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Framing Egypt : Roman literary perceptions of Egypt from Cicero to Juvenal

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I

Pliny the Elder's Egypt: representations of Egypt in the *Natural History*

1. INTRODUCTION

The *Natural History*, the encyclopedic work of Pliny the Elder (AD 23 – 79), claims to cover everything found in the Roman world. It is the largest, surviving, single work of Roman times. Its 37 books contain a myriad of well-organized facts: first, the world above the earth's surface; then the different regions, humans, animals and vegetation on the surface; and finally the stones and minerals beneath it. Thus, representations of Egypt can be found distributed over several books and chapters in the *Natural History*. For instance, its geography and topography are explained in book 5; Egyptian animals can be found in book 18; and Egyptian monuments are described in book 36 where Pliny discusses various types of stone. Although not specifically about Egypt, the *Natural History* is the most informative and comprehensive Roman source on Egypt. Other Roman literature contains perceptions of Egypt but they mainly focus on one specific theme, such as the Nile or animal worship. The potential importance of the *Natural History* for establishing Roman perceptions of Egypt has been noted before but not been studied well, apart from a couple of passages such as Pliny the Elder's account of Egyptian wonders, probably because of its bulk and prosaic nature.¹⁰⁶ This chapter is the result of an investigation into all kinds of references to the various different Egyptian topoi that the *Natural History* contains. This

¹⁰⁶ In her work on Roman perceptions of the Nile Manolaraki has recently emphasized the 'amount of Egyptian material' in the *Natural History*, and she notes that this work embodies 'shifting associations of the Nile', but she decided not to undertake a study of the entire *Natural History*, because 'the sheer volume of Pliny's *Aegyptiaca* discourages a full analysis and falls outside my scope', 2013, 127.

— Note on text edition and translation of Pliny's *Natural History*: the text used is Von Jan and Mayhoff's 1967 Teubner edition, translations are my own.

chapter focuses first and foremost on Pliny's conctualization Egypt by comparing them to two traditional concepts of negative stereotyping and antiquity. It deals, in the second place, with the contextualization of Pliny's representation of Egypt. It discusses how this representation functions within the larger context of the *Natural History*.

Pliny wrote his encyclopedia approximately a century after Actium. This means that the communicative memory – possibly reflected in Augustan poetry – of Actium has disappeared, to use Assmann's term (explained in the general discussion on pp. 31-32). According to Assmann, after three generations communicative memory is transferred into cultural memory by 'cultural formation' and 'institutional communication'. Pliny wrote exactly in this time of transition. Consequently, his representation of Egypt in the Flavian age may have differed greatly from those who eye-witnessed Actium. Furthermore, Pliny the Elder wrote in a time when concepts of Egypt were actively used by Flavian emperors to legitimate their rule. For instance, in ancient historical sources the crowning of Vespasian in Egypt was associated with the flooding of Nile and, consequently, with the prosperity of Egypt and Rome. Apart from Roman literary sources, also Roman material culture shows grand-scale Flavian adaptation of Egyptian and Egyptianizing objects in particular those related to the cults of Isis.¹⁰⁷ It has been argued that the Flavian use of concepts of Egypt was a consequence of an increased interaction between Rome and its periphery that took place in that time; this close relationship between center and periphery in the Flavian period led to an intercultural framework in which new concepts of Egypt could operate. Based upon this argumentation it has been stated that in the Flavian period Augustan negative stereotypes coexist with perceptions that are 'less contemptuous and more inquisitive'.¹⁰⁸ In addition, the *Natural History* belongs to the genre of ethnographical/geographical works, which seem to have approached Egypt from a less biased stance than poetry did. For instance, Smelik and Hemelrijk note that 'ethnographical writings show more openness than usual towards barbarian cultures', when stating that Strabo's work shows less prejudice

¹⁰⁷ See Versluys forthcoming, with references to relevant literature.

¹⁰⁸ Manolaraki 2013, 126, who quotes on the same page Ando 2003, 326, to support her argument. Ando notes in relation to Roman religion: 'the Mediterranean world in the Flavian period was integrated as never before. This can be studied in a number of ways: trade, migration, communication and, as a special example of the latter two, the spread of diaspora cults.'

against Egypt than Augustan poetry.¹⁰⁹ At least negative stereotypes of Egypt or the Egyptians are extremely rare in the *Natural History*.¹¹⁰ By studying Pliny's conceptualization of Egypt, the present chapter aims to put the allegedly central role of Actium and Augustan poetry in perspective.

The *Natural History* is an encyclopedic work. Nevertheless, in the last three decades it has been reappraised as a monograph. It is now widely acknowledged to be a product of empire, since knowledge of previously unknown regions was becoming available as a result of military conquest and exploration. Because of its relation between 'imperial control' and 'imperial knowledge', the *Natural History* can be called a product of its time, i.e. it contains the Flavian 'Zeitgeist'.¹¹¹ It also produces a mental map of the Roman world in which interconnectivity and interdependence are central themes. The present chapter aims to investigate whether Pliny's conceptualization of Egypt fits into the two 'traditional' concepts (negative stereotypes and positive evaluation of Egypt's antiquity, see general introduction on pp. 11-13) and explain it in the larger context of the *Natural History*. How does Egypt function in Pliny's overall message?

1.1. *A short guide to the contents of the Natural History with special attention to representations of Egypt*

Pliny wrote the *Natural History* in the last decade of his life (70-79 CE) and dedicated it to Titus who was about to become the next emperor.¹¹² In the

¹⁰⁹ Smelik and Hemelrijk 1984, 1929.

¹¹⁰ Particularly one passage involving Alexandrians can be read as including the negative stereotype of untrustworthiness that appears frequently in association with Alexandria or Egypt in the Roman literature (Plin. *HN* 12.59). In this passage the Alexandrians appear to be notorious for stealing frankincense. Murphy 2004, 103, however, shows that in this passage it is not the untrustworthiness of Egyptians *sec* that is most important, but the fact that their fraudulence as *civilized* people contrasts with the honesty of native Arabians. See also Beagon 1992, 78 n. 46. Another text involving the fraudulence is Plin. *NH* 12.200 in which the Alexandrians are said to adulterate opium. Another instance where *adulterare* is used in an Egyptian context is *NH* 37.119. Here Egyptian kings are said to be famous for their adulteration of the stone *cyanus* by other tinted stones.

¹¹¹ See p. 46, n. 142-143.

¹¹² Pliny and Titus may have served together in the Roman army; for this and other biographical information on Pliny the Elder, see esp. Syme 1969; 1987; 1991, but also Beagon 2005, 1-11.

preface, Pliny formulates the object of his study as the ‘world of nature or, in other words, life’ (*rerum natura, hoc est vita, pref.* 13). His work aims to cover the entire natural world (*NH* 2.2):¹¹³

sacer est, aeternus, immensus, totus in toto, immo vero ipse totum, infinitus et finito similis, omnium rerum certus et similis incerto, extra intra cuncta complexus in se, idemque rerum naturae opus et rerum ipsa natura.

It is sacred, eternal, immeasurable, complete in completeness, rather itself truly completeness, infinite and similar to the finite, definite of all things and similar to the indefinite, including in it everything that is within and without, at once a work of nature and nature itself.

In order to give the impression that he succeeded in presenting everything there is to know, Pliny arranged his work carefully. The imposed order is underlined by the table of contents. The encyclopedia starts with a description of the universe (book 2), followed by the treatment of the geography and ethnography of the territories that together make up this universe (books 3-6). Then the focus shifts to life on the earth's surface: humans (book 7), animals (books 8-11), trees and plants (books 12-27), and the medical uses of the flora (books 28-32). The last five books contain a description of elements delved from underneath the earth's surface: stones and minerals (books 33-37).¹¹⁴

Based upon the bibliography that Pliny gives for each book in his table of content, Pliny gathered the relevant facts from earlier Roman and Greek sources. The *Natural History* cannot, however, simply be characterized as a compilation. Pliny's ‘creative intentions’¹¹⁵ can be traced throughout the work. He is striving to present new information, and the way the facts are presented points at several underlying tactics and strategies to persuade the

¹¹³ For the relation of his passage and the cosmological theories of Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics, see Beagon 1992, 26-54. This passage of Pliny together with his cosmological section have been analyzed thoroughly, for references see Beagon, *ibid.*, 26 n. 1. See also Carey 2003, 21-22, who points out the ambivalence (infinite and finite, definite and indefinite, within and without) of the passage and reads it as a reflection of Pliny's *Natural History* as a whole: it is a work about nature, but it can also be a work of nature itself.

¹¹⁴ An extended description of the organization of the *Natural History* can be found in Isager 1991, 41.

¹¹⁵ For the quote, see Beagon 1992, 21.

reader to come to certain conclusions.¹¹⁶ Though Pliny's work reflects his interest in geography, physics and biology, it is not based on 'fieldwork'. A vivid image of Pliny's devotion to studying literary sources is given by his nephew Pliny the Younger in a letter to Baebius Macer (Plin. *Ep.* 3.5): his uncle appears to have been a workaholic, he seems to have spent every available hour of the day studying and reading sources, assisted by several secretaries. In this respect, a modern study called it 'somewhat ironical'¹¹⁷ that Pliny the Elder died during the natural phenomenon of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius as commander of the Roman fleet at Misenum. This final episode in Pliny the Elder's life is also famously narrated by Pliny the Younger in another letter (Plin. *Ep.* 6.16).¹¹⁸

The *Natural History* is first and foremost associated with geographical and historical works. Pliny's sources for his description of Egypt seem to have been predominantly historians like Herodotus, Diodorus of Sicily and Apion. Herodotus is mentioned as the source in the chapters on pyramids (*NH* 36.79) and the Egyptian labyrinth (*NH* 36.84). Diodorus is not specifically referred to when discussing Egypt, but Pliny does mention him rather prominently in his preface (*NH pref.* 26) and in his table of contents as the source for book 5 – where he discusses the geography and topography of Upper and Lower Egypt and the Nile. Apion, who wrote a treatise on Egyptian affairs, τὰ Αἰγυπτιακά, seems to be an important source for Pliny on Egyptian matters: *NH* 30.8 on a magical plant that also grows in Egypt; *NH* 30.99 on the beetle

¹¹⁶ For Pliny's strategies to give the impression of 'totality', see Carey 2003, 17-40. Pliny recognized the difficulty of presenting his work in an attractive manner as can be derived from *NH pref.* 15: *res ardua vetustis novitatem dare, novis auctoritatem, obsoletis nitorem, obscuris lucem, fastiditis gratiam, dubiis fidem, omnibus vero naturam et naturae sua omnia*, 'It is a hard task to give novelty to what is old, authority to what is new, splendour to what is worn-out, light to what is obscure, attraction to what is repugnant, credibility to what is doubtful, yet nature to all things and all her properties to nature.' To underline the novelty of his work, he stresses that he is presenting new material in *NH pref.* 17: *ex exquisitis auctoribus centum inclusimus XXXVI voluminibus, adiectis rebus plurimis, quas aut ignoraverant priores aut postea invenerat vita*, 'We have included in 36 volumes facts from one hundred writers that we have studied meticulously, with a great number of facts in addition that previous writers either ignored or later experience discovered.'

¹¹⁷ For the quote, see Beagon 1992, 1.

¹¹⁸ Pliny the Younger describes his uncle as possessing *acre ingenium, incredibile studium, summa vigilenta*, 'an acute intellect, an amazing devotion to study, and an immense capacity of doing without sleep', Plin. *Ep.* 3.5.8 tr. Beagon, 1992, 1.

as one of Egypt's deities; *NH* 36.79 on pyramids; and *NH* 37.75 on a statue of Serapis in the Egyptian labyrinth.¹¹⁹

Throughout the *Natural History* hundreds of references are made to Egypt that include geographical and topographical information on Egypt's territory and the Nile, descriptions of Egyptian flora and fauna, medical use of Egyptian plants, descriptions of Egyptian monuments and anecdotes about Cleopatra. Not all of the references are equally useful for the study of Roman perceptions of Egypt. For example, the information that some kind of stone originated in Egypt may give the impression that the provenance of a stone mattered to the Romans, but without additional information, it does not give much insight into what Romans thought of Egypt. Hence, the passages discussed below have in common that they contain Roman cultural and geopolitical views regarding Egyptian material. The interpretative framework that relates the *Natural History* to Roman attitudes towards rule, conquest and the cultural implications of embedding foreign areas in the Roman Empire has been constructed by modern research.

