

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Oxford, Trinity Term 2014

Rewriting the Egyptian river

The Nile in Hellenistic and imperial Greek literature

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96726 words

Abstract of: *Rewriting the Egyptian river: the Nile in Hellenistic and imperial Greek literature*

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This thesis explores Hellenistic and imperial Greek texts that represent or discuss the river Nile. The thesis makes an original contribution to scholarship by examining such texts in the light of the history of Greek discourse about the Nile and in the context of social, political and cultural changes, and takes account of relevant ancient Egyptian texts. I begin with an introduction that provides a survey of earlier scholarship about the Nile in Greek literature, before identifying three themes central to the thesis: the relationship between Greek and Egyptian texts, the tension between rationalism and divinity, and the interplay between power and literature. I then highlight both the cultural significance of rivers in classical Greek culture, and the polyvalence of the river Nile and its inundation in ancient Egyptian religion and literature.

Chapter 1 examines the significance of Diodorus Siculus' representation of the Nile at the beginning of his universal history; it argues that the river's prominence constructs Egypt as a primeval landscape that allows the historian access to the distant past. The Nile is also seen to be useful to the historian as a conceptual parallel for his historiographical project. Whereas Diodorus begins his universal history with the Nile, Strabo closes his universal geography with Egypt; the second chapter demonstrates how Strabo incorporates the Nile into his vision of the new Roman world.

Chapter 3 presents a diachronic study of Greek discourse concerning the two major Nilotic problems, the cause of the annual inundation and the location of the sources. It examines first the construction of the debates, and second the transformation of that tradition in Aelius Aristides' *Egyptian Oration*. The functions of the Nile in Greek praise-poetry are the subject of chapter 4; it is shown that the Nile and its benefactions are used by poets to lay claim to political, religious or cultural authority, and to situate Egypt within an expanding *oikoumene*. The fifth and final chapter turns to Greek narrative fictions from the imperial period. The chapter demonstrates that the Nile is more familiar than exotic in these texts. It is shown that Xenophon of Ephesus and Achilles Tatius play with the trope of 'novelty' in this very familiar literary landscape, while Heliodorus articulates a more profound disruption of the expected Egyptian tropes, and ultimately replaces Egypt with Ethiopia as a new Nilotic environment.

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Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to the Arts and Humanities Research Council for the Doctoral Research Grant that has made this project possible. Similar thanks are owed to New College for their generous support in the form of the Hastings Rashdall Graduate Scholarship.

I am very grateful to all with whom I have discussed this research over the last three-and-a-half years. John Baines, Jane Lightfoot, Amin Benaissa and Gregory Hutchinson provided insightful and helpful comments on early drafts for transfer and confirmation of status, which have shaped this thesis for the better. My thanks are also due to Dirk Obbink for supervising the first year of my DPhil. I have benefited from the comments and feedback of those who have read or listened to parts of this thesis, including Luuk Huitink, André Lardinois, Chris Pelling, and Liz Sawyer, as well as fellow graduate-students at seminars in Oxford, Nijmegen, and Princeton. Ian Moyer and Jessica Priestley kindly gave me access to unpublished work on the hymns of Isidorus, and the Hellenistic reception of Herodotus respectively. I am also very grateful for the eagle-eyed observations of Jane Burkowski, Sophie Duncan and Barnaby Taylor, who have saved me from many inconsistencies and infelicities. Above all my supervisors Mark Smith and Tim Whitmarsh have been unfailingly generous with their time, support, guidance and feedback; my gratitude to them is correspondingly deep.

Finally, this research would not have been completed without the love and support of my friends, fiancé, and family, especially my parents.

Abbreviations

- ANET* J. B. Pritchard. 1950. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts relating to the Old Testament*. Princeton.
- A.P.* *Anthologia Palatina*.
- CDD* J. J. Johnson (ed.). 2001. *The Demotic Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*. Chicago: [<https://oi.uchicago.edu/research/pubs/catalog/cdd>]. Accessed: Wednesday 23.04.2014.
- CEG* P. A. Hansen. 1983-9. *Carmina Epigraphica Graeca*. Berlin.
- Crum* W. E. Crum. 1939. *A Coptic Dictionary*. Oxford.
- Deir Chelouit I* C. Zivie-Coche and Y. H. Hanafi. 1982-1992. *Le temple du Deir Chelouit*. Cairo. Vol. 1.
- DK* H. Diels and W. Kranz, 1952. *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*. 6th edn. Berlin.
- Edfou* M. De Rochemonteix Chalvet and E. G. Chassinat. 1892-1985. *Le temple d'Edfou (inscriptions)*. Paris etc.
- Edfu VII* D. Kurth, A. Behrmann. 2004. *Edfu VII*. Wiesbaden.
- FGrH* F. Jacoby. 1923-. *Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*. Leiden.
- IEG* M. L. West. 1971. *Iambi et elegi Graeci*. Oxford.
- IG* *Inscriptiones Graecae*. 1873-.
- ILS* H. Dessau. 1892-1916. *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*. Berlin.
- LÄ* W. Helck and E. Otto (eds.). 1972-1992. *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*. Wiesbaden.
- LIMC* H. C. Ackermann, J.-R. Gisler, L. Kahil. 1981-. *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*. Zürich.
- LSJ* H. G. Liddel and R. Scott, rev. H. S. Jones. 1925-1940. *Greek-English Lexicon*. 9th edn. Oxford.
- Kawa* M. F. L. Macadam. 1949. *The temples of Kawa: Oxford University excavations in Nubia*. London.
- NP* H. Cancik, H. Schneider, A.F. Von Pauly and others (eds.). 1996-2003. *Der Neue Pauly: Enzyklopädie der Antike*. Stuttgart.

- OGIS* W. Dittenberger. 1903-1905. *Orientalis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae: supplementum sylloges inscriptionum graecarum*. Leipzig.
- Peek GVI* W. Peek. 1955. *Griechische Vers-Inschriften 1, Grab-Epigramme*. Berlin.
- RE* A. Pauly, G. Wissowa and W. Kroll (eds). 1893-. *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*. Stuttgart, Munich.
- SEG* *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*. 1923-.
- Suppl. Hell.* H. Lloyd-Jones and P. Parsons (eds.). 1983. *Supplementum Hellenisticum*. Berlin.
- Motif-Index* S. Thompson. 1955-1958. *Motif-Index of folk-literature*. Rev. Edn. Bloomington, Indiana.

Introduction

What this thesis does

The Nile runs through Greek literature from Hesiod to Heliodorus; it courses through genres as diverse as epic, tragedy, historiography, philosophy, meteorology, natural history, geography, hymn, epinician, paradoxography, fictionalised biography, romance, and apocalyptic. It attracts attention from Greek scholars, poets, scientists, kings, emperors, and soldiers as a river unsurpassed in size and fertility, a rich natural resource, a source of wonder in the strange phenomenon of its summer inundation, the home and progenitor of huge, dangerous and exotic animals, the giver of wealth, a sign of the edges of the world, the symbol of a quest for knowledge, of inquiry and of mortal wisdom itself, delimited by the sources of the river, which remained unreachable and unknowable. The waters of the Nile give life to Egypt, a place identified by Greek texts as remarkably strange, rich in wisdom and cultural beginnings, but also profoundly different from Greek culture, a place of radical 'otherness' that reveals the 'self' of Greek identity. This 'othering' of Egypt in fifth- and fourth-century BC Greek texts is a trope that has been made familiar by recent scholarship; less familiar are the transformations and continuities of earlier conceptions of the Nile in Greek texts during the Hellenistic and Roman imperial periods.

This thesis explores the multi-faceted and polyvalent representations of the river Nile and its inundation in a range of texts of the Hellenistic and imperial Greek periods, examining and bringing to light the rich literary and cultural significance of this central hydrological discourse. It goes beyond existing scholarly analyses by moving away from the consideration of Nilotic images in Greek texts as static and unchanging *topoi* towards synthetic interpretations focused on elucidating the construction and functions of the river and its inundation within individual texts. The thesis is particularly concerned with understanding Nilotic texts and passages embedded within larger texts in the light of the history of Greek discourse about the Nile (a discourse that is termed 'Nilography' in this thesis), as well as in the context of social, political and cultural changes over the Hellenistic and imperial periods. The thesis also extends the range of existing scholarship by taking full account of relevant ancient Egyptian texts, where this is pertinent to the Greek texts; the

discussion is informed by an understanding of Egyptian literature and the rich semiotics of the river and its inundation in Egyptian culture.

Justification for the thesis

Greek perceptions and constructions of the Nile have been an object of scholarly attention for several decades. The single most substantial contribution to scholarship has been the life-long work of the French papyrologist Danielle Bonneau, who dedicated the majority of her research to the complex problems of the Nile and its inundation.¹ Bonneau's work extends widely over technical, linguistic, economic, institutional, administrative, fiscal, sociological and religious issues, and incorporates a wide variety of papyrological, literary, numismatic, archaeological and other evidence. Her wide-ranging 1964 monograph discusses the phenomenon of the annual inundation that fascinated Greek and Roman writers.² The book examines the economic and social impact of the inundation, the various theories proposed to explain the cause of the flood, and lastly the cult of the Nile in Egyptian, Greek and Roman sources. Later works include *Le fisc et le Nil* (1971) and *Le régime administratif de l'eau du Nil dans l'Égypte grecque, romaine et byzantine* (1993), which focus on the administration of the inundation and the processes implemented at local and higher levels to control and maintain irrigation in Egypt.³ These important studies are in addition to more than sixty published articles on the Nile, irrigation, and other aspects of the hydrology of Egypt. Bonneau's extensive work is invaluable; however, her approach to literary sources is dominated by her interests as a historian, and can now be significantly complemented, enhanced and updated by an approach that foregrounds the texts as *literary* productions.

Speaking generally, Roman views of the Nile have been the subject of more sustained scholarly interest than the Greek; Greek attitudes to and responses to the Nile have been generally treated in the course of broader studies of Egypt in Greek texts, or in article-length studies of individual

¹ For a full bibliography of Bonneau's work, see Bernard (1993).

² Bonneau (1964a).

³ Bonneau (1971) and (1993) respectively.

writers or texts. Brigitte Postl's 1970 dissertation marshals a rich collection of evidence for the presence of the Nile and Nilotic *topoi* in Greek and Roman sources.⁴ This study however functions more usefully as a survey of the sources than as a detailed analytical investigation into texts. More recently, studies of the Roman Nile have demonstrated new methodologies and sophisticated literary analysis. Miguel John Versluys accentuates the interpenetration of visual and written narratives about the Nile in ancient art and literature; his re-evaluation of the value of Nilotic scenes in mosaics and other visual media for understanding Roman responses to Egypt has prompted studies that integrate visual and written sources.⁵ A new monograph by Eleni Manolaraki explores representations of the Nile in the imagination of writers in the period following the Augustan conquest of Egypt until the end of the second century CE.⁶ Manolaraki presents new and subtle readings of such writers as Lucan, Statius, Valerius Flaccus, Plutarch and Philostratus, demonstrating that the Nile is not a static symbol in post-Augustan Rome, but a richly signifying theme and set of motifs that can be used to articulate a whole series of overlapping themes.⁷ Manolaraki's study is particularly valuable for its synthesis of ancient texts with attention to their status as 'creative distillations of political, social and cultural attitudes toward Egypt', and as 'a site of contesting, affirming and reflecting on the broadening meaning of Roman identity'.⁸ In Manolaraki's reading, which is informed by recent work on the political and symbolic meanings of space in the Roman empire, the Nile emerges as a 'diachronic, symbolic space'.⁹

Despite this growth of interest in the Nile in Greek and especially Roman texts, a detailed study of Greek Nilography in the Hellenistic and imperial periods is lacking. This thesis aims to illuminate that gap, by exploring a series of Greek texts that represent the Nile and that tackle the issues raised by the river and its unusual phenomena. The texts were selected for analysis by relatively

⁴ Postl (1970).

⁵ Versluys (2002), and see the essays in Bricault-Versluys-Meyboom (2007).

⁶ Manolaraki (2013), reviewed by West (2013).

⁷ See Manolaraki (2013) 6.

⁸ Manolaraki (2013) 10.

⁹ Manolaraki (2013) 24, with bibliography n. 48.

straightforward criteria. First, the texts all originate from the Hellenistic or imperial periods. Representations of Egypt and of the Nile in the fifth and fourth centuries have already attracted considerable attention.¹⁰ The conquests of Alexander greatly expanded Greek knowledge of geography beyond the Mediterranean rim, and profoundly altered conceptions of the inhabited world (*oikoumene*).¹¹ The late Hellenistic period also saw the growth of massive projects of ‘universal’ history and geography, which claimed to encompass all time and/or space; the Nile plays a significant role in such universal texts, which must negotiate the presence of this massive river from an ancient country.¹² Ptolemaic rule of Egypt also instigated great changes in the nature of Greek encounters with Egypt. Further transformations occur after the annexation of Egypt by Rome, when Egypt and the Nile are incorporated into the Roman Empire. The latest text (chronologically) discussed in this thesis is Heliodorus’ *Aithiopika*. This is not an arbitrary choice; Heliodorus is a powerful symbolic closing-point to any discussion of the significance of the Egyptian Nile in ancient literature, as a text that wrestles with what has become the familiarity of the river, and that ultimately moves beyond Egypt and the Egyptian Nile altogether, closer to the sources of the river and of wisdom in Ethiopia.¹³ Christian texts largely fall outside the scope of this study. The Nile and its inundation continue to permeate patristic writings in Greek and Coptic, where the Nile is understood as one of the four rivers of heaven, and the inundation as a gift from God that is under the control of Christ or the archangel Michael.¹⁴ The richness of Nilotic symbolism in Christian texts, and the intriguing transformations and reinvigoration of earlier Nilotic *topoi*, themes and motifs in such texts warrant a separate study devoted to the late antique period.

¹⁰ For detailed bibliography, see further below pp. 15-18; significant studies include Froidefond (1971), Vasunia (2001), and Moyer (2011).

¹¹ Geus (2003) provides a useful overview of developments in geographical thought after Alexander.

¹² On the emergence of ‘universal’ approaches to history and geography, see Breebaart (1966), Burde (1974), Momigliano (1982), Alonso-Núñez (1990) and (2002), Clarke (1999a) and (1999b), Marincola (2007).

¹³ See chapter 5, with bibliography.

¹⁴ On the Nile in Christian writing and art, see Engberding (1953), Hermann (1959), Maguire (1999).

Most of the texts analysed in this thesis are written in Greek. This focus is justified not only by the relative lack of scholarly analysis of Greek Nilography after Herodotus, as identified above, but also but the strong sense articulated by Greek texts of a continuous tradition of writing about the Nile, in which later writers, historians and scientists participate and on which they repeatedly reflect. A focus on Greek texts allows us to observe the unfolding transformations in the function of Greek Nilography through social and cultural changes, especially the new and various self-fashionings of Greek writers in the Hellenistic and imperial periods. This focus allows us to trace the ways in which Greek Nilography can be used to reflect on, construct and display the cultural authority and identity of the writer. That said, relevant comparanda in Latin and Demotic Egyptian are also discussed where appropriate. For instance, Seneca the Younger and Pliny the Elder both discuss the causes of the inundation; these discussions are interventions in and continuations of Greek speculation on this subject.¹⁵ Likewise, Tibullus' *Elegy* 1.7 is discussed as a reworking of a fragment of Callimachus which had given voice to the Nile itself.¹⁶ Texts in the Egyptian language are also important for a nuanced understanding of certain Greek texts, particularly some of those analysed in chapter 4, including hymns to the Nile and to Isis.

As was suggested above, the presence of the Nile in Greek texts endures across many centuries and across many genres. The texts discussed in this thesis range across Greek historiography, geography, rhetoric, hymn (including epigraphic hymns), encomia and epinician, and romances, in addition to Latin and Demotic texts. The choice of texts has not however been arbitrary. The thesis does not analyse documentary texts that concern the river and the inundation; such sources have been well-treated by Danielle Bonneau's exhaustive studies.¹⁷ What is more, despite the temporal and generic range of the texts treated in this thesis, the study is given coherence and unity by the recurrence of certain central themes and ideas, which are perennially reworked and transformed for different purposes. Greek 'scientific' Nilography is a recursive and self-reflexive tradition, which

¹⁵ Sen. *QN* 4a.2.23-30, Plin. *HN* 5.10; see chapter 3 of the current thesis.

¹⁶ Callim. fr. 384 Pf.; see chapter 4 of the current thesis.

¹⁷ See esp. Bonneau (1971) and (1993).

frequently involves an engagement with and confrontation of earlier writers, notably Herodotus, whose presence may be traced like a palimpsest through the thesis. Other texts outside this investigative tradition continually rework Nilotic images and motifs, and indeed allude to the scientific tradition. In what follows, I draw out some of the themes that will recur throughout the thesis like the channels of a braided river.

Greek and Egyptian connections

Recent decades have witnessed radical shifts and re-evaluations in the fundamental scholarly narratives about the ways in which Greeks and other cultures of the Mediterranean and the Near East related to one another, and in particular the ways in which literary texts imagine, refract and participate in those relationships. No longer is it sufficient or desirable to see Greeks as operating within a hermetically-sealed cultural unit in isolation from the rest of the Near East and the Mediterranean world, in the manner of the 'European tradition, especially the scholarly tradition, [which] used to see the Greeks... as unique and isolated, classical'.¹⁸ Rather, new and growing numbers of studies encourage us to think in terms of a plurality of bi-, inter-, and multi-cultural literary discourses and of cultural dialogues between Greeks and non-Greeks over the course of many centuries and in many contexts. This thesis is implicated in the, at times overlapping, questions of how and why Greeks imagined and wrote about the Nile in certain ways, and of how those texts might be related to Egyptian texts or ideas.

It is a familiar scholarly *topos* that 'Egypt' in Greek texts of the fifth and fourth centuries is constructed as the radical 'other' that reveals the Greek 'self' by opposition and inversion.¹⁹ The text central to this conception is the second book of Herodotus' *Histories*, which asserts that 'the Egyptians in most of their manners and customs reverse the common practice of mankind' (Hdt. 2.35). The binary opposition constructed between 'self' and 'other' in the ethnography Herodotus is

¹⁸ Burkert (2004) 1.

¹⁹ Froidefond (1971), Hartog (1980), (1988), (1996), Vasunia (2001), Cartledge (2002) 71-4, Harrison (2003). Gruen (2011) stresses the importance of connection between Greek and non-Greek in Greek texts, which often runs alongside the 'othering' of non-Greeks.

developed most famously by François Hartog, but was anticipated by Christian Froidefond, whose analysis of Egypt in Herodotus stressed the function of this country as a primeval landscape full of the origins of culture and religion.²⁰ Froidefond argued that the ‘Egypt’ of Herodotus is part of the *mirage égyptien*, a place constructed out of Greek fascinations and preoccupations. Thirty years later, Phiroze Vasunia presented a reading of Herodotus’ second book (among other texts) that was informed both by Hartog’s Herodotean ‘mirror’ and by critiques of Orientalism by contemporary cultural theorists, including Edward Said and Michael Foucault.²¹

A second approach to the problem of the relationship between Greek literature and Egyptian culture emerged in some studies of Hellenistic poetry, which posited that certain problematic passages in Callimachus and Theocritus (especially) could be better understood as references or allusions to central Egyptian mythological and religious ideas, particularly those relating to kingship.²² Certain ‘Egyptianising’ references were argued for by Ludwig Koenen and Peter Bing in the 1970s and 80s, and the idea of ‘intercultural poetics’ as a model for reading Callimachus, Theocritus and Apollonius was put forward in a monograph by Susan Stephens.²³ Stephens argues these writers ‘often appear familiar with and even seem to appropriate elements from Egyptian myth, which they recast as or assimilate to Greek’.²⁴ Stephens’ approach is welcome as an attempt both to move beyond readings that seek to entrench Greek literature as an isolated cultural monolith, and also to ask how Greek and Egyptian texts (or ideas) may influence one another. However, it is severely hampered by, on the one hand, the striking and severe *absence* of Egypt in most Hellenistic poetry, which forces her arguments to rely often on tiny and unflagged

²⁰ Hartog (1980), Froidefond (1971).

²¹ Vasunia (2001) 11-7, drawing especially on Said (1978). For reviews of Vasunia, see Moyer (2003) and Barbantani (2005).

²² Merkelbach (1981), Koenen (1977), (1983), (1993), Bing (1988), Selden (1998), Reed (2000), Stephens (2003), (with cautious circumspection) Hunter (2003). Sceptical accounts include Zanker (1989) and Weber (1993). For further discussion, see chapter 4, pp. 196-7.

²³ Stephens (2003), reviewed by Goldhill (2005).

²⁴ Stephens (2003) 43.

details, and, on the other, by what appears to be an overwhelming preoccupation with *Greece* in these same texts.

Further approaches to this issue are characterised by an emphasis on marginal texts outside the classical 'canon', and by an examination of various modes of interrelation between Greek and Egyptian. Ian Moyer presents a cogent and provocative challenge to models of interpretation that focus solely on Egypt as 'alterity', which Moyer attributes in part to an over-reliance on Herodotus.²⁵ Instead, he offers a new examination of the 'roles of Egyptian subjects in the so-called 'fringes of copenetration' where Greek discourses on Egyptian history and culture were created',²⁶ and argues that in these necessarily marginal contexts, Egyptians can be seen as taking an active part in the construction of Greek discourse about Egypt.²⁷ Apart from Herodotus' encounter with Egyptian priests (Hdt. 2.142-144), Moyer examines Manetho's *Aegyptiaca* (early Ptolemaic period), an aretalogy to Serapis from Delos (third/second century BCE), and a pharmacological treatise *De virtutibus herbarum* by a certain Thessalus (fourth century CE). Moyer's chosen texts, 'snapshots and glimpses' of a different kind of history, articulated in different places over several centuries, reveal that Greco-Egyptian cultural identities could be negotiated and articulated in several modes, and bear witness to the richness of ideological positions in apparently 'Greek' texts.

A growing body of evidence illustrates cultural exchange and interchange between Greek and Egyptian texts, especially in the Hellenistic and imperial periods. Recent scholarship demonstrates a richly complex experience of multilingualism in Egypt over the course of several centuries, including bilingual archives, and the differing situations in which Greek and/or Egyptian might be used, spoken or written.²⁸ Several Demotic Egyptian texts were translated or adapted into Greek.

²⁵ Moyer (2011) ch. 1, an expanded version of Moyer (2002).

²⁶ Moyer (2011) 34.

²⁷ Of particular value is Moyer's competence in both Greek and Egyptian languages.

²⁸ See in particular, Papaconstantinou (2010), and Depauw (2012); for archives, Clarysse (2010). On Latin in Egypt, see Adams (2003) 527-641.

The *Myth of the Sun's Eye* is known in Demotic and Greek, in slightly different versions;²⁹ similarly, the *Dream of Nectanebo* is familiar from Greek texts, and has recently been found in Demotic versions too.³⁰ Versions of the Sesostris story are also found in both Greek and Demotic.³¹ Transmission from Demotic to Greek is also suggested by some oracular literature: the Greek text known as the *Oracle of the Potter*³² bears striking similarities to the Demotic *Oracle of the Lamb*.³³ It is also clear that the *Alexander Romance* interweaves Greek and Egyptian material.³⁴

This survey has illustrated new and older approaches to the problems of interpreting Egypt's presence in Greek literary texts, and has pointed to some of the rich modes of cultural interaction that occurred over the course of antiquity. The approach taken by this thesis is a hybrid one, since representations of and ideas about the Nile are articulated across a wide range of texts, both texts which would be typically categorised as 'canonical', such as Herodotus or Callimachus, and those which are more marginal, such as the hymns of Isidorus to Isis or a Greek hymn to the Nile itself. Sometimes these texts derive from what Moyer has termed the 'fringes of copenetration', the edges of the contact zone between Greek and Egyptian at which boundaries are fluid or richly intercultural.³⁵ However, not all the texts analysed in this thesis emerge from these contexts. The Nile is a central symbol of Egypt, but is also assimilated into Greek culture as a symbol of, for instance, the unknown, the process of inquiry, narrative, or literary traditions. Greek Nilography is

²⁹ A Demotic text known as the *Myth of the Sun's Eye* was published by Spiegelberg (1917); a Greek version, with some variants, was published by Reitzenstein (1923), cf. West (1969) and (2013). For the Demotic version, see Hoffmann and Quack (2007) 195-229, 356-60 (under the name *Die Heimkehr der Göttin*); cf. Quack (2009) 129-39.

³⁰ For the Greek version, see Koenen (1985); for the Demotic, see Ryholt (1998) and (2002), cf. Hoffmann and Quack (2007) 162-5, 348, and Quack (2009) 64-5.

³¹ Stephens and Winkler (1995) 246-66. See also Hoffmann and Quack (2007) 177, and Quack (2005) 61.

³² Koenen (1968).

³³ Simpson (2003), Hoffmann and Quack (2007) 181-3, 351-3, Quack (2005) 150-2.

³⁴ Stoneman (2008), and Stoneman, Erickson and Netton (2012) discuss the complex cultural origins and permutations of this set of texts. See Stoneman (2008) 6-26 on the place of Egypt in biographical traditions about Alexander.

³⁵ The notion of the 'contact zone' was coined by Pratt (1992) 8 to refer to 'the space of imperial encounters'.

not created afresh in every iteration, and is not always, or even necessarily foremost, a response to the 'facts' of the Nile as a geophysical entity or as integral to and representative of Egyptian culture, but often functions as a sign of inquiry and the limits of human knowledge that is appropriated by and integrated into Greek discourse in a variety of ways. At the same time, it is not possible to see Greek texts about Egypt and the Nile in the Hellenistic and imperial periods as simply constructions of 'the other'; Egypt, penetrated, explored and ruled by Greeks, Ptolemies and Romans, is a space in which Greek and Egyptian identity cannot be constructed over against one another, and which increasingly functions as a *familiar* place - exotic perhaps, but not entirely and radically strange. Imperial Greek imaginative narratives such as the so-called 'ideal' novels repeatedly play with the familiarity of Egypt, a familiarity both literary and actual.³⁶

Rationalism and divinity

The Nile provoked two great questions that consistently attracted investigation and debate among Greek and Roman writers in antiquity, that of the cause of the annual inundation, and the location of the sources of the river. At the same time, the Nile was a numinous, unfathomable and divine entity that was a source of wonders and an object of worship. These two conceptions of the river and its inundation are variously intertwined and held in tension with each other in Greek texts. The Nile is a subject to be investigated, measured, understood and controlled, as Vasunia has shown in his reading of Herodotus' imagination of Egypt.³⁷ Later, Strabo and Diodorus Siculus articulate the control and management of Nilotic space through the building of dykes and dams, the mechanics of irrigation, taxation and the use of Nilometers. Herodotus also participates in an already-ongoing debate about the cause of the inundation and the location of the Nile, rejecting mythological explanations and using his excursus to display his command of a great range of argument.³⁸ Herodotus' use of rationalising and naturalistic argument, building on the inquiries of the Presocratics, was taken up by subsequent writers, who place an emphasis on the display of

³⁶ See chapter 5 of the current thesis.

³⁷ Vasunia (2001) 87-91.

³⁸ See chapter 3.

participation as well as a negotiation of the preceding literary tradition. Nilotic inquiry becomes a symbol for the display of education and an awareness of the key touchstones of Greek culture, especially for the Second Sophistic writer Aelius Aristides.

Yet from the beginning of Greek awareness of the Nile, the river forms part of the divine landscape of the world. Hesiod mentions the Nile as first of the offspring of Tethys and Okeanos.³⁹ Herodotus rejected the notion that the Nile was part of Okeanos, the massive primordial river surrounding the earth, and indeed the very notion of Okeanos. The idea does however recur in later texts, and is often attributed to the Egyptians.⁴⁰ The river was also regarded as a deity by Greeks and Romans.⁴¹ The Nile was pictured iconographically as a typical Greco-Roman river-deity, an old bearded male, reclining and often surrounded by his 'children' (the cubits of the inundation), a cornucopia, and other Egyptianising motifs, including crocodiles, hippopotami or a sphinx.⁴² The cult of the Nile was part of the fabric of late Hellenistic and Roman Egypt, celebrated famously with Nile-festivals.⁴³ Nile water (or what purported to be Nile water) was used in the worship of Isis and Sarapis, whose devotees 'most typically valued Nile water as a sign of the prosperity, fertility, and familial well-being offered them in this life by their gods'.⁴⁴

These twin threads, the rational and the divine Nile, are sometimes opposed to one another, as in Herodotus, but certain other texts explode the tension between them. The *Egyptian Oration* of Aelius Aristides both participates in the traditional form of rationalising Nilotic inquiry and then

³⁹ Hes. *Theog.* 337-8.

⁴⁰ Diod. Sic. 1.37.1, Horapollon *Hierogl.* 1.21, Louvre Hymn to the Nile 2-3. See Bonneau (1964a) 143-9.

⁴¹ The inundation was deified in Egyptian theology, for which see below pp. 29-32.

⁴² The most famous specimen is the 'Vatican Nile' (Vatican Museums, Museo Chiaramonte, inv. No. 2300). For recent bibliography, see Versluys (2002), cat. no. 15, Swetnam-Burland (2009) 439 n.1. The type (see *MILC* 6(1): 720-6, s.v. 'Neilos') occurs in a variety of media, including sculpture, coins, mosaic, painting, and gems; see Swetnam-Burland (2009) 440 n. 4 for bibliography.

⁴³ On the cult of the Nile among Greeks and Romans, see Bonneau (1964a), (1971b), (1974), (1985), (1994), (1995).

⁴⁴ Wild (1981) 3.

'caps' it, transforming the naturalistic debate into praise of his favourite healing gods and a demonstration of the hidden mechanics of divine activity and revelation.⁴⁵ The quest for the sources of the Nile embodies the dual attractions of the river as both a subject of geographical investigation and a reminder of the limits of human knowledge; the Nile always remained outside what was and could be known, always inscrutable, unapproachable and ineffable.

Power and literature

It is a commonplace that culture is deeply implicated in the processes and exercise of political - perhaps especially imperial - power. The texts analysed in this thesis originate from periods in which Egypt was subject to rule by the Ptolemies and Romans. These texts often align knowledge of the Nile, and claims about those who influence and shape the Nile, with the exercise of political power. The Nile can stand as a symbol for both textual and political authority. Scientific inquiry about the Nile is often correlated explicitly with royal or imperial power.⁴⁶ Herodotus had the Egyptian king Psammetichus engage in Nilotic inquiry, and a correlation between political expansionism and scientific pursuits is especially pronounced in the tradition that associates Alexander with a quest for the sources of the river.⁴⁷ Strabo associates the ability to undertake research about the river, and to govern it effectively, with Greek and later Roman rule; his correlation of knowledge, political power and hydrological control is significant in its reversal of the trope that Egypt is the source of Greek wisdom.

Another intersection between power and literature is the definition of geopolitical space in texts. The Nile is regularly made synonymous with Egypt in Greek texts, but this identity is rarely fixed or

⁴⁵ See chapter 3.

⁴⁶ See chapter 3 for further discussion.

⁴⁷ See chapter 3 for further discussion.

stable;⁴⁸ instead, the meaning of Nilotic space, and its place within the inhabited world (*oikoumene*) is regularly re-evaluated in Greek texts. To judge from Herodotus' discussion, the Nile seems to have been considered as the border between Libya and Asia by early Ionian geographers.⁴⁹ This continental division, which entails that half of Egypt is Libyan and the other half is Asian, is rejected by Herodotus on the grounds that, since the Nile splits at the apex of the Delta, the Delta itself would have to be considered a separate continent, a notion that Herodotus clearly finds absurd.⁵⁰ Yet despite rejecting this earlier view, Herodotus does not provide a new answer; defining Egypt as 'the whole extent of territory inhabited by Egyptians' (πᾶσαν... ταύτην τὴν ὑπὲρ Αἰγυπτίων οἰκεομένην, Hdt. 2.16), he does not assign Egypt to a continent. Rather, he seems to indicate that Egypt falls between Asia and Libya, slipping between and out of continental categories, since 'we know of no boundary properly speaking between Asia and Libya except the borders of Egypt' (οὐρίσμα δὲ Ἀσίῃ καὶ Λιβύῃ οἶδαμεν οὐδὲν ἔδον ὀρθῶ λόγῳ εἰ μὴ τοὺς Αἰγυπτίων οὖρους, Hdt. 2.16). Nilotic space in Herodotus is in every respect an in-between land. The Nile represents marginality, and with its hidden sources, belongs to the furthest reaches (ἔσχατα) of the world.⁵¹

⁴⁸ An equivalence between the Nile and Egypt is still regularly made in Anglophone texts, for instance, in Toby Wilkinson's (2014) new popular history *The Nile: Downriver through Egypt's past and present*. Egypt is the primary user of water from the Nile, but increasing water-needs in upstream countries demonstrate the dependence on the Nile of many countries in this complex riparian region. The river flows through ten modern northeast African countries - Rwanda, Burundi, DRC, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Eritrea, South Sudan, Sudan and Egypt; use and development of the river is subject to treaties and partnerships, especially now the Nile Basin Initiative, launched in 1999 to 'seek to develop the River Nile in a cooperative manner, share substantial socio-economic benefits and promote regional peace and security' (<http://nilebasin.org/index.php/about-us/nile-basin-initiative>, accessed 6 April 2014). For a non-Egyptocentric collection of Nilotic studies, see Erlikh-Gershoni (2000).

⁴⁹ Hdt. 2.16-7; for Herodotus' scepticism concerning continental divisions, see 4.36. See Thomas (2000) 80-3, Graham (2003), Romm (2010), esp. 218.

⁵⁰ Hdt. 2.16.

⁵¹ E.g. Bacch. 9.41 ἐπ' ἔσχατα Νείλου.

The Nile is an integral element in the various reformulations of Egyptian space as ‘Egyptian’, ‘Greek’, and ‘Roman’ over the following centuries. Although Egypt is, on the whole, relatively marginal to Hellenistic poetry, a fragment of an epinician by Callimachus gives voice to the Nile (in Greek) and connects the river to centres of Greek athletic and religious culture, reorienting Egypt so that it is central rather than peripheral.⁵² The Roman annexation of Egypt both subordinated the Nile to Rome, and made Egypt vital to the economic stability of Rome.⁵³ Egypt played a strategic role in the empire, as seen in Tacitus’ summary of Augustus’ policies concerning the province: senators and prominent Roman equestrians were forbidden from entering it without permission, ‘thereby isolating Egypt so that no pressure should be exerted on Italy by starvation’ (Tac. *Ann.* 2.59).⁵⁴ Egypt is typically characterised in literary sources from the Augustan period in negative terms; Stephen Nimis notes that a few negative stereotypes about the country and its people are frequently repeated: the murder of Pompey by Ptolemy XIII, the attack by Cleopatra, the strange custom of animal-worship, and the cowardice and barbarism of Egyptians.⁵⁵ The Nile participates in this characterisation; the river is often imbued with human emotions that mirror the state of the human actors. Propertius describes Cleopatra’s attempts to force the Tiber to bear the ‘Nile’s threats’ (*Nili... minas*, 3.11.42); later, she flees ‘to the wandering streams of frightened Nile’ (*in timidi vaga flumina Nili*, 3.11.51). Rivers are also significant symbols of imperial power in texts from the period of the principate, and were displayed in military triumphs.⁵⁶ In Strabo’s universal geography from the early Roman empire, the Nile is made subject to Rome; it is one of many imperial rivers, brought within the ambit of Roman imperial might, directing its products toward Rome.⁵⁷ Strabo allows that Egypt is superior to Ethiopia, in part because it is ‘less remote’, but also

⁵² Callim. fr. 384 Pf.; see chapter 4 of this thesis.

⁵³ Egypt was of course vital to Rome’s grain supply; Rickman (1980) 231-5.

⁵⁴ Bowman (1986) 40 observes that Roman rule in effect ‘depoliticised’ Egypt.

⁵⁵ Nimis (2004) 41. Cf. Postl (1970), Reinhold (1980), Smelik-Hemelrijk (2000), Maehler (2003), Manolaraki (2013) 31.

⁵⁶ See especially Östenberg (2009) 230-45, and Nicolet (1991) 31-2, 37-8, 69, Murphy (2004) 154-60, Campbell (2012) 370-8 (conquered rivers), 379-83 (rivers cooperating with Roman power).

⁵⁷ See chapter 2 of this thesis. Interest in the relation between space, geography and political authority in the ancient world was sparked primarily by Nicolet (1988), translated into English (1991).

asserts that improvements to the Nile have been made under the early Ptolemies and the Romans. Strabo's conception of Nilotic space is mirrored by a poem of Tibullus, which, in alluding to Callimachus' Nile, silences the voice of the river and incorporates it into a list of imperial possessions.

Rivers in Greek culture

Landscapes are conceptually potent in Greek culture, and rich in mythological, religious or literary associations; landscape elements are often represented in literary texts and the visual arts.⁵⁸ Mountains, caves, the sea, springs, and trees were numinous and often symbolic spaces.⁵⁹ Yet perhaps few elements of the natural world attracted quite so much religious, literary, mythological, and symbolic depth in Greek culture as rivers.⁶⁰ Rivers - especially navigable rivers - held practical, geographic and political importance as routes of communication, transport and trade.⁶¹ They form lines of communication and connection on the one hand, and of division on the other: people might be connected by drinking the water of the same river, but rivers also created natural obstacles, geographical borders that could be crossed or conquered or transgressed.⁶²

⁵⁸ On landscape in Greek visual arts, see Nelson (1977), Hedreen (2011). For some studies of landscape in Greek literary texts, see Parry (1957); Segal (1963); Hernández (2008); Bremer (1975) on Euripides' *Hippolytus*; Williams (1989) on Apollonius Rhodius, now with Thalmann (2011). See also Osborne (1987), Buxton (2009). Spencer (2010) provides a short but rich and theoretically-informed introduction to landscapes in Roman culture. Modern cultural geography has stressed the symbolic and cultural aspects of landscapes; see Cosgrove (1984), (1985), (2008), Cosgrove-Daniels (1988), Crang (1998), Mitchell (2000).

⁵⁹ On mountains, see Buxton (1992) and (1994) 81-96; Buxton (1994) 97-113 also discusses the sea, caves and springs. On caves, see Ustinova (2009); on the sea, Kowalski-Claramunt-Zucker (2007); on trees, see e.g. Buxton (2009) 210-30.

⁶⁰ See Brewster (1997), Piquet (1993). Braund (1996), Jones (2005) and Campbell (2012) discuss rivers in Roman culture but there is considerable continuity in the conceptions of Greek and Romans.

⁶¹ Rivers are particularly significant as routes of communication and trade in Strabo's *Geographia*.

⁶² E.g. early Ionian continental divisions along rivers and Herodotus' scepticism, cf. Hdt. 4.36. On river boundaries, see Scheliha (1931), Baslez (1995), Braund (1996), Campbell (2012) 62-4, 186-97.

Rivers were worshipped as local deities, personifications of the local environment; the only river-god to achieve cultic renown across Greece was the Achelous. The holy character of rivers is indicated by Hesiod's injunctions to pray, look into the stream, and wash one's hands before crossing a river.⁶³ Sacrifices were made to river deities, including the dedication of bulls and the drowning of other animals, such as horses.⁶⁴ The *Iliad* indicates other aspects of devotion to rivers: a certain Hypsenor is the priest of Scamander, and the Spercheius has an altar and a sanctuary.⁶⁵ Centuries later, Pausanias noted several rivers which received honours and cult, including the Alpheus at Olympia, the Cladeus in Elis, and the Pamisus in Messenia.⁶⁶ Rivers were worshipped as 'nourishers of children' (κουροτρόφοι), even to adolescence;⁶⁷ offerings of locks of hair were made by adolescents.⁶⁸ Orestes names this offering a θρεπτήριο in Aeschylus' *Libation-Bearers*.⁶⁹ River-names or names derived from rivers might also be given to children: Asopodoros, Ismenodoros, Kephisodotos and so on.⁷⁰ In Athens, in the region of a fifth-century shrine between Piraeus and Phaleron, a marble relief was dedicated by Cephisodotus ('given by Cephisus'); one side of the relief depicts deities including the river Cephisus and Nymphs. Another relief is dedicated by a mother named Xenokrateia to Cephisus and other gods.⁷¹

⁶³ Hes. *WD* 737-41, cf. 757-9.

⁶⁴ Bulls dedicated and live horses drowned in the Scamander (*Il.* 21.124-32); cf. Cleomenes' sacrifice to the Erasinus at Srgos (Hdt. 6.76). Pausanias mentions an annual sacrifice made by the king to the Pamisus in Messenia (4.3.10).

⁶⁵ *Il.* 5.77-8, 23.140-51. On the frequent association of the Trojans with rivers (vs. the Greeks' identification with the sea, see Fenno (2005) 482-7.

⁶⁶ Paus. 5.14.5-6, 5.13.11, 5.10.7, 15.7, 4.3.10.

⁶⁷ For rivers as κουροτρόφοι, see Hes. *Theog.* 346-8, Aesch. *Cho.*, Callim. fr. 384 Pf. I. 28.

⁶⁸ *Il.* 23.141-151, Paus. 1.37.3, 8.41.3, 8.20.3, cf. Σ Pind. *P.* 4.145, Σ B Hom. *Il.* 23.142. See especially Leitao (2003); see also Eitrem (1915) 364-7, Currie (2002) 31-3, Parker (2006) 430-1.

⁶⁹ Aesch. *Cho.* 6.

⁷⁰ On 'potamonymic' names, see Curbera (1998), Parker (2000) 60, Currie (2002) 32 esp. n. 87.

⁷¹ *IG* I.3 986 (*CEG* II 743), 978 (*CEG* II 744). For discussion and bibliography, see Purvis (2003) 15-32, and Parker (2006) 430 with n. 49.

Rivers were often seen as powerful and virile male gods in Greek culture, in contrast to springs, which were conceptualised as female.⁷² In early Greek cosmogonies, rivers were integral to the formation of the universe. Okeanos, the primeval world-river, was the father of all the gods in Homer (*Il.* 14.200-202);⁷³ in Hesiod, Okeanos and Tethys were the parents of ground-waters, rivers and springs (*Theog.* 337-48).⁷⁴ Rivers were often seen as prodigiously fertile or aggressively amorous, as for instance the shape-shifting Achelous who pursues Deianeira in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*: 'my suitor was a river' (μνηστήρ γὰρ ἦν μοι ποταμός, *Soph. Trach.* 9).⁷⁵ Achelous is defeated by Herakles who breaks off his horn, which is then seen as the 'horn of plenty'. Other rivers, including the Spercheius and Enipeus were also thought to have fathered children by mortal women.⁷⁶ Rivers were powerful and dangerous adversaries for heroes; apart from Herakles defeating Achelous, the most famous example in Greek literature is Achilles' fight with the Scamander at Troy.⁷⁷ In Greek myth then, rivers possessed a hyper-masculinity: fertile, sexually aggressive, and dangerously combative.

Greek rivers were also symbols of individual regions, and represented the homeland of those who lived nearby. It is this association that enabled the depiction of 'defeated' rivers in Roman triumphal processions.⁷⁸ Possession of local rivers could be contested,⁷⁹ and a new colony could assert its

⁷² On the iconography of river-gods, see *LIMC* IV.1 s.v. 'Fluvii', 139-48; cf. Gais (1978). On Greek river-gods, see Wasser in *RE* 6.2780-91 s.v. 'Flussgötter', Nilsson (1967) 1.270-3, Weiss (1984).

⁷³ cf. *Il.* 21.196-7; for fluctuation between Achelous and Okeanos, see D'Alessio (2004).

⁷⁴ cf. Orpheus fr. 15 Kern, quoted by Pl. *Cra.* 402b-c. On primeval waters in Greek thought, Rudhardt (1971), cf. Jones (2005) 1-16.

⁷⁵ See Clarke (2004) on this passage. On Acheloos, see Isler (1970), *LIMC* 1.1. 12-36 s.v. 'Acheloos'.

⁷⁶ For the Spercheius, see *Il.* 16.174; Enipeus, see *Od.* 11.235-57. For further references, see Currie (2002) 32 n. 85, and 31-3 on this theme more generally.

⁷⁷ *Il.* 21.211-382. On fighting with a water deity as a 'typical *Heldentat*', see Currie (2002) 36.

⁷⁸ See above p. 23.

⁷⁹ The Peneus near to Mt Pindus was claimed by the Tymphaei and the Thessalians, Strabo 7.7.9.

identity by renaming a local river after a river of the homeland.⁸⁰ In the fifth-century Hippocratic treatise *Airs, Waters, Places*, the quality of waters is said to vary from place to place and to affect the health and even the character of those who drink the water.⁸¹ For instance, the Phasis is said to be the ‘most stagnant of all rivers’ (στασιμώτατος πάντων τῶν ποταμῶν), producing ‘feeble’ (ἀναλδέες) crops, as a result of which the Phasians themselves are seen as unpleasantly large and corpulent.⁸²

Rivers were also integral to the evocation of numinous, beautiful and literary landscapes, and are often places of pleasure. In Homer, rivers are places for washing clothes, where the ordinary activities of well-ordered peaceful societies take place. In the *Iliad*, the springs of the Scamander and the former washing-places of the Trojans are described as a reminder of the peaceful past, which forms a stark contrast to the pollution Achilles has recently inflicted on the Scamander (*Il.* 21.218-220, 234-239), and to the impending destruction of Troy.⁸³ A river is also the setting for Nausicaa’s washing of clothes and encounter with Odysseus, who has been rescued by the same river.⁸⁴ Rivers are protective, cultured places, and in later texts are associated with pleasure, relaxation, holiness and eroticism. The treatise *Airs, Waters, Places* considers the best waters to be those which are ‘sweet and clear’ (γλυκέα καὶ λευκά) and ‘can bear a little wine’ (τὸν οἶνον φέρειν ὀλίγον οἶά τέ ἐστίν).⁸⁵ A mesmerising, holy and richly symbolic landscape in Sappho contains smoking altars, roses, apple trees, a flowery meadow, gentle breezes and ‘cool water’ (ῥῆδωρ ψυχρον).⁸⁶ Similarly, the classic *locus amoenus* of the *Phaedrus* has a ‘most pleasant spring’ (ἡ... πηγὴ χαριεστάτη) which ‘flows with cold water’ (ρεῖ... ψυχροῦ ὕδατος); the

⁸⁰ Settlers from Argos founded Argos Amphiloichikon in Acarnania and named the local river Inachus, Strabo 7.7.7. For the Inachus as a marker of Argive identity, cf. Paus. 8.6.6.

⁸¹ *AWP* 1.

⁸² *AWP* 15.

⁸³ *Il.* 22.147-56.

⁸⁴ *Od.* 6.85-98, 5.441-63.

⁸⁵ *AWP* 7.

⁸⁶ Sappho fr. 2.5.

spot also seems to be dedicated to Achelous and the nymphs.⁸⁷ Running water is then an indispensable element of the *locus amoenus* in the subsequent tradition of the *topos*.⁸⁸

Rivers are frequently used in metaphorical contexts, to articulate important and difficult concepts in human life and literature.⁸⁹ Heraclitus' famous fragment claims 'you cannot step into the same river twice' (δῖς ἐς τὸν αὐτὸν ποταμὸν οὐκ ἄν ἐμβαίης), which appears to be a metaphor for the inevitability of change.⁹⁰ Metaphors for literary inspiration, production and quality in Greek and Roman texts are frequently drawn from the domain of water, and especially rivers.⁹¹ As early as Homer, speech 'flows' like rivers; Nestor's voice 'flows sweeter than honey' (μέλιτος γλυκίων ῥέεν).⁹² A fragment of Cratinus compares the loquaciousness of a drunk poet to a 'flood of words' (τῶν ἐπῶν τῶν ῥευμάτων); his 'mouth has twelve springs, Ilissus is in his throat' (δωδεκάκρουνον τὸ στόμα, Ἰλισσὸς ἐν τῇ φάρυγι).⁹³ A particularly Alexandrian conceit, picked up and fully exploited by Roman poets, was that the poet might drink inspirational waters.⁹⁴ In pre-Alexandrian Greek poetry, the motif is relatively undeveloped, with the exception of Pindar, who will drink the water of Thebe, 'as I weave for spearmen my varied hymn' (ἀνδράσιν αἰχματαῖσι πλέκων Ἰ ποικίλον ὕμνον).⁹⁵ It is unclear however whether Pindar desires to drink these waters for inspiration, or as a sign of his local identity. Different waters are also connected

⁸⁷ Pl. *Phdr.* 230b; for the nymphs, see also 238d1, 241e3-4, 262d2-5, 263d6-7.

⁸⁸ e.g. Theoc. *Id.* 7.136-7, 142; see Pearce (1988) esp. 293-304. On the *locus amoenus* in literary tradition, see Curtius (1953) 195-200, Schoenbeck (1962), Thesleff (1981), Lohse (2009).

⁸⁹ For some comments on the richness of this metaphorical domain, see Ackroyd (2008) 7-10, Herendeen (1981).

⁹⁰ fr. 91 DK, quoted by Plato *Cratylus* 402a.

⁹¹ See especially Jones (2005) 51-67.

⁹² *Il.* 1.249, cf. the Muses and those whom the Muses love in Hes. *Theog.* 39-40, 84, 96-7. See Harriott (1969) 124.

⁹³ Cratinus fr. 186; see Murray (1981) 95.

⁹⁴ Hesiod is said to have drunk from the Hippocrene, the Heliconian spring: Asclepiades or Archias (*A.P.* 9.64), Antipater of Thessalonica (*A.P.* 11.24); . For this theme, see Crowther (1979) 2, and as developed by Roman poets, Jones (2005) 56-59.

⁹⁵ Pind. *OI.* 6.86-7.

with different kinds of poetry or text; this *topos* is particularly developed in Roman rhetorical handbooks, but is apparent in earlier texts. Most famously perhaps, Callimachus seems to connect long poetry with the ‘great...stream of the Assyrian river’ (Ἀσσυρίου ποταμοῖο μέγας ῥόος), and his own poetry with a trickling stream from a holy fountain, ‘pure and undefiled, the crown of waters’ (ὀλίγη λιβάς ἄκρον ἄωτον).⁹⁶ A common metaphor used from the Hellenistic period identified Homer with the Ocean, particularly as the source for other writers.⁹⁷ Pseudo-Longinus uses the image of the Homeric ‘spring’ (νᾶμα), from which Plato diverts waters, to express literary filiation; Manilius has a similar image, with Homer as a ‘stream’ (*amnis*).⁹⁸

Rivers then are richly-signifying phenomena in Greek culture: they are divine and the recipients of cult; they divide the world and bind it together; they symbolise regions and characterise peoples; they are representative of beautiful, refreshing and erotic landscapes; they function as metaphors for time, change, human life, and literature itself. These connotations are also associated with the Nile, particularly in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, as the studies in this thesis illustrate. However, the Nile was not a geographical *tabula rasa*; rather, it was a fundamental presence in the lives and culture of the Egyptians over thousands of years. For this reason, it will be helpful to summarise some important ideas about the river and its inundation that were central to Egyptian culture.

The inundation and the river in Egyptian culture

⁹⁶ Callim. *Hymn* 2.108, 112. Williams (1978) 87-96 argues that the image of the sea represents Homer, drawing on the common identification of Homer with the Ocean that goes back to *Il.* 21.193-7; cf. Traill (1998). Hutchinson (1988) 68, Cameron (1995) 273-4 *contra* this view.

⁹⁷ E.g. Dion. Hal. *Comp.* 24, Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.46; further citations: Brink (1972) 553-6, Williams (1978) 87-9, 98-9.

⁹⁸ [Longinus] *Subl.* 13.3; Manilius 2.8-11. See Ellis (1899), Goold (1961) 169-70 for the resemblance. Hunter (2012) 44-5 sees a parallel between [Longinus] and Plato *Republic* 6, 485d8-9; a closer parallel is *Timaeus* 77c, quoted by [Longinus] at 32.5. The Longinian image, via Plato, draws on a Homeric image (*Il.* 21.257-9).

Egyptian culture made a fundamental distinction between the river, the year-round geographical presence termed *itrw*, and the annual inundation, *ḥꜥpi*.⁹⁹ Specifically, the name *ḥꜥpi* was given to the deified personification of the inundation; the river itself was not deified. Yet although the inundation was profoundly important to Egyptian theology, cult, and culture, the river too has a significant symbolic presence in, for example, literary texts.¹⁰⁰

Hapi was typically depicted as an androgynous figure with pendulous breasts and a full, heavy stomach, either standing or walking, kneeling or squatting.¹⁰¹ He is often shown with a headdress of aquatic plants, and he frequently brings offerings, or, from the nineteenth dynasty, is shown paired in an iconographic group called ‘the union of the two lands’ (*sm3-t3wy*).¹⁰² The personified inundation was not a god like the rest of the Egyptian pantheon, since he does not seem to have received regular cult or have a temple or cult image, although occasional reference is made to priests of the Nile.¹⁰³ Rather, his cult seems to have been bound to the hydrological cycle of the inundation. Extant texts of hymns to the inundation indicate that hymns were sung to hasten the

⁹⁹ De Buck (1948).

¹⁰⁰ This short survey does not have the space to consider all the rich meanings and uses of water in Egyptian culture, for instance in magic and temple rituals; for the former, see especially Koenig (1994) and (2005), and for water in temple rituals, see Bonhême (1995). For studies of water in Egyptian culture, see Menu (1994), Amenta-Luiselli-Novella Sordi (2005), Harry (2011).

¹⁰¹ Baines (1985) 93-5. A Demotic papyrus, *P.Berlin* 13603 col. 4, line 3, clearly indicates the androgynous nature of the god, referring to ‘the figure of Hapi, being half male and half female’; see Erichsen and Schott (1954) 316. Most studies, including Prell (2009) 220 n.71, describe Hapi as androgynous; Baines (1985) 118-22, and Kákosy (1982) 290, deny the feminine qualities of Hapi’s iconography, and classify the god as exclusively male.

¹⁰² Baines (1985) 201-2.

¹⁰³ Van der Plas (1986) 179. Statuettes of Hapi in metals, stone and wood are mentioned as offerings to the god in *Papyrus Harris*; cf. other statues in gold and bronze, Hibbs (1985) 114. A Ptolemaic letter, *P.Berlin* 13566, line 3, has as its recipient a ‘prophet’ (*ḥm-ntr*) of Hapi; see Zauzich (1993) and Smith (1997/8).

arrival of the inundation at the beginning of summer.¹⁰⁴ Offerings were also made to the inundation, for example at Gebel Silsileh, a site about forty miles north of Aswan. Here inscribed stelae record offerings made three times a year to Hapi by Seti I, Ramesses II, Merenptah and Ramesses III, kings of the nineteenth and twentieth dynasties (14th-12th centuries BCE), and the performance of a rite called the ‘throwing of the book of Hapi’.¹⁰⁵ The Ramesside hymn to the inundation lists the offerings made to Hapi, including ‘finest incense, short-and long-horned cattle, birds for burnt offering’.¹⁰⁶ The same text indicates that ‘great feasts are held for him’.¹⁰⁷ Festivals celebrating the inundation are reasonably well-documented for the Graeco-Roman period, but evidence is rather sparse for earlier periods.¹⁰⁸

The inundation and other waters like rain were believed to be emanations of Nun, the primordial waters out of which life emerged at the beginning of creation.¹⁰⁹ Several texts emphasise that at the inundation, Egypt is returned to, or reminiscent of, a primordial time, to the conditions before creation;¹¹⁰ a hieratic graffito describes the flooding of the Luxor Temple under Osorkon III (twenty-third dynasty, reigned 787-759 BCE) as follows: ‘the flood [Nun] flowed forth [covering?] this land in

¹⁰⁴ For instance, the famous *Hymn to the Inundation*, ed. van der Plas (1986): ‘Come back to Egypt, O you who bring satisfaction and peace, making green the two banks of the Nile!’ (XIV.7-8); cf. another Nile hymn from Deir el-Medineh (*O.Deir el-Medineh* 1675), line 16 ‘Come Hapi! Don’t delay!’; see Posener (1980) 99 with pl. 81-4 and 81a-84a. Egyptian hymns to the Nile are discussed further in ch. 4.

¹⁰⁵ Text re-published with French translation by Barguet (1952). On the ‘books of Hapi’, see Bonneau (1964a) 404-5, Grandet (1994) 1:143-50.

¹⁰⁶ XIII.9; van der Plas (1986) 1:149-51.

¹⁰⁷ XIII.3.

¹⁰⁸ See chapter 4 for further discussion. For festivals of the Nile, see Lefebvre (1921), Bonneau (1964a), Bonneau (1971b).

¹⁰⁹ Van der Plas (1986) 1:59-60, 64-5, 134, cf. Smith (2002) 116-7. Egyptian cosmogonies are many and varied, but the emergence of life from the seemingly inert waters of chaos (i.e. Nun), is common to most, see Sauneron-Yoyotte (1959) 22-3, 25; Smith (2002) 201 observes of a Graeco-Roman period text *On the Primaeval Ocean* that in this text ‘the waters of the Primaeval Ocean are regarded as an active principle’.

¹¹⁰ See van der Plas (1986) 1:30-1, 100-1.

its entirety and extended up to the hills as at the beginning [of creation]'.¹¹¹ Similarly a high inundation during the sixth year of Taharqa (twenty-fifth dynasty, reigned 690-664 BCE) was described in an inscription from his temple at Kawa: 'the land was like the Primeval waters, like the inert waters'.¹¹² The same idea is found in funerary texts, including spells from the Pyramid Texts and the Coffin Texts.¹¹³ The land then emerges renewed from the receding waters.¹¹⁴ The inundation itself was held to emerge from two caverns in the region of the First Cataract near Elephantine.¹¹⁵

At various times in Egypt's history, different gods were credited with power, mastery or influence over the inundation. Khnum, a ram-headed god from the First Cataract, was particularly associated with the inundation, due to his status as a creator-god who fashioned humans from mud out of the primordial water; for example, the Ramesside hymn to the inundation states that 'Khnum fashions him [Hapi]' (*kd sw hnmw*).¹¹⁶ Satis and Anukis, who replaced Heket as Khnum's consorts, presided over the rising and falling of the waters respectively.¹¹⁷ The gods Shu, Ptah and Thoth were also

¹¹¹ See Vandier (1936) 123; for a translation see Huddlestun (1995) 348.

¹¹² See *Kawa* 1.24-6, translated Huddlestun (1996) 357.

¹¹³ See e.g. PT 581 Sethe from the pyramid of Pepy I (sixth dynasty, 2289-2255 BCE), CT Spell 318 A, Spell 320, Spell 321.

¹¹⁴ This event is echoed in the Hermopolitan cosmogony, in which a primeval mound arose from Nun; see Sauneron and Yoyotte (1959) 51-4, cf. Hibbs (1985) 112.

¹¹⁵ Texts connect Elephantine, Hapi and the sources from (at least) the Middle Kingdom onwards; an inscription of Sesostris I in the temple of Satis at Elephantine is the first to mention the sources explicitly (Helck (1978) 74-75). See e.g. *The Book of Going Forth by Day* (= *Book of the Dead*) ch. 149.14, line 10 'the double cavern of Abu [= Elephantine] at the mouth of the Flood' (*krty 3bw r r hsp*); cf. Nile-offering stela at Silsileh, Ramesses II, line 3 (see Barguet (1952) 59). For other sources, and detailed discussion, see van der Plas (1986) 1:172-9.

¹¹⁶ II.4. See van der Plas (1986) 1.88-9. The verb *kd* is used of Khnum's archetypal activity, fashioning something on the potter's wheel. See also Bonneau (1964a) 232-4, Hibbs (1985) 118-9.

¹¹⁷ Bonneau (1964a) 233, Hibbs (1985) 118-9.

connected with the inundation; Thoth bound the inundation to a lunar cycle, while Shu and Ptah were assimilated with the creative functions of Khnum, and hence with the inundation.¹¹⁸

Osiris is closely connected to the river and the inundation. The myth of Osiris' murder by his brother Seth and the actions of his sister-wife Isis to recover and revive the corpse are most familiar to classicists from Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride*.¹¹⁹ In Egyptian culture, this murder is a taboo theme, and is usually referred to covertly.¹²⁰ However, the main framework of the myth emerges from several sources; water is integral to several aspects of the myth.¹²¹ Osiris was murdered by Seth on land, apparently on the river-bank or close by, and his body subsequently thrown into the river.¹²² The corpse is sometimes dismembered before being thrown into the river, although as Joachim Quack observes, the unequivocal Egyptian sources for this dismemberment are relatively late.¹²³ Osiris' connection with the water of the Nile is demonstrated by inscriptions and reliefs from the temple of Dendera, the shrine to Hathor in southern Egypt, in which a procession of deities representing most of the nomes of Egypt bring water representing the body part of Osiris found in that nome.¹²⁴ The body of Osiris, distributed throughout Egypt by the river,

¹¹⁸ Bonneau (1964) 232 - Ptah; 234-6 - Thoth; Hibbs (1985) 119-20.

¹¹⁹ Text, translation and commentary, Griffiths (1970); Richter (2001) 191-4 provides a useful overview of scholarship since Griffiths. See also Richter (2011) 214-29 and Manolaraki (2012) 252-7, with review by West (2013).

¹²⁰ Quack (forthcoming) 3.

¹²¹ Malaise (1985), Koemoth (1994), Claus (2005).

¹²² Vernus (1991) showed that Seth did not *drown* Osiris in the river, although some scholarship still incorporates this older idea, e.g. Oestigaard (2011); for the newer interpretation, see Quack (forthcoming), Koemoth (1994). According to *P.MMA* 35.9.21, a late Ptolemaic text, col. 26, line 8, Seth killed Osiris 'while crossing the river' (*m d3 hr itrw*); see Goyon (1999) 65 and pl. 25.

¹²³ Quack (forthcoming) 6. This dismemberment is part of Seth's attempts to desecrate the corpse of Osiris after his murder; see for instance the *Calendar of Lucky and Unlucky Days* (MSS from the Ramesside period), which mentions that Seth entered the embalming workshop of Osiris to scatter his divine members (entry for 13th day of third month of the Inundation).

¹²⁴ Quack (forthcoming) 9; for the inscriptions, see Cauville (1997) 2:39-45, Kaper (2008-2009) 31-45.

comes to represent the body of Egypt.¹²⁵ The Nile inundation can also be considered as the ‘efflux’ (*rdw*) from Osiris, the product of the liquids oozing from the decaying corpse.¹²⁶ For instance, an inscribed stela for Osiris and other gods at Abydos by Ramesses IV (1153-1147) addresses Osiris as ‘the great inundation, that floods freely at the season; gods and men live off the efflux from you’.¹²⁷ In the Pyramid texts of the Old Kingdom, Osiris is named ‘young water’, that is the water of the inundation which carried fertilising silt.¹²⁸ The Osirian myth of life, death and revival was also tied to the rebirth of the vegetation after the inundation.¹²⁹

Isis, as wife and sister to Osiris, also became linked to the inundation. In one myth, the inundation is caused by her tears as she searched for her dead husband.¹³⁰ Isis was also connected with the north wind which coincided with the coming of the inundation.¹³¹ Most significantly, Isis was assimilated with the goddess Sothis (or Sopdet), the personification of the star Sirius (‘dog star’).¹³² The heliacal rising of this star around 17th-19th July coincided, during the Pharaonic era right through to the Roman period, with the beginning of the inundation; the Egyptians connected these two events from an early period.¹³³ Isis’ role in regenerating Osiris functioned as a parallel to Sothis heralding the inundation.¹³⁴

¹²⁵ Claus (2005) 202, Quack (forthcoming) 11.

¹²⁶ See especially Winkler (2006), Frankfort (1948) 45, Koemoth (1994) 1-5, Claus (2005) 209-10.

¹²⁷ *ḥꜥpy wr ḥr šntš ḥr tp tr ʿnš ntrw rmt m rdw im.k*. For the text and translation, see Peden (1994) 159-173. Cf. e.g. PT 788, 1360.

¹²⁸ PT 589a.

¹²⁹ See Bonneau (1964a) 249-52, Koemoth (1994) 11-20.

¹³⁰ See Paus. 10.32.18, with Derchain (1970).

¹³¹ See e.g. the Demotic papyrus *P.Berlin* 6570, col. H, lines 19-20, with Kockelmann (2008) 61; discussed in chapter 4 of the current thesis.

¹³² Bonneau (1964a) 263-66, Desroches-Noblecourt (1980), and see Clerc (1978) for the Roman period; texts relevant to the late period discussed in chapter 4 of this thesis.

¹³³ E.g. PT 477, where Sothis is ‘she who creates again the vegetation’.

¹³⁴ See Bonneau (1964a) 264.

The king was also closely connected with the inundation; royal claims to control over the inundation, the essential life-giving annual event of Egypt, mark instantiations of royal power on political and cosmological planes.¹³⁵ From the New Kingdom and into the late Period, the king was seen as responsible for and the guarantor of the inundation.¹³⁶ The role of the king in introducing the 'new water' is particularly pronounced at Edfu.¹³⁷ It is also seen on a stela at Taharqa's temple at Kawa commemorating a high inundation in the sixth year of his reign, where the king prays for an inundation from Amun-Re, who brings it about 'immediately'.¹³⁸ By ensuring that the inundation arrives at the right season, the king enacts his political and cosmological functions of maintaining order against the potential for chaos.¹³⁹ The king may be addressed as 'beloved of Hapi the great'.¹⁴⁰ The bond between king and inundation is accentuated in texts that address the king as the son of the inundation, in Ptolemaic temples at Edfu for example, or the Ramesside Hymn.¹⁴¹ The king can also be identified metaphorically with the inundation, as 'the great Nile', or one who 'makes the land greener than a high inundation'.¹⁴² The inundation even seems to be used as a metaphor for the king's legitimacy in the stela of Ramesses IV to Osiris and other gods from Abydos.¹⁴³

The inundation is usually described in terms that accentuate the benefits it brings, including fertility, prosperity, and joy, as expressed for instance in the famous Ramesside hymn to the inundation.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁵ For the association of the king with the inundation, see Grapow (1924) 61-2, Posener (1960) 47-61, Germond (1979), Grimal (1994), Haikal (1994), Tiradritti (1997).

¹³⁶ Germond (1979).

¹³⁷ See Germond (1979).

¹³⁸ *Kawa* 1:24-6, lines 5-7; cf. Posener (1960) 54-5.

¹³⁹ For the absence of the inundation and a disordered Nile as articulating political disorder, see below p. 38.

¹⁴⁰ From a stela of Sobekhotep VIII (thirteenth dynasty); see Habachi (1974) 208, also Baines (1974) and (1976).

¹⁴¹ *Edfou* I 473.10, II 180.17, *Hymn* XIV.3; see van der Plas (1986) 1:153-7.

¹⁴² Grapow (1924) 61-2.

¹⁴³ Tiradritti (1997).

¹⁴⁴ These themes are discussed further in chapter 4.

However, some Egyptian texts also articulate the destructive power of the inundation and other waters thought to emanate from Nun, such as rain.¹⁴⁵ I give here a couple of relevant texts. In the hypostyle hall of the temple at Luxor, a graffito from the third year of Osorkon III (23rd dynasty, reigned ca. 777-749 BCE) records the powerful force of a particularly high inundation, described as a 'great curse' (*w^c3w wr*), which no dykes could restrain.¹⁴⁶ An inscribed stela now in Cairo describes the arrival of a 'great inundation' (*h^cpi wr*) in the twenty-ninth year of Amasis (26th dynasty, reigned ca. 570-526 BCE); the waters destroyed the dyke to the south of Memphis, and threatened the collapse of the northern dyke as well.¹⁴⁷

In Egyptian culture therefore, the inundation was personified, and to a certain extent divinised; the god Hapi received offerings and hymns. The inundation was always subject to influence by other gods, including Khnum, Thoth, and especially Osiris and Isis, and had a close relationship with the maintenance of political and cosmic order by the reigning king. As such, Hapi was the 'spirit' or 'divine personification' of the inundation, rather than a primary god *per se*.

Although the river itself (*itrw*) was not divinised by the Egyptians, it was symbolically and culturally significant.¹⁴⁸ The river was a prime means of travel, which was a key theme in much Egyptian literature,¹⁴⁹ a boundary between the two banks and between places in Egypt, a source of life-giving water, and a place of danger. Water was a profoundly ambivalent substance, evoking both life and uncontrollable chaos.¹⁵⁰ Antonio Loprieno has argued that 'water' in Egyptian literature

¹⁴⁵ Smith (2002) 117-9; see also Huddleston (1995) 353-60. For the destructive impact of torrential rain, see Vandersleyen (1967) and (1968), publishing a stela from the reign of Ahmose (18th dynasty, reigned ca. 1550-2525 BCE), which describes torrential rain that caused considerable damage in the region between Dendera and Thebes.

¹⁴⁶ Vandier (1936) 123, Traunecker (1972) 199.

¹⁴⁷ Cairo: JE37494; see Daressy (1923), Vandier (1936) 125-6, Huddleston (1995) 358.

¹⁴⁸ For 'water' as a symbol, metaphor and landscape element in Egyptian literature and culture, see especially Grapow (1924), Haikal (1994), Moers (2001), Loprieno (2005), Widmaier (2009) 68-74.

¹⁴⁹ On travel in Egyptian literature, see Loprieno (2003), Baines (2007).

¹⁵⁰ Widmaier (2009) 68.

evokes three 'aquatic spheres'.¹⁵¹ First, water is a symbol of passage, 'the (mostly dangerous) conduit to the Other and border of the Untoward'.¹⁵² So the protagonist of the Middle Kingdom tale *The Shipwrecked Sailor* is caught and shipwrecked in a storm at sea, and arrives on a mysterious island where he meets a huge, talking and possibly divine serpent.¹⁵³ Loprieno's second 'aquatic sphere' is the 'pleasure and intimacy' of 'tamed' water, in pools, channels, gardens and water-meadows.¹⁵⁴ *P. Westcar* contains several episodes about royal escapades, of which the third involves an eroticised rowing excursion at the court of Snefru; in this scene, water is used for royal relaxation and titillation, and the loss of a hair-ornament in the water is resolved by a clever magician.¹⁵⁵ Third, Loprieno observes that water is a symbol of 'ethical purity or liturgical purification', for instance in compositions of so-called personal piety from the New Kingdom.¹⁵⁶

The river can be a site of pleasure and enjoyment; a love song of the New Kingdom describes a lover sailing downstream to meet his beloved, and 'the river is wine'.¹⁵⁷ However, the river is not 'tamed' or 'bounded' in the same ways as a pool or canal, and more frequently is a site of danger and chaos in Egyptian literary texts. The protagonist Sinuhe in the Middle Kingdom narrative flees Egypt in fear and confusion, and 'crossed in a rudderless barge', a symbol of his lack of direction.¹⁵⁸ The Middle Kingdom *Teaching of Khety* calls the fisherman 'feebler than any other profession', because the river is such a dangerous place, 'he cannot even realise that the

¹⁵¹ Loprieno (2005) 27.

¹⁵² Loprieno (2005) 27.

¹⁵³ *P.St-Petersburg 1115*. This text is rich in metaphors from water and sailing, as Loprieno (2005) 27 observes. For a detailed recent study, see Burkard (1993); the text is translated with notes and bibliography in Lichtheim (1973) 211-5, Parkinson (1997) xxi-xxii, 89-101, and Simpson (2003) 45-53, 584-7. Cannuyer (1998) reads the tale as an allegory of the inundation itself.

¹⁵⁴ Loprieno (2005) 27.

¹⁵⁵ Booth (2005) gives a short account of water in this tale, which is translated with notes and bibliography in Lichtheim (1967) 215-22, Parkinson (1997) xxii-iii, 102-27, Simpson (2003) 13-24, 551-3.

¹⁵⁶ Loprieno (2005) 27, 37.

¹⁵⁷ *P.Harris* 500, 'Love Songs', no. 5; see Simpson (2003) 310.

¹⁵⁸ *P.Berlin* 3022, 14. Parkinson (1997) 21-53, Simpson (2003) 54-66, 587-592.

crocodile's waiting, being blinded by fear'; the washerman who 'washes on the riverbank' is scarcely better off.¹⁵⁹ Nile crocodiles are a notorious hazard;¹⁶⁰ in Middle Kingdom texts they represent a lurking or hidden lethal danger: a man's wife and children might 'perish by a pool, infested by night with a swarm of crocodiles',¹⁶¹ or lovers may be separated by the Nile and a waiting crocodile.¹⁶² Changes to the river also signify the chaos of political instability, embodied in the land as drought,¹⁶³ as the burial of the dead in the river,¹⁶⁴ or the transformation of the river into blood.¹⁶⁵

The idea that the river is a place of danger, transition to other realms and death continues into late period texts, including such Demotic texts as the first tale of Setne Khaemwas (*Setne I*).¹⁶⁶ In this text, the river is the location of a powerful hidden object, the book of Thoth; when this book is taken from its hiding-place, three characters drown in the river. As Loprieno observes, the river in this text has ties to the mythical abyss and is a magical threat. In addition, frequent riverine journeys mark

¹⁵⁹ Fisherman - stanza 21; washerman - stanza 19; see Parkinson (1997) 278-9.

¹⁶⁰ For crocodiles in Egyptian literature, see especially Moers (2001) 202-21, and Kakosy (1965), Eyre (1976) and (1992). The crocodile is an important theological and cultural presence in Egypt, most importantly in the guise of the crocodile-god Sobek; see *LÄ* 3.791-801, s.v. 'Krokodil', and *LÄ* 3.801-11 s.v. 'Krokodilskulte'.

¹⁶¹ From *The Dialogue of a Man and his Soul*, *P.Berlin* 3024, see lines 70-80. Translations, bibliography and notes: Lichtheim (1973) 163-9, Parkinson (1997) xxiv, 151-165, Simpson (2003) 178-187, 568-9, Allen (2011).

¹⁶² *Cairo Love Songs*, no. 21, see Simpson (2003) 317, and Widmaier (2009) 74. These texts date from the New Kingdom; see particularly Mathieu (1996).

¹⁶³ E.g. *The Prophecy of Neferti*, *P.St Petersburg* 111B, 26 (eighteenth dynasty). See Parkinson (1997) xxiii, 131-43, Simpson (2003) 214-20, 573.

¹⁶⁴ *The Dialogue of Ipuwer and the Lord of All*, *P.Leiden* 1.344, 2.6. See Parkinson (1997) xxiv-xxv, 166-99, Simpson (2003) 188-210, 542-4.

¹⁶⁵ *Ipuwer*, 2.10. On disruptions to the Nile as a feature of 'Chaosbeschreibung' in Egyptian texts, see Assmann (1983) 357-9. The image is most familiar from the Hebrew tradition, Exodus 7.17-9, 24-5.

¹⁶⁶ *P.Cairo* 30646; for excellent photographs, see Goldbrunner (2006) *plates*. Editions: Brugsch (1867), Goldbrunner (2006). For translations, see Ritner in Simpson (ed.) (2003) 453-69, Lichtheim (1980) 127-38, and (in German) Hoffmann and Quack (2007) 137-52, 343-5; each with bibliography .

transitions between the familiar everyday world and the various fantastic geographies of the narrative, which defamiliarise the land of Egypt itself. The river and its inundation are therefore both powerfully evocative and semiotically rich concepts in Egyptian culture: the inundation, divine but lesser than other gods, as a symbol of abundance and prosperity, and the river as a more ambivalent substance, always potentially dangerous and chaotic.

Chapter 1

Nilotic origins and the great task of the historian: the Nile in Diodorus Siculus *Bibliothēke* 1

This chapter examines the representation and functions of the Nile in the first book of the *Bibliothēke* of Diodorus Siculus. It presents a new reading of the historian's concern with the river and its exceptional phenomena at the beginning of the work. It asks why the Nile is so prominent at the beginning of the *Bibliothēke*, what are the key terms of his representation of the river, and how it is interlaced with the writer's articulation of his own task as a universal historian. Although Diodorus' representation of Egypt has been considered in some detail, this is less true of his depiction of the Nile, which plays a considerable role in the first book. The only section to receive sustained attention is usually the discussion of the sources of the Nile and the causes of the inundation (1.37-41).¹⁶⁷ This chapter goes beyond an examination of these sections to consider the function of the Nile as a significant phenomenon within the context of the beginning of this unparalleled universal history.

Any reading of the first book of the *Bibliothēke* must first contend with the history of its generally unfavorable reception, and especially the critical approach that has repeatedly excavated the text to mine for the treasure of fragments of earlier, supposedly more valuable sources. The first book, with the exception of some chapters, has generally been attributed by scholars to the *Aegyptiaca* by Hecataeus of Abdera. This argument was first made by G. Schneider in 1880, was adopted by E. Schwartz in 1885 and 1903 (excepting chapters 32-41, which were attributed to Agatharchides, following Leopoldi), and has since been followed by Felix Jacoby and Oswyn Murray, among others.¹⁶⁸ Anne Burton was notably more cautious in her assessment, allowing that while Book 1 makes some use of Hecataeus of Abdera, other sources are also incorporated 'into the framework of [Diodorus'] own construction'.¹⁶⁹ Her arguments were however predominantly ignored or

¹⁶⁷ I examine these chapters in detail in chapter 3 as part of a discussion of Nilotic speculation in Greek texts.

¹⁶⁸ Schneider (1880); Schwartz (1885) and *RE* cols.663-704 s.v. 'Diodoros [38]'; Leopoldi (1892); Jacoby, see commentary on F25 of Hecataeus (*FGrH* 264); Murray (1970) and (1975).

