

## Thematic Emptiness and Atemporality in Herodotus Book 4

Book IV of Herodotus has often been interpreted as a chaotic series of digressions, which in turn has problematized scholars' attempts to draw thematic conclusions. Of these attempts, Hartog's (1979/91) model of contrasting familiarity and otherness, proposed in the wake of Edward Said's seminal work (1978), remains the most persistent. This paper, in following Grethlein (2009) and Greenwood (2018), however, proposes a different thematic unity within Book IV, namely that of emptiness and space. In the first section, I seek to demonstrate how the lack of established settlements (4.123, 127) and manmade *θωμάσια* by Scythians (4.82) and the other *ἔθνεα* of the northern fringe (4.18) reflect upon their characteristic elusiveness (4.127). Herodotus, in turn, brands this Scythian elusiveness upon both their very way of life and how they interact within this so described "desolate land" (4.5). In the second section, I analyze how Herodotus' choice in narration of abstracting space inevitably abstracts time as well. The result is not a sense of *timelessness* in as much as *atemporality*. The lack of credible informants (in the eyes of Herodotus), records, and generally memory renders time loosely distinct in his narration. In the final section, I explain how this lack of specificity in the Scythian *λόγος* provides Herodotus with a metacommentary on the challenges facing, and limits to, *ἱστορίη* (4.16). In other words, time indistinct provides an analog to the doubtful information preserved within his sources (4.16,18). Through this reading, Book 4 is not entirely the inverse of Book 2's Egypt (Redfield, 1985) in as much as an example of deeds that fade away in time (1.pr.). The Scythians' lack of any *θωμάσια* renders them the exception to the other *ἔθνεα* in the *Histories*; their lack of *wonders* forces them into the present; their deeds cannot fade away in time because they cannot yet be placed in time. This becomes apparent during Darius' invasion as the

transformation of the Scythian landscape reflects the transformation of Scythian character, leaving them strangers in the waste of their own land (4.140). As a result, the Scythians are rendered in a present-past, always current yet elusive to the historical method outlined by Herodotus.

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