




Philip and the Nubian Official: Dimensions of Geography, History, and Archaeology

Mark Wilson

Department of Biblical and Ancient Studies
University of South Africa

Email: markwilson@sevenchurches.org
Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8536-2718>

 <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.104.522>

Abstract

The encounter between Philip the evangelist and the African man in Acts 8 has elicited much scholarly attention in recent years, particularly regarding issues of gender, race, and ethnicity. Overlooked in these discussions are significant matters of material culture that can help readers better understand this pericope. Material culture, according to *The Cambridge Handbook of Material Culture Studies*, is an interdisciplinary field that examines the relationships between people and their things as well as the interpretation of objects by drawing on theory and practice from disciplines such as anthropology, archaeology, history, and museum studies. Therefore, the methodology of this study delves into relevant issues of material culture such as geography, history, and archaeology. These provide significant insights informing the interpretation of the text. Each character is developed within his own individual trajectory in the narrative. The possible routes of travel for Philip from Jerusalem are explored, and the site of the baptism is localised. Then the means and mode of water and land travel of the African official are elucidated. Geographical terminology is clarified, particularly the location of Ethiopia in antiquity, and the historical relationship between Rome and Nubia is outlined. Jews in Egypt and their pilgrimage travel to Jerusalem are also explored. Insights from ancient authors like Strabo are incorporated, and key archaeological discoveries are presented. The result is a more nuanced contextual reading of this pivotal, divinely orchestrated meeting described by Luke.

Keywords: Philip the Evangelist, Jerusalem, Gaza, Nubia, Kandake, Nile River, Alexandria

Introduction

The account of Philip's encounter with an African man in Acts 8 has received much attention from biblical scholars in recent years. Numerous monographs and articles have appeared that discuss various dimensions of gender, race, and ethnicity thought to be in the text. This article offers a different reading of this pericope by taking a material culture approach that looks at its geographical, historical, and archaeological dimensions. The two main characters—Philip and the man from Africa—will be introduced individually even as their paths eventually intersect in a dramatic meeting on the road to Gaza. The interpretive implications of this contextual reading are contemplated throughout the discussion.



Philip's Journey to Gaza

Suggested Routes

Philip is first introduced in Acts 6:5–6 as one of the seven men chosen to serve tables. Philip appears next among the Jerusalem believers scattered after Stephen's martyrdom and subsequent persecution initiated by Paul (8:1, 4).¹ After successfully preaching the word in Samaria, Philip returns to Jerusalem with Peter and John (8:25).² In 8:26 Philip receives his next assignment: an angel gives him verbal directions to go south from Jerusalem along the road to Gaza.³ However, no reason is given. Upon reaching the coastal plain Philip receives a second directive, this time from the Spirit, to introduce himself to an unknown traveler (8:29). Later at the baptismal pool the Spirit of the Lord snatches Philip away to Azotus (8:38). These place names provide clues regarding the geographical landscape of the pericope.⁴

Three routes were possible for Philip's journey. Early church tradition marked the baptismal site at Bethsoro/Beth-zur in the Judean hills near Hebron. Eusebius (*On*. 52:2-3) writes: "There is now a village Bēthsōrō at the twentieth milestone on the road going from Jerusalem to Hebron. (Near) there is also pointed out a spring coming out of the hill where it is said the eunuch Candaces was baptized by Philip."⁵ The Madaba Mosaic (6th century CE) shows a church at Bethsoura and identifies it with a Greek inscription: "the (sanctuary) of Saint Philip where they say Kandacē the eunuch was baptized" (Donner, 1992:60-61). Donner further notes that the "text could be misinterpreted as if Candace were the eunuch's name—and the mosaicist fell into this trap." In the text previously quoted, Eusebius also followed this error by calling the eunuch "Kandakes." This was corrected later by Jerome (*Ep*. 108.11). This route was a circuitous way to reach Gaza and should be rejected, despite church tradition.

Another route followed the watershed ridge to Bethlehem, then turned west along another ridge today known as Husan. It then dropped into the Shephelah toward the Elah valley. Near biblical Azekah, the road bent southwest towards Betogabris. This is the route preferred by Beitzel (2009:251, 252 map 107) and Wright (2019:199-200). However, it is still not a direct route.

The most direct road descended from Jerusalem at 765 metres above sea level (asl) southwest through the valley of Rephaim (Nahal Refa'im) from Ein Yael through the Shephelah to the Elah Valley (cf. Wright, 2019:198-199). At Ein Yael, archaeologists discovered a Roman villa with mosaics. Ruins of a possible Byzantine church or monastery were found nearby (Edelstein 1990:36–38). Because of the presence of a spring and pool dating to the early Roman period, Rapuano (1990:49) suggested: "There exists a strong possibility that the spring at Ein Yael was where Philip paused to baptize the Ethiopian eunuch." Although he marshals several interesting arguments toward that conclusion, the identification is questionable. Below the Palestinian village of alWalaja, there is a pool of water called "Philip's Spring" (Ein el-Haniyeh; Fig. 1), now an Israeli national park. In the fourteenth-fifteenth centuries this spring was also identified as the baptismal

¹ A book title will be given only for texts not found in Acts.

² For a fuller discussion of Philip as a character in Acts, see Wilson (2024:2-3).

³ This reading assumes that *κατὰ μεσημβρίαν* in 8:26 means direction, not time. In his discussion of Meroe, Strabo (*Geogr*. 2.5.7) uses the similar phrase *ἐπι μεσημβρίαν* to indicate direction from the city.

⁴ I wish to thank José Rafael, a student at the École Biblique, for graciously driving me to trace Philip's route from Jerusalem to Wadi el-Hesi in October 2022. I also grateful for the opportunity to present a draft of this paper at the "Historical Geography of the Biblical World" section of the Society of Biblical Literature annual meeting in 2022.

⁵ Matson's photo of this spring taken in the 1930s is found at: <https://www.loc.gov/item/2019709720/>.

site. However, neither of these two baptismal sites are likely since they do not fit the time frame of the passage and perhaps were so identified later because of their proximity to Jerusalem.



Fig. 1 “Philip’s Spring” (Ein el-Haniyeh), courtesy of the author

This road was perhaps used by the Romans during the Jewish revolt (Josephus *J.W.* 4.9.1), especially if Gerasa (Horvat Geres) is localised at Khirbet Jurish/Har Kitron. Northwest of modern Battir the road left the Rephaim valley (547 m asl) and climbed to the pass below Har Kitron (Tzur Hadassa; 753 m asl). The ruins of “apparently an ancient site” (Conder & Kitchener 1883:116) date to the Hellenistic period, suggesting this route was already in use during that period.

