

Meanders Through Time Rivers in Art and History

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Leonardo da Vinci
1503-5



Note meandering river on left, aqueduct on right
“Landscape hunters” have identified plausible background in Tuscany.

Senatello and Marecchia rivers?

Olivia Nesci from the University of Urbino, Rosetta Borchia

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Leonardo da Vinci

Nesci and Borchia 2013



Upcoming book: Code P by Nesci and Borchia

Rosetta Borchia 2012 photo credit.

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Paul Cézanne 1883

Leonardo da Vinci



But there are a lot of aqueducts...

1882-5 Mont Sainte-Victoire and the Viaduct of the Arc River Valley (France)

Seems to me as if Leonardo employs a mix of reality and I imagination here, but I do like his stream.

Meanders Through Time – Rivers in Art and History

- A few thoughts on rivers
 - Two definitions
- The science of river forms and evolution
 - Why do rivers meander?
 - Fluvial Geomorphometry
- Rivers in art
- Rivers as art



What I would like to discuss today:

This talk to brush several topics that could each carry more than an hour of discussion.

Rivers in Art: What they works say about how we see rivers, and perhaps people from the past viewed rivers.

As you will see this work on art is not exhausted...

By way of Introduction...

Ganges Eno Thames Limpopo Mekong Severn Amazon Rur Yellow
Danube Po Ni Orange San Lorenzo Mississippi Tigris Cam Porcupine Pishon
Ural Sepik Congo Meander Ottawa Peace Tonto Chagres Lumber Ebro
Brisbane Ohio Padma Rio Grande Seine Euphrates Tar Krishna Uruguay
Yellowstone Jordan Toro Willamette Kwai Rio de la Platta White Deep Roe
Blackfoot Amur Cahulawassee Nile Ob Avon Columbia Trent Suwanee Round
Styx Magdalena Saint-Lawrence Rubicon Rogue Pigeon Yukon Darling
Onyx New Wear Liffey Okawa Tennessee Fly Lena Colorado Cape Fear
Niagara Potomac Yahara Wabash John Celedon Torne Volga Cowlitz
Hudson Murray Delaware Todd Hiwassee Noatak Platte Rhine American
Catawba Missouri Pee Dee Wailuku Don Bosnia Susquehanna Brithor
Yangtze Roanoke Chicago Snake Merrimack Watauga Loire Cuyahoga Stones

There are about 165 major rivers in the world.

Unlike the sea, they are ephemeral . Even the oldest among them, such as the New River, are relatively young geologically; <400 million years or ~10% of earths age.

Many mighty rivers as we know them today have only existed in a from we would recognized for a relatively short time. For example, the Nile as a major river in Africa has only existed for 1-2 million years (Remsen, 2013).

Great Rivers of Continents

Ganges Eno Thames Limpopo Mekong Severn **Amazon** Rur **Yellow**
Danube Po Ni Orange San Lorenzo **Mississippi** Tigris Cam Porcupine Pishon
Ural Sepik **Congo** Meander Ottawa Peace Tonto Chagres Lumber **Ebro**
Brisbane **Ohio** Padma Rio Grande Seine **Euphrates** Tar Krishna Uruguay
Yellowstone Jordan Toro Willamette Kwai Rio de la Platta White Deep Roe
Blackfoot **Amur** Cahulawasse **Nile** Ob Avon **Columbia** Trent Suwanee Round
Styx Magdalena **Saint-Lawrence** Rubicon Rogue Pigeon Yukon Darling
Onyx New Wear Liffey Okawa Tennessee Fly Lena Colorado Cape Fear
Niagara Potomac Yahara Wabash John Celedon Torne **Volga** Cowlitz
Hudson **Murray** Delaware Todd Hiwassee Noatak Platte **Rhine** American
Catawba **Missouri** Pee Dee Wailuku **Don** Bosnia **Susquehanna** Brithor
Yangtze Roanoke Chicago Snake Merrimack Watauga **Loire** Cuyahoga Stones

There are many ways to categorize rivers

Great Wild Rivers

Ganges Eno Thames **Limpopo** Mekong Severn Amazon Rur Yellow
Danube Po Ni **Orange** San Lorenzo Mississippi Tigris Cam **Porcupine** Pishon
Ural **Sepik** Congo Meander Ottawa **Peace** Tonto Chagres Lumber Ebro
Brisbane Ohio Padma Rio Grande Seine Euphrates Tar Krishna Uruguay
Yellowstone Jordan **Toro** Willamette Kwai Rio de la Platta **White** Deep Roe
Blackfoot Amur Cahulawassee Nile Ob Avon Columbia Trent Suwanee Round
Styx Magdalena Saint-Lawrence Rubicon **Rogue** Pigeon **Yukon** Darling
Onyx **New** Wear Liffey Okawa Tennessee **Fly** Lena **Colorado** Cape Fear
Niagara Potomac **Yahara** Wabash John Celedon Torne Volga **Cowlitz**
Hudson Murray Delaware Todd Hiwassee **Noatak** Platte Rhine American
Catawba Missouri Pee Dee **Wailuku** Don Bosnia Susquehanna Brithor
Yangtze Roanoke Chicago **Snake** Merrimack **Watauga** Loire Cuyahoga Stones

Rivers of Conflict

Ganges Eno Thames Limpopo **Mekong** Severn Amazon Rur Yellow
Danube Po Ni Orange San Lorenzo Mississippi **Tigris** Cam Porcupine Pishon
Ural Sepik **Congo** Meander Ottawa Peace Tonto Chagres **Lumber** Ebro
Brisbane Ohio Padma **Rio Grande** Seine Euphrates Tar Krishna Uruguay
Yellowstone Jordan Toro Willamette **Kwai** Rio de la Platta White Deep Roe
Blackfoot Amur **Cahulawassee** Nile Ob Avon Columbia **Trent** Suwanee Round
Styx Magdalena Saint-Lawrence **Rubicon** Rogue Pigeon Yukon Darling
Onyx New Wear Liffey Okawa Tennessee Fly Lena Colorado **Cape Fear**
Niagara **Potomac** Yahara Wabash John **Celedon** Torne Volga Cowlitz
Hudson Murray **Delaware** Todd Hiwassee Noatak **Platte** Rhine American
Catawba Missouri Pee Dee Wailuku Don **Bosnia** Susquehanna Brithor
Yangtze Roanoke Chicago Snake Merrimack Watauga Loire Cuyahoga **Stones**

Rivers are often borders between nations even though they are often in the middle of their valleys; in the middle of our activities, cities and resources.

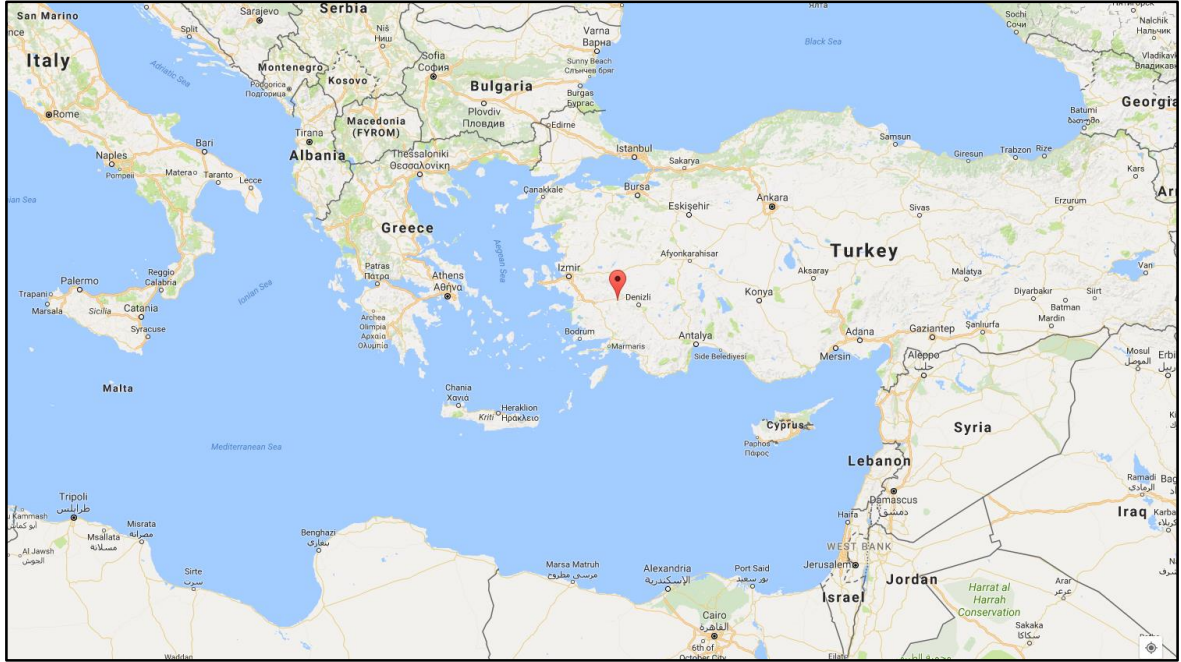
Other Iconic Rivers, among many...

