

## The Crocodile and the Labyrinth: Strabo's Autopsy of the Egyptian Fayum

In c. 25 BCE, Strabo sailed down the Nile in the entourage of the Roman prefect Aelius Gallus (Strabo 2.5.12) and saw a highlights tour of Egypt – sphinxes, pyramids, temples, and colossi (Strabo 17.1). His trip also included an excursion into the Fayum where he visited the great Labyrinth and fed the crocodile Suchus at the city of Arsinoe. The legitimacy of Strabo's autopsy of the Fayum area has been questioned, however, alongside claims that Herodotus invented his autopsy of the Fayum and Strabo copied these falsehoods (Armayer, 1985). This paper argues instead that autopsy was a critical methodological tool Strabo employed in specific circumstances and was not copied from Herodotus nor was it merely garnish to grab the attention of his readers. Through close reading and stylistic analysis of both Strabo's and Herodotus' texts, a pattern emerges showing that Strabo uses multiple types of autopsy and in ways that differ from Herodotus, including in instances when Herodotus is silent on a subject.

This paper analyzes Strabo's account of the Fayum, specifically his visit to the Labyrinth (17.137) and the sacred crocodile of Arsinoe (17.138), as a case study for his use of autopsy and as a comparison to Herodotus' use of autopsy. While scholarly interest in Strabo continues to grow, this topic, and Strabo's account of Egypt in general, has received limited attention, as has Strabo's language and style. Thus, this paper provides an original reading of Strabo's *Geography* and contributes a new perspective to Strabo as a writer, scholar, and geographer.

### Bibliography

Armayer, O. K. (1985). *Herodotus' Autopsy of the Fayoum: Lake Moeris and the Labyrinth of Egypt*. Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben.