

# SOME THOUGHTS ON XERXES’S “DAIVA” INSCRIPTION AND ITS INTERPRETATION

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## **Summary: Some Thoughts on Xerxes’s “Daiva” Inscription and its Interpretation**

The so-called “*daiva* inscription” of the Persian king Xerxes I (*ca.* 486–465 BC) is one of the most intriguing documents of the Achaemenid kings, mainly due to the mention of the word that gives this text its name. The sole mention of this word has led scholars to believe that this text marks an unprecedented turning point in Persian history: the one presenting the Great King as a religious fanatic, strengthening the image handed down to us by Greek historiography—especially the one of Herodotus. Four interpretative models have been postulated to understand this word’s function, three of which have identified the Persian *daivas* with specific historical agents and events. The last one focuses instead on the nature of the textual content in a broader sense. Further problems arise when dealing with the question of when this text was crafted. This conundrum was mainly understood through the view of Greek historiography, disregarding much of the contradictory evidence that will be presented here.

**Keywords:** Xerxes – “Daiva” inscription – Achaemenid religion – Royal legitimation

## **Resumen: Algunas reflexiones acerca de la inscripción “Daiva” de Jerjes y su interpretación**

La llamada inscripción “*daiva*” del rey persa Jerjes I (*ca.* 486–465 a.C.) es uno de los documentos más intrigantes de los reyes aqueménidas, debido principalmente a la mención de la palabra que da nombre a dicho texto. La sola mención de esta palabra ha llevado a investigadores a creer que este texto marca un punto de inflexión sin precedentes en la historia persa: el que presenta al Gran Rey como un fanático religioso, fortaleciendo la imagen que nos ha sido legada por la historiografía griega—especialmente la de Heródoto. Se han postulado cuatro modelos interpretativos para com-

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prender la función de esta palabra, tres de los cuales han identificado a los *daivas* persas con agentes y acontecimientos históricos específicos. El último se centra, en cambio, en la naturaleza del contenido textual en un sentido más amplio. Otros problemas surgen al tratar la cuestión de cuándo fue elaborado este texto. Este enigma se entendió principalmente a través de la visión de la historiografía griega, sin tenerse en cuenta gran parte de las pruebas contradictorias que se presentarán aquí.

**Palabras clave:** Jerjes – Inscripción “Daiva” – Religión aqueménida – Legitimación real

## INTRODUCTION

For many centuries, the understanding of Achaemenid history was the direct result of Greek historiographic analysis, from which Herodotus took a central role. The Persians are depicted as the barbarians *per excellence*, as the others in relation to the Greeks, especially to the Athenians. Thanks to the deciphering of the Old Persian cuneiform script in the nineteenth century, new perspectives on Persian history were opened to indagate, and at the same time, the academic world witnessed the birth of a new study field—Assyriology. The Achaemenid inscriptions offered the possibility to deal with primary sources that can either confirm, refute, or complement the overbearing Greek perspective. Although almost all of these texts present quite similar themes and motives, some stand out for their length, narrative detailing, and peculiar vocabulary. The *daiva* inscription undoubtedly accentuates this last feature, named after this peculiar word that makes a brief but quite intriguing appearance. This text is of great importance due to its unique subject matter without parallel in other Achaemenid royal inscriptions, dealing with activities, according to many scholars, of religious intolerance. Throughout the years, much ink has been spilled on this conundrum. Why was this word used only in this particular setting? What does this word mean within the context of the inscription itself and Xerxes’s reign? Is it related to Xerxes’s—and thus, Darius’s and other Achaemenid kings’—alleged Zoroastrian belief? This paper will deal with all these questions and shed some light on this puzzle’s neglected aspects. The article is thematically divided into two parts. In the first

part, the central questions revolve around the inscription itself and its content—discovery, dating problems, and reliable information. In the second part, the interpretative models and their methodological plausibility will be fully addressed.

## DISCOVERY

On 26 June 1935, an expedition of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago led by E. F. Schmidt discovered the so-called *daiva* inscription (henceforth XPh) at the garrison quarters at the southeastern corner of the royal palace in Persepolis, the Old Persian residential town.<sup>1</sup> Overall, four copies of this inscription were found—two in Old Persian, one in Babylonian and another one in Elamite—, as well as three copies of the so-called *harem* inscription (henceforth XPf), which tells us about Xerxes's succession (*ca.* 486 BC) to the throne after his father's death, Darius the Great (*ca.* 522–486 BC).

The Old Persian copies of XPh were cataloged as "A" and "B." Copy A, the only complete one, has a length of 60 lines. Copy B is an incomplete replica since the edges of the limestone slab are unfilled, the text ends abruptly on line 51 and lines 28, 29, 30 are considerably damaged. The other two exemplars have a length of 50 lines each, and only the Babylonian version was found in full condition.<sup>2</sup> Both Old Persian reproductions are nearly indistinguishable since they exhibit the same line break and word distribution.<sup>3</sup> The only differences between them are limited to certain characters on lines 31, 37, and 45. Thankfully, this divergence does not alter its content.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Schmidt 1939: 11–15.

<sup>2</sup> The missing piece of the Elamite version was found in 1957 by Ali Sami, director of the Archeological Institute of Persepolis, and, two years later, the complete version was published in Cameron 1959.

<sup>3</sup> Herzfeld 1937: 62.

<sup>4</sup> Herzfeld 1937: 62. The distinctions are restricted exclusively to the lack of cuneiform signs: "In 31, the *pa* of *upariy* lacks the two small verticals in A, but is complete in B. In 37, the final character *na* (in *daivadanam*) is correct in A, but is miswritten *va* in B, probably because *va* ends the preceding line. In 45, the *ma* of *mai*y lacks the small middle vertical in B" (cf. Kent 1937: 293).

A third replica (XMa, *i.e.*, Xerxes in Murgahb) was discovered in 1961 by the British Institute of Persian Studies led by David Stronach at the citadel Tall-i Takhr in Pasargadae as a cover plate of a drain grave. As copy B, we are dealing with an incomplete inscription, for its upper left corner, lines 1 through 8, 50 through 57, 58 through 60 are severely damaged. However, this is an exact copy of those found in Persepolis. There are no variations among its text and copy A and B, the word distribution and the cuneiform characters are in almost exact order. As Stronach has clearly emphasized, its great significance lies more in the circumstances of the discovery itself rather than in the linguistic quality, from which nothing new can be asserted. The discovery of such an inscription in Pasargadae must be interpreted as an impressive indication of the continuous attention given to this palace during Xerxes's reign long after Cyrus's death.<sup>5</sup>

As far as the complete copy's—as well as the others'—physical condition is concerned, XPh was crafted on one single clay tablet-shaped limestone slab with engraved text on four sides (two 27-line stone slabs—front and back—and two 3-line stone slabs—upper and lower). The dimensions are 51x51 cm for the 27-line stone slab and 10x51 cm for the 3-line stone slab. In terms of their shape, form, and particularly the production method, it is rightly presumed that the copies were intended to be displayed as foundation documents but, for unknown reasons, never used in the intended manner.<sup>6</sup>

## DATING ATTEMPTS

Since the first dating attempts made by E. Herzfeld in 1937 and 1938, the scholarship agreed predominantly with him. In his view, XPh should be dated to the Great King's first years.<sup>7</sup> In order to back up this assumption, the following arguments were presented:

<sup>5</sup> Stronach 1978: 152.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Schmidt 1939: 12; Cameron 1959: 470; Schmitt 2000: 88; Briant 2002: 550–554; Schmitt 2009: 20, 164.

<sup>7</sup> Herzfeld 1937: 64; Herzfeld 1938: 470.

- Firstly, this can be assumed due to the inscription's indisputable linguistic affinities with Darius's tomb inscription in Naqsh-e Rostam (DNa).
- The second point lies in the unique wording used in XPh: Xerxes addressed himself as "the King" and not as "the Great King." On the third, fourth and seventh paragraphs,<sup>8</sup> the following sentence thus appears: "Proclaims Xerxes, the King" (*Θāti Xšāyaršā, xšāyaθiya*). In later inscriptions, however, the following phrase is used instead: "Proclaims Xerxes, the Great King" (*Θāti Xšāyaršā, xšāyaθiya vazrka*).<sup>9</sup>
- XPh content revolves around events immediately after Xerxes's rise to power.
- The situation on how the country list was drawn up is even more compelling. By further inspection, it would be indeed possible to gain a reliable date:

*Sie erwähnt zwei Gruppen von Ioniern 'die im Meere' und 'die jenseits des Meeres'. Die ersten sind die echten Ionier der Westküste und Inseln Kleinasiens, die zweiten die von Dareios Yaunā takabarā genannten Makedonier. In den späteren Skulpturen des Xerxes erscheinen die Ionier den geschichtlichen Ereignissen gemäß nicht mehr. Ihre Erscheinung in der Liste lehrt, dass diese vor Salamis geschrieben ist. Das Datum liegt also zwischen 486 und 480 fest, näher an 486.*<sup>10</sup>

For Herzfeld, a decisive dating factor is the reference of the Ionian dwelling in the sea, a.k.a. Greeks living on the west coast of Asia Minor.

<sup>8</sup> The paragraph sequence corresponds to the one laid out by Schmitt 2009. By using this one, we will encounter one considerable challenge, for it is, let us say, inconsistent with the traditional inscription paragraph sequence used by Herzfeld 1937, Herzfeld 1938, Kent 1937, Cameron 1959. The difference relays mainly upon the fourth paragraph; for the former, XPh has seven paragraphs in total, but for the latter authors, it has only five sections: for Schmitt, §4 equal to §4a, §5 equals to §4b, §6 equals to §4c and §7 equals to §5.

<sup>9</sup> All Old Persian texts will be presented not in the original cuneiform, but rather in the phonemic transcription. On the phonemic transcription, Schmitt 2009; Schmitt 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Herzfeld 1937: 64–65. The *Yaunā takabarā* make an appearance in DNa §3 and are accordingly translated into English as "the peltē-wearing Ionians" (Schmitt 2000) and into German as "die schildtragenden Griechen" (Schmitt 2009). The country list of XPh will be intensively addressed below.

R. Kent did not only coincide with Herzfeld's points but also tried to reinforce his hypothesis. He argued that the wording at the beginning of the fourth paragraph (lines 28 and 29) implies indeed that Xerxes recently became king: "Proclaims Xerxes the King: When I became king ..." (*Θāti Xšāyaršā, xšāyaθiya: yaθā taya adam xšāyaθiya abavam...*).<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Herzfeld's second argument was adopted, especially since Kent agreed that the phrase "Xerxes, the King" will be replaced by the expression "Xerxes, the Great King" on later inscriptions. Finally, defending Herzfeld's last argument, he advocated for a country list dating preceding Salamis and Plataea.<sup>12</sup>

For Kent, there would not be anything else to dispute—at least in this regard. The only criticism he gave is related to the interpretation of the *daiva* report. For Herzfeld, XPh illustrates inner-Iranian religious conflicts that may be well attributed to Darius's religious tolerance policies and may have extended into Xerxes's reign. Such conflicts would have been well led by Median Magi, the highest priests in the Persian empire, whose influence and power would have been threatened by the introduction of a new uniform, anti-sacrificial religion. Kent saw the situation completely different since he argued the *daivas* should only be interpreted as foreign gods.<sup>13</sup>

Basically V. Struve not only followed Herzfeld's dating approach but also introduced a new argument that would further support an inscription early date. The formula at the beginning of the seventh section ("Me may Ahuramazda protect from evil, and my palace and this land": *mām A.uramazdā pātu hacā gastā utamaī viθam utā imam dahyāvam*) will be replaced in later inscriptions by: "Me may Ahuramazda protect, together with the gods, and my kingdom and what I have done" (*mām A.uramazdā pātu hadā bagaiḅiš utamaī xšačam utā*

<sup>11</sup> Kent 1937: 305.

<sup>12</sup> Kent 1936: 214.

<sup>13</sup> Kent 1936: 214–215. Cf. Hartmann 1937; Herzfeld 1937: 70ff.; Frye 1984. On the Persian Magi and their role, Ahn 1992: 100ff.; Trampedach 2017. All these theories will be further discussed below.

*tayamai krtam*).<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, Struve claimed that there are several linguistic parallelisms amongst XPh und XPf, such as the invocation mentioned above. Consequently, if XPf informs us of Xerxes's rise to power and belongs to the king's early days, XPh should analogically fit into Xerxes's first years.<sup>15</sup>

Admittedly, Struve's new approach is worth analyzing. It is undoubtedly remarkable that, for example, every Xerxes's inscription using the formula "proclaims Xerxes, the Great King" comes exclusively from Persepolis, or it was discovered there.<sup>16</sup> There is as well an astonishing regularity between the last invocation ("me may Ahuramazda protect, together with the gods") and the utilization of the phrase "proclaims Xerxes, the Great King." However, do such regularities corroborate that those inscriptions belong to a later date than other inscriptions? Is this the only and decisive criterion, according to which XPh would *ex negativo* belong at an earlier point in time? On further analysis, it can be demonstrated that Struve's logic cannot be convincing enough because it is arbitrary and even tendentious to try discovering similarities only between both documents without including other royal inscriptions. XPh is a type of source that fits extraordinarily well into the Achaemenid royal inscription corpus. XPh is, therefore, a text which has numerous affinities, both on a linguistic and a content level, with other royal inscriptions not only from Xerxes himself but also from Darius. Would it then be, agreeing with Struve's logic, that, if there were

<sup>14</sup> Struve 1968: 115. Cf. Ghirshman 1976: 5ff. To be found in XSc, XVa.

<sup>15</sup> Although not explicitly stated by Struve, I think this similitude between both inscriptions relies on the fact that XPh was discovered together with three exemplars of XPf.

<sup>16</sup> In Schmitt's Achaemenid inscriptions corpus, a total of 26 inscriptions falls into Xerxes's lifetime. 19 out of 26 come from Persepolis (three from Elvend and surroundings, three from Susa, and one from Van). Of these 19 inscriptions, four contain the sentence "proclaims Xerxes, the Great King" (XPb, XPc, XPd, and XPg). The sentence "proclaims Xerxes, the King" can only be found in six inscriptions (XPa, XPf, XPh, XPj, XPl, and XPm). It is conspicuous that in one out of the four inscriptions, the invocation cited by Struve appears "me may Ahuramazda protect together with the gods (...)" and in four out of the other six inscriptions, the first invocation: "me may Ahuramazda protect (...)" (in XPj and XPm this sentence is nowhere to be found). However, two inscriptions belong to the exception, namely the XSc and XVa, because in each of them the sentence "proclaims Xerxes, the King" with the formula "me may Ahuramazda protect together with the gods (...)" appear.

similarities among XPh, DNa, and DBa—which are also exceptionally well attestable—,<sup>17</sup> both inscriptions must be dated to the same period? Would it as well mean that, if there were similarities between what Struve believed to be early and late inscriptions—which is also well provable—,<sup>18</sup> both inscription groups would undisputedly belong in the same period? In my opinion, this is a weak criterion for the inscription date, assuredly recognized by the fact that his approach did not draw any substantial attention amongst his peers and future scholars.

