

Herodotus and the Encyclopaedic Impulse in Antiquity

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Introduction: A Case for the Reconsideration of the *Histories*

One of the most important works to have survived Classical Antiquity is the *Histories*. Written by Herodotus of Halicarnassus in the latter half of the 5th century BC it is one of our best sources for the conflict commonly known as the Persian Wars (499 – 449 BC). Even though it is perhaps the most detailed document of the nearly fifty-year conflict between the Greek city-states and the Persian Empire, its place among the great works of history has been contended.

Some historiographers consider Herodotus the father of history and his text the first of the genre. In fact, the word history comes from the Greek ἱστορία or *historie* the expression Herodotus uses to characterise his investigation into the reasons for the ‘hostilities between Greeks and non-Greeks.’¹ Others, however, have found Herodotus lacking. At best, Herodotus’ critics consider him an unreliable relater of information that is, in equal parts, as fantastical as it is nonsensical. At worst, they consider him deliberately deceitful.² This is not to say that the *Histories* has ever been completely dismissed from the canon of historical writing. Rather, it would be more accurate to say that the priorities and aims of history as a discipline have not always aligned with the Herodotean

¹ Herodotus, the *Histories*, (trans.) Waterfield, Robert, Oxford University Press: Oxford (1998), proem. The meaning of the word inquiry (*historie*) has been discussed at length elsewhere. For a brief but useful introductory discussion on the subject, Paul, Demont, ‘Figures of ‘Inquiry’ in Herodotus “Inquiries”, *Mnemosyne*, vol. 62 (2009), pp. 179 – 205, 2009, p. 182 – 84.

² The debate concerning Herodotus and his sources is one that has ancient roots. For an example from late antiquity, see Plutarch’s *on the Malice of Herodotus*. For a more contemporary example, see Detlev, Fehling, *Herodotus and his ‘Sources’: Citation, Invention and Narrative Art*. (trans.) J.G. Howie. Francis Cairns (Publications) Ltd: Leeds, 1989. An extended critique of ‘liar school’ can be found in Pritchett, W.K, *the Liar School of Herodotus*, J.C. Gieben; Amsterdam (1993).

paradigm. The *Histories* is a winding, eclectic and not an all-together straightforward account of the conflict. It is tied loosely together by a seemingly obscure structure with a diffuse and often unclear aim. In the 18th century, as the discipline of history aimed to professionalise, scholars found it difficult to reconcile the disparate parts of the Herodotean narrative as it often departs from the subject at hand in order to digress, fixate, or elaborate on some detail that the narrator presumably found to be of interest.³ Although this undoubtedly makes the text entertaining, it is also perceived as a major fault. Instead of Herodotus, the rigorous and dispassionate approach of the historian Thucydides, whose single-subject narrative and claims of writing objective history, was elected as the better of the two and as someone who the emerging discipline could model itself after.

18th century notions of what constitutes legitimate historical writing dominated until well into the 20th. Although they have largely fallen out of fashion as the understanding of what constitutes a legitimate historical text has widened, the *Histories*, generically, thematically, and formally innovative, is still difficult to place.

How, then, are we to understand the *Histories*? Undoubtedly, it is a work of great effort and learning. Indeed, what is particularly fascinating about the Herodotean text is the remarkable breadth and width of the narrative scope. It sets Herodotus apart from not only his contemporaries but also from preceding and succeeding historians. At its core, the *Histories* is polyphonic text, containing within the boundaries of its textual body fragments and titbits of disparate and varied knowledge. It is this particular quality that we should consider when we attempt to understand the *Histories*.

The *Histories* is *encyclopaedic* in both scope and aim. As will be discussed, “encyclopaedic” is a difficult term to define but should, in the context of this paper, be understood to mean texts that in some way or another aim for totality and/or comprehensiveness.

An encyclopaedic text is one that *gathers*, *organises*, and *stores* knowledge according to explicit or implicit principles of organisation. The ultimate intention/goal of an encyclopaedic text is to collect all that is known in relation to its subject of choice.⁴

³ See, for example, Hrdt., 5.87 – 88.

⁴ See Hilary, Clarke *the Fictional Encyclopaedia: Joyce, Pound, Sollers*, Routledge: New York, (1990 (2011)), p. 20 – 20, on ‘encyclopedic optimism’ and the futility of attempting to contain all of knowledge within a single text.