The road then descended through a natural defile today called Horvat Hanut (“ruins of the resting place”; Fig. 2). Near the top are the remains of a large cistern; a smaller cistern is found halfway down. Drinking water was always necessary for travelers and livestock. The rugged terrain required that a stepped road be cut into the limestone to provide easier passage for traffic up and down the hill. The bedrock was probably covered with gravel or sand to allow smoother and safer transit. Two well-preserved sections of roadbed still exist. A cluster of fallen milestones has fallen next to the road as it continues its descent.⁶ “Although most of the milestones found along this road are from the second century AD and beginning of the 3rd century AD, the Roman road traced the Biblical way through the valley of Elah and so was in use during the second temple period.”⁷ Wright (2019:199) doubts whether this route was operational in the early 30s CE, thus prefers the “natural” route running west of Bethlehem. However, it is doubtful whether the Romans would have later developed a road where no earlier route existed (cf. Roll 2009:11). A final question asks if the steepness of the rock-cut steps here and on other roads in Israel could carry wagon traffic. Roll (1983:151) opines: “The impression is, therefore, that the transport of goods on roads with stepped segments was carried out with beasts of burden.” If this were the case, perhaps travelers using wheeled vehicles had to leave them at the base of the pass. This has implications for the African traveler, soon to be discussed.

⁶ Photos of these milestones are available at: <https://www.biblewalks.com/horvathanut#Milestones>.

⁷ Quoted from <https://www.biblewalks.com/Geres>. A description of the site along with photographs and aerial drone views can be found on the website.



Fig. 2 Horvat Hanut, courtesy of the author

The road entered the Elah valley (335 m asl) after a descent of 212 metres. The valley is approximately 8 kilometres long, the first level section along the route. Since it passed below Socoh (Horvat Sokhah) which was situated on a ridge to the south,⁸ Rainey and Notley (2007:240) suggested: "It may have been in the vicinity of Socoh that Philip and the eunuch parted ways." They propose a baptismal site at one of numerous springs in the Elah valley. In their map, "Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch," Philip is depicted as taking a direct road westward to Azotus. Their interpretation seemingly suggests that Philip was not supernaturally transported to the Mediterranean coast.

The road to Azotus split with the Betogabris road at a T-junction below ancient Azekah. The Peutinger Map marks this as "Caper(zac)aria," 24 Roman miles (34 km) from Jerusalem.⁹ A milestone, found nearby and dating to 198 CE, similarly marks the distance from Jerusalem at XXVIII RM (Fig. 3).¹⁰ This station provided the first stop for travelers going to the coast. From Caperzacaria the preferred route turned southward through a defile still used by Highway 38. The milestone mentioned above along with four other milestones and a section of Roman road are displayed today at the KKL visitors center near Givat Yeshayahu. The road continued to the important junction at the twin cities of Betogabris (Bet Guvrin) and Maresha-Marisa/ Eleutheropolis. Betogabris was eight Roman miles (12 km) from Caperzacaria and stood at 256 metres asl, 509 metres lower than Jerusalem.

⁸ See the map of Ben David (2013).

⁹ Whether Azekah, mentioned several times in the Jewish Bible, is the site of Tell Zecharya has been debated. Talbert (2000:70R) situates Caphar Zacharia several miles west but with a question mark. However, the consensus is that the two sites are identical because of its prominent situation guarding the upper Elah valley.

¹⁰ These Roman milestones attest to the route's continued significance for travel between Jerusalem and Gaza. For photographs and discussion of these milestones, see <https://www.biblewalks.com/elahromanroad>.



Fig. 3 Milestone 24, courtesy of the author

Meeting on the “Desert” Road

After Betogabris the road left the Judean hill country and ran southwestwards.¹¹ Only this section until Gaza could be described as ἔρημος (8:26). This interpretation rests on identifying the antecedent of αὕτη as ὁδός and not Γάζα which immediately precedes it.¹² The translation “desert road” (NIV, NLT, NET) or “desert place” (ESV) makes no sense in terms of physical geography because Israel has no actual desert. Wright (2019:200) notes that this plain is “a rolling, drier steppe land with wide, open empty spaces between its towns. This is a good fit for the description *erēmos*.” Therefore, a better translation of ἔρημος here would be its translation in other Lukan texts: “desolate,” “deserted,” or “isolated” (1:20; cf. Luke 4:42; 9:12; 15:4). Since there were no significant cities between Betogabris and Gaza, this uninhabited area would fit the description where the rendezvous took place (8:29-30). Wright (2019:200) agrees: “It was on the westward run out of Marisa where Philip most likely met the Ethiopian eunuch.” The road first passed north of Tel Lachish and follows the approximate line depicted in the *Barrington Atlas* (Talbert, 2000:70R).¹³ Roll (1983:139) similarly shows this route in his map of the Roman road system in Judea. The road intersected the *Via Maris* between Ashkelon and Gaza.

Travel by Carriage

While walking in this isolated area, Philip was directed by the Spirit to approach a vehicle called a ἄρμα (8:29). Most English versions misleadingly translate *harma* as “chariot”;¹⁴ only the *NLT* and *CEB* translate as “carriage.” A chariot suggests images of Ben Hur racing his horses around the Circus Maximus, the great hippodrome in Rome. Whether the *harma* had two or four axles is

¹¹ The Peutinger map shows a route running north of Betogabris to Ascalon, perhaps a “coastal” road to distinguish it from the south “desert” road, not shown on that map. Roll (1983:139) shows both routes on his map. Roll (1983:137-138) also notes five factors that influenced the construction of roads with both geographic and human factors being particularly relevant for the route under discussion.

¹² Rainey and Notley (2007:240) observe that the explanatory phrase, αὕτη ἐστὶν ἔρημος, “is commonly viewed as an indication of Luke’s ignorance of the topographical realities of Judea.” Such supposed ignorance would be unusual if Philip were Luke’s source for the specifics of the story.

¹³ The Peutinger Map does not show this route but rather the one running north from Eleuthropolis to Ashkelon, the latter’s distance to Jerusalem given as 48 Roman miles.

¹⁴ Lake and Cadbury (1979:96) tersely comment: “Scarcely ‘chariot’.”

debatable. The *carpentum* had two wheels and was essentially a covered chariot. Richly ornamented, it was the mode of transport for Roman women. It is depicted on the reverse of some Roman imperial brass *sestertii* being pulled by a team of mules. However, this smaller *carpentum* had limited space and was not used for traveling long distances.¹⁵ A double-axled carriage known as the *petorritum* was more comfortable and served as the limousines of the Roman world (Fig. 5).¹⁶ With a wooden roof and a decorated interior, they were pulled by a team of horses or mules.¹⁷ A relief featuring a *petorritum* can be seen on a funerary monument in Austria.¹⁸ Such a double-axled carriage averaged up to eight kilometres per hour on level ground.¹⁹ This better describes the type of vehicle called a *harma* here.²⁰



Fig. 4 Frieze of a *petorritum*²¹

Several other things suggest this interpretation. First, its occupant was seated, and Philip was invited to climb in and sit next to him (8:31). The seating area would be in an enclosed cabin that also provided protection from the sun. This would reduce the glare if someone was trying to read a scroll as well as to protect a fragile papyrus roll from the sun's rays. The occupant is not himself driving.²² English translations fail to note the ellipsis in 8:38 and translate something like "he commanded the chariot to stop." This would only be possible if the vehicle were self-driving. A

¹⁵ For illustrations of a *carpentum* see <https://www.ngccoin.com/news/article/2288/NGC-Ancients-The-Cart-Before-the-Mule---Carpenta-on-Roman-Coinage/>.

