

The Problem of Achaemenid ‘Religious Policy’¹

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Introduction

This paper reflects my personal struggle to try to get to grips with one of the central issues that has exercised, and continues to exercise Old Testament scholars, i.e. the development and emergence of the community centred on Jerusalem, for whom the Achaemenid Persian empire traditionally marks a turning point in Judaeon history and the formation of Judaism. The empire’s appearance on the world stage signals the end of the Babylonian exile, the building of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, and the crystallisation of debates about the nature of Yahwism and correct ritual, reflected in the emergence of ever more vociferous, contending groups, or ‘parties’, as Morton Smith (1971) famously termed them. What aspects of Achaemenid studies, as they have developed over the last twenty to thirty years,² might be most relevant in helping us to see how the history of the Jewish community fits into the broader framework of this vast empire, which stretched from Central Asia to Egypt, and lasted well over twohundred years, from c.550 to 330 BC? In what follows, I shall focus discussion on the widespread assumption that the Persian authorities practised (or implemented) a special ‘religious policy’. The concept, as it is has been employed, seems to have been formulated via the prism of Europe’s own troubled history of religious orthodoxies, heresies and persecutions, interspersed by periods of ‘toleration’. And, as I shall seek to demonstrate, it is entirely inappropriate to how we at present understand of the workings of the Achaemenid empire.

1 I must thank Brigitte Groneberg for inviting me to Göttingen to deliver a lecture on this subject in June, 2006. This is the slightly modified text of that lecture. I am most grateful to Reinhard Kratz for his helpful comments on that occasion. For a summary exposition of essentially the same views, see now Briant 2007.

2 See, in particular, *Achaemenid History* I–VIII; Briant 1996a [2002]; Henkelman 2006a, 2006b.

To begin, what are the broad characteristics of this unique Achaemenid religious policy deemed to be? First, it is (or has been) widely assumed that the attitude of the Achaemenid kings towards the religious beliefs and practices of their subjects differed markedly from that of their Assyrian and Babylonian imperial predecessors and the subsequent Macedonian successor states. The rulers of these political entities were assiduous in trying to impose, forcibly if need arose, their own religio-cultic systems on subject peoples. By contrast, the Achaemenid kings practised a laudable system of toleration, explicitly permitting the diverse communities of the empire to cultivate their particular religion. This is demonstrated by Persian support for, and even direct intervention in, local cults: the Persians finance buildings, regulate ritual observance and supervise the maintenance of cultic establishments in all their rich variety. This is thought to be part of a consciously articulated and consistent policy, which formed an important sector of the Persian administrative bureaucracy.³ A factor contributing to this supposedly unusual development is related to ideas about the religious beliefs of the Achaemenid kings themselves. These are thought by many to have been marked by a kind of moral monotheism, whereby the wise lord Auramazda subsumed, or was the emanator of, all other divine manifestations, which were regarded in effect as aspects of his being. This religious system evolved, or derived, from the teachings of the great Eastern Iranian prophet, Zoroaster – hence it is often called Zoroastrianism. Its focus on a single god and the accompanying observances, which are marked by an absence of idol worship, might, it is thought, have led its adherents to have had a particular sympathy for, and interest in fostering, the aniconic monotheism which marked the developing Jewish cult of the sixth to fourth centuries.⁴

But, of course, the very idea that the Persians, uniquely, concerned themselves so closely and generously with the cults of their subjects (and that of Judah in particular) derives from the Hebrew Bible itself, specifically the books of *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*. *Ezra* contains, as is well known, a series of ‘documents’, most prominently royal edicts, permitting the return of Jews from Babylonian captivity, authorising the rebuilding, even funding, of the Jerusalem temple destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar II in 587/6, and ordering in detail how worship was to be conducted in the

3 My definition here is crude, but reflects a general perception, which has become a cliché; see its neat encapsulation by Neil MacGregor in Curtis & Tallis 2005: 6. For the idea of a specifically articulated Achaemenid imperial religious policy, see the controversial work of Frei & Koch 1984 & 1996. For some critical responses, see Watts 2001; Kuhrt 2001 (with references); Ska 2003.

4 The standard discussion of Zoroastrianism is Boyce 1982. For a discussion setting out all the debates in summary, see Yamauchi 1990: 395 ff.; for some realistic observations on Zoroastrianism during the Achaemenid period, see Kellens 1991.

restored sanctuary (*Ezra* 1.2–4; 6.1–12; 7.12–25). The protagonists of both *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* are presented as closely associated with the Achaemenid royal court, and personally commissioned by the Persian king to go to Jerusalem in order to oversee execution of these orders and implement the appropriate cult.⁵

But given, the miniscule size of Persian period Judah – c.30 kilometres square, according to Bickerman (1962: 11) – and its marginality in strategic terms, prominent biblical scholars such as Wellhausen (1878) have long doubted the reality of Persian royal involvement in regulating Jerusalem's cult.⁶ Why should and would the authorities of this immense world empire concern themselves with the internal theological worries and squabbles of a tiny community located well off the beaten track? Underpinning these doubts is the fact that the Old Testament texts, as we have them, have clearly been extensively reworked over decades and centuries. This makes it possible for scholars to throw doubt on the genuineness of the Ezra documents, and even on the very historical existence of Ezra,⁷ pointing out that, for example, he does not figure as a hero in early Jewish legend, contrary to Nehemiah.⁸ Is he, perhaps, brought into prominence only later in association with spurious royal documents in order to clothe them with an imposing archaic pedigree, which would lend support to claims that Jerusalem had been enjoying special cultic privileges and specific forms of worship ever since the far distant days of the Persian kings?

The response to this kind of scepticism has been to comb the sources available for the Persian empire, especially, of course, those contemporary with its existence, in order to see whether the Persian rulers acted in relation to the cults of other communities in ways analogous to their reported behaviour in *Ezra-Nehemiah*. If one were to find evidence of such actions, then it would be possible to say that the Achaemenid régime did indeed develop a unique approach to relations with its subjects on the religious plane, and it would allow historians to accept the Ezra-Nehemiah stories more or less at face value.

In order to test these opposing view, the next step must be to examine the main pieces of evidence that have been used at various times in these

5 Ezra appears as a priest, scholar and 'scribe of the law of the god of heaven', personally commissioned by Artaxerxes (I?) to bring moneys to Jerusalem for rebuilding the temple, to institute proper sacrifice and generally inquire into the Judaeans community (*Ezra* 7.12–26). Nehemiah describes himself as a royal cupbearer (*Neh.* 1.11).

