

## Thematic Emptiness and Atemporality in Herodotus Book 4

### 1. Percy Bysshe Shelley, “Ozymandias”

And on the pedestal, these words appear:  
‘My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;  
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!’  
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare  
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

### 2. Hdt. 4.16.1-2

τῆς δὲ γῆς, τῆς περὶ ὅδε ὁ λόγος ὄρηται λέγεσθαι, οὐδεὶς οἶδε ἀτρεκέως ὃ τι τὸ κατύπερθε ἐστὶ: οὐδενὸς γὰρ δὴ αὐτόπτεω εἶδέναι φαμένου δύναμαι πυθέσθαι... ἀλλ’ ὅσον μὲν ἡμεῖς ἀτρεκέως ἐπὶ μακρότατον οἶοι τε ἐγενόμεθα ἀκοῇ ἐξικέσθαι, πᾶν εἰρήσεται.

“But of the land about which this λόγος sets out to relate, no one knows without deviation what is north of it: for indeed I can inquire with no one who has said he has seen it as an eyewitness. . . But as much as I have been able to reach explicitly by hearsay about the farthest land, all will be told.”<sup>1</sup>

### 3. Hdt. 4.82

θωμάσια δὲ ἡ χώρα αὕτη οὐκ ἔχει, χωρὶς ἢ ὅτι ποταμούς τε πολλῶ μεγίστους καὶ ἀριθμὸν πλείστους. τὸ δὲ ἀποθωμάσαι ἄξιον καὶ πάρεξ τῶν ποταμῶν καὶ τοῦ μεγάθεος τοῦ πεδίου παρέχεται, εἰρήσεται. ἵχνος Ἡρακλέος φαίνουσι ἐν πέτρῃ ἐνεόν, τὸ ἔοικε μὲν βήματι ἀνδρός, ἔστι δὲ τὸ μέγαθος δίπηχυ, παρὰ τὸν Τύρην ποταμόν.

But this land is wonder-less, apart from having the largest and greatest number of rivers. And that thing which offers itself as worthy of marvel besides the rivers and the massiveness of the Steppe will be mentioned: they [the locals] show a track of Heracles set in rock beside the river Tyras, looking like the footprint of a man, but two cubits long.

### 4. Hdt. 4.123.1-2

ὅσον μὲν δὴ χρόνον οἱ Πέρσαι ἦσαν διὰ τῆς Σκυθικῆς καὶ τῆς Σαυρομάτιδος χώρας, οἱ δὲ εἶχον οὐδὲν σίνεσθαι ἄτε τῆς χώρας εὐούσης χέρσου: ἐπεῖτε δὲ ἐς τὴν τῶν Βουδίνων χώραν ἐσέβαλλον, ἐνθαῦτα δὴ ἐντυχόντες τῷ ξυλίνῳ τείχει, ἐκλελοιπότην τῶν Βουδίνων

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<sup>1</sup> All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

καὶ κεκενωμένου τοῦ τείχεος πάντων, ἐνέπρησαν αὐτό. [2] τοῦτο δὲ ποιήσαντες εἶποντο αἰεὶ τὸ πρόσω κατὰ στίβον, ἐς ὃ διεξελθόντες ταύτην ἐς τὴν ἔρημον ἀπίκοντο.

So long as the Persians were going through the Scythian and Sauromatian lands, they had nothing to be plundered seeing that the land was barren. And after they invaded the land of the Boudini, here they stumbled upon a wooden fortified town, and with all the Boudini having abandoned and emptied the fortified structure, they set fire to it. And once they did this, they continued always onward the track, and having gone through it they arrived at this desolate land.

5. Hdt. 4.127.2

‘ὄ τι δὲ οὐκ αὐτίκα μάχομαι τοι, ἐγὼ καὶ τοῦτο σημανέω. ἡμῖν οὔτε ἄστυα οὔτε γῆ πεφυτευμένη ἐστί, τῶν περὶ δείσαντες μὴ ἀλῶ, ἢ καρῆ ταχύτερον ἂν ὑμῖν συμμίσοιμεν ἐς μάχην. εἰ δὲ δέοι πάντως ἐς τοῦτο κατὰ τάχος ἀπικνέεσθαι, τυγχάνουσι ἡμῖν ἐόντες τάφοι πατρώιοι.’

“...I will now tell why I do not join combat with you. We have produced neither towns nor land, for which we would join you in battle quicker out of fear that they should be captured or ravaged. But if you must arrive at this quickly, we have ancestral graves...”

6. Hdt. 4.140.1-3

Σκύθαι μὲν τὸ δεύτερον Ἴωσι πιστεύσαντες λέγειν ἀληθέα ὑπέστρεφον ἐπὶ ζήτησιν τῶν Περσέων, καὶ ἡμάρτανον πάσης τῆς ἐκείνων διεξόδου. αἴτιοι δὲ τούτου αὐτοὶ οἱ Σκύθαι ἐγένοντο, τὰς νομὰς τῶν ἵππων τὰς ταύτη διαφθείραντες καὶ τὰ ὕδατα συγχώσαντες. εἰ γὰρ ταῦτα μὴ ἐποίησαν, παρεῖχε ἂν σφι, εἰ ἐβούλοντο, εὐπετέως ἐξευρεῖν τοὺς Πέρσας. νῦν δὲ τὰ σφι ἐδόκεε ἄριστα βεβουλεῦσθαι, κατὰ ταῦτα ἐσφάλησαν. Σκύθαι μὲν νῦν τῆς σφετέρης χώρας τῇ χιλόσ τε τοῖσι ἵπποισι καὶ ὕδατα ἦν, ταύτη διεξιόντες ἐδίζηντο τοὺς ἀντιπολεμίουσ, δοκέοντες καὶ ἐκείνουσ διὰ τοιούτων τὴν ἀπόδρησιν ποιέεσθαι. οἱ δὲ δὴ Πέρσαι τὸν πρότερον ἐωυτῶν γενόμενον στίβον, τοῦτον φυλάσσοντες ἦσαν, καὶ οὔτω μόγις εὔρον τὸν πόρον.

For a second time the Scythians trusted that the Ionians were speaking the truth and wheeled around in chase of the Persians, but they missed the entire exit of the Persians. The Scythians themselves were culpable for this, having destroyed the horses' pastures and pooled the water in this land. Had they not done this, it would have been possible for them, if they wanted, to find the Persians easily. But now that which seemed to have been the best plan for them was a failure. Now the Scythians were searching for their enemy, going through this land of theirs, which was with pasture and water for the horses, supposing the latter would make an escape through these. But indeed the Persians were travelling on guard the way which they came before and so barely did they find a means of passage.

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