



**Cairo University**  
**Faculty of Science**

**ENVIRONMENTAL ISOTOPIC AND GEOCHEMICAL  
INVESTIGATION OF THE GROUNDWATER  
AQUIFER OF WADI EL NATRUN AREA, EGYPT**

**A THESIS**

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## Dedication

*To my late mother who supported me  
wholeheartedly.....*

*To all of the staff, friends and colleagues  
who helped me.....*

*To my family, for their ever-present  
support of my personal endeavours  
towards learning.....*

*To all of them I dedicate this work...*

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## ABSTRACT

The current study deals with the geochemical investigation of the groundwater encountered in Wadi El Natrun area, northeastern corner of the Western Desert. It aims to identify the recharge sources of the Pliocene aquifer and to evaluate its water quality for different uses, as well as to evaluate the temporal changes in the groundwater situation in Wadi El Natrun area due to long term exploitation. In order to achieve the goals of the study, hydrogeochemical and isotope analyses as well as age dating were carried out.

The surface sediments in the study area are represented by Late Tertiary and Quaternary deposits. The study area comprises two fold systems: the Syrian arc and the Clysmic fold systems. Three main fault systems of normal type affect the West Delta area. These are the Clysmic, Aqaba and Tethys fault systems.

The groundwater in Wadi El Natrun area belongs mainly to the Pliocene aquifer. The water flows from the Pleistocene as well as the Miocene aquifer to the Pliocene aquifer. The latter is also recharged from the irrigation water and from El Nubaria and El Nasr canals. The groundwater salinity of the Pliocene aquifer varies from fresh in the eastern part of the study area to brackish water due west and south. Fresh water could be attributed to the influence of the fresh water of the Pleistocene aquifer due east, the recharge from the water of Miocene aquifer in the southeast of the depression and the continental origin of most of the water-bearing formations. The dominance of brackish water in the southern and western parts of the depression could be due to the effect of the presence of a great thickness of clay sediments of lagoonal and marine origin with high content of salt, upward leakage and mixing with deep saline water through faults, lateral flow of saline water of the Miocene aquifer due southwest of the study area and due to extensive pumping rates. Generally, the TDS distribution pattern increases in the direction of flow, confirming the effect of water- rock interaction. The variation of lithologic facies in the different parts of the depression plays an important role in the water quality in the study area.

Chemically, there are three water types: sodium chloride water type dominates the study area, bicarbonate water type occurs in the southeast of the study area and mixed water type in the eastern part of the depression which implies possible blending of the groundwater due east of the depression (Pleistocene aquifer water) with that of the depression (Pliocene aquifer water). Moreover, the eastern and southern parts of

the depression seem to be controlled by carbonate dissolution and/or ion exchange, while the southwestern part of the depression is controlled by evaporite dissolution and/or reverse ion exchange process.

Oxygen and deuterium stable isotopes of the groundwater of the Pliocene aquifer reveals that the main source of recharge is of meteoric origin with minor modification processes. Most of the samples lie very close to the composition of the Old Nile water (prior to High Dam construction), apart from the point of present day Nile water indicating that groundwater recharge is not so active. Some samples shift toward more depleted values in the direction of the paleowater, which may reach the aquifer from the deep aquifers under exploitation.

The results of tritium analysis conducted on a selected number of Pliocene groundwater samples in the study area reveal no measurable tritium and indicate a residence time in excess of 50 years. Three groundwater samples were selected for  $^{14}\text{C}$  aging. Their radiocarbon age varies in the range from  $2100 \pm 70$  y.b.p. to  $9426 \pm 145$  y.b.p. and increases toward the west of the depression reflecting the progressive proportional decrease of recent recharge in the direction of flow from east to west on account of a paleorecharge component. The relationship between radiocarbon age and  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  values of the Pliocene groundwater samples shows a general trend of decreasing  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  with increasing age confirming the presence of paleowater component of depleted oxygen-18 print which can be the Nubian sandstone aquifer water. The trend line indicated in the  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  vs. Radiocarbon age relationship may put constraints on the recharge sources of the groundwater in the study area, which could come from a combination of isotopically depleted Nubian Sandstone paleowater with a mixture of present day Nile water and pre High Dam Nile water.

The groundwater of both winter and summer seasons is evaluated for drinking and irrigation. With respect to TDS, the eastern part of the depression has acceptable water for drinking, while the central part of the depression is permissible whereas the western part of the study area is unsuitable. The groundwater is excellent to very satisfactory for livestock and poultry.

