

## Are Pseudo-Plutarch's Narrations About the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers in His Book "*On Rivers*" Reliable?

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### Abstract:

The text of the book entitled *On Rivers*, attributed to Pseudo-Plutarch, is based on the manuscript *Palatinus Heidelbergensis gr. 398* (*Codex Palatinus Graecus 398*, fols. 157r-173r), dated to the ninth century CE and housed in the Heidelberg University Library. Since the author of the text is identified as Plutarch, it was initially assumed that the book belonged to the famous Mestrius Plutarch (ca. 46-120 CE). However, when the author's vocabulary, intellectual level, and the references employed in the composition of the text are considered, it becomes clear that *On Rivers* cannot be attributed to Mestrius Plutarch but rather to another author bearing the same name. For this reason, the author has come to be referred to as Pseudo-Plutarch. The book addresses twenty-five significant rivers from various regions of the known world and takes the form of a catalog providing geographical, onomastic, etymological, mythological, and paradoxographical information about these rivers. While some modern scholars dismissed Pseudo-Plutarch's *On Rivers* as unreliable and therefore negligible, others used it as a reference source to substantiate their arguments. The present article was written in order to compare the narrations about the Euphrates (Ἐὐφράτης = Fırat) and the Tigris (Τίγρις = Dicle) found in *On Rivers*, attributed to Pseudo-Plutarch, with those of other ancient authors, and to question the accuracy of Pseudo-Plutarch's narrations regarding these two rivers. The geographical, onomastic, etymological, mythological, and paradoxographical information provided in the book is compared to the writings of other ancient authors as well as with modern scholarship, and its reliability is critically examined. It is therefore recommended that scholars exercise caution and adopt a critical perspective when citing Pseudo-Plutarch's *On Rivers* as a reference.

**Keywords:** Pseudo-Plutarch. *On Rivers*. Euphrates. Tigris. Mesopotamia

### INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that water is one of the most essential substances for life. In addition to being one of the most fundamental necessities of living beings, freshwater sources made agriculture possible on the lands they irrigated, thereby encouraging human communities to settle around freshwater. Over time, this circumstance led to the emergence of civilizations along riverbanks. Recognizing the extent to which their lives depended on water, human societies attributed a sacred quality to it, at times imagining it as a deity and at other times as the primordial substance of the universe. Yet water, while symbolizing life, productivity, abundance, and fertility, has also been associated with drought and destruction. In eschatological myths, water often appears as the agent of a great catastrophe followed by annihilation, most commonly in the form of a great flood found in nearly every culture, or, alternatively, as the fundamental element of a new beginning. This conception formed the basis of ancient geographical thought: just as in myth, it was proposed that all waters originate from the great ocean encircling the world and ultimately flow back into it, such that water constitutes both beginning and end. This idea was expressed in Ancient Greek mythology as well. Myths such as those of Tethys and Oceanus, as well as Zeus's flood narrative, demonstrate the importance attributed to water in Greek mythological thought. Natural philosophers in Ancient Greece similarly claimed that water was the *arche*,

the fundamental substance of the universe. Given the significance attributed to water, independent books devoted exclusively to it were also composed. One such book is *On Rivers*, attributed to Pseudo-Plutarch, which compiles major rivers from various regions of the ancient world.

Pseudo-Plutarch's book entitled *On the Names of Rivers and Mountains and of the Things Found in Them* (Περὶ ποταμῶν καὶ ὄρων ἐπωνυμίας καὶ τῶν ἐν αὐτοῖς εὕρισκομένων) is commonly abbreviated as *On Rivers*.<sup>1</sup> The text of the book is based on the ninth-century manuscript Palatinus Heidelbergensis gr. 398 (Codex Palatinus Graecus 398, fols. 157r-173r), discovered in the Heidelberg University Library.<sup>2</sup> Because the author is identified as Plutarch, the book was initially thought to belong to the renowned Mestrius Plutarch (ca. 46-120 CE). However, when Mestrius Plutarch's vocabulary, intellectual sophistication, and the sources he employed are considered, it becomes evident that *On Rivers* must belong to another author named Plutarch. Moreover, a marginal note in the manuscript explicitly states that the attribution is erroneous, remarking that the book is far removed from Plutarch's intellectual brilliance in both thought and diction and must therefore belong to another Plutarch. This confirms that the book should be attributed to Pseudo-Plutarch.<sup>3</sup>

