
Review: The Fayum and Lake Moeris

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name. The treaties thus made by the representative of a company acting under Royal Charter are submitted at once for approval to Her Majesty's Government through the Foreign Office. It is obvious that it is only by an abuse of language that such action can be described as filibustering.

THE FAYUM AND LAKE MOERIS.*

THE degree of credence which it is considered safe to bestow on the descriptions of the early Greek geographers varies from time to time and from person to person in a somewhat curious manner. The existence of Lake Moeris, as described by Herodotus and subsequent writers, has been doubted, denied, and reasserted; the fact that it no longer exists is apparent, and theories to account for its disappearance if it did exist are numerous and most of them unsatisfactory. At present the balance of opinion, strengthened by recent readings of hieroglyphic inscriptions, inclines towards belief in the past existence of the lake, and the question of its exact situation has incidentally acquired more than historical interest. Mr. Cope Whitehouse has argued that if a lake capable of regulating the Nile floods and reinforcing the water-supply for irrigation at low Nile existed once, it must be possible to restore it and so vastly enhance the commercial value of the cotton-lands of Lower Egypt. There is practically no difference of opinion as to the neighbourhood near which this lake was situated. It must have been in the modern province of Fayum, an oasis lying much below Nile-level on the left bank of the river above Memphis, and irrigated from the Nile by a canal known as the Bahr Yusuf.

The drawback which beset the earlier theorists was their ignorance of the exact configuration of the district in question, and the only claim which Major Brown makes to originality is, that he has been able to argue out his views on the basis of an exact survey of the Fayum province. His position as Inspector-General of Irrigation for Upper Egypt has made him minutely familiar with the levels of the country, with the effect of evaporation, the regulation of irrigation, and all those practical details which enable one to form correct opinions on a question which largely involves engineering.

His book consists of five short chapters dealing respectively with The Fayum of To-day, Ancient Testimony about Lake Moeris, Theories as to where and what Lake Moeris was, History of the Fayum

* 'The Fayum and Lake Moeris,' by Major R. H. Brown, R.E. London, Edward Stanford: 1892.

Province, and lastly, The Fayum in the future and possible utilisation of the Wadi Raian. Of these the first and fourth are most important, and to their contents it is advisable to direct attention.

The Fayum is an oasis surrounded by desert, and separated from the Nile by a tract of barren sand from $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 7 miles wide, broken by a narrow fertile strip along the Bahr Yusuf. The contour-line of 100 feet above sea-level practically bounds the province, and except at the entrance of the Bahr Yusuf there is no gap below this level in the encircling hills. The map illustrating Mr. Cope Whitehouse's article in the *Proceedings* for 1890, p. 685, shows the approximate contour-lines of the depression, which in three places sinks below sea-level, viz., in the shallow Gharak Basin in the south, the larger Wadi Raian in the south-west, where the lowest point is 131 feet below sea-level, and surrounding the Birket-el-Kurun in the north-west, where the water-level of the lake stands at 141 feet below sea-level, and its deepest part is probably as much as 200. The Wadi Raian is separated from the Fayum proper by a gap at the level of 85 feet above the sea, and its hollow shows no trace of geologically recent water-action nor of Nile deposits. The whole of the Fayum depression dips towards Lake Kurun, to which all the surplus irrigation water finds its way; but evaporation is so far in excess of the supply, that since 1885 the level of the water has been falling at the average rate of 20 inches per annum. In the Fayum depression there are abundant deposits of Nile mud up to the contour-line of 85 feet, and the contours show a fan-shaped elevation projecting from the entrance of the Bahr Yusuf exactly similar in form to a delta thrown down by a mud-laden river entering a lake. The depression is now thoroughly irrigated and grows enormous quantities of cotton, cereals, and fruit, there being as a rule two crops in the year, and sometimes as many as three in fifteen months. A railway connects this fertile district with Cairo.

From his study of the figures, which are fully worked out in the book, Major Brown has come, with apparently good reason, to the conclusion that the whole Fayum province, excluding the Wadi Raian, was once a lake fed from the Nile—the original Lake Moeris; that this lake was not of artificial formation, but was brought under control by the Pharaohs, and the land gradually reclaimed; and that it might have been employed as a reservoir to supplement the low Nile. He enters very minutely into the statistics of Mr. Cope Whitehouse's plan for utilising the Wadi Raian as a storage reservoir. This could be done if no attempt were made to use it for modifying Nile floods. As a reservoir for supplementing low Niles in Lower Egypt the Wadi Raian could probably be used also to receive the irrigation, drainage, and surplus flood-waters of the Upper Nile valley.

Major Brown's work is so concise, as well as so thorough, that it is practically impossible to convey a correct impression of it in an abstract.

He brings forward no statement without a full array of reasons, and he contradicts no hypothesis without showing what he believes to be ample proof. The book is a model of scientific precision, and the illustrations from the author's photographs convey an admirable impression of the scenery of the district described.

A GREAT COLUMBAN ATLAS.*

THE reproduction of ancient maps has always had a peculiar interest to geographers, and such works as those of Santarem, Jomard, Nordenskiöld, and Lelewel have been of inestimable value to students of geography and history. Most of the maps in Santarem's and Jomard's atlases being coloured reproductions, necessarily convey a more correct idea of the originals than those in which this important feature has been omitted, and it is doubtless with the knowledge of this fact before them that the Berlin Geographical Society has been at such pains to give an exact reproduction of the maps contained in this atlas, which it has published in celebration of the fourth centenary of the discovery of America.

The production of this work, which is dedicated to the German Emperor, was undertaken by Dr. Konrad Kretschmer, under the direction of Baron von Richthofen, President of the Berlin Society, and the manner in which they have carried out the work reflects the greatest credit on themselves, and the Society to which they belong.

The atlas, which is accompanied by a volume of letterpress, contains the history of exploration and cartography from the time of Strabo to the sixteenth century. Twenty-four of the plates are reproductions, now published for the first time. They have been copied from parchment documents in all the principal European libraries, and are exact reproductions of the originals. Of the remaining sixteen maps, some have been reconstructed, or reduced in scale to meet the requirements of the atlas. Among the more striking maps are the following: Map by Bartolomeo Pareto, 1455, in the Victor Emanuel Library at Rome; map of the world by Giovanni Battista Calviro e Oliva, 1673, in the National Library of Naples; maps from the atlas of Angelus Eufredutius, 1556, in the Communal Library of Mantua; several maps by Battista Agnese, of the latter half of the sixteenth century, in the University Library of Bologna; map from the atlas of Aloysius Cesanis 1574, in the Library of Parma; copy of a globe by Francisus Bassus Mediolanensis, 1570, in the University Library of Turin. The circular maps, such as the Hereford map, have all been redrawn, coloured

* 'Atlas der Festschrift der Gesellschaft für Erdkunde zu Berlin zur Vierhundert-jährigen Feier der Entdeckung Amerikas.' (With text).