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## THE INDIAN RIVER THAT FLOWS FROM PARADISE\*

**Abstract.** In the *Jewish Antiquities* (I, 1, 3), when paraphrasing the passage of Genesis 2, 10–15, Flavius Josephus notes that the four rivers springing in paradise are the Phison (Φεισὼν), which passes through India and is called Ganges by the Greeks, the Euphrates and Tigris, which flow into the Red Sea, and finally the Geon, which crosses Egypt and is called the Nile by the Greeks. Starting from Josephus' comments, this research focuses on the various interpretations of the Genesis passage, and in particular on the references to the Phison in the writings of the hellenised Jewish and Christian authors. The contents of these texts show common traits with Greco-Roman sources that describe India as a utopian space outside of history. Therefore, the analysis of the documents reveals how a sequence of texts developed over the centuries, starting from a utopian image of India and reaching a definition of a land close to paradise.

**Keywords:** Eden, Evilat, India, Phison, Ganges, Indus, Hyphasis

In the Septuagint, the verses of Genesis 2, 10–14, that describe Eden and the four rivers originating from it<sup>1</sup>, appear rather controversial already among the ancient authors that quote and comment upon it<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> See the Greek text in *Septuaginta. Vetus Testamentum Graecum. I Genesis*, ed. J.W. WEVERS, Göttingen 1974. See the English translation in *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*, ed. A. PIETERSMA, B.G. WRIGHT, Oxford 2007.

<sup>2</sup> On the hypothesis that the four rivers of paradise are all in an area of the Near East, see E.A. SPEISER, *The Rivers of Paradise*, [in:] *Oriental and Biblical Studies. Collected Studies of E.A. Speiser*, ed. J.J. FINKELESTEIN, M. GREENBERG, Philadelphia 1967, p. 23–34. On the Jewish sources related to this passage, see Y.T. RADDAY, *The Four Rivers of Paradise*, HeBS 23, 1982, p. 23–31. On the Hellenistic Jewish and Christian authors reading the same passage, see M. ALEXANDRE, *Entre ciel et terre: les premiers débats sur le site du Paradis*, [in:] *Peuples et Pays Mythiques. Actes du V<sup>e</sup> colloque du centre de recherches mythologiques de l'Université de Paris X*, ed. F. JOUAN, B. DEFORGE, Paris 1988, p. 187–224; A. SCAFI, *Il paradiso in terra. Mappa del giardino dell'Eden*, Milano 2007, p. 23–31. On the place of paradise in Armenian, Syriac, Greek and Latin Christian sources, see H. INGLEBERT, *Interpretatio Christiana. Les mutations des savoirs (cosmographie, géographie, ethnographie, histoire) dans l'Antiquité chrétienne (30–630 après J.-C.)*, Paris 2001, p. 81–90. On the medieval writings concerning these rivers and the easterly collocation of paradise, see H.R. PATCH, *The Other World According to Descriptions in*

At the beginning of Flavius Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities*<sup>3</sup>, where the passage is paraphrased, we read (I, 1, 3):

ἄρδεται δ' οὗτος ὁ κήπος ὑπὸ ἐνὸς ποταμοῦ πᾶσαν ἐν κύκλῳ τὴν γῆν περιρρέοντος, ὃς εἰς τέσσαρα μέρη σχίζεται. καὶ Φεισῶν μὲν, σημαίνει δὲ πληθὺν τοῦνομα, ἐπὶ τὴν Ἰνδικὴν φερόμενος ἐκδίδωσιν εἰς τὸ πέλαγος ὑφ' Ἑλλήνων Γάγγης λεγόμενος, Εὐφράτης δὲ καὶ Τίγρις ἐπὶ τὴν Ἐρυθρὰν ἀπ᾿ αἰσὶ θάλασσαν: καλεῖται δὲ ὁ μὲν Εὐφράτης Φοράς, σημαίνει δὲ ἦτοι σκεδασμὸν ἢ ἄνθος, Τίγρις δὲ Διγλάθ, ἐξ οὗ φράζεται τὸ μετὰ στενότητος ὄξυ: Γηὼν δὲ διὰ τῆς Αἰγύπτου ῥέων δηλοῖ τὸν ἀπὸ τῆς ἐναντίας ἀναδιδόμενον ἡμῖν, ὃν δὴ Νεῖλον Ἑλληνες προσαγορεύουσιν.

Now this garden is watered by a single river whose stream encircles all the earth and is parted into four branches. Of these Phison (a name meaning "multitude") runs towards India and falls into the sea, being called by the Greeks Ganges; Euphrates and Tigris end in the Erythraean Sea: the Euphrates is called Phoras, signifying either "dispersion" or "flower", and the Tigris Diglath, expressing at once "narrowness" and "rapidity"; lastly Geon, which flows through Egypt, means "that which wells up to us from the opposite world", and by Greeks is called the Nile.

Unlike the Genesis passage, where the river Phison *encircles the whole land of Heuilat, there where the gold is*<sup>4</sup>, Josephus here writes that it crosses India and is called Ganges by the Greeks<sup>5</sup>. This is undoubtedly a relevant detail since it is one of the earliest mentions of India as being placed close to paradise. In his rewriting of the Genesis text, Josephus performs a two-fold intellectual task: on the one hand, he identifies the location of the four rivers in question and indicates their Greek names; on the other, he reconstructs the etymology of the Hebrew names, attributing an allegorical meaning to them. This interpretative process reflects the purpose of Josephus, who wrote the *Antiquities of the Jews* in order to make the history and traditions of his people known to a Greek-speaking audience<sup>6</sup>.

*Medieval Literature*, Cambridge Mass. 1950, p. 134–174; J. VALTROVÁ, *Beyond the Horizons of Legends: Traditional Imagery and Direct Experience in Medieval Accounts of Asia*, Nu 57, 2010, p. 154–185.

<sup>3</sup> See the Greek text and the English translation in JOSEPHUS, *Jewish Antiquities*, vol. I, trans. H.St.J. THACKERAY, Cambridge Mass. 1930 [= LCL, 242] (cetera: JOSEPHUS). On the relation between Flavius Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities* and the *Book of Genesis*, see C.T. BEGG, *Genesis in Josephus*, [in:] *The Book of Genesis. Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, ed. C.A. EVANS, J.N. LOHR, D.L. PETERSEN, Leiden–Boston 2012 [= VT.S], p. 303–329.

<sup>4</sup> Gn 2: 11. Trans. by R.J.V. HIEBERT, in *A New English Translation...*, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Josephus rewrote the text of the Bible, translating and paraphrasing it with additions. On his method, see L.H. FELDMAN, *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible*, Berkeley 1998 [= HCS, 27], p. 14–23.

<sup>6</sup> See Josephus' statements on his debt to the Greek audience in JOSEPHUS, I, 5–9; XVI, 174–175; XX, 262–263. On the relationship between Josephus and Greek literature, see E. ALMAGOR, *Josephus and Greek Imperial Literature*, [in:] *A Companion to Josephus*, ed. H.H. CHAPMAN, Z. RODGERS, Malden Mass.–Oxford–Chichester 2016 [= BCAW], p. 108–122.

Still within the hellenised Jewish culture, it is noteworthy that in Philo of Alexandria's works there are several hints at allegorical interpretations of the four rivers that flow from paradise. In a long passage from the *Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis* (I, 19, 63 – I, 27, 87)<sup>7</sup>, Philo clarifies that the four streams (ἀπόρροιαί) mentioned in Genesis 2, 10–14 are figuratively four particular virtues (ἀρεταί) of man, the great river (ποταμός) from which they flow corresponds to the general virtue (γενική ἀρετή), namely goodness (ἀγαθότης), while Eden represents the wisdom (σοφία) of God<sup>8</sup>. In Philo's extensive commentary, where the abstractedness of the exegesis is emphasized, the Phison represents prudence (φρόνησις), the Geon courage (ἀνδρεία), the Tigris self-mastery (σωφοσύνη), the Euphrates justice (δικαιοσύνη)<sup>9</sup>. In this interpretative scheme the influence of Platonic doctrines and Stoic ethics<sup>10</sup> can be seen very clearly, since the four rivers descending from paradise metaphorically represent four virtues already classified as essential for the ideal city by Plato<sup>11</sup>, and for man by Chrysippus<sup>12</sup>, Panaetius<sup>13</sup> and Posidonius<sup>14</sup>. Philo, just like Josephus, successively attributes an allegorical meaning to the etymology of the river names<sup>15</sup>. Specifically, the Phison, in Greek Φεισών, is to be linked to the verb φειδεσθαι that means "sparing", i.e. guarding the soul by wrong deeds<sup>16</sup>. The Phison has the task of preserving a beneficial, loving and favourable disposition. As Genesis 2, 11 states that there is gold in the land of Evilat, Philo explains that gold is the most precious of metals and therefore prudence is the

<sup>7</sup> PHILO, *On the Creation. Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis 2 and 3*, vol. I, trans. F.H. COLSON, Cambridge Mass. 1929 [= LCL] (cetera: PHILO, *Legum Allegoriae*). The same ideas are found in the *Questions and Answers on Genesis*, see PHILO, *Questions and Answers on Genesis*, trans. R. MARCUS, Cambridge Mass. 1953 [= LCL, 380] (cetera: PHILO, *Quaestiones in Genesim*).

