

MELA'S PHOENICIAN GEOGRAPHY

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The appearance in 1998 of F. E. Romer's English translation of Pomponius Mela's *De Chorographia* has helped to raise further the profile of this previously rather obscure author.¹ Indeed, since the publication a decade previously of the Budé edition by Alain Silberman, interest in Mela seems to have grown quite steadily. Important contributions in German by Kai Brodersen have widened our appreciation of Mela's place within ancient geography as a whole, and his role within the history of cartography has been the subject of a number of shorter pieces.²

One element common to all these works, however, is a continuing tendency to disparage both Mela himself and the work he created. This is typified by Romer, for whom Mela was 'a minor writer, a popularizer, not a first-class geographer'; one 'shocking reason' for his choice of genre was simply poor preparation, 'insufficient for technical writing in geography'.³ Similar judgements appear in the works of Brodersen and Silberman.⁴ Mela's inaccuracies are, for these critics, typical of the wider decline of geography in the Roman period. Perhaps such negative views sprang initially from a sense of frustration: it was counted as one of our author's chief defects that he failed to list many sources for his work. For scholars interested in *Quellenforschung* it makes poor reading. Yet, quite clearly, the *De Chorographia* has also been damned by comparison. Mela's work has been held against the best Graeco-Roman learning on geography during antiquity — against Strabo, Ptolemy, or Pliny — and it has usually been found wanting. Set against the achievements of his peers, his work does not stand close scrutiny. Thus, for most scholars, the text has been read as a failed exercise in technical geography, or a markedly inferior document in the wider Graeco-Roman geographical tradition.⁵

Nevertheless, such judgements can only be meaningful if our author did indeed set out to write a technical manual, or chose to follow an established pattern. But did he? In what follows, I argue that in many crucial respects, he did neither. Mela does deserve our attention — not as a technical geographer or as part of the Graeco-Roman tradition, but as a representative of a distinct culture, all too often overlooked. If we attempt, by examining his motivations and background, to understand for what readership his work was intended, a different picture emerges. If we scrutinize both what is and what is not inside the geography, we may discover a writer fulfilling a parochial purpose. He is composing something which would bring meaning to compatriots and to kinsmen, not to academics or soldiers. His work can shed light on the world of Roman provincial life in a way that a thousand artifacts cannot.

¹ F. E. Romer, *Pomponius Mela's Description of the World* (1998; henceforth *Description*). To suggest it has raised Mela's profile is perhaps an understatement. Apart from Romer's work, the single piece devoted solely to Pomponius Mela in English appears to be the reference in the *OCD*.³

² The Budé edition (1988) contains an *Introduction* by Silberman (vii–liv), and *Notes complémentaires* (henceforth *Notes*), which cover many aspects of the work. The same author also wrote a number of articles on the subject. K. Brodersen's text with parallel German translation, titled *Kreuzfahrt durch die alte Welt* (1994), provides a concise summary of the geographical issues raised by Mela's text, and illustrations of attempted reconstructions of a map based on the *De Chorographia*. For another edition, see that of P. Parroni (1984).

³ Romer, *Description*, 27.

⁴ For example, Silberman's 'Le première ouvrage latin de géographie: la Chorographie de Pomponius Méla et ses sources Greques', *Klio* 71 (1989), 571–81; this is unduly negative not merely about Mela, but also at times about Strabo. For Brodersen, Mela's work was schematic and inconsistent, and plagued by poor technical knowledge; for which see his *Terra Cognita: Studien zur römischen Raumerfassung* (1995), 87–94.

⁵ For the standard critiques, see F. Gisinger, 'Pomponius Mela', in *RE* XXI (1952), 2308–49; C. Bur-sian, 'Zur Kritik des Pomponius Mela', *N. Jahrb. für Philol. u. Paed.* 39 (1869), 629–55. Comparative studies with Pliny can be found in D. Detlefsen, *Die Geografie Afrikas bei Plinius und Mela und ihrer Quellen*, *Quellen und Forschungen* 14 (1908), and A. Klotz, *Quaestiones Plinianaee geographicæ* (1906).

I. POMPONIUS MELA

Who was Pomponius Mela? This is a difficult question to answer. He is known to us only through his one extant work, the three books which comprise the *De Chorographia*. Inside this rather dry document we can find only a few personal references. Mela does provide us with his birthplace, Tingentera in southern Spain.⁶ Yet apart from this we know almost nothing about his life. There is no information on his family or where he lived, and no information about his works. His birth and death are unrecorded. We must piece together a story from a few fragments. It is possible that he was related in some way to Seneca: but a shared cognomen with one of the latter's sons remains the only significant testimony.⁷ Slim evidence indeed. As for his writing, we are similarly ignorant. He does mention other works twice in the *De Chorographia* — at the outset he claims that at a later stage he will write a more detailed geography, and in an aside about Rome he says that describing it was worthy of a separate volume.⁸ But the latter may have been a purely rhetorical device, and there is no evidence that Mela ever completed any other, more detailed geographical treatise.

We are left to ponder possible dates. The text itself can be dated with some degree of certainty to the reign of Claudius, on the strength of Mela's account of Britain. Here, he announces the imminent return of the greatest princeps ('principum maximus') from Britain and the celebration of a triumph.⁹ It had at one stage been argued that this might refer to the reign of Gaius.¹⁰ Yet there is greater circumstantial evidence in favour of a Claudian date, and we must suppose that Mela either composed the work, or at least edited it, sometime around A.D. 44.¹¹ From this, in turn, we may broadly surmise some dates for his lifetime; roughly speaking, Mela probably lived sometime between 20 B.C. and A.D. 100. Of this period the earlier portion seems more than likely; the *De Chorographia*, for all its faults, does not seem to be the work of a younger man.¹²

This last conclusion may perhaps best be seen from Mela's use of his sources: however superficially, he does seem to have consulted a wide range of material. Unlike earlier geographers such as Strabo, he was not interested in advertising the work of other scholars, and rarely troubled to discuss the merits or demerits of their opinions. He names just three authors in the entire work — Ennius, Nepos, and Homer.¹³ As for showing whence some of his other material derived, he only names the Carthaginian explorer Hanno and the Roman Q. Metellus Celer as primary sources, and gives no indication of how he accessed their accounts.¹⁴ That is not much to go on. Perhaps because of this, and given various concordances between certain passages in the *De Chorographia* and items to be found in Pliny, there has been considerable speculation about which other intermediate sources he used. In particular, there appears to have been a common source written before 25 B.C. which both Mela and Pliny used.¹⁵ This may be apparent from their description of the coast of Mauretania, for example.¹⁶ The

⁶ 2.96.

⁷ J. M. Gleason, 'A note on the family of the Senecae', *CP* 69 (1974), 278–9, seems overly optimistic about what can be made of the common cognomen. Had there been any real link, we might have expected it to emerge from the pages of Seneca himself. Romer, *Description*, 3, seems unaware of any difficulty in describing Mela as from an 'Italic family'.

⁸ 1.2; 2.60.

⁹ 3.49.

¹⁰ Initially by C. Frick, 'Ueber die Abfassungszeit der Chronographia des Pomponius Mela', *Philol.* 33 (1874), 741–2. The idea, its proponents, and its problems are discussed in Silberman, *Introduction*, x–xi.

¹¹ Silberman, *Introduction*, xi–xiii, gives a concise summary of the arguments in favour. Mela's description of Britain as 'quippe tam diu clausam' seems in particular to reflect a Claudian line of thinking later

reproduced by Suetonius (*Claudius* 17) and Tacitus (*Agricola* 13).

¹² I differ in this respect from Romer, *Descriptions*, 9, 23, where brashness, lack of preparation for technical geography, avoidance of judgement, blind modernism, and ambivalence about the *antichthon* are cited as plausible reasons for Mela's youth at the time of composition. Notwithstanding the way in which these supposed flaws prejudice the purpose of the text, in at least two cases, they may be equally cited as signs of maturity. *Contra*, his familiarity with the material itself is the strongest possible motive for seeing him at least in middle age.

¹³ 2.66 (Ennius); 3.45, 90 (Nepos); the Homeric references are discussed below.

¹⁴ 3.90, 93 (Hanno); 3.45 (Metellus).

¹⁵ Silberman devotes considerable space to the idea: *Introduction*, xxxvi–xlii.

¹⁶ Detlefsen, *op. cit.* (n. 5).

identity of any common source, or whether there was more than one such source, is open to speculation but it is quite possible that material used by both authors was written by Varro.¹⁷

However, it must also be admitted that our author consulted a wide range of texts in Greek. Conclusive proof of this is nigh impossible to establish; nor can we say with assurance the identities of the various authors. There are, however, sufficient passages within the *De Chorographia* to suggest his use of earlier accounts: although Mela may have had scant regard for whatever sources he read, he clearly had read some. The title itself gives some indication of a familiarity with geographical concepts current in Greek texts of the period.¹⁸ A brief reference to Greek *physicos* is another sign, as is the passage in which he discusses the possibility of inhabitants of other continents — the *antichthones*.¹⁹ The very construction of the *De Chorographia*, in the form of voyages along the coasts of the world, allows us to assume that he was aware of the existence and probably the contents of one or more *periplus* texts, quite probably written in Greek.²⁰ Mela also seems to have read Herodotus, or accounts which drew very heavily on the latter.²¹ Furthermore, it may be conjectured that he was aware of and used the work of Strabo, or at least one of Strabo's chief sources, perhaps Posidonius or Artemidorus.²² Whatever the case, we are clearly not dealing with a novice but with a man of some learning. Mela was capable of organizing and writing a coherent, if slightly clumsy, text on the world of his day.²³

II. THE REJECTION OF TRADITION

So far, nothing about Mela's circumstances or literary endeavours need overly surprise us. A Spanish provincial, he had read the standard sources and seems to have constructed a journeyman's geographical text. Yet closer inspection is revealing: whatever Mela had or had not read, his is no traditional account. Although couched in a format which seems to embody the ways of his geographical predecessors, in both construction and emphasis the *De Chorographia* offers a clear rejection of established geographical traditions.

Re-assessing Homer

This rejection may be seen initially in his negative attitude to Homer. Whatever materials Mela used to compose his work, one thing is certain: they would have contained extensive reference to Homer. For writers in Greek, the poet remained central

¹⁷ Amongst others, see e.g. C. Nicolet, *Space, Geography and Politics in the Early Roman Empire* (1991), 174, n. 15.

¹⁸ The title itself may not be completely secure; it does appear, however, at the head of *Vat. Lat.* 4929, which by common agreement is considered the earliest manuscript extant.

¹⁹ 3.45 (*Physicos*); 1.4, 54 (*antichthones*).

²⁰ As Silberman notes (*Introduction*, xxxii–iii), a considerable number of place names appear in their Greek form, rendering it probable that Mela transcribed the names directly from Greek texts. Furthermore, Mela indicates on occasion that information is provided by general sources, including 'experts' and 'Greeks' (e.g. 1.60, 76; 2.83, 96, 100, 113; 3.56, 57, 60).

²¹ Silberman (*ibid.*) concedes that Mela's descriptions of Egypt and Scythia, for example, seem to derive from Herodotus, but considers it unlikely that he consulted the latter's work directly, instead gaining

information via an intermediary. That Mela often misinterprets or condenses Herodotus' text, however, seems insufficient reason to believe that he had never read it.

²² Typically, Strabo is not considered a primary source by most commentators, who prefer to see in Mela's account ideas from Artemidorus or Poseidonius (e.g. Silberman, *Introduction*, xxxiv; Gisinger, *op. cit.* (n. 5), 2404–5). This is in some contrast to the standard view (alluded to in the previous note) whereby most of Mela's information came from intermediary sources. Strabo's account was, of course, the best intermediary source available to Mela, and certainly there are numerous places where Mela's information seems to rely upon the account provided by the *Geography*.

