



ACHAEMENID IMPACT IN THE BLACK SEA

COMMUNICATION OF POWERS

Edited by Jens Nieling and Ellen Rehm



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BLACK SEA STUDIES

11

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Contents

<i>Jens Nieling & Ellen Rehm</i> Introduction	7
<i>Adele Bill</i> Achaemenids in the Caucasus?	15
<i>Maria Brosius</i> Pax Persica and the Peoples of the Black Sea Region: Extent and Limits of Achaemenid Imperial Ideology	29
<i>Anne Marie Carstens</i> The Labraunda Sphinxes	41
<i>Vladimir R. Erlikh</i> Recent Investigations of the Ulski Kurgans	47
<i>Diana Gergova</i> Orphic Thrace and Achaemenid Persia	67
<i>Vladimir Goroncharovskij</i> A Silver Rhyton with a Representation of a Winged Ibex from the Fourth Semibratniy Tumulus	87
<i>Tatiana N. Smekalova</i> Geomagnetic Surveys in the Territory of Labrys (Semibratnee Townsite) in 2006-2008	103
<i>Florian Knauss, Iulon Gagoshidze & Ilias Babaev</i> A Persian Propyleion in Azerbaijan Excavations at Karacamirli	111
<i>Jens Nieling</i> Persian Imperial Policy Behind the Rise and Fall of the Cimmerian Bosphorus in the Last Quarter of the Sixth to the Beginning of the Fifth Century BC	123
<i>Ellen Rehm</i> The Impact of the Achaemenids on Thrace: A Historical Review ¹	137

Ellen Rehm

The Classification of Objects from the Black Sea Region Made or Influenced by the Achaemenids¹

[161](#)

Lâtife Summerer & Alexander von Kienlin

Achaemenid Impact in Paphlagonia:
Rupestral Tombs in the Amnias Valley

[195](#)

Mikhail Treister

'Achaemenid' and 'Achaemenid-inspired' Goldware and Silverware,
Jewellery and Arms and their Imitations to the North of the
Achaemenid Empire*

[223](#)

Christopher Tuplin

Revisiting Dareios' Scythian Expedition

[281](#)

Indices

[313](#)

Contributors

[323](#)

Introduction

Jens Nieling & Ellen Rehm

A short historical overview

For 200 years, from the second half of the sixth century to the decades before 330 BC, the Persian dynasty of the Achaemenids ruled Anatolia and Armenia as part of an enormous empire stretching from the Mediterranean Sea to Afghanistan and India. The Great Kings Dareios I and Xerxes I even tried to conquer Greece and the northern Black Sea territories. Although they failed, parts of Thrace did become part of their dominion for a short period. The Pontic Greeks were able to take advantage of the situation by aligning themselves with Persian supremacy, which might have been a tempting alternative to joining the Athenian-led Delian League.

As the Great Kings in Persepolis lost interest in their northwestern border, their satraps had to handle the situation, maintaining the balance of power by entering into various alliances with Greek and probably also Scythian factions. This was a stable solution and the satraps became so adept at playing this 'Anatolian plan' that a desire for independence arose.

From 400 BC onwards, with the rebellion of Cyrus the Younger, as documented by Xenophon, a series of internal struggles started to weaken parts of the Empire. This situation was beneficial to the peripheries, for example, the Bosporan Kingdom, and led to a new level of acculturation at the expense of the Persians in the first half of the fourth century. In a kind of globalization effect, the established Greek polis communities were also destabilized during the same period, so that, finally, nobody could resist the new rising power of the Macedonians.

In contrast to some of the other satrapies, such as Egypt, Phoenicia and Syria, the Black Sea had no prosperous cities or provinces to offer.

