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The Achaemenid Persian Empire

From the Medes to Alexander

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The Achaemenid Persian Empire was something new in history: a hyper-power without serious rival, a world empire on an unprecedented scale. At its territorial height under Darius I and Xerxes (early fifth century BCE), the Achaemenid Empire ruled territory stretching from the western edge of the Himalayas to Libya and the Sudan and from the Indus River Valley to the Danube.

The Medes, from whom the Persians purportedly developed much of their own organizational framework, are generally considered the Persians' imperial predecessors, but the traditional representation of the "Median Empire" has become difficult to maintain. There were two principal features that underlay the success of Achaemenid Persian rule: an intricate administration that managed massive resources over vast territories in conjunction with a sustained, compelling ideology centered upon the king. The Achaemenids were, of course, indebted to numerous ideological and organizational elements of their predecessors—especially the Elamites, Assyrians, and Babylonians—in the ancient Near East, but they were masters at adopting and adapting previous structures.

After the fall of Nineveh (612 BCE) and the collapse of the Assyrian Empire, three major powers dominated the ancient Middle East: the Babylonians (heirs to much of the Assyrian realm), the Lydians in Anatolia, and the Medes in northern Iran. By the end of Cyrus the Great's reign in 530, the Persians had conquered each of the three great powers and additional lands besides. Cyrus's son Cambyses added Egypt and parts of modern Libya and the Sudan to the empire, and Darius I added further territory in northeastern Africa, the Indus Valley, and parts of southeastern Europe. With some fluctuation—most notably the loss of Egypt for roughly 60 years in the fourth century—the empire's dominion remained stable for over 200 years, until the conquests of Alexander of Macedon in the late 330s. Despite Alexander's startling achievement in conquering this vast empire, the unification of west and east did not survive his death. This chapter will include a historical sketch of the Median and Achaemenid periods, along with overviews of the Achaemenid court, administration, ideology, and Alexander's conquest of the empire.

Sources

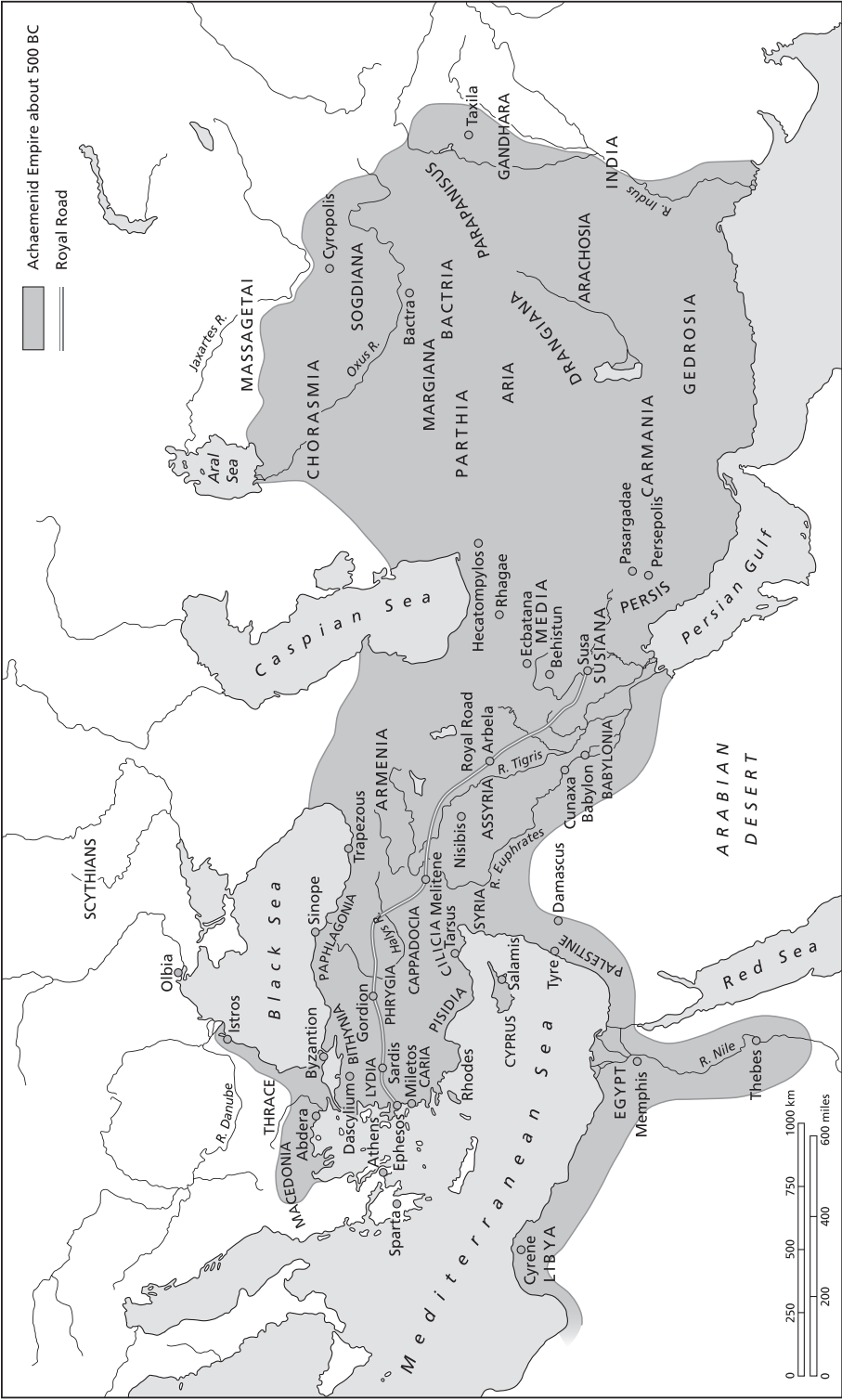
Sources for the Achaemenid Empire are diverse but sporadic, and it is difficult to assemble a continuous historical narrative. Historians of the period generally spend more time in assessing the usefulness of any source available rather than on deciding which sources to use. The luxury of multiple, detailed perspectives for a single historical event or phenomenon is infrequent.

Archaeological excavation has unsurprisingly been focused on urban areas throughout the empire, and in several cases Achaemenid settlement, which is not frequently the focus of modern excavators, is only one level of often thousands of years of occupation. Several important cities in the ancient Near East have been continuously inhabited from antiquity into the modern period—for example, Hamadan in Iran (ancient Ecbatana), considered the capital of Media—and excavation opportunities in these areas have been limited, regardless of any political considerations. Upheaval in the Middle East has periodically made excavation difficult, if not impossible, in many areas. Within Iran itself, Pasargadae and Persepolis, the two most prominent Achaemenid sites (both in Fars), have received much attention. The city of Susa in Khuzistan was important for centuries as an Elamite center, and it too became a royal center, the one most frequently referenced in the Greek sources.

The empire's scope is reflected in documentary sources from several languages, those of the core included Old Persian, Elamite, and Babylonian (Akkadian), as well as Aramaic. The last was the *lingua franca* of the Empire, i.e., for the entire ancient Near East. Nevertheless, Greek sources dominate Achaemenid historiography, a phenomenon that has necessitated the consideration of Achaemenid history through a Greek lens. Until the late nineteenth century CE, Achaemenid history was primarily a construct of Greek and biblical accounts, on whose traditions the first Persian Empire had an enormous impact. With the decipherment of various cuneiform scripts, more records from the core of the empire became accessible. Royal inscriptions and administrative texts, offering new insights and different perspectives, have dramatically changed our understanding of Achaemenid history. Advancements are ongoing, as these sources—along with the archaeological and art historical evidence—are analyzed and contextualized in their own right and also weighed against the Classical and biblical accounts.

