

Thought, Culture,
and Historiography
in Christian Egypt,
284-641 AD

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Edited by

Tarek M. Muhammad
and Cornelia Römer

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PREFACE

In 2013, when I met Cornelia Römer for the first time in Cairo, we talked about a lot of various issues, which were related to the History of Coptic Egypt, in particular from the first to the ninth century. We were looking forward to holding a regular conference about the History of Coptic Egypt every two years or even more often. Cornelia encouraged me strongly. Later, we had more talks about the procedures of the *First International Conference on the History of Christian Egypt, 284-641 AD*. At the same time, the president of Ain Shams University welcomed the idea and encouraged us to organize the conference.

When I met His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, Pope of the Orthodox church of Egypt, asking him to support the conference, he said to me: “I’m so happy that one of the official institutions in Egypt, i.e. Ain Shams University, is interested in Coptic history.”

For two reasons, we determined the period of 284 to 641 AD. While 284 AD was the year of the greatest martyrdom in Egypt and the beginning of the Coptic calendar, 641 AD was the beginning of the Arab conquest of Egypt, which changed gradually the overall Coptic face of Egypt into an Arabo-Coptic face, i.e. the Islamic-Christian Egypt we have today.

In April 2014, the First International Conference on Christian Egypt took place at Ain Shams University. In May 2015, the second one followed, and finally in May 2017, the third one was held.

Here, we present some of the best papers, whether historical or documentary, which derive from the first and the second conferences about Early Christian Egypt held at Ain Shams University in 2014 and 2015.

We would like to thank His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, Pope of the Orthodox Church of Egypt, for his unremitting encouragement. Thanks are also due to Dr. L. Blumell for his generous support, proofreading, and useful remarks. We also owe many thanks to Prof. Noha A. Salem, Director of the *Center for Papyrological Studies and Inscriptions*, for her faithful support. Our colleagues V. Christides, P. Argarate, Eleni Pachoumi, I. A. Gendī, A. Ramadān, and W. A. Farag we thank for their enthusiastic contributions during these conferences.

We also would like to thank the editorial staff of Cambridge Scholars Publishing, particularly Victoria Carruthers, Sean Howley, Hannah Fletcher, Adam Rummens, Matthew Scott, Sophie Edminson, and Anthony Wright for their help and professionalism.

I. HISTORY

THE NILE IN THE BYZANTINE WRITINGS OF 4TH-7TH CENTURIES AD

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The Nile attracted the interest of writers throughout antiquity, such as Herodotus, Strabo, Pliny the Elder, and Dio Cassius. In the Byzantine era, the Nile was mentioned in numerous literary and historical writings during the period between the fourth and seventh centuries, such as Aelius Spartianus, Eusebius of Caesarea, Ammianus Marcellinus, Claudius Claudianus, Nonnos of Panopolis, Dioscorus of Aphroditon and John Malalas. Some Byzantine writings have been translated from ancient Greek and Roman sources, especially information about the sources of the Nile, mouths, floods, plants, animals, tribes and peoples who lived close to it. The Byzantine writings may have been greatly influenced by Greek and Roman writings on the Nile as a result of the cultural decline in the Early Byzantine age due to the political and religious changes that had a great influence on that cultural aspect. This created a lack of innovation in dealing with some historical and geographical issues and prompted writers to imitate previous writings. However, there are some differences in the Byzantine writings about the concept of the name of the Nile because of the influence of Christian writings during the Byzantine age, in addition to the existence of different political conditions in Egypt and the kingdoms surrounding it across the Red Sea. This led some Byzantine writers such as Procopius of Caesarea and John Malalas to speak about the Byzantine embassies to Kingdoms on the Nile from the reign of Diocletian until the Islamic conquest of Egypt (284-642 AD).

Introduction

The Nile was the cynosure of Greek and Roman writers from the ancient times; such as Herodotus (ca. 460 BC), who created a relationship between

* I'd like to thank Dr. Lincoln Blumell for his useful remarks and careful proofreading.

Egypt and the Nile when he praised the Nile and described it as so great, “ἔόντες μεγάλα.”¹ More interestingly, he admired the effect of the river on the Egyptian soil; hence, he thought that the Egyptian soil was the gift of the river, not of the Egyptians, because the Nile carried down the silt from Ethiopia to Egypt.² This idea is repeated in the fourth century by Philostratus the Younger.³ In contrast, Strabo claimed that Herodotus was wrong about the Nile and Egypt, because Strabo thought that Egypt was a gift of both the Nile and Egyptians. He underscored the fact that whoever visited Egypt could not know anything about Egypt before understanding the nature of the Nile.⁴ This nature was mentioned by many writers who described water of the Nile as so sweet that the Egyptians had no desire to drink wine.⁵ In the fourth century, Emperor Julian (361-363 AD) said the Egyptians believed that the Nile was not only the saviour and benefactor of the land, but it also warded off the ruin afflicted by the fire of the sun in the summer.⁶

This paper will compare Greco-Roman and Byzantine writings by studying many themes concerning the name of the Nile, its southern sources and northern mouths, floods, animals, plants, people, the most important cities in its banks, the role of the Nile in diplomacy and war, and finally the economic importance of the Nile in the Byzantine era. We'll use several methodologies to discuss this topic through description and analysis to answer the following question: Did the portrayal of the Nile in the Byzantine writings parallel or differ from the Greek and Roman sources?

¹Herodotus, *The History*, trans. A. D. Godley, in *The Loeb Classical Library* 117–120, London and Cambridge 1975, Vol. I, II.10.

²Herodotus, *The History*, Vol. I, II.5.

³“Αἰγυπτίους μὲν γὰρ παρὰ τοῦ Νεῖλου ἡγή.” Philostratus the Younger, *Imagines*, trans. A. Fairbanks, London - New York 1931, II.14.

⁴Strabo, *The Geography*, trans. H. L. Jones, London - Cambridge 1967, Vol. I, I.2.29.

⁵Heliodorus, *The Aethiopica*, The Athenian Society's Publications 5 (Athens 1897) II. 28. In the fourth century Aelius Spartianus said: “si quidem tanta illius fluminis dulcitus, ut accolae vina non quaerant.” Aelius Spartianus, *Pescennius Niger*, in *Historia Augusta*, trans. D. Magie, in *The Loeb Classical Library* 139–140, 263, London – Cambridge 1991, VII.7–8.

⁶Julian, *The Works of the emperor Julian*, trans. W. C. Wright, in *The Loeb Classical Library* 13, 29, 157, London - New York 1913, Vol. I, Oration. 3.119B.

