

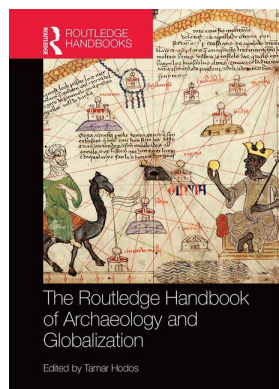
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9.4

Globalization and the study of the Achaemenid Persian Empire

Henry P. Colburn

An elusive empire

The Achaemenid Persian Empire was the largest political entity of its day. Founded c.550 BCE by Cyrus the Great, it rapidly swallowed up the Median, Lydian and Babylonian kingdoms, adding Egypt c.525. At its greatest extent it extended from the Indus River to the Danube, and included such disparate places as Sogdiana, Egypt, and even, for a time, Athens (Figure 9.4.1). For two centuries it was the dominant political power in the Near East and eastern Mediterranean, until its destruction by Alexander the Great c.330 BCE (Briant 2002).

In this chapter I consider how globalization can contribute to our understanding of the Achaemenid Empire. The archaeological study of the empire is characterized by a divide between imperial and local phenomena. This divide was perhaps best articulated by Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg (1990: 263) in an essay aptly named ‘The quest for an elusive empire’:

The extant evidence seems to allow one to argue both for a monolithic empire as well as an amalgam of culturally distinct and politically semi-independent areas. The former position is founded on generalizations based on material from regions for which documentation is available. The second conclusion is generally derived from archaeological evidence.

This divide has long coloured studies of Achaemenid imperialism and rule. It has especially informed ideas of imperial power being weak or diffuse, or of limited imperial presence in certain regions (Root 1991). Even well-intentioned attempts to identify and articulate changes under Achaemenid rule are hampered by an apparent lack of evidence for that rule (Khatchadourian 2012: 963–65). Simply put, the absence of homogeneous material culture elements across the empire have been taken as evidence for the empire’s limited impact and influence on the regions it ruled.

I argue that globalization provides a useful intellectual framework for bridging the divide identified by Sancisi-Weerdenburg. Archaeological studies of premodern globalization focus on long-distance connectivity, and on societal change (e.g. social, economic, cultural) ensuing from that connectivity (Feinman this volume; Jennings this volume). Homogeneity is but one of various forms this change can take; indeed, such change takes place in local contexts, which

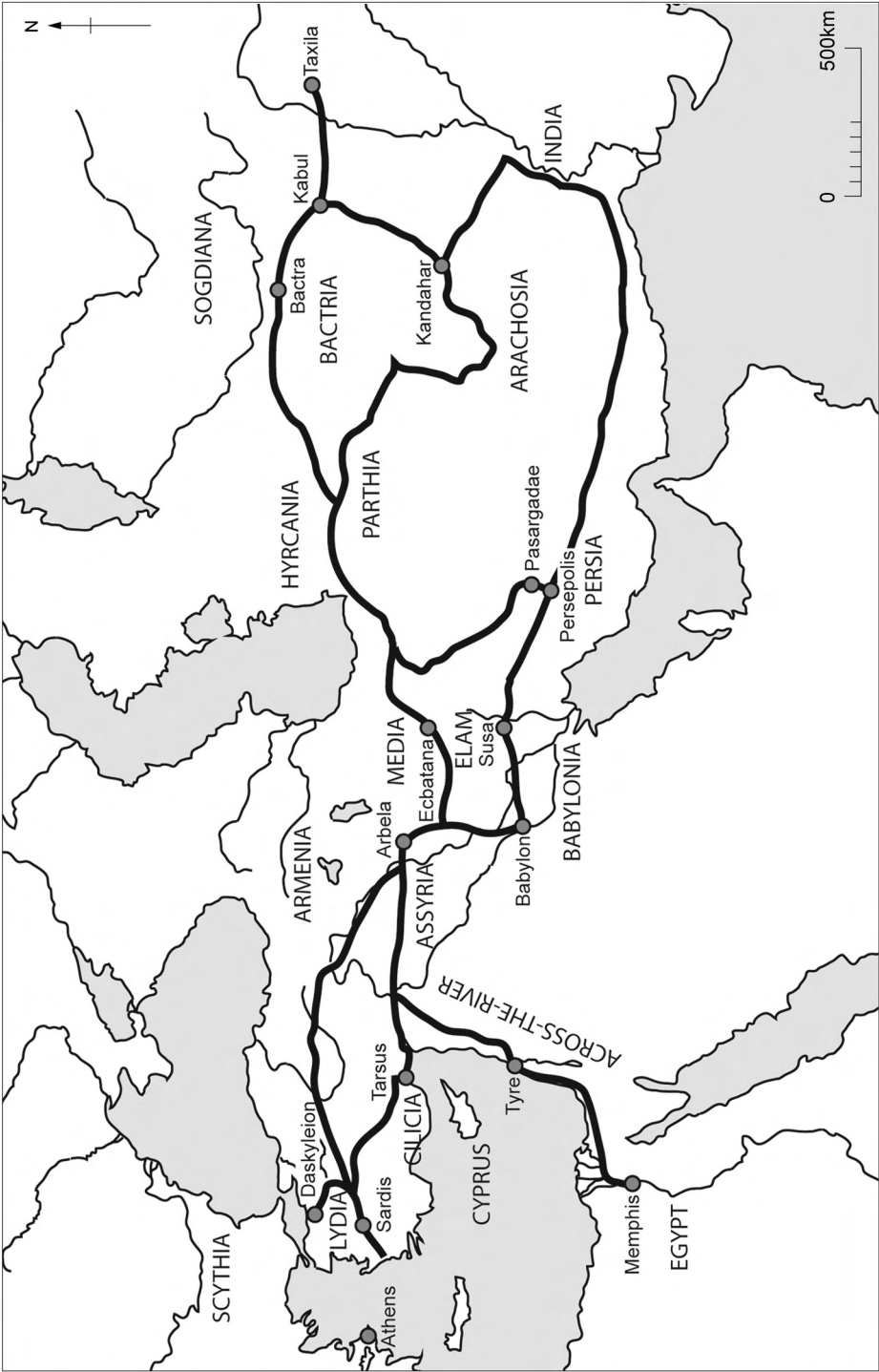


Figure 9.4.1 Map of the Achaemenid Empire, showing major sites and routes. Drawn by A.J. Renoux

invariably affect its appearance and character. This is especially relevant to the study of the Achaemenid Empire, since if the existence of long-distance connectivity in the empire can be established, we are justified in trying to understand seemingly local phenomena in the context of global processes, and we are likewise justified in identifying global phenomena in local settings. Rather than seeing homogeneous suites of material culture spreading across the empire, we find different groups of people adopting elements of a shared ‘visual vocabulary’ for use in their own local contexts. In globalization studies this is sometimes referred to as ‘glocalization’ (e.g. Nieuwenhuyse this volume), that is, an explicitly local iteration of a global phenomenon.

Thus the aim of this chapter is less to determine whether or not the Achaemenid Empire was an instance of ancient globalization than it is to use modern globalization to better understand the past. After a brief discussion of recent archaeological approaches to globalization I present the evidence for long-distance connectivity, which primarily consists of administrative measures meant to facilitate and coordinate imperial activities across the Near East. Next I consider some examples of object types that illustrate the spread of a shared visual vocabulary in the empire. These objects were used to construct identities that had both local and ‘global’ significance. While they do not point to the creation of a global culture, they do suggest that some people began to see themselves as part of something larger than their own local communities. This is especially interesting in light of Achaemenid imperial ideology, the subject of the final section, which emphasized both the diversity of the subject peoples, and the inclusion of those subject peoples in the project of empire. Arguably, this ideology would have reduced the pressure to assimilate to the empire’s ruling class, making it all the more significant that some individuals nevertheless chose to construct their identities in global terms.

Approaching globalization in Achaemenid West Asia

Although globalization is generally thought of as a modern phenomenon encompassing the entire world, its main systemic features existed in earlier periods as well, albeit on reduced geographic scales (Feinman this volume; Jennings this volume). Moreover, the question of whether or not the Achaemenid Empire, or any other historical or archaeological phenomenon, was an instance of globalization is less important than how modern globalization can help us to better understand the past. For the purposes of this discussion, globalization is a heuristic tool that provides organizing principles for a difficult body of evidence.

The main features of globalization are an increase in connectivity on an inter-regional scale and social, cultural and economic change resulting from it (Feinman this volume; Jennings this volume). Connectivity arises from meaningful interactions between people, groups and institutions. These interactions can be meaningful either because of their frequent recurrence or because of their political, economic or social significance. In network terms, these meaningful interactions become ‘ties’ (Knappett this volume). In periods of limited literacy (and indeed in prehistory) these interactions necessarily took place in person or were mediated through objects. In instances of globalization the connectivity created by these interactions extended over far greater distances than before and was quantitatively greater (though not necessarily greater in terms of strength or significance).

This increased connectivity can have a range of effects that contribute to social and cultural change. Notable among these is space–time compression, which refers to a perceived reduction in geographical and chronological distance as a result of increased connectivity (Jennings this volume). In other words, it is a sense that, for practical or ideological purposes, the world has become smaller. Related to this is a trend towards standardization, in areas such as language, coinage, and units of measurement, but also in more abstract ways, such as social customs and

administrative practices. Standardization of this sort facilitates the meaningful interactions that constitute connectivity, and like time–space compression has the effect of making distant people and places seem less foreign.

Another prominent feature of globalization, and perhaps the most widely recognized, is homogeneity (Jennings this volume). As discussed above, time–space compression and standardization facilitate interactions between geographically distant people and institutions. One effect of this is the dissemination of a shared visual vocabulary. When new objects and images are introduced to a region as a result of meaningful interactions they effectively expand the existing repertoire of visual forms. Furthermore, since the networks created by these interactions are often dominated by certain groups or regions (Jennings this volume), certain objects and images are more likely to be disseminated and adopted on a widespread basis.

In searching for evidence for the effects of globalization it is also important to consider scale (Feinman this volume). As Michael Kearney (1995: 548) has noted, globalization ‘refers to social, economic, cultural, and demographic processes that take place within nations but also transcend them, such as that attention limited to local processes, identities, and units of analysis yields incomplete understanding of the local’. In other words, the societal changes ensuing from increased long-distance connectivity can have different forms in different contexts. Imported images or object types can have local meanings assigned to them (Hodos 2010: 23–25; Boozer 2012). Thus globalization can contribute to heterogeneity as well as homogeneity (Jennings this volume). So studies of globalization need to examine local phenomena in their global context, and global phenomena in their local context.

Archaeological evidence is usually illustrative rather than probative. This is especially true of the Achaemenid Empire, given the historiographic difficulties alluded to at the beginning of this chapter. So while long-distance connectivity cannot always be demonstrated, the potential for it can be, especially in the form of infrastructure, institutions and administrative measures that facilitate movement and communication. Also, the evidence for cultural change is generally discernible in local contexts rather than empire-wide trends. This is due in part to uneven coverage of the empire by archaeologists; the Achaemenid period is better understood in some regions, especially in the western half of the empire, than it is in others. It is important to recognize as well that the empire’s ideology emphasized diversity rather than homogeneity, which may also have affected how people throughout the empire made use of non-local material culture and social practices.

Long-distance connectivity

In order to control its vast geographical extent, the Achaemenid Empire employed several strategies for linking together distant places. These included the establishment of a network of roads and storehouses, a mounted relay postal system, the use of Aramaic as an administrative language, and the standardization of the calendar. These measures created the potential for long-distance connectivity by reducing the uncertainties of travel within the empire, and also facilitated interactions between people in different parts of the empire by creating some basic common ground. It is important to note as well that while many of these features had existed in earlier West Asian political entities, the Achaemenid Empire used them on a much greater geographical scale than ever before, to link together a much wider array of subject peoples.

The Achaemenid road network (Graf 1994; Colburn 2013; Figure 9.4.1) is best known in the western regions of the empire, where it has excited the interest of Classical authors and modern scholars alike. The tablets of the Persepolis Fortification Archive, especially those recording the disbursement of travel rations, attest to movement throughout the empire as well. These roads

were built, maintained and guarded by imperial officials. They were furnished with way stations at regular intervals, where travellers could procure supplies. For example, an Aramaic document (Porten and Yardeni 1986–99: no. A6.9) written on leather parchment by the governor of Egypt, Arshama, authorizes his subordinate Netihor to draw rations at several places along the road to Egypt through northern Mesopotamia and Syria–Palestine. Texts recording the disbursements of travel rations from Persepolis, Idumaea and Bactria suggest that roads throughout the empire were similarly provisioned (Briant 2012). The stations were positioned at intervals averaging 24 km, spaced approximately a day’s journey apart by foot (Colburn 2013: 37–38).

These roads allowed the easy movement of people and goods from one region of the empire to another by mitigating some of the uncertainties of long-distance travel. They were no doubt intended primarily to meet the needs of the empire, such as the mustering and deployment of armies or the transport of tribute payments, but in doing so they certainly created opportunities for interactions and ensuing connections. The Persepolis Fortification Archive attests to the movement to and from Persepolis of crews of workmen and women from across the empire, each labelled with an ethnonym indicating its geographic origin (Briant 2002: 429–39; Henkelman and Stolper 2009). In one instance the Archive indicates that between 502 and 498 BCE crews of Thracians, Egyptians, Lydians, Bactrians and Cappadocians were all dispatched to Tamukkan, a town in the Bushehr peninsula on the Persian Gulf coast (Henkelman 2008: 308–09). During this five-year period there must have been many opportunities for interactions between these different groups. There were also more permanent relocations, both voluntary and involuntary, that created resident populations of foreigners in various cities and regions of the empire: there were communities of Carians in Borsippa (Waezegggers 2006), Cimmerians, Phrygians, Urartians, Lydians and Indians in Nippur (Stolper 1985: 72–79), Egyptians in Susa (Zadok 1992: 145–46), and Jews and Aramaeans in southern Egypt (Porten 1968), to name a few.

The roads also made it possible for high-speed communication to take place over long distances. The empire established a relay postal system that employed mounted couriers (known in Elamite by the term *pirradazish*). The system operated in a manner similar to the Pony Express of nineteenth-century America. The similarity is close enough that one can use the Pony Express to estimate the top speed for imperial communication (Colburn 2013: 41–47). The estimate suggests that a *pirradazish* could cover approximately 230 km per day. This means that information could travel between Persepolis and Susa in a matter of days, and between Persepolis and Memphis in under two weeks. Most communication would have been somewhat slower, especially in the absence of stirrups or horseshoes. But the combination of an extensive road network and the *pirradazish* system meant that vital information and orders could be transmitted throughout the empire in relatively short order.

The empire further facilitated inter-regional communication through the employment of Aramaic as an imperial *lingua franca*. Aramaic was already in use as a *lingua franca* in the Neo-Assyrian Empire, and it was retained in the Achaemenid Empire as the medium of long-distance communication, both within and outside of the empire. This is best attested by the correspondence of Arshama (Porten and Yardeni 1986–99: nos. A6.3–16; Tuplin and Ma 2013). Arshama was frequently absent from his province, and on these occasions he issued orders to his subordinates by means of Aramaic letters written on leather parchment. The Persians used Aramaic for diplomatic communication with the Greeks, including even the Spartans, who were famed in antiquity for their isolation and xenophobia (Thucydides 4.50). It was also used in Egypt and at Persepolis in administrative contexts, and even to disseminate imperial propaganda, as suggested by the fragmentary Aramaic version of Darius’ Bisitun inscription found at Elephantine at the southern border of Egypt (Greenfield and Porten 1982). Aramaic thus served as a medium

of communication in multilingual settings, allowing people from across the empire, and even outside of it, to interact with each other.

The Persians also sought to standardize the Babylonian calendar, which was the most widely used calendar in the empire. In addition to Mesopotamia, its use is attested in Egypt, Palestine, Asia Minor and Bactria, and the Elamite and Old Persian calendars used at Persepolis were assimilated to it. The Babylonian calendar was a lunar calendar, and thus required the insertion of intercalary months in order to remain properly aligned with the seasons. In earlier times these intercalations were made at the discretion of the king, and thus word of them had to be disseminated to outlying areas in order for the calendars to remain in sync. During the reign of Darius, however, a fixed 19-year cycle was established (Stern 2012: 105–23). This effectively standardized the calendar throughout the empire, making it possible to coordinate imperial activities across great distances.

These measures enacted by the empire in order to better administer and control its territory also created the potential for long-distance connectivity. The use of Aramaic permitted people across the empire to speak to each other and engage with administrative entities with less need for intermediaries such as translators. The standardization of the calendar reduced the complication of moving between different timekeeping systems. And the road network and postal system contributed to time-space compression by making distant places less distant from a practical standpoint. Furthermore, the movement of people and the populations of resident foreigners in various cities and regions of the empire contributed to deterritorialization by making these places more cosmopolitan and multi-ethnic.

Homogeneity and diversity

The extent to which the long-distance connectivity discussed in the previous section led to social and cultural change in the Achaemenid Empire is difficult to determine archaeologically. In particular, there is little evidence for the dissemination of homogeneous material culture across the empire. One reason for this is that research on the empire has focused primarily on its western provinces, and generally on earlier or later periods. Also, global phenomena and processes have distinctly local effects, which can result in heterogeneity as well as homogeneity (Jennings this volume). Thus examination of local contexts is important for studying globalization in the empire. Indeed, there is a discernible spread of a shared visual vocabulary in the empire, which was nevertheless deployed primarily using local material culture traditions and systems of meaning (Root 1991: 10–13).

One example of this shared visual vocabulary is jewellery – mainly bracelets, armlets and torques – featuring protomes in the form of animal heads or foreparts, including those of ibexes, calves, lions and mythical winged creatures. The reliefs on the Persepolis Apadana show members of several delegations, including the Medes, Syrians, Ionians, Indians, and the Saka Tigraxauda, carrying rings with animal protomes (Figure 9.4.2). It is not clear what type of object these are meant to be, since their size might be exaggerated for the sake of legibility (Root in press). But since they are carried by multiple delegations they are clearly not a regional object type. Rather, their use in this context suggests they are symbols of unity.

