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A HYMN TO THE NILE

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A HYMN TO THE NILE

An invocation to the river Nile to flood the country hearing the prayers of the sun, the earth, and men and children who sing his praises is transcribed as a school exercise on two tablets belonging to a notebook.¹ The theme of an invocation to the Nile is ancient and traditional and already appeared on Pharaonic Hymns. It was part of the school *curriculum* even then, as ostraca found at Deir-el-Medineth show.² The Greeks were aware of the existence of hymns to the Nile and Aeschylus, *Suppl.* 1024–1025 wrote, μηδ' ἔτι Νείλου προχοᾶς σέβωμεν ὕμνοις. This hymn is conventional and rhetorical. Most of the images and expressions are predictable and are borrowed from Homer, Hesiod, the later epic tradition, and the imperial prose writers. It is very interesting, however, because it reveals something of that late epic poetry which will have a later flowering in Nonnus' *Dionysiaca*.

The notebook where the hymn appears is complete and shows the work of different hands, pen trials, mathematical exercises, and a list of tax-payers which apparently has nothing to do with a school context. On the second cover there is a name, Ammonios, a student who owned or used the notebook. The poem on the Nile is transcribed on the first and second tablet.³ The wooden border exhibits letters of the alphabet written by the uncertain hand of a beginner, perhaps the same Ammonios who signed the cover, but certainly not the writer of the poem. This is a student at a higher level with a fairly proficient, but not completely regular hand which can be dated on palaeographical grounds to the end of the third or the beginning of the fourth century A.D.

The text of the hymn in the *editio princeps* is unsatisfactory. The diplomatic transcription is correct in some places, but the editor did not understand many verses or even refrained from interpreting them and left them blank. He repeatedly accused the student of being incompetent, of not understanding a text which was given to him on dictation, and not knowing metrics. It is true that the student commits a large number of phonetic mistakes, but such mistakes were very frequent even in the writing of cultivated people and certainly of school teachers. Some of the mistakes (see lines 7, 8, 24) seem to point to a text transcribed from a model. Although the hexameters do not exhibit a technique particularly refined, they observe all the rules of metrics.

¹ The notebook of five waxed tablets is preserved in the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities of the Louvre Museum, inv. MNE-911. It was published by Patrice Caudeirier in *P. Flor.* XVIII 23–32, the volume on wooden and waxed tablets edited by R. Pintaudi and P. J. Sijpesteijn.

² See G. Posener, *Catalogue des ostraca littéraires de Deir el Médineth, Documents de Fouilles de IFAO du Caire* XVIII (1951) nos. 1176 and 1190–93.

³ It occupies a side of each tablet, see *P. Flor.* XVIII Tavv. XXXV–XXXVI.

I will give first an uncorrected transcription of the text, adding only accents, breathings, and spaces between words, then a normalized text and a translation.

A

1 [Νεῖλον + 8]σον ἀναμέλψετε ... γονοίτε
 2 τὸν ποταμῶν πρέσβιστον ἐγίνατο πότνια Τηθύς
 3 ἢ τῶν ἐξ ἱερῶν / ἀπορρόου Ὠκεανοῖο ///
 4 Αἰγύπτου ζαθείης φυσίζοον ὄλβιον ὕδωρ.//
 5 κλυτι πάτερ ποταμῶν καὶ ἐπίγεο σὴν ἐπεὶ γαί[αν],
 6 ἠέλιος καλέει σε θεριγενὲς οἶδμα κομίσει /
 7 καὶ χθῶν γυμνω{θ}χθεῖσα τελεισιγόνων αἰ ὠν'
 8 νῶτον ἀπαπλώσσα μένει χρυσορόον ὕδωρ
 9 ἀνέρες ἐστηῶτες ἐπὶ προχοῆσιν τεῆσιν //
 10 κλήζουσιν Νεῖλοιο διειπετέος φίλον ὕδωρ
 11 καὶ παῖδες φονέντες ἐτήσοιν ὕμνον ἀολλῆς
 12 λισσόμενοι καλέουσι τελειότατόν σε φα
 13 νῆναι / σεῖο γὰρ ἐμποραῖς μερότων γλυκε
 14 ρώτερος αἰόν // οὐκέτι μέ ναύταις ναῖς ἦ
 15 λθον ἀλλ' ἐπὶ γαίαν // νηυσὶν ἐπεμβένου
 16 σιν κυβερνήτες ἅπαντες ///