²³ His learning clearly extended from the traditional to more recent accounts, as exemplified by the naming of hitherto unattested peoples, such as the Satarchae (2.3), or places, such as Scandinavia (3.54).

to the whole idea of geography.²⁴ This is exemplified by the work of Strabo, who opens his account with Homer and pursues the theme relentlessly until the closing stages. Whether Mela had indeed read Strabo, as suggested above, or whether he had not, he was certainly aware of Homer; and undoubtedly he was aware too of the latter's influence on the subject as a whole.

The Homeric songs provided a common cultural heritage which could be embraced by many peoples of the Greek-speaking East, not just those of mainland Greece. The songs of Homer were widely considered as almost sacred texts. Unsurprisingly, then, citizens of even the farthest-flung Greek communities throughout the Mediterranean world found pride and a sense of belonging in locating themselves, as it were, on the Homeric map. The historical continuity of interaction between their areas and the heartland of Greek affairs (which also embraced Troy and the neighbouring regions in Asia Minor) lent value to the lives of many provincials in Greek cities. It was not a question of ethnicity. The majority of those who partook of Greek culture throughout the East were Greek by education, not by direct ancestry. To these people, Homer was the foundation stone of a common cultural tradition.²⁵

Such feelings, however, may not have been as strong in the western half of the Empire. Homer's geographic grasp was, as his many Greek admirers pointed out, very wide in its scope; it seemed to have embraced most areas of the Mediterranean. Enthusiasts such as Strabo were keen to show how far Homer had been aware of the peoples and lands even at the very edges of the Mediterranean region and beyond.²⁶ Nevertheless, even the poet's most ardent supporters could not deny that his verses had little in the way of specifics for the western Mediterranean. Thus there was correspondingly less for people in Italy, Africa, Spain, and Gaul to promote by way of Homeric ties. The provincials of towns in the Roman West often had no literary background (at least no *Homeric* literary background) against which to place their existence. Their homes were in 'new towns', physical manifestations of the way ahead. Just as many provincials became 'new men' by adapting — by leaving older ways behind in favour of Roman connections — so the landscape of the Roman West was, during the first century A.D., in the process of transformation and adaptation towards the Italian pattern. Mela's home town, Tingentera, was ample proof of this: as discussed below, it seems to have been a town created by *fiat*, whose inhabitants must often have felt the need for the explanation of their position and background.²⁷

Lacking historical ties to the Greek world, and organizing themselves for a Roman future, many educated provincials in the West must have been searching for a new model of geography — a new model for the world of the West. In creating this, Homer, and the Greek model for which he was the outstanding symbol, had to be jettisoned. This is especially visible in Mela's work; and grasping it is essential if his writing is to be fully understood. Mela resisted the Homeric model of geography both actively and passively. His active resistance is demonstrated where he takes open issue with Homer; passively, he shows his independence by refusing to be interested in Homeric things, and by avoiding, where possible, discussion of Homer's information.

Of the two, it is easier initially to consider how far the Homeric influence is resisted passively — that is, how far the Homeric themes and elements common to geographical

²⁴ In general, see M. Sechi, *La Costruzione della scienza geografica nei pensatori dell' antichità classica*, Memorie della Società Geografica Italiana 44 (1990), ch. 8.2; 137–43. Also, C. Jacob, *Géographie et ethnologie en Grèce ancienne* (1991), 16–32; R. French, *Ancient Natural History* (1994), 125 ff. Despite the careful attempts to discriminate between poetry and facts in Homer by Eratosthenes, subsequent scholars continued to place great emphasis on the poet. This was certainly true of Crates of Mallos, as argued by G. Aujac, *Strabon et la science de son temps* (1966), 24–5. The latter also amply illustrates Strabo's own attitude. The *Geography* actually opens (1.1.1) with a discussion of Homer.

²⁵ One which also endured: see Dio Chrysostom's

description (*Orations*, 36.9–10) of the Homer-loving citizenry of Olbia, for example. The town was on the very edge of the Graeco-Roman world.

²⁶ Strabo is at pains to point out that Homer's silence on many areas was not a shortcoming (1.2.29), and that he was not to be compared to other poets (1.2.20). On Strabo's account, Homer was well aware of Egypt and the Ethiopians (1.2.31–2), for example. The poet's knowledge of the area in the remoter West is also asserted at several points (1.1.4). Limitations to his knowledge were admitted (e.g. in the case of India, 1.2.32), even that he came by some accounts from the Phoenicians (1.1.4); but in general, the picture is consistently positive.

²⁷ See Section III below, esp. nn. 52–6.

discussion are absent. This was ultimately the most effective way in which the Homeric tradition could be avoided. In the *De Chorographia* it is not an absence of Homeric material which indicates this — quite the reverse. The names of the heroes are here in abundance, and the sites of the Homeric cycle are also present — testimony in itself that Mela may have used Homer, or a source such as Strabo, which was heavy in Homeric material. Instead, it is the lack of interest in relating these people and places to the poet which is most telling — for example, the absence of any reference to the *Catalogue of Ships*, or the casual way in which the Hyperboreans appear.²⁸ Achilles, Ajax, Diomedes, Ulysses — heroic figures appear sporadically throughout the text. Yet there is no real need to examine Mela's treatment of them in detail: it is futile to chase down the name of every hero or town common to both the Homeric cycle and Mela, because they are cited only from the point of view of entertainment, not from a discussion of their validity. Since there is little discussion in Mela's work as a whole, we can hardly expect debate about the Myrmidons, or of Rhesus and his Thracians, or any concerted attempt to identify where they lived.

The whole character of the *De Chorographia* worked against such discussion. Except at points where the author was really interested, he offers only a sketch, pure and simple. Yet it is vital to recognize this method of composition as an act of choice: it is an indication of the lack of weight Mela attached to these subjects. One simple proof of this, for example, is the curious assertion that Aenos in Thrace was founded by Aeneas.²⁹ Not only does this fail to accord with more recent propaganda about the origins of Rome, it flies in the face of several sources whom Mela seems otherwise to have consulted. These include not just Homer, but Herodotus and Strabo.³⁰ To have read or thought attentively about Aenos would have given another view.

As for Mela's attitude to Homer himself, however, we may reasonably surmise it from the points at which he actively chooses to mention him. There are three of these, one in each book; and all are instructive. The first is a reference to Egyptian Thebes. A list of the most famous cities of Egypt is given, including:

... Thebae utique quae, ut Homero dictum est, centum portas, sive, ut alii aiunt, centum aulas habent, totidem olim principum domos, solitasque singulas, ubi negotium exegerat, dena armatorum milia effundere.³¹

... Thebes, which as it was told by Homer, has one hundred gates, or, as others have it, one hundred palaces, homes in previous days to the same number of princes, each of which could by itself, when the need arose, put out a force of ten thousand soldiers.

The tone of this passage immediately establishes the author's view. The Homeric story that the city possessed one hundred gates is given. Yet it is quickly passed over, without any further discussion, in favour of another, much longer account, which Mela clearly appears to find either more believable or simply more interesting. Either way, it is not particularly flattering to Homer.

The second reference, although superficially neutral, is once more quite damning. In this instance, what the reader notes first and foremost is the oblique way in which Homer is mentioned. In a passage about the Pharos at Alexandria, Mela informs us that, according to the Homeric songs ('Homeric carmine'), the lighthouse was in earlier times removed from the shores by a considerable distance — a day's sailing.³² The failure to name the text explicitly (and the reminder of its poetic nature) inspires little confidence in the information. No specific mark of respect is offered to the poet himself. Mela then goes on to speculate, seemingly with no axe to grind, about what changes need to have taken place in the form of the Egyptian coastline for the lighthouse to have originally been located at such a distance. At first glance, it seems to be a harmless, even

²⁸ Contrast Strabo's reverential treatment of the *Catalogue* (1.2.17: it is 'aimed at the truth'). His discussion of mainland Greece is essentially the work of a scholiast on the *Catalogue*. See e.g. P. W. Wallace, *Strabo's Description of Boiotia. A Commentary* (1979), 2. For Mela on the Hyperboreans, see 1.12, 13; 3.36.

²⁹ 2.28.

³⁰ It appears in Homer at *Iliad* 4.520; also Herodotus 4.90; Strabo 7, frag. 51.

³¹ 1.60. Cf. *Iliad* 9.381.

³² 2.104. The reference is to *Od.* 4.358.

good-natured, attempt to justify the Homeric account. But we should remember that the instance in question was well known to scholars in antiquity; indeed it was a notorious error on Homer's part, which required the ingenuity or disingenuity of his most ardent defenders to excuse. Such a passage, which Mela may well have read, is to be found in Strabo, who appears to cast the blame for the error on whoever it was that gave the information to Homer initially.³³ Mela probably knew well the effect of raising this mistake, and his own attempts to retrieve Homer's text, subtly undermined by a hint of doubt ('si ita res fuit') may have been particularly disingenuous.

It is the final reference, however, which is the most decisive. The discussion concerns whether or not the earth was surrounded by water.³⁴ On this issue, in one of the very few personal opinions he gives throughout the whole text, Mela states:

Sed praeter physicos Homerumque qui universum orbem mari circumfusum esse dixerunt, Cornelius Nepos ut recentior, auctoritate sic certior; testem autem rei Quintum Metellum Celerem adicit, eumque ita rettulisse commemorat: cum Galliae pro consule praeesset Indos quosdam a rege Boiorum dono sibi datos; unde in eas terras devenissent requirendo congnoisse, vi tempestatum ex Indicis aequoribus abreptos, emensosque quae intererant, tandem in Germaniae litora exisse.³⁵

But, beyond the early philosophers and Homer, who said that the the whole world was surrounded by ocean, there is the testimony of Cornelius Nepos, who, as a more recent witness, is thus more reliable. On this subject, Nepos furnishes the account of Q. Metellus Celer, attributing to the latter the following report: when Celer was proconsul in Gaul, he was given by the king of the Boii some Indians as a gift. And upon trying to establish whence they had arrived in those parts, they answered that they had been driven by the force of tempests from Indian waters, and having crossed the intervening districts they had finally come to the shores of Germany.

Homer is mentioned, but he is hardly given reverential treatment. He is merely appended to an otherwise nondescript group of *physici*, as an example of one who holds the truth of this assertion. Not only that, worse is to come: Homer's thesis was, according to Mela, made more credible by the superior account of Cornelius Nepos, who, as a more recent witness, should be worthier of trust — a comment which presumably would have been enough to make poor Strabo turn in his grave. And in a final effort to outdo Homer entirely, Mela adds the report of Quintus Metellus Celer, to the effect that some Indians found in Germany at that time must have travelled there via the northern Ocean.³⁶ It is a bald expression of the triumph of modern Roman learning over the stolid and often erroneous theorizing of the Greeks.

Nothing could emphasize the differences between the Greek geographers and Mela more than these occasional references to the poet. Mela may have been aware of Homer. Yet he was as indifferent to his charms as many writers in Greek were to his defects. True enough, Homer had his detractors even amongst the latter: but in the act of revolt they paid homage to his immense influence. In the *De Chorographia*, however, Homeric elements are scattered about for interest and amusement only. At each point, a reader who knew Homer might feel the need for a reference, a quotation, or more information about the mythical element. In Mela's concise version there was room for none.

Beyond Greece and Rome

If we move away from the subject of Homer to look at the whole construction of the *De Chorographia*, we find further striking contrasts with earlier geographical texts. Here too, our author broke away from tradition. Unlike his predecessors' accounts, Mela's world appears to have no definite cultural centre. Naturally, in whatever Greek

³³ 1.2.30. Strabo goes to considerable lengths to defend Homer on this point.

³⁴ 3.44–6.

³⁵ 3.45.

