Into the Void: Herodotus' Construction of Bactria

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Abstract

Despite occasional mentions of Bactria in his work, Herodotus does not include any information on the customs, history or religion of the country and its inhabitants. This lack of a *logos* or of *mirabilia* is not surprising at first glance, since Herodotus, like most ancient Greek authors, had no particular interest in Eastern Iran or Central Asia. However, a number of times, the text seems to anticipate more detailed information on Bactria that Herodotus never provides. It is argued here that in the work of Herodotus, Bactria's main narrative significance is as a destination for deportations by the Persian rulers. In comparison to the two other destinations for deportations in the *Histories*, Bactria is specifically characterized by its geographical, ethnographic and economic featurelessness. Its resulting representation as a void heightens the terror associated with deportation there.

Introduction

It is no secret that ancient Greek and Roman authors displayed a lack of interest in providing a complete and accurate investigation in the history of Eastern Iran.[1] While the Alexander historians allow for a few glimpses into the world of ancient Central Asia and especially archaeological progress has helped expand the picture in recent decades,[2] the history of these territories in this period has not received a proper treatment by contemporary authors, resulting in the lack of a coherent historical narrative. This regrettable situation dates to the very

[1] I thank M. Iliakis, M. Mendoza and M. Ferrario for discussing many aspects of this paper with me and for providing extensive and constructive feedback. I take full responsibility for any remaining faults.

[2] For a survey of recent work on Achaemenid Bactria, cf. Briant 2020.

beginning of Achaemenid historiography with Herodotus. While he provides relatively detailed *logoi* (accounts) of various territories the early Persian kings conquered, he virtually ignores the province of Bactria.[3]

This seems at first to be nothing special. After all, Herodotus largely ignores many provinces of the Persian Empire, especially in the east, making only passing reference to them. It will be argued here, however, that the situation cannot simply be explained by a lack of interest, and that the lack of information on Bactria cannot be compared to that of other lands such as Sogdiana or Parthia. Not only does this have historical reasons, as the important position of Bactria in the Achaemenid Empire has long been recognised.[4] The oddity also becomes apparent in a careful reading of the *Histories* themselves. Herodotus makes the occasional reference to Bactria that, when taken in context with the rest of the work, seems to anticipate detailed information that is never provided. The aim of the present paper is to demonstrate that ignorance of Bactria alone is not a sufficient explanation for these omissions, but that Herodotus produces a distinct narrative effect connected to this name. The narrative of Herodotus is here not taken to be historical in the sense of being a source for Bactrian history itself. The many historical and geographical imprecisions and inaccuracies pertaining to Central Asia found in Herodotus will not be discussed here. What is of interest is what Herodotus does and does not tell his audience, not how correct his tale is.

The Bactrians before Herodotus

Bactrians and Greeks were integral parts of the Achaemenid Empire, which implies that some degree of mutual knowledge and contact must have existed, at least within the imperial centres.[5] However, how much information beyond the name as part of the Achaemenid imperial complex reached the centres of Greek cultural

[3] This has already been noted by Rawlinson 1912, xvi. The words of Tarn 1951, xxi still hold true that "there was once a tradition" for Graeco-Bactrian history (cf. also Mairs 2014, 5), and this makes the modern-day observer wonder if the pre-Hellenistic period of Bactria was involved in this narrative. This intriguing question must be left aside here, as must be the nature of any local historical tradition and how it may be compared to the historiography developed by Classical Greek authors.

[4] Even Herodotus himself acknowledges this in his story of the revolt of Masistes (IX.113). Subsequently, an elevated status of Bactria in the empire has been assumed time and again by scholars, cf. Holt 1988, 42 and Klinkott 2005, 58.

