

Aegyptiaca Vespasiani
Nilus on Vespasian's Alexandrian Coins
Evidence for the Tradition of the Legitimization of Power

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Abstract: During the first three years of Vespasian's reign, coins which depicted Nilus bust were minted in Alexandria. Some scholars relate these representations to the reported by Cassius Dio (LXVI 8, 1) sudden exceptional Nile flooding which took place after the emperor's arrival in Alexandria. However, the dates of both events are disputable. It seems that Nilus bust on the coins is rather an expression of Roman emperors' complying with requirements of the tradition which identified the monarch with the renewed Nile.

Keywords: Alexandria, Roman Period Egypt, Nilus' representations, Nile flooding, Vespasian, Cassius Dio, Suetonius, Tacitus, coins

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The river god Nilus was one of the divinities belonging to the triad whose worship was associated with the ruler cult in the times of the Ptolemies as evidenced by the inscription from Canopus, dedicated to Serapis, Isis, Nilus, king Ptolemy (III Euergetes) and queen Berenice (II).¹

According to J.N. Svoronos, a head of a bearded man with his hair bound with a *taenia* and falling on the neck, depicted on coins attributed to Ptolemy VI Philometor, represents Zeus or Nilus.² J.M.C. Toynbee³ and S. Bakhoun⁴ adopted the identification proposed by R.S. Poole, who attributed this type of coin to the reign of Ptolemy V Epiphanes and associated the head on the obverse with Nilus.⁵

During the Roman period a personification of the Nile depicted in the form of a bust of a bearded man with cornucopia was a recurring iconographic motif on the coins minted in Alexandria.⁶

¹ Breccia 1926: 52, Pl. XVII/2; Savvopoulos, Bianchi, Hussein 2013: 136–137, no. 44c (18402); Fraser 1972: 263, n. 584 (vol. I); 415, n. 584 (vol. II); Bakhoun 1999: 99; Malaise 1994: 365.

² Sv. 1378, with ref. *SNG Cop.* 273.

³ Toynbee 1934: 31, Pl. X.3.

⁴ Bakhoun 1998a: 3–5.

⁵ *BMC Ptol.* 82; cf. Jentel 1992: 724, no. 56, with ref. *BMC Ptol.* 87, Pl. 17,3 mistakenly.

⁶ Toynbee 1934: 31–32; Bakhoun 1999: 94; cf. Jentel 1992: 724–725, nos 57–63, Pl. 429.

Beyond doubt, these images were inspired by representations in different forms of art, illustrating the complete figure of the Egyptian river god or only his bust, as for instance in the sculpture carved in greywacke found at Canopus. This work shows an adult bearded man with his hair up, decorated with a diadem. A small cornucopia (empty) is placed close to the left shoulder covered by folds of drapery. Most probably the bust was originally fixed on *clipeus*. R.R.R. Smith dated this sculpture to the second century AD.⁷ According to Z. Kiss, it reflects Hellenistic creations of the third – second century BC, and could have been carved in the first century BC, in the times of Augustus or even Cleopatra VII.⁸

Was Nilus bust displayed on Alexandrian coins simply one of the elements of the iconographic repertoire commemorating gods venerated in Egypt or was this to show a particular message emphasizing the connection between the emperor and the life-giving powers of Nilus? Or else, was this to show the people of the province that, according to the tradition, the Roman emperor is the impersonation of the new Nile? Although the representation of Nilus on Vespasian's coinage was not the most frequently used motif, these issues seem to illustrate clearly the significance of Egyptian tradition for the creation of imperial authority.

The series of Nilus representations on Alexandrian coins were commenced by issues in years 39 and 40 of Augustus' reign (**Fig. 1**).⁹ After a break of several decades, the image of Nilus bust was shown on Claudius' coins minted in years 10 and 11 of his reign (**Fig. 2**),¹⁰ and later, on coins minted under Nero in year 10 (**Fig. 3**).¹¹ During the short rule of Galba the bust of Nilus appeared only in year 2 (**Fig. 4**).¹² It can be found on the reverses of coins issued during even shorter reigns of Otho (**Fig. 5**)¹³ and Vitellius (**Fig. 6**).¹⁴ The representation of Nilus bust was also shown on coins struck for Vespasian, immediately after he had taken over power in AD 69 (**Fig. 7**), and likewise it appeared on coins minted in years 2 (**Fig. 8**) and 3 of his reign (**Fig. 9**).¹⁵

The image of Nilus on Vespasian's coins generally displays the type of representation as introduced under Augustus. It is a bust of a mature bearded man, with his hair tied up. The head is decorated with papyrus reeds. Drapery covers the left shoulder and the cornucopia is next to the right shoulder. On some specimens the cornucopia is topped with short lines (leaves?) or a small globule (fruit?). R. Martini identified the element surmounting the cornucopia on a coin *SNG Milano* 793 dated to AD 70/71 (year 3) as the head of Genius.