The Name of the Nile in the Byzantine Sources

The Nile has many names from ancient times; the Egyptians described it as a God ‘Hapi,’ and worshipped it, because it was the bringer of water and fertility.⁷ In his epic *Odyssey*, Homer called it Αἰγύπτος ‘Mud land,’⁸ but Byzantine historians used a Greek word Νεῖλος for the Nile, which appeared in the fourth century in the writings of Aelius Spartianus as *Nilum*.⁹ This name appeared for the first time in the Greek poems of Hesiod in the eighth century BC.¹⁰ Many Greek and Roman historians followed in the footsteps of Hesiod when they called it Νεῖλος ‘Nile’.¹¹ However, Strabo held the opinion that the name ‘Nile’ should be only applied to the river on the Egyptian side; the part located beyond Meroe (northern Sudan) had three major branches: Ασταβόρας (Atbara) flowed on the eastern side of Meroe; Ασάπους (White Nile); and finally Ασασόβας (Blue Nile).¹² During the sixth and seventh centuries, almost all of the Byzantine writings called the Nile ‘Νεῖλος’. In one of Dioscorus of Aphrodito’s letters (566-570 AD), he compared Athanasius (the duke of Thebes) to the Nile because of his fame.¹³ This is the evidence about the Greek influence on the Byzantine writers. However, we find another trend in the ecclesiastical writings, when the name of *Geon* was mentioned in

⁷ A. Moret, *The Nile and Egyptian Civilization*, trans. M. R. Dobie, London 1972, p. 28.

⁸ Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. A. T. Murray, in *The Loeb Classical Library* 104–105, London – Cambridge 1945, Vol. I, 4. 351.

⁹ “Antinoum suum, dum per Nilum navigat, perdidit, quem muliebriter flevit.” Aelius Spartianus, *Hadrian*, in *Historia Augusta*, trans. D. Magie, in *The Loeb Classical Library* 139–140, 263, London – Cambridge 1991, XIV. 5–6.

¹⁰ “Τῆθὺς δ’ Ὠκεανῷ ποταμοὺς τέκε δινήεντας, Νεῖλον τ’ Ἀλφειον.” Hesiod, *Theogony*, trans. G. W. Most, in *Theogony, Works and Days, Testimonia*, in *The Loeb Classical Library* 57, London - Cambridge 2006, I.337.

¹¹ Herodotus, *The History*, Vol. 1, II.10–11, 13, 15–16–20, 22, 24–29, 31–35, 72, 90, 93, 97, 99, 108, 111, 113, 116, 124, 127, 138, 149–150, 154–155, 158, 179; Diodorus of Sicily, *The History of Diodorus Sicily*, trans. C. H. Oldfather, in *The Loeb Classical Library*, Vol. II, London - Cambridge 1967, II.35.2, 43.4, III.1.1, 3.2, 8.1, 10.1, 34.7, IV.2.3, 27.3; Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, trans. E. Care, in *The Loeb Classical Library*, London - New York 1914–1927, Vol. VIII, LXV.8.1, LXIX.11.2.

¹² Strabo, *The Geography*, Vol. VIII, 17.1.2. cf. Ch. Beke, “On the Nile and Its Tributaries,” *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 17 (1847), pp. 2–27.

¹³ *P. Lond. Lit.* 100D; L. S. B. MacCoull, *Dioscorus of Aphrodito, his Work and his World*, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London 1988, pp. 86–7.

the Byzantine period. In the geographical dictionary *Onomasticon*, Eusebius of Caesarea called the Nile *Gaion*, and Jerome translated Eusebius's word as *Geon*.¹⁴ This name was identical with the biblical river *Gihon* in the Old Testament (Gen. 2:13), which flowed from paradise through the Ethiopian Land.¹⁵ The latter idea was already stated in Philostorgius' History,¹⁶ and the *Chronographia* of George Syncellus as *Geion* or *Chrysorroas* 'streaming with gold'.¹⁷ Similarly, Cosmas Indicopleustes (the Egyptian traveler) called the Nile *Geon*.¹⁸ Additionally, Palladius, bishop of Helenopolis, and John of Nikiu called the Nile *Gihon*,¹⁹ but Cosmas still used the word 'Neilos',²⁰ and John of Nikiu repeated the word 'river' to describe the Nile in almost all of his history.²¹

In papyri, the Nile is simply called ποταμος 'river',²² not *Neilos* or *Nilum* as in the literary sources. However, the name *Neilos* is used in people's names, as Νείλος Νείλο, Νείλος Δίδα, Νείλος Ζωσίμου, Αύρηλιος Νείλος,²³ and Νείλος ὀργάνARIOS, 'the waterworks-engineer' in Arsinoe district.²⁴

¹⁴ Eusebius of Caesarea, *The Onomasticon, Palestine in the Fourth Century*, trans. G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville, Jerusalem 2003, pp. 60–1.

¹⁵ D. W. Johnson and A. Culter, vs. "Nile, Νείλος," *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. A. P. Kazhdan and A. M. Talbot, New York - Oxford 1991, Vol. III, p.1486.

¹⁶ Philostorgius, *Church History*, trans. Ph. R. Amidon, *Society of Biblical Literature*, Leiden – Boston 2007, 3.10.

¹⁷ George Synkellos, *The Chronographia, A Byzantine Chronicle of Universal History from the Creation*, trans. W. Adler and P. Tuffin, London 2002, pp. 47, 53.

¹⁸ Cosmas Indicopleustes, *The Christian Topography of Cosmas, an Egyptian Monk*, ed. and trans. J. W. McCrindle, New York – London 2010, II.133.

¹⁹ Palladius bishop of Helenopolis, *The Paradise of the Holy Fathers*, trans. E. A. W. Budge, *The Assyrian and Egyptian Antiquities in the British Museum*, London 1907, Vol. I, p. 32; John of Nikiu, *The Chronicle*, trans. from Zotenberg's Ethiopic text by R. H. Charles, London 1916, XVI.2, XXXI.4, LI.42, LXVII.7, LXXII.19, XCV.13.

²⁰ Cosmas Indicopleustes, *The Christian Topography*, II.133.

²¹ John of Nikiu, *The Chronicle*, XVIII.2–3, XXXI.4–5, LI.43, LXXXII.20, LXXXIX.32, XCVII.21–23, CIX.8–9, 12, CXI. 8, 11, 15–16, CXII. 3–4, CXIII. 1–3, 5, CXIV. 2, 4, CXV. 2, 5, CXVIII. 3, 6–7.

²² CPR 7.42.6,10 (Arsinoites, AD 401–500).

²³ BGU 1.217.r2.9,13, r3.4 (Arsinoites 101CE–300 CE); 2.364.19 (Arsinoites 11 Sept. 553).

²⁴ CPR 14. 41.5 (501–700 CE).