Pseudo-Plutarch's *On Rivers* consists of narratives concerning twenty-five major rivers of the known world. In composing the book, the author did not approach the subject solely from a geographical perspective, nor did he strictly adhere to a river-by-river descriptive method. Rather, he sought to portray rivers through the cultural perspectives of the peoples living along their banks. The book resembles a catalog that provides geographical, onomastic, etymological, mythological, and paradoxographical information about each river. It also has a spatial dimension, since the rivers discussed are real geographical entities. The author's purpose in writing the book and the criteria by which the rivers were selected remain unknown, as the manuscript contains neither an explanation nor a preface. Nevertheless, in light of the geographical knowledge of the period, it may be argued that these rivers were considered the most significant in shaping the known world and the regions through which they flowed. The geographical information provided about the rivers is generally broad, often limited to the name of a region. After presenting geographical and occasionally etymological or onomastic information, frequently based on myth, the author, where applicable, discusses the etymology of a nearby mountain and the myths associated with it. He then turns to stones and plants (and in one instance, a fish) found near the river that has unusual medical, psychological, scientific, or religious properties, followed by an narration about local customs and practices associated with these natural elements. The paradoxographical information about these stones and plants is particularly striking. In the myths transmitted by Pseudo-Plutarch, divine justice is often enacted through vengeance upon those who commit sexual crimes, while the names of the oppressed are preserved and monumentalized by being assigned to rivers and mountains. The myths employed to convey information about rivers sometimes appear as alternative versions of well-known myths, and at other times may be inventions of the author himself.

Pseudo-Plutarch's *On Rivers* was dismissed by some modern scholars as unreliable, while others cited it as a reference source in support of their arguments. The present article aims to compare the narrations about the Euphrates (Εὐφράτης = Fırat) and the Tigris (Τίγρις = Dicle) found in *On Rivers*, attributed to Pseudo-Plutarch, with those of other ancient

<sup>1</sup> Ancient Greek Περὶ ποταμῶν; Latin *De fluviis*.

<sup>2</sup> Mesut Kınacı, "Pseudo-Plutarkhos'un Nehirler Üzerine Adlı Eserine Göre Maiandros Nehri ve Yorumlanması", *Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 39/ 68 (2020), 124; Chiara Poidomani, "Il De fluviis pseudoplutarcho nella redazione del codice Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Supplément grec 443A", *Commentaria Classica*, 3 (2016), 57-58.

<sup>3</sup> Felix Racine, "Pseudo-Plutarch's *On Rivers* and the School Tradition", *Falsifications and Authority in Antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. J. Papy – E. Gielen, Turnhout: Brepols, 2020, s. 216; Brian J. Campbell "Pseudo-Plutarch, on the Names of Rivers and Mountains and the Things in Them", *Geographers of the Ancient Greek World II*. ed. D. Graham – J. Shipley, Croydon, 2024, s. 711.

authors, and to evaluate the accuracy of Pseudo-Plutarch's narratives about these two rivers. Thus, this study seeks to assess the references used by Pseudo-Plutarch and, through selected examples, to determine whether his narrations about the Euphrates and Tigris can be considered reliable.

### Euphrates

Pseudo-Plutarch states that the Euphrates River belonged to Parthia and flowed near the city of Babylonia.<sup>4</sup> In antiquity, the region known as Parthia encompassed the southern parts of present-day Turkmenistan and the northeastern territories of Iran.<sup>5</sup> The term Parthia was used in antiquity in both a geographical and a political sense. Geographically, it referred to the southeastern regions of the Caspian Sea, including southern Turkmenistan and northeastern Iran, whereas in its political usage it denoted a much broader territory extending from the southern shores of the Caspian Sea to Mesopotamia.<sup>6</sup> In this context, even though Pseudo-Plutarch's description of the river's geographical location is rather general, it may nevertheless be regarded as broadly accurate.