<sup>8</sup> PHILO, *Legum Allegoriae*, I, 19, 63. Cf. PHILO, *Quaestiones in Genesim*, I, 12.

<sup>9</sup> PHILO, *Legum Allegoriae*, I, 19, 65. In PHILO, *Quaestiones in Genesim*, I, 12, the list of rivers and virtues has an inversion between the second and third items: Phison-wisdom, Geon-temperance, Tigris-courage, Euphrates-justice.

<sup>10</sup> On the relationship between the rivers of paradise and the virtues listed by Philo, see R. RADICE, *Philo and Stoic Ethics. Reflections on the Idea of Freedom*, [in:] *Philo of Alexandria and Post-Aristotelian Philosophy*, ed. F. ALESSE, Leiden–Boston 2008, p. 153–155.

<sup>11</sup> PLATO, *Republic*, IV, 441D–442D, vol. I, trans. C. EMLYN-JONES, Cambridge Mass. 2013 [= LCL, 237].

<sup>12</sup> See fragment II, 262 in *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, vol. II, coll. I. AB ARNIM, Stuttgartiae 1903.

<sup>13</sup> The four virtues appropriate to man according to Panaetius are expounded in Cicero's *De officiis: cognitio veri, iustitia, magnitudo animi, temperantia* (chapters 25–104, in CICERO, *On Duties*, trans. W. MILLER, Cambridge Mass. 1913 [= LCL]).

<sup>14</sup> Diogenes Laertius (VII, 92) reports a variable number of virtues proper to man, depending on different Stoic philosophers, but specifically attributes four virtues to Posidonius. Further on, he states in general that they are: wisdom, courage, justice, temperance (cf. DIOGENES LAERTIUS, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. II, trans. R.D. HICKS, Cambridge Mass. 1925 [= LCL]). See on this passage the study by J. MANSFELD, *The Stoic Cardinal Virtues at Diog. Laert. VII 92*, Mn 42, 1989, p. 88–89.

<sup>15</sup> PHILO, *Legum Allegoriae*, I, 20, 68 – 27, 87. Cf. PHILO, *Quaestiones in Genesim*, I, 13.

<sup>16</sup> PHILO, *Legum Allegoriae*, I, 20, 66.

most precious of virtues<sup>17</sup>. Philo conjures a complex symbology around the names of the remaining three rivers of paradise<sup>18</sup>, according to his critical method. In the *Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis* Philo does not identify the physical seats of the four rivers, as he is only interested in their allegorical significance<sup>19</sup>. By contrast, in the *Questions and Answers on Genesis* Philo advances a rationalistic conjecture: since some say that the Tigris and Euphrates originate in the Armenian mountains but there is no paradise there, it could be far from the *oikoumene* and there could be a river flowing underground and dividing into several large veins, which would then rise to the surface to form the known springs<sup>20</sup>. However, Philo does not seem to give weight to this conjecture, because immediately afterwards he proposes the same allegorical interpretation of the four rivers developed in the *Allegorical Interpretation*. Philo's exegesis of the Scripture is undoubtedly different and more complex if we compare it to Josephus' explanation. Philo reconstructs the etymologies of the names of the rivers, steering them towards a moral meaning<sup>21</sup>, for which he provides numerous arguments, mostly going back to Greek philosophy, and often evoking other passages from the Scripture. More broadly, Philo's main aim is to give the biblical account a figurative value by interpreting it according to Greek ideological models that are useful in the moral education of the members of his community<sup>22</sup>.

Regarding the Christian sources, the uncertain geographical collocation of Eden and of the four rivers flowing from paradise emerges as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Evidence of this is the comment to the same Genesis passage in the *Ancoratus* by Epiphanius of Salamis (Chapter 58)<sup>23</sup>. Epiphanius underlines

<sup>17</sup> PHILO, *Legum Allegoriae*, I, 20, 66.

<sup>18</sup> The name Geon means "breast" or "butting" (PHILO, *Legum Allegoriae*, I, 21, 68). The river Tigris is connected to self-mastery that "directs" against human weakness (PHILO, *Legum Allegoriae*, I, 21, 69). The name Euphrates means "fruitfulness" (PHILO, *Legum Allegoriae*, I, 23, 72).

<sup>19</sup> In *Quaestiones in Genesim*, I, 13, Philo, considering the text of the Septuagint, wonders why the location of the Euphrates is not indicated. He believes that this is for symbolic reasons, whereby the Euphrates is generally known as a symbol of justice and not for the land it flows through.

<sup>20</sup> PHILO, *Quaestiones in Genesim*, I, 12. This hypothesis is later resumed by Augustine in *The Literal Meaning of the Genesis* (see below).

<sup>21</sup> On the various levels of allegory adopted by Philo, see J. CAZEAUX, *Philon d'Alexandrie, exégète*, [in:] ANRW, T. II, Bd. 21.1, ed. H. TEMPORINI, W. HAASE, Berlin–New York 1984, p. 156–226; D.T. RUNIA, *The Structure of Philo's Allegorical Treatises: A Review of Two Recent Studies and Some Additional Comments*, VC 38.3, 1984, p. 209–256; IDEM, *Further Observations on the Structure of Philo's Allegorical Treatises*, VC 41.2, 1987, p. 105–138; R. RADICE, *Allegoria e paradigmi etici in Filone di Alessandria. Commentario al «Legum allegoriae»*, Milano 2000.

<sup>22</sup> See D. DAWSON, *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria*, Berkeley 1992, p. 73–74. On Philo's method, see J. PÉPIN, *Mythe et Allégorie. Les origines grecques et les contestations judéo-chrétiennes*, Paris 1958, p. 215–246.

<sup>23</sup> EPIPHANIUS, *Ancoratus und Panarion haer. 1–33*, ed. K. HOLL, M. BERGERMANN, Ch.-F. COLLATZ, Berlin–Boston 2013 [= GCS, 25] (cetera: EPIPHANIUS, *Ancoratus*).

that Eden is not in heaven and, quoting from the Genesis, explains that a spring “flows out” from Eden but it does not “descend” from above<sup>24</sup>. Then he adds<sup>25</sup>:

οὗτος ἀφορίζεται εἰς τέσσαρας ἀρχάς, ὄνομα τῶ ἐνὶ Φεισῶν», καὶ ὁρῶμεν τὸν Φεισῶν ἐπ’ ὄψεσιν ἡμῶν. καὶ Φεισῶν μὲν ἔστιν ὁ Γάγγης παρὰ τοῖς Ἰνδοῖς καλούμενος καὶ καὶ Αἰθίοψιν, Ἕλληνες δὲ τοῦτον καλοῦσιν Ἰνδὸν ποταμόν. «πάσαν γὰρ τὴν Εὐλάτ περικυκλοῖ», τὴν μικρὰν Αἰθιοπίαν καὶ τὴν μεγάλην, τὰ μέρη τῶν Εὐλαίων, διαπερᾶ δὲ τὴν μεγάλην Αἰθιοπίαν καὶ πίπτει εἰς τὸν νότον καὶ δύνει ἔσωθεν Γαδείρων εἰς τὸν μέγαν Ὠκεανόν.

This [river] “is separated into four branches. The name of the first is Pishon”, and we see the Pishon with our own sight. And Pishon is the one called Ganges by the Indians and Ethiopians, but the Hellenes call this the Indus River. “For it surrounds all of Havilah”, little Ethiopia and the great, the parts of Havilites, and it passes through great Ethiopia and falls into the south and enters inside Gades into the great Ocean.

This passage from Epiphanius is significant in two respects. First, in the identification of the Phison with the Ganges attributed to the Indians and Ethiopians, a trace of the ancient confusion and overlapping of India and Ethiopia attested in various Greco-Roman sources can be seen<sup>26</sup>. Secondly, despite the fact that the Genesis passage states that the Geon flows through Ethiopia, Epiphanius instead explains that the Phison encircles both little and great Ethiopia, and crosses the great Ethiopia, thus distinguishing between two Ethiopias without mentioning India. Equally problematic is Epiphanius’ assertion that the same river heads south to Gades and reaches the “great Ocean”. The issue is that in Greco-Roman geographical works Gades is placed to the West, near the Pillars of Heracles<sup>27</sup>. Therefore, Epiphanius’ indications are rather unclear. It can be assumed that they originate from Greco-Roman sources that duplicated the location of the well-known

<sup>24</sup> EPIPHANIUS, *Ancoratus*, 58, 1.