Criticism of Herzfeld's dating method arose throughout the years, so much so that he felt compelled to rectify his original conclusion. Instead of defending a date before Salamis, he claimed XPh had to be made right after Salamis, namely between 479 and 472, arguing that the mainland Greeks do not seem to be mentioned on the inscription. Eventually, he decided for the year 478, having, yet again, as center of his argumentation the circumstances in which the Ionians are depicted.<sup>19</sup> Both dating corrections can be understood by the fact that, on the one hand, the Greeks dwelling in Asia Minor do not seem to be mentioned on the country list (third paragraph).<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, Xerxes is merely addressed as “the King” and not as “the Great King.” Due to the

<sup>17</sup> The country list introductions of both XPh §3, DNa §3, and DB §6 are virtually identical. The only discrepancy concerns the following sentence in DNa §3, 17: “these [are] the countries, which I seized” (*imā dahyāva tayā adam agrbāyam*). Instead, the next sentence appears in XPh §3, 15: “these [are] the countries, of which I was king” (*imā dahyāva tayaišām adam xšāyaθiya āham*). In contrast, we can observe in DB the following: “these [are] the countries, which fell to my lot” (*imā dahyāva tayā manā patiyāiša*). Other similitudes can be found in the first two paragraphs with minor disparities: The kings' names and titles. How the first two paragraphs of XPh were composed indicates doubtlessly that Darius's inscriptions, especially DB and DNa, served as a pattern to be followed by the next kings. This phenomenon is also well attested in other inscriptions, such as XEa, XPa, XPb, XPc, XPd, Xpf, and XVa.

<sup>18</sup> For instance, the first two paragraphs (the introduction and royal titles) are identical in the large inscriptions. For XFa, XIa, XPe, XPg, XPi, XPj, XPk, XPl, XPm, Xpn, XPo, Xpp, XPq, XPr, and XPs, the introduction and the following section are dissimilar since these are either small or fragmentary inscriptions, except for XPg, and XPl.

<sup>19</sup> Herzfeld 1947: 395ff.; Herzfeld 1968: 350ff: “The fact that the Ionians are absent from the list in §3 and that the loss is silently admitted, precludes from the beginning the possibility of interpreting the following paragraphs as an account of the king's triumphal entry into Athens.”

<sup>20</sup> This point was already dissented by Schmitt 1972 (cf. also Klinkott 2005: 80). In his examination, the Persian wording granted to the Ionians (*Yauna tayai drayahyā*) does not correspond

omission of the Greeks dwelling in Asia Minor, a direct consequence of the Persian failure in Europe, as well as the incomplete royal titles, XPh must be dated after the Persian campaign against Hellas. Unfortunately, his new dating effort was not much acknowledged by fellow scholars, so that this remark has remained almost unnoticed.

One of the few supporters of this new approach was R. Schmitt. In one article published on the occasion of the 2500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of fellow foundation of the Iranian empire, he outlined the royal title development and addressed "*das letzte Glied des von Dareios zu Beginn seiner Regierungszeit geführten Titels*" (xšāyaθiya dahyūvnām):

*Diese Wendung (...) wird unter Dareios auch erweitert um das Adjektiv vispazana-, „alle Stämme umfassend“. Dies wird aber seinerseits von Xerxes ab (...) zu paruzana- „viele Stämme umfassend“ variiert. Hier wird also überdeutlich der in vispazana- erhobene Anspruch der Weltherrschaft (...) widerrufen, und man darf zuversichtlich behaupten, dass die Ereignisse von Marathon, Salamis und Plataiai der Grund hierfür gewesen sind. Xerxes begnügt sich als „König der Länder, die viele Stämme umfassen“ mit der Charakterisierung seines Reiches als eines ‚Vielvölkerstaates‘, und in der Tat werden die Achaimenidenkönige ja nicht müde, in langen Listen all die von ihnen beherrschten Länder bzw. Völker aufzuzählen oder sie andererseits auf bildlichen Darstellungen dem Betrachter in ihrer Vielzahl ebenso wie in ihrer Verschiedenartigkeit vor Augen zu führen.<sup>21</sup>*

This title "renunciation" would represent an undoubted result of the revocation of Xerxes's pretensions to world supremacy only explained by the events after Salamis and Plataea. On the one hand, the title degradation could only be explained through the Persian failure

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to Cyprus, Herzfeld's assumption, but rather to the Daskylitic satrapy or the Greeks dwelling in Northwestern Asia Minor.

<sup>21</sup> Schmitt 1977: 388.

campaign. On the other hand, this would also strongly suggest, although *ex silentio*, that the Hellas campaign would have had the same relevance both for the Greeks and the Persians—which is doubtful. As criticism, G. Ahn's remarks seem to be strikingly revealing and, at the very least, compelling:

*Diese Sichtweise erweist sich bei näherem Hinsehen als stark von der herodoteischen Euphorie über den Ausgang der griechisch-persischen Auseinandersetzung geprägt; was jedoch für die Griechen ein Existenzkampf um ihre Freiheit war, muss für Xerxes nicht zwangsläufig dieselbe Bedeutung besessen haben. Bezeichnenderweise fehlt jegliche Einschätzung der Vorgänge von persischer Seite, so dass nicht einmal der Grund für den Abbruch der Unternehmung näher bekannt ist.*<sup>22</sup>

By carrying on with his argumentation, he comes to the following conclusion: “*Eine genaue Analyse macht sogar deutlich, dass die Titel der einzelnen Formulare gegeneinander austauschbar sind.*” Ahn rightfully argues that this parallelism, as well as the word interchangeability, can be even traced back to Darius's inscriptions since both words *vispazana-* and *paruzana-* reaffirm a universal claim to power:

*Für diese Vermutung kann zwar die wohl in die Xerxeszeit zu datierende Inschrift DE, die den Text von DNα 1–13 bis auf ‚paruzanānām‘ statt ‚vispazanānām‘ wortwörtlich zitiert, nicht als Zeuge herangezogen werden, wohl aber der Titel des Dareios in DPe 3f. ‚xšāyaθiya dahyūvnām paruzanānām‘ – „König der vielen Länder“. Die Rede von der Herrschaft über viele Länder ist also kein Spezifikum einer Zeit, die sich durch militärische Misserfolge zu bescheiden gelernt hat. Die Titel „König der Länder“, „König der vielen Länder“, „König der Länder aller Rassen“ und „König auf der ganzen Erde“ schlossen sich offenbar nicht aus, sondern konnten nebeneinander verwendet werden.*<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Ahn 1992: 260. Cf. Walser 1972: 1; Starr 1975: 41; Walser 1984: 47ff.

<sup>23</sup> Ahn 1992: 260.

To sum up, it can be concluded that there is still substantial disagreement among scholars regarding the XPh date, whether it be a specific or approximative period. At least, according to the current state of things, it can now be said that a particular preference still exists for Herzfeld's first dating draft, even though all his four points are no longer supportable. The different conjunctures whose main dating assumptions revolve around Xerxes's European campaign are trying to somehow arrive at a biased conclusion at the expense of those elements that might as well deny them. It would seem as if those theories sought to force the finding from the written material under all circumstances. With such dating attempts—particularly Schmitt's—, we can observe a futile effort to assign the same prominence to the Greek-Persian conflict for both the Greek and Persian world view, which is the main hurdle in all dating attempts previously discussed. This biased methodology insinuates, to a great extent, that both Persians and Greeks had fought for the same reasons, namely their existence and freedom.

Furthermore, when considering other arguments for an early inscription date, such as the replacement or addenda to certain expressions ("the King" for "the Great King," or "me may Ahuramazda protect" for "me may Ahuramazda protect together with the gods"), a specific historical development in the royal title would indeed seem to become apparent—at least at first glance. In this case, it is even more challenging to determine whether the wording above indicated had been deliberately replaced or not. It could also be interpreted as a mistake committed by one of the scribes responsible for it or a merely indiscriminately word swap since both words and expressions shared the same semantic significance. We do not know this, and probably we will never know, although I agree mostly with Ahn's remarks. What can be modestly added is that this cuneiform Old Persian inscription does not offer any viable indication of precise dating, either before or after the campaign in Greece or by replacing certain linguistic expressions.

## INFORMATION FROM THE INSCRIPTION

What kind of information is to be obtained from XPh? It is imperative to note herewith that any other information, be it theories or interpretations relating to the passages to be dealt with, need not be taken into consideration, at least in this part. In other words, it is appropriate to confine oneself exclusively to the textual report of XPh: what is the inscribed text trying to communicate? Only selected passages of the inscription will be included for this purpose, namely §5, 35–41; §4, 28–35; and §3, 13–28.<sup>24</sup> The fifth paragraph reads as follows:

35. (...) *utā antar aiṭā dahyāva āha, yad-*  
 36. *ātaya paruvam **daivā** ayadiya. Pasāva va-*  
 37. *šnā A.uramazdahā adam avam **daivadāna-***  
 38. ***m** viyakanam utā patiyazbayam: “**daivā***  
 39. *mā yadiyaiša;” yadāyadā paruvam **daivā***  
 40. *ayadiya, avadā adam A.uramazdām ayada-*  
 41. *i rtācā brazmaniya. (...)*

Lines 35–41: “And within these countries, there was (a place), where formerly the *daivas* were worshiped. Afterward, by the favor of Ahuramazda, I destroyed this *daiva shrine* und I proclaimed: ‘the *daivas* shalt not be worshiped (any longer)!’ Wheresoever formerly the *daivas* were worshiped, there I worshiped Ahuramazda at the right time and with the right ceremonial.”<sup>25</sup>

This paragraph was chosen for mainly two reasons: firstly, it is the only section where the word *daivā*<sup>26</sup> is mentioned four times on the whole inscription. Secondly, there is no other mention of this word in the entire Achaemenid inscription corpus. The word *daivā* appears three times in the nominative case plural on lines 36, 38, and 39, and the word *daivadāna-*, a composite of the former,<sup>27</sup> occurs only once on line 37 in the accusative case singular.

<sup>24</sup> For the paragraph sequence used, see n. 8.

<sup>25</sup> All English translations were carried out by the author of the article.

<sup>26</sup> For further analysis of the word *daiva* and its Avestan equivalent, see below.

<sup>27</sup> The word *daivadāna-* is compounded by *daivā* and *dāna-*. The former stays usually untrans-

The following information emerges from this section: it is reported that within a single country or land (*dahyāva*), the undefined *daivas* have been worshiped. This nation cannot be otherwise singled out—at least so far. For unknown reasons, the Great King—in the first-person—saw himself obligated to destroy the *daiva* shrine, and in its place, the cult to Ahuramazda shall be imposed. From this point forward, the chastised country and its inhabitants must revere the new cult at the right time and with the right ceremonial (*rtācā brazmaniya*). Those are the only reliable statements to be obtained from this passage. Further information concerning the *daivas*' origin or the shrine's location seems to be impossible to infer.

However, if the first sentence of the fourth paragraph (*utā antar aiṭā dahyāva āha*) is once again surveyed, a reference to a country allegedly mentioned in a previous passage can be surely deduced. For this reason, it is now necessary to turn our attention towards the anterior passage to confirm whether such a nexus would indeed be manifest. The fourth paragraph reads as follows:

28. (...) *Θāti Xšā-*
29. *yaṛšā xšāyaθiya: yaθā taya adam x-*
30. *šāyaθiya abavam, asti antar aiṭā*
31. *dahyāva, tayai upari nipištā, a-*
32. *yauda. Pasāvamai A.uramazdahā upastām*
33. *abara, vašnā A.uramazdahā avām dahyāvam*
34. *adam ajanam utašim gāθavā nīšāda-*
35. *yam. (...)*

Lines 28–35: “Proclaims Xerxes, the King: When I became king, there is within these countries, which (are) inscribed above, (one which was) in turmoil. Afterward, Ahuramazda bore me aid; by the favor of Ahuramazda, I smote this country and put it (over) in its (proper) place.”

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lated. The latter is generally translated as “vessel” (Kent 1950: 189), “Behälter, Bewahrungsort” (Brandenstein and Mayrhofer 1964: 114). Hence, this composite can be rendered into English as either “temple” or “shrine of the *daivas*” (Schmitt 2014: 163).

As proceeded prior, it is necessary to dissect the paragraph by sorting out the relevant information: there was an unnamed country that had been previously listed on the inscription and, for unknown reasons, had rebelled against Xerxes's authority. He was able to subdue this uprising successfully, and after this, the punished country was "put back in its right place" (*utašim gāθavā nīšādayam*). The measures taken and the implications of the last sentence cannot be lamentably further determined.

By considering this passage for the analysis of the previous one, it can be presumed that the "country in turmoil" (*dahyāuš ayauda*) is the one the devotion of the *daivas* was still alive against the king's will. This logic in the sequence of events described on XPh does not have to be as problematic as it would seem to be. The linguistic phrasing used for the uprising country is always introduced by the well-defined clause *antar aītā dahyāva* preceded or succeeded by a conjugated form of the Old Persian verb *ah*.<sup>28</sup>

Admittedly, this fact has been mainly accepted within Iranian studies. It is rightly presumed that Xerxes, without wanting to provide further information upon the *daivas* events, intended to continue his speech of the fourth paragraph in the following section, as if both paragraphs were indeed outlining the incidents of the same country.<sup>29</sup> In doing so, a straightforward narrative continuum is well established. If one were to pursue and purposely carry on this logic, which is the most plausible interpretation, it would then, as it were, remain clear that the fourth and fifth sections must be closely connected to each other, providing us a more linear sequence of events and not separate incidents disjointed from each other.