**Key Words:** Hydrogeochemistry, isotope hydrology, water quality, groundwater, Wadi El Natrun.

# LIST OF CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
Abstract .....	i
List of Contents .....	iii
List of Figures .....	v
List of Tables .....	x

## **CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION**

1.1. Location .....	1
1.2. Aim of Study .....	1
1.3. Methodology .....	3
1.4. Previous Work .....	3
1.5. Climate .....	9
1.6. Geomorphology .....	10
1.6.1. Alluvial Plains .....	10
1.6.1.1. Young alluvial plain .....	10
1.6.1.2. Old alluvial plain .....	14
1.6.2. Structural Plains .....	14
1.6.2.1. The depressions .....	14
<i>A- Wadi El Natrun Depression</i> .....	14
<i>B- El Ralat Depression</i> .....	16
<i>C- Dier Makaryous Depression</i> .....	16
1.6.2.2. The folded ridges .....	17
1.6.3. The Tablelands .....	17
1.7. Geologic Setting .....	17
1.7.1. Lithostratigraphy .....	17
1.7.1.1. Quaternary deposits .....	17
<i>A-The Recent deposits</i> .....	20
<i>B-The Pleistocene deposits</i> .....	20
1.7.1.2. Tertiary deposits .....	21
<i>A- Pliocene deposits</i> .....	21
<i>B- Miocene deposits</i> .....	23
<i>C- Oligocene deposits</i> .....	24
<i>D- Eocene deposits</i> .....	25
1.7.2. Structural Framework .....	25
1.7.2.1. Folds .....	25
1.7.2.2. Faults .....	26
1.7.2.3. Unconformities .....	28
1.8. Geologic History .....	28

## **CHAPTER 2 HYDROGEOLOGY**

2.1. Surface Water System .....	31
2.2. Groundwater System .....	35
2.2.1. Recent Aquifer .....	35
2.2.2. Pleistocene Aquifer .....	36



2.2.3. Pliocene Aquifer .....	45
2.2.4. Miocene Aquifer .....	56
<b>CHAPTER 3</b>	
<b>HYDROGEOCHEMISTRY</b>	
3.1. SURFACE WATER SYSTEM .....	61
3.1.1. Chemical Characteristics of Saline Lakes (Brines) .....	61
3.1.2. Chemical Characteristics of Saline Ponds .....	62
3.1.3. Chemical Characteristics of Water Seeps .....	64
3.1.4. Hypothetical Salt Assemblage .....	64
3.2. GROUNDWATER SYSTEM .....	65
3.2.1. Pliocene Aquifer .....	65
3.2.1.1. Hydrochemical aspects .....	65
A- TDS distribution .....	65
B- Distribution of major ions .....	67
C- Major ion's relation .....	75
D- Chemical activity diagrams .....	100
E- Geochemical classification of groundwater .....	105
F- Saturation indices .....	114
G- Statistical aspects .....	121
<b>CHAPTER 4</b>	
<b>ISOTOPE HYDROLOGY</b>	
4.1. Stable Environmental Isotope Indices .....	131
4.1.1. The aerial distribution of $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ in the study area .....	136
4.1.2. Seasonal changes of environmental isotopes .....	136
4.1.3. Deuterium and Oxygen-18 relationship in the study area .....	139
4.1.4. Stable isotopes and hydrogeochemistry .....	143
4.2. Tritium and Radiocarbon Dating .....	144
4.2.1. Tritium .....	144
4.2.1. Radiocarbon Dating .....	146
<b>CHAPTER 5</b>	
<b>GROUNDWATER QUALITY EVALUATION</b>	
5.1. Evaluation of Groundwater of the Pliocene Aquifer for Drinking Purposes	
5.2. Evaluation of Groundwater of the Pliocene Aquifer for Domestic Uses.	150
5.3. Evaluation of Groundwater of the Pliocene Aquifer for Irrigation Purposes	
5.3.1. Total salinity .....	153
5.3.2. Classification based on sulphate concentration .....	154
5.3.3. Wilcox classification (1948) .....	154
5.3.4. The U.S. Salinity Laboratory Staff classification (1954) .....	158
5.4. Evaluation of Groundwater of the Pliocene Aquifer for Livestock and Poultry .....	159
<b>SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION</b>	
	163
<b>REFERENCES</b>	
	170
<b>APPENDICES</b>	
	179
<b>ARABIC SUMMARY</b>	

