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Herodotus' *Histories*, Book 2, Section 86: The 'Other' and the other 'Other'

This work analyses key elements of historiographical information gathered from the short passage from Book 2, section 86 of Herodotus' *Histories*, which describes the elaborate practices of the mummification process performed on deceased elite Egyptians.¹ This analysis will form a historiographical study of Herodotus' use of the description of Egyptian 'barbarian' mortuary customs. It is my intention to support the argument that Herodotus may have been constructing a comparison between the Egyptian barbarian 'other', and alternative barbarian 'others' specifically for his Greek audience. The investigation will be undertaken through a succinct consideration of the written material's hypothetical interpretations, as well as evaluating the purpose of Herodotus' writing concerning this particular topic. A concise exploration of Herodotus' presentation of evidence, in the form of personal experience or as part of his 'enquiries', as well as his hypothesised methods of collecting said evidence, will be made. Moreover, the intended recipients of this work, and the possible reasoning behind what information was included, will also be addressed briefly. In doing so, an attempt will be made to substantiate the assertion that mortuary customs were an essential aspect of creating a Greek sense of identity, as well as of the ethnographical and geographical 'other'. This advances the assertion that Herodotus was attempting to stimulate his audience to consider the Egyptians within an alternative framework to that of other barbarian groups within the Persian Empire.

1 Herodotus 2.86.

Herodotus was born in Halicarnassus, a Greek city on the western edge of the Persian Empire (in Asia Minor).² Herodotus considered himself a Greek; he spoke Greek, and wrote his prose in that language.³ Halicarnassus could be considered culturally interposed between the two civilisations of Asia Minor and Greece. Due to his geographical and cultural context, it seems plausible that Herodotus may therefore have had a high esteem for those who identified as ‘Greek’ and non-Greeks alike, especially in light of his stated intention to preserve the achievements of both groups.⁴ Indeed, Herodotus introduces his *historie* (‘enquiry’) by clarifying this intention.⁵ He states that he wishes to preserve for posterity the accomplishments and ‘marvellous deeds’ of both Greeks and the barbarian peoples of the Persian Empire by means of a thorough enquiry, and subsequent public display.⁶

This can arguably be detected in the relative consideration with which he records the customs of a barbarian culture, as seen in excerpt 86, Book Two of the *Histories*.⁷ A significant proportion of the content in the first few books of the *Histories* appear to offer an examination by Herodotus of the people and the countries that joined to constitute the extensive Persian Empire. Book Two of Herodotus’ *Histories* consists mainly of a discussion of the cultures and customs of the Egyptians. The fact that Herodotus depicts the activities involved in mummification in intimate detail indicates that he not only took an interest in these practices as a custom of the Egyptians, but that he also thought that such activities would be interesting to his fellow Greeks. His works may have been intended for public performance as lectures in Greek. It seems reasonable to assert that Herodotus’ target audience would have been Greeks. Moreover, as Herodotus lived for most of his adult life in Athens, and indeed, held Athenians in

2 Gould 1989, 5.

3 Gould 1989, 1.

4 Herodotus 1.1.0.

5 Herodotus 1.1.0.

6 Herodotus 1.1.0.

7 Gould 1989, 5.

high regard, his principal audience may have been Athenian Greeks.⁸ Thus, due to his inherent Greek bias, Herodotus feasibly would have approached his enquiries from a Greek perspective. This would seem to denote not only Herodotus' own sense of 'Greekness', but would also better allow his Greek audience to relate to the information communicated to them through his 'displays'.

A historiographical approach to the *Histories* of Herodotus is imperative, as the philosophical evolutions, social developments and social mores of his time would necessarily be reflected in this work.⁹ The impetus that prompted Herodotus to begin his enquiries into the cultures comprising the Persian Empire, as well as the *mythoi* ('stories') of the Greek *poleis*, appears to have been the latterly occurred Persian Wars.¹⁰ It has been suggested that Herodotus may have begun his investigations in order to examine the psychological and social consequences of the Persian Wars, the contemporaneous *Zeitgeist* and the ethnography of the Greek and Persian civilisations that had converged during these significant world events.¹¹ It seems he considered the Persian Wars to be the result of years of varied activities performed by both Greeks and barbarians, which were fated to be repeated, and the recording of which could edify humankind for the future.¹² This could be seen as a reflection of Herodotus' sense of universal cyclicity, and the influence of the Greek *oikeomenê* ideology in his work.¹³ Consequently, these circumstances would have affected Herodotus' personal appreciation of his cultural past and, indeed, that of his contemporaneous world, thereby shaping the essence of the elucidation found in his *Histories*.¹⁴ Modern historians have often criticised Herodotus for his apparent lack of factual material. However, it seems that there cannot be any clear distinction between 'facts' and history as a construction framed by the historian himself, especially as 'history' within