It seems that the connection of the Nile with Vespasian was very firm in ancient Roman tradition. Flavius Philostratus, who lived much later, in his *Vita Apollonii* (V, 28), attributes the following words to Vespasian as addressed to the Egyptians: ἄρῶσαθε ὡς

⁷ Smith 2006: 40–41, Fig. 29.

⁸ Kiss 2010: 213–216, Fig. 18.4–5.

⁹ *RPC I* 5041, 5052.

¹⁰ *RPC I* 5174, 5181, a bust of a child near left shoulder in year 10.

¹¹ *RPC I* 5273, 5276, cornucopia in front of Nilus bust.

¹² *RPC I* 5348.

¹³ *RPC I* 5364.

¹⁴ *RPC I* 5375.

¹⁵ *RPC II* 2407, 2418, 2428.



1. Augustus, Egypt, Alexandria, AE, obol, year 40 (AD 10/11) (*ACSearch*, Fritz Rudolf Künker GmbH & Co. KG Auction 143, 6. October 2008, Lot 472).



2. Claudius, Egypt, Alexandria, AE, diobol, year 10 or 11 (AD 49/50 or 50/51). Glasgow, University of Glasgow, The Hunterian Museum, *SNG Glasgow* 3703 (*SNG org*, ID: SNGuk_1202_3703).



3. Nero, Egypt, Alexandria, billon tetradrachm, year 10 (AD 63/64) (*ACSearch*, Gorny and Mosch Giessener Münzhandlung Auction 152, 10 October 2006, Lot 1856).



4. Galba, Egypt, Alexandria, AE, hemidrachm, year 2 (AD 68/69). Glasgow, University of Glasgow, The Hunterian Museum, *SNG Glasgow* 3854 (*SNG org*, ID: SNGuk_1202_3854).



5. Otho, Egypt, Alexandria, AE, hemidrachm, year 1 (AD 69) (*CoinArchives*, Classical Numismatic Group Electronic Auction 329, 25 June 2014, Lot 318).



6. Vitellius, Egypt, Alexandria, AE, diobol, year 1 (AD 69). New York, American Numismatic Society 1944.100.53712 (Phot. A. Roche, courtesy of American Numismatic Society).



7. Vespasian, Egypt, Alexandria, AE, hemidrachm, year 1 (AD 69). London, British Museum, Department of Coins and Medals, *BMC Alex.* 269 (*British Museum*, Reg. No. 1888,0403.12, ©Trustess of the British Museum).



8. Vespasian, Egypt, Alexandria, AE, hemidrachm, year 2 (AD 69/70). London, British Museum, Department of Coins and Medals, *BMC Alex.* 270 (*British Museum*, Reg. No. 1864,1118.302, ©Trustess of the British Museum).



9. Vespasian, Egypt, Alexandria, AE, hemidrachm, year 3 (AD 70/71). Glasgow, University of Glasgow, The Hunterian Museum, *SNG Glasgow* 3880 (*SNG org*, ID: SNGuk_1202_3880).

Νεῖλου καὶ ἐμοῦ',¹⁶ i.e. *draw [inspiration] from me like you draw [water] from the Nile*. It is a wordplay based on double meaning of the verb ἀρύω, 'draw water' but also 'draw inspiration', so it sounds like identification of the emperor with the Nile.¹⁷

It is known that Vespasian founded a monumental statue of Nilus with child characters, symbolizing the level of flooding measured in cubits, in *Templum Pacis* in Rome (Plin., *Nat. Hist.* XXXVI, XI, 58).¹⁸ It took place several years after his Alexandrian issues showing the bust of Nilus had been produced. Vespasian never commemorated the type of reclining Nilus on his coinage, neither in Rome nor in Alexandria. It would not appear on Alexandrian coins until Domitian's year 6.¹⁹ A figure of reclining Nilus would be pictured on Roman imperial coins for the first time under Hadrian.²⁰