<sup>25</sup> EPIPHANIUS, *Ancoratus*, 58, 2. The English translation (with a minor correction) is in St. EPIPHANIUS OF CYPRUS, *Ancoratus*, trans. Y.R. KIM, Washington 2014 [= FC, 128].

<sup>26</sup> On the confusion between India and Ethiopia, which is widespread in ancient sources from different contexts, see P. MAYERSON, *A Confusion of Indias: Asian India and African India in the Byzantine Sources*, JAOS 113.2, 1993, p. 169–174; P. SCHNEIDER, *L’Ethiopie et l’Inde. Interférences et confusions aux extrémités du monde antique (VIII<sup>e</sup> siècle avant J.-C. – VI<sup>e</sup> siècle de notre ère)*, Rome 2004 (where there is a rich collection of Greco-Roman sources on this issue); IDEM, *The So-called Confusion between India and Ethiopia: The Eastern and Southern Edges of the Inhabited World from the Greco-Roman Perspective*, [in:] *Brill’s Companion to Ancient Geography. The Inhabited World in Greek and Roman Tradition*, ed. S. BIANCHETTI, M. CATAUDELLA, H.-J. GEHRKE, Leiden 2016 [= BCCS], p. 184–202; P.W. VAN DER HORST, “India” in *Early Jewish Literature*, JSJ 46.4, 2015, p. 574–579.

<sup>27</sup> In many sources Gades is a city or an island. See, for instance, the passages in DIODORUS SICULUS, *Library of History*, V, 20, vol. III, trans. C.H. OLDATHER, Cambridge Mass. 1933 [= LCL]; DIODORUS SICULUS, *Library of History*, XXV, 10, vol. XI, trans. F.R. WALTON, Cambridge Mass. 1957 [= LCL]; STRABO, *Geography*, III, 5, 3–6, vol. II, trans. H.L. JONES, Cambridge Mass. 1923 [= LCL].

Pillars of Heracles both in the West near Gades<sup>28</sup> and in the far East<sup>29</sup>. Later, in this chapter of the *Ancoratus*, we may note that Epiphanius firmly stresses that the existence of paradise is not to be doubted, and also the spring and the rivers that originate from it are real, and the story of Adam and Eve is true. *Otherwise* – Epiphanius comments – *the truth is a myth, and all things are allegorized*<sup>30</sup>. These words by Epiphanius are highly emblematic as they show his will to demonstrate that the Genesis account cannot be considered a myth and that it is trustworthy. We understand here that among the Christian writers the allegorical interpretation of the text was controversial, and it was a widespread belief that its literary meaning should also be taken into consideration. Epiphanius' exegesis – later resumed by Pseudo-Caesarius' *Quaestiones et responsiones*<sup>31</sup> – diverges entirely from those of the hellenised Jewish authors, such as Flavius Josephus and Philo, who preferred an allegorical interpretation in their comments to the biblical texts<sup>32</sup>.

Considering another 4<sup>th</sup>-century text, the *Journey from the Paradise of Eden to the Romans* (Ὀδοιπορία ἀπὸ Ἐδέμ τοῦ παδείσου ἄχρι τῶν Ῥωμαίων)<sup>33</sup>, we find a singular description of the utopian community of the Blessed (Μακαρινοί)<sup>34</sup> living near Eden. Here, the Blessed have a church made up of a mountain of diamonds, under which flows the river that comes from paradise, and it divides into four branches: to the south the Geon and the Phison, to the north the Tigris and the Euphrates. They feed on fruit, honey, flour and manna, which rains from the

<sup>28</sup> See the sources collected in M. ALBALADEJO VIVERO, *Las Columnas de Heracles en el imaginario griego*, [in:] *Le Déroit de Gibraltar (Antiquité-Moyen Âge). I. Representations, perceptions, imaginaires*, ed. F. DES BOSCS, Y. DEJUGNAT, A. HAUSHALTER, Madrid 2019, p. 39–57.

<sup>29</sup> The location of the Pillars of Heracles in the Far East, in an unspecified area, can already be found in the α-recension of the *Alexander Romance*: see (PSEUDO-CALLISTHENES), *Historia Alexandri Magni*, III, 27, vol. I, recensio vetusta, ed. G. KROLL, Berlin 1926. Furthermore, the *Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem* mentions the trophies of Hercules and Liber placed at the final border of India: see *Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem*, ed. W. WALTHER BOER, Meisenheim am Glan 1973 [= BKP, 50], p. 59. Connected to this source is Pliny's information that beyond Sogdiana were the altars of Hercules, Liber, Semiramis and Alexander: PLINY, *Natural History*, VI, 18, 49, vol. II, *Books 3–7*, trans. H. RACKHAM, Cambridge Mass. 1942 [= LCL] (cetera: PLINIUS).

<sup>30</sup> EPIPHANIUS, *Ancoratus*, 58, 8: ἀλλὰ μῦθος λοιπὸν ἢ ἀλήθεια καὶ ἀλληγορεῖται τὰ πάντα. Trans. by Y.R. Kim with a minor change.

<sup>31</sup> PSEUDO-KAISARIOS, *Die Erotapokriseis*, ed. R. RIEDINGER, Berlin 1989 [= GCS] (cetera: PSEUDO-CAESARIUS, QR), p. 142. See further discussion below.

<sup>32</sup> Epiphanius' opinions are also shared by Augustine, as we are going to see later.

<sup>33</sup> See the critical text in *Expositio totius mundi et gentium*, ed. J. ROUGÉ, Paris 1966 (cetera: *Expositio totius mundi*), p. 346–355. According to J. ROUGÉ, the *Journey* has much in common with the first part of the *Expositio totius mundi*, as they seem to depend on a single source (*Expositio...*, p. 62).

<sup>34</sup> In the *Expositio totius mundi* this name became *Camarini*: see below. Among the studies dealing with the *Journey* and the *Expositio* see: M. PHILONENKO, *Camarines et Makarinoi. De la 'Narratio' de Zosime à l'Expositio totius mundi*, [in:] *Perennitas. Studi in onore di Angelo Brelich*, Roma 1980, p. 371–377; M. ALEXANDRE, *Entre ciel et terre...*, p. 210–213.

Easter Sabbath for seven days; they also do not sow or reap but glorify God. This narrative reads like a description of a mythical Golden Age, a sort of temporarily remote *elsewhen*, with a happy and blessed mankind. We can infer that this story illustrates how, in the cultural *milieu* of late antiquity, a Christian imagery had been created around paradise, in which both the suggestions of hellenised Jewish and Christian authors converged, as well as the Greek mythical tales, such as those about the islands of the Blessed (Μακάρων νῆσοι)<sup>35</sup>. Most notable among these narratives is the passage from Lucian's *True History*<sup>36</sup>. Here we read of an island with a city made of gold, temples made of beryl; it is always daytime and always springtime; there are springs of water, honey and perfume, and rivers of milk and wine; fruits grow wild on the trees; ears of wheat produce ready-made bread, and some trees produce cups of wine; the inhabitants never grow old and gather in symposia where they play and sing. Undoubtedly, the text of the *Journey* has many elements common to this tale.

Sometime later, the same geographical information from Josephus on the river Phison is to be found in the work *On the Races of India and the Brahmins* (Περὶ τῶν τῆς Ἰνδίας ἔθνῶν καὶ τῶν Βραγμάνων) by Palladius<sup>37</sup>, who specifies that the Ganges is to be identified with the Phison, which the Scripture mentions as one of the four rivers of paradise<sup>38</sup>. In this text, we then read the Brahmins inhabit the area by that river, live in a state of nature and practise asceticism<sup>39</sup>. Palladius' account shares several elements with the *Journey*: the Brahmins, like the Blessed, feed on the wild fruits of the earth, do not sow or plough, and pray continually to God<sup>40</sup>.

Conversely, in Philostorgius' *Ecclesiastical History*<sup>41</sup>, written in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century<sup>42</sup>, the Phison is identified with the river Hyphasis (III, 10)<sup>43</sup>:

<sup>35</sup> The islands of the Blessed are already mentioned by Hesiod and Herodotus: *Hesiodi Theogonia. Opera et dies. Scutum*, v. 171, ed. F. SOLMSEN, Oxonii 1970 [= SCBO]; *Herodoti Historiae*, III, 26, vol. I, ed. N.G. WILSON, Oxford 2015 (cetera: HERODOTUS). Cf. A.S. BROWN, *From the Golden Age to the Isles of the Blest*, Mn 51, 1998, p. 385–410.

<sup>36</sup> *Luciani opera*, II, 6–15, vol. I, ed. M.D. MACLEOD, Oxford 1972.

<sup>37</sup> PALLADIUS, *De gentibus Indiae et Bragmanibus*, ed. W. BERGHOF, Meisenheim am Glan 1967 [= BKP, 24] (cetera: PALLADIUS, *De gentibus Indiae*).

