ALEXEY K. VINOGRADOV

HELIODOROS ON AITHIOPIAN ARCHERS PART 1: THE EYE SHOOTERS (*AETH.* IX. 18. 5-6)[1]

In memory of Svetlana Bersina, who believed the *Aithiopika* to be "an encyclopaedic reference-book for Meroe".

1.

The novel by Heliodoros, conventionally titled *The Story of Theagenes and Charikleia,* more familiarly known as *The Aithiopika*, occupies a special place among the literary works of late classical antiquity because it relates to the cultural milieu of the ancient Middle Nile Valley, the region of modern northern Sudan.

Recognized by literary critics as among the brightest Graeco-Roman love stories (once styled as "erotic", in a meaning rather far from what this term implies today), the *Aithiopika* often attracts scholars' attention by its lively plot, innovative structure of narration, remarkable skill in literary techniques, and richness in intertextual allusions and mythological reminiscences, etc.

The setting of the story is peculiar: it takes place in the Nile Valley from the Delta in Egypt up to the city of Meroe in Aithiopia. A special value of the novel is in its wealth of ethnographic details, which imparts an exotic *couleur locale* to the love-and-adventure story set on the edge of the (civilized) world. This point was long ago stressed by the German poet and translator Vicentius Obsopoeus (Vincent Heidnecker), the first editor of the *Aithiopika*'s manuscript after its recovery at the sack of Buda in 1526:

> "I recommend The Æthiopian History of Heliodorus, as the most absolute Image of all humane Affections; <…> Of all Greek Authors that ever came into my hands, I must // affirm him to be the most pleasant and will venture to say the most Learned. <…> For the Argument which is various, I can avert it to be compleat; for as much as it is, besides the continued pleasantness of the Tale, full of admirable turns and surprises; he has most skilfully given the Cosmography of many places; laid open the secret causes of Nature in many Instances; learnedly described the Rites and Customs of many Nations; the nature of divers Mountains, Rivers, Stones, Herbs, and Regions of Ægypt and Æthiopia especially, Countrys the least known; mingling all with such beautiful disgressions, that in the whole Work he hath left nothing imperfect or that might give offence to the most Critical Reader".[2]

Scholars have often commented on the great popularity of Heliodoros' novel after its 1534 (re-)publication in Basel, pointing out its actual or supposed influence on the work of many European writers of 16th and 17th centuries, whether it be Torquato Tasso or William Shakespeare, or writers of the Spanish Golden age (Juan Pérez de Montalván, Pedro Calderón de la Barca, Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra), some authors of French *romans précieux*, and later Jean Racine, etc. Much more complex and less studied seems to have been the question of the possible influence(s), if any, exerted upon Heliodoros himself, and the sources he could have used when creating the exotic scenes which form the background of the romance of his main characters.

The search for answers is greatly complicated by the extreme scarcity (if not *lack*) of information about Heliodoros himself, which is actually confined to his name (if it is not a *pseudonym*), his patronymic, and the name of his birth-place, indicated in the colophon of the novel: "a Phoenician from (the city of) Emesa, (one) of the Clan (?) of the Sun/Helios, son of Theodosios, Heliodoros". Bearing in mind that over 20 persons have been attested as bearers of this rather frequent name in antiquity[3] and that no dates of his

1 I am most grateful to Dr. Angelika Lohwasser for helping me acquaint myself with several rare publications relating to the subject of the present study. As usual, I am indebted to Dr. Timothy Kendall for bettering the English style of my text.

2 Presented among the "Testimonies of Eminent Persons, Ancient and Modern, concerning the following Work" in several editions of the novel in English translation made with participation of Nahum Tate (Heliodorus 1687, pp.<xii–xiii>; Heliodorus 1753, p. vii). The punctuation and orthography of the 1687 (the second) edition are retained here.

3 PWRE VIII, Sp. 12–44.

life have yet been ascertained – suggestions range from the 2nd to the 4th centuries CE[4] – it becomes very difficult to prove which sources he used when writing his book.

All that can be said is that the ethnographic details presented in the novel generally correspond to the information encountered in the specialized works of the authoritative Graeco-Roman historians and geographers from Herodotos to Plinius, which points to Heliodoros' deep acquaintance with the mainstream of the antique Aithiopian *logos*.

Most intriguingly, the *Aithiopika*'s descriptions of certain particular details (e.g., the heavy armour of Persian warriors [IX.15], the curious appearance of the giraffe/kamelopardalis [X.28], or the Nile sources and the Mountains of the Moon,[5] etc.) are either presented in much greater detail than in the earlier writers' accounts or are unparalleled, which suggests that Heliodoros may have used some presently unknown, perhaps lost, sources of information. Owing to such examples – the ones to be discussed below included – the novel proves to be an important sourcebook *per se*, not yet entirely decoded and appreciated.