B

17 φανη...
 18 ἰχθύες ἐν πεδίοισι καὶ οὐ βόες ἀμφινέμον
 19 ται % Νεῖλος γὰρ τὴν πρόσθε βατὴν ἐποίη
 20 σε καὶ ὑγρὴν % καὶ τραφερὴν τέμνουσι βό
 21 ες μετὰ χεύματα Νεῖλου % θάλλεις
 22 αἶα μέλαινα τεὸν σταχυητόκον ὕδωρ
 23 εἰλήκοις ποταμῶν βασιλεῦ κουοτρόφε
 24 <N>εἶλε % σῶ δὲ ρόφ περὶ βωμὸν ἐριγεο σ
 25 ἦσι θηλαῖς % σεῖο δ' ἀεξομένοιο μάκαρ
 26 καὶ πατρίδι κῦδος % τοὺς πλήρεις μερόπος
 27 σι φέρον ἔκεις κανιδίους ///

Text with Revised Orthography and Verses in Sequence

1 [Νεῖλον] ἀναμέλψετε
 2 τὸν ποταμῶν πρέσβιστον ἐγίνατο πότνια Τηθύς·
 3 ἢ τῶν ἐξ ἱερῶν ἀπορρόου Ὠκεανοῖο

- 4 Αἰγύπτου ζαθῆς φυσίζοον ὄλβιον ὕδωρ.
 5 Κλῦθι πάτερ ποταμῶν καὶ ἐπείγιο σὴν ἐπὶ γαῖαν·
 6 ἡέλιος καλέει σε θερειγενὲς οἶδμα κομίσσαι
 7 καὶ χθῶν γυμνωθεῖσα τελεσσιγόνων (ὑμεν)αίων
 8 νῶτον ἀναπλώσασα μένει χρυσορρόον ὕδωρ.
 9 Ἄνερεις ἐστηῶτες ἐπὶ προχοῆσι τεῆσιν
 10 κλήζουσιν Νεῖλοιο διειπετέος φίλον ὕδωρ·
 11 καὶ παῖδες φωνοῦντες ἐτήσιον ὕμνον ἀολλεῖς
 12–13 λισσόμενοι καλέουσι τελειότατόν σε φανῆναι·
 13–14 σεῖο γὰρ ἐλπωραῖς μερόπων γλυκερώτερος αἰών.
 14–15 Οὐκέτι μὲν ναύταις ναῦς ἤλυθον, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ γαῖαν
 15–16 νηυσὶν ἐπεμβαίνουσιν κυβερνητῆρες ἅπαντες.

 18–19 Ἰχθύες ἐν πεδίοισι καὶ οὐ βόες ἀμφινέμονται,
 19–20 Νεῖλος γὰρ τὴν πρόσθε βατὴν ἐποίησε καὶ ὑγρὴν
 20–21 καὶ τραφερὴν τέμνουσι βόες μετὰ χεύματα Νεῖλου.
 21–22 Θάλλεις, αἶα μέλαινα, τὸν σταχυητόκον ὕδωρ.
 23–24 Ἰλήκοις, ποταμῶν βασιλεῦ κου(ρ)οτρόφε Νεῖλε,
 24–25 σῶ δὲ ρόφω περὶ βωμῶν ἐγείρειο σῆσι θυηλαῖς.
 25–26 Σεῖο δ' ἀεξομένοιο, μάκαρ, καὶ πατρίδι κῦδος
 26–27 τοὺς πλήρεις μερόπεσσι φέρων ἤκεις κανιδεῖους.

Translation

- Celebrate, O . . . the Nile with song,
 the oldest river which queen Tethys begot
 or one of the sacred waters of encircling Ocean,
 blessed, life-giving water of holy Egypt.
 5 Harken, father of rivers, and hasten upon your land,
 the sun calls you to bring the wave growing in summer,
 and the earth, naked,
 leaning out its back awaits the water of fruitful marriage streaming with gold.
 Men standing at the river mouth
 10 invoke the beloved water of divine Nile
 and children singing all together the annual hymn
 in prayer invite you to manifest yourself most perfect,
 for through hopes of you the life of mortals is sweeter.
 No longer do ships sail forth with their sailors(?), but on land
 15 with ships all the pilots go.

