

1 From the Mediterranean to the Indus Valley:  
Modalities and Limitations of the Achaemenid  
Imperial Space

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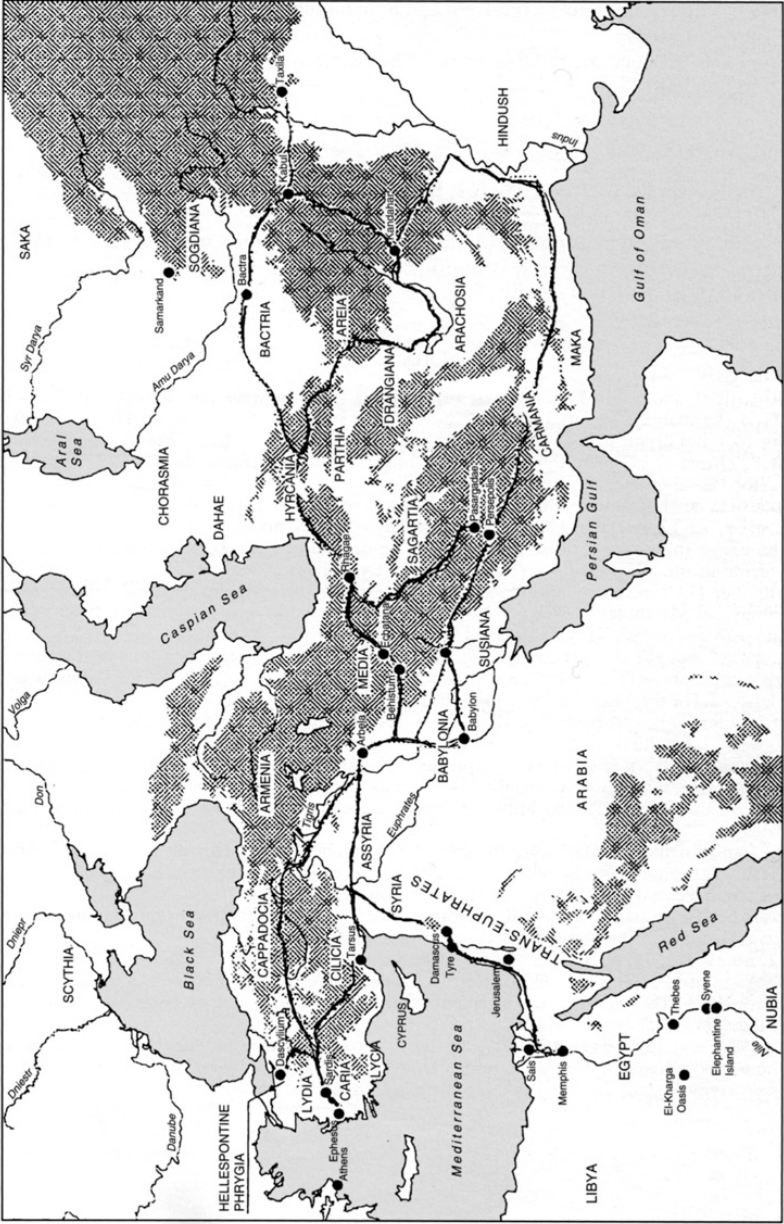
1.1 Preliminary Remarks: Power and Control

The Achaemenid Empire founded by Cyrus the Great (550–530 BCE),<sup>1</sup> expanded by his successors, Cambyses (530–522) and most importantly Darius the Great (522–486), was conquered by Alexander the Great between 334 and 323. After the wars between the successors of the Macedonian conqueror, also known as the Diadochi, the empire imploded into several competing kingdoms (the Hellenistic kingdoms). From a geopolitical global perspective, the establishment of the empire of the Great Kings put an end to a very long period of territorial divisions among several kingdoms and empires, such as those existing around 550 (Pharaonic Egypt, the Lydian Kingdom in Asia Minor, the neo-Babylonian kingdom in Mesopotamia and in the Fertile Crescent, the Median kingdom in the surroundings of Hamadan/Ecbatana, etc.). The Achaemenid historical phase represents thus a singular moment in the *longue durée*: it is the first and last time in history that these peoples and countries were united within a unitary state structure for more than two centuries. This would later be called the Persian-Achaemenid Empire, in line with the name of the reigning dynasty (Map 1.1).

To the great surprise of his contemporaries, Alexander the Great succeeded in seizing the empire following four major battles. One of which, the Battle of Gaugamela in October 331, made possible the consequent capturing of the large royal residencies situated in the Babylonian and Elamite plains (Babylon, Susa) as well as those situated on the Persian (Persepolis, Pasargadae) and Median plateau (Ecbatana). Since antiquity, Alexander’s victory traditionally served as a proof to the weakness of state control in the Achaemenid region and an indication of its irremediable decadence. In line with the fourth-century Plato and Xenophon views, this decadence is proposed as starting with the death of Cyrus in 530.<sup>2</sup> In modern Europe, one of the most popular thesis was to

<sup>1</sup> Hereafter all dates are before common era (BCE) unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>2</sup> See Briant 2002b, where the texts are quoted and commented.



Map 1.1 The Achaemenid Empire. Copyright Achemenet, Paris.

condemn together the Achaemenid and the Ottoman Empires: both were depicted as “despotic,” but also as extremely fragile structures. Notwithstanding their arrogant claims, the despotic rulers of these polities were said to be unable to fully control the territories under their nominal rule. Put to the challenge of an exterior shock, both polities “collapsed under their own weight.”<sup>3</sup>

Generally, the abovementioned thesis is nowadays considered too simplistic and is by and large dismissed. Nonetheless, the victorious crossing of the empire’s western borders in 334 by Macedonian armies, followed by the fall of the royal residences in 331–330, poses substantial questions about the nature of the Achaemenid rule. How did the Achaemenids conceive the control of their imperial space? What were the governance techniques that enabled the empire to remain intact for more than two centuries? The difficulty in answering these questions is aggravated by the evident absence, under the Achaemenid Empire, of either dissemination of the Persian language or the emergence of archeologically identifiable “Achaemenid civilization,” which could have assisted in bringing together the various peoples of the empire. This explains why in 1980 a British archaeologist, the late Roger Moorey, made the following observation:

Material traces of the two hundred years of Persian rule in the Near East are still generally elusive. In many regions of their far-flung empire, this period is amongst the least known archaeologically. . . . As rulers, they [the Achaemenids] seem primarily to have lived in enclaves or in military strongholds, widely scattered, but linked by a highly efficient communication system and by the strongly centralized administration it served and fostered.<sup>4</sup>

The formulations create an image of an empire comprised of territories most of which were not under the effective control of the conquerors, who were reduced to living in “enclaves.” In 1990, Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg, summed up the impasse in the debates at that time in a provocative title “The Quest for an Elusive Empire,” and attempted to define an approach that would not confront the “archeological” and “historical” visions. This also explains why, in the first lines of my 1996 synthesis (Briant 2002a, 1), I raised a programmatic question in an interrogative and provocative manner: “Was there ever an Achaemenid Empire?” Lastly, in 2003, Remy Boucharlat and myself once again used a similar formulation when organizing a colloquium on the archaeology of the Achaemenid Empire.<sup>5</sup>

During the last twenty-five years, the discoveries and publications have increased to such an extent that a territory, which, in evidence available in 1990 appeared not to be covered by a tightly knit administrative network,

<sup>3</sup> On this theme, see Briant 2010; 2017a, 318–39.

<sup>4</sup> See citation, references and commentaries in Briant 1987 and KCP, 48–9.