The question always rises as to why the Great Kings were interested in the western and northern Pontic zones. One possible answer might be the desire to conquer every part of the known world. After 479 BC, it seems that the Great Kings acknowledged the fact that the coast and the Caucasus formed the natural borders of their Empire. The satraps, on the other hand, could not avoid becoming involved in the affairs of the Black Sea region in order to safeguard the frontiers they had established. They had to incorporate the Greeks, as accepted inhabitants of their province, into the Persian adminis-

trative system. Possibly they achieved this by granting them the monopoly in sea trade and using the Anatolian Greeks as the main active bearers and transmitters of Persian customs and culture. More research into this chapter of Persian history is still required.

The development of research

Over the past few years, the breadth of research into the Persians has expanded. Usually only considered by historians, and then only from the viewpoint of Greek writers, the Achaemenid period is generally a marginal area of the archaeological disciplines. Whereas for Classical archaeologists the Persian Empire lies in the far east and most of them are not well acquainted with its eastern cultural background, for many ancient Near Eastern archaeologists the destruction of Nineveh in 612 BC marks the end of the great cultures of the ancient Near East. In addition, they are often not well acquainted with the cultural history of the west. Historically, each of the disciplines has developed independently, adopting different approaches and even using different language. On the one hand, these presuppositions make dealing with such a marginal area of study as the Achaemenid period particularly interesting, but, on the other hand, they also make it particularly difficult.

Nevertheless, several years ago a few scholars who were closely interconnected, especially through dealing with a particular geographical region, took up this challenge. As a result, several important international conferences occurred. While the conference held in Paris in 2003, which published the report *Colloque sur l'archéologie de l'empire achéménide* (Persika 6, 2005), was devoted to the whole Achaemenid Empire, a conference held in Istanbul in 2005 (*The Achaemenid Impact on Local Populations and Cultures in Anatolia. (6th – 4th Centuries BC)*) restricted itself mainly to the monuments of Anatolia. However, in this way, it provided a perspective on the types of influence that affected the shores of the Black Sea. Further important information on the Achaemenids in the region of the Black Sea can be found in the publications of the Vani conferences held regularly in Georgia.

A new Aarhus project

The Aarhus Centre for Black Sea Studies is currently working on the acculturation process from a distinctly Pontic perspective. The new project is devoted to the most significant phases of the Persian period. As in other regions, new meanings and values were introduced by the Persians which had a defining influence on the region in this period. This is evident in the precious objects found in Thracian, Scythian and Caucasian surroundings that reflect this influence. In all these regions on the edge of the Empire, a process of state formation took place to a certain degree, and this is documented by other indicators as well as the presence of Persian-influenced precious objects. The

project is interested not only in the areas which belonged to the Persian Empire as satrapies but also in the neighbouring regions, which were or might have been in close contact with the Persians. One of the aims of the project is to establish the different positions that the various regions held – both geographically and politically. To determine which elements influenced these widespread regions might be the first step in identifying the different cultural mechanisms at work during this important period.

The historical sources

Apart from the important Bisitun inscription of Dareios the Great, which informs us about his rise and his amazing reorganization of the Persian Empire, there is little political evidence from Persia itself.

There are, however, large and important groups of various types of texts, especially from the mainland but also from Babylonia and Egypt, which throw light on the organization of the Achaemenid Empire. They also provide us with details of daily life. But there are no written sources originating from the western and northern parts of the Empire and from neighbouring regions. We are, therefore, dependent on written records composed by Greek authors. In his *Histories*, Herodotos describes the beginning of the rise of Achaemenid power and introduces the reader to its expansion under Dareios the Great. The commander and author Xenophon is one of the most important witnesses for the later periods, because he was directly involved in the fratricidal war between Cyrus the Younger and his brother, the Persian king Artaxerxes, which took place in Kunaxa near Babylon. However, we should always keep in mind that all the writers from Greece or Asia Minor viewed events through their own eyes, and that, consequently, these sources are subjective and biased. Nevertheless, it should be noted that, although their background was formed by the knowledge that the Persians were a danger to their own societies, through the disagreements of the various political entities, particularly in Asia Minor, these western views of the enemy differed and, in turn, the foreign easterners certainly aroused wonderment.