-
- 18–19 Fishes and not oxen dwell in the plain
 19–20 for the Nile inundated the land formerly accessible by foot
 20–21 and the oxen plough the fertile land after the Nile’s flood.
 21–22 Dark earth, you flourish in your water which produces corn.
 23–24 Be gracious king of rivers, Nile nourisher of children,
 24–25 with your current raise yourself before the altar for your sacrifices.
 25–26 When you are rising, blessed one, our fatherland has glory.
 26–27 You are present bringing to mortals full baskets.

Commentary

1 We do not know to whom the poet is addressing his invocation to celebrate the river Nile (the Egyptians, a chorus of children, the Muses?). The anonymous poet of a song to the Nile of the V–VI century A.D., D. L. Page, *Literary Papyri* (Cambridge, Mass. 1941) 147.2, sings, ἀείσομεν . . . μολπῆς. The remains of the line are hardly visible because much of the hardened wax fell off and there are faint traces on the scratched wood. At the end γόνου meant perhaps “children”, perhaps the second element of a compound. The jussive future expressing command is the equivalent of an imperative and is post-Homeric, cf. H. W. Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge, Mass. 1920) 1917. In the third century B.C. Parmeno of Byzantium, invoking Αἰγύπτιε Ζεῦ Νεῖλε, sang of the inhabitants of different Egyptian towns who worshipped the river (*Suppl. Hell.* 604A).

2 The definite article is used as a relative pronoun as in Homer, with the Nile as the likely definite antecedent in the previous line. In ποταμῶν there is no need to suppose the phonetic spelling of *omicron* for *omega* (see ed. pr.) because traces of this letter are visible. The line is almost certainly a reference to Hesiod, *Theog.* 368, τοὺς γείνατο πότνια Τηθύς. For the general thought, with rivers (and the Nile among them), streams, springs and the like generated by the marriage of Tethys and Ocean cf. also Himerius, *Or.* IX.80–88 (p. 78 Colonna).

3 According to Diodorus, *Bibl.* I 37.7 and Horapollo, *Hierogl.* I 21, the cosmogony of the Nile originating from Ocean came from the Egyptians, cf. D. Bonneau, *La crue du Nil* (Paris 1964) 143–45. But another Egyptian cosmogony regarded the Nile as Ocean itself. The world had originated from Ocean and the flooding Nile was called Ὠκεανός. Beside the oblique stroke used to mark the caesura, oblique strokes are used at the end of the line as end fillers. Single or multiple dashes are employed in this way also at the end of lines 4, 6, 9, 16, and 27. Students cared for a good layout of their writing at every level of education, see R. Cribiore, *Writing, Teachers and Students in Graeco-Roman Egypt* (Diss. Columbia University 1993) 73–74.

The line is difficult. R. Merkelbach suggests as a possible solution

αἴρων ἐξ ἱερῶν ἀψορρόου Ὁκεανοῖο
Αἰγύπτῳ ζαθέη φυσίζοον ὄλβιον ὕδωρ

with αἴρων (“der du hochhebst”) instead of ἦτων and Αἰγύπτῳ ζαθεῆ in the dative case.

4 The epithet φυσίζοος is Homeric. The expression φυσίζοον ὕδωρ appears in *AP IX* 383.12, an epigram on the Egyptian months, καὶ Μεσορὶ Νεῖλοιο φέρει φυσίζοον ὕδωρ, and in Nonnus, *Paraph. Evang. Ioann.* 4.48. With the adjective ὄλβιος the poet expresses the joy and hope aroused by the Nile summer flood which appears also in other moments of the poem (cf. lines 13 ἐλπωραῖς, 13/14 γλυκερώτερος, 25 μάκαρ). The general rejoicing at the rising of the waters is reflected also in the Pharaonic Hymns to the Nile: see R. T. Rundle Clark, “Some Hymns to the Nile”, *Univ. Birmingham Historical Journal* 5,1 (1955) 5, and J. B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (Princeton 1969) 372; cf. also *P. Oxy.* III 425 (II–III A.D.) where the river waters are said to be “smiling”, γελῶντα; *P. Turner* 10.3, a Christian hymn to the Nile of the VI century, where the flood is again described as “smiling”; *P. Lit. Lond.* 239.20 where the adjective ἰλαρός is employed.