8 Arieti 1995, 209.

9 Spalding and Parker 2007, 27.

10 Harrison 2003, 237. See also Alonso-Núñez 2003, 151.

11 Alonso-Núñez 2003, 147. See also Bichler and Rollinger 2000, 26.

12 Munson 2001, 6. The concepts of fate and divine ordinance is often found in the *Histories*. See, for example, Herodotus 9.16: 'what God has ordained, no man can by any means prevent'.

13 Bichler and Rollinger 2000, 27.

14 Munson 2001, 3–4. See also Spalding and Parker 2007, 27.

the context of Herodotus should perhaps be analysed as an amalgamation of his perceptions and investigations into his contemporary environment.¹⁵

Herodotus may have been attempting to educate his contemporary Greeks about the barbarian societies of the Persian Empire, as well as intending his works to enlighten audiences in the future.¹⁶ Herodotus appears to analyse barbarian cultures as a whole with comparative magnanimity.¹⁷ He therefore may have been endeavouring to persuade provincial Greeks to consider the *nomoi* ('customs') of cultures outside of their own. The examination of the *nomoi* of all cultures played a significant role in Herodotus' work. The key to insight into other communities would feasibly have been the close examination of their established customs and their anthropological contexts.¹⁸ Indeed, Herodotus himself asserted: 'Custom is king'.¹⁹ Customs can be seen to anchor both Greeks and non-Greeks within their geographical and temporal frameworks.²⁰ Thus, crucially, geography and ethnography would appear to be inseparable within a Herodotean context.²¹

Herodotus' methodology was based on the oral questioning—hence, *historie* ('enquiry')—of individuals, as well as his own hypothesised observations. One of the principal issues for historians analysing Herodotus through the lens of historiography is the fact that he 'loved to tell a good story'.²² This is apparent in many instances within the *Histories*. The provenance of Herodotus' information is uncertain. Many scholars have argued that it seems implausible that Herodotus actually went to Egypt.²³ Armayor makes a strong argument that even had Herodotus gone to Egypt, in reality it is highly unlikely that he would have spoken personally to the Egyptian priests.²⁴ Thus the accuracy of the information

15 Spalding and Parker 2007, 34. See also Munson 2001, 16.

16 Baragwanath 2008, 1–2. See also Munson 2001, 4–5.

17 Gould 1989, 5.

18 Munson 2001, 8–9 and 40.

19 Herodotus 3.38.

20 de Bakker 2012, 108.

21 Alonso-Núñez 2003, 146.

22 Yamauchi 1999, 528.

23 Armayor 1978, 59–60.

24 Armayor 1978, 63–5.

related by Herodotus on the subject of embalming in Book Two, Section 86 is questionable. It seems improbable that Herodotus would have been permitted to witness the process of mummification in person. It seems rather more likely that this information may have been garnered from an outside source. It may be likely that he had encountered an Egyptian priest, or someone who may have at some time been involved in mummification in Egypt. The dubious nature of the source of the information within the *Histories* is of concern. However, this does not negate the comparative historiographical value of Herodotus' text. The passage analysed here would seem to reinforce the hypothesis that Herodotus may have been depicting the Egyptians (as part of the Persian Empire), representing them as the 'other' for the benefit of his postulated Greek audience. Further extracts found within Book Two that discuss ancient Egyptian customs would appear to reinforce this hypothesis. Nevertheless, the nature of this particular excerpt, and the gusto with which it is related, would imply that this may have been imparted to his audience with the purpose of titillation; in this particular case, Herodotus may have simply been attempting to entertain. One could imagine the oral narration of the gruesome excerpt 86—accompanied in all likelihood by gestures and enactments—must have excited much discourse among the audience. Be that as it may, the fact that many of the practices involved in embalming of Egyptian mummies described by Herodotus have proven to be relatively accurate indicates that his hypothetical informant, or indeed, he himself, may have had first-hand knowledge of these operations.

