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Power and Opposition in the Ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean World

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Power and Opposition in the Ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean World

«Like an unseen god» (Ctesias F1b §21, 7 Lenfant): The Unapproachability of the Near Eastern Kings in Greek Sources as Tool of Power

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Abstract. *The aim of this paper is to review the inaccessibility of the Near Eastern kings in Greek sources as a tool of power: inaccessibility, in fact, was considered by the Greeks an essential feature in order to rule over Asia; nonetheless, it is important to note that Greek sources on the one hand emphasize the importance and the political use of this tool and, on the other hand, reflect on the weakness of power built through the king's inaccessibility.*

Rezumat: *Obiectivul acestui articol este de a analiza felul în care inaccesibilitatea suveranilor din Orientul Apropiat a fost prezentată în sursele grecești ca un instrument al puterii. Mai mult decât atât, aceasta a fost considerate de către greci o condiție imperativă pentru a stăpâni Asia. Totuși, necesită observat faptul că sursele grecești accentuează importanța utilizării acestui instrument al puterii, dar în același timp scot în evidență și fragilitatea autorității fundamentate pe inaccesibilitatea suveranului.*

Numerous classical sources describe the elaborate procedures that made it possible to gain access to the Great King, or at least attempt to, at the Persian court:[1] admission to the king's presence required a complicated court protocol (difficult to reconstruct accurately) and involved long, frustrating waits.[2] Achaemenid kings are usually described as practically inaccessible, almost invisible, a feature that may also have given them an aura of

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[1] BRIANT 1996, 234-235; 269-274; 357-359 = 2002, 222-223; 258-262; 345-347; MILLER 1997, 125-127; ALLEN 2005; LLEWELLYN-JONES 2013, 66-72.

[2] Some aspects of the Achaemenid court etiquette are still debated (cf. bibliography at n. 1). In particular, it can be mentioned the known case of the προσκύνησις. See on this topic, for example, BRIANT 1996, 235 = 2002, 223; LENFANT 2009, 233-235; MATARESE 2014; TUPLIN 2017.

exceptionality.[3] Among the peculiar traits of this court etiquette, also ascribed by classical sources to Near Eastern kingdoms earlier than the Persians,[4] the remoteness of the king particularly impressed the Greeks, as is shown, for example, in the famous passage of the *de Mundo*[5] (which, as emphasized by Briant and Allen, among others,[6] provides a valuable summary of the Greeks' ideas on these features of Persian and Near Eastern court protocol).

First of all, as noted by scholars,[7] this inaccessibility (which, as already said, in Greek sources is not only a Persian feature but, more in general, a Near Eastern one) is usually viewed with suspicion by the Greeks and it also confers, in most cases, a tyrannical overtone to the king (as shown by the very significant Deioces in Herodotus I 96-101). Furthermore, the Oriental (and in particular Persian) nature of this feature emerges on several occasions. For example, Thucydides' words (I 130) on Pausanias can be emphasized: among the other obvious Persianizing traits adopted by Pausanias, the historian also mentions that he «made himself difficult of access» (δυσπρόσοδόν τε αὐτὸν παρεῖχε).[8]

In general, it seems clear that the Greeks were deeply affected by this specific element of the Achaemenid court, an aspect which, besides the historical and historiographical thoughts it has awakened (which will be discussed later), appears to have troubled them for very concrete reasons. For instance, two amusing pieces of evidence such as Aristophanes *Ach.* 80-82[9] and Epicrates fr. 3, 10-13 K.-A[10] can be mentioned in this regard: they show the irritation of the Greeks, forced to wait and overcome many hurdles in order to communicate with the Great Kings or the satraps (cf. Xen. *Hell.* I 6, 6-10; Plut. *Lys.* 6, 6-8); these adversities have been comically exaggerated in Aristophanes' verses and used as a paradigmatic example in Epicrates' fragment.[11]

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[3] See, for example, [Arist.] *Mund.* 398a (with a characterization of the Great King as a god; on the issue of the controversial Persian royal divinity, see Tuplin 2017). Cf. Hdt. I 99, 2 (referred to the Median king Deioces) and Ctesias F 1b § 21, 7 Lenfant (on the Assyrian king Ninyas).

[4] Cf. *infra.*

[5] [Arist.] *Mund.* 398a. αὐτὸς μὲν γὰρ, ὡς λόγος, ἵδρυτο ἐν Σούσοις ἢ Ἐκβατάνοις, παντὶ ἀόρατος, θαυμαστὸν ἐπέχων βασίλειον οἶκον καὶ περίβολον χρυσῷ καὶ ἠλέκτρῳ καὶ ἐλέφαντι ἀστράπτοντα· πυλῶνες δὲ πολλοὶ καὶ συνεχεῖς πρόθυρά τε συχνοῖς εἰργόμενα σταδίοις ἀπ' ἀλλήλων θύραις τε χαλκαῖς καὶ τείχεσι μεγάλοις ὠχύρωτο· ἔξω δὲ τούτων ἄνδρες οἱ πρῶτοι καὶ δοκιμώτατοι διεκεκόσμηντο, οἱ μὲν ἀμφ' αὐτὸν τὸν βασιλέα δορυφόροι τε καὶ θεράποντες, οἱ δὲ ἑκάστου περιβόλου φύλακες, πυλωροί τε καὶ ὠτακουσταὶ λεγόμενοι, ὡς ἂν ὁ βασιλεὺς αὐτός, δεσπότης καὶ θεὸς ὀνομαζόμενος, πάντα μὲν βλέποι, πάντα δὲ ἀκούοι.

