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CRITICAL ROUND-UP

Ways of Seeing: Herodotus' Egypt in the History of Modern Reception*

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ABSTRACT: While the legacy of Herodotus has already captured the attention of many commentators, only a few have delved into the distinct aspects of the reception of the Egyptian *logos*, predominantly concentrated in Book 2. This is surprising given its significance, not only for its exemplary nature, but also for its originality. This study aims to pinpoint the specific features characterizing the reception of Book 2, mainly spanning from the nineteenth century to the present day. It approaches this topic from two interconnected and pivotal perspectives: first, an exploration of the sources used by Herodotus in crafting his depiction of Egypt and an assessment of their credibility; secondly, an examination of how academic research has engaged with Book 2, oscillating between viewing it as a repository of insights into ancient Egypt and interpreting it merely as a reflection of the Greek perspective on the land of the Nile.

KEYWORDS: Egypt, sources, Egyptian priests, Egyptian Greeks, Hecataeus, Egyptologists, Hellenists, research, historiography.

When Herodotus, a native of Halicarnassus in Asia Minor, visited Egypt around 450 BC,[1] he was not the first Greek to set foot on the banks of the Nile: mercenaries, merchants and regular tourists had been abundant since the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty (656–525).[2] A few decades before him, Hecataeus of Miletus documented his explorations in a work that has unfortunately been mostly lost,[3] but which might have greatly influenced Herodotus.[4] Nevertheless, Herodotus ventured into uncharted territory. The aim of the *Histories* as stated in the Proem (to immortalize 'great and marvellous deeds done by Greeks and foreigners [βαρβάροισι]'),[5] and, even more significantly, his investigative method, evident in several of the author's observations, especially within the Egyptian *logos*, established his reputation as the 'Father of History' from ancient times

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[1] The precise date of Herodotus' journey to Egypt is debated. As the historian claims to have seen the bones of warriors from the Battle of Papremis (3.12.4), this journey took place after that event, which is dated to around 460 BC (see Schwartz 2021). On the question of the date of Herodotus' journey to Egypt, see Lloyd 2007: 226, who places it between 449 and 430 BC.

[2] For Greeks in Egypt under the Saite rule, see Tallet 2021: 16–43 (with bibliography).

[3] On the description of Egypt by Hecataeus, as it can be reconstructed from the fragments of the *Periegesis* and the *Genealogiai*, his two main works, see especially Burstein 2009.

[4] On this debated question, see particularly Lloyd 1975: 127–39 and, more recently, Dillery 2018. See also below.

[5] Hdt. proem (tr. Godley).

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onwards. Yet during that time, Herodotus' work has faced numerous criticisms, including frequently being deemed unreliable.[6]

Although Herodotus' legacy has already been thoroughly analyzed,[7] few studies have focused specifically on the distinct aspects of the reception of the Egyptian *logos*,[8] primarily concentrated in Book 2.[9] However, this *logos* is both exemplary, (showcasing the author's investigative methods and literary qualities),[10] and original (mainly due to its extended length justified by Egypt's exceptional attributes).[11] Consequently, it raises enquiries that pertain not only to the entire work but also to its specific subject: Egypt. While not striving for an exhaustive treatment of the challenges presented by the specific reception of Book 2, or aiming for historiographical thoroughness, I will initially demonstrate that the polemic concerning Herodotus' sources and their reliability has centred on Book 2. However, as we will observe, this controversy has not been approached in the same manner from the nineteenth century to the present day. Most importantly, the perspectives taken by commentators, depending on whether they were Egyptologists or Hellenists, guided them in seeking distinct categories of information when engaging with Book 2. Lastly, the anecdotes — which, while not exclusive to Book 2, are extensively developed within it — have also elicited widely differing reactions.

Herodotus' sources and their credibility

As expressed by Christine Hunzinger, 'nulle part mieux qu'au Livre II n'apparaît le laboratoire de l'enquêteur, de ses démarches, de ses interrogations, de ses raisonnements'.[12] Historical enquiry requires the privileging first of hearing (ἀκοή, that is, what one has heard), and then of seing (ὄψις, which transforms into autopsy when personally conducted),[13] with the latter holding a higher priority

[6] For a concise overview of the debates raised by this question among modern commentators, see Ruffing 2021.

[7] Given the extensive bibliography, I refer to recent syntheses in the *Herodotus Encyclopedia*, analyzing the reception of Herodotus throughout the ages, with bibliographical references: Haywood 2021, Gorton 2021, Grogan 2021, Marchand 2021, Bridges 2021. In the same encyclopaedia, also see the entries dedicated to the historiographical study of Herodotus, presented chronologically by period: Monti 2021, Miletti 2021, Karapanagioti 2021, Dolle 2021.

[8] The Egyptian *logos*, meaning the digression that Herodotus devotes to Egypt, spans the entirety of Book 2 and can even be extended into the beginning of Book 3 (up to 3.38).

[9] Book 2 has been studied independently by Lloyd 1975, 1976, 1988 and, more recently, by Haziza 2009 and Coulon, Giovannelli-Jouanna and Kimmel-Clauzet 2013, albeit without directly addressing the question of the peculiarities of its reception. An insightful examination of the Greek perspective on Egypt, as well as that of Hellenists' research on the subject, has been undertaken by Moyer 2011: 1–41. Nevertheless, this goes far beyond the simple scope of Herodotus' Book 2.

[10] Book 2 is indeed generally regarded as the epitome of the literary qualities attributed to the figure sometimes referred to as the 'Homer of prose'; see, for instance, Boedeker 2002: 97.

[11] These points are underscored by Hunzinger 2010.

[12] Hunzinger 2010: 69 ('Nowhere is the investigator's laboratory, his approach, his questions, and his reasoning more apparent than in Book II', tr. Quint).

[13] The methods of Herodotean enquiry are particularly well defined at 2.29: 'by my own travel

than the former.[14] This involves filtering the amassed information through the lens of critical judgement (γνώμη).[15] It is precisely in this aspect that he is deemed an innovator.[16]

Herodotus' autopsy — or the extent of his travels in Egypt

While Herodotus asserts that he personally journeyed to Elephantine to investigate,[17] commentators have raised doubts regarding the extent or even the authenticity of his travels in Egypt. This scepticism has recurred periodically since antiquity[18] and persists among certain contemporary commentators,[19] including O. Kimball Armayor,[20] Richard Lister[21] and even Jean Yoyotte. Despite Yoyotte's refusal to 'nier la réalité de son voyage',[22] he maintained the following in 1994:

> Il est décidément impossible de croire qu'il ait réellement dépassé le Fayoum vers le Sud... On doit admettre une certaine dose de bluff, d'invention, d'humour, bref de "mensonges" chez le Père de l'Histoire.[23]

Even though this form of accusation has been effectively countered in the past, it seems that Herodotus had only a brief sojourn in Egypt.[24] This limited time prevented him from fully delving into all of his observations or thoroughly exploring the various aspects of the country.[25] Without necessarily casting doubt

and sight as far as the city of Elephantine, and beyond that by question and hearsay' (μέχρι μὲν Ἐλεφαντίνης πόλιος αὐτόπτης ἐλθών, τὸ δ᾽ἀπὸ τούτου ἀκοῇ ἤδη ἱστορέων) and 2.99: 'Thus far all I have said is the outcome of my own sight and judgment and inquiry. Henceforth I will record Egyptian chronicles, according to that which I have heard, adding thereto somewhat of what I myself have seen' (Μέχρι μὲν τούτου ὄψις τε ἐμὴ καὶ γνώμη καὶ ἱστορίη ταῦτα λέγουσά ἐστι, τὸ δὲ ἀπὸ τοῦδε Αἰγυπτίους ἔρχομαι λόγους ἐρέων κατὰ [τὰ] ἤκουον· προσέσται δε τι αὐτοῖσι καὶ τῆς ἐμῆς ὄψιος, tr. Godley).