<sup>5</sup> See Briant and Boucharlat 2005, 17–25.

presents in 2017 a very different image.<sup>6</sup> In this context, the research done on the Elamite tablets of Persepolis is of paramount importance.<sup>7</sup> A good example is that of Central Asia since the arrival on the antiquity market (in 2000) of Aramaic documents on leather from Afghanistan (Naveh and Shaked 2012), and also the publication of fragments of Elamite tablets found in Old Kandahar (Fischer and Stolper 2015). Renowned as a largely autonomous area in the empire of the Great Kings, this vast territory was under the control of satraps.<sup>8</sup> Despite maintaining a significant degree of autonomy, these satraps were under the supervision of Persepolis and employed Aramaic scribes whose vocabulary and formulations were similar to those used by other Aramaic scribes, for example, in Achaemenid Egypt. Meanwhile, the publication of the 460 demotic ostraca discovered in the Ayn Manawir oasis in western Egypt is likewise very telling. These ostraca that mention the regnal years of the Great Kings from the fifth century show that at the other end of the empire, this Egyptian village was well included in the empire's space.<sup>9</sup> In particular, the question is whether the existence of underground water channels in that oasis indicates the extension towards Egypt of an Iranian technique (attested on the Persian plateau during the Achaemenid period) as part of an active development policy of the Achaemenid central government.<sup>10</sup> There are other examples, including the findings of archaeological excavations from the Bactria-Sogdiana area, the Caucasus and Western Minor Asia, and the great royal residences, all of which considerably expand the available documentation.<sup>11</sup> In this regard, it is also important to consider the iconographic documentation bearing witness to

<sup>6</sup> Besides BHach I (1997) and II (2001), Briant 1999, a collection of commented documents of Kuhrt (2007), and conference proceedings published in the series *Transeuphratène* (Paris), *Persika* (Paris) and *Classica et Orientalia* (Wiesbaden), see my bibliographical reviews in Briant 2016a; 2017b, 1–39. See also [www.achemenet.com](http://www.achemenet.com), where numerous publications of documents may be found, and since 2001, specialized articles published in the online publication ARTA: [www.achemenet.com/en/table/?/on-line-publications/arta/tableau-des-articles](http://www.achemenet.com/en/table/?/on-line-publications/arta/tableau-des-articles).

<sup>7</sup> Selectively published by Cameron 1949 and by Hallock (1969, 1978), the Persepolis tablets are currently being exhaustively published by a team led by M. W. Stolper in Chicago: see, for example Briant, Henkelman, Stolper 2008, 16–25 and passim; Jacobs, Henkelman, and Stolper 2017 (in particular Stolper 2017 and Henkelman 2017). In principal, the chronological arc of the tablets is limited (see HPE, 422–424), yet we understand today that the setup of this system dates before the establishment of Persepolis by Darius. This system was maintained throughout the entire Achaemenid history.

<sup>8</sup> The satrap is the head of one of the (around twenty-five) imperial administrative units (called satrapies): see section 1.4.

<sup>9</sup> *Ostraca* published on [www.achemenet.com/en/tree/?/textual-sources/texts-by-languages-and-scripts/hieroglyphic-and-demotic-egyptian/ostraca-from-ain-manawir#set](http://www.achemenet.com/en/tree/?/textual-sources/texts-by-languages-and-scripts/hieroglyphic-and-demotic-egyptian/ostraca-from-ain-manawir#set), with all necessary references.

<sup>10</sup> See Briant 2001 and 2002c, with edits in KCP, 16–17. I also reflected (2017d, §1.3) on possible relationships between the village micro-history and imperial history. Concerning the underground channels of irrigation in Achaemenid Egypt, the debate continues (cf. Agut and Moreno-García 2016, 638, and Boucharlat 2017, particularly pp. 291–2).

<sup>11</sup> See Briant-Boucharlat 2005; Khatchadourian 2016.

the imprint of Persian themes in the provinces – a documentation provoking diverging political interpretations.<sup>12</sup>

Owing to the persistent ambiguity of the available documentation, the question of the Persian imperial presence posed above should still be born in mind, even though today it must be phrased differently (e.g., Colburn 2017). It is time to renounce the debate between a “centralist” thesis – based on the implicit postulate that antiquity state-building can be analyzed through concepts and ideas that came into being very late and exclusively in Europe – and an “autonomist” thesis that reduces the imperial authority to the network of the great royal roads. A distinction must be made between “control” and “authority.” Local authorities (sanctuaries, kings, peoples, cities) did not necessarily come into conflict with imperial control. On the contrary, the recognition of local authorities was one of the modes of exercising imperial authority in the provinces. Insofar as their decisions and activities did not oppose the requirements of the imperial power, various local authorities (kings of the Phoenician cities, heads of Egyptian and Babylonian sanctuaries, governments of Greek cities, etc.) preserved their sphere of influence. Influence would be preserved if obligations (e.g., taxes, supply of troops, ships, and so forth) remained fulfilled. Among many others, one wonderfully eloquent document – the famous trilingual inscription of Xanthos – allows us to analyze the entanglement of powers and responsibilities, those exerted by the satrap (Pixodaros) and those exercised by the city of Xanthos: “Royal power and satrapal authority oversee the maintenance of peace and prosperity in their states, by acknowledging the customs, languages and institutions of local communities whose continued existence and functioning they favored.”<sup>13</sup>

## 1.2 Imperial Space Limited by Its Borders

Through text and images, the Great Kings have frequently exalted their power over their diverse territories and peoples. Following his victories in 522–520 over the nine “liar-kings,” who were depicted as displayed before him, bound to each other, in a defeated position, Darius had the text of his exploits engraved on the cliff of Media’s Behistun:<sup>14</sup>

I am Darius, the Great King, King of kings, king in Persia, king of peoples/countries (*dayava*) . . . These are the peoples/ countries who obey me . . . In all, twenty-three, . . . they were my faithful subjects.

These peoples are regularly enumerated in the inscriptions of Darius and his successors. They are carved on the royal tombs (in the form of the throne

<sup>12</sup> See review in Briant 2015.

<sup>13</sup> See KCP, 99–127 (with several updates, pp. 7–8); citation, p. 122.

<sup>14</sup> The translations of the royal inscriptions are borrowed from Kuhrt 2007, 141–57 and 476–505.

bearers), on the stairs of the Persepolis *apadana*<sup>15</sup> (as delegations carrying tributes/gifts of the most remarkable products from their regions) or even on the base of the statue of Darius discovered in Susa but carved in Egypt. On the folds of the statue itself, Darius is adorned with the following titles: “I am Darius, Great King, King of kings, King of countries, King on this great earth.” Furthermore, Darius proclaims that in the future those who gaze at the statue would “know that the Persian man holds Egypt.” Another example is that of the foundation charters of the palace of Susa in which Darius flatters himself that he could have used materials and artisans from the entire empire. For example, the gold arrived from Lydia and Bactria, the lapis-lazuli from Sogdiana and Chorasmia, the ivory from Nubia, India and Arachosia, etc. The number and order of the people and countries might have varied but the message remained the same: the message of immense territorial power, symbolized by the seizure of the material and human wealth of each country submitted to the Great King. Beyond this ideal unity, the royal declarations do not fail to highlight the ecological and cultural diversity of the empire. This is well illustrated in the trilingual inscription of Persepolis:

Over this wide earth, there are many lands: Persia, Media and the other lands of other tongues, of mountains and plains, from this side of the sea to that side of the sea, from this side of the desert to that side of the desert. (HPE, 172–81)

Beyond these repetitive declarations that are more ideological than administrative,<sup>16</sup> the royal inscriptions provide information on one concrete reality, namely the existence of imperial boundaries. Let us start with a sentence from Darius’s inscription, which was engraved on four plates of gold and silver deposited in pairs at the northeast and southwest corners of the Persepolis *apadana* (DPH): “This [is] the kingdom which I hold, from the Saka who are beyond Sogdiana, from there as far as Kush, from the Indus as far as Sardis.” This text alone makes one doubt that the Achaemenids had ever aspired to universal domination, except by implicitly assimilating imperial space and the universe.<sup>17</sup> Their empire is immense and of infinite variety, but it is limited to the four cardinal points.

<sup>15</sup> Known through royal inscriptions, the term *apadana* is usually translated or rather understood as audience-hall.

<sup>16</sup> The list of lands (*dahyava*) inspired multiple analyses: See for example Herrenschmidt (2014).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. HPE, 179: “What Darius calls the land (*būmi*) – what the Greeks call *arkhè* [territorial dominion] and what we ourselves call Empire – is notionally merged with the frontiers of the known world: the Empire represents the totality of lands and peoples.” This is precisely the reality expressed by Dino who writes (*ap.* Plutarch, *Alex.* 36.4): “The Persian kings had water fetched from the Nile and the Danube, which they laid up in their treasures as a sort of testimony of their power (*arkhè*) and universal empire (*to kyreuein hapantôn*).” The borders of the empire are also evoked in other classical texts (Herodotus, Xenophon, etc.) yet under vague formulations (HPE, 179).