Moreover, assuming that the rebellious country is one of the countries "inscribed above," it could be logically concluded that the mentioned country had already been referred to on Xerxes's single

<sup>28</sup> On the fifth paragraph, we encounter the word *āha*, in the third-person singular imperfect active. On the fourth paragraph, we stumble upon *asti*, in the third-person singular indicative active.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Hartmann 1937: 158; Nyberg 1938: 366ff.; Levy 1939: 106ff.; Riminucci 2006: 186.

country list. On that ground and for the sake of our source's better understanding, it is essential to scrutinize the last paragraph to be investigated in this article, namely the country list (§3), to obtain a better view of the problem of the *daivas*. Xerxes's country list reads in the following way:

13. (...) *Θāti Xšāyaršā*
14. *xšāyaθiya: vašnā A.uramazdahā, imā*
15. *dahyāva, tayaišām adam xšāyaθiya ā-*
16. *ham apataram hacā Pārsā; adamšām*
17. *patiyaxšayaḷ; manā bājim abaraha; ta-*
18. *yašām hacāma aθanhya, ava akunava;*
19. *dātam, taya manā, avadiš adāraya: Māda,*
20. *Ūja, Hara.uvatiš, Armina, Zranka, Parθava,*
21. *Haraḷva, Bāxtriš, Sugda, Uvārazmiš,*
22. *Bābiruš, Aθurā, Θataguš, Sparda,*
23. *Mudrāya, Yaunā tayaḷ drayahyā dā-*
24. *rayanti utā tayaḷ paradraya dārayanti,*
25. *Maciyā, Arbāya, Gandāra, Hinduš,*
26. *Kaṭpatuka, Dahā, Sakā haumavargā, Sakā*
27. *tigraxaudā, Skudra, Ākaufaciyā,*
28. *Putāyā, Krkā, Kūšiyā (...)*

Lines 13–28: “Proclaims Xerxes, the King: by the favor of Ahuramazda, these (are) the countries of which I was King outside of Persia; I governed over them, to me they bore tribute; which was arranged to them by me, they did that; the law which (is) mine, that held them firm: Media, Elam, Arachosia, Armenia, Drangiana, Parthia, Aria, Bactria, Sogdiana, Chorasmia, Babylonia, Assyria, Sattagydia, Lydia, Egypt, the Ionians who dwell in the sea and who dwell beyond the sea, the Makans, Arabia, Gandara, India, Cappadocia, the Dahae, the Amyrgian Scythians, the Scythians with pointed caps, Thrace, the Akaufakans, Libyans, Carians, (and) Nubians.”

Xerxes claimed to be the absolute ruler over all these countries. The country mentioned above is to be located where, initially, rose

against the Great King's authority. Following this logic, this would also be the same vassal country, in which a large part of the population still practiced the cult of the *daivas*. Whether this insurrection and the sanctions imposed after its pacification should be understood as events close in time is not ascertainable from the inscribed report.

If there is, at this point, still hesitation upon the narrative sequence logic, which would be entirely comprehensible, let me present one last remark to this respect. To further support the paragraph continuum thesis, we must bring up a very notorious fact that tended to be quite recurrent on closer inspection of Achaemenid history through the lens of Greek historiography. Accordingly, one of the best-known repressive measures against revolting and hostile populations were typically the destruction of temples and sanctuaries.<sup>30</sup> In this regard, one could very well assume that the Great King's primary motivation to destroy the *daiva* shrine or prescript its cult altogether seemed to have been motivated by political rather than religious reasons.

The following four Herodotean examples could accurately illustrate the repressive measures taken by Xerxes toward hostile populations, especially during the Greek campaign undertaken by the Persian empire, during which several Greek sanctuaries were either desecrated, plundered, or destroyed:

- VIII 32.2–33: looting and burning of temples in Phocis and the Apollo sanctuary in Abae

*[32] (2) But most of them (i.e., the Phocians) made their way out of the country to the Ozolian Locrians, where is the town of Amphissa above the Crisaeian plain. The foreigners overran the whole of Phocis, the Thessalians so guiding their army; and **all that came within their power they burnt and wasted, setting fire to towns and temples.** [33] Marching this way down the river Cephissus they ravaged all before them, burning the towns of Drymus, Charadra, Erochus, Tethronium, Amphicaea, Neon, Pediea, Tritea, Elatea, Hyampolis, Parapotamii, **and Abae, where was a richly endowed***

<sup>30</sup> Further on this point, see below.

*temple of Apollo, provided with wealth of treasure and offerings; and there was then as now a place of divination there. **This temple, too, they plundered and burnt;** and they pursued and caught some of the Phocians near the mountains, and did certain women to death by the multitude of their violators.*

- VIII 51.2–53: pillage and burning of the Athenian acropolis

*[51] (2) There they took the city, then left desolate; but they found in the temple some few Athenians, temple-stewards and needy men, who defended themselves against the assault by fencing the acropolis with doors and logs; these had not withdrawn to Salamis (...) [52] (1) The Persians sat down on the hill over against the acropolis, which is called by the Athenians the Hill of Ares, and besieged them by shooting arrows wrapped on lighted tow at the barricade (...) [53] (1) But at the last of the quandary the foreigners found an entrance; for the oracle must need be fulfilled, and all the mainland of Attica be made subject to the Persians. In front of the acropolis, there was a place where none was on guard and none would have thought that any man would ascend that way; here certain men mounted near the shrine of Cecrops' daughter Aglaurus, though the way led up a sheer cliff. (2) **When the Athenians saw that they had ascended to the acropolis, some of them cast themselves down from the wall and so perished, and others fled into the inner chamber. Those Persians who had come up first betook themselves to the gates, which they opened, and slew the suppliants; and when they had laid all the Athenians low, they plundered the temple and burnt the whole of the acropolis.***

- IX 13.1–2: Mardonius' destruction of Athens

*[13] (1) So spoke the herald, and departed back again; and when Mardonius heard that, he was no longer desirous of remaining in Attica. Before he had word of it, he had held his hands, desiring to know the Athenians' plan and what they would do, and neither harmed nor harried the land of Attica, for he still ever supposed that they would make terms with him; (2) but when he could not move*

*them, and learnt all the truth of the matter, he drew off from before Pausanias' army ere it entered the Isthmus; but first **he burnt Athens, and utterly overthrew and demolished whatever wall or house or temple was left standing (...)***

- IX 65.2: burning of the temple of Demeter in Eleusis

*[65] (2) And herein is a marvelous thing, that though the battle (i.e., Plataea) was hard by the grove of Demeter there was no sign that any Persian had been slain in the precinct, or entered into it; most of them fell near the temple in unconsecrated ground; and I judge—if it be not a sin to judge of the ways of heavens—that **the goddess herself denied them entry, for that they had burnt her temple, the shrine at Eleusis.***

Although this might have the appearance of a *modus operandi* attributed exclusively to Xerxes, this procedure against adverse population antecedes and transcends Xerxes's behavior. A similar reaction both of Darius towards Greek temples and Cambyses to Egyptian temples can also be found in Herodotus himself: the burning of the sanctuary of Apollo at Didyma during the Ionian Revolt (VI 18–19), the destruction of Ionian cities like Chios, Lesbos and Tenedos and the desecration of their sanctuaries (VI 31–33); several times in the context of Egyptian conquest, where various sanctuaries and cult sites were allegedly desecrated and destroyed either by Cambyses's order or, at least, with his permission (Hdt. III 16, 25–26, 28–30, 33).<sup>31</sup> There are numerous instances in Greek historiography which, apart from their tendentious and arbitrary nature, can in great detail attest this point of view, namely the Persian *modus operandi* towards sanctuaries of rebellious populations, which among other things, have much helped to establish the image of the Persian kings as hybrid oriental despots in the Greek collective memory.

<sup>31</sup> The cases given here are not about their truthfulness, but rather serve to demonstrate how Greek historiography (cf. Diod. I 46; Strab. XVII 1, 27) had pictured the Achaemenid behavior

Nevertheless, let us go back to the main argument exposed above: based on the examples given and supported by written sources, it would seem to be entirely plausible to assume that the country the *daivas* were worshipped in (§5) was the same country that was most likely in turmoil for unknown reasons at the beginning of Xerxes's reign (§4). As a result, Xerxes, after taking the corresponding repression measures, ordered the destruction of an arguably prominent sanctuary within this country as punishment for its insubordination—not only against the ideal imperial order but also against the Great King's authority. The cult to Ahuramazda was instated offhand instead of the demolished *daiva* shrine.

All these measures taken by the Great King, as far as we restrict ourselves to the analysis of XPh, seem to have been mainly of political and not religious nature.<sup>32</sup> With the help of the information gained out of the narrative structure of XPh, it can be stated that both the country list and the fourth section can prove to be an introduction to the *daiva* report. Therefore, this would mean that, after coming under Persian power, an unnamed province rose against the empire right after Xerxes becoming king, and that the same upraised province, after its "pacification," was punished through the destruction of one of their sanctuaries, by name *daivadana*.

However, one last question remains open, which is the biggest puzzle of XPh: with all the information we have gained so far, would it be possible to locate the revolting and then punished country by name mentioned on XPh? If it were possible to locate this country, then it

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towards certain situations, especially warlike ones (cf. Harrison 2004; Chiasson 2012). On the arbitrary nature of Greek sources, particularly Herodotus recount on Cambyses and his Egyptian expedition, Posener 1936: 1–26, 164–175; Kienitz 1953: 57ff.; Klotz 2015: 3–4; Agut-Labordère 2016; Irwin 2017.

<sup>32</sup> I agree, to a certain extent, that orientalist also see strictly political reasons behind the measures against the *daivas* (cf. Nyberg 1938: 366ff.; Boyce 1982: 174–175). Nevertheless, one must sharply diverge from their interpretation, according to which the overall course of the *daiva* event results from Xerxes's Zoroastrian devotion. For instance, Boyce's consideration of XPh ultimately leads to a religious interpretation, primarily because of the terminological similarity between the Achaemenid language on XPh and the meaning of the Avestan word *daeva* (see below).

would be possible in the same way to locate the *daiva* land. However, this is not an easy undertaking, especially since many scholars had already tried to do so in the context of both Iranian studies and Greek history unsuccessfully, in most cases. The upcoming part of this paper is dedicated to analyzing such attempts, which have led to theories still worthy of discussion.

### THEORIES AND INTERPRETATIVE MODELS

In the academic literature, there are four main theories on the XPh account, which, on the one hand, have enjoyed high acceptance and, on the other hand, were the starting point for great discussions. The first three theories touch upon the historical framework of the report detailed on XPh, the country the *daivas* would have been worshipped in, and the possible origin of the *daivas* site. However, the fourth theory does not deal with any given historical framework but rather with the nature of the inscription(s) itself. According to this theory, the inscription is not an ordinary source material whose content can be placed in a particular historical context. It is instead an unusual text—like the majority of Achaemenid inscriptions—whose primary function was to proclaim royal ideology. So, without any further ado, I would like to present these theories and let us see whether they can still be regarded as possible hypotheses for the great XPh mystery.

#### *The Destruction of the Esagila at Babylon (or Egyptian Temples?)*

A few years after Xerxes became king, uprisings broke out in two central Persian provinces, the course of which older scholars tried to link with the XPh country:

- During Darius's last years, an uprising broke out in Egypt<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Herodotus (VIII 7) describes the Egyptian revolt only casually in the context of Darius's new war arrangements against the Greeks, which had to be continued by Xerxes. The only thing that can be gathered from the Herodotean passage concerning this uprising is that “ὅς δὲ

under the leadership of a certain Khabasha,<sup>34</sup> in which the newly appointed king's troops managed to successfully put down a more than two-year revolt after bloody encounters. However, it remains utterly unknown whether Persian troops had carried out temple disturbances during this revolt.<sup>35</sup> Due to the apparent conservation of Egyptian temples, Egypt must be excluded as a reference point for XPh.<sup>36</sup>

- At about the same time, two successive uprisings broke out at Babylon.<sup>37</sup> The first one, which according to Babylonian sources, should not have lasted long, took place in 484 (June or July) under the leadership of a certain Bēl-šimanni. Xerxes succeeded in ultimately defeating the revolt within a couple of days.<sup>38</sup> A second, longer, and more dangerous uprising broke out two years after (August 482) under the leadership of a certain Šamaš-eriba. During this revolt, the rebels succeeded in

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ἀνεγνώσθη Ξέρξης στρατεύεσθαι ἐπὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα, ἐνθαῦτα δευτέρῳ μὲν ἔτει μετὰ τὸν θάνατον τὸν Δαρείου πρῶτα στρατηγὴν ποιέεται ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀπεστεῶτας, τούτους μὲν νυν καταστρεψάμενος καὶ Αἴγυπτον πᾶσαν πολλὸν δουλοτέρην ποιήσας ἢ ἐπὶ Δαρείου ἦν, ἐπιτράπει Ἀχαμένει ἀδελφεῷ μὲν ἑωυτοῦ, Δαρείου δὲ παιδί.”

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Budge 1902: 72–74; Stern 1984: 71. Whether this leader could be identified as Pharaoh Psammetichus IV is not clear (cf. Cruz-Urbe 1980).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Budge 1902: 70–74; Levy 1939: 109; Ahn 1992: 113.

<sup>36</sup> Similarly, it is entirely unknown whether a cult to Ahuramazda founded by Xerxes was established after this revolt. The Egyptian “hypothesis,” if it might be called so, first appeared in Hignett 1963: 89 (n. 5) as a small response to Olmstead’s Bactrian hypothesis (see below). Nevertheless, it is, first and foremost, regrettable that Hignett did not provide any arguments at all to defend his hypothesis.

<sup>37</sup> For the dating of the Babylonian uprisings, Cameron 1941: 319–325; Parker and Dubberstein 1956: 15; Böhl 1962: 111–113; Kuhrt and Sherwin-White 1987: 70; whereby both Cameron and Parker and Dubberstein erroneously placed the two uprisings in the year 482. The corresponding correction of this dating was then made by Böhl’s article and is mostly accepted in the academic literature (Ghirshman 1976: 4; Kuhrt and Sherwin-White 1987: 70; Ahn 1992: 113; Dandamayev 2000: 329; Riminucci 2006: 187ff). In my opinion, it is worthwhile at this point to make a small remark on the chronological classification: Although there is a predominantly sizeable academic consensus for the revolts’ years, it still seems to be extremely peculiar that according to Briant’s opinion, these revolts would have taken place in the years 481 for the one of Bēl-šimanni and 479 for that of Šamaš-eriba (Briant 2002: 525, 535, 544).