5 At the beginning of the line the word κλῦτι represents the phonetic spelling of the epic imperative κλῦθι. Lack of aspiration and interchange of aspirated and voiceless stops is a common mistake which corresponds to the identification of the sounds in speech. T and θ interchange between vowels, see F. T. Gignac, *A Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine Periods I* (Milan 1975) 90–92. About the address in the second person in invocations, the *Du Stil*, see E. Norden, *Agnostos Theos* (Stuttgart 1956) 143–63. The Nile is hailed as “father of rivers”. Cf. in Tibullus I 7.23 *Nile pater*. Toward the end of the poem, on line 23, the Nile is called τῶν ποταμῶν βασιλεύς “king of rivers”, the same expression which occurs in *P. Lit. Lond.* 239.15 and which Bonneau (op. cit. line 3) 411–13 interprets as the Nile dominating its branches and canals. In the first Hymn of Isidorus, *SEG VIII* 548.11 = E. Bernand, *Inscr. métr.* 632 no. 175 I 11, Νεῖλου ποταμοί should probably be interpreted as the river’s canals, cf. V. F. Vanderlip, *The Four Greek Hymns of Isidorus and the Cult of Isis* (Toronto 1972) 26, note 11. Cf. also as parallel the expression Νεῖλος ἄναξ appearing in an epigram of Hedyllus (Athenaeus XI 497 D = A. S. F. Gow – D. L. Page, *The Greek Anthology, Hellenistic Epigrams* 101 no. IV 7). At the end of the line in the word γαῖαν, *alpha* and *iota* are written on the wooden edge for lack of space. It is unclear whether the rest of the word was also written on the wooden border. There seem to be some traces, but the border all around the tablet exhibits letters of uneven size which the ed. pr. regarded as part of a practice alphabet. It is not very likely, in any case, that the vertical line appearing after *iota* was a mark of abbreviation.

6 There is no doubt that the third word in the line is a σε and not a δέ (ed. pr.). The adjective θερειγενής appears once in Nicander, *Ther.* 601 and five times in Nonnus. In *Dionys.* 26.238 the whole expression, θερειγενὲς οἶδμα, refers to the Nile. This adjective

probably appears again in conjunction with the Nile in *P. Oxy.* 2520, fr. 13.11, a poem in hexameters, *Suppl. Hell.* 920.11]ερειγεν[. The whole expression recalls Tibullus, *Eleg.* I 7.22 *aestiva aqua*, which refers to the Nile.

7 In writing γυμνωθεῖσα the student, after tracing what looks like the beginning of a *theta*, wrongly wrote χθ repeating the initial sound of χθών. In the passive participle of the verb γυμνώω there is the idea of the earth being “laid bare”, see e.g., Nonnus, *Dion.* 2.69, 6.379, 46.186. Plutarch, *Isis et Osiris* 366 D, says the land is bare when the Nile is at its lowest level, γυμνοῦται δ’ ἡ χώρα and in 366 E calls this τῆς γῆς ἀπογύμνωσις. The adjective τελεσσίγονος is often used by Nonnus. In *Dion.* 1.398 it refers to γάμος, while in 8.313 appears the expression τελεσσιγάμων ὑμεναίων. The line lacks two short syllables and <ὑμεν>αίων, suggested by R. Merkelbach, seems the most likely integration. Probably the student committed haplography and in copying jumped from the ending ν of τελεσσιγόνων to the first ν of ὑμεναίων. For the marriage of a river, the Alpheus, with the fount Arethousa, cf. the epigram *AP IX* 362. The earth is often described as the Nile’s bride: see the epigram on Augustus as victor at Actium *Suppl. Hell.* 982.9–10 of the I century A.D., where the Egyptian land is called δάμαρ ἢ χρυσεῖς πήχεσι λουομένη; D. L. Page (op. cit. line 1) 147, a song to the Nile of the V–VI century A.D., where the expression used is πολυρροθίων ὑμεναίων; Nonnus, *Dion.* 3.277, 6.341–42, and 26.229–35, 233 ἀμαλλοτόκων ὑμεναίων “sheaf-producing wedding”. Nonnus uses the plural ὑμεναίων very often, always with the meaning “wedding” and at the end of the hexameter. Plutarch, *Isis et Osiris* 366 A describes the union of the Nile with the land as the marriage of Isis, the earth, and Osiris, the Nile, as does Heliodorus, *Aeth.* IX 9.