Ganges Eno **Thames** Limpopo Mekong Severn Amazon Rur Yellow
Danube Po Ni Orange San Lorenzo Mississippi Tigris **Cam** Porcupine Pishon
Ural Sepik Congo Meander Ottawa Peace Tonto **Chagres** Lumber Ebro
Brisbane Ohio Padma Rio Grande **Seine** Euphrates Tar Krishna Uruguay
Yellowstone **Jordan** Toro Willamette Kwai Rio de la Platta White Deep Roe
Blackfoot Amur Cahulawassee Nile Ob **Avon** Columbia Trent **Suwanee** Round
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Niagara Potomac Yahara **Wabash** John Celedon Torne Volga Cowlitz
Hudson Murray Delaware Todd Hiwassee Noatak Platte Rhine American
Catawba Missouri Pee Dee Wailuku Don Bosnia Susquehanna Brithor
Yangtze Roanoke **Chicago** Snake **Merrimack** Watauga Loire **Cuyahoga** Stones

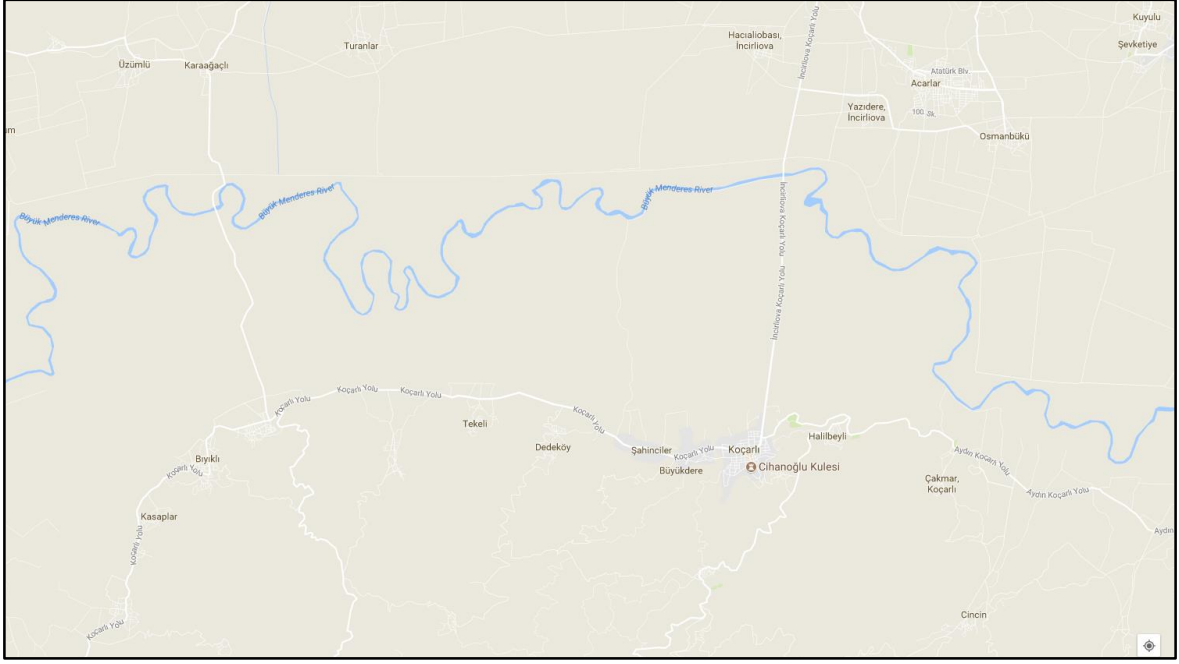
Meander, Maiandros, Menderes River

Ganges Eno Thames Limpopo Mekong Severn Amazon Rur Yellow
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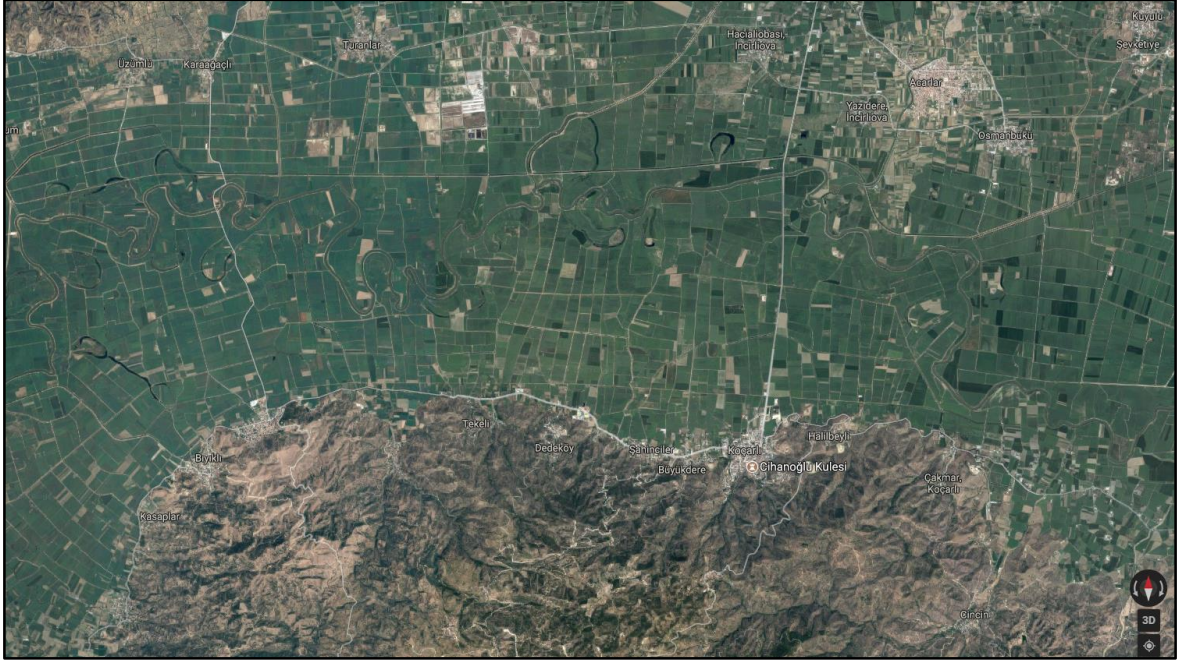
But the first river I would like to discuss in the Meander.



Now found in western Turkey, the Maeander is medium sized river draining to the Aegean Sea



Looking closer we can see highly sinuous course of the meander



It passes through a broad relatively flat plain constrained by steep hilly ground to the north and south of the river valley.



Portions of the Meander meander quite a bit

Definition #1: Meander

VERB

1. Follow a winding course.
'a river that meandered gently through a meadow'
2. Wander at random.
'kids meandered in and out'
3. Proceed aimlessly or with little purpose.
'a stylish offbeat thriller which occasionally meanders'

NOUN

1. A winding curve or bend of a river or road.
'the river flows in sweeping meanders'
2. An indirect or aimless journey.
'a leisurely meander round the twisting coastline road'
3. An ornamental pattern of winding or interlocking lines.

Origin:

Late 16th century (as a noun): from Latin maeander, from Greek Maiandros, the name of a river (see Menderes).

First use in English 1599. First use in Greek 760–710 BC (Iliad).

This brings me to my first definition. As you may already know, or have gathered by now, our modern word meander comes from the example of the Meander River.

<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/meander>

16th century English word from 8th century BC place name

The Iliad

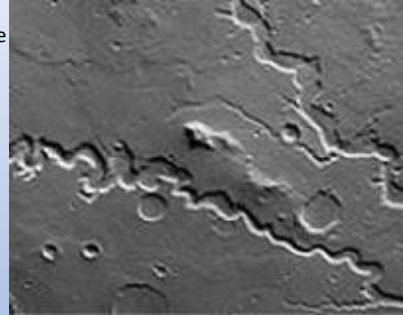
And Nastes again led the Carians, uncouth of speech, who held Miletus and the mountain of Phthires, dense with its leafage, and the streams of Maeander, and the steep crests of Mycale.

A natural understanding of meanders

A few examples:

Lewis and Clark
John Wesley Powel
William Shakespeare
Leonardo Da Vinci
Henry Thoreau
Aldo Leopold
Confucius
NASA
Greek Key

Eberswalde
Crater
Delta
(Mars)



Greek Key (Island of Rhodes)

It is not just a modern concept that rivers meander. The word meander may have been coined by the Greeks BC, and entered the English language in the 16th century but the concept of a winding river is both an ancient and an evolving science. I'll touch on a few examples of this context from examples as diverse as classic Greek to NASA's exploration of our solar system.

Bookend with discussion of Greek Key and meanders on other worlds:

Greek Key used in architectural freezes and on pottery from 900BC – Present.

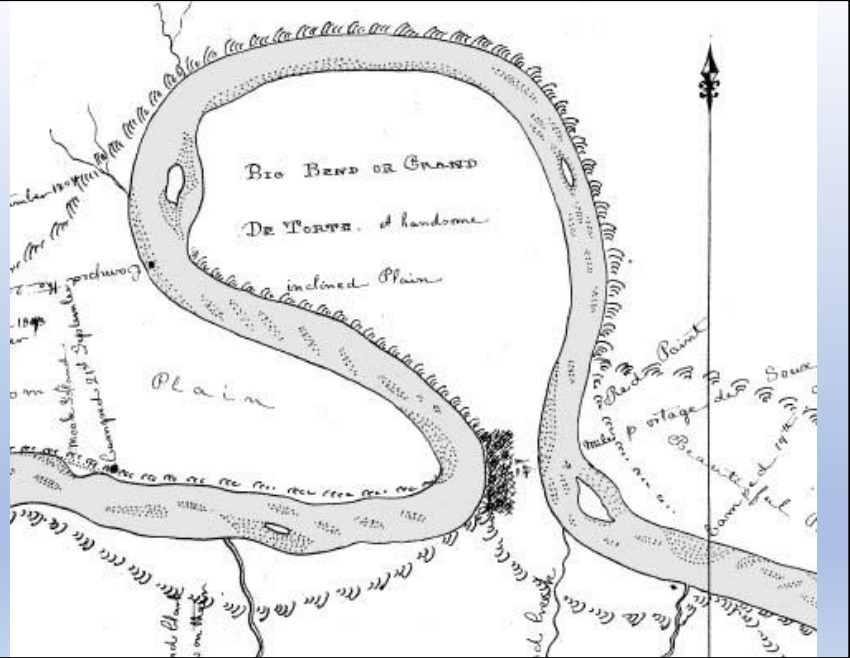
Confucius describing water as "twisting around ten thousand times but always going eastward" 5th century BC

NASA has seen meanders on at least three planetary bodies. Winding channels on Titan (A moon of Saturn)

Lewis and Clark
on the Missouri
1803-1806

“The river is only
1 1/4 mile across &
30 Miles around”

William Clark 1803



Note that this detail **covers three days travel** up the Missouri, almost 60 river miles.

