



Rethinking the Achaemenid World Order: Space, Religion, and Communicative Strategies*

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Introduction

The present essay explores a number of conceptions and policies, generally associated with the rule of Darius I (522–486 BCE), which *mutatis mutandis* defined the Achaemenid Empire's constitution until its fall. These pertain to (1) the empire's boundaries, both real and imagined, as well as the perception of the "other"; (2) the regulation of the empire's religious landscape, which allowed for the individuation of religious practices within a regimented and ordered universe; and (3) communicative strategies that facilitated the royal discourse's espousal of the intellectual perceptions/predispositions of local audiences.

The Boundaries of Empire

The mental maps of the Achaemenid Empire have been discussed recently by a number of scholars, among them Anca Dan,¹ Pierre Briant,² Robert Rollinger and Julian Degen,³ Hilmar Klinkott,⁴ and John Hyland.⁵ Rollinger's contributions in particular have shown the extent to which the Achaemenids were tributary to Mesopotamian *Vorlagen*, and, like their predecessors, marked bodies of water on the fringes of the empire as the *limes* of their world, in this superimposing intellectual conception of space on the topographical reality of their polities. There is much merit in this approach, but once again *both* Old Iranian and Mesopotamian traditions must come to bear to form a more complete and capacious vision of the Achaemenid political space.

Following the rise and expansion of the Persian

Empire under Cyrus and Cambyses, the territorial additions of Darius I seem in contrast modest and wanting, although they would profoundly define the topographical shape of the empire for centuries to come by establishing the empire's water-bound extremities as its borders. Upon the consolidation of Darius' rule, we are informed of a number of imperial campaigns in the four corners of the realm. The first one was undertaken in the third year of the king's rule, thus, in the years 520/519 BCE, in the immediate aftermath of Darius' successful defeat of the "liar-kings," and was led against one of many Iranian tribes of the northern steppes identified as Sakā, of which the Achaemenid inscriptions knew a variety. This campaign was directed against the *Sakā tigraxaudā*, "the Sakā with the pointed hat," most likely on the eastern frontiers of the empire. The second campaign took Darius to Egypt probably in 519/518 BCE, a year after the expedition against the *Sakā tigraxaudā*. The Bisotun inscription (DB) mentions an Egyptian rebellion while Darius I was fighting insurgencies during his first year, upon his reconquest of Babylonia in December 522 BCE (DB 2.5–8). What is more, Egyptian documents show that beginning in April 521 BCE, part of Egypt recognized another leader as Pharaoh, namely, an indigenous prince by the name of Petubastis (IV), which could indicate that Achaemenid rule in Egypt was contested in 521 by a local rebellion against Persian domination.⁶ Petubastis IV's rule must have lasted until the campaign in 519/518 of Darius, whose reign in Egypt is again attested on an inscription on the occasion of the demise of the Apis Bull in August 518 BCE in Memphis and its burial in November 518 BCE (a third document attests to Darius'

rule also in Thebes in February 517 BCE).⁷ It was most likely during this campaign that Darius also erected a number of stelae celebrating the establishment of the “Suez Canal,” which, as we shall see, report on how the king “seized Egypt from Persia,” and ordered a canal to be dug to permit ships to sail from the Nile all the way to the Persian Gulf (*abiy draya taya hacā Pārsā aitiy*, “towards the sea that goes [flows away] from [the shores of] Persia”).⁸ The third campaign of Darius would take him in 513 BCE to the Danubian and Cimmerian regions, against the western Sakā (who most likely were called later in Achaemenid inscriptions the *Sakā tayaiy paraḍraya*, “Sakā who are beyond the sea”).⁹

On all these campaigns, it appears that the boundaries of the realm were “rounded off” to attain the natural, water-bound frontiers of the “ordered” world, whose perimeters could have been inspired by the projection of a mytho-epic space, referred to as a continent/clime (*karšuuar-/n-; kišwar*) in the Avesta and later Middle Iranian cosmological texts, and typically presented as the locus of the Iranian (Aryan) abode/expanse (*airiio.šaiiana-/airiiana- vaējah-*).¹⁰ But before assessing whether the mytho-epic geography of the Avesta, as elaborated by Sasanian Zoroastrian cosmogony, may be drawn upon to elucidate Achaemenid conceptions of the imperial space, we shall succinctly outline its principal tenets.

In the Avesta, and subsequent Late Antique Zoroastrian traditions, we often encounter the concept of the “seven-partite earth” (*haptō. karšuuairi- zam-*), or that of the “seven climes or continents” (*hapta- karšuuān-*). A case in point being the Yasna 57, where Sraoša, the obstruction-smashing *yazata*, is mentioned as the first sacrificer to Ahuramazdā and the *aməša- spənta-* (the Life-giving Immortals), the one who facilitates the Immortals’ coming down to the “seven-partite earth”:¹¹

sraošəm ašīm huraodəm
vəṛəθrājanəm ... yazamaide
yejhe amaca vərəθraynaca
haozqəβaca vaēdiiāca
auuāin aməša spənta
aoi haptō.karšuuairim zqm

We sacrifice to Orderly Sraoša of the Rewards,
the obstruction-smashing ...

on account of whose force and obstruction-smashing
strength,
good lineage and knowledge,
the Life-giving Immortals came down
to the seven-partite earth.

Yasna 57.23

In a number of passages of the Avestan hymn *Zamyād Yašt*, celebrating the royal fortune and glory, the archetypal, mytho-epic king, Haošiiarha Paraḍāta, is mentioned to have ruled over the “sevenfold earth” (*būmī- haptaiθiiā-*), over both demons and men, sorcerers and witches, potentates and poetasters:¹²

yaṭ uparhacaṭ
haošiiarhəm paraḍātəm
darəyəmcit aipi zruuānəm
yaṭ xšaiiata paiti būmīm haptaiθiiqm
daēuuānqm mašiiānqmca
yāθβqm pairikanqmca
sāθrqm kaoiiqm karafnqmca
yō janaṭ duua θrišuuā
māzainiianqm daēuuānqm
varəniianqmca druuatqm
ahe raiaa ...

(the Kauuian fortune) which followed
Haošiiarha Paraḍāta
for a long time thereafter,
so that he ruled on the sevenfold earth
over daēuuas and men,
sorcerers and witches,
potentates, poetasters, and mumblers;
he who smashed two-thirds
of the Giant daēuuas
and the Lieful ones who made a choice.
On account of his wealth ...

Yašt19.26

What is more, in the selfsame *Zamyād Yašt*, we find the “seven climes/continents” (*hapta- karšuuar-/n-*) also in conjunction with the villain Turanian Fraṇsiian who was combing the countryside in quest of Zarathustra’s glory (*xʷarənah-*):¹³

yejhe taṭ xʷarənō isaṭ
mairiio tūiriio fraṇrase
vīspāiš auui karšuuān yāiš hapta

*pairi yāiš hapta karšuuqn
mairiō apataṭ fraṇrase
isō xʼarənō zaraθuštrāi*

Whose was that Fortune,
which the Tur(an)ian villain Fraṇrasiian sought
across all the seven climes,
over the seven climes, wherein
the villain Fraṇrasiian ran about
seeking the Fortune of Zarathustra.

Yašt 19.82

The names of the continents constituting the *haptō.karšuuairi- zam-* “the seven-partite earth” (Y.57.23; V.19.13) are well attested in several passages of the Avesta, among others in two lists of the *Mihr Yašt* (Yt.10.133) and the *Viḍēvdād* (V.19.39), where the seven climes are named thus: Arəzahi; Sauuahi; Fradaḍafšu; Viḍaḍafšu; Vourubarəšti; Vourujarəšti; and Xʼaniraθa. From among these, one in particular, the luminous continent of Xʼaniraθa (*karšuuar- yaṭ xʼaniraθa-bāmiia-*)¹⁴ – called Xwanīrah in Middle Persian garb – is described in later Middle Persian anthologies as forming the central continent that is surrounded by the other six, and being in size equivalent to them all put together:

*ān rōz ka Tištar wārān kerd ka-š zrēh az-iš būd hēnd
hamāg gyāg nam bē grift 7 pārag bē būd pārag-ēw
čand nēm-ēw mayān 6 pārag pērāmōn ud ān 6 pārag
čand ī Xwanīrah u-š kišwar nām nihād ud keš bē būd*

On that day, when Tištar created the rain, whence the seas sprung up, all places became wet. Seven parts came to be; one part, which was (in size) as much as one half (of all the parts), was in the middle and the other (six parts) around it, and those six parts were equal to Xwanīrah (in size). They are called climes (*kišwar*), for they were furrows (*kiš*).

Bundahišn 8.2¹⁵

This Xʼaniraθa/Xwanīrah, judging from the extant Avestan material, and the more explicit Middle Iranian cosmogonical texts, is the place where the mythical Mount Harā (*harā- bərəzaiti-*, “the tall Harā”), its high peak, Mount Hukairiia, and Lake Vourukaša (*zraīia- vouru.kaša-*, “the Vourukaša Sea”), whereinto the heavenly waters (coming from Hukairiia) flow, are all located.¹⁶

What is more, Xʼaniraθa/Xwanīrah is bound by two (mythical) rivers, called in the Avesta Raṇhā (named Ārang in Middle Persian texts and placed in the west) and Vaṇhʼi Dāitiā (named Wehrōd and located in the east in Middle Persian texts), which delimit the boundaries of the central clime/continent. Xwanīrah and the other continents are said to be separated from each other by many obstacles, that is, bodies of water, forests, and other barriers, so that only divine guidance (*pad parwānagih ī yazdān*), or miracle/magic (*pad warzāwandih*), would grant passage into other climes:

[8.4] *az kišwar ō kišwar juḍ pad parwānagih ī yazdān
ud warzāwandih tā šudan nē šāyēd* | [8.5] *čiyōn
gōwēd kū mayān ī Arzah ud Sawah ud Xwanīrah zrēh
dārēd čē bahr-ēw az (ān) zrēh ī Frāxkerd pērāmōn bē
dāšt/gāšt az mayān ī Fradadafš (ud Widadafš) wēšag
dārēd mayān ī Worubaršn ud Worujaršn kōf ī buland
bē rust kū tā az kišwar ō kišwar paywand bē bawād
kū tā ēk ō did šudan nē šāyēd*

It is not possible to go from continent to continent, but with the guidance of gods and (the use of) miraculous power/magic. It is thus said that between (the continents) Arzah, Sawah, and Xwanīrah there is a sea, for a portion of it is encompassed by the Frāxkerd (Vouru. kaša) Sea. Between (the continents) Fradadafš and Widadafš there is a forest. Between (the continents) Worubaršn and Worujaršn there high mountains have grown, so that they may be some link between the continents, (but) also that it is not possible to cross from one to the other.

Bundahišn 8.4–5

In short, what is perceived to be the central clime, and associated with the mythical continent of Xʼaniraθa/Xwanīrah, the abode of the Iranians, is in the Zoroastrian geography hermetically closed, and its frontiers are demarcated by two rivers that signal its finitude. These rivers, however, following the later Zoroastrian tradition, run (north to south) crossing the oceans (*pad zrēhihā wid-erēnd*) and eventually flow back into the mythical Vourukaša Sea, having received the waters of other rivers and tributaries during their course around the earth:

[11.1] *gōwēd pad dēn kū ēn 2 rōd az abāxtar nēmag az
Harburz Ōhrmazd frāz tazēnīd ēk ō Xwarwarān šud*

kū Ārang ud ēk ō Xwarāsān šud kū Weh rōd xwānēnd
 [11.2] *az pas ī awēšān 18 rōd az ham bun-xān frāz tazīd*
hēnd ud pad ham Harburz andar zamīg frōd šud hēnd
ud pad Xwanīrah ō paydāgīh mad hēnd čiyōn abārig
āb az awēšān pad was-maragīh frāz tazīd estēnd ...
 [11.4] *awēšān āb hamāg abāz ō ēn 2 rōd gumēzēnd ī*
ast Ārang rōd ud Weh rōd [11.5] *awēšān harw 2 pad*
kanārag ī zamīg gardēnd ud pad zrēhīhā widerēnd ud
hamāg kišwar xwāreṇd az ān zahāfīh/zahābagīhā ud
pas harw 2 pad zrēh ī Frāxkerd ō ham rasēnd ud abāz
ō bun-xān rasēnd (ī) aziš bē tazīd hēnd

[11.1] It is revealed in the (good) religion that these two rivers (God) Ōhrmazd caused to flow forth from the north side of (Mount) Harburz, one towards the West, which they call Ārang, and another that goes towards the East, which they call the river Weh. [11.2] After these, 18 rivers flowed forth from the same source, namely, the selfsame Harburz, went into the ground and become visible again in Xwanīrah, when other bodies of water flowed forth in great number from them ... [11.4] All bodies of water mingle again with those rivers, which are the Rivers Ārang and Weh. [11.5] Both circle the edge of the earth and cross over the seas, and all countries drink from those springs. Thereafter both (rivers) meet at the Frāxkerd Sea, the very source, whence they (first) flowed forth.