<sup>38</sup> PALLADIUS, *De gentibus Indiae*, I, 1.

<sup>39</sup> See R. STONEMAN, *Who are the Brahmins? Indian Lore and Cynic Doctrine in Palladius' De Bragmanibus and its Models*, CQ 44, 1994, p. 500–510; see my article *The Naked Wise Men of India*, SMSR 87.2, 2021, p. 685–689.

<sup>40</sup> PALLADIUS, *De gentibus Indiae*, I, 11–12.

<sup>41</sup> PHILOSTORGIUS, *Kirchengeschichte*, ed. J. BIDEZ, Berlin 1981 [= GCS] (cetera: PHILOSTORGIUS).

<sup>42</sup> On the datation and the method of the *Ecclesiastical History*, see D. MEYER, *Débat cosmologique et discours historique dans l'Histoire ecclésiastique de Philostorge*, [in:] *L'historiographie tardo-antique et la transmission des savoirs*, ed. P. BLADEAU, P. VAN NUFFELEN, Berlin–Boston 2015 [= Mil.S, 55], p. 191–207.

<sup>43</sup> For the English translation, see PHILOSTORGIUS, *Church History*, trans. Ph.R. AMIDON, Atlanta 2007 [= WGRW, 23], p. 46.

Ὅτι κείσθαι τὸν Παράδεισον οὗτος εἰκασία χρώμενος λέγει κατὰ τὰς ἰσημερίας τῆς Ἡοῦς, πρῶτον μὲν ἐξ ὧν τὰ πρὸς μεσημβρίαν δὴλά ἐστι πάντα οἰκούμενα σχεδὸν μέχρι τῆς ἕξω θαλάττης, ἣν θάλατταν ὁ ἥλιος ἤδη ξυμφλέγει καθέτως ἐπ' αὐτῇ τὰς ἀκτίνας ἐρείδων· καὶ ἡ διὰ μέσου λεγομένη ζώνη τοῦτο ἐστίν. ἔτι δὲ καὶ διότι ὁ νῦν Ὑφασις καλούμενος ποταμός, ὃν ἡ γραφὴ Φησῶν ὀνομάζει, καὶ αὐτὸς τοῦ Παραδείσου ἀναβλύζων, ἐκ τῶν ἀρκτῶων μάλλον τῆς Ἀνατολῆς μερῶν ἐπὶ τὴν μεσημβρίαν φαίνεται ῥέων καὶ εἰς τὸν ταύτη Ὠκεανὸν τὸ ρεῖθρον εἰσερευγόμενος, ἀντικρὺ τῆς νήσου Ταπροβάνης. οὐ παρὰ τὰς ὄχθας τοῦ ποταμοῦ εὐρίσκεται τὸ λεγόμενον καρύφυλλον, εἴτε καρπός, εἴτε δὲ καὶ ἄνθος τυγχάνει. καὶ πεπιστεύκασιν οἱ ἐκείνη τῶν ἐκ τοῦ Παραδείσου τοῦτο δένδρον εἶναι. καὶ γὰρ καὶ ἡ ὑπὲρ αὐτοὺς γῆ ἔρημός τέ ἐστι δεινῶς ἅπασα καὶ ἀκαρποτάτη. ἐκ δὲ τοῦ φέρειν τὸν ποταμὸν τὸ ἄνθος, ἐπίδηλον ἂν εἴη ὡς οὗτος ὁ ποταμός ὑπὲρ γῆς ἅπας ῥεῖ, μηδαμόθι καταδύομενος· οὐ γὰρ ἂν τὸ ἐκείθεν φυόμενον ἠδύνατο φέρειν. ἔχει δὲ τι καὶ ἄλλο σύμβολον τῆς περὶ τὸν Παράδεισον γεγραῖς ἐπιμιξίας· φασὶ γὰρ ὡς ἐάν τις τύχοι πυρετῶ λάβρω φλεγόμενος, εἰς τὸν ποταμὸν βαπτισάμενος, παραυτίκα τοῦ νοσήματος ἀπαλλάττεται.

Resorting to conjecture, he [Philostorgius] states that Paradise lies in the eastern equinox, first because it is evident that almost all the regions to the south are inhabited, all the way to the outer sea. At that distance this sea is burned by the sun, which strikes it with its rays from directly above, and this is what is called the equator. Another reason is that the river now called the Hyphasis, which scripture names the Pishon and which itself rises in Paradise, seems rather to flow south from the northern parts of the east and to empty into the ocean there opposite the island of Taprobane. Along the banks of this river is found what is called the *caryophyllon*, whether that be a fruit or a flower. The local people think that it is from a tree descended from those in Paradise. Now in fact the land above them is completely a desert, quite barren. But the fact that the river bears the flower shows that this river flows above ground for its entire length, without ever going under. Otherwise it would not be able to bear what germinates from there. And there is another sign of the linkage of earth with Paradise: they say that someone taken with a violent fever recovers at once after bathing in river.

This passage makes it clear on what assumptions the connection of paradise with the river Phison would be based. Overall, the connotation of the Indian river as a symbol of an *elsewhere* that is not only geographically remote, but also far removed from civilisation. On closer analysis of the information provided in the passage, we see three relevant elements. Philostorgius' first annotation attempts to identify the Eastern seat of paradise: it is located in the position where the sun rises during the equinox, i.e. beyond the extreme limit of the inhabited lands; furthermore, the Hyphasis-Phison flows southwards from the North-Eastern regions and reaches the Ocean opposite the island of Taprobane. The second indication highlights the river's course: the presence of the flower (or fruit) *caryophyllon* shows that the river flows on the surface. Here Philostorgius presents an opposite opinion to that of Philo, who – in his *Questions and Answers on Genesis* – conjectured the underground course of the river springing from paradise. The third comment dwells on the miraculous power of those waters, which help recover from fever. As to the first observation, we know that the Greco-Roman



sources traditionally assume the island of Taprobane<sup>44</sup> as a marginal space which emblematically represents the ultimate boundary of the civilized world, a sort of “another world” (*alterum orbem terrarum*) as Pliny the Elder writes in his *Natural History*<sup>45</sup>. According to Pliny, who drew his information from previous sources, Taprobane’s inhabitants are richer than the Indians because they possess gold and large pearls<sup>46</sup>; the sun rises from the left and goes down to the right<sup>47</sup>; the shadows fall northwards and not southwards<sup>48</sup>; in the summer the sea is stormy<sup>49</sup>. Moreover, the inhabitants of the island are presented as a utopian community where there is no ostentation of riches, nobody owns slaves, there is no siesta in the middle of the day, buildings are never too high, the price of corn does not rise, there are no courts of law and no disputes<sup>50</sup>. Again on Taprobane we can reconsider Palladius’ *On the Races of India*, where – beside the identification of the Phison with the Ganges – we find a lengthy description of the island as an extraordinary land inhabited by the Macrobioi who live up to 150 years and where the trees never stop giving fruits<sup>51</sup>. As to the plant of the *caryophyllon* mentioned in Philostorgius’ passage, it echoes the several references to miracle plants in India cited not only by Ctesias, but by several other authors<sup>52</sup>. Finally, Philostorgius’ observation on the therapeutic power of the river Phison is very interesting. This recalls the information on the Indus provided by Pseudo-Plutarch’s *On Rivers*<sup>53</sup>: in this river is found a stone that is able to defend virgins from rapists<sup>54</sup>, a herb that has excellent effects against jaundice<sup>55</sup>, and a very black stone that Indians wear as earrings<sup>56</sup>. Also noteworthy is Dio Chrysostom’s account<sup>57</sup> on the Fountain of Truth (πηγήν τὴν τῆς ἀληθείας) of the Brahmins, “by far

<sup>44</sup> On Taprobane as a utopian space, see G.L. CAMPBELL, *Strange Creatures. Anthropology in Antiquity*, London 2006, p. 127–128; R. STONEMAN, *The Greek Experience of India. From Alexander to the Indo-Greeks*, Princeton–Oxford 2019, p. 248–250.

<sup>45</sup> PLINIUS, VI, 24, 81. Cf. SOLINU, 53, 1, in *Wunder der Welt. Collectanea rerum mirabilium*, ed. K. BRODERSEN, Darmstadt 2014.

<sup>46</sup> PLINIUS, VI, 24, 81.

<sup>47</sup> PLINIUS, VI, 24, 87.

<sup>48</sup> PLINIUS, VI, 24, 87.

<sup>49</sup> PLINIUS, VI, 24, 83.

<sup>50</sup> PLINIUS, VI, 24, 89.

<sup>51</sup> PALLADIUS, *De gentibus Indiae*, I, 4; I, 6.

<sup>52</sup> On Indian plants, see the information in K. KARTTUNEN, *India and the Hellenistic World*, Helsinki 1997 [= SO.SOF, 83], p. 129–167.