1.2. *Reading the Natural History as a monograph: status quaestionis*

In the last three decades modern research has shown that the *Natural History* is more than a reference work.¹²⁰ Since the 1980s it has been studied in its entirety, as a treatise on a particular subject with a central message. The break from the traditional *Quellenforschung* was first established by several studies of the scientific world of Pliny, placing his writings within the larger context of Roman technical and philosophical thoughts.¹²¹ Several scholars who

¹¹⁹ Apion was a 1st cent. CE Alexandrian grammarian who wrote a five-book work about Egypt, called *Aegyptiaca* or τὰ Αἰγυπτιακά ('Egyptian affairs'), see J. Ap. 2.10; Gell. *NA* 5.14.4; 6.8.4; 10.10.2; Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos*, 39. Damon 2011, argues that Pliny in *NH* *pref.* 26 specifically referred to Apion's *Aegyptiaca* as a source for his *Natural History*. See also Damon 2008, 347-359, for a biography of Apion and Apion's negative reputation in antiquity, specifically focussing on his *Aegyptiaca*.

¹²⁰ Due to the interest in isolated items, research on the *Natural History* mostly involved a study into the sources used by Pliny. For this *Quellenforschung* see: Detlefsen 1901; Münzer 1897 and a more modern example: Sallmann 1971.

¹²¹ The first studies that focussed on the ancient scientific culture in which Pliny wrote are papers of several conferences. The papers of the Como-conference (1979), *Atti del convegno di Como, 27-29 settembre 1979*, published in four volumes: *Tecnologia, economia e società nel mondo romano* (1980), *Plinio il Vecchio sotto il profilo storico e letterario* (1982), *Plinio e la natura* (1982), *La città antica come fatto di cultura*

approached the *Natural History* as a monograph and actually *read* it instead of just *referred* to it are of special importance for my discussion of Pliny the Elder's Egypt.¹²²

In her book *Roman Nature, the thought of Pliny the Elder* (1992), Mary Beagon demonstrates the diverse intellectual and philosophical discussions on which Pliny drew when he composed his encyclopedia. According to Beagon, the relation between Pliny's divine 'Nature' (*Natura*) and man is the central theme of *Natural History*, although that relationship is complicated: 'The benevolent deity [*Natura*] who serves the interests of her supreme creation, man, can sometimes unleash a chaos of unruly elements which threaten his very existence. On some occasions, she is no more than a backdrop for the works and deeds of man. At other times, her power imposes limitations on the ambitions of man's inferior intellect.'¹²³ Beagon's work is particularly important for my study as it gives insight into Pliny's selection criteria. Whether certain information was stressed or omitted – including his representation of Egypt – was first and foremost molded by certain philosophical thoughts. For instance, animal worship is mainly approached negatively elsewhere in the Roman literature. Pliny's account (*NH* 8.184-186) of Apis, on the other hand, shows respect and interest in this animal god, and lacks the regular rejection of animal worship. His attitude towards Apis becomes understandable when the wider context is taken into account. In the *Natural History* animals are considered to exist for the purpose of man.¹²⁴ The

(1983); the papers of the Nantes conference (1985), published in *Helmantica* and in Pigeaud and Oroz 1987; and the papers of the London symposium (1983) published in French and Greenaway 1986. The most influential study focussing on Pliny's contribution to Roman science and technology is Healy 1999.

¹²² Other important studies that contribute to the tendency to read the *Natural History* as a monograph include: Gibson and Morello 2011, a collection of papers of the Manchester conference 2006 that focussed on several aspects of imperialism in the *Natural History*; Bispham, Rowe and Matthews 2007, a collection of essays that particularly placed Pliny's *Natural History* in the politics and culture of the Flavian age; De Oliveira 1992, who studied Pliny's moral and political motives; Citroni Marchetti 1991, who studied Roman moral opinions in the *Natural History*; Wallace-Hadrill 1990, who noted the antithesis between nature and luxury and argued that this digression was part of Pliny's strategy to give science a more prominent place in Roman culture.

¹²³ Beagon 1992, 50. See also Beagon 2005.

¹²⁴ Teleology (here the purpose of animals in men's lives), though important, is not the only guideline in Pliny's description of animals, see Beagon 1992, 133: 'Teleology is certainly part of Pliny's view of life, but it is not allowed to restrict his aim of

account of Apis forms a digression in the discussion of one of the most useful animals for man according to Pliny: the ox. Within this context of conducive relationships between man and animal, negative conceptualizations of such an animal as useful as the ox would have been out of place.¹²⁵

The other three scholars to whose work this chapter is particularly indebted do not focus on Pliny's thoughts but on Pliny's project of encyclopedism. All three studies appeared almost simultaneously and connect Pliny's encyclopedia with Rome's world power, but from different angles. The first one is Valérie Naas' *Le projet encyclopédie de Pline l'ancien* (2002). In this book Naas lays bare the methodological and ideological nature of Pliny's 'project'. She argues that many characteristics of the *Natural History*, such as its order and totality, are peppered by Flavian moralities. For my study, her chapters on the *mirabilia* are especially important.¹²⁶ Naas notices the centrality of Rome in the *Natural History* and Pliny's techniques to create this result. The *mirabilia* of the remote parts of the Roman Empire are emulated by the city of Rome itself in such a way that Rome becomes the greatest miracle of all.¹²⁷ Naas explains how *mirabilia* are usually connected to far and remote places 'which is part of their status; what is far away can be unknown or vague and the confrontation with it arouses surprise and wonderment.'¹²⁸ The connection between *mirabilia* and the periphery makes the very inclusion of the *mirabilia* on its own an important indication of Rome's ability and power to control the periphery of its empire. The periphery functions to glorify Rome, and because those miracles of the periphery are manifest in Rome, Rome becomes the world, a *mundus alius in uno loco*.¹²⁹ Naas' main example of *mirabilia* of the periphery that serve to enhance Rome's status are Egyptian monuments. This topic will be discussed further below on pp. 75-76.

portraying *Natura* both in detail and as a coherent whole.' See *ib.* 125-133, for a discussion of teleology and the influence of Aristoteles on the *Natural History*.

¹²⁵ See for similar argumentation Smelik and Hemelrijk 1984, 1960, who, however, do not relate the ox to its usefulness for mankind.

¹²⁶ In this respect another study of hers in Gibson and Morello 2011, is of the greatest importance. For *mirabilia* in the *Natural History* see also Beagon 2011; 2007 and 1992.

¹²⁷ The emulation of *mirabilia* also had negative effects on Rome, especially when luxury was involved. See Naas 2011; Carey 2003 and 2000; Wallace-Hadrill 1990.

¹²⁸ Naas 2011, 63.

¹²⁹ Plin. *NH* 36.101; Naas 2011.

Sorcha Carey in her book, *Pliny's catalogue of culture, art and Empire in the NH* (2003), explains Pliny's chapters on art history within the totality of the *Natural History*. Her research can be connected to the tendency to move away from the mainly late nineteenth-century approach to isolate the chapters on art from the rest of Pliny's encyclopedia.¹³⁰ Another exponent of this perspective is Isager's *Pliny on art and society* (1991). 'Art' is linked inextricably to the central theme of the *Natural History*, which is 'Roman totality' according to Carey. In my discussion of Pliny, the attention Carey pays to Pliny's 'strategies of encyclopaedism' to construct a Roman totality is particularly important. Her analysis of Pliny's structuring devices emphasizes his way of adapting data to the aims and purposes of his work.¹³¹

Trevor Murphy in his book, *Pliny the Elder's Natural History, the empire in the encyclopedia* (2004), interprets the whole *Natural History* as 'an artifact of Empire': Pliny's work could only exist because of Rome's Empire. Secondly, it is also an exponent of empire, because it is a manifestation of Roman domination, comparable to Roman triumphs and maps. All three, the *Natural History*, Roman triumphs and maps, expose the world which has now become Roman to the Roman public. Murphy shows that the centrality of Rome in the *Natural History* exists not only in its demonstrated ability to display all kinds of foreign artifacts in Rome; it can also be found in Pliny's way of describing foreign cultures and peoples. Using François Hartog's method of studying ethnographies, Murphy shows how Pliny's thoughts on the 'Other' can be read as Roman self-reflection. For my study on Pliny's Egypt, Murphy's metaphor of the *Natural History* as a map of the Roman world is particularly influential. By describing all the corners of the world now dominated by the Romans, the *Natural History* reveals the unknown and the process of description makes the unknown known.

2. PLINY'S CONCEPTUALIZATION OF EGYPT

The purpose of this section is to investigate whether Pliny's conceptualization of Egypt fits into the two 'traditional' concepts: the negative stereotypical

¹³⁰ See e.g. Jex-Blake and Sellers 1896 and Ferri 1946.

¹³¹ For the quote, see Carey 2003, 13. *Ibid.*, 17-40, who discusses the 'strategies of encyclopaedism'.

Other and positive evaluation of Egypt's antiquity. The first traditional concept will be addressed in 2.1 and in 2.2. First it will be explored whether the region Egypt belonged or did not belong to the Roman Empire according to the *National History* and, secondly, it will be discussed whether Egypt was labelled as the Other or as exotic. The second traditional concept, Egypt's antiquity, will be addressed in 2.3.

2.1. *Egypt as isolated and unfamiliar?*

In modern literature the Augustan legislation prohibiting Roman senators and the important *equites* from setting foot on Egypt's soil (Tac. *Ann.* 2.59.4) is connected with two characteristics of the Roman discourse on Egypt. In the first place, it turned Egypt into unknown territory because the scholarly classes could not verify facts about this region with their own eyes or gain extensive knowledge through experience. Consequently, it has been argued that the works of Roman writers about Egypt, such as Pliny, show an unfamiliarity with this territory.¹³² Secondly, the resulting isolation of the Roman province of Egypt led to the existence of negative stereotypes about the Egyptians. For instance, Meyer Reinhold argued: 'on the Roman side we know that there ensued growing contempt and hatred for the Egyptians. The "Sonderstellung Aegyptens" (*Augustus seposuit Aegyptum* [reference to Tac. *Ann.* 2.59.4], its isolation and singular institutions gave the Romans the assurance of the region as the "breadbasket" of Rome, but the policy engendered many problems. One aspect of the uniqueness of Egypt was the exclusion of Roman senators and important equites (*equites illustres*) from Egypt, with the result that few who wrote about Egypt had first-hand knowledge of the population, its thoughts, and psychology.'¹³³ The idea behind this kind of argumentation seems to be that since important Romans never really engaged with Egyptian people, they did not have the opportunity to adjust their opinion about them in a more positive way. Both assumptions are the result of a comparison between the

¹³² Smelik and Hemelrijk 1984, 1959-1960: 'Pliny the Elder says surprisingly little about Egyptian animal worship in his 'Naturalis Historia' while the subject of his work lent itself most readily to an elaborate description. Perhaps the fact that he had never been in Egypt plays a part in this matter. ... The *relative unfamiliarity* with Egypt already noticed in Pliny the Elder comes sharply to the fore in a poem by Statius, 'Propempticon Maecio Celeri' [*Silv.* 3.2] by name.' My italics.

¹³³ Reinhold 1980, 100.

‘real’ Egypt and its representations in the works of Roman writers.¹³⁴ This also suggests that the Roman norm was to apply stereotypes. As a result the *Natural History*’s lack of them is ascribed to Pliny’s ‘personal attitude’, i.e. as deviant from the general attitude.¹³⁵

In this section a different approach will be taken by reading the *Natural History* as a mental map of the Roman world. The studies of Naas, Carey and Murphy show that Pliny’s world is utterly Roman. However, this does not mean that all areas described by Pliny were Roman territory, strictly speaking. Regions like India or Ethiopia, for instance, did get a fair amount of attention although they were not Roman provinces. While Pliny uses Roman provinces as the framework for his description of the Roman world in books 3 - 6, his mental map of the Roman world is larger than the Roman Empire and its provinces.¹³⁶ The idea that Rome owned the world manifested itself under Augustus. In his *Res Gestae* Augustus displayed a long list of areas that he had either conquered or explored. All those territories together formed the *orbis terrarum* that was actually nothing more than another phrase for *orbis Romanus*, as Augustus himself clarified in the introduction of the *Res Gestae*, ‘Below is a copy of the achievements of the deified Augustus, by which he made the world subject to the rule of the Roman people’ (*rerum gestarum divi Augusti, quibus orbem terrarum imperio populi romani subiecit .. exemplar sub[i]jectum*).¹³⁷ Similar expressions of the Roman sense that the world was theirs can be found in contemporary poets like Ovid and Horace.¹³⁸ In his influential book *L’inventaire du monde: géographie et politique aux origines de l’Empire Romain* (1988, tr. 1991), Claude Nicolet showed that Augustus’ *Res Gestae* can be read as a mental map of the world and that his process of mapping the world was equivalent to claiming the world as Roman.¹³⁹ Augustus not only described the Roman world in words, he also illustrated it on a pictorial map. Augustus’ son-in-law Agrippa finalized a project started

¹³⁴ Reinhold’s assumption that negative stereotypes may change by intergroup contact is only partly true, see general introduction, p. 25, n. 79.