The first step in the conquest of the Black Sea region by Dareios I was to mount a campaign against the Scythians in 512 BC. *Christopher Tuplin*, who is working on warfare and military rule in the Persian Empire, re-examines this campaign and touches on the question of the satrapy of Thrace. The extent and duration of this satrapy is still a matter for debate, due to scarce and uncertain documentation. Ancient sources – both written and archaeological – only reveal that the coastal area of Thrace was conquered. The hinterland seems to have remained in the hands of the indigenous rulers, who were – and this has to be emphasized – sometimes in close contact with the Persians, whom they exploited in order to acquire more power and control, unlike other rulers within the region.

Ellen Rehm has compiled a history of Thrace in respect of the Achaemenids.

She examines the difficult question as to which area is meant by the ancient writers – Thrace as part of Europe or as part of Asia Minor – and for which period a satrapy is in question and how long a dependency can be recorded. She also analyses the name “Skudra”, as used in Persian inscriptions. In spite of a general consensus, even today there is no absolute certainty that this term can be equated with Thrace.

Maria Brosius discusses the cooperation between the conquerors and indigenous peoples, which used the system of the *pax persica*. She comes to the persuading conclusion that the Persians formulated different criteria for these peripheral areas of their Empire, where military and economic aspects were crucial.

Jens Nieling throws light on Ionian and Persian collaboration in respect of the conquest of the area around the Black Sea by the Persian rulers. He enquires into the requisite preparations for the Scythian campaign of Dareios I and comes to the conclusion that in prior years a clear expansion of the Ionians is noticeable, which can be demonstrated by a strong increase in the number and the quality of construction of settlements. He proposes support from the Persians, who in this way must have created a better operational base. According to him, as a result of the Ionian rebellion, the Persians intervened once again in the politics of the northern area around the Black Sea, and in about 495 BC destroyed the Ionian settlements there. One of the proofs given by Nieling of this presumed Persian campaign of revenge is that the destruction can only be established on the coast and therefore clearly speaks for an attack from the sea.

Archaeological research

For more than a century, the archaeological community has known about the inventories of spectacular Kurgan burials around the Black Sea. References to precious objects and imported Greek vases easily find their way into publications. The finds from the northern coast show a fascinating mixture and blend of so-called Greek and Barbarian art and have prompted numerous discussions concerning the types of co-existence of the diverse groups living there. The objects from the western coast, especially the finds of enormous hoards of gold and silver from present-day Bulgaria, have traditionally dominated all fields of research. Nowadays, thanks to modern excavation techniques and also thanks to a change in emphasis, with the main focus now being to understand the living circumstances of the ancient population, we can learn more from what at first sight seem to be unexciting materials from common graves, cemeteries and settlements.

How clearly the Achaemenids influenced other Anatolian regions as well, through art and iconography in representations of the indigenous population, can be seen in the Paphlagonian rock tombs in the presentation by *Lâtife Summerer* and *Alexander von Kienlin*. In their façades, decorated with architectural

features and reliefs – and originally probably also painted – the graves from Donalar, Terelik, and Salarköy exhibit extremely interesting echoes of Persian models, combined with indigenous and Greek ideas. This eclecticism is demonstrated in a few illustrations from this remote region and is one of many possible indications of the way in which various external influences could affect the presentation of local dynasties.

In southwest Anatolia also, in Karia, elements of Persian influence are clearly reflected. *Anne Marie Carstens* explains how, under the harsh rule of the Hekatomnids – powerful indigenous chiefs, who retained both their own position as local rulers and the position of satrap forced upon them – the rural sanctuary of Zeus, dating to the fourth century BC, was renewed. In this temple, two matching statues of sphinxes were found, based on models from the Persian heartland. They indicate the formal influence of Persia, since flanking sphinxes, which in the Near East are attested as guardians of gates warding off evil, occur on numerous seals in western Anatolia. In addition, they provide a connection in terms of content. Like other elements of the temple, they demonstrate, through the absorption of Persian culture, an assimilation of the display of Achaemenid power.