<sup>38</sup> Böhl 1962: 111–113; Dandamayev 2000: 329.

reconquering important cities, including Borsippa, Dilbat, and Babylon<sup>39</sup> (just as in the first uprising) and murdering Zopyrus, the satrap of Babylon. After the riot was subdued, two separate satrapies for the districts of Babylon and Abar Nahara were installed.<sup>40</sup>

Then, in this context, it was widely accepted by several renamed scholars,<sup>41</sup> based exclusively on the evidence of Greek authors, that the statue of Bel-Marduk was removed from the Esagila, that the Marduk priest was murdered by trying to prevent the Great King from confiscating the statue, and that Babylonian temples, especially that of Bel-Marduk, was destroyed.<sup>42</sup> Among the ancient authors used to support this hypothesis are Herodotus, Strabo and Arrian, of whom the latter two wrote about the destruction of the temple. Herodotus, on the other hand, reports only on a statue confiscation from the Esagila, considered as the Bel-Marduk statue, and the murder of the Marduk priest given his indisposition to meet Xerxes's requirements. It is worth mentioning that all three Greek authors, strangely enough, did not describe any uprising in Babylon. However, a single mention in Greek literature of one of the two Babylonian uprisings<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Böhl 1962: 111–113; Dandamayev 2000: 329.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Stern 1984: 73, 78ff.; with further literature, Klinkott 2005: 74.

<sup>41</sup> Hartmann 1937: 158–159; Nyberg 1938: 365ff.; Ghirshman 1954: 190–191; Böhl 1962: 113; Duschesne-Guillemain 1962: 156ff.; Widengren 1965: 138ff.; Mayrhofer 1969: 162–163; Herrenschmidt 1980: 326ff.; Dandamayev 2000: 329. Although Olmstead 1948: 237; Boyce 1982: 164; Boyce 1984: 293 agree with the theory in some aspects (Xerxes had the statue of Marduk removed, the Marduk priest murdered and the Esagila destroyed), they plead for other interpretations of XPh.

<sup>42</sup> For older scholars, this was precisely the point from which Xerxes, a religiously strict ruler, would have renounced the religious tolerance policy traditionally practiced by his predecessors and who would begin to be regarded as a hybrid ruler, which, as Ahn 1992: 117ff. has long remarked in detail, corresponds to a picture outlined by Herodotus of the Persian rulers as hybrid oriental despots. Those scholars who argued for Babylonian theory as the historical reference point for XPh also defended the view that Xerxes was a Zoroastrian fundamentalist and has set a limit to an epoch characterized by religious tolerance.

<sup>43</sup> It seems that the Babylonian uprising described by Ctesias was that of Šamaš-eriba due to its relevancy and impact, rather than the first one, and also since Zopyrus' assassination was described.

and the assassination of Zopyrus is known in extracts thanks to Ctesias of Cnidos,<sup>44</sup> handed down by Photius I, Patriarch of Constantinople. At this point, it is necessary to analyze how these sources depicted the Babylonian incident and, given the case, to provide a new interpretation for them.<sup>45</sup>

- Hdt. I 183:

[183] (1) ἔστι δὲ τοῦ ἐν Βαβυλῶνι ἱεροῦ καὶ ἄλλος κάτω νηός, ἐνθα ἄγαλμα μέγα τοῦ Διὸς ἐνὶ κατήμενον χρύσειον, (...) (2) ἔξω δὲ τοῦ νηοῦ βωμός ἐστι χρύσειος, ἔστι δὲ καὶ ἄλλος βωμός μέγας, ἐπ' οὗ θύεται τὰ τέλεα τῶν προβάτων (...) ἦν δὲ ἐν τῷ τεμένει τούτῳ ἔτι τὸν χρόνον ἐκεῖνον καὶ ἀνδριάς δυώδεκα πηγέων χρύσειος στερεός: (3) ἐγὼ μὲν μιν οὐκ εἶδον, τὰ δὲ λέγεται ὑπὸ Χαλδαίων, ταῦτα λέγω. **τούτῳ τῷ ἀνδριάντι Δαρεῖος μὲν ὁ Ὑστάσπεος ἐπιβουλεύσας οὐκ ἐτόλμησε λαβεῖν, Ξέρξης δὲ ὁ Δαρείου ἔλαβε καὶ τὸν ἱερά ἀπέκτεινε ἀπαγορεύοντα μὴ κινεῖν τὸν ἀνδριάντα (...)**

[183] *In the Babylonian temple there is another shrine below, where is a great golden **image of Zeus** (i.e., of Bel-Marduk), sitting at a great golden table (...) (2) Outside the temple is a golden altar. There is also another great altar, on which are sacrificed the full-grown of the flocks (...) and in the days of Cyrus there was still in this sacred demesne a **statue** of solid gold twelve cubits high. (3) I myself have not seen it, but I tell what is told by the Chaldeans. Darius son of Hystaspes purposed to take **this statue** but dared not; Xerxes his son **took it, and slew the priest who warned him not to move the statue.***

<sup>44</sup> Ctes. *Pers.* VII–XXIII 26 (= FGrHist 688 F 13a 26): “Ἐξελαύνει Ξέρξης εἰς Ἐκβάτανα, καὶ ἀγγέλλεται αὐτῷ ἀπόστασις Βαβυλωνίων καὶ Ζωπύρου τοῦ στρατηγοῦ αὐτῶν ὑπὸ σφῶν ἀναίρεσις.”

<sup>45</sup> For this matter, it is relevant for the revaluation of this theory to only assess Herodotus in original Greek.

- Strab. XVI 1, 5

[1] (5) (...) Here too is **the tomb of Belus** (i.e., Bel-Marduk), now in ruins (**having been demolished by Xerxes, as it is said**) (...)

- Arr. *Anab.* III 16, 4

[16] (4) On entering Babylon, Alexander directed the Babylonians to rebuild **the temples Xerxes destroyed**, and especially the **temple of Baal**, whom the Babylonians honor more than any other god (...)

- Arr. *Anab.* VII 17, 1–2

[17] (1) **The temple of Belus** was in the center of the city of Babylon (...); (2) Like the other shrines of Babylon, **Xerxes had razed it to the ground** when he returned from Greece.<sup>46</sup>

By considering these factors, it could then seem logical to assume that the Great King did indeed take repressive measures to the detriment of the rebels, by destroying their temples, as a result of two successive uprisings occurring at a quite inopportune time,<sup>47</sup> requiring large troop logistics and having been bloodily suppressed. Similarly, it must also be considered that the expulsion of cults and destruction of temples never happened without any reason, primarily since it occurred as a result of a punctual crisis within the empire that tended to develop into warlike events.<sup>48</sup>

Accordingly, this response, which may have involved the expulsion of cults, should not be regarded as an arbitrary or unjustified act of religious intolerance, but rather as Xerxes's overarching intervention,

<sup>46</sup> This passage is highly fascinating and equally controversial since it is the only source in which Xerxes's repressive measures against the Babylonian uprising after the Hellas campaign were dated. It must also be admitted that the three previous sources do not offer any precise data for the royal reprisals. However, due to the Babylonian theory's untenability (see below), it will not be appropriate to pursue this problem.

<sup>47</sup> The initial situation was indeed very unfavorable for Xerxes because, based on Ctesias report (see n. 44) and the reconstruction of the events offered here, this was the period in which the Great King was dedicated to preparations for war against Greece.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Firpo 1986: 331–333, 361–374.

whose authority was granted, according to XPh, by Ahuramazda and whose main task as king was to restore the imperial and world order distorted by revolts.<sup>49</sup> However, as long as it seemed more conducive to the Persian court, the Great King allowed the revolting people to maintain all those domestic and even religious customs after suppressing any rebellion.<sup>50</sup> Despite all that was already established, it is highly doubtful that Xerxes destroyed the main Babylonian temple—the Esagila—as punishment for the uprisings, murdered the local chief priest, and either destroyed or removed the statue of Bel-Marduk.

The turning point, thanks to which this theory was finally refuted, came along with an article published by A. Kuhrt and S. Sherwin-White in 1987, in which it was convincingly demonstrated, through a new and fruitful Herodotus reading, that the statue taken away by Xerxes was not that of Bel-Marduk, but another statue whose name remains unknown.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Riminucci 2006: 188–189; Abdi 2007: 55ff. This remark necessarily goes hand in hand with the Persian worldview, and although this is a topic regularly brought to the forefront of the discussion on the Achaemenid religion, it will not be possible to pursue it in detail here. Nevertheless, the language of XPh shows several similarities with that of Avesta (see below). Another yet uncommented similarity between both is the fact that this inscription, especially on the fifth section, has an Avestan dualistic-antagonistic terminology, which could well primarily be understood as a malignancy (an undesired cult) to be eliminated from the world and the restoration competence of the imperial and world order given by Ahuramazda (the destruction of such undesired worship and, instead, the establishment of the real cult). In other words, the Avestan term *arta-* is related to both the destruction of the *daiva* site and the establishment of the cult of Ahuramazda and the term *daiva* is intricately linked to *drug-* and *dregvant-*, terms with a religious devaluing meaning (cf. Ahn 1992: 108ff).

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Riminucci 2006: 189ff. Likewise, this is the transcendental point to understand the logic behind the temple destruction policy carried out by Xerxes and all Persian rulers. This policy is not an arbitrary punishment measure to all rebels throughout every corner of the Persian empire and corresponds somewhat to those circumstances in which the rebellious populations find themselves in relation to the imperial power.

<sup>51</sup> The Babylonian theory's main argument was based exclusively on Herodotus report and the assumption that had arisen for several years from the incorrect reading of his passage. If it is confirmed that Xerxes took another statue from the Esagila and not that of Bel-Marduk, the Babylonian theory consequently collapses. Similarly, it should be emphasized that other sources, be it Strabo or Arrian, only served to confirm the Herodotean passage (cf. How and Wells I 1936: 142–143; Asheri *et al.* 2007: 202–203).

The beginning of the paragraph and the tense change are critical for understanding what Herodotus is trying to put into words. He starts by describing in the present tense (*ἔστι δὲ τοῦ*) that there is a second temple in the sanctuary at Babylon, where a great *ἄγαλμα* of Zeus can be seen. The Greek word *ἄγαλμα* should be comprehended as a statue in honor of a god that, in most cases, has cultic functions.<sup>52</sup> After this explanation, Herodotus carries on to describe two altars outside this temple (*ἔξω δὲ τοῦ νηοῦ βομὸς ἔστι χρύσεος, ἔστι δὲ καὶ ἄλλος βομὸς μέγας*). The opposition of both existing altars becomes apparent with the enumerative/explanatory particle *δὲ*. Then, what is crucial for the following sentences, he changes to the imperfect tense followed by an adversative *δὲ* to point out the former presence—in the same precinct—of another solid gold statue depicted as *ἀνδριάς*. Herodotus emphasizes that *ἐγὼ μὲν μιν οὐκ εἶδον* in relation to the recently named *ἀνδριάς* understood as an image of a man or merely as a statue.<sup>53</sup>

The logical implication of this description and the wording of the whole passage so far is that this *ἄγαλμα* is still *in situ*. Following this assumption, Darius wanted to take the *ἀνδριάς*, not the *ἄγαλμα*, but did not dare to do so. However, Xerxes manages to confiscate the statue from the holy district known as *ἀνδριάς* and, yet again, not the *ἄγαλμα*. If one were to accept this hypothesis and follow Kuhrt's and Sherwin-White's conclusions,<sup>54</sup> it would be impossible that XPh would directly refer to the suppression of the Babylonian revolt of the year 482 and the destruction of the Bel-Marduk temple. The *daivas* thematized on the inscription should not relate to any Babylonian deities.

Even if it were to be assumed that Xerxes had murdered the Marduk priest and destroyed this statue, it would have had the immediate consequence such as the Babylonians, according to the traditional laws, would no longer have been able to recognize the Achaemenids as legitimate rulers, which in turn was never attempted after the revolts.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Cf. LSJ s. v. *ἄγαλμα*; cf. Nock 1930: 3ff.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. LSJ s. v. *ἀνδριάς*.

<sup>54</sup> Kuhrt and Sherwin-White 1987: 78.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Ahn 1992: 114; Dandamayev 2000: 329.

This would have happened since the Babylon chief priest was the only person responsible for carrying out the royal investiture and providing the king with his royal powers. Moreover, assuming the chief priest's assassination and the removal of the statue of Marduk were carried out by Xerxes, we must inevitably consider lines 39–41 of XPh:

39. (...) *yadāyadā paruvam daiyā*  
 40. *ayadiya, avadā adam A.uramazdām ayada-*  
 41. *ī rtācā brazmaniya. (...)*

39. Wheresoever, formerly **the daivas**  
 40. were worshiped, there I worshiped Ahuramazda  
 41. at the right time and with the right ceremonial.

There is no written, let alone archeological evidence that tells us about a cultic organization to Ahuramazda at Babylon. Quite the contrary, Marduk priests and the indigenous population did continue their cultic traditions, either at or near Babylon, without any hindrance.<sup>56</sup> One last consideration provided by R. Frye contributes to the definitive refutation of the Babylonian hypothesis by assuming, rightly so, that a general polemic against Marduk would inevitably have led to an extension to other Babylonian and non-Zoroastrian deities in other regions of the empire, or at least in southern Mesopotamia. However, this was not the case here.<sup>57</sup>

### *The Destruction of the Athenian Acropolis*

The idea of conciliating XPh with the Greeks, and especially with Athens, sounds indeed quite enticing to not, at the very least, try to pursue it. I. Lévy published in 1939 an article titled "*L'inscription triomphale de Xerxès.*" In this paper, he outlined a new theoretical framework for XPh and the *daiva* problem. By doing so, he criticized both Babylonian and Iranian theories and proposed this theory as a possible

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Boyce 1982: 174–175; Kuhrt and Sherwin-White 1987: 78; Riminucci 2006: 189.

<sup>57</sup> Frye 1984: 174: "(...) and if Xerxes had meant only Babylon he would have said so, or if the daivas included Marduk then they should also have included Humban, and perhaps mountains and rivers near Persepolis."

solution.<sup>58</sup> This model focuses not only on the *daiva* report but also pays some special attention to one particular sentence found in the country list:

23. (...) *Yaunā tayai drayahyā dā-*  
 24. *rayanti utā tayai paradraya dārayanti* (...)<sup>59</sup>

23. (...) the Ionians who dwell in the sea  
 24. and who dwell beyond the sea (...)