1. Towards the west, the imperial lands are bordered by the eastern Mediterranean. Equipped with an acropolis, a garrison and a treasury, the city of Sardis can be considered the center of the imperial domination in western Asia Minor, at least symbolically, due to its status as the capital of the ancient Lydian kingdom, which the Persian empire replaced.<sup>18</sup>
2. Towards the south, the land of Kush (Nubia) is theoretically included in the list of lands under Achaemenid control but in reality the border was situated at the level of the second Nile cataract in Elephantine (Agut and Moreno-Garcia 2016, 634). There, a powerful garrison, composed of troops from all over the empire, was stationed.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, when, in 332, after the conquest of Egypt, Alexander had to choose a place to imprison rebels, he sent them to Elephantine.<sup>20</sup> In general, border zones were sites of banishment, whether located in southern Egypt, Bactria-Sogdiana or the islands of the Persian Gulf.<sup>21</sup>
3. To the north, Darius evokes the Sakas, also called the Scythians of Asia in the Greek sources. Cyrus had already waged war against them, and Darius himself led an army against them in 520, as shown by the late addition of their king, Shunkha, on the cliff of Behistun. On this frontier, facing the Scythian population, the information once again stems from the accounts of Macedonian military operations near the Syr-Darya (Jaxartes). The region had seven fortified towns, which Alexander and his lieutenants had to reduce one by one: “Cyropolis, the largest of all had a rampart higher than the other cities since it had been built by Cyrus” (Arrian IV.2.2; 3.1–4). Strabo (XI.11.4) refers to the city as Cyra and describes it as the “furthest from the foundations of Cyrus, a city situated on the Jaxartes and marking the limit of the Persian empire.” The available narratives thus give the image of a boundary reinforced by a series of fortresses. According to Arrian (IV.1.3), the city that Alexander wanted to found in this region “would be well placed for any eventual invasion of Scythia and as a defense bastion (*prophylakè*) of the country against the raids of the barbarians dwelling on the other side of the river.” Faithful to a stereotyped representation of the perils posed by the “nomad,” the Greek expression highlights, in a clearly exaggerated way, a state of structural and permanent hostility between the empire and the Scythian confederations. Everything suggests that during the Achaemenid period, the cultural and commercial relations between the two were significant. It is probable that some Sakas/Scythian peoples were the subjects of the

<sup>18</sup> The expression used by Plutarch, *Alex.* 17.1 (Sardis: “the barbarian empire’s rampart on the sea front [*to proskema tès epi talassèi tòn barbaròn hēgemonias*]”) gives an account of the city’s defensive capacities in facing an attacking army. The voluntary surrender of Mithrenes to Alexander completely annulled this. (See discussion in the text, section 1.7.)

<sup>19</sup> The organization of the garrison of Syene-Elephantine is well-known thanks to Aramaic documentation: see HPE, 417–18, 448–51, 472–3, etc. Despite their age, the books of Porten (1968) and Grelot (1972) remain invaluable references.

<sup>20</sup> Arrian, *Anabasis* III.2.7. <sup>21</sup> See Briant 1984, 97.

Great King and were to send the military contingents demanded by the satrap. Moreover, the various Scythian peoples are present among the peoples enumerated in the royal inscriptions and are represented in the imperial iconography at Persepolis, at Naqsh-e Rostam and on the statue of Darius. But, undoubtedly, a recognized frontier existed between the two sides.<sup>22</sup>

4. From west to east, says Darius in his inscription of Persepolis, the empire extends from “Sardis to the Indus.” We know that in the Achaemenid period, there were two great provincial units to the east, Gandhara and the Indus. The Indus was undoubtedly one of the frontiers of the empire (HPE, 754–7). Alexander’s forceful halt on the banks of the Hyphasis River (Beas) seems to indicate that, among the five rivers of Punjab, the Hyphasis marks the eastern border of the province of Gandhara (see Briant 2010b, 38 and n. 29). The erection of altars on the river frontiers indicates that Alexander was conscious of having reached the edge of the Achaemenid world.<sup>23</sup> From Sardis to the Indus, from Elephantine to the Scythians of Central Asia, his victorious march enabled him to take over the borders of the empire of Darius.

### 1.3 A Center Without Capital

According to Herodotus (III.197), alone of all the peoples, the Persians were not subject to tribute. If the tablets of Persepolis qualify such an affirmation (HPE, 397–99), the royal inscriptions serve as a testimony to the eminent and privileged place of Persia proper (*Parsa*; the *Fārs*). “Great King, King of Kings, King of countries containing all kinds of men, King in this great earth far and wide,” Darius defined himself also by his lineage and family links (“Son of Hystaspes, an Achaemenian”) as well as his ethnic origin (“a Persian, son of a Persian, an Aryan having Aryan lineage” [DNa]). The Persians were frequently designated as conquerors:

These are the countries which I got in my possession along with the Persian people [DPe].

The spear of a Persian man has gone far. A Persian man has delivered battle far indeed from Persia [DNa].

I am a Persian; from Persia I seized Egypt [DZe].

The Persian man/warrior (*martiya*) conquered Egypt [DSab].

In his prayers, Darius regularly called for the protection of Ahuramazda over Persia and “her good horses and good warriors.” In addition, Darius asked

<sup>22</sup> On this point, see Briant 1982, 181–234; HPE, 1026; for the cultural exchanges between Bactria-Sogdiana and the world of steppes, see Francfort 2013.

<sup>23</sup> See Liverani (1990, 59–65) on older examples of erections of steles “at the extreme and opposite points of the world, [which] affirm even more completely the universal control.” Lastly, Seleucids imitated Alexander’s moves on the Iaxartes (Kosmin 2014, 61–63).

Ahuramazda to protect his people and realm from three evils: “an [hostile] army, famine and Lie (*drauga*).” Thus, protection from the dangers of a foreign invasion, the troubles following a weak harvest or internal dissent (DPd). Lastly, we also find: “May Ahuramazda protect from harm, and my royal house, and this land” (DNa), etc.

The close alliance between the dynasty and the clans of the Persian nobility also reflects the privileged position of Persia at the heart of the empire. It also underscores the quasi-hegemonic role of the Persians at the core of the ruling class that administered and controlled the empire. This group remained largely loyal to Darius III when facing Alexander.<sup>24</sup> Persia was also, among the countries subjected to the Great King, designated by Darius and his successors as the cradle of the Persian nation and culture. It is in this land that Cyrus erected the city of Pasargadae (where his tomb is located). It is also where Darius built Persepolis, as well as inaugurated the cliff near Naqsh-e Rostam as the location for the royal tombs before Artaxerxes II and III ordered to carve out their own respective tombs above the Persepolis platform.

The Great King had many residences in which he stayed during the year. Besides Pasargadae (site of the royal investiture according to Plutarch) and Persepolis, the Great King and his royal court resided periodically in Susa (entirely remodeled by Darius the Great and his successors), in Babylon (also partly remodeled to accommodate the court) and, finally, in Media’s Ecbatana. In each of these residences, palaces were built according to the same plans, and figurative representations elaborated on the same model.<sup>25</sup> Even though the royal residences were not empty in the absence of the king, the real center of the empire remained the location graced by the king’s presence, be it Persia, Elam, Babylonia, Media, or any provincial residences to which his travels or military expeditions between Sardis and Bactria or between Babylon and Memphis would lead him. If one desires to identify a center of the empire, one must think of a “multipolar center” organized on a Persepolis–Susa–Babylon–Ecbatana quadrilateral (Map 1.1), sometimes extended as far as Sardis, Memphis or Bactria when the Great King led his armies in conquest or reconquest.

Classical writers frequently evoked the Persian custom of periodical migrations of the royal court, which they attributed to seasonal periodicity (HPE, 183–95).<sup>26</sup> From this point of view, the Achaemenid monarchy may be conceived as a type of territorial power well attested over the ages. One thinks, for

<sup>24</sup> What I typically refer to as the “ruling ethno-class”; see HPE, chapter 8, “The King’s men” and chapter 17.2: “The great King and the Persian aristocracy.” Updated in KCP, 4–5.

<sup>25</sup> For example, we know that under the form of a painted fresco, a replica of the Persepolis carved “Frieze of tributaries and donors” existed in Susa: Cf. Boucharlat 2013 and fig. 434–5.