The Medes: Greek Historiography and Assyrian-Babylonian Evidence

Medes and Persians were closely linked linguistically and culturally. The dates and routes of their migrations into Iran are the topics of many studies but without consensus. From the latter centuries of the second millennium through the middle of the first, Iranian peoples spread throughout Iran, the western and southwestern



Map 4.1. The Achaemenid Empire.

Source: Bang and Scheidel, 2013, *The Oxford Handbook of the State in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean*, 200. Copyright: Oxford University Press.

parts of which are referred to today as Elam (*Haltamti* in Elamite). Inscriptions of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III in the late ninth century are the first to attest to both Medes and Persians in the written record.¹ Numerous settlements of both Medes and Persians in the central Zagros were gradually incorporated into the Assyrian Empire's umbrella over the course of the eighth and early seventh centuries BCE. We have no documentary evidence from the Medes themselves. Even delineating a core area of Median power is a difficult task. The modern city of Hamadan, ancient Ecbatana, served as a capital in the sixth century, as discerned from later traditions about Cyrus the Great's victory over Astyages in 550.

Understanding of the "Median Empire"—a construct traditionally viewed as a sort of proto-Achaemenid Empire—has undergone a complete re-evaluation. The Medes were clearly a force with which to be reckoned in the late seventh and early sixth centuries BCE. But when the Greek legends about Median rule are compared with Assyrian and Babylonian evidence contemporary to the Medes themselves, we are able to track neither a supra-regional entity that relied (as did the Achaemenids) on an advanced, professional bureaucracy nor the successful incorporation of local elites.

The traditional picture of a Median Empire in modern scholarship is beholden mainly to Herodotus and the Classical traditions, traditions which date two centuries (or more) after the Median floruit. Whether the Medes are classified as an empire or not now seems mainly a matter of perspective. None of Michael Mann's four strategies of rule may be traced for the Medes beyond a superficial level, if even there. The lack of any indigenous or contemporary testimony to substantiate a Median "empire" as the term is generally understood—and allowing for variation in that understanding—has caused serious doubts in its very existence.² It is more productive to assess the Medes on a model contemporary with their origins in the Neo-Assyrian period, i.e., the chiefdoms of the Zagros Mountains, than it is to assess them on the model of the Achaemenid Persian Empire into which they were subsequently absorbed. The Classical Greek representations of the Medes are based almost entirely on the latter.

Herodotus was not unique in his consideration of the Medes' importance, but it is mainly his literary account of the Medes and their *arkhē*—the Greek term often translated as "empire," but a term with a range of meanings—on which the whole modern edifice of a Median Empire is based. Herodotus's tale of the first Median kings (book 1, paragraphs 96–106) thematically matches the rise of tyrants in Greek city-states, a story with Greek imagery of the Achaemenid court superimposed.³ According to Herodotus, a Mede named Deioces arrogated power to himself, manipulated his election as ruler (i.e., king), insisted on a bodyguard of spear-bearers, and implemented construction of an elaborate, fortified capital: Ecbatana.

¹ Rollinger 1999; Waters 1999.

² Mann 1986, 143ff. See Lanfranchi et al. 2003, 402–403; and note especially Liverani 2003; Radner 2003; and Lanfranchi 2003.

³ Helm 1981; Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1988.

Deioces then removed himself from his subjects and implemented behavioral protocols. Herodotus's remaining narrative on the Median kings emphasizes military matters, as the Medes battled Scythians and Assyrians.

Assyrian evidence tells another story, and it is one that does not involve a supra-regional entity or territorial dominion. The Medes whom the Assyrians encountered lived in fortified settlements throughout the central and northern Zagros Mountains, especially along the Khorasan Road (the Silk Road) toward modern Tehran. The rulers of these settlements are called in the royal annals "city lords" (sg. *bēl āli*) a term that suggests a limited scope of their power. Many of these Median city lords entered into formal treaty relationships (*adê*-agreements) with Assyria, with Assyria as the dominant partner. This situation maintained through the reign of Esarhaddon (681–669 BCE), but after that it becomes darker.

The archaeological evidence is scattered and difficult to interpret.⁴ Median sites such as Nush-i Jan, Godin, and Baba Jan indicate a floruit in the late eighth and early seventh centuries BCE and a decline in the first half of the sixth. It is around this time that we would expect to find a fledgling Median Empire. But Assyrian sources for political and military history ca. 640–610 BCE are relatively thin, and not just about the Medes. When the Medes reappear in the narrative, by way of the Babylonian chronicles, they were attacking Assyria in 615 BCE. There is no indication in the documentary or archaeological evidence how Umakištar, the Cyaxeres of classical texts, brought a Median army into such devastatingly effective use.

The phenomenon of the Medes as a major military force in this period seems beyond doubt, but the political trappings of this Median power are elusive, to say the least. The Babylonian evidence compels a reconsideration—and reduction—of presumed Median reach westward both into northern Mesopotamia as well as eastern Anatolia. The resulting deconstruction has resulted in a modified picture of the Medes: a loosely connected federation of tribes capable of overthrowing a declining Assyrian Empire (in conjunction with the Babylonians) but as an entity with neither the structural framework nor the cohesion to maintain an empire in the sense of a bureaucratic, centralized entity. The traditional model—one of presumed continuity from Assyria through Media to Persia, for which we thank the Greek tradition—does not work.

In the Book of Jeremiah, the plural "kings" is used when describing the Medes at 25.25, 51.11, and 51.27–28 in a historical context describing the late seventh and early sixth centuries BCE. In Nabonidus's inscriptions, the king of the *umman-manda* (i.e., the Medes) is accompanied by additional "kings going at his side" (LUGAL.MEŠ *alik idišu*).⁵ This and other Babylonian evidence better fits an image of a destructive force with a loose, unifying leadership but one that was incapable of imposing a structured, bureaucratic machinery that would allow more pervasive

⁴ Roaf 2003; Genito 2005; Stronach 2003, 2012.

⁵ Cf. Liverani 2003: 8–9; Tuplin 2004; and Waters 2011. See Rollinger 2003 on the western reach of Median power, Schaudig 2001, 416f i 7–29 for the text of Nabonidus's inscription.

and longer-lasting control. Another passage in Herodotus—outside his rendition of the Medes’ rise under Deioces and his successors—parallels Nabonidus’s perspective: “The Medes ruled all together and (directly) those living nearest; and these, further, ruled their neighbors, and so again in turn, they theirs . . .” (1.134.3). Visualizing Median power via a system of informal rule of its neighbors offers a better model. The plurality of kings mentioned in Jeremiah (“kings of the Medes”) fits such a reconstruction: Median domination over multiple, neighboring peoples, each of whom owed allegiance, directly or indirectly, to a Median overlord without the formal structure of an organizational empire.

Achaemenid Persia

Historical Sketch

The Persian Empire in its first phase—encompassing territory from Central Asia through Anatolia—was forged by Kuraš of Anshan in the space of roughly 20 years, ca. 550–530.⁶ This Kuraš was Cyrus the Great. Anshan was the name of an Elamite capital city and the region around it, which came to be called *Pārsa* (*Persis* to the Greeks), roughly coterminous with modern Fars. The Elamites were the indigenous inhabitants of Iran, whose civilization had flourished for centuries, since the third millennium BCE. Cyrus’s feat was unprecedented in its scale, speed, and (ultimately) staying power, but Cyrus and his conquests remain enigmatic in many ways. How do we explain the rapid rise of the Persian Empire from its origins as the kingdom of Anshan, a city for which there is no attested settlement from roughly 1000 to the beginning of the Achaemenid period?⁷ The prevailing assumption is that this area of Fars was inhabited by pastoralists. This assumption—at a superficial level—agrees with Herodotus (1.125) and other classical writers’ portrayal of the Persians as a tribal-based society, but to note that we are missing critical information is an understatement.