Pseudo-Plutarch further reports that the river was formerly called Ksaranda, and that it was later named Medos after Medos, the son of Artaxerxes, who cast himself into the river following his rape of Rhoxane, the daughter of Kordyos.<sup>7</sup> The naming of the river as Euphrates is likewise explained through a similar myth. According to this narration, upon returning home Euphrates failed to recognize his son Axourtos and, mistaking him for a stranger while he slept beside his mother, killed him. When Euphrates realized that the person he had slain out of jealousy was his own son, he threw himself into the River Medos in despair. For this reason, the river was renamed Euphrates.<sup>8</sup> The myths transmitted by Pseudo-Plutarch concerning the naming of the river are not seen in other sources. On the contrary, it can be established that the river was known as Buranun or Buranunna<sup>9</sup> by the Sumerians, Purattum<sup>10</sup> by the Babylonians, Purattu<sup>11</sup> by the Akkadians and Assyrians, and Puruna<sup>12</sup>, Puranti<sup>13</sup>, or Puratti<sup>14</sup> in Hittite texts. These phonetic correspondences indicate that the river bore a similar name from a much earlier period and that this designation entered Ancient Greek as Euphrates (interpreted as "well-forded" or "having good crossings"). This evidence demonstrates that Pseudo-Plutarch's narrations about the river's nomenclature are unreliable.

Pseudo-Plutarch also notes the presence near the river of a stone called *aetites* (ἄειτιτης, "eagle stone"), which midwives reportedly placed upon the bellies of women in labor in order to ensure a painless delivery.<sup>15</sup> The *aetites* may be described as a brown, egg-shaped stone with a hollow interior containing other stones or mineral matter<sup>16</sup>. Pseudo-Plutarch's

<sup>4</sup> Ps-Plut. *de Fluv.* XX. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Strab. XI. 9. 1; J. Williem Drijvers, "Strabo on Parthia and Parthians". *Das Partherreich und Seine Zeugnisse The Arsacid Empire; Sources and Documentation* ed. Josef Wiesehöfer, Stuttgart (1998), s. 279-294.

<sup>6</sup> Strab. XI. 9. 1; Drijvers, *a.g.m.* 282; Theresa Blaschke, *Euphrat und Tigris im Alten Orient*, Verlag Publishers, Harrassowitz, 2018, s. 50.

<sup>7</sup> Ps-Plut. *de Fluv.* XX. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Ps-Plut. *de Fluv.* XX. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Alfred Goetze, An Old Babylonian Itinerary. *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 7/2, (1953), s.60; Dietz Otto Edzard *at al.* *Die Orts- und Gewässernamen der prä-sargonischen und sargonischen Zeit*, Ludwig Reichert, Wiesbaden 1977, s. 248; Wolfgang Schramm, *Akkadische Logogramme*. Universitätsverlag, Göttinger 2010, s. 29.

<sup>10</sup> Goetze, *a.g.m.* s. 60; Edzard *at al.* *a.g.e.* s. 248; Brigitte Gronenberg, *Die Orts – und Gewässernamen der altbabylonischen Zeit*, Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, Wiesbaden 1980, s. 303-305.

<sup>11</sup> Johann Tischler, *Kleinasiatische Hydronymie*. Reichert Verlag, Wiesbaden 1977, s. 53; Sebahattin Bayram – Remzi Kuzuoğlu, "Eski Asur Dönemi Metinlerinde Geçen Akarsu İsimleri", XVIII. *Türk Tarih Kongresi XI*, ed. S. Nurdan – M. Özler, TTK Yayınları. Ankara 2022, s. 326 dn. 20.

<sup>12</sup> Amelie Kuhrt, *Eskiçağ'da Yakındoğu-M.Ö. 3000-330*, çev. Dilek Şendil, İstanbul 2007, s. 316.