Although the *Histories* is sometimes mentioned adjacent to the encyclopaedic, scholarships have thus far neglected to investigate the implications of this relationship further. The following text is an attempt to rectify this omission. By surveying recent scholarship on the encyclopaedic text in antiquity, it appears that it is to a large extent a problem of definition. Meaning, a disagreement between scholars on what the term *encyclopaedic* is meant to signify. Attempts to define what is meant by encyclopaedic also warrants questions of whether it is even appropriate to attempt to label an ancient text as an “encyclopaedia” or if it is necessary to widen our understanding of the term to avoid anachronism. After considering these issues, I will argue that, based on its aim and structure in relation to its content, the *Histories* can be described as encyclopaedic. To illustrate, the second book of the *Histories*, historically dismissed as an anomaly, will be used as an example of the encyclopaedic impulse that permeates the work as a whole. To conclude, I will consider what can be gained from reading the *Histories* as part of the encyclopaedic paradigm.

The Encyclopaedic Tradition

First, then, the encyclopaedia. The study of the encyclopaedia in antiquity is a narrow field.⁵ Despite increased interest in the subject in recent years, scholars still struggle with a fundamental question: is it appropriate or even possible to speak of an encyclopaedia before the Enlightenment? As Greg Woolf and Jason Köing argue in their overview of the encyclopaedic phenomena in antiquity, ancient “encyclopaedic” works are not encyclopaedias in the modern sense.⁶ Even someone with a causal understanding of the classic appearance of the encyclopaedia can tell that the *Histories* bear little resemblance to canonised examples of the genre such as Denis Diderot’s *L’Encyclopédie*, or the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. The *Histories* lacks features essential to these works. It has no organising index, there is no alphabetic order, and no subject-headings, all features we have come to associate with the encyclopaedia. Put differently, a particular way of *organising* and *presenting* knowledge that we associate with the

⁵ Woolf and Köing (2013) and Binkley (1997), are two Anglo-American anthologies that examine the encyclopedic phenomena across a range of text, and periods, see Harris-McCoy (2008) p. 13, for a list of French and German texts on the subject.

⁶ Jason, Köing, and Greg, Woolf, ‘Introduction’, in Jason, Köing, and Greg Woolf (eds.), *Encyclopedism from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2013), pp. 1 – 23, p. 2 – 3; cf. with.

18th century encyclopaedia is missing. Accordingly, we must make our first important distinction between the encyclopaedia and the encyclopaedic tradition. They are, of course, related. However, the encyclopaedia is the product of a particular historical situation, the Enlightenment, and is shaped in accordance with the intellectual aspirations of that era.⁷ To avoid the pitfalls of anachronism what seems at first glance to be a hair-splitting difference between terms will reveal itself to be fundamental to our understanding of the *Histories* as *encyclopaedic*, but not necessarily an *encyclopaedia*.

It is true, as Köing and Woolf argue, that ‘encyclopaedism was never a genre within classical antiquity.’⁸ However, Robert Fowler remarks that while the encyclopaedia as a ‘single book’ did not exist in ancient Greece, works that could be considered encyclopaedic still existed. Texts that aim for comprehensiveness in one way or another such as large-scale genealogies that ‘preserv[ed] the sum of mythical knowledge,’ Hesiod’s *Theogony*, the catalogue of ships in the *Iliad* that list the Greek expeditionary forces (paralleled in Hrdt. 7.61-99), and the Aristotelian corpus that covers ‘rhetoric, poetics, logic, physics, ethics, history, ethnology [...]’ are among the texts that Fowler identifies as proto-encyclopaedic in nature.⁹ Indeed, to account for the variety of texts in antiquity that might be considered encyclopaedic in nature, it is perhaps more appropriate to speak of an **encyclopaedic tradition**, or **encyclopaedic paradigm**.¹⁰ However, scholarship remains divided on the particulars – what works should be considered encyclopaedic? With such a wide variety of material to choose from, is it possible or even productive to group these texts together, and even if we do, is it possible to speak of a coherent and *conscious* history of encyclopaedic writing that stretches across antiquity?¹¹

The fact is that it is Pliny the Elder’s *Naturalis Historia*, written several centuries after the texts listed by Fowler, that most scholars consider the first proper example of an encyclopaedic text in antiquity. In contrast to Fowler, who looks to the Greeks, Trevor Murphy states in the introduction to his monograph

⁷Aude, Doody, ‘Pliny’s Natural History: Enkuklios Paideia and the Ancient Encyclopaedia’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 7(1) (2009), pp. 1 – 21, p. 20.