¹⁶⁹ Burton (1972) 34, more generally 1-34. Burton's arguments were mostly ignored by scholars.

misrepresented. The attribution of Book 1 to Hecataeus of Abdera has encouraged scholars to treat the text as a mostly unproblematic access to the earlier historian.¹⁷⁰

However, scholars have more recently illuminated the cracks in the arguments for the wholesale attribution of Book 1 to the *Aegyptiaca* of Hecataeus. Most importantly, Charles Muntz, in his 2008 dissertation and a 2011 article derived from this doctoral research, has dismantled Murray's arguments for treating Book 1 as an 'epitome' of Hecataeus.¹⁷¹ Muntz demonstrates first the difficulties involved in ascribing most of Book 1 to Hecataeus. Second, he shows that supposed anachronisms cannot be considered evidence for an early Ptolemaic date, as Murray argues. Third, Muntz draws attention to the citation of other sources in Book 1, and to the possible use of both Manetho and Herodotus by Diodorus. Muntz concludes that the small number of internal contradictions in Book 1 are 'probably more indicative that the text of Book 1 as we have it has not received a final edit in which Diodorus would have smoothed these problems out. Otherwise Book 1 is marked by a high degree of consistency overall, indicative of a single author'.¹⁷² Muntz's arguments are an important corrective to the prevalence of *Quellenforschung* that has dominated Diodoran scholarship for most of a century.

Muntz's dissertation and article come at a moment of sea-change in Diodoran scholarship, as scholars had started to examine Diodorus' own role in the composition of the text and issues in the interpretation of the whole or parts of the text. In separate works in the 1950s, Jonas Palm and Walter Spoerri argued on the basis of linguistic and stylistic evidence that the text of Diodorus belonged to the mid-first century BC, while in 1962, Robert Drews demonstrated Diodorus manipulated his sources to emphasise his own interests in the moral lessons of history.¹⁷³ The presence of Diodorus as a unifying, controlling and organising figure in his history has been

¹⁷⁰ See e.g. Murray (1970), Burstein (1992), Dillery (1998).

¹⁷¹ Muntz (2008) 11-35 provides a response to Murray (1970); see also Muntz (2011).

¹⁷² Muntz (2008) 35.

¹⁷³ Palm (1955); Spoerri (1959); Drews (1962).

highlighted by Catherine Rubincam's studies of the internal structure and especially of source-citations in the *Bibliothēke*.¹⁷⁴ Kenneth Sacks situated Diodorus Siculus and his text firmly in the intellectual and cultural contexts of the first century BC, and of the late Hellenistic period more broadly, arguing that Diodorus himself 'influenced by contemporary political and aesthetic considerations, is responsible for much of the non-narrative material and determined the overall shape and main themes of the history'.¹⁷⁵ Peter Green's commentary on Books 11-12.37.1 likewise treats Diodorus seriously, and dismisses the approach of *Quellenforschung*.¹⁷⁶ These scholars, in dismantling the argumentative apparatus of Diodoran *Quellenforschung*, have opened the way for new readings of parts of Diodorus' text as consciously-shaped and deliberately-planned narratives, seen perhaps most conspicuously in Muntz's dissertation on Book 1, and Iris Sulimani's monograph on historiography and culture-heroes in the first five books.¹⁷⁷

The present chapter builds on the insights of these new critical approaches to the *Bibliothēke* by confronting the Nile as a phenomenon in the text created and shaped by Diodorus. I do not argue that Diodorus has *not* used such sources as Agatharchides, Artemidorus, or Hecataeus, but rather that, since it is impossible to extract such sources from the text as we have it, and also, since there is evidence demonstrating Diodorus' overt control and shaping of the narrative, it is both possible and preferable to interpret the depiction and discussion of the Nile in Book 1 as part of that unified textual whole.

Given the scholarly approaches that have dominated Diodoran studies until relatively recently, it is unsurprising that Book 1 has attracted little interest as a source for mid-first century BC attitudes to and representations of Egypt in Greek texts; those that do mention Diodorus are often extremely

¹⁷⁴ Rubincam (1987), (1989), (1998a) and (1998b). See also Sulimani (2008).

¹⁷⁵ Sacks (1990); for responses to Sacks see Stylianou (1991) and Fornara (1992).

¹⁷⁶ Green (2006), esp. 1-47.

¹⁷⁷ Muntz (2008), Sulimani (2011).

pejorative.¹⁷⁸ The view of Egypt as preserved in the text of Diodorus Book 1, and sometimes attributed to Hecataeus of Abdera, has been associated with utopian thought; Egypt functions as a model society, the birthplace of science and culture, and a place of sumptuous ease and fertility.¹⁷⁹ A rather different interpretation is offered by Jesús Lens Tuero and Javier Campos Daroca, who compare Diodorus' assessment of Egypt with encomiastic texts.¹⁸⁰ While such approaches have provided important insights into the text, nevertheless on the whole they fail to read the presentation of Egypt within the context of, first, the beginning of Diodorus' new universal history, and second, the traditions of discourse about the Nile and Egypt in earlier Greek historiography. Erich Gruen provides an important corrective, interpreting Diodorus' account of Egypt as a successor to that of Herodotus, supplying a 'notable index of continuity' with his predecessor.¹⁸¹ Gruen dismisses the notions that Diodorus wrote an encomium of Egypt or set up the Egyptians 'as either a foil or model'.¹⁸² Rather, he argues that Diodorus, like Herodotus, traces 'overlap and interconnection' between Greek and Egyptian culture and history.

The most substantial addition to scholarly assessments of Diodorus' representation of Egypt is Charles Muntz's as yet unpublished 2008 dissertation. Muntz argues that Egypt is the starting-point for the *Bibliothēke* because it distinguishes Diodorus from his predecessors. Egypt, according to Muntz, is a case that reveals the superiority of monarchy, the ability of humans to advance, and the importance of leaders in halting moral decline.¹⁸³ Particularly valuable is Muntz's treatment of Book 1 as an integral part of the *Bibliothēke*, which has important things to say about Diodorus' purpose and intentions for his project and about his own character as a historian. Muntz devotes

¹⁷⁸ See for instance Africa (1963). Nimis' survey of Egypt in Greco-Roman history and fiction devotes three sentences to Diodorus' account of Egypt, primarily contrasting Diodorus' approach with Strabo's, and categorising Diodorus as a 'compiler and epitomator' (Nimis (2004) 42).

¹⁷⁹ Sacks (1990) 69; Dillery (1998) 260-75; Fragaki (2008).

¹⁸⁰ Lens Tuero and Campos Daroca (1993).

¹⁸¹ Gruen (2011) 92.

¹⁸² Gruen (2011) 94.

¹⁸³ Muntz (2008) 228-29.

brief attention to Diodorus' discussion of the Nile, mentioning only the problems of the source and causes of the inundation, but emphasises the role of autopsy; he observes that chapters 37-41 add to Diodorus' self-presentation, enhancing 'his authorial credibility as an observer and not a fabricator'.¹⁸⁴

This chapter builds on the insights of Muntz and others by focusing on the presentation and functions of the Nile in Book 1. The terms in which Diodorus describes the Nile - as old, as a site of preservation and continuity, as huge, useful and subject to human improvement and control - are demonstrated to be parallel to the terms in which history itself is described. The Nile is not therefore solely a wondrous or utopian phenomenon of the ancient land of Egypt, but a key means of reflecting on the historiographical project, just as that project is getting underway.

1. In the beginning was the river

Diodorus begins his universal history with the early history and customs of the Egyptians. The historian notes that Greeks and barbarians make competitive claims to antiquity, with each holding that they were 'autochthonous' (αυτόχθονας) and the discoverers of useful culture (Diod. Sic. 1.9.3).¹⁸⁵ This indication of conflict over historical origins highlights that Diodorus' beginning is one of choice, made ostensibly for the following reasons:

ἐπεὶ δὲ κατὰ τὴν Αἴγυπτον θεῶν τε γενέσεις ὑπάρξει μυθολογούνται, αἱ τε τῶν ἄστρον ἀρχαιόταται παρατηρήσεις εὐρήσθαι λέγονται, πρὸς δὲ τούτοις πράξεις ἀξιόλογοι καὶ πολλαὶ μεγάλων ἀνδρῶν ἱστοροῦνται, ποιησομεθα τῆς ἱστορίας τὴν ἀρχὴν διὰ τῶν κατ' Αἴγυπτον πραχθέντων. (Diod. Sic. 1.9.6)

Since Egypt is the country where mythology places the origin of the gods, where the earliest observations of the stars are said to have been made, and where many noteworthy deeds of great men are recorded, we shall begin our history with the events connected with Egypt.

¹⁸⁴ Muntz (2008) 91.

¹⁸⁵ Denis Feeney borrows Zerubavel's phrase 'out-past-ing' to describe the process of cultures making claims of greater antiquity (and therefore legitimacy) than others; see Feeney (2007) 29, and Zerubavel (2003) 105-9.

Diodorus indicates that Egypt is connected themselves with several kinds of beginning: theological (the origins of the gods), scientific (astronomical observations), and cultural (deeds of great men). In beginning with Egypt, Diodorus explicitly does not attempt to claim that the Egyptians are the oldest nation (Diod. Sic. 1.9.4), but rather to record ‘what each nation has to say concerning its antiquity’ (τὰ δὲ λεγόμενα παρ’ ἐκάστοις περὶ τῆς ἀρχαιότητος). Structurally, Egypt makes a powerful beginning because it allows Diodorus to focus on one particular place, rather than leapfrogging around the Mediterranean and Near East for the early periods of history and prehistory; Egypt, a place long-recognised by the Greeks to be saturated with history, is a useful spatial frame. Even if Diodorus does not necessarily hold Egypt to be prior (although his narrative repeatedly stresses the great antiquity of Egypt), then it remains a convenient location to consider the origins of history.

The antiquity of Egypt was a perennial motif and source of fascination in Greek texts.¹⁸⁶ The *locus classicus* is Herodotus’ conversation with the priests at Thebes, who claimed 341 generations lay between the current priest and the first king of Egypt, which Herodotus calculates at 11340 years.¹⁸⁷ Herodotus marks the contrast with the Greek sense of history by recalling Hecataeus’ encounter with these priests, when the Greek historian had recounted his entire family history through sixteen generations back to a divine ancestor.¹⁸⁸ In Herodotus, the encounter with the Theban priests illustrates not only the extraordinary depth of Egyptian cultural memory, but also their ability to record and preserve that past in concrete, physical form, through the wooden statues commemorating each high priest. This deep Egyptian past illuminates a vast gulf between the Greek sense of time and that of the Egyptians; as Vidal-Naquet observes, ‘Egypt appears as the

¹⁸⁶ See e.g. Pl. *Tim.* 22F, Aristot. *Met.* 352b, cf. Aristot. *Pol.* 7.9.5, 1329b. Cf. also Hdt. 2.2, esp. 2.142-3, on which, and for general discussion of the antiquity of Egypt in Greek thought, see Froidefond (1971) 140-144, Lloyd (1975) 175-178, Hunter (1982) ch. 2, Vasunia (2001) 110-135; Moyer (2002), and (2011).

¹⁸⁷ Hdt. 2.142-3. See especially Moyer (2002) and (2011).

¹⁸⁸ Hdt. 2.143.

paradigm of human history'.¹⁸⁹ Diodorus too stresses the antiquity and longevity of the Egyptians throughout his account, repeatedly drawing attention to the long lines of kings and years.¹⁹⁰

Despite this conception of Egypt as almost incomprehensibly older than Greece, no other universal historian had begun with Egypt. Herodotus, whose large geographical and temporal range sets him as a forerunner of universal history, discusses Egypt in the second book of his *Histories*.¹⁹¹ Ephorus began with the return of the Heraclidae, avoiding the period of myth,¹⁹² and Theopompus' historical works continued Thucydides (*Hellenica*, from 411-394 BCE), and then turned to universal history at the time of Philip of Macedon (*Philippica*).¹⁹³ Neither of Diodorus' main successors, Nicolaus of Damascus or Pompeius Trogus begin with Egypt, but instead start from Assyria.¹⁹⁴ Diodorus' decision to begin his universal history with Egypt therefore sets his history in a unique position, and marks Diodorus' attempts to carve out a new historiographical niche for himself.

It is also likely, as Charles Muntz suggests, that, by beginning with Egypt, Diodorus was taking advantage of a growing interest in this country during the mid-first century BCE.¹⁹⁵ Egypt was increasingly of political concern to Rome, especially during the restoration of Ptolemy XII Auletes; after this king's death in 51, Egypt effectively became a client state of Rome.¹⁹⁶ Muntz also points to the archaeological evidence which shows interest in Egyptian motifs in Italy from the end of the second century BCE, as well as evidence for Egyptian cults in Italy.¹⁹⁷ Diodorus' Egyptian

¹⁸⁹ Vidal-Naquet (1986) 45; cf. Froidefond (1971) 137, 146, 149, on the 'discovery of historical time, and Lateiner (1989) 150, on Herodotus' expanded temporal and cultural perspective.

¹⁹⁰ e.g. Diod. Sic. 1.45.3; see also Muntz (2008) 108-110.

¹⁹¹ On Herodotus as a precursor to universal history, see Burde (1974) 9-17, Vannicelli (2001).

¹⁹² *FGrH* 70 T 8.

¹⁹³ *Hellenica*: *FGrH* F 5-23; *Philippica*: F 24-396.

¹⁹⁴ See especially Muntz (2008) 110-111.

¹⁹⁵ Muntz (2008) 105-108.

¹⁹⁶ Gruen (1984), Lampela (1988), Siani-Davies (1997).

¹⁹⁷ Muntz (2008) 107-8.

beginning is prominent, and programmatic; it seems to capitalise on contemporary political and cultural interests in the country, while setting Diodorus apart from his predecessors and rivals in universal historiography.

In Greek texts, Egypt is strongly correlated with theological, social and cultural origins; Diodorus goes a step further by attributing to the Egyptians an account of the origins of human life itself in Egypt:

Φασὶ τοίνυν Αἰγύπτιοι κατὰ τὴν ἐξ ἀρχῆς τῶν ὄλων γένεσιν πρώτους ἀνθρώπους γενέσθαι κατὰ τὴν Αἴγυπτον διὰ τε τὴν εὐκρασίαν τῆς χώρας καὶ διὰ τὴν φύσιν τοῦ Νείλου. (Diod. Sic. 1.10.1)

Now the Egyptians have an account like this: When in the beginning, the universe came into being, men first came into existence in Egypt, both because of the favourable climate of the land and because of the nature of the Nile.

The Nile is said to produce a large quantity of food spontaneously, which can easily support animal and human life (Diod. Sic. 1.10.1). According to the Egyptians, evidence to support their claim to supreme antiquity is offered by the mud of the Nile, which is said to produce living animals spontaneously after the inundation (Diod. Sic. 1.10.2-3, and 1.10.6-7). The idea of spontaneous generation as evidence for the emergence of life in Egypt is given twice. In the first account (Diod. Sic. 1.10.2-3), as ‘evidence’ (τεκμήριον) for their claim to antiquity, the Egyptians offer the fact, supported by eyewitness testimony, that the soil around Thebes produces mice of great size and number:¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ Burton (1972) comments on the long-lived belief that mice could be spontaneously generated. The spontaneous generation of mice from the mud of the Nile is attested also at Democrit. 68 B 5 (DK), Pliny *NH* 9.179, cf. Macr. *Sat.* VII 16.12. The idea that the earth (not the Nile) could engender mice is found at Varro *Rer. rust.* 1.8.5, cf. Favorinus *On Exile* 10.4, and seems to be alluded to at the beginning of the *Batrachomyomachia* 6-7, see Ludwich (1896) *ad loc.*, with further reff. Mice are elsewhere associated with unusual forms of reproduction, see esp. Arist. *Hist. An.* 6.37 580b, including the assertion that ‘some maintain, that, if they merely lick salt, mice become pregnant, without any copulation’; cf. Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 685 D. On the folklore and stories connected to mice, see esp. Beckmann (1972), also Dawson (1925), Hekster (2002).

τῆς δ' ἐξ ἀρχῆς παρ' αὐτοῖς ζωογονίας τεκμήριον πειρῶνται φέρειν τὸ καὶ νῦν ἔτι τὴν ἐν Θηβαίδι χώραν κατὰ τινὰς καιροὺς τοσοῦτους καὶ τηλικούτους μῦς γεννᾶν ὥστε τοὺς ἰδόντας τὸ γινόμενον ἐκπλήττεσθαι· ἐνίους γὰρ αὐτῶν ἕως μὲν τοῦ στήθους καὶ τῶν ἐμπροσθίων ποδῶν διατετυπῶσθαι καὶ κίνησιν λαμβάνειν, τὸ δὲ λοιπὸν τοῦ σώματος ἔχειν ἀδιατύπτων, μενούσης ἔτι κατὰ φύσιν τῆς βώλου. (Diod. Sic. 1.10.2-3)

As proof that animal life appeared first of all in their land they would offer the fact that even at the present day the soil of the Thebaid at certain times generates mice in such numbers and of such size as to astonish all who have witnessed the phenomenon; for some of them are fully formed as far as the breast and front feet and are able to move, while the rest of the body is unformed, the clod of earth still retaining its natural character.

The Egyptians then use this ongoing phenomenon to claim that it is evident that human life came into being here, because the soil of Egypt remains extraordinarily fertile, even when this kind of event no longer occurs elsewhere. The argumentative force of the passage runs as follows: given that, even now (καὶ νῦν ἔτι), the Nile can generate animals out of itself, how much more so would that have been true at the beginning of the world, when the condition of the land and climate supported spontaneous generation. The second account is similar (Diod. Sic. 1.10.6-7), this time explaining how life could have emerged in Egypt after the destruction of life caused by the flood of Deucalion, and relies on the combination of the abundant rains falling at that time and the intense heat of Egypt. Again, current phenomena are offered as evidence for the past:

καὶ γὰρ ἐν τοῖς καθ' ἡμᾶς ἔτι χρόνοις κατὰ τὴν ἐπίκλυστον Αἴγυπτον ἐν τοῖς ὀψίμοις τῶν ὑδάτων φανερώς ὁρᾶσθαι γεννωμένας φύσεις ἐμψύχων· ὅταν γὰρ τοῦ ποταμοῦ τὴν ἀναχώρησιν ποιουμένου τὴν πρώτην τῆς ἰλύος ὁ ἥλιος διαξηράνη, φασὶ συνίστασθαι ζῶα, τινὰ μὲν εἰς τέλος ἀπηρτισμένα, τινὰ δὲ ἡμιτελῆ καὶ πρὸς αὐτῇ συμφυῇ τῇ γῆ.

Indeed, even in our day during the inundations of Egypt the generation of forms of animal life can clearly be seen taking place in the pools which remain the longest; for whenever the river has begun to recede and the sun has thoroughly dried the surface of the slime,¹⁹⁹ living animals, they say, take shape, some of them fully formed, but some only half so and still actually united with the very earth.

¹⁹⁹ The presence of slime here is a Presocratic idea, cf. the report of Archelaos by Diogenes Laertius (DK60 A1= Diog. Laert. 2.16-17), and Lucr. *DRN* 5.812-13, with Campbell (2003) *ad loc.*

Diodorus chooses to begin his account of Egypt, which begins his universal history, with this peculiar phenomenon of life emerging directly out of the soil of the inundated countryside. A closer examination of these passages reveals the implications of this choice of beginning more fully.

Spontaneous generation in Egypt is seen as a hang-over from an earlier stage in the world's history, thereby characterising Egypt as a primeval landscape. The existence of spontaneous generation, or abiogenesis, was admitted as a feature – albeit an unusual one – of the natural world in ancient biological treatises, and in poetry.²⁰⁰ In both the biological treatises and poetry, spontaneous generation occupies a marginal place in the order of the world, confined either to specific circumstances and species, or to the early times of the universe. In the *De Generatione Animalium*, on the apparent basis of empirical evidence, Aristotle accommodates spontaneous generation within his account of how animals are reproduced;²⁰¹ however, such abiogenesis is limited in very specific ways.²⁰² First, it occurs in small, rather than larger and more complex animals. Second, the Aristotelian works make a distinction between animals produced by spontaneous generation and animals produced by sexual reproduction. In Theophrastus' botanical writings too, spontaneous generation is admitted on the basis of empirical evidence, but Theophrastus appears to be more cautious – sceptical, even – about true spontaneity; as Maurice Balme comments, Theophrastus tends to attribute such apparently spontaneous production of plants either to unseen seeds in the ground, or to the action of rain and streams in moving seeds.²⁰³ So both Aristotle and Theophrastus set clearly-defined limits on the existence and influence of spontaneous generation in the natural world.

²⁰⁰ See Guthrie (1957) 39-42 and chs. 1-2 generally on the idea of the 'motherhood' of the earth in antiquity. The theory of spontaneous generation was long-lived and recurred until the nineteenth century.

²⁰¹ Notably Arist. *Gen. an.* 3.2 762a, especially the words ἡ γένεσις αὐτοματός ἐστιν.

²⁰² Balme (1962) considers spontaneous generation in Aristotle and Theophrastus, emphasising the problem in Aristotle about how such a phenomenon should be regularised.

²⁰³ Balme (1962) 91.

Beyond the scientific texts, spontaneous generation is typically held to belong to an earlier stage of the cosmogonic process that for the most part no longer holds true in the contemporary world. So, a fragment of the pre-Socratic philosopher Archelaus reported by Hippolytus attests that the fertility of the earth was short-lived (DK 60 A4 = Hippol. *Refut.* 1.9.5). In Lucretius, the exhaustion of the earth, like a woman worn out by old after long years of childbearing, explains why spontaneous generation is much less common now than in the early life of the earth, at which time more and larger animals were generated in this way (*DRN* 5.793-836).²⁰⁴ Widespread spontaneous generation, particularly of large animals, is almost wholly limited to a specific time in the past, *prope certo tempore* (*DRN* 5.823). In Diodorus too, spontaneous generation characterises the earth at the beginning of time (Diod. Sic. 1.7.4), which is contrasted with later changes in the earth's composition, after which 'each kind of living creatures was now begotten by breeding with one another' (ἐκ τῆς πρὸς ἄλληλα μίξεως ἕκαστα γεννᾶσθαι τῶν ἐμψύχων, Diod. Sic. 1.7.6), that is by sexual reproduction. Spontaneous generation then, is typically limited to the early stages of the world's existence, which Diodorus designates as the 'first generation of the universe'.²⁰⁵

In Diodorus, the Nile proves to be the exception to this rule, preserving a process that is elsewhere either marginal, or confined to the far-distant past. The Nile is thereby characterised as a primeval landscape, which preserves and recreates the emergence of life annually after the inundation. The construction of Egypt as a primeval land is an old trope of Greek discourse; in Diodorus, the contemporary behaviour of the Nile functions as a parallel to conditions at the beginning of the world. In particular, spontaneous generation in Egypt preserves conditions that prevailed at the time of the flood of Deucalion (Diod. Sic. 1.10.4). The text draws on a old motif, familiar from Plato's *Timaeus*, that the Nile preserves Egypt from the periodic 'destructions' (φθοραί) sent by

²⁰⁴ West (1964) 100-102 on the motherhood and present sterility of the earth; see also Campbell (2003) 82-3 ad *DRN* 5.812-3, 91-96 ad 5.826-36.

²⁰⁵ Note 1.8.1: 'Concerning the first generation of the universe this is the account which we have received...' (Καὶ περὶ μὲν τῆς πρώτης τῶν ὄλων γενέσεως τοιαῦτα παρειλήφαμεν....).

the gods, including the flood of Deucalion.²⁰⁶ In the *Timaeus*, the power of the Nile in saving Egypt means that knowledge of history in Egypt extends deep into the past, far beyond the knowledge of the Greeks. In other texts, the deluge associated with Deucalion appears to have marked an epochal moment in the division of time, as Wheeler suggests in an analysis of the relationship between Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and universal history.²⁰⁷ In particular, the deluge marks a moment when particular natural laws are established.²⁰⁸ By contrast, Diodorus' text attributes to the Egyptians the opinion that knowledge of the past at the time of Deucalion can be gained by a comparison with present-day phenomena, and that, whatever changes the world underwent after the flood, they were not experienced in Egypt (1.19.4-6). The Nile not only originates in a time prior to this flood, but continues to exhibit behaviour that belongs to that distant and irrecoverable time. In this way, it crosses an epistemic division between the early and later periods of history.

Whereas elsewhere spontaneous generation is a marginal or obsolete phenomenon, in Egypt it is said to be endlessly repeated; as the following passage demonstrates, it is literally indefinite:

ὅταν γὰρ τοῦ ποταμοῦ τὴν ἀναχώρησιν ποιουμένου τὴν πρώτην τῆς ἰλύος ὁ ἥλιος διαξηράνη, φασὶ συνίστασθαι ζῶα, τινὰ μὲν εἰς τέλος ἀπηρτισμένα, τινὰ δὲ ἡμιτελῆ καὶ πρὸς αὐτῇ συμφυῆ τῇ γῆ. (Diod. Sic. 1.10.7)

For, whenever the river has begun to recede and the sun has thoroughly dried the surface of the slime, living animals, they say, take shape, some of them fully formed, but some only half so and still actually united with the very earth.

²⁰⁶ *Tim.* 22D. See Vasunia (2001) 218ff. on this passage. An opposition between the catastrophic deluge and the workings of the Nile is also evident in Seneca (*QN* 4A, contrast 3.27-30), on which see Williams (2008) 235-6.

²⁰⁷ Wheeler (2002) 183. The regular recurrence of *kataklysmoi* in Greek philosophical accounts also mark definitive moments of change in human history; see Anaximand. DK 12 A 27, Xenoph. 21 A 33, Aristot. *Met.* 1.14.352a-b, Pl. *Tim.* 22c-e. In his discussion of the role of the Nile in Seneca (*QN* 4A), Williams (2008) 226-7 comments on the same writer's account of the deluge (related to the Stoic conflagration) 'that overwhelms the world and effaces all conventional distinctions as part of the process that leads to a new cosmic beginning'.

²⁰⁸ Verg. *G.* 1.60-3. See Wheeler (2002) 183 n. 75.

That is, the cycle of the inundation returns the land of Egypt annually to a state of primordial generation. Indeed, the situation of spontaneous generation in Egypt even allows the viewer to see what would have been invisible in earlier times, namely, the process of generation itself. Diodorus' account of spontaneous generation in early times asserts that animal life emerged from 'pustules covered in delicate membranes' (σηπεδόνας ὑμέσι λεπτοῖς περιεχομέναις, Diod. Sic. 1.7.3), in a process parallel to pregnancy, and that these animals emerged 'when the embryos had attained their full development' (τῶν κυοφορουμένων τὴν τελείαν αὔξησιν λαβόντων, Diod. Sic. 1.7.4). By contrast, the life that emerges from the Nile is a heterogeneous conglomeration of animate and inanimate, animal and ooze. The text stresses the *incompleteness* of the process itself. Some mice are said to emerge from the soil around Thebes incomplete:

ένίους γὰρ αὐτῶν ἕως μὲν τοῦ στήθους καὶ τῶν ἐμπροσθίων ποδῶν διατετυπῶσθαι καὶ κίνησιν λαμβάνειν, τὸ δὲ λοιπὸν τοῦ σώματος ἔχειν ἀδιατύπτων, μενούσης ἔτι κατὰ φύσιν τῆς βώλου. (Diod. Sic. 1.10.2)

For some of them are fully formed as far as the breast and front feet and are able to move, while the rest of the body is unshaped, the clod of earth still retaining its natural character.

The word ἀδιατύπτως is rare, but occurs occasionally in medical contexts; in the *Gynaecology* of Soranus, it refers to the unshaped organism in the first part of pregnancy.²⁰⁹ For Soranus, this first 'unshaped' (ἀδιατύπτως) organism is incomplete (ἀτελή), in contrast with the complete offspring that is produced in the later part of pregnancy. Similarly, the text of the *Bibliothèque* shows the reader creatures both fully-formed (τινὰ μὲν εἰς τέλος ἀπηρτισμένα, Diod. Sic. 1.10.7) and those which remain incomplete, (τινὰ δὲ ἡμιτελή καὶ πρὸς αὐτὴ συμφυῆ τῇ γῆ). These undeveloped creatures remain united to the earth, in a situation which again mirrors that of pregnancy; in Aristotle's *De Generatione Animalium*, the adjective συμφύης is used of the growing offspring's connection to the womb (Arist. *GA* 737b16-18). For Diodorus then, the Nile not only preserves primordial behaviour, but allows the viewer to observe what would have been hidden inside the earth in earlier periods, and continues to be hidden in the normal course of human and mammalian pregnancy.

²⁰⁹ ὅτι κατὰ μὲν τοὺς πρώτους χρόνους, ὅτε ἀκμὴν ἀδιατύπτως ἐστὶν ὁ γόνος (1.43.12-13), following the text of Burgière and Gourevitch (1988), vol. I.

The Nile preserves phenomena that properly belong to the past; their survival into the present of Diodorus' time is an exception and a marvel.²¹⁰ The river thereby gives the historian access to that past, to primordial time. This is particularly valuable for a writer whose explicit aim is to encompass all events, 'beginning from the most ancient times' (ἀρξάμενος ἀπὸ τῶν ἀρχαιοτάτων χρόνων, Diod. Sic. 1.3.6), claiming to be a truly universal history.²¹¹ The claim is provocative, announcing as it does a departure from the practice of his predecessor Ephorus, who explicitly excludes the remote mythic past from his history.²¹² Diodorus' approach, which aims to exhibit universalism in both temporal and spatial planes, is distinctively novel.²¹³ Diodorus' narrative extends temporally back through mythic time and spatially out through non-Greek regions, yet it begins even further back, with an account of the process of cosmogony.²¹⁴ If mythic time is excluded by Ephorus, then this earliest time, the first creation of the universe, should be utterly outside human knowledge; as Denis Feeney has it, 'deep cosmogonic time still remains beyond the pale'.²¹⁵ Cosmology, theogony and the origins of animal and human life might be the subjects of poetry, but remained outside the remit of historiographers. Herodotus for instance, as Donald Lateiner has observed, 'rejects the epic convention of beginning *in medias res* and the cosmological and theogonic convention of beginning in the beginning'.²¹⁶ Making not just a *start* but an *origin* is a programmatic

²¹⁰ NB: ἐκπλήττεσθαι (1.10.2), παραδόξως (1.10.3).

²¹¹ cf. Diod. Sic. 1.9.1: 'I shall undertake to give a full account of all the events which have been handed down to memory and took place in the known regions of the inhabited world' (περὶ δὲ τῶν πράξεων τῶν παραδεδομένων μὲν εἰς μνήμην, γενομένων δὲ ἐν τοῖς γνωριζομένοις τόποις τῆς οἰκουμένης, διεξιέναι πειρασόμεθα). See Clarke (1999) 252.

²¹² Barber (1935) 144, Burton (1972) 51, Clarke (1999a) 255.

²¹³ Muntz (2008) 67-8.

²¹⁴ See Spoerri (1959).

²¹⁵ Feeney (2007) 80.

²¹⁶ Lateiner (1989) 38, see generally 35-50. On the preface to the Histories, see Pelliccia (1992), esp. 74-80, and 74 n. 23 with bibliography, Asheri (2007) 7-10.

act by Diodorus, as he lays claim to a specific kind of universalism that is emphatically greater than that of his predecessors.²¹⁷

Despite his stated ambition to include all events from all places, Diodorus is aware of the limitations of knowledge and evidence in early periods:

ὡς ἂν ἐνδέχεται περὶ τῶν οὕτω παλαιῶν, ἀκριβῶς ἀναγράψομεν ἀπὸ τῶν ἀρχαιοτάτων χρόνων ἀρξάμενοι. (Diod. Sic. 1.6.2-3)

We shall give an accurate account, so far as that is possible in the case of things that happened so long ago, beginning with the earliest times.

The historian seems to acknowledge that knowledge of the ‘earliest times’ is precarious and difficult to access. By contrast, the repeated activity of the Nile has the capacity to preserve that primordial state of affairs, and allows the historian to access that knowledge, if only through the second-hand witness of his purportedly Egyptian sources.²¹⁸ The use of Egyptian sources to access the distant past does not originate with Diodorus, but is an important *topos* of Greek discourse about Egypt, most memorably in Herodotus’ encounter with the Egyptian priests. Herodotus, following in the footsteps of Hecataeus, reveals the paucity of Greek historical memory by recounting his encounter with the Egyptian priests at Thebes, which testifies to an unbroken tradition over 11340 years, monumentalised in a series of three hundred and forty-five wooden figures of the high priests. For Herodotus, Egyptian time is almost infinitely deeper and more comprehensible than Greek time. This richly-documented and remembered past, transmitted to him by the Egyptian priests, allows him to claim an authority about that distant past.²¹⁹ Moreover,

²¹⁷ I am borrowing here the distinction made by Leander (2008) between beginning as ‘starting’ and beginning as ‘origin’. See also Said (1975) 4-6.

²¹⁸ The passage emphasises the clear visibility of the spontaneous generation, note that the phenomenon is so impressive ‘as to astonish all who have witnessed the occurrence’ (ὥστε τοὺς ἰδόντας τὸ γινόμενον ἐκπλήττεσθαι, 1.10.2), cf. φανερώς ὁρᾶσθαι (1.10.6).

²¹⁹ See Feeney (2007) 72-5, especially 75, which characterises Herodotus’ position vis-à-vis the Egyptian past as follows: ‘the difference between Egyptian and Greek time is one of quantity, in terms of depth, but this quantitative difference is so great that it translates into qualitative terms, giving Egyptian time a plotted-out texture that is incomparably superior to that of Greek time in its reach.’

Herodotus uses the Nile itself to draw conclusions about the ancient geological past of Egypt (Hdt. 2.10-13). He conjectures that Egypt was formerly a gulf, filled in by the action of the river in bringing down alluvial deposits from Ethiopia:

Κοῦ γε δὴ ἐν τῷ προαναισιμωμένῳ χρόνῳ πρότερον ἢ ἐμὲ γενέσθαι οὐκ ἂν χωσθεῖη κόλπος καὶ πολλῶ μέρων ἔτι τούτου ὑπὸ τοσοῦτου τε ποταμοῦ καὶ οὕτως ἐργατικοῦ; (Hdt. 2.11)

Is it then to be believed that in the ages before my birth a gulf even much greater than this [i.e. the Arabian gulf] could not be silted up by a river so great and so busy?

The historian extrapolates from the current behaviour of the river to theorise about the distant geological past. Diodorus' account of the spontaneous generation of animals from the Nile reaches still further into the distant past, to provide proof (τεκμήριον, 1.10.2) of the origin of human life from the contemporary phenomena of the river.

The Nile therefore serves to bring the distant past into the realm of the visible, accessible present. In this way, it functions as a parallel to the man-made monuments of Egypt described by Diodorus.²²⁰ The continuation of spontaneous generation into Diodorus' own time is accentuated by the repetition of such phrases as τὸ καὶ νῦν ἔτι (1.10.2), καὶ γὰρ νῦν (1.10.3), and καὶ γὰρ ἐν τοῖς καθ' ἡμᾶς (1.10.6), which are also deployed in Diodorus' description of Egyptian monuments.

The Labyrinths of Crete and Egypt are compared as follows:

ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν κατὰ τὴν Κρήτην ἠφανίσθη τελέως, εἴτε δυνάστου τινὸς κατασκάψαντος εἴτε τοῦ χρόνου τοῦργον λυμνηναμένου· ὁ δὲ κατ' Αἴγυπτον ἀκέραιον τὴν ὄλην κατασκευὴν τετήρηκε μέχρι τοῦ καθ' ἡμᾶς βίου. (Diod. Sic. 1.61.4)

However, the [Labyrinth] in Crete has entirely disappeared, whether it be that some ruler razed it to the ground or that time effaced the work, but the one in Egypt has stood intact in its entire structure down to our lifetime.

So too, despite their great age, the pyramids have endured 'to our lifetime' (εἰς τὸν καθ' ἡμᾶς βίον, Diod. Sic. 1.63.5), in their original state, 'still preserving their original position and the entire

²²⁰ See Vannicelli (2001) 237-240 for an examination of the Nile in Herodotus as one of the rivers 'that have displayed great works' (ἔργα ἀποδεξάμενοι μεγάλα, Hist. 2.10) and the relation of ἔργα to the destructive effects of time.

structure undecayed' (διαμένουσι μέχρι τοῦ νῦν οἱ λίθοι τὴν ἐξ ἀρχῆς σύνθεσιν καὶ τὴν ὅλην κατασκευὴν ἄσηπτον διαφυλάττοντες, Diod. Sic. 1.63.5). Egyptian customs are described in similar terms, as survival and persistence (note διαμένειν, Diod. Sic. 1.97.1). In the Egypt of Diodorus' *Bibliothēke*, monuments have a tendency to resist the atrophying consequences of time and the depredations of rulers, in contrast with monuments outside Egypt. Not just ancient, they endure in a state of preservation that reveals their original state. The emphasis of the historian lies not simply on the supreme antiquity of the cultural achievements and natural phenomena of Egypt but on their persistence and the preservation of their integrity and original appearance. The Nile, monuments, and customs in Egypt all represent an unchanging continuity; Egypt frozen in time, ready to be analysed and interpreted by the historian. These phenomena, hydrological and cultural, thereby give the writer access to a time generally considered unreachable or unknowable.

The river and monuments of Egypt also parallel the claims made by Diodorus for the power of history; whereas 'other memorials remain for a brief time' (ἄλλα μνημεῖα διαμένει χρόνον ὀλίγον, Diod. Sic. 1.2.5), and are then destroyed, history 'possesses with regard to time a custodian that ensures its perpetual transmission to posterity' (χρόνον ἔχει φύλακα τῆς αἰωνίου παραδόσεως τοῖς ἐπιγινόμενοις). This is the first of several parallelisms between history and the Nile in the first book of the *Bibliothēke* that will be examined in this chapter.

2. Size matters

For Diodorus, the Nile is the largest of all rivers.²²¹ The unsurpassed magnitude of the Nile is a recurrent motif in the first book of the *Bibliothēke*, especially at 1.31-36. It is the 'greatest of all rivers and the one which traverses the greatest territory' (μέγιστος δ' ὢν τῶν ἀπάντων ποταμῶν καὶ πλείστην γῆν διεξιὼν καμπὰς ποιεῖται μεγάλας, 1.32.2).²²² The immense size of the Nile is matched by the enormity of Egypt; the river drains into vast areas of sand, fens and large marshes (1.32.4). The river contains numerous huge islands with cities, notably Meroe (1.33.1-3): 'speaking

²²¹ 1.32.1, cf. 2.35.1.

²²² cf. 'the biggest [river] of the *oikoumene*' (μέγιστος... τῶν κατὰ τὴν οἰκουμένην, 1.37.2).

generally, the river forms so many islands that the report of them can scarcely be credited' (καθόλου δὲ τοσαύτας νήσους ποιεῖν τὸν ποταμὸν ὥστε τοὺς ἀκούοντας μὴ ῥαδίως πιστεῦσαι).²²³ Even the animals and plants that inhabit the Nile are larger and more abundant than the fauna and flora found elsewhere, e.g. the mice (1.10.2), plants (1.34.3), crocodiles (1.35.6), and fish (1.36.1).

The size of the Nile contributes to its status as a wonder; but emphasis on its greatness also functions as a vehicle for the historian's critique of earlier writers, and as a justification of his own choice of subject and range. Diodorus' insistence that the Nile is the largest river of all may itself be a programmatic statement, locating himself in opposition to Herodotus, who identified the Ister (Danube) as the biggest river.²²⁴ Elsewhere in the *Histories*, the Ister is seen as the parallel of the Nile, so the course of the river in Europe mirrors that of the river in 'Libya' (Hdt. 2.34), and the two rivers 'arise from the same measure of distance', ὁ Νεῖλος... τῷ Ἰστρῷ ἐκ τῶν ἴσων μέτρων ὁρμᾶται (Hdt. 2.33).²²⁵ Herodotus justifies his choice of the Ister over the Nile, on the basis of its tributaries and the constant flow of water both in winter and summer, by which 'the Ister is the greatest river' (γίνεται ὁ Ἰστρὸς ποταμῶν μέγιστος, 4.50).

Major rivers are important boundaries and landmarks in Greek and Roman texts, and the epithet of 'the greatest (of) river(s)' was given to various rivers in the ancient world.²²⁶ The Danube was considered particularly impressive; Dionysius of Halicarnassus identified it as the biggest river in Europe.²²⁷ Several writers provide a 'top three' or 'top four' of big rivers, variously including the

²²³ The size of Meroe is particularly worthy of comment; it is 'of considerable extent', εὐμεγέθη, and far larger than the other islands, τῷ δὲ μεγέθει πολὺ προέχειν τῶν ἄλλων νήσων, cf. Strabo 1.2.25 '[the Nile] is of such width that it contains islands with many thousands of inhabitants, the largest of which is Meroe', and 17.1.2, 'Meroe, a rather large island', νήσον εὐμεγέθη τὴν Μερόην.

²²⁴ Hdt. 4.48, 4.50.

²²⁵ On the parallelism between the Nile and the Ister, see Lloyd (1966) 342, Gould (1989) 89-90, Thomas (2000) 66-7, 77-8, 101, 201-2, 209, Vasunia (2001) 96-7.

²²⁶ For the function of references to large rivers, see Campbell (2012) 55-56.

²²⁷ *Antiquitates Romanae* 14.1.1. Dionysius awards second place to the Rhine.

Nile, Danube, Rhine, Rhone, Ganges, and Indus.²²⁸ As can be seen from the lack of consensus about the relative size of rivers, Diodorus' assertion about the Nile does not have the status of a given fact. Rather, such assertions show him participating in a tradition of speculation about large rivers.

Diodorus' claims about the Nile are particularly significant in view of the emphasis placed in his narrative on size; assertions about the size of the Nile refract a concern with size in the universal history. Size is a conspicuous concern as the writer begins to justify the production of his work in the prolegomena (Diod. Sic. 1.3.2-8). Size had been of rhetorical and programmatic interest to ancient historiography since the announcement in Herodotus' preface of his subject as 'great and marvellous deeds' (ἔργα μέγала τε καὶ θωμαστά, *Hist.* 1.*praef.*).²²⁹ Diodorus justifies the production of his work by stressing the great 'magnitude' (τὸ μέγεθος, Diod. Sic. 1.3.4) of the task awaiting a writer of history. He asserts that the advantage of history lies in its potential scope, 'in the taking up of a huge number and variety of circumstances' (ἐν τῷ πλείστας καὶ ποικιλωτάτας περιστάσεις λαμβάνειν, Diod. Sic. 1.3.2).

Diodorus makes a remarkable claim for his work:

περὶ δὲ τῶν πράξεων τῶν παραδεδομένων μὲν εἰς μνήμην, γενομένων δὲ ἐν τοῖς γνωριζομένοις τόποις τῆς οἰκουμένης, διεξιέναι πειρασόμεθα. (Diod. Sic. 1.9.1)

But as regards all the events which have been handed down to memory and took place in the known regions of the inhabited world, I shall undertake to give a full account of them.

As Katherine Clarke puts it, 'a more preposterous aim could scarcely be imagined. Diodorus explicitly defines the scope of his historical work as being spatially the whole of the known world

²²⁸ Strabo 15.1.35 C702: the Ganges and Indus followed by the Ister and Nile; Varro (cited by Gell. *NA* 10.7): the Nile, then the Danube, then the Rhone; Sallust (also cited by Gell. *NA* 10.7): Nile, Danube.

²²⁹ Marincola (1997) 34-43 discusses how 'magnification' is transformed by successive historians, and suggests that the kind of magnification announced by such historians as Diodorus, Dionysius and Livy might be modeled on the opening of Herodotus, whose subject is ἔργα μέγала τε καὶ θωμαστά, 'great and marvellous deeds'. Herkommer (1968) 165-71 catalogues the occurrence of the *topos* among the historians.

and temporally all memorable events'.²³⁰ In this aim, Diodorus explicitly combats those writers of universal history whose subject is more restricted in temporal or spatial range (1.3.2-4).²³¹ The text carefully enumerates the various limitations of previous historians: first, there are those who restrict their geographical range to individual wars or cities (1.3.2); second, those who fail to include all time from the earliest times to the present day (1.3.2); third, there are those whose work lacks accuracy in dating, omits the deeds of non-Greeks or ancient legend (τὰς παλαιὰς μυθολογίας), or is incomplete because of the writer's death. Finally, Diodorus points to the lack of a history complete 'even to our own lifetime' (μέχρι τοῦ καθ' ἡμᾶς βίου, 1.3.3), which he attributes to the 'greatness of the undertaking' (τὸ μέγεθος τῆς ὑποθέσεως, 1.3.4). Diodorus identifies the lack of a single, unified and complete history as a major impediment to understanding, thereby justifying the production of his own work, which claims to rectify these many problems. By this announcement, the historian both inscribes himself into Greek traditions of historiography, which included the magnification of the subject under discussion, and carves out a niche for his own work, by emphasising the uniqueness of its temporal and spatial reach.

The problems identified by Diodorus in earlier accounts of the world's history are mirrored in miniature by his account of the problems in earlier texts on the river Nile and its remarkable phenomena:²³²

ὅλως γὰρ ὑπὲρ τῆς ἀναβάσεως τοῦ Νείλου καὶ τῶν πηγῶν ἔτι δὲ τῆς εἰς θάλατταν ἐκβολῆς καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ὧν ἔχει διαφορῶν παρὰ τοὺς ἄλλους ποταμούς, μέγιστος ὧν τῶν κατὰ τὴν οἰκουμένην, τινὲς μὲν τῶν συγγραφέων ἀπλῶς οὐκ ἐτόλμησαν οὐδὲν εἰπεῖν, καίπερ

²³⁰ Clarke (1999a) 252. This 'strong' view of universal history has been defended by Alonso-Núñez (1990) 173: 'universal historians strictly speaking are only those who deal with the history of mankind from the earliest times, and in all parts of the world known to them'.

²³¹ By his conscious rejection of earlier historians as inadequate, Diodorus establishes himself within the tradition of Greek historical inquiry. Polybius too criticises the limitations of previous historians (1.4.2-3), and acknowledges Ephorus as the only writer truly to write τὰ καθόλου (5.33.2).

²³² For analysis of Diodorus' discussion set within the context of Greek traditions of speculation about the river's sources and inundation, see chapter 3.

είωθότες μηκύνειν ἐνίστε περὶ χειμάρρου τοῦ τυχόντος, τινὲς δ'ἐπιβαλόμενοι λέγειν περὶ τῶν ἐπιζητουμένων πολὺ τῆς ἀληθείας διήμαρτον. (Diod. Sic. 1.37.2)

For on the general subject of the rise of the Nile and its sources, as well as on the manner in which it reaches the sea and the other points in which this, the largest river of the inhabited world, differs from all others, some historians have actually not ventured to say a single word, although they would now and then to expatiate at length on some winter torrent or other, while others have undertaken to speak on these points of inquiry, but have strayed far from the truth.

Diodorus' complaint about previous writers' treatment of the Nile begins with a comment about the misguided efforts of his predecessors. Diodorus has previously criticised writers of history who are limited in either temporal or spatial range (1.3.2-4); here, his subject (i.e. the Nile) is contrasted with others writers' habits of 'expatiating at length on some winter torrent or other' (μηκύνειν ἐνίστε περὶ χειμάρρου τοῦ τυχόντος). The contrast is extreme: the 'winter torrent' is unnamed, unlike the famous Nile; the word χειμάρρος suggests one of the mountain streams of mainland Greece, which are typically small and unpredictable, torrential in winter and dried-up in summer.²³³ The unnamed χειμάρρος, in contrast to the large and perennial Nile, has narrow spatial and temporal limits, being small and seasonal. Second, Diodorus criticises those writers who 'have strayed far from the truth' (πολὺ τῆς ἀληθείας διήμαρτον), and outlines various issues of accuracy and comprehensiveness among previous writers. This criticism corresponds to the second of Diodorus' complaints about earlier universal historians, that they were inaccurate and incomplete (Diod. Sic. 1.3.2). The last of Diodorus' criticisms of earlier historians involved the lack of up-to-date information 'even to our own lifetime' (μέχρι τοῦ καθ' ἡμᾶς βίου, 1.3.3). Similarly, Diodorus notes the existence of new information about the Nile, which necessitates a new account of the river (1.37.5). The historian's rhetorical justification for his discussion of the river is therefore structurally parallel to his justification for the production of his universal history. The parallels are striking and significant. Both the Nile and the universal history are characterised by their supreme magnitude and significance; Diodorus' discourse on the Nile thus functions as a miniature version of his monumental project.

²³³ Brewster (1997) 3.

Diodorus' emphasis on the size of the river is an important marker of the status he accords to his own work, which is seen to be capable of incorporating within it such a massive river. The greatness of the Nile acts as a parallel for the greatness of the historical project undertaken by Diodorus. Diodorus is not alone in identifying 'great' writing with powerful rivers; rather, he is drawing on a frequent association between text and rivers in ancient literary and rhetorical discourse.²³⁴ Mighty rivers are associated with eloquence (*eloquentia*) in Quintilian.²³⁵ The writer of the treatise *De Sublimitate* uses works of nature to exemplify our response to the sublime, and selects the Nile, the Danube, the Rhine and Okeanos as particular objects of admiration, in contrast to the 'small streams, useful and pellucid though they be' (μικρὰ ρεῖθρα... εἰ καὶ διαυγῆ καὶ χρήσιμα, 35.4). The Nile and other great rivers generate admiration precisely because of their size; they, like other sublime natural phenomena, are 'striking and great and beautiful' (περιττὸν... καὶ μέγα καὶ καλόν, 35.3).

3. Complexity and elusiveness, from source to Delta

A second aspect of Diodorus' description of the river concerns its difficult, winding course. Throughout its course, the river is elusive, problematic and threatened by natural obstacles. The following discussion focuses on three aspects of this description, namely the problem of the sources, the winding course, and the obstacles faced by the river.

Central to Diodorus' discussion of the hidden sources of the Nile is a continued ignorance and lack of knowledge. Knowledge about the sources remains elusive due to the lack of evidence. The mysterious sources of the Nile were a notorious problem for Hellenistic and Roman geography;²³⁶ in Diodorus, this perennial quandary is strongly associated with the language of historiographical

²³⁴ See Jones (2005) 51-2. Homer is identified with Okeanos in Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Comp.* 24) and Quintilian (10.1.46); cf. Callim. *Hymn* 2.106 with Williams (1978) 87-89, 98-99, Kahane (1994), and Traill (1998) 216-218.

²³⁵ Quint. *Inst.* 5.14.31, cf. 9.4.7.

²³⁶ Romm (1992) 149-156, and chapter 3 of this thesis.

investigation. As in Herodotus, the sources of the Nile remain beyond the limits of autopsy. The Nile rises in the south, ‘having its sources in regions which have never been seen’, τὰς πηγὰς ἔχων ἐκ τόπων ἀοράτων (1.32.1). The state of knowledge has emphatically not changed since the time of Herodotus’ account:

τὰς δὲ πηγὰς τοῦ Νείλου, καὶ τὸν τόπον ἐξ οὗ λαμβάνει τὴν ἀρχὴν τοῦ ρεύματος, ἐορακέναι μὲν μέχρι τῶνδε τῶν ἱστοριῶν γραφομένων οὐδεὶς εἴρηκεν οὐδ’ ἀκοὴν ἀπεφήνατο παρὰ τῶν ἐορακέναι διαβεβαιουμένων. (Diod. Sic. 1.37.6)

And as for the sources of the Nile and the region where the stream arises, not a man, down to the time of the writing of this history, has ever affirmed that he has seen them, or reported from hearsay an account received from any who have maintained that they have seen them.

The absence of autopsy here is paramount; not only does the writer acknowledge his lack of autopsy, but no one has even reported a claim from someone to have seen them. The search for the sources of the Nile is articulated in terms heavily loaded with historiographical significance; autopsy and oral report, that is ἀκοή, fundamental to this kind of investigation, are lacking.²³⁷ In the absence of suitable evidence from autopsy, investigation into the sources of the river is reduced to a matter of ‘guesswork and plausible conjecture’ (εἰς ὑπόνοιαν καὶ καταστοχασμὸν πιθανόν). Diodorus rejects the account given by the priests of Egypt since it too lacks evidence, and does not reduce the level of perplexity, by: λόγον φέροντες εἰς πίστιν αὐτὸν πολλῆς πίστεως προσδεόμενον ‘advancing as proof an explanation that requires proof itself’ (1.37.7). The inhabitants of Meroe do not possess any better knowledge about the sources of the Nile; rather their name for the river – Astapus, ἐκ τοῦ σκότους ὕδωρ, ‘water from darkness’ - articulates their ignorance. Whereas claims to autopsy are a strategy used by Greek and Roman historians to construct an authoritative persona, when faced with the general ignorance about the sources of the Nile, Diodorus emphasises the lack of autopsy.²³⁸ As Muntz observes, by ‘not endorsing an unverifiable theory of the Nile’s origins’, Diodorus demonstrates his appropriate use of autopsy.²³⁹

²³⁷ On autopsy and inquiry, see especially Marincola (1997) 63-86.

²³⁸ Marincola (1997) 80 n. 83 lists such claims to autopsy by the historians.

²³⁹ Muntz (2008) 90.

This denial that anything can be known about the sources of the Nile in the absence of autopsy differs from the approach to this debate that Diodorus attributes to Herodotus. Diodorus ascribes to Herodotus the following assertion:

Ἡρόδοτος ἀνατίθησι Λίβυσι τοῖς ὀνομαζομένοις Νασαμῶσι τὴν ἀκριβῆ θεωρίαν τοῦ ῥείθρου, καὶ φησιν ἕκ τινος λίμνης λαμβάνοντα τὴν ἀρχὴν τὸν Νεῖλον φέρεσθαι διὰ χώρας Αἰθιοπικῆς ἀμυθήτου· (1.37.11)

Herodotus, when distinguishing between the Libya which lies to the east and that which lies to the west of this river, attributes to the Libyans known as the Nasamones the exact observation of the stream, and says that the Nile rises in a certain lake and then flows through the land of Ethiopia for a distance beyond telling.

Jessica Priestley has recently shown that Diodorus (or the account epitomised in Diodorus, which she attributes to Agatharchides) misrepresents Herodotus; as she reminds us, ‘Herodotus theorises that the course and length of the Nile mirrors that of the Ister, but at no point does he claim that the Nasamones had found the Nile’s source. Instead he reminds his audience that ‘... concerning the sources of the Nile no-one can speak’ (2.34.1)’.²⁴⁰ Priestley sees in this summary of Herodotus a deliberate attempt at misrepresentation: ‘simplifying and misrepresenting Herodotus’ account allows Agatharchides to criticise it, in a Herodotean manner, as lacking in proof... in order to establish his own authority on an issue for which Herodotus seems to have been regarded as one of the most authoritative sources’.²⁴¹ Again, Diodorus’ account of the Nile is intimately connected to Greek traditions of historiography, even as the sources of the Nile prove an impenetrable obstacle to investigation.

The Nile is also characterised by the complexity of its course. The text describes the river’s course as a series of ‘great windings’ (καμπὰς μεγάλας, 1.32.2). Whereas Strabo describes the course of the river in Egypt as flowing ‘in a straight line’ (ἐπ’ εὐθείας, *Geog.* 17.1.3 C787), Diodorus describes its route as much more circuitous, ‘flowing not in a straight line, but in windings of every

²⁴⁰ Priestley (2010) 133.

²⁴¹ Priestley (2010) 134-5.

sort' (οὐκ ἐπ' εὐθείας φερόμενος, ἀλλὰ καμπὰς παντοίας ποιούμενος, Diod. Sic. 1.32.5). The river turns in every direction:

ποτὲ μὲν γὰρ ἐλίττεται πρὸς τὴν ἑω, ποτὲ δὲ πρὸς τὴν ἐσπέραν, ἔστι δ' ὅτε πρὸς τὴν μεσημβρίαν, εἰς τοῦπίσω λαμβάνων τὴν παλίρροϊαν. (Diod. Sic. 1.32.5)

For it twists now towards the east, now towards the west, and at times even towards the south.

The movement of the river is described as twisting, and even backward-flowing. For a time, the river seems to abandon its northward trajectory; its fulfillment as a river, debouching in the Mediterranean, seems threatened by an insistent circular motion, spiralling and flowing backward. The distinctive word παλίρροϊα echoes the same word used in Herodotus of the confusion of waters that prevents the accurate measurement of the river's depth at Syene.²⁴² The landscape itself impedes the northward flow, as 'precipitous ravines' and 'narrow defiles' cause the stream to 'rush backward' (παλισσυτεῖ, 1.32.6). The backward motion of the river is most pronounced at the cataracts, which dramatically interrupt the otherwise smooth stream (1.32.7). Here, all forward motion is arrested: the river is 'split' (σχιζομένου) and there is a 'backflow' (παλίρροϊα again, 1.32.9) of water. This movement is even seen as contrary to nature, which is restored only as the river turns north again 'to its natural course' (ἐπὶ τὴν κατὰ φύσιν φοράν, 1.32.6).

In addition, not all the river's waters reach the sea; the text describes the ways in which the river's volume is 'reduced' (συστέλλεται, 1.32.3), 'swallowed up' (καταπίνεται, 1.32.4) by sand on the Libyan side and 'immense fens and large marshes' (τέλματα παμμεγέθη καὶ λίμνας... μεγάλας, 1.32.4) on the Arabian. As the river is distinguished by its size, so it is diminished by an immense landscape. Despite these threats to the course of the Nile, the river is not dissipated and ultimately reaches its conclusion at the Delta, which is characterised by its fertility and usefulness for agriculture (Diod. Sic. 1.34.1-11).²⁴³ Even at the Delta, the river is split over and again, 'divided into several streams' (εἰς πλείω μέρη σχιζόμενος, Diod. Sic. 1.33.5), including the seven natural mouths in addition to several artificial ones.

²⁴² Hdt. 2.28. For further discussion of this passage, see chapter 2.

²⁴³ On usefulness and benefactions as key themes in both Nilotic and historiographical discourse, see below.

At every point of its course the Nile seems to be threatened with dissipation or reflux, and faces many obstacles in its approach to the sea. Despite the fame and size of the river, it seems in danger of being swallowed up by the immensity of surrounding space or by a return south, towards the unseen - and therefore unwritable - source. Diodorus' narrative sets out to carefully plot the river, tracing it from its unseen source, through marshes, desert, cataracts and windings as far as the vision of ease that characterises the Delta. Descriptions of the course of the river Nile are also important narrative elements in Seneca's *Quaestiones Naturales* and Pliny's *Naturalis Historia*.²⁴⁴ Trevor Murphy highlights the elusive quality of the Nile in Pliny's description, 'which is an expert at evading detection as well as at worming its way through formidable obstacles'.²⁴⁵ The Nile acquires a particular quality of character, much like a human protagonist; for Murphy, rivers permit 'the insertion of narrative into geography' and these narratives resemble biography.²⁴⁶ Similarly, Diodorus' account of the Nile is not an isolated element of the *Bibliothēke*, but can be understood as a parallel for the very process of writing history, as the historian must keep control of the vast number of events over vast geographical areas.

4. Usefulness

Diodorus' account clearly articulates the many advantages brought by the Nile, which is described as the most beneficial of rivers. Importantly, the language used to articulate these benefactions corresponds in several places with the kind of benefits attributed to history. First, the river is fertile and 'produces many crops of every kind' (πολλοὺς καὶ παντοδαποὺς ἐκφέρει καρπούς, Diod. Sic. 1.34.2), and is 'easily' (ῥαδίως) irrigated. Animal and plant-life is both varied and abundant;

²⁴⁴ Sen. *QN* 4a.2.1-12; Pliny *NH* 5.51-54. See Murphy (2004) 142-145 and Williams (2008).

²⁴⁵ Murphy (2004) 143.

²⁴⁶ Murphy (2004) 142. The notion that rivers embody a narrative that can be told from source to end as a biography continues to inform modern texts; see for instance Ackroyd (2008) on the Thames, and especially Cioc (2002), an 'eco-biography' of the Rhine, e.g. p.5: 'The notion that a river is a biological entity - that it has a "life" and a "personality" and therefore a "biography" - is not altogether out of step with scientific or commonsense notions of rivers'.

the Nile carries down ‘a great quantity of all kinds of earth’ (γῆν πολλὴν καὶ παντοδαπὴν καταφέροντος, 1.34.3), ‘marshes are all-productive’ (ἔλη γίνεται πάμφορα, 1.34.3), with ‘all kinds of roots’ (ρίζαι... παντοδαπαί, 1.34.3). This variety and abundance allows even the poor and sick to have ‘self-sufficiency’ (αὐτάρκεια, 1.34.4) with a ‘varied diet’ (τροφὰς ποικίλας, 1.34.5). The Nile provides many plants suitable for supplying the necessities of life, ‘but it would be a long task to tell about them’ (ὑπὲρ ὧν μακρὸν ἂν εἶη γράφειν, 1.34.11). The river also contains “every variety of fish and in numbers beyond belief” (παντοῖα γένη ἰχθύων καὶ κατὰ τὸ πλῆθος ἄπιστα, 1.36.1). Agriculture is said to be particularly easy in Egypt, with harvests gathered ‘with very slight outlay of money and labour’ (ἐλαχίστοις δαπανήμασι καὶ πόνοις, 1.36.5). The Nile contributes to the ‘lightening of labour’ (τοῖς ἔργοις εὐκοπίαν) and to the ‘profit’ (λυσιτέλεια, 1.36.4) of the inhabitants of Egypt.

The abundant fertility of the Nile and the ease of Egyptian agriculture are familiar motifs in Greek discourse.²⁴⁷ This passage in Diodorus has been read as expressing idealistic or even utopian characteristics. Dillery sees in the repetition of the adjective πάμφορος for instance an echo of Hecataeus of Abdera’s report of the Land of the Hyperboreans.²⁴⁸ However, Diodorus’ assessment of the Nile does not simply focus on good things, but is articulated in terms of benefaction, a key idea in the *Bibliothēke*.²⁴⁹ The Nile is the most beneficial of rivers:

καθόλου δὲ ταῖς εἰς ἀνθρώπους εὐεργεσίαις ὑπερβάλλει πάντας τοὺς κατὰ τὴν οἰκουμένην ποταμούς. (Diod. Sic. 1.36.2)

In general, it surpasses all the rivers of the inhabited world in its benefactions to humanity.

This terminology of benefaction precisely parallels Diodorus’ conception of the utility of history, which is named the ‘benefactor of the entire human race’ (εὐεργέτιν δὲ τοῦ κοινοῦ γένους τῶν

²⁴⁷ See e.g. Hdt. 2.14. For a sobering corrective, see Lloyd (1976) 75-6 on the ‘unrelenting toil and vigilance’ required of the Egyptian peasant.

²⁴⁸ F 7 = Diodorus 2.47.1, Dillery (1998) 262. Dillery’s argument for seeing Hecataeus as the source of 1.34 relies in part on the use of the adjective πάμφορος in both passages; however, as even Dillery notes, this is a relatively common word in Diodorus. Its use here cannot be taken to indicate that Hecataeus lies behind both passages.

²⁴⁹ Sacks (1990) 23-36; Marincola (1997) 49, 149-50; Sulimani (2011) 64-5, 68-9, 71-2, 80, 82.

ἀνθρώπων, Diod. Sic. 1.2.2). Both the Nile and history are said to possess a superlative quality of benefactions, either by exceeding all other rivers, or by benefiting the whole human race. History is also claimed to instigate beneficence in men, whether founders of cities, lawgivers, or discoverers of the arts and sciences (2.1.1). Benefaction is a fundamental theme in Diodorus history; benefactors are both mythical and historical figures, and the benefactions typically result in significant, even immortal honours, for the benefactor.²⁵⁰ Benefactors typically act ‘for the common good’, as expressed by such terms as: ἀνθρώπων (1.13.1), τὸ γένος τῶν ἀνθρώπων (1.2.4, 4.53.7), or τοῦ κοινοῦ βίου (1.13.1).²⁵¹ Unusually for Diodorus’ narrative, the Nile and history function as non-human benefactors, both excelling in their usefulness.

The key terms that are used to express the central advantages of history in Diodorus’ view are: ὠφελέω and ὠφελεία; συμφέρω and τὸ συμφέρον; and χρήσιμος.²⁵² History is held to be of practical advantage and benefit not just to individuals, but to society as a whole:

Τοῖς τὰς κοινὰς ἱστορίας πραγματευσαμένοις μεγάλας χάριτας ἀπονέμειν δίκαιον πάντας ἀνθρώπους, ὅτι τοῖς ἰδίους πόνοις ὠφελῆσαι τὸν κοινὸν βίον ἐφιλοτιμήθησαν· ἀκίνδυνον γὰρ διδασκαλίαν τοῦ συμφέροντος εἰσηγησάμενοι καλλίστην ἐμπειρίαν διὰ τῆς πραγματείας ταύτης περιποιούσι τοῖς ἀναγινώσκουσιν. (Diod. Sic. 1.1.1)

It is fitting that all men should render great gratitude to those writers who have composed universal histories, since they have aspired to help by their individual labours human society as a whole’ for by offering a schooling, which entails no danger, in what is advantageous they provide their readers, through such a presentation of events, with a most excellent kind of experience.

²⁵⁰ Sulimani (2011) 64.

²⁵¹ Sulimani (2011) 66.

²⁵² ὠφελέω and ὠφελεία: 1.1.1 (ὠφελῆσαι), 1.3.2 (τῆς ὠφελείας), 1.3.5 (ὠφελῆσαι); συμφέρω and τὸ συμφέρον: 1.1.1 (τοῦ συμφέροντος), 1.3.1 (πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον); χρήσιμος: 1.1.2 (τῶν χρησίμων), 1.1.4 (χρησιμωτάτην), 1.2.7 (ἅπαντα τᾶλλα χρήσιμα), 1.3.7 (τὸ χρήσιμον), 1.3.8 (χρησιμώτερον), 1.4.1 (χρησιμωτάτην). Sacks (1990) 23-36 examines Diodorus’ concept of utility in the context of Hellenistic historiography, and argues that Diodorus’ ‘understanding of moral utility is, then, somewhat independent and different from that of Ephorus’ (p.35).

The usefulness of history is articulated in terms of practical benefits in everyday life (1.1.4). Moreover, the work of earlier historians is criticised for being less useful than their potential (1.3.1). Diodorus stages his own work as a contrast to these less useful predecessors:

ἐκρίναμεν ὑπόθεσιν ἱστορικὴν πραγματεύσασθαι τὴν πλεῖστα μὲν ὠφελῆσαι δυναμένην, ἐλάχιστα δὲ τοὺς ἀναγινώσκοντας ἐνοχλήσουσαν. (Diod. Sic. 1.3.5)

We resolved to write a history after a plan which might benefit its readers the most and inconvenience them as little as possible.

Diodorus here claims for his work a superlative usefulness (note πλεῖστα) that sets it up as a parallel to the Nile, the surpassingly beneficial river.

A parallel between the narrative of universal history and water is explicitly evoked at 1.3.7, which again draws attention to the usefulness of universal history:

ἐξέσται γὰρ ἐκ ταύτης ἕκαστον πρὸς τὴν ἰδίαν ὑπόστασιν ἐτοίμως λαμβάνειν τὸ χρήσιμον, ὥσπερ ἐκ μεγάλης ἀρυόμενον πηγῆς. (Diod. Sic. 1.3.7)

For from such a treatise every man will be able readily to take what is of use for his own purpose drawing as it were from a great fountain.

The word πηγὴ ‘spring’ can be used to mean simply ‘source’ or ‘origin’, but the primary sense is of the source of running water; here the verb ἀρύομαι indicates that Diodorus likens his work to a great fountain or spring. The metaphor taps into a correspondence in ancient thought between water and literary creativity, which is articulated most frequently in poetry, but occurs also in prose. A writer might drink from particular waters (especially holy streams),²⁵³ or be likened to such waters himself. In the case of this second motif, the writer becomes the ‘source’ of inspiration to

²⁵³ In Greek poetry, see Pindar *O.* 6.84-7; Hesiod and Homer are also said to have drunk from holy streams for inspiration, for which see epigrams by Alcaeus of Messene (*A.P.* 7.55), Asclepiades (or Archias) (*A.P.* 9.64), Antipater of Thessalonica (*A.P.* 11.24), and Moschus 3.76. Callim. *Aet.* fr. 2 does not make clear whether Callimachus himself and/or Hesiod are said to have drunk from the Hippocrene; so Harder (2012) v. 2: 94-5. Drinking from streams to gain poetic inspiration is a common motif of Roman poetry; see Wimmel (1960) 222-238; Crowther (1979); Cameron (1995) 364-65, who notes that the water, not the drinking *per se*, is the significant motif; Jones (2005) 57.

others; the use of this metaphor to express the transmission of literary creativity between generations is particularly evident in the *De Sublimitate*:

μόνος Ἡρόδοτος Ὀμηρικώτατος ἐγένετο; Στησίχορος ἔτι πρότερον ὃ τε Ἀρχίλοχος, πάντων δὲ τούτων μάλιστα ὁ Πλάτων ἀπὸ τοῦ Ὀμηρικοῦ κείνου νάματος εἰς αὐτὸν μυρίας ὄσας παρατροπὰς ἀποχετευσάμενος. (13.3)

Was Herodotus the only ‘very Homeric’ writer? Surely Stesichorus and Archilochus earned the name before him. So, more than any, did Plato, who diverted to himself countless rills from the Homeric spring.

The role of literary source and origin is frequently ascribed to Homer, from whom other writers may draw inspiration or models.²⁵⁴ In the context of the common identification of literary source with Homer, Diodorus’ claim is revealed as quite provocative; by arrogating to himself the status of ‘source’, he claims a particularly privileged position for his work. Further, the metaphor of the great spring recall the springs of the Nile, which are the source of the world’s most useful river.²⁵⁵ Diodorus establishes his work as a parallel to this most beneficial of rivers, although in this history, access even to the origins is possible, in contrast to the sources of the Nile, which remain beyond human sight and knowledge; no-one can draw off water from the springs of the Nile.

5. Moderation and control

Central to Diodorus’ conception of the Nile, as we have seen, are the river’s size and usefulness. Yet despite the exceptional benefits accorded by the river and its inundation, the text also articulates the need for the great river to be controlled and regulated, in order to attain a balance between famine and catastrophic flooding. This need is expressed in terms of due proportion or

²⁵⁴ On the idea of Homer’s priority and influence, see the citations collected by Russell (1965) 116; for the metaphor see esp. Manilius 2.8-11, and Russell’s example (d), Heraclitus (*Quaest. Hom.* 18): ταῦτα ὥσπερ ἐκ πηγῆς τῶν Ὀμηρικῶν ἐπῶν εἰς τοὺς ἰδίους διαλόγους ὁ Πλάτων μετῆρδευσεν; cf. Dion. Hal. *Comp.* 24, Quintilian 10.1.46. Williams (1978) 88-89, discussing the famous reference to the πόντος (= Homer’s Okeanos) at the conclusion to Callimachus’ *Hymn to Apollo*, observes that the motif is ‘already a commonplace in the Hellenistic period’.

²⁵⁵ In the context of the Nile, πηγὴ is used in either the singular or the plural: pl. Diod. Sic. 1.32.1, 1.37.6; cf. Hdt. 2.28, 4.53; Strabo 17.1.52; sing.: *OGIS* 168.9 (from Syene, second century BCE).

suitable size (συμμετρία) and timeliness; as we shall see, this language corresponds to another important principle of historiography in Diodorus.

First, the text notes the inconsistency of the inundation, which is said to have led to the construction of a lake by the king Moeris:²⁵⁶

ἐπειδὴ γὰρ ὁ μὲν Νεῖλος οὐχ ὠρισμένης ἐποιεῖτο τὰς ἀναβάσεις, ἡ δὲ χώρα τὴν εὐκαρπίαν παρεσκεύαζεν ἀπὸ τῆς ἐκείνου συμμετρίας εἰς ὑποδοχὴν τοῦ πλεονάζοντος ὕδατος ὠρυξε τὴν λίμνην, ὅπως μήτε διὰ τὸ πλῆθος τῆς ρύσεως ἐπικλύζων ἀκαίρως τὴν χώραν ἔλη καὶ λίμνας κατασκευάζη, μήτ' ἐλάττω τοῦ συμφέροντος τὴν πλήρωσιν ποιούμενος τῇ λειψυδρίᾳ τοὺς καρποὺς λυμαίνεται. (Diod. Sic. 1.52.1)

For since the Nile did not rise to a fixed height each year and yet the prosperity of the country depended on the constancy of the flood-level, he excavated the lake to receive the excess water, in order that the river might not, by an excessive volume of flow, immoderately flood the land and form marshes and pools, nor, by failing to rise to the proper height, ruin the harvests by the lack of water.

A Goldilocks-like balance is integral to the prosperity (ἡ εὐκαρπία) of Egypt; the lake ensures that the country will not be ruined (λυμαίνεται) by flooding or drought. Key words are 'immoderately' (ἀκαίρως) and a rise 'less than what was proper' (ἐλάττω τοῦ συμφέροντος). Ensuring this balance provides 'an opportune supply of water' (τὴν τῶν ὑδάτων εὐκαιρίαν), thereby counterbalancing the inopportune (cf. ἀκαίρως) action of the river. The existence of the lake corrects the inconsistency of the inundation and provides the necessary συμμετρία, the convenient size for the inundation, a quantity of water proportionate to the need of the people. This principle of συμμετρία is also associated with the Nile in Philostratus' *Imagines* 1.5. The text describes an image of the Nile, with a representation of a tutelary divinity in Ethiopia, 'from whom are sent [the waters] in due proportion' (ὑφ' οὗ πέμπεται ταῖς ὥραις σύμμετρος, *Imag.* 1.5 301K).²⁵⁷ The prosperity of Egypt relies in the right size of inundation arriving at the right time.

²⁵⁶ For a discussion of this lake, which is an archaeological problem, see chapter 2, n. 346.

²⁵⁷ Cf. the opening of the same ecphrasis: 'About the Nile the Cubit-Dwarfs are sporting, children in due proportion to their name' (οἱ Πήχεις ἀθύρουσι παιδία ξύμμετρα τῷ ὀνόματι).

The principle of *συμμετρία* is also an important characteristic of Diodorus' approach to historiography, and occurs regularly in the *Bibliothēke*.²⁵⁸ The word is particularly common in the phrase *στοχαζόμενοι τῆς συμμετρίας* 'since we are aiming at due proportion' (see 1.8.10, 1.9.4, 1.29.7, 1.41.10, 4.5.4), which punctuates the narrative at moments when the historian refuses to expand further on a particular subject. The historian gestures towards a wealth of available material, yet simultaneously wrests control over the course of the narrative. The principle of *συμμετρία* allows the historian to maintain the illusion of comprehensiveness, even while circumscribing the limits of the narrative; this exercise of *συμμετρία* contributes to the construction of the writer's persona as a historian capable of managing the huge and disparate subject matter of his universal history, and marks a series of pointed interventions into the narrative. The text draws attention to *συμμετρία* and the need for balance of a large entity in the discussion of the inundation of the Nile. The beginning of the account articulates a desire to steer the narrative between two extremes:

...περὶ ὧν ἐν κεφαλαίοις ἐροῦμεν, ἵνα μήτε μακρὰς ποιῶμεθα τὰς παρεκβάσεις μήτε ἄγραφον τὸ παρὰ πᾶσιν ἐπιζητούμενον ἀπολείπωμεν. (Diod. Sic. 1.37.1)

... regarding this [i.e. the causes of the inundation] we shall speak summarily, in order that we may neither make our digression too long nor fail to record that which all men are curious to know.

Just as the lake of Moeris is intended to preserve a balance between insufficiency and excess during the inundation, here Diodorus foregrounds the need to balance excessive length against omission of information. The writer returns to the idea at the close of his discussion:

ἐπεὶ δὲ τὴν βίβλον ταύτην διὰ τὸ μέγεθος εἰς δύο μέρη διηρήκαμεν, στοχαζόμενοι τῆς συμμετρίας, τὴν πρώτην μερίδα τῶν ἱστορουμένων αὐτοῦ περιγράψομεν. (1.41.10)

And since we have divided this book into two parts because of its size, inasmuch as we are aiming at due proportion in our account, at this point we shall close the first part of our history.

Issues of both size and proportion are brought into view here: the writer claims to be able to offer yet more 'varied' (*ποικιλώτερον*) material, but adheres instead to a principle of 'brevity' (*συντομία*).

²⁵⁸ Noted by Clarke (1999a) 265-266; discussed by Sulimani (2011) 150.

Diodorus' explicit emphasis on proportion and brevity, particularly in the discussion of the Nile, also operates as a response to his predecessors, especially Herodotus. It was noted above that Diodorus objects to writers who provide excessively long discourse on irrelevant subjects (such as the unnamed winter torrent, 1.37.2). Diodorus uses the verb *μηκύνω* to describe such writings, which is the verb also used by Herodotus in his justification of the length of his discussion of Egypt:

Ἔρχομαι δὲ περὶ Αἰγύπτου μηκυνέων τὸν λόγον, ὅτι πλεῖστα θαυμάσια ἔχει ἢ ἡ ἄλλη πᾶσα χώρα καὶ ἔργα λόγου μέζω παρέχεται πρὸς πᾶσαν ἄλλην χώραν· (Hdt. 2.35)

But concerning Egypt I am going to speak at length, because it has more wonders than any other land, and everywhere presents works beyond description.