However, the first Roman imperial issue displaying an Egyptian god²¹ was realized under Vespasian, who in AD 71 commemorated a tetrastyle temple dedicated to Isis on the *Campus Martius* in Rome. A standing statue of the goddess was placed inside the sanctuary and a semi-circular pediment was decorated with an image of Isis Sothis sitting on the dog.²²

In Rome the interest in Egypt and fascination with the nilotic landscape increased in the times of Vespasian and continued during the Flavian period.²³ However the Nile had definitely different significance in Rome and Egypt, where for centuries the god of the river was a subject of ardent veneration, and annual inundations were specially celebrated.²⁴

The Romans, exactly as the Ptolemies before, had to comply with the pharaonic tradition. Each new Egyptian ruler was a divine incarnation in his own right.²⁵ As the one in charge of the proper functioning of the country, he was responsible for the organization of the distribution of the Nile water and harvest, whose abundance depended, above all, on the annual inundation. The Roman emperor, only occasionally visiting Egypt, was represented by the prefect, and it was him who was practically responsible for fulfilling the duties of the ruler. Since the final stages of Nero's reign (AD 66), the office of the Egyptian prefect belonged to Tiberius Julius Alexander, born in Alexandria.²⁶ It was him who managed the

¹⁶ Flav. Phil., *Life of Apoll.* 1912, provides a fairly non-literal translation: *You shall draw as liberally upon me as you do upon the Nile*; cf. Manolaraki 2013: 122–123; Bonneau 1964: 312.

¹⁷ Translation and comments, personal letter from T. Derda; draw water/draw inspiration, *LSJ* 1996: 250 (ἀρύω).

¹⁸ Cf. Henrichs 1968: 74; Laskowska-Kusztal 2015: 77–79; cf. Jentel 1992: 725, no. 67 and commentary.

¹⁹ *RPC* II 2523. Also in year 6, Domitian introduced the image of Nilus seated (*RPC* II 2522). Both types of figural representations are attested several times, in years 8, 10–13 (*RPC* II 2550–2552, 2575, 2611, 2673–2674, 2700). The bust of Nilus, with lotus, instead of cornucopia at the shoulder (*RPC* II 2474, 2477), as under Titus (*RPC* II 2466, 2470), was minted earlier, in year 2 only.

²⁰ *RIC* I¹ 308–314, 865–870.

²¹ Earlier, the bust of a deity with several attributes among which the headdress of Isis can be seen, was represented on Republican coins, *RRC* 409.1.

²² *BMCRE* II 780, p. 123+, p. 149*, AD 71–73; *RIC* II² 116–117 (= *RIC* I¹ 453), 204 (= *RIC* II¹ 537); Henrichs 1968: 79–80; Clerc 1978: 255–256; Bakhom 1998b: 76; 1998c: 179.

²³ Manolaraki 2013: 14, 22, 27, 122–130.

²⁴ Bonneau 1971b: 56–57.

²⁵ Clerc 1978: 267, 273–274; Bakhom 1998a: 7.

²⁶ Henrichs 1968: 73, 77–79; Montevicchi 1981: 169–170.

province under Galba, Otho and Vitellius, and it was him who in AD 69 heard the oath of allegiance to Vespasian taken by the legions stationed in Egypt.

As reported by Tacitus (*Hist.* II, 79), *The initiative in transferring the Empire to Vespasian was taken at Alexandria under the prompt direction of Tiberius Alexander, who on the 1st of July made the legions swear allegiance to him. That day was ever after celebrated as the first of his reign (...).*²⁷ It is also related by Suetonius (*Vesp.* VI, 3) that ‘on the Kalends of July’,²⁸ i.e., on 1 July 69, when Vespasian was in Judaea, in Egypt the first year of his reign commenced. According to the Egyptian calendar, that year ended on 28 August.

On 29 August the Egyptian New Year began with the season of the flooding, *akhet*. In fact, there was a discrepancy between the official beginning of the year and the beginning of the yearly Nile inundation. It was heralded around 19 July by the appearance of Sothis (Sirius), devoted to Isis, in the morning sky.²⁹ The life-giving waters first rose in the south of the country and then gradually the flooding moved toward the north until they overflowed far and wide in the area of the Delta.

