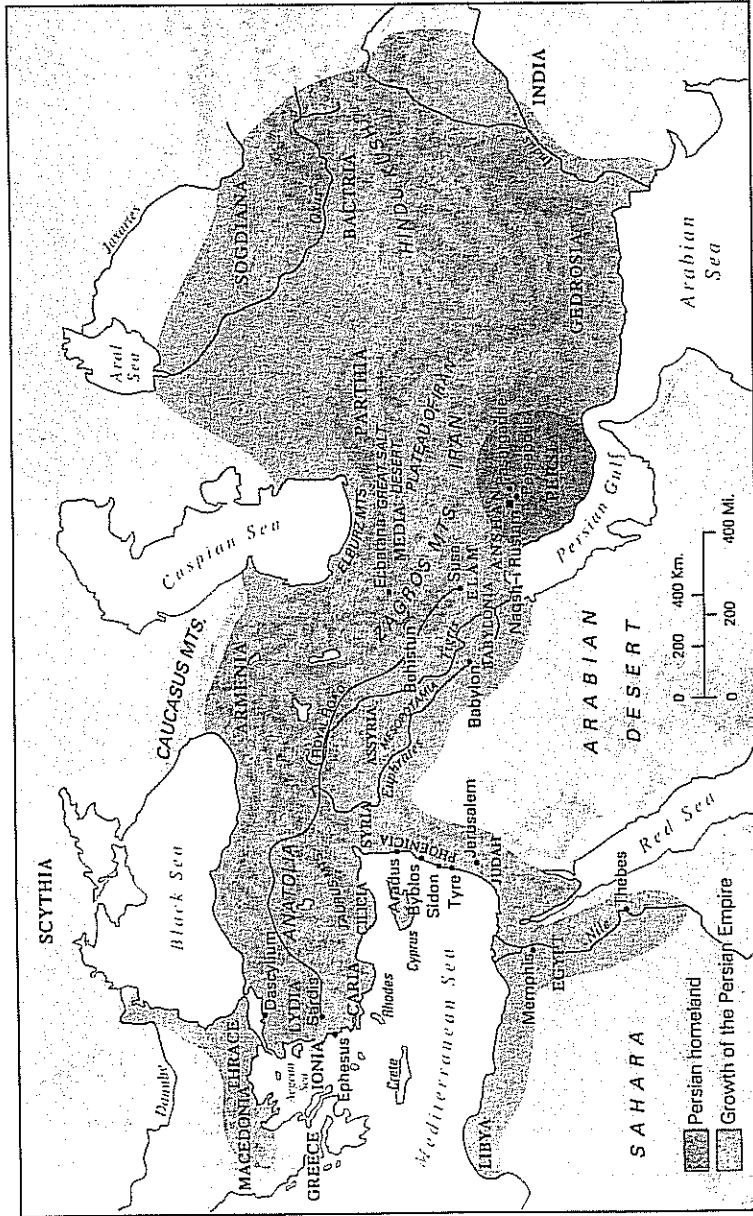
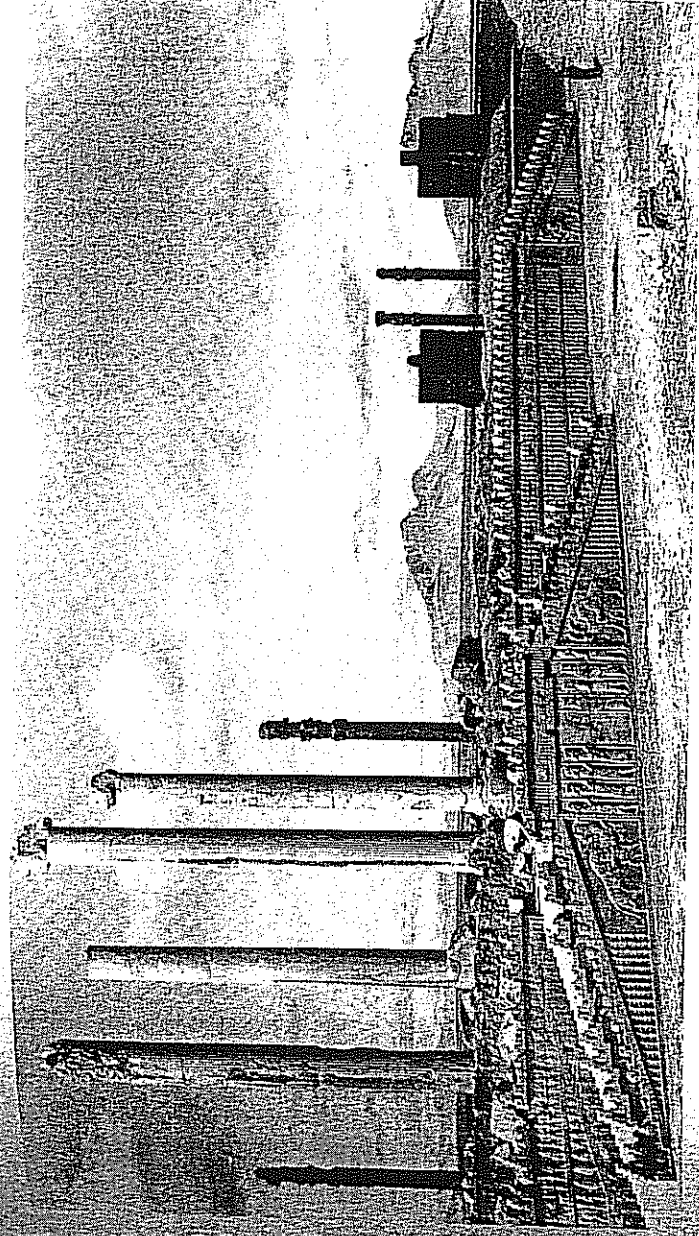


