

egyptian chronicles

water from thousands of years ago
flows over the rocks with the same sound
as centuries ago, fertilizing the sand
I am moved every time I contemplate
the River Nile.

from the balcony
of the ninth floor of the Shepherd Hotel
I admire you
from the second floor
through a glass window having breakfast
every six months
I have seen you by day and by night
seated at the table
from my bed
in the open air
from the bridge crossing the Tahrir plaza
on foot
in a taxi
from the Chilean embassy in Zamalek at noon
traveling by bus to Cheops Kefren and Micerinos
toward the Beit el Wadi resort where we hold ALMA
from the shadows of Philoe Island
in the midst of palm trees where Ramses II sailed many times
from the flat roof of the cruiser in Edfu
from the route followed by the holy family when they fled from Bethlehem
taking a boat going south in Maadi
registered in Coptic icons
avoiding Herod's slaughter
Mary and Jesus in Joseph's arms
on his shoulders for the return
and the river of soft colors

from the Aswan dam above and below
half closing my eyes because of the glare
you extend as a bulky womb taking the form of a lake
at dusk
in the modern locks of Esna seated for an hour in victory
beside a dark-skinned man who with well-aimed lashes
makes the Arabian horses run through the main streets of the town

enigmatic river

for the last seven years present in my mind
seven thousand kilometers away
when the geography professor pronounced your name in fourth grade
I learned about you
from the wharfs of Luxor
to the Alexandria delta
as the largest navigable river in the world
to your shores of papyrus reeds cemeteries and masts
the warm basket of Moses

pyramids monasteries temples
protected for centuries hidden under sand storms
thanks to the wind
today we can decipher the hieroglyphics
on the cartridges
the book of the dead
the first writing
guiding the future by erroneous paths
you still guard ancient treasures

you inspired civilizations
they all wanted to own you
your floods spreading silt they crossed the continents
to annex you to their boundaries
from far-off lands they came to you with helmets and swords
shedding the blood of all nations
Chaldeans Assyrians Persians Phillip of Macedonia Alexander the Great
Roman emperors
fell captive to the enchantment of your peace
in modern times Napoleon Bonaparte broke the nose of the sphinx
and not a few writers
became famous relating the crimes loves and perfume of the locus flower

you are so far away and ancient as history
today as close as tomorrow
you pass through time using clocks without hands

pharaoh's persistence bowed to the extended rod that dyed you with blood
until the native magicians could not repeat its works
plagues of lice grasshoppers darkness
and
the death of the first born

let my people go that they might serve me

God brings his plans to completion

at your height
at the level of the waters
with emotions controlled
from a small boat
I can
caress you
with my hand
leaving a track in your tiny waves
which you immediately erase
but
not
from my memory.

Rev. Francisco Javier Rivera

Translation: Joan Meger