³⁶ *ibid.* A much disputed passage.

documents he had read, Greece itself, like Homer, remained at the centre of the world. This was true both of historians and of geographers. Even Polybius, for example, whilst composing his chronicle of the rise of Rome, set it inside the larger framework of the Greek-speaking world. Similarly, Strabo's world is one in which the details are painted on to an Homeric background. Unfortunately we no longer possess many of the world geographies we know to have been written by Greek authors such as Posidonius or Artemidorus. However, judging by Strabo's text the emphasis on Greece proper must have been very evident. Despite its small land area and relative paucity of resources, Greece and its associated islands occupy the central three books out of fifteen Strabo devoted to a description of the known world. Indeed, a total of eight books — more than half his account — form his centrepiece, which is a description of what might be termed the Greek milieu, including adjoining areas such as Thrace and Asia Minor, both strongly connected with the Greek world since early antiquity.³⁷

Mela's Greece, by contrast, occupies a mere nineteen sections out of a total of some three hundred and fifty. The description is curt, and to save space the reader's knowledge about (or lack of real interest in?) Greece is already assumed. This is particularly true of Athens, which Mela dismisses with the remarkable phrase 'clariore quam ut indicari egeant Athenae'.³⁸ Some parts of Mela's list seem to have been taken from Strabo, though there can be no certainty.³⁹ If so, Mela has either failed to understand the significance of the construction of the *Geography* or wilfully misread it; as noted above, there is certainly no mention here of the Homeric *Catalogue of Ships*. It may also be significant that when Mela chooses to comment on Corinth, for example, he cuts straight to the point — 'Corinth, once famous for its opulence, is now more noted, after its disaster, as a Roman colony' ('Corinthos olim clara opibus, post clade notior, nunc Romana colonia').⁴⁰ Mela does trouble to mention some famous Greek figures, but not excessively. Diogenes the Cynic, Demosthenes, the poet Aratus, the Athenian Cimon — only a few random names, scattered throughout the text, can be found.⁴¹ For the observant reader, Mela's attitude is summed up by his reference to Greek thought about Nysa and the nearby mountain, Meros, in India:

Famam hinc praecipue habent; in illa genitum, in huius specu Liberum arbitrantur esse nutritum, unde Graecis auctoribus ut femori Iovis insitum dicerent aut materia ingessit aut error.⁴²

These places chiefly derive their repute from the fact that people think that Liber was born in the town, and suckled in a cave on the mountain. From this, either their materials or plain misjudgement have led Greek authors to say that Liber was placed in the thigh of Jupiter.

The phrasing makes the implication clear: Greek learning and Greek errors were synonymous.

Furthermore, we should remember that Mela did not simply refuse to acknowledge Greece as the centre of world. In many ways he also rejected Rome. Given Mela's lack of interest in maintaining the traditions of geography as it had been transmitted via texts written in Greek, it might be thought that his interest would primarily lie with the world of Rome. Indeed, many have taken an interest in Mela precisely for this reason; as the earliest extant geographical text in Latin, the *De Chorographia* has a clear appeal for Roman historians, and the information he provides has often been put to use in studies dealing with Roman history. Surprisingly, however, the same lack of interest which Mela displays in Greece is equally apparent for Rome. Odd as it seems, Mela was not interested in Rome *per se* at all.

³⁷ To suggest, as does Silberman, *Introduction*, xxv, n. 2, that Strabo's treatment of Greece is not much better than that of Mela is unwarranted. It is superior in every sense.

³⁸ 2.41.

³⁹ For example, Silberman, *Notes*, 188–90, lists first and foremost the links between this text and that of Pliny, as he does elsewhere. However, as his own notes indicate, Mela's account also closely mirrors the

account of Strabo. The consistency of such similarities can, of course, prove little, but may give a strong indication that Mela had access to Strabo's text, or an intermediary document.

⁴⁰ 2.48.

⁴¹ 1.105 (Diogenes); 2.109 (Demosthenes); 1.71 (Aratus); 1.78 (Cimon).

⁴² 3.66.

Had Mela been interested in creating a more Roman geography, he might have begun by shifting the centre of the world more explicitly to Italy. There was, after all, plenty to write about, with the towns, roads, and aqueducts which made the Italian peninsula unique. Yet there is little evidence that this was ever an objective. His account both of Italy as a whole and of Rome as a city is startlingly reminiscent of the earlier treatment of Greece. Italy receives merely fifteen sections of text, three less even than Greece. It makes no pretence at being anything other than a bland catalogue. Nor was Mela overly keen to wax eloquent about Rome. Unlike Pliny, who would later go on to sing the praises of the capital and catalogue various items purely in terms of when they first were seen in Rome, Mela spends almost no time at all in praise of the city.⁴³ It is dispatched with the same brevity that Athens was, this time via a neat side-step: Rome was, says Mela, 'founded long ago by shepherds, but now, if justice was done to the material, would be worth a book of its own'.⁴⁴ Assuming Mela took some heed of his readers, one is tempted to conclude either that his readership was very familiar with Rome, or that they were largely uninterested in it. Inevitably, considering the vastness and splendour of the capital, the second answer seems somehow more appropriate.

This conclusion is reinforced by Mela's clear lack of concern for Rome's distinctive history and for its own mythology. The absence of many Roman historical figures is remarkable. There is no Scipio, no Fabius or Flaminius. No Marius, no Sulla. We hear nothing about Crassus, or Caesar, nothing about Mark Antony. Could Mela have been ignorant of these people? That is scarcely credible, since he can conjure up, as we shall see, one or two names at least. More tellingly, he betrays a knowledge of Ennius, which makes silence about Scipio, for instance, all the more strange.⁴⁵ The lone mention made of Pompey is similarly significant.⁴⁶ It concerns the town of Pompeiopolis in Cilicia, and Mela can relate that the town was settled by Rhodians and Argives before Pompey settled some pirates there. At that time the town was called Soloe, but later took the name Pompeiopolis. This seems to imply a basic knowledge of Republican history (at least Pompey's campaigns in the East), which curiously finds no expression elsewhere. Nor, too, does he seem to have been swayed by imperial propaganda which related specifically to Rome; Mela appears oblivious to the attempts made in the time of Augustus to promote the mythical attachment of Rome to Asia Minor, and even to Africa, via the legend of Aeneas. As we have seen, his account of Aeneas and Aenos contains discrepancies from the accounts prevalent. Certainly, he makes no real attempt to disassociate Antandros in the Aeolid from an alleged connection with Ascanius, Aeneas' son.⁴⁷

Ultimately, however, it is very difficult to conceive of Mela's work as a 'Roman Geography', since to an extraordinary extent it seems to deny the existence of the Roman State. Were it not for the oblique reference to Claudius' conquest of Britain discussed earlier, we would hardly learn from Mela that the Roman State existed at all as an institutional entity. The word *princeps* does actually occur (at the same point in the text), but about the imperial legates, about the frontiers, about the role of the Senate or the distribution or creation of a provincial system, about the legions and their dispositions there is barely a word. Augustus may have begun the process of stamping Rome's imperial authority on the world-maps of his day, with provincial arrangements and the permanent settling of legions, but one would hardly know about this from Mela. Augustus' conquests in the Danube area go unmarked. Amongst innumerable things which pass without mention we can find no struggle against the Pannonians, and no Dacians to worry about. There is no Lugdunum, no reference to the reorganization of provincial structures, or of the re-organization of the East.

Why this should be the case is unclear. Perhaps Mela's readers could safely be assumed to possess this knowledge already. Or, although unlikely, Mela himself might not have been well informed about provincial arrangements. Whatever the case may be,

⁴³ Noted by French, *op. cit.* (n. 24), 216.

⁴⁴ 2.60.

⁴⁵ 2.66. Ennius seems to have had some connection with the Scipios (Cicero, *Pro Arch.* 9.22), making the

omission more noticeable for those interested in Roman themes.

⁴⁶ 1.71.

⁴⁷ 1.92.

the lack of reference to Roman frontiers is especially instructive. The world described in the *De Chorographia* is a world in which the Romans are the unacknowledged masters, whose domination the author neither needs to, nor cares to describe. Rome's domination, like the science of the Greeks, is in great measure taken as understood. It was simply not a focus of attention. For Mela's real interests we must look elsewhere.

III. OLD ROOTS AND NEW VISIONS

If we wish to understand the *De Chorographia* of Pomponius Mela, we need to set it outside the established tradition of Greek geographical writing. We must disabuse ourselves of the idea that it was in some way a 'Roman' document; it belongs neither to Greece nor to Rome. Instead, we need to return to Mela's origins and his circumstances as we know them. Here are all the clues we need to give the text its proper meaning.

The two facts which he does reveal about himself are essential for the full appreciation of his work. Speaking of the coast of southern Spain, he says:

et sinus ultra est in eoque Carteia, ut quidam putant aliquando Tartessos, et quam transvecti ex Africa Phoenices habitant atque unde nos sumus Tingentera.⁴⁸

After this is a bay in which is the town of Carteia (according to some, the site of former Tartessos) and Tingentera, in which live Phoenicians who were transported here from Africa, and whence we ourselves originate.

Everything about this statement is significant.⁴⁹ Mela indicates first that the origin of his community was a Phoenician settlement which crossed over from Africa; indeed, his use of the present tense (*habitant*) strongly implies the continued Phoenician nature of the town. Secondly, he places its current location at Tingentera, in Spain, in the region of Carteia, held by some to have been Tartessos, another Phoenician site of considerable antiquity. As we shall see, between them these statements provide a vital context without which it is impossible to understand the *De Chorographia*. It is worthwhile, therefore, establishing the basis of Mela's claims at this point.

It would initially be helpful if either the area from which this community was transposed or the site of Tingentera itself were known to archaeologists. Unfortunately, neither is known. It is not fruitful to speculate whether for Phoenician one might read Liby-phoenician, postulating an arrival from much farther east; for we know that Phoenician communities were scattered right along the African coast.⁵⁰ Nor can we locate with any precision the town of Tingentera, a name not given by any other source. Strabo talks of the town of Zelis, whose inhabitants were moved across from Africa, and which was renamed Iulia Iozia.⁵¹ The meaning of this text is open to dispute: it is quite possible that the renamed town was not the Spanish settlement at all, but the original African settlement which later became the Iulia Constantia Zilil found in Pliny.⁵² On the other hand, this town seems also to fit Mela's description, and some scholars have pointed out that *ioza* may be a Phoenician word which means 'transported'.⁵³ The issue is further muddled by our other sources. Pliny speaks of Tangier (Tingis) as relocated too, calling it *Traducta Iulia*, something which again seems confused.⁵⁴ To add to the

⁴⁸ 2.96.

⁴⁹ Pace Romer, who seems to believe Mela 'blurts out' the information at random: *Description*, 1.

⁵⁰ The suggestion was that of Silberman, *Notes*, 227, n. 12. (re 2.96).

⁵¹ 3.1.8. The text also indicates that the Romans sent *epoikoi* to the site of the renamed town.

⁵² Pliny, *NH* 5.2. This case is strongly argued by N. Mackie in 'Augustan colonies in Mauretania', *Historia* 32 (1983), 332-58, see especially 343-50. There is perhaps some reason to suspect that Mela's people *did* come from the site of Zilia, since that is where he ends his account. See below, n. 146.

⁵³ Mackie, *op. cit.* (n. 52), 344, and n. 39, provides the literature for this argument, but remains sceptical. The possibility cannot be entirely ruled out, however; the word *ioza* does carry a strong resemblance to the Phoenician 'yṣ'. See further, A. Schulten, *Iberische Landeskunde I* (1955), 146.

⁵⁴ Pliny, *NH* 5.2. In addition to Mackie's discussion noted above, see J. Desanges in the Budé edition of Pliny, *NH* (1980), 84-5. Mackie's analysis, by which Tingis was merely refounded by Claudius and had been *Traducta Iulia* since Augustan days, is very plausible.

problem, there is in fact some later evidence for an as yet undiscovered settlement on the Spanish coast called Transducta.⁵⁵ The sources thus create a measure of confusion and the situation may be impossible to sort out satisfactorily. Nevertheless, we may be confident that the translocation of Mela's community did indeed take place, for other sources indicate that such movements from Africa had often occurred. Indeed, wherever the location of Iulia Izoa was, the population transfer from Africa to Spain remains the central, unchallenged feature of Strabo's account.⁵⁶ Nor is this the only piece of evidence relating to such movement. Our ancient sources speak with some conviction on the point, and are at pains to stress the ease of relations between the communities on both African and Spanish sides of the Gibraltar Straits.⁵⁷

Thus Mela may be believed when he tells us that he lived in a community whose origins were Phoenician and whose location was in Spain. These two facts are central, I believe; they will explain the emphasis of the work. As is argued below, his concentration on both the Phoenician heritage and Spanish surroundings is remarkable — it is as if Mela were re-orientating the map. Exploring the text from this angle, we can see a writer outlining a vision of the world as it was known by a famous culture, but one which was neither intellectually nor militarily dominant.