The verb recurs (twice) in his explanation for the apparent digression on the cultural achievements of the Samians.²⁵⁹ The verb *μηκύνω* in Herodotus signals a moment at which the historian intervenes in his narrative in order to explain why he has chosen to dwell on particular peoples or places, namely, their wondrous or great works. To 'speak at length' in the manner of Herodotus is directly opposed to Diodorus' principles of proportion and brevity, which enable him to maintain (rhetorically, at least) close control over an expansive, indeed all-encompassing, narrative.

6. Culture-heroes, the Nile and the historian

The benefactions of the Nile are tempered by the need to regulate and control the river. Diodorus frequently connects the Nile with outstanding figures, chiefly kings and culture-heroes, who improve the river or its effects on people. These culture-heroes, as will be seen, perform tasks that parallel the task of the universal historian; just as history is made parallel to the Nile, so too the figure of the historian, Diodorus, mirrors the figures of culture-heroes in Egypt.

²⁵⁹ ἐμήκυνα (Hdt. 3.60); the verb occurs at both the beginning and the end of the passage. The verb is also used at 5.54 of the length of a journey.

The presence of culture-heroes is significant in the first five books of the *Bibliothēke*; Sacks first noted their importance as structurally unifying figures in 1990, an idea picked up and examined in detail in a monograph by Sulimani.²⁶⁰ In particular, Sulimani discusses the functions of figures like Osiris, Semiramis and Herakles in Diodorus' narrative and historiographical vision; these figures 'travelled all over the world, conquered countries and cities, contributed to the welfare of their inhabitants and, on the whole, benefited humanity in almost every aspect of life such as agriculture, trade, culture, religion and political order'.²⁶¹ Such culture-heroes are particularly prevalent in Egypt, where their deeds of benefaction cluster especially around the use and control of the Nile.

First, the entwining of the Nile and culture-heroes is notable in the names ascribed by Diodorus to the river; twice, it is named after a king.²⁶² No reasons for the association between the king Aigyptos and the river are provided; the hydronym Neilos is derived from the king Neileus after his construction of canals and his eagerness to increase 'the usefulness of the Nile' (τὴν εὐχρηστίαν τοῦ Νείλου, 1.63.1), that is, by acting in accordance with the principles espoused by Diodorus at the beginning of the *Bibliothēke*. The Nile was known to the Greeks by several names, and was subject to frequent etymologising on these names; Diodorus alone lists Okeanos, Aetos, Aigyptos and Neilos (Diod. Sic. 1.19.4).²⁶³ By attributing the hydronym 'Neilos' to an Egyptian king, Diodorus eschews common Greek etymologies for the name 'Neilos' that rely on the Greek language.

²⁶⁰ Sacks (1990); Sulimani (2011).

²⁶¹ Sulimani (2011) 165.

²⁶² These names are Aigyptos (1.19.14) and Neilos, after Neileus (1.63.1).

²⁶³ For ancient surveys of successive names for the Egyptian river, see Tzetz. *Σ ad Lyc.* 119, 576; [Plut.] *De fluv.* 16 = Thrasyllus of Mendes *FGrH* 622 F 1; *Σ ad Apoll. Rhod. Arg.* 4.269-71 = Hermippos of Smyrna *FGrH* 1026 F 90; Pliny *NH* 5.54. Ancient names are discussed by Wagner (1898) col. 87-88; *RE* 17.1.555-566, esp. col. 556; Bollansée (1999) 589. No convincing account of the etymology of the name 'Neilos' (and its modern descendants) has been given; for attempts to find an etymology, see Goedicke (1979) who derives it from the Egyptian term for the mouths of the Nile *r3w-h3w(t)*.

The word Neilos is commonly derived in Greek texts from the νέα ἰλύς, new mud, that is deposited during the annual inundation. Explicit attestations of this etymology tend to be late;²⁶⁴ however, it seems that Diodorus twice alludes to this idea via *figurae etymologicae*. The clearest example, due to the promixity of the word ‘Neilos’ and the terms of the etymology, occurs at 3.3.3:

ὅτι δ’ ἐστὶν αὐτῶν ἡ χώρα πᾶσα ποταμόχωστος ἐναργεστάτην ἔχειν ἀπόδειξιν τὴν γινομένην κατὰ τὰς ἐκβολὰς τοῦ Νείλου· καθ’ ἕκαστον γὰρ ἔτος αἰὲ νέας ἰλύος ἀθροισμένης πρὸς τὰ στόματα τοῦ ποταμοῦ καθορᾶται τὸ μὲν πέλαγος ἐξωθούμενον τοῖς προσχώμασιν, ἡ δὲ χώρα τὴν αὔξησιν λαμβάνουσα.

Also the statement that all the land of the Egyptians is alluvial silt deposited by the river receives the clearest proof, in their opinion, from what takes place at the outlets of the Nile; for as each year new mud is continually gathered together at the mouths of the river, the sea is observed being thrust back by the deposited silt and the land receiving the increase.

Similarly, at 1.36.2, Diodorus describes the effects of the inundation on the soil of Egypt; agricultural prosperity depends on the annual flood, ‘always bringing down new mud’, (ἐπάγων δ’ αἰὲ νέαν ἰλύν). These two instances suggest that this etymology of the name Neilos was known in the first century BC, but that at 1.19, Diodorus deliberately avoids it, instead connecting the name to a king who benefited the country.²⁶⁵

Osiris and Sesostris are similarly connected with improving the Nile. Osiris, the Egyptian culture-hero *par excellence* of Diodorus’ narrative, marks the southern border of Egypt by ‘curbing the river by dikes on both banks’ (τὸν ποταμὸν ἐξ ἀμφοτέρων τῶν μερῶν χώμασιν ἀναλαβεῖν, Diod. Sic. 1.19.5).²⁶⁶ It is the practical benefit to humans that the historian notes; the dikes allow the water to be let out ‘gently as it might be needed’ (πρᾶως καθ’ ὅσον ἂν ᾗ χρεία). Further

²⁶⁴ See e.g. Tzet. Σ *ad* Lyc. 119; Σ *ad* Theoc. 7.114; *Etym. magn.* p. 602, 9; Nonnus *Dion.* 3.275ff.; Heliod. *Aeth.* 9.22; Serv. *ad Aen.* 9.30.

²⁶⁵ On Neilos/Neileus as a mythological figure, see Hesiod *Th.* 338, Apollodorus 2.1.4, Σ Apoll. Rhod. *Arg.* 4.269 (= *FGrH* 1026 F 90, attributed to Hermippos of Smyrna); see also Wagner (1898) col. 93-4 and Bollansée (1999) 589.

²⁶⁶ On the figure of Osiris in Diodorus’ narrative, see Muntz (2008) 124, 129-138, 143-146; Sulimani (2011) 166, 230-237, 246-249.

improvement of the irrigation systems is also attributed to Sesostris (1.57), the benefits of which include the increased security of the inhabitants against the inundation and enemies, and easier gathering of abundant harvests.²⁶⁷

The association between culture-heroes and the Nile is especially pronounced at 1.19, an episode that Diodorus again attributes to the Egyptians, involving Osiris, Prometheus and Herakles. In the region where Prometheus ‘was governor’ (εἶχε τὴν ἐπιμέλειαν) in place of Osiris who had gone campaigning, a catastrophic inundation of the Nile destroyed ‘practically everything’ (σχεδὸν ἀπάντων) and caused Prometheus to despair to the point of suicide. The speed and violence of the water gave the name ‘Aetos’ to the river; but Herakles arrived and ‘speedily stopped the flood at its breach and turned the river back into its former course’ (τό τε γινόμενον ἔκρηγμα ταχέως ἐμφράξαι καὶ τὸν ποταμὸν ἐπὶ τὴν προϋπάρξασαν ῥύσιν ἀποστρέψαι, 1.19.2). Diodorus observes that this narrative is the origin of the myth ‘that Herakles had killed the eagle which was devouring the liver of Prometheus’ (ὡς Ἡρακλέους τὸν ἀετὸν ἀνηρηκότος τὸν τὸ τοῦ Προμηθέως ἦπαρ ἐσθίοντα, 1.19.3). The myth of Prometheus, Herakles and the eagle is rationalised by Diodorus as a incident of early Egyptian history.

This narrative is not related in any other text; Anne Burton noted that this version of Prometheus and Herakles is ‘totally divorced from the usual Greek tradition’.²⁶⁸ However, parallels do exist, and two similar versions of the episode are particularly relevant. These are two scholar to Apollonius Rhodius *Arg.* 2.1248, both of which are rationalised accounts of the myth of Prometheus and the eagle. The first states that the Hellenistic historian Agrotas, in the thirteenth book of his *On Libya*, writes that Herakles drew a river called the ‘Eagle’ off into a canal, separating Prometheus from the

²⁶⁷ For the deeds of Sesostris, cf. Hdt. 2.12, 158, 4.42, and Sulimani (2011) 248.

²⁶⁸ Burton (1972) 85. Sulimani (2011) 247 observes that ‘no other writer attributes a similar feat to Herakles in Egypt’. However, Burton also notes that despite the attribution of the episode to Egyptian sources, ‘it is difficult to determine what, if any, foundation there is for the story in Egyptian mythology’. Gruen (2011) 96 discusses the passage as an example of Diodorus’ interest in the transformation of ‘Egyptian’ tradition into Greek myth.

‘eagle’, and thereby freeing him from his chains.²⁶⁹ The second scholion reports a similar version of the myth attributed to the late fifth-century mythographer Herodorus, that Prometheus, a Scythian king, was chained by his people because he could not provide for them after the flooding of a river named the ‘Eagle’. Herakles again diverted this river to the sea and freed Prometheus from his chains:²⁷⁰

On the basis of similarities between the summary of Agroitas’ narrative and the episode at Diodorus’ 1.19, Muntz has recently argued that Agroitas may have been one of Diodorus’ sources for Book 1.²⁷¹ However, the citations from the *Argonautica* scholiast do not entirely account for certain details of the episode in Diodorus, including the location in Egypt, Prometheus’ position as ‘governor’, the suicidal feeling of Prometheus, the *aetion* for the hydronym ‘Aetos’, and the inclusion of ‘Aetos’ in a list of names for the Nile. In addition, Diodorus’ narrative does not construe ἦπαρ as ‘fruitful land’.²⁷² These are significant impediments to seeing Agroitas as the immediate source for the Diodoran episode. Herodorus’ account likewise has several differences from Diodorus’ account, including the location in Scythia, and Prometheus’ imprisonment by the Scythians. Neither Agroitas nor Herodorus provide a precise parallel to the episode in Diodorus. A

²⁶⁹ Σ Apoll. Rhod. Arg. 2.1248 = *FGrH* 762 F 4a: Ἀγροίτας δὲ ἐν τῇ ἰγ’ τῶν Λιβυκῶν δεῖπνεῖσθαι φησι τὸ ἦπαρ Προμηθέως δόξει ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀετοῦ διὰ τὸ τὴν κρατίστην τοῦ Προμηθέως χώραν τὸν ποταμὸν τὸν καλούμενον Ἄετὸν φθείρειν, ἦπαρ δὲ παρὰ πολλοῖς τὴν εὐκαρπον λέγεσθαι γῆν· Ἡρακλέους δὲ ἐξοχετεύσαντος διώρυξι τὸν ποταμὸν, τὸν τε ἀετὸν δόξει ὑπὸ αὐτοῦ κεχωρῖσθαι καὶ τὸν Προμηθέα λελύσθαι τῶν δεσμῶν.

²⁷⁰ *FGrH* 31 F 30: περὶ τῶν δεσμῶν τοῦ Προμηθέως ταῦτα· εἶναι γὰρ αὐτὸν Σκυθῶν βασιλέα φησι, καὶ μὴ δυνάμενον παρέχειν τοῖς ὑπηκόοις τὰ ἐπιτήδεια, διὰ τὸ τὸν καλούμενον Ἄετὸν ποταμὸν ἐπικλύζειν τὰ πεδία, δεθῆναι ὑπὸ τῶν Σκυθῶν· ἐπιφανέντα δὲ Ἡρακλέα, τὸν μὲν ποταμὸν ἀποστρέψαι εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν· καὶ διὰ τοῦτο μεμυθεῖσθαι ἀνηρηκέναι τὸν ἀετὸν Ἡρακλέα· τὸν δὲ Προμηθέα λῦσαι τῶν δεσμῶν.

²⁷¹ Muntz (2011) 591-2; he also suggests use of Agroitas by Diodorus at 4.26.2-3 and 4.27.1 due to their similarity to a passage of Agroitas cited by the scholiast to Apoll. Rhod. 4.1396. See also Burton (1972) 11-12.

²⁷² The scholion is the only citation given by *LSJ* for the meaning of ἦπαρ.

closer examination of the passage reveals in more detail the importance of this episode, and the significance of Herakles' intervention on the Nile.

One factor that may have facilitated the transition of the myth to Egypt is a conceptual connection in Greek thought between Egypt and Scythia. The Prometheus myth is typically located at the edges of the known world, usually the Caucasus region or Scythia (as in Herodorus above).²⁷³ The beginning of the *Prometheus Bound* signals the marginality of the myth's setting:

Χθονὸς μὲν ἐς τηλουρὸν ἤκομεν πέδον,

Σκύθην ἐς οἶμον, ἄβατον εἰς ἐρημίαν. (Aesch. *PV* 1-2)

To earth's remotest limit we come, to the Scythian land, an untrodden solitude.

Both the Caucasus region and Scythia lie on the edges of the earth. This may provide one clue to the transition of the myth as it appears in Diodorus to Egypt, given that Egypt also lay on the *eschata* of the world. Moreover, there is a long-lived association in Greek thought between Scythia and Egypt, and especially between the Nile and the rivers of Scythia, notably the Danube (Ister). The parallelisms Herodotus draws between Egypt and Scythia are well-known; the Nile and the Ister are the subject of a sustained set of comparisons (see Hdt. 2.26, 2.33-34, 4.50).²⁷⁴ Aristotle cites the Ister and the Nile as the greatest rivers that flow into the Mediterranean Sea (*Mete.* 356a).

Herakles is associated both with Egypt and with taming difficult water. First, in other texts, Herakles is linked to mythic endeavours in Egypt, most notably his killing of the murderous king Busiris, who

²⁷³ For the setting in Scythia, see Aesch. *PV* 1. The scholia to the *PV* however claim that this setting differs from the usual location of the myth in the Caucasus mountains, as in Pausanias (5.11.6), Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 2.1247, and Servius' commentary on Verg. *Ecl.* 6.42. The *Prometheus Unbound* seems to have had Prometheus bound to the Caucasus (Aesch. fr. 193 Radt = Cic. *Tusc.* 2.23-25; see Hansen (2007) 84. Apollodorus compromises and calls Mt Caucasus a Scythian mountain. On the Prometheus myth as a transformation of 'the ancient Caucasian narrative of the Fettered giant in its southern form', see Hansen (2007), building on the arguments of A. Olrik (originally in Danish, translated into German (1922), summarised by West (1966) 314-5).

²⁷⁴ On the Herodotean comparisons between Scythia and Egypt, see Lloyd (1966) 342; Gould (1989) 89-90; Hartog (1979) 1137-54 and (1988) 14-19; Redfield (1985), based on Hartog's 1979 article; Thomas (2000) 66-7, 77-8; Vasunia (2001) 96-7.

notoriously sacrificed visitors.²⁷⁵ Like Herakles' battles with animal hybrids and monstrous people, this task demonstrates the hero's 'mission to civilise'.²⁷⁶ Second, heroes in Greek myth frequently contend with rivers or other bodies of water.²⁷⁷ The Iliadic narrative of Achilles' contest with the Scamander (*Il.*21.211-382) is particularly notable; to this episode should be added Menelaus fighting with Proteus, and Peleus' contest with Thetis. Regarding these episodes, Bruno Currie observes that 'to fight with an aquatic deity is a typical *Heldentat*: the person of whom such a tale is told (who invariably prevails) takes heroic credentials from the encounter'.²⁷⁸ Of all Greco-Roman heroes, Herakles' control of bodies of water, especially of rivers, is the most significant.²⁷⁹ At 4.35.3, Diodorus rationalises Herakles' combat with the Achelous river in a way parallel to the episode narrated at 1.19: 'But Herakles, desiring to do a service to the Calydonians, diverted the river Achelous, and making another bed for it he recovered a large amount of fruitful land which was irrigated by this stream. Consequently certain poets, as we are told, have made this deed into myth. Herakles' connections with the Achelous are well-established in myth; his violent combat with the river is often attested in literary and artistic sources.²⁸⁰ He is also credited with the diversion of the river Alpheus (and, in some sources, the Peneus too) to clean the Augean

²⁷⁵ See Hdt. 2.45, who rejects the story, with Lloyd (1976) *ad loc.*; Isoc. *Bus.*, with Livingstone (2001) 78-85 (on the literary history of the Busiris story) and Vasunia (2001) 183-215, figg. 3-6. Accounts of the myth are summarised by Gantz (1993) 418. In the version related by Apollodorus (2.5.11), Herakles arrives after nine years of drought.

²⁷⁶ Graf *NP s.v.* 'Herakles'. On Herakles as 'civilising hero', see Burkert (1979) 78-98, Malkin (2011) ch. 4, esp. 120.

²⁷⁷ See *Motif-Index A.* 533 'culture hero regulates rivers'.

²⁷⁸ Currie (2002) 36.

²⁷⁹ Bayet (1926) 163 gave to Herakles the epithet 'dieu des eaux', cf. Pfiffig (1980) 21 'Herr der Quelle', echoed recently by Davies (2006) 117-8, 'Hercules... the master of waters', discussing Propertius IV.9.

²⁸⁰ See especially Soph. *Trach.* 9-17, with Clarke (2004), cf. Pind. *Dith.* 2 = fr. 249a Maehler, Archil. 286-7 *IEG*, both examples cited by Currie (2002) 35; Strabo 10.458; Apollod. 2.75; Ovid *Met.* 9.1-97; cf. Clarke (1981) 299. Gantz (1993) 432-3 summarizes the myth in its various versions. See also Burkert (1979) 96, who interprets the purpose of Herakles' combat with the Achelous as a parallel for his mastery of animals: 'it is food that is sought from the lord of waters'.

stables,²⁸¹ and with making the river Strymon unnavigable by filling it with rocks (Apollod. 2.5.10).²⁸² Diodorus records other hydrological achievements of Herakles in Book 4, notably his draining of the marshes around Tempe, damming the stream near the Minyan city of Orchomenus (4.18.6-7), and the narrowing (or opening) of the straits of Gibraltar (4.18.4-5).

Herakles' mastery of the river at 1.19 combines these mythological threads of the hero's civilising endeavours in Egypt and his power over water. So although no other version of the Prometheus myth is located in Egypt, so intimately is Herakles connected with the control of water, especially of rivers, that his mastery over the Nile's destructive power is appropriate. For Diodorus, as we have seen, the Nile is the greatest of all rivers. At the beginning of his monumental history, Diodorus presents the mastery of the world's greatest river by the world's greatest civilising hero.

Culture-heroes are then integral to Diodorus' account of early times; part of the civilising mission is articulated through their manipulation and control of water, especially the Nile, by acts that avert crisis and provide benefactions for the inhabitants of Egypt. In a significant move, Diodorus presents his own activity as a historian as parallel to that of these significant culture-heroes. This is demonstrated by the similarities of vocabulary and phrasing used to describe the activities of both culture-heroes and historians. The proem to the *Bibliothēke* describes the actions of Herakles, who has won 'in exchange for mortal labours an immortal fame' (θνητῶν πόνων... Τὴν ἀθάνατον εὐφημίαν, Diod. Sic.1.2.4); the text highlights his 'great and continuous labours and dangers' (μεγάλους καὶ συνεχεῖς πόνους καὶ κινδύνους), 'in order that he might confer benefits upon the race of men and thereby gain immortality' (ἵνα τὸ γένος τῶν ἀνθρώπων εὐεργετήσας τῶχῃ τῆς ἀθανασίας). The language of Herakles' achievements brings to attention the extent and magnitude of his labour, in order to provide benefactions for humanity. The importance of size and benefactions as historiographical principles in Diodorus has already been seen. The act of writing

²⁸¹ See Diod. Sic. 4.12.2, the first source to involve diverting the river Alpheus, cf. Apollod. 2.5.5. Gantz (1993) 392-93 mentions the possibility the motif existed from the fifth century, i.e. on one of the metopes at Olympia, which may depict Herakles opening a water-channel.

²⁸² See also West (1966) *ad* Hes. *Theog.* 339.

his universal history is also framed in terms of a lengthy and laborious enterprise (Diod. Sic.1.4.1). Like Herakles himself, the archetype and zenith of heroic achievement, the historian's task comprises 'much labour' (πολλοῦ δὲ πόνου), 'with much hardship and danger' (μετὰ δὲ πολλῆς κακοπαθείας καὶ κινδύνων). Like Herakles, the historian has travelled over both Asia and Europe, in order to complete his labour.

Further verbal parallels connect the actions of culture-heroes and kings with the activity of the universal historian. Sesostris digs canals, in order to allow the people to harvest 'quickly and easily' (συντόμως καὶ ῥαδίως, 1.57.2). The adverb συντόμως is regularly used by the historian and is a marker of textual control.²⁸³ Throughout the first books of the *Bibliothēke*, Diodorus displays and re-iterates his oversight of the huge narrative, a supervision which is marked by the frequent use of such phrases as συντόμως, ἐν κεφαλαίοις, τὰ κατὰ μέρος and ἀκριβῶς.²⁸⁴ These phrases draw attention to the constant activity of the historian in shaping, channelling and directing his narrative, as heroes like Herakles and Osiris channel and (re-)direct the river.

Conclusions

The Nile, culture-heroes and the historian are closely bound up with one another in the first book of the *Bibliothēke*. All three are said to be benefactors of humanity. Moreover, the size and scale of the Nile is akin to that of Diodorus' historical project, and both require the intervention of exceptional people prepared for lengthy and difficult labour. Diodorus' discussion of the Nile in Book 1 is closely allied with the new project of universal history. The continuation of spontaneous generation from the mud of the Nile is a sign of the exotic strangeness and antiquity of Egypt, and also functions as a beginning *ex ni(hi)lo* for this new kind of universal history that eschews previous temporal limits. The Nile gives access to a time that is remote and inaccessible, allowing the phenomena of the past to be observed and interpreted by the historian. The Nile further

²⁸³ See for instance 1.44.5 and 2.2.2. In both cases the word articulated a point at which the narrator draws attention to his shaping and control of the narrative.

²⁸⁴ Sulimani (2011) 180.

parallels the process of history by its size, the complexity of its course, and its usefulness to humanity. The mystery of the world's greatest river is, as will be seen in chapter 3, a platform for Greek historiographical discourse and scientific speculation. In this chapter, it has been seen that the Nile functions as an analogue for history and for historical narrative. The focus on the Nile has underlined the importance of reading Diodorus' text as an integrated whole rather than isolated units, and revealed Diodorus' self-positioning as a historian of the greatest subject-matter the world can offer.

In Diodorus' universal history, Egypt and the Nile provide a perfect beginning. The use of Egypt as a framing device is matched in several ways by another massive Greek text of the first century BCE, Strabo's universal geography, the *Geographia*, which is drawn to a close with a description of Egypt, in which the Nile is prominent. The following chapter examines Strabo's description of the Nile and the ways in which the river is incorporated into Strabo's vision of the *oikoumene* under Roman control.

Chapter 2

Strabo surveying Egypt: locating the Nile in the *oikoumene*

A significant proportion of the seventeenth and final book of Strabo's massive geographical work, the *Geographia*, is devoted to the description of Egypt (17.1.1 C785-17.1.54 C821). Strabo's account of Egypt envisages the Nile and surrounding regions in Egypt as a province of Rome, emphasising the incorporation of the former pharaonic and Ptolemaic kingdom into the hegemony of Roman dominion. This chapter examines Strabo's descriptions of the Nile, and the role of the Nile in describing both Egypt and other places. Strabo's text articulates a vision of the Nile that reflects its context as a work produced by a Greek scholar with generally positive attitudes to Rome and friends among the political élite (notably Aelius Gallus), shortly after the Roman annexation of Egypt. It is particularly significant in the history of Greek discourse about the Nile, since it both borrows from and participates in that tradition, and simultaneously transforms elements of it. These transformations are illuminating expressions of what the Nile meant and represented for Strabo. In particular, Strabo's description of the Nile testifies to the enduring importance of Herodotus' *Histories 2* as a paradigm for examining and investigating the river.²⁸⁵ Strabo's account re-deploys and transforms narrative techniques familiar either from Herodotus or from other parts of the *Geographia*, in ways that articulate the new and profound differences of the Strabonian river from that described by Herodotus, and the integration of the river into the Roman *oikoumene* (inhabited world).²⁸⁶

Strabo's text originates in the period shortly after the Roman annexation of Egypt in 30BC, when Egypt became a province of Rome. Attitudes to Egypt and the Nile in Roman texts of the Augustan

²⁸⁵ This, despite Strabo's less than approving attitude towards his predecessor. See Dueck (2000) 46, and further below.

²⁸⁶ The concept of the *oikoumene* is integral to Strabo's geographical project. It is defined at 1.4.6 C65: καλοῦμεν γὰρ οἰκουμένην ἣν οἰκοῦμεν καὶ γνωρίζομεν, 'we call the *oikoumene* that which we inhabit and know'. This *oikoumene* is frequently identified with the limits of the Roman empire. For Strabo's concept of the *oikoumene*, especially its connection to the Roman empire, see Dueck (2000) 44-45 108-122. On the idea of the *oikoumene*, see Gisinger *RE* 17: 2123-2174; Romm (1992).

period have been well-analysed.²⁸⁷ Studies draw attention to the typically negative representations of Egypt in this period; as Stephen Nimis writes, ‘literary sources from the Augustan period on tend to repeat a number of negative clichés and topoi: the treacherous murder of Pompey by Ptolemy XIII, the pernicious attack on the state by the dangerous and seductive Cleopatra, the bizarre worship of animals, Egyptians as cowardly Orientals and barbarians, etc.’²⁸⁸ The Nile, especially in the Roman poets, is seen as complicit in the ‘crimes’ of the land, and particularly of Mark Antony and Cleopatra; in Propertius for instance, the captive Nile forms part of Octavian’s triumph, after its ‘threats’ (*minas*) have failed.²⁸⁹ Within this context, Strabo’s account of Egypt has been interpreted as ‘less prejudiced’, a ‘serious and matter-of-fact’ articulation of the writer’s knowledge of Egyptian geography.²⁹⁰ Gruen similarly focuses on the ‘sober’, ‘staid and serious’ tone of Strabo’s assessment, and suggests that ‘on the rare occasions when Strabo delivers any evaluation of Egyptians, it is decidedly positive’.²⁹¹ Manolaraki notes twin facets in Strabo’s text, which she sees as both ‘fully aligned with Augustan ideology’, and articulating an ‘admiration for [Egypt’s] great past and interest in certain aspects of its cult and... the geography of the Nile’.²⁹² This chapter seeks to go beyond these generalised comments to consider in detail Strabo’s depiction of the Nile and its implications, situated within the contexts of the *Geographia*, of the traditions of Greek discourse about the river, and of the early Roman empire.

1. The Place of Egypt in the *Geographia*

²⁸⁷ See Postl (1970); Reinhold (1980); Smelik and Hemelrijk (1984); Versluys (2002) 4-15; Maehler (2003); Nimis (2004); Rosati (2009); Manolaraki (2013) 29-42.

²⁸⁸ Nimis (2004) 41. Similar arguments are made by Smelik and Hemelrijk (1984) 1928-1929, and Manolaraki (2013) 29-31. This view is greatly enriched and nuanced by Versluys (2002), esp. 4-15, who includes visual and archaeological material, and comments on the varied political, economic, religious and cultural relations between Rome and Egypt.

²⁸⁹ Propertius 2.1.31-3, cf. 3.11.42. Manolaraki (2013) 31 discusses this passage in connection with Verg. *Aen.* 8.7121-13 and *G.* 3.28-9.

²⁹⁰ Smelik and Hemelrijk (1984) 1929.

²⁹¹ Gruen (2011) 100-101.

²⁹² Manolaraki (2013) 31-32.

The *Geographia* presents a geographical survey of the entire *oikoumene*.²⁹³ After two introductory books, the survey begins in Book 3 with Iberia in the northwestern Mediterranean, and circles around the Mediterranean rim east and south, with an account of Rome's rise to power at the end of Book 6, before ending in Book 17 with Egypt, Ethiopia and Libya.²⁹⁴ Dueck observes that Ethiopia and Libya occupy distinctly marginal positions in the *Geographia*, since they are at the borders of the *oikoumene* and at the limits of knowledge.²⁹⁵ Egypt therefore holds a prominent position in the *Geographia* as the last great, well-known region to be described, and one that is under Roman control. Prominent in Strabo's description of Iberia, which opens the geographical survey in Book 3, is the presence of Rome and its influence in the region;²⁹⁶ Strabo's Egypt too is ordered and governed by Rome. Roman imperial hegemony structures Strabo's representation of the *oikoumene*. Whereas Diodorus Siculus begins his universal history with Egypt, Strabo draws together his vision of universal geography with Egypt, which functions as a sign of Roman imperial power.

2. Autopsy and the geographer

Strabo is, overall, a reticent figure in his own geography; despite his claims to have travelled more widely than earlier geographers (*Geog.* 2.5.11C117), he tends to mention his personal experience of his travels only rarely, at least directly.²⁹⁷ Indirect evidence for Strabo's authorial persona and presence at particular sites can be garnered from his use of temporal phrase as 'in my time' (καθ' ἡμᾶς), as well as descriptions of places that indicate a particular sensory or emotional reaction.²⁹⁸ On the whole however, Strabo's extensive personal experience of travelling through the

²⁹³ For a description and discussion of the work's structure, see Dueck (2000) 165-80.

²⁹⁴ This structure follows the traditional order of *periploi* and the *periegesis* of Hecataeus.

²⁹⁵ See Strabo 17.3.23 C839, with Dueck (2000) 178-9.

²⁹⁶ See Dueck (2000) 170.

²⁹⁷ On Strabo's autopsy, see Waddy (1963), Clarke (1997), Dueck (2000) 16-30.

²⁹⁸ On 'oblique self-reference' in temporal phrases, see Clarke (1997) 102. Dueck (2000) 18-19 illustrates some points at which descriptions seem drawn from Strabo's own associations, especially where sensory reactions or unexpected details are observed.

Mediterranean world is erased from the text, to the extent that his work has been characterised as '(nonphenomenological) ethnographic historiography', in contrast to the reconstruction of the author's journey revealed in Pausanias' account of Greece.²⁹⁹

Egypt is the great exception to this characterisation of Strabo's presence in the text, since, as Dueck observes, 'we have ample evidence for [it] in the most famous sites of Egypt'.³⁰⁰ Strabo's Egyptian narrative is striking in part because of Strabo's degree of involvement as a traveller, tourist and eyewitness. Strabo travelled in Egypt as far as Philae (17.1.50 C818) in the company and entourage of Aelius Gallus, his friend and *praefectus* of Egypt.³⁰¹ It seems that Strabo subsequently spent several years living in Alexandria; his description of the city stands out among ancient texts as particularly detailed, and contains several explicit autopsy statements.³⁰² The geographer makes several interventions indicating his presence and autopsy into his Egyptian narrative, including measurements of the Nile when he sailed from Alexandria to the vertex of the Delta (17.1.24 C803), his observations of the priests' houses in Heliopolis (17.1.29 C806), and of the sphinxes (17.1.32 C807), a remarkable sight near the pyramids (17.1.34 C808), the labyrinth and the sacred crocodile Suchus (17.1.37 C811), the statues of Memnon and kings' tombs (17.1.46 C816), as well as his visits to Syene (2.5.12 C118, 17.1.50 C818), and Philae (17.1.50 C818).³⁰³ The conjunction of Egypt and the clustering of Strabo's autopsy statements is not

²⁹⁹ Elsner (2001) 8.

³⁰⁰ Dueck (2000) 20.

³⁰¹ This journey is likely to have taken place in 29-26BC; see Dueck (2000) 20. On the chronology, see Jameson (1968) 78-9. Gallus is mentioned as Strabo's 'friend and companion' (φίλος καὶ ἑταῖρος) at 2.5.12, where he also states: 'I was with Gallus at the time he was prefect of Egypt, and accompanied him as far as Syene and the frontiers of Ethiopia'; this journey is mentioned several times in book 17: 17.1.53 C819, 17.1.46 C816, 17.1.29 C806.

³⁰² See Fraser (1972) 11-37 for a summary of Strabo's account of Alexandrian topography. Strabo saw the flooding of Pelusium (1.3.17 C58), the Roman security force at the harbour (2.3.5 C101), the plants of Egypt (3.5.10 C175), Lake Mareotis (17.1.4 C789), and states that he talked with the glass blowers about their craft (16.2.25 C758).

³⁰³ Most of these are listed by Dueck (2000) 20-21.

accidental, but rather marks Strabo's participation in a mode of engaging with and representing Egypt that had been exploited by Herodotus.

Statements of autopsy by Herodotus are particularly prevalent in Book 2; John Marincola observes that of forty-two claims to autopsy and inquiry expressed in the *Histories*, twenty-eight occur in Book 2.³⁰⁴ Egypt is full of wonders (θωμάσια, *Hist* 2.35) and possesses more monuments (ἔργα) than any other country; these wonders are there to be seen and admired. For Herodotus, Elephantine at the south of Egypt functions as the boundary of autopsy as well as a geographical border.³⁰⁵ Egypt is coterminous with Herodotean autopsy; everything outside of Egypt is excluded from his gaze, but everything that lies within these limits is theoretically open to being seen and investigated by the historian. Strabo's repetition of his own autopsy in Egypt displays his awareness of his literary predecessor, and allows him also to inhabit the Herodotean role of the eyewitness and inquirer. The shared emphasis on autopsy generates what Jaś Elsner has termed a 'shared subjectivity', a 'consensus of shared assumptions';³⁰⁶ Strabo does what Herodotus does and sees what he sees, thereby setting himself up as a successor and rival to the earlier writer.

Strabo's use of autopsy to establish superiority over predecessors is at issue in his discussion of the problematic previous measurements of the distance between Alexandria and the vertex of the Delta (17.1.24 C803-4); only by witnessing the act of measurement can Strabo demonstrate the inconsistency of units of measurement in Egypt, and thereby undermine the previous data given by Artemidorus. Autopsy then becomes a strategy for bolstering Strabo's own narratorial authority. Strabo sets the limit on his autopsy at Philae, stating that 'we went to Philae from Syene' (ἦλθομεν δ' εἰς Φιλὰς ἐκ Συήνης, 17.1.50 C818). The island of Philae, just south of the first cataract, was a site of considerable religious veneration, which had been developed particularly under the Ptolemies, and continued to attract the attention of Roman governors and

³⁰⁴ Marincola (1987) 122-3.

³⁰⁵ Hdt. 2.29.

³⁰⁶ Elsner (1994) 240, 253.

emperors.³⁰⁷ Herwig Maehler has suggested that the nearby temple of Elephantine may have lost some of its importance to Philae during the transition from the Ptolemaic to the Roman period.³⁰⁸ Strabo's description of Philae is significant not only as a reflection of Roman interest in the site, but also in comparison with Herodotus, since the limits set by Strabo on autopsy are not identical with those set by Herodotus. In a famous passage, Herodotus sets the extent of his autopsy at Elephantine (2.29), just *north* of the first cataract. Strabo's claims to have visited Philae, further south than Elephantine, outstrips Herodotus, functioning as a distinct 'capping' of his predecessor. This allows the narrator to describe things unseen by Herodotus, including the cataract itself, and their journey through the surrounding landscape. The text repeatedly draws attention to the marginality of this region. It is difficult, although not impossible to access; the cataract itself is a formidable natural barrier, 'ending in a precipice' (τελευτῶσα δ' εἰς κρημνόν, 17.1.49 C818). Strabo describes reaching Philae after a land-journey in a waggon (ἀπήνη, 17.1.50 C818), and a journey across the water to the island in an unfamiliar kind of boat (ἐπὶ πάκτωνος), which is said to resemble wicker-work. Philae itself is a liminal place between Egypt and Ethiopia, with a mixed population (κοινὴν κατοικίαν Αἰθιοπῶν τε καὶ Αἰγυπτίων, 17.1.49 C818).³⁰⁹ By visiting Philae, Strabo slips outside Egypt proper into the transitional space between Egypt and Nubia. Philae and the region beyond Elephantine lie on the limits of Egypt and on the limits of autopsy, but nevertheless, limits that exceed those set by Herodotus. This display of the limits of autopsy demonstrates that Strabo too can play the methodological game, and outperform Herodotus. Places along the Nile in Egypt therefore function as sites for the display of Greek literary identity.

³⁰⁷ Especially Ptolemy VIII Euergetes; for an art historical study of the Ptolemaic building programme, see Vassilika (1989); further bibliography is given by Beness and Hillard (2003) 204-5, n. 15. On the concept of 'pilgrimage' to Philae, see Rutherford (1998). The various motivations for travel to Philae in the Roman period are discussed by Beness and Hillard (2003). See also *LÄ* 4: 1022-7, with bibliography; Hoffmann, Minas-Nerpel and Pfeiffer (2009); Jackson (2002) 109-55 on the Upper Nile valley in the Roman period.

³⁰⁸ Maehler (1992) 213.

³⁰⁹ On Philae as a contested space, see Rutherford (1998), esp. 250-3.

3. The reader and the traveller

The text also brings the Nile before the eyes of the reader, recreating the river and its countryside. Book 17 opens with the assertions of Eratosthenes, which attempt to describe the length and shape of the Nile as from an orthographic projection; its shape is described as like the letter N written backwards (17.1.2 C785-6). Further 'orthographic' descriptions are provided for the shape of the Delta (17.1.4 C788) and Alexandria (17.1.8 C793). Geometry is a core component in the exercise of geography in Strabo's work,³¹⁰ and is listed as a key principle to which the geographer must make recourse before describing the *oikoumene*, especially its 'size, shape, nature and the proportion it bears the whole earth' (πόση τις καὶ ποία τὸ σχῆμα καὶ τὴν φύσιν οἷα ἐστὶ καὶ πῶς ἔχουσα πρὸς τὴν ὅλην γῆν, 2.5.4). Geometry and the use of geometrical figures aid the geographer in his business of accurately describing the *oikoumene*. Geometrical figures are frequently used to describe shape in the *Geographia*, and the writer notes, for instance, the difficulty of describing Italy with just one such figure (5.1.2).³¹¹

Strabo also locates the origins of geometry in Egypt, in a passage that stresses the influence of the Nile on the need for continuous measurement of the land:

ἔδέησε δὲ τῆς ἐπ' ἀκριβὲς καὶ κατὰ λεπτόν διαιρέσεως διὰ τὰς συνεχεῖς τῶν ὄρων συγχύσεις ἃς ὁ Νεῖλος ἀπεργάζεται κατὰ τὰς αὐξήσεις, ἀφαιρῶν καὶ προστιθεὶς καὶ ἐναλλάττων τὰ σχήματα καὶ τὰλλα σημεῖα ἀποκρύπτων οἷς διακρίνεται τό τε ἀλλότριον καὶ τὸ ἴδιον· ἀνάγκη δὴ ἀναμετρεῖσθαι πάλιν καὶ πάλιν. (17.1.3 C787)

There was need of this accurate and minute division on account of the continuous confusion of the boundaries caused by the Nile at the time of its increase, since the Nile takes away and adds soil, and changes the shapes, and in general hides from view the signs by which one's own land is distinguished from that of another. Of necessity, therefore, the lands must be re-measured again and again.³¹²

³¹⁰ Dueck (2000) 54-5.

³¹¹ On the use of geometrical and other figures to convey ideas of geographical shape in Strabo, see Dueck (2000) 247-8 and (2005).

³¹² cf. Herodotus 2.109, and Lloyd (1988) *ad loc.* Lyons (1926) attempts to distinguish two kinds of land-measurement.

The flooding of the Nile changes and obscures human demarcations of the agricultural landscape, and thereby necessitates continuous re-measurement. The activity of the Nile renders the extent of land itself unstable and variable, and threatens to undermine not only agriculture but the possibility of social existence in Egypt.³¹³ The text goes on to assert that the measurements necessitated by the inundation were the origin of geometry (ἡ γεωμετρία). This account of the invention of geometry is comparable with that given by Herodotus, which emphasises the measurement of the land, and the clarification of property boundaries for tax assessments under Sesostris (Hdt. 2.109).³¹⁴ The attribution of the invention of sciences and art to the Egyptians is a common motif in Greek texts; this claim about geometry locates the origins of an important science in the disruption of the soil of Egypt caused by the inundation. As signs (σημεῖα) of ownership are erased by the river, mensuration imposes sense and order on Egypt, a land in which all social (and political) order thereby relies upon such measurement.³¹⁵

The text also provides a plethora of data concerning measurement and names, that serve to bring the Nile before the eyes of the reader. Strabo begins with the ‘declarations of Eratosthenes’ (Ἐρατοσθένους ἀποφάσεις, 17.1.1 C785), which consists of seven measures of spatial distance, one of temporal distance, one figure to express shape, and around twenty proper names, including the names of tributaries of the Nile around Meroe, and those of such tribes as the Megabari, Blemmyes and Nubae (17.1.2). In particular, Strabo records Eratosthenes’ declarations concerning the position and length of the river. Moreover, Strabo rejects this data, not on the grounds of inaccuracy, but because it is *insufficient*:

Ἐρατοσθένης μὲν οὖν οὕτως. δεῖ δὲ ἐπὶ πλέον εἰπεῖν καὶ πρῶτον τὰ περὶ τὴν Αἴγυπτον, ὅπως ἀπὸ τῶν γνωριμωτέρων ἐπὶ τὰ ἐξῆς προΐωμεν. (17.1.3 C786)

³¹³ Bonneau (1971) 82-4, 85-6 discusses the measurement of land in Egypt and its aims.

³¹⁴ See Lloyd (1988) *ad loc.* Cf. Diod. Sic. 1.69, Clem. Al. *Strom.* 1.74.2. Arist. *Metaph.* A 981b 21 attributes the invention of geometry to the leisure enjoyed by the Egyptian priestly class. See also Lyons (1926), Peet (1923) 31-2, Sarton (1953) 116, Aujac (1966) 107-12, Yoyotte (1997) 68-9.

³¹⁵ cf. Cosgrove (1996) 16-7: ‘Along the Nile... a cultural landscape of bounded and differentiated spaces was annually recovered from the confused chaos of earth and water left by flood, and the earth once more made productive’.

This, then, is what Eratosthenes says. But it is necessary to speak at greater length, and first of the parts about Egypt, in order to proceed from those that are better known to those that come in order thereafter.

Thereafter, Strabo gives dozens of measurements of the river, and of the location and size of settlements in Egypt: for instance, that the perimeter of the Delta is 3000 stadia (17.1.4 C788), that above the Delta, the river is 4000 stadia in length and 300 stadia in breadth (17.1.4 C789), that the length of the coast between Pelusium and Canopus is 1300 stadia, and from Pelusium to Pharos 150 stadia (17.1.6 C 791).³¹⁶

These ‘orthographic projections’ and measures of distance give a bird’s-eye view of the Nile, rendering the vast space of the Nile conceptually visible and therefore comprehensible to the Greek reader. They are totalising, authoritative and reduce the Nile and Egypt to images that can be easily seen by the Greek reader, who has already ‘seen’ the rest of the *oikoumene* in the earlier books of the *Geographia*.³¹⁷ This top-down perspective is combined with Strabo’s reconstruction of the Nile as a route along which the reader vicariously travels; alongside echoes of the writer’s own experience in Egypt, the narrative is constructed so as to set the reader in the position of traveller.³¹⁸ The *periplous* technique is widely used in the *Geographia*; wherever possible, Strabo’s narrative follows the line of coasts and rivers. Rivers are particularly prominent features of Books 3 (Iberia), 15 (India), 16 (Mesopotamia), and 17 (Egypt). The *periplous*-format informs the account of Egypt; between 17.1.14 and 17.1.51, the reader encounters Egypt as a series of sites along the Nile. As In Herodotus, Egyptian space is organised around the Nile, although the creation of a fictive journey is more fully realised in the *Geographia*. So geographical information is frequently given to the reader as though experienced by someone sailing upstream and seeing settlements and other sights in turn. For instance, the land south of Heliopolis is described as follows:

³¹⁶ On Strabo’s measurements and data concerning Egypt, see Ball (1942) 53-62.

³¹⁷ Vasunia (2001) 100-2 suggests that Herodotus’ vision of Egypt is similarly ‘panoptic’ and ‘authoritative’; the narrative sweeps over vast distances, offering a perspective that cannot be matched by any individual.

³¹⁸ Elsner (2001) 4-5 argues that this is true of the structure of Pausanias’ text.

ἔντεϋθεν δὴ ὁ Νεῖλός ἐστιν ὁ ὑπὲρ τοῦ Δέλτα: τούτου δὴ τὰ μὲν δεξιὰ καλοῦσι Λιβύην ἀναπλέοντι, ὡσπερ καὶ τὰ περὶ τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρειαν καὶ τὴν Μαρεῶτιν, τὰ δ' ἐν ἀριστερῇ Ἀραβίαν. ἡ μὲν οὖν Ἡλίου πόλις ἐν τῇ Ἀραβίᾳ ἐστίν, ἐν δὲ τῇ Λιβύῃ Κερκέσουρα πόλις κατὰ τὰς Εὐδόξου κειμένη σκοπᾶς: δείκνυται γὰρ σκοπὴ τις πρὸ τῆς Ἡλίου πόλεως, καθάπερ καὶ πρὸ τῆς Κνίδου, πρὸς ἣν ἐσημειοῦτο ἐκεῖνος τῶν οὐρανίων τινὰς κινήσεις: ὁ δὲ νομὸς Λητοπολίτης οὔτος. ἀναπλεύσαντι δ' ἐστὶ Βαβυλών... νυνὶ δ' ἐστὶ στρατόπεδον ἐνὸς τῶν τριῶν ταγμάτων τῶν φρουρούντων τὴν Αἴγυπτον: ῥάχης δ' ἐστὶν ἀπὸ τοῦ στρατοπέδου καὶ μέχρι Νείλου καθήκουσα, δι' ἧς ἀπὸ τοῦ ποταμοῦ τροχοὶ καὶ κοχλῖαι τὸ ὕδωρ ἀνάγουσιν, ἀνδρῶν ἑκατὸν πεντήκοντα ἐργαζομένων δεσμίων: ἀφορῶνται δ' ἐνθένδε τηλαυγῶς αἱ πυραμίδες ἐν τῇ περαίᾳ ἐν Μέμφει καὶ εἰσὶ πλησίον. (17.1.30 C 806-7)

From Heliopolis, then, one comes to the Nile above the Delta. Of this, the parts of the right, as one sails up, are called Libya, as also the parts round Alexandria and Lake Mareotis, whereas those on the left are called Arabia. Now Heliopolis is in Arabia, but the city Cercesura, which lies near the observatories of Eudoxus, is in Libya; for a kind of watch-tower is to be seen in front of Heliopolis, as also in front of Cnidus, with reference to which Eudoxus would note down his observations of certain movements of the heavenly bodies. Here the Nome is the Letopolite. And, having sailed further up the river, one comes to Babylon, a stronghold... But now it is an encampment even as far as the Nile, on which the water is conducted up from the river by wheels and screws; and one hundred and fifty prisoners are employed in the work; and from here one can clearly see the pyramids on the far side of the river at Memphis, and they are near to it.

The text creates the illusion of an ongoing journey up the river. This journey is timeless, as indicated by the use of the present indicatives (ἐστίν, δείκνυται, ἀφορῶνται, εἰσὶ) and present participles (ἀναπλέοντι). This journey is not the record of any specific event taken by a specific individual (note the use of the passive voice in δείκνυται, ἀφορῶνται); here, Strabo's own autopsy recedes as a vicarious journey is created for the reader.

Space in the narrative is oriented around this hypothetical viewer, so that land west of the river is referred to as τὰ δεξιὰ ('the parts on the right'), land on the east as τὰ... ἐν ἀριστερῇ ('those on

the left').³¹⁹ Places are listed in order as they are reached on the river-journey, in the form of a list or catalogue:

ἐπὶ δὲ τῷ ποταμῷ Ἑρμοῦ πόλις ἐστίν· εἶτα Γυναικῶν πόλις καὶ νομὸς Γυναικοπολίτης· ἐφεξῆς δὲ Μώμεμφις καὶ Μωμεμφίτης νομός· (17.1.22 C803)

And, on the river, is a Hermopolis, and then Gynaecopolis and the Gynaecopolite nome, and, next in order, Momemphis and the Momemphite Nome.

The adverbs εἶτα and ἐφεξῆς organise space as a sequence based on the changing location of the hypothetical viewer, a sequence that should be understood as both temporal (particularly with the use of εἶτα) and spatial (ἐφεξῆς is more commonly used of space than of time).³²⁰ Egyptian space is organised along the course of the Nile, relative to the hypothetical traveller sailing upstream. Strabo's Egyptian narrative therefore combines strong assertions of Strabo's own journey and autopsy with the involvement of a reader-traveller, who uses the Nile as a route, from which he experiences the unfolding sights of Egypt. In this way, the Egyptian part of the *Geographia* approaches what Elsner has described as a phenomenological structure in Pausanias' *Periegesis*, and is rather distinctive from Strabo's more common nonphenomenological style.³²¹

The reader-traveller is one who experiences Egypt as a non-native visitor, that is, as the reader of the *Geographia*, who has encountered the rest of the *oikoumene* through the organising lens of Strabo's text. In the *Geographia*, all the space of the *oikoumene* becomes accessible to the reader-traveller. This reader-traveller has already approached Egypt through the gateway of Strabo's description of the journey west (i.e. from the previous book describing Mesopotamia) to Alexandria, his description of the city itself and the journey south-east from Alexandria (17.1.6ff.). The narrator-guide picks out items to be seen by the reader-traveller along the course of his journey; in the case of the passage under discussion, the narrative directs attention to a watch-tower (σκοπή) in front of (πρό) Heliopolis, as well as to the pyramids. These items are accentuated

³¹⁹ On direction and 'egocentric' vs. 'absolute' space in language, see e.g. Bloom (1999) 127-34, Slack and van der Zee (2003) 1-17, Levinson (2003).

³²⁰ See *LSJ* under ἐφεξῆς.

³²¹ Elsner (1994) 4-5.

by the language of sight (δείκνυται; ἀφορῶνται δ' ἐνθένδε τηλαυγῶς); in the case of the pyramids, the narrative indicates *how well* the buildings can be seen (τηλαυγῶς). Egypt, then, is reproduced for the reader as a series of sights along the route of the river.

Strabo's account of seeing Egypt and recreating those sights as a journey along the river is closely entangled with the political realities of Egypt. Strabo's reports of autopsy derive from his visit to Egypt in company with his friend Aelius Gallus, *praefectus* of Egypt in 25-4BCE. Autopsy is not apolitical; as Colin Adams observes in a study of cultural tourism in Graeco-Roman Egypt, travel is the partner of geographical knowledge, which in turn is the partner of empire.³²² The text reveals that Strabo and Gallus encounter Egypt as a place which is exhibited to them. At Heliopolis, Strabo's group is shown certain sights:

ἐκεῖ δ' οὖν ἐδείκνυντο οἱ τε τῶν ἱερέων οἴκοι καὶ Πλάτωνος καὶ Εὐδόξου διατριβαί.
(17.1.29 C806)

There the houses of the priests and schools of Plato and Eudoxus were pointed out.

The houses are said to have belonged to priests who studied philosophy and astronomy, and to have taught Plato and Eudoxus some wisdom, despite concealing most of their knowledge. Heliopolis is presented to Strabo and his Roman party as a site of ancient wisdom, that is an attraction because of its connections to Hellenic culture; here, the foreign is of interest because it is an originary-point of Greek culture.³²³

At other points, Egypt and the Nile are displayed as spectacles for the benefit of the foreign visitors. At Arsinoe, foreigners go to see (ἐπὶ τὴν θέαν) the sacred crocodile (17.1.38 C811). The feeding of this crocodile is described as a performance directed by the priests for the foreigners

³²² Adams (2007) 164. Gregory (1999) examines similar processes at work in nineteenth-century tourism in Egypt.

³²³ See also Adams (2007) 164-6.

(ξένοι), who manoeuvre the animal into position at the arrival of each subsequent foreigner.³²⁴ Strabo's party witness this performance (εὔρομεν δὲ ἐπὶ τῷ χεῖλει κείμενον τὸ θηρίον, 'we found the animal lying on the edge of the lake', 17.1.38 C811), and listen to an explanation of the 'mysteries':

ὁ γοῦν ἡμέτερος ξένος, ἀνὴρ τῶν ἐντίμων, αὐτόθι μυσταγωγῶν ἡμᾶς, συνῆλθεν ἐπὶ τῇ λίμνῃ ...

At any rate, our host, one of the officials, who was introducing us into the mysteries there, went with us to the lake...

This explanation forms the introduction to the display of the crocodile's feeding, and is part of the performance enacted by the priests for the foreigners. The sacred crocodile in the Arsinoite nome was a big draw for foreign visitors and dignitaries; papyri attest to the preparations made to receive important visitors, including guests of the king from Argos (254 BCE) and the Roman senator Lucius Memmius (112 BCE), who came to 'see the sights' (ἐπὶ θεωρίαν), including the crocodile.³²⁵ Gallus and Strabo see an Egypt staged for them and take part as the foreign spectators.

At the south of Egypt, the river itself is brought into play as a character in a staged spectacle for the prefects:

Μικρὸν δ' ὑπὲρ τῆς Ἐλεφαντίνης ἐστὶν ὁ μικρὸς καταράκτης, ἐφ' ᾧ καὶ θέαν τινὰ οἱ σκαφῖται τοῖς ἡγεμόσιν ἐπιδείκνυνται· (17.1.49 C817)

A little over Elephantine is the little cataract, on which the boatmen exhibit a kind of spectacle for the prefects.

Strabo does not say explicitly that he witnessed this event, or that it was performed for his group; a performance seems likely, given the presence of the prefect Aelius Gallus. The cataract is the setting for the demonstration of skill by the boatmen, who navigate their boats safely over the

³²⁴ 'But when another foreigner arrived, likewise carrying an offering of first-fruits, the priests took it, went around the lake at a run, took hold of the animal, and in the same manner fed it what had been brought' (ἐπελθόντος δὲ καὶ ἄλλου τῶν ξένων κομίζοντος ὁμοίως ἀπαρχήν, λαβόντες περιήλθον δρόμῳ καὶ καταλαβόντες προσήνεγκαν ὁμοίως τὰ προσενεχθέντα, 17.1.38 C812).

³²⁵ *P. Tebt. I 33 = Sel. Pap. II 416. Cf. P. Lond. VII 1873* from the Zenon Archive.

rough water. Strabo, Gallus and the company are not engaged in a passive 'viewing' of the country; rather, their presence engenders performance and spectacle by locals for the 'foreigners'. The Egypt, and the Nile, seen by Strabo and articulated in the *Geographia*, are places staged for consumption by the political élite.

The Nile in Strabo is encountered therefore as a means for penetrating the interior of Egypt from the coast, and as the platform from which to view the cities, sights and historic monuments of the country. The gaze of the Greek writer organises and represents Egypt as a series of sites along the river that are encountered by the reader-traveller between Alexandria and Philae. Strabo's own autopsy marks him out as a writer who takes on the role of the Herodotean inquirer in Egypt, and even outdoes Herodotus at his own game. Vision and spectating are closely correlated with political control; not only is the prefect Aelius Gallus governor of all that he surveys on his Nile expedition, but that which is surveyed is carefully constructed precisely *to be beheld* by the governor, and by the geographer who accompanies him and incorporates those experiences and performances into his survey of the entire *oikoumene*.

It has already been seen that the power of Rome is integral to Strabo's account of Egypt. I turn now to consider Strabo's representation of the river itself in more detail. Predominantly, the Nile in Strabo is a river that can be - and is - controlled, understood and harnessed for the benefit of the Roman people. The Egyptian river, remarkable though it is, is seen, observed, measured, and well-regulated. The text presents the reader with a river that is subject to being known, tamed by technology, and made productive in agriculture. The peculiar nature of the Nile remains the object of intense interest, speculation and comment, yet the focus of the *Geographia* is the ways in which this remarkable river has been brought within human control and made reliably productive. Moreover, the text accentuates the role of Roman political control in Egypt; for Strabo, it is the Romans who have brought the potential of the river to full fruition.

4. Qualities of the river

In the *Geographia*, the Nile is the most exceptional phenomenon of Egypt, frequently attracting superlatives. It is described as:

τῶν κατ' Αἴγυπτον τὸ γνωριμώτατον καὶ παραδοξότατον καὶ μάλιστα πάντων μνήμης ἄξιον καὶ ἱστορίας (1.2.22 C29).

Among the most remarkable, the most wonderful and the most worthy of remembering and recording of all things in Egypt.

The rising of the river and its alluvial deposits are marvellous peculiarities, unusual and noteworthy (παραδοξίαν, μήτε καινότερα τούτων... μήτ' ἐπιφανέστερα, 1.2.29 C36). The text signals its participation in the tradition of Greek intellectual discourse about the Nile with the words μνήμης ἄξιον καὶ ἱστορίας, which recall the Herodotean inheritance in which the Nile functions as a paradigm of ἱστορίη.³²⁶ The expression μνήμης ἄξιον echoes the articulation of Herodotus' justification for the work in the proem to the *Histories*, which emphasises the preservation of memory (*Hist.* 1.*praeŋ*). Yet the *Geographia* also imposes limits on discourse about the unusual qualities of the Nile. Book 17 avoids the marvellous tales prevalent in the accounts of Herodotus and Diodorus Siculus, explicitly rejecting the embellishment of previous writers. Regarding the sources of the Nile:

Πολλὰ δ' Ἡρόδοτός τε καὶ ἄλλοι φλυαροῦσιν, ὥσπερ μέλος ἢ ρυθμὸν ἢ ἡδυσμὰ τι τῷ λόγῳ τὴν τερατείαν προσφέροντες· οἷον καὶ τὸ φάσκειν περὶ τὰς νήσους τὰς πρὸς τῇ Συήνῃ καὶ τῇ Ἐλεφαντίνῃ (πλείους δ' εἰσι) τὰς πηγὰς τοῦ Νείλου εἶναι, καὶ βάθος ἄβυσσον ἔχειν τὸν πόρον κατὰ τοῦτον τὸν τόπον. (17.1.52 C819)³²⁷

Both Herodotus and others talk much nonsense, adding to their account marvellous tales, to give it, as it were, a kind of tune or rhythm or relish; as for example, the assertion that the sources of the Nile are in the neighbourhood of the islands near Syene and Elephantine (of which there are several), and that at this place its channel has a bottomless depth.

The text dismisses the earlier *logoi* of Herodotus and others as nonsense, and marks out what is appropriate discourse. The river is 'most wonderful' (παραδοξότατος, 1.2.22 C29) and ἴδιος, but 'marvellous tales' (τερατεία) are rejected. The distinction between what is παράδοξος, ἴδιος and

³²⁶ For the idea of the Nile as a 'worthy *historia*' see French (1994) 110.

³²⁷ Cf. Hdt. 2.28.

τέρας is a significant one, as Schepens and Delcroix have distinguished in their study of paradoxographical writers in antiquity.³²⁸ In their analysis, the use of such words as ἴδιος and ξένος act as textual reminders of the focus of the material, whereas τέρας and its derivative τερατώδης may be ‘quite appropriately used to criticize some information for being sensational rather than factual’.³²⁹ These scholars note that even paradoxographical works regularly exclude the category of τέρας, as Strabo does here. The text likewise criticises the enriched language used by Herodotus and other writers in their accounts of the Nile, to which are added ‘a kind of tune or rhythm or relish’ (μέλος ἢ ῥυθμὸν ἢ ἡδυσμά τι). This phrase echoes Aristotle’s formulation of the language of tragedy:³³⁰

λέγω δὲ ἡδυσμένον μὲν λόγον τὸν ἔχοντα ῥυθμὸν καὶ ἀρμονίαν [καὶ μέλος]... (*Poet.* 1449b 28-9)

By language enriched I mean that which has rhythm and harmony [and song]...

Aristotle characterises this language as ‘enriched (ἡδυσμένον)”; the same adjective is used in the *Republic* to denote the ‘pleasant muse of lyric or epic’ (τὴν ἡδυσμένον Μοῦσαν... ἐν μέλεσιν ἢ ἔπεσιν). The echo of Aristotle’s phrase in Strabo’s text aligns Herodotus and other predecessors with such fictions as tragedy. Strabo’s description of the Nile therefore rejects outlandishly strange claims and stories, setting limits on the marvellous qualities of the river. For Strabo, the river is less a collection of wonders than an important geographical and economic influence that can be controlled by human ingenuity.

Strabo’s primary interest in the Nile is not in the river as a natural phenomenon, but instead in the ways the river and its alluvial deposits have contributed to and continues to influence the civilisation of Egypt. The civilisation of Egypt can be contrasted with the lack of civilisation in Ethiopia. Despite the presence of the river, the Ethiopian way of life lacks the sophistication of the Egyptian:

³²⁸ Schepens and Delcroix (1996), esp. 380-2.

³²⁹ *id.* 381.

³³⁰ Noted by Radt *ad loc.*

καὶ μὴν οἳ γε Αἰθίοπες τὸ πλεόν νομαδικῶς ζῶσι καὶ ἀπόρως διὰ τε τὴν λυπρότητα τῆς χώρας καὶ τὴν τῶν ἀέρων ἀσυμμετρίαν καὶ τὸν ἀφ’ ἡμῶν ἐκτοπισμὸν (17.1.3 C787)

And indeed the Ethiopians lead for the most part a nomadic and resourceless life, on account of the barrenness of the country and of the unseasonableness of its climate and of its remoteness from us.

This text emphasises the continuity of the river between Egypt and less well-known places like Ethiopia (17.1.3 C786); nevertheless despite this continuity, the Ethiopians’ life is negatively characterised as ‘nomadic and resourceless’ for three reasons: the barrenness of the land, its climate, and its remoteness. In the *Geographia*, barrenness is clearly correlated with poverty, nomadism and barbarism, as demonstrated by Strabo’s description of the Arians who live west of India, who are ‘utterly barbarous’ (τελέως βαρβάρων), on account of the ‘barrenness’ (διὰ λυπρότητα) of their country (2.5.32 C130). The remoteness of the Ethiopians is said to be a further cause of their continuing barbarism.³³¹ The centrality of Rome as a civilising force in Strabo generates a hierarchy in which those places closer to Rome are more civilised. Peoples exposed to the influence of Rome typically become more civilised, like the Cavari, some of whom are ‘no longer barbarians’ (οὐδὲ βαρβάρους ἔτι ὄντας, 4.1.12 C186) as a result of contact with Rome. In Ethiopia then, the presence of the Nile itself is insufficient to bring about civilisation.

As for Egypt, the country would be uninhabitable without the river. Strabo acknowledges the centrality of the river and its fertility to life in Egypt, drawing on well-established motifs. Egypt is utterly dependent on the river, which allows both cultivation and navigation (15.1.26 C697). The text quotes Herodotus’ famous formulation that Egypt itself, at least Lower Egypt, is a ‘gift from the river’ (τοῦ ποταμοῦ δῶρον, 1.2.23 C30).³³² Strabo observes repeatedly the excellent quality of

³³¹ The remoteness of the Ethiopians is a traditional motif; see *Od.* 1.22-4, esp. 24: ἔσχατοι ἀνδρῶν, cf. *Il.* 1.423-4. The location of the Ethiopians is vaguely-defined in early texts; it is sometimes a fairytale land, and at other times set in the distant east or south. See Hadas (1935), Ramin (1979) 73-80, and Romm (1992) 49-50; *Od.* 4.84 situates them in the general area of the south, together with the Sidonians, Erempi and Libya, but note Heubeck-West-Hainsworth (1988) 75 *ad Od.* 1.22: ‘the identification of the Ethiopians with the people living south of Egypt is not certainly attested before Hecataeus’.

³³² Hdt. 2.5. Arrian comments that Hecataeus also called Egypt ‘the gift of the river’ (δῶρον τοῦ ποταμοῦ, *Anabasis* 5.6 =FGrH 1 F 301), cf. Griffiths (1966), Vasunia (2001) 91.

the alluvial soil of Egypt, which is identified by the terms ἀρετή, εὐδαιμονία and εὐκαρπία.³³³ The river itself is said to support fish ‘many in number and various in kind, with a particular local character’ (πολλοὶ μὲν καὶ ἄλλοι χαρακτήρα ἔχοντες ἴδιον καὶ ἐπιχώριον, 17.2.4 C823). Strabo also quotes certain statements of Aristobulus concerning the fertility of the Nile, including the greater contribution made by this river than other to fecundity, the production of large animals (μεγαλοφυῆ), multiple human births, and the combination of the river and the sun, which results in the Nile being ‘fecund’ (πολύγονον) and nutritive (τρόφιμον).³³⁴

5. Controlling the river

These reported comments of Aristobulus express the fertility of the Nile in rather exaggerated terms. However, it is significant that they are reported in the context of Strabo’s description of India, not of Egypt.³³⁵ In general, Strabo does not ascribe particularly remarkable properties to the Nile, in contrast with, for instance, Diodorus Siculus.³³⁶ The prosperity of the land is said to be the result, not of the gifts of the river alone, but rather of the combination of the river, the land, and human intervention, as the following passage demonstrates:

ἡ δὲ περὶ τὸν ποταμὸν πραγματεία διαφέρει τοσοῦτον ὅσον τῇ ἐπιμελείᾳ νικᾶν τὴν φύσιν. φύσει γὰρ πλείονα φέρει καρπὸν καὶ ποτισθεῖσα μᾶλλον φύσει δὲ καὶ ἡ μείζων ἀνάβασις τοῦ ποταμοῦ πλείω ποτίζει γῆν, ἀλλ’ ἡ ἐπιμέλεια πολλάκις καὶ τῆς φύσεως ἐξίσχυσεν ἐπιλιπούσης, ὥστε καὶ κατὰ τὰς ἐλάττους ἀναβάσεις τοσαύτην ποτισθῆναι γῆν ὅσην ἐν ταῖς μείζουσι, διὰ τε τῶν διωρύγων καὶ τῶν παραχωμάτων· (17.1.3 C787-8)

The activity of the people in connection with the river goes so far as to conquer nature through diligence. For by nature the land produces more fruit than do other lands, and still more when watered; and by nature a greater rise of the river waters more land; but diligence has often, even

³³³ See e.g. ἀρετή 17.1.5 C791; εὐδαιμονία 17.1.3 C787; εὐκαρπία cf. φύσει γὰρ πλείονα φέρει καρπὸν 17.1.3 C788. See van der Vliet (1984) on the use of these terms in Strabo. For ancient comments on the fertility of the Nile, see Bonneau (1964a) 116 n. 8, adding Callimachus fr. 384.27 Pf. Θηλύτατον, on which see chapter 4 below.

³³⁴ Strabo 15.1.22 C695. On this ‘concoction’ of the river’s deposits and the sun, see also Diod. Sic. 1.10.1-3.

³³⁵ For further discussion of the presence of the Nile in Strabo’s description of India, see below.

³³⁶ See chapter 3.

when nature has failed, availed to bring about the water of as much land even at the time of the smaller rises of the river as at the greater rises, that is, through the means of canals and embankments.

Whereas many Greek and Roman texts accentuate the ease of agriculture in Egypt,³³⁷ or even the ability of the soil spontaneously to produce life,³³⁸ Strabo's account emphasises the necessity for human involvement in the landscape, as the river's natural excellence is enhanced by human action, and the unpredictable riverine landscape placed under human control. As we shall see, this dominion of the natural world, expressed in the 'conquest of nature' motif, is tied to royal, and especially Greek and Roman imperial, political power.³³⁹

The deficiencies of nature, the differences of the height of the inundation, are said to be remedied by diligence (τῆ ἐπιμελείᾳ). The word ἐπιμελεία in the *Geographia* is semantically complex, yet it is always strongly associated with aspects of human 'culture'. It may denote: the nurturing of a human being or deity (10.3.11, 15.1.59); human industry (whether mining, agriculture, or cultural achievements such as writing, 11.4.1, 15.1.58, 1.2.20, 3.2.9, 5.3.8); the custodianship of a temple or games (7.7.6, 8.3.33, 9.3.7).³⁴⁰ When ἐπιμελεία refers to the relationship between humans and the natural world in the *Geographia*, it carries connotations of enhancing nature. Thus Strabo mentions the 'parks', παραδείσοι, on the far side of the Euphrates, in which certain plants were cultivated, which would not otherwise grow in that landscape.³⁴¹ Ἐπιμελεία can correct and compensate for problems in nature. With regard to the Nile, ἐπιμελεία refers to human industry, to

³³⁷ Hdt. 2.14, cf. 1.193; Ar. Av. 504-507; Diod. Sic. 1.36.4-5. See Harrison (2000) 59-60.

³³⁸ e.g. Diod. Sic. 1.10.1-3. For the spontaneous generation of animal life from the Nile, see chapter 1 and Bonneau (1964a) 118-21.

³³⁹ For the 'dominion of nature' as a parallel to imperial ambitions in Herodotus, see Romm (2006) 187-91. Blackbourn (2006) gives a rich and fascinating analysis of the 'conquest of nature' by political powers as a theme in the shaping and creation of the landscapes of modern Germany.

³⁴⁰ We might compare the rich semantic field of the English words 'culture', 'cultivate' and 'cultivation' cf. Lat. *colo*.

³⁴¹ For *paradeisoi* as places where unusual plants may be cultivated, cf. Plut. *Artaxerxes* 25; see also Xen. *Oec.* 4.13-4, *Hell.* 4.1.33. Tuplin (1996) comprehensively surveys the evidence for *paradeisoi*; see also, Briant (2002) 442-4.

the canals (διωρύγες) and embankments (παραχωμάτα) which increase the natural fertility of the river, and compensate for the unpredictability of the flood.³⁴²

Furthermore, ἐπιμελεία (or the lack thereof) in the *Geography* is an indicator of relative civilisation, as Strabo's description of the Albanians demonstrates.³⁴³ The land of the Albanians is excellent, even better-watered than the Babylonian and Egyptian plains (11.4.3 C502), and abundantly productive. However, this productivity occurs without attention from the inhabitants:

τυγχάνει δ' ἐπιμελείας οὐδὲ μικρᾶς' ἀλλὰ τάγ' ἄσπαρτα καὶ ἀνήροτα πάντα φύονται, καθάπερ οἱ στρατεύσαντές φασι, Κυκλώπειόν τινα διηγούμενοι βίον (11.4.3 C502)

It receives not even slight attention, yet 'all things spring up for them without sowing and ploughing', according to those who have made expeditions there, who describe the mode of life there as 'Cyclopean'.

The lack of ἐπιμελεία among the Albanians is correlated with a primitive existence, described elsewhere as pastoralist, and verging on the nomadic (11.4.1); although they are less 'barbaric' than, for instance, the Ethiopians, nevertheless their lack of ἐπιμελεία in agriculture contributes to their characterisation as less advanced than, for instance, the Egyptians.

By contrast, the Egyptian Nile is characterised by human attention, specifically the construction of canals and embankments or dykes. The practice of ἐπιμελεία designates the Egyptians as civilised, according to Strabo's hierarchy. The Nile and its valley in Egypt are intensively occupied, cultivated and civilised places. The Egyptians are praised for their way of life:

καὶ γὰρ πολιτικῶς καὶ ἡμέρως ἐξ ἀρχῆς ζῶσι καὶ ἐν γνωρίμοις ἴδρυνται τόποις, ὥστε καὶ αἱ διατάξεις αὐτῶν μνημονεύονται· καὶ ἐπαινοῦνταί γε δοκοῦντες ἀξίως χρήσασθαι τῇ τῆς χώρας εὐδαιμονίᾳ, μερίσαντές τε εὖ καὶ ἐπιμεληθέντες.(17.1.3 C787)

For from the outset they have led a civic and cultivated life and have been settled in well-known regions, so that their organisations are a matter of comment. And they are commended in that they

³⁴² Oleson (2000) 183-214 surveys Egyptian irrigation during antiquity. Bonneau (1993) discusses methods of regulating the Nile-waters during the Graeco-Roman period.

³⁴³ See van der Vliet (2003), esp. 263-4.

are thought to have used worthily the good fortune of their country, having divided it well and having taken good care of it.

Human control of the waters of the Nile permeates Strabo's description, just as artificial waterways pervade the landscape. This is particularly evident in the Delta:

ἀπὸ γὰρ τῶν πρώτων μερῶν ἀπορρῶγες πολλαὶ καθ' ὅλην μερισθεῖσαι τὴν νῆσον πολλὰ καὶ ῥεῖθρα καὶ νήσους ἐποίησαν, ὥσθ' ὅλην γενέσθαι πλωτὴν διωρύγων ἐπὶ διώρυξι τμηθειῶν, αἱ κατὰ ῥαστώνην πλέονται τοσαύτην ὥστε καὶ ὀστράκινα ἐνίοις εἶναι πορθμεῖα· (17.1.4 C788)

For, beginning with the first parts of the Delta, many branches of the river have been split off throughout the whole island and have formed many streams and islands, so that the whole Delta has become navigable - canals on canals having been cut, which are navigated with such ease that some people even use earthenware ferry-boats.

The natural hydrological structure of the Delta has been altered by the division of the river and the creation of canals, so much so that canals overlap, illustrating how intensively the landscape has been worked. Strabo frequently comments on the use of canals in transportation and commerce, which are correlated with civilised lifestyles.³⁴⁴ Hydrological works are in evidence outside the Delta too, especially around Lake of Moeris, where canals and locks again enhance the work of

³⁴⁴ A canal large enough for merchant-shipping is described at 17.1.26 C805.

nature (17.1.37 C811).³⁴⁵ The hydrology of the Lake of Moeris is by nature ‘useful’ (χρήσιμον) to agriculture, but human intervention, in the form of a canal and locks, provides control and management of the water.

Strabo’s comments on hydrological works and improvements are not new, being an important part of Herodotus’ description of Egypt.³⁴⁶ In Herodotus, the buildings of canals and dams in Egypt is

³⁴⁵ Exactly what the so-called ‘Lake of Moeris’ (Greek: ἡ Μοίριος καλεομένη λίμνη, ἡ Μοίριδος λίμνη) is has been the subject of controversy. Herodotus described a man-made lake in the Fayum, which was filled by a canal leading off the river Nile (Hdt. 2.148-149). The ‘lake of Moeris’ is also described by Strabo (17.1.37), Diodorus Siculus (1.59.1-3), Pomponius Mela 1.55.6, and Pliny *NH* 36.76. These ancient testimonies described a lake in the Fayum used as a reservoir for Nile-water, regulated by a canal connecting the Nile and depression. Herodotus attributes the excavation of the lake to the king of the same name, Moeris, that is Amenemhet III of the 12th Dynasty (Hdt. 2.101). The historicity of Lake Moeris and particularly of Herodotus’ account has been questioned, especially by Armayor (1985). The issue is obscured by the continuing debate over Egyptian terminology. Gardiner (1943) argued that the Egyptian word *hn.t* should be translated ‘lake, swampy ground’ in preference to the earlier reading ‘canal’. He therefore interprets phrases such as *Mr-wr pw hn^c hn(t)-f* as ‘that is [the canal] Moiris, together with its lake’, and the Demotic form *t3 hn.t n Mr-Wr* as ‘the lake of Moiris’. Gardiner understood the name *Mr-Wr* to refer not to the name of the lake, but a town, ‘probably Kôm Medinet Ghurâb (‘Gurob’), an argument still accepted by a majority of scholars, and identifies the ‘Lake of Moeris’ with the modern Birket-el-Qarun (a deep-lying lake in the north-west of the Fayum depression). However, recent scholarship has demonstrated problems with Gardiner’s readings, notably the translation of *hn.t* as ‘lake’; Cruz-Uribe (1992), following a note in Charles Nims’ doctoral thesis of 1937, cites Demotic evidence in favour of reading *hn.t* as ‘canal’. Cruz-Uribe (1992) 65-66 provides a survey of scholarly discussions of the term *hn.t*. Gardner and Caton-Thompson (1929) argued, with evidence from their geological studies, that the Lake of Moeris referred to by Herodotus could not be identified with the Birket-el-Qarun. Garbrecht (1986), following Gardner and Caton-Thompson argues attractively that in the Ptolemaic period, an artificial water-storage lake was developed in the Gharak Basin (south-east of the Fayum), on the basis of the well-preserved remains of a masonry dam near the village of Itsa. More recently, Cook (2011) 62-3, in a detailed study of irrigation in the Ptolemaic and Roman Fayum, has rather cut the Gordian knot by arguing that Herodotus’ statement about the high level of the lake ‘was merely meant as an indication that the lake was ‘impressive’.’ Among further discussions of this issue, see Shafei (1960), Beinlich (1987), Vandorpe (2004), Cook (2011) 60-5, esp. 60 n.29 with extensive bibliography.

³⁴⁶ See e.g. Hdt. 2.99, 2.108, with Hartog (1988) 18-19, 200; Vasunia (2001) 75-108; Lloyd (1988) 11-3, 30-1.

an exercise in royal power.³⁴⁷ Min is said to have built Memphis on the land drained by the diversion of the river (Hdt. 2.99); the greatest alterations to the landscape however are those of Sesostris, who fundamentally changes the space of Egypt by building canals and dividing up the land (Hdt. 2.108). Sesostris uses prisoners of war to accomplish his projects, which are thereby an effective demonstration of the king's power. As Hartog argues, 'the Egyptian space was a creation imposed by a power'.³⁴⁸ As in Herodotus' narrative of the building of the Athos canal, in which workers excavated the canal 'under the lash' (ὑπὸ μαστίγων, 7.22), the work is an enactment of royal coercion.³⁴⁹ At the same time however, Herodotus' attitude to the hydrological works in Egypt is one of admiration, most evidently in his discussion of the Lake of Moeris, which is 'even more astonishing' (θῶμα ἔτι μέζον, 2.149) than the Labyrinth.