⁸ Jason, Köing, and Greg, Woolf, ‘Encyclopaedism in the Roman empire’, in (eds.) Jason, Köing, and Greg, Woolf, *Encyclopaedism from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2013) pp. 23 - 63 , p. 23.

⁹ Robert, Fowler, ‘Encyclopaedias: Definitions and Theoretical Problems’, in (ed.) Binkley, Peter, *Pre-modern Encyclopaedic Texts*, Brill: Leiden (1997) pp. 3 – 31, p. 19; 19.

¹⁰ Clarke, 1990 (2011), p. v: Clarke suggest several different words to describe the encyclopaedic phenonema, each with its own implications.

¹¹ Köing and Woolf (2013a) p. 2.

on the *Naturalis Historia* that ‘there is something particularly Roman’ about the encyclopaedia.¹² Latin texts are overrepresented in the study of the encyclopaedic phenomena in antiquity. Other frequently cited examples are Vitruvius’s *on Architecture*, and Varro’s *Artes* and the texts of Celsus and Quintilian are often considered encyclopaedic in nature as well. Common between them is, as in the case of the Greek texts, not their subject matter. Rather, it is that these works are all texts of and about knowledge, compiled and then subordinated either to a governing theme or system of organisation.¹³ Texts that, as Daniel Harris-McCoy suggest, engage with ‘the broader issues of the collection and organization of information in pursuit of the totalizing ideal.’¹⁴

The overrepresentation of Roman writing in the history of the encyclopaedic as a phenomenon can perhaps be explained by the fact that it is at this point that the texts take on a form that is legible to later cultures as encyclopaedic. The encyclopaedic tradition before Latin literature is disparate, less uniform. On the other hand, the fact is that not much pre-Roman material survives in a shape that would allow for fruitful study of the encyclopaedic phenomena. Naturally, there are number of problems associated with attempting to analyse text that have ambitions of totality from fragments.¹⁵

Several scholars have sized upon the Greek term *enkyklios paideia*. The term often understood to mean general education and is tied to a tradition of learning of the liberal arts that emerged in antiquity. To sustain an argument for an encyclopaedic tradition, scholars such as Murphy and Clarke trace the use of the word in both Greek and Latin texts.¹⁶ For example, Murphy suggest that Pliny uses it to describe ‘the totality of human knowledge.’¹⁷ Others, however, have been less enthusiastic about seeing this as a basis on which to construct a lineage of encyclopaedic texts. Aude Doody, for example, questions the inclusion of the texts of Varro and Celsus in the encyclopaedic tradition. She argues that while their connection to the idea of *enkyklios paideia* is evident, the concept should

¹² Trevor, Murphy, *Pliny the Elder’s Natural History: The Empire in the Encyclopedia*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2004) p. 13; cf. with Fowler, 1997, p. 17 who argues that the idea of the comprehensive encyclopedia was ‘Roman’, and Köing and Woolf, (2013b) p. 23.

¹³ Doody, (2009) p. 2.

¹⁴ Daniel, Harris-McCoy, ‘Varieties of Encyclopedism in the early Roman Empire: Vitruvius, Pliny the Elder, Artemidorus’, *Dissertation*, University of Pennsylvania (2008) p. 6.

¹⁵ Harris-McCoy (2008) p. 11.

¹⁶ Murphy (2004) p. 13; Clarke, (1990 (2011)), p. 17 – 18.