According to Lévy, XPh deals with the burning of the Athenian acropolis during the Greek campaign of 479 BC (Hdt. VIII 51.2–53, see above). Thus, there were no rebellions to be eliminated broken out from within the empire, but instead, the war against the Ionians living across the sea (*Yaunā tayai drayahyā*) had been the only reason for Xerxes behind XPh, provided it was carved a few years later after the battles at Plataea and Salamis. In distinct contrast to Herzfeld's considerations, these battles, the entire war, and its overall course did not influence the XPh.<sup>60</sup> Lévy's further argumentation is based almost exclusively upon his Herodotus reading:

*Dès lors, le problème est résolu. Tous les indices convergent sur Athènes, que Xerxès pouvait traiter de tributaire indocile, car elle avait rejeté les Pisistratides, fêaux du roi. Elle fut, suivant la tradition grecque que tout confirme, l'objet principal de la haine de l'Achéménide. En représailles du sacrilège que les Athéniens avaient commis à Sardes en brulant les bois sacrés et les temples, il ne s'arrêtera pas avant d'avoir pris et incendié Athènes. Il prépare longuement une guerre de revanche qui est une guerre sainte: la ville conquise, il incendie l'Acropole et ses temples—le daivadana.*<sup>61</sup>

<sup>58</sup> On the Iranian theory, see below.

<sup>59</sup> Sancisi-Weerdenburg 2001: 323 has rightly observed that the denomination *Yaunā*, which does not have any pejorative connotation at all, was used in Near Eastern sources (Assyrian, Hebrew, and Persian) and covers in most cases all Greeks in a nonspecific way (cf. Brinkman 1989; Rollinger 1997; Rollinger and Henkelman 2009).

<sup>60</sup> Lévy 1939: 118. Clearly, he is polemizing with Herzfeld's first dating attempt (see above).

<sup>61</sup> Lévy 1939: 120. A couple of interesting points must be addressed in this quotation: Firstly, as already noted by Ahn (see above), one can observe an evident Herodotean influence in

Lévy is equally aware of what is written in VIII 54 concerning Xerxes's appeal to the Athenian refugees. Instead, he arbitrarily chooses to ignore and discredit it, arguing that this particular Herodotean survey should be no longer taken into account.<sup>62</sup> Apart from such arbitrary elements, he argued, it is quite explicit that the Great King's appeal to sacrifice refers to a god left unnamed by Herodotus, namely Ahuramazda. Moreover, as described in the first book, the refugees' ritual actions undoubtedly correspond to Persian religious customs, in which it is not prevalent to "*erect images of gods, temples and altars (...) They used to sacrifice to Zeus (i.e., Ahuramazda) on the mountain peaks.*"<sup>63</sup>

One of the most problematic parts of this theory is precisely considering all Greece as the land in which the royal repressive measures towards the *daivas* are said to have taken place. For if, on the one hand, we may look at how this theory has been welcomed in the contemporary academic literature, we can distinctly state that it has had neither a positive nor a negative impact on the further academic debate. On the other hand, following Lévy's logic in the narrower sense and taking yet again the country list into consideration, it shows those countries the Great King claimed to rule over. Remarkable—and indeed sometimes misleading—, lines 23 and 24 present two groups of Ionians or, better, Greeks: those dwelling in the sea or on the coast and beyond the sea. By declaring this, it is rather doubtful that the Great King—regarding the *Yaunā* living beyond the sea—would claim to

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Lévy's statement, especially since he takes over Herodotus' point of view regarding the origin of the war almost literally. Secondly, it is quite fascinating how this almost inevitably idea of Xerxes as a religious fundamentalist with hints of an Eastern despot arises (cf. Young 1980: 239; Koch 1996: 138). Xerxes, as such, was preparing a holy war because of Athens' sacrilegious actions in Sardes. This presumption cannot be testified to in any available source known. And finally, the assumption that the acropolis and the temples on it (emphasis in the plural) represented the seize and destruction of the *daivadāna* (focus on the singular form, see above) raises several queries not easy to be answered.

<sup>62</sup> Lévy 1939: 120 (n. 4): "Hérodote se demande si Xerxès n'a pas agi sur l'ordre d'un songe ou sous l'influence des remords."

<sup>63</sup> Hdt. I 131, 1: "Πέρσας δὲ οἶδα νόμοισι τοιοῖσινδε χρωμένους, ἀγάλματα μὲν καὶ νηοὺς καὶ βωμοὺς οὐκ ἐν νόμῳ ποιευμένους ἰδρῦεσθαι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖσι ποιῆσαι μωρὴν ἐπιφέρουσι, ὡς μὲν ἐμοὶ δοκεῖν, ὅτι οὐκ ἀνθρωποφύεας ἐνόμισαν τοὺς θεοὺς κατὰ περ οἱ "Ἕλληνας εἶναι."

govern over the whole of Greece, especially since the wording found on Darius's and Xerxes's inscriptions most likely refer to the inhabitants of the coastal towns of Asia Minor (*Yaunā tayai drayahyā* = Hellespontine Phrygia)<sup>64</sup> and the inhabitants of the Aegean islands (*Yaunā tayai paradraya* = Hellespontine Thracia).<sup>65</sup> In other words, under Darius and Xerxes, there would be an actual claim to rule over the Greek islands and cities in Asia Minor and not over Greece.

The political relationship among the Persian empire, the Ionian islands and cities of Asia Minor could be confirmed by comparing another Achaemenid monument. On the country list of the base relief of a Darius statue discovered in Susa,<sup>66</sup> we can observe the 24 countries claimed to be Persian subjects.<sup>67</sup> A noteworthy fact is that the Ionians are neither mentioned nor represented anywhere. There are two schools of thought around this conundrum. The one defends that this could be understood due to the fact that this country list, precisely like every Achaemenid inscription, would not be attributed any historical character since the country lists and every other detail within all Old Persian inscriptions tend instead to communicate royal ideology and not historical events.<sup>68</sup> The other argues that the omission of the Ionians could

<sup>64</sup> Cf. DPe §2, 14; DSe §4, 27. See n. 20.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. DPe §2, 15; DSe §4, 29. With this assumption, it is not only possible to completely stripe this theory out of its theoretical framework, but also Herzfeld's both XPh dating attempts (see above), according to which the *Yaunā tayai drayahyā* referred exclusively to the inhabitants of Cyprus, the *Yaunā tayai paradraya* referred to the *Yaunā takabarā* only testified in DNa §3, 29 and A<sup>3</sup>Pb 26, and to the Ionians in Asia Minor (according to him *Yaunā tayai uškahyā*, such as in DPe §2, 13).

<sup>66</sup> The Darius statue discovered in Susa at Christmas 1972 can be surely dated to the last third of Darius's reign (498–492 BC). Cf. Trichet and Poupet 1974: 59; Hinz 1975: 115ff.

<sup>67</sup> On the left and right side of the base relief, there is a very impressive country list drafted in hieroglyphics and decorated with two times twelve figures which visually represents 24 subject nations. The visual element of the depicted subject nation reminds to DB, DPe, DNa and DSe. The subjected countries are listed in the following order: Persia, Media, Elam, Aria, Parthia, Bactria, Sogdia, Arachosia, Drangiana, Sattagydia, Chorasmia, the Scythians beyond the sea (on the left side); Babylonia, Armenia, Lydia, Cappadocia, Thracia, Assyria, Hegra (= Arabia), Egypt, Libya, Nubia, Maka, India (on the right side). Cf. Root 1979: 61–68; Calmeyer 1991; Klinkott 2005: 73.

<sup>68</sup> Further to this point, see below.

be very well placed into a precise historical context and represents real political changes within the Persian empire. Whereas the first point will be addressed eventually in this same paper, the second point should be given more attention. Firstly, we have to assume that the omission of the *Yaunas* depends upon neither a change in the empire's foreign policy<sup>69</sup> nor a deliberate error or lack of Egypt's political interest in Greece.<sup>70</sup> The concealment of the *Yaunas* in this relief—inevitably dated to 498–495—corresponds to the historical development during the Ionian Revolt (*ca.* 500–494 BC).<sup>71</sup> The data is too clear to be regarded as a mere coincidence. After the suppression of the Ionian Revolt, Xerxes did not doubt to mention the *Yaunas* on the country list again. Moreover, merely because this would reflect the Great King's actual claim to power.<sup>72</sup>

This small observation shows the weak basis this theory lies on. Besides, as already pointed out, the *Yaunas* would have to refer to the Greeks of Asia Minor (*tayai drayahyā*)—not to the Greek mainland—and to the Aegean islands' inhabitants (*tayai paradraya*). What can also help to refute this hypothesis finally is XPh statement from line 39 onwards, which was either wrongly or biasedly interpreted. In those lines, it is reported, as the conclusion of the measures taken against the *daiva* site, an Ahuramazda cult was founded. In contrast to Lévy, it seems to be necessary at this point to rely on the Herodotean report (Hdt. VIII 54):

*(...) On the next day after the messenger was sent, he (i.e., Xerxes) called together the Athenians exiles who followed in this train, and bade them go up to the acropolis and offer sacrifices after their manner, whether it was some vision seen of him in sleep that led him to give this charge, or that he repented of his burning of the temple. The Athenian exiles did as they were bidden.*

<sup>69</sup> Roaf 1974: 127 argues that there are a considerable course change and a lack of interest in Persian foreign policy towards the *Yaunas* and other unmentioned populations.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Calmeyer 1983: 166.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Walser 1984: 27ff.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Walser 1984: 27ff.

According to Herodotus, the Great King did not establish a cult dedicated to Ahuramazda on the acropolis. Quite the opposite, since he ordered the Athenian refugees first to climb the acropolis and to sacrifice according to their autochthonous customs, and not according to Persian fashion.<sup>73</sup> As a result, it can be confirmed that the Athenian hypothesis does not correspond to the XPh report.

### ***Repressive Measures Against non-Zoroastrian Cults (a.k.a. the Iranian Theories)***

In contrast to the hypotheses discussed previously, the next group of theories does not gravitate primarily around the question of the *daiva* shrine location but rather around those deities possibly associated with the term *daiva*. As already demonstrated, the *daivas* must be identified with neither Babylonian nor Egyptians nor Greek subjects.

There have been several versions of this theory,<sup>74</sup> but the first version was put forward by Herzfeld.<sup>75</sup> In his opinion, it would not have been possible that foreign deities were called *daivas*. The Iranian denomination *baga* was used only to identify foreign gods, as established in BD §62 and §63 (*A. uramazdā[mai] upastām abara utā aniyāha bagāha, tayaj hanti*).<sup>76</sup> The nation meant in XPh, Herzfeld continues, is not only Media but also Elam, places where gods like Mithra, Anahita, and Vrθragna—the *daivas* themselves—had always been worshiped, and their cults predated the prophet himself, Zarathustra. Although the introduction of a monotheistic *Staatsreligion* may have taken place during Darius's reign, he presented himself as a tolerant person towards older cults and mainly towards popular gods within the Persian priesthood. The *status quo* was so maintained. However, when Xerxes succeeded him, the religious tolerance policies

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Macan 1908: 441; How and Wells 1933: 253.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Olmstead 1948; Dandamayev 1976; Ghirshman 1976; Bianchi 1977; Boyce 1982; Frye 1984.

<sup>75</sup> Herzfeld 1937: 70ff.

<sup>76</sup> Herzfeld 1937: 70ff.; Herzfeld 1938: 105ff.

were suppressed altogether. Holding a leading position within the Persian elite, the Median Magi felt compelled to revolt against this new order since their position started to be threatened.<sup>77</sup> The introduction of a new *Staatsreligion* and, even more so, the policies put forward by Xerxes accompanied the final disparagement of the *daivas*. This inner-Iranian religious conflict was the historical reference point of XPh.

In this theory, compelling points can be identified, but even more, much-complicated questions arise with it. First of all, onto the more remarkable details: the interpretation is restricted to a religious setting, under the presumption of Xerxes's and Darius's Zoroastrian faith. Moved by his profound beliefs, Xerxes had tried to impose his religion under all circumstances. The intentional concealment of the insurgent province(s) on XPh should be understood in two ways. Firstly, it was entirely apparent to all Persian subjects that XPh was directly referring to Media and Elam. Secondly, this concealment should be understood as Xerxes's irredeemable failure.<sup>78</sup>

The most problematic elements of this theory have to be addressed: the statement by which the word *baga* corresponds only to foreign deities is wrong. This position is nowadays widely regarded as disproved only by the simple fact that *baga* is extensively used in the Old Persian cuneiform inscriptions to refer to Ahuramazda itself.<sup>79</sup> The issue regarding the Iranian origin of the *daivas* will be discussed below and, therefore, will not be tackled here. That the *daiva* country is identified with either Media or Elam (or even both) is purely conjectural, with no tangible evidence to back it up—and this statement concerns not only Herzfeld but others still defending this opinion. The third point

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Mayrhofer 1969; Ahn 1992: 131ff.; Sancisi-Weerdenburg 2001: 334; Abdi 2007: 55ff.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Abdi 2007: 69ff.

<sup>79</sup> Sims-Williams 2000: 404 asserts that, although *baga* can only be documented in a few passages in the *Gāthās* and Young(er) Avesta, this word underwent a substantial change on a semantic level in Old Persian, in which it can be translated as "god:" "(The word *baga-*) is the only generic term for the divinities worshipped by the Achaemenids." Cf. Brandenstein and Mayrhofer 1964: 109ff.; Schmitt 2014: 149. Evidence for *baga* used as a common word to identify Ahuramazda can be found in AmHa, AsHa, DEa, DNa, DNb, DSe, DSf, DSt, DSab, DZc, XEa, XPa, XPb, XPe, XPd, XPf, XPh, XPl, XVa, D<sup>2</sup>Ha, A<sup>2</sup>Hc, A<sup>3</sup>Pa (*baga vazrka A. uramazdā*) und in AsHa, DHa, DPb, DPh, DSf, XEa, XVa, A<sup>2</sup>Hc (*maθišta bagānām*).

is as well very speculative and quite problematic in itself, mainly because it presupposed too many abstruse matters regarding Zarathustra's lifetime and alleged intervention in Darius's rise to power. Given the complexity of such a topic and the overwhelmingly academic consent about it nowadays, the only thing it can be affirmed is that this postulate should be regarded as indefensible.<sup>80</sup>

Another point of consideration is the semantic similarities found in the Avesta and XPh. The Avestan term *daeua* and the one found in XPh contain a negative literal sense of this word, understood as either "false gods" or "idols."<sup>81</sup> For that reason, Herzfeld concluded that both Achaemenid kings were followers of Zoroastrianism, the father being not as radicalized as the son. M. Boyce does not add anything new regarding both kings' faith. Nevertheless, she tries to be more cautious by interpreting the inscription, especially since, in her opinion, the location of the *daiva* country remains still open.<sup>82</sup> So, like Herzfeld, she also appeals to the stated semantic resemblances.<sup>83</sup> Hence, Xerxes's first political-religious realization was intolerance towards the *daivas*. The tolerance policy towards non-Persian religions (*anarya-*), which was instead the characteristic of a direct attitude of indifference political pragmatism,<sup>84</sup> was replaced by the religious disregard towards non-Iranian deities.