Painted Cup of Arcesilas of Cyrene
The ruler of this Greek community in North Africa supervises the weighing and export of silphium, a valuable medicinal plant.
(Bibliothèque nationale de France)



Map 4.1 The Persian Empire Between 550 and 522 B.C.E., the Persians of southwest Iran, under their first two kings, Cyrus and Cambyses, conquered each of the major states of western Asia—Media, Babylonia, Lydia, and Egypt. The third king, Darius I, extended the boundaries as far as the Indus Valley to the east and the European shore of the Black Sea to the west. The first major setback came when the fourth king, Xerxes, failed in his invasion of Greece in 480 B.C.E. The Persian Empire was considerably larger than its recent predecessor, the Assyrian Empire. For their empire, the Persian rulers developed a system of provinces, governors, regular tribute, and communication by means of royal roads and couriers that allowed for efficient operations for almost two centuries.



View of the East Front of the Apadana (Audience Hall) at Persepolis, ca. 500 B.C.E. To the right lies the Gateway of Xerxes, Persepolis, in the Persian homeland, was built by Darius I and his son Xerxes, and it was used for ceremonies of special importance to the Persian king and people—coronations, royal weddings, funerals, and the New Year's festival. The stone foundations, walls, and stairways of Persepolis are filled with sculpted images of members of the court and embassies bringing gifts, offering a vision of the grandeur and harmony of the Persian Empire. (Courtesy of the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago)

This is an extremely important historical document. For all practical purposes, it is the only version we have of the circumstances by which Darius, who was not a member of the family of Cyrus, took over the Persian throne and established a new dynasty. The account of these events given by the Greek historian Herodotus, for all its additional (and often suspect) detail, is clearly based, however indirectly, on Darius's own account. While scholars have doubted the truthfulness of Darius's claims, the inscription is a resounding example of how the victors often get to impose their version of events on the historical record.

The Behistun inscription is certainly propaganda, but that does not mean that it lacks value. To be effective, propaganda must be predicated on the moral values, political principles, and religious beliefs that are familiar and acceptable in a society, and thus it can provide us with a window on those views. The Behistun inscription also allows us to glimpse something of the personality of Darius and how he wished to be perceived.

Another document, found at Persepolis, the magnificent ceremonial center built by Darius and his son Xerxes, expands on the qualities of an exemplary ruler. While it purports to be the words of Xerxes, it is almost an exact copy of an inscription of Darius from nearby Naqsh-e Rostam, where Darius and subsequent kings were buried in monumental tombs carved into the sheer cliff. This shows the continuity of concepts through several reigns.

A great god is Ahuramazda, who created this excellent thing which is seen, who created happiness for man, who set wisdom and capability down upon King Xerxes.