Bundahišn 11.1–2, 4–5

As such, these two mythical, “globe-roaming” rivers have been associated with multiple rivers throughout history. A case in point being Raṇhā/Ārang that has been identified in the later Zoroastrian tradition with the Tigris as well as the Nile (which could be perceived as the continuation of the selfsame river across the ocean); and Varḥvī Dāitiā with the river Indus (*Mīhrān rōd/Hindugān rōd*) and more:¹⁷

*jud az ēn 3 zrēh ī *meh u-š pas tazēnīd az Harburz*
az abāxtar kanārag 2 rōd ī Ārang ud Weh ud Ārang
*ast Diglit tazān ō *rōn frōd-šudān ud Weh-rōd ō *rōn*
*ul-āmadān būd pad 2 sar bē *gašt bē ō zrēh šud hēnd*

Aside from these three *large seas, he [God Ōhrmazd] made flow from (Mount) Harburz, from north, two rivers Ārang (Raṇhā) and Weh[rōd] (Varḥvī Dāitiā). Ārang is the Tigris whose course was in the direction of the setting (sun); and the (course of) Weh River was in the direction of the rising (sun).

Wizdagīhā ī Zādspram 3.22¹⁸

[11a.1] *Ārang rōd ān ī guft kū az Harburz bē tazēd*
ud āyēd pad Sūrag būm kē Šam-iz xwānēnd ud pad
(E)giptōs būm kē Misr-iz xwānēnd bē widerēd u-š
*ānōh rōd ī nēw *Egiptōis xwānēnd* [11a.2] *Weh rōd pad*
Xwarāsān bē widerēd ud pad Sind būm šawēd ud pad
Hindugān ō zrēh rēzēd u-š ānōh Mīhrān rōd xwānēnd
ud Hindugān rōd-iz xwānēnd

[11a.1] The River Ārang is the one that, it is said, flows forth from (Mount) Harburz and comes to the land of Syria, which they also call Šam, and crosses (over) to the land of *Egypt, which they also call Misr, wherein they also call it the ‘good river of Egypt.’ [11a.2] The Weh River goes across the East to the land of India and pours into the sea in India, where they also call it the ‘Mīhrān River’ – they also call it the ‘River India.’

Bundahišn 11a.1–a.2

Completing this picture is the reality of salt seas and their relation both to Xʷaniraθa/Xwanīrah and the cosmic Vourukaša Sea. Intriguingly, the latter, although the fabled repository of all sweet waters, appears to be related to, or connected with, the three large salt seas of the Iranian world, which serve as purifiers of waters flowing into the Vourukaša Sea, a function also shared by the mythical rivers Raṇhā and Varḥvī Dāitiā. These salt seas are identified in the later Zoroastrian traditions as the Persian Gulf (Pūitkā/Pūydīg)¹⁹; the Caspian Sea (Kāmrōd); and the Black Sea (Syāwbun).²⁰ Thus, the picture that emerges from all this is the idea of a mytho-epic Iranian expanse bound by a network of water frontiers, to wit: the outer salt seas to the northeast (Kāmrōd), west (Syāwbun), and south (Pūitkā/Pūydīg) – with the latter, that is, the Persian Gulf, being connected with the mythical Vourukaša Sea – and two mighty rivers circling the earth and connected possibly with these salt seas and, like them, mingling eventually in the Vourukaša Sea.

When we contrast the tenets of the Zoroastrian/Avestan geography with the Achaemenid imperial space under Darius and his successors, a few commonalities stand out. The Achaemenid geography recognized several levels of spatial division, best observed in the expanded Achaemenid titulature in Old Persian inscriptions, which remained relatively consistent in its structures from its beginnings under Darius I to the end of Artaxerxes III Ochus’ rule.²¹ In general, Darius’ titulature shows a tripartite structure:

[1] *adam darayava^huš* | *xšāyaθiya vazarka* |
xšāyaθiya xšāyaθiyānām |

[2] (*xšāyaθiya pārsaiy*) | *xšāyaθiya dahayūnām*
(*vispazanānām* / *paruzanānām*) | *xšāyaθiya*
ahayāyā / *haruvahayāyā būmiyā* (*vazarkāyā dūrai*
apiy) |

[3] *vištāspahayā puça* | *haxāmanišiya* | (*pārsa*
pārsahayā puça ariya ariyaciça) |

I, Darius | great king | king of kings |

(king in Persis) | king of the lands (of many races/all
races) | king on this (great) earth (far and wide) |

son of Vištāspa, | an Achaemenid | (Persian, of Persian
descent, Aryan, of Aryan seed) |

The first sequence exhibits the king's titles in terms of waxing exaltation: "great king" > "king of kings"; the second expresses the spatial expanse of the kingship, again in expanding order: "king in Persis" > "king of the lands (of many races/all races)" > "king on this (great) earth (far and wide)." And the third sequence indicates the king's social context in terms of widening circles, from his more immediate kinship relation ("son of Vištāspa") to his broader ethnic belonging "Aryan, of Aryan seed." Of interest in this context is the opposition between *xšāyaθiya dahayūnām* (*vispazanānām/paruzanānām*) (DNa 10–11; DE 14–16) "king of the lands (of many races/all races)" and *xšāyaθiya ahayāyā būmiyā vazarkāyā dūrai apiy* (DNa 11–12)/*xšāyaθiya haruvahayāyā būmiyā* (DSb 7–9) "king on this (great) earth (far and wide)"/"king on the whole earth," with the former referring to the empire's spatial reality, its manifold provinces (*dahayau*), and the latter to the vaguer notion of the inhabited: *būmī- vazarkā- dūrai apiy/haruvā- būmī-* "the great earth far and wide/the whole earth."

The concept of *būmī-* does not primarily pertain to a concrete imperial space, but represents a higher geography, whose cosmogonical pertinence may still be discerned.²² Indeed, *būmī-* is often associated with Ahuramazdā's act of creation (*baga vazarka A^huramazdā haya im|ām būmim adā haya avam asm|ānam adā*, "the great god Ahuramazdā who placed/set this earth (*būmī-*), who placed yonder sky"; DNa 1–3). In another passage, the earth is described as a creation in turmoil

(*būmī- yaudaⁿtī-*), that needed to be reset in its proper place/foundation (*°-šim gāθavā niyašā-daya-*): *A^huramazdā* [*ya*]θ|ā *avaina imām būmim yau[daⁿtim]* | *pasāva-dim manā frābara mām* [*xšā*] | *yaθiyam akunauš adam ... vašnā A^huramazdāh[ā]* | *a|dam-šim gāθavā niyašādayam*, "When Ahuramazdā saw this earth in turmoil, he then gave it to me. He made me king ... By the greatness of Ahuramazdā, I seated it down on its place." Thus, this otherworldly dimension of *būmī-* appears to represent a different concept than the actuality of the realm (*xšaça-*), whose components and four quarters the inscriptions often depict:

ima xšaçam taya ada|m dārayāmiy hacā sakaibiš
tayaip pa|ra sugdam amata yātā ā kūšā hacā hiⁿda|uv
amata yātā ā spardā tayamaiy A^hurama|zdā frābara
haya maθišta bagānām m|ām

This is the realm that I hold: from the Scythians who are beyond Sogdiana, from there all the way to Kūš/Nubia, from India, from there all the way to Sardis, this (all) Ahuramazdā gave me, he who is the greatest among the gods.

DH 3–7 = DPh 4–9²³

Whereas the imperial space encompasses a sample of regionally organized provinces and concrete frontiers, the *būmī- vazarkā- dūrai apiy/haruvā- būmī-* is more capacious, less tangible, and of a different ontological order. It may well be an equivalent of the idealized central clime known from the Avestan/Zoroastrian traditions as the X^aniraθa/Xwanīrah, or even the totality of the (seven) continents, the *haptō.karšuuairī- zam-* "the seven-partite earth," as these notions do not seem to have been unfamiliar to the Achaemenids.

Indeed, according to Ptolemy (Ptol. 5.8; 5.14), the river Volga was called by Scythians settled in the northern shore of the Black Sea 'Pā (< **Rahā-*), a designation that indubitably refers to the mythical river Rañhā.²⁴ This report, which likely reflected realities of the late Hellenistic period, could also intimate that the concept of Rañhā as the western frontier of X^aniraθa (or the imperial space) was also known to, or observed by, the Achaemenids, although it remains to be seen whether it could have referred to waters other than the Volga in the sixth century BCE. In this context, we should be reminded of the stelae

(reportedly) erected by Darius I on the proximity of waterways in the Ancient Near East and Egypt, during some of his major campaigns, possibly to mark the limits of the realm. The significance of these “end of the world” stelae are well-known and much discussed in scholarship.²⁵ Among their many purposes is the desire to demarcate the outer boundaries of the realm, evoking the sovereign’s prowess in accomplishing an unprecedented act, hence projecting power for the benefit of internal and external audiences.

A number of stelae are extant or attested for the reign of Darius I. The more important ones are those inscribed in the empire’s three cuneiform languages (Elamite, Akkadian, and Old Persian), as well as late Egyptian, and placed all along Darius I’s recently established “Suez” canal.²⁶ In the Old Persian variant, the series of stelae commemorate how the king “seized Egypt from Persia,” and ordered a canal to be dug to allow ships to sail from the Nile (through the Red Sea) all the way to the Persian Gulf (*abiy draya taya hacā Pārsā aitiy* “towards the sea that goes (flows away) from [the shores of] Persia”):

[baga] vazarka A^huramazdā
haya avam asmānam adā |
haya imām bū[m|i]m adā
haya [mar]tiyam adā
ha[ya š]iyātim adā martiyahay|ā
haya dārayava^hum xšāyaθiyam aku[nau]š
haya d[ā]rayavahauš xšāyaθiyahyā xšaça|m frābara
taya vazarkam
taya [^huvasam ^hu]mar[ti]yam

adam dārayava^huš | xšāyaθiya vazarka xšāyaθiya
xšāyaθiyānām xšāyaθiya dahyūnām v[ispazan]ānām
[xšāyaθiya] hayāy|ā būmiyā vazarkāyā dūrai y apiy
[v]ištās[pahayā p]uça ha|xāmanišiya

θātiy dārayava^huš xšāyaθiya ada[m p]ārsa a^hmi[y hac]
ā pā|rsā mudrāyam agarbā[ya]m

adam nī[ya]štāyam imām [yauviyā]|m kataniy hacā
pirāva nāma rauta taya mudrāyaiy danu[vatiy ab]|iy
[dr]aya taya hacā pārsā aitiy

pas[āva] iyam yauviyā | [akaniya] | ava[θā yaθā]
adam niyaštāyam ut[ā nāva] āyatā hac[ā mudrā]|yā
ta[ra imā]m yauviyām ab|iy pārsam [ava]θā yaθā
mā[m kāma āha]

A great god is Ahuramazdā,
who created yonder heaven,
who created this earth,
who created man,
who created happiness among men,
who made Darius king,
who bestowed on King Darius this realm,
which is far and wide
which is with good horses and with good men.

I (am) Darius the great king, king of kings, king of
lands of many races, king on this great earth far and
wide, son of Hystaspes, an Achaemenid.

King Darius proclaims: I am a Persian; from Persia, I
seized Egypt.

I ordered this canal to be dug, from a river called Nile,
which flows in Egypt, towards the sea that goes (flows
away) from (the shores of) Persia.

So, this canal was dug as I had ordered, and ships went
from Egypt through this canal to Persia, as was my
desire.