Sources and Mouths of the Nile

The sources of the Nile aroused much controversy among writers, who represented three opinions: first, the sources of the Nile were located in the great lake between the city of Syene (Aswan) and Elephantine, which was called the island of Tachompso.²⁵ The second opinion was that the sources of the Nile were in Mauritania by Mount Atlas, toward the west and close to the ocean itself (figure. 1). The Greeks called it the pillar of the sky, because no one has ever ascended its summit or seen its peaks, which were always covered with snow.²⁶ During the summer, it sent down a huge amount of water, which flowed through arid deserts for a distance of a twenty-day journey until western Ethiopia, where the Nile made the island of Meroe (Napata) in the lake called Nilides or Nigris, which was supposedly the source of the Nile. As for the third opinion, it said that the Nilepia, and began at the boundaries of Ethio²⁸, 'sourced-heavenlywas '²⁷ extended to the Delta (figure 2).²⁹

In the Byzantine period, Eusebius of Caesarea and Cosmas Indicopleustes supported the third opinion, which claimed that the Nile flowed from Ethiopia in the summer, which begins in the Egyptian month *Epiphi* (July) and continues till *Thoth* (September), during which time it rains and numerous rivers arise, all of which flow into the Nile.³⁰ However, Ammianus Marcellinus relied on Herodotus' evidence when he said that the springs of the Nile were not known until his time. He was strongly opposed to the opinion that the Nile sprang from a mountain situated in Mauritania, beside the ocean. Rather, he believed that the river flowed through the regions of Ethiopia and went under various names until it reached the cataracts (steep rocks). However, he didn't know from

²⁵ Herodotus, *The History*, Vol. I, II. 28-29. Herodotus Probably depended on a Hymn to the Nile, which he translated from the Egyptian priests that said the Nile came from the ocean, which is encircling the earth. Cf. R. Cribiore, "A Hymn to the Nile," *ZPE* 106 (1995), pp. 97-106.

²⁶ Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, Vol. IX, LXXVI.13.4.

²⁷ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, trans. H. Rackham, in *The Loeb Classical Library*, London - Cambridge 1967, Vol. II, V.10.51; "Apud Hesperios Aethiopas fons est Nigris, ut plerique existimavere, Nili caput." Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, Vol. III, VIII. 32.77.

²⁸ Homer, *The Odyssey*, Vol. I, 4. 477; Strabo, *The Geography*, Vol. I, I.2.29.

²⁹ Strabo, *The Geography*, Vol. I, I.2.32.

³⁰ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Onomasticon*, pp. 60-61; Cosmas Indicopleustes, *The Christian Topography*, II.133, 140. Cf. L. P. Kirwan, "The Christian Topography and the Kingdom of Axum," *GJ* 138/2 (1972), p. 170.

where the water originated.³¹ Although he knew good information on the sources of the Nile, according to Herodotus, he wrote that the sources of the Nile would not be known to posterity, as they had been.

Regarding the water of the river, Athanasius of Alexandria said that the source of the Nile sprang in the highlands of Ethiopia in summer, which caused the flood of the river before it came to Egypt.³² Additionally, many writers described the springs of the Nile, such as the poet Claudius Claudianus, who imagined that he went into the heat of the desert towards the south to search out the hidden sources of the Nile;³³ he was heading for Ethiopia and leaving the whole world behind.³⁴ In a similar way, Dioscorus of Aphrodito described the fame of the lineage of St. Colluthus (the patron saint of Antinoe) as extending as far as the sources of the Nile.³⁵

With reference to the source of the White Nile, it was said to be in the mountains farther south. This information was probably gathered from indigenous traders or Byzantine travellers who visited those sites. Olympiodoros of Thebes did not explore as far as the Nile in Lower Nubia when he sojourned in a southern area of Thebes. He spoke about the five Nubian towns: Prima, Phoenico, Chiris, Thapis and Talmis.³⁶ Cosmas Indicopleustes described the Nile's sources when he said that the Nile flowed from low-lying regions in the south towards the northern regions.³⁷

Many ancient writers conceived of the Nile as a boundary marker between Asia and Libya, and the meridian was drawn approximately along the course of the Nile from Meroe in Ethiopia to Alexandria, a distance of roughly ten thousand *stades*, or *ca.* 1980 km.³⁸ Many Byzantine writers said that the Nile flowed through seven mouths, each of which had the

³¹ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, ed. and trans. J. C. Rolfe, in *The Loeb Classical Library*, Vol. II, London - Cambridge 1935–2000, XXII.15.3, 7–9.

³² Athanasius of Alexandria, *Vita S. Antoni or Life of Antony*, in *Select Works and Letters by Athanasius*, ed. and trans. by H. Ellershaw, with notes and commentaries by A. Robertson, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* 4, Edinburgh-Michigan 1891, p. 32.

³³ Claudius Claudianus, *Poems*, trans. M. Platnauer, in *The Loeb Classical Library* 134–35, London - Cambridge 1990, Vol. I, *De Consulatu Stilichonis*, I (XXI) vs. 179–80.

³⁴ Claudius Claudianus, *Poems*, Vol. I, in *Rufinum Liber Secundus*, V. vs. 244–45.

³⁵ *P. Cair. Masp.* I 67120 vB; MacCoull, *Dioscorus of Aphrodito*, pp. 96–7.

³⁶ Olympiodoros of Thebes, *Fragmenta*, trans. R. C. Blockley, in *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire*, Vol. II, Liverpool 1983, fr. 35.

³⁷ Cosmas Indicopleustes, *The Christian Topography*, II.133.

³⁸ Strabo, *The Geography*, Vol. I, I.2.22, II.5.7; Diodorus of Sicily, *The History*, Vol. II, III.3.2–3.

appearance of an uninterrupted river and emptied into the sea. Those streams were given the following names: the Heracleotic or Canopic, Sebennyitic, Pathmitic, Mendesian, Tanitic, and Pelusiatic.³⁹ But the main branches of the lower part of the Nile were formed by the two branches: the Pelusiatic to the east and the Canopic 'Heracleotic' to the west, with 280 km between the two mouths. This made Lower Egypt an island in the shape of a triangle, which is why it was called by the Greek letter Δ.⁴⁰ In the fifth century, the poets Claudius Claudianus and Nonnos of Panopolis approved the opinion that the Nile had seven mouths.⁴¹

The Nile Flood

As far as the Nile's deluge is concerned, it was described by many Greek, Roman and Byzantine writers, but they were divided into two groups: the first opinion said that the etesian winds hindered the river from flowing out into the north.⁴² Pliny the Elder (23 AD) was a proponent of this view, emphasizing that the etesian winds blew in the opposite direction at that time of the year. In the summer, the rains of Ethiopia were due to the same etesian winds, which brought clouds from the rest of the world to Egypt. In the meantime, the Nile began to flow again at the rising of the Dog-star, when the sun entered the sign of the Lion. On the other hand, when the sun entered the sign of Virgo, the Nile began to fall with the same speed as when it rose.⁴³ According to the second opinion, the Nile flowed because the sun was the driving force behind the Nile's flood, and attracted the water to it, so that the winds drove the water to the south. Afterwards, the water crashed into the mountains at the Nile's springs, and thus the rains flowed at that point, making the Nile flood in the summer.⁴⁴

In the fourth century, Ammianus Marcellinus did not believe, as others did, that the Nile's flood occurred because of the congealed masses of snow in the north which, when melted, formed clouds due to the heat of

³⁹ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, Vol. II, XXII.15.10; John Cassian, *Conferences*, trans. E. C. S. Gibson, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* 11, Edinburgh - New York 1893, III.18.1.