Cassius Dio (LXVI 8, 1) reports that after Vespasian’s arrival in Alexandria there was an exceptionally strong and sudden flooding: *Following Vespasian’s entry into Alexandria the Nile overflowed, having in one day risen a palm higher than usual; such an occurrence, it was said, had taken place only once before.*³⁰

Neither Suetonius, nor Tacitus mentions such a phenomenon. Does that imply that Cassius Dio was mistaken? As regards the earlier flooding he seems credible. He supposedly meant the one in the times of Claudius reported by Pliny the Elder (*Nat. Hist.* V, X, 58), which reached 18 cubits, i.e. 27 feet. On the other hand, it might be intriguing that Pliny the Elder, describing the marks of the Nile level and recalling the extraordinary flooding under Claudius, remains silent on the subject of the unusual rise of waters under Vespasian.

It is known that Vespasian did not arrive in Egypt immediately after he had been declared emperor, even not in July 69. A few days later, acclaimed emperor also by soldiers in Judaea, he first travelled to Syria and stopped on his way in Caesarea.³¹ He only accessed Alexandria in autumn AD 69, after the battle of Bedriacum (near Cremona), which took place on 24 October, that is in year 2 of his reign according to the Egyptian calendar. It was still a season of *akhet*, but the Nile level should not be rising anymore.

Writing about Vespasian’s arrival in Alexandria, Suetonius (*Vesp.* VII, 1) reports that after leaving the temple of Serapis, where the new emperor wished (...) *to consult the auspices as to the duration of his power*, he received a letter with tidings of the defeat of Vitellius’ troops.³² Tacitus (*Hist.* III, 48) clearly reported that Vespasian had arrived in Egypt earlier

²⁷ English quotations of Tacitus, *Histories*, are taken from *Com. Works of Tacit. 1873*.

²⁸ English quotations of Suetonius, *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, are taken from Suet., *Liv. Twelve Caesars 1914*.

²⁹ Clerc 1978: 247, 253; France 2000: 45–46.

³⁰ English quotations of Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, are taken from Dio Cass., *Roman History 1925*; Derchain 1953: 263.

³¹ Hadas-Lebel 1993: 139.

³² Cf. Derchain 1953: 261.

but he entered Alexandria already aware that his position could not be shaken.³³ Most likely in order to show that he ruled under the protection of Serapis, Vespasian ensured that the letter reached him after he had been advised by the oracle, in front of the crowd. 'Emperor's miracles', reported by Tacitus (*Hist.* IV, 81) and Suetonius (*Vesp.* VII, 2), such as the healing of a blind man and a crippled one, were supposed to create an image of Vespasian as a supernatural character who, by Serapis' will, deserved to rule as an emperor. It is not certain when these events took place. Tacitus does not state that it was immediately after Vespasian's arrival and his visit in Serapeion: *In the month during which Vespasian was waiting at Alexandria for the periodical return of the summer gales and settled weather at sea, many wonders occurred (...)*.

The cases of miraculous healing were not ignored by Cassius Dio, who related them after the information about the flooding. Consequently, his report pictures these events as connected. This account often draws attention of scholars. Is Cassius Dio a credible author? Most scholars are free of such doubts, even though they do not agree with regard to the date of the exceptional Nile flooding. A. Henrichs openly questions the veracity of the report written by Cassius Dio related to the event.³⁴ Th. Schneider associates the date of the great flooding with the date when Vespasian was declared emperor, that is 1 July 69,³⁵ which was still before his arrival in Alexandria. It is not in accordance with the account written by Cassius Dio (LXVI 8, 1), who did not describe the precise extent of time which elapsed between Vespasian's arrival in the city and the flooding but stated decidedly that it took place after Vespasian's entrance to Alexandria. M. Malaise concludes on the basis of Cassius Dio's text that the exceptional flooding took place on the day of the emperor's appearance in Alexandria, in November 69.³⁶ The sudden rise of the Nile waters in late autumn 69 would have to be extraordinary indeed, nevertheless, taking into consideration the season of the year, it does not seem possible.

As a comparison, it is known from a letter written by emperor Julian on 20 September 362 that the level of the Nile in autumn that year reached 15 cubits.³⁷ According to the classification of flooding by Pliny the Elder (*Nat. Hist.* V, X, 58), such a level provides only *securitatem*, 'complete confidence'.³⁸

Without doubt, Vespasian entered Alexandria after 24 October 69.³⁹ He had already been informed about the victory of his troops in Italy and the death of Vitellius.⁴⁰ A. Henrichs believes that Vespasian reached the city by the end of January 70.⁴¹ H.-J. Thiessen is of the

³³ Cf. Milne 1924: 29; Derchain, Hubaux 1953: 49; Montevecchi 1981: 169.