The pastoral component may explain why the early Persians are so thin in the archaeological record and, simultaneously, may provide one key to Cyrus’s rise. Pastoral groups evolved into incredible fighting forces in later empires, among others the Arabs and the Mongols, and those parallels can be instructive here. The march of traceable Persian conquests in our sources proceeded from Iran to the Anatolian plateau and then to Babylonia. Perhaps somewhat ironically, the primary riverine agricultural regions of Babylonia (Tigris and Euphrates) and Egypt (Nile)—geographically in strong contrast with the Persians’ pastoral origins—were added late in the initial stages of Achaemenid expansion, under Cyrus and Cambyses,

⁶ The main treatments are Briant 2002 and Kuhrt 2007a. Shorter syntheses include Kuhrt 1995, ch. 13; Wiesöfer 2001; Allen 2005; Brosius 2006; and Waters 2014, which contains a more extended version of the analysis presented here.

⁷ Sumner 1994 and Potts 2011.

respectively. Was Cyrus not capable of conquering Babylonia—his almost immediate neighbor but a large, centralized empire in its own right—until his own forces had been significantly augmented through other conquests? Or did other geopolitical or strategic concerns take Cyrus throughout Iran and Anatolia first?

The thin source material confounds answers to such questions and, for that matter, the application of appropriate models. A simple formula for conquest includes a significant armed force, but we do not have demographic figures for any region of the empire.⁸ Beyond the essential phenomenon of Persian-Elamite acculturation (for which see later discussion), it seems obvious that an important component in the Persians' successful conquests may be found in the incorporation of Iranians outside the core area of Fars. The exact chronology eludes us, but some of this incorporation must have occurred before or during Cyrus's initial conquests; perhaps some of the northern regions may be considered a natural progression, if not inheritance, from his victory over the Medes.⁹ Any such hypotheses are complicated, however, because much of northern and eastern Iran are poorly represented in the extant textual and archaeological sources, especially during the initial phases of expansion under Cyrus and Cambyses. These eastern regions were undoubtedly critical to the Achaemenid Persians' rise, if for no other reason than as sources for manpower. However, it is unlikely to be a coincidence that in later Iranian tradition eastern Iran was considered their homeland and that Darius I's family had so many links—religiously, culturally, even in the etymology of their names—with Zoroastrian and eastern Iranian traditions.¹⁰ Over several centuries in Pārsa, the synthesis of various Persian and Elamite groups resulted in a demographic dynamic of the early Persians who forged the Achaemenid Persian Empire in the sixth century BCE. A variety of data testifies to the cultural components of Persian-Elamite acculturation, but the archaeological and documentary evidence is so disjointed that only a general outline of the history of the early period is possible.¹¹ In the mid-first millennium, "Elam" as a geographic and political term is understood to refer to Susiana. Several kings bearing Elamite names are attested in Neo-Elamite texts during the century that immediately preceded the rise of the Achaemenid Empire, ca. 650–550 BCE. But beyond their names there is little indication of the places, extent, or chronology of their rules.¹² It is currently impossible to describe beyond a superficial level how Cyrus the Great's forebears, kings of Anshan, fit into this geopolitical dynamic. In the Cyrus Cylinder—a foundation inscription from the Marduk sanctuary in Babylon—Cyrus (II) the Great names his forebears as kings of Anshan: Cambyses, Cyrus (I), and Teispes. One might assume

⁸ See the discussion of Wiesehöfer 2009, 76–78, with appropriate caveats.

⁹ Rollinger 2008; Waters 2010a.

¹⁰ For discussion and references, Yarshater 1985; Gnoli 1980, 1989; Vogelsang 1992; Dandamaev 1989, 36–37; Waters 2004.

¹¹ See inter alia, Mirotschedji 1985, 1990, 2003; Carter 1994; Henkelman 2008, ch. 1; and the contributions in Álvarez-Mon and Garrison 2011.

¹² Cf. Vallat 1996; Potts 1999, 288–306; Waters 2000, ch. 7; 2013; Tavernier 2004. On Elam as a geographic term, see Vallat 1993, cviii–cx and cxxvii–cxliii.

that Cyrus's predecessors conquered some territory outside Anshan, which then laid the groundwork for Cyrus's future expansion, but such an assumption is impossible to verify.

In the year 550 BCE Cyrus defeated Ishtumegu, the Astyages of classical sources, and took Ecbatana. The addition of Median forces—and those of whichever other Iranian peoples were beholden to the Medes—presumably augmented Cyrus' forces considerably. We do not know if Cyrus's subsequent moves were proactive or reactive, but the former is usually implied and almost always taken for granted in modern scholarship. A "program of conquest" is not obvious from the extant sources, but Cyrus's rapid rise strikes most modern historians as no accident. Cyrus subsequently conquered Anatolia by the mid-540s and Babylonia in 539. Beyond allusions in Greek sources, we know nothing of the intervening years of Cyrus's reign. Herodotus (1.153) indicates that after his defeat of Croesus of Lydia, Cyrus entrusted further campaigning in Anatolia to subordinates, while he planned to campaign against Babylonia, the Scythians and Bactrians, and Egypt. Egypt was not conquered until his son Cambyses's reign. Various traditions indicate that Cyrus died in 530 fighting in the extreme northeast of the empire, the most developed of which is Herodotus's account of the campaign against the Massagetae (1.204–214).

Cambyses's reign is notable mainly for the conquest of Egypt and other parts of northeastern Africa, 525–522 BCE. The crisis that engulfed the fledgling empire upon Cambyses's death in 522 resulted in the accession of Darius I. This crisis was initiated by a revolt of Cambyses's brother Bardiya and was chronicled not only in the Classical tradition but also by Darius at Mt. Bisitun (see following discussion). It is an incredible—in the literal and figurative senses—story of fratricide, an imposter double, and the dramatic struggle to slay the impostor and secure the throne. According to Darius, and in outline followed by Herodotus, Ctesias, and other Greek writers, Cambyses slew his brother Bardiya in secret. While Cambyses was in Egypt, in 522 a rebel claiming to be Bardiya seized power within Parsa itself. Darius names the rebel Gaumata and claims that no one knew that he was not the real Bardiya. Herodotus's more colorful tale has a pair of brothers at the center of the scheme: one not only looked exactly like Cambyses's now-deceased brother but also had the same name: Smerdis. Regardless of the circumstances of Cambyses's death and Bardiya's revolt (or rightful succession?), the particulars of which remain elusive, the empire exploded into chaos. What Cyrus and Cambyses had built over the past three decades was in danger of completely falling apart. Darius and six other men, Persians of the highest rank, managed to slay the (according to Darius) imposter and then commenced a series of battles across Mesopotamia and Iran. Through victories in these battles, Darius claimed the throne. For good measure, he married the daughters of Cyrus (Hdt. 3.88) to strengthen his link to the founder.

Darius added to the empire's territories with conquests in the Indus River Valley, Libya, Scythians in Central Asia and in the Danube and Black Sea regions, and in Thrace and the Aegean. Xerxes's reign is noted mainly for his expedition against Greece in 480–479 BCE, which resulted in several Persian victories, including the

sack of Athens. The Persians were driven out, however, and were thus not able to incorporate formally this region in the empire. Subsequent decades involved sustained efforts to maintain Persian holdings in southeastern Europe and western Anatolia against mainly Athenian assertiveness. The record is almost entirely one-sided, but there is little indication that Xerxes and his successors ceded any territory. The single provincial list from Xerxes's reign even adds new territories—the implication being that he too expanded the borders of the empire.