[6] BRIANT 1996, 270-272 = 2002, 259-260; ALLEN 2005, 39.

[7] MITCHELL 2013, 43-44; ALLEN 2005, 39; LLEWELLYN-JONES 2013, 47.

[8] See GOMME 1956, 433; HORNBLOWER 1991, 216.

[9] Ar. *Ach.* 80-82: ἔτει τετάρτῳ δ' εἰς τὰ βασίλει' ἤλθομεν· / ἀλλ' εἰς ἀπόπατον ᾤχετο στρατιὰν λαβών, / κἄχεζεν ὀκτὼ μῆνας ἐπὶ χρυσῶν ὀρῶν.

[10] Epicrates fr. 3, 10-13 K.-A.: καὶ Λαῖς ὀρθῶς <νῦν> νομίζοιτ' ἂν τέρας. / αὕτη γὰρ οὖν ὁπότ' ἦν νεοττὸς καὶ νέα, / ὑπὸ τῶν στατήρων ἦν ἀπηγριωμένη, / εἶδές δ' ἂν αὐτῆς Φαρνάβαζον θᾶττον ἄν·

[11] See BRIANT 1996, 358 = 2002, 346; TUPLIN 1996, 152; MILLER 1997, 125; OLSON 2002, 96-97.

That the Greeks were struck by this characteristic of the Oriental court can also be inferred by the fact that they speculated on the origin of this feature and on its political purpose (two aspects related to one another). We have some indications of this reflection in literary sources, historiographical in particular. Given the large number of testimonies on this topic, the discussion can be limited to a few examples (confined between the end of V and the beginning of IV century) which can be considered particularly meaningful and useful to clarify some issues, and also because they deal with the central moment of the establishment of this practice.

As regards the origin, the first aspect to point out is that Greek historians ascribed the introduction of this feature to various Near Eastern populations and/or kings: for example, it has been attributed to the Median king Deioces by Herodotus (Hdt. I 96-100), to the Assyrian Ninyas by Ctesias (F 1b § 21 Lenfant), to the Persian Cyrus by Xenophon (Xen. Xen. *Cyr*. VII 5, 37-55) and to Atossa, a figure whose chronological and geographical collocation is unclear, by Hellanicus (*FGrHist* 4 FF 178a-c). For different reasons (and it is interesting, as we will see dealing with all these stories, to reflect on the Greek etiological speculation on this matter), each of these figures substantially reformed the royal organization, providing it with a feature of unapproachability, typically Oriental for the Greeks. The other aspect to emphasize is the political importance of this reform: firstly, it can be inferred implicitly by the fact that this change usually takes place at the very beginning of a king's reign or sometimes, even more meaningfully, of a new empire or dynasty, (remoteness, therefore, seems characterized by a founding value); its relevance is also explicitly mentioned in the sources which, for various reasons depending on the king involved, point out the essential importance of the reform in establishing the power of a single man over a multitude of subjects (perhaps the whole population or just the noblemen, from case to case) and ensuring the exercise of such power (even when, at times, the king may be inadequate for his role). What may appear merely as a simple adjustment in court protocol is actually described as a key feature in building and maintaining royal power and rule over the subjects.

It is worth noting the difference of opinion among Greek historians regarding the personality and/or population who should be acknowledged as the innovator: this discrepancy reveals the historians' reflections, and their contrasting opinions, on the beginning of the Oriental monarchy and on the connections between the Persians and the previous Near Eastern kingdoms, an aspect that also involves the theory of the continuity of empires[12]. For example, the difference between Herodotus and Ctesias can be noted: the onset of the unapproachability of the king is ascribed to the Medes (Hdt. I 99-100), then inherited by the Persians, according to the former, but is ascribed to the Assyrians by the latter (Ctesias F 1b § 21 Lenfant; the same can be said for the so-called Median dress, which is Median

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[12] On this topic see, for example, CALMEYER 1987, 18-20; TUPLIN 1994, 251-256; ASHERI 2003; WIESEHÖFER 2003; LANFRANCHI 2003; Id. 2011; ZOURNATZI 2013.

according to Herodotus I 135, but created by Semiramis as per Ctesias F 1b § 6, 6 Lenfant). As noted by Lanfranchi, there is a substantial difference between Herodotus and Ctesias: the former viewed the Achaemenids as heirs of the Medes, the latter practically as heirs of the Assyrians[13].

