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GREECE VI. THE IMAGE OF PERSIA AND PERSIANS IN GREEK LITERATURE

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The image of Persia in Greek literature is highly stylized and may not be considered as a reflection of actually experienced cultural contacts (for a comprehensive treatment see Miller). Greece's perception of the Persians was initially influenced by her impression of the Median Empire, which was situated in "upper" Asia as a counterpart to the Lydian Empire (Bichler, 2000, pp. 213 ff.; Bichler and Rollinger, 2000, pp. 68-70). The expansion of the Persian Empire under Cyrus II the Great (q.v.), which affected the Greek cities in western Asia Minor (Walser, 1987), was experienced as the sovereignty "of the Mede" (Xenophanes, in Diels, ed. F. 18). The Persian wars, following the Ionian rebellion of 499 B.C.E., were considered as "Medika" and the political cooperation with the opponent as "Medism" (Graf; Tuplin, 1994 and 1997). In 472 B.C.E., Aeschylus still presented the Persian kings as descendants of an eponymous Medos (*Persae*, l.765). Diodorus Siculus (10.27) refers to the latter as an exiled Athenian. From Herodotus on (cf. Herodotus, 7.61.3, 7.150.2), however, the prevailing belief was that they were descendants of Perseus (Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 1.2.1) or Perses (Hellanicus of Lesbos, in Jacoby, I, pp.

122 f., F 59 f., no, 4, III C 1, pp. 412 f., F 1, no. 687a; Abydenus, in ibid., III C 1, p. 407, F 6b, no. 685).

The part of Athens in the victories at Marathon and Salamis (in 490 and 480 B.C.E.) was stylized into mythical dimensions in Aeschylus's tragedy *Persae*, written in 472 B.C.E. (regarding Persian-Greek contacts in general, cf. Vickers, 1990; Miller, pp. 3 ff.). Although the kings that followed Cyrus II were said in this tragedy to rule the whole of Asia, their despotism had to admit defeat before the freedom of the Greeks, who only obeyed their ancestral rules (see Miller, esp. pp. 176 ff., 230 ff.; cf. Georges, pp. 76 ff.; Schmal, pp. 74 ff.; for detailed treatment see Hutzfeld; Hall). Despotism and lack of defensive power appear in the pseudo-Hippocratic writings as the typical results of Asia's lush nature and its climate (Peri Aeron, chaps. XXIII-XXIV). The Persian Empire's association with despotism and luxury was established with the expansion of Athenian propaganda. Prostration was shown on stage as a mark of barbarian despotism, and the taste of Greek politicians for Persian luxury was the subject of mockery (see esp. Aristophanes, pp. 73 ff., cf. esp. line 100 about an old Persian quotation; see Brandenstein).

A systematic record of Persian customs and history can be found in Herodotus' *Histories*, written around 427-424 B.C.E. Simple ways of life, strict education, regular habits, and an elementary religion are the source of the original strength of the people (Herodotus, esp. 1.131 ff.). Herodotus' view that the ancient Persians did not erect temples, statues, and altars to their gods, but considered the latter as natural forces to whom they sacrificed in the open air (1.131), was taken at face value. He was followed by Strabo (15.3.13) and a number of other authors (e.g., Berossus, in Jacoby, *Fragmente* III C 1, p. 394, F 11, no. 680; cf. Jacobs). In contrast, Dinon states (Jacoby, *Fragmente* III C 1, p. 531, F 28, no. 690) that the Persians also erected statues to honor fire and water (Fragment 28), but to what extent can this be traced back to actual cult reforms under Artaxerxes II is a moot point (Briant, 1996, pp. 260-62, 696, 941; Stevenson). Though Herodotus described the life of the ancient Persians as simple, he added that luxury, pomp, alcoholism, polygamy, and pederasty made the great men of the empire appear full of conflicts. He provided vivid examples: intriguing court ladies and eunuchs, deceitful satraps as well as noblemen and brave officers. The dignified queen mother Atossa contrasts with the cruel, demonic queen Amestris, and Xerxes's uncle Artabanus (qq.v.) faces the thoughtless general Mardonius as a wise counselor. The kings indeed incorporate all the potential qualities of a monarch: the patriarchal founder of

