

University of Trento/Universität Augsburg  
Graduate School *Forms of Cultural Exchange*

«That Land Became Mine»

Baktria, Northeastern Central Asia, the Teispid-  
Achaemenid Persian Empire (ca. 550-327 BCE)

A Dissertation submitted to the Department of  
Humanities of the University of Trento and the  
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of Philosophy

by

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## Foreword and Acknowledgments

С (огромной) любовью и благодарностью:  
прежде всего Негару, а также Москве, народам  
Евразии, степям и, последнее, но не менее  
важное, великой мечте, которая однажды была.  
Потому что без всего этого просто ничто не  
стало бы тем же самым; и темнее жизнь.

It may perhaps be argued that one of the loftiest lessons of Russian literature, from Evgenij Onegin to War and Peace, from Family Happiness to The Death of Ivan Il'ič and the masterpieces of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, from Life and Fate to The Kolyma Tales or Dr. Živago, and from The Keeper of Antiquities to The Children of the Arbat via Quite Flew the Don and Čevengur, all of them ranking among the most overwhelming frescoes of one of the darkest epochs in the history not only of a country, but of the entire earthly trajectory of homo sapiens sapiens, lies in the realization that, even amidst the deepest pain and the most unbearable sorrow, there is no human experience worthy of the name that can be sufficient in itself. This also - perhaps above all - applies to (what pretends to be) a piece of scholarship. Nothing that can be found in the following pages, certainly not as much as there is, if anything at all, of value, is the result only – or even mainly - of my work.

Man, Aristotle argued in his Politics, is by constitution a social animal, and outside the *societas* (πόλις, i. e. a human community) there is only room for beasts or – if one believes in them - gods, and therefore not for human beings.<sup>1</sup> The most exciting aspect of research, of any research, is precisely the opportunity to embark on a journey together with others, and to benefit from intellectual and - above all - human companionship within a context in which one can grow, both personally and scientifically. The debts I have incurred in both areas are too many and too heavy for me to settle. What I can do, and I do so with joy as well as gratitude, is to explicitly acknowledge both, and for both to offer my deepest thanks.

I start with the intellectual and scientific debts, although it is my firm belief that it is not always easy, and perhaps not even meaningful, to distinguish too clearly between one and the other of the two categories mentioned above. My heartfelt thanks go therefore to Professor Hans-Joachim Gehrke and Professor Sitta von Reden of the University of Freiburg im Breisgau. The interest and warmth with which both of them, albeit in different roles, have followed my, at times limping, study path, make them two figures of rare distinction as well as the exceptional scholars that experts, and perhaps not only them, know so well all around the world. Freiburg was an environment rich in stimuli that were out of the ordinary in terms of both number and content, not least because of the incredible

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<sup>1</sup> Arist. *Pol.*, 1.2.1253a.

research team that Professor von Reden was able to build. More than any publication - which in itself says quite a lot - the level of the scholars she brought together around the *BaSaR* (Beyond the Silk Road) project shows beyond doubt how, and to what extent, before being a historian of uncommon value, Sitta von Reden is a great teacher. It has been an honor and a privilege for me to have had access to this unique and precious milieu.

The students with whom I had the opportunity to spend (together, before even this became a privilege) a semester studying Herodotos allowed me to return, this time, *incredibile dictu*, as a lecturer, to an author who, like one of his greatest (and most misunderstood as such) successors, Lev Nikolaevič Tolstoj, was able to translate into the written word the deepest sense of both History and the infinite number of stories of which the former is composed. To them goes my most sincere gratitude for their active and attentive participation as well as for their sincere interest, which helped to make my stay in Germany an experience of great emotional as well as intellectual value.

Without the support, and patience, of Lauren Morris and Milinda Hoo, among the most promising young scholars of ancient Bactria currently active on the international scene, this project would never have got beyond the embryonic stage. To Lara Fabian, one of the most intelligent, sensitive and intellectually stimulating people I have ever met, I owe countless fascinating and instructive conversations about the Caucasus, history and memory in the Soviet Union, as well as the knowledge of some books that have proved fundamental in the elaboration of the theoretical framework of the present work, as well as of others that have been faithful companions in dark moments.

To Søren Stark I owe everything I know about the oasis of Buxārā, its inhabitants and its surroundings (including those fairs that already the intellectuals of the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate - *الخلافة الغباسبية* - considered, rightly or wrongly, not very recommendable). Without the patience, availability and expertise of Dr. Kathrin Leese-Messing and Dr. Silvia Nico, the latter a wonderful example of in-betweenness embracing the *Domus Liviae*, the Aegean and the Tiānshān (天山) peaks, the Chinese sources (and the methodological skills necessary for their proper interpretation) would have remained forever precluded to me. The same applies, but south of the Mediterranean, to Dr. Elena Tosti di Stefano, whose linguistic advice - and her uncommon kindness - have averted, on more than one occasion, egregious errors and proved instrumental in helping me to find my way through the *Dār al-Islām* (دار الإسلام) as far as Transoxiana (*Mā Warā’ an-Nahr* ما وراء النهر).

The members of the Hellenistic Central Asian Research Network and of the Hellenistic Group, starting with the initiators of both, Rachel Ruth Mairs, Gunvor Lindström, Monica D’Agostini and Omar Coloru, have over time been a constant source of material support and inspiration. The intellectual liveliness and spirit of solidarity of these particular research groups shows that, believe it or not, it is possible to use Facebook in an intelligent manner, regardless of its creator’s intentions

and in accordance with Gramsci's acute - and apparently still very topical - observation that any project for the transformation of the existing cannot disregard the appropriation, in a revolutionary fashion, of the instruments that guarantee the permanence of the established order.

Razieh Taasob has been an attentive, competent, and caring companion in my fierce struggles against both stubborn library catalogues and the vagaries of Microsoft Word, a towering guide in the labyrinths of numismatics, Yuèzhī (月氏) and Kuşāṇa (Guīshuāng 貴霜) iconography, as well as a patient and prodigal encourager in my stuttering attempts to learn that marvellous language which, in spite of Oriana Fallaci's senseless ramblings, has given mankind, among others, 'Omar Ḥayyām and Ferdowsī.

Olivier Bordeaux, Gunnar R. Dumke and Christian Mileta never failed to support me during various stages of this project. Henry P. Colburn, Johanna Lhuillier and Miguel John Versluys have taken the trouble - and perhaps not always the pleasure - not only to provide me with «the right advice», but also to read some drafts of different chapters, providing invaluable comments on each occasion and equally valuable encouragement at times when it was most needed. I am moreover no less grateful to Professor Robert Rollinger (Innsbruck), whose support, unparalleled expertise, and moving kindness, have significantly contributed to broadening the horizon of my research while placing it within a coherent and methodologically sound framework. The same goes for Professor Gregor Weber (Augsburg), who stood by with joyful attitude and competent suggestions during my entire study program between Trento and Augsburg.

Against the background of the *longue durée*, however, this project is the fruit of the University of Trento, where I had the privilege of training in the Humanities Department. Professor Maurizio Giangliulo has followed every stage of my research, from its very beginnings, in the form of a - rather unworthy - master's thesis (to say nothing, out of piety, of the BA) with the patience, support, and directive capacity which is the hallmark not only of the greatest among scholars, but also, and perhaps especially, of the true magistri. I owe a great deal to him: to give just one example, the discovery of the Tolstoian nature of Herodotos, one of the most illuminating historical and literary insights I have benefited from in recent years, is thanks to him.

Nothing can be said of Professor Elena Franchi and Dr. Giorgia Proietti which does them even palely adequate justice. From anthropology to social memory, everything theoretically refined in this work is the outcome of their teaching. As if that were not enough, the warmth and affection they have been able (and willing) to reserve for me have contributed to making Trento much more than a university alma mater. The best words to express my gratitude were found, quite surprisingly, by the otherwise usually rancorous Solženicyn, in an extraordinary повесть that expresses in one of the most sensitive way I know of a longing for human solidarity and historical sensitivity that is particularly dear to me:



there is therefore no point in repeating such words here, but they remain dedicated to both in sincere gratitude, unbounded admiration and inexhaustible affection. Throughout my studies and research, Professor Elvira Migliario, Professor Alessandro Parenti, Professor Serenella Baggio and Professor Alice Bonandini have always been helpful and friendly people to talk to. My warmest thanks go to them, to Dr. Emanuele Pulvirenti and Dr. Rhyne King, whose brilliant doctoral thesis have been a constant source of inspiration for me.

As said, it is not always easy, in many cases impossible and rarely desirable, to distinguish clearly between intellectual and human debt(s): in the luckiest cases, one fades into the other. Much of what I give thanks for in the following lines, therefore, could equally have been said of the people mentioned above. And vice versa. Since this work is conceived, within the framework of an European *cursus studiorum*, as the culmination of a long journey, it is my duty (and pleasure) to thank here those who over time, with infinite patience, have laid the foundations of that journey: Beatrice Baldini, Bruna Romano, Maria Franca Bottero, Vincenza Buonocore, Norma Donini, der letzten in Dankbarkeit und Wertschätzung.

Despite their - in some ways baffling - diversity, Fulvio Ferrario and Cecilia Pasero, Maddalena Damasio, Ilaria and Vincenzo Pasero have been indispensable reference points for me along more than one bumpy road. To them, in varying degrees and from different points of view, I owe more than can be mentioned, and repaid, here, in a lifetime or more, should there in fact be something more. I therefore limit myself to just one example: love for culture, which means (or should mean) for the human being, as well as the ability, in different forms and ways, to recognize this human being in the «Other-than-oneself» of which Todorov wrote, or in the eyes and body of Camus' *Étranger*.

They share this debt, in part, with Maria Cristina de Mariassevich. To her I owe, among other things, the understanding of who Michelangelo was and the most beautiful lesson on the last Goya I can remember. With Giulietta Ottaviano I shared, unworthily, a passion for a language and for an incredible multi-layered history: «the last dream the old world». For this immense privilege, the least I can do is to quote Marina Ivanovna Tzvetseva's passionate and, despite the frightening desperation of the love they exude, entrancing verses: Спасибо вам, и сердцем и рукой.

To Beata Ravasi goes my gratitude for having loved me along a path that was new for both of us, but which it was important to see developing.

Angela Alaimo deserves credit for having opened up unknown horizons for me on categories such as time, space, environment and society that an approximate education had ended up naturalizing. To her I owe a crash course on How to Be Unhappy (for in fact, as Flaiano had it, the situation is hopeless, but not serious), the discovering of the path that led me from Sankara to Fanon, Dr. Guevara and, via Isaac Deutscher, to Lev Davidovič Bronstejn and Gregory Bateson: in a word, for having taught me

(how) to travel. The best of the geographical outlook contained in this work is the outcome of her mentorship and of her caring friendship.

Cristina Merlo and Cristina Termini have been two constant friends whose affection has sustained me at times when I would have done very little alone. To have been able to share this and other journeys with them is a privilege that goes beyond any merit I might have acquired towards them.

I cannot (yet) say that I have met Guido Carpi in person. I have, however, known his scientific and educational activity, and this is enough for me to thank him here. Had I had known earlier, I would now be writing my acknowledgements at the bottom of a dissertation on Tolstoj, Puškin, Čexov or on the prose of Larisa Rejsner, «the Pallas of the revolution». Да здравствуй, товарищ!

A very special debt, perhaps the one I acknowledge with most joy, I have contracted with all those «thick» (sensu Geertz) friends and/or interlocutors that I have had the opportunity to meet in the most disparate circumstances at very different (and almost never particularly cheerful) times of my life, thanks to whom I have nevertheless had the opportunity to remember that it is worth fighting for the world, although there is very little to rejoice about - per se - from being in the world.

What is more, each in their own way, those man and women have been shining examples for me of how important it is to strive to ensure that the - sometimes overwhelming - beauty of existence – what rightfully Kundera called *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* - does not remain the prerogative of a (way too) small part of humanity. If I have been able to truly understand the deeper meaning of a life project whereby one must «be realistic, but dream the impossible», it has been through the impetus of such encounters, for which I cannot be grateful enough.

I will limit myself here to a few names; why they appear in this list, each of those mentioned knows. Yılan Bekir (Барлык иллэрнең пролетарийлары, берләшәгез!), Mariana Castro (королева бирюзы), Cinzia Di Pietro, Carlota Donner (mit besonderem Zuneigung), Hamid Erroguı, Elena Fedele, Beate Häberle, Iroda and Ozoda Ismailova, Hannah Klein, Julian Degen, Clemens Steinwender, Karolina Kurkowska, Mitra Mahdavi, Ęlina Majer, Miraziz Mirkhamidov, Zach Silvia, Sabine Nfata, Kathrin Nickel, Katja Ogorodnikova, Ol'ga Osadčeva, Anna Pasolli, (be)born in a yurt and destined to the steppe, Andrea Scipione, Inna Šumkina, Lada Uvarova (Татьяна Ларина, на берегах Волги), Letizia Zavatti, Zack Silvia, Ekaterina Kasyanova (for a beautiful encounter between Trento and Petersburg) and Anastasia Zubko. Many thanks also to Maddalena Scarperi and Claudia Giacomoni, faithful companions along the trails of Mani.

Regardless of the paths that each of us has taken (and despite the opinion that she might have matured about me and – perhaps even most importantly - about our relationship), Alice Dominici deserves my deep gratitude for having tinged with her colors and scents the life of somebody who did not even remotely suspect that all of this could even exist. In the, perhaps arrogant, illusion that what

follows is a good part of the best I have been able to achieve so far, this work belongs to her as I would have once wished much else did. Thanks to Tiziana Carducci and Gianfranco Pandolfo for always having made me feel at home. Eugenio Damasio took the trouble of trying to convince me, perhaps not in vain, that since we are destined for extinction in any case, we might as well face it with dignity and be grateful for the time we have lived, remembering, among other things, that there is no point in committing suicide because there is way too much to read.

Giulia Corsini and Chiara Verdi belong to that very small group of people who, often in vain, one would like to meet during a lifetime. I had the good fortune and immense privilege of meeting them along the way when I was sixteen.

As for Tommaso Girardi, much could be said, but there would be no point in doing it: he, too, already knows all there is to know, and perhaps a little more. The disproportionate number of disgraceful stories we have shared, and some of them even lived together, would be enough in itself to consider oneself lucky enough, but our relationship has given, and continues to give me, much more. I therefore cannot do more than to wish him to soon find, be it in the highlands of Anatolia, the snows of the Pāmīr, the steppes of Central Asia or the wines of the Caucasus, that undercarriage he had repeatedly asked his grandfather for, but never got. May hell's flames wrap you up, my dear friend.

This note, however, is bound to end, as it started, with the name of Negār Mohammadi. Words are not enough to properly express what she has meant to me since the day we met over a *Midsummer's Night* Conference. There is, however, love to fill up this gap, and my amazed gratitude for having made me desire not only a life with her, which is in fact all too easy an enterprise, but life as such, perhaps for the first time, undoubtedly the way she did. «The hungry heart, the roving eye, have come to rest, do not apply. The frantic chase, the crazy ride, the thrill has gone, I step aside. I'd believed in anything, were it not for you. Showing me by just existing, only this is true. I love you. I love you. Without question, I love you». Long story short, I would argue that Nietzsche's words are, once more, the best way to aptly describe what perhaps has been the main consequence of that night: since the day I learned walking, I like to run.

خیلی درست دارم ، عشقمن.

Trento, Augsburg, Palm Springs, December 2023

Marco Ferrario

## List of Abbreviations

- AbB* = *Altbabylonische Briefe in Umschrift und Übersetzung*. 14 voll. Leiden: Brill.
- ABC* = Grayson, K. A., 1975. *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns.
- ADAB* = Naveh, J., - Shaked, S. (Eds.), 2012. *Aramaic documents from ancient Bactria (fourth century BCE) from the Khalili collections*. London: Khalili Family Trust.
- ADB*: Sachs, J. A., - Hungerer, H. (Eds.), 1988. *Astronomical diaries and related texts from Babylonia. 1. Diaries from 652 B.C. to 262 B.C.* Wien: Verlag Österreichischer Akademie der Wissenschaften.
- ALBL* = Tuplin, J. C., - Allen, L., - Ma, J. (Eds.), 2013. *The Arshama Letters from the Bodleian Library*. 4 voll. London: The Bodleian Library.
- API* = Schmitt, R., 2009. *Die altpersischen Inschriften der Achaimeniden*. Wiesbaden: Reichert.
- ARTP* = Bowman, R., 1970. *Aramaic Ritual Texts from Persepolis*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- BDNA* = Sims-Williams, N., 2000-2012. *Baktrian Documents from Northern Afghanistan*. 3. voll. London: The Nour Foundation.
- CAD*. = *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*. 21 voll. Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.
- CII 1* = Schmitt, R., 2000<sup>2</sup>. *Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum*. Part 1, vol. 1, texts 1, *The Bisitun inscriptions of Darius the Great: Old Persian text*. London: School of Oriental and African Studies.
- CII 2* = Rougemont, G., 2012. *Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum*. Part 2, vol. 1.1, *Inscriptions grecques d'Iran et d'Asie centrale*. London: School of Oriental and African Studies.
- Clavijo* = López Estrada, F. (Ed.), 1999. Ruy González de Clavijo. *Historia del Gran Tamorlán e itinerario y enarración del viage: embajada a Tamorlán*. Madrid: Castalia.
- IEO*: Canali De Rossi, F. 2004. *Iscrizioni dello Estremo Oriente Greco: Un Repertorio. Inschriften griechischer Städte aus Kleinasien 65*. Bonn: Habelt.
- IGCH*. = Thompson, M. - Mørholm, O., - Kraay, C. M. (Eds.), 1973. *An Inventory of Greek Coin Hoards*. New York: The American Numismatic Society.
- IG II<sup>2</sup>* = Kirchner, J., 1910-1940. *Inscriptiones Graecae II et III: Inscriptiones Atticae Euclidis anno posteriores*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Parts I-III. Berlin: Berlin- Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften.
- IPNB*. = Schmitt, R., 2011. *Iranisches Personennamenbuch. Band V, Faszikel 5a. Iranische Personennamen in der Griechischen Literatur vor Alexander der Große*. Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.
- TLL* = AA. VV. *Thesaurus linguae latinae, editus iussu et auctoritate consilii ab academiis*

*societatibusque diversarum nationum electi*. München: Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften.

*OGIS* = Dittenberger, W., 1903. *Orientalis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae* 3 voll. Leipzig: Hirzel.

*PFT* = Hallock, T. R., 1969. *Persepolis Fortification Tablets*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

*PFS*. = Garrison, B. M., - Root, C. M., 2001. *Seals on the Persepolis Fortification Tablets*. 2 voll. Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

*PTT*: Cameron, G. G., 1948. *Persepolis Treasury Tablets*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

*RIME* 4: Frayne, R. D., 1990. *Royal Inscription of Mesopotamia, Early Periods. Old Babylonian Period (2003-1595 BC)*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

*SAA*: AA. VV. (Eds.), 1987 - *State Archives of Assyria*. 18. voll. Helsinki: The Finnish Oriental Society.

*TAB*. = Inagaki, H., 2002. *Treasures from Ancient Bactria*. Kyoto: Miho Museum.

*TADAE* = Porten, B., - Yardeni, A., - Kletzing, M., - Han, E. (Eds.), 1986-2014. *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt*. 4 voll. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns.

*TPE*. = Kuhrt, A., 2007. *The Persian Empire. A Corpus of Sources from the Achaemenid Period*. 2 voll. London: Routledge.

*WAI*. = Schmitt, R., 2014. *Wörterbuch der altpersischen Königsinschriften*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

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## Note on Style and Spelling

The present work has been written according to the standards of the *Chicago Manual of Style* (17<sup>th</sup> edition: <https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/book/ed17/frontmatter/toc.html>), and follows therefore the American rather than the English spelling. For the sake of consistency with the majority of scholarship, abbreviations of Greek and Roman writer's names as they occur both in the text and in the footnotes follow the conventions established by the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (4<sup>th</sup> ed., 2012) and the *Neue Pauly*, Band 3, XXXVI-XLIV. Abbreviations not occurring in these references works have been included in a separate list of abbreviations. Both the footnotes and the bibliography are formatted following the citation style recommended by the *American Journal of Archaeology*. As for the Persepolis tablets, I stuck to the following: PF hints at the first comprehensive publication by Richard T. Hallock (1969). Fort. (followed by 4 digits) refers to the Persepolis Fortification tablet in the National Museum of Irān edited by G. G. Cameron, collated by Hallock, Jones, and Stolper, collated and published by Abdulmağid Arfa'ī (2008), which have now been recollated by Wouter Henkelman. As for yet un- or only partially published texts, Fort. (followed by 7 digits) denotes unpublished PFT edited by Stolper, while NN refers to the unpublished PFT edited by Hallock, collated and currently being prepared by Henkelman for publication. As I could not access these last two *corpora* myself, whenever a text coming from one of those is mentioned, reference is also made of the publication in which it occurs, wherefrom the translation is also taken. Through the text spellings coming closer to the original language have been chosen (in case of Greek personal or place names, for example, the transliterated Greek form has been preferred over the Latinized one: Antiochos rather than Antiochus). This must be taken as a thumb rule, however, due to the fact that some names have become embedded in the scholarly discourse in their latinized form to the point of discouraging a rendering perhaps more faithful to the original language, but not reader friendly. Thus, Achaemenid is preferred over Aḫaimenid or Akhaimenid, and Darius over Dareius or Dārayava.uš or Dārayava<sup>h</sup>uš. However, an attempt has been made through this work to reflect the scientific usage in other disciplines which the present work had to engage with, in an attempt to mirror the interdisciplinary framework which ideally should underpin the research behind the following pages: thus, instead of Kushana or Kušana, the Indological spelling Kuṣāṇa has been chosen, and the same goes for modern place names such as Badaḫṣān (not Badakhshan) or Afġānistān, instead of Afghanistan. Diacritics have also been used in transliterations of Fārsi, Arabic, Türk and Ancient Near Eastern Languages such as Old Persian or Aramaic. The transcription of Chinese names and places follows the Hànyǔ Pīnyīn (漢語拼音) conventions and not those common in the Wade-Giles system: consequently, Sīmǎ Qiān (司馬遷) has been given preference over Ssi-ma chen. Finally,

Cyrillic names and places are rendered into English with diacritics (Altaï for Алтай, Semireč'e for Семиречье).



## Chapter 1

### Why Baktria, after all? An Introduction to *Altneuland*

At the approach to every border, tension rises within us; emotions heighten. People are not made to live in borderline situations; they avoid them or try to flee from them as quickly as possible. And yet man encounters them everywhere, sees and feels them everywhere.

- R. Kapuściński. *Imperium* (1993), 63-64.

امروز ترا دسترس فردا نیست  
و اندیشه فردات به جز سودا نیست ضایع مکن  
این دم از دلت شیدا نیست کاین باقی  
عمر را بها پیدا نیست .

[Do not remember the day that has passed || And do not lose yourself in tears over the coming tomorrow: || On past and future let no foundation be laid; || Live for today and do not throw your life to the wind].

- 'Omar Ḥayyām, (عمر خیام), *Rub 'āyyāt* (رباعیات), XIII.

#### 1. Dispelling a Mirage: Baktria *Strikes Back*

Writing at the dawn of scientific archeological research in Afġānistān, the wife of the first director of the *French Archaeological Delegation in Afghanistan (DAFA)*, Eugénie Bazin-Foucher (1898-1952), provided a telling picture of (some of) the difficulties non armchair scholars had to face in order to carry out fieldwork in that country. «Although at times it was so hot that a flask of benzine packed in a trunk would evaporate, at other times, in order not to freeze, we had to walk on foot next to our horses, whose muzzles had icicles hanging from them».<sup>1</sup> Said otherwise, from the very beginning it looked clear to all those who were involved that studying Baktria was – and probably never would have been – an easy task. Nevertheless, as the (frustrated) hopes shared by M.me Bazin's husband Alfred Foucher with many of his correspondents – in France and abroad -, the looming rewards were deemed worth the challenges, and many times at that.<sup>2</sup>

However, such a view seems not (anymore?) shared by the whole scientific community, as I personally had the opportunity to witness during a coffee break at an international conference held

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<sup>1</sup> Fenet 2020, 150.

<sup>2</sup> See Foucher 1927 for a first, rather disappointed, summary of his excavations at Baktra as well as Fenet 2020, 160-165 providing a concise overview on the French work(s) in the country since Madame Foucher's letter quoted in the text was written.

some years ago. While talking with an eminent scholar of classical Greek historiography about the project I was involved into at the moment (which ultimately became the present work) he asked me a rather interesting question, both for what it does say about the perception - not only in popular literature and mainstream news outlet - of Central Asia and related scholarly endeavors today as well as, perhaps even mostly, for what it says *not*. «Are you serious? Why on Earth would you study Baktria? Who cares about that godforsaken place!»

There are – as the first part of this introduction aims to show, good reasons why such a question needs to be answered carefully and in rather considerable detail. The first, and perhaps more obvious, is that it clearly shows how much this space (and the people who lived – and even today are living - within it) still is not (or *mis*) understood outside a quite small – although actively engaged – circle of professionals working in the many branches of the discipline(s) concerned with it, from history to archaeology and from numismatics to ethnography and prehistory, to mention but a few. The second (arguably more important) is that it seems to be rather at odds with the ubiquitous presence of Central Asia – at least – in (but not limited to) the political discourse of Euro-(North)American countries, and since at least a few years at that. If in fact one takes even a superficial glance at the shelves of every bookstore – both in Italy and abroad – or just randomly surfs through the most renowned digital reminders, from *Amazon* to *Abebooks* and from *Ebay* to the notorious *Libgen*, it will rapidly become evident 1. why it might *not* be so untimely to delve *now* into Central Asian studies as well as committing to the history thereof and 2. how much this space is *not* as peripheral – meaning, erroneously, marginal - as one would assume and as it is sometime still portrayed, most of the time only to lure possible readers through the irresistible charm of an adventurous exoticism.

The reason for this can – at least to a certain extent – be recognized in a remarkable (and telling) paradox: while in fact, within the scholarly community, the opinion according to which the best use that one could make of terms such as *Silk Roads* (and of its more or less edulcorated variants, with or without inverted commas) would be to make *no* use of it *at all* is gaining more and more popularity, the space (as well as its label) which, according to the very well known – and at least as much discussed – narrative sketched by von Richthofen would have represented the most important corridor (a term which seems neutral and unassuming as it appears, to a closer scrutiny, loaded with preconceived discourses about, for example, a territory, the people living within it *and* the use such people made of that territory) linking the Easternmost fringe of the Eurasian landmass, namely China, unified under the banners of the Hán dynasty (漢朝 Hàncháo) on the one hand, and the Mediterranean Basin on the other, is in fact experiencing a revival never seen at the very least since the times of the instant-classic memories of travel(er)s, explorations and conquests (intellectual, political as well as

cultural) written by men (and women) such as Sven Hedin, Ármin Vámbéry, Sir Aurel Stein or Ella Maillart.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the fact that the *European Research Council* has granted a nearly 3 million Euro research funding to a project which explicitly (from its very title) aims at going *Beyond the Silk Road*, this by now ubiquitous brand - as Martin Bernal dubbed the title of his highly popular (and fiercely contested) 3 volumes study tellingly called *Black Athena* - has indeed very much contributed in both bringing back on the front rows of the academic (and to a certain extent even public) debate and in giving new appeal to a geo-cultural context and to the people living (or having lived) within it which, at least in Europe and in the United States, for a long time had been granted a rather marginal space.<sup>4</sup> Not least thanks to the most ambitious - and more often than not rather explicitly neoimperial(ist) - infrastructural plan ever launched probably since the construction of the Trans-Siberian railway, namely the by now notorious *One Belt One Road* initiative, the republics of former Soviet Central Asia have become (once again) prominent in the public debate within the so-called developed countries in Europe and beyond the Atlantic.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Among the most vocal critics of the explanatory potential of a concept such as that of the *Silk Road(s)* worth mentioning are for example Rezakhani 2010, Hansen 2012, 7-8, Chin 2013, Morris 2017a, von Reden 2019a, 1-5 and Rezakhani forthcoming. As it is well known, baron Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen (1833-1905) was among the first to popularize the concept of *Seidenstraße* in 1877: the first full-fledged expositions of his idea of the space encompassed by the silk road(s) and of the interhuman relationships behind it are to be found in his massive (5 volumes) monograph bearing the title *China. Ergebnisse eigener Reisen und darauf gegründeter Studien* (von Richthofen 1912). Sven Hedin's (1865-1952) travels through the Täklimakán desert (one of them of Odyssean nature, during which he barely escaped with his life, while the caravan that came with him almost entirely hungered to death) were narrated by the explorer in several, highly successful volumes: cf. Hedin 1903; 2014<sup>3</sup>. Precocious child, versed in several languages, travelers, academician, and astoundingly productive writer, Vámbéry (1832-1913) described his numerous adventures in Central Asia in several books, some of them even translated into Italian while he was still alive (cf. Vámbéry 1876). As for who most likely was, and still is, the best known among the individuals just mentioned, Marc Aurel Stein (1862-1943) owes his (in China really bad) reputation to the exploration of the Tarim Basin as well as of the cities which blossomed across it between the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE and the 1<sup>st</sup> CE, such as Niyá, the kingdom of Khotan, Lóulán and, above all, Dūnhuáng, in modern-day Gānsù. Here, in the now world-famous Mògāo caves, Stein found (and took away with him) around 7000 scrolls of invaluable historical importance. In the West, he became a hero, in China the personification of devious colonial arrogance and outright thievery: Hansen 2012, 167-198.

<sup>4</sup> Trying to answer to the (sometimes extremely violent, although by no means completely unfounded) critics to his trilogy, Bernal (2001, 158) rather unconvincingly argued that, despite his desire to call the book *African Athena*, it was his publisher who insisted to label the volumes as they became to be known: for, according to him, if it was true that, taken separately, «women» and «black» did not sell anymore, *together* «women» and «black» sold quite a lot. The above mentioned project (*BaSaR*) is directed by Prof. Sitta von Reden (Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg), and the main product coming out of it will be a 3 volume *Handbook of Ancient Afro-Eurasian Economies*, the first of which, published in December 2019, seeks to provide the adequate context(s) – political history, sources and, the very hidden treasure of the book, the history of historiography – of *each* of the Empires acting on the stage of what most recently Angelos Chaniōtēs (2018) called *Age of Conquests* (300 BCE - 300 CE) over the entire space of Eurasia: the Hellenistic Empires, those of Central Asia, the Mauryan Empire and its successors in the subcontinent, Hán China, the Xiōngnú (匈奴) Empire, the Roman one and the Arsakid realm (see on the latter Overtoom 2020); as for the second volume – published in December 2021, it deals with the entanglements of local, regional, and imperial economies, while the third shall explore the concept of inter-imperiality. It must however be noted here that, not least for rather obvious geopolitical and historical reasons, in the Russophone world the situation concerning the awareness of, and the sensitivity to, Central Asia, has been, and still is, very different: Goršenina 2012; 2014, 473-518; 2017; 2019. Schliephake 2019 provides an illuminating account of the issues discussed above in the context of 19<sup>th</sup> century British India.

<sup>5</sup> But see already the lively debate in 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain: Goršenina 2014, 445-470.

This is shown, to mention but a single example, by the heavily advertised reprint of some highlights in the literature dedicated to these regions of the world, from Peter Hopkirk to Ella Maillart: this is a remarkable editorial enterprise which, despite the considerable literary values of works such as *The Great Game*, *Foreign Devils along the Silk Road*, *Setting the East ablaze* (a much overlooked, but masterful narrative of the early days of Soviet Central Asia) or *Turkestan Solo* would have been at least hazardous just a decade ago.<sup>6</sup>

But this is by no means the whole story. It might in fact be added that, in very recent years (starting arguably around 2016) some feeble hinting at certain – cautious - *structural* changes within the local ruling élites have made easier for a broader public to travel to the five republics of Central Asia – with the exception of the nearly watertight Türkmenistan -, thus opening up these places to the waves and refluxes of global-scale tourism. This has been particularly true in the case of Uzbekistan, a country which has been lucky enough to be able (thanks to an ethnonationalist politics of mythmaking that has been as ruthless against ethnolinguistic minorities, from the Taġiks to the Russians, as it was – and to some extents still is - cynically realist in understanding the potential of its coherent application 1. *within* and, most of all, 2. *outside* its borders) to boast some of the hallmarks of the *Silk Road* narrative as parts of its territory: Xiva, Buxārā and, last but by no means the least, Samarqand, the latter a particularly interesting case because, at the time of the Soviet Union's demise, the «O'zbek identity» of the city was (and partially still is) something more than just questionable.

Moreover, the unabated fascination of the breath-taking landscapes surrounding the *Pāmīr Highway*, the growing popularities of events such as the *Mongol Rally* and, finally, exchange rates (to use a prudish euphemism) incredibly competitive, have made the rest. If still in the mid 10s of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, to the eyes of the overwhelming majority of the international public opinion, they were little more than failed countries, in the last 5 or 6 years the post-Sovietic *-stāns* have turned into the proverbial golden egg lying hen, to the delight of a substantial multitude of (more or less) sensitive, cultivated, talented and/or adventurous publicists-divulgators.<sup>7</sup> Not least thanks to the new (indeed without precedents in terms of both quality *and* quantity) possibilities offered by technology and the growing wave of digitalization, contrary to what could perhaps be imagined, the academic world has not been (completely) taken out of guard by this renewed interest in Central Asian and related matters, including the countries' cultural heritages.

Of course, the latter – including the pre-Tīmūrid, pre-Mongol and pre-'Abbāsīd ones – were not unknown to the Western (and Russian trained) erudition, and this at the very latest starting with the

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Boulnois 2016<sup>3</sup>, Hopkirk 2010; 2017, Maillart 2015; 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Frankopan 2015, Cardini 2016, Fatland 2017; 2019. On the politic of ethnogenesis that is now to be seen in post-Soviet Central Asia see Abašin 2018.

18<sup>th</sup> century; quite the contrary.<sup>8</sup> However, the discovery of the (chronologically speaking) Hellenistic site at Āi Xānum (an O‘zbek name meaning «Lady Moon», the ancient toponym of the city being as contested as it remains unknown) on the one hand and, on the other, the Soviet excavations directed by Sarianidi at Tillyātēpe (respectively in the Dašt -i Qal‘a plain and in the Šebergān region in Afġānistān: two events which importance in the history of Eurasian archaeology could be legitimately compared with Schliemann’s uncovering of the Mykenean θόλος graves) as well as, thirdly, the increasingly growing stream of archaeological material being poured on the antiquity markets (mostly, but by no means only, coins coming from the lootings favored by the turmoil which – starting with the late 70s - tore and to much extent still is tearing the country apart) have made possible to literally turn the entire discipline upside down, eventually transforming Baktrian studies in one of the most sprawling fields of modern-day ancient history and archaeology.<sup>9</sup>

The authority of a long-standing scholarly tradition (as well as of a colonial heritage the scope of which only recently has (begun to) undergo a critical assessment) has contributed a great deal to the fact that, perhaps not unsurprisingly, the lion’s share in this *Baktrian Renaissance* has been played by Greek culture, or at least by what generations of scholars at least until some years ago were unshakingly certain it was Greek culture.<sup>10</sup> Although much work still needs to be done (both because of the restraints imposed on scholars by the source material(s) and, above all, in the light of a political situation which makes research in Afġānistān prohibitive, to say the least), substantial progresses have nevertheless already been achieved, and this on multiple fronts: from political history to historical geography, and from numismatic study to archaeological research, including some remarkable advances in developing the theoretical tools with which to analyze the evidence brought

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<sup>8</sup> Mairs 2013d. Cf. Bayer 1738, Tarn 1938, Narain 1957 as well as the very important overviews provided by Coloru 2020, Fabian 2020b, Fenet 2020, and Goršenina and Rapin 2020, in each case with abundant previous literature.

<sup>9</sup> The bibliography on Āi Xānum (the name comes from that of a 17<sup>th</sup> century-born O‘zbek princess married to no less than four different rulers of the Dġānīd dynasty, the followers of the Šāybanīds, the first, and in the light of their wars against Tīmūr’s heirs, which in modern Uzbekistan mythology are the noble – and putative – fathers of the Motherland, O‘zbek emperors of which memory have been preserved; Bernard and Francfort 1978, 25, Bernard 1985, 81) has become almost impossible to manage. Truly landmarks for the study of what Rachel Mairs (2006) called *The Hellenistic Far East* are the 9 *Fouilles d’Ai Khanoum* volumes published starting in the 1973 under the direction of Paul Bernard (1929-2015), the first director of the excavations, and then by his collaborators and students. On Tillyātēpe see for example Pfrommer 1996, Mordvintseva 2010 and Peterson 2020 as well as the literature cited in these contributions. To these astonishing findings should be added the very contentious *Oxus Treasure*, part of which was bought by the British Museum while another portion – although it is a still debated question if we are indeed talking of the same hoard – is now housed in the Miho Museum in Kyōto, Japan. For an overview on this corpus see e. g. Dalton 1964, Litvinskiġ and Pičikjan 1981; 1996; 2000, Pičikjan 1992; 1996, the papers in Inagaki 2002, Muscarella 2003 (fiercely arguing that we are dealing with a fake, and a very poor one at that) and Curtis 2004. For the context of the discovery both of this and of other, no less spectacular, Central Asian treasures, cf. Bopearachchi and Flandrin 2005 and Holt 2012a.

<sup>10</sup> Symptomatic in this sense is the – very much outdated but for many reasons yet still unavoidable – article by Louis Robert (1968) on the Greek inscriptions found in the Āi Xānum gymnasium. Cf. at least also Bernard 1967, Grenet – Rapin 1983, Rapin 1992a; 1992b; 1995.

to light in recent years or to reassess the (considerable, but not always and not entirely satisfactorily published) already known material.<sup>11</sup>

Best proof of the above are two recent handbooks of the *Routledge World* series (to which a – much awaited - forthcoming one needs to be added), and this because, arguably for the first time since the UNESCO founded *History of Civilizations* volumes, they embrace the entire history of Central Asia, from the earliest times to the Sāsānian (and later Muslim) conquest, providing both students and established scholars with the most up-to-date and critically informed overview of this region of the world available today – arguably not only, but prominently - in English.<sup>12</sup> From the printing (now dating some 30 years) of the first systematic numismatic studies (the coins being the only among the documentary corpora related to Central Asian history which is not lacking, although by no means easy to deal with), which tried to shed some light on the bewildering historical events taking place on the stage of the Irānian Plateau and further East within the Seleukid Empire around the mid 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, considerable progress has been made also in this field. Remarkably, this goes far beyond the (by all means still worth praising) sketch of a more or less hypothetical relative chronology of the approximately 40 (give or take) kings and queens who followed one another over the course of three centuries in the – not always lucky - attempt to conquer (and, importantly, to hold) political hegemony within the Greek(speaking) world(s) on both sides of the Hindūkūš.<sup>13</sup>

On top of, and beyond, the above, both technological progress – enabling scholars to implement metallographic analysis of ever increasing sophistication – and the development of extremely sensitive theoretical models for the study of the results brought by the former have made possible, in the most recent years, to put forward revolutionary hypothesis concerning crucial questions such as, to mention but a few among the most remarkable examples, the patterns of monetary circulation within Hellenistic Bactria and the (so-called: the actual political and administrative organization of this space is far from have being properly understood) Indo-Greek kingdoms, the linguistic competence(s) of the mint workers overseeing the use of the dies out of which the coins were struck – especially thanks to the study of bilingual emissions, bearing Greek and Kharoṣṭhī, Brāhmī or even Chinese and Khotanese inscriptions), the actual number of mints active during a given time span, the

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<sup>11</sup> When it comes to the *histoire bataille* mention is due to the (although very different) works by Coloru 2009 (by far the best of the three) Widemann 2009<sup>2</sup> and Widmer 2015. As for the historical geography, besides the many contributions authored by a dean of Central Asian studies such as Ēdvard Vasil’evič Rtveladze (2001; 2002; 2009; 2010; 2011; 2017; 2019), a crucial contribution to the understanding of the mental maps of (post)Achaemenid Central Asia shaping the narratives of Graeco-Roman sources are the studies by Claude Rapin (2001; 2005; 2013; 2014; 2018a; 2018b), to which Grenet and Rapin 2001 and Rapin and Grenet 2018 can be added. As for the methodological approaches, must-read are the studies by Milinda Hoo (2018; 2020; 2021 – especially useful for economic historians – and now her first, 2022 monograph) as well as some recent papers by Lauren Morris (2019c; 2020).

<sup>12</sup> Lyonnet and Dubova 2020, Mairs 2020, Cribb forthcoming.

<sup>13</sup> Kovalenko 1996, Holt 1999. See Mittag 2006 and Hoover 2013 for a rather severe judgement of these studies and on the chronologies established by them as well as on previous work such as Narain 1989 and the somewhat out of date, but still unavoidable Bopearachchi 1991.

– most likely – monetary policy behind the opening and/or closing down of one or more of them, the very same power strategies of a given king and, last but not least, a proper way to present the results in graphs and tables which can be read (and understood) also outside the rather small circle of professional numismatists.<sup>14</sup>

The steadily increasing theoretical sharpness and – consequently – the growing mistrust for methodologies (such as analysis based on the style of the engraving) which leave the researchers a considerably large room for subjective evaluations (that is to say: discretionary power), too large indeed to warrant satisfactory conclusions, has caused the exponential growth of systematic studies of surviving numismatic corpora (especially, but not just hoards), with the main goal of establishing chronological sequences based either on the so-called overstrucks (king A engraving his monograms or portrait over those of king B) and/or the discovery of invaluable die links, the latter being the connection which can be established between two series of coins sharing the same obverse but two different reverses. As with every analytical tool, also in the case of die studies, there are – great – advantages in systematically applying this method. One of the most conspicuous can be recognized in the possibility of developing quantitative analysis. This in fact, of course, considerably lowers the risk of elaborating hypotheses, and in some case – as to be witnessed perhaps most egregiously in Tarn's *The Greeks in Bactria and India* – even full-fledged narratives entirely based on subjective or impressionistic evaluations, and sometimes even cultural biases and/or a full panoply of other misconceptions. Nevertheless, one has also to take stock of some thorny problems. Among the most daunting it is possible to mention here the sheer existence and availability – or not (note that the former two are not the same thing) – of a corpus substantial enough to provide a statistically satisfactory sample as well as the researcher's ability to present the results of his studies in a useful way (sometimes meaning little more than comprehensible, if not readable) to the wider scholarly public. The latter point, odd as it might seem, cannot be underestimated, as it is well known to every non specialist who has tried to make sense of the – sometimes utterly impenetrable – jungle of graphs, tables, diagrams, and catalogues which are so characteristic of the Central Asian numismatic literature.

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<sup>14</sup> Osmund Bopearachchi is still one of the most influential names within the field of Central Asian numismatics, although by no means the only one. Besides the above-mentioned *Catalogue raisonné* (1991), cf. also at least Bopearachchi 2000; 2004; 2005. Instrumental in bringing (Seleukid) Bactria back onto the main stage of the wider post-Achaemenid (Afro)Eurasian world has been the publication (Houghton – Lorber 2002) of an important catalogue of Seleukid emissions aimed at updating the pathbreaking work by E. T. Newell (1938). For an introduction to Central Asian numismatics and to its tools cf. Holt 1999; 2012a as well as, most recently, Bordeaux 2020 and Glenn 2020a. Although not without problems, Brian Kritt's works (1996; 2001; 2015; 2016) cannot be avoided by any scholars trying to make sense of the – indeed still in need of foundational work (but see already Morris 2021 a, c, and c) – economic history of Hellenistic Bactria.

This having been said, and as the bibliography clearly shows, there can be little doubt that today, Baktrian – and perhaps to an even greater extent Indo-Greek and Kuṣāṇa – numismatics seems to have a future ahead of itself which is as rich of challenges as it is of opportunities.<sup>15</sup> The fundamental reasons that make the above-sketches advances in numismatic studies of particular importance can perhaps be reduced to two central issues. Firstly, the considerable expansions (both in its quantity and quality) of the data available to scholars represents the best premise possible in order to pave the way to an economic history of the Hellenistic (Far) East. If just some 15 years ago such a project would have been perceived by the majority of scholars as little more than wishful thinking (another «Baktrian mirage» among many in the field), both the results achieved in the last 5 years and a systematic study of the written sources available for these periods (on a scale never attempted before) had the consequence that, today, such an endeavor not only looks like to be well on its way – even though it remains a daunting one –, but it also promises to bring very interesting results in a not (too) distant future.<sup>16</sup> Secondly, such recent developments within the numismatic field give support to, and are themselves supported by (a Batesonian «feedback loop» of sorts), a thorough re-examination of the written sources concerning the (not just political) history of Central Asia within the – crucial – 500 years between the last three centuries BCE and the first three of the common era. Needless to say, this goes both for the transmitted as it does for what, borrowing a term coming from Chinese studies, one might call excavated texts (the former not so scanty as it has become common sense within scholarship).<sup>17</sup> Starting around the second half of the 2010s, in fact, this self-reflecting process (which was 1. momentous in its scope, 2. very much needed and, importantly, 3. is still underway) has progressively turned the scholarly attention from the reconstruction of royal genealogies, warfare, and Empire-building toward topics such as social and cultural history, a *Wende* the importance of which it is rather difficult to overemphasize.<sup>18</sup>

Contrary to what some among the most spectacular findings coming from the excavations campaigns carried on over the course of almost 20 years by the *DAFA* had initially lured researchers into thinking, the publications of the materials collected on the one hand and, on the other, the in-depth studies of historical geography, topography, and hydrology of the Āi Xānum plain (Dašt -i Qal‘a) as well as, later, of the Surxondaryo valley have shown beyond any possible doubt that the blossoming

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<sup>15</sup> Among the most recent works in the field, particularly worth mentioning are: Dumke 2013; 2020, Glenn 2014; 2015, Marcinkiewicz-Joseph 2016, Vignaud 2017, Bordeaux 2018, Jansari 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Morris 2019b; 2019c. This is also shown, among other things, by some recent publications which are going to shape the scholarly debate in a substantial manner for years coming: see e. g. Glenn 2020b, Jansari 2020b and Jakobsson 2020.

<sup>17</sup> Morris 2019b, Mairs 2020b.

<sup>18</sup> Starting with her doctoral dissertation (Mairs 2006), Rachel Ruth Mairs has been one of the steadiest and most original interpreters of this authentic Cultural Turn. A few examples would suffice here: Mairs 2007; 2008; 2009; 2011; 2012a; 2012b; 2013a; 2013b; 2013c; 2014b; 2014c; 2014d; 2014e; 2015; 2017. On the concept of «feedback loop» see Bateson 1972, 198-204.



of the detected sites (and most likely of the *entire* surrounding plain on a radius of at least 200 km<sup>2</sup>), far from being the outcome of Alexander's genius and/or the Seleukid imperial insight (a – indeed not even much – disguised «Greek miracle») had on the contrary its roots in a much older, complex, and therefore compelling history.<sup>19</sup> But there is more than just that: a careful study of the urban landscape of the very same Āi Xānum which was not restricted to the so-called palatial quarter has enabled scholars to gather an increasingly growing amount of evidence, strongly hinting at a complexity of the site's social environment the scale of which dwarfs any previously held assumption. Such a feature is all the more remarkable in the light of the (at first sight) so distinctively «Greek» and «imperial» outlook of the (one should never forget this point) so far *only* known and thoroughly excavated city of Central Asia within the Hellenistic period, two aspects which weighed quite much in the assessments of both the political and cultural history of the site itself and of the space under consideration here as a whole.<sup>20</sup>

Instead of a (rather crude, although still quite popular) distinction between «Greeks» and «natives» or of a – no less crude – generic assimilationist perspective, the latter clearly advertised by the deployment of dubious terminologies such as «Hellenization» or its only at first sight more insightful homologues («hybridization», «influence(s)», «melting pot»), which are actually devoid of any kind of heuristic value, the study of post-Alexandrian Bactria is now trying to embrace with increasing decision a thoroughly deconstructivist (and broadly speaking much more sophisticated) theoretical paradigm.<sup>21</sup> This new research framework is no more focused – as, following the positivist outlook characteristic of 19<sup>th</sup> century *Quellenforschung*, it has been the rule until not so long ago – on the study of «influences» and «styles» in order to charter (ethnic or otherwise) «identities» and then trying to follow their evolution (or recession?) on the long run, all of this with the overarching aim to

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<sup>19</sup> Among the most spectacular finds it is possible to mention, for example, fragments of Greek comedy masks adorning a fountain, the by now worldwide celebrated Corinthian capitels housed in the British Museum or the «photographic negative» of an Aristotelian dialogue impressed on the site's ground. For the studies on the historical geography and the geology of the Āi Xānum plain cf. e. g. Gardin – Gentelle 1976, Gardin 1985. A truly milestone in the scholarship of Eastern Bactria's society and economy on a long-term perspective are the three volumes of the *Prospection archéologique en Bactriane orientale*, started in 1974 and ceased after the Soviet invasion of Afġānistān in 1978: see Gentelle 1989, Lyonnet 1997, Gardin 1998. Despite the astounding amount of data collected by this impressive archaeological survey (over 25 tons of pottery), which makes the *Prospection* the broadest corpus for the entire history of Central Asia before the Mongol invasion led by Temüjin (Samarqand fell in 1220, rapidly followed by Buxārā), the rather limited area surveyed – at least proportionally to the extension of the whole Achaemenid, and then Seleukid satrapies of Bactria and Sogdiana imposes considerable constraints regarding the opportunity (from a methodological point of view), of broadening the conclusions reached for the only Āi Xānum plain to other territories beyond this one.

<sup>20</sup> Martinez-Sève 2016, 105. Lecuyot 2013 is perhaps the most detailed study of non-monumental urbanistic architecture at Āi Xānum; see also Martinez-Sève 2014; 2015 (more focused on diachrony). Cf now Hoo 2022, 103-108.

<sup>21</sup> This scholarly tradition was firstly born within the field of social studies (sociology and anthropology) but has slowly but effectively intruded in other disciplines such as ancient history. Among the classics it is possible to mention, for example Berger - Luckmann (1966) and Fentress - Wickham (1992). The hypothesis of a rather sharp distinction between «Greeks» on the one hand and «natives» on the other after Alexander's campaign in Central Asia has been supported even in very recent: see Burstein 2012 on the one hand and, on the other, the remarks by Mairs 2013b; 2013c and Hoo 2022, 38-70.

establish, firstly, if and – secondly - to what extent «Hellenism» ever reached and/or took roots *in Bactria and India*.<sup>22</sup>

As most recently – and very persuasively – argued by Milinda Hoo, in fact, the most effective and promising way in order to understand a sociocultural space such as that of Bactria *After Alexander* – a space in which, to borrow the Richard White’s words on the relationships between the natives and the new settlers in the Pays-d’*en-Haut*, each of the actors involved (from the Graeco-Makedonian soldiers and the Persian(ized/Persianizing) population in one case to the French colonists and the Algonquians in the other) had not the possibility «to impose itself by the simple display of force» – does not consist in asking what a given piece of (material cultural) evidence could be or to which tradition it might belong.<sup>23</sup> On the contrary, the much more difficult – but also much more challenging and rewarding – question one should ask is what that piece of (material cultural) evidence might have signified to the customers of a given object within the relational context in which the average inhabitant of 3<sup>rd</sup> to 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE Bactria was enmeshed in each and every single day of his or her life.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps, the decisive advantage brought by the adoption of such a theoretical standpoint relies in the emphasis it puts on the mutual (and at the same time dynamic: again Bateson’s «feedback loop») relationship between the single individual and the space (both physical and social) in which that same individual lived and by which it was surrounded and influenced, while at the same time shaping it with his (or her) actions and even memories or thoughts.<sup>25</sup> Instead of speaking of (ethnic) identity, the analytical focus has now shifted towards the study of a toolkit of socio-cultural signs (and material objects) within which a person and/or a social group can choose what, within a given circumstance, looks like to be the most adapt and/or useful in order to pursue his/her own advantage as well as that of the community in which (s)he moved or to which it was, or felt, affiliated.<sup>26</sup>

Said otherwise, such a perspective gives back agency to the anonymous multitude of social actors whose choices and (re)positionings in the face of a certain authority (for example an Empire), despite

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<sup>22</sup> For a severe critic of the analytical power of concepts such as «identity» cf. Amselle 1990, the important article by Burbaker - Cooper (2000) and, more recently, the overviews by Francesco Remotti (2007; 2010; 2013).

<sup>23</sup> Note especially Hoo 2022, 56-64 on hybridity and its pitfalls.

<sup>24</sup> White 2011<sup>2</sup>, 52: with the label *Pays-d’*en-Haut** a region to the South and the West of the Canadian Great Lakes between the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is usually identified. As for the arguments summarized (but hopefully not trivialized) in the text see the most recent contributions by Milinda Hoo (2010; 202; 2022, 229-270 for a first comprehensive sketch of a translocal approach to Hellenistic Central Asian history and archaeology). White’s has been for decades and perhaps still is the monograph which better than any other combines erudition, analytical skills and narrative talent in the attempt to sketch the outlines of a complex process of co-construction of a mutually comprehensible world for two human groups which – both, as it is important to stress – came thoroughly *unprepared* (from a cultural point of view as well as from the ability to make power relationships count) to what Todorov (1982) called «the problem of the Other». More recently, Pekka Hämäläinen (2008) studied the case of the Comanche Empire (flourished between the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century between New Mexico, Colorado, Kansas, and Oklahoma to be conquered by the colonists only in 1875) contributing a great deal in radically changing our understanding of concepts such as «frontier», «stranger» and even «conquest». Cf. also his most recent (2019) monograph on *Lakota America*.

<sup>25</sup> Tuan 1972.

<sup>26</sup> Patterson 1975, Naerebout 2010.

their being mostly completely invisible to the historian's eye, must nevertheless have been decisive in shaping the destinies of different human groups in a world – which we might call that of Central (Eur)Asia – stretching more or less from the Aegean to the Indus and from the Altaï to Nubia – that, most likely starting at the very least from the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE thanks to the Achaemenid conquest(s) and then during the years following Alexander's *Anabasis*, doubtless experienced a considerable number of those «time-space-compressions» recognized by Justin Jennings and Tamar Hodos as one of the most remarkable consequences (both on the individual and on the collective experiential scale) brought forward by the process of becoming part of – as well as of coming in contact with – something like an Empire.<sup>27</sup>

Starting from such a perspective, to the scholar several research paths suddenly open up. For example: in the light of what we know about Āi Xānum's planimetry, how are we supposed to imagine the mindscape of a city dweller doing his/her business in the space of the ἀγορά compared to that of somebody (not per se of humbler status or ranking lower in the social hierarchy) living in the surrounding χώρα? And what spectrum of affordances – in itself a rather underexploited but very rewarding theoretical concept within Central Asian studies, as it hopefully shall become clear later on – does a territory such as that of the Dašt -i Qal'a plain offer to a dynasty eager to appropriate, first and foremost (but not only) on the symbolic level as well as on the economic and/or administrative ones, a space such as that of Eastern Bactria, which was fertile, densely settled and very much closer to one of the most important highways of the entire satrapy (that is, the Amudaryo river)?<sup>28</sup> At the same time, and on the contrary, what possibilities did that same territory make available to individuals and/or social groups which, although by no means wanting to give up on the huge opportunities coming from their being close to (integrated within and/or interacting with) a political entity as powerful and complex as an Empire, nevertheless also nurtured the desire of breaking away, when the need was felt, both from a gaze as that of the Great Kings – and of their heirs - more often than not perceived (also because it wanted to be perceived as such) as too intruding

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<sup>27</sup> Jennings 2011, 30, Hodos 2017, 4. On the consequences of the establishment of the Persian Empire for the Eurasian societies in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE see most recently the enlightening paper by Rollinger 2021a.

<sup>28</sup> On the concept of «landscape affordance» the studies by Tim Ingold (1992; 1993, 161-171; 2000, 166-171) are crucial: see moreover the very recent, brilliant Weaverdyck *et al.* 2021. The river, known in the west as the Amudaryo, occurs in the Latin sources as the Oxus, while Greek authors call it Ὠξος and Ὠχος (which perhaps was not the same river: see Rapin 2001; 2005; 2013; 2014; 2017a, 49-49 and Grenet-Rapin 2001 with references). In the Arabic sources, the Amudaryo is called Ġayhūn (جیحون). The Fārsī name is آمودریا (Āmū Daryā), while in Pašto the hydronym is rendered as آمو سیند, that is Āmú Sínd. The other major river in Central Asia is the Syrdaryo (داریا سیر, Sīr Dāryā), and it was known in the Graeco-Roman sources as the Ἰαξάρτης (Iaxartes). Arab speaking geographers, on the other hand, called the Syrdaryo Seyhun (سیحون), while in Türkophone sources the employed hydronym is Yinchu, that is to say, «pearl river», most likely because of the purity of its waters: see Bartol'd 2002, 210-231.

as well as from their hands – which could potentially always be experienced as rapacious as it was threatening and awe inspiring?<sup>29</sup>

In very recent years, an attempt has been made to apply theoretical paradigms and conceptual tools such as those summarized above to some corpora among the available ones for different time frames within Central Asian history, and the results coming out of these studies have been extremely compelling. In the case of the Seleukid Empire (usually, and wrongly, thought as incapable of – and indeed not quite much interested in – holding sway over its Central Asian territories), scholars such as Matthew P. Canepa, Rolf Strootman, Richard Wenghofer and, most vocally, Paul J. Kosmin, have been able to show how crucial it was for the dynastic project of Alexander's heirs to reshape the space(s) they conquered (what Polyb. 18.15.3-6 called the «spear-won land», *δορίκτητος χώρα*) according to a paradigm of both space and time in which no trace whatsoever of the status quo ante year 1 of the Seleukid era (artificially projected backwards to 312-311 BCE, that is, 6 years before Seleukos named himself king) was – meant - to be seen and therefore remember, to say nothing of reclaimed. Even more interestingly, they compellingly argued in favor of 1. the centrality of a space such as Baktria within this project and 2. the extent to which Central Asian power holders succeeded in appropriating of those Seleukid instrument of Empire building turning them to their own advantage against the former masters as they came to build a new Empire, now arguably for the first time born from, hinging on, and centered in Baktria.<sup>30</sup>

Two remarks support the above sketched argument.<sup>31</sup> On the one hand, there is the enthusiasm with which such strategies of spatial (and to an ever broader extent chronological) engineering were apparently taken up at the four corner of the realm by almost every imperial official which was sufficiently acquainted with the devices elaborated before his (attempted) takeover by the Seleukids themselves and daring enough to challenge the royal dynasty on its own terrain, a point which has been recently emphasized by Canepa.<sup>32</sup> On the other, we can observe the opposite phenomenon, namely the fierce determination with which, from Armenia to Karakēnē and from Babylonia to

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<sup>29</sup> Scott 2009, 324-337. See also most recently Payne and King 2020 for a concise and at the same time very insightful introduction to the problem as well as King 2020.

<sup>30</sup> Kosmin 2014a, 31-79; 2018b, 19-44. The impact on the landscape, both natural and anthropic (civic, sacred) of the Seleukid strategy of imperial self-staging has been thoroughly analyzed by Canepa 2015; 2018, 170-187; 2020). To these the following studies might also be added: Wenghofer and Houle 2016, Strootman 2018, Wenghofer 2018, Degen 2019 (on the concept of spear-won land and its Achaemenid, and more broadly Ancient Near Eastern, precedents and contexts).

<sup>31</sup> This argument, in turn, implies the need to radically rethink the place and meaning of Seleukid imperial history within 1<sup>st</sup> Millennium BCE Eurasia. Such an endeavor started already some 30 years ago thanks to the seminal Kuhrt and Sherwin-White 1993 but has taken an increasingly growing speed in the last decade. Among the possible examples of this trend which could legitimately being called a «new Seleukid history» see Strootman 2011; 2014; 2020 (a, b, and c), Plischke 2014; 2017, Engels 2017a; 2018.

<sup>32</sup> On the so-called «technologies of memory» as a powerful instrument of imperial self-staging within the Irānian world (the latter to be conceived *lato sensu*, thus including the Seleukid Empire) see Canepa 2010. As it now seems increasingly clear, Baktria offered an ideal terrain for the elaboration of such experiments and for the enacting of what Hans-Joachim Gehrke (2003a; 2003b; 2014) called *intentionale Geschichte*: see for example Rapin 2010 and Kosmin 2018b, 98-100.

Baktria, such Seleukid (and Graeco-Baktrian, and Indo-Greek...) strategies were resisted, rejected, and at times even upturned.<sup>33</sup>

Building on Kosmin's most recent studies, a few years ago Martinez-Sève has brought forward a new and compelling interpretation of the later stages of Āi Xānum's settlement history (the so-called «post palatial period»)<sup>34</sup> Contrary to the still broadly shared view within the scholarly community, she suggested that the city's abandonment should be interpreted not (or not only) as the consequence of a destructive attack coming from the Northern nomadic tribal groups (as usual dubbed as «barbarian»), but as the outcome of an outbreak of considerable and extended violence unleashed by some strata of the local community against the members of the civic élite (be them «Greeks» or «Baktrians»), if the distinction has any meaning at all in the context of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE).<sup>35</sup> The fact that, according to the results of archaeological excavations, the huge fire which, around that date (145 BCE, year more, year less), apparently devastated Āi Xānum, thus sealing the definitive loss of the city's status as an over-regional capital, mostly affected buildings of overarching symbolic purchase within the urban mindscape provides evidence, according to Martinez-Sève, supporting the hypothesis of a deliberate act of what she calls a *damnatio memoriae*, aimed at bringing down the hated (and very much feared) imperial power by destroying some of its most powerful spatial landmarks – and instrument of extraction and control -, namely the πόλις archive and the treasury.<sup>36</sup> Following up from the above discussion, it might be possible to look forward with a cautious optimism to the future of research within the field of Hellenistic Baktrian History, as it is clearly shown by the recent – and as its editor, Rachel Mairs, aptly points out in her introduction, very timely – publication of a seminal companion to *The Graeco-Baktrian and Indo-Greek World*, which is both going to become the standard reference work for students approaching one (or more) of the topics related to this space as well as to set research standards anew for scholars already acquainted with them.

All in all, and at last, Baktria seems today no more to be *ultima*, as Virgil called the region while drawing the contours of a mythical place far at the edge of the οἰκουμένη (which, from a cultural even before than a political point of view, rather explicitly implied its being already out of it). However, neither it appears deemed to remain into a perhaps even more frustratingly condition, that of an ever-escaping mirage, as almost a century ago lamented Alfred Foucher, the founding father of the

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<sup>33</sup> Kosmin 2018b, 105-136.

<sup>34</sup> Martinez-Sève 2018; 2020b.

<sup>35</sup> The communis opinio of a massive raid coming from the steppes (in one or more, at least two, waves around the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE) has been embraced, among others, by Bernard 1987, Lyonnet 1998, Coloru 2009, 231-236 and Francfort 2013b.

<sup>36</sup> Martinez-Sève 2018, 407 but see already Kosmin 2018b, 137-186. For a thorough discussion of the concept of mindscape see the landmark study by Lynch 1965. On the Āi Xānum's treasury building the to-go reference is still Rapin 1992a.

*DAFA*.<sup>37</sup> To this can be added that Baktria, more broadly speaking Central Asia as a whole, and its legacy, starting from the people, ancient and modern now dwelling in and claiming those territories, appear to have considerably if not entirely, lost its features as a bone of contention between Hellenistic (which in Central Asian studies is, still, mostly to say «Greek») history, in which river bed Alexander had brought the region, tearing it away, volens nolens, from a dark past of barbarism – as claimed firstly, but, as it seems, not lastly, by Tarn. Moreover, and at the same time, it is not anymore possible to reduce Baktria as just an appendix to India and/or to Indian history and culture(s) which, according to Narain, despite having being conquered, conquered back, and on the long run of time overcame their – indeed much more uncultivated, conqueror(s).<sup>38</sup> Instead, and almost three centuries after of the publication of the first *History* devoted to it, Baktria (and its surroundings) seems now close to be acknowledged the dignity of a status of its own as a space capable of create history out of its own premises and features, (qua Bactriana); and as such, as a space deserving to be studied iuxta propria principia.<sup>39</sup> To sum up and further qualify this point with the fitting words of Milinda Hoo, «it is time for Hellenistic Central Asia to be liberated from its dubbed status as an intermediate cultural crossroad – a “hub of half the world” – and to be considered as a place of, and on its own».<sup>40</sup> Rachel Mairs’ edited volume represents indeed a huge step in this direction, an achievement which deserves to be fully emphasized and which might have something to teach to scholars working on epochs different than the one assessed by the book, as the present study seeks to demonstrate.

## 2. *The Call of the Wide*: Baktria within the context(s) of Central (Eur)Asian History

In the light of all the above, it seems quite reasonable to argue that, among the most remarkable contribution of the last 15 years of research, a landmark development ought to be seen in having radically reevaluated the historical, cultural, and political – increasingly also the economic aspect is

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. Verg. *Aen.*, 8.687-688. On the «Baktrian mirage» see Foucher 1927, Fenet 2020, and Iliakis forthcoming.

<sup>38</sup> Tarn 1902; 1938, xiii and, on the other end of the spectrum, Narain 1957, 23. Such a view, indebted as it is in his sharp dichotomy civilization vs. barbarism (in the case of Baktria very much stressed by the linguistic similarities which, according to the ethno-linguistic perception of the sources, allows to put the Sakā people (Gr. Σκύθοι: for his own part Herodotos speaks of Σάκαι, noting that the two groups were somehow related) in the same basket with the Sogdians and the Bactrians, thus further underlying the structural otherness opposing them to Alexander and his man, as it appears clear e. g. from Plut. *De Alex. fort.*, 1.5-6 (*Mor.*, 328D-329A) and Strab. 11.11.3), should by now have made its time. However, as it is most clearly shown by Holt 2005, 164, stereotypes of this kind are still circulating both in the academic field and in popular literature, the news outlet, and therefore to a considerable extent remain (unreflected) commonsense. On the Indian subcontinent during the time frame 300 BCE-300 CE see the very insightful overviews by Dwivedi 2019a; 2019b), while on Baktria and India at the beginning of the Hellenistic era consult Jansari 2020a. Hoo 2022, 46-60 on post World War II Hellenism and the aftermath of the concept during the decolonization movement (note that Tarn’s book appeared 7 years before May 9, 1945, and in many respects belongs to another intellectual era.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Holt 2012a, 10-26 and Mairs 2013a regarding the first (1738) *Historia regni Graecorum Bactriani in qua* – so the title goes on – *simul Graecarum in India coloniarum vetus memoria explicatur*. Note most recently Coloru 2020.

<sup>40</sup> Hoo 2020, 563.

gaining salience - importance of Baktria. From a terra incognita full of rude and ferocious barbarians («that godforsaken place») to a crucial agent (on its own terms) within a dense world of sociopolitical and economic (inter)relationships spanning a huge time frame. Starting from the earliest epochs – as it is clearly shown by the contributions collected in another paramount miscellaneous volume as the recently edited *World of the Oxus Civilization* – until, at the very least, the foundation, around 751 CE, of the ‘Abbāsīd province of Mā Warā’ an-Nahr (the «Land beyond the [Oxus] river») thanks to the efforts – and the ruthless conquest – of the general Qutayba ibn Abī Šāliḥ Muslim (669-716 CE).<sup>41</sup> How important this paradigmatic shift of post-Alexander Baktria’s historical and political status is, cannot be overemphasized: after decades, if not centuries, of marginality, not just this satrapy, but the whole of Central Asia, has now been brought on equal terms with other «cradles» of Empires, such as Rome, Anšan, or Qíncháo (秦朝).<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Morris 2019a, 88: «Drawing from rich resources, an unruly history, and new political ambitions, the rulers of Baktria transformed Central Asia from an Eastern imperial frontier – as it was under the Achaemenids, Alexander and the Seleukids – into a new imperial space. Baktria was thus the locus of power of the independent Greek Kingdoms, followed by the Kushan Empire». Once it has been acknowledged that the transformation of Baktria in an imperial space cannot be seriously denied (just think of the impressive building plan which, starting at the very latest with the reign of Eukratides - ca. 171-145 BCE – radically transformed Āi Xānum into a, if not into the imperial capital (Martinez-Sève 2014; 2015; 2020b, 94-103; 2020c, 222-225), it should be noted that one should speak of an «Eastern imperial frontier» only – and also in this case very cautiously – in geographical and not – as it is still common use to do – political terms (again Virgil’s ultima Bactra). Thanks especially to the very problematic nature of the available sources (mostly numismatic) the issue of Baktria’s breakaway from Seleukid control has been, and still is, one of the thorniest and most hotly debated topics of the entire field, and after almost a century of discussion one seriously begins to wonder if a definitive conclusion would ever be reached. What we might call the «orthodox» view (that is, Diodotos’ rebellion - «secession» from the Seleukids overlords) has been defended by Tarn 1938, to be taken up again from a thoroughly numismatic viewpoint by Bopearachchi 1991, Kovalenko 1996, Holt 1999 (harshly criticized – if not regarding the matter at stake, surely for the method adopted – by Glenn 2015), Lerner 1999, Kritt 2001 and, lastly, by Coloru 2009 and Bordeaux 2018. More careful regarding the relationships between the Seleukid kings and their satraps, especially to the East of Media, have been Capdetrey 2007, Ramsey 2009, Chrubasik 2016 and now Wünsch 2022, 287-306. In the last years, an increasingly growing number of scholars has put forward the view that the progressive development of regional powers apparently autonomous from the imperial center(s), far from advertising the fragility of the Seleukid power, should on the contrary be understood as a conscious strategy of «feudalization» (or «vassallization» according to Strootman 2020a). The efficacy of such a strategy ought to be recognized 1. in the – at least partial – victory over the first wave of Arsakid expansion into the Irānian Plateau (Strootman 2018; for the political history see Fabian 2019a, Overtoom 2020) and 2. in the ability of a king such as Antiochos III in claiming back all the territories conquered by Seleukos up to the Indus (Coloru 2017a; 2017b and Martinez-Sève 2017, with further bibliography. Wenghofer’s studies (2016; 2018) accept the numismatic theories advanced by Jakobsson (2011; 2020) and Zeng 2013, according to whom the Diodotid dynasty counted three, and not two, as usually thought, kings (Diodotos I, Diodotos II and Antiochos Νικátor, otherwise unknown). We are dealing here with a potentially revolutionary hypothesis, because 1. it implies a radically revisited chronology of the Seleukid East and, far more important 2. would be the definitive proof supporting the «revisionist» theories concerning the functioning of both the Seleukid Empire and of Baktria as a satrapy, thus disposing once and for all of the long-lasting picture of a space subject to recurring upheavals and de facto impossible to rule. However, it is important to know that such a view has been criticized by Kritt 2015 and most recently by Bordeaux 2018, 80-87.

<sup>42</sup> Until the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE a rather unassuming center within Ēlām (Southwest of modern-day Irān), Anšan was the powerbase starting from which Cyrus II launched his campaigns towards the Mediterranean (taking Sardis) and to the East, thus paving the way for the birth of the Achaemenid Empire: Briant 2002, 13-31, Zarghamee 2013, 67-94, Rollinger 2014b, 2021a and now Waters 2022. The state of Qíncháo (秦朝) was one out of 7 political actors (together with Qí 齊, Chǔ 楚, Yān 燕, Hán 韓, Zhào 趙 and Wèi 魏) which played a key role during the so-called Warring States period (Zhànguó qī xióng 戰國七雄, ca. 475-221 BCE), at the end of which the Hán Empire was born: see most recently Leese-Messing 2019a and especially the essays in part 7 (pp. 581-778) of Childs-Johnson 2021. Being the first – and to my knowledge the only so far – scholar to have coherently developed the idea of Baktria as an imperial space on its own,

It seems possible to me to tease out at least two fundamental factors which have made this truly Copernican revolution possible. The first of them should be recognized in the – significantly – broadening of the scholarly perspective in contrast to what until not so many years ago had been the main research focus: that is to say, the almost exclusive interest for the Greek hegemony in Central Asia following Alexander campaign. By radically subverting an *opinio communis* which was as short-sighted as it was deeply rooted, the adoption of a (chronologically) deeper and (spatially) wider viewpoint enabled scholars to re-assess the period the traditional starting point of which is marked by the (assumed, but never really demonstrated) fall of Āi Xānum at the hands of the – allegedly - steppe people not as the end of «Greek civilization» in this space (which is, sometimes even not so much implicitly, understood – especially by classicists - as the beginning of a new dark age), but instead as the beginning of a transitional, and much creative, phase towards a new, indeed very effective and peculiarly distinct epoch of imperial expansion under the aegis – it is worth stressing – of those very same supposed barbarians (the newly established Kuṣāṇa dynasty) for long time held responsible for the «fall of civilization» in (Greek dominated) Central Asia.<sup>43</sup> As a wide range of studies in the last years has shown in an increasingly convincing manner, the golden age of Kuṣāṇa Central Asia (broadly speaking between the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries CE) would be simply unthinkable without the creative and by all means original re-adoption (and adaptation) by the new conquerors of a remarkably diversified toolkit of strategies (be they political, linguistic, ideological or infrastructural) which were already preceding them and which had been maintained not just intact (while of course accounting for developments and differences), but also strikingly productive.<sup>44</sup>

Against the background which has been sketched so far, the forthcoming publication of a *Routledge World Series* volume edited by Cribb, Bracey, and Morris entirely focused on *The World of the Kuṣāṇa* is therefore particularly eagerly awaited, as it will surely add further insight to this important, and still very poorly understood, political, economic, and cultural player during a crucial period within the imperial history of ancient Eurasia.<sup>45</sup> With Robert Rollinger, we might then argue that the imperial idea, once entered Central Asia, never left. When, how, and why this momentous

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to Lauren Morris goes the praise for having significantly contributed to the conceptualization of the historical developments within this region of the world from a comparative perspective.

<sup>43</sup> See Mairs 2013d. How much needed such a theoretical reframe was is shown by other – landmarking – studies which, in different fields (from Archaic Greece to (Early) Medieval history) have demonstrated how misleading (and heuristically void) a concept such as that of «dark age(s)» is. On Greek history see Hall 2007, Osborne 2009<sup>2</sup> and now Hodos 2020. On Early Medieval history the to-go reference are the two monographs by Chris Wickham (2005; 2010). On the Oxus civilization see Lyonnet and Dubova 2020.

<sup>44</sup> Worth mentioning regarding this topic are an important book by Posch (1995) as well as, more recently, several studies by Lerner (2010; 2011 – which has however been severely criticized by Lyonnet 2012; 2018 -, 2016; 2017); but see also Coloru 2015 and, most recently, Cribb 2020. A very detailed analysis of the artistic, numismatic, and epigraphic evidence so far available in order to shed light over this extremely complex period of post-Hellenistic Central Asian history has been carried out by Taasob 2016 as well as Morris 2017a; 2017b and Skinner 2017. See the overview by Morris 2019a, 74-88. Stefan Härtel's forthcoming monograph on Kuṣāṇa history is a much awaited addition to this list.

<sup>45</sup> See on this topic most recently Di Cosmo and Maas 2018.



development started, thanks to the stimulus of the Teispid-Achaemenid Empire, shall be the subject of this work.<sup>46</sup>

As for the second – and perhaps the most important – factor, it is related to the scale(s) which have been used in order to study this region of the world and its connections with the neighboring *Kings, Countries, and Peoples*, as one might say borrowing the title of a recent collection of Pierre Briant's essays.<sup>47</sup> No doubt also thanks to the steadily increasing presence (on a political, economic and cultural level) of China within the Central Asian spaces, a process which promises – without question on the middle or the long run, perhaps even much sooner – to thoroughly redefine the power balance within a territory by far and wide broader than just the Sino-Tibetan world, scholarship in the last years has been much busy in critically reassessing widely (and more often than not uncritically) employed concepts such as those of «center» and «periphery».<sup>48</sup> Among the most important results caused by this second theoretical repositioning has been the uptake of a methodological standpoint which less and less relies on definitions – felt as artificial and misleading – such as «East» or «West» in order to study Empires like those built by the Romans, the Sāsānians (and the preceding Arsakids), the Caliphs (both Umayyad and then 'Abbāsīd) or by the Inner and Easter Asian polities, especially the Hàn emperors and the Xiōngnú.<sup>49</sup>

At first sight, this might seem rather obvious but, as even a quick glance at the most recent bibliography shows, it is not. On the contrary, it might be further argued that one of the main results of this new wave of research (embodied for example in the recently published *Empires and Exchanges in Eurasian Late Antiquity: Rome, China, Iran, and the Steppe, ca. 250–750* by Nicola di Cosmo and Michael Maas (2018)) has been the demonstration that each of the above-mentioned worlds – but others could easily be added – cannot be adequately understood neither in its own diachronic development nor in its entanglements with the entities surrounding them if not by adopting a trans-continental and inter-imperial perspective. Otherwise stated, by becoming acquainted with an (Afro)Eurasian vantage point, which alone is capable of adequately giving the deserved prominence to spaces and people until quite recently (even within the cultivated academic world) considered «peripheral» (which is to say less developed than their neighbors or, more straightforwardly, barbarians). This goes for the Eurasian mountain ranges, from the Caucasus to the Hindūkūsh and the Pāmīr), its deserts, (from the Sahrā' to the Qaraqum and the Tāklīmakan), the steppes (from those

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<sup>46</sup> Rollinger 2023 for a discussion of the Empire's impact on its Eastern (and Western, Northern, and Southern) borderlands. See also Bang *et al.* 2021 I on what they call *The Imperial Experience*.