<sup>13</sup> Tischler, *a. g. e.*, s. 53.

<sup>14</sup> Christopher Woods, "On the Euphrates", *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie* 95, (2005), s. 8; Blaschke *a.g.e.*, s. 85-96.

<sup>15</sup> Ps-Plut. *de Fluv.* XX. 2.

<sup>16</sup> Albert Fay, *A Glossary of the Mining and Mineral Industry*, Washington 1920, s. 18.

narrations about the *aetites* are frequently paralleled in other ancient authors.<sup>17</sup> Pliny the Elder (*nat.* XXXVI.39-40) reports that *aetites* stones, wrapped in the skins of sacrificial animals, were worn by pregnant women as amulets or hung on animals, thereby preventing miscarriage and facilitating childbirth. This practice and belief, common in the medical tradition of the period, persisted for centuries. There are also views suggesting that the use of this stone in matters related to pregnancy and childbirth was widespread in Mesopotamian civilizations.<sup>18</sup> In this respect, Pseudo-Plutarch's narrations about the *aetites* may be considered reliable.

Pseudo-Plutarch further states that near the river grew a plant called *axalla* (ἄξαλλα), translated as *thermon* (θερμόν), and that individuals suffering from malarial attacks were cured by placing this plant upon their chests. He notes that he derived this information from Book XIII<sup>19</sup> of *On Rivers* by Chrysermus of Corinth.<sup>20</sup> The term *axalla* is thought to be of Assyrian origin.<sup>21</sup>

In addition, it is reported that a mountain called Drimylon extended near the river, and that on this mountain a stone very similar to *sardonyx* (σαρδόνυξ) was formed. As stated by Pseudo-Plutarch, kings used this stone in royal insignia, and when the stone was placed in hot water it proved highly effective against visual impairment. He states that these narrations were drawn from *On Stones*<sup>22</sup> by Nicias of Mallos.<sup>23</sup> *Sardonyx* is the name given to a variety of *agate* stone characterized by white, red, and brown bands.<sup>24</sup> Modern studies showed that *sardonyx* was a well-known and widely used semi-precious stone in ancient Mesopotamia<sup>25</sup> and was among the most sought-after ornamental stones<sup>26</sup>. Pliny the Elder (*nat.* XXXVII.23-24) provides detailed information on *sardonyx*, its properties, and its uses, noting that it was used by Emperor Claudius and ranked among esteemed gemstones. Various narratives suggest that rings adorned with sardonyx signified high social status and were typically stored in ivory boxes.<sup>27</sup> As stated by Pliny the Elder (*nat.* XXXVII.31), the finest examples of this stone were found near Babylon. In light of this evidence, Pseudo-Plutarch's narrations about *sardonyx* may similarly be regarded as reliable.

Pseudo-Plutarch's narrations about the *aetites* stone and the *axalla* plant, and to some extent those concerning the *sardonyx*-like stone, were transmitted almost in their entirety by Ioannes Stobaeus.<sup>28</sup> This suggests either that both authors relied on the same source or that Stobaeus copied Pseudo-Plutarch's excerpts directly.<sup>29</sup>

## Tigris

Pseudo-Plutarch reported that the Tigris is a river of Armenia and that it empties into the "Arsaces Marsh" and the Araxes River.<sup>30</sup> Because the region where the river rises was called Armenia in antiquity, the first claim may be considered geographically plausible; however,

<sup>17</sup> Ail. *nat.* I. 35. Philostratus of Athens (Philostr. *Ap.* II. 14. 3) stated that eagles and storks do not build their nests without placing this stone, and that thanks to this stone, their eggs do not easily crack, nor do snakes approach the eggs.

<sup>18</sup> Joseph Bidez, "Plantes et pierres magiques d'après le pseudo Plutarque de fluviis", *Tiré à part des Mélanges offerts à M. Octave Navarre par ses élèves et ses amis. Privat*, 1935, s. 32; Sema Arslan, "Eskiçağlardan Günümüze Kartal-Taşı/Hamilelik-Taşı ve bu Taşın Kullanım Alanları Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme", *Oannes*, 3, (2021a), s. 99-100.