<sup>53</sup> See *Plutarchi Chaeronensis Moralia*, vol. VII, ed. G.N. BERNARDAKIS, Lipsiae 1896 (cetera: PLUTARCHUS, *De fluviis*), p. 327.

<sup>54</sup> PLUTARCHUS, *De fluviis*, XXV, 2.

<sup>55</sup> PLUTARCHUS, *De fluviis*, XXV, 3.

<sup>56</sup> PLUTARCHUS, *De fluviis*, XXV, 5.

<sup>57</sup> See DIO CHRYSOSTOM, *Discourses*, vol. III, trans. J.W. COHOON, H. LAMAR CROSBY, Cambridge Mass. 1940 [= LCL] (cetera: DIO CHRYSOSTOMUS).

the best and most godlike of all”: whoever drank its water could never be found a liar<sup>58</sup>. A similar tradition about an Indian miracle fountain is that of John Stobaeus<sup>59</sup> who quotes a passage from Porphyry’s *On the Styx* (who in turn attributes his information to Bardesanes)<sup>60</sup>. The text tells of a swamp that the Indians call “testing room” (δοκιμαστήριον), where the Brahmans immerse those who denied committing an evil deed together with their accusers: the innocent would have no trouble crossing it, but the guilty, submerged up to the head, would be taken out of the water alive and handed over for re-education<sup>61</sup>. As seen, Philostorgius’ passage, one of the most extensive on the Indian river flowing from paradise, belongs to a well-documented tradition on the characterization of India as a land of *mirabilia*.

Later, during the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the work *Quaestiones et Responsiones* by Pseudo-Caesarius<sup>62</sup> testifies how for a long time in late antiquity the heavenly or earthly collocation of Eden and of the rivers originating from it was subject of discussion<sup>63</sup>. Pseudo-Caesarius, in particular, when quoting the above-mentioned passage from the Genesis, raises questions on the ‘identity’ (ὁμωνυμία)<sup>64</sup> between paradise and Jerusalem, or between heaven and Eden. He specifies that the garden (παράδεισος) of Eden is not in heaven, nor does the spring located there descend from heaven, and neither does the river flowing out of it come from heaven<sup>65</sup>. Pseudo-Caesarius’ passage echoes and reworks that of Epiphanius<sup>66</sup>, who also affirms the earthly seat of paradise. Regarding the location of the Phison, Pseudo-Caesarius states that it flows along Ethiopia and India where it is called Ganges, but the Greeks call it Ister or Indus, while the Illyrians and the Ripians call it Danube (Δανούβιος), and the Goths use a name similar to the latter (Δούναυτη)<sup>67</sup>. As in Epiphanius’

<sup>58</sup> See DIO CHRYSOSTOMUS, XXXV, 22: φασὶ δὲ ἐξαιρετον αὐτοῖς εἶναι μίαν πηγὴν τὴν τῆς ἀληθείας, πολὺ πασῶν ἀρίστην καὶ θειοτάτην, ἧς οὐδέποτε ψεύσασθαι τοὺς ἐμπίπλαμένους.

<sup>59</sup> STOBÆUS, I, 3, 56 in *Ioannis Stobaei Anthologium*, vol. I, rec. C. WACHSMUTH, Berolini 1884.

<sup>60</sup> See fr. 376F in *Porphyrii Philosophi fragmenta*, ed. A. SMITH, Stuttgartiae 1993 [= BSGR].

<sup>61</sup> See the comment on the fr. 7 and the suggestions on this ordeal by C. CASTELLETTI in PORFIRIO, *Sullo Stige*, Milano 2006, p. 245–248, 270–274.

<sup>62</sup> PSEUDO-CAESARIUS, QR, 163. The date of the work *Quaestiones et responsiones* has been ascribed by R. RIEDINGER to the 6<sup>th</sup> century: *Pseudo-Kaisarios. Überlieferungsgeschichte und Verfasserfrage*, München 1969 [= Barchiv, 12], p. 442–444. Cf. I. PERCZEL, *Finding a Place for the Erotapokriseis of Pseudo-Caesarius: A New Document of Sixth-Century Palestinian Origenism*, ARAM.P 18, 2006, p. 49–83, in particular p. 59–61.

<sup>63</sup> According to M. ALEXANDRE, *Entre ciel et terre...*, p. 202–207, the discussion on the heavenly or earthly seat of paradise can be related to the opposing viewpoints of Origen and the anti-origenians.

<sup>64</sup> The meaning of ὁμωνυμία in Caesarius’ text is difficult to interpret, but it is quite likely that the author assumes an “ambiguity, or equivocal identity” between the words. See *LSJ* s.v. ὁμωνυμία.

<sup>65</sup> Caesarius explains the question of the geographical location of Eden in a rather intricate way, but it is clear in his perspective that Eden is not in heaven, but it is a place on earth.

<sup>66</sup> The text of Pseudo-Caesarius contains a broad paraphrase of Epiphanius’ *Ancoratus*: see the study by R. RIEDINGER, *Pseudo-Kaisarios...*, p. 267–274.

<sup>67</sup> PSEUDO-CAESARIUS, QR, 163.

text, the overlapping between Ethiopia and India is evident here<sup>68</sup>, but the names of the rivers identifying the Phison increase. Only that it should be a river located in a region at the edge of the *oikoumene* seems clear. Later on, Pseudo-Caesarus essentially repeats Epiphanius' geographical indications, explaining that this river surrounds the land of Evilat, namely the second Ethiopia and the lands of the Evilites, runs through the first Ethiopia, and then flowing south and west near Gades runs out into the well-known Ocean.

Returning to the *Genesis* passage on the four rivers that originate in Eden, and mainly on the Phison, we find other comments in the 6<sup>th</sup> century work *Christian Topography* by Cosmas Indicopleustes (II, 81)<sup>69</sup>. First of all, we read that the Phison is called Indus or Ganges, it flows from unspecified internal regions into the Indian sea, and it also *produces beans of the Egyptian sort, and the fruit called Neilagathia; savoury herbs, also, and lotus plants, and crocodiles, and everything the Nile produces*<sup>70</sup>. Noteworthy here is the shift from the identification of the Phison with an Indian river to the comparison with the Nile. This association is not surprising as often in Greco-Roman sources the Indus and Ganges are compared to the Nile, owing to the great flow of their waters and their flooding, and for the same reason India is likened to Egypt and Ethiopia: in this respect, it is sufficient to recall Strabo's account on India, which draws information from Aristobulus, Nearchus, Onesicritus and Megasthenes<sup>71</sup>. As for the other rivers, Cosmas states that the Geon flows through Ethiopia and Egypt into our gulf, i.e. the Mediterranean, the Tigris and the Euphrates flow from Persarmenia to the Persian Gulf<sup>72</sup>. In another passage we read that the Indus, which corresponds to the Phison, flows into the Persian Gulf and divides Persia from India<sup>73</sup>. Finally, in a third passage, Cosmas maintains that the Phison separates India from the land of the Huns, and that in the Holy Scripture India is called the land of Evilat<sup>74</sup>. Soon after, Cosmas explains that Evilat is of the race of Cham, for Genesis 10, 6 states that *the sons of Cham are Chous,*

<sup>68</sup> Cf. n. 20.

<sup>69</sup> COSMAS INDICOPLEUSTÈS, *Topographie chrétienne*, vol. I, ed. W. WOLSKA-CONUS, Paris 1968 [= SC, 141] (cetera: COSMAS INDICOPLEUSTES).

<sup>70</sup> COSMAS INDICOPLEUSTES, II, 81: Καὶ οὗτος δὲ ὁ ποταμὸς καὶ κιβώρια ἔχει καὶ τὰ καλούμενα νειλαγαθία καὶ φύλλα καὶ λωτάρια καὶ κροκοδείλους καὶ ἕτερα, ἃ ἔχει ὁ Νεῖλος. See the English translation in COSMAS INDICOPLEUSTES, *The Christian Topography of Cosmas, an Egyptian Monk*, ed. J.W. McCRINDLE, Cambridge 1897, p. 75.

<sup>71</sup> On the comparison of the Nile with the Indus and the Ganges see the numerous passages of Book XV (1, 16; 19; 22; 23; 25–26; 35; 45) in STRABO, *Geography*, vol. VII, trans. H.L. JONES, Cambridge Mass. 1930 [= LCL] (cetera: STRABO). For example, STRABO, XV, 1, 45 relates Aristobulus' news that there are crocodiles in the Nile and Indus (*Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, 139 F 38, vol. I–III, ed. F. JACOBY, Berlin–Leiden 1923–1958).

<sup>72</sup> COSMAS INDICOPLEUSTES, II, 81.

<sup>73</sup> COSMAS INDICOPLEUSTES, XI, 16.

<sup>74</sup> COSMAS INDICOPLEUSTES, XI, 24. In this passage Cosmas quotes word for word Gn 2: 11.