<sup>80</sup> On the problem of Zarathustra's time with further literature, Ahn 1992: 95ff.; Skjærvø 2011; Grenet 2015; Hintze 2015; Humbach 2015; de Jong 2015; Skjærvø 2015.

<sup>81</sup> Herzfeld 1937: 74ff.

<sup>82</sup> Boyce 1982: 174ff. According to her, the *daiva* country could be as well identified with Egypt, Babylon and even Athens.

<sup>83</sup> Boyce 1982: 174ff.: "Old Persian *daiva* is equivalent to Avestan *daeua*; and the natural interpretation of Xerxes's words is that, as a Zoroastrian, he was recording the destruction of an Iranian sanctuary devoted to the worship of those warlike beings condemned by the prophet."

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Firpo 1986: 376ff.; Ahn 1992: 120; Sancisi-Weerdenburg 2001: 334; Campos Mendez 2006; Riminucci 2006: 189. For those scholars, it is hard to believe that specific belief systems would be banned from the empire. On several occasions, foreign cults of newly subjected populations were accepted without any difficulty, as long as they fulfilled their assigned tribute obligations. Pragmatism ought to be the central theme since the integration of new subjects, given the Achaemenid imperial structure, was facilitated by the fact that their pre-existing administrative arrangements, including religious systems, were absorbed by the empire. In my opinion, the Achaemenid expediency towards foreign peoples for the sake of imperial cohesion should be hereby discussed instead of "tolerance." On the word *aranya-*, Gignoux 1985.

Deities the *daivas* have repeatedly been identified with were either Mithra or Anahita.<sup>85</sup> This identification is rather unlikely since they still had a prominent place in the Zoroastrian pantheon independently of their omission in the *Gāthās*. Furthermore, their cults, especially under Darius and Xerxes, present an unbroken tradition, and both gods enjoyed the same rank as Ahuramazda in later royal inscriptions during the reign of Artaxerxes II (*ca.* 405/4–359/8) and Artaxerxes III (*ca.* 359/8–338).<sup>86</sup>

Another variant of this theory assumes that the confrontation of Zoroastrianism with the ancient Iranian cults began in pre-Achaemenid times continued throughout Xerxes's reign. The gods of these ancient cults should be therefore identified with the *daivas*, the Avestan *daevas*.<sup>87</sup> Although not fully elaborated, Boyce considered that not only religious considerations could have played a significant role, but also reasons linked with the royal family's legitimation.<sup>88</sup>

Following Frye's considerations, the *daivas* were not foreign deities, but rather Indo-Iranian gods still worshiped within the ancient Iranian heartland.<sup>89</sup> His argument is based on the volume concentration of XPh copies discovered around the Iranian Fars, especially in Persepolis and Pasargadae. Accordingly, Xerxes's actions would strongly allude to the cultural and religious Iranization process of Fars. In other words, it was all about the cultural clash, for which the Great King took repressive actions against Elamite ancient traditions for the sake of personal beliefs. Frye's theory brings numerous questions rather than answers and, also, is based on as yet unproven grounds. The significant problem is the lack of archeological evidence in the region. So far, there has not been any archeological site confirming the existence of an Ahuramazda temple or, for that matter, cult.<sup>90</sup> The same

<sup>85</sup> Dandamayev 1976: 226ff.

<sup>86</sup> Herzfeld 1937: 75; Frye 1984. Cf. A<sup>2</sup>Ha, A<sup>2</sup>Hb, A<sup>2</sup>Sa, A<sup>2</sup>Sd, A<sup>3</sup>Pa.

<sup>87</sup> Boyce 1984: 294. The only difference between Boyce and Herzfeld is that, in her version, there is no direct reference to the involvement of the Median Magi. Still, the spectrum of possible actors in this conflict is widened.

<sup>88</sup> This will be adequately addressed below.

<sup>89</sup> Frye 1984.

<sup>90</sup> Against this statement, Tilia 1972: 241ff.; Ghirshman 1976: 11ff.

goes for any evidence regarding the destruction of temples in Fars during Xerxes's reign or, let us say, during the first half of the fifth century BC. The second problem is that several cuneiform tablets from Persepolis seem to speak against the "Iranization" of Fars—and therefore, the whole Iranian world.

These tablets are grouped into two sets: the Persepolis Fortification Tablets (PFT) and the Persepolis Treasury Tablets (PTT). The first group (PFT) consists of *ca.* thirty thousand tablets and fragments and is dated to Darius's reign (*ca.* 510–494). The second group (PTT), a smaller set than the first one—consisting of *ca.* 750 tablets and fragments—is dated between 492 and 458. The whole material has not yet been fully published.<sup>91</sup> In the PFT set, we can find individual tablets—54 so far—dealing with "*rations for individuals with religious functions*"<sup>92</sup> and also with the allocation of food rations for the so-called "*lan ceremony*." Even though many religious ceremonies sponsored by the Persian empire in the form of regular food distribution are listed,<sup>93</sup> we can observe that the *lan* ceremony was the only significant sacrificial cult, "*für das von der Verwaltung ganz regelmäßige Zuteilungen ausgegeben wurden, Monat für Monat*."<sup>94</sup> This cultic diversity, maintained, promoted, and even cultivated by the empire, thus proves the free religious atmosphere in Persepolis and surroundings, contradicting the cultural Iranization of Fars.<sup>95</sup> However, precaution has to be the first of our considerations when dealing with this material. The volume published of PFT and PTT is though too insignificant to draw any decisive conclusion, but at least we can observe certain tendencies that contradict what was postulated so far.

<sup>91</sup> For PFT, Hallock 1969; Hallock 1973; Hallock 1978; Hallock 1985; Henkelman 2008: 58ff. For PTT, Cameron 1948; Cameron 1958; Cameron 1965. On the *état de la question*, Jones and Stopler 2008, Razmjou 2008. Only two out of the thirty thousand of the PFT (6,7%) and one out of the seven hundred fifty of the PTT (13,34%) have been so far published.

<sup>92</sup> Hallock 1969: 25ff. This group is labeled as "K1 texts."

<sup>93</sup> Ceremonies, such as Šip, Akriš, Nah, Nuaš, Pumazziš and Dausik are to be listed (cf. Razmjou 2004: 104).

<sup>94</sup> Koch 1992: 227. Cf. also Razmjou 2004: 106ff.; Henkelman 2008: 208ff.

<sup>95</sup> This ceremony expanded geographically from Persepolis (district I), through Shiraz (district II), to Fahlian and north (district III/IV). Against this view, Abdi 2007: 62.

Common ground to all these theories is the Achaemenid kings' Zoroastrian faith, the semantic affinities between the Avestan *daevas* and the XPh *daivas*, and the Iranian nature of the *daiva*. These three points have to be addressed now.

### *The Zoroastrian Confession of the Achaemenids*

The Zoroastrian literature is traditionally composed of six different text groups: the Avesta, a large number of clay tablets in Emalite, few Aramaic inscriptions, Sassanian inscriptions, Pahlavi texts (either Avestan translations or commentaries), and the Old Persian cuneiform inscriptions.<sup>96</sup> The reason for this arrangement should not be surprising: The Old Persian inscriptions make it clear as daylight that Ahuramazda is one of the most important deities for the Achaemenid kings, but not the only one. Mithra and Anahita were also mentioned in the royal inscriptions of Artaxerxes II and Artaxerxes III. General formulae reinforce this declaration, such as:

- *baga vazrka A.uramazdā* ("the/a great god is Ahuramazda"),<sup>97</sup>
- *A.uramazdā imām dahyāum/ima xšaçam/imām būmīm manā frābara* ("Ahuramazda bestowed upon me this land/this kingdom/this earth"),<sup>98</sup>
- *vašnā A.uramazdahā* ("by the favor of Ahuramazda"),<sup>99</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Skjærvø 2011: 318–320.

<sup>97</sup> The adjective *vazrka-* ("big, great") is commonly used as an epithet mainly for either Ahuramazda or the kings underlining these two figures' role for the imperial order. Exceptionally, it can also appear to depict further *būmī-* ("earth") and *xšaça-* ("kingship"). Cf. Schmitt 2014: 278.

<sup>98</sup> The compound verb *fra-bar* ("to bestow, to confer") appears exclusively with those three words, and always having Ahuramazda as subject (cf. Schmitt 2014: 152), remarking, among other things, that relationship between Ahuramazda and the king, his main subject on earth. Following the logic of imperial ideology, Ahuramazda is the only being able to bestow anything through his will upon anyone.

<sup>99</sup> The substantive *vašna-* ("favor, will") only occurs together with this very stereotypical phrase (cf. Schmitt 2014: 277).

- *A.uramazdāmai upastām abara* (“Ahuramazda bore me aid”),<sup>100</sup>
- *mām A.uramazdā pātu* (“me may Ahuramazda protect”).<sup>101</sup>

If we only were to consider this piece of evidence, it would seem quite evident that the Achaemenids took part in a belief system in which Ahuramazda was the most prominent deity. Nevertheless, this conundrum is not as apparent as it would seem to be, nor is it an easy one to find an answer for. The academic discussion has not reached a consensus on the question of whether this god is the same one Zarathustra himself preached, whether the embodiment of the Achaemenid Ahuramazda can be traced back to Zarathustra’s reform(s), and to what extent the Achaemenid kings were, in fact, Zoroastrians.<sup>102</sup> Unfortunately, all these unresolved problems cannot be addressed on these pages. However, it can be addressed the similar grounds through which we might tilt the balance in favor of the Achaemenids’ Zoroastrian faith, entailing that the Achaemenids were, at a very least, familiar with the Zoroastrian literature available to them—if not the whole Avesta, at a very least the *Gāthās*.<sup>103</sup>

### The Zoroastrian Henotheism

The first time the Avesta was written down was a little after 600 CE. Before this point, we are dealing with a collection of different texts, thematically similar, composed orally around the second and first mil-

<sup>100</sup> The substantive *upastā-* (“aid, assistance”) appears exclusively in phrases with the verb *abra* (to give, to bear). Cf. Schmitt 2014: 265ff. The word *A.uramazdāmai* can appear without the enclitic particle *-mai*.

<sup>101</sup> The verb *pā-* (“protect, guard”) is predominantly used in this formula directed to Ahuramazda. In later inscriptions, we can see it with an invocation to Mithra and Anahita. The invoked protection should only be granted for the king, his father, house, land, and achievements (cf. Schmitt 2014: 223).

<sup>102</sup> For further literature, Ahn 1992: 95; Henkelman 2008; Skjærvø 2011; Hintze 2015; de Jong 2015.

<sup>103</sup> Due to its two primary linguistic forms, the Avesta is formally divided into the *Old* and *Young(er) Avesta*. The *Old Avesta* is composed of the five *Gāthās* (the *Ahunauuaitī Gāthā*

lennia BCE. However, the oldest manuscript we have access to comes from either the thirteenth or fourteenth century.<sup>104</sup> Hence, we are talking about an interval of over fifteen hundred years between its composition and transcription. It would certainly be absurd to reckon that the religion preached by Zarathustra did not undergo significant changes throughout all these centuries.<sup>105</sup>

The idea of Spitama Zarathustra and his monotheism is very modern, at least among Western scholars, deeply influenced by the image of the Old Testament's Moses.<sup>106</sup> This monotheistic image of the prophet was then linked to his reform in the pre-Islamic world. This reform would entail, on the one hand, the rejection of the inherited Indo-Iranian beliefs and, on the other hand, the preaching of a new reformed monothetic religion whose principles are described in his *Gāthās*.<sup>107</sup> Nevertheless, as clearly stated by Skjærvø, there is nothing in the *Gāthās* themselves, attributed directly to Zarathustra by a large majority of scholars, that could suggest either a reform or his teachings. Moreover, his image appeared in the *Gāthās* already heavily transformed—or even mythologized—as an ideal ritual model.<sup>108</sup> This conclusion profoundly affects not only our idea of Zarathustra himself—his historicity—but also his reform and teachings—the rigorous monotheism ascribed to Zoroastrianism. Howbeit, the notion of Zarathustra and his monotheism is still very omnipresent, so that even the idea of other deities in the Old Avestan has been emphatically rejected. New philological research has made groundbreaking improvements with new and improved translations of the *Gāthās*, as well as of the Avesta.<sup>109</sup> These let us explicitly recognize in the several

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[Yasna 28–43], the *Uštaiuiiī Gāthā* [Yasna 43–46], the *Spəntāmañiiu Gāthā* [Yasna 47–50], the *Vohuxšaθrā Gāthā* [Yasna 51] and the *Vahištōišti Gāthā* [Yasna 53] and the *Yasna Haptañhāiti*. Zarathustra himself is traditionally regarded as the autor of the *Gāthās* (cf. Skjærvø 2003–2004; Panaino 2007).

<sup>104</sup> Cf. Kellens 1998.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. de Jong 2015.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Herrenschmidt 1987: 230. On Zoroastrianism in Greek sources, de Jong 1997: chapter 3.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Skjærvø 2011.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. Molé 1963; Skjærvø 2011.

<sup>109</sup> Humbach 1991; Hintze 2007.

passages throughout the Old Avesta that other *ahuras* (*Aməša Spəntas*: Ahuramazda's first creations) exist besides Ahuramazda and show up as personified beings, such as Good Thought (*Vohu Manah*), Best Order (*Aša Vahišta*), The Well-Deserved or Worthy (royal) Command (*Xšaθra Vairya*), Life-Giving Humility (*Spentā Ārmaiti*), Wholeness (*Haurvatāt*), and Immortality (*Amərətāt*).<sup>110</sup>

Now, coming back again to the Achaemenid inscriptions, it is clear that this conception of divinity pluralism was carried on without hesitation. Even before deities like Mithra and Anahita began to be explicitly mentioned, this plurality was already fully acknowledged. The following formulae illustrate this assertion:

- *A. uramazdahā hadā (visaibiš) bagaibiš* (“Ahuramazda together with [all] the gods”),<sup>111</sup>
- *A. uramazdāmaḷ upastām abara, utā aniyāha bagāha tayai hanti* (“Ahuramazda bore me aid and the other gods who are”),<sup>112</sup>
- *A. uramazdahā, haya maθišta bagānām* (“Ahuramazda, the greatest of gods”).<sup>113</sup>

Though not openly mentioned, other deities' existence is fully attested in the Old Persian inscriptions and the *Gāthās*, leaving no space for doubts. However, without trying to determine the pantheon of Zoroastrianism, it can be ensured that in both literary sources, a prominent place within this pantheon was granted to Ahuramazda alone, the greatest and supreme of gods. Hence, the Old Persian faith, call it Mazdaism or Zoroastrianism, is undoubtedly a henotheistic belief system.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. Plut. *Mor.* 370 A (= *Is.* 47).