³⁴ Henrichs 1968: 73.

³⁵ Schneider 1994: 308 (Vespasian).

³⁶ Malaise 1972: 407–408.

³⁷ Bonneau 1964: 95, n. 1; 1971a: 38, 44–48.

³⁸ English quotation of Pliny's *Naturalis Historia*, is taken from Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 1961; cf. Martin 1987: 191–192; Bonneau 1964: 337–340; 1971a: 38; Clauss 2006: 35.

³⁹ Most probably by mistake, Cordier (2007: 101–102) dates Vespasian's arrival in Alexandria and, at the same time, exceptional inundation to the end of January 68 AD.

⁴⁰ Levick 1999: 52; Hadas-Lebel 1993: 142.

⁴¹ Henrichs 1968: 53–54.

opinion that Vespasian arrived in Egypt at the end of AD 69, but he reached Alexandria as late as in January 70.⁴² According to G. Hölbl the Nile overflowed in July 70.⁴³ S. Bakhoun assumes that strong flooding began on 1 July 70.⁴⁴ Previously, the same date was proposed by D. Bonneau for Vespasian's arriving in Egypt. She does not provide the exact day for the Nile flooding.⁴⁵ She refers to Vespasian's coin, *BMC Alex.* 270 (year 2 of Vespasian's reign) and the text of Cassius Dio (LXV 9, 2) for AD 69 flooding, and a coin *Datt.* 395 (year 3) and the text of Cassius Dio (LXVI 8, 1) for the AD 70 flooding. The phenomenon is described as 'normale?' in AD 69 and 'abundante' in AD 70.⁴⁶ Cassius Dio wrote about flooding only in book LXVI 8, 1. In book LXV 9, 2, he recorded that Vespasian, being proclaimed emperor, had not only to raise money, but also to collect grain to deliver to Rome.⁴⁷ D. Bonneau attributes such action to Vitellius.⁴⁸

While referring to coins as evidence for the Nile flooding, D. Bonneau overlooks the fact that there was the issue of year 1 of Vespasian's reign, also depicting the bust of Nilus. Both specimens struck during year 1 (1 July – 28 August 69), and the ones from year 2 (29 August 69 – 28 August 70) could have been related to the AD 69 flooding, although coins issued in year 2 could have been related to AD 70 flooding as well. On the other hand, are the representations of Nilus bust on the coins of a given issue evidence for any particular flooding? If so, should not exceptional flooding be commemorated in an extraordinary manner? The images depicted on coins of years 1, 2 and 3 are similar. It is evident that details, including the cornucopia, are different in the three issues, but it is hard to identify all the elements of small sizes and decide if there are any distinguishing features characteristic for the particular years. Even more so, if Vespasian's coins are compared with other AD 69 emperors' mintage. It seems that the top of the cornucopia on coins issued under Vitellius is similarly decorated with a vegetal pattern(?).⁴⁹ Analysis of some published specimens and examination of the specimens in the collection of the British Museum performed by the author did not result in confirming the opinion held by R. Martini that on Vespasian's coins the cornucopia is surmounted by a head of a child.⁵⁰ No Genius figure is noted on specimens belonging to other collections.⁵¹

According to D. Bonneau, on the coins of Claudius issued in connection with abundant flooding, Nilus bust with cornucopia over his right shoulder is represented with an additional cornucopia on the opposite side, surmounted by a child, Ploutos, symbolizing 16 cubits.⁵²

⁴² Thiessen 1986.

⁴³ Hölbl 2000: 34.

⁴⁴ Bakhoun 1998c: 180.

⁴⁵ Bonneau 1964: 339, 311.

⁴⁶ Bonneau 1971a: 237; cf. 219.

⁴⁷ See also: Cass. Dio LXVI 8, 3; cf. Derchain 1953: 74; Henrichs 1968: 74; Montevecchi 1981: 169.

⁴⁸ Bonneau 1971a: 237.

⁴⁹ E.g. *SNG Paris* 711.

⁵⁰ *SNG Milano* 793, year 3; cf. *supra*, p. 92.

⁵¹ Including the American Numismatic Society collection, personal letter from A. Meadows.

⁵² Bonneau 1971a: 235; cf. 1964: 333–334; Pliny the Elder, *Nat. Hist.* V, X, 58, 16 cubits, i.e. 24 feet, means *delicias* ('delight').

