



MASISTES

MASISTES, Greek rendering (*Masístēs*) of an Old Iranian name **Masišta-* (reflected also in Bab. *Ma-si-iš-tu₄*) based on the superlative YAv. *masišta-*, OPers. *maθišta-* “greatest, supreme”; originally the name may have been a title (cf. OPers. *maθišta pasā tanūm* “the greatest after myself [the king]”); but, equally well, the basic meaning may have been “oldest, first-born.” Two persons known from Greek sources bore this name:

1. A Persian leader, who died in the battle at [Salamis](#) according to Aeschylus (*Persians* 30, 971), who lists him in each place together with an [Artembares](#) and in the form *Masístrēs*, which may be remodeled after *Amístrēs* (v. 21) and certainly can be corrected in *Masístēs* (according to Herodotus; see no. 2, below); even if the name is identical with that of Xerxes’ brother (no. 2), this does not necessarily mean that we have to do with the same person (cf. Schmitt, 1978, pp. 40 f.; 2011, pp. 243-45, no. 201a).

2. A son of Darius I and [Atossa](#), thus a full brother of Xerxes (Herodotus 7.82), satrap of Bactria (9.113.2) and one of the six commanders of Xerxes’ army in the expedition to Greece (7.82); together with [Mardonius](#) (no. 2) he led that part of the army that marched along the Thracian coast in parallel with the Persian fleet (7.121.3). On the retreat he is said to have reproached the general Artayntes for cowardice and would have been killed by him, if his bodyguard had not saved him at the last moment (9.107.1–3).

The story of the adultery committed by Xerxes with Masistes’ daughter Artaynte (his niece) is told in detail by Herodotus (9.108–113); that story is rich



in fiction and as a whole without doubt is invented by Herodotus himself, but it must have had a historical background, insofar as some (unknown) quarrel between Xerxes and his brother ended in the downfall of Masistes and his family (see Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 1980, pp. 67–75; Müller, 2006, pp. 290–300). Starting from the hypothesis that **Maθišta* in fact was the title of Masistes (as potential heir to the throne), H. W. A. M. Sancisi-Weerdenburg (1980, pp. 69–73) argued in favor of the identification of the Herodotean Masistes with *Ariaménēs*, whom Plutarch, *De fraterno amore* (= *Moralia* 488D) mentioned as Darius's oldest son (whereas the eldest has the name *Artobazánēs* in Herodotus 7.2.2).

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