<sup>26</sup> A close examination of the Persepolis tablets hints to this point (Tuplin 1998) yet does not question the itinerancy of the Achaemenid court. Quite the contrary, the Elamite archives generously supply the documents pertaining to the movements of the court (Henkelman 2010). These are equally attested by Babylonian sources (Waerzeggers 2010, 800–4).

example, of the Carolingian royalty, of which R. McKitterick (2011, 146, 168) recently claimed that “it is not merely the ceremonial circumambulation of the royal progress to take symbolic possession of the kingdom, but actually a mean of ruling. . . . Charlemagne’s solution to the problem of royal control of his realm was thus a combination of itinerancy and stability with a complex network of officials empowered to conduct business on his behalf, so that the king himself . . . was ‘like a great railway junction shunting personnel all over the kingdom’”. Unfortunately, we do not possess precise information for the movement of the Persian Great Kings, but there is no doubt that on these occasions peoples and cities laid on luxury and magnificence to greet the Great King with dignity.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, every satrap was compelled to greet the Great King at the borders of his territory.<sup>28</sup> For his part, the Great King was displaying his political and financial power, by exchanging valuable gifts and taking on-spot decisions aimed to strengthen his authority.

For this reason, in the Achaemenid case similar to the Carolingian kingdom, the term “capital” should be avoided.<sup>29</sup> Contrary to what Greek authors suggest, Susa was not the capital of the Great King and the term should not to be used either for Pasargadae, Persepolis or Ecbatana. The Great King had no capital. During periodical movements of the royal court, the royal tent served as the ultimate (mobile) center of the empire. From this itinerant locus of power, the king remained in contact with the senior administrators left in the large royal residences, while using the services of his accompanying scribes (Briant 2014).

Nonetheless, beyond the seductive semantics of an itinerant power, we must remain cautious regarding the consequences of this mobility that remained of a limited scope against the backdrop of the immensity of the imperial space. The comparison to the Carolingian monarchy is suggestive, but it should not be carried too far. In quite a comparable manner, one should not ascribe too a great importance to the travels of the Seleucid kings across their empire: These do recall the Achaemenid traditions, but they also take on specific characteristics (Kosmin 2014, 142–80). On this point I share the reservations made by Capdetrey (2015, 663): “The Seleucid ‘system of circulation’ made sense and was effective only if, in the absence of the king and his court, the taxes were collected, the borders remained more or less protected and the local arbitrations were rendered and applied by the royal agents. These continued to be applied even though the king did not step foot in the region for a decade or two. In other

<sup>27</sup> See as a comparison the greetings reserved to Alexander by the Persian and Babylonian authorities (HPE, 189–90).

<sup>28</sup> See Arrian VI.29.2 and Quintus Curtius X.1.24.

<sup>29</sup> On the latter see Brühl (1967, 198 and 200): “Let us be warned against the inconsiderate and uncritical use of the term ‘capital’ in scientific literature, [as] ‘itinerant monarchy’ and the idea of ‘capital’ are mutually excluding.”

words, the Seleucid power could not rely solely on a simple and irregular epiphany of the king and his court.”

If we restrict the analysis to the quadrilateral of the four large Achaemenid royal residences, we immediately discover that the presence of the king and his court could not have been conceived without the activity of the satrapal administrations of Susa, Babylon and Ecbatana, if only because the presence of several thousand extra people implies additional levies on food and labor on cities and sanctuaries, and an extended use of stocks held in the royal stores (Henkelman 2010). To this we should add the enormous requisitions made for the construction and maintenance of the royal palaces and princely residences available to the king and the members of the court.<sup>30</sup> And what about the tremendous levies made beforehand among the peoples and cities forced to ruin themselves in order to welcome the royal caravan and army? (HPE, 402–3). Conversely, there were many peoples and cities that never had the pleasure, or misfortune, to welcome the royal procession into their midst. In other words, the mobility of the royal court was an element of territorial control, but it was certainly not sufficient to ensure its permanence and solidity.

#### 1.4 External and Internal Borders

In principle, all peoples situated within the borders of the empire were subjects of the king without any limitations or exceptions. All were under the authority and supervision of the satraps, who were the personal representatives of the Great King in the various lands of the empire.<sup>31</sup> To enforce the imperial order, the satraps had at their disposal a civil and fiscal administration as well as armed forces and garrisons.<sup>32</sup> The maintenance of order, therefore, presupposed the satraps maintained absolute loyalty to the Great King, which was not the case in general. That said, it is inappropriate to construe the revolts of the satraps as the structural cause for the empire’s fragility. Moreover, even within the borders of the empire, several peoples had established specific relationships with the Great King, which some observers willfully interpret as an abandonment of imperial sovereignty over a certain territory. This interpretation then serves to prove the weakness of imperial control, which is deemed incapable of maintaining order even in the regions adjacent to the heart of the empire.

<sup>30</sup> See e.g. Briant 2013, 12–13 (Babylonia and Susa); Waerzeggers 2010, 805–9 (Susa); Tolini 2001 and 2013 (Babylonia).

<sup>31</sup> The number of satrapies (approximately twenty-five) varied throughout the history of the Achaemenid empire.

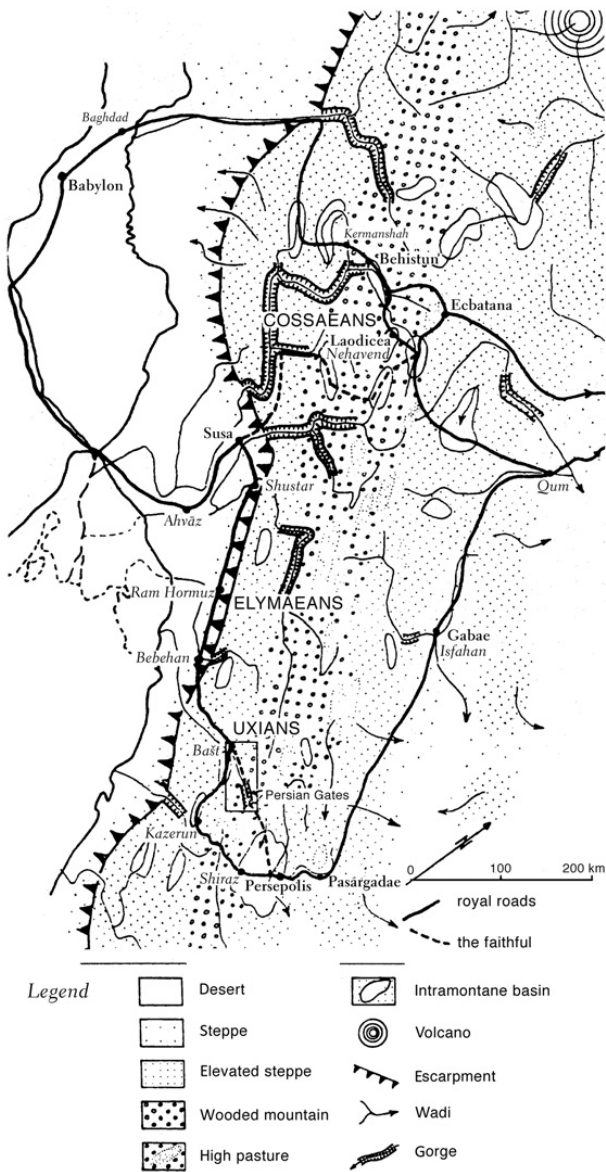
<sup>32</sup> On the powers of satraps, see HPE, 338–47, and Klinkott 2005; for provincial administrations see the excellent research by Tuplin 1987a (see pp. 113–37: “geographical divisions”; 145–7: “Satrapies and Provinces”); on the garrisons see Tuplin 1987b (Asia Minor) and HPE, 374–6.

Of all the peoples systemically branded as “brigands” by classical sources, the best known example is that of the peoples of Zagros (Uxians and Cossaeans in particular, yet others as well)<sup>33</sup> (Map 1.2). Their situation and status can be studied by accounts of Alexander’s passage through the Uxians’ territory during his march between Susa and Persepolis, at the end of the year 331; Alexander’s visit of the Cossaeans in 324; and Antigone’s attempts several years later to cross through Cossaeon territory. One of the characteristics attributed to these people is that they demanded a certain payment when the Great King crossed their territory, going from Ecbatana to Babylon (Cossaeans) or from Susa to Persepolis (Uxians). Reading Arrian (III.17.1): in contrast to another group of Uxians, “who inhabited the plains and obeyed the Persian satrap and now surrendered to Alexander, the Uxian hill men, as they were called, were not subject to Persia. And now they sent a message to Alexander that they would only permit him to take the route towards Persia with his army if they received what they used to receive from the Persian king on his passage.”