¹⁷ Murphy (2004) p. 33, also p. 13.

not be taken to be equated with the encyclopaedic tradition.¹⁸ In fact, the term encyclopaedia was not in common use before the 15th century.¹⁹ As John North maintains, while the *enkyklios paideia* certainly gestures toward an idea of a complete circle of learning, it does not signify the same as encyclopaedia – a term that denotes a complete circle of knowledge.²⁰

What we might conclude from this is that while several texts across both Greek and Roman antiquity share a number of features with each other, it is difficult to trace a conscious and sustained tradition of encyclopaedic writing in antiquity. Scholarship is still undecided on whether the encyclopaedic phenomenon is dependent on a shared method or linked together by their association with a specific ideal of learning and education. Still, what we can say with confidence is that a number of texts in antiquity are operating, either in part or in whole, under what we might justifiably call an **encyclopaedic impulse**. As Clarke argues: ‘The encyclopaedia, then, results from one basic impulse: to know all there is to know.’²¹ To put it differently, the encyclopaedic impulse can be taken to be synonymous with striving for ‘comprehensiveness.’²²

To speak of an impulse rather than a tradition allows for an expansive understanding of the **encyclopaedic** while simultaneously avoiding the discrepancies that emerge if we attempt to construct a genealogy of texts, which would imply the diachronic development of a genre across a period of time. As illustrated, it is difficult to do such a thing with confidence. To describe it as an encyclopaedic impulse also allows us to account for a variety of phenomena. Above all, the encyclopaedic impulse should be applied to texts that gesture towards a being comprehensive accounts of a body of knowledge, but not one that necessitates direct correspondence in style or structure to other texts that we might also consider encyclopaedic. Having dealt with some of the challenges that query into the encyclopaedic necessitates, we have arrived at a vantage point from which we can begin to examine the encyclopaedic impulse in antiquity, and in the *Histories* in particular.

¹⁸ Doody (2009) p. 3.

¹⁹ Fowler (1997) p. 27 – 29.

²⁰ John, North, ‘Encyclopedias and the Art of Knowing Everything’, in 1997, (ed.) Binkley, Peter, *Pre-modern Encyclopaedic Texts*, Brill: Leiden (1997) pp. 183 – 201, p.184.

²¹ Clarke, 1990 (2011), p. 18.

²² Köing and Woolf (2013b) p. 24.

The Structure of the *Histories*

When Woolf and Köing trace the development of the encyclopaedic phenomena in pre-Roman texts, Herodotus makes an appearance. His inclusion is largely due to the abundance of material that his text incorporates: ‘almost without restriction, and yet without losing the sight of the overarching structure of the work.’²³ However, for Woolf and Köing, Herodotus and the tradition of history stand adjacent to the encyclopaedic.²⁴ A close relationship between ancient historical works and the encyclopaedic is, however, not a foreign concept. Christine Rubicam speaks of the two types of texts as linked (if not synonymous) and notes that ‘the genre of encyclopaedic history can be traced back to the ancient world.’²⁵ Given Rubicam’s recognition that histories have the potential to be encyclopaedic in character, it is curious that the *Histories* (given its relative fame) is not given any attention in her account of the encyclopaedic histories of the Greek world. Rubicam considers Ephorus of Cyme, (4th century BC), the starting point for encyclopaedic ‘world histories’, which she highlights as an important precursor to the *Bibliotheca Historica* of Diodorus Siculus, 1st century B.C. Some of the aspects of the work that she highlights as encyclopaedic in Ephorus and Diodorus, such as accounts of the lineage of both Greek and non-Greek peoples, are commonly recognised features of the *Histories* as well.²⁶ Perhaps the chief reason for Rubicam’s omission is one that we have already considered. In her study of the *Bibliotheca Historica*, Rubicam examines the explicit method of organisation, set out by the author of the text – the introductory paragraphs, the chronological division – and supposes the encyclopaedic work to rely on an easily identified structure that will aid the reader in orientating and navigating through the material.²⁷ To this end, perhaps Rubicam can be said to be somewhat coloured by generic expectations set by the 18th century encyclopaedia. The *Histories* is organised around a less explicit structure. This, however, does not mean that *the Histories* is lacking one.

²³ Köing and Woolf (2013b) p. 26.

²⁴ Köing and Woolf (2013b) p. 50.

²⁵ Catherine, Rubicam, ‘The Organisation of Material in Graeco-Roman World Histories’, (ed.) Binkley, Peter, *Pre-modern Encyclopaedic Texts*, Brill: Leiden (1997) pp. 127 – 137, p. 128; cf. the tradition of universal history, in e.g. Jose Miguel Alonso-Nues., ‘Herodotus’ Conception of Historical Space and the Beginnings of Universal History’, in (eds.) Peter, Derow and Robert, Parker, *Herodotus and his World*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2003) pp. 145 – 152.