The World of the Phoenicians

It is a moot question whether the impact of Phoenicia on the ancient world of the Mediterranean has ever received the recognition it deserved. In antiquity, certain geographical sources, chiefly in Greek, provide enough information for us to estimate that this impact was quite profound. But the information is often given only grudgingly, and usually without especial emphasis. Modern accounts, in turn, are hardly noteworthy for emphasis on Phoenician civilization as a whole. It is only very recently that the phenomenon has been accorded any treatment at all: traditional narratives have been dominated either by temporal divisions between early 'biblical' Phoenicia and Phoenicia in classical antiquity, or by the geographical division between the worlds of Phoenicia and Carthage.⁵⁸ The cohesion of Phoenician culture has been rather overlooked in all this, despite the continued use in the ancient sources of the term Phoenician to describe various settlements in the western Mediterranean even into the first century A.D.

Some scholars have side-stepped the question by emphasizing the gradual absorption of Phoenicia, and its offshoot Carthage, into the Greek-speaking milieu. After the conquest of the Phoenician coastline by Alexander, the great cities of Phoenicia, Sidon, and Tyre did undoubtedly begin to reflect Hellenistic culture, so that by the time of Rome's dominion they can be spoken of as Greek cities.⁵⁹ Yet the evidence we possess indicates the persistence of distinctive elements of Phoenician culture in the homeland well into the first century A.D. and shows that in the western Mediterranean Punic cultures endured despite the proximity of Greek cities. We might question, for example, whether Carthage ever really become 'Hellenized', as Momigliano once claimed.⁶⁰ Aristotle might treat the city as a *polis*, but that reveals very little — the *polis* was simply the best local concept available for dealing with this Phoenician town. And that Eratosthenes placed Carthage on an equal footing with the Romans, Persians, and

⁵⁵ Ptolemy 2.4.6. The name does appear as 'Traducta', but only in the geography of Ravenna (5.4).

⁵⁶ Mackie, *op. cit.* (n. 52), 348–50, does not dispute this element in Strabo. Nor is she concerned to locate Tingentera itself. On the other hand, she does discuss the parallel case of a movement from Africa noted by Pliny, *NH* 3.19 (from Icosium in Mauretania to Ilici in Spain).

⁵⁷ Gellius 10.26.6, stresses that the crossing at the Straits is no more really than a *transgressio* and it is certainly not a lengthy voyage, only 15 km at its shortest point. This enabled the kind of communications noted by Plutarch, *Sertorius* 7, 9, Sallust,

Jugurtha 18, and by the author of the *Bellum Alexandrinum* 51–62.

⁵⁸ A trend now finally being reversed: see especially V. Krings (ed.), *La civilisation phénicienne et punique* (1995). In the present article, the underlying unity of Phoenician/Punic civilization is assumed, unless specific historical events and personalities associated rather with Carthage than Phoenicia in general are at stake.

⁵⁹ e.g. F. G. B. Millar, *The Roman Near East 31 BC–AD 337* (1994), 505.

⁶⁰ A. Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom* (1971), 4.

Indians when it came to the standards of Hellenistic civilization makes one only more, not less, eager to see them as distinct.⁶¹ After all, in the other cases, as Momigliano himself argued, the Greek view of each of these people was rather myopic.⁶² And the fact that both Macedonian and Seleucid rulers had looked to Hannibal for support during their military campaigns against Rome reveals almost nothing about essential Greek attitudes to Carthage or Phoenicia itself. One might easily adduce similar but contrary evidence, such as the wars fought between Greeks (not Macedonians) and Carthaginians in Sicily.

What links existed did so mostly in the intellectual field. On the account given by authors in Greek, the process was fairly straightforward. Phoenician intellectuals, such as the Pythagoreans mentioned by Iamblichus, Clitomachus, the head of the Academy in Athens, or the atomist philosopher Mochus provided input into mainstream Greek thinking.⁶³ They contributed ideas and in some cases attended Greek learning institutions. But we know almost nothing of the other side of the story. Both Phoenician and Carthaginian sources are entirely lacking. Like the Romans, the Phoenicians seem to have been adept at absorbing and responding to the ideas and practices of Greek thought. But we should be wary of mistaking intellectual affinity for social, cultural, and political identity. The Carthaginians, for example, were quite evidently capable of adapting Greek ideas for their own purposes and political ends. Had a different result emerged from the Punic Wars, we might have found today's scholars arguing over how it was that Carthaginian, not Roman, civilization was able to exploit and subsume the key elements of Greek culture, and yet remain a mystery to the Greeks themselves. It is vital to beware of deriving from our Greek and Latin sources a purely Graeco-Roman Phoenician or Punic civilization.

On the other hand, recent attempts at making a positive synthesis of what can be gleaned about Phoenician and Punic influence on the Mediterranean world from various sources — archaeological, epigraphic, textual — have led to only partial results. For example, as a close inspection of the excellent survey edited recently by Veronique Krings illustrates, although the Phoenician and Punic civilization can generate a considerable amount of text, a great deal of caution is evident throughout: in many areas there is simply insufficient information to proceed, or we remain highly unlikely to be able to do so.⁶⁴ It is true that a considerable amount of archaeological information is now available, and we are much better informed than ever before about the situation in Spain and Africa.⁶⁵ Yet many problems are still to be solved, and we remain in need of further materials.

Ultimately, however, modern scholars hesitate to locate the Phoenicians on the cultural map of the Mediterranean because the ancient sources themselves are mostly contradictory on this point.⁶⁶ It has often been noted that Polybius, Posidonius, and other Greek intellectuals associated with Rome seem to have found Roman expansion at once both a welcome and yet a worrying phenomenon. Similarly with Phoenicia; from what we can judge from our extant sources, especially the works of geographers, a definite ambivalence was attached to this community, which was in so many ways highly integrated into the Greek milieu, and in so many ways strikingly different.

This began relatively early. Homer speaks of the Phoenicians three times, all in the *Odyssey*. Yet even at this early date, the poet's references, although appearing to acknowledge the wide range of Phoenician activities and their sea-faring prowess, seem

⁶¹ Eratosthenes' view is given by Strabo 1.4.9.

⁶² The thrust of the book as a whole. The selection of the Jews but not the Phoenicians as alien to the Greeks seems artificial, and to depend on hindsight.

⁶³ Pythagoreans: *Vita Pythag.* 27.128; 36.267. Mochus: Strabo 16.2.24. Clitomachus: Diogenes Laertius 4.67.

⁶⁴ Krings, op. cit. (n. 58). Some pessimism or hesitancy is expressed by the editor herself (ch. 2), by S. Ribichini (ch. 4), and by the latter again as regards questions of a 'world-view' (ch. 11). Curiously, he has

almost nothing to say about Mela, who appears in this entire volume only in passing.

⁶⁵ The material is best covered in Krings, op. cit. (n. 58), esp. 743–845 (chs 11–16). For some earlier surveys, see e.g. G. Garbini, *I Fenici: storia e religione* (1980), esp. 125–50; E. Lipinski, *Dictionnaire de la civilisation phénicienne et punique* (1992), 166; S. Moscati, *The World of the Phoenicians* (1968), ch. 17, 230–42 on Spain.

⁶⁶ The best discussion of these sources is in G. Bunens, *L'expansion phénicienne en Méditerranée* (1979).

also to be slightly denigratory. For Odysseus, the Phoenicians were pirates.⁶⁷ They might save him on occasion, but might also abandon him.⁶⁸ They were, in brief, 'rapacious sailors'.⁶⁹

A similar dual message is visible in subsequent accounts. The Phoenicians had been credited since the time of Herodotus with having introduced writing into Greece, and with great technical skills in sailing and exploration.⁷⁰ Their circumnavigation of Africa also found its way into the *Histories*.⁷¹ However, there were also negative aspects to the portrayal found in the earliest Greek literature, and, perhaps more significantly, their colonization of the African coast and links with the Carthaginians was rarely examined in any depth.⁷²

By Strabo's time, the initial extent and character of Phoenician expansion had been considerably obscured by the rise and fall of Carthage — Phoenician in origin, but distinct in outlook. This seems in itself to have led to a certain tension in Strabo's text. On the one hand, he was aware of the political effects of Phoenician colonization, especially where Carthage was concerned. And in the interests of enhancing Rome's reputation, Carthage was not to be underestimated. On the other hand, Strabo had every reason to downplay the idea that Phoenician expansion had resulted in a widespread cultural impact and had surpassed in many respects early Greek and Roman efforts towards the West.

This tension can best be seen in Strabo's seventeenth book. In his discussion of Phoenician Africa, it is Carthage which takes centre stage. As a Mediterranean power, Carthage may have been a distant memory, but its historical importance was undoubted, and he provides a short but powerful analysis of the resources available to the city in its struggle with Rome.⁷³ Yet at the same time, Strabo clearly underlines the continuing importance of Phoenician settlement in Europe during Augustan times. Indeed he went as far as to say that:

Even to this day, the best part of continental Europe and also the adjacent islands are occupied by Phoenicians; and they gained possession also of all that part of Libya which men can live in without leading a nomadic life.⁷⁴

In this context, Strabo also makes a specific point of noting the success of Phoenician colonization in Spain 'beyond the Pillars', i.e. beyond the Straits of Gibraltar. The whole passage is not only a homage to ancient Phoenicia/Carthage, but also to the power of Rome which ultimately gained the mastery.⁷⁵

Yet, even whilst acknowledging these realities, Strabo is not keen to explore the topic. He remained unwilling to assess the full impact of Phoenicia on the western Mediterranean, perhaps because it was a 'foreign subject'.⁷⁶ Certainly, he is at pains to suppress talk of Phoenician discoveries and settlements in Libya beyond the pillars: although he notes some Phoenician *emporía* to the south of Lixus, he refuses to countenance the existence of some three hundred Tyrian settlements which one source attested beyond there.⁷⁷ Instead, he prefers to discuss only the credibility of the sources involved, and, though the issue is twice mentioned, he leaves it unresolved.⁷⁸ Furthermore, there is no mention, where we might expect it, of Phoenician influence in

⁶⁷ 13.271–86. Naturally, piracy as such was by no means a dishonourable occupation in Homer's day, as noted by M. E. Aubet, *The Phoenicians and the West* (1993), 102–8, in discussing these references. By Thucydides' day, however, a tone of censure seems to be attached to the recall of such activities (1.2). Whilst positive on origin, Homer's information may rapidly have come to be seen in a less than flattering light.

⁶⁸ 14.287–300.

⁶⁹ 15.415–28

⁷⁰ Writing, 5.58; skills, 7.23.

⁷¹ 4.42.

⁷² Herodotus records the seizure of women twice (1.1; 2.54) echoing the Homeric idea. He also manages to address the foundation of Carthage from a very oblique angle (3.19).

⁷³ 17.3.15.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ Strabo's pro-Roman stance needs little elucidation. His brief summation of the situation in his own day (17.3.24) does not mention any of Rome's wars as especially troublesome.

⁷⁶ The western edges of the world form a parallel with Strabo's account of India (Book 15). In neither case will the author speculate or give credence to accounts (e.g. that of Pytheas) of areas beyond Roman control. His friend Aelius Gallus' experience in Arabia presumably weighed heavily in this respect.

⁷⁷ 17.3.2–3.

⁷⁸ 17.3.8, where Strabo dismisses Artemidorus, but not the latter's dismissal of Eratosthenes. The ploy is typical of Strabo's hedging.