These texts are built upon a series of depreciative Greek stereotypes of the lifestyle of populations qualified indistinctively as “nomads.” These stereotypes prevented ancient observers from seeing the Cossaeans or Uxians as fully constituted societies. This is well demonstrated in Arrian’s (III.17.6) abrupt statement: “The Uxians had neither money nor arable land.” In fact, neither the Cossaeans or the Uxians sustained themselves through banditry and gathering, even if they could revert to these in times of peril (e.g., when Alexander attacked the Uxians in the middle of winter). They devoted themselves to valley bottom cultivation and mostly to herding in a localized semi-nomadic framework. This is well demonstrated by the amount and composition of the tribute that Alexander demanded from the Uxians: “The tribute assessed was a hundred horses every year, with five hundred transport animals, and thirty thousand from their flocks and herds.” The misunderstanding of ancient authors stems also from their desire to systemically set up a contrast between the weakness of the Great Kings and the sturdiness of Alexander, who refused to pay the agreed sum. A few years later, facing the same Cossaeans, Antigonus dismissed the advice of one of his lieutenants, namely “to buy the passage with money, he considered it cowardliness to purchase through a treaty or tribute the permission to pass freely” (Diodorus XIX.19.2–8). Consequently, what had been long labeled a “ransom” was taken as evidence of weakness of the Great Kings incapable of controlling the roads used by the itinerant court.

Once duly decrypted and contextualized, the information derived from classical sources is quite different from the interpretation given to them.

<sup>33</sup> I present comprehensive research in Briant 1976, Briant 1982b: 57–112; summarized in HPE, 727–33.



Map 1.2 The Zagros area. Produced by Pierre Briant.

Neither the Cossaeans nor the Uxians strictly controlled the main roads used by the royal caravan when traveling between the royal residences. On the contrary, the king had to make a detour to meet the Cossaeans and Uxian leaders. The relations between the central government and these peoples were managed through an annual exchange of gifts and counter-gifts during a carefully codified ceremony. Neither the Cossaeans nor the Uxians were strictly speaking external to the empire. Nor should they be regarded as internal enemies whom the central authorities had to monitor militarily. Moreover, both peoples provided military contingents to the royal army. This relatively flexible relationship allowed the establishment of what may be called a “peripheral integration.” This integration may have facilitated the regular exchanges of goods (herds) with the royal economy of Persepolis.<sup>34</sup>

The relationship with other peoples could be much more troublesome. One is struck, for example, by the numerous expeditions led by the Great Kings against the Cadusians in Media’s Zagros.<sup>35</sup> While the context remains unknown, it seems that this people were divided between two kings, both recognized by the imperial power. According to Plutarch (*Art.* 24.6,9), the war led by Artaxerxes II ended with the conclusion of a formal agreement with each of those two kings in the form of a “peace and alliance treaty (*philia kai symmakhia*).” This type of treaty was also established with the Scythians of Central Asia who in 332/1 are presented as “allies (*symmakhoi*),” just like the Cadusians (Arrian III.19.3). To a certain extent, the relations between the imperial power and these petty kings and princes can be compared to those that, through the treaties of loyalty (*ādū/ādē*), linked the local authorities to the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian kings, or to those regimenting the rights and duties of client kings within the framework of the Roman imperial domination. Imperial sovereignty was established on a balance of power, which sometimes required expeditions at the conclusion of which the king or satrap reasserted his authority through official treaty.

In Asia Minor, too, the existence of kinglets is well documented. This is the case with Paphlagonia, situated in northwestern Asia Minor, whose kings were under the supervision of the satrap of Daskyleion (HPE, 642–3, 698–9). In spite of Xenophon’s insistence on the periodical disturbances caused to the Persians by the Mysians, Pisidians, Lycaonians or even the indigenous people of Armenia, their territories were not beyond the empire. They were closely watched by the satrap’s troops. Often referred to as “non-subjects” by Greek authors, these people regularly provided specialized military contingents (cavaliers, slingers) to the imperial forces (HPE, 641–2; 697–9; 730–1;

<sup>34</sup> For more on this read the well-informed suggestions in Henkelman 2005, 159–65 and 2011; see also Bahadori 2017 and more particularly Balatti 2017.

<sup>35</sup> Ancient texts and analyses in HPE, 613–14, 732–3, 766–8.

765–8; 793–5). The permanence of indigenous political structures (royalty) does not imply that these peoples were fully independent. One of the most interesting examples is that of Mausolus, who continued to claim the title of “King of Caria”; yet from the empire’s perspective he officially was the Achaemenid satrap of Caria, fully responsible to the Great King.<sup>36</sup>

### 1.5 From One Edge of the Empire to the Other<sup>37</sup>

Despite the existence of provincial governments with troops and garrisons and notwithstanding the multiple agreements with kinglets and other local leaders, the immensity of the imperial space remained problematic: How to ensure that orders of the imperial government would be received and applied throughout the empire? Greek observers tended to focus on the difficulties involved in bringing together military contingents from across the empire in the case of an invasion led by an enemy from within (revolt of Cyrus the Younger against Artaxerxes II) or by an external enemy (Alexander against Darius). Others claimed that on the contrary, the capacity of a Great King to disseminate orders swiftly, given the effectiveness of the road and mail systems, made it possible “to remedy the immensity of the empire.”<sup>38</sup> We also know the famous passage where Herodotus depicted the route and organization of the royal road and its relays (*stathmoi*), which, from Sardis to Susa, included inns, stopovers and guard posts (V.52–54). Contrary to what has long been postulated, the road linking Sardis to Susa was not the only “royal road (*odos basilikē*).” In a work unfortunately lost, Ctesias “enumerated the relays (*stathmoi*), days of travel and parasangs from Ephesus to Bactria and India.”<sup>39</sup> Besides, the Greek military narratives offer information on the distances and durations of these journeys: twenty-two days from Babylon to Susa; approximately thirty days between Susa and Persepolis; twenty days between Susa and Ecbatana (nine days for the same journey if using the direct and difficult route through Cossaeon land).<sup>40</sup>

On this point, the analysis of the tablets of Persepolis brings incomparable details. Within the archives of the tablets of the Persepolis fortifications (PFT), Richard Hallock (1969) identified several series that were individualized by their functions, one of which (the Q series) refers to the movement of people

<sup>36</sup> See HPE, 667–70; 767–8; 1032, in which I link the example of Caria’s king-satrap to the one known during the Neo-Assyrian era according to the inscriptions of Tell Fekheriye, in which the local dynast is qualified both as a *mlk* (king) and *saknu* (governor).

<sup>37</sup> On the roads and communications in the Achaemenid empire, see Briant 1991 (KCP, 359–75); Graf 1994; HPE, 357–74 and 927–9 (with references); BHach I, 78–81 and II, 125–7; Kuhrt 2007, 730–62 and 2014b; Briant 2012 and KCP, 18–21; Colburn 2013.

<sup>38</sup> See Xenophon, *Cyr.* 8.6.17 and Herodotus VIII.98.

<sup>39</sup> Ctesias F33 (76). The parasang is a historical Persian unit measuring itinerant distance. It is difficult to evaluate out of context; according to most estimates it was roughly 5 km.