Herodotus' digressions into stories which had allegedly been related to him might be perceived as being problematic, as one can never be certain whether or not the passage one is considering is intended as 'factual' or 'storytelling'. However, conceptualisations of *mythoi* and *logoi*, 'tales told', play meaningful roles in the inquiry of Herodotus.²⁵ The stories told to him by disparate sources appear to be the building blocks from which his work took its shape. Furthermore, 'narrative' appears to be regarded as a questionable form of historical description.²⁶ This is

25 See, for example, Munson 2001, 34–5.

26 Spalding and Parker 2007, 47.

exceptionally challenging to the study of Herodotus, considering that many of his explanations are presented in a narrative format. Fehling is of the opinion that Herodotus' work consists largely of reader manipulation, even going so far as to name the *Histories* 'Lügenliteratur'.²⁷ Herodotus would likely have utilised certain poetic tools in his public displays. However, perhaps he never intended his tales to be accepted without question; it seems more likely that he simply used these mechanisms in order to captivate his spectators. Be that as it may, the narrative holds particular significance in the context of Herodotus' contemporary milieu. During the fifth century BCE, it seems that the practice of communication by means of the written word was uncommon, in spite of the rise of the sophists.²⁸ Oral traditions—*legomena*—and mythologised remembrances were apparently the dominant methods of conveying societal heritage and the events of the past from one generation to the next.²⁹ Therefore, the theory of 'social memory' should be applied when considering any part of Herodotus' work.³⁰ Social gatherings would have been the framework in which these oral traditions were imparted to the community; thus, they inevitably became a major source of entertainment. Moreover, orally performed stories are effective media through which themes, mores and lessons can be transmitted to a predominantly uneducated public.³¹ Thus, 'storytelling' could be considered an effective communication device in Herodotus' context. Herodotus states his intention to 'display' his works, by which one would understand that these were intended to be presented orally to an audience in order to both simultaneously entertain and educate them.³² Considering that the chief purpose of the 'enquiry' which Herodotus made was to record and perpetuate the wonders of humankind as he perceived them, it is logical that he should have endeavoured to present his works to his audience in an entertaining, accessible, and memorable manner. The results of Herodotus' inquiries—the *logoi* and *legomena* told to him—would consequently have been

27 Fehling 1971, 90–4.

28 Baragwanath 2008, 35.

29 Gould 1989, 36–39; 69–70.

30 Gould 1989, 36–39; 69–70.

31 de Bakker 2012, 108.

32 Herodotus, 1.1.0. See also Munson 2001, 4–5.

orally transmitted using narrative as a tool with which to convey information in a public forum. Thus, ‘narrative’ as a genre in the framework of Herodotus’ enquiry can truly be seen to provide his audience with ‘purpose, motion and direction’.³³

The *Histories* as a whole gives the impression that Herodotus was a diligent researcher. Certainly, he appears to have been cautious when recording his personal experiences and observations, in order to ensure that they did not seem fantastical.³⁴ However, as he necessarily would have had to have relied on translators and other intermediaries in his travels outside of the Greek-speaking world, certain sections of his work are questionable.³⁵ Scholars have intimated that it is improbable that Herodotus journeyed to Egypt in the pursuit of his enquiries.³⁶ Even had he actually gone to Egypt, it is implausible that Herodotus would have been permitted to observe the mummification of a wealthy individual. Crucially, Herodotus states that the Egyptian information he has related—including the discussion of mummification—is a result of his ‘own direct observation and research’,³⁷ thus indicating that he may not have been present at embalming activities, but trusted the intelligence related to him implicitly.³⁸ If it is accepted that Herodotus did not travel to Egypt, it would appear to be unlikely that he would have travelled even further afield.³⁹ Thus, it would seem logical that the majority of his material concerning funerary *nomoi* of barbarians must have originated from external sources, namely *logioi*, (‘those with a story to tell’).⁴⁰ This information then would have been collected and collated by Herodotus in the course of his inquiries. Assertions have been made that Herodotus would admit when his facts were flawed; with regard to the passages dealing with the mortuary practices of barbarians, however, Herodotus does not seem to doubt the word of

33 Spalding and Parker 2007, 48. See also Baragwanath 2008, 4–6.

34 Fehling 1971, 74.

35 Fehling 1971, 3–4.

36 Armayor 1978, 59–60.

37 Herodotus 2.99.

38 de Bakker 2012, 119–20.

39 Armayor 1978, 61–2.

40 Gould 1989, 27.

his sources.⁴¹ Thus again, *logoi* are important considerations in the context of his sources and their analysis.⁴² Herodotus' use of the phrase *legetai* ('it is said') is suggestive of his acknowledgment of the importance of oral transmission in recording the deeds of any community. It seems incontrovertible that a number of the stories related to Herodotus by foreign peoples may have been symbolic in their culture, or even apocryphal.⁴³ He seems to be cognisant of this at times; in spite of this, his choice to include these stories in his *Histories* appears to indicate that all stories, both Greek and barbarian, were significant in his enquiries.