[5] On Bactrians in Persepolis cf. Henkelman 2018; on Greeks in Persepolis at the same time cf. Rollinger/Henkelman 2009, 332-339.

and literary life in this period remains uncertain. It is unknown if Bactria appeared on the maps of Anaximander and Hecataeus, although the latter is more probable. For the most part, the evidence comes from Herodotus himself. He seems to presuppose a knowledge of the name, as its first introduction (I.153.4) comes without further explanation. His narration of the expedition of Scylax of Carianda further suggests that knowledge of the Bactrians as a people was included in Scylax's report, whether it was used by Herodotus directly or filtered through Hecataeus' *Periegesis*.[6] As discussed below, Herodotus does not elaborate on this ethnographic knowledge, indicating that it was likely drawn from his sources rather than inserted from his own observations. Even if the works of Scylax and Hecataeus contained more detailed accounts, this does not mean knowledge about Bactria was considered common, since neither author appears to have been widely known in the Greek world.[7]

The most direct confrontation the Greeks in the Aegean would have had with Bactrians was during Xerxes' invasion. Both Aeschylus and Herodotus mention Bactrians as part of the invading army.[8] Whether this information should be taken at face value is however questionable. Aeschylus may have derived his information from an ethnographic source, perhaps even Hecataeus himself.[9] Taking into account the discrepancies between Aeschylus and Herodotus, [10] the relevant text should not be read as historically accurate information. The only conclusion that can be drawn from Aeschylus is that the name of the Bactrians was familiar to the Athenian audience as one of the many ethnicities in the Persian Empire.

It is equally questionable whether Herodotus' description of Xerxes' army is historical. Here too, it has been suggested that Herodotus provided *Katalogwissen* that is either based on, or comparable to Hecataeus, or even constitutes an extension of Aeschylus.[11] The prominence given to the Bactrians, Sacans and Indians in the final

[6] Karttunen 1989, 77.
[7] Karttunen 1989, 69.
[8] Aeschylus: *Persai*, 306-7; Herodotus: VII.64; VII.86; VIII.113.2; IX.31.3-4.
[9] So Jacoby 1912, 2700 with somewhat unfounded certainty.
[10] Rosenbloom 2006, 41 describes Aeschylus' catalogue as "dramatic fiction". cf. also Schmitt 1978, 70-71 where it is concluded that many of the names of Aeschylus' commanders were invented. The name of the Bactrian champion, Τενάγων is entirely non-Iranian (*ibid*, 64-65).
[11] Bichler 2000, 324; Jacoby 1912, 2700 (in the same context as Aeschylus).

phase of the invasion around the Battle of Plataea (VII.114.1; IX.31.3-4) may be topical, given the narrative purposes of Herodotus' account.[12]

Bactria in the Herodotean Persian Empire

The Conquest of Cyrus

The first appearance of the Bactrians is in I.153.4, where Herodotus narrates the withdrawal of Cyrus from Ionia and the delegation of affairs:

> Ἥ τε γὰρ Βαβυλών οἱ ἦν ἐμπόδιος καὶ τὸ Βάκτριον ἔθνος καὶ Σάκαι τε καὶ Αἰγύπτιοι, ἐπ' οὓς ἐπεῖχέ τε στρατηλατέειν αὐτός, ἐπὶ δὲ Ἴωνας ἄλλον πέμπειν στρατηγόν.
> For [Cyrus] had Babylon on his hands and the Bactrian nation and the Sacae and Egyptians; he was minded to lead an army himself against these and to send another commander against the Ionians.[13]

Herodotus' audience receives an exposition of the future conquests of the Persians which he claims were on the mind of Cyrus.[14] However, Herodotus does not narrate the conquest of Bactria, jumping straight from Babylon to his war against the Massagetae. Herodotus anticipates criticism of omission in I.177 by stating:

> Τὰ μέν νυν κάτω τῆς Ἀσίης Ἅρπαγος ἀνάστατα ἐποίεε, τὰ δὲ ἄνω αὐτῆς αὐτὸς Κῦρος, πᾶν ἔθνος καταστρεφόμενος καὶ οὐδὲν παριείς. τὰ μέν νυν αὐτῶν πλέω παρήσομεν: τὰ δὲ οἱ παρέσχε τε πόνον πλεῖστον καὶ ἀξιαπηγητότατα ἐστί, τούτων ἐπιμνήσομαι.
> Harpagus then made havoc of lower Asia; in the upper country Cyrus himself subdued every nation, leaving none untouched. Of the greater part of these I will say nothing, but will speak only of those which gave Cyrus most trouble and are worthiest to be described.