Because of the Greek source bias, the focus of much Achaemenid political history gravitates toward the west: especially the activities of the Persian satraps in Anatolia and, to a lesser extent, intermittent but intractable rebellions in Egypt. The Persians were frequently involved in Greek politics, playing one city-state against another for the Persians' own advantage—e.g., in stabilizing Persian control in western Anatolia. An example of such a policy may be seen during the reign of Darius II, when his son Cyrus the Younger's financial and military assistance to the Spartans enabled them to finally defeat Athens in 404 and bring to an end the Peloponnesian War. In 387/386, Persian military and diplomatic successes resulted in the King's Peace, essentially an edict of Artaxerxes II that reasserted formal Persian sovereignty in Anatolia—contested for almost a century after Xerxes's withdrawal from Greece—and made the Persians the unchallenged power in the Aegean world. This situation did not maintain for long, and we may only wish that Persian sources for this diplomatic victory were extant to provide a further window into their imperial vision. Sporadic troubles in Egypt were generally contained until ca. 400, when Egypt ultimately was lost from Achaemenid control. It remained independent for much of the fourth century BCE, and it was only reincorporated into the empire by Artaxerxes III in 342. With a few exceptions, the east remains almost a blank in the documentary record until Alexander of Macedon's campaigns, recorded almost entirely by the Greek tradition.

After Xerxes's death, contested succession became the norm, whether through palace intrigue among members of the royal family and court or, in some cases, full-scale civil war such as that recorded in copious detail by the Greek writer Xenophon between Artaxerxes II and his younger brother Cyrus in 401. Several scholars have drawn historical inferences from the (apparent) lack of imperialistic activity and the (seeming) instability of the royal succession. But this is a tricky undertaking because of the dearth of sources, and any conclusions are provisional at best. Occasionally, Achaemenid royal inscriptions provide a tenuous link to political phenomena recorded in the Greek tradition, but these are as infrequent as they are difficult to interpret. In one of his inscriptions from Persepolis (XPf §4), Xerxes alludes specifically to the fact that Darius had other sons but that Darius chose Xerxes as the successor—the only other rationale Xerxes gives is, true to formula, because Xerxes had Ahuramazda's favor. Herodotus's tale (7.2–3) on the same subject features as the determining factor the exiled Spartan king Demaratus's advice to Darius. Demaratus argued that the eldest son born after Darius had become king (i.e., Xerxes) should be the successor, not any sons born to Darius before he

took the crown. Herodotus's story is a livelier one, and allows him to feature the Spartan Demaratus as a wise adviser (one of Herodotus's stock character types), but it is more literary than historical. How much correspondence should be allowed between the two testimonies? In any case, the Achaemenid dynastic principle remained a given to the end, beyond question, regardless of how much blood was shed by how many contenders for the throne. Achaemenid kings could trace their bloodline directly to Darius I and, through Xerxes and his mother Atossa, to Cyrus.

The Locus of Power: Kings and Queens, the Royal Court, and the Elites

The king of kings was the sun around whom all else revolved. From his physical stature to his presentation, all was carefully managed to highlight his august position. Most of our descriptive evidence comes from Greek sources, though the archaeological record—especially the sculptures from Persepolis—is of course of critical importance. The king's robe and accoutrements distinguished him from others. In sculpture he is generally larger than others portrayed, his beard is longer and more elaborate, and he also wears a special type of crown, a tiara called in Greek the *kidaris*.

The queen held a similarly august position to the king, but she is less visible in the sources. The queen herself and the queen mother were prominent in a hierarchy that included secondary wives, concubines, and palace staff. Persian royal women were enormously powerful, but in ways that often defy the stereotypes prevalent in Greek sources, which overflow with sexual intrigue and emphasize the dominant position of women and eunuchs. This lay at the root of the overarching sense of effeminacy that has colored much of subsequent Western tradition about the Persian court. But later Classical perspectives, especially concerning the royal women, do not always match up with other evidence. Documents from Persepolis testify to the range of economic activities of the royal women Irtashduna (Greek Artystone, a daughter of Cyrus and wife of Darius) and Irdabama, who controlled major land holdings with large staff retinues, interacted consistently with high officials (men) on state and private business, and were able to travel at will.¹³

The king was dependent on an elite class of nobles in order to govern successfully. But this dependence worked both ways: members of the nobility were dependent upon royal favor for their positions and prerogatives, and royal favor could be lost. Herodotus relates the story of one of Darius's helpers against Gautama, Intaphernes, who overstepped his authority in dispensing punishment to some of Darius's guards (3.118–119). Darius viewed this act as a threat to royal prerogative, i.e., his own security, and Intaphernes was put to death. Disbursements of royal favor often accompany descriptions of the royal table, elaborate feasts that were

¹³ See Brosius 1996 and note the wide-ranging discussion in Llewellyn-Jones 2013.

spectacles in their own right in the number of attendants, the lavish entertainments, as well as enormous quantities of food and drink.¹⁴ Gifts, the marks of royal favor, might include grants of land; elite status symbols of clothing, weapons (such as an *akinakes*, a type of dagger), or jewelry; and special favors. Numerous Greek and Roman sources refer to the phenomenon of royal feasting and gift giving, and Elamite and Babylonian documentation allude to the requisition of foodstuffs and other supplies for such.

Themistocles, the Athenian general who was responsible for the Greek naval victory at Salamis in 480, provides a striking example of the king's largesse to worthy individuals outside the Persian elite, in this case even one who was previously an enemy. After his rejection by his own countrymen, Themistocles made his way to Persia, duly impressed the king (whether Xerxes himself or Artaxerxes I is debated), and received a bequest of several cities in Anatolia for his upkeep (Thucydides 1.137–138; Plutarch, *Life of Themistocles* §29). The Greek accounts of this fascinating story are truncated, perhaps because the phenomenon of the great Athenian hero “going Persian” (or “Medizing,” as the Greeks termed it¹⁵) was difficult to countenance. Themistocles provides a notorious case, but examples of the co-opting of local elites into the Persian system are legion. Persians may have, in most cases, served as the upper stratum of the governing system (e.g., the satrap and his staff), but effective rule went beyond a Persian gloss and the capability of armed force.

The incorporation of local elites, who also had a stake in the system, might be displayed in style of clothing, drinking and dining behaviors, imagery embroidered or engraved on personal effects, gift exchange, and even mortuary practices, among other behaviors.¹⁶ The hieroglyphic inscription of Udjahorresnet, a naval commander who defected to the Persians, provides one example. It is carved on his votive statue from Sais in Egypt. The inscription chronicles Udjahorresnet's career, with special emphasis on his service to both Cambyses and Darius I. Udjahorresnet lists his own titles and achievements and relates the various ways that he facilitated a smooth transition to Persian rule: by advising the kings on proper treatment and offerings for temples and by supplying competent personnel for the keeping of sacred records. In return Udjahorresnet maintained a high position in Egyptian society and even aggrandized himself via his collaboration. The cooperation and incorporation of such local elites was essential for successful Persian rule.

It is important to note that with royal grants and honors came responsibilities. When requested, the overseers of these estates (still technically considered royal property) would be required to provide what was asked by satraps or the king: supplies, workers, even troops. It is through such means that the empire functioned, in other words, how the empire obtained and organized labor, military

¹⁴ Henekelman 2011a.

