

Strab. 16.1.9-11

Text Übersetzung:

(H. C. Hamilton, W. Falconer / C. D. Yonge)

[9] [...] The Persians, through fear of incursions from without, and for the purpose of preventing vessels from ascending these rivers, constructed artificial cataracts. Alexander, on arriving there, destroyed as many of them as he could, those particularly [on the Tigris from the sea] to Opis. But he bestowed great care upon the canals; for the Euphrates, at the commencement of summer, overflows; It begins to fill in the spring, when the snow in Armenia melts: the ploughed land, therefore, would be covered with water and be submerged, unless the overflow of the superabundant water were diverted by trenches and canals, as in Egypt the water of the Nile is diverted. Hence the origin of canals. Great labour is requisite for their maintenance, for the soil is deep, soft, and yielding, so that it would easily be swept away by the stream; the fields would be laid bare, the canals filled, and the accumulation of mud would soon obstruct their mouths. [...]

[10] It is not, perhaps, possible to prevent inundations of this kind altogether, but it is the duty of good princes to afford all possible assistance. The assistance required is to prevent excessive overflow by the construction of dams, and to obviate the filling of rivers, produced by the accumulation of mud, by cleansing the canals, and removing stoppages at their mouths. The cleansing of the canals is easily performed, but the construction of dams requires the labour of numerous workmen. For the earth being soft and yielding, does not support the superincumbent mass, which sinks, and is itself carried away, and thus a difficulty arises in making dams at the mouth. Expedition is necessary in closing the canals to prevent all the water flowing out. When the canals dry up in the summer time, they cause the river to dry up also; and if the river is low (before the canals are closed), it cannot supply the canals in time with water, of which the country, burnt up and scorched, requires a very large quantity; for there is no difference, whether the crops are flooded by an excess or perish by drought and a failure of water. The navigation up the rivers (a source of many advantages) is continually obstructed by both the above-mentioned causes, and it is not possible to remedy this unless the mouths of the canals were quickly opened

and quickly closed, and the canals were made to contain and preserve a mean between excess and deficiency of water.

[11] Aristobulus relates that Alexander himself, when he was sailing up the river, and directing the course of the boat, inspected the canals, and ordered them to be cleared by his multitude of followers; he likewise stopped up some of the mouths, and opened others. He observed that one of these canals, which took a direction more immediately to the marshes, and to the lakes in front of Arabia, had a mouth very difficult to be dealt with, and which could not be easily closed on account of the soft and yielding nature of the soil; he (therefore) opened a new mouth at the distance of 30 stadia, selecting a place with a rocky bottom, and to this the current was diverted. But in doing this he was taking precautions that Arabia should not become entirely inaccessible in consequence of the lakes and marshes, as it was already almost an island from the quantity of water (which surrounded it).