[12] Bichler 2000, 351-352; on the difficulties of Herodotus' narrative of the Persian Wars specifically cf. Harrison 2002.
[13] All citations and translations of Herodotus are based on Godley 1920-1925.
[14] As Bichler 2000, 266 rightly points out, Herodotus concludes that Cyrus' plans failed. This is, however, no explanation for the absence of a Bactrian narrative, given that the conquest of Bactria would have been successful.

Herodotus' narrative is however not entirely compatible with the plans attributed to Cyrus. The Egyptians were not conquered by the Persians, but not by Cyrus.[15] In his account of Xerxes' invading army, Herodotus (VII.64.2) specifies that the Sacans (Σάκαι) were the Amyrgian Scythians, while the Persians (incorrectly in his opinion) refer to all Scythians as Sacans. The Amyrgians are mentioned only in this context, and thus there is no indication when or by whom they were conquered. Consequently, it is just as unclear to the reader if, according to Herodotus, Bactria was also conquered by Cyrus. The argument that could be made from Herodotus is merely implicit: Bactria appears as part of the Persian Empire under Darius, without any explicit mention of its conquest either by Cambyses or Darius.[16]

The 12th nomos and Bactrian Geography

In III.93.1, Herodotus makes explicit what was only implied in I.177. Bactria is now an integral part of the Persian Empire and constitutes the 12th of the 20 *nomoi*:

> Ἀπὸ Βακτριανῶν δὲ μέχρι Αἰγλῶν ἑξήκοντα καὶ τριηκόσια τάλαντα φόρος ἦν: νομὸς δυωδέκατος οὗτος.
> The twelfth [*nomos*], the Bactrians as far as the land of the Aegli; these paid three hundred and sixty [talents].

Herodotus is otherwise not shy to name all the ethnicities of his *nomoi*. However, the 12th *nomos* is vaguely described as Βακτριανῶν δὲ μέχρι Αἰγλῶν. The formula involving μέχρι is also found in the 5th *nomos* (III.91.1),[17] but Herodotus goes out of his way to mention not only what peoples are in this *nomos*, but even that the Arabs are not included. The 20th *nomos* could also be seen as ethnically vague, only mentioning the "mass of Indians" (Ἰνδῶν δὲ πλῆθός); however, Herodotus shortly afterwards describes these Indian tribes in great detail (III.98-

[15] Herodotus says nothing about a conquest of the Sacans by Cyrus, supposing they are not to be identified with the Massagetae. Their conquest is mentioned in VII.9.2 as a historical event.
[16] Whether an ancient reader of Herodotus could have made an argument from geography, presupposing a dominance of Bactria for Cyrus' Massagetae campaign, is questionable. Herodotus does not locate Bactria with any geographical markers (see below), and his geography of the Araxes river (the Oxus?) is highly problematic (cf. Panchenko 1998, 216-222, with the historically untenable suggestion of the Araxes being the Ganges).
[17] cf. also Laird 1921, 308, fn. 2.