A number of examples of these types of jewellery are extant (Rehm 1992: 14–40; Curtis 2005); unfortunately, most are unprovenanced. Though this material is not useful for studying the distribution of these jewellery types, it is nevertheless shows that a significant quantity of it was produced. There are, however, some excavated examples recovered from burials. One of these burials is at Susa (Tallon 1992), one of the major cities of the empire where the king frequently held court. This tomb contained two gold bracelets and one torque with lion

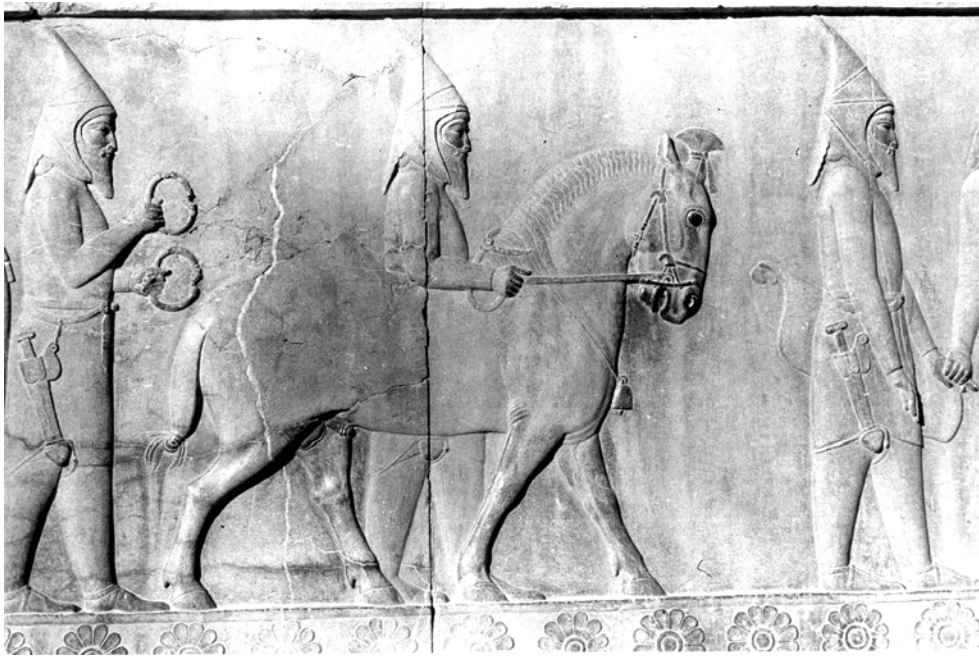


Figure 9.4.2 Relief showing the Saka Tigraxauda, east façade of the Apadana, Persepolis, c.500 BCE. Photograph by M.C. Root

protomes. A gold bracelet with lion heads was found in one of the latest tumulus burials at Gordion (Sams 1979: 12; Figure 9.4.3), and two gold bracelets with lion protomes were found in a tumulus near Sardis (Özgen and Öztürk 1996: no. 111). Two more tombs, located at the site of Hacinebi overlooking the Euphrates in south-eastern Turkey, feature silver and bronze bracelets and anklets with horned animal heads, including two ibexes (Stein 2014: 268–72). At the nearby cemetery at Deve Hüyük several bronze bracelets with bovine heads were found (Moorey 1980: 77–78).

There are also some examples of jewellery with animal protomes in other media, including a tomb painting in Lycia (Mellink 1972: 266), and on Egyptian statues. Most notably, the well-known statue of Udjahorresne, originally from Sais in the Nile Delta, wears a bracelet with lion protomes (Colburn 2014: 288–90). According to the statue's hieroglyphic inscription, Udjahorresne was a high-ranking official in Egypt under the Egyptian kings Amasis and Psamtik III and under the Persian kings Cambyses and Darius (Kuhrt 2007: 117–22). He designed the Egyptian language titulary for Cambyses, and he spent time at the court of Darius before returning to Egypt. The inscription also states that 'I [Udjahorresne] was a learned man for all lords; my character was judged good by them. They gave me gold ornaments' (Kuhrt 2007: 119). The reference to gold ornaments must mean his bracelet, which is implied to be a gift from the Achaemenid king. At the same time, there is a long tradition, going back to the late Old Kingdom, of Egyptian kings giving gold objects to honoured subjects, and of the recipients of these gifts recording the honour in inscriptions and other personal monuments (Moyer 2006: 245–47). Thus Udjahorresne reinterpreted his bracelet, a sign of royal favour in the Achaemenid world, in an Egyptian context. Indeed, this type of statue, a *naophorous* or shrine-bearing statue, has a very specific theological meaning in Egyptian thought (Klotz 2014).



Figure 9.4.3 Gold lions' head bracelet (15 J 1), Tumulus A, Gordion, c.530–525 BCE.
Photographed by G. Bieg.