[14] This superiority of sight over hearing is asserted right from the beginning of the *Histories*, at 1.8, through the lesson conveyed by the story of Gyges.

[15] The reconstruction of the geological history of Egypt (2.10–15), attempted by Herodotus, is a particularly detailed example of the significance of *gnomē* in Book 2. On this passage, see Haziza 2009: 60–7.

[16] For a convenient and comprehensive presentation of Herodotean methodology, see, for example, Gondicas and Boëldieu-Trévet 2005: 24–34.

[17] Hdt. 2.29.

[18] Momigliano 1983: 169–85.

[19] The challenge to Herodotus' reliability, which extends beyond the simple question of his journey to Egypt, reached its peak, even among Hellenists, in the early 1970s, with Fehling 1971, the main proponent of what William Kendrick Pritchett dubbed the 'Liar School' (see Pritchett 1993; for this 'school', see also Tamiolaki 2021).

[20] Armayor 1978.

[21] Lister 1980.

[22] Yoyotte 1994: 696 ('deny the reality of his journey', tr. Quint).

[23] Yoyotte 1994: 695 ('It is decidedly impossible to believe that he actually travelled beyond Fayoum to the South ... We must acknowledge a certain amount of bluff, invention, humour, in short "fabrications" from the Father of History', tr. Quint).

[24] See especially the consistently useful work of Sourdille 1910. Nowadays, these accusations seem largely outdated. See below.

[25] Camille Sourdille convincingly proposed the hypothesis of Herodotus staying in Egypt

on the Greek historian's actual time spent in Egypt, commentators have also frequently attempted to elucidate the challenges of interpreting Herodotus' text. They have done so by considering the possibility of a hurried understanding due to his status as a foreign traveller,[26] or even by attributing the difficulties to the limited quality of his oral sources.

Oral sources: the question of Egyptian priests

Although Herodotus prided himself on deriving much of his local information from the priests,[27] whom he considered to be the repositories of centuries-old knowledge and the quintessential representatives of Egyptian wisdom,[28] the quality of his Egyptian informants has been called into question. Many commentators in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries explained the errors, particularly concerning religious facts, in the accounts that Herodotus claimed to have heard from the mouths of Egyptian priests by highlighting the subordinate position of these informants in the priestly hierarchy.[29] For instance, in 1888, while the French Hellenist Alfred Croiset sought to defend the Father of History against severe criticism levelled at him by the English Assyriologist Archibald H. Sayce,[30] he nevertheless considered that 'Les récits d'Hérodote sur l'histoire de l'Égypte et de la Haute-Asie ne doivent être accueillis qu'avec réserve', since 'le plus souvent, il s'adressait à des employés subalternes qu'il prenait pour des prêtres, ou à des cicérones qu'il prenait pour des savants'.[31] The prevailing opinion in the historiography of this period, both Hellenic and Egyptological,[32] is succinctly summarized by Marcel Hombert in a review of Wilhelm Spiegelberg's 1926 work:

> Pour les périodes antérieures [to his stay in Egypt], des réserves sont nécessaires, car on trouve plus souvent dans ses écrits *des histoires* que *de l'histoire* et, comme il n'a jamais été en contact en Égypte

from late July to early September of the same year.

[26] This accusation is further bolstered by the fact that it seems quite certain that Herodotus did not write his account immediately but some time later, perhaps around 430–420, or even later according to some scholars (Fornara 1971; Irwin 2018). For more details, see Irwin 2021.

[27] The term ἱρεύς, meaning 'priest', appears forty-two times in Book 2. See Powell 1938: 173.

[28] See Haziza 2009, 2018 and, particularly regarding the figure of wisdom represented by the legendary pharaoh Proteus, 2014b and 2023 (for earlier bibliography).

[29] This is the case, for example, with Kenrick 1841, Lepsius 1849, Maspero 1878, Wiedemann 1890, How and Wells 1912, Sourdille 1925, Spiegelberg 1926, Säve-Söderbergh 1946, Kolta 1968. For a few instances of such considerations, see also Baldwin 1964: 171, who criticizes this prevailing scepticism early on.

[30] Sayce 1883.

[31] Croiset 1888: 154 ('Herodotus' accounts of the history of Egypt and Upper Asia must be approached with caution [since], more often than not, he was speaking to subordinate employees whom he mistook for priests or cicerones whom he mistook for scholars', tr. Quint).

[32] See, for instance, Maspero 1878: 136, who finds it quite improbable that 'un simple curieux, venu pour voir le pays et pour en observer les mœurs, soit parvenu en quelques semaines à forcer les portes d'un sanctuaire et à se faire guider dans les cours d'un temple par un prêtre de rang' ('just a curious visitor, who came to see the country and observe its customs, managed in a few weeks to force open the doors of a sanctuary and be guided through the courtyards of a temple by a priest of the highest rank', tr. Quint).

> qu'avec des compatriotes et avec les classes les moins élevées de la population indigène, les renseignements qu'il nous donne sont ceux qu'il pouvait recueillir chez des guides-interprètes ou chez des prêtres de rang inférieurs.[33]

Recent research, however, has tended to reverse this prevailing opinion. In his monumental commentary on Book 2 of Herodotus, Alan B. Lloyd was already critical of the correlation to be drawn between the quality of information and the level of the consulted priests.[34] This trend has become even more pronounced in recent years. A comparison between Herodotus' narrative and the royal Egyptian annals, conducted in 2013 by Lilian Postel, provides an example. This comparison pertains to the segments of Book 2 that cover history prior to the Saite period (2.99–150), and reveals that the historian from Halicarnassus relied heavily on Egyptian documentation, especially the royal annals.[35] From the perspective of the Egyptologist, Herodotus gained substantial insights from Egyptian priests (essentially those of Memphis),[36] granting him access to 'first-hand Egyptian sources' (through an interpreter).[37] Nonetheless, this does not necessarily imply that the information is always 'accurate', in the sense of faithfully reflecting historical reality. In fact, according to Postel, the disparities within Herodotus' text might result from the 'nature de cette documentation, partielle, dépendant des monuments subsistants et des pratiques d'affichage', or from the 'recours à plusieurs documents annalistiques, ne se recoupant pas forcément'.[38] Through an in–depth study, the Egyptologist demonstrates that Herodotus likely did not employ the complete royal annals stored within the temples. Instead, he probably used summaries of these annals, which were displayed and openly accessible within the *temenos* (primarily in Memphis). According to Postel, 'Hérodote avait donc un accès relativement aisé à cette documentation ; il n'avait besoin pour ce faire que d'un prêtre sachant lire les hiéroglyphes, versé dans les inscriptions anciennes, c'est-à-dire comprenant à la fois l'état de la langue et la phraséologie propres à ces textes royaux, mais aussi un minimum de contexte historique et culturel'.[39] Discrepancies, especially those related to chronology, in Herodotus'

[33] Hombert 1926: 1053 ('For the periods before his stay in Egypt, reservations are necessary, as his writings often contain *stories* rather than *history*. Since he had no contact in Egypt with anyone other than fellow countrymen and the lowest classes of the indigenous population, the information he provides is based on what he could gather from guides, interpreters, or lower-ranking priests', tr. Quint). The italics are those of the author.

[34] See Lloyd 1975: 94–100. In his study on the saga of Sesostris, Claude Obsomer has also sought to re-evaluate the quality of Herodotus' informants (see Obsomer 1989).