¹⁶ For a description of the *petorritum* and the related *carrus/carruca*, see Hudson (2013:45).

¹⁷ A well-preserved four-wheeled carriage, made of iron, bronze and tin, was found near the stables of an ancient villa north of Pompeii; see <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2021/feb/27/archaeologists-find-unique-ceremonial-vehicle-near-pompeii>.

¹⁸ The reconstruction of such a carriage is displayed in the Roman-Germanic Museum in Cologne; <https://roemisch-germanisches-museum.de/History>.

¹⁹ Since the first thirty Roman miles of the journey were not on level ground, the average speed would be less. Also, on the descent to Betogabris, Philip could have walked faster than the carriage so was able to catch up to the carriage as it reached level ground.

²⁰ After more research on Roman vehicles, my earlier view that the ἄρμα was a *carpentum* has changed (cf. Wilson 2019:189 n. 44).

²¹ Courtesy of Wikipedia licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Germany; <https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carpentum#/media/Fichier:Maria-Saal-Steinrelief-Kutsche.jpg>.

²² Ramsay (1910:64) suggests that such a high-status individual on a long journey would be "accompanied by a retinue of servants and guards. But these are not alluded to." If the Nubian were traveling with the Kandake herself, this might be true. But as a dynastic official traveling on main routes, the need for such a retinue would be minimal.

better translation, recognizing the implied object, is: “he commanded the driver to stop the carriage.”²³ Estigarribia (1992:41-42) likewise suggests that a driver is implied, then further notes that ambassadors and important officials usually travelled with baggage, scribes, and servants. He concludes, “It would have been astounding to find a royal envoy, or a royal courtier if it was our case, journeying alone by remote lands.” Therefore, the official’s party might have included such other attendants.

Was it easy for an ancient traveler to read in such a carriage? Hamblin and Grunsfeld (1974:130) observe: “just how easy it could have been to read, while jolting along the road on wooden wheels encased in iron rims, no ancient bookworm seems to have recorded. Not only were there no tires: the vehicles hadn’t any kind of springs. The *lectica* [litter] provided the only jolt-free ride on the road.” As mentioned, the descent through the foothills to Betogabris was over bumpy terrain. Therefore, it would be difficult to read a scroll of *scriptio continua* until smoother terrain presented itself on the coastal plain, another indication that the rendezvous occurred after Betogabris (8:32-33). That the text being read was only a few verses into Isaiah chapter 53 may possibly indicate that the traveler’s oral reading had just commenced.

Site of the Baptism

Various sites for the baptism have been proposed, as previously mentioned. However, its localisation at Wadi el-Hesi is most convincing. Robinson (1856:514-515) first made this tentative identification in 1838. Its proximity to Azotus, 22 kilometres to the northwest, according Horton and Blakeley (2000:63), “emphasizes the geographical locale of the baptism.” So they argue for a site near Tell el-Hesi along the Wadi el-Hesi. Hardin, Rollston, and Blakeley (2012:27) note further that “only the wadis el-Hesi and es-Saba have accessible, drinkable water. The water in all other wadis is briny.” Clean potable water would have made Wadi el-Hesi a critical stop for travelers, especially to water livestock (Kouchy 1989:6; fig. 6).



Fig. 5 Wadi El-Hesi from the northwest, courtesy of the author

²³ Hudson (2013:21) points out that even calling this vehicle a “carriage” is problematic since “the Romans did have some fifteen words for varieties of ‘carriages.’” He further observes that the translator of these words “is thus faced with the problem of deciding whether to use obsolete terms for roughly analogous types of conveyances (e.g., buggy, cabriolet, chaise, coach, curricle, gig, phaeton, shay, stanhope, Tilbury, and the numerous variants of each of these), but since both these vehicles and their associations have largely disappeared, generic terms such as ‘carriage’ or ‘chariot’ are frequently used, a tendency that often obscures important differences” (2013:22 n 54).

The wadi is 11 Roman miles (17 km) from Betogabris and 17.5 Roman miles (26 km) from Gaza. On his way to Jerusalem the driver had likely stopped the carriage at the spring to refresh themselves and their horses. Thus, the African traveler was already aware of the existence of this waterhole. Because of the wadi's distance from Betogabris, Philip had at least two hours to explain the Isaiah text before they reached the pool. Responding to the gospel message, the African requested to enter the water for baptism (8:37-39). After Philip's disappearance to Azotus, the carriage continued towards Gaza (Fig. 6), where it joined the coastal road southwestwards.²⁴ The distance between Jerusalem and Gaza was approximately 90 kilometres, a two-day journey.



Fig. 6 "Desert" countryside towards Gaza, courtesy of the author

The Nubian's Travels

The issues of material culture related to Philip's journey are minor compared to those of the African man who is called an Αἰθίοψ.²⁵ English versions that translate literally as "Ethiopian" fail to note that Ethiopia in antiquity was not the modern nation. The *HCSB* does provide a note reading "Nubia," while a note in the *NIV* states this is "the southern Nile region." That Nubia is meant is confirmed by the mention of its ruling dynasty—the Kandake, a hereditary title like Pharaoh that was carried by its queen mothers.²⁶ The Kandakes reigned from Meroe's two chief cities, Napata and Meroe.²⁷ Amanirenas (r. 40-10 BC) was the Kandake whom Strabo (*Geogr.* 17.1.54) describes as "a masculine sort of woman, and blind in one eye." This description perhaps owes more to a general Roman stereotype of barbarian queens than represents an accurate portrait of her. Amanirenas was succeeded by her daughter Amanikasheto who ruled until 1 CE.

²⁴ For a map showing the route from Tell ed-Duwier (Lachish) to Gaza via Tell el-Hesi, see Hardin, Rollston, and Blakely (2012, 28 fig. 9).

²⁵ The word and its Hebrew form אֲשִׁיט are usually translated "Cush, Cushite" in the Old Testament (e.g., 2 Chronicles 14:9; Jeremiah 13:23; 38:7). For a brief introduction to Cush, see Burrell (2020).

²⁶ The other title given to royal women was *qore* (Lohwasser & Phillips 2021:1021). This topic was also addressed by Ashby in her 2022 ASOR plenary address, "Women of the Sacred South: Nubian Women in the Temple and Upon the Throne."