105). The 12th *nomos* is the only one which remains nondescript in terms of ethnicities throughout the work. The reader does not learn how many peoples the *nomos* includes, and the Aigloi are never mentioned again.[18]

In the context of Herodotus' description of the Indians (III.98.3-105.2), the Bactrians make another fleeting appearance. Herodotus focuses on the Ἰνδῶν δὲ πλῆθός and provides information on their various ethnic groups and *mirabilia* associated with them. In III.102.1 it is said that the Indians of the polis of Caspatyrus and the Pactyic country have a similar way of life as the Bactrians. However, instead of taking this as an opportunity for an excursus on this way of life, Herodotus leaves it at this. The audience is none the wiser about these Indians or the Bactrians, because the way of life of neither is described. There is only one hint towards the nature of these people. Herodotus describes them as the most warlike (μάχιμος) of the Indians. But even this cannot be extended to the Bactrians, as Herodotus provides this information in addition to the statement that their way of life is like that of the Bactrians.[19]

One might expect a mention of Bactria in the geographic excursus in III.106-117. Here, a brief mention of Persian rule in Eastern Iran under Darius is found (III.117). It also serves to locate the Chorasmians, Hyrcanians, Parthians, Sarangians and Thamanaians.[20] It does not illuminate these peoples very much, but at least it provides some, however inaccurate, information on the environment they inhabit and where they would be located geographically, which also helps to locate the other peoples in the 14th and 16th *nomoi*.[21] It also shows that these people were at the mercy of the Persian king through his control of hydraulic works. However, Bactria is entirely

[18] Nor have historians ever been able to identify them; cf. Laird 1921, 308-9 for an unconvincing hypothesis connecting the Aigloi with the Ligyans, and Tomaschek 1894.

[19] It is however noteworthy that a warlike and uncivilised nature is assigned almost as a trope to the Bactrians in later literature, cf. Curt., *Hist. Alex*. IV.25.3; Strab. *Geogr*. XI.11.3; *Periplus Maris Erythraei* §47. While the latter seems to refer to the contemporary Kushan Empire (cf. Falk 2015, 92-93), the wording describing them as a τοῦτον μαχιμώτατον ἔθνος is astonishingly close to that in Herodotus (οὗτοι μαχιμώτατοι εἰσὶ Ἰνδῶν).

[20] There is no doubt from the context that the Thamanaians would represent the otherwise unmentioned Arachosians (cf. also III.93), so already Nagel 1982, 60, although the meaning of the name or how it pertains to the Arachosians remains elusive. Interestingly, the Areians are missing from this narrative even though Herodotus knows of them and joins them in the same *nomos* as the Parthians, Chorasmians and Sogdians (III.93.3). The explanation offered by Jacobs 1994, 106 does not have historical substantiation.

[21] Bichler 2000, 287-288 remarks on the significance of this story in the greater narrative of the Histories. This is also noted by Asheri et al 2007, 505, who however take the facticity of Herodotus' story more seriously than Bichler.

absent here, leaving the 12th *nomos* without any precise location. Herodotus does not even hint at the fact that Bactria is located anywhere in the vicinity of the Parthians, Sarangians or Thamanaians. The audience can only deduce that it is somewhere in the further reaches of the empire, and perhaps (although this is never explicitly stated) that they were neighbours of the Indians.[22]

Bactria in the East

Before addressing the most narratively significant mentions of Bactria and the Bactrians in Herodotus' work, it is necessary to comment on one appearance that received much argumentative weight in modern scholarship. Towards the end of Herodotus' work, Bactria and the Bactrians feature once more in passing in the story of Xerxes and the wife of Masistes. After Amestris mutilates his wife, Masistes, the brother of Xerxes and himself satrap of Bactria, plans to incite the Bactrians and Saca to revolt against Xerxes in revenge (IX.113). The story has been much-commented on for its narrative structure and significance.[23] Additionally it has been taken as evidence that Bactria possessed an elevated status in the empire, as it was governed by the king's brother.[24]

There is no particular information on the Bactrians here other than that they "loved" (ἔστεργόν) Masistes, suggesting that Persian rule as such was not rejected.[25] However, the ability of Masistes to gather support from the Saca implies a geographic proximity. The Saca, however, are never explicitly located either. As Herodotus claims they are a Scythian tribe or, in Persian interpretation, the Scythians, one is only left to deduce they live at the outer reaches of the world.