2.

The subjects of the present study are several curious statements found in Book IX, a rather prolonged a digression relating to the art of war and barely connected with the main love-story, dedicated to the totally fictive siege of the Egyptian frontier city Syene, with Persian forces. In this episode, the Persian army, commanded by the satrap Oorondates, was surrounded by the army of the Aithiopian king Hydaspes in alliance with some of the neighbouring peoples.

It is understandable that the account of the siege and the eventual decisive battle would be rather selective in details, given that its source was a belletristic work rather than a military report or scholarly treatise. Here the writer focused on what he thought were remarkable points while ignoring the rest. For instance, speaking of the besieged garrison, he does not say much about the armour of the Egyptians or their allies, the Libyans and Medes, but he minutely depicts the heavy-armed Persian horseman (his is apparently the most detailed description of a *katafrakt* in all of antique literature).[6]

The picture of the Aithiopian host is equally selective. The heavy infantry from Meroe is mentioned rather cursorily as taking part in the battle. A little more is said about the war elephants (Heliodoros being the first – if not the only – Graeco-Roman writer to mention the existence of this combat arm in Ancient Sudan),[7] the force which is commanded by king Hydaspes himself. Yet the main attention of the writer seems to be the lightly armed auxiliaries composed of men from the Country of the Troglodytai, from the Cinnamon Land, as well as the Blemmyes and the Seres, apparently the peoples subject to the king of Aithiopia.

Perhaps the brightest passages in Heliodoros' description of the battle at Syene are those describing the archers, as if the writer wanted to emphasize their special role in the Aithiopians' victory (later asserted by Hydaspes himself at his triumphal return to Meroe, the capital of the kingdom – *Aeth*. X. 26).

Of course, it will be remembered that by the time Heliodoros wrote his novel (supposedly 3rd-4th centuries CE) the reference to the Aithiopian skill in archery had evidently turned into one of the commonplaces of the antique Aithiopian logos (cf. Hdt. VII. 69. 1; Diod. III. 8. 4; 33. 1; 33. 3-4; Strabo XVI. 4. 9, 4.10, 4.11, 4.17; XVII. 2. 3; Plin. VI. 35. 194; cf. Luc. *Salt*., 18, etc.). However, it should be noted that Heliodoros, while following the general Graeco-Roman tradition, does present some new, remarkable particulars unparalleled in other sources. Two of the five references to the Aithiopian archers in the record of the battle at Syene[8] are worth special discussion. They refer to two different types of warriors.

3.

One group of archers were mounted, hidden in special turrets secured to the backs of war elephants. The text does not specify, but since this force was headed by king Hydaspes himself, it might be supposed that the archers on the elephants were his fellow countrymen from the region of Meroe. The account of

4 Egunov 1965, p. 3 (1st quarter of the 3rd century), Bersina 1977, p. 146 (1st half of the 3rd century), van der Valk 1940, p. 100 ("aprés l'année 351, et pas trop longtemps après cette année la"). For the problems of dating see Bowie 2008, pp. 32–35. Cf. note 30 below.

5 See Hennig 1944, S. 426–431. For the problems of rendering this most interesting passage, sometimes attributed to a certain anonymous (Christian) writer, see Khvostov 1907, pp. 67–70, esp. 70, n. 1.

6 The description of the armour of the *katafrakt* in the *Aithiopika* is given in so much detail (with sizes of a single scale of the plated body armour provided) that – given a certain phraseological similarity with a related, albeit briefer statement, by the emperor Julian (see Dodgeon & Lieu 1994, pp. 153 [para 7.2.3] vs. 183 [para 7.6.4]) – one could assume that Heliodorus' description was original and not *vice versa*, as stated in the literature (van der Valk 1940, pp. 99–100).

7 *Aeth*. IX. 16–18.

8 *Aeth*. IX. 5. 8; 16. 2; 18. 5–6; 19. 3–4; X. 26. 1.

the Syene battle presents them as specialists of the highest skill marksmanship:[9]

> "They <who were> in the turrets on the elephants (six men in each, two archers on either side, except the rear left unattended) were shooting – as from the castle towers – so steadily and exactly, that the mass <of arrows> seemed to the Persians like a cloud. \\ And the Aithiopians, mainly making the enemies' eyes their targets, – as though they were not fighting with equals but <rather> contesting <between themselves> in marksmanship, – were hitting <the mark> so exactly that <those> stricken by the arrows plunged in total confusion through the crowd, with shafts, like pipes, projecting from <their> eyes" (*Aeth*. IX. 18. 5–6).