²⁷ For a helpful chronology of Cush and other Nubian kingdoms, see Thurman and Williams (1979, 12–13).



She was succeeded by Amanitore who ruled until 20 CE with her husband Natakamani.²⁸ Their eldest son Arikhankharer is featured in what is considered one of the masterpieces of Nubian art: “Arikhankharer slaying his enemies.”²⁹ Amanitore was succeeded by Amantitere (or Amanitaraqide) who ruled until 41 CE, so Amantitere was probably the Kandake referred to in Acts 8.³⁰

The Nubian man served the Kandake as a εὐνοῦχος. While the meaning is assumed to be a castrated male, its use in the Jewish scriptures is semantically much broader. Here in 8:27 Luke is using a character introduction formula based on the introduction of Potiphar in Genesis 39:1 where all modern English versions translate σῆϕ/εὐνοῦχος as “official” or “officer.”³¹ There Potiphar is also said to be married (39:7-19). Luke is not speaking of a castrated individual but possibly a circumcised man who was perhaps even married.³² Having clarified the traveler’s nationality and position, he can now be identified more precisely as the Nubian official.

Nubia and Rome

Egypt was conquered by the Romans in 30 BCE and then made a province of their empire. Its southern border was located between the first and second cataracts on the Nile, an area called Triakontaschoinos by Greek and Roman geographers.³³ Lower Nubia’s northernmost city was Pedeme (Meroitic) or Primis (Latin), modern Qasr Ibrim. The Kandake, Amanirenas, began to make incursions into southern Egypt. In 23 BCE the Roman commander Petronius resisted by forcing the Nubian forces southwards, whereupon he attacked the royal residence at Napata and razed it in 22 BCE.³⁴ Petronius had traveled 1561 kilometres beyond Syene (Pliny the Elder *Nat.* 6.35) but did not continue to Meroe, deciding “that the regions farther on would be hard to traverse” (Strabo *Geogr.* 17.1.54). Amanirenas herself retaliated and attacked the Thebais—the district around Thebes—and captured Elephantine, Philai, and Syene (modern Aswan).³⁵ In Egypt they “enslaved the inhabitants, and also pulled down the statues of Caesar” (Strabo *Geogr.* 17.1.54). Their victory is believed to be heralded on the Hamadab stele now in the British

²⁸ For the relief of Amanitore, see

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aegyptisches_Museum_Berlin_InvNr7261_20080313_Barkenuntersatz_Natakamani_Amanitore_aus_Wad_Ban_Naga_1.jpg.

²⁹ For the relief of Arikhankharer see

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Prince_Arikankharer_Slaying_His_Enemies,_Meroitic,_beginning_of_first_century_AD,_sandstone_-_Worcester_Art_Museum_-_IMG_7535.JPG.

³⁰ Keener (2013, 1545) strangely asserts that Meroe was in decline already by the middle of the first century CE. The Fourth Meroitic Kingdom did not decline until the early 300s when Noba conquered it. Axum did not destroy Meroe until 350 CE.

³¹ The Hebrew word סֵרִיס (*sārís*), εὐνοῦχος in the LXX, is also translated “official” in many other texts (e.g., 1 Samuel 8:15; 2 Kings 8:6; 23:11; 24:12,15; 25:19). For a fuller lexical discussion see Patterson (1980:635) and Schneider (1964:766).

³² For a fuller discussion of this issue, see Wilson (2024:6-8).

³³ For an overview map of the Nile valley from Aswan to Khartoum, see Thurman and Williams (1979:19); for a map of Nubia in Roman times between the first and second cataracts, see page 21.

³⁴ Török (2008:428) surprisingly questions whether the capture of Napata was fact. An interesting connection between this invasion and the pyramidal tomb of Cestius built in Rome between 18–12 BCE perhaps exists. As Nyquist writes (2014:28): “Cestius’ choice of tomb-design...is reminiscent of the Nubian pyramidal form of Meroe, where Cestius might have served in the Augustan campaigns.”

³⁵ A relief of Kandake is portrayed on a building in Meroe. Although attributed to Amanitore, it more likely depicts Amanirenas and her victory over the Romans; see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amanitore#/media/File:Amanitore.jpg>.



Museum.³⁶ Statues of Augustus were looted, and a decoration, now lost, depicted frescoes of bound Roman prisoners and other enemies under the feet of a seated queen.³⁷

A temple today called M 292 was an important cultic center temple that experienced reconstruction for fourteen centuries beginning in the tenth century BCE. While the deity worshiped here is unknown, Grzymiski (2021:553) notes that “perhaps it was a god (or goddess) of victory.” Burstein (2006) observes that under the temple’s threshold “they placed a bronze head of Augustus taken from an imperial cult statue at Syene, where it would be stepped on every time someone entered the shrine, a common way for Kushites to symbolize their supremacy over enemies.”³⁸ Thus, anyone entering would symbolically trample on the emperor and deliberately humiliate him. A mural painting found in the temple depicts a scene with three chained prisoners, with the front one being light-skinned with a Roman helmet (Shinnie and Bradley 1981:168 fig. 1; 170-171). Rome’s humiliation was complete, at least in the eyes of the Nubians. Later in 22 BCE the Kandake sent ambassadors to Samos to sue for peace directly with Augustus who was staying on the island (Dio Cassius 54.7.4; Adam 1983:93-94). This victory was heralded in his *Res Gestae* (26.5), and in her translation Cooley (2009:225) observes that “by recording this expedition, Augustus continues his theme of Rome’s empire encompassing the known limits of the world.”

Jews in Egypt and Nubia

A community of Jewish mercenaries settled in Elephantine in southern Egypt in the late sixth century BCE. The *Letter of Aristeas* (1.13) records that Jewish troops from Judea joined Psammitichus and his Egyptian forces to fight against the king of the Ethiopians around this time.³⁹ However, the Elephantine community and its temple were destroyed in 411 BC (Kerkeslager 1998:109-112). While a settlement no longer existed at Elephantine, its descendants later populated Apollonopolis Magna and Ombos just to the north. Throughout the Ptolemaic and early imperial periods Jews population continued to live in other Egyptian settlements on the Nile including Diopolis Magna, Thebes, and Abydos.⁴⁰ Hubbard (1996:346) notes the presence of these Jewish settlements in Upper Egypt and their likely connection to the Nubian official.

But did any Jews live farther south in Nubia? Amanirenas’ invasion of southern Egypt in 23 BCE extended as far north as Thebes. The queen took captives back to Meroe, so some Jews living in these towns might have been among them. The official might have been taken captive as a circumcised boy at this time. He would be approximately sixty years old when he met Philip, if such a historical reconstruction did occur. Another possibility is that he had been recruited by the Kandake because of his linguistic and financial capability.

³⁶ For a photograph and description of the stele, see https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA1650. For a new reading of the second stele, see Rilly (2014).