The presence of a second cornucopia is uncertain, a definition of a child's bust is under discussion.⁵³ The design on some coins seems to suggest that a representation of a child's bust or a small reclining child's figure, not always well executed(?), was placed in front of Nilus bust (**Fig. 2**). Above all, it should be noted that the date of the issue, AD 49/50 (= year 10) is much later than the dating of the flooding (AD 45). S. Bakhoum duly recognizes this discrepancy and states that the representation of a child is not a symbol of a very good flooding.⁵⁴ There is no evidence for regular connection between the inundations and the representation of Nilus on coins either, even though in the case of subsequent issues (under Trajan) showing Nilus with Greek numeral ις (16) a correspondence with good flooding can be observed.⁵⁵

Was not Nilus bust on the coins rather an answer to the need for depiction of gods important for Egypt, a manifestation of the relation between the emperor and the Nile? Aware of the significance of the Nile for Egypt and also for Rome, as it was a result of the high fertility of the Egyptian soil caused by the annual flooding that enormous amounts of grain were sent to Rome, the mint of the province displayed Nilus bust and thus implied that the emperor epitomized his powers at that moment.⁵⁶ It could be suggested that when decisions were taken about the issues of coins showing Nilus under Vespasian, it was a sign of a deliberate policy of the Roman administration, regardless of the level of the flooding. To confirm Vespasian's position, coins of year 1 already displayed the image of Nilus bust. The concept was not new. It had been done before in the issues struck for Otho (emperor 15 January – 25 April 69) and Vitellius (emperor 19 April – 1 July 69). It might be said that the victorious Vespasian followed a way of his predecessors. Was Tiberius Julius Alexander, the prefect of Egypt of many years, undoubtedly well-informed about the traditions of the country, involved in this process of building the imperial authority?⁵⁷ Vespasian, who 'lacked prestige and a certain divinity' (Suet., *Vesp.* VII, 2), needed symbols of power and strengthening of his position. Just like the 'miraculous healings', the exceptional Nile flooding was a favorable circumstance for him. Should scholars have the doubts about Cassius Dio's credibility or assume that the exceptional Nile inundation really took place, even though it is possible that Cassius Dio, who obviously never witnessed this event, was consciously or unconsciously imprecise?

After his arrival in Egypt, Vespasian collected grain for Rome 'in as large quantities as possible' (Cass. Dio LXV 9, 2), which implies that the AD 69 flooding must have been at least good. It might be speculated that this flooding, good or even better than average, could have taken place at the time when Vespasian was proclaimed emperor, but association of this event with Vespasian's arrival in Alexandria and the 'miracles' which he performed there could have seemed more spectacular to Cassius Dio.

⁵³ Lichocka 2013: 441–442, n. 79.

⁵⁴ Bakhoum 1999: 94–96.

⁵⁵ Bakhoum 1998a: 8.

⁵⁶ Cf. Laskowska-Kusztal 2015: 76–77, 82–85; Bakhoum 1998a: 7.

⁵⁷ Henrichs 1968: 53; Hadas-Lebel 1993: 142–143.

It is also possible that the sudden rise of the water level happened in AD 70 and Cassius Dio correctly related succession of events, although withholding the precise information about the time which elapsed between Vespasian's arrival in the city and the flooding in question. The flooding could have taken place much later after emperor's arrival, in July 70 AD, though it would rather be before his leaving the place and not exactly after his arrival.⁵⁸ That could explain why neither Suetonius, nor Tacitus mentioned the flooding in their accounts of Vespasian's entry into Alexandria. The date of 1 July 70 AD for the sudden rise of the Nile water level seems to be the result of association with the date of Vespasian's acclamation as emperor.

It could be believed that the exceptional flooding described by Cassius Dio took place in July 70 AD and it began when the emperor had already been staying in the city for some time, perhaps preparing the ground for his entry into Rome. The time of departure from Egypt also depended on suitable conditions for such a journey. Furthermore, despite the fact that Cassius Dio writes about 'sudden flooding', it might have happened that at a certain moment the measurements taken on Elephantine⁵⁹ indicated that the July flooding of AD 70 would be high and it was decided that the phenomenon should be exploited, so that the population of the province would remember the connection between the presence of the emperor and the exceptional inundation. Vespasian's presence could be perceived as the arrival of the new Nilus who grants the annual rejuvenation of the forces of nature. It is also possible that it was a coincidence which Cassius Dio slightly dramatized in his report. A similar interpretation was put forth by M. Pfeiffer, who believes Cassius Dio connected the flooding with declaring Vespasian the emperor of 'all good things'.⁶⁰ In July or August 70 AD Vespasian sailed away to Rome,⁶¹ where he disembarked at the end of September or at the beginning of October. Before that, at the beginning of AD 70, he sent his son Titus, together with the prefect of Egypt, Tiberius Julius Alexander, to Judaea.⁶²

