

A Note on Strabo, Geography 14.6

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In her 1995 article on ‘Strabo, Polybios, and the Stade’, Sarah Potheary argues, contrary to the views of Aubrey Diller (1934) and Germaine Aujac (1966), that Strabo used a consistent value for the Greek stade (*stadion*) throughout his *Geography*. Strabo was neither ‘a happy ignoramus, who simply did not know that these distances were based on varying stades’, nor ‘a careless scholar who realised the situation but did not care’.¹ When giving distances, Strabo consistently employed a conversion rate of one stade to one-eighth of a Roman mile (185 metres). According to Potheary, the only exception found in Strabo’s work is the conversion ratio of 8 1/3 miles to the stade used by Polybios, a discrepancy to which Strabo himself draws attention.²

While Potheary’s conclusion remains valid on general grounds, it does not take account of some apparent exceptions to the rule in book 14 of the *Geography*, where Strabo is describing Cyprus. The relevant passages, all of which deal with overland distances,³ will be discussed below.

[1] μήκος δὲ ἀπὸ Κλειδῶν ἐπὶ τὸν Ἀκάμαντα πεζῇ σταδίων χιλίων τετρακοσίων ὀδεύοντι ἀπ’ ἀνατολῆς ἐπὶ δύσιν. (Strabo, *Geography* 14.6.2 C 682 Radt)

The distance from the Kleides [islands] to the Akamas [promontory] on foot, travelling from east to west, is one thousand four hundred stades.

The distance of 1400 stades (259 km) by road from Akamas to the Kleides islands is close to the distance in real space measured on a modern map and to the estimate of Artemidoros, quoted by

¹ Potheary 1995: 49. For more recent assessments of Strabo as a scholar and geographer, see Koelsch 2004: 507-13.

² Strabo 7.7.4, C 322; Potheary 1995: 51; cf. Hultsch 1882: 85-86.

³ Sailing distances have been omitted, as sea distances are generally too imprecise for the purpose of the present analysis.

Pliny the Elder,⁴ of 162½ Roman miles = 1300 stades for the distance from Akamas to cape St. Andreas (not including the sailing distance to the islands). In this case, Strabo is evidently applying the ‘standard’ stade of 1/8 Roman mile.

[2] Εἴθ' ἢ Πάφος, κτίσμα Ἀγαπήνορος καὶ λιμένα ἔχουσα καὶ ἱερὰ εὖ κατεσκευασμένα· διέχει δὲ πεζῶν σταδίων ἑξήκοντα τῆς Παλαιπάφου. (Strabo, *Geography* 14.6.3 C 682 Radt)

Next Paphos, a foundation of Agapenor, having a harbour and a well-built sanctuary. The distance by road to Palaipaphos is sixty stades.

The *Tabula Peutingeriana* gives the distance separating New Paphos and Old Paphos as 11 Roman miles = 88 stades and the twelfth milestone from Nea Paphos⁵ was found c. 2.5 kilometres east of Old Paphos. Measured on a modern map, the distance from the site of the northeast gate⁶ of New Paphos to the ruins of the sanctuary in Old Paphos (Kouklia) is 15.2 km = 10.3 Roman miles = 82 stades. Thus Strabo's figure is slightly less than three quarters of the actual distance.

[3] εἶτα Καρπασία πόλις λιμένα ἔχουσα, κεῖται δὲ κατὰ τὴν ἄκραν τὴν Σαρπηδόνα· ἐκ δὲ τῆς Καρπασίας ὑπέρβασίς ἐστὶν ἰσθμοῦ τριάκοντα σταδίων πρὸς τὰς νήσους τὰς Καρπασίας καὶ τὸ νότιον πέλαγος· (Strabo, *Geography* 14.6.3 Radt C 683)

Next Karpasia, a city having a port, and nearby, the Sarpedon promontory. From Karpasia, the passage across the isthmus is thirty stades, to the Karpasia islands and the sea on the southern side.

The ὑπέρβασίς ἰσθμοῦ, ‘passage across the isthmus’ is stated by Strabo to be thirty stades long measured from Karpasia (Agios Philon). On a modern map, the distance is at least 7.5 km = 41 stades from shoreline to shoreline; perhaps slightly less if Strabo's distance was reckoned from the

⁴ Artemidoros ap. Pliny, *Natural History* 5.129. Like Strabo, Pliny reckons a stade at 1/8 of a Roman mile, equivalent to 185 metres, cf. *Natural History* 5.63.

⁵ Bekker-Nielsen 2004: 273-74 no. 12 = Mitford 1980: 1334 no. 14.

⁶ Inter-city distances were normally measured from the gates or from the *pomerium*, not from the centre of a city; Bekker-Nielsen 2004: 170-71 n. 20; Chevallier 1997: 64.

landward side of Karpasia's *pomerium*.⁷ Again, Strabo under-estimates the distance by a factor of c. 0.75.