8 In ἀπαπλώσσασα the student had committed an assimilation mistake of anticipation writing π twice. For this common kind of mistake see S. Timpanaro, *The Freudian Slip. Psychoanalysis and Textual Criticism* (London 1976) 97. The adjective χρυσορρόης or χρυσορρόας frequently refers to the Nile which brought bounteous food and revenues with its flood, according to what says Atheneus V 203 C: μόνως γὰρ ὡς ἀληθῶς ὁ χρυσορρόας καλούμενος Νεῖλος μετὰ τροφῶν ἀφθόνων καὶ χρυσὸν καταφέρει ἀκινδύνως γεωργούμενον. See also Joann. Antioch., *FHG IV* 541, fr. 2; Joann. Lyd., *De Mens.* IV 68; Gregory Naz., *Laud. Athan.* 35 116.28 = Migne 21, p. 1116; Epiphanius, *Haereses* 37 17.5. The word occurs in the second Hymn of Isidorus: see Vanderlip (op. cit. line 5) 35, line 17, and 43 note 17. In Olympiodorus, *Arist. Met. Comm.* 105.26 the name of the river was related to the gold dust which it carried. The poet of our hymn, however, uses the adjective with the spelling χρυσόρροος which appears only in Joannes Damascenus, *Hom.* 11.1 = Migne 96.764 A. It refers to λόγος, in a metaphorical sense. Procopius of Gaza writing to his friend Hieronymus (*Ep.* 81.2) tells him to smile seeing the Nile streaming with gold, γελᾷ μόνον χρυσῶ ῥέοντα τὸν Νεῖλον ὀρῶν. Cf. also the epigram *Suppl. Hell.* 982.10, quoted on line 7.

9 On the *iota* of προχοῆσι there is a mark of diaeresis, as on the *upsilon* of ὑγρῆν in line 20. Starting from the second century A.D. marks of diaeresis are often found in students’

exercises, see Cribiore (op. cit. line 3) 88–90. It is difficult to be certain of the sense the poet attributed to προχοῆσι. In Homer it has the meaning “river mouth”, and since this poem appears to rely so heavily on Homeric diction probably this is the most likely meaning. In this case the word can perhaps tell us something about where the poem was composed, that is in the Delta region. The word in the plural, though, was often employed with the meaning “river current, flow” by Apollonius Rhodius and occasionally by other writers, see E. Livrea, *Apollonii Rhodii Argonauticon Liber IV* (Florence 1973) 47 note 132 to IV 271. Aeschylus, *Suppl.* 1024–1025 uses the expression in regard to the Nile with the meaning “current”, Νείλου προχοάς.

10 Perhaps φίλος should be taken here as a possessive adjective as in Homer, “their water”.

11 Writing φονέντες instead of φωνούντες, the student perhaps mistook ου for ε in the model. The mistake is sometimes made by modern editors of papyri, see H. C. Youtie, *The Textual Criticism of Documentary Papyri* (London 1974) 68 Appendix II.

13–14 An oblique dash divides the new verse from the previous one which the student could not fit in the line. Multiple dashes mark verse division in line 14, 15, and 16. – The adjective γλυκερός refers to the river Nile, Νίλου γλυκεροῦ in an inscription of the I–III A.D. in which a Roman officer describes an incubation dream, M. Totti, *Ausgewählte Texte der Isis- und Sarapis-Religion, Quell. Abhand. griech. Epigr.* XII (Hildesheim 1985) 109 no. 42.14 = E. Bernand, *Inscr. métr.* 168 no. 42. Cf. also Νειλῶται γλυκυδρόμοι, *P. Oxy.* III 425.3.

14–15 The nominative plural ναῦς was used by later writers, cf. e.g., Achilles Tatius IV 12.1. For the image already appearing in a Pharaonic hymn, “The ships . . . come to land with wind and oars”, cf. a poem celebrating the accession of Ramses IV, J. Assmann, *Ägyptische Hymnen und Gebete* (Zürich 1975) no. 241.23 p. 498. – The correct restoration of verse 14 has not yet been found. The meaning should be: The ships do not sail on the river.

15–16 Cf. in Ovid, *Met.* I 283–312 the paradoxical images of the flood, *aut subiecta curva vineta carinae*. Similarly Horace, *Carm.* I 26.12, and, as Cauderlier noted, Claudian, *Nilus*, XLVII.40, *remis sonuere novales*. For the author’s further development of the motif, see on 18–19.

