

out entering it, but if it did, the Ust-Urt plateau to the west would force the river so far to the south that it would inevitably join the Oxus two or three hundred miles from the present shore of the Caspian. Therefore under present conditions the Oxus and Jaxartes could not possibly enter the Caspian Sea by separate mouths. If, however, the Caspian were to expand so as to coalesce with the Sea of Aral, or to be separated from it only by a short sound or river, the two seas might be regarded as one, and the conditions would agree with the description of Patroclus. The absence of any distinct mention of the Sea of Aral by either Greeks, Chinese, or Persians down to the time of Menander of Constantinople, A. D. 590, suggests either that no such lake existed, which is extremely improbable, or that it was regarded as a part of the expanded Caspian.

The reports of Aristobulus and Patroclus have been discredited because these men, or some others of Alexander's followers, confused the Paropamisus mountains of Afghanistan with the Caucasus range; and, finding the name of Don or Tanis attached to the Jaxartes, supposed it to be the Don or Danube of Europe. Opinion is divided as to how fundamental their geographical errors may have been. They were probably wrong in saying that the Caspian Sea was a gulf of the northern ocean symmetrical with the Persian gulf on the south, and, like it, separated from the main ocean by a narrow strait. Their mistake, however, is not so great as it appears at first sight. Humboldt, Wood, and others have favored the hypothesis that in ancient, perhaps prehistoric times, the Caspian and Aral seas formed a single body of water, which discharged to the north. The