²⁶ Rubicam (1997) p. 131 – 132.

²⁷ Rubicam (1997) p. 130 – 132. cf. Thucydides, *The War of the Peloponnesians and the Athenians*, (trans.) Mynott, Jeremy, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2013) 5.26.1.

The structure of the *Histories* was, for a long time, considered alternatively confusing or impenetrable. The *Histories* is a repository of knowledge, but it is not designed for the reader to dip in and out and retrieve bits of knowledge. It requires an engagement with the text to understand why it is that a specific type of knowledge is included.

While now largely accepted as an almost canonical work of Herodotean scholarship, upon its publication Henry R. Immerwahr's *Form and Thought in Herodotus*, was a radical reconsideration of the structure of the *Histories*. It can be credited for laying the foundation of our modern understanding its structure.²⁸ Revisiting it is useful as it clearly outlines the composition of the work. Immerwahr surveys the *Histories*, suggesting that it is composed of a series of *logoi*: a series of minor and major stories or narrative units.²⁹ Rather than viewing the Herodotean text as a collection of more or less relevant tales Immerwahr suggest that a unifying structure governs the works. It is also this underlying structure that justifies the inclusion of what previously has been dismissed as a series of lengthy digressions on non-relevant subjects.³⁰

The subject of the *Histories* is, as Herodotus states in his preface to preserve the remarkable achievements of 'Greeks and non-Greeks' from being 'erased by time' and above all to discern the underlying causes of 'the cause of hostilities between Greeks and non-Greeks.'³¹ According to Immerwahr's reading of the *Histories*, its primary concern is with the conflict that posterity has named the Persian Wars and the nations that were the primary actors in this struggle.³² Immerwahr's reading is supported by the way that the narrative begins with this central aim to then expand to explain it thoroughly, reaching back into the remote past to the man that was first responsible for the aggressions. 'Croesus was Lydian by birth', writes Herodotus. But for Herodotus, this is not a sufficient exploration of the subject, and the history of how? Croesus became king of the Lydias is also related: 'Here is how the kingdom passed from the

²⁸ See Irene, De Jong 'Narrative Unity and Units', in Egbert J. Bakker, Irene, de Jong and Hans, Van Wees (eds.), *Brills Companion to Herodotus*, Brill: Leiden (2002) pp. 245 – 266., for an overview of the scholarship surrounding the structure of the work, as well as modification to Immerwahr's reading by using the notions of 'prolepsis' and 'analepsis'.

²⁹ Henry, Immerwahr, R. *Form and Thought in Herodotus*, Philological Monographs of the American Philological Association: Cleveland, Ohio (1966), p. 14.

³⁰ Immerwahr, (1966) p. 325; Donald, Lateiner, *the Historical Method of Herodotus*, University of Toronto Press: Toronto (1989) p. 40.

³¹ Hrdt., *preface*; Athens as a central actor among the Greek is heavily emphasised. See e.g. Hrdt. 5.66.1; 5.89.1.

³² Immerwahr (1966), p. 317.

Heraclidae, who had been the Lydian royal family, to Croesus family.³³ Again and again, the *Histories* repeats this narrative pattern. It maintains at its centre, the conflict to it as a justification for its inclusion of material, for example, 5.96.1 – 5.97.1, but then stretches in an effort toward comprehensiveness, a complete picture of events – the underlying causes, the details, the settings and the scenes, the people that the conflict directly and indirectly affects, the lands they inhabit, their culture. The nature of the encyclopaedic impulse in Herodotus is tied to the two central aims of his preface. The following section aims to demonstrate, with a study of Book 2 of the *Histories*, ways that the encyclopaedic impulse is expressed.

The *Histories*, Knowledge, and the Encyclopaedic impulse

Undisputedly the *Histories* is a work of, and about, knowledge. Importantly about *collecting*, *evaluating*, and *preserving* knowledge. This much Herodotus makes clear. The *Histories* is encyclopaedic because there is no clear demarcation, or hierarchical ordering of different kinds of knowledge. Indeed, knowledge, local and national tradition both written and oral, scientific, ethnographic, geographic and genealogical knowledge, moral and divine knowledge, and knowledge regarding human nature is all deemed necessary to make the narrative of the Persian Wars as complete as possible.