[22] The absence of Bactria is not commented on by Bichler 2000, but the map on p. 407 serves to illustrate the geography of Herodotus' east and displays that Bactria is not located in the work. This is indeed an important improvement over most other reconstructions of Herodotus' geography which typically label Bactria, notably the map "The world according to Herodotus" by J.O. Thompson reproduced on p. 458 of *Brill's Companion to Herodotus*.

[23] Wesselmann 2007; Stoneman 2015, 181-194, both with extensive literature.

[24] e.g. Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1980, 122-124; Holt 1988, 40-41; Klinkott 2005, 55.

[25] cf. Bichler 2000, 363, and on the loyalty with some unfortunate reasoning and speculation Holt 1988, 39-41.

Bactria as a Destination for Deportation

In IV.204, the deportees of the Greek city of Barce in Cyrenaica are mentioned to have been relocated by Darius to a village in Bactria:[26]

> IV,204: οὗτος ὁ Περσέων στρατὸς τῆς Λιβύης ἑκαστάτω ἐς Εὐεσπερίδας ἦλθε. τοὺς δὲ ἠνδραποδίσαντο τῶν Βαρκαίων, τούτους δὲ ἐκ τῆς Αἰγύπτου ἀνασπάστους ἐποίησαν παρὰ βασιλέα, βασιλεὺς δέ σφι Δαρεῖος ἔδωκε τῆς Βακτρίης χώρης κώμην ἐγκατοικῆσαι. οἳ δὲ τῇ κώμῃ ταύτῃ οὔνομα ἔθεντο Βάρκην, ἥ περ ἔτι καὶ ἐς ἐμὲ ἦν οἰκεομένη ἐν γῇ τῇ Βακτρίῃ.
> This Persian armament advanced as far as Euhesperidae in Libya and no farther. As for the Barcaeans whom they had taken for slaves, they carried them from Egypt into banishment and brought them to the king, and Darius gave them a town of Bactria to dwell in. They gave this town the name Barce, and it remained an inhabited place in Bactria till my own lifetime.

This would have been an opportunity for Herodotus to provide some information on Bactria, its people or even just some very basic economic or geographic facts as he would later do with the narrative of the Eretrian deportees in Cissia (VI.119). VI.9.3 repeats the motif of Bactria as a location for deportations, and once again, does not provide any details on what kind of a place Bactria is, although one would not expect it in this context.

The deportation into a Bactrian void

Recently, Matarese 2021 has studied the deportation narratives in the work of Herodotus and concluded that the fate of the residents of Barce, Miletus and Eretria are the only true cases of deportations explicitly described by Herodotus.[27] Matarese discusses these cases especially concerning their historical veracity and their political background. These issues are of no concern here, but the focus is rather on what Herodotus tells his audience and on the effect of the vision of Bactria that emerges from his representation.

[26] The historicity of this deportation and the general historical contexts (including that of Achaemenid Bactria) has been discussed by Matarese 2021, 49-55 and Ferrario 2021, both with affirmative conclusions. The Greek colonisation of Cyrenaica is narrated in Herodotus at the end of his Libyan digression (IV.168-199) leading up to the story of the Persian conquest of Barce.
[27] *Op. cit*., 47; 68-69; 81-82. Regarding the deportation of the Barcaeans however, Matarese is a bit more nuanced and argues it is strictly speaking not a deportation, as it consists of two phases (p. 47). cf. also Mendoza 2020, where it is concluded that Herodotus, despite embellishment, is the most reliable narrator on Achaemenid deportation practices.