<sup>19</sup> *FGrH* 287. 4. 6.

<sup>20</sup> Ps-Plut. *de Fluv.* XX. 3.

<sup>21</sup> Elwira Kaczyńska, "Non-Greek Glosses in the Work of Fluvii by Pseudo-Plutarch", *ŽAnt*, 62, (2012) s. 148. dn. 46.

<sup>22</sup> *FGrH* 60. 3.

<sup>23</sup> Ps-Plut. *de Fluv.* XX. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Max Bauer, *Precious Stones*, Pennsylvania 1968, s. 512; Süleyman Özkan, "Eski Anadolu'da Kuvars Taşı İşlemeciliği", *Karadeniz'den Fırat'a Bilgi Üretimleri: Önder Bilgi'ye Armağan Yazılar*, ed. A. Öztan – Ş. Dönmez, Ankara (2011) s. 271; Sema Arslan 2021b, "Çivi Yazılı Belgelere göre Eski Mezopotamya'da Kuvars Grubu'ndan Bazı Taşlar ve Özellikleri", *Archivium Anatolicum*, 15 (2021b), s. 347.

<sup>25</sup> Bauer, *a. g. e.*, s. 512; Özkan, *a. g. m.*, s. 271; Arslan, *a. g. m.*, 2021b, s. 347.

<sup>26</sup> Arslan, *a. g. m.*, 2021b, s. 347.

<sup>27</sup> *Iuv.* VII. 140-145. XIII. 135-140.

<sup>28</sup> Chiara Poidomani, "Il De fluviis pseudoplutarcheo nella redazione del codice Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Supplément grec 443A", *Commentaria Classica* 3, (2016), s. 66; Charles Delattre, "L'alphabet au secours de la géographie. (dés)organiser le De fluviis du pseudo-Plutarque", *Polymnia*, (2017), s. 57-58.

<sup>29</sup> Stob. IV. 36. 13-14.

<sup>30</sup> Ps-Plut. *de Fluv.* XXIV. 1.

the statement that the Tigris flows into the Arsaces Marsh and the Araxes is incorrect. The Araxes is generally localized to the modern Aras River and, contrary to Pseudo-Plutarch's narration, has no connection with the Tigris. The Tigris takes its headwaters in the Southeastern Taurus Mountains, specifically from Mount Hazarbaba, and flows southward.<sup>31</sup>

Pseudo-Plutarch further stated that the river's earlier name was *Sollax*, which he translated as “submerged,”<sup>32</sup> and he explained the name Tigris by appealing to a well-known Dionysiac myth. According to this story, Dionysus, driven mad by Hera's anger, wandered the world; upon reaching Armenian territory he was unable to cross this river and begged Zeus for help. Zeus, hearing Dionysus' prayers, sent him a tiger; mounting the animal, Dionysus crossed the river. For this reason, the river was renamed the Tigris. Pseudo-Plutarch added that he was quoting these details from Book 1 of Theophilus' *On Stones*.<sup>33</sup> The story of Dionysus' crossing of the Tigris is narrated at length in Nonnus' *Dionysiaca* (24.1-65).

Pseudo-Plutarch also relates, on the basis of a tale he attributes to Hermesianax “the Cypriot” and to Book 3 by Aristonymus, the following version: when Dionysus fell in love with the nymph Alphesiboia and could not win her over with gifts, he transformed his body into a tiger. By frightening her, he compelled her consent; after he lay with her along the river, their son Medos was born. When Medos grew up, he renamed the river Tigris (= “tiger”) because of what had occurred.<sup>34</sup> These narrations are not seen outside Pseudo-Plutarch's *On Rivers*, and it is therefore possible that the author is inventing an alternative myth. In addition, there is a view in scholarship that “Hermesianax the Cypriot” is a fictive author.<sup>35</sup>