6 See the references in Kuhrt 2001: 167, n.4.

7 See, for example, Garbini 1986; Lebram 1987, and cf. the critical analysis of issues, with references, in Grabbe 2004: 70–85.

8 *Ecclesiasticus* 49.13; II *Maccabees* 1.18; 2.13; cf. Smith 1974: 92.

arguments among biblical scholars, and how they are currently viewed by a majority of students of Achaemenid history. Given the combination of the complexity of the subject and the limitations of space, a selection of some of the most important sources will have to suffice here. At the end, I shall try to draw out some of the implications of this discussion for the history of Persian period Judah, which lies at the root of the conundrum.

1. The religion of the Persian kings

What, to start with, do we know about the religious practices and beliefs of the Persian kings themselves, which many have thought could account for their particular ‘take’ on the religious activities of their subjects? Here, I should emphasise, we must – if we are to gain any kind of understanding – confine ourselves to looking at the contemporary material emanating from the Persian imperial centres.⁹ The most important, albeit circumscribed, source is the Persian royal inscriptions, in which we hear the voices of the Persian kings.¹⁰ There are no royal inscriptions in Old Persian predating Darius I,¹¹ but from his reign onwards there are royal statements inscribed on palaces, tombs and cliff faces, or deposited in the foundations of buildings.¹² From them it emerges that the king’s supreme god is Auramazda. Again and again, the kings state that what they did in war and peace was achieved ‘with the help of Auramazda’. Auramazda is the prime creator of cosmic and earthly order (see figure 1), and it is through him,

9 A useful and sober guide to Iranian religion in this period is Malandra 1983.

10 For the Achaemenid royal inscriptions, see Weissbach 1911 (giving the Babylonian as well as Elamite versions); Kent 1953 (who set up the standard form of citing Old Persian inscriptions); Schmitt 1991 (Darius I’s Bisitun inscription); id. 2000 (inscriptions from Naqsh-e Rostam & Persepolis); Lecoq 1997 (translations only). For select translations, see TUAT I: 419–450; 609–612; Veenhof 1983: 60–80; Brosius 2000; Demarée & Veenhof 2003: 373–386. See also the Oriental Institute (Chicago) website, <http://www.uchicago.edu/OI/PROJ/ARI.html>.

11 I.e. none survive. There are some inscriptions in the names of Arsames, Ariaramnes and Cyrus the Great (AmH; AsH; CMA–c). The first two are generally considered fakes, while the ones in Cyrus’ name from Pasargadae were almost certainly put up by Darius I. Many scholars argue that the Old Persian cuneiform script was created early in the reign of Darius I; for references, see Kuhrt (in press b), ch.5 no.1, n.1. Contrary to the long accepted view that Old Persian cuneiform was only used for formal royal inscriptions, an administrative text in Old Persian has been identified among the Persepolis Fortification tablets (to be published by M.W. Stolper in *ARTA* (www.achemenet.com/ressources.enligne)).

12 They come mainly from Persepolis and Susa (for the ones from Pasargadae, see above, n.11), although note the canal stelae from Egypt (DZa–c). Several are said to come from Ecbatana (modern Hamadan), but their findspots are not totally certain. Rock inscriptions have been found at Bisitun, Elvend and Van.

with him and as part of his bountiful creation that the Persian monarch rules this earth:

§ 1 A great god (is) Auramazda, who created this earth, who created yonder heaven, who created man, who created happiness for man, who made Darius king, one king of many, one lord of many.

§ 2 I (am) Darius the great king, king of kings, king of countries containing all kinds of men, king on this great earth far and wide, son of Hystaspes, an Achaemenid, a Persian, son of a Persian, an Aryan, having Aryan lineage.

§ 3 Darius the king proclaims: By the favour of Auramazda these are the countries which I seized outside Persia; I ruled over them; they bore me tribute; what was said to them by me, that they did; my law – that held them (firm); Media, Elam, Parthia, Areia, Bactria, Sogdiana, Chorasmia, Drangiana, Arachosia, Sattagydia, Gandara, India, Scythians who drink hauma, Scythians with pointed caps, Babylonia, Assyria, Arabia, Egypt, Armenia, Cappadocia, Sardis, Ionia, Scythians who are across the sea, Thrace, petasos-wearing Ionians, Libya, Nubia, Maka, Caria. (DNa, paras.1–3)¹³

This complementarity of god and king may, indeed, be expressed by the relief carved on the facades of the Persian royal tombs, with the divine and royal figures facing each other in a reciprocal gesture of greeting and blessing.¹⁴ Auramazda and the Persian king together thus represent right, truth and a cosmic-moral order, from which it follows that the king's subjects, the inhabitants of the empire, must remain loyal to the political structure which embodies it. Hence rebellion against the king is equated with not adhering to Auramazda's rule; as Darius puts it when describing a revolt against him:

§ 72 Darius the king proclaims: Those Elamites were disloyal, and by them Auramazda was not worshipped. I worshipped Auramazda. By the favour of Auramazda, as (was) my desire, so I treated them.

§ 73 Darius the king proclaims: Whosoever shall worship Auramazda, his shall be the prayer, both living and dead. (DB, col. V)¹⁵

What he means is that the rebels threatened the god-defined imperial order and thus had to be punished, not that their religious practices were offensive to the Persian ruler. In effect, he is saying that in order for mankind to partake of blessings on this earth and, after death, in heaven,

13 The text is inscribed behind the figure of the king on Darius I's tomb at Naqsh-e Rostam (see fig.1). Many identify the figure in the winged disc as a representation of Auramazda, which fits nicely with the close relationship outlined in the text. An alternative view is that it is a representation of the royal glory (*khvarna*, comparable to the Mesopotamian concept of *melammu*), see Shahbazi 1974.

14 See Schmidt 1970 for the publication of the Achaemenid tombs; Root 1979: 162–181 for discussion of the image.

15 Repeated verbatim with respect to the Scythian revolt in the next section. Both are in Old Persian only.

humanity must be loyal to the king, which is elided with reverence for the king's god, Auramazda. This is, in essence, also the message delivered in more developed terms by Xerxes, as commemorated in a set of foundation document from Persepolis:

§ 4a Xerxes the king proclaims: When I became king, there is among those countries which (are) inscribed above (one, which) was in turmoil. Afterwards Auramazda brought me aid; by the favour of Auramazda I defeated that country and put it in its proper place.