Herodotus' taste for tales of wonder, and his mindfulness of the importance of conveying the *nomoi* of geographically removed barbarian cultures, combined with the appeal that oral communications would have for a crowd of eager listeners, would probably have produced a highly entertaining ethnographic lecture.⁴⁴ For example, his relation of mummification as the prevailing mortuary custom of the Egyptians is somewhat ghoulish; however, when one considers that this information was probably intended to be communicated aloud in public with accompanying gestures, his use of language and gruesome detail makes sense. If Herodotus' main aims in his work were to record and transmit deeds and wonders of the world in order that they not be forgotten, and to entice Greeks to consider the peoples of the Persian Empire, passages relating outlandish customs for disposal of the dead would be well suited for this objective.⁴⁵ Herodotus' description of Egyptian mummification was probably most significant in that their customary disposal of remains was different from that of Greek society.⁴⁶ The modern disciplines of history and anthropology both deal with contexts, and attempt to transmit the *milieux* of any given group, as well as their 'otherness', to an external faction.⁴⁷ Thus, the enquiry into the *nomoi* of barbarian last rites by Herodotus in

41 Yamauchi 1999, 528.

42 Munson 2001, 34–5.

43 de Bakker 2012, 112–13.

44 Herodotus 2.86.

45 As per Wolfgang Iser's theory of 'reader response'. See Baragwanath 2008, 3–24.

46 See Musgrave 1990, 271–99, and Garland 1985.

47 Cohn 1987, 19. See also Davidson 2004, 150.

his *Histories* could be regarded as satisfying both of these mandates, and hence could be analysed through these modern lenses of history and anthropology. The funerary practices of any group are key ethnographical aspects of that culture and society.⁴⁸ Indeed, the disposal of the dead is significantly symbolic of a particular culture and usually has no interference from outside groups.⁴⁹ In order to facilitate the anthropological contemplation of any ethnic body, the consideration of these procedures is indispensable.⁵⁰ It seems manifest that Herodotus considered funerary customs to be among the most ethnographically significant practices of non-Greek peoples.⁵¹ Therefore, if Herodotus was attempting to prompt his audience to contemplate the anthropological frameworks of the Persian Empire, a discussion of barbarian mortuary traditions would be logical.

The first significant appearances of barbarian funerary customs in the *Histories* are those of the Persians, in general, and the Magi (a Persian caste) in particular.⁵² Here, Herodotus indicates that a male Persian was not buried until the body had been scavenged by animals and birds.⁵³ Moreover, the Magi covered the deceased with wax and then buried him.⁵⁴ These are the first of many instances in the *Histories* where the funerary *nomos* of a barbarian group is singled out to indicate the inherent ‘otherness’ of that group to the Greek audience.⁵⁵ Herodotus’ reported tales of barbarian *Totenbehandlung* from the outermost geographic zones of the Greek sphere could hardly be more different from normal Greek practices.⁵⁶

Cremation appears to have been the common practice in ancient Greek society for disposal of the dead.⁵⁷ In excerpt 86 from Book Two of the *Histories*, Herodotus described the mortuary practice of the Egyptians—namely the

48 Bichler 2000, 48.

49 Munson 2001, 168.

50 Munson 2001, 168.

51 Bichler 2000, 48.

52 Herodotus 1.140. Also discussed in Munson 2001, 167.

53 Herodotus 1.140.

54 Herodotus 1.140.

55 Munson 2001, 167.

56 Musgrave 1990 and Garland 1985.

57 Musgrave 1990, 272–74.

attempted preservation of the physical body—which was wholly the opposite of the Greek norm. It would certainly seem that the preservation of the physical body as performed by the ancient Egyptians would not have been considered appropriate by Greeks. In doing this, Herodotus would appear to be constructing a conceptualisation of the Egyptians as ‘other’, opposite to the Greeks and other cultures within his world view.⁵⁸ The rather lurid narrative of the intricacies of organ removal, including the brain, from the corpse seems to be related with ghoulish glee. Perhaps this could be interpreted as an example of Herodotus’ appreciation of a stimulating narrative. It appears to be characteristic of Herodotus, and certainly worthy of future investigation at a later date, that he calls attention to the fact that in ancient Egypt, ‘mummification is a distinct profession’.⁵⁹ This implies that this professionalism, with regard to the disposal of the remains of the deceased, would seem curious, or indeed exotic, to his Greek audience, since evidence would seem to suggest that, within a Greek context, disposal of physical remains would have been the responsibility of immediate family members.⁶⁰ Herodotus’ remark that Egyptian embalmers ‘ask which of the three [embalming methods] is required’, seems pertinent.⁶¹ In highlighting this query, an element of orality is introduced in this section of Herodotus’ work that is compelling: an enquiry within an enquiry, which would appear to reflect Herodotus’ notions of the cyclical nature of things.