[35] Postel 2013.

[36] Regarding the relations between Herodotus and the Egyptian priests, especially those of Memphis, see also Obsomer 1998.

[37] Postel 2013: 113.

[38] Postel 2013: 113 (In fact, according to Postel, the disparities within Herodotus' text might result from 'the partial nature of this documentation, which depends on surviving monuments and display practices' or from the 'use of several non-overlapping analytical documents', tr. Quint).

[39] Postel 2013: 113 ('Herodotus therefore had relatively easy access to this documentation. All he needed was a priest who knew how to read hieroglyphics and was well-versed in ancient

account of ancient Egyptian historical periods (the Old and Middle Empires), might also arise from the use of diverse annalistic sources. These sources could originate from various sites or different textual traditions (as indicated, for instance, by Demotic documentation).

Since Herodotus did not speak Egyptian, it is reasonable to assume that he acquired a substantial amount of information from the Greek community in Egypt, as he openly acknowledges. This is especially true regarding the more recent history of the country (starting from the Twenty-Sixth [Saite] Dynasty onwards).[40] Herodotus also emphasizes that, beginning with the reign of Psammetichus, when these Egyptian Greeks established a permanent presence in the country, they significantly contributed to imparting a deeper understanding of Egypt to the wider Greek world (2.154):

> The Ionians and Carians who had helped him to conquer were given by Psammetichus places to dwell in called the Camps, opposite to each other on either side of the Nile; and besides this he paid them all that he had promised. Moreover he put Egyptian boys in their hands to be taught the Greek tongue; these, learning Greek, were the ancestors of the Egyptian interpreters. The Ionians and Carians dwelt a long time in these places, which are near the sea, on the arm of the Nile called the Pelusian, a little way below the town of Bubastis. Long afterwards, king Amasis removed them thence and settled them at Memphis, to be his guard against the Egyptians. It comes of our intercourse with these settlers in Egypt (who were the first men of alien speech to settle in that country) that we Greeks have exact knowledge of the history of Egypt from the reign of Psammetichus onwards.[41]

Herodotus' debt to Hecataeus

Apart from these various sources, including ὄψις and ἀκοή, Herodotus might also have drawn upon previous depictions of Egypt, notably the one produced shortly before him by Hecataeus of Miletus.[42] Among the criticisms that have been directed at the Father of History since ancient times, one reappears intermittently,

inscriptions, i.e, someone who understood not only the language and phraseology of these royal texts but also a minimum of historical and cultural context', tr. Quint).

[40] 2.147: 'Thus far I have recorded what the Egyptians themselves says. I will now relate what is recorded alike by Egyptians and foreigners to have happened in that land, and I will add thereto something of what I myself have seen.' (Ταῦτα μέν νυν αὐτοὶ Αἰγύπτιοι λέγουσι, ὅσα δὲ οἵ τε ἄλλοι ἄνθρωποι καὶ Αἰγύπτιοι λέγουσι ὁμολογέοντες τοῖσι ἄλλοισι κατὰ ταύτην τὴν χώρην γενέσθαι, ταῦτ' ἤδη φράσω· προσέσται δε τι αὐτοῖσι καὶ τῆς ἐμῆς ὄψιος, tr. Godley).

[41] Οἱ δὲ Ἴωνές τε καὶ οἱ Κᾶρες τούτους τοὺς χώρους οἴκησαν χρόνον ἐπὶ πολλόν· εἰσὶ δὲ οὗτοι οἱ χῶροι πρὸς θαλάσσης ὀλίγον ἔνερθε Βουβάστιος πόλιος ἐπὶ τῷ Πηλουσίῳ καλεομένῳ στόματι τοῦ Νείλου. Τούτους μὲν δὴ χρόνῳ ὕστερον βασιλεὺς Ἄμασις ἐξαναστήσας ἐνθεῦτεν κατοίκισε ἐς Μέμφιν, φυλακὴν ἑωυτοῦ ποιεύμενος πρὸ Αἰγυπτίων. Τούτων δὲ οἰκισθέντων ἐν Αἴγυπτον γινόμενα ἀπὸ Ψαμμητίχου βασιλέος ἀρξάμενοι πάντα [καὶ] τὰ ὕστερον ἐπιστάμεθα ἀτρεκέως· πρῶτοι γὰρ οὗτοι ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ ἀλλόγλωσσοι κατοικίσθησαν (tr. Godley).

[42] On this matter, see Lloyd 1975: 120–40.

particularly regarding Book 2: Herodotus is said to have largely copied Hecataeus! Porphyry, a Neoplatonist philosopher from the third century AD, asserts, for instance, that in his second book, Herodotus 'nearly transcribed whole sections of Hecataeus of Miletus' *Periegesis*, with only minimal modifications'.[43] This perspective is also shared by certain contemporary commentators on Herodotus, among whom William Arthur Heidel can unquestionably be regarded as one of the foremost proponents.[44] Nonetheless, to fully grasp the scope of Herodotus' adaptations of his predecessor, it would be necessary to reconstruct Hecataeus' depiction of Egypt.[45] Unfortunately, there is limited material available: the extant remnants of Hecataeus' writings concerning Egypt (which number around thirty or fewer) mainly consist of geographic and ethnographic details extracted from his *Periegesis*.[46] This lack is exacerbated by the fact that the majority of the fragments come from Stephanus of Byzantium, a grammarian from the sixth century AD, and they primarily comprise names of regions and places, presented without any contextual clues.[47] To comprehend the full extent of Herodotus' use of material from Hecataeus, we need to focus solely on an analysis of the *Histories*. In his commentary on Book 2 of Herodotus, Lloyd has endeavoured to pinpoint the portions of Hecataeus' work that could have influenced, or been incorporated by, Herodotus.[48] These analyses have been condensed in this paper, using the text from Book 2 of Herodotus, and presented in the enclosed table (see Appendix).

Examining this table, there might be a temptation to agree partially with Porphyry and those who assert that Herodotus is significantly indebted to his predecessor. However, echoing Lloyd, we must exercise great caution, as 'it should be remembered that isolating by inference cases where Hecataeus has been used as a source is an extraordinarily difficult undertaking for various reasons'.[49] The mere fact that the works of Hecataeus and Herodotus touch upon similar aspects concerning Egypt does not necessarily indicate the former's influence on the latter. In fact, only a very small number of Herodotus' borrowings from Hecataeus can be considered very probable,[50] and even in those instances, it does not automatically imply that Herodotus merely copied his predecessor. When we take a closer look, for instance, at the depiction of Egypt's position in the world or the Nile inundation in the works of both authors,[51] it becomes evident that Herodotus wrote with Hecataeus' *Periegesis* in mind. This work served as an implicit point of reference, but Hecataeus also offered the Father of History a

[43] *FGrHist*, 1 F324a.
[44] Heidel 1935. In this study, he goes even further than his predecessors by suggesting that even the historical portions of Book 2, particularly the history of the Saite dynasty, could be derived from Hecataeus.
[45] I previously addressed this issue in a lecture ('Hécatée dans l'ombre d'Hérodote? L'exemple du Livre II') given at the Fragments seminar of the Centre de Recherches Archéologiques et Historiques Anciennes et Médiévales, University of Caen Normandy, in January 2020 [hal–02564955].
[46] Moyer 2014: 2.
[47] Burstein 2009: 138.
[48] Lloyd 1975: 127–36.
[49] Lloyd 1975: 134.
[50] See the table in the appendix.
[51] For a more detailed development of the argument, see Haziza 2009.

framework for broader exploration. While Herodotus took as his foundation the Ionian contemplations regarding the geographical portrayal of Egypt and shared the aspiration of his forerunners, particularly Hecataeus, to create a rational geography that would diverge from tradition and authority, he still — and this is not contradictory — formed his own viewpoint, not solely from personal observation and reflection, but also from his perceptions of the region he was describing — in this instance, Egypt. Therefore, the definition of the country he adopts is generally much closer to local criteria,[52] with the Egyptians considering their land the inseparable union of Upper and Lower Egypt, meaning the Valley and the Delta, rather than those definitions adopted by the Ionians.[53] The same approach, encompassing both borrowing and distancing, was similarly employed in addressing the matter of the Nile flood.