The contrasting views of Greek historians on the origin of the remote king, given their value as historiographical speculation, have raised scholars' doubts about the historical reliability of these sources, sometimes taking antithetical positions: are they evidence that the Greeks knew this feature was already a characteristic of Near Eastern kingdoms before the Achaemenids (an even more ambitious question because the Medes are involved) or are they simply a projection back into the past of an Achaemenid feature? We can also consider the more general question about whether and which traits were inherited by the Achaemenids from earlier kingdoms[14].

In general, in order to better clarify the numerous elements of the matter, it is important to discuss the texts mentioned above (focusing only on the subject of the kings' inaccessibility, considering the difficulty of some of these passages, such as, and above all, the Herodotean history of Deioces).

Starting with the Herodotean account of Deioces (Hdt. I 99-100), it must be emphasized that Deioces is the first Median king, «the founder», as Asheri called him in his commentary on Herodotus.[15] In the Histories, Deioces is not only an eminent king among Median rulers (and, more generally, among Near Eastern kings), he is also a key character for the Herodotean reflection on the development of personal power (as pointed out, for example, by Thomas and Walter, among others).[16] In the light of Deioces' importance in the Histories, it seems even more remarkable that, after having his palace and the city of Ecbatana built (a kind of synoecism), the Median king decided to establish a rule according to which «no one should come into the presence of the king» (Hdt. I 99, 1: οἰκοδομηθέντων δὲ πάντων κόσμον τόνδε Δηιόκης πρῶτος ἐστὶ ὁ καταστησάμενος, μήτε ἐσιέναι παρὰ βασιλέα μηδένα, δι᾽ ἀγγέλων δὲ πάντα χρᾶσθαι, ὁρᾶσθαί τε βασιλέα ὑπὸ μηδενός)[17]: the king's unapproachability (also concretely achieved thanks to the new buildings) is therefore crucial; indeed, it is the climax of Deioces' entire political strategy which aims to put power into the hands of one man and to maintain such power. Moreover, Herodotus adds an etiological remark in Hdt. I 99, 2. The psychological nature, so to speak, of Deioces' decision can also be noted (similar perspectives can be found in the other sources):[18] not being seen creates an aura of

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[13] See, e.g., LANFRANCHI 2010, 51-53.

[14] See, for different standpoints, BRIANT 1984, 98; Id. 1996: 36 = 2002, 26; LANFRANCHI 2010.

[15] ASHERI et al. 2007, 147.

[16] WALTER 2004; THOMAS 2012.

[17] Herodotus' text is based on WILSON's edition.

[18] Cf. *infra.*

exceptionality and conveys the idea that the king is superior to his subjects; this perception of the king leads the subjects (in Deioces' case, the noblemen he grew up with) to accept his power willingly and prevents them from plotting against him in order to dethrone him (Hdt. I 99, 2: ταῦτα δὲ περὶ ἑωυτὸν ἐσέμνυνε τῶνδε εἴνεκεν, ὅκως ἂν μὴ ὁρῶντες οἱ ὁμήλικες, ἐόντες σύντροφοί τε ἐκείνῳ καὶ οἰκίης οὐ φλαυροτέρης οὐδὲ ἐς ἀνδραγαθίην λειπόμενοι, λυπεοίατο καὶ ἐπιβουλεύοιεν, ἀλλ᾽ ἑτεροῖός σφι δοκέοι εἶναι μὴ ὁρῶσι).[19]

Regarding the remoteness of the Median kings, another Herodotean passage (Hdt. I 114) can be cited: when Cyrus was still a child, playing with other boys and pretending to be their king, he «assigned some of them to the building of houses, some to be his bodyguard, one doubtless to be the King's Eye; to another he gave the right of bringing him messages; to each he gave his proper work» (Hdt. 114, 1: ὁ δὲ αὐτῶν διέταξε τοὺς μὲν οἰκίας οἰκοδομέειν, τοὺς δὲ δορυφόρους εἶναι, τὸν δέ κού τινα αὐτῶν ὀφθαλμὸν βασιλέος εἶναι, τῷ δὲ τινι τὰς ἀγγελίας ἐσφέρειν ἐδίδου γέρας, ὡς ἑκάστῳ ἔργον προστάσσων). This was only a game, but it is interesting to note that, as soon as he played the role of king, Cyrus established some of the functions which are effective, among other aims, in creating and maintaining a distance between the ruler and his subjects, thus confirming the relevance of unapporoachability, at least in Herodutus' idea of Median kingship.

Ctesias' account of Ninyas, as transmitted by Diodorus (Ctesias F 1b § 21 Lenfant), contains an important element of novelty (also to be found in the story of Atossa in Hellanicus):[20] the unmanly nature of the king. While Deioces wants to prevent other noblemen from understanding that he is no different from them, Ninyas' aim (embodied in his main purpose, i.e. «ensure the safety of his rule and to assuage the fear that he felt in relation to his subjects»,[21] directly linked to the king's military reform) seems also to have been to disguise his effeminate, luxurious lifestyle[22] which may have appeared inappropriate and unacceptable for a king.[23] He therefore creates a system designed to hide his behaviour from his subjects[24] (in this regard, we can note Ninyas' decision to have an entourage of concubines and, more importantly, eunuchs, whose unmanliness may have concealed the king's own) and to arouse fear in his subject through the new directives given to the army. The reasons lying

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[19] Cf. Arist. *Pol.* III 1288a 15-19.