Three camp sites are marked on the map

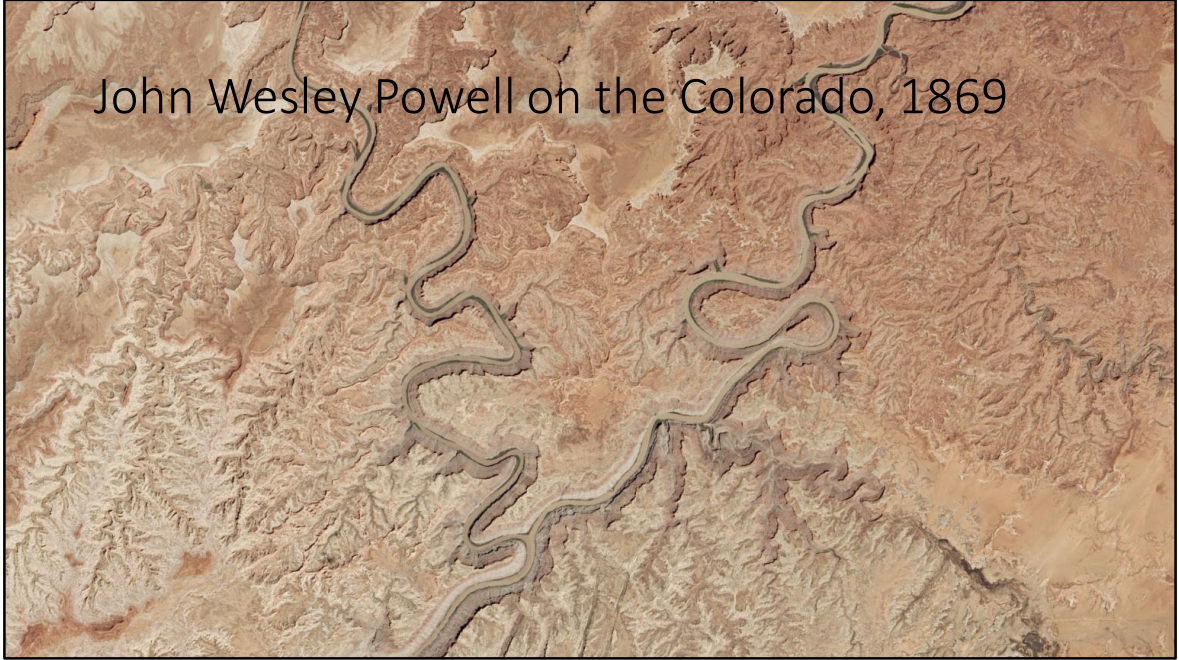
Clark notes that 1/25 mile would cover 30 river miles.

From a bluff Clark could see this extent.

A channel, again in a wide floodplain.

L & C took measurements of rivers that stand up to modern methods.

Their notes indicate a lot of sediment moving through the system.



Colorado and Green Rivers near Canyonlands National Park, Utah

Powell (first Secretary of Interior) descended Colorado with a party in open wooden boats (he made this journey with only one arm).

Described river pattern in detail and his survey proved the surprising fact that the river travels into higher and higher ground as it flows south (evidence of continental scale uplift)

Photo credit (Nasa)



Shakespeare's Henry IV part one, famous for its presentation of Prince Hal and Falstaff, contains a clear statement and **understanding of the nature of a river to meander**.

Introduce plot of the scene:

Henry the 4th is king but seems vulnerable

His son (to be Henry V) is taking nothing seriously – prefers taverns

Owen Glendower, Henry Percy (Hotspur), Edmund Mortimer plot against him (some had helped him become king)

Glendower, Hotspur, Mortimer and Worcester are meeting in front of a map to discuss splitting up England after their presumptive defeat of Henry Bolingbrook.

Shakespeare. 1597 (420ya)

Production photo from Garden Grover Theater 2017 (LA) King Henry IV Part 1
GLENOWER

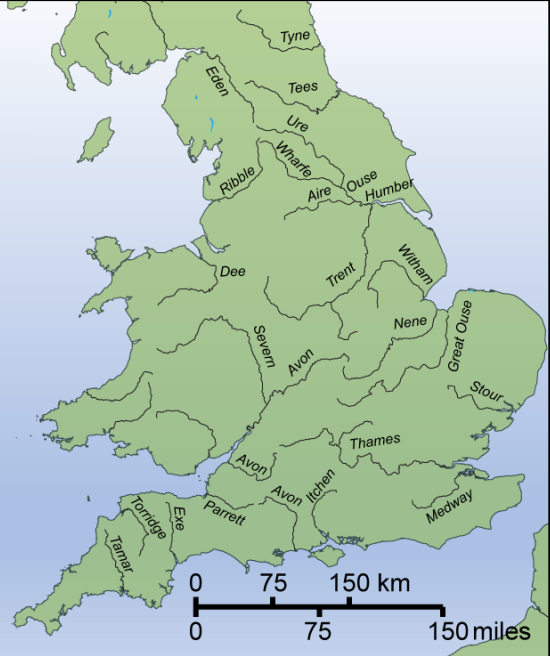
Come, **here's the map**: shall we divide our right
According to our threefold order ta'en?

GLENDOWER

Come, here's the map: shall we divide our right
According to our threefold order ta'en?

MORTIMER

The archdeacon hath divided it
Into three limits very equally:
England, from Trent and Severn hitherto,
By south and east is to my part assign'd:
All westward, Wales beyond the Severn shore,
And all the fertile land within that bound,
To Owen Glendower: and, dear coz, to you
The remnant northward, lying off from Trent.



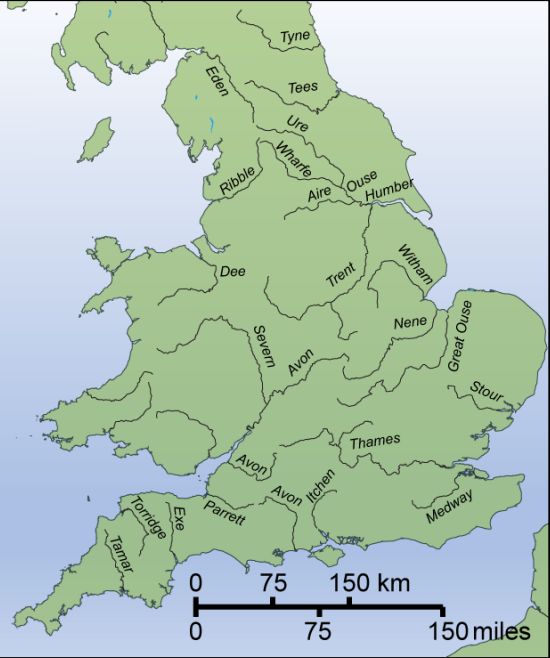
Outline the three parcels

HOTSPUR

Methinks my moiety, north from Burton here,
In quantity equals not one of yours:
See how this river comes me cranking in,
And cuts me from the best of all my land
A huge half-moon, a monstrous cantle out.
I'll have the current in this place damm'd up;
And here the smug and silver Trent shall run
In a new channel, fair and evenly;
It shall not wind with such a deep indent,
To rob me of so rich a bottom here.

GLENDOWER

Not wind? it shall, it must; you see it doth.



Just when all seems agreed upon...

Hotspur notes that the Trent River meanders far into his piece of the pie and suggests straightening it out to get more land. Perhaps in jest(?) but Glendower is having none of it and is ready to fight over it.

“Not wind? it shall, it must; you see it doth.”

Cantle (curve on a saddle)



The River Trent these days, likely a smaller meander than indicated by Shakespeare.

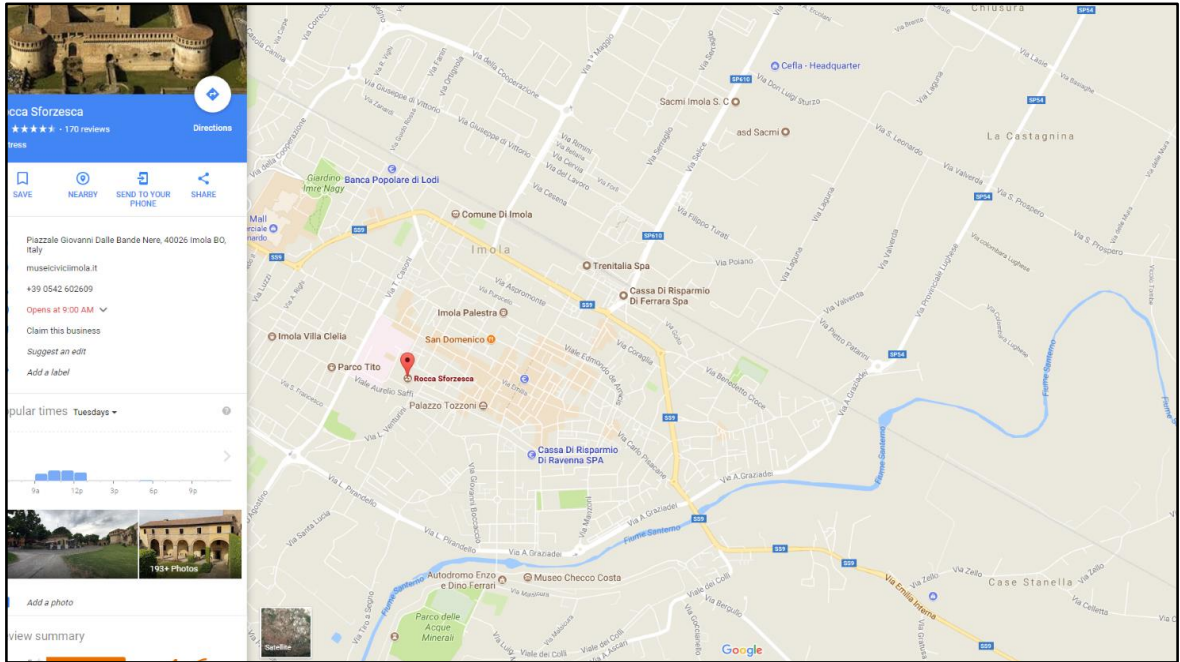
But it does seem as if both Shakespeare and his audience may have known that the Trent river meandered and changes course.