Proclaims Xerxes the King: By the will of Ahuramazda I am of such a sort, I am a friend of the right, of wrong I am not a friend. It is not my wish that the weak should have harm done him by the strong, nor is it my wish that the strong should have harm done him by the weak.

The right, that is my desire. To the man who is a follower of the lie I am no friend. I am not hot-tempered. Whatever befalls me in battle, I hold firmly. I am ruling firmly my own will.

The man who is cooperative, according to his cooperation thus I reward him. Who does harm, him according to the harm I punish. It is not my wish that a man should do harm; nor indeed is it my wish that if he does harm he should not be punished. . . .

What a man says against a man, that does not persuade me, until I hear the sworn statements of both.

What a man does or performs, according to his ability, by that I become satisfied with him, and it is much to my desire, and I am well pleased, and I give much to loyal men. . . .

Of such a sort are my understanding and my judgment if what has been done by me you see or hear of, both in the palace and in the expeditionary camp, this is my capability over will and understanding.

This indeed my capability: that my body is strong. As a fighter of battles I am a good fighter of battles. Whenever with my judgment in a place I determine whether I behold or do not behold an enemy, both with understanding and with judgment, then I think prior to panic, when I see an enemy as when I do not see one.

I am skilled both in hands and in feet. A horseman, I am a good horseman. A bowman, I am a good bowman, both on foot and on horseback. A spearman, I am a good spearman, both on foot and on horseback.

These skills that Ahuramazda set down upon me, and which I am strong enough to bear, by the will of Ahuramazda, what was done by me, with these skills I did, which Ahuramazda set down upon me.

The Greek historian Herodotus creates a vivid portrait of Xerxes in his account of Xerxes' invasion of Greece in 480 B.C.E. He is drawing upon information derived from Greek who served in the Persian army, as well as the proud popular traditions of the Greek states that successfully resisted the invasion.

In this city Pythius son of Atys, a Lydian, sat awaiting them; he entertained Xerxes himself and all the king's army with the greatest hospitality, and declared himself willing to provide money for the war. . . . Xerxes was pleased with what he said and replied: "My Lydian friend, since I came out of Persia I have so far met with no man who was willing to give hospitality to my army, nor who came into my presence unsummoned and offered to furnish money for the war, besides you. But you have entertained my army nobly and offer me great sums. In return for this I give you these privileges: I make you my friend, and out of my own wealth I give you the seven thousand staters which will complete your total of four million. . . . Remain in possession of what you now possess, and be mindful to be always such as you are; neither for the present nor in time will you regret what you now do." . . .

[some time later] As Xerxes led his army away, Pythius the Lydian, . . . encouraged by the gifts that he had received, came to Xerxes and said, "Master, I have a favor to ask that I desire of you, easy for you to grant and precious for me to receive." Xerxes supposed that Pythius would demand anything rather than what he did ask and answered that he would grant the request, bidding him declare what he desired. When Pythius heard this, he took courage and said: "Master, I have five sons, and all of

them are constrained to march with you against Hellas. I pray you, O king, take pity on me in my advanced age, and release one of my sons, the eldest, from service, so that he may take care of me and of my possessions; take the four others with you, and may you return back with all your plans accomplished." Xerxes became very angry and thus replied: "Villain, you see me marching against Hellas myself, and taking with me my sons and brothers and relations and friends; do you, my slave, who should have followed me with all your household and your very wife, speak to me of your son? Be well assured of this, that a man's spirit dwells in his ears; when it hears good words it fills the whole body with delight, but when it hears the opposite it swells with anger. When you did me good service and promised more, you will never boast that you outdid your king in the matter of benefits; and now that you have turned aside to the way of shamelessness, you will receive a lesser requital than you merit. You and four of your sons are saved by your hospitality; but you shall be punished by the life of that one you most desire to keep." With that reply, he immediately ordered those who were assigned to do these things to find the eldest of Pythius's sons and cut him in half, then to set one half of his body on the right side of the road and the other on the left, so that the army would pass between them.

Xerxes has ordered a bridge to be built to transport his troops over the Hellespont strait.