*Mesraeim, Phoud and Chanaan, and the sons of Chous are Sheba and Evilat*<sup>75</sup>. Cosmas' complex interpretation is based on a conceptual model – already implicit in the Genesis text – that is rooted in mythical tales where genealogies contain names of superhuman characters that also embody geographical or natural elements. To give just one example among many, in Hesiod's *Theogony* Gaia, which corresponds to the earth, is the primordial being that generates numerous other beings, including Ocean<sup>76</sup>.

The Greek interpretations on the geographical position of Eden and the four rivers of paradise is also confirmed by some passages of Christian Latin authors. The first worthy of mention here is from Ambrose of Milan's *On Paradise*<sup>77</sup>. In his comments to Genesis 2, 10–14, Ambrose applies an allegorical model. First, we read that paradise is a fertile land in Eden, namely a fertile soul<sup>78</sup>; the fountain in Eden from which a river flows corresponds to the well-cultivated human soul from which all the virtues originate<sup>79</sup>. Then, Ambrose focuses on the four rivers flowing from that fountain: the Phison, as the Jews called it, but Ganges according to Greeks, runs towards India; the Geon, which is the Nile, crosses Egypt and Ethiopia; the Tigris and the Euphrates surround Mesopotamia<sup>80</sup>. Later, Ambrose further clarifies his allegorical interpretation adding that the Wisdom of God corresponds to the fountain of life, and of spiritual grace; the stream that irrigates paradise springs from the fertile soul, which give rise to the four virtues leading to eternal life: prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice<sup>81</sup>, represented by the Phison, the Geon, the Tigris and the Euphrates<sup>82</sup>. As can be seen, the same list of virtues is in Philo's works. The connection between the cultural backgrounds of the two authors can be grasped in Ambrose's statement that *The wise men of this world have adopted this division from us and transferred it to their writings*<sup>83</sup>. Here, one may presume an allusion to the indebtedness of the Greek philosophers to the Bible and the Jewish tradition.

<sup>75</sup> COSMAS INDICOPLEUSTES, XI, 24: υἱοὶ δὲ Χάμ Χοῦς καὶ Μεσραεῖμ Φοῦδ καὶ Χαναάν· υἱοὶ δὲ Χοῦς Σαβᾶ καὶ Εὐλάτ.

<sup>76</sup> HESIOD, *Theogony*, v. 126–138, ed. M.L. WEST, Oxford 1966.

<sup>77</sup> See S. Ambrosii Opera, pars I, *Exameron, De Paradiso, De Cain et Abel, De Noe*, ed. C. SCHENKL, Lipsiae 1886 (cetera: AMBROSIUS, *De Paradiso*).

<sup>78</sup> AMBROSIUS, *De Paradiso*, 3, 12.

<sup>79</sup> AMBROSIUS, *De Paradiso*, 3, 13.

<sup>80</sup> AMBROSIUS, *De Paradiso*, 3, 14.

<sup>81</sup> AMBROSIUS, *De Paradiso*, 3, 14.

<sup>82</sup> AMBROSIUS, *De Paradiso*, 3, 15–18. In this section, Ambrosius explains at length the allegorical meaning of the four virtues represented by the four rivers of paradise.

<sup>83</sup> AMBROSIUS, *De Paradiso*, 3, 14: *Quae etiam sapientes istius mundi ex nostris adsumpta in suorum scripta librorum transtulerunt*. The English translation is by J.J. SAVAGE in St. AMBROSE, *Exameron, Paradise and Cain and Abel*, trans. J.J. SAVAGE, New York 1961 [= FC, 42].

Contrary to Ambrose's interpretation is Augustine's viewpoint. In his *The Literal Meaning of the Genesis* (VIII, 7)<sup>84</sup>, he comments on the same passage from Genesis and shares Epiphanius' opinion by defending the literal truth of the biblical account. Indeed, Augustine believes that the rivers of paradise are real and that their names are not figurative expressions, because they are known to the inhabitants of the lands that they cross. Moreover, two of them had their names changed in the past, because the Phison is now called Ganges, while the Geon is named Nile. In Augustine's perspective, this demonstrates the primacy of a literal over a figurative interpretation of the biblical text. Given that the position of heaven is unknown, Augustine – following Philo's conjecture in *Questions and Answers on Genesis* – supposes that these rivers reach their well-known springs only after an underground course<sup>85</sup>. Augustine's explanation of the real existence of these rivers presents a rationalistic and pragmatic exegetical model that seeks to reconcile mythical and historical data<sup>86</sup>.

Further interesting information on the river Phison can be found in a letter by Jerome (CXXV, 3)<sup>87</sup>:

Felix cursus est, si post sex menses supra dictae urbis portum teneant, a quo se incipit aperire Oceanus, per quem vix anno perpetuo ad Indiam pervenitur et ad Gangem fluvium – quem Phison sancta scriptura cognominat – qui circuit omnem terram Evilat et multa genera pigmentorum de paradisi dicitur fonte evehere. Ibi nascitur carburiculus et zmaragdus et margarita candentia et uniones, quibus nobilium feminarum ardet ambitio, montesque aurei, quos adire propter dracones et gryphas et inensorum corporum monstra hominibus impossibile est, ut ostendatur nobis, quales custodes habeat avaritia.

It is a successful trip if the harbour of the abovenamed city [Aksum] is reached in six months. At that point begins the ocean, which takes nearly a year to cross before you come to India and the river Ganges – called Phison in the Scriptures – which compasses the whole land of Evilat, and is said to carry down from its source in Paradise many kinds of bright pigments. This land is the home of the carbuncle and the emerald, and those gleaming pearls which our great ladies so ardently desire. There are also in it mountains of gold which men cannot approach because of the dragons and griffins and other huge monsters, set there to show us what sort of guardians avarice employs.

<sup>84</sup> See AUGUSTINUS, *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim. De Genesi ad litteram liber imperfectus. Locutiones in Heptateuchum libri septem*, ed. J. ZYCHA, Lipsiae 1894.

<sup>85</sup> On this explanation in Philo and Augustine, see the commentary in St. AUGUSTIN, *La Genèse au sens littéral in douze livres. De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim*, vol. II, trans., praef. et note P. AGAËSSE, A. SOLIGNAC, Paris 1972 [= OsA, 49], p. 501.

<sup>86</sup> On the fact that Augustine dwells on the observation of the reality of things, see the observations of L. FLADERER, *Augustinus als Exeget. Zu seinen Kommentaren des Galaterbriefes und der Genesis*, Wien 2010, p. 201–202.

<sup>87</sup> JEROME, *Select Letters*, trans. F.A. WRIGHT, London 1933 [= LCL, 262].

This passage provides several clues on the location of the Phison. Besides mentioning India and the Ganges, identified with the Phison, here Jerome also provides useful information on the products coming from the land of Evilat. It is a country full of wonders, following the codified patterns of Greco-Roman descriptions of India. The ancient motif recurring in Herodotus' account on giant ants digging gold from the Indian sand<sup>88</sup>, and in Ctesias' tale about griffins guarding gold in the mountains of India<sup>89</sup>, reappears. The same theme is reused here as a moralistic metaphor for avarice. Moreover, in another letter (LIII, 1)<sup>90</sup> Jerome mentions the journey of Apollonius of Tyana, who is said to have arrived in India, and then by crossing the river Phison, namely the Ganges, reached the Brahmans. This last detail is duplicated in Palladius' *On the Races of India and the Brahmans*. Finally, the river Phison flowing from paradise and commonly called Ganges is also mentioned in Jerome's *De situ et nominibus locorum hebraicorum liber*<sup>91</sup>.

In addition to all this, it is worth recalling a passage in the *Expositio totius mundi et gentium* (IV–VII), which has many common elements with the *Journey from the Paradise of Eden to the Romans*. Here, we read that in the easterly land of the Camarini<sup>92</sup> – called Eden by Moses – a large river flows that then branches into four rivers called *Geon*, *Phison*, *Tigris* and *Euphrates*<sup>93</sup>. The population of the Camarini is then described as an ideal, utopian and perfectly orderly society: they do not cultivate, they eat bread that rains from above, they do not get sick, they live long, they are absolutely honest, and they rule themselves without an overriding authority<sup>94</sup>. In the *Expositio* immediately after the Camarini are placed the Brahmans, also very honest and lacking a supreme authority like their neighbours<sup>95</sup>. As can be seen, many connections on the same themes recur between Palladius' treatise, the *Expositio*, the *Journey*, and Jerome's Letter 53.

To conclude this overview of the Latin sources dealing with the river Phison, we should mention a passage from the *Etymologies* by Isidore of Seville (XIII, 21, 8)<sup>96</sup>, who, paraphrasing the text of the Genesis, writes that the Ganges is called Phison

<sup>88</sup> HERODOTUS, III, 102.