<sup>47</sup> Briant 2017.

<sup>48</sup> Hansen 2020.

<sup>49</sup> Cf., for example, Brosseder 2019 (on the Xiōngnú), Shayegan 2011, Olbrycht 2015, Fabian 2019a, and Wiesehöfer 2019 (on the Arsakids), Canepa 2009; 2010, Wiesehöfer 2011a, Rezakhani and Daryāyī 2016, Rezakhani 2017 and Potts 2018 (on Sāsānian Ērān) Weaverdyck 2019a (Rome) and Meier 2020 (on all of the above mentioned). A recent (but questionable) review of the golden age of the Islamic (أمة) has been provided by Starr 2015.

surroundings the main oases of Bactria and Sogdiana, for example Buxārā, to Mongolia and Qazaqstan) and the oceans (from the more studied Indian one to the Austronesian seaborne Empires).<sup>50</sup>



**Map 1.1. New Entanglements and Transformations after Alexanders: the Irānian World under Seleukids and Arsakids.** © Peter Palm

<sup>50</sup> See for example Ptak 2007, Beckwith 2009, Golden 2011, Christian 2018 as well as the already mentioned – landmarking – *Geschichte der Völkerwanderung* by Mischa Meier (2020, especially pp. 156-171 and 731-743). As further evidence of the fact that such a perspective enjoys increasingly favor in the current historical phase, the *European Research Council (ERC)* has recently massively financed two broad research projects dedicated to the study of economic and cultural exchanges from an inter-imperial perspective. The first is the already mentioned *Beyond the Silk Road (BaSaR)* based at the German University of Freiburg im Breisgau (Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg) and directed by Professor Sitta von Reden, while the second is an Oxford-based project on *Nomadic Empires. A World Historical Perspective* under the leadership of Pekka Hämmäläinen. For more information see the respective websites: <https://www.basar.uni-freiburg.de> and <http://nomadicEmpires.history.ox.ac.uk>. For an introduction to the concept of inter-imperiality and to its application to scholarship on the ancient world from a trans-continental perspective see Doyle 2014a; 2014b; 2018.



**Map 1.2. Sāsānian, Byzantine, Kušāna, Early Türk and pre-Islamic Afro Eurasia. © Peter Palm**

To quote the suggestive title of one of Barry Cunliffe’s most recent volumes, *The Birth of Eurasia* is only to be understood by taking into account the mutual relationships of steppes, deserts, and oceans, and of the worlds between, within, and across them.<sup>51</sup> Following such recent (and very speedy) developments, the fact that in different academic fields – including ancient history – Central Asia has been capturing the attention of an increasingly broader scientific community should raise little to no surprise.<sup>52</sup> As even a not so scrupulous bibliographic inquiry can easily show, in the last years Silk Road Studies have developed into a branch on its own within scholarship on the ancient world: we have now Silk Road Journals, international conferences dedicated to Afġānistān - «the hub of half the world» (or «crossroads of Empires») - have been held and the Silk Road brand – for such it is – has revealed itself as a truly refuge asset on which to invest in a book marked (within as well as outside academia) which appears more overstocked at every turn of the year.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Cunliffe 2015, 1-34.

<sup>52</sup> Two examples among the many available. Chinese expansion into Central Asia (an actual topic if ever there was one) almost 2000 years after the epic voyage of the Hān envoy Zhāng Qiān (張騫, 164-113 BCE: cf. the classic study by Hulsewé 1979) and the possibility of a new confrontation with Russia (a post-modern version of the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century Great Game) has greatly contributed in awakening the attention not only – as it was only to be expected – of political scientists and politicians, but also of sociologists, anthropologists and, although to a rather lesser extent, ancient historians. Special interest has been reserved to the study of ethnic (self)perception and community (myth)making among the youngest generations of post-Communist republics such as Kyrgyzstan and Qazaqstan, both generously target by – by no means gratuitous – astonishing Chinese investments. See on this topic the studies by Schröder – Stephan-Emmrich 2014, Schröder 2014 and Schröder 2016.

<sup>53</sup> Some random examples took out of just the catalogues of the most prestigious international academic publishers. Christian 2000, Benjamin 2007; 2018, Beckwith 2009, Liu 2010; 2022, Hansen 2012; 2020, Baumer 2014, Frankopan 2015; 2019, Boulnois 2016<sup>3</sup>, Kim *et al.* 2017.

Remarkably, at least within the scholarly discourse, such an editorial blossoming would not have been possible without the decisive contribution of newly published documentary sources: they are mostly of numismatic character, but worth mentioning are at the very least letters and legal contracts such as the *Aramaic Documents from Ancient Bactria*, the *Bactrian Documents from Northern Afghanistan* or the so-called *Sogdian Letters* discovered near a fortress at the Kūh-e Moğ, East of Panjikant (Панҷакент, in modern-day Taškistān) and spanning more than a millennium, from the last days of the Achaemenid Empire in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE to the Muslim conquest of Central Asia between the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. Among other things, this has made possible to fill up with voices, and in the case of Kuṣāṇa coins, also with faces – of king(let)s, princes(les), merchants, mercenaries and many others, a huge space, ranging from the Easternmost fringes of the Arsakid Empire to modern-day Xīnjiāng (新疆, or Uyğur autonomous region). This equals to a conglomerate of worlds which, until very recently, has laid almost outside of the mainstream historical gaze due to the lack of extensive written narratives, with the (very partial) exception of some – indeed most vague – hints at the so-called «Western regions» (which is to say, Central Asia) scattered through Chinese narrative sources, which in turn have recently experienced, and are still undergoing, a thorough critical scholarly reassessment: from Sīmǎ Qiān (司馬遷) in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE to the Buddhist pilgrim Xuánzàng (玄奘, also known to the world as Chén Huī 陳) almost 700 years later, in the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE.<sup>54</sup> Not taking into account a few – and for this very reason all the more commendable – exceptions, it should here be noted that the tumultuous growth of the sources available to scholars has not always been followed by a scientific output adequately reflecting the value of both numismatic and archaeological material as well as of the new methodological tools lately acquired by researchers working on different epoch within Central Asian history.<sup>55</sup> The reasons of what – in the absence of a resolute shifts in trends especially in the field of popular literature, no matter how refined and sophisticated this might be – concretely runs the risk of transforming itself into a huge missed

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. Posch 1995 and Thierry 2005. Today, Kuṣāṇa studies are by far and wide the most vital sub-sector of pre-Islamic Central Asian scholarship. This is shown, for example, by the path-breaking Falk 2015, the catalogue of Kuṣāṇa, Kuṣāṇa-Sāsānian and Kidarites (*xwn/xyon* in Irānophone sources) held by the *American Numismatic Society* (Jongeward and Cribb 2015), those edited by Joe Cribb and Robert Bracey, of the Kuṣāṇa coins hosted by the British Museum (Cribb and Bracey 2021) and, last but not the least, no less than 3 doctoral dissertations (Taasob 2016, Morris 2017a and Skinner 2017) completed in just two years and dedicated to several topics of the political and cultural history of the Kuṣāṇa Empire. See also most recently Morris 2019a; 2019b; 2019c; 2020; 2021a; 2021b; 2021c.

<sup>55</sup> For their philological expertise special mention is due to the works of de la Vaissière (2004; 2005; 2015), while within archaeology Morris has distinguished herself for a thoroughly reassessment of (among others) numismatic and material cultural data, especially those coming from the hoards such as that of Bagrām: see Morris 2017a; 2017b; 2020. Important is also a quite recently (2008) translated study by a very prominent figure among Russian speaking archaeologists, namely Elena Kuz'mina (1931-2013) on *The Prehistory of the Silk Road*. Particularly worth mentioning of this book is its emphasis on the steppe world (on which see most recently Stark 2020) as a decisive player for the development of the Central Asian Empires. This aspect has been the object of other studies, for example Ball 2015 and Cunliffe 2019, 171-274.

opportunity in order to give both Central Asia and (why not saying it loud?) the people who, willy-nilly, of those traditions are the legitimate heirs, the centrality they deserve in Eurasian history without however mistreating the sociopolitical and cultural complexity of this part of the world - but on the contrary emphasizing them - are numerous.<sup>56</sup> Suffice here to mention and briefly discuss three particularly representative issues.

First undoubtedly comes the near impossibility – for a single scholar – to master the almost discouraging roster of languages, both ancient and modern, the knowledge of which would be needed in order to properly assess the available sources on a time span ranging many centuries (to say nothing of the scholarly literature, now increasingly written, especially when it comes to Central Asia, in the national, post-Soviet idioms). The second reason – which is a direct consequence of the first – has to be seen in the steadily increasing specialization within each and every scientific and disciplinary branch involved in the study of this space: to name but a few, from Sinology to Irānian studies, from scholarship on the Muslim world to Classical philology and from Indology to the archaeology of each of the already mentioned territories and cultures.<sup>57</sup> Finally, it must not be overlooked that not only is not particularly frequent that the experts within each of those fields are able (or willing) to fruitfully talk with and to each other (as it is – more often than not – the case with regards to Classics), but given how different from each other are 1. the status quaestionis, 2. the applied methodologies and – a point which is important as it is usually forgotten – 3. the legacy of the different scholarly traditions (the influence of which in conditioning the kind of questions from which researchers usually set out in assessing the material available to them must be especially stressed in the case of a contested field such as Central Asia), a productive and truly interdisciplinary exchange has turned out to be the real «Baktrian Mirage» at work during the almost 300 years of the discipline(s).<sup>58</sup>

As a short footnote to the above, the chapters included in *Part III (Historiographies)* of the recently published volume I of the *Handbook of Ancient Afro-Eurasian Economies* deserve special mention,

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<sup>56</sup> For recent definitions of what has to be understood under the label of Eurasia see Honeychurch 2015, 81 (with previous literature) and Christian 2018 I, 3-4.

<sup>57</sup> As already noted by Briant (2017a, 442), there are instances in which «ultraspecialisation puts a brake on historical understanding rather than stimulating innovation». This is why collaborative enterprise such as the *BaSaR* project are mandatory for a better understanding of Central Asian history.

<sup>58</sup> An – indeed resounding – example will suffice to make the point clear. Despite the fact that they constitute by far and wide the richest, and sometimes the only narrative evidence we can rely on regarding the events of the whole of Central Asia during a time span of several centuries - broadly from the abandonment of Āi Xānum by a fraction (of a fraction?) of its population (or was it just the upper class?) down to the Sogdian letters from the Kūh-e Moğ - which is to say the same amount of years separating the readers of this pages from Dante Alighieri, Chinese sources, spearheaded by Sīmā Qiān, have not undergone (at least for now) anything comparable to textual criticism – to say nothing of narratological, semiotic, stylistic inquiry and so on – as it has indeed become common praxis in other fields whose practitioners would be very much interested in exploiting the information coming from those sources, such as Classical philology itself. What kinds of problems derive by all the above as it comes to make use of a source as complex as the *Shiji* has only been highlighted in recent years by Di Cosmo (e.g. 2002, 255-313; 2010), Kim (2009), Chin (2014, 143-190, dedicated both to the *Shiji* and to later historical works, for example that of Bān Gù 班固, 32-92 CE) as well as, most recently Leese-Messing (2019b), the latter providing rich previous bibliography, also written in Chinese.



for taken together they provide the most up-to-date, and skillful, attempt at self-reflecting on the intellectual histories behind the shared knowledge (and myths) on the spaces and people treated in the volume. In the light of the scope of her chapter on *Russian Perspective on Eurasian Past*, Lara Fabian's contribution stands out as one of the true hidden treasures of this remarkable book.<sup>59</sup>

These (and many other related) problems have however been no obstacle to a – worryingly – increasingly wide number of scholars (as well as well-learned amateurs) to sew together (more often than not and – following from what has been said so far – almost unavoidably, starting from translations or, in the worst cases, from second or even third hand quotations) every single bit of available evidence with the overarching goal of providing a coherent narrative under the label of «big history» or «big picture» (now almost become a literary genre on its own) of ancient Eurasian history; all of this, moreover, hiding behind potentially catch-all terms such as «connectivity», «networks», «interactions», «influences» and, of course, Silk Road(s).<sup>60</sup> Despite the fact that, in one form or another, they are (almost) everywhere to be seen in paper titles, panels, monographs, and exhibition catalogues, both Central Asia and the people which inhabited (and animated) its space(s) have been left with a quite unrewarding task within projects such as those described above. That is to say, they have more often than not being portrayed as mere intermediaries («middlemen») shuttling back and forth (or shrewdly impeding these movements) between what one might call, paraphrasing Canepa, *The Two Eyes of the Earth* – namely Hàn China and imperial Rome.

Such a fate has most famously affected the Arsakids, portrayed from courtly circles likely originating within the Sāsānid realm onwards as debauched kings and deceitful merchants: a picture which was adopted full hands – and applied also to other rivals - by Caliphal-age sources, as it is for example the case with one among the most learned among them, that is the polymath al-Ṭabarī (839-923 CE).<sup>61</sup> How partisan and misleading such a picture of the people situated beyond the sphere of influence of the Umma as well as of «All under Heaven» - Tiānxià (天下), that is the Chinese Empire – is, and moreover how symptomatically it mirrors the diffidence – in turn stemming from misunderstanding, calculated political goals, self-representation, and sheer ignorance - of both Hàn and 'Abbāsīd urban(ocentric) culture, is shown by the fact that the very same τόπος can be found,

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<sup>59</sup> Fabian 2019b.

<sup>60</sup> See for example Benjamin 2007; 2018, Liu 2010, Baumer 2014 (an indeed much praised book), Lerner 2015.

<sup>61</sup> Among the greatest historiographers of the golden age of Early Medieval Muslim culture, Abū Ġa'far Muḥammad ibn Ġarīr al-Ṭabarī wrote a *History of Kings and Prophets* (*Ta'riḫ al-rusul wa l-mulūk*) in which (1.183 and 1.706) the Arsakids are given the rather unflattering moniker of «Kings of Factions», in Arabic *mulūk al-ṭawā'if* (ملوك الطوائف). See Engels 2017a, 29, who quotes the two passages in al-Ṭabarī's work – erroneously – translating the Arab label as «King of Dispersions». Thanks are due here to Dr. Elena Tosti di Stefano for the precious linguistic advice. For a more in-depth discussion of the historian, of his work and of the cultural context in which he as well as first-class characters active in the Caliphal world around that time lived see e. g. Starr 2015, 163-224.

almost unchanged, in a source antedating al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'riḫ* of almost 4 centuries: that is in the *Book of the Later Hàn* (*Hòu Hànshū* 後漢書) by Fàn Yè (范曄 398-445 CE).<sup>62</sup>

Concerning the case of the Arsakid Empire, a steadily growing number of scholars has been working hard in order to refute once and for all the (etic, and moreover highly loaded from an ideological point of view) picture of the successors of the Seleukids astride the Irānian world as it is to be found in historical sources, trying instead to replace it with the image of an highly sophisticated agrarian Empire (in passing doing away with the nomadic myth still hunting the dynasty), which was able to interact both on a political and on a cultural level with all its – close and more distant – neighbors within the Eurasian chessboard, from the Mediterranean to China.<sup>63</sup> This cannot however be said, at least to the same extent, for the Kuṣāṇa (who ruled another, still mostly under-researched and scantily known, huge Empire, which at the height of its might encompassed Central and South Asian territories over thousands of kilometers). One of the reason accounting for this has to be recognized in the fact that, with the exception of a few mentions in Chinese literary sources (among them again Fàn Yè) and in some, late, Latin chronicles (such as the *Historia Augusta*), archaeology and numismatics are the only disciplines which can really contribute something meaningful to the study of this paramount Central Asian Empire.<sup>64</sup> However, despite its «objective» (or «objectual») nature,

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<sup>62</sup> See *Hòu Hànshū* 88. The history told here (a veritable masterpiece of ethnocentrism) is that of the explorer Gān Yīng (甘英). Sometimes around 97 CE he was allegedly sent by his emperor, named Hàn Hé Dì 漢和帝 (reigned 88-106 CE) to Rome (called Dàqín 秦 in Chinese sources). As he came in Arsakid territories (Ānxī 安息), Gān Yīng was allegedly advised by Arsakid nobles (who were extremely jealous of their role as middleman and traders in luxury wares through Asia (starting of course with silk, the procurement of which, at least according to Roman moralists from Seneca (*Helv.*, 16.4) to Pliny the Elder (*NH.*, 12.41) was responsible of the financial breakdown of the Roman Empire) against travelling any further, and this for the following reasons: «the Ocean is boundless. Those who manage to make the journey in both directions can do that in three months, if they have the winds on their side. But if the wind is against them, this can take almost two years. This is why those who are sailing through the sea bring with them supplies for three years. The boundless ocean [cf. the Homeric «wine colored sea» (οἶνον πόντος) in *Il.*, 13.703 and *Od.*, 13.32] bound men to remember their country. And they fall homesick, and some among them die». As Gān Yīng heard those words – so laconically states Fàn Yè «he came back».

<sup>63</sup> On the Arsakids and their Empire worth mentioning are, among others, Olbrycht 1996; 1998a; 1998b; 2015b, Wiesehöfer and Müller 2017, Wiesehöfer 2019, Gregoratti 2013; 2014; 2017a; 2017b; 2019, Fabian 2017, the latter of special importance because it sheds some light on a space as crucial as it is almost entirely unknown outside the specialist's circle as the Caucasus and the Eastern Black Sea – the Colchis, Iberia, around this time, and 2019a). Note moreover now Hoo 2022, 127-154 on Old Nisa, in modern day Türkmenistan.

<sup>64</sup> See e. g. *Shǐjì* 123 and *Hòu Hànshū* 88.2920-2921: «almost 100 years after [the conquest of Baktria by the Dà Yuèzhī (大月氏)], the prince [xīhóu 翺侯] of Guìshuāng [貴霜, perhaps somewhere into the Badaḫšān mountain range, in the north of Afgānistān: cf. Lerner 2016] became king, and its dynasty was named that of the king Guìshuāng [that is to say the future Kuṣāṇa]. He then invaded Ānxī [from the context it seems that we are dealing here with the Eastern fringes of the Parthian Empire, in the region of Ḥurāsān] and conquered the area of Gāofù [高附, that is the Kābul region]. He also subjugated all the Púdá kingdoms [濮達, allegedly in the area of modern Gardēz, that is to say Paktyā] and Jībīn [罽賓, somewhere around the area of Kāpīsā or Gāndhārā]. Qiūjiùquè [丘就卻, that is to say the founder of the new Empire] was more than 80 years old as he died. His son, called Yángāozhēn [閻高珍, most likely Vima Tahk(tu) or, perhaps, his brother Sadaṣkaṇa], became king in his place. He defeated Tiānzhú [天竺, probably in Northwestern India] and entrusted generals in order to control and lead [that place]. The Yuèzhī became extremely rich. All the kingdoms called [as their king] the Guìshuāng [Kuṣāṇa] king, but the Hàn call them with their original name, that is, Dà Yuèzhī». On this very complicated matter see Thierry 2005, Rezakhani 2017 (on the Sāsānians in the East, who interacted much with the Kuṣāṇa) and Morris 2019a, 74-83. On the information to be gained from the *Historia Augusta* see *SHA, Ant. Pius.*, 15.4.

its *Sachlichkeit*, material culture is not a fact, something bearing an a priori meaning, and needs therefore to be interpreted.<sup>65</sup> In the case of the Kuṣāṇa, this interpretative challenge provides a diagnostic example of the importance of a solid theoretical framework starting from which archaeological evidence might be scrutinized and - once understood in its proper context(s) – fully exploited in all its potential for historical analysis.

Moving within the discursive horizon of both the Silk Road(s) and of «connectivity», almost all the most recently published synthetic studies on the political and cultural history of Eurasia have unabatedly interpreted the – astonishing for their number as well as sophistication – findings discovered in what has been understood to be Kuṣāṇa territory (this is especially true for the Bagrām Northwest of Kābul), as the ultimate proof of the long-lasting hypothesis that the political and economic fortunes of the Kuṣāṇa Empire were owed to their role as brokers along the international exchange network(s) involving luxury wares between China and the Mediterranean world (as the discovery of bronze mirrors and refined glassware, among many other things, would allegedly demonstrate).<sup>66</sup>

Thrown out of the door within the context of scholarly debates on post-Achaemenid Central Asia – but to be honest also in that case this has happened only in a rather small circle of specialists, and also here not without setbacks and only starting in very recent years – the idea of Bactria’s sociopolitical and cultural development as simply a reactive phenomenon (the «Greek miracle»), came back through the window in the field of Kuṣāṇa studies. «Middleman», in fact, is little more than a politically correct understatement to define a people (and a space) without its – their - own history and devoted with even less agency. Otherwise stated, the «hub of half the world» (carrefour of civilizations, the cultural melting-pot, and so on) hinging on (Central)Eurasia which emerges from these narratives is, to borrow the terminology of anthropologist Marc Augé, a *Non-Place*.<sup>67</sup>

How restrictive (short-sighted) such a perspective is if one’s goal is to address – and then to explain – the complexity of a political phenomenon such as the Kuṣāṇa Empire appears clear, to mention but a telling example, as soon as one is confronted with the inscription of perhaps the most famous among the dynasty’s rulers, namely Kāṇiṣka I (the Great, reigned ca. 127-151 CE).<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> We shall return in more details on these issues in chapter 5. See already however the insightful discussion of the problem in Hoo 2020 and, at more length, 2022.

<sup>66</sup> On the concept of «order of the discourse» as the horizon of what can be thought (and therefore spoken and discussed) concerning a given topic see Foucault 2004. On the brokering role of the Kuṣāṇa cf. the conclusions (converging despite the different analytical perspectives shaping the authors’ outlook) reached by Falk 2014, 34 and Benjamin 2018, 201-203. See however the much more sophisticated analysis of the material discovered in the Bagrām hoard by Mairs 2014a (and from a «globalization perspective» Mairs 2017) as well as Morris 2017a; 2017b; 2020 and especially her groundbreaking dissertation (2021).

<sup>67</sup> See the by now classic Augé 1992 as well as the remarks by Harvey 1985; 2001; 2013 concerning the intrinsically constructed (and therefore dynamic) nature of space, both as a physical place and as a metaphor.

<sup>68</sup> Morris 2019a,79.



Carved in places of highly scenic impact and engraved in a monumental style which by no means falls short of their much more known (and celebrated) Achaemenids, Roman or Sāsānian parallels, Kāñiṣka's inscriptions unambiguously show the Kuṣāṇa rulers' aim of symbolically appropriating the space – not only, but also, through the people living therein - of which they had militarily become overlords. In other words, to anyone even barely acquainted with this kind of evidence, it is impossible not to recognize at Rabatak (near the site of Surḥ Kotal, in the modern Afġān province of Baġlan to the South of Qundūz) a distinctive – and paramountly important – *Lieu de mémoire*, on which without doubt Kāñiṣka aimed to bestow that «sense of place» which, as demonstrated some 40 years ago by the geographer Yi-Fú Tuàn (段義孚), is capable of transforming a given point within a space (even if much more anonymous than the imposing Rabatak), in something different, and heavily symbolically – and thus politically - loaded.<sup>69</sup>

If this was already not enough, the careful analysis of the Bagrām hoard as well as of its cultural context carried out in the last years by Morris has (and still is) considerably contributing to a momentous reassessing of the traditional understanding of the Kuṣāṇa Empire's internal structures and dynamics.<sup>70</sup> Instead of the Eurasian middlemen, Morris vocally (and convincingly) advocates the image of a dynasty with extremely sophisticated tastes, carefully constructing a very specific narrative and understanding of its own past (which is to say, being capable of making shrewd use of intentional history in the very same way of other masters of this genre, from Perikles to Augustus down, as we shall see, to the (re)founder of the Persian Empire, namely «Dārayavauš, the King»). Finally, a dynasty whose members were very much willing to – and capable of - tap into luxury goods exchange networks spanning from the Mediterranean Basin to the Altaï range not as intermediaries, but as active protagonists (among many others across a far-flung space) driven by their own political and ideological agenda(s).<sup>71</sup> This is a crucial point, on which we shall return below in discussing the entanglements between the Achaemenids and their Central Asian (would be) subjects.

Despite these – per se extremely remarkable – insights, Morris' perhaps most important contribution so far (one of those intuitions which truly bears the potential of lastingly changing an entire research field) can be seen in her conceptualization of the Hellenistic-period Baktrian Empire – which, for reasons which by now should have become clear, I purposefully try not to call Graeco-Baktrian – as

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<sup>69</sup> Tuan 1972. The to-go reference concerning the places of memory is still Nora 1992. See however also Morris 2019a, 77 for a useful cartographic representation of some of the most important Kuṣāṇa sites.

<sup>70</sup> Note the historical assessment of the evidence in Morris 2021d, 394-439.

<sup>71</sup> Presently the best introduction to the topic is to be found in the path-breaking study by Morris 2019c, 681-688, but see also Morris 2021a; 2021c. For more in-depth discussion of the hoard and of its history see Morris 2017a; 2017b; 2021, 185-393, while Morris 2020, 584-590 discusses, to my knowledge for the first time, the use Kuṣāṇa rulers did of Greek power's cultural memory. Although starting from radically different premises (namely the elaboration of a Taġik people's *Historia Sacra* reaching its peak in the October revolution), the importance of studying Central Asia as a space endowed with its own historical agency had already been claimed by Babadžan Gafurovič Gafurov (1908-1977) in two monographs published respectively in 1952 and 1989: see Morris 2019c, 675-681 for more details.

well as the Kuṣāṇa realm as epiphenomena of a single political and cultural continuum following one another over the course of almost 400 years: seen from this perspective, the trajectory of these two Empires would have brought about a crucial transformation of Central Asian history, the effects of which would have been felt at the very least until the coming of the Caliphal armies under the lead of Qutayba.<sup>72</sup> This – at the same time too long and too short - summary of the discipline(s) developments over the course of the last years has hopefully shown – beyond any reasonable doubt – that Baktria (taken here pars pro toto for the whole of Northern Central Asia from the Hindūkūš to the Aral) deserves to be studied not as a function of the role this space played within the broader framework of somebody else’s history (of the Greek world, as Tarn argued, of the Indian one, as stated by Narain in his polemical backlash against Tarn or of a rather vague world of *States, Empire, and Networks*, as the title of a recent *Cambridge World History* volumes reads) but, on the contrary, on the basis and as a function of its own history and culture within and against the background of a very peculiar experience, the imperial one, which started with Cyrus II in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE.<sup>73</sup> At last, Central Asia then *Strikes Back*, and moreover does it qua Central Asia. Although a rather modest one, nevertheless this is in and for itself a good reason for rejoicing within the framework of a geopolitical and social scenario which, for (too) many other reasons, is still extremely difficult for this space and, what counts the most, for the people living in it.

### 3. The Imperial Experience of Central Asia: Some Preliminary Remarks

The attentive reader will not have failed to notice that, within this overview of Central Asian scholarship and of its developments in the recent past, there has been so far one remarkable absent, namely the Teispid-Achaemenid Persian Empire. Many are the reasons which acquaint for this, at first sight rather puzzling, shortcoming: the first, and even to the non-specialists perhaps most familiar, is the sporadic, fragmentary, from a geographical point of view very unbalanced (exceedingly favoring the Western half of the Empire, from Asia Minor to Egypt and Babylonia) and finally, as it comes to Graeco-Roman historiographers, heavily conditioned by the ideological discourse – and sometimes sheer ignorance of the places and people treated –, nature of the sources available in order to reconstruct the social, economic, religious and cultural history of an Empire of such magnitude and complexity as the Teispid-Achaemenid was.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Morris 2019a, and now also (although somehow challenging Morris’ interpretation, Hoo and Wiesehöfer 2022).

<sup>73</sup> See. Lerner 2015 as well as, with the deployment of a much more sophisticated methodological toolkit, von Reden 2015; 2019a.

<sup>74</sup> To this it might be added that, in some cases, from the dahayāuš of Armenia to – not by chance – the Central Asian satrapies, even the political history cannot be satisfactorily reconstructed even in its broadest outlines. For an authoritative introduction to the history of the Irānian οἰκουμένη (which is to say, not limited to the Achaemenid Empire), see



**Map 1.3. The First Eurasian Hyperpower: the Teispid-Achaemenid Persian Empire from the Aegean to the Indus.**  
 © Peter Palm

Despite the quantic leap brought to bear by the publication of the 15 volumes in the (still ongoing) *Achaemenid History Workshops* series – of which Briant’s *History of the Persian Empire* might perhaps be seen as the ideal prosecution of the original Workshops and to a certain extent the crowning of such enterprise -, Central Asia has not (or only tangentially and to a rather modest measure) benefitted from the considerable achievements which have marked the scholarship of the first Irānian world Empire over the course of the last 40 years.<sup>75</sup> The second reason is of both a geopolitical nature and, one could say, of cultural order. This is not to say that, therefore, we are dealing with a secondary aspect. Quite to the contrary: if in fact there is a kernel of truth in the famous aphorism of the Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce, according to which «all history is, in itself, contemporary history», such a remark is a fortiori true in the case of Central Asia. However incredible it might sound today, given both the years, and the sociopolitical context in which they occurred, it is nevertheless a fact that some of the most sensational discoveries in the history of Central Asian

Wiesehöfer 2004<sup>3</sup> and, more recently, Canepa 2018, however focusing more on cultural and religious history. Worth mentioning are also the contributions collected in the *Oxford Handbook of Ancient Iran* (2013, edited by D. T. Potts).

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Sancisi Weerdenburg *et al.* 1987- (the series now includes other, no less remarkable studies under the title of *Achaemenid History*) as well as Briant 2002. Most recently, Briant has supervised the English translation of two collections of his essays (Briant 2017a; 2018a), which represent a sort of – very useful – apparatus criticus to the monumental synthesis, both for the breath of its scope and the depth of its fine-grained analysis, of the *History of the Persian Empire*. See now King 2021, 3-10 for an overview of the past Achaemenid historiography and an assessment of its present and future.

(and perhaps even world) archaeology occurred within Stalinist Soviet Union in the years immediately antedating the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact.<sup>76</sup> The impenetrability of the country on the one hand, the skepticism – at least from the point of view of the methodological and theoretical approach by no means completely unjustified – nurtured by the academic world both in Europe and in the United States regarding Soviet scholarship of the ancient world on the other and, finally but not less importantly, a considerable linguistic barrier, have conjured in turning Russophone scientific production inaccessible – and thus usually ignored – to colleagues abroad. The few exceptions have been a (scanty) number of translations – for example Dandamaev’s work on *Persia under the first Achaemenids* into German – and French, famously the lingua franca of the Russian speaking intelligencija, in which the same Soviet scholars sometimes happened to publish; however, this by no means suffices to properly take stock of the impressive amount of work produced from the ‘30s, and therefore it can safely be argued that historical enquiry of the Eastern satrapies in the East of the Empire for long decades almost ignored Russophone (which more often than not equaled to say «archaeological») literature on the topic.<sup>77</sup> Far from having become better, it is not preposterous to argue that, following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the situation has gotten even worse. With the exception of Taġikistān, which rather challenging economic situation makes it fully dependent on the Russian Federation, in the other Central Asian republics, the construction (which has proceeded at neck breaking speed, often with tragicomic results, as in the case of Türkmenistan) of an old-new national identity mostly if not entirely played out in anti-Soviet (which often meant Russian) fashion, has vigorously promoted the use of the national languages as the main, if not only vehicle (doing to the difficulty, at least for the older generation of citizens, to learn English) of scholarly communication to the disadvantage of Russian. Not surprisingly, the most immediate result has been an even further marginalization of the (worthy, and given the circumstances in which most of them were and/or are still forced to work, in not a few cases even heroic) Taġik, Türkmen, Qazaq, Kyrgyz, and O‘zbek scholars.

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<sup>76</sup> On Soviet archaeology during those years see especially Goršenina 2012, 189-292 and, for a Central Asian case study, Aržantzeva – Härke 2019. Kleiñ 2014 provides a compelling narrative of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Russophone archaeological tradition with a biographic spin. On the impact, both political and cultural, of Stalin’s government across the Union see for example Kotkin 1995 (who rightly speaks of *Stalinism as a Civilization*) and, more recently, Baberowski 2012. Tellingly, if in the west the two-year period 1937-1939 has become known as «The Great Terror», in Russia it is still called Ежовщина (Ežovščina): that is to say, the Ežov era, from the name of the former people’s commissar of internal affair (the notorious NKVD). The anthropological shift caused in Soviet (and post 1991) society by those years has been masterfully summarized by Anna Axmatova, who labelled the Ежовщина «the cannibal years».

<sup>77</sup> Goršenina 2012, Kleiñ 2012 and Fabian 2019b, 598-608. Moreover, what has been said about the acquaintance with French among the Russian intelligencija would need further qualifications, for if it was still true during the 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, it did not involve all of the intelligenty: for obvious reasons Lenin gave precedence to German, while Stalin himself, whose ideas so heavily conditioned scholarship during his tenure of the position of GenSek, never went beyond the command of Russian, and even in this case never completely leaving behind a pronounced Georgian accent.

As it comes to Afġānistān, it goes almost without saying that the political history over the course of the last 40 years has played, and to a considerable still plays, a sadly paramount role. Started in 1979 from the O‘zbek border, the Soviet invasion has plunged the country in a downward spiral of which, even today, it is not easy to see the end (to say nothing of the features of the – much hoped-for – aftermath). The fact that the excavations at Āi Xānum – a few hundreds kilometers from the ford on the Amudaryo (South of Termiz) which was used by Soviet troops as a bridgehead as the war begun in order to cross into Afġānistān, as perhaps thousands of years ago Alexander might at least once have done, although in the opposite direction – had to be stopped in haste and hurry and the site was left to be pillaged (per se a remarkable calamity) must doubtlessly be counted among the smallest misfortunes among those which befell the country in the last half century barely needs to be further commented upon.<sup>78</sup>

First the rise of the Ṭālibān and, after some years, the intervention of the US-led NATO coalition, in addition to causing pain and suffering to a people already tormented by a decade-long (civil)war of unprecedented violence, have both dealt (despite the very different reasons, which of course need to be kept in mind) a near-to-deadly blow to the already precarious situation of the Afġān cultural heritage.<sup>79</sup> The archaeological museum in Kābul was bombed and pillaged, and it is only thanks to the foresight (as well as to the astounding bravery) of some of the scholars and employees working both there and in other institutions if the damages – of immeasurable scale: just think at the renowned Buddha statues at Bāmiyān – inflicted to the country’s historical and archaeological patrimony have not assumed even more catastrophic proportions. Direct consequence of those events has been the unrestrained proliferation, on the antiquity market(s), of Afġān rarities, eagerly sought after by both private collectors and institutions opened to the wider public (as it is perhaps most notably the case of the Miho Museum in Kyōto, Japan). Needless to say, such a wide-ranging (and very much profitable) trade has been conducted in the most absolute disregard of the rights of both the Afġān state and people, to say nothing of the funding thus provided to warlords, bandits, and terrorists of all stripes: from the Ṭālibān themselves to al-Qā’ida and, most recently to the galaxy of the so-called Islamic State satellites.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> On the history of Āi Xānum see, among others, Mairs 2014b, 57-101. On the history of the Soviet- Afġān war see the relevant chapters in Vogelsang 2002 as well as the more recent collection of essays edited by Penter and Meier (2017). A literary still unmatched account at the same time moving and soberly matter-of-fact devoted to the history of this (paradoxical in its tragic irony) anti-imperialistic invasion has been provided by Aleksievič 2016. For a political and cultural history of Central Asia (including Irān) over the longue durée see Dilip 2009 and now Khalid 2021.

<sup>79</sup> Rašid 2000 as well as the more recently political and cultural history of Afġānistān by Barfield 2010, 164-133 (on the dynamics of the Soviet-Afġān conflict and its aftermath, including the Ṭālibān’s rise to power).

<sup>80</sup> Bopearachchi and Flandrin 2005, 100-175. See now Colburn 2020d on Irānian artistic canon in the market as well as the remarks in Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 134 fn. 2 on the (rather murky) history of the *ADAB* corpus, on which more below in chapter 7.

As if all of the above were not already enough (and, sadly, quite predictably), the flourishing of the antiquity market has stimulated the birth of an equally thriving school of forgers, the most sophisticated of which seems to be based in Pakistān, according to the well-informed in the Pešāwar area, not by chance one of the most prosperous trading posts for Afġān antiquities on the entire planet. Alarmingly, recent studies have been able to show that not only do Pakistān-based counterfeiters have access to a wide range of (authoritative and very much up-to-date) scientific publications, but they are even in possession of technical skills developed enough to enable them to realize copies which can be exposed as forgeries only with the help of a whole range of analysis (metallurgical, petrographic, and many more) which are however financially extremely demanding, and the costs of which the Afġān state has neither the means to afford nor – perhaps understandably given the circumstances in which it operates – the political will to sponsor.<sup>81</sup> Such a situation faces every scholar with a whole array of challenges which must be taken into account as one tries to understand the history (and to make sense of the historiography) of ancient Central Asia.

On the one hand there are the – thorny – questions of juridical nature as well as the ethical standards one is supposed to conform to while carrying out research in the field related to this space(s), all of them one way or another connected with the issue of 1. possibly having to deal with forgeries and 2. being, more often than not, confronted with the need of making use for scientific research of source material(s) coming from non-controlled excavations (a gentle understatement for «illegal»). On the other, there is the close to total impossibility of carrying on extensive fieldwork in Afġānistān (coupled with the extensive pillage of many sites, among which Āi Xānum is just one example among many). This poses another remarkable hindrance still looming large on present scholarship, for it may force to depend on publications by now partially or entirely outdated, based moreover on standards and relying on a theoretical and methodological toolkit largely unsuitable to contemporary research questions (as the case of the Bagrām hoard eloquently shows). To this it might still be added a degree of approximation not infrequently bordering on arbitrariness as it comes to the actual spatial location – to say nothing of the dating problems – of archaeological sites, including the most important ones.

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<sup>81</sup> This having been said, such remarks of course by no means imply that everything that comes out on the antiquity market should be regarded ipso facto as a forgery. In fact, almost all among the most remarkable discoveries of the last years, some of which are going to lastingly (re) shape our understanding of Central Asian history and are therefore indispensable for the scholarly progress in this field came exactly from uncontrolled excavations. See for example Bernard and Rapin 1994, Bernard *et al.* 2004, Shaked 2004, Clarysse and Thompson 2007, Rapin 2010 and Naveh and Shaked 2012. A further, no less daunting problem specifically related to archaeological material of (allegedly) Achaemenid origin in Central Asia has to be seen in the fact that it has been discovered completely out of context and/or in archaeological strata dated to later periods (mostly Hellenistic or Kuṣāna): this is for example the case of the findings brought to light during the excavations at the sanctuary of Tāxt -i Sāngīn (in modern day Taġikistān, some 100 km to the Southwest of Āi Xānum): see on this especially the studies by Gunvor Lindström (2008; 2010; 2016; 2020, 289 fn. 2, 291-295, now with the comments in Hoo 2022, 109-126). Perhaps the most well-known (and most contested) case is that of the already mentioned Oxus Treasure. See Dalton 1964, Barnett 1968 and the debate between Oscar Muscarella (2003) and John Curtis (2004; 2012), as well as the catalogue by Inagaki 2002 (*Treasure of Ancient Bactria*, henceforth *TAB*).

On top of this, to complicate matters even further, there is the bewildering multiplication of names according to the language – and alphabet, and transliteration – with which the various studies (and the local inhabitants, on whose information those studies themselves often depend) refer to a given site.<sup>82</sup> In the light of what has so far been discussed, instead of (and much more than) complaining about what still has not been done, one should indeed perhaps rather marvel at the results which have already been achieved. In this domain – as in many others – of Achaemenid history, Briant's extensive work amounts to an authentic milestone. Besides the detailed chapters in the *History* explicitly devoted to the territories (and people) located to the East of Ekbatana (modern Hamadhān), the paramount urban site of ancient Media (Māda in Old Persian) and one of the most important of the entire upper satrapies down to Seleukid times, his studies devoted to the interactions between the Ancient Near-Eastern Empires – thus not only the Achaemenid polity – and the (agro)pastoralist communities of Arabia, Kurdistān, the Zagros mountain range and those dwelling across Central Asia even today mark the unavoidable starting point for every scholar working on such topics, while - to the best of my knowledge - in the case of the *L'Asie centrale et les royaumes proche-orientaux du premier millénaire* (1984) we are still dealing with the only monograph explicitly attempting a full-scale assessment of the political history of what we may call *The Achaemenid Far East* over the course of several centuries which does not fail to take into account the Empire's Near Eastern precedents, from Assyria to Ēlām.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> The to-go reference as it comes to this and related matters is the *Archaeological Gazetteer of Afghanistan* (Ball 1982) recently republished in an updated edition, moreover amended – one hopes – of the most conspicuous imprecisions affecting the former one (Ball 2019). Concerning the excavation projects, only in very recent years the *DAFA* has reopened some trenches in the north of the country (most notably in the Balḥ (بلخ) oasis, the site of ancient Baktra, which pottery has been the subject of a landmark study (2015) by Charlotte Elizabeth Maxwell-Jones): however, the situation remains precarious, to say the least: Marquis 2018. A good example of these – very much concrete and not always easy to overcome – linguistic and topographic is shown by the ponderous bibliography collected by Sebastian Stride in his monumental dissertation (2005 IV).

<sup>83</sup> Cf. at least the following: Briant 1976; 1983; 1984 (*L'Asie centrale*); 1985; Briant 2001b as well as, more recently, 2009a; 2018b and 2020. The paragraphs in the *History* which are especially important for matters related with the territories ranging from the Caspian Sea and the Indus (which is to say the so-called upper satrapies, referred to as «αἱ ἄνω σατραπείαι» in the literary sources, for example Diod. Sic. 18.39.21) as well as to other questions, for example the relationship between the Great King, his satraps and the local powerholders are to be found in Briant 2002, 33-38, 76-79, 122-137, 338-347, 567-569, 656-681 and 743-754. Much attention to the Near-Eastern context and heritage of the Achaemenid Empire has been paid especially by Robert Rollinger (see for example 2014b and c, 2017b and 2021 as well as the relevant chapters in the pathbreaking 2 volume *Companion to the Achaemenid Persian Empire* edited by Rollinger himself and Bruno Jacobs).





Map 1.4. *Training for Empire 1. Central Asia in Contact with the World: the Bronze Age* © Peter Palm



Map 1.5. *Training for Empire 2. Central Asia in Contact with the World: the Empire of Aššur* © Peter Palm

An at least partial exception is represented by another monograph, antedating Briant’s *History* by 4 years, dedicated by Vogelsang to *The Rise & Organization of the Achaemenid Empire* as well as to



the *Eastern Iranian Evidence* available in order to reconstruct the processes behind the first two.<sup>84</sup> Despite the author's profound acquaintance with Afġānistān's space(s) and culture(s) as well as with what in the specialized scholarship is usually referred to as the «Indo-Irānian borderland», it must be noted that Vogelsang's ambitious and wide-ranging study has been harshly criticized for its poor methodology as well as (a proof of some of the points raised above) for having almost completely obliterated the Russophone scholarship on archaeological matters. This is most clearly seen in what, far as I am aware, has been the most outright rebuke *The Rise & Organization* met, namely Francfort's, one of the authoritative voices of Central Asian archaeology as well as excavator of the Bronze-Age site of Šōrtūghai, in Eastern Baktria.<sup>85</sup>

Starting around the middle of the 2000 with the doctoral dissertation defended by Wu Xin at the University of Philadelphia and following with a considerable amount of other studies at least partially based on this (so far unpublished) work, these contributions mark, to the best of my knowledge, perhaps the most significant advancement in the studies related to the Easternmost fringes of the Achaemenid Empire since Briant's times, with the – by all means remarkable – exception of the impressive volume-like article dedicated by Wouter Henkelman to (among other things), what he calls the «Imperial paradigm» across the Irānian Plateau, with a focus on Arachosia.<sup>86</sup> Among the – numerous – merits of the Wu's scholarship (one could mention as a way of example the consistent use she has made in her research of much overlooked if not previously entirely unpublished

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<sup>84</sup> Vogelsang 1992a. See moreover other essays following this monograph: Vogelsang 1992b;1998. Besides taking into account Northwestern (and -Eastern) Central Asia – which is to say, roughly speaking, the Persian satrapies of Margiana, Areia, Parthia, Drangiana, Baktria, Sogdiana, and Chorasmia), Vogelsang's work also discusses the territories South of the Hindūkūš, namely Gandhara (Gāndhārā), Arachosia (Harauvatiš), what classical sources dubbed the «Paropamisadae» (Upāirisaēna), Sattagydia (Ōataguš) and Eastern Gedrosia, and the present Irānian province of Makrān, which he identifies with the Achaemenid satrapy of Maka (the latter in fact most likely located in modern Omān: Potts 2021b). See on the topography of the Eastern Achaemenid satrapies Jacobs 1994; 2017a.

<sup>85</sup> Francfort 2005, 313. Coloru 2009, 124-130 (a towering work which still has to be digested, especially in the non-Italian speaking scholarship) addresses Achaemenid Baktria in passing while focusing on the period between mid 3<sup>rd</sup> BCE and mid 1<sup>st</sup> CE. While understandable given the scope of the book, it somehow overlooks the Empire's impact over the structures of post-Achaemenid Baktrian societies (and beyond, a point raised by Briant 2017a, 446-449 and now forcefully by Rollinger 2023). Moreover, judging from the bibliography, his analysis moves almost exclusively in the wake of French-speaking historiography: in addition to Briant and Francfort, other authors of commanding influence for this study are Bernard, Rapin, and Grenet, but of paramount importance is also the work of scholars such as Lyonnet and Martinez-Sève. As for the Russophone historians and archaeologists (some of them authors of several publications in French), worth mentioning are at least the names of Viktor Ivanovič Sarianidi, Galina Vasil'evna Šiškina, and Galina Anatol'evna Pugačenkova. See Goršenina 2012, 295-329 and Kleĭn 2014 for an assessment of Tsarist and Soviet scientific inquiry (which is to say Russian speaking – and writing – but not limited to the ethnic Russians or even to the citizens of the former RSFSR) from the establishment of the Turkestan governorate down to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>86</sup> Henkelman 2017a; but see now the related contributions in the *Companion* by Rollinger and Jacobs as well as the important essays dedicated to the Archaeological Achaemenid Horizon in Central Asia (Genito and Maresca 2019). Restricting myself, for now, to the enumeration of the contributions authored by Wu Xin alone, worth mentioning are at least the following: 2005 (her doctoral dissertation), 2007; 2010; 2014; 2017; 2018; 2020. Minardi 2015a is a seminal work because, among other things, it conveniently summarizes almost a century of research (formerly entirely a Soviet monopoly, more recently characterized by ever-increasing international collaboration) on Chorasmia (Uvārazmiya, to the South of the Aral Sea, or at least of what is left of it). On Achaemenid administration in Baktria see also the recent contribution by Gzella 2021b. Trousdale and Allen 2022 is of critical importance for the archaeology of Southwestern Afġānistān.

archaeological material such as courtly glyptic bearing depictions of warfare in Central Asia, to which we will come again in due time), of special importance seems to me the multiplicity of perspective she tries to take into account in her study of Achaemenid Central Asia: the imperial, the local as well as, notably, the one centered on the steppe and its inhabitants. In the light of all this, what are then the reasons, if any, which justify a new attempt at a regional study dedicated to a satrapy of the Achaemenid Far East? This question, I think, can be answered by providing basically three different reasons.

The first is of a somewhat more general scope: despite the considerable dynamism showed in the last years by almost everyone among the related disciplines, from numismatic to archaeology and philology, pre-Muslim Central Asia is still a relatively young research field, the groundwork for which – as one of the most eminent specialists on the matter recently remarked – is still in the process of being laid.<sup>87</sup> How much truth there is in such a statement becomes evident, to mention but perhaps the most striking example, if one compares the number – by now almost impossible to even fathom – of cultural histories of the Graeco-Roman world on the one hand and, on the other, Mairs' pioneering monograph (2014b), to the best of my knowledge still the only study of this kind devoted to Central Asia (and moreover limited, it should not be forgotten, to the Hellenistic period).<sup>88</sup>

The second reason concerns the source material based on which a study such that envisaged above might be attempted, a well-known (and perhaps to some extents even abused) locus desperatus of the scholarship in the field. As hopefully shall be highlighted in more detail in the following chapter, in the course of the last 20 years, the documentary evidence available to scholars interested in Achaemenid Central Asia has expanded in a considerable way, despite the fact that, due not least to the geopolitical events mentioned in the previous pages, we are (and most probably will remain) still much far away from possessing a corpus even remotely comparable, for example, to that provided by

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<sup>87</sup> This has recently (17.02.2020) been claimed by Gunvor Lindström (Deutsches Archäologisches Institut) in the context of an important *Freiburg Ancient Central Asia Seminar* (FrACAS) organized by Lauren Morris in collaboration with Milinda Hoo at the *Seminar für Alte Geschichte* of the Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg and can be confirmed, among other things, by Rhyne King's recent dissertation (2021) on the Achaemenid satrapal household (which deals extensively with Arachosia and Baktria), now providing one of the very few wide-ranging studies on this crucial topic: see the bibliography – mainly concerned with the Hellenistic and post-Hellenistic period, in Ball 2020.

<sup>88</sup> Of a markedly theoretical slant (but by no means limited to it), Hoo 2022 has the remarkable merit of significantly enlarging the horizon beyond Baktria (thus to a considerable extent correcting the perspective distortion caused by the *Āi Xānum* «mirror» - or mirage), taking into account other extremely interesting, and of no smaller importance – contexts such as Arsakid Nisa (Παρθαννίσσα in the Greek sources, Gadymy Nusaý in Türkmen: see most recently Bruno 2020, with bibliography) and Hellenistic Babylonia, thus providing the framework, as the title of her book claims, for a translocal approach towards the cultural history of Afro Eurasia in the Hellenistic age. Hoo 2020 is a concise but very useful introduction to the themes discussed in the book and to the methodology it employs. The already mentioned Morris 2017a; 2019c; 2020; 2021a; 2021b; 2021c; 2021d bear the potential for laying the groundwork of the economic and cultural history of Kuşāna-epoch Central Asia.

other regions of the Empire, from Babylonia to Egypt and from Asia Minor – notably thanks to the Greek (and Lycian, Luvian, Karian...) epigraphic habit(s) – to Persia (Fārs, Pārsa) itself.<sup>89</sup>

The amount of information made available by the results of the *Prospections archéologiques en Bactriane orientale* (3 volumes published between 1989 and 1998) has been brought to bear thanks to the work of new archaeological expeditions: this has enabled scholars to widen the scope of their analysis beyond the Dašt -i Qal‘a plain (where Āi Xānum is located) and, as a consequence, to insert Eastern Bactria within a geographic and ecological brighter and more complex context, a point which for reasons we will later comment upon in more depth deserves full emphasis. Parallel to the work carried out by the *Mission Archéologique Franco-Ouzbèke de Sogdiane (MAFOuz-Sogdiane*, the «Northern» twin of the *DAFA*), a role of paramount importance has been played in the last years by the research groups directed, on the one hand, by Ladislav Stančo (*Česká archeologická expedice v Uzbekistánu*), and on the other by Søren Stark and Fiona Kidd. While the first has been and still is active especially in the South of modern-day Uzbekistan (at the foothills of the Kōýtendağ range as well as in other oasis bordering with Türkmenistan), the second has instead focused his research around the Buxārā oasis and in the territories of the neighboring steppe.<sup>90</sup> Special mention is due here to the impressive work of Sebastian Stride, whose study of historical geography of the Surxondaryo plain (a massive – and unfortunately unpublished – 5 volumes French dissertation) represents an achievement of invaluable importance for a number of reasons, the most important of which is perhaps the fact that it entails the one of – if not the - most up-to-date catalogue of the relevant literature (not only archaeological but also to a considerable extent ethnographic, geological, and climatological) available today: notably, it digests, and makes available to the reader, a huge amount of Soviet-era literature, for those capable of reading Russian a truly goldmine.<sup>91</sup>

The advancements made in archaeology have to a given extent been accompanied, if not matched, by those achieved within the field of philology. In the wake of Hallock’s path-breaking studies, the University of Chicago based *Persepolis Fortification Archive Project* has carried out the publications of the Ēlāmite tables found in their thousands during the excavations conducted at the important Achaemenid administrative center and royal residence in 1933. While it is important to bear in mind that a gaze from the center by its very nature inevitably leaves out – or at the very best blurs – a considerable amount of the processes taking place at a micro level in the territories of the single

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<sup>89</sup> Compare the regional surveys in the *Companion* by Jacobs and Rollinger (2021).

<sup>90</sup> See most recently the overviews by Stark 2020 (on the Hellenistic and later periods) and 2021 (on the Achaemenid era).

<sup>91</sup> The situation is however already quickly changing thanks, for example, to works such as Junker 2022, the forthcoming monograph by Zachary Silvia on the rural archaeology of Hellenistic Central Asia and two dissertations currently being prepared by Mariana Castro (ISAW, New York) on the extraction and circulation of the Kyzylkum turquoise and Merlijn Veltman (Leiden) on object networks and agencies across the Eurasian steppes.

satrapies, to say nothing of the areas beyond, but still very much in contact with them, it is nevertheless undisputable that the Persepolis archive provides by far and wide the privileged source in order to study the dynamics of the administrative apparatus as well as Persian strategies of extraction and control, while at the same time being one of the most important in order to take stock of the *Organization*, if not the *Rise*, of Baktria as a space within the Empire. Said otherwise, the birth of a satrapy. Therefore, given that 15 years have elapsed since Wu's dissertation and new evidence has been published, an even tentative reassessment of our knowledge on this topic seems not to be out of place. Speaking of «excavated texts», however, arguably the true landmark discovery of the last years (and as far as Central Asia is concerned, most likely ever since Herzfeld's excavations at Persepolis), has been the purchase – on the antiquity market – of a corpus of documents on parchment and wood known to scholars as the *Aramaic Documents from Ancient Bactria (ADAB)*.<sup>92</sup> We will have more than one opportunity to discuss them in greater detail in the course of the present work: what is nevertheless important to stress out right from the start here is the fact that, despite their provenance makes a proper contextualization of these document nearly impossible, the *ADAB* provide (even if within a rather narrow chronological span), a cross-section of unprecedented depth and priceless value of exactly those very same processes and dynamics about which the Persepolis archive is completely silent.

The painstaking ecdotic, exegetic, and comparative research stimulated in the very last years by this exceptional discovery and by the publication (2012) of said documents allows us now to put forward some general hypothesis concerning both physiognomy and physiology (if one may say so) of the Achaemenid satrapy of Baktria, at the same time from the perspective of its relationship(s) with the rest of the Empire (as well as, more in particular, with the – moving – court of the Great King) and, by no means less importantly, with the immediately surrounding territories; which is to say, with the many – I purposefully stress the plural for reasons which will become clearer in the course of the work – social actors living within, beyond these spaces, and interacting with each other.<sup>93</sup>

However, no matter how enlightening it might be – and in the case of the *ADAB* documents this equals to say «very much» - no documentary corpus can be properly exploited in its full potential for historical analysis in the absence of a proper theoretical and methodological framework: and it is exactly starting from this vantage point – the third reason why it makes sense, today, to attempt an in-depth study of Achaemenid Baktria from an explicit Central (Eur)Asian perspective (the imperial space theorized by Lauren Morris, as we have seen) – that the present study seeks to provide, if not a

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<sup>92</sup> Cf. Shaked 2004 and Naveh and Shaked 2012.

<sup>93</sup> The reference studies regarding the *ADAB* documents, without which the present work would not have been conceivable and on which it heavily relies, especially when it comes to the still unpublished Persepolis texts, are Henkelman and Folmer 2016, Folmer 2017, Henkelman 2017a, Tavernier 2017 (a and b) as well as Tuplin 2017a and King 2021, 315-365.

significant contribution, at least a fresh outlook to some important, and still contested, research questions.

With the overarching goal – the merits of which will arguably never be stressed enough – of setting both Achaemenid history and historiography free from the shackles of the ideological conditioning caused by the dependence of the two fields on classical sources, the *New Achaemenid History* launched by Sancisi Weerdenburg and Kuhrt – and brought forward, among others, by Briant, Henkelman, Jacobs, Rollinger, Wiesehöfer, Stolper, Waters, Cool Root, Garrison, and Tuplin, – has devoted a great deal of seminal research to the understanding of the imperial functioning on several levels, from the administrative to the political and from the military to the ideological, repeatedly – and rightly – stressing its capacity (sometimes truly stunning) of effectively governing even in the most minute details territories lying thousands of kilometers apart from each other and characterized by a linguistic and ethnocultural diversity on a scale never seen before and that no ruling class in Eurasian history antedating the Achaemenids had been challenged to organize, catalogue, and – as it only fits every imperial project worth this name and the relative ambitions – exploit.<sup>94</sup>

In more recent years, however, – and also following in the wake of regional studies of ever increasing depth and detail – research focus has progressively shifted towards its border (or frontier) zone(s): it should be noticed here, however in passing, that to emphasize the plurality of these spaces within a polity as big and complex as the Persian (or every other) Empire is crucial; and of no less importance is to keep in mind that, as Tolstoi's unhappy families, every borderland has its own peculiarities and logics, which deserve proper and careful study.

Instead of thinking about such a concept (as it has long been done, also because of the lack of documentary evidence) as charting a space chiefly defined by the progressive weakening of central authority until it fades away and/or as constantly and almost unavoidably tempted by «autonomist» and «secessionist» outbreaks (a picture still quite much in vogue with regards to Seleukid Bactria), an increasingly growing number of scholars coming from different field studies has put forward a resolute perspective shift, which is worth taking into account in our case as well, for it supplies food for thoughts concerning, among other things, one of the main aspects of Wu's recent work, namely the relationship(s) between Bactria and its wider, imperial context(s).<sup>95</sup>

Following in the footsteps of the theoretical work by anthropologist James C. Scott, such scholars have stressed the importance of recognizing in those areas which Scott himself in an important book

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<sup>94</sup> Among many others, this is a point made very clearly by Rollinger 2021a. On borderlands as a source of innovation cf. the theoretical framework provided by Versluys forthcoming. For a recent and thorough reassessment of Seleukid politics and policies at the Empire's fringes see Wunsch 2022.

<sup>95</sup> This has recently been shown by the publication (2020) of an entire volume dedicated to *The Limits of Empire in Ancient Afghanistan*, which methodological approach has by no chance been heavily informed by Scott's work (Payne and King 2020).

defined as characterized by a high rate of «state evasion» (and ranging from the south Asian hilly landscapes – Scott’s main case study – to the Inner Mongolian semi-desertic plains (known in the literature as Ordos, (È’èrduōsī 鄂尔多, Ордос хота) and from the Andean foothills to the Afġān valleys or the Buxārān steppes), the ideal environment within which the imperial administration, the human groups (at least formally) regarded as being part of that same imperial «body politic» and, finally, an entire plethora of social actors (which, as Scott strongly and convincingly emphasizes, was in the past and mostly still is numerous and composite as it usually goes underrepresented in our source materials) whose existence on a structural level is played in the interstices between interaction and refusal – or between participation and defiance, if not outspoken challenge -, painstakingly (re)negotiate the condition(s) of mutual coexistence (and of exploitation, and violence, to mention but a few characteristic features of social life in such scenarios).<sup>96</sup>

From such a perspective, frontier zones are thus no more anomic spaces, but instead fertile ground(s), kilns in which original solutions are forged to problems which are intricated as they were (are) in constant change; solutions, moreover, which – as recently stressed by Miguel John Versluys in an inspiring contribution – with all due arrangements can then be brought back to the center or circulated within the broader context of the Empire itself.<sup>97</sup> It is the circular nature of such a process which is of special relevance here, as well as the fact that, born out of complexity, it surely generates more complexity, but, at the same time, it also offers a wider spectrum of options which a given community can rely upon in order to face new and unexpected challenges and/or to bring forward new claims and demands. Here lays perhaps both the most important point of this theoretical framework, and its usefulness in order to approach Central Asia landscape(s) and societies both per se and within an imperial arena from a refreshingly new outlook.<sup>98</sup>

As it comes to Bactria (be it Achaemenid or claimed by somebody else), the adoption (and adaptation) of such a theoretical standpoint might be seen as both a daring and a promising step: I would venture to say that is a necessary one. To this day, and Wu Xin’s studies are no exception, the Northeastern offshoots of the Teispid-Achaemenid Empire have been considered, to borrow the title

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<sup>96</sup> Cf. at least Düring and Stek 2018a, Rollinger and Gehler 2022 and, on steppe societies, Rogers 2018. In recent years, an interesting, if not always consistent, application of some of the theories upon which the present study is based has been attempted in the context of one of the frontier zones par excellence among the Achaemenid dahayāva, namely that of Armenia, from an archaeological perspective: see Khatchadourian 2016; 2020, to which the following pages owe a considerable debt. On the so-called «flight zones» and on the strategies adopted by the population(s) living in them in order to escape the control of overarching political entities while at the same time consistently trying of gaining the most from the latter’s – unavoidable – presence struggling however in order to preserve the respective familiar or social group’s autonomy the to-go reference are the numerous works by James Scott, among which the following deserve mention here: 1985; 1998; 2009.

<sup>97</sup> Versluys 2022; forthcoming

<sup>98</sup> On the circular nature of this process see the important remarks by Versluys 2014 and Pitts and Versluys 2015, 3-31. On frontier zones as a cradle of productive and creative adaptations both in space and time see most recently Strootman 2016, several among the contributions in Strootman and Versluys 2017 and, on Central Asia, Hoo 2022.

of a famous – although contested – study on another North, that of the Chinese Empire through its millennial history, a *Perilous Frontier*.<sup>99</sup> In the best scenario, it has been portrayed as a buffer zone sheltering the oasis dwellers from the pastoral raiders of the steppes; in the worst, as an inexhaustible hotbed of rebellious satraps, defecting (sometimes also murderous) generals and, in the staunchest Orientalizing tradition possible, concubines as beautiful as they were (because they were) bewitching and cheating wives, more often than not murderous themselves. In other words, the «Graveyard of Empires», starting with the most ancient in the long run of Eurasian history, in an overlap which is suggestive as it is misleading and ultimately false of ancient history (and histories) on the one hand and immediate – in the technical sense of not mediated, meaning not (self)reflected upon, contemporary experience(s).<sup>100</sup>

Of all the faults attributable to a theory and methodology of this kind, to my mind by far the most serious is that it considers all the actors at play across such a borderland (we may, somewhat schematically, dub them «the Empire», «the Baktrians» and «the Others»: we will return to the latter later on) as static entities, de facto reifying them. In addition, such a stance (again, to be understood in its technical, anthropological meaning) treats as facts what, on closer inspection, appear to be nothing more than statements (or claims, if not wishful thinking). How questionable such a positioning is becomes clear when it is tested, to give but an egregious example, on sources which are anything but neutral, if ever there was one, such as the inscription of King Darius at Bīsūtūn: for in fact it takes for granted the (indeed at least dubious) idea that, in 522 BCE, the Achaemenid Empire in Baktria was already as structured as it appears through the prism – the latter too, in its own way and although to a very different extent than at Bīsūtūn, deformed and deforming – of the Persepolis archive (more on this last point in the second chapter).

As Seth Richardson has forcefully shown in the case of 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE Babylonia, however, such bombastic statements as those to be found in the inscriptions of, for example, Sūmû-El of Larsa (1891 BCE which, tellingly, can withstand close comparison with *The King's Speech* at Bīsūtūn), far from fulfilling a descriptive – or even informative – task («in the year 1891 in Larsa things are as I here say»), they much more bring forward a desire (or an ambition).<sup>101</sup> According to Richardson, moreover, the very same formulation of such ambitious desires (that equals to say: the capability, by

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<sup>99</sup> Barfield 1989, but see already the pioneering work by Owen Lattimore (1988).

<sup>100</sup> See more recently – but not less controversially – Barfield 2001 (which ideas are still endorsed in Bang *et al.* 2021 II, 163). A handbook example of how the (in this case Baktrian) past should not be interpreted and even less explained is represented by Holt 2005 (on which the sharp – although fitting – remarks in Briant 2017a, 26 fn. 91). The fact that this book, marred as it is with overstretched comparisons between Achaemenid Baktrian and modern Afġānistān, has recently (2012) enjoyed a second edition proves the above-raised point concerning the prejudices still surrounding this space both in scholarship and – what appears even more alarming – among the wider public. King 2021, 315-361 for a brilliant new assessment of Baktria's position within the Empire, shrewdly assessing the entanglements between the imperial apparatus and what Dürind and Stek 2018a call the practical situations on the ground.

<sup>101</sup> On the politics of Isin and Larsa see now Wagensonner 2022, with solid previous literature.

Sūmû-El – or Darius – and not by others, to give written expression to those desires) represents in itself a crucial step towards their effective implementation in the real world.<sup>102</sup> With these considerations in mind, it is not out of place to remember that, despite what Darius imposing visual and textual project would lead us to believe, or to forget, the situation we see mirrored in the Persepolis archive (at the current state of our knowledge dated, as it is well known, between, give or take, the years 509 and 494 BCE) follows by at least a generation what it can be assumed might have been the approximate date of Cyrus II's – first? - arrival in, conquest of, and order imposed upon Central Asia (around 530 BCE?) and by more than 10 years Darius' rise to the imperial throne (522-521 BCE) after an infight which brought the entire polity to the verge of collapse. Which is to say, here is where the problems actually start.<sup>103</sup>

To take up another of Seth Richardson's graphic formulas, how in fact are we supposed to imagine the situation in these spaces *Before Things Worked*? That is to say: in the critical stage of the establishment of Teispid power in Baktria and during its even more critical phase of Achaemenid defense and consolidation (through overturn?) in the course of the *annus mirabilis* celebrated by Darius at Bīsūtūn?<sup>104</sup> What can we imagine the representatives of the Empire – in itself in its formative process at the time – might have been capable of accomplishing on the ground?<sup>105</sup> What kind of constraints could the latter as well as the very landscape of Baktria have imposed on the conquering army– in a *longue durée* perspective, such as that informing to a considerable extent the present work, a much more relevant question – on the Achaemenid administration? Put differently: on what kind of affordances could effectively rely those who proclaimed that «this whole land became mine» (*pasāva dahyāuš manā abava*) and, on the other hand, what were the ones playing in the hands of those who conceived their relationship with the Great King (*xšayaθiya*) in a radically different way?<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> The essential theoretical core underlying the idea of what the author calls «the presumptive state» was formulated by Seth Richardson in a landmark 2012 study and has since then been reworked and refined in subsequent publications (e. g. 2014 and 2016).

<sup>103</sup> Rollinger 2016b on Darius' visual program at Bīsūtūn and its Near Eastern precedents. Kuhrt 2021 and Waters 2022, 108-156 on Cyrus' imperial project. Waters 2010 for a compelling (if tentative) chronology of the King Eastern campaign(s) and its implications.

<sup>104</sup> See Richardson 2017. The very name of the place chosen by Darius in order to eternalize his deeds (from Old Persian \**Bagāstāna*, namely «the place of the gods») should give the interpreter pause to think. Since it represents one of the very few extensive (primary) narrative sources from which snippets of (early) Achaemenid history can be reconstructed, it goes without saying that the point is not to leave it out of the historical gaze, but to regard it for what it is, which is to say perhaps the most unbalanced version possible of the event it is reporting (a case which could be made for many other *Res Gestae*, including, most famously, those of emperors Augustus and Šābūhr).

<sup>105</sup> Düring and Stek 2018a, 10.

<sup>106</sup> On the landscape affordances from a perspective of «state flight» see Scott 2009, 39-62. The Old Persian quotation comes from DB<sub>p</sub> col. III § 39. All the Old Persian translations are taken from the editions by Kent 1953, *TPE*, *API* and *CII* 1, while those from the Ēlāmite rely on the editions by Cameron (*PTT*), Hallock (*PFT*), Arfā'ī 2008, and Henkelman's publications, wherefrom I also take the references and the editions of the not yet published tablets. As for Graeco-Roman sources, I have checked my translation with the most authoritative English editions (especially the Loeb Classical Library series) as well as with those in other European languages (mainly German, French, and Italian).



Questions of this kind inevitably raise another, crucial issue: given the fact that, broadly speaking, when we talk about the «Persians» we are, more or less, clear about whom we mean (Cyrus II and his Persian-Ēlāmite milieu), what exactly do we have in mind when we refer to the «Baktrians», to the «Central Asian peoples» or, more generically, to the «locals»? The importance of the problem is inversely proportional to the frequency with which it is currently debated in the specialist literature. Simplifying a little (but, hopefully, not too much) the various positions, scholars tend to identify the «border» (in itself a concept which would be in need of further qualification: I myself choose to speak of frontier zones or *borderlands*) between Baktria and Sogdiana with one of the two mighty Central Asian rivers, namely the Amudaryo (Oxus), while the second one, the Syrdaryo (Iaxartes), is seen as separating the latter satrapy and the steppe people, called Σκύθοι in the Greek sources, *Scythae* by the Roman historians and Sakā in the (Old Persian) Achaemenid inscriptions.<sup>107</sup> A few comments are in order here.

First: such a partition of the imperial territory is entirely hypothetical, for on the one hand the administrative (to say nothing of the geographic) boundaries of each Achaemenid territory are never explicitly mentioned in the primary sources - provided they ever existed, which in the case of an Empire claiming universal rule can in itself be questioned.<sup>108</sup> Therefore, on the other hand, they had to be reconstructed by relying entirely on the information gauged from Greek and Roman historians, whose precise understanding of the topography of the territories to the east of Ekbatana is, to say the least, somewhat shaky.<sup>109</sup> Second: to this classification another – much more problematic – might be added, namely the partition of Central Asian people between the oases dwellers (mostly concentrated in Baktria, in the Murǧ-āb delta in Margiana, along the course of the Zarafšān, and in the Surxondaryo) on the one side and, on the other, the steppe inhabitants roaming the plains of Sogdiana and the neighboring regions to the West (as in the case of Chorasmia) and to the East, such as Ustrūšana (اسروشنه, in modern-day Farǧāne valley (Фарғона), at the crossroad between Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Taǧikistān).<sup>110</sup> Such distinctions, if not carefully qualified (which, notably, not always happens) take with them a whole array of issues, among which three can be highlighted here.

The first is related to one of the main sources out of which such classifications ultimately come, namely Strabo and, through him, (a stream of the) tradition related to the Alexander historians.<sup>111</sup> The main concerns with these authors and their works – which in some cases can be studied with great

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<sup>107</sup> For a recent historical-geographical overview of ancient Central Asia see Morris 2019a, 59-62.

<sup>108</sup> Rapin 2018b on Achaemenid mental maps as reflected in Herodotos' work.

<sup>109</sup> See most recently Rapin 2014 on the so-called *Vulgata* tradition.

<sup>110</sup> Note Filanovič 2010 and Burjakov 2011 for two recent topographic studies of this and neighboring regions.

<sup>111</sup> And here too distinctions should apply: how much, and in what respects (if at all) is Seleukid historiography – see Primo 2009, Visscher 2019 – different from the tradition coming from Alexandria, and how does this impact on the way our sources understand the Central Asian space? Morris 2019b and Mairs 2020b for a discussion of the available sources from the standpoint concerning the Hellenistic and post-Hellenistic period.

profit, as Briant has repeatedly shown –, derives both from their (sometimes very) poor understanding of the ecologies and social structures of Central Asia's spaces, a point recently raised in a very convincing way especially by Rapin, and from the broader interpretative framework underlying their narrative. For the latter in fact make use of concepts, worldviews, and analytical tools which in Central Asia (but the same might be said for the Caucasus, not by chance two environments in which, to give but one telling example, people usually grow up speaking three or more languages, which means with a bewildering spectrum of (social) identities), simply do not make sense.<sup>112</sup> Secondly: an entirely new range of historical and ethnographic studies concerning the very ambitious (and spectacularly failed, especially in its Stalinist version) Soviet experiment in spaces characterized by complex ecologies, rough terrains and, most of all, a long-lasting tradition of «state evasion» (from the Azerbaijani countryside, especially in the Naxçıvan area bordering with Northwestern Irān to – which is of special interest to the present work - various regions of Central Asia, from Uzbekistan to Qazaqstan) have been able to show in remarkable – and appalling – detail how flawed (and dangerous, not only for the affected population but – tellingly – also for the state itself) projects aimed at producing ex nihilo order and transparency have turned out to be. This is especially true in the case of sociopolitical contexts in which everything, from marital ties to conviviality to the partition of fields and pastures, was on the contrary based on complexity, change, and the constant (re)negotiation of norms and rights.<sup>113</sup>

At first glance farfetched, if not entirely preposterous, the comparison between the establishment of Teispid-Achaemenid power in Baktria on the one hand and, on the other, the Sovietization of Central Asia and the Caucasus I believe on the contrary it might be illuminating for at least the following reasons (and this is the third point I would like to make here).<sup>114</sup> To begin with, unlike Cyrus and Darius in his aftermath, at the time of the creation of the Soviet Socialist Republics of Central Asia (a process which in itself encompassed several years between 1920 - the founding of the Qazaq SSR - and 1929, when it was the turn of Tağikistān and to a certain extent was not even thoroughly completed in the early '30s) the Russian Empire, albeit with another name and under very different

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<sup>112</sup> Strab. 11.11.4, but see also *FGrHist* 134 F 5. On Strabo's geography and anthropology cf. at least some essays by Elvira Migliario (2012; 2014) and Daniela Dueck (2013; 2015 as well as those included in her 2017 edited *Routledge Companion to Strabo*). Mairs 2007 furthermore provides a good illustrative compendium of the alienation – whether actually perceived or consciously constructed it is difficult to say – reflected by Hellenistic sources in the face of the encounter with the culture(s) of Central Asia: Taietti 2022 on Arrian's narrative beyond military history. On the Graeco-Roman tradition on Central Asia see now Morris 2019b and Mairs 2020b. A milestone in the philosophical-anthropological reflection on the experience of the «Other» is represented by Todorov 1982.

<sup>113</sup> For an overview which brilliantly mingles historical reconstruction (on a scale of 7 centuries) with ethnographic enquiry see the contributions collected in Fragner and Kappeler 2006. On the problems entrenched in a State-eye's view see Scott 1998. The sociological and ethnographic study of Caucasian and Central Asian rural contexts which informs the present discussion to a considerable extent is mainly based on the work by the Berlin historian Jörg Baberowski and its school: see for example Baberowski 2003; 2012; 2015 as well as Kindler 2014 and Teichmann 2016. Of no less importance have also been, among others, Northrop 2004, and Viola *et al.* 2005.

<sup>114</sup> Note for example the enlightening Kassimbekova 2014.

premises, had been present there for at least 50 years (the conquest of the Qo'qon Hānate by Konstantin Petrovič von Kaufman dates to 1875).<sup>115</sup> Moreover, and as far as we know contrary to both Cyrus and Darius, the Red Army, not to mention the party activists and officials, who were killed in the hundreds in the process, had however to fight for years to get the better of the armed resistance of a whole panoply of local rebels, known in the press as *basmači* (басмачи). As for the, even more painful, complicated and full of setbacks, process of establishing the administration and its related infrastructures and habitus in the newly (re)conquered territories, to say nothing of a phenomenon still more difficult to measure such as that of cultural penetration, at the time, and not by chance, dubbed «rooting» – *korenizacija* –, the comparison between the frustration oozing from the reports of the former ČK (then *NKVD*) officials on the one hand and, on the other, the well-oiled, highly sophisticated, and astonishingly effective machine of the Persepolis archive, if first and foremost speaks volumes as it comes to Soviet shortcomings, at the same time raises the rather unsettling question concerning the strategies undertaken by the Persians in order to achieve such a degree of territorial control (as well as, which counts the most, of the population living within that space).<sup>116</sup>

There is, finally, another argument, which to my mind is also the paramount one in order to support the adoption of such a comparative outlook. With all due proportions having been made, in fact the unfathomable unbalance between the coercive means available to the Soviet state on the one hand and of the Achaemenid Empire (to say nothing of the Teispids, when everything was just taking shape) on the other, requires us to reflect seriously on the features of the latter's organization of their domains, and especially on the dynamics of sociopolitical interactions with their subjects, since it is only thanks to these two factors that all the Great Kings of Persia, from Cyrus II to Artaxerxes V (Bessos) and then, to a certain extent, even Alexander and Seleukos, were able to enjoy uninterrupted, and apparently (almost) unchallenged control over men and resources which, as we shall see, were fundamental both to the Empire's political survival and to the effectiveness and persuasive nature of its self-representation.<sup>117</sup>

In strikingly contrast with all the above, the Soviet counterpart of the Persian King of Kings (not by chance known in the country as either *вождь* (*vožd'*) or *хозяин* (*hozjain*), which one might not unfaithfully translate as «Mighty Ruler» and «Master of the House»), namely comrade Stalin, did not manage to subdue either Central Asia or even its native Caucasus to its will until the eve of the invasion of Poland, which equals to say both ten long years after the official founding of the Tağik

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<sup>115</sup> On the Russian conquest and the new colonial order of Central Asia see now Khalid 2021, 75-113.