Cyrenaica, and, whilst he noted the land east of Carthage as belonging to the Liby-phoenicians, Strabo makes no attempt to describe this hybrid culture.⁷⁹

This is where Mela's distinct contribution emerges. In the *De Chorographia*, he does not hesitate to invoke the Phoenician past, and does so in purely positive terms. Reading Mela, one can easily believe what Strabo asserted about the thriving nature of Phoenician communities in Augustan times. Indeed, as befits a man who may well have been writing for a readership which would have included many people of Phoenician stock, unsurprisingly Phoenician themes are pervasive.

His comments on Sidon and Tyre are a good example.⁸⁰ In some ways the account resembles that of Strabo.⁸¹ The facts which are given about the Phoenicians (their invention of the alphabet, seamanship, and prowess in war) are largely the same. But the context is quite different. In Strabo's account, the author notes the Homeric reference to Sidon, and Posidonius' attribution of the ancient dogma concerning atoms to the Phoenician Mochus, thus placing it from the outset within the traditional Greek sphere. He then moves rapidly away from early Phoenicia, to talk about his own day, when Sidon produced the best philosophers, giving a brief list including Boethus, Diodotus, Antipater, and Apollonius.⁸² There is no trace of this in Mela. The cities' great renown for modern Greek learning is passed over, with reference made exclusively to the Phoenician past. Further, Mela indicates that the Phoenicians did not just invent letters, but literature itself — a claim which, however true, was more calculated to please a readership in Mela's home town, with its Phoenician ancestry, than any Greek (or Roman) who chose to read it.

Furthermore, the *De Chorographia* places a clear emphasis on Carthaginian and African themes. The relation of both of these to Phoenicia would have been clear to Mela's readers. Africa is treated in twenty-three sections initially, and (if one excludes text dealing specifically with the eastern African coast, which related more to Egypt in antiquity than to the Phoenician West) a further eighteen sections at the end, giving a total of forty-one; it is more than the total space given to Greece and Italy combined. Such a heavy bias will not have escaped Mela's readers, and must have been designed specifically for them.

Scrutiny of the references to Carthage and the Phoenician West is highly instructive. The Phoenician link with Carthage is explicitly noted, as it is with Utica. Indeed, compared to both Athens and Rome, which are dismissed in two very similar short phrases, Carthage receives fair mention:

Utica et Carthago, ambae inclutae, ambae a Phoenicibus conditae, illa fato Catonis insignis, haec suo, nunc populi Romani colonia, olim imperii eius pertinax aemula, iam quidem iterum opulenta, etiam nunc tamen priorum excidio rerum quam ope praesentium clarior.⁸³

Utica and Carthage are both famous cities and were both founded by the Phoenicians. The former is renowned for the fate of Cato; the latter for its own destiny. Now a colony of the Roman people, Carthage was once relentless in her rivalry for Rome's Empire; already opulent once more, she is still more famous today for the destruction of her former power, however, than for that of her present inhabitants.

Mela goes on to list other places with Phoenician interest — Hadrumetum, Leptis, Clupea, Habromacte, Phyre, and Neapolis, as the most famous amongst the minor towns of the coast towards the Gulf of Syrta.⁸⁴ The fame of these places is explicitly listed, whereas other (non-Phoenician) cities in other parts of the text receive only short shrift. Nor does the author content himself with discussing only major sites in this fashion. In his discussion of Phoenicia itself he describes Marathos as 'not an obscure city'.⁸⁵ Yet for the average reader of geography it presumably was.

Africa itself provides the key passages which reveal some of Mela's assumptions. In his discussion of the North African shore east of Carthage, he states:

⁷⁹ 17.3.21; 3.19.

⁸⁰ 1.66.

⁸¹ 16.2.23-4.

⁸² 16.2.24.

⁸³ 1.34.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

⁸⁵ 1.67 (*urbs non obscura*).

orae sic habitantur ad nostrum maxime ritum moratis cultoribus, nisi quod linguis differunt et cultu deum quos patrios servant ac patrio more venerantur. proximis nullae quidem urbes stant, tamen domicilia sunt quae mapalia appellantur.⁸⁶

That being so, the shores are inhabited by people socialized according to our custom, except that particular ones differ in language and in the cult of the gods whom they worship as ancestral and venerate in the traditional way. No cities, in fact, arise in neighbouring areas, but nevertheless there are groupings of nomads' huts called *mapalia*.

This is a very interesting passage. Romer seems to believe that it is an example of Mela's cultural outlook, and 'reflects the cultural imperialism of the age'.⁸⁷ Although recognizing the Semitic root of the term *mapalia*, he sees in this text the bias of the Graeco-Roman thinker when confronted by the nomadic world.⁸⁸ That might well be so. However, on closer inspection, it seems to contain much more than this.

To begin with, we need to determine exactly what is being said at the outset of the passage — what is meant by the word '*sic*'. Clearly this links the passage to the preceding text. But which text? It is not, as in Romer's division, likely to have been concerned just with Cyrenaica. Instead, it goes all the way back to Chapter 33, where the words 'the following region' open a fresh discussion. This discussion is concerned with Carthage and the Philaeni, legendary Carthaginian brothers, as much as with the various towns which lie in Cyrenaica. It is a description of a coastline controlled by Carthage. Admittedly, Mela is quite clear about the Greek cities of the Pentapolis (1.40). Yet read as a whole, the text (1.33–1.40) is hardly about the Greek colonies as such.

Thus the passage takes on a different colour. The peoples who are 'socialized according to our custom' now appear to be the Liby-phoenicians mentioned by Strabo. And the crucial phrase 'our custom' now appears to indicate not Romans, but Phoenicians. This accords, in any case, with what we know about the archaeology of the area. The people of the North African shore seem to have retained into the early decades of the first century A.D. customs traceable as much to the Phoenician as to the Graeco-Roman tradition.

Furthermore, this explanation allows us to see the use of the word *mapalia* in its proper context. This term appears to be Semitic in origin, and fits rather neatly with the idea of people socialized according to Phoenician, as opposed to Graeco-Roman custom. Indeed, its very appearance should alert us to some significance. Despite the far reach of the *Chorography*, Mela seldom uses words which have no Greek or Latin root. Apart from this instance there is only one other: the word *covinni* which, according to Mela, was a term used by the ancient Britons to describe their war-chariots.⁸⁹

Similarly, when it came to discussing the islands of the Mediterranean, most of which had a strong connection with the seafaring Phoenicians, Mela could afford to give plentiful text. His account opens with an island of the Phoenician West, off Gades, and, although he dutifully mentions all the key Mediterranean islands, an unmistakably large amount of space is allotted to those where Phoenician influence had been strongly involved. Arados, for example, lying off Phoenicia itself, receives an interesting description.⁹⁰ More revealing still is Mela's description of the small islands opposite the Gulf of Syrtis — Chyrae, Thylae, and Aegatae — described as *Romana clade memorabiles*.⁹¹ At first glance, it seems that Mela may simply have got his facts wrong again; after all, these islands were famous not as the site of a Roman defeat, but of the decisive victory of the First Punic War. However, looked at from the Phoenician

⁸⁶ 1.41.

⁸⁷ Romer, *Description*, 46, n. 40. Elsewhere, he terms it 'an excellent handbook of Roman cultural ideas and attitudes' whilst allowing the author to remain 'detached' (p. 31).

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, 46–7, nn. 40, 41, 42.

⁸⁹ 3.52.

⁹⁰ 2.103.

⁹¹ 2.105.

perspective, the alleged mistake quickly disappears: Mela has recorded faithfully the site of a memorable *Punic* defeat at the hands of the Romans.⁹²

In Mela's account of the islands, the emphasis on Phoenician and Punic heritage is quite clear. Sicily, the site of Carthaginian settlements and battles, understandably receives considerable discussion and is linked with Hannibal at one point.⁹³ Amongst the other large islands, Crete and Cyprus (both of which had significant contacts with Phoenicia) also are accorded some detail. On the other hand, the Greek isles of the Aegean are listed with the utmost brevity, as if he cannot be done with them fast enough. And to clinch the account, Mela dwells at length on the places to which he probably felt most connected — Sardinia and the Balearics, where Phoenician culture was deeply embedded.⁹⁴ The names of their settlements are recorded with some relish. Mela even offers what may be a rare personal reminiscence about Colubraria, said to be located off Ebusos. This place was apparently uninhabited, due to the abundance of serpents. Yet a certain portion of its territory, belonging to Ebusos, remained free from any danger.⁹⁵ The theme of abundance is certainly apparent in all of this. Ebusos itself is described as rich in all produce save grain, Sardinia as remarkably fertile; and one is left at the close of the book to wonder at the comparative wealth of all these places.⁹⁶ If we are right to pay attention to the authorial voices of our usually reticent ancient geographers, then this instance, combined with all that Mela says about his home town, must surely be telling.⁹⁷

To emphasize Phoenician and Punic themes, however, Mela not only described their cities and battle sites in greater than average detail; he also introduced historical personages at key points in the text. His references to notable figures from Carthage, and from recent African history, also served to underscore his main themes.

This can be seen initially by contrasting the striking incidence of Punic and African figures in the work with the paucity of figures from other backgrounds. When it came to people from the Graeco-Roman milieu, Mela quite clearly lacked interest. Whilst Herodotus and Strabo, for example, held distinct views about how the peoples of the world related to each other, both men measured geography in human terms. Their accounts of places are also accounts of notable *people*, and as places interacted with the Greek world the chief actors are unfailingly reported. By contrast, Mela's regions are practically devoid of character. There are, unsurprisingly, elements of myth; plenty of names from mythology, and a sample of gods and goddesses, apparently from the Greek and Roman pantheon. Yet historical figures are much rarer; less than thirty are mentioned in the whole of the *De Chorographia*. Mela's world, as he announces at the start of his text, seems to be comprised of a rather colourless list of places. Nevertheless, when people do receive mention, it is significant that they do so in connection with the worlds of Phoenician Africa and Carthage. Of the people who are mentioned, a significant number are either Carthaginian or African figures, including not only Hasdrubal, Hanno, Mago, and Syphax, but more recent leaders such as Jugurtha, Juba, and Bocchus.⁹⁸ Hannibal's name is mentioned three times — which makes him the most cited historical person in the whole text.⁹⁹ There are actually as many Africans as Romans in the text; only seven Roman figures receive any mention. And as we shall see,

⁹² According to Silberman, *Notes*, 231, nn. 2–3, Mela has simply confused the Aegatae with the isles known as the Aigimouroi (Strabo 2.5.19). But with the event being in Mela's own words *memorabiles*, that seems unlikely. Further, as I indicate below, Mela seems better acquainted with the Punic Wars than with any other historical topic. It all makes sense when one realizes that Mela is speaking from the *Phoenician* point of view, for whom the battle might well have been seen as the major disaster which sparked off Carthage's unhappy decline.

⁹³ 2.116, giving the story of Pelorus, Hannibal's helmsman.

⁹⁴ 2.123–6.

⁹⁵ 2.126. The use of the word *meminisse* at this point may not be accidental. It is not otherwise a word common in Mela's text.

⁹⁶ For the archaeology of these places and their Phoenician connections, see most recently P. van Dommelen, 'Punic persistence: colonialism and cultural identities in Roman Sardinia', in R. Laurence and J. Berry (eds), *Cultural Identity in the Roman Empire* (1998), 25–48. Also, C. Tronchetti in Krings, *op. cit.* (n. 58), 712–40 (Sardinia); C. Gómez Bellard, *ibid.*, 762–75 (Balearics).

⁹⁷ K. Clarke, 'In search of the author of Strabo's *Geography*', *JRS* 87 (1997), 92–110, argues for the importance of Strabo's 'voice' — another author who, like Mela, is known to us solely from his own writing.

⁹⁸ 2.94 (Hasdrubal); 3.90, 93 (Hanno); 3.124 (Mago, the town recalling the leader); 1.30 (Syphax); 1.29 (Jugurtha); 1.30 (Juba); 1.29 (Bocchus).

⁹⁹ 2.89, 116; 3.7.

these Romans themselves find their way into Mela precisely because they had connections either with Phoenicia, Carthage, or Spain.