¹³⁵ See p. 44, n. 132 and pp. 36-37.

¹³⁶ For Rome’s provinces as framework for a world view, see Talbert 2004.

¹³⁷ Translation and text edition of Cooley 2009.

¹³⁸ *Ov. Fast.* 2.683; *Hor. Ep.* 2.1.254. But Polybius had also expressed the same kind of feeling (1.1.5)

¹³⁹ Nicolet 1991, 15-27. See *ib.* 29-56 on ‘symbolism and allegories of the conquest of the world’ for the use of the terms *orbis terrarum* or its Greek equivalent, ἡ οἰκουμένη.

by Julius Caesar to visualize the scope of the Roman Empire. Agrippa's map was placed in the Porticus Vipsania.¹⁴⁰ Vespasian put an updated version of this map in the newly built Temple of Peace. Pliny referred to this map as 'the world worthy to be observed by the city' (*orbem terrarum urbi spectandum*, *NH* 3.17). The Temple of Peace has been described as a 'World Museum' as it gathered famous artifacts from all over the world. The presence of a map of the world would have worked as an interpretative frame: the world is now Roman.¹⁴¹

Trevor Murphy compared the *Natural History* with 'mapping'. Like actual maps of the Roman Empire, the *Natural History* showed to Pliny's Roman readers what should be considered Roman. Although cultural contacts between the territories described in the *Natural History* existed before the Romans incorporated the diverse areas as provinces within their Empire, without doubt, knowledge about all the corners of the world only became truly available through Roman conquest. Pliny is not the only Flavian author whose work shows a tendency to map the Roman world in literary form. It has been argued that Tacitus, especially in his *Agricola*, also demonstrates a 'conceptual relationship between mapping, conquest, knowledge and imperialism'.¹⁴² In general, it has been stated that '[w]hat can be discerned from the writings of the Flavian period and of the principates which immediately ensued is that, in a strong conceptual sense, imperial control and imperial knowledge, *imperium* and *scientia*, were coextensive.'¹⁴³ Rome and regions conquered by Rome are *presented* as known – in contrast to the level of real knowledge.

Set against this theoretical background, Egypt, conquered by the Romans and annexed as a Roman province in 31/30 BCE, can be expected to be known territory in the *Natural History*. To verify this hypothesis, first Pliny's

¹⁴⁰ Brodersen 1995, 275-86, argued that Agrippa's map was not a pictorial one, but an inscription with distances. See also Salway, 2001, *contra* and Brodersen's response, 2001. Carey 2003, 64, takes up Brodersen's suggestion and relates it to Pliny's use of inscriptions as 'devices within the text'.

¹⁴¹ Flavius Josephus relates that the outside of the building displayed the *sacra* of the temple of Jerusalem and the menorah, and that the *temenos* kept famous artifacts from all over the world, Joseph *BJ* 7.5.7. Pliny tells us that the main collection on display in the Temple of Peace was originally part of the *Domus Aurea*, the private palace of Nero. For the Temple of Peace as 'World Museum', see Versluys forthcoming.

¹⁴² Boyle 2003, 37, with reference to Evans 2003, 255-276.

¹⁴³ Boyle 2003, 37.

description of a region will be discussed that has a prominent place in the *Natural History*: Hispania Ulterior or Hispania Baetica, a Roman province since 197 BCE. This region (and not Rome or Italy) forms the starting point of Pliny's treatment of all regions in the world (books 3 - 6). It has been argued that it may not have been a coincidence that Pliny began his geographical and topographical account of the world with this territory as it is known from a letter of Pliny the Younger that his uncle held a procuratorship of province.¹⁴⁴ Then the geographical treatment of Hispania Baetica with that of Egypt will be compared. As a reality check, finally Pliny's description of both Roman provinces will be compared with his discussion of the islands around Britannia, a region unconquered by the Romans.

Mapping Egypt in the Natural History

The geographical description of Hispania Beatica, Egypt and the Glass Islands can be found in the geographical section of the *Natural History*, books 3 - 6, which discusses all regions of the *orbis terrarum*. These books deal with 'places, peoples, seas, towns, harbors, mountains, rivers, measurements, present and past populations' [*situs, gentes, maria, oppida, portus, montes, flumina, mensurae, populi qui sunt aut qui fuerunt, NH 1 (3); (4); (5); (6)*]. After treating northeastern Spain, Italy, the transalpine regions and the coast of the Adriatic sea in book 3, and Greece, Germany, Britain, Belgium, Spain, Portugal and the Atlantic islands in book 4, Pliny turns his gaze across the Strait of Gibraltar to Mauritia, Numidia, Africa and Egypt in book 5. After Egypt the northwest-oriented order is continued by discussing Arabia, Syria and Palestine. Book 6 describes Asia Minor.

Hispania Baetica is geographically demarcated by its natural boundaries, rivers and mountains (*NH 3.6*). It is separated from Hispania Lusitania by the river Anas in the north and from Hispania Tarraconensis in the east by Mount Solorius and the ridges of Oritani, Carpentani and Astures. The capricious course of the river Anas – spreading and narrowing, burrowing underground and emerging – is stressed. The fertility of Hispania Baetica, named after the river Baetis which splits the region in two, is praised, 'it is superior to the other provinces in its rich cultivation and in its particularly fertile and peculiar

¹⁴⁴ Beagon 1992, 4-5. She reads 'eye-witness references' and 'positive enthusiasm' in Pliny's treatment of Spain throughout the *NH* esp. in *NH 37.203* which 'suggests personal contact with Spain and her people'.

brightness, too' (*cunctas provinciarum divite cultu et quodam fertili ac peculiari nitore praecedit*, *NH* 3.7). Thereafter, Pliny lists the most important coastal places from west to east (*NH* 3.7-3.8) and the most important inland places by region from east to west among which the cities and rivers of the four jurisdictions of Hispania Baetica get special attention: Gordubensis (*NH* 3.10), Hispalensis (*HN* 3.11), Astigitanus, (*NH* 3.12) and Gaditanus (*NH* 3.15). His account of Hispania Baetica ends with a discussion of its length and breadth according to Marcus Agrippa as given on his map (*NH* 3.16-17).

The systematic and factual way in which Pliny gives shape to Hispania Baetica by first giving a general lay-out and then zooming in meticulously on its different zones by mentioning and counting their important places reads like an imperial map. Pliny gives his reader the impression that he knows exactly what he is talking about. The legal bonds between the towns in Hispania Baetica and Rome are clearly expressed: '[Hispania Baetica] comprises four jurisdictions, those of Gaditanus (Cadiz), Cordubensis (Cordoba), Astigitanus (Ecija) and Hispalensis (Seville). Its towns number 175 in total, of which 9 are colonies, 10 municipalities of Roman citizens, 27 towns granted early Latin rights, 6 free towns, 3 bound by treaty to Rome and 120 paying tribute' (*iuridici conventus ei IV, Gaditanus Cordubensis Astigitanus Hispalensis. oppida omnia numero CLXXV, in iis coloniae IX, municipia c. R. X, Latio antiquitus donata XXVII, libertate VI, foedere III, stipendiaria CXX, NH* 3.7). In her study Carey shows that this union between taxonomy and Empire can be found throughout books 3 - 6.¹⁴⁵ She argues that the world described in the *Natural History* coincides with the Roman Empire as the legal connections (*municipium, colonia, libertas*, etc.) between the towns and Rome are stressed while at the same time those which are located outside are diminished, because towns which did not have a legal connection with Rome were regularly set aside as unimportant, *ignobilia*. Hence it is argued that Pliny's enumeration of diverse geographical areas and cities of the world found in books 3 - 6 is not random. It was based on Roman administrative lists.¹⁴⁶

The same well-organized structure with an eye for the legal relation with Rome defines Pliny's geographical description of Egypt as well. First the triangular shape of Lower Egypt, the Nile Delta, is delineated. Two branches

¹⁴⁵ Carey 2003, 32-35. For a discussion and quotation of *NH* 3.7 see *ibid.*, 33.

¹⁴⁶ Sallmann 1971, 95-106; Nicolet 1991, 176-178; Christol 1994, 45-63.

of the Nile ending in the Canopic and the Pelusiac mouth separate Egypt from respectively Africa and Asia (*NH* 5.48). Like the Anas and the Baetis, the Nile serves as a natural boundary. Thereafter, Pliny turns his attention to Upper Egypt in the following way (*NH* 5.49):

summa pars contermina Aethiopiae Thebais vocatur. dividitur in praefecturas oppidorum, quas νόμους vocant: Ombiten, Apollonopoliten, Hermonthiten, Thiniten, Phaturiten, Coptiten, Tentyriten, Diospolitén, Antaeopoliten, Aphroditopoliten, Lycopoliten. quae iuxta Pelusium est regio nomos habet Pharbaethiten, Bubastiten, Sethroiten, Taniten. reliqua autem Arabicum, Hammoniacum tendentem ad Hammonis Iovis oraculum, Oxyrynchiten, Leontopoliten, Athribiten, Cynopoliten, Hermopoliten, Xoiten, Mendesium, Sebennyten, Cabasiten, Latopoliten, Heliopoliten, Prosopiten, Panopoliten, Busiriten, Onuphiten, Saiten, Ptenethum, Ptemphum, Naucratischen, Meteliten, Gynaecopoliten, Menelaiten, Alexandriae regionem, item Libyae, Mareotis.

The uppermost part of Egypt, bordering on Ethiopia, is called Thebaid. It is divided into prefectures of towns, that they call *nomoi*: the Ombite, Apollonopolite, Hermonothite, Thinite, Phaturite, Coptite, Tentyrite, Diospolite, Antaeopolite, Aphroditopolite and Lycopolite. The *nomoi* in the regions near Pelusium are the Pharbaethite, Bubastite, Sethroite and Tanite. The rest of the *nomoi* are called the Arabic, Hammoniac (extending to the oracle of Jupiter Ammon), Oxyrhynchite, Leontopolite, Athribite, Cynopolite, Hermopolite, Xoite, Mendesian, Sebennyte, Cabasite, Latopolite, Heliopolite, Prosopite, Panopolite, Busirite, Onuphite, Saite, Ptenethus, Ptemphus, Naucratische, Metelite, Gynaecopolite, Menelaite, these are in the region of Alexandria, likewise Mareotis is in the region of Libya.

This passage – the underlining marks the subdivision of Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt with special attention for Alexandria – can be regarded as typical for Pliny’s accurate and well-structured treatment of Egypt. It gives detailed information about Egypt’s division in *praefectures* of towns, called *nomoi*. First the districts of Upper Egypt (*summa pars*) are systematically listed from South to North. Thereupon Pliny directs his attention to the districts of Lower Egypt centering around the Pelusiac mouth of the Nile. After treating the eastern part of Lower Egypt, Pliny enumerates the remaining parts of the Delta around Alexandria. The use of the juridical term *praefectures* denotes the difference in Roman government between its province Egypt and a province like Hispania Baetica and underlines the administrative character of the supplied information. Since its annexation Egypt had been ruled by a prefect of equestrian rank instead of by the traditional senatorial governor and was

not divided into jurisdictions, but into 40 districts, or the already mentioned *nomoi* or *praefectures*, each governed by a *strategos*. After the systematic topographical description of all the districts of Egypt, Pliny focuses on the Nile, the river that divides Egypt into an upper and lower part.¹⁴⁷ Its course is described from its unknown source to its discharge in sea (*NH* 5.51-54). Despite his earlier remark that the source of the Nile is unknown, Pliny begins his account of the Nile by stating that King Juba located its source in the mountains of Mauretania. From here it flows through scorching deserts and over long distances to Ethiopia (*NH* 5.51-53). Its course is capricious. Sometimes it dives under the surface for days before it appears again, but it proceeds fiercely.¹⁴⁸ Apparently, the disappearance of the Nile underground for long distances led to questions of whether certain waters located in Mauretania and Ethiopia did or did not belong to the Nile. In this respect Pliny relates how King Juba could prove by a crocodile caught in a Mauretanian lake that the Nile created this lake. The crocodile was thereupon dedicated by King Juba to Isis in her temple at Caesarea where it could still be seen in Pliny's day.¹⁴⁹ On the border of Egypt and Ethiopia when the Nile reaches the First Cataract (Pliny notes *novissimo catarracte*, *NH* 5.54), its violence is stressed. Here the Nile does not seem to flow, but to riot between the

¹⁴⁷ Rivers in the *Natural History* function as structural devices, see Murphy 2004, 142-148; Beagon 1992, 194-200; Sallmann 1971, 221-225. Rivers separate areas from each other, but they also connect them. The Danube (*NH* 4.79-80), Po (*NH* 3.117-122) and the Tigris (*NH* 6.126-130) – rivers that are described by Pliny from their source to discharge in the sea – create divisions between areas. And so we are informed that the Po was once a frontier of the Roman Empire. Also the Nile plays a demarcating role; it divides Asia from Africa (*NH* 3.3) and it causes a division into Lower and Upper Egypt. Beside being natural boundaries, rivers also connect diverse areas. The Danube, for instance, forms the connection between Germany and the Black Sea (*NH* 4.79-80). Pliny emphasizes the use of rivers for travel and transport when he repeatedly remarks that they are *navigabilis*. For the use of *navigabilis* (and also *amoena*) to describe rivers, see Beagon 1992, 194-200. Like the other rivers in the *Natural History*, the Nile is treated as a road.