<sup>116</sup> Compare Kassimbekova 2014, 160-178 on Soviet reports from Tağikistān whose redactors were forced to lie in order to appease Moscow to the point of making impossible to actually take stock of the situation in the republic with the terse, because intelligible to anybody involved at first glance, clay tablets from Persepolis.

<sup>117</sup> On this latter point see Briant 2002, 743-754; 2009a; 2009b, the first two outstanding analysis, among other things, for their being many years ahead of the scholarly opinion at the time.

SSR and at the cost of a famine (in Qazaqstan, the Kuban' region, and in the North of the Transcaucasian Federation, to say nothing about Central Russia and the Ukraine) which claimed between two and four million victims. The latter was moreover followed by arguably the two most terrible years among the 30 during which he held power (including the second World War): the Great Terror, in itself a litmus of the shaky (presumptive, in Richardson's terms) nature of his (Empire's) power over those regions.<sup>118</sup> Only in little, remote Taġikistān, the «cannibal years» led to the liquidation of - at least - a thousand of the Party's most prominent members: as for the civilian population, to the best of my knowledge there are no (truly reliable) statistics at present, but there is every reason to believe that the consequence of the Soviet «Great Fracture» (Великий Перелом) were as momentous as they were devastating. The Qazaq example leaves little doubt about this.<sup>119</sup>

One might raise the objection that - in the truest sense of the words – no matter what, Central Asia was nevertheless conquered within some decades, as it happened centuries ago with the Persians. This is, however, to miss a crucial point. If in fact, on the one hand, Stalin's strategies were abandoned literally in the very days after the vožd's death, never to be resumed again (at the very least not in their original features), on the other those elaborated by Cyrus II and his successors 1. in much more challenging circumstances and, it is not out of place to stress it again, 2. having at their disposal a significantly more constrained amount of resources, successfully granted to the Teispid-Achaemenid power in Central Asia a life of more than 200 years. As if this were already not enough, there is increasingly growing – but more often than not ignored, or at least not valued as it should - evidence showing that, without the templates set by Achaemenid infrastructures (to be understood *lato sensu* as both physical as well as in terms of governmentality), Hellenistic Baktria would not have survived Alexander's conquest.<sup>120</sup>

Long story short, the perhaps most ambitious theoretical and methodological goal of the present study is, with all due caution, to systematically apply to Teispid-Achaemenid Baktria (and neighboring regions, especially Sogdiana and the steppes) at least some of the analytical categories developed by scholars such as Scott, Richardson or White, and successfully exploited by them for their study of those spaces defined by the Yale anthropologists as «shatter zones». In the context of scholarship on Southeast Asia (which also includes, to a certain extent, Afġānistān itself), these spaces

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<sup>118</sup> See at least Baberowski 2003, 669-830 and Kindler 2014, 232-311.

<sup>119</sup> Teichmann 2016, 242-304 provides considerable insight on the issue of Stalin's unbridled terror as an effective (for him and for his clique, but devastating for almost anything else, including the economic output) strategy of governmentality in Uzbekistan and Taġikistān.

<sup>120</sup> Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 139-140, Wu 2020, 612: «Without the Achaemenid administrative system in Central Asia, the whole region would have taken on a very different trajectory». It is important to stress, as «the region» implies, that such remarks are by no means limited to Baktria alone, although the satrapy played a paramount role in this process.

are labelled, *toto pro partibus*, with the name of Zomia.<sup>121</sup> Otherwise stated, these are spaces (both physical and social) in which, as White himself has it, two – or more – parts are forced to act without any of them being strong enough in order to dispose of the other(s) *neither manu militari* nor, a point which needs to be emphasized, by making recourse to a strategy as simple as it was effective, namely simply by leaving.<sup>122</sup> Put in a nutshell, this implies the necessity of renouncing to look at a given Empire – no matter how categorical the latter’s ruling class might be in stating the opposite – not as the only (a still – too – widely shared perspective), but on the contrary as one – though arguably the most outstanding - among a plurality of actors entangled in a social and environmental context on which terrain, to a closer enquiry, it is the Empire itself the one who, as the newcomer on the stage, turns out to be in a rather disadvantaged position, and thus in need of allies: and the latter, as it is all too well known, are by no means a cheap commodity.

Otherwise stated, while following in the footsteps of Wu and King in their remarkable attempt at framing Baktria in the context of the Persian Empire, this study also aims at studying the latter’s development over the course of its history in the light of Central Asia’s sociopolitical and environmental background. In order to achieve this, at least two important methodological requirements are to be kept in mind. Firstly, it is time to recognize that the distinctions we find in our narrative sources (including the primary ones), between «Baktrians», «Sogdians», «Chorasmians» and – especially – «Sakā» are, to a considerable extent if not entirely, arbitrary, for they are the outcome of a very specific (imperial) way of looking at both the space the Teispids and the Achaemenids sought to conquer and the people living in it (what Scott calls the ethnographic-classificatory state-like way of seeing). Once this has been done, this perspective has to be abandoned in favor of a different paradigm based on the concept of situational (or context-based) identity, be it political, ethnic, social, or otherwise.<sup>123</sup> Such a theoretical shift is of special importance because, as among other researchers most recently and convincingly Mairs and Hoo have shown in their studies on Hellenistic Baktria, in the following pages it will be argued that, even in Teispid-Achaemenid

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<sup>121</sup> The neologism was originally coined by van Schendel 2002, but see more recently Scott 2009, 8. Significantly, when defining the boundaries of Zomia, some scholars have argued in favor of including territories such as the Caucasus and Afġānistān (Scott 2009, x-xi): at least in geographical-environmental terms, the present choice to adopt the term and the categories underlying the analysis of the interactions that took (but one might argue still take) place within such a context and to apply them to the study of the Teispid-Achaemenid precedent in the region seems therefore amply justified.

<sup>122</sup> White 2011<sup>2</sup>, 50-52. Such a condition of – however unwelcomed – unavoidable co-dependance has been tellingly labelled «the satrapal condition» by Khatchadourian 2016, 1-25. Worth mentioning as a comparative case study is also the situation in Malaysia over the course of at least the last 200 years as it emerges from Scott’s analysis (1985, 62).

<sup>123</sup> Once more, the parallel with the Soviet Union provides another illuminating comparative case study: Hirsch 2005 and the contributions related to this issue in Fragner and Kappeler 2006. On the concept of situational ethnicity and of the social production of cultural (and political) affiliation see the landmarking study by Amselle 1990 as well as, more recently, the important contributions by Maurizio Giangiulio (2010a; 2010b; 2010c; 2010d) and Henry Colburn (2020a, 131-188; 2020c), the latter’s main concern being the Achaemenid Empire (more precisely Egypt). On the Sakā world(s) see moreover the contributions in Simpson and Pankova 2021 and now Linduff and Rubinson 2021 on Pazyryk (with the Achaemenid Empire however in a rather background position).

Central Asia – and this is one of the main points of the present study – it is unwisely to see somebody as being «Persian», «Baktrian» or «Sakā». Instead, I contend that people choose among a wide pool of social options what to be(come) according to what circumstances require or suggest it might be more profitable for a given individual and/or for the reference group (s)he is – or claims to be – affiliated with. Secondly, it seems the time has come to take up the challenge, recently raised by Bleda Düring and Tesse Stek in a thought-provoking edited volume, of looking at imperial borderlands and at its inhabitants as actors endowed with agency and not, in accordance with the famous Platonic metaphor, as lumps of wax which the political-military apparatus of the Empire is capable of shaping as it pleases.<sup>124</sup>

It is equally essential to avoid the (only apparently more sophisticated) perspective that tends to see Teispid-Achaemenid-era Central Asia as developing, and its inhabitants as acting, simply in a responsive way with regards to decisions taken at the court of the Great King, a standpoint which has been pursued most consequentially in recent years by Wu Xin.<sup>125</sup> Even assuming – while not granting – that talking about «Persianization» might be a useful way to address the issue of political and ideological cohesion within the Empire, it is however of paramount importance to conceive of this phenomenon as being the outcome of the interaction of all the parties involved, although in different ways and to different degrees, in the process. It must also be constantly borne in mind that, as shown by Versluys, there is no action exerted by a given (political, economic, religious...) «center» on the territories it claims to govern that is not matched by a (re)action exerted in the opposite direction, the effects of which can be equally transformative.<sup>126</sup> After all, such a methodology does little more than (the effort of) taking into account the results of the most sophisticated research conducted in the course of the last years at other outskirts of Zomia's territories, while at the same time acknowledging the challenges of such an enterprise, the most evident among them being that, in stark contrast with Achaemenid Baktria, cases such as those studied by Scott are blessed by the existence of a considerably wider corpus of (written) evidence, especially of archival nature.<sup>127</sup> If we turn our attention to the Roman Empire's *limes* (from the provinces of Africa to those of Moesia and Pannonia in Eastern Europe), compelling studies published over the last 20 years have shown beyond any reasonable doubt the shrewd diplomatic *savoir-faire* of the so-called barbarians. Remarkably, this

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<sup>124</sup> Plat. *Th.*, 194c. See also Versluys forthcoming and Rollinger 2023.

<sup>125</sup> See for example the main line of reasoning adopted in Wu 2018, tellingly entitled *Exploiting the Virgin Land*. The attentive reader will not have failed to notice that we are faced, again, with a pre-Silk Road version of the «Kuṣāṇa middleman» theory, to my mind once and for all demolished by Morris 2019c, 681-687.

<sup>126</sup> Versluys 2014; 2022; forthcoming.

<sup>127</sup> Brilliant examples of such a methodology are the recent contributions by Boozer 2018 (on the Southernmost fringes of the Roman Empire in Egypt, at the borders with Nubia), Ristvet 2018 (a subtle study of the dynamics of the Urartean kingdom in 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE Caucasus) and Colburn 2018, who analyzes the changes brought by the dialectic of local power and imperial control in the landscape and society of the Egyptian oasis of al-Ḥārga, located in the modern governorate of the wādī al- Ġadīd. See also the theoretical remarks in Düring and Stek 2018b.

goes also – if not especially – for those among them considered to have been the most barbarian of all, by no chance (and like their Baktrio-Sogdian ancestors), coming moreover from a place as remote and frightening (Τάρταρος> Tartarum>Tartaria ≈ Ta(r)tars) as, in the eyes of Mediterranean-based societies, Central Asia was: namely Attila’s Huns.<sup>128</sup>

Without in any way attempting to downplay the importance of these works, it must nevertheless be acknowledged that, as it comes to theoretical paradigms and/or to the importance of historical and ethnographic comparative material, the greatest contribution to the development of the methodology adopted in this work probably comes from Sinology, and in particular – on the one hand - from the research conducted over the last two decades on the relations between the Hán and Xiōngnú Empires; on the other, from the models developed in order to understand the *Rise & Organization* of steppe-based Empires.<sup>129</sup> To stress but one among the most interesting parallels following from such a comparative attitude, it should be noted that the picture of an Empire ab originibus solidly structured and cohesive, which was moreover intent at wresting from the barbarism of the steppe lifestyle legions of more (or less) feral shepherds has been, to say the least, greatly reduced by the critical examination of both the literary and archaeological evidence underlying the above mentioned studies.<sup>130</sup> It does moreover not hurt to remember that, at the time of its expansion Northwards, both the Hán and Achaemenid Empires came from periods, albeit of different chronological extent, of internecine warfare of potentially catastrophic scope. Put it differently, it looks like we need a more careful assessment of the dynamics that shaped the Persian Northeastern borderland(s) in Central Asia, as this reappraisal bears the potential of consistently influence our understanding of the development of the satrapy, and eventually of a not negligible part of the Empire, itself.

As it has already been pointed out several times, in Baktria the available sources simply do not allow - as it is the case with the Roman and Hán Empires - to demonstrate the soundness of the hypotheses presented so far: a certain degree of speculation is therefore unavoidable. This having been said, however, such is precisely the purpose of developing a model (or, as I rather prefer, a reconstructive

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<sup>128</sup> On the evolution (but it would not be completely out of place to speak of an involution) of the concept of Ta(r)tary in Europe collective memory see the discussion in Goršenina 2014, 101-124. On the negotiated nature of Rome’s African borders (*limes Africae proconsularis*) during the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE see, among others, the detailed study by Cordovana 2007, 209-282, while on the management of the Northeastern (Danubian) frontier zone see Palazzi 2014, 195-258. On the Huns political shrewdness see Nečaeva 2014; 2018 as well as Meier 2015; 2020.

<sup>129</sup> As among others especially Robert Rollinger (forthcoming) has not failed to recognize, since the studies – then held as more or less the last word on the matter, by Barfield (1989) and Yú (1967; 1994<sup>2</sup>), the bibliography on this topic has grown to the point of being almost no more manageable. While not aiming at being exhaustive, it might nevertheless be of some use referring to the following works and to the bibliography enlisted by their authors: Brosseder 2008; 2011; 2015, 2018; 2019, Di Cosmo 1994; 1999a; 1999b; 2002; 2010; 2011; 2013; 2015; 2018; 2020, Kradin 2011a, 2011b; 2015a; 2015b; 2018, Miller 2009; 2011; 2014; 2015 and Selbitschka 2015. Of no smaller interest – and of great importance for some of the hypotheses developed further in this work, have been the studies on the origin of the first Türkic Qāğanate by Golden 1992; 2011a; 2011b; 2018.

<sup>130</sup> Beckwith 2023 for a compelling comparative approach to the problem taking into account both the Chinese and the Irānian worlds.

scenario). That is to say, trying to explain a complex phenomenon as economically and efficiently as possible. Therefore, to the scenario of a Land of the Unrule-able, as Wu Xin has it, the following chapters aim at counterpose another one, which starts from the conceptualization of Teispid (and then Achaemenid) Central Asia as a multilayered space, which was structured, maintained, and modified itself over the course of several decades due to a process of constant negotiation of its defining features between the multiple actors entangled within it.

If we now wanted to summarize in four points the theoretical and methodological aims of this work, they are the following. Somehow paradoxically, the first can be spelled out *e contrario*: 1. the next chapters are not intended to replace one interpretative paradigm, which is probably wrong (namely that of Bactria as a rebellious satrapy constantly on the verge of secession and/or invasion by the peoples of the steppes, the already (in)famous «Graveyard of Empires»), with another, most likely no less wrong one, which is to say that of a *Time Regained*, centered on a narrative which makes Bactria the beating heart of the Empire, if not even the «lost homeland» of the Achaemenid dynasty itself, of Zoroāstra, of Eurasian monotheisms, and so on.<sup>131</sup> On the contrary, what this study is explicitly concerned with is 2. the acknowledgement, along the lines of the overarching framework recently put forward by Lauren Morris, of the full extent of the complexity of Central Asia *qua ipsa*. 3. Moreover, rather than striving to assemble every single fragment of evidence available in an attempt – which is in itself doomed to failure – to construct a coherent narrative, another important goal is to acknowledge how little we really know about this space in terms, for example, of the processes and actors involved in the processes underpinning its formation.<sup>132</sup> However, starting from such rather disappointing conclusions, the present work also aims 4. at critically rethinking what we thought we knew about Bactria during Achaemenid hegemony (including its Teispid precedents), at the same time paying special attention to the spaces, the processes, and the protagonists of other contexts which, while being of similar complexity, have however the considerable advantage to be better – or simply more – known to us thanks to a broader amount of source material.

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<sup>131</sup> It might be thought that such a catalogue serves only rhetorical purposes. This is however not the case, as the recent book, promising as it is in his inviting title (*Discovering Cyrus*) by Zarghamee (2013, to be compared for example with Briant 2018a, 135-142) quite clearly shows: see e. g. pp. 123-158 and 501-511. Once the – challenging – reading of this ponderous biography has been completed, the Cyrus which has been discovered might look to somebody much closer to the Amīr Timūr celebrated (more exactly, invented, *sensu* B. Anderson) by O‘zbek national(ist) propaganda as the founding father of the reborn Motherland (pace the life and deeds of the first true O‘zbek emperor, Muḥammad Šāybanī Ḥān) than to the king which, in the famous Cyrus Cylinder at ll. 20-22 thus speaks: «I am Cyrus, king of the universe, mighty king, king of Babylon, king of Šumer and Akkad, king of the four quarters || son of Cambyses [Kabūjiya], great king, king of Anšan, descendant of Teispes [Šešpeš], great king, king of Anšan || eternal seed of kingship, whose reign was loved by Bēl and Nabū, whose kingship they wanted to please their hearts» (translation based on Schaudig 2001 and *TPE* I, 71). On the Ēlāmite (and not Persian, as it is still to be heard and read) origin of Cyrus’ name see most recently Henkelman 2017b, 292 fn. 34 with the related previous bibliography and Waters 2022, 1-33.

<sup>132</sup> King 2021 has already achieved much concerning this point: note his concluding assessment at pp. 366-380.



If adequately developed, such a comparative approach bears the remarkable potential of allowing the researcher to see if and to what extent the chosen comparanda help to shed some, albeit tenuous, light on what, as far as 6<sup>th</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE Central Asia is concerned, the available sources – be they Achaemenid or Graeco-Roman, archaeological or epigraphic – very simply leave completely in the dark. In the remainder of this introduction, I shall try to elaborate a little more on the stages through which I seek to test the validity of the standpoint outlined so far. The following chapter, which is dedicated to a more in-depth examination of the sources underpinning said endeavor, aims instead at making explicit the foundations of the analysis that will take shape in the following pages.

#### 4. *The Return of the (Great) King*: an Outline of the Present Work

As it has been said at the end of the previous section, the following chapter of this study is mainly devoted to the discussion of the different kinds of evidence on which, as a whole, it is based. The third chapter (*Nomina nuda tenemus*) focuses instead on an exhaustive examination as possible of what at the present state of research is the oldest evidence available of the name for Bactria (Bāxtrīš in Old Persian, Βακτριανή/Βακτρία in the Greek sources, Bactriana in the Latin ones), namely the trilingual inscription of Bīsutūn. Among many others, one of the fundamental reasons why such an inquiry is needed is that, at Bīsutūn, we find the most elaborate description of the Teispid-Achaemenid imperial space as it (second) founder, the Great King Darius I, wanted it to be represented to the eyes of his contemporaries as well as handed down to posterity.

The philological investigation of specific key terms that recur in the text of the inscription, above all the noun xšaçaṗāwā («satrap») and others derived from the same verbal root (xšay-, meaning «to govern», «to hold power») aims at subjecting to critical scrutiny the image, depicted and therefore, at least in its intentions, verified (both in the sense of «sanctioned» and of verum facere, «brought to reality», «made true») by the inscription itself, of the Great King as the sole and undisputed holder of power within the imperial space. This latter narrative was taken up and distorted, in a tyrannical slant, by Aeschylus in his well-known tragedy (*The Persians*) and became one of the everlasting symbols of Achaemenid «despotism».<sup>133</sup> If, however, following in the footsteps of the semiotic and narratological reading applied by Richardson to the inscriptions of the Mesopotamian kings, we try to look at Bīsutūn not as an account, however partisan, of a series of events that have already taken place, but instead as the expression of an ambition (or an endeavor, what Richardson calls «a claim»),

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<sup>133</sup> Aesch. *Pers.*, ll. 211-213: «εὖ γὰρ ἴστε, παῖς ἐμὸς || πράξας μὲν εὖ θαυμαστὸς ἂν γένοιτ' ἀνὴρ, || κακῶς δὲ πράξας, οὐχ ὑπεύθυνος πόλει, || σωθεὶς δ' ὁμοίως τῆσδε κοιρανεῖ χθονός» [«[...] for you know well that, if my son were successful, he would be a very much admired man; but were he to fail – well, he is not accountable to the community, and if he comes home safe he remains ruler of this land»]. On xšay- and xšaçaṗāwā see the seminal treatment in *WAI*, 285.

we are confronted with a whole new set of questions.<sup>134</sup> What does Darius exactly mean when he speaks of «Baktria»? And what does he have in mind in the moment in which he boasts that «that land» became his («mine»)? Who are exactly, moreover Dādêršiš and Vivāna, Darius' two bandakā – or so at least he asserts – in Baktria and Arachosia? And, on top of this all, on what foundations relies the power that these two men (apparently on behalf of Darius himself) appear to have held astride the two slopes of the Hindūkūš? Finally: what are the consequences of conceiving the spread of Teispid (and in its wake Achaemenid) power in Baktria in terms similar to those adopted in the case of Sūmû-El of Larsa, that is, of thinking of Persian-ruled Central Asia as a presumptive satrapy, at the very least until Darius was able to crush his opponents during the civil war of 522-519 BCE?<sup>135</sup>

The implementation of such a theoretical framework, it should be noted, would not be possible if, as still argued by some of the most authoritative specialists on the topic, the origins of Achaemenid Baktria had to be conceived as nothing (or little) more than Cyrus' annexation of a vast Central Asian kingdom (or even several lesser realms), from whose subdivision into smaller administrative districts the different Persian satrapies would eventually have been carved out (as far as it is of interest for the present work those of Baktria, Sogdiana, Chorasmia, Margiana and, most likely, the Paropamisadae); moreover with the above mentioned units being structured around the two most important of them: Baktria to the North and Arachosia to the South of the Hindūkūš, the latter, interestingly, being, according to the narrative of Bīsutūn, exactly the two dahayāva entrusted by Darius to his bandakā.<sup>136</sup> However, it will be argued that a close reading of the available sources which pays due attention to the archaeological evidence does not support such a hypothesis, thus de facto bringing us once more back to Bīsutūn. From here follows the paramount question bridging the discussion so far developed to the fourth chapter of this study: what kind of landscapes (both physical and anthropic) should we imagine was Cyrus confronted with as, around the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, he entered the Central Asian stage perhaps for the first, and possibly even not the last time?<sup>137</sup>

The pages (The Road to Oxiana: *reconstructing a «presumptive satrapy»*) devoted to the roughly 20-years period elapsing between the conquest of Baktria at Cyrus' hand and Darius' rise to the imperial throne is arguably the most sensitive of the whole enterprise, at least from a methodological viewpoint. With the sole exception of the – rather compendious – narrative in Book 1 of Herodotos' *Histories*, not a single piece of written evidence (be it transmitted or excavated) has come down to us

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<sup>134</sup> Cf. Richardson 2012, 4. Otherwise stated, the suggestion put forward here is not to take the whole Bīsutūn narrative as a retrospective assessment, but as a proactive statement of an imperial power in the making, which as such had to be negotiated on the ground with many and by no means disinterested actors.

<sup>135</sup> Richardson 2017.

<sup>136</sup> See for example Jacobs 1994, 209, still arguably the to-go reference on the subject, though in need of an update in the light of the most recent evidence, especially the archaeological one.

<sup>137</sup> Waters 2010 for a high chronology of Cyrus' (first) encroachment in Central Asia.

which might help in shedding some light over this crucial chronological span.<sup>138</sup> We are therefore compelled to rely entirely on archaeology. However, the results of some recent excavations carried out both in the territory of ancient Bactria and in another area characterized by a considerably high rate of what Scott would call «state evasion potential» such as the dahayāuš of Armenia, seem to provide very interesting information about the socio-spatial organization of a territory endowed with the affordances of Teispid and, arguably, (early) Achaemenid Central Asia.<sup>139</sup> If combined with a general theory of what the landscape allowed – and even more so of what it did not – to a project of conquest and administration («extraction and control») such as the Persian one, archaeological evidence can perhaps provide important insights to support the hypothesis, which foregrounds this entire study – of the genesis and development (*The Rise & Organization*) of Achaemenid power in Central Asia as a complex phenomenon, which resulted out of a – and as the trajectory of Cyrus' attempt at tapping into Sakā territory shows, anything but predictable or teleological – process of negotiation and co-construction of a common ground capable of allowing the various players in the game to explore their respective strengths and those of their adversary while, in Richardson's words, slowly but steadily «getting confident».<sup>140</sup>

It should almost go without saying that, with the – at least partial – exception of what we will define here only for the sake of convenience as «the Empire», the features of those actors cannot be deduced from the archaeological evidence, as repeatedly (and improperly) has been attempted to do in the past. Luckily enough, the considerable progresses made in the last years in the study of another of Zomia's Central and Inner Asian outskirts as the Mongolian steppe (both in the Ordos and in Transbaikalia) on the one hand and, on the other, a careful analysis of the information provided by the ethnography of both the Caucasus and Central Asia before Stalin's first five-year plan (пятилетка) changed everything, provide researchers with a rich comparative repertoire, both in terms of evidence and, what perhaps counts the most, as it comes to conceptual categories on the basis of which the same evidence might fruitfully be scrutinized. The combined use of these sources aims at elaborating a more nuanced – but hopefully, if somewhat paradoxically, more convincing – picture of the relations (and conflicts) underlying the birth of the Teispid-Achaemenid imperial space in Central Asia, which Darius dares to boast before Ahuramazdā had become his. The complexity of these interactions, and the sensitivity of the equilibria on which they were based, far from supporting the (by now badly outdated but nevertheless remarkably resilient at least as far as Central Asia is concerned) idea of a «weak» (or «elusive») Empire, should on the contrary make us reflect on the adaptability of the actors involved, each of whom, it must be stressed, had as its first and perhaps only aim to gain the maximum

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<sup>138</sup> Cf. most recently Kuhrt 2021 for an overview.

<sup>139</sup> Cf. most recently the remarks in Payne and King 2020.

<sup>140</sup> Richardson 2016.

profit for itself and its social group from the socio-political relationship in which imperial representatives and subjects, rulers and ruled, were all involved, whether they liked it or not.

Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, not much unlike the French and the Algonquians within the Pays-d'en-Haut, in Baktria too the actors on the stage seem to have come to realize rather quickly, and perhaps to their dismay, that the full achievement of their strategic goals was possible not in spite, but on the contrary by virtue of the existence, which in some cases they would probably have gladly done without, of their respective counterpart(s). Seen from such a perspective, even the most arrogant statements of domination and appropriation of territory, men, and resources by the Achaemenid rulers take on a different twist. In order to obtain what it wants - and not infrequently needs –, the «center» (the Empire) is thus forced to give what the borderland(s) requests and – indeed – not infrequently demands.<sup>141</sup>

Although in the following pages it will be tried to carefully avoid as consistently as possible terms such as «center» and «periphery», it should nevertheless be noted that, in contrast to the theoretical frameworks first elaborated by Wallerstein, later developed by his followers (and to a given extent still consistently used, although more or less disguised, also by scholars of the ancient world), in the present work those and similar labels, if anything, are used only with a purely denotative, spatial function (as both a possible reading of the so-called dahayāva lists and a well-known passage in Herodotos might suggest, seen from Persepolis Baktria (or for what matters Greece) was more distant, and thus in a certain sense «peripheral», than, say, Susa or Babylon).<sup>142</sup> On the contrary, and following in the footsteps of the work of numerous scholars such as, among others, Baberowski, Düring and Stek, Scott, Versluys, Rollinger and the research group directed by von Reden, in the next chapters geographical liminality will be recognized a decidedly stronger agency, which in more than one case will be shown as capable of considerably influencing the choices the «center» (the Empire) decides or is compelled to make. It will not have gone unnoticed that it is once more the circular nature of such a process which represents the true novelty of the theoretical standpoint which the present work seeks to apply to the (Achaemenid) Baktrian case. Instead of being the litmus on which the – alleged – weaknesses of the Persian imperial system are measured, the Central Asian borderlands become

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<sup>141</sup> Hämäläinen 2008, 141-239 on the degree to which Spaniards and Comanches were ready to compromise with each other in order to better exploit one another.

<sup>142</sup> Cf. Wallerstein 2004. On the mental map(s) of both Herodotos (see especially Hdt. 1.134.2: «τιμῶσι δὲ ἐκ πάντων τοὺς ἄγχιστα ἐωυτῶν οἰκέοντας μετὰ γε ἐωυτούς, δευτέρα δὲ τοὺς δευτέρους; μετὰ δὲ κατὰ λόγον προβαίνοντες τιμῶσι: ἤκιστα δὲ τοὺς ἐωυτῶν ἐκαστάτω οἰκημένους ἐν τιμῇ ἄγονται, νομίζοντες ἐωυτούς εἶναι ἀνθρώπων μακρῶ τὰ πάντα ἀρίστους, τοὺς δὲ ἄλλους κατὰ λόγον 1 τῆς ἀρετῆς ἀντέχεσθαι, τοὺς δὲ ἐκαστάτω οἰκέοντας ἀπὸ ἐωυτῶν κακίστους εἶναι») and the royal inscriptions cf. Dan 2013 and Rapin 2018b.

here the testing ground on which to assess the degree(s) of sophistication and, most importantly, flexibility, and resilience of that same system.<sup>143</sup>

As it has already been noted during this introduction, when it comes to assessing these topics with regards of the Achaemenid Empire, the late 6<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE are blessed with the priceless advantage of being at least partially covered by the huge amount of evidence provided by the Persepolis archive. This invaluable material provides the basis for the discussion developed in the fifth chapter of the present work (*Thus Saith the Lord: Darius, Son of Vīštāspa*). In the light of the information which can be gained from this source – as well as from the broader corpus of tablets yet to be or published in several scattered studies –, this section aims at discussing once again, in the wake of this newly expanded corpus, the well-known topic of Baktria’s integration within the «world economy» (today one might even say «global system») established by the foundation of the Persian Empire, in order to try to push the debate a (however little) step beyond the conclusions reached by Briant, and further refined by more recent studies (notably by Henkelman and King) dedicated to the working process of Achaemenid administration within the imperial domains.<sup>144</sup> Thanks to these foundational works, that men, animals, information, raw goods, luxury wares, and much more were moving in great amounts, on a considerable pace and with great frequency from one end of the Empire to the other has in fact repeatedly been shown, and must indeed be taken for granted. If we leave aside the hypothesis of an exclusively predatory outlook, which for many reasons (some of them we will be able to discuss in further detail in the following chapters) must be excluded, much less self-evident is the most profitable way in which such movements have to be understood.<sup>145</sup> Aiming at throwing some (more) light on this issue, the hypotheses brought forward in the present study will rely on the following main elements. Firstly, if we consider the state of the evidence, the recent publication of an entire new set of tablets enables scholars to study from a considerably different (and deeper) perspective than it was previously possible the numbers, qualifications, tasks, and payments of the Baktrians (and Sogdians) on the road across the Achaemenid imperial infrastructures.<sup>146</sup> Beyond proving, on a documentary basis, the claim according to which Baktria played a paramount role within the Empire’s economy – which is by the way a remarkable fact in itself – the newly available material allows moreover to better understand why such a statement is true, and with what consequence for both the Empire itself and the satrapy’s territory (as well as of

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<sup>143</sup> Cf. Doyle 2014a, Versluys 2014, 9-16, von Reden 2015; 2019a. Note Favereau 2021, 224: in order to better understand imperial dynamics as a whole, one has to look at the role assigned to an Empire’s borderlands.

<sup>144</sup> On globalization theory as a fruitful theoretical framework with which to study the Achaemenid Empire see Colburn 2017.

<sup>145</sup> See most recently King 2022 for a study of the frequency, especially around the New Year, of trips to the King from different satrapies of the Empire and the possible implications of such a pattern.

<sup>146</sup> Henkelman 2018a on Baktrians and Sogdians, King 2021, 266-314 and Schütze 2021 on Arachosia.

the borderlands' «further away from Pārsa») and society. Secondly, and more related to the methodological slant of the present discussion, the appreciation of the theoretical insight brought by the so-called material turn in the study of what in a recent *Archaeological Dialogue* Versluys has called «objects in motion» and its introduction within the field of Achaemenid studies by Khatchadourian puts the historian in the rather privileged condition of giving considerable heuristic value to terms such as «contacts», «networks», «exchanges», and «interaction», the sprawling multiplication of which within a given study or even a scholarly discipline raises sometimes the suspect of being inversely proportional to the analytical sharpness of the same concept(s).<sup>147</sup> Despite the fact that – in an extremely high number of cases – the complete lack of any reliable archaeological context makes an even hypothetical interpretation of the overwhelming majority of objects «of Central Asian provenance» a remarkably difficult (and risky) enterprise, the developments of socio-anthropological research related to the *Social Life of Things* compel the historian of Achaemenid Central Asia to raise questions such as, among others: what are the reasons behind the fact that a carpet almost surely fabricated either the Farḡāṇe valley or in Baktria itself found (rather literally) its eternal rest in a grave erected in the Sajany mountains, deep into the Altaï, some 5000 km distant from their original environment of production?<sup>148</sup>

And what should be said concerning the astonishing (in their beauty, value, and exquisite taste) golden and silver objects brought to light by the Soviet excavations carried out in modern day Taḡikistān, at the sanctuary of Tāxt -i Sāngīn, which have been dated by archaeologists (admittedly, mostly on stylistic grounds) to the Achaemenid period? How are we, moreover, to understand the Achaemenid (looking) items coming from the well-known (and still hotly debated) Oxus Treasure?<sup>149</sup> Given their – considerably bigger if compared with that of, however sophisticated, acculturation theories – analytical and hermeneutic potential, theoretical concepts such as those of community of praxis (what a given audience chooses to do with and of a given object and what kind of functions and meanings it might have assumed not by virtue of what it is, but due to the context in which it is enmeshed), negotiation of identarian affiliation, and of intentional history might be capable to tease

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<sup>147</sup> Cf. Versluys 2014 (as well as the other contributions replying to his in the same *Archaeological Dialogue*), Pitts – Versluys 2015, Khatchadourian 2016, 25-80, Hodos 2017, Mairs 2017, Hoo 2018; 2020; forthcoming and Pitts and Versluys 2022. Among the founding fathers of this field of study there are without question the Indian anthropologist Arjun Appadurai and the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu: see at least Bourdieu 1979 and the works by Arjun Appadurai 1986, 1990, 2000). However, of considerable importance have been to the development of some of the ideas discussed here the work (contemporary with, but independent from, those of Appadurai) of Daniel Miller (see e. g. 1987, 1995, 2005).

<sup>148</sup> Beyond the still critical Rudenko 1970 see especially Wu 2005, 300; 2007, as well as the remarks in King 2021, 353-361. Linduff and Rubinson 2021, 88-97 devote a section to possible production and circulation patterns within and beyond the horizon of the Pazyryk culture, but the Achaemenid Empire stands out by its absence in such a treatment.

<sup>149</sup> Dalton 1964, Litvinskij and Pičikjan 1981; 1996; 2000, Pičikjan 1992; 1996, Inagaki 2002, Curtis 2004; 2012, Francfort 2012. Note however Mongiatti *et al.* 2010, suggesting on scientific grounds a dating of (at least part of) the objects allegedly from the area around the temple compatible with Achaemenid overlordship over the region: see Lindström 2020, 291-295.

out of such material a so far unexpected polyphony. The outcome of the above is that it is at last given back both voice and historical agency to social and political actors different than the Great King and his court(esans), while at the same time by no means downplaying the influence they had in producing and circulating such objects and affiliated ideas and ideologies, in (and arguably much further beyond) Baktria.<sup>150</sup>

Starting with the reign of Darius' son Xerxes (Xšāyāršā, 485-465 BCE) almost until Alexander's coming on stage in 330, the documentary landscape on Central Asia becomes barren once again: moreover, in the few cases in which our narrative sources do actually mention Baktria, the tone which informs such accounts (starting with Herodotos and his so-called Masistes' romance (Hdt. 9.108-113, in itself a truly masterpiece of the genre) has contributed a big deal in strengthening within the collective memory (both in and outside academia) the picture of this satrapy as the anomic and unrulable space par excellence. It is with the goal of at least challenging – if not straightaway refuting – such an appreciation of the third phase – after Cyrus and Darius – of (Achaemenid) Baktrian imperial history that the rather provocative title of chapter 6 has been chosen: *Uno fumavit Baktria tota rogo? Achaemenid Baktria From Xerxes to Ahvamazdā*.<sup>151</sup> The starting assumption is provided by the acknowledgement that those very same sources (about whose partisanship much has been said and written by now), which on several occasions mention the revolts that - according to modern interpreters - from the death of Darius I to the demise of the Empire itself (or, according to others, to its continuation sub specie Alexandri) would have bedeviled the Achaemenid (Far) East with almost cyclical recurrence, at the same time do almost never fail to notice that the government of Baktria was consistently entrusted to a relative of the Persian monarch, who moreover seems to have been given the title of «second after the King».<sup>152</sup> How is it then possible, if indeed it is possible, to do justice of this apparent contradiction? And what if the very same, almost catalogic, mention in our classical sources of those upheavals, instead of being an index of their frequency, on the contrary would show the exact opposite, namely their rather exceptional nature? After all, while a written source usually held as extremely reliable such as the *Shiji* – which moreover, and contrary to most of our Greek and Roman evidence, is contemporary of at least part of those same events that it is recording – appears sometimes truly obsessed by the presence of massive Xiōngnú hordes threateningly pushing at the Hán Empire's borderlands, to the astonishment of the scholars working on this material, the archives of the garrisons located at the Chinese Northern frontier zones and brought to light in increasingly higher number over a territory ranging from Eastern Manchuria

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<sup>150</sup> More in particular, the concept of «community of praxis», in itself coming originally from sociology and corporation management theory, has been successfully applied to the study of Central Asian material culture of the Hellenistic period (especially, but not only, from Baktria) in Hoo 2018; 2020.

<sup>151</sup> Rollinger and Degen 2021c on the period from Darius I to Artaxerxes I.

<sup>152</sup> García Sánchez 2014. On Greek ethnography concerning the Persian Empire see Madreiter 2012.

(Dōngběi 东北) to Western Mongolia do not mention the word Xiōngnú even a single time. It goes almost without saying that the most logical conclusion which can be drawn from this is not that there were no Xiōngnú, for we have plenty of evidence showing that they actually were there, and even in considerable number, as among other things the very same Shǐjì demonstrates. On the contrary, it must be deduced that they were such a common presence that no need was felt even of calling them by their (Chinese) name, and in fact we mostly hear of just «the enemy».<sup>153</sup> By the same token, therefore, it does not seem so implausible to argue that, over the course of more than a century, it was exactly the rather unexpected nature of the turmoil taking place in Bactria which secured the surviving of their record in our historical sources (leaving behind their well-known penchant for depicting the unstoppable downward spiral which the Empire was allegedly enmeshed into starting straight after Darius', if not Cyrus', death).<sup>154</sup> But there is even more in this than that: besides the issues related to the imperial succession, it should be asked to whose advantage would indeed have played a political upheaval (moreover almost certainly coupled by military intervention) even roughly comparable to the rebellions – or so he called them – crushed by Darius in the aftermath of Cambyses' death.<sup>155</sup> Even apart from the literary genre - one thinks for example of the Assyrian inscriptions -, the tens of thousands of casualties among the ranks of the Central Asian «insurgents» referred to in some versions of the Bīsūtūn inscription (for example in the Babylonian, but, interestingly, not in the Old Persian one) give an idea of the destructive scale which a full-fledged invasion by imperial forces was capable of.<sup>156</sup> And one ought moreover to take into account that, in 522 BCE, the Empire was in turmoil from Babylon to the Indus, a fact that must have contributed in no small measure in thinning the ranks of the «loyalist». All things considered, it is therefore difficult to imagine that, especially on the Central Asian side (including the local élites), somebody really had any interest in tearing the status quo apart. Notably, the same can however be argued in the case of the Empire itself. As especially chapter 5 seeks to show, from the viewpoint of Persepolis' bookkeeping, «Central Asia» meant natural resources, highly specialized manpower, potential royal brides of renowned beauty and no less legendary talents (as the almost proverbial example of Alexander's wife Rōxanē would have shown) and – last but by no means least – the most famed and feared cavalry of entire Eurasia at the

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<sup>153</sup> If, of course, we can assume the emic label of those human groups referred to by the Chinese sources as Xiōngnú really was Xiōngnú: cf. Giele 2011. For a concise but exhaustive introduction to this kind of excavated texts from the Hán period see most recently Ma 2019.

<sup>154</sup> It is the same principle that underlies the catalogue of the most spectacular sieges in history up to his day in Polyb. 29.12: according to him, the siege of Baktra by Antiochus III, about which, except for some scraps of narrative in Book 11 of his *Histories*, we know nothing, was one of the favorite topics of the writers committed with military affairs, so that it became - next to other similar events much more familiar to us, such as the destruction of Carthage - in fact, proverbial.

<sup>155</sup> See Duindam 2016 for a phenomenology of the dynastic way of ruling an Empire which is as wide-ranging in the examples discussed as it is sophisticated from the theoretical and analytical standpoint.

<sup>156</sup> Hyland 2014 for a stimulating discussion of these figures.



very least until the rise of the Xiōngnú Empire in Inner Asia and of its *Shányú* Mòdún (冒頓單于, 234-173 BCE) or, almost a millennium and a half later, of Temüjin's Mongolian horsemen. Given the stakes at issue for both sides, it seems quite likely that the mutineers were quickly liquidated, according to a pattern that, tellingly, would be repeated until the final twilight of the Empire itself. The fact that there are indeed quite substantial reasons to doubt the notion of Bactria as plunged in a semi-permanent guerrilla warfare throughout the 5<sup>th</sup> and a good part of the 4<sup>th</sup> century is shown, on the one hand, by the study of a class of documentary evidence that it is interesting as it has so far been rather consistently overlooked as the Central Asian related glyptic; on the other hand, there are the most recent results of archaeological investigation, especially those coming from the region of Surxondaryo, in Southern Uzbekistan. More in particular, the excavations carried out at the site of Kyzyltēpe (in the Miršade oasis of the upper Surxondaryo) and the results of – in the scholarship of Achaemenid Central Asia rather pioneering – paleoenvironmental analysis conducted on samples of the recovered finds have made it possible to draw a picture which notably looks much more similar to the so-called Empire's golden age as reflected through the Persepolis archive than it does to the *History of Decline and Fall* as it emerges from the (masterful) Herodotean narrative, the influence of which on Western thought on the Achaemenid polity has been – and in the case of Bactria to a certain degree still is - so long-lasting.<sup>157</sup> Such outcome is all the more remarkable if one thinks that the Masistes' romance tells of a space on which the Halikarnassian (who was in fact capable of gathering strikingly reliable information on other regions of the Empire despite both huge geographical distance and multiple linguistic barriers), appears, judging from what he reports on Central Asia in the course of the whole book, to have known little if not nothing at all.

The exceptional importance of the *ADAB*'s discovery, purchase, and publication demand that this priceless corpus shall be given the space it is deserves. For this reason, the seventh chapter of the present work (*My Kingdom for a Camel. On Satraps and Powerbrokers in 4<sup>th</sup> Century Achaemenid Bactria*) aims at moving forward in the study of the wealth of information this evidence might give on the satrapy's mechanisms of governmentality.<sup>158</sup> Moreover, it seeks to carry out such analysis by taking into account the agency and vested interests of the widest range of social actors possible, from Aḥvamazdā, allegedly the local satrap, surely an incredibly powerful official, proceeding down the social ladder to the soldiers appointed to the ungrateful task of eradicating locusts from the fields belonging to an important local authority.<sup>159</sup> If on the one hand such documents allow us to show in

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<sup>157</sup> Lyonnet and Fontugne 2021 for the most recent (critical) assessment of the Kyzyltēpe excavations.

<sup>158</sup> King 2021, 315-366 has recently provided a massive contribution to a better understanding of Achaemenid imperial dynamics in Bactria as they emerge through the *ADAB* (see most recently Lemaire 2022 on the archive(s) from which the parchments likely originated). While building on these foundational assessments, the present work aims at suggesting further angles from which to look at this evidence.

<sup>159</sup> Navch and Shaked 2012, 94 ff. A4 (= Khalili IA1).

a manner previously unknown the efficient solidity of those systemic dynamics of administration, organization, control, extraction, and logistics management of human and natural resources (Henkelman's «imperial paradigm») which celebrate their triumphs, to mention but a few examples, in the monumental theater of the dahayāva personifications along the steps of the Apadāna at Persepolis or in the dizzying catalogue of the so-called Susa foundation charter (DSf), the ADAB however at the same time – and with no less clarity - show the fragility of the Middle Ground on whose stability the glories of the Empire in the East showcased in the royal inscriptions («that land became mine») so substantially depended. Barely disguised under the veil of the deferential formulas of politeness that adorn most of the surviving documents within the corpus, the *Aramaic Documents from Ancient Bactria* provide, if carefully mined, unsuspected access to an inextricable bundle of contradictions stemming from competing interests, latent conflicts, and ad hoc (which means structurally precarious) agreements struck in an attempt – by each of the actors involved – to bind themselves to the other party only if, and to the extent that, this would have ensured the highest return - personal and/or for the respective group(s) –, be it in terms of economic, symbolic, or social gain. In order to further support this – to the best of my knowledge so far overlooked or at least underexplored - possibility of reading this dossier, the ADAB evidence will be compared with another group of documents (the so-called *Bactrian Documents from Northern Afghanistan*) which, for reasons we will deal with in more detail while introducing them to the reader, allow to gain much insight into the sociopolitical world of 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE Central Asia.<sup>160</sup> In spite of the narrowness of the time span illuminated by them (some 30 years in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the last century of Persian rule), the first – and so far the only – «excavated texts» recovered from Achaemenid Baktria nevertheless offer a solid textual foundation on which to hinge a long-term interpretation of this space that considers it as a breeding ground for remarkable experimentation, steadily wrestling between two instances which were at the same time conflicting and yet mutually linked by a subtle though firm dialectic. On the one hand, we have in fact the Empire's need of bringing chaos back to order (as according to Darius Ahuramazdā himself ordered him), of dispelling opacities and making everything, from the landscape to social relationship, as transparent as possible: this is what Pierre Briant has called «imperial control».<sup>161</sup> On the other, however, we have to take very seriously into account other, multiple needs, namely those of all the inhabitants of Zomia: as eloquently shown by Scott, the whole spectrum of those social groups and individuals (notably with little regard to any spatial or temporal differences) during the long run of world's imperial history have consistently drawn their lifeblood from such – apparent – disorders and opacities: in Briant's word, imperial

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<sup>160</sup> King 2020 has been foundational in the development of the ideas presented in this section of the chapter.

<sup>161</sup> Briant 2017a, 45.

control cannot be understood without «local power».<sup>162</sup> One of the reasons for what might at first sight appear as a rather paradoxical situation is, according to Scott, exactly because only what in the eyes of the modern state's (or the ancient Empire's) «archival rationality» appears to be disorder and opacity, on the contrary allows the bearers of this second instance (the «locals» be they members of the so-called élite or not) to organize their sociality, their space(s), and their time in accordance with rules and templates that do not come from anything other than the needs of the very community that those worldviews express and/or from the environment that those frameworks allows and tolerates: *sub umbra floreo*.<sup>163</sup> As most recently shown by Richard Payne and Rhyne King, the Hindūkūš is only one, although very important, among those places where, at the same times, the Empire reaches its maximum of integrative power, tactical flexibility, and adaptation while unescapably being confronted with its limits: structural, and therefore eventually impossible to overcome.<sup>164</sup>

The last chapter (ГОЛЫЕ ГОДЫ. *Alexander in Bactria*) aims to examine some of the most important features of Achaemenid Central Asia as outlined in this work, namely adaptability and resilience, from the very peculiar vantage point of a transitional period.<sup>165</sup> Few individuals in history have been more fascinating – and more divisive – than Alexander III of Makedon (the Great).<sup>166</sup> For many centuries celebrated, in the wake of, among others, Arrian and Plutarch, as the harbinger of a new era in human history (in Hegelian terms, a cosmic-historical hero), recent years have witnessed a progressive focus on aspects of the Makedonian's life such as violence, destruction, and ruin: this hints at a repositioning of the historical assessment of his conquest of the Persian Empire which, although undoubtedly necessary, has to the mind of many scholars (most vocally Briant) focused too much on the individual and too little on the broader socio-anthropological, political and cultural context (Mediterranean as well as Near-Eastern), within which Alexander was an enormously significant, but not unique nor probably (at least at the beginning of his expedition) the most important – actor.<sup>167</sup> By reconstructing Alexander's Central Asian campaign (330-327 BCE) on the basis of a number of important recent in-depth overviews that draw on decades of archaeological research and studies of historical geography, the primary goal of this chapter is to show how the (eco)system the

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<sup>162</sup> See now Briant 2020 for further, insightful remarks on this topic.

<sup>163</sup> Scott 1998.

<sup>164</sup> Payne and King 2020.

<sup>165</sup> In numerous studies, Briant has repeatedly emphasized the importance of taking stock of the Achaemenid precedent in order to properly understand the world shaped by Alexander and his heirs: see e. g. Briant 2017a, 429-458, 472-499, 556-590; 2018a, 181-201.

<sup>166</sup> See now the seminal Degen 2022a.

<sup>167</sup> It goes without saying that the bibliography on Alexander and his Empire is simply huge. Here it will suffice to outline, although in a rather sweeping way, the evolution of the scholarly debated on the matter hinted at in the text: Tarn 1948, Bosworth 1988; 1998, Holt 1988a, Gehrke 2002<sup>2</sup>, Holt 2005, Naiden 2019, but see for example the historiographical remarks in Briant 2015 and now Degen 2022a, 11-29. In the light of the *longue durée* perspective adopted as well as of her thorough contextualization of the Argead dynasty, Müller 2016 is a noteworthy exception, to which the essays in Müller *et al.* 2017 can also profitably be added. On Alexander and the East see now Degen 2022, 250-300 (concerning Babylon) as well as 332-408 (tackling the Achaemenid imperial ideology).

features of which have been described in the previous chapters reacted when faced with the most significant external perturbation to which it had been subjected since the time of Darius I (and it seems legitimate to maintain that Alexander's invasion would have remained such for centuries, at least until the outbreak of the Caliphal armies under the command of the 'Abbāsīd general Qutayba).<sup>168</sup> In the light of the two-year period of fierce fighting which, leaving the rhetoric imposed by the literary genre aside, all of the surviving historiographical sources describe as characterized by unprecedented harshness and violence even in the context of a massive military campaign such as Alexander's, which lasted for almost an entire decade, how are we to interpret the apparently sovereign indifference shown by the latest among the documents included in the *ADAB* dossier so far published which, in a style that is indeed indistinguishable from that of its older counterparts, records the details of the process of collection and redistribution of agricultural produce through different regions of Baktria thanks to the efforts of several officers performing a whole range of thoroughly Achaemenid functions, but which dates the whole business «in the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Sivan [יָסָוּ], in the 7<sup>th</sup> year of Alexander, the King», just as nothing had happened?<sup>169</sup> Authoritative scholars, most recently and forcefully Rachel Mairs, have sought to see in the formula concrete proof 1. of the ephemeral nature of the takeover by «King Alexander» and 2. of the almost unchanged permanence of imperial structures (above all, of the administration) which at the right moment would have made the fortune of the Seleukid Empire during the decades to come, and notably not only in Central Asia.<sup>170</sup> As the discussion developed in the chapter intends to show, however, the document in question (*ADAB* C4) represents a rather special case within the corpus, and therefore needs to be treated with caution, especially in the light of the most recent results of archaeological investigation into local settlement structures, from which a picture emerges that makes it difficult to support the hypothesis that, in the aftermath of Alexander's departure towards India, «business as usual» resumed in Baktria as nothing remarkable had ever taken place.<sup>171</sup> Without attempting in any way to mitigate the more disturbing aspects of military expedition of imperial conquest such as that conducted by Alexander – and by so many others before and after him – one of the fundamental goals of this concluding chapter is to show how the sensitivity of the economic and social system laid out in the course of the present study required much less than a «total war» (*Vernichtungskrieg*, as for example Holt claims Alexander's was) for it to be damaged almost irreparably, *de facto* confining the actual

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<sup>168</sup> Among the most important overviews (and at the same time of remarkable analytical depth) concerning Northeastern Central Asia historical geography at the time of Alexander's invasion see e. g. those by Rtveladze (2002; 2019) and Rapin (2013; 2014; 2017a; 2018a).

<sup>169</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 203 ff. C4 (= Khalili IA 17), ll. 1-2.

<sup>170</sup> Mairs 2016: but see however the more careful opinion voiced in Mairs 2020a, 567-568. It should be moreover remarked that such an approach implicitly argues that Alexander took little to no interest in administrative matters, an opinion which has been convincingly challenged by Briant in several studies, before and after his *History*.

<sup>171</sup> Iliakis 2021.

effectiveness of the administrative apparatus – or of what remained of it – to a few major urban centers, but nothing, or very little, more. In the absence of the preconditions of trust, mutual dependence and, above all, due to the lack of men capable, as Bryan Miller has it, of effectively «navigating» it, the Middle Ground that had made the fortunes of Teispid-Achaemenid Bactria was destined to dissolve into the – for at least some of the social actors involved – life-saving expanse of the steppes of Sogdiana, Chorasnia, Afġān Bactria, and the remote inaccessibility of the valleys and gorges of Ustrūšana.<sup>172</sup> For when negotiation (which was part and parcel of the Persian imperial system in Central Asia), is no longer an option, the inhabitants of Zomia have in fact always had on their side – as (tellingly) Herodotos already noted about the Scythians, whom he judged to be the authors of «one of the most ingenious discoveries of which I am aware» – a weapon against which every Empire has always found itself remarkably, and frustratingly, powerless: namely the flight.<sup>173</sup> It would have taken all the diplomatic skill and linguistic-cultural competence of the true «last of the Achaemenids» (as Briant famously called Alexander), namely Antiochos I – who was by no chance the son of a Central Asian princess, the Sogdian Apama – as well as a painstaking diplomatic work lasting more than a decade to rebuild, albeit starting from significantly different premises, that open space of negotiation and mutual dependence-through-exploitation which would not only have allowed Central Asia *After Alexander* to emerge unscathed from the troubles of the Seleukid kingdom, but even to evolve into one of the most fascinating «imperial spaces» of Eurasian history. At last, the fame of the treasures this space entailed, above all the legendary horses from the Fargāne valley, which were rumored to sweat blood, would have crossed mountains and deserts until it reached the very distant Cháng'ān (長安): and from the streets and markets of the flourishing Hàn capital, these (and arguably many other) tales would have found their way through the court to the ears of an emperor as ruthless as he was ambitious, namely Wūdi (漢武帝, 157-87 BCE).<sup>174</sup> By virtue of an

<sup>172</sup> On mutual trust as an unavoidable instrument of every system of (pre-modern) imperial control, see Tilly 2005.

<sup>173</sup> Hdt. 4.46.2: «τῷ δὲ Σκυθικῷ γένει ἔν μὲν τὸ μέγιστον τῶν ἀνθρωπῶν πρηγμάτων σοφώτατα πάντων ἐξεύρηται τῶν ἡμεῖς ἴδμεν, τὰ μέντοι ἄλλα οὐκ ἄγαμαι: τὸ δὲ μέγιστον οὕτω σφι ἀνεύρηται ὥστε ἀποφυγεῖν τε μηδένα ἐπελθόντα ἐπὶ σφέας, μὴ βουλομένους τε ἐξευρεθῆναι καταλαβεῖν μὴ οἶον τε εἶναι. τοῖσι γὰρ μήτε ἄστεα μήτε τείχεα ἢ ἐκτισμένα, ἀλλὰ φερέοικοι ἐόντες πάντες ἔωσι ἰπποτοξόται, ζῶντες μὴ ἀπ' ἀρότου ἀλλ' ἀπὸ κτηνέων, οἰκῆματά τε σφι ἢ ἐπὶ ζευγέων, κῶς οὐκ ἂν εἴησαν οὗτοι ἄμαχοί τε καὶ ἄποροι προσμίσγειν;» [«But the Scythian race has in that matter which of all human affairs is of greatest import made the cleverest discovery that we know; I praise not the Scythians in all respects, but in this greatest matter they have so devised that none who attacks them can escape, and none can catch them if they desire not to be found. For when men have no stablished cities or fortresses, but all are house-bearers and mounted archers, living not by tilling the soil but by cattle-rearing and carrying their dwellings on wagons, how should these not be invincible and unapproachable?») This is not, as most famously Hartog 1980 argued, just fiction: On the contrary, Robert Kindler has shown in great detail (2015, 73) that, still in the 20s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the remarkable degree of population mobility represented the main hindrance to the Sovietization (as Stalin conceived it) of both the Qazaq SSR and of other regions of newly (re)conquered Central Asia, from Türkmenistan to Qoraqalpog'iston and the neighboring territories in the Aral region. In his words – which powerfully remind one of those employed by Scott in his studies -, «it was mandatory to make the nomads traceable, so that the communists could impose their legitimacy».

<sup>174</sup> On Chinese information on Central Asia around the reign of emperor Wūdi see most recently Nickel 2020.

expansionist project within steppe territory on a scale such as which China had no memory from at least several decades, eager to get his hands on as many of these wonders as possible, the «martial emperor», as he became to be known, soon resolved to dispatch an audacious envoy, Zhāng Qiān (張騫) to lands where in living memory no inhabitant of Tiānxià had ever ventured before. To a certain extent, and at least as far as narrative is concerned, this enterprise would have opened a new phase in the history of the Afro-Eurasian world, in whose legend (the last of Baktria's mirages) we are still living, and perhaps today in a particularly prominent way: another legacy, it might be argued, of the Empire founded by Cyrus and (re)conquered by Darius.

In summarizing the essential points discussed in the previous chapters, the last section (Everything Was Forever, Until it Was No More. *Some (Almost) Concluding Remarks*) finally seeks to suggest some possible paths to follow in the research of the years to come.

## Chapter 2

### *Baktria in Wonderland: Sources and Methods on Achaemenid Central Asia*

كان عندهم ملذوداً لما فيه من  
الخروج عن ريقة الحكم و عدم الانقياد للسياسة  
و هذه الطبيعة منافية للعمران  
و مناقضة له فغاية الأحوال العادية كلها عندهم الرحلة  
و التغلب و ذلك مناقض للسكون  
الذي به العمران و فناف له فالحجر

[Barbarism has become their temperament and their nature. They enjoy it because it means freedom from authority and no subservience to a master. This natural disposition is the negation and antithesis of civilization].

- Ibn Ḥaldūn بن خلدون  
*Muqaddimah* المقدمّة,  
2.25.

Τὴν δ' Ἀλεξάνδρου παιδείαν ἂν  
ἐπιβλέπῃς, Ὑρκανούς γαμῆν ἐπαίδευσεν  
καὶ γεωργεῖν ἐδίδαξεν Ἀραχωσίους, καὶ  
Σογδιανούς ἐπεισε πατέρας τρέφειν καὶ  
μὴ φονεύειν.

[But if you examine the results of Alexander's instruction, you will see that he educated the Hyrkanians to respect the marriage bond, and taught the Arachosians to till the soil, and persuaded the Sogdians to support their parents, not to kill them].

- Plut. *De Alex. Fort.*, 1.5 (= *Mor.*  
328D).

#### 1. *Where have all the sources gone?*

Among the τόποι that characterize research on pre-Islamic Baktria, one of the most popular is undoubtedly the mourning over the dearth of available sources (especially narrative ones).<sup>1</sup> The back cover of one of the works still considered among the foundational studies in the field, even goes so far as to claim that the scanty eleven pages or so of Greco-Roman authors anthologized by the author ought to be taken as representing the entire surviving textual evidence covering this space and

<sup>1</sup> Cf. (critically) Morris 2019a, 57.

concerning the Hellenistic period.<sup>2</sup> On closer inspection, however, such an assertion proves to be unfounded: an even not too scrupulous perusal of the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* makes it in fact quite easy to pull together a database of more than a hundred pages, and this is only limited to the literary evidence coming from the Mediterranean world (from the Archaic to the Roman Imperial period down to late Antiquity).<sup>3</sup> Contrary to what is usually claimed, therefore, the problem, is not the quantity but the quality of the extant textual sources. They are in fact, on the one hand, mostly preserved only in fragments (this is especially true for almost the entire Hellenistic historiography), moreover usually selected with polemical intentions by the – later - authors who transmit them: Strabo's selection of authors of Ἱνδικά provides a remarkable example on the matter.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, they are sources dated centuries after the events they deal with, whose narration is moreover focused almost exclusively on the dramatis persona of Alexander and on his transformation – as he falls victim of the spell of the East -, into a suspicious and cruel tyrant.<sup>5</sup>

To this it should be added that, especially in the case of Latin historiographers, recent studies have shown that the understanding of the structures and functioning of the Achaemenid Empire of authors such as Justin or Curtius Rufus was more often than not heavily influenced by the image of the Arsakid commonwealth circulating in the Mediterranean world at the time in which they were writing their works. As a consequence, it becomes particularly difficult to find Achaemenid «layers» (realia, according to Briant) within the narrative of the historiographers living and writing under Rome's imperial rule.<sup>6</sup> In the particular case of the events involving the so-called upper satrapies (that is, roughly, Eastern Irān and Central Asia up to the Indian territories), a not insignificant weight in their treatment by the surviving sources seems to have been played by the reception of previous models, above all Herodotos, Ktesias, and Xenophon, especially the first two being paramount authorities on Persian matters.<sup>7</sup> This would suggest that, even if more detailed information on the topography (and ethnography) of Central Asia was available in the Hellenistic period (which in the light of

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<sup>2</sup> Holt 1999, 174-185. Later overviews include the appendix to Leriche 2007 and Mairs 2020b, 425-427.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Coloru 2009, 65-97 for a rather detailed discussion of the treatment reserved to Hellenistic Bactria in ancient historiography as well as pp. 329-345 for what to the best of my knowledge is still the most detailed index of extant evidence (not only literary and not only classical) on pre-Islamic Central Asia so far published (and see moreover pp. 232-236; 239).

<sup>4</sup> Note now Schunk 2019 on Arrian's work on India.

<sup>5</sup> To give but one example, consult Strab. 2.1.19-20 (on Megasthenes, on whom see also the studies by Kosmin 2014a, 31-58, Rollinger 2016a and Stoneman 2019, 129-286, with references). On the *Orientalism* informing (Greek) historical sources even before Alexander's expedition and on their impact over later production even beyond antiquity see Madreiter 2012, while on the historiography of Alexander see most recently Nawotka *et al.* 2019. Cf. also Briant's remarks on this topic and on the related scholarship from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards (2018a, 74-83).

<sup>6</sup> Curt. 4.12.11 and Just. *Epit.*, 11.12.10 provide two instances among many which clearly show that, behind the alleged description of Achaemenid realia, we are in fact dealing with such authors' perception of the Arsakid Empire: on this latter point see Müller 2017b as well as the contributions collected in Wiesehöfer and Müller 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Müller 2017a, 295. On Herodotos' impact on later historical geography note Bichler 2006 and Dan 2013. Rapin 2018b on the Achaemenid antecedent.



Megasthenes', Demodamas', and Patrokles' activity it cannot be excluded), it had however already been almost entirely lost by the time of Ptolemy's *Geography*; one might even go further and argue that, therefore, authors such as Arrian or Diodoros Siculus reworked the information available to them in their geographic and ethnographic reference models.<sup>8</sup> In spite of these - and other might easily be enlisted - methodological challenges, by virtue of the fact that the historiographic record (especially Arrian on the one hand and, on the other, the so-called Vulgata tradition consisting of Curtius Rufus, Diodoros Siculus, the *Epitome Mettensis*, the *Itinerarium Alexandri*, and Plutarch) remains the only narrative of any breadth for reconstructing the political-administrative history of the Achaemenid Empire - notably as with regards to its Eastern offshoots, which are not dealt with in otherwise fundamental works such as Xenophon's *Anabasis* - modern historians have always been rather reluctant to discard them, partially or entirely, from their research.<sup>9</sup>

In an attempt not to dismiss the entire classical historiographic tradition while at the same time taking into account the distortions to which it is exposed - the most significant of which is undoubtedly the ideological-moralistic agenda underlying the narrative of almost all the authors in question - starting in a consistent way with the 1980s, some scholars, most among them trained within an Ancient Near Eastern research tradition, have tried to read these narrative sources against the grain, in an attempt to discern, through a terminology which is often vague and despite the ambiguities caused by the broader narrative context in which the account of a single episode is inserted, snippets of institutions and/or practices that can be traced back to the Achaemenid context. Then, in a second step, they have sought to compare the information thus obtained with other - this time primary - sources (the Persepolis archives as well as the Babylonian documents coming from the dossier of the Murašû entrepreneurial «dynasty» or the Aramaic correspondence of Aršāma and his subordinates, the latter an invaluable corpus of evidence coming from Egypt).<sup>10</sup>

The potential of this method of investigation has been systematically exploited with an impressive display of erudition and methodological sensibility by Briant, both with regard to the Western half of the Empire as well as - and this is all the more important as the evidence is much thinner - to the

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<sup>8</sup> On the perception of the spatial organization of the οἰκουμένη in the Hellenistic period see Rathmann 2006, while regarding the (re)construction of the Central Asian space known to the *Geography* see the landmarking Rapin 2001; 2005 and Bernard 2005. On Greco-Roman Indogrophy see most recently von Reden 2019c.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Wiesehöfer 2004<sup>3</sup>, 94-102: the - extremely influential - representation of the Empire as a chaotic aggregate of peoples, languages, and traditions is a recurrent topic in the classical historiographic tradition, as it is shown e. g. by Curt. 4.1.15. and Diod. 17.102.2. On these sources see most recently Matarese 2021, 12-17.

<sup>10</sup> The Persepolis archive will be discussed in more detail further but see already Henkelman 2008b, 65-179; 2013 for an overview. On the evidence coming from the Murašû dossier, Stolper 1985 remains fundamental, but see more generally King 2021, 199-265 on Achaemenid Babylonia. On the exchange of letters of the satrap of Egypt Aršāma (ארשם, 'ršm, active around the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, cf. Polyæn. 7.28) with, among others, his steward Neḥtiḥōr (נְחִיחֹר, נחתיחור), see most recently the edition provided by Christopher Tuplin and John Ma (2020). King 2021, 142-198 for a historical assessment of this powerful Achaemenid prince's household.

territories the East of Ekbatana.<sup>11</sup> Suffice it here to mention the example of the σύλλογος summoned by Alexander - and soundly deserted by the most important lieutenants of Achaemenid Central Asia, most notably by Spitamenes - in a place known as Zariaspa.<sup>12</sup> The episode is recorded, albeit in a slightly different way, both by Curtius Rufus and by Arrian. Thanks to a sophisticated etymological analysis and by comparing the two accounts with other parallel passages, e. g. in Xenophon, where the term σύλλογος is mentioned and discussed in more detail, Briant was able to show in a very convincing way how Alexander was most likely trying to make use - in vain, as events would have shown - of an institution through which the satrap of Baktria, and perhaps the Great King himself when he was personally touring the Central Asia satrapies, was able to keep in touch with the most important members of the local aristocracy, according to a mechanism not too different from the one that, more than a millennium and a half later, would have allowed the O'zbek leader Šāyḅānī Ḥān to recruit troops even from the most inaccessible regions within the territory under his rule.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, the – in these terms rather fruitless - debate on whether classical sources are useful for reconstructing (at least in its essential features) the organizational structure - not to mention the functioning, especially in the case of administrative echelons at a lower level if compared with the relationship between the king and the satrap - of the Achaemenid Empire is far from having reached

<sup>11</sup> Briant 2002, 357-471 is still a landmark. He moreover explicitly and repeatedly (2002 pp. 693-696) has argued in favor of considering the Alexander historiographers «another Achaemenid source»: see also Briant 2009a.

<sup>12</sup> The site is mentioned in various sources: in addition to Ptol. *Geog.*, 6.11.7 and Steph. Byz., s. v. Ζαρίασπα, of particular relevance are Polyb. 10.49.5 and Strab. 11.11.2, from whose evidence it has usually been inferred that the toponym corresponded to Baktra. In the case of Polybios, this is an inference stemming from the fact that, cornered after a clash with Antiochus III's forces, Euthydemus - the successor of the Diodotids in Baktria - would logically have sought shelter in the capital of the satrapy: «After the battle [against Antiochus III near the river Arius (Ἄριος, هریرود, Harīrūd, near Herāt)] Euthydemus was terror-stricken and retired with his army to a city in Baktria called Zariaspa». The Greek text reads as follows: «γενομένης δὲ τῆς μάχης ταύτης ὁ μὲν Εὐθύδημος καταπλαγεὶς ἀνεχώρησε μετὰ τῆς δυνάμεως εἰς πόλιν Ζαρίασπαν τῆς Βακτριανῆς». As for Strabo, he is even more explicit in supporting the equivalence Zariaspa with Baktra: «Their [*scil.* of the post-Seleukid rulers in Central Asia] cities were Baktra (also called Zariaspa, through which flows a river [which, following this interpretation, should be identified with the Balḥ-āb] bearing the same name and emptying into the Oxus), and Darapsa, and several others». See the Greek text of this passage: «πόλεις δ' εἶχον τὰ τε Βάκτρα ἤνπερ καὶ Ζαρίασπαν καλοῦσιν, ἣν διαρρεῖ ὁμόνυμος ποταμὸς ἐκβάλλων εἰς τὸν Ἰξον, καὶ Ἄδρασα καὶ ἄλλας πλείους». However, Rapin 2018a, 265-271 has argued relying upon both philological as well as historical arguments, that Zariaspa should in fact be identified with Marakanda (Afrāsīyāb, at the outskirts of modern-day Samarqand). If viable, such hypothesis would entail radical implications as it comes to the interpretation of Alexander's entire Central Asian campaign. The same could moreover be said for Polybios' passage, which Rapin rather swiftly sidelines along with Strabo and Pliny the Elder (*NH.*, 6.18: «Baktri quorum oppidum Zariasta, quod postea Battrā, a flumine appellatum est») as «useless» in order to properly reconstruct Central Asian topography. It should nevertheless be noted that, by doing so, he fails to recognize the consequences of his location of Zariaspa near the site of Marakanda in the case of Polybios' passage, which is all the more puzzling if one acknowledges that all previous scholars, from Tarn (1938, 71-128) to Coloru (2009, 175-194) have been unanimous in arguing that Sogdiana had long escaped Greek control (on this issue see most recently Lyonnet 2020, 323-324). A remarkable exception is Lerner 1999, 45-88 (in particular pp. 63-84, reproducing almost unchanged the arguments put forward in Lerner 1996).

<sup>13</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 4.1.5, Curt. 7.6.15. Xenophon's closely related passage is to be found in *Oec.*, 4.7: see Briant's detailed discussion (1984, 82-85; 2017a, 476-479) From Diod. Sic. 17.74.1-2 it would seem that Bessos himself had been able to make use of a similar institution at the time of his usurpation of the throne as he chose to take the royal name of Artaxerxes (Artaxšaça) V. On the organization of the post-Tīmūrid Ḥānates in Central Asia see Bregel 2009. Golden 2011b, 114 pointed out that the entire Šāyḅānīd dynasty relied fundamentally on persuasion of and cooperation with local notables (officials, and/or leaders of religious sects or clans) far more than on law or force.

a unanimous conclusion. This is particularly clearly shown by the question concerning the so-called «lists» of satrapies reported by classical historians in the context of their discussion of the events μετά Ἀλέξανδρον (treatise of Babylon and Triparadeisos, in 323 and 321 BCE respectively).<sup>14</sup>

The greatest perplexity was voiced by Bruno Jacobs who, despite this, through a close and comparative reading of exactly those same lists, has attempted to identify a hierarchical model of the political and administrative structure of the Persian Empire (at least as far as the reign of Darius III is concerned).<sup>15</sup> In what has become the classic formulation of this reconstructive hypothesis since the historian's first systematic study, Jacobs' model basically develops according to a triadic structure (Großsatrapie, Hauptsatrapie, and Kleinsatrapie, usually translated in English as respectively Great-Main-, and Small satrapy): several Kleinsatrapien would make up a Hauptsatrapie, and several Hauptsatrapien a Großsatrapie. Furthermore, according to Jacobs, the name of each superordinate unit (Haupt- and Großsatrapie) would derive from respectively the Klein- and Hauptsatrapie which he describes as «central» (which most likely means, given the examples he provides, as in the case of Arachosia and Bactria, the most important territories from the point of view of the resources they had at their disposal).<sup>16</sup> On the opposite end of the scholarly spectrum, in a detailed study on the institutional position and functions of the Persian satrap, Hilmar Klinkott has on the contrary supported the historical reliability of the lists preserved by the classical historiographic tradition, going so far as to raise the possibility that they might indeed have been based on Achaemenid originals, and more specifically on archival documents.<sup>17</sup>

In recent years, specialists in the field have expressed reservations about both positions. Jacobs' model has been accused of excessive schematism, since such a rigid tripartition of the territory seems to fit with difficulty the geographical and cultural complexity of the Achaemenid space.<sup>18</sup> The increasingly growing evidence coming from the Persepolis archive has moreover significantly contributed in highlighting some inconsistencies within Jacob's model: to mention but a single – telling – example, yet unpublished Ēlāmite tablets from Persepolis record that travel orders issued in Gāndhārā, which suggest that the region might have had a satrap on its own, and thus not being

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Curt. 10.10.2, Diod. Sic. 18.3.1, *FrGrHist* 100 F 8, *FrGrHist* 156 F 1(6) and Just. *Epit.*, 13.4.15.

<sup>15</sup> Jacobs 1994, 40. See moreover Jacobs 2003 for a critical assessment of the scholarly debate concerning the historical reliability of the so-called administrative reforms allegedly implemented by Darius and described at length by Herodotos (3.89-94) as well as the recent overview in Jacobs 2017a; 2021.

<sup>16</sup> Jacobs 2006.

<sup>17</sup> Klinkott 2005, 447. One of the most significant problems that this hypothesis presents is the fact that, until now, the Achaemenid documentary sources (starting with the Persepolis archives) have not yielded anything comparable to the lists provided by the historiographic tradition transmitted by the manuscripts of authors such as Herodotos. To this should be added the not unanimously positive reception of Klinkott's monograph by scholars: note at least Tuplin 2006, among the few anglophone scholars who seems to have taken notice of this in fact important work, and Jacobs 2007 (while Olbrycht 2007 offers a much more positive assessment of the book).

<sup>18</sup> On this matter see most recently the important study by Rapin (2018b).

(entirely?) administratively dependent on Baktria, as implied by Jacobs' reconstruction.<sup>19</sup> Secondly, the claim that the officers in charge of the Großsatrapien were «probably without exception Achaemenid princes» should at least be regarded with some degree of caution in the light, on the one hand, of the critical re-examination underwent by similar positions once held with regard to Seleukid satraps; on the other, by virtue of a greater understanding of the «intentional» nature of the genealogical history within Eurasian cultures: among other aspects, it follows from such studies that concepts such as «Persian», «local», or even just «family member» (οἰκηϊότης, as Bessos himself is called in our narrative sources) should be assessed more critically than hitherto has been the case.<sup>20</sup> As for the case made by Klinkott, it too was demonstrated to be no less problematic, and this for several reasons. Apart from the inherent weakness of any argument *ex silentio*, a recent trend within scholarship devoted to the perception of space in ancient Mediterranean societies has shown quite convincingly that - far from reflecting any Achaemenid administrative pattern - the «satrapies» mentioned in the accounts provided by classical sources correspond, at best, to the territories perceived to be affected by Alexander's war activities.<sup>21</sup>

An exception to this approach is represented by the work of Claude Rapin: while decidedly reacting against the skepticism referred to above, in several detailed contributions he has consistently attempted at reconstructing the different administrative levels of the satrapies of Baktria and Sogdiana precisely on the basis of the description of Alexander's expedition in Central Asia as it is to be found in the accounts of classical historiographers.<sup>22</sup> If on the one hand the greatest merit of Rapin's seminal studies undoubtedly lies in the insight they provide on the multi-layered nature of Achaemenid power in Central Asia, his work nevertheless does not undermine the soundness of the arguments brought against Klinkott's thesis - and, implicitly, also to Jacobs' model - for example by specialist of what has become known as Common-Sense Geography.<sup>23</sup> On the contrary, it can be argued that such critical remarks call for a rethinking of the geography of the Achaemenid Empire in more flexible terms, especially in ecologically complex spaces such as Central Asia and (or) the Caucasus. For this reason, and despite the fact that both the systematic nature and the cataloguing outlook of the Persepolis archives leave no doubt as to the imperial administration's aspiration to impose both order

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<sup>19</sup> Jacobs 1994, 217-220: but compare Henkelman 2017a, 208-2017, with significant and compelling evidence.

<sup>20</sup> Jacobs' positions ultimately rely on the famous concept of the *ethno-classe dominante* developed by Pierre Briant (1988). Note however the debate concerning Seleukid *Herrschaft*: Mehl 2003, Brüggemann 2009; 2010, and Plischke 2014, 50-55, which might have some explanatory purchase also in an Achaemenid context. Compare also Engels 2017a, 136-146. On genealogies' flexible nature within the Greek world and beyond see for example Gehrke 2003b; 2011, Giangiulio 2010a; 2010b.

