble a banana tree, but really a date palm, as most scholars (including Wolska-Conus) have assumed and expressed by way of their captions to the picture (none of them have commented on the word  $\mu\omicron\zeta\acute{\alpha}$ , though). In the light of the term *mozāti* referring to dates, I think Winstedt's otherwise attractive "banana hypothesis" should be laid to rest.

39 On the importance of silk for Byzantium see Pigulewskaja *Byzanz auf den Wegen nach Indien*, 80-87.

40 *Ibid.*, 126.

41 McCrindle has "androstachys" in his translation, which is also what the codices give. But since this word is unknown, he suggests that this is a misspelling of *nardostachys*, which is the Greek term for spikenard. See McCrindle *The Christian Topography of Cosmas*, 366, esp. note 7. Wolska-Conus has emended this word in her Greek text, so the translation should also be changed accordingly.

42 One might think of Byzantine, but also of Syriac, Persian, Arabic, Himyarite or Ethiopian manuals—at least the merchants Cosmas most probably came into contact with in Egypt would be from these regions. Unfortunately, no such manual is extant for the time in question or anytime close. A few works Cosmas may have used, or ones that show at least some parallels with the route to India are as follows: I. A treatise from the middle of the fourth century, containing geographical and commercial information, extant in two Latin versions and commonly called *Expositio totius mundi et gentium*. See Pigulewskaja *Byzanz auf den Wegen nach Indien*, 46-50 and 100-109, as well as Franz Peter Mittag, "Zu den Quellen der *Expositio totius mundi et gentium*. Ein neuer Periplus?", *Hermes* 134 (2006): 338-351. II. A very short treatise the author of the *Expositio* may have used is called *Ὁδοιπορία ἀπὸ Ἐδέμ τοῦ παραδείσου ἄχρι τῶν Ῥωμαίων* ("Journey from Eden, the paradise, to the Romans.") See Alfred Klotz, *Rheinisches Museum*, N.F. 65 (1910): 606-616, as well as Pigulewskaja *Byzanz auf den Wegen nach Indien*, 100-109 and 323f. Perhaps Cosmas knew its contents, which may have sparked his effort to prove that paradise is contiguous with earthly realms in *Top. Chr.* 2.43-45. III. A curious report about a lawyer from Egyptian Thebes, from the fifth century, travelling via the Axumite kingdom to Sri Lanka, preserved in a treatise on the Brahmins

by Palladius. See J. Duncan M. Derrett, "The History of 'Palladius on the Races of India and the Brahmans,'" *Classica et Mediaevalia* 21 (1960): 64-135, as well as Don Patrick Mervyn Weerakkody, *Taprobanê – Ancient Sri Lanka as known to Greeks and Romans* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997): 119-131, and Stefan Faller, *Taprobane im Wandel der Zeit* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2000): 142-151. IV. The historical work of Ammianus Marcellinus (late fourth century), V. The ecclesiastical history of Philostorgios (early fifth century; only an excerpt compiled by Photios survives) and VI. The *Historia arcana* of Procopius (sixth century) all feature references to Byzantine commerce with the east, although not systematically. The list of these works is not meant to suggest that Cosmas copied large portions, or anything at all from them—in fact, his accounts about eastern regions exceed them and are far too lively to be the result of mere compilation—but they are meant to show that in Cosmas' lifetime and the immediately preceding centuries India, Sri Lanka, China and their commercial goods were of great interest to the Byzantines.

43 Franz Ferdinand Schwarz, "Kosmas und Siedediba," *Živa antika (Antiquité vivante)* 25 (1975): 469-490; Weerakkody *Taprobanê–Ancient Sri Lanka as known to Greeks and Romans*, 133-144; Faller *Taprobane im Wandel der Zeit*, 151-161.

44 Stefan Faller, "Die Malediven und Lakkadiven in griechischen und lateinischen Quellen," in: Stefan Faller, ed., *Studien zu antiken Identitäten* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2001), 163-192.

45 Clark *Imaging the Cosmos*, iv.

46 Welsch writes this about a fictional character, Henrik Ibsen's Peer Gynt. His reasons for doing so are reminiscent of the non-fictional person of Cosmas, though: "Ibsen's Peer Gynt (first staged in 1876), when scrutinizing his identity, discovers a multitude of personalities inside himself: that of a passenger, of a gold-digger, of an archaeologist, of one who knows how to enjoy life, etc. This is reflected by his wandering between various countries and cultures: from his home in Norway to Morocco, into the Sahara and to Egypt, to the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, also visiting various mythical places. Peer Gynt is an almost paradigmatic figure of transculturality. He represents the transgression from the old ideal of a person as a monad (sphere-like, monolithic, like the old concept of cultures) to the new mode of being as a nomad, a wanderer between various worlds and cultures – a minor change in the order of letters, and everything is different." ([...] Ibsens Peer Gynt (Uraufführung 1876) entdeckt, als er seine Identität erforscht, eine ganze Reihe von Personen in sich: einen Passagier, einen Goldgräber, einen Archäologen, einen Propheten, einen Bonvivant usw. – so wie er auch äußerlich ein Wanderer zwischen unterschiedlichen Ländern und Kulturen ist: zwischen seiner norwegischen Heimat und Marokko, der Sahara und Ägypten, dem Atlantik und dem Mittelmeer und zahlreichen mythischen Orten. Peer Gynt ist eine geradezu paradigmatische Figur der Transkulturalität. Er repräsentiert den Übergang vom alten Ideal der Person als Monade (kugelförmig, monolithisch wie das alte Konzept der Kulturen) zur neuen Seinsweise des Nomaden, des Wanderers zwischen verschiedenen Welten und Kulturen – ein kleiner Buchstabentausch, und alles ist anders.) See Welsch, "Was ist eigentlich Transkulturalität," 46.