For Udjahorresne, this bracelet signified his connection to the Achaemenid king and his participation in the project of empire. The individuals buried at Susa, Gordion, Sardis, Hacinebi and Deve Hüyük did not necessarily have similar such personal relationships with the king, but the inclusion in their tombs of objects implying such connections is suggestive of their perceived stations in life. The bronze examples from Deve Hüyük further show that jewellery of this sort was also used by non-elites, illustrating how the shared visual vocabulary of the empire was employed across different social strata. All of these people considered these objects to be important markers of their identities as participants in the empire, so important as to take them to the grave. They constructed their respective identities in globalized terms, and the material culture they used to do so was informed by empire-wide processes rather than strictly local ones. Yet the statue of Udjahorresne was part of an explicitly Egyptian representational practice and made to serve a specific theological purpose. This was Udjahorresne's primary concern in fashioning this statue; the global element of his identity is of secondary importance.

The bracelet on Udjahorresne's statue presents an example of what is sometimes called 'glocalization,' that is, a local interpretation of a non-local or global phenomenon. This is significant concept for the Achaemenid Empire, since in some instances the social and cultural conditions in a certain region create a uniquely discernible interaction with global processes. One example of this is in the highlands of Armenia, where several columned halls were built within or beside old Urartian fortresses (Khatchadourian 2013; Figure 9.4.4). Columned halls

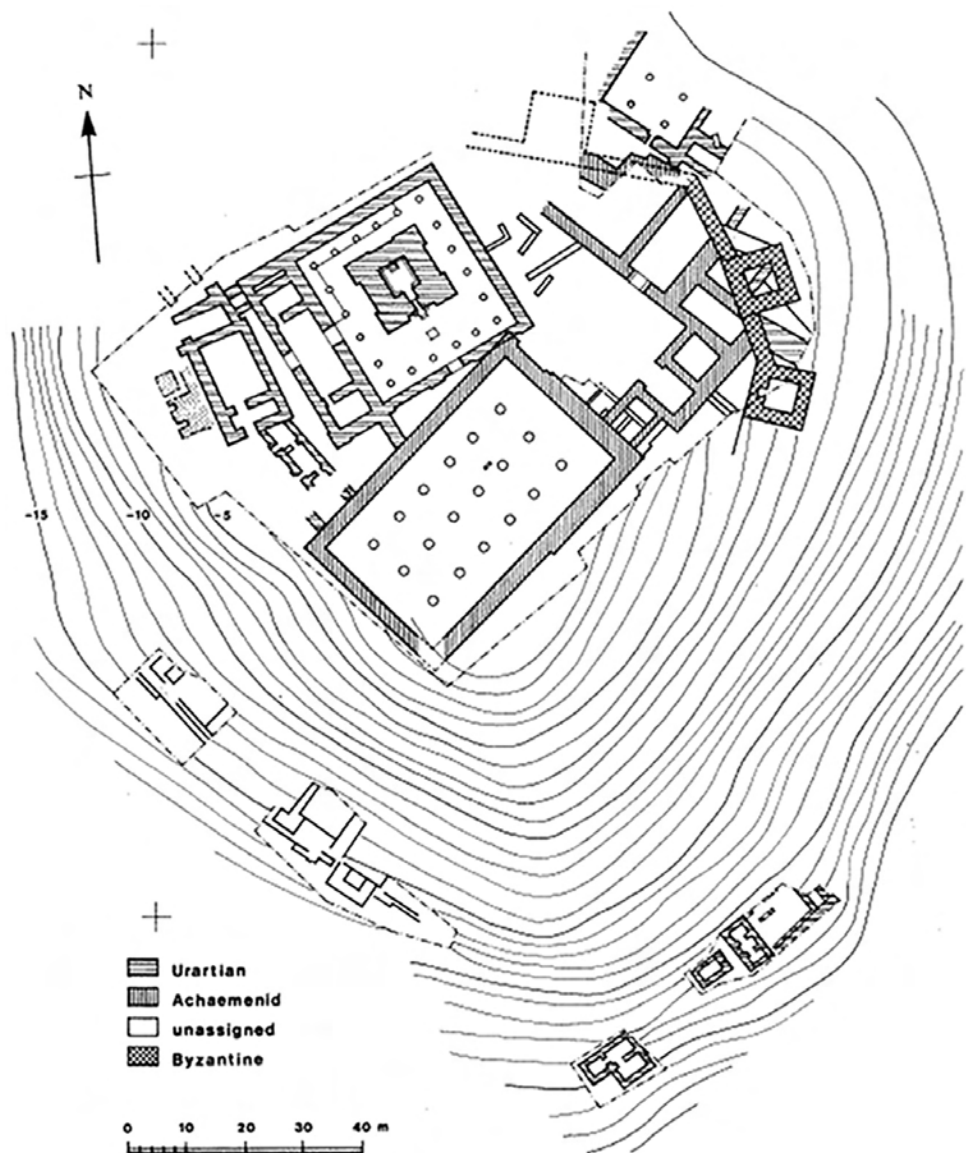


Figure 9.4.4 Plan of the Urtian fortress and columned hall at Altintepe, Turkey. Source: Summers 1993: figure 2. Used with permission