These examples demonstrate that while Herodotus did not hesitate to draw on Hecataeus, albeit without necessarily quoting him directly, he was also inclined to create methodological distinctions.[54] According to John Dillery, the polemic in Book 2 directed towards the Greeks, and Hecataeus in particular, serves a specific purpose: to highlight that Hecataeus remained excessively reliant on Greek *topoi* — an author who betrays a 'Hellenocentric' mindset — and did not allocate adequate space for his own *autopsy* as well as the knowledge amassed by non-Greeks, especially the Egyptians.[55] For Dillery, it was Herodotus' exposure to Egypt that propelled him beyond his ties to Hecataeus in his approach to historical writing. He claims that Herodotus transitioned away from relying solely on his predecessor — the remnants of this phase can be seen in Herodotus' work — to challenging it: the historian of Halicarnassus came to understand in Egypt that Hecataeus' interpretation of the past, despite making advancements in comparison to the Greek tradition, was still fundamentally and even irreparably flawed.[56]

A source of information on ancient Egypt or a record of Greek thought?

Between love and disinterest: Herodotus in the history of Egyptology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

Herodotus' Book 2 served as a gateway to the civilization of Pharaonic Egypt for Europeans over an extended period. In the nineteenth century, the trend of travelling to the Orient contributed to the growing popularity of the *Histories*,[57]

[52] Hdt. 2.15–17.
[53] See also the insightful remarks on this matter by Burstein 1996: 596.
[54] However, it is important to note that the ancients did not conceive of citation in the same way as we do. On this matter, for instance, see the cautions put forth by Dillery 2018: 38: 'Ancient notions regarding appropriation and borrowing, allusion and intertext, are complex and ought not to be confused with our own.'
[55] Dillery 2018.
[56] Dillery 2018: 49.
[57] Regarding the trend of the 'Voyage to Egypt', see, for instance, Moussa 2004.

especially Book 2.[58] Nonetheless, this popularity was not without its detractors.[59] Egyptomania, sparked by Napoleon Bonaparte's expedition to Egypt (1798) and the construction of the Suez Canal (between 1859 and 1869), coincided with the emergence of Egyptology. This discipline was propelled by Jean-François Champollion's deciphering of hieroglyphic writing in 1822. With the advent of modern archaeology, Herodotus emerged as a valuable guide whose accounts could be corroborated through field discoveries and broader comparisons with various local sources, which were increasingly amenable to translation. As a result, nineteenth-century Egyptologists maintained a close relationship with Herodotus, diligently seeking to verify his assertions.[60] In the initial chapter of his book on pigs in ancient Egypt, Youri Volokhine underscores the significance of Greek notions, particularly those of Herodotus, about animals in Egypt. These notions profoundly influenced the trajectory of research on this subject, as well as many others.[61] He demonstrates how early Egyptologists' presuppositions were influenced by classical sources, with Herodotus foremost among them. For instance, John Gardner Wilkinson substantiates the scarcity of depictions of pigs in painted or engraved scenes with reference to the Egyptians' supposed abhorrence of the animal, due to its association with Set and consequent impurity.[62] However, he did recognize the use of pigs in agriculture for burying grain, following Herodotus' description.[63] Meanwhile, Champollion, much like other Egyptologists of this first generation, interpreted tomb scenes depicting pigs as images of the damned.[64] Although progress in the discipline in the second half of the nineteenth century meant that Egyptologists tended to assign less importance to the accounts of classical authors, they remained vital sources. This is illustrated by a letter from Auguste Mariette to Ernest Desjardins, dated 28 December 1873.[65] In the letter, the founder of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo lists the Egyptian divinities mentioned by their Greek names in Herodotus and aims to identify their Egyptian counterparts.[66] Until the 1960s, Egyptologists left

[58] The rehabilitation of Herodotus begins as early as the sixteenth century (see Tamiolaki 2021).

[59] Cf. Marchand 2021 for the reception of Herodotus between the second half of the eighteenth century and the end of the nineteenth century. For Herodotus' reception in the nineteenth century and its impact, see also Harrison and Skinner 2020.

[60] This was already the case among modern-era travellers, enthusiasts of 'cabinets of curiosities', for whom a journey to Egypt was a cherished endeavour. Grimal 1988: 14 notes that Herodotus is the first guide one would bring on a trip to Egypt, a fashion that prevailed even before the French Revolution.

[61] Volokhine 2014: 41.

[62] Wilkinson 1837.

[63] '... the river rises of itself, waters the fields, and then sinks back again; thereupon each man sows his field and sends swine into it to tread down the seed, and waits for the harvest; then he makes the swine to thresh his grain, and so garners it.' (... ἀλλ' ἐπεάν σφι ὁ ποταμὸς αὐτόματος ἐπελθὼν ἄρσῃ τὰς ἀρούρας, ἄρσας δὲ ἀπολίπῃ ὀπίσω, τότε σπείρας ἕκαστος τὴν ἑωυτοῦ ἄρουραν ἐσβάλλει ἐς αὐτὴν ὗς, ἐπεὰν δὲ καταπατήσῃ τῇσι ὑσὶ τὸ σπέρμα, ἄμητον τὸ ἀπὸ τούτου μένει, ἀποδινήσας δὲ τῇσι ὑσὶ τὸν σῖτον οὕτω κομίζεται, 2.14; tr. Godley).

[64] Champollion 1845: pl. CCLXXII and 1868: 190.

[65] Mariette 1884.

[66] It is the same approach that dominates the work of Sourdille 1910, aiming to compare Herodotus' data on the religion of Egypt with Egyptian sources.

the overarching interpretation of the work to Hellenists. They essentially viewed the Greek visitor's account as a potential source of assistance, a collection of hints that could contribute to our understanding of ancient Egypt. There was a general reliance on Herodotus' sincerity,[67] especially regarding what he claimed to have witnessed, although narratives from Egyptian priests were met with greater scepticism, as discussed earlier. Once more, Hombert's assessment of Spiegelberg's work encapsulates the prevailing sentiment of that era:

> Pour l'époque à laquelle il [Herodotus] vivait, il constitue une source de premier ordre, on peut dire la source la plus riche: les trop rares renseignements fournis par les monuments et les documents égyptiens confirment souvent ses affirmations, ils n'en prouvent jamais la fausseté et ils sont complétés par lui de la manière la plus heureuse.[68]

During this initial phase of Egyptology, Herodotus was primarily consulted for his first-hand accounts. Nevertheless, it was in this period that the first signs of disappointment began to emerge, as evidenced by this excerpt from Gaston Maspero's *L'Archéologie égyptienne*, which pertains to water management around Memphis and the existence of Lake Mœris (2.149):