A different situation obtains in the area of present-day Bulgaria, which at one time belonged to the Thracian satrapy. Even though it was under Persian rule probably for only a few centuries, more than 100 years later clear traces of influence remained visible. *Diana Gergova* deals with the rich finds of gold and silver from both Kurgan and Douvanli, which were mostly deposited in the fourth century BC, but contain objects that are definitely older. The objects are examined in respect of their function and Gergova comes to the conclusion that the finds are to be considered as ritually buried hoards, which in turn can be divided into various categories. Besides jewellery, horse-trappings and weapons, drinking vessels can also be identified. In respect of form, the objects often appear to be local imitations of Achaemenid objects and indicate the influence of the Achaemenid Empire, which at that time had turned Thrace into a Persian satrapy. However, Gergova connects the contents of these hoards with local cults, indicating how closely related they were to the Mother Goddess and to Apollo and Ars.

Similarly, the objects which reflect Achaemenid influence east of the Black Sea mainly come from graves. In a wide-ranging contribution, *Adele Bill* provides a survey of objects influenced by the Achaemenids from the Caucasus, which according to Herodotos represented the northernmost border of the Persian Empire. As usual, a discussion arises as to how far these objects indicate an Achaemenid occupation. Nevertheless, they provide clear proof that in the long term the power of the Persians left significant traces, in spite of the strong indigenous traditions of the various small tribes who lived in this region.

Focusing on a single site, *Vladimir R. Erlikh* presents finds from the northern Caucasus. The extraordinarily rich Ulski Kurgans were partly excavated at the

end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century, and partly at the beginning of the 21st century. To some extent, since they contained no burials, they are to be considered as ritual sites. Along with typical Scythian objects, they also provide objects demonstrating Achaemenid influence. The Kurgans can be dated from the second half of the sixth century BC up to the second half of the fourth century BC. On the basis of comparative examples from Achaemenid centres such as Pasargadae, the late phase shows the extensive sphere of activity of the Achaemenids and a close connection with the Persian Empire. A discussion of the production of these objects concludes that there must have been workshops in Colchis which imitated the Achaemenid style.

In Colchis, which lies to the south, remains of architecture can be compared which unequivocally prove a close connection with the Persian Empire. The results of the Deutsch-Georgisch-Azerbaijanischen Expedition in Karacamirli, presented by *Florian Knauss*, *Iulon Gagoshidze* and *Ilias Babaev*, show how far to the north construction of buildings was carried out by or in accordance with Achaemenid traditions. The size, but especially the construction material of stone – there is no tradition of building with stone in this region – and the architectural features, such as the bell-shaped bases and the rediscovered Persian propyleion, are very similar to remains from the Achaemenid heartland. We cannot yet tell the precise size of the associated residence, which undoubtedly was located on a neighbouring hill. Nevertheless, its general size and its carefully worked style, which is very like the architecture of Persian residences in the heartland, establish that Karacamirli was the dominant residence of a high-ranking authority in this region, if not the central building complex overall. Similar remains in neighbouring Gumbati and Sari Tepe, which have come to light, are clearly smaller and exhibit a style that is somewhat remote from the original. It remains interesting – according to what we know so far – that Achaemenid power felt it particularly necessary to make its presence and its might noticeable through buildings.

Mikhail Treister looks at Achaemenid and Achaemenid-inspired metalwork from the periphery and from the region north of the border with the Persian Kingdom. In his contribution, he describes an arc from present-day Bulgaria to the Caucasus, and discusses the styles and divisions of the objects and their chronological distribution, as well as the typical forms of Persian culture. In this connection he persistently poses the question of the locations of the workshops, which adopted a so-called “Achaemenid international style”.