DZc = Darius at Suez

Other stelae, reported by Herodotus, were apparently erected on the occasion of Darius I’s bridging the Bosphorus, around 513–511 BCE, during the king’s ambitious expedition to submit, or push back the Sakā tribes in the Danubian and the Black Sea regions.²⁷ Much like the Nile-Red Sea canal in Egypt, spanning a pontoon bridge over the Bosphorus was an engineering feat, requiring considerable imperial resources warranting the placement of commemorative stelae, such as those described by Herodotus: στήλας ἔστησε δύο ἐπ’ αὐτοῦ λίθου λευκοῦ ἐνταμὼν γράμματα ἐς μὲν τὴν Ἀσσύρια ἐς δὲ τὴν Ἑλληνικά, “he [Darius] placed two stelae of white stone (marble) upon/next to it, engraving one in characters in Assyrian, and another in Greek”; these, however, were apparently carried off by Byzantines before Herodotus’ lifetime.²⁸

Herodotus knows of yet another stela during Darius’ Scythian expedition, that is, the one erected at the source of the Tearus river while en route to the Danube river: ἐπὶ τοῦτον ὦν τὸν ποταμὸν ἀπικόμενος ὁ Δαρεῖος ὡς ἐστρατοπεδεύσατο ἡσθεῖς τῷ ποταμῷ στήλην ἔστησε καὶ ἐνθαυτα γράμματα ἐγγράψας λέγοντα τάδε, “having arrived at this river, Darius

took position, delighted at the river, and placed a stela there, engraved with writing, saying thus ...”²⁹ This stela, apparently in cuneiform script, for which we have partial archaeological evidence at our disposal, seems to have been extant until the mid-nineteenth century.³⁰ Although the content of the inscription has been rightly rejected in scholarship, including its somewhat maladroit use of the royal titulature, there is, however, a point worthy of consideration. The title of Darius in this stela is reported as: Δαρειός ὁ Ὑστάσπεος Περσέων τε καὶ πάσης τῆς ἡπείρου βασιλεύς, “Darius, son of Hystaspes, king of Persians and of the entire land/continent,” the latter of which may represent *mutatis mutandis* the Old Persian expression *haruvā- būmī-* “the whole earth.”³¹ If so, it is significant that this expression was used at the outer western boundary of the realm.

Most recently, the fragment of a stela written in Old Persian, and mentioning the name of Darius I, has been excavated in the city of Phanagoria located in the Taman Peninsula, on the Cimmerian Bosphorus connecting the Maeotian Lake (Sea of Azov) to the Black Sea,³² and appears to attest to the presence of Persian troops on the northern shore of the Black Sea. This fragment, whose origin has been diversely interpreted in recent scholarship, but which undoubtedly belongs to the reign of Darius I, could be yet another indication that Darius was marking bodies of waters (seas; straits; rivers) at the periphery of his realm with “end of the world” stelae:

(1) [-.....d-a-r-y-v-(h)[-u-š:x-š-y-θ-i-y-h-y-a:-----]

(2)[a-d-m:d-a-r-y-v-(u)-š:x-(š)[-y-θ-i-y:-----]

(3)[-.....p-r^u-u-v-m:a[-.....]

(4)[-.....vⁱ-i-y-t-(r)-y-m:a[-.....]

(5)[-.....a-d-m:a-(k^u)[-u-n-v-m:-----]

(6)[-.....];-m-r-t[-i-y-----]

[A great god is Ahuramazdā ... who bestowed] on [King Dar]ei[os] [(dāraya)vah[auš xšāyaθiyahyā]] [this realm ... I am Dar]i[us] the [great] k[ing] ... [be]fore (*[par]uvam) ... I [traver]sed / [resti]tuted ([*viyata-]rayamⁱ / [*niyaçā]rayamⁱ) I m[ade/did] (adam *a[kunavam]) ... man/men (*marti[ya-])³³

If indeed the fragment found in Phanagoria belonged to a stela erected in the more immediate vicinity of the Taman Peninsula, and was not carried off from afar, then its presence in combination with the testimonies of the *Tabulae Iliacae* – namely, the Roman Chronicle (*Chronicon Romanum*, also called *Tabula Capitolina*) and the Getty Table³⁴ – that traditionally place the date of Darius I’s Scythian expedition (to the year 513/512 BCE), but also mention his crossing of the Cimmerian Bosphorus, Κιμμέριος Βόσπορος,³⁵ could intimate that a majority of the waterways, as was the case of the Thracian Bosphorus, or the river Tearus, were adorned with stelae during Darius’ campaign:

ἀφ’ οὗ Ἀρμόδιος καὶ Ἀριστογείτων [Ἴπ-]
παρχον τὸν τύραννον ἀνείλον [καὶ]
Δαρειός ἐπὶ Σκύθας διέβη ζεύ[ξ]α[ς τὸν]
Κιμμέριον [Β]ώσπορον, ἔτη φκη’.

From which time, Harmodius and Aristogeiton killed the tyrant Hipparchus, and Darius against the Scythians crossed (over) by bridging the Cimmerian Bosphorus, 527 years.

Inscriptiones Graecae XIV, no. 1297, col. II, ll. 22–25

The last piece of evidence in Darius’ marking the boundaries of his empire pertains to the campaign directed against the *Sakā tigraxaudā*, “the Sakā with the pointed hat,” and their leader Skunxa, most likely on the eastern fringes of the realm. Although we do not possess a stela documenting this campaign, it was nonetheless deemed sufficiently important to alter the completed Bisotun relief and its accompanying inscriptions, to add the likeness of the defeated Saka king Skunxa in the row of “liar kings,” and engrave – with the addition of a supplementum – the fifth column narrating, among others, the king’s Sakā campaign, a new Old Persian variant below the relief (see fig. 1).

The Bisotun inscription reports as follows:

[θāti]y dārayava^huš xš[āyaθiya pa[sāva had]ā kār[ā a-]dam [aš]iyavam abiy sak[ām pas[a]vā [sakā taya]i(y) xau[dā]m tigrām barati|y i[maiy patiš mām ā]iša [ya-] (d)iy abiy draya a|vā[rasam d]rax[t]ā [ava hadā kār]ā visā viyatara|yam [pasāva] avaiy sak[ā adam] ajanam aniyam aq[ar]bāya hauv basta ānayatā] abiy mām ut|ā[šām haya maθ]ištā skuⁿxa nāma avam aq[ar]bāya

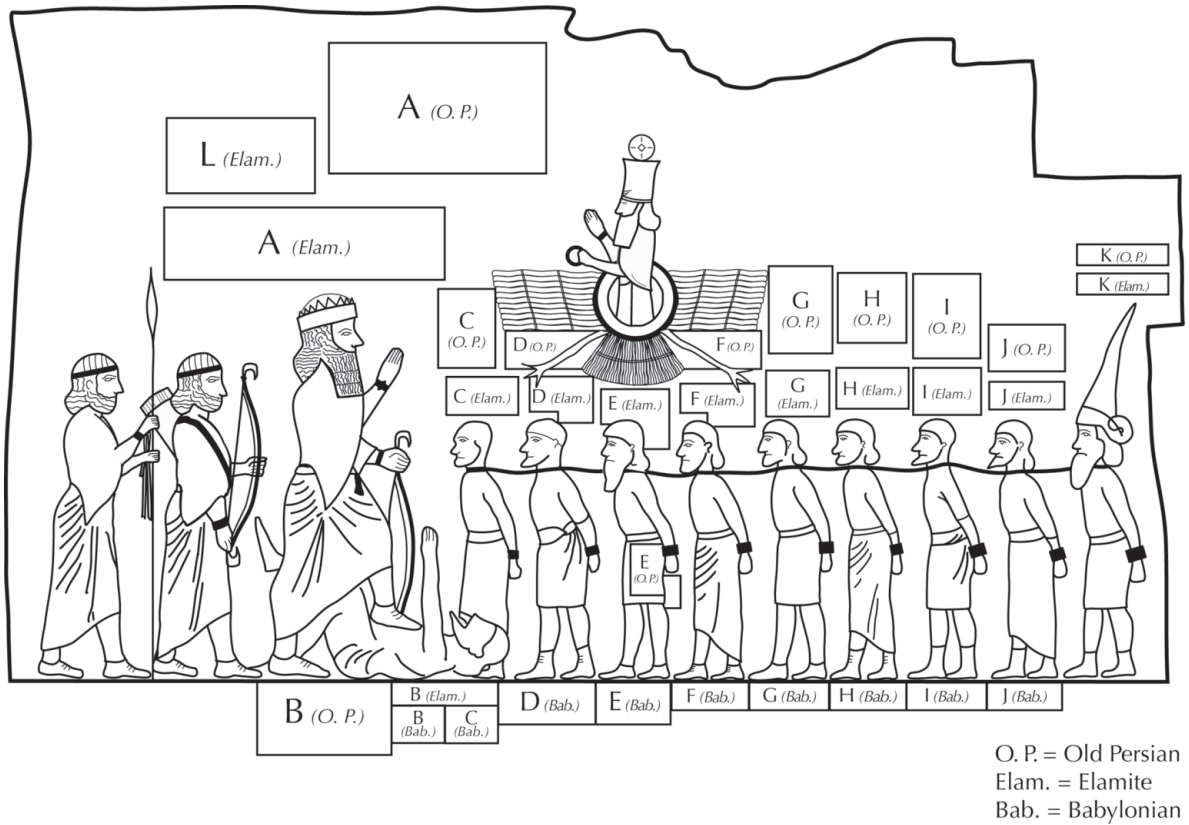


Fig. 1. Darius and the liar-kings on the relief of Bisotun. Drawing by Jill Curry Robbins following King and Thompson 1907: plate 13.

[basta]m ānaya [abiy mām] avadā aniyam maθ|ištam
akunavam ya[θā] mām kāma pasāva da|hayāuš manā
abava

[θāti]y dārayava^huš xšāya|θi[ya avaiy] sa[k]ā ari[k ā-]
ha utā naiy A^huramazd|ā-[šām aya]diya A^hurama[z-]
d[ām] ayadaiy vašnā A^hurama|zdā[ha] yaθā mām kāma
[avaθādi]š akunavam

θāt|iy [dā]rayava^huš [x]šāyaθiya [haya] A^huramazdām
yadāta|iy [avahay]ā [yāna]m [ahatiy] utā jivahayā utā
m[artahay]ā

King Darius proclaims: Then I went with the people in arms to Scythia. Then the Sakā/Scythians who wore the pointed cap, they came against me. When I arrived at the sea/body of water, I crossed it with the entire army by means of tree *trunks²/*wooden rafts². Then I smashed those Scythians. Some they seized, and some were brought bound to me. And they seized the one who was greatest among them, named Skunxa. He was

brought bound to me. There I appointed another (to be) the greatest as it was my desire. Then the land became mine.

King Darius proclaims: Those Scythians were evil and did not sacrifice to Ahuramazdā. I sacrificed to Ahuramazdā. By the greatness of Ahuramazdā, I did with them as I wished.

King Darius proclaims: the one who sacrifices to Ahuramazdā, he shall receive (his) reward both when alive and in death.

DB 5.30–36

Once more, we see the king establishing boundaries at the junction of a body of water, which the inscription calls a “sea” (*drayah-*). Uncertainty surrounds all elements of this report, from the location of the *Sakā tigraxaudā* to the identity of the waters that were crossed (*viyataraya-*).³⁶

As commonly accepted, the *Sakā tigraxaudā* are mentioned invariably in conjunction with eastern lands and are therefore distinct from the western *Sakā* (the so-called *Sakā tayaiy paraḍraya* [DNa/DSe]).³⁷ They may therefore be associated with those *Sakā* whom Darius in his inscriptions in Hamadān (DHa) and Persepolis (DPh) places on the farther side of Sogdiana (*ima xšaçaṃ taya adam dārayāmiy hacā sakaibiš tayaiy para sugdam amata yātā ā kūšā hacā hindauv amata yātā ā spardā*, “this is the realm I hold, from the *Sakā* on the far side of Sogdiana [*para sugdam*], all the way to Nubia, from India all the way to Sardis”; DHa 4–6), while describing the realm expanse, again in loose correlation with water frontiers: Sardis (Aegean); Nubia (Nile); India (Indus); and the *Sakā* (Jaxartes).