<sup>111</sup> Found four times with *visaibiš* in DPd (three times) and DSe; and nine times without *visaibiš* in DSt, XPb, XPc, XPd, XPg, XSc, XVa, D<sup>2</sup>Sa, and A<sup>2</sup>Hd.

<sup>112</sup> Found only twice in DB.

<sup>113</sup> Found eight times in AsHa, DHa, DPd, DPh, DSf, XEa, XVa, and A<sup>2</sup>Hc.

## Semantic and Lexical Dualism

When depicting the education of Persian children, Herodotus stated that these were particularly instructed in horse riding (*ἵππεύειν*), archery (*τοξεύειν*), and telling the truth (*ἀληθίζεσθαι*).<sup>114</sup> Afterward, Herodotus says that the Persians “*hold lying to be the foulest of all.*”<sup>115</sup> The emphasis Herodotus put on the remark of “telling lies” (*ψεύδεσθαι*) has some particular resemblance to the dualism found in the Gathic and Young(er) Avestan *aša-drug* doctrine. This conceptual similitude can also be traced back to the dualistic *ṛta-drauga* conflict of the Achaemenid royal inscriptions best exemplified with Darius’s texts and XPh.<sup>116</sup> In the *Ahunauuaitī Gāthā* (*Yasna* 32, 3–5), Zarathustra rejected the *daevas*, paragon of evil thoughts, words, and actions.<sup>117</sup> By doing so, Zarathustra tries to contrast the difference between Evil Thinking (*Aka Manah*) and the world of Lies (*drug*), on the one hand, and between Good Thought (*Vohu Manah*) and the world of Truth (*aša*). This terminology is strikingly akin to the one used in XPh, particularly in the paragraphs exposed above. In XPh, the term *daiva* is used in a pejorative sense and appears in the background of this polarizing world view, precisely as seen in the Avesta. Kellens also demonstrated convincingly that the Old Persian dualistic conception entails another linguistic phenomenon featured in both the Avesta and the Achaemenid inscriptions called the “lexical dichotomy.”<sup>118</sup> The lexical dichotomy should be understood as the doubling of the vocabulary, allowing a strict classification of an expression into a negative or positive context, occurring with the help of two words available for a term.<sup>119</sup>

Both points prove the linguistic correspondence of Old Persian with Avestan terms and demonstrate that Old Persian as a language,

<sup>114</sup> Hdt. I 136, 2: “*παιδεύουσι δὲ τοὺς παῖδας ἀπὸ πενταέτεος ἀρχάμενοι μέχρι εἰκοσαέτεος τρία μῶνα, ἰχνεύειν καὶ τοξεύειν καὶ ἀληθίζεσθαι*” (cf. How and Wells I 1936: 116).

<sup>115</sup> Hdt. I 138, 1: “*αἰσχιστον δὲ αὐτοῖσι τὸ ψεύδεσθαι νερόμισται.*”

<sup>116</sup> Cf. Bianchi 1977: 3ff.; Boyce 1982: 118ff.; Kellens 1983: 112ff.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. Humbach 1991: II 94ff.

<sup>118</sup> Kellens 1983: 112ff.

<sup>119</sup> Criticism of this can be found in Widengren 1965: 145.

like Old Avestan, tends to operate in a very dualistic manner, pairing moral and ethical concepts also found in the *Gāthās*.<sup>120</sup>

*The Semantic Affinities between Daēuuas (Avesta) and Daiva (XPh)*

The Old Persian *daiivā* comes from the reconstructed Old Indo-Iranian *daiuá-* (“heavenly, celestial, god”). Its semantic value as a word describing celestial beings was carried on by other Indo-Iranian languages, best exemplified by the Vedic Sanscrit (*devá-* for “heavenly, luminous, divine”). Its etymological equivalent is well represented by the Latin word *deus/divus*, reflecting its Indo-European origin.<sup>121</sup> With the emergence of both Old and Young(er) Avestan languages, we start to witness specific changes on a semantic level since *daēuuā-* began to mean mainly “demon,” even though it was still used to describe “god,” although to contrast with the word *mašiiā*—man. For in the *Gāthās*, they still constitute a separate category of divinities, although partially rejected and not always categorized as intrinsic maleficent beings.<sup>122</sup> The *daēuuas* were still worshiped at Zarathustra’s lifetime by people who already accepted the religion of the *Gāthās* (*Yasna* 32.8) and Iranian leaders (*Yasna* 32.3, 46.1). With the *Gāthās*, the *daēuuas* also start to be reproached for being incapable of proper divine discernment and for accepting the improper religion. Their full rejection and demonization within the Zoroastrianism were slowly taking place, so much so that they are represented in the Young(er) Avesta as small, malevolent, and deceitful genies whose primary function is the disturbance of the world order, human welfare, and orderliness in human religious life. In other words, to directly antagonize the world order established by Ahuramazda.<sup>123</sup> Although this development seems to be relatively

<sup>120</sup> For further examples of Avestan formulae in the Old Persian beyond the *Gāthās*, Skjærvø 1999.

<sup>121</sup> The word is attested only once in Greek by Hesychios of Alexandria (s. v. *Δεῖβας*; ed. Latte 1953: 421).

<sup>122</sup> Benveniste 1967; Kellens 1983. Cf. *Yasna* 44.20.

<sup>123</sup> Whether the complete rejection of the *daēuuas* from the Zoroastrian pantheon was a development initiated by Zarathustra is not the subject of this paper. For further analysis on the subject, Skjærvø 2015: 416.

gradual in the sacred texts, it is near to impossible to single out at which point precisely in the history of Zoroastrianism this transformation occurred.<sup>124</sup> What we encounter in the Old Persian terminology on the *daiva* is undoubtedly a truly clear rendition of this word from the Avestan, for its negative sense was nearly precisely incorporated into the Old Persian tradition reflected in XPh.

However, we also have to admit that it is challenging to reconcile quite fragmentary and scarce—represented by the Old Persian sources—with chronologically irregular data—represented by the Avesta.<sup>125</sup> This observation dramatically hinders from drawing any conclusion on how radicalized Xerxes seemed to be for some of the most prominent scholars. The fact is that, at the very least, the Achaemenids were very conscious about the Zoroastrian literature, so much so that it was a relevant thematic constant on their inscriptions. Nevertheless, the degree of Xerxes's Zoroastrian faith cannot be established through the evidence of usage of a single word four times.

*The Iranian Origin of the Daivas (or their Identification with Iranian Gods)*

At the beginning of this section, it was pointed out that Herzfeld considered the denomination *baga* exclusively for foreign deities, whereas *daivas* would have been reserved for Iranian gods. Though probably unwillingly, his research scheme was reduced to a dualistic working frame, reinforced partially for his problematic interpretation of the Avestan and Old Persian, whose linguistic interpretations fell victim to several philological inaccuracies, given the time he happened to live in. One might even say, some of the readings Herzfeld was relying on for his interpretations are outdated.

<sup>124</sup> Cf. Nyberg 1938: 96; Bianchi 1977; Boyce 1975: 17ff., 251ff.; Boyce 1982: 17; Boyce 1992: 72ff.

<sup>125</sup> For further arguments on the reconciliation of these two factors, Herrenschildt and Kellens 1993.

Nevertheless, his influence is undeniable. Almost all his remarks on the XPh puzzle have set the benchmark for further discussion: translation and interpretation of unclear Old Persian words, the dating, an interpretative model to contextualize the inscription. However, much of his assertions denote rushed attempts to try to coerce fragmentary evidence he had at his disposal into very disputed conclusions. The evidence that reassures the Old Iranian origin of the word *daiva* cannot be denied.

On the other side, the fact that no known Iranian dialects attest to the survival of a positive sense for this word cannot be the result of innovation but rather should be understood as an original element of the Iranian language and religion themselves.<sup>126</sup> This certainty revolves around the word itself, not around the identification of the *daivas* themselves. Not even in the *Gāthās*, the *daēuuas* can be singled out by name, but instead, they are identified as an anonymous collective of beings whose only mission is to disturb everything Ahuramazda has set out in the world for humanity and its well-being. This assertion is best exemplified through the following formulae:

*Y. 30, 6: aiiā nōiṭ ərəš vīšiiātā daēuuācinā, hiiat īš ā dābaomā  
pərəs<ə>mnəṅg upā jasat, hiiat vərənātā acištəm manō,  
at aēsəməm həṅduuārəntā, yā bənaiien ahūm marətānō.*

*Y. 30, 6:* The Daevas do not at all discriminate rightly between these two (spirits). Because delusion comes over them when they take counsel, so that they choose the worst thought. Therefore, they gather with Wrath, with which the mortals sicken existence.<sup>127</sup>

*Y. 32, 3: at yūš daēuuā vīspāṅhō Akāt Manəṅhō stā ciθrəm,  
yascā vā maš yazaitē, Driūjascā Pairimatōišcā;  
šiiəoməm aipī daibitānā, yāiš asrūdūm būmiiā haptaiθē,*

<sup>126</sup> Herrenschildt and Kellens 1993.

<sup>127</sup> Text according to Humbach 1991; West 2011. Translation by the former.

Y. 32, 3: (Zarathustra speaks): But you, O you Daevas all, are seed (sprung) from Evil Thought, and (so is that alleged) master who worships both, you as well as the activities of Deceit and Contempt, for which you, again and again, have become notorious in (this) seventh (of the seven climes) of the world.

*Y. 32, 4: yāṭ yūš tā fra.mīmaθā, yā mašiiā acištā dantō  
vaxšəntē daēuuō.zuštā, vaṇhəuš sīzdiiamnā manaṇhō,  
Mazdā Ahurahiīā xratəuš nasiiantō Ašāatcā*

Y. 32, 4: insofar as you order those worst (things), (by) offering which the mortals may grow (as) minions of (you) Daevas, flinching from good thought (and) straying from the intellect of the Wise Ahura and from Truth.

*Y. 32, 5: tā dəbənaotā mašīm hujiiātōiš amərə<ta>tātascā,  
hiiaṭ vā akā manaṇhā yəṅg daēuuəṅg akascā mainiiuš,  
akā šiiəθnəm vacaṇhā yā fra.cinas drəguuaṇtəm xšaiiō.*

Y. 32, 5: Therefore, you lure the mortal one away from good life and immortality, because the evil spirit along with evil thought (had lured) you, the Daevas, (away from them), (the evil spirit) as well as the action (inspired) by the evil word, by which a ruler recognizes a deceitful person.

This is how the Old Persian *daivas* should be interpreted, namely as the metaphorical representation of everything that can put the world order in peril. The world order, as given to humankind, is the manifestation of Ahuramazda's will and, as such, should be protected through god's designated agent on earth, the Persian king. Out of an ideological-propagandistic perspective, the Achaemenid king's mission is to safeguard the world order given by Ahuramazda. From a pragmatic point of view, this means that the king must protect his position of power no matter what, since whichever disturbance that came about within his sphere of control always threatened his situation, somewhat precarious.

That is the main reason why Gregor Ahn entitled his Ph.D. dissertation “*Religiöse Herrscherlegitimation im Achämenidischen Iran.*” By using the word *Herrscherlegitimation* (“legitimation of sovereign”) and not *Herrschaftslegitimation* (“legitimation of sovereignty”), he rightly remarks that the monarchy as a form of government was never questioned, but rather the person in charge whose power was bestowed upon him as designated successor of previous kings or taken over by and for him.

One last variant of the Iranian theory should be discussed. A. Olmstead in 1948 argued, based primarily upon Roman sources, that the XPh discussion should not be focussed on the Iranian heartland but rather on Bactria, for this satrapy was the troubled land led by Ariamenes, according to Plutarch and Justin, satrap of Bactria, Xerxes’s half-brother, and Darius’s oldest son.<sup>128</sup> After Darius’s death and finding out that Xerxes was eligible to the throne, Ariamenes, as the oldest son, marched from Bactria to meet the newly appointed king for claiming back the position he supposedly was to inherit.<sup>129</sup> On the other hand, Olmstead also sought to identify the *daivadana* in the land of the Dahae, a remote region from the Iranian heartland where the cult to Ahuramazda might have well been alive. Being ready to contend with his half-brother over the throne, Ariamenes was then placated by Xerxes with gifts and promised to become the Persian court’s highest after the king himself. Accepting these conditions, Ariamenes voluntarily put the diadem onto his brother’s head.

Due to the quite contradictory and sparse written sources, we can observe that Ariamenes as the satrap of Bactria did not rebel against his brother and the empire. However, as Darius’s first-born son, he only raised some objections against Xerxes, which were finally settled by his paternal uncle (Artabanos in Plutarch and Artaphanes in

<sup>128</sup> Plut. *Mor.* 173b (= *Reg. et imp. apoph.*), *Mor.* 488d (= *De frat. amor.* 18); *Themist.* 14.3; *Iust.* II 10. According to this description, we can identify this Ariamenes with Artobazanes, Darius’s first-born son.

<sup>129</sup> *Mor.* 173b. Notwithstanding the elaborateness in *Mor.* 488d, Plutarch assesses the following: *Ἀριαμένης μὲν οὖν κατέβαινεν ἐκ Μήδων* and not from Bactria. In *Hdt.* VII 2, Xerxes fell into disagreement over the right to the throne with Artobazanes, not Ariamenes.

Justin).<sup>130</sup> E. Benveniste and P. Briant equated the Ariamenes story and character with the Herodotean episode of Masistes, implying that Plutarch's description represents a corruption of the Herodotean tradition.<sup>131</sup> The story origins of Masistes and Ariamenes, apart from the fact that they would represent the same person, are quite different from each other and diverge in nearly every detail: the former was ready to become premeditatedly insurgent from Bactria based on the humiliation of his wife, which Xerxes prevented in due time with severity. Instead, the latter only claimed the throne's right as first-born in peace, which he voluntarily renounced peacefully. Except for the equation between the Old Persian name "Masistes" (*mabišta-*), whose translation into Greek would be *μέγιστος*, and the honorary title awarded to Ariamenes, "the highest after the Great King,"<sup>132</sup> there is no convincing reasons to regard both figures as the same.<sup>133</sup>

As far as the *daivadana* is concerned, Olmstead assured that these were the *Dahā*, nomadic people located in the region east of the Caspian Sea or the river Iaxartes, who, according to Strabo.<sup>134</sup> Regardless of Olmstead's attempt to locate the *daiva* episode within the Iranian region (Bactria and *Dahā*), it is not easy to assume that we are dealing with two different events. As already stated, it seems more comprehensible that both episodes deal with the same population.