§ 4b And among those countries there were (some) where formerly the *daivas* had been worshipped. Afterwards by the favour of Auramazda I destroyed that place of the *daivas*, and I gave orders: 'The *daivas* shall not be worshipped any longer!' Wherever formerly the *daivas* have been worshipped, there I worshipped Auramazda at the proper time and with the proper ceremony.

§ 4c And there was something else, that had been done wrong, that too I put right. That which I have done, all that I have done by the favour of Auramazda. Auramazda brought me aid, until I had done the work.

§ 4d You, who shall be hereafter, if you shall think: 'Happy may I be (while) living and (when) dead may I be blessed,' obey that law, which Auramazda has established! Worship Auramazda at the proper time and with the proper ritual! The man who obeys that law which Auramazda has established, and (who) worships Auramazda at the proper time and in the proper ceremonial style, he both becomes happy (while) living and blessed (when) dead.

§ 5 Xerxes the king proclaims: Me may Auramazda protect from evil, and my (royal) house and this land! This I pray of Auramazda; this may Auramazda grant me. (XPh paras 4–5)¹⁶

What he does here is to elaborate his father's statement about the debt of loyalty owed by subjects to the empire, by emphasising the centrality of the royal role in mankind's redemption: the passage, he says, from the world of the living to the hereafter is mediated through the person of the king – only through fidelity to the Persian monarch and his order can the individual be saved. To stray from that path is to be guilty of blasphemy – to worship false gods.¹⁷

Although Auramazda is clearly the supreme deity of the Persian ruler, he is certainly not the sole god. From Darius on, there are repeated references to, for example, 'Auramazda and the gods' or 'Auramazda and all the gods.'¹⁸ The thousands of administrative documents from Persepolis, dating from Darius I reign, show the central authority making

16 For the uncertainties of translation, see Lecoq 1997: 160. See the fundamental discussion of this text by Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1980, ch.1; cf. Briant 1996a: 567–571 [2002: 550–554]. See also Kellens 1995.

17 See the fundamental discussion of this text by Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1980, ch.1; cf. Briant 1996a: 567–571 [2002: 550–554]. See also Kellens 1995.

18 See, for example, DPd, DPf, DPg, DPh.

repeated, generous provisions for a diversity of cults in the Achaemenid home region of Fars, including, side by side with Auramazda and some other Iranian deities, the old Elamite gods of Fars and – possibly – divinised local topographical features, such as rivers and mountains.¹⁹ These last might be better interpreted as the locations where cult acts were performed, rather than being divinities in themselves. A further point to note is that all the gods supplied from government stocks are either Elamite or Iranian – the one exception is Mesopotamian god Adad. But, as he had formed part of the Elamite pantheon since the early second millennium BC, this apparent exception vanishes on closer inspection.²⁰ In a recent study, Wouter Henkelman has argued, persuasively, that this combination of Iranian and Elamite cults is what became the Persian religion of the Achaemenid period (2006a). And it is noteworthy that the quantities of supplies for, for example, the old Elamite god Humban vastly outstrip those for Auramazda, who figures rather infrequently in the Fortification corpus. It is probably more appropriate to think of Auramazda as, above all, the god of the king, rather than the overarching supreme deity he became in later periods of Persian history.²¹

Further, even at the level of royal declarations, there are hints of an evolution over time within Persian religion. Thus, in the inscriptions of Artaxerxes II (405–359), Auramazda is associated on several occasions with two other gods, Anahita and Mithra; the latter also figures in an inscription of his successor Artaxerxes III.²² What this implies is by no means clear. The one possible indicator appears in a fragment of the early hellenistic Babylonian scholar, Berossus:

The Persians, the Medes and the magi did not believe in wooden or stone images of the gods but in fire and water like the philosophers. Later, however, after many years, they began to worship statues in human form as Berossus reports in the third book of his Chaldaean history. Artaxerxes, the son of Darius, the son of Ochus, introduced this practice. He was the first to set up an image of Aphrodite Anaitis in Babylon and to require such worship from the Susians, Ecbatanians, Persians and Bactrians and from Damascus and Sardis. (FGrH 680 F11)²³

What Berossus seems to be saying here is that Artaxerxes II initiated a change by introducing a statue-cult of the goddess Anahita in Babylon, and

19 See Hallock 1969, PF 336–354; see further Henkelman 2006a: 415–456.

20 See the discussion by Henkelman 2006a: 239–258.

21 Note, most strikingly, DSk: 'I (am) Darius, the great king, king of kings, king of countries, son of Hystaspes, the Achaemenid. King Darius proclaims: Auramazda is mine; I am Auramazda's; I worshipped Auramazda; may Auramazda bear me aid.'

22 Anahita and Mithra, A²Ha; A²Sa; A²Sd. Mithra alone: A²Hb; A³Pa.

23 The Berossus passage is cited by Clemens of Alexandria (mid-2nd century AD) in his *Protrepticus*. For translations of the passage, see Burstein 1978: 28; Verbrugge & Wickersham: 62.

required worship of the goddess in statue form by ‘the Susians, Ecbatanians, Persians and Bactrians’, as well as ‘from Damascus and Sardis’. What this means precisely is uncertain. A possible interpretation rests on the differences in the wording, i.e. the text refers to the cult first in relation to the Iranian peoples, while outside Iran, it names only satrapal seats.²⁴ So it could be that an edict was issued for the inhabitants of Greater Iran who were henceforth to render cult in this form to the popular Iranian goddess Anahita, whose worship was well-established and widespread throughout the region. Simultaneously, the king ordered the establishment of Anahita shrines in the chief satrapal centres of Babylonia, Asia Minor and Syria. The shrines in these satrapal seats were now to serve as a focus for the Persian communities of the imperial diaspora.²⁵ If this understanding is correct (and it is, of course, hypothetical), Artaxerxes’ order would have been aimed exclusively at Iranians and Persians in the provinces, aimed at strengthening their sense of cohesion and identity as members of the governing élite vis-à-vis their non-Persian subjects.²⁶

To summarise the main points: the very limited evidence at our disposal indicates that loyalty to the Persian king and empire was, metaphorically, equated with acceptance of his own prime deity, Auramazda. This is, in some respects, comparable to Assyrian imperial ideology, where obedience to the Assyrian ruler implied acceptance of the power of Assyria’s gods, in particular Assur.²⁷ But in neither case does this mean that worship of these imperial deities was ever imposed on subjects – acknowledgement of the conqueror’s right to rule automatically entailed recognition of his gods’ superior strength – nothing more. It is important to remember that this is a world of gods competing for power; the contest between Baal and Yahweh on Mount Carmel in the time of Elijah (1 *Kings* 18.20–46), for one, is a powerful reminder of this. Further, many Elamite and Iranian gods were acknowledged, worshipped and royally supplied within the Persian homeland. And we can glimpse a shift within the religion of the Persian rulers of the late fifth and fourth centuries – both in terms of cult practice, indicated by the erection of divine statues, and in the

24 The satrapal centres in Babylon, Sardis and Damascus (not Memphis in Egypt, as Egypt had seceded in Artaxerxes II’s reign).

