



OROITES

OROITES, the Graecized form (*Oroítēs*) of an Old Iranian name of unclear etymology (perhaps hypocoristic **Arv-ita-* from OIr. **arva-* = Av. *auruuu-* ‘swift, brave’ according to Hinz, p. 39). It was borne by the satrap of Lydia, Phrygia, and Ionia during the reigns of the Achaemenid kings Cyrus II and Cambyses. The last years of his career are discussed in detail by Herodotus (III.120-29), and they illustrate the tendency of satraps to establish semi-independent power bases; these officials therefore had to be treated by the Great King with some circumspection.

Perhaps about 522 B.C.E. (the chronology remaining quite disputable, though) Oroites plotted to kill the hitherto astute tyrant of Samos, Polycrates. Herodotus discusses two motives he had heard suggested for this action. A better motive may be indicated by Diodorus Siculus (X.16.4), who states that some Lydians had fled to Samos to escape Oroites’ domination. They carried their wealth with them, and this was seized by Polycrates. The vindictive Oroites, appealing to Polycrates’ greed, lured him to Magnesia, where the tyrant was killed (apparently under torture) and the corpse crucified. A notable figure caught up in this whole series of events was the physician Democedes of Croton. Lucian remarks (*Charon* 14) that Polycrates was betrayed by a servant of his, Maeandrius. The tragic end of the Greek ruler was long remembered (see, e.g., M. Cornelius Fronto’s letter *De bello Parthico* 7 p. 223, 12 v.d. Hout; Johannes Tzetzes, III.548).

Oroites was unconcerned about the attempt by the false Smerdis/Bardiya and his mage supporters to secure the Achaemenid throne in 522 (Herodotus



3.126-29). He did not support Darius in the latter's accession struggle; rather, he seems to have used this period of turbulence to extend his own power. He killed the satrap of the province to the north, Hellespontine Phrygia (Mitrobates), and his son. Darius, within a few years of securing his position in Persia, sent an agent to Oroites, ostensibly on government business. The agent, Bagaesus, cleverly sounded out the loyalties of the satrap's picked Persian bodyguards. They proved compliant to the king's written orders and killed Oroites. His slaves and wealth were confiscated and taken to Susa.

Because Herodotus practically is the only source for Oroites, the historical interpretation of his account and, above all, the chronological connection with the other events of the political upheaval following Cambyses' death are at issue (cf. Vargyas).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

See also: Justi, *Namenbuch*, p. 234b, no. 1. A.T. Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire*, Chicago, 1959, pp. 110-11.

A. R. Burn, *Persia and the Greeks*, London, 1962, pp. 106-07.

W. Hinz, *Altiranisches Sprachgut der Nebenüberlieferungen*, Wiesbaden, 1975, p. 39.

P. Vargyas, "Darius and Oroites," *The Ancient History Bulletin* 14, 2000, pp. 155-61.

(C. J. Brunner)