All this brings us to our main query, namely, to what extent was Darius’ marking of the realm’s waterways during his early major campaigns a means to designate the *limits* of the empire, or validate its *universality*? In recent scholarship, a valiant effort has been made to address this question by referring to Ancient Near Eastern precedents, to understand the mental geography of the Achaemenid Empire as a function of its dialogue with the Mesopotamian past and the emulation of its *Vorlagen*. Whereas there is much merit in these efforts, and much truth in the Achaemenid indebtedness to the Mesopotamian intellectual legacy, there are also limits to be observed, for there is a proper Iranian worldview and cosmogony to be considered as well, whose traces, albeit faintly present in the Achaemenid world, may, if duly probed, still open up other interpretative venues to qualify Darius’ marking of his empire.

In this context, we may see Darius’ early campaigns at the frontiers on the waterfront as an attempt to reach the boundaries of an idealized central clime/continent (such as the Xʷaniraθa/Xwanīrah) that is bound in the east and west by two mythical waterways that cross the oceans, circle the earth, and connect with salty seas to flow eventually into the cosmic waters of the Vourukaša. Indeed, whereas the placement of stelae in the Danubian/Cimmerian regions and in Egypt may well have made use of Ancient Near Eastern practices to demarcate the realm’s confines, it did so, as it appears, within an Iranian cosmogonical framework; the rivers crossed and borders delimited by Darius on the western fringes (the Taurus; Danube; possibly the Don;

and the Volga) could have been an attempt at identifying the manifest, visible tributaries of the cosmic Raṇhā, whose name is attested in the late Hellenistic period for the Volga (Pā; Ptol. 5.8; 5.14), and thus at exploring the natural waterways defining the western boundaries of the realm. A cosmic Raṇhā that, were we to follow the later cosmogonical traditions, would have crossed the ocean and been identified with the Nile. In this light, it may not be surprising that the waters of the Danube and Nile were reportedly kept in the Achaemenid treasury (Plu. *Alex.* 36.2), as they must have symbolized the realm’s expanse, but also been the actualization of confines marked by the elusive cosmic river Raṇhā. In the same vein, Darius’ crossing of a body of water in his campaign against the *Sakā tigraxaudā* in the East was precisely fulfilling what his later deeds in Egypt and in eastern Europe would also accomplish, namely, establishing the realm’s idealized *limes*. In the campaign against the *Sakā tigraxaudā*, the identity of the *drayah-*, which the king reportedly traversed, remains still unresolved. It either refers to a sea, such as the Aral Sea, or rivers, such as the Oxus and Jaxartes – if we were to pay heed to the expression *Sakā tayaiy para sugdam*. However, it could also have referred to cosmic waterways that define the eastern boundary of the central clime, and were associated with the tributaries flowing into the mythic Vanhī Dāitiā (and eventually into the *zraīah- vouru.kaša-* “the Vourukaša Sea”), which in later traditions was identified with the Indus river (*Mihrān rōd/Hindugān rōd*).³⁸

If this conjecture were to hold, then the unknown expanse beyond the frontiers of the realm would not perforce be the bitter seas and the vacuity beyond them, but other climes that ontologically belong to the world of being that are separated from the central clime by the presence of obstacles or waterways that are themselves realizations of cosmic waters. If indeed Darius’ policy had been about reframing the frontiers of the realm within a Mazdean geography, by giving credence to the idea of a central clime delimited by cosmic rivers, then how is this limitation to be reconciled with the universality claim we detect not only in the spirit of the inscriptions, but also in the garb of expressions, such as *būmī- vazarkā-dūraiṇ apiy/haruvā- būmī-*, “the great earth far and wide/the whole earth,” which appear to lay claim to the whole inhabited world? As we have

argued above, the concept of *būmǝ-* does not refer to the imperial space, but is pregnant with a cosmogonical connotation, since it often occurs in association with Ahuramazdā's act of creation. Thus, it is conceivable that the Achaemenids, beginning with Darius I, began to perceive the actuality of the realm (*xšaça-*) as bound by the emanations of the cosmic rivers Raṇhā and Vaṇhī Dāitiā, but still maintained their idealized claim over all climes/continents, the whole earth (*haruvā- būmǝ-*), which was bestowed upon them by Ahuramazdā in conjunction with the creation of the world.

It is in this vein that we have to understand the expression *dahayāva tayā para draya*, "the lands beyond the sea" (DPe 14–15). It certainly refers to mainland Hellas – as it follows upon *yaunā tayaiy^huškahayā utā tayaiy drayahayā* "Ionians who are on dry (land) and those who are (on islands) in the sea" (DPe 12–14) – whose inhabitants are more specifically called *yaunā tayaiy paradraya dāraya^{ti}*, "Ionians/Greeks who dwell beyond the sea" (XPh 23–25), but certainly encompasses also other *ethnea* that are qualified as *paradraya*, "beyond the sea," such as the Danubian/Cimmerian Sakā, the *Sakā tayaiy paradraya* (DNa; DSe). Although both of these people are said to be held within the bounds of the empire, *imā dahayāva tayā adam adaršiy*, "these are the lands I hold" (DPe 7–9)/*imā dahayāva tayaišām adam xšāyaθiya āhām*, "these are the lands, whose king I am" (XPh 14–16), they still seem to be different, being located outside the immediate confines of the realm, possibly being cast off the Achaemenid commonwealth.

Ordering the World

But how was this realm, which Darius reshaped by casting it into the mold of Mazdean geography, structured? Or more precisely, what intellectual and religious tenets would have regimented it, affording the king to hold sway (*dar-*) over its diverse constituents, the *dahayāva paruzanā/vispazanā* "the lands of many races/all races" (DNA 10–11; DE 14–16). One of the cardinal questions in Achaemenid studies is still concerned with how the Achaemenid Empire shaped its religious landscape,³⁹ and whether we may speak of an Achaemenid policy in religious matters that was distinctly at odds with the state of affairs in

prior empires of Mesopotamia and was characterized by the willingness of the central authority to afford limited autonomy in religious practices to the empire's heterogeneous constituents. Or, what is more, whether beyond this perceived permissiveness, the empire was even supportive of local cultural practices by economically sustaining them, or even assertively regulating their rituals.

Many examples have been discussed in the past to make a case for an Achaemenid religious policy that would, as a matter of state doctrine, facilitate local religious or cultural practices, especially around the *Reichsautorisation* idea, which has been vigorously discussed in Iranist quarters and among Biblical scholars in the past decades.⁴⁰ This dossier is beyond the scope of the present study, although we shall still draw on some of that evidence, but also pay heed to other documentation – that has either been adequately explored in recent time, or is still in want of being more fully probed – which we hope shall shed additional light on the religious landscape of the Achaemenid Empire.

Although the Achaemenids were indebted to the traditions of the Assyrians, Babylonians, and other cuneiform cultures, such as the Elamites, theirs was a distinct religious world, shaped partially by their Indo-Iranian heritage, as reflected in the Achaemenid royal inscriptions. In a nutshell, the epigraphic material conveys the following picture as to the exalted position of Ahuramazdā and his synergy with the great king: Ahuramazdā is represented as the greatest of gods (*maθišta bagānām*), who had set the cosmos in motion (*dā-*) and regulated the world through order (*arta-*). The concept of Order, although *functionally* ever present in the Achaemenid inscriptions in the very act of Ahuramazdā's establishing the cosmos ("this earth"/"yonder sky"), does however rarely occur in an explicit manner as an overarching principle, as it frequently does in the Avesta (*aša-*):

*iθā āt yazamaidē ahurəm mazdqm
yə gəmčā ašəmčā dāt
apascā dāt uruuarāscā varj^hhiš
raocāscā dāt būmimčā
vīspācā vohū*

Table 1

In life	In afterlife
(<i>maniyāiy</i>) <i>šiyāta ahaniy jīva</i> when you think: ‘may I be <u>happy</u> (<i>šiyāta</i> -) when <u>alive</u> ’	<i>utā marta artāvā ahaniy</i> ‘and a <u>follower of Order</u> (<i>artavan</i> -) when <u>dead</u> ,’
<i>avanā dātā parīdiy taya A^huramazdā niyaštāya</i> (then) <u>follow the law which Ahuramazdā has set down</u>	<i>A^huramazdām yadaišā artācā barmāniy</i> (and) <u>you should sacrifice to Ahuramazdā according to</u> <u>*Order (<i>artācā</i>) in the heights</u>

Thus, we worship Ahura Mazda
who has placed both the Cow and Order,
both the good waters and plants,
both the lights and the earth,
and all good things⁴¹

In Xerxes’ *daiva*- inscription (XPh), we find probably the most explicit reference to *arta*- as an organizing principle in the expressions *artācā barmāniy*, and *artavan*- , with the latter qualifying the followers of Order, in contrast to *Lie* (*drauga*-), the principle of chaos and evil:

**tuvam kā haya | apara yadiy maniyāiy šiyāta ahaniy
| jīva utā marta artāvā ahaniy | avanā dātā parīdiy
taya A^huramazdā niyaštāya A^huramazdām yadaišā
q|rtācā barmāniy |*

*martiya haya avanā dātā pariyaita taya A^huramazdā
n|ištāya utā A^huramazdām yadaiy q|rtācā
barmāniy hauv utā jīva | šiyāta bavatiy utā marta
artāvā | bavatiy*

You, whoever (you are), who (shall come) hereafter,
when you think: ‘may I be happy (*šiyāta*-) (when) alive,
and a follower of Order (*artavan*-) (when) dead,’ (then)
follow the law which Ahuramazdā has set down; you
should sacrifice to Ahuramazdā according to *Order
(*artācā*) in the heights.⁴²

The man who follows the law which Ahuramazdā has
set down and sacrifices to Ahuramazdā according to
*Order in the heights, he shall be not only happy while
alive, but also a follower of Order when dead.⁴³

In this passage, a parallelism has been created
between, on the one hand, the happiness of man,
more precisely, the state of him being “happy”
(*šiyāta*-), which translates into him following
(*pariy-ay*-)⁴⁴ the law (*dātā*-) set down (*ni-štāya*-)

by Ahuramazdā in the material world (“when living” *jīva*-), and on the other hand, the blessedness of man, that is, the state of him being “a follower of Order” (*artavan*-) in the afterlife (“when dead” *martha*-), which consists in sacrificing to Ahuramazdā, in accordance with the (cosmic) order (*artācā* < **artā hacā*) fashioned in the heights (*barmāniy*) (see table 1).

The inscriptions also admonish men not to leave the “right path” (*paθi- tayā- rāstā*-) established by Ahuramazdā:

*martiyā hayā A^huramazdāhā framānā hauv-taiy gastā
mā θadaya paθim tayām rāstām mā avah^hardā⁴⁵ mā
sta^mbava*

O man, may the command of Ahuramazdā not seem
foul to you! Do not leave the straight path, do not
oppose (it)!

Intriguingly, this “right/straight path” is also
known from the Avesta as the one leading “up
to Order” (*ā ašāt*) for the followers of Order
(*ašauuan*-):

*razištahe paθō aēšəmca vaēdəmca
yō asti razištō ā ašāt
vahištəmca ahūm ašaonqm*

the seeking and finding of the straightest path,
which is the straightest up to Order
the best existence of the followers of Order.

Y.68.13

What does all this mean? Simply put: happiness is
gained in the material world by following Ahuramazdā’s law, in addition, however, those who also (correctly) sacrifice (*yada*-) to Ahuramazdā while alive, shall progress on the “right path” that leads

Table 2

<i>šiyāta-</i> in life	<i>artavan-</i> in afterlife
in order to be <u>happy</u> (<i>šiyāta-</i>) in the <u>material world</u>	in order to be a follower of Order (<i>artavan-</i>) in <u>afterlife</u>
the <i>homo mazdeanus</i> is to <u>follow the law</u> set down by Ahuramazdā	the <i>homo mazdeanus</i> is to <u>sacrifice according to</u> <u>*Order in the heights</u>

to Order, and will eventually be blessed in the afterlife as followers of Order. Thus, we have the schemata shown in table 2.

But what about the king's law that holds together in orderly fashion the empire's diverse constituents, and strikes fear into the hearts of his subjects?

θātiy dārayava^huš xš[ā]yaθiya vašnā A^huramazdāha im[ā] dahayāva tayā adam aqarbāya[m] apataram hacā pārsā adamšā[m] patiyaxšayaīy manā bājim aba[ra]ha tayašām hacām aθahaya ava [a]kunava dātām taya manā avadi[š] adāraya

King Darius proclaims: By the greatness of Ahuramazdā, I ruled over these lands which I seized in addition to Persia. They bore me tribute. They did whatever was told them by me. My law held them (in place).