This brief but informative passage leaves a rather astonishing impression in light of what little is known today about the military arts of the historical inhabitants of the Middle Nile Valley. The elephant was, of course, well known in Ancient Sudan. From very early times the country was the major source of ivory for Egypt, as witnessed by numerous representations showing elephant tusks among the gifts or levies (along with logs of ebony, skins of exotic animals, etc) brought to the pharaohs or their deputies by the dark-skinned tribute-bearers from the Egyptian Old Kingdom on.[10] Later, in the times of the independent kingdom of Kush, ivory continued to be highly valued, judging by the stores of tusks found in the course of excavations at Sanam and Wad ben Naga (Welsby 2002, pp. 175–176; Vercoutter 1962, pl. XXII b), stores which appear to have been reserves for trade with the outer world.

During the Hellenistic period (more precisely, from the reign of Ptolemy II on), as Graeco-Roman writers report, Aithiopia must have become an important area for elephant hunting with the view of training for the military, ceremonial and other (including the circus') uses.[11] Paradoxically, the elephant business, though carried in the regions between the Nile Valley and the Sudanese part of the Red Sea coast, seems to have been conducted by the Egyptians – presumably with the help of the local inhabitants, the "cave-dwellers"/Troglodytes – mainly for the deliveries abroad (through the coastal ports), first of all to Egypt.

Whether the elephant was actually used for war in the Ancient Sudan is a question difficult to answer today. Many guesses and assertions in this regard have been presented in the literature,[12] but no conclusive textual, nor even iconographic, evidence has been found so far.[13] Several representations in the Lion Temple at Musawwarat es Sufra, sometimes interpreted as those of the Kushite war elephants,[14] can hardly be labeled as such,[15] both for lack of any traces of the animals' equipment (armour, and/or turrets),[16] absence of the indispensable drivers (the so-called *mahouts*), etc. and for the more or less obvious *allegoric* tenor of the surviving scenes whose context is perceptible.

Also, we might note that some of the experts in the history of war in the Ancient World have considered the possibility of the elephants' military use in the Sudan as rather unlikely due to the African elephant's much lesser flair for training, comparing to that of the Indian elephant).[17] Besides, there is a direct statement by Cosmas Indicopleustes (6th century CE), asserting that "The Aithiopians do not

9 <IX. 18.5> οἵ τε ἐπὶ τῶν ἐλεφάντων κατὰ τοὺς πύργους (ἓξ μὲν ἕκαστον κατειληφότες δύο δὲ κατὰ πλευρὰν ἑκάστην ἐκτοξεύοντες, τῆς ἐπ΄ οὐρὰν μόνης εἰς τὸ ἄπρακτον σχολαζούσης) οὕτω δή τι συνεχές τε καὶ ἐπίσκοπον ὥσπερ ἐξ ἀκροπόλεως τῶν πύργων ἔβαλλον ὥστε εἰς νέφους φαντασίαν τὴν πυκνότητα παραστῆναι τοῖς Πέρσαις, <18.6> καὶ πλέον ὅτε τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς μάλιστα τῶν ἐναντίων σκοποὺς οἱ Αἰθίοπες ποιούμενοι, καθάπερ οὐκ ἐκ τῶν ἴσων πολεμοῦντες ἀλλ΄ εὐστοχίας ἀγώνισμα προθέντες, οὕτως ἀδιαπτώτως ἐτύγχανον ὥστε οἱ διαπεπαρμένοι τοῖς βέλεσιν ἐφέροντο σὺν οὐδενὶ κόσμῳ διὰ τοῦ πλήθους καθάπερ αὐλοὺς τοὺς ὀιστοὺς τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν προβεβλημένοι.

10 Davies 1935, pls. VI, XXII; Davies 1936, pl. XVI; Davies 1943, pls. XVII–XIX.

11 The question is minutely discussed – with references to the relevant antique sources – by Pier Armandi in his classical study on the military use of the elephants in the Ancient World (1843, pp.77–88). See also Casson 1993.

12 Bersina 1977, p. 169; Lobban & de Liedekerke 2000, pp. 235–238. cf. Shinnie 1967, p. 94.

13 Note the sensible remark of Derek Welsby: "The elephant is depicted in Kushite art. <…> Among the rare accounts of battles between Kushites and the outside world there is, however, no record of elephants being employed" (1996, p. 43; cf. 146, 175–176, 186).