[20] Cf. *infra*.

[21] Translation by J. ROBSON.

[22] Ctesias F 1b § 21, 1-2 Lenfant: Μετὰ δὲ τὸν ταύτης θάνατον Νινύας ὁ Νίνου καὶ Σεμιράμιδος υἱὸς παραλαβὼν τὴν ἀρχὴν ἦρχεν εἰρηνικῶς, τὸ φιλοπόλεμον καὶ κεκινδυνευμένον τῆς μητρὸς οὐδαμῶς ζηλώσας. πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ ἐν τοῖς βασιλείοις τὸν ἅπαντα χρόνον διέτριβεν, ὑπ᾽ οὐδενὸς ὁρώμενος πλὴν τῶν παλλακίδων καὶ τῶν περὶ αὐτὸν εὐνούχων· ἐζήλου δὲ τρυφὴν καὶ ῥᾳθυμίαν καὶ τὸ μηδέποτε κακοπαθεῖν μηδὲ μεριμνᾶν, ὑπολαμβάνων βασιλείας εὐδαίμονος εἶναι τέλος τὸ πάσαις χρῆσθαι ταῖς ἡδοναῖς ἀνεπικωλύτως.

[23] Ninyas' effeminate behaviour is clearly described in Just. I 2, 11 (*contentus elaborato a parentibus imperio belli studia deposuit et, veluti sexum cum matre mutasset, raro a viris visus in feminarum turba consenuit*).

[24] Cf. Arist. *Pol.* V 1314b 28-34.

behind the introduction of the former practice, in particular, have clear etiological value, being one of the Greek explanations of the origin of Near Eastern remote kingship.

Ninyas' unapproachability and the peculiar directives given to the army achieve the king's aim of exercising a strong psychological effect on his subjects, as explicitly stated by Diodorus: the population lives in fear of the king and regards Ninyas as an invisible god against whom not one word of complaint should be pronounced (τὸ δὲ μηδ' ὑφ' ἑνὸς τῶν ἔξωθεν θεωρεῖσθαι τῆς μὲν ἀληθοῦς περὶ αὐτὸν τρυφῆς ἄγνοιαν παρείχετο πᾶσιν, καθάπερ δὲ θεὸν ἀόρατον διὰ τὸν φόβον ἕκαστος οὐδὲ λόγῳ βλασφημεῖν ἐτόλμα). To quote Azoulay: «Invisibility can therefore be equated with panoptism».[25] Unlike Deioces in Herodotus, however, who wants his peer noblemen to think he was different from them and thus extraordinary, as noted by Lanfranchi, «Ctesias [...] is convinced that the pattern factually ultimately solicits the divinization of the king by all his subjects. [...] for Herodotus, inaccessibility and invisibility affect mainly the *élite*, for Ctesias, their effects are universal».[26]

In conclusion, it can be added that we have few details about how the kings of the following thirty generations ruled, from Ninyas down to Sardanapallus (Diodorus claims they followed Ninyas' example, παραπλησίως δὲ τούτῳ καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ βασιλεῖς, παῖς παρὰ πατρὸς διαδεχόμενος τὴν ἀρχήν, ἐπὶ γενεὰς τριάκοντα ἐβασίλευσαν μέχρι Σαρδαναπάλλου) but it must be stressed that the revolt leading to the downfall of Sardanapallus was started by an act of violation of the king's inaccessibility, i.e. the direct vision of the king.[27]

There are also some interesting aspects of remote kingship in the history of Cyrus in Xenophon's *Cyropaideia* (VII 5, 37-55): these chapters confirm unapproachability as a key trait of Near Eastern monarchies, from a Greek point of view. Soon after the conquest of Babylon, Cyrus, who during the campaign was always accessible to everybody, decides to change his attitude (cf. Xen. *Cyr.* VII 5, 46; 55), although the initial outcome is quite problematic due to the large numbers of people wanting to be accepted to his presence (Xen. *Cyr.* VII 5, 37-41): it must be underlined that Xenophon (Xen. *Cyr.* VII 5, 37) introduces Cyrus' will to reform his attitude regarding court etiquette as «a desire to establish himself as he thought became a king, but he decided to do it with the approval of his friends, in such a way that his public appearances should be rare and solemn and yet excite as little jealousy as possible»[28] (ἐκ δὲ τούτου ἐπιθυμῶν ὁ Κῦρος ἤδη κατασκευάσασθαι καὶ αὐτὸς ὡς βασιλεῖ ἡγεῖτο πρέπειν, ἔδοξεν αὐτῷ τοῦτο σὺν τῇ τῶν φίλων γνώμῃ ποιῆσαι, ὡς ὅτι ἥκιστα ἂν ἐπιφθόνως σπάνιός τε καὶ

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[25] AZOULAY 2004, 151 n. 20. Cf. STEINER 1994, 132 on Deioces in Herodotus: «Deioces' written documents play a crucial role in keeping the tyrant hidden and his subjects in view». Cf. also *FGrHist* 689 F 2 (on which see LENFANT 2009, 277-298, with bibliography).