## LIST OF FIGURES

	<b>Page</b>
<b>Fig. 1.1.</b> Location map of the study area .....	2
<b>Fig. 1.2.</b> The monthly mean values of air temperature (°C) at different stations (1946-1993) .....	12
<b>Fig. 1.3.</b> The monthly mean values of rainfall of different stations (1946-1993) .....	12
<b>Fig.1.4.</b> The monthly mean evaporation values in different stations (1946-1993).....	12
<b>Fig. 1.5.</b> Geomorphologic landforms of Wadi El Natrun and surrounding areas, Western Desert, Egypt (Modified after El Sayed, 1999).....	13
<b>Fig. 1.6.</b> Geological map of Wadi El Natrun and surrounding area, Western Desert (Modified after El Sayed, 1999).....	18
<b>Fig. 1.7.</b> Wadi El Natrun well No. 1, Western Desert, Egypt (Modified after Gomaa, 1995) .....	19
<b>Fig.2.1.</b> Surface water systems in the north and east of the study (modified after Embaby, 2003) .....	32
<b>Fig.2.2.</b> Distribution of different aquifers in Wadi El Natrun area and its vicinities (Modified after El Sayed, 1999).....	36
<b>Fig.2.3.</b> Geologic cross section (Modified after El Sheikh, 2000) .....	38
<b>Fig.2.4.</b> Hydrogeological cross section (Modified after El Sheikh, 2000) .....	39
<b>Fig.2.5.</b> Hydrogeological cross section (Modified after El Sheikh, 2000) .....	40
<b>Fig.2.6.</b> Saturated thickness contour map of the Pleistocene aquifer (Modified after El Abd, 2005) .....	41
<b>Fig.2.7.</b> Flow net map of the Pleistocene aquifer in the eastern part of Wadi El Natrun (June, 1996), Western Desert, Egypt (Modified after El Sayed, 1999).....	41
<b>Fig.2.8.</b> Flow net map of the Pleistocene aquifer (Modified after El Abd, 2005) .....	42
<b>Fig.2.9.</b> Depth to water contour map of the Pleistocene aquifer, 2003 (Modified after El Abd, 2005). .....	44
<b>Fig.2.10.</b> Effective porosity percentage contour map of the Pleistocene aquifer (Modified after El Abd, 2005) .....	44
<b>Fig.2.11.</b> Hydraulic conductivity contour map of the Pleistocene aquifer (Modified after El Abd, 2005) .....	45
<b>Fig.2.12.</b> Hydrogeological cross section (Modified after El Abd, 2005).....	46
<b>Fig.2.13.</b> Hydrogeological cross section (Modified after El Abd, 2005).....	47
<b>Fig.2.14.</b> Saturated thickness contour map of the Pliocene aquifer (Modified after El Abd, 2005) .....	49
<b>Fig.2.15.</b> Shale percentage contour map of the Pliocene saturated thickness (Modified after El Abd, 2005) .....	49