¹⁴⁸ For the personification of the Nile in the *Natural History*, see Manolaraki 2013, 127-131, who discusses Pliny's Nile tradition with a focus on the Nile's commitment towards Rome.

¹⁴⁹ Juba II (48 BCE – 23/24 AD), son of King Juba I of Numidia, was given the throne of Mauretania in 25 BCE by Augustus. In 25 BCE Juba married Cleopatra Selene, daughter of Mark Antony and Cleopatra VII. Both grew up in Rome in aristocratic circles and both had by birth a legal claim on Africa and Egypt. For Juba's and Cleopatra's rule over Mauretania, see Roller 2003.

mountains. Finally, the river flows gently towards its discharge in the Egyptian sea by its many mouths (NH 5.54). After describing the Nile from source to discharge, Pliny discusses the various reasons for and particularities of the flooding of the Nile (NH 5.55-58). His chapters on the Nile are closed by presenting diverse authoritative calculations of the place where the Nile enters Egypt to Lower Egypt and its discharge into the sea (NH 5.59).

In chapter 5.60 Pliny returns to his praxis of presenting lists of topographical places when he enumerates important Egyptian cities. Like his treatment of the general division of Egypt and its districts, these cities are not listed randomly but are carefully divided by district. First the cities of Upper Egypt (NH 5.60-61) are mentioned, then the city of Alexandria gets special attention: ‘but with reason Alexandria shall be praised, founded by Alexander the Great on the coast of the Egyptian Sea on the side of Africa’ (*sed iure laudetur in litore Aegyptii maris Alexandria, a Magno Alexandro condita in Africae parte*, NH 5.62). Lastly the names of the most important towns of Lower Egypt (NH 5.63) are given. Taking the Pelusiac mouth as a natural border, Pliny changes his subject and shifts his attention to Arabia Petraea (NH 5.64).

Comparing the geographical description of Egypt with that of Hispania Baetica, they appear to be very similar. In both cases the general layout of the region is presented first with special attention being paid to the natural boundaries, followed by an accurate and meticulous presentation of administrative data, including a systematic division in districts and cities. In both cases Pliny seems to speak with authority. Let us now compare his accounts with that of a region that did not belong to the Roman Empire at that time: the islands around Britain (NH 4.104):

Timaeus historicus a Britannia introrsus sex dierum navigatione abesse dicit insulam Ictim, in qua candidum plumbum proveniat; ad eam Britannos vitilibus navigiis corio circumsutis navigare. sunt qui et alias prodant, Scandias, Dumnam, Bergos, maximamque omnium Berricen, ex qua in Tylen navigetur

The historian Timaeus says that the island Ictim is a six days’ journey by ship away inwards from Britain, where tin occurs, and to which the Britons sail in boats made of wickerwork covered with hides. Some attest that there are other islands too, the Scandiae, Dumna, Bergos, and Berrice, the largest of all, from which one sails to Thule.

In this account of the 'Glass Islands' (*Glaesiae*, NH 4.103-104) located beyond Britain that also include the legendary Thule, the island 'most distant of all' (*ultima omnium*, NH 4.102), Pliny does not report data in a factual way like he does in his geographical accounts of Egypt and Hispania Baetica.¹⁵⁰ He uses the authority of other writers (*Timaeus historicus.. dicit* and the vaguer *sunt qui*) to account for the existence of certain islands. This forms a major contrast with his treatment of Egypt and Hispania Baetica, as he can confidently put their regions and cities in their right place. Apart from calculations of distances between places, historical and mythical tales, and theoretical expositions about natural phenomena such as the flooding of the Nile – all of them are discussions in which Pliny often expresses his opinion – Pliny's treatment of Egypt and Hispania Baetica is devoid of references to other authorities. Apparently the topography of both was known to such an extent that any doubt about the certainty of it could be left behind.

Reading the *Natural History* as a mental map of the Roman world, imperial knowledge seems one of the markers that determine the boundaries of that world. Roman provinces are known because Romans set foot there and needed accurate administrative and topographical information to organize their government. The inextricable relation between 'imperial control' and 'imperial knowledge' seem to be most explicit when Pliny focusses on the legal bonds between Rome and certain provincial regions. The borders of Pliny's map are demarcated by those areas, such as the islands around Britain, about which hardly anything is known and even their existence cannot be confirmed. In his geopolitical reality, Egypt was a Roman border region as it was the southernmost Roman province. Its neighbor Ethiopia was never legally part of the Roman world, regardless of some Roman expeditions in that area.¹⁵¹ There is a gap between being legally and mentally part of something. This is what Reinhold seems to be pointing out when he ends his discussion of the Roman legal isolation of Egypt and the existence of stereotypes with the following words, 'Egypt was in the Empire, but not of

¹⁵⁰ For a discussion of Thule in relation to the unknown source of the Nile, see Romm, 1992, 121-171, particularly 149-156. Britain is often referred to as Thule, see Evans 2003, 256-257: 'The elision of Britain and Thule was more than a convenient metrical variant for Roman poets – it also encapsulated the concept that Britain was fabulously remote, mystically unreal and beyond the bounds of knowledge.'

¹⁵¹ For the Roman expeditions in Ethiopia, see n. 153 and pp. 138-139, n. 321.

it.¹⁵² On the mental map of the *Natural History*, however, Egypt plainly belonged to the Roman world. It was not even considered a border region as this place was reserved for regions such as Ethiopia.¹⁵³ Hence, within the framework of the *Natural History*, Egypt is clearly mapped within the Roman Empire.

2.2. *Egypt as the Other or the exotic?*

Ancient sources bear witness to a long literary tradition in which Egypt functions as the Other.¹⁵⁴ Herodotus described Egypt as a clear antipode to the Greek world. In his famous ethnography of the Egyptians, the women went to the market and were responsible for trade, while the men stayed home to weave. And, to give another example, it was claimed the Egyptians used to read from right to left.¹⁵⁵ Roman writers were not as radical as Herodotus, but they did envisage Egypt as having characteristics opposed to what Romans found acceptable.¹⁵⁶ Nilotic scenes found in Roman contexts with their representation of the Nile surrounded by indigenous species such as crocodiles, ibises and hippopotamuses and vegetation like the papyrus plant

¹⁵² Reinhold 1980, 103.

¹⁵³ The alleged relationship between knowledge and military expansion is prominent in Pliny's description of the Nile from the Egyptian border to its unknown source in *NH* 6.183-188 when discussing Ethiopia. In this account he describes what became known after Nero's expedition to Ethiopia. This expedition aimed to map Ethiopia by following the Nile upstream. The report shows a remarkable shift in the kind of information it supplies when it reaches the regions beyond Meroë, i.e. the regions not penetrated by Roman expeditions. When discussing the regions 'known' to the Romans because of expeditions, Pliny is able to mention discoveries of animals and environmental changes (*NH* 6.184-186). As soon as the regions beyond Meroë are reached, Pliny presents an ethnography of the Ethiopians (*NH* 6.187-188). Compared to other ethnographies in the *Natural History*, the Ethiopians together with the Indians were attributed the most extreme abnormalities, see Murphy 2004, 88-90. Throughout the ancient literature the Ethiopians were an epitome for exotic people far away: Hom. *Il.* 23.205, for their virtue: *Il.* 4.423; *Hdt.* 3.97, for their longevity *Hdt.* 3.23; Strabo 1.2.24-28. See also: Lesky 1957: 27-38; Snowden 1983: 3-17, 46-59; Romm 1992: 45-60.

¹⁵⁴ See the studies of Froidefond 1971 and Vasunia 2001, p. 10, n. 37.

¹⁵⁵ These are just two examples of a long list of 'aberrant' behavior of the Egyptians, *Hdt.* 2.35-37. For a detailed discussion of Herodotus' book 2, see Froidefond 1971, 113-207.

¹⁵⁶ For Roman negative stereotypes of Egypt, see chapter III.

and lotus give the impression that Egypt was the exotic region par excellence for the Romans. These scenes seem to underline a link between Egypt's exotic flora and fauna and the Roman perception of Egypt as the Other as it is argued that the physical deformations of the depicted Egyptians became more pronounced in the Augustan age.¹⁵⁷ The *Natural History* hardly contains negative stereotypes, but it includes ethnographical descriptions of people that can be interpreted as reflecting on Rome's own behavior, and it also pays considerable attention to exotic or foreign flora and fauna.¹⁵⁸

In the previous section it was argued that the Roman world was demarcated by regions that legally did not belong to the Roman world. Those legally belonging to Rome, Egypt included, are characterized by a high interconnectivity. Within the context of the *Natural History* these Roman provinces and Rome itself are part of one large network: the Roman Empire. An example of a passage that creates the sense of high interconnectivity can be found in book 15 when Pliny discusses the cherry tree (*NH* 15.102):

Cerasi ante victoriam Mithridaticam L. Luculli non fuere in Italia, ad urbis annum DCLXXX. is primum invexit e Ponto, annisque CXX trans oceanum in Britanniam usque pervenere; eadem [ut diximus] in Aegypto nulla cura potuere gigni.

Before the victory of Lucius Lucullus over Mithridates, in the 680st year of our city [74 BCE], there were no cherry-trees in Italy. Lucullus first imported them from Pontus, and in 120 years they have crossed the ocean and arrived in Britain, but all the same [as we said] no amount of care enabled them to grow in Egypt.

According to this passage the cherry tree was introduced in Italy after Rome conquered Pontus. The same species could be found in Britain 120 years later when Britain was conquered and became part of the Roman Empire under Emperor Claudius. The claim that it was impossible to cultivate the cherry tree in Egypt shows that Pliny linked its cultivation to the entirety of the Roman Empire: the province Egypt formed the most southeastern edge of the Empire and the province Britain, the northwestern border. Hence, this passage shows that Romans envisaged the Roman Empire as a global network in which every corner of the Empire was connected to each other and where every corner

¹⁵⁷ Versluys 2002.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Murphy 2004, 77-128.

could exchange commodities. This example also clarifies that Rome was literally the center of this exchange: the cherry tree was transported from Pontus via Italy to Britain, but Rome was also the creator of this global exchange as its Empire, its army, its government and the roads it built ensured exchange.¹⁵⁹ Beside pointing at global interconnectivity, this passage also shows the effects of being interconnected: the same things could be found everywhere, i.e. interconnection leads here to a certain amount of homogeneity, making different parts of the Roman Empire less distinctive despite all the differences.¹⁶⁰

The passage of the cherry tree is an example of how content in the *Natural World* underlines Pliny's major goal: to encompass the entire world, which is the Roman world.¹⁶¹ As the structure and content of the *Natural History* are composed to mirror, but also create an entire world, the different regions or parts of this world are likely to be made subordinated to its totality. Hence the general loss of the exclusiveness of single regions seems to be a result of Pliny's urge to enclose the entire world. Against this background first Pliny's rendering of the Egyptians will be discussed (2.1) followed by an interpretation of Pliny's representation of the Egyptian flora and fauna (2.2).

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Carey 2003, 35, with reference to *NH* 3.39: 'Pliny imagines Italy as not only the conqueror of the world, but its very creator, the country which gave birth to all others (*terra omnium terrarium alumna eadem et parens*).'

¹⁶⁰ In this section 'homogeneity' and its derivatives will be used in relation to the status and identity of the various regions in the *Natural History*. Homogeneity as used in this section should, therefore, not be interpreted as being opposite to the 'variety of nature', *varietas naturae*, which is a theme throughout the *NH*. In her interpretation of Pliny's encyclopedic work in which she approaches the *Natural History* and its subject 'nature' (*natura*) from the Roman Stoic point of view, Beagon notes: '[n]ature's supreme power is proven through her supreme variety.' See, Beagon 2005, 24 and *ad* 7.6-8. The *Natural History* surely forms a huge, highly diverse collection of everything nature has to offer. Especially the inclusion of many 'wonders', *mirabilia*, that happen all over the Roman world seem to underline the variety of the Roman world. Hence, Egyptian animals, for instance, are not the same as Ethiopian ones in the *Natural History*. Being different in landscape, flora, and fauna, however, does not immediately mean that the diverse regions also have a clearly different cultural status in the *NH*.

¹⁶¹ For a detailed study on Pliny's strategies to achieve totality, see Carey 2003, 17-40.