14 Wenig 1993, S. 216–217 (Exkurs 9.2: 'Elephanten'), 219–220 (Exkurs 10: 'Die Gefangenen und Feinddarstellungen'); Lobban & de Liedekerke 2000, p. 237; Welsby 1996, p. 176.

15 The assertions that "<…> Kushites had prowess as mahouts of war elephants" and that "Sometimes Kushites executed their prisoners using war elephants" (Lobban & de Liedekerke 2000, pp. 238 and 237 respectively) are most debatable and – in the otherwise quite informative study – look as a misinterpretation of the references which they are based on (Welsby 1996, pp. 43, 186), and which in fact are cautious enough (see note 13 above).

16 The rather allegoric scene of a triumph in the well-known relief on the Western Wall in the Lion Temple in Musawwarat es-Sufra (Musawwarat I.1, Taf. 47; Plan 10a; Musawwarat I.2, Taf. 17-c, 47, 49-c, 51-d; cf. 76, 77; Welsby 1996, p. 44, fig. 12), shows the elephants covered with something like a horsecloth – a detail characteristic of a *peaceful* (perhaps, ceremonial) rather than a warlike function.

17 Armandi 1843, pp. 2–3, 11–12; cf. Casson 1993, p. 251; Török 1997, pp. 396, 430–431.

know <the art of> taming elephants"[18] but noticing at the same time that animals might occasionally be captured and trained for shows (Cosmas Topogr. XI, 339). Still it remains a question which of the peoples inhabiting the lands south of Egypt could have been meant by Cosmas, bearing in mind the remarkable looseness of the term "Aithiopia" and the fact that the traveller did visit, for instance, the kingdom of Axum, the south-eastern neighbour of the Ancient Sudan, which could be also referred to by the same appellation.

In any case, the possibility that Heliodoros' novel is the only surviving evidence of the Ancient Sudanese use of elephants for military purposes perhaps should not be ruled out completely, but taking into account the belletristic nature of the *Aithiopika* this evidence should probably be recognized as the one still wanting verification by other sources.[19]

4.

While there still remains much doubt about the veracity of Heliodoros' account of the Aithiopian war elephants in the (imaginary) battle of Syene, his words about the amazing accuracy of the Aithiopian archers (sitting in the turrets on the elephants' backs)[20] seems much closer to truth. The text says that the Aithiopian archers shot their arrows so as to hit the enemy in the eye. At first, this statement might seem merely a rhetorical device[21] (supported by the somewhat sinister irony in its comparison of the wounded with flutists in the following phrase).[22] The paradox is, this seemingly hyperbolic remark may actually be the only realistic detail of Heliodoros' description of the battle.

Some strikingly close parallel(s) to the above passages in the *Aithiopika* may be recognized in a series of accounts of the medieval chroniclers, relating to the spread of Islam in North Africa in the 7th century CE. Following the conquest of Egypt in 639 one part of the Arab force moved west on the continent continuing the early caliphate expansion, while the other one went up the Nile. Having reached the region of the Middle Nile, where by this time the Kushite Kingdom had transformed into a conglomeration of three Christian Nubian Kingdoms, the invaders met a fierce resistance by the local people, who managed to block the incursion and to preserve for some seven centuries more their political sovereignty, way of life, and religion.[23]

The Arabic sources mention two unsuccessful southern expeditions of the Muslims (CE 641/642 and 651/652 accordingly) which seem occasionally to have been confused by the later historians. One reason was probably due to the fact that the witnesses' recollections were only written down two centuries after the events they described, apparently having previously been transmitted only orally (cf. Kennedy 2007, pp. 139–140). In any case, the later campaign, marked by the decisive battle at Dunqula (usually identified with modern Old Dongola), the capital of the Nubian Kingdom of Maqurra/Makuria, and later of the united Nubia, appears to be particularly memorable for the Muslim chroniclers.

Accounts of the battle, in which the Arab force, headed by the emir of Egypt, ʿAbdallah ibn Saʿd, was manifestly defeated, have been preserved in at least a dozen Arabic memoirs,[24] the chroniclers

18 οἱ δὲ Αἰθίοπες οὐκ ἴσασιν ἡμερῶσαι ἐλέφαντας.

19 We may treat with some skepticism Heliodoros' statement that the war elephants of the Aithiopians carried crews of six archers (which would have been accompanied by a seventh person, the elephant's driver – a *mahout*). The weight of this number of people, according to the estimates presented in the specialist literature, would exceed by almost twice the weight that an elephant would be able to carry for a prolonged time. Armandi's analysis of the numerous Graeco-Roman statements about elephants' crew strength made him "regarder comme un maximum ce nombre de 4 combattants", indicated in a number of sources (1843, p. 261).