The theme of canal-building in Egypt takes on a different significance in Strabo, a move which refracts the changed political context of his writing. Strabo identifies canal-building as a royal

³⁴⁷ Canal-building and maintenance seems to be associated with royalty in pharaonic Egypt. This view has been doubted, especially by Butzer (1976), who argued that irrigation was primarily under local control, and dismissed major state-run hydrological projects, followed by Eyre (1994) and Manning (2002). A re-assessment of the evidence for royal administration of canals is offered by Cook (2011) 33-51.

³⁴⁸ Hartog (1988) 18.

³⁴⁹ Canal-building, along with other acts of hydrological or geological engineering in the *Histories*, has been interpreted as a morally problematic activity, affronts to the natural limits of the world and acts of pride, *hybris*, or transgression; the *locus classicus* is Herodotus' account of the building of the Athos canal (7.22-4), especially: 'It seems to me, making conjecture of this work, that Xerxes when he ordered this to be dug was moved by a love of magnificence and by a desire to make a display of his power and to leave a memorial behind him' ('Ὡς μὲν ἐμὲ συμβαλλόμενον εὐρίσκειν, μεγαλοφροσύνης εἵνεκεν αὐτὸ Ξέρξης ὀρύσσειν ἐκέλευε, ἐθέλων τε δύναμιν ἀποδείκνυσθαι καὶ μνημόσυνα λιπέσθαι, *Hist.* 7.24). For this view, see especially Immerwahr (1966) 84, n. 14 and 293, citing Scheliha (1931); Solmsen (1982); Lateiner (1989) 129, quoting Solmsen, and ch. 6 generally. However, scholars have recently challenged this view of Herodotus' disapprobation of canal-building: Baragwanath (2008) 254-63 argues that Herodotus' narrative of the Athos canal evokes 'a doubleness of possible interpretations of Xerxes' motives in building the canal' (263), which are explicable from both Greek and Persian perspectives; Scullion (2006) 193 argues that 'the rivers crossed and diverted, canals, and tunnel in the *Histories* are not problematised on religious grounds and sometimes lovingly described'; Romm (2006) 189 focuses on the amazement and wonder elicited by such works.

activity, as can be seen in his discussion of Babylon and the region of Mesopotamia.³⁵⁰ The queen Semiramis is said to have left many visible works throughout Asia, including:

τά τε χώματα ἃ δὴ καλοῦσι Σεμιράμιδος, καὶ τείχη καὶ ἐρυμάτων κατασκευαὶ καὶ συρίγγων τῶν ἐν αὐτοῖς καὶ ὑδρείων καὶ κλιμάκων καὶ διωρύγων ἐν ποταμοῖς καὶ λίμναις καὶ ὁδῶν καὶ γεφυρῶν. (16.1.2 C737)

the mounds called the Mounds of Semiramis, and walls, and the construction of fortifications with aqueducts therein, and of reservoirs for drinking-water, and of ladder-like ascents of mountains, and of channels in rivers and lakes, and of roads and bridges.

Canal-building and maintenance are, above all, the duty of good rulers, as in the case of the Euphrates:

Τὸ μὲν οὖν παντάπασι κωλύειν τὴν τοιαύτην πλήμμυραν οὐχ οἶόν τε ἴσως, τὸ δὲ τὴν δυνατὴν προσφέρειν βοήθειαν ἡγεμόνων ἀγαθῶν ἐστίν. (16.1.10 C740)

Now it is impossible perhaps altogether to prevent overflows of this kind, but it is the part of good rulers to afford all possible aid.

Strabo, reporting Aristobulus, stresses the involvement of Alexander in canal inspection, clearing and construction (16.1.11 C741). The text associates these works with Alexander's intention to take possession (κατακτᾶσθαι) of the region and align him with traditional Mesopotamian royalty.³⁵¹ Whereas Herodotus attributes the majority of Egyptian canal-building to Egyptian royal power, Strabo ascribes particularly significant improvements to the periods of early Ptolemaic, and then Roman, rule.³⁵² The Nile is appropriated by Greeks and Romans, justified by their technical mastery of the river. The ingenuity and hard work inherent in ἐπιμελεία are seen to be particularly characteristic of Greek, and later Roman, rule, as the limitations of native Egyptian hydrological words, and indeed knowledge about the river, are contrasted with later improvements.

³⁵⁰ Westermann (1917) suggests that Strabo's detailed description of irrigation in Mesopotamia is based on his first-hand knowledge of irrigation in Egypt.

³⁵¹ cf. 'Alexander [Aristobulus says], busied himself thus with the canals, and also inspected thoroughly the tombs of the kings and potentates, most of which are situated among the lakes' (ταῦτά τε δὴ πραγματεύεσθαι περὶ τὰς διώρυγας τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον, καὶ τοὺς τάφους σκευωρεῖσθαι τοὺς τῶν βασιλέων καὶ δυναστῶν· τοὺς γὰρ πλείστους ἐν ταῖς λίμναις εἶναι, 16.1.11 C741)

³⁵² For a survey of the evidence for Graeco-Roman period canals, see Cook (2011) 41-51.

The text makes mention, for example, of a canal running from the Nile to the Red Sea near the city of Arsinoe (17.1.25 C804).³⁵³ Ancient testimony concerning this canal and its construction is contradictory. According to Herodotus, the canal was begun by Necho (the son of Psammetichus) and finished by Darius; according to Aristotle, it was abandoned by both Sesostris and Darius. Diodorus records that it was begun by Necho, worked on by Darius and finished by Ptolemy; this is similar to Strabo's account, except that Strabo attributes the first cutting to Sesostris rather than Necho. Pliny reports that the canal was never completed.³⁵⁴ This confusion is considerable and suggests that the 'ancient textual evidence... can only be used cautiously as a primary historical source'.³⁵⁵ However, the texts do attest to the importance of making claims to and about major works of hydrological engineering such as canals. In each case, the canal is connected with the royal ruler: Darius, Necho, Sesostris, Ptolemy II, Trajan. Pliny appears to name the canal the 'river of Ptolemy'; Ptolemy identifies it as the 'river of Trajan'. In particular, the stelae erected by Darius and Ptolemy each lay claim to excavation of the canal; those of Darius seem to have been visible from the canal. The excavation of the canal articulates royal power and prestige; as such, Strabo's claim that the canal was completed by Ptolemy II is significant. It marks a moment of Greek achievement, and particularly, by minimising the achievement of previous rulers, enacts a moment of Greek superiority over the former rulers of Egypt, both Egyptian and Persian.

6. The early Ptolemies and the Nile

³⁵³ There is considerable textual evidence for a canal from the Nile to the Red Sea, running through the Wadi Tumilat east of the Delta. To summarise: 1) Four stelae, erected by Darius I, to commemorate the excavation of a canal to the Red Sea (Posener (1936) 48-87); 2) Hdt. 2.188-9, with Lloyd (1988) 149-58; 3) Arist. *Meteor.* 1.15; 4) the Pithom Stela, erected by Ptolemy II Philadelphus at Tell al-Maskhuta (see Thiers (2007)); 5) Diodorus Siculus 1.33.8-12. There is an extensive discussion of these sources in modern scholarship. An accessible summary is provided by Redmount (1975), updated by Cooper (2009). Among older discussions, see Küthmann (1911); Bourdon (1925); Posener (1936) and (1938); Ball (1942); Naville (1885), on the Pithom Stela. Redmount argues that there were in fact two canals, at least in the western part of the Wadi, running along the north and south sides of the Wadi respectively.

³⁵⁴ Redmount (1975) 130.

³⁵⁵ Redmount (1975) 133.

The Ptolemies, at least the early Ptolemies, are also represented as superior to the Egyptians in their curiosity about, and exploration of, the Nile. First, the text contrasts the limited knowledge of earlier times with new knowledge about the river (17.1.5 C789). The acquisition of new knowledge is explicitly associated with the expeditions of the Ptolemies dispatched for various purposes, including elephant-hunting, and particularly with Ptolemy Philadelphus, who is described as ‘loving research’ (φιλιστορῶν), a suitably Herodotean pursuit. His attitudes are set in opposition to the interests of previous kings, specifically Sesostris; despite ‘being congenial to learning’ (οἰκεῖοι σοφίας γεγονότες), and Sesostris’ expeditions as far as the cinnamon-bearing country, the Egyptians fail to gain adequate knowledge about the rains:

θαυμαστὸν οὖν πῶς ἐκ τῶν τοιούτων ἀφορμῶν οὐ τελέως ἐναργῆς ἦν ἡ περὶ τῶν ὄμβρων ἱστορία τοῖς τότε. (17.1.5 C790)

It is surprising therefore that the men of that time, having such knowledge to begin with, did not possess a perfectly clear knowledge of the rains.

Again, the ideal activity is expressed in Herodotean terms (ἱστορία); it is this interest in investigation that the Egyptians are seen to be lacking. Any Egyptian witnesses to and ideas about the river are ignored, as instead the text articulates the history of *Greek* knowledge about the problem. A chain of Greek knowledge is built, extending from Posidonius right back to Homer, and it is this chain to which Strabo attaches his own text.³⁵⁶ This chain articulates the sense that Greek knowledge about the river has an inherent superiority and intuitive brilliance that far outweighs any native Egyptian knowledge. Understanding of the cause of the inundation is seen to be contained even in the earliest of Greek texts, namely Homer’s use of the poetic epithet διπεπτής, which is

³⁵⁶ Strabo regards Homer as a great source of geographical knowledge (e.g. 1.1.10 C6) and quotes him over seven hundred times. For discussion, see Kim (2010) 47-84, and Dueck (2000) 31-40.

read as ‘fallen from heaven’.³⁵⁷ This epithet is shown to be justified by the recent expansion of geographical horizons and observation among the Greeks, enabled by political conquest, which has permitted Greeks to become ‘eyewitnesses’ (αὐτόπται). Knowledge therefore is located among the Greeks, not the native Egyptians. Reversing a common *topos* of Greek discourse, which posits Egypt as the source of Greek learning, the text asserts Greek knowledge about the river in a way that justifies their former political control; again, it is Greeks who possess the ability to unlock the river’s potential.³⁵⁸ This reversal of the direction of knowledge between Egypt and Greece must modify Arnaldo Momigliano’s argument that there was ‘no dramatic change in the Greek evaluation of Egypt during the Hellenistic period’, specifically with regard to the attribution of knowledge and invention to the Egyptians. Rather, a double dichotomy is established, in which the Egyptians’ culture is seen as more sophisticated than that of the nomadic Ethiopians, but both are trumped by the rule of the early Ptolemies and the Romans.

³⁵⁷ Strabo thereby takes a position in the contested interpretation of this phrase. In Homer, this epithet only occurs in the formula διειπετός ποταμοῖο (*Il.* 16.174, 17.263, 21.268; *Od.* 4.477, 7.284; cf. Hes. fr. 320 Merkelbach-West). It is typically understood as ‘fallen from Zeus’, with the first element derived from Zeus, and the second from πίπτω ‘to fall’, although the dat. form διει- (in place of a gen.) is unexpected (see Heubeck-West-Hainsworth (1988) 337 *ad Od.* 7.28; Griffith (1997) 353-4). *Hom. Hymn Aph.* 4 has οἰωνούς τε διειπετέας, where διειπετέας seems to mean ‘flying through the air’, derived from πέτομαι ‘to fly’ (see Janko (1982) 155-6; Faulkner (2008) 79 *ad Hom. Hymn Aph.* 4). Both etymologies are given by the *Etymologicum Magnum*, see 275.21 ἀπὸ Διὸς πίπτων, ἢ πετόμενος. Alcman fr. 3.67 has the form διειπετής, of a star ‘falling through the heaven’ (ἀστήρ | ὠρανῶ διειπετής). Edwards (1991) *ad Il.* 17.233-6, possibly following Humbach (1967) 279, suggests the meaning ‘swift’, as if derived from διερός ‘swift’. In the fifth century, the word is re-analysed: at E. *Bacch.* 1267 διειπετέστερος is to be understood as ‘more translucent’, ‘more shining’; cf. [E.] *Rhes.* 43 διειπετὴ δὲ νεῶν πυρσοῖς σταθμά. The *Etymologicum Magnum* cites *Bacch.* 1267 translating διαυγής. As Liapis (2012) *ad [E.] Rhes.* 43 notes: ‘perhaps 5th-c. authors misapplied the adj.’s Homeric use to the lucidity of the ever-flowing water of rivers’. For further discussion, see Treu (1958), Renehan (1972).

³⁵⁸ Recent scholarship has demonstrated, particularly in the study of empire, the ways in which scientific knowledge and political power feed and shape one another. See König and Whitmarsh (2007) esp. 4-39 on the relationship between knowledge and the Roman empire; p. 4 nn. 3-4 for some relevant studies. See Pratt (1992) 29-37 on the imperialist implications of Linnaeus’ systematising of nature.

7. The Nile under Roman rule

Roman rule is represented as particularly advantageous for Egypt. Augustus 'put an end to Egypt being ruled by drunken violence' (τὴν Αἴγυπτον ἔπαυσε παροινουμένην, 17.1. 11 C797), which had characterised the reign of the later Ptolemies. Strabo praises the restoration of prosperity, brought to Egypt by Rome:

Τοιαῦτα δ' ἦν, εἰ μὴ χεῖρω, καὶ τὰ τῶν ὕστερον βασιλέων. Ῥωμαῖοι δ' εἰς δύναμιν, ὡς εἰπεῖν, ἐπηνόρθωσαν τὰ πολλά, τὴν μὲν πόλιν διατάξαντες ὡς εἶπον... (17.1.13 C798)

Such then, if not worse, was the state of affairs under the later kings also; but the Romans have, to the best of their ability, I might say, set most things right, having organised the city as I have said...

Increased agricultural and economic output under Roman rule is particularly praised (17.1.12 C797, 17.1.13 C798), as Egypt now brings huge revenues to the empire. Strabo singles out the increase in agricultural output since the time of Petronius' prefecture, which he attributes to the effective use of hydrological works:

ἐπὶ γοῦν τῶν πρὸ Πετρωνίου χρόνων ἡ μεγίστη μὲν ἦν φορὰ καὶ ἀνάβασις, ἡνίκα ἐπὶ τεσσαρεσκαίδεκα πήχεις ἀνέβαινεν ὁ Νεῖλος, ἡνίκα δ' ἐπ' ὀκτώ, συνέβαινε λιμός· ἐπ' ἐκείνου δὲ ἄρξαντος τῆς χώρας καὶ δώδεκα μόνον πληρώσαντος πήχεις τοῦ Νείλου μέτρου, μεγίστη ἦν ἡ φορὰ, καὶ ὀκτώ ποτε μόνον πληρώσαντος λιμοῦ οὐδεὶς ἤσθητο. (17.1.3 C788)

At any rate, in the times before Petronius the crop was the largest and the rise the highest when the Nile would rise to fourteen cubits, and when it would rise to only eight a famine would ensue; but in the time of his reign over the country, and when the Nilometer registered only twelve cubits, the crop was the largest, and once, when it registered only eight cubits, no one felt hunger.

Strabo's account does not specify who held responsibility for the improvements to the canals and embankments, or who carried it out; rather, his account focuses on the contrast between 'the times before Petronius' (ἐπὶ... τῶν πρὸ Πετρωνίου χρόνων) and the situation 'during his reign' (ἐπ' ἐκείνου δὲ ἄρξαντος, 17.1.3 C788). The emphasis on the increased harvests during and after the prefecture of Petronius suggest that the Romans have the ability to make full use of the potential of the river, and therefore justifies Roman dominion over Egypt.

Other sources also attest to the improvements made by the Romans to hydrological works in Egypt. As in Strabo, such improvements are tied to the exercise of political power, and specifically to Augustus' conquest:

Fossas omnes in quas Nilus exaestuat oblimatas longa vetustate, militari opera detersit. (Suet. *Vit. Aug.* 18)

With military help he cleaned out all the canals into which the Nile overflows, which had long been silted up.

Suetonius' assertion may be compared with Dio Cassius' account, which ascribes the improvements to the period of Augustus' stay in Egypt in 30BCE.³⁵⁹ Despite the chronological problems of Dio's account, both writers clearly align the renewal of Egypt's system of canals and dykes with Augustus' newly-won political control of the country.

Canal-building is often associated with Roman military activity; Tacitus for instance records that in 47 CE Domitius Corbulo had his troops build a canal twenty-three miles long between the Rhine and the Meuse, 'to keep the soldiers free from sloth' (*ut miles otium exueret*).³⁶⁰ Similarly, in 58 CE Paulinus Pompeius and Lucius Vetus completed an embankment (*agger*) and a canal (*fossa*), again to keep the soldiers from idleness, and to increase communication between the west and the north.³⁶¹ In these passages, canal-building functions explicitly as a substitute for military activity. Moreover, canal-building is sometimes associated with the glory of the emperor, as Pliny reminds Trajan in a letter asking him to support the building of a canal from Lake Sapanca, in Nicomedia, to the Sea of Marmara.³⁶²

³⁵⁹ Dio 51.18.1. Westermann (1917) 240 comments on the chronological problems of Dio's narrative at this point, and argues that the actual supervision of the cleaning of the canals was, for the most part, the responsibility of Aelius Gallus as prefect of Egypt. See also Adams (2007).

³⁶⁰ *Ann.* 11.20; see Campbell (2012) 223.

³⁶¹ *Ann.* 13.53; see Campbell (2012) 223.

³⁶² See Mitchell (1987) 333-4 and MacMullen (1959).

Intuenti mihi et fortunae tuae et animi magnitudinem conuenientissimum uidetur demonstrari opera non minus aeternitate tua quam gloria digna, quantumque pulchritudinis tantum utilitatis habitura.
(*Ep.* 10.41.1)

As I contemplate the greatness of your fortune and your spirit, it seems entirely appropriate to point out to you construction works that are worthy of your eternal renown and your glory, and which will be as useful as they are splendid.

Although Pliny's letter is of course later than the *Geographia*, it illuminates some of the imperial ideology articulated in canal-building. The letter also expresses the importance in Roman thought of completing works begun by earlier rulers, as we have also seen in Strabo's description of the Nile:

Sed hoc ipso - feres enim me ambitiosum pro tua gloria - incitor et accendor, ut cupiam peragi a te quae tantum coeperant reges. (*Ep.* 10.41.5)

I am fired with enthusiasm by this very point - for you should think of me as ambitious for your glory - that what the kings had only begun, should be brought to a successful end by yourself.

Roman hydrological works therefore served several purposes for the Romans: first, they function as activity for soldiers, in the absence of military activity; second, as improvements to the military infrastructure, and communication within regions; third, as opportunities for the concrete embodiment of the glory of the emperor.

In addition, these hydrological improvements symbolise the subjection of foreign rivers to the might of Rome. As we have seen, Strabo describes the effective use of the river Nile as a 'conquest of nature'; this conquest of nature is most powerfully effected under Roman rule. The river Nile is now, to extend the military metaphor, directly subject to Roman might, and to exploitation for the benefit of Rome. The conquest of a river was frequently used as a metaphorical expression for the conquest of a region or people by Roman poets. Virgil for instance describes the rivers chastened by Augustus:

*Euphrates ibat iam mollior undis,
Extremique hominum Morini, Rhenus bicornis,*

*Indomitique Dahae, et pontem indignatus Araxes. (V. Aen. 8.726-728)*³⁶³

The Euphrates moved now with humbler waves, and the Morini were there, furthest of mankind, and the Rhine of double horn, the untamed Dahae, and Araxes chafing at his bridge.

However, whereas the Araxes is represented as frustrated (*indignatus*), and the Nile as 'mourning' (*maerentem*) in the *Aeneid*, Strabo's text accentuates the peaceful disposition of Egypt (17.1.53 C819) and the increase of productivity and prosperity under the Romans (17.1.13 C798). The Nile, in Strabo, is transformed into a peaceable waterway that brings benefits to the Roman empire: 'it is now a province, and it... pays considerable tribute (ἐπαρχία δὲ νῦν ἐστι, φόρους... τελοῦσα ἀξιολόγους, 17.1.12, C797). This incorporation of the river Nile into the Roman empire as a helpful and productive entity reflects one aspect of the ideology of Roman rule in Egypt. Cornelius Gallus, the first prefect of Egypt, set up a trilingual inscription in celebration of his military achievements, which praised his own gods 'and the supporting Nile'.³⁶⁴ The Nile becomes a supportive ally of Roman power.³⁶⁵

The benefits of the Nile to the Romans include excellent harvests and the opening up of trade routes via the river. Alexandria for instance is seen as a central node of international trade:

τῆς δ' εὐκαιρίας τῆς κατὰ τὴν πόλιν τὸ μέγιστόν ἐστιν ὅτι τῆς Αἰγύπτου πάσης ἄλλος ἐστὶν οὗτος ὁ τόπος πρὸς ἄμφω πεφυκῶς εὖ, τὰ τε ἐκ θαλάττης διὰ τὸ εὐλίμενον, καὶ τὰ ἐκ τῆς χώρας ὅτι πάντα εὐμαρῶς ὁ ποταμὸς πορθμεύει συνάγει τε εἰς τοιοῦτον χωρίον ὅπερ μέγιστον ἐμπόριον τῆς οἰκουμένης ἐστί. (17.1.13 C798)

Among the happy advantages of the city, the greatest is the fact that this is the only place in all Egypt which is by nature well situated with reference to both things - both to commerce by sea, on

³⁶³ The passage famously describes the 'mourning Nile, of massive body, opening wide his folds and with all his raiment welcoming the vanquished to his azure lap and sheltering streams' (*magno maerentem corpore Nilum l'pandentemque sinus et tota veste vocantem caeruleum in gremium latebrosaue flumina victos, Aen. 8.711-13*). Cf. Hor. *Carm.* 2.9.21-24, with Nisbet and Hubbard (1978) 158; Prop. 4.3.35; Sil. *Pun.* 3.446-65; Ov. *Fast.* 1.285-6; Stat. *Silv.* 3.2.137-8. See also Cic. *Marc.* 28-9; Luc. *Pharsalia* 5.267-9; Florus 2.13.88. On this theme, see Campbell (2012) 370-8.

³⁶⁴ *ILS* 8995; see Hoffmann, Minas-Nerpál and Pfeiffer (2009).

³⁶⁵ On this motif, see Campbell (2012) 379-83.

account of the good harbours, and to commerce by land, because the river easily conveys and brings together everything into a place so situated - the greatest emporium in the inhabited world.

The river enables wealth to flow not just within Egypt, but beyond Egypt, and particularly to the centre, Rome. The river is the conduit linking the goods of the interior to the *oikoumene*, the outside world; Strabo describes Alexandria as follows:

μόνη γὰρ ἡ Ἀλεξάνδρεια τῶν τοιούτων ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ καὶ ὑποδοχεῖόν ἐστι καὶ χορηγεῖ τοῖς ἐκτός. (17.1.13 C798)

For Alexandria alone is not only the receptacle of goods of this kind, for the most part, but also the supply to the outside world.

Alexandria is the interface between Egypt and the rest of the world as a result of its excellent location, mediating between the Nile and the Mediterranean sea. This *connecting* function is in opposition to Strabo's description of Egypt's natural condition of 'self-sufficiency' (τὸ αὐτάρκες τῆς χώρας) and 'the difficulty of invasion by outsiders' (τὸ δυσείσβολον τοῖς ἔξωθεν, 17.1.53 C819). Strabo uses these factors to explain Egypt's predisposition, as he sees it, to peace; importantly, it establishes a contrast between the former insularity of the country, and its current state, in which it has been penetrated, conquered, and 'opened out' by the Romans.³⁶⁶ The Nile ensures that Egypt is, under the Romans, no longer a closed or isolated space, but well-integrated into the networks of the Roman *oikoumene*, directing wealth towards Rome.

8. Integration into the *oikoumene*

Strabo's Egyptian narrative therefore articulates the renewed vigour of the Nile as a waterway for agricultural prosperity and the transformation of the river into a conduit for Roman wealth. In terms of this integration into the Roman world, the Nile has several similarities with other rivers described in the *Geographia*, rivers that have been tamed, domesticated and incorporated into the Roman empire. These rivers are characterised by their accessibility, the ease of trade and communication, and their excellent agriculture, which are likewise features of Strabo's description of the Nile. Such

³⁶⁶ Similar language of 'opening up' is used of European explorations in Africa, beginning from the late eighteenth century. See for instance Pratt (1992) 11.

rivers are particularly prevalent in Strabo's discussion of the Iberian peninsula in Book 3.³⁶⁷ Strabo frequently comments on Iberian rivers, their length, nature, and the degree to which they can be navigated. Of Iberian cities, the best known are those situated on the rivers, estuaries and sea, which enable commerce (3.2.1 C141). Strabo's discussion of the rivers, especially the Baetis, reveals several similarities with his description of the Nile. First, the region is 'marvellously' (θαυμαστῶς) fertile (3.2.4 C142). Second, the export value of goods is high, and increased by the system of rivers and estuaries, which permit easy access to the interior of the southern Iberian peninsula (3.2.4 C142); trade is conducted entirely with Italy and Rome, just as Egypt's goods make their way to the centre (3.2.6 C144). Strabo also makes mention of the extensive canal network, which is useful for trade, both for local people and the Romans (3.2.5 C143-4). The southern part of the Iberian peninsula is closely associated with Roman values, and the writer focuses on those areas which have embraced the Roman way of life (3.2.15 C151). The features of the Iberian rivers highlighted by Strabo's description are paralleled by his emphasis on similar features, fertility, trade, canals, accessibility, relations with Rome, in his account of the Egyptian Nile. Unlike the analogies between the Nile and the rivers of India, these similarities are not explicit, but encourage the reader to make connections between the discrete places and regions of the *oikoumene*. Similarities between the Nile and other rivers of the *oikoumene*, such as the Baetis in the region of Turdetania in Iberia, demonstrate that the Nile is now to be seen as sharing in the activities and values that praised by Strabo and produce benefits for Rome.

Whereas the Nile in Herodotus is characterised by its liminal position between continents, its difference from other rivers, and the mystery attending its sources and southern course, a symbol of the profound otherness of Egypt, the Nile in Strabo is shown to be civilised, domesticated and productively beneficial for Rome. The Egyptian Nile has been familiarised; it can be seen, known and used. The Egyptian Nile, in Strabo, no longer functions as the paradigm of the edges of the *oikoumene*, but can be deployed to describe other, stranger places.

³⁶⁷ Dueck (2000) 41; at least this is true of the south-eastern parts of the Iberian peninsula. The north and west of Iberia Strabo holds mostly in contempt (3.1.2 C137).

Comparison and analogy can be used to describe things that are less well-known by reference to those that are more well-known. In the *Geographia*, the Nile is frequently compared with other rivers, as it is in Strabo's predecessors. In Herodotus, the Ister (Danube) is the most important comparandum for the Nile, since the location, size, length and other characteristics of the European river function as analogical parallels for the features of the southern.³⁶⁸ In Strabo, the Nile is frequently associated with the great rivers of India, the Indus and the Ganges.³⁶⁹ Comparisons between the river of Egypt and those of India in Strabo's description of India are pervasive and sustained.³⁷⁰ As Grant Parker has observed in his study of Roman conceptualisations of India, 'what is striking is the persistence of the scheme [in the *Geographia*], as if it provides Strabo with a framework of explanation'.³⁷¹ In what follows, I pick up on Parker's observation; examining the significance of the systematic parallels drawn between the Nile and the Indian rivers, I would argue that the cautionary phrase 'as if' could be dropped from Parker's formulation. The analogies *do* provide Strabo with a framework of explanation; its implications for his conceptions of the Nile (and of course, the Indian rivers) are significant.

Resemblances, or as Pierre Schneider would have it, 'confusions', between the Nile and Indian rivers are a common pattern in Greek thought.³⁷² With the exception of Herodotus' statement that the Indus is the second river where crocodiles are found (4.44), such correspondences between the Nile and Indian rivers develop later, especially after the expedition of Alexander.³⁷³ Strabo's

³⁶⁸ See e.g. Hdt. 2.33-4, Hartog (1988) 17-9, Vasunia (2001) 93, 96-7, Redfield (1985) 103. On these narrative strategies in Herodotus, see Hartog (1988) 225-30.

³⁶⁹ See e.g. 15.1.13 C690, 15.1.18 C692, 15.1.19 C693, 15.1.22-6 C694-7. On resemblances between the Nile and Indian rivers in Greek geographical thought, see Schneider (2004) 35-6, Parker (2008) 111; Schneider (2004) *passim* on confusion between Ethiopia and India in Greek thought. On the importance of rivers in Greco-Roman Indography, see Dihle (1964).

³⁷⁰ Parker (2008) 95, 111, Schneider 316-321, especially 320.

³⁷¹ Parker (2008) 111.

³⁷² For citations and discussion, see Schneider (2004) 35-7.

³⁷³ Schneider (2004) 36.

description of India relies in large part on the (now lost) accounts of India written by the companions of Alexander, among them Nearchus, Onesicritus and Aristobulus.³⁷⁴ In particular, these accounts seem to have emphasised the comparison of the newly-experienced rivers of India with the river Nile, and in turn this seems to have made a great impression on Strabo. As Schneider comments, 'la façon dont Strabon rédige laisse même penser que, trois siècles après, le géographe jugeait encore que les points communs primaient les différences'.³⁷⁵

The analogies between the Nile and the Indian rivers are extensive and sustained. They are seen as comparable in several respects, including: their length (15.135 C702), their Delta-shaped estuaries (15.1.13 C690), fauna (15.1.13 C690), flooding (15.1.19 C692-3), climate (15.1.22 C695), over-average fertility and productivity (15.1.22 C695), and the necessity of the rivers for life on the plains (15.1.25 C696). What is the purpose of such comprehensive parallels? First, India, in Strabo's *Geographia* is a relatively unknown, and still wild, space, as is attested by the writer's explicit reliance on other texts, contrasting with, for instance, his account of Egypt, which could be drawn from autopsy, at least in part.³⁷⁶ Structurally, Strabo's narrative follows the expedition of Alexander, which is presented as a journey of discovery as well as conquest; Alexander is said to have 'entertained the desire of possessing India, of which he had received many, although indistinct accounts' (τότ' ἤδη καὶ τῆς Ἰνδικῆς ὠρέχθη, λεγόντων μὲν περὶ αὐτῆς πολλῶν οὐ σαφῶς δε, 15.1.26 C697), just as areas reached by Alexander are said to be more well-known' than others (15.1.32 C700). Moreover, Alexander himself is implicated in the process of comparing the Indian and Egyptian rivers; Strabo reports Nearchus' comment on Alexander's mistaken identification of the Hydaspes and Acesinus with the sources of the Nile (15.1.25 C696).³⁷⁷

³⁷⁴ Schneider (2004) 317, Pédech (1984) 155-156. On Nearchus, see Bosworth (1995) 361-365; on Onesicritus see Brown (1981); on Aristobulus, see Brunt (1974). Vasunia (2001) 259-61 comments on the use of the Herodotean framework of description of Egypt, and particularly the Nile, by Nearchus and others in their descriptions of India: 'these fragments... clearly... indicate that Nearchus used Herodotus' Egyptian account as his model for writing about India'.

³⁷⁵ Schneider (2004) 320.

³⁷⁶ On autopsy in Strabo, see above.

³⁷⁷ cf. Arrian *Indika* 6.1.2-3, 5-8, Romm (1992) 149-156, Pearson (1960) 121-3.

Knowledge of India is seen to be deeply entwined with Alexander's military pursuits. The regions east of the Hypanis are said to be beyond accurate knowledge completely; reports of these areas are 'exaggerated' (ἐπὶ τὸ μείζον) and 'rather marvellous' (τὸ τερατωδέστερον). As Parker argues, the prevailing view of India articulated by Indographic discourse of this period is a dual one, that privileges on the one hand the well-organised social structures of India and, on the other, the marvellous creatures and an overwhelming natural abundance: 'this reflects a variegated picture of India, one in which phenomena are wilder the further out you move'.³⁷⁸ Knowledge about India therefore, unlike knowledge about Egypt, remains relatively scanty and out-of-date.

In the light of this limited knowledge, the *Geographia* can be seen to employ its extensive system of analogy between the Nile and the Indian rivers as a method of explaining the less well-known place through the lens of the more well-known. So for instance, the estuary of the Indus is compared to the Egyptian Delta:

ὁ δὲ Ἰνδὸς δυοῖ στόμασιν εἰς τὴν μεσημβρινὴν ἐκπίπτει θάλατταν, ἐμπεριλαμβάνων τὴν Παταληνὴν καλουμένην χώραν παραπλησίαν τῷ κατ' Αἴγυπτον Δέλτα. (15.1.13 C690)

The Indus falls into the Southern Sea, and empties itself by two mouths, encompassing the country called Patalene, which resembles the Delta of Egypt.

The Delta is a very well-known, even famous, element of Egyptian geography, whose shape had been familiar for centuries.³⁷⁹ The very familiarity of the Egyptian Delta allows it to be used as a way to describe, visualise and explain the unfamiliar, and as a way to negotiate the experience of *difference*, by assimilating it to the familiar.³⁸⁰ The consequences of these analogies for discourse about India are significant, as they bring this distant and little-understood area within the purview of the Greek or Roman reader, and allow it to be interpreted through the lens of what was formerly the archetype of the strange, exotic, and profoundly 'Other' place, namely Egypt. The implications for Strabo's view of the Nile are similarly important. The Nile, in Strabo's conception, is no longer

³⁷⁸ Parker (2008) 95.

³⁷⁹ E.g. Hdt. 2.15, Plato *Tim.* 21e (cited by Strabo 17.1.4 C788), Aesch. *PV* 813-4; cf. Diod. Sic. 1.34.1. See Bernand (1970) 17.

³⁸⁰ Parker (2008) 111 uses the metaphor of 'translation' between different cultures.

an archetype of mystery and exoticism, but is now coded as *more familiar*. The Nile is no longer simply the object of geographical description, but a figure enabling the description of other, more mysterious, more exotic rivers that remain outside the limits of Roman dominion. Strabo's use of descriptions of Indian rivers which compare them to the Nile allow the relatively unknown Indian rivers to be more clearly 'seen' by the reader.

Conclusions

Strabo's *Geographia* demonstrates that the act of describing the Nile, of bringing it before the eyes of the reader, is one that marks the authority of Strabo as writer and the Romans as rulers. Strabo's text articulates a response to Herodotus' paradigmatic description of the Nile that is a reworking of his predecessor, which incorporates the Nile into a bigger, globalising perspective in a world with new geographical knowledge and new geopolitical horizons. The Nile is now subject to Rome, part of a Roman province, and is integrated, together with its products, into the Roman *oikoumene*, as it also becomes part of the *Geographia*. Strabo's account of the Nile and of Egypt avoids the negative stereotypes and clichés about Egypt familiar from Augustan texts, instead characterising the Nile as peacefully productive, and made more so by human intervention in the form of irrigation and hydrological works. Strabo's description of the Nile nevertheless participates in the Roman imperial project. Although he demonstrates a certain admiration for the ancient and well-organised life of the Egyptians, as superior to the remote and barbarous Ethiopians in particular, it also reveals the improvements brought to the Nile by the early Ptolemies and by Rome. The Nile is no longer seen as wholly unique or remarkable; rather it is incorporated into Strabo's massive geographical project as one of the many remarkable rivers of the world, which are now under direct or indirect Roman hegemony. The Nile in Strabo's account is no longer a sign of the exotic Other, or at least, no longer simply such a sign; although a sense of difference between the Nile and elsewhere remains, this is a difference that is now accommodated within the known *oikoumene* and the Roman empire.

Strabo's Nilotic narrative embodies a moment of participation in a Greek discourse about Egypt and its river. Strabo employs characteristically Herodotean tropes, especially autopsy, enacting a reiteration of Herodotus' famous narrative that goes beyond his predecessor's geographical limits. The next chapter examines another aspect of Greek Nilographic discourse, discussion of the Nile's two major problems, the cause of the inundation and the location of the sources. This discourse is notable for the emphasis laid on the creation and evocation of a literary tradition, through the repetition of predecessors and the use of specific forms of argument. Such texts create and constantly reflect back on Greek Nilography, which becomes a marker of Greek curiosity, education, and the authority of the writer.

Chapter 3

The twin problems of the Nile: the creation and transformations of Nilographic traditions

The Nile presented two connected problems of understanding for Greek and Roman writers, philosophers and rulers, which remained absorbing dilemmas for centuries. The first problem was the cause of the annual inundation, and the second, the location of the sources of the river. Discussion and debate of these twin problems formed the core of Graeco-Roman Nilotic discourse, as problems, solutions, refutations, and new theories were endlessly re-iterated. As early as Herodotus, the first extant specimen of Nile-literature, and the model for later texts, the historian portrays himself as intervening in a debate that is *already* ongoing; Herodotus is not the source of such debate, but a moment within it.

This chapter examines Greek texts that participate in this tradition of debate about the twin problems of the Nile, and presents new readings that situate the texts within that tradition, as well as in the context of increasing knowledge and expanding geopolitical horizons. The chapter falls into two parts. The first examines Greek discussions of the twin Nilotic problems from Herodotus to the Early Empire, as well as the parallel doxographical tradition. It focuses on the creation of canonical traditions of Nilotic speculation, and the ways in which each writer claims authority within the tradition. A central aspect of this discourse is the distinction made between the two problems, with the result that the first problem (the cause of the inundation) becomes emblematic of the process of investigation, whereas the second (the location of the sources) marks the ultimate limits of such investigation and human knowledge. The second part of this chapter examines the transformation of the form and functions of speculative discourse on the Nile in the *Egyptian Oration* of Aelius Aristides, a second-century AD text that is usually dismissed as a weak treatment of the problems of the Nile. On closer consideration, and particularly in the light of the traditions of Nilotic discourse, Aristides' oration is revealed as an innovative reworking of the inheritance of Nilotic texts.

Part I: the creation of a tradition

1. The texts

Greek, and eventually Roman, speculation on the causes of the inundation and the sources of the Nile persisted for generations. I begin by outlining the primary texts that attest to this speculation, before examining their important features.³⁸¹ The texts fall into two categories: first are texts that present or summarise earlier theories in order to defend or refute them and/or argue in support of a particular theory; second are texts that summarise earlier theories in the form of a list, or collection of *doxai*.

Herodotus 2.19-34 is the first extant Greek text that discusses the twin problems of the Nile.³⁸² He treats first the cause of the inundation (2.19-27) and then the river's sources (28-34). The second significant text is a treatise *De inundatione Nili (D.I.N.)*, of which the Greek original is lost and which now survives for the most part only in a medieval Latin translation.³⁸³ The treatise has frequently been attributed to Aristotle,³⁸⁴ although this attribution has been disputed, with Theophrastus the other strong contender for authorship.³⁸⁵

First, evidence against Aristotelian authorship comes in the form of *P.Oxy.* 4458, which has been identified as a fragment of the work of the second-century philosopher and geographer

³⁸¹ The theories themselves are well-known and discussed in detail elsewhere; see particularly Bonneau (1964a), part 2: 135-214.

³⁸² See Foucart (1943), Bonneau (1964a), Gianotti (1988), Lloyd (1976) and (2007) 254-62, Thomas (1998) and (2000), Munson (2001a) and (2001b), Graham (2003).

³⁸³ Published as Rose (1886) fr. 248, pp. 188-97; and by Jakoby as *FGrH* 646 F 1. The text was re-published with a translation and discussion in French by Bonneau (1964b); Beullens (2011) presents a new Dutch translation and discussion of the text.

³⁸⁴ Partsch (1909), followed by Rehm *RE* 33.57-62, Balty-Fontaine (1959), Bonneau (1964b) and Buellens (2011).

³⁸⁵ Rose (1863), Steinmetz (1964) 278-96, Sharples (1998) 197-8.

Poseidonius on the inundation.³⁸⁶ The first column of the very fragmentary papyrus has strong similarities to what would be the Greek original of the *D.I.N.*;³⁸⁷ it is unclear whether Poseidonius knew that work directly, or only indirectly through Eratosthenes.³⁸⁸ It seems likely that Poseidonius distinguished Aristotle from the author of the *D.I.N.*, and again, as Robert Fowler notes, both Strabo and Agatharchides (in Diodorus Siculus) ignored the *D.I.N.*³⁸⁹ Further indications that Aristotle is not the author are given in the text's explanation for the inundation, in the rainfall in the Ethiopian highlands. The text implies that this rain is caused by the compression of clouds against the mountains (§12). This explanation for rain is associated in ancient texts with Theophrastus, rather than Aristotle, who explained rain by the process of cooling.³⁹⁰ As Sharples notes, this suggests the the *D.I.N.* is not Aristotle's, but rather Theophrastus', or someone following Theophrastus' explanation for rain.³⁹¹ This evidence is sufficient to cast doubt on the idea that Aristotle wrote the *D.I.N.*; it is not sufficient to conclude that Theophrastus is the author. However, it appears likely that the *D.I.N.* derives from someone familiar with Theophrastus' ideas about rain.

Further discussions of the twin problems of the Nile are found in the *Bibliothèque* of Diodorus Siculus, and in Strabo's *Geographia*.³⁹² The source of Diodorus' discussion has come under considerable scrutiny, like the rest of the first book; it is typically attributed to Agatharchides of

³⁸⁶ Fowler (2000) 134.

³⁸⁷ Jakobi and Luppe (2000).

³⁸⁸ Fowler (2000) 141.

³⁸⁹ Fowler (2000) 141-2.

³⁹⁰ For the contrast between the Aristotelian and Theophrastean explanations, see e.g. Olympiodorus, *On Aristotle's Meteorology* 1.9 346b30 (CAG vol.12.2.p.80.30-81.1 Stüve) = Fortenbaugh, Huby, Sharples and Gutas (1992) fr. 221B; for discussion of Theophrastus' ideas about rain, see Sharples (1998) 194-198.

³⁹¹ Sharples (1998) 197. Steinmetz (1964) 281-3 also argues that Theophrastus wrote the work.

³⁹² Diodorus Siculus *Bib.* 1.30-41, and Strabo 17.1.5 C789-C791.

Cnidus, with or without Artemidorus as intermediary.³⁹³ However, as with the attribution of the rest of Book 1 to Hecataeus, the attribution to Agatharchides relies on unsafe assumptions about the text and method of Diodorus, which I argued in chapter 1 were highly misleading.³⁹⁴ As in chapter 1, I refer to Diodorus as the author of chapters 30-41, by which I do not mean to imply that Diodorus has *not* used such sources as Agatharchides or Artemidorus, but rather that any such material cannot be neatly excised from Diodorus' text and as such it is more profitable to treat Diodorus himself as the organising figure.

A second group of texts attests to a doxographical tradition concerning the inundation, which recorded earlier opinions in list form without commenting on their plausibility or refuting their arguments. The *Anonymus Florentinus*, preserved on a thirteenth- or fourteenth-century manuscript, records the *doxai* of several thinkers about the inundation, including Thales, Anaxagoras, Kallisthenes, Euthymenes, Oinopides and Herodotus.³⁹⁵ A list of *doxai* about the inundation of the Nile also occurs in the *Placita* of Aetius, the first-century AD doxographer, a large collection of doxographic material.³⁹⁶ This text collects the opinions of Thales, Euthymenes, Anaxagoras, Democritus, Herodotus and Ephorus. Finally, the scholion to Apollonius Rhodius *Arg.* 4.269-271a cites Anaxagoras, Euripides, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Nicagoras, Democritus, Oinopides, Ephorus, Thales and Diogenes.³⁹⁷

2. The first problem: the causes of the inundation

2.1. Argument and Greek 'cleverness'

³⁹³ Scheider (1880) originally attempted to attribute chapters 30-41 to Hecataeus of Abdera, although this required considerable interpolation. Leopoldi (1892) proposed Agatharchides as Diodorus' source for these chapters, on the basis of Agatharchides' prominence at the conclusion of the passage. Leopoldi has been followed by Schwartz *RE* s.v. 'Diodoros [38], Murray (1970) and Priestley (2010). Burton (1972) argued that Artemidorus may be an intermediary between Agatharchides and Diodorus.

³⁹⁴ See chapter 1, pp. 40-42.

³⁹⁵ = *FGrHist* 647 F 1.

³⁹⁶ = *FGrHist* 647 F 2, Diels *DG* 384-6 (Aet. *Plac.* IV)

³⁹⁷ = *FGrHist* 647 F 3, cf. Lachenaud (2010) 442-5 with French translation and notes.

Herodotus is the first extant witness to the Greek traditions of speculation about the Nile. The historian characterises contemporary debate about the causes of the Nile inundation as a quest for the public recognition of cleverness; this extraordinary phenomenon presents an opportunity not solely for the increase of knowledge but also for the display of Greek erudition:

Ἀλλὰ Ἑλλήνων μὲν τινες ἐπίσημοι βουλόμενοι γενέσθαι σοφίην ἔλεξαν περὶ τοῦ ὕδατος τούτου τριφασίας ὁδοῦς. (Hdt. 2.20)

But certain Greeks, wanting to be notable for cleverness, have spoken about this water in three different ways...

Herodotus' own intervention in the debate is carefully staged to accentuate and display his own skill in argument and the handling of evidence. The excursus on the inundation (2.19-27) is a *tour de force* of argumentation, in both the refutation of others and the exposition of his own theory. As Rosalind Thomas observes, it is 'probably the single most sustained piece of argumentative proof in the *Histories*'.³⁹⁸

2.1.1. Herodotus

The structure of Herodotus' discussion is highly ordered. It begins with a statement of the problem (2.19), detailing Herodotus' particular area of interest, namely the reasons for the rise of the river at the summer solstice and its subsequent fall. The historian proceeds by listing and refuting other theories (2.20-23), before presenting and arguing in favour of his own solution (2.24-27). The entire passage is full of the language of logical argument, evidence and proof. First to be discussed is the theory of the etesian winds (2.20), the theory of Thales, although this name is not mentioned in the text.³⁹⁹ Herodotus dismisses this argument on account of its logical inconsistencies, since the Nile continues to rise even in the absence of the winds, and other rivers in Syria and Libya do not behave in the same way. The second theory mentioned by Herodotus is

³⁹⁸ Thomas (2000) 182, cf. Lloyd (1976) 93 and 144-165, Thomas (1998), Munson (2001a), (2001b), Graham (2003) esp. 304-5.

³⁹⁹ See DK 11 A16; for discussion of the theory, see Bonneau (1964a) 151-159, following Stricker (1956) 10-12. Lloyd (1976) 98-9 rightly demolishes Stricker's argument (followed by Bonneau) that Thales' theory was derived from Egyptian ideas.

that the inundation is the result of the Nile flowing from Okeanos, a theory propounded by Hecataeus of Miletus.⁴⁰⁰ This theory is denigrated as ‘less rational’ (ανεπιστημονεστέρη) and ‘more marvellous’ (θωμασιωτέρη). Herodotus sets himself squarely within the practice of naturalistic explanations, and rejects anything that smacks more of marvel than of rationality. It is dismissed because it fails to pass the important test of falsifiability; since ‘he carried his tale into the region of the unknown’ (ἐς ἀφανὲς τὸν μῦθον ἀνενείκας, *Hist.* 2.23), the theory is incapable of being tested, of being proven true or false.⁴⁰¹ The third theory is examined and refuted in closer detail. This theory is that of Anaxagoras of Clazomenae, and asserts that ‘the Nile flows from where snows melt’ (τὸν Νεῖλον ῥέειν ἀπὸ τηκομένης χιόνος, 2.22).⁴⁰² The arguments used to refute Anaxagoras’ theory rely on the apparent improbability of snow falling in Ethiopia, ‘from the hottest places’ (ἀπὸ τῶν θερμοτάτων):⁴⁰³

<Τεκμήρια> γῶν πολλά ἐστι, ἀνδρὶ γε λογίζεσθαι τοιοῦτων πέρι οἴω τε ἔόντι, ὡς οὐδὲ οἰκὸς ἀπὸ χιόνος μιν ῥέειν.

Anyone who cause use his wits about such matters will find plenty of arguments to prove how unlikely it is that snow is the cause of the flooding.

Herodotus’ refutations of previous theories therefore expose inconsistent arguments, reject what is based on myth, and illustrate what is improbable. Herodotus’ own theory is stated twice, briefly at 2.24, and in an extended form at 2.25-27. The brief summary relies on argument from probability (note οἰκὸς); the long form adds that the Nile behaves in a way opposite from all other rivers, which is made out to be consistent with the behaviour of the sun in that region (2.25).

The problem of the inundation therefore allows the historian to demonstrate the process and methods of inquiry, by his intervention into an existing debate in which he sets himself above earlier theorists. His apparent reluctance to theorise about the inundation does not diminish the

⁴⁰⁰ Hdt. 2.21, 23. See Bonneau (1964a) 143-50, Lloyd (1976) 100-1.

⁴⁰¹ See also Fowler (1996) 79.

⁴⁰² Bonneau (1964a) 161-4, Lloyd (1976) 101-4, and (2007) 255-6, cf. Thomas (2000) 136.

⁴⁰³ On arguments from probability in Herodotus, see Lloyd (1976) 102 and esp. (1975) 162-3, Thomas (2000) 168 n. 1 with bibliography.

intricate care with which he advances his own argument. Both by dismissing his predecessors' solutions and presenting his, the historian adds to his own reputation.⁴⁰⁴

Texts that speculate on the causes of the inundation frequently demonstrate the importance of rationalism, careful argumentation, and the presentation of evidence. This is particularly true of the *D.I.N.*, Diodorus Siculus, and Strabo, which reveal a sustained engagement with the methods and approaches of Herodotus. Careful argumentation and evidence are less significant for texts that reflect the doxographical tradition, such as the *Anonymus Florentinus*, which tend to summarise rather than critique earlier views.

2.1.2. *De inundatione Nili (D.I.N.)*

Like Herodotus, the writer of the *D.I.N.* proceeds through the theories in turn, dismissing and refuting them, before finishing with his own solution to the problem. Like Herodotus, the writer begins by setting out the problem (§1).⁴⁰⁵ The theories themselves are arranged, as Bonneau observes, not chronologically, but logically: first, the text treats theories that explain the inundation by the addition of water during the summer (Thales, Diogenes, Anaxagoras, as well as two accounts that are unnamed, which are known to be those of Euthymenes of Marseille and Timaeus); second, a theory involving the inversion of seasons (attributed to Nicagoras of Cyprus); and third, theories based on the subtraction of water during the winter (Herodotus, and another anonymous theory, that of Oenopides of Chios).⁴⁰⁶ As in Herodotus, the refutation of the theories is an important element of the text. The theory of the etesian winds is refuted by the same means that Herodotus used, namely, an exposure of the inconsistency of the argument, and a counter-argument κατ' ἀναλογίαν (§3). The theory of Diogenes of Apollonia (§4) is likewise refuted by reference to the other rivers of Libya, which do not behave in the same way as the Nile. The theory of Anaxagoras of Clazomenae, which explains the inundation of the Nile by the fall of snow in

⁴⁰⁴ cf. Graham (2003) 305.

⁴⁰⁵ All references are to Bonneau's text (1964b).

⁴⁰⁶ Summarised clearly by Bonneau (1964b) 16-7.

Ethiopia, is discussed in greater detail, but likewise dismissed; in particular, the text relies on the geographical idea that the Nile is too big to be fed by snow-melt, and that Ethiopia and Libya are too hot to produce such snow (§5), which Herodotus also says. The author also dismisses some theories as irrational, and their arguments as poor; in particular, the two anonymous theorists discussed at §8 are described as ‘those who do not have plausible hypotheses’ (*eos qui non habent rationes verisimiles*) and as ‘completely devoid of sense’ (*irrationabile totaliter*). Particular scorn is reserved for arguments deemed to be irrational; the investigation of the problems of the Nile is expressed as a matter for rationalising and naturalistic speculation. The writer of the *D.I.N.* also criticises the quality of the argument proposed by Nicagoras of Cyprus as insufficiently clear (*non plane autem hoc determinat* §9), and for not advancing the debate (*videtur enim nichil negociatus esse circa hoc quod dicitur*).⁴⁰⁷ The parallels with Herodotus’ use of argument and logical structure in his account of the inundation and sources of the Nile are significant, and mark the continuation of the tradition of Nilotic inquiry and investigation by the writer of the *D.I.N.* In short, both accounts are similarly structured, both begin with Thales, both rely on arguments from probability and use similarly-located rivers as evidence for arguments from analogy, and both locate themselves within a naturalistic tradition.

At §10, the writer begins a countdown of the remaining theories, until finally it seems as though only one solution remains (*nunc autem relinquetur sola causa dictorum*, §12), which the writer of the treatise adopts, namely the theory that the inundation is caused by rainfall. The text claims that the problem (*problema*) of the inundation is solved, that it is in fact no longer a *problema*. The text argues in favour of this theory by emphasising both that it is derived from observational evidence and that it provides support for the refutation of Anaxagoras’ theory about snow-melt.⁴⁰⁸ The treatise does not indicate whose observation led to this resolution of the problem.

⁴⁰⁷ Nicagoras of Cyprus is credited with the idea that the Nile flows most abundantly in the summer because it seeps out of the ground in the region where it is winter during our summer. For Nicagoras, cf. Σ Ap. Rhod. *Argon*. 4.269 (p. 123 above); for explanations of the flood based on the idea that it emerges from the ground, see Bonneau (1964a) 171-86.

⁴⁰⁸ On observation, see Bonneau (1964b) 26.

Observation of the rains and the solving of the problem of why the Nile floods is attributed to several figures in Greek texts. As we have noted, the *D.I.N.* does not attribute the observations to anyone in particular. A fragment of the third-century BCE natural scientist Eratosthenes, quoted by Proclus, is similarly vague, stating only that some people arrived at the sources of the Nile and saw the rains, with the result that the explanation of Aristotle was confirmed.⁴⁰⁹ In the first century BCE, Diodorus reports Agatharchides' opinion (second century BCE) that rainfall in the mountains of Ethiopia causes the inundation (Diod. Sic. 1.41.4-9). Diodorus' approval of his theory is often treated as a reason for attributing the entire excursus on the inundation to the second-century BCE historian and geographer.⁴¹⁰ Diodorus' commendation of Agatharchides is however rather circumspect, being described as 'nearest the truth' (ἔγγιστα... τῆ ἀληθείᾳ, 1.41.4). In Diodorus' report, Agatharchides presents his theory almost apologetically, pre-emptively defending it against the objection that too little is known about the causes of the flood:

Πολλὰ γὰρ τὴν φύσιν ἐναντίως φέρειν, ὧν τὰς αἰτίας οὐκ ἐφικτὸν ἀνθρώπους ἀκριβῶς ἐξευρεῖν. (*Bib.* 1.41.6)

For nature presents many contradictory phenomena, the exact causes of which are beyond the power of mankind to discover.

Agatharchides then offers, again rather defensively, not observational evidence from Egypt, but statements about Asia 'to testify' (μαρτυρεῖν).⁴¹¹ Agatharchides' report is not therefore connected with any kind of eyewitness reports. Diodorus himself suggests that Ptolemy Philadelphus was the first Greek to cross into Ethiopia (Diod. Sic. 1.37.5). The passage is of dubious historical value, since Greeks are known to have visited the region prior to the reign of Philadelphus.⁴¹² Strabo

⁴⁰⁹ Proclus, on Pl. *Tim.* 37d = Arist. Fr. 246 = Eratosthenes fr. III B, 52 Berger = *FGrH* III C 1, 646 T 2c.

⁴¹⁰ See Burton (1972) 141-2, Strasburger (1975) 88-90, Verdin (1983). I have argued in chapter 1 of this thesis against the wholesale attribution of large sections of Diodorus' text to earlier writers.

⁴¹¹ Herodotus also used 'proofs' (μαρτύρια) to demonstrate the falsity of the snow-melt theory (Hdt. 2.22).

⁴¹² Greek mercenaries in the reign of Neco II visited the region, and under Psammetichus II, Greek mercenaries penetrated far into Nubia. Herodotus may have visited the area, and both Alexander and Ptolemy I stationed soldiers at Elephantine. See Burton (1972) 138, Burstein (1976) 141-2.

contrasts the ancients (οἱ ἀρχαῖοι) who relied ‘mostly on conjecture’ (στοχασμῶ τὸ πλεόν) with ‘those of later times’ (οἱ δ’ ὕστερον) ‘who were eyewitnesses’ (αὐτόπται γεννηθέντες); his account links this eyewitness material with navigators of the Arabian Gulf and Ptolemaic elephant-hunters.⁴¹³ Texts from the third through to the first centuries BCE therefore either remain silent about the identity of the eyewitnesses, or link them with the activities of the Ptolemies south of Egypt.

Later sources associate eyewitness evidence for the rainfall-theory with the activities of Alexander the Great. John Lydus, the sixth-century CE antiquarian writer, states that Kallisthenes claimed to have campaigned with Alexander and gone to Ethiopia where he discovered that the Nile floods from the huge rains in that area.⁴¹⁴ John Lydus’ ‘quotation’ is also problematic: first, John says that Kallisthenes discussed this Nile-expedition in Book 4 of the *Hellenica*, which however was published before Alexander invaded Asia.⁴¹⁵ Second, according to the *Anonymus Florentinus*, Kallisthenes’ opinion is given as γνώμη, rather than ὄψις.⁴¹⁶ It is therefore unlikely that Kallisthenes made such a claim, as John Lydus asserts. From the ninth century, we have a passage from Photius, who epitomises the anonymous author of a life of Pythagoras.⁴¹⁷ This text suggests that Aristotle himself observed the phenomenon, having accompanied Alexander to those regions where he ascertained the cause ‘by sight’ (ὄψει). Photius quotes the Greek original of the *D.I.N.*, stating that ‘this is no longer a problem, for it has been clearly seen that it rises from the rains’ (τοῦτο οὐκέτι πρόβλημά ἐστιν· ὥφθη γὰρ φανερώς ὅτι ἐξ ὑετῶν αὖξει). The tradition of a Nile-expedition under Alexander has been thought historical, yet the evidence is late and problematic.⁴¹⁸ Ian Moyer summarises the main reasons for doubting such an expedition as being, first, the absence of any evidence for the expedition in the less fanciful traditions of Alexander-

⁴¹³ Strabo 17.1.5 C789.

⁴¹⁴ John Lydus 4.107= *FGrH* 124 F 12a.

⁴¹⁵ Kallisthenes *FGrI* II B, 124 T 27.

⁴¹⁶ See Fowler (2000) 140, cf. Burstein (1976) 138.

⁴¹⁷ Photius *Bibl.* 249², 441b (Henry) = *FGrH* III C 1, 646 T 2a.

⁴¹⁸ The tradition is taken historically by Burstein (1976) and Vasunia (2001) 278-82.

biography, including those derived from Kallisthenes, and second, the use of Kallisthenes' name as a way to garner authority for fabulous stories about Alexander.⁴¹⁹ The value of the tradition lies in its place as part of a nexus of Greek and later Roman ideas connecting Alexander, as archetypal soldier and ruler with the quest for the elusive Nile-source.⁴²⁰

As we have seen therefore, the earliest sources connecting the theory of the rainfall with eyewitness testimony do not specify who first saw the rains. It is only later sources that make a connection between such eyewitness accounts and the activities of, first, the Ptolemies, and later, Alexander himself. Although the historical question remains open, this evolving tradition of attaching eyewitness accounts to various important figures is significant for our understanding of the nature of Nilotic inquiry in Greek culture. It illustrates both the importance of autopsy, and also the connection between scientific research and expansionist political control in Nilotic discourse, a theme that is explored in more detail later in this chapter.

2.1.3. Diodorus Siculus

Subsequent texts continue to debate the causes of the inundation in terms of argumentation, rationalism and evidence. This tradition is particularly evident in Diodorus Siculus and Strabo, as well as the Latin texts, Seneca's *Quaestiones Naturales* and Pliny's *Historia Naturalis*.⁴²¹ The Nile-exkursus in Diodorus Siculus is full of various modes of argumentation. Hellanicus, Cadmus, Hecataeus and other early logographoi are characterised by - and dismissed for - their reliance on myth (εἰς τὰς μυθῶδεις ἀποφάσεις ἀπέκλιναν).⁴²² Like Herodotus, Diodorus uses recognised forms of argument to refute his predecessors, and adds rhetorically to his arguments by asserting

⁴¹⁹ Moyer (2011) 10, n.41.

⁴²⁰ For further discussion of this theme, see below pp. 139-141.

⁴²¹ Sen. *QN* 4a.2.23-30, Plin. *HN* 5.10.

⁴²² Hellanicus of Mytilene, a contemporary of Herodotus, wrote several works on mythography, local and regional history and chronology, *FGrHist* 3 B 40-50. Cadmus of Miletus is referred to in several sources (Suda, Dion. Hal. *Thuc.* 23, Joseph. *Ap.* 1.13) as a historian; Schmid and Stählin (1946) 691-3 doubts Cadmus' existence.

that other theories are ‘easy to refute’ or ‘plausible but false’. To take the second of these elements first, the theory of Thales, is ‘seemingly plausible, [but] may easily be shown to be false’ (τοῦ δὲ λόγου τούτου, καίπερ εἶναι δοκοῦντος πιθανοῦ, ῥάδιον ἐξελέγξαι τὸ ψεῦδος, 1.38.3). The language of ‘proof’ (ἐξελέγξαι) in particular recalls Herodotus, and is re-iterated in the dismissal of Democritus of Abdera: ‘it is easy for anyone to refute this explanation also’ (ῥάδιον δὲ καὶ τοῦτον ἐξελέγξαι, 1.39.4).⁴²³ The theory of Anaxagoras likewise requires ‘a brief refutation’ (οὐ πολλῆς ἀντιρρήσεως, 1.38.5). Diodorus claims that Ephorus attempts to use probable arguments (πιθανολογεῖν... πειρᾶται), but he too does not ‘arrive at the truth’ (τῆς δ’ ἀληθείας οὐδαμῶς ἐπιτυγχάνων, 1.39.7). Unusually in a Greek treatise, the passage preserved in Diodorus Siculus also purports to record the opinion of the ‘wise men in Memphis’. This echoes the comments of Herodotus concerning his questioning the priests ‘of Hephaestus’ at Memphis (2.3), and likewise the difficulty of obtaining evidence from the ‘priests or anyone else’ (οὔτε τι τῶν ἱρέων οὔτε ἄλλου οὐδενός, 2.19.1) with regard to the inundation. The passage in Diodorus both goes beyond Herodotus, by finding an opinion among the ‘wise men’, and subjects the theory to the same standards of testing as other theories; it admits of an ‘obvious rebuttal’ (πρόχειρον ἀντίρρησιν, 1.40.5), and is particularly criticised for being ‘incapable of disproof’ (ἀνεξέλεγκτον, 1.40.1). The passage in Diodorus employs some of the same modes of argumentation used by Herodotus. Arguments κατ’ ἀναλογίαν, which we have seen are frequently used in Herodotus’ Nile-excursus, are likewise a feature of Diodorus’ version.⁴²⁴ We also find argument from probability, a form used in Herodotus’ excursus (2.25.2, 2.27), at 1.40.6; note the introductory phrase, ‘for it is likely that...’ (εἰκὸς γὰρ εἶναι...). Other arguments reveal (or purport to reveal) the inconsistencies of earlier theories, a move likewise characteristic of Herodotus’ discussion. Diodorus attempts to find inconsistencies in Herodotus’ own theory, by asserting that the sun would have the same effect on other rivers in Libya, ‘but... nowhere in Libya is anything like this to

⁴²³ Democritus’ theory states that snow from the mountains of the north melts and forms clouds which are driven south by the etesian winds and hit the mountains of Ethiopia, thereby causing the inundation. See Steckel, s.v. ‘Demokritos’, *RE Suppl.* 12: 191-223, Bonneau (1964b) 201-3.

⁴²⁴ See e.g. 1.38.3.

be seen taking place' (οὐδαμοῦ τῆς Λιβύης οὐδὲν τοιοῦτον γινόμενον θεωρεῖται, 1.38.12).⁴²⁵ However, in the case of Herodotus, the writer does more than simply find flaws in the earlier historian's argumentation; rather, he presents the historian as careless in his own reasoning, as 'inventing an explanation' (σχεδιάζων, 1.38.12). As Jessica Priestley has observed, it suits the writer's 'rhetoric to depict Herodotus as less careful in his methods than himself'.⁴²⁶ That is, Diodorus represents Herodotus as making the same mistakes to which he himself objects.⁴²⁷

2.2. A sense of the past

It has been seen that texts that speculate about the causes of the inundation, from Herodotus on, place a great deal of weight on the presentation of naturalistic, rationalistic explanations, argumentation and the use of evidence, especially evidence derived from observation. We have seen that Herodotus' Nile-excursus is already participating in an Ionian debate about the causes of the inundation. A text that tackles the subject of the causes of the inundation never begins *ex nihilo*, but is conscious of the surrounding debate. The inclusion of theories from previous thinkers and writers is an integral element of Greek discussions of the Nile, creating a tradition in which the repetition of the past becomes, despite the refutation of earlier theories, indispensable to the new text. Texts frequently appeal to the same handful of earlier theories and names, even those whose ideas were easily shown to be false. Recurrent repetition forms a classicising literary tradition, even a canon, of names connected with the inundation. Marincola has succinctly described ancient literary tradition as inherently 'traditional' and 'consciously classicising', 'with appeal made to a few unchanging models of acknowledged mastery'.⁴²⁸ Texts on the inundation of the Nile claim novelty

⁴²⁵ For a defence of the logic of Herodotus' theory, see Graham (2003) 298-300.

⁴²⁶ Priestley (2010) 136.

⁴²⁷ As others have noted, Diodorus' tone towards Herodotus seems to be relatively mild throughout; see Murray (1972) 205, and Priestley (2010) 121 on Diodorus' (=Agatharchides') description of Herodotus as πολυπράγμων at 1.37.4 as broadly sympathetic, even a 'respectful' tribute. On the broad range of connotations in Diodorus' concept of *polypragmosyne*, see Leigh (2013) 106-7.

⁴²⁸ Marincola (1997) 12.

and the solution to the problem, yet the incorporation of long-since discredited theories speaks to the importance of prior investigation and discourse in this debate.

This continuity can be seen perhaps most clearly in the case of the afterlife of Thales of Miletus, the sixth-century BCE philosopher, who speculated that the cause of the inundation was the blowing of the etesian winds against the mouths of the river.⁴²⁹ The weaknesses of the theory were, as shown above, articulated by Herodotus (2.20.2-3), yet it was frequently re-iterated in later texts, including the Aristotelian *D.I.N.* (§3), Diodorus Siculus (1.38.2), Lucretius (*DRN* 6.715-728), Seneca (*Nat. Quaest.* 4.A.2.23) and Aristides (*Eg. Or.* 10-11).⁴³⁰ The theory was also mentioned (not always attributed to Thales by name) by Pliny the Elder (*H.N.* 5.9), Manilius (*Astron.* 3.630), Plutarch (*Plac. Phil.* 4.1.1), Philo (*Vita Mosis* 1.20), Diogenes Laertius (*Vit. Philos.* 1.37), Ammianus Marcellinus (22.15.7), Arrian (*Ind.* 6.7), and Heliodorus (2.28.3).⁴³¹ As Bonneau has observed, each time the theory of Thales is discussed, the previous arguments are summarised, and others are added.⁴³² The inclusion of Thales in discussions of the Nile therefore both activates earlier instantiations of the investigation, and marks a new addition to the discourse. Thales' position at the head of the tradition of Nilotic inquiry is particularly significant, since Thales is seen as the first philosopher; Aristotle named him the 'founder' (ἀρχηγός) of natural philosophy.⁴³³ Including Thales at the beginning of lists of theorists could be seen as an attempt to present Nilotic inquiry as a prototypical type of natural inquiry, one that stretches right back to the beginning of Greek philosophy, and that is therefore integral to Greek cultural expression. Later writers therefore locate themselves within a continuing tradition of naturalistic inquiry that originated with the founder of philosophy.

⁴²⁹ For this theory, see Bonneau (1964a) 153-9.

⁴³⁰ See Bonneau (1964a) 154.

⁴³¹ Bonneau (1964a) 154-8.

⁴³² Bonneau (1964a) 154: 'Chaque fois que la théorie de Thalès est discutée, les arguments précédents sont repris, d'autres s'ajoutent'.

⁴³³ Arist. *Metaph.* 1,3,983b17-984a3.

In what follows, I examine the importance of an awareness of the preceding tradition in several Greek texts concerned with the inundation. The *D.I.N.* shares many similarities of form and structure with Herodotus' inquiry into the problems of the Nile, in addition to the emphasis on rigorous argumentation. First, the names and theories of the writer's predecessors have a striking presence in the text. Whereas in Herodotus the theories about the inundation are not explicitly attributed to individuals, the writer of the *D.I.N.* includes a catalogue of the names of earlier thinkers together with their theories. The text suggests that those he cites are not the only writers to have discussed the problem, but rather that he has selected among them:

Horum autem qui quidem existunt dicti prius a dubitantibus de ipso, hos nos dicemus. (D.I.N. §3)

Of those explanations that have been made by people inquiring into the problem, these are the ones we will speak of.

The text proceeds to give the theories of: Thales of Miletus, Diogenes of Apollonia, Anaxagoras of Clazomenae, Nicagoras of Cyprus, and Herodotus. Each theory is typically introduced by a construction of reported speech, for instance, *Thales... inquit* (§3), *Diogenes... ait* (§4), *Anaxagoras... ait* (§5). This form is typical of doxographical lists and treatises. However, the treatise is not reducible to such a doxography, at least in the sense of a list of briefly curtailed opinions, since the *D.I.N.* gives weight to the careful refutation of each theory, as we observed above.

This tradition of inquiry about the inundation is also attested in Strabo. At 17.1.5 C789, the geographer quotes Poseidonius on the chain of writers who theorised that the summer rains were responsible for the rising:

τὸ δ' ὅτι ἐξ ὄμβρων αἰ ἀναβάσεις μὴ ζητεῖν, μηδὲ τοιούτων δεῖσθαι μαρτύρων οἷους Ποσειδώνιος εἶρηκε. φησὶ γὰρ Καλλισθένη λέγειν τὴν ἐκ τῶν ὄμβρων αἰτίαν τῶν θερινῶν παρὰ Ἀριστοτέλους λαβόντα, ἐκείνον δὲ παρὰ Θρασυάλκου τοῦ Θασίου (τῶν ἀρχαίων δὲ φυσικῶν εἰς οὗτος) ἐκείνον δὲ παρ' ἄλλου, τὸν δὲ παρ' Ὀμήρου διιπετέα φάσκοντος τὸν Νεῖλον „ἄψ δ' „εἰς Αἰγύπτωιο διιπετέος ποταμοῖο.“

But the fact that the rising of the river results from rains should not have been investigated, nor yet should this matter have needed such witnesses as Poseidonius mentions; for instance, he says

that it was Callisthenes who states that the summer rains are the cause of the risings, though Callisthenes took the assertion from Aristotle, and Aristotle from Thrasylces the Thasian (one of the early physicists), and Thrasylces from someone else, and he from Homer, who calls the Nile 'heaven-fed': 'And back again to the land of Aegyptus, heaven-fed river'.

The inclusion of Homer at the culmination of the list is particularly significant, invoking the texts that were seen as the *fons et origo* of Greek literary culture. Greek poetry frequently declares its awareness of Homer as the progenitor of literature and culture;⁴³⁴ Strabo's quotation of Poseidonius claims that figure also for the longstanding problem of the Nile. Indeed, the list of witnesses suggests that the answer to the problem had already been discovered by Homer, that there was, ultimately, no problem in the first place, only Homer's truth.

Strabo comments obliquely on the extent of speculative discourse about the Nile by dismissing the subject, 'since it has been discussed by many' (πολλῶν εἰρηκότων, 17.1.5). He also hints at the agonistic nature of Nilotic inquiry, which generates a competitive rivalry - and even plagiarism - between writers. Strabo mentions the work of those 'in our time' (καθ' ἡμᾶς) on this subject, that is Eudorus and Ariston the Peripatetic.⁴³⁵ Strabo humorously mentions that they produced 'the book about the Nile' (τὸ περὶ τοῦ Νείλου βιβλίον); given the similarity between their work, it is clear that one is appropriated (ὑποβαλλόμενος) from the other. The accusation of plagiarism made by Strabo points to the value placed on theories about the Nile; as Herodotus had earlier stated, inquiry about the inundation is an opportunity for the display of Greek cleverness.

⁴³⁴ For Homer as the literary source in Greek culture, see chapter 1, p. 69.

⁴³⁵ Eudorus and Ariston seem to have been active in the middle of the first century BC. Ariston defected from the Academy, and spent time in Alexandria, where he produced a work on the Nile at roughly the same time as Eudorus. They appear to have adopted the Aristotelian theory about rainfall being the cause of the inundation. Moraux (1984) 516-7 suggests that one of the two may be the author of the *D.I.N.* (which cannot be true if Fowler is right that *P.Oxy.* 4458, which quotes the *D.I.N.*, is from a work by Poseidonius, the second-century geographer. On Eudorus, see Martini *RE* s.v. 'Eudorus [10]', Moraux (1984) 509-27, esp. 516-7; on Ariston, see Gercke *RE* s.v. 'Ariston [55]', Mariotti (1966), Moraux (1973) 181-93. Diels (1876) 11 notes that the similarity between the works might point to a common source rather than plagiarism.

The inclusion of an excursus on the inundation of the Nile in the *Bibliothēke* of Diodorus Siculus also signals his participation in the tradition of historiographical and scientific inquiry. Diodorus' excursus on the causes of the inundation lists and names Thales, Anaxagoras, Euripides, Herodotus, Democritus, Ephorus, the 'wise men' in Memphis, Oenopides, and Agatharchides as previous theorists. Once again, we may note the importance of including the names and theories of one's predecessors, even as such theories are rebutted. Further, one may observe the relative stability of the tradition, since the names listed are familiar from previous texts. Diodorus' excursus is not simply a display of erudition or investigative skill, which one might expect to incorporate other less well-known names and theories, but also signals his intervention in the tradition - in the canon - of Nilotic inquiry. This participation is particularly significant in the case of Diodorus, for whom an engagement with his predecessors is a significant element of his rhetorical self-presentation, part of which is constituted by the claim to have superseded earlier historians.⁴³⁶

Diodorus' discussion of the inundation and sources of the Nile is rich in names and polemic. As in the proem, the historian begins by critiquing the method of inquiry used by earlier writers, in particular the either excessive or insufficient space given by each to the problem (1.37.2). The introductory remarks to the Nile-passage emphasise the inadequacy of earlier historians in tackling the problem of the Nile, including Hellanicus, Cadmus, Hecataeus, Herodotus, Xenophon, Thucydides, Ephorus and Theopompus, a roll-call of Diodorus' predecessors in historiography. Herodotus for instance is praised as 'curious' (πολυπράγμων), above others, yet is dismissed 'for having followed contradictory conjectures' (ἀντιλεγόμεναις ὑπονοίαις εὑρίσκεται). Diodorus' emphasis on historians at this juncture (contrast for instance the list of names at 38-41, which includes philosophers and natural scientists) opens a parallel between the Nile-excursus and the proem (and the history as a whole), to which I shall return. This introductory section allows Diodorus to intervene in the debate (given the perceived inadequacy of his predecessors), to present himself as a successor who has avoided the faults of his forebears, and to emphasise his erudition. Indeed, the use of the Nile-excursus as a means for Diodorus's self-positioning vis-à-vis

⁴³⁶ See chapter 1.

earlier historians is also demonstrated at 1.41.10 by his allusion to further knowledge, suggestive of his greater understanding of the subject, via the rhetorical move of *occultatio*:

Καὶ περὶ μὲν τῆς πληρώσεως τοῦ Νείλου, δυνάμενοι ποικιλώτερον ἀντειπεῖν πρὸς ἅπαντας, ἀρκεσθησόμεθα τοῖς εἰρημένοις, ἵνα μὴ τὴν ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἡμῖν προκειμένην συντομίαν ὑπερβαίνωμεν.

With regard then, to the flooding of the Nile, though we are able to answer with more varied arguments all who have offered explanations of it, we shall rest content with what has been said, in order that we may not overstep the principle of brevity which we resolved upon at the beginning.

Diodorus hints here at a fullness of understanding beyond the already extensive discussion, a further aspect of his self-positioning relative to the literary and scientific tradition. This is parallel to the claim by the writer of the *D.I.N* to have selected certain writers from among others.

The issue of exactly what caused the annual inundation of the Nile was already part of Ionian philosophical inquiry by the time Herodotus intervened in the debate. After Herodotus, investigation and inquiry continued in the peripatetic tradition and historiography, as well as resumés of the *historia quaestionis* in doxographical texts. As important as the display of argumentative strategies is the continuity of the tradition, which continues to incorporate old and long-dismissed theories. Greek discourse about the causes of the inundation stresses the potential for knowledge to be improved, and as a problem that reveals a writer's skill in argument, proof, investigation, the collection and sifting of sources, and where new evidence gives rise to new and better theories. In addition, old theories are included in new treatises, which creates a constantly reiterated canon of discourse on this problem.