DNa 15–22

(θ)[ātiy dārayava^huš xšāyaθiya vasiy ta]ya duš[kar-tam āha ava naibam a]kunav[am] dahayāva [ayauda] aniya [ani][y]am aja ava a[dam] akunavam [vašnā] A^huramazdāhā yaθā a[niya a]niyam naiy jatiy ci[nā gā]θavā kašciy astiy d[ātām] taya manā haca avanā tar[sati]y yaθā haya tauviyā tayam skauθim naiy jatiy nai[y] vimardatiy

[Thus, proclaims King Darius: much that had been done] badly I made [good]. The lands [were in turmoil]. They smashed [one] another. By the greatness of Ahuramazdā, I made it so that they did not smash one another [until] everyone was in his place. (Now) they fear my law, so that the mighty does not strike the weak, or destroy him.

DSe 30–44

How does this law relate to that of Ahuramazdā, and where does the king's law fit into the fabric

of Order, phenomenological or transcendental? It seems that a scantily noticed tri-partite structure governs the distribution of these ordering principles and laws: the law of Ahuramazdā, which is said to be set down (*ni-štāya-*), regulates, in the material world, the ethics of the Mazdean man, the *homo mazdeanus*, as well as his orderly sacrifice to Ahuramazdā, if he were to partake in the cosmic order in the afterlife; the king's law, which is reminiscent, in the (phenomenal/material) world of the cosmic order (*arta-*) that Ahuramazdā has fashioned in the heights (*barzmani-*), concerns the remaining constituents of the empire, the *homo imperialis*.

In sum: the law of Ahuramazdā is about the Mazdean man, his happiness, his proper sacrifice, and his afterlife; the king's law seems however to project itself on other members of the empire, maybe on the *homo imperialis* beyond Persia. However, both Ahuramazdā's law and the king's law appear to operate as ordering agents; in this they are the different *modi essendi* of the self-same cosmic order, but for different audiences. Thus, we have the schemata shown in table 3.

If, indeed, the Persians did not impress upon their subjects their own *Götterwelt*, then how did they translate their political dominion into the realm of the sacred? It seems that theirs was a subtle form of cultural imprint that demands further scrutiny. Their approach toward extraneous theologies and practices was one of orderly arrangement. This means that rather than carrying off the gods of the conquered, for these endured the ascendancy of the Iranian pantheon, the Achaemenids would resort to structuring and arranging their subjects' religious practices, rituals, laws, and even pantheon, as if this ordering was reminiscent of the re-enactment of an original act of creation by their supreme god Ahuramazdā, who had set the cosmos in motion by ordering it.

Table 3

<i>homo mazdeanus</i>		<i>homo imperialis</i>
in order to be <u>happy</u> (<i>šiyāta</i> -) in the <u>material world</u> ↓	in order to be a follower of Order (<i>artavan</i> -) in <u>afterlife</u> ↓	in order to be <u>happy</u> (<i>šiyāta</i> -) in the <u>material world</u>
follow (<i>pariy-ay</i> -) the law (<i>dāta</i> -) set down by Ahuramazdā	sacrifice (<i>yada</i> -) according to *Order (<i>artācā</i>) in the heights	the king's law (<i>dāta</i> -) holds them together (<i>dāraya</i> -)

Persepolitan Archives

The first piece of evidence is the testimony of the Persepolitan archives, which predominantly consist of Elamite tablets. These tablets, in particular the Persepolis Fortification Tablets that were administrative records on clay belonging to the reign of Darius I, from the end of the sixth to the beginning of the fifth centuries (509–493 BCE), represented records of locally produced commodities distributed by the royal administration at Persepolis (*Pārsa*) to different officials and entities under the purview of Persepolitan accountants, for a wide range of purposes, including cultural and religious services.⁴⁶ Striking in these documents from the heartland of the realm is the Persepolitan administration's willingness to enable the religious services of a great variety of gods, including Iranian – such as Ahuramazdā, Spēntā *Ārmaiti* (*Išpandaramattiš*), and the *frauuāši* (*Irdanapirutiš* = *Artāna Frawartiš*) – Elamite, and Babylonian divinities, among them, Humban, Napiriša (Nafir-iršara), Adad, and “Earth”; altogether many kinds of religious services were performed by sundry types of priests, parading both Elamite and Old Persian titles, such as the *šaten*, the *maguš*, the *lan-lirira* (= *zaotar*), the fire-priest *ātarvaxša*-, and others.⁴⁷ Intriguingly, however, Ahuramazdā does not appear to occupy in the Persepolitan tablets the selfsame exalted and uncontested position it commands in the Achaemenid inscriptions of the same period. At first glance, there seems to be a profound rift in our documentary evidence between the ideological picture depicted in the inscriptions, where Ahuramazdā reigns supreme (although other divine creatures also populate this thrifty place, be they the *aniyāha bagāha*, literally the “other gods,” or be they Mithra and Anāhitā), and the pantheistic

festival we observe in the Elamite tablets. There is no doubt that the resolution of tensions prevailing between contemporaneous sources, radically at variance with each other, holds the key for evaluating Achaemenid religious policy *in toto*. Much effort has been spent in scholarship on reconciling the contradictory testimonies on the state of Achaemenid religious affairs.

As mentioned previously, the Elamite tablets knew of a variety of gods, and a variety of religious services to honor them. Among the principal services on record, the one designated under the name *lan* was celebrated on a grand scale by the administration, judging from the large quantity of provisions recorded for it, and was either listed in conjunction with the names of deities, such as *Druva*, *Huvarira*, Earth, *Visai Bagā*, and occasionally Ahuramazdā, or without specification altogether. As Ahuramazdā itself is rarely mentioned in these tablets, it was traditionally assumed that the *lan* service ought to have been the official service for the supreme deity itself. This interpretation reposed on the presumption that Ahuramazdā dominating the religious sphere according to the royal inscriptions ought to have been equally predominant in Elamite tablets, even though its name was only infrequently mentioned therein. The *lan* service, however, is now proven to have been the main vehicle for the liturgical services of a multitude of gods, including, but not exclusively being the monopoly of, Ahuramazdā.⁴⁸ Moreover, the Persepolitan archive could suggest, as it has been argued in recent years, that cultural practices on display in Persepolis were indicative of the Persian-Elamite acculturation process, that is, the long process of cross-cultural interactions between Elamites and Persians on the Iranian plateau over the span of several centuries prior to the formation of the empire, which would have

decisively shaped Persian identity in spite of its Indo-Iranian heritage.⁴⁹ Accordingly, Achaemenid religious practices could have been shaped by this cultural phenomenon, whereby Elamite (or Babylonian-Elamite) gods, such as Humban, were adopted, and worshipped along with Iranian divinities, many known to us from the Mazdean pantheon. Thus, an argument could be made that Persian exposure to the Elamite culture, and its subsequent adoption of Elamite divinities – possibly also the impact of elements of Mesopotamian imperial legacy⁵⁰ – may have been instrumental in creating an aptitude of permissiveness, an accommodating disposition toward religious *others*. But acculturation may not be the sole explanation to account for the crown's largesse vis-à-vis a plethora of divine beings in Persepolis, and once more an attempt is to be risked, in light of recent developments in Avestan studies, to seek inspiration.⁵¹ In a nutshell, the extant Avestan corpus is the juxtaposition of two liturgical recitatives, one long and unitarian (but encompassing several variants)⁵² forming an anthology we have come to call the *yasna*, and which not only initiated the long liturgy in praise of Ahuramazdā, but also that of other divine entities; and the other liturgy being a collection of minor recitatives/rituals for individual divinities.⁵³ Thus, there is good reason to consider the *lan* service, that is, the most important liturgy performed for a panoply of gods among the “acculturated” Persians, as a liturgy *akin* to the *yasna* ritual, even though surely not identical with it, as they belong to different cultural contexts.⁵⁴ In both cases, that is, in the *yasna*'s long liturgy, and in the *lan* ceremonial, Ahura Mazdā/Ahuramazdā is praised, without being the exclusive recipient of the sacrifice, since other divine entities worthy of sacrifice are also populating these liturgies. This proposition would also have the benefit of reconciling the diverse and polyvalent rituals performed in the heartland of the realm with the rigid tenets of the Achaemenid inscriptions. But beyond all, and returning to our initial inquiry, considering the *lan* service to be comparable to, or *wesensgleich* with, the *yasna*, means that one could make the Mazdean substratum itself, or the polyvalence inherent to it, responsible for the Achaemenids' ability to assimilate the Elamite *Götterwelt*, as it would have been bestowed with an intellectual vision affording the embrace of other divinities and religious practices.⁵⁵

The Bible

Another piece of evidence is provided by the testimony of the *Ketuvim*, more particularly the Book of Ezra. Only decades after Cyrus the Great liberated the Jewish Diaspora from its Babylonian exile in 539 BCE, granting to it the right of return to Judea, we are informed through the testimony of the Bible, the Book of Ezra, that by virtue of a royal edict or *framāna*-, whose historicity may be contestable, a certain Ezra (whose existence as a historical figure has also been contested), a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses, was dispatched from Babylon together with his retinue, bestowed as he was with considerable financial means, to revive the Temple of Jerusalem⁵⁶ (Ezra 7.6: “this Ezra came up from Babylon. He was a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses, which the Lord, the God of Israel, had given”). Ezra's mission as the king's imperial emissary consisted in: (1) assessing the extent to which the Law of Moses had been applied in Jerusalem (Ezra 7.14: “You are sent by the king and his seven advisers to inquire about Judah and Jerusalem with regard to the Law of your God, which is in your hand”); (2) appointing magistrates and judges to administer the selfsame law (Ezra 7.25: “And you, Ezra, in accordance with the wisdom of your God, which you possess, appoint magistrates and judges to administer justice to all the people of Trans-Euphrates – all who know the laws of your God”); (3) instructing those who were unaware of it (Ezra 7.25: “And you are to teach any who do not know them”); and finally, (4) punishing *forcefully* those not abiding by the law, that Ezra possessed (Ezra 7.26: “Whoever does not obey the law of your God and the law of the king must surely be punished by death, banishment, confiscation of property, or imprisonment”). The Bible, while speaking of the law of Ezra's god, or the law of Moses, refers to nothing, but the Torah, as a teacher of which Ezra is introduced from the outset. What is of importance in this context, where the law of Ezra's god (*dāthā dī-ēlāhākh*⁵⁷) designates the Pentateuch, is its juxtaposition to the “law of the king” (*dāthā dī mal'kā*) – דָּתָא דִּי-אַלְהָא דִּי-מַלְכָּא (*dāthā dī-ēlāhākh w^o dāthā dī mal'kā*)⁵⁷ – subtly signaling that the canon, which Ezra was required to impose upon the Jewish *ethnos* owed its enforceability and validity to the king's law, and was thereby sanctioned by the entire weight of the empire.

It furthermore suggests that what the empire intended to impress on Jerusalem's community was not an efflux of Iranian Mazdean beliefs, but possibly an interpretation of the Torah itself, which on account of it being supported by the empire, might have had the authoritative potency of the king's law, thus, intimating it had been regulated and put into order by the empire. What do we precisely mean with the Persians arranging or ordering the Torah? And what type of an imposition of imperial power is that? We certainly do not suggest that the Persian king or his scribes were actually engaged in the interpretative process of Jewish laws, but merely that the empire had permitted or facilitated the imposition of the Torah as a normative set of laws on the Jewish *ethnos*, hence in a certain sense strengthening the formation of Jewish identity.⁵⁸ The ordering thus was not the actual arrangement of the Torah, or Moses' Law, but its incorporation into the larger frame of Persian norms, ideology, and ultimately cosmogony. The Persian king of kings fulfilling Ahuramazdā's divine design, his sanctioning the Law of Moses was a re-enactment of Ahuramazdā's cosmic ordering, hence permitting the Law of Moses to be interwoven into the larger fabric of Ahuramazdā's orderly arrangement of the universe. Indeed, it seems that notwithstanding the disparity of religious beliefs and ritual practices, the Achaemenids would seek to domesticate these heterogeneous theologies and practices by casting them into the regulating framework of the empire's laws and *mores*, which on earth were fulfilling the same function that the cosmic ordering of Ahuramazdā did in the yonder, without either altering the essence of the religions being *ordered*, or being altered by it.