According to Clarke, encyclopaedic works are always about ‘both the object of knowledge and the process of coming to know.’³⁴ The conflict between the Greek city-states and the Achaemenid Empire should be considered the overarching object of knowledge, and all that is included in the *Histories* is included in service of understanding the reasons for this conflict. Fowler, perhaps the only one who remarks on the encyclopaedic character of the *Histories* (but nevertheless fails to elaborate), maintains that ‘the work is encyclopaedic: one way or another, the whole of the known world (and beyond) is worked into the narrative.’³⁵ It is precisely this particular characteristic that suggest the encyclopaedic impulse, and it is visible both in small and large inquiries into the nature and state of things.

³³ Hrdt. 1.6; 1.7.

³⁴ Clarke, (1990 (2011)) p. 17.

³⁵ Robert, Fowler, ‘Herodotus and his prose predecessors’, in (eds.) Carolyn, Dewald, and John, Marincola, *the Cambridge Companion to Herodotus*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2006), pp. 29 – 45, p. 30.

Herodotus' narrative is characterised by a narrator that mediates knowledge of others to his readers. A rhetoric staple of the Herodotean inquiry, displayed at the beginning of the text and re-occurring throughout, is this: after opening his work with reporting what he considered to be the earliest cause of the conflict between Greeks and non-Greeks, namely the 'abducting of women', and relating both the Persian and Greek versions of what escalates into a series of abductions and counter-abductions of both Persian and Greek women, Herodotus states, 'I am not going to come down in favour of this or that account, but I will talk about the man who, to my certain knowledge, first undertook criminal acts of aggression against the Greeks.'³⁶ While Herodotus does not adhere to his initial claims of impartiality with any great fidelity, what makes this particular narratorial quirk interesting is the fact that Herodotus, although he asserts his own position in terms of what he considers to be the most likely version of events, simultaneously accounts for different traditions of knowledge before making his judgement in the matter.³⁷ While this is a common occurrence throughout the *Histories*, perhaps the best display of the encyclopaedic impulse is the second book, concerning Egypt.

Historically, Book Two of the *Histories* has been viewed as somewhat of an anomaly. It treats Egypt, the country, its people, and their customs. What is often referred to as the Egyptian *logos* or the Egyptian digression spans an entire book and is the lengthiest of its kind in the *Histories*. For a time, some scholars like Jacoby and Fornara even supposed that because it initially seems non-relevant to the main narrative, Book Two was originally intended as a separate geographic and ethnographic piece.³⁸ Immerwahr's argument that it should be considered part of the main narrative was long considered one of his most controversial claims. However, as Immerwahr argues, Egypt was after all submerged into the Persian Empire and made-up part of the expeditionary forces that attacked Greece.³⁹ Furthermore, it shares similarities in content and structure as the other digressions in the text such as the Scythian in Book 4, and the Spartan in Book 5, whose significance to the narrative has not been

³⁶ Hrdt. 1.1.1 – 5; 1.1.1; 1.5.2.

³⁷ E.g. Hrdt. 2.121.1.

³⁸ See, e.g., Reinhold, Bichler, "Herodotus's Book 2 and the Unity of the Work", (eds.) Harrison, Thomas, and Irwin, Elizabeth *Interpreting Herodotus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, (2018), pp. 76 – 98.

³⁹ Immerwahr, (1966), p. 317; 323 – 4.

dismissed.⁴⁰ And indeed, it is perhaps the second book which most clearly displays Herodotus' encyclopaedic impulse.

The ambition of the Egyptian *logos* mirrors that of the *Histories* as a whole. Herodotus writes, 'I am going to talk at some length about Egypt, because it has very many remarkable features and has produced more monuments that beggar description than anywhere else in the world.'⁴¹ While John Marincola remarks that praise of subject is often used as a standard rhetoric device in historical works in antiquity, it also squares with the aim of the *Histories* as a whole, to gather and preserve remarkable features and achievements, as well as gesture towards the language of comprehensiveness.⁴² Egypt is home to more account-worthy monuments than in any other part of the world and this is worth retelling and preserving.