[4] εἶτα Τρήτα καὶ Βοόσουρα καὶ Παλαιίπαφος, ὅσον ἐν δέκα σταδίοις ὑπὲρ τῆς θαλάττης ἰδρυμένη, ὕφορμον ἔχουσα καὶ ἱερὸν ἀρχαῖον τῆς Παφίας Ἀφροδίτης· εἶτ' ἄκρα Ζεφυρία πρόσορμον ἔχουσα, καὶ ἄλλη Ἀρσινόη ὁμοίως πρόσορμον ἔχουσα καὶ ἱερὸν καὶ ἄλσος· μικρὸν δ' ἀπὸ τῆς θαλάττης καὶ ἡ Ἱεροκηπία. (Strabo, *Geography* 14.6.3 Radt C 683)

Next Treta, Boösoura and then Palairaphos, which is situated ten stades inland from the sea, and has an anchorage and an ancient sanctuary of the Paphian Aphrodite. Then cape Zephyria which has a landing-place, and another Arsinoë which likewise has a landing-place, a temple and a sacred grove; and a short distance from the sea is Hierokepis.

Strabo tells us that Old Paphos is located 'ten stades' from the sea.⁸ This, like the other figures, is a round number and Strabo does not tell us from which point the distance was reckoned: from the shoreline or from the anchorage mentioned in the following sentence. Thus we cannot tell whether he under-estimated the distance in this case as well.

[5] εἶτ' Ἀφροδίσιον, καθ' ὃ στενὴ ἡ νῆσος· εἰς γὰρ Σαλαμίνα ὑπέρβασις σταδίων ἑβδομήκοντα· εἶτ' Ἀχαιῶν ἀκτὴ, ὅπου Τεῦκρος προσωρμίσθη πρῶτον ὁ κτίσας Σαλαμίνα τὴν ἐν Κύπρῳ, ἐκβληθείς, ὡς φασιν, ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς Τελαμῶνος· (Strabo, *Geography* 14.6.3 Radt C 682)

Next Aphrodision, where the island is narrow, for the passage across to Salamis is seventy stades; then the beach of the Achaians, where Teukros, the founder of Salamis in Cyprus, made his first landing: exiled, as they tell, by his father Telamon.

According to Strabo, the 'passage across' (*hyperbasis*) from Aphrodision on the northern coast to the city of Salamis is seventy stades in length.⁹ This figure is clearly in error: as pointed out by D.G.

⁷ Bekker-Nielsen 2004: 170.

⁸ Strabo 14.6.4 C 683.

⁹ Strabo 14.6.3 C 682.

Hogarth more than a century ago,¹⁰ no location on the north coast lies within 70 stades of Salamis. From the site of ancient Salamis, a short distance north of modern Famagusta, the nearest point on the north coast is 28 kilometres or 151 stades distant as the crow flies. Hogarth himself offered one possible explanation, but went on to reject it:

It is just possible that Strabo either stated, or intended to state, the distance from Aphrodisium to the *bay* of Salamis, and not to Salamis itself ... But as this involves an emendation of Strabo's text, it must not be pressed; and on other grounds I cannot feel satisfied that the alteration is worth the making.¹¹

A further argument against Hogarth's emendation is that the toponym 'bay of Salamis' is not attested in ancient literature; Strabo himself simply refers to 'the sea on the southern side'. The problem is compounded by the absence of unequivocal evidence for the location of Aphrodision. The place-name is found only in one other ancient author, Ptolemy,¹² who locates the city between the 'beach of the Achaians' mentioned by Strabo and an otherwise unknown settlement, Makaria.¹³

In 1852, the German traveller Ludwig Ross visited the north coast around the village of Akanthou and tentatively proposed that an *Aphrodision* might well have been the predecessor of the church of the 'Panagia Pergamou',¹⁴ on the map accompanying Hogarth 1889 (fig. 1) marked as 'Pergamon'. An examination of the ruins seen by Ross led Hogarth to conclude that they dated from the Byzantine, not the Roman period.¹⁵ In their place, Hogarth proposed another site, some distance further westward, known as Iastriká, as the ruins of ancient Aphrodision.¹⁶ In his view, Akanthou village was the successor of ancient Aphrodision; here, as elsewhere in Cyprus, settlements had moved inland where they were less exposed to raids from the sea.

¹⁰ Hogarth 1889: 94.

¹¹ Hogarth 1889: 95-96.

¹² *Geogr.* 5.14.4. The *dekate Kyprou* mentioned by Stephen of Byzantium s.v. 'Aphrodisias' probably refers to the sanctuary of Aphrodite at Old Paphos.

¹³ Bekker-Nielsen 2010: 422.