of this sort are unknown in Urtian architecture, but they are a prominent feature of major Achaemenid sites such as Persepolis, Pasargadae and Susa, where they served as an architectural rendering of the empire's ideology of inclusion and participation (Root 2015). Khatchadourian (2013: 136) attributes the construction of the Armenian halls to local rather than imperial agency, arguing that 'by using the columned halls . . . highland authorities participated to some degree in the reproduction of what had become an institution of Achaemenid political culture, albeit inflected by aspects of their own worldview.' The construction of these halls within the walls

of old Urartian fortresses linked these former highland structures of authority to new, imperial ones. Furthermore, several more columned halls were built in this region, but at sites without Urartian fortresses (Knauss 2006; Knauss *et al.* 2013). The implication is that the adoption of this building type was a widespread phenomenon in this region. If, as Khatchadourian has proposed, these halls were constructed by local elites, they represent efforts by those elites to express their statuses in global terms.

In some cases it is even possible to identify the spread of certain social practices along with the shared visual vocabulary of the empire. For example, there are distinctive forms of the 'Achaemenid bowl', characterized by a carinated shoulder and everted rim. They appear at Persepolis on the Apadana reliefs, where they are carried by various subject peoples, and versions of them made of metal and ceramic have been found in various parts of the empire, including Egypt, Palestine, Cyprus and Anatolia (Dusinberre 1999). Images of these bowls in use suggest that the practice of holding them on one's fingertips while drinking also spread across the empire (Miller 2011). This was most likely the manner of their use at the royal court (cf. Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 1.3.8), and the adoption of this practice signalled one's familiarity with or connections to (real or imagined) the king and the social centres of the empire. Furthermore, the existence of ceramic versions of these bowls further suggests that their use extended to a wide segment of the empire's population, like the jewellery discussed above. And the persistence of this type in ceramic and metal ware corpora, in such disparate places as Egypt (Colburn in press) and Gandhāra (Petrie *et al.* 2008), after the fall of the empire attests to the degree to which these bowls had become engrained in local cultural systems.

It is important to recognize as well that the shared visual vocabulary did not originate exclusively in the Achaemenid royal court. For example, images of the Egyptian god Bes, usually depicted frontally as a bearded, bandy-legged dwarf, occur in a wide variety of media across the empire (Abdi 1999, 2002). These include seals and seal impressions, coin types, *stelae*, architectural fragments, and figurines. The significance of this phenomenon is uncertain; Bes does not seem to be connected directly with Achaemenid imperial ideology or religion. But his spread throughout the empire was certainly a consequence of the long-distance connectivity created by the imperial administrative measures discussed earlier.

The spread of a shared visual vocabulary and social practices did not necessarily lead to the creation of a 'global culture' per se, but it did create certain commonalities between previously less-connected groups of people, and over greater distances than before. These commonalities were greatest among social elites, who were most likely to have trans-regional connections, or pretensions thereof, and many of whom held positions of authority within the imperial administration. These elites have been described as the 'international elite' of the empire (Weinberg 1999), and some of them, such as Udjahorresne, Themistocles, Ezra and Nehemiah, are identifiable by name in various textual and epigraphic sources. Other people, such as the soldiers, military colonists and crews of workmen, also no doubt adopted aspects of the visual vocabulary or social practices that they encountered while moving across the empire on imperial business.

Achaemenid imperial ideology

The difficulties in identifying clear examples of shared material culture and practices across the empire may result in part from the character of Achaemenid imperial ideology. This ideology is best understood from its visual articulation in the decorative programme of the palace complex at Persepolis and the royal tombs nearby at Naqsh-e Rostam (Garrison 2013; Kuhrt 2010; Gates-Foster 2014: 182–86). These structures have reliefs illustrating the diversity and breadth of the empire's subject peoples by showing examples of these peoples dressed in distinctive clothing.

For example, the Saka Tigraxauda are shown wearing the pointed caps for which they were known (Tigraxauda means ‘with pointed hats’). These are not necessarily accurate representations of the clothing worn by the peoples of the empire, but they are meant to indicate that each group is distinctive and separate from the others. Achaemenid imperial inscriptions similarly give varying lists of subject peoples (Cameron 1973), also meant to illustrate the empire’s vast reach. The trilingual cuneiform inscription on the tomb of Darius at Naqsh-e Rostam connects the images of subject peoples with the empire’s reach:

If you now should think ‘how many are the countries which King Darius held?’ look at the sculptures of those who bear the throne, then shall you know . . . the spear of a Persian man has gone forth far . . . a Persian man has delivered battle far indeed from Persia.