25 See the discussion in Briant 1986; 1996a: 695–698 [2002: 676–680].

26 On the concept of the Persian ruling élite defined ethnically, see Briant 1996a [2002], esp. ch. 8, and note the way in which it has been deployed by Ma 2003 to illuminate hellenistic kingship.

27 See, briefly, Kuhrt 1995: 511–514 (with references); Holloway 2002. Note also the interesting article on Assyrian and Babylonian royal dedications in Zagros shrines commemorating/markings the conqueror’s presence, Radner & Kroll 2006. Nor, of course, was the centrally organised Seleucid ruler cult intended to wipe out local forms of worship, see Bi(c)kerman 1938, ch.7; Sherwin-White & Kuhrt 1993: 202–210.

articulation of royal ideology, as shown by the inclusion of Anahita and Mithra in the prayer sections of some royal inscriptions. Nothing here, one might note in passing, chimes in with conventional notions about Zoroastrianism.

2. Persian kings and their subjects

What of those documented instances in which Persian kings associate themselves with the cults of non-Persian deities? First, and most famously, there is the Cyrus Cylinder, found at Babylon, almost certainly in association with the temple of Marduk, the city's patron-deity.²⁸ The document, written in Babylonian Akkadian, was clearly composed in the wake of Cyrus' victory in battle over the Babylonian king Nabonidus in the autumn of 539.²⁹ This was followed by the surrender of the Mesopotamian capital, signalled by the citizenry formally inviting the Persian victor to enter in peace as their new king. Cyrus accepted, which in turn obliged him to cast himself in the role of a ruler blessed and approved by Marduk – an action expressed concretely by sanctioning civic and sacred building, authorising divine offerings and proclaiming the formal restoration of the status quo, disrupted by the war just fought. This inevitably led to the reign of his defeated foe being viewed in retrospect as a period of disastrous social, political and religious dislocation. Such an action and the accompanying public proclamation renewing devastated buildings and disrupted cults and returning displaced peoples, were an absolutely standard part of the behaviour and rhetoric of conquerors of Babylonia. They guaranteed a measure of socio-political continuity to the losers and provided a framework within which the local élites could reach an accommodation with the new régime. The whole package was a potent and time-honoured Babylonian method enabling the Persians to rally support among the defeated: it does not reflect a new Persian policy; it does not indicate that the Persians were hailed as liberators; and it tells us nothing of the personal stance in relation to Babylonian religion of the Persian kings. It is, essentially, a tool for political legitimisation.³⁰

The same policy was adopted by Cyrus' son and successor, Cambyses, following his conquest of Egypt. The main evidence here is the autobiography inscribed on the naophorous statue of Udjahorresnet, who

28 The most recent treatment (transliteration and translation), with full references, is Schaudig 2001: 550–556; add Michalowski in Chavalas 2006: 426–430.

29 See Grayson 1975, no.7, col. iii, 12–20; Glassner 1993 [2004], no.26.

30 See Kuhrt 1983; 1987; (in press) a.

had been admiral and high official under the Saite kings and now became a courtier to the Persian monarchs.³¹ Udjahorrsnet's account shows that Cambyses' policy in Egypt mirrored that of Cyrus in Babylonia: forging links with members of local élites, installing them in honoured (though not politically powerful) positions, exploiting their familiarity with local conditions in order to make acceptance of his rule as palatable as possible and moulding himself to fit the role an Egyptian king was traditionally expected to fill – honouring the gods, authorising continued offerings, maintaining sanctuaries in purity, adopting ceremonial Egyptian titles and names.³² Other Egyptian evidence does not contradict this. There is the epitaph of a sacred Apis bull, the cult closely associated with Egyptian kingship, who was buried with elaborate funeral equipment by Cambyses in 524; the sarcophagus for this very Apis bull also survives.³³ Another Apis epitaph from 518, records the death of the new bull who had been formally installed by Cambyses in 524. So here again is clear evidence for Cambyses deporting himself in accordance with the sacred dictates of Egyptian kingship, just as Cyrus had taken on the attributes of a Babylonian monarch in order to cement Persian power.³⁴

A demotic document of the hellenistic period preserves an edict of Cambyses relating to Egyptian temple incomes.³⁵ Although hard to understand fully, it is clear that its purpose was administrative – an attempt to regulate and perhaps reorder the large temple-holdings for the benefit of the new régime. Nowhere does it prescribe anything connected to cult performance. The interests of the Persian authorities here, as in Babylonia where the ample documentation reveals it particularly clearly, lay in maximising the profits of the vast reserves of manpower, agricultural production and liquid assets controlled by the temples, so that they might be most efficiently and effectively exploited, as indeed they were, through

31 Edited (with translation) by Posener 1936, no.1. For translations see, for example, Otto 1954: 169–173; TUAT I, 603–608; Lichtheim 1980: 36–41; Lloyd 1982; Brosius 2000, nos.20 & 54.

32 See, in particular, Lloyd 1982; Briant 1996a: 68–72 [2002: 57–61].

33 See Posener 1936, nos.3 & 4; Brosius 2000, nos.21, 22 & fig.3. For a description of the Apis' installation and the elaborate funerary obsequies, see Thompson 1988: 196–203.

34 There is a problem raised by the date of the birth of the next Apis bull (Posener 1936, no.5), see the references at Kuhrt (in press b), ch.4, no.13, n.1.

