He states that the mountains, by their cold temperature, condense the atmospheric moisture and receive a vast quantity of water, so that they may be compared to an enormous suspended sponge. He shows by geographical illustrations, drawn from Asia and the Mediterranean basin, that the largest rivers descend from the loftiest ground, where the water accumulates in numberless channels. He admits the possible existence of underground lakes from which rivers may issue, and alludes to the disappearance of some streams into subterranean channels.

Aristotle, moreover, reflected profoundly on the geological operations of rivers. Recognising the truth of the observation that the plain of Egypt had been built up by the deposits of the Nile, he also noted that along the shores of some parts of the Black Sea the river alluvia had increased so much in sixty years that the vessels in use there had to be much smaller than formerly, and that in this case, as in so many others, the silting up might go on until the marsh-land became dry ground. Similar changes were then in progress on the Bosphorus. The contemplation of these and other vicissitudes led the philosopher to some striking generalisations as to the past and the future of the surface of our globe, to which reference will be made on a later page.

To Strabo we are indebted for some sagacious observations on the hydrography of the Mediterranean basin. He points out that, like the Nile, the other rivers that enter this sea form extensive alluvial deposits at their mouths, as well as inland over the low grounds, and he specially instances the plains of