[26] LANFRANCHI 2010, 52.

[27] Cf. *infra*.

[28] Translation by W. MILLER.

σεμνὸς φανείη). It appears that, in Xenophon's opinion, remoteness is an essential feature for a Persian king.[29]

So, unlike Deioces, Cyrus perceives inaccessibility as a possible cause of jealousy and makes an effort to organize carefully the circumstances in which he is accessible to all. The peculiarity of Cyrus' behaviour, as pointed out by Azoulay,[30] lies in the fact that his wish is not to separate himself from all his subjects without distinction: he aims, instead, to set himself and the members of the court (his noble companions) apart from the rest of the population of the empire, while consolidating the bond within his court. In this, he is clearly distinct from Deioces who wishes to appear different from his former equals.

The last example which will be taken into consideration is Hellanicus' Atossa (*FGrHist* 4 FF 178a-c = 687a FF 7a-c),[31] who must be separated from Xerxes' mother. Unfortunately, due to the fragmentary, concise and problematic nature of Hellanicus' account on Atossa,[32] it is rather difficult to fully understand the history of this queen (for example, there is no certainty as to her geographical origin or the period she lived in and, as a result, her role in the development of Near Eastern kingship can only be conjectured).[33] First of all, there is an etiological aspect which can be compared to some extent to Ninyas' history in Ctesias:[34] Atossa must hide the fact that she is a woman and for this reason she institutes some forms of dress (such as the tiara and the ἀναξυρίδες) and, probably in order to establish separation from her subjects (functional to conceal her nature), she also adopts the use of eunuchs (like Ninyas) and letters (like Deioces) (κρυβοῦσαν δὲ τὴν τῶν γυναίων ἐπίνοιαν τιάραν πρώτην φορέσαι, πρῶτον δὲ καὶ ἀναξυρίδας, καὶ τὴν τῶν εὐνούχων ὑπουργίαν εὑρεῖν, καὶ διὰ βίβλων τὰς ἀποκρίσεις ποιεῖσθαι).[35] The need to hide the queen's womanhood seems to have played a central role in what appears to have been the beginning of the Oriental remote kingship in Hellanicus;[36] however, from his fragments, it is unclear whether Atossa's choice of an inaccessible kingship was due only to the need to conceal the fact that she was a woman or

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[29] Cyrus completes his court reform with the introduction of a system of guards (Xen. *Cyr.* VII 5, 58-70).

[30] AZOULAY 2004,161.

[31] *FGrHist* 4 F 178a (Anon. *De mulier.* 7): Ἄτοσσα· ταύτην φησὶν Ἑλλάνικος ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς Ἀριάσπου ὡς ἄρρενα τραφεῖσαν διαδέξασθαι τὴν βασιλείαν. κρυβοῦσαν δὲ τὴν τῶν γυναίων ἐπίνοιαν τιάραν πρώτην φορέσαι, πρῶτον δὲ καὶ ἀναξυρίδας, καὶ τὴν τῶν εὐνούχων ὑπουργίαν εὑρεῖν, καὶ διὰ βίβλων τὰς ἀποκρίσεις ποιεῖσθαι. πολλὰ δὲ ὑποτάξασα ἔθνη πολεμικωτάτη καὶ ἀνδρειοτάτη ἐν παντὶ ἔργῳ ἐγένετο. *FGrHist* 4 F 178b (Tatian. *Ad Gr.* 1): καὶ ἐπιστολὰς συντάσσειν (*sc.* εὗρεν) ἡ Περσῶν ποτε ἡγησαμένη γυνή, καθά φησιν Ἑλλάνικος· Ἄτοσσα δὲ ὄνομα αὐτῇ [ἦν]. *FGrHist* 4 F 178c (Donat. Ter. *Eun.* 167): *eunuchos a Persis institutos putant ex captivis; a Babylonibus enim Hellanicus auctor exstat id habuisse.*

[32] Fragment c from Donatus, in particular, presents both textual and interpretative issues. Cf. n. 33.

[33] On Atossa in Hellanicus see AMBAGLIO 1980, 133-134; GERA 1997, 141-150; PORCIANI 1997, 157-160; LENFANT 2009, 20 n. 1; CIOFFI 2012; POWNALL 2016, *ad loc.*

[34] GERA 1997, 148.

[35] GERA 1997, 148-149; PORCIANI 1997, 157-158; CECCARELLI 2013, 89.