<sup>40</sup> Diodorus XIX.19.2; 19.8; 55.2.

and livestock along these roads.<sup>41</sup> The tablets show very clearly that all the lands of the empire are the starting and ending point of travelers, from Sardis to Bactria, passing through Babylon, Persepolis, Ecbatana and even Kandahar;<sup>42</sup> Lebanon is also mentioned once (NN 1609). Taking the particular example of the movements recorded towards Susa<sup>43</sup> or from Susa:<sup>44</sup> Out of sixty-two cases (thirty-nine towards Susa, twenty-three from Susa), one can notice in particular the lands of eastern Iran, such as Bactria<sup>45</sup> (2), Kerman (13), Hindus (18), Arachosia (4), Gandhara (2), Makkan (1), Aria (2), Drangiana (1) and Sagartia (1). Moreover, there are many mentions of travel towards Media.<sup>46</sup>

Who could make use of the royal roads and their logistical facilities? The principle is simple: in order to travel on the royal roads and thus to have access to the relay stations and depots, the group leader had to obtain a sealed authorization (*halmi*) prior to his departure. Once presented to the relevant authorities, he could obtain food rations at each station in accordance with the terms and quantities specified in the travel document. The authorization could be issued in the name of the king or in the name of the high administrator of Persepolis (Parnaka, for example).<sup>47</sup> It was more regularly issued by the satrap in charge of the territory of departure. Among hundreds of others, one example illustrates the mode of writing and shows that animals also received rations (PF 1397):

1<sup>-7</sup>29 [BAR of] flour, supplied by Mirizza, Karabba the Indian, sent forth from the king [to] India, received for rations, [for] 1 day [in] the third month, 24th year.<sup>8-9</sup> He himself received 2 QA.<sup>9-11</sup> 180 "people" (passengers?) received each 1½ QA.<sup>11-12</sup> 50 boys received each 1 QA.<sup>12-13</sup> 3 horses consumed each 3 QA.<sup>14-15</sup> 3 mules consumed each 2 QA.<sup>15-16</sup> He carried a sealed document of the king.<sup>48</sup>

Another interesting example is a voyage in 495 of a certain Dauma and thirty-five other persons under his command from Sardis to Persepolis. Dauma had obtained an authorization (*halmi*) that had been issued by Irdapirna, also known as Arthaphernes, the satrap of Sardis (PF 1404). Another tablet also referred to Sardis. It reads:

<sup>41</sup> The tablets mentioning the rations for the animals in movement along the routes constitute a series labeled S3 by Hallock ("travel rations for animals").

<sup>42</sup> Fragments of Elamite tablets found in the fortifications of old Kandahar and analyzed by Fischer and Stolper 2015.

<sup>43</sup> PF 1287, 1289, 1318, 1351, 1358, 1377, 1399, 1436, 1439, 1529, 1552, 1555, 1953<sup>34</sup>, 2050, 2051, 2056; PFa 4; NN 317, 431, 809, 881, 901, 946, 1044, 1081<sup>74</sup>, 1081<sup>81-82</sup>, 1264, 1571, 1580, 1585, 1621, 1713, 1898, 1939, 2040<sup>4-6</sup>, 2062, 2139, 2323.

<sup>44</sup> PF 1332, 1348, 1361, 1383, 1385, 1398, 1440, 1484, 1540, 1550, 1556, 2057; PFa 17; NN 615, 765, 844, 946, 1458, 2095, 2096, 2383, 2503, 2383. See Briant 2013.

<sup>45</sup> For mentions of Bactria and Bactrians in the archives of Persepolis, see Henkelman 2018.

<sup>46</sup> See Henkelman 2008b, 310–12.

<sup>47</sup> Possibly a parent of Darius, Parnaka was the director of the administration in Persia proper, perhaps holding the title of satrap.

<sup>48</sup> 1 BAR = c.10 liters; 1 QA = slightly less than 1 liter.

7 marriš (ca. 70 liters) beer Datiya received as rations.<sup>4–5</sup> He carried a sealed document of the king.<sup>5–9</sup> He went forth from Sardis (Išparda) [via] express service (*pirradaziš*), went to the king [at]<sup>10–13</sup> 11th month, year 27.<sup>13</sup> [At] Hidali (NN-809).

As D. Lewis (1980) had shown, Datiya is no other than Datis, sent by Darius on an inspection tour in western Asia Minor at the time of the Ionian revolt. The very high beer ration (roughly 70 liters) received here at a station located on the edge of Persia (Hidali), illustrates the fact that the volume of rations was calculated according to the status of power and prestige. Among the beneficiaries are the high-ranking court figures (princes and princesses), including the king, whose itinerancy paved the way to special preparations in the relevant stopover stations. This is evident from an Elamite tablet found in Susa stating: “64 marriš (of) ghee/clarified butter, supplied by Maštetinna, was dispensed on behalf/before of the king, at Susa and 5 villages (*humanuš*), in the twenty-second year.”<sup>49</sup> Again, this is only a piece of a well-documented record (the J texts of Hallock) on the logistical preparations in the course of the king’s movements, including those within Fārs outside the seasonal migrations.<sup>50</sup> The king’s table had to be served by certain immutable rules: only slight variations are observable from one place of residence to another.<sup>51</sup>

As store managers knew that they are accountable,<sup>52</sup> the tablets certify that the rations were delivered according to the *halmi*, but they do not quote *halmi* directly. However, a parchment document written in Aramaic and found in Egypt demonstrates what a *halmi* is. It is a letter that the satrap of Egypt, Arshama (then in Babylonia), entrusted to his steward Nehtihor, whom he sent back to Egypt. The letter is addressed to seven officials overseeing stations along the road, among which one easily recognizes Arbela and Damascus. They are given the power to distribute flour, beer and wine in precisely defined quantities according to the status of the travelers. The horses are not forgotten, as they receive fodder. The obligations of the travelers are strictly defined. They are forbidden to take advantage of the system unduly: “Give them this ration, each official in turn, according to the route which is from province to province until he reaches Egypt. And if he be in one place more than one day then for those days do not give them extra rations” (Briant 2012, 193–5, q.v. for further references).

The Q series report on numerous movements of groups, frequently very large ones, of *kurtaš*, a term referring to workers from across the empire, frequently

<sup>49</sup> See Briant 2013, 13 with references.

<sup>50</sup> The file was fully edited and analyzed in detail by Henkelman 2010.

<sup>51</sup> See the fascinating text by Polyaeus, Strat. IV.3.32 (HPE, 286–9; Amigues 2003; Henkelman 2010, 684–9). Polyaeus points out that during all halts of the court between Susa and Babylon, the wine supplied is half grape wine and half palm wine. Certain produce, such as carthamus grains and saffron, are only distributed when the court is in Media (Ecbatana).

<sup>52</sup> For more on the accounting practices of the royal administration see Fischer and Stolper 2015 and Stolper 2017.

working in construction sites (Persepolis, Susa, Tamukkan, etc.), in agriculture as well as in workshops. For example, groups of *kurtaš* moved between Persepolis and Susa: 100 Lycians (PF 1566), 108 Capadoccians (PF 1577), 26 Thracians (PF 1575) and 124 Babylonians (NN 2133). The *kurtaš* were also enumerated by their specialties such as 416 stonemasons (NN 2426). In another tablet (PF 1557), a group of 547 Egyptians was moved between Persepolis and Tamukkan followed by a group of 690 Egyptian *kurtaš*-masons (NN 0480). Tamukkan, the location of another royal residence on the Persian Gulf (close to Bushir), was also the site of the arrival of 150 Skudrian female *kurtaš* from Media, 980 Lycian *kurtaš*, 980 Cappadocian *kurtaš*, 74 Bactrians and workers sent from Babylonia's Sippar (Henkelman 2008b, 305–10, q.v. for further references).

Among the men of the central and provincial administrations circulating the roads, we may notice the *pirradaziš*, whom Hallock identified as “fast messengers.”<sup>53</sup> The same qualifier *pirradaziš* may also refer to horses used in the express service (“express [horse]”).<sup>54</sup> The *pirradaziš* travelled alone or in small groups (two or three) and were almost exclusively sent directly by or to the king. They were sometimes sent for a journey between Persepolis and Susa (PF 1335), or for a distant destination such as Sardis (PF 1321). The existence of this specific class of messengers and horses dedicated to a rapid service sheds light on well-known passages from Xenophon and Herodotus, who were deeply impressed by the contrast between the immensity of the imperial space and the rapidity in which orders were conveyed from one corner of the empire to the other.<sup>55</sup> The tablets also evoke other characters involved in the road and mail services such as the “elite guides” (*barrišdama*) and the “caravan leaders” (*karabattiš*).<sup>56</sup> Lastly, there were also servicemen responsible for the opening and maintenance of roads.<sup>57</sup>

If we synthesize the information from the Persepolis documentation, the Aramaic records (between Egypt and Bactria), the Babylonian documentation and the accounts of the Greek military expeditions (in particular that of Alexander), a certain pattern of administrative practices across the empire emerges. The existence of archives from Sardis to Bactria is the clearest illustration of this.<sup>58</sup> Not only were all the regions of the empire linked by a network of royal roads, which kept them in constant contact with the center,

<sup>53</sup> PF 300, 1285, 1319, 1320, 1321, 1329, 1334–5, 2052. <sup>54</sup> PF 1672, 1700, 2061, 2062.

<sup>55</sup> Texts cited and analyzed in HPE, 369–71; see Colburn's 2013 reflections on pp. 41–9.