<sup>21</sup> On space perception in Mediterranean antiquity see recently Dan 2013; Dan *et al.* 2014. The argument that, at most, classical historiographic sources allow us to reconstruct Alexander's path but not the political organization of the Achaemenid Empire has recently been made by Ruffing 2017b, 330.

<sup>22</sup> Rapin 2013; 2017a; 2018a. This historical and geographical approach is characteristic also of Rtveldadze 2002; 2019.

<sup>23</sup> Bekker-Nielsen 2014, Dan *et al.* 2014, Poiss 2014. Most recently, Sieberer 2017 is a critical study of the (intentional) geographic construction of Herodotean space.

and legibility to the space it very successfully governed, it is far more likely that, in daily practice, boundaries were much more blurred, constraints less compelling, and loyalties subject to greater negotiation than the sources suggest. This at least partly justifies Kai Ruffing's remarks, according to which the term «satrapy» should be taken to mean a «sphere of influence and of operative capacity» of Achaemenid officials, rather than (as more or less implicitly assumed) a defined and delimited space: remarkably, - as we shall see – such an understanding of the concept is much closer to the semantics of Persian terminology, at least as far as we are able to gauge from the extant evidence.<sup>24</sup> Another thorny issue concerning the use of classical sources as a tool for studying Achaemenid Baktria is the difficulty, noted by several scholars, in reconciling their accounts of - to mention just one, particularly striking example - the impressive density of the urban fabric of the satrapy, (the well-known Baktria of a thousand cities), with the results of archaeological investigation across several Northern Central Asian regions.<sup>25</sup> As Nicola Di Cosmo has persuasively argued, however, this procedure is theoretically flawed, since it is based on the assumption that two distinct classes of documents can be used in a complementary manner, one supporting the other, in order to construct a coherent narrative, which is untenable since it is vitiated by the circular nature of the underlying process.<sup>26</sup> A further questionable aspect of this methodology lies in the gap between what is known from both archaeological and literary evidence and what is not: as Alexander Meeus pointedly observed with regards to the age of the Diadochi, the temptation to «fill in the gaps» of one documentary class with information from the other(s) must be resisted, since this procedure completely obliterates the fragmentary nature of the dataset as such, both quantitatively and on the diachronic level. However constraining they might be, such discrepancies exist, and it is essential to deal with them.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ruffing 2017b, 323 (but note already Briant 2002, 63-67): the soundness of such remarks is clearly demonstrated, as it will be seen, by the documents collected in the *ADAB* dossier, which are as much pervaded by terminology denoting - or at least striving to define - social relations between individuals and/or between groups as they lack almost any explicit definition of geographical boundaries, strikingly in contrast with what one would expect from an archive, albeit only partially preserved, likely originating from the administrative center of a satrapy as important as Baktria. On the origin of the *ADAB* documents see King 2021, 315-321, 347-355 and now Lemaire 2022.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. the different positions voiced in Lyonnet 1990 and Wu 2005, 381. On the «thousand cities» of Baktria see e. g. Just. *Epit.*, 41.4.5 and Matarese 2021, 49, who seems to take this definition at face value, while at the same time projecting it back into Achaemenid times («the degree of Baktria's urbanization already before [the Hellenistic epoch] was very high»). As for archaeological research in itself, it should be noted that there are at least two different – and rather heterogeneous – schools: on the one hand the so-called Western (especially French) one; on the other, the (post)Soviet research tradition, on which see the important overviews by Kleiñ (2012; 2014).

<sup>26</sup> Di Cosmo 2002, 44-92. As in the case with the border zone between Hán and Xiōngnú territory, even in the case of Achaemenid Baktria, the historian is confronted with two rather distinct research objects: an archaeological and a documentary (literary and epigraphic) Baktria. And, also in this case, the goal cannot be that of using both sources with the aim of reconstruct a coherent narrative. On the contrary, one should seek to analyze, on a structural level, to what extent these two objects provide not overlapping, but coherent pictures concerning a given topic.

<sup>27</sup> Meeus 2013.

In the light of the above, the aim of this chapter is therefore threefold: firstly, it is intended to offer as comprehensive a review as possible of the sources underlying the two pictures of Achaemenid Bactria we are able to extract from our two different evidentiary sets, namely the historiographic (literary) and archaeological. Secondly, it seeks to show how both documentary classes can be profitably used to illuminate some of the aspects which are of particular interest to the present study (above all the interaction between the imperial administration and the Central Asian population), and which have so far been neglected by scholars whose main interest consisted almost exclusively in reconstructing a model of political and spatial organization which, at least in the forms that have been suggested from Jacobs' studies onwards, most likely never existed, or at least not with the degree of rigidity the models sketched above imply. The concluding section finally discusses a third set of evidence, this time coming from ethnography, and it strives to show how and why the comparative method ought to become part and parcel of the critical apparatus necessary for an adequate understanding of the cultural-historical dynamics characteristic of both the Achaemenian satrapy of Bactria and of its surrounding environment. The decisive contribution of this rather peculiar source material is of a theoretical nature: more precisely, it consists in offering a range of possible interpretative scenarios based on which to interpret information that can be obtained independently from both archaeological and literary evidence.

## 2. Beyond Griffins and Gold: Bactria in the Graeco-Roman Sources

### 2.1. *Patres Historiae, apud quos sunt innumerabiles fabulae*: Herodotos and Ktesias

Apart from a few sporadic mentions by the tragic poets, in whose texts, however, the term «Baktrian» plays little more than a metonymic function for «the (Far) East», the first author to spend more than some passing words on the Achaemenid satrapies of Central Asia is, unsurprisingly, Herodotos.<sup>28</sup> As already noted in the introduction to this study, the Masistes' romance (Hdt. 9.108-113) arguably played a considerable, if not decisive, role in strengthening in the cultural and geographical horizon of Western (Greek, and then Roman) tradition the image of Bactria as a

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<sup>28</sup> The tragic poets: see Aesch. *Pers.*, 306-307, 318-319: it is not without some interest to note that, in a highly rhetorical context aimed at emphasizing the immense power of the Persian army in order to highlight its ruinous defeat, the example chosen is precisely that of the Baktrian contingent, as if Aeschylus were somehow aware of its importance within the Achaemenid military machine. As for Euripides (*Bacch.*, 13-22), worthy of special mention is the fact that, already in the final years of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE (for the *Bacchae* were staged around 407/406 BCE), Bactria could already become part of a mythical geography and be mentioned, *pars pro toto*, as an example of a «somewhere» at world's end, as it would have become customary later, at least in the Roman imperial period. See for example Prop. 3.11.21-26, the already mentioned Verg. *Aen.*, 8.687-688 as well as, (although much) later on, Ael. *NA.*, 4.27 and *Ant. Gr.*, 4.3.26-30 (where Justinian is celebrated as the master of the entire universe, notable because of his alleged conquest of Bactria, something which already Ktesias apparently claimed with regards to Cyrus' conquest of the East).

«Graveyard of Empires», a land not (worthy?) to be ruled, populated by all sort of savage people, and constantly on the brink of revolting against any imperial power. When it comes to his notorious satrapal list (3.89-94), the latter is so tightly embedded within a dense narrative of Darius as *dramatis persona* as to render it *de facto* useless for the purposes of a historical discourse on Achaemenid Baktria.<sup>29</sup> There are, however, at least two other passages - one better known, one much more overlooked - that deserve attention, as they might shed light on some aspects which for the present discussion seem to be of interest.

The first, and most renowned, is the Central Asian section within the – fluvial, almost Homeric - catalogue of Xerxes' army that makes up a considerable part of the *Histories*' 7<sup>th</sup> book. At least three aspects make this passage particularly significant. First, the mention of Hystaspes (Ἵστάσπης, *Vīštāspa*), «son of Darius and Atossa, of the lineage of Cyrus» at the head of a contingent among which Baktrians and Scythians are enlisted («Βακτρίων δὲ καὶ Σακέων ἤρχε Ἵστάσπης ὁ Δαρείου τε καὶ Ἀτόσσης τῆς Κύρου») implies, at the very least 1. that Baktria enjoyed a position of absolute prominence in the framework, at a minimum, of the Achaemenid administration in Eastern Irān, so much so as to require the presence in the field of scions of the royal house.<sup>30</sup> 2. Far from being limited to the - albeit by no means negligible - symbolic significance, the presence of Hystaspes also implies the existence of a bureaucratic (scribes, archives) and infrastructural (couriers and mail stations) apparatus which must have been capable of guaranteeing the constant flow of information to and from the imperial court, a conclusion that is in itself sufficient to dispel the myth of the satrapy of Baktria as being on the verge of a not better qualified «secession» at the time of Xerxes' reign.

The second aspect worthy of consideration is the reference to the presence of the Scythians (Σκύθαι, *Sakā*) within the Baktrian contingent. It may, of course - as is usually argued – have a simple geographical content («to the East of the Baktrians live the *Sakā*»): however, it cannot be excluded that such reference play, as I would be inclined to believe, an explicitly ethnographic function; that is to say, Herodotos was aware of the ethnically composite nature of the population constituting the satrapy (σατραπεία) of Baktria.<sup>31</sup> This should not come as a surprise, since even Strabo must acknowledge that the language of the Baktrians and the Sogdians (inhabitants of an area with an elevated Scythian «density») is «almost the same». And this although in his narrative framework the distinction between «barbarism» and «civilization» - the latter often and gladly identified with liminal

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<sup>29</sup> See the discussion in Jacobs 1994, 93-97; 2003. On the Herodotean literary construction of the character of Darius as it is encountered in the *Histories* see most recently Rollinger 2017a and Ruffing 2018.

<sup>30</sup> That we are not dealing here with (just) Herodotean storytelling is made very likely by other, arguably independent, sources attesting to the same pattern: García Sánchez 2014.

<sup>31</sup> As it is clearly suggested by the names occurring in the *ADAB* tallies (note Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 180), for which the editors were only partially able to provide an Irānian etymology, thus suggesting that the linguistic, and therefore most likely ethnic, composition of the Baktrian population was much more complex than usually assumed.

territories (frontier zones: for example, mountain ranges or steppes) and with a mobile way of life - plays a fundamental role. This implies, at least, the sharing of some elements of the same cultural κοινόν among (some members of) the two groups.<sup>32</sup>

This, of course, does not mean that the Baktrians and the Sogdians spoke some sort of Ursprache which had remained unchanged over the centuries from the time of the *Avestā* onwards, as Antonio Panaino has conclusively argued.<sup>33</sup> It does mean, however, that there was, or at least by the sources it was perceived to be, a certain cultural affinity (which can also mean, as Hobsbawm and Gehrke have shown, the invention of a common tradition for the purposes of political solidarity) among the peoples of Eastern Irān - or at least among their élites - which drew on a heritage of shared tradition, if not linguistic and/or political coherence that is difficult to argue it did not play any relevant role before Cyrus' rise, as Matthew Canepa has recently strongly emphasized (and as it is implied by Panaino himself in the conclusion of his article).<sup>34</sup> For the purposes of this chapter (and more broadly of the entire study), such an observation is particularly relevant, because it contrasts rather jarringly with an opinion - still widespread even today - that sees the inhabitants of the Central Asian oases (namely the Baktrians) and those of the steppes (Sogdians, Sakā and, in some cases, Chorasmians) as representatives of different cultural if not outright ethnic groups, moreover in conflict both among themselves, with the latter constantly on the verge of invading the territories of the former in order to plunder them, and with the Achaemenid imperial power.<sup>35</sup> On the contrary, Herodotos' remark seems to reflect a much more complex situation, comparable in some respects to the one he himself described with regards to the Black Sea and the Propontis (4.106-108), another geographical and cultural context resistant to any simplistic classification on the basis of ethnicity, economy (which only means of lifestyle and subsistence strategies: «nomads» as opposed to «sedentary»), or linguistic and cultural categories. The implications of all this in the overarching framework of a study of the functioning of Achaemenid power in Bactria will hopefully become clearer in the course of the following pages.

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<sup>32</sup> Strab. 15.2.8: «ἔτι τῶν πρὸς ἄρκτον Βακτριῶν καὶ Σογδιανῶν· εἰσὶ γὰρ πῶς καὶ ὁμόγλωττοι παρὰ μικρόν». In other passages of the *Histories* (for example 4.24) Herodotos provide considerable evidence of his being very much aware of polyglossia as an indexical marker of sociocultural complexity and as a proxy of interactions of different nature within a given space, physical as well as (and especially) anthropic.

<sup>33</sup> Panaino 2015.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Canepa 2018; 2020. According to what Panaino himself writes (2015, 101), in fact, «Strabo's ultimate statement probably refers to various forms of *homoglossia* and *homographia* adopted among the various communicative strategies of the Persian Empire and that enabled a number of higher officers belonging to a few of different Aryan *ethne* to be sufficiently conversant with an Aryan *koiné*, based on the court language in Old Persian (plus Median elements and other socio-linguistic varieties)». Italics in the original. Note Schmitt 1994 on possible evidence for an Arachosian variety of Old Irānian: if and to what extent, however, such an allegedly linguistic coherence ought to be taken as indexical of an Arachosian identity (and why a single one, after all?) remains questionable.

<sup>35</sup> Wu 2010.



The third aspect that deserves to be discussed here concerns a detail of the panoply shared by the entire Central Asian contingent (not only the Baktrians, therefore, but also adopted by the Parthians, the Chorasmians, the Sogdians, the Gāndhārians, and the Dadaci - perhaps a neighboring population settled in the Kābul or Lagmān valleys – as well as, which is of special interest here, by the Sakā): namely the «native bow of reed».<sup>36</sup> A close comparison with the description of the Xiōngnú military equipment suggests that Herodotos is referring to the composite bow, whose wooden core (the «reed»?) was reinforced by the addition of animal - mostly horse - sinews which gave the weapon a particular flexibility and, consequently, a remarkable range and infinitely greater firepower than its counterparts in use (for example) in Assyria, thus making it one of the deadliest offensive tools available to the peoples of the steppes, from Mongolia to the Caspian Sea (and one of the most feared by their enemies).<sup>37</sup> The adoption of the composite bow by several Central Asian peoples, and in particular in the territories of Bactria, Sogdiana, and Chorasmia, implies either a process of diffusion from an «external» source (the Sakā) or, more probably and again by analogy with what is known about the Xiōngnú, the multi-layered (and consequently multi-lingual) nature of the population of both the satrapies beyond the Caspian and the Oxus, the inhabitants of which would most likely have found it difficult to describe themselves as ethnically, culturally, and/or socially (in terms of family units as well as genealogical and territorial alliances) radically different from the Sakā. Added to the previous considerations, this detail provides further support in favor of a reconsideration of the ethnographic space of Bactria in the light of sociopolitical and cultural considerations and not, on the basis of the majority of our historiographic sources - but with the exception, so it seems, of Herodotos - of a geographical-ecological or, worse, ethnic nature.

Much less famous than the catalogue in the 7<sup>th</sup> book (and therefore rarely discussed in modern scholarship), but to my mind no less relevant, is a passage within the 4<sup>th</sup> book of the *Histories* (4.204.4) in which, while informing his public on the fate of the Libyan city of Barke (Βάρκης), Herodotos tells the story of the destruction of the πόλις by the princess Pheretime and the deportation (ἀνδραποδισμός) of the whole civic body to Bactria where, so the Halikarnassian continues, «down to my own days» the Barkeans would still have been settled.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Hdt. 7.64 ff.: «Βάκτριοι δὲ περὶ μὲν τῆσι κεφαλῆσι ἀγχότατα τῶν Μηδικῶν ἔχοντες ἐστρατεύοντο, τόξα δὲ καλάμινα ἐπιχώρια [...] Σάκαι δὲ οἱ Σκύθαι περὶ μὲν τῆσι κεφαλῆσι κυρβασίας ἐς ὄξυ ἀπηγμένας ὀρθὰς εἶχον πεπηγνίας, ἀναξυρίδας δὲ ἐνεδεδύκεσαν, τόξα δὲ ἐπιχώρια καὶ ἐγχειρίδια [...] Πάρθοι δὲ καὶ Χοράσμοι καὶ Σόγδοι τε καὶ Γανδάριοι καὶ Δαδίκαι τὴν αὐτὴν σκευὴν ἔχοντες τὴν καὶ Βάκτριοι ἐστρατεύοντο. τούτων δὲ ἦρχον οἶδε». Hdt. 4.46.3 explicitly calls the Sakā «ἰπποτοξότα»: cf. Meier 2020, 164-167.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *Hànshū* 52.2401 and the discussion in several contributions by Di Cosmo 2002, 213; 2013, 48 as well as Golden 2011b, 142: according to these scholars, the composite bow would have been invented somewhere in Central Asia around the year 1000 BCE. See moreover Manning 2021, 108-110, who however to my mind rather underestimates the qualities of such a weapon (compare Dandamaev and Lukonin 1989, 225). For what appears at the present date to be the most comprehensive study of Sakā bows see Simpson and Pankova 2021, 103-124, 258-267.

<sup>38</sup> Hdt. 4.204.4: «Οὗτος ὁ Περσέων στρατὸς τῆς Λιβύης ἐκαστάτω ἐς Εὐεσπερίδας ἦλθε. τοὺς δὲ ἠνδραποδίσαντο τῶν Βαρκαίων, τούτους δὲ ἐκ τῆς Αἰγύπτου ἀνασπᾶστους ἐποίησαν παρὰ βασιλέα, βασιλεὺς δὲ σφι Δαρεῖος ἔδωκε τῆς

Although as far as I know all commentators - even the most authoritative ones – have rather unceremoniously glossed over this passage, it should be taken into serious consideration, at least for the following reasons. Firstly, the formula «περ ἔτι καὶ ἐς ἐμὲ» (and its homologues) in Herodotos usually alludes to that «local knowledge» which, as shown especially by Luraghi, in turn implies that what is referred to must have been considered at least credible within the community from which the story in question originated.<sup>39</sup> Since moreover the Libyan λόγος in which Barke's story is inserted dates back to the generation before Herodotos, it follows that, in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the possibility for a Libyan contingent, no matter how numerous, to reach Baktria was considered, to put it cautiously, not only likely, but perfectly feasible, and this despite the enormous logistic challenges involved.<sup>40</sup> The second argument supporting the hypothesis that the historian knew what he was talking about is of a linguistic order: although it has been argued, based on a passage from Ktesias' Περσικά, that the terms used by Herodotos are grounded in popular etymology, such a claim seems to be unwarranted for the following reasons. In Greek, «-ανιος» is not a suffix: since, therefore, it has no morphological autonomy, the possibility that the ethnic «Βαρκανίου» (the inhabitants of Barke) was perceived as actually deriving from a base «Βαρκη-», is difficult to refute.<sup>41</sup> If, therefore, Herodotos' account is at least partly based on a historical core, the narrative context within which it is set (a morality tale of ὕβρις and female tyrannical cruelty horribly punished by the gods) should impose caution when drawing general conclusions.<sup>42</sup> Rather than seeing in this episode the proof of the function of Baktria as a desolate place of exile (the «Siberia of the Achaemenid Empire», according to a formula as infelicitous as it has become popular), it rather testifies both to the high degree of mobility of resources - in this case the labor force - within the Persian Empire (this by now a well-known fact) and (more importantly) to the circumstance that Baktria was actively involved in this network, the latter a hypothesis that is confirmed by primary, archival sources, as we shall see in more detail in chapter 5.<sup>43</sup> As for Ktesias, although he claims - at least according to the tradition to which we owe his fragments - to have used primary sources («royal archives») in the writing process of his Περσικά, his reliability as an informant on Persian realia - from legal norms to court ritual and histoire événementielle - has long been the topic of a heated scholarly debate, which in recent years has

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Βακτρίας χώρας κόμην ἐγκατοικῆσαι. οἱ δὲ τῆς κόμης ταύτης οὐνομα ἔθεντο Βάρκην, ἣ περ ἔτι καὶ ἐς ἐμὲ ἦν οἰκεομένη ἐν γῆ τῆς Βακτρίας». Matarese 2021, 45-56 for a recent treatment of this passage, listing previous scholarship.

<sup>39</sup> Luraghi 2001.

<sup>40</sup> Note now Henkelman and Jacobs 2021 on Achaemenid infrastructure.

<sup>41</sup> The pertinent passage within Ktesias' work is *FGrHist* 688 F 1b (3) (= 1b 3 Lenfant, where the ethnonym Βορκανίων is attested: cf. however also *FGrHist* 688 F 9 (6) = 9a Lenfant). According to the Byzantine-epoch author Tzetzes (*Chil.*, 1.90-103, behind whom there seems to be once more a piece of information coming from Ktesias), Cyrus II would have found a satrapy of the Barkaeans in Eastern Irān or Central Asia: see Lenfant, 2004, 258-259). I owe a special thanks to prof. Alessandro Parenti (University of Trento), unparalleled mentor as it comes to linguistic matters.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. the contextualization of this passage within the Libyan λόγος according to Giangiulio 2010d, 179-191.

<sup>43</sup> On Baktria as a place of exile during the Achaemenid period cf. Rawlinson 1909, 23 (who popularized the equation between Baktria and the Stalinist *GuLag*) and Coloru 2009, 123-124.

strongly emphasized the nature of the Persia described by Ktesias as most of all a cultural construct. Consequently, the current opinion among researchers is that it is almost always true that his work says much more about how the Greeks imagined the Achaemenid world - especially the one hinging on the court - than about the actual («truly» Persian) topic he is dealing with. This is by the way a phenomenon well known to post-colonial anthropology.<sup>44</sup>

In a rather paradoxical way, it is however precisely the high degree of literary construction of Ktesias' work that makes it necessary to pay particular attention to anecdotes or other information whose apparently trivial nature or context, extraneous to the courtly environment – famously an archetypal theatre of all the «oriental» nefariousness featuring in Greek accounts of the Persian Empire -, might reveal details whose importance for the modern historian is inversely proportional to that attributed to them by the original source (Ktesias himself) or his epitomizer (e. g. the Byzantine patriarch Photios) who selected those passages. If by virtue of its similarity to the famous Herodotean description (5.52-54) the mention of a «royal road» connecting Ephesos to Baktria and leading through it to India – due not least to its vagueness - causes little sensation, far more interesting is the story of a Baktrian «merchant» who, in attempting to ford a river, is said to have lost a full cargo entailing some 500 precious stones.<sup>45</sup> In its apparent sketchy nature, this episode actually allows for some interesting considerations: from one of Darius' royal inscriptions (DSf § 10) we learn, for example, that Central Asia - and in particular Baktria and Sogdiana - were considered by the Achaemenid rulers to be the main source of such valuable material (rubies and lapis lazuli among others), a role that the region continued to play until the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, as was spectacularly demonstrated by the discovery, in the treasury of Āi Xānum, of precisely a block of raw lapis lazuli weighing 75 kg.<sup>46</sup> Another detail of particular importance is the one concerning the state (gems, therefore a semi-finished commodity) of the cargo lost by the imprudent merchant, because it agrees with the hypothesis, formulated independently on an archaeological basis, of the existence in

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<sup>44</sup> On the royal archives – allegedly – exploited by Ktesias during his tenure as courtly physician in Persia see Diod. Sic. 2.32.4: «οὗτος οὖν φησιν ἐκ τῶν βασιλικῶν διφθερῶν, ἐν αἷς οἱ Πέρσαι τὰς παλαιὰς πράξεις κατὰ τινα νόμον εἶχον συντεταγμένας, πολυπραγμονῆσαι τὰ καθ' ἕκαστον καὶ συνταξάμενος τὴν ἱστορίαν εἰς τοὺς Ἕλληνας ἐξενεγκεῖν». Regarding the literary construct of Ktesias' Persia see at least Rollinger 2010 and Madreiter 2012, 33-133.

<sup>45</sup> On the route linking Ephesos with Baktra see *FGrHist* 688 F 33. The Baktrian merchant's (dis)adventure his told in *FGrHist* 688 F 45 (= Fr. 45 (6) Lenfant). Cf. moreover Briant 2002, 377.

<sup>46</sup> Rapin 1992a, 50. The biggest if not only source of such mineral within the ancient world was located in the Badaḥšān region (at the border between Northeastern Afġānistān and Southern Taġikistān, near the modern-day Wāḥān corridor, known in Pašto as *Vāḥān Dahléz*, رواخان دهلېز). Remarkably, mining activity there stretches back several centuries, if not even millennia before the coming of Persian power in the region: Bavay 1997. As most recently observed by Nona Avanesova (2020) and Natal'ja Vinogradova (2020), the extraction of this material 1. might have played an important role in providing the economic wealth of the Baktria-Margiana Archaeological Complex in its regional variants (including further away from Baktria) and 2. might have involved mobile pastoralists from nearby communities (which was most definitely the case around the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE, as Trudnovskaja 1979, 108). This latter possibility is made even likelier if one thinks that the precious Chorasmian turquoise (also mentioned by Darius) was most likely mined deep into the Kyzylkum desert by pastoralist communities: on this topic Mariana Castro (*ISAW* NY) is currently writing a dissertation under the advice of Søren Stark.

Baktria of factories for processing semi-precious stones, probably intended for making seals, by the way further proof of the existence of an administrative system by no means less developed than what it is known in the West, including the Persepolis region itself.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, the technical and stylistic analysis of these objects suggests that their manufacture was carefully supervised - perhaps even by the court of the Great King himself -, which implies that their circulation within the Empire should be seen in the context of the economy of that «unequal exchange» which, as Briant has shown, played an essential role in the process of social stratification of the imperial aristocracy, in itself a very powerful instrument of political control.<sup>48</sup> The fact that the handling of this material, so important for the logic of the Achaemenid symbolic economy, was entrusted to - more or less shrewd - Baktrian officials (the size of the cargo suggests that the «merchant» featuring in Ktesias' anecdote must have held a very important position within or faced with the administration of the satrapy) is also worthy of note. We will return on this passage in more detail both in chapter 5 and 7. As these examples have tried to show, while classical sources are probably the wrong tool with which to search for clues about the administrative order and geopolitical organization of the Empire, they are nevertheless surprisingly rich in details about economic, social, and cultural processes as well as concerning the actors involved in them. A similar analysis carried out by Lauren Morris in the context of Hellenistic Baktria has brilliantly shown how rewarding this change in the Fragestellung can be: this is remarkably true, to mention but a single example, in the study of the economic history of the latest arrival on the scene of the Hellenistic Eurasian Empires.<sup>49</sup> The next section, therefore, seeks to test the validity of this method on Alexander's historiography, whose tradition represents by far and wide the largest part of the surviving literary (historical, geographical, and ethnographic) corpus on Achaemenid Baktria and, more broadly, Northeastern Central Asia.<sup>50</sup>

## 2.2. *Hic sunt peones*: Arrian, the *Vulgata* tradition and James C. Scott

As shown by the most recent publications on the subject, the use made of Alexander's historiography in specialist research is almost exclusively oriented towards the reconstruction of the political and military events that characterized the Makedonian's Central Asian campaign.<sup>51</sup> Such a focused interest is undoubtedly prompted by the sources themselves which, although they concentrate on

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<sup>47</sup> On Baktrian glyptic see Rancfort 2013a, 23-58. An overview of the archaeological sources for the Achaemenid Empire in the Northeast is now provided by Rapin 2021.

<sup>48</sup> Briant 2002, 316-324. On (unequal) gift economy see also Algazi 2003. The hypothesis that the process of production of seals was subjected by scrupulous directive control by the Achaemenid court has been put forward by Wu 2005, 73.

<sup>49</sup> Morris 2019b; 2021a; 2021b; 2021c.

<sup>50</sup> Nawotka *et al.* 2019.

<sup>51</sup> A notable exception is now Taietti 2022.

discussing Alexander's evolution (degeneration) and/or (most notably for example in the case of Arrian) on praising him as a brilliant strategist, at the same time testify almost unanimously to the fact that the two years spent by Philip's son in Transoxiana (329-327 BCE) were, by comparison, the toughest of the entire campaign.<sup>52</sup> When it comes to assess the reliability of the literary sources, most scholars usually adopt a combinatorial method. Having established that the historian of Nicomedia is the best among the available sources by virtue of his - presumed, since by his own claim the narrative in the *Anabasis* is based on the diaries written by eye-witnesses who, at least in the case of Ptolemy, were by no means uninterested in what and how they wrote - greater reliability, for over forty years scholars have almost unescapably adopted Arrian's account as a guide to events, using instead the authors of the so-called Vulgata (they too ranked in descending order of reliability, from Curtius Rufus and Strabo to Justin and Diodoros Siculus) to fill in the gaps left by the narrative provided by the *Anabasis* itself.<sup>53</sup> A notable exception in this regard has been the work of Ėdvard Rtveladze, whose topographical reconstructions, predominantly based as they are on archaeological evidence, however, have sometimes been met with criticism.

In recent years, more and more specialists have been voicing unease concerning this approach.<sup>54</sup> The most pertinent critical remarks rest on a number of methodological observations, the first and most important of which is the acknowledgement that, having very different literary traditions behind them, Greek and Latin historiographic sources cannot be (re)assembled in order to construct a coherent (but by all accounts artificial) narrative.<sup>55</sup> Although seemingly trivial, the significance of this statement becomes evident when one considers that a serious and exhaustive historical and philologically critical study of the different literary traditions underlying the surviving historiography

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<sup>52</sup> Particularly devoted to the reconstruction of the historical geography of Alexander's expedition in Central Asia and India are the contributions by Bosworth (1998), Holt (1988a; 1994; 2005), Rapin (2013; 2017a) and of the already mentioned Ėdvard V. Rtveladze (2002; 2019). See however most recently also Naiden 2019, 163-187. Müller 2016, 74-85, 278-311 and Alonso Troncoso and Álvarez Rico 2017 deserve a mention on their own due to the attention they dedicate to the understanding of both the mechanisms regulating courtly life in Makedonia and during the campaign and to the contrasts between the royal old guard embodied among others by Parmenion and the environment of the young ἑταῖροι around Alexander.

<sup>53</sup> The pioneer of this procedure was Brian Bosworth, whose commentary on the *Anabasis* (1980), although incomplete and today quite outdated, remains a fundamental reference point.

<sup>54</sup> While discussing the most appropriate methodology for the purposes of using classical historiographical sources to reconstruct the history of Hellenistic-period Baktria, Morris 2019b, 381-389 has highlighted a number of principled issues that can just as appropriately be referred to the years under study in the present work. 1. All the transmitted sources - including the Chinese ones - are constructed and shaped by their external perspective as well as by 2. the imperialist agenda and 2.1. the more general pedagogical-moralistic intent underlying the narrative of a space which 3. is moreover perceived as lying at the borders of the world known to these sources and about which direct information was scarce (notably, the Kuṣāṇa appear to have been completely absent from the mental horizon of both Greek and Roman sources). Therefore, they are often more useful for understanding the historical context that those sources produced than the space - or the societies - they attempt to describe. Cf. Mairs 2014b, 155; 2020b. More confident, although with regards to the late and post-Hellenistic period has been Rapin 2007, 50-64.

<sup>55</sup> Morris 2019b, 383.

on Alexander's campaign in Central Asia is a relatively new development, having consistently started during the last two decades.<sup>56</sup>

Grenet and Rapin have particularly distinguished themselves in this field of research. Their considerable authority is based above all - but not only - on their almost unparalleled direct knowledge of the places discussed in the sources (often at the level of village micro-toponymy), in itself the result of decades of archaeological fieldwork under the guidance of Paul Bernard and then, in later years, as directors of the French Archaeological Mission in Sogdiana (*MAFOuz*).<sup>57</sup> In particular, in two fundamental contributions Rapin has been able to reconstruct the genesis of the surviving sources, showing with convincing arguments how, contrary to the almost unanimous opinion shared by the specialists on such topics, at least since Tarn's work, in many respects the authors of the so-called *Vulgata* (Curtius Rufus, Diodoros, Justin, and the much neglected but important *Metz Epitome*) proves to be far more reliable than both Arrian and that tradition - both in Greek and in Latin - which depends, directly or indirectly, on the one hand, on the Seleukid court (mainly Antiochus III) and, on the other, on Alexandrian scholarship (Eratosthenes).<sup>58</sup>

According to Rapin's analysis, this would be demonstrated by the conjunctive error caused by the confusion of Zariaspa (according to him Marakanda-Afrāsīyāb) with Baktra, which occurred starting with the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. Such confusion would have intervened at a stage of the textual transmission that Rapin calls level 3, distinguishing it from a level 2 (the historians around the courtly environment of Antiochos I, e. g. Patrokles and Demodamas), which in turn follows from - and at least to a certain extent depends on - a level 1 (represented by the eye-witness accounts provided by Ptolemy, Onesikritos, Aristobulos, and the bematists). Furthermore, such revealing error would link (through the mediation of Eratosthenes and an unknown source, which Rapin calls «author X») and suggest he might be identified with Apollodoros of Artemita) the above-mentioned writers with Polybios, Arrian and a considerable share of the post-Hellenistic tradition down to Ptolemy's *Geography*.<sup>59</sup> The fact that this toponymic confusion does not occur in the testimonies of the so-called

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<sup>56</sup> See for example Bichler 2019 on Onesikritos.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. most recently Rapin and Grenet 2018 on the route followed by Alexander as he headed to India. Of truly revolutionary nature but remained almost ignored beyond the rather limited circle of specialists of Central Asian history are also previous studies such as Grenet and Rapin 2001 (on Alexander's campaign in 328 BCE), Rapin 2001; 2005.

<sup>58</sup> Matarese 2021, 15, on the contrary, joins the still very widespread view of Arrian's account as being more trustworthy than those of the *Vulgata* authors (but see now Degen 2022b on the *Anabasis*' narrative as shaped by Alexander official language). For an example supporting the claim made here cf. Coloru 2021, 67 on the ancient name of Barikot, a site in the Swāt valley (modern Pakistān). On the historiography which flourished at the court of Antiochus III following his *Anabasis* in (Eastern) Asia see Primo 2009, 87-103. Kosmin 2013b; 2014a, 66-76 argues that Antiochus III's true aim was not, as historiography has not become tired of repeating since the time of Polybios, to emulate Alexander, but Seleukos I, and that therefore the narrative drawn from these historians has the explicit intention of constructing an imaginary space, for the use and consumption of courtly self-representation. On court and Empire in the Seleukid realm see most recently Visscher 2020.

<sup>59</sup> Concerning Apollodoros of Artemita cf. *FGrHist* 779. By all accounts, the author of the Παρθικά must have been well-known to Strabo, who quotes him explicitly as an auctoritas (for example at 11.7.3 in order to debunk what he argues are

*Vulgata* is interpreted by Rapin as proof of the dependence of the authors representing this, different, tradition on another source (an «author Y», perhaps Kleitarkhos), from which another branch of testimonies («Z», possibly Timagenes?) would have drawn: from here, so the argument goes on, ultimately comes Diodoros of Sicily and, following the Latin translation of the original, Trogus Pompey as it is known in Justin's *Epitome* and finally the *Historiae Alexandri* by Curtius Rufus.<sup>60</sup> As for the *Metz Epitome*, this latter source would be a direct descendant of author «Y», as it is shown, in Rapin's opinion, by the fact 1. that it does not contain the confusion of Zariaspa (Marakanda) with Baktra and 2. that unlike Curtius Rufus, Diodoros, and Justin, it presents a more accurate geography of Eastern Irān (for example Media is in its proper place and not, as both in the *Library of History* and in Curtius, rotated by 180°). If they are to be given any credit (which to my mind is rather plausible), from these observations it would appear, paradoxically, that the *Epitome* ought be the most reliable source of the entire surviving corpus on Alexander's campaign in Central Asia, at least from a topographical point of view.<sup>61</sup> A similar conclusion has been reached - independently of Rapin - by scholars such as Müller and Ruffing, who have pointed out that classical historiographic sources, and, remarkably, in particular Arrian, are of little to no help in understanding the administrative geography of the Achaemenid Empire.<sup>62</sup>

If this is indeed the (rather disappointing) case, what consequences should the historian interested in studying Central Asia in the period before Alexander's invasion draw from it? Especially by virtue of the new documentary discoveries (most notably the *ADAB*) which provide, with a degree of resolution entirely comparable to that of the Persepolis archives, a first-hand perspective on Baktria and its neighboring territories, the best solution seems to be that of simply setting aside the administrative issue (territorial subdivision of the satrapies, their respective hierarchies and

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Aristoboulos' [*FGrHist* 139 F 20] and Patrokles' [*FGrHist* 712 F 5] inaccuracies as well as in 11.11.1, a passage in which a claim by Apollodoros is quoted, according to which «Baktria is the ornament [πρόσχημα] of Ariana as a whole».

<sup>60</sup> On Kleitarkhos see *FGrHist* 137. On Justin and Trogus see Primo 2009, 207-211.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Rapin 2014; 2018a, 258-263 (especially p. 259) and Goršenina and Rapin 2020, 194-205. These - as well as the previous - contributions by the French scholar are not even referred to in any among the most recent publications devoted to the study of Alexander's expedition in Central Asia written in a language which is not Russian (e. g. Vacante 2012, Howe 2016 and the already mentioned biography by Naiden 2019). On the cartographic misrepresentation of Media see Curt. 7.3.23 and Diod. Sic. 17.83 (where Alexander is said to have advanced in the direction of the Pontic territory and of the European and Asian Scythians (super Bosphorum in the words of Curt. 7.6.12), while in *Epit. Mett.* 4 he seems to advance Eastward as it should be expected, heading towards the Caspian lands (Hyrkania) and then the Hindükūš.

<sup>62</sup> See for example Brodersen 2004, Müller 2017a, 311 and Ruffing 2017b, 330. In particular in the case of the Swāt (سوات, also known as Uḍḍyana and located in modern day Pakistāni territory), the archaeological excavations conducted over the course of the last decades under the aegis of the Italian mission (*ISMeO*) directed by Luca Maria Olivieri have been able to show that the *Vulgata* authors seems to have indeed been more reliable than the account provided by the *Anabasis*, upon which however the entire narrative by Brian Bosworth (cf. 1998, 66-166) is dependent. See on this topic most recently Olivieri 2020 with previous references. On Arrian as Seleukid historian see Primo 2009, 250-253, while on his relationship with Alexander's ideological discourse (his «official language») cf. now the contributions in Degen and Rollinger 2022. As for Pierre Briant (see most recently 2017b, 843-844) he has on the contrary argued in favor of a considerable amount of (reliable) information to be extracted from classical sources (especially from the accounts devoted to the first Diadochic wars, especially Diodoros' books 17 to 19 and the *Life of Eumenes* by Plutarch), of course after appropriate contextualization and critical analysis.

boundaries) in order to focus instead, on the one hand, on the socio-political organization of the territories North of the Hindūkūš as well as on the power relations regulating the social dynamics of these territories, from the satrapal center to the villages in the countryside. On the other hand, it could be suggested that a promising way forward ought be pursued by means of studying different aspects of the satrapal territory such as 1. the nature of its landscape - with all the implications that this entails in terms of, for example, mining potential and land use -, 2. the economic resources available to the population and, finally, 3. the subsistence strategies adopted by the various human groups settled in Baktria and Sogdiana in order to understand how these interacted with the ambitions of the Empire.

In the case of the historiographic tradition, research of this kind has been conducted, with the results mentioned above, by Briant and, more recently, by Rapin himself, who has skillfully reconstructed the socio-economic organization underpinning the control – firstly Achaemenid and then, after the capture of Bessos, by Spitamenes and his allies – over the strategically fundamental region of Qashqadaryo (southwest of Samarqand) and of the Zarafšān valley up to the oasis of Buxārā (in particular in the area of Qarši, perhaps to be identified with the Achaemenid settlement of Nīḥšapāia, probably from a \**nīxša-pāya*, mentioned in the *ADAB*).<sup>63</sup> In what remains of this section, a few examples will be presented in order to show what can still be gleaned from the classical historiographic tradition and how the information thus obtained perhaps allows us to go one step further than the results - which nevertheless remain fundamental – reached by the studies of, among others, Briant and Rapin.

Let us start with the case of Curtius Rufus, which appears to be particularly interesting. On the one hand, his description of the landscape - and climate - of Baktria, which is primarily (and evidently so) aimed at praising Alexander's heroic virtues so as to render even more strident his transformation into a cruel despot with a penchant for extravagances of every kind (culminating in the murder of Kleitos at Marakanda during one of these revels), has significantly contributed in consolidating the image of a hostile region, teeming with marauding barbarians and populated, from the Hindūkūš to the Köpetdağ through the Derbent gorge, by extremely poor (and, as a consequence, very much hostile) mountain people.<sup>64</sup> On the other hand, however - and in the case of the Hindūkūš description to be found in his work, in the space of just two sentences - the Roman historian is able to provide some information that, in the light of what we know from other, but independent, textual sources

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. Rapin 2013. Qarši is known in Graeco-Roman sources (e. g. Arr. *Anab.*, 3.30.6 and Curt. 7.6.10) as Xenippa: see also Naiden 2019, 150.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Curt. 7.4.27-29 on Baktrian landscape and Curt. 7.3.5-12 on the dystopian feature of the Hindūkūš mountains, whose ravages Alexander manages to tame by virtue of his courage and superhuman ability to withstand hardship. Cf. Holt 2005, 45-84 and most recently Howe 2016, 151 for the most up-to-date bibliographic review on the - unwarranted - associations between Alexander's campaign and the resistance opposed first by the Basmāči and later by the of the Muğāhidīn to the Soviet troops at the beginning (1920s-30s) and at the end (1979-1989) of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as well as to the *NATO* mission throughout the first two decades of the following one.



(mainly the Persepolis tablets), allows us to get an idea of the administrative functioning of the Achaemenid satrapy as well as of the impact of the economy – to be understood *lato sensu*, thus including its political aspect - of the Empire on the local populations. This is not self-evident and for this reason all the more remarkable, and therefore the historian is compelled to scrutinize such evidence much more carefully than it has been the case so far. To this end, the description to be found in the *Historiae Alexandri* of the Hindūkūš and its inhabitants provides an excellent example, and therefore deserves to be quoted in its full length. Curtius Rufus' account runs as follows: «they [the local mountain people] are called the Parapanisadae, a rude race of men and especially uncultivated even among barbarians. The harshness of their climate had hardened the nature also of the inhabitants. They look in great part toward the very cold Northern pole, on the West they are adjacent to the Baktriani, on the South their territory slopes toward the Indian sea. They build huts of unbaked brick, and because the land is destitute of timber, since even the ridge of the mountain is bare, they use the same brick up to the very top of their buildings. But their structure is broader at the base and gradually becomes narrower as the work grows, and finally it comes together very much like the keel of a ship. There they leave an opening and let in light from above. Vines and trees, if any have been able to live in such a frozen soil, they bury deep in the ground; in winter these remain dug in, and when the end of winter begins to open the earth, they are restored to the sky and to the sun. But such deep snows cover the ground and are bound so fast by ice and almost perpetual cold, that no trace is to be found even of birds or of any wild beast».<sup>65</sup>

As pointed out by Morris, the description of the lifestyle of the Paromapisii provides valuable information about their nutritional strategies and the economy they were able to develop in an impervious environment such as the mountains South of the Baktra oasis, which can be fruitfully compared with other sources (ancient as well as modern) describing human-nature interactions and entanglements in the contexts of landscapes – wrongly - considered marginal from an «imperial» perspective, such as the Zagros mountains or the Caucasus.<sup>66</sup> The reference to the grapevine is of particular relevance because it disproves, at the very moment in which it is uttered, the literary and historiographic construct of mobile peoples as dependent on a subsistence economy based, moreover,

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<sup>65</sup> Curt. 7.3.5-11: «Parapanisadae appellantur, agreste hominum genus et inter barbaros maxime inconditum. Locorum asperitas hominum quoque ingenia duraverat. Gelidissimum septentrionis axem ex magna parte spectant, Baktrianis ab occidente coniuncti sunt, meridiana regio ad mare Indicum vergit, Tuguria latere crudo struunt et, quia sterilis est terra materia, nudo etiam montis dorso, usque ad summum aedificiorum fastigium eodem laterculo utuntur. Ceterum structura latior ab imo paulatim incremento operis in artius cogitur, ad ultimum in carinae maxime modum coit. Ibi foramine relicto superne lumen admittunt. Vites et arbores, si quae in tanto terrae rigore durare potuerunt, obruunt penitus; hieme defossae latent, cum discussa aperire humum coepit, caelo solique redduntur. Ceterum adeo altae nives premunt terram, gelu et perpetuo paene rigore constrictae, ut ne avium quidem feraeve ullius vestigium exstet». See however also Arr. *Anab.*, 5.3.2-3, Diod. Sic. 17.82.1, Ptol., *Geog.*, 6.17.1 and Strab. 15.2.8-11. On the different spellings of such mountain range (Παροπάμισος, Παροπαμισάδα, Παροπάνισος, Παροπανισάδα, Paropanisus, Paropanisadae) and their possible etymologies see Rollinger 2014c.

<sup>66</sup> On the mountain people living in the Zagros in the 1st millennium BCE see Balatti 2017, 247-302.

on the almost exclusive practice of pastoralism. In this case too, ethnography of the last century offers comparative material of considerable interest, from which a significantly different picture emerges, as the following example shows. Sent at the beginning of the 1930s to one of the most inaccessible and desolate recesses of the newborn Tağik Soviet Socialist Republic (the Vaḥš valley, East of Qabodiyon - Қабодиён -, in the extreme Southwest of the country, close to the Afġān border) as part of a colossal, and tragically ill-advised, project for the construction of a dam of mammoth proportions, the Soviet engineers (and the American Willard Gorton, recruited as an external consultant – bourgeoisie specialist, as he was called - and to whose diaries we owe the recording of the episode) found themselves being fed, after the central committee of Stalinābād (Dušanbe) had abandoned them to their own fate, by a few families of O‘zbek, Türkmen, and Afġān shepherds who with considerable skill were able to carry out the cultivation of corn, melons, wheat, legumes and – in fact – vines: all products with which until that very moment they had supplied the entire surrounding district (район).<sup>67</sup>

As noted by Christian Teichmann in commenting on Gorton’s anecdote, the fact 1. that until the forced collectivization, mass deportations, and terroristic campaign which, in successive waves, thoroughly disrupted the entire socio-economic and ecological ecosystem of Tağikistān, geographical boundaries were not economic ones and 2. that the economy of the upper Vaḥš valley depended on a few semi-settled herding households, should suggest caution to those who attempt to understand the political, economic, and social history of Bactria on the basis of rigid schematizations such as the dichotomy, no matter how refined, between «nomadic» and «sedentary» or «oasis dwellers» and «steppe inhabitants» (a topic on which we will return in greater detail in the course of chapter 4) when trying to make sense of what we may call, following Pierre Briant, la phase d’installation of Teispid-Achaemenid power in Northern Central Asia.<sup>68</sup>

Another passage by Curtius Rufus, this time coming from the 8<sup>th</sup> book of his *Historiae*, provides a second example of how a reading of the sources which is attentive both to the literal meaning of the text and to an appropriate contextualization of the latter can prove extremely rewarding. The setting is the late 329 BCE at the height of the war of attrition waged by Spitamenes (first arguably the most important ally and then the traitor of Bessos as well as father of Apama, who was to become the wife of Seleukos and mother of Antiochos I) against Alexander’s troops. Following a particularly

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<sup>67</sup> Teichmann 2016, 145. The construction of the dam (a project that Stalin himself followed with particular attention), as mentioned, proved to be a failure and the deportation, uninterrupted until 1937, when the infrastructure was abandoned, of several thousand people in order to supply the engineers with the necessary labor caused the destruction of the entire valley economy, which until then had been based mainly on the skills and ecological experience of the «nomads». What we are seeing at work here, I would contend, can be fruitfully understood by means of the microecological framework famously developed by Horden and Purcell (2000, 80-87).

<sup>68</sup> Briant 1978. For an in-depth study of the episode related with the dam’s construction in the Vaḥš valley see Teichmann 2016, 142-172.

devastating attack on a Makedonian contingent in a locality that is difficult to identify but which might be located along the course of the Zarafšān river, West of Marakanda, the Makedonian decided to confront Spitamenes in person.<sup>69</sup> However, the Central Asian's mastery of the terrain compelled Alexander to engage a series of exhausting chases, to the point of forcing him to change his mount in an attempt not to let his adversary escape, as Curtius Rufus relates in the passage of interest here: «Yet the king [Alexander], from time-to-time changing horses, pursued the fugitives [Spitamenes and his men] without interruption. The young nobles who were accustomed to attend him had given out, all except Philippos; he was a brother of Lysimachos, and had just arrived at manhood, and, as was readily apparent, a youth of a rare character».<sup>70</sup>

However trivial it may seem, the mention of the change of horses (and several times at that) carries with it some implications which it is useful to reflect upon.<sup>71</sup> Firstly - as in the case of the ethnography of the Paropamisii - this detail is in clear contradiction with Curtius Rufus' own portrait of Achaemenid Central Asia as a desolate and uninhabitable land. Marakanda was on the contrary in all probability the most important settlement North of Baktra (tellingly Arrian calls it «the royal residence in Sogdiana») and must therefore have been well connected both with the capital of the satrapy and with other settlements in the region as well as across neighboring territories.<sup>72</sup> To start with the obvious, Curtius Rufus' testimony therefore suggests that Alexander made use of one of those (multiple) σταθμοί that were the strength of the Achaemenid imperial road system so much celebrated in classical sources, from Herodotos onwards.<sup>73</sup> But it is possible to go even further in demonstrating the - in itself predictable - presence of the Achaemenid cursus publicus also in the Central Asian satrapies. The imperial σταθμοί must in fact have prompted an entire economy which, as the episode of the Vahš dam suggests, was in all probability based mainly if not exclusively on the resources available to the local population, and it is moreover almost certain that this economy was not limited to the procurement of horses. As, in his powerlessness, a disheartened Abdurrahim Xodžibaev (the chairman of the council of people's commissars of the Tağik SSR) had to

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<sup>69</sup> Rapin 2018a, 264 locates the events related with Spitamenes' ambush (narrated both by Arr. *Anab.*, 4.5.3 and Curt. 7.10.1-7) in the surroundings of the modern O'zbek village of Durmentépe, in a place called Ljajljakuī, along the shores of a tributary of the Zarafšān which Graeco-Roman sources call the Polytimetos (Πολυτίμητος, namely «the [river which is] much honored» in Arrian's words). Cf. the coordinates of this river's mouth as they are given in Ptol. *Geog.*, 6.14.2 as well as the reference in a Strabo's passage (11.11.5). The plausibility of Ptolemy's location of the watercourse in Sogdiana seems to be confirmed by the fact that in Middle Persian (Pahlavī) the river is known under the name of Nāmīg, with exactly the same meaning as the Greek hydronym: Rapin 2017b, 436.

<sup>70</sup> Curt. 8.2.35: «Rex tamen subinde equos mutans sine intermissione fugientes insequabatur. Nobiles iuvenes comitari eum soliti defecerant praeter Philippum: Lysimachi erat frater tum primum adultus et, quod facile adpareret, indolis rarae».

<sup>71</sup> Müller 2017a, 298.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Arr. *Anab.*, 3.30.6: «[Ἀλέξανδρος] ἐπὶ Μαράκανδα ἦγε· τὰ δὲ ἐστὶ βασιλεία τῆς Σογδιανῶν χώρας». According to Curt. 7.6.10 the city's ramparts measured almost 30 stadia. See on this topic also Grenet 2004 and Rapin 2018a, 263-271.

<sup>73</sup> Hdt. 7.239.2-3, 8.98, Xen. *Cyr.*, 8.6.17-18. Cf. on this topic Graf 1994, 167 as well as, more recently, Colburn 2013 and Henkelman and Jacobs 2021 with references.

acknowledge in a report he sent to Moscow, down in 1932 and despite the frenzied industrialization of the 1<sup>st</sup> five-year plan, the camel was still not only the most common, but also by far and wide the most efficient means of transport in the whole country.<sup>74</sup> There is no reason not to believe that the camels referred to by Xodžibaev were Baktrian camels (*Camelus Bactrianus* Linnaeus), and it is interesting to note that in Graeco-Roman sources starting at the very latest with Aristotle, this animal is of particular relevance, as it is shown by the fact that the philosopher describe the beast's features in considerable detail, moreover comparing it to its Arabian counterpart (*Camelus dromedarius* Linnaeus).<sup>75</sup> The fact that, while reporting on the murder of both Philotas and later of his father Parmenion, Diodoros notes that the messenger sent to Ekbatana from far away Drangiana carrying Alexander's orders covered the journey in just 11 days on special «racing camels» (ἐπὶ δρομάδων καμήλων) shows that, to the East of the Caspian, the camel was most likely what it might be called a real «strategic asset», which the imperial administration had every interest in not being deprived of.<sup>76</sup> Further evidence supporting this hypothesis could be identified in the large-scale breeding of camels as it is implied by Plutarch's account in the *Life of Alexander*, where he claims that the name «Gaugamela» means «the house of camels», five thousand of which, according to the same author, were needed to transport part of the Persepolis treasure to Babylon (and were therefore reared in the surrounding territories).<sup>77</sup> The strategic significance of these animals seems to have remained constant over the centuries, at least judging by the use of such «δρομάδες καμήλοι» made by the Türkmen (especially the Tekke) and Baluč clans even in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century: thanks to armed bands riding «quick-riding camels», which allowed them to make daily incursions within a radius of 80 miles (almost 129 km), they were able to terrorize large regions of Irān in the years of Qāḡār rule (whose representatives came to power in the 18<sup>th</sup> century), enslaving men, women, and children on a scale nearing in the worst case the tens of thousands. These people were then sold in the (in)famous markets of Buxārā and Xiva in Uzbekistan, as attested by the detailed and colorful accounts of Western travelers and diplomats, particularly the British.<sup>78</sup> As we shall see later in this work, and as the passage from Diodoros Siculus' account suggests, Gaugamela was not the only «camel house» available to the Great King: for the *ADAB* evidence in fact shows what kind of economic (but also,

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<sup>74</sup> Teichmann 2016, 146.

<sup>75</sup> Arist. *Hist. An.*, 2.1.5. For a detailed cultural and ecological history of the camel (and its human entanglements) see now Sala 2022.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Diod. Sic. 17.80.3 and Curt. 5.2. Here follows Diodoros' passage: «Ὁ δ' Ἀλέξανδρος ἐκπέμψας τινὰς ἐπὶ δρομάδων καμήλων καὶ φθάσας τὴν φήμην τῆς περὶ τὸν Φιλώταν τιμωρίας τὸν πατέρα τοῦ Φιλώτου Παρμενίωνα ἐδολοφόνησε, τεταγμένον μὲν τῆς Μηδείας ἄρχοντα, πεπιστευμένον δὲ τοὺς βασιλικούς θησαυροὺς ἐν Ἐκβατάνοις, ἔχοντας ταλάντων ὀκτωκαίδεκα μυριάδας».

<sup>77</sup> On the possible etymology of the name Gaugamela see Plut. *Vit. Alex.*, 31.3 and the commentary in Henkelman 2017a, 57, fn. 14. On the 5000 camels needed in order to carry the booty coming from the sack of Persepolis cf. Plut. *Vit. Alex.*, 37.2. On camels in the Persepolis archive, see now King forthcoming.

<sup>78</sup> The narrative of British Lieutenant Colonel C. E. Stewart is particularly graphic: see Potts 2014, 319 fn. 319 for further bibliographical details.

perhaps keenly, provided a too clear-cut distinction of the two makes any sense, sociopolitical) opportunities the demand for this precious resource on a scale such as that implied by the logistical needs of the Achaemenid Empire was able to offer for, at the very least, one component of Central Asian society. The episode of Alexander's horse therefore strongly suggests that a similar system must have applied to a whole range of equids, the breeding of which in Central Asia still constitutes one of the most important economic resources - and one of the most important sources of prestige - for a significant part of the local population.<sup>79</sup> As the examples discussed so far have hopefully shown, even a highly critical evaluation of the classical historiographic tradition does not prevent its fruitful use for historical investigation: it is, so to say, simply a matter of knowing how to choose which kinds of questions to ask to which sources.<sup>80</sup> Having now sketched in some details the contours of the first among our images of Bactria (the literary-historiographic one), the next section of this chapter takes a closer look at the archaeological and archival sources in order to delineate more clearly the features of the other image of this satrapy with which the historian has to deal: namely not the «transmitted» but the «excavated» one. We will then turn our attention to the ethnographic evidence.

### 3. *The Archaeology of Knowledge: Text, Space, and Time*

#### 3.1. *The King's Speech*. Bactria as seen from the Achaemenid Archives

In 1992, more than 50 years after Herzfeld's discoveries at Persepolis and almost three decades after the fundamental editio princeps of a part - conspicuous in absolute terms (2087 Ēlāmite tablets, to which others have been added over time, for a total (ongoing) amount today of around 7000 specimens), but negligible in relative ones (little more than 1/10 of the entire dataset according to some estimates, even less following the opinion of other scholars) - of the Persepolis archive, Vogelsang's *Rise & Organization of the Achaemenid Empire* rightly attempted to overcome the perspective distortion caused, among other things, by the fact that almost all textual sources on the Achaemenid realms come from the Mediterranean basin or, at most, from Babylonia. It did so, however, in the wrong way, that is to say, by ignoring almost entirely the approximately 25000 clay tablets found in two small rooms of a walled rampart at the edge of the imposing stone terrace (Apadāna)

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<sup>79</sup> Herds which must have been both numerous and large, given the fact that, as noted by Golden 2011b, 12, one or two shepherds on foot can manage hundreds of sheep while a single rider can manage herds of 100 or more horses. As implied both by a passage in Arrian's *Anabasis* (3.17.6) and by the Persepolis archive (see the remarks by Henkelman 2005, 159-164), there is compelling evidence suggesting that pack animals came partly from royal herds and partly from subject peoples, some of whose members by the way provided also specialized manpower for the royal herds.

<sup>80</sup> A similar point has been made, notably with regards (among others) to the Baktrian case by Pierre Briant (2017a, 51).

that formed the heart of the residence of the Achaemenid rulers in Fārs.<sup>81</sup> As Jacobs, Henkelman, and Stolper have forcefully underlined in the introduction to a recent miscellaneous volume which probably brings together the best of contemporary research on the subject, the documents coming from Persepolis (both the tablets found near the fortification wall of the Apadāna and the so-called treasury tablets, as well as the seals, which were also found in their thousands during the excavations) ought to be regarded as the most important source available for reconstructing the structure and functioning of the Empire's administrative apparatus, all the more so because of the considerations made in the previous section regarding the classical historiographic tradition.<sup>82</sup> The tablets provide in fact an unfathomable amount of information on (among other things) the names of officials, the territories in which they were respectively appointed, the languages used within the imperial bureaucracy, the organization of extraction, storage and logistics of resources (natural and human) from one end of the Empire to the other, but also on investment strategies in the satrapies as well as in the imperial heartland, and much more. Since the *Achaemenid History Workshops* series, an impressive tradition of scholarship has shown the enormous potential of this documentary corpus for the study of regions such as Egypt or Achaemenid Babylonia in order to investigate the mechanisms through which the Persian Empire managed to establish what Michael Mann has called «infrastructural power», i. e. the ability of the state to penetrate society and implement political decisions throughout the territory over which it claims control.<sup>83</sup> In an attempt to correct the perspective distortion caused by the outlook of classical sources - and in particular by the tradition headed by Ktesias, although Aeschylus' *Persians* had already exerted an important influence -, which describe the Achaemenid Empire as a patchwork of peoples held together (often with difficulty) only by the rulers' ability to impose their will by force, numerous contributions by different scholars focused in particular on the analysis of those documents which in his pioneering edition Richard

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<sup>81</sup> Vogelsang 1992a; 1992b; 1998. The figure of 25000 tablets (roughly corresponding to some 18000 original documents) it is estimated represented no more than a mere 25% of the total amount of the imperial archive at the time it was functioning (what we have must in fact have been a dormant one): see among others Henkelman 2008b, 177-179 and Garrison 2017a, 522. Jacobs *et al.* 2017 on Herzfeld's discovery of the archive.

<sup>82</sup> Jacobs, Henkelman, and Stolper 2017. More details on the composition of the Persepolis archive and on the history of the publication of the corpus as it is available today are provided by Henkelman 2008b, 65-179, but still worth consulting is the landmarking Hallock 1969.

<sup>83</sup> Mann 1984, 189; 1986, 98. Besides the already mentioned works by Briant, considerable attention deserves a recent comparative study by Jursa and Moreno García (2015) devoted to the analysis of both Babylonian and Egyptian fiscal regimes before the establishment of Persian power in these two regions. The main reason for this is that such contribution makes possible to evaluate in a more refined way the nature of the choices Achaemenid administration made on matters of such importance as tax collection, all the more so in the context of two among the Empire's newly established satrapies which, starting already with Hdt. 3.89 ff. were clearly perceived as paramount within the imperial economy, both in a literal and in a figurative sense. The essays in Kleber 2021 offer a fresh perspective on Achaemenid taxation across the Empire. For a detailed discussion of Herodotos' perspective on Achaemenid administration see at least Tuplin 2011; Tuplin 2018a. Colburn 2020a provides moreover the most up-to-date overview study on the dialectic between imperial administration and local institutions (his case study focuses on Egypt) from an archaeological perspective: see however already Colburn 2018.

Hallock classified as «Q» and «S», namely the travel documents issued by the imperial administration to individuals and/or to sometimes very large groups (especially of workers, called kurtaš in Ēlāmite) as well as the receipts certifying the amount of provisions available to users of the imperial road system.<sup>84</sup> In light of the great importance of these documents for understanding the organization of the Persian imperial space, it is surprising to note that - despite the predominant interest of research in the Western half of the Empire - the majority among the tablets so far published recording movements outside Persia (Fārs) actually concern those Eastern satrapies, where it has been assumed, more or less tacitly, that the penetration capacity of Achaemenid infrastructural power tended to decrease in proportion to the distance from the Empire's major administrative centers. The exhaustive analysis conducted by Wu Xin based on the sample edited by Hallock has in fact shown that, out of 109 tablets listed in his appendix covering an area wider than the Persepolis' closest surroundings and neighboring territories, 74 specifically deal with the satrapies further away from the heartland. Of those latter ones, 85% (55 documents) record movements of men, animals, and natural resources coming from and/or going to the Eastern satrapies. Among these, a significant role is played by Arachosia (explicitly mentioned in 9 tablets), but the importance of Baktria is indicated by the numerous occurrences of India (Hidûš, present in 23 documents, i. e. 31% of the sample), since the Eastern route to Pañjāb historically had a crucial stop in Baktria, as shown, among other things, by Alexander's own expedition.<sup>85</sup> If alone this simple statistical remarks would be sufficient to demand a decisive reassessment of the place occupied by Central Asia within the Achaemenid political and economic chessboard, the publication (resumed in 2002) of Hallock's inedited materials, as well as the continuation of the archive's ecdotic work, has enriched the Central Asian dossier with new revealing details, concerning, for example, the status of absolute prominence that the Baktrians seem to have enjoyed, as evidenced among other factors by the allocation to some of them of large portions of meat, a rarity within the corpus known so far, or of dried fruit, considered a delicacy worthy of the King of Kings' table itself.<sup>86</sup> Building on Wu Xin's study and enriching its analysis in the light of the new material made available especially thanks to the recent studies by Wouter Henkelman and Rhyne

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<sup>84</sup> Henkelman 2008b, 75-86 on the structure underpinning the archive and pp. 126-162 on the main guidelines regulating imperial administration in Fārs, according to him (see especially 2017a) a template to be applied and adapted to every other satrapy in the Empire. On these very same matters still worth consulting is the study by Heidemarie Koch (1990).

<sup>85</sup> Wu 2005, 100-138. On *How Alexander entered India* see most recently Rapin and Grenet 2018. Since Wu's dissertation a considerable amount of research has been carried out on Arachosia, which today represents the best covered among the Eastern satrapies: see especially Henkelman 2017a and King 2019; 2021, 266-314.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. PF NN 1507, a document which records 46 sheep (or goats) allocated to a group of Baktrians (text and translation from Henkelman 2018a, 236). As for dried fruit, there is an interesting mention (NN 2108) of a ration of kudagina, perhaps coming, as many other imperial Ēlāmite words in the archive, from Old Persian \*gaudakaina (Tavernier 2007, 456) given to a group of Greeks (yunuyap) travelling to the court. Henkelman 2010, 743, from which I take the reference to the tablet) suggested that the kudagina might have been «candied dried peaches / plums / damsons» which, so his argument goes on, must have been «an elite gift marking the status of the travelers and the favor they enjoyed». Henkelman 2021d as well as the impressing Stolper 2021 on fruits and related commodities in the Persepolis archive.

King, Chapter 5 of the present work therefore aims to provide an overview of what we currently know of Achaemenid infrastructural power in Baktria as reflected in the Persepolis archive. At the same time, it also seeks to draw some implications concerning the impact of such an overarching system and of its metabolism on the local social, political, and economic structures.

There is, however, a methodological point worth raising here. Although the most recent publications bode well for its reliability - at least from a general point of view concerning the functioning of the Persian administrative apparatus in the different imperial satrapies - the very nature of the source means that it is critical not to lose sight of its limitations.<sup>87</sup> The first, and most striking, concerns the (for the moment) still extremely partial nature of the sample available. Therefore, the aim of the study of the Persepolitan evidence should not be to establish a hierarchy between the different territories (or macro-areas, e. g. the «East» as opposed to the «West») of the Empire, but rather 1. to understand their general operating mechanisms and 2. once these have been identified, to ascertain whether, in what way, and with what results these general principles were applied to the particular context of this or that satrapy, with the - not secondary - aim of further investigating 3. whether and in what terms the regional ecosystem (available resources, socio-economic structure of local communities, and so on) forced the supra-local power to modify and/or to adapt itself to these contingencies, and finally 4. if so how, to what extent, and what consequences the above involved both for the imperial paradigm itself and for the local territories (and communities).<sup>88</sup> The second limitation, which is no less macroscopic, concerns the chronology of the documents known so far: they are in fact dated over a rather narrow time span, from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 28<sup>th</sup> year of Darius' reign (which is to say between April 509 and April 493 BCE). As it can be easily understood, this calls for caution when applying deductions from the archival material to periods other than those of Darius' reign itself.<sup>89</sup> Such a methodological caveat is certainly valid for the period prior to the accession to the throne of «Darius, the Great King, son of Vištāspa», since it is unthinkable that a structure of the complexity reflected in the Persepolis documents would have required at least some few years before it could actually function with the efficiency that can be inferred from the tablets and at such a level of capillarity (it is indeed amazing how quickly such an apparatus was made able to operate in the way that scholarship, since the time of Hallock's publications, has been able to illustrate).<sup>90</sup> It is not therefore

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<sup>87</sup> Tuplin 1987a, Henkelman 2008a; 2013 and Tuplin 2019.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Düring and Stek 2018a.

<sup>89</sup> Henkelman 2008b, 110-126 on the scope, both geographical and chronological, of the Persepolis archive.

<sup>90</sup> A fitting parallel in terms of both rapidity and efficiency would be the Caliphal conquest of the Byzantine and Sāsānian territories (Azad 2020, Marsham 2021). However, at least as far as the *Far East* is concerned, the feat of Cyrus' and Cambyses' (deputies) is even more baffling given that, contrary than the case of 'Umar ibn al-Ḥaṭṭāb and 'Othmān ibn 'Affān, prior to the Teispids there was no previous administrative template (to say nothing of one comparable to the Byzantine or Sāsānid ones, on which cf. most recently Canepa 2021 and Kaldellis 2021) which could have been relied upon.



by chance if recently Henkelman has identified the bureaucracy directed by the archive(s) as the main instrument of the «imperial leap» imprinted by the Persian administration on the organization, control, and exploitation of the territories conquered by «the spear of the Persian man», as Darius himself has it.<sup>91</sup> The argument is, however, much less valid for the subsequent period (that of the purported «decadence»), and this by virtue of the discovery of another - albeit fragmentary - archive, namely, at least according to the editors and to the almost unanimous opinion of the scholars who have recently worked on this evidence, the one from which originate the *Aramaic Documents from Ancient Bactria* already mentioned in the introduction.<sup>92</sup> It follows, among other things, that for the purposes of this study, they constitute the indispensable complement to the information provided by the Persepolis tablets.<sup>93</sup> The intense ecdotic and exegetic activity stimulated by this sensational discovery, in fact, has made it possible to show how, a century and a half later than Darius' Reconquista and thousands of kilometers away from the heartland of Pārsa, Achaemenid officials in Baktria still made use of terms, procedures, and sometimes even spellings entirely analogous to those found in other periods and in other places of the Persian οἰκουμένη (including, of course, Persepolis, our main benchmark). This is a fact which, among many things, provides considerable support to the view of the systematic application, by the imperial court and the chancellery gathered around it, of a precise method of government (which most recently Henkelman suggestively dubbed «the imperial paradigm») to territories as diverse as those belonging to the Great Kings' domains.<sup>94</sup>

There is, however, a third limitation, the nature of which is all the more treacherous since it concerns neither the chronology nor the completeness of the archives available for the study of Achaemenid Central Asia, but rather the very nature of these sources or - as anthropologists would say - the outlook that informs them and the principles on the basis of which the information they transmitted was catalogued and made available (as well as what which they withheld). In other words - and this is true in the case of both the Persepolis tablets and the *ADAB* evidence - the problem at hand concerns the imperial origin of these two archives. At the root of both, in fact (but this could perhaps be said of the concept of the archive itself, of its ideal type), there is the need, specific to every human community - apart from a few exceptions which, as we will discuss shortly, are particularly relevant in the specific case of the subject of this work - to classify, order, and inventory a surrounding environment, whose

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<sup>91</sup> Henkelman 2018a, 239.

<sup>92</sup> See most recently King 2021, 315-321 and Lemaire 2022, arguing that, in fact, what we have would come from Bagavanta's file, and not from Ahvamazdā's, as commonly assumed in the most recent scholarship on the documents.

<sup>93</sup> On the *ADAB* cf., among others, Shaked 2004, Naveh and Shaked 2012, Mairs 2016, Tuplin 2017a.

<sup>94</sup> Of paramount importance have been the historical, philological, and linguistic studies on the *ADAB* evidence carried out in recent years by Margaretha Folmer (2017), Jan Tavernier (2017a and b) and Christopher Tuplin 2017a. Concerning the imperial paradigm and its traces in the evidence (the imperial signature), see especially Henkelman 2008b, 136-180; 2010; 2017a; 2018a; 2018c; 2021a.

complexity seems to inhibit the action (and escape the control) of that very same community.<sup>95</sup> According to James Scott's sharp formulation, in fact, the primary goal of those forms of multilayered collectivity that by virtue of a long tradition we today call «state» consists, on the one hand, in the creation of social, economic, and cultural spaces that obey two fundamental criteria: «legibility» and «simplification»; on the other, in the elimination of their opposite, namely «ambivalence» and «opacity». To put it in his very words, «the first condition of state appropriation (for whatever purpose) must be an inventory of available resources – population, land, crop yields, livestock, storehouse stocks».<sup>96</sup> It is (or should be) rather easy to understand that the more the geographical extension - and with it the social complexity - of the community under investigation increases, the more pressing the need becomes for those at the top levels of that community to acquire as much information as possible on all sorts of matters, from ecology to ethnography, from topography to urban planning strategies, based onf which to orient their actions and organize their control of the space whose possession is being claimed.<sup>97</sup> Starting from this theoretical consideration, it is particularly striking that, with the exception of the royal inscriptions, the Persian Empire seems to have elaborated one writing system (imperial Aramaic) and incorporated a second (Ēlāmite) for apparently exclusively archival-bureaucratic purposes and not, as one might expect, for reasons of self-representation.<sup>98</sup> A fact, the latter, which makes it very difficult not to grasp the close relationship, which one would be tempted to define of a causal nature, between writing and imperial administration in the sense defined above.<sup>99</sup> This is why, in spite of the most diverse premises and historical backgrounds, land registers, archives, and censuses are, in one form or another, an inescapable component of any supra-regional political entity. The Achaemenid Empire is, of course, no exception to this rule: on the contrary, several of the strategies developed by it had a huge impact

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<sup>95</sup> It is precisely the meticulous application of these principles by the Achaemenid rulers that enabled Briant to draw up his (arguably still unsurpassed) inventory of the Achaemenid world on the eve of Alexander's conquest: see Briant 2002, 693-768 as well as, more recently, Briant 2009a; 2020 (the latter specifically on Baktria).

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Scott 1998, 9-52; 2017, 40-141. A similar argument has been developed by the Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1989) in the context of one of the most lucid (and scary) analyses of the Nazi genocidal phenomenon ever written: a salient feature of modernity - and more generally of any organism which in a way or another calls itself a state - would be, so Bauman (2005) argues, the attempt to wipe out both ambivalence and any «grey area» within its territory and, most importantly, in its body politic. As the study of Rollinger and Gehler (2014) convincingly shows, Scott and Bauman's reflections do not lose their validity when applied to a context such as that of a pre-modern Empire.

<sup>97</sup> Baberowski 2003, Gregory 2004, Northrop 2004 and Hirsch 2005 have shown how much this holds true as it comes to the last of Eurasia's Empires (the Soviet Union) and how far rulers were ready to go in order to gather information allowing them to shape order out of such a complex and entangled space.

<sup>98</sup> Ēlāmite (like Akkadian) has a tradition of monumental inscriptions (Malbran-Labat 2018, Tavernier 2018), which might account for its choice, together with Old Persian (which however had not, at least as far as we know), as one of the languages featuring on the Kings' visual programs – starting at least with Darius – (Rossi 2021). The findings of a least one tablet written in Old Persian (Stolper and Tavernier 2007: see moreover Tavernier 2017a; 2021) makes one wonder about its status as only an artificial language used for self-staging purposes.

<sup>99</sup> Scott 2017, 141 rightly points out that the *Epic of Gilgamesh* was written during the Ur III period (2100 BCE: see now Grafinkle 2022), i. e. roughly a thousand years after the first use of cuneiform writing for reasons of state administration, and a similar argument could be made about the Qin dynasty (Qín Cháo 秦朝, 221-206 BCE): see Leese-Messing 2019a, 138-148; 2019b.

over many of the conquered territories, especially those where, for whatever reason, as far as we know such traditions did not exist (in itself a strong argument against the hypothesis of forms of political organization of (proto)statal nature.<sup>100</sup>

However, the very fact that the information collected in the archive has to be processed - otherwise the complexity of the world they are recording could not be handled, therefore rendering the archive itself useless – brings with it as an unavoidable consequence that something of that complexity is inevitably and constantly lost (or is, more or less consciously, obliterated): something «is being eroded», as a rather perplexed Lieutenant Yolland comments in a famous play by Brian Friel.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, «this information is, however, like a cadastral survey, a snapshot soon out of date. As appropriation proceeds, continuous record keeping is required – of grain deliveries, corvée labor performed, requisitions, receipts, and so on».<sup>102</sup> In the case of Achaemenid Baktria, over a period of two centuries and a half, we see men, animals, agricultural products, valuable minerals, possibly textiles, and much more moving in vast quantities over an area remarkably larger than Central Asia alone.<sup>103</sup> Yet, it is, if not impossible, oftentimes quite challenging for us to know anything more precise about these men, why they went to the places indicated on their passes (halmi), how their communities functioned within the Empire and in relation to it: the very simple reason accounting for this is because such for us so important details are completely alien to the interests underlying an object such as the (imperial) archive.<sup>104</sup> Indeed, it might even be said that the latter is perhaps the most refined product of a process of simplification that is the indispensable premise of any form of widespread social power.<sup>105</sup> Even before the actual organization and functioning of the imperial machine, the archive as power object betrays and reveals a desire (a claim, as Richardson would have

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<sup>100</sup> Kindler 2014, 72. As shown by a recent edited volume on the Oxus Civilization (Lyonnet and Dubova 2020), the question if the BMAC possessed some of the features (for example an archival tradition of some kind) regarded as typical of a (proto)state is still intensely debated among scholars.

<sup>101</sup> *Translations* (Act II, scene I): «OWEN: What is happening? YOLLAND: I'm not sure. But I'm concerned about my part in it. It's an eviction of sorts. OWEN: We are making a six-inch map of the country. Is there something sinister in that? YOLLAND: Not in... OWEN: And we're taking place names that are riddled with confusion and... YOLLAND: Who's confused? Are the people confused? OWEN: And we're standardising those names as accurately and as sensitively as we can. YOLLAND: «Something is being eroded».

<sup>102</sup> Scott 2017, 141.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. most recently King 2021, 353-361.

<sup>104</sup> Note Scott 1998, 13: «If the utilitarian state could not see the real, existing forest for the (commercial) trees, if its view of its forests was abstract and partial, it was hardly unique in this respect. Some level of abstraction is necessary for virtually all forms of analysis, and it is not at all surprising that the abstractions of state officials should have reflected the paramount fiscal interests of their employer. The entry under “forest” in Diderot’s *Encyclopédie* is almost exclusively concerned with the *utilité publique* of forest products and taxes, revenues, and profits that they can be made to yield. The forest as habitat disappears and is replaced by the forest as an economic resource to be managed efficiently and profitably» (see, remarkably, Henkelman and Stolper 2021 on *counting trees around Persepolis*). Ingold 2000, 27-76 gives but an idea about how much has gone lost in that *Encyclopédie* entry which paradoxically might have been very much useful knowing even for the very sake of public interest (or imperial domination). King 2022 for an hypothesis concerning one reason for trips to the royal court as attested at Persepolis.