The representation of Nilus on Alexandrian coins struck under Vespasian does not provide a decisive argument to settle how to interpret the records written by Cassius Dio as evidence for the exceptional Nile flooding, nor, if it is assumed that the exceptional flooding transpired at all, if it happened in the summer of AD 69 or AD 70. E. Laskowska-Kusztal favours a version implying that Cassius Dio mistook the dates of two events, Vespasian's proclamation as emperor on 1 July 69, followed by an exceptional Nile flooding, and his arrival to Alexandria, some months later.⁶³

The range of representations from the first year of Vespasian's reign proves a very well considered compilation of the iconographic repertoire of the coins. Apart from the busts of Serapis, Isis and Nilus, also representations of Nike and Eirene, figures of Alexandria and Rome were shown, as well as the bust of Titus, who was granted the title

⁵⁸ Cf. Henrichs 1968: 54, n. 11.

⁵⁹ Martin 1987: 192; Bonneau 1993: 177–178.

⁶⁰ Pfeiffer 2010: 111–112.

⁶¹ Henrichs 1968: 54, n. 11; Montevicchi 1981: 169.

⁶² Hadas-Lebel 1993: 143, 154.

⁶³ Laskowska-Kusztal 2015: 77.

of Caesar.⁶⁴ It is an obvious attempt to connect the concept of victory and peace, an expression of respect for the Egyptian triad, a hope for creation of a dynasty and a resolution to gain favour with both Rome and Alexandria.

In the context of the evidence provided by Alexandrian coins, it was rather Serapis and Isis who were steadily and consistently venerated in the times of Vespasian. Almost throughout his reign, in years 1–7, the mint in Alexandria issued coins bearing a representation of Serapis bust,⁶⁵ in whose sanctuary the emperor received the oracle. At the same time, an image of Isis was regularly depicted on Vespasian's Alexandrian coins.⁶⁶ In year 8 of Vespasian's reign, there emerged a different representation; for the first time Zeus-Serapis was shown standing or sitting on the throne with Cerberus at his feet.⁶⁷ Both representations were also attested in year 9.⁶⁸ It is striking that from year 4 of Vespasian's reign (29 August 71 – 28 August 72 AD), Nilus bust was not minted any more.

Vespasian's situation was unusual. He entered Egypt as a Roman emperor, but he had not been granted the title of *Augustus* by the Roman Senate yet. Therefore, the obverses of the first coins, minted before his arrival in Alexandria, display his portrait accompanied with the legend ΑΥΤ ΤΙΤ ΦΛΑΥΙ ΟΥΕΣΠΙΑΣΙΑΝ ΚΑΙΣ. Vespasian received the title of *Augustus* on 21 December 69 AD, so its Greek equivalent, the title Σεβαστός appeared on Alexandrian coins from year 2. Likewise, from year 2 the obverse legend is always in the genitive form, ΑΥΤΟΚ ΚΑΙΣ ΣΕΒΑ ΟΥΕΣΠΙΑΣΙΑΝΟΥ.⁶⁹ Most likely, both the selection of the images, and the composition of the legend were rather made on the initiative of the local administration than by emperor's personal order.

The representation of Nilus bust on coins was a modest reflection of the ideology associated with the Nile. Its recognition by Romans, for the benefit of Roman domination, even if only officially, helped the Egyptians to preserve their tradition and identity under the Roman rule.

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⁶⁴ *RPC* II 2401–2406.

⁶⁵ *RPC* II 2408, 2419, 2429, 2433, 2437, 2441, 2444; cf. Cordier 2007: 102.

⁶⁶ *RPC* II 2409, 2420, 2430, 2434, 2438, 2442, 2445; cf. Malaise 1972: 406–413.

⁶⁷ *RPC* II 2449–2451.

⁶⁸ *RPC* II 2457–2458.

⁶⁹ *RPC* II, p. 322; cf. Isaac 1984: 143.

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