Trent River famous for changing course over history. Many old channel forms present in modern landscape.



Another example, this time from Italy near Bologna

Plan of Imola 1502, by Leonardo da Vinci. (near Bologna) Flume Santero



Imola today

Fortress founded in 13th century

Near Bologna

Meander pattern seems to be further east these days, but roads and river clearly those mapped by Leonardo.



Not only was Leonardo mapping the streets, but the river itself in detail
He seems to have drawn current and sediments.

Which brings me to ... Rivers...

Definition #2: River

NOUN

- 1 A large natural stream of water flowing in a channel to the sea, a lake, or another river.
- 1.1 A large quantity of a flowing substance.

Origin:

Middle English: from Anglo-Norman French, based on Latin riparius, from ripa 'bank of a river'.

<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/river>

We all know what a river is, and this definition seems to encompass general views of what a river is.

It is true that the second definition –Lava to glacial ice kind of is a broad range but seems to meet our experience. But the words origin from “bank of a river” (riparian today) seems to conflict a bit with the concept of flowing...

[This is a hint that the definition is full of inconsistencies and holes]

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- 1 A large natural stream of water flowing in a channel to the sea, a lake, or another river.
- 1.1 A large quantity of a flowing substance.

Origin:

Middle English: from Anglo-Norman French, based on Latin riparius, from ripa 'bank of a river'.

But what is a river?

It begins at a source and flows down to its mouth, it runs

Yet rivers do not leave the hills

Rivers have banks and channels, pools and riffles

Yet a river may leave its banks

Or, once gone, leaves only a riverbed

"On those stepping into rivers staying the same other and other waters flow" Heraclitus (c 536-475 BC)
or, popularly, "One cannot step into the same river twice."

What is a river? Water? A channel? A flow? "I knows it when I sees it"?

Or, more elegantly:

At what point in its course does the Mississippi become what the Mississippi means? —
(T.S. Eliot, Introduction to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*)

Heraclitus: This is generally taken to refer to the seeming contradiction between our calling a river "the same", while knowing that the material constituents of a river, the "waters", have completely changed.

Not just a flux, not just a channel through a valley

Definition #2: River

- 1 A large natural stream of water flowing in a channel to the sea, a lake, or another river.

Can we see any other cracks in this definition? **Every word** has a weakness:

“Large” – okay – not a stream, no clear distinction between a river and a stream

Could not you define a stream as “A small natural river of water...”

Large stream is a circular argument.

“Natural”? In most cases, sure. (Whitewater Center, LA River, Panama Canal = Chagres)

“Stream”? In not a stream small? I thought this was a river... Flux a better word? Flow?

“Flow of water flowing”? Not getting to far here.

“Water” – Lava, ice, air of the jet stream (Not stream again! The jet stream is huge)

“Channel? Must it be in its channel? What about a river in flood?

“Bypass reach” is what engineers call a river than misses the turbines.

To the sea etc? Not always – The Colorado River last reached the sea in 1998.

Many rivers end on a plain.

Definition #2: River

NOUN

- 1 A large natural stream of water flowing in a channel to the sea, a lake, or another river.

Legal: A natural stream of water, of greater volume than a **creek or rivulet**, flowing in a **more or less** permanent bed or channel, between defined **banks or walls**, with a current which may either be continuous **in one direction or affected by the ebb** and flow of the tide. (Black's Law Dictionary)

Mainstream media: A river is a large, natural stream of flowing water (National Geographic)

Internet: A natural flowing watercourse, usually freshwater, flowing towards an ocean, sea, lake or another river (Wikipedia)

Educational: A natural stream of freshwater that has a current and moves towards another body of water (MonkeySee)

Scientific: Water flowing on the Earth's surface (USGS)

Poetic: The river is a strong brown god (T.S. Eliot)

A dynamic channel-forming flow of water and sediment descending a landscape.

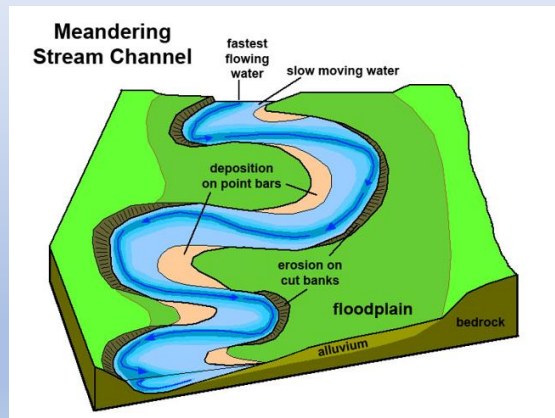
There are other definitions.

Legal definition has a lot of loopholes...

My definition is also assailable but I'm going with it for now.

(Because it helps generally define the environment I encounter most often)

Why do rivers meander anyway?

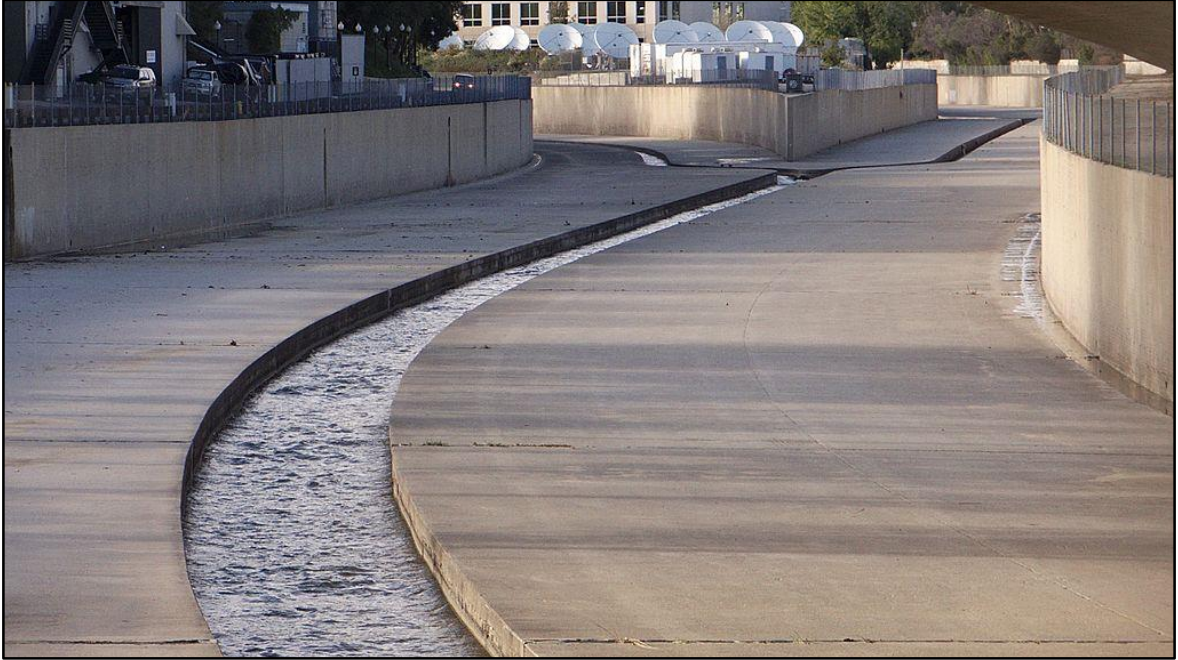


Most efficient way to get water downstream is a straight line.
But what is most effective way to get water and sediment downstream?

Santa Cruz example San Lorenzo River (Overly large channel build to prevent flooding) It moved water straight to the ocean from the Santa Cruz Mountains but moved it too slowly to carry much sediment. Sediment filled the channel until flooding again threatened)

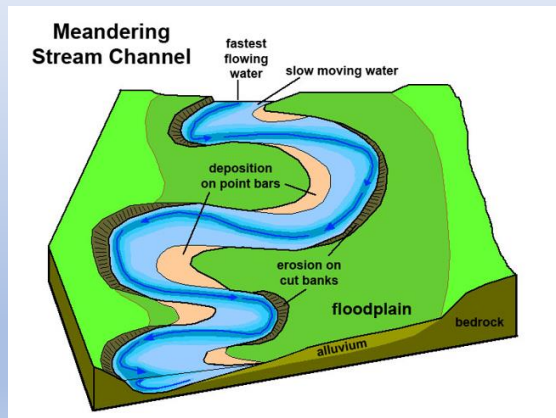
“Any river is really the summation of the whole valley. To think of it as nothing but water is to ignore the greater part”. — (Hal Borland, This Hill, This Valley)

Discuss simple processes that result in an efficient meandering channel that moves water and sediment.



LA River with low flow channel (one possible solution to San Lorenzo River issue, sediment shifted by low flow channel)

Why do rivers meander anyway?



Variation in soils, bedrock form and debris (trees) of course can and do change the direction of rivers.