Egyptians

The *Natural History* does not abound with ethnographies compared to other Greek and Roman writings, but those included concern groups living beyond the boundaries of the Roman Empire: the Hyperboreans (*NH* 4.89-91), the Essenes (*NH* 5.73), the Seres (*NH* 6.54 and 6.88), the Ethiopians (*NH* 6.187-188), the cannibals in the north (*NH* 7.9-11) and the Indians (*NH* 7.21-32).¹⁶² As Egypt is a known region, the *Natural History* contains no ethnography of the Egyptians.¹⁶³ Pliny is not interested in ordinary customs and habits of human beings; he collects the extraordinary as this underlines the diversity *Natura* has to offer.¹⁶⁴ In line with this, in book 7 of the *Natural History*, which

¹⁶² Murphy 2004, 87, with reference to Shaw 2000, 374, notes that '[a]mong the Greek and Roman books that contain ethnographic matter, the *Natural History* does not make an overwhelming first impression. Brent Shaw has compared the amount of ethnographical material in Pliny's book unfavorably to Strabo and argues from this that the Flavian Romans were less concerned about barbarians than earlier generations.'

¹⁶³ The association between pygmies (or dwarves; for the differences between the two, see Meyboom 1995, 150-151) and Egypt is particularly present in Nilotic scenes in which they frequently appear. On this matter: Versluys 2002, 275-277, who relates the presence of pygmies (or dwarves) in Nilotic scenes to the Roman perception of Egypt as the 'Other'; Meyboom 1995, 151, stressing the difference between pygmies and dwarves, argues that pygmies (and naked black dwarves) stood for indigenous Egyptians while dwarves with a whiter skin who often wear Greek clothes represented Hellenized and Greek Egyptians. *Ibid.*, 150-154, for the association between pygmies and dwarves with Egypt in general. In the context of crocodiles, the *Natural History* describes a tribe of humans 'of small stature' (*mensura eorum parva*) living right on the Nile in what is now Denderah who are said to be hostile to the crocodiles 'mounting on the back of the crocodiles as if riding a horse' (*dorsoque equitantium modo inpositi*) scaring these animals away from their land (*NH* 8.92-94). As this is just one tribe of people located at a specific spot, they cannot be seen as being representatives of indigenous Egypt within the *Natural History*. Pliny *NH* 6.188, like Homer (*Il.* 3.2-6) and Herodotus (2.32), places pygmies at the source of the Nile in *Aethiopia*.

¹⁶⁴ In *NH* 7.6 the link between the 'power and the majesty' of nature and *mirabilia*, here the Ethiopians, is explicit: *quis enim Aethiopas antequam cerneret credidit? aut quid non miraculo est, cum primum in notitiam venit? quam multa fieri non posse priusquam sunt facta iudicantur? naturae vero rerum vis atque maiestas in omnibus momentis fide caret, si quis modo partes eius ac non totam complectatur animo*, 'for who believed in the Ethiopians before seeing them? Or what is not taken for miraculous when it comes first into our awareness? How many things are judged to be impossible before they have happened? Certainly, the power and dignity of Nature at every stage lacks credibility, if one's mind encompasses just parts of it and not the

deals with the human race, the Egyptians do not stand out except for one theme: human fertility, especially concerning multiple births. When discussing multiple births, Pliny skips ‘ordinary’ twins and jumps rather quickly over triplets (*NH* 7.33):

tergeminos nasci certum est Horatiorum Curiatorumque exemplo. super inter ostenta ducitur praeterquam in Aegypto, ubi fetifer potu Nilus amnis. proxime supremis Divi Augusti Fausta quaedam e plebe Ostiae duos mares, totidem feminas enixa famem, quae consecuta est, portendit haud dubie. reperitur et in Peloponneso quinos quater enixa, maioremque partem ex omni eius vixisse partu. et in Aegypto septenos uno utero simul gigni auctor est Trogus.

It is certain by the examples of the Horatii and the Curiatii that triplets are born. Higher multiple births are considered as portentous, except in Egypt where drinking the water of the Nile enhances fertility. Close to the deified Augustus’ funeral, a certain plebeian woman in Ostia called Fausta gave birth to two boys and two girls, which was no doubt a portent of the famine that followed. In the Peloponnesian a woman gave birth to a quintuplet four times, and the majority of infants from each of the births survived. In Egypt, Trogus has reported that septuplets were born at the same time from one uterus.

The birth of quadruplets, quintuplets and even septuplets is so extraordinary that it must be an omen. In this passage Egypt is mentioned twice. Both instances refer to its high fertility rate, which is here associated with the frequency and size of multiple births. From other ancient sources we know that Egypt was one of the areas which was believed to have a high fertility rate. Strabo, for instance, mentions that according to Aristotle, Egypt was second in fertility after India.¹⁶⁵ Aulus Gellius interprets a text of Aristotle concerning the birth of quintuplets – the highest multiple birth according to Aristotle – as referring to Egypt, a connection that Aristotle himself did not make. Aulus Gellius’ interpretation makes sense when another passage of Aristotle is taken into account where he notes that high levels of multiple births frequently lead to abnormalities of the newborn and that these

whole.’ This passage reads as a justification for the inclusion of much incredible material. See also Beagon 2005, 24-25; 43-46.

¹⁶⁵ Strabo 15.1.22-23. On the attestation of high levels of ‘twins’ on censor lists in Egypt, see Huebner 2007, 37-38.

abnormalities especially occur in Egypt.¹⁶⁶ In the *Natural History* a few examples of deformed Egyptians can be found, but an explicit link between a high level of multiple births and abnormalities is not made in Pliny's work.¹⁶⁷ The quoted passage of Pliny also shows that though *mirabilia* were first and foremost associated with faraway people and regions at the ends of the earth, they could also happen closer to home, here in Ostia. Throughout the *Natural History*, we find references to foreign *mirabilia* matched to the wonders of Italy and Rome, giving them a prominent place. This characteristic of Pliny's work will be discussed further in section 3 on p. 66.

Apart from the high level of multiple births, no ethnographical attention is paid to the Egyptians. And even this one extraordinary Egyptian characteristic is not very striking compared to the multiple extreme abnormalities Pliny attributes to the Indians, for instance (*NH* 7.22):

multos ibi quina cubita constat longitudine excedere, non expuere, non capitis aut dentium aut oculorum ullo dolore adfici, raro aliarum corporis partium: tam moderato solis vapore durari. philosophos eorum, quos gymnosophistas vocant, ab exortu ad occasum perstare contuentes solem immobilibus oculis, ferventibus harenis toto die alternis pedibus insistere.

It is known that many people in that place are taller than five cubits (2.2 m.), do not spit, do not suffer any pains in the head, teeth or eye, and rarely in any other bodypart: so hardened they are by the moderate heat of the sun. Their philosophers, whom they call gymnosophists stand persistingly gazing at the sun from dawn till dusk without blinking eyes, standing the whole day in the burning sand on alternating feet.

On the one hand, Pliny ascribes extreme abnormalities firmly to the unknown regions beyond the borders of the Roman Empire while on the other, he is rather silent about ethnographical differences between the people living inside the territories of the Roman Empire. This strategy gives the impression that

¹⁶⁶ Arist. *GA* 770a, 35-36. Prolific birth or its opposite was a theme in the Greek literature in the second half of the fifth century BCE, see Thomas 2000, 243-149, on Herodotus and others.

¹⁶⁷ *NH* 7.35: a dead Egyptian hippocentaur brought to Rome by Claudius and preserved in honey; *NH* 11.272: an Egyptian 'monstrosity' with an extra pair of eyes in the back of his head; *NH* 11.253. Regarding the dead hippocentaur mentioned in *NH* 7.35 as an example of the many strange births in book 7 of the *Natural History*, the existence of this creature was not exclusive to Egypt as Pliny also mentions the birth of a dead hippocentaur in Thessaly in the same context.

all people living in the diverse regions within the Roman Empire, including the Egyptians, are similar and interchangeable. In the *Natural History* the Egyptians are not the Other, but appear to be the Self.

Egyptian flora and fauna

Land animals are discussed in book 8 which distinguishes between foreign, or exotic, animals and indigenous animals. In line with Pliny's overall structure, book 8 starts with a description of the largest land animal, the elephant (*NH* 8.1-35), and ends with the smallest, the mouse (*NH* 8.220-224). The chapters devoted to exotic animals are loosely categorized by region, with one reserved for Egypt. First the animals of the Northern part of the world, Scythia, Germany, the island of Scandinavia get attention followed by those of Africa, India, Ethiopia, Egypt and ending with those of the Black Sea and Alpine. The following Egyptian animals are described: snakes (*NH* 8.85-87), the ichneumon (*NH* 8.88), the crocodile (*NH* 8.89-90), the *scincus* (African lizard, *NH* 8.92), the hippopotamus (*NH* 8.95-96) and the ibis (*NH* 8.97). Foreign trees are discussed in books 12 and 13, including those of Egypt, Ethiopia, Cyrenaica, Asia and Greece, followed by a treatment of trees and bushes from the Mediterranean, Red Sea, Indian Ocean, Cave dwellers Sea. In book 13 the following Egyptian trees are discussed: the *ficus Aegyptia* (Egyptian fig, *NH* 13.56-57), *arbor Persea* (*NH* 13.60-61), *cuci* (doum palm), *NH* 13.62), *spina Aegyptia* (thorn-wood, *NH* 13.63), the *prunus Aegyptia* (plum-tree, *NH* 13.64), including some notes on Egyptian gum (*NH* 13.66-67) and with a relatively long description of the papyrus plant and its uses (*NH* 13.68-89). Compared with other foreign regions Egypt is not most exclusive in harboring exotic flora and fauna.

Pliny shows that his Roman reader probably fancied exotic species more than the domestic ones as can be derived from the following remark (*NH* 10.118): *Minor nobilitas, quia non ex longinquo venit, sed expressior loquacitas certo generi picarum est*, 'A certain kind of magpie is less renowned, because it does not come from afar, but its garrulity is more distinct.'¹⁶⁸ It is not the features of an animal that are important, but the fact that it came from afar. Another passage seems to be pointing in the same direction (*NH* 8.142): 'Many of the domestic animals are also worth studying' (*ex his quoque animalibus quae nobiscum degunt multa sunt cognitu digna*).

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Beagon 1992, 128.

This remark reads like a justification for including information that perhaps nobody is waiting for.

In his discussion of foreign animals, Pliny constantly relates them to Rome. He never seems to fail to notice when they were put on display for the first time in Rome, such as the first appearance of the elephant (*NH* 8.16):¹⁶⁹

Elephantos Italia primum vidit Pyrrhi regis bello et boves Lucas appellavit in Lucanis visos anno urbis CCCCLXXIV, Roma autem in triumpho V annis ad superiorem numerum additis.

Italy saw elephants for the first time in the war with King Pyrrhus, and called them Lucan oxen because they were seen in Lucania, in the 474th year since the city's foundation (280 BC), but Rome first saw them at a date five years later, in a triumph.

These kind of references to Rome can also be found in Pliny's treatment of Egyptian animals such as the crocodile and the hippopotamus, see pp. 67-69. The interconnectivity between Rome and the rest of the (Roman) world is also stressed in his description of foreign trees. An example can be found at the beginning of Pliny's account of foreign trees and this involves a naturalized tree, the plane. This tree travelled from the areas of the Ionian Sea, to Sicily, Italy, and Belgium according to Pliny (*NH* 12.6):

Sed quis non iure miretur arborem umbrae gratia tantum ex alieno petitam orbe? platanus haec est, in mare Ionium Diomedis insula tenus eiusdem tumuli gratia primum invecta, inde in Siciliam transgressa atque inter primas donata Italiae et iam ad Morinos usque pervecta ac tributarium etiam detinens solum, ut gentes vectigal et pro umbra pendant.

But who would not justly look with awe at a tree required from another world merely for the sake of shade? This tree is the plane, first imported into the Ionian Sea as far as the island of Diomedede to be placed on his tomb, and which from there crossed over to Sicily and was among the first trees bestowed on Italy, and which now has travelled as far as Belgium and yet occupies soil that pays tribute to Rome, so that the people pay revenue even for shade.

¹⁶⁹ Other examples are the lion, *NH* 8.53; leopard, *NH* 8.64; tiger, *NH* 8.65; giraffe, *NH* 8.69; lynx, *NH* 8.70, etc. Occasionally Pliny also mentions that an animal has never been seen in Rome: *alces*, probably the reindeer or the moose, *NH* 8.39.