17 After a few letters the line is left blank. Perhaps the student, when copying verse 12, which was the first not to fit entirely in the line, started to write on the first line of the second tablet the word which he had to divide, φανῆναι.

18–19 Starting from this line, verse division is marked with bars and little circles, almost like percentage signs. About these signs see R. Cribiore, “The happy farmer: a student composition from Roman Egypt”, *GRBS* 33 (1992) 247–263. – Achilles Tatius, IV 12, describes extensively the spectacle of the Nile flood, with fish together with oxen, ἰχθύων ὁμοῦ καὶ βοῶν. The inversion motif, sea for land, was a common poetic topos. In an

epigram of Philippus of Thessalonica, *AP IX 299*, two oxen, used to ploughing, complain that they have to pull a drag-net and endure in the sea the labour of the land, εἰν ἄλλι τοὺς γαίης ἀντέχομεν καμάτους. They have to toil for fish, not for corn, and plough the sea, ἰχθύσι δ' ἐκ σταχύων λατρεύομεν. ἅ ταλαεργοί· ἤδη κῆν πελάγει καρπὸν ἀροῦσι βόες.

19–20 For what is almost a verbal reminiscence see Procopius, *Ep.* 124.2, where the flooding Nile makes navigable the land once accessible by foot, πλωτὴν ποιεῖν τὴν πάλαι βατήν.

20–21 The Homeric expression ὕγρῃ καὶ τραφερῇ (e.g., *Il.* 14.308, *Od.* 20.98), “the sea and the land” is split between two successive verses and τραφερός here means not only “dry”, but “fat, rich”. The supposition of the ed. pr. that the preposition μετὰ had to be taken with the meaning “in the middle of” and the oxen plowed “amid the water” cannot be supported. Cf. Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* V 10 58, *ut quaeque liberata est terra seritur*, “as the flood leaves it, each strip of land is sown” and XVIII 47 169, the seed was scattered after the river receded. That the Egyptians had to wait for the water to recede is also attested by Plutarch, *Quaest. Conv.* IV 5 670B. The term χεύματα often designates the waters of the Nile, see Nonnus, *Dion.* 26.234, Clemens Alexandrinus, *Protr.* 4.50.3.3, and the Didymean oracle in Porphyrius, *De Phil. Orac.* 124.6 Wolff = Porph. fr. 309 F p. 358,13 Andrew Smith (1993) = Eusebius, *Praep. Evang.* 5.7.5 p. 236,1 Mras. It is used quite often in relation to the Nile in *Oracula Sibyllina* (e.g., 14.329 Geffcken). See also the imperial inscription found at Philae, E. Bernand, *Les inscriptions grecques et latines de Philae II* (1969) 128, no. 158 = Totti (op.cit. lines 13–14) 96 no. 36.3, where the author of the epigram had travelled to the island of Isis and the Nile to which Egypt owes its fortune, Νείλου βαθὺ χεῦμα ὅς Αἴγυπτον πολύολβον. The verb τέμνειν is taken with the meaning of “cutting the land lengthwise”, that is “ploughing”, a somewhat rare usage, cf. e.g., not only Aeschylus fr. 196, but also Solon 3.47. Nonnus uses the verb with this meaning in *Dion.* 1.108 and 2.67.

21 The verb θάλλω sometimes appears with a cognate accusative, but the accusative is perhaps here better taken as an accusative of respect. In an inscription from Ptolemais, Asklepius, the son of Apollo-Horus, is invoked in the hope that he gives everlasting waters to the Nile, an immortal gift to the city and glory to Egypt, Νείλου δὲ ῥοὰς δώτης μάκαρ αἰδίου / καὶ τᾶιδε πόλει θάλας ἀμβρόσιον / πάσῃ δ' ἀγανὸν κλέος Αἰγύπτῳ (Powell, *Coll. Alex.* p. 138 = E. Bernand, *Inscr. métr.* 653 no. 176). Cf. lines 25–26 for the idea of glory conferred to Egypt.

22 The adjective σταχυητόκος occurs only here, but it is easily interpreted. Nonnus uses similar compound adjectives of στάχυς like σταχυηκόμος, σταχυηφόρος, σταχυητόμος.