¹⁵ On the phenomenon of Medism, see Graf 1984 and Tuplin 1997.

¹⁶ For the incorporation of local elites, the data is diffuse and varied. The evidence from Anatolia is particularly rich; see especially the treatment in Dusinberre 2013, with references, especially pp. 76–79. See Lloyd 1982 for the Udjahorresnet statue and inscription.

duty, or other types of service. This organizational capacity is best traceable in Babylonian documentation such as the Murashu archive. This archive consists of several hundred clay tablets dating from the reigns of Artaxerxes I and Darius II (dating from 440 to 416) that record the operations of a family of businessmen, the Murahu, with wide-ranging commercial interests that also involved the management of landed estates. Members of the highest levels of Persian administration—Darius II's queen, Parysatis, and Arshama, the satrap of Egypt, among others—are mentioned in texts from the archive.¹⁷ Some of the estates that the Murashu managed were state-controlled, granted to various individuals for their use and profit, in return for services to the king. The practice was not unique to Babylonia, and it parallels exactly the bequests to Themistocles in Anatolia.

Military obligations accompanied these grants of land, arranged by what is called the *haṭru*-system, *haṭru* the Akkadian word for “bow.” The system was land-for-service: grants of land were given by the crown in return for services on demand. Grant holders, often termed “tenants” in the modern literature, relinquished the supervision of the estates to managers like the Murashu. The tenants could borrow from the managers against future harvests. The managers in turn sublet the land to farmers, who did the actual agricultural work and were allowed to keep a percentage. Any surplus produce would be sold on the market for silver and credited to the tenant's account for future use; from this the manager also received a percentage. This basic system included most socioeconomic groups. The amount of land granted to each person was commensurate with that person's socioeconomic status and the amount of services expected in return.

The maintenance of power required the potential as well as the real application of force. Persian military forces were drawn from all areas of the empire, members of the professional corps as well as conscripts levied for local action or for major campaigns. Classical sources frequently refer to the (usually exaggerated) numbers of the army or the variety of its contingents. But these sources are neither clear nor consistent with regard to the makeup of the army or its organization, so it is not possible to provide a definitive breakdown of its hierarchy or even its size.¹⁸ The backbone of the Persian army consisted of an elite permanent corps, the so-called Immortals, which numbered 10,000 soldiers according to Herodotus. Whenever one of their number died or was wounded or ill, another would take his place so the number of the battalion always remained at 10,000.

An inner core of the Immortals, numbering 1,000, may have been the king's select bodyguard. This would have represented the cream of the empire's elite, socially and militarily. This force was commanded by the *chiliarch*, a Greek word meaning “commander of 1,000,” perhaps from an Old Persian word **hazarapatish*.¹⁹ The *chiliarch* was clearly a high official in the army and at the court, where he regulated

¹⁷ Stolper 1985.

¹⁸ Cf. inter alia Wiesehöfer 2001, 89–93; Wallinga 2005; Lee 2007; Krentz 2010, 91–93.

¹⁹ On the *chiliarch*, see Briant 2002, 258–259; Henkelman 2002; Keaveney 2010.

access to the king, but the full range of his powers is not yet understood. Prestige items are frequently mentioned in conjunction with Persian officers and nobles, a phenomenon that fed Greek stereotypes of Persian effeminacy and weakness. But these items were more symbolic than practical and communicated the status of the possessor.

In addition, the Achaemenid ruler was able to conscript soldiers from all over the empire for specific campaigns or local action, on the model of the *haṭru*-system described previously. These levied troops from the provinces of course did not have the same sort of armor or weaponry as did, for example, the Persian Immortals and similar contingents, and their training (and thus effectiveness) varied widely. When he tallies the vast forces that Xerxes arrayed against Greece in 480, Herodotus gives a colorful rendering of the vast and diverse forces of the imperial levy, including descriptions of the various contingents clothing and equipment (7.61–100). That these depictions describe a parade more than a battle array has long been acknowledged.

Administration of the Empire: Satraps and Satrapies

The Achaemenid Empire set new standards in its organizational capacity, and not just with regard to the amount of territory ruled. The empire was divided into satrapies or provinces, each ruled by a satrap, answerable to the king. The satraps, the “protectors of the kingdom,” were typically members of the Persian elite, if not of the extended royal family. These individuals served at the king’s will, but in many cases (and in consideration of faithful service) they and their offspring might rule for decades. Satraps maintained a great deal of autonomy over the administration of their province, but they were frequently in contact with the king, necessarily so on major matters such as foreign policy or major military operations. The word “satrap” (Old Persian *xšaçaṗāvan*) may be considered equivalent to the governor of a province, one level below the king, while the term “satrapy” (from the Greek *satrapeia*, derived from the Old Persian term) refers to a province. The satrap had a plethora of staff—his own personnel and other royal officials (responsible directly to the king)—to support his work.

The creation of the Achaemenid administrative structure is usually attributed to Darius I. However, even if he reformed the system, parts were certainly organized under Cyrus and Cambyses. Tribute had been collected by Darius’s predecessors; it was a long-standing practice before the Achaemenids. Herodotus provides a detailed accounting (3.90–95) of the empire’s satrapies and their respective tributes. Whether Herodotus’s tribute total, a staggering sum of 14,560 talents, has any basis in reality is open to debate.²⁰ Tribute might also include troop levies and what we would term taxes: payments from royal holdings for the maintenance of

²⁰ Note the discussion at Briant 2002, 390–393.

government officials and other expenditures. An incredibly detailed customs account from Egypt lists harbor dues and taxes on specific items in the cargo paid to “the house of the king,” which referred to a local treasury. Such a centralized system reflects the bureaucratic legacies of both Egypt and Mesopotamia, which reach back for centuries previous. This customs account would not have been unique to Egypt; indeed, it should be considered the norm throughout the empire, but the evidence is rarely preserved.²¹ Satraps were responsible for the security of their provinces as well as for the maintenance of roads and other networks of communication. When the king sought military forces for a major campaign, it was the satrap’s responsibility to assemble the requested forces from his area.

The incorporation of local rulers into the satrapal system reveals another means whereby local elites came to have a stake in the empire’s stability, such as the Hecatomnid family in Caria in the fourth century BCE. Many satraps were appointees from elite Persian families, as in the case of Artabazus in Phrygia (in northwestern Anatolia). Artabazus founded what amounts to a satrapal dynasty: his son Pharnaces and his grandson Pharnabazus provide an unbroken line from 479 BCE well into the fourth century. Artabazus was a cousin to the royal family, thus a part of the extended Achaemenid clan, and this connection underlines the Persian nobility’s stake in the empire. The king depended upon his satraps’ loyalty for the empire’s smooth functioning and stability, and the satrap depended upon the king for his position.

The functioning of the empire demanded reliable communications between center and periphery, and the most visible manifestation of this was an extensive network of roads. The Persians adopted and greatly expanded their predecessors’ systems to facilitate communication across vast distances. Individuals or groups on state business carried sealed documents that allowed access to supplies or provisions en route to their destination. The most famous of these roads, though it was only one of many, was the so-called Royal Road between Susa in Elam and Sardis in Lydia: it ran through Cappadocia and Cilicia in Anatolia to Armenia and then southward through Arbela and on toward Susa. By Herodotus’s calculations the route ran roughly 1,500 miles and took a journey of 90 days (5.52). Royal dispatches could move with much greater speed via a relay system with fresh horses and messengers at each staging post (8.98). There were similar routes in all directions from the empire’s core in Fars. The primary route to Bactria across northern Iran is called in modern works either the Khorasan Road or, for later periods, by its better-known appellation: the Silk Road. Administrative documents from Persepolis, Syro-Palestine, and Egypt record disbursements to travelers in all directions.

