

Imitating *βάρβαροι*:: The Appropriation of Persian Culture in Greece after the Persian Wars

During the Orientalizing Period of the eighth and seventh centuries BCE, the Aegean world was heavily influenced by the cultures of the Ancient Near East. The Greeks were accepting of Persian symbols and decorations and were quick to adapt these objects into their own art and culture. This period proved that Greek artists and craftsmen themselves were capable of producing eastern motifs on their own works. However, I hope to show that after the Greek victory in the Persian Wars, eastern influences increased and became more prominent in mainland Greek art and architecture and that it became more acceptable for the Greeks to own possessions with eastern motifs. After the wars, the Greeks were accepting and even jealous of Persian fashions (Bridges et al. 2007, 37) and the influence of Persian “material goods aided the process of social stratification...and contributed to status expression in the subsequent Hellenistic world” (Miller 2003, 319). To take this further, I aim to look at Persian culture being appropriated by the Greeks for their own uses during the emergence of the new democracy, to show that while these images, symbols, and fashions were not Greek in origin, they were so commonly used and adapted by the Greeks that they then became symbols of their ‘Greekness.’

This paper will look primarily at material culture, but will also examine mentions of Persian objects and ideas in Greek literature, such as Aeschylus’ *Persians* and Herodotus’ *Histories*. I will start by examining the adaptation of Persian symbols in Greek society, considering the acceptance of Persian clothing, with examples of Persian dress seen on vases and grave stelai and mentions of Persian slippers in dramas such as Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata*, and the introduction and use of Persian parasols, seen in Aristophanes’ *Birds* and by Eros holding a parasol of Aphrodite on the Parthenon frieze. Further, I will analyze the Persian origins of Attica rhyta, the adoption of Persian architecture, such as the Persian king’s tent, into Greek society,

and how Persian elements and influences were implemented into the Parthenon friezes. I will also study the adoption of eastern imagery, mainly griffins, an eastern figure that saw connections with Persian royalty, on Greek pottery: such as two Attic red figure bell kraters depicting the Grypomachy (Beazley Numbers 260105 and 230372), on mosaics: such as the griffin and horse mosaic from Corinth, the Bellerophon mosaic at Olynthus, and a griffin pebble mosaic from Pella, and in literature: starting with Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* and Herodotus.

The Classical period, which spanned the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, was an era of war and conflict, but also of political, cultural, and artistic advancements in Greece. This period is one of the most celebrated eras of Ancient Greek culture, influencing Western politics, art, architecture, literature, and philosophy. And most importantly, this celebrated period was influenced by the eastern *βάρβαροι*, as the Persians were so often depicted. Erich Gruen comments that “the receptivity in the Greek world to Persian dress, Persian products, Persian art, and the Persian aesthetic generally as status symbols and modes of cultural expression among the elite was widespread” (Gruen 2010, 11). In the fifth century, Greek society quickly began to associate the ideas of luxury and extravagance with a Persian lifestyle. And as Greek society was not yet completely literate, visual images and goods were important sources of public information, propaganda, and personal display.

Bibliography

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