> Le réseau avait son origine près du Gebel-Silsiléh, et courait jusqu'à la mer sans s'écarter du fleuve, si ce n'est une fois près de Béni-Souef, pour jeter un de ses bras dans la direction du Fayoum. Il franchissait la montagne près d'Illahoun, par une gorge étroite et sinueuse, approfondie peut-être à main d'homme, et se ramifiant en patte d'oie; les eaux, après avoir arrosé le canton, s'écoulaient, les plus proches dans le Nil, par la route même qui les avait amenées; les autres, dans plusieurs lacs sans issue, dont le plus grand s'appelle aujourd'hui Birkét-Qéroun. S'il fallait en croire Hérodote, les choses ne se seraient point passées aussi simplement. Le roi Mœris aurait voulu établir au Fayoum un réservoir destiné à corriger les irrégularités de l'inondation; on l'appelait, d'après lui, le lac Mœris. La crue était-elle insuffisante? L'eau, emmagasinée dans ce bassin, puis relâchée au fur et à mesure que le besoin s'en faisait sentir, maintenait le niveau à hauteur convenable sur toute la moyenne Égypte et sur les régions occidentales du Delta. L'année d'après, si la crue s'annonçait trop forte, le Mœris en recevait le surplus et le gardait jusqu'au moment où le fleuve commençait à baisser. Deux pyramides, couronnées chacune d'un colosse assis,

[67] Even as late as 1961, Alan Gardiner was writing that '[i]n truth there is no reason to impugn his good faith' (1961: 3).

[68] Hombert 1926: 1053 ('For the time in which he lived, Herodotus is a primary source, one could say the richest source: the all-too-scarce information provided by Egyptian monuments and documents often corroborates his claims, never disproving them, and he complements them in the most felicitous manner', tr. Quint).

> représentant le roi fondateur et sa femme, se dressaient au milieu du lac. Voilà le récit d'Hérodote: il a singulièrement embarrassé les ingénieurs et les géographes. Comment en effet trouver dans le Fayoum un emplacement convenable pour un bassin qui n'avait pas moins de quatre-vingt-dix milles de pourtour? La théorie la plus accréditée de nos jours est celle de Linant, d'après laquelle le Mœris aurait occupé une dépression de terrain le long de la chaîne libyque, entre Illahoun et Médinéh; mais les explorations les plus récentes ont montré que les digues assignées pour limites à ce prétendu réservoir sont modernes et n'ont peut-être pas deux siècles de durée. Je ne crois plus à l'existence du Mœris. Si Hérodote a jamais visité le Fayoum, cela a dû être pendant l'été, au temps du haut Nil, quand le pays entier offre l'aspect d'une véritable mer. Il a pris pour la berge d'un lac permanent les levées qui divisent les bassins et font communiquer les villes entre elles. Son récit, répété par les écrivains anciens, a été accepté par nos contemporains, et l'Égypte, qui n'en pouvait mais, a été gratifiée après coup d'une œuvre gigantesque, dont l'exécution aurait été le vrai titre de gloire de ses ingénieurs, si elle avait jamais existé. Les seuls travaux qu'ils aient entrepris en ce genre ont de moindres prétentions; ce sont des barrages en pierre élevés à l'entrée de plusieurs des Ouadys qui descendent des montagnes jusque dans la vallée.[69]

[69] Excerpts taken from Maspero 1887 [online: https://www.hellenicaworld.com/France/Literature/GastonMaspero/fr/LArcheologieEgyptienne.html]. ('The network of canals began near Silsilis [Gebel Silsileh] and extended to the seaboard, without ever losing touch of the river, save at one spot near Beni Sûef, where it throws out a branch in the direction of the Fayûm. Here, through a narrow and sinuous gorge, deepened probably by the hand of man, it passes the rocky barrier which divides that low-lying province from the valley of the Nile, and thence expands into a fanlike ramification of innumerable channels. Having thus irrigated the district, the waters flow out again; those nearest the Nile returning by the same way that they flowed in, while the rest form a series of lakes, the largest of which is known as the Birket el Kûrûn. If we are to believe Herodotus, the work was not so simply done. A king, named Moeris, desired to create a reservoir in the Fayûm which should neutralise the evil effects of insufficient or superabundant inundations. This reservoir was named, after him, Lake Moeris. If the supply fell below the average, then the stored waters were let loose, and Lower Egypt and the Western Delta were flooded to the needful height. If next year the inundation came down in too great force, Lake Moeris received and stored the surplus till such time as the waters began to subside. Two pyramids, each surmounted by a sitting colossus, one representing the king and the other his queen, were erected in the midst of the lake. Such is the tale told by Herodotus, and it is a tale which has considerably embarrassed our modern engineers and topographers. How, in fact, was it possible to find in the Fayûm a site which could have contained a basin measuring at least ninety miles in circumference? Linant supposed "Lake Moeris" to have extended over the whole of the low-lying land which skirts the Libyan cliffs between Illahûn and Medinet el Fayûm; but recent explorations have proved that the dikes by which this pretended reservoir was bounded are modern works, erected probably within the last two hundred years. Major Brown has lately shown that the nucleus of "Lake Moeris" was the Birket el Kûrûn. This was known to the Egyptians as Miri, Mi-ûri, the Great Lake, whence the Greeks derived their Moiris a name extended also to the inundation of the Fayûm. If Herodotus did actually visit this province, it was probably in summer, at the time of the high

The matter of Lake Mœris, and specifically the labyrinth (a remarkable construction, according to the Halicarnassian historian, 2.148) located near the lake, exemplifies the transformation in how twentieth-century Egyptologists have considered the insights provided by the Greek historian.[70] Herodotus gave credit for the labyrinth to the rulers of the Dodecarchy, which itself posed an issue, particularly since other sources, notably Strabo,[71] appear not to corroborate this viewpoint. Since the seventeenth century, archaeologists and historians have been captivated by this enigmatic structure. However, none of the various theories regarding the building's identification have been considered entirely satisfactory.[72] Armayor ultimately concluded it must be a completely imaginary monument.[73] At a time when Egyptological research was increasingly able to rely on advances in archaeological excavation methods, the example of the labyrinth shows how, without necessarily adopting such a degree of scepticism towards Herodotus, Egyptologists at the end of the twentieth century were at least distancing themselves from Book 2, which had been rejected by scholars of Greek studies in the same period.

The Greek perspective on Egypt according to Hellenists' work

While the impact of the Greek view on Herodotus' description of Egypt has long been taken into account, at least unconsciously,[74] it has been theorized by Hellenists, mainly from the last third of the twentieth century onwards. In 1971, Christian Froidefond demonstrated for the first time how Book 2 represented

Nile, when the whole district presents the appearance of an inland sea. What he took for the shores of this lake were the embankments which divided it into basins and acted as highways between the various towns. His narrative, repeated by the classic authors, has been accepted by the moderns; and Egypt, neither accepting nor rejecting it, was gratified long after date with the reputation of a gigantic work which would in truth have been the glory of her civil engineers, if it had ever existed. I do not believe that "Lake Moeris" ever did exist. The only works of the kind which the Egyptians undertook were much less pretentious. These consist of stone-built dams erected at the mouths of many of those lateral ravines, or wadys, which lead down from the mountain ranges into the valley of the Nile', tr. A.B. Edwards 1895: online at https://ia803406.us.archive.org/35/items/manualofegyptian14400gut/14400–h/14400–h.htm.)

[70] The historiography of pigs in ancient Egypt is another good example, analyzed by Volokhine 2014: a turning point seems to begin in the early decades of the twentieth century. On one hand, the idea of a 'bipolar sacredness' of pigs starts to emerge (see particularly Newberry 1928), and on the other hand, archaeology (confirmed by iconography) has attested since the 1930s to the consumption of the animal by Egyptians from the Neolithic period (on this point, see for example Farout 2012: 61, with bibliographical references). For a concise overview of the challenge to Egyptologists' belief in a taboo around pigs, derived from Herodotus' statements, see Ikram 2001.