Extensive, local bureaucracies are manifestations of a wider system by which the king and the imperial bureaucracy managed the empire’s territories. The most famous are the Persepolis Treasury Tablets and the Persepolis Fortification Tablets

²¹ The document is translated and discussed in Kuhrt 2007a, 681–703, and see Briant 2002 for additional examples.

from Persepolis, labels that indicate the find spots of the archives, not their contents. An important component of the Fortification archive is the wide range of sealings on the tablets, more than 1,100 distinct types of seal impressions on the published Elamite tablets.²² These reflect an integral part of the administrative process, as the sealings on a tablet may in themselves communicate the originator or recipient, the responsible official(s), and even the specific locale of the transaction. The archive as a whole deals mainly with the collection, storage, and redistribution of foodstuffs and livestock. The tablets provide crucial data on the organization of labor; fiscal management; the demography and cartography of the empire's core; operations of state institutions; religious practices and cultic personnel; travel on state business; and a host of other social and cultural aspects of Achaemenid history. None of this incredible detail and sophistication was unusual, and it was not unique by any means to Persepolis. It is difficult to reconcile a *laissez-faire* or indifferent approach of the royal administration in the face of such detailed records.

Bullae from Daskyleion and Aramaic documents from Bactria attest to additional bureaucracies, comparable with and connected to the central one at Persepolis, even in the far-flung provinces.²³ For example, Thucydides relays that Xerxes gave the satrap Artabazos his royal seal (1.29.1), and this act finds an echo in the seal inscriptions found at Daskyleion that bear Xerxes's name. Access to provisions and storehouses along the royal roads required authorization, as demonstrated by not only Herodotus's description of the Royal Road but also a number of documents in Aramaic and Elamite. Herodotus's account is corroborated by a Persepolis tablet (PF 1404), a disbursement from the satrap Artaphernes for a traveling group.

A satrap had a great degree of autonomy in the day-to-day business of his province, but one loyal to the king stayed within the bounds of royal policy and acted in accordance with royal directives. To act otherwise was tantamount to revolt, and the satrap risked removal from office and, potentially, execution. The demise of Oroetes, the end result of Darius's carefully orchestrated commands sent via messages under the royal seal (Hdt. 3.128), serves as a paradigmatic example of royal control in the satrapies but also the consequences of insubordination. Oroetes, the satrap of Lydia, had remained aloof during the crisis that preceded Darius's accession. Darius tested the loyalty of the Persian troops in Oroetes's satrapy through a series of letters sent under the royal seal. Each letter contained a command that, if the troops obeyed, was a signal for the messenger to continue reading aloud the letters. When it became clear to the messenger that the satrap's troops were loyal to the king, he opened and read the last letter, which commanded the guards to slay Oroetes. They did so immediately.

There are a number of other examples. Around 493 BCE, the satrap Artaphernes compelled negotiated settlements through arbitration for Ionian cities, established

²² Cameron 1948 and Hallock 1969. See the contributions in Briant et al. 2008 and on the sealings note Garrison and Root 2001.

²³ Shaked 2004; Naveh and Shaked 2012; Kaptan 2002.

the boundaries of their territories, and assessed their tribute (Hdt. 6.42). Also datable in the 490s, the satrap Pherendates imposed regulations on Egyptian priests in Elephantine, including payment of taxes, via Darius's directive. Another directive implemented in Egypt by the satrap Arsames, this one of Darius II in 419/418, involved Jewish workers and the observance of the Passover. Artaxerxes II, via the satrap Struthas, arbitrated a border dispute between the Ionian cities Miletus and Myus in the late 390s. Military matters outside the satraps' province certainly required royal approval. In the late 490s, Artaphernes supported Aristagoras's suggestion of a campaign against Naxos, though the king had to approve of the plan (Hdt 5.31–32). In the mustering for an attack on Egypt in 473, Pharnabazus calls himself the master of words while the king is the master of actions (Diodorus Siculus 15.41.3), in response to the mercenary commander Iphicrates's complaint of the muster's plodding progression.²⁴ In the same passage, Iphicrates is described specifically as having been summoned by the king himself.

The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology

A cohesive, comprehensive program known from the reign of Darius I onward dominates discussions of Achaemenid royal ideology, a universal ideology in the character of its influences and the extent of its application throughout the empire. The prevalent features of Achaemenid ideology were initiated and codified by Darius I, honed by Xerxes, and persisted in their essentials for the remainder of the Achaemenid period. Because the ideological program—manifest in texts, art, and architecture—remained virtually unchanged for the next two centuries, it has been viewed as static or even stultifying. But it is more productive to focus on its consistency and its effects—in other words, its resounding success.

Important ideological elements are already traceable from Cyrus's and Cambyses's reigns. For example, the sculptural program instituted at Cyrus's capital Pasargadae contains a number of elements that borrow from the Persians' imperial predecessors and that anticipate the ideology implemented by Darius.²⁵ Cyrus's plain but elegant tomb has several international elements. It rests upon a monumental, tiered platform that recalls the stepped pyramid of Djoser in Egypt and, more directly, the ziggurats of Mesopotamia and Elam. A large fragment of a relief from one of the gateways of Pasargadae's Palace S portrays the lower legs of a bull-man and a human figure wearing a long fish-cloak. Both images are well-known as protective figures in Assyrian art and a close parallel exists in a royal relief of the ruler Senacherib. More striking is the guardian genius from a gateway in Pasargadae's Palace R: a hybrid wearing an Elamite garment, with Assyrian-type

²⁴ Cawkwell 2005, 148, and Waters 2010b for discussion and further references.

²⁵ On the Pasargadae material, see Stronach 1978, 1997a, 1997b. On Achaemenid ideology in general, see Root 1979; Kuhrt 2007a, especially Chapter 11; Lincoln 2012.

wings, and an Egyptian triple crown. This figure incorporates a wide-ranging symbolism. The inclusion of the Egyptian headdress may imply that the installation of the figure was done in the time of Cambyses or even Darius.

In both Babylonian and Hebrew written sources, Cyrus is portrayed as the favored of the gods—of Marduk and of Yahweh, respectively—and the restorer of their temples and rites. In the Cyrus Cylinder and the so-called Verse Account of Nabonidus, both cuneiform inscriptions from Babylonia, Cyrus's righteousness is contrasted with Nabonidus's impiety. In the biblical accounts of Second Isaiah and Ezra, Cyrus is a messianic figure, the one who released the Jews from captivity and facilitated the rebuilding of the Temple.²⁶ Cyrus is lionized in Classical accounts as well, an extreme example found in Xenophon's paean to him as the ideal leader and ruler, a father-figure, in the *Cyropaedia*.

The foremost expression of Achaemenid royal ideology—in grandeur and in scale—was Persepolis. The sculptures along the side walls of the *apadana* (or Audience Hall) express this most clearly, a procession of Persians and Medes leading the subjects of the empire bearing gifts to the king. Each delegation of the empire's subjects is depicted in that people's traditional dress and bears an offering, an animal or product associated with that area or culture.²⁷ The Achaemenid kings did not portray in their monumental sculptures the violent subjugation of enemies, with the exception being the Bisitun relief of Darius I. The message of the Persepolis *apadana* reliefs seems rather one of solidarity or inclusiveness between the king—to whom the procession and the gifts are directed—and his subjects, though the message may also be considered one of hierarchical submission. The nuances may be cast in a multitude of ways, but the underlying message is one of an order established and preserved by a benign king, the agent of Ahuramazda, the chief god of the Zoroastrian tradition, to whom Darius and his successors all credit their rule. All this matches the rhetoric of the royal inscriptions.