The Punic connection is clearly true of some of the Roman figures. Two are authors — Ennius and Nepos. Both can be connected easily with Carthage and Africa. Ennius' fragments are enigmatic on the question, but he does at least seem to have treated the subject through his account of Scipio.¹⁰⁰ Nepos is more secure: he wrote an apparently sympathetic sketch of Hannibal. Moreover, as we have seen, it was Nepos who was preferred by Mela over Homer in discussion of the Ocean, and he seems to have written a geographical work which Mela may have consulted.¹⁰¹ We can only speculate about the contents of this work, but it would probably have contained material strongly weighted in favour of the western Mediterranean, making it all the more suited to Mela's purpose.¹⁰² Amongst the other Romans mentioned, Cato needs no discussion: the link is obvious and directly stated by Mela himself.¹⁰³ It might be worth adding that even Greek historical figures (and there are few of these too) appear linked to Phoenicia, as is evidenced by the case of Cimon the Athenian.¹⁰⁴ Overall, one gets the distinct impression that Mela demanded little or no background historical knowledge from his readers, except for one thing: Punic history. Not *Rome's* Carthaginian Wars, to be sure: there is, as we saw earlier, no Scipio, no Fabius. Just Punic history.

Thus, Mela's account has a strong flavour which is neither derivative from any earlier account still extant, nor followed by any later one. There is little circumspection or tension regarding Phoenician expansion in the *De Chorographia*. Quite the contrary, it seems to have been the source of Mela's inspiration. When he discusses his home town, Tingentera, it is coupled, quite deliberately, with ancient Tartessos — a famous site whose very name might have summoned up a whole cultural heritage for the people of Punic Africa and Spain.¹⁰⁵ A key site in the early expansion across the western Mediterranean, it was the subject of speculation, even as Troy and the Aeolid was for many Greeks.¹⁰⁶ For Mela, Phoenicia provided the fundamental cultural basis for his treatise, upon which the nearer worlds of Carthage and Spain could then be located,

Spain and the Roman West

If Phoenicia formed the background for the cultural and historical orientation of Mela's text, and Carthage occupied the middle ground, then Spain — the area where his readers lived and worked — provided plenty of material with which to fill in the most visible scenery. The Spain of Mela's time was a land wholly within the Roman sphere, and in all probability it had been that way throughout his life. It comes as no surprise, then, that Mela's remarks about Spain are chiefly concerned with its relations with Rome. Just as he had provided his readers with a cultural map of the past, he also gave them a framework for understanding the present in their own terms, as Spaniards within the imperial system.

¹⁰⁰ Bunnens, op. cit. (n. 66), 138, lists Ennius' references to Phoenicia, both of which refer to the foundation of Carthage.

¹⁰¹ Mela's reference to this lost work (3.45) can be supplemented by various fragments of Nepos himself which may belong to this unnamed work; see N. Horsfall, *Cornelius Nepos. A Selection Including the Lives of Cato and Atticus* (1989), xv, xvii.

¹⁰² He seems at least to have been interested in the geography of his homeland in Transpadane Gaul; see J. Geiger, *Cornelius Nepos and Ancient Historical Biography*, *Historia Einzelschriften* (1985), 67.

¹⁰³ 1.34.

¹⁰⁴ 1.78.

¹⁰⁵ 2.96. A number of ancient sources record the mineral wealth of Tartessos (e.g. Dionys. Per. 337, Ps.-Aristot., *Mir. Ausc.* 135). Its identification with biblical Tarshish remains subject to dispute. The most recent discussion of Tartessos is in Krings, op. cit. (n. 58), 247–64. See also M. Aubet (ed.), *Tartessos: arqueología protohistórica del Bajo Guadalquivir* (1989).

¹⁰⁶ For a survey of the various traditions about Tartessos, see C. G. Wagner, 'Tartessos en la historiografía: una revisión crítica', in *La colonización fenicia en el sur de la península ibérica. 100 años de investigación*, Actas del seminario/facultad de humanidades/universitario de Almería, 1990 (1992), 81–116.

This regionalism in Mela has already been recognized. Scholars of geography have noted that when it comes to his native land Mela can provide a greater range of detail.¹⁰⁷ Yet neither the roots of Mela's regionalism, nor the process by which he creates the linkage between the Phoenician word and Spain have yet received any recognition. But the process is vital: Mela's regionalism was not based solely on nostalgia, but on community. The framework he created touched on the interaction of the Roman State with local peoples and noted the important links between the past and present situations.

To see how Mela created this framework, we should first return to examine the remaining historical figures — this time Roman figures — cited within the text. Augustus, Metellus, Caepio, and Pompey, like the figures evoking the Phoenician past, are names conjured up with a purpose. These too perform a specific function.

First of all, Augustus. As noted earlier, Rome's early myths and its earliest historical stories were relatively parochial in nature. It is difficult to see how they could have acted as a substitute cultural background for a provincial geographer. Indeed, many of the early stories about Rome, such as the repulse of the Gauls, were decidedly chauvinist. There was little common ground inside these stories upon which to bind the peoples who would later become Roman provincials to the imperial idea. However, since the time of Augustus, some consistent efforts seem to have been made to draw provincials in the West into closer harmony with their Roman and Italian masters. These efforts are especially visible in the shape of the altars and places of worship, some of which were strongly associated with Augustus in person. In Gaul, Spain, and other Western provinces, these altars formed a convenient way for both rulers and ruled to emphasize the common culture of the Roman world.

It is notable, then, how the name of Augustus, which Mela uses only twice, is linked on both occasions to exactly this type of site, and both times in Spain. First, comes a tower in Lusitania.¹⁰⁸ This, according to Mela was memorable for an inscription to Augustus. Unfortunately, neither the site of this tower, nor the inscription has since come to light. And it is unclear from the bare text exactly who set up this monument. But the chances are that local communities were involved, and that the site symbolized their links with the Roman State. Even more telling is the second reference to Augustus, in connection with the Arae Sestianae in north-western Spain.¹⁰⁹ These altars, Mela informs us, were sacred through the name of Augustus (*Augusti nomine sacrae*). They seem to have been established by Lucius Sestius (cos. suff. 23 B.C.), Augustus' legate in Farther Spain, and are usually presumed to be connected to the completion of the Roman conquest in 19 B.C. Yet Mela's text shows them to have carried clear significance for the local population, and it may be that they were superimposed on a site of existing local significance, or designed with some wider religious purpose in mind.

Indeed, it is noticeable that on these occasions Augustus' name is connected neither with the establishment of provincial administration nor with conquest or military affairs. His relations with the peoples of the area are to the fore. To illustrate this, it is worth remembering the range of Roman features which Mela might have chosen. Temples and other such sites at which the Roman authorities attempted to embrace the provincials and foster some common feeling were far from the most visible way in which Rome had imposed itself on the area. Colonies and *municipia*, armies, forts and roads, the spread of villas and commercial stations were all visible elements in the Roman landscape. Yet all these found as little mention in Mela's geographical sketch as they had done in earlier Greek writings. For the Greek ethnographers, these manifestations of Roman force may have held no especial social significance. For Mela, as a provincial, they were either routine, or of a significance which was all too clear.

¹⁰⁷ It is duly noted, albeit briefly, on the opening pages of Romer, *Description*, and Brodersen, *op. cit.* (n. 2). For the latter, Mela's outlook is 'Lokal-patriotismus'.

¹⁰⁸ 3.11. The inscription may have commemorated Augustus' victories over the Asturians and Cantabri-ans. See Schulten, *RE*, cited in Silberman, *Notes*,

254, n. 17. On the other hand, the inscription may have symbolized a great deal more than military success.

¹⁰⁹ 3.13. The altars are also noted by Pliny (4.111) and Ptolemy (2.6.3). But the accounts of the three authors are at variance, and seem difficult to reconcile. See Silberman, *Notes*, 256, n. 8.

Next, Q. Servilius Caepio (cos. 106 B.C.). Again, he is associated with a site of some especial religious or social significance within southern Spain.¹¹⁰ This time it is a tower situated on an island at the mouth of the Guadalquivir river, thought to have been constructed around 108 B.C.¹¹¹ According to Strabo, this was a marvellous lighthouse, built by Caepio to protect sailors in the area from the numerous shoals and reefs.¹¹² Additionally, the place seems to have been of some religious significance. Strabo reports an oracle (of Menestheus, otherwise unknown) there; Mela does not confirm this, but reports both an altar and a temple to Juno.¹¹³

Of the five historical Roman figures within the *De Chorographia*, only two, Pompey and his trusted follower Q. Metellus Celer (cos. 60 B.C.), seem to have no relation at first glance either with Phoenicia or with Spain. But here too Mela's homeland may have been evoked. Although the reference to Pompey comes during a discussion of Cilicia, for Mela's audience merely the name itself may have been especially significant. The memory of Pompey's stint in Spain fighting Sertorius, and of the many young men of southern Spain who had fallen at Munda in 45 B.C. fighting alongside Pompey's sons, may still have been strong.¹¹⁴ Apart from his connection to Pompey, a Spanish link for Metellus Celer is less immediate, but, as we have seen, his importance to Mela came in other ways — in establishing the genuine contribution of modern Roman learning over the outdated concepts of Homer.

Finally, we need to bring forward one more personality, this time non-historical: Hercules. This name crops up in the *De Chorographia* more than any other — indeed, even when not directly referenced, Hercules is often present via sites where he had important shrines.¹¹⁵ Hercules formed a key link between the old Phoenician world and the world of Roman Spain. At many of his major temples, notably that at Gades, the link with the Phoenician god Melqart was especially abiding and will have been very recognizable to Mela's readers.¹¹⁶ In a text which begins and ends where the Pillars of Hercules lay, the mythical demigod, like the author's own community, was of two continents and two different worlds.

Mela's use of a few genuine historical figures and a legendary hero to create geographical emphasis, however, is not the only way in which he chooses to stress Spain. We have noted how he eschewed lengthy or detailed comment on either Athens or Rome, and how both Greece and Italy are relatively under-represented when compared to earlier (and indeed later) geographical works. By contrast, Spain is at the heart of the *De Chorographia*. A cursory reading of the text immediately leaves the impression that Mela placed more emphasis on Spain than on any other area with the exception of Africa. Indeed, in geographical detail his account of Spain is perhaps the best part of the work.¹¹⁷ Moreover, compared to the paucity of space he allotted to Italy and Greece, Mela devoted a great deal of text to Spain, in the same way as he did to Africa. Spain appears in twelve sections initially, but this is supplemented by a further sixteen in Book Three; twenty-eight sections as opposed to a mere fifteen for Italy, and eighteen for Greece.

To a considerable extent, this resulted from the shape of the work itself. The text as a whole consists of three journeys: first, a description of the lands facing onto the

¹¹⁰ 3.4.

¹¹¹ In the aftermath of a campaign against the Lusitanians; see Appian, *Hispania* 70. The island is now called Salmedina.

¹¹² 3.1.9.

¹¹³ 3.4.

¹¹⁴ Curiously enough Pompey does not appear in relation to Spain itself, but to Cilicia: 1.71. The absence of Caesar himself may be less hard to explain: owing to its support for Pompey, southern Spain seems not to have been treated with Caesar's usual clemency; it has been argued that Roman colonization in the area was a punitive measure: J. Tsirkin, 'The South of Spain in the Civil War of 40–45 B.C.', *Archivo español de arqueología* 54 (1981), 81–100.

¹¹⁵ For Hercules or his labours cited by name, see e.g. 1.26, 27, 103; 2.29, 36, 78; 3.46, 47, 100, 103, 106.

He will naturally have come to mind also in episodes relating to the Argonauts (also widely mentioned). As Brodersen notes, *op. cit.* (n. 2), 10–11, Mela can distinguish between various traditions about Hercules, and in general displays much Greek mythology for his readers. However, to accept that Mela's readers understood the popular Greek legends in no way precludes them from continuing to link certain elements with an older tradition.

¹¹⁶ Hercules' strong connection to Mela's home town is noted by the author (3.46); the ashes of 'Egyptian Heracles' (again, an interesting attribution) were supposedly buried at Gades, near Mela's home town. Across the Phoenician world, but especially at Gades, Heracles was strongly associated with the Phoenician god Melqart.