Additionally, the comprehensive description of the expensive products used in the process of mummification as delineated by Herodotus—such as myrrh, cassia and spices—could indicate that these were items of great value and scarcity in the Greek sphere.⁶² In this excerpt, and the successive two paragraphs, it appears to be of great concern to him that there are three distinct ‘price points’ for the treatment of the body deceased. One could possibly infer from this that there might not have been such a distinction in the funerary practices of the ancient

58 Herodotus 2.35.

59 Herodotus 2.86.

60 Garland 1985, 21–3.

61 Herodotus 2.86.

62 Herodotus 2.86.

Athenians. Therefore, a commentary by Herodotus on the wealthy economic status of the Egyptians could be inferred, particularly when considered in an implied comparison with the relatively poor fiscal condition of mainland Greece. It could be extrapolated that by mentioning the use of these premium commodities in the preservation of the dead, Herodotus may have been creating an image of the Egyptians as luxurious and extravagant. This would appear to reinforce his tacit formulation of the Egyptians as the ‘other’, and as part of the Persian Empire. From this, the Greek sense of ‘weak’ ethnicity in the ‘other’, which originated in countries that were warmer and richer than they, is implicit.

The barbarian groups show great disparity in their funerary behaviour, yet all their customs would probably seem wholly inappropriate to a Greek audience.⁶³ Further examples include the ritualised cannibalistic practices of the Issedones, and the elaborately excessive burials of the Scythian kings, which would feasibly have caused outrage in a Greek assembly.⁶⁴ The reasoning behind Herodotus’ inclusion of funerary vignettes is never expressly stated and may seem arbitrary at first. However, when considered in the context of his enquiry as a whole, these descriptions of mortuary practices would appear to be the epitome of the *nomoi* that so fascinated and motivated Herodotus. The Egyptian attempts to wholly preserve the body would have juxtaposed jarringly with the apparently prevalent Greek practice of cremation.⁶⁵ Yet Herodotus’ discussions of other barbarian funerary customs from the geographic edges of his known world would denote far greater ‘otherness’ than that of the Egyptians.⁶⁶ Herodotus’ delineation of the sophisticated and pragmatic Egyptian approach to mortuary activities, in contrast to his depictions of the brutal and primitive customs of more geographically distant barbarians, implies that the geographically immediate Egyptians were considered by him to be more civilised than their farther Imperial counterparts. In much of his work on Egypt, Herodotus expends considerable energy emphasising

63 Bichler 2000, 84.

64 Bichler 2000, 48–9, and 84. See also Herodotus 4.26 and 4.71.

65 Musgrave 1990, 272–4.

66 Bichler and Rollinger 2000, 44–5.

the pronounced ‘otherness’ of the Egyptians, not only compared to Greeks, but to other known peoples.⁶⁷ This would appear to be confirmed by his depiction of their exotic mortuary customs.⁶⁸ However, it seems significant that Herodotus himself mentions that the Egyptians appear to have considered anyone who did not speak their language to be ‘barbarians’.⁶⁹ The Greek conceptualisation of ‘barbarian’ — any group that did not speak Greek — is thus mirrored within a context which would be considered by Greeks to be wholly un-Greek in their schema of self-identification.⁷⁰ This problematises considerations of Herodotus’ creation of the Egyptian ‘other’ for his hypothesised Greek audience. Consequently, reductionist theories would not function in an analysis of Herodotus’ representations of the Egyptians, as they might in his depictions of alternative barbarian groups.⁷¹ Herodotus makes a point of identifying this aspect of Egyptian civilisation, which seems to associate Egyptian identity and culture with Greek society and self-identification.⁷² Moreover, Herodotus intimates that aspects of Greek religion may have had their roots in Egypt, thus juxtaposing these two apparently disparate religious contexts.⁷³ This allusion again appears to identify the Egyptians closely with the Greeks. In doing so, he arguably creates an identifiable ‘other’ for his Greek audience that is accessible and relatable.