The Egyptian Pantheon

A similar pattern we may observe in the actions of the early Persian kings in Egypt. Following the conquest of Egypt in 525 BCE, on a now remote but vast oasis in the Western Desert, the Kharga Oasis,⁵⁹ the Persian king Darius erected and completed a number of temples dedicated to Egyptian gods, and what is more, initiated extensive irrigation projects by introducing the *qanāts* to the area (notably in 'ayyn Manāwir and Qasr el-Ghuweita), which may have served the creation of Persian-style paradises.⁶⁰ Although the origin of

some of these temples, especially those in Qasr el-Ghuweita, and further north in Hibis, may go back to the Saite period,⁶¹ the bulk of the construction, the wall decorations of the Hibis Temple,⁶² in conjunction with the substantial *qanāt* installation,⁶³ identify the Kharga Oasis project as an Achaemenid imperial program and the one responsible for it as Darius, whose cartouche is well attested on the walls of the Hibis Temple, and on two occasions at the temple of Qasr el-Ghuweita.⁶⁴ At the Hibis Temple, Darius is depicted on elaborate high-reliefs as Pharaoh, sporting the fashionable Egyptian double-crown.⁶⁵ Striking in this context, however, is not the Persian king's depiction as Pharaoh, but the extensive representation of Egyptian gods on the walls of the sanctuary (Room A).⁶⁶ Although the temple is dedicated to the god Amun, the king is nonetheless represented making offerings to a myriad of Egyptian gods (including the Theban triad of Amun, Mut, Khonsu), neatly organized, whenever applicable, according to the regions, whence their cult had originated. Altogether the walls of the sanctuary bear the representations of some 700 divinities from Upper and Middle Egypt, partaking in this pantheic festival.⁶⁷

Beholding these reliefs, one may not escape the impression that this assembly of divinities represented yet another imperial project, signaling yet another *modus* of Persian *ordering*, this time not organizing the Law of Moses, but the Egyptian pantheon. Again, this does not mean the Persians re-organized the cult of these divinities, altered their underlying beliefs, or theophanic projections, but that the Achaemenids, by dint of assembling these gods *en bloc* within a pantheic frame, had structured their relations with the king, incorporated them within the ideological frame of the empire,⁶⁸ an empire that in essence *thought and pronounced order*. A subtle imprint that symbolically was reminiscent of Ahuramazdā's act of cosmic ordering.

What is more, both in the case of the Exiles' return to Jerusalem, which on the basis of ravages inflicted to the region of Yehuda by the Neo-Babylonians still qualified under the early Teispids and Achaemenids as a post-collapse society (as has been persuasively interpreted most recently for the Benjamin region in Judaea),⁶⁹ and in the case of the Kharga Oasis, the empire was investing substantially in barren land, erecting sanctuaries and temples as part of a yet-to-be-defined

building program.⁷⁰ Surely, Darius' imperial engagement intended to pull the empire's hinterland into the empire's fold, but there is more. And that more seems to reflect Darius' desire to impress the empire's imprint also in the realm of the divine on its constituents, by contributing to its (future) revitalization through orderly excellence, that is, *fraša*-.⁷¹

Communicative Strategies

In a realm whose confines were redefined in terms of the Mazdean geography, whose religious landscape subtly and nimbly was ordered by Darius I to befit the idealized re-enactment of Ahuramazdā's cosmic ordering, we witness the emergence of a sophisticated communicative strategy, which aimed at accommodating the mental sensibilities of varied target groups. Indeed, the political discourse of the central authority is often cast in multiple molds, each directly composed for the benefit of a specific (aural) audience, whom the narrative deems as an exclusive silent interlocutor. On the face of it, compositional strategies geared toward individual audiences, whose intellectual makeup, in terms of political predisposition and/or mytho-epic affinities, the state's discourse would take into account, appears an expedient way to communicate with the realm's subjects. But, beyond the act of political expediency, one wonders whether this individuation process is akin to the ordering impetus we witness under Darius and the political system he lastingly forged. Indeed, one is tempted to conjecture that by reformulating the king's proclamations in the intellectual mold of the empire's subjects, the crown would also manifest its ordering presence in the realm of the woven words. As the investigation of this line of inquiry is beyond the scope of this study, in the following we shall merely provide a glimpse at the individuation process in Darius' communicative strategy.

The Bisotun Inscription

In the sixth century BCE, following the death of king Cambyses on his Egyptian campaign, the Achaemenid throne was held or seized by one or several individual(s), whose identity/-ies remain(s) contested, as our main sources provide

conflicting information, before Darius I's own usurpation. Two different traditions report on the events following Cambyses' demise and Darius' accession.⁷² One is the Bisotun inscription itself, in which one magus (priest) called Gaumāta is depicted as the usurper who seized power by pretending to be the royal prince Bardiya, Cambyses' brother and heir.

The other tradition comprises the reports collected, among others by Herodotus and Pompeius Trogus, as captured in the Epitome by Justin, that attribute the usurpation of Cambyses' throne to two magi, eventually eliminated by Darius and his helpers. In the accounts of Herodotus and Justin, within each magian couple, we find one crown-bestower, Patizeithes in Herodotus, Oro-pastes in Justin; and one puppet-king, Smerdis and Mergis, respectively, who due to their physical resemblance to Bardiya, could be substituted for the defunct prince. As I have argued in extenso in prior publications,⁷³ the divergence between the two narratives, that is, the one reflected in the Bisotun inscription and the traditions captured by classical authors, are in reality two different redactions targeting each a specific audience. The text of the Bisotun inscription, couched in the literary tradition of the Ancient Near East, was targeting possibly a non-Iranian, Mesopotamian, audience, whereas the stories reflected in the writings of Herodotus, Aeschylus, and Hellanicus of Lesbos, among others, most likely represented the oral re-composition of the events by Darius I's scribes. In doing so, the latter had recourse to Iranian epic themes, which were best suited to make the story of Bardiya's murder – without Darius' role being revealed – believable to the larger Iranian population (*kāra*-) of the empire. This distribution is borne out by the structure of the Bisotun inscription. Indeed, it decisively distinguishes between three discrete conceptions: the *dipi*- ("inscription"); the *dipiciça*- ("transcript?"; Elamite *tuppi-me*); and the *haⁿdugā*- ("report"), as we may observe in table 4.

Here, the physical inscription itself is the *dipi*-, which not only can be read (*patiparsa*-), but also, as other passages indicate, is written (*ni-paiθa-/nipišta*-), may be seen (*vaina*-), and, what is more, may be destroyed (*vikan*-), and is in need of being preserved (*paribara*-). Aside from the *dipi*-, there is the *haⁿdugā*-, which unlike the *dipi*- may not be read or seen, but has to be reported, spoken of (*θaha*-). Clearly, it stands for the dissemination

Table 4

<i>dipi-</i> "inscription"	<i>vaina-</i> "see" <i>niyapaiθa-/nipišta-</i> "wrote; written" <i>patiparsa-</i> "read" (<i>naiy/mā</i>) <i>vikan-</i> "(not) destroy" <i>paribara-</i> "preserve"
<i>haⁿdugā-</i> "report"	(<i>naiy</i>) <i>apagaudaya-</i> (<i>naiy</i>) <i>kārahayā</i> <i>θaha-</i> "(not) conceal, (not) reveal to the <i>kāra-</i> " <i>xšnau-</i> "hear; listen"
* <i>dipiciça-</i> "transcript?"	<i>patišam kun-</i> "reproduce?" <i>ariyā utā pavastāyā utā carmā</i> * <i>grāfta-</i> <i>ah-</i> "captured (recorded) in Aryan, as well as on clay and on parchment" * <i>niyapaiθiya-</i> <i>utā patiyaθraθiya-</i> <i>paišiyā</i> * <i>mām</i> "written and read in my [= Darius'] presence" * <i>frāstāya-</i> "send out"

or oral retelling of Darius' narrative to an Iranian audience (*kāra-*). As we may observe in the following two passages:

θātiy dārayava^huš xšāyaθiya nūram θuvām varnavatām taya manā kṛtam avaθā kārahayā θādiy mā apagaudaya yadiy imām haⁿdugām naiy apagaudayāhāy kārahayā θāhāy A^huramazdā θuvām dauštā biyā utātaiy tau^hmā vasiy biyā utā dargam jīvā

King Darius says: now let what I have done convince you. Tell it thus to the people in arms, do not conceal it; if you were not to conceal this account from, and tell (it) to, the people in arms, (then) may Ahuramazdā be your friend, may you have a large progeny, and live long.

DB 4.52–57

θātiy dārayava^huš [xšāya]θiya yadiy imām haⁿdugām apagaudayāhāy naiy θāhāy [k]āra[hay]ā A^huramazdā<i>y jatā biyā utātaiy tau^hmā mā biyā

King Darius says: if you were to conceal this account from, and not tell (it) to, the people in arms, (then) may Ahuramazdā strike you, and may you not have any progeny."

DB 4.57–59

Darius admonishes against concealing (*apagaudaya-*) his story, and encourages people to retell it. One may argue that the third term **dipiciça-*, and its Elamite counterpart *tuppi-me* are also bound to express a distinct concept. What this latter nuance might be, ought to be inferred from the use of actions that are associated with the **dipiciça-* (or *tuppi-me*) in the famous paragraph 70 of the Old Persian variant, where we read:

*θātiy dārayava^huš xšāyaθiya vašnā A^huramazdāha ima *dipi[c]i[çam] taya adam akunavam patišam ariyā utā pavastāy[ā] utā carmā *grāftam āha *pat[i]šam[c]iy [*nāmanā]fam akunavam *pa[t]i[ç]a[m] *^hu[vādā[tam akuna]va[m] utā *niyapai[θ]i[ya u]tā patiyaθraθiya paišiyā mā[m] pasā[va] ima *dipi[ciça] m f[r]āstāyam vi[s]padā antar dahayā[v]a kāra *hamā-[t]axšatā*

Said Darius the king: by the greatness of Ahuramazdā this transcript/copy that I reproduced (replicated), was captured (recorded) in Aryan, as well as on clay and on parchment. I (also) replicated (thereupon) my signature, and reproduced my genealogy. It was both written and read in my presence; afterwards, this transcript/copy I sent out everywhere in the lands, where the people in arms were applying themselves (in my service?).

DB 4.88–92

It appears from the above context that **dipiciça-* is that which may be “captured (recorded)” on clay and parchment (*pavastā- utā carman-*), “written and read (loud) in the presence” of the king (*niyapaiθiya- utā patiyaθraθiya-*), and be “sent out” (**frāstāya-*) everywhere in the lands (*vispadā aⁿtar dahayāva*). Clearly, this **dipiciça-* ought to be a mobile document, and as such distinct from the inscription itself (*dipi-*) and its oral rendition (*haⁿdugā-*). As the Elamite etymon *tuppi-* implies, *tuppi-me* ought to be a written document, but one that could be duplicated from a *Vorlage*, and placed on different writing surfaces to be disseminated, but also one that could have required official authentication by dint of the king’s signature (**nāmanāfa-*), and genealogy (**^huvādātām*), that were reproduced thereupon; in brief: a “transcript.”

In sum, the dissemination of the Bisotun narrative may have taken place on two levels: an oral Old Persian variant (*haⁿdugā-*) of the Bisotun inscription was circulated, and an Old Persian written transcript (**dipiciça-*) of the selfsame inscription, recorded on clay and parchment, sent to the four quarters of the empire. It was probably the oral *haⁿdugā-* that gave rise to the stories captured by our Greek sources, but since neither its content, nor that of the “other copy in Aryan,” are known to us, this remains merely an informed speculation.