The subjects which the Herodotean inquiry concerns itself with in relation to Egypt are numerous; genealogy of the Egyptian people from its earliest kings; a refutation to Homer on the presence of Helen in Ilium; and the flora and fauna of the land, where rare birds such as the 'Phoenix' and the 'Ibis' are among subjects discussed.⁴³ While the Roman encyclopaedic texts mined books for knowledge, Herodotus claims that he makes many different kinds of sources in order to compile the material for his text. In the Egyptian account, the traditions of the learned Egyptians – the 'priests of Hephaestus' – stand as first source of knowledge.⁴⁴ The second source of knowledge are the traditions about the Egyptians found amongst the Greeks. Although the Greek accounts are discounted in favour of the authority of the Egyptian stories, it is still significant that they are included.⁴⁵ Similarly to the instance cited above as an example of the Herodotean inquiry at work, we might understand this as creating a more comprehensive picture of the Egyptians, and the various traditions of knowledge at play simultaneously. The third source of knowledge is Herodotus himself. In the absence of verifiable truth of any given story, or report, Herodotus records

⁴⁰ Hrdt. 4.1 – 82; 5.39 – 48..

⁴¹ Hrdt. 2.35.1.

⁴² Marincola, (2017) p. xxxii – xxxiii.

⁴³ Hrdt., 2.142; 2.113 – 120; 2.73, 2.75.

⁴⁴ Hrdt. 2.3; see Luraghi, Nino, "The Importance of Being λόγιος", *The Classical World*, vol. 102(4) (2009) p. 439 – 456, on the subject of the Egyptian priests as sources, as well as oral and written accounts. Cf: Joseph, Skinner, 'Herodotus and his world', in (eds.) Thomas, Harrison, and Elizabeth, Irwin, *Interpreting Herodotus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (2018) pp. 187 – 222, p. 197: 'his *akoe*-statements' not referencing an actual person but 'a specific way of representing knowledge.'

⁴⁵ Hrdt. 2.123.1.

his own view of the matter, based on travels and own inquiries, for example, 2.19.1; 2.29.1; 2.99.1, with the addition of evidence to support his view, such as oracles, and other sources of certain knowledge.⁴⁶

Indeed, the narrative scope of the second book of the *Histories* aims for totality. Another representative example of this is the sequence of paragraphs following the statement: ‘Here are some other Egyptian discoveries’, followed by a number of shorter and longer sections describing, ‘divination’, ‘medicine’ and ‘how they mourn and bury their dead’ and the worship of Perseus.⁴⁷ Herodotus clearly displays a desire to account for as many noteworthy aspects of Egypt (without discriminating between different types of knowledge), as possible.

One of the clearest examples of this is the extended account on the various probable reasons for the summer flooding of the Nile, 2.19 – 26. Not only does it illustrate how Herodotus engages with the intellectual milieu of his time, but it also demonstrates clearly how he compiles knowledge from different sources, presents them and evaluates them, in this order. Wolf and Köing observe that, ‘the works we most readily categorise as encyclopaedic are the ones that stood out for their claims to greater authority, greater completeness, and more comprehensive order’.⁴⁸ Herodotus’ consideration of the Nile is a solid example of this type of encyclopaedic impulse. Herodotus begins by stating that, ‘Three different theories were advanced by certain Greek thinkers [...] two of these views would not be worth mentioning, in my opinion, except that I want to give some idea of what they are.’⁴⁹ Herodotus then proceeds to account for the theories of the Nile that he does not agree with, such as dismissing the existence of an ‘Ocean.’⁵⁰ Subsequently he offers his own explanation of ‘why the Nile floods in summer’ by arguing that it has to do with how the sun is driven out of its path by storms.⁵¹ While what Herodotus reports might not be accurate or true (in light of what we know from our own historical vantage point), Rosalind Thomas, in an overview over the various sources which Herodotus draws on in his argument, has identified a relationship with some of the intellectuals of this time. Thales of Miletus’ theory is disputed in 2.20, Hecataeus’ is challenged in 2.23 and the most extended critique Herodotus directs towards Anaxagoras’

⁴⁶ Hrdt. 2.18.