the Achaemenid dynasty, Cyrus the Great; the mad, despotic Cambyses; the shrewd Darius I (qq.v.) seeking his own advantage and wavering between magnanimity and despotism; and the ambitious but overtaxed Xerxes, whose image as sinner against gods and temples is depicted by Aeschylus and Herodotus. They all fail in the end due to their immense policy of conquests (Descat; Georges, pp. 167 ff.; Rollinger, 1998; idem, 1999; Bichler, 2000, pp. 263 ff.; Bichler and Rollinger, pp. 87 ff.).

A new situation arose in the Peloponnesian war (431-404 B.C.E.); the great king was able to join in the Greek hegemonic wars on the side of Sparta. Thucydides very soberly describes the thus resulting relations between Greeks and Persians (Thucydides, 8.18, about Sparta's first agreement with Tissaphernes or Darius II; cf. Miller, pp. 109 ff.; Walser, pp. 63 ff.). In individual cases, however, the adoption of Persian customs, and particularly despotic allures, were considered as questionable (cf. Herodotus, 1.130 on Pausanias).

Through the writings of Xenophon, who personally witnessed the unsuccessful campaign of Cyrus the Younger (see CYRUS vi), the pretender to the throne, against his elder brother Artaxerxes II (q.v.) in 401 B.C.E, and described it in his *Anabasis*, more light is thrown into the Persian army and administration (Walser, pp. 101 ff.; Georges, pp. 207 ff.). In his *Oeconomicus* (4.4 ff.) he also provided a brief description of the great king's household. The *Persiká* of Ctesias (q.v.), who, as the personal physician of the great king Artaxerxes II Mnemon (405-359 B.C.E.), claimed to have carried out an autopsy (cf. Dorati), is of great importance, despite the fact that only fragments of this work have reached us (Momigliano 1979, pp. 156 ff.; Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 1987a; idem, 1987b; Wiesehöfer, tr., pp. 79 ff.). Ctesias painted a gaudy picture of a kingdom that was marked with decadence and decline, had become a toy between courtiers and the harem, and was drowned in oriental luxury (König; Auberger, pp. 340 ff.; see also Lenfant). Even Nicolaus of Damascus (Jacoby, *Fragmente* II/1, p. 361, F 66.3, no. 90) largely followed Ctesias. He considered Cyrus as a Median (*Mardos genos*) and presented him as the son of a shepherd, who was capable of winning the throne (Jacoby, *Fragmente*, F 66.3; Balcer, pp. 217-18). Xenophon, on the other hand, is very objective in his *Anabasis*, but his ethnographic notes are equally stereotyped. The character studies of the Persians are sharper: Cyrus the Younger incorporates the features of an ideal ruler (esp. in *Anabasis* 1.9), while the satrap Tissaphernes is a sly, deceitful figure. In his *Hellenica*, Xenophon depicts the honest satrap, Pharnabazus, struggling with his problems of loyalty (cf. 4.1.28 ff.) and pays tribute to a

courageous woman named Mania, who, as a widow, performed the functions of a satrap (cf. 3.1.10 ff. on her). His *Cyropaedia*, which was probably written after 362 B.C.E., is an admiring homage to ancient Persia, though set in an idealized early period. This was the prototype of a state novel, in which the universal monarchy founded by Cyrus II the Great appears as the paradigm of a just reign, sharply contrasting with the sad image of contemporary decadence (see *Cyropaedia* 8; cf. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 1980, pp. 184 ff.; Briant, 1989; Tatum; Briant, 1987b; Janni p. 129).