<sup>105</sup> Mann 1984; 1986, Ando 2017a.

it).<sup>106</sup> Following Scott's analysis, it is crucial to understand that what the records can tell us is «something about the utopian, Linnean order in statecraft that is implicit in the logic of record keeping, its categories, its units of measurement and, above all, in the things it pays attention to. The “gleam in the eye” of what I think of as the “quartermaster state” – is most instructive. As a mark of this aspiration, the very symbol of kingship in Sumer [*ki-en-gi*] was the “rod and line”, almost certainly the tools of the surveyor». <sup>107</sup> This process of simplification and (ideally, hoped-for) elimination of ambivalence, Scott goes on observing, can be summed up in five basic features, or steps, which is not useless to recapitulate here. This is because they also concern rather directly the kind of information on Baktria (and, one should not forget, on the Baktrians – the latter conceived as those living in or being somehow related with Baktria at the moment the record was written down) that we find - or not - in our primary sources, and specifically in the Persepolis archives, both in the *PTT* and, mostly, in the *PFT*. As for the *ADAB*, as we shall see, they in some ways provide a partial exception.<sup>108</sup>

1. Every «state simplification» constitutes a compendium of those aspects of social life that are of official interest: the service-oriented, utilitarian nature of these observations, far from being neutral, is on the contrary strongly interested, if not to say biased. It is, otherwise stated, a strategy or a positionality. 2. Any «state simplification» usually takes written form, which can be 2.1. verbal, 2.2. numerical or 2.3. both: hence the apparent aridity (synonymous with «scientific», impartial, objective nature) of a source such as the archive. A whole amount of data, (Scott's forest «as habitat») gets therefore consciously obliterated. 3. This art of recordkeeping treats social facts in a static way, providing at best, in the form of a snapshot, an answer X to a question Y, completely erasing the diachronic factor. Hence the need of updating the data, a process which can be extremely demanding for the imperial («state») apparatus and, even more importantly, it is usually impossible to achieve in a satisfactory manner without the commitment of a consistent array of collaborators.<sup>109</sup> 4. The «facts» thus stylized are usually also presented in an aggregated manner, which again considerably and consistently overlooks sometimes extremely important local specificities. There is, for example, only The Russian Peasantry, no matter of the differences from region to region and sometimes even within the very same community (*obščina* - община), to say nothing of individual peculiarities. 5. This finally implies that the strength of the information collected (and filtered) by the archive lies precisely in its ability to allow those in power to consider certain social facts as differentiated along a fixed

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<sup>106</sup> Richardson 2012.

<sup>107</sup> Scott 2017, 142 with related bibliography. On the utopian (presumptive, according to Richardson 2012, satrapal, following Khatchadourian 2016) aspect – condition – of imperial power (in our case the Achaemenid one) we will return in more detail in the next chapter.

<sup>108</sup> Scott 1998, 80.

<sup>109</sup> Kassimbekova 2014 provides a rather telling example of this point in her study on early Soviet Taġikistān.

scale of reference, thus attempting to generalize as much as possible while at the same time trying, as far as feasible, not to do it to such an extent as to jeopardize the informative content of those general evaluations which, to follow again Scott's argument, have prompted those in power within a community to develop (and to keep it working) a tool as complex as an archive.<sup>110</sup>

But in a context such as that of Achaemenid Central Asia, the obscuring of the multitude of voices mentioned above by archival rationality (from the point of view of the commissioner and the executor of the archive itself - it needs to be emphasized - an unavoidable necessity, and indeed the *raison d'être* itself of the entire operation of «state simplification») risks to put at substantial stake not only the study of social actors other than the small circle orbiting around the imperial court and its emanations in the various satrapies, but even an adequate understanding of the functioning of the Empire itself. The dependence - even for the performance of the (apparently) most elementary tasks, such as draining a stream - of the Soviet state on a multitude of otherwise anonymous players (each of them, moreover, not devoid of individual and/or group interest(s) not always overlapping with those of the state, and more often than not in fact directed against it) in the countryside of Central Asia and the Caucasus clearly shows how even documents in many ways as incredibly detailed as the Achaemenid archives require to be read through an appropriate lens or, as Scott would have it, both literally and metaphorically *Against the Grain*.<sup>111</sup> The question is, of course, which kind of lens is the most appropriate one to such a task. The last section of this chapter attempts to provide some answers by introducing a category (ethnographic evidence) whose potential seems to have been greatly underestimated by the historiography on Bactria, both during the Achaemenid as well as subsequent periods (though this is remarkably not the case with previous ones ) down to the Muslim takeover.<sup>112</sup> First, however, it is necessary to say a few more words about the evidence provided by the – in recent years consistently increasing - archaeological research.

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<sup>110</sup> This certainly does not mean that, when speaking of state simplifications, it is implied that it is something naïve or, worse, rudimentary. The Persepolis archive show that the very contrary was (perhaps even more) true 2500 years ago. On the contrary: what is meant by this expression is, following Scott (1998, 81) once again, that «first, the knowledge that an official needs must give him or her a synoptic view of the ensemble; it must be cast in terms that are replicable across many cases [notably: according to Henkelman 2017a the most important feature of the imperial paradigm developed by the Persians]. In this respect, such facts must lose their particularity and reappear in schematic or simplified form as a member of a class of facts. Second, in a meaning closely related to the first, the grouping of synoptic facts necessarily entails collapsing or ignoring distinctions that might otherwise be relevant».

<sup>111</sup> Kindler 2014, 73: the need to collect, catalogue, and exploit information on the part of the state actually shows not its strength, but the limits that some territories, such as for example those in Central Asia, especially outside the space of the agricultural-based oases, impose on entities, as is the case with the huge majority of pre-modern Empires, that are fundamentally agrarian (or as in the case of the Mongols, which conquered agrarian-based territories. How Muscovy became a regional power under the Golden Horde speaks volumes on this matter: Favereau 2021). On the Russian ethnographic enterprise for imperial purposes, see Kivelson 2006, 171-209 and Golden 2011b, 128 (who also significantly points out the different strategies adopted by the population to evade the intrusive curiosity of imperial officials).

<sup>112</sup> Schwarz 2022 for a good example of such a methodology concerning the *Land Behind Bukhara*.

### 3.2. *Multiplex et varia*: Tracing Baktrian Space over Time

One of the reasons why the Achaemenid period is (or at least has been until very recently) of lesser interest than the later historical phase(s) of pre-Islamic Bactria undoubtedly lies in the elusive nature of the archaeological evidence from the centuries characterized by Persian hegemony over Central Asia. Even in the Āi Xānum plain, by far the best-known territory in the entire area, nothing comparable to the vestiges of the Hellenistic city has so far been dated to an earlier period, except for the ruins of what appears to have been an earlier fort (Kuhna Qal‘a), located approximately two kilometers away from the Hellenistic settlement which however remained (purposefully, as it has been suggested) abandoned after Alexander’s invasion.<sup>113</sup> This has long been interpreted as a clear indication of the fragile nature of Achaemenid power in Central Asia: the same irrigation canals that crossed the plain of the Dašt -i Qal‘a were at first dated to the Hellenistic period, a position which took some time to correct in favor of a much longer chronological perspective that contributed to downplaying the «miraculous» nature of the (albeit significant) phase(s) of urban expansion of Āi Xānum in the post-Achaemenid period. To mention but one among the most debated examples in the scholarly literature on the topic, the city’s water supply would in fact have not been possible if the Greeks had not been able to make use of techniques much older not only than their settlement in Central Asia, but probably also than the advent of Persian rule in the region.<sup>114</sup> The case of ceramics is also indicative of the problematic nature of the available archaeological evidence: the first significant novelty in the Baktrian repertoire (the so-called Megarean bowls and fishplates) dates, according to the opinion communis, from the late Hellenistic period; as for the previous centuries, however, it is extremely difficult, and according to some it would even be impossible, to clearly distinguish between the ceramics of the late Bronze and early Iron Age (so-called «Yaz II») and the «Achaemenid» period («Yaz III»)<sup>115</sup> The chronology itself of these two ceramic phases is a matter of debate: while the French school, prominently embodied by Bertille Lyonnet, mainly favours a dating of the Yaz II pottery between 1100 and 700 BCE, the Soviet-educated tradition, represented for example by Boris Anatol’evič Litvinskiĭ, has argued for a significantly lower chronology (600-450 BCE), in order to link some - supposed - innovations in ceramic production to the establishment

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<sup>113</sup> Kosmin 2014a, 193 (stressing the purposeful nature of Seleukid abandonment of the site: see also Canepa 2015; 2018, 307-323 on Seleukid (and Arsakid) «topography of power» across Irān), Mairs 2014c. For an overview of the site’s features see e. g. Gardin 1998 as well as Ball 2019 n. 631, the latter enlisting all the previous relevant bibliography.

<sup>114</sup> Gardin and Gentelle 1976, Gentelle 1989, 81-106, Gardin 1999.

<sup>115</sup> See however Junker 2021; 2022 for a critical reassessment of scholarly mainstream on the topic based on her study of the ceramic material collected at Torbulok (Торбулок, to the East of the Taġik capital Dušanbe: but see already Lindström 2014; 2017; 2020, 301-304).

of Achaemenid power in Bactria.<sup>116</sup> The situation is not much better in neighboring areas (above all Chorasmia and Sogdiana), which the written sources indicate, although again never explicitly, as having been closely connected - if not administratively subordinate - to Bactria. However, even with regards to them, the analysis of the ceramic material published so far has not made it possible to clearly identify what specialists call the «Achaemenian horizon» within the archaeological landscape of these regions.<sup>117</sup> In recent years, however, significant advances in both interpretative methodology and excavation data have also contributed to a significant change in the archaeological profile of Achaemenid Bactria. As regards the former, Lauren Ristvet's and, above all, Lori Khatchadourian's studies of another liminal region of the Empire, the *dahayāuš* of Armenia, have consistently highlighted how the absence of monumental forms of social organization (palaces, temples, large urban settlements) cannot in itself be interpreted as proof of the inexistence of complex societies, capable of controlling and exploiting their territory in an effective and productive manner.<sup>118</sup> The results of this research can be usefully compared with more recent reassessments of early Iron Age Central Asia: as we will discuss in more detail in chapter 4, they suggest a revision of the current positions within the scholarly community (i. e. the interpretation of the development of infrastructures as the only precondition for the establishment of Achaemenid power in Bactria) in favour of a perspective that is more attentive to the evolution of the local context(s), which properly values what the different human groups installed in Central Asia before the arrival of Cyrus' armies might have – and as it will be argued in the following chapters, it is indeed highly probable that they actually did – offered to the (newborn and structuring) Achaemenid administration.<sup>119</sup>

This is an extremely important change in perspective (if not a paradigm shift), to which the studies in historical geography carried out among others by Sebastian Stride have contributed significantly. His archaeological survey of the Surxondaryo valley (in the Southernmost part of present-day Uzbekistan) has provided the most sophisticated examination of the landscape(s) which most profoundly defines the Baktrian territory - and of the various possibilities of exploitation that it offers – which is available to date.<sup>120</sup> Of particular importance for the present work, as will be argued, has moreover been Stride's elaboration of an ecological model of the region's settlement patterns through time in the light of which it seems possible to interpret in a significantly innovative way the precious little which is known to date about the first phase (i. e. prior to the carving of the Bīsūtūn inscription)

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<sup>116</sup> See the different positions advocated by Lyonnet 1997, 102-119 and Gardin 1998, 109-112 (the latter having some – although not substantial – contrasting views even with respect of Lyonnet's chronology) on the one hand and, on the other, Litvinskiĭ and P'jankova 1991 and Wu 2005, 145-167. Maxwell-Jones 2015 for the most recent thorough study of the ceramic evidence of a single site (the Baktra oasis) and now Junker 2022 on Taġikistān.

<sup>117</sup> On Sogdiana: Raiano 2014; 2019 Bonora 2019. On Chorasmia see Minardi 2015a, 61-79; 2021.

<sup>118</sup> Khatchadourian 2016, 81-90, Ristvet 2018. On Achaemenid Caucasus see now Knauss 2021.

<sup>119</sup> Lhuillier 2018; 2019.

<sup>120</sup> See for example Stride 2005 I; 2007.

of Teispid-Achaemenid power in Central Asia. A further crucial aspect of Stride's studies which deserves to be emphasized here, is the attention to that *multiplex et varia natura* of the Baktrian territory, as Curtius Rufus aptly has it.<sup>121</sup> Rather than concentrating just on the major oases, as had been the case until then (and as is still largely the case fifteen years after his dissertation), the ecological - holistic, to use Ingold's formulation - perspective of Stride's wide-ranging survey emphasized the latter's deep entanglement with, and (inter)dependence on, the surrounding territory, among which a paramount role was played by the steppes and the foothills surrounding the Surxondaryo valley to the North and South.<sup>122</sup>

This work was taken up and further developed by the research group led by Ladislav Stančo (Univerzita Karlova, Praha), which extended the scope of its investigation to the neighboring Sherabāddaryo valley.<sup>123</sup> Although mainly focused on the Hellenistic period, the research of the *Česká archeologická expedice v Uzbekistánu* proved to be of great importance in providing diachronic depth to a landscape archaeology that until then had been excessively concentrated on the synchronic analysis of - a few - contexts (for example the Āi Xānum plain or the Qundūz region).<sup>124</sup> From the point of view of this work, the most significant drawback of such an analysis is undoubtedly the confusion of different strategies of land use (in this case: the significant growth of some settlements, above all, of course, Āi Xānum) with a process towards more sophisticated forms of territorial exploitation (notably not limited to irrigated – or dry - agriculture). Instead, as chapter 4 seeks to show, it is highly likely that the Empire's low archaeological visibility was the result of a perfectly conscious choice, made in order to derive as much profit as possible from an environment that imposed significant limitations (or, to put it differently, endowed with specific affordances) to those claiming overlordship over it. And the most effective way of transforming these limitations into assets seems to have been through an intense collaboration with the local population, in a symbiotic relationship within which distinguishing too clearly between exploiters and exploited does not do justice to the complexity - and the creative component - of the political-economic and social relations at stake in such a multi-layered context.<sup>125</sup>

Although considerations of this kind may look a bit too abstract or vague, the reopening – albeit amidst a considerable amount of difficulties - of the *Dafa*'s activities in the Baktra oasis (Balḥ) on

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<sup>121</sup> Curt. 7.4.25: «Bactrianae terrae multiplex et varia natura est».

<sup>122</sup> Cf. Ingold 2000, 243-288 for an in-depth treatment of human-landscape interaction(s) from an ecological and not anthropocentric perspective. Weaverdyck *et al.* 2021 for a very useful discussion of the concept of landscape affordances in antiquity, with examples and literature (pp. 313-317 is devoted to Central Asia).

<sup>123</sup> Stančo *et al.* 2017a; 2017b. Havlík 2018; 2021, Stančo 2018; 2020; 2021. The – seminal - contribution by Havlík, originally written in Czech, has been made accessible to me thanks to the precious collaboration of Dr. Marie Tauchmanová, to whom my warmest thanks are due for having translated the text.

<sup>124</sup> Zachary Silvia's forthcoming monograph on the rural settlement landscape of Central Asia is going to further enrich our dataset and the overall historical picture that can be drawn from it.

<sup>125</sup> Stride *et al.* 2009b.



the one hand, and the resuming of research, after many decades, at the important site of Kyzyltēpe (in the Surxondaryo valley, in the present-day district of Shurchi), on the other, have produced results that seem to support to a considerable extent some of the hypotheses formulated so far.<sup>126</sup> In the case of the Balḥ oasis, for example, recent investigations have identified traces of a system of garrisons strategically placed to guard the most important routes to the South and the North, thus underlining the oasis' crucial role as an hub of paramount importance within Central Asian territories North of the Hindūkūš (the site of Čašma-ye Šifā, for example, appears to have been covered a prominent position within this very system).<sup>127</sup> In addition, survey activity in the oasis' territory outside the perimeter of Balḥ revealed the strategic importance of settlements such as Altin 1 and its counterparts in the vicinity of the modern settlement of Āqča (some 100 km West of Baktra) for Achaemenid control over the steppes, a clear hint to the latter's importance within the satrapal framework and the overall imperial (political) economy in Central Asia.<sup>128</sup>

With regard to the settlement of Kyzyltēpe itself, the most recent excavations carried out by a research team led by Leonid Sverčkov, Wu Xin, and Nikolaus Boroffka are noteworthy in that they have made it possible to collect and examine a significant sample of palaeozoological and palynological finds, a unique case in the archaeology of Achaemenid Central Asia at the present time: furthermore, their analysis has produced the most complete archaeological picture to date of an important rural settlement of the (late) Achaemenid period and – which perhaps is even more remarkable – of its ecological context.<sup>129</sup> This last aspect is particularly important because the information gathered in this way can be compared both with the Persepolis documentation and with the later (if seen from Persepolis, but notably almost contemporary to the Kyzyltēpe excavations) *ADAB* evidence, thus making it possible to understand, albeit in a fragmentary way, some aspects of the Baktrian economy both locally and in the broader context of the (socio)economic organization of the Achaemenid *Far East*.<sup>130</sup> It is precisely such an unusual level of detail in the analysis of the satrapal administration as it is allowed by this kind of sources that raises with new elan the question of the relationship between the Teispid-Achaemenid administrative machine and the surrounding territory. In other words, it forces us to rethink in a more sophisticated way the role of the pastoral and, more generally, non-sedentary, highly mobile communities in the broader (in terms of space) and deeper (in terms of time) framework of the history of Achaemenian Bactria.<sup>131</sup> Important as it is, however, one might venture arguing that archaeological and textual evidence alone is not sufficient

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<sup>126</sup> Wu *et al.* 2017, Marquis 2018; Lhuillier *et al.* 2021.

<sup>127</sup> Ball 1982 n. 186; 2019, 80 (n. 186).

<sup>128</sup> Ball 1982 nos. 36; 37.

<sup>129</sup> Wu *et al.* 2015.

<sup>130</sup> Wu 2018 and now King 2021, 322-343, further elaborating on Wu's data.

<sup>131</sup> See the important remarks in Kidd forthcoming.

to construct a sufficiently complex and plausible interpretative scenario in the light of which to re-examine the history of Achaemenid Central Asia and, most importantly, of its borderlands within, across, and astride the territory we understand as having been under the purview of the Kings and his satraps. It is for this reason that, in the following and last section of this chapter, yet another category of sources among those constituting the documentary corpus underpinning the arguments put forward in the present work will be briefly discussed, namely the ethnographic comparanda.

#### 4. *Myths, Emblems, Epics*. Morphology and History in Achaemenid Baktria

Since the time of Herodotos' account of the Sakā arrival into Media, both the Caucasus and Central Asia (the two possible routes available to the newcomers - assuming that the Halikarnassian's narrative can be traced back to historical events) have been traditionally interpreted by scholars as constituting *The Perilous Frontier* of the Irānian world on the one hand and the peoples settled beyond it on the other.<sup>132</sup> In one case, one of such frontier zones was relatively easy to identify (the imposing ranges of the Caucasus itself); in the other, however, the borderland(s) was much less smoothly delimited, fading away into the vastness of the Central Asian steppes. In both cases, however, the human groups coming – or perceived as such – from beyond those borderlands have traditionally been envisaged, from the Sakā to the Mongols, as playing the role of Irānian dynasties' bitter antagonists par excellence, starting already with the Achaemenids down to the Sāsānids in Late Antiquity.<sup>133</sup> In the case of Achaemenid Central Asia, the scarcity of written sources has significantly hampered research on such a vital topic as the relationships between the imperial polity and its Northeastern neighbors. With the exception of Herodotos' account of Cyrus' death in Transoxiana and the fleeting mention of a rather ill-defined Sakā contingent in Xerxes' army in book 7, in fact, until Alexander's time the only information, if one can call it such, concerning the relations between the Great King and those populations that the Persians, as Herodotos reports, generically called Sakā, comes from the Apadāna bas-reliefs - in which they also appear as tributaries of the Persian monarchs - and from the Bīsutūn inscription.<sup>134</sup> From this last document (col. V § 75) we learn that, moved by disdain by virtue of the fact that these people did not worship Ahuramazdā (avaî Sakā arīkā āha, those Sakā were faithless) Darius would have crossed «the river» - probably the Syrdaryo - and would then

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<sup>132</sup> Barfield 1989 for the title quoted in the text.

<sup>133</sup> See Hdt. 1.104 ff. On the interpretation of the route(s?) followed by the Sakā see the different positions of Vogelsang 1992a (in favor of the Central Asian hypothesis) and Adalı 2017, 62, who instead, in agreement with most scholars, tends to follow Herodotos' account and therefore locates the origin of the Cimmerians and Scythians mentioned by both Herodotos and Strabo (11.14.14) and, above all, Assyrian and Urartean sources, North of the Caucasus. As a sidenote to the above, it might be argued that in both reconstructions borderland dynamics have been interpreted in a far too static way. Compare Balatti 2017 on the porous and dynamic nature of mountain environments in the Ancient Near East.

<sup>134</sup> Swart 2021, 245-248 on the Apadāna.

have subjected them to his will, which is to say, of Ahuramazdā itself, for it is in the name and under the protection and benevolence of him «and the other gods who are» that the Great King constantly declares to act.<sup>135</sup>

To date, the most sophisticated attempts at investigating the role of the Sakā in the political and administrative framework of the Achaemenid *Far East* have been carried out by Briant through a systematic analysis of the literary sources (especially Arrian and Curtius Rufus), in an attempt to reconstruct, from the point of view of imperial organization, the relations between the Persian King, his officials active in the territory - starting with the satrap - and the inhabitants of the borderland satrapies such as, for example, Baktria and Sogdiana.<sup>136</sup> More recently, Claude Rapin sought to reassess the evidence already studied by Briant in the light of his long archaeological activity especially in the Samarqand area and in the region (viloyat) of Qashqadaryo, in order to elucidate 1. the politics and policy of territorial control adopted by the Empire in strategically crucial areas such that guarded by the Derbent passes, on the border between the valleys of the Qashqadaryo and, more to the South, of the Surxondaryo on the one hand while, on the other, 2. trying to shed further light on the role played within these strategies by some prominent personalities (Sisimithres, Chorienes, Oxyartes himself - the father of Rōxanē) who enter the narrative provided by the extant literary sources only because they were the target of Alexander's (very much unwelcomed) attentions.<sup>137</sup>

Although path-breaking in nature and still unavoidable, it will not escape the attentive reader's notice that both Briant and Rapin's studies are mainly concerned with the reconstruction of the administrative structure of Baktria and Sogdiana, and much less with the analysis not only of the political - the fact that they are prominent personalities goes or should go almost without saying - but also, more specifically, of the socio-economic role of individuals such as the aforementioned Central Asian magnates (and many others could be added, from the Chorasmian Pharasmanes to Catanes and Austanes in the lower Surxondaryo through Arimazes at Derbent and, of course, Spitamenes).<sup>138</sup> Over

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<sup>135</sup> On Cyrus' campaign in Transoxiana see Hdt. 1.201-216 and Waters 2010; 2014, 42-43 with Bichler 2021 for the episode's Fortleben. Concerning Darius' expedition against the unfaithful (or apostates?) Sakā see Lincoln 2012, 405, Rollinger 2013, 61 and now the foundational Rollinger and Degen 2021b. For an edition with translation of the Bīsūtūn text see *API*, 91 and *CII* 1, while on the Apadāna reliefs, among many others, worth mentioning is the lengthy (and debated in its conclusions) study by Gropp 2009 and now Swart 2021, 117-268 (pp. 241-248 focus on Northeastern Central Asia).

<sup>136</sup> Briant 1983, 181-234; 1985 as well as the pages devoted to this topic in the *History of the Persian Empire* (Briant 2002, 842-872).

<sup>137</sup> Of paramount importance here are the twin studies by Claude Rapin (2013; 2018a). An interim summary on Alexander's strategy in Central Asia was provided by Rapin 2017a. See moreover the overview in Goršenina and Rapin 2020 and Rapin 2021. Rapin *et al.* 2022 provides a much awaited historical and archeological assessment on the Derbent wall (which however blinds out the situation under the Achaemenids).

<sup>138</sup> Classical literary sources label such men with the quite vague term of ὑπαρχοί (if they are written in Greek) or *praetores* if we are dealing with Roman authors. Here some textual reference as a way of example. Sisimithres is mentioned by Arr. *Anab.*, 4.21.6-10, Austanes shows up instead in Curt. 8.5.2. As for Pharasmanes, a meeting with Alexander in 328 BCE is reported again by Arr. *Anab.*, 4.15.4 and by Curt. 8.1.8. See more in general the biographic entries in Heckel 2006.

the past 15 years, in numerous detailed publications, Wu Xin has been perhaps the most vocal advocate of a radical change in perspective on these matters, arguing for the need to study Achaemenid Bactria in the context of a broader Central Asian horizon. The main (and arguably most welcome) novelty of such a point of view consists in the fact that, instead of limiting the perimeter of the analysis to the spaces immediately adjacent to the territory of the satrapies of Bactria and Sogdiana (e. g. the pre-Aralic steppes or the Fargāne valley), the scholar proposed to considerably widen the focus to include territories (from the so-called hunger steppe in Qazaqstan to the Altaï and Transbaikalia) traditionally classified as belonging to another field of scholarship entirely, namely that of Inner Asia – thus to a certain extent linking the world of the «Achaemenid» Sakā with those of the mobile people of the Mongolian plains as far as Manchuria.<sup>139</sup> As a number of recent contributions have shown, Wu’s intuition has been particularly foresighted, since in the last years voices in favor of including the peoples of the steppes in the framework of a broader study of the great Empires of Eurasia, from imperial Rome to Táng, China have multiplied, with results in more than one case of absolute importance.<sup>140</sup> It is therefore at the same time interesting and quite disappointing to note that - apart from the already mentioned Wu Xin -, in such a scholarly trend, the Achaemenid Empire is conspicuous by its absence.<sup>141</sup> Also noteworthy, in this context, is the use which has been made by the scholar of materials that until now constituted the almost exclusive domain of other disciplines (from epigraphy to art history), with the aim of reconstructing, through the adoption – again rather foresighted in the framework of research on Achaemenid Central Asia - of such theoretical tools as those proper of the so-called network analysis, the type and frequency of the contacts between the satrapies of the Persian Far East and the world of highly mobile shepherds dwelling in the Eurasian steppes. Such methods have been especially instrumental in her studies of the extraordinary findings from Pazyryk (a Late Iron Age site on the Ukok Plateau, in the raïon – район - of Koš-Agačskii) as well as of the copious, but until then much neglected as it comes to such kind of research questions, imperial glyptic production.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> The Hunger Steppe is known as Мырзашөл (*Myrzashөл*) in Qazaq, under the name of *Mirzacho’l* in O’zbek and as Голодная степь (*Golodnaja Stjep’*) in Russian: see for more details the map attached to Kindler’s study (2014). On the terminology that has become established in the study of these regions of Eurasia see Goršenina 2014, 519-544. The first study in which Wu Xin openly argued for the importance of this broadening of the scholarly horizon has been her doctoral dissertation (Wu 2005, 6-16). Kim 2021 is suggestive of how productive such an approach might actually be.

<sup>140</sup> Note most recently Beckwith 2023.

<sup>141</sup> Considering only Eurasian history before the coming of Islam, see e. g. Beckwith 2009, 29-162, Golden 2011b, Hansen 2012, 25-56, Kim 2017, Christian 2018 I, 121-244, Meier 2020, 298-309, 953-1020. Worth mentioning are however two recent articles by Søren Stark, which at least partially fill this regrettable gap: 2020, 81-82, 2021 as well as Jacobs and Gufler 2021.

<sup>142</sup> Wu 2005, 321-375; 2007. On the so-called *Frozen Tombs* of Pazyryk see the still fundamental Rudenko 1970 as well as, more recently, the contribution by Crescioli 2017, the pages devoted to this evidence in Simpson and Pankova 2021 as well as the thorough assessment of the Pazyryk culture in Linduff and Rubinson 2021. Not least because of the scarcity of the sources and the difficulties of interpretation, the use of both tools and theories developed by network analysis in the context of Central Asian studies – which until a few years ago was dominated by questions almost entirely devoted to

The enormous potential and the most innovative aspects of these studies, however, appear to be tainted by some fundamental methodological issues, which significantly condition their results and, consequently, the overall profile of Achaemenid Baktria that emerges from them. For the purposes of the present discussion, it is appropriate to mention at once what to my mind seem to represent both the most questionable arguments - and the theoretical problems - characterizing both Wu Xin's more recent work and her previous research. First: an excessively strict interpretation of the sources – which it should be once again stressed, are all exogenous - attempting to elaborate an ethnography of the Central Asian peoples.<sup>143</sup> Such an ethno-linguistic distinction (Baktrians - Sogdians - Sakā) underpins a second, equally problematic differentiation, this time however of a socio-political order, namely that between oasis dwellers (the Baktrians) and steppe inhabitants (Sogdians and Sakā).<sup>144</sup> Third: these distinctions preclude the demonstration, through a combinatory use of the archaeological and literary evidence (which we have seen to be inherently problematic especially when it comes to the study of the steppe worlds), of a general model, the latter in turn aiming at inscribing the relations between the Empire (represented by the satrap of Baktria) and the local populations and/or those of the neighboring steppes (again: Sogdians, Chorasmians, Sakā) within a framework of constant conflict, on the basis of similar theories elaborated some years ago concerning another frontier: that of Northern China. The simple fact that, at least as far as the latter *Perilous Frontier* is concerned, models favoring a too clear-cut distinctions between one side of the frontier and the other and/or advocating a conflictual model of interactions have undergone serious criticism in recent years should give us pause to think with regards to their applicability within the context of Achaemenid Central Asia.<sup>145</sup>

One of the most ambitious aims of the present work is probably to critically confront all the arguments presented above, in the belief that they are based on overly simplistic socio-

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the *histoire bataille* (the first reversal of such a trend is the prolegomena to a cultural history of this space by Mairs 2014b, and now Hoo 2022) is much more limited than, for example, what is now common practice within the field of Mediterranean studies: in this regard, see at least Horden and Purcell 2000, Malkin 2002, and Weaverdyck 2019b, 322-327 for a concise but dense summary.

<sup>143</sup> Besides DB (Darius' trilingual inscription at Bīsutūn: all too often the Old Persian version is the only one considered by scholars), worth mentioning is at least Strab. 15.2.8 who, by the way, as already noted, argued that, at least from a linguistic perspective, it was by no way so easy (surely for his sources) to clearly distinguish between Baktrian and Sogdians: «εἰσὶ γὰρ πῶς καὶ ὁμόγλωττοι παρὰ μικρόν». That «an ethno-cultural and military unity» existed within the context of the Achaemenid upper satrapies (especially in Central Asia) has been stressed by Briant 2018a, 191.

<sup>144</sup> Wu 2005, 142-166. The sheer fact that Hdt. 4. 26 reports how, in the Bosphoros and Black Sea area, interactions between different social actors took place in no less than seven languages should make too easy equivalences between language and cultural and/or political affiliation suspect, especially in a territory such as Central Asia in which, even up to a generation ago, the majority of the local population (though almost never the party cadres) grew up in an environment that was at least bilingual (Russian/Qazaq, Russian/Tağik and so on), when not even tri- or quadrilingual (especially in and across the borderlands, for example between Afğānistān, Tağikistān, and Uzbekistan).

<sup>145</sup> Wu 2010; 2014. The model on which her contributions ultimately rest had been developed in previous years by Thomas J. Barfield (1989; 2001). For a – very – critical evaluation of this very same model cf. the arguments convincingly put forward by Bryan K. Miller in his important dissertation (2009, 61-63) as well as by the seminal Di Cosmo 2002.

anthropological categories: among the most significant consequences of such an outlook as the one presented above is a considerable underestimation of the skills and resources of those forms of human group organization and land exploitation that Adalı has recently termed «nomadic states» in the context of the genesis and functioning of the satrapies which after Cyrus' conquest developed into Achaemenid Central Asia, and in particular Baktria, throughout the entire historical trajectory of the Empire.<sup>146</sup> The main features of the new interpretative scenario upon which the overarching theoretical architecture and historical analysis of the source material within the present study are based will be dealt with in more detail in the course of chapter 4. What is important to stress here is that the elaboration of the latter would not have been possible in the absence of the comparative evidence offered 1. by the most recent studies conducted, inter alia, on the peoples of Inner Asia - above all the Xiōngnú, and 2. by the massive amount of ethnographic material gathered from the study of Central Asia, and to a not inconsiderable extent of Azerbaijān (Azərbaycan), in the decades prior to the first Soviet five-year plan (1928-1932, the so-called «revolution from above» promoted by Stalin and his inner circle).<sup>147</sup> In what remains of this section, a few examples will try to clarify both how and why such a comparative method can significantly help to look at Achaemenid Baktria from an entirely new and potentially very fruitful perspective.

#### 4.1. Beasts From the North: New *Sakā*, New Borderlands

The main reason that justifies an in-depth comparison with the most up-to-date specialized literature devoted to the interactions between the Hán Empire and the Xiōngnú lies in the fact that, not so differently from the Achaemenid case, also with regards to the Northern frontier of the Heavenly Kingdom the prevailing interpretative model has always been that of embittered warfare. This inclination toward confrontational attitudes was explained by appealing to the structural economic dependence of the peoples of the steppes (and of the Empires that some of them founded and of which the Xiōngnú were the most illustrious predecessors), on the products – mainly agricultural but also of prestige goods and other valuable objects of special importance in terms of the social status acquired through them by the most representative members of Xiōngnú society - located on the other side of the frontier(zones), in the imperial lands.<sup>148</sup> According to such line of reasoning, this

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<sup>146</sup> Adalı 2017, 65. Other definitions and classifications have been proposed, to mention but an authoritative example, by Kradin 2011a; 2011b. Cf. also Rogers 2012; 2015; 2017.

<sup>147</sup> Note moreover Brower 2003, Geiss 2014, and Kendirbai 2020 on the Tsarist period.

<sup>148</sup> Barfield 1989, 32-86 and Khazanov 1994<sup>2</sup>, 64-84, with the latter having been instrumental in the development of the theory according to which pastoral economies would be structurally dependent on the agrarian ones (they are, in his words, not self-sufficient, which is demonstrably false: compare Humphrey and Sneath 1999 and Honeychurch 2015). On the Xiōngnú cf. e. g. Brosseder 2019, with literature.

dependency was allegedly compensated for by the steppe aristocracy mainly through the use of two strategies: firstly, by repeated raids in Chinese territory or through the threat of invading the borderlands, usually with the intention - by exploiting the tactical superiority provided by their cavalry - of extorting from the Empire sumptuous subsidies (*munera*, as the Romans would have said), according to a policy that Chinese sources euphemistically call *héqīn* (和親, or «of perpetual peace»), the latter being in fact the result of the disastrous defeat suffered by the imperial troops in 200 BCE at the battle of Bādēng (白登之戰, in the present province of Shānxī 山西).<sup>149</sup> Starting from a seminal study by Nicola Di Cosmo, a more theoretically sophisticated reading of historical sources (above all the *Shǐjì*) on the one hand and, on the other, a careful evaluation of the enormous progresses made by archaeological research (for example the excavations at Noyon Uul, in the sum - district - of Batsümbèr - Батсүмбэр -, North of the capital Ulaanbaatar), have revolutionized our understanding of both Xiōngnú society and, consequently, our picture of the latter's interactions with the Hán Empire.<sup>150</sup>

When compared with what is known from modern and contemporary ethnography of agro-pastoralist communities in Mongolia (be they organized in whatever sociopolitical forms, from small or larger family lineages to Empires), this seemingly insignificant detail allows the following to be deduced. 1. Rather than by making use of the vague and misleading label of «nomads», the Xiōngnú - like probably the vast majority, if not all, of pastoral societies in Eurasian history - should more correctly be described as hybrid agro-pastoral communities within which, depending on seasonality and ecological, economic, and or political opportunity, sometimes extremely sophisticated forms of agriculture were practiced besides herding activity.<sup>151</sup> 2. Secondly, it follows that the possession of land – which is explicitly mentioned in the *Shǐjì*, was arguably a consequence of Xiōngnú society's organization on the base of «ritually» defined groups that congregate in certain places (*nutga*) for particular social reasons, [which] demonstrates the coexistence of identities and socio-political networks that might be open to (re)interpretation between and at gatherings. These distinctions are

<sup>149</sup> On Chinese imperial policy of *héqīn* still worth consulting, although its being now quite outdated, is the seminal monograph by Yú 1967. However, in a recent and very much influential article (2015), the German Sinologist Armin Selbitschka has offered a significantly new reassessment of Hán strategy of dealing with pastoral people at the Empire Northern and Western borders: see also Di Cosmo 2002, 190 ff.

<sup>150</sup> *Shǐjì* 史記, 110.2879: «其畜之所多則馬、羊，其奇畜則橐駝、驢、羸、馱騾、駒駘、驂騾。逐水草遷徙，毋城郭常處耕田之業，然亦各有分地». This passage's translation, which I borrow from Di Cosmo 2002, 272, runs as follows: «Most of their domestic animals are horses, cows, sheep, and they also have rare animals such as camels, donkeys, mules, hinnies and other equines known as *táotū* e *tuóxi*. They move about according to the availability of water and pasture, have no walled towns or fixed residences, nor any agricultural activities, but each of them has a portion of land». See the relevant articles in Simpson and Pankova 2021 on the archaeological record coming from Noyon Uul.

<sup>151</sup> For the definition of «agro-pastoral hybrid communities» see Kim 2017, 15. Consult moreover Kidd forthcoming on Central Asia.

the sorts that were manipulatable in the realm of power politics». <sup>152</sup> 3. A third consequence to be drawn from such evidence is that gatherings comparable to those taking place at the nutga were in all likelihood intended to (re)structure both the cohesion between the élites of the various groups belonging to a given (macro)territory and the hierarchies between what the *Hòu Hànshū* calls «the clans whose names [carry weight] within the state». <sup>153</sup> This in turn implies that, 4. within these societies, concepts such as «center» and «periphery» can only still be of some heuristic value if they are used in socio-political and not, as is still the tendency for example in the study of the Sakā within the Achaemenid Empire, in spatial terms.

But there is even more in this than that. Once it has been established that – in a way moreover which is not too different from the «Scythians who till the soil» mentioned by Herodotos - the various Xiōngnú groups enjoyed some form of land property rights, an inescapable question arises, which concerns where these plots might have been located. <sup>154</sup> As convincingly argued by Di Cosmo, at least some of them were undoubtedly scattered in and across the steppes of the Ordos, for the soil in these plains ought to be regarded as one of the richest grazing grounds in the whole of Eurasia, an inexhaustible source of that cavalry which, from the troops of Xerxes to Temüjin, acted as the jewel in the crown of the art of warfare both in Central Asia (the Arsakids are a notable example of this) and further East in Mongolia and Manchuria. <sup>155</sup> This must have been all too well known both to the Chinese court of Cháng’ān and to the Great Kings of Persia, especially if, as has often been repeated, the origin of the Irānian peoples were indeed to be sought in the steppes of Central Asia, between the Caspian Sea and Lake Balqaš (Балқаш) in present-day Qazaqstan. <sup>156</sup> In the case of the Chinese emperors, it seems now fairly clear that - thus in passing radically overturning the communis opinio of a supposed «dependence» of the barbarian «nomads» on the wealth of «civilized» China - it was on the contrary the desire nurtured by the Son of Heaven (Tiānzǐ 天子, the Hán ruler), who wanted both unlimited access to the pastures of the Ordos and a rich supply of horses for his army, to have triggered - following a massive penetration of Hán soldiers and/or settlers into foreign territory - the internal crisis of the steppe world from which the Shányú Mòdún (冒頓單于), the founder of the Xiōngnú Empire, would have emerged victorious, with disastrous consequences for the imperial

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<sup>152</sup> Miller 2009, 69. Emphasis is in the original.

<sup>153</sup> *Hòu Hànshū* 89.2944-2954: «為國中名族». I owe the translation to the invaluable help and kindness of Dr. Silvia Nico. Compare Broadbridge 2022 on the social structure of Mongol society.

<sup>154</sup> This was already known to Herodotos: Hdt. 4.17-18. See Kim 2009; 2010 for some rather interesting remarks on the description of Eurasian people in both the Halikarnassian and in Sīmǎ Qiān. On the latter consult also Di Cosmo 2010.

<sup>155</sup> Di Cosmo 1994; 1999b, Golden 2011b, 4 and now extensively, if sometimes perhaps overemphasizing the «nomadic» nature of such cavalry warfare, Overtoom 2020.

<sup>156</sup> Zarghamee 2013, 21-42, though this is an endlessly debated topic in scholarship. See among many others Tavernier 2021 on languages and peoples in the Achaemenid Persian Empire.



armies and paving the way for the establishment of the first «nomadic Empire» in world's history.<sup>157</sup> In the light of this considerations, the fact that the so-called Sogdian «delegation» (or «embassy») portrayed on the reliefs engraved over the Apadāna steps is ethnically marked precisely by the depiction of a horse should give us pause to think.<sup>158</sup> Could it not be that the expedition «beyond the river» that Cyrus paid for with his life was motivated by similar intentions to those that drove his Chinese counterpart Gāo Zǔ (高祖, reigned 202-195 BCE) three centuries later (and with equally catastrophic outcomes) to set out to conquer the steppe? The Assyrian precedents in Media – it should here not go unnoticed - provide a compelling example supporting this hypothesis.<sup>159</sup> And what about Darius' campaign against the Sakā accused of being arīkā and their leader, the famous Skunkha so prominently portrayed at Bīsūtūn? These are just some of the questions that a proper contextualization of Achaemenid Baktria within its wider Eurasian framework can pose and, I would argue, if not to solve, perhaps at least to a considerable extent also clarify.

#### 4.2. *Союз нерушимый верблюдов свободных*: Baktria, Local Power, and Imperial Control

If the study of Xiōngnú society (but the same could be said as well of similar cases that have been the subject of in-depth study in recent years, from Armenia to the Zagros) can help to shed some light on the socio-anthropological complexity of the Baktrian landscape(s), a closer look at Soviet Central Asia can be just as useful in tackling - on a new and, so it is hoped, theoretically more sophisticated ground - a crucial issue in the field of scholarship on every pre-modern Empire: that is, the impact of political, economic, social, and administrative choices made by a given ruling class on the territories subject to it or at least claimed as such.<sup>160</sup> Before moving on to exemplification, however, a few words should be said to justify the time frame (the decades antedating the first Soviet пятилетка – the Five-Year Plan) chosen as the source for the ethnographic material presented both below and in the following chapters. As a number of important studies on the sociology of the Stalinist period have clearly shown, in addition to the destruction of both entire economies - for example, the mixed pastoral subsistence strategies of rural Qazaqstan – and of a dizzying number of human lives, the «revolution from above» (by no chance also called «the great fracture») had as its most significant consequence the breaking of almost every society among those that made up the complex – ethnic,

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<sup>157</sup> This was a momentous event in Eurasian history, which is however completely ignored in Bang *et al.* 2021 II.

<sup>158</sup> Swart 2021, 212-219 on the Sogdians in the Persepolis reliefs.

<sup>159</sup> Rollinger 2020; 2021a.

<sup>160</sup> Cf. among them all the recent monograph by Silvia Balatti (2017, 51-135), where a wide-ranging overview and a thorough discussion of the representations of semi-pastoralist communities by the societies of Ēlām, of the kingdom of Urartū, and of the Assyrian Empire is offered. See also Khatchadourian 2016, 118-152 and Ristvet 2018, both remarkable contributions for their shrewd analysis of the available evidence.

sociopolitical, linguistic... - mosaic of the Soviet Union.<sup>161</sup> This is, however, particularly true for regions, such as the Caucasus and Central Asia, where, until throughout the 1930s, and in some cases even beyond, large portions of the territory belonged only nominally to the state, whose infrastructural power, to use Richardson's formula, could be described as «presumptive» at the very best.<sup>162</sup> The systematic use of violence as a method of government (aptly called *Herrschaft der Gewalt* by Jörg Baberowski and *Macht der Unordnung* by Christian Teichmann) should therefore be interpreted as the most explicit sign, not of the invincible power of the Soviet state, but of its inability to otherwise (which means to say, more durably and more efficiently) control the populations - and through them the resources - of areas whose social, economic (mixed pastoralism, different agricultural strategies), and environmental logics (landscape affordances) presented a degree of complexity in the face of which the government settled in Moscow as well as – notably – its avatars in the provinces were almost entirely devoid of any kind of what Michael Mann calls despotic power.<sup>163</sup> This background is of great importance for the issue discussed in these pages, for at least the following reasons.

1. Because it is precisely the presumptive nature of the Soviet state before Stalin's revolution that makes it possible to try to imagine the kind of challenges that the (itself in statu nascendi at the time) Teispid and (after Darius' own Великий перелом) Achaemenid Empire must have faced; while at the same time, one should not lose sight of such a point, being able to overcome them at a considerably lower price than its Socialist counterpart. In addition to this, because 2. in the context of the policy of Sovietization of the re-conquered territories of once-called Turkestan and the Caucasus, the newly formed anti-imperial Soviet Empire undertook an unprecedented campaign of «ethnographic cartography», the value of whose information is essential for the study of societies - above all the mobile communities within the newly formed Türkmen, O'zbek, and Qazaq SSRs - which were shortly to be destroyed by the «revolution from above» spearheaded in 1928 by the *GenSek*.<sup>164</sup> And, finally, because 3. the very difficult process of diffusion of Soviet infrastructural power in Central Asia offers a unique vantage point from which to address an issue which is of paramount importance

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<sup>161</sup> The examples are too numerous to even count. Here are at least a few key works that explicitly focus on the systematic use of violence by the Stalinist regime as a preferred means of social transformation: Kotkin 1995, 172-176, Scott 1998, 193-222, Baberowski 2012, and Schnell 2012, 431-512. The same could be said of the twin of Stalin's first five-year plan, the Great Leap Forward promoted – notably against Xruščëv's advise, who knew better – by Chairman Máo Zédōng (毛澤東), arguably Stalin's most perceptive - and therefore ruthless – pupil: see Dikötter 2011.

<sup>162</sup> Richardson 2012 for the concept of a «presumptive state».

<sup>163</sup> Explicitly dedicated to the study of Central Asia and the Caucasus are Baberowski 2003 (Azerbaijan), Northrop 2004 (Uzbekistan), Kindler 2014 (Qazaqstan), and Teichmann 2016 (Uzbekistan and Taġikistān) while Christian 2018 II, 367-436 is also very useful – although being less analytical – because it further considers the territories of Mongolia and Xinjiāng.

<sup>164</sup> Himself very much active in Western Siberia, where local lifestyles were also dramatically turned upside down. On this and similar matters mention is due to the extraordinary account of the exploration of the Kara-Bugaz gulf (Кара-Бураз, Garabogazköl in Türkmen) by Konstantin G. Paustovskii (1967). See moreover at least Westerman 2002, Bustanov 2015, 36-88, Aržantzeva and Härke 2019 and Fabian 2019b.

from the perspective of the present work: that is to say, to what extent the entire Soviet apparatus, from the General Secretary of the state-party to the last village official, was dependent as much on the technical skills of the population whose members the Bol'sheviki intended to civilize as on the networks of relations, clientele, and extended family circuits of the most prominent members of the (old-new) local élite for the purpose of, firstly, spreading «the spirit of the October» and, after years of vicious civil war, for the (re)construction of socialist Central Asia.

Jörg Baberowski and his school have persuasively argued that the main aim of the Great Terror (and the ultimate reason for its almost cannibalistic nature) was above all, if not exclusively, to destroy precisely those mechanisms of patronage and social solidarity characteristic of the most influential circles of local rulers who, far from having converted to the Leninist way of thinking, had on the contrary appropriated for their own benefit - and to the detriment of the opposing groups within their own, local environment first and foremost – both the party structures and the instruments favoring economic advancement (as well as those of political struggle) that the same party, which practically meant Soviet power and the Soviet state, made available to them and to their clients and allies.<sup>165</sup> As already mentioned in the introduction, however, while it is highly probable - and as we shall see, if read through the right lens and asking the right questions, not only the classical sources, but also the *ADAB* documents provide eloquent clues to this effect - that mechanisms similar to those in force in the O'zbek (and within the Türkmen, and Qazaq, and Tağik, and Georgian...) party were also fully displayed within Central Asian societies in the Achaemenid period, there is however no less doubt that the local satrap, to say nothing of the Great King, who was hundreds of kilometers away for most of the year, did not have even remotely comparable resources to prevent what Rolf Strootman has caustically called the «paradox of power»: namely, the growing dependence of the imperial authority on other power circuits, that is to say the local élites.<sup>166</sup> And this despite the fact that the latter would have had - at least formally - a subordinate role with respect to other members of the political and administrative upper echelons of the Empire (Briant's *éthno-classe dominante*): however, the fact that in samples of our surviving evidence some of these officers are not even given a title within the administrative hierarchy of the satrapy, far from further stressing their dependency on the satrap, highlights instead the latitude of their local power, without which that of their superiors was all but

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<sup>165</sup> Baberowski's two most recent volumes (2012 and 2015) are crucial in this regard. The effect of the policy of generalized terror on social ties in Qazaqstan (inside and outside the party) is summarized by Kindler 2014, 312. A recent description of the Stalinist regime's autophagic mechanism, in which today's executioners were transformed - sometimes literally - into tomorrow's victims (think for example of the sinister relay between Jagoda, Ežov, and Berija at the head of the *GPU-NKVD-MGB*) is offered among others by Viola 2017.

<sup>166</sup> A telling example of this kind of élite strategies in antiquities is provided by the life and work of Josephos: Bang *et al.* 2021 I, 6-20, 28-34 (here Empire itself is defined as an «aristocratic privilege»). Note King 2022, detailing the effort the imperial administration put into the enterprise of bringing people (and goods) to the royal court from the four corner of the Achaemenid realm.

nominal.<sup>167</sup> In addition to this, Strootman further pointed out, the thorniest problem inherent in the paradox is that, although perhaps counter-intuitively, this dependency tends systematically to become more acute the more widespread and pervasive the power (infrastructural, economic, and symbolic) of the Empire itself becomes (hence the paradox). Moreover, the evident disruptive potential of such a dynamic can be reduced by the imperial ruling class – and usually only to a certain extent and at considerable costs – but it is impossible to completely eradicate it without endangering the Empire itself in the process.<sup>168</sup> The following example, which brings the present chapter to an end, seeks to show who the above-mentioned social actors might have been in the context of 6<sup>th</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE Achaemenid Bactria, and how their relationship(s) with the new powerholders could have looked like. In recapitulating the new perspectives of historical inquiry opened up by 1. a methodologically more sophisticated re-examination of the available sources and 2. the new corpora recently published, the conclusion finally aims at making explicit how and in what ways the arguments developed in the pages below might provide new insight within the framework of contemporary research on Central Asian history and society before the coming of Islam.<sup>169</sup>

#### 4.2.1. Hydrology and Empire in Achaemenid Bactria

At the end of the famous list of the Achaemenid satrapies established following Darius' so-called administrative reform(s) (Hdt. 3.89 ff.), to show how this restructuring of the imperial territories granted the ruler infinitely greater power over his subjects than that of his predecessors (but the same applies to Xerxes, as the rest of the *Histories* show), Herodotos dwells on an episode that took place, he claims, somewhere near Chorasmia (today Xorazm viloyat, in the oasis of Xiva). The relevance of this anecdote for the arguments put forward in the present work is such that it seems appropriate to quote it in full. «In Asia – according to the Halikarnassian – there is a plain surrounded by mountains, through which mountains there are five clefts. This plain belonged formerly to the

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<sup>167</sup> A point stressed by Tuplin 2017a concerning the Achaemenid period and by King 2020 for Afġānistān in Late Antiquity.

<sup>168</sup> Strootman 2014, 121-123, Bang *et al.* 2021 I, 179-220. When looked at from this perspective (how to resolve the paradox of power), the terrorist-mafia strategy (as poignantly defined by Baberowski) adopted by Stalin proved incredibly effective, since in a world such as that of the five-year period between 1934 and 1939, in which, as one witness admitted, «we were afraid of what we thought», one of the fundamental elements for any form of sociality, and consequently for the exercise of power, was lacking: namely mutual trust. See Tilly 2005 and, for a penetrant study of the psychological and social consequences of the methodical exercise of systematic terror within Bol'sġhevik society, see among others Sebag Montefiore 2003. However, the price paid for achieving such a result was so high that as soon as Stalin died almost all his strategies were revoked and – famously – only three years later his entire system brought to trial. Nothing of the above happened during the two centuries of Achaemenid rule.

<sup>169</sup> An accessible and at the same time dependable and informative synthesis on Central Asia *After Alexander* is offered, in a historical-political perspective, by Beckwith 2009, 183-318 and, in a socio-cultural one, by Starr 2015. See also the essays in Cribb and Hermann 2007 and most recently the overview in Cribb 2020.

Chorasmians; it adjoins the land of the Chorasmians themselves, the Hyrkansians, Parthians, Sarangians, and Thamanai; but since the Persians have held sway it has been the king's own land [ἐστὶ τοῦ βασιλέως]. Now from the encircling mountains flows a great river called Aces. Its stream divides into five channels, and watered formerly the lands of the peoples aforesaid by passing to them severally through the five clefts; but since the beginning of the Persian rule the king has blocked the mountain clefts, and closed each passage with a gate; the water thus barred from outlet, the plain within the mountains becomes a lake, seeing that the river pours into it and finds no way out. Those therefore who formerly used the water can use it no longer, and are in very evil case; for whereas in winter they have the rain from heaven like other men, in summer they are in need of the water for their sown millet and sesame [note the presence of millet in Chorasmia: this crop requires considerable amount of water, especially in summer, from which follows that already before Darius' in Chorasmia a native system of agricultural engineering was in place]. So whenever no water is given to them, they come into Persia with their women, and cry and howl before the door of the king's palace, till the king commands that the river-gate which leads thither should be opened for those whose need is greatest; then, when this land has drunk its fill of water, that gate is shut, and the king bids open another for those of the rest who most require it. I have heard and know that he exacts great sums, over and above the tribute, for the opening of the gates. So much for these matters». <sup>170</sup> This passage has been commented upon many times. One of the most authoritative interpretations is undoubtedly that provided by Briant, who ended up setting the standard in the scholarly approaches to this and similar passages (most famously Polyb. 10.28) in which classical historiography more or less explicitly discusses the extent and mode in which Achaemenid infrastructural power was brought to be in the satrapies. <sup>171</sup> According to his reading of the episode, therefore, «in Herodotus's mind, this example especially illustrates the power of Darius and the results of the Persian conquest for the

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<sup>170</sup> Hdt. 3.117. The Greek text runs as follows: «ἔστι δὲ πεδῖον ἐν τῇ Ἀσίῃ περικεκλημένον ὄρει πάντοθεν, διασφάγες δὲ τοῦ ὄρεος εἰσὶ πέντε. τοῦτο τὸ πεδῖον ἦν μὲν κοτὲ Χορασμίων, ἐν οὖροισι ἐὼν Χορασμίων τε αὐτῶν καὶ Ὑρκανίων καὶ Πάρθων καὶ Σαραγγέων καὶ Θαμαναίων, ἐπεῖτε δὲ Πέρσαι ἔχουσι τὸ κράτος, ἐστὶ τοῦ βασιλέως. ἐκ δὴ ὧν τοῦ περικληθέντος ὄρεος τούτου ῥεῖ ποταμὸς μέγας, οὖνομα δὲ οἱ ἐστὶ Ἄκης. οὗτος πρότερον μὲν ἄρδεσκε διαλαλαμμένος πενταχοῦ τούτων τῶν εἰρημένων τὰς χώρας, διὰ διασφάγος ἀγόμενος ἐκάστης ἐκάστοισι: ἐπεῖτε δὲ ὑπὸ τῷ Πέρσῃ εἰσὶ, πεπόνθασι τοιόνδε: τὰς διασφάγας τῶν ὄρέων ἐνδείμας ὁ βασιλεὺς πύλας ἐπ' ἐκάστη διασφάγι ἔστησε: ἀποκεκλημένου δὲ τοῦ ὕδατος τῆς ἐξόδου τὸ πεδῖον τὸ ἐντὸς τῶν ὄρέων πέλαιος γίνεται, ἐνδιδόντος μὲν τοῦ ποταμοῦ, ἔχοντος δὲ οὐδαμῆ ἐξήλυσιν. οὗτοι ὧν οἱ περ ἔμπροσθε ἐώθεσαν χρᾶσθαι τῷ ὕδατι, οὐκ ἔχοντες αὐτῷ χρᾶσθαι συμφορῇ μεγάλη διαχρέωνται. τὸν μὲν γὰρ χειμῶνα ὕει σφι ὁ θεὸς ὥσπερ καὶ τοῖσι ἄλλοισι ἀνθρώποισι, τοῦ δὲ θέρος σπεύροντες μελίην καὶ σήσαμον χρῆσκονται τῷ ὕδατι. ἐπεὰν ὧν μηδὲν σφι παραδιδῶται τοῦ ὕδατος, ἐλθόντες ἐς τοὺς Πέρσας αὐτοὶ τε καὶ γυναῖκες, στάντες κατὰ τὰς θύρας τοῦ βασιλέως βοᾶσι ὠρυόμενοι, ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς τοῖσι δεομένοισι αὐτῶν μάλιστα ἐντέλλεται ἀνοίγειν τὰς πύλας τὰς ἐς τοῦτο φερούσας. ἐπεὰν δὲ διάκορος ἢ γῆ σφῆων γένηται πίνουσα τὸ ὕδωρ, αὐταὶ μὲν αἱ πύλαι ἀποκλιθῶνται, ἄλλας δ' ἐντέλλεται ἀνοίγειν ἄλλοισι τοῖσι δεομένοισι μάλιστα τῶν λοιπῶν. ὡς δ' ἐγὼ οἶδα ἀκούσας, χρήματα μεγάλα πρησόμενος ἀνοίγει πάρεξ τοῦ φόρου». According to a previous passage in the so-called satrapy list (Hdt. 3.93.3) the Chorasmians, together with the Sogdians, the Areians and the Parthians, paid to the royal coffers 300 talents each year.

<sup>171</sup> On this passage, which has been studied as much as it has been discussed, see most recently Briant 2017a, 305-330, who elaborates on the analysis developed in previous contributions (2001b; 2002).

subject peoples' way of life and internal organization. After the conquest, the land “belongs to the king”». But the story does not end here: as Briant sees it, moreover, «even in the form of monarchic fable that it has assumed» Herodotos' Chorasmian reportage «expresses a real state of affairs: the deepening of Persian dominion went hand in hand with the development of a tribute economy, the driving force behind royal appropriation».<sup>172</sup>

Despite the authoritativeness that this understanding of the passage has enjoyed and continues to enjoy, while without wanting in the slightest to deny the impact brought by the Achaemenid conquest over the lands and peoples of Central Asia (quite the contrary, as the following chapters shall point out), there are, I believe, at least two reasons that justify the search for rather different interpretative solutions and more broadly make possible to argue in favor of an alternative context in which «royal appropriation took place». The first is of a philological and narratological order and concerns an overall re-evaluation of the figure of Darius as a *dramatis persona* within the plot of the Histories. The second is related to the evidence we can use in order to read this passage, as Scott would have it, against the grain. The fact that, in the same narrative context, the King is explicitly referred to as a barterer (κάρηλος) has recently been interpreted by Kai Ruffing as an indication of Herodotos' intention to construct a(nother) *History of the Decline and Fall* of the Persian Empire, in which the transition from a severe and sometimes cruel but noble and generous king (Cyrus) to a madman (Cambyses) to a cunning, scheming and avaricious usurper (Darius), culminating in the embodiment of all the faults of the three previous kings - without even their less vicious traits - (Xerxes) plays a fundamental role.<sup>173</sup> In the light of an assessment of this kind, the fact that at the center of the entire history is the situation of total dependence of the hapless Chorasmians – now reduced to little more than impotent beggars - on the discretion of Darius' decisions, the latter moreover aimed exclusively at maximizing profit, should raise suspicions.

A change of perspective (and a suitable comparative touchstone) makes it possible, as I would like to try to show below, not to renounce Herodotos' passage as a source of historical investigation and - at the same time - to open some interesting scenarios, which have so far been rather neglected, about both the nature and mode of functioning of Achaemenid power in Central Asia. Firstly, as already suggested regarding the *Shiji*, also in the case of the Halikarnassian a careful reading of the passage allows us to overcome some - simplistic - schematizations that have nevertheless become commonplace in modern research. The case in question concerns the economy of the Chorasmians.

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<sup>172</sup> Briant 2002, 415-417.

<sup>173</sup> Ruffing 2018. The passage in question is Hdt. 3.89.3. It is not by chance, further argues Ruffing (2018, 150), if in the very same narrative context Cambyses is called δεσπότης, while Cyrus is given the title of πατήρ. This interpretation fits in very well with the most recent results of Robert Rollinger's research on the Herodotean construction of the Achaemenid world image and, in particular, of the actions characterizing the reign of each ruler: cf. Rollinger 2014a; 2017a; 2017b; 2021d and Rollinger and Bichler 2017.

Located on the edge of one of the most inaccessible territories of entire Central Asia (the Üstÿrt Plateau and the semi-desert steppes of the Qoraqalpog'iston on the one side, the Qaraqum on the other), Chorasmia has always been considered a region of mobile shepherds, little or not at all integrated (whatever one means by this term) within the Empires that over the centuries have claimed the region for themselves, at least until the golden age of the 'Abbāsid caliphate (roughly between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> century CE).<sup>174</sup> If Herodotos is to be taken seriously, however, the mention of sesame and especially millet cultivation – which, as hinted above, requires a particularly demanding irrigation regime - should give pause for thought, since the two cultivars point in the direction of the existence of economic structure underpinning that «polyvalent nomadism» which some important studies on Bronze Age Central Asian populations have identified as a key feature exemplifying the socio-economic complexity of the entire region over a huge chronological span.<sup>175</sup> Secondly, it is, however only through the ethnographic evidence offered by the study of such issues in the Soviet context that, as I shall try to argue now, it becomes possible to fully appreciate the significance of such a seemingly minor anecdote as that of the royal dams in Chorasmia.

Herodotos claims that, «before» (πρότερον), the use of the river belonged to the local population (οὔτοι ὧν οἱ περ ἔμπροσθε ἐώθεσαν χρᾶσθαι τῷ ὕδατι) but that, after the Persian conquest (ἐπείτε δὲ Πέρσαι ἔχουσι τὸ κράτος) the control of this precious resource, and consequently of the whole plain, became the exclusive prerogative of the Great King (ἐστὶ τοῦ βασιλέος). Now: before speaking, following Briant, of Persian domination, royal appropriation, or even of imperial control over the means of production, one should be rather cautious. The Amudaryo is in fact a river with an extremely complex water regime, the channeling of which has challenged - and defeated - the most talented engineers who have attempted this task since at least the 19<sup>th</sup> century, namely as (Russian and then Soviet) imperial domination once again was established with full force.<sup>176</sup> However, since the lives of entire communities on either side of the modern O'zbek - Türkmen border depended on this waterway, despite their status as barbarian and (especially the Türkmen) uncivilized nomads, the only ones with the appropriate skills to profitably exploit the course of the Amudaryo were, and still are, the inhabitants of the local communities: otherwise stated, without the people there was no control on the resources (and not the other way round, as implied by Herodotos). Fayzulla Ubaydullayevič Xo'jayev (1896-1938), a leading figure within the Communist Party of Soviet Uzbekistan, was well too well aware of this. A few months before his arrest (and shooting) at the peak of the Ežovščina, he

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<sup>174</sup> Golden 2011b, 24-25, Starr 2015, 156-157. On this trans-Caspic area's relationships with the steppe world see e. g. Olbrycht 1996; 1998a, Minardi 2015a, and Gregoratti 2017a.

<sup>175</sup> Cf. at least the contributions by Michael Frachetti and colleagues (Frachetti 2009, Frachetti *et al.* 2010 and Frachetti and Rouse 2012). Spengler III 2019, 60-61 on millet irrigation, with pp. 74-77 focusing on its cultivation by mobile people.

<sup>176</sup> Westerman 2002, 176, Starr 2015, 38.

was entrusted by no other than Stalin with the unrewarding task of preventing a flood that threatened to destroy the neighboring cotton fields, and with them the entire local ruling class, including, of course, himself. The situation appeared particularly desperate because, despite the sky-high sums invested by Moscow - which was now presenting the bill by pressingly demanding results - in the construction of dams, containment channels and so on, nothing had helped to tame the floods of the Amudaryo. In an attempt to rescue himself from this – literally – dead(ly) end, Xo‘jayevev decided to go for broke and did not hesitate for a second in relieving the teams of engineers recruited from the best polytechnics in the entire Union of their duties. Instead, by making extensive use of the strategical help provided by members of his own (well ramified, as it is only fitting to a local powerholder) network of dependencies, he recruited a handful of carefully chosen local experts: from shepherds to village chiefs and semi-settled, highly mobile farmers. Contrary to all expectations, perhaps including those of Fayzulla Ubaydullayevev himself, the flood was averted. In different times, such an outcome would have allowed Xo‘jayevev to get rid of all his opponents within the party, of whom there was no shortage, while at the same time ensuring huge dividends in terms of local power for the members of his faction, whose ecological skills had proved to be indispensable for the protection of a strategic asset such as O‘zbek cotton, and therefore proved unavoidable in fostering the interest of the Empire as a whole.<sup>177</sup>

Moral of the story: in the light of this account, it does not seem entirely out of place to re-read Hdt. 3.117 through the lens of Xo‘jayevev hydraulic performance: the Persian κράτος in the region should therefore be interpreted much more as the outcome of a negotiation with the representatives of the local communities, who alone 1. possessed the knowledge and skills - as mentioned above, extremely advanced - necessary to profit economically (or at least to avoid cataclysms) from a river such as the Amudaryo and 2. were the only ones able to find and mobilize the necessary labor force which from time to time was needed to carry out the Empire’s tasks.<sup>178</sup> The real owners and controllers of the «modes of production», from this point of view, would therefore not be the imperial officials, but the Chorasmian élites: as for Darius, my suggestion is to argue that, in exchange for the accessibility of that stretch of river flowing through Chorasmia, he transformed into imperial officials the (more fortunate) predecessors of Xo‘jayevev; for the latter, before the advent of Achaemenid power, were nothing more than modest - and probably regularly competing among themselves - local big men. The most obvious strength of such a reading is that, without doing violence to the text, it offers a

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<sup>177</sup> Further on this story in Teichmann 2016, 199-200.

<sup>178</sup> Cf. the definition of social relationship developed by William Honeychurch (2015, 34-36) in the context of his analysis of the co-dependent and mutually conditioned (and conditioning) birth and establishment of both the Hàn and the Xiōngnú Empires. It might even be the case that Herodotos – and, paradoxically, Briant making (critical) use of him - is indeed reflecting streams of Persian (more specifically, Darius’) ideological discourse as it is for example to be found at DNα §4: see the remarks in King 2021, 195-198.



picture of the mechanisms underlying the functioning of (infrastructural, but not limited to it) imperial power within a pre-modern context which is consistently in line with the most recent trends of historical research on this and similar spaces.<sup>179</sup>

In addition, such an evaluation is also consistent with hypotheses put forward recently by other scholars - most notably by Claude Rapin - regarding comparable contexts in which the exploitation of a watery resource may have been the foundation of the position that, at least according to the historiographic sources, an individual like Arimazes seems to have held in a key territory such as the upper Surxondaryo valley (around the Derbent pass).<sup>180</sup> Finally, and arguably most importantly for the overall logic of this study, such hypothesis allows us to rethink the power relations between two groups whom we may call, following the title of a recently published book on exactly those very same topics within a colonial framework, *Masters and Natives*, giving moreover a higher level of agency to social actors other than the Great King and the satrap, which on the contrary have been the almost exclusive focus of more or less recent historiography.

## 5. Conclusion. Achaemenid Bactria *Beyond the Mirror*

This chapter has attempted to show how, despite the customary formulas, the available documentation on Achaemenid Bactria, although not overabundant, nevertheless allows, if mined with care, to formulate potentially fruitful hypotheses regarding both the reasons underlying the importance traditionally acknowledged to the satrapy within the imperial polity and, above all, concerning the nature and role of external actors with respect to the Persian ethno-classe dominante. In particular, it has sought to elucidate by what means a broader research horizon, which takes advantage of the most up-to-date research on the mobile populations of (Eur)Asia - from the Xiōngnú in the Ordos to Soviet Chorasmia - can prove decisive in shedding light both on the strategies of governmentality deployed by the Empire and on those, equal and opposite, developed by the latter's subjects.<sup>181</sup> It is especially to those communities, once they have been removed both from their role as passive pawns within the Achaemenid administrative machine and from their Orientalizing background as proud and indomitable marauders, that a more fitting agency as interlocutors with the Empire's representatives has to be given (back). Within this dialogue, moreover, even though some pre-conditions were, in fact, given at the outset, to predict all of its outcomes should not be regarded as (too) obvious an enterprise. With such premises now in place, it is time to give Darius the floor again, so as to try to understand what he was referring - or what he aspired - to when he proclaimed

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<sup>179</sup> Ando 2017a.

<sup>180</sup> Rapin 2013, 66-69; 2017a, 48. On Arimazes see Curt. 7.11.1-29, *Epit. Mett.*, 15-18, Polyæn. 4.3.29 and Strab. 11.11.4.

<sup>181</sup> Kidd forthcoming is a treasure-trove of evidence and theoretical models to work with.

that he had become in one and a single, long year, as Tacitus would have said, lord and master (xšayaθiya, imperator, вождь), of the whole of Central Asia.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Cf. Tac. *Hist.*, 1.3.1.

## Chapter 3

### *Nomina nuda tenemus*

Βάκτρα· πόλις. Στράβων ια. Τὸ ἔθνικόν Βάκτροι καὶ Βάκριοι καὶ Βακτρία τὸ θηλυκόν. Ἔστι καὶ πόλις Βάκτριον. Τὸ ἔθνικόν Βακτριανός καὶ Βακτριανή.

[Baktra, a city. Strabo <mentions it> in the 11<sup>th</sup> book <of his *Geography*>. The ethnic name <is> Baktri or Baktrians and Baktria is the feminine. There is also a city <which is called> Baktrian: <in this case> the ethnic name is Baktrian and Baktriana].

- Steph. Byz., Ἐθνικά, s. v. Βάκτρα.

#### 1. *Stat Bactria pristina nomine*

Extant Latin and Greek sources, from Aeschylus' *Persians* in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE to Ptolemy's *Geography* in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, call Baktria (Βακτριανή/Βακτρία, Bactriana) that region of Central Asia which modern Western (by which is meant mainly non-Russian-speaking) historiography identifies with the territories extended between Northeastern Afġānistān up to the rivers Amudaryo and Darya -i Pandġ, Southwestern Taġikistān, and the Southern border of Tŷrkmenistan up to the Kŷytendaġ and Boysuntov mountain ranges, the latter delimiting to the North and west the Surxondaryo valley, in Southern Uzbekistan.<sup>1</sup> Although, as we shall see, several attempts have been made, it does not seem possible, in the light of the extant evidence, to reconstruct even in the broadest

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<sup>1</sup> Among the most authoritative advocates of this definition is Claude Rapin, whose research on the historical geography of Central Asia has contributed significantly, over the last 20 years, in shedding light on the perception of this space by the historiography of the Hellenistic and Roman period: see at least Rapin 2001; 2005; 2014; 2018b. The distinction between Western (predominantly Anglo-Francophone and German) historiography on the one hand and Russian-speaking historiography on the other (of Soviet heritage) is necessary since scholars belonging to the latter define the Baktrian space rather differently. For example, they locate the border between the Achaemenid (and later Hellenistic) satrapies of Baktria and Sogdiana at the slopes of the Hišār range (Gissarskii khrebet - Гиссарский хребет - in Russian, in Taġik Qatorkŷhi Hisor - Қаторкӯҳи Ҳисор -, in O'zbek Hisor tizmas), and call the area between the Amudaryo and the Hišār «Northern Baktria». Goršenina 2012 and Fabian 2019b provide an up-to-date overview of Russian-speaking historiography on Central Asia and beyond, while Morris 2019a, 59-62 focuses in more detail on the definition of the Central Asian space in terms of political and cultural history. On the emergence of the concept of «Central Asia», the studies of Svetlana M. Goršenina (2014; 2017; 2019) provide an unavoidable to-go reference: see most recently Goršenina and Rapin 2020.

outlines the perception of the Central Asian space proper to its local inhabitants during antiquity (what we might call their «mental map»).^2



**Map 3.1. The Irānian East and Central Asia. © Peter Palm**

The reasons for this are basically twofold: on the one hand, the only written evidence describing the geography of this part of Eurasia that has come down to us originates from sources outside the Baktrian context; on the other hand, the first documents written in the local language (belonging to the Eastern Irānian branch of the Indo-European family) are rather late (from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE onwards).^3 In addition, they do not say a single word about even the more general characteristics of the Baktrian space, neither from the point of view of physical geography nor from the perspective of its anthropic (which is to say cultural) or administrative (namely political) organization.^4 No less complex is, however, to reconstruct the perception which of this space had the pre-modern Empires that have claimed possession of it throughout history, starting of course with the Teispid-Achaemenid polity. As it is well known, in fact, with the exception of royal inscriptions (mainly Bīsūtūn and Naqš

<sup>2</sup> For an example of such attempts see Vogelsang 1992b. On the concept of «mental maps» in (Graeco-Roman) antiquity and beyond see Rathmann 2006, Bekker-Nielsen 2014, and Dan *et al.* 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Note however Schmitt 1994 for possible earlier evidence of an Arachosian dialect. If to such a linguistic evidence ought to correspond a political or ethnic self-awareness of some kind remains debatable.

<sup>4</sup> With regards to this first documentation written in the local Baktrian language (dating to the Kušāṇa Empire but using the – adapted – Greek script, as it is to be seen in the very name of the dynasty - Κουσάνο) cf. at least Morris 2019b, 412-414 and Cribb 2020 (both with previous literature) for an overview of the Greek legacy in Kušāṇa Central Asia.

-i Rustam) and administrative corpora on papyrus, parchment, or clay recovered from (partial) archival records (Persepolis, the *ADAB*), the Irānian world seems to have lacked a written tradition comparable, for example, to that embodied by classical historiography, which would have allowed us to formulate hypotheses - however risky - on how the rulers of arguably the first hyperpower of Eurasian antiquity imagined, and therefore attempted to organize, the enormous space of which, from around the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, they had become undisputed masters.<sup>5</sup>

According to the sources which have been handed down to us, the first mention of Baktria referencing a territorial (and according to most commentators also political and administrative) unit under the control of the Achaemenids occurs in the famous inscription of Bīsūtūn, which commemorates, in Old Persian, Ēlāmite, and Akkadian, the events following the death of Cambyses (Kabūjīya) and the – by no means unchallenged - rise to the throne of Darius I (Dārayavauš).<sup>6</sup> Paragraph 6 of the inscription, in fact, consists of arguably the first example of a detailed list – specimens of which changed to a certain extent over time under both Darius and Xerxes - of the populations (but the more precise understanding of the Old Persian word *dahayāva* is probably «territories») under the authority of the founder of the Achaemenid dynasty and (re)builder of Cyrus' Empire.<sup>7</sup> As it has been pointed out several times, the catalogue of Darius' narrative seems to be underpinned by a spatial conception of the Empire as divided into macro-territorial units, each one hinging on a certain, specific area (a given ἔθνος? in Old Persian, in fact, a *dahayāuš*) of particular

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<sup>5</sup> See on this matter Skjærvø's remarks (2005, 56): according to him, Irānian society was almost in its entirety an oral one. A broad overview on the sources available in order to study the Achaemenid Empire has been provided, among others, by Briant 2002, 1-13 and by Josef Wiesehöfer (2004<sup>3</sup>, 25-53) but see also the two-volume companion of selected, translated, and commented evidence by Amélie Kuhrt (*TPE*) and now section III of the landmarking *Companion* edited by Bruno Jacobs and Robert Rollinger (2021). Lincoln 2012, 145-166 together with Dan 2013 and Rapin 2018b explore how the Achaemenids mapped the space they ruled: compare Daryāyī 2017 on Sāsānid mental maps.

<sup>6</sup> With some - notable but not per se disqualifying - differences, the same events are recounted in a famous Herodotean λόγος (Hdt. 3.64-89). On the very delicate phase of transition from the reign of Cambyses to that of Darius (which means, from the lineage of Cyrus to that of Achaemenes - Hāxamaniš, Ἀχαμένης -, whom Darius himself, in DB<sub>a</sub> 1-8 recognizes as his ancestor), see among others the discussion in Wiesehöfer 1978, Petit 1990, 13-23, Jacobs 1994, 93-97, Briant 2002, 107-137 as well as the overviews in Rollinger 2021b and Rollinger and Degen 2021c. Due to the extremely marked ideological undertones of a monument – which means including both text and image, as we shall see - such as Bīsūtūn (Lincoln 2012, 375-406), the purpose of which moreover, according to some scholars (e. g. Schwinghammer 2011) was primarily to provide the new ruler with a semblance of authority over a realm he arguably sized by usurpation in the context of a merciless civil war, caution has been expressed several times regarding the use of the inscription as a historical document: cf. Rollinger 2006; 2014b, Vallat 2001. Its nature as a primary source (and the first ever to have been recovered so far) on the Empire nevertheless makes the inscription a testimony of unavoidable importance, and some of the information it contains has been deemed reliable by most scholars. On the morphology and spelling of Old Persian, in addition to the classic grammar by Kent 1953 see most recently Skjærvø 2016.