¹¹⁷ Silberman, *Introduction*, xxiv–xxv.

Mediterranean (i.e. an account in the form of a *periplus*) starting with Africa, and working along via Egypt to Asia, then returning westwards via Greece and Italy, finishing at Spain. A second journey describes the islands inside the Mediterranean and Black Sea, beginning (at least rhetorically) with the island of Gades near Spain, before covering in sequence the islands of the Pontus, the eastern Mediterranean, the African shores, and finally the European shores, again ending with islands around Spain. The final description is again in the fashion of a *periplus*, this time beginning with Spain, heading north around Europe and Scandinavia, before descending southwards along the eastern edges of Asia, returning along the southern shores of Africa back to Spain whence the narrative commenced.

Given our acquaintance with earlier more straightforward *periplus* descriptions of coastal voyages, and the *Geography* of Strabo, which sets off from Spain and describes the earth in a similar circular fashion, arriving at its close at Morocco and the north-westerly tip of Africa, this construction has aroused hardly any curiosity. And it may be that Mela is just following an established pattern. Yet even were this true (and I believe we must credit him in this respect, even if in no other, with a modicum of originality), it is not so much the copying of an established tradition here, as its adoption for a set purpose. To begin with, Mela's initial *periplus* is in the contrary direction to Strabo's account — it proceeds anti-clockwise, as it were. Nor does he use just one circuit, but three. Each time, even if the start or finish is merely a slight rhetorical phrase, he is beginning and ending with Spain. All roads, in Mela's world, lead not to Rome, but to Spain.

Furthermore, we should note Mela's particular attention to the Roman State as it was manifest in Spain and the neighbouring areas. His comments in this respect are particularly interesting. To begin with, whereas the Roman State is practically invisible in the East, with little mention of provincial structures or of change in administration, Mela does make his readers aware of the situation in Spain. The Spanish provinces of Baetica, Lusitania, and Tarraconensis all receive mention by name.¹¹⁸ Neighbouring areas with strong ties to the Iberian peninsula are also mentioned: the Gallic area of Narbonensis, Mauretania, and Numidia.¹¹⁹ It is as if Mela is anxious to confirm the provincial status of these areas.¹²⁰ We might contrast this with his omission of Roman provinces in Asia Minor (such as Galatia and Cappadocia), and with the complete absence of any information about the Roman organization of the Danube. These were far-away places, which required little explanation.

Finally, when it came to structures of life (what for Strabo might have been termed 'civilization'), Mela wanted to stress the positive side of purely Roman arrangements; they had, after all, dominated the life of his own community. His little aside about Narbonensis ('magis culta et magis consita, ideoque etiam laetior') reveals how much his view of *modern* civilization was tied to Rome: for Mela, Narbonensis lay on Our Sea, where there were most opulent cities which he dutifully lists as veteran foundations; and to his audience and readers in Baetica, another province where the Roman countryside was to be found equally well-represented, the comment would be especially telling.¹²¹ It is in this context that we should note Mela's sole references to 'our authors' ('nostris auctoribus'), occasions in which ties to the Latin world ostensibly appear. There are only two of these in the entire work, and they deserve some attention. The first of these comes in a report about cave fishing off the Mediterranean coast of Gaul.¹²² The second concerns 'our songs' about Thule.¹²³ Both deal with the West, both with maritime themes. In citing accounts for these, Mela is not only recognizing more recent findings,

¹¹⁸ Baetica, Lusitania, and Tarraconensis all find mention at 2.87, 88; and at various places in Book 3.

¹¹⁹ Narbonensis appears at 2.74; Mauretania at 1.25, 30; Numidia at 1.30.

¹²⁰ Perhaps even to confirm their authenticity, in the face of changes: see below.

¹²¹ 2.74–5. Given the history of Augustan veteran settlements in Mauretania noted by Mackie, *op. cit.* (n. 52), and the influx of settlers into the cities of

southern Spain, one might be forgiven for thinking that Mela is here trying to show how Roman influence could lead to prosperity.

¹²² 2.83. The story seems originally to have come from Polybius (34 frag. 10, recorded by Athenaeus 8.332a), but it appears also in Strabo (4.1.6). Silberman, *Notes*, 217, shows that, once again, Nepos might well be the Roman author behind this reference.

¹²³ 3.57.

he is making an effort to link the knowledge of the fishing and trading communities of the Phoenician past with more modern Latin settings.¹²⁴

IV. MELA, HIS COMMUNITY AND HIS TIMES

It is time now to draw these threads together, and we can do this by turning away from Pomponius Mela to his readership. This silent community barely receives any mention in modern scholarship: the work is deemed a text either for schoolboys or for the public lecture hall.¹²⁵ Yet it seems to have occupied the mind of the author from his opening words. Ironically this is the point at which so many readers today begin to lose interest, since the work is announced in an extremely diffident way:

Orbis situm dicere aggredior, impeditum opus et facundiae minime capax — constat enim fere gentium locorumque nominibus et eorum perplexo satis ordine, quem persequi longa est magis quam benigna materia — verum aspici tamen cognoscique dignissimum, et quod, si non ope ingenii orantis, at ipsa sui contemplatione pretium operae attendentium absolvat.¹²⁶

I am undertaking a description of the world, an awkward task which hardly offers any chance for eloquence; it essentially consists of a list of the names of people and places, drawn up according to their rather tangled order. All this provides material which is lengthy more than benign. Yet it is in truth an area most worthy of study, which would repay the attention of attentive readers, if not by the stylistic qualities of its author, then at least by the very contemplation of the subject matter itself.

This whole passage may be a *topos*, and is certainly a little contrived.¹²⁷ Yet, even considered as such, it gives clues to the readership for the work. Readers (or listeners) are informed that what they are about to read may be heavy going in the main, and end up as a list of names of peoples and places. The apology sums up perfectly the parochial nature of Mela's community. For a modern historian, interested in the ancient world, the passage is a huge disappointment. Yet for a provincial, largely uninterested in the niceties of Greek science, it must have come as something of a relief, knowing that the discussion would not be long-winded and that at least the local places would get due mention. In short, what is announced from the start is geography for the provincials.

We may contrive a feel for this by creating a purely hypothetical scenario. Let us imagine that Mela was forty years of age when he composed the *De Chorographia*, and was born in A.D. 4. Let us suppose, too, that he lived in a town, Tingentera, which was comprised mostly of Phoenician settlers transferred from Africa in the days of Augustus. On this account, Mela's father or older relations may well have been brought up in Africa. They may have spoken a Punic dialect, and followed many Punic customs. Perhaps Mela's wife did so too, or members of her own family. Mela himself, aware of his roots, yet able in Latin and Greek and aware of the wider Roman world, was led to discussing how these two elements came together. For these people the world of Roman Spain might have been the primary, everyday world. Yet what this meant in practice was the continuing cultural heritage of Carthage, and ultimately Phoenicia. This heritage explained everything about their community. That of Greece and Rome mattered only tangentially, and was necessary merely for their current understanding of the wider world. Helping them to see their proper cultural heritage underneath current realities was both educational and fulfilling. Perhaps Mela delivered his work in the form of lectures at Tingentera itself.

¹²⁴ The use of *noster* in both passages is echoed by its use at the close of the work: see below, n. 149.

¹²⁵ These two options are the only ones envisaged by Silberman, *Introduction*, xxvii, who regards the work as a 'recul considérable par rapport à l'état de la science géographique aux époques précédentes'. He himself is doubtful about whether the text was meant

for school use, on the grounds that its style was deficient. Romer's only opinion (*Description*, 3) is that the readers were in Rome, for which there is no concrete evidence.

¹²⁶ I. I.

¹²⁷ Noted by T. Jansson, *Latin Prose Prefaces* (1964), 99.

How convincing is this scenario? *Prima facie*, it is certainly not implausible; not only are Punic speakers attested on inscriptions into imperial times both in Spain and in Africa, but the whole area where Mela grew up seems to have retained a high degree of local Punic culture. As Fear has recently shown, the depth and strength of local Punic cultures near Gades should not be underestimated.¹²⁸ Constant waves of Punic settlement, from the earliest times through to Hannibal's transferral of the 30,000 'Blastophoenicians', led to a situation whereby Strabo could assert that the majority of the towns in Turdetania were inhabited by Phoenicians.¹²⁹ The towns of the area were laid out and built in the Phoenician style; their coins carried legends of Phoenician gods and goddesses; and their temples were renowned places of worship where the persistence of Punic rites caught the attention of writers throughout antiquity.¹³⁰ As Fear himself noted, it is difficult to talk of 'Romanization' in this context: although changes took place under Roman rule, the result was usually a fusion of the new and the old — a kind of 'transculturation'.¹³¹ Next Africa. Here too, the continuity of Punic customs prevailed. Fergus Millar demonstrated this thirty years ago: the Africa whence Mela and his townsfolk arrived was a place where Punic writing still existed, and Punic funerary customs were still observed.¹³² In neither place will our evidence allow us to assess the role of the language in the public sphere; but it is surely enough that we can see it operating in the private domain. Nor were Spain and Africa alone in this respect: certain Phoenician/Punic communities, such as those on Sardinia and Ibiza, may also have retained their cultural identity well into the Roman period.¹³³ Furthermore, such evidence as we possess allows us to believe that these communities were not isolated from the world of Roman politics and culture. The case of the Balbi of Gades is sufficient to illustrate what people from Gades could achieve in Roman terms; the patronage of Caesar and Pompey and a triumph for the younger Balbus are eloquent testimony of this. Nor was the achievement purely political: the latter seems to have written a learned work on Roman religious practices.¹³⁴

There is nothing to prevent us from seeing Mela as linked to such a community, given his obvious interests, and every reason to suspect that he was. Of course, the whole scenario I present above could be seen as merely speculation. There is evidence, but only circumstantial evidence. After all, we have no way of knowing for whom this text was prepared — perhaps it was for schoolboys interested in the Punic Wars or Caesar's campaigns in Spain. We have no conclusive proof that a Punic-speaking community was active in Mela's home town, or that he had any links with one via family or business. Yet the readership for the text which I propose here makes better sense, I would argue, than the readerships which have been assumed by most accounts thus far.¹³⁵

Indeed, for the attentive scholar, the *De Chorographia* bears not only the hallmarks of its readership, but of the times in which it was composed. Again, this question has been largely ignored. Apart from securing a Claudian date, there has been little inquiry made, chiefly because the document is such a pastiche of earlier sources. Yet this issue, too, deserves more attention.

¹²⁸ A. T. Fear, *Rome and Baetica. Urbanization in Southern Spain c 50 B.C.-A.D. 150* (1996), esp. 225–50. This is an excellent survey of the situation, and dispels some still prevalent myths about the Romanization of the area. As Fear points out (p. 234), at Gades some 28 per cent of the names recorded in *CIL* 2 have some kind of Punic connection.

¹²⁹ The earliest settlement was noted by Latin authors such as Velleius (1.2). For Hannibal and the 'Blastophoenicians' see Appian, *Hisp.* 57. For Turdetania, Strabo 3.2.13.

¹³⁰ Fear, *op. cit.* (n. 128), 234–6.

¹³¹ *ibid.*, 250.

¹³² F. G. B. Millar, 'Local cultures in the Roman Empire: Libyan, Punic and Latin in Roman Africa', *JRS* 58 (1968), 126–34.

¹³³ A good example from Sardinia is provided by M. G. Guzzi Amadasi, *Le iscrizioni fenicie e puniche delle colonie in occidente* (1967), 133, #8.

¹³⁴ Macrobius, *Sat.* 3.6.16.

¹³⁵ Romer, for example, seems completely at a loss; 'it is as if Mela wrote *The Chorography* as much for himself as for others' (*Description*, 20). In the two pages devoted specifically to Mela's readership (*ibid.*, 13–15), there is no discussion of their actual identity. We are left with the idea of a 'playful Mela' (*ibid.*, 12), playing complex literary games involving emblematic passages which save readers from the puzzling problems posed by the world.