Darius's Bisitun Inscription served as the blueprint for a new Achaemenid royal ideology. It was inscribed on Mt. Bisitun ca. 520 in Elamite, Akkadian, and Old Persian cuneiform and disseminated through the empire; a fragmentary Aramaic version was found in Elephantine in southern Egypt. The three versions flanked a relief showing Darius triumphant, hailing the winged disk (the god Ahuramazda) with one foot resting on the supine Gaumata, the imposter king who claimed to be Bardiya, the son of Cyrus. Underneath Ahuramazda stretches a line of captives, hands bound behind the back and a rope connecting their necks, each rebellious "Liar-king" labeled with his identity—those kings whom Darius defeated over the course of 522–520 to secure his position. The Bisitun Inscription is a victory monument on the pattern of centuries of Mesopotamian and Elamite traditions. The "Liar-kings" are cast as rebels and the antipathy of order, an order of course typified by Darius as the chosen agent of Ahuramazda.

²⁶ Yamauchi 1990, 89–92; Briant 2002, 46–48; and Kuhrt 2007b.

²⁷ See, for example, the accessible treatment in Allen 2005, 72–81.

Subsequent royal inscriptions lack the battle narratives given at Bisitun, but they follow and develop a universalist ideology. The king has a special relationship with Ahuramazda: the divine imprimatur that provided the legitimizing factor so central to royal legitimacy throughout Near Eastern history. The king is chosen by Ahuramazda, who created him and made him king and who provides him with legitimacy and protection. The king is the guardian of order and the safeguard against the forces of chaos. The king protects what is right and strives actively against falsehood (often translated as the Lie, the Old Persian word is *drauga*); he respects the interests of all his subjects, strong and weak. The list goes on. Beyond the attributes of good character and intelligence, the king himself is also effective in combat; this involved being an accomplished warrior on horse and on foot, with both bow and with spear. These qualities also appear in descriptions of the Persian royals elsewhere; for example, Xenophon's lengthy encomium of Cyrus the Younger relays the exact qualities mentioned here (*Anabasis* 1.9).

Last, but certainly not least because it is emphasized in almost all the royal inscriptions, the king is an Achaemenid, descended from the eponymous ancestor Achaemenes. Except for this last point, which is simply a variation of the theme of legitimacy by descent, most of the preceding elements listed were typical in Near Eastern traditions since the oldest royal inscriptions and reliefs. Darius's royal titles and lineage at Bisitun (§1–4) emphasize his descent from Achaemenes, for whom the dynasty is named. Achaemenes is not attested before Darius's inscriptions. Darius does not provide his full lineage in subsequent inscriptions, but he is always an Achaemenid. He also places great emphasis on being Persian and, in inscriptions at Naqsh-e Rostam and Susa (DNa and DSe) he emphasizes being Iranian (Old Persian *Ariya*) as well. Explanations for these emphases vary, but they become the dominant markers in royal identity thereafter, first and foremost the label "Achaemenid."²⁸

Imperialism may be motivated by some of the previously noted qualities—especially as cast within an ideological plane—but the reasons for expansion could be many. Not least is that expanding the realm had been a feature of royal ideology throughout Mesopotamian and Elamite history, and examples are legion. In the often-extensive and never modest lists of titles and epithets of Assyrian kings, increase is a frequent theme, and increase applied also to enlarging Assyrian dominion. "May they [the gods] give him [Ashurbanipal] a straight scepter to extend the land and his peoples. . . ." Elamite kings such as Shutruk-Nahhunte II incorporated the epithet "Expander of the Realm" (*likume rišakki* and variants) in their royal titles.²⁹ There are echoes of this in the Greek tradition, for example when Herodotus (7.8.2) dramatically casts Xerxes's rationale for invading Greece in the context of Xerxes's comparison with his predecessors: "When I received this throne,

²⁸ Darius's ethnic emphasis (Persian and Iranian) in his royal titles and epithets seems to run counter to Cyrus's emphasis, judged from his use of the title "king of Anshan," which recalls an Elamite tradition. The data sample is small, however. Cf. Waters 2004; Potts 2005; Vallat 2011; and Henkelman 2011b.

²⁹ Livingstone 1989, 27 obv. line 17 for the Assyrian example, and König 1965, nos. 71–73 for the Elamite.

I began to worry lest I fall short of those who came before me as king and increase Persian dominion no less than they did. . . .” Through Darius I a pattern of expansion is clear, at times an extension of a moral imperative—the king’s responsibility to punish enemies and wrongdoers, or “liars” as they are cast in the Bisitun inscription. One way to interpret Xerxes’s expedition against Greece, with Athens as the ultimate goal, is just that: as punishment for their involvement in the Ionian Revolt (499–494) and, depending on interpretation of the Athenians’ embassy to the satrap Artaphernes in 507, as reaction against a recalcitrant vassal.³⁰ That further territorial acquisition was intended may be assumed. However, that Xerxes’s army was ultimately defeated is a reality that apparently did not find its way into the ideological realm of the royal inscriptions.

Some scholars have attempted, by comparing the so-called provincial (or satrapy) lists, to track the territorial expansion or contraction of the empire, but this is a tricky undertaking. The ideological expression of empire may not match the bureaucratic or structural organization on the ground. Nevertheless, these lists are the closest thing to an imperial map that we can access and assess; but they are not easily interpreted from a geopolitical perspective. The lists are of specific *dahyāva*, the plural form of Old Persian *dahyu*, and with one exception dating to Xerxes’s reign they all come from inscriptions of Darius I. The Old Persian word *dahyu* may mean either “people” or “country,” and the context is not always clear. Each list includes both peoples and places, the latter not necessarily synonymous with the boundaries of a formal satrapy.³¹

Except for the Bisitun inscription (ca. 520 BCE), it is impossible to date any royal inscriptions with any precision. But they are ideologically consistent. For example, whether Xerxes’s list (XPh §3) dates after his failed invasion of Greece is uncertain, but if so, there is no acknowledgment of any loss of territory. Xerxes’s is the longest list, and the various Yauna (Greeks) are still included. There are two new *dahyāva* here as well: the Dahae of Central Asia and the Akaufaka, whose location is unknown. We cannot track the historicity of these conquests, but it is not an accident that Xerxes’s list is the longest extant. Xerxes had to develop his father’s territorial dominion further, and distant campaigns were necessary—regardless of results of individual battles—to do so. As expressions of imperial ideology, the lack of specificity (as we seek it) was not unintentional. In other words, these lists portray the king’s idealized perception of his dominion and do not necessarily delineate actual, imperial control, especially on the fringes of the Empire. That Xerxes’s *dahyu*-list is not only the longest but also the last extant is curious. Whether that is an accident of discovery, or whether the formal presentation of a list was deemed no longer necessary after Xerxes, is uncertain. Some would correlate the latter possibility with a cessation of Persian expansionism after Xerxes—an assessment that makes sense within the thin, extant record, but in the end it cannot be verified.

³⁰ Cf. Kuhrt 1988; Nenci 2001; and Kramer 2004.

³¹ See Vogelsang 1992, 96–119; Briant 2002, 172–175; and Jacobs 2006.

Alexander and the End of the Achaemenids

Before his death, Philip II of Macedon (r. 359–336 BCE) had sent 10,000 men across the Hellespont to Abydos, which later became the staging area for Alexander's crossing in 334. Philip's aims, and to what extent Alexander may have expanded upon them, are much discussed in the modern literature.³² Similarly, Alexander's stunning achievement has been variously attributed to his own demonstrable brilliance—as a military leader on par with the greatest in history—or to a pervasive but nebulously defined Persian decadence and decline. The latter phenomenon is well entrenched in the Greek historiography but is stereotypical to the point that it is difficult to discern the facts.

