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The World According to Eratosthenes

Its western expanse swims with airy light
over a quarter of the world's ocean.

The east extends only to India,
narrowing to parallels and meridians
blocking the dogged waves.

Mother Ganges empties
holiness into an unnamed sea
where finned nightmares munch
on ships as snacks.

Continents culled from travellers' accounts
as Eratosthenes quickly scratched in beaches,
banks, and bounds, conserving ink.

Near perfect in his estimation
of the earth's circumference and tilt.

Yet called *Beta* by detractors who sneered
that his work so irritated the gods
they'd chock up bays with sand
stade after *stade* (each, 600 Greek feet)
to punish mortals for their shameless curiosity
about the world's curves.

However, because Eratosthenes invented leap day
those in the know usually brought him supper,
hoping they'd be left with open harbours.

When he completed his map,
much of Africa was labelled Libya
with only a grassy stretch
south of the Nile for elephants, rhinos, and such.