3. The second problem: the location of the sources of the Nile

Treatments of the location of the Nile's source in Greek texts present rather different issues. The sources of the Nile remain hidden, out of sight and beyond knowledge; they present a different kind of challenge to the investigative power and the ever-more expansive geopolitical horizons of the Greeks and Romans. Conquerors, kings and emperors might articulate a desire to penetrate this secret, but the object of such desire always dissolves or disappears altogether. Whereas theories about the inundation abounded, were subject to the processes of investigation and proof, and were gathered into lists, the location of the sources does not attract similar speculation. I examine in detail one recurring idea about the source of the Nile, namely that the river arises in west Africa, in order to illustrate the epistemological problems associated with this issue. In what follows, I examine the history of discourse about the sources of the Nile, beginning with Herodotus, then turning to texts of the late Hellenistic and Roman period, especially in the light of the expansion of the horizons of the *oikoumene* in these periods.

The source of the Nile is always situated outside the realm of human habitation and therefore knowledge, in various regions on the edges of the known world.⁴³⁷ An early idea had the Nile arise from Okeanos, the very edge of the world-disc.⁴³⁸ A second theory placed the source of the Nile in far-off India, and was attributed to Alexander the Great, although this theory was rapidly disproved.⁴³⁹ Other writers placed the source in the far south, either in the distant highlands of Ethiopia or the even more obscure southern zone, separated from us by a region of impassable

⁴³⁷ Romm (1992) 149.

⁴³⁸ Ultimately, this goes back to the *Iliad*, which claims that Okeanos surrounds the world (*Il.* 18.606-7) and that Okeanos is the source of all groundwaters (*Il.* 21.196-7). Hecataeus of Abdera believed that the Nile arose in Okeanos; this was dismissed by Herodotus *Hist.* 2.21, 23; see Lloyd (1976) 100-4 *ad loc.*, Scheliha (1931) 18-23, Bonneau (1964a) 143-50. See above p. 125.

⁴³⁹ Arrian *Anab.* 6.1.2, *Ind.* 6.8. See Thomson (1948) 82, 124, Postl (1970) 16-7, Schneider (2004) 37-40. On the marginality of India in Greek and Roman thought, see Parker (2008) 48 n.169, 64, 284.

heat.⁴⁴⁰ Finally, the idea that the Nile arose in west Africa was recurrent in antiquity, and continued to persist even up to the nineteenth century.⁴⁴¹ The source of the Nile, wherever it is located, is consistently placed in the distant and unknown reaches of the world.

3.1. Searching for the source: kings and knowledge

The search for the source of the Nile is sometimes correlated in Greek and Latin texts with the exercise of military or political power. Several kings are represented as engaging in acts of investigation or inquiry about the source of the Nile. Herodotus has Psammetichus measure the depth of the Nile between Syene and Elephantine, to ‘arrive at a proof’ (ἐς διάπειραν... ἀφικέσθαι, *Hist.* 2.28).⁴⁴² Psammetichus appears to have convinced himself and the scribe to whom Herodotus spoke, but Herodotus’ scepticism about the story is obvious. Several traditions connect Alexander the Great with a quest for the source of the Nile. First, as we have already noted, according to Arrian, following Nearchus, Alexander believed he had found the source of the Nile in India and began a letter to his mother Olympias, only to cancel this part of the letter ‘when

⁴⁴⁰ The second of these theories is attributed variously to Nicagoras of Cyprus (*D.I.N.* §9) and Eudoxus of Cnidus (*Aet. Plac.* 4.1.7 = Diels *DG* 386), who ascribes it to Egyptian holy men, cf. *Diod. Sic.* 1.40.2, ‘certain wise men in Memphis’ (τῶν δ’ ἐν Μέμφει τινὲς φιλοσόφων); see Romm (1992) 150-1. The source of the Nile was located, albeit vaguely, in the Ethiopian highlands by the writer of the *D.I.N.*, Eratosthenes (*Strabo Geog.* 17.1.2 C 876), and Ptolemy 4.8.

⁴⁴¹ Euthymenes of Massilia is the first thinker connected with this theory; Sen. *QN* 4a.2.22 reports that Euthymenes claimed that the Nile arose in the Atlantic, and that the etesian winds blow the (freshwater) sea inland; cf. *FGrHist* 647 fr. 1.5 (= *Anonymus Florentinus*). On Euthymenes’ theory, see Thomson (1948) 77, Postl (1970) 18, Roller (2003) 190, Roller (2006) 15-7, with bibliography p.15 n.88. This theory was not adopted. Herodotus, with some circumspection, locates the source of the Nile in the far west of Africa, rather than the western Ocean (*Hist.* 2.31-34, and see discussion below). A key aspect of the *Libyka* of Juba II of Mauretania was the connection between Egypt and West Africa by the location of the source of the Nile in lower Mauretania; this idea is reported in Pliny *HN* 5.10, Pomponius Mela 3.96ff, and others; the implications of this theory are discussed in detail below. See also Postl (1970) 18-26 on the theory of the western source, and Roller (2003) 192-5 on Juba II.

⁴⁴² On Psammetichus as an inquirer, and for parallels with the figure of Herodotus as a historian, see Christ (1994) 171-2. Christ pp. 176-77 also draws attention to the inquiry of Etearchus, the king of the Ammonians, into the source and identity of the Nile (on which, see discussion below). On figures of inquiry in the *Histories*, see also Demont (2009).

he had more accurately investigated' (ἐπεὶ μέντοι ἀτρεκέστερον ἐξήλεγε) the geography of the river Indus.⁴⁴³ In this anecdote, we see Alexander participating in intellectual and scientific debate, embodying a conjunction of military expansionism and scientific speculation. Another tradition has Alexander send Callisthenes (or Aristotle send Alexander) to investigate the cause of the inundation in the Upper Nile region.⁴⁴⁴ According to Maximus of Tyre, Alexander asked the oracle of Zeus at Ammon about the source of the Nile.⁴⁴⁵ The interaction between political mastery and the search for the source of the Nile is most pronounced in the so-called Nile-excursus in Book 10 of Lucan's *Bellum Civile*.⁴⁴⁶ James Romm and Eleni Manolaraki have recently examined the functions of the episode. Romm highlights the parallels drawn between Alexander and Julius Caesar, who both express a desire to reach the source of the Nile, and argues that Lucan might use the 'source of the Nile' as a figure for megalomaniac ambition and the imperial rule of Caesar and his descendants.⁴⁴⁷ Manolaraki likewise draws attention to the equation made by Acoreus, the Egyptian priest, between 'famous seekers of the Nile from Alexander and the Oriental tyrants Sesostrius and Cambyses to the Roman Caesar'.⁴⁴⁸ Caesar is made to claim that he would give up war-making if he could learn the secret of the Nile; Acoreus' supposed revelation of the truth however is, as Romm points out, 'little more than a rehashing of the Eudoxan theory... with high rhetorical color'.⁴⁴⁹ The Egyptian priest, traditionally a guardian of wisdom, is revealed to have penetrated the truth of the Nile no deeper than a fourth-century Greek scientist. Several writers associate Nero with an expedition to search for the sources of the Nile.⁴⁵⁰ Seneca records that two centurions were sent to investigate the sources of the Nile by Nero, who is *veritatis in primis*

⁴⁴³ Arrian *Anab.* 6.1.4-5.

⁴⁴⁴ See above pp. 129-30.

⁴⁴⁵ 41.1.

⁴⁴⁶ Luc. *BC* 10.172-331.

⁴⁴⁷ Romm (1992) 155.

⁴⁴⁸ Manolaraki (2013) 80. Manolaraki's reading of the Lucanian Nile is richly nuanced, and moves well beyond the connections between the Nile-quest and imperial ambition.

⁴⁴⁹ Romm (1992) 154.

⁴⁵⁰ On Nero and the Nile, see De Nardis (1989), De Vivo (1996), Gauly (2004), Hine (2006), Williams (2008), Braund (2013), Doody (2013).

amantissimus;⁴⁵¹ Seneca's account presents Nero in a positive light, as a seeker after knowledge. Pliny's account is more ambivalent, allowing for a combination of motives, including military.⁴⁵² Pliny stresses the flow of knowledge and observations from the margins of the empire, here the deserts of Ethiopia, right back to the emperor at the centre.⁴⁵³ Nero's search for the sources of the Nile illustrates the entwining of scientific and military pursuits, as well as the prestige of setting out to solve a problem that is paradigmatic of the limitations of human knowledge; as Trevor Murphy has stressed, 'knowledge of the natural world was commonly viewed as an attribute of the emperor's power'.⁴⁵⁴ In these examples, the king is a figure of scientific or geographical investigation, operating within the parameters and conventions of the discipline: Psammetichus measures, Alexander tests and abandons a hypothesis, Caesar questions, Nero sends out investigators. None however achieves his goal, which always slips elusively out of his grasp.

These episodes demonstrate, first, the close entwining of military and political conquest with scientific and geographical knowledge in the periods under discussion, and second, the unattainability of the goal. The question of the source of the Nile is not simply an abstruse scientific puzzle; it is never *just* about the geographical problem, 'where is the source of the Nile?' Rather, the source of the Nile, properly belonging to the limits of the physical world, tantalises and goads, signifying the absence of knowledge and imperial control. It functions thereby as a sign of the limits of inquiry and political power; moreover, it exemplifies their *appropriate* limits. In what follows, I examine the ways in which Greek and Latin texts articulate the problem of the Nile's source; my analysis highlights the function of the source as a figure for the process and limits of inquiry, and as an epistemological goal that is unattainable. Even as the source is apparently identified in lower Mauretania for example, other parts of the river are compelled to slip out of sight, so that the Nile can never be known in its entirety.

⁴⁵¹ Seneca *QN* 6.8.3.

⁴⁵² Pliny *HN* 6.181.

⁴⁵³ For this theme in the Elder Pliny, see Murphy (2004) 194-216.

⁴⁵⁴ Murphy (2004) 204.

3.2. Herodotus

For Herodotus, the source of the Nile is an acute epistemological problem; the historian notes these problems, and the difficulty of obtaining accurate information, regarding both the inundation (*Hist.* 2.19, 2.24) and, especially, the sources (2.28-29):

Τοῦ δὲ Νείλου τὰς πηγὰς οὔτε Αἰγυπτίων οὔτε Λιβύων οὔτε Ἑλλήνων τῶν ἐμοὶ ἀπικομένων ἐς λόγους οὐδεὶς ὑπέσχετο εἰδέναι, εἰ μὴ ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ ἐν Σαΐ πόλι ὁ γραμματιστὴς τῶν ἱρῶν χρημάτων τῆς Ἀθηναίης. Οὗτος δ' ἔμοιγε παίζειν ἐδόκεε, φάμενος εἰδέναι ἀτρεκέως. (2.28.1-2)

Concerning the sources of the Nile, nobody I have spoken with, Egyptian, Libyan, or Greek, professed to have any knowledge, except the scribe who kept the register of the treasures of Athene in the Egyptian city of Sais. But even this person, though he pretended to exact knowledge, seemed to me hardly serious.

Herodotus criticises the experiment performed by the Egyptian king Psammetichus, which attempted to demonstrate that the springs of the Nile were located between two mountains Crophi and Mophi near Syene and Elephantine. The question of the sources of the Nile presents problems of evidence and knowledge yet more acute than that of the inundation, which is highlighted in the historian's famous statement at 2.29:

μέχρι μὲν Ἐλεφαντίνης πόλιος αὐτόπτης ἐλθῶν, τὸ δ' ἀπὸ τούτου ἀκοῆ ἤδη ἱστορέων. (*Hist.* 2.29)

As far as Elephantine I speak as an eye-witness, but further south from hearsay.

Autopsy is, as we have seen, a significant method of inquiry, particularly in the Egyptian *logos* and in Herodotus' comments on the hydrological history of Egypt. Here however, the inscrutability and enduring problems of the source of the Nile are signalled by a reliance on ἀκοή.

Herodotus does not entirely confine the source of the Nile to obscurity, although his statements are heavily guarded. At 2.31-34, Herodotus suggests that, south of the 'Deserters',⁴⁵⁵ the river runs from west to east:

⁴⁵⁵ The Asmach, see 2.30.

Τὸ δὲ ἀπὸ τοῦδε οὐδεὶς ἔχει σαφέως φράσαι· ἔρημος γάρ ἐστι ἡ χώρα αὕτη ὑπὸ καύματος.
(Hist. 2.31)

Beyond this, no-one can speak clearly about this, for the country is uninhabited because of the heat.

The account is characterised by the impossibility of certain knowledge, because the region lies outside human occupation and therefore observation.⁴⁵⁶ Herodotus does include a reported observation of a great river in west Africa, but this is carefully mediated by an extremely convoluted chain of word-of-mouth reports, a five-fold layering of ἀκοή, from Herodotus, via the Cyrenaeans, who visited the oracle of Ammon and talked to Etearchus (the Ammonian king), who had spoken with some Nasamonians from Syrtis, who reported that some ‘wild young men’ (παῖδας ὑβριστᾶς, 2.32) told a story in which ‘a great river with crocodiles in it flowed past the town from west to east’ (παρὰ δὲ τὴν πόλιν ῥέειν ποταμὸν μέγαν, ῥέειν δὲ ἀπὸ ἐσπέρης αὐτὸν πρὸς ἥλιον ἀνατέλλοντα, φαίνεσθαι δὲ ἐν αὐτῷ κροκοδείλους).⁴⁵⁷ Herodotus’ identification of this river with the Nile is extremely circumspect; Etearchus ‘supposed it to be the Nile, and indeed the story makes sense’ (συνεβάλλετο εἶναι Νεῖλον, καὶ δὴ καὶ ὁ λόγος οὕτω αἰρέει, 2.33). This multi-layered oral report articulates a sense that the historian has distanced himself from the statement, and that the question of its veracity should be approached with caution.⁴⁵⁸ Herodotus supports this fifth-hand oral report with a conjecture from analogy, that the Nile runs parallel to the Danube in Europe. Unlike Herodotus’ refutations of previous theories about the cause of the inundation, and the proposition of his own theory, his speculation about the source of the Nile is couched as conjecture and based on the often problematic evidence of hearsay (ἀκοή) rather than autopsy

⁴⁵⁶ cf. 2.34.

⁴⁵⁷ This ‘great river’ is usually identified as the Niger; see Hyde (1947) 278-9, Meek (1960), Graham (2003) 299 n. 23. Lloyd (1976) 138-9 argues that the river is the, now dry, Bodele Depression northeast of Lake Chad.

⁴⁵⁸ On the use of *akoe*-statements to express the historian’s reluctance to assent to the truth of the statement, see Shrimpton (1997) 245-6, Hornblower (2002) 374-80, Luraghi (2006) 83. These arguments are an important corrective to views according to which Herodotus’ source-citations are intentionally duplicitous, for which see Fehling (1989); for a response to Fehling’s approach, see Fowler (1996) 80-6.

(ὄψις). The twin problems therefore admit of very different approaches, which allow the historian to demonstrate the process and methods of inquiry that characterise the *Histories*.

Greek texts that discuss the twin problems of the Nile after Herodotus treat the question of the source of the Nile very differently from that of the cause of the inundation. The unseen source functions as a marker of the limits of human knowledge; even if a location is posited, this remains, as in Herodotus, relatively circumspect, and the problem of the sources does not attract a tradition of speculation in the manner of the inundation.

3.3. Hellenistic period

The Hellenistic period witnessed a particular interest in the Upper Nile valley on the part of the Ptolemies, and the names of several Ptolemaic explorers of this region have been preserved.⁴⁵⁹ Philon made an expedition to Meroe, under Ptolemy I or II;⁴⁶⁰ he was followed by Dalion, who went above Meroe in the reign of Ptolemy II,⁴⁶¹ and then by Aristocreon, Bion, Basilis, Simonides, and Timosthenes, who ‘commanded the navies of Philadelphus’ (*classium Philadelphi praefectus*, Plin. *HN* 6.35.183).⁴⁶² The studies of Stanley Burstein in particular have detailed the extensive involvement of the Ptolemies in Lower Nubia, beginning with a campaign by Ptolemy I and continuing for several decades after the campaign of Ptolemy II in the 270s.⁴⁶³ Burstein draws attention to the strategic advantages of relations with Nubia, especially the maintenance of a regular supply of war-elephants.⁴⁶⁴ Burstein concludes that the results of Ptolemaic exploration

⁴⁵⁹ cf. Roller (2003) 192-3. See Burstein (2000).

⁴⁶⁰ Strabo 2.1.20 C77 (= *FGrHist* 670 fr. 2). See Fraser (1972) 2 296 n. 338, 297 n. 339, 600 n. 314.

⁴⁶¹ Plin. *HN* 6.35.183 (= *FGrHist* 666). See Roller (2003) 192-3.

⁴⁶² Plin. *HN* 6.35.183.

⁴⁶³ For the campaign of Ptolemy I as satrap, see the reference to the ‘territory of Irem’ on the Satrap Stela, trans. Ritner in Simpson (2003) 393 with n. 4. See also Burstein (1979), (1989), (1993), (1996), (2000), (2008).

⁴⁶⁴ Burstein (1989) 4-11, (2000), (2008), Casson (1993).

were ‘impressive’,⁴⁶⁵ particularly in the understanding of the geography of the Upper Nile valley, and suggests that ‘rumors may even have reached them of the Nile’s ultimate source in Lake Victoria in modern Uganda’.⁴⁶⁶ However, while some improvement to geographical knowledge is undeniable, knowledge of the hydrology of the Nile above Meroe remained quite vague, as will be seen below.⁴⁶⁷ Even after the expeditions of the Ptolemies, and later, the Romans, knowledge about the upper reaches of the Blue and White Nile was extremely scant; this ongoing absence of information is refracted in various ways in the relevant texts.

3.4. Diodorus Siculus

For Diodorus Siculus, a discussion of the source of the Nile accentuates the ignorance of inquirers. I discussed in chapter 1 the historiographical significance of Diodorus’ account, which stresses the elusiveness of the sources, and the purpose of the misrepresentation of Herodotus at Diod. Sic. 1.37.11.⁴⁶⁸ Here, I will add only that Diodorus gives explanations of the source supposedly by three cultural groups who live by the Nile, namely the Egyptian priests, the Trogodytes known as the Bolgii, and the people of Meroe.⁴⁶⁹ We might expect Diodorus to allow that knowledge might increase, or speculation become more plausible, as we approach the region where the source is expected to be; rather, Diodorus underlines the profound lack of knowledge about this question by stressing the complete ignorance of the people of Meroe, who give the river the name ‘Astapus’, i.e. ‘water from darkness’ (ἐκ τοῦ σκότους ὕδωρ, *Bib.* 1.37.9). The mystery does not diminish with proximity to the region of the supposed source.

⁴⁶⁵ Burstein (2000) 35.

⁴⁶⁶ Burstein (2008) 147.

⁴⁶⁷ See e.g. Strabo 16.4.8, 17.2.2-3 (from Eratosthenes). See Huss (1991), Roller (2003) 193 n. 55, and (2006) 94-95, n. 31.

⁴⁶⁸ See chapter 1, p. 63.

⁴⁶⁹ The Trogodytes, in Diodorus, live along the Red Sea as far north as the Greek port of Berenice and are described at 3.32-33. On the Trogodytes, see Murray and Warmington (1967).

Diodorus' emphasis on continuing ignorance regarding the source of the Nile, and especially on the lack of evidence, whether autopsy or hearsay, is striking in light of the beginning of Book 17 of Strabo's *Geographika*, which indicates that both Eratosthenes and other, unnamed writers, examined the question of the source of the Nile (*Geog.* 17.1.2 C786).⁴⁷⁰ However, this summary of Eratosthenes, and other comments in the *Geographika*, reveals both the vagueness of Eratosthenes' account, and also a notable caution in Strabo's assessment of the question of the Nile's source. Strabo reports that, according to Eratosthenes, two rivers are tributaries of the Nile around Meroe, 'which flow from some lakes in the east' (φερόμενοι... ἔκ τινων λιμνῶν ἀπὸ τῆς ἑω); the first, to the east of the island is Astaboras (the modern Atbara), and the other the Astapus (the Blue Nile). Strabo notes that this second river is called by others the Astasobas and that another river, 'which flows from some lakes in the south' (ρέοντα ἔκ τινων λιμνῶν ἀπὸ μεσημβρίας), is the Astapus.⁴⁷¹ As Huss observes, this summary of Eratosthenes and others is rather vague; the use of the indefinite pronoun *τινες* reveals a lack of exact knowledge of this region of the Ethiopian highlands.⁴⁷² Huss further notes that this vague expression 'from some lakes' appears to have taken over an opinion which we find in the *D.I.N.*, that there are *stagna, per que Nilus fluit* (*D.I.N.* §12). Neither Eratosthenes nor the unnamed 'others' is able to provide further evidence, either by autopsy or hearsay. Moreover, Strabo himself neither confirms nor denies Eratosthenes' report. Unlike theories about the causes of the inundation, assertions about the source of the Nile do not attract debates involving refutations, counter-argument and proof; the issue remains outside of both knowledge and falsifiability.

⁴⁷⁰ On Strabo's account of Eratosthenes and other predecessors, see Huss (1992).

⁴⁷¹ See Pietschmann, *RE* ss. vv. 'Astapus' and 'Astasobas'.

⁴⁷² Huss (1991) 340-1.

3.5. Strabo, Pliny and the western source

The same tendency is found in Strabo's report that some believe the sources of the Nile are to be found in Maurasia:

τοὺς δὲ ποταμοὺς ἔχειν φασὶ καὶ κροκοδείλους καὶ ἄλλα γένη ζῴων ἐμφερῆ τοῖς ἐν τῷ Νείλῳ· τινὲς δὲ καὶ τὰς τοῦ Νείλου πηγὰς πλησιάζειν οἴονται τοῖς ἄκροις τῆς Μαυρουσίας.
(*Geog.* 17.3.4 C826)

The rivers are said to contain crocodiles, as also other kinds of animals similar to those in the Nile.

Some think that even the sources of the Nile are near the extremities of Maurasia.

Again, Strabo reports unnamed sources (τινὲς... οἴονται) but does not comment on the veracity of the assertion or provide an argued response to the idea. The notion that the Nile rises in west Africa was, as we have seen, probably postulated by Euthymenes of Massilia, and reported, without conviction, by Herodotus. The idea returns however in the first century BC with the work of Juba II, who seems to have been committed to the connection of Mauretania with the Nile, and argued that the source of the Nile was located in the mountains of lower Mauretania.⁴⁷³ Duane Roller, in a recent and detailed study of Juba II's scholarship, asserts that 'Juba's view, however strange geographically and zoologically, became commonplace'.⁴⁷⁴ Significantly however, Juba's theory is often expressed in the form of unconfirmed and unfalsifiable reports, or results in peculiar convolutions of the Nile's course; both of these strategies draw attention to the elusiveness of the sources of the Nile in Greek and Roman thought.

Pliny provides important testimony to Juba's account of the sources of the Nile.⁴⁷⁵ However, his assessment is cautious; he acknowledges that the Nile rises 'from unknown sources' (*incertis... fontibus*, *HN* 5.10.51), and circumscribes his report of Juba by noting that the origin of the river seems to be in Mauretania, 'so far as King Juba was able to find out' (*ut Iuba rex potuit exquirere*). Similarly, in the first century AD Pomponius Mela describes 'a spring, which is supposed in some

⁴⁷³ For detailed discussion of Juba's research in the *Libyca*, see Roller (2003) chapter 8, esp. 191-5.

⁴⁷⁴ Roller (2003) 195.

⁴⁷⁵ Pliny *HN* 10.5.51-2; see Roller (2003) 193-4.

quarters to be the source of the Nile'.⁴⁷⁶ As in Herodotus, the idea that the Nile originates in west Africa is treated cautiously and attributed to others.

Locating the sources of the Nile in west Africa generated further problems, especially that of accounting for the river's course between Mauretania and Meroe, which is said to flow either through wasteland or even underground. Pliny, again apparently following Juba, circumvents the problem by having the river flow underground, not once but twice, on the second occasion for the distance of twenty days' journey.⁴⁷⁷ This hidden journey of the Nile takes it through 'scorching deserts for an enormously long distance' (*deserta et ardentia et inmenso longitudinis spatio*, HN 5.10.51). In particular, the Nile hides itself in uninhabited regions, until it reaches first 'another larger lake in the territory of the Masaesydes clan of Mauretania Caesariensis' (*alio lacu maiore in Caesariensis Mauretaniae gente Masaesydes*), and then 'it hides for another space of twenty days' journey until it reaches the nearest Ethiopians' (*iterum harenis receptus conditur rursus xx dierum desertis ad proximos Aethiopias*). The visibility of the Nile, the verifiability of its course, is strongly correlated with the presence of human communities; in uninhabited space, the river has to disappear underground. Other texts, such as Pomponius Mela, have the Nile flow, as in Herodotus, for vast distances through wasteland or desert. In this way, the apparent uncovering of the sources of the Nile in west Africa requires a secondary hiding of the river; finding the western spring, even conjecturally, necessitates 'losing' the course of the river as it flows undetectably through or under empty terrain. Consequently, the river can never be known in its entirety; some part of the river, whether the source or its early passage through the interior of Africa, remains out of sight, beyond verifiable knowledge and the discourse of Greek and Roman speculation and argument.

⁴⁷⁶ *Chorographia* 3.9.9.

⁴⁷⁷ HN 10.5.52.

Part II: Aelius Aristides

4. Aelius Aristides

In the mid-second century AD, the tradition of speculative discourse on the twin problems of the Nile was appropriated and transformed by the orator Aelius Aristides in the *Egyptian Oration* (*Or.* 36), a piece that has attracted little critical attention.⁴⁷⁸ Although the text bears several similarities to earlier investigations into the problems of the river, it is nevertheless quite distinctive from the preceding tradition. Aristides employs the distinctive form of Nile discourse, offering the theories of his predecessors followed by refutation, with his own solution at the end; he rejects however the insistence of the tradition on rationalising, naturalistic explanations of the inundation. Yoking together the twin problems more closely than his predecessors, Aristides rejects previous explanations for the inundation on the grounds that the ultimate cause, that is the source of the river, remains unknown, and attributes the inundation instead to the power of the Saving Gods. This little-studied work is an important testament to the powerful symbolic value of Nilotic discourse in Greek culture; Aristides' transformation of the discourse reveals still more clearly its status as an emblem of the process and limits of human inquiry.

4.1. A roll-call of the past

The text adopts the form of speculative Nilography, in the listing of theories with refutations and the final presentation of a new theory. As Charles Behr has observed, Aristides quotes only from historians or poets, and 'suppresses' the names of philosophers and scientists;⁴⁷⁹ this is evident in the second paragraph, as Aristides introduces the theory of the etesian winds, but, rather than attributing it to Thales, as is found so frequently in Nile treatises, Aristides mentions only that Herodotus 'also controverts and refutes' it (ἀντιλέγων ἐλέγχει). The text is a veritable roll-call of

⁴⁷⁸ The *Egyptian Oration* was composed in Smyrna between 147 and 149 CE, following Aristides' stay in Egypt in 142 CE. There is a dearth of scholarship on this text; see *RE* s.v. 'Nilschwelle' cols. 576-7; notes on the oration in Behr (1981), cf. Behr (1978). Ewen Bowie (*NP* s.v. 'Aristides [3]'), listing Aristides' work, assigns the *Egyptian Oration* to its own category, 'an essay on the sources of the Nile, in which he frequently polemicizes against Herodotus'.

⁴⁷⁹ Behr (1981) 403.

classical historians and poets, including Herodotus, Euripides, Aeschylus, Ephorus, Euthymenes, Homer, Hecataeus of Miletus, and Pindar. These names are important, comprising an alternative canon to the names usually collected in the peripatetic and doxographical traditions, names such as Thales, Anaxagoras, Oinopides, Democritus, Nicagoras and Diogenes, let alone Aristotle or more recent scientists and philosophers, which, as we observed above, are integral to the form of this discourse. Aristides' engagement is with the poets and historians of the fifth and fourth century, with none later than Ephorus; the orator participates in Nilotic speculation as an inheritor of a tradition which he constructs as belonging to the great writers of fifth and fourth-century Greek literature, rather than to philosophy and science. Classicism and archaism are integral to many Greek texts from the Roman empire; here, we see Aristides' re-analysis of Nilotic speculation as a discourse of wisdom in which he, as an educated man and heir of that cultural inheritance, can take part.⁴⁸⁰

It has been seen that earlier instantiations of speculative inquiry about the twin problems of the Nile are readily articulated as participating in an ongoing dialogue and debate with a raft of predecessors. In the *Egyptian Oration*, the orator presents himself in direct dialogue with earlier writers, especially via the frequent use of, often ironic, apostrophe. Euripides is addressed as 'most clever' (ὦ σοφωτατε, 13), Herodotus as 'best of historians' (ὦ κάλλιστε λογοποιῶν, 45), Ephorus as the 'summit of wisdom' (ὦ σοφίας κεφάλαιον, 70), and Euthymenes as 'most delightful' (ὦ χαριέστατε Εὐθύμενες, 85).⁴⁸¹ The apostrophe of Euthymenes is particularly revealing of the orator's involvement in the textual tradition of Nilotic inquiry:

εἰ γὰρ μὴ συνίης, ὦ χαριέστατε Εὐθύμενες, εἰ ταῦτ' ἀληθῆ Ἐφορος λέγει σοὶ φάσκων
δοκεῖν, ὅτι οὐ λύεις ἀπορίαν, ἀλλὰ κινεῖς μείζω καὶ ἀτοπωτέραν τῆς ἐξ ἀρχῆς...

For if you do not realise, most delightful Euthymenes - if Ephorus' report of your opinion is true -
that you do not solve the difficulty, but raise another greater and stranger than the original one...

⁴⁸⁰ See e.g. Swain (1996) 65-100 on the interest in the Greek past in imperial texts.

⁴⁸¹ On apostrophe in ancient literature, especially in the Homeric epics, see de Jong (2009) 93-7.

The mention of Ephorus reveals that Aristides' understanding of Euthymenes is mediated through Ephorus; that is, the encounter with Euthymenes is both textualised and distanced, metaleptic. Wagner in particular has argued that the use of metalepsis can be a sign of the 'constructedness of the narrative'.⁴⁸² The metaleptic address of Euthymenes draws attention both to Aristides' creation of a dialogue with his predecessors, and to the mediated, textual nature of that relationship.

Simultaneously, the text hints obliquely a further dialogic dimension, by constructing a discursive framework for the oration at the beginning of the work. It opens by setting up a scenario for discussion of the Nile with an unnamed addressee:

Ἄ πρώην ἤρου με περὶ τοῦ Νείλου, ἐπειδὴ σοι διὰ βραχέων καὶ ἐπιπολῆς ἀπεκρινάμην καὶ ἅμα οἱ ἐπεισελθόντες ἀφείλοντο, ἐβουλήθην ἀναλαβὼν διελθεῖν σοι καὶ ὡσπερ ἄλλο τι χρέος ἀποδοῦναι πάντα τὸν λόγον· (Aristides *Orat.* 36.1)

Since I only briefly and superficially answered your recent questions about the Nile and at the same time my visitors interrupted me, I wished to resume the discussion and to pay back the whole answer like any other debt.

The addressee is undefined, and the device is soon dropped, but the prominence of this further character in the oration establishes Aristides as an intermediary between the writers of the past and his (invisible) interlocutor. As the text opens and throughout the text, the orator represents himself as Herodotus *redivivus*, adopting a 'historiographical pose' that echoes his predecessor.⁴⁸³ He examines Egypt not just once but *four* times, identifying subjects for investigation that are not just typical Egyptian *topoi*, but also characteristic of Herodotus' discussion of Egypt: the pyramids (cf. Hdt. 2.124-129), the Labyrinth (cf. Hdt. 2.148), temples (cf. Hdt. 2.137-138, 175-6), and canals (cf. Hdt. 2.99, 2.138, 2.149). The orator likewise discusses his methods of research, from books, and measurements taken with the assistance of the 'priests and prophets of each place' (μετὰ τῶν παρ' ἐκάστοις ἱερέων καὶ προφητῶν), a procedure that mirrors Herodotus' interactions with Egyptian priests (cf. Hdt. 2.2-3, 19, 143). Like Herodotus, Aristides states the matter of particular

⁴⁸² Wagner (2002) 239: 'Les métalespses, dans leur diversité, ont toutes en commun le fait de signaler l'essence construite du récit, c'est-à-dire le procès de textualisation'.

⁴⁸³ For the term 'historiographical pose', see Morgan (1982) on Heliodorus.

interest ‘the means of the Nile’s rising and the cause of this phenomenon being contrary to other rivers in the matter of the seasons of the year’ (τὸ πῶς ὁ Νεῖλος ἀνέρχεται καὶ τίς ἡ πρόφασις τοῦ τάναντία αὐτὸν πεπονθέναι τοῖς ἄλλοις ποταμοῖς περὶ τὰς ὥρας τοῦ ἔτους, 2).⁴⁸⁴ The key points are the reasons for the inundation, and the fact that the Nile behaves in a way different from other rivers, a collocation also made in Herodotus. Again like Herodotus, Aristides accentuates the lack of clarity in this area (περὶ τῶν ἀδήλων, 2).⁴⁸⁵ Finally, the orator indicates that his purpose is not to propose a new theory, but to demonstrate that ‘it does not happen through the reasons that each of them alleges’ (ὅτι οὐ διὰ ταῦτα ἃ ἕκαστοι λέγουσιν, 2). Herodotus too had expressed dissatisfaction with previous theories, and had adopted a rhetorical pose of reluctance to give his own theory, a pose echoed by Aristides, who does indeed spend the majority of his text dismantling earlier texts, only to provide his own solution at the very conclusion. In this oration, the orator uses this historiographical pose to articulate polemic against Herodotus.

The text is an argumentative *tour-de-force*, an elaborate confection of the arguments and counter-arguments deployed in the tradition of this inquiry, expanding upon many of the same forms of argument used by Herodotus and others to dismiss the theories of their predecessors. Importantly, as I have noted, Aristides identifies the subject of his oration as primarily a *deconstructive* one, to demonstrate that ‘it does not happen through the reasons that each of them alleges’ (ὅτι οὐ διὰ ταῦτα ἃ ἕκαστοι λέγουσιν, 2). For example, arguments κατ’ ἀναλογίαν and demonstrations of inconsistency are again used to refute the theory of the Etesian winds (3-12). The theory that the

⁴⁸⁴ cf. Hdt. 2.19, esp. 2.19.3 on the peculiar nature of the Nile by which it behaves opposite (τὰ ἔμπαλιν) to other rivers.

⁴⁸⁵ cf. περὶ τῶν ἀφανέων, Hdt. 2.24.1.

inundation is caused by melting snows, here ascribed to Euripides, is dismissed with vituperative comments about the lack of intelligence shown by the poet:⁴⁸⁶

πῶς οὖν, ὦ σοφώτατε Εὐριπίδη, λευκῆς τακείσης χιόνος ἀρδεύει Νεῖλος Αἰγύπτου γύας; τῆς ποῦ τακείσης;... ἀλλὰ τοῦτ' ἐκείνου γελοιότερον (13).

How then, o most clever Euripides, does the Nile irrigate Egypt's fields at the melting of the white snow?... But this is sillier than that.

This refutation demonstrates the rhetorical heightening of earlier arguments. Whereas Herodotus and other earlier texts questioned the plausibility of the snow-theory, due to the heat of the southern regions, Aristides compares the theory to the assertion 'that the craters at Etna are the source of ice' (13). Moreover, the moral character of those advancing this theory is imputed: 'whether we ourselves advance this argument and are shameless liars, or whether we trust others who advance it and are easy dupes' (ἐὰν μὲν αὐτοὶ λέγωμεν τὸν λόγον, ὡς ἀναιδῆ ψευδόμενοι, ἐὰν δ' ἑτέροις λέγουσι πιστεύωμεν, ὡς ῥαδίως ἐξαπατώμενοι, 17).

The oration then turns to two other commonly-discussed theories, first the theory that the inundation is caused by rains, and then Herodotus' own theory. Following his extensive refutation of Herodotus, Aristides turns to the views of Ephorus (64-84) and Euthymenes (85-96), which are discredited in the same manner as the other writers. These are dismissed with a plethora of carefully-interlaced arguments. Herodotus, for example, refuted the theory of the snows with four briefly-stated arguments; Aristides adduces no fewer than nine elaborately-developed arguments against the theory of the rains, together with 'four general proofs' (τέτταρα... σημεῖα, 40) against

⁴⁸⁶ The theory that the inundation was caused by snow-melt was proposed by Anaxagoras of Clazomenae (see pp. 126-7 above). Euripides alludes to the idea at the beginning of the *Helen* (Il. 1-3); cf. fr. 228 Nauck = Diod. Sic. 1.38.4 and *Anon. Flor.* 2. Diodorus says that Euripides was a pupil of Anaxagoras, an idea commonly stated in the biographical tradition, cf. Vitruvius *De Arch.* 8.*Praef.*1. Aristides' quotation of Euripides rather than Anaxagoras demonstrates his engagement with Nilotic inquiry as a tradition comprising the great names of classical literature, rather than of philosophy and science.

the theories of the etesian winds and the rains combined.⁴⁸⁷ Aristides' arguments rely primarily on comparison with other rivers that are increased by rains, that do not behave in the same way as the Nile, on probability (especially at 32, note *καίτοι πῶς εἰκός*), and on personal experience (especially at 33), forms of argument that as we have seen are also characteristic of Herodotus' Nile excursus. The *Egyptian Oration* echoes the structure and form of the debate common since Herodotus.

Participation in the tradition of Nilotic inquiry, as we have seen, frequently involves a combative attitude to one's predecessors, and in this too, Aristides is no exception. In this way, this Nilotic discourse functions as a strategic way of articulating a sense of competition with the past that is prevalent in imperial Greek texts. Aristides' polemic is particularly reserved for Herodotus, as can be seen in paragraphs 41-63. These paragraphs simultaneously assert that Herodotus fabricated his account of the Nile, and set up Aristides as an emulator of the historian's methods, whose achievement is to be more Herodotean than Herodotus. The earlier historian is particularly criticised for failing to address the central question of the Nile's rising, 'but he invents a cause for its [i.e. the river's] diminution' (*ἀλλὰ πῶς μειοῦται συμπλάσαι*, 41), and for speaking 'contrary to the facts' (*ἐτέρως*, 46). The orator's attitude is ambivalent; the historian is praised as 'the best of historians' (*κάλλιστε λογοποιῶν*, 45), although the context of correction suggests irony, and for inspiring a love of Egypt (57), yet this praise is tempered by the lack of truth Aristides identifies in the historian's accounts of the Nile (46).

⁴⁸⁷ The arguments can be summarised as follows: 1. The Nile rises in an orderly fashion, unlike other rivers that are increased by rain. 2. The waters do not diminish quickly, unlike other rivers that are increased by rain. 3. If rain were responsible, there would be many risings of the river, not just one, and many diminutions. 4. By comparison with other rivers that are increased by rain, the Nile should also rise sometimes in the winter. 5. A repetition of the 'orderliness' of the Nile. 6. There is sand at the cataracts. 7. The Ethiopians can't say that they have rain. 8. Argument from probability: there is rain in Lower Egypt, but this does not seem to affect the river; is it likely that rain further south would then affect the river? 9. Argument from his own experience: an anecdote about the cloudlessness of Egypt. Further arguments against both the etesian winds theory and the rains theory: 10. The river rises before the etesian winds. 11. The river rises even without the etesian winds. 12-13. The maximum and minimum heights of the river are not consistent with the etesian winds.

Alongside this criticism, Aristides presents himself as engaging in the same mode of activity as Herodotus, and as using the same methods, such that he outdoes the original historian. This self-positioning vis-à-vis Herodotus is visible from the opening paragraphs of the oration (see above), and in the passage refuting Herodotus' theory. The orator proclaims his adoption of a Herodotean guise, by 'digressing' (παρεξελεθειν) 'in the manner of Herodotus himself' (κατ' αὐτὸν Ἡρόδοτον) (48). The orator foregrounds his own visits to Egypt, and his autopsy:

Ἀνέπλευσα γὰρ οὖν ἔγωγε καὶ αὐτὸς καὶ εἶδον ἀκριβέστερον ἢ ἔδει φασίν.

For I sailed there myself and I was "a more careful observer than necessary", as they say.

Aristides particularly stresses his observations of Elephantine and the cataracts, which form a boundary of observational knowledge in Herodotus.⁴⁸⁸ Aristides shows Herodotus wrong in the matter of the cataracts, by accentuating his own visual experience.⁴⁸⁹ The confrontation with Herodotus is particularly direct and polemical at 50, as Aristides asserts his own autopsy at Elephantine: ὅπερ οὖν λέγω οὐκ ἀκούσας, ἀλλ' ἰδὼν ἀκριβῶς οἶδα 'my remarks are not hearsay, but I know from accurate observation', a remark which directly inverts the methods used by Herodotus at Elephantine (2.29.1). Aristides also employs local witnesses, in the Herodotean manner, including an Ethiopian whom he claims to have questioned (55). Aristides' *Egyptian Oration* is an elaborate construction that displays at once both the orator's *paideia*, through his intervention in discussion of problems that had long exercised Greek thinkers and writers, and his competitive rivalry with the archetype of that tradition, Herodotus, whose voice and methods the orator appropriates in order to expose the historian's perceived faults.

⁴⁸⁸ See Hdt. 2.29.1: 'as far as Elephantine I speak as an eye-witness, but further south from hearsay' (μέχρι μὲν Ἐλεφαντίνης πόλιος αὐτόπτης ἐλθὼν, τὸ δ' ἀπὸ τούτου ἀκοῆ ἤδη ἱστορέων).

⁴⁸⁹ See for instance: καὶ προσεδόκων νῦν γέ που τοὺς καταπάκτας ὄψεσθαι 'I expected that I would see the cataracts' (49), τῆς θεᾶς εἶνεκα τῶν καταρακτῶν 'on account of the sight of the cataracts' (49), ἐπιδειξαι ἡμῖν αὐτοὺς τε καὶ τὸ θέαμα δὴ τὸ ναυτικὸν ὃ τι εἴη 'to show us the cataracts and whatever their naval spectacle might be' (49), εἶδον 'I watched' (50).

4.2. Transforming the tradition

Aristides' text does not simply 'rework' the tradition of Nilotic speculation, but fundamentally deconstructs and transforms it. The text repeatedly stresses that the causes of the inundation and the origin of the river itself are unknown, criticising his predecessors who behave 'as if shooting in the dark' (ὥσπερ ἐν σκότῳ τοξεύοντες, 100), and 'care about the unknown' (περὶ τῶν ἀδῆλων φροντίζειν, 100). Whereas earlier texts articulate progress in understanding the inundation while admitting ignorance of the sources, the *Egyptian Oration* yokes the problems together, and identifies the true problem in a confusion of investigative, or aetiological, priorities, whereby attempts to determine the cause of the inundation are made while the source remains unknown:

ὅτε δ' αὐτὸ τοῦτο ὁμολογεῖται περὶ Νείλου, μηδέπω καὶ νῦν εὐρῆσθαι πόθεν ὀρμάται καὶ τί τὸ νότιον πέρασ αὐτοῦ, πῶς οἶόν τε τὴν αἰτίαν ζητεῖν, ἢ πῶς εἰπεῖν πόθεν αὖξεται; (39)

But when it is agreed about the Nile that even now its source and southern limit have not been discovered, how is it possible to seek its cause or to say where it arises?

For Aristides, the very terms of the discourse itself are flawed by a reliance on uncertain principles (i.e. the uncertain location of the sources). This issue recurs later in the oration, as Aristides describes the ignorance even of the Ethiopians in the far south, who might be expected to have a better knowledge than the Greeks of the source (57). Since even they do not know about the springs of the Nile, how can the Greeks, "ignorant of first principles, inquire after second ones?" (τίς ἢ τῆς ἀναβάσεως αἰτία φροντίζειν καὶ τὸ πρῶτον, φασιν, οὐκ εἰδότας τὸ δεύτερον ζητεῖν; 57). This move is strategic, since it allows Aristides to reject *any and all* rationalising explanations for the inundation, given that the location of the sources remained an enduring mystery. Aristides thereby implicates all previous attempts to explain the inundation, in a radical 'capping' of the tradition. This conjunction of the two problems is relatively unusual; Seneca comments that 'if it could be understood where the Nile begins to rise, the causes of its flooding might also be found out' (*unde crescere incipiat si comprehendi posset, causae quoque incrementi invenirentur*, QN 4a.2.2), but as we have seen, the two problems are typically treated separately and in different ways.

The culmination of Aristides' re-analysis of the tradition of Nilotic inquiry is reached only at the conclusion of the text, when the oration moves at a sharp tangent away from the typical trajectory of the Nile-treatise. We have seen that, since Herodotus, rationalism and naturalistic explanation were integral to Nilotic inquiry. Aristides, however, having demonstrated the inadequacy of previous attempts, claims to solve the problem of the inundation by sidestepping rationalising explanations altogether. The orator attributes the remarkable phenomenon of the inundation to the 'great wisdom and providence of the god' (τῆ μεγάλης σοφίᾳ καὶ προναίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ, 123); all the benefits of the inundation, and its seemingly paradoxical habit of flooding summer, are directly ascribed to the beneficence of the 'Saviour Gods':⁴⁹⁰

ταύτην ἐγὼ μόνην αἰτίαν ἐπινοῶ δι' ἣν ὁ Νεῖλος δι' Αἰγύπτου καὶ τῶν ἐκείνη ρεῖ καὶ μέγιστος δὴ τοῦ θέρους. ὁρῶ δ' ὅτι καὶ τῶν ἰαμάτων ἀπὸ τῶν σωτήρων θεῶν ἀπολαύομεν, ὧν εἷς ἐστὶν ὁ τῷ Νεῖλῳ συνώνυμος· καὶ τὸ μὲν κεφάλαιον καὶ τὴν καθάπαξ αἰτίαν ἅπαντες σὺνισμεν, ὅτι ἡμᾶς βούλονται σώζειν καὶ ὑγιεῖς ποιεῖν...(123-4)

This [wisdom and providence] I conceive is the only cause why the Nile flows through Egypt and the regions there, and indeed is greatest in summer. I see that we also enjoy cures from the Saviour gods, one of whom has the same name as the Nile. And we all know the ultimate purpose and the principal cause, that they wish to save us and make us healthy....

This conclusion is startling in its rejection of the tradition of rationalising explanations for the Nile, which had characterised Greek discussion of the topic since at least the time of Thales' speculations. Aristides has demonstrated his own skill as a rhetorician, in articulating replies to and refutations of earlier writers, while simultaneously rejecting the very terms of that debate, a move which necessitates a radically different solution to the problem that does not make assumptions about the unknown.

⁴⁹⁰ Asclepius and Sarapis. For Aristides' devotion to Sarapis, before his conversion to Asclepius, see *Orat.* 45 (*Hymn to Sarapis*), and Vidman (1969) no. 316. Asclepius and Sarapis were often identified with one another in the imperial period and even under the Ptolemies: see Tac. *Hist.* 4.84, and Stambaugh (1972) 75-8.

4.3. The Saviour Gods and a hidden cure for Egypt

It would be easy to dismiss this explanation as the symptom of an overt and cloying religiosity of which Aristides is frequently accused. Waddell seems to find the ‘reliance upon divinity a disappointing conclusion’.⁴⁹¹ However, the overturning of the rationalising tradition of Nilotic inquiry in the concluding paragraphs of the treatise demands closer attention. In these sections, the orator identifies the inundation with the intervention of the ‘Saviour Gods’, and the Nile is likened to a cure for Egypt. In what follows, I explore the implications of the closing moments of the oration, and draw parallels with other texts by Aristides.

Aristides lists several extraordinary qualities of Nile-water: the freshness of the water, which is ‘not subject to aging’ (χρόνου κρείττον ὕδωρ παρέχεται, 116), its sweetness (118), and its incomparable usefulness to the land, at the height of summer (117, 119). The encomiastic tone of this passage is indicated by the frequent reference to the Nile as a ‘wonder’:

τί δ’ οὐ τῶν ἐκείνου θαῦμα; ἢ πῶς οὐκ ἐκ παραδόξων ἅπας συνέιλεκται; (119)

What is not marvelous in that river? Or is not the whole river a collection of wonders?

Aristides’ assertions about the extraordinary qualities of Nile-water can be paralleled elsewhere by his assertions about other sacred and healing waters. For example, *Oration 39* is in praise of a sacred well in the temple of Asclepius; its waters are ‘most sweet’ (7), are not affected by time (it remains ‘unspoiled and uncorrupted’, 9), are highly useful (12), and ‘its changes are contrary to the seasons of the year’ (12). These are also features of the Nile identified as worthy of praise in the *Egyptian Oration*. The well of Asclepius is also a gift of the gods, ‘a servant and co-worker’, ready to work ‘to save mankind’ (11). Sacred waters are frequently an intermediary between Aristides and his gods in the matter of healing, and his works often make reference to the prescriptions of the god that involve water. These typically involve the command to drink or abstain from drinking water, to take baths or to abstain from taking baths in particular waters.⁴⁹²

⁴⁹¹ Waddell (1935) 125.

⁴⁹² Boudon (1994) 161. Bathing in Aristides is the subject of Downie (2008), and Downie (2013) 87-125.

Scholars, especially Alexia Petsalis-Diomidis, have recently begun to consider the rich interconnections between the themes of travel, the landscape, the body and the divine in Aristides' work.⁴⁹³ As Petsalis-Diomidis has argued, journeys are undertaken for the purpose of healing, and articulated by the experience of the body in those places.⁴⁹⁴ The body of Aristides is itself described as a landscape.⁴⁹⁵ Such interconnections between travel, the landscape, and health can also be discerned in the *Egyptian Oration*. As seen above, Aristides emphasises his personal experience of Egypt through travel (four times - τετράκις, 1), and particularly his own observation of the cataracts (47-50). The landscape at Syene is particularly marked by Aristides' physical condition; here, his experience is mediated by his ill-health, since 'I was in poor condition through ill-health' (φαύλως ὑπὲρ ἀρρωστίας διακείμενος, 49). These close conceptual links between travel, the landscape, the body and the divine are especially pronounced at the conclusion of the *Egyptian Oration*.

The intervention of the saviour gods provides a cure for Egypt from a wide range of disasters:

ὡς δὲ καὶ σεισμοῖς καὶ λοιμοῖς καὶ τοῖς ἐξ οὐρανοῦ κατακλισμοῖς ἀνάλωτος ἡ χώρα δι' αὐτόν ἐστιν οὐδὲ τοὺς πρὸ ἡμῶν Ἑλληνας ἔλαθεν. (124)

Not even the Greeks before our time were unaware that the land is untouched by earthquake, plague, and deluges from heaven because of the Nile.

Aristides here alludes to a theme of the Greek imaginary about Egypt familiar from Plato's *Timaeus*, in which Egypt is said to be preserved from the various destructions of mankind (φθοραὶ... ἀνθρώπων, 22c), by water and by fire, that regularly devastate the earth, by the power of the Nile:

ἡμῖν δὲ ὁ Νεῖλος εἰς τε τᾶλλα σωτὴρ καὶ τότε ἐκ ταύτης τῆς ἀπορίας σφύζει λυόμενος. (22d)

And in our case the Nile, our Saviour in other ways, saves us also at such times from this calamity by rising high.

⁴⁹³ Petsalis-Diomidis (2008), Petsalis-Diomidis (2010) 67-121.

⁴⁹⁴ Petsalis-Diomidis (2008) 139.

⁴⁹⁵ Petsalis-Diomidis (2008) 139.

For Aristides, the Nile protects Egypt from several kinds of disaster, including earthquakes. Elsewhere, Aristides also attributes the cessation of earthquakes to Zeus the ‘Saviour’. In the third *Sacred Tale*, Aristides describes a powerful and destructive series of earthquakes in Asia Minor, which nearly destroyed Mytilene, in addition to several villages. Aristides however, then living in Smyrna, describes his sacrifice of an ox to Zeus ‘the Saviour’, at which ‘all those earthquakes stopped,... through the providence and power of the gods’ (*HL* III. 40). So too, the provision of the Nile in Egypt is attributed to the ‘great wisdom and providence of the god’ (τῆ μεγάλης σοφίᾳ καὶ προνοίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ, 123).

The Nile therefore parallels other sacred waters in Aristides’ work, and works as a metaphorical ‘cure’ for the dry and thirsty land in the summer season, yet also as an actual cure for disease and other natural disasters, a theme that draws on a familiar Nilotic motif. However, the role of the Nile in Egypt is also made parallel to the workings of the human body in other, less obvious ways. It was demonstrated above that Aristides’ objections to earlier theories about the inundation are in part dependent on a confusion of aetiological priorities; given that the source of the Nile remains unknown, knowledge about the inundation is also impossible. The conclusion of the treatise emphasises the miraculous quality of the inundation (it is ἐν τι τῶν ἀπίστων, 120), and its apparent opposition to the time of year and the land:

... ἀλλ’ ἀτεχνῶς ὡσπερ οἱ τὴν ἐναντίαν τῷ παντὶ βαδίζοντες τῶν ἀστέρων ἐναντία καὶ τοῖς καιροῖς καὶ τῆ φύσει τῆς χώρας αἴρεται. (120)

... But indeed just as the planets whose orbits are retrograde to the Universe, it rises contrary to the seasons and the nature of the land.

The action of the inundation is unexpected, and seemingly paradoxical. The ‘work’ of the river is also described as ‘hidden’ (τὸ ἀφανὲς τοῦ ἔργου, 122). That is, the cause of the inundation is unknown, hidden from human knowledge, yet provides a ‘cure’ for the dry summer heat of Egypt (119), which is unexpected, given the climate and the absence of rain.

The actions of the Saviour Gods are also deemed to be frequently unfathomable or inexplicable:

τὴν δ' ἐπίνοιαν αὐτὴν καὶ τὸ αἴτιον ὧν φράζουσιν ἐκάστοτε τίς πώποτ' ἐξευρεῖν οἶός τε; οἷ γε καὶ δι' αὐτῶν τῶν ἐναντιωτάτων εἶναι δοκούντων καὶ ἃ μάλιστ' ἂν τις φυλάξαιτο ἰάσαντο.

But who has ever been able to fathom the very notion and cause behind what they tell us on each occasion? For they have cured us through means which seem to be the very opposite of what you would expect and which one would especially avoid.

In a work so concerned with the aetiology of the inundation, the word αἴτιον draws attention to the control of the gods over phenomena which are inexplicable from a human perspective. Again, the apparent contrariness of the divine cures (δι' αὐτῶν τῶν ἐναντιωτάτων) parallels the contrary nature of the Nile, behaving as it does in a way opposite (ἐναντία, 120) to apparent geographical and climatic facts. The Nile remains essentially an opaque phenomenon, whose effects are seen, but whose causes remain invisible, and whose nature is known only to the saviour gods.

Issues of hiddenness, ignorance, and unexpected cures originating from the gods are prevalent in Aristides' later accounts of his experience of disease and divine healing, particularly in the *Hieroi Logoi*. It is now commonplace to speak of Aristides' experience of his own sick body as a 'text' to be 'read';⁴⁹⁶ Brooke Holmes has recently added more nuance to such interpretations of the *Hieroi Logoi* by stressing the points at which his body and his symptoms are particularly *illegible* and unintelligible either to himself or to the medical profession.⁴⁹⁷ The *Hieroi Logoi* are particularly concerned with the demonstration of the limitations of medical knowledge and expertise when confronted with the hidden inner workings of the sick human body, and the contrast thereby engendered between limited human knowledge and the all-seeing understanding of the god.⁴⁹⁸ This is evident for instance at the beginning of the second *Sacred Tale*, when 'the doctors were wholly at a loss not only as to how to help, but even to recognise what the whole thing was' (*Or.*

⁴⁹⁶ See Percy (1988) 391 and Perkins (1992) 261, with further discussion by Holmes (2008) 83 n. 8.

⁴⁹⁷ Holmes (2008).

⁴⁹⁸ Petsalis-Diomidis (2010) 73-4 discusses the ways in which second-century medical practice emphasised the revelation of the body by doctors who read the 'narrative' of that body's interior.

48. 5-6); their ignorance continues throughout the oration (cf. 'neither could they help nor did they recognise the variety of my disease', 48.69).⁴⁹⁹

A passage particularly relevant to Aristides' oration on the Nile inundation is from the first of the *Sacred Tales* (*Or.* 47.63), and is worth quoting in full:

καὶ γίγνεται φῶμα ἀπ' ἀρχῆς οὐδεμιᾶς φανεράς τὸ μὲν πρῶτον οἶον ἂν τῷ καὶ ἄλλῳ γένοιτο, ἔπειτα προήλθεν εἰς ὄγκον ἐξαίσιον, καὶ ὁ τε βουβῶν μεστὸς ἦν καὶ πάντα ἐξώδει, καὶ ὀδύνας παρηκολούθουν δεινὰ καὶ πυρετὸς ἔστιν ἅς ἡμέρας. ἐνταῦθα οἱ μὲν ἰατροὶ πάσας φωνὰς ἠφίεσαν, οἱ μὲν τέμνειν, οἱ δὲ ἐπικάειν φαρμάκοις, ἢ πάντως δεῖν ὑπόπιον γενόμενον διαφθαρῆναι. ὁ δὲ θεὸς τὴν ἐναντίαν ἐτίθετο, ἀντέχειν καὶ τρέφειν τὸν ὄγκον· καὶ δηλαδὴ οὐχ αἵρεσις ἦν ἢ τῶν ἰατρῶν ἀκούειν, ἢ τοῦ θεοῦ... ὁ δ' αὖ θεὸς διὰ τέλους ἀντεῖχε, κελεύων φέρειν τὸ παρόν· πάντως γὰρ αὐτὸ ὑπὲρ σωτηρίας εἶναι, εἶναι γὰρ τοῦ ῥύματος τούτου τὰς πηγὰς ἄνω, τοὺς δὲ κηπουροὺς τούτους οὐκ εἰδέναι τοὺς ὄχετους ἢ χρὴ τρέπειν.

And a tumour grew from no apparent cause, at first as it might be for anyone else, and next it increased to an extraordinary size, and my groins as distended, and everything was swollen and terrible pains ensued, and a fever for some days. At this point, the doctors cried out all sorts of things, some said surgery, some said cauterisation by drug, or that an infection would arise and I must surely die. But the god gave me a contrary opinion and told me to endure and foster the growth. And clearly there was no choice between listening to the doctors or to the god... But the god remained firm throughout and ordered me to bear up with the present circumstances. He said that this was wholly for my safety, for the source of this discharge was located above, and these gardeners did not know where they ought to turn the channels.

This incident again articulates the ignorance of doctors when confronted with the diseased body of the orator; a closer examination reveals several points of contact with Aristides' articulation of the problems of the Nile. First, the origin of the tumour is unknown; it 'grew from no apparent cause' (γίγνεται φῶμα ἀπ' ἀρχῆς οὐδεμιᾶς φανεράς). The doctors, and Aristides himself, see only the growth of the 'extraordinary tumour' (ὄγκον ἐξαίσιον), without being able to discern its

⁴⁹⁹ See also Holmes (2008) 84 on 'the failure of even the best physicians at Rome to make sense of his symptoms within the semiotic framework of contemporary medicine'; cf. Behr (1968) 169, nn. 23-4.

cause, which remains hidden from human sight and therefore knowledge. The hidden origins of the tumour is paralleled by the hidden sources of the river Nile. Second, the incident is articulated in language that echoes learned medical discourse; Percy demonstrates that much of the language in this passage has parallels in the Hippocratic corpus, especially in *Epidemics* 7.⁵⁰⁰ The human doctors give conflicting opinions about the solution to the problem of the tumour (οἱ μὲν ἰατροὶ ... οἱ μὲν... οἱ δέ), which becomes a matter for learned debate, as indicated by the words ἐνταῦθα οἱ μὲν ἰατροὶ πάσας φωνὰς ἠφίεσαν. Indeed, as Percy argues, the ‘human doctors speak with the voice of Hippocrates, and they maintain, as did the Coan’s final aphorism, that no cure exists beyond the triple methodology of surgery, cautery, and drugs’.⁵⁰¹ The text therefore sets up an encounter between the ineffectual learnedness of human doctors, and the intervention of the knowledgeable god. This intervention countermands all the suggestions of the human doctors, and is especially notable for its insistence on a ‘contrary opinion’ (τὴν ἐναντίαν), which has a deadly potential. As Downie observes, ‘this clearly falls outside the expected range of medical responses’.⁵⁰² This emphasis on the ‘contrary opinion’ of the god is closely parallel to the end of the *Egyptian Oration*, with its insistence on the cures of the god as ‘the very opposite’ of what one would expect, and on the Nile as behaving ‘contrary’ (ἐναντία) to the seasons and the nature of the land. Moreover, the events subsequent to the god’s intervention are described as ‘wonders’ (θαυμαστά, 64) and ‘strange (παράδοξα, 54), language which again parallels Aristides’ articulation of the nature and phenomena of the Nile in the *Egyptian Oration*.

Finally, the body itself is likened to a waterway, in which the ‘discharge’ has ‘sources’ (τὰς πηγὰς) and must be directed into the right ‘channels’ (τοὺς ὀχετούς).⁵⁰³ The text alludes here a well-used Iliadic simile, in which a gardener runs a channel from a spring to water his plants and garden (*Il.*

⁵⁰⁰ Percy (1992) 608.

⁵⁰¹ Percy *loc. cit.*

⁵⁰² Downie (2013) 99.

⁵⁰³ Downie (2013) 99 interprets these words as part of the god’s language, between the ‘technical and the mysterious’, that ‘carries a numinous, oracular charge that human medicine cannot command’. Neither Downie nor Percy (1992) comments on the Homeric allusion.

121.257-262). The simile articulates the guiding, controlling actions of the gardener, who removes obstructions,⁵⁰⁴ and allows the water to flow freely (261). By contrast, the gardeners of Aristides' body (that is, the doctors) were unable to clear the 'obstruction' of the tumour, due to their lack of understanding. The god however is said to know that the 'sources of this discharge were located above' (εἶναι γὰρ τοῦ ῥύματος τούτου τὰς πηγὰς ἄνω).⁵⁰⁵ The ignorance of the doctors about the location of the 'sources' of the problem, contrasted with the knowledge of the god, is comparable with the ignorance of Aristides' predecessors concerning the sources of the Nile. The strangeness of Aristides' own body is matched by the strange phenomena of the natural landscape; both contain certain elements whose causes are unseen and about which apparently learned human individuals have little real knowledge, and yet both are subject to the power of the healing gods, who have true knowledge of the causes and sources of such phenomena, and act, in ways contrary to human expectations, for the benefit of man and the land.

In the second century CE, Aelius Aristides appropriated the centuries-old form of Nilotic speculation in his *Egyptian Oration*. The oration demonstrates his *paideia* and knowledge of Greek culture by participating in that tradition of Nilotic inquiry according to the conventions of the form. Aristides lists earlier theories, right back to the idea that the inundation is caused by the etesian winds, refutes them in turn with carefully-developed arguments, and finally presents his own idea. The oration is in particular a response to Herodotus' account of Egypt, echoing the historian's methods and observations. Simultaneously however, Aristides reconfigures that tradition; by engaging only with poets and historians, the orator creates his own canon of Nilotic inquiry, which is rather distanced from the standard list that begins with Thales as the originator of natural philosophy. Aristides 'caps' the tradition by rejecting the naturalistic tradition altogether and

⁵⁰⁴ 259: ἀμάρης ἐξ ἔχματα βάλλων 'clearing away the dams from the channel'.

⁵⁰⁵ The word ἄνω is frequently used by medical writers to describe the upper parts of the body, for instance Hippoc. *Prognosticon* 7.29: αἵματος δὲ ῥῆξιν ἐκ τῶν ἄνω τόπων μάλιστα προσδέχασθαι, '...but expect haemorrhage, most probably from the upper parts', contrasted with the area 'below the navel' (τὰ ὑποκάτω τοῦ ομφαλοῦ). The word also has extra resonance in the context of Aristides' aqueous metaphor, since ἄνω is also used of the upstream, inland regions of a river, e.g. Hdt. 2.155 ἄνω ἀπὸ θαλάσσης ἀναπλεῖν.

transforming Nilotic inquiry into a discourse of somatic miracle and divine revelation. Aristides' text reflects the popularity of Sarapis and of the cult of the Nile in the imperial Roman world, and highlights a tension between rationalistic and divine theories of causation. In accordance with Aristides' own preoccupations, his personal gods, Asclepius and Sarapis, are held responsible for the world's greatest greatest phenomenon, and one that emblematises the practice of Greek intellectual inquiry. Aristides' interpretation and reanalysis of naturalistic Nilotic inquiry as inadequate functions as a parallel to the privileging of divine knowledge, revelation and healing over scientific and medical inquiry and ignorance that is articulated later and more fully in the *Hieroi Logoi*. By assigning the extraordinary phenomena of the Nile, which had become symbolic of the Greek quest for knowledge, to the power of the gods to whom Aristides attributes his own power of speaking and, later, the healing of his body, the *Egyptian Oration* may be read as part of the orator's self-fashioning as a figure who attempts to reveal the gaps and limitations of human knowledge.

Conclusions

This chapter has examined texts that bear witness to a tradition of inquiry and discourse about the cause of the inundation and the sources of the river in Greek literary culture. It shows that these twin problems were, in most texts, treated separately and in different ways. Speculation about the cause of the inundation tended to be accumulative and agglutinative, as newer discussions incorporated even long-discarded theories, and to act as a way for writers to display their skill in argument and position themselves as superseding predecessors. As such, this tradition enacts both an inherent classicism, a need to recall the past, and a robust agonistic discourse. Claims to knowledge about the inundation are significant ways of claiming authority, particularly when claiming that the problem has been solved. By contrast, even as knowledge about the inundation increased, the sources of the Nile remained profoundly beyond what was or could be known. The sources become a means of demarcating the limits of knowledge and human exploration; they are tantalising, but enforce a boundary of appropriate limits. As we have seen, speculation about the sources of the Nile does not attract repetition of previous theories or the use of arguments based

on evidence in the same way as the cause of the inundation; such theories as are recorded are laced with epistemological problems, as writers acknowledge. These twin problems, *recto* and *verso* of a Nilographic coin, reveal that speculation about the Nile is never simply a scientific problem, but part of a display of the process of investigation and inquiry, and especially, a response to Herodotus, who remains vitally important to later texts. Herodotus is particularly significant in Aelius Aristides' *Egyptian Oration*, which radically re-orientes the tradition. The text binds together the aetiology of the inundation with the mystery of the sources, and, rejecting earlier rationalising and naturalistic explanations for the inundation, attributes the inundation to Aristides' saviour gods, who are responsible for saving Egypt and effecting similar cures in the human body. In this way Aristides participates in the tradition of Nilotic discourse, articulating his own *paideia* and ability to compete with the great names of fifth and fourth-century Greek literature, and achieves a radical capping of that tradition, by attributing this greatest natural phenomenon to the same gods who granted to Aristides the twin gifts of oratory and healing.

Aristides is not the only writer to stress the divine qualities of the river. In the following chapter, I examine the presence of the Nile in poetic texts that articulate praise or honour of a divinity or other individual.

Chapter 4

Nilotic praise: Greek addresses to the inundation, to Isis, and to mortals

The previous three chapters have demonstrated the many forms and functions of Greek inquiry, speculation, and description of the Nile. The river and its inundation, however, were more than simply natural phenomena to be investigated and discussed; this chapter turns to examine the presence of the Nile in several Greek poetic texts that articulate praise, whether for the river itself, for a divinity or a mortal individual. This chapter shows that these texts generate landscapes of praise in which Nilotic motifs are prominent, and that the Nile, together with its benefactions, is used to lay claim to political authority or religious power, or to situate Egypt within the *oikoumene*.

These texts include hymns to the Nile, to Isis and encomiastic texts in honour of prominent individuals from Egypt. They originate from both within and outside Egypt, and over a period of several centuries; outside the scope of this chapter are continuations of addresses and prayers to the Nile or to the divinity or divine power in charge of the inundation from Christian contexts. The endurance of the cult of the Nile into Coptic Egypt is an important religious phenomenon that deserves focused attention of its own.⁵⁰⁶ These texts do not derive exclusively from cultic contexts, although reference is sometimes made to cultic or religious matters: the Louvre hymn to the Nile is transcribed as a school exercise; the hymns of Isidorus are inscribed on the gates of a temple in Egypt; Theocritus' *Encomium of Ptolemy Philadelphus* and Callimachus' fr. 384 are laudatory texts by learned and complex poets. This chapter does not attempt to analyse the realia of the Nile cult in Greek, Roman or Egyptian texts, but rather examines the ways in which the Nile is figured,

⁵⁰⁶ The beneficence of the Nile inundation was frequently attributed to the archangel Michael, Christ, or to one of the saints, in Coptic writings. On the enduring presence of the Nile in the Christian landscape of Egypt, see for instance *P.Lond.Lit* 239 (with Bonneau (1964a) 410-13); *P.Oxy.* 3148; *BM Or.* 3580; Timothy of Alexandria, *Discourse on St. Michael the Archangel* 144, tr. Wallis Budge (1915) 1027, ed. 512-25; *BM Or.* 4951 (a Palestinian Syriac service known as the 'liturgy of the Nile', for which see Margoliouth (1896)); for secondary literature, see Engberding (1953), Hermann (1959), Tóth (2011). The motif continues even in modern Egyptian Arabic literature - see, for instance, Edwār al-Kharrāṭ, *Rama and the Dragon*, tr. Ghazoul (1999) 168: 'I was also told that the Nile will not flood unless the archangel Michael descends on his holiday to the Land of Egypt and weeps'.

addressed, constructed and described in hymnic, laudatory or encomiastic texts. Greek texts that praise the Nile, or figures associated with the river and its inundation, articulate the abundant benefits wrought by the rising waters, the joy experienced by the inhabitants, and the special, even unique, status of the Nile. They also reveal interesting and important junctures between Greek and Egyptian ideas and motifs, the implications of which have not yet been fully realised in scholarship. In various ways, these texts envisage the Nile as a unique and characteristically Egyptian space, whose incorporation into the orbits of Greek and Roman geopolitics is negotiated in various ways.

1. Praise of the Nile

The cult of the Nile rose to prominence in Roman Egypt, and was particularly a feature of the second and third centuries CE. Bonneau links this rise in popularity to the reign of Hadrian and the death of Antinous by drowning in the Nile in 130 CE.⁵⁰⁷ The Roman-period cult seems to have drawn on the Egyptian heritage of the divinised inundation Hapi and Hellenistic conceptions of Neilos; Frankfurter in particular stresses the continuity of the cult of the Nile as a ‘popular ritual tradition bound up... inescapably with the rhythms of the agricultural cycle’.⁵⁰⁸ No temples dedicated to the Nile exist and little mythological or theological detail accrued around the god, but evidence of the cult is varied in both type and provenance.⁵⁰⁹ A Demotic papyrus from the second century BCE attests to the existence of small sanctuaries of Hapi;⁵¹⁰ sanctuaries might also add a Nilometer to the temple precincts.⁵¹¹ There is some evidence from the Roman period of priestly titles (in Greek) relating to the cult, for instance the expression ‘high-priest of the most holy Nile’ (ἀρχιερεύς τοῦ ἱερωτάτου Νείλου), from Oxyrhynchus in 183 CE.⁵¹² Coins and statues

⁵⁰⁷ Bonneau (1995) 3215.

⁵⁰⁸ Frankfurter (1998) 42; cf. Bonneau (1995). On Hapi, see ‘Introduction’, pp. 30-32.

⁵⁰⁹ Kákosy (1982) 290.

⁵¹⁰ Botti (1967) no. 25b, 13 and 22, p.19; see Bonneau (1995) 3208.

⁵¹¹ See Frankfurter (1998) 43.

⁵¹² *P.Wisc.* 9.4; see Bonneau (1964a) 383. For similar titles under the Ptolemies, see Bonneau (1995) 3207-8, and (in Demotic) *P.Berlin* 13566, line 3, see Zauzich (1993), cf. Smith (1997/8) 196.

also illustrate the presence of a Nile cult in Roman Egypt.⁵¹³ Most significant is the evidence for festivals of the Nile, which are attested throughout the Roman period. Festivals coinciding with the agricultural year were held at the summer solstice (around 22nd June), at the heliacal rising of Sirius (Sothis, 19th July), and (usually) in August (the *Semasia*).⁵¹⁴ The greatest festival, characterised by joyful exuberance, was the *Semasia*, which celebrated the signs of the coming inundation.⁵¹⁵ This festival involved parades, processions, sacrifices, and feasting, in addition to Greek cultural displays, of theatrical performances, athletic competitions, mime and Homeric recitation.⁵¹⁶

1.1. Egyptian addresses to the inundation

Texts addressed to Hapi, spirit of the inundation, are attested from early in Egypt's history through to the Late Period. A recitation from the pyramid of Pepy I, third king of the sixth dynasty, addresses Hapi; here, the inundation is described as a re-iteration of the events of creation.⁵¹⁷ It is said to bring green vegetation, sustenance and rejoicing to men and gods, and is associated with the north wind. These themes remain important in later texts. Several spells from the Coffin Texts are addresses by Hapi himself, who appears again as a manifestation of primeval times, renewing creation.⁵¹⁸ In these texts, Hapi causes growth in the natural world, as he did at the first emergence of life, and thereby sustains and satisfies the gods themselves.

⁵¹³ Bonneau (1995) 3209-12.

⁵¹⁴ Bonneau (1971) 56. Bonneau (1971) 59-60 outlines festivities in honour of the Nile held at other times of the year.

⁵¹⁵ See Strabo 17.48, and Diod. Sic. 1.36.11-12. Bonneau (1964a) 361-405, (1971) 58-9.

⁵¹⁶ Bonneau (1971) 62.

⁵¹⁷ PT 581 (Sethe) = Pepi 523 Allen (2005), with translation.

⁵¹⁸ Coffin Texts, Spells 317 321; see Clark (1955), Faulkner (1973) 240-250. These texts date from the eleventh dynasty.

The most well-known Egyptian address to Hapi is a long hymnic text in hieratic ascribed to the Middle Kingdom sage Khety, but which was probably composed in the eighteenth dynasty.⁵¹⁹ To judge from the number of extant copies, which all derive from the region around Thebes, the text quickly became canonical and was set as a school-exercise.⁵²⁰ The themes of the hymn are the universal power of the god, and the joy and beneficial effects engendered by his coming, contrasted with despair and death during his absence. The god is the begetter of Sobek and other gods, including the Ennead, but his own origin and nature remains hidden and mysterious. The hymn unites Egypt in a vision of the beneficence of the river to the entire land. Another ostrakon from Deir el-Medineh preserves a separate and very different hymn to the Nile, which articulates a beautiful vision of the abundance, fertility and joy of the natural world during the inundation, and of the maintenance of harmonious order in social and cultic life.⁵²¹ The god himself has a mysterious origin. As in 'Khety's' hymn, Hapi makes possible every aspect of life in every part of Egypt, bringing universal benefit.

From the same period we have four stelae inscribed at Gebel el-Silsileh, 75km north of Aswan in the south of Egypt, dedicated by four kings of the nineteenth dynasty, Sety I, Ramesses II, Merenptah and Ramesses III.⁵²² These texts record donations made by the kings to Hapi twice a year at the time of the inundation. The inscriptions address Hapi as the father of gods, the self-created, who provides food, abundance and joy. They also express the particular relationship between Hapi and the king, who voices praise and ordains offerings to the god.

⁵¹⁹ So van der Plas (2013), cf. Knigge (2005). For the text, translations, and discussions, see especially van der Plas (1986), Helck (1972), *ANET* 372-3, Lichtheim (1969), (1973), Foster (1975). Older works include Maspero (1912), Gardiner (1935), Hermann (1960), Posener (1938).

⁵²⁰ Noted by Knigge (2005) 61 with n. 22; some copies have frequent orthographical errors, which would indicate a school context.

⁵²¹ *O.Deir el-Medineh* 1675. Published by Posener (1980) 99 with pl. 81-4 and 81a-84a, translated Foster (1995) 118-22, no. 52.

⁵²² Barguet (1952). On the cultic dimensions of the site, which was particularly connected with the inundation, see Kucharek (2012) 4.

These Nilotic motifs of fertility, abundance, renewed life and the hiddenness of the god continue into later texts, in which the life-giving power of the inundation is often ascribed to other gods, including the goddess Mut, and the gods Ptah and Amun.⁵²³ Invocations to the inundation continue to be found in funerary texts, including the texts comprising the book of ‘Going out in daylight’ (i.e. ‘the Book of the Dead’).⁵²⁴ In chapter 57a, the deceased asks Hapi, ‘the greatest of the sky’, for power over water.⁵²⁵ Chapter 149, sections 13 and 14, express the hope of the deceased for power over water and plants, and connect the deceased with the ‘fluid coming from Osiris’.⁵²⁶ The inundation is the subject of temple inscriptions from the late period, notably a description of the high inundation during the sixth year of Taharqa’s reign, from the temple at Kawa.⁵²⁷ The text describes the high inundation in celebratory and positive terms. The inundation is compared to ‘the Primeval waters, like the inert waters’, another echo of the time of creation. Again, the inundation brings joy and festivities to Egypt and a harvest ‘beyond calculation’. Although an abnormally high flood would have caused considerable destruction, the text expresses only the benefits, in terms parallel to earlier celebrations of Hapi.⁵²⁸

This brief and by no means exhaustive survey has, by drawing together similarities of theme and motif, necessarily obscured the subtle variations and differences between texts deriving from a great temporal and geographical span.⁵²⁹ Nevertheless these texts illustrate a tradition of addresses to and invocations of the inundation, which possesses a continuity of themes and ideas about the inundation over many centuries. These themes and motifs were adapted for differing

⁵²³ See the examples from the Berlin papyri cited by Knigge (2005) 63-4.