This passage shows some overlap with the one figuring the cherry tree quoted above on p. 54, in its connection between the Roman Empire (the provinces who have to pay tribute) and the existence of the same kind of trees all over the globe. Pliny starts discussing proper foreign trees (*externas*) after informing the reader that he will discuss the naturalized foreign trees in his book on fruit-bearing trees. The *Natural History*'s tendency to highlight the exotic already been explained by Valerie Naas in her studies about the *Natural History* as a vehicle to highlight the marvel of Rome and its Empire itself.¹⁷⁰

Egypt harbors flora and fauna that are foreign to Rome and Italy, it forms one of the exotic places in the world encompassed by the *Natural History*. But the descriptions of Egyptian vegetation and animals do not turn Egypt in the exotic Other, because including the 'exotic' generally serves Pliny's aim to encompass the Roman world in its entirety: it is inseparably related to the *Natural History*'s creation of a Roman world. Hence while being exotic, Egypt is not Rome's antipode, but firmly part of the Roman world.

2.3. *Egypt as particularly ancient?*

In two sources probably consulted by Pliny the Elder for his representation of Egypt, Herodotus and Diodorus Siculus, a particular concept of Egypt stands out: it is perceived as one of the oldest regions in the world. In Herodotus, Egypt is the second oldest nation after Phrygia, and in Diodorus Siculus it is the most ancient region in the world.¹⁷¹ In both works Egypt is also particularly influential on the development of other territories which came into existence later. All kinds of Egyptian inventions, such as agriculture, spread from Egypt to surrounding areas, most prominently to the Greeks. It is illustrative of the wisdom attributed to Egypt that Greeks like Plato and Pythagoras were believed to have studied in Egypt under the supervision of Egyptian priests. In the Roman literature from Cicero to Tacitus, references to the antiquity of Egypt can be found, as will become clear in chapter IV. In this section it will be questioned whether Egypt is perceived as particularly ancient in the *Natural History*. My interpretation is based on the information considering Pliny's effort to encompass the Roman world in its entirety, which was outlined in the previous section 2.2.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. p. 42.

¹⁷¹ See pp. 191-193.

Egyptian discoveries

In the works of Herodotus and Diodorus Siculus, Egypt is rendered as the origin of many inventions that were taken over by surrounding areas such as Greece.¹⁷² An inquiry as to whether the *Natural History* presents the same concept of Egypt as the first inventor can best start with the list of human discoveries that Pliny presents at the end of book 7.¹⁷³

Scrolling through this list of all kinds of discoveries, Egypt appears to be related to seven inventions, including writing (*NH* 7.192-193); cities (*NH* 7.194); woven fabrics (*NH* 7.195); medicine (*NH* 7.196); monarchy (*NH* 7.199); astrology (*NH* 7.203); and painting (*NH* 7.203).¹⁷⁴ These seven inventions seem to stand in close relationship to the theme of Egypt's great antiquity. In particular, the convention that Egypt was much older than the relatively young Greece seems to be hinted at in, for instance, *NH* 7.193, where according to Anticleides Egypt developed writing long before the first kings of Greece came into being:

Anticleides in Aegypto invenisse quendam nomine Menon tradit, X'V' annorum ante Phoronea, antiquissimum Graeciae regem, idque monumentis adprobare conatur.

Anticleides relates that in Egypt a certain man called Menon had invented writing, 15,000 years previous to Phroneus, the most ancient king of Greece, and he tried to prove this with documents.

After mentioning Anticleides' opinion, Pliny also refers to Epigenes, who claimed that the Babylonians had already inscribed their astronomical records on baked bricks for 730,000 years, although others came to a number of 490,000 years. Like the Egyptians, the Babylonians, who are sometimes confused with the Assyrians, were generally thought of as very ancient.¹⁷⁵ Another case in which the antiquity of the Egyptians is presented as being in some kind of rivalry with that of Greece can be found in Pliny's discussion

¹⁷² On the theme of first inventor, see e.g. Kleingünther 1933; Thraede 1962. Cf. Hartog 2001, 41-77 and p. 191.

¹⁷³ An excellent commentary on book 7 is Beagon 2005.

¹⁷⁴ When Danaus is also taken into account, two discoveries need to be added: wells, *NH* 7.195, and navigation, *NH* 7.206.

¹⁷⁵ Beagon 2005; *ad loc.* Note that *NH* 7.193, like Roman sources in general, indicates that especially the fact that hieroglyphs on still consultable inscriptions about Egypt's deep past proved Egypt's antiquity.

of the foundation of the first city. Three different opinions of who invented the first town are given – Cecrops, Phoroneus or the Egyptians - of which the third option is said to be much earlier (*NH* 7.194)¹⁷⁶:

oppidum primum Cecrops a se appellavit Cecropiam quae nunc est arx Athenis; aliqui Argos a Phoroneo rege ante conditum volunt, quidam et Sicyonem, Aegyptii vero multo ante apud ipsos Diospolin.

Cecrops gave his name to the first town, Cecropia, which is now the Acropolis of Athens. Some authorities place the foundation of Argos by King Phoroneus earlier and certain others that of Sicyon also; while the Egyptians date their own town of Diospolis (= Thebes, ML) much earlier.

Nevertheless unlike the works of Diodorus Siculus and Herodotus, Egypt is not given a prominent place in world history in the *Natural History*. This is due to Pliny's striving to be as comprehensive as possible. He includes every invention imaginable and this results in a long list. When we look at the different regions where these inventions originated, most of them appear to be attributed to individual Greeks. These Greek inventions are interspersed with the inventions of other people such as Egyptians, Scythians and Phrygians. An impression can be gained from the following example, *NH* 7.197:

aes conflare et temperare Aristoteles Lydum Scythen monstrasse, Theophrastus Delam Phrygem putant, aerariam fabricam alii Chalybas, alii Cyclopas, ferrum Hesiodus in Creta eos qui vocati sunt Dactyli Idaei. argentum invenit Erichthonius Atheniensis, ut alii, Aeacus; auri metalla et flaturam Cadmus Phoenix ad Pangaeum montem, ut alii, Thoas aut Aeacus in Panchaia..

Aristotle thinks that Lydus the Scythian gave instructions to melt and work copper, but Theophrastus believes that it was the Phrygian Delas; the manufacture of bronze some attribute to the Chalybes and others to the Cyclopes; the forging of iron Hesiod ascribes to the people called the Dactyli of Mt. Ida in Crete. Erichthonius of Athens discovered silver, or according to others Aeacus, goldmines and smelting gold were discovered by Cadmus the Phoenician at Mt. Pangaeus, or according to others by Thoas or Aeacus in Panchaia ..

¹⁷⁶ In his discussion about the geography and topography of Egypt, Pliny had already stressed the abundance of Egyptian cities (*NH* 5.60) among which Thebes was generally regarded as being an ancient city.

Within this long list, Egypt's seven discoveries do not stand out. Egypt is just one first inventor out of many.

In the previous section on Egyptian flora and fauna, it has been showed that while discussing foreign species, Pliny always kept his eye on Rome. The same tendency can be found in his enumeration of human inventions. Pliny concludes this list by relating three of them specifically to Rome. These three inventions are singled out by Pliny in his discussion of the three earliest agreements between all people and concern the introduction of the use of the Ionian alphabet (*NH* 7.210), the habit of shaving one's beard (*NH* 7.211), and a similar way of time-keeping (*NH* 7.212-215). For instance, regarding shaving Pliny notes (*NH* 7.211):

Sequens gentium consensus in tonsoribus fuit, sed Romanis tardior. in Italiam ex Sicilia venire post Romam conditam anno CCCCLIV adducente P. Titinio Mena, ut auctor est Varro; antea intonsi fuere. Primus omnium radi cotidie instituit Africanus sequens. Divos Augustus cultris semper usus est.

The next agreement of peoples [second after the introduction of the Ionian alphabet] was in the matter of barbers, but it was agreed upon later by the Romans. They came to Italy from Sicily in 300 BCE, being brought there, according to Varro, by Publius Titinius Mena. Before that the Romans had been unshaved. The first to introduce a daily-shave was Africanus the second. The deified Augustus always used the razor.

Considering Pliny's urge to encompass the Roman world in its totality, ending a long list of human discoveries with three inventions that were adopted by *all* people is not insignificant. Pliny specifically relates these inventions to Rome by mentioning that these agreements were introduced in Rome at a later date than in other regions. This seems to suggest that neither the date of the invention nor the original inventor itself was important; rather how it was adopted and made significant in later (Roman) times is.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ A similar tendency to underline the development and contemporary use by the Romans of an item invented earlier can be seen in Pliny's account of the papyrus plant in *NH* 13.68-89. Pliny justifies the relatively great attention he pays to the papyrus plant by emphasizing the importance of this plant for civilization (*humanitas*) and the keeping of records (*memoria*). It becomes clear that Pliny means *Roman* civilization. The great majority of information Pliny supplies about papyrus – its use, variety and manufacture – concerns Roman society. The history and the discovery of papyrus are also bound up with Roman intervention. Although the great Roman authority Marcus Varro related the discovery of papyrus to the foundation of Alexandria by Alexander

Egyptian past

Although the past in the *Natural History* seems to play a minor role in general and Egypt does not hold a leading position in world history, Pliny certainly does not hide the fact that Egypt had a long and famous history. The following passage taken from book 5 on Egyptian cities is telling (*NH* 5.60):

Aegyptus super ceteram antiquitatis gloriam XX' urbium sibi Amase regnante [habitata] praeferet, nunc quoque multis etiamsi ignobilibus frequens.

In addition to the other glories of the past, Egypt can declare it had 20,000 cities in the reign of King Amasis, and even now it is heavily packed with many, although of no importance.

According to Pliny, Egypt was proud of several other achievements such as the mention in book 36 of a couple of Egyptian ‘wonders’ like pyramids and obelisks. In his accounts Egypt’s deep antiquity is particularly highlighted. However, like Pliny’s treatment of human discoveries discussed in the previous section, the relation with the present is stressed. Referring to the altered contemporary situation (*nunc*), Pliny clearly distinguishes the past from the present: Egypt was once glorious, but now not (so) anymore in the present.

Another example in which Egypt is related to the present Roman situation concerns the Nile. After discussing the various theories of the flooding of the Nile, Pliny notes about the rising of the Nile (*NH* 5.58):

maximum incrementum ad hoc aevi fuit cubitorum XVIII Claudio principe, minimum V Pharsalico bello, veluti necem Magni prodigio quodam flumine aversante.

The highest rise up to date reached the level of 18 cubits [27 feet] in the principate of Claudius, and the lowest to a level of 5 cubits [7.5 feet] in the year

the Great (*NH* 13.69), Pliny notes important examples that disagree with Varro’s opinion (*ingentia exempla contra M. Varronis sententiam*, *NH* 13.84). The first deviation is the story that books written in Greek and Latin were discovered in the coffin of the Roman King Numa (*NH* 13.48), proving that the discovery of papyrus should be dated earlier than Alexander the Great. In the passage that follows, Pliny discusses the number and the titles of the books found in Numa’s coffin (*NH* 13.85-88). Although Rome is not identified as the place where papyrus was invented, in this discussion it certainly is the place where the oldest paper books were discovered.

of the War of Pharsalus, as if the river were showing its aversion to the murder of Pompey by some kind of portent.

According to this passage the Nile – whose rising had been measured accurately in Egypt for thousands of years, because the grain harvest depended on it – reached its highest and lowest point relatively recently, when the histories of Rome and Egypt were intertwined, as if the Nile only existed for Roman causes. Particularly the personification of the Nile as being concerned about the fate of Rome presents a great contrast with the Nile's function in other Roman sources, especially Augustan poetry, where the Nile seems to be violent towards Rome.¹⁷⁸ This suggests that Egypt's antiquity only mattered when the Roman present was concerned. Meaning that in the *Natural History* the traditional concept of Egypt's deep antiquity is not that prominent.

3. THE FUNCTION OF EGYPT IN THE *NATURAL HISTORY*

In the previous section it was argued that Pliny presented Egypt as an integral part of the contemporary Roman world. Some features of Egypt may have differed from Rome, but it was certainly not the Other. And Egypt may have had an ancient history, it was the present situation that mattered. Beside investigating *how* Pliny conceptualized Egypt, in this chapter it is also explored *why* Egypt was presented that way. To do so, we have to start with the overall message of the *Natural History*. It can be read as a celebration of the Roman world in its entirety, but it has one obvious centre which ranks higher than the rest: Italy and, most prominently, Rome.¹⁷⁹ Throughout the *Natural History* Rome is the point of reference, everything is compared, matched or otherwise related to Rome in such a way that 'Rome becomes the world', i.e. Pliny creates a particular Roman identity.¹⁸⁰ This part investigates whether the conceptualization of Egypt has a function in this process of identity creation and discloses what its contribution to Roman identity was exactly.

First, the physical contribution of Egypt to Rome will be discussed (3.1). Then the physical presence of Egyptian objects in Rome will be compared

¹⁷⁸ See Manolaraki 2013, 129; Cf. Carey 2003, 36.

¹⁷⁹ For an eulogy on Italy and Rome, see *NH* 3.39-40.