In the two paragraphs summarized above, the goal is to offer etymological explanations for the river's name. When the origin of the hydronym is examined, it becomes clear that the Sumerians called the river Idigna/Idigina, while the Akkadians used Idiglat.<sup>36</sup> It is also expressed in Sumerian by the term Tig-gal, meaning “great river.”<sup>37</sup> In Assyrian texts it appears as 𐎶𐎠. di-ig-lat, i.e., Diglat.<sup>38</sup> Although Greek authors refer to the river as Tigris, Pliny the Elder notes that in stretches where the current is weak it was called Diglitus, and that once the flow becomes stronger and faster it is then called *Tigris*. In Persian, Tigris was said to mean “arrow,” most likely with reference to the river's speed.<sup>39</sup> On phonetic grounds, the form *Tigris* may be understood as an Ancient Greek adaptation of earlier names; the Dionysus-and-tiger myth should be seen as a Greek attempt to explain an already existing name.

In the Tigris, there was a completely white stone called *mynda* (μύνδα), and people protected themselves from attacks by wild animals by carrying it on their person. Pseudo-Plutarch states that he is quoting this information from Book 3 of Leon of Byzantium's *On Rivers*.<sup>40,41</sup> Aristotle notes that the stone's name belonged to the language of the local inhabitants and

<sup>31</sup> Strab. XI. 14. 2; XVI. 1. 21; Plin. *nat.* VI. 127. Also See. Julian Rzóška, *Euphrates and Tigris, Mesopotamian Ecology and Destiny*. London 1980, s. 41; Veli Ünsal, “Eskiçağda Anadolu Su Kaynakları (Orta ve Doğu Anadolu)”, *Selçuk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 28, (2012), s. 217; Blaschke, *a. g. e.*, s. 51.

<sup>32</sup> Strab. XI. 14. 2; XVI. 1. 21; Plin. *nat.* VI. 127. Also See. Rzóška, *a. g. e.*, s. 41; Ünsal, *a. g. m.*, s. 217; Blaschke, *a. g. e.*, s. 51.

<sup>33</sup> Ps-Plut. *de Fluv.* XXIV. 1.

<sup>34</sup> Ps-Plut. *de Fluv.* XXIV. 2.

<sup>35</sup> Felix Atenstädt, “Zwei Quellen des sogenannten Plutarch de fluviis. *Hermes*”, 57 (1922), s. 230.

<sup>36</sup> Tischler, *a. g. e.*, s. 148; Groneberg, *a. g. e.*, s. 287; Ünsal, *a. g. m.*, s. 218.

<sup>37</sup> Ali Narçın, *A'dan Z'ye Asur*. İstanbul 2013, s.147.

<sup>38</sup> Wolfgang Schramm, *Akkadische Logogramme*. Göttinger 2010, s. 66; 70; Hande Duymuş Florioti, “M.Ö. I. Binyıl'da Mezopotamya'da Nehir Ulaşımı: Asur Örneği”, *History Studies* 4 (2012), s. 151; Blaschke, *a. g. e.*, s. 96.

<sup>39</sup> Plin. *nat.* VI. 127.

<sup>40</sup> *FGrH* 132. 3.

<sup>41</sup> Ps-Plut. *de Fluv.* XXIV. 2.

that it was pronounced *Modon*. Apart from this difference in naming, Pseudo-Plutarch's narration about the stone seems to coincide word-for-word with Aristotle's.<sup>42</sup>

Near the river stretches Mount Gauran, so named after Gauran, the son of the satrap Roxane. Because of his exceptional piety he obtained special favor and was the only Persian to live for three hundred years and die without falling ill. It is thought that he had an extremely expensive tomb on the hills of Mausorus. By the gods' favor the mountain was renamed and took the name Gauron.<sup>43</sup> Yet Pseudo-Plutarch's information here appears to be erroneous: no other source attests a mountain called Gauran/Gauros near the Tigris. A mountain named Carbantus is mentioned near the Tigris<sup>44</sup>; Pseudo-Plutarch likely confused this mountain with Gauronon/Gaurus, located in Campania near Cumae.<sup>45</sup>

