

Interview with Dr. Shawna Dolansky

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LaToya Leary: Hi Dr. Dolansky. Please introduce yourself?



Shawna Dolansky: I'm Shawna Dolansky. I am Professor of Hebrew Bible at the College of Humanities at Carleton University. I teach in the humanities program and also in the religion program that we run.

LaToya: Thank you. Can you tell me a bit about this project? Why this particular topic?

Dr. Dolansky: This is the topic that was given to us. I'm pretty sure I told the editorial staff that we were open to any topic that wanted and that Andrew was interested in Hebrew Bible and New Testament... that I'm more comfortable with Hebrew Bible, obviously, but we were open to any topic they were looking at. We could handle it. When they presented the Nile and I presented it to Andrew, he just immediately started reading everything that was available on the Nile and collecting information.

LaToya: What was your role in this project?

Dr. Dolansky: Andrew really took charge of the project from the beginning. He was very excited and he, sort of, set himself the task of researching everything that had been written on the Nile. Our first meeting about it was for me to say, "You need to read some Bible Odyssey articles and see how short they are and how little you can actually fit in there"... and to also think about the information that our intended audience is looking for. My role was, sort of, guiding him through the process of not really finding information because he did that on his own, but directing him as to what should be included and what should be left out. That was probably the hardest piece for him, who's used to writing term papers, you know, long, deep, well-researched papers. This is such a short piece. We really had to think about what was important to present here and to think about the Bible Odyssey article as a spring board for other students to be able to get a basic overview and then do their own research from there... so what was important to include in a basic overview and what was probably less important. That really was probably the longest part of our deliberations. He gathered so much information... every time the Nile was mentioned in the Bible, he had it listed out. He's also... he didn't mention this so I will. He had already done two years of Latin and the equivalent of two years of Hebrew and he's just starting Greek this year... this is all, sort of, on his own... so he was also interested in looking at it in different languages and different translations. So, I think my job was editing and reining in more than anything else and helping out with the final shape of the article. He definitely did the bulk of the work.

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LaToya: I think that's a really good thing because part of John's idea with this project is to make the student the first writer. It sounds like that happened which is great!

I have one more question for you. Were there any surprising discoveries or unexpected breakthroughs during this collaboration?

Dr. Dolansky: The zeal with which he threw himself into the task was a bit of a surprise. I had worked with Andrew before and I know him fairly well because we meet weekly for this Hebrew club that he participates in and I know his enthusiasm for learning, but even so I was pretty taken aback by how quickly and how much he was researching tight away. I just had to pull him back and say, "This is not a book. This is a very short article and we really need to think about what absolutely needs to be included in it." It was a pleasant surprise and it was great. It speaks well of his future as an academic. He mentioned the same thing, you know, that sort of surprise too was just how little of what he researched was going to make it into the final product.

LaToya: Yeah! Well, thank you. Thank you for talking to me again and for taking the time out. I hope you have a great day!

Nile

by Andrew Wilson; Shawna Dolansky

What is the Nile?

The Nile is a river in Egypt that is more than 4,100 miles (6,600 km) long. While the Nile also flows through other African countries, it is most heavily associated with Egypt. The river has been essential for Egypt's prosperity from antiquity to the present.

Although many Egyptian gods were associated with the Nile, Hapi is perhaps the most significant. Hapi was the god greeted by Egyptians every spring, since he symbolized the annual flooding of the Nile, which brought prosperity and fertility to the land. This cyclical flood was so predictable that Egypt came to be known as the only site in the region with a steady food supply. The Bible and other ancient documents report that when food was scarce in other areas, migrants came to Egypt for supplies (Gen 12:10, Gen 41:57). Egyptians believed that the predictability of the Nile's floods depended on upholding their larger religious principles and practices, which staved off the powers of chaos and maintained cosmic order.

The English word "Nile" derives from the river's Greek name, *Neilos*, and its Latin name, *Nilus*. In the Hebrew Bible, there is no proper noun or title for this river: the Nile is often simply referred to as "the river" (e.g., Gen 41:1) or "the river of Egypt" (e.g., Amos 8:8). This Hebrew word used for river here may derive from the generic Egyptian word for river. Following the Hebrew, the Septuagint does not use the specific word *Neilos*, which appears in other ancient Greek texts. However, modern English translations typically insert the word Nile where it is implied. The Nile is not mentioned in the New Testament.