⁴⁰ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, Vol. II, V.9.48.

⁴¹ "hinc bibat aestivum septemo gurgite Nilum." Claudius Claudianus, *Poems*, Vol. I, In *Rufinum Liber Primus*, III. vs. 185; "Βλέμυς ὠκύς ἵκανε ἐς ἐπαπόρου στόμα Νείλου," Nonnos of Panopolis, *Dionysiaca*, trans. W. H. D. Rouse, in *The Loeb Classical Library*, London - Cambridge 1940, Vol. II, 17.394; 26.245.

⁴² Herodotus, *The History*, Vol. I, II.20.

⁴³ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, Vol. II, V.10.55–56.

⁴⁴ Herodotus, *The History*, Vol. I, II. 24; Heliodorus, *The Aethiopica*, II.28.

the sun. According to this theory, the clouds were then driven towards the south by the etesian winds; hence the heavy rains overflowed on the southern springs of the Nile and the flood came because of the Ethiopian rains falling in those regions in the season of torrid heat. Ammianus saw that both of these reasons seemed to be out of harmony with the truth.⁴⁵ Ammianus got his evidence from the ancient writers who said that the cause of the Nile's deluge was the etesian winds blowing for forty-five days and hindering the river from flowing out into the north; consequently, the water covered all the ground. The flood started when the sun was in Cancer and the river increased until it passed into Libra and flowed at high water at about sixteen cubits for a hundred days, then it became smaller.⁴⁶

Nonnos of Panopolis held the view that the Nile's flood took place in summer, when the star of Cancer was right opposite Capricorn.⁴⁷ In a similar way, the poet Claudius Claudianus presented two opinions about the date of the Nile's flood. First, he mentioned that the Nile's flood took place in winter.⁴⁸ However, he claimed that the flood was in the summer, too.⁴⁹ Maybe, Claudius Claudianus used two different sources, which speak about the Nile. According to Claudius Claudianus, the Nile flowed more beneficently and powerfully than all other rivers; a fact that remained a mystery,⁵⁰ since it used to leave a trail of ruin along the banks of all its seven mouths.⁵¹

At the end of the sixth century, Dioscorus of Aphrodito believed that the Nile flowed forth and covered Egypt's fields.⁵² At the same time, Cosmas Indicopleustes wrote about the Nile's flood that began from the Abyssinian plateau (Lake Tana), which accounted for the heavy downpour in winter on the numerous rivers, but coincided with the summer season in Egypt. Those occurrences began in July and continued until September,

⁴⁵ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, Vol. II, XXII.15.5.

⁴⁶ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, Vol. II, XXII.15.3–13.

⁴⁷ Nonnos of Panopolis, *Dionysiaca*, Vol. II, 17. vs 394; 26. vs 245; Vol. III, 38. vs 284–7.

⁴⁸ “ante dabunt hiemes Nilum, per flumina dammae errabunt.” Claudius Claudianus, *Poems*, Vol. I, *Panegyricus dictus Probrino et Olybrio Consulibus* I. vs. 169.

⁴⁹ “hinc bibat aestivum septeno gurgite Nilum.” Claudius Claudianus, *Poems*, Vol. I, in *Rufinum Liber Primus* I (III) vs. 185.

⁵⁰ Claudius Claudianus, *Poems*, Vol. I. *Panegyricus dictus Manlio Theodoro Consuli XVII* vs. 232–3.

⁵¹ Claudius Claudianus, *Poems*, Vol. II. *Deprecatio ad Hadrianum XXII* (XXXIX) vs. 57–8.

⁵² P. Cairo. *Masp.* 67315, 67317; MacCoull, *Dioscorus of Aphrodito*, pp. 91–3, 137–40.

making the Nile flood.⁵³ At that time, Egypt used to be covered with the regular floods, making boats the only available means of transportation which the Egyptians used to go to the tombs during the Nile's flood; this time of year was therefore not a busy time.⁵⁴

After Emperor Constantine I became increasingly attentive to the interests of the Christians and abandoned the heathen superstitions, in which it was affirmed that Serapis brought up the Nile for the purpose of irrigating Egypt because a Nilometer was ritually carried into his temple, Constantine directed his ambassador Alexander to transfer it to the church. Although many pagans predicted that the Nile would not overflow because of the displeasure of Serapis, there was an inundation in the following year that took place regularly; thus, it was categorically proved that the rising of the Nile was not in consequence of their superstition.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the pagan rituals continued until the beginning of fifth century because Sozomen and Theophanes Confessor mocked the claim that the river would cease to flow if the sacrificial offerings stopped; as a consequence, the blood would not be mingled with the waters that derive their source from the paradise of God.⁵⁶

In the Roman era, the Nile's deluge used to rise at an average rate of 24 feet, that is equal 16 cubits, while the largest rise recorded 27 feet,⁵⁷ that is why the famous statue of the Nile in the Vatican Museum in Rome, which represents the reclining god holding ears of corn and a cornucopia, was surrounded by sixteen children, each one simulated a cubit high of water (figure. 3),⁵⁸ to herald the advent of great floods for the Egyptians.⁵⁹ However, in the Byzantine period, the Nile flood probably did not rise over 12 cubits.⁶⁰

⁵³ Cosmas Indicopleustes, *The Christian Topography*, II.140.

⁵⁴ John Cassian, *Conferences*, II (XV) 3.

⁵⁵ Socrates, *The Ecclesiastical History of Socrates Scholasticus*, trans. A. C. Zenos, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* 2, Oxford – London 1890, I.18; Sozomen *The Ecclesiastical History*, trans. C. D. Hartranft, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* 2, Oxford - London 1890, I.8; Theophanes Confessor, *The Chronicle, Byzantine and Near Eastern History AD 284-813*, trans. C. Mango and R. Scott, Oxford 1997, p. 27.

⁵⁶ Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, VII.20; Theophanes Confessor, *The Chronicle*, p. 112.

⁵⁷ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, Vol. II, V.10.58.

⁵⁸ Moret, *The Nile*, p. 32; A. Farah, *Al-Nīl fī al-Maṣāder al-Ighrīqiya* "The Nile in the Greek Sources," Cairo 2012, pp. 65–6 (in Arabic).

