Greeks on Persian Monuments: The Belatedness of Persian Monumental Discourse

The Achaemenid Persian Empire is characterized by masterful imperial discourse that managed to bind together a territory of unprecedented size through its skillful deployment of textual and visual imagery, including the management and shaping of the landscape itself (Canepa 2018) and the appropriation of extant local landscapes and structures (Canepa 2018, Khatchadourian 2016). Monuments constitute an important historiographical technique in the discursive repertoire of the Great Kings, as is suggested by the presentation of imperial history (or at least imperial *status quo*) in the form of relief sculptures and accompanying inscribed texts. The contents of these monuments became numinous, if not always highly legible, *in situ* and were programmatically disseminated throughout the empire. The text of Darius' Bisitun Inscription (DB), for instance, was re-copied in Akkadian at Babylon, and in Aramaic at Elephantine a century after its creation; and the outlines of the narrative were known by Herodotus (Köhnken 1980), who even writes of a stone engraving, or τύπος λιθινός, created by Darius to commemorate his accession (*Hist*. 3.88.3; see Rollinger 2021 and 2018). Ctesias, for his part, knows both of a monument at "Bagistanos" (*FrGrH* 688 F1b §13.2; surprisingly presented, however, not as Persian but as Assyrian!) and also of Darius' rock-cut tomb (FrGrH 688 F13 = Photius §19), thereby alluding to the funerary complex at Naqšī-Rustām whose ritual significance would go on to inform subsequent dynasties' engagement with the built environment of Iran, long after the end of the Achaemenid Empire (Canepa 2018).

And yet Greek historians of the Persian Empire frequently highlight problems with, or failures of, Persian monumental discourse in their own narrative depictions of Persian history (see for example Grethlein 2009, 2013; Rollinger 2018, 2021). How are we to reconcile Greek

problematizations of Persian monuments with the evident success of the exemplars treated, or at least referenced, in their histories? The situation is even more striking given the demonstrated indebtedness of imperial Athens' monumental productions to Persian practice, as evinced in items such as the Athenian Tribute Lists and the Parthenon friezes (Root 1985). The persistence of the attitude—appearing in Herodotus and Ctesias—cannot be attributed entirely, or in both cases, to an observed disjunction between the claims made by Persian monumental discourse, on the one hand, and the success, or successful expansion, of the Persian imperial enterprise on the other hand.

Accepting Grethlein's view (2009, 2014) that Greeks regard Persian monuments as engaging inappropriately in premature commemoration, I suggest another way in which Greek historians of Persia express skepticism about the effectiveness of Persian monuments. Namely, the very adaptability of Persian monumental discourse to local iconographic vocabularies contributes to a general Greek perception of the monuments of the Great Kings as derivative, belated, and secondary by comparison with previous empires' efforts. This explains why Greek histories of Persia are rich in monuments, but not Persian ones: in Ctesias' mention of Bagistanos, for instance, credit for the local monument is re-assigned by the Greek historian to the legendary Assyrian builder Semiramis. Herodotus appears to allude to the Egyptianizing statue of Darius found at Susa, but originally designated for Egypt, when he contrasts the extant statues of Sesostris with Darius' attempt to set up an ἀνδριάς 'statue' of himself in Egypt (*Hist*. 2.110; see Tuplin 2018: 103 and Rollinger 2021). Part of the point of this episode must be Darius' attempt to emulate an Egyptian type, and the Egyptian priest's refusal to countenance this emulation when Darius had not achieved the same degree of military success as Sesostris had.

The Great Kings depicted in Herodotus and Ctesias' narratives fail to engineer distinctive monumental types of their own.

Works Cited

Canepa, M. P. 2018. *The Iranian Expanse. Transforming Royal Identity Through Architecture, Landscape, and the Built Environment, 550 BCE – 642 CE.* Oakland, CA.

Grethlein, J. 2009. "How Not to Do History: Xerxes in Herodotus' *Histories*." *AJP* 130.195-218.

———. 2013. *Experience and Teleology in Ancient Historiography. 'Futures Past' from Herodotus to Augustine.* Cambridge.

Khatchadourian, L. 2016. *Imperial Matter. Ancient Persia and the Archaeology of Empires.* Oakland, CA.

Köhnken, A. 1980. "Herodots falscher Smerdis." *WJa* 6a.39-50.

Rollinger, R. 2018. "Herodotus and the Transformation of Ancient Near Eastern Motifs: Darius I, Oebares, and the Neighing Horse." In T. Harrison and E. Irwin, edd. *Interpreting Herodotus*, 125-148. Oxford.

———. 2021. "Herodotus and Empire: Ancient Near Eastern Monuments and Their Cultural Recycling in Herodotus' *Histories*." In J. Ben-Dov and F. Rojas, edd., *Afterlives of Ancient Rock-cut Monuments in the Near East. Carvings in and out of Time*, 186-220. Leiden.

Root, M. C. 1985. "The Parthenon Frieze and the Apadana Reliefs at Persepolis: Reassessing a Programmatic Relationship." *AJA* 89.103-120.

Tuplin, C. J. 2018. "Dogs That Do Not (Always) Bark: Herodotus on Persian Egypt." In T. Harrison and E. Irwin, edd. *Interpreting Herodotus*, 99-123. Oxford.