

branch, issuing at what is called the mouth of Sebennytus, is neither the least in volume, nor the least famous of the three. In addition to these there are two other mouths, the Saitic and Mendesian, which split off from the Sebennytic and so run into the sea. The Bolbitine and Bucolic mouths are not natural branches but excavated channels.

<sup>18</sup> The opinion I have expressed about the extent of Egypt is supported by an oracle delivered from the shrine of Ammon which came to my notice after I had formed my own conclusions.<sup>18</sup> The people of Marea and Apis, on the Libyan frontier, took a dislike to certain religious observances, especially the prohibition against eating the flesh of heifers; accordingly, they went to the shrine of Ammon and said they were in no way bound by Egyptian custom as they considered themselves not to be Egyptians at all, but Libyans; they lived outside the Delta, had nothing in common with Egypt, and wished to be allowed to eat what they pleased. The oracle, however, refused their request, and declared that all the country irrigated by the Nile was Egypt and all the people who lived below Elephantine and drank the Nile's water were Egyptians. Now when the Nile overflows, it floods not only the Delta but parts of the territory on either side supposed to be Libyan and Arabian respectively, to a distance of two days' journey – in some places more, in some less.

About why the Nile behaves precisely as it does I could get no information from the priests or anyone else.<sup>19</sup> What I particularly wished to know was why the water begins to rise at the summer solstice, continues to do so for a hundred days, and then falls again at the end of that period, so that it remains low throughout the winter until the summer solstice comes round again in the following year. Nobody in Egypt could give me any explanation of this, in spite of my constant attempts to find out what was the peculiar property which made the Nile behave in the opposite way to other rivers, and why – another point on which I hoped for information – it was the only river to cause no breezes.

<sup>20</sup> Certain Greeks, hoping to advertise how clever they are, have tried to account for the flooding of the Nile in three different

ways. Two of the explanations are not worth dwelling upon, beyond a bare mention of what they are: one is that the summer north winds cause the water to rise by checking the flow of the current towards the sea. In fact, however, these winds on many occasions have failed to blow, yet the Nile has risen as usual; moreover, if these winds were responsible for the rise, the other rivers which happen to run against them would certainly be affected in the same way as the Nile – and to a greater extent, in that they are smaller and have a less powerful current. There are many such rivers in Syria and Libya, but none of them are affected in the same way as the Nile. The second explanation is less rational, being somewhat, if I may so put it, of a legendary character: it is that the Nile exhibits its remarkable characteristics because it flows from the Ocean, the stream of which encircles the world. The third theory is much the most plausible, but at the same time furthest from the truth; according to this, the water of the Nile comes from melting snow, but as it flows from Libya through Ethiopia into Egypt, that is, from a very hot into a cooler climate, how could it possibly originate in snow? Obviously, this view is as worthless as the other two. Anyone who can 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 of the river: the strongest proof is provided by the winds, which blow hot from those regions; secondly rain and frost are unknown there – and after snow rain is bound to fall within five days. So that if there were snow in that part of the world, there would necessarily be rain too; thirdly, the natives are black because of the hot climate. Again, hawks and swallows remain throughout the year, and cranes migrate thither in winter to escape the cold weather of Scythia. But if there were any snow, however little, in the region through which the Nile flows and in which it rises, none of these things could possibly be; for they are contrary to reason. As to the writer who mentions the Ocean in this connexion, his account is a mere fairy-tale depending upon an unknown quantity and cannot therefore be disproved by argument. I know myself of no river called Ocean, and can only suppose that Homer or some earlier poet invented the name and introduced it into poetry. If, after

later. This is my personal opinion, but for the former part of my statement on these matters I have the authority of the priestesses of Dodona.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>24</sup> About the oracles – that of Dodona in Greece and of Ammon in Libya – the Egyptians have the following legend: according to the priests of the Theban Zeus, two women connected with the service of the temple were carried off by the Phoenicians and sold, one in Libya and the other in Greece, and it was these women who founded the oracles in the two countries. I asked the priests at Thebes what grounds they had for being so sure about this, and they told me that careful search had been made for the women at the time, and that though it was unsuccessful, they had afterwards learned that the facts were just as they had reported them. At Dodona, however, the priestesses who deliver the oracles have a different version of the story: two black doves, they say, flew away from Thebes in Egypt, and one of them alighted at Dodona, the other in Libya. The former, perched on an oak, and speaking with a human voice, told them that there, heard her understand the words to be a command from heaven, and at once obeyed. Similarly the dove which flew to Libya told the Libyans to found the oracle of Ammon – which is also an oracle of Zeus. The people who gave me this information were the three priestesses at Dodona – Phemonia the eldest, Timarete the next, and Nicanora the youngest – and their account is confirmed by the other Dodonaeans connected with the temple.