20 For the turrets/towers carried by the war elephants see a special digression in Armandi 1843, pp. 252–279.

21 Quite understandable looks the attempt to rationalize the words of Heliodorus made by Rowland Smith, the author of the 1855 English translation (p. 220), who seems to suggest that the aim of the Aithiopian archers was not so much the eyes of their enemies but rather the vision slit in their helmets which was the only vulnerable point of the Persian *katafraktoi* (whose body-armour is certainly styled in the text as "impregnable to arrows and protective from any injury" – *Aeth*. IX. 15. 3). The parallelism between the statements of the *Aithiopika* and the Arab sources, however, makes this rendering unwarranted.

22 The interpretation "with the arrows protruding from their eyes like the twin pipes of a double flute" suggested in the 1989 English translation by John Morgan (p. 549), one of the leading experts on Heliodoros' *Aithiopika* today, looks very doubtful both with regard to the common sense (for otherwise one would have to assume that each of the wounded Persians was *twice* hit in the eyes by the Aithiopians' arrows) and to the lexicological considerations. The word αὐλός did not necessarily imply a *double* flute, judging by the possibility of its use in *singular* form (see Liddell, Scott, Jones 1996, p. 277: αὐλός, 1) (cf. ὅταν γὰρ ὁ αὐλὸς φθέγγηται, παντάπασι σιωπῶμεν; <…> πρὸς τὸν αὐλὸν κατέλεγεν, <…> ὑπὸ τὸν αὐλὸν ὑμῖν διαλέγωμαι Xen. *Smp*. VI, 3).

23 Shinnie 1954, pp. 4–5; Shinnie 2009, pp. 123–124; Welsby 2002, pp. 68–70.

24 Vantini 1975; pp. 56–57 (Ibn ʿAbd al-Hakam, d. 871); 68–69 (Ibn al-Khordadhbeh, c. 885); 80–81 (Al-Baladhuri, d. 892); 94–95 (Ahmad al-Kufi, d. 926); 98 (At-Tabari, d. 923); 105 (Abu-l-Faraj Qudama, c. 930); 127, 132 (Al-Masʿudi, d. 956); 144–145 (Yusuf al-Kindi, d. 971); 343, 346 (Yaqut ar-Rumi, d. 1229); 457 (Ad Dimishqi, d. 1327);

often producing the names of the eyewitnesses, together with the more or less prolonged chains of the transmitters of the stories. Most impressive among these accounts is that of the Arab historian Al-Baladhuri (d. 892):

> «<…> The Moslems met in Nubia determined resistance. They were subjected to such severe showers of arrows until most of them were wounded and had to return with many wounds and blinded eyes. Therefore, were the Nubians called the "archers of the eyes" <…>
>
> "<I was told by>[25] Muhammad b. Saʿd, <…> from a shaykh of the tribe of Himyar. The latter said: 'I have been to Nubia twice during the caliphate of ʿUmar ibn al-Khattāb, and I never saw a people who are sharper in warfare than they. I heard one of them say to the Moslems: "Where do you want me to hit you with my arrow?" and in case the Moslem would disdainfully say: "In such a spot", the Nubian would never miss it.
>
> They were fond of fighting with arrows;[26] but their arrows would scarcely ever hit on the ground. One day, they arrayed themselves against us and we were desirous to carry the conflict with the sword; but they were too quick for us and shot their arrows, putting out our eyes. The eyes that were put out numbered 150'."[27]

A short remark of Ahmad al-Kufi (d. 926), another historian writing on the same subject, suggests that along with the archers some other forces were also fighting on the Nubian side in the Dunqula battle (Vantini 1975, p. 95), yet the greatest impression on the Arabs (whether participants or their later memories' transmitters) was obviously made by the local bowmen.

The "Dunqula syndrome" turned out to be so strong that even speaking of the peace-treaty eventually established with the Nubians, and commenting on the composition of the established *quasi*-tribute (in fact merely a form of barter, implying an exchange of equivalent gifts),[28] the later historians of the caliphate were never reluctant to recall the price paid for the armistice. The *coup de maître* of Nubian archers, which secured for them appellations "the eye shooters" and "the pupil smiters", stayed memorable in the Arab historical tradition for at least 800 years after the clashes under discussion.

5.