In the course of four years, Alexander inexorably conquered Persian territories. By the summer of 330 the terrace of Persepolis had been burned and the last Achaemenid king, Darius III, was dead in northern Iran with Alexander in hot pursuit. Alexander's progression is usually tracked by the three main set battles fought against Persian forces—at Granicus in May of 334, at Issus in November of 333, and at Gaugamela in October of 331—and by his conquest of Egypt in 332. Though some places like Egypt were delivered to Alexander without resistance, Darius III and his officials contested almost every step of Alexander's invasion. Action occurred simultaneously on many fronts in Anatolia from the summer of 334 well into 332, so it took two years for Alexander's generals to secure the northwestern flank of the empire. Fierce resistance in Gaza and other parts of Syro-Palestine belie superficial accountings of Alexander's breezy acquisition of Egypt. The loss of those former regions made Egypt's defense untenable. With Alexander in control of Cyprus and the Phoenician cities, there was no longer any effective Persian-controlled fleet in these regions to thwart him.

Alexander needed the Persian imperial bureaucracy—headed in the main by Persian elites or by Persianized local nobility—to have any chance at maintaining a successful conquest. Achaemenid officials who surrendered were not only spared but might keep their position and status. In other words, beyond a change in ruler and allegiance, the administration of many important cities looked no different than they had before Alexander arrived: local rule and local institutions continued. More than 200 years of Achaemenid rule would have Persianized many regions, especially manifest among the elites but to varying levels, an important phenomenon that is in need of further study.³³ Alexander himself would have had exposure to Persian dignitaries and customs, since Macedonia had had much contact with Persians and had been a Persian vassal in the fifth century BCE.

Alexander's entry into Babylon in October of 331 BCE offers a showcase for his adoption of important aspects of Achaemenid ideology, modeled on previous traditions. The Babylonian performance paralleled Alexander's entries into Sardis

³² For example, see Bosworth 1988, 1996; Briant 2010.

³³ See Dussinberre 2003, 2013 for Achaemenid Sardis and other parts of Anatolia.

in Lydia and Susa in Elam, other cities that surrendered voluntarily, each undoubtedly with local variations. The entry into Babylon followed a historical pattern; the one most immediately relevant was that of Cyrus's conquest in 539.³⁴ After a hard-fought battle and decisive victory at Opis north of the city, Cyrus was received into the city of Babylon without a fight: a carefully choreographed entrance that glossed the violence that preceded it. Alexander clearly welcomed the opportunity to fit himself into a pattern that Cyrus himself had followed.

The Babylonians lined the walls and the streets to greet Alexander. The reception culminated in his paying respect to the Babylonian god Marduk (Bel) and his temple, a necessary part of the process. In an astronomical diary entry about this event Alexander is called "King of the World" (Akkadian *šar kiššati*³⁵), the same title used to describe Cyrus in the Verse Account of Nabonidus. The title *šar kiššati* had a long history in Mesopotamian tradition, and its application to Alexander was not accidental. Its use implies a continuity of imperial tradition and supplies a connection to Cyrus, highlighted by their similar entries into Babylon. The case at Susa was similar; after negotiation, Alexander was met by a delegation that offered him a formal welcome, which culminated in the surrender of the city and its treasury (Arrian 3.16.6–7).

Alexander's progress into Fars was not so easy, as the defense of the Achaemenid heartland was fierce. Nevertheless, once successful, Alexander continued the important acknowledgment of expected forms. A visit to Pasargadae and Cyrus's tomb to pay his respects to the empire's founder culminated in the continuation of the traditional sacrifices performed there. The burning of the Persepolis terrace in May 330—impetus for which is also still debated—of course does not fit a pattern of integration with the preceding dynasty. Such processes are never seamless and Alexander was obviously not Persian, but Macedonian. His men and the Greeks held certain expectations as well. The burning of Persepolis signaled a new order: one based on, but separate from, the previous. The circumstances surrounding the death of Darius III, seemingly bereft and murdered by his own officials, are often overshadowed by Alexander's assumption of the successor's mantle. Alexander cast himself in the role of Darius's avenger and is thus sometimes portrayed as "the last Achaemenid." That is an exaggeration, though continuity with the Achaemenid forms and traditions was both useful and necessary.

The Achaemenid Empire and dynasty may be viewed as having been brought to an end with the death of Darius III. One of the men who killed Darius III, Bessos the satrap of Bactria, took the Achaemenid moniker Artaxerxes, an attempt at dynastic continuity, so Alexander had more fighting to do before Bessos and other challengers were quelled. Alexander continued a policy of recruiting elites among the Persian nobility; while many resisted, no small number joined him, presumably in hopes of retaining their economic and social status in the new order. With

³⁴ Kuhrt 2007c, 618–621.

³⁵ Sachs and Hunger 1988, no. 330.

the exception of one appointment of a Macedonian (Menon in Arachosia), the eastern satrapies remained governed by Persians through the early 320s. Some were subsequently replaced due to suspicions about their loyalty, but many were retained.³⁶

Thus, Alexander's necessary Persianization became more pronounced via his adoption of Achaemenid ideology and the incorporation of Persians and Iranians into his entourage. Alexander recruited Iranian troops from throughout the eastern satrapies, including a corps of 30,000 young men who were to learn Greek and to train in Macedonian tactics (Arrian 7.6.1). While considered by Quintus Curtius as hostages (8.5.1), this group may be considered one manifestation of Alexander's policy of fusion—a policy only in its early stages before Alexander himself died in 323. There were other components. Alexander married Rhoxane, the daughter of an Iranian nobleman (Oxyartes) who was appointed as a satrap, for whatever other reasons no doubt to secure allegiances and to dissuade challengers among the eastern Iranian nobles. After his return from the Indian campaign in 324, Alexander also married the Achaemenid princesses Stateira (daughter of Darius III) and Parysatis (daughter of Artaxerxes III). More marriages occurred between Alexander's companions and Iranian noble women at an elaborate joint wedding in Susa. Just as Darius I moved to consolidate his power after his accession by marrying the daughters of Cyrus, Alexander revealed here a far grander plan to integrate the Iranian and Macedonian elite, to form effectively a new ruling class. But many elements of Alexander's approach were bitterly unpopular with his Macedonian cohorts, and he faced resistance within his own ranks.

In the end Alexander had a short time to implement a plan of governing this vast enterprise after his conquests. There is acrimonious debate yet about how Alexander should be viewed, at the extremes as a new philosopher-king prepared to unite west and east or as a bloodthirsty marauder. The unification of the *oikumene* was in any case short-lived. It is impossible to say how well his policies would have worked in the longer term. The splitting of the Achaemenid Empire among his successors in the Antigonid, Seleucid, and Ptolemaic (among several smaller entities) shattered any illusions of a politically unified *oikumene*, even as it dawned a new era.

Chronological Chart of Achaemenid Persian Kings

Cyrus (II) the Great, ca. 559–530 BCE
 Cambyses II, 530–522 BCE
 Darius I, 522–486 BCE
 Xerxes I, 486–465 BCE

³⁶ See Briant 2010, Chapters III–V.

Artaxerxes I, 465–424 BCE
 Xerxes II, 424–423 BCE
 Darius II, 423–405 BCE
 Artaxerxes II, 405–359 BCE
 Artaxerxes III, 359–338 BCE
 Artaxerxes IV (Arses), 338–336 BCE
 Darius III, 336–330 BCE

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