23 An invocation to the divinity to be gracious and benign is familiar in hymns as in prayers, cf. e.g., in imperial hymns E. Heitsch, *Die griechischen Dichterfragmente der römischen Kaiserzeit, Abhand. Akad. Wiss. Gött.* Folge 49 (1963) 192 line 28 = *Pap. Graec. Mag.* IV 2826, hymn to Selene. The verb ἰλήκειν is often used by Nonnus in the optative at the beginning of the hexameter: cf. e.g., *Dion.* 25.211. Rufinus, *Hist. Eccl.* XI 30.23 calls

the Nile *aquarum dominus*. In writing κουροτρόφε the student omitted to copy *rho*. The adjective usually accompanies a feminine name and is often an epithet of goddesses. Nonnus, *Dion.* 24.50 uses it for the water of a river, κουροτρόφον ὕδωρ. Eustathius repeatedly says that rivers were called κουροτρόφοι because life is brought about by wetness and they are bringing life, see e.g. *Comm. Il.* 4.274.20, κουροτρόφοι . . . ἐνομίζοντο οἱ ποταμοὶ διὰ τὴν ὑγρότητα. Perhaps here there is also an allusion to the iconography of the Nile god surrounded by sixteen children who represented the cubits measuring the water's flood. The ed.pr. reading of κουροτροφε as χουοτροφε, i.e. referring to χοῦς, besides being unattested, is clearly wrong.

24 Autopsy convinced me that N of Νεῖλε was forgotten at the beginning of the line and not written at the end of the previous line.

24–25 Again a difficult line. The solution adopted in the text is to emend ἐριγεο into ἐγίρεο = ἐγείρεο. A less attractive idea is to write ἐρείκειο “split, divide around the altar”. – The invocation to come to the sacrifices is not unusual toward the end of hymns, cf. e.g., Heitsch (op. cit. line 23) 171 LIV.8 = Hippolytus, *Refut.* IV 35,5, Hymn to Hecate, ἔλθοις εὐάντητος ἐφ’ ἡμετέρησι θυηλαῖς. The feast for the Nile's flood was regularly celebrated with sacrifices, cf. e.g., *P. Oxy.* 2405.10, Heliodorus, *Aeth.* IX 10.2, and Aelius Aristides 36,125 p. 303,6 Keil. Although in the second half of the IV century they were officially banished, people kept on celebrating them, cf. Libanius, *Epist.* 1183 and *Or.* XXX. – The plural θυηλαῖς is frequently used in Nonnus (*Dion.* 4.353, 7.167, 21.159 and *Paraph. Evang. Ioann.* 4.91). Cf. also Hymn III of Isidorus, *SEG VIII* 550.29.

25–26 The verb ἀέξω is used in the passive with the meaning “rise” referring to waves of sea water as in Homer, *Od.* 10.93. It is the poetic form of αὔξω and αὐξάνω which are used in prose writers to indicate the rising of the Nile, see Plutarch, *Isis et Osir.* 377 A and Aelius Aristides 36,32 p. 274,1 Keil. Πατρίδι is a dative of the possessor, with omission of ἐστί, cf. Smyth (op. cit. line 1) 1476–1477.

26–27 The term κανεῖδιος, supposedly a diminutive of κἀνειον, is not attested. As noticed by the ed.pr. there is a clear hyperbaton. On coins, statues, and mosaics the river Nile was often represented as an old man holding a cornucopia full of fruits or in the company of different figures holding garlands, cornucopias or baskets as in the Vatican marble where a man with a basket of fruits appears next to the Nile, see Bonneau (op. cit. line 3) 354–355. Cf. the mosaics recently discovered in Sepphoris in Galilee, E. Netzer and Z. Weiss, New mosaic art from Sepphoris, *BAR* 18 (1992) 36–43 where on the left a female figure representing Egypt holds a cornucopia full of fruits and is leaning on a basket of fruits. See also *P. Oxy.* XV 1796 (Page, *Literary Papyri* 124), a poem in hexameters about Egyptian botany, speaking of the abundance, fertility, and fruits which the “smiling” Nile's flood brings. The Nile was called καρποφόρος (e.g., *SB* 4086.1, 8672.1, 8673.1), and the Hymns of Isidorus, I line 13 and II line 19, celebrate the Nile's flood as bringer of fruits. See also *P. Lond. Lit.* 239.23–27 for the idea of the earth bringing fruits after being inundated by

the river's water. R. Merkelbach suggests that in the poem the baskets could actually be baskets of water alluding to the rising of the water level, as in the shaduf the water is raised by baskets.

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