35 The text is written on the reverse of the Demotic Chronicle (Paris, Bib.Nat. 215), edited by Spiegelberg 1914; see Devauchelle 1995 and Brosius 2000, nos.24 & 55 for translations.

the system of taxation³⁶ – installations of priests in Egypt, for example, were vetted and taxed by the Persian authorities.³⁷

The only other Persian ruler to figure officially in relation to non-Persian deities is Darius I, whose regicide and usurpation of the throne unleashed a series of serious rebellions in 522/1, which threatened to shatter the young empire into pieces. His ultimate victory, very much against the odds, amounted to what might be described as a refoundation of the Achaemenid empire.³⁸ His success and subsequent consolidation were commemorated throughout the provinces of which some testimony survives.³⁹ A statue (one of a pair), showing Darius dressed and sculpted in Achaemenid style, but with a lengthy Egyptian hieroglyphic inscription and conventional Egyptian symbols on the base was found at Susa.⁴⁰ But originally either it, or a copy, was erected in the Egyptian temple of Re at Heliopolis. It describes (and shows) Darius simultaneously in the guise of a pious Egyptian monarch, beloved, installed and blessed by Egypt's gods, and as a foreign warrior and conqueror, who now controls ('holds') the country.⁴¹

Totally Egyptian is the great temple at Hibis in the Khargah Oasis, where Darius added extensively to the earlier Saite structure – almost certainly part of Darius' effort to entrench Persian control solidly along Egypt's western fringes. The large structure follows entirely Egyptian building and decorative conventions, showing (and describing) Darius again and again in a purely pharaonic style, worshipping Egypt's gods and being suckled by Egyptian mother-goddesses as any pharaoh of old.⁴² In

36 See Joannès 1990 for an overview of the interaction of Persian authorities and local institutions in Babylonia, including the taxation of sanctuaries.

37 As shown by a demotic document from Elephantine (PBerlin 13582) published by Zauzich 1978. See Martin 1996, C35 for a translation.

38 The fundamental discussion is Dandamaev 1976; add now the very full analysis in Briant 1996a [2002], ch.3.

39 See DB, para. 70. For the copy of Darius I's Bisitun inscription found in Babylon, see von Voigtlander 1978; for the Aramaic version from Egypt, Greenfield & Porten 1982 (also TADAE 3, C.2.1).

40 Publication by Perrot et al. 1974; for further discussion, see O. Muscarella in Harper et al. 1992, no.153. Note that, while the subject figures in cartouches, appear conventionally Egyptian at first sight, their upraised hands are not, echoing the gestures of the throne-bearers at Naqsh-i Rostam and Persepolis.

41 Note also the Kabret canal stele (DZc), which has a quadrilingual text and the iconography, while stylistically Egyptian, shows the king in unmistakable Persian dress (see Posener 1936).

42 On Persian control here, see Cruz-Urbe (<http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~gdc/ghu/ghuieta.htm>), as well as id. 1988. For a discussion of the rearticulation of Egyptian kingship imagery in the Hibis pronaos (Horus and Seth combined in the royal/divine heraldic figure; a lion accompanying the god/king in the slaying of Apophis), see Sternberg-Hotabi & Aigner 2006. Note that in Dakhleh Oasis there are remains of a 26th dynasty temple, together with remnants of fine Persian period work (E. Bettles, personal communication, March 2007).

Babylon, Darius erected inscribed copies of the text recounting his victory over those who had challenged his seizure of the throne; the copies were placed prominently along Babylon's sacred processional street. The account was not only inscribed in Babylonian Akkadian and accompanied by an image of the king triumphant over rebels, it seems from the fragments that at every point where the original version in Iran named Persia's chief god, Auramazda, over and over, as the divine agent who had brought about Darius' victory, the Babylonian version substituted the name of Babylon's own principal god, Marduk.⁴³

All of the documents I have described relate directly to the legitimisation of the new rulers.⁴⁴ Their aim is to integrate the bloody conquerors (and the conquests were bloody and violent)⁴⁵ as effectively and smoothly as possible into the milieu of their new subjects, by manipulating existing, hallowed ideas about what constituted an acceptable and legitimate king within the respective societies. In these efforts, the local gods and belief-systems play a crucial role, which explains the presentation of the foreign invaders as acting at the behest of Babylonian or Egyptian deities, honouring them and ensuring the continuation of their cults. The politically calculated pragmatism of this policy, which forbids us to deduce anything concrete about the personal attitudes to these cults by the Persian rulers, should be clear.

3. Persian government involvement in local cults

These are the only examples extant in which one can observe the person of the Persian king directly engaging with the religious institutions of his subjects. There are, however, a few instances where the Persian government can be seen to intervene at some level within cultic affairs, and which have been argued to reflect a Persian interest and direct involvement in local religious matters.

43 See Seidl 1999 for the monument and text.

44 Given the chaotic circumstances surrounding Darius I's accession, it is appropriate to consider him as essentially a 'new' ruler, needing to establish and legitimise his control.

45 Always recognised in antiquity: Cyrus the Great's pillaging and slaughter following on the Battle of Opis in 539 (Grayson 1975, no.7, iii 11–14), the Persian sacking and killing at Sardis in the 540s, Hdt. 1.184–185 and, of course, Cyrus' plundering of Ecbatana in 550 (Grayson 1975, ii, 3–4). See Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1990: 33–35 on the image of Cyrus as a tyrannical ruler before Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* became known in the Renaissance and reversed the picture.

3a) Elephantine

Two Egyptian demotic papyri, for example, contain the correspondence between the administrators of the Khnum temple on Elephantine and Pherendates, the Persian satrap of Egypt in 493. They show that the authorities insisted on being informed, and approving the appointments, of new temple staff, given their interest in monitoring and taxing their resources.⁴⁶ But by far the largest dossier comes from the Jewish community, also on Elephantine island, settled there since the time of the pre-Persian Saite rulers. Here it formed part of a large and ethnically mixed garrison serving to secure Egypt's sensitive southern frontier at Aswan.⁴⁷ The several hundred papyri and ostraca give a fairly full picture of the community's affairs in the last decade of the fifth century. One text, noted by earlier editors of the material, concerns regulations about the proper performance of the Jewish Passover (Cowley 1923, no.23). Although very fragmentary, it appears that the directions were sent from Jerusalem and endorsed by Arshama, the Persian satrap of Egypt.⁴⁸ But when we try to define the level at which the Persian authority involved itself in this matter, it seems fairly clear that their intervention was restricted to the rather mundane one of facilitating communications between Jerusalem and Elephantine and granting official permission for the Elephantine Jews to be off duty on specified days. The governmental interest, in the Passover celebrations was limited, as far as one can tell, to ensuring the smooth functioning of the rota of garrison duties in this strategically crucial frontier-zone.