Variants of Darius’ Stelae at Suez

Above, we have seen the Old Persian version of the extant four stelae erected by Darius at the “Suez” canal. The stelae, for which we do not possess a proper expression in Old Persian – the inscribed statues of Darius in Egypt DSⁿ and DS^{ab} are called *patikara- aθangaina-* “stone relief” that could have been appropriate, but is not otherwise attested – are a unique genre. They are not monumental inscriptions, referred to usually as *dipi-*, nor are they mobile objects, such as the **dipiciça-*, nor are they an oral report, the *haⁿdugā-*. The stelae permit to encapsulate simultaneously the royal proclamations in one structure that may be placed on the realm’s peripheries. Stelae introduced by Darius could display the royal narrative, simultaneously redacted in multiple languages, and cast in different literary traditions, for the reception of varied (and elusive) audiences:

the Old Persian variant possibly intended for the consumption of the Persian ethno-class in the provinces; the Egyptian variant, created for dissemination (maybe also as an oral composition based on the written transcript of the stelae) among Egyptian élites. It is thus not surprising that the little that survives from the hieroglyphic texts shows the adoption of Egyptian literary norms and traditions, in this case the narrative structure, as shown by Alan Lloyd who compares the structures of the two extant variants (both the Maskuta and the Kabret/Kubri texts) of the Suez stelae with the structure of the *Königsnovelle*.⁷⁴ This narrative structure established some time ago by Alfred Hermann (*Die ägyptische Königsnovelle*, 1938) has been described as follows: the story begins (1) with the king either having a dream, or his being informed in his palace of a matter of consequence; (2) the king’s plan meets with the enthusiastic approval of his courtiers; (3) the course of action proposed by the king is ordered; and (4) a short report is made.⁷⁵ This seems to be precisely the structure that Lloyd has established,⁷⁶ which we have reproduced below:

Darius was in his palace in Persia. The issue of a water link between Egypt and Persia was raised, the rationale being the delivery of tribute. Inspectors were required to go to Egypt in order to dig the canal and this was done. This made it possible for a fleet laden with goods/tribute to sail from Egypt to Persis. The texts then proceed to describe the praise for his achievement by princes and inspectors ... Darius then orders the achievement to be recorded on a stele.

Preliminary Conclusions

In the early years of Darius I, a number of policies and conceptions were instituted, which appear to have had a lasting impact on the constitution and self-definition of the Achaemenid world.

(1) Foremost among them was the concept of empire that, inspired by Mazdean thought and imaginary, marked the imperial space *xšaça-* as an expanse delimited by a network of waterways (rivers and salty seas) reflecting the material realization of cosmic rivers (such as Rañhā and Vanhī Dāitiā). In contrast to this political realm, the concept of *būmī- vazarkā- dūraiṇ apiy/haruvā- būmī-*, “the great earth far and wide/the whole

earth,” lays claim to the whole inhabited world and is of a different ontological order, as it is predominantly associated with Ahuramazdā’s cosmogonical acts of creation. It may be thus argued that beginning with Darius I’s reign, the actuality of the realm (xšaça-) was perceived as being bound by the emanations of the cosmic rivers Raṇhā and Vaṇh^{vī} Dāitiā, while still maintaining an idealized claim over other climes/continents, the whole earth. The *haruvā- būmī-* may thus be akin to the totality of the (seven) continents, the *haptō.karšuuairī- zam-*, “the seven-partite earth,” and the imperial space to the central clime, the X^{anira}θa, known from the Avestan/Zoroastrian traditions and geography.

(2) The imposition of a Mazdean geography could also indicate that the imperial confines were subjected to the subtle ordering hand of Ahuramazdā. Living according to Order appears to have had diverging implications for the realm’s respective constituents: for the Mazdean man, it means following (*pari-ay-*) the law set down (*ni-štāya-*) by Ahuramazdā, to gain happiness (*šiyāta-*) in life (= in the material world), as well as (correctly) sacrificing (*yada-*) to Ahuramazdā – that is, according to the “Order in the Heights” (*artācā*) – in order to be eventually blessed in the afterlife as a follower of Order (*artavan-*); for the non-Mazdean citizens of the empire, the *homines imperialis*, they are held together by the ordering nature of the king’s law (*dāta-*), and in this state may also experience happiness (*šiyāta-*). Since Ahuramazdā’s law and the king’s law appear to operate both as ordering agents, they are merely different *modi* of the selfsame cosmic Order, but for different audiences. It is the king’s law that operates as an ordering hand (in codifying, assembling) in Judea and Egypt and bestows the nimble impress of the empire.

(3) The communicative strategies of a realm thus delimited and ordered by Darius I also appear endowed with the ability to espouse the intellectual perceptions/predispositions of local audiences by casting the royal discourse into their mental framework. Whether this individuation process in the compositions of the royal discourse is akin to the ordering mechanism we have seen in the religious landscape, by affecting also the realm of the woven words, we may suspect, but not clearly formulate at the present.

Notes

* A shorter version of this article, titled “Rethinking the Achaemenid World Order: The Imperial Space,” will appear in *Entangled Worlds: Ancient Iran and the Classical Mediterranean* © 2027 J. Paul Getty Trust, www.getty.edu/publications.

1. Dan 2013: 83–121.
2. See Briant 2021: 49–78.
3. Rollinger 2020: 383–98; Rollinger 2021: 815–830; Rollinger and Degen 2021: 187–224.
4. Klinkott 2021; Klinkott 2022.
5. Hyland forthcoming.
6. See Wijnsma 2018: 160–61, table 1.
7. See Wijnsma 2018: 160–61, table 1.
8. Differently, see Wasmuth 2017: 229.
9. On the Scythian campaign of Darius, see Tuplin 2010: 281–312.

10. The Aryan space, is mentioned in sundry passages of the Avesta, among them in the Mihr Yašt, where Miθra approaches the gold-adorned top of Mount Harā, whence he gazes upon the entire Aryan abode (*vīspa- airiīō.šaiiana-*): *yō paoirīō zaraniō.pīsō/srīrā *barəšnauuō gərəβnāiti/aḍāt vīspəm ādiḍāiti/airiīō.šaiianəm səuiištō* “[Mithra] who as the first the gold-adorned/beautiful heights seizes/whence he looks upon the entire/Aryan abode, he (Mithra who is) the most rich in life-giving strength” (Yt.10.12–13). In a number of passages, among them, the *Vidēvdād* and the *Ābān Yašt* (Yašt 5.104) dedicated to *Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā*, the *yazata* associated with waters, the Aryan expanse is linked with the river Vaṇh^{vī} Dāitiā: *tqm yazata/yō ašəuuu zaraθuštrō/airiēne vaējahi vaṇhuiiā dāitiiaiīā*, “to her (Anāhita) he sacrificed/Zaraθuštra, the orderly one/in the Aryan Expanse of the (river) Vaṇh^{vī} Dāitiā (the Good Lawful one).” In the *Vidēvdād* (V.1.2), the Aryan expanse is also qualified as Ahuramazdā’s first creation: *paoirīm asaṇhəmca šōiθranəmca vahištəm frāθβərəsəm/azəm yō ahurō mazdā/airiianəm vaējō vaṇhuiiā dāitiiaiīā*, “as the best of places and abodes I first fashioned forth/I, Ahura Mazdā/the Aryan Expanse of the (river) Vaṇh^{vī} Dāitiā (the Good Lawful one).” The unpublished Avestan texts used and cited in this essay have been generously placed at my disposal by Prods Oktor Skjærvø.

11. For the Yasna 57, see Kellens 2011: 80–81; Hintze 2000: 281; Kreyenbroek 1985: 34–37; and Dehghan 1982: 25–26. For the Pahlavi exegesis and translation of the Yasna 57, see Kreyenbroek 1985, and Dehghan 1982.

12. For recent editions of the *Zamyād Yašt*, see Hintze 1994; Pirart 1992; and Humbach and Ichaporia 1998.

13. On this passage, see Hintze 1994: 346–52; and Pirart 1992: 106–108.

14. Yt. 10.15.

15. The text follows the edition of Pakzad 2005.

16. In the *Ābān Yašt* (Yašt 5.3), *Anāhitā* is compared to a great, roaring river that one may hear from afar, as large a body of water as all the other rivers together (*yā asti auuauuaiti masō/yaθa vīspa imā āpō/yā *zəmā paiti frataciṇti*, “who [Anāhitā] is as much in extent as all these waters, which flow forth around the earth”); she flows from Mount Hukairiia to the Vourukaša Sea (*yā amauuaiti fratacaiti/hukairiiaṭ haca barəzaṇhaṭ/aoi zraiiō vouru.kašəm*, “who [Anāhitā] flows forth forcefully, away from the tall Hukairiia, to the Vourukaša Sea”); Yt.5.3 (= Y.65.3).

17. See Yarshater 1983: 352.

18. The text follows the edition by Gignoux and Tafazzoli 1993.

19. In the *Vidēvdād* (V.5.19), the relation of the Pūitikā and Vourukaša Sea are clearly described in the following terms: *yaoždiia taciṇti āpō/zraiiāṇhaṭ haca Pūitikāṭ/auui zraiiō vouru.kašəm*, “the waters to be purified flow/from the Pūitikā Sea/toward the Vourukaša Sea.”

20. On the three salt seas in the later Zoroastrian traditions, see *Bundahišn* 10.7–9; 10.14–15; *Wizdagihā ī Zādspram* 3.17–21: *zrēh ī Frāxkerd ud ō bē 3 baxšihist u-š 3 zrēh aziš būd xwānihēd Pūydiḡ ud *Kamīrōd ud Syāw-bun*, “the Frāxkerd (Vourukaša) Sea was split in three, and from it emerged three seas that were Pūydiḡ, Kamīrōd, and Syāw-bun”; and *Vidēvdād* 5.19. See Boyce 1975: 45; Moazami 2014: 137; and Agostini and Thrope, 2020: 137.

21. See Shayegan 2011: 247–57.

22. Compare the still pertinent, but diverging, remarks of Herrenschildt 1976: 43–44, who ascribes a duality of references to *būmī*-, both “earth” and “empire”: “Dans le corpus vieux-perse, il y a deux preuves à mon interprétation de ‘*būmi*’ en ‘empire’. La première, ressentie par Émile Benveniste, consiste en la qualification par *vazraka* de la ‘terre’ dans le titre qui nous préoccupe ; ‘roi sur cette grande terre’ ... La seconde preuve est l’emploi de la ‘terre’, toujours *būmi*, dans un contexte bien connu où apparaît d’ordinaire le ‘royaume’ (*xšaça*).” See also Frye 1977: 75–78, who refutes a political definition of the term *būmī*-, see also Calmeyer 1982–83: 105–187, pls. 16–24; 141–222.

23. Old Persian texts follow mostly the edition minor by Schmitt 2009, with diverging numbering.

24. This was still known to Ammianus Marcellinus (22.8.28), who also refers to Ptolemy’s ‘Pā as “R(h)a”’: Huic R(h)a vicinus est amnis in cuius superciliis

quaedam vegetabilis eiusdem nominis gignitur radix proficiens ad usus multiplicis medelarum.

25. See Liverani 2017: 91–98; Liverani 2010: 240; and Rollinger 2021.

26. See Posener 1936: 48–87; Wasmuth 2017: 125–86; and Colburn 2019: 158–61.

27. See Tuplin 2010: 294–98.

28. Hdt. 4.87.2.

29. Hdt. 4.91.2.

30. The base of this stela seems to have been extant in the early twentieth century as reported by Eckhard Unger (Unger and Weissbach 1915: 10, 13), who was able to localize it in the vicinity of Pınarhisar (Bunar Hissar): “... [die] drei Quellen von Jene oder Jenno, eine Stunde nordwestlich von Bunar Hissar, die einen bedeutenden Ruf in der ganzen Umgegend genießen und in vollstem Maße verdienen. Sie liegen nahe beieinander und direkt an der Heeresstraße des Perserkönigs. Die größte Quelle, Bökük Kamera genannt, ist eine Doppelquelle”; and “Die Ostquelle, welche im Altertum als die bedeutendere gelten mochte, hat noch jetzt in der Mitte der Nordeinfassung den Sockel einer Stele in ursprünglicher Lage ... Der Sockel ist 0,69 m lang, 0,40 m breit und 0,20 m dick ... das Material ist, wie das der anderen Steine ... der im Orte anstehende Muschelkalk.” In addition, a cuneiform inscription was reported a half a century before by General Jochmus (Jochmus 1854: 44), who was told of an ancient Assyrian (اسکی صوریائی) inscription with letters in the shape of nails: “the mysterious inscription in letters described as resembling ‘nails’ could not be found.” See also West 1985: 296; and Tuplin 2010: 295.

31. Of different opinion, see Schmitt 1988: 36.

32. On the Old Persian stela fragment and its discovery, see Kuznetsov and Nikitin 2017: 154–59; Avram 2018/19: 169–78; Kuznetsov and Nikitin 2019: 1–7; Tsatskhladze 2018: 71–76; Rung and Gabelko 2019: 83–125; Shavarebi 2019: 1–15; Avram 2019: 15–24; Schmitt 2019: 34–49; and Tsatskhladze 2019: 113–51; more recently, also Avram 2022: 75–108; Kuznetsov 2023: 59–84; and Tsatskhladze 2023: 1–27.