<sup>26</sup> Personally, however, I would suggest that if the Phoenicians really carried off the women from the temple and sold them respectively in Libya and Greece, the one who was brought to Greece (or Pelasgia as it was then called) must have been sold to the Theoprotians; and later, while she was working as a slave in that part of the country, she built, under an oak that happened to be growing there, a shrine to Zeus; for she would naturally remember in her exile the god whom she had served in her native Thebes. Subsequently, when she had learned to speak Greek, she established an oracle there, and mentioned, in addition, that the same Phoenicians who had sold her, also sold her sister in Libya. The story which the people of Dodona tell about the

doves came, I should say, from the fact that the women were foreigners, whose language sounded to them like the twittering of birds; later on the dove spoke with a human voice, because by that time the woman had stopped twittering and learned to talk intelligibly. That, at least, is how I should explain the obvious impossibility of a dove using the language of men. As to the bird being black, they merely signify by this that the woman was an Egyptian. It is certainly true that the oracles at Thebes and Dodona are similar in character. Another form of divination – by the inspection of sacrificial victims – also came from Egypt.<sup>25</sup>

It was the Egyptians too who originated, and taught the Greeks to use ceremonial meetings, processions, and professional offerings: a fact which can be inferred from the obvious antiquity of such ceremonies in Egypt, compared with Greece, where they have been only recently introduced. The Egyptians meet in solemn assembly not once a year only, but on a number of occasions, the most important and best attended being the festival of Artemis at Bubastis: second in importance is the assembly at Busris – a city in the middle of the Delta, containing a vast temple dedicated to Isis, the Egyptian equivalent of Demeter, in whose honour the meeting is held. Then there are the assemblies in honour of Athene at Saïs, of the Sun at Heliopolis, of Leto at Buto, and of Ares at Papremis. The procedure at Bubastis is this: they come in barges, men and women together, a great number in each boat; on the way, some of the women keep up a continual clamour with castanets and women, sing and clap their hands. Whenever they pass a town on the river-bank, they bring the barge close in-shore, some of the women continuing to act as I have said, while others shout abuse at the women of the place, or start dancing, or stand up and pull up their skirts. When they reach Bubastis they celebrate the festival with elaborate sacrifices, and more wine is consumed than during all the rest of the year. The numbers that meet there are, according to native report, as many as seven hundred thousand men and women – excluding children. I have already mentioned the festival of Isis at Busris: it is here that everybody

courageous enemy who fought valiantly for freedom, he erected pillars on the spot inscribed with his own name and country, and a sentence to indicate that by the might of his armed forces he had won the victory; if, however, a town fell easily into his hands without a struggle, he made an addition to the inscription on the pillar – for not only did he record upon it the same facts as before, but added a picture of a woman's genitals, meaning to show that the people of that town were no braver than women.<sup>28</sup> Thus his victorious progress through Asia continued, until he entered Europe and defeated the Scythians and Thracians; this, I think, was the furthest point the Egyptian army reached for the memorial columns are to be seen in this part of the country but not beyond. On his way back Sesostris came to the river Phasis, and it is quite possible that he here detached a body of troops from his army and left them behind to settle – or, on the other hand, it may be that some of his men were sick of their travels and deserted. I cannot say with certainty which supposition is the right one. But it is undoubtedly a fact that the Colchians are of Egyptian descent. I noticed this myself before I heard anyone else mention it, and when it occurred to me I asked some questions both in Colchis and in Egypt, and found that the Colchians remembered the Egyptians more distinctly than the Egyptians remembered them. The Egyptians did, however, say that they thought the original Colchians were men from Sesostris' army. My own idea on the subject was based first on the fact that they have black skins and woolly hair (not that that amounts to much, as other nations have the same), and secondly, and more especially, on the fact that the Colchians, the Egyptians, and the Ethiopians are the only races which from ancient times have practised circumcision.<sup>29</sup> The Phoenicians and the Syrians of Palestine themselves admit that they learned the practice from Egypt, and the Syrians who live near the rivers Thermodon and Parthenius, as well as their neighbours the Macronians, say that they learnt it only a short time ago from the Colchians. No other nations use circumcision, and all these are without doubt following the Egyptian lead. As between the Egyptians and the Ethiopians, I cannot say which learned from the other, for the custom is evidently a very ancient one; but I

have no doubt that the other nations adopted it as a result of their intercourse with Egypt, and in this belief I am strongly supported by the fact that Phoenicians who have contact with Greece drop the Egyptian usage, and allow their children to go uncircumcised.

And now I think of it, there is a further point of resemblance between the Colchians and Egyptians: they share a method of weaving linen different from that of any other people; and there is also a similarity between them in language and way of living. The linen made in Colchis is known in Greece as Sardonian linen; that which comes from Egypt is called Egyptian.

Most of the memorial pillars which King Sesostris erected in the conquered countries have disappeared, but I have seen some myself in Palestine, with the inscription I mentioned, and the drawing of a woman's genitals. In Ionia also there are two images of Sesostris cut on rock, one on the road from Ephesus to Phocaea, the other on the road between Sardis and Smyrna; in each case the carved figure is nearly seven feet high and represents a man with a spear in his right hand and a bow in his left, and the rest of his equipment to match – partly Egyptian, partly Ethiopian. Across the breast from shoulder to shoulder runs an inscription, cut in the Egyptian sacred script: *By the strength of my shoulders I won this land.* The name and country of the conqueror are not here recorded, and some who have seen the image suppose it to represent Memnon; however, they are wide of the mark, for Sesostris has made the truth plain enough elsewhere.<sup>30</sup>

The priests went on to tell me that Sesostris, on his return home with a host of prisoners from the conquered countries, was met at Daphnae, near Pelusium, by his brother, whom he had left to govern Egypt during his absence, and invited with his sons to a banquet. While they were at dinner, his brother piled faggots round the building and set them on fire. Seeing what had happened, Sesostris at once asked his wife (for she was a member of the party) what he should do about it, and was advised by her to take two of their sons – of whom there were six – and lay them out over the burning wood to make a bridge by which they might walk through the fire to safety. The