Continual process of erosion and deposition

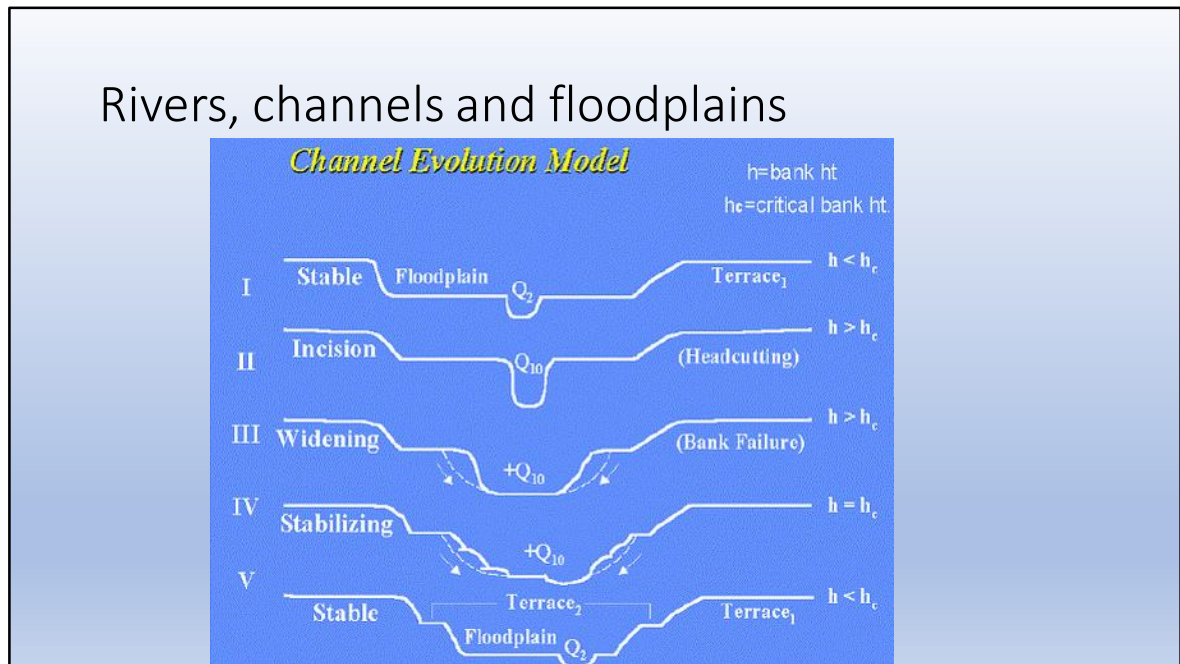
"Does the least work in turning and hence most probable form "Luna Leopold"

Adjustment process towards Uniform Power.

Down valley migration of meander bends.

And, over geologic time, downcutting and terrace formation.

Rivers, channels and floodplains

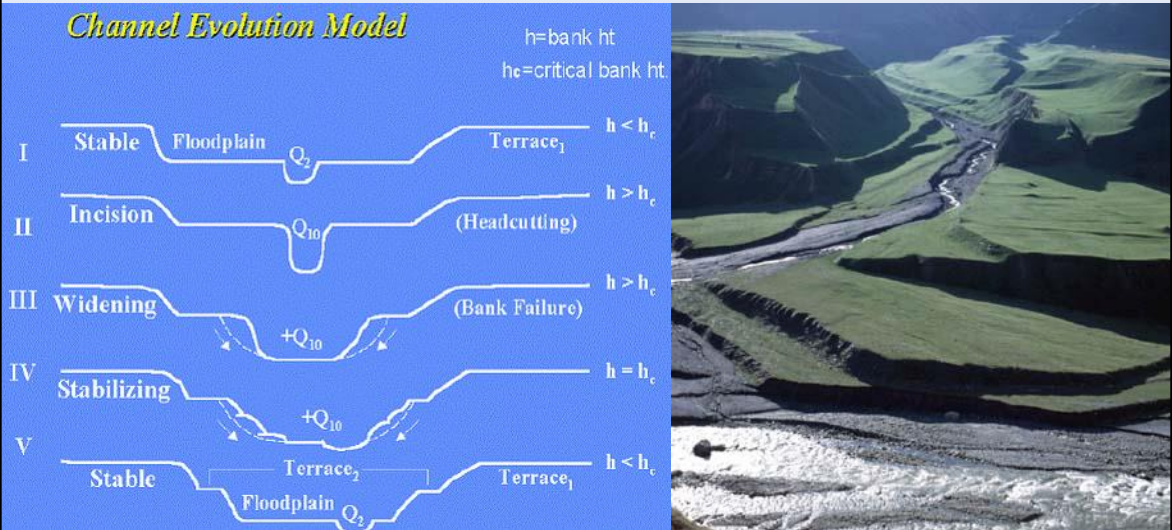


Pseudo-stability of a channel in a alluvial floodplain.

Stable dimension for generations. Terrace formation over geologic time.

Rivers, channels and floodplains

Channel Evolution Model



Pseudo-stability of a channel in an alluvial floodplain. Terraces formed over periods of climatic change.

Why do rivers meander anyway?



Ansel Adams

Point bars, terraces, floodplain and valley **built by the river.**

Snake River approaching the Tetons

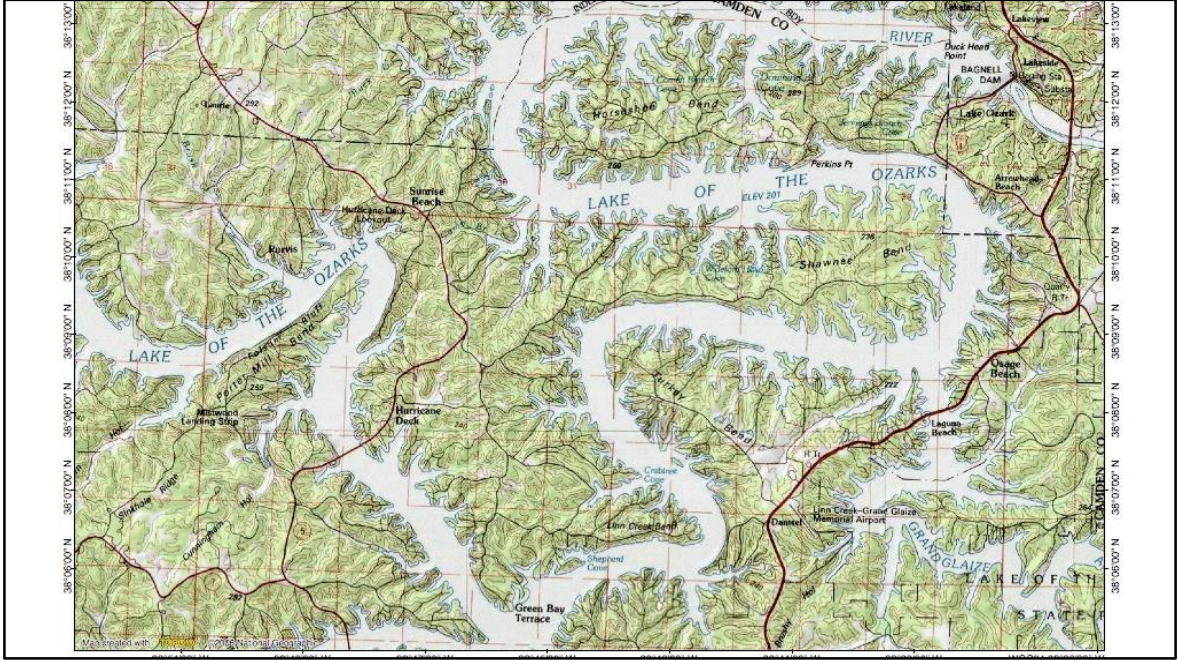


Osage River - Ozarks of Kansas and Missouri

In classic history (no longer taught?) Egypt was “the gift of the Nile”, according to Herodotus (485-425BC).

Often taken to mean that the fertile land was the gift from spring floods. But he meant more:

What Herodotus means is that it is the deposit and hence the creation of the river and that it was once march or sea.



Osage is no longer a meandering river but a lake and tiny delta.

Rivers in Art

The Flight into Egypt



So, what can we discover about how other people have and do think of rivers?
Can we find out what rivers of the past we like?

Panel from The Flight into Egypt, Giovanni di Paolo, 1436

Note river in far background...

This print, from my grandmother's kitchen wall, has always intrigued me.



Quick aside: I need to point out my western bias (from experience) but this talk could certainly be based upon many cultural artforms.

[*Krishna embraces Gopis*](#), Gîtâ-Govinda-manuscript, 1760–1765.



Some detail in the current and banks.

Mill and other structures perhaps not from Middle East and scale is a real issue...

Any realism in the river? Is there a pool on the meander bend behind the hill?



The Flight into Egypt Vittore Carpaccio 1515
A popular subject, often with rivers



Perhaps not to Egypt yet...
Landscape with the Flight into Egypt is an 1563



Jan Griffier-the-Elder-Two-Panoramic-River-Lands 1652

One common features I see in early landscapes is a lot of controlling structure being employed to determine river's shapes; **Meanders banging off hard points of land**. Many examples of such landscapes where you get the sense that the shape of the mountains and rocks determine the shape of the river (rather than vice-versa).

But to be fair, here, in the distance there is one meander bend not required by rock.



Jan Griffier-the-Elder-Two-Panoramic-River-Lands #2 1652

Again, at least in the foreground river shape controlled by hills and ridges.



Jan Peeter van Breenael River Landscape with Anglers. 1704

Again, less meandering than being pushed around by hard landscape and small ridges.



Mountainous Landscape with River Valley and Castles, Jan Meerhout, 1661



River Valley, Hercules Segers, c. 1626 - c. 1630

This river in the background really becoming the river's valley as it sets its own shape once past one ridge and one outcrop.