<sup>7</sup> The exact meaning (and consequently the most appropriate translation) of the term *dahayāuš* has been the subject of heated debate among scholars for decades. See Dandamaev 1989, 96-99; 1994, Vogelsang 1992a, 96-96, Jacobs 1994, Briant 2002, 390-391, and Klinkott 2006. As it will be discussed later in this chapter, our understanding of the concept of satrapy (σατραπία) and satrap (σατράπης) is mainly the result of Herodotos' construction of the Achaemenid space (cf. Dan 2013, Rapin 2018b), and consequently it needs to be critically scrutinized. In fact, just to mention one example, the Herodotean σατραπία almost completely obliterates the ethno-geographical aspect of the ancient Persian *dahayāuš* (see on this latter point Wu 2005, 18). Rollinger 2016c on the decrease of inscription over time as a result of a conscious strategy of imperial self-staging which he evocatively calls the *End of History* narrative.

importance: in addition to Persis (Pārsa, broadly comparable to the modern province of Fārs), such a position of pre-eminence is conferred, for example, to the dahayāva of Lydia (Spardā, metonymically identified through the dahayāuš' main city, namely Sardis), Babylon (Bābiruš) and Arachosia (Harauvatiš).<sup>8</sup> An interesting aspect, which has not escaped the attention of some commentators, is that, as the catalogue proceeds to list the territories/populations of Central Asia, Bactria appears to hold a prominent position too - rhetorically placed in the center as it is -, surrounded by Chorasmia (Ūvārazmīy, to the West), Sogdiana and the territories of the Sakā, the Herodotean Scythians (Šuguda [...] Saka, to the North) and Gāndhārā (Gādāra, to the East). The text reads as follows: «Darius the king proclaims: these are the peoples [countries: once again dahayāva] who obey me; by the favor of Ahuramazdā, I was their king: [...] Chorasmia, Baktiana [Bāxtrīš], Sogdiana, Gāndhārā, [the country of the] Sakā [which is to say Greek Scythia, the Σκυθική described for example in Hdt. 4. 99]».<sup>9</sup>

An important and still today unresolved issue concerning the first mention of the place name «Bactria» relates to the exact meaning of the term, i. e. what it is supposed to identify. Indeed, since some recent discoveries (which in turn are among the most welcome results of a renewed ecdotic work on the documentary corpus from the Persepolis archives, which was taken up again since 2002) seem to show that the occurrence of the substantive Bāxtrīš in the material record published and studied so far is progressively increasing from the late 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, the question has been raised whether the name is of local origin, and thus reflects an – at the present stage of research ill-defined - emic perspective (at least at some level - but which one? - of Baktrian society), or, on the contrary, whether it is the result of the Persian attempt to rationalize the space conquered by Cyrus in Central Asia. If this is the case, the toponym would instead reflect an etic perspective, i. e. that of the imperial administration and, more broadly, of the Achaemenid rulers.<sup>10</sup> The latter is, for example, the opinion supported by Bruno Jacobs. According to him, the Akkadian equivalent of the name in the Bīsutūn inscription (Bāxtrīš/Bāktrīš) should be understood in its main function as an ethnonym, from which the corresponding choronym would have been derived: in other words, he suggests to translate Bāxtrīš as «the Baktrians»; consequently, «Bactria» would mean, from the point of view of the Achaemenid rulers, «the place where the Baktrians live».<sup>11</sup> Such a view is also advocated by Jacobs with regard to

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Lincoln 2012, 41-59, Minardi 2015a, 17, and Jacobs 2017a for a detailed discussion of the logic underpinning the construction of Achaemenid imperial space as it emerges from Darius' inscription, an issue most recently addressed once again in an important contribution by Claude Rappin (2018b).

<sup>9</sup> DB<sub>p</sub> col. I § 6: «θātiy Dārayavauš xšayaθiya: imā dahayāva tyā manā patiyāiša: vašnā Ahuramazdāha adamšām xšayaθiya āham: [...] Ūvārazmīy, Bāxtrīš, Šuguda, Gādāra, Sakā». The translation follows Kent 1953, 119 and *TPE* I, 141. On the role, function, and representation of Ahuramazdā in his relation to Darius see further below in this chapter.

<sup>10</sup> Henkelman 2018a, 226 for a detailed catalogue of the occurrence of anthroponyms, toponyms and ethnonyms (in different imperial languages: Jacobs 2012) somehow related to Bactria within the Achaemenid archival sources, from which the linguistic evidence discussed in this section is taken.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Jacobs 2006. According to Tomaschek 1896, the origin of all our names would be a poleonym (the name of the major urban (?) center within the region, namely Baktra), which by means of analogy would have then been extended over the entire space controlled through the city itself. Arguably expressed here is, although in a rather cursory way, one

the dahayāuš immediately following Baktria in the catalogue of the inscription, namely Sogdiana (Šuguda): in this case, too, we would be dealing first of all with an ethnonym («the Sogdians», from which the choronym would derive, indicating «the land where the Sogdians live»), and the same should apply in the case of the other Central Asian dahayāva, from Drangiana (Old Persian Zranka/\*Dranka, today's Sīstān) to the already mentioned Gāndhārā.<sup>12</sup> Considering moreover the fact that the two dahayāva of Bāxtrīš and Šuguda invariably appear as contiguous in all lists of countries/populations in the extant corpus of Achaemenid inscriptions, from the dawn of Darius' reign to that of Xerxes' - so Jacobs' argument goes on -, both terms would reflect the organization of both the space and the peoples settled in it after Cyrus' campaign in the Irānian Plateau and Central Asia.<sup>13</sup> It would follow that what we might call the «ethnographic capital» acquired during these conquests would have provided the material foundation for a representation of the Empire's territories as political and administrative units: the encounter (held by many interpreters, starting with one of the most influential of all time, namely Herodotos, to have been predominantly if not exclusively a clash) with certain human groups within a given geographical space would therefore be at the origin of the name of the space itself.<sup>14</sup> Although Jacobs does not refer to it, a comparison with the modern colonial history of Central Asia would seem to provide some important clues in support of his argument: as recently noted by Svetlana Mixaiĭlovna Goršenina, in fact, the practice of «defining» and at the same time subdividing and organizing the Central Asian space for reasons of administrative and economic control appears to have been a constant feature of all those political institutions which, starting at least from the late Middle Ages, laid hegemonic claims over the regions East of the Caspian.<sup>15</sup> This is particularly evident, even though they started from the very opposite assumptions, in the case of both the Tsarist Empire and its direct (and antithetical) successor and heir, the Soviet Union. One just needs to think of the invention of Central Asian nations - and nationalisms - in the

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of the first arguments supporting the hypothesis of a pre-Achaemenid Baktrian polity: see moreover Oppert 1901, 482-493. Note that in the Ēlāmite version (likely the first to have been written), the dahayāuš are rendered, in the words of Grillot-Susini *et al.* 1993, 40 fn. 98, as «gentilics marked by the animated plural». The land seems also in this case to be defined by the people inhabiting it.

<sup>12</sup> Jacobs 2017a, 31. On Drangiana cf. Schmitt 1995 and most recently Genito 2013, 625-626 as well as Ball 2020, 374-375, with Trousdale and Allen for an archaeological overview of Southwestern Afġānistān. On Gāndhārā see Vogelsang 2000. Both are mentioned in DB<sub>p</sub> col. I § 6. In the case of Gāndhārā, it might be of some interest to note that, in non-Irānian (but still Indo-European) languages, the place name seems to have developed from an ethnonym. In the *Ṛgveda* (cf. e. g. 1.126.7, a passage which has been dated around the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE) the name is to be found in the context of a syntagm such as «Gāndhārīnām avikā», translated as «the sheep of the Gāndhārāns».

<sup>13</sup> Waters 2010 on the possible chronology of the (first?) campaign lead by Cyrus East of the Caspian, and Kuhrt 2021.

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion on the importance of «ethnographic capital» as a fundamental instrument of any project of imperial expansion and domination see most recently Payne *et al.* 2016, 21 and Vlassopoulos 2017, 367. An important volume addressing many issues related to the question of the *Cyropaedia* as a source of historical and ethnographic material over the (early) Persian Empire has recently been edited by Bruno Jacobs (2020).

<sup>15</sup> Goršenina 2012, 215-218; 2014, 283-384, Morris 2019a, 59-62.

context of the Leninist (but Stalin-influenced if not inspired) policy of коренизация (korenizacija, meaning something such as «rooting»<sup>16</sup>).

Other scholars have argued in favor of opinions different from Jacobs', attempting instead to demonstrate, usually based on philological and linguistic arguments, the possibility of a local origin of the toponym indicating Baktria. The starting point for most of these hypotheses is the similarity, which their proponents have tried to show to be kinship, between the ethnonym/choronym attested in Bīsūtūn (Bāxtrīš) and that of the river of the oasis - and of the city - bearing the same name, namely the Balḥ-āb.<sup>17</sup> It should be noted at the outset here that this argument is at least partly based on assumptions, since the etymological equivalence rests on a female root of the name Bāxtrīš, usually reconstructed as \*bhag.<sup>18</sup> According to some linguists, the meaning of this root would be «she who separates», the significance of which would be traced back to the (hypothetically) dividing function of the Balḥ-āb river between the oasis and the surrounding steppes. Similar attributes would have been routinely conferred not only to rivers, but also to smaller watercourses (streams) in the context of irrigation works.<sup>19</sup> According to the supporters of this view, since the – again, hypothetical - root predates the name of Baktria as it is attested in the Achaemenid inscriptions (as for the Persepolis tablets, they are rarely mentioned in this context), it would be feasible to postulate a correlation, the nature of which is not further detailed, between the Baktrian hydrography and the spatial perception that the inhabitants would have had of the place they inhabited.<sup>20</sup> Attempting to support, one more time on linguistic grounds, the argument of the local origin of the term identifying Baktria within Achaemenid sources, Eilers argued that, at least as it appears in the royal inscriptions, the word would be attributable to a loan of Irānian (but not Persian) origin. This could be inferred, according to his hypothesis, from the Ēlāmite form of the name attested at Bīsūtūn, namely Ba-ak-ši(-is).<sup>21</sup> Such a reconstruction bears some resemblance to the idea, already developed by Kent in paragraph 9 of his *Old Persian Grammar*, that Bāxtrīš could be traced back to a Median linguistic environment.<sup>22</sup> Kent

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<sup>16</sup> See on this topic e. g. in Fragner and Kappeler 2006, 139-182.

<sup>17</sup> This is the opinion of perhaps the most authoritative interpreter of Old Persian, namely Rüdiger Schmitt: cf. *WAI*, 153.

<sup>18</sup> For his own part, Tomaschek supported a different option (\**bagh*).

<sup>19</sup> For example, Vogelsang 1992a, 59 argued that many regions of Eastern Irān (Ariana, Arachosia, Baktria among others) received their names from the most prominent local hydronym, in the case of Baktria the Rūd -i Balḥ. The core of ancient Baktria, he further goes on arguing, should therefore be located along the course of this river.

<sup>20</sup> Schmitt 1984, 184-207. In order to give further plausibility to their argument, supporters of the etymological interpretative outlook have pointed out that there are other cases in which the name of an Achaemenid dahayāuš originates from a local hydronym. This would for example be demonstrated in the case of Arachosia (Harauvatiš), from the Arḡandāb river, and Ariana, from the Harīrūd. However, it should be noted that, at least as far as Arachosia is concerned, the fact that the Old Persian Harauvatiš is etymologically equivalent to the Sanskrit Sārasvatī at least makes one wonder whether the Achaemenids did not rather translate another (in this case Indian) etic definition of the space of Arachosia into their own language. Riep forthcoming for a detailed study on rivers and spatial perception in our extant (literary) record on Central Asia.

<sup>21</sup> Eilers 1977, with not Henkelman 2018a, 226 for references to the name's rendering attested in the Persepolis archive.

<sup>22</sup> Kent 1953, 8. More recently, De Blois 2013 has argued in favor of the Avestān form Bāxōi- as the native one, an opinion shared among others also by Witzel 2013, 424.



justified this hypothesis (which is in itself difficult to support only because of the fact that almost nothing is known about the language spoken in Media around the time when the Bīsūtūn texts were written down, let alone for earlier periods) by pointing out that the nexus /-tr/ in the noun Bāxtrīš is preserved after a fricative (x).<sup>23</sup> From this he inferred a sequence that starting from the Medic /-tr/ would have given the Old Persian /ç/ (i. e. /š/): this shift would then have been at the origin of the common Old Iranian form \*Bāxçīš, which in turn would allow to explain the reading attested in Bīsūtūn.<sup>24</sup>

Kent's reconstructive hypothesis was however criticized by Eilers, who argued that, based on what (precious little) is known of the morphology of the Medic language, it is a /-θr/, and not a /-tr/, nexus what would be required to produce the sequence postulated by Kent. In addition to this, the scholar further argues, the only plausible starting point for a reasonable hypothesis of etymological reconstruction should be the linguistic evidence (in itself, however, far from unproblematic) coming from the oldest layers of *Avestā*, i. e. the *Gāθā* (*Yasnā* 28-38, 43-51 and 53), *Yasna* 27, and the so-called *Yasna Haptañhāiti* (that is «of the prayer in seven chapters», *Yasna* 35-41).<sup>25</sup> Starting from this hypothetical nexus /-θr/, however, so Eilers contends, the most that can be obtained is a (once more hypothetical) \*Bāxthri, but then one is not more able to proceed further in the reconstruction, leaving the Bīsūtūn reading unexplained.<sup>26</sup> Other specialists have opposed Eilers' argument by virtue of the fact that, according to them, the problematic nature of the linguistic data coming from the *Avestā* (above all the chronological uncertainty regarding the composition and circulation, in written and/or oral form, of a corpus of which the present *Avestā* is but a late - 12<sup>th</sup> century CE - derivative) makes any reconstructive hypothesis based on such linguistic material methodologically questionable. Herzfeld was arguably among the most severe critics of the feasibility of the *Avestā* as a historical source: for he pointed out that, at least according to the evidence provided by the extant manuscripts, many of the attested forms may in fact be pseudo-Avestān, in fact back-translations modelled on materials originally written in Middle Persian (Pahlavī).<sup>27</sup> While not failing to recognize as almost certain the fact that texts such as the *Gāθā* and the aforementioned *Yasnā* date in some form from

<sup>23</sup> On the origins of the Medes, their political organization and the end of their power see Dandamaev and Lukonin 1989, 45 and more recently Rollinger 2008; 2020; 2021a. Rossi 2010 on Median language and identity.

<sup>24</sup> Henkelman 2018a, 226 for a thorough overview over all the so-far attested terms indicating both Baktria and Baktrian(s), with abundant previous bibliography.

<sup>25</sup> See on these matters the still important, although by now rather outdated, introduction in Boyce 1975, 3-22 as well as Kellens 1976. On the use of these texts (especially those of the *Old Avestā*) as a historical source – particularly on Central Asia – see Grenet 2005. Concerning the Achaemenids' knowledge of Avestān texts and their influence on the Kings' self-representation cf. the contributions by Skjærvø (1999; 2005; 2013), Cantera (2017), and Kellens (2012; 2017; 2021).

<sup>26</sup> See Tavernier 2007, 25, who reports Eilers' arguments but shares Kent's point of view, as done also by Gnoli 1980, 92 n. 7. As for Schmitt (*WAI*, 151), he reconstructs an original \*Bāxθrī-, rendered by the *Avestā* as Bāxδī (from \*Bāxδrī-), interpreted as «the rendering of the local Baktrian name form». This however does still not clear if we are dealing with the definition of a space or of the people living in it understanding themselves as such.

<sup>27</sup> Herzfeld 1968, 322.

before the advent of Achaemenid power in Central Asia, Herzfeld and others after him nevertheless insist on the fact that linguistic arguments in and by themselves are completely insufficient for the purpose of determining the nature - endogenous or exogenous - of a given toponym, let alone the spatial perception of the speakers to whose linguistic use such a toponym might be traced back to or – even worse - the reasons behind the choice of the toponym itself.<sup>28</sup>

In relatively recent years, the Iranist and archaeologist Frantz Grenet has again strongly defended the validity of the *Avestā* as a source of historical data on pre-Achaemenid Central Asia.<sup>29</sup> His main argument starts from a passage in the first *Vīdevdād*, in which the 16 primeval territories created by Ahuramazdā are mentioned: among them - after Margiana - comes, in its accusative form (Bāxδīm), what in Grenet's eyes indisputably appears as a reference to Bactria.<sup>30</sup> To be honest, further notes Grenet, what is referred to is actually a settlement, namely Baktra, which in the Avestān books is more than once praised as «the blessed one, whose banners flutter in the sky».<sup>31</sup> In spite of the rhetorical overtones, Grenet further argues, a description such as that of the *Vīdevdād* would match rather well with the two major settlements of whole ancient Afġānistān, namely Baktra and Qandahār, in Arachosia (to which, he points out, the *Vīdevdād* also refers the same epiclesis characterizing Baktra). In his own words, they «match each other on both sides of the Hindukush: they were the largest fortified sites in this period, towering above rich plains, and hence suitable for military and/or religious gatherings».<sup>32</sup> In further support of his view, Grenet tries to demonstrate how the description occurring in *Vīdevdād* 1. 3-15 of the *Airiianəm vaējō* (the original, mythic, abode of the Aryan people) and of the neighboring territories reveals a close knowledge by the anonymous author of the Afġāno-Taġik highlands, and in particular of a portion of Badaġšān (ancient Eastern Bactria) along the course of the Darya -i Pandġ. Following Grenet's argument, this would be the river Dāityā (Dāitiiaiā), whose «rapids» (vaŋhuiiā) would then represent the (historical) core of the *Airiianəm vaējō* itself.<sup>33</sup> The hypothesis is undoubtedly suggestive, and the authority of the scholar enormous (not least because of his 30 years of experience in the field as an archaeologist working in these very regions). However, even assuming that *Vīdevdād* 1.3-15 does indeed refer to a region of Central Asia roughly corresponding to what would become Achaemenid Bactria, it would still need to be demonstrated

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<sup>28</sup> Irrespective of the reconstructive and interpretative difficulties entrenched in every reading of the Avestān material, Frye 1984, 61 argued for an origin of the Irānian peoples in the lands «north of the Oxus river», thus - so it seems - in Sogdiana (or according to Soviet archaeologists in Northern Bactria), if not even further North.

<sup>29</sup> Grenet 2005, 35 ff. and, more recently, Grenet 2015a. The possibility is not entirely ruled out in a recent study by Matthew P. Canepa (2018, 3), while Zarghamee 2013, 2-5 is almost certain of the reliability of the Avestān material not only as a historical source, but even as a bearer of clues about the identification of the so-called abode of the Ariyā (also known as the Irānian Expanse: *Airiianəm vaējō*).

<sup>30</sup> *Vīd.*, 5.1.6-7.

<sup>31</sup> In Avestān «srīraṃ ərəδβrō drafšam» (*Vīd* 1.6): see Grenet 2005, 30.

<sup>32</sup> Grenet 2005, 30: the latter is an especially interesting remark, on which more later.

<sup>33</sup> Grenet 2005, 35. Compare Jacobs 2021, 848.

that the symbolic density of the name (which in turn presupposes, at the very least, a knowledge of the Avestān tradition as it has come down to us through the manuscript tradition) was 1. accessible and 2. known to Darius (to say nothing to Cyrus and his heirs), which has so far not been done. If, as mentioned, the (endogenous or exogenous) origin of the name «Baktria» is still apparently an unsolved problem, no less difficulties have been caused by the chronology of this toponym/choronym. In an attempt to circumvent the methodological obstacles inherent in use of the *Avestā* without abandoning the hypothesis of an epichoric roots of the toponym, Rüdiger Schmitt endeavored to refute the arguments put forward by Michael Witzel, who advocated an Achaemenid neologism from a hypothetical \*Bāxdi.<sup>34</sup> Schmitt's argument is twofold: on the one hand, he contends, other forms of the toponym are attested in the pre-Achaemenid period, all of which can be traced back to a Central Asian origin.<sup>35</sup> Secondly, the evidence provided, although centuries later, by the onomastics of Āi Xānum, would reflect local traditions that could be traced back to an era antedating the advent of Persian power in the region.<sup>36</sup> The glottological reconstruction leads Schmitt to a form \*Bāxδī-, which he considers the most plausible one can possibly reach in order to justify the reading attested in the Bīsutūn inscription.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, when it comes to advance a – however tentative - chronology, he is confronted with no smaller difficulties than those facing Witzel, and is unable to come to satisfactory conclusions either regarding the hypothetical person (or group) responsible for the introduction of the term designating Baktria before the Achaemenid conquest or concerning the other fundamental question at the heart of the debate, namely whether this word originally designated a human group (Jacobs' hypothesis) or a – be it mythical or physical - space (Grenet's position).<sup>38</sup> The etymological and linguistic reconstructive investigation thus seems to lead to a dead end, leaving intact the primacy of Bīsutūn in the hierarchy of sources, and thus that of the Achaemenid definition as a starting point for a study of the genesis of the Central Asian imperial landscape. However, the challenges posed by the Avestān material were not such as to make more than one scholar desist from the idea of reconstructing a pre-Achaemenid past for Baktria. And if - apart from Grenet and, recently, Rapin - the evidence provided by the *Avestā* did not seem sufficiently conclusive, scholars have moved in search of other sources, as we will see in the following sections of the present chapter.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Schmitt 1984, 204. Cf. Tavernier 2007, 357, who follows in the footsteps of a (hypothetical) reconstruction already put forward by Nicholas Sims-Williams, who interprets the Ēlāmograph «<sup>H</sup>ALba-ak-ti<sup>l</sup>-ia-ip» as mirroring the late Avestān term Bāxdi.

<sup>35</sup> Schmitt 1984, 205-207.

<sup>36</sup> Such onomastic evidence is discussed in Grenet and Rapin 1983, 373-381.

<sup>37</sup> *WAI*, 153.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Schmitt 1995, 534-535.

<sup>39</sup> Grenet's arguments have recently been taken up by Rapin 2017b, 430-431.

### 1.1. From Ktesias to Ferdowsī: a Baktrian Empire before the Empire?

As mentioned in the previous paragraphs, the methodological difficulties and the (sometimes contradictory) plurality of outcomes of philological research are only one aspect - however relevant - of the problem under discussion here. Although far from being univocally accepted as an effective tool of historical investigation, in fact, historical reconstructive linguistics has been used by some scholars for a double purpose. On the one hand, there was - and persists even in recent years - the intention to disprove the hypothesis of the Achaemenid origin of the ethnonym/toponym designating Bactria. On the other hand, and starting from this negative evidence (which in itself entails some shaky logical premises), an attempt has been made to demonstrate the existence of a political entity, prior to Cyrus' invasion of Central Asia, also called «Bactria». From the latter - and from its political and territorial organization -, it is finally argued, the Achaemenids would have derived both the name and the administrative structure of the future satrapy, more or less along the same line that have been suggested in the case of Egypt or Babylonia.<sup>40</sup> To support this assumption, some scholars have pointed out that independent traditions (differing in method, interest, and purpose), such as classical historiography and Persian literary lore contain fragments of what might be considered historical events attesting to the existence of such an allegedly pre-Achaemenid political entity, albeit often reshaped into forms with clear semi-legendary contours. Some examples: as far as classical historiographic tradition is concerned, the account provided by Diodoros of Sicily of the expedition of the Scythian ruler Madyes against his adversary Phraortes and the one, also contained in the *Historical Library*, of the campaign launched by the Assyrian king Ninus in upper Asia (including Bactria, where however he suffered - so the historian says - a resounding defeat) form the basis of the corpus usually brought to bear in support of the existence of a Baktrian polity (sometimes even called an «Empire») prior to Cyrus' expedition. As for the Irānian literary tradition, on the other hand, the most important source is Ferdowsī's (فردوسی, 940-1020 CE) poem, the *Book of Kings* or *Shāh-Nāmeḥ* (شاهنامه), which provides the only detailed account of Persian (mnemo/mytho)history from the earliest times to the Islamic invasion which has survived in manuscript tradition.<sup>41</sup> However alluring, the picture sketched above presents some structural difficulties that should be clearly highlighted here because, however obvious they may seem, they are rarely explicitly discussed by proponents of the

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. Gnoli 1975 as well as the discussion in Jacobs 1994, 31-35, with further bibliography.

<sup>41</sup> The *Book of Kings* is an epic poem which subject, as mentioned, is Persian history, from the earliest times until the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. According to Naiden 2019, 63, a careful analysis of the work would allow us to reconstruct layers of cultural memory and oral narration dating «at least» back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, which would justify - with all due caution - its use as a historical source. Such an argument is not new: some linguists, in particular Prods Oktor Skjærvø (2005, 72) have argued that Ferdowsī's poem has parallels with, for example, some scenes from the *Yāšt*, which would suggest the continuity of an extremely ancient oral tradition, probably antedating the Achaemenids and known to them at least in part. On Ferdowsī's sources see now Stronk 2021, 1514-1515.

thesis supporting the existence of a Baktria «before (Achaemenid)Baktria». The first relates to the impossibility of establishing with any degree of plausibility the origin of the information accessible to Diodoros (writing more than half a millennium later than the events he discusses) and Ferdowsī (more than a millennium and a half away from them) in order to verify the results that linguistic analysis can achieve. Take for instance the case of Diodoros Siculus himself. Notwithstanding the accusations of sloppiness, ignorance, and coarse compilatory attitude traditionally levied against him - and which a recent historiographical trend seems more and more inclined to question - it is however difficult to doubt that the author of the *Historical Library*, in this (one might notice) not unlike other Greco-Roman historiographers, rightly or wrongly considered much more authoritative (e. g. Arrian and in some respects Herodotos himself), seems to have had a rather vague idea of both geography and, above all, of Central Asian history prior to Alexander's conquest, which ought to be taken as the real watershed in the history of Irān, both Eastern and Western (Persepolis is never described until 330 BCE), as far as almost all classical authors are concerned.<sup>42</sup> Hence the question - discussed in the chapter of this work devoted to the literary evidence - as to the legitimacy of using classical historiography for a reconstruction of the working mechanisms of the bureaucratic and administrative apparatus of the Achaemenid Empire, let alone in order to shed light on its (hypothetical) predecessors in territories such as Eastern Irān and Central Asia: this is all the more questionable in the absence of primary evidence in the light of which the literary (and archaeological) record can be assessed.<sup>43</sup>

When it comes to Ferdowsī, the question is, if possible, even thornier: the *Shāh-Nāmeḥ*, in fact, is not only an epic poem, but it is in addition permeated by a deep feel of nostalgia towards a glorious Irānian past, the recovery of which through the lenses of an «archaeological» memory serves the author in his purpose of (re)building an «authentic» tradition that acts as a worthy counterbalance to the Islamic Empire (the Caliphate, ḥilāfa, خلافة, first under the Umayyads and then the 'Abbāsids), born on the ashes of the Sāsānid dynasty starting from the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE, when the last Šāhanšāh Yazdegerd III was deposed and killed in 651 CE, following the advance of Umayyad troops into the territory of Sāsānid Ērān after the battle of al-Qādisīyah (636 CE).<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> For a reassessment of the Diodorean work see Rathmann 2016 and the recent volume edited by Hau *et al.* 2018, in particular the section devoted to the *New Quellenforschung* (pp. 251 ff.) on the *Library*. Rathmann 2006 provides a detailed overview of the geographical information on Central Asia available at the time of Diodoros and, likely, to Hellenistic geography as a whole. See also the aforementioned studies by Rapin 2001; 2005 and the useful synoptic map in Rapin 2018a, 260. For a reassessment of Arrian's testimony see Degen 2022, 13 and now Degen and Rollinger 2022 with literature.

<sup>43</sup> See also Morris 2019b, 383-389 concerning a similar question in the context of Hellenistic Central Asia (as already mentioned and as noted by Morris herself, there seems to be no mention whatsoever of the Kuṣāṇa Empire in the entire classical literary record).

<sup>44</sup> Wiesehöfer 2011a provides a both synthetic and detailed overview of the events which brought to be the Muslim invasion of Sāsānian Iran and of the impact of Caliphal invasion over Central Asia. See now the relevant chapters in Meier 2020 and Maršam 2021 on the early Caliphate (Azad 2020 focuses on the conquest of Ḥurāsān).

Although it has been argued in recent years that Ferdowsī's poem indeed preserves traces of an Irānian cultural tradition much earlier than the time in which it was written (according to David Engels and Kyle Erickson, dating at least from the Seleukid period), it should not be forgotten that, against the background both of the literary genre (the ἔπος) and, above all, of the historical context in which the *Shāh-Nāmeḥ* was conceived, the possibility that Ferdowsī may 1. have selected and 2. reshaped these traditions – of which actual existence we have, however, no proof - according 2.1. to his own artistic agenda and 2.2. the rules underlying any process of ethnogenesis, is rather high, and the implications arising from these dynamics ought to deserve more consideration in the process of critical examination of the «historical» evidence which is claimed to be available from a close reading of the *Book of Kings*.<sup>45</sup> This is especially evident once the case is considered of the dichotomy established by the poet between the peoples of Ērān and those of Tūrān (the Turkic peoples of Central Asia, compared to fire and water), which obeys much more to ideological agendas – as for example to the antinomy between non-sedentary peoples and urban civilization - than it (albeit palely) reflects the sociology of Central Asia at Ferdowsī's time, not to mention that of earlier historical periods.<sup>46</sup> In other words, the kind of history told by Ferdowsī could rightly be defined as intentional: as shown by Hans-Joachim Gehrke in many important contributions devoted to this topic, the study of this kind of history (and of its methodologies) is undoubtedly able to illuminate some aspects of the (lato sensu) political and/or cultural historical thought of the author/compiler and the reasons behind his/her choice to remember (or not to remember, to modify, and adapt) a certain event. As far as history *wie es eigentlich geschehen ist* is concerned, this kind of source, of which the *Shāh-Nāmeḥ* arguably provides a paradigmatic example, is however much less adequate. For this reason, a reconstruction of the pre-Achaemenid imperial past of Baktria based on the «traditions» recovered from Ferdowsī's poem appears, from a methodological point of view, to be suspicious at best.<sup>47</sup> A second problematic aspect - and one that nevertheless tends to be overlooked when discussing this class of documentary evidence - is the circular nature of the whole process of demonstration. Proponents of the thesis

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<sup>45</sup> This is not to be found in the two most recent contributions which, to the best of my knowledge, discuss the feasibility of using the *Shāh-Nāmeḥ* as a historical source, namely Engels and Erickson 2016 (especially pp. 51-59) and Naiden 2019, 63.

<sup>46</sup> Potts 2014, 170-172: the antagonism between Ērān and Tūrān refers above all to the perception (rooted in the ideology of almost every urban and sedentary civilization) of the antinomy between the peoples of the Irānian Plateau and those of the steppes. However, it does not consider (in all probability deliberately) the fact that, for example, among the inhabitants of the steppes there were also people of Irānian stock. From an etymological point of view, in fact, the name Tūrān (توران) has no correlation with the ethnonym Tūrük bodun (the «celestial Turks» and the tūjué 突厥 of the Chinese sources) identifying the Turkic peoples for example in their oldest inscriptions: cf. Stark 2008, 46-52. For a more balanced account see e. g. Fragner and Kappeler 2006, 81-120.

<sup>47</sup> On the concept of intentional history see at least Gehrke 2011, 51: it is defined by the German scholar as what is known, or believed to be known, within a given social group in relation to the group's own past. In numerous contributions (e. g. 2001; 2003a; 2003b; 2014), Gehrke has applied this methodology of social-historical and anthropological investigation to archaic and classical Greek history. In Italy, a similar critical orientation has been taken up and developed by Maurizio Giangulio (2010a; 2010b) and now most remarkably by Proietti 2021.

arguing in favor of the existence of a political entity established in Baktria prior to the Achaemenid conquest (usually known as the Ḥayānid Empire) are in fact wont to make use of the traditions - or alleged traditions - recovered from Diodoros or Ferdowsī to support the historical linguistic analysis of some sections of the *Avestā* (e. g. the *Yašt* or the *Vīdevdād*); in turn, these are then employed to give historical plausibility to the accounts handed down in the *Library* and/or the *Shāh-Nāmeḥ*.<sup>48</sup>

Another source often referred to in support of the plausibility of the existence of a Baktrian Empire that both predated and worked as a precursor (for example in its administrative features) to the Achaemenid satrapy is the historian (and personal physician of Artaxerxes II) Ktesias of Knidos, who lived roughly between the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE (ca. 405-359). From his account of the events in Asia prior to the accession of Cyrus to the throne of Anšan, we learn of the existence of a dynasty of Baktrian rulers, who would have reigned in an earlier period, successfully opposing, unlike the Persians until the rise of Cyrus himself, the conquest of their territories launched by the Medes.<sup>49</sup> Here too, however, there are methodological reasons why the Ktesian account cannot be used (whether with a critical outlook or taken more literally) as a reliable historical source for the pre-Achaemenid past of Baktria. These are remarks that would not lose their validity even if one were to accept the truth of the (much quoted as it is usually regarded with considerable skepticism) claim according to which Ktesias took advantage of consulting «royal archives» during his stay at court.<sup>50</sup> The fact, for instance, that the main topic of Ktesias' research is the Persian court, suggests that the reconstruction he provides of the origins of the Empire and of the geo-political situation of the time in which he lived and wrote reflect much more the ideological orientation of Artaxerxes' entourage (and/or what the author could reasonably expect his audience wanted to read/hear) than a «service-oriented» image of the organization and functioning of the Empire as conveyed, by contrast, by the Persepolis tablets.<sup>51</sup> To this should be added, on the one hand, the weight of Herodotos' legacy, with which there is no doubt that Ktesias was confronted when he elaborated his own image ad usum Graecorum of the Persian court.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, a certain tendency to stereotype - centered on topics (and τόποι) such as luxury, lust, and violence which are

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<sup>48</sup> A good example of circular arguments structured along these lines is to be found in Zarghamee 2013, 165-166. For a discussion of further Avestān material related to the (supposed) Ḥayānid Empire cfr. Jacobs 1994, 33.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. *FGrHist* 688 F 1b (26). Such a claim already raises suspicion, not least because it assumes the existence of a Median Empire of some sort, which does not stand up to scrutiny: Rollinger 2020; 2021a.

<sup>50</sup> This is an assumption which in any case can neither be proved nor disproved, but that appears to be rather unlikely: cf. Lenfant 2004, XXXVI-XXXIX. The mention of the archives occurs in a passage from the Diodorean *Library* (2.32.4): «Ktesias of Knidos lived at the time of Cyrus' [the younger: cf. Briant 2002, 615-637] expedition against his brother Artaxerxes. Taken prisoner, Ktesias found employment at the king's court thanks to his medical skills and lived for 17 years as an honored guest at his [Artaxerxes II's] palace. In addition to this, this author claims that in the royal documents [ἐκ τῶν βασιλικῶν διφθερῶν] he researched all the details [that recur in his work] and that, after having drawn up a historical account from them, he made it public for the benefit of the Greeks. In these documents, according to some well-informed men, the Persians are wont to record ancient deeds».

<sup>51</sup> See Lenfant 2004, 111-112, Rollinger 2011, 341 and Wiesehöfer 2011b, 503-505.

<sup>52</sup> This is clearly demonstrated by Bichler 2021, using Cyrus' death as an example.

almost unavoidable features of the Greco-Roman imagination concerning the Achaemenid world, the roots of which have indeed recently been traced back to Ktesias' work itself.<sup>53</sup> Similarly to what has been suggested in the case of Ferdowsī, and as Madreiter's studies seem to demonstrate, also with regard to Ktesias, the most reasonable working hypothesis appears to be that of reading his Περσικά through the lens of intentional history.<sup>54</sup> From such a perspective, the author's description of a large and powerful Baktrian kingdom capable of resisting the Assyrian and Median invasion (in the logic of the Περσικά, according at least to the surviving fragments, both important predecessors of Achaemenid Persia within a well-known framework proper to the classical historiographic tradition known as *translatio imperii*) probably obeys much more the constraints of literary genre than it reflects - more or less obliquely – any kind of historical reality.<sup>55</sup> The suspicion that such a logic is at work in the context of Ktesias' reconstruction of the past of upper Asian societies prior to the rise of Persia under Cyrus is reinforced by the fact that, when narrating the events leading from Assyrian power to the Median hegemony (the latter being also in Herodotos the direct predecessors of the Achaemenid Empire, thus in passing completely erasing Ēlām from the record), the decisive factor appears to be precisely the enlistment of the king of Baktria and his soldiers in the ranks of the Median king Arbakes. The following is Ktesias' account of the episode: «Arbakes and his family decided to meet as soon as possible with the lieutenants [of the Baktrians], bringing with them the wisest and most valiant of their soldiers. If by their own arguments they could not persuade the Baktrians to take their side in the revolt [against Assyria], they would have forced them to share the same fate [as the Medes] by force. But finally, at first the commander alone, then the whole army was enthusiastic about the prospect of being liberated, and all of them moved to the same camp [that of Arbakes]».<sup>56</sup> In the light of both this passage and the previous remarks, it could be argued that Cyrus' conquest of a powerful political entity established in Baktria answers to the same logic at work in the case of Arbakes' rise to power. The balance in Asia decisively tips in Cyrus' favor only when the latter succeeds in securing the loyalty of the ruler of Baktria and of his soldiers, just as had happened in the

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<sup>53</sup> On Ktesias' narrative and its Herodotean precedent(s) see e. g. Rollinger 2010, while on the development of Greek (and later Roman) *Orientalism* following Ktesias' historical work, see Madreiter 2012, 33-134. On such *Orientalism's* *Nachleben* see Lincoln 2007, 67-96 and the critics by Colburn 2011, to which Lincoln replied in a later contribution (2013).

<sup>54</sup> See Madreiter 2012, 9-30 on sociological and psychological literature as well as on literary and narratological analysis useful for understanding the literary and historical construction of the description of more or less well-known peoples in Greco-Roman culture.

<sup>55</sup> Lanfranchi 2011, 200-202 has convincingly shown how, in Ktesias' work, the history of a particular region (in the author's case, of Assyria) is narrated in function of the rise of Achaemenid power and its conquest of the territory in question. A similar observation has been made by Lenfant (2004, LII-LIV) and Rollinger (2011, 333) with regards to Media, which makes the Baktrian λόγος particularly suspect.

<sup>56</sup> *FGrHist* 688 F 1b (26). See on this passage Rollinger's remarks (2011, 318). Provided that we are dealing with some kind of historical evidence at all, which is far from sure, Arbakes' «family» might be a rendering of those groups of acolytes which Beckwith 2009, 1-28 calls *comitatus* and singles out as one of the main features of Eurasian traditions, both as it comes to warfare and to myth.



case of the rise to power of the Medes against Assyria.<sup>57</sup> Of course, one might legitimately wonder why the Baktrians - and not, for example, the Parthians or the Arachosians - play such an important role in the architecture of the *translatio imperiorum* through which Greek authors read the history of the ancient Near East and of Irān before the coming of the Achaemenids. The fact that in his play celebrating the Median (Persian) wars, Aeschylus uses the destruction of the Baktrian contingent *pro toto* as decisive evidence accounting for the disastrous defeat of Xerxes' contingent at Salamis only shifts the question of the reasons for the prominence of the Baktrians a century back in time, without however providing any further clues.<sup>58</sup> In the current state of affairs, therefore, the source material in our possession does not allow the use of Ktesias in order to support the hypothesis of the existence of a pre-Achaemenid Baktrian polity, nor can the onomastics and/or toponymy preserved in the surviving fragments be exploited - as is sometimes still the case - to support linguistic and glottological arguments arguing in the same direction.<sup>59</sup>

## 1.2. Myth, (intentional)history and archaeology in (pre?)Achaemenid Baktria

As mentioned above, in recent years some authoritative scholars (mostly archaeologists) of Central Asia have attempted to underpin the hypotheses developed from Avestān geography (as it emerges from the above-mentioned passages of the first *Vīdevdād* and from the *Mihr Yašt* - 10.14) by making use of archaeological and topographical evidence.<sup>60</sup> In particular, Grenet and Rapin have forcefully argued in favor of the possibility of reconstructing the «mental map» of the author of the first *Vīdevdād* and of the cartography of the *Mihr Yašt* starting from the identification of some rivers around which the catalogue of the lands created by Ahuramazdā would be oriented: the Murǵ-āb (Μυρφοῦ) in the case of Margiana, the Harīrūd in connection to Ariana, the Qundūz-āb as it comes to the Zarafšān valley (called *Gava* in the *Avestā*) and Chorasmia, whose location in the texts would

<sup>57</sup> Cf. *FGrHist* 688 F 9 (2): the submission of the Baktrians to Cyrus is the decisive factor in the latter's rise to absolute power. See Rollinger 2011, 327.

<sup>58</sup> Aesch. *Pers.*, 306-307, 318-319 with Proietti 2021, 133-134. It could - perhaps - be argued that, already in classical times, in the worldview of Mediterranean societies, Baktria had acquired the mythical-fabulous contours of a land at world's end that we find, for example, in the famous Adulis inscription (Ἄδουλις, in *Gθ' αζ κθ' α.λ.η*), erected by Ptolemy III (*OGIS* 54) and still known centuries later to Kosmas Indikopleustes (Κοσμάς Ἰνδικοπλεύστης, 6<sup>th</sup> century CE), who mentions it in his *Topographia Christiana* (2.59.8). As far as the Ptolemies are concerned, however, the long-lasting impact of Near Eastern imperial discourses should not be underestimated (as pointed out for example in Degen 2022, 50). Seen this way, to conquer Baktria might still have meant, as far as the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, to conquer «the world».

<sup>59</sup> This is the conclusion reached by Rollinger 2011, 343 at the end of a detailed analysis of Ktesias' *Μεδική λόγος*. In his own words, at least as far as the episodes prior to the time when Ktesias himself lived are concerned, his narrative cannot be used for historical purposes. Further considerations about the possibility (and methodology required therefor) of using some of the information provided by Ktesias for historical analysis can be found in Rollinger 2014b, 167.

<sup>60</sup> Witzel 2000 and Zarghamee 2013, 2-5 have strongly argued in favor of Baktria as the original land of the Irānians. See also Gnoli 1980, 23-57.

hinge on the tributaries of the Oxus (Amudaryo).<sup>61</sup> The onomastic and topographical knowledge apparently displayed by the Avestān author(s) plays an important role in the argumentation of scholars such as Grenet and Rapin since, once the latter is accepted, it becomes, in their opinion, less problematic to postulate the historical existence of that Kavi Vīštāspa whose exploits (remarkable fact: located in Baktra and neighboring areas) are celebrated in the hymns that make up the *Yašt*, and whom a long tradition regards as having been the patron of Zoroāstra himself.<sup>62</sup> In recent years, other scholars have suggested that during Cyrus' lifetime a tradition emerged, which could be traced back to Eastern Irān or Central Asia itself, representing the founder of the Persian Empire along the lines of the Kavi Vīštāspa (who, according to one of the supporters of this thesis, Reza Zarghamee, «was undoubtedly a historical figure»). The main aim of such tradition would have been to include Cyrus himself within a genealogy of patrons of the founder of the new religion, a hypothesis made even more plausible, so its supporters claim, by a series of testimonies according to which Cyrus was an active supporter of the Zoroastrian cult.<sup>63</sup> This assumption is followed by a second one, particularly relevant to the present work, namely the hypothesis that, in the context of the crucial military campaigns waged not only in Persia, Ēlām, and Babylonia, but also in Eastern Irān and Central Asia at the time of the succession to Cambyses, Darius would have been able to exploit the homonymy between his father (also called Vīštāspa) and the revered king of the glorious Baktrian imperial past - as well as the latter's identification with Cyrus - therewith crediting his own genealogy (some speak of «lineage» or «dynasty», others, more generally, of a «family clan») within such a prestigious cultural and religious tradition. The ultimate aim of this genealogical (re)construction, so concludes the argument developed by the proponents of such hypothesis, would have been to take advantage, in terms of both political and military alliance, of the prestige enjoyed in Baktria by both Cyrus and the Kavi Vīštāspa, with whom the former would have been identified as he was still alive.<sup>64</sup>

Taken together, the arguments summarized above are intended to lend greater plausibility to a long-standing assumption, namely the existence of a political entity, which some scholars refer to as a

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. the already mentioned catalogue in *Vīd.*, 1.3-15 and the comments in Grenet 2005, 39-40 and Rapin 2017b, 427-430.

<sup>62</sup> As it is well known, this is the subject of lively debate: see for instance Boyce 1975, 275-276 and, very critically, the opinion of Beckwith 2009, 365-369. The first indisputable evidence of this tradition dates back to the Sāsānid period but lasted long after the fall of the Empire itself cf. *Yaš.*, 5.104-110, 9.29-31.

<sup>63</sup> Vogelsang 2002, 105. Among the most recent (and vocal) supporters of the hypothesis of Vīštāspa's historicity there is a pupil of the great Iranist Richard Nelson Frye and author of a biography of the first Teispid Great King, namely Reza Zarghamee (2013, 540). See however the cautionary remarks in de Jong 1998, 39-75; 2021.

<sup>64</sup> About Darius' father see Hdt. 3.70.3: «Darius, whose father's name was Hystaspes [Ἰστιάσπης], was an officer [ὑπαρχος] of second rank in Persia». According to Briant 2002, 467, however, Herodotos would be mistaken in this case, since the Bīsūtūn inscription (DB<sub>p</sub> col. II § 35) claims that Darius' father, at the time of his son's accession to power, was performing military duties in Parthia. Yet, it is not clear from Briant's analysis whether Herodotos is wrong in simply locating Hystaspes as active in Persia or whether it is the very fact that he was ὑπαρχος in the Achaemenid Empire of the late 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE that should be questioned. The Ēlāmite version is of little help here (Grillot-Susini *et al.* 1993, 29-30).

«confederation», governed by Kavi Vištāspa and his descendants, through the use of evidence deemed more solid, e. g. archaeology. This confederation would have extended across the whole of Northern Central Asia, from Bactria to Chorasmia, and the Achaemenid Central Asian satrapies would have originated from the political-administrative (re)organization of such a polity under Darius, if not already Cyrus.<sup>65</sup> As Gherardo Gnoli already observed, however, the textual evidence (from the classical authors to the *Avestā*), is rather thin, since, in the first case, it is based on a few fragments - what remains of Ktesias' Median λόγος and some scattered notes of Hekataios, transmitted moreover through much later sources, for example Athenaios -, while in the case of the *Avestā*, as it has been mentioned, the uncertainties related to the textual transmission of the corpus would be such as to discourage its use as a historical source.<sup>66</sup> However, in spite of the uncertainties regarding the possibility of demonstrating any kind of link (let alone their historical existence) between Zaratūštra and Vištāspa, Gnoli does not exclude the possibility of what the scholar defines as a «Bactrian hegemony» in Central Asia, therefore implying in this way - or at least as it can be gauged by his own work - the existence of some form of political entity, whose (hypothetical) features he does not further clarify.<sup>67</sup> This leads us back to the theories of Grenet and numerous other specialists in Central Asian archaeology (including – but by no means limited to - some of the representatives of the Soviet and post-Soviet tradition, for example Viktor I. Sarianidi), who have repeatedly argued that the only acceptable methodology for elucidating the pre-Achaemenid history of Iron Age Central Asia consists in making a critical use of textual sources supported by archaeological excavations: among the most influential representatives of this current of thought is undoubtedly Henri-Paul Francfort.<sup>68</sup> To be fair, it must be stressed that neither Grenet nor his colleagues (but things are different in the case of Russian-speaking archaeology, and especially with regard to the new Central Asian republics) have ever attempted to establish a consequential relationship between the topographical competence shown by (some of) the Avestān texts and the latter's reliability as a historical source. Nevertheless, the results of their analysis have sometimes been employed in this sense, taking up and reformulating Gnoli's thesis concerning the historicity of a «Bactrian hegemony» extended in whichever form from Central Asia to pre-Achaemenid Eastern Irān. By virtue of the importance of this discussion in the

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<sup>65</sup> Such was for example already Tam's view (1938, 478 ff).

<sup>66</sup> Another - authoritative - example of the combinatorial use of these sources to demonstrate the historical plausibility of Ḥayānid Bactria is Frye 1998<sup>2</sup>, 39-40. The fragments of Ktesias have already been mentioned: here it must be stressed that even Grenet, who is by no means against such a hypothesis, admits (2005, 41) that, in all probability, Ktesias «never set foot» in Eastern Irān or Central Asia. On Hekataios see Fr. 302 Nenci (= Ath. 2.70). For a critique of the use of such sources see Gnoli 1980, 91-97.

<sup>67</sup> Gnoli 1980, 92-95.

<sup>68</sup> Francfort 1988, 168-169, according to whom, if studied against the results of the archaeological evidence, Avestān sources would even allow to reconstruct the borders of such political entity, may it or not to be equated with the Ḥayānid Empire centered on pre-Achaemenid Bactria. On Iron Age Central Asia at large see now the contributions in Lhuillier 2021.

overall economy of the present work, it is not out of place to summarize, at least in brief, the structure of the argument put forward by the proponents of the above thesis in its most elaborate form.

First, the historical-linguistic study would show that there are sections of the *Avestā*, including, remarkably, the *Vīdevdād*, that cannot be dated later than the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, and according to many scholars this chronology should be corrected further backwards, moving the dating of these oldest layers to around the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE.<sup>69</sup> Following this line of reasoning, therefore, the texts as preserved were written down around 600 BCE (which implies that, at least in theory, they could have been known in the form in which we read them to Cyrus himself). This assumption makes it possible - it should be noted - to circumvent the main difficulty mentioned above, namely the extremely late dating (13<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> century CE) of the most recent Avestān manuscripts that have been preserved.<sup>70</sup> Second, the geographical competence of the first *Vīdevdād* and of the *Mir Yašt* would allow to demonstrate that, despite the rhetorical colores, the primeval land of the Irānian-speaking people (the Irānian Expanse, *Airtianəm vaējō*) was identified with a real space, distinguishing it, for example, from Ásgarðr of Norse epic, the residence of the Æsir: moreover, this space would correspond to the river Vaḥš (the Ὠξοῦς of the Greek sources of the Hellenistic period, today's Darya-i Pandž, not to be confused with the Ὀξοῦς/Oxus, the Amudaryo).<sup>71</sup> Thirdly, the accuracy of the details contained in this narrative would mean that the historical plausibility of another description, that of Baktra as the theatre of Kavi Vīštāspa's exploits, should not be dismissed without further considerations. Fourth, and finally, the circle is brought to a close with the reference to the passages of the *Shāh-Nāmeḥ* dealing with similar episodes described in the *Avestā*, since, so the argument goes, when Ferdowsī tells the story of the founders of Baktra by proceeding to list the entire genealogy of Vīštāspa, who is said to have held court in the city, it is plausible that the traditions to which the Medieval poet refers might indeed reflect much more than a poetic reworking of a mythical space, as the meticulous description of the Eastern Badaḥšān would confirm.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> This is for example Grenet's opinion (2005, 44-45). Another authoritative supporter of an older chronology is the Skjærvø 2005, 80 who argues that, around 1000 BCE, «the Persian tribe migrates onto the Plateau, somehow making its way into Western and Southwestern Iran by the 9<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries, bringing with it the *Old Avesta*. The «Young Avestan» tribe migrates into Arachosia/Sistān [moving from Northeastern Baktria, at least according to Grenet's reconstruction], where the *Young Avesta* is composed, incorporating all or some of the *Old Avesta*. Other tribes migrate onto the central Plateau, among them the Medes».

<sup>70</sup> Skjærvø 2013, 549. A similar chronology has been proposed by Golden 2011b, 21.

<sup>71</sup> These are, in fact, not two different graphic renderings of the same river, but two different watercourses (with the Ὠξοῦς being the Amudaryo): cf. Strab. 11.7.3 and Arr. *Anab.*, 3.29.2. Further details in Grenet and Rapin 2001, 82, while a detailed philological discussion is provided by Grenet 2005, 35-36.

<sup>72</sup> See for example the discussion in Jacobs 1994, 32-34. Even more explicit has been Zarghamee 2013, 175, who argues that Cyrus would have appropriated, turning it to his own advantage, the «strong Zoroastrian tradition» existing in Baktria (as well as in Drangiana) at the time of his conquest.

Further details can then be added to this basic structure of the argument. To give but an example: according to Ferdowsī's account, the sacred fire of Zoroastrian tradition, known under the name of Noš-adar, would have been preserved at Baktra. By virtue of the plausibility conferred by the aforementioned archaeological-topographical reading of the Eastern Irānian territories described in the *Avestā*, which tradition would later be taken up by Ferdowsī, the possible discovery on Baktrian soil of temples and/or altars somehow to be related to a fire cult (which, as is well known, is usually interpreted as the main evidence for the existence of Zoroastrian rituals such as those described in the surviving *Avestān* texts - the so-called «long liturgy» of the *Yasnā*) and datable to the Achaemenid period would demonstrate in an irrefutable manner that the Great Kings of Persia, starting from Cyrus himself, would have consciously attempted to exploit for dynastical and legitimation purposes «local traditions, memories and interpretations of places and the new roles of those places within the new imperial topography of power».<sup>73</sup> In recent years, the study of spatial perception and of its manipulation by imperial powers in the ancient Near East and in Irān (especially in the Sāsānid period) has enjoyed remarkable popularity among scholars. In fact, it has been argued that the planning of the so-called built environment is closely linked to the elaboration of a specific «topography of power». This formula is used in specialist literature to indicate the strategy of a political power to establish a link between 1. places that are particularly significant from the point of view of cultural belonging and/or of the social memory of a given human group (for example on religious grounds) and 2. social practices - the celebration of festivals, coronation rituals and so on - aimed 3. at conferring authority and legitimacy on that same political power.<sup>74</sup> Drawing on the most recent work from this latest wave in research, some scholars have argued that, in the context of such a topography of power, Baktria would have been a cornerstone of the Achaemenid (and Teispid before them) strategy of self-legitimization, precisely because of its imperial past. This would be all the more fitting in the case of Baktra, most likely having been the capital of that Empire (the already mentioned Ḥayanid kingdom).<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Further details in Canepa 2018, 22, from where the quote in the text comes. See however already Genito 2013, 630, according to whom Baktra «was a holy city of Zoroastrianism, and under the name Bactria it became the capital of Bactriana» and Witzel 2013, 434. «Capital» is a very slippery term when it comes to Achaemenid history (Gondet 2018), and the same could be argued in the case of allegedly polities antedating the Empire.

<sup>74</sup> Canepa 2018, 382 provides an effective definition of a concept such as that of «topography of power». He quotes the American geographer Carl Ortwin Sauer (1889-1975), from where he borrows the term «cultural landscape», which he defines as «fashioned from a natural landscape by a culture group. Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium. The cultural landscape is the result». Analogous strategies employed to create a cultural landscape are well known in other regions of the Ancient Near East (from Mesopotamia to Assyria) and have abundantly been exploited by the Achaemenids themselves, most notably at Naqš -i Rostam or even in the case of the Bīsūtūn inscription: see for a useful comparison Harmanşah 2015, 83-100.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Francfort 1988, 168-169, whose assessment, like those by Grenet and Rapin, is particularly authoritative in view of his decade-long experience as an archaeologist in Central Asia, and in particular in Eastern Baktria. See also Zarghamee's discussion (2013, 123-137) of the symbolic importance of the Zoroastrian cult for Cyrus and his successors.

The implications of such assumptions are so far-reaching that they require adequate scrutiny. The first question that needs to be asked in this context, therefore, is: do we have documentary evidence of Achaemenid (or earlier) temple structures in Baktria? And if so, is it possible to interpret this evidence as a proxy of Zoroastrian cults sponsored by the Great King or, under his mandate, by one of his officials (e. g. by the satrap)? However, the question could be posed in more general terms: what do we know, quite simply, about the rituals (religious, dynastic, or otherwise) of Baktria prior to the Hellenistic period? In both cases, the answer is, admittedly, «not much», and this although the prolonged excavation seasons carried out by the *MAFOuz* in Sogdiana (particularly in the Qashqadaryo and Zarafshān valleys) have enriched the landscape with new data, the interpretation of which, however, is still far from being unambiguously established. As mentioned in the previous chapters, the literary sources have conveyed a fragmentary and nebulous picture of the political - not to mention the socio-cultural - history of Achaemenid Baktria, and the situation has been further complicated by Seleukid activism in the area (which Kosmin has defined as «dynastic advertising»), which not infrequently contributed to «actively erasing» the memory of Persian power throughout the Empire, including in Central Asia.<sup>76</sup> A good example of such a conscious activity of mnemotechnical engineering on the part of the Seleukids in the Eastern Irānian lands is evident in the case of Āi Xānum, where what seems to have constituted the core of the Achaemenid settlement (still clearly visible from the wall of the new city) was destined to fall into ruin and, according to archaeological research at least, never to be inhabited again, while all around the plain the activities (construction, irrigation, and other) that befit the foundation (and in the post-Seleukid era the refoundation) of, if not an authentic imperial settlement, then at least a strategic center of fundamental importance, were in full swing.<sup>77</sup> Finally, some historiographical trends (starting from Russian-speaking scholarship and especially, also in this case for reasons – but this time contemporary - of «mnemotechnical engineering», from the local, O‘zbek and especially, by virtue of the linguistic contiguity, however remote (Persian as opposed to Turkic), the Taḡik schools) have not been particularly willing to seriously confront the methodological remarks concerning the identarian or ritual belonging evoked by material culture voiced, among others, by Rachel Mairs and Milinda Hoo.<sup>78</sup> As highlighted most vocally by the latter, especially in such a culturally dense context as

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<sup>76</sup> Kosmin 2014a, 195: this position, it should be noted, sharply contrasts with the vulgata of the Seleukid Empire as a continuation – albeit by other means - of the Achaemenid legacy, according to a line of interpretation that goes back at least to *From Samarkand to Sardis* (Kuhrt and Sherwin-White 1993). On Seleukid and post-Seleukid temple architecture as means of imperial (self)affirmation see Martinez-Sève 2010; 2015 and Canepa 2015. Canepa 2018, 42-67 is currently the most up-to-date study of the (often contrastive) dialogue between the Seleukid dynasty throughout the Empire and its Achaemenid predecessor in the long and complex process of construction of a new topography of power.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Canepa 2009, 154-187; 2010 for an in-depth study (albeit related to Sāsānid Ērān and its relationships with the Roman Empire) of these and other strategies of memory engineering. On the organization of Āi Xānum’s cityscape in the Hellenistic period see for example Martinez-Sève 2014; 2015.

<sup>78</sup> See especially Mairs 2014b, 57-101, Hoo 2018; 2020; 2022.

Central Asia, before asking what a given object (e. g. a temple or an altar) is, one should reflect on the intention behind certain choices (e. g. «Corinthian» columns within a «Mesopotamian» planimetry), which means raising the issue of the transformation in a local fashion of architectural or decorative elements belonging, for example and precisely because of their extra-local origin, to a style perceived as global and therefore especially appealing because of its flexibility.<sup>79</sup>

As we shall see, such methodological sophistication is still far from making its way into the archaeological debate (and consequently into historical interpretation) regarding the place occupied by Baktria within the wider - and yet at the same time not only «interconnected», but also and perhaps most importantly graspable as such in its being supra-local - Achaemenid world.<sup>80</sup> Despite, or perhaps exactly because of, the above, it is worth taking a closer look at the archaeological evidence that is used to argue for the pre-Achaemenid (and Zoroastrian) past of Baktria. The aim is to establish whether we really have elements that allow us not to consider - as this chapter argues – the text of the Bīsutūn inscription as the first evidence on the perception of Baktria in terms of a historical and political entity. The inscription itself will then be the subject of a second section, aimed at studying more closely the language of power adopted by Darius in relation to Baktria, so as to elucidate its nature, or at least what the narrator of the inscription («Darius, the King») presents as naked facts: as *res ipsa*.

### 1.2.1. The fire and the river

A very famous - and until today highly contested - passage in Herodotos' *Histories* states that the Persians (by which he probably meant «those speaking languages similar to that of the Persians» - i. e. the Irānian peoples) «do not build or erect statues or temples or altars [...], yet they call the whole vault of the sky Zeus [which is usually, probably mistakenly, taken to mean Ahuramazdā], and to this deity they sacrifice on the highest peaks of the mountains. The Persians also make sacrifices in honor of the sun and moon, earth and fire, water and winds».<sup>81</sup> The interpretative history of this passage is symptomatic of the methodological difficulties that characterize the study of pre-Islamic Central Asia (especially, but by no means only, during the Achaemenid period): quoted on several occasions as an

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<sup>79</sup> On the use of such categories within archaeological discourse see Naerebout 2010, Jennings 2011 and Hodos 2017, but cf. also most recently Hoo 2020, 554-555 and Strootman 2020b. Crucial are Pitts and Versluys 2021 and Versluys 2022.

<sup>80</sup> A remarkable exception in this regard: Colburn 2017. Concerning the Empire's ability to present itself to its subjects, from Sardis to the Indus, as a single community (for example thanks to its highly developed road system) see Colburn 2013, 47.

<sup>81</sup> Hdt. 1.131.1-2: «Πέρσας δὲ οἶδα νόμοισι τοιοῖσιδε χρεωμένους, ἀγάλματα μὲν καὶ νηοὺς καὶ βωμοὺς [...] οἱ δὲ νομίζουσι Διὶ μὲν ἐπὶ τὰ ὑψηλότατα τῶν ὀρέων ἀναβαίνοντες θυσίας ἔρδειν, τὸν κύκλον πάντα τοῦ οὐρανοῦ Δία καλέοντες: θύουσι δὲ ἡλίῳ τε καὶ σελήνῃ καὶ γῆ καὶ πυρὶ καὶ ὕδατι καὶ ἀνέμοισιν». Cf. moreover Polyæn. 7.11.12 and another testimony (4<sup>th</sup> century BCE) of the historian Deinon of Kolophon (*FGrHist* 690 F 28: «θύειν ἐν ὑπαίθρῳι τούτους ὁ Δίνων λέγει, θεῶν ἀγάλματα μόνα τὸ πῦρ καὶ ὕδωρ νομίζοντας»).

example of everything Herodotos did not know and did not understand about the Achaemenid cultural universe he was describing, it is nevertheless (paradoxically) constantly mentioned in support of the religious (and in particular Zoroastrian) character of practically all architecture that can be traced back more or less laboriously to a temple (or an altar).<sup>82</sup> At Āi Xānum, located at the confluence of the Kokča and Darya -i Pandğ rivers (the latter being the Vahš, Strabo's Ὠχοῦς and not, as usually assumed, the Oxus/Ὠξοῦς Amudaryo) and - as mentioned - already occupied before the advent of Graeco-Makedonian power, the discovery during excavations (carried out between 1961-1978) of an «Iranizing» podium on the Southeastern side of the acropolis was interpreted by archaeologists as an indication of the existence of Zoroastrian cults celebrated in Baktria during the Achaemenid period.<sup>83</sup> In Sogdiana, at the sites of Koktēpe, Sangirtepē, and Kyndyktēpe, the discovery of similar structures (terrasses sacrées in the (French) archaeological jargon) has given new vigor to the thesis of the Central Asian origin of the Mazdean religion and its pre-eminent position within the ritual landscape of the Achaemenid upper satrapies.<sup>84</sup> As can easily be imagined, the results of these excavations have in their turn given renewed impetus both to the hypothesis of a high dating of the – Old – *Avestā* (and in particular of the *Vīdevdād* and *Mir Yašt*) as well as to another claim, derived from the former, namely that concerning the pre-eminent role played by the territories of Baktria-Sogdiana in this cultural (and later political) topography.<sup>85</sup> It should be noted, however, that if one decides to accept at least part of the reliability of Herodotos' text, one must also recognize 1. that the historian does not mention any kind of particular fire cult (assumed as being the cornerstone of all Zoroastrian rituals) and - perhaps more importantly - 2. that up to now the interpretation of the structures of Āi Xānum, Koktēpe, and Sangirtepē within a Mazdean framework is based solely on structural parallels with the architecture of other (later) sanctuaries in which the practice of a Zoroastrian rituals seems beyond doubt. However, at least so far, no clear traces of rituals similar to the cult of Ahuramazdā have been found at the above-mentioned sites, such as the deposition of pure ashes in deposits known as ātašgāh, traces of which have allegedly been discovered in almost every temple structure unearthed in more or less recent years in Central Asia; and this even when almost incontrovertible evidence shows that, to put it mildly, a fire cult was not the only one (and perhaps not even the predominant one) among those practiced in that given sanctuary.<sup>86</sup> This is the case, to name but just the most famous example,

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<sup>82</sup> On the presumed Zoroastrian rites described in the classical sources see the pertinent remarks in De Jong 1998, 343-386; 2021. Critics of Herodotos' description (except for then using it e contrario to confirm the Zoroastrian devotion of the Achaemenids) are Boyce 1975, 79 and, more recently, Rapin 2017b, 419. See most recently Henkelman 2021c, 1245-1247, noting inter alia that in the Bīsutūn inscription there is explicit mention of «temples of the gods», which consequently implies that Ahuramazdā was not alone nor likely prominent in the Achaemenid imperial pantheon.

<sup>83</sup> Rapin 2017a, 48-49 with previous bibliography on the riverine system of Eastern Baktria.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Rapin 2007, 32-44, Boroffka 2009, 140-141 as well as, more recently, Rapin 2017b, 423-426 and Wu 2020, 608-612.

<sup>85</sup> Rapin 1992b, 107, Grenet 2005, 39.

<sup>86</sup> Mairs 2014c on Achaemenid Āi Xānum.



with the temple of Tāxt -i Sāngīn, about a hundred kilometers West of Āi Xānum, in present-day Taġik territory.<sup>87</sup> Unlike Herodotos, in book 15 of his *Geography*, Strabo indeed mentions the cult of fire as a distinctive feature of Persian (Irānian) religiosity. A few lines later in the same passage, however, he also does not fail to report sacrifices celebrated «by going to a lake or river or spring where, after digging a pit [βόθρος], they [the Persians] sacrifice a victim over it».<sup>88</sup> Strabo's account has been interpreted by an expert on Central Asian archaeology such as Henri-Paul Francfort as «the most precise description among those handed down from classical antiquity» of a fertility ritual linked to a river cult (the deified Vaḥš) characteristic of Central Asian cultures at least since the Bronze Age.<sup>89</sup> Similar devotional practices, Francfort also noted, seem to have enjoyed considerable fortune and equally remarkable continuity, since they are attested throughout the history of Central Asia, from the Achaemenid to the Kuṣāṇa period (an aspect that in the case of the latter dynasty tends to go unnoticed in the face of the flowering of Buddhism and of the so-called art of Gāndhārā). This seems demonstrable by virtue of the comparative analysis, on the one hand, of some among the cultic objects found at Āi Xānum - for instance in the perimeter of the so-called temple with indented niches or à niches indentées. On the other hand, of some among the most famous and artistically elaborate artefacts retrieved in the notorious Oxus treasure, the authenticity of which is still being debated but is of such an importance that, in the absence of irrefutable evidence proving the partial or total forged nature of the items of which it is composed, it is impossible to overlook within the context of any historical study on Baktrian art and culture during the almost 250 years of Persian rule over Central Asia.<sup>90</sup>

By virtue of these considerations, it has been noted, any attempt at interpreting both the archaeological material and the textual evidence from an exclusively Achaemenid (which means, in

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<sup>87</sup> A good example of this search for ātašgāh in the ritual landscape of ancient Baktria: Litvinskii and Pičikjan 2002, 38-43. On the cultic history and ritual practices of this complex building see especially the many contributions by Gunvor Lindström (2008; 2010; 2016 and most recently 2020, 291-297). In chamber number 4 of the temple, a podium was found on which there was a bronze statue of a Marsyas playing a flute. The podium was inscribed with the following dedication: (Litvinskii - Pičikjan 1981, 153): «Εὐχὴν || ἀνέθηκεν || Ἀτροσωκῆς || Ὕξω». As Gunvor Lindström (2016, 283 ff., with illustrations) has it: «this is therefore a figure from Greek mythology, dedicated by a man with an Iranian name to a local, Sogdian or Baktrian deity, and yet the dedicatory inscription is Greek: a fusion [Mischung] of different influences [Einflüsse], which are attested both in the case of the Oxus temple and other shrines in the Hellenistic Far East». The temple as excavated dates to the Hellenistic period and the discussion is still open as to the possibility of the existence in Achaemenid times of podiums or other structures similar to those described by Herodotos. However, what is clear from the Atrosökēs inscription is the considerable complexity of the Baktrian cultic landscape, which should lead one to be wary of interpretations in an exclusively Zoroastrian lore. On the inscription see also *CII* 2 n. 95 and *IEO* n. 311.

<sup>88</sup> Strab. 15.3.14: «διαφερόντως δὲ τῷ πυρὶ καὶ τῷ ὕδατι θύουσι [...] τῷ δ' ὕδατι, ἐπὶ λίμνην ἢ ποταμὸν ἢ κρήνην ἐλθόντες, βόθρον ὀρύξαντες εἰς τοῦτον σφαγιάζονται».

<sup>89</sup> On the religious landscape of Bronze Age Central Asia see most recently the relevant chapters in the edited volume by Lyonnet and Dubova (2020), for example pp. 178-214.

<sup>90</sup> Francfort 2012. Cf. for the objects mentioned by Francfort the catalogue of Inagaki 2002 nos. 67b-e and the remarks by Curtis (2004; 2012 contra Muscarella 2003, to be compared with the methodological observations by Colburn 2020d). See moreover further below in chapter 5. On the methodological difficulties related to the definition of a religious or more strictly cultural affiliation based on the archaeological data of Āi Xānum see Martinez-Sève 2010; 2012, Mairs 2012b, and Hoo 2022, 244-251.

the context of this discussion, Zoroastrian) perspective should take into account, which is rarely done, at least two methodological caveats. The first: Strabo's passage and the inscription of Atrosōkēs, although much later than the Achaemenid period, constitute rather strong indications in favor of the existence of a complexity of local religious life(s) which was 1. greater and 2. much more resilient than we are usually willing to acknowledge. Even assuming (and not granting) that rituals and symbolism comparable to - if not directly derived from - those attested in the *Avestā* were part of the cultural horizon of Achaemenid Baktria, there are compelling reasons to suspect that they were not the only ones, nor that they enjoyed special public favors by the ruling power, the latter being an especially important point.<sup>91</sup> A telling example concerning these and similar matters: the human figures engraved on some silver tablets among those recovered from the Oxus treasure and dated to the Achaemenid period (5<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> century BCE) have traditionally been interpreted as depicting priests of the Avestān cultic tradition, at least as it is known from the textual evidence. This, it is claimed, would be shown by their headdress - the bašliq - with mouth protection in order not to contaminate the sacred fire, and by the ritual bundle of rods - called barəsmān in the Avestān literature (e. g. in *Vīdevdād* 19.19, which also prescribes their length). However, they could instead, and with no less plausibility, represent an epichoric riverine deity (most likely the deified Oxus).<sup>92</sup> The second caveat concerns the body of source materials used to demonstrate the pre-eminent role of Avestān religiosity in the cultural horizon of the Achaemenid dynasty and confronts the supporters of this view with even more radical problems (which explains, at least in part, why the latter are systematically passed over in silence by many scholars, especially philologists and historians of religions): namely the Persepolis archive.<sup>93</sup> As Wouter Henkelman's detailed analysis has in fact shown, of the 250 or so texts relating to (public, meaning not restricted to the celebration of the dynasty alone, as it is the case with the royal inscription) cultic activities known to date, the offerings explicitly dedicated to Ahuramazdā amount to no more than 10, compared for example to the 26 in honor of Humban, a pre-eminent deity

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<sup>91</sup> Comparable problems arise as soon as one tries – as it has usually been done – to interpret the archaeological material coming from Āi Xānum starting from an exclusively Hellenocentric perspective: see Hoo 2018; 2020, 560-562, Morris 2019b, 397-401; 2019c, 670-681. Remarkably, traces of Zoroastrian deities or rituals in the *ADAB* documents are scanty indeed: Tavernier 2017b.

<sup>92</sup> For a more detailed discussion of these artefacts see Curtis 2004, 294 and Francfort 2012, 131, who argues in favor of the epichoric hypothesis. Of considerable importance is also a recent observation made by Christopher Tuplin (2019, 29): as is shown by the case of Athena *πολιάς*, perhaps one of the most locally-colored deity of the entire classical world, she was apparently accepted without any problem within the Achaemenid *πάνθειον* (the famous – and wrongly called such – Persian religious tolerance). See on this matter a well-known passage in *Is.* (45.1.4), in which Cyrus is called *māšīāh*, which makes it methodologically unsound to search exclusively for Zoroastrian rituals (even in Central Asia) to prove the Achaemenid patronage of this or that temple (or altar, or podium or whatever else). See de Jong 2021 for a sophisticated distinction between imperial, dynastic, and familiar style of religious devotion under the Achaemenids.

<sup>93</sup> A critical examination of the issues raised by the Persepolitan corpus in the context of an overall study of the religiosity of Eastern Iran and Central Asia is entirely absent from the discussion of authors such as the aforementioned Litvinskiĭ and Pičikjan as well as in the contributions of Shenkar 2007 (while it is present, albeit cursorily, in Shenkar 2014, 50), Panaino 2017 and in Rapin 2017b.

of the Ēlāmite πάνθεον.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, once it has been demonstrated, contrary to what was believed until very recent years, that the daily sacrificial offerings (indicated by the term *lan* in the tablets) recorded in the archive had nothing to do with the cult of the «supreme deity» of Achaemenid religiosity (namely Ahuramazdā), an in-depth study of the archival evidence shows that the latter even ranks eighth among the deities to whom popular barley offerings were addressed.<sup>95</sup> Far from being a trivial observation, findings of this kind demonstrate that, in the framework of the religious life of Achaemenid Fārs as the imperial court conceived and organized it (but a similar discourse is possible also in the case of regions much more distant, such as Ekbatana/Hamadhān, in which the Ēlāmite influence was probably less substantial than in the area of Persepolis or Susa) Ahuramazdā appears as one god within a much larger ensemble, whose hierarchies, it must be noted, seem to have been dictated much more by the local religious context than by the personal devotion of this or that ruler (and even less so by the «officially» sanctioned religion, which as such most likely never existed).<sup>96</sup> In addition to that, the (remarkable) fact that in the Persepolis archives no less than five rivers are found to have been the recipient of ritual offerings by the imperial administration should at least impose greater caution on those who propose a unilateral Zoroastrian reading of the votive, Achaemenid-looking objects found in the Oxus treasure.<sup>97</sup>

If this were not enough, the evidence of the *ADAB* documents (late 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE) poses further difficulties for the proponents of the thesis of an unabated Mazdean tradition having hold sway in and across Bactria. A fragment of Berossos (ca. 350-270 BCE) reports that Artaxerxes II (405-359 BCE) was the first to introduce in various parts of the Empire (including in Bactria), statues of the goddess Anāhitā, whose veneration previously, the same Berossos remarks, took place in aniconic form.<sup>98</sup> By

<sup>94</sup> Henkelman 2008b, 216; 2018b, 816-817 (where the scholar points out that Ahuramazdā appears as receiving less than one third of the offerings devoted to Humban, who in turn was honored with almost the same amount «of all gods with an (Indo-)Iranian background taken together») as well as 2021b; 2021c for the most up-to-date survey of the evidence.

<sup>95</sup> Henkelman 2017b, 279-284. Cf. Henkelman 2008b, 244-253 for a convincing rebuttal of the hypothesis which saw the *lan* texts as state-sponsored offerings reserved to Ahuramazdā (as argued among others by Heidemarie Koch). On this issue see most recently the (critical) remarks by Kellens 2021, 1217-1218 and the objections in Henkelman 2021b, 1221-1223.

<sup>96</sup> Henkelman 2017b, 285-290; 2021b, 1224-1227 for a survey discussing Ahuramazdā's presence and role both in the Fortification Archive and in the royal inscriptions (together with Henkelman 2021c, 1255-1257). Cf. in the same contribution pp. 320-328 for the edition of Fort. 1316-101. This is a document of paramount importance, for it shows the overarching role of deities such as the Ēlāmite Humban compared with Ahuramazdā (the latter is attested – rev. ll. 28-29 – as recipient, together with Napiriša and Adad, of 30 liters of «food offering for the gods»). See moreover Henkelman 2018b, 816-822 with references.

<sup>97</sup> See e. g. Henkelman 2008b, 224 fn. 491 for further evidence from the archive: PF 0339 records sacrificial offerings for three rivers, PF 1955 ll. 1-3 (a river and a mountain), NN 0379 (again three rivers), NN 2259 ll. 3 ff. (once more a river and a mountain).