To begin with, Mela's document strongly reflects the general spirit of the age. In Tiberius' day, Strabo had already complained about the 'Egyptians and Syrians' who had begun to deride the Homeric account about their native lands.¹³⁶ Perhaps these Syrians and Egyptians were the literate representatives of a wider Phoenician culture, in the same way as the renowned dancing girls of Gades, usually referred to as 'Syrian' or 'African', represented its more popular element.¹³⁷ As we have seen, people with a Punic background could, and did, compose literature in both Latin and Greek, literature which presumably carried somewhere within it the hallmarks of the author's cultural background. And as we have also seen, Mela's text is undoubtedly of the 'Egyptian and Syrian' kind detested by Strabo, in that it has little reverence for Homer. Non-Greek traditions, both Roman and native, were a source of pride to many provincials in the Western provinces, and it is not surprising that their literature should mirror the trend.

Furthermore, we might see in Mela's geography echoes of the Claudian period itself. Once the text is understood to be Phoenician in outlook, we might suitably wonder about the specific moment of its composition. Claudius himself had shown considerable interest both in Carthage, about which he had written a history, and in the affairs of southern Spain.¹³⁸ As for the Phoenician homeland, there is no change in Claudius' time from established customs — both Sidon and Tyre continued to mint coinage, the latter in silver, a practice that continued until Nero's reign.¹³⁹ On a charitable view, Mela's work is a response to a positive atmosphere emanating from Rome itself.

On the other hand, this was a time in which, for one reason or another, the close-knit world of the African and Spanish coasts was being, administratively at least, split asunder. After the death of Ptolemy, son of Juba II, and the subsequent pacification of the area by Suetonius Paulinus in A.D. 41–2, Claudius not only annexed Mauretania, he (re)divided it into two separate administrative units, Caesariensis and Tingitana. In so doing, there is every reason to believe that he may have been detaching from Baetican administration the Augustan colonies of Mauretania, which seem to have been administered from Spain prior to this date.¹⁴⁰

This action cannot have passed without comment in southern Spain. There is evidence that Mauretanian 'Moors' (a term which might well have been applied to many within the Phoenician communities) were subsequently displeased with the new circumstances, since they appear to have launched a prosecution against Nero's procurator in A.D. 60.¹⁴¹ And there is also evidence that during A.D. 69, as a way to curry favour in Spain, offers were made by Otho which would effectively have given some communities of the Moors to the province of Baetica.¹⁴² This latter evidence shows that over twenty years later the issue was still one which rankled in Spain. Viewed in this light, Mela's text might take on still further meaning: as a fairly unsubtle attempt at passive resistance to these Claudian changes, by illustrating the shared community of the Phoenician world which was then being further separated. His one, rather isolated, comment about the 'greatest of princes' would on this reading carry a certain amount of sarcasm. And Mela's failure to discuss more recent events in Spain and Africa itself would become much clearer: his aim was to stress historical conditions, not recent changes.

Finally, we may see in this type of work the full transition to what might be called 'administrative geography' which Claude Nicolet so ably investigated. Since the time of Caesar documents seem to have been drawn up giving details of the disposition of the

¹³⁶ Strabo 1.2.30. The comment might conceivably refer to Aristarchus and Crates, but the word *viv* is a strong indication that Strabo is talking about his own day.

¹³⁷ Fear, *op. cit.* (n. 128), 236–7.

¹³⁸ See B. Levick, *Claudius* (1990), 18. Claudius' interests in Spain were doubtless reflected by his reading of Cicero's *Pro Balbo* when arguing for the admission of the Gauls to the Senate.

¹³⁹ See F. G. B. Millar, *The Roman Near East* (1993), 288–9.

¹⁴⁰ Argued by Mackie, *op. cit.* (n. 52), 352.

¹⁴¹ Tacitus, *Annals* 14.28 ('*accusantibus Mauris*') on the prosecution of a procurator. Mackie argues (*op. cit.* (n. 52), 352), that these articulate 'Moors' were actually the citizens of privileged communities inside Mauretania (i.e. the towns founded by Augustus). They may equally well, of course, have been representing *Phoenician* communities.

¹⁴² Tacitus, *Histories* 1.78.

Roman provinces, and with the coming of Augustus and the survey of Agrippa administrative reckoning of the Empire found its feet. Nevertheless, such materials were not in the realm of intellectual debate in the same way as earlier geographical philosophy had been. At the dawn of the Augustan age, a man with patrons, such as Strabo of Amaseia, by dint of travel and scholarship might aspire to a fairly good knowledge of Roman arrangements — colonies, provinces, and so forth. The great changes which seem to have accrued under the Principate, however, were documented in a way which made them less accessible to the amateur: they were a resource which only a select ruling stratum could rely upon. Even Pliny's geographical sections, though they do actually derive in places from provincial lists, often display a remarkable ignorance about current affairs. In Mela's case, we might speculate that Mela had no patrons who might have procured such material. Even allowing for his clear Punic interests, it is doubtful whether he would have overlooked good quality Latin information on the provinces had it been widely available. After all, his readers had quite developed tastes (if Livy can be so described), and clearly, had he been able to avail himself of any connections within the Roman world, this deficiency might easily have been remedied.¹⁴³ Even allowing for a certain degree of poor scholarship and other failings on Mela's part, we might remark that he had certainly no access, for example, to the Caesarian sources on Africa which Pliny appears to have used, or to the *formulae provinciae* which underpinned the latter's account of Spain.¹⁴⁴

Locating its readership and the spirit of its author's times throws the *De Chorographia* into a fresh light. Was Mela simply a hopeless geographer who tried, and signally failed, to follow in the great Greek geographical tradition? Or was he a very poor scholar, struggling to compose a Latin geography for consumption at Rome — a man who was neither as assiduous as Pliny, nor as versatile? To date, most scholars have answered affirmatively to one, or even both, of these questions. For these scholars Mela has embodied the collapse of ancient geography; he has seemed to be a foolish dilettante, piecing together an account which contains one or two items of excellent fresh information, but which is mostly riddled with errors and ignorance. In taking this approach, one is forced to consider Mela's choice of people and places as purely random, revealing nothing of the conscious or subconscious. If this view is at all credible, it would be fair to suggest that whomever this work was designed for, they must have been sorely disappointed. From all we have seen above, such pessimism about Mela, and about his readership, is simply not warranted.

V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

As with any text or artifact whose purpose is to express the relations between various human communities, world maps and atlases usually come bundled with their authors' values or preconceptions. Unlike a map of the London Underground, or a map of a library's reading rooms, both of which are principally functional in nature, an atlas is designed to instruct on an entirely different level. One cannot use a subway map in the same way as an atlas. The former tells you how to get somewhere. The latter tells you how to think about, locate and separate human communities. It embodies a way of thinking.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Livy seems to have been popular reading in Baetica: the younger Pliny (*Ep.* 2.3) notes that several people went from Gades to Rome simply to meet him. This popularity probably reflected both the continuing interest in Carthage in Spain, and Livy's reputation as a historian of the Punic Wars.

¹⁴⁴ For the existence of Caesarian document(s) concerning Africa, see the cogent arguments of B. D. Shaw, 'The Elder Pliny's African Geography', *Historia* 30 (1981), 424–71. Pliny is usually assumed to

have used *formulae* for Spain, but his material shows signs of drawing on various sources: see Fear, *op. cit.* (n. 128), 105–30.

¹⁴⁵ For the social and political implications involved in mapping, see initially J. Black, *Maps and Politics* (1997) and *Maps and History* (1998). Still useful as a case study is H. R. Wilkinson, *Maps and Politics: A Review of the Ethnographic Cartography of Macedonia* (1951).

The *De Chorographia* belongs firmly in the latter category. It is by no means a neutral account attempting an objective view of the world. In Mela's case, he seems to have been reacting against the Graeco-Roman vision, with its emphasis on Greek thought and Roman arms. On the surface, it has all the key features which a Latin reader of the day would want or need. Yet beneath this, it is not hard to see the emphasis of the account — an emphasis with which many local people could presumably identify. The characters and places who appear in the text do not do so by accident. Mela had done plenty of reading and was not entirely blind to the information his sources contained. Yet he was little interested in the Graeco-Roman world *per se*; and he knew his readers would have similar tastes.

Even the title of this work offers itself to this conclusion. Strictly according to Greek definitions, the task of the chorographer differed from that of the geographer. Geography dealt with the whole world, chorography merely with the detailed description of the various lands within it.¹⁴⁶ Faced with this, scholars have always had some difficulty reconciling the title of the work in hand with its contents: it is called the *De Chorographia* but it seems to be too bald, too curt to qualify as such. More often than not, this difficulty is left unresolved.¹⁴⁷ Yet it can be dealt with simply by admitting that, for all its trappings, it really *is* a kind of chorography — one where Africa and Spain are described in their global setting. If not only Spain, Africa, and Phoenicia, but the whole world of Phoenicia is included (including Italy, Sicily, Sardinia, southern Gaul, Egypt and East Africa, and Cyprus), we can easily account for a good half of the whole text.

By Roman times, making a world map was a known art, and it is quite possible that Mela used or constructed a map in conjunction with this text. If he did so, it is almost certain that southern Spain occupied a key position on the chart. Regardless of how this map was labelled, it doubtless emphasized ties to the old Punic world of Africa, a world of fishermen and traders, whence they or their parents had come. The Roman State, especially where it had superseded this older world, was naturally represented: it made the circumstances of Mela's readers far clearer. Yet the clues to the map's meaning lay in the commentary which accompanied it: a text which revealed an 'obscured community', commemorated a dwindling heritage, and presaged the burgeoning Roman future.¹⁴⁸

Mela blended the past with the political realities of Roman Spain. In the farthest reaches of Iberia during the first century A.D. the *Pax Romana*, so long in the forging, was now unchallenged. The why's and wherefore's of history writ large were, if not without consequence, no longer of much importance. That is why Mela's Phoenician leanings are not advertised as such, and why the account is not open about its underpinnings. The Claudian settlement in Mauretania showed that the wider Phoenician community could no longer expect uniform political treatment, nor to be considered as a community apart. The prevailing ethos of the Roman Empire in the first century A.D. was cohesion, not separatism. For those reminiscing about olden times, parochial pleasures needed to be couched in a form which could be reconciled with present-day realities. In closing his account, Mela leaves his readers beached on the Atlantic coast of Africa, at the place whence his own people had sprung:

Ultra est colonia et fluvius Zilia, et unde initium fecimus Ampelusius in nostrum iam fretum vergens promuntorium, operis huius atque Atlantici litoris terminus.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ The classic statement of definition for the two words is that of Ptolemy, *Geography*, 1.1. Strabo understood that mathematical geography, as the wider, more general account, had to precede detailed description (2.5.1), seeing the chorographer's task as a filling-in of details (2.5.17).

¹⁴⁷ e.g. Silberman, *Notes*, 97, where the disparity between Mela's stated objective (chorography) and his achievement (at first glance, a sketched geography) is not discussed.

¹⁴⁸ The phrase is that of J. L. López Castro, 'El concepto de romanización y los fenicios en la Hispania republicana: problemas historiográficos', in *La colonización fenicia en el sur de la península ibérica. 100 años de investigación*, actas del seminario/facultad de humanidades/universitario de almería, 1990 (1992), 151–65.

¹⁴⁹ 3.107. It is interesting that Mela concludes with Zilia. This might plausibly reinforce suspicions that it was from here that his people originally moved.

Beyond lies the colony and river called Zilia, as well as the promontory of Ampelusia, as it turns towards our shores, whence we made our start. It marks both the end of this work, and of the shores of the Atlantic.

For Mela, 'our shores' are not the Mediterranean, but the Atlantic coast of Spain, the Straits of Gibraltar.¹⁵⁰ The beginning he names was not merely the beginning of a text, but of a community's journey into Roman Spain. This, surely, was a fitting place at which to conclude his Phoenician Geography.

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¹⁵⁰ Noted correctly by Silberman, *Notes*, 96, n. 3. The phrase echoes Mela's previous comments about his home town at 2.96.