<sup>56</sup> See Hallock 1969, 42 (with observations by the author pertaining to the hypothetical characteristics of translations).

<sup>57</sup> See Henkelman 2017, 63–79; on the continuities between the Achaemenid system of surveying roads and the specialists in Alexander's army (the so-called *bematistai*), see also Briant 2016b, 264–8 and mainly Kegerreis 2017.

<sup>58</sup> See HPE, 422–71; Briant 2009a; and now Fischer and Stolper 2015 (Kandahar), and revised by Henkelman 2017, with my comments (Briant 2017d, 833–6, 841–2).

but also the maintenance of such an impressive network presupposed the existence of an enormous administrative mechanism capable of managing stores across thousands of kilometers. Every year, from Sardis to Bactra, the heads of stores had to make a report of all the inputs and outputs. The reports were then meticulously audited by accountants in Persepolis. Local authorities had to monitor the stocks.<sup>59</sup> The recently published Aramaic documentation from Bactria elucidates the sophistication of the satrapal administration, which was strongly influenced by the administration known from the Persepolitan sources (Briant 2009a, 148–51). All this presupposes the existence of a gigantic centralized imperial logistics.<sup>60</sup> Persepolitan sources also clearly show that the control of the empire's peoples did not stem merely from the rhetoric of royal declarations. The levying of workers (*kurtas*) in all regions and their movement from one site to another on the basis of simple administrative decisions show that the power of the empire owed much to the conscription of soldiers and workers as well as other forms of taxation. No region in the empire was exempt from this.

## 1.6 The Land and the Sea

Documentation regarding maritime space and imperial control is infinitely less abundant. Yet, since the 17th and 18th centuries CE, a postulate has circulated widely in historical literature, namely that Persians have never been interested in maritime activity. Some even claimed that they were thalassophobic. Thomas Kelly (1992: 7) claimed they were like the Assyrians: “Both were essentially land-locked people who had no real experience with the sea prior to their respective conquest of the Phoenician cities along the east coast of the Mediterranean.” Kelly continues by claiming that if, under the reign of Cambyses and Darius, the Persians exerted control over the Mediterranean thanks to Phoenician warships, this hegemony quickly dissipated following defeats at Salamis and Mycale in 480/479. A similar thesis was proposed by B. Revere in 1957. One can trace its origin to a report delivered to Colbert in 1667 by Bishop Huet, who published it in 1716; it was also presented by Montesquieu in his *Spirit of Laws* in 1748 and 1757 (Briant 2017a, 135–49; 164–8).

Concerning the alleged thalassophobia of the Persians, it should be noted that this thesis was drawn up on the basis of an abusive reduction of the Achaemenid maritime space in the Mediterranean, which was almost

<sup>59</sup> See the very illuminating anecdote transmitted in the *Oeconomica* of Pseudo-Aristoteles (2.2.38) and located in the last years of Alexander in Babylonia: “Antimenos bade the governors of the provinces to replenish, in accordance with the law of the country, the magazines along the royal highways. Whenever an army passed through the country or any other body of men unaccompanied by the king, he sent an officer to sell them the contents of the magazines.” See Briant 2012, 188.

<sup>60</sup> See also section 1.7 below.

exclusively conceptualized through the prism of the relations between the Achaemenid Empire and the Greek cities, particularly Athens. It should not be forgotten that the empire included in its midst several maritime spaces, which the Great Kings repeatedly mentioned in their inscriptions as territories under their control.<sup>61</sup> Darius presented his power from “this side of the Bitter River and the far side of the Bitter River” (*DPg*, Bab. 2).<sup>62</sup> Besides the shores of the Mediterranean, the northern borders reached the Black Sea, the Marmara Sea, the Caspian Sea and the Aral Sea;<sup>63</sup> to the west and the south, the empire comprised the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. Darius ensured the maritime link between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea by digging the canal (a precursor of the Suez Canal), thereby creating another link between Egypt and Persia.<sup>64</sup>

The fact that the Persians called upon the Phoenicians shows that, in this area as in others, they knew how to capitalize on the specialties of each of the subjugated peoples. However, this does not prove that they themselves were inexperienced in the maritime domain. The existence of sailors is mentioned, for instance, in several tablets from the Persepolis Fortification Archive,<sup>65</sup> and a “ship-commander” is mentioned in one of the Persepolis Treasury Tablets.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, an Aramaic document found in Egypt demonstrates that the Persian-Iranian technical vocabulary of shipbuilding was highly developed and specialized.<sup>67</sup> Another Aramaic document from Egypt provides essential information on the control of merchant ships.<sup>68</sup> This is the now famous Customs Accounts document, in which the Achaemenid administration is seen to control all the boats from Phoenicia and Asia Minor, when they approached to the border port of Thônis in the delta. A thorough inventory check was carried out and tariffs were levied on entry and exit according to strict standards.<sup>69</sup> The royal stores’ export of wheat from the ports of Asia Minor was also controlled in part by the satraps (KCP, chapter 19).

<sup>61</sup> See more on this in the form of the important reflections by Haubold 2012, situating the Achaemenid Empire in the lineage of their Middle Eastern predecessors.

<sup>62</sup> On the so-called *Babylonian World Map*, the earth “is surrounded by a circular body of water called the ocean or, literally, the ‘Bitter River’” (Haubold 2012, 8).

<sup>63</sup> It is possible that the Aral Sea is referred to in the Behistun inscriptions, in which Darius congratulates himself for subjugating “the Sakas from beyond the sea” (DB §74).

<sup>64</sup> On this point, see Klotz 2015 who against a widely-accepted interpretation and through a reexamination of the “canal steles” concluded that Darius “sought to ensure a steady flow of tribute and other precious materials from Egypt to Persia, by all routes possible.”

<sup>65</sup> See e.g. tablet NN 2261, ll. 4–8, cited by Henkelman 2008b, 310. Two hundred and fifty nine “boatmen” were sent from Persepolis to Media (these may refer to the river navigation: HPE, 378–84).

<sup>66</sup> PT 008. Referring to Bakabada, identified by Cameron (1948, 95) with Megabates known by Greek sources for being *navarkhos* in Xerxes’s navy. We may also compare to the title of *Mithradata* in the Aramaic document listed as such: \**nav-pati* (naval commander) – a term which is identical in its construction to the Greek *navarkhos*.

<sup>67</sup> TADAE 1, pp. 99–101, with commentaries by Grelot 1972, 283–95; see also HPE, 449–51.

<sup>68</sup> See KCP, chapter 18, and updates on pp. 19–20.

<sup>69</sup> The levying on boats is also known in Lycia and Babylonia.

Unquestionably, the thalassophobia thesis was developed particularly with regard to the policies attributed to the Persians in the Persian Gulf. According to ancient authors (Arrian and Strabo), Alexander decided in 325 to destroy river fortifications (*katarraktai*) which the Persians, supposedly inexperienced in naval warfare and fearful of a maritime invasion, erected across the Tigris and Euphrates. Such a presentation postulates that the Persians were incapable of defending even the heart of their empire since, not only were the Great Kings to pay “tolls” to the Uxians and Cossaeans when moving from one residence to another (see section 1.4), but they were forced also to take refuge behind fortifications on the side of the Persian Gulf. It is unnecessary to repeat here in detail the arguments which, in my opinion, invalidate the recurrent thesis of Persian maritime ineptitude, based as it is on the postulate of a profound transformation of a “despotic and decadent” Achaemenid Empire under the “progress” brought by the Macedonian conquest.<sup>70</sup> Suffice it to mention two points. First, the *katarraktai* on the Tigris River were not permanent military fortifications but light dams constructed at the time of the dry season for irrigation purposes and dismantled during the rainy season.<sup>71</sup> Second, there is no reason to suppose that the Persians had abandoned the Persian Gulf to pirates: the (too few) available clues suggest that the Persian presence in the Gulf remained relatively solid, even during the advance of Alexander’s naval fleet.<sup>72</sup>

## 1.7 The Downfall of an Empire

In principle, all precautions were taken to maintain the integrity of the empire and its borders by protecting it from an exterior threat. Yet, as we know, between spring 334 and autumn–winter of 331/330, Alexander successfully conquered Asia Minor, the Syrian-Phoenician coast and Egypt, as well as seized control of the large royal residences of Babylonia, Susa, Persepolis and Pasargadae. Later on, between 330 and 324, Alexander conquered the satrapies of eastern Iran and the Indus valley before returning to Babylonia via the Persian Gulf, Pasargadae and Persepolis, coming to rest in Ecbatana. Naturally, the Persian defeat raised questions and doubts on the reality and effectiveness of the control of the imperial space. Without being able to answer it in all the details, I shall bring forward several reflective elements within the framework of a survey of the external and internal borders of the imperial space.

