

PART TWO

THE LAND THE NILE BROUGHT TO LIFE

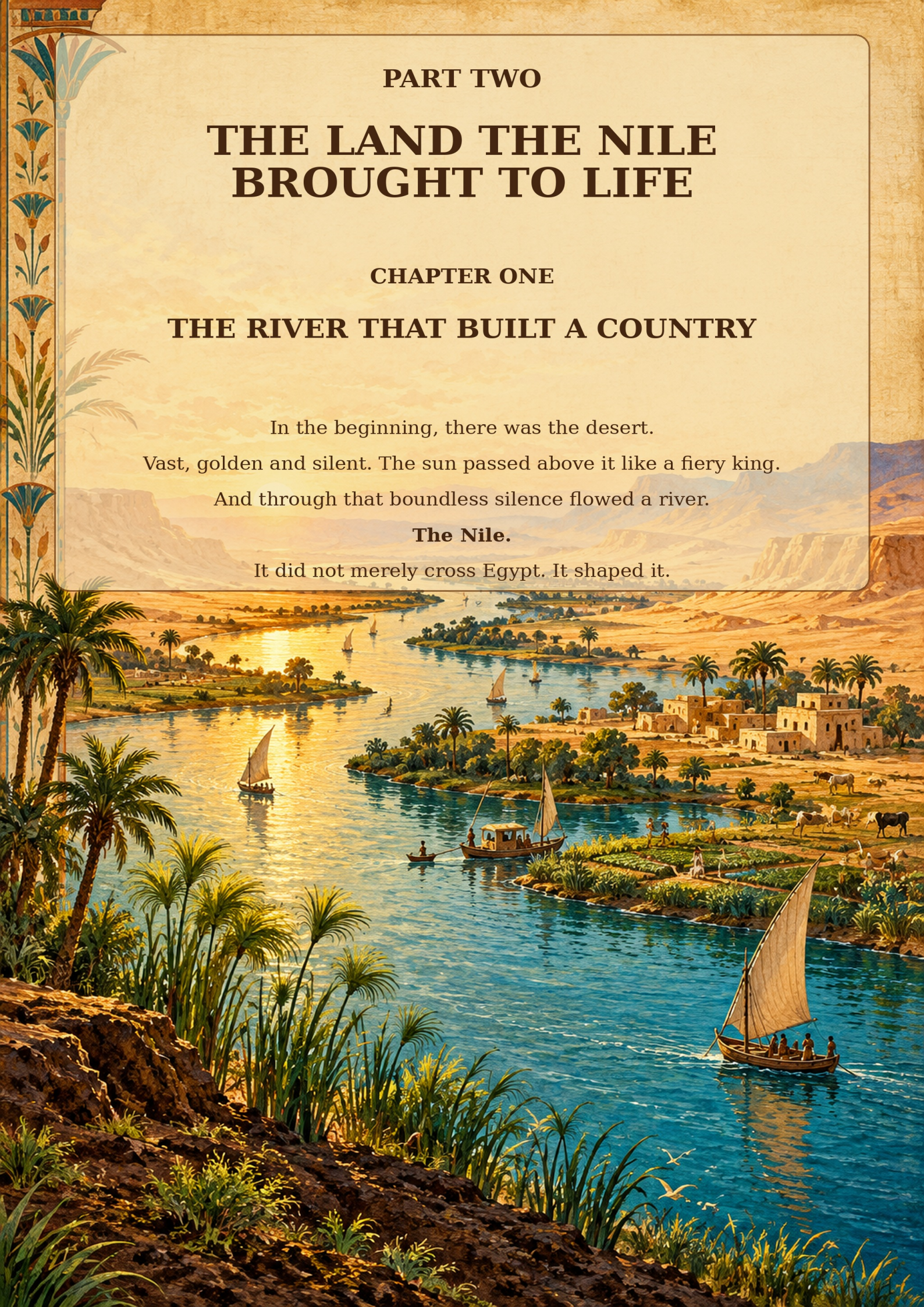
CHAPTER ONE

THE RIVER THAT BUILT A COUNTRY

In the beginning, there was the desert.
Vast, golden and silent. The sun passed above it like a fiery king.
And through that boundless silence flowed a river.

The Nile.

It did not merely cross Egypt. It shaped it.



THE RIVER THAT BUILT A COUNTRY

Each year, when Sirius rose into the sky, the waters of the Nile began to swell. They left their banks and spread across the thirsty land.

When they withdrew, they left behind a gift: dark, fertile silt. Where dry earth had lain, wheat, barley and flax could now grow.

The people dug canals, raised embankments and guided the water where it was needed. They measured the land again and restored its boundaries.

The Nile had brought the country to life once more.





A WINDOW OF KNOWLEDGE

THE THREE SEASONS OF THE NILE

AKHET

THE INUNDATION

The waters spread over the land and left behind fertile silt.

PERET

EMERGENCE AND SOWING

The land appeared again and cultivation began.

SHEMU

LOW WATER AND HARVEST

The crops ripened and the fields were harvested.



The Egyptian year followed the breathing rhythm of the river.

THE RIVER AS TEACHER

The river offered more than food. It taught people to observe the sky, reckon time, measure the land and work together.

Villages gathered beside its waters, cities were built and people were united who might otherwise have remained separated by the desert.