⁵⁹ Philostratus the Younger, *Imagines*, I.5.

⁶⁰ *The Theodosian Code*, trans. C. Pharr, New York 1951, 9.32.

Animals and Plants

Interestingly, Egypt had incredibly rich flora and fauna, with the result that many animals and plants have been found on both banks of the Nile since antiquity. In the fourth century, Ammianus referred to many animals which lived on land and in water of the Nile (and therefore amphibious) such as crocodiles, which he described as destructive monsters, sometimes with a length of eighteen cubits.⁶¹ In the sixth century, Timotheus of Gaza said that crocodiles live in two rivers only, in the Nile and in Hydaspes (a river in India). Additionally, he described how Egyptians catch the crocodiles: after anointing themselves with crocodile grease, they jump into the Nile on the backs of crocodiles and catch them.⁶² These animals were mentioned by several Greek historians who said that there were many crocodiles in the Nile,⁶³ which the Egyptians used to call *champsae*. Most interestingly, some Egyptians, especially those who lived in Thebes and by Lake Moeris (Qarūn in Fayoum), considered the crocodiles sacred. On the other extreme, others in Elephantine regarded the crocodiles as enemies and hunted them in various ways.⁶⁴

The Nile also had hippopotamuses, which were described as amphibious animals with cloven hooves like a horse,⁶⁵ and as similar to the elephant, because they both have tough skin. Timotheus of Gaza described how the hippopotamus goes up to the fields to eat grass when the water of the Nile was at low level.⁶⁶ In the sixth century, Timotheus of Gaza also described the Egyptian rhinoceros, which was similar in size to the hippopotamus, but its nose has a horn and lives near the Nile.⁶⁷ Furthermore, there are many wild animals that are carnivorous, such as

⁶¹ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, Vol. II, XXII.15.14–16.

⁶² Timotheus of Gaza, *On Animals PERI ZWVN, Fragments of a Byzantine Paraphrase of an Animal-Book of the 5th Century AD*, trans. F. S. Bodenheimer and A. Rabinowitz, *collection de travaux de l'académie internationale d'histoire des sciences* 3, Paris - Leiden 1949, 42.1, 7.

⁶³ Herodotus, *The History*, Vol. I, II. 68; Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, Vol. IX, LXXVI.13.4.

⁶⁴ Herodotus, *The History*, Vol. I, II. 69–70.

⁶⁵ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, Vol. II, XXII.15.21; Timotheus of Gaza, *On Animals*, 44.1–2. hippopotamus was sacred in the Lower Egypt in the ancient time. See Herodotus, *The History*, Vol. I, II.71; Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, Vol. III, VII.30.73.

⁶⁶ Timotheus of Gaza, *On Animals*, 44.1–3.

⁶⁷ Timotheus of Gaza, *On Animals*, 45.1. Pliny the Elder opined that there was an animal called the *catoblepas* (gnu) near the spring of Nigris in western Ethiopia. Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, Vol. III, VIII. 32.77.

lions, leopards, and hyenas that live alongside giraffes, and *kynokephaloses* ('the dog-faced baboons'), as well as buffalos, elephants, horned boars, and giant snakes.⁶⁸

There were also many birds living around the Nile, one of which was the *Χηναλώπεκας* ('the Egyptian goose'),⁶⁹ about which Dioscoursus of Aphroditon wrote at the end of the sixth century. Additionally, there was a little bird called the *Trochilus* ('Egyptian warbler') that lived on the crocodiles where it looked for bits of food when the crocodiles slept.⁷⁰ Finally, the ibis was the most well-known Egyptian bird in antiquity.⁷¹ Ammianus Marcellinus, who was the most prolific writer in the fourth century, described the ibis, when he translated Herodotus' description of it: he said that the bird is sacred, harmless, and beloved by Egyptians, because it met the winged armies of snakes which issued from Arabia *Provincia*. By this description, he certainly was describing the role of the ibis in killing locusts.⁷²

The Nile contained a lot of fish called scale-fish as well as eel.⁷³ In the papyri, we read about catching ὁ ψάριον ('the fish') and using it as food.⁷⁴ In other places we read ὁ ψάριον ποταμίου ('the fish of the river'), indicating the Nile.⁷⁵

Most importantly, the Nile gave life to many plants on its banks. In Thebes, nearly 40 miles from the Nile, an olive-producing forest was found. The region also contained the Egyptian palm tree, which produced the sweetest fruit in the winter; it contained a large pit providing the natives with quite a harvest. After cleaning the fruit, they crushed the pits and made it into cakes for storage. There was also once a forest region close to Memphis with such enormous trees that three men could not join hands around a tree's perimeter.⁷⁶

Additionally, lilies were the most well-known plants growing in the water of the Nile. The Egyptians called the lily 'lotus,' which they dried in

⁶⁸ P. G. P. Meyboom, *The Nile Mosaic of Palestrina: Early Evidence of Egyptian Religion in Italy*, Leiden – New York – Köln 1994, p. 47.

⁶⁹ Herodotus, *The History*, Vol. I, II.72–73.

⁷⁰ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, Vol. II, XXII.15.14–16; Timotheus of Gaza, *On Animals*, 42.13–14.

⁷¹ Herodotus, *The History*, Vol. I. II.76.

⁷² Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, Vol. II, XXII.15.26.

⁷³ Herodotus, *The History*, Vol. I. II.76.

⁷⁴ *P. Wisc.* 2.60.12 (IIIrd Century AD).

⁷⁵ *CPR* 7.42.6 (Arsinoites AD 401–500).

⁷⁶ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, Vol. IV, XIII.19.63–65.

the sun to get plant-based bread.⁷⁷ Most significantly, papyrus was a key item of Egyptian merchandise in the Byzantine era. It used to grow everywhere along the banks of the Nile and was used to create paper by monks. They also collected the leaves of papyrus in long, slender bundles to make mats.⁷⁸

People and Cities

Demographically, the border of Egypt in antiquity reached just beyond Elephantine, where the country of Nubia began. At that point, an island was populated by Ethiopians and Egyptians, surrounded by a large lake on the shores of which many Ethiopian nomads dwelt.⁷⁹ Cosmas in the sixth century counted the Ethiopian tribes such as Atalmo, Tangaites and Bega.⁸⁰ Regrettably, the Ethiopian nomads advanced to Elephantine with their leaders, ravaged everything, and took over Meroe 'Napata' among other cities as their capital.⁸¹ The Romans tried to protect southern Egypt from these nomads: Septimius Severus sailed to upper Egypt in 200 AD, and by crossing the Nile, he had a panoramic view of the whole country. Unfortunately, he was unable to cross the frontier of Ethiopia because of a pestilence.⁸²

As a matter of fact, Ammianus described many tribes as Blemmyes who dwelt on the Nile banks. The Blemmyes were warriors, half-naked in dyed cloaks that were waist length. They rode swift horses and camels at all times and never ploughed or cultivated the soil. Thus, they roamed over wide and extensive tracts without fixed abodes or laws. Their life was always on the move. A wife would offer her husband a spear and a tent as a dowry under a temporary contract with the right to leave him after a stipulated time, if she so decided.⁸³ Ammianus elicited this evidence from Diodorus of Sicily who confirmed that the majority of Ethiopians lived by the banks of the Nile and the islands in the river, whereas others populated a region called the Arabian mountains located between the Nile and the

⁷⁷ Herodotus, *The History*, Vol. I, II.92.