<sup>70</sup> See Briant 2002b; 2009b; 2010a; 2016b, 206–85; 2017a, 305–39; KCP, 429–610.

<sup>71</sup> I frequently dealt with this question and retraced in detail its historiography in a study the main conclusions of which are translated in KCP, chapter 28 (“The *katarraktai* of the Tigris: Irrigation-works, commerce and shipping in Elam and Babylonia from Darius to Alexander”). See also a summary in Briant 2010b, 89–93.

<sup>72</sup> See HPE, 758–62, 1028–9, KCP, 600–5; Potts 2010; Henkelman 2017 §1.1–3; §2.3.3 (citing a Babylonian tablet [YOS 3, 10], attesting the use of a maritime route linking southern Babylonia to Tamukkan, situated to the north of the Persian coast of the Persian Gulf).

In contrast to a popular thesis, the attested satrapal revolts never truly endangered the solidity of the empire.<sup>73</sup> The most dangerous revolt affecting the empire's center, without, however, reaching the royal residences, was the revolt of Cyrus the Younger and it was of a dynastic nature. Namely, it was not intended to destroy the empire but to replace the Great King (Artaxerxes) by his brother (Cyrus). If, strategically speaking, it prefigures the offensive carried out by Alexander from Asia Minor, it nonetheless failed. Despite the insistence of the ancient authors (all devoted to the memory of Cyrus) on emphasizing the king's difficulties in gathering all available contingents "due to the remoteness of these regions (the Iranian Plateau and India),"<sup>74</sup> Artaxerxes managed to mobilize a considerable force to face his brother.

The greatest danger came from the revolts of the conquered nations.<sup>75</sup> Darius I struggled during the years 522–520 having to suppress revolts that spread throughout the empire, from the Syr-Darya to the Nile Valley. These revolts also enflamed the lands of the center such as Media, Babylonia, Elam and even Persia itself. That said, the leaders of these revolts never attempted to join forces to face Darius.<sup>76</sup> The manifestation of so many revolts erupting at the same time from one end of the empire to the other did not recur in the empire's history. Putting aside occasionally volatile relations with certain peoples of Anatolia, mostly resolved by periodic strikes by the satraps in charge of these territories, and the Ionian revolt against Darius (HPE, 146–156), two main lands posed enduring problems to the Achaemenid Empire: Babylonia and even more Egypt. After the revolts of 522–521, Babylonia revolted again, twice in the early years of Xerxes; these revolts were brief, though. Similarly, to the acts taken by his father during the 521–520 revolts, Xerxes took the necessary measures to nip the ferments of insubordination in the bud.<sup>77</sup> Babylonia does not seem to have caused any further disturbances. Egypt, however, posed incomparably more acute problems. Not only did an indigenous king revolt in 522/521 but the history of the Nile was punctuated by successive revolts, until under ill-known circumstances, Egypt regained its full independence in 404 under indigenous pharaohs.<sup>78</sup> Reconquered by Artaxerxes III in 343/342, it revolted again under the reign of Pharaoh Khababash. The consequent takeover by the Persians lasted only a few

<sup>73</sup> For more on the satrapal revolts against Artaxerxes II see HPE, 656–73, and conclusions, pp. 674–5.

<sup>74</sup> Diodorus XIV.22.2 (see above section 1.6); on the revolt of Cyrus, see HPE, 615–30 (p. 627 on the preparations of Artaxerxes).

<sup>75</sup> On the precautions and military measures taken by the Achaemenid authorities, see the compilation of cases and sources in Tuplin 2014.

<sup>76</sup> See analysis in HPE, 107–26, 898–901; Kuhrt 2007, 140–58.

<sup>77</sup> On the revolts of 521, see Beaulieu 2014; on the revolts against Xerxes and the takeover by the Great king, see Waerzeggers 2003/4 et Kuhrt 2014a.

<sup>78</sup> On our ignorance, see HPE, 619–20, 987.

years since in 332 Alexander conquered it without any real opposition from the Persian forces.<sup>79</sup>

Despite the fragility of the Persian position in Egypt, it is clear that in 334 the Achaemenid Empire extended from Sardis to the Indus and from the Syr-Darya to Aswan, in a spatial configuration that was almost unchanged since 480. Moreover, between 334 and 331, the Great King managed on several occasions to assemble imposing military forces levied among all the peoples of the empire, and he had at his disposal, in the Mediterranean, naval forces far superior to the fleet of Alexander. We cannot therefore say that the empire crumbled under the weight of its own weaknesses. Darius was defeated, first, because Alexander excelled on the battlefield (the reasons are still explored, but some of which undoubtedly relate to the tactical superiority of Alexander and his army). The second reason for the initial defeats was that (for reasons that still escape us<sup>80</sup>) Darius's general staff failed to prepare a systematic defense of the Mediterranean coast. Should that have been done, the defenders would have perhaps prevented Alexander from unloading his troops. Besides, although it was carried out consistently until the aftermath of the Battle of Issos, the defense of the Mediterranean front was very soon weakened considerably by the surrender without battle of the commander of Sardis (Mithrénès) to Alexander.<sup>81</sup>

Moreover, the successive defeats in Issos (November 333) and Gaugamela (October 331) ceded to the Macedonian enemy the vital infrastructure of the territories behind the battlefields. This infrastructure allowed the conquerors to overcome the challenge posed to the invader of supplying its military on a daily basis. According to Donald Engels, the author of the sole book dedicated to the military logistics of Alexander's army (published back in 1978): "the terrain of the Persian empire was in a real sense the Persian king's most formidable weapon. Its extensive deserts, salt wastelands, barren, impenetrable mountain ranges, rivers of salt water, severe climatic extremes, and the often vast distances between cultivated inhabited regions were immense obstacle to any invading army" (p. 121). Without denying the existence of these obstacles and challenges (which also faced the army of the Great King), I believe, on the contrary, that the existence of multiple stores and stocks<sup>82</sup> in the satrapies and

<sup>79</sup> I studied the Egyptian revolts in HPE, to which I am referring the reader; see also the recent Agut and Moreno-García 2016, 653–81.

<sup>80</sup> On this, see HPE, 818–23; 1042–3.

<sup>81</sup> While still isolated at that point in time (HPE, 842–4), the recruitment of a member of the Persian aristocracy raises questions about the existence of man-to-man agreements prior to Alexander's arrival. About Alexander's preexisting knowledge of the Achaemenid imperial inner-workings, see KCP, 499–504, 519–20, 573–82.

<sup>82</sup> Stores of food stuff, weaponry and other types of supplies: see e.g. Xenophon, *Anab.* III.4. 1 (bow and lead cords used in preparing slings).

on the routes of the great royal roads was an important advantage to Alexander. Alexander thus used the resources of the Achaemenid imperial logistics against itself: it was the imperial machinery<sup>83</sup> that offered the invader all the resources he needed.

Thus, far from illustrating the structural fragility of the Achaemenid Empire, the Macedonian conquest, on the contrary, eloquently underscores the superior administrative, technical and military management of the imperial space. It was paradoxically the organizational strength of Darius's empire that Alexander built upon to defeat him. The route of the invasion is essentially identical with that of the great royal roads known from the Persepolis tablets. As his armies progressed, Alexander retraced the Achaemenid borders and reconstituted the imperial space, which was no different from the one held by Darius III until his assassination in July 330. We may now comprehend the politics of Alexander who relentlessly recruited existing administrative cadres and gathered around him the Persian-Iranian nobility. Whatever the indisputable ferments of change brought about by the conquest, Alexander's empire, in 323, was the direct heir of the empire previously held by Darius III.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> See Briant 2018. The recently published Aramaic documents of Bactria showcase that the Persepolitan system (magazines, distributions, goods and supplies, etc.) was well-organized at the time of Alexander's arrival. Furthermore, it survived the Achaemenid defeat (Briant 2009a, 148–51).

<sup>84</sup> Only thus may I present Alexander as the "last of the Achaemenids" (while adding that he was also "the first of a long dynasty of Hellenistic kings"): see updates in KCP, 21–9.

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