Asher Brown Durand 1853



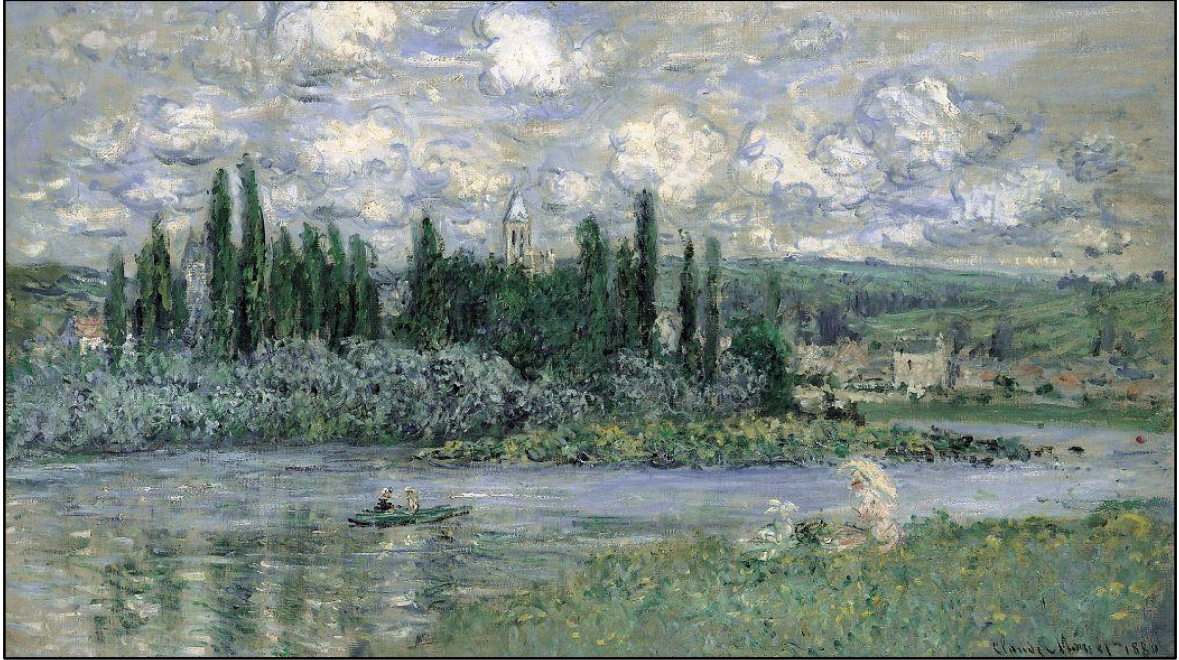
Diego Rivera Avila Morning The Ambles Valley 1908 (River Adaja)



Thomas Cole The Oxbow 1836
This river seems to be in charge of its valley
Hudson School



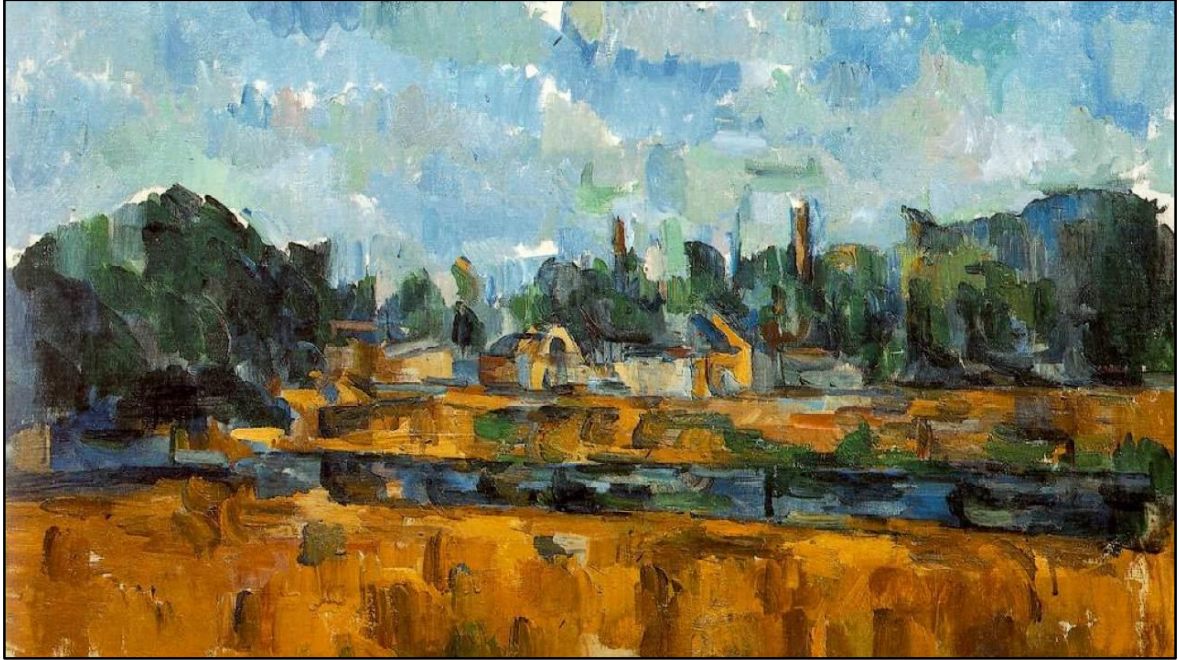
Marla Brenner Breaking Clouds on the Yahara River



Claude_Monet_Vétheuil_sur_Seine_1880



Red Vineyards near Arles Vincent van Gogh 1888



Riverbanks Paul Cezanne 1905

Just pointing out yet another wonderful river scene that may not inform this discussion much...



The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere

Deeply cut meander bends an interesting feature in this fantastic landscape

Artist: Grant Wood (American, Anamosa, Iowa 1892–1942 Iowa City, Iowa)

Date: 1931



Claude Lorrain Landscape with dancing figures. 1650s Seems like a plausible landscape...



Claude Lorrain *Worship of the Golden Calf* (1653). One of at least three scenes with same river



Pastoral Landscape
Same river shapes in very different landscapes



Plate depicting the story of Perseus and Andromeda from the Isabella d'Este service.
About 1524
Museum of Fine Art - Boston

So much subject in the way of the view!



Difficulty that subject is rarely the river
The Old Man and Death
Joseph Wright of Derby
1774



Winslow Homer
Has his interest in the ocean crept in here?



Freighter Inviken, Richard De Wolfe 2011
Modern subject dominating the perspective



The Hay Wain is a painting by John Constable, finished in 1821
Scenes showing uses of the river can be helpful



Gathering places



Les_jeux_d'enfants_Pieter_Brueghel_l'Ancien 1560

Four swimmers in a meandering river below a mill.

Reflections make it difficult to see, but the river course is quite sinuous.

Rivers as Art

Water is the driver of Nature

Leonardo da Vinci

America is a great story and there is a river on every page of it

Charles Kuralt

Eventually, all things merge into one, and a river runs through it

Norman Maclean

There are many, many river quotes. Art is more than paintings but many of my examples are in this form. But there are plays, songs, books poems photographs and other forms of art that will tell you about rivers.

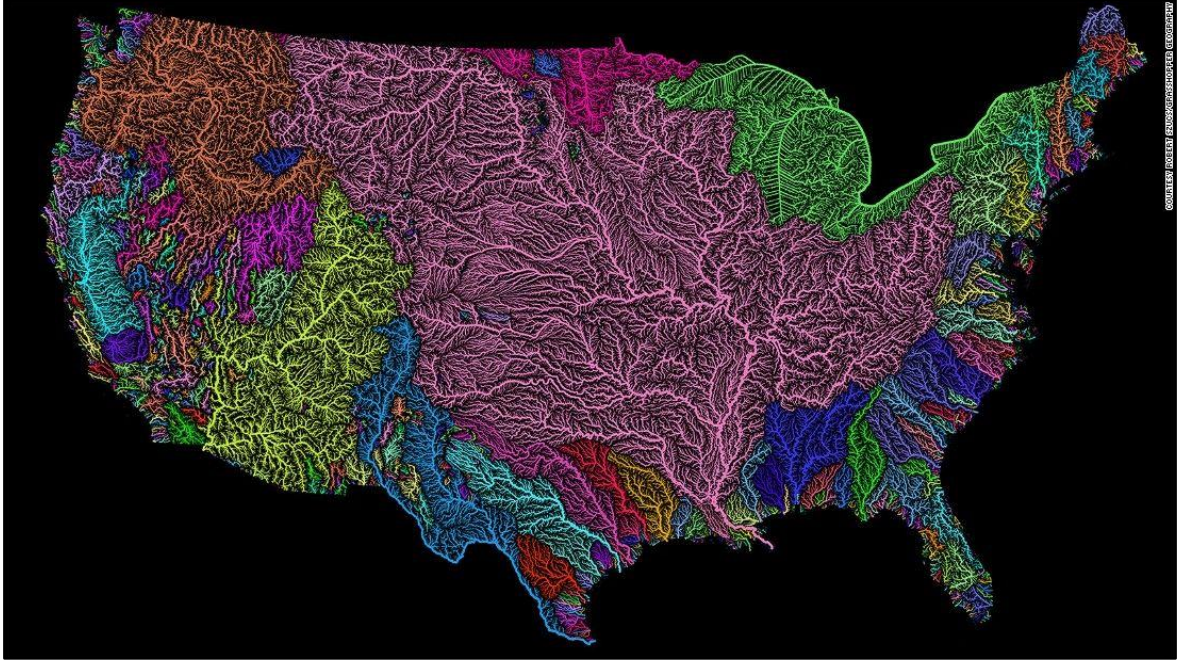


The meander motif took its name from the river Meander. The motif is also known as Greek key.