<sup>98</sup> *FrGrHist* 680 F 11 (2-3): «ἀγάλματα μὲν θεῶν οὐ ξύλα καὶ λίθους ὑπειλίφασιν (scil. Πέρσαι καὶ Μῆδοι καὶ μάγοι) ... ἀλλὰ πῦρ τε καὶ ὕδωρ ὡς φιλόσοφοι. μετὰ πολλὰς μέντοι ὕστερον περιόδους ἐτῶν ἀνθρωποειδῆ ἀγάλματα σέβειν αὐτοὺς Βήρωστος ἐν τρίτῃ Χαλδαϊκῶν παρίστησι, τοῦτο Ἀρταξέρξου τοῦ Δαρείου τοῦ Ὠχοῦ εἰσηγησαμένου, ὃς πρῶτος τῆς Ἀφροδίτης Ἀναίτιδος τὸ ἄγαλμα ἀναστήσας ἐν Βαβυλῶνι καὶ Σούσις καὶ Ἐκβατάνοις <καὶ> Πέρσαις καὶ Βάκτροις καὶ Δαμασκῶι καὶ Σάρδεσις ὑπέδειξε σέβειν». Considerable importance was also given to the next fragment (*FrGrHist* 680 F 12), in which the Seleukid historiographer mentions «the master and leader [ὑφηγητῆς αὐτοῖς [of the Persians] ἐκεῖνος καὶ καθηγημῶν] of the religion of the Magians [τῆς μαγικῆς γέγονεν ἀγιοτείας]. The «ὑφηγητῆς καὶ καθηγημῶν»

virtue of Berossos' activity as a priest of Bēl/Marduk, his testimony has traditionally been considered particularly authoritative, at least in religious matters.<sup>99</sup> Now: since Anāhitā also appears in Avestān texts (e. g. in *Yašt* 5.3 = *Yašt* 13. 6), the fragment has consequently been used to suggest, in the most cautious among the many reconstructive hypotheses, the existence of Zoroastrian cults in Achaemenid Baktria. According to the supporters of such a view, these cults would have been sponsored by the rulers, with the explicit intention of exploiting the symbolic capital deriving from an association with the kings of old who governed over Balḥ (regardless of their being mythical or historical); and this not least because snippets of a tradition which has come down to Ferdowsī's great poem claims that the latter too – as the Achaemenids – were fervent followers (if not even patrons) of Zaratuštra.<sup>100</sup> Berossos' mention of the statue (τὸ ἄγαλμα) erected by Xerxes (ἄναστήσας) at Baktra is also interpreted by proponents of the theory of Zoroastrian worship in Baktria in an evolutionary manner: from the rituals practiced en plein air mentioned by Herodotos to temple structures like those at Tāxt -i Sāngīn, adorned from the first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century with statues of the deity.<sup>101</sup> In the case of the Oxus temple, this hypothesis would be confirmed, so the argument further goes on, by the stratigraphy of the building, which would make it possible to date the oldest layers to the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, while its first monumental phase is now universally dated considerably later, around the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE. This stratigraphy, it is moreover argued, would therefore match the chronology of Artaxerxes II, thus providing arguments supporting the reliability of Berossos' passage, with all the implications that this entails.<sup>102</sup>

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in question has always been identified with Zaratuštra. However, it is not at all clear what Berossos' sources might have been regarding the time and place of origin of the prophet: see also *FGrHist* 765 F 43, dating the floruit of Zaratuštra 500 years before the fall of Troy, thus in clear contradiction with the tradition on which Ferdowsī also drew. If the «Ξάνθος ὁ Λυδός» mentioned by Step. Byz. and the *Suda* (s. v. Λυδία and s. v. Ξάνθος Κανθαύλου respectively) is the same author of the fragments mentioned above, the fact that he is dated to around the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE («γεγονώς ἐπὶ τῆς ἀλλώσεως Σάρδεων» according to the *Suda*), makes it difficult to think that the latter did not have at his disposal first-hand sources concerning the genealogy (mythical or historical) of Cyrus, and it is also reasonable to assume that, in case a kinship with Zaratuštra was known to him, he would not have failed to mention it. Of course, an argument ex silentio is always a weak one, but it should be up to the supporters of the Zoroastrian hypothesis to demonstrate the greater reliability of, for example, the traditions Ferdowsī draws upon compared with other available evidence, especially when it comes to primary sources such as the *ADAB* or, most importantly, the Persepolis archive.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Primo 2009, 53-72 as well as Panitschek 2016, 474-486.

<sup>100</sup> See extensively on this subject Zarghamee 2013, 123-159. While Soviet and later post-Soviet archaeologists (above all the excavators of the temple at Tāxt -i Sāngīn, Litvinskii and Pičikjan (2000, 187-300)) have repeatedly argued for the existence of Zoroastrian cults in Achaemenid Baktria (and according to them also in earlier times), Paul Bernard (1994) has been more cautious: although he did not explicitly go so far as to deny the Zoroastrian nature of the temple, he nevertheless put forward the hypothesis of the existence of another sanctuary, about one kilometer South of Tāxt -i Sāngīn, dedicated instead to a river deity (obviously the Oxus), thus calling into question the exclusivity of the Mazdean cult in the region.

<sup>101</sup> Such line of thought has been supported by Boris A. Litvinskii and Igor' R. Pičikjan in several contributions: cfr. e. g. Litvinskii and Pičikjan 1981, Pičikjan 1992; 1996.

<sup>102</sup> According to Skjærvø 2005, 80, the *Young Avestā* (which includes the *Yašt*, the language of which is considered by some glottologists to be very similar to Old Persian as it is known from the royal inscriptions) should have replaced the *Old Avestā* around the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE as the «ritual text» of the Achaemenids (see moreover Kellens 2021 and de Jong 2021). And since also in the *Yašt* the mention of Anāhitā appears, it is exactly the 5<sup>th</sup> century which would constitute a terminus post quem for the introduction of her cult. On this subject see also De Jong 1998, 268-284. For the stratigraphy

This reconstruction, however, faces some difficulties that cannot be sidestepped so nonchalantly. Firstly, the evolutionary pattern is undoubtedly fallacious, as the *MAFOuz* excavations in Sogdiana have shown: and this regardless of whether or not (religious and urban (?)) centers such as Koktēpe, Sangirtēpe, Kyndyktēpe or Bandykhan are interpreted in Zoroastrian terms. In the case of Koktēpe, for example, already in the phase *prior* to the Achaemenid period (Koktēpe II, which began around the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE) the construction of at least two imposing walls is attested. Their exact function is still a matter of debate among archaeologists (was it a political and economic center or - if the distinction makes sense - a religious τέμενος?), but their sheer existence shows beyond any doubt that it was not necessary to wait for the Achaemenid imperial intervention for the population in Central Asia to shape their mindscape in an extremely sophisticated manner.<sup>103</sup>

Secondly, an evaluation of Berossos' text as the one summarized above lacks adequate source criticism and therefore cannot in itself, be taken as proof of the resilience of the Zoroastrian cult in Baktria.<sup>104</sup> Besides, since in the *Yašt* Anāhitā itself is often associated with rivers and water in general, it is perhaps appropriate to ask whether, in a context such as that of Baktria and Sogdiana, dominated as it was by the presence of imposing rivers such as the Oxus and the Syrdaryo, the most immediate association of the believers might not have been precisely with the water element (therefore with local rituals, similar to those described by Strabo) and not with the Mazdean cult.<sup>105</sup> The evidence of the Persepolitan tablets should not be forgotten in this circumstance either: as in the case of Ahuramazdā, the documents retrieved from the imperial archives show the goddess being worshipped together with other numinous figures (the already mentioned Napiriša for instance), but not in the prominent position one would expect against the background of her Zoroastrian pedigree.<sup>106</sup> In this regard, and this is the third point to be stressed here, one should also keep in mind some important observations recently developed by Wouter Henkelman.<sup>107</sup> While on the one hand documents such as Fort. 1316-101, which attest (r., l. 14) to the existence of sacrifices traditionally believed to be Ahuramazdā's prerogative in honor of other deities (Napiriša in this case), dramatically show the complexity of religious life in the imperial heartland (arguably a proxy for the whole of Achaemenid domains), they also free the scholar from «attempts to “save” the position of Auramazdā in PFA in agreement with his perceived role in the inscriptions». Paradoxically, the very fact that the archive tablets assign

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of the temple of Tāxt -i Sāngīn see Litvinskii and Pičikjan 2000, 19. The arguments of the two archaeologists have been criticized by Francfort 2012, 110, according to whom it is not possible to identify any stratigraphic level prior to the Seleukid phase of occupation at the site. Hoo 2022, 109-126 for the most recent commented overview of the site.

<sup>103</sup> Rapin 2017b, 419-421.

<sup>104</sup> Similar conclusions had already been reached by Briant (2017a, 90-95) thanks to the study of a famous (and very much discussed) inscription from Asia Minor: see *SEG* XXIX, 1205; XXXV, 1253, XXXVI, 1089, XL, 1071.

<sup>105</sup> Francfort 2012, 110.

<sup>106</sup> Henkelman 2017b, 289-290 on this critical tablet and its implications.

<sup>107</sup> Summarized for example in Henkelman 2018b, 818, with references.

Ahuramazdā «a non-exclusive position, opens the way to a fresh appreciation of his status in the inscriptions and, by extension, in the Empire».<sup>108</sup> We will return shortly to the «new status» of Ahuramazdā that these important critical remarks - and others that will be made - allow us to attribute to him in the context of the self-representation of Achaemenid rulers as it emerges from the royal inscriptions.

For the moment being, however, it is necessary to dwell a little more on Berossos' passage, since the traditional interpretation of it faces a third, perhaps decisive, challenge, which has not been adequately taken into account until now. With the possible exception of a reference to the Zoroastrian calendar in a parchment document catalogued by the editors among the «lists of supplies and names» (C series, of which it is however particularly difficult to establish the correct reading in the decisive passage), the *ADAB* do not in fact bear any trace whatsoever of Zoroastrian deities.<sup>109</sup> In the light 1. of what has been said about the nature of the Achaemenid archives (a direct emanation of the imperial court and a mirror of its aims and goals) and 2. of the chronology of the *ADAB*, contemporary or very slightly subsequent to the reign of Artaxerxes II, the fact that there is no - at least explicit - mention of Anāhitā means that the onus probandi stays on those who, in the hierarchy of sources, give priority to the preserved fragments of Berossos' work. According to the (albeit partial) documentation provided by the *ADAB*, the image of Achaemenid Baktria as a lieu de mémoire of the satrapal's pre-Achaemenid imperial (and Zoroastrian) past needs to be reassessed at best. Fourth: even scholars who are not by themselves against the above hypothesis have pointed out that, at least until the Arsakid era, it is not possible to prove the existence of Zoroastrian cults in Irān or Central Asia on the sole basis of architectural evidence, which in many cases - at least as far as the Achaemenid period is concerned - is the only one available, and it is moreover extremely scanty.<sup>110</sup> The latter observation in particular is of great importance, since it calls into question the evidentiary value of much of the source material at our disposal concerning such and related issues.

Since, however, in defiance of the sometimes very concrete risk of a *petitio principii*, it continues to be invoked in support of what we might now call the «imperial hypothesis» regarding the pre-Achaemenid past of Baktria, it will be appropriate to review what archaeological research actually

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<sup>108</sup> Henkelman 2017b, 286.

<sup>109</sup> The document under scrutiny here is *ADAB* C3: cf. Naveh and Shaked 2012, 192 ff. C3 (= Khalili IA22). See the discussion of this thorny ecdotal issue in Tavernier 2017b, 98-102. As rightly noted by the scholar, one of the major problems encountered by the hypothesis of the use of a Zoroastrian calendar in the C3 document is the fact that the scribal practice of the rest of the corpus usually employs the Babylonian system of time reckoning: it is attested for example in the case of Naveh - Shaked 2012, 66 ff. A1 (= Khalili IA6) l. 14 (the month of Marḥešvan), or Naveh and Shaked 2012, 94 ff. A4 (= Khalili IA1) l. 8 (Sivan) or again in Naveh and Shaked 2012, 174 ff. C1 (= Khalili IA21) l. 1 (Kislev). On the hypothesis that the Achaemenids had knowledge of a Zoroastrian calendar, see Panaino 2017 with an abundant previous bibliography.

<sup>110</sup> Rapin 1992b, 101. Concerning Parthia's rise under the Arsakid dynasty and the creation of a new topography of power see Canepa 2018, 68-95 as well as, for a general overview on the Arsakid Empire in the context of Hellenistic Eurasia and on the related sources see Fabian 2019a, Wiesehöfer 2019 and Bruno 2020.

may (not) provide in support of this hypothesis, in order to verify the validity of the assumption of this chapter, namely that, for the historian, the imperial chronology of Baktria begins at Bīsūtūn, and it is therefore to that monument (text and iconography) that one should turn in order to dig deeper in the early history of Teispid-Achaemenid Central Asia.

### 1.2.2. *In Search of Temple Lost*

As far as we know, the oldest structures used for cultural purposes in Baktria have been dated to around the 15<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Among them, one of the most significant is the rectangular building measuring 60 x 44.5 m excavated at Džarkutan, in what is now Southern Uzbekistan. This is a multi-functional building, whose sacred area, identified by archaeologists in the Eastern part of the site, was situated on a raised platform (1.4-2.5 meters) of considerable width (approximately 400 m<sup>2</sup>). Above the latter, the excavators found traces of an altar originally surrounded by four columns.<sup>111</sup> Remains of ashes and burnt bones were unearthed at the site, the deposition of which would seem to suggest that they were attributed a sacred value; in addition, the discovery of traces of libations, which scholars have interpreted as evidence of the use of the haṃmā, the sacred plant - and the drink made from it - playing a key role in the purification rituals described in the *Avestā* (cf. e. g. *Yasna* 4.1), was interpreted by Soviet excavators (who, by resuming studies begun almost 50 years earlier, were the first to conduct research at the site of Džarkutan between the 1970s and the 1980s) as evidence of the existence of Mazdean cults in Baktria, and thus as confirmation of the hypothesis of Baktria being the land of origin, if not of Zoroāstra himself at least of the religion associated with the prophet's name.<sup>112</sup> However, these and similar theories have been consistently challenged since the publication of the first field reports by Viktor Ivanovič Sarianidi, on the grounds that religious ceremonies centered on fire and the collective consumption of haṃmā are part of a widespread heritage among different Indo-Irānian cultures, and therefore it would not be possible to use such findings as irrefutable evidence of distinctly Zoroastrian rituals.<sup>113</sup> Nevertheless, the very recent discovery at the site of Topaz Gala dēpe, even further to the West of Džarkutan, in the Seraksh oasis in present-day Türkmenistan, of a building consisting of four rooms which, on the basis of the results of C<sup>14</sup> analyses, has been dated to between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE and which archaeologists have not hesitated

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<sup>111</sup> Shenkar 2007, 170, with further bibliography. More specifically on (allegedly) Zoroastrian fire-temples, or installations of fire chambers in Achaemenid Central Asia cf. Grenet 2015b, 139-140.

<sup>112</sup> One up-to-date overview of the studies carried out at the site of the Bronze and early Iron Age at Džarkutan has been provided e. g. by Lhuillier *et al.* 2015; 2018. Cf. moreover Lo Muzio 2017, 24-25. On the persistence of such interpretative models in contemporary scholarship see Henkelman 2018b, 804-805.

<sup>113</sup> Canepa 2018, 150. Abdullaev 2022 on psychotropic plants and their use in Eurasian history.

to identify as a fire temple, has been used to enhance the hypotheses put forward by Sarianidi regarding the existence of Mazdean cults in Central Asia prior to the Achaemenid conquest.<sup>114</sup>

This hypothesis was in turn taken as the premise for a second one, namely the by now well-known correlation of such archaeological discoveries with traditions relating to the activity of Zoroāstra - whose historical existence is therefore implicitly assumed - in the territories of Baktria and Margiana, the heartland of the (mythistorical) Ḥayānid Empire.<sup>115</sup> However, it should be noted that the allegations made about the building excavated at Džarkutan remain valid also in the case of discoveries at Topaz Gala dēpe, which therefore makes it methodologically questionable (because of its circular nature) an attempt to prove through the Avestān tradition the arguments developed starting from the archaeological material and vice versa. As already mentioned in the previous pages, the discovery of the so-called Oxus temple at the site of Tāxt -i Sāngīn represented an event of exceptional importance in Central Asian archaeology: the very peculiar architectural composition and the (considerable) amount of extremely varied finds stimulated a heated debate concerning both the dating of the temple and the god(s) worshipped at the sanctuary. According to Boris A. Litvinskii and Igor R. Pičikjan, the discovery, in two side rooms of the building of ash remains should be interpreted as evidence of ātašgāh (the ritual precinct used to preserve the sacred fire). If so, the consequence would be to provide material evidence supporting the hypothesis of a long-lasting Mazdean tradition rooted in Baktria, giving therefore background to the hypothesis of the latter having been consciously exploited for political and ideological legitimacy by the Achaemenid dynasty.<sup>116</sup> Other scholars, for example Henri-Paul Francfort, have however pointed out that the ritual use of fire does not in itself mean that fire was also the object of the cult in question.<sup>117</sup> In addition, excavations subsequent to those of Litvinskii and Pičikjan have yielded bones and other remains of ritual banquets, which have to be taken a serious obstacle to the interpretation of the two side chambers of the temple as ātašgāh. This is because, as it is well known, one of the fundamental precepts of Zoroastrian liturgy, at least as it is known from the extant literature, requires that ritual ashes be pure and not mixed with anything else that might contaminate them. Therefore, even assuming that the site was the object of cultic practices in Achaemenid times - a point that is as important as it is still the subject of lively debate among the various archaeological schools - any discussion of the nature of the cult(s) practiced at Tāxt -i Sāngīn should not ignore the hypothesis that the main (if not the only) deity worshipped at the

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<sup>114</sup> Cf. the critics voiced for example by Ciro Lo Muzio (2017, 21-22). For a report on the site see Wagner 2018 with further bibliography.

<sup>115</sup> Wagner 2018, 340-341. Concerning the consumption of haumā in what might be interpreted as an *Avestān* ritual context see Skjærvø 2013, 559. As for the – intensively disputed – issue of Zoroāstra's historicity see Starr 2015, 72 (with the chronology at p. xxxi) and the pertinent contributions in the recently (2015) edited *Wiley Companion to Zoroastrianism*.

<sup>116</sup> Litvinskii and Pičikjan 2000, 38-51 and now Lindström 2020, 288-295.

<sup>117</sup> Francfort 2012, 124.



sanctuary was the river Vaḥš (the Oxus).<sup>118</sup> The fact, moreover, that the already mentioned Atrosōkēs (whose name bears traces of a theophoric component associated with fire - atr/ātaš - chose to dedicate his ex-voto not \*πυρί, but Ὡξωι is another element against the Mazdean hypothesis that is not easy to ignore.<sup>119</sup> Similar cautionary remarks could be voiced concerning some significant archaeological discoveries brought to light by the *DAFA*, the reopening of whose excavations in the Baktra oasis (albeit amidst many difficulties) is undoubtedly welcome news in an otherwise rather desolate landscape. The excavations focused on an area North of the modern village of Čašma-ye Šifā, approximately 20 km South of Balḥ.<sup>120</sup> Among the most important discoveries brought to light by recent fieldwork in the area, the unearthing of an imposing limestone monolith inside a structure that, according to archaeologists, should be interpreted as serving a ritual purpose of some kind, although the exact nature of both the site and the monolith are still being investigated, stirred particular interest.<sup>121</sup>

Despite these uncertainties, the limestone block has been interpreted as a fire altar without much hesitation. While such a hypothesis has yet to be confirmed, the underlying intention is clear, namely, to confirm by way of analogy the theories put forward in the case of Tāxt -i Sāngīn. In addition, the existence of a Zoroastrian altar at Baktra would only give new impetus to the arguments supporting a deep-rooted Mazdean memory entrenched within the symbolic landscape(s) of the satrapy, a memory moreover which would have been exploited by the Achaemenids, at least since Darius, with the goal of gathering supporters among the peoples of Central Asia, whose backing during the delicate phase of the latter's ascent to the throne must have been of crucial importance.<sup>122</sup> A decisive role in the structuring of such hypotheses has been assigned to a group of objects of valuable material (gold and silver) belonging to the Oxus treasure and considered - although not unanimously - as components of the patrimonial holding of the temple at Tāxt -i Sāngīn.<sup>123</sup> In particular, the famous gold plaquettes apparently depicting priestly figures holding in one hand an object unanimously identified with the barəsman (i. e. the bundle of pomegranate twigs or tamarisk that constitutes a central component of the Mazdean liturgical paraphernalia) discovered both in the Oxus deposit and at the site of Mir Zakah (in the so-called Mir Zakah II hoard, 53 km North of Gardēz, along an ancient route connecting Ġaznī to Gāndhārā) have been repeatedly identified as the most reliable evidence of the existence of Zoroastrian cults in Afġānistān during the Achaemenid period, a claim allegedly made even more

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<sup>118</sup> Melloni 2023 for a thorough investigation on river cults from Hyrkania to the Indo-Irānian borderlands.

<sup>119</sup> Francfort 2012, 109 and Melloni 2020 (focusing on the Hellenistic period).

<sup>120</sup> Ball 1982 n. 186.

<sup>121</sup> Marquis and Besenval 2008, 987-988. Lhuillier *et al.* 2021 for the most recent overview of the archaeology of Balḥ, with special focus on the Iron Age occupation of the oasis.

<sup>122</sup> Skjærvø 2013, 562-563 has recently discussed the long-standing but never definitively (dis)proven hypothesis of the Central Asian origin of the Achaemenid lineage.

<sup>123</sup> Cf. Pičikjan 1996, but cf. Lindström 2020 discussing a wider regional (religious) landscape.

likely by the discovery of the altar at Čašma-ye Šifā.<sup>124</sup> The fact that the latter (and the building together with it) was discovered in Baktra was, not surprisingly, interpreted as a significant clue supporting the historical plausibility of (at least part of) the traditions mentioned above and systematized in their most complete form by the *Shāh Nāhme*, for according to Ferdowsī Zoroāstra was active in Baktria «under the protection of the kings of Balḥ».<sup>125</sup>

There are at least two reasons why such a reconstruction should not be accepted without further reservations. The first concerns the dating of the votive offerings found at Tāxt -i Sāngīn (including the gold plaquettes of the Oxus treasure, their exact relation to the temple being far from straightforward at the present stage of research).<sup>126</sup> Although the style of the manufacture undoubtedly bears traces - at the very least - of memories of Achaemenid goldsmithing and glyptic techniques, it cannot be ruled out that at least a portion of these findings might have been the work of masters active during the Hellenistic period.<sup>127</sup> As a consequence, this makes the use of the treasure's gold plaquettes to prove the existence not only of an Achaemenid sanctuary, which in itself would pose a difficult enterprise, but also of cults that predate the Empire especially problematic. The reason for this is that, as mentioned above, at the current state of our knowledge, the chronology of the site itself cannot be dated back further than the time of the establishment of Seleukid power in Baktria (and more specifically to the reign of Antiochos I, i. e. from 294 BCE onwards).<sup>128</sup> The second remark concerns the nature of the cult attested by the temple (if it is indeed a temple) and the altar (if it is indeed an altar, although this hypothesis seems to be the most widely accepted, at least for the time being) of Čašma-ye Šifā.<sup>129</sup> Similarly to what has been said about the sanctuary at Tāxt -i Sāngīn (notwithstanding the existence or not of Achaemenid precedents of the building comparable to the one which was erected under Seleukid aegis) and concerning the major religious structures of Āi Xānum, the possibility that the cults celebrated there had nothing to do with Zoroastrianism but were, on the contrary, much more linked to devotional practices dating back - at least - to the Bronze Age, should impose caution also when developing interpretations concerning the recent discoveries at

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<sup>124</sup> Bernard *et al.* 2006, 1235. On the site of Mir Zakah: Ball 1982 n. 728; 2019, 257-258 with updated bibliography. The circular nature of the whole argument (the altar confirms the interpretation of the tablets which in turn confirm the interpretation of the altar) should not go unnoticed.

<sup>125</sup> Marquis 2018, 165.

<sup>126</sup> A detailed study of the ritual practices attested at Tāxt -i Sāngīn in a longue durée perspective can be found in the contributions by Gunvor Lindström (see e. g. 2010; 2016).

<sup>127</sup> Francfort 2012, 114.

<sup>128</sup> Litvinskii and Pičikjan (1996; 2000, 72-76), on the other hand, argued for a dating of the oldest layers of the site well before the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. The chronology of Antiochos' debut as Seleukid viceroy in the upper satrapies has long been the subject of debate among scholars. The hypothesis of 293 BCE long in vogue, now seems to have been definitively refuted by a cuneiform tablet that dates the settlement of the Seleukid ruler (together with his wife, the princess Stratonike), who, it must be stressed, was of Central Asian extraction due to his maternal descent, to 18 November 294 BCE. See on these matters Bernard 1985, 36 and more recently Engels 2017a, 114. On the establishment of Seleukid power in Baktria cf. also further below chapter 8.

<sup>129</sup> Rapin 1992b for a typology of (Hellenistic) sanctuaries in Central Asia and Shenkar 2007 for the earlier periods.

Baktra/Balḥ.<sup>130</sup> This caution seems all the more warranted in view of the results of survey activity recently carried out by a joint research team of the *DAFA* and its twin organization *MAFBA* (*Mission archéologique française en Bactriane afghane*) at the Bālā Hiṣār (literally acropolis) of Balḥ, which brought to light evidence dating to the early Iron Age, therefore compellingly suggesting that the site was in all probability inhabited before the Achaemenid conquest.<sup>131</sup> Because of the importance of a river like the Balḥ-āb (to say nothing of the Amudaryo further to the North) not only for the ecology of Baktra oasis, but also of the two neighboring ones of Šebergān and Ḥulm, it would come as little to no surprise if the local population would have put the worship of an epichoric deity (the river) before that of Ahuramazdā, just as it is likely that Vaḥš was the main focus of the cultic life of the inhabitants in the area of the temple at Tāxt -i Sāngīn.

The last of the so-called fire temples discovered so far in the territory of Baktria - to which the results of the *MAFOuz*-led investigations mentioned earlier in these pages should be added - and which have been dated to the Achaemenid period is located in the oasis of Bandykhan, in present-day Southern Uzbekistan, at a site called Kyndyktēpe.<sup>132</sup> The space identified by the archaeologists as the cultic area measures 18 x 22.5 m and consists of a larger central room and two smaller lateral ones.<sup>133</sup> The comparative study of ceramic evidence from other sites in Southern Uzbekistan, and more specifically the finds from the later levels of the settlement layers found at Kyzyltēpe, in the Surxondaryo valley, a site to which we shall return later on in this study, has allowed specialists to roughly date the Kyndyktēpe complex to around the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, approximately at the same time of the final phase of Achaemenid hegemony over Central Asia.<sup>134</sup> As already mentioned in the case of the dating (and cultic function) of the Oxus temple, almost thirty years ago Claude Rapin rightly pointed out that establishing the nature of religious practices in a temple prior - at the very least - to the Arsakid period exclusively on architectural grounds is an impossible (and

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<sup>130</sup> Shenkar 2007 for a survey of temple features in the wider ancient Irānian world (with Canepa 2018, 149-169 on Achaemenid sacred spaces).

<sup>131</sup> Marquis 2018, 163, Lhuillier *et al.* 2021, where further bibliography is to be found, including recent excavation reports so far unpublished. On the Baktran Bālā Hiṣār see also Ball 1982 n. 99 and the updated entry in Ball 2019 n. 99.

<sup>132</sup> See the preliminary results published in Boroffka 2009. Judging from the coordinates (37°55'21'' latitude and 67°24'07'' longitude) provided by Sebastian Stride (2005 III, 14, who however claims this location to be «extremely approximate», très approximative in the – original – French text) compared to those of the most up-to-date publication on the subject (Mokroborodov 2018, 343; 2021 which provides the following coordinates: N 37°51'12.41''; E 67°21'43.86''), the site in question seems to be no. 9 in Stride's catalogue (Karfunsaj-Bandykhan) who, however, at the time of his survey, had not been able to identify anything other than a Late Islamic level (I2 in Stride's terminology) followed by the Mongol period (M1, M2 and M3).

<sup>133</sup> Mokroborodov 2018, 345-346.

<sup>134</sup> Regarding the ceramic material from the Kyzyltēpe excavations see Sverčkov *et al.* 2013 as well as Wu *et al.* 2017. A summary of the ceramic material found at Kyndyktēpe can be found in Mokroborodov 2018, 346-349. For a visual rendering of (so-far) known Achaemenid sites in Afġānistān see Ball 2019, 562 (map 5), while Stride 2005 V provides a comprehensive overview of the Surxondaryo valley. See now Havlík 2021. The recent (2019) monography edited by Stančo and Tušlová dedicated to the Sherabāddaryo also entails a full catalogue of the site so far known, ranging from the Sapalli culture (late Bronze Age to modern times).

most likely even methodological unsound) endeavor.<sup>135</sup> Since the strongest argument in favor of the Zoroastrian character of the temples in question, both in the case of Tāxt -i Sāngīn and Kyndyktēpe, rests precisely on an architectural one, it follows that the main premise of the entire deductive chain is lacking, and therefore greater caution would be recommended when moving from the process of excavation to the interpretation of its results.<sup>136</sup>

Let us now try to draw a provisional assessment of the review of the documentary evidence carried out so far. At the current state of research, the hypothesis of a conscious attempt by the Achaemenid rulers to refer to the political and/or symbolic legacy of an imposing Ḥayānid Empire that would have ruled Central Asia from Chorasmia to Margiana up to Afrāsyāb and Koktēpe (which Rapin considers to have been the capital of pre-Achaemenid Sogdiana) and whose rulers would have been active patrons of the Mazdean cults (and according to some of Zaratūštra himself) rests on rather shaky foundations.<sup>137</sup> Such a conclusion seems all the more warranted if one takes into account - which to the best of my knowledge has rarely been the case within such debate - the results of research carried out over the last two decades by the Qoraqalpago-Australian Archaeological Mission (*KAE*) in Chorasmia. Both a new analysis of the vast amount of material and the publication of new and significant discoveries have significantly contributed to show that the first contacts of Chorasmia with the territories further South along the Amudaryo must be attributed to stimuli coming from Baktria at a time when the latter was already under Achaemenid control. Instrumental in this process has been, on the one hand, a thorough reexamination of the findings - mainly, but not exclusively, of ceramic nature - discovered (but often published in a selective and not always rigorous manner) over several decades by Soviet archaeologists working within the *Chorasmia archaeological and ethnographic expedition* founded and directed since the 1930s by Sergeĭ Pavlovič Tolstov (together with Sarianidi a legend of Central Asian archaeology) by the members of the *Karakalpak-Australian Archaeological Expedition in Khorezm (KAE)*.<sup>138</sup> On the other, the crucial contribution provided by the publication of new and significant discoveries, from the extraordinary wall paintings excavated at the site of Akchakan-kala to precious tableware (e. g. ῥυτά made of finely worked ivory) cannot be overemphasized.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Rapin 1992b.

<sup>136</sup> Cf. the discussion in De Jong 1998, 343-350 and the critical remarks raised against the deduction of the (post)Soviet archaeologists by Francfort 2012, 124.

<sup>137</sup> This had already been argued rather convincingly by Gnoli 1980, 95. Christopher I. Beckwith (2009, 367) has recently formulated no less harsh judgements, denying the possibility of locating in time and/or space both Zaratūštra and the entire range of geographical and onomastic references to be found in the Avestān corpus.

<sup>138</sup> On this topic - and for an overview of the most recent works of the *KAE* - see Betts *et al.* 2001; 2002 as well as the more recent Minardi 2015a and Negus Cleary 2015 I. On Tolstov see in detail Kleĭn 2014 II, 268-284.

<sup>139</sup> One of the most significant merits of the *KAE* is to have made accessible to the non-Russian-speaking academic public the results of the extensive literature produced by scholars working in the Soviet period in Chorasmia and in the neighboring regions. Although vitiated by inevitable ideological prejudices (in turn dictated, at least in part, by political pressure the actual extent of which is beyond the comprehension of anyone who did not live in the Soviet Union at the

Incidentally, among the results particularly worthy of mention in the context of this new blossoming of scholarship on ancient Chorasnia there is surely the reassessment that they impose on a model (the one provided by Bruno Jacobs) which, despite having been formulated years ago when the sheer amount of historical and archaeological information on Eastern Irān and Central Asia was significantly less than what is accessible today, is still considered authoritative: according to it, Chorasnia would in fact have been a *Kleinsatrapie* dependent on Media, which apparently was not the case.<sup>140</sup> Even if the model in question should be maintained in its fundamental lines (which against the background of the new evidence brought to light, not only in Chorasnia, might be debatable), it is nevertheless interesting that, from the point of view of imperial organization, the Achaemenid rulers at least attempted to shape a Central Asian macro-region with a certain spatial contiguity, and that this latter was centered on Baktria, a fact the importance of which is not undermined if we cast into doubt the existence of a Central Asian Empire prior to Cyrus' conquest. On the contrary, such a consideration forces one to ask why it was precisely Baktria that acquired (moreover, in what seems to have been a relatively short time) such a pre-eminent position. By virtue of these studies - the results (of some) of which will be discussed in more detail in later chapters of this work - the attempt by some Iranists to reconcile the hypothesis, already put forward by Tolstov, of a Chorasnian confederation with the existence of a pre-Achaemenid Baktrian Empire that at a no better specified time, but prior to the conquest at Cyrus' hands, would have extended its sphere of influence over it, not only seems to lack adequate support from the literary sources - which in itself is hardly surprising - but also seems to contradict what can be gauged from the most recent archaeological investigation carried out in the territory of one of the regions that would have been part of this hypothetical pre-Achaemenid Central Asian Empire.<sup>141</sup>

### 1.3. The god(s) of Darius, of Xerxes, and Artaxerxes

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time: suffice it to say that the first excavation campaign was supported by pharaonic investments at the height - 1938 - of the Great Terror), the information collected by Tolstov and his collaborators provides a database of exceptional importance, which still awaits to be studied in its entirety. Of considerable relevance for reasons more related with the history of historiography (as for example the colonial aspects of the first ethnographic-archaeological expedition of an anti-imperialist Empire) is also the contribution of Aržantzeva and Härke 2019.

<sup>140</sup> Jacobs 1994, 191. On pre-Achaemenid Media from an archaeological perspective cf. Jacobs and Stronach 2021.

<sup>141</sup> Cf. the overview on this and related issues provided by Minardi 2015a, 61-75; 2018; 2021, while Stride 2005 I remains foundational for an understanding of the spatial layout of the Surxondaryo valley (and arguably of Baktria as a whole) over the *longue durée*. Among the supporters of the hypothesis of a Chorasnian confederation later becoming part of the pre-Achaemenid Baktrian Empire, one of the most influential is undoubtedly Richard Frye, for years one of the most authoritative voices in world Iranistics (see Frye 1984, 58-60; 1998<sup>2</sup>, 39-40). A recent, comprehensive, and insightful critical analysis of Russian-speaking historiography (pre-October, Soviet and post-1991) is accessible in Fabian 2019b and Morris 2019c, 675-681.

In the light of what has been said so far, it appears quite reasonable to maintain that the historical plausibility of a political entity capable of controlling a large part, if not all, of Central Asia (South of present-day Qazaqstan) between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE to the point of influencing the administrative choices underlying the Achaemenid (re)organization of the territories conquered by Cyrus during and following his campaign East of the Euphrates seems, at least as far as archaeological research is concerned, to be on the defensive. However, the fact that the arguments supporting a conscious use by the Achaemenid dynasty (and in a pre-eminent way by Darius, also by virtue of the number and importance of his inscriptions) of 1. semantic fields and 2. vocabulary strongly alluding to the texts of the *Old Avestā* (in a seminal study devoted to the subject Skjærvø explicitly speaks of «quotations»), and thus, irrespective of his having been (or not) an historical figure, to Zoroaster himself, which is to say, consequently, to the Mazdean cult as reconstructed from the texts in the context of the struggle for the succession to Cambyses with the explicit aim of gathering support in the Central Asian lands (if not as an outright mean to claim the throne for himself), has not ceased to find supporters. Consequently, such claims deserve here some detailed scrutiny.<sup>142</sup> In its most sophisticated and elaborate version, the abovementioned hypothesis has been supported by referring to multiple case studies by the already mentioned linguist and philologist Prods Oktor Skjærvø. According to him, a stylistic and literary analysis of the Achaemenid inscriptions in the light of the Avestā textual corpus would make it possible to identify such a large number of parallels, both at the macro (i. e. of textual structure) and micro (lexical) level - the latter defined by Skjærvø as «quotations» or «interpretations» of the Avestā material - that the conclusion according to which the Great Kings of Persia, at least from Darius onwards, constructed their own self-representation (which following Skjærvø presupposes a self-perception) against the background of a Zoroastrian imagery would be inescapable. The condition for this is, so the scholar continues, that by «Zoroastrianism» is meant «the religion as expressed in the (entire corpus of) the *Avestā*», while by «Achaemenid religion» is meant «the religion expressed in the different primary and secondary sources at our disposal».<sup>143</sup> At this point it should be noted, before going any further, that the relatively marginal position of Ahuramazdā as it emerges from the analysis of the Persepolis archives dramatically highlights an undeniable hiatus not only between primary and secondary sources, but also between two of the most important bodies of primary sources - the inscriptions and the imperial archives - at

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<sup>142</sup> For example, Jacobs 1994, 209 states without much hesitation that «the Great satrapy [Großsatrapie] of Baktria developed from the Ḥayānid Empire or what was left of it after the wars against Pharnus/Phraortes». On the (thorny) issue of Achaemenid «quotations» from the *Avestā* see e. g. Skjærvø 1999.

<sup>143</sup> Skjærvø 2013, 563, but note de Jong 2021. Cf. moreover the objections raised by one of the most eminent scholars of *Avestā* still active today (Jan Kellens), who moreover is anything but opposed to the idea of identifying a Zoroastrian current - which means: of that theology and liturgy that can be derived from a study of *Avestān* texts - within Achaemenid evidence concerning spiritual life: cf. for example Knäpper 2011; 2012, 552-553 and most recently Kellens 2021, 1214-1215.

our disposal, which raises questions not dealt with by such a linguistic approach.<sup>144</sup> However, given the relevance of the question not only to the study of Achaemenid religion, it is appropriate to leave aside for a moment the problems posed by this evidence of absence (which is quite different from the absence of evidence) and follow Skjærvø's argument to the end.

The evidence cited by the scholar in support of his hypotheses is copious and comes from both the *Older* and the *Younger Avestā*. It is sufficient here to mention a few examples of particular prominence. In one of the 72 sections into which the *Yasnā* is divided (from the word for «sacrifice», as a whole they make up the texts used in order to accompany the funeral mourning), the poet-officiant is presented, in Skjærvø's words, «as (1) a competent sacrificer, that is, as another Zarathuštra [the officiant par excellence]; (2) a creature of Ahura Mazdā's; and (3) an opponent of the Lie». Next comes the critical passage, which runs as follows: «then I declare myself to him [Ahuramazdā] first as “Zarathuštra”, the true one; (second, that) I wish to command hostilities for the follower of the Lie». <sup>145</sup> In one of Darius' inscriptions from Susa, found engraved on a baked clay brick during excavations in the area of the imperial palace, the Achaemenid King seems to express his devotion to Ahuramazdā using rhetorical gestures and - above all - a vocabulary that bears more than a passing resemblance to the self-representation of the *Yasnā* poet: «Proclaim Darius, the King: Ahuramazdā belongs to me and I belong to Ahuramazdā. I have honoured [verehrt in Rüdiger Schmitt's translation] Ahuramazdā. May [soll [...] bringen, baratu in the text] Ahuramazdā bring me support [upastām]!» According to Skjærvø's interpretation, the parallel with the text of *Yasna* 43 would be compelling since, like the poet (and implicitly, through him, Zarathuštra), Darius is presented here as «Ahuramazdā's chosen». <sup>146</sup> Recently, the philologist Alberto Cantera has developed Skjærvø's arguments further by pointing out that the names of some individuals among the most prominent within Darius' inner circle - from the notorious Atossa, who, according to Herodotos «at court held all the power» to the son and grandson of the ruler (Vīstāšpa and Pissuthnes) - should be interpreted as royal anthroponyms, alluding (by what Jacoby called *Zitatnamen*) to famous characters linked in the Avestān tradition (e. g. in the *Yašt*) to the figure and activity of Zarathuštra. <sup>147</sup> In the case of Atossa, the Old Persian version of the name, \*Utauθa, would derive from the Avestān Hutaosā, the wife of

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<sup>144</sup> Which to my mind totally justifies Wouter Henkelman's (2017b, 290) remarks, according to which «the question is not whether the (older) Zoroastrian tradition and the Graeco-Roman sources are relevant for the study of Achaemenid religion or not, but whether they provide an adequate interpretative *framework* to address the roles it played in the imperial heartland [i.e. in Fārs, but a similar argument could apply to other satrapies, including Baktria] and the reflections thereof in tablets and inscriptions». Emphasis in the original.

<sup>145</sup> *Yasna* 43.8: the translation follows Skjærvø 2005, 59. Emphasis is in the original.

<sup>146</sup> DSk (here the text's translation follows the edition provided by Lecoq 1997, 238-239 as well as the German version to be found in *API*, 138): «θāti Darayavauš xšāyaθiya: || manā Ahuramazdā, || Ahuramazdāha adam; || Ahuramazdām ayadaī. || Ahuramazdāmā upastām baratu». Cf. moreover Skjærvø 2013, 563. Further supporting the argument of the Norwegian Iranist might be the observation (see e. g. Rollinger 2014b, 155-156) that legitimation through divine sanction is one of the pillars of Persian dynastic self-representation from Darius onwards.

<sup>147</sup> On Atossa see Hdt. 7.3.4: «ἡ γὰρ Ἀτοσσα εἶχε τὸ πᾶν κράτος».

Kavi Vištāspa (*Yašt* 15.35), while if we turn to Pissuthnes (mentioned e. g. in Thuc. 1.115), the reference can be traced back to a son of the same Vištāspa, called Piši.šiiāoθna (*Yašt.*, 13.103).<sup>148</sup> Remarkable, according to Cantera, would be especially the frequency within the Achaemenid genealogy of the name Vištāspa, since, as already noted by Mary Boyce, this anthroponym occurs in Western Irān only in the form Guštāsp, the latter clearly derived from the *Shāh Nāhme*.<sup>149</sup> This evidence might indicate, in a slightly more cautious version of Skjærvø's hypothesis, an allusion to a cultural (and perhaps explicitly religious) tradition spread throughout the Indo-Irānian world, since similar Zitatnamen can also be found in the *R̥gveda*.<sup>150</sup> In a more daring version, this would be an explicit declaration of Mazdean faith, whatever it might actually mean in the context of late 6<sup>th</sup> century Irān and in such a particular framework as the Achaemenid royal inscriptions.<sup>151</sup> Picking up again the thread of Skjærvø's argument, there is a second example that in his view would prove Darius' conscious assimilation to the figure of the Avestān poet, which according to the scholar deserves special attention. In the *Yašt*, at the end of the battle against the archenemies of the Irānian peoples (the hordes coming from Tūrān, repeatedly described as nothing less as a danger to the order and security of the whole world), the main antagonist of the entire story, Fraṅrasiian, is taken prisoner and brought before the Kavi Haosrauuṅha, who kills him to avenge his misdeeds. In invoking divine assistance so that he can perform his duties as actor/narrator, the poet asks that sufficient strength be bestowed upon him «so that I may bind the Tūrān bandit, Fraṅrasiian, so that I may bring him in chains before the Kavi Haosrauuṅha, [so that] Kavi Haosrauuṅha may kill him [...] avenging [his] son, Siiāuaršan, the hero who was killed by evil [men/deeds]». <sup>152</sup>

According to the text of the Bīsutūn inscription, more than one among the rivals defeated by Darius (the so-called – by him – liar kings) met a similar fate. What deserves to be stressed in this context is that, in narrating the punishments of his defeated opponents, Darius lingers in great detail on (and underlines with remarkable emphasis) his own direct involvement in the torture and murder of some of his most prominent antagonists who, like Fraṅrasiian, are accused of having attempted at the political (and therefore the cosmic) order established by Ahuramazdā and entrusted to Darius.<sup>153</sup> The

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<sup>148</sup> Cantera 2017, 51.

<sup>149</sup> Boyce 1982, 41: the passage we are dealing with here comes from book 6 of Ferdowsi's poem. I am particularly grateful to Dr. Raziéh Taasob for the help she provided in tracking this reference.

<sup>150</sup> This appears to be the opinion of both Jan Kellens (2017, 12-13) and of Alberto Cantera himself (2017, 60-62). An example of such Zitatnamen is provided by the name of the Great King Darius (Dārayavauš) himself: cfr. *Yašt* 31.7: «yā dāraaiṭ vahištəm manō» as well as *R̥V* 1.51.4: «ādihārayaḥpārvatedānumatvāsu». On this issue it might be useful to refer to the contributions by Skjærvø (1999, 34 ff.) and Kellens (2002, 424 fn. 8).

<sup>151</sup> Among the most authoritative proponents of this position is undoubtedly Mary Boyce: on Darius see e. g. Boyce 1982, 90-149.

<sup>152</sup> *Yāš.*, 9.17-18 = *Yāš.*, 17.38 (the translation follows Skjærvø 2005, 72). See most recently Kellens 2021, 1261 on the Avestān lore of Darius' and Vahēyazdāta's names and their confrontation over the sources of Achaemenid social power.

<sup>153</sup> On this aspect of Darius' self-representation of his political action as aimed at the restoration of an order that is both cosmic and divine, see Lincoln 2012, 393-406 and Rollinger 2014b, 153.



Great King's words leave no room for imagination: «That man, Āçina [who was rebellious in Ēlām] was brought before me in chains. I killed him». A few lines later, Darius has something more to say concerning the fate reserved to one of the most dangerous among the nine «rebels», a man named Fravartiš, who took up arms in Media: «He was captured and brought to me. I cut off his nose, ears, and tongue and gouged out one of his eyes». <sup>154</sup>

In disagreement with those who have sought to deny the Zoroastrian character (in the sense defined above) of Achaemenid religious affiliation as expressed in the inscriptions by pointing out that, in the entire epigraphic corpus, it is not possible to identify a single reference to Zaraθuštra, Skjærvø has argued that this fact is most likely due to the difference in literary genre of the two sources (royal proclamations on the one hand, ritual texts on the other). The decisive point, according to Skjærvø, is the structural and lexical parallels of the kind described above, which make it highly probable that the *Avestā* was very much prominent within the Achaemenid cultural horizon and that, moreover, it was repeatedly alluded to (or quoted) in the epigraphic evidence we know of. <sup>155</sup> Based on «the chronology of the *Avestā* and the historical data on the migrations of the Persians», Skjærvø finally proposes a reconstructive scenario whereby the *Old Avestā* would have reached Western and Southwestern Irān between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE in the form of a «sacred and closed corpus, crystallized and made canonical» in Central Asia about half a millennium earlier. Subsequently, around the last quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE (at the time of his own ascent to power), Darius «persuaded himself (conveniently?) to be the chosen one of Ahuramazdā», planned his own coup d'état and founded his own dynasty «in accordance with the principles of the *Old Avestā*». <sup>156</sup>

The adverb «conveniently» seems not to have been chosen without reasons, since it leaves open the possibility that Darius' ancestors «could always have been Zoroastrians»: that is, that the *Avestā* - or

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<sup>154</sup> See respectively DB<sub>p</sub> col. I §17 for Āçina (who is said to have rebelled in Ēlām) and DB<sub>p</sub> col. II §32 for Fravartiš (rebel in Media). Both translations follow *TPE* I, 144-145. In addition to the *Avestān* parallels, mention should perhaps also be made of the ἀκριβία with which the Assyrian rulers describe the treatment of their opponents. Darius' represents a kind of Urkatalog of the forms of physical violence associated in Greek literature with Persian tyranny: see Rollinger's detailed list (2010, 590-600, based on Herodotos' example) and the latter's comparison with Ancient Near Eastern, especially Assyrian, precedents at pp. 600-619.

<sup>155</sup> This hypothesis has recently been supported by Matthew P. Canepa (2018, 380 fn. 35). According to the scholar, although it is not possible to prove that the figure of Zaraθuštra was *not* known to the Achaemenids, the prophet is nevertheless not traceable in the primary sources, a fact that should suggest that Zaraθuštra played no role in the emic characterization of Achaemenian religiosity [he speaks of «faith»]. Similar objections had already been considered, and rejected, by Skjærvø (2013, 562), since, he argues, Zaraθuštra is also absent in the Sāsānid inscriptions (both in the royal ones and in those of a prominent figure such as the priest Kerdīr), but – still - no one for this reason would ever dare to argue that the Sāsānids were not Zoroastrian. See moreover Khatchadourian 2016, 12.

<sup>156</sup> Skjærvø 2005, 80-81. Italics are in the original. The advantage of such a scenario, according to the scholar, consists in the fact that it would explain Darius' «single-minded» insistence on Ahuramazdā, the latter opposed to the later inclusion in the text of the inscriptions of deities such as Miθra and Anāhitā. The cult of Miθra among the Persians is attested at least as early as the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, since Xenophon notes that an important Achaemenid official, Artabazos, used to take oaths in the name of Miθra: Xen. *Cyr.*, 7.5.54.

at least its earliest version(s) - could indeed have constituted «part of their religious heritage».<sup>157</sup> Developing this hypothesis even further, Skjærvø seems to suggest that Darius' self-representation as the lofty officiant, «Ahura Mazdā's chosen», the intermediary between the gods [in the case of the inscriptions «the god»] and men, might have been a conscious political choice, aimed at securing his support and allies in Central Asia at a decisive turning point of his (Darius') political career, namely the unrelenting struggle against his (many) opponents on either side of what had once been Cyrus' Empire and was now on the verge of disruption. Finally, since the origins of the Achaemenid dynasty (some speak, perhaps more appropriately, of a clan) are still being debated today, the hypothesis of a Central Asian socio-cultural background would remain open, thus making the suggestion of a conscious self-representation in a Mazdean fashion by one of the most successful members of the family even more attractive.<sup>158</sup> The fact that, at least according to the Bīsutūn text, Darius' father - also called Vīštāspa - was militarily active in Parthia (thus implicitly assuming that his role in Central Asia had something to do with the origin of the family itself, which is still to be proven), could provide at least partial support to the above-mentioned hypothesis, since it would justify both Darius' constant reference to the Avestān texts, and his self-identification with Zaratuštra, which seems to follow so closely the model of the *Yasnā* poet, in whose case such identification is explicitly formulated.<sup>159</sup>

### 1.3.1. Menschliches, ach nur Allzumenschliches: Local Gods for Imperial Claims

The fact that, at least since Darius' times, the Achaemenid rulers sought to represent themselves as Ahuramazdā's chosen ones and that the cult of this deity became a distinctive element (at least) of dynastic religiosity has been taken for granted by research starting from the discovery of the royal inscriptions - above all Bīsutūn and Naqš -i Rostam -, by virtue of the very close relationship established within the iconographic syntax of the monuments between the Great King and a figure emerging from a winged circle, facing the monarch in a gesture traditionally interpreted as a greeting/ blessing and in which it has become customary to see either a representation of Ahuramazdā himself

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<sup>157</sup> Skjærvø 2005, 80. Most recently on the relationship (or lack thereof) between the Achaemenids and the *Avestā* see Kellens 2021 and the shrewd remarks in de Jong 2021.

<sup>158</sup> A detailed discussion of the hypotheses concerning the origins of Darius' familiar lineage can be found in the still foundational Wiesehöfer 1978, 182-185.

<sup>159</sup> Briant 2002, 126-127, Skjærvø 2013, 548: in the Bīsutūn inscription alone, Ahuramazdā is mentioned no less than 63 times. On the issue related with Darius' first year of «struggle and rule» see Rollinger 2014b, 150-152, who has strongly emphasized (p. 152 fn. 21) the pressure Darius faced as usurper of the throne of both Cambyses and Bṛdiyā, Cyrus' second son (Schwinghammer 2011; 2021). According to Rollinger, the problematic nature of his own position against his competitors explains the fervor of imperial expansion shown by both Darius and Xerxes, as well as the perceived urgency of the founder of the (new) dynasty to forge alliances that would help him stay in power. Following Skjærvø's remarks, allusions to the *Avestā* would have been an integral part of this strategy, especially in Central Asia, the land of origin, if not of the (mythical-historical) figure of Zaratuštra, at least of the religious tradition of which the Avestān text is the carrier.

or the personification of the *x'ārənah* (cf. the Sogdian 𐰽𐰺𐰍 - *farn* - and the Bactrian φαρρο); the latter being an attribute indicating, according to the different meanings bestowed upon this concept by scholars, glory, honor, celebrity, and (divinely sanctioned) good fortune.<sup>160</sup> This seems for instance to be the main meaning of the Armenian word *p'ark'* (փարկ), which is also a derivative of the Avestān precedent; hence the Zoroastrian interpretation of the *x'ārənah* hypothetically depicted, for instance, at Bīsūtūn. In the text of the inscription, this concept would be expressed by the formula *vašnā Ahuramazdāha*, i. e. «with the help/by the will of Ahuramazdā».<sup>161</sup> Despite the authority of a long tradition, assessments of the evidence of such a kind seem to fail in taking proper account of at least two important aspects. First: the impressive iconographic repertoire provided by the Persepolis seals. This (still to be fully explored) body of primary sources shows in fact that, as already observed on the basis of the archival tablets, in its daily ritual and administrative practice, the Achaemenid religious landscape appears to have been geared, rather than on the worship of a pre-eminent deity, on a syntax centered on the two concepts of «divine» and «numinous», thus along a continuum within which the distinction between the first category (the explicit representation of a pre-eminent deity of the Assyrian or Babylonian, Ēlāmite and/or Irānian pantheon) and the second (a clearly supernatural entity, «often of human(oid) feature and winged [...] but whose exact identification (and, consequently, its ontological status within the supernatural world [...]) is not certain») seems to have remained deliberately ambiguous. Such a trend running through the imperial religious (iconographic) landscape has recently been identified by Wouter Henkelman as distinctive of the «creative synthesis» operated by the Achaemenid Empire out of the multiple traditions from which it developed.<sup>162</sup> Second, interpretations exclusively focused on Mazdean symbology underestimate the complexity of objects such as the royal inscriptions. More specifically, they ignore the multiplicity of the reading public (made out of many individuals and groups with very different textual and symbolic skills) addressed by such documents as the inscriptions. Said multiplicity necessarily implied the opening up of 1. the iconographic apparatus, 2. the «text» (what is actually said in the inscriptions, which belongs to the domain of the «narrative»), and 3. the «TEXT» (the sacred dimension of the written word, regardless of whether or not the addressee are able to grasp its meaning - or even just read it: think of the height at which the reliefs are placed, out of reach for anyone, with the likely exception of the gods; this dimension belongs instead to the domain of the «emblematic») to a bewildering broad spectrum of meanings, each interpretable by the user according to the latter's symbolic skills.<sup>163</sup>

<sup>160</sup> De Jong 2021 for a distinction between family, dynastic, and imperial religion.

<sup>161</sup> For example, at DB<sub>p</sub> col. I § 6: see Boyce 1982, 224-225.

<sup>162</sup> See especially Garrison 2017b, 185. On the «creative synthesis» which the Achaemenid Empire showed to be capable of see Henkelman 2017b, 319. As far as representations of the divine in Achaemenid art is concerned see e. g. Root 2012 with previous bibliography. On the religion of the Achaemenid rulers, note now de Jong 2021 with literature.

<sup>163</sup> See on this issue also the remarks in Garrison 2011, Rollinger 2016c, and Matarese 2021, 18-21.

As Mark Garrison has insightfully remarked, this flexibility (a carefully sought-for ambiguity?) is a distinctive element of any ideological power, the main strength of which lies not so much in the logical consistency of the message that the holder of such power conveys, but in the apparent coherence of the whole, which is capable of communicating immediately (in the sense of «in an unmediated manner, prior to critical reflection») both a general meaning, which Garrison defines as «imperial», and different particular meanings, each of them being adaptable to and comprehensible within the cultural horizon of an audience as diverse as the public of the Achaemenid Empire claims indeed was.<sup>164</sup> In the light of these considerations, the fact that the winged figure occupying such a prominent standing in the royal inscriptions could only be recognized as a representation of Ahuramazdā or of the x<sup>v</sup>ārənah would even have been counterproductive, since the iconographic apparatus displayed at Bīsūtūn or Naqš -i Rostam was in all probability the only medium truly accessible to the majority (if not the totality) of the Empire's audience. The evidence coming from the glyptic suggests instead that the main function of the winged figure featuring in the inscriptions was to communicate the «numinous» (in the sense explained above) nature of the Achaemenid ruler(s) and of the respective genealogy, whose list of members goes back nine generations (and thus beyond any individual memory), therefore fulfilling precisely the purpose of blurring the boundaries between the historical and the mythical, between the «human» and the «divine».<sup>165</sup> The fact that, within the Achaemenid οἰκουμένη, someone within the audience (the customers) of the inscriptions (in their triple component of 1. image, 2. text, and 3. TEXT) ought to have recognized also allusions to a tradition like the one reflected in the known Avestān texts most likely stems from the (consciously pursued) allusive nature of the inscriptions more than from a theological declaration of intent (and even less of faith). After all, it is Darius himself who declares that, at the origin of his success, there is the support (upastā) both of Ahuramazdā and of «the other gods who are» (utā aniyāha bagāha ||

<sup>164</sup> Garrison 2011, 67, Rollinger 2016c and more recently Manning 2021, 120-123 on «who heard and read royal inscriptions». The importance of the immediate persuasive capacity (in the sense expressed above, i. e. without interpretative barriers) of both a «text» and a «TEXT» is made rather explicit in a famous anecdote told by Plutarch (*De garr.* 5 = *Mor.*, 504C-D) according to which a client of the renown logographer Lysias, enthusiastic after the first reading of the defense speech prepared for him (and for which he paid a considerable amount of money), returned furious the next day to complain, claiming that, on a second, more careful reading, the logical coherence of the speech was almost non-existent. Lysias sneered and replied: «But you are not going to deliver it in front of the judges more than once, are you?» («Λυσίας τινὶ δίκην ἔχοντι λόγον συγγράφας ἔδωκεν: ὁ δὲ πολλάκις ἀναγνοὺς ἦκε πρὸς τὸν Λυσίαν ἀθυμῶν καὶ λέγων τὸ μὲν πρῶτον αὐτῷ διεξιόντι θαυμαστὸν φανῆναι τὸν λόγον, αὐθις δὲ καὶ τρίτον ἀναλαμβάνοντι παντελῶς ἀμβλὺν καὶ ἄπρακτον: ὁ δὲ Λυσίας γελάσας "τί οὖν" - εἶπεν - οὐχ ἅπαξ μέλλεις λέγειν αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τῶν δικαστῶν;»)

<sup>165</sup> Garrison 2011, 65, and compare now Degen 2022, 40-43. For a detailed discussion of the polyphony of meanings attributable to the depiction of anthropoid and theriomorphic figures (with or without wings) in late 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE imperial glyptic see Garrison 2017b, 193-223; 2017c, 333-387. For a detailed discussion of Darius' «visual vocabulary» as displayed at Bīsūtūn see Rollinger 2016b. Cf. the genealogy given in DB<sub>p</sub> col. I § 2: «Saith Darius, the King: my father is Hystaspes [Vīštāspa], Hystaspes' father is Arsames, Arsames' father was Ariaramnes and Ariaramnes' father was Teispes; Teispes' father was Achemenes [Haxāmaniš]». And again (§§ 3-4): «That is why we are called Achaemenids: we have long been of noble lineage, ours was from ancient times a lineage of kings [...] There are eight in my lineage who were kings in the past. I am the ninth. From the origin [of the lineage] until today we are a total of nine kings». See moreover *API*, 37.

tayaī hanti).<sup>166</sup> The serious possibility - not to say the proof - that the meaning of the formula is not a reference to a category of ontologically superior divine entities (Ahuramazdā and its Avestān context), but to all the gods worshipped within the Empire, among whom Ahuramazdā is but a *primus inter pares* (and this moreover only in the context of the inscriptions, which is to say of the dynastic, not the imperial religion, provided there was ever one) is demonstrated by the fact that the Akkadian version of the same passage (DB<sub>a</sub> 103 ff.) speaks, somewhat laconically, of «all the gods» (*dinger<sup>mes</sup> gab-bi*).<sup>167</sup>

If this is true - and the comparison with the Akkadian version leaves few doubts (while the Ēlāmite one, at least as far as can be argued, preserves the ambiguity of the Old Persian version) - how to justify the almost obsessive recurrence of the name of Ahuramazdā in a text such as Bīsutūn, and how to interpret the winged figure with whom Darius seems to have such a close relationship? A compelling solution to these long lasting questions was recently put forward by Bruno Jacobs, who suggested that the most appropriate approach for interpreting the inscriptions (and not each one independently from the others, as «closed» texts, but in a systemic perspective) is that of ethnogenesis.<sup>168</sup> According to the scholar's interpretation, it is possible to assume that, within an Indo-Īrānian mythical and religious tradition populated by innumerable supernatural entities, including Ahuramazdā itself, the latter was chosen as the tutelary deity of that social group according to whose members' claims its «historical» origins could be traced back to the figure of Achaemenes (and therefore as a potential primeval ancestor – in Jacobs' words the familiar Urahn -, in line with a well-known genealogical model already attested in the case of other aristocratic families of antiquity, such as the Roman *gentes*, most famously the Julio-Claudian one).<sup>169</sup> It would therefore be by virtue of this protective function (that of a θεός ἀλεξίκακος, as the Greeks would have it) of the now enthroned King and of his lineage - which alone, Jacobs points out, is cited by Darius to justify his rise to power - that Ahuramazdā is celebrated in the inscriptions (and it is interesting to note that, according to a tradition derived either from Plato or from his school, Zeus, [Ahuramazdā?] was among the ancestors of the same Achaemenes).<sup>170</sup> It would then be in this way, the historian's argument goes on, that one of the many divinities included in the (Indo)Īrānian πάνθεον - whether or not of Central

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<sup>166</sup> DB<sub>p</sub> col. V § 62: cf. *API*, 82.

<sup>167</sup> Henkelman 2017b, 308 and now de Jong 2021.

<sup>168</sup> Cf. the similar position adopted by Peter Golden (1992, 115-140, 379-416; 2011a) for the purpose of studying the (representations of the) origins of Türkic peoples and the studies collected in Falk 2015 about - among other things - the «founding myths» (*sensu* Girard) of the Kušāna dynasty.

<sup>169</sup> Jacobs 2017c, 260. Cf. the passage in the *Histories* (4.127.4) in which Herodotos attributes to the Scythians a genealogical conception which looks quite similar to that of the Persians, putting in one of their rulers' mouth (Ἰδάνθουρος), in the context of a conversation with Darius', the following claim: according to the Saka ruler, he considers as his own lords (δεσπότας) only his own ancestors (πρόγονοι), namely Zeus and Hestia (Δία τὸν ἐμὸν πρόγονον καὶ Ἥστίνην).

<sup>170</sup> See Plat. *Alc.* I, 120e. «[...] ἢ οὐκ ἴσμεν ὡς οἱ μὲν Ἡρακλέους, οἱ δὲ Ἀχαιμένους ἔκγονοι, τὸ δ' Ἡρακλέους τε γένος καὶ τὸ Ἀχαιμένους εἰς Περσέα τὸν Διὸς ἀναφέρεται.»

Asian origin – which was especially praised by and felt particularly close to one of the many aristocratic families of the late 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE political landscape of Cyrus’ domains now bidding for primacy, would have been elevated to the rank of imperial (or, better, dynastic) deity in the same way as - and in the wake of - other gods traditionally entrusted with the protection of the King, from Humban in the Ēlāmite world to Bēl/Marduk or Adad in the Assyrian and Mesopotamian cultural environments.<sup>171</sup> Such an interpretation would also explain the semantic shift of the term xšāyaθia, usually translated as «sovereign» but which, as already noted by Jan Kellens, originally meant nothing more than something like «the authority to establish rules and enforce them within spaces and social groups of varying extents». This is a definition which is much better suited to the power of a charismatic head of an extended family - as is typical, for example, of the pastoral societies of the steppes of Central and/or Inner Asia, to whose milieu the origins of the Achaemenids have often been traced - than to the universalistic ambitions of an emperor, «lord of many, king over many».<sup>172</sup> From the above Jacobs concludes, it follows that, in the same way in which a word such as xšāyaθia would have gained the supra-local prestige conferred upon it by Darius’ victory in the context of a struggle for supremacy between different aristocratic groups «by distinguishing the [Achaemenid] “house” within the wider group of the other aristocratic families», through the rise of the Achaemenid clan thanks to Darius’ bid for power, the patron deity of the latter «would have been distinguished from those of the other families» which had been eventually defeated.<sup>173</sup>

If such a reconstruction were to be accepted, what is then left of the winged figure? The most likely hypothesis, according to Jacobs, would be to recognize in it a representation of the eponymous ancestor of the family (Haxāmaniš). Following the scholar’s hypothesis, the constant representation of this genealogical hero – straddling as it does several levels, from 1. a historical (the existence, impersonated by Darius, of a human group self-styled as «Achaemenids»), to 2. the mythical (the catalogue spanning nine generations) and finally 3. a divine one (the iconography according to the type of the «winged anthropomorphic figure», itself coming from a long standing Near-Eastern tradition and thus open to multiple interpretations) - would have had the ultimate aim of raising a genealogical cult to the level of the «numinous». The main consequence of such an undertaking would have been to transform this cult from a symbol of local belonging (the dynastic memory of the

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<sup>171</sup> Cf. for example Jacobs 2011, Jacobs and Trampedach 2013, and Jacobs 2017c, 257-258. Gaspa 2017 for a discussion of Assyrian imperial theology and royal ideology as a forerunner of Achaemenid imperial religion (cf. de Jong 2021, 1202-1205). Such a parallel, it shall be noted in passing, considerably downplays any purely Avestān model for the understanding of Bīsutūn, and therefore delivers a considerable blow to the Ḥayānid hypothesis concerning pre-imperial Baktria, at least as a prominent reference of Darius’ self-representation (note moreover Henkelman 2018b, 818-819).

<sup>172</sup> Kellens 2002, 446.

<sup>173</sup> Jacobs 2017c, 258. This is, it should be noted in passing, a scenario in more than one respect analogous, to name but a conspicuous example, to dynamics of the civil wars which tore apart the late Roman republic and ended with Octavian being crowned Augustus, the elevated one.

Achaemenid family) to an imperial emblem (thus supra-local and ready to be used - and understood - in different ways according to the different traditions of kingship in the territories subject to the new power, which at the time was still far from being unchallenged, as the inscription itself shows). One of the strengths of such a suggestion, it is worth noting, is that snippets of evidence attesting to precisely such a cult are to be found both in primary sources and in classical historiography.<sup>174</sup>

The basic arguments in support of this interpretation, according to Jacobs, are as follows. First, there is the striking resemblance (ranging from the way in which the beard is rendered to the headdress, a «turreted crown») between the figure of Darius and the winged entity engraved in the rock. Such similarities would be ill-suited to a deity like Ahuramazdā, whom the Avestān texts clearly characterize as ontologically different from the rest of the cosmos, not to mention the fact that Zoroastrianism - as attested by the cult of fire - is famously distinguished by an aniconic conception of the divine. Second: the gesture addressed by the King to the winged figure and reciprocated by the latter to the former in the Achaemenid reliefs would not, as usually assumed, indicate veneration (why would a god worship a human being after all?) but, rather, and as abundant iconographic parallels of Near-Eastern origin testify (most likely taken up by the Sāsānids, for example in the famous inscription of Šābūr I (reigned 240-270 CE)), the sealing of an allegiance between the two individuals staging on the scene. Such a hypothesis would be further strengthened by the torque (according to some scholars it would instead be a ring) that the winged figure holds in his left hand, and which is reproduced as such in the Apadāna reliefs to symbolize the alliance between the Great King and the peoples now belonging to the Achaemenid Empire: what in the context of his discussion of the etho-classe dominante Briant famously called the dynastic pact.<sup>175</sup> Third: in spite of the inertia of a long-lasting tradition of scholarship, Garrison's detailed study of the depictions of turreted and podium-like structures on the glyptic recovered from the Persepolis excavations raises serious doubts

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<sup>174</sup> Jacobs 2017c, 258-261. See also Garrison 2011, 65; 2017a, 524; 2017b, 190-193, who has pointed out (p. 192), that within an almost boundless iconographic corpus (the number of different symbols present in the glyptic material from Persepolis alone would be «approximately between 3500 and 3700»), Darius and his successors had at their disposal a wide repertoire of images similar to the winged figure depicted in the inscriptions to choose from in order to give their mythical-historical genealogy «divine» and «numinous» characters, so the fact that he chose precisely that visual vocabulary should not be considered a random choice. Regarding the primary sources attesting to the cult of ancestors in the Achaemenid period (certainly from the time of Xerxes), great importance should be attached to the recent publication (Waerzeggers 2014) of a Neo-Babylonian document (BM 72747) recording a ritual offering to a statue of Darius in the temple of Sippar in the first year of his successor's reign. Another famous example, albeit from a later period, of a dynastic cult in an ethnogenetic (or «intentional history») outlook is represented by the Nemrut Dağı inscription of Antiochus I of Kommagene (*OGIS* 383), whose text posits (ll. 30-31) «the fortunate roots of my ancestors» (ἐμοῦ γένους εὐτυχες || τάτη ρίζα) under the protection (ll. 224 f.) of the «πατέρας ἀπαντας θε || οὐς ἐκ Περσίδος τε καὶ Μακετίδος || γῆς Κομμαγενῆς». Cf. moreover ll. 115 f., where a «νέ || μεσις βασιλικῶν δαιμόνων» is mentioned. As for literary sources attesting to the cult of the dynasty's ancestors (e. g. of Cyrus) in the Achaemenid Empire, see among the many examples Curt. 8.4.1 as well as Just. *Epit.*, 11.15.10 (regales deos) with the remarks in Henkelman 2011b; 2011c.

<sup>175</sup> Garrison 2011, 40. On the sociopolitical meaning of Achaemenid torques as symbols of allegiance between the Great King and (at least a part of) his subjects see most recently Colburn 2020c as well as further in this work (especially chapter 5).

as to whether in the royal inscriptions we are indeed dealing (as it is usually claimed) with a fire altar on the Zoroastrian model or, rather, with an element that usually appears - as shown for example in a seal from Gordium in which both the turreted structure and the winged anthropomorphic figure are to be seen - in the context of scenes depicting the so-called «heroic encounters». According to the convincing argument developed by Garrison, therefore, this parallel evidence provides rather solid arguments against the Mazdean hypothesis, fitting instead very well with an interpretation of the iconographic apparatus of the royal Achaemenid inscriptions in terms of familiar and/or dynastic worship.<sup>176</sup>

To borrow a famous dictum from Friedrich Nietzsche, Darius «knew the man better». This seems to have been true both in the sense that at the heart of the iconographic apparatus of the inscriptions there is his relationship with a man, namely his ancestor Haxāmaniš (whether or not this was a mythical or historical figure and regardless of whether this was known to Darius) and, most importantly, in the sense that the symbolic power wield – in the eyes of other human beings – by the carefully sought-for ambiguity of figures whose contours almost seamlessly transcended from a dimension which was «human, oh just too human» into the realm of the heroic and from the latter into the divine one must have been perfectly clear to him. Moreover, the hypothesis developed so far helps to explain why the new King made so an extensive use of such a visual language. As a way of comparison, it perhaps suffices to think of Alexander, who - at the latest in the Sāsānid era - had already become a mythological figure, namely Iskander. Long story short, in the syntax of the inscriptions, the reference to Ahuramazdā belongs at the same time to the realm of the «text» and, for much of its audience, of the «TEXT».<sup>177</sup> Thanks to the symbolic stratification of a deliberately hybrid (or rather, ambiguous, multi-layered) representation, the iconographic apparatus, which was made accessible to (and thus open to interpretations by) a much wider audience, and in particular the winged figure, could suggest both the meaning of «dynastic legitimisation» (the cultic role of an eponymous hero) and that of «affiliation of kingship to the sphere of the divine», thus enabling it to speak in different ways to different audiences, something that a unilateral representation of the event eternalized in the reliefs, for example in Zoroastrian terms, would have inevitably prevented.

## 2. Šiyāti Bāxtrīyā

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<sup>176</sup> See Garrison and Root 2001 I, 18-19, Garrison 2011, 47-49 and the detailed discussion of the iconographic evidence related to «altars in Persepolis glyptic» in Garrison 2017c, 117-332. For an illustration of the seal of Gordium see Jacobs 2017c, 270 table 3, and his remarks on this piece of evidence. An interpretation in a resolutely Mazdean fashion (e. g. in the case of the reliefs of Naqš -i Rostam) is offered by Boyce 1982, 113.

<sup>177</sup> See the important distinction between these two levels in Garrison 2011, 61 and Rollinger 2016b; 2016c.



## 2.1. Bīsūtūn, again

In the light of what has been discussed so far, two questions stand out. First: since it is a document no less fraught with ideology and ambiguous than the Avestān texts, why should the Bīsūtūn inscription be used as a source for a historical reconstruction of Bactrian politics and society within the context of the (early) Achaemenid Empire? Second: if accepted, how can a reading along the lines proposed by Jacobs and Garrison of a medium such as this shed new light on the birth and development of the emerging Achaemenid satrapy? The answer to the first question is almost trivial: quite simply, the Bīsūtūn inscription is the first document - and what is more, it is a primary source - known to date that contains information reasonably attributable to historical events taking place in pre-Hellenistic Bactria, which cannot be said, despite the ἀκριβία displayed by generations of interpreters, of either linguistic or, as we have seen, archaeological evidence.<sup>178</sup> Not only that, but the chronology of these events can moreover be reconstructed with a considerable degree of accuracy by virtue of the information contained in the text itself.<sup>179</sup> It was in fact most likely written between January 521, when Darius stayed for a few months (perhaps almost a whole year) in Media after one of his lieutenants (Vidarna, Ὑδάρνης in Hdt. 3. 70) quashed an uprising in the region, and 519 BCE, when the (would be) King himself decided to move against a group of steppe dwellers - the Sakā tigraxaudā - probably pushing North of the Zarafšān (according to others - most recently Claude Rapin - taking a Western route instead, in the direction of the Aral Sea and towards the Syrdaryo delta).<sup>180</sup> This last terminus post quem is made almost certain by the fact that Darius had part of the already completed monument demolished in order to include the portrait of Skunkha («the Scythian», as the inscription calls him) in the list of the liar kings he defeated.<sup>181</sup> Put another way, the inscription

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<sup>178</sup> This has actually been acknowledged by Skjærvø himself: cf. Skjærvø 2005, 81; 2013, 563. On Achaemenid religion and its relations with Zoroastrianism as we can reconstruct it on the basis of the *Avestā* see also Lincoln 2007 (a study that has, however, been the subject of harsh criticism: cf. Colburn 2011 and Lincoln's reply in 2013); 2012, Kellens 2017; 2021.

<sup>179</sup> On the chronology of the Bīsūtūn inscription see e. g. Wiesehöfer 1978, Briant 2002, 107-122, Rollinger 2014b, 155, Kosmin 2018a as well as the commentary in *TPE* I, 140-141.

<sup>180</sup> Rapin 2018b, 38. On Vidarna cf. DB<sub>p</sub> col. II §25: «a Persian called Vidarna, an envoy of mine, I appointed him commander in that region [...] When he reached Media - in a place called Maru, in Media - there he fought against the Medes» (the translation follows *TPE* I, 144-145). 521 BCE could also be the approximate date when the project of immortalizing Darius' deeds in a place like Bīsūtūn was first discussed. The hypothesis that Darius' Scythian campaign in 519 was directed not North of Sogdiana, but in the direction of Chorasmia, has been supported by Dandamaev 1989, 136-140 and more recently by Minardi 2015a, 30. On Darius, Bīsūtūn, and the Sakā see now Rollinger and Degen 2021b.