[36] On Hellanicus' interest in inventions, see AMBAGLIO 1980, 133-134; GERA 1997, 144; FOWLER 2013, 688.

whether there was a more structured political plan (as per Deioces). Despite the fact that the *de Mulieribus* does not actually state this, it is possible to assume that Atossa, as a result of unapproachability, also gains an aura of extraordinariness: after all, she was thought to be the legitimate king.[37]

The different elements contained in these sources can now be summarized: many practical reasons are given for the choice of a condition of remoteness (although a fixed pattern aimed at concealing some kind of deficiencies can be recognized, in the cases of Ninyas and Atossa, or a dangerous normality, in the case of Deioces). In any case, besides the story of Atossa (too unclear to be judged), all the other sources state that the king is considered exceptional by his subjects (or at least a some of them) thanks to this kind of invisibility (but for Ninyas this exceptionality looks more like a consequence than a primary purpose).[38] Besides Greek opinion on this form of kingship (a judgment which, as we have seen, can fluctuate), in Greek perception this pursuit of an aura of exceptionality through isolation is useful to a single man to establish and retain his power: essentially, being unapproachable becomes necessary to make the image of the king extraordinary and this impression becomes an instrument of power, a form of psychological oppression (as described by the sources themselves). This tool of power is frequently used to mislead the mass of subjects, imposing the will of a single man at the expense of the people who are deceived about the king's actual qualities and intentions (and of those who, were they aware of them, would rebel against him).[39] It is possible to conclude that, from a Greek point of view, universal dominion over Asia must be managed through specific court etiquette and royal behaviour, including the king's remoteness.[40]

As a counterpart to the importance of the unapproachability of Near Eastern kings as an instrument of power (and, to some extent, as confirmation of this importance), it is necessary to mention the attempts to find forms of opposition to this kind of royal control. The desire for resistance emerges as a quest to take direct vision of the king, thus violating the royal self-representative structure, partially based on the king's remoteness, and expose (or threaten to expose) the king's flaws. It is also worth noting, as will be shown by some examples, that sometimes the beginning of revolutions, both real and potential, against royal power consists in the violation of the king's inaccessibility by means of a direct view of the monarch.

One of Ctesias' fragments (F 1b § 24; cf. FF 1ρε; 1ρα Lenfant), also allows us to reflect on the role of eunuchs in conspiracies against Eastern kings (a point for which Ctesias, in general, is

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[37] GERA 1997, 150.

[38] LANFRANCHI 2010, 51.

[39] Cf. *infra*.

[40] LANFRANCHI 2010, 49 (referred to Ctesias' ideas on «universal dominion over all Asia» by Oriental kings).

an essential source, particularly regarding the Achaemenids):[41] this fragment of Ctesias makes clear that the view of Sardanapallus (and the consequent discovery of his depraved practices), achieved by corrupting a eunuch at the king's service, played a key role at the beginning of Arbaces' and Beleys' revolt.[42]

Eunuchs are frequently entrusted with the control of access to the king (as shown by the fragment just discussed): besides the above-mentioned stories of Ninyas and Atossa (which are also remarkable for the etiological thoughts on the role of eunuchs at Near Eastern courts), Ctesias' work can be considered in general, as can, for example, that of Herodotus concerning the Achaemenids (e.g. Hdt. III 77, 2). The role of eunuchs at court and their proximity to the king make them, as shown in Ctesias, key figures in plotting against the king (and sometimes these conspiracies are in favour of the eunuch himself).[43]

The importance of seeing the king, as an act of opposition to royal power and of essential relevance for the development of an actual subversive action, can be inferred, for example, from two relevant Herodotean passages. First of all, the story of Pseudo Smerdis' exposure (Hdt. III 68-69): it must be said that Pseudo Smerdis' story is certainly very problematic and his status, both juridical and physical, makes his story unique.[44] In any case, the episode is both useful and interesting for this discussion. From Herodotus' account it appears that, before starting the actual conspiracy against the usurper, Otanes, suspicious of the king's behaviour, decides to determine his identity with the help of his daughter, Phaedyme:[45] in Herodotus, the story of Pseudo Smerdis is actually based on the assumption that nobody could come close enough to the king to expose him.[46] Even more interesting is the Herodotean history of Intaphernes (Hdt. III 118-119): it can be pointed out that, on one hand, Intaphernes believes he is deceptively deprived of his right to see the king and therefore believes that Darius is abusing his power (Hdt. III 118) and, on the other hand, Darius is so worried by Intaphernes' actions that he fears a potential revolt by the seven conspirators

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[41] On this topic see LENFANT 2012 (with bibliography).

[42] Ctesias F 1b § 24, 4-5 Lenfant: ἐφιλοτιμήθη δὲ καὶ τὸν βασιλέα κατ' ὄψιν ἰδεῖν καὶ τὸν ὅλον τούτου βίον κατασκέψασθαι· διόπερ δούς τινι τῶν εὐνούχων χρυσῆν φιάλην, εἰσήχθη πρὸς τὸν Σαρδανάπαλλον, καὶ τήν τε τρυφὴν αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸν γυναικώδη τῶν ἐπιτηδευμάτων ζῆλον ἀκριβῶς κατανοήσας, κατεφρόνησε μὲν τοῦ βασιλέως ὡς οὐδενὸς ἀξίου, προήχθη δὲ πολὺ μᾶλλον ἀντέχεσθαι τῶν δοθεισῶν ἐλπίδων ὑπὸ τοῦ Χαλδαίου. τέλος δὲ συνωμοσίαν ἐποιήσατο πρὸς τὸν Βέλεσυν, ὥστε αὐτὸν μὲν Μήδους ἀποστῆσαι καὶ Πέρσας, ἐκεῖνον δὲ πεῖσαι Βαβυλωνίους κοινωνῆσαι τῆς πράξεως, καὶ τὸν τῶν Ἀράβων ἡγεμόνα φίλον ὄντα προσλαβέσθαι πρὸς τὴν τῶν ὅλων ἐπίθεσιν.