National Geographic

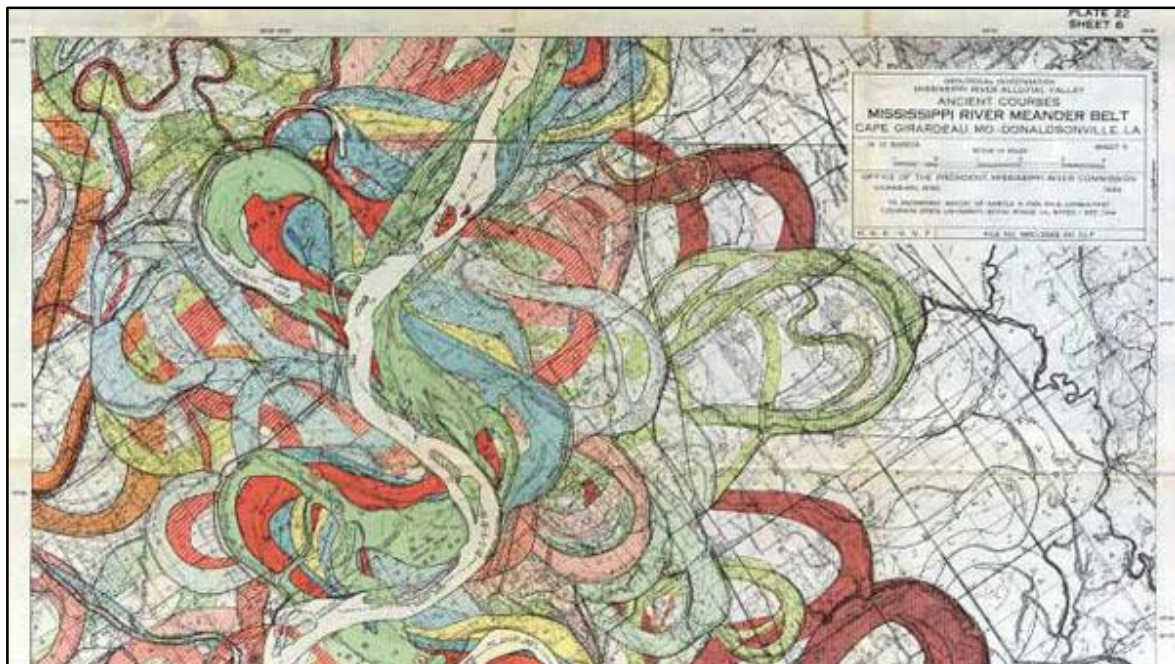
Clearly rivers are calendar fodder



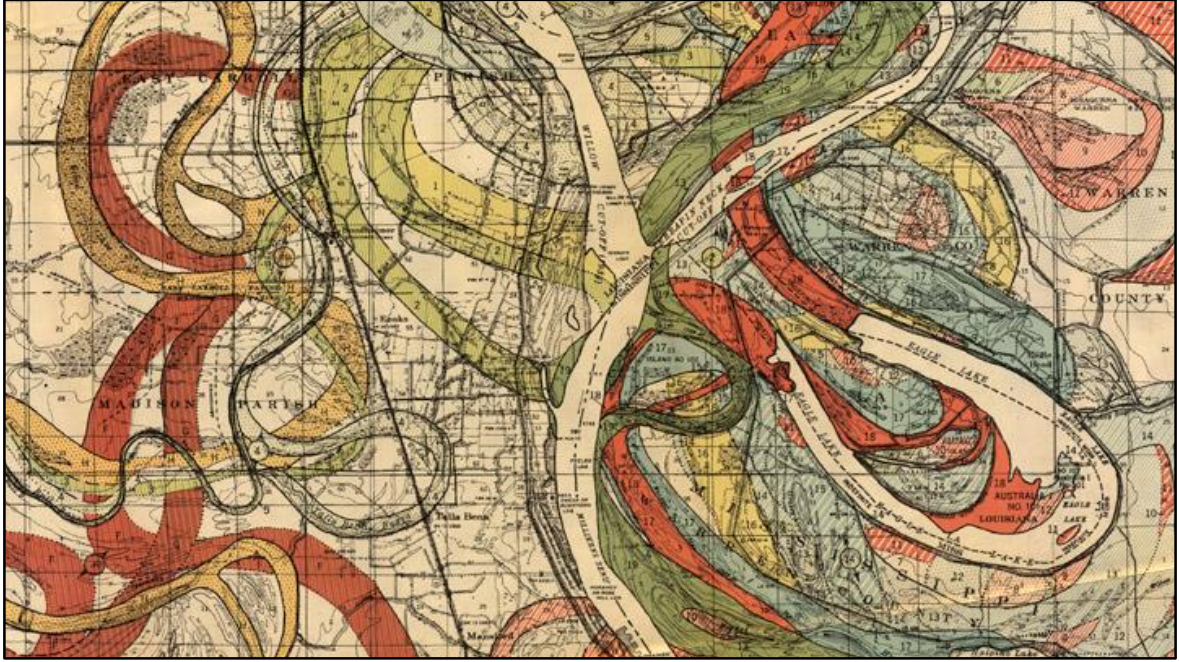
GIS artist Robert Szucs

Point out great lakes

Not extent of Mississippi is clipped here – extends into Canada (and a bit further to Chicago via reversal of Chicago River)



Soils map of lower Mississippi



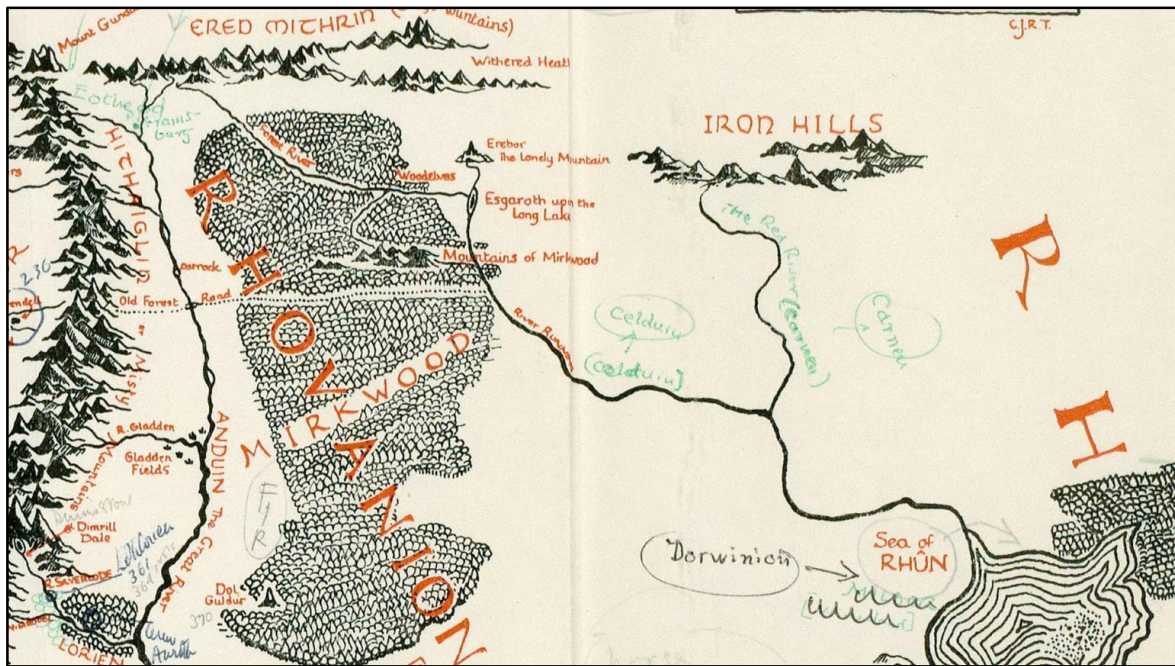
THE ALLUVIAL VALLEY
OF THE LOWER
MISSISSIPPI RIVER
Harold Fisk, 1944



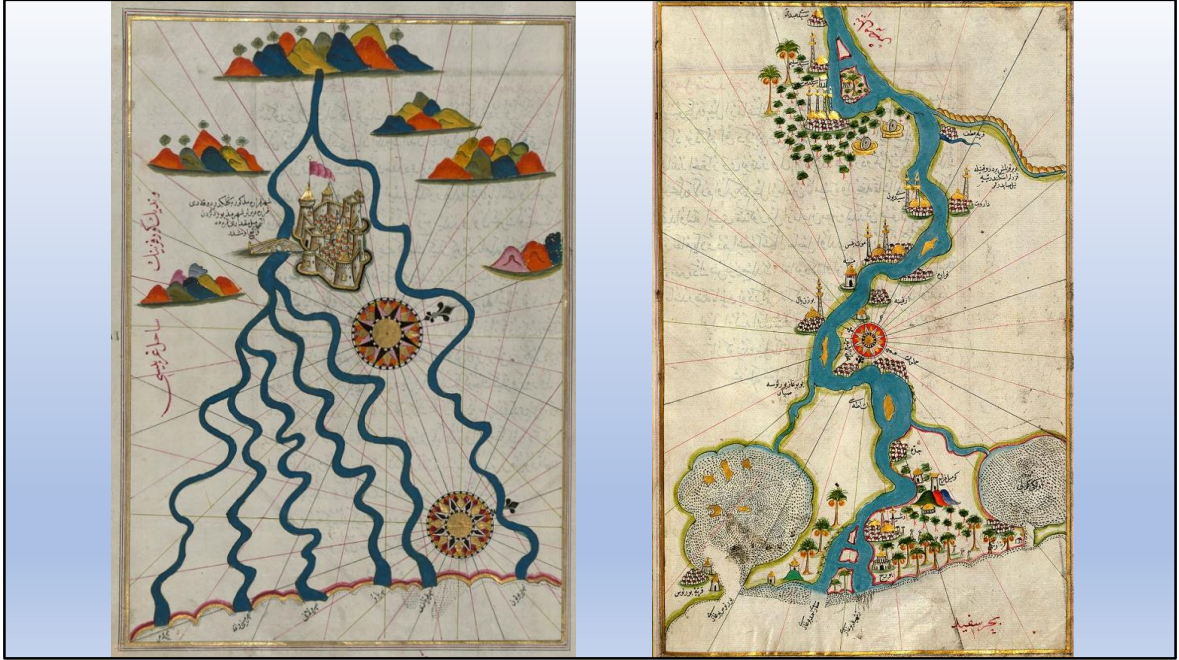
Compare to above and note old State lines