The men who had been given this assignment made bridges starting from Abydos across to that headland; the Phoenicians one of flaxen cables, and the Egyptians a papyrus one. From Abydos to the opposite shore it is a distance of seven stadia. But no sooner had the strait been bridged than a great storm swept down, breaking and scattering everything. When Xerxes heard of this, he was very angry and commanded that the Hellespont be whipped with three hundred lashes, and a pair of fetters be thrown into the sea. I have even heard that he sent branders with them to brand the Hellespont. He commanded them while they whipped to utter words outlandish and presumptuous, "Bitter water, our master thus punishes you, because you did him wrong though he had done you none. Xerxes the king will pass over you, whether you want it or not; in accordance with justice no one offers you sacrifice, for you are a turbid and briny river." He commanded that the sea receive these punishments and that the overseers of the bridge over the Hellespont be beheaded.

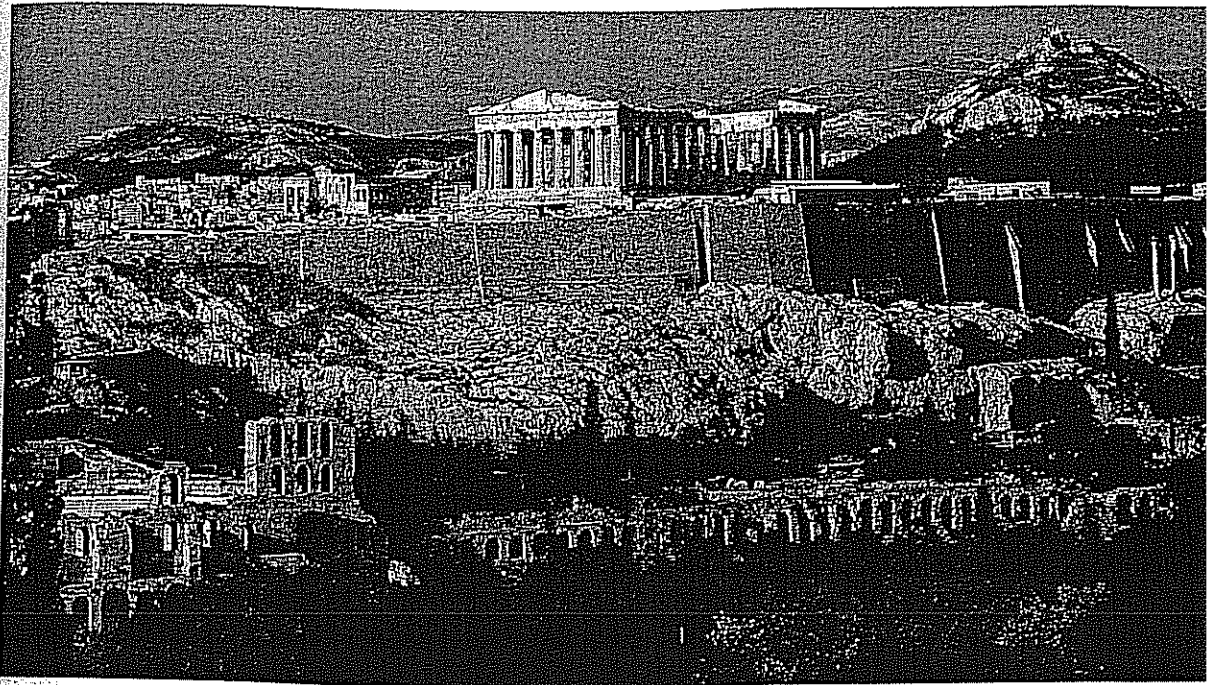
Xerxes then reviews his land and sea forces.

When they were at Abydos, Xerxes wanted to see the whole of his army. A lofty seat of white stone had been set up for him on a hill there for this very purpose, built by the people of Abydos at the king's command. There he sat and looked down on the seashore, viewing his army and his fleet; as he viewed them he desired to see the ships contend in a race. They did so, and the Phoenicians of Sidon won; Xerxes was pleased with the race and with his expedition. When he saw the whole Hellespont covered with ships, and all the shores and plains of Abydos full of men, Xerxes first declared himself blessed, and then wept. His uncle Artabanus perceived this. . . . Marking how Xerxes wept, he questioned him and said, "O king, what a distance there is between what you are doing now and a little while ago! After declaring yourself blessed you weep." Xerxes said, "I was moved to compassion when I considered the shortness of all human life, since of all this multitude of men not one will be alive a hundred years from now. May Ahuramazda protect me and what was done by me."