In light of the evidence provided by the historians of the Arab caliphate, whose authenticity does not seem ever to have been disputed, the concise but bright passage about the Aithiopian "eye shooters" in Heliodoros' account of the battle at Syene no longer looks like a literary decoration merely intended to impart to the narration a dramatic flavour. The imagery of the chronologically uncertain (or simply timeless ?) events presented in a love-story turns out to contain some bits of trustworthy information about the inhabitants of the Middle Nile Valley so far unattested in any other of the Graeco-Roman sources.[29]

The paradox in the present case is the intriguing fact that the *Aithiopika*'s description of the "eye shooters" turns out to be closer to (medieval) Arab historical tradition than to the (ancient) Graeco-Roman one. It would seem that formally presenting a picture from the times of the Persian domination in Egypt (6th to 5th centuries BCE), Heliodoros at a certain point went beyond the commonplaces of the traditional Aithiopian logos, formed by the earlier historians from Herodotos (developing some motifs already present in Homer) to, say, Pliny the Elder, and added some previously unknown information (in the present instance relating to the art of war), which was perhaps contemporary to him.

Does it not give us a prompt regarding the time of Heliodoros' work on his novel and of the new sources he was using? Of all the guesses as to the date of the *Aithiopika*, ranging from 2nd to 4th century CE, the latest one would seem more probable in view of the long-noticed similarity between Heliodoros' account in Book IX of the Aithiopians' very peculiar siege methods at Syene and the available reports about the – previously unparalleled – tactics of Persian king Shapur II when besieging the Roman garrison of Nisibis, a city in Roman Mesopotamia in the year 350 CE.[30]

528–529 (Ibn al-Furat, 1334–1405); 572 (al-Qalqashandi, d. 1418).

25 Conjecture after ArIst 1960, p. 27.

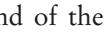
26 Lev Kubbel' and Victor Matveev suggest the rendering: "they discharged many arrows" (ArIst 1960, p. 27)

27 Vantini 1975, pp. 80–81; checked with the rendering by Lev Kubbel' and Victor Matveev in ArIst 1960, p. 27. Cf. Shinnie 1967, p. 123.

28 Cf. Shinnie 2009, pp. 123–124; Welsby 2002, pp. 69–73.

29 It would be tempting to state certain correspondence between the sources of the *Aithiopika* and the Arab sources' characterisation of the style of the Sudanese archers' "work of war". The words of Heliodoros about the Aithiopian archers' playful competition in accuracy, as though they considered their shooting an entertainment rather than serious work (*Aeth*. IX. 18. 6), would seem comparable to al-Baladhuri's observation about the Nubian archers' – similarly playful – challenge to the Arabs (somewhat reminiscent of Cyrano de Bergerac's duel gasconade in the 1st Act of Edmond Rostand's play), with invitation to determine the aim for shooting. A hint of irony seems to have been caught in both cases, revealing the self-confidence of the "eye shooters.'

30 van der VALK 1940, pp. 97–99; Morgan 1989, p. 352; Morgan 1996, pp. 418–420.

Ironically, if the latter hypothesis is correct, it should mean that by the time when Heliodoros was creating an image of the prosperous (and victorious) Aithiopian kingdom with its capital in Meroe, that kingdom's historical prototype apparently had already ceased to exist, giving way to the cultural conglomeration of the three new political formations in the same region – the Nubian kingdoms of Nobadia, Muqurra/Maquria and Alwa/Alodia – with ethnically changed populations (supposedly arrivals from the western oases)[31] with new language and religion, yet apparently still retaining something in common with their predecessor in the mode of life. It was the Nubians who, three centuries later, were to withstand the Arab incursion and to show the skill of their archers. These Nubian "eye shooters" must have been able to bring to perfection the traditional mastery of their predecessors due to which the lands in the Middle Nile Valley from time immemorial were called by their Egyptian neighbours (and later also by the native kings in their texts in Egyptian) "the Land of the Triple Curved Bow" ( *T3 štj*).[32]

The ethno-cultural renovation in Ancient Sudan must have been a rather prolonged process, because the earliest – and not yet very informative – references to the Nubians (called Noubai/Nubae, Nobatai/Nobadae, Noba, etc.)[33] in the Nile Valley appear in Graeco-Roman sources long before the crucial time of the mid-4th century CE (Welsby 2002, pp. 14–30). The fact that Heliodoros turned out to be aware of some details of this process, having included in his novel a brief passage on the previously unrecorded "eye shooters", once more reveals the remarkable inquisitiveness of the *Aithiopika*'s author, suggesting that his work, with all due attention and respect, should be treated as a potential source of most valuable bits of information, however anachronistic – or maybe better to say, timeless – might at first sight appear their amalgamation in this love-and-adventure story.