¹⁸⁰ See my discussion on Naas 2002 and 2011, on p. 43.

with that of Greek objects to put Egypt's status as cultural testator in the *Natural History* into perspective (3.2). Third, it will be investigated how Egypt could contribute to Roman identity by focusing on examples of Roman emulation (3.3). This part will end by discussing a special case of Roman emulation in which emulation forms the tool to effectuate the incorporation of an Egyptian tradition into Roman society (3.4).

3.1. *Everything flows to Rome: a hippopotamus, five crocodiles, and three obelisks*¹⁸¹

In his discussion of Egyptian animals, Pliny notes the following in his discussion of the hippopotamus (*NH* 8.96):

Primus eum et quinque crocodilos Romae aedilitatis suae ludis M. Scaurus temporario euripo ostendit.

Marcus Scaurus exhibited it [a hippopotamus] in a temporary channel at Rome first time, together with five crocodiles, at the games which Scaurus gave when aedile.

Marcus Scaurus funded the games in which these Egyptian animals figured in 58 BCE. In Rome they were literally placed in a new context, a temporary channel (*temporario euripo*). Images of these animals, such as Nilotic scenes, were already known in Italy. The Nilotic scene found in Pompeii in the House of the Faun, dated to 80-70 BCE, is probably the most famous, but in 58 BCE Romans saw these foreign animals for the first time in real life in Rome. They did so in the context of Roman games where these animals became part of public entertainment, clearly with political and social intentions.

Given Pliny's standard comment of when a foreign animal was first seen in Rome, Trevor Murphy argued that the actual display in Rome of foreign animals – most notoriously in triumphs – coming from what was now Roman territory can be matched to the description of these animals in the *Natural*

¹⁸¹ Parts of my discussion of Pliny's account of the obelisk were published earlier in Leemreize 2014a. This section title is borrowed and adapted from a statement of Murphy 2003, 52, who in his discussion of Pliny's account of the transportation of the obelisk now known as the Montecitorio Obelisk from Egypt to Rome sees this transportation as the prime example of 'how things flow to Rome, marking it the center of the world's power'. See also Leemreize 2014b.

History. In both cases Murphy suggests that the display of these animals in Rome is not the result of a simple transportation of 'objects'. Rather, Pliny's work shows how foreign objects were used to become an integral part of Roman culture. As these animals mostly came from subdued regions and were considered booty, both triumph and reference in the *Natural History* revealed to the public 'the world that is now Roman'. Notwithstanding the fact that Egypt was not Roman territory in 58 BCE when Scaurus displayed the hippopotamus and the five crocodiles – it was after all a Roman province when Pliny composed his *Natural History* – these animals became Roman because they came from territory that Rome considered to be theirs, in fact the whole world.¹⁸²

Considering the 'Roman' hippopotamus and five crocodiles, the fact that they came specifically from Egypt was probably less important to the Roman audience than the fact that they came from afar and that they had never seen them in real life before. At least Pliny's text does not stress the importance of 'Egypt' in this example. This kind of information can be gained from the passage in which Pliny describes the transportation of three obelisks to Rome. In Pliny's much-discussed account (*NH* 36.64-74), the Egyptian obelisk

¹⁸² For the Roman claim that the whole world was theirs, see p. 45-46. The specific passage in the *Natural History* in which a hippopotamus and crocodiles are said to have been displayed in Rome also lays bare another interpretative layer. The person responsible for the games in which the hippopotamus and five crocodiles figured, Marcus Scaurus, is firmly associated in the *NH* with extravagance and decadence: *docebimusque etiam insaniam eorum victam privatis opibus M. Scauri, cuius nescio an aedilitas maxime prostraverit mores*, 'I shall show that their [Caligula's and Nero's] insanity was surpassed by the private exploits of Marcus Scaurus, whose aedileship may probably have done more than anything to overthrow the morals', *NH* 36.113, see also Carey 2003, 96-97. Scholars have already argued that the *Natural History* can be read as a moralistic work that shows the negative consequences of being a successful conqueror, i.e. the riches of the world become the riches of Rome. On 'the problem of luxury' Carey 2003, 101, argues: 'The image of Rome as the world, luxury theaters and all, may ultimately reflect Nature's human microcosm ('there was no evil anywhere that was not present in man'); but it also embodies the paradox which has dominated Pliny's inventory – that trying to catalogue the glorious totality of the Roman Empire, you inevitably include luxury, the substance directly responsible for Rome's decline.' Pliny complains on several occasions about the display of wealth and moral decay, and Marcus Scaurus seems to embody Rome's steps on the pathway to decadence. Interpreted in this vein, the hippopotamus and the five crocodiles are in their specific context of the *Natural History* part of a Roman discussion about *luxuria*.

becomes incorporated in Roman culture without dismissal of its original Egyptian function.

In Pliny's account, obelisks are first and foremost dedications to the sun.¹⁸³ He begins by describing obelisks as monoliths made of Syene granite, constructed by pharaohs as a form of competition *and* as dedications to the sun (*obeliscos ... solis numini sacratos*, *HN* 36.64). He concludes his account by noting that the third obelisk now in Rome was originally a dedication to the sun by Pharaoh Nencoreus, who was ordered to do so by an oracle (*HN* 36.74). Pliny relates that during his time, three obelisks were on display in Rome: one in the Circus Maximus, the second in the Campus Martius (both transported by Augustus), and the third in the Vatican Circus (transported by Caligula). He does not devote many words to the function of the first and third obelisks in Rome, but he does elaborate on the second one. Although the original function of obelisks as dedications to the sun remains explicitly intact in the Roman inscription that was added to this monument,¹⁸⁴ Pliny only refers implicitly to this aspect when he describes the new 'Roman' function of the obelisk: 'to the one in the Campus, the deified Augustus added a remarkable function in order to measure the sun's shadows and thereby the length of days and nights' (*ei qui est in campo divus Augustus addidit mirabilem usum ad dependendas solis umbras dierumque ac noctium ita magnitudines*, *HN* 36.72). Thus, the new Augustan function as a meridian can only be seen as a Roman adaptation of the original function.¹⁸⁵ In the lines (*HN* 36.72-74) following the above quoted passage Pliny explains the layout and workings of the meridian, and especially discusses the various reasons for the failure of this mechanism to correspond with the calendar over the last thirty years. In

¹⁸³ For a discussion on this account see Reitz 2012, 51-53; Murphy 2004, 51-52; Carey 2003, 86-89; Naas 2002, 353-355. For an archaeological study focused on Egyptian obelisks in their new Roman context, see Schneider 2004.

¹⁸⁴ *CIL* VI.702: 'Imperator Caesar Augustus son of the deified Caesar, pontifex maximus, emperor for the twelfth time, consul for the eleventh time, holding tribunician power for the fourteenth time, when Egypt had been reduced to the power of the Roman people, gave this gift to the sun' (*imp. Caesar divi fil. / Augustus / pontifex maximus / imp. XII cos. XI trib. pot. XIV / Aegypto in potestatem / populi romani redacta / soli donum dedit*).

¹⁸⁵ An interesting paper on Augustus' so-called *Horologium* in its larger context is Heslin 2007, according to whom the obelisk is a meridian instead of a sundial. On this debate see Haselberger 2011, with responses and additional remarks by Heslin, Schütz, Hannah and Alföldi. A general study on obelisks in Rome is Iversen 1968.

Pliny's account. The focus is on the new Roman function of the obelisk, but its original Egyptian function as dedication to the sun is never absent.¹⁸⁶ Hence, this account presents an example of incorporation of (ancient) Egyptian ideas for Roman purposes.

3.2. *Everything flows to Rome: Egyptian versus Greek art*

The *Natural History* pays attention to all kinds of foreign art found in Rome, but first and foremost to originally Greek artifacts.¹⁸⁷ Only rare references can be found to pieces of art associated with other territories. In only four instances – apart from the obelisks – does Pliny refer to objects that seem to have been transported from Egypt to Rome. Two of them are about Hellenizing works of art such as the father Janus made by the 4th century BCE Greek sculptor Scopas or his contemporary, Praxiteles. Noting that the sculptors of many pieces of art are now unknown to Romans, Pliny remarks (*HN* 36.28):

item Ianus pater, in suo temple dicatus ab Augusto ex Aegypto advectus, utrius manu sit, iam quidem et auro occultatus.

Similarly, the statue of father Janus, dedicated to his temple by Augustus after being transported from Egypt, is carved by one of them [Scopas or Praxiteles], and now because of a golden covering it is even more obscure.

Pliny also mentions the statue of a personification of the Nile with 16 children that Emperor Vespasian placed in the Temple of Peace. This statue was made of the Ethiopian stone 'basanite' which was discovered by the Egyptians according to Pliny. He does not state whether this probably Hellenizing statue was carved in Egypt or Rome, but the subject and its material appear to have a clear link to Egypt as Pliny immediately presents another statue in Egypt made of this material: the colossal seated Memnon in Thebes (*NH* 36.58):¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ See Naas 2002, 353-355, for Pliny's appreciation of technical and practical 'wonders' in relation to his account on obelisks.

¹⁸⁷ Throughout the books on mineralogy (books 33 to 36) chapters on art can be found: book 33 contains chapters on silver casting; book 34 on bronze statuary; book 35 on painting and modeling and book 36 on marble and other stone sculpture. For a collection of these texts specifically, Jex-Blake and Sellers 1896.

¹⁸⁸ The statue of Memnon is one of the two seated colossi of Amenhotep III (fourteenth century BCE) in the necropolis of Thebes. Because the statue produced a sound at dawn, tourists to Egypt identified it with Memnon who was the son of Eos, the Dawn.

invenit eadem Aegyptus in Aethiopia quem vocant basaniten, ferrei coloris atque duritiae, unde et nomen ei dedit. numquam hic maior repertus est quam in templo Pacis ab imperatore Vespasiano Augusto dicatus argumento Nili, sedecim liberis circa ludentibus, per quos totidem cubita summi incrementi aurentis se annis eius intelleguntur. non absimilis illi narratur in Thebis delubro Serapis, ut putant, Memnonis statuae dicatus, quem cotidiano solis ortu contactum radiis crepare tradunt.

Egypt has also discovered a stone in Ethiopia that is known as ‘basanite’, its color and hardness resembles iron, this is why it is given its name. Never a larger piece was found than the one dedicated in the Temple of Peace by Emperor Vespasian Augustus that represented the Nile, surrounded by sixteen playing children who represent the equal number of cubits of the most favorable level the river should rise. Not unlike, they say, a block in the sanctuary of Serapis at Thebes, chosen for the statue of, as they believe, Memnon, about which they state that it cracks every day when it is touched at dawn by the first rays of the sun.

A third reference to pieces of art brought from Egypt to Rome can be found in Pliny’s discussion of the stone red porphyry which is quarried in Egypt. According to Pliny, Vitrasius Pollo, the agent of Emperor Claudius, brought statues carved out of this material from Egypt to Rome. The text does not give us any clue as to their style, Egyptian or Hellenizing. But the Romans did not like statues of red porphyry as Pliny notes that ‘this innovation was not quite approved’ (*non admodum probata novitate, NH 36.57*). In confirmation, the archaeological record of Egyptian material in ancient Rome seems to indicate that the import of statues of this kind of material was rare.¹⁸⁹ The fourth and last reference to an originally Egyptian statue concerns the repatriation of, according to Pliny, an Osidian statue of the Greek mythological warrior Menelaus (*NH 36.197*):¹⁹⁰

remisit et Tiberius Caesar Heliopolitarum caerimoniis repertam in hereditate Sei eius, qui praeferat Aegypto, obsianam imaginem Menelai.

This identification, however, might have originated even before the statue started to ‘speak’ at dawn, see Théodoridès 1989. Studies on the colossus of Memnon include Bowersock 1984 and Foertmeyer 1989, 23-25.

¹⁸⁹ See, for instance, the latest study on Imperial Roman Egyptian and Egyptianizing material, Müskens 2016, which catalogue contains no object of red porphyry.

¹⁹⁰ In Greek mythology Menelaus was linked to Egypt, see Hom. *Od.* 4 and Eur. *Hel.*

And Emperor Tiberius returned to the ceremonies of the people of Heliopolis an obsidian statue of Menelaus that he found in the legacy of one Seius who had been prefect of Egypt.

In the context of the cults of the sun-god at Heliopolis, it is highly likely that the statue was meant to represent a pharaoh in Egyptian style and not Menelaus, who was linked to Egypt in Greek mythology. Pliny, however, identified the statue with a mythological male figure associated with Egypt who was familiar to him (*Interpretatio Graeca / Romana*).

Compared to Pliny's overview of the presence of Greek art in the Rome, these four instances of art transported from Egypt to Rome are rather disappointing. In reality, more Egyptian works were probably to be found in ancient Rome as modern archaeological studies seem to indicate.¹⁹¹ However, as Pliny aims to recall the splendor of Rome by pointing out the flow of all important pieces of art to Rome in the *Natural History*, we should be careful not to exaggerate the role of Egyptian art styles as being Rome's cultural foundation.