⁷⁸ John Cassian, *Conferences*, I.23.

⁷⁹ Herodotus, *The History*, Vol. I, II.29.

⁸⁰ Cosmas Indicopleustes, *The Christian Topography*, II.142.

⁸¹ Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, Vol. VI, LIV.5–6.

⁸² Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, Vol. IX, LXXVI.12.4.

⁸³ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, Vol. I, XIV.4.1-3. Török says that around 370 AD, the king of the Blemmyes dwelled in the Eastern Desert in Egypt. L. Török, "A Contribution to Post-Meroitic Chronology: the Blemmyes in Lower Nubia," *RStO* 58, Fasc. 1/4 (1984), p. 219.

Red Sea. Other Ethiopians resided in the heart of Libya. The Ethiopians who dwelt along the Nile had dark complexions, flat noses, and woolly hair. They were savage-looking, barbaric, and spoke with a shrill voice; some of them used shields of raw ox-hide, short spears, and wooden bows. The women were also well-armed. Most Ethiopians were naked; however, some of them protected their bodies from the heat of the sun by skins of sheep and goats and wore bronze rings in their lips. They used some grasses as a source of food, while others gathered wild fruits by lakes and marshes. Some Ethiopians sowed sesame and lotus, while others fed on the tender roots of the reeds. However, the majority of Ethiopians lived on the meat, milk, and cheese of their cattle.⁸⁴

Ammianus described the Egyptian nation as the most ancient of all. On the southern border, it extended to Elephantine, Meroe, and some cities of Ethiopia. The eastern boundaries bordered the Red Sea.⁸⁵ During the sixth century, John Malalas devoted more attention to the description of the Nile and said that the tribe of Ham, Noah's second son, dwelled in the region around the Nile, Africa, and as far as Mauritania to the Pillars of Hercules.⁸⁶ Procopius of Caesarea described the distance from Axum to the Egyptian boundaries, where the city of Elephantine was situated. This distance was a thirty-day journey and contained many nations, among which were the Blemmyes and the Nobatae. As for the Blemmyes, they dwelled in the central portion, whereas the Nobatae dominated the territory closer to the river Nile.⁸⁷ The capital Meroe was encircled by Nile, where the people decorated their hair with arrows.⁸⁸

Economic importance of the Nile

The Nile represented an important economic means for Egypt since antiquity. The importance of the Nile was apparent for agriculture, but the Egyptian farmers only knew the Nile as ποταμιον ('river') in their papyri,⁸⁹ especially when writing about the conflicts between peasants living by the Nile. When the central government in Constantinople weakened in the control of the distribution of water, many peasants stole

⁸⁴ Diodorus of Sicily, *The History*, Vol. II, III.7–8.

⁸⁵ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, Vol. II, XXII.15.1–3.

⁸⁶ J. Malalas, *The Chronicle of John Malalas*, trans. E. Jeffreys, M. Jeffreys and R. Scott, *ByzAus* 4, Melbourne 1986, 1.6.

⁸⁷ Procopius of Caesarea, *History of the Wars*, trans. H. B. Dewing, in *The Loeb Classical Library*, London – New York 1914, Vol. I, I.19.27–29.

⁸⁸ Claudius Claudianus, *Poems*, Vol. I, *Epithalamium* X. vs. 222–223.

⁸⁹ CPR 7.42.6,10 (Arsinoites AD 401–500).

water or broke down the dykes before the flood had reached the twelve-cubit mark. This occurred when Menas, the *pagarch* of Antaeopolis, closed the canal which supplied Aphrodito to divert the water for his own district, and the peasants were helpless to face him,⁹⁰ with the result that many villages fought over the division of the water.⁹¹

During the Byzantine period, the importance of the Nile was described by Gregory of Nazianzen, who said that the Egyptians portrayed the Nile in their songs as 'the giver of fruits, corn and the measurer of happiness by its cubits', where the prosperity of the country was proportionate to the annual rise of the river during the flood.⁹² In the fifth century, the Egyptian poet Claudius said that the Egyptian soil was the best kind, and Carthage's in North Africa was second, because the Egyptian soil is unequalled in its prolific production of corn.⁹³ This appeared in Egeria's description of her journey to Egypt at the end of the fourth century when she referred to the soil in the eastern Delta where fields produced vineyards; others produced balsam, orchards, heavily cultivated fields, and numerous gardens along the banks of the Nile.⁹⁴

The Nile supported the people with clay, with which pottery of various colours was produced. All of this production was for domestic and religious purposes. Many Egyptian cities were famous for their industry including Menas, Hermopolis, Aphrodito, Arsinoe, Hermonthis, Oxyrhynchus, and Thebes.⁹⁵ Egyptian papyrus was the chief source of paper, and it was a key item in Egyptian merchandise in the Byzantine era. It used to grow everywhere along the banks of the Nile.⁹⁶

The Egyptians used the Nile as a means of transportation with the aim of travelling from anywhere in Egypt towards Alexandria on the coast of the Mediterranean,⁹⁷ using corn ships rowed by three hundred oarsmen,⁹⁸

⁹⁰ *P. Cairo. Masp.* 67002 (c.522 AD ?). Cf. A. Ch Johnson and L. C. West, *Byzantine Egypt: Economic Studies*, Amsterdam 1967, p. 11.

⁹¹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Vita S. Antoni*, p. 50.

⁹² Gregory of Nazianzen, *Select Orations*, trans. C. G. Browne and J. E. Swallow, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* 7, New York 1893, Or. 39.5.

⁹³ Claudius Claudianus, *Pomes*, Vol. I, *De Bello Gildonico* 1 (XV), vs 56–65.

⁹⁴ Egeria, *Diary of a pilgrimage*, trans. G. E. Gingras, in *Ancient Christian Writers* 38, ed. J. Quasten et als., New York 1970, p. 9.

⁹⁵ Johnson and West, *Byzantine Egypt*, pp. 113–116.

⁹⁶ John Cassian, *Conferences*, I.1.23.