Ellen Rehm adopts a similar approach in her attempt to establish a stylistic classification for these objects, which could help to answer questions concerning centre and periphery, acculturation and dependence. She strives for a threefold division, the open boundaries of which should prevent a forcing of the material into modern categories.

Vladimir Goroncharovski presents the important and interesting site of Semi-bratnee, ancient Labrys, located at the former mouth of the Kuban river. The

urban settlement with an adjacent necropolis around several impressive kurgans may be considered as a centre, if not the capital, of the Sindian people. He uses a silver-gilt rhyton from one of the burial mounds to demonstrate how local-Persian-Greek interaction was mirrored in the symposium equipment used by the ruling class.

Tatyana Smekalova focuses on the same Seven Brothers site and reports her latest magnetometer scanning results which shed light on the complicated plan of the town's defensive structures. Her work shows that research at this important site is still very much in its infancy.

Concluding comments

The papers collected in this volume were given at a conference held at Sandbjerg Manor, the guest house of the University of Aarhus, near Sønderborg, from the 10th to the 12th January 2008; except for the articles by Ellen Rehm and Tatyana Smekalova which were written while they were working at the Black Sea Centre. Later added was the contribution by Vladimir Goroncharovski of Institute of the History of Material Culture of the Russian Academy of Sciences at St. Petersburg, who kindly allow us to publish the new results of his excavation. To all the participants and authors we would like to express our great gratitude. We must also mention the openness and pleasantness with which the representatives of the various disciplines livened up the many discussions. Due to the fact that the topic was illuminated from a range of perspectives, it was possible to come to conclusions that will lead us further in our understanding.

In the final discussion, it was agreed that there is still a need for further research into the role of the Persians in the Black Sea region. Due to the lack of historical and political information and written sources, especially from the eastern region of the Black Sea, this area has previously been excluded from general research. After this first step towards compiling the results from various areas of research, we hope that study of this exciting period of the Black Sea region, during the time of the last and greatest ancient Near Eastern superpower, will continue.

Aarhus, March 2010

Achaemenids in the Caucasus?

Adele Bill

There are many publications about the Achaemenids and their culture. But who were the Achaemenids or, better yet, what does the term “Achaemenid art” mean exactly?

The Achaemenids were simply a dynasty of rulers of a vast and powerful empire with extremely diverse inhabitants. Unlike the Romans, who also ruled over a huge territory and developed and transmitted their own schemes of planning and architectural types, the Persian satraps simply took over existing palaces and residences.

For the construction of his palace in Susa, Dareios I brought together workmen and materials from different parts of the Empire. The so-called foundation inscription, from about 522 BC, reads:

The gold was brought from Sardis and from Bactria, which here was wrought. The precious stones lapis lazuli and carnelian which were wrought here, these were brought from Sogdiana. The precious stone turquoise, this was brought from Chorasmia, which was wrought here.

The silver and the ebony were brought from Egypt. The ornamentation with which the wall was adorned, that from Ionia was brought. The ivory which was wrought here, was brought from Ethiopia and from Sind and from Arachosia.

The stone columns which were here wrought, a village named Abiradu, in Elam from there were brought. The stone-cutters who wrought the stone, those were Ionians and Sardians.

The goldsmiths who wrought the gold, those were Medes and Egyptians. The men who wrought the wood, those were Sardians and Egyptians. The men who wrought the baked brick, those were Babylonians. The men who adorned the wall, those were Medes and Egyptians (Curtis & Rasmussen 2005, 56, cat. no. 1).

Therefore, is it appropriate to speak of Achaemenid art or architecture? A comparison to the Medici in Florence is perhaps more appropriate. We would never speak of Medici art; we would prefer the term ‘art in the time of the Medici’.

However, the main question under consideration in this article is: how can we interpret the material from burials in the modern states of Georgia, Arme-