<sup>89</sup> CTÉSIAS DE CNIDE, *La Perse. L'Inde. Autres fragments*, F 45, 26, ed. D. LENFANT, Paris 2004 [= CUF. SG, 435] (cetera: CTESIAS, *Indica*).

<sup>90</sup> Cf. SAINT JÉRÔME, *Correspondance. Lettres LIII–LXX*, ed. J. LABOURT, Paris 1953, p. 9.

<sup>91</sup> *Onomastica sacra*, ed. P. DE LAGARDE, Gottingae 1870, p. 117, s.v. *Evila*.

<sup>92</sup> In the *Journey* they are referred to as *Macarinoi* (see above).

<sup>93</sup> *Expositio totius mundi*, IV.

<sup>94</sup> *Expositio totius mundi*, V–VII.

<sup>95</sup> *Expositio totius mundi*, VIII. On the connection between the Camarini with the Brahmans, see R. STONEMAN, *Tales of Utopia: Alexander, Cynics and Christian Ascetics*, [in:] *Philosophy and the Ancient Novel*, ed. M.P. FUTRE PINHEIRO, S. MONTIGLIO, Groningen 2015, p. 51–63, in particular p. 55–56. On the analysis of the description of the Camarini in the *Expositio*, see my article *The Brahmans' Utopia from the Greek Sources to John of Salisbury's Policraticus*, IGr 15, 2021, p. 97–113, mainly p. 101–103.

<sup>96</sup> ISIDORUS HISPALENSIS, *Etimologiae*, vol. XIII, trans. G. GASPAROTTO, Paris 2004 (cetera: ISIDORUS).

in the Holy Script, it flows from paradise and crosses India. The Phison is called “throng” (*caterva*) because it receives ten streams, while the Ganges is called thus from the Indian king Gangarus, it rises like the Nile and floods the easterly lands. As observed by F. Delpech<sup>97</sup>, it seems that Isidore’s etymology of the name Ganges leads back to a mythical tale from Philostratus’ *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, according to which a king called Ganges, son of the river Ganges, once reigned over India<sup>98</sup>. Furthermore, the motif of the assimilation of the Indian fluvial waters of those of the Nile reappears.

If we consider the above-mentioned sources as a whole, there are some important elements that deserve closer analysis. First of all, it is interesting to note that Genesis already places paradise in the East (2, 8). If we then compare this passage with the comments provided by the hellenised Jewish writers as well as by the Christian ones, we see that also the territories crossed by the four rivers are in the East: the Phison flows in the land of Evilat, which corresponds to India<sup>99</sup>; the Geon in Ethiopia<sup>100</sup>, that is considered – as seen – a marginal land and often mistaken for India both in Greco-Roman and Christian sources; the Tigris reaches the Assyrian territory<sup>101</sup> and together with the Euphrates delimits Mesopotamia<sup>102</sup> to finally flow into the Eritrean Sea<sup>103</sup>, or into the Persian Gulf<sup>104</sup>, or into the Dead Sea, according to the different versions<sup>105</sup>.

Another point of interest that emerges from the sources collected above on the Phison, is its variable identification with the Ganges, with the Indus, with the Hyphasis, or with the Ister or Danube. This shows not only the uncertainty of the authors’ actual geographical knowledge, but also and above all the absence of the need to verify their information. The authors infer geographical details largely from reading previous texts, generating a transmission of data that are not real, but codified as recurring *topoi*. Emblematic is the case of the reworking of Epiphanius’ *Ancoratus* passage in Pseudo-Caesarius’ *Quaestiones et responsiones*, where the same literal interpretation of the Genesis passage is given, but the geographical location of the Phison is even more uncertain and muddled. Indeed,

<sup>97</sup> F. DELPECH, *Remarques sur la légende du roi Gangès, fils du gange (Philostrate, Vie d’Apollonios de Tyane III, 20–21): imaginaire grec et mythes indiens*, [in:] *Fleuves d’Asie. Centres de civilisation*, ed. P.-S. FILIOZAT, M. ZINK, Paris 2020, p. 111–157, in particular p. 132.

<sup>98</sup> PHILOSTRATUS OF ATHENS, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, III, 20–21, vol. I, trans. C.P. JONES, Cambridge Mass. 2005 [= LCL, 16].

<sup>99</sup> JOSEPHUS, I, 1, 3; PALLADIUS, *Gentibus Indiae*, I, 1; COSMAS INDICOPLEUSTES, II, 81; PSEUDO-CAESARIUS, QR, 163; ISIDORUS, XIII, 21, 8.

<sup>100</sup> PHILO, *Legum Allegoriae*, I, 21, 68; PHILOSTORGIUS, III, 10; COSMAS INDICOPLEUSTES, II, 81; PSEUDO-CAESARIUS, QR, 164; ISIDORUS, XIII, 21, 7.

<sup>101</sup> PHILO, *Legum Allegoriae*, I, XXI, 69; PSEUDO-CAESARIUS, QR, 165.

<sup>102</sup> PHILOSTORGIUS, III, 8; ISIDORUS, XIII, 21, 10.

<sup>103</sup> JOSEPHUS, I, 1, 3.

<sup>104</sup> COSMAS INDICOPLEUSTES, II, 81.

<sup>105</sup> ISIDORUS, XIII, 21, 10.

the only common element is that this river is placed in a marginal Eastern area – or in the North-East if we comply with the mention of the Danube and the Ripians by Pseudo-Caesarius –, in any case distant from the *oikoumene*, known first to the Greeks and the Romans, and then to the Christians.

In addition, more attention should be paid to the Genesis words on the Phison crossing the land of Evilat where there are gold, onyx and aromatic resin (2, 11–12). To this end, if we examine the classical tradition, we can verify that the presence of gold<sup>106</sup>, precious stones<sup>107</sup> and uncommon fragrances<sup>108</sup> is a feature of the Indian territory and one of the most widespread *topoi* in the descriptions of India given by Greco-Roman authors<sup>109</sup>. These sources represent India as a land of marvels, where extraordinary events occur, where natural laws are subverted, where enormous riches are to be found and fabulous peoples live. All these traits have contributed to the image of a utopian land, remote in both space and time.

One example among many is enough to clarify the topical motifs in the narrations produced by classical antiquity on India<sup>110</sup>. It is the synthesis of the *Indika* by Ctesias as reported in the *Bibliotheca* by Photius<sup>111</sup>, where we find all the stereotypes used by Greek culture to define India as a sort of geographical *elsewhere* placed at the easternmost boundary of the *oikoumene*<sup>112</sup>. Two factors should be considered when evaluating this document. Firstly, Lucian already regarded the information from Ctesias' *Indika* to be mendacious since the author had never seen India nor heard of it<sup>113</sup>. Thus, a well-known codified tradition about India, described with paradoxical elements, was already established in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. Secondly, Lucian's statement is confirmed by the fact that Photius himself at the end of his summary of the *Indika* claims that Ctesias told paradoxical stories but passed them off as true<sup>114</sup>. We can therefore assume that this aspect already

<sup>106</sup> See the above-mentioned account by Herodotus (III, 102): cf. K. KARTTUNEN, *India in Early Greek Literature*, Helsinki 1989 [= SO.SOF, 65], p. 171–176.

<sup>107</sup> K. KARTTUNEN, *India and...*, p. 233–252; G. PARKER, *The Making of Roman India*, Cambridge 2008 [= GCRW], p. 154–156.

<sup>108</sup> G. PARKER, *The Making...*, p. 150–154.

<sup>109</sup> On stereotyped descriptions of India, see J.S. ROMM, *The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought. Geography, Exploration, and Fiction*, Princeton NJ 1992, p. 82–120.

<sup>110</sup> A full list of the Greco-Roman sources would be too long. However, it is useful to mention the collections of B. BRELOER, F. BÖMER, *Fontes historiae religionum Indicarum*, Bonn 1939 [= FHR, 7] and *L'Inde vue de Rome. Textes latins de l'Antiquité relatifs à l'Inde*, ed. J. ANDRÉ, J. FILLIOZAT, Paris 1986.

<sup>111</sup> See the edition CTESIAS, *Indica*, F 45.

<sup>112</sup> On Ctesias' *Indika*, see J.S. ROMM, *The Edges...*, p. 86–88; G. PARKER, *The Making...*, p. 28–33. Cf. M. ALBALADEJO VIVERO, *La India en la literatura griega. Uno estudio etnográfico*, Alcalá 2005, p. 43–54.

<sup>113</sup> LUCIANUS, *Historiae Verae*, I, 3. It should be noted that Lucian in *The Lover of Lies* (ch. 2) maintains both Herodotus and Ctesias as untruthful, cf. LUCIAN, *The Lover of Lies, or the Doubter*, vol. III, trans. H. HARMON, Cambridge Mass. 1921 [= LCL].