⁹⁷ *SB* 6.9088.3 (Oxyrhynchites 201-300 CE), 16.12340.3–4 (Hermopolites 312 CE), 16.12636.3 (Hermopolites 301-325 CE), 24.16271.2 (Oxyrhynchites 341CE); *CPR* 17A7.1,22 (Hermopolites 317–327 CE); *P. Thead.* 47 (IV^cs); *P. Sakaon* 29.2 (Arsinoites IVth C.); *P. Amh.* 2.138.5 (327 AD), 144.recto.12 (5th C.); *P. Col.* 7.144

such as when Augustalis of Alexandria had the grain *annona* brought down the Nile to Alexandria and shipped to Constantinople.⁹⁹ On the other side, the Nile connected with the port of Clysma on the Red Sea by Trajan's canal,¹⁰⁰ and connected with Myus Hormus by the desert road between Coptus (on the Nile's bank) and the Red Sea.¹⁰¹ In 531 AD, when Justinian I (527-565 AD) sent his ambassador to the Homerites and Ethiopians, he commanded them to transport Indian goods to Rome by way of the Red Sea and Egypt by using the Nile.¹⁰² The traders sailed from the Ethiopian and Arabian ports in the south of the Red Sea to the Egyptian ports in the north such as Myus Hormus and Clysma. From Myus Hormus, the traders carried their goods by land to Coptus on the Nile's bank, and from there they carried their goods via ships to Alexandria by the Nile.¹⁰³ Additionally, Elephantine in southern Egypt was a very important port for the Ethiopian vessels during the Roman and Byzantine eras, when they traded with the Egyptians.¹⁰⁴

The Nile between diplomacy and war

The Nile played an important role in paving the way for opening diplomatic channels between the Romans and the Ethiopian tribes. The Romans maintained a large garrison after the revolution in Egypt in 297 AD. After crushing the revolution, Diocletian headed for southern Egypt to quash the tribes of Nobatae who plundered the whole region of southern Thebes. He persuaded the tribes to retreat to their own homes and settle along the Nile, promising to bestow upon them great towns and lands better than that which they had previously occupied. In this way, Emperor Diocletian achieved two aims: he prevented them from looting the Egyptian country and he warded off the Blemmyes and other barbarians in

(Karanis AD 335 Nov 3), 7.152 (Karanis AD 345 Sep 23), 7.160–161 (Karanis AD 351–354); *P. Oxy.* 86 (338 AD); *P. Mich.* 20.816 (AD 374 April 10); *P. Cairo. Masp.* 67030 (531 AD); *P. Lond.* 1714 (4 March, 570 AD); *O. Mich.* 1.171–172 (Karanis 300–425CE); Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, III.14; Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, IV.10.

⁹⁸ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, Vol. I, XVII.4.13.

⁹⁹ Johnson and West, *Byzantine Egypt*, p. 156.

¹⁰⁰ John of Nikiu, *The Chronicle*, LXXII.19.

¹⁰¹ Strabo, *The Geography*, Vol. VIII, 17.1.44–45.

¹⁰² Procopius of Caesarea, *History of the Wars*, Vol. I, I.20.9–12; Malalas, *The Chronicle*, 18.56; Theophanes Confessor, *The Chronicle*, pp. 361–362.

¹⁰³ Strabo, *The Geography*, Vol. VIII, 17.1.44–45.

¹⁰⁴ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, Vol. II, V.10.59.

southern Egypt. This pleased the Nobatae who migrated immediately and took possession of all the Roman cities and the land on both sides of the Nile beyond the city of Elephantine. Afterwards, Emperor Diocletian stipulated a fixed sum of gold be given annually to the Blemmyes on the condition that they should no longer loot Roman lands in Egypt. According to Procopius of Caesarea, the Nobatae and Blemmyes continued to receive the tribute until the reign of Justinian I. In the reign of Emperor Diocletian, a very strong fortress close to the city of Elephantine was constructed where he established certain temples and altars for the Romans and the Ethiopian tribes. Furthermore, he made room for priests of both nations to settle in the fortress with the goal of cementing friendship through sharing the things sacred to them. The place was called *Philae* (Lovers) as a result.¹⁰⁵

Emperor Diocletian moved the *Legio prima Maximiana* to Philae to prevent the threatening of Blemmyes and Nobatae,¹⁰⁶ as well as translated the *Legio tertia Diocletiana* Thebes for the province of Thebes,¹⁰⁷ which camped in Apollonis Magna 'Edfu.'¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, Emperor Constantine II (337-340 AD) translated a *uexillatio Parthusagittariorum* from Syria to Diospolis in the province of upper Thebes in 340 AD under the command of Senecio '*comes limitis*' to protect the southern frontier of Egypt from the Nobatae and Blemmyes.¹⁰⁹ This garrison continued to stay in southern Egypt after 425 A.D., which was called *Equites sagittarii indigenae Diospoli* in the '*Notitia Dignitatum*.'¹¹⁰ But the Blemmyes and Nobatae continued their attacks on the province of upper Thebes, especially in Philae and Syene during 425-450 AD. As a result, Appion, bishop of Syene and Philae, sent a request to Emperors Theodosius II (408-450 A.D.) and Valentinianus III (424-454 A.D.) to direct the soldiers to protect

¹⁰⁵ Procopius of Caesarea, *History of the Wars*, Vol. I, I.19.29-36; R. B. Hitchner and A. Kazhdan, vs "Blemmyes (Βλέμνυες)," *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, Vol. I, p. 296; V. Christides, "Ethnic Movements in Southern Egypt and Northern Sudan: Blemmyes-Beja in Late Antique and Early Arab Egypt until 707 AD," *Listy filologické/Folia philologica*, Roč. 103, Čís. 3 (1980), pp. 131-32. About the Byzantine existence in Nubia during the fifth century see T. Hägg, "Nubicograeca I-III (Bemerkungen zu griechischen Texten aus Nubien)," *ZPE* 54 (1984), pp. 101-12.

¹⁰⁶ *Notitia Dignitatum*, ed. O. Seeck, Berlin 1876, Or. XXXI.37.

¹⁰⁷ *Notitia Dignitatum*, Or. XXXI. 38.

¹⁰⁸ D. van-Berchem, *L'armée de Dioclétien et la réforme Constantinienne*, Paris 1952, p. 62.

¹⁰⁹ H. I. Bell et als. (ed.), *The Abinnaeus Archive, Papers of Roman Officer in the Reign of Constantius II*, Oxford 1962, pp. 1, 4-5.