31 Shinnie 2009, p. 118; Welsby 2002, pp. 14, 18.

32 The interpretation of this term as "Land of the Bow", first suggested at the end of 19th century and often used in the research literature until now, is in my opinion misleading for it misses the main feature of the logogram  (*št*), depicting a *special type* of bow. The problem is in some detail discussed in Vinogradov 2000, and with additions in Vinogradov 2006, pp. 149–165, 179–180 (Chart 4), figs. 11–12.

33 See Strabo XVII. I. 2; I, 53 (as a borrowing from Eratosthenes); Ptol. *Geog*. IV. 7.

Bibliography

ArIst 1960: Арабские источники VII–X веков. Подготовка текстов и переводы Л.Е. Куббеля и В.В. Матвеева (Древние и средневековые источники по этнографии и истории народов Африки южнее Сахары, <Т. 1>; Москва–Ленинград)

Armandi 1843: P.D. Armandi, Histoire militaire des éléphants, depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu'a l'introduction des armes a feu <…> (Paris–London–Frankfurt)

Dodgeon & Lieu 1994: M.H. Dodgeon & S.N.C. Lieu (eds.), The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars, AD 226–363. A Documentary History (New York; repr. 2002)

Bersina 1977: С.Я. Берзина, '«Эфиопика» Гелиодора как источник по истории Мероэ', Meroe, вып. 1 (Москва), с. 146–190

Bowie 2008: E. Bowie, 'Literary milieux', in: T. Whitmarsh (ed.), The Cambridge Companion to the Greek and Roman Novel (Cambridge), pp. 17–38

Casson 1993: L. Casson, 'Ptolemy II and the Hunting of African Elephants', Transactions of the American Philological Association, Vol. 123, pp. 247–260

Davies 1935: N. de G. Davies, Paintings from the Tomb of *Rekh-Mi-Reʿ* at Thebes (Egyptian Expedition, Vol. X; New York)

Davies 1943: N. de G. Davies, The Tomb of *Rekh-Mi-Reʿ* at Thebes, Vol. II (Egyptian Expedition, Vol. XI; New York)

Davies 1936: N. M. Davies, Ancient Egyptian Paintings, selected, copied and described <…> with the editorial assistance of A.H. Gardiner, Vol. I: Pls. I–LII (Chicago)

Egunov 1965: А.Н. Егунов, '«Эфиопика» Гелиодора', in: Heliodorus 1965, с. 5–36

Heliodorus 1687: <Heliodorus,> The Triumphs of Love and Constancy: A Romance. Containing the Heroick Amours of Theagenes & Chariclea. In Ten Books. The first Five Rendered by a Person of Quality, the last Five by N. Tate (2nd ed., London)

Heliodorus 1855: The Greek Romances of Heliodorus, Longus, and Achilles Tatius <…> Translated from the Greek, with Notes, by the Rev. Rowland Smith, MA <…> (Scriptores Erotici Græci; London)

Heliodorus 1965: Гелиодор, Эфиопика, пер. с древнегреческого (ред. А.Н. Егунов) (Библиотека Античной Литературы; Москва)

Heliodorus 1989: Heliodorus, An Ethiopian Story, tr. by J.R. Morgan, in: Collected Ancient Greek Novels, ed. by B.P. Reardon (Berkeley–Los Angeles–London), pp. 349–588

Hennig 1944: R. Hennig, Terrae incognitae. Eine Zusammenstellung und kritische Bewertung der wichtigsten vorcolumbischen Entdeckungsreisen an Hand der dar-