(Kuhrt 2007: 503)

At the same time, Achaemenid ideology also emphasized inclusion and participation on the part of these subject peoples. On the façade of the Apadana at Persepolis the subject peoples are being led by the hand; some are armed, and most are carrying animals or objects, interpreted as gifts. The entire scene can be read as a microcosm of the empire in which the subject peoples voluntarily submit to the king and willingly participate in the project of empire (Root 1979: 227–84). The participatory metaphor is even more blatantly deployed in the case of the ‘throne-bearers’ portrayed on the Central Building and Throne Hall at Persepolis, and on the tombs at Naqsh-e Rostam. Here the subject peoples (along with a Persian) are shown with their hands raised above their heads as if they are holding up the platform on which the king sits (or stands). The implication seems to be that all of the peoples of the empire played a role in supporting the king (Root 1979: 131–61). Texts such as the so-called ‘Foundation Charter’ inscription from Susa expresses a similar idea by describing the construction of a palace there as the result of an effort by artisans drawn from across the empire (Root 2010: 178–86).

The combination of diversity and inclusion in Achaemenid ideology arguably reduced any pressure for conformity or assimilation (Gates-Foster 2014). There may well have been social or political advantages to adopting new material culture and practices, but from an ideological standpoint the empire was concerned explicitly with uniting many different peoples. Because these differences played a significant role in imperial ideology, there may have been some motivation for subject peoples to retain local forms and practices, at least in certain contexts. In fact, Achaemenid royal power was presented in local idioms whenever possible. This is best documented in places like Babylonia (Waerzeggers 2015) and Egypt, where Achaemenid kings were represented as pharaohs in certain key contexts, such as on *stelae* commemorating the death of the Apis bull (Colburn 2014: 120–29). In light of these ideological considerations it is all the more striking that certain individuals in the empire did indeed employ a shared visual vocabulary in the construction of their identities, in a manner that is discernible today. It is quite possible that had the empire survived longer such identities would have become more prevalent. But the tension between connectivity, created by administrative measures, and ideology, stressing the empire’s diversity, seems generally to have been resolved in favour of the latter. Indeed, the Achaemenid ruler’s claim to be a uniquely privileged figure – the King of Kings no less – in the social order of the Near East, relied on it being thus (Kuhrt 2010: 92–93).

A connected empire

The search for features of globalization in the Achaemenid Empire puts the divide between local and imperial phenomena identified by Sancisi-Weerdenburg in a new light. The empire

was geographically very large, so the Persians implemented administrative measures resulting in space–time compression and standardization to make it functionally smaller and therefore easier to govern. These measures also created the potential for long–distance connectivity on an unprecedented scale. It is difficult to characterize this connectivity, since much of the evidence for movement and communication relates only to official business. But it did lead to the dissemination of a shared visual vocabulary throughout the empire that was employed by certain individuals to construct their identities in non–local terms. This vocabulary did not supplant local traditions; rather, it augmented them, permitting these individuals to construct their identities in non–local terms if they so wished. Its deployment was frequently embedded in local representational practices, making it difficult to discern archaeologically. Moreover, Achaemenid imperial ideology was at pains to emphasize the diversity and breadth of the empire, and there was thus relatively little impetus for subject peoples to adopt aspects of Persian identity.

The Achaemenid Empire, then, is a case in which the long–distance complex connectivity necessary for globalization was present, but did not lead to widespread cultural change. According to the criteria articulated by Jennings (this volume), this disqualifies the empire from being an example of globalization per se, even though several features of globalization, such as space–time compression, standardization and even deterritorialization can be identified. This might seem an unsatisfying conclusion, but it is nevertheless an important statement about the nature of Achaemenid rule. It suggests that the long–distance connectivity in the empire, though certainly regular (if not frequent) and meaningful, was not necessarily strong. This does not mean the empire was weak or disconnected; as Knappett (this volume; following Granovetter 1973), points out, weak ties can be very powerful. Arguably, the emphasis on diversity in Achaemenid ideology indicates that these ties were left deliberately weak, since the creation of a single, albeit massive, cultural entity would undermine the significance of titles like ‘King of Kings,’ and thus run contrary to Achaemenid cosmology (Kuhrt 2010; Gates–Foster 2014: 182–86). And, as the shared visual vocabulary in the empire shows, certain individuals were nevertheless quite able to navigate these connections, and were profoundly affected by doing so.

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