¹¹⁰ *Notitia Dignitatum*, Or. XXXI. 27.

the churches, just as the soldiers in neighbouring Philae were being put at the service of its churches.¹¹¹ Probably, the Byzantine administration responded to this appeal for aid, so, one thousand soldier in *Legio secunda Traiana* was translated from Latopolis 'Esna' to Syene, and was called *Milites Miliarenses*, *Syene*.¹¹² Additionally, *Cohors prima felix Theodosiana* was translated to Elephantin.¹¹³

The Emperor Justinian I (c. 536 AD) decided to destroy both the Nobatae and Blemmyes; accordingly, he promoted Narses and told him to command the troops and raze the pagan temples of the Nobatae and Blemmyes. The Emperor commanded that the priests be put under house arrest and sent the pagan statues to Byzantium.¹¹⁴ At the same time, the Nile was the mean of diplomacy of Justinian I when he sent his ambassador Julian to Esimiphaeus, king of Homerite in Arabia Felix, and Hellestheaeus, king of Axum, in 531 AD to direct their religious community towards joining with the Romans in war against the Persian king, Kovades.¹¹⁵ The ambassador Julian sailed for Alexandria, from whence he sailed on the Nile and reached Ethiopian territory by way of the Red Sea. On arriving at Axum, he described the Ethiopian ceremonies in the palace and the clothes of the king and provincial governors with flautists playing music. When the Byzantine ambassador arrived at Axum, he gave the letter and gifts of Emperor Justinian to the Ethiopian king, who kissed the seal and received the gifts. Upon opening and interpreting the letter, the Ethiopian king read the commands of Justinian to arm against Kovades to destroy the territory bordering on his own, and to sever all commercial exchange with him in the future. As an alternative, the Ethiopians could trade through the country of the Homerites. The Byzantine ambassador returned to Constantinople via the Nile.¹¹⁶

Conclusion

Although the Nile was mentioned in some Byzantine sources during the period between the fourth and seventh centuries, most of those historical and geographical sources got much their information from Greek and

¹¹¹ B. Porten, *The Elephantine Papyri in English: Three Millennia of Cross-Cultural Continuity and Change*, Documenta et monumenta orientis antiqui 22, Leiden – New York – Köln 1996, D 19.

¹¹² *Notitia Dignitatum*, Or. XXXI. 34–5, 37.

¹¹³ *Notitia Dignitatum*, Or. XXXI. 64.

¹¹⁴ Procopius of Caesarea, *History of the Wars*, Vol. I, I.19.36–7.

¹¹⁵ Procopius of Caesarea, *History of the Wars*, Vol. I, I. 20.9–12.

¹¹⁶ Malalas, *The Chronicle*, 18.56.

Roman sources, especially the information about the sources of the Nile and its seven mouths, the causes of the flood, plants, animals that grew and lived on its banks, and the tribes and peoples who lived close to it. Maybe the Byzantine influence was a result of the cultural decline in its later age, which created a dependence and lack of innovation, which pushed them to imitate the Roman writings. The Byzantine writers did not exert themselves to conduct or investigate the Nile, although many of them were Egyptian or had visited Egypt. Although the Byzantine writers differed in their understanding of the Nile, which based on the requirements and variables of the Byzantine era, and was influenced by the Christian writers in that age, yet the name 'Nile' has remained the more common name until now, although the word river 'ποταμιον' was used in the Greek papyri. Finally, the Byzantine historians in the sixth century AD, such as Procopius of Caesarea and John Malalas, mentioned that the Byzantine embassies to Arabia Felix and Ethiopia travelled through the Nile and the Red Sea to make political alliances between Justinian I and the kings of Abyssinia and Homerites, and the role of the river in the consolidation of these relations from the time of the Emperor Diocletian in 297 AD, until the Islamic conquest of Egypt (639-642 AD).

Illustrations

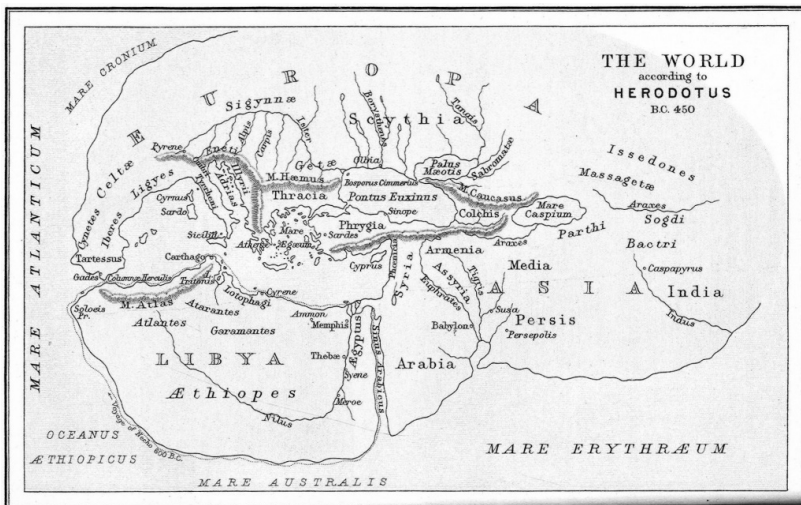


Figure 1: The World according to Herodotus in 450 BC

Source: <http://www.eupedia.com/forum/threads/26277-Illyria/page2>

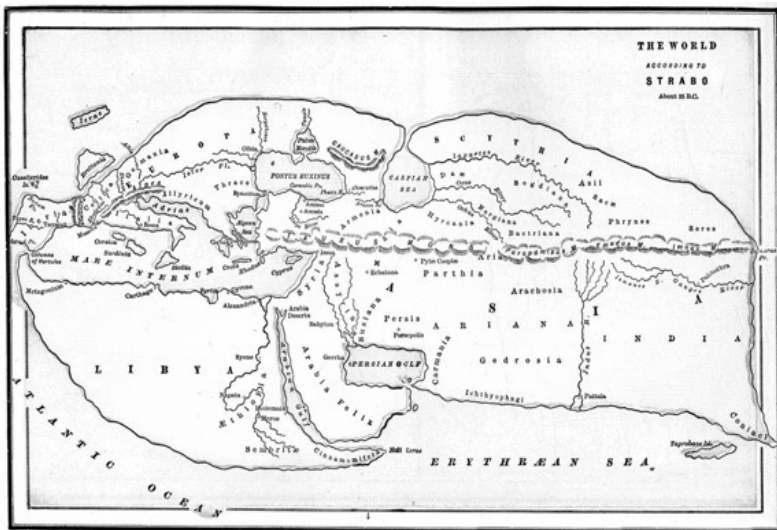


Figure 2: The World according to Strabo in 25 BC, *drawn by George Cram for Cram's Universal Atlas, Geographical, Astronomical and Historical in 1900 CE.*(6)
 Source: <http://beforewinthrop.com/section1/BW1-02-TechMovesWestEurope.html>



Figure 3: Statue of the Nile from Vespasian's Temple of Peace. Musei Vaticani, Roma (Italy). Source: http://www.livius.org/a/1/egypt/nile_vat.JPG