⁵²⁴ This collection of funerary spells and formulae, attested in many versions, has been newly published by Quirke (2013), who is sensitive to the variations between copies.

⁵²⁵ See Quirke (2013) 140.

⁵²⁶ See Quirke (2013) 363.

⁵²⁷ See Huddleston (1995) 357-8 for a translation of this text, with p.357 n.72 for bibliography.

⁵²⁸ Huddleston (1995) 359-60. For an awareness of the destructive aspects of the inundation, see the ‘Introduction’, p. 36.

⁵²⁹ One important idea, discussed in the ‘Introduction’ p. 34, and prevalent in the Graeco-Roman period is that the inundation was the efflux of Osiris, or even identified with the body of Osiris itself.

functions, but stress the mystery of the god, the joy and abundance brought by his arrival, and describe the inundation as a repetition of creation.⁵³⁰

1.2. The Nile in encomiastic Greek texts

As early as the fifth century BCE, the unusual and beneficial qualities of the inundation had been characteristic subjects of Greek texts that discussed Egypt, and the Nile was considered an appropriate subject for prose encomia. Such praise is found in the *Busiris* of Isocrates (12-14), in which the Nile provides an ‘immortal rampart’ (ἀθανάτω... τείχει), and a godlike power over the cultivation of the land.⁵³¹ Praise of the Nile is also found in the *Timaeus*, in the mouth of an ‘Egyptian’: ἡμῖν δὲ ὁ Νεῖλος εἰς τε τᾶλλα σωτήρ καὶ τότε ἐκ ταύτης τῆς ἀπορίας σώζει λυόμενος, ‘in our case the Nile, our Saviour in other ways, saves us at such times too from this calamity’ (Pl. *Tim.* 22d). The Nile is the preserver of Egyptian life, culture, and civilisation.

From the Hellenistic and imperial periods, evidence survives of a tradition, or at least motifs, of praise to the Nile in Greek poetry. First, from the third century BCE, fragments of a hymn by Parmeno of Byzantium to the Nile as the Egyptian Zeus are extant.⁵³² The lines, of which fewer than five are extant, mention several towns in Egypt. Second, a hexametric invocation to the Nile (the Louvre hymn) is preserved in a wax notebook; the notebook is dated paleographically to the late third or early fourth century CE. This text is discussed more fully below. Fragments of another address to the Nile in hexameters are preserved, on papyrus, dating to the fifth or sixth century.⁵³³ In these verses, the Nile is invoked as the bridegroom of Egypt, and the inundation is envisaged as the wedding of the two. Finally, *P.Turner* 10 is a Christian hymn to the Nile, dating from the sixth

⁵³¹ Livingstone (2001) 120 sees the encomium of Busiris more strictly as an encomium of Egypt, and notes that it ‘conforms closely to the precepts given by Menander Rhetor for the ‘praise of a city’ (*RG* III. 344.16-367.8).’ On the passages praising the Nile, see Livingstone (2001) 125-33. On the *Busiris*, see also Vasunia (2001) 183-207.

⁵³² *Suppl. Hell.* 604A; Powell (1925) 237; Diehl (1949-1952) III.136.

⁵³³ Norsa (1925) no.845; Keydell (1934) 420; Page (1950) no. 147.

century, of twenty-four lines; the first twenty-one lines are addressed to the Nile and the last three to Christ as benefactor.⁵³⁴

1.3. The Louvre hymn to the Nile

An invocation to the Nile in Greek is preserved on two wax tablets that belong to a school notebook.⁵³⁵ The manuscript consists of twenty-seven hexameter verses, invoking the Nile to bring the inundation, and can be dated paleographically to the end of the third or beginning of the fourth century CE. The hymn itself of course may have been composed at an earlier date. It is likely, as Cauderlier noted, that the text is a dictation exercise, and not the original work of the individual who has transcribed it here, on the basis of numerous orthographical and other errors.⁵³⁶ It is probable that the provenance of the tablet is the Fayoum.⁵³⁷ The hymn has been described as ‘conventional and rhetorical’.⁵³⁸ While the text does employ familiar motifs to describe the Nile, nevertheless it is worth closer attention. The hymn promotes the Nile as an Egyptian river tied by cosmological genealogy to Greek culture. It also reworks conventional motifs, articulating both the participation of the writer in Greek literary culture and highlighting the benefits brought to Egypt by the Nile; the Nile is figured as a uniquely beneficial river that brings glory to Egypt.

The Louvre hymn begins in typically Greek hymnic fashion, with a request that the river should be celebrated in song. It seems that the name of the river in the first line (which does not survive) introduces the relative clause of lines 2-4:

τὸν ποταμῶν πρέσβιστον ἐγείνατο πότνια Τηθύς
 <Τ>ηγῶν ἐξ ἱερῶν ἀψορροῦ Ὠκεανοῖο
 Αἰγύπτου ζαθέης φυσίζοον ὄλβιον ὕδωρ.

<Τ>ηγῶν *Battezzato*; ἡ τῶν *Cribiore*; αἴρων *Merkelbach*

⁵³⁴ Manfredi (1981).

⁵³⁵ Cauderlier (1989), Cribiore (1995), Battezzato (1996).

⁵³⁶ Cauderlier (1989) 106.

⁵³⁷ Cauderlier (1989) 102, who suggests, more precisely, the town of Theadelphia.

⁵³⁸ Cribiore (1995) 97.

... which queen Tethys begot as the oldest river

From the holy springs of encircling Okeanos,

blessed, life-giving water of holy Egypt.⁵³⁹

The text opens with the declaration that the Nile is the oldest river of Tethys and Okeanos. The lines bear close similarity to Hesiod *Theog.* 368: υἱέες Ὀκεανοῦ, τοὺς γείνατο πότνια Τηθύς; the sons of Okeanos are the rivers and streams previously listed.⁵⁴⁰ The likelihood of an allusion to Hesiod in the second line of the Louvre hymn is increased by the reference to the Nile as the eldest of the rivers (τὸν ποταμῶν πρέσβιστον) born to Tethys and fathered by Okeanos. Although this detail is not explicit in the *Theogony*, the Nile is listed *first* of the rivers:

Τηθύς δ' Ὀκεανῷ ποταμοὺς τέκε δινήεντας,

Νεῖλόν τ' Ἀλφειόν τε καὶ Ἡριδανὸν βαθυδίνην... (Hes. *Theog.* 337-8)

Tethys bore to Okeanos eddying rivers, the Nile and Alpheus and deep-eddying Eridanus...

The collocation ἀψορρόου Ὀκεανοῖο is found in the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* and the *Theogony* to denote the world-river Okeanos that flows around the world.⁵⁴¹ Okeanos and the Nile had long been connected in Greek thought; as we have seen, an early theory that the Nile arose from Okeanos was attributed to Hecataeus of Miletus and rejected by Herodotus.⁵⁴² However, from the Hellenistic period onward, the idea that the Nile arose from Okeanos was associated explicitly with the Egyptians; Diodorus Siculus and Horapollo attribute the opinion to the Egyptian priests.⁵⁴³ And, as is well known, the idea does ultimately derive from the Egyptian doctrine that the waters of the Nile arose from the primordial waters, Nun.⁵⁴⁴ However, as was observed above, whereas

⁵³⁹ Translations of the hymn are by Criboire (1995).

⁵⁴⁰ Bonneau (1964a) 145 interprets the Hesiodic material as a reflex of the Egyptian tradition that the Nile derived from Okeanos; this is however difficult to sustain in light of the following objections: 1. Hesiod ascribes the parentage of rivers to this union of Okeanos and Tethys; 2. the Hesiodic account relies on two parents, male and female, unlike the Egyptian tradition that made the Nile part of the waters of Nun (i.e. Okeanos); 3. Okeanos is, in Homer, the origin of *all* the world's rivers, seas, and groundwaters, not just the Nile (*Il.* 21.196-7).

⁵⁴¹ *Il.* 18.399; *Od.* 20.65; *Theog.* 776.

⁵⁴² See ch. 3 above.

⁵⁴³ Diod. Sic. 1.37.7, Horapollo *Hierogl.* 1.21. See Bonneau (1964a) 143-9.

⁵⁴⁴ Bonneau (1964a) 143-50.

Egyptian invocations of the Nile often articulate parallels between the coming of the inundation and the original moment of creation, this evocation of primordial time is entirely absent from the Louvre hymn, which instead binds the Nile into the Greek genealogy of Okeanos and Tethys. The river is grounded in Greek myth and thereby claimed by Greek culture.

The hymn redeploys conventional Greek Nilotic motifs, creating a vision of Egypt basking in the abundance and wonder of the river. It was noted above that the abundance and fertility engendered by the inundation are central themes of Egyptian texts. The Greek hymn also explores these themes, but without the motifs that characterise the Egyptian discourse, such as the joy given by the inundation to the gods, the hiddenness of the god, and beautiful descriptions of the natural world. Rather, the motifs of the Louvre hymn are familiar from Greek discourse. Central to the hymn is the spectacle of the paradoxical Nile, the ‘wave growing in summer’ (θερειγενές οἶδμα).⁵⁴⁵ Lines 14-21 illustrate the fundamental reversals of land and water undergone in Egypt during the inundation. The land becomes a waterway for ships (14-15).⁵⁴⁶ The inundation causes a complete (though temporary) reversal, as ἰχθύες ἐν πεδίοισι καὶ οὐ βόες ἀμφινέμονται ‘fish and not oxen dwell in the plain’ (18-19). These inversions of water and land are a common trope of Greek and Roman constructions of the Nile.⁵⁴⁷ Above all, the text luxuriates in the fertility and abundance brought by the inundation. The coming of the inundation is figured as a marriage between the land and the water (7), an image commonly used of the Nile.⁵⁴⁸ The water is ‘streaming with gold’ (χρυσοπόρον), an adjective frequently used of the Nile with reference to the abundance and wealth brought by the inundation.⁵⁴⁹ It is ‘corn-producing’ (σταχυητόκον, 22) and

⁵⁴⁵ The same phrase is used of the Nile at Nonnus *Dion.* 26.238. See Cribiore (1995) 101-2.

⁵⁴⁶ The restoration of line 14-15 is still uncertain; as Cribiore points out, ‘the meaning should be: The ships do not sail on the river’.

⁵⁴⁷ Hdt. 2.97; Ach. Tat. 4.12.2. Comparison made by Cribiore (1995) 103-4, *ad* 18-19; she also compares an epigram of Philippus of Thessalonica *A.P.* IX 299.

⁵⁴⁸ For parallels see Cribiore (1995) 102 *ad loc.*, who cites *Suppl. Hell.* 982.9-10 (1st cent. CE), an epigram on Augustus’ victory at Actium; the address to the Nile published by Norsa (1925); Nonnus *Dion.* 3.277, 6.341-42, 26.229-35; cf. Plut. *DIO* 366 A; Heliod. 9.9.

⁵⁴⁹ See Cribiore (1995) 102.

‘nourisher of children’ (κου<ρ>οτρόφε, 23).⁵⁵⁰ The Nile is ‘life-giving blessed water’ (φυσιζοον ὄλβιον ὕδωρ, 4). In early hexameter texts, the adjective is always used as an epithet of the fertile earth; it is used by Aeschylus to describe Zeus.⁵⁵¹ The connection of the phrase φυσιζοον ὕδωρ to the Nile recalls not only the exceptional fertility engendered by the Nile, but also the notion that the water itself, rather than the soil of Egypt, held the power of fertility.⁵⁵²

The theme of fertility is continued into line 22, in which the land is addressed as ‘black earth’ (αἶα μέλαινα). The combination αἶα μέλαινα is not, so far as I can determine, attested elsewhere, although its equivalent γαῖα μέλαινα is used regularly in Homer and elsewhere.⁵⁵³ The phrase is not used exclusively to illustrate the fertility of soil;⁵⁵⁴ it does however very accurately describe the appearance of the cultivable soil of Egypt after the inundation. The soil of Egypt had long been associated with blackness by the Greeks.⁵⁵⁵ The water of Egypt too is sometimes called black.⁵⁵⁶ The term αἶα μέλαινα functions as an equivalent to the common Egyptian word for Egypt itself, *km.t* (late, and Demotic *kmj*), literally ‘black land’, used originally of the cultivated land, in contradistinction to the desert (*dšrt* ‘red land’). The word is connected to the verb *km* ‘to be/become

⁵⁵⁰ σταχυητόκον is a *hapaax*, but as Cribiore (1995) 104 notes, Nonnus uses similar compound adjectives from στάχυς. The adjective κουροτρόφος, ‘nourisher of children’ is applied to any river or spring in Greece; see Price (1978) 126, 128. Cribiore (1995) 105 notes that κουροτρόφος here may allude to the iconography of the Nile god with his cubit-children.

⁵⁵¹ *Il.* 3.243, 21.63, *Od.* 11.301, *Hom. Hymn Aph.* 125, Aesch. *Supp.* 584-5.

⁵⁵² Wild (1981) 92-7 for ancient testimonies of the fertility of Nile water relating to plants, animals and humans.

⁵⁵³ See *Il.* 2.699, 15.715, 17.416, 20.494; *Od.* 11.365, 11.587, 19.111.

⁵⁵⁴ But see, for instance, *Od.* 11.587, 19.111.

⁵⁵⁵ Herodotus observes that Egypt is ‘black-soiled’ (μελάγγαιος), cf. the scholiast to Pl. *Tim.* 25b, who calls Egypt ‘the country of the black-footed ones’. See Vasunia (2001) 47-53 on the collocation of Egypt with blackness especially in fifth-century tragedy.

⁵⁵⁶ *Od.* 4.359: μέλαν ὕδωρ; [Plut.] *De fluv.* 16.1. Bonneau (1995) 3197-9 associates this ‘black water’ with other rivers which are called Μέλας, and with the Meroitic name Astapus (for which see Pliny *HN* 5.10 and Pomponius Mela *Chorog.* 1.50). Delattre (2011) 161 n. 2, in a new edition and commentary of the *De fluviiis* suggests that ‘Melas’ might be a translation of the Egyptian *km.t*; as seen in the discussion below however, *km.t* always refers to the land of Egypt itself, never to the river.

black' which persisted in Demotic; the word *kmy* continued to be used of the cultivated land generally in the late period, e.g. *pr-imnt n p3 kmy* 'the west of the cultivated land' and *kmy n sywt* 'cultivated land of Siut'.⁵⁵⁷ Moreover, the meaning of the word seems to have been understood by Greeks; Plutarch describes the Egyptian word for Egypt as follows:

ἔτι τὴν Αἴγυπτον ἐν τοῖς μάλιστα μελάγγειον οὔσαν, ὥσπερ τὸ μέλαν τοῦ ὀφθαλμοῦ, Χημίαν καλοῦσι. (Plut. *DIO* 34, 364 C 5)

Again, they call Egypt, since it is mostly black, *Khemia*,⁵⁵⁸ like the black part of the eye.

Given that at least one Greek was aware of the Egyptian word *kmy* and its meaning, it is at least plausible that the phrase αἶα μέλαινα functions directly as a simple calque of the Egyptian term. The Louvre hymn therefore addresses Egypt as a fertile land, in a term that echoes both Homeric phrasing and at the same time the Egyptian word for the land itself. Even while the text inscribes itself within the conventions of Greek hymnic (and hexametric) discourse, it glances at its geographical context and situates the hymn firmly within the exceptional land of Egypt.

Perhaps the most complex engagement with a pre-existing Nilotic motif in the Louvre hymn is to be found at lines 9-10:

Ἄνῆρες ἐστηῶτες ἐπὶ προχοῆσι τεῆσιν
κλήζουσιν Νεῖλοιο διειπετέος φίλον ὕδωρ.

Men standing at the river mouth invoke the beloved water of divine Nile.

The adjective διειπετέος occurs several times in the Homeric poems, and is frequently used of a river in the genitive case: διειπετέος ποταμοῖο.⁵⁵⁹ Specifically, it is used twice in the *Odyssey* of the Egyptian river Aigyptos, that is, the Nile, at 4.477 and 4.581. However, the location of those invoking the inundation at the 'river-mouths' ἐπὶ προχοῆσι τεῆσιν (9) in the text recalls another occurrence of the collocation διειπετέος ποταμοῖο, at *Il.* 17.263 ὡς δ' ὅτ' ἐπὶ προχοῆσι διειπετέος

⁵⁵⁷ Respectively *P.Setna* 1, 5/11, *P.Cairo* 50059, 5. Darnell (1990) discusses the use of this word in Demotic and Coptic to refer to a portion of the 'black land'.

⁵⁵⁸ The aspiration (χ) probably reflects pronunciation of a lower Egyptian dialect, cf. the Bohairic Coptic ⲬⲬⲙⲓ as opposed to the Sahidic and Achmimic ⲬⲬⲙⲉ. See Griffiths (1970) 425-6, and Crum *s.v.* ⲬⲬⲙⲉ.

⁵⁵⁹ *Il.* 16.174, 17.263, 21.268, 21.326; *Od.* 4.477, 4.581, 7.284, cf. Hes. fr. 320 Merkelbach-West.

ποταμοῖο, a line which does not refer to the Nile. Lines 9-10 therefore recall both the Homeric designation of the Nile as διπετέος ποταμοῖο in Homer, and a further moment at which this noun-epithet combination is joined with the phrase ἐπὶ προχοῆσι. This set of multiple correspondences does not exhaust the allusive texture of these lines. As mentioned, the text evokes the performance of an annual hymn (ἐτήσιον ὕμνον, 11) to the river ‘by the streams’ (ἐπὶ προχοῆσι).⁵⁶⁰ This performative context echoes the evocation of hymns to the streams of the Nile in Aeschylus’ *Supplices* (1024-9), as the Chorus of Danaids declare their preference for Argos over Egypt:

...μηδ’ ἔτι Νείλου
 προχοὰς σέβωμεν ὕμνοις,

 ποταμοὺς δ’ οἱ διὰ χώρας
 θελεμὸν πῶμα χέουσιν
 πολύτεκνοι λιπαροῖς χεύμασι γαίας
 τόδε μειλίσσοντες οὐδ’ ας. (Aesch. *Suppl.* 1024-29)

No longer let us honour the streams of the Nile with hymns, but the rivers which pour their gentle draught through the land, and increase the birth of children, soothing its soil with their fertilizing streams.

The beneficent gifts (notably fertility) commonly associated with the Egyptian river are instead transferred to the rivers of Argos, the Erasinus and Inachus.⁵⁶¹ The Louvre hymn, however, emphatically re-instates the river as both a source of fertility and a fit subject for hymns.

⁵⁶⁰ The term προχοαί when used of the Nile has several possible referents: first, the mouths of the river and the area around the Delta, as at Aesch. *Suppl.* 28 Νείλου ἐπὶ προχοῆσι Κανώβιδος ἐγγύθεν ἀκτῆς. Second, the expression can be used to denote the Nile *simpliciter*, so Peek *GVI* 1080.1 Νίλου (sic) ἐπὶ προχοαῖς; third, it can denote the current of a river, as most probably at Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.270-1 Διόθεν δέ μιν οὔποτε δεύει Ἰ ὄμβρος. ἄλις προχοῆσι δ’ ἀνασταχύουσιν ἄρourke, so Criobore, cf. Livrea (1973) 47, *ad* Ap Rhod. *Argon.* 4.131, with further references, not, as Johansen and Whittle (1980), the inundation of the Nile.

⁵⁶¹ As Borthwick (1963) 232 observes, ‘in the *Supplices*... the generative power of Nile water is an important motif’, cf. Vasunia (2001) 45-6.

The Louvre hymn also praises the Nile as the world's greatest river. It is addressed as the oldest river (τὸν ποταμῶν πρέσβιστον), as well as the 'father of rivers' (πάτερ ποταμῶν, 5) and 'king of rivers' (ποταμῶν βασιλεῦ, 23). These epithets are not empty rhetorical phrases. Rather, I argue that they function to establish the Nile as the senior river of the world, a not uncontested position, and even as a fluvial parallel to Zeus.

To consider the epithet πάτερ ποταμῶν first, rivers are often called 'father' with respect to their prodigious virility. The virile fertility of the Nile was of course particularly significant.⁵⁶² In art, the Nile was often depicted surrounded by his 'children', the ideal sixteen cubits of the inundation.⁵⁶³ The epithet πάτερ ποταμῶν, however, denotes not only the traditional virility and fertility of rivers, but the Nile as the father of other rivers. This epithet is not used of other rivers, except Okeanos. The text has already mentioned the children of Okeanos; now the use of the epithet πατήρ perhaps aligns the river with the source and origin of other rivers, Okeanos. Simultaneously, I would argue that the epithet recalls a well-established parallel between the Nile and Zeus which is discussed further below. Zeus too is characteristically a father; a common Homeric epithet is πατήρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε 'father of men and gods'.⁵⁶⁴ Moreover, in the second century CE, a prose oration of Aelius Aristides identified Zeus as the father of everything, including rivers, heaven, earth, gods, mankind, animals, plants.⁵⁶⁵

Secondly, the Nile is addressed as ποταμῶν βασιλεῦ 'king of rivers' (line 23). The expression seems to be attested at Callimachus *Aetia* fr. 7c.16: καὶ Φάσις [ποταμῶν ἡμε]τέρων βασιλεύς.⁵⁶⁶ Similar descriptions are cited by Harder in her note on this line; other rivers identified as the 'king of rivers' or 'kingliest of rivers' include the Asopus (Bacch., 9.45), the Tiber (Dion. Peri. 353, Ennius

⁵⁶² cf. *Nile pater*, Tib. 1.7.23.

⁵⁶³ e.g. the so-called Vatican Nile statue.

⁵⁶⁴ See *Il.* 1.544, 4.68, 5.426, 8.49, 8.132, 11.182, 15.12, 16.458, 20.56, 22.167, 24.103; *Od.* 1.28, 12.445, 18.137.

⁵⁶⁵ Aelius Aristides *Orat.* 43.29.

⁵⁶⁶ Harder (2012) vol. 2, 160 *ad loc.*

Ann. 1.63, *Stat. Silv.* 3.5.111), the Hesperus (*Virg. A.* 8.77), the Eridanus (*Virg. G.* 1.482), and the Achelous (*Ovid, Met.* 9.17). The epithet seems therefore to be an encomiastic motif used of rivers. The phrase is also found of the Nile in *P.Lit. Lond.* 239, line 15, which Bonneau, followed by Cribiore, interprets as the Nile holding power over its branches and canals.⁵⁶⁷ In the Louvre hymn, however, it is more likely that the epithet places the Nile among the great rivers of the world, alongside for instance the Tiber.⁵⁶⁸

At the same time, the epithet indicates a further parallelism with Zeus. The Nile was not uncommonly connected with Zeus in Greek texts, especially those in which the river was seen as a replacement for rain in Egypt. The Nile is of course manifestly not a river associated with heavy rainfall; monsoon rains falling on the Ethiopian plateau are ultimately responsible for the rising of the inundation, but rain in Egypt itself is exceptionally rare. However, the scarcity of rainfall in Egypt gave rise to an important literary motif in classical literature, that of the 'rivalry between the Nile and rain'. Serge Sauneron cites passages from twelve writers, to which list Bonneau and Robert Wild added at least another eleven.⁵⁶⁹ Moreover, deities who held power over the Nile were associated with the rain from Roman times, including Isis, Osiris and Horus.⁵⁷⁰ Further, on the basis of Zeus' power over rain as Ζεὺς ὄμβριος or ὑέτιος, the Nile could be identified with that god. For instance, in the third century BCE, Parmeno of Byzantium addressed the Nile as the Egyptian Zeus, Αἰγύπτιε Ζεῦ Νεῖλ'.⁵⁷¹ This is explained in a scholion to Pindar *P.* 4.56, quoting Parmeno, as follows: ἀναλογεῖν γὰρ τοῖς τοῦ Διὸς ὄμβροις τὸ τοῦ Νεῖλου ὕδωρ. The association between the Nile and rain is particularly evident in *P.Lit.Lond.* 239. This text is a small

⁵⁶⁷ Cribiore (1995) 101 *ad l.* 5, following Bonneau (1964a) 411-13.

⁵⁶⁸ The Ramesside Egyptian hymn to the inundation also includes the idea that the Nile be saluted as a king (VI.4).

⁵⁶⁹ Sauneron (1952) 41-8, and Wild (1981) 64 and 222 n.38.

⁵⁷⁰ Wild (1981) 65. Isis is called 'Mistress of Rain (ἐγὼ ὄμβρων εἰμὶ κυρία) in the aretology at Kyme; see Peek (1930) 114, cf. *P.Oxy.* 1380.277-80, 237-39. For Osiris and the rain, see Plut. *DIO* 34.364 D and 40.367 B; Horus was linked with both the rain and the Nile.

⁵⁷¹ *Suppl. Hell.* 604A, line 1.

'amulet' of nine vellum leaves dated to the sixth or seventh century CE, consisting of an invocation to the Nile followed by the Constantinopolitan Creed and Psalm 132.⁵⁷² The text suggests a number of parallels with Zeus, particularly in its repetition of words connected with rain; the river is addressed as πολλοίομβρ{οι}ε μεγαλώνοιμε Νεῖλε 'Nile of abundant rain, of the great name'. The epithet πολλοίομβρ{οι}ε is picked up later in the same text by ὄμβροις (30) and ὀμβρορο (36).⁵⁷³ In the context of this parallelism with Zeus, the river is also addressed as ποταμῶν βασιλεῦε (13-15). The application of this epithet here suggests that it should be interpreted as a further parallel between the Nile and Zeus, and that the use of the same epithet in the Louvre hymn should be interpreted in the same way.

The Louvre hymn then is an important testament to the use of Nilotic motifs in a Greek text in the imperial period. It seems likely that the text derives from a school context, and cannot be considered among the most sophisticated of highly-developed pieces of poetry produced in the ancient world. However, closer analysis reveals that the text is of more interest than previously thought. By invoking the Hesiodic genealogy of the river, the text locates the Nile firmly within Greek literary culture, and excludes ideas that are central to the Egyptian traditions of Nilotic praise and invocation. At the same time, the text celebrates the unique benefits that accrue to Egypt from the inundation and praises the Nile in terms that point to a rivalry with other rivers and even with Zeus. The Louvre hymn situates the Nile within the parameters of Greek culture, with the exception of the address to Egypt itself as 'black land' (αἶα μέλαινα), which reminds the reader of the ultimate duality of Egypt as a land both Egyptian and Greek.

2. Isis

The Nile was closely associated with Isis and other Egyptian deities. Greek texts that praise Isis often include references to the Nile and the goddess' power over the river and inundation. Closer analysis of some of these references reveals more clearly the conception and functions of the Nile

⁵⁷² ed. Milne (1927) no. 239, discussed by Bonneau (1964a) 410-3.

⁵⁷³ Probably for ὄμβροις, so Milne (1927) 201, note to 36, followed by Bonneau (1964a) 411.

in encomiastic texts in the late Hellenistic and Roman periods, and especially the delicate interplay between the uniqueness of the river as a phenomenon local to Egypt and the increasingly universal power of the goddess. Particularly relevant are the four hymns to Isis composed by one Isidorus and inscribed on two piers at the entrance to the southern forecourt of a large temple of Isis-Hermouthis in the town of Medinet Madi (ancient Narmouthis) in the far southern area of the Fayoum.⁵⁷⁴ Hymns I and III (thirty-six lines each) are written in dactylic hexameters; hymns II and IV (thirty and forty lines respectively) in elegiac couplets. The hymns have frequently been dismissed by scholars as ‘metrically faulty and poetically inept’, although they are now beginning to attract more attention as valuable evidence in the history of Greek hymnody and the cult of Isis.⁵⁷⁵

In particular they are early examples of hymns and aretalogies to Isis that became very widespread and survive in numerous examples. These texts, of which approximately a dozen are attested, date from the period c. 100 BCE to 300 CE; they survive in inscriptions from sanctuaries in Egypt and Greece, in addition to quotations in Diodorus Siculus (1.27) and an extract in Apuleius (*Met.* 11.5); a long invocation to Isis on papyrus from the early second century CE is also extant (*P.Oxy.* 1380).⁵⁷⁶ The earliest Greek addresses to Isis are the four hymns of Isidorus. The other inscriptions are as follows: 1) a hexametric aretalogy of Isis from Andros, first century BCE (A); 2) a

⁵⁷⁴ On the hymns of Isidorus, see *SEG* 13.2.548-51; Turchi (1949-50), Keydell (1952), Vandoni (1952), Bernand (1969), Vanderlip (1972), Bollók (1974), Dieleman and Moyer (2010), Faraone (2012), Fantuzzi-Hunter (2004), Moyer (forthcoming). In 2010, the Centre for the Study of Ancient Religions at the University of Chicago hosted a seminar on the Hymns of Isidorus at Medinet Madi; resources from that seminar are available online at <http://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/csar/projects/isidorus/> [accessed Wed 8 May 2013].

⁵⁷⁵ See especially Fantuzzi-Hunter (2004), Faraone (2012), Moyer (forthcoming).

⁵⁷⁶ The bibliography on this Isiac aretalogical material is extensive and increasing; the following does not claim to be exhaustive. See the following studies of *P.Oxy.* 1380: Grenfell-Hunt (1915), La Faye (1916), Collart (1919), van Groningen (1921), Manteuffel (1928) and (1930) 70ff., Cazzinaga (1965). On the epigraphic aretalogies, see: 1. Andros hymn: Ross (1842), *IG* 15.5.739, Peek (1930) 4-116, Vidman (1969) no. 157. 2. Cyme hymn: *IG* 15.5.739, Roussel (1929), Lexa (1930). 3. Ios hymn: *IG* 15.5.739; Dittenberger (1960) no. 1267. 4. Inscription from Saloniki: Pelakides (1934). See also, Grandjean (1975), Harder (1944), reviewed by Nock (1949), Festugière (1949), Müller (1961), Bergman (1968), Merkelbach (1995). From an Egyptological perspective, see the excellent discussion by Quack (2003), especially regarding the interchange between Greek and Egyptian.

hymn from Cyme in the Aeolid, also first century BCE (K); 3) a hymn from the island Ios, second/third century CE (J); 4) an inscription from Saloniki, dated to approximately the same period (S). In 1944, Richard Harder posited that texts K, J, S and D (the prose version quoted in Diodorus Siculus) derived from a single Greek source (M), which he argued was a translation originating from an (unknown) original Egyptian text, a stele at Memphis.⁵⁷⁷ Werner Peek later argued that the hymn from Andros (A) could be derived from the same source (M).⁵⁷⁸ The hymns of Isidorus show distinct similarities to the texts derived from M, but do not themselves originate from the same source.

In addition, these hymns articulate a specific moment of interaction between Greek and Egyptian contexts. A fluidity between Greek and Egyptian is thematised in the hymns, particularly in the fourth hymn, by Isidorus' programmatic claim:

Ἀσφαλῆως δὲ μαθὼν τε παρ' ἀνδρῶν τῶν ἱστορούντων
ταῦτα καὶ αὐτὸς ἐγὼ πάντ' ἀναγραψάμενος
ἠρμήνηυσ' Ἑλλησι θεοῦ δύναμιν τε ἀνακτος,
ὡς βρο[το]τὸς οὐδ' ἕτερος ἔσχεν ἴσην δύναμιν. (40)
Ἰσίδωρος
ἔγραψε.

Reliably learning these facts from men who study history,
I myself have set them all up on inscribed pillars
and translated (into Greek) for Greeks the power of a Prince who was a god,
power such as no other mortal has possessed.

Isidorus wrote it.

Ian Moyer has recently commented that 'Isidorus thus identified himself as an intermediary between the traditions of ancient Egypt and the Greeks, but on its own this statement does not clearly indicate whether he considered himself more at home in one language and its literary

⁵⁷⁷ Harder (1944) 21-2.

⁵⁷⁸ Peek (1930).

traditions or the other'.⁵⁷⁹ Recently, Moyer and Christopher Faraone have analysed the varying degrees of localism and transregionalism in the hymns; Moyer very sensitively discusses the implications of the reader's physical movement around the columns of the gate to read the hymns, and the gradual movement *towards* a specifically Egyptian locale from the first to the fourth hymns. In what follows, I examine the presentation of the role and functions of the Nile, over which Isis holds power. I consider how the texts negotiate Egyptian and Greek ideas about the river and inundation, as well as the relation of these texts to the canonical texts of Greek literature. I argue that the hymns deliberately position themselves between Greek and Egyptian traditions, as is suggested by their liminal location at the gates of the temple. Moreover, I would suggest that the writer's use of Homeric allusion establishes his texts' *difference from*, rather than identity with, those Greek traditions.

2.1. Isis, bringer of the inundation

In the invocations and aretalogies, Isis is regularly ascribed the power of 'bringing forth' the inundation. In the first hymn of Isidorus, the inundation is attributed to the power (δύναμις) of the goddess:

Σῆι δυνάμει Νείλου ποταμοὶ πληροῦνται ἅπαντες
 ὥρηι ὀπωρινῆι, καὶ λαβρότατον χεῖθ' ὕδωρ
 γαῖαν πᾶσαν ἔπι, ἵν' ἀνέγλιπος καρπὸς ὑπάρχηι. (1.11-13)

By your power the channels of Nile are filled, every one, at the harvest season, and its most turbulent water is poured on the whole land that produce may be unailing.

Isis here is said to instigate the rising of the Nile ὥρηι ὀπωρινῆι 'at the harvest season'; the Greek season ὀπώρα denoted the 'part of the year between the rising of Sirius and of Arcturus'.⁵⁸⁰ As is well known, Isis had been associated with the rising of the Nile in Egyptian culture since a very early period, and is frequently identified with the star Sirius (Sothis), whose heliacal rising marked

⁵⁷⁹ Moyer (forthcoming) 8: <http://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/csar/files/2010/03/Moyer-Isidorus-at-the-Gates-of-the-Temple.pdf>.

⁵⁸⁰ *LSJ ad loc.*

the first appearance of the inundation.⁵⁸¹ The connection between Isis, Sothis and the releasing of the Nile flood is well attested in the Late Period in both Greek and Egyptian (including Demotic) texts. In the M-text of the Greek aretalogies, Isis declares: ἐγὼ εἶμι ἢ ἐν τῷ τοῦ Κυνὸς ἄστρῳ ἐπιτέλλουσα ‘I am she who appears in the Dog Star’ (M 9).⁵⁸² Isis is likewise assimilated to Sothis in the Greek invocation *P.Oxy.* 1380. 143-4 κ[υρ]ία Ἰσι, μ[ε]γίστη θεῶν, πρῶτον ὄνομα, Ἰοῖ ἢ Σῶθι.⁵⁸³ The idea also figures in a Demotic papyrus, which states that Isis appears among the stars as Sothis:⁵⁸⁴

h^c=t n spt.t iw_f=w (P.Heid.dem. 736 verso, x+7)

You appear as Sothis among them [i.e. the stars].⁵⁸⁵

Similarly, according to Plutarch, the Egyptians regarded Sothis as the star of Isis (*DIO* 38).⁵⁸⁶

Isis’ control of the inundation is profoundly beneficial. A comparison with the activity of Zeus is apposite. Line 12 alludes to *Il.* 16.385-6: ‘on an autumn day, when Zeus sends down the most turbulent water’ (ἤματ’ ὀπωρινῶ, ὅτε λαβρότατον χέει ὕδωρ ἢ Ζεὺς). The allusion marks a significant reversal of the source. In the Iliadic precedent, the rain-waters of Zeus are profoundly destructive, the result of the god’s anger at the injustice and impiety of men.⁵⁸⁷ The torrential rains cause the rivers to run in spate (16.389), destroying the landscape (16.390) and the ‘works of men’ (ἔργ’ ἀνθρώπων, 16.392), that is their fields and crops.⁵⁸⁸ By contrast, Isis releases the beneficial waters not of rain, but of the inundation, which although turbulent (λαβρότατον), paradoxically result in the blessing of unending harvest (ἀνέγλιπος καρπὸς) rather than the

⁵⁸¹ Vanderlip (1972) 26, Müller (1961) 34.

⁵⁸² Müller (1961) 33-5.

⁵⁸³ cf. *PGM* VII 496 Ἰσι Σῶθι σουηρι Βούβαστις ‘Isis, Sothis, ‘Souêri’, Bubastis’.

⁵⁸⁴ For text, see Kockelmann (2008), text 1, with commentary 59-60.

⁵⁸⁵ Kockelmann (2008) n. 228 notes that in the Tanis version of the Demotic text of the Canopus Decree, the Sothis-star is referred to as the ‘star of Isis’ *syw n 3s.t = τὸ ἄστρον τὸ τῆς Ἰσίους*.

⁵⁸⁶ cf. Plut. *DIO* 21; Horapollo (1.3).

⁵⁸⁷ On the violence of rain sent from Zeus at this time of year, cf. Hes. *WD* 676-7.

⁵⁸⁸ On this connotation of ἔργ’ ἀνθρώπων, see Janko *ad Il.* 16.389-92; cf. 19.131; *Od.* 6.259 with Hainsworth-Heubeck-West (1988) *ad loc.*

destruction of the crop. The line is therefore a more dynamic use of Homeric allusion than that allowed by the editor Vera Vanderlip, who claims that 'Isidorus is obviously misusing the Greek ὀπώρη'.⁵⁸⁹

The interconnectedness of originally Greek and originally Egyptian ideas can be seen in a passage describing the coming of the inundation. Isis leads the Nile over the land:

Νεῖλον χρυσορρόαν πείθουσ' ἀνάγεις κατὰ [κ]αι[ρό]ν
 Αἰγύπτου ἐπὶ γῆν ἀνδράσιν εὐτερπήν.
 Εὐανθεῖ τότε καρπὸς ἅπας καὶ πᾶσι μερίζεις
 οἷσι θέλεις, ζῶην παντοδαπῶν ἀγαθῶν. (Isid. 2.17-20)

Persuading the gold-flowing Nile, you lead it in season over the land of Egypt as a blessing for men. Then all vegetation flourishes and you apportion to all whom you favour a life of unspeakable blessing(s).

The verbs ἄγω and ἀνάγω are used frequently of Isis and the Nile.⁵⁹⁰ In *P.Oxy.* 1380, Isis is the one 'who brings up the Nile over the whole country': τὴν καὶ τὸν Νεῖλον ἐπὶ πᾶσαν χῶραν ἐπανάγουσαν (*P.Oxy.* 1380.125-6).⁵⁹¹ In the second of Isidorus' hymns, the use of the verb ἀνάγω also has connotations of resurrection; the verb is frequently used of bringing a person up from the dead.⁵⁹² These connotations gesture in two directions, both to Isis' revival of Osiris in Egyptian myth, and to her associations with Demeter. In *P.Oxy.* 1380, the same verb ἐπανάγω is also used of Isis' recovery of her brother, at 186-9: σὺ τὸν ἀδελφόν σο[υ] ἐπα]νή[γ]αγες μόνη κυβερνήσασα καλῶς καὶ εὐαρμόστως θάψασα['you brought back alone your brother, piloting him safely and burying him fittingly'. Both the Nile and Osiris may be 'brought back' by Isis. The verb κυβερνήσασα in an Egyptian context is particularly suggestive of a river-journey, recalling both the physical recovery of the body and its revival by Isis. A Demotic doxology of Isis, preserved on papyrus, includes the following line:

⁵⁸⁹ Vanderlip (1972) 27.

⁵⁹⁰ Vanderlip (1972) 44.

⁵⁹¹ On the problematic grammar of ἐπὶ πᾶσαν χῶραν ἐπανάγουσαν, see below.

⁵⁹² e.g. Hes. *Theog.* 626; Pl. *R.* 7.521c.

[n3] nty hn [n3 y]l.w s (n) 3s.t [in=s]-tn r p3 t (P.Tebt.Tait 14, x+1)

O you who are in [the riv]ers. Pray to Isis, and [she brings] you to the bank.⁵⁹³

In both Greek and Demotic texts, Isis is responsible for the safe preservation of those in difficulty on rivers. It is well known that Osiris and the Nile are identified with one another in both Egyptian and Greek texts, most notably Plutarch *DIO* 32 (363 D): οὕτω παρ' Αἰγυπτίοις Νεῖλον εἶναι τὸν Ὅσιριν ἴσιδι συνόντα τῆ γῆ 'so [they say] among the Egyptians Osiris is the Nile uniting with Isis as the earth', cf. 33.⁵⁹⁴ Simultaneously, the presence of such language as ἄγω and ἀνάγω points to Isis' identification with Demeter.⁵⁹⁵ In the myth of Demeter and Persephone, the daughter was 'brought back' to the world, as were vegetation and agriculture.⁵⁹⁶ The hymn's description of Isis' control over the coming of the inundation therefore recalls both Greek and Egyptian motifs, in ways that are not mutually exclusive, but could be variously activated by different visitors with different prior knowledge and, perhaps, expressions of religious devotion.

The second of Isidorus' hymns celebrates Isis as Agathetyche, as the discoverer of cereal crops, and the bringer of fertility, abundance and blessing. In this hymn, the Nile is associated with the blessings of fertility and new life that Isis precipitates. Isis' power over the inundation is a function of her role as the 'Discoverer of Life and Crops' (ζωῆς καὶ καρπῶν εὐέτρι<α>, 3). Her power over the inundation has both Greek and Egyptian precedents.

2.2. Isis and fertility

Isis' power over the Nile inundation and over agriculture is often articulated in terms of 'discovery' (εὕρημα); once again, this language points towards both Greek and Egyptian contexts.

⁵⁹³ Kockelmann (2008) text 6; Kockelmann suggests that [n3] nty hn [n3 y]l.w refers to 'drowning people trapped in the water'. See also Quack (2003) 355, for whom 'those in the rivers' are boatmen.

⁵⁹⁴ See Griffiths (1970) 420 *ad loc.*, with references to and discussions of Egyptian evidence for this belief, cf. 56-8, esp. 56, 'fully consonant with developed Egyptian doctrine is the association of Osiris with the Nile'.

⁵⁹⁵ See Hdt. 2.59, cf. 2.171; Diod. Sic. 1.13.5; Plut. *DIO* 27 361 E. Here Isis is identified with Persephone; see Griffiths (1970) 392-3. Tobin (1991) 187 argues that this identification is little more than an extension of the identification between Persephone's mother Demeter and Isis.

⁵⁹⁶ e.g. *Hom. Hymn Dem.* 349 ἐξαγαγεῖν.

The ‘discovery’ trope is particularly prevalent in Isidorus’ hymns, and in the aretalogies deriving from the M-text. In the second of Isidorus’ hymns, Isis is addressed as:

ζωῆς καὶ καρπῶν εὐρέτρι<α>, οἷσί τε πάντες
τέρπονταί τε βροτοὶ σῶν χαρίτων ἔνεκα. (Isid. 2.3-4)

O discoverer of life and cereal food wherein all
mortals delight because of your blessings.⁵⁹⁷

In the first of Isidorus’ hymns, Isis is explicitly identified with Demeter (cf. Δηοῖ ὑψίστη), to whom this language of ‘discovery’ was typically applied. The same associations between Isis, Demeter and discovery are used in the prose hymn to Isis quoted by Diodorus Siculus at 1.27.4: ἐγὼ εἶμι ἡ πρώτη καρπὸν ἀνθρώποις εὐροῦσα ‘I am the first who discovered crops for men’, cf. Diodorus’ narrative at 1.14.1: εὐρούσης μὲν Ἰσιδος τὸν τε τοῦ πυροῦ καὶ τῆς κριθῆς καρπὸν ‘when Isis had found the fruit of wheat and barley’. In Diodorus’ narrative, Isis’ discovery of the fruits of wheat and barley results in a radical change from cannibalism to agriculture (1.14.1). That is, the action of Isis marks an essential alteration from savagery to the ‘civilised’ values of agriculture.⁵⁹⁸ In both Diodorus’ narrative and Isidorus’ hymn, cereal crops and are a source of joy, and Isis-Demeter is an important ‘culture-hero’.⁵⁹⁹

However, the language of the discovery of agriculture also echoes Egyptian religious conceptions. The hymns of Isidorus are inscribed at the temple of Isis-Hermouthis, and the first hymn addresses Isis as Hermouthis in the first line (Ἑρμοῦθι). ‘Hermouthis’ is the transliterated form of the Egyptian name Renenut(et) (i.e. *rnn.wt.t* or *rnn.t*), a goddess associated with nursing and the harvest, to whom Isis was assimilated.⁶⁰⁰ Both Dieter Müller and Thomas Dousa have emphasised

⁵⁹⁷ cf. Isid. 1.3, 8.

⁵⁹⁸ For cannibalism as an attribute of primitive societies in Greek thought, see Segal (1974). Egyptians were occasionally believed to practise cannibalism; see Isoc. *Bus.* 5 (although the more usual story is that Busiris sacrificed humans, e.g. Hdt. 2.45, Apollod. 2.5.11).

⁵⁹⁹ ‘Culture-hero’ is related to the term ‘culture-bringer’; see especially Sulimani (2011) 14-15. Several gods and heroes were known to Greeks as culture-heroes; in addition to Demeter, Athena, Dionysus, Apollo, Herakles and Prometheus were also significant ‘civilising’ figures.

⁶⁰⁰ Müller (1961) 31-2; Vanderlip (1972) 19-20. See also Leitz (2002-3) 4.686-92, s.v. ‘*Rnn-wt*’.

the contribution of the syncretised forms of Isis-Hermouthis-Renenutet to the background of the Greek aretalogical texts.⁶⁰¹ In addition, it seems that the characteristic form of the Greek Isis aretalogies, single sentences beginning ἐγὼ εἰμι..., may derive from Egyptian, and in particular, Demotic precedents.⁶⁰² If so, Isis' discovery of cereal foods belongs not only to the milieu of Hellenistic Greek culture-heroes, but also to Egyptian conceptions of agricultural goddesses.⁶⁰³

It has been demonstrated so far that the language and conceptions of the hymns of Isidorus fuse Egyptian and Greek precedents. This is also true of the common motif of Isis as mistress of rivers and winds.

2.3. Isis, mistress of rivers and winds

In the second of Isidorus' hymns, Isis is designated the 'creator of all rivers, and of very swift streams' (κτίστης καὶ γαίης τε καὶ οὐρανοῦ ἀστερόεντος ἢ καὶ ποταμῶν πάντων κώκυτάτων τε ῥοῶν, lines 11-12).⁶⁰⁴ This can be widely paralleled across the Greek hymns and aretalogies. First, in the Cyme version (K) of the Greek Isis aretalogy, Isis as the narrating voice proclaims: ἐγὼ ποταμῶν καὶ ἀνέμων καὶ θαλάσσης εἰμι κυρία 'I am the mistress of rivers and the winds and the sea'. Importantly this inscription links Isis' mastery over rivers with that over the winds and the sea. Second, this is paralleled by Lucian: καὶ τὸν Νεῖλον ἀναγέτω καὶ τοὺς ἀνέμους ἐπιπεμπέτω... (referring to Isis-lo, *Dial. D.* 7).⁶⁰⁵ A similar conception is articulated in the Oxyrhynchus invocation: θαλασίων καὶ ποταμίων στομάτων κυρίαν 'mistress of the mouths of seas and rivers' (*P.Oxy.* 1380.122-3), cf. σὺ τῆ[ς] γῆ[ς] κυρία ἢ α.ρ[. . . .] πλή]μμυραν ποταμῶν 'you, lady of the land,

⁶⁰¹ Müller (1961), Dousa (2002).

⁶⁰² Quack (2003).

⁶⁰³ Müller also suggests that the distinctive language of εὔρημα in the hymns of Isidorus and the Greek aretalogies re-articulates an original Egyptian notion of 'creation', in which the Greek verb εὕρισκειν corresponds to the Egyptian verb *ḥr* (Müller (1961) 33, followed by Dousa (2002) 156.).

⁶⁰⁴ Similar plaudits are given to the Agathosdaimon, Sokonopis at *Isid.* 4.11-14.

⁶⁰⁵ Müller (1961) 61 n. 1 compares *P.Oxy.* 1380.61 and *Apul. Met.* 11.5 *quae caeli luminosa culmina, maris salubria flamina... nutibus meis dispenso.*

bring(?) the flood of rivers' (222-4); later in *P.Oxy.* 1380, Isis' control of waters is generalised still further as she is identified with the principle of moisture: σὺ πάντων ὑγρῶν καὶ ξηρῶν καὶ ψυχρῶν... (183ff.).

Common to the Greek praises of Isis is a focus on the universal, cosmic powers of the goddess, surpassing her original geographical limitations. Scholars have recently stressed the cosmic and universal aspects of the goddess in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, in that Isis is seen to belong, not only to geographically specific areas of her native Egypt, but to every land. Guilia Gasparro, for instance, has argued that the Greek Oxyrhynchus invocation traces 'an *oikoumene* entirely marked by the presence of Isis'.⁶⁰⁶ Moreover, recent scholarship has underlined the inextricability of Greek and Egyptian strands in texts relating to Isis; the Hellenistic goddess is a new divinity, whose identity may be refracted through multiple lenses for the purposes of diverse communities. The Greek praises of and addresses to Isis articulate this diversity of context. The universality of Isis' appeal also affects the roles and functions of the Nile in such texts; no longer is Isis' sphere of influence limited to the Nile. Rather, the Nile is one of a number of waters in Isis' domain, just as Egypt becomes merely one of the favoured cult-places of the goddess. In these pluralising laudatory texts, her control of water is generalised; consequently, the Nile becomes less individualised.

This extension of Isis' fluvial functions to encompass all rivers is characteristic of the Hellenistic goddess.⁶⁰⁷ This is a very common aspect of the Hellenistic Isis, and should be considered in parallel with her role as a maritime goddess, in which capacity she may be known as Isis Pelagia, Isis Pharia or Isis Euploia. The maritime functions of the goddess appear to derive from a Hellenistic Greek syncretism with Aphrodite-Arsinoe; Aphrodite had been known as a marine deity,

⁶⁰⁶ Gasparro (2007) 55.

⁶⁰⁷ Müller (1961) 61-2: 'Griechisch ist es auch, wenn Isis in der Aretalogie nicht nur Herrin des Nils, sondern der Flüsse im allgemein ist.'

while Arsinoe II became associated with the military fleet, and hence with Aphrodite Euploia, and the sea more generally.⁶⁰⁸

The presentation of Isis' control of rivers and other waters is particularly significant in *P.Oxy.* 1380, where the general statement of Isis' powers over rivers is punctuated by the naming of three rivers over which she holds sway: καὶ τοῦ ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ Νείλου, ἐν δὲ Τριπόλι Ἐλευθέρου, ἐν δὲ τῇ Ἰνδικῇ Γάγγου 'and in Egypt the Nile, in Tripolis the Eleutheros, in India the Ganges' (224-6). These references parallel the extensive list of cult-titles and their place of origin that begins the invocation (1-119).⁶⁰⁹ The detailed list of places in which Isis is worshipped encompasses large areas of the known world; Egypt, naturally, dominates the first part of the list, and several places in the Delta are mentioned, although the section on Upper Egypt is very fragmentary. From l. 77, the list ranges outside Egypt, with Arabia, Asia Minor, Cyrene, Crete, Chalcedon, Rome, the Aegean islands, Cyprus, Syro-Palestine, Delphi, the land of the Amazons, India, Persia, Italy, and the Hellespont. The original editors of this invocation were puzzled by the mention of the Eleutheros in l. 224, which seemed out of place: 'the Eleutheros... was quite a small river, and that it should be placed on the same level of sanctity as the Nile and Ganges is remarkable.'⁶¹⁰ However, the locations of these rivers pick up the places mentioned in the list of cult-titles at the beginning of the text: the Nile is representative of Egypt; the Eleutheros, i.e. the modern Nahr el-Kebir and the

⁶⁰⁸ Barbantani (2005) 152 suggests that 'possibly Isis as a sea goddess is an Alexandrian creation, due to syncretism with Aphrodite and her association with early Ptolemaic queens, mistresses of naval activities'; Bricault (2006) 16-33 provides more evidence for this interpretation, countering earlier attempts to derive Isis Pelagia or Euploia from Egyptian prototypes. For such attempts, see especially Griffiths (1975) 129-36, cf. Bergman (1968) and Müller (1961); the parallels are however very tenuous. In the pharaonic period, Isis could wield control of the wind and Nilotic navigation, but influence over the open sea (little as this is considered in Egyptian thought) was the domain of Hathor.

⁶⁰⁹ Isis herself is a polyonymous goddess, see e.g. *Isid.* 1.26, cf. 16; cf. the hymn to Anubis from Kios, Bithynia: σὴ τε μάκαιρα θεὰ μήτηρ πολυώνυμος Ἰσις 'and your blessed goddess mother, many-named Isis' (6), and e.g. the *Life of Aesop* in which a priestess prays to Ἰσι πυριώνυμε 'Isis of the many names' (5), but cf. also the Demotic *P.Brooklyn* 47.218.50, col. 9, l. 10, *ʒs.t nb.t rn.w* 'Isis, lady of names'.

⁶¹⁰ Grenfell and Hunt (1915) 220, n. *ad* 224.

northern border of present-day Lebanon, recapitulates the region of Syro-Palestine, while the Ganges recalls the more distant land of India (cf. 103).

At this point, however, it is necessary to confront a potential confusion in the presentation of the Nile in *P.Oxy.* 1380, which has a bearing on the ‘universalism’ of the text. At 125-6, the text on the papyrus reads: τὴν καὶ τὸν Νίλον ἐπὶ πᾶσαν χώραν ἐπανάγουσαν. Grenfell and Hunt, the original editors of the papyrus, translated the Greek as follows: ‘who also bringest back the Nile over every country.’⁶¹¹ Given the emphasis on Isis’ universal and cosmic potency in this invocation, it is tempting to understand these lines as referring to the universal power and influence of the Nile.⁶¹² However, the referent of the phrase ἐπὶ πᾶσαν χώραν is by no means clear. Grenfell and Hunt note that ‘ἐπὶ πᾶσαν <τὴν>χώραν ... i.e. Egypt, would be more suitable’.⁶¹³ An instructive parallel is the aretology from Cyme, which opens with the grandiose self-proclamation: Εἶσις ἐγὼ εἰμι ἢ τύραννος πάσης χώρας. Festugière, Müller and Griffiths interpret this as a claim to universal hegemony over the *oikoumene*,⁶¹⁴ translating ‘the absolute ruler of every land’.⁶¹⁵ Harder, on the other hand, sees in this phrase a parallel to the Egyptian royal epithet *nb t3.wy*, with the implication ‘mistress of the entire land’, i.e. of Egypt.⁶¹⁶ Similarly Kockelmann has suggested that it is ‘tempting’ to see in the title a direct Greek translation of the Demotic *t3 nb.t ʿ p3 t3 tr=f*. The Egyptian word *t3* is itself ambiguous, and may be translated either ‘land’ or ‘earth’. Thus, in a Demotic ostrakon, Isis is given the epithet *3s.t hn3 nb.t p.t hnʿ t3* ‘Isis, mistress, lady of heaven and earth’, in which *t3* ‘earth’, as the terrestrial domain, clearly opposes the celestial domain. By contrast, *t3* may designate a select area of the world, for instance *t3 3lby(n)* ‘land of Arabia’, *t3 nhs*

⁶¹¹ Grenfell and Hunt (1915) 202.

⁶¹² cf. Diod. Sic. 1.27.5, in which Osiris is ‘the one who campaigned over every land’ (ὁ στρατεύσας ἐπὶ πᾶσαν χώραν).

⁶¹³ *ib.* 217, n. ad 125-6.

⁶¹⁴ cf. *P.Oxy.* 1380.121 ἄνασσα τῆς οἰκουμένης.

⁶¹⁵ Festugière (1949) 222 and n. 41, Müller (1961) 19, Griffiths (1975) 156.

⁶¹⁶ Harder (1944) 35.

'land of Nubia', *ḫr* 'land of Syria'.⁶¹⁷ The Greek word χώρα typically designates a place, area of land, or country, rather than the terrestrial domain *simpliciter*; it is, for example, frequently used to denote areas within Egypt; thus the words ἡ ἄνω χώρα καὶ ἡ κάτω in an inscription refer to Upper and Lower Egypt respectively.⁶¹⁸ However, the Egyptian *ḫr* is frequently translated by the Greek χώρα, which allows the possibility that the Greek translation sometimes preserves the ambiguity of the original Egyptian *ḫr*. The problematic referent of lines 125-6 of the Oxyrhynchus invocation may therefore originate in such an ambiguity. However, while the ambiguity in the address to Isis as ἡ τύραννος πάσης χώρας may have significance in both 'localising' and 'universalising' contexts, as suggested by Bergman,⁶¹⁹ it is unlikely that the Nile should be seen as returning to every country; rather, it inundates the whole land. This reading is supported by the later references in the invocation to Isis' control of the Eleutheros and the Ganges. Thus, the power of the Nile is extensive, but not, in these addresses, universal; rather, it is Isis who should be seen as the queen, not just of the Nile inundation, but of rivers, the sea and any kind of moisture.

I have argued so far that the emphasis on Isis as 'mistress of rivers' in the Greek hymns and aretologies can be derived from a Hellenistic Greek generalisation of her function as guardian of the Nile and its inundation. However, the matter is not so clear-cut, since Egyptian texts of the Hellenistic period likewise associate Isis with waters outside Egypt. For example, an enigmatic ostrakon of the second century BCE from the well-known archive of Hor in Memphis describes Isis walking on the face of the water of the Syrian sea (that is the Mediterranean):

3st ḫ ntr:t ʕ3t n p3y kmy p3 ḫr iw.s mšꜥ (n) rdwy-s ḫr ḫr | p3 mw (n) p3 ym (n) ḫr

Isis, the great goddess of this Egypt and the land of Syria, is walking upon the face (of) | the water of the Syrian sea.⁶²⁰

So in Egyptian texts too, we find Isis connected with bodies of water outside Egypt.

⁶¹⁷ See the title *wr p3 ḫ 3lbyn* 'chief of the land of Arabia' (*O.Krug* A, 16); *kwr n p3 ḫ nḫs* 'ruler of the land of Nubia' (EG 561); *ḫr* 'land of Syria' (e.g. *O.Hor* 1, 12); all examples cited in *CDD T*, p.47 s.v. *tA*.

⁶¹⁸ *OGIS* 90.46 (from Rosetta, second century BCE), cited by *LSJ* s.v. χώρα II.3.

⁶¹⁹ Bergman (1968) .

⁶²⁰ Ray (1976) text 1, pp. 7-14.

The Cyme inscription also links Isis' mastery over rivers with that over the winds and the sea. This collation of domains can again be derived from both Egyptian and Greek precedents. The third of Isidorus' hymns uses the image of Isis 'journeying to' or 'dwelling in' the winds to articulate the universal power of the goddess over the *oikoumene*:

ἢ που ἐς Λιβύην ἢ ἐς Νότον ἀμβιβέβηκας,

ἢ βορέου πέρατα ναίεις ἠδυπνόου αἰεΐ,

ἢ Εὐρου πνωιάς, ὅθι ἀντολαὶ ἠελίοιο... (Isid. 3.20-2)

Whether you have journeyed into Libya or to the south wind,

Or whether you are dwelling in the outermost regions of the north wind ever sweetly blowing,

Or whether you dwell in the blasts of the east wind where are the risings of the sun...

The north wind is associated with the coming of the inundation in Egyptian texts, and is especially connected with Isis and Renenutet (Hermouthis).⁶²¹ In the Demotic papyrus *P.Berlin* 6570 the inundation and the north wind are among the benefactions of Isis.⁶²² Isis and Renenutet are sometimes identified with the north wind in temple inscriptions.⁶²³ Isidorus' third hymn seems to demonstrate a generalisation from Isis' connection with the north wind to the winds of the other compass points, articulating the universal power of the goddess, which is paralleled by her role in the Greek aretalogies as 'mistress of the winds'.⁶²⁴

Once again, however, the Greek Isis-praises suggest a multiplying profusion of connotations with parallels in both Egyptian and Greek contexts. The winds in Greek thought were intimately bound

⁶²¹ Contra Müller (1961).

⁶²² Column H, lines 19-20: 'I gave [you] the inundation... I gave you the north wind'; see Widmer (1998) 91, Kockelmann (2008) 61.

⁶²³ *Deir Chelouit I*, p. 33, no. 11, 1, 1 (Isis); *Edfu VII* 243b (Renenutet). See Bonneau (1964a) 151-2, Vanderlip (1972) 55 *ad* Isid. 3.21, Kockelmann (2008) 61-3 with additional texts.

⁶²⁴ Merkelbach (1995) 118 relates the Egyptian correlation between the inundation and the north wind to the Greek epithet 'mistress of the winds'.

to navigation,⁶²⁵ and their occurrence in the aretalogies may pick up on the functions of Isis Pelagia as the discoverer of seafaring, and mistress of sailing, for instance in the aretalogies: ἐγὼ θαλάσσια ἔργα εὐῆρον (M 15 = KSJ); cf. ἐγὼ ναυτιλίας εἰμὶ κυρία (K). Isis is strongly associated with the sea in Greek and Roman texts from the late Hellenistic period; in her capacity as a goddess of the sea she may be known as Isis Pelagia, Isis Pharia or Isis Euploia.⁶²⁶ Given the functions of Isis as a goddess of the sea, her complementary role as ‘mistress of winds’ in the Greek aretalogies and invocations may be intelligible not only from the originally Egyptian perspective that connected the north wind with the arrival of the Nile flood, but also from a Greek perspective in which the regularity and reliability of the winds were essential to navigation, particularly navigation on the open sea. Once again, the Greek Isis-aretalogies are doubly determined, first by their connections to Egyptian traditions and secondly by their transposition into a Hellenised Greek context.

Parallels in Greek and Egyptian texts render the task of determining the ‘origins’ of particular motifs and ideas extremely difficult, and indeed misleading. Rather, it is necessary to consider the implications of such ‘double determination’. In the Isis aretalogies and Isidorus’ hymns, references to the Nile may be interpreted from (at least) two perspectives. In contexts local to Egypt, Isis’ control of the Nile brings the inundation and all its traditional benefits; Isis-Sothis was the guarantor of the inundation and Isis-Hermouthis was an important agricultural deity. Simultaneously, Isis’ traditional sphere of operations is expanded; the Nile itself is inscribed within a globalising perspective. In these texts, especially *P.Oxy.* 1380, the Nile is no longer viewed as the only

⁶²⁵ On the importance of winds in Greek navigation of the Mediterranean, especially in the open sea, see Morton (2001) 217-19, cf. McGrail (1991). Morton (2001) 48-61 discusses the various winds common in the Mediterranean region. Murray (1987) 139 stresses the importance of winds in ancient cultures: ‘winds determined both coastal and offshore sailing routes, defined navigational hazards, and at times, affected the outcomes of naval battles’.

⁶²⁶ These epithets are common on inscriptions; see especially Bruneau (1974) 336 on Isis Euploia and 349-51, and *id.* (1961). The literature on the marine functions of Isis is extensive, see especially: Bricault (2006), Griffiths (1975) 31-47, Leclant (1986) 346-7, Castiglione (1970), Bergman (1968), Müller (1961) 61-67, Vandebek (1946) 44-54.

exceptional river, but rather as chief among a series of rivers over which Isis exercises authority. In this, the Nile parallels the position of Egypt in the aretalogies. Isis is no longer solely mistress of Egypt; rather, Egypt is one among many preferred abodes or places of worship.

In the next part of the chapter, I turn to the use of the Nile in encomiastic texts addressed to prominent individuals, a monarch, an athlete and a military leader, from the Hellenistic and Roman periods. The use of Nilotic motifs in these texts reveals much about the concerns of these texts with constructing a place for Egypt within the *oikoumene*, with political authority over Egypt, and with inscribing Egypt and the Nile within Greek culture.

3. The Nile in Hellenistic encomiastic poetry

With a few exceptions, Egypt and the Nile are almost entirely absent from Hellenistic poetry. The poetic space of the works of Callimachus, Theocritus and Apollonius of Rhodes is expansive and rich in toponyms and hydronyms, but characterised by the omission of Egypt; the worlds of the *Aetia*, of bucolic, of Argonautic adventures, are constituted of fictional landscapes imbued with the inheritance of Greek mythology and literature.⁶²⁷ The notable exception to this Egyptian absence is encomiastic or hymnic poems, particularly those concerned with kingship, the gods or other exceptional individuals.⁶²⁸ Scholars, notably Susan Stephens, have argued that the presence of Egypt in these texts articulates a refraction into Greek texts of Egyptian mythological and theological ideas, particularly those relating to Egyptian kingship ideology.⁶²⁹ This approach allows for the possibility that ‘court poets’ might have been familiar with such ideas, and in several cases has drawn attention to moments at which Greek encomiastic discourse of the Ptolemaic court can

⁶²⁷ On this distinctive omission of Egypt as a ‘strategy of exclusion’ in Callimachus, see Asper (2011) 173-6; on bucolic space in Theocritus’ mythological *Idylls*, see Klooster (2012); for an analysis of Hellenism and space in the *Argonautica*, see Thalmann (2011).

⁶²⁸ See e.g. Selden (1998), and Stephens (2003) 122-70, on Theocritus *Idyll* 17. Cf. Strootman (2010) 40-2, Bulloch (2010) 169-70.

⁶²⁹ Merkelbach (1981), Koenen (1977), (1983), (1993), Bing (1988), Selden (1998), Reed (2000) Stephens (2003), (with cautious circumspection) Hunter (2003). Sceptical accounts include Zanker (1989) and Weber (1993).

appear to be illuminated by key aspects and motifs of pharaonic ideology. Few of the proposed ‘Egyptianising references’⁶³⁰ have won common assent among scholars. One of the most significant is the phrase ἀηποτέρη μεσόγεια, over which the Ptolemies rule, in Callimachus’ *Hymn to Delos*.⁶³¹ This has been interpreted as ‘both inland regions’, i.e. ‘Upper and Lower Egypt’, a reference to the ‘Two Lands’.⁶³² Some ‘Egyptianising’ readings of Hellenistic poetry are attractive, including this instance in the *Hymn to Delos*. It is, however, necessary to confront the lack of overtly Egyptian reference in most texts and the unsettling awareness that, in most cases, these texts can be read *adequately* from an entirely Greek perspective. Nevertheless, there remain moments and passages which, puzzling from a Greek perspective, might well be illuminated by the background of Egyptian tradition.⁶³³ At the same time, descriptions of Egypt and especially the Nile in Hellenistic poetry refract and rework motifs familiar from Greek discourse, so that the Nile of Callimachus and Theocritus is a literary - and intertextual - river, informed by the Greek heritage of discourse about the river, in addition to motifs adopted from Egyptian conceptions of kingship. Despite the relative absence of Egypt from Hellenistic poetry, the figure of the Nile is occasionally used by Hellenistic poets to articulate the place of Egypt in the inhabited world, to proclaim the exceptional qualities of individuals from Egypt, and to identify the land of the Nile as a place of Greek culture.

3.1. Theocritus, *Encomium to Philadelphus*

I begin with Theocritus’ seventeenth *Idyll*, the *Encomium to Ptolemy Philadelphus*, which presents a vision of the universal splendour of Zeus and Ptolemy. Egypt, with the Nile, lies at the centre of Ptolemy’s domain, and Ptolemy himself possesses similar characteristics to the Nile. Zeus acts as the first link between Ptolemy and the Nile. Zeus is a central figure in the poem: he forms the opening (ἐκ Διὸς ἀρχώμεσθα, 1); the eagle at 72 is taken to be an omen of Zeus (73); Zeus also

⁶³⁰ Hunter (2003) 92.

⁶³¹ Callim. *H.* 4.168.

⁶³² Merkelbach (1981), Koenen (1983) 174-90, (1993) 81-4, Bing (1988) 136.

⁶³³ My approach to these issues is informed particularly by the judicious caution expressed by Hunter (2003) 48-53.

closes the poem (137). Throughout, Ptolemy Philadelphus acts as a doublet to Zeus, and the encomium has a particular relationship to Callimachus' *Hymn to Zeus*.⁶³⁴ Zeus also functions as the hinge between the two specific geographical locales of the poem, Cos (58-72) and Egypt (79-120). Egypt is introduced by means of a contrast between the rain (from Zeus) and the Nile, which as we noted above is a common *topos* in ancient texts.⁶³⁵ Egypt achieves a special status in the vast geographical space of the poem; Zeus 'rules over many lands and many seas' (πολλὰς δὲ κρατέεις γαίης, πολλὰς δὲ θαλάσσης, 75-6) and waters 'countless lands and countless races of men' (μυρίαί ἄπειροί τε καὶ ἔθνεα μυρία φωτῶν, 77), but these, unnamed and blandly alike in their raininess, are no match for Cos and then the unique land of the Nile inundation. The *Encomium* is marked by parallels with Callimachus' *Hymn to Zeus*. In particular, the *Hymn to Zeus* describes how the landscape of Arcadia is transformed by the birth of Zeus from arid lifelessness to well-watered (εὐύδρος, 19) land. Rhea, in her need for water during childbirth, causes a 'great flood' (μέγα χεῦμα, 32) to pour out over the 'waterless' (ἄβροχος, 18) land of Arcadia.⁶³⁶ Zeus' birth corresponds with the presence of water in Argos; similarly, Theocritus' *Encomium* sets up correlations between Ptolemy and the water of Egypt, the 'flooding Nile' (Νεῖλος ἀναβλύζων, 80).

A second key theme of the poem is the abundance of wealth enjoyed by Ptolemy. Abundance is signalled as a poetic concern in the proem (note παρεόντος ἄδην, 10). The Nile is prodigiously productive (79) and brings enormous benefits to Egypt, in the form of skilled craftsmen (81) and numerous cities (82-4). The text likewise praises Ptolemy's abundant wealth and benefaction (εὐεργεσίη, 116), which is distributed to the gods, other kings, cities and his companions (108-11). Both Ptolemy and the Nile bring wealth and benefactions to those who are dependent on them.

⁶³⁴ Stephens (2003) 164: 'which [poem] is prior cannot be determined with any degree of conviction... The two clearly construct themselves against each other'.

⁶³⁵ See above, p. 180.

⁶³⁶ The word ἄβροχος might reflect a usage peculiar to Egypt, referring to land uninundated by the Nile; so Bing (1988) 137 n. 90, and Stephens (2003) 98 with n. 74. The episode as a whole is interpreted by Stephens (2003) 96-102 as articulating a primeval, 'Egyptian' landscape that echoes the theogonic myth of the birth of Horus.

Third, both the Nile and Ptolemy also provide for the defence of the people. The Nile defends Egypt from its enemies, allowing the people to prosper in peace (98-101); these lines deploy a motif familiar from Isocrates' *Busiris*, in which the Nile is the defence of Egypt.⁶³⁷ Ptolemy is characterised throughout the encomium as a strong warrior defending his people: Ptolemy will sit alongside Alexander and the archetypal warrior, Herakles (17-8); he is a warrior comparable to the mythic heroes (53-7); his military command allows him to amass a great empire (86-94). Susan Stephens has argued that the interconnected benefits brought by the king and the river in Theocritus' *Encomium* mirror the benefactions accomplished by the archetypal 'good king' figure, exemplified by Sesosösis in Diodorus Siculus' narrative (1.56-7).⁶³⁸ At the same time, Stephens and Richard Hunter have underlined the similarities between these texts and traditional Egyptian conceptions of the good king, as illustrated for example by the Israel stele of Merenptah:

The cattle are left to roam, no herdsman crosses the river's flood; towns are settled.⁶³⁹

The Nile in Theocritus' *Encomium* is a central site for the articulation of praise. The text draws on encomiastic traditions from both Greek and Egyptian cultures to generate a vision of the Nile as a uniquely powerful and beneficial phenomenon of Egypt that contributes to the laudatory portrait of Ptolemy, who stands over both traditions.

3.2. Callimachus, fr. 384 Pf.

The Nile is also the epicentre of praise in a fragment of Callimachus. Callimachus fr. 384 Pf. is the fragment of an epinician, in elegiac distichs, in praise of the athletic victories of the Ptolemaic statesman Sosibius.⁶⁴⁰ The extant lines of the papyrus reveal numerous speakers, including the Nile, who voices his approval of the victories of Sosibius, and of the fame brought back by these

⁶³⁷ Isoc. *Bus.* 12-13, see Livingstone (2001) 127-8 *ad loc.* Cf. Diod. Sic. 18.35.6 (an invading army is eaten by crocodiles), with Hunter (2003) 174.

⁶³⁸ Stephens (2003) 160.

⁶³⁹ Lichtheim (1976) 76, quoted by Stephens (2003) 161. See also Richard Hunter (1996) 89.

⁶⁴⁰ Bibliography on fr. 384 Pf.: Cahen (1924), Barigazzi (1951), Sevieri (1998), Stephens (2002), Bremen (2007), Lelli and Parlato (2008).

victories. The fragment is relatively understudied in scholarship, and has been dismissed as artistically inferior to the fifth-century epinicians of Pindar and Bacchylides. Closer examination of the fragment, however, reveals that Callimachus both echoes these earlier encomiastic poets in his evocation of the Nile, and transforms the function of such motifs to accommodate a new centre of athletic and cultural prowess, namely Egypt.

The fragment abounds in multiple voices that originate in different times and places: the primary narrator gives way at line 9 to a hymn to Poseidon (9-15), at line 28 to the Nile (28-34), at line 35 to an unknown speaker (35-47), and finally to the offering apparently dedicated by Sosibius at the outermost branch of the mouth of the Nile (49-50). This multiplicity of poetic voices has been seen as problematic, even poetically objectionable, by scholarship, but more recently, Roberta Sevieri has pointed to a more fruitful mode of interpretation, arguing that this polyphony of the lyric 'I' functions as a sort of virtual chorus, emphasising the diverse times and places of multiplying praise.⁶⁴¹ In what follows I examine more closely the nature and poetic functions of the speech of the Nile, and its implications for the new epinician articulated by Callimachus.

Susan Stephens has pointed to the speech of Nile in fr. 384 Pf. as one of a 'number of features of the Victory of Sosibius that do not comfortably fit the epinician frame'.⁶⁴² For Stephens, such unusual features seem to mark a 'customisation' of the epinician that 'bind[s] Greek and Egyptian together'.⁶⁴³ Stephens' argument relies on what is seen as the unusual quality of the epinician, including the speech of the Nile. However, these qualities resonate with parallels in Greek encomiastic poetry more fully than has been considered; important contexts are Callimachus' innovative play with classical Pindaric epinician, and other Hellenistic laudatory poems. The richness of these multiple, and multiplying, hermeneutic contexts redefines the limits of the epinician for the new Ptolemaic context.

⁶⁴¹ Sevieri (1998) 198.

⁶⁴² Stephens (2002) 260.

⁶⁴³ Stephens (2002) 261.

The speech of the Nile cannot be directly paralleled in extant epinician of the fifth century; however, at the beginning of Pindar's first Nemean ode, the lyric voice urges the resting-place (ἄμπνευμα) of the Alpheus to issue a hymn of praise:

Ἄμπνευμα σεμνὸν Ἄλφειοῦ,...

σέθεν ἀδυεπῆς

ῥυμνος ὀρμάται θέμεν (5)

αἶνον ἀελλοπόδων

μέγαν ἵππων, Ζηνὸς Αἰτναίου χάριν· (*N.* 1.1, 4-7)

Sacred resting-place of Alpheus... from you sweet-voiced song rushes out to give great praise for storm-footed horses, by the grace of Aetnaean Zeus.

The Alpheus is an important geographical landmark in the landscapes evoked by fifth-century epinician. This river is frequently mentioned in the epinician of both Pindar and Bacchylides.⁶⁴⁴ It is also prominent in the myth of Pelops (*O.* 1.90-92). The importance of the cult of the river-god at Olympia is demonstrated by Pausanias (5.14.6). The reference to the resting-place of Alpheus in *N.* 1.1 (Ἄμπνευμα σεμνὸν Ἄλφειοῦ) seems to be an allusion to the myth that the Alpheus, after diving underground/-water, resurfaced at the fountain of Arethusa in Syracuse.⁶⁴⁵ Thus the Alpheus signifies not only the site of Olympic victory in epinician, but in this Nemean ode, the homeland of the victor Chromius of Aitna. The song of the Alpheus/Arethusa is a direct consequence of the gods, and the victor's excellence (ἄνδρὸς δαιμονίαις ἀρεταῖς), and is explicitly correlated with praise (αἶνον... μέγαν, 6-7). That is, in Pindar's epinician, the victory of the athlete establishes a reason for the river or fountain, emblem of the victor's homeland, to sing.

Callimachus' epinician for Sosibius transforms this motif by allowing the reader to 'hear' the words of the river Nile itself:

⁶⁴⁴ E.g. *O.*: 1.20, 1.92, 2.13, 3.22, 5.18, 6.34, 6.58, 7.15, 8.9, 9.18, 10.48, 13, 35, *N.*: 6.18, *I.*: 1.66; Bacch. 6.3, 5.37-9, 8.27, 178b-86.

⁶⁴⁵ Griffith (2008) 1-8, esp. 4. The connection between the Alpheus and Arethusa is frequently attested: *Ov. Met.* 5.572-641; Σ *Pind. P.* 2.12a (2.33-34 Drachmann), Paus. (5.7.3).