When comparing the three deportation narratives, a dissimilarity becomes immediately clear. Despite the fact that all three deportations receive narrative attention, the audience learns much more about the fate of the Milesians and the Eretrians than that of the Barcaeans. The Milesians are relocated to a town called Ampe at the mouth of the Tigris by the "Red Sea" (VI.19-20). While there is no information about how they went on to live there, the fact that they were located close to the sea as in their old home bears at least minimal comfort. One could imagine them to live a life not too dissimilar there to the one they had previously had. The audience knows a few things about the Red Sea from Herodotus' work. It is the original home of the Phoenicians (I.1), the city of Babylon is not too far away (I.180), it is both geographically connected to the body of water frequented by the Hellenes (I.202) and also practically by way of a canal (II.158). The Milesians are not the only deportees here and at least they are in a *nomos* with other peoples, whose names are known (III.93) and who also suffer from Persian rule (III.117). The shape of the Red Sea is also known (IV.37-38). In other words, while the Milesians are exiled, they have not entirely disappeared. If one wanted to visit them, Herodotus' account would help find them.

The fate of the Eretrians is harsher. They are deported to a royal domain called Arderikka, some 210 *stadia* from Susa in Cissia (VI.119). To be sure, there is no Cissian *logos* in the work of Herodotus,[28] but the audience again gets an idea of the kind of place the Eretrians are banished to. The main topographical features are the river Choaspes and the royal city of Susa (V.49), both of which feature prominently elsewhere in the work of Herodotus (I.188). He also provides details of the economic activity, as there is a well some 40 *stadia* from Arderikka that produces asphalt, salt and oil. Herodotus describes the technique of extraction, which may suggest, although it is not explicitly stated so, that the Eretrians are condemned to work there. This is certainly a pitiable fate, and has been regarded so by later classical authors.[29]

[28] It needs to be pointed out in this context that there is also no mention of Cissia's (i.e. Elam) conquest by the Persians. The first time Susa is mentioned by Herodotus, it is already such a prominent part of Cyrus' domain that he will drink water only from the river Choaspes that flows by it (I.188.1), although it could be argued that this particular piece of information pertains to Herodotus' own time and not necessarily to that of Cyrus.

[29] cf. the references in Matarese 2021, 75-81.

The deportees from Barce, on the other hand, disappear into a void. Herodotus does not elaborate on Bactria when he discusses the deportation, nor does he do so anywhere else in his work. There is a vague sense of geographic proximity when the Bactrians are repeatedly mentioned together with the Saca and the Indians, ethnicities the audience know to locate at the outer reaches of the world. But there is no information on Bactria itself. The territory remains completely featureless and the audience cannot envision its climate, economic activity or the way of life of its inhabitants. It has no sense of how big Bactria is or what kind of ethnic diversity the Bactrians deal with.

Bactria is therefore a blank spot in the work of Herodotus, and the audience only learns that the deportees inhabit a village there which they named for their hometown of Barce. Herodotus' statement that they still lived there at his time is of little comfort to those empathising with them, as this only means they are still suffering their fate, which is not only entirely unknown (since Herodotus does not go into detail about it) but also unknowable (since Herodotus tells us neither where Bactria is, nor what the country is like). This also makes the threat given to the Ionians by the Persian generals (VI.9.4) appear in a different light:

> εἰ δὲ ταῦτα μὲν οὐ ποιήσουσι, οἳ δὲ πάντως διὰ μάχης ἐλεύσονται, τάδε ἤδη σφι λέγετε ἐπηρεάζοντες, τά περ σφέας κατέξει, ὡς ἐσσωθέντες τῇ μάχῃ ἐξανδραποδιεῦνται, καὶ ὡς σφέων τοὺς παῖδας ἐκτομίας ποιήσομεν, τὰς δὲ παρθένους ἀνασπάστους ἐς Βάκτρα, καὶ ὡς τὴν χώρην ἄλλοισι παραδώσομεν.
> But if they will not be so guided, and nothing will serve them but fighting, then utter a threat that shall put constraint upon them, and tell them that if they are worsted in battle they shall be enslaved; we will make eunuchs of their boys, and carry their maidens captive to Bactra, and deliver their land to others.