³⁷ For a discussion of the war against Rome as seen by the Meroites, see Rilly (2017:para. 67-76).

³⁸ This head of Augustus, also called the Meroe Head, was excavated by John Garstang in 1910. Hacked from a bronze statue of the emperor, the head is noteworthy for its original eyes inset with glass pupils and calcite irises. It was later donated to the British Museum:
https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1911-0901-1.

³⁹ Kahn (2007, 513-514) reviews the evidence and suggests that it need not be Psammitichus II who led an army with Jewish soldiers against Cush in 593 BCE but might also have been Psammaticus I who utilized troops sent by Josiah sometime between 640-10 BCE.

⁴⁰ See the map in “Photos” at <http://www.asor.org/anetoday/2020/12/cushites-hebrew-bible>. For maps of the Ptolemaic kingdom and the Roman province of Egypt, see Wittke, Olshausen, and Szydlak (2010:121, 179). For the map “The Jewish Diaspora in the Ptolemaic period,” see Davies & Finkelstein (1989:130 fig. 3).

Luke states that this Nubian official, like Paul, went to Jerusalem to worship (προσκυήσων εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ; 8:27; 24:11). Rutherford (2017:258) notes that “the greatest pilgrimage tradition in the early Roman Empire [was] namely Jewish pilgrimage to Jerusalem.” Thus, the Nubian and Paul are described as pilgrims who traveled to the temple to worship at a feast. This replicates the pilgrimage account of Acts 2 when many diaspora Jews were present in Jerusalem at Pentecost (cf. John 12:20; Josephus *Ant.* 4.203-204).⁴¹ This was possibly not even the Nubian’s first trip to Jerusalem, for he had both the time and the means to make previous pilgrimages.⁴²

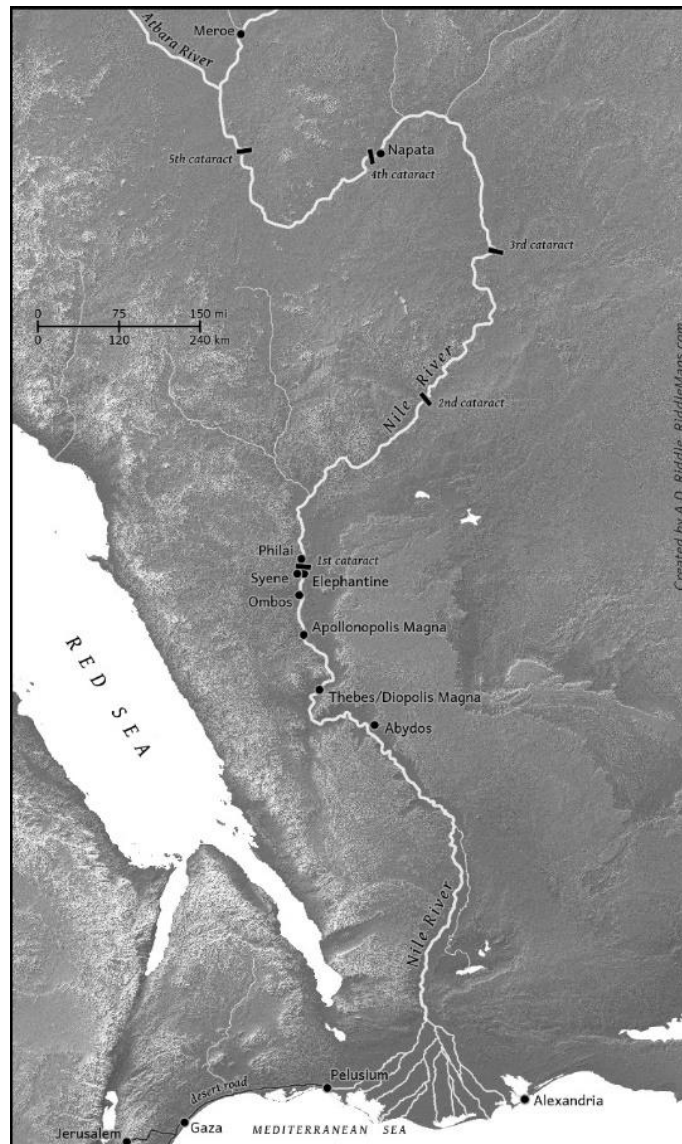


Fig. 7 Sites mentioned in the article⁴³

⁴¹ For a discussion, albeit with a different thesis, of the official making a pilgrimage as a Jew from the Diaspora, see Rhamie (2019:198-210).

⁴² For more on the religious status of the Nubian official, see Wilson (2024:8-11).

⁴³ Since no south-oriented maps could be found that faced the same direction as the Nile Mosaic of Palestrina, Riddle Maps was commissioned to produce this map (<https://www.riddlemaps.com/>).



Nubian's Journey to Jerusalem

The physical geography related to the Nubian's journey is remarkable, even for ancient travel. Pilgrimage to the temple at Jerusalem for one of the feasts involved a significant investment of time and money. As Kerkeslager (1998:106) notes: "Prohibitive travel expenses, the additional loss of income caused by long absences from home, family responsibilities, and other obstacles made it difficult for Jews in Egypt...to send the required family members to Jerusalem." While true, Jews from Italy, Achaia, and Asia would have similar considerations, yet we know that they regularly made pilgrimages to Jerusalem for the feasts (cf. 2:9-10). As the Kandake's minister of finance, the Nubian man had the opportunity to conduct official travel without such usual constraints. When Philip met the carriage carrying the Nubian near Betogabris, little did he know how far his new acquaintance had traveled.

Travel from Meroe to Alexandria

A journey from Meroe to Jerusalem was not only time consuming but wearisome.⁴⁴ Yet the initial stage by river was easier than overland travel since, as Adams (2012:138) notes, "The River Nile provided the most natural of transport highways, and... most long journeys would have been made by river." Keener (2013:1543), while acknowledging that the Nile current made travel easier, nevertheless notes that "the cataracts at Aswan made for an arduous journey." This was just one of the five cataracts between Meroe and lower Egypt that required travelers to transit around them. The upper Nile has the shape of the Greek letter *nu* backwards N (Strabo *Geogr.* 17.1.2). Because of such riverbends, the distance by water was considerably longer. The Orbis Geospatial Network Model (<https://orbis.stanford.edu/>) for ancient travel calculates the river route from Syene to Alexandria to take 11.6 days covering 1138 kilometres, thus averaging around 98 kilometres a day.⁴⁵ Syene, once the boundary (Lat. *claustra*) of the Roman Empire (Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.61), is the southernmost city on the Orbis map. Tracing a route along the Nile on Google Earth from Syene to Napata yields a distance of 870 kilometres, then from Napata to Meroe another 534 kilometres, totaling 1404 kilometres from Syene to Meroe.⁴⁶ If the Nubian official first visited Alexandria on the initial leg of his journey, the distance to the Roman provincial capital totaled 2542 kilometres. If travel time on the river is estimated around 100 kilometres a day, it would take at least twenty-six days to reach Alexandria from Meroe. Allowing for travel delays around the cataracts, a reasonable estimate for river travel from Meroe to Alexandria would be around a month.