A more complex issue emerges from a series of five (possibly six) documents, two of them quite lengthy.⁴⁹ Here the Jews of Elephantine report to both the governors and priests in Jerusalem and Samaria, as well

46 PBerlin 1359 & 1340, published in Spiegelberg 1928. For the observation that the demotic of the satrap's letter shows it to be a direct translation from Aramaic, see Hughes 1984; for clarification of the process involved, see Chauveau 1999; for taxation of the installation of temple staff, see above, n.37. (For translation and further references, see Kuhrt (in press b), ch.17, no.30.)

47 Although the majority of the documents emanate from the Jewish community, references in the material show clearly that the 'Aramaean Quarter' (where the Jews lived, as opposed to the 'Egyptian Quarter' or 'town of Khnum') was inhabited by all kinds of people: Egyptians (a servant in the Khnum sanctuary; boatmen), a Caspian and a Chorasmian are all attested (see, most recently, the references in von Pilgrim 2003: 311, nn.21–24).

48 What the reference to the Persian king, Darius II, means precisely is difficult to make out given the state of the papyrus.

49 Cowley 1923, nos.27; 30–33; TADAE 1, A.4.5–10. Two documents are duplicates (draft and improved copy), and one is not normally associated with this dossier, but it is possible that it notes action taken by the authorities against some of the people involved at some point during the affair.

as, eventually, to the satrap, Arshama,⁵⁰ that several civic and official installations on Elephantine, as well as their Yahweh temple, had been damaged or destroyed by the adherents of the Egyptian god Khnum.⁵¹ In this, according to the Jews – and it is important to remember that it is solely their voices that emerge –, the Egyptians were aided by the local Persian commander, Vidranga and his son Nafāina. Khnum was, of course, the ancient ram-headed deity of the region, to whom Elephantine had been sacred certainly since early dynastic times, i.e. c.3000 years, if not earlier. The quarrel between Jews and Egyptians was protracted, dragging on for at least five years before eventually the authorities gave permission to the Jews to rebuild their temple and re-initiate its cult.

Trying to understand and make sense of this conflict is not easy, but a recent detailed re-analysis by Pierre Briant (1996b) has succeeded in shedding a good deal of light on it.⁵² Together with the archaeological finds, this allows a basic outline of the events to be reconstructed. It is clear both from the Elephantine texts and recent archaeological work that the Yahweh temple stood in close proximity to the age-old sanctuary of Khnum.⁵³ At some point, before 410, a wall was built with official sanction. In the course of its construction, part of a royal granary was destroyed and access to a well, which was the main source of water for the inhabitants, was restricted as a result. Further, the wall traversed the eastern part of the Jewish sanctuary, which itself had encroached on the main processional way. As a result the fabric of the Yahweh temple ran the risk of sustaining serious damage. When the Jews complained to the local governor's tribunal, the Egyptians countered with the claim that the Jewish shrine occupied terrain legally belonging to the old Egyptian settlement. The Egyptian claim was upheld, as the Jews were unable to produce proof of their entitlement to the space occupied by their cult. As a result, in accordance with Egyptian law, part of the Yahweh temple was dismantled under the aegis of the local Persian commander. In doing this, however, he overstepped the mark in one respect: under Egyptian law, the guilty party in such a property dispute was responsible for removing the offending

50 That is not totally certain: 'my lord' is used to address other high level functionaries as well as the satrap (see Kratz 2006: 254).

51 The precise actions and damages do not emerge with complete clarity, as the letter making the accusation is fragmentary (further, von Pilgrim 2003).

52 Briant's reconstruction requires modification in several respects in view of the archaeological find, which shows that what he took to be a reference to the enlargement of the Khnum temple, in fact relates to the building of a wall, as shown clearly by von Pilgrim 2003 (see, particularly, fig.2). Nevertheless, this does not undermine the basic outline of events as reconstructed by Briant (as von Pilgrim acknowledges).

53 In fact the Yahweh temple stood on the west side of the old main and processional street, which separated it from the Khnum temple.

structure and entitled to keep the materials. This the Persian commander had not permitted the Jews to do. In the light of this legal breach, the Elephantine Jews turned to a higher authority. They petitioned Arshama, the satrap, as well as community leaders in Jerusalem and Samaria. They pointed to their ancient right to have a Yahweh shrine from the Saite period on, an entitlement confirmed by Cambyses, and requested that judges and inspectors investigate and confirm their claims.⁵⁴ After three years, the Jewish entitlement was indeed proved and they were granted permission to reconstruct the temple and bring offerings. Nevertheless, the permission was hedged about with certain stipulations. The Jews had to pay a fine, or compensation, to the satrapal treasury; all the rebuilding costs had to be borne by the Jewish community itself and they were subject to satrapal surveillance to ensure that they adhere to the terms under which they were allowed to re-establish their cult.⁵⁵ Clearly, some of these conditions must relate to efforts by the authorities to calm any counter claims by the Egyptians, living cheek by jowl with the Jews, and ensure that the two communities, who played an essential role in defending this important and vulnerable frontier, get along reasonably smoothly.⁵⁶ The affair can thus be understood to reflect a problem arising from a conflict between local Egyptian legal norms and the overarching imperial, or royal, law concerned with the maintenance of proper order. Intervention in the religious affairs as such of the contending parties at no point informed the action taken by the Persian authorities.

3b) The Xanthos Trilingual

The same is true of a document from another part of the empire. In 1973, a French archaeological team working at the Leto sanctuary of Xanthos in Lycia (south-western Turkey) found a trilingual inscription engraved on a stele.⁵⁷ Its two main, i.e. broad, sides were inscribed with the text of a

54 See the interesting discussion in Kratz (2006: 258–259), who suggests that the reference to Cambyses plays a role similar to the appeals to the Cyrus decree(s) in *Ezra* – in other words, legitimising claims by a community to have (and thus rebuild) a temple.

55 It could, alternatively, be the case that what I take as an official indemnity was a bribe paid by the Jews to hasten the progress of their claim, as Kratz 2006 argues.

56 Note the official veto on blood sacrifices, which some have thought had offended the members of the Khnum sanctuary (i.e. Jews sacrificing animals held sacred in the Egyptian cult). But then, why had the practice continued for the previous 200+ years? It remains an insoluble enigma (further Kratz 2006: 261–262, with references).