[43] See LENFANT 2012. Cf. BRIANT 1996, 279 ff. = 2002, 268 ff. Despite this, eunuchs are sometimes considered (e.g. Hdt. VIII 105, 2; Xen. *Cyr.* VII 5, 59-60) among the most trustworthy appointees. See TOUGHER 2008, 43-44; LENFANT 2014, 429; 434-435.

[44] See, in general, BRIANT 1996, 109-118; 924 = 2002, 97-106; 895-896; ASHERI et al., 458-471; KUHRT 2007, 136-170.

[45] On this aspect see ASHERI et al. 2007, 466 (with bibliography).

[46] BRIANT 1996, 111-113 = 2002, 100-101 (who, quoting Just. I 9, 11 *quae res eo occultior fuit, quod apud Persas persona regis sub specie maiestatis occulitur*, wonders: «But can we be expected to believe that the king (or his substitute) would not have granted a single audience during the course of several years?»).

who killed Pseudo Smerdis, so he decides to imprison Intaphernes and his family, condemning them to death.[47] Many observations can be made about these Herodotean chapters. Above all, this episode is particularly illuminating because Intaphernes does not actually commit a real act of rebellion: in Herodotus' account, Intaphernes has no intention of revolting against the Great King, but Darius suspects him nonetheless. It appears to me that this scenario reveals the importance of the Great King's unapproachability as a tool of power and shows how any attempt to challenge such a tool is considered an act of rebellion against the king and his authority. Whether any actions actually oppose the power or simply appear to threaten this royal privilege, they are a cause of strong concern for the king. It can be added to these reflections that chapters 118-119 seem particularly relevant. First of all, Herodotus takes care to prepare the story earlier, in III 84, 2: it must be emphasized that the seven conspirators, having discussed Otanes' special condition, first establish how to regulate access to the king (probably also in the light of the Pseudo Smerdis affair), confirming once again the importance of this feature (τάδε δὲ ἐς τὸ κοινὸν ἐβούλευσαν, παριέναι ἐς τὰ βασιλήια πάντα τὸν βουλόμενον τῶν ἑπτὰ ἄνευ ἐσαγγελέος, ἢν μὴ τυγχάνῃ εὕδων μετὰ γυναικὸς βασιλεύς). Moreover, after the long excursus about Darius' new organization of the empire, chapters 118-119 end the story of the revolt of the seven against Pseudo Smerdis, describing the immediate developments among the members of the conspiracy. It can also be noted that these chapters contain the memorable argument of a brother's irreplaceability (Hdt. III 119, 6).[48]

To conclude about this episode, from the point of view of historical explanation, Martin West[49] suggested that it may reveal Darius' genuine concerns about Intaphernes and his reputation: Intaphernes/ Vindafarna, indeed, emerges as a chief figure in the Behistun inscription (he is first on the list of Darius' helpers and is entrusted with an army to quell another Nebuchadnezzar; DB §§ 50,[50] 68[51]); also in *Persians* (vv. 775-779),[52] despite doubts about

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[47] Hdt. III 119, 1-2: Δαρεῖος δὲ ἀρρωδήσας μὴ κοινῷ λόγῳ οἱ ἓξ πεποιηκότες ἔωσι ταῦτα, μεταπεμπόμενος ἕνα ἕκαστον ἀπεπειρᾶτο γνώμης, εἰ συνέπαινοί εἰσι τῷ πεποιημένῳ. ἐπείτε δὲ ἐξέμαθε ὡς οὐ σὺν ἐκείνοισι εἴη ταῦτα πεποιηκώς, ἔλαβε αὐτόν τε τὸν Ἰνταφέρνεα καὶ τοὺς παῖδας αὐτοῦ καὶ τοὺς οἰκηίους πάντας, ἐλπίδας πολλὰς ἔχων μετὰ τῶν συγγενέων μιν ἐπιβουλεύειν οἱ ἐπανάστασιν, συλλαβὼν δὲ σφέας ἔδησε τὴν ἐπὶ θανάτῳ. On the form Ἰνταφέρνης see SCHMITT 2007, 148-149.

[48] See ASHERI et al. 2007, 506-507.

[49] WEST – WEST 1991, 187.

[50] Saith Darius the King: thereupon I sent forth an army to Babylon. A Persian named Intaphernes, my subject – him I made chief of them [...] (translation by R.G. Kent).