The Nile built Egypt every year — and the people built it with the river.



OCEANE — AETUS — MELAS

OCEANE. In the earliest tradition the river was called Oceane. The name was associated with the image of a boundless watery landscape in the Delta, when land and water seemed not yet to have been divided, after the great floods remembered in Greek tradition as those of Ogyges and Deucalion.

AETUS. When the river swelled at the rising of Sirius and its waters rushed into the land governed by Prometheus, it was called Aetus, the Eagle. Heracles closed the breach and restored the water to its former channel. Thus the eagle that consumed the liver of Prometheus acquired a second, river-born interpretation.

MELAS. A parallel ancient tradition records that the river had been called Melas after Melas, son of Poseidon.

Sources: Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*, 1.19.1-4. On Rivers, 16.

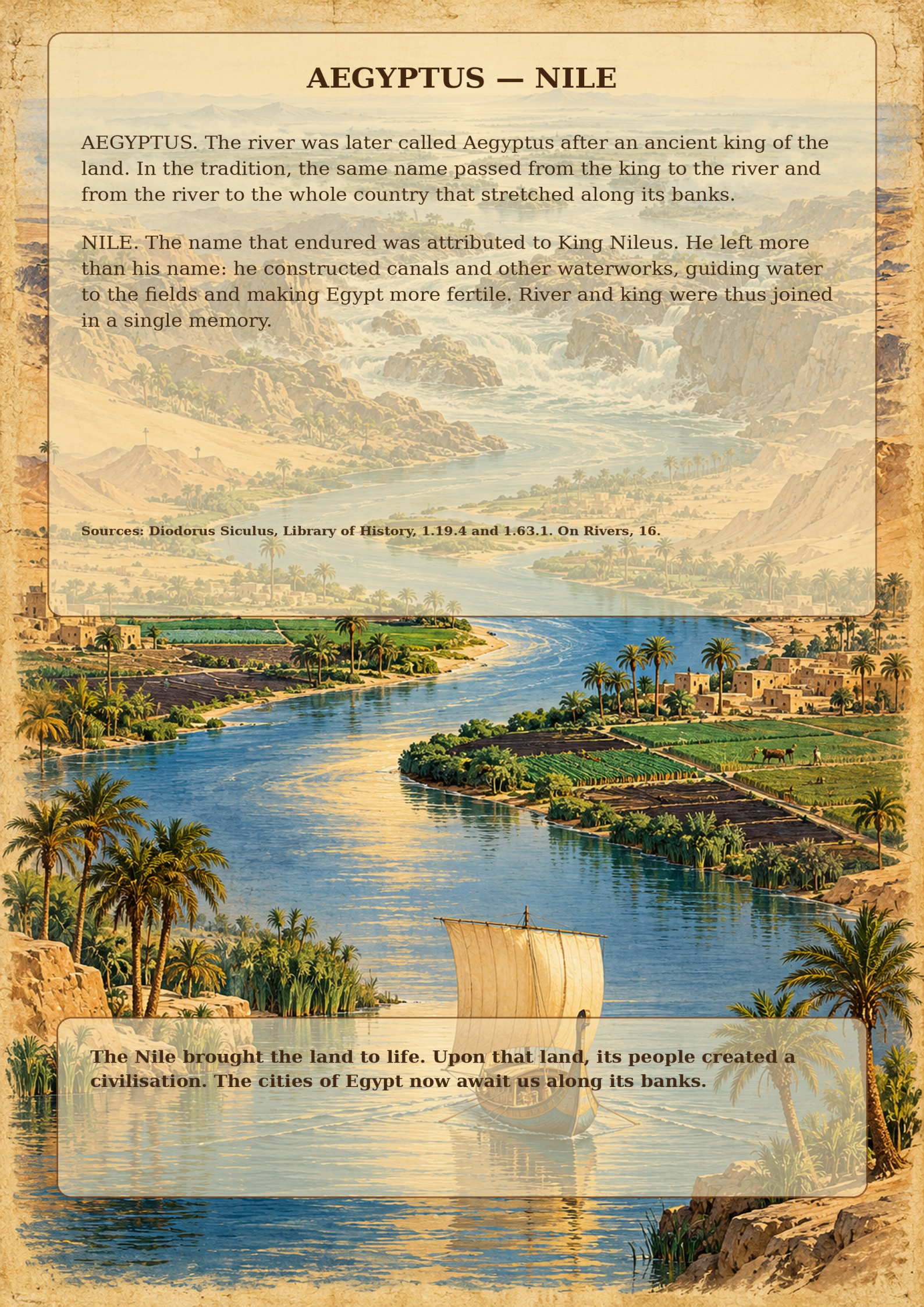


AEGYPTUS — NILE

AEGYPTUS. The river was later called Aegyptus after an ancient king of the land. In the tradition, the same name passed from the king to the river and from the river to the whole country that stretched along its banks.

NILE. The name that endured was attributed to King Nileus. He left more than his name: he constructed canals and other waterworks, guiding water to the fields and making Egypt more fertile. River and king were thus joined in a single memory.

Sources: Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*, 1.19.4 and 1.63.1. *On Rivers*, 16.



The Nile brought the land to life. Upon that land, its people created a civilisation. The cities of Egypt now await us along its banks.