57 See Metzger 1974; *Fouilles de Xanthos VI. La stèle trilingue du Letôon*, Paris.

resolution passed by the Xanthians, one in Lycian, the other in Greek, i.e. the languages current in the region:

After Pixodarus, son of Hecatomnus, had become satrap of Lycia, [and] established as archons of Lycia, Hieron and Apollodotus, and as governor of Xanthos, Artemelis,

(II, ll.5–8)

the Xanthians and their *perioikoi* (i.e. non-citizen inhabitants) have decreed that an altar be erected in honour of Basileus Kaunios and Arkesimas

(III, ll.8–11)

and they have chosen as priest Simias, son of Kondorasis, and, in the course of time, whoever is closest related to Simias,

(IV, ll.11–18)

and they have granted him, on all his goods, an exemption from imposts and the city has given the land which Kesindelis and Pigres used to cultivate and all that adjoins that land and the houses as property to Basileus Kaunios and to Arkesimas and three half minas shall be given each year by the city

(V, ll.18–20)

and all those who have been emancipated shall pay ten drachmas to the god

(VI, ll.20–23)

and all that has been inscribed on the stele has been consecrated to belong in its totality to Basileus Kaunios and to Arkesimas

(VII, ll.23–26)

and, in addition to all the resources which will accrue from it, each new moon a sheep shall be sacrificed and each year an ox

(VIII, ll.26–35)

and the Xanthians and the *perioikoi* have sworn to do for the gods and for their priest everything that has been written on the stele, not to take any of it away and not to allow anyone else to do so. Whosoever takes something away from it, may he be guilty before the gods, Leto, her descendants and the Nymphs, and may Pixodarus be the guarantor.

(Greek text of Trilingual Stele, Xanthos)

The inscription records the decision by the local community to set up a cult for two Lycian deities. Provisions for its upkeep include a tax-exempted priest, a grant of land, an annual sum to be paid by the city and a levy on emancipated slaves. The date of the text is late Achaemenid, pretty certainly 338/7.⁵⁸ An Aramaic version, summarising these clauses, is set on one of the narrow sides of the stele:

⁵⁸ For the date, see Badian 1977; Briant 1998a: 305–306, n.3.

(I. Date, place, provincial authority. ll.1–5)

In the month Siwan of year one of Artaxerxes the king, in the fortress of Orna, Pixodaro, son of Katomno, (being) the satrap who (governs) in Caria and (in) Lycia.

(II. The decision to found a cult, ll.6–8)

The inhabitants of Orna have decided to make a cult(?) for Kandawas the God of Kaunos and (for) his Companion.

(III. Appointment of priest, ll.9–10)

And they have made Simias, the son of Koddorasi, priest.

(IV. Cult endowment, ll.10–14)

And there is an estate which the inhabitants of Orna have given to Kandawas the God. Annually, by the town, is given one and a half mina of silver.

(V. Performance of cult and exemption, ll.14–18)

The priest sacrifices at the beginning of the month one sheep to Kandawas the God, and he burns(?) each year 1 ox. And the property, which is his, is exempted.

(VI. Inscription and invocation, ll.19–27)

This decree (here) inscribed is (the one which conveys title of) the property. Further, if anyone ever takes (something) from Kandawas the God or the existing priest, (may that person) be removed by Kandawas the God and by his Companion! And, by the God, Lato, Artemis, Hshatrapati and the other (gods), (may) that person be removed! And may those gods exact (expiation) from him! (Aramaic summary of Lycian/Greek civic decree, Xanthos)

In the 1979 publication, the editor of the Aramaic text gave a translation that, if accepted, would suggest that the satrap was here presented as, at the public level, officially making himself responsible for instituting the cult and its attendant provisions. This has been taken by some biblical scholars as providing a parallel to the Persian government's close involvement in Ezra's activities in Jerusalem.⁵⁹ But this translation has been contested by several specialists,⁶⁰ and the positioning of the abbreviated Aramaic version on the narrow and least significant side of the monument also undermines such a reading of the document. A thorough recent re-analysis (Briant 1998a) now suggests, rather more plausibly, that the satrap's role is extremely limited: in the Aramaic version, his name simply figures as part of the dating formula; in the Greek text, he is invoked at the end as the upholder of the civic decree in parallel to the local gods. In other words, should any of the decree's provisions be infringed or contested in the future then the regional government is asked to defend them within an earthly legal context, while the gods would pursue the wrongdoers on the metaphysical plane. Again, then, we do not see the Persian authorities

59 Such as Frei (in Frei & Koch 1996); see also Fried 2004.

60 For example, Teixidor 1978; Lemaire 1995.

involved directly with the internal cultic arrangements of a subject community. There is merely the expectation that they would be cognisant of the local provisions because, undoubtedly, a document recording the resolution will have been held in the satrapal archives. Should a dispute arise at a future date concerning the income, land-use and so forth on which the cult depended, the satrapal government would be expected to uphold the provisions in its role as the maintainer of local order.⁶¹

4. Persian worship of non-Persian gods

None of this denies the possibility, indeed likelihood, of Persians within the empire embracing the cults of local divinities. But where we have evidence for this it is, quite clearly, from the material available, something that reflects personal and private beliefs and pieties. This is true, as has been demonstrated recently, of, for example, the so-called Droaphernes inscription from Sardis, preserved in a Roman period copy. It was published by Louis Robert in 1975 and daringly interpreted by him as showing that Droaphernes, a Persian governor in Sardis, set up a statue of the chief Persian god Auramazda in the hellenised guise of ‘Zeus the Lawgiver’. Along with this creation of an Iranian cult in Asia Minor, Robert argued that he set out rules for its worship, particularly in relation to other local gods:

In the thirty-ninth year of king Artaxerxes, Droaphernes, son of Barakes, sub-governor of Lydia, consecrated the statue of Zeus the Lawgiver. He orders his (sc. Zeus’) *neokoroi therapeutes* (cultic attendants) who have the right to enter the *adyton* (innermost sanctuary) and who crown the god, not to participate in the mysteries of Sabazios of those who carry the victims to be burnt, and of Angodistis and of Ma. (Greek inscription, Sardis, engraved in the Roman period; Robert 1975.)

There are, unfortunately, serious grammatical problems with Robert’s translation, as several scholars have pointed out.⁶² In fact, the text needs to be reread as commemorating the dedication of a statue by the Persian official Droaphernes to a local Sardian manifestation of Zeus:

In the thirty-ninth year of Artaxerxes’ reign, Droaphernes, son of Barakes, sub-governor of Lydia, (dedicated) the statue to Zeus of Baradates. (Followed by an engraved leaf).