The threat is severe, as it encompasses the complete dissolution of Miletus. The deportation of the maidens specifically to Bactra adds additional menace. Bactra itself is now mentioned as the name of a specific place, likely meant to be understood as a city.[30] Nothing more is explained about Bactra itself, so the specification does not add information. However, it adds a sense of precision to the threat while retaining its emptiness in specificity.

[30] The toponym appears once more in IX.113.1.

As discussed above, Bactria was not an entirely unknown name to the Greeks of Herodotus' period. The name likely invoked vague notions of a remote part of the Persian Empire, and rumours and speculations may have existed. Bactria emerges as a void which Herodotus does not fill. This makes the fate of the deportees of Barce and the threat to the Milesians all the more terrifying. Herodotus adds one final element of tragedy here, because the Barcaeans retain their name and identity, disappearing geographically but not ethnically. One may compare this to the episode of the Branchidae, where a population deported to Central Asia in the period of the Persian Wars retained their identity until the time of Alexander. The perception of the Macedonian invaders was that they were Barbarised Hellenes, but the Branchidae themselves understood themselves as the descendants of the Greek deportees, ethnically and culturally.[31] The Barcaean deportation was much closer in time to Herodotus, and by stating that the town was still inhabited in his day, the implication is strong that the Greek identity was retained.[32] It appears that Herodotus indicated that the Barcaeans still existed, yet the narrative provides no information on the conditions of their existence.

Herodotus presents the deportations as historical events and further underscores their impact on the deportees. The relatively mild treatment of the Milesians, who started the Ionian Revolt, is contrasted with the ambiguous fate of the Eretrians, who merely came to their aid. The fate of the Eretrians is not made explicit. The hard labour Herodotus associates with Arderikka may imply a shocking and undeserved fate. In the case of Bactria, the absence of such information is not a mere omission: the province is depicted as a void where those sent effectively vanish, a fate that makes the idea of going to Bactria particularly unsettling.

[31] Mairs 2008, 20-21. cf. also Kubica 2016, 147-148. Ferrario 2021, 17-18 argues differently, suggesting that the deportation was understood to have resulted in the loss of the Greekness of those deported. Curtius, *Hist. Alex.* (VII.5.29) is explicit that, while their speech was gradually degenerating, their Greek customs were still alive: *Mores patrii nondum exoleverant; sed iam bilingues erant, paulatim a domestico externo sermone degeneres.*

[32] So also Matarese 2021, 48 and 191; also Mendoza 2020, 149-150 where it is pointed out that perception of cultural belonging of deportee communities was different in individual cases.

Conclusion

In the work of Herodotus, Bactria acquires a distinctive set of connotations. It appears as a place defined by its remoteness and lack of features. Such a blank spot on the map would *prima facie* not be terrifying to members of a culture so renowned for its eagerness to explore, for which Herodotus himself is a prime testament. However, the few associations that are made with Bactria must have seemed truly terrifying to his audience. Hardly any place could be more remote and unreachable for the Greeks. The notion of deportation to this territory, once enacted, once threatened, expresses an exile into the unknown with no hope of ever returning.[33] This makes Herodotus' Bactria effective precisely because of its lack of definition.

The lack of information on eastern Iran and Central Asia is therefore not to be treated simply as derived from Herodotus' poor knowledge. It will probably never be possible to fully determine whether there really was little source material available to him, or if more detailed investigations were impossible or unfeasible to him. What the evidence discussed above does suggest is that there was an opportunity here for Herodotus to develop the name of Bactria into a narrative trope. Ampe, Arderikka and Bactria are three distinct locations associated with deportations, but only Bactria reappears as a looming threat. It would be too much to state that this threat linked to the name of Bactria was a general association in ancient Greece. In the light of the discussion above, it may not be too much to suggest however, that Herodotus intended to construct such a link.

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[33] The connotation has not evaded modern observers, who could not help drawing parallels to their own time, as perhaps most clearly exemplified by Rawlinson 1912, 32: "Bactria seems to have been used as a sort of "Siberia" under the Persian kings."

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