In the ensuing period, the image of Persia was a mixture of fascination and contempt. Plato viciously criticized the education of women at court, which wrecked even the works of great kings such as Cyrus II and Darius I from the outset (*Nomoi* 3.694a ff.). At the same time, he picked up the image of Persian alcoholism already described by Herodotus (*Nomoi* 3.637d-e), which was to enjoy great popularity in the ensuing ancient tradition (Maurtitsch-Bein). Theopomus stylized the great king as a receiver of lavish gifts (Jacoby, *Fragmente* II/2, p. 592, F 263a, no. 115), an image which also formed a tradition (cf. Aelianus, *Varia Historia* 1.31-33). The royal table and royal eating habits also awakened the interest of Greek authors within the context of a luxurious life at court (cf. Heraclides Cumaeus, in Jacoby, *Fragmente*, 689, F 2; Polyaenus, 4.3.32; Lewis). A wealth of negative clichés about the Persian Empire is contained in Plutarch's *Life of Artaxerxes*, which is mainly based on Ctesias and Dinon: court intrigues, a brutal empress (Parysatis, the queen of Darius II), and horrible scenes of executions. At the same time, however, Artaxerxes II is shown as a magnanimous ruler and patron of his friends. A series of further *Persica* is preserved in meager remnants: Charon of Lampsacus (Jacoby, *Fragmente*, 262), Dionysius of Milet (Jacoby, *Fragmente*, 687), Hellanicus of Lebos (Jacoby, *Fragmente*, F 4), Pharnouchus of Nisibis (Jacoby, *Fragmente*, 694 T 1), Hermesianax of Colophon (Jacoby, *Fragmente* III, C 1, p. 531, no. 691; cf. Drews, pp. 20 ff.; Balcer, pp. 210 f., 213, 216 f.).

The so-called king's peace in Greece of 387-386 B.C.E. had boosted Persia's influence even more, but had led to much counter-propaganda. Ephorus created the impression that formerly, in 480-479 B.C.E, Greece had been threatened by a combined attack of Persians and Carthaginians (Jacoby, *Fragmente* II/1, pp. 95 f., F 186, no. 70; cf. Bichler, 1985), and that Pindar had already praised the western Greek victories against the Carthaginians and Etruscans in 480 and 474 B.C.E. as battles equaling those of Salamis and Plataea for the freedom of the Hellenes (*Pythia* 1.71 ff.). Ephorus's conception

remained effective (cf. Diodorus, 11.1.3-2.1, 11.20.1-22.6, 11.24, 126.2), even though his opinion concerning the intentional dual attack was criticized by Aristotle, who called it a mere coincidence (*Poetics* 32, p. 1459a). As early as 380 B.C.E., the Athenian orator Isocrates recommended waging war against Persia as a means of creating harmony among the Greeks. Against the natural enemy, even a breach of contract was legitimate (Panegyricus, 160 ff.). In 346 B.C.E., Isocrates directly approached Philip II of Macedonia with this idea, pointing out the military weakness of the opponent as well as the treasures held by the barbarians (Philippus, 83 ff., 130 ff.; cf. Walser, pp. 115 ff.). Alexander's court historiographer, Callisthenes, finally stylized the war against Darius III as a campaign of revenge for Xer-xes's misdeeds. With Alexander's campaign of 334-324 B.C.E., the Persian Empire became the contrasting image against which Alexander's kingship measured itself. He had vanquished an empire, the original strength of which had been based on strict morals (cf. Arrian, *Anabasis* 5.4.5). Now the adoption of Persian court customs, above all obeisance (*proskynesis*), was considered to exercise pernicious effects on the victor (Diodorus, 17.77; Plutarch, *Alexander* 45 ff.). But Alexander's alleged plans to mix the populations of Asia and Europe (Diodorus, 18.4) and to bring about friendship between East and West (Plutarch, *De Alexandri magni fortuna aut virtute* 1.329c) bear witness to the ambivalence of the Greek image of Persia. Peucestas, the only Macedonian satrap in Persia to have learnt Persian, appreciated it (Arrian, 6.30.3), and Alexander's prayer in Opis on the Tigis expressed the hope of ruling Persians and Macedonians together according to the principles of concord (*homonoia*) and partnership (*koinônia*; Arrian, 7.11.9).

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