61 Cf., for example, the satrap’s role in the Myous-Miletus quarrel (SIG 134), and note Hdt. 6.42–43, describing Artaphernes measuring and assessing civic lands in western Asia Minor at the end of the Ionian Revolt.

62 See Frei & Koch 1984: 19–21; Gschnitzer 1986; see the very full discussion by Briant 1998b.

Further, and very important, is the fact that what Robert interpreted as regulations for the new cult are actually statements quite independent and separate from this act of dedication. An engraved leaf (see above) marks the end of Droaphernes' act of dedication. The subsequent instructions for temple-personnel are quite distinct, connected to the worship of local deities and very probably enacted at a later period. What this shows is that the text is part of a local temple archive, recording a variety of acts related to the temple's history, well known from other sites in the hellenistic and Roman periods.⁶³ What remains, then, is a one off, private act of devotion performed by a Persian in honour of a local Lydian god, part of a longer dossier enshrining the temple's history.

This personal honouring by individual Persians of gods connected with their place of residence and functioning is amply demonstrated in Egypt,⁶⁴ and most interestingly by the stele from Saqqara, found late in 1994 (figure 2).⁶⁵ It is a traditional Egyptian funerary monument, but the Egyptian-named dead man is the son of a Persian father and Egyptian mother, and has had (probably) himself depicted in a typical Achaemenid court style, while the Egyptian hieroglyphic and demotic texts contain the standard invocations to Osiris, god of the dead:

(i) Hieroglyphic text:

Spell: Osiris, foremost of the West, the great god, the lord of the sanctuary, (may) he give an invocation-offering of bread, beer, oxen, fowl, clothing, alabaster(?), incense(?), things perfect and pure, the luxuries upon which the god lives, to the *ka* of Djedherbes, son of Artam, born of the lady Tanofrether.

(ii) Demotic text:

Spell: Osiris, foremost of the West, Wennofer, the great god, lord of (Ro)staw(?), praises his name, (that is) Djedherbes, son of Artam, born of Tanofret-[...] for ever. (H.S. Smith in Mathieson et al 1995)

What this category of material illustrates is the reverence for, and interest in, local deities evinced by individual Persians stationed and active in diverse localities of the immense Persian realm and the process of acculturation – but certainly not intervention in cultic matters at some official, bureaucratic level.

63 See the analysis of the Priene dossier by Sherwin-White 1985; note, too, the Lindos Chronicle, *FGrH* 532, see Bertrand 1992, no.2, for a translation.

64 See the many dedications to Min of Koptos by Persian officials in the Wadi Hammamat quarries, Posener 1936, nos.24–35. Note also the statue of the Persian governor of Hellenistic Phrygia set up in front of the Athena sanctuary at Ilium (Diodorus 17.17.6), as well as the induction of Bagadates as an officiant in the cult of Artemis at Amyzon, because of his known devotion to her (321/0; Robert & Robert 1983: 97–118).

65 For a report on the find, analysis of text, iconography and the Old Persian name, see Mathieson et al. 1995.

5. Implications

This, of course, has implications for how we might evaluate the historical realities of the Ezra and Nehemiah stories. As I have stressed Persian interest in local cults does not seem to have gone beyond safeguarding administrative and fiscal interests, or manipulating local religious structures to help underpin the reality and legitimacy of their claims to be the new rightful kings. In this, Persian behaviour can be seen to parallel that of their predecessors and, indeed, successors.⁶⁶ It is perfectly possible that Nehemiah was sent from the Persian court to iron out a problematical situation in Judah, with social, economic and political ramifications, and that, given the official standing this gave him, he acted to resolve current conflict within the Yahweh cult.⁶⁷ But there is no evidence that something of that kind could ever have formed part of his official remit. Ezra's mission must remain a puzzle, although it is conceivable that his action in relation to 'the law of god' could have been linked to resolving problems arising out of the intersection of Jewish divinely derived legal practices and the overarching Persian imperial order.⁶⁸ It is also not unthinkable that the 'Cyrus edict' in *Ezra* 1.2–4, permitting funds collected from exilic communities to be used for rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem, represents a Persian administrative response⁶⁹ to a Judaeian petition, on analogy with the situation we saw with respect to reconstructing the Yahweh shrine on Elephantine in the late fifth century.⁷⁰ But the various and contradictory edicts quoted in *Ezra*⁷¹ makes their authenticity questionable and hence leaves us with a situation that, while aspects of his and Nehemiah's actions are historically feasible, they are certainly not provable. The single aspect where it may be possible to identify a Persian order relating to the performance of the Jewish cult appears in Darius' decree, as given in *Ezra*. Within the detailed stipulations, there appears the command to offer regular prayers on behalf of the Persian king and his dynasty:

... so that they may offer soothing sacrifices to the god of heaven, and pray for the life of the king and his sons. ... (extract from the rider to the second version of the Cyrus decree by Darius I, *Ezra* 6.10).

66 See Kuhrt 1987 & 1990, tracing the pattern in Babylonia from the time of Assyrian domination through to Alexander's conquest; Kuhrt & Sherwin-White 1991 and Sherwin-White & Kuhrt 1993 for Seleucid kings and Babylonian cults.

67 See Smith 1971 comparing Nehemiah's activities to those of a Greek tyrant.

68 See the article by Wiesehöfer 1995.

69 Although this could not plausibly date earlier than Darius I, see Bedford 2001.

70 See the explicit comparison between the two situations by Kratz 2006.

71 The one in *Ezra* 6 is in Aramaic, while the first in chapter 1 is in Hebrew; their stipulations, too, diverge considerably.

Could this be an echo Herodotus' statement about Persian religion that noone was allowed 'to pray for any personal blessing, but [must pray] that it may go well for all the Persians, including the king, since he is himself one of the Persians'. (1.131)? If so, then this could be an exhortation to the subject peoples to remember that their continued well-being, now and in the hereafter, was inextricably linked to the survival of the cosmic order created by Auramazda, which has placed the Persian king on this earth to defend it, as encapsulated in the recurring heraldic device of the Persian royal hero overcoming chaos in the shape of a rampant lion or fantastic monster.⁷²

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72 For the mythic image of the Persian king elided with the heroic, ideal 'Persian man', see Root 1979: 303–311. For the many instances of sacrifices in Babylonian shrines 'for the life of the king/royal family', see, e.g., Grayson 1975, no.13b, ll.3–8; Sachs & Hunger 1989, nos. 204, 187, 171.

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