καλά μοι θρεπτός ἔτεισε γέρα

...[...οὐ] γάρ πώ τις ἐπ[ί] πόλιν ἤγαγ' ἄεθλον

]ταφίων τῶνδε πανηγυρίων (30)

καὶ πουλὺς, ὃν οὐδ' ὄθεν οἴδεν ὄδεύω

θητὸς ἀνὴρ, ἐνὶ γούν τῶδ' ἔα λιτότερος

κε[ίνω]ν οὐς ἀμογητὶ διὰ σφυρὰ λευκὰ γυναικῶν

καὶ παῖς ἀβρέκτω γούνατι πεζὸς ἔβη' (fr. 384. 28-34)

'A beautiful reward has my nursling paid back to me... For until now no one had brought a [...] trophy to the city from these sepulchral festivals... and, great though I am, I, whose sources no mortal man knows, in this one thing alone was more insignificant than those streams which the white ankles of women cross without difficulty, and children pass over on foot without wetting their knees'.

The Nile in Greek texts often functions as a metonym for Egypt, as for example in some encomiastic verses that seem to refer to the 'land of the Nile', i.e. Egypt.⁶⁴⁶ Callimachus' Nile identifies itself in terms familiar from earlier Greek texts: its abundant fertility (θηλύτατον... ὕδωρ, 27), its great size (πουλὺς, 31) and its unknown sources (ὃν οὐδ' ὄθεν οἴδεν ὄδεύω | θνητὸς ἀνὴρ, 31-2). The conjunction of these common motifs recalls and participates in a familiar and ready identifiable Greek construction of Egypt as distinctly 'other'.

Simultaneously, the speech of the Nile participates in the Greek tradition whereby the local identity of athletes and heroes is marked by their connection to a river of their homeland area. In the fragment considered here, this is signalled by the word 'nursling' (θρεπτός, 28). Stephens again sees here an unusual image, and interprets this as an allusion to the Egyptian Nile god Hapi, 'with pendulous breasts'.⁶⁴⁷ However, the association between local rivers and heroes or athletes in Greek epinician is not infrequently articulated by the metaphor of 'nurture', which has a broader semantic range than 'nursing' narrowly conceived; this metaphor was noted by Pfeiffer in his

⁶⁴⁶ *Suppl. Hell.* 969, l.2, see Barbantani (2007) 21 *ad loc.*

⁶⁴⁷ Stephens (2002) 256-7.

comments on Callimachus fr. 384 l. 28.⁶⁴⁸ Rivers can be responsible for the nurture of men (Hes. *Theog.* 346-8). Orestes offers the Inachos a lock of hair as a *θρεπτήριον* (Aesch. *Cho.* 6), in recompense for nurture, a kind of offering also given by parents or children to nurses for their rearing. A *θρεπτήριον* may be given as a thank-offering for the care given by both parents; that is, it is not limited semantically to thanks for the care entailed in ‘nursing’, so for instance in Hesiod, *Op.* 187-8: οὐδέ κεν οἷ γε ἰ γηράντεσσι τοκεῦσιν ἀπὸ θρεπτήρια δοῖεν ‘nor would they repay their aged parents for their rearing’.⁶⁴⁹ Moreover, the word *θρεπτός* does not exclusively refer to a nursling, but also denotes other close domestic or familial relationships, including those of a household slave, an adopted foundling, or pupil.⁶⁵⁰ Personal names, too, frequently articulate the affinity between local river and people, as for instance: Strymodoros, Potamodorus, Kephisodorus.⁶⁵¹

In the epinician for Sosibius, the Nile is incorporated into the act of praise that links the honorand with his homeland. Again, similar encomiastic strategies may be traced in extant fifth-century epinician. In Pindar’s *Pythian* 10, the local river becomes the site for the recitation of praise:

ἔλπομαι δ’ Ἐφυραίων

ὄπ’ ἀμφὶ Πηνειὸν γλυκεῖαν προχεόντων ἐμάν

τὸν Ἴπποκλέαν ἔτι καὶ μᾶλλον σὺν ἀοιδαῖς

ἔκατι στεφάνων θαητὸν ἐν ἄλιξι θησέμεν ἐν καὶ παλαιτέροις... (Pind. *Pyth.* 10.55-8)

And I hope that, while the Ephyreans pour forth my sweet voice beside the Peneius, with my songs I will make Hippocleas even more admired for his garlands by boys his age and by his elders...

⁶⁴⁸ Pfeiffer (1949) 315, citing Σ *ad Il.* 23. 144; Aesch. *Cho.* 6 and Σ *ad Pind. Pyth.* 4.145; Aesch. fr. 155, *Suppl.* 281. Fenno (2005) argues sensitively that the *Iliad* consistently aligns the Trojan warriors with the local rivers of the Trojan plain, and the Greeks, by contrast, with the sea. Achilles (23.141-51) negates his bond with his native river, the Spercheios, as noted by Fenno 483 n.19.

⁶⁴⁹ See West (1978) 201 *ad loc.*; cf. Richardson (1974) *ad Hom. Hymn Dem.* 168. See also *Il.* 4.4778-8 = 17.301-2.

⁶⁵⁰ *LSJ* s.v. *θρεπτός*.

⁶⁵¹ Parker (2000) 53-79, esp. 59-60, cited by Currie (2002) 32 n.86-7. Currie 32, n.84 also cites an incident from the *Life of Homer* (3 p. 194 Allen =p. 4 Wilamowitz) in which his mother Kretheïs gives birth to Homer by the river Meles and gives the child the name Melesigenes, ‘taking this appellation from the river’.

Drew Griffith has recently suggested that *Olympian* 1 was performed in front of the fountain Arethusa, which was thought to have a subterranean connection to the Alpheus.⁶⁵² Honour for the hydrology of Camarina is thematised in another Olympian ode, in which the herald sings of ‘the river Oanis, and the local lake, and the sacred canals with which Hipparis waters its people’ τὸ τεὸν ποταμόν τε Ὠανὸν ἐγγωρίαν τε λίμναν ἰ καὶ σεμνοὺς ὄχετούς, Ἰππάρης οἷσιν ἄρδει στρατόν (Pind. *OI.* 5.11-12). Bacchylides 9 demonstrates a complex interweaving of praise and myth with the victor and his homeland, including the rivers of this homeland.⁶⁵³ After his Nemean victory, the athlete Automedes returns to the ‘red-eddying Asopos’, ἴκετ’ (Ἀσωπὸν) πᾶρα πορφυροδίναν (39), a river whose fame is already known throughout the world, ‘even to the furthest reaches of the Nile’, ἐπ’ ἔσχατα Νείλου (41). Callimachus alludes therefore to an important encomiastic motif of earlier epinician, namely the relationship between the laudandus, his home river, and the honour that accrues to the latter as a result of the victory.

Moreover, as scholars have already noticed, the voice of the speaking Nile in Callimachus also evokes the role of the Nile in earlier epinician. In fifth-century epinician, the Nile functioned as a marker of the edges of the world, as for instance in the lines from Bacchylides 9 quoted above (40-1); even the distant Nile and the Boeotian river Thermodon (42-3) have encountered the famous Asopos.⁶⁵⁴ Fearn argues that ‘this geography makes it appear natural that Phleious is a dominant player on the local and Panhellenic stages.’⁶⁵⁵ By contrast, the victories of Sosibius in Callimachus ensure that the Nile no longer exemplifies the *eschata*, but is incorporated into the world of Greek athletic and cultural achievement. As Riet van Bremen has argued, ‘now, at last, the Nile too, had become a Panhellenic river’.⁶⁵⁶

⁶⁵² Griffith (2008) esp. 5-6. On the Alpheus/Arethusa connection, see above 201.

⁶⁵³ On the geographical aspects of Bacchylides 9, see especially Fearn (2003).

⁶⁵⁴ A parallel observed by Barbantani (2001) 97 n.112, and Bremen (2007) 372; cf. Pind. *Isthm.* 6.22-23.

⁶⁵⁵ Fearn (2003) 360.

⁶⁵⁶ Bremen (2007) 372.

Indeed, the speech of the Nile re-negotiates the familiar terms of centre and periphery. He refers dismissively to other rivers that previously were more famous, streams which ἀμογητὶ διὰ σφυρὰ λευκὰ γυναικῶν | κ[αὶ πα]ῖς ἀβρέκτω γούνατι πεζὸς ἔβη, which ‘the white ankles of women cross without difficulty, and children pass over on foot without wetting their knees’ (fr. 384.33-4). His words allude to Cyrus’ threat to the river Gyndes (Hdt. 1.189) that ‘he would make it so weak that women should ever after cross it easily without wetting their knees’. This allusion marginalises the rivers of Greece, aligning them with a radically reduced Mesopotamian river. As the Nile becomes incorporated into the centre of the Panhellenic world, so it displaces the old rivers of Greece to the *eschata*. In lines 23-4, the primary speaker refers to the people of Alexandria and those living on the banks of the river Cinyps, τις Ἀλεξάνδρου... | γῆν ἐπὶ καὶ ναίων Κίνυφι. The Cinyps was a Libyan river that marked the western edge of the Ptolemaic kingdom.⁶⁵⁷ Reference to the Cinyps occurs only rarely in Greek and Latin texts, most commonly occurring in ethnographic discourse or contexts.⁶⁵⁸ Herodotus mentions the Cinyps in his description of the tribes of Libya; it flows through the country of the Macae ‘who shave their hair to a crest... they carry in war bucklers made of ostrich skins’ (Hdt. 4.175). Virgil suggests the pastoralism of the Libyans, referring to the Cinyphian goat: *nec minus interea barbas incanaque menta / Cinyphii tondent hirci saetasque comantis* ‘nor less, meanwhile, do herdsmen clip the beard on the hoary chin of the Cinyphian goat, and shear his hairy bristles’ (G. 3.311-13). Richard Thomas has suggested that these lines anticipate the lines on the *pastores Libyae* (339-48). These lines on Libyan pastoralism balance a similar ethnographic description of the Scythian peoples (349-83), and thereby correspond to a well-established contrast between extremes of climate, which are located at the edges of the world.⁶⁵⁹ That is, the evocation of the Cinyps elsewhere in ancient literature does not primarily evoke the Ptolemaic empire, but rather a very distant region, characterised by pastoralism. In the epinician for Sosibius, references to both Alexandria and the Cinyps accentuate the extraordinary geographical range of the glory attained by Sosibius; it reaches not only the modern metropolis of

⁶⁵⁷ Kees, *RE* s.v. ‘Kinyps’.

⁶⁵⁸ Hdt. 4.175, 198; Verg. *G.* 3.311-3; Mela 1.37; Pliny *HN* 5.27; Ptol. 4.3.13, 20.

⁶⁵⁹ See Thomas (1988) 105 *ad* 339-83; Thomas (1982) 36-60.

the Ptolemies, but even, as in fifth-century epinician, the world's *eschata*, defined as the Cinyps now that the Nile is a new centre of encomiastic renown.

Both Theocritus and Callimachus employ the Nile in encomiastic texts praising individuals from Egypt. These texts situate the Nile and Egypt at the centre of power and praise, and re-deploy apparently familiar Nilotic motifs in new formulations, which celebrate the unique qualities of the river in the context of Ptolemaic military, political and cultural achievement. Although some motifs, especially in Theocritus' *Encomium*, might resonate against a background of Egyptian kingship motifs, the Niles of Theocritus and Callimachus are also literary and intertextual rivers, deeply imbued with Greek ideas about the river. The voice of the Nile in Callimachus is profoundly Hellenised. These texts articulate the exceptional qualities of the Nile and identify Egypt as a unique place, but nevertheless one that is now thoroughly accommodated and subordinated to Ptolemaic power and deeply connected to Hellenic culture.

3.3. Tibullus, *Elegy 1.7*

A further re-evaluation of the place of the Nile in the world occurs in Tibullus' elegy 1.7, which is 'full of reminiscences of Callimachus'.⁶⁶⁰ This elegy, addressed to the poet's patron M. Valerius Messalla Corvinus, has proved difficult to classify generically, as it appears to shift between several forms, incorporating aspects of a birthday poem, the victory ode and the invocatory hymn.⁶⁶¹ Within a highly complex structure, the transition to Egypt and the Nile, and the subsequent so-called 'hymn' to Osiris has proved one of the poem's most trenchant interpretive problems. At 20-9, the elegist addresses the Nile:

qualis et, arentes cum findit Sirius agros,
fertilis aestiua Nilus abundent aqua?

Nile pater, quanam possim te dicere causa

⁶⁶⁰ Bulloch (1973) 80.

⁶⁶¹ Maltby (2002) 280; for attempts to analyse the poem's genre, see Luck (1959) 84, Murgatroyd (1980) 209.

aut quibus in terris occuluisse caput?
 te propter nullos tellus tua postulat imbres,
 arida nec pluuio supplicat herba loui.
 te canit utque suum pubes miratur Osirim
 barbara, Memphitem plangere docta bouem.

[Shall I sing] how fertile Nile floods in summer when Sirius cracks the thirsty fields? Where or wherefore, Father Nile, can I say you hide your head? Thanks to you your country never prays for rain; no withered grass petitions pluvial Jupiter. The barbarian peoples sing of you and marvel as at their own Osiris, taught to bewail the Memphite bull.

These lines enact a transformation of Callimachean images that marks out a further alteration of the importance and functions of the Nile, and of the centrality of the elegist's voice. In what follows I examine the significance of Callimachean allusion to these lines, and the alterations made to the role of the Nile.

Line 21 is commonly acknowledged to be a quotation of Callimachus fr. 384.27 Pf. θηλύτατον καὶ Νεῖλος[ς ἄ]γων ἐνιαύσιον ὕδωρ.⁶⁶² Line 22 bears similarities to lines 31-2 of the same epinician. Moreover, the evocation of the Apis bull at 28-9 echoes fr. 383 Pf. 1.16, εἶδ' ἑταῖραι φαλιὸν τ' ἄρ' ὕληρον ἠλεμισαί; this fragment again belongs to an epinician context, perhaps for Sosibius, or Queen Berenice herself, which may also be located in Egypt. These allusions are more than echoes of Callimachean expression, since frr. 383 and 384 are victory-poems, appropriate to the celebratory context of *Elegy* 1.7. However, while the allusions to Callimachus have often been noted, the implications of Tibullus' subtle re-negotiations and transformations of those originals have been less considered.

First, Tibullus' elegy relocates the speaking voice. I have discussed above the implications of the plurality of speaking voices in Callimachus' fr. 384 Pf., of which the Nile is one. It is the Nile who voices fr. 384.27. By contrast, claims about the Nile in *Elegy* 1.7 are voiced by the elegist, as is the rest of the poem. Indeed, in place of the plurality of voices characteristic of Callimachus fr. 384,

⁶⁶² Similarity noted by Pfeiffer *ad loc.*

Elegy 1.7 foregrounds the rhetorical concern of the elegiac voice with his own poetic control: *non sine me* (9)...; *an te... canam* (13)...; *quanam possim te dicere causa... occuluisse caput?* (23-4). In this new elegy, the voice of the Nile rejoicing with and for the victor is absent.

Rather, the Nile is incorporated into a list of rivers that mark geographical extent and military control. As J.P. Elder has observed, the elegy is permeated by the motif of flowing liquid; this motif is perhaps most powerfully deployed in the names of rivers that punctuate the poem.⁶⁶³ The list begins with rivers of Aquitania, the Saone, Rhone, Garonne, and Loire (11-12), echoing the description of rivers in the *De bello Gallico* (1.1) and Strabo's account of Gallia (4.1).⁶⁶⁴ Tibullus' list then moves to the East, mentioning the Cydnus and the Nile. Similarly, the *Panegyricus Messallae*, a 212-line hexametric poem praising Messalla as orator and commander, contains a list of rivers in a military context (135-46). As Schrijvers has argued, the topographical references of the *Panegyricus Messallae* create 'a quasi-cartographic overview of the whole *oikoumene*'.⁶⁶⁵ That is, the rivers function to delineate the world, or more precisely, the world subjugated to Roman military power.

Lists of rivers are markers not just of geographical boundaries, but of the ability of military leaders and emperors to master the territory belonging to those rivers. Such iconography is, for instance, apparent in the representation of the Danube on Trajan's column as a passive observer of the Roman legions in Dacia.⁶⁶⁶ This imagery was integral to the triumphs of Caesar and Octavian: in 46 BCE, Caesar held four triumphal processions, in the first of which the Rhine, the Rhone and the captive Ocean (*captivus Oceanus*) were paraded, and in the second, the Nile.⁶⁶⁷ As Ida Östenberg has demonstrated in her recent analysis of the Roman triumph, these rivers were 'paraded as

⁶⁶³ Elder (1965) 100 n. 8.

⁶⁶⁴ Schrijvers (2009) 160.

⁶⁶⁵ Schrijvers (2009) 157.

⁶⁶⁶ cf. Murphy (2004) 140-1.

⁶⁶⁷ Florus *Epit.* 2.13.88. Ovid describes the images of captured rivers and cities in triumphs at *Ars Am.* 1.213-28.

outer markers of worldwide supremacy'.⁶⁶⁸ Similarly, a procession of rivers marked geographical dominion in the triple triumph of Octavian in 29 BCE, echoed in the catalogue of subjugated peoples and rivers at *Aeneid* 8.726-8.⁶⁶⁹ Such catalogues of rivers therefore mark not only the subjugation of an individual region or people, but the extensiveness of Roman conquest and the dominion over the *oikoumene* claimed by Rome. Similarly in Tibullus' elegy, the catalogue of Aquitanian and eastern rivers evokes the extensiveness of Roman conquests.

Tibullus' elegy also incorporates rivers from all three continents, Europe (the Gallic streams), Asia (Cydnus) and Africa (Nile). Caesar's triumphs in 46 BCE demonstrated his might over the three continents, and therefore over the whole *oikoumene*, as Pompey's triumphs had before.⁶⁷⁰ This is not to suggest that the elegy functions as a virtual triumph; rather, Tibullus' use of rivers evokes the complex military and geographical connotations of riverine iconography in Rome, in which rivers are subjugated to conquering might.

Moreover, Tibullus' allusions to Callimachus mark a stark contrast between the roles of the Nile in these poems. In Callimachus' epinician, the Nile articulates the victory brought back to Egypt by the prizewinning Sosibius; by contrast, in the context of Tibullus' elegy for Messalla, the Nile becomes a merely passive participant, and merely one among many, in the conquests won. Further, the evocation of the sources of the Nile at 23-4 locate this river once more at the *eschata* of the inhabited world. Whereas in Callimachus' epinician, the Nile repositions himself at the epicentre of encomiastic discourse, despite the mystery of his sources (fr. 384.31-2), the elegist's

⁶⁶⁸ Östenberg (2009) 287; Beard (2007) 123.

⁶⁶⁹ On these lines and their connection to Octavian's triumph, see Östenberg (1999).

⁶⁷⁰ See Florus *Epit.* 2.13.88; for Pompey's oikoumenical triumph, see Dio 37.21.2: 'He celebrated the triumph in honour of all his wars at once, including in it many trophies beautifully decked out to represent each of his achievements, even the smallest; and after them all came one huge one, decked out in costly fashion and bearing an inscription stating that it was a trophy of the inhabited world.' (καὶ αὐτὰ μὲν ἅπαξ ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν πολέμων ἤγαγε, τρόπαια δὲ ἄλλα τε πολλὰ καὶ καλῶς κεκοσμημένα καθ' ἕκαστον τῶν ἔργων καὶ τὸ βραχύτατον ἔπεμψε, καὶ ἐπὶ πᾶσιν ἔν μέγα, πολυτελῶς τε κεκοσμημένον καὶ γραφὴν ἔχον ὅτι τῆς οἰκουμένης ἐστίν).

double question at 23-4 situates the river as the mirror-image of the Gallic rivers of the west, at the furthest edges of human knowledge.

Conclusions

The Nile and Nilotic motifs are used in Greek encomiastic texts to mark issues of Egyptian identity and the place of Egypt in the wider *oikoumene*. Hellenistic poets align the river with prominent individuals of Ptolemaic Egypt. Like the honorands, the river is exceptional and is used to articulate the distinctive quality of Egypt and its great men. In Theocritus' *Encomium*, key motifs familiar from both Greek and Egyptian contexts are renewed, illustrating a new kind of Ptolemaic power. The surviving portions of Callimachus' epinician to Sosibius, meanwhile, see Egypt reinvigorated as a new centre of Greek culture, which is marginalised again under Rome in Tibullus' *Elegy* 1.7. The late Hellenistic hymns of Isidorus at Medinet Madi attest to a complex re-positioning of the Nile and Egypt in the global order. These texts openly acknowledge their multi-cultural contexts and multi-lingual perspectives; ideas about the Nile are intelligible to both Greek and Egyptian readers. They articulate a sense of tension between Egypt as a special place and the incorporation of the river into the *oikoumene* that is entirely under the control and blessing of Isis-Hermouthis. Other texts point to a literary tradition of addresses to the Nile itself. The Louvre hymn to the Nile illustrates the incorporation of the Egyptian river into Greek culture. Encomiastic motifs align the river with Greek genealogical myth and the 'topsy-turvy' Egypt familiar from Herodotus. At the same time, the text promotes the river as a unique river and proclaims the local allegiance of the Nile that brings glory to the fatherland, which is addressed as 'black land', a term calquing the Egyptian name for Egypt.

Over a period of several centuries and from several regions of Egypt, in these texts the Nile is constructed as a landscape of praise that shifts and slips along a spectrum of Greek and Egyptian identity, never entirely one nor the other, but always both. In the next chapter, I examine how these issues of Nilotic space and identity are worked through in Greek fictional prose narratives.

Chapter 5

'The novel sight': the Nile in imperial Greek fiction

Travel and exotic locales are among the many striking and important aspects of the Greek narrative prose fictions that flourished in the imperial period.⁶⁷¹ As James Romm has observed, these prose fictions typically share the spatial parameters adopted by Herodotus in his *Histories*, in which the periphery of the known *oikoumene* helped to delimit and critique the centre.⁶⁷² The literary landscapes of the surviving full-length imperial prose fictions (with the exception of Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe*) are embedded in the Herodotean tradition of the exploration and description of marginal lands, and indeed, as I will argue in this chapter, are constructed out of the landscapes of the literary past.

Egypt retains a privileged prominence, among the exotic locales of Greek narrative prose fictions, featuring in the works of Xenophon of Ephesus (*Ephesiaka*), Achilles Tatius (*Leucippe and Cleitophon*), and Heliodorus (*Aithiopika*). The Nile (and Egypt) are also pervasive in the early third-century work of Philostratus, the *Life of Apollonius* (*Vita Apollonii* = VA). Papyrus fragments of further, otherwise lost, novels, indicate that the importance of Egypt and the Nile are not confined to the so-called 'ideal' novels. *P. Michael*. 4 contains portions of a description of the inundation of the Nile; originally attributed to a technical or scientific treatise, further examination, particularly of the florid diction and style of the fragment, has suggested that it may rather belong to a fictional work.⁶⁷³ Albert Henrichs suggested that fragment B of Lollianus' largely lost novel *Phoinikika* is set in the Nile Delta, on the grounds that it involves human sacrifice, a motif which Greek writers sometimes connect with Egypt.⁶⁷⁴ Finally, in a study of a mosaic from Tivoli that depicts a Nilotic

⁶⁷¹ Rohde (1914), Bowie (1991), Bowersock (1994), Romm (1994), Elsner (1997), Whitmarsh (1999), Kuch (2003).

⁶⁷² Romm (2006) 112.

⁶⁷³ For categorisation as a geographical piece, see Merkelbach (1956), Drescher (1949); re-analysed as a fictional piece by West (1973), Stephens and Winkler (1995).

⁶⁷⁴ Henrichs (1972), supported by Winkler (1980) 155-6.

scene, Helen Whitehouse has argued that the mosaic depicts a scene from another, unknown novel at least partly set in Egypt.⁶⁷⁵

Egypt's prominence in these texts has been seen as remarkable, even by the standard of works so concerned with travel outside Greece, and even as a potential clue to the very origin of the Greek genre. Karl Kerényi argued that the Greek novels are in essence religious texts of the Isis cult;⁶⁷⁶ this interpretation was followed by Reinhold Merkelbach, who added the notion that Isiac references formed a secret code known to initiates.⁶⁷⁷ A different approach is adopted by John Barns, who argued for a similarity of themes between Greek and Egyptian fictional narratives and illustrated evidence of translation between the traditions.⁶⁷⁸ More recent scholarship has added to the evidence for translation of Egyptian texts into Greek.⁶⁷⁹ However, as Ian Rutherford has indicated in a new survey of the issue, 'the hypothesis that the Greek romance is somehow derived from Egyptian literature has not moved on since Barns 1956'.⁶⁸⁰

Another kind of literary relationship is posited by Rutherford in an article from 2000, arguing that Heliodorus' use of the *boukoloï* alludes to a group of similar characters, 'herdsmen' (Egyptian Ⲫⲙ.ⲱ), in a Demotic text known in English as the 'Contest for the Benefice of Amun', from the

⁶⁷⁵ Whitehouse (1985); the relevant mosaic is an *emblema*, now in the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff, no. 32.93.

⁶⁷⁶ Kerényi (1927).

⁶⁷⁷ Merkelbach (1962).

⁶⁷⁸ Barns (1956).

⁶⁷⁹ A Demotic text known as the *Myth of the Sun's Eye* was published by Spiegelberg (1917); a Greek version, with some variants, was published by Reitzenstein (1923), cf. West (1969) and esp. (2013). The *Dream of Nectanebo* narrative is also known in both Greek and Demotic, for which see Ryholt (1998) and (2002). Texts of other genres show evidence of translation, for instance apocalyptic texts; the *Oracle of the Potter* is found only in Greek, but has close similarities to e.g. the Demotic *Oracle of the Lamb*: for the former, see Koenen (1968), and for the latter Simpson (2003). See discussion in the 'Introduction' p. 18.

⁶⁸⁰ Rutherford (2013) 36.

Inaros-Petubastis Cycle.⁶⁸¹ Rutherford asserts that both specific and broad structural parallels ('narratological motifs') exist between the texts: in addition to the presence of the Boukoloi, he cites communal ritual activity, piracy, marshes and rushes, and an Egyptian priest leading the Boukoloi.⁶⁸² He argues that these connections are not the result of passive 'transmission', but rather of a deliberate bicultural choice on the part of Heliodorus, that 'two distinct traditions were available both to Heliodorus and his readers: the tradition of the Greek romance, ... and the tradition of Egyptian Demotic fiction'.⁶⁸³ Given the fact of Greek-Egyptian bilingualism in this period, and the evidence for translations of Egyptian narrative fiction into Greek, it is not implausible that some of Heliodorus' readers may have encountered such texts as the *Contest*, either in the original or in translation.⁶⁸⁴ If Rutherford is correct, his suppositions would constitute an exciting development in our understanding of the relation between Greek and Egyptian fiction. However, arguments for such intertextual relationships based on parallels of motif, theme or structure are notoriously difficult to assess, especially when they occur in unmarked or unflagged contexts; in the absence of further investigation, Rutherford's arguments must remain in the realm of the possible and the speculative.

The Nile itself in Greek fiction has also attracted scholarly attention. Stephen Nimis surveys the role of Egypt in Greco-Roman history and fiction; treating the *Aithiopika* of Heliodorus in detail, he concludes that Egypt is 'neither the beginning nor the end, but the in-between land'.⁶⁸⁵ An article by L. Plazenet in 1995 argued that discourse about the Nile in the Greek novels marked the presence

⁶⁸¹ Rutherford (2000). The *Contest for the Benefice of Amun* is preserved on *P.Spiegelberg*, published by Spiegelberg (1910), with further fragments published by Hoffmann (1995a) and (1995b), Tait (1977) and (2000). Hoffmann in Hoffmann and Quack (2007) 88-107 gives a translation into German, with notes and bibliography pp. 336-338. For introductions to the Inaros-Petubastis cycle, see Hoffmann (2000) 199-204, Tait (1994) and (1996).

⁶⁸² Rutherford (2000) 111-113.

⁶⁸³ Rutherford (2000) 118.

⁶⁸⁴ For bilingualism, see Papaconstantinou (2010); on evidence for translations from Egyptian to Greek, see Whitmarsh (2013) 12, West (2013), and the 'Introduction' to this thesis, pp. 17-8.

⁶⁸⁵ Nimis (2004).

of the literary tradition, becoming a symbol by which the novelists could mark their difference from that tradition.⁶⁸⁶ Plazenet dismissed the notion that the presence of the Nile signified realism, or the mere re-use of common topoi, and emphasised the thematic and narrative functions of the river; so for instance, in the *Aithiopika* of Heliodorus, he argued that the Nile became a measure of knowledge and true discourse, possession of which (for example) persuades Charikles to trust Calasiris.⁶⁸⁷ Further studies by Tim Whitmarsh and David Elmer have analysed the narrative functions in Heliodorus' *Aithiopika* in more depth. Whitmarsh notes that in the *Aithiopika*, 'the Nile constitutes the spine of the narrative, and Heliodorus conspicuously and self-consciously organises his text around it'; his argument accentuates the parallels between the river and the text of the *Aithiopika* itself, suggesting even that the Nile of Heliodorus is a 'kind of text, open to (indeed encouraging) 'mysteriosophic' readings'.⁶⁸⁸ For Whitmarsh, the river acts as a 'narrative map' not only of the unfolding story but also of the revelation of the 'message' and 'meaning' of the text. This approach is developed by David Elmer, who argues that the Nile is a figure for intertextuality, inquiry and the revelation of paternity in the *Aithiopika*.⁶⁸⁹ Elmer argues that 'Nilotic inquiry articulates the story of Kharikleia's gradual return from the anonymity of an exposed infant to her rightful place in the Ethiopian succession'.⁶⁹⁰ The emphasis of the text of the hybrid, composite nature of the Nile as a river comprised of several waters is interpreted as a symbol of the complex, hybrid ethnic identity that characterises the chief characters of the novel. For Elmer, the text of the *Aithiopika* consistently frustrates the notion of a 'pure' point of origin, both for the Nile, and the characters whose identity is in question (who even include Homer), and leads 'ultimately to the acknowledgement of a fundamentally complex rather than simplex identity'.⁶⁹¹ In addition to these

⁶⁸⁶ Plazenet (1995) 21.

⁶⁸⁷ Plazenet (1995) 20-21.

⁶⁸⁸ Whitmarsh (1999) 28-29. Whitmarsh elucidates well the parallels between the text and the river; I would however suggest that what he identifies as 'Heliodorus' ingenious use of a river as a geographic template representing narrative structure' is anticipated by the narrative and structural functions of the river Nile at the beginning of Diodorus' *Bibliothēke* (for which see chapter 3 of this thesis).

⁶⁸⁹ Elmer (2008).

⁶⁹⁰ Elmer (2008) 434.

⁶⁹¹ Elmer (2008) 443.

studies of the Greek novels, which focus primarily on Heliodorus, Eleni Manolaraki's new monograph includes an analysis of the functions of the Nile in Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius*, based on the methodological approaches of Whitmarsh and Elmer, in which she argues that the Nile performs similar narrative functions in the *VA* as in other imperial period fictions.⁶⁹² That is, she argues that the Nile 'functions as a compositional device that organises Apollonius' philosophic principles and consequently the larger cultural politics of the *VA*.'⁶⁹³ In short therefore, recent scholarship has emphasised the functions of the Nile as a metaphor for the narrative and for certain important themes in individual narrative fictions, whether the revelation of 'mysteriosophic' truth, paternity and hybrid identity, of the demonstration of Apollonius' discernment and philosophic enlightenment.

In this chapter, I reanalyse the presence and functions of the Nile in these texts, in the light of the previous four chapters of the thesis. The role of the Nile in these texts exceeds the metaphorical 'narrative' functions that have previously been examined, and moreover, texts such as Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe and Cleitophon* warrant a more sustained attention than has previously been allowed, owing apparently to the greater interest excited by Heliodorus. Previous chapters have demonstrated that Greek discourse concerning the Nile is deeply entwined in its own tradition; that is, writers interested in the Nile consistently present quotations from and an engagement, whether conciliatory, admiring or confrontational, with their predecessors in the tradition, as well as the repetition and re-working of enduring Nilotic topoi and images. This entanglement within the tradition of Nilotic inquiry and discourse is also true of the fictional narratives, which are deeply implicated in the negotiation of the heritage of Nilotic discourse. In particular, the presence of Herodotus appears like a palimpsest through many of these texts. Scholars have previously observed the significance of Herodotus for writers of imperial Greek fictions; James Romm notes that three of the surviving full-length novels are set in the same spatio-temporal arena as the

⁶⁹² Manolaraki (2013) 259-296. Whitmarsh (1999) 25 had previously noted the importance of the *VA* as an intertext for Heliodorus' Nilotic narrative.

⁶⁹³ Manolaraki (2013) 259.

Histories, while John Morgan discusses the imitation of the Herodotean historiographical persona by the narrator of Heliodorus' novel.⁶⁹⁴ The Nile is also a site that points to instantiations of the river, the inundation and Egypt in Greek texts other than Herodotus. The Nile of the Greek novels is a landscape fraught with the literary tradition of Nilotic discourse, in which the exotic 'Other' is Hellenised and accommodated with the *oikoumene* of Greek writing and knowledge. Earlier chapters of this thesis have traced the presence of Herodotus' Nilography through later texts, and the enduring influence of his text on the Nile as an examination of knowledge and the limits of human inquiry. In Greek prose fictions, the Nile offers ways of negotiating epistemological limits, imperfect knowledge, allegory, and the ineffable. In these prose fictions, the Nile is frequently the site of the trials and sufferings of the protagonists, full of strangeness, danger and untoward events, yet simultaneously is shot through with remembrances and echoes of the Greek literary past. These echoes destabilise the protagonists' claims to 'novelty', and mark the ways in which the texts both integrate themselves into and distinguish themselves from that literary past.

1. Xenophon of Ephesus, *Ephesiaka*

Egypt and the Nile are privileged foreign locales in the *Ephesiaka*, a narrative in which places outside Ephesus are places of danger and suffering.⁶⁹⁵ Xenophon's representation of the Delta region in particular is relatively accurate and specific, and reveals a great interest in topographical and religious matters.⁶⁹⁶ This landscape is a literary construction that engages with earlier Greek discourse about Egypt.⁶⁹⁷ The Nile in Xenophon is particularly a setting for false, apparent or attempted deaths, which are thwarted; this correlation between the Nile and death, especially false death, is constructed out of the heritage of Greek traditions and texts about Egypt.

⁶⁹⁴ Romm (2007) 112; Morgan (1977).

⁶⁹⁵ On the symbolic geography of Xenophon's narrative, see Whitmarsh (2011) 45-50.

⁶⁹⁶ On Xenophon's topography as relatively accurate, see Griffiths (1978) 425-37 and Sartori (1989); *contra*, Henne (1936) and Schwartz (1985).

⁶⁹⁷ Plazenet (1995) 7-9, Nimis (2004) 46-8, cf. Brioso Sánchez (1992).

The identification of Egypt as a privileged space in Xenophon's narrative is signalled by an oracle, given to the parents of the lovesick young couple Habrocomes and Anthia, from the temple of Apollo in Colophon (Xen. Eph. 1.6).⁶⁹⁸ The oracle outlines the kind of suffering endured by protagonists in Greek fictions, and locates some of the action 'by the waters of the river Nile' (ποταμοῦ Νείλου παρὰ ῥεύμασιν), thereby providing the only spatial anchor to a narrative that will visit Syria, Cilicia, Cappadocia, Phoenicia, Italy, and Sicily. Otherwise, spatial referents, such as 'over the sea' (ὑπεῖρ ἄλα) are vague. Egypt then is the only geographical goal of the narrative explicitly identified by the oracle. By this point in the narrative, the reader has been made aware that Egypt is to be an important locale for the protagonists, and a point towards which the narrative is inevitably tending. The reader's awareness of this narrative drive is however made to contrast with the ignorance of the protagonists' fathers, who - despite the oracle's topographical specificity regarding the Nile - do not understand what is meant by 'the river' (ὁ ποταμός), and ultimately decide to send the newly-wed couple to Egypt:

ἡμελλόν τε γὰρ ἄλλην ὄψεσθαι γῆν καὶ ἄλλας πόλεις καὶ τὸν τοῦ θεοῦ χρησμόν, ὡς οἶόν τε ἦν, παραμυθῆσασθαι ἀπαλλαγέντες χρόνῳ τινὶ Ἐφέσου... Ἦν δὲ ὁ πλοῦς αὐτοῖς ἐπὶ Αἴγυπτον παρεσκευασμένος. (Xen. Eph. 1.10)

They were to see some other land and other cities, and palliate the effect of the divine oracle as far as they could by leaving Ephesus for a while.... They had prepared to make the voyage to Egypt.

The plot is by this point heading straight for Egypt, and straight towards the fulfilment of the prophecy. Egypt is the inevitable destination for their journey. This part of the plot has been seen as a(nother) structural flaw, since, as B. P. Reardon suggests, 'the parents certainly seem to be looking for trouble, given the contents of the prophecy'.⁶⁹⁹ While the development seems perhaps psychologically under-motivated, the journey to Egypt is nevertheless rather overdetermined. Egypt is pre-eminently a land of visual marvels, and in the *Histories* of Herodotus, attracts visitors, including Solon, who come to see the sights (Hdt. 1.30). Egypt became a place frequented by Greek travellers, who came for such tourism ('to see the sights'), and to visit sites of religious

⁶⁹⁸ This oracle has been criticised as a structural fault for being placed 'so early in the story', Schmeling (1980) 89.

⁶⁹⁹ Reardon (2008) 134 n. 6.

significance.⁷⁰⁰ Strabo's account of Egypt particularly reveals the importance of Egypt as a place full of 'sights' that Greeks could go to see.⁷⁰¹ In the *Ephesiaka*, Egypt appears to be a place of irresistible narrative attraction, in line with the construction of Egypt in other Greek texts as a tourist hotspot.

As a foreign locale, the Nile is ambivalently coded in Xenophon's narrative.⁷⁰² As the oracle makes clear (to the reader), it will be the place of salvation for the protagonists; prior to that salvation however, it is full of danger, difficulty and near death. The danger of shipwreck in Egypt is foreshadowed by the history of the old Ephesian doctor Eudoxus, who 'had been shipwrecked on a voyage to Egypt' (ἦκε δὲ ναυαγίῳ περιπεσὼν εἰς Αἴγυπτον πλέων, Xen. Eph. 3.4). Habrocomes is initially stranded in Egypt after a shipwreck 'at the Paralian mouth of the Nile Delta, next to the Phoenician coast' ([ἐκπίπτει δὲ] ἐπὶ τὰς ἐκβολὰς τοῦ Νείλου τὴν τε Παράλιον καλουμένην καὶ Φοινίκης ὄση παραθαλάσσιος, Xen. Eph. 3.12). This is immediately followed by an attack by 'men from the Shepherds who lived there' (ἐκπεσοῦσι δὲ αὐτοῖς ἐπιδραμόντες τῶν ἐκεῖ ποιμένων, Xen. Eph. 3.12).⁷⁰³ Shipwreck is an important component of Greek prose fictions, but the motif of shipwreck (or at least difficult sailing) had also been associated with Egypt since the *Odyssey*,⁷⁰⁴ and is the cause of Menelaus' arrival in Egypt in Euripides' *Helen*.⁷⁰⁵ In both the *Odyssey* and the *Helen*, Egypt is a place of narrative delay and obstacles, from which Menelaus attempts to escape. Egypt is a place where exciting, dangerous and remarkable events unfold: wrestling with the shape-shifting Proteus, shipwreck, false deaths, the disappearance of phantoms,

⁷⁰⁰ On the cultural and religious significance of travel to and within Egypt by Greeks and Romans, see Rutherford (1998), (2012), Frankfurter (1998), Adams (2007).

⁷⁰¹ This issue is discussed in Chapter 2.

⁷⁰² Whitmarsh (2011) 47.

⁷⁰³ These 'Shepherds' seem to be synonymous with the 'Herdsman' (βουκόλοι) who regularly feature in other Greek novels, notably Achilles Tatius' *Cleitophon and Leucippe* and Heliodorus' *Aithiopika*. See Rutherford (2000), with Winkler (1980), and below, p. 225.

⁷⁰⁴ *Od.* 3.299-300.

⁷⁰⁵ Eur. *Hel.* 408-410.

the reunification of husband and wife. As Habrocomes and Anthia arrive in Egypt, the shipwreck motif sets up certain expectations for the reader about the kind of adventures in store.

The Nile gives extraordinary speed to the chaotic forces of Hippothous and his robbers, who move quickly and riotously across Egypt. Having arrived in Egypt and ‘sailing on the Nile’ (τῷ ποταμῷ τῷ Νείλῳ πλεύσαντες, Xen. Eph. 4.1), they zig-zag anarchically up and down Egypt, from Hermopolis and Schedia, to Memphis, to Mendes (north again, in the Delta), to Tawa and Leontopolis (south again), to Coptus and then as far as ‘the heights of Ethiopia’ (τῆς Αἰθιοπίας τὰ ἄκρα, Xen. Eph. 4.1). The crazy itinerary, very distanced from the logical north-south progression of Strabo’s Egyptian narrative, suggests the rapid energy and frenetic pace of Hippothous’ band, who cover hundreds of miles in an instant. The Nile also gives speed to this group on their return north; having attacked the village of Areia, they ‘withdrew not by the same route but by the Nile’ (κατήεσαν οὐ τὴν αὐτὴν ὁδὸν ἀλλὰ διὰ τοῦ Νείλου, Xen. Eph. 5.2). Even when disembarked, the band continues ‘beside the banks of the Nile’ (παρὰ τὰς ὄχθας τοῦ Νείλου, Xen. Eph. 5.2). The Nile facilitates the chaotic and destructive action of the robbers, and adds to the danger of the protagonists.

Xenophon also draws on the association in Greek thought between Egypt and death. This association emerges in a conversation between Habrocomes and Aegialeus, a Spartan who has settled in Sicily as a fisherman (Xen. Eph. 5.1). The fisherman explains how, his wife having recently died, ‘her body was embalmed in the Egyptian style’ (τὸ δὲ σῶμα αὐτῆς ἐτέθαπτο ταφῇ Αἰγυπτίᾳ, 5.1), since he had learnt embalming. For Aegialeus, the preservation of his wife’s body enables him to interact with her as though she were still alive: ‘I still talk to her as if she were alive and I lie down with her and have my meals with her’ (ἀεὶ τε ὡς ζώσῃ λαλῶ καὶ συγκατάκειμαι καὶ συνευωχοῦμαι, 5.1). The scene alludes to a striking episode in Herodotus’ description of the Egyptian practice of mummification, in which an embalmer violates the corpse of a beautiful

woman.⁷⁰⁶ Egyptian death customs are frequently seen as strange, exotic and sometimes erotic in Greek and Latin texts.⁷⁰⁷ Diodorus Siculus claims that ‘nor will a man marvel at the peculiarity of the customs of the Egyptians when he learns of their usages with respect to the dead’ (οὐχ ἥκιστα δ’ ἂν τις πυθόμενος τὰ περὶ τοὺς τετελευτηκότας νόμιμα τῶν Αἰγυπτίων θαυμάσαι τὴν ἰδιότητα τῶν ἐθῶν, Diod. Sic. 1.91). Both Diodorus (1.91-2) and Herodotus (2.86-90) provide long accounts of Egyptian practices of embalming and other burial customs, emphasising with visceral detail the treatment of the innards and the exotic products associated with embalming. Greek and Latin texts also emphasise Egyptian practices surrounding the deaths of animals, such as descriptions of the death of the Apis bull by Herodotus and Diodorus Siculus.⁷⁰⁸ Egypt is also associated in Greek texts with reports of human sacrifice and cannibalism, most notably with Busiris.⁷⁰⁹ For all its wild fertility and extraordinary productivity, Egypt is also strongly associated with death in the Greek tradition.

Three close encounters with death in Xenophon are carefully located near the Nile. Attempts are made twice to execute Habrocomes, and once to execute Anthia. First, Habrocomes is sentenced by the prefect of Egypt to death (Xen. Eph. 4.2). The means of death is crucifixion, and the site of the crucifixion is precisely located:

Ἄγουσι δὲ αὐτὸν οἷς τοῦτο προσετέτακτο παρὰ τὰς ὄχθας τοῦ Νείλου· ἦν δὲ κρημνὸς ἀπότομος εἰς <τὸ> ῥεῦμα τοῦ ποταμοῦ βλέπων. (Xen. Eph. 4.2)

They brought him to the banks of the Nile, where there was a sheer drop overlooking the stream of the river.

⁷⁰⁶ Hdt. 2.89. On this passage and the connection between mummies and necrophilia in ancient texts, see Montserrat (1998) and Vasunia (2001).

⁷⁰⁷ Relevant texts are collected by Dawson (1928). On attitudes to Egyptian mummification in Western culture, with particular emphasis on the eroticisation of the embalmed corpse, see Montserrat (1998).

⁷⁰⁸ Hdt. 2.39-40, Diod. Sic. 1.84-5.

⁷⁰⁹ Rejected by Hdt. 2.45, Eratosthenes at Strabo 17.1.19, and complicated in Diod. Sic. 1.67, cf. 4.27. Vasunia (2001) 185 n. 4 and 186 nn. 5 and 6 collates sources that accept the tradition, and discusses the significance of attributing human sacrifice to Egypt pp.185-193.

At this point in the narrative, we have reached the location signalled by the oracle as the place where gifts will be offered to Isis the saviour, that is the 'stream' (note ῥεῦμα) of the Nile. The repetition of this spatial location sets up a tension between the reader's awareness that this, or a similar, place will ultimately provide salvation, and the immediate narrative context of Habrocomes' apparently impending death. The specificity of this location also reveals a close relationship with a similar scene in Chariton's *Chaereas and Callirhoe*, although it is not possible to say with certainty which text is prior.⁷¹⁰ In Chariton, the grave-robber who has sold Callirhoe into slavery is crucified:

ἔβλεπεν ἀπὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ τὴν θάλασσαν ἐκείνην, δι' ἧς αἰχμάλωτον ἔφερε τὴν Ἑρμοκράτους θυγατέρα, ἣν οὐκ ἔλαβον οὐδὲ Ἀθηναῖοι. (Chariton 3.4.18)

From his cross he looked out on that sea over which he had carried as a captive the daughter of Hermocrates, whom even the Athenians had not taken.

In both Xenophon and Chariton, characters are crucified in places overlooking bodies of water. A verbal reminiscence (βλέπων ~ ἔβλεπεν) confirms the relationship. In Xenophon, the location by the Nile sees Habrocomes poised between life and death; it is the Nile that effects his salvation. During the attempted crucifixion, Habrocomes prays to Helios 'that the waters of the Nile should never be polluted by the body of a man unjustly killed' (μήτε τὸ Νείλου ῥεῦμα μίανθει ποτε ἀδίκως ἀπολομένου σώματι, 4.2).⁷¹¹ Habrocomes' prayer brings about an moment of direct divine intervention in the narrative, an unusual device in Greek romances.⁷¹² The wind picks Habrocomes up and carries him into the river:

ἐμπίπτει δὲ ὁ Ἀβροκόμης τῷ ῥεύματι καὶ ἐφέρετο οὔτε τοῦ ὕδατος αὐτὸν ἀδικούντος οὔτε τῶν δεσμῶν ἐμποδιζόντων οὔτε τῶν θηρίων παραβλαπτόντων, ἀλλὰ παραπέμποντος τοῦ ῥεύματος·

⁷¹⁰ The current balance of scholarly opinion favours the view that Chariton is earlier than Xenophon; see Bowie (2002) 56-7, Tilg (2010) 85-2. The priority of Xenophon is upheld by O'Sullivan (1995); Whitmarsh (2011) 264 is 'still unconvinced' that Xenophon is necessarily later.

⁷¹¹ This speech again echoes, or is echoed by, a scene from Chariton, as Chaereas, racked with guilt at the apparent death of Callirhoe, cries out during his trial: μὴ θάψητέ με, μὴ μιάνητε τὴν γῆν, ἀλλὰ τὸ ἀσεβὲς καταποντώσατε σῶμα 'Do not give me burial; do not pollute the earth - plunge my criminal body to the bottom of the sea!' (Chariton, 1.5). Note the verbal correspondences, μίανθει ~ μιάνητε; σώματι ~ σῶμα.

⁷¹² On the usual narrative naturalism of these texts, see Morgan (1993) and cf. Whitmarsh (2011) 47.

Habrocomes fell into the torrent and was swept away; the water did him no harm; his fetters did not get in his way; nor did the beasts do him any harm as he passed, but the current guided him along. Habrocomes is preserved from drowning, and remains unharmed by the ‘beasts’ (θηρία) of the river. Although these beasts are unnamed, the word likely evokes the exotic Nilotic megafauna, hippopotamuses and crocodiles, that are frequent elements in Greek descriptions of the river. These animals normally pose great danger to humans, as Perdicas’ invading army discovered to their cost in 321 BCE:

Οἱ πλεῖστοι δὲ παρενεχθέντες ἐπὶ πολὺν χρόνον ὑπὸ τῶν ἐν τῷ ποταμῷ θηρίων κατεβρώθησαν. (Diod. Sic. 18.35.6)

Most of them, carried along for some time, were devoured by the animals in the river.

Xenophon’s Habrocomes escapes the two fates detailed by Herodotus of those who fall into the river, either crocodile-attack or drowning (Hdt. 2.90). The direct intervention of the god signals that Egypt has an exceptional status among the settings of Xenophon’s narrative; just as it was the only locale specified in the oracle, so too it is a place marked by extraordinary divine and natural activity.

The Nile is also identified as the location of the second attempt to execute Habrocomes. When the crucifixion of Habrocomes fails, owing to the intervention of the Nile, the waters carry him ‘to the mouths of the river to the sea’ (εἰς τὰς ἐμβολὰς... τὰς εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν τοῦ Νεῖλου, 4.2). This Delta location is the site of the second attempted execution, this time on a funeral pyre; the text explicitly mentions the position of the fire: ‘and so everything was made ready, and the fire was set up by the mouths of the river’ (καὶ ἦν μὲν ἅπαντα παρεσκευασμένα, καὶ ἡ πυρὰ παρὰ τὰς ἐκβολὰς τοῦ Νεῖλου, 4.2). For a second time, preparations for Habrocomes’ death are made near the river. Once again, Habrocomes is rescued from this death by the river, by the combination of an extraordinary divine and natural power:

Κάνταῦθα κυματοῦται μὲν ὁ Νεῖλος, ἐπιπίπτει δὲ τῇ πυρᾷ τὸ ῥεῦμα καὶ κατασβέννυσι τὴν φλόγα·

Then the Nile rose in spate, and the surge of water struck the pyre and put out the flames.

As has been previously observed, this episode mirrors that of Croesus' escape from the funeral pyre in Herodotus (Hdt. 1.87), which is extinguished by a violent rainstorm.⁷¹³ The Herodotean scene is transposed from its original setting to Egypt, and establishes the Nile as a river imbued with beneficial power and divinity.

This motif is echoed by the description of the attempted punishment of Anthia by the robber chief Hippothous. Like Habrocomes, Anthia has been accused of murder; as a result, Hippothous elects to bury her alive (Xen Eph. 4.5). As in the attempted executions of Habrocomes, the location of the execution site is carefully articulated: 'When they threw them in, they shut the trench with large planks and piled earth on top - the Nile was not far away - and put one of the robbers, Amphinomus, on guard' (Ὡς δὲ ἐνεβλήθησαν, ξύλα ἐπιτιθέντες μεγάλα ἐπέχωσαν τὴν τάφρον (ἦν δὲ τοῦ Νείλου ὀλίγον ἀπέχουσα) καὶ κατέστησαν φρουρὸν ἓνα τῶν ληστῶν, Ἀμφίνομον, Xen. Eph. 4.6). Here, the proximity of the Nile is not a factor in either the method of her execution or her rescue; the spatial marker of Anthia's position relative to the Nile seems almost parenthetical. This spatial marker does however recall Habrocomes' own proximity to the river at the time of attempts to execute him; this doubling of the narrative space creates the expectation that Anthia too will be rescued, that her death too is only a *Scheintod*.⁷¹⁴ Anthia's execution itself confuses ontological categories, setting the living in the place of the dead.⁷¹⁵ She is 'buried' in a 'trench' (τὴν τάφρον), which recalls the 'tomb' (τάφος) mentioned in the oracle (Xen. Eph. 1.6); this 'trench' functions as a makeshift, ambivalent tomb.⁷¹⁶ It has been seen that Xenophon's Egypt is a place where the norms of life and death may be inverted, as in the case of the Spartan fisherman who embalmed his dead wife and continued to lie with her. Here too,

⁷¹³ See Reardon (2008) 156, n. 20; Whitmarsh (2011) 47-8.

⁷¹⁴ For the notion of 'doubling of the narrative space', see Konstan (2002) 4.

⁷¹⁵ On burial alive as a confusion of the categories of life and death, cf. Soph. *Ant.* 1068-9.

⁷¹⁶ The scene also parallels the false death of Callirhoe in Chariton's text; Callirhoe, seemingly dead, is placed in a vault near the sea, approachable by water: 'Hermocrates had a splendid tomb near the sea' (ἦν δὲ τάφος μεγαλοπρεπῆς Ἑρμοκράτους πλησίον τῆς θαλάσσης, Chariton 1.6.5). The careful location of both scenes close to water indicates that one scene draws on the other; it is however difficult to be certain of the relative chronology.

Anthia's descent into the trench constitutes a death that is no death. Moreover, she is rescued from the trench (5.2) even as her erstwhile executor, Hippothous, believes her dead.

In Xenophon's *Ephesiaka* therefore, Egypt is an ambivalent space.⁷¹⁷ It is the site of danger and shipwreck for the protagonists and the home of the ever-threatening 'Shepherds'. However, the plot tends inevitably towards Egypt as a location for these narrative events, following the announcement of the oracle which privileges the space 'beside the waters of the river Nile' (ποταμοῦ Νείλου παρὰ ῥεύμασιν) as a site for the progression of the narrative, which, in the novelistic genre, necessitates danger and suffering. Certain scenes are explicitly located by or close to the Nile; these settings recall the representations of Egypt in earlier Greek texts. The construction of the Nile in earlier texts that informs Xenophon's text is itself deeply ambivalent: Egypt is viewed as a land preoccupied by death and, in the case of Euripides' *Helen*, death as illusion, but the Nile is also a fundamentally beneficial force.

2. Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Cleitophon*

Descriptions of the Nile and its associated phenomena are prominent in Achilles Tatius' novel, *Leucippe and Cleitophon*. Achilles' Nilotic landscape is constructed as a palimpsest of themes and motifs from earlier Greek texts, and must also be read in the light of descriptions of other bodies of water in the novel, which have significant thematic and intertextual functions. Water is an important component of landscapes in Achilles Tatius, whether landscapes described in works of art, or the landscapes in which the characters move. In addition, water in Achilles Tatius marks moments of intertextuality and fictionality; descriptions of water in the novel often implicate the text in a relationship with previous writers. This is particularly significant in light of the narrator's claims to 'novelty' regarding the Nile, which are circumscribed and ironised by the very familiarity of the scenes described.

⁷¹⁷ Contrast Whitmarsh (2011) 46, who suggests that Egypt is the exception to the rule that space 'abroad' is coded negatively.

The reader's perceptions of the Nile in Achilles Tatius are mediated by the narrator Cleitophon, who describes his experiences in Egypt. What Cleitophon says about the Nile reveals his own emotional investment in and responses to certain incidents; at the same time, his use of familiar Nilotic *topoi* exposes the distance between his naiveté as a narrator and the reader's awareness of the Nile in literary tradition. First, after the protagonists are shipwrecked, their hired Egyptian boat is attacked by the *Boukoloι*.⁷¹⁸ The danger of the situation is increased by the narrowness of the river, which compels the pilot to stop the boat (3.9.3). Their capture constrains the articulacy of the narrator Cleitophon, with the result that he is unable to frame requests in language, but can only 'display my desires in sign language' (με δεῖ... τὴν δέησιν δηλοῦν ταῖς χειρονομίαις, 3.10.1).

Cleitophon's description of the Nile Delta, the home of the *Boukoloι*, employs familiar tropes about the river, especially the confusion of land and water (Ach. Tat. 4.12), which was used as early as Herodotus (Hdt. 2.97).⁷¹⁹ This confusion is eventually heightened by the commotion of battle, when 'it was impossible to discriminate what was lake and what was ground' (διακρίναι δὲ οὐκ ἦν, τί λίμνη καὶ τί πεδῖον, Ach. Tat. 4.14.7). Cleitophon stresses the close connection between the *Boukoloι* and the land- (or water-)scape: the marshes impede nonlocal (τὸ ξένον) vessels (4.12.5), the papyrus reeds provide concealment (4.12.7), and they are defended by dikes that can flood enemies (2.14.1). The reliance of the *boukoloι* on the Nile is particularly stressed; it is 'everything to them: a river, a land, a sea, a lake' (Νεῖλος ὁ πολὺς πάντα αὐτοῖς γίνεται, καὶ ποταμὸς καὶ γῆ καὶ θάλασσα καὶ λίμνη, 4.12.1). The landscape is characterised as one in which only the *Boukoloι* can move and navigate.

⁷¹⁸ Dio (72.4) records that a group of *Boukoloι* caused unrest in the Nile Delta in 171CE, although the historicity and details of this event remain shadowy; Winkler (1980) 181 remarks, 'something happened around 171/2 AD, and [Avidius] Cassius did something to restore the order which the Romans preferred. The rest is fiction and anecdotal history'. See the following discussions: Winkler (1980), Alston (1999), Rutherford (2000), Polanski (2006), Blouin (2010), Capponi (2010) 131-133.

⁷¹⁹ Criboire (1995) 103 on the same motif in the Louvre Hymn to the Nile, citing an epigram by Philippus of Thessalonica (A.P. IX 299).

The Nile is initially a setting of danger and confusion, where water and land are in competition, and where the landscape gives speed and camouflage to the dangerous *Boukoloi*. Cleitophon's attitude toward the Nile is transformed at the point when Leucippe and Cleitophon are reunited and the Boukoloi defeated, which 'frees' the river:

ἐλευθερωθέντος δὲ τοῦ ποταμοῦ τῆς τῶν βουκόλων ὕβρεως παρεσκευαζόμεθα τὸν ἐπὶ τῇ Ἀλεξάνδρειαν πλοῦν. (Ach. Tat. 4.18.1)

Now that the river had been set free from the violence of the Boukoloi, we prepared to sail to Alexandria.

For Cleitophon, the change in his fortunes transforms his experience of the river into that of a *locus amoenus*. In particular, whereas the capture of Leucippe and Cleitophon was associated with the narrowness of the Nile and the difficulty of speaking for Cleitophon, the defeat of the Boukoloi reawakens the sights and sounds of the Nilotic landscape:

ἦν οὖν ἐξ ἀπλοίας μακρᾶς πλεόντων πάντα μεστὰ καὶ πολλή τις ὄψεως ἡδονῆ· ναυτῶν ῥοδή, πλωτῆρων κρότος, χορεία νεῶν· καὶ ἦν ἅπας ὁ ποταμὸς ἐορτή, ἐώκει δὲ ὁ πλοῦς κωμάζοντι ποταμῷ. (Ach. Tat. 4.18.3)

In all directions a colorful scene was spread before your eyes: choruses of sailors singing chanteys, passengers clapping hands, a naval oratorio. The river was one unending holiday; our sailing a celebration of the river.

The river is in party-mode, and Cleitophon's pleasure is heightened by his 'first taste of the Nile, unadulterated by wine, to see how sweet that water was' (ἔπινον δὲ καὶ τοῦ Νείλου τότε πρῶτον ἄνευ τῆς πρὸς οἶνον ὀμιλίας, κρίναι θέλων τοῦ πόματος τὴν ἡδονήν, Ach. Tat. 3.18.3). Cleitophon becomes a connoisseur of water. When the Boukoloi controlled the river, the waters had been associated with the salt sea.⁷²⁰ Now, for Cleitophon, the water is characterised by three qualities, sweetness, clarity and coldness.⁷²¹ These are qualities consistently associated in Greek thought with the best waters.⁷²² In particular, the adjective γλυκὺ 'sweet' dissociates the

⁷²⁰ See especially: 'everything was as the sea' (πάντα δὲ ἦν ὡσπερ θάλασσα, 4.14.2).

⁷²¹ For the Nile as particularly sweet, see Aesch. *PV* 812, Diod. *Sic.* 1.40.1, Sen. *QN* 4.2.30, Aristides *Or.* 36.119, with Wild (1981) 231 n. 37 and Delia (1992) 186 n. 37.

⁷²² See 'Introduction' pp. 27-8.

Nile from the image of the salty waters which had previously characterised it. Secondly, the water is described as cold, thus explicitly linking it to the ‘cold water’ of the Phaedran *locus amoenus* (ψυχροῦ ὕδατος, *Phaedr.* 230b). At this point, the Nile is restored as a place of security and safety for the reunified lovers. The Nile is both a site of danger and impediment when it is the domain of the *boukoloj*, and a new *locus amoenus* when that enemy is defeated. Cleitophon’s experience of the river mirrors his emotional state.

Water in Achilles, whether in the settings for particular events or as described in the ecphrasis of artistic scenes, often reveals something about the emotional state of the narrator or situation. At the beginning of the novel, Cleitophon stands nearby a votive painting that is described by the unnamed primary narrator; the presence of water, both the sea and the water in the painted garden, adds to the construction of the image as an eroticised *locus amoenus*.⁷²³ Cleitophon and the primary narrator then move to a ‘delightful place and a setting most appropriate for tales of love’ (τόπος ἡδῦς καὶ μύθων ἄξιος ἐρωτικῶν, *Ach. Tat.* 1.2.3); in this ‘grove’ (ἄλσος), redolent of the setting of the *Phaedrus*, water flows, ‘cold and clear as if from fresh-melted snow’ (ψυχρόν τε καὶ διαυγές, οἶον ἀπὸ χιόνος ἄρτι λυθείσης ἔρχεται, 1.2.3).⁷²⁴ Cold water is an important motif in the Phaedran *locus amoenus*, as it is also in a mesmeric and eroticised landscape of Sappho.⁷²⁵ The presence of cold and clear water in this ‘grove’ of Achilles Tattius indicates an erotic context, as the primary narrator makes explicit. The water of the Nile, when tasted by Cleitophon, also possesses the qualities of coldness and clarity. Water also recurs in an eroticised landscape at 1.15, the site of Cleitophon’s first encounter with the (as yet unnamed Leucippe), ‘in a formal garden’ that is drenched with Cleitophon’s desire; Cleitophon perceives the landscape as

⁷²³ The sea: *Ach. Tat.* 1.1.2; the garden’s water: 1.1.5; cf. *Iliad* 21.257-59.

⁷²⁴ On this setting, see Martin (2002) 147-148. On Platonic, and especially Phaedran presences in Achilles Tattius, see Mheallaigh (2007), Marinčić (2007), Martin (2002); cf. on Plato in the novels generally, Goldhill (1995).

⁷²⁵ fr. 2, line 5: ὕδωρ ψυχρον. See introduction, pp. 27-8.

embodying the kind of union he desires.⁷²⁶ Once again, a ‘spring’ (πηγή) suggests a parallel with the spring of the *Phaedrus* (230b).

Water is also a discursive *topos* in erotically charged discourse in Achilles Tatius. At 1.18, surrounded by the erotic garden, Cleitophon attempts to seduce Leucippe; his speech includes arguments drawn from the idea of Eros’ influence over the natural world, including the river Alpheus and the spring Arethusa. The waters are vividly anthropomorphised, as Cleitophon speaks of the ‘transoceanic wedding of the waters’ (γάμος ὑδάτων διαπόντιος, Ach. Tat. 1.18.1). The symbolic association of water with eroticism in Achilles Tatius reaches its climax in the episode of the testing of Leucippe’s virginity in the fountain of the Styx (8.14). The *aition* of the miraculous qualities of the water are given in an aetiology that might be classified as a digression, yet marks a culmination of the novel’s insistent connection between water and *eros* (8.12). Artemis transforms her companion Rhodopis ‘into a springhead of water on the very spot where she had sprung her maidenhead’ (εἰς ὕδωρ λύει τὴν κόρη, ἔνθα τὴν παρθενίαν ἔλυσε, 8.12.8). However, rather than functioning as a site of *eros*, the fountain is the proof of a girl’s virginity (or otherwise): ‘when someone is accused in affairs of Aphrodite, she enters the spring to bathe’ (ὅταν τις αἰτίαν ἔχη Ἀφροδισίων, εἰς τὴν πηγὴν εἰσβάσα ἀπολούεται, 8.12.8). *Eros* then is consistently associated with water in Achilles Tatius, as it marks sites of erotic tension, seduction, and discourse, as well as sites of the testing of sexual purity. The Nile illustrates a transformation of fortune, from danger and separation, to the reunification of the lovers, when it takes on the properties of a properly erotic *locus amoenus*.

After the danger of the river has been lifted, Cleitophon behaves like a consummate Nile tourist. He knows the sights to observe, and what to say, yet his experience of the Nile and its phenomena as new and exciting is compromised by the very familiarity of the Nilotic tropes. At 4.18, Cleitophon describes the sights and sounds of the Nile; the text draws attention to the scene as a sight and collection of esounds, an intensely sensory experience, displayed for ‘pleasure’ (ἡδονή). Egypt

⁷²⁶ On this garden, see Martin (2002) 149-152, García (2010).

was a place full of visual wonders in Greek texts, and this emphasis on the visual had acquired a new depth in the popularity of Nilotic scenes in mosaics and paintings during the Hellenistic and imperial periods.⁷²⁷ The most well-known of such scenes is the famous Palestrina Nile mosaic, from the sanctuary of Fortuna in Praeneste.⁷²⁸ The lower part of the mosaic in particular shares certain features with the description of the river and its attendant phenomena in Achilles Tatius, which is characterised by a plethora of boats, and a holiday atmosphere that resembles the celebrations at the time of the inundation:

καὶ ἦν ἅπας ὁ ποταμὸς ἐορτή, ἐώκει δὲ ὁ πλοῦς κωμάζοντι ποταμῶ.

The whole river was a festival; our sailing a celebration of the river.

The words ἐορτή and κωμάζοντι in particular evoke the celebrations of the festival of the Nile that took place annually at the inundation, and which is depicted in the Palestrina Nile Mosaic. One scene, in the central section of the lowest zone of the mosaic, depicts three groups of people celebrating the inundation: two groups are taking their ease, reclining, drinking, and making music (note the transverse flute and a triangular harp);⁷²⁹ nearby a man plies a papyrus skiff (Meyboom: ‘canoe’) laden with lotus blossoms, a sign of the inundation, through the waters, in which more lotus flowers bloom.⁷³⁰ For Meyboom, this scene (among others) represents the ‘ceremonies of the annual Khoiak festival and the inundation of Egypt with its attendant festivities’.⁷³¹ Indeed, the inundated land is a common subject in mosaic and wall-paintings of the imperial period, as Versluys observes in his collation of one hundred and thirty-one such scenes; they are ‘not representations of Egypt, but flood-scenes’.⁷³² Cleitophon’s experience of the river seems mediated by the grammar of the visual representation of Nile-scenes.

⁷²⁷ Versluys (2002).

⁷²⁸ The mosaic depicts the Nile from the sources to the Delta, at the time of the inundation. Meyboom dates the mosaic to the first century BCE. For the mosaic, see especially Meyboom (1995), who gives a full description, discussion and interpretation.

⁷²⁹ For a more detailed verbal description, see Meyboom (1995) 33-34 (Section 19), with figg. 20 and 21 and p. 258, n. 127.

⁷³⁰ See Meyboom (1995) 34.

⁷³¹ Meyboom (1995) 71.

⁷³² Versluys (2002) 40.

Cleitophon is then made to record another visual experience, that of seeing a crocodile (14.19.1), which he describes in graphic detail. Again, Cleitophon describes an archetypal Nilotic sight, one which had even become a tourist attraction. Strabo describes the ‘tamed’ (χειροθήτης) crocodile Suchus at Arsinoe (Crocodelopolis) which was fed grain, meat and wine ‘by the foreigners who go to see it’ (τῶν ξένων τῶν ἐπὶ τὴν θῆαν ἀφικνουμένων, *Geog.* 17.1.38 C811). Descriptive passages on the crocodile are also common, beginning with Herodotus,⁷³³ and are paralleled in the visual, where they are frequently depicted in mosaics and paintings.⁷³⁴ For instance, to the left of the scene of music and sailing discussed above, the Palestrina Nile mosaic depicts a scene of crocodiles and a hippopotamus hunt.⁷³⁵ These animals are the characteristic Nilotic fauna, and appear regularly in both Graeco-Roman texts and images, as well as ancient Egyptian hunting scenes. Indeed, the crocodile is a creature so recognisable and so closely identified with the Nile that it is used to signify Egypt on coins.⁷³⁶ Cleitophon’s long description stresses the creature’s confused form, which is both fish and beast, and its size, especially the size of its jaws and number of teeth; similar features are picked out by Herodotus, who describes the crocodile as ‘amphibious’ (λιμναῖον, *Hdt.* 2.68.3). Cleitophon’s description of the crocodile therefore is mediated by earlier texts; Cleitophon ‘sees’ Nilotica through the Greek literary past.

Moreover, Cleitophon’s crocodile is the culmination of a series of descriptions of megafauna in Book 4, of which Charmides had intended the first two to impress Leucippe. First is the hippopotamus, which Charmides invites Cleitophon and Leucippe to view (*Ach. Tat.* 4.3.1).⁷³⁷

⁷³³ On the crocodile, see *Hdt.* 2.70, *Strabo* 17.1.44, *Pliny NH* 8.38, *Aelian NA* 10.21; also *LÄ* 3.791-801, s.v. ‘Krokodil’.

⁷³⁴ Versluys (2002) 265, n. 235 catalogues seventy depictions of crocodiles in Nilotic scenes from a corpus of 131 items; the crocodile ‘is therefore the most frequently occurring animal in Nilotic landscapes’.

⁷³⁵ For a detailed verbal description, see Meyboom (1995) 31-32 (Sections 12 and 18) with fig. 19.

⁷³⁶ See e.g. Poole (1892), nos. 1153, 1147, 1156, 465.

⁷³⁷ Another Nilotic *topos*; see *Hdt.* 2.71, *Arist. HA* 7(8), 2,589a 24-29, *Aelian NA* 11.37, *Pliny HN* 11.160, *Diod. Sic.* 1.35.10-11; *LÄ* 4.501ff. s.v. ‘Nilpferd’.

Charmides then describes the elephant, which Cleitophon admits to having seen only in 'pictures' (γραφῆ, 4.4.2). His description of the crocodile therefore, based on autopsy, functions to 'cap' even Charmides' exhibition of the hippopotamus and description of the elephant. In Achilles Tatius therefore, the Nile is 'iconic', a river described and pictured in terms and tropes familiar from centuries of Greek discourse about Egypt, both written texts and images. The Nilotic landscape described by Cleitophon takes on the characteristics of ecphrasis, of an artificial composite that draws attention to its literary heritage.

Water frequently functions as a sign of the constructed nature of certain landscapes in Achilles Tatius, and as an evocation of the text's fictionality. To return to the beginning of the novel, as was noted above, water is present in the painted landscape depicting Europa:

ὑδὼρ κατὰ μέσον ἔρρει τοῦ λειμῶνος τῆς γραφῆς, τὸ μὲν ἀναβλύζον κάτωθεν ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς, τὸ δὲ τοῖς ἄνθεσι καὶ τοῖς φυτοῖς περιχεόμενον. ὄχετηγός τις ἐγγέγραπτο δίκελλαν κατέχων καὶ περὶ μίαν ἀμάραν κεκυφῶς καὶ ἀνοίγων τὴν ὁδὸν τῷ ρεύματι. (Ach. Tat. 1.1.5-6)

And in the very middle of this picture meadow flowed water, first bubbling up from deep in the earth and then spreading out over the surface for the flowers and plants. An irrigator bent down over one rivulet with hoe in hand, depicted in the very act of making a channel for the stream.

As we have seen, the presence of water is part of the erotic landscape, yet the added detail of the irrigator marks human control over this apparently wild meadow,⁷³⁸ a reminder of the human culture which created this representation of a landscape. Richard Martin observes that the detail may be a 'generic self-portrait', 'equivalent to the writer writing himself into the text'.⁷³⁹ The sentence alludes to *Iliad* 21.257-59. The intertext reminds the reader that this is a textual landscape, constructed out of fragments of the literary past. The text is doubly artificial; it is a description of a fictional picture, and it simultaneously recalls other literary landscapes.⁷⁴⁰

⁷³⁸ Swift (2009) 365 describes the 'meadow' (κῆπος or λειμῶν) from which a girl is abducted as 'a liminal space, incorporating fertility without the regulation imposed by agriculture. Its wilderness is that of the wilderness rather than the community.'

⁷³⁹ Martin (2002) 146.

⁷⁴⁰ See Bartsch (1989), Martin (2002). Carruesco (2010) discusses the motif of the garden as a generic element of the novel.

Moreover, this Iliadic text is at the centre of a nexus of allusions in both Greek and Latin texts that evoke the issue of literary filiation.⁷⁴¹ This Iliadic simile appears to be used in the imperial period to articulate intertextual relationships; an allusion to the simile in Achilles Tatius signals the constructed, composite, ‘literary’ nature of the ekphrasis.

Water similarly signals the fictionality of the novelistic landscape in the scene where Cleitophon encounters Leucippe in the formal garden:

ἐν μέσοις δὲ τοῖς ἄνθεσι πηγὴ ἀνέβλυζε καὶ περιεγέγραπτο τετράγωνος χαράδρα χειροποίητος τῷ ῥεύματι. τὸ δὲ ὕδωρ τῶν ἀνθέων ἦν κάτοπτρον, ὡς δοκεῖν τὸ ἄλλος εἶναι διπλοῦν, τὸ μὲν τῆς ἀληθείας, τὸ δὲ τῆς σκιᾶς. (Ach. Tat. 1.15)

Among the flowers, a spring bubbled up within a rectangular pool constructed to contain the flow. The flowers were reflected in the water as in a mirror, so that the entire grove was doubled - the realm of truth confronting its shadowy other.

As we noted above, this spring echoes the *locus amoenus* of the *Phaedrus*. In the novelistic garden however, the wildness of the original setting is contained by artificial constructions; this is no wilderness, but a ‘formal garden’, in which the boundaries between nature and artifice are indistinct. So too, the spring is contained within an artificial limit; it is constructed, literally ‘lined off’ (περιεγέγραπτο), in a rectangular pool ‘fashioned by hand’ (χειροποίητος). The metaphor from writing, and the allusion to *poiesis* again tie the category of water to the domain of literary production itself.⁷⁴² Moreover, this contained body of water generates reflections of the garden, like a mirror. The comparison again suggests a fictionality akin to novelistic writing; the water creates an image of a world that resembles the real world, but lacks physical substance.⁷⁴³

Finally, the text problematises the relationship between claims to autopsy of particular waters and the reader’s awareness of the literary past. Cleitophon’s ‘experience’ of the Nile as a ‘sight’ that

⁷⁴¹ E.g. [Longinus] *De subl.* 13.3, Manilius 2.8-11. See Hunter (2009) 158-60, Hunter (2012) 44-5.

⁷⁴² Martin (2002) 151-2 on the thematising of novelistic art in this passage.

⁷⁴³ There are echoes here of Plato’s discussion of poetry in the *Republic*, in which poetic and artistic representations, ‘appearances’ (φαινόμενα), are contrasted with the realm of truth (ἡ ἀλήθεια) (596e). On the play between truth and falsity, real and unreal in this scene, see Mignogna (1995) 27-30.

recalls both earlier texts and artistic representations of flood-scenes is anticipated by the tales of a certain Chairephon about three miraculous waters, a Sicilian spring, an Ismaric river,⁷⁴⁴ and a Libyan lake (Ach. Tat. 2.14.7-10). His intervention comes *à propos* of the interpretation of an oracle in which the words ‘Hephaistos embraces Athena’ are read as a reference to the ‘friendly affection of fire and tree’ (αὕτη πυρὸς φιλία καὶ φυτοῦ, Ach. Tat. 2.14.5). Chairephon’s words appear irrelevant to the immediate discursive context, yet perhaps have a greater bearing on the narrative as a whole.⁷⁴⁵ Two important issues arise from this miniature paradoxographical catalogue. First, they are ‘mysteries’ (μυστήρια) that Chairephon claims to have seen with ‘my own eyes’ (ἐθεασάμην γὰρ ἐγώ, Ach. Tat. 2.14.6). In a novel permeated by questions of sight and perception, Chairephon’s claims to autopsy echo a Herodotean mode of narration, suggesting an authoritative (tertiary-level) narrator.⁷⁴⁶ His paradoxographical catalogue of water-*mirabilia* is replete with markers of autopsy and other modes of perception, and the possibility of autopsy by others: ‘you will see’ (ὄψει), ‘if you touch’ (θιγόντι δέ σοι) ‘if you see it’ (εἰ μὲν ἴδοις αὐτὸν εὐθύς), ‘but if you hear it’ (ἤν δὲ ἀκοῦσαι).⁷⁴⁷ Once again however, the paradoxographical items are implicated in the constructed and displayed fictionality of the text. Chairephon claims to have witnessed these mysteries himself (2.14.6), yet linguistic markers of perception (‘you could see’) cluster around the first two items only. The third, that is the ‘Libyan lake’ has no such markers; rather, it is an indistinct group of ‘Libyan maidens’ (αἱ Λιβύων παρθένοι) who ‘know the secret’ (ἴσασιν αὐτῆς τὸ ἀπόρητον, Ach. Tat. 2.14.9). Further, the story is recognisably derived from Herodotus (Hdt. 4.195) and Ktesias (*Indika* 4). Claims to autopsy are furthest from the story in which the literary heritage is most apparent, and yet simultaneously the visible ‘literary history’ of these stories works to distance the narrator from his own claims to authority; once again, a narrative is revealed as composite, and constructed from fragments of the literary past.