Pseudo-Plutarch also reports that a plant resembling wild barley grew near the river, and that the locals cooked it in olive oil and rubbed it onto their bodies, remaining free of illness until death. As his source for this claim he cites Book 1 of Sostratus' *Mythica*.<sup>46</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The information Pseudo-Plutarch provides about the Euphrates and Tigris in *On Rivers* can, after careful evaluation, be rendered more intelligible and more practically useful for researchers. Rising in eastern Anatolia, the Euphrates and the Tigris provided "living water" to the lands they traversed, sustaining nearby human populations, animals, and plants; they also supported transportation and subsistence economies until they reached the Persian Gulf. Many cities and polities were founded along their banks, and the political landscape of the region took shape in relation to these waterways. For these reasons the rivers were regarded as sacred and were accorded a place among the gods. In Mesopotamia, before the Greek myth of Tethys and Oceanus, it was imagined that all things came into being through the mingling of Apsû's fresh waters and Tiamat's salty waters.<sup>47</sup> Enki, one of the Sumerian gods, worshipped by the Babylonians as Ea, was believed to be the source from whose shoulders the Euphrates and Tigris sprang, forming Mesopotamia.<sup>48</sup> It is also known that, before rituals performed for the god Marduk, the Babylonians underwent purification with water, and that this water had to be drawn from the Euphrates and the Tigris.<sup>49</sup> In Greek mythology, both rivers likewise appear among the river-god children of Oceanus and Tethys.<sup>50</sup>

Given that the Euphrates and Tigris together create Mesopotamia, a fertile region that for a time decisively shaped world history, it should be assumed that this is why they become the subject of Pseudo-Plutarch's *On Rivers*. Pseudo-Plutarch's claims about the localization of the Euphrates and the Tigris are generally reliable. With respect to their naming, however, it is clear that he produces alternative myths. It may be argued that he transmitted such myths in order to legitimate the Ancient Greek pronunciations of hydronyms used in older Mesopotamian civilizations. The narratives concerning the *Aetites* and *Sardonyx* stones align with ancient authors and with modern research and may therefore be regarded as trustworthy. By contrast, the accuracy of his narrations about the *mynda* stone and the wild-

<sup>42</sup> Aristot. *Mir.* 159. Also See. Søren Lund Sørensen, "Ps.-Plutarch's *On Rivers*, the *Mirabilia*, Stobaeus 4.36, and paradoxographical literature", *Historiography and Mythography in the Aristotelian Mirabilia* (258-278), ed. S. Schorn – R. Mayhew, Routledge (2024) s. 265

<sup>43</sup> Ps-Plut. *de Fluv.* XXIV. 3.

<sup>44</sup> Plin. *nat.* VI. 31. 133.

<sup>45</sup> Brian Campbell, "Pseudo-Plutarch, on the Names of Rivers and Mountains and the Things in Them", *Geographers of the Ancient Greek World Vol II* (710-739), ed. I. D. Graham – J. Shipley, Cambridge (2024), s. 738.

<sup>46</sup> Ps-Plut. *de Fluv.* XXIV. 4.

<sup>47</sup> Enuma Eliş I. 1-10. Also See. Albayrak *et al.*, "Eski Mezopotamya'da Nehirlerin Edebî ve Dinî Metinlere Yansıması", *Çağlar Boyunca Nehirler, Denizler ve Göller*, ed. O. Dumankaya, İstanbul (2021), s. 236.

<sup>48</sup> Kürşat Demirci, *Eski Mezopotamya Dinlerine Giriş*, İstanbul 2013, s. 27.

<sup>49</sup> Demirci, *a. g. e.*, s. 62; 66; Blaschke, *a. g. e.*, s. 543-552.

<sup>50</sup> Hyg. *Fab.* 6.

barley-like plant cannot be confirmed. Pseudo-Plutarch buttresses his narratives with numerous references, yet the existence of these authors and books cannot be fully verified. In general, researchers are advised to exercise particular caution when citing Pseudo-Plutarch's *On Rivers* and to approach it with a critical eye.

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