[71] Strabo 17.1.37. For various sources dealing with the labyrinth, see Obsomer 1992.

[72] Lloyd's proposition (Lloyd 1970; 1988: 120–4; 2007: 348–50) is undoubtedly the most widely endorsed, but it has been challenged on the basis of relevant arguments by Obsomer 1992, who has himself been critiqued, especially by Uphill 2000.

[73] Armayor 1985.

[74] Stanley Burstein even speaks of a heavily 'Hellenocentric' treatment of Egyptian history (see Burstein 1996: 593).

a crucial milestone in what he termed the 'mirage égyptien'.[75] The extensive digression that Herodotus dedicates to the land of the Nile exposes his admiration for the antiquity of its civilization and its innovations. The Greek historian never ceases to emphasize that the Egyptians were pioneers in numerous domains, particularly religion:[76]

> Further, the Egyptians (said they) first used the appellations of twelve gods (which the Greeks afterwards borrowed from them); and it was they who first assigned to the several gods their altars and images and temples, and first carved figures on stone (2.4).[77]
>
> It would seem too that the Egyptians were the first people to establish solemn assemblies, and processions, and services (2.58).[78]
>
> Further, it was the Egyptians who first made it a matter of religious observance not to have intercourse with women in temples, nor enter a temple after such intercourse without washing (2.64).[79]
>
> Moreover, the Egyptians were the first to teach that the human soul is immortal (2.123).[80]

Then, to this picture of the profound antiquity of Egyptian culture, Herodotus adds the concept of religious transmission: 'Indeed, wellnigh all the names of the gods came to Hellas from Egypt' (2.50).[81] A veritable Greek institution, the Egypt of the Greek historian is depicted as a realm of wisdom that distinguishes itself from other barbarian territories. Since the time of Homer, the Greeks held Egypt in high esteem as an extraordinary and wondrous land — proximate to the Other World and fantastical realms, replete with enchantment and legendary wealth. Although Herodotus was part of a scholarly tradition, pioneered by the Ionians, that aimed to be rational, his perspective on Egypt remains imprinted

[75] Froidefond 1971 ('The Egyptian mirage').
[76] For Herodotus' understanding of Egyptian religion, see primarily Assmann 2000, particularly the chapter titled 'Herodot über die Artikulation der Götterwelt'. See also Harrison 2000 (especially chapter 8) and, for a recent and original approach, Schwab 2020 (with earlier bibliographical references on the subject), which proposes a 'multidimensional approach' for exploring Herodotus' depictions of foreign religions, particularly in Book 2.
[77] Δυώδεκά τε θεῶν ἐπωνυμίας ἔλεγον πρώτους Αἰγυπτίους νομίσαι καὶ Ἕλληνας παρὰ σφέων ἀναλβεῖν, βωμούς τε καὶ ἀγάλματα καὶ νηοὺς θεοῖσι ἀπονεῖμαι σφέας πρώτους καὶ ζῷα ἐν λίθοισι ἐγγλύψαι (tr. Godley).
[78] Πανηγύρις δὲ ἄρα καὶ πομπὰς καὶ προσαγωγὰς πρῶτοι ἀνθρώπων Αἰγύπτιοί εἰσι οἱ ποιησάμενοι, καὶ παρὰ τούτων Ἕλληνες μεμαθήκασι (tr. Godley).
[79] Καὶ τὸ μὴ μίσγεσθαι γυναιξὶ ἐν ἱροῖσι μηδὲ ἀλούτους ἀπὸ γυναικῶν ἐς ἱρὰ ἐσιέναι οὗτοί εἰσι οἱ πρῶτοι θρῃσκεύσαντες (tr. Godley).
[80] Πρῶτοι δὲ καὶ τόνδε τὸν λόγον Αἰγύπτιοί εἰσι οἱ εἰπόντες ... (tr. Godley).
[81] Σχεδὸν δε καὶ πάντων τὰ οὐνόματα τῶν θεῶν ἐξ Αἰγύπτου ἐλήλυθε ἐς τὴν Ἑλλάδα (tr. Godley). On this subject, see the recent analyses by Pirenne-Delforge 2020: 74–7.

with a captivating, albeit unsettling,[82] portrayal of a distant land, abundant with the unfamiliar, the supernatural and the magical. In several instances, these territories are depicted as profoundly distinctive, even in contrast to the Greek world,[83] as demonstrated by François Hartog in his renowned 1980 monograph, *Le miroir d'Hérodote*. While not undermining Froidefond's analyses, Hartog's book has had a lasting impact on Herodotus studies, sparking a surge in interest from that point onwards.[84] The 'rhétorique de l'altérité' ('rhetoric of otherness') identified by Hartog in the Herodotean text is particularly applicable to Book 2,[85] primarily through the use of an inversion scheme, 'manière de transcrire l'altérité, en la rendant aisée à appréhender ... l'inversion est une fiction qui fait "voir" et qui fait comprendre : elle est une des figures concourant à l'élaboration d'une représentation du monde'.[86] In defence of his thesis, Hartog examines the Scythian *logos*, while also drawing examples from the Egyptian *logos*. In this regard, the section concerning Egyptian customs (2.35) has gained renown for its employment of the inversion principle, which Hartog considers a key technique in Herodotus' Greek examination of otherness, alongside comparison and analogy. The Other is thus portrayed as an antithesis to the Greek, embodying 'customs and laws contrary for the most part to those of the rest of mankind' (tr. Godley), in other words, the Greeks. According to the author, the mirror also symbolizes the depiction of the world and the recent past constructed by Herodotus: traversing and narrating the world, functioning as both a rhapsode and a surveyor, he arranges it within a Greek realm of understanding. Phiroze Vasunia's *The Gift of the Nile: Hellenizing Egypt from Aeschylus to Alexander* (2001), delves further into this concept, enhancing it with insights gleaned from contemporary research on orientalism and colonialism.[87]

While these approaches are immensely stimulating, they have inadvertently contributed to the growing divergence between Egyptological studies, rooted primarily in archaeological and philological research, and Hellenic studies, in which Egypt is perceived solely through the lens of a distorted and self-centred Greek perspective.[88] As Ian Moyer succinctly outlines, while also underscoring the significance of Book 2 of Herodotus in the reconstruction of this discourse,

> Egypt, in the history of Hellenism, is 'other' twice over: an Other not only to ancient Greeks, but also to modern historians, classicists, and other students of Hellenism. This double alterity is the product of scholarly analogies and cultural affiliations that have identified Greek civilization as the Western subject at the center of narratives,

[82] Regarding the Greeks' fear in the face of Egypt, see Haziza 2023.
[83] On Egypt as a land of inversion for the Greeks, cf. Hartog 1980.
[84] Dolle 2021: 1285.
[85] Hartog 1980.
[86] Hartog 1980: 227 ('a way of transcribing "otherness" and making it easy to grasp ... Inversion is a narrative device that helps us "see" and understand: it contributes to the elaboration of a world representation', tr. Quint). The most evident example of the inversion pattern used by Herodotus for Egypt can be found at 2.35.
[87] Vasunia 2001.
[88] On this point, see for instance the synthesis by Burstein 1996.

> discourses, and theories of modern European and American historiography. Even when Momigliano and others have examined the limits that constrained Greek knowledge of Egypt,[89] their often acute analyses get caught up in the problem of representing the other, since Egypt, by analogy with the West's 'others' is imagined as illusory, repressed, or irretrievable. In such accounts, Egypt is not the subject of an historical narrative or the central referent of discourse or theory, but an object of representations which appropriate and incorporate an Egyptian 'other' into the 'same' of Western knowledge.[90]

By the end of the twentieth century, these approaches also inclined Egyptologists towards the realm of Greek studies concerning Herodotus.