33. The reading of the fragment follows Schmitt 2019.

34. On the Roman Chronicle and the Getty Table, including an English translation of the relevant passages, see more recently, Rotstein 2016: 58–66. For English translations of the Roman Chronicle and the Getty Table, see Burgess and Kulikowski 2013: 309–10, col. B, l. 8 (Roman Chronicle); and Burstein 1984: 157–58, 161–62 (Getty Table). For a more recent German translation, see Montenegro 2004: 279–88. On the Getty Table, and the definitive resolution of the date of

Darius' Cimmerian campaign, see Burstein 1984: 160–61, ll. IIB 32–37: “In *FGrH* 252 B8 the assassination of Hipparchus, the brother of the Athenian tyrant Hippias (514), and Darius I's Scythian campaign are both dated to the year 513/12. The Getty *Tabula Iliaca* proves that this puzzling entry ... is merely the result of Cutter d's arbitrary combination of two separate entries from his source, the original *Chronicon Romanum*. This discovery eliminates from the *Chronicon Romanum* one of the principal chronological errors ascribed to it on the basis of *FGrH* 252 B.16. The solitary kappa in line 37, which was cut directly under the eta of ἔτη in line 36, is all that Cutter d inscribed on the Getty *Tabula Iliaca* of what clearly was the *Chronicon Romanum*'s date for Darius I's Scythian expedition ΦΚΗ = 513/12.” Still of import is the study of the Roman Chronicle by Sadurska 1964: 78–83, who – like Balcer 1972: 128, before Burstein's publication of the Getty Table – interpreted Darius' crossing of the Cimmerian Bosphorus as a misinterpretation of the king's traversing the Thracian Bosphorus: “le Bosphore de Thrace a été défini erronément comme Cimmérien.” For the passage of the Getty Table referring to Darius' Scythian expedition, on the basis of Burstein's reading (158), see below:

Ἀφ' οὗ Ἀρμόδιος καὶ Ἀριστογεί-
των Ἰππαρχὸν τὸν τύρανν-
ον ἀνείλαν, ἔτη.
Ἀφ' οὗ Δαρεῖος ἐπὶ Σκύθας ἐ-
στρατεύσεν, ἔτη κ.

From the time Harmodius and Aristogeiton
killed Hipparchus, the tyrant, years.
From the time Darius campaigned
against the Scythians, years, 20.

35. Avram 2018/19: 181–82.

36. See Rollinger and Degen 2021a: 188–89, 205–7; and Rollinger 2021: 825.

37. See Rollinger and Degen 2021a: 193–97.

38. It is noteworthy that at least in the epic tradition, such as in the *Šāhnāme*, *daryā* signifies both “sea” and “river”; for example, the Yellow (or Yangtze) river is referred to as the *daryā-ye Čīn* and the Indus and Nile rivers are called, respectively, *daryā-ye Sind* and *daryā-ye Nīl*; Khaleghi-Motlagh 1988: 177, v. 202; and Wolff 1965: 377–78. Of interest is also the mention of *daryā-ye Baykand* (دریای بیکنند), which refers to the city of Pokent by the Zarafšān river, a former tributary of the Oxus; for the reference in the *Šāhnāme*, see Khaleghi-Motlagh 1988: 327, v. 18, n. 22.

39. Not only do we have an incomplete comprehension of the Achaemenid religions, in spite of

new documentation and research that has markedly enriched our knowledge (Henkelman 2008), and dedicated symposia on the question (Henkelman and Redard 2017), but also, furthermore, we lack an adequate comprehension of the relation (if any) of the Achaemenid Mazdeism with extant Avestan recitatives, which were composed between the latter half of the second millennium to the first half of the first millennium BCE.

40. See Frei 1995: 1–35; Frei 1996: 5–31; Rüterswörden 1995: 47–61; Wiesehöfer 1995: 36–46; Kuhrt 2000: 257–79; Briant 2000: 235–45; Kuhrt 2007: 117–42; Schmid 2007: 23–38.

41. YH 37.1.

42. For the expression *artācā barzmaniy*, with *artācā* < **artā hacā* (corresponding to Av. *ašāt hacā*), and *barzmaniy(a)* as loc. sing. in -i(y) or in -iā, see Skjærvø 1999: 28, 41–43. For a different interpretation of *artācā barzmaniy* as related to *rtu*– “rechte (Opfer-)Zeit,” and a stipulated adjective *brazmaniya*– “mit rechtem Zeremoniell,” compare Schmitt 2014: 214 and 154; also, the convincing critics of Skjærvø 2011: 327–28. More recently, following Schmitt, see Kellens 2017: 16–17.

43. XPh 46–56.

44. Compare also Schmitt 2009: 168, n. 53; and Schmitt 2014: 146, who emendates this to **pariyaiti*.

45. On the form *ava^harda* < *hard* “leave” + *ava-*, see Skjærvø 1999: 48; compare also Schmitt 2009: 104, n. 59; and Schmitt 2014: 235–36, who assumes a form *rad* “leave” unattested in Old Iranian.

46. On the importance of the rich Persepolitan glyptic material, which does not constitute the subject of the present study, see more recently, Garrison 2018: in particular 15–116; see also Henkelman 2008: 65–179.

47. See Henkelman 2008: 305–84; Skjærvø 2005: 53–54.

48. See Razmjou 2004: 103–17; Henkelman 2017a: 273–346.

49. See de Miroschedji 1985: 292–96; de Miroschedji 1990: 69–72; de Miroschedji 2003: 34–36; Stronach 1997: 37–39, 49; and Stronach 2019: 46–66; Henkelman 2008: 41–57; Henkelman 2011: 584; and Tavernier 2011: 243.

50. See Gaspa 2017: 172.

51. The Avestan corpus consists of two chronologically distinct groups of compositions: The Old Avesta, which is commonly dated to the second half of the second millennium BCE, and consists of ritual metric texts (the *Gāthās*) and the *Yasna Haptaŋhāiti* written in archaic rhythmic prose; and the Younger Avesta, which contains a great variety of compositions, such as hymns to individual deities (*Yašts*), prayers and litanies,

religious and legal texts, as well as mythical narratives, that are deemed to have been composed slightly before the Achaemenid inscriptions. These two bodies of compositions were compiled to form two liturgical collections, possibly by the Achaemenid period, that were used as recitatives in rituals. The most important of these liturgical recitatives, the long liturgy, which is referred to as the standard *yasna*, was used in this unified ceremony in praise of Ahuramazdā and other divine entities, worthy of sacrifice; see Kellens 2012b: 553–54: “L’Avesta que nous possédons n’est pas une mosaïque hasardeuse de ‘writings,’ mais la juxtaposition de deux liturgies, l’une longue et unitaire, l’autre morcelée en rites mineurs. La première est savamment agencée afin de produire un sens déterminé et elle est ancienne. Il arrive que les textes avestiques eux-mêmes en dépeignent le cursus et il semble qu’elle ait eu pour aboutissement doctrinal l’élaboration du calendrier théonymique, qui donne sa structure au recueil des liturgies brèves (surtout les *Yašts*). Le récitatif de la liturgie longue est lui aussi une anthologie. Son assemblage a consisté à souder, dans une visée ritualiste précise, des textes d’âge et, peut-être, d’écoles diverses.”

52. See Cantera 2014: 6 (and 64): “on a obtenu une image de la liturgie longue beaucoup plus riche que celle que nous avons auparavant. Elle apparaît comme une liturgie avec un bon nombre des variantes qui présentent des variations significatives par rapport à la forme basique, la cérémonie quotidienne qu’on appelle le *Yasna*.” Also Kellens 2012b: 554.

53. See Kellens 1998: 451–519; Kellens 2012a: 49–58; Kellens 2012b: 551–58; Kellens 2017; Cantera 2014; Cantera 2017: 21–68.

54. See Kellens 2012b: 557; Kellens 2017: 15.

55. There is a capacious quality to the first seven chapters of the standard *Yasna*, the *vīspe āšahe ratuuō* “all the *ratus* of Order (*aša-*),” where all the *yazatas* “divine beings worthy of sacrifice” and *ratus* “prototypes; models,” are enumerated at the beginning of the long liturgy with sacrificial times and texts that have been ascribed to them with the expression: *niuuāēdaiiemi haṅkāraiemi (daθušō ahurahe mazdā)* ... “I announce and organize (the sacrifice of Ahura Mazdā who has put all in place) on account of ...” (Y.1.3–18); see Kellens 2006.

56. Collins 2017: 52–61.

57. Schmid 2007: 32; and Kiel 2017: 323–45.

58. Collins 2017: 61.

59. Agut-Labordère 2018: 359–77; and Colburn 2018: 86–114.

60. See Agut-Labordère 2016: 324–25; and Colburn 2019: 95–130.

61. See Lloyd 2007: 107–11; and Cruz-Urbe 2008: 73–82.

62. Wasmuth 2017: 225–39, esp. 238: “Alle hier relevanten Teile der Dekoration sind unumstritten peserzeitlich und im Namen Darius erstellt.”

63. See Wuttman 2001: 109–36, esp. 134: “la présence de vestiges datés du V^e siècle avant J.-C. ... nous incite, dans l’état de nos travaux, à formuler l’hypothèse de l’implantation quasi simultanée, à l’époque perse, de l’essentiel du réseau.”; Rossi and Ikram 2018: 510–21.

64. See Darnell 2007: figs. 1–2; Darnell, Klotz, and Manassa 2013: 1–31; Agut-Labordère 2016: 324; and Colburn 2018: 96–97.

65. For Darius’ relief on the Western Wall of the Hibis Temple, Room L, see Davies 1953: pl. 26.

66. See Cruz-Urbe 1988: 1–43; Davies 1953: pls. 2–5; and Colburn 2019: 114–23.

67. See Sternberg-el Hotabi 1994: 238–54.

68. See Colburn 2019: 122–23; and Zivie-Coche 2008: esp. 8: “Thus the Egyptian pantheon, or at least a large part of it, was brought together on the walls of the cella of the Amun temple at Hibis. The naos was, in effect, conceived of as a microcosmos wherein the gods of Egypt were gathered and the yearly rebirth of Osiris celebrated.” Of different opinion is Kessler 2003: 213: “Ich glaube deswegen auch, dass die topographische Auflistung der Götterformen im Sanktuar keine theologische Zusammenfassung im Kontext einer Amunreligion darstellt und kein theologisches Handbuch sein soll; auch ist sie inhaltlich für mich keine spezifische Neuerung der Perserzeit.”

69. On Jerusalem representing a post-collapse society, see Schniedewind 2019: 106–16.

70. See Wuttman 2001: 135.

71. On the concept of *fraša-* as referring to the eschatological idea of renewal and rejuvenation of existence (*ahūm frašəm kar-*), see Lincoln 2012: 189–201; Skjærvø 2005: 79.

72. Shayegan 2020: 137–38.

73. Shayegan 2012; and Shayegan 2020: 137–67.

74. See Lloyd 2007: 101–4.

75. Jansen-Winkeln 1993: 102: “Die Geschichte kann z.B. beginnen, indem der König einen Traum hat, oder ihm werden (im Palast) Botschaften gebracht oder Meldungen erstattet, er breitet während einer Thronsetzung einen Plan aus, dem die Höflinge dann begeistert zustimmen, gelegentlich aber auch widersprechen, wobei sich später freilich herausstellt, wie recht der König hatte, es kommt mithin oftmals zu Dialogen, die in einem Lobpreis des Königs durch sein Gefolge enden können, darauf folgt die Ausführung des Befehls

oder Plans, die teils ausführlich geschildert, teils knapp berichtet wird." See also Spalinger 2011: 363.

76. Lloyd 2007: 102.

Abbreviations – Inscriptions

DB	Darius, Bisotun
DE	Darius, Elvand
DH	Darius, Hamadan
DHa	Darius, Hamadan, a
DNa	Darius, Naqš-e Rostam, a
DPe	Darius, Persepolis, e
DPh	Darius, Persepolis, h
DSb	Darius, Susa, b
DSe	Darius, Susa, e
DSn ^a	Darius, Statue Fragment (at the Louvre), a
DZc	Darius, Suez, c
XPh	Xerxes, Persepolis, h

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