<sup>114</sup> CTESIAS, *Indica*, F 45, 51.



appeared in the original version of the work. Nonetheless, it is also possible that Photius' account reflects the layering of paradoxical elements that overlapped over the centuries and became *topoi*<sup>115</sup>. However things stand, Ctesias' *Indika* constituted a source much exploited by later authors<sup>116</sup>.

If we examine Photius' exposition, we find a detailed description of several prodigies and incredible events happening in India. Among others, we read that: a) India's population is larger than that of the whole world<sup>117</sup>; b) farther East there are no countries inhabited by men<sup>118</sup>; c) there is neither thunder, lightning, nor rain<sup>119</sup>; d) the climate is so hot that the sun looks much larger than usual and many die of the heat<sup>120</sup>; e) the surface of the sea is so hot that fish keep to the bottom<sup>121</sup>; f) there are huge golden mountains<sup>122</sup>; g) there are several miraculous fountains in different areas: one fills with liquid gold every year<sup>123</sup>, one produces honey<sup>124</sup>, another discharges everything that is plunged into it except iron, silver, gold, and copper<sup>125</sup>. The information attributed to Ctesias on the Indian vegetation is equally extraordinary. On that land huge reeds<sup>126</sup> and palms<sup>127</sup> grow, and there are very strange trees, like the *parebum* that attracts everything that comes closer to its roots<sup>128</sup>, the *siptachora* from which the inhabitants gather amber<sup>129</sup>, and the *carpion* that produces extremely fragrant oily drops<sup>130</sup>. The human beings living there are also given very unusual characteristics. Among the information that Photius attributes to Ctesias we find monstrous beings<sup>131</sup> – like the *martichora*<sup>132</sup>,

<sup>115</sup> J.M. BIGWOOD, *Ctesias' Indica and Photius*, *Phoenix* 43, 1989, p. 302–316, supposes that Photius' synthesis of Ctesias' *Indika* could have been affected by the Photius' interest for fantastic narrations. Cf. A. NICHOLS, *Ctesias' Indica and the Origins of Paradoxography*, [in:] *Recognizing Miracles in Antiquity and Beyond*, ed. M. GEROLEMOU, Berlin–Boston 2018, p. 3–16.

<sup>116</sup> For instance, Pliny describes the fabulous peoples of India by quoting Ctesias (PLINIUS, VII, 2, 27–30).

<sup>117</sup> CTESIUS, *Indica*, F 45, 2.

<sup>118</sup> CTESIUS, *Indica*, F 45, 4.

<sup>119</sup> CTESIUS, *Indica*, F 45, 5; F 45, 18.

<sup>120</sup> CTESIUS, *Indica*, F 45, 12.

<sup>121</sup> CTESIUS, *Indica*, F 45, 13.

<sup>122</sup> CTESIUS, *Indica*, F 45, 26.

<sup>123</sup> CTESIUS, *Indica*, F 45, 9.

<sup>124</sup> CTESIUS, *Indica*, F 45, 29.

<sup>125</sup> CTESIUS, *Indica*, F 45, 49.

<sup>126</sup> CTESIUS, *Indica*, F 45, 14.

<sup>127</sup> CTESIUS, *Indica*, F 45, 28.

<sup>128</sup> CTESIUS, *Indica*, F 45, 35.

<sup>129</sup> CTESIUS, *Indica*, F 45, 36.

<sup>130</sup> CTESIUS, *Indica*, F 45, 47.

<sup>131</sup> On the fantastic creatures inhabiting India, see R. WITTKOWER, *Marvels of the East. A Study in the History of Monsters*, *JWCI* 5, 1942, p. 159–197. See G.L. CAMPBELL, *Strange Creatures...*, p. 114–120.

<sup>132</sup> CTESIUS, *Indica*, F 45, 15. On the *martichora*, see P. LI CAUSI, *Sulle tracce del mantichora. La zoologia dei confini del mondo in Grecia e a Roma*, Palermo 2003.

the gryphons<sup>133</sup>, worms that live in the Indus<sup>134</sup>, asses with a horn on their forehead<sup>135</sup> – and a variety of huge<sup>136</sup> or very tiny animals<sup>137</sup>. In addition, we read of a number of legendary peoples<sup>138</sup>, whose features are mostly aberrant, like the ‘dogheaded’ men (Κυνοκέφαλοι)<sup>139</sup>, the Pygmies<sup>140</sup>, human beings born with white hair that turns black as they age, those with eight fingers and those with huge ears<sup>141</sup>.

If we reflect on Ctesias’ narration, we realize that it shares several motifs with the above-mentioned sources on the river Phison and its geographical position. From this perspective, Philostorgius’ passage is especially relevant – as we have seen – but Cosmas Indicopleustes’ *Christian Topography* and the Letter 125 by Jerome are also worth recalling, as they replicate already codified *topoi* about India. Cosmas mentions the unique herbs and crocodiles of the Indus, according to the motif of the Indian rivers-Nile assimilation. And for his part, Jerome – despite having knowledge of the reality of commercial travels to India – borrows the paradoxical tales on India’s perfumes, precious stones, golden mountains, and monsters for a moralistic purpose.

Summarizing what we have so far observed, it is possible to trace a history of the interpretations of the Genesis passage on the four rivers of paradise. The first fact is that the descriptions of India provided by Greek authors, starting with Scylax<sup>142</sup>, Ctesias, and Herodotus<sup>143</sup>, go back to the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE. It would not be difficult to say that their model of representation is the one on which the Genesis narration was shaped, where Eden is in the East, the river Phison flows in the land of Evilat, full of gold and treasures, and also the remaining three rivers that originate from paradise flow across Eastern lands. This is what appears in the translation of the Septuagint which was produced in the Hellenistic Jewish cultural *milieu* of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE<sup>144</sup>. Later, in the notes of Flavius Josephus and in the commentaries of Philo – both belonging to the same hellenised Jewish

<sup>133</sup> CTESIAs, *Indica*, F 45, 26. See K. KARTTUNEN, *India in Early...*, p. 177–179.

<sup>134</sup> CTESIAs, *Indica*, F 45, 46.

<sup>135</sup> CTESIAs, *Indica*, F 45, 45.

<sup>136</sup> Giant roosters (CTESIAs, *Indica*, F 45, 8), dogs that can attack lions (F 45, 10), sheep and goats larger than asses (F 45, 27).

<sup>137</sup> The bird called *dicairon* is the size of a partridge’s egg (CTESIAs, *Indica*, F 45, 34).

<sup>138</sup> Cf. K. KARTTUNEN, *India in Early...*, p. 127–133.

<sup>139</sup> CTESIAs, *Indica*, F 45, 40–43. On the *Cynocephali*, see K. KARTTUNEN, *India in Early...*, p. 180–185.

<sup>140</sup> CTESIAs, *Indica* F 45, 21. A copious study of the sources mentioning Pygmies is in P. JANNI, *Etnografia e mito. La storia dei Pigmei*, Roma 1978.

<sup>141</sup> CTESIAs, *Indica* F 45, 50.

<sup>142</sup> On Scylax’s account on India see K. KARTTUNEN, *India in Early...*, p. 65–68; J.S. ROMM, *The Edges...*, p. 84–85; M. ALBALADEJO VIVERO, *La India...*, p. 15–20; G. PARKER, *The Making...*, p. 14–18.

<sup>143</sup> On Herodotus’ passages on India, see K. KARTTUNEN, *India in Early...*, p. 73–79; M. ALBALADEJO VIVERO, *La India...*, p. 27–41.

<sup>144</sup> See M. HENGEL, *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture. Its Prehistory and the Problem of its Canon*, London–New York 2002 [= OTS].

environment of the 1<sup>st</sup> century – the Genesis passage was reinterpreted allegorically in order to highlight its moral meaning, but traces of a re-elaboration of Greek accounts on Eastern countries, and India in particular, are visible. A third and yet later layer was constituted by the comments of the Christian authors who present both the allegorical interpretation of the text – as is the case of Ambrose – and the literal one – as regarding Epiphanius, Pseudo-Caesarius and Augustine. Even among Christian writers, such as Philostorgius, Cosmas, Jerome and Isidore, the reproduction of stereotypes about a remote, and sometimes deliberately unknown, *elsewhere* emerges. Finally, in a context of Christian-eschatological works, such as that of the *Journey from the Paradise of Eden to the Romans*, the *Expositio totius mundi*, and Palladius' *On the Peoples of India and the Brahmans*, India and the Indian river flowing out of paradise are connected to the lands inhabited by blessed peoples, such as the Macarinoi, the Camarini and the Brahmans: they have no need of civilisation and technological innovations, since their life is characterised by a temporal removal, a sort of remote *elsewhen* outside of history. In any case, the common element in the whole sequence of these texts is the reproduction of ancient ideas, originally conceived by the Greeks and then echoed by the Romans. Ultimately, the sources analysed show that India, imagined as a *utopian* land by the Greco-Roman world<sup>145</sup>, was later identified as a land close to paradise, in both hellenised Jewish and Christian circles.

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