Re-evaluating Herodotus and his 'fantastical' anecdotes

In contemporary scholarship, Herodotus is experiencing a resurgence, owing in large part to the prominence of anthropology and ethnography, along with advancements in our understanding of the non-Greek civilizations of antiquity that largely corroborate Herodotus' depictions. Many recent studies by Egyptologists, such as those compiled in a collaborative publication from 2013,[91] have illustrated the significance of considering Herodotus' account of the land of the Nile in enhancing our comprehension of Egypt. Through comparisons such as evaluating our knowledge of the 'Calendriers du destin' (calendars of auspicious and adverse days usually linked with past mythological episodes) in ancient Egypt with Herodotus' descriptions of Egyptian divinatory methods, Emmanuel Jambon concludes that Herodotus' information was indeed of high quality.[92] Similarly, recent archaeological findings by Franck Goddio's team at Thonis-Heracleion appear to validate Herodotus' portrayal of the *baris*, a type of Egyptian boat which, as per the Greek historian, was used for transporting goods.[93] In specific domains, Herodotus stands as a valuable source. Within the ongoing surge of interest among Egyptologists in the Late Period — the time when Herodotus visited Egypt — there is an increasing fascination with his geographical depiction of the country,[94] as well as his portrayal of Egyptian customs during the First Persian Period (526–401). This portrayal is based on his personal observations, hence offering engaging first-hand insights, some of which are unparalleled. Likewise,

[89] Ian Moyer refers here to the renowned study by Arnaldo Momigliano on *Alien Wisdom*, in which Egypt is excluded (see Momigliano 1975).
[90] Moyer 2011: 2–3.
[91] Coulon, Giovanelli-Jouanna and Kimmel-Clauzet 2013. For a critical review of this publication, see, for example, Haziza 2014a.
[92] Jambon 2013.
[93] Herodotus, 2.96. For a 'popular' presentation of the connection between Herodotus' text and the results of recent excavations at Thonis-Heracleion, cf. Belov 2014. Also, for a detailed presentation, see Belov 2018.
[94] On the evolution of the understanding of this period by Egyptologists, see, for example, Perdu 2012 and Payraudeau 2020: IX.

understanding the interactions between Greeks and Egyptians starting from the Saite period is no longer a matter only for Hellenists, but a contribution to a better perspective on the entirety of Late Period Egypt.

This is evident in the case of Naucratis, situated on the eastern bank of the canopic branch of the Nile in the Delta, around fifteen kilometres from the Egyptian town of Saïs. While archaeological evidence indicates Greek settlement as far back as the late seventh century,[95] it was Amasis, the second-to-last pharaoh of the Twenty-Sixth (Saite) Dynasty, who solidified Naucratis as an actual *emporion* ('trading-post'), sanctioned by Egyptian authorities. The likely intention was to exert stringent control over the Greek community.[96] A skilful diplomat, Amasis offered a number of advantages in addition to this economic control. These enabled him to win over the Greek community, which he needed for his army, while satisfying his national base.[97] A significant portion of the benefits granted to the Greeks revolved around religious practices, as attested by Herodotus at 2.178.

As we can see from these few examples, the significance of Herodotus' depiction of Egypt has been amplified by recent Egyptological studies. These studies are increasingly inclined to entertain the possibility that Herodotus might indeed have had access to dependable Egyptian sources. However, this approach falls short of encompassing the complete depth of the Egyptian *logos* for contemporary historians. Indeed, ongoing research is increasingly indicating that Herodotus should not be recognized solely as one of the 'early Egyptologists',[98] but also as an extraordinary portal into the imagination and mindsets of the Late Period. As they mirror the words of his sources, encompassing both Greek and Egyptian perspectives,[99] all the narratives recounted by the Father of History — especially the most imaginative ones — are deserving of attention. This is because they offer insights into the viewpoints, depictions and creative faculties of those who conceived and transmitted these narratives. As I have aimed to demonstrate in various publications,[100] the comprehensive range of accounts attributed to Herodotus, even the most fantastical among them, provides a window into the perceptions and ideas of that era. The vast question of Herodotus' sources will continue to provoke debate, but whatever the quality of his informants, the historian from Halicarnassus grants us access to narratives, primarily oral in nature, that were in circulation during this time. These narratives serve as testimony to ancient ways of thinking. Thus, for example, the ancient history of Egypt presented in the first section of the second part of Book 2 is not so much a reflection of actual events, but rather a portrayal of how the Egyptians themselves envisioned their own country. In my view, the imaginative anecdotes provided by Herodotus in

[95] See Villing and Schlotzhauer 2006 and, for further bibliographical references on this topic, Tallet 2021: 22n107.

[96] See Bresson 2000a, 2000b and 2005, as well as the crucial observations of Agut-Labordère 2012, which consider the research of both Hellenists and Egyptologists on the subject.

[97] On this matter, cf. Haziza 2012.

[98] This expression, which is undoubtedly a high compliment in the words of its author to Herodotus, can be found in Coulon 2013: 184.

[99] On the significance of opinion in the 'mode d'emploi des *Histoires*', see Darbo-Peschanski 1983.

[100] Cf. particularly Haziza 2009.

Book 2 might also reflect the perspectives of the Egyptian elites, especially the priests, during Herodotus' era.[101] And it is important to remember that Herodotus gathered his information in the fifth century BC, often centuries or even millennia after the events he aimed to reconstruct. Even if the Egyptians had written sources about their history, these sources likely underwent a change in meaning over time. In other words, they were probably no longer fully comprehensible to the Egyptians themselves during Herodotus' time.[102]

Likewise, those numerous anecdotes that appear at first sight to be just fanciful tales frequently offer insights into the local cultural background,[103] and, even if they are not accurate accounts, attest to the creativity of their respective communities.[104] Joachim Quack, for instance, has clearly demonstrated that certain anecdotes recounted by Herodotus, previously deemed entirely unbelievable, were actually rooted in authentic Egyptian narratives. Traces of these can be observed in Demotic literature, which is gaining more recognition.[105] To provide a single illustration, the Herodotean anecdote about Pheros (2.111) can be juxtaposed with a recently discovered Demotic tale that seems to be an Egyptian version of this story.[106] Therefore, the label of *muthologos*, attached to Herodotus since antiquity,[107] should no longer carry a negative connotation. The significance of Herodotus' Egyptian *logos* surpasses the mere question of the Greek historian's reliability. Even when straying from historical accuracy, the accounts he presents hold invaluable testimonies. Specifically, in the case of Egyptian history, they mirror the Late Period Egyptians' perception of their past rather than providing a record of historical events.

Furthermore, recent studies are inclined to underscore the necessity of nuanced consideration regarding the sources used by Herodotus, contingent upon the diverse themes expounded in Book 2. While *autopsy* holds particular relevance for the geographical and ethnographical segments of the Egyptian *logos*, the use of oral traditions becomes indispensable for the portion of Book

[101] For instance, see Haziza 2009: 9–41.

[102] On this matter, particularly consider the stimulating analyses of Loprieno 1998 and 2001.

[103] For an initial consideration of the role of anecdotes in Herodotus' *Histories*, especially within Book 2, see Haziza 2013.