Disney movie Intro

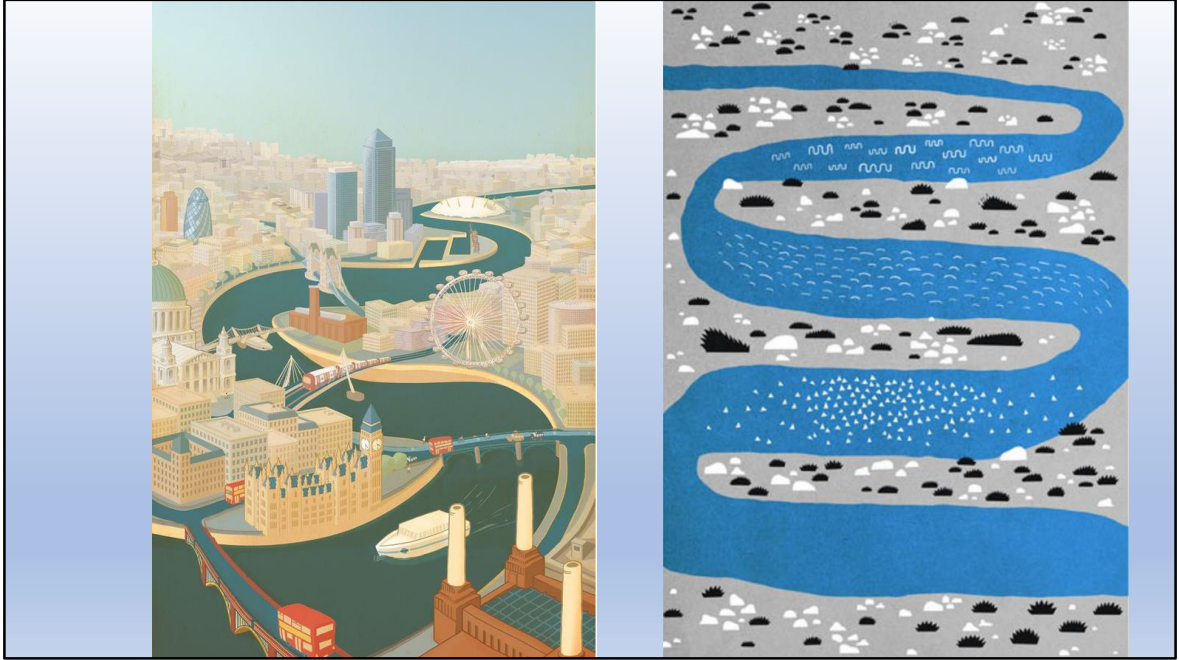


J. R. R. Tolkien The Hobbit



City of Ferrara with the Six Rivers Flowing into the Gulf of Venice

Illuminated Manuscript, Map of the Nile River with various oases on each as far as Sīdī Ma'rūf from Book on Navigation, Walters Art Museum Ms. W.658, fol.310b
Originally composed in 932 AH / 1525 CE and dedicated to Sultan Süleyman I ("The Magnificent"), this great work by Piri Reis (d. 962 AH / 1555 CE)

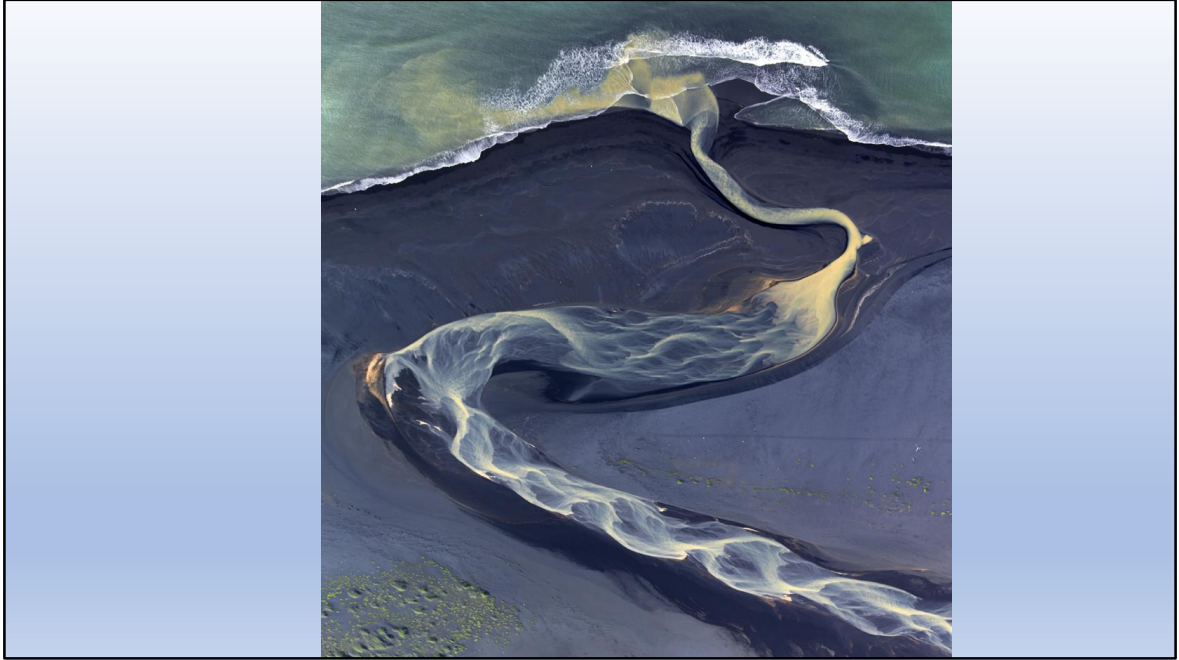


Sam Bevington
Tyler Besty



Abby Phillips Metzger

Willamette River silt deposits and old channels



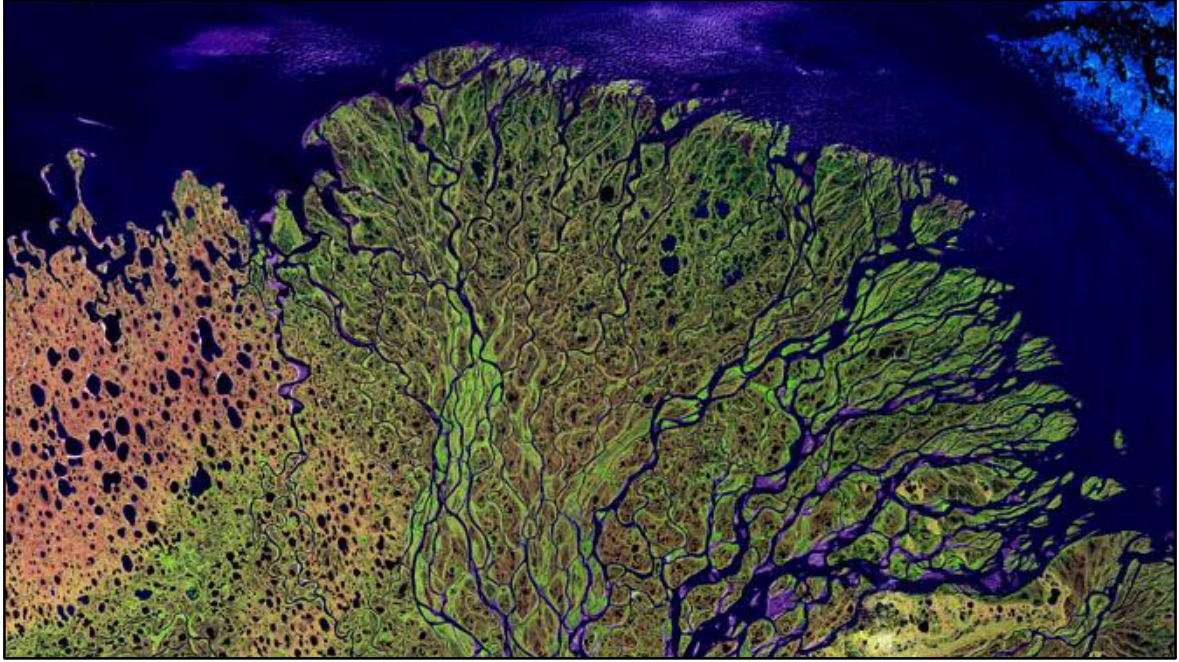
Photographs of Icelandic Rivers from above, captured by Russian photographer Andre Ermolaev.



Narcity Media
Lava



China



Lena – Landsat 2000 false color image
Also in the Nature Research Center visible from 1-3 floor stairs
(Herodotus)



Artic river



The banks of the great grey-green, greasy Limpopo River, all set about with fever-trees
Rudyard Kipling

Further reading

- A River Runs Through It and Other Stories by Norman Maclean
- Trout fishing in America by Richard Brautigan
- A View of the River by Luna Leopold
- The Meaning of Rivers by T. S. McMillin
- Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain
- Hidden Treasure – Traffic
- Elk River Falls by Billy Collins



Source: <http://www.archives.gov>

Elk River Falls

is where the Elk River falls
from a rocky and considerable height,
turning pale with trepidation at the lip
(it seemed from where I stood below)
before it is unbuckled from itself
and plummets, shredded, through the air
into the shadows of a frigid pool,
so calm around the edges, a place
for water to recover from the shock
of falling apart and coming back together
before it picks up its song again,
goes sliding around the massive rocks
and past some islands overgrown with weeds
then flattens out and slips around a bend
and continues on its winding course,
according to this camper's guide,
then joins the Clearwater at its northern fork,
which must in time find the sea
where this and every other stream
mistakes the monster for itself,
sings its name one final time
then feels the sudden sting of salt.

Billy Collins



Nomad Harper Lee