



CITIZENSHIP I. IN THE ACHAEMENID PERIOD

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i. In the Achaemenid Period

All freeborn inhabitants of the Achaemenid empire were considered subjects of the Persian king. Nevertheless, in some constituent elements of the empire quite different forms of political organization prevailed (e.g., monarchic, oligarchic, aristocratic, democratic, and theocratic), and rulers enjoyed autonomy in internal affairs. Particularly in Babylonian cities, where self-rule was traditional, freeborn city dwellers who owned land in the adjacent countryside were considered legally equal citizens (*mār-banê*) and enjoyed membership in popular assemblies (*puhru*) that were invested with jurisdiction over property and other private disputes and local crimes. They participated in the cult of the local temples and enjoyed a number of economic privileges, including regular shares of temple income.

Many aliens also lived in Achaemenid Babylonia: royal military colonists, Persian and other foreign officials in the state service (tax collectors, dragomans, royal judges, and so on), merchants, and the like. Although freeborn, these people had no civil rights in Babylonia and no access to the Babylonian temples; they could not be admitted to membership in the popular assemblies, for they did not own land within the civil jurisdiction. Once a



group of foreigners had become settled in sufficient numbers to constitute a distinct community, however, it could constitute its own popular assembly for self-government. For instance, according to a document dated in the reign of Cambyses (529-22 b.c.e.), a certain part of the city of Babylon settled by Egyptians had an “assembly of Egyptian elders,” which made a decision about lands belonging to some Egyptians in the royal service (Strassmaier, no. 85). Another such self-governing ethnic minority consisted of the Jews of the Babylonian captivity, whose elders decided internal matters of civil law.

Semiautonomous communities also existed in Asia Minor, where, beginning in the 5th century b.c.e., Miletus and some other Greek cities were permitted local democratic governments. Also in the 5th century b.c.e. Judah was gradually transformed into a theocratic state, and its capital, Jerusalem, became a self-governing temple city. The Phoenician cities, too, exercised considerable autonomy, retaining their traditional political organization through general assemblies of freeborn men, which in some instances were even able to restrict the authority of local kings.

All the sources, Iranian, Elamite, Greek, and so on, are silent about the practices prevailing in Persia itself; however, it may tentatively be assumed that important cases were decided upon in specially convened assemblies, as Herodotus (1.125) mentioned that [Cyrus II](#) (559-29 b.c.e.), when he decided to rebel against the Median king Astyages, summoned an assembly of the Persians to inform them of his resolution.

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