¹⁴ Ross 1852: 134-35.

¹⁵ Hogarth 1889: 97-98.

¹⁶ Hogarth 1889: 99.

Some distance inland from Akanthou/Tatlısu, at the northern approach to the Mallıdağ pass, a steep, narrow stretch of roadway cut into the living rock can be seen running parallel to the modern highway (fig. 2).¹⁷ For part of the ascent, a set of steps runs parallel to the roadway, perhaps a later addition for the benefit of pedestrians and pack-animals. From its resemblance to other rock-cut roadways on the island,¹⁸ the ascent appears to be of Hellenistic or Roman date, and since the Mallıdağ pass offers the only convenient route through this part of the Northern Range, there is little doubt that the road formed part of the *hyperbasis* connecting Aphrodision and Salamis.¹⁹ As such, it provides a strong argument in support of Hogarth's identification of Iastriká with ancient Aphrodision. The problem remains, however, that the shortest possible route from the presumed site of Aphrodision over the Mallıdağ pass to the site of ancient Salamis is far longer than the 70 stades cited by Strabo.

A possible conjecture may be offered here. Since there is no evidence that Strabo ever visited Cyprus,²⁰ he must have combined information from different sources to produce his description of the island. One of these was sources was Eratosthenes;²¹ another will have been a description of the coast intended for navigators (*periplous*), from which he took his description of the north coast; a third an itinerary containing overland distances. If this itinerary, as was customary in the Greek-speaking world, rendered distances in the Milesian numeral notation, $\rho\omicron$ (170) could easily have been misread or miscopied as o (70).

A route from Aphrodision over the Mallıdağ pass and passing through Lefkoniko/Geçitkale and Peristerona/Alanıçı to Salamis would be c. 42 kilometres or 230 stades. Three quarters of this figure comes to c. 170 stades. It would seem that as was the case at Nea Paphos and Karpasia, Strabo's

¹⁷ The road was studied in detail by Marit Jensen and the author in October 2012. To the best of our knowledge, it had not previously been recorded or published.

¹⁸ E.g., Bekker-Nielsen 2004: 129; 134.

¹⁹ On an earlier occasion (Bekker-Nielsen 2004: 158) the present author suggested that the *hyperbasis* might have been a direct route across the mountains behind Akanthou/Tatlısu, in which case the distance to Salamis would not be far longer than 170 standard stades of one-eighth Roman mile. Following the discovery of the ancient road in the Mallıdağ pass, this hypothesis is no longer tenable.

²⁰ For a full discussion of the extent of Strabo's travels, see Dueck 2000: 15-28.

²¹ Cf. Strabo 14.6.4 C 684.

figure for the journey from Aphrodision to Salamis may have been underestimated by a factor 0.75. But how did these errors arise?

All that can be said with certainty about the source from which Strabo, directly or indirectly, derived is overland distances is that it postdates the foundation of New Paphos c. 315 BC.²² If compiled during the period of Ptolemaic rule in Cyprus, it is quite possible that its distances were given in the Egyptian unit of measurement known as the *schoinos*. Strabo complains that he could find no single uniform value for the *schoinos*: in some parts of Egypt it was equal to 30 stades, in other areas 40 or 60.²³

On this theory, the original source gave the distance across the Karpas peninsula as one *schoinos* (40 stades), that between New and Old Paphos as 2 *schoinoi* (80 stades) and the ‘passage across’ from Aphrodision to Salamis as 5 3/4 *schoinoi* (230 stades²⁴). At a later date, these values were converted using the ratio of 30 stades to the *schoinos*, producing the figures 30, 60 and 170 stades, which were recopied as 30, 60 and 70 into the document that served Strabo as his source.²⁵

²² For the date, Bekker-Nielsen 2000.

²³ Geogr. 17.1.24 C 804.

²⁴ Units were more often divided into halves, quarters and eighths than into thirds; thus 5 3/4 or 5 5/8 are more likely than 5 2/3. Any one of the three would, after multiplication by 30, be rounded to 170.

²⁵ An alternative possibility is that Strabo’s source used ‘stades’ longer than the standard stade. Antoine Hirsch has argued for the co-existence of two metrological systems in Egypt, one based on the ‘royal’ cubit of c. 52.5 cm and an older system based on a ‘great’ cubit of 60 cm, which remained in use into the Ptolemaic period (Hirsch 2013: 120; 149, table 28). As an Egyptian stade equalled 400 cubits, a hypothetical ‘great stade’ would have been c. 240 metres. At present, however, there is no textual evidence for the use of a 240-metre ‘great stade’ in the Hellenistic period.

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FIGURES

Fig. 1. Map of the Karpas peninsula (Hogarth 1889).

Fig. 2. Rock-cut roadway north-east of Mallıdağ (author's photo, October 2012).