Travel on the Nile

During the Hellenistic and Roman periods various types of commercial and official ships plied the river including luxury barges called *thalamegoi*, literally "cabin-carriers" (cf. Callixeinus of Rhodes, *About Alexandria*, 204e-206d; Appian *Praef.* 10). This vessel, along with other types, are featured in scenes on the Nile Mosaic of Palestrina that dates to the first century BCE. The upper part of the mosaic is thought to represent Nubia, again showing its riverine connection.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ See the detailed maps of the Nubian settlements along the Nile in Ashby (2020:xvi-xvii, figs. 2-3).

⁴⁵ Diodorus (3.34.7) notes that many travelers have made this journey in ten days.

⁴⁶ Around 60-61 CE Nero sent an expedition up the Nile as far as Meroe (Pliny the Elder *Nat.* 6.35; 12:19; cf. Seneca the Younger *Nat.* 6.8.3-5). Pliny the Elder (*Nat.* 6.35.5) reports that the expedition corrected previous estimates and fixed the distance at 871 miles (1402 km). As Braund (2015:134) notes: "This was a mission that was at once scientific, diplomatic and military."

⁴⁷ A *thalamegos* is probably depicted on the mosaic's left side with a roofed cabin supported by walls only at the ends. The sides show two columns with grills partly closing the space between them. Nubians are featured in hunting scenes, again showing their riverine connection; see Meyboom (1995:102, 227, 255).



In 47 BCE Julius Caesar and Cleopatra made a legendary river cruise on a *thalamegos* almost to Nubia accompanied by some four hundred other vessels (Suetonius *Julius* 52.1; Appian *BCiv.* 2.90; Hillard 2002). Petronius, after capturing Napata, sent the captives to Alexandria by ship (Strabo *Geogr.* 17.1.54). Strabo (*Geogr.* 17.1.16) also reports that on a canal outside Alexandria there was a “marina for *thalemegoi* which officials use for sailing to upper Egypt.”⁴⁸ Travel was restricted to daytime for, as Adams (2012:146) writes, “Little river travel would have been possible at night. Ancient sailors on the Nile did not benefit from the lights of villages and towns by the riverside to guide them. Night navigation was therefore impossible.” It was on such vessels and in such a manner that the Nubian official traveled from Meroe. A stop in Alexandria would be propitious, for he could conduct government business, connect with the Jewish community, and even purchase a papyrus scroll.⁴⁹

Buying a Papyrus Scroll

The Nubian official had the financial means to travel on a comfortable river barge on river and to ride in a stylish carriage. And as Bock (2007:342) observes: “He is wealthy enough to have his own copy of Isaiah.” Millard (2000:48) suggests that this scroll was a souvenir of a visit to Jerusalem. If the text were Hebrew, its provenance could be Jerusalem. But since the text of Isaiah 53:7b-8a was from the LXX, a Greek scroll would more likely come from Alexandria than Jerusalem. Even Millard concedes that the manuscript production of later Gospel papyri undoubtedly originated in the metropolis of Alexandria, the origin of the Greek Septuagint (cf. *Letter of Aristeas*; Philo *Mos.* 2.31-44). Millard notes the difficulty of estimating the price of a book. Nevertheless, he suggests that the text of Isaiah would take three days to copy plus the cost of the long papyrus roll (the surviving Dead Sea scroll of Isaiah is written on 17 sheets). Therefore, the cost of a copy of Isaiah would be approximately six to ten denarii. Millard (2000:48; cf. Richards 2004:165-169) concludes, “While that is not cheap, it would not put books out of the reach of the reasonably well-to-do.” Surely the Nubian official would fall into that category.

The official was literate in Greek, as his oral reading of Isaiah and response to Philip attests.⁵⁰ But was Greek even known in Nubia? Burstein (2008:53) observes that “the discovery in the royal enclosure at Meroe of a column drum with the Greek alphabet does suggest that Greek was taught at Meroe. As in the Hellenistic period, the initial motive was probably pragmatic; the Kings of Kush needed officials like the appropriately named Great Ambassadors to Rome who were fluent in both Greek and Egyptian to deal both with Roman officials and the priests of the temple of Isis at Philae.” The Nubian Jew admirably filled the role of such an official.

Travel from Alexandria to Jerusalem via Gaza

Alexandria was situated near the mouth of the westernmost branch of the Nile called the Canobic. From here the official needed to reach Pelusium situated on the easternmost branch called the Pelousiakos (Ptolemy *Geogr.* 4.5.10). Strabo (*Geogr.* 17.1.6) provides a sailing distance of 1450 stadia (255 km) between it and Pharos. Because the Butic Canal (*Boutikos Potamos*; Ptolemy *Geogr.* 4.5.44) was not operational in the early first century CE,⁵¹ it was not a travel option for the

⁴⁸ Casson (1995:341) writes that the *thalamegoi* “were the *dahbiyehs* of the ancient world, the Nile yachts, such as those that ferried government officials up and down the river.”

⁴⁹ For the history of the Jewish community in Alexandria, see Barclay (1996:27-34, 48-78).

⁵⁰ Parsons (2008:128) observes that the Nubian “replies with a rhetorically sophisticated question (using a rare potential optative), which underscores again the privileged aspect of his position.”

⁵¹ An estimated date is after 70 CE to the mid-2nd century CE, according to Schiestl (2021:31).



Nubian official. Therefore, a sea voyage from Alexandria was likely, estimated by Orbis at 332 kilometres over 1.7 days.

Travelers arriving by sea from Alexandria could disembark at Pelusium and hire a carriage to follow the Via Maris to Gaza before taking the desert road inland to Jerusalem.⁵² The Antonine Itinerary (ca. 200 CE) gives a distance of 134 Roman miles (198 km) between Pelusium and Gaza.⁵³ Carriage travel averaged around 32 Roman miles (47 km) a day so that leg of the journey would take approximately four days.⁵⁴ On his return the Nubian official would travel the same coastal road from Gaza to Pelusium. If Alexandria was bypassed on the return, sailing directly southwards along the Pelousiakos branch of the Nile would save the Nubian much time and cost. Orbis calculates the distance from Pelusium to Syene at 1108 kilometres taking sixteen days.