3.3. *Emulating Egypt*

In his account of the obelisks, Pliny stresses the problems of transporting these gigantic monoliths. He notes how the Egyptians dug channels to transport them. The Romans after shipping the obelisks across the sea, transported them from the coastline to Rome through the Tiber. This transportation motivated Pliny to comment about the Tiber (*HN* 36.70):

quo experimento patuit non minus aquarum huic amni esse quam Nilo.

The experiment shows that the river has just as deep a channel as the Nile.

The Nile in the *Natural History* is *the* river of rivers as it is in general in antiquity. Other large rivers such as the Euphrates, Tigris, Ganges and the

¹⁹¹ Catalogues of Egyptian and Egyptianizing objects in Rome include: Arslan 1997; Rouillet 1972; Malaise 1972a and b; for an interpretation of these catalogues see Versluys 2002. For 'manifestations of Egypt in Augustan Rome', see Van Aerde 2015.

Niger are described by comparison to the Nile.¹⁹² By comparing the Tiber with the Nile, Pliny illustrates the great dimensions of the Tiber, producing a status-enhancing effect. It is as if Pliny is saying: ‘You would not believe it, but the Tiber is actually as great as the Nile’. This is not the only occasion where representations of Egypt are made to contribute positively to the status of Rome.

Valérie Naas has shown that in the *Natural History*, the *mirabilia*, ‘wonders’ of the world, served Rome’s prestige. In particular, book 36 offers a good example of this mechanism. Pliny enumerates foreign *mirabilia*, including obelisks, pyramids, the sphinx, the lighthouse of Pharos, the Egyptian, Cretan, Lemnian and Italian labyrinths, the ‘hanging’ (*pensilis*) town of Thebes, the temple of Diana at Ephesus, and the *mirabilia* of Cyzicus including the ‘run-away’ (*fugitivus*) stone and the Thracian Gate famous for its echo. Next, Pliny immediately pays attention to the ‘wonders’ (*miracula*) of Rome. He justifies his change of subject as follows (*NH* 36.101):

verum et ad urbis nostrae miracula transire conveniat DCCCque annorum dociles scrutari vires et sic quoque terrarum orbem victum ostendere.

But is it now suitable to move on to the wonders of our city, to investigate the resources apt to 800 years of experience, and to show that here [in wonders] too the world is surpassed.

According to Pliny, Rome’s buildings surpass those of the rest of the world. Roman standards and morality are the leading principle in valuing Rome’s achievement. The usefulness of buildings was an important criterion for ranking achievements, more so than other criteria such as beauty. For instance, Pliny holds Roman sewers to be ‘the greatest achievement of all’ (*opus omnium ... maximum*) and the importance of ‘functionality’ of buildings

¹⁹² Niger, probably not the river now known by that name, *NH* 5.55; Ganges, *NH* 6.65; Tigris and Euphrates, *NH* 18.170, 18.182. A comparable source is Vitruvius, where the constructions of temples alongside the riverbank of Nile is used as an example for Roman city planning. Cf. Manolaraki 2013, 36. On several occasions in the *Natural History* the extreme fertility of Egypt’s soil caused by the flooding of the Nile leading to an abundance of crops, is mentioned. For the fertility of Egypt, see *HN* 5.55; 17.31; 18.62; 18.92; 21.86.

probably caused him to describe pyramids as 'superfluous and foolish display' (*otiosa ac stulta ostentatio*).¹⁹³

In the *Natural History* all foreign *mirabilia*, whether it be buildings, multiple births, strange creatures, or extreme decadence, seem to have at least some kind of Roman equivalent or are surpassed by a Roman version. A good example is the famous anecdote of Cleopatra swallowing an expensive pearl in book 9 of the *Natural History*. While enjoying a lavish banquet, Cleopatra bet with Antony that she could spend 10,000,000 sesterces on a single banquet. Cleopatra won this wager by dissolving one of the most expensive pearls in the world in vinegar and swallowing it (*NH* 9.119-121). Pliny rounds this anecdote off by remarking that (*NH* 9.122):

non ferent hanc palmam spoliabunturque etiam luxuriae gloria. prior id fecerat Romae in unionibus magnae taxationis.

They [Cleopatra and Antony] will not carry off this trophy and will be robbed even of this false pride of luxury. A person of earlier time had done this before at Rome regarding pearls of great value.

The predecessor was the son of a tragic actor, Clodius, who wanted to know the exact taste of pearls. When he found out that he liked them, he shared his pleasure with guests, whom he all offered their pearl of choice to swallow. In the *Natural History* Cleopatra as well as Antony are prime examples of persons with a lust for luxury, but Antony was worse (*NH* 33.50):

Messalla orator prodidit Antonium triumvirum aureis usum vasis in omnibus obscenis desideriis, pudendo crimine etiam Cleopatrae. summa apud exteros licentiae fuerat Philippum regem poculo aureo pulvinis subdito dormire solitum, Hagnonem Teium, Alexandri Magni praefectum, aureis clavis suffigere crepidas: Antonius solus contumelia naturae vilitatem auro fecit.

The orator Messalla has transmitted that the triumvir Antony used golden vessels amid all indecent desires, a crime that even Cleopatra would have been ashamed of. Till then the sum of wantonness was in the hands of foreigners, King Philip used to sleep with a golden cup under his pillow, Alexander the Great's prefect Hagnon of Teos used to sole his sandals with golden nails: Antony alone, however, made gold cheap by this indignity to nature.

¹⁹³ See also Beagon 2005, 7-8, for the contrast between Pliny's rejection of private buildings and appraisal of public buildings: 'buildings with a public and/or utilitarian function are applauded'.

Clearly distinguishing between ‘foreign’ (*exteros*) and Roman, here in the person of triumvir (*triumvirum*) Mark Antony, Pliny drives his point home: Rome outdoes all previously known foreign decadence.¹⁹⁴ Hence, the fixed pattern that Rome surpasses everything, Egyptian decadence included, does not always have status enhancing effects.

3.4. *Rome as successor culture*

Previously, on pp. 69-70, it has been shown how the original Egyptian function of the obelisk was adapted to Roman circumstances and that in this process the obelisk became incorporated as an integral part of Rome. However, Pliny’s report on the obelisk can also be interpreted as a Roman incorporation of the Egyptian *history* of the obelisk. As Pliny associates the Roman employment of the obelisk with an Egyptian tradition, Egyptian and Roman history seem to merge. Pliny’s account of the obelisks is a story of continuous competition. First, the ancient pharaohs, who lived before and during the Trojan war according to Pliny, are competing against each other in creating obelisks.¹⁹⁵ The difficulties in erecting these obelisks are stressed by the example of Ramses who tied his son to the apex of an enormous obelisk - spurring the laborers to work as carefully as they could - to ensure the construction of the obelisk (*HN* 36.66). The difficulties of erecting such a large monument are surpassed by the transportation of an obelisk to Alexandria by Ptolemy Philadelphus. Pliny narrates how boats and rivers were modified to get the job done (*HN* 36.67-68). And finally the Roman Emperor Augustus, in turn, surpasses Ptolemy by his transportation of the obelisks to Rome: ‘Beyond all difficulties was the task of transporting obelisks to Rome by sea’ (*super omnia accessit difficultas mari Romam devehendi, HN* 36.69). Here we have a clear example of emulation: the works of Augustus’ Egyptian predecessors have a status-enhancing effect on Augustus’ achievement. It turns out to be even more astounding because the difficulties Augustus had to overcome were greater than those of Ramses and Ptolemy. But this emulation not only relates the achievements of Roman and Egyptian rulers to each other, it also connects the Roman present to the Egyptian past. By writing a history

¹⁹⁴ For the problem of luxury, see p. 42, n. 127.

¹⁹⁵ Plin. *NH* 36.64: ‘Monoliths of this [granite of Syene], that were called obelisks, were made by the kings, out of a certain kind of competition’ (*trabes ex eo fecere reges quodam certamine, obeliscos vocantes*).

of the obelisk from the first pharaohs via the Ptolemies to Roman emperors in such a way that each 'generation' surpasses the former, Pliny inscribes Roman emperors into an ancient tradition. This transition implies that Rome incorporated not only the object but also the ancient tradition for which the obelisk stood.¹⁹⁶ Hence, Pliny's account is an example of how the concept of Egypt's antiquity can have a function in terms of self-definition: incorporating Egypt's antiquity provides Rome with an admired deep antiquity.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This chapter served in the first place to investigate the relationship between the literary representation of Egypt and the two traditional concepts: Egypt as the stereotypical Other and Egypt as particularly ancient. Reading the *Natural History* as a monograph, this chapter interpreted the passages in which Egyptian topoi figured within its larger context, the aims and purposes of this encyclopedia. Firstly, this chapter argued that Egypt is not particularly represented as the stereotypical Other in the *Natural History*. Section 2.1 showed that the region Egypt was familiar territory. The systematic and factual way in which Pliny describes Egypt with his keen eye on Egypt's legal bonds Rome shows that Egypt is mentally mapped within the Empire. It was as well-known to the Romans as any other region that legally belonged to the Roman Empire. The unknown and abnormal was placed outside Pliny's map of the Roman Empire. By looking at the representation of the inhabitants of Egypt section 2.2 argues that Egyptians appear interchangeable with other people living in the Roman Empire. Ethnographical attention is only paid to abnormal people living in the unknown and unfamiliar regions outside the borders of the Empire. Considering the Egyptians the only exception to this rule seems to be the high fertility rate in Egypt, a feature often entangled with Egypt in the literary tradition. However, compared to the ethnographies of other people this feature does not stand out as outlandish. Section 2.2 also discussed the representation of Egyptian flora and fauna. Although Egypt harbors certain vegetation and animals that are foreign to Rome or Italy, these

¹⁹⁶ See also Parker 2007, who discusses five aspects that contribute to answering the question: 'What did obelisks mean to Romans of the Empire'. These five aspects are: 'transportation; the measuring of obelisks and the use of them to provide measurements; the habit of adding inscriptions to them; problems involved in describing them; and finally imitations and representations', *ib.* 210.

exotic flora and fauna do not turn Egypt into the exotic Other. The description of Egyptian flora and fauna needs to be interpreted in Pliny's overall theme to connect these with Rome in order to create one Roman world of which Egypt is firmly part. Secondly, section 2.3 demonstrated that Egypt is also not particularly represented as ancient. Unlike the literary tradition in which it is held to be one of the oldest regions and coined the first inventor par excellence, Egypt appears as one regions of inventions in a pool of many of these. Although the *Natural History* does reckon with Egypt's deep and famous antiquity, it is the present situation in which Egypt was not that glorious anymore that mattered. Pliny's focus on the contemporary Roman Empire to which all former independent regions including Egypt belong, makes the past of these less significant.

Beside investigating the relation between representations of Egypt and the concepts of the Stereotypical Other and Egypt's antiquity, this chapter also looked at the function of Egypt in terms of Roman self-representation. By analyzing passages in which Egyptian objects and animals were said to be on display in Rome, section 3 showed that their presence in Rome was not the result of a plain transportation of 'objects'. These original Egyptian animals and objects contributed to Roman self-esteem because they came from subdued faraway territory that was now Roman. Especially Pliny's description of transportation of obelisk demonstrates how the incorporation of specifically Egyptian objects could have contributed to Roman self-representation. Pliny's account shows how the original Egyptian meaning of the obelisk becomes an integral part of Rome by adaptation: his accounts shows that the Romans knew something of the original Egyptian function of the obelisk and that they probably used that knowledge to give it a new Roman function. Pliny's account makes the obelisk a symbol for a a deep history of competition between pharaohs. By inscribing Augustus' transportation of the obelisk into this tradition, Rome not only incorporated an object from a subdued region, but also the ancient tradition for which the obelisk stood. However section 3 also showed by comparing the presence of Egyptian with Greek art in Rome as attested by Pliny, not to over-estimate Egypt's role as Rome's foundation culture, at least not in the *Natural History*.

In the third place, this chapter wished to put Actium and Augustan poetry in perspective as the focus on this event and this period may have led to an over-emphasis of negative stereotypes and the function of these negative stereotypes as negative mirroring. This chapter showed that Egypt does not

always have to be rendered the stereotypical Other in Roman literature. It also demonstrated that Egypt could be treated like an integral part of Roman society, instead of being just the Other and it also showed that the appropriation of Egypt could contribute to Roman status. Pliny wrote in Flavian instead of Augustan times and his work was geographical/ethnographical, not poetical. Hence, taking the conclusions of this chapter in mind, the next chapter will delve into the relationship between Augustan poetry and Egypt as the stereotypical Other.