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. How does Darius justify his assumption of power in the Behistun inscription? What is his relationship to Ahuramazda, the Zoroastrian god, and what role does divinity play in human affairs?
2. How does Darius conceptualize his empire (look at a map and follow the order in which he lists the provinces), and what are the expectations and obligations that he places on his subjects? What does his characterization of his opponents as "Lie-followers" tell us about his view of human nature?
3. Looking at the document of Xerxes from Persepolis, what qualities (physical, mental, and moral) are desirable in a ruler? What is the Persian concept of justice?
4. How do the stories in Herodotus accord with the Persian conceptions of empire, kingship, and justice seen in the royal inscriptions? Where do we see gleeful Greek subversions of those ideals?
5. To what audiences are Darius and Xerxes directing their messages, and in what media are they being disseminated? Given that Darius himself is, in all likelihood, illiterate, and that so are most of his subjects, what is the effect of the often repeated phrase: "Darius the King says"?

Sources: First selection from Behistun inscription translated by L. W. King and R. C. Thompson, *The Sculptures and Inscription of Darius the Great on the Rock of Behistun in Persia*, London, 1907 (<http://www.livius.org/be-bm/behistun03.html>); second selection from Persepolis Naqsh-i Rostam (http://www.livius.org/x/xerxes/xerxes_texts.htm#daeva); third selection reprinted by permission of the publishers and the trustees of the Loeb Classical Library from *Herodotus, Volume III*, Loeb Classical Library Volume 199, translated by A.D. Godley, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1922. The Loeb Classical Library® is a registered trademark of the President and Fellows of Harvard College.



The Acropolis at Athens This steep, defensible plateau jutting up from the Attic Plain served as a Mycenaean fortress in the second millennium B.C.E., and the site of Athens has been continuously occupied since that time. In the mid-sixth century B.C.E. the tyrant Pisistratus built a temple to Athena, the patron goddess of the community. It was destroyed by the Persians when they invaded Greece in 480 B.C.E. The Acropolis was left in ruins for three decades as a reminder of what the Athenians sacrificed in defense of Greek freedom, but in the 440s B.C.E. Pericles initiated a building program, using funds from the naval empire that Athens headed. These construction projects, including a new temple to Athena—the Parthenon—brought glory to the city and popularity to Pericles and to the new democracy that he championed. (Robert Harding World Imagery)

Another important intellectual development also took place in Ionia in the sixth century B.C.E. A group of men later referred to as logographers^a ("writers of prose accounts"), taking full advantage of the nearly infinite capacity of writing to store information, began gathering data on a wide range of topics, including ethnography (description of a people's physical characteristics and cultural practices), the geography of Mediterranean lands, the foundation stories of important cities, and the origins of famous Greek families. They were the first to write in prose—the language of everyday speech—rather than poetry, which had long facilitated the memorization essential to an oral society. *Historia*, "investigation/research," was the name they gave to the method they used to collect, sort, and select information. In the mid-fifth century B.C.E. Herodotus (ca. 485–425 B.C.E.), from Halicarnassus in southwest Anatolia, published his *Histories*. Early parts of the work are filled with the geographic and ethnographic reports, legends, folktales, and marvels dear to the logographers, but in later sections Herodotus focuses on the great event of the previous generation: the wars between the Greeks and the Persian Empire.

Herodotus declared his new conception of his mission in the first lines of the book:

I, Herodotus of Halicarnassus, am here setting forth my history, that time may not draw the color from what man has brought into being, nor those great and wonderful deeds, manifested by both Greeks and barbarians, fail of their report, and, together with all this, the reason why they fought one another.³

In stating that he wants to find out *why* Greeks and Persians came to blows, he reveals that he has become a historian seeking the causes behind historical events. Herodotus directed the all-purpose techniques of *historia* to the service of *history* in the modern sense of the term, thereby narrowing the meaning of the word. For this achievement he is known as the "father of history."



Hellenistic Cameo, Second Century B.C.E. This sardonyx cameo is an allegory of the prosperity of Ptolemaic Egypt. At left, the bearded river-god Nile holds a horn of plenty while his wife, seated on a sphinx and dressed like the Egyptian goddess Isis, raises a stalk of grain. Their son, at center, carries a seed bag and the shaft of a plow. The Seasons are seated at right. Two wind-gods float overhead. The style is entirely Greek, but the motifs are a blending of Greek and Egyptian elements. (G. Dagli-Orti/The Art Archive)