Journey of Theophanes

Theophanes, a high Roman official who lived in Hermopolis in the province of Thebaid, made a comparable journey around 320 CE. The itinerary overlaps in several places. Adams notes: “It is likely that the first stage from Middle Egypt to Alexandria (for which few details remain) was by river.” From Alexandria Theophanes traveled to Pelusium via Herakleopolis while on the return went directly from Pelusium to Egyptian Babylon. Matthews (2006:20), however, takes a different view of the itinerary. He does not assume the journey mentioning Alexandria is the journey to Antioch described in the main archive, since Alexandria was not on Theophanes’ route to or from Antioch. He concludes: “We must be dealing with some other journey and some other business. Theophanes was what would now be called a frequent traveler who must often have had occasion to visit Alexandria.”⁵⁵ Several centuries earlier the Nubian official had traveled a similar itinerary and was probably also a frequent visitor to Alexandria on behalf of the Kandake.

Stages and Distances of the Nubian’s Journey

The following table suggests the stages and means of the Nubian’s journey. It then estimates the minimum distances and travels times for the journey without stops:

Stages	Means	Distance km	Days
Departure			
Meroe to Syene	River	1404	14
Syene to Alexandria	River	<u>1138</u>	<u>12</u>
		2542	26
Alexandria to Pelusium	Sea	255	3
Pelusium to Gaza	Land	198	4
Gaza to Jerusalem	Land	<u>90</u>	<u>2</u>
		543	9
Return			
Jerusalem to Gaza	Land	90	2

⁵² Philo (*de Prov.* 2.64) made at least one pilgrimage to Jerusalem during his lifetime. The details are unknown except that he passed through Ascalon (Ashkelon), so his ascent to Jerusalem was along a route different from the one described above.

⁵³ For a map of this itinerary by Bernd Löhberg, see <https://www.tabulae-geographicae.de/english/roman-empire/the-antonine-itinerary/>.

⁵⁴ This is the average daily distance estimated for Theophanes’ journey; see Adams (2012:160) and Matthews (2006:50).

⁵⁵ For maps of the journey see Matthews (2006:57-58, maps 1, 2).



Gaza to Pelusium	Land	198	4
Pelusium to Syene	River	1108	16
Syene to Meroe	River	1404	14
		2800	36
Total		5885	71

The round-trip distance on water and land between Meroe and Jerusalem is estimated at 5885 kilometres, a journey taking well over a month in each direction.⁵⁶ Stops in Alexandria and Jerusalem would have lengthened the time of the trip. So masked in the Acts 8 account are major logistical issues related to the geography and chronology of the Nubian's journey.

Conclusion

The account of the meeting of Philip and the Nubian man in Acts chapter 8 occupies an important place in Luke's narrative. This article has discussed important issues of material culture related to its geographical, historical, and archaeological background. Understanding this background, undoubtedly somewhat known to Theophilus and Luke's audience, allows modern readers to better understand this pericope. The unnamed African man has been identified as a Jew, a treasury official serving the Nubian dynast called the Kandake. After traveling on pilgrimage from Meroe to Jerusalem, he is returning home when a divine connection occurs with Philip. The Nubian is reading from Isaiah 53 on a scroll probably purchased in Alexandria. Before the Spirit catches Philip away, the official is baptized in the pool at a spring. His conversion precedes that of another Diaspora Jew, Saul of Tarsus, which is described in chapter 9. The Nubian becomes the only unnamed major character in Acts and the only one living outside the limes of the Roman Empire.

References

- Adams, C. (2012). 'There and Back Again': Getting Around in Roman Egypt. In C. Adams & R. Laurence (Eds). *Travel & Geography in the Roman Empire*. Routledge, London/New York, 138-166.
- Adams, W.Y. (1983). Primis and the 'Aethiopian' Frontier. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, 20, 93-104.
- Ashby, S. (2020). *Calling Out to Isis: The Enduring Nubian Presence at Philae*. Gorgias, Piscataway, NJ.
- Ashby, S. (2022). Women of the Sacred South: Nubian Women in the Temple and Upon the Throne; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V6WjqVpYaJw&t=6s>.
- Barclay, J.M.G. (1996). *Jewish in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE – 117 CE)*. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Beitzel, B.J. (2009). *The New Moody Atlas of the Bible*. Moody, Chicago.
- Ben David, C. (2013). Map in All Roads Lead to Jerusalem; <https://milestones.kinneret.ac.il/en/maps/>.

⁵⁶ Bock (2007:342), suggests a trip of five months each way in a chariot, which fails to account for faster travel on the Nile River.



Bock, D.L. 2007. *Acts*. Baker, Grand Rapids.

Braund, D. (2015). Kings Beyond the Claustra. Nero's Nubian Nile, India and the Rubrum Mare (Tacitus, Annals 2.61). In E. Baltrusch & J. Wilker (Eds). *Amici - socii - clientes? Abhängige Herrschaft im Imperium Romanum*. Berlin, Edition Topoi, 12-159.

Burrell, K. (2020). Biblical Profile: Representing Cush in the Hebrew Bible. *Biblical Archaeology Review*, 46(5), 62, 64.

Burstein, S.M. 2006. When Greek was an African Language;
<https://archive.chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/1301>.

Burstein, S.M. 2008. When Greek Was an African Language: The Role of Greek Culture in Ancient and Medieval Nubia. *Journal of World History*, 19(1), 41-61.

Casson, L. (1995). *Ships and Seamanship in the Ancient World*. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore/London.

Conder, C.R. & Kitchener, H.H. (1883). *The Survey of Western Palestine: Memoirs of the Topography, Orography, Hydrography, and Archaeology*, vol. 3. Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund, London.

Cooley, A.E. (2009). *Res Gestae Divi Augusti: Text, Translation, and Commentary*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Davies, W. D. and Finkelstein, L. (Ed). (1989). *The Cambridge History of Judaism: The Hellenistic Age*, vol. 2. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Dio Cassius. (1917). *Roman History*, vol. 6, books 51-55. E. Cary & H.B. Foster (trans.). Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

Donner, H. (1992). *The Mosaic Map of Madaba*. Kok Pharos, Kampen.

Edelstein, G. (1990). What's a Roman Villa Doing Outside Jerusalem? *Biblical Archaeology Review*, 16(6), 32, 34, 36-38, 40, 42.

Estigarribia, J.V. (1992). "Commentaries on the Historicity of Acts of the Apostles 8, 26–39." *Beiträge zur Sudanforschung* 5, 39-46.

Eusebius. (2015). *The Onomasticon by Eusebius of Caesarea*. G.S.P. Freeman-Grenville (trans.). Peabody, MA, Hendrickson.

Grzymiski, K. (2021). The City of Meroe. In G. Emberling & B.B. Williams (Eds). *Oxford Handbook of Ancient Nubia*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 545-561.

Hamblin, D. J. & Grunsfeld, M.J. (1974). *The Appian Way: A Journey*. Random House, New York.

Hardin, J.W., Rollston, C.A. & Blakely, J.A. (2012). Biblical Geography in Southwestern Judah. *Near East Archaeology*, 75(1), 20-35.