<b>Fig.2.16.</b> Hydrogeological cross section (Modified after El Sheikh, 2000).....	50
<b>Fig.2.17.</b> Flow net map of the Pliocene aquifer in Wadi El Natrun area, Western Desert, Egypt, (June, 1996), (Modified after El Sayed, 1999).....	51
<b>Fig.2.18.</b> Hydrogeological cross section (Modified after El Sheikh, 2000).....	52
<b>Fig.2.19.</b> Depth to water contour map of the Pliocene aquifer, 2003 (Modified after El Abd, 2005) .....	53
<b>Fig.2.20.</b> Hydrogeological cross section extending in NW-SE direction, Wadi El Natrun area, Western Desert, Egypt (Modified after El Sayed, 1999).....	54
<b>Fig.2.21.</b> Effective porosity percentage contour map of the Pliocene aquifer (Modified after El Abd, 2005).....	55
<b>Fig. 2.22.</b> Hydraulic conductivity contour map of the Pliocene aquifer (Modified after El Abd, 2005) .....	55
<b>Fig. 2.23.</b> Saturated thickness contour map of the Miocene aquifer (Modified after El Abd, 2005) .....	57
<b>Fig. 2.24.</b> Shale percentage contour map of the Miocene saturated thickness (Modified after El Abd, 2005) .....	57
<b>Fig.2.25.</b> Flow net map of the Miocene aquifer (Modified after El Abd, 2005).....	58
<b>Fig.3.1.</b> Lateral distribution pattern of TDS values along the lakes.....	62
<b>Fig.3.2.</b> Location map of the collected groundwater samples (A- Winter samples, B- summer samples) .....	66
<b>Fig.3.3.</b> Distribution pattern of the TDS of the groundwater samples in Eadi El Natrun area, (A- Winter samples, B- summer samples) .....	68
<b>Fig.3.4.</b> Potassium concentration contour map of the groundwater samples (A- winter samples, B- summer samples). .....	69
<b>Fig.3.5.</b> Sodium concentration contour map of the groundwater samples (A- winter samples, B- summer samples). .....	70
<b>Fig.3.6.</b> Magnesium concentration contour map of the groundwater samples (A- winter samples, B- summer samples). .....	72
<b>Fig.3.7.</b> Calcium concentration contour map of the groundwater samples (A- winter samples, B- summer samples). .....	73
<b>Fig.3.8.</b> Chloride concentration contour map of the groundwater samples (A- winter samples, B- summer samples). .....	76
<b>Fig.3.9.</b> Sulphate concentration contour map of the groundwater samples (A- winter samples, B- summer samples). .....	77
<b>Fig.3.10.</b> Carbonate concentration contour map of the groundwater samples (A- winter samples, B- summer samples). .....	78
<b>Fig.3.11.</b> Bicarbonate concentration contour map of the groundwater samples (A- winter samples, B- summer samples). .....	79

<b>Fig. 3.12.</b> Lateral distribution pattern passing through well localities from 1 to 6, in the eastern zone of the depression. Location 1 represents samples 23 and 65, location 2 is for samples 27 and 81, location 3 is for samples 11 and 80, location 4 is for samples 8 and 82, location 5 is for samples 29 and 73, location 6 is for samples 34 and 75, see figure 3.2 A and B.....	80
<b>Fig. 3.13.</b> Lateral distribution pattern passing through well localities from A to E, in the western zone of the depression. Location A represents samples 7 and 72, location B is for samples 3 and 68, location C is for samples 51 and 79, location D is for samples 52 and 78, location E is for samples 40 and 77, see figure 3.2 A and B.....	81
<b>Fig.3.14.</b> The main ion dominance zonation map for winter samples.....	86
<b>Fig.3.15.</b> The main groundwater types for A- winter and B- summer samples.....	87
<b>Fig.3.16.</b> Ca+Mg/alkalinity ratio for winter (A) and summer (B) samples.....	88
<b>Fig.3.17.</b> Zonation map of the groundwater samples based on the Ca+Mg/alkalinity ratio for A- winter groundwater samples and winter spring water samples and B- summer samples. ....	89
<b>Fig.3.18.</b> Ca/Mg molar ratio for winter (A) and summer (B) samples.....	90
<b>Fig.3.19.</b> Zonation map based on the Ca/Mg ratio for A- winter and B- summer samples. ....	92
<b>Fig.3.20.</b> Ca+Mg versus $\text{SO}_4+\text{HCO}_3$ ratio for winter (A) and summer (B) samples.....	93
<b>Fig.3.21.</b> Zonation map based on the Ca+Mg versus $\text{SO}_4+\text{HCO}_3$ ratio for A- winter and B- summer samples. ....	94
<b>Fig.3.22.</b> The relationship between sodium and chloride A- winter, B summer samples. ....	95
<b>Fig.3.23.</b> Zonation map based on Na versus Cl ratio for A- winter and B- summer samples.....	96
<b>Fig.3.24.</b> The non-carbonate calcium plus magnesium versus sulphate concentration for A- winter and B- summer samples.....	97
<b>Fig.3.25.</b> $\text{SO}_4$ versus Ca diagram A-winter, B- summer samples. ....	97
<b>Fig. 3.26.</b> Zonation map based on $\text{SO}_4$ versus Ca diagram for A- winter, B- summer samples. ....	98
<b>Fig.3.27.</b> The molar excess of sodium over chloride against the concentration of sulphate for A- winter and B- summer samples.....	99
<b>Fig. 3.28.</b> Hydrogeological cross sections (Modified after El Sheikh, 2000).....	101
<b>Fig.3.29.</b> Aerial distribution of geochemical processes controlling groundwater evolution in Wadi El Natrun area. ....	102
<b>Fig.3.30.</b> $\log a_{\text{Mg}^{2+}}/a_{\text{H}^+}^2$ versus $\log a_{\text{Na}^+}/a_{\text{H}^+}$ diagram (A- Winter, B- Summer samples). ....	104
<b>Fig.3.31.</b> $\log a_{\text{Ca}^{2+}}/a_{\text{H}^+}^2$ versus $\log a_{\text{Na}^+}/a_{\text{H}^+}$ diagram (A- Winter, B- Summer samples). ....	104
<b>Fig.3.32.</b> $\log a_{\text{Mg}^{2+}}/a_{\text{H}^+}^2$ versus $\log a_{\text{Ca}^{2+}}/a_{\text{H}^+}^2$ diagram (A- Winter, B- Summer samples) .....	105