⁴⁷ Hrdt. 2. 82; 2.83; and 2.84; 2.85 – 90; 2.91.1. – 91.2.

⁴⁸ Woolf and Köing (2013b) p. 32.

⁴⁹ Hrdt. 2.20.1.

⁵⁰ Hrdt. 2.23.

⁵¹ Hrdt. 2.24.

theory that the flood derives from the melting of snow.⁵²In Herodotus own explanation, Thomas has also found parallels with the theories of ‘Diogenes of Apollonia, and Oinopides of Chios.’⁵³ What this section demonstrates then, is that Herodotus’ inquiry did not only concern itself with the remote past but shows a keen interest and awareness of the intellectual, and scientific investigations of his time. The learning of the Sophist, the pre-Socratic, and the Ionian natural philosophers are found in the text as well – a display of different types of knowledge.

While this overview is an insufficient account of all the aspects of Book Two of the *Histories*, it illustrates the following clearly: that the narrative is constructed out of a number of different types of knowledge, each with different origins. The materials’ relevancy is justified by the relationship to the Egyptian land, and its people. In turn, the Egyptian *logos* is part of the *Histories* because they were part of the Persian forces against the Greeks. As demonstrated, the encyclopaedic impulse is undisputedly present in the range of examples displayed above, as well as in the way they are organised around a central structure and clearly defined aims.

Conclusion: The Transmission of Knowledge

What use is an encyclopaedic reading of the *Histories*? Modern Herodotean scholarship has interested itself with questions pertaining to the *purpose* of the Herodotean inquiry, attempting to discern through the explicit and implicit statements in the text what Herodotus’s intentions are. It is often pointed out that in contrast to Thucydides, who intended his text to be a ‘possession for all time’, the *Histories* is perhaps not as clear as to its use value.⁵⁴ By reading the *Histories* as an encyclopaedic work however, opportunities to consider it in new and innovative ways open up. Rubicam argues that ‘I take it as self-evident that encyclopaedic literature is designed in some sense to store knowledge [...]’.⁵⁵ As Herodotus’ programmatic statement asserts, ‘I will cover minor and major

⁵² Rosalind, Thomas, ‘the Intellectual Milieu of Herodotus’, in (eds.) Carolyn, Dewald, and John, Marincola the *Cambridge Companion to Herodotus*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge (2006). p. 60 – 75, p. 63; see also, Rosalind, Thomas, *Herodotus in Context: Ethnography, Science and the Art of Persuasion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2000).

⁵³ Thomas (2006) p. 63.

⁵⁴ Thuc.1.22.4; Lateiner (1989) p. 98.

⁵⁵ Rubicam (1997) p. 128.

human settlements equally, because most of those who were great in the past have diminished in significance by now, and those who were great in my own time were small in times past'.⁵⁶ This statement has often been read as Herodotus' assertion on the mutability of fortune (a prevailing theme throughout the *Histories*).⁵⁷ However, it could also be considered a statement in line with the encyclopaedic desire to collect and preserve knowledge. After all, Herodotus does claim in his proem that one of his chief aims is to preserve the knowledge of great and remarkable deeds and marvels from being lost to the void of time. Arguably, the *Histories* manifests an anxiety for a potential loss of knowledge. The Herodotean inquiry can be considered a way to conserve, transmit, and most importantly, make legible this knowledge to others.⁵⁸ This also makes the *Histories* a text of as much use for posterity as it is for its contemporary audience. For what is an encyclopaedic text if not a text that is deeply concerned with the transmission of knowledge?

To consider Herodotus' great work encyclopaedic allows us to inquiry into what kinds of knowledge Herodotus believed worthy of preserving. It also allows us to inquiry into how knowledge is structured and presented in the text. By extension, this also allows us to consider how knowledge is ordered in the culture that produced the text. Finally, it will allow us to contemplate the wide variety of traditions and branches of knowledge collected by Herodotus and preserved and transmitted in the *Histories*.

⁵⁶ Hrdt. 1.5.2.

⁵⁷ Hrdt. 1.5.2.

⁵⁸ cf. Donald, Lateiner, *the Historical Method of Herodotus*, University of Toronto Press: Toronto (1989) p. 40 – 41.