- Hillard, T.W. (2002). The Nile Cruise of Cleopatra and Caesar. *Classical Quarterly*, 52(2), 549-554.
- Horton, Jr., F.L. & Blakely, J.A. (2000). 'Behold, Water!' Tell el-Hesi and the Baptism of the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26–40). *Revue Biblique*, 107(1), 56-71.
- Hubbard, D.A. (1996). "Ethiopian Eunuch." In *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. D.R.W. Wood & I.H. Marshal (Eds). InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL.
- Hudson, J.M. (2013). On the Way: A Poetics of Roman Transportation. PhD diss., University of California Berkeley.
- Jerome. (1893). *St. Jerome: Letters and Select Works*, vol. 6. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. W.H. Freemantle (trans.). Christian Literature Company, New York.
- Kahn, D. (2007). Judean Auxiliaries in Egypt's Wars against Kush. *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 127(4), 507-516.
- Keener, C.S. (2013). *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary 3:1–14:28*, vol. 2. Baker, Grand Rapids.
- Kerkeslager, A. (1998). Jewish Pilgrimage and Jewish Identity in Hellenistic and Early Roman Egypt. In D. Frankfurter (Ed). *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt*. Brill, Leiden, 99-225.
- Kouchy, F.L. (1989). The Past and Present Physical Environment of Tel el-Hesi, Israel. In B.T. Dahlberg & K.G. O'Connell, S.J. (Eds), *Tell el-Hesi: The Site and the Expedition*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, IN, 5-36.
- Lake, K. & Cadbury, H.J. (1979). *English Translation and Commentary*. In F.J.F. Jackson & K. Lake (Eds). *The Beginnings of Christianity, Pt., 1, The Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 4 Baker, Grand Rapids, repr.
- Letter of Aristeas. (1985). *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2. In J.H. Charlesworth (Ed) & R.J.H. Shutt (trans.), Doubleday, New York, 12-34.
- Lohwasser, A. & Phillips, J.S. (2021). Women in Ancient Kush. In G. Emberling & B.B. Williams (Eds). *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Nubia*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1015-1022.
- Matthews, J. (2006). *The Journey of Theophanes: Travel, Business, and Daily Life in the Roman East*. Yale University Press, New Haven, CT.
- Meyboom, P.G.P. (1995). *The Nile Mosaic of Palestrina: Early Evidence of Egyptian Religion in Italy*. Brill, Leiden.
- Millard, A.R. (2000). *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus*. Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield.
- Nyquist, A. (2014). The Solitary Obelisk: The Significance of Cult in Hierapolis of Phrygia. M.A. thesis, University of Oslo.



Patterson, R.D. (1980). 1545 סַרְיָס (*sārīs*). In R.L. Harris (Ed). *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 2. Moody, Chicago, 634-635.

Ptolemy. (2000). *Ptolemy's Geography: An Annotated Translation of the Theoretical Chapters*. J.L. Berggren & A. Jones (trans.). Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.

Rainey, A.F. & Notley, S.R. (Eds). 2007. *Carta's New Century Handbook and Atlas of the Bible*, Carta, Jerusalem.

Ramsay, W.M. (1910). *Pictures of the Apostolic Church: Studies in the Book of Acts*. Hodder & Stoughton, London.

Rapuano, Y. (1990). Did Philip Baptize the Eunuch at Ein Yael? *Biblical Archaeology Review*, 16(6), 49.

Rhamie, G.C.A. (2019). "Whiteness, Conviviality and Agency: The Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26-40) and Conceptuality in the Imperial Imagination of Biblical Studies." PhD Thesis, Canterbury Christ Church University.

Richards, E.R. (2004). *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*. Inter-Varsity, Downers Grove, IL.

Rilly, C. (2014). Fragments of the Meroitic Report of the War Between Rome and Meroe, 13th Conference for Nubian Studies; <https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01482774>.

Rilly, C. (2017). Des temples dans la savane, Le royaume de Méroé. 290 av. J.-C.-350 apr. J.-C. In O. Cabon (Ed). *Histoire et civilisation du Soudan: De la préhistoire à nos jours*. Soleb, Paris, para. 67–76 at <https://books.openedition.org/africae/2817>.

Robinson, E. (1856). *Biblical Researches in Palestine and Adjacent Countries*, vol. 2. Crocker and Brewster, Boston.

Roll, I. (1983). The Roman Road System in Judea. *Cathedra*, 3,136-161.

Roll, I. (2009). Between Damascus and Megiddo: Roads and Transportation in Antiquity across the Northeastern Approaches to the Holy Land. In L. Di Segni, Y. Hirshfeld, J. Patrich, & R. Talgam (Eds). *Man near a Roman Arch: Studies Presented to Prof. Yoram Tsafrir*. Israel Exploration Society, Jerusalem, 1-20.

Rutherford, I. (2017). Concord and Communitas: Greek Elements in Philo's Account of Jewish Pilgrimage. In M.R. Niehoff (Ed). *Journeys in the Roman East: Imagined and Real*. Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 257-272.

Schiestl, R. 2021. A New Look at the Butic Canal, Egypt. *E&G Quaternary Science Journal*, 70, 29-38.

Schneider, J. (1964). εὐνοῦχος. In G. Kittel (Ed). *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 2. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 765-768.

Shinnie, P. & Bradley, R. (1981). The Murals from the Augustus Temple, Meroe. In W.K. Simpson and W.M. Davis. *Studies in Ancient Egypt, the Aegean, and the Sudan*. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 167-172.



Strabo. (1932). *Geography*, vol. 8, book 17. H.L. Jones (trans.). Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

Talbert, R.J. (Ed). (2000). *Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World*. Princeton University Press, Princeton.

Thurman, C.C. Maye & Williams, B. (Eds). (1979). *Ancient Textiles from Nubia*, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago.

Török, L. (2008). *Between Two Worlds, The Frontier Region between Ancient Nubia and Egypt 3700 BC - 500 AD*. Brill, Leiden.

Wilson, M. (2019). The Roman Road System around the Mediterranean. In B.J. Beitzel (Ed). *Lexham Geographic Commentary on Acts through Revelation*. Lexham, Bellingham, WA, 175-194.

Wilson, M. 2024. Philip and the Nubian Official: Dimensions of Text and Narrative. *Pharos Journal of Theology*, 105(1), 1-15.

Wittke, A.-M., Olshausen, E. & Szydlak, R. (Eds). (2010). *Brill's New Pauly Historical Atlas of the Ancient World*. Brill, Leiden.

Wright, P.H. (2019). The Desert Road between Jerusalem and Gaza. In B.J. Beitzel (Ed). *Lexham Geographic Commentary on Acts through Revelation*. Lexham, Bellingham, WA, 195-201.

Conflict of Interest Statement: *The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.*



This article is open-access and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Licence

The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) and the copyright owner(s) are credited and that the original publication in this journal is cited, in accordance with accepted academic practice. No use, distribution or reproduction is permitted which does not comply with these terms.