⁷⁴⁴ MSS give ποταμὸς Ἰβηρικός; for the reading ‘Ismaric’, see Laplace (1983) with Reardon (2008) 196, n. 32.

⁷⁴⁵ On this passage as a ‘competitive exchange of extraneous learning’ of the Second Sophistic, see Morgan (2007c) 115.

⁷⁴⁶ For a subtle study of sight and perception in Achilles Tatius, see Morales (2004).

⁷⁴⁷ References in this sentence to Ach. Tat. 2.14.7-10.

This distance between the narrator's perception and that of the reader is particularly apparent in Cleitophon's claims that the sights he witnesses on the Nile are 'new'. The intermingling of land and sea in the domain of the Boukoloι is described as 'the new sight' (τὸ θέαμα καινόν); during the battle, the 'novelty' of the events is accentuated by the repetition of this word καινός:

καὶ ἦν καινὰ ἀτυχήματα, καὶ ναυάγια τοσαῦτα, καὶ ναῦς οὐδαμοῦ, ἀμφότερα δὲ καινὰ καὶ παράλογα. (4.14)

Novel accidents and shipwreck everywhere without a ship: both were new and paradoxical.

The word καινός suggests rhetorical paradox and literary inventiveness; the sights designated 'new' however, are such only to the naive narrator Cleitophon, since they are well-known tropes of Nilotic writing, particularly the confusion between land and water.⁷⁴⁸ We noted above that the 'literary' quality of Chairephon's water-*mirabilia* undercuts his claims to autopsy. Here, the patterning of Nilotic sights by the internal narrator as 'new and paradoxical' mirrors the patterning by the secondary internal narrator Chairephon; both narrators claim to have knowledge about particular natural phenomena that are undermined by the reader's awareness that they derive ultimately not from autopsy but from earlier texts. The water-*mirabilia* and the Nilotic landscape are alike inextricably *textual* phenomena. Throughout the narrative therefore, the Nile, like other landscapes in the novel, articulates issues of fictionality and intertextuality.

The environs of the Nile in Achilles Tatius are saturated with allusions to the literary past. As in Xenophon's *Ephesiaca*, Egypt is closely identified with death, both false and genuine; this identification once more is correlated with references to tragedy, especially Euripides' *Helen*. At 3.15, Cleitophon witnesses Leucippe's apparent death at the hands of the brigands. The scene is replete with clichés about Egyptian behaviour, as the bandits engage in human sacrifice (of a virgin) and then cannibalism. Cleitophon sits watching, transfixed by terror (ἔκπληξις, 3.15.6). However, the death is subsequently revealed to be fictitious, in true Egyptian fashion. At 3.19, Menelaus, an Egyptian, describes his shipwreck (cf. Menelaus in *Helen*, 408-410) and the false

⁷⁴⁸ Hdt. 2.97, Louvre hymn 19-20; see chapter 4, p. 175 of this thesis.

death of Leucippe after which she is rescued. Menelaus' preparations for the rescue of Leucippe are explicitly formulated in terms of theatrical, specifically tragic, play-acting: the name Menelaus itself recalls the character of the same name in Euripides' *Helen*, the drama of illusion and false death; the wreckage of a ship attacked by the bandits casts up a chest formerly belonging to a professional stage actor who gave readings from Homer (3.20.4); the chest holds a false sword 'for staging a spurious death' (πρὸς τὰς κιβδήλους σφαγᾶς, 3.20.7), which was used as a stage prop in Leucippe's false death. Again, parallels with Euripides' *Helen* are suggestive; not only is spurious death a repeated trope, but that trope is used to escape from the clutches of death-loving Egyptians.⁷⁴⁹

The third book of the novel is closed by two interesting deaths, that of Kleinias who is taken by the sea (3.23.3-4), and that of the old phoenix. Kleinias' death is also figured in terms of a dramatic production, as Cleitophon cries: 'O senseless sea, you begrudged us a share of the drama of human kindness' (ὦ θάλαττα ἄγνωμον, ἐφθόνησας ἡμῖν ὀλοκλήρου τοῦ τῆς φιλανθρωπίας σου δράματος, Ach. Tat. 3.23.4). The theatrical metaphor recalls the reader to the world of Euripides' *Helen*, in which a fictitious death at sea is the means for escape from Egypt. Cleitophon's despair is for both the loss of life and the loss of proper burial, an issue which is thematised in the *Helen*. Once again, allusions to Euripides' play highlight the association of Egypt with suppositious death, and thence the significance of illusion, theatricality and fiction in this self-consciously fictionalising text.

The second death and burial, that of the phoenix, is linked in spatial terms more closely to the Nile: the dead phoenix is brought by his son 'to the Nile' (ἐπὶ τὸν Νεῖλον, 3.24.4, phrase repeated 3.24.5) for burial. Ethiopia, the land of the bird's life, is contrasted with Egypt, the land of its death: 'the Ethiopians claim the honor of his lifetime residence, the Egyptians of his death' (μερίζονται

⁷⁴⁹ Eurip. *Hel.* 1057-62.

δὲ αὐτοῦ Αἰθίοπες μὲν τὴν ζώην, Αἰγύπτιοι δὲ τὴν τελευτήν, 3.24.1, cf. 3.24.7).⁷⁵⁰ Moreover, the description of the phoenix alludes to the similar description in Herodotus (2.73). The passage in Achilles Tatius refers to the city of the Sun (τὴν πόλιν...τὴν Ἡλίου, cf. the temple of the Sun, τοῦ Ἡλίου τὸ ἱερόν, Hdt. 2.73), to the lump of myrrh in which the corpse of the bird's father is deposited (σμήρνης γὰρ βῶλον τῆς εὐωδιστάτης 3.24.4, cf. τῆς σμήρνης ῥόν, Hdt. 2.73), and to the migratory habits of the bird (in Achilles Tatius, the bird travels from Ethiopia; in Herodotus, from Arabia). However, Herodotus explicitly rejects this story regarding the phoenix; he denies autopsy, and judges that the story is not credible (ἐμοὶ μὲν οὐ πιστά, Hdt. 2.73). Reports of the phoenix in other Greek and Latin texts are similarly guarded. Tacitus records the story of the phoenix, but notes that 'this is full of doubt and legendary exaggeration' (*haec incerta et fabulosis aucta*) yet allows that the bird is still seen occasionally (*aliquando*) in Egypt (*Ann.* 6.28). Pliny similarly finds the stories problematic, withholding judgement from the veracity of the reports (*haud scio an fabulose; narratur, NH* 10.2), and dismissing the 'phoenix' brought to Rome during the censorship of Claudius Caesar as counterfeit (*quem falsum esse nemo dubitaret*). Another account of the death of the phoenix, common in ancient texts, indicates that the death is no real death, since the phoenix is resurrected or reinvigorated. In both cases, the identity of the phoenix is problematic; either it is too fabulous to be credible, or the death itself has no meaning as a genuine death.

By contrast with the Herodotean and other investigative narrators, however, the narrator of Achilles Tatius' novel does not distance himself from the report of the phoenix. Rather than being merely a digressive description, the incident of the phoenix causes a significant temporal delay in the progression of the narrative, when 'the expedition had to be put off for five days' (ἀνάγκη δ' ἦν τὴν ἔξοδον ἐπισχεῖν τοσοῦτων ἡμερῶν, 3.24.3). The phoenix teeters on the edge of realism. The inclusion of this account of its death, which is frequently considered implausible in Greek and Latin writers, might therefore be seen as a moment of authorial subterfuge, underlining the

⁷⁵⁰ The association between the bird and the Nile may be a reflex of an originally Egyptian idea. The Greek phoenix appears to derive from the Egyptian *bnw* bird, which is linked to the cult of the sun in Heliopolitan theology; the bird emerged out of the primeval waters on the *bnbn* stone. See Lecocq (2005).

fictionality of the text, and its engagement with the literary past. In the fiction of Achilles Tatius therefore, as in that of Xenophon of Ephesus, the Nilotic landscape is one imbued with the tropes and representations of earlier texts, particularly the collocation of Egypt with death, both real and fictitious. It is a site where fictionality and the presence of Greek literary predecessors are brought to the fore, even as the text-internal characters and narrators seem ignorant of the earlier archetypes, and are fascinated by its apparent novelty.

3. Heliodorus, *Aithiopika*

The *Aithiopika* of Heliodorus has been called the ‘most Egyptian of all the novels’, and the one in which the Nile is the most important.⁷⁵¹ Several important recent analyses have examined the place of Egypt (and the river) in Heliodorus, and also of Philostratus’ *Life of Apollonius*, which has been seen as an important intertext for Heliodorus.⁷⁵² These studies share an emphasis on the thematic and structural functions of the river in the narrative, following Whitmarsh’s assertion that the Nile ‘constitutes the spine of the narrative’.⁷⁵³ I build on these earlier studies, from a complementary angle. This chapter has demonstrated that Nilotic landscapes in the novels are less ‘exotic’ than they are deeply familiar from earlier Greek texts. The ‘Nile’ is a space in which certain events and themes seem almost pre-determined: shipwreck, an encounter with the hostile and dangerous Boukoloi, perhaps some encounters with exotic beasts, and above all death - or rather *Scheintod*; all such events and *topoi* are derived from earlier texts. The Nilotic landscape in the novels therefore is one in which the literary past familiarises the supposedly unfamiliar, or what is unfamiliar and strange to the text-internal characters. The Nile is similarly imbued with remembrances of the Greek literary past in Heliodorus, who presents however a new solution to this increasingly Hellenised literary landscape.

⁷⁵¹ Nimis (2004) 53.

⁷⁵² Plazenet (1995) 13-22; Whitmarsh (1999); Nimis (2004); Elmer (2008). For the importance of Philostratus, see Manolaraki (2013) 259-296.

⁷⁵³ Whitmarsh (1999) 24, who also discusses the textuality of the Nile, cf. 28 ‘in a sense, the Nile itself represents the *Aethiopica*’.

More intensely than in either Xenophon or Achilles Tatius, Nilotic *topoi* cluster in Heliodorus in a landscape composed of a superabundance of themes familiar from classics of Greek Nilography, especially Herodotus, but also Plutarch, Philo, Strabo, Diodorus Siculus, and novelistic texts, including Xenophon of Ephesus and Achilles Tatius. The Nilotic landscape is a mosaic constructed out of *tesserae* from many earlier texts, some so commonplace as to be untraceable to a single source, others distinctly reworking particular passages of individual texts.⁷⁵⁴ Recently, ideas of ‘polyphony’ and ‘heteroglossia’ have been at the heart of Heliodoran studies, demonstrated by studies focusing on ‘Hellenism and hybridity’, ‘purity and corruption of genealogies’,⁷⁵⁵ as well as the convoluted questions of paternity, origins and sources.⁷⁵⁶ Heliodorus’ allusiveness has been of recent interest to scholars: Whitmarsh argues that the text is informed by ‘a direct but agonistic [engagement] with the epic tradition’,⁷⁵⁷ accentuating thereby the presence of the *Odyssey*; other studies consider the importance of, for instance, Herodotus or Philostratus. Much has been written about the Nile as a metaphor for complex identities and the search for origins in the novel; Elmer in particular points to the interplay between literary ‘sources’ and the sources of the river: ‘Homer’s origin, like the sources of the Nile, is a problem that leads ultimately to the acknowledgement of a fundamentally complex rather than simplex identity’.⁷⁵⁸

In what follows, I examine more closely the related issues of the familiarity of knowledge and the Nilotic landscape, and the problematic alignment of Egypt with the ‘new’ or ‘unfamiliar’. In this discussion, I build on an observation at the end of one of Whitmarsh’s subtle studies:⁷⁵⁹ Kalasiris

⁷⁵⁴ I have borrowed this image from the visual arts for two reasons: first, the overwhelming prevalence of Roman Nilotic scenes in mosaics and wall-paintings; second, as an echo of Kristeva’s original formulation of ‘intertextuality’ as a ‘mosaïque de citations’ (Kristeva (1969) 146).

⁷⁵⁵ Both quotations from Whitmarsh (1998) 124. Whitmarsh begins from the Bakhtinian concept of ‘polyglossia’ or ‘heteroglossia’ as ‘a subversive, polyphonic synthesis of the ‘voices’ of other genres’ in Bakhtin (1981) 94-5.

⁷⁵⁶ See Elmer (2008).

⁷⁵⁷ Whitmarsh (1998) 95.

⁷⁵⁸ Elmer (2008) 443.

⁷⁵⁹ Whitmarsh (1998).

presents himself as having learned discussion about the Nile with Greeks in Delphi, yet, as Whitmarsh notes, his claims that these are ‘things of which none but members of the priestly caste may read and learn’ is substantially undermined by the very familiarity of his ‘secrets’, which are presented in the manner of a miniature Greek treatise on the Nile. As Whitmarsh observes, ‘he proceeds to give an account which would surprise no Greek interested in the subject, while not neglecting to dismiss rival versions, in a standard move of sophistic *epideixis*’.⁷⁶⁰ This episode illustrates the importance of the literary *Hintergrund* of Nilotic discourse in Heliodorus. The text regularly borrows from both well-known texts and oft-repeated *topoi* (Morgan’s ‘allusions to familiar knowledge’).⁷⁶¹ At the same time, the text deploys unacknowledged quotations of and parallels to earlier texts on the Nile, with the result that every element of the Nilotic environment is part of a literary landscape formed of *bricolage*, and suffused with previous Nilotic inquiry, whether marked or unmarked.

As David Elmer has observed, ‘Egypt is the space of intertextuality’.⁷⁶² The ‘full-knowing reader’ of Heliodorus encounters a thoroughgoing re-analysis of the functions and semiotics of the river Nile (and Egyptian space) in earlier romance narratives, in the act of recognising such intertextual moments and listening to the resonances thereby activated.⁷⁶³ The surface spatial patterning of the novel’s journey and through Egypt - the generic expectation of such a journey - is frequently disrupted by the undercurrents and circling eddies of these intertextual moments. The Nilotic landscape is already saturated with the literary past; the Heliodoran narrative exploits and reorients this literary past, in the construction of a radically new novelistic discourse, that re-evaluates generic expectations of the Nile, and transforms the place of the Nile in the novel.

⁷⁶⁰ Whitmarsh (1998) 52. On the form of such treatises or epideictic passages on the Nile, see ch. 3 of this thesis.

⁷⁶¹ Morgan (1982) 234-5: ‘Heliodorus tends either to use classics like Herodotos or points of knowledge so general that is impossible to pin his allusion on any one source’.

⁷⁶² Elmer (2008) 429; Elmer however privileges Herodotus as the primary source of allusions, whereas I would argue for an allusive texture that draws on many sources. Morgan (1982) 244 sees these allusions as signs of realism.

⁷⁶³ Pucci (1998).

3.1. The beginning

The novel famously begins *in medias res*, but this beginning in the middle is also located at an end, that is, the ending of the Nile, ‘when a group of men in brigand gear peered over the mountain that overlooks the place where the Nile flows into the sea at the mouth that men call the Heracleotic’ (ἄνδρες ἐν ὄπλοις ληστρικοῖς ὄρους ὑπερκύψαντες, ὃ δὴ κατ’ ἐκβολὰς τοῦ Νείλου καὶ στόμα τὸ καλούμενον Ἡρακλεωτικὸν ὑπερτείνει, Heliod. 1.1). This reference to the Heracleotic mouth of the Nile appears innocent, but already the text is implicated in the history of Greek discourse about the river. The branch of the Delta is specified as ‘the mouth that men call the Heracleotic’ (στόμα τὸ καλούμενον Ἡρακλεωτικὸν). John Morgan has argued that this (apparent) specificity is important because it is the site of the future Alexandria; the absence of the city fixes the narrative at a pre-Alexandrian date.⁷⁶⁴ Moreover, the narrative begins at a site laden with literary significance, the *locus classicus* of literary sophistication and learning.⁷⁶⁵ Morgan’s observation on this location is useful, but can be expanded. As Morgan indicates, the choice of the Heracleotic mouth of the Nile begins to construct the novel’s literary landscape, a landscape already loaded with literary freight. As has been observed in Xenophon of Ephesus and Achilles Tatius, the Delta is a typical site for the adventures of the novels.⁷⁶⁶ However, the choice of the Heracleotic mouth pre-Alexandria perhaps signals an attempt by the narrator to distinguish the narrative-space of *Theagenes and Charikleia* from the spheres of action in other novels. That is, Heliodorus generates a defamiliarising effect, consonant with the oblique and enigmatic scene visible to the ‘men in brigand gear’, by setting the opening of the novel in a locale apparently familiar to the genre of the novel, that is, ‘the Delta’, but at a spatial remove (i.e. the western rather than the eastern Delta), and at a temporal remove also (i.e. before the foundation of Alexandria).

⁷⁶⁴ Morgan (2012) 576; cf. Morgan (2007) 483, who also comments that ‘no recognisable historical events are integrated into the plot, and the action thus cannot be assigned to any particular historical year’.

⁷⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁷⁶⁶ See above.

However, the setting is not simply the Heracleotic mouth of the Nile, but the one ‘called the Heracleotic’ (τὸ καλούμενον Ἡρακλεωτικόν). The phrase τὸ καλούμενον has several functions. It establishes the ‘historiographical pose’ that characterises the narrator throughout the novel.⁷⁶⁷ This characterisation is especially apposite here as it recalls the history of Greek inquiry into the river and its phenomena, exemplified in particular by Herodotus. The assertion that the river-mouth is the one ‘called’ (τὸ καλούμενον) Heracleotic is however more complex, eliding as it does a disagreement in Greek texts over the names of this branch, which is also known as the Canopic.⁷⁶⁸ The words τὸ καλούμενον signal the awareness of the Heliodoran narrator of the rich textual history of Greeks naming the river and its parts, and alert the reader to the participation of the Heliodoran narrator in the kind of Nilotic discourse that pervades the text.⁷⁶⁹

3.2. Ironised inquiry

Scholars have previously discussed the Nile’s prominence, particularly as an object of inquiry and of knowledge, in Heliodorus.⁷⁷⁰ As Elmer has identified, the river ‘repeatedly appears as an object of inquiry for the characters’, including the Egyptian Calasiris, the Greek Charikles and the Ethiopian Hydaspes. Characters might claim to have obtained knowledge about the river, or to have made an inquiry about it, yet these claims are not straightforward. As we have seen already, Kalasiris claims to have interrogated Egyptian priests about temple secrets, yet his discussion is a

⁷⁶⁷ On this ‘historiographical pose’, see Morgan (1977).

⁷⁶⁸ Diod. Sic. 1.33.7 and Strabo 17.1.4 give the Canobic and Heracleotic as alternative names for the same branch; Pliny *NH* 5.64.1 gives the Naucratic and Heracleotic as alternative names for the branch that is sometimes mentioned instead of the Canobic (that is, he treats the Heracleotic and Canobic as different branches, of which one may be mentioned in lists of the seven branches of the Nile Delta). Texts which list the ‘Canobic’ among the branches of the Delta include: Hdt. 2.17, Pomp. Mela 1.60, ps-Scylax 107; texts naming the ‘Heracleiotic’ include: Amm. Marc. 22.15.10. On the names of the branches of the Delta, see Honigmann *RE* 562-3, who indicates that the Heracleotic mouth may have been a off-shoot of the Canobic branch; see also Radt *ad* Strabo 17.1.4. See Ball (1942) 22-30, 58-9. The issue of the seven mouths of the Nile is complicated by the shifting hydrology of the region, as Ball (1942) 23 notes.

⁷⁶⁹ On the importance of Nilotic inquiry to the structure and thematic development of the novel, see in particular Elmer (2008).

⁷⁷⁰ See especially Plazenet (1995) 20-22, Whitmarsh (2002) 26, Elmer (2008) 433-7.

set-piece of familiar Nilotic *topoi*, mimicking the voice of Herodotus and other epideictic writings. In what follows, I argue that the text repeatedly problematises issues surrounding knowledge or inquiry about the Nile, particularly when such knowledge or inquiry is designated as ‘secret’, ‘hidden’, or ‘new’.

Calasiris’ disquisition is instigated by the curiosity of the Greeks:

καὶ συνελόντι τῶν κατ’ Αἴγυπτον ἐν οὐδὲν ἀπελίμπανον ἱστοροῦντες· Αἰγύπτιον γὰρ ἄκουσμα καὶ διήγημα πᾶν Ἑλληνικῆς ἀκοῆς ἐπαγωγότατον. (Helioid. 2.27.3)

Their questions covered everything in Egypt, for the Greeks find all Egyptian lore and legend irresistibly attractive.

Their curiosity is explicitly directed towards the object in which Greek texts are famously interested, and is articulated in Herodotean terms, mirroring the behaviour of the historian confronted with the Nile by engaging in *historie* (note ἱστοροῦντες).⁷⁷¹ Questions about the Nile are directed by ‘one of the more sophisticated ones’ (τις... τῶν ἀστειοτέρων, Helioid. 2.28.1); the Nile of course is the archetypal curiosity of Egypt. Ironically, the disquisition that Calasiris presents to the Delphians as belonging to the ‘sacred texts’ of the Egyptian priests, is replete with clichés of Nilotic inquiry familiar from Herodotus and other texts. Calasiris covers the sources of the river, its uniqueness and the inundation, the three classic issues of Nilotic inquiry, articulated in the form of a miniature treatise (which even includes the dismissal of another theory), before cramming yet more *topoi* into his speech: the inundation turns Egypt into a sea,⁷⁷² the water is sweet to drink,⁷⁷³ and the river gives off no breezes.⁷⁷⁴ Calasiris, in line with the confusion of ethnic identity which characterises his first appearance at 2.21 (note his ‘Greekish’ appearance, πρὸς τὸ ἑλληνικώτερον, Helioid. 2.21.2), behaves like the Greek historian, yet the bookish familiarity of his ‘inquiry’ contrasts with the careful emphasis of Herodotus, who distinguishes between the information gained from his

⁷⁷¹ The situation inverts Herodotus’ visit to Egypt.

⁷⁷² See e.g. Hdt. 2.97.

⁷⁷³ See p. 226 above.

⁷⁷⁴ See e.g. Hdt. 2.27.

own inquiry (ὄψις τε ἐμῆ καὶ γνώμη καὶ ἱστορίη, Hdt. 2.99.1) and that gained primarily from hearsay (κατὰ τὰ ἤκουον, Hdt. 2.99.1). In Heliodorus, even the Egyptian priest seems to have ‘read’ Herodotus.

Moreover, Charikles’ intervention (Heliod. 2.29.1) reveals Calasiris’ claim to exclusive knowledge about the Nile as a convenient fiction, as he interjects that he was told the same ‘by the priests of the Nile at Katadoupoi’ (παρὰ τῶν ἐν Καταδούποις ἱερέων τοῦ Νείλου). Charikles’ encounter with the priests unveils the apparent mystery of Calasiris’ inquiry obtained from the ‘sacred texts’ of the Egyptian priests as a tourist trick. Charikles claims to have visited Katadoupoi ‘to find out about the cataracts of the Nile’ (Καταδούπους αὐτοῦς καθ’ ἱστορίαν τῶν καταρρακτῶν τοῦ Νείλου, Heliod. 2.29.5). Charikles too formulates his activities in the proper language of *historie*. However, here too is a suggestion that this inquiry is not as genuine as it appears. The Katadoupoi are an important locus of Nilotic inquiry in Philostratus’ *Vita Apollonii*, identified with the cataracts (VA 6.1), to which Apollonius journeys. However, as Eleni Manolaraki notes, the Philostratean text conflates the cataracts with the springs (πηγαί) of the Nile, thereby generating a startling anomaly, since the two were generally considered distinct geographical entities.⁷⁷⁵ Manolaraki argues well that this imaginative geography symbolises the holy man’s ability to encompass the whole earth in his experience and knowledge.⁷⁷⁶ The Katadoupoi therefore are a place of unstable geography. Although Charikles does not claim to find the springs of the Nile at Katadoupoi, he does, uniquely, apply the name ‘Katadoupoi’ to a town (note κατὰ τὴν πόλιν, 2.30.1). Reardon notes that this designation is made ‘clearly mistakenly’.⁷⁷⁷ Yet as with other geographical ‘mistakes’ in Heliodorus, this apparent infelicity is revealing. ‘Katadoupoi’ proves impossible to map as a location, creating a disjunction between the seemingly ‘realistic’ novelistic setting and the extra-textual reality. Its presence in the text functions as a sign of fictionality, and reminds the reader that the *historie*

⁷⁷⁵ Manolaraki (2013) 274, 284-9.

⁷⁷⁶ Manolaraki (2013) 289.

⁷⁷⁷ Reardon (2008) 402 n. 64.

apparently undertaken by Charikles, which putatively verifies that of Calasiris, is fundamentally bound up in the textuality of Nilotic discourse.

The presence of the Nile in the narrative of Heliodorus generates other expectations, some of which, such as an epideictic disquisition on the inundation and sources, are (at least partially) fulfilled. Other expectations are frustrated. As Kalasiris, Knemon and Nausikles leave the village, they encounter a crocodile:

...καὶ τὰς ὄχθας τοῦ Νείλου παραμείβοντες κροκόδειλον ὀρώσιν ἀπὸ τῶν δεξιῶν ἐπὶ θάτερα διερπύζοντα καὶ τῷ ρείθρῳ τοῦ ποταμοῦ σὺν ὀξείᾳ τῇ ρύμῃ καταδυόμενον. (Heliod. 6.1)

... and they saw a crocodile scuttle across their path from right to left and plunge full tilt into the waters of the river.

As we have seen, descriptions of the crocodile are common in Greek texts about the Nile, especially in Achilles Tatius. By contrast, Heliodorus' crocodile is notably lacking in visual description, that is in the ekphrasis typically expected of such an encounter. The Nilotic landscape of the novel, as well as of other genres, is comprised of such typical elements as the crocodile; in Heliodorus, it is the *lack* of description of the crocodile, indeed the almost *absence* of the creature itself, that inscribes difference. However, the very absence of description functions to implicate the reader in the textuality of the landscape. By the lack of a description, the Heliodoran narrator implicates the reader in a prior knowledge of the beast, acquired either from external experience or from previous texts, including perhaps the visual arts. This knowledge aligns the reader with the response of the Egyptian characters Calasiris and Nausikles, since 'for two of them it was a common sight and occasioned no alarm' (Οἱ μὲν δὴ ἄλλοι συνήθως τε καὶ ἀθορύβως τὸ ὄφθὲν ἤγον, Heliod. 6.1.2). But Knemon does not see clearly, only a 'dark shape close to the ground', and is alarmed. The response of Nausikles to Knemon's alarm is laughter (τοῦ Ναυσικλέους ἐκγελῶντος). The familiarity of Calasiris and Nausikles with the fauna and exotic phenomena of the river is mirrored by that of the reader, since both are accustomed to the 'sight' of crocodiles, either in Egypt or texts about Egypt; as a result, a former sign of the exotic, the dangers and the

peculiarities of an unusual, topsy-turvy country,⁷⁷⁸ can now signify the very familiarity of Nilotic landscapes.

The familiarity of Egypt is also indicated by the ironising epithet ‘new’, as in Achilles Tatius. At 9.5, the narrator describes the spectacle of ferryboats crossing the flooded ground at Syene:

Καὶ ἦν θεαμάτων τὸ καινότατον, ναῦς ἀπὸ τειχῶν πρὸς τείχη περαιουμένη καὶ ναύτης ὑπὲρ μεσογαίας πλωϊζόμενος καὶ πορθμεῖον κατὰ τὴν ἀρόσιμον ἐλαυνόμενον· (Heliod. 9.5)

This was a most strange spectacle: a ship crossing from one wall to another, a sailor sailing over the countryside, a ferry plying over ploughed fields.

The verbal reminiscence of the description in Achilles Tatius of a similar scene is strong; Achilles, as discussed above, describes the co-mingled land and sea during the battle of the Boukoloï as ‘the new [or, strange] sight’ (τὸ θέαμα καινόν, Ach. Tat. 4.14). The irony of the Heliodoran incident is multiplied, however, since the scene, now even less ‘new’ than when described by Achilles, is nonetheless qualified by the superlative form of the adjective (καινότατον). At the point of greatest familiarity, the *topos* is ‘most new’.

Heliodorus’ narrative therefore presents the Nile, and the land of the Nile, as a space in which former novelty, exoticism and mystery have been ceded to familiarity and commonplace. The text frequently illuminates disjunctions between the characters or narrators, who experience the Nile as ‘new’, ‘strange’, ‘unfamiliar’ or a place worthy of Herodotean inquiry, and the reader, with a wealth of experience drawn from earlier written texts and visual representations. Egypt is a ‘space of intertextuality’,⁷⁷⁹ yet the resonances activated by this intertextuality point to a re-analysis of the role of the Nile.

⁷⁷⁸ Note that the narrator of Achilles Tatius describes the crocodile as a ‘crossing of categories’, ‘a fish-animal’ (4.19).

⁷⁷⁹ Elmer (2008) 429.

3.3. Getting over Egypt

Heliodorus' narrative does not simply replicate the patterns, motifs and themes of earlier texts, whether in allusions to earlier texts or reference to common *topoi*. Rather, it reveals that the Egyptian landscape poses various problems and even suggests the inadequacy of the Nile, before constructing Ethiopia as a transformation of the familiar (even over-familiar) Nilotic environment. The re-evaluation and transformation of Nilotic space in Heliodorus unfolds gradually over the course of the narrative. Occasionally, the text seems to hint at the unsatisfactory nature of the Egyptian Nile as a literary landscape. Egypt has been seen as a transitional, 'ambiguous and liminal' space within the novel.⁷⁸⁰ Calasiris receives an oracle from Delphi delineating his origins in Egypt and his imminent return home:

Ἴχνος ἀειράμενος ἀπ' εὐστάχου παρὰ Νείλου
 φεύγεις μοιράων νήματ' ἐρισθενέων.
 Τέτλαθι, σοὶ γὰρ ἐγὼ κυαναύλακος Αἰγύπτιοιο
 αἶψα πέδον δώσω· νῦν δ' ἐμὸς ἔσσο φίλος. (Heliod. 2.26)

From Nile's corn-rich banks you path has led
 As you flee from far-reaching Fate's spun thread.
 Fear not. The hour is near when I shall lead you home
 To black-soiled Egypt. For now, friend, welcome!

This oracle suggests an Odyssean *nostos* patterning, centred around a flight from and return to Egypt.⁷⁸¹ However, the *nostos* of Calasiris is not the primary narrative movement of the novel (it has in any case been accomplished prior to the time-frame of the novel); Calasiris himself dies in the second half of the novel at 7.11. The narrative continues, and the trajectory of the novel continues inexorably southward, away from 'black-soiled Egypt' to Ethiopia.⁷⁸² In Heliodorus' new novelistic text, the narrative cannot remain in Egypt.

⁷⁸⁰ Whitmarsh (2002) 26 and (2011) 129-35, Nimis (2004) 54, Morgan (2012) 571.

⁷⁸¹ On the confrontation of Heliodorus with the epic tradition, see Whitmarsh (1998). For the Odyssey as a key structural pattern for the so-called 'ephebic' romances, see Whitmarsh (2002), and especially, on the distinct trajectory (not on the Odyssean model) of Heliodorus, p. 115.

⁷⁸² For further discussion of the epithet 'black-soiled' and this oracle, see below.

Occasionally, moments of intertextuality reveal a tension between the tropes and typical imaginative constructions of the Nile, and the specific functions of the Nile in Heliodorus' text. The Nile, at least in the north of Egypt, is not a very pleasant *locus amoenus*. Calasiris persuades Knemon to visit his home by dismissing the Nile as a place for talking:

ὄχθας μὲν Νείλου τάσδε καὶ Νεῖλον ἀπολίπωμεν, οὐ γὰρ ἡδὺ μακροτέρων διηγημάτων ἀκροατήριον τόπος ἡλίου μεσημβρία φλεγόμενος... (Heliod. 2.21)

Let us leave the Nile and its banks, for a spot under the scorching midday sun is not the most agreeable of places for listening to long tales...

As so frequently in the novels, the setting recalls that of the prelude to the *Phaedrus*, but this time by contrast: the dialogue takes place at midday (*Phaed.* 229a) and the breeziness of Plato's *locus amoenus* is σφόδρα ἡδύ (*Phaed.* 230b). Only much further south does the Nile provide what seems to be a genuine *locus amoenus* during the midday heat (for which, note τῆς τε ἡλιακῆς ἀκτίνος τὸν φλογμὸν, Heliod. 8.14.2, and τῆς ἄγαν μεσημβρίας χαλώσης, 8.15.1). The presence of water and trees local to Egypt (persea and sycamores) generates the atmosphere of a classic *locus amoenus*, yet even the presence of the erotic protagonists does not complete the scene, given their uncomfortable situation and apparent proximity to death. This is not the scene of joyful reunification which characterises the celebratory Nilotic scene in Achilles Tatius (Ach. Tat. 4.18).

3.4. Syene

A major shift in the reader's perceptions of the Nile occurs at the beginning of the ninth book, when the narrative moves to Syene, on the very borders of Egypt and a place of narrative transition. Syene is a place of liminal focus.⁷⁸³ It forms the traditional boundary between Egypt and Ethiopia; Herodotus records the tradition (with which he disagrees) that Syene is the place of the sources of the Nile, while nearby Elephantine formed the explicit limit of his autopsy (Hdt. 2.28-9).⁷⁸⁴ In

⁷⁸³ Whitmarsh (2002) 26, (2011) 129-130.

⁷⁸⁴ Strabo (17.1.3 C787) also locates the boundaries (ὄροι) at Syene and Elephantine.

Heliodorus, Syene marks the point at which the Nile ceases to be a benefit for the Egyptians (under the rule of the Persians), and becomes instead a strategic element of the Ethiopian attack; this marks the beginning of a transformation from Egyptian to Ethiopian space.

Hydaspes demonstrates a consummate mastery of the Nile that mirrors the actions performed by Egyptian kings in Herodotus. Hydaspes' armies are initially 'poured out' (περιχέας) around the city (Heliod. 9.1.2).⁷⁸⁵ The siege of Syene is broken by spectacular hydrological engineering, controlling the mighty river; the text accentuates its size and power (Heliod. 9.3). The purpose of Hydaspes' engineering, appropriately for a king with the name of a powerful river, is to 'flood them out' (ὡς ἐπικλυσμός ἐστιν ὁ σκοπὸς τοῦ περιτειχίσματος, Heliod.9.3.6). Indeed, the water and the very land itself work against the Persians to the advantage of the Ethiopians, in a parody of the beneficial changes typically wrought by the inundation. Syene becomes an 'island' (νῆσος), 'an inland town surrounded by water, washed by the waves of the flooding Nile' (περίρρυτος ἢ μεσόγαιος τῷ Νειλώφ κλύδωνι κυματουμένη, Heliod. 9.4.2), in a dangerous equivalent to the common image of island-like settlements in Egypt during the inundation.⁷⁸⁶ The text describes the subterranean movement of water and soil in detail; the 'heat of summer' (τῆς θερινῆς ὥρας) has created 'crevices of the soil' (διὰ τῶν ἀραιωμάτων τῆς γῆς), through which the water can seep, generating subsidence; as a result, the 'black and fertile' soil (μέλαινα καὶ εὐγείος), typically a sign of the abundance and prosperity of Egypt, now works against the Persians, 'the defenders being thrown off their feet by the shock' (τῶν ὑπερμαχομένων τῷ βρασμῷ κλονουμένων, Heliod. 9.4.3).

Indeed, even after the defeat of Oroondates, the danger of ruptured dikes and treacherous mud remains; the river and land remain dangerous and unpredictable. The siege of Syene reverses the common trope that the Nile provides the defence of Egypt; in Isocrates' *Busiris*, Egypt is 'protected by the immortal rampart of the Nile' (ἀθανάτῳ δὲ τείχει τῷ Νείλῳ τετειχισμένην, Isoc. *Bus.* 12),

⁷⁸⁵ On the riverine associations of Hydaspes' own name, see Elmer (2008) 439-42.

⁷⁸⁶ For this image, see e.g. Hdt. 2.97.

which renders it ‘impregnable and difficult for foes to conquer’ (ἀνάλωτος μὲν ὦν καὶ δύσμαχος τοῖς ἐπιβουλεύουσιν, Isoc. *Bus.* 13). The defence of Egypt by the Nile (and its ‘monsters’) is a motif found elsewhere too, in Theocritus’ *Encomium of Philadelphus* (98-101) and Diodorus Siculus (18.35.6).⁷⁸⁷ At Syene by contrast, the seeping waters of the Nile cause ‘a part of the wall’ (μέρος τι τοῦ τείχους) to collapse (Heliod. 9.5.1), leaving the defending Oroondates ‘walled in by water’ (ἀποτετειχισμένος δὲ τῷ ὕδατι, 9.5.2). Oroondates’ own attempt to employ the river in a defensive manoeuvre is disastrous (9.16.1), as he stands with his back to the river to prevent himself being ‘encircled’ (ἀπετειχίζεν, 9.16.1). The text emphasises the failure of his strategy, as the Persians are surrounded and driven into the river (Heliod. 9.20.4). Whereas previous rulers of Egypt used the Nile as an aid in defence, now the text of Heliodorus has Hydaspes harness the power of the river in his offensive strike against Persian-dominated Egypt; the ruler of Egypt fails in his attempts to control the river.

Simultaneously, the narrative indicates that the Egyptians are perhaps not quite as in control of the river as they would like, and even that the Egyptian understanding of the river is fundamentally limited. The battle for Syene takes place ‘at the time of the Neiloa, the greatest of all festivals in Egypt; (τὰ Νειλῶα τότε, τὴν μεγίστην παρ’ Αἴγυπτίοις ἑορτήν, Heliod. 9.9). This festival is said to mark the first signs of the inundation and co-incides with the summer solstice. Usually the beginning of the inundation marks a time of preparation, anticipation and the alleviation of anxiety, as in Strabo, when ‘from such signs’ (ἐκ τῶν τοιοῦτων σημείων) the people know the total height of the inundation and can predict revenues.⁷⁸⁸ Celebrations of Nile-festivals were seen as lively and joyous affairs, especially in the visual arts.⁷⁸⁹ Typically these scenes are relaxed and harmonious. In Heliodorus, the Syenians’ religious dedication is portrayed as problematic. It is their post-celebratory exhaustion that leads to the escape of the whole Persian army.

⁷⁸⁷ For discussion of this motif, see also p. 222 of this thesis.

⁷⁸⁸ Strabo *Geog.* 17.1.48, cf. Diod. Sic. 1.36.11-2 for emotions at the beginning of the inundation.

⁷⁸⁹ Versluys (2002) 281-2.

The temporal setting at the Neiloa introduces an unusual passage of narratorial comment, discussing the beliefs of the Egyptians:

Θεοπλαστοῦσι τὸν Νεῖλον Αἰγύπτιοι καὶ κρειπτόνων τὸν μέγιστον ἄγουσιν, ἀντίμιμον οὐρανοῦ τὸν ποταμὸν σεμνηγοροῦντες οἶα δὴ δίχα νεφώσεων καὶ ὑετῶν ἀερίων τὴν ἀρουμένην αὐτοῖς ἄρδοντος καὶ εἰς ἔτος ἀεὶ τεταγμένως ἐπομβρίζοντος· (Heliod. 9.9)

The Egyptians apotheosise the Nile and consider it the greatest of all divinities, hallowing the river as the exact counterpart of heaven; for without clouds or celestial precipitation it brings moisture to their fields and waters the ground like rain with the utmost regularity each year.

The underlined words echo a passage of Philo's *De Vita Mosis* 2.195:⁷⁹⁰

θεοπλαστοῦσι τῷ λόγῳ τὸν Νεῖλον Αἰγύπτιοι ὡς ἀντίμιμον οὐρανοῦ γεγονότα καὶ περὶ τῆς χώρας σεμνηγοροῦσιν.

In fact, the Egyptians apotheosise the Nile as the counterpart of heaven and talk about the land in terms of high reverence.

Morgan has suggested that the quotation provides another example of Heliodorus' 'rather bookish inspiration', but does not find the allusion wholly successful in 'completely integrating his borrowed material'.⁷⁹¹ Morgan hits upon a significant issue here, since the source-text articulates a definite scepticism about Egyptian Nile-worship. Philo's text consistently articulates the godlessness of the Egyptians, which is epitomised by their 'construction' (θεοπλαστοῦσι, literally, 'they mould as a god') of the Nile as a divinity. Sarah Pearce, in a study of Philo's representation of Egypt in the *De Vita Mosis* and other texts, illustrates the ways in which Philo employs familiar images and *topoi* about the river to demonstrate the Egyptians' impiety; here, the familiar theme of the rivalry between the Nile and rain, a trope which typically emphasises Egypt's self-sufficient prosperity, is re-deployed to accentuate their atheism.⁷⁹² Moreover, the river, the life-force of Egypt 'is the material tool of God, who will use the river to punish the inhabitants of Egypt because of their prevailing impiety'.⁷⁹³ The (unmarked) quotation of this passage in Heliodorus is not simply a

⁷⁹⁰ The allusion was noted in the Lexicon of Stephanus (s.v. Ἀντίμιμος).

⁷⁹¹ Morgan (1982) 245.

⁷⁹² Pearce (2007).

⁷⁹³ Pearce (2007) 215-39, esp., on the *De Vita Mosis*, 219-23.

'bookish' quotation, to be identified by an educated reader. Rather, the quotation carries distinctly unsettling undertones of artificiality and falseness, especially in the words θεοπλαστοῦσι, with its hints of fictiveness and fabrication, and σεμνηγοροῦντες, suggesting 'fine phrases' without substance. The quotation disrupts the apparently laudatory tone in which the description of the Neiloa is articulated, and introduces a note of ambivalence vis-à-vis the Egyptian Nilotic religion.

The following passage heightens this sense of ambivalence, presenting the Egyptians' supposed beliefs of the Egyptians as a tripartite allegorical system.⁷⁹⁴ The majority of the people (ὁ πολὺς λαός) understand the Nile as an embodiment of the moist element. This is explicitly a vulgar interpretation, which 'they make public' (δημοσιεύουσι). A greater revelation is imparted to 'initiates' (τοὺς μύστας), to whom it is shown that 'the land is Isis and the Nile Osiris, having exchanged the material objects for the names' (Ἰσιν τὴν γῆν καὶ Ὅσιριν τὸν Νεῖλον καταλλέλλουσι, τὰ πράγματα τοῖς ὀνόμασι μεταλαμβάνοντες). Although this is presented as a mystery into which Egyptians must be initiated, once again it corresponds to a physical allegory that was familiar to Greek writers.⁷⁹⁵ This identification of Isis with the land and Osiris with the Nile is a commonplace of Greek understanding of the Isiac cult; Heliodorus indicates that this knowledge, a mystery for Egyptians, is information that could be obtained by any educated Greek. Once again, the reader experiences the Nile and Egypt in Heliodorus' narrative not as exotic or strange, but as familiar, a familiarity engendered by the long history of Greek textual discourse about the river. Heliodorus then indicates that the Egyptian mysteries of the Nile have a further dimension, a truth available only to the higher initiates, but ostentatiously withholds the secret from the reader.⁷⁹⁶ Heliodorus adopts a pose of 'holy silence', refusing to divulge the 'greatest

⁷⁹⁴ On this passage, see Sandy (1982) 157-60, Winkler (1982) 151-2, Whitmarsh (2011) 129-35. Allegory in Heliodorus is discussed by Lamberton (1986), Dowden (1996), Hunter (2005) and Most (2007).

⁷⁹⁵ See esp. Plut. *DIO* 32, 'So among the Egyptians Osiris is the Nile uniting with Isis as the earth' (οὕτω παρ' Αἰγυπτίοις Νεῖλον εἶναι τὸν Ὅσιριν Ἰσιδι συνόντα τῇ γῆ), with Griffiths (1970) 420-1. Cf. Lydus *De mens.* 4.45, Porph. *De imag. Ap.* Euseb. *Praec. Evang.* 3.11.51.

⁷⁹⁶ See Whitmarsh (2011) 132.

mysteries' (τὰ μυστικώτερα).⁷⁹⁷ Whitmarsh observes the significance of this ritual silence 'to mark the ineffable: to mark the presence of extreme religious intensity, the absence of linguistic explication is a more powerful index than language itself'.⁷⁹⁸ At the same time, this silence ensures that the final revelation remains unknowable to the curious Greek reader, who becomes caught in an epistemological puzzle. The reader becomes aware that the supposed mystery of Isis and Osiris is no mystery at all, but remains unable to move beyond that limited understanding.

The Nilotic allegory presents a movement of ideas from the materiality of the phenomena of the Nile (τὰ πράγματα) towards an abstract truth symbolised by secrecy and light, 'the torch of truth' (τῶν ὄντων λαμπάδι). This 'torch' is one of a series of 'torches' in the narrative, a motif linking Charikleia, marriage, and the Isis cult, and culminating at the climax of the novel.⁷⁹⁹ The motif also functions to activate issues of interpretation and understanding.⁸⁰⁰ At 9.9, the 'torch of truth' (τῶν ὄντων λαμπάδι) also remains a symbol of the higher interpretation of the Isiac mysteries. The torch is a motif that recurs in patterns that are only resolved at the culmination of the novel in Ethiopia, as the protagonists ride into Meroe 'by the light of torches' (ὑπὸ λαμπάσιν, Heliod. 10.41.3), which are their wedding-torches. The presence of torches here too marks the arrival of 'the more mystic parts of the wedding ritual' (τῶν ἐπὶ τῷ γάμῳ μυστικωτέρων, 10.41.3), which are also hidden from the view of the reader. In the same way, the 'higher' truth about the mysteries of the Nile remains hidden; in Egypt, a veil of religious silence impedes the revelation, but even as the narrative reaches its completion in Ethiopia, the ultimate truth about the Nile's mysteries continue to elude us. Ethiopia brings us closer to the sources of the Nile perhaps, but no

⁷⁹⁷ Parallels are listed by Whitmarsh (2011) 132 n. 134.

⁷⁹⁸ Whitmarsh (2011) 132.

⁷⁹⁹ See 1.30.4 (Isis), 2.1.3 (wedding torches), 4.17.4 ('kidnapping' of Charikleia), 4.19.3 (wedding torches), 5.5.2 (Charikleia's verbal signs), 7.8.5 (Isis), 10.41.3 (wedding torches). On the metaphor of the torch, see Arnott (1965).

⁸⁰⁰ See e.g. 1.30.4, when Thyamis, the chieftain of the bandits, is reminded of a dream 'in which he had seen Isis and her whole temple full of torches and sacrifice' (καθ' ὃ τὴν Ἴσιν ἑώρα καὶ τὸν νεῶν ἅπαντα λαμπάδων καὶ θυσιῶν ἀνάμεστον). This dream, seen at 1.18.2 has already proved impervious to accurate interpretation. For the torch as a symbol of recognition, see 5.5.2.

closer to the underlying meaning of the river. Despite the breadcrumb trail of ‘torch’ clues, the text resists an easy typological mapping of the mysteries of the Nile onto the narrative.

3.5. An Ethiopian Nile

Eventually and inexorably, the narrative proceeds to the very south of Egypt and thence to Ethiopia in search of Charikleia’s origins. First, the spatial orientation and the dynamics of knowledge and inquiry in the novel are radically challenged by Hydaspes, the Ethiopian king from the Meroitic south, beyond Elephantine. The peculiarities and wonders of the Nile in Egypt are unimpressive to this king, who possesses equal wonders in Ethiopia and can control the Nile to his own advantage when in Egypt. The Nile leads the characters on past Egypt. Ethiopia and the Ethiopian king ultimately function as more than places *beyond* Egypt; in Heliodorus’ narrative, they work to *replace* Egypt as a Nilotic space for the novel.

Hydaspes represents a transformation in the orientation of Nilotic knowledge. On his entry into Syene, Hydaspes is treated like a tourist or historian, asking about the origin of the Neiloa and ‘anything worth admiring or seeing’ (τι θαύματος ἢ θεάματος ἄξιον) in the city (Heliod. 9.22.2), whereupon he is shown the ‘well that measures the Nile’ (τὴν τε φρεατίαν τὸ νειλομέτριον, Heliod. 9.22.3) and the sundials ‘that cast no shadow at noon (τοὺς τῶν ὥρονομίων γνώμονας ἀσκίους κατὰ μεσημβρίαν ὄντας, 9.22.4). Unlike a Herodotus or Strabo however, Hydaspes’ response is one of a rather jaded familiarity:

Καὶ ταῦτα μὲν ὁ Ὑδάσπης οὐ σφόδρα ὡς ξένα ἐθαύμαζε· συμβαίνειν γὰρ τὰ ἴσα καὶ κατὰ Μερὸν τὴν Αἰθιοπίων (Heliod. 9.22.4)

Hydaspes, however, was not much impressed by these sights, which were already familiar to him; exactly the same occurred, he said, at Meroe in Ethiopia.

Hydaspes’ remarks articulate the superiority of Ethiopia over Egypt, yet, tellingly, they also align Hydaspes with the reader of the *Aithiopika*, to whom the famous Nilometers are also already familiar from earlier Greek texts, in which they feature prominently as curiosities of the Nile. The reaction of Hydaspes is a reminder that these ‘wonders’ of Egypt are no longer ξένα, but rather a

familiar aspect of this literary landscape. Hydaspes' encounter with the Egyptian Nile is literary, but he, unlike the Greek characters who visit Egypt, exposes that sense of stereotype.

The priests proceed to give an account of the divinity of the Nile that would not be out of place in a Greek geographical or ethnographical treatise, giving expositions of the titles of the divine Nile, its seasons, potential etymology, and local wildlife (Heliod. 9.22.5-6), all of which are topics familiar to Greek literature. Again, Hydaspes' response is dismissive, arguing that the river and its inhabitants originate in Ethiopia, not Egypt: Ἄλλ' οὐκ Αἰγύπτια ταῦτα...ἀλλ' Αἰθιοπικὰ τὰ σεμνολογήματα (Heliod. 9.22.7). This rivalry between Ethiopian and Egyptian over matters Nilotic is itself something of a literary *topos*; Diodorus Siculus for instance illustrates an apparent rivalry over the relative antiquity of Ethiopia and Egypt.⁸⁰¹ In Heliodorus, Hydaspes' knowledge of the Nile at least equals, if not exceeds, that of the Syenian priests. The text thereby subverts the pervasive connection between (perceived) geographical centrality and knowledge. In the *Geography* of Strabo, knowledge of the Nile diminishes as one travels further south, away from the hub of the empire in Rome towards the *eschata*. This diminution of knowledge corresponds with a decreasing level of 'civilisation' southwards along the Nile. This coding of centre-periphery as knowledgable/civilised-ignorant/uncivilised is paralleled by, for instance, the Palestrina Nile Mosaic, the upper section of which depicts 'Ethiopia' as a place of backward primitiveness and exoticism, articulated in the 'captions' labelling each exotic beast.⁸⁰² By contrast, Hydaspes' prior familiarity with the 'curiosities' of the Nile signals a re-alignment of knowledge and the boundaries of the familiar.

3.6. Deviant geography and the disordering of knowledge

The text describes precisely the course taken by Hydaspes upon leaving Syene at the beginning of book 10:

Τὰ μὲν οὖν πρῶτα ἐχώρει τῆς ὄχθης ἀεὶ τοῦ Νείλου καὶ <τῆς> παραποταμίας ἐχόμενος· ἐπεὶ δὲ εἰς τοὺς καταρράκτας ἀφίκετο, θύσας τῷ Νεῖλῳ καὶ θεοῖς ἐνορίοις, ἐκτραπείς τῆς

⁸⁰¹ Diod. Sic. 3.2.1.

⁸⁰² See Ferrari (1999) 366 for an argument a reading of the Palestrina Nile Mosaic as a representation of a 'succession of ages or states of existence in an imaginary itinerary through time'.

μεσογαίας μᾶλλον εἶχετο καὶ εἰς τὰς Φίλας ἐλθὼν ἡμέρας μὲν που δύο διαναπαύει τὸν στρατόν, αὐθις δὲ τὸ πολὺ τοῦ πλήθους προαποστείλας, προεκπέμψας δὲ καὶ τοὺς αἰχμαλώτους, αὐτὸς ἐπιμείνας τὰ τε τεῖχη τῆς πόλεως ὠχύρωσε καὶ φρουρὰν ἐγκαταστήσας ἐξώρμησε. (Heliod. 10.1.1)

To begin with he followed the banks of the Nile and kept to the areas watered by the river, but when he reached the cataracts, he sacrificed to the Nile and the gods of Egypt and then turned away from the river and marched inland instead, until he came to Philai, where he rested his army for two days or so.

The passage is significant for its deviant geography and relationship to other texts. Philae of course is an island in the Nile in the region of the first cataract that would in no way be accessed by a two days' march away from the river. Philae was a popular pilgrimage site in the imperial period, and therefore a relatively familiar element of Greek and Roman experiences of Egypt.⁸⁰³ Heliodorus dislocates Philae, constituting a disordering of Nilotic geographical knowledge, of what we thought was familiar about Egypt. The careful delineation of Hydaspes' route marks the transition of the narrative to a new geographical zone, one marked out not by the generic expectations of the novel, but the construction of a new imaginative geography.

Imaginative geography is also an important facet of movement south of Egypt at the cataracts in Philostratus' *Vita Apollonii*. This journey is undertaken by the holy man Apollonius 'on account of sources of the Nile, for it will be delightful not only to see the sources of the Nile, but also to listen to the roar of its waterfalls' (τῶν πηγῶν ἔνεκα, χαρίεν γὰρ τὸ μὴ μόνον ἰδεῖν τὰς τοῦ Νείλου ἀρχάς, ἀλλὰ καὶ κελαδοῦντος αὐτοῦ ἀκοῦσαι, 6.17). The text is remarkable for its conflation of the cataracts with the springs of the Nile.⁸⁰⁴ The unusual combination of two geographic areas usually understood as distinct in Greek and Roman texts makes clear that "Apollonius' passage is imaginative rather than geographic".⁸⁰⁵ The purpose of this imaginative travel is expressed well by Jas Elsner, for whom what matters is 'the necessary symbolism whereby the whole earth as far as

⁸⁰³ Rutherford (1998).

⁸⁰⁴ See Manolaraki (2013) 273-5.

⁸⁰⁵ Manolaraki (2013) 274.

its boundaries is in the orbit of his holy man's personal experience and knowledge'.⁸⁰⁶ Whitmarsh has observed that Philostratus' *Vita Apollonii* is a significant intertext for Heliodorus, but whereas Philostratus conflates different geographical spaces in order to represent the imaginative and philosophical conquest of space, even - and perhaps especially - at the *eschata* of the *oikoumene*, Heliodorus reconfigures Nilotic space and knowledge in a movement away from the epicentre of other novelistic adventures, and a transformation of novelistic locales. Apollonius conflates the cataracts and the springs of the Nile, which thereby mark simultaneously the edge of the *oikoumene* and the culmination of the Greek quest for wisdom. Hydaspes, by contrast, at the very point at which Apollonius achieves his philosophical quest - that is, the cataracts - attains them (εἰς τοὺς καταρράκτας ἀφίκετο) and immediately changes direction, away from the Nile, away from the previous trajectory, and away from the *Vita Apollonii*. If in the *Vita Apollonii* the cataracts are conflated with the sources, then in Heliodorus' *Aithiopika*, the narrative first veers sharply away from the cataracts and then allows the sources to recede from importance.⁸⁰⁷ Hydaspes does not even comment on the cataracts, and the sources of the Nile are of no interest to the king.

Ultimately, the novel comes to Meroe, and Hydaspes and Kharikleia return home. The description of Meroe generates parallels with Nile cities and landscapes downstream in Egypt, until finally Meroe replaces Egypt. Hydaspes enters Meroe victoriously; as at Syene, this triumphant entry is accompanied by garlands of Nile flowers, hymns and sacrifices.⁸⁰⁸ As with the cities of Egypt, the Nile is the defining element of the landscape of Meroe. Elmer has pointed to the importance of the idea of 'confluence' at Meroe, arguing that the 'Nile below Meroe is fundamentally different from the Nile above the city', and that this new hybridity corresponds 'both to the novel's heterogeneous literary heritage and to Kharikleia's multiplex patrimony'.⁸⁰⁹ The Nile is indeed multiple around

⁸⁰⁶ Elsner (1997) 31-2.

⁸⁰⁷ On the sources of the Nile receding from significance at the end of the narrative, see Elmer (2008) 37.

⁸⁰⁸ 10.3.2, cf. 9.22.1.

⁸⁰⁹ Elmer (2008) 438.

Meroe, but it is worth paying closer attention to the particularity with which the text articulates this identity:

Ἡ γὰρ δὴ Μερὸν μητρόπολις οὖσα τῶν Αἰθιοπῶν τὰ μὲν ἄλλα ἐστὶ νῆσος τριγωνίζουσα ποταμοῖς ναυσιπόροις τῷ τε Νεῖλῳ καὶ τῷ Ἀσταβόρρῳ καὶ τῷ Ἀσασόβῳ περιρροομένη... (Heliod. 10.5.1)

Meroe is the capital of Ethiopia. In form it is a triangular island bounded on all three sides by navigable rivers: the Nile, the Astaborrhhas, and the Asasobas.

Once again, we find that the text echoes a dispute about the Nile; as at the opening of the novel on the Heracleotic branch of the Delta, the dispute concerns names. Although the names given in Heliodorus' text are authentic, their application to particular rivers is disputed in other Greek texts. Strabo's account of this region is internally inconsistent; he gives two descriptions of the river with different names.⁸¹⁰ Heliodorus' account is closest to Strabo's first description, at 17.1.2.⁸¹¹ Heliodorus also recalls the issue of the rivers' confused nomenclature, by subtly changing the spelling: Ἀσταβόρρας rather than Ἀσταβόρας, and Ἀσασόβας instead of Ἀσασόβας. Heliodorus chooses one of Strabo's accounts and adds minute differences, further complicating an already complex issue, and disturbing the reader's expectation that this is a familiar geography. The Nile is a textual phenomenon here too, emerging out of and reflecting back on the Greek literary past, but now, in Ethiopia, which in Homer signifies distance and the periphery of the world, Heliodorus disrupts what the reader expects to know about the river and the country, marking a move beyond the familiar.

The end of the novel parallels the beginning in other ways too. Meroe is described as a 'triangular island' (νῆσος τριγωνίζουσα).⁸¹² This detail recalls the importance of shape as a descriptive tool

⁸¹⁰ *Geog.* 17.1.2 C786: the Astaboras to the east, and to the west the Astapus, sometimes called the Astasobas; and 17.2.2 C821: three rivers, the Astaboras, Astapus, and Astasobas, converge south of the island, with the Nile to the north.

⁸¹¹ Elmer (2008) 438 n. 67 connects the Heliodoran passage with Strabo 17.2.2 and finds it 'surprising' that the novelist does not 'reproduce' the earlier writer's geography.

⁸¹² The city of Meroe is not in fact situated on an island, although this was a conception commonly held by many ancient authors; it is a city, and not an island, in Hdt. 2.29.

in Strabo, and indeed the tone of the passage, with an emphasis on the size and fertility of the region, is cartographic.⁸¹³ Meroe is frequently conceived of as an island in ancient texts; however, its shape is described only infrequently. Diodorus Siculus describes Meroe as having the ‘shape of a long shield’ (ταύτην δὲ τῷ μὲν σχήματι φασιν ὑπάρχειν θυρεῶ παραπλησίαν, Diod. Sic. 1.33.2), that is rectangular; similarly Strabo uses the word θυρεοειδής (17.2.2).⁸¹⁴ Heliodorus’ insistence on the triangularity of the island may simply be a geographical error; however, the Heliodoran narrative is one in which every detail must be weighed for significance. In Nilotic terms of course, the most significant triangular area of land is the Egyptian Delta, which is frequently described as both an island, and as triangular.⁸¹⁵ The parallels between Meroe and the Delta are sustained in this paragraph. The Nile is said to break upon the apex of the triangle (τοῦ μὲν κατὰ κορυφὴν ἐμπίπτοντος, τοῦ Νείλου, 10.5.1), an expression resembling Plato’s description in the *Timaeus* of the apex of the Delta (ἐν τῷ Δέλτα, περὶ ὃν κατὰ κορυφὴν σχίζεται τὸ τοῦ Νείλου ῥεῦμα, Pl. *Tim.* 21e). Heliodorus describes the size of Meroe as follows:

Μέγεθος δὲ οὔσα μεγίστη καὶ ἡπειρον ἐν νήσῳ σοφισομένη (τρισχιλίους γὰρ τὸ μῆκος, εὔρος δὲ χιλίους περιγράφεται σταδίους) (Heliod. 10.5.2)

In size Meroe is so vast that, despite being an island, it presents the impression of being a continent.

Again, this comment recalls the Herodotean discussion of the Delta (Hdt. 2.16), in which Herodotus dismisses (in the words of Lloyd, ‘joyfully and maliciously’) the opinion of ‘the Ionians’ who divide up the earth into three divisions (τρία μόρια), Europe, Asia, and Libya; in this schema, the Delta should count as a separate continent, or at least island, being part of neither Asia nor Libya.⁸¹⁶ In Heliodorus, the striking image of the Delta as a continent in and of itself is translated to

⁸¹³ On shape in Strabo, see p. 88 of this thesis, and Dueck (2005).

⁸¹⁴ The long rectangular shield (θυρεός, corresponding with the Roman *scutum*) is to be distinguished from the round shield (ἀσπίς, corresponding with the Roman *clipeus*).

⁸¹⁵ Diod. Sic. 1.34.1-2, note ἡ...νήσος αὕτη, describes the Delta as ‘much like Sicily in shape’; Strabo 17.4.1 describes the Delta as both an island and triangular, cf. Pl. *Tim.* 21e. Ammianus Marcellinus discusses the two most famous islands (*insulas*) of the Nile, Meroe and Delta, ‘the latter clearly so-called from the form of the triangular letter’ (*a triquetrae litterae forma hoc vocabulo signatius appellata*, 22.15.11-12).

⁸¹⁶ See Lloyd (1976) 82-4.

Meroe. These parallels between the Egyptian Delta and Meroe suggest that Meroe, the triangular island at the confluence (or divergence) of the Nile, is figured as a narrative replacement for the Egyptian Delta, and thus for Egypt itself. The Nile provides continuity between Egypt and Ethiopia, even as Nilotic space is reconfigured in the new novelistic zone of Meroe.

A final example of the substitution of Ethiopia for Egypt occurs in the closing moments of the narrative. As the narrative ends, Charikles reflects on the oracle at Delphi, which had declared that the protagonists would travel ‘to the black land of the sun’ (ἡελίου πρὸς χθόνα κυανέην, Heliod. 10.41.2 = 2.35.5). Colour has of course been central to the dynamics of the novel; Charikleia’s white skin is a visible sign that separates her from her (black) Ethiopian parentage.⁸¹⁷ Ethiopia is designated the ‘black land’, the land of Charikleia’s black-skinned parents. However, this designation also encodes a replacement of the characteristically ‘black land’ of earlier Greek texts, especially tragedy and novels, namely Egypt. ‘Blackness’ had long been a trope of Greek discourse about Egypt, with reference both to the skin colour of the inhabitants and the colour of the soil as a result of the inundation.⁸¹⁸ The black soil of Egypt signifies both fertility and death. This trope is re-iterated in the *Aithiopia* as a marker of the Egyptian land; Kalasiris for instance receives an oracle from the Pythian priestess at Delphi, who declares: ‘for I will lead you quickly to the plain of black-soiled Egypt’ (σοὶ γὰρ ἐγὼ κυαναύλακος Αἰγύπτιοιο ἰαῖψα πέδον δώσω, 2.26.5). The form κυαναύλακος is a *hapax*, but its meaning is clear from the elements of the compound, and from the numerous compound words formed from the prefix κυαν-. At the siege of Syene, again the soil is described as ‘black and fertile’ (μέλαινα καὶ εὐγείος). We have seen above how the Nile is turned against the very land of Egypt itself by Hydaspes’ attack; the dark soil does not here bring fertility, only death to the defenders of Syene. By the end of the novel however,

⁸¹⁷ On issues of colour in Heliodorus, see especially Dilke (1980), Perkins (1999), Morgan (2005); Selden (1998) discusses the colour hierarchy of the *Aithiopia* in the light of nineteenth and twentieth-century racial ideology and politics.

⁸¹⁸ See Vasunia (2001) 47-51 on the coding of ‘Egypt’ and ‘Egyptians’ as black in tragedy and other fifth-century Greek texts. I have argued elsewhere in this thesis that the association of Egypt with blackness continues into the imperial period, for which see my discussion of the Louvre hymn (pp. 176-7). [Plut.] *De fluv.* 16.1 (=1159A-B) gives ‘Melas’ as a former name of the Nile, on which see Delattre (2011) 161 n. 2.

Ethiopia has replaced Egypt as the ‘black land’ of the narrative; the repetition of the oracle by Charikles reinforces this substitution, and is lent particular weight by the repetition of the word *κυανήν*, used of the soil of Egypt in the oracle given to Kalasiris, *κυαναύλακος*. The Heliodoran narrative therefore inscribes Ethiopia, not only as the destination of the *Liebespaar* and the ultimate *telos* of the narrative, but even as a replacement for Egypt.⁸¹⁹

It has been seen that the Nile in Heliodorus, as a literary landscape, is deeply imbued with the presence and memory of earlier texts. This presence is articulated by the accent placed on the irony generated by the Nilotic inquiry by the characters, whose investigations and questions reveal Nilotic commonplaces and motifs familiar from earlier Greek texts. The description of the landscape itself by the primary narrator is also deeply engaged with the literary past, such that the absence of a particular element (e.g. an ecphrastic description of a crocodile) is immediately, and significantly, notable. In this text, even more than in Xenophon of Ephesus and Achilles Tatius, the ‘Nile’ is a space deeply fraught with the Greek literary past. The arrival of Hydaspes from the south articulates a re-alignment of Nilotic knowledge, and a shift in the spatial orientation of the novel, which moves inexorably towards Ethiopia. The Nile however functions as more than a sign for the symbolic trajectory of the narrative, and of the unfolding revelation of Charikleia’s patrimony; rather, the Nile delineates the continuity between ‘Egypt’ and ‘Ethiopia’ as spaces for novelistic happenings, while demonstrating a substitution of the space of Egypt for that of Ethiopia (i.e. Meroe). Ethiopia is written as a Nilotic space in which the protagonists of the novel can remain - where in fact they belong - for, unlike previous novels, in which the ‘land of the Nile’ means a land of *Scheintod* and transition, the Heliodoran narrative transforms Nilotic space into a new home.

Conclusions

Despite the claims of internal narrators in the novels, the Nile is not a new landscape. In the centuries following Herodotus’ vision of Egypt as a space of profound otherness and marvellous

⁸¹⁹ cf. Whitmarsh (1998) 99, who argues that the *Aithiopika* inverts the former hierarchy of centre-periphery, as ‘the pleasure of new configurations supplants the reassurance of the repetition of the old’.

wonders, the Nile and Egypt have become deeply familiar places, with a full storecupboard of literary themes and motifs. We have already seen this process of familiarisation at work in the attempts of Diodorus Siculus and Strabo to accommodate Egypt within the global *oikoumene* of the first century BC, whether as a site for the examination of deep prehistory, or as a part of the Roman Empire. Quite apart from the large numbers of Greeks living in Egypt itself, the Nile and Egypt had become familiar icons across the Empire. Representations of the Nile in flood had been popular since at least the first century BCE; Egyptianising art and nilotica had proliferated especially after the Roman conquest. John Miguel Versluys charts in particular a move towards a schematic, even stereotypical, representation of the Egyptian landscape that took place by the second century AD.⁸²⁰ In addition, from the third century BCE, Isiac cults had spread all around the Mediterranean, encompassing sites as widespread as modern Turkey, Delos and Aegean islands, and Italian cities such as Puteoli and Rome. In the imperial period, Greeks and Romans travelled to and within Egypt to see the sights, and to visit sites of religious significance; here too, Egypt might be seen ‘through the lens’ of earlier Greek writers’ accounts of Egypt, especially Herodotus and Homer.⁸²¹

The ‘Nile’ and ‘Egypt’ are sites heavy with the literary and artistic past, where traditions and motifs accrete - the sweetness of Nile water, descriptions of Nile-festivals and of crocodiles, the danger of death and of only seeming death near the river. For the imperial period novelists, as for Aelius Aristides, the Nile functions as a marker of that Greek literary past. Xenophon of Ephesus and particularly Achilles Tatius draw attention to the familiarity of Egypt, playing off the trope of ‘novelty’ in this now least exotic of literary landscapes. Achilles Tatius’ narrative sees Cleitophon take a first sip of Nile-water, a sensual delight that is new only to him. The reader has tasted these waters many times over the history of Greek literature. Heliodorus’ *Aithiopika* enacts a more profound disturbance of the familiar literary tradition. In this way, the *Aithiopika* bears similarities to Aristides’ *Egyptian Oration*, which both participates in the familiar discourse of Nilotic speculation, and

⁸²⁰ Versluys (2002) 262.

⁸²¹ Adams (2007) 180-1, Rutherford (2012) 710.

configures it in the service of his own self-fashioning as a writer. In Heliodorus' text, the waters of the Nile at Syene cause the 'black and fertile soil' of Egypt to subside and give way to the arrival of Hydaspes, the Ethiopian king. The text itself destabilises the familiar tropes of Egypt, exposing and reframing their limits, until Egypt is erased altogether and replaced by Ethiopia as a new novelistic destination. If the centuries after Herodotus enact a gradual incorporation of the Egyptian Nile within various permutations of Greek and Roman knowledge and power, Heliodorus radically displaces Egypt as a sign of over-familiarity, and thoroughly disorders what we think we know about Nilotic space.

Conclusions

The chapters of this thesis have explored representations of the river Nile in Greek Hellenistic and imperial texts; these texts have ranged in time from Callimachus to Heliodorus, over many different genres, and have originated from both within and outside Egypt. These texts have revealed that, in the centuries after Herodotus' classic discussion of Egypt in the second book of his *Histories*, the Nile was a richly polyvalent theme in Greek culture. The Nile became a symbol of inquiry and of the quest for knowledge, while the hidden location of the sources functioned to demarcate what remained unknown and outside human perception. This inquiry was built on the theorising of earlier Greek thinkers, and each text created anew the impression of an unbroken intellectual line back to Thales or Homer, who are seen as originators of Greek culture. It has been seen that Nilotic inquiry offered a means for later writers to position themselves within a mode of intellectual discourse and to reflect on, refract and variously transform that tradition, especially as a response to Herodotus. In this way, we have seen that, for such writers as Diodorus Siculus, Strabo, Aristides and Heliodorus, Nile discourse functions as a way to display one's ability in debate, in history, in geography, and as a way to rival, even outdo, Herodotus. Greek texts also use the Nile as a symbol of narrative itself; while this idea is familiar in the study of the Greek novelists, especially Heliodorus,⁸²² this thesis has also probed the use of the river as a structuring principle of the texts of Strabo and Diodorus Siculus, and in the case of the latter, probed the suggestive parallels the historian establishes between his own text and the great river.

The second important strand to emerge from this thesis is the diversity of ways in which these texts construct, and contest, a place for the Nile and for Egypt within the wider *oikoumene*. The texts explored in this thesis originate from periods in time when Egypt was becoming more familiar to Greeks and Romans, was subject to Macedonian conquest and Ptolemaic rule, and then came gradually under the influence of Rome until it was annexed and incorporated into the Roman empire. Political change instigated an increasing penetration of Egypt and the settlement and political rule of that space by Greeks and Romans. Over the same centuries, a wide range of

⁸²² See especially Elmer (2008).

Aegyptiaca - in the form of monuments, scarabs, canopic jars, and sculptures - was exported from Egypt, and Egyptian cults spread across the Mediterranean. Egyptianising art was extremely popular and produced for consumption in Roman homes, gardens, tombs and baths; Nilotic scenes, including the famous Palestrina Nile mosaic, were widespread from the first century BCE throughout the imperial period. These centuries are therefore witness both to the transformation of Egypt into Ptolemaic and later Roman imperial space, and to the diffusion of Nilotica across the Mediterranean.

This thesis has traced the ways in which Greek texts conceive of and situate the Nile within this changing *oikoumene*. For Diodorus, the Nile offers the perfect beginning to his new conception of universal history that aims to encompass all events within the whole *oikoumene*; picking up on fifth- and fourth-century BCE conceptions of Egypt in Greek texts, the land of the Nile is characterised as a primeval landscape, a place of origins. Strabo's *Geographia* articulates the incorporation of the Nile into the Roman empire; as the river and its land become more accessible to the visitor and more subject to Greek and especially Roman rule, they become less exotic, less 'other', and instead function to highlight the benefits of Roman hegemony. Some texts act as reminders of the dual heritage of Greek and Roman Egypt, drawing on Nilotic motifs and themes that can be understood from both Greek and Egyptian perspectives; it has been seen too that praises of Isis in Greek stress the universal power of Isis, generalised for all peoples from her origins in Egypt. A fragment of Callimachus (fr. 384 Pf.) and an elegy of Tibullus that reworks the Callimachean piece point to the renegotiation of Egyptian space by Ptolemies and Romans; first, the Nile becomes a (Greek-)speaking subject and reorients Egypt as a new centre of Hellenic culture, and then, in Tibullus, the Nile forms a part of the imperial possessions of Rome. Finally, in the Greek novels, Egyptian space is both exotic and familiar; the novelists play with the well-known quality of Nilotic tropes, until finally they are transformed in Heliodorus. Heliodorus' text enacts an erasure of Egypt in favour of Ethiopia as a new Nilotic and novelistic space.

Recent scholarship demonstrates the rich range of meanings and associations that Egypt and the Nile held for Greeks and Romans, as well as the wealth of cultural interchange that took place at the 'fringes of co-penetration' between Egyptian and Greek culture. Eleni Manolaraki, for example, reveals 'the divergences and continuities in imaginings of Egypt from Lucan to Philostratus', in an analysis centred around the dynamic between intellectual conquest and political (imperial) power.⁸²³ This thesis makes a new contribution to scholarship, often in counterpoint to Manolaraki's work, by focusing on the continuities and transformations of the functions and symbolism of the Nile in Greek texts from the Hellenistic and imperial periods, and by an approach that is informed by an awareness of Egyptological material.

This thesis also makes contributions to the study of Greek intellectual and cultural history. It has, for example, traced the ways in which various texts respond to their predecessors, especially Herodotus, whose description of Egypt is echoed and challenged by later writers in their use of Egyptian geography, assertions of autopsy, descriptions of the sights and sites of Egypt, and corrections (explicit or implicit) to the writer of the *Histories*. Descriptions of Egypt in post-classical Greek texts, especially geographical and historical writings, seek to create a place for themselves in Greek intellectual discourse in part through their reaction to Herodotus. In this way, the current thesis can be seen to contribute to recent scholarly interest in the reception of Herodotus in Hellenistic culture, represented most clearly by Jessica Priestley's new monograph.⁸²⁴

The textual explorations of this thesis also intersect with scholarly interests in Greek literature of the imperial period. Greek representations of Nile landscapes and the space of Egypt demonstrate parallels and contrasts with the construction and representation of space in other imperial texts, including Pausanias' description of Greece.⁸²⁵ A second significant theme is the junctures between rationalism and belief articulated in some texts that concern the Nile; for the second-century orator

⁸²³ Manolaraki (2012) 309.

⁸²⁴ Priestley (2014).

⁸²⁵ See for instance Elsner (2001) and Hutton (2005).

Aelius Aristides, the traditions of Greek Nilotic inquiry provided an opportunity, not only to participate in an ancient and culturally prestigious rationalistic debate about a natural phenomenon and thereby display his *paideia*, but also to promote the power of the gods with whom he felt a close affinity, and to whom he attributed both his verbal skill and later his bodily health. The *Egyptian Oration*, a text which has not attracted much critical attention, has been seen to demonstrate significant parallels with other texts by Aristides that expose the limitations of scientific or medical discourse in favour of divine revelation, notably the *Hieroi Logoi*. Aristides reconfigures the landscape of Egypt as a religious one, reinvigorating Nilotic phenomena as wonders, an act which again is of interest to those who have recently explored the connections between Aristides texts, Asclepius, the body, and landscape.⁸²⁶ Finally, the history of Nilotic inquiry, from the Presocratics to Aristides and refracted in such writers as Heliodorus, has revealed that this inquiry is deeply entwined both with shifting structures of imperial power, and with curating Greek intellectual history. Nilographic texts collect not just knowledge, but the history of the debate about the problems of the Nile. This Nilotic inquiry, which is attested over several centuries, contributes to an understanding of the ordering and systematising of knowledge in the Hellenistic and Roman imperial period, which has been the subject of recent scholarship.⁸²⁷

This thesis began with the aim of exploring the representations and functions of the Nile in Greek literature from the Hellenistic and imperial periods. I hope now to have revealed the rich set of meanings for Greek culture of this river which was seen variously as a site of fertility, wonders, and primeval origins, as an emblem of Egypt, whether foreign and strange, or tamed and subjugated to the power of Ptolemies or Romans, as a symbol of narrative, of history, and of inquiry, and as a sign of both the possibilities and limits of human knowledge; the Nile embodies the tensions between the quest for human knowledge and the limitations, and even ultimate bafflement, of that knowledge.

⁸²⁶ Notably Petsalis-Diomidis (2008) and (2010), and Downie (2013).

⁸²⁷ As illustrative examples, see (on empire in Pliny) Murphy (2004) and the articles in König and Whitmarsh (2007).

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