[104] The eminent Egyptologist Gaston Maspero expressed a similar sentiment when he exclaimed, 'Les monuments nous disent, ou nous diront un jour, ce que firent les Khéops, les Ramsès, les Thoutmôs du monde réel. Hérodote nous apprend ce qu'on disait d'eux dans les rues de Memphis' (Maspero 1878: 174; 'Monuments tell us, or will one day tell us, what Khufu, Ramses, and Thutmos did in the real world. Herodotus tells us what was said about them in the streets of Memphis', tr. Quint).

[105] Quack 2013.

[106] Quack 2013: 66. See also Ryholt 2006; and for another example — that of the legendary figure of Sesostris — see Widmer 2002 and 2014.

[107] From ancient times, the work of Herodotus has faced strong criticism, and its author was even accused of lies and fabrications. According to Photius (*Library*, 72, 43b18–20), Ctesias in the early fourth century BC labelled him a 'liar' in his *Persica*. A bit later, Aristotle (*Gen. An.* 3.756a6) referred to him as a 'fabulist' (μυθόλογος), an opinion that was echoed in the first century AD by Plutarch in *De Herodoti Malignitate*, who additionally accused the Greek historian of being 'a friend of barbarians' (φιλοβάρβαρος). This critical stance has also persisted among some modern scholars, who, while not adopting the hypercritical judgment of Fehling 1971, have tended to distance themselves from a work that is marked by anecdotes and tales.

2 dedicated to Egyptian history. Nevertheless, another differentiation must be drawn between the ancient and more recent past — specifically, from the Twenty-Sixth (Saite) Dynasty onwards and with the establishment of a substantial Greek community in Egypt. For the preceding period (that is, before the Saite dynasty), Herodotus primarily leaned on accounts from Egyptian priests, who conveyed a perspective on this bygone era constructed in the Late Period. For the period that followed, the accounts of the Greek community are undeniably crucial and can be distinguished from the perception that the Greeks had about the land of the Nile and its history from outside Egypt.[108] Understanding the distinct characteristics of this group, particularly the Hellenomemphites, offers another avenue for interpreting Book 2, and one that warrants further exploration. Lastly, considering the expectations of Herodotus' audience is another key to understanding specific passages. Herodotus' descriptions are often filtered through an *interpretatio Graeca*, which was vital for the comprehension of his Greek audience, but which can also tend to obscure or even distort his narrative. For instance, when Herodotus depicts a hippopotamus, he does so by drawing comparisons to animals familiar to the Greeks (2.71):

> They present the following appearance: four-footed, with cloven hooves like cattle; blunt-nosed; with a horse's mane, visible tusks, a horse's tail and voice; big as the biggest bull. Their hide is so thick that, when it is dried, spearshafts are made of it.[109]

Likewise, the remarkable anecdote of Rhampsinitus' descent into the Underworld (2.122) is unquestionably rooted in an Egyptian context; however, it exhibits an *interpretatio Graeca* that could have had significant implications for how it was perceived not only by a Greek audience beyond Egypt but also by contemporary commentators.[110] Rather than being an oversimplification, the emphasis on dice rather than an Egyptian board game like senet is likely to have altered the initial significance of the anecdote. This shift strengthened the stereotypical Greek perception of a naturally arrogant barbarian ruler,[111] especially as it became more pronounced in the period following the Graeco-Persian Wars.[112] This type of interpretation could have contributed to widening the gap between the Greeks of Egypt and the rest of the Greeks in their perception of the land of the Nile, as

[108] On this matter, see, among others, along with other references: Haziza 2014b; 2023; forthcoming.

[109] Φύσιν δὲ παρέχονται ἰδέης τοιήνδε· τετράπουν ἐστί, δίχηλον, ὁπλαὶ βοός, σιμόν, λοφιὴν ἔχον ἵππου, χαυλιόδοντας φαῖνον, οὐρὴν ἵππου καὶ φωνήν, μέγαθος ὅσον τε βοῦς ὁ μέγιστος· τὸ δέρμα δ᾽ αὐτοῦ οὕτω δή τι παχύ ἐστι ὥστε αὔου γενομένου ξυστὰ ποιέεσθαι ἀκόντια ἐξ αὐτοῦ, tr. Godley.

[110] Cf. the detailed argumentation in Haziza forthcoming.

[111] For a synthesis of this image of the Egyptians by the Greeks, see Haziza 2016. See also Haziza 2006.

[112] For instance, see Hall 1997 and 2002, who developed the idea of an 'oppositional' construction of Greek identity based on the traumatic event of the Greco-Persian Wars.

they viewed from afar a region belonging to the barbarian world that they did not fully understand.

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Appendix: The Influence of Hecataeus on Herodotus

Reference	Theme	Remarks
2.2	Psammetic's experiment on language	F. 1
2.5	Egypt is a gift of the Nile (δῶρον τοῦ ποταμοῦ)	F. 301
2.6	Surveying Egypt's northern border	Herodotus' rejection of Ionian opinion/improvement
2.8	Topography of Egypt	Dependency/improvement (in 8, 3)
2.10	Interest in sedimentation in the Greek eras	Possible dependence
2.11–2	2.11: Information on the Red Sea	Information that may have been obtained from Hecataeus' pinax. Influence of Hecatean topography
2.15–7	Topography of Egypt (polemic against the Ionian geographers, on the definition of Egypt)	Dependence on Hecateus' topography/improvement in 2.15.1 and 17.4–5
2.23	"The opinion about the Ocean is grounded in obscurity and needs no disproof; for I know of no river of Ocean; and I suppose that Homer or some older poet invented this name and brought it into his poetry" (translation Godley)	Possible criticism of Hecataeus
2.28–34	Sources and course of the Nile	Rejects Hecataeus' theories but is influenced by the desire for symmetry
	2.31	Certainly based on Hecatean mapping
	2.32: Cartography of Libya	Known for being Hecatean
	2.34	Probably derived from Hecateaus because its cartography is known to have been influenced by the desire for symmetry
2.43	Genealogy of Heracles	Potential dependence
2.44	The wanderings of Cadmus	Potential dependence

2.45	Heracles (cf. Busiris legend)	Probable influence (also possible in 2.42–3, 83, 113, 145), but an attack on a Hecatean legend.
	"But among the many ill-considered tales told by the Greeks, this is a very foolish story which they relate about Heracles" (tr. Godley)	F. 1
2.49.3	The legends of the Theban cycle	A certain debt to Hecataeus is possible (cf. also 2.145.4)
2.51	The custom of the ithyphallic Hermes: Influence of the Pelasgians on the Greeks The Pelasgians in Attica	Tradition of F. 127 (but contaminated and confused with Herodotus' view of the origins of the Athenians and most Greeks)
2.70–1	Crocodile hunt Description of hippopotamuses	F. 324
2.73	The Phoenix	F. 324
2.77.4	Egyptian beer	F. 322 F. 323
2.91	Danaids (legend of Perseus)	Quite likely (see also 2.171.3)
2.92, 94, 96.1	Botanical questions + boats (Egyptian *baris* in II, 96)	Interest found in Hecataeus: T. 25, F. 291, F. 292
2.98	Danaus and Archander	Potential dependence
2.104	The origins of the Colchians	Potential dependence
2.112–120	History of Proteus	Possible (cf. mention of Φάρος in F. 307; of Κάνωβος in F. 308, of Δούλων πόλις in F. 345, of Ἐλένειον in F. 309)
2.143	Hecataeus discusses chronological issues with Theban priests	F. 300
2.145–6	A question of chronology/ genealogy of the Greek gods	
2.156.1–2	The floating island of Chemmis (Chembis)	F. 305
2.165–6	The nomes of the Μάχιμοι	
2.171.3	Legend of the Daughters of Danaus (prehistory of the Peloponnese)	Fairly probable dependence

NB: This table is based on information from Lloyd 1975: 127–36.