[51] Saith Darius the King: these are the men who were there at the time when I slew Gaumata the Magian who called himself Smerdis; at that time these men cooperated as my followers: Intaphernes by name, son of Vayaspara, a Persian; Otanes by name, son of Thukhra, a Persian; Gobryas by name, son of Mardonius, a Persian; Hydarnes by name, son of Bagabigna, a Persian; Megabyzus by name, son of Datuvahya, a Persian; Ardumanish by name, son of Vahauka, a Persian (translation by R.G. KENT).

the textual and historical reliability of these verses of the Aeschylean tragedy,[53] Intaphernes (called Artaphrenes), appears to have been one of the main members, if not the leader, of the conspiracy against Mardos.[54]

The important aspect of these examples, besides the fact that the easiest way of fighting a king's remoteness is by trying to see him, is that these actions are perceived by the protagonists of these stories as obvious attempts to subvert the authority of the ruler, and that sometimes they are (or at least they are seen as) crucial in order to begin a revolt against royal power.

In conclusion, as often is the case with classical sources on Persians, doubts remain on how many and which details regarding the kings' unapproachability can be considered historically accurate, especially as far as the origin of this feature is concerned: although some scholars, such as Lanfranchi, for example, have spoken in favour of the reliability of these sources, others are somewhat sceptical.[55]Besides their importance as valuable, yet arguable, instruments to reconstruct some aspects of the Achaemenid and Near Eastern kingdoms histories (their court etiquette in particular), these texts may, above all, play a crucial role in providing a better comprehension of the Greek historical and historiographical reflection on Achaemenid (and Near Eastern) kingship. The remoteness of the Great King (and Near Eastern kings) is, in fact, negatively marked and clearly opposed to the accessibility and availability of Greek rulers, as recently affirmed by Mitchell.[56]

Greek sources, moreover, assign to inaccessibility a central function for Achaemenid kingship and its image: such a pre-eminent role, at least according to the Greek view (which seems to have been deeply impressed by it) led Greek historians to speculate about the origin and purpose of the rulers' remoteness and to ascribe its creation to various populations and personalities (the stories of Deioces in Herodotus and of Ninyas in Ctesias, especially, can be mentioned). These thoughts are highly valuable to infer and better understand the disparate ideas of Greek historians on the development of Oriental kingship and, above all, on the relationships between Achaemenids and the earlier Near Eastern kingdoms, notably in the intricate field of monarchical power and its government.

As noted by Lanfranchi (with regard to Ctesias),[57] unapproachability, as part of both the peculiar court protocol and the ruler's behaviour, seems to have been considered by the

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[52] [...] τὸν δὲ σὺν δόλωι / Ἀρταφρένης ἔκτεινεν ἐσθλὸς ἐν δόμοις / ξὺν ἀνδράσιν φίλοισιν, οἷς τόδ᾽ ἦν χρέος. / ἕκτος δὲ Μάραφις· ἕβδομος δ᾽ Ἀρταφρένης / κἀγώ· πάλου δ᾽ ἔκυρσα τοῦπερ ἤθελον (West's edition); [...] τὸν δὲ σὺν δόλῳ / Ἀρταφρένης ἔκτεινεν ἐσθλὸς ἐν δόμοις / ξὺν ἀνδράσιν φίλοισιν, οἷς τόδ᾽ ἦν χρέος, / [ἕκτος δὲ Μάραφις ἕβδομος δ᾽ Ἀρταφρένης.] / κἀγώ· πάλου δ᾽ ἔκυρσα τοῦπερ ἤθελον (Garvie's edition).

[53] On these verses see WEST – WEST 1991, 182-188; DI BENEDETTO 1993; GARVIE 2009, 300-301, 304-305.

[54] WEST – WEST 1991, 187; DI BENEDETTO 1993, 262, 269-271.

[55] Cf. n. 14.

[56] MITCHELL forth.

[57] LANFRANCHI 2010, 49.

Greeks as an essential feature in order to rule over Asia (as shown by the great care that, in classical sources, the Eastern kings take to preserve their remoteness). Nonetheless, it is particularly interesting to note the paradox emerging from classical texts about this style of rule: in fact, on one hand, Greek sources emphasize the importance and the political use of this feature – there is, indeed, acknowledgement of the psychological value of this instrument of power which can increase subjects' (at all economic and social levels) reverence and fear of the king, thus discouraging potential attempts of opposition or revolt and providing soundness and continuity for monarchical power.[58] However, on the other hand, the Greeks also reflected on the weakness of power built through the king's inaccessibility, pointing out that viewing the king may actually spark a revolt and make it possible to undermine the artificially made image of exceptionality, thus showing that sometimes the king, far from being an extraordinary creature, is actually a figure unworthy of power. One of the chief features in providing the Great King with authority and prestige also reveals, in Greek historical speculation, how unstable his power can be.

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[58] Cf. MITCHELL forth., evoking Kantorowitz' idea of the king's two bodies: «The ideology of royal separation helped to create stability within the office which stood apart from the person of the king, so that the office of kingship, and especially its heroic and charismatic qualities, could be maintained as immutable without a dependency on any particular incumbent».

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