<b>Fig.3.33.</b> Piper Diagram for groundwater samples. ....	107
<b>Fig.3.34.</b> $(\text{CO}_3+\text{HCO}_3)$ -( $\text{Cl}+\text{SO}_4$ ) versus $(\text{Ca}+\text{Mg})+(\text{Na}+\text{K})$ diagram, numbers in squares represent the different geochemical fields. ....	108
<b>Fig.3.35.</b> Genetic classification of groundwater in the Pliocene aquifer. ....	109
<b>Fig.3.36.</b> Different types of water based on Sulin Diagram, for A- winter and B- summer samples.....	110
<b>Fig.3.37.</b> Schoeller Diagram for different groundwater samples collected in the winter. ....	112
<b>Fig.3.38.</b> Schoeller Diagram for different groundwater samples collected in the summer. ....	113
<b>Fig. 3.39.</b> Areal distribution of major ionic proportions, for A- winter and B- summer samples. ....	114
<b>Fig.3.40.</b> Saturation Index (SI) contour map for $\text{pCO}_2$ (A- for winter and B- for summer samples). ....	116
<b>Fig.3.41.</b> Saturation Index (SI) contour map for calcite (A- for winter and B- for summer samples). ....	117
<b>Fig.3.42.</b> Saturation Index (SI) contour map for dolomite (A- for winter and B- for summer samples). ....	118
<b>Fig.3.43.</b> Saturation Index (SI) contour map for gypsum (A- for winter and B- for summer samples). ....	119
<b>Fig.3.44.</b> Relationship between saturation indices (SI) of A- calcite, B-dolomite and C- gypsum and TDS. ....	120
<b>Fig.3.45.</b> Dendrogram (Hierarchical Cluster Analysis) for the winter groundwater samples in the study area. Dotted line defines "phenon line", which is chosen by the analyst to select number of groups or subgroups.....	126
<b>Fig.3.46.</b> Zonation map based on the dendrogram for groundwater samples, A- Winter and B- summer samples.....	128
<b>Fig.3.47.</b> Dendrogram (Hierarchical Cluster Analysis) for the summer groundwater samples in the study area. Dotted line defines "phenon line", which is chosen by the analyst to select number of groups or subgroups.....	129
<b>Fig.4.1.</b> Aerial distribution of $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ values in groundwater of Pliocene aquifer for A- winter samples and B- summer samples.....	137
<b>Fig. 4.2.</b> Seasonal changes in oxygen-18 values of the Pliocene groundwater.....	138
<b>Fig. 4.3.</b> Seasonal changes in oxygen-18 values in the saline lakes. ....	139
<b>Fig.4.4.</b> $\delta\text{D}$ - $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ relationship for the groundwater of Wadi El Natrun area.....	141
<b>Fig. 4.5.</b> $\delta\text{D}$ - $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ relationship for the lakes, saline ponds and water seeps, Wadi El Natrun area.....	141
<b>Fig. 4.6.</b> Values of d-excess versus $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ in the study area.....	142
<b>Fig.4.7.</b> Stable isotope composition versus salinity for identification of different salination processes: mixing (grey circles) of fresh (open circles) and mineralised water (black circles), dissolution of salt and leaching (open squares), and evaporation (open triangles), after Mook, (2000).....	143