über vorliegenden Originalberichte, Bd. I: Altertum bis Ptolemäus, (Leiden; 2te verbesserte Aufl.)
Kennedy 2007: H. Kennedy, The Great Arab Conquests. How the Spread of Islam Changed the World We Live In (Philadelphia)
Khvostov 1907: М. Хвостов, Исторія восточной торговли греко-римскаго Египта (332 г. до Р.Х. – 284 г. по Р.Х.) (Казань)
Lobban & de Liedekerke 2000: R.A. Lobban & V. de Liedekerke, 'Elephants in Ancient Egypt and Nubia', Anthrozoös, Vol. 13:4, pp. 232–244
Morgan 1989: J.R. Morgan, 'Introduction', in: Heliodorus 1989, pp. 349–353
Morgan 1996: J.R. Morgan, 'Heliodoros', in: Schmeling 1996, pp. 417–461
Musawwarat I. 1: F. Hintze, et al., Der Löwentempel. Textband (Die Ausgrabungen der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 1960 bis 1970; Berlin, 1993)
Musawwarat I. 2: F. Hintze, et al., Der Löwentempel. Tafelband (Die Ausgrabungen der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 1960 bis 1970; Berlin, 1971)
Shinnie 1967: P.L. Shinnie, Meroe: A Civilization of the Sudan (Ancient Peoples and Places; London)
Shinnie 1954: P.L. Shinnie, Medieval Nubia (Museum Pamphlet, no. 2 ; Khartoum)
Shinnie 2009: P.L. Shinnie, Ancient Nubia (London – New York) (~1996)
Schmeling 1996: G. Schmeling (ed.), The Novel in the Ancient World (Leiden – New York – Köln)
Török 1997: L. Török, The Kingdom of Kush. Handbook of the Napatan-Meroitic Civilization (Der Nahe und Mittlere Osten. 1. Abteilung; Leiden – New York – Köln)
van der Valk 1940: M.H.A.L.H. van der Valk, 'Remarques sur la date des Éthiopiques d'Héliodore', Mnemosyne, Vol. 9, No. 2, pp. 97–100
Vantini 1975: G. Vantini, Oriental Sources Concerning Nubia (Heidelberg – Warszawa)
Vercoutter 1962: J. Vercoutter, 'Un Palais des Candaces, contemporain d'Auguste (Fouilles a Wad-ban-Naga 1958–1960)', Syria, T. 39, Fasc. 3/4, pp. 263–299
Vinogradov 2000: A.K. Vinogradov, 'On the Rendering of Toponym T3 STJ', CdÉ, Vol. LXXV, pp. 223–234
Vinogradov 2006: А.К. Виноградов, Эпитет, имя, титул в письменных памятниках Куша. Этюды по исторической ономастике Древнего Судана, вып. 1, (Москва)
Welsby 1996: D.A. Welsby, The Kingdom of Kush. The Napatan and Meroitic Empires (London) (~ 2002)
Welsby 2002: D.A. Welsby, The Medieval Kingdom of Nubia. Pagans, Christians and Muslims along the Middle Nile (London)
Wenig 1993: St. Wenig, 'Die Darstellungen. Untersuchung zu Ikonographie, Inhalt und Komposition, der Reliefs', in: Musawwarat I. 1, S. 74–227

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Gegenstand der vorliegenden Studie sind einige kuriose Aussagen in Buch IX von Heliodoros' Roman *Aithiopika*, im Zusammenhang mit der Schilderung der (völlig fiktiven) Belagerung der ägyptischen Grenzstadt Syene mit persischen Truppen durch das Heer der Aithiopier.

Zu den erhellendsten Passagen in Heliodoros' Beschreibung gehören jene, in denen die Bogenschützen beschrieben werden. Im Text heißt es, dass die Aithiopier ihre Pfeile so schossen, dass sie den Feind ins Auge trafen. Auf den ersten Blick mag diese Aussage nur als rhetorische Figur erscheinen, doch tatsächlich ist diese Bemerkung vielleicht das einzige realistische Detail in Heliodoros' Darstellung der Schlacht.

Auffallend enge Parallelen zu den obigen Passagen aus der *Aithiopika* lassen sich in einer Reihe von Berichten mittelalterlicher Chronisten über die Ausbreitung des Islam in Nordafrika im 7. Jh. erkennen. Die arabischen Quellen erwähnen zwei erfolglose Expeditionen der Muslime in den Süden, insbesondere den Feldzug von 651/652, der durch die entscheidende Schlacht bei der Stadt Dunqula (gewöhnlich mit dem heutigen Alt-Dongola identifiziert) gekennzeichnet war. Den größten Eindruck auf die Araber machten offensichtlich die lokalen Bogenschützen, die den Beinamen „die Augenschützen" erhielten und danach mindestens 800 Jahre lang in der arabischen Geschichtstradition in Erinnerung blieben.

Interessanterweise stellt sich heraus, dass die Beschreibung der „Augenschützen" in der *Aithiopika* der mittelalterlichen arabischen Geschichtsüberlieferung näher steht als der antiken griechisch-römischen. Von allen Vermutungen über die Datierung der *Aithiopika*, die vom 2. bis zum 4. Jh. n. Chr. reichen, scheint die letzte, die auf ein Datum nach dem Jahr 350 hindeutet, wahrscheinlicher.

Ironischerweise bedeutet dies, dass zu der Zeit, als Heliodoros ein Bild des blühenden (und siegreichen) aithiopischen Königreichs mit seiner Hauptstadt in Meroe schuf, das historische Vorbild dieses Königreichs offenbar bereits aufgehört hatte zu existieren und dem kulturellen Zusammenschluss der drei neuen politischen Formationen im alten Sudan – den nubischen Königreichen Nobadia, Maquria und Alodia – Platz gemacht hatte.