Although every single version of this group of theories has been the center of multiple scholarly discussions when dealing with the XPh interpretation, they lack any factual corroboration and methodological

<sup>130</sup> Cf. Briant 2002: 524; Riminucci 2006: 193.

<sup>131</sup> Benveniste 1966: 53; Briant 2002: 524.

<sup>132</sup> Plut. *Mor.* 173b (ἐκ τούτου μέγιστος ἦν [*i.e.*, Ariamenes] παρ' αὐτῷ [*i.e.*, Xerxes] καὶ παρεῖχεν εἴνον ἐαυτόν), *Mor.* 488d ([Xerxes speaking]: "τούτοις σε τιμᾶ νῦν Ξέρξης ὁ ἀδελφός: ἐὰν δὲ βασιλεὺς ἀναγορευθῆ, πάντων ἔση παρ' αὐτῷ μέγιστος").

<sup>133</sup> It remains open whether Olmstead was of this opinion. Based on Briant's interpretation, this would seem to have been the case, for neither Plutarch nor Justin mentioned a revolt or, at the very least, the attempt of one. In contrast, Herodotus is the only reference to this brotherly quarrel (cf. Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1980: 69–73).

<sup>134</sup> Strab. XI 8, 2. In Tac. *Ann.* XI 10, 2, it is the river Sinden "quod Dahas Ariosque disternat."

completeness that would suggest a solution for XPh. From Herzfeld's erroneous assumption that the word *baga* refers to only non-Iranian deities, up until Frye's remarks whose logic can be neither confirmed nor refuted by the available material to us, the theories discussed above remain mostly either refused or unproven. A final consideration to this section is that all these theories have clearly shown a certain theoretical obstinacy for wanting to understand the XPh irreversibly in a religious manner, hindering a fuller and richer interpretation of this inscription tremendously.

### *The Ahistorical Character of XPh*

The last hypothesis, defended in particular by two well-known scholars specialized in Achaemenid history, has given rise to a novel perspective worthy of analysis, attempting to provide an original interpretation of XPh. According to Briant and H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, XPh is a unique text whose primary function is the proclamation and declaration of royal power and authority to a broad audience—the Persian subjects. This text deliberately used specific linguistic formulae, which in this case were heavily laden not only with Zoroastrian connotations but also with ancient Near Eastern elements—particularly of Assyrian and Babylonian origins—, in order to create an institutionally and ideologically simplified communication channel among the kings and their subjects, and to legitimize and recognize the rulers' position as head of the Persian empire in the face of their subjects.<sup>135</sup> Moreover, due to the tremendous chronological vagueness not only in this inscription but also in the entire corpus of Achaemenid inscriptions, it was pointed out that, except for Darius's epitaph in Naqsh-e Rostam (DNa), all Achaemenid cuneiform inscriptions should be ascribed a fundamentally ahistorical character.<sup>136</sup>

<sup>135</sup> Briant 2002; Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1980.

<sup>136</sup> As criticism of the "ahistoricity" of the Achaemenid cuneiform inscriptions, Ahn 1993: 112 (n. 106). It is correct to point out that the royal inscriptions (apart from Darius's tomb inscription) do not have any chronological information. Nevertheless, the lack of chronological infor-

According to Sancisi-Weerdenburg, XPh should be interpreted so that it led us to clearly understand that all insurgents, regardless of their origin, cultural customs, or religious beliefs should be punished and, if necessary, their sanctuaries—or, for that matter, places beloved by those punished—should be destroyed. Accordingly, the word *daivas* would only be a superordinate term used to characterize an undermined place reigned by chaos and confusion, both of which were capable of bringing great embarrassment and uncertainty to the world order bestowed upon the kings by Ahuramazda, as well as to the authority of the rulers in the eyes of the Persian subjects. For this reason, the linguistic formulae used on all inscriptions are intentionally crafted to ensure the kings' optimal self-representations publicly and to legitimize the royal authority within the empire under all circumstances.<sup>137</sup>

Assuming the total absence of chronological and geographical references, Briant concludes that all Achaemenid royal inscriptions—except for DNa—do not constitute narrative texts truthful to historical events but rather serve to announce royal ideology not ascribed to any precise historical framework. The inscriptions were never intended to convey accurate historical narrative information but were exclusively used to legitimize the kings' position and, accordingly, to insure their royal power against their subjects. As a result, Xerxes's actions do not refer to any punctual uprising carried through by a reluctant nation to the new overlords or any specific royal actions placed in a punctual place or time. In all Achaemenid inscriptions, one can find the same literary *topoi*, according to which every valorous ruler has to be capable to demonstrate his abilities as the new king by permanently restoring the imperial—and thus also the earthly and divine world—order, and, at the same time, securing the justice at the beginning of his reign.<sup>138</sup>

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mation does not mean that all events documented on the inscriptions have an ahistorical character. If this had been the case, then an ahistoric character should be attributed to the Achaemenid building inscriptions (proof of the building activity documented on the Xerxes inscriptions in XPa, XPd, XPf (§4, 36–41), XPi, XPm, XSc. References to the building activity of Darius in Xerxes inscriptions in XPc, XPf (§4, 36–41), XSa, XSd).

<sup>137</sup> Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1980: 29–31, 266ff.

<sup>138</sup> Briant 2002: 166.

Moreover, the inscriptions intend not only to illustrate the permanence of royal power and the transcendence of royal virtues but also to give to the subjects the image of the boundless power of an almost omnipotent ruler whose dominion is subordinated exclusively to Ahuramazda's will. Briant even goes further with his arguments reaching the following conclusion when discussing the Achaemenids' idealized image of space and imperial power:

*It must thus be recognized that neither the lists nor the representations constitute administrative catalogs yielding a realistic image of the imperial realm. It was not administrative districts that the Great Kings wanted to represent. The word used in the inscriptions is dahyu 'people.' The kings did not intend to give a list that was either complete or exact. The inscribed lists are nothing but a selection of subject countries. Darius and his successors are neither archivists nor historians. What they intend to leave to posterity is not administrative data. The inscriptions accompanying the reliefs show instead that what they wished to transmit to their contemporaries was a politico-ideological message.*

From this perspective, we can gain a better understanding of the data irregularities found in the different country lists and reliefs since these were not drafted with the intention to portrait historical or, for that matter, accurate events, but to portrait a particular image of the world concerned almost exclusively with political and, most notably, ideological issues.<sup>139</sup>

One could rightly argue as criticism two things: first, both theoretical approaches might seem temptingly too simplistic—at a very first glance—compared to the other theories. However, this new theoretical approach could considerably help to acknowledge, in an improved manner, the discrepancies between Darius's and Xerxes's country lists and reliefs. Again, the logic behind all country lists and reliefs cannot be explained away with the help of specific historical events, but only by the Great King's intentionality, which ultimately cannot be determined

<sup>139</sup> Briant 2002: 177.

except by the fact that the inscriptions were both instruments of power to spread royal ideology and served to justify their ruling position. This reasoning would be the only factor taken into consideration behind the designing of such monuments, and other examinations should not be considered essential, primarily since they cannot be further explained or verified with the available material. Secondly, one can rightfully question what category Darius's and Xerxes's building inscriptions would belong to within this framework. Although Briant and Sancisi-Weerdenburg never directly addressed this question, it must not be disregarded as it still shows theoretical inconsistencies that need to be explained. Consequently, as in the case of the theories discussed above, this explanatory model remains also partly incomplete.

## CONCLUSION

The initial questions asked at the beginning of this paper remain, to a certain extent, still open. First and foremost, it must be admitted that it has been a challenging undertaking to find an adequate answer to a long-unsolved problem with the available material, which can sometimes be very contradictory. Nevertheless, this paper aimed to give the reader a compact introduction into this unresolved problem and from which angle to tackle it, in case someone else wants to continue investigating it more systematically. In the first part of this paper was demonstrated that XPh provides certain reliable information, based upon the well-grounded information, such as the structural continuum regarding the country list and paragraphs §4 and §5. When it comes to interpreting §5 and accurate dating attempts, scholars encounter significant uncertainties that cannot be resolved with the tools we so far have.

The Babylonian theory, considered for several years the largely accurate and practically unchallenged explanatory framework for understanding XPh, was based on the incorrect reading of a Herodotean passage (Hdt. I 183), which could only be revised in 1987. The Athenian theory, which in a sense was a reaction to Herzfeld's Iranian interpretation, also posed several methodological problems,

which in turn were due to the tendentious and arbitrary reading of yet another Herodotean passage.

The Iranian theory—or, better, the group of theories—is indeed quite fascinating, especially since it does not attempt to find a genesis in either Herodotus or any other Greek source—to a large extent. However, the problem with this interpretative model largely depends on how methodological disjointed the group of theories is. Although they share a common starting point—Herzfeld’s considerations—, they tend to take different paths, making it challenging to trace them all together. Another hurdle when analyzing these theories is that one immediately stumbles upon the old scholar discussion of whether the Achaemenid kings were Zoroastrians or not. Although this matter can only be answered under the assertion that the royal inscriptions contain a large amount of vocabulary heavily laden with Zoroastrian connotations, we cannot determine how much influence this confession—for lack of a better word—would have exerted upon pragmatical state affairs. It is noteworthy that even the Iranian scholars themselves are not able to answer whether this deity, as testified on the Achaemenid inscriptions, corresponds perfectly to the same deity preached by Zoroaster. The last variant of the Iranian group of theories is Olmstead’s Bactrian theory, which must be excluded due to theoretical inconsistency.

The exposition and presentation of the first three hypotheses tried to show that Xerxes, unlike his predecessors, made a radical change in the Achaemenid religious policy, confirming the biased Greek image—mainly induced by Herodotus—towards the Persian kings. The last hypothesis is quite fascinating and seems to conclude several deadlocked problems presented in the first theses. This one, putting the ideological nature and function of XPh as center of argumentation, enjoys a high acceptance and consensus among scholars nowadays.<sup>140</sup> For it goes far beyond the textual content of the inscription itself and attempts to bring not only XPh but all inscriptions to a more revealing status, a continuum with regards to their content. By treating them thematically all together and not separately, it tries to pre-

<sup>140</sup> Most notably in de Jong 2015.

vent the mistakes of other interpretative models, which have shown mainly methodological deficit, thus illustrating its methodologic advantage. Although the last explanatory model may also offer a couple of not easily solvable questions, it is the most comprehensive and plausible one up until this point, in my opinion.

As a final remark, this can be added: when becoming king or having been king for already a couple of years, Xerxes intended to present his (recently) acquired unique position to the Persian subjects since the presentation of the royal power was an essential royal matter to be dealt with. Following Darius's example, he first had inscriptions made that would serve to legitimize his precarious position. It is interesting to note that Xerxes, due to his upbringing at the heart of the empire itself—the first generation growing up as a Persian prince—, consciously used specific linguistic formulations strongly marked by religious connotations and viewed as ubiquitous among Persian subjects. Thus, Xerxes set out—continuing his father's strategy—an institutionally and ideologically communication channel among the image he wanted to be perceived by and his subjects—the recipients of this magnificent propagandistic construct. Whether the *daiva* event corresponds to a factual episode in Achaemenid history should not be thus regarded as the neuralgic point for understanding this problem. Instead, we should focus on the deliberate usage—or even instrumentalization—of religious expressions and the function of royal inscriptions as the vehicle of royal propaganda. Indeed, the omission and vagueness of any historical reference points on XPh lead us to believe that the ideological factor was the most crucial element behind this text. Should the public embarrassment and punishment of a specific rebellious population have been the paramount consideration for XPh, the question arises by itself: why then did not Xerxes order his officers to explicitly name that treacherous province so everyone could undoubtedly know to whom is XPh referring? By doing so, Xerxes not only could have set a prime example on how to deal with insubordination through public humiliation but also could have allowed him to present himself as a more active ruler and eager to defend the interest of his empire no matter what.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that XPh and all Achaemenid inscriptions have an absolute ahistorical character, from which no historical information can be referred to. The rhetoric of XPh represents a discourse of royal legitimacy that establishes, through familiar vocabulary to the recipients, that possible reprisals have to be put into effect against subjects who had been unwilling to follow royal orders. The punishment for unsubordinated subjects must be enforced independently of religious and cultural customs.

The “putting it over in its proper place” was not only enforced for the sake of metaphysical consideration—although it does not mean they played a role—but also for the sake of the image the kings tried to maintain to secure their precarious position as long as possible.

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# HUMAN RITUAL KILLING AT DOMUZTEPE AND UR: A BATAILLAN PERSPECTIVE

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## **Summary: Human Ritual Killing at Domuztepe and Ur: A Bataillan Perspective**

The ritual killing of humans in the ancient Near East has received increased attention in recent years. Material evidence for the practice is commonly interpreted in terms of theories of ritual and sacrifice developed by prominent scholars of comparative religion during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Typical interpretive models include communication and communion with supernatural beings and gift exchange as a social and political tool. This article provides a brief overview of these recent trends in the study of human sacrifice in the ancient Near East before turning to George Bataille's views of the practice in the context of his theories of general economy and religion. It is argued that his notions of expenditure and transgression serve as useful tools for the interpretation of several instances of anthropoctony in the ancient Near East.

**Keywords:** Human Ritual Killing – Ancient Near East – Bataille – Expenditure – Transgression

## **Resumen: La matanza de seres humanos en Domuztepe y Ur: una perspectiva Batailleana**

La matanza ritual de seres humanos en el Cercano Oriente antiguo ha recibido mayor atención en los últimos años. La evidencia material de esta práctica se interpreta comúnmente en términos de las teorías del ritual y del sacrificio desarrolladas por destacados académicos de la religión comparada de finales del siglo XIX y principios del XX. Los modelos interpretativos típicos incluyen la comunicación y la comunión con seres sobrenaturales y el intercambio de regalos como una herramienta social y política. Este artículo ofrece un breve repaso de estas tendencias recientes en el estudio del sacrificio humano en el Cercano Oriente antiguo para luego enfocarse en la

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