<b>Fig. 4.8.</b> TDS versus $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ relation of the groundwater samples, (Groups A and B are discussed in text). .....	144
<b>Fig. 4.9.</b> TDS versus $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ relation of the surface water (A- winter samples and B- summer samples). .....	145
<b>Fig. 4.10.</b> Distribution of carbon- 14 data. ....	147
<b>Fig. 4.11.</b> Radiocarbon age versus $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ relationship for the Pliocene groundwater samples. ....	147
<b>Fig. 5.1.</b> Groundwater classification for drinking water based on the TDS guidelines given by WHO (1984), A-winter samples and B- summer samples. ....	149
<b>Fig. 5.2.</b> Groundwater classification for drinking water based on the $\text{SO}_4$ guidelines given by WHO (1984), A-winter samples and B- summer samples.....	151
<b>Fig. 5.3.</b> Groundwater classification for laundry uses based on the hardness as $\text{CaCO}_3$ (mg/l) given by WHO (1984), A-winter samples and B- summer samples.....	152
<b>Fig. 5.4.</b> Groundwater classification for irrigation based on the TDS content (ppm), A-winter samples and B- summer samples.....	155
<b>Fig. 5.5.</b> Wilcox diagram for the classification of groundwater of the Pliocene aquifer for irrigation purposes, winter samples (circles) and summer samples (squares).....	156
<b>Fig. 5.6.</b> Classification of groundwater samples based on Wilcox (1948), A-winter samples and B- summer samples. ....	157
<b>Fig. 5.7.</b> U.S. salinity diagram for the classification of groundwater of the Pliocene aquifer for irrigation purposes, winter samples (circles) and summer samples (squares), (US Laboratory Staff, 1954).....	159
<b>Fig. 5.8.</b> Classification of groundwater samples based on US Salinity (1954), A- winter samples and B- summer samples.....	160
<b>Fig. 5.9.</b> Groundwater classification based on the National Academy of Science (1972), A-winter samples and B- summer samples. ....	161

## LIST OF TABLES

	Page
<b>Table 1.1.</b> Mean monthly meteorological data of Wadi El Natrun, Tahrir and Ganaklees stations (1946-1993).....	11
<b>Table 1.2.</b> Lithostratigraphic subdivision of the Pliocene rock units in Wadi El Natrun and adjacent area, Western Desert, Egypt (Modified after El Sayed, 1999).....	22
<b>Table 2.1.</b> The hydraulic parameters of the Pleistocene aquifer. ....	42
<b>Table 2.2.</b> The hydraulic parameters of the Pliocene aquifer. ....	56
<b>Table 2.3.</b> The hydraulic parameters of the Miocene aquifer. ....	61
<b>Table 3.1.</b> Hypothetical salt assemblages and water types of surface water. (W and S stand for Winter and Summer, respectively). ....	63
<b>Table 3.2.</b> Hypothetical salt assemblages of Pliocene groundwater samples. ....	84
<b>Table 3.3.</b> Descriptive statistics for the winter groundwater samples data, units in ppm. ....	122
<b>Table 3.4.</b> Descriptive statistics for the summer groundwater samples data, units in ppm. ....	122
<b>Table 3.5.</b> Correlation matrix of the winter groundwater samples data. ....	123
<b>Table 3.6.</b> Correlation matrix of the summer groundwater samples data.....	123
<b>Table 3.7.</b> Mean water chemistry data of the subgroups of the winter samples determined from HCA. pH (standard units), specific conductance ( $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$ ), mean concentration (ppm), $n^a$ is the number of samples. ....	127
<b>Table 3.8.</b> Mean water chemistry data of the subgroups of the summer samples determined from HCA. (Key as in table 3.7). ....	127
<b>Table 3.9.</b> Rotated Component Matrix of groundwater samples of the study area...	130
<b>Table 4.1.</b> Results of environmental isotope analyses of the studied water samples of Wadi El Natrun area.....	133
<b>Table 4.2.</b> Isotope averages for the different water samples and some reference samples. ....	135
<b>Table 4.3.</b> Temporal variation of $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ values in the study area (groundwater well localities are shown in figure 3.2 A). ....	138
<b>Table 4.4.</b> Tritium content of the studied water samples.....	146
<b>Table 5.1.</b> International standards for the quality of drinking water (WHO, 1984).....	148
<b>Table 5.2.</b> Classification of the water on the basis of hardness (After Durfer and Becker, 1964). ....	153
<b>Table 5.3.</b> Permissible limits of salinity for irrigation water. ....	154
<b>Table 5.4.</b> Guide to the use of saline water for livestock and poultry (National Academy of Science, 1972) .....	162