Herodotus contends with many preconceived ideas that Greeks would have had about Egypt in his Book Two.⁷⁴ He does not seem to depict the Egyptians as shockingly different; all things considered, he seems to convey that they had peculiar eccentricities.⁷⁵ In point of fact, Book Two of the *Histories* could be considered to contain many remarks which would seem to suggest that Herodotus

67 Gruen 2011, 77. See, for example, Herodotus 2. 35–42.

68 As discussed above.

69 Herodotus 2.158. See also Gruen 2011, 76–7.

70 Munson 2001, 101.

71 Gruen 2011, 76–7 and 82.

72 Gruen 2011, 76–7 and 82.

73 Herodotus 2.54–7. See also Fehling 1971, 51.

74 de Bakker 2012, 113.

75 Gould 1989, 95. See also Yamauchi 1999, 528. For example, the Egyptian practice of shaving one’s eyebrows after the natural death of a pet cat, Herodotus 2.66.

held the Egyptians in some esteem.⁷⁶ For example, Herodotus claims that the Egyptians were not only the first to calculate the year and its seasons accurately, but also were the first to assign months and days to gods, and acknowledges the fact that Egyptian doctors were sophisticated and specialised.⁷⁷ The Egyptian dichotomy thus presented by Herodotus—that of an Egypt both truly different and yet quite similar to Greece—is significant. It could be argued that Herodotus hereby augmented conceptualisations of contemporary Greek identity, by delineating foreign cultures within a Greek context.⁷⁸ The use of descriptions of funerary customs throughout the barbarian world, would appear to consolidate those of the Egyptians as wholly and bizarrely different to the burial customs of the Greeks, and would also appear to reaffirm that these practices were not so abominably ‘other’ in comparison with, for example, the cannibalistic Indians.⁷⁹ In this manner, Herodotus creates the impression of simultaneously establishing and subverting the concept of an Egyptian, barbarian ‘other’.⁸⁰

While aspects of Herodotus’ treatment of the mortuary practices of non-Greek groups may not be wholly accurate, or altogether unbiased, this unquestionably does not negate the historical value of Herodotus’ work. It is the opinion of the author that Herodotus should not be disregarded simply because his sources are questionable. Even should these sources prove to be incorrect, his work provides a *terminus a quo* for historical and ethological discussion. ‘Narrative’ in the context of Herodotus’ inquiries seems to have been a logical, indeed necessary, method of elucidation, rather than the denigrated methodology that modern scholars would have it be. The impression is formed that Herodotus’ principal intention was to be both ethnographer and educator of his fellow Greeks. Therefore, Herodotus may have presented a study of his contemporary world—peoples and places—orally, in order to introduce to his contemporaries a type of anthropological commentary. The *nomoi* of many cultures, Greek and barbarian,

76 Gruen 2011, 79.

77 Herodotus 2.3–4 and 2.82–4. See also Gould 1989, 95–6.

78 Moyer 2011, 82.

79 Herodotus 3.38.4. See also Bichler 2000, 48.

80 Gruen 2011, 82.

comprise a large portion of his *Histories*, and are a logical base for his enquiry into his contemporary framework. In order to encourage his Greek audience to consider the ‘others’ of the Persian Empire, Herodotus’ commentaries on funerary customs would appear judicious. Nevertheless, his exegesis encounters a striking paradigm shift in his construction of the Egyptian dichotomy. The creation of an Egyptian ‘other’ as presented by Herodotus could be analysed as infinitely more complex than depictions of alternative barbarian ‘others’. Herodotus appears to have related the *nomoi*, including the funerary customs, of the Egyptians in order to establish an ‘other’ his contemporary Greek audience could consider, and with which they could identify. In doing so, it is feasible that he formulated a sympathetic, Hellenocentric Egyptian ‘other’ with which his public could compare alternate, more geographically removed, and thus more exotic, barbarian communities. This would appear to harmonise with the traditional Greek conceptualisation of cultures and customs becoming more alien and barbaric the farther they were geographically from Greece. Thus, the work of Herodotus can be seen to reinforce customs and geography as disseminating factors in the Greek conceptualisation of barbarism. This analysis reinforces the assertion that custom would truly appear to be king in the work of Herodotus. Herodotus’ treatment of Egyptian mortuary customs in comparison with those of other barbarian groups could reasonably be seen as the development of a lens through which his Greek audience might examine—and re-evaluate—itsself and its civilisation, as well as cultures it had traditionally perceived as barbarian.

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