<sup>181</sup> Cfr. DBk: «iyam Skunkha || haya saka»: see Waters 2014, 76. On this chronology see the text (with commentary) in *TPE* I, 150-151 as well as Rollinger 2016a, 150 and now Rollinger and Degen 2021b. Incidentally, it is interesting to note that 1. we know nothing about Skunkha's fate, whereas Darius does not spare any details in the case of other opponents, from Āçina to Fravartiš, which leads one to wonder whether the episode involving Skunkha, of undoubted importance for the Achaemenid ruler, should however be placed on the same level as the events of the previous year. 2. It is Darius himself who admit (see DB<sub>p</sub> col. V § 74) that he merely replaced Skunkha with another Saka: «avadā aniyam maθištam akunavam || yaθā mān kāmā āha; || pasāva dahayāuš māna abava». This passage, whose value seems to have been underestimated by scholars (Briant 2002, 127 pointing out the religious and symbolic implications of the event, but without elaborating further on the political side of it), could be an important clue to understand in more detail the nature

provides the most detailed, reliable, and ancient chronology available for reconstructing the early stages of the imperial history of Baktria, and for this reason it is impossible to do without it. The second question raises however more sensitive issues. On the one hand, the analysis of linguistic and archaeological evidence has led to the conclusion that, prior to Bīsūtūn, it is likely that Baktria as a political-administrative unit (to say nothing of a Ḥayānid, or otherwise, Empire) never existed.<sup>182</sup> This would consequently lead to use the text of the inscription, albeit with all the caution dictated by the partisanship of the authorial voice, as a historical source at least concerning a number of events that, as it has been argued several times, Darius had no reason - and perhaps did not even have the possibility - to sanitize to his own advantage, and on which narrative it would therefore be possible to rely on.<sup>183</sup> Garrison and Jacobs' aforementioned remarks, however, suggest that we are faced with a document of such complexity that any exegesis that attempts to distinguish a historical «structure» from (one or several) ideological «superstructure(s)» is inadvisable and methodologically inadequate. It would be more appropriate, on the contrary, to recognize in Bīsūtūn what Garrison himself calls «a carefully construed environment», within which scraps of historicity («little of the real life») serve as a frame for the – ideologically heavily loaded – display of «a hoped-for-fantasy»: in Richardson's words, a presumptive claim of established power.<sup>184</sup> This last consideration is of particular importance, because it allows us to remove Bīsūtūn from the timelessness to which we often tend to relegate it, and places its text instead within a long-standing tradition, that of Near Eastern inscriptions (from the Assyrian to the Ēlāmite, Urartean and, above all, Babylonian ones), from the study of which two remarkable facts emerge. First, there is the «provisional» nature of the power claimed in such texts by the different rulers; second, it also appears very clearly that the extension and effectiveness of such power were not infrequently - not to say constantly - inversely proportional to the assertiveness and confidence with which these and similar texts (including Bīsūtūn) claim it to be both all-encompassing and unfailing.<sup>185</sup> On careful reflection, one should also realize that there is no reason to give Bīsūtūn an exceptional status within the corpus of Achaemenid royal inscriptions - or, more broadly, of similar devices within the long history of the ancient Near East: this is so because

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and dynamics of the interactions between the Empire and the different human groups settled in Central Asia before both Cyrus' conquest and Darius' reconquista, as we shall see in the next chapter.

<sup>182</sup> Cf. Rapin 2021, 320: if at all, it is possible to identify, also from the *Avestā*, a religious, but not a political network centered on Baktria.

<sup>183</sup> On the difficulties faced by the interpreter as (s)he tries to make sense of the narrative of Darius' rise to power as it is presented in the inscription see among others Rollinger 2006, Jacobs 2011, Schwinghammer 2011, Vallat 2011 and Lincoln 2012, 378 ff. Hyland 2014 on Darius' attempt to shape the narrative concerning the casualties to his own advantage.

<sup>184</sup> Garrison 2011, 17-18. As Manning 2021, 220 has it, «outside of the inscriptions, Darius and his servants had to deal with willful individuals who wanted something in exchange for cooperation, and with the endless intermediaries between them and the humble workers who enacted their orders». On the process of imperial élite building and its pitfalls in a world historical perspective see Bang *et al.* 2021 I, 179-220.

<sup>185</sup> Richardson 2017.

(just as in the case of the entire Naqš -i Rostam complex) Bīsūtūn stands out a luminous example of an *ex eventu* prophecy, which presents a panoptic view of the Empire and of the events that presided over its (re)birth under Darius' reign that is deliberately misleading, for its narrative (and ideological) emphasis is all shifted, to take up the concepts and terminology used by Garrison, to the «emblematic» function at the expense of the «narrative» one.<sup>186</sup> It should not be forgotten, however, that in the background, and at the origins, of the «semantics of the numinous» that pervades 1. the iconography 2. the text and 3. the TEXT featuring at Bīsūtūn there was a vicious internecine conflict whose outcome, at the time of the events, must have been anything but predictable. The outpouring of violence that marked the execution of the defeated provides unequivocal testimony to this. Therefore, it is not in spite, but precisely by virtue of the «emblematic» nature of the inscription that it is of particular interest to study more closely what the Bīsūtūn text has to say about other individuals featuring in it, whose importance seems to have been such as not to have made possible their (complete) concealment, even within such an ahistorical (panoptic) narrative as that of the inscription.<sup>187</sup> Although the only narrator, Darius is not the only actor on stage: this is true in the story told at Bīsūtūn and in all likelihood it could not have been less true (even if by «Darius» we mean the entire house of Achaemenids) in the period between Cambyses' death and the carving of the monument *ad maiorem gloriam* of the Great King and of his lineage. Just as a way of an example: where are, and who are, the officers appointed by Cyrus and Cambyses in Central Asia? Indeed, it is impossible to deny that Darius (or better, his *factio*) could not help but to have relied on some of them in a context such as that of 522 BCE. Although fragmentary, the reconstruction of the events does in fact allow us to guess the extent of the military operations orchestrated by the various contenders along fronts stretching thousands of kilometers through extremely impervious territory, from the highlands of Armenia to the mountains of Afġānistān.<sup>188</sup> As said, the gravity of the situation Darius had to face cannot be overestimated: this consequently makes it all the more interesting to examine in greater detail what he chose to (or was forced to, or could not not) tell about the men on whom he was able to rely when defending key territories (not only in Media and Fārs) from the armies of his rivals. In what remains of this chapter, an attempt will therefore be made to show how a reading of Bīsūtūn's text based on the methodological principles discussed in the preceding pages allows us to answer the second of the questions raised at the outset of this section. What can this space, constructed as it was to stage a «hoped-for-fantasy» of imperial power tell us 1. about the impact of the Achaemenid conquest of Central Asia and 2. concerning the role of this region (and of its inhabitants)

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<sup>186</sup> Garrison 2011, 61-64.

<sup>187</sup> Rollinger 2016b on the features that distinguish (though within a clearly recognizable tradition) Darius' visual program from its Near Eastern predecessors. Hyland 2014 on Darius' attempt to downplay other individuals' features as a way of presenting himself, if not as the only, for that proved to be impossible, at least as the foremost hero of the story.

<sup>188</sup> Briant 2002, 116-117 and now Jacobs 2021, 847.

within the framework of a political entity of hitherto unknown size and complexity in the history of the ancient Near East as the new Empire indeed was?<sup>189</sup>

## 2.2. «This is what has been done by me in Baktria»

The second mention of Baktria in the Bīsutūn inscription after the one, already discussed, in col. I (§ 6) occurs in the context of Darius' recollection of his victory over one of the most dangerous of the so-called liar kings who acted as his competitors in the struggle for the succession to Cambyses' throne. A «Persian, a man named Vahēyazdāta», who claimed to be Bṛdiyā, the second son of Cyrus and brother of Cambyses, acting in concert with a certain Fravartiš, who had risen up in Media, had in fact managed to gather an army capable of threatening Darius' control of the Irānian Plateau and of Central Asia, thus, in the words of Briant, «considerably raising the stakes of the revolt».<sup>190</sup> The following is Darius' account: «A country [dahayāuš] called Margiana [Maguš nāmā: this is the region around the Merv oasis, in present-day Türkmenistan] rose up against me. A man called Frāda, a Margian: this [the rebels] made their leader. So, I sent against him a Persian named Dādêršiš, my servant, a satrap in Baktria [Dādêršiš nāma Pārsa, manā bandaka, Bāxtriyā xšačapāvā]. I spoke to him as follows: “Go, defeat that army that does not submit to my will [literally, «that does not call itself mine»: paraīdi, avam kāram jadi, haya manā nai gaubatai]!” Following this, Dādêršiš marched at the head of the army. He engaged in battle with the Margians. Ahuramazdā brought me aid [Ahuramazdāmaī upastām abara]; by the will of Ahuramazdā my army annihilated the troops of the rebels. Twenty-three days of the month of Āçiyādiyahya had passed, when they came to battle. [§ 39] Saith Darius, the King: as a result of these events, that country became mine. This [is] what has been done by me in Baktria [dahayāuš manā abava: ima tya manā kṛtam Bāxtriyā].<sup>191</sup> Although it is now almost universally accepted 1. that (at the express wish of Darius) the text of the Bīsutūn inscription circulated widely throughout the Empire, in different versions and in numerous languages - in

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<sup>189</sup> Although, as has been rightly pointed out several times by Pierre Briant (see most recently 2017a; 2018a) and Robert Rollinger (2014b; 2014c, forthcoming) both the Achaemenids and to some extent Alexander himself (on whom see now Degen 2022) can be more adequately understood if placed and studied within a broader Near Eastern historical and cultural context, it is nevertheless true that, as they both acknowledge, there is no precedent that can be taken as a truly comparable reference to describe the political entity that developed following Cyrus' conquest: cf. Briant 2002, 124 and Rollinger 2017b.

<sup>190</sup> Briant 2002, 121. We are actually dealing with a civil war (Schwinghammer 2011; 2011): nothing except his own words tells us, in fact, that Darius' claims to the throne were any more solid than those of his adversaries.

<sup>191</sup> DB<sub>p</sub> col. III §§38-39 (translation according to *TPE* I, 146): note that the Ēlāmite and the Akkadian versions are consistent with the Old Persian one here: Grillo-Susini *et al.* 1993, 51. The battle fought by Dādêršiš against the Margians is likely to have taken place between the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 28<sup>th</sup> of December 521 BCE, as it can be deduced from information within the text itself. According to Lincoln 2012, 401-404, one could argue from the Persian text of the inscription a difference in the treatment of Frāda, who would have been spared: this, however, seems to be contradicted by the Babylonian version (Briant 2002, 139) which leaves little doubt about the fate of the Margian, slain like the other insurgents.

addition to the three attested in the inscription, at least fragments of an Aramaic copy are known for certain - and 2. that, by virtue of this, the events narrated in the inscription were well known within the Persian οἰκουμένη, the name of Dādêršiš, «satrap in Baktria», is not mentioned by any source among those known with the exception of the inscription itself, which makes Darius' account the only evidence available concerning a man who, it can be argued from the narrative, must have played a not insignificant role in the ascension to the throne of the Achaemenid ruler.<sup>192</sup> For the purposes of the present work, three aspects of this account are particularly relevant, and as such will be addressed more closely in the following sections of this chapter. First: the fact that Dādêršiš is called «Persian» (Pārsa). Second: the fact that Darius calls him «my [loyal] servant» (māna bandaka). Third, but of no less importance: the fact that, at the time of the upheavals in Margiana, Dādêršiš was «satrap in Baktria» (Bāxtrīyā xšaçaṗāvā).<sup>193</sup>

### 2.3. A «Persian» called Dādêršiš

Let us take a closer look at Darius' words: «Dādêršiš nāma Pārsa, manā bandaka, Bāxtrīyā xšaçaṗāvā». Although extremely dry, there is nothing obvious in this definition, starting with the very ethnic (?) affiliation of Dādêršiš. Indeed, when considering the meaning of the latter, it should not be lost sight of the chronology of the events one is talking about.<sup>194</sup> That at such a high date (only some 8 years after Cyrus' death) Persians - by which is meant «officials from Southwestern Irān, from Pārsa» - held such important positions in Central Asia (Vivāna, called «satrap in Arachosia», also receives the epithet «Persian») should not be taken for granted, all the more so since, as Robert Rollinger has noted, «it is only during the reign of Darius that the Empire and the imperial elite begin to qualify themselves as Persians».<sup>195</sup> That «during» is instructive, because it can be understood as

<sup>192</sup> Fragments of the inscription have been found at Babylon, while at Elephantine, Egypt, scraps of a papyrus probably used as a schoolbook attest that the inscription was still used by students as a literacy drill a century after the events it narrates: see Briant 2002, 123, Aspesi 2005, Jacobs 2012, 98, Rollinger 2016c. This fact helps to explain at least in part why the Herodotean account of Darius' rise to power (Hdt. 3.63-80) bears some remarkable similarities with the Bīsūtūn's text. The most notable among these are the names of the participants in the *coup d'état* that brings Darius to power in Herodotos' account: with the exception of one Ardumaniš, the names of the six Persian notables who conspired with Darius to eliminate Gaumāta as reported by Herodotos also occur in their original form in the inscription. That the text of the latter must have made known in the four corners of the Empire (which underlines its importance) is explicitly stated by Darius himself: cf. DB<sub>p</sub> col. V § 70. A good parallel in this sense is the famous *senatus consultum De Pisone patre* of which we know, both from Tacitus' account (*Ann.*, 2.68 ff.) and from the text of the epigraph itself, published some twenty years ago, that it was made public both in military garrisons through the whole Empire (l. 172, *in hibernis cuiusq[ue] legionis at signa figeretur*) and in public registers (r. 176, *referrī in tabulas publicas*) at the explicit order of the emperor (Tiberius), who obviously had every interest in making the verdict of the senate, which absolved him of any responsibility for the death of his adopted son Germanicus, as widely known as possible throughout the Roman domains.

<sup>193</sup> Grillot-Susini *et al.* 1993, 51 for the Ēlāmite version of the account and von Voigtlander 1978, 31 for the Akkadian one, both consistent with the Old Persian.

<sup>194</sup> Waters 2010.

<sup>195</sup> Rollinger 2014b, 159.

indicating at the earliest the last decade of the 6<sup>th</sup> century (but the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> would perhaps seem a more reasonable chronology), as the date marking the start of a process of self-identification (the birth of Persianism, taking up Strootman and Versluys' formula) with the group membership professed by the Achaemenid ruling clan: a path which, as always happens in similar cases, must have taken a rather long time and followed uneven trajectories «from Samarqand to Sardis».<sup>196</sup> But how are we to envisage the situation 30 years earlier, at the time of Cyrus and Cambyses? Do we really have to see in the appointment of Dādêršiš and Vivāna the recognition of Central Asia as having an exceptional political importance within the imperial organization, an importance - moreover - such as to require that members of the by-now famous ethno-classe dominante (by which we mean, following Briant's definition - which has become paradigmatic for entire scholarly traditions even outside the field of Achaemenid studies - members of the most influential families from Fārs/Pārsa) were entrusted with the government of these territories already in the immediate aftermath of Cyrus' conquest?<sup>197</sup> The Bīsutūn inscription shows that this was indeed not always the case everywhere in the Empire, nor at all times. Even if we want to avoid considering Darius' father, Vīštāspa, whose socio-cultural background, although the Central Asian hypothesis has been put forward several times, is not known, it is possible to infer from the Bīsutūn account itself that there were at least two other individuals who held crucial military posts in the years 522-521 and who were not - or at least were not recognized by Darius as - Persians (in the sense of their ethnicity: as for their political affiliation, this is an entirely different matter).<sup>198</sup> As for the former, Taḥmaspāda (sent to Sagartia to crush the revolt of Čičantaḥma, one of Darius' adversaries who, judging by the punishment he received, must have been perceived as particularly dangerous), its Medic origin [Taḥmaspāda nāma Māda] may perhaps constitute a further exception by virtue of the special consideration that - according to a still widespread opinion among scholars - the Medes (the Ēlāmites are hardly ever mentioned) were given during the reigns of Cyrus and Cambyses.<sup>199</sup> In spite of this, it is however no less remarkable that he is explicitly referred to as «Mede», all the more so if, as argued with particularly convincing

<sup>196</sup> An example of this group identity is provided by DNa § 2: «Adam Dārayavauš || xšāyaθiya vazrka || xšāyaθiya xšāyaθiyānām || xšāyaθiya dahayūnām vispazanānām || xšāyaθiya ahyāyā būmiyā vazrkayā dūraī api || Vīštāspahyā puça || Haxāmanišiya, || Pārsa, Pārsahyā puça, || Ariya, Ariyaciça». On the constructed (Benedict Anderson would have said imagined) nature of Persian ethnic affiliation by rulers who had by then relatively little to do with Persia (Pārsa), be they Achaemenid or otherwise, see Canepa 2017, Jacobs 2017b, Plischke 2017 and Strootman 2017.

<sup>197</sup> Cf. Briant 1988 for the definition of the Persians (in the above-mentioned sense) as the ethno-classe dominante. Worth quoting at the outset of this discussion are the words of Rhyne King (2021, 11): «[...] satraps must be male, they must be “Persian”, etc. None of these qualifications has ever been shown to be universally true».

<sup>198</sup> See Manning 2021, 49, who sees «Darius' presentation of himself as Persian and Aryan as tendentious and part of a process of ethnogenesis and self-definition, not a fact to be taken for granted». Stark 2021, 698-699 suggests that Vīštāspa might have been crucial in securing the loyalty of Dādêršiš and Vivāna to Darius.

<sup>199</sup> On Taḥmaspāda as well as the issue concerning the Medic heritage within the context of Cyrus' and Cambyses' reigns see respectively DB<sub>p</sub> col. II § 33 (consistent with the Ēlāmite and the Akkadian version: Grillot-Susini *et al.* 1993, 50, DBa, 62) and Briant 2002, 80-82. See moreover Swart 2021, 162-175 on what she calls «Elamites and Susians» in the Apadāna reliefs.

arguments, for example, by Wouter Henkelman, the Persepolis archives show that, already from the 6<sup>th</sup> century and probably from the very beginning of the Empire's history, there was no perceived difference between Persians, Medes, and Ēlāmites (who are in fact mentioned extremely sporadically in the tablets because, in the words of the scholar, they are «us»<sup>200</sup>).

The case of the second individual (also called Dādêršiš), however, deserves further attention. That he might be the same bandaka in charge of suppressing the revolt in Margiana seems at least unlikely, not only because of the distance separating the territory of action of the first from that of the second (Armenia, another crucial region but notoriously reluctant to any kind of control), but also and above all because this second Dādêršiš is explicitly identified as of Caucasian origin (Dādêršiš nāma Arminiya).<sup>201</sup> In the absence of further details (such as a particularly revealing patronymic or, as in this case, the specific mention of an ethnic (?) background), the mere qualification of «Persian» can be misleading, as is clearly shown by documents attesting, already in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, Babylonian citizens with Irānian patronymics and, during the reign of Cambyses, at least one individual - also a Babylonian - whose name appears to be etymologically traceable to an Irānian cultural context (Bagapada).<sup>202</sup> Herodotos' famous passage (1.125.2-3) listing the lineages that make up the ἔθνος of the Persians (δὲ Πέρσεων συχὰ γένεα) is another illustrative example. As Daniel T. Potts has rightly pointed out, this description should not be understood «in an ethnolinguistic sense» and, in the absence of primary sources which can be taken as being more revealing in this regard, there is no reason to assume that the populations listed by Herodotos (Πανθιαλαῖοι Δηρουσιαῖοι Γερμάνιοι on the one hand, defined as sedentary ἀροτῆρες and, on the other hand, the νομάδες «Δάοι Μάρδοι Δροπικοὶ Σαγάρτιοι») were (ethnically) related to each other and/or to the other inhabitants of Fārs.<sup>203</sup> Finally, as Henry Colburn recently showed in a very convincing way in the case of the «Persian» Udjahorresnet, «Persian identity» has to be understood first and foremost «as constructed and thus sizeable for many reasons», which implies that Dādêršiš might well not have been a Persian but, for

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<sup>200</sup> Colburn 2020c, 62 with references: among more than 5000 published tablets, the Persians are mentioned as such only 4 times, the Medes 1 and the Ēlāmites are completely absent from the ethnic record of the archive.

<sup>201</sup> On the Armenian Dādêršiš see DB<sub>p</sub> col. II §§ 26-28 consistent with the Ēlāmite text (Grillot-Susini *et al.* 1993, 48): DB<sub>a</sub>, 49 calls him «an Urartean».

<sup>202</sup> Briant 2002, 83.

<sup>203</sup> Potts 2014, 89. Enlightening in this regard are the remarks made by Rašīd al-Dīn (1247-1318 CE and author of the most important historiographical work of the Īlhānīd period, the *Ġāmi' al-tawārīḥ*, to be translated as *Collection of histories*), who observes (p. 36 in the 1868 edition by N. I. Berzin) that «with regard to the Türkic peoples who are now called Mongols, they originally had their own names [...] but because of [the advent] of the Empire, greatness and power [of the Mongols], nowadays all other tribes have taken the name [of the Mongols]». Important in this passage is Rašīd al-Dīn's awareness of the eminently political, and not ethnic, nature of group solidarities within a pastoral society such as the Mongol, and it is perhaps safe to imagine that similar processes were at work in the formative stage of the Achaemenid Empire, especially in Central Asia, where the presence of societies structured on a model at least partly similar to the Mongol one was (and is) even more substantial than it was the case in Irān, as Potts himself demonstrates in his remarkable monograph. My warmest thanks are due to Dr. Lara Fabian for helping me to find the text of the 19<sup>th</sup> century edition as well as for her contribution in understanding the Russian translation.

reasons related for example to the ideology of conquest projected by Darius' over the territories he claimed for himself, he was given such an (ethnic as well as political) identity, which in turn he would have been more than glad to take on, since it provided a powerful tool for his self-promotion within a very challenging environment, both on the imperial level and within his own, Egyptian context.<sup>204</sup> On the contrary, given the fact that «ethnicity may not necessarily be the most pertinent aspect of identity for a given situation», even assuming that Dādêršiš indeed was ethnically a Persian, one should not underestimate his other (political) identities within the Baktrian context he was enmeshed in and entangled with.<sup>205</sup> In the light of these case studies and of the related methodological remarks, the following questions arise. 1. Are we therefore really entitled to believe that, in just twenty years (and in the specific case of Central Asia, probably even less), Cyrus and Cambyses managed to organize the - immense - territories they conquered in such a way as to be able to entrust them (exclusively) to the rule of the most eminent scions of the Median, Ēlāmite, and/or Persian families? 2. Moreover, if at least in the case of regions such as Egypt or Babylonia, the existence of a complex and highly tested political-administrative structure could, in principle, have facilitated the establishment of an (partially or even totally external) ethno-classe dominante, is it feasible to apply this model on territories with a geography (and social structures) as different as those of Central Asia, especially now that the hypothesis of an earlier Ḥayānid Empire, on the structure of which the kings of Persia would have modelled their political and administrative map(s) of the upper satrapies, seems in all likelihood no longer defensible? 3. Finally, even if we admit the plausibility (which has yet to be proven) of the previous hypotheses, can we really think that, together with the satraps, all or even the most part of the personnel needed to guarantee territorial control on the scale reflected by the Persepolitan administration also migrated to Central Asia together with Darius' bandakā?

### 2.3.1. *One Flew over the Satrap's est: Ršādā and ᾿Aopvoç, Alexander and Dārayavauš*

The case of Vivāna provides valuable material to explore some of the issues raised in the previous section.<sup>206</sup> The Bīsūtūn text says that he was active in Arachosia and had to face the armies of Vahêyazdāta during the latter's attempt, in concert with Fravartiš in Media, to seize Central Asia, thus pincer (out)maneuvering Darius and his allies.<sup>207</sup> According to the inscription, Vivāna faced Vahêyazdāta's troops on two occasions, winning both the pitched battles he took part in. The first

<sup>204</sup> Colburn 2020c, 62.

<sup>205</sup> Colburn 2020c, 60. See Jacobs 2021, 836: «the position of satrap was by no means reserved for Iranians».

<sup>206</sup> DB<sub>p</sub> col. III §§ 45-48.

<sup>207</sup> In Old Persian called Harauvatiš, Arachosia was a region probably centered around the valley of the Argandāb in Southern Afġānistān and extended northwards to the Southern slopes of the Hindūkūš, where it bordered Gāndhārā: cf. Jacobs 1994, 228-233. Bae 2001, 174-182 for a detailed treatment of the Arachosian campaign.



clash took place near «a fortress called Kāpišakāniš». <sup>208</sup> Despite his success, Vivāna was however forced to engage battle again, this time «in a district called Gandutava», which some scholars believe to be in the Kābul area, where his troops inflicted a devastating defeat on those of his rival. <sup>209</sup> Vahēyazdāta's lieutenants went into hiding, but Vivāna pursued them until he caught up with the rival armies in the vicinity of «a fortress named Ršādā in Arachosia». Here the rebels were again confronted, defeated, and their leaders taken prisoner by Vivāna who «slaughtered the men who were his [Vahēyazdāta's, but this could also refer to his lieutenants] closest associates». Following these events, Darius proclaims, «that land [Arachosia and neighboring territories] became mine». <sup>210</sup> The Ēlāmite text adds some revealing details about the fortress of Ršādā, which are completely absent from the Old Persian text. <sup>211</sup> Among other things, they provide a handy demonstration that the trilingual text of Bīsūtūn is not the result of translations from one of the languages «in which the king speaks» into the others; on the contrary, we are dealing with paraphrases, and therefore it would be appropriate to consider the three versions as different traditions of the same text and not - as tends to be done, especially if one is not endowed with the linguistic skills necessary to consult the different versions in the original - as three witnesses of a single tradition. The place where Vivāna won one of his battles is in fact called irmatam, and is explicitly said to have been the personal property of Vivāna, while the Old Persian version simply speaks of a didā, i. e. of a «fortress», and the same is to be found in the Akkadian rendering of the other two (birtu). <sup>212</sup> A second possibility to render the Old Persian didā into Ēlāmite would be through halmarriš, a word that, in the Persepolis archives, occurs to identify both a military stronghold and an administrative center in charge of the collection of the products from a certain region that are part of the tax in kind (bāji-, the Greek φόρος, often rendered as «tribute»). <sup>213</sup> Although significantly later (the last quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE), it is nevertheless interesting to note that even in the case of Bactria (and Sogdiana, especially the latter usually considered to have been little or not at all subject to Achaemenid control during this date), we are in possession of evidence showing the existence of something comparable to the Ršādā mentioned in the (Old Persian versions of the) inscription. Such evidence therefore deserves to be studied with some attention, since it may prove useful in understanding the functioning of politics and administration of the same territories in earlier centuries, for which no direct evidence has been preserved, thus forcing the historian to reason by the means of analogy. As it is well known, during

<sup>208</sup> The date of December 29<sup>th</sup>, 522 BCE can be guessed from DB<sub>p</sub> col. III § 45 (cf. *TPE* I, 147).

<sup>209</sup> Probably on February the 21<sup>st</sup> of the year 519 BCE, as it can be deduced from DB<sub>p</sub> col. III § 46 (cf. *TPE* I, 147).

<sup>210</sup> DB<sub>p</sub> col. III §§ 47-48 (*TPE* I, 147).

<sup>211</sup> Henkelman 2018c discusses in detail the importance of estates such as Ršādā likely was both in wartimes and in more peaceful contexts.

<sup>212</sup> Briant 2002, 444, *TPE* I, 156, DB<sub>e</sub> § 37, Db<sub>a</sub>, 83. See also Henkelman 2018b, 810-812 on this term and its meaning in the Ēlāmo-Irānian context of the so-called «Persian ethnogenesis» antedating the rise of the Empire.

<sup>213</sup> Henkelman 2017a, 105.

repeated military campaigns in the Surxondaryo valley in the South of present-day Uzbekistan, Alexander besieged, conquered, and sacked at least three fortresses/administrative centers apparently entirely analogous to the irmatam of Vivāna, and which (Greek) historiographical sources call πέτραι.<sup>214</sup> The temporal distance separating the two sources (Bīsūtūn on the one hand, Arrian and the Vulgata tradition on the other) does not seem in itself a sufficient reason to assume that, before Alexander, R̥šādā was an isolated case in Central Asia, and given the mirror-like functions held by Darius' two lieutenants North and South of Hindūkūš, there is on the contrary every ground to suspect that Dādêr̥šiš also had his own R̥šādā in Baktria. If it is not mentioned in the inscription, this might only be due to the fact that, unlike Vahêyazdāta, Frāda did not have time to reach Baktria, being confronted and defeated on his own soil, in Margiana. But there is another aspect of the mention of R̥šādā that should not be overlooked: since the context of the Bīsūtūn inscription leaves little doubt that the irmatam already existed before Darius' accession to the throne, it is not idle to wonder how to interpret the fact that Vivāna «owned» a land estate with a fort in Arachosia. The traditionally accepted explanation, once again, follows Briant's hypothesis that the local (Persian) satrap, namely Vivāna, received ex officio one (or more) properties as a royal gift.<sup>215</sup> This hypothesis is based - more or less implicitly - on a second one, namely that, starting from the reign of Cyrus, the Persians had been able to develop a bureaucratic and administrative system similar to the one reflected in the Persepolis archives, i. e. a mechanism of control and extraction of taxes (from which not even the estates of the satraps or those of other officials settled in the territory were exempt) managed and controlled by a strong body of officials under the guidance of a treasurer (in Old Persian \*ganzabara), who meticulously recorded the amount of fiscally assessable produce coming from the different districts of the Empire and then organized its transport to the major imperial administrative and political centers, from Persepolis itself to Susa and Ekbatana.<sup>216</sup> Evidence of the existence - across the entire imperial territory - of such a pattern of land management has been recognized in PF 1495, a tablet dated between February and March 500 BCE («in the twelfth month, year 22 [of Darius, the King]»).<sup>217</sup> According to the text of this document, a party of 31 men led by a certain Miššabadda is

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<sup>214</sup> See for example the account provided by Arr. *Anab.*, 4.3.29: «Alexander invaded the territory of the Sogdians, which is in all respects rugged and impassable. In the midst of it stands a rock which is accessible only to birds, and a thick and impenetrable forest surrounds it, making the peaks of this rock, already inaccessible, even more inaccessible. Arimazes exercised control over this rock by means of a solid fortress equipped with Sogdians, and he controlled water sources and ample food supplies». Curtius Rufus (7.11.1) makes use of the very same word (Una erat petra, quam Ariamazes I Sogdianus cum xxx milibus armatorum obtinebat, alimentis ante congestis quae tantae multitudini vel per biennium suppeteren). See on Alexander and the Central Asian rocks the insightful contribution by Rollinger 2014c.

<sup>215</sup> Briant 2002, 445. See most recently Garrison and Henkelman 2020, 222. What is sure is, as the two scholars remark, that such landed properties were «subjected to taxation and other obligations». They were visited by «registrars» (called karamarašbe) and in at least one case (NN 2556, as referenced in Garrison and Henkelman 2020, 222) those officers most likely «made a registry of landholders on the estate and/or their produce».

<sup>216</sup> On the travels to and from Susa see Briant 2018a, 269-273.

<sup>217</sup> Henkelman 2017a, 165 for a treatment of this tablet's content.

mentioned as overseeing the transport of the «baziš [Ēlāmite for the Old Persian bāji-, i. e. the «tribute», literally the «share» (of the king)] of Udana».<sup>218</sup> The men, the tablet continues, were on their way «from Barrikana to Susa». The hypothesis that the contingent in question came from Arachosia is made almost certain by the fact that the official in charge of it, Miššabadda, was carrying «a sealed document [halmiš, an actual waybill or «passport»] from Bakabaduš», who in turn is known to be the issuing authority for similar travel documents authorizing the movement of various contingents of people, animals, and goods to and from Arachosia.<sup>219</sup> The almost predictable consequence of this fact would be that such Bakabaduš was probably a very high-ranking official, if not the satrap himself.<sup>220</sup> Moreover, as noted by Wouter Henkelman, «the expression “*baziš* of PN [a given person’s name]” suggests a more personal form of tribute, hence individuals of some rank [Udana, Bakabaduš, and perhaps even Miššabadda himself] with an interest [of private, personal nature] in Arachosia and Barrikana/\*Parikāna. A tentative explanation may be found in the bestowal of royal land grants to nobles and high-ranking administrators, who enjoyed the revenue of such estates, but were not exempt of obligations in the form of (military) service or material tribute».<sup>221</sup> In order to further support Briant’s hypothesis – the implications of which he shares - Henkelman goes on to illustrate a rather large casuistry of testimonies similar to the one concerning Miššabadda coming from documents of the Persepolis archives, previously unknown and edited and commented by himself, in order to demonstrate - in a very convincing way - that at least as far as 5<sup>th</sup> century Arachosia is concerned (but there are no reasons to think that in Baktria things were radically different) a system of tax collection and produce transportation such as the one highlighted by the Miššabadda travel expedition was perfectly established (which, however, still leaves open the question of the time needed for the running in of such a system, as well as nothing is said about the involvement of the locals in it, which is unthinkable to have been absent). Further comparative material of some interest comes from Achaemenid Babylonia, notably from the archives of the entrepreneurial family of the Murašû, which shows that, at least in Mesopotamia, infrastructures such

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<sup>218</sup> See King 2019 and Schütze 2021 on Achaemenid taxation system in Arachosia. *WAI*, 150-151 on the etymology of bāji.

<sup>219</sup> Cf. moreover PF 1530, where a man called Haurbaukbama and referred to as tidda-huttira (something like «inspector») is recorded as on the road headed towards the king by order of the same Bakabaduš, and two other men are enlisted with him. Another example is provided by NN 0803 (a sealed authorization from Bakabaduš) which accounts for more than 800 kurtaš («workers») travelling to Susa coming from Arachosia: see Henkelman 2017a, 160, referencing the unpublished tablet.

<sup>220</sup> The translation follows the one provided by Henkelman 2017a, 165. This Bakabaduš is known from other documents as the principal imperial administrator, and perhaps even the satrap, of Achaemenid Arachosia during Darius’ reign. The oldest evidence of his name is to be found in Fort. 1901A (Dar.19 = 503 BCE): Henkelman 2017a, 156 fn. 165. King 2021, 266-277 for the most recent and detailed treatment of Bakabaduš and his household.

<sup>221</sup> Henkelman 2017a, 165. It should also be noted that this is not an isolated case. A person named Bakabasu seems to have issued a travel passport to another group of travelers led by an official named Bakadadda (again, Arachosia is the party’s region of origin), apparently in order to collect tribute (baziš): see NN 2149 and also NN 2580 with Henkelman 2017a, 98-99, where both tablets are referenced.

as the *irmatam/halmarriš* were included in the Achaemenid tax system to an extraordinary degree of depth.<sup>222</sup> Fruits, grains, rations for labor and troops, livestock, and much more were in fact stored within a wide network of *irmatam*, suggesting that these estates were indeed subject to a range of fiscal, and perhaps, as argued by Henkelman, military obligations.<sup>223</sup> This, in turn, makes it possible to assume with a certain degree of confidence that the «elite travel expeditions», as Henkelman calls them, which at the current state of knowledge are moreover attested in no less than 11 tablets in Arachosia alone, should be studied in the context of a political and economic network introduced by the Achaemenids in Central Asia in the same way as in other satrapies of the Empire, in which however our documentation is more abundant and consequently the phenomenon is already known and recognized as such (for example in Egypt and Babylonia).<sup>224</sup>

The argument is convincing, and the data cited in support seem unambiguous: but are we allowed, based on these elements, to conclude that, wanting to limit ourselves to the case of Central Asia, landed properties similar to that of *Vivāna* cannot be understood otherwise than as the fruit of royal prodigality? As said, the parallel of the Sogdian fortresses (*πέτραι*) mentioned by Alexander's historiographers, and in particular the case of the rock controlled by Arimazes, should inspire caution. Recently identified with a relative degree of plausibility thanks to intensive archaeological survey activity carried out by French and O'zbek scholars (under the direction of Claude Rapin), the *πέτρα* of Arimazes was apparently located North of the modern O'zbek village of Derbent, near a relief called *Sarymas*.<sup>225</sup> This, in turn, occupies a position of paramount importance, protecting the strategic ford of the *Machai Darya*, a river that, when in flood, is an almost unpassable obstacle even today: the strategic role of this ford, it should be noted, derives mainly from its location at a bottleneck along the main road leading from *Baktra* to the *Qashqadaryo* valley and from there to the *Zarafšān* basin (which means to the territory of *Marakanda/Afrāsyāb*, and thus to the Sogdian steppes).<sup>226</sup> A further feature worth mentioning about the fortress of Arimazes (and which in fact did not escape the attention of Alexander's historians, just as it did not go unnoticed by his soldiers and generals) is the remarkable amount of provisions stored at a relatively remote site in a secluded valley in Uzbekistan, which fears no comparison with similar lists of goods and food resources known from other contexts (again called *irmatam*), from Babylonia to Egypt to *Kīrmāna* (*Carmania*, modern province of *Kermān*,

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<sup>222</sup> Jursa and Moreno García 2015 for a comparative study of the fiscal systems of Egypt and Babylonia as forerunners of the Achaemenid imperial paradigm in those regions. Dromard 2021 for a detailed case study from Nippur and the surrounding region.

<sup>223</sup> Henkelman 2017a, 166.

<sup>224</sup> Henkelman 2017a, 164. The social status of the actors involved in these tablets can be deduced, according to the scholar, from a small number of men or *šalup* («free») and the relatively considerable number of *puhu* («servants», literally «boys»). See e. g. NN 1188, a tablet recording a company of 8 *šalup* and 55 *puhu* led by a certain *Miramanna* and travelling from Arachosia to an unknown destination (possibly *Susa*), as referenced in Henkelman 2017a, 164.

<sup>225</sup> See most recently Rapin *et al.* 2022 on this region of *Surxondaryo*.

<sup>226</sup> Note Rapin 2013 and the cautionary remarks by Stančo 2021.

in Southeastern Irān).<sup>227</sup> Since it is rather implausible that Arimazes had amassed such an amount of resources (according to our written evidence enough to maintain - at least - 3000 men, without counting their families, for two years) exclusively in anticipation of the siege by Alexander, it is reasonable to assume that his *πέτρα*, as well as the Ršādā of Vivāna, was part of the Empire's fiscal system, whose tax collections justify the amount of resources (and of others it is possible to assume the existence, most likely stored in units depending on the residence of Arimazes himself) present in the fortress at the time of the arrival of the Makedonian troops. But that is not the entire story. In the Greek sources, Arimazes is called ὕπαρχος (*dux, rex, praetor* by the Latin authors), and the context within which he is mentioned - the resistance to Alexander's advance by a not insignificant faction of the Central Asian aristocracy - leads to the hypothesis that Arimazes was one of those big men who seem to have negotiated their political position within the Achaemenid Empire by virtue of, among other things, the control they held over vital resources such as mountain passes or fords similar to the Machai Darya, which the representatives of imperial power in Baktria (and not only there) had not only the interest, but the necessity, to keep open in order to ensure the lines of communication between the satrapal's main settlements (in this case Baktra, further South) and the Eastern limits of the (direct) political influence wielded by Persian authority in Central Asia.<sup>228</sup> It could moreover be argued that a cogent ethnographic parallel of such big men is given, for example, by the male figurehead of an extended family similar to those who, at least until the mid-1930s, but in certain parts of the countryside even now, lived in Central Asia and the Caucasus, e. g. in the province of Naxçıvan, on the border of the Azerbaijani steppes - ancient Media Atropatene (Ἀτροπατήνη) - and whose oldest members represented, and sometimes still do so, the ruling class of the entire village unit (called *aul* in Central Asia and *obščina* in the Russian countryside).

Both in the case of Vivāna and Arimazes, the importance in both economic and strategic terms of the estates/fortresses they controlled is evident from the stubbornness, in one case rewarded, in the other not, with which Alexander on the one hand and, on the other, Vahêyazdāta about two centuries earlier, tried to take possession of them; and despite the fact that the Bīsutūn inscription is rather laconic about the events in Baktria, it does not seem too far-fetched to assume that Dādêršiš made efforts to confront the rebels in Margiana on their territory precisely in order to prevent similar

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<sup>227</sup> Cf. Arr. *Anab.*, 4.16.3, whose account, however, provides only indirect evidence about the stronghold. In contrast, as in other cases, Curt. 7.11.1-3 offers a more detailed description, which deserves to be quoted in full: «There was a stronghold, which Arimazes, a native of Sogdiana [«Ariamazes Sogdianus»], ruled with 3000 armed men in his charge, and in which he had previously stored supplies capable of supporting an army of that size for the entire duration of two years. The fortress rises to a height of 30 stadia and its perimeter measures 150 stadia; overhanging on all sides, it is only accessible through a narrow and steep corridor. In the middle of this path there is a cavern, the entrance to which is narrow and dark, but then gradually widens to contain deep recesses. There are abundant springs in it and the water that collects in this cave gives life to a river that flows down the mountainside».

<sup>228</sup> Rapin 2013, 66-69 provides the most topographically accurate discussion to date of the fortress of Arimazes and of the complex of other *πέτρα* located in this apparently strategically important region of Achaemenid Central Asia.

attempts as those of Vahêyazdâta against strongholds similar to the Arachosian Ršādā, but this time located North of Hindūkūš, i. e. in Baktria.<sup>229</sup> If we wanted to further pursue the analogy with Alexander's Central Asian expedition, we ought perhaps to put forward the following hypothesis. Like Arimazes, both Dādêršiš and Vivāna were prominent figures of the local society who, at the decisive moment of the invasion launched by the armies of Vahêyazdâta and Frāda and of Darius' counter-offensive, were shrewd enough to choose the right side.<sup>230</sup> As a consequence, and by analogy with what happened to some luckier (or more cunning) colleagues of Arimazes, above all Alexander's future father-in-law, the Baktrian Oxyartes, they were allowed to keep the possessions that Cyrus, Cambyses and, in the specific case of Baktria and Arachosia, the latter's younger brother - Bṛdiyā - (of whom some sources claim that he was appointed governor in Central Asia, in a co-regent fashion not too different from that of Antiochos I centuries later) had left them in exchange 1. for formal political submission and 2. for the men and resources they were able to mobilize in the territories under their jurisdiction.<sup>231</sup>

In the adoption of this strategy it is possible to recognize, to use a sociological formula, the attempt by the Great Kings of Persia to build a «minimum winning coalition», without which the control of conquered territories would have been, if not impossible, at the very least extremely demanding, and this especially when what Scott calls «the friction of the terrain» caused by distances such as those in Central Asia made rapid and effective interventions particularly complex.<sup>232</sup> As shown by Edgar Kiser and Margaret Levi in a recent assessment of the entrenchment strategies of infrastructural power of supra-regional political entities (from modern nation states to pre-industrial Empires), the negotiation process underlying such potentially highly unstable coalitions can be structured (among other things) through the granting of rights, bribes, and privileges by the (aspirational) hegemonic power, i. e. «the state», to the members of what the two scholars call a given «selectorate»: namely

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<sup>229</sup> DB<sub>p</sub> col. III § 38 merely states that Dādêršiš «waged battle against the Margians» (cf. *TPE* I, 146), but if the comparative evidence of Alexander's campaign provides any reliable indication - as I personally would be keen to believe - there is every reason to suspect that Arimazes' was not an isolated case (after all, Alexander sacked the territory, if not the building itself, of at least two other similar units) and that it was not limited to Sogdiana (why should it be, after all?), from which one might deduce that in Baktria there were similar other *πέτραι* (Kuhna Qal'a in the plain of Āi Xānum for instance?) of which the historiographic sources have not preserved any trace.

<sup>230</sup> Irrespective of being ethnically Central Asians or not, we should assume that their position was acquired through negotiations with local élites, especially in the light of the swiftness of Cyrus' conquest and Cambyses' consolidation. This likely gave both of the two bandaka remarkable latitude, and therefore interests, in the territories under their purview: compare King 2020.

<sup>231</sup> As pointed out by Petrie and Magee 2007, 14, both the literary sources and, independently of these, the archaeological evidence makes the existence of «a dualism» inherent in the structure of Achaemenid authority in the East of the Empire quite clear (see moreover Petrie 2020). Briant himself (2002, 37-38) admits that, in the case of the Lydian revolt lead by Paktyes (Just. *Epit.*, 1.7.11), everything suggests that Cyrus called upon local cadres during the period of transition from Lydian to Persian rule: a choice, according to him, by no means without risk but which, despite a few mishaps, seems to have proved successful in the long run. Are we therefore not entitled to imagine a similar scenario in Central Asia?

<sup>232</sup> See Scott 2009, 68-72 on the importance for supra-regional political entities to overcome the obstacles imposed by the «friction of the terrain» 1. by reducing the mobility of the subject population(s) and, if this is not possible 2. by taking root in the territory through strategic alliances.

to the representatives of local power(s) who build the privileged (but not exclusive) audience to which the cooperative afflatus of an Empire is usually addressed.<sup>233</sup>

### 2.3.2. The Dynastic Pact: an (*ethno*)*classe dominante*?

In the context of the Achaemenid system of government, the application of this strategy of structuring and consolidating imperial power has been recognized by Pierre Briant as the cornerstone of what the scholar has called «the dynastic pact», the distinctive aspects of which have been summarized with great effectiveness in a passage from Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*. In fact, addressing a group of notables, Chrysantas, Cyrus' advisor on diplomacy, claims that, both for the most prominent Persian families and for those subjects who had chosen to collaborate actively in the project of imperial consolidation and expansion, the interests (and enemies) of such allies would become the interests (and enemies) of Cyrus himself.<sup>234</sup> One aspect that needs to be underlined regarding the functioning of the dynastic pact and the granting of privileges to individuals and/or prominent families within a given territory (i. e. a system of clientelist networks) is that this strategy is not at odds with the development of institutions (in the sense of Douglass North, that is, constraints conceived by human beings and aimed at structuring political, economic, and social interactions) and protocols seeking to create - and uphold - a structure capable of managing, monitoring, and developing the - very different - regions of the Empire, even those without a bureaucratic-scribal tradition or a written language, as seems to have been the case in the Eastern satrapies before the coming of the Empire.<sup>235</sup> The reason for this lies in the fact that, especially in the initial phase of conquest and consolidation of Persian hegemony (say, at least, the first ten years) - and particularly in regions that were geographically and socially extremely complex, such as the Caucasus and Central Asia - difficulties of communication, extremely high transportation costs (especially overland), and the almost total absence of any archival tradition comparable to those so deeply rooted in areas like Egypt or Babylonia must have limited to a considerable extent the penetration of both forms of state

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<sup>233</sup> Concerning the use of such terminology see Kiser and Levi 2015, 565 with references.

<sup>234</sup> Cf. Xen. *Cyr.*, 8.1.5 and Briant 2002, 354. A similar opinion is expressed by Cyrus' father, Cambyses, in the speech attributed to him by Xenophon also in the same *Cyropaedia* (8.5.22-26).

<sup>235</sup> Henkelman 2017a, 80-81. About the concept of institutions as developed by Douglass C. North (1920-2015, Nobel Prize in Economics in 1993) and the importance of this theoretical tool for studying the (especially, but by no means only, economic) functioning of pre-modern societies see Goldstone and Haldon 2009, von Reden 2019a, 3 and von Reden and Speidel 2019, 703-709. One of the clearest demonstrations of the possibility, at least theoretically, of reconciling the most blatant clientelist system with the most elephantine of bureaucracies and the most capillary social control (or the aspiration to it) is given by Stalinist Soviet Union, in which, alongside the state apparatus, a mafia-like family system flourished (as defined by Baberowski 2012), actively promoted by Stalin's «Caucasian clan» and his closest collaborators (from Sergo Ordžonikidze to Anastas Mikojan and from Lavrentii Berija to Mir Cəfər Bağırov), who had grown up in societies governed by remarkably similar mechanisms.

power, which Michael Mann has described as «despotic» and «infrastructural».<sup>236</sup> In the light of the hindrances (of which the logistical ones are only the most obvious) that the Persian conquerors had to face, the hypothesis that both decentralization and «partial privatization» of activities such as territorial control and taxation were recognized as by far the most effective strategies to achieve the two fundamental imperial goals of revenue collection and maintenance of internal order, and that they have therefore been adopted not obtorto collo, but in full awareness of the advantages for both parties involved in regions such as Baktria, Sogdiana or Arachosia arguably gains considerably in terms of plausibility.<sup>237</sup>

If we now want to draw from the analogy with the case of Arimazes and the other ὑπαρχοὶ of Baktria and Sogdiana all the consequences that such a comparison implies, it seems not without foundation to assume that, following the upheaval caused by the death of Cambyses (a dynastic crisis precipitated in a full-fledged civil war and which bears more than one analogy both with the attempted usurpation of Cyrus the Younger at the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century (the battle of Cunaxa took place in 401 BCE) and, what is more interesting here, with the events following the assassination of Darius III), the priority aim pursued by individuals such as Vivāna and Dādêršiš might have been none other than the protection of their possessions and (consequently) of the power – both social and economic - that derived from them. The only difference between the story of Arimazes and that of Darius' two lieutenants (but in some ways they are comparable to Oxyartes or Artabazos) is to be found in the fact that Vivāna and Dādêršiš had the foresight to side, timely enough, with the faction that at the end of the civil war ended up victorious, not least thanks to their active involvement.<sup>238</sup> If Alexander had been forced to withdraw from Central Asia, there is no reason to doubt that Spitamenes would not have failed to reward Arimazes for his indefatigable resistance to the invader (and, consequently, that the fate of Oxyartes would have been much different, and arguably considerably worse). It is therefore hardly surprising that Darius did the same with Vivāna and Dādêršiš who, like Oxyartes, were confirmed in their positions, kept their privileges, and perhaps - but we cannot know for sure - even managed to expand their sphere of influence (as we know from historiographic sources happened in the case of Oxyartes) to the detriment of those who, in Arachosia and Baktria, had bet – as one could rightly say in the light of Herodotos' anecdote concerning Darius' conquest of the throne - on the wrong (neighing) horse.<sup>239</sup> Put another way, the title of satraps (which does not derive from a decision

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<sup>236</sup> Mann 1984, 188-192; 1986, 95 ff. On the age of Teispid's great conquests see Kuhrt 2021.

<sup>237</sup> Cf. Mann 1984 as well as the remarks by Kiser and Levi 2015, 558-560.

<sup>238</sup> On Artabazos cf. Arr. *Anab.*, 3.23.7 (where his position among the innermost circles of Darius III's court is emphasized), Curt. 3.13.13, Plut. *Vit. Artax.*, 27.4, Xen. *Hell.*, 5.1.28 as well as the bibliographical entry in Heckel 2006, 55. As for Oxyartes see e. g. Arr. *Anab.*, 6.15.3, Curt. 8.4.21-24, Diod. Sic. 18.3.3 as well as the related entry in Heckel 2006, 187-188.

<sup>239</sup> Hdt. 3.89 and Rollinger 2017a. According to Curt. 9.8.9-10, Oxyartes (praetor Bactrianorum) not only retained the territories he already governed at the time of Alexander's invasion, but was even able to expand them, no doubt to the



taken by Darius, the latter, for the lack of appropriate means in the context of the civil war, seemingly limiting himself to the confirmation of a given status quo ante) could be interpreted as the reward given by the new Great King to Dādêršiš and Vivāna in recognition of the loyalty they showed him at the decisive moment of his bid for the throne. If this hypothesis were to be accepted, it would follow that Darius' victory over the liar kings would have marked, by virtue of the royal favor, the advancement of both Dādêršiš and Vivāna from the ranks of the local élite to that of members of the (new) imperial top class. In this sense, they now truly became «Persians», by which one would mean the incorporation of both into the uppermost ranks of the newly (re)born Empire, in the same way that becoming Ἕλληνες in the context of the Seleukid kingdom - for example in Baktria - meant in all likelihood having attained a social and political status, and therefore a cultural, and not an ethnic or even less an identarian, affiliation.<sup>240</sup> Such a hypothesis would moreover fit rather well with the career of other ethnically non-Persian favorites in the early years of Achaemenid power, as is shown by the case of the most famous among them, the Egyptian Udjaḥorresnet, commander between 526 and 525 BCE of Cambyses' fleet during the battle of Pelusium.<sup>241</sup>

Although not in itself in contradiction with the available evidence, it must also be admitted that such a reconstruction must at present remain at the stage of hypothesis, since the gaps in the documentation are too many and too significant for it to be demonstrated. What can be done, however, is to compare the scenario proposed here with the one traditionally accepted by scholars and try to establish which of the two is more economical. In any case, even if one chooses, in deference to Ockham's razor, to stick to the letter of the Bīsūtūn text and consequently to recognize in Vivāna and Dādêršiš two Persians (in the sense of «ethnically native of Fārs») and holders (the one by explicit admission of

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detriment of those among his peers who had been less able to juggle politically between the evanescent Persian power and Alexander's (now) irresistible rising star. In this regard, the fact that Oxyartes maintained his privileges even after the death of his son-in-law is not negligible: see *FGrHist* 100 F 8 (5), Diod. Sic. 18.3.3, Just. *Epit.*, 13.4.21, and *Lib. Mort.* 121 concerning the arrangements made at Babylon (323 BCE) and Diod. Sic. 18.39.6 (on Triparadeisos, in 321 BCE).

<sup>240</sup> On the concept of the imperial élite within the Persian Empire see Briant 2002, 347-357; 2018a, 379-415, Basello 2021. As Adriano V. Rossi pointed out (2010, 297), «the self-designation Pārsa- in the royal inscriptions points to membership in the political entity», which no doubt included speakers of different languages belonging to different groups. As far as the understanding of «Hellenism» in the Seleukid Empire is concerned, see the insightful remarks in Strootman 2011; 2020 (a and b). On the difference between ethnic identity and cultural belonging (or affiliation) see the interesting case studies discussed in Mairs 2012a; 2013c; 2014b, 113-145. As it comes to the creation of an élitarian (political) identity in the Achaemenid Empire see Colburn 2020a, 131 ff.; 2020c.

<sup>241</sup> On imperial favor as the main driver of social mobility both in the case of Persians and other ἔθνη within the Empire see Briant 2002, 332-334, Wiesehöfer 201, and Rollinger 2014b, 159-161. On the figure of the court favorite see Strootman 2014, 179-184. The career and personality of Udjaḥorresnet have recently been studied by Henry Colburn (2020a, 179-187), who has warned against the use of terms such as favorite or (from his point of view, even less appropriate) collaborator as negatively connoted (Colburn explicitly mentions Vidkun Quisling (1887-1945), referring to a long scholarly tradition which aimed at comparing the latter with Udjaḥorresnet). In the case in question of Dādêršiš and Vivāna, as should be clear from the discussion, the comparison could not be more out of place, because 1. the balance of forces in the field at the time of Darius was not the same as at the time of Quisling and 2. because, if the interpretation of the Bīsūtūn text proposed here were correct, the two Central Asian lieutenants would show considerably more initiative than that of a mere executor of external orders, a figure now identified *paris pro toto* with the notorious Norwegian politician. On the concept of «imperial collaborator» see moreover the insightful remarks by Düring and Stek (2018a).

Darius, the other by virtue of a fair probability) of land concessions assigned to them by the Great King (probably already Cyrus, almost certainly Cambyses - or Bṛdiyā ) and active as satraps in two regions that in the course of subsequent decades would become the cornerstones of the administration of the entire Achaemenid East, the consequences would be of no less importance. On the contrary, even in the case of a more literal interpretation of the inscription, we would be faced with first-hand evidence that, as early as the last quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, Achaemenid Central Asia was organized according to certain distinctive features of the Persian strategy of imperial consolidation, which leads one to wonder how it was possible to achieve such remarkable results within - at most - just twenty years. In the following pages, the attempt will be made to offer some hypotheses to this crucial question based on the documentary evidence available and of some other sources that are external to the time and space under investigation, but which it shall be argued allow to develop a compelling interpretative framework through which our (Achaemenid-related) source material can fruitfully be scrutinized. Before going on, however, it is appropriate to dwell on the portrait - indeed a rather dry one - of Dādêršiš as it is offered at Bīsutūn, since it contains two other terms that, as we will try to show, reveal more than one might at first suspect about how the Achaemenids, at least since the reign of Darius, imagined the space of Baktria as part of their domains and, secondly, concerning how the Great Kings planned to control this space and its population: otherwise stated, how they thought to put into practice the «hoped-for-fantasy» which Mark Garrison identified as one of the hallmarks of the entire Bīsutūn narrative.<sup>242</sup>

#### 2.4. «A servant of mine»

When introducing the section devoted to his (Darius') exploits in Baktria and Margiana, the by now Great King qualifies Dādêršiš as his *bandaka*. Usually translated as «henchman», «servant», «vassal» or, following the misleading and most likely tendentious Greek translation (δοῦλος) of the Persian noun as «slave», *bandaka* is actually an extremely complex term, of which the Bīsutūn inscription provides the earliest preserved evidence. With the exception of his father Vīštāspa, of whom it is simply said (DB<sub>p</sub> col. III § 35) that «he was in Parthia» (haḥ [Vīštāspa] Parθavaḥ āha), the term *bandaka* is used to identify all those individuals who sided with Darius in his battle against the liar kings (i. e. his - apparently equally legitimate - competitors to the throne).<sup>243</sup> This applies as much in the case of the two generals who fought in Armenia (the aforementioned Dādêršiš, explicitly called Armenian, and a «Persian» named Vaumisa) as in that of Taḥmaspāda, the Mede, and also with regard

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<sup>242</sup> Garrison 2011, 17-18.

<sup>243</sup> Compare Grillot-Susini *et al.* 1993, 50 (DB<sub>e</sub>, § 35, DB<sub>a</sub>, 35): «Vīštāspa, my father, was in Parthia».

to the two Central Asian lieutenants, Dādêršiš and Vivāna. It is not idle at this juncture to note that the same terminology is used to refer also to the most important among the men who, in Darius' account, in this followed by Herodotos' narrative, took part in the conspiracy that culminated in the assassination of Gaumāta. From this it is in fact possible to infer that, contrary to what the Greek translation suggests, a bandaka was a man 1. of free condition and 2. of high social status, the latter depending, at least in part, on the proximity of the bandaka himself to the King or to other influential members of his family. Equally remarkable is the fact that the title could apparently be bestowed irrespective of one's membership to the (Persian) ethno-classe dominante, since a Mede and an Armenian are also explicitly called bandaka, suggesting once more that the highest ranks of Achaemenid court society were not per se closed to non-Persians.<sup>244</sup> As already mentioned, the Herodotean account of these same events (the conspiracy against Gaumāta/Smerdis) provides further support to what has been argued so far because, given the fact that at least in this context it proves to be surprisingly faithful to the Bīsutūn text, it allows us to draw a comparison between the way Darius represents his acolytes and the point of view chosen by the historian. The usefulness of the latter, as noted in the previous chapter, lies not so much in its nature as a chronicle of events, but in the way it depicts the courtly environments of the time and the relationships within it, to which one must add the (in no way benevolent) emphasis given by Herodotos to the more «trickster-like» aspects of the Achaemenid ruler's character (or dramatis persona). Now: the fact that in both narratives Darius calls bandaka individuals such as Otanes (Οτάνης in Herodotos, Hutana in the inscription), who seem to have enjoyed a social status and a degree of prestige at least comparable to that of Darius himself, provides the best evidence of the nature of aristocratic solidarity conveyed by the term, at least in its original sociolinguistic context.<sup>245</sup> It is therefore possible to argue that the bandakā (plur. of bandaka) were individuals of high rank, «bound» (as this is in fact the meaning of the Indo-European root \*bhendh from which the term, like the German binden or the English to bind, derives) to the King by a relationship which, although implying formal subordination, was freely accepted, and probably

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<sup>244</sup> See on this matter at least Briant 2002, 335-337 and Wiesehöfer 2010, 514-519. As Briant himself has noted (2017a, 509-510), Arrian's mention (*Anab.*, 1.17.3) of a group of powerful individuals at Sardis at the time of Alexander's conquest (οἱ δυνατώτατοι τῶν Σαρδιανῶν) might be an explicit reference to a «community separated» from but at the same time «linked to the satrap», which was moreover entrusted with very important administrative tasks in the region of the main Lydian city. We would therefore see, down in the last year of Achaemenid rule, the permanence beside the Persian political apparatus of local power structures of considerable relevance.

<sup>245</sup> Cf. DB<sub>p</sub> col. IV § 68 (DB<sub>c</sub>, § 54, DB<sub>a</sub>, 110): next to Otanes, the Bīsutūn text mentions a Gaubaruva, (whom Herodotos calls Gobrias - Γοβρύας -, while the Ēlāmite text of the inscription reads Kambarma), Bagabuxša (Μεγάβυζος) and Ardumaniš (this is the only one among the names of the conspirators not to occur in Herodotos, who instead mentions a certain Ἀσπάρτινες, whose name in any case - cf. the root \*asp- = horse, as in the case of Vištāspa, see the modern Fārsi word اسب - must have suggested a noble origin, whether he was a historical figure or not: think of the (allegedly) «proletarian» poet Hipponax (Ἰππῶναξ), whose name actually means, in a rather Homeric fashion «lord of horses»). Cf. moreover Hdt. 3.70.

sanctioned through an oath.<sup>246</sup> There is arguably enough evidence, therefore, to advance the hypothesis that we are dealing in this case with a courtly title, which was probably bestowed both on members of the most eminent families of the Persian aristocracy (as in the case of Otanes) and on individuals coming from the élite of the conquered societies (as for instance probably happened with Udjahorresnet), with the intention, according to Briant, of weakening family solidarity in favor of dynastic loyalty and therefore isolating the notables within a one-to-one relationship with the King, to whom they were, literally, bounded.<sup>247</sup> In other words, it would have been, according to Briant, a prosecution «by other means» of the dynastic pact mentioned above. Such a social dynamic does not seem to have escaped the notice of some Greek authors (e. g. the much-belittled Diodoros Siculus), who describe the bandakā in terms unequivocally analogous to those of the φίλοι well-known from the Hellenistic courts. Moreover, the historian does not fail to emphasize how the power of one or the other, although depending to a significant extent - especially in the case of the favorites - on the benevolence of the Great King, who had the right at any time to revoke the title and the privileges attached to it (and therefore to inflict a severe blow to the social position and the political and economic influence of the bandaka), was not however entirely dependent on the support of the imperial court and of its dominus.<sup>248</sup> As both Rolf Strootman and Jeroen Duindam have strongly emphasized and demonstrated with a wealth of examples, far from being the Benthamite device of panoptic control described by Norbert Elias, the pre-modern court was on the contrary at least as much the ideal place for local élites to compete among themselves and, to a certain extent, even with the King (who was undoubtedly the biggest player, but not the only one), in order to turn the courtly dynamics of favor and privilege to their own advantage.<sup>249</sup> For the purposes of this discussion, the fundamental aspect of an institution such as the bandaka is that, at least according to the Bīsūtūn text,

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<sup>246</sup> See Eilers and Herrenschildt 1988, 684. Such relationship was usually made explicitly visible through a belt, which was not rarely worn by the Great King himself. That the language employed at Bīsūtūn can be deceptive, and it is, moreover, highly rhetorical, and ideological is shown, among other things, by the Babylonian version of the text, where bandakā is rendered as qallū (the Akkadian for «slave»): King 2021, 178 with references.

<sup>247</sup> Cf. Briant 2002, 325, Klinkott 2005, 35 - who quotes Xen. *Cyr.*, 8.6.10-11 to show that the functions of the satrap, and consequently his self-representation «were structured in accordance with the principle of an imitatio regis» and Klinkott 2008, which is however limited to the only (ethnic) Persian élite.

<sup>248</sup> This is for example the moral of the story of Orontes as told by Diod. Sic. 15.11.2 and, centuries later, by Plut. *Vit. Artax.*, 11.2. During the reign of Artaxerxes II (405-358 BCE), the commander of the Persian troops who led the siege of Cyprus, a certain Tiribazos, was accused by his colleague Orontes, jealous of the former's success and prestige, of having secretly made agreements with the enemy (Diod. Sic. 15.8.3-4). Tiribazos was brought to trial but managed to prove the slanderous intent of Orontes' accusations, who was «covered with infamy and was excluded from the circle of friends [of the King]» (ἐκ τε τῶν φίλων ἐξέκρῖνε). It is quite clear from the context that the Greek φίλος is a translation, undoubtedly more appropriate than δοῦλος, of the Persian bandaka. On the Kings' φίλοι in the Hellenistic period see Strootman 2014, 147-150. Note, moreover, Diod. Sic. 15.91.1 and Briant 2017a, 70, from which it can be argued that indeed Orontes' position within his own satrapy was very much comparable with that of Spitamenes in Sogdiana. On the Hellenistic φίλοι see most recently Egetenmeier 2021, 104-174 on *Königsfreunde als Mittler: Aufgaben, Rollen, Erwartungen*.

<sup>249</sup> See Duindam 1994 for an insightful critique of the influential model of court functioning developed by Norbert Elias over half a century ago (*Die höfische Gesellschaft* dates to 1969). On the court as an instrument of power (of the sovereign and his subordinates) and theatre of rituality (royal as well as aristocratic) see Strootman 2014, 31-92. On the social dynamics within it see again Strootman 2014, 145-164 and Duindam 2016, 150 ff.

it was designed to be (and in fact was) replicated in the territories of the various satrapies, to all intents and purposes mirroring locally the hierarchies and social practices of the imperial court. That of the satrap (himself a *bandaka*), in other words, can be described as a small-scale copy of the court of the Great King.<sup>250</sup> Just like their Achaemenid superiors, in fact, satraps too adopted strategies described by sociologists as «network building» and characterized by practices known to anthropology as «unequal exchange», «binding gift», and ritual hospitality. The paramount goal of this - not negligible - use of resources, which implied the capacity of collecting and mobilizing them in the first place, was to build their own social fabric of *bandakā*, the loyalty of whom (often themselves belonging to members of the most prestigious and powerful families of a given territory and/or social group) was ensured through the bestowing of prestigious positions within the cadres of the army or in the administrative apparatus, for example through the office of treasurer (\**ganzabara*).<sup>251</sup> A central aspect of this process that should not be overlooked - and which constitutes one of the central arguments underpinning the present work - is the proactive role of both the *bandakā* and of the *bandakā* of the *bandakā*, whose particular interests and the dynamics of social competition at the local level were able to influence imperial strategies to no lesser an extent than the ability of the latter to shape the former. A paradigmatic example of the functioning of this mechanism is offered by the Qazaq Communist Party (but those of other Soviet republics - for example the Georgian one - could also be brought to bear here). The latter, in fact, rapidly developed into a real socialist courtly society - not by chance modelled on that taking shape in and around the Kremlin - which, in this case truly born, following the model developed by Elias, as an instrument of control and domestication of local society, quickly turned into a theatre for the prosecutions, again by other means, of the internal feuds of Qazaq high-society.<sup>252</sup> Such a centrifugal spiral eventually forced Stalin, who initially had become its active promoter and guarantor, to take rather drastic countermeasures (as it was his style), but the remarkable point is that he succeeded in stemming, and also in this case, only partially, such dynamics only through the carefully planned chaos of collectivization, which was in turn followed, in a short time, by the Great Terror. This are all means, as it has been mentioned, which were far beyond the capacity – to say nothing of the will - of even the most stereotypical oriental autocrat.<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> Briant 2002, 312-314.

<sup>251</sup> For a detailed discussion of the «binding gift» see Algazi 2003. On satrapal hospitality as the main strategy of network building see Klinkott 2005, 350-367, Briant 2018a, 218-221 (concerning the army) and, more generally on the concept of power networks from a sociological viewpoint see Grewal 2008.

<sup>252</sup> Remarkably, this had already been the case during the colonial expansion in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: as noted by Andreas Kappeler (note Fragner and Kappeler 2006, 143), the position of local potentates in territories such as Xiva and Buxārā and of the ‘*ulamā*’ was even strengthened by the establishment of the Russian protectorate.

<sup>253</sup> Comparable examples are to be found by the hundreds in the Caucasus (Baberowski 2003, 669-830) as well as in other Soviet republics of Central Asia, for example in Uzbekistan (where in fact the purges were particularly savage, even by Stalinist’s criteria) and Taġikistān (some 3000 party members were executed in the tiny republic alone: Teichmann 2016, 173-210).

The critical aspect of the Qazaq example - also for the purposes of a more articulated understanding of the relations between «state» and «society» in Achaemenid Baktria - is that, as Robert Kindler has pointed out, distinguishing between Party officials acting as local faction leaders (there were some who even openly called themselves Qağan/Ḥān) and vice versa is not only impossible, but would not even be advisable from a methodological point of view, as it would probably not reflect the self-perception of this or that qağan/tovarišč (товарищ). Put another way, the Party (in our case the Achaemenid Empire) provided these men 1. with a new language and 2. with new tools within whose framework and according to whose etiquette and grammar they pursued interests of a mainly if not exclusively local nature.<sup>254</sup> However, by virtue of the new level of interconnectivity generated by the Empire, these local interests were able to influence the policies of the central court in a not insignificant way, not infrequently with outcomes which moreover were appreciably different from, if not entirely contrary to, the original intentions - and wishes - of the latter. Stalin solved the problem, so to say, by cyclically mass murdering the state cadres from Moscow to Kyrgyzstan: having neither the means to pursue such ends nor being able to afford such a managerial turnover, the Achaemenids evidently had to resort to other strategies in order to counterbalance the most unwelcome effects of processes that were indispensable for the territorial rooting of that very same imperial power which they eventually run the risk to undermine. A good example of the dynamics described above is the documentary corpus concerning an official named Bagiya. He is mentioned in one of the Persepolis tablets as a Kermāni, which could mean either «from Carmania», in the sense of an ethnic affiliation, or, according to the interpretation of some scholars, «active in Carmania». While this aspect of Bagiya's figure and function is still a matter of debate, what his Persepolitan file shows beyond any doubt is that he must have been a rather important administrator, active in a territory of great strategic interest such as the Persian Gulf, the latter subject, during the reign of Darius, to the authority of the satrap of Carmania.<sup>255</sup> According to Briant, the appointment of officers such as Bagiya to positions of responsibility within the imperial administrative framework should be understood in terms of what he calls the development of a hereditary nobility into a court nobility, as much in the case of Fārs as in that of the other satrapies.<sup>256</sup> If the hypothesis of a local background (be it an Arachosian, a Baktrian or, more generally, a Central Asian) of Dādêršiš and Vivāna were well-founded, it would follow that,

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<sup>254</sup> Kindler 2014, 48.

<sup>255</sup> Bagiya is called Kermāni (in Ēlāmite <sup>AS</sup> kur-ṛ ma-nu?--ia-ra) in PF 1377 (translation according to Henkelman 2017a, 52 fn. 8). He is said to have been travelling from Carmania to Susa during the 19<sup>th</sup> year of Darius' reign (503 BCE) or, according to Hallock 1969, 388, in the 23<sup>rd</sup> year of the same ruler's reign (499 BCE). Bagiya «carried with him a sealed document [issued by] Karkiš», the satrap of Carmania (see on him Henkelman 2010, 704-713), which indicates the bandaka position of our traveler (translation according to Hallock 1969, 388).

<sup>256</sup> Briant 2002, 326. Bagiya's ethnic affiliation is still a matter of debate. According to Henkelman 2017a, who provides the most recent edition and translation of the corpus concerning the official, Kermāni would mean «Carmanian» and not, as other scholars tend to think «active in Carmania».

by becoming *bandakā* of the Great King and/or one of his satraps, individuals such as the two aforementioned, as well as Arimazes, Spitamenes or even Bagiya himself, acquired therefore a social capital that they could have profitably exploited within their own community: in fact, becoming much less dependent on the power dynamics of their local context of origin, which gave them a leverage and an authority that, in some cases, could even be passed down to these men's children, thus becoming, to all intents and purposes, real local dynasties.<sup>257</sup> Bagiya Kermāni could also be an example of this phenomenon, since it has recently been suggested that he could be identified as the *Bagaios* (Βαγαῖος) of Hdt. 3.128.1, the latter being in turn the father of Mardontes, who is said to have been the leader of a contingent of islanders from the Persian Gulf who joined Xerxes' army during his expedition against Greece.<sup>258</sup>

In accordance with a model recently elaborated by Clifford Ando to explain how the despotic (*sensu* Mann) imperial power of the Roman Empire turned out to be functional (in his words «instrumental») to the transformation and promotion of the potential («capacity») of subordinate communities, one could argue that the dual nature (of alliance and subordination) underlying the dialectic between the *bandaka* and his superior (but one should not forget the superior's superiors either) made its way into social circles outside Achaemenid Persia (*Pārsa*) through a mechanism that Ando himself calls «mimetic reduplication». The main features of such a mechanism are well described already in Chrysantas' speech. Following Ando's argument, a mimetic reduplication might fittingly be defined as the set of legitimizing principles operating in relation to public power in a given case and in relation to social differentiation in more general terms, which developed profound homologies to those in force within the Roman Empire (in the case in question here, the Persian domains).<sup>259</sup> Consequently, by naming one of the leading men in his newly formed circle of collaborators a *bandaka*, Darius actually aimed to establish imperial power in Baktria on the basis of the same principles (one-to-one relationship with the King, unequal friendship, dependence on royal favor) that characterized both the family structure and, with the birth of the Empire, the functioning of the court within Persian society.<sup>260</sup> In other words, it would be an attempt to shape, more Persiano,

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<sup>257</sup> Klinkott 2005, 47-49: two anecdotes reported respectively in Hdt. 3.15.2 and Hdt. 5.25.1 show that «local dynasties» also existed in other regions of the Empire. The fact that the son of a judge named Otanes was able to inherit his father's office even though the latter had been condemned to a gruesome death by Darius, and that in Egypt the descendants of Psammenitos remained at the head of the satrapy despite the fact that Psammenitos himself had rebelled against Persian authority, provide significant examples of the ability of local aristocratic families to maintain their privileges in spite of a not always smooth relationship with the imperial administration. The most likely reason for this is that, simply put, the latter could not do without them.

<sup>258</sup> Hdt. 7.80 with Henkelman 2017a, 52-54. The prerequisite for the identification, which Henkelmann himself admits (2017a, 52 fn. 8 for a thorough discussion of the dossier, which is summarized here) cannot be proved, is that the position of Mardontes had previously been held by his father. This is also the conclusion reached by Jacobs 1994, 198-199.

<sup>259</sup> Ando 2017b, 119.

<sup>260</sup> This does not imply, however, that Darius' *bandakā* in Baktria had to be (ethnic) Persians. The possibility that locals made their way up to the highest ranks of the imperial hierarchy (the result of an external conquest) is supported by an important piece of evidence from 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE Baktria. Indeed, as Lauren Morris (2019a, 84-85) has noted, during the

the social hierarchies of local communities, by virtue of that principle of uniformity and simplification («legibility») which - as James Scott has persuasively shown - underlies every imperial project.<sup>261</sup> But this is only one side of the coin. Indeed, as the Qazaq case discussed above shows, at the end of similar processes it is not always easy to distinguish where the imperial official (the «state» or the товарищ) ends and where the charismatic leader (the «society», the qağan) begins.

#### 2.4.1. «As soon as you scratch the Persian...»: Imperial Contradictions

Based on the above considerations, it might be possible to state that, in the Bīsutūn text, Baktria seems to have already been conceptualized in terms of what Ando has called the «constitutive outside» of the imperial heartland (Fārs). As a bandaka himself, Dādêršiš was supposed to rule the territories assigned to him by Darius by recruiting other men, once his peers and now his subordinates (along the lines of the relationship that, according to the available sources, bound individuals such as Arimazes or Oxyartes himself to Bessos) within his own power network(s), as bandakā in their own turn. Following Ando's reasoning, it could be argued that, by imitating Persian (in Ando's case of course Roman) principles of legitimation regarding the functions of the government and the hierarchies of officers in the service of that government, Darius was in fact aiming at expanding the notion of social order on which Achaemenid imperial power was based also within the communities of the (re)conquered territories, including Baktria and Arachosia. Similarly to what seems to be possible to argue in the case of the Roman Empire, this mechanism should therefore be understood as functional to ensure that the local communities, to use Ando's terminology, collaborated with the imperial administration in the construction and maintenance of a single social order, namely by putting in place another process of simplification for the sake of (state) legibility, as one will not fail to note.<sup>262</sup> At a first glance, such a reconstruction would seem to confirm, on the one hand, the traditional image of a capillary (and more often than not intrusive) bureaucratic Empire, capable of mobilizing resources and of collecting taxes in the most remote peripheries of its domains (from the steppes of Baktria and Sogdiana to the deserts of Carmania and Gedrosia: a distinctive feature of what

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reign of Vīma Kadphises (ca. 113-127), an individual whose sociocultural affiliation is unfortunately unknown, named Nukunzuk, calls himself in an inscription found on a silver plate marego (l. 2 μαρεγο, the Baktrian term for «servant» or «slave») of the Kuṣāna king Vīma Kadphises, a title that rather closely resembles, if only in structural terms, the bandaka of the Bīsutūn inscription. As rightly remarked by King 2021, 217, « the imperial authorities [not only the Achaemenids, as the case of the Kuṣāna μαρεγο probably shows] recognized that they needed local collaborators to manage the government on a smaller scale», and what is assumed here fits broader patterns working in other regions and in different times during the Persian hegemony over Central Eurasia.

<sup>261</sup> Scott 1998, 2.

<sup>262</sup> Ando 2017b, 119.



Munson and Scheidel call «tributary states».<sup>263</sup> On the other hand, such an assessment would seem to support the assumption that the ruler and the members of his inner circle were firmly in control of their subjects, framed as they were within a political entity consciously organized according to the principle of redistribution of the spoils of conquest within a small group of Persians belonging to the socio-ethnic group of the conquerors and to it alone (or predominantly).<sup>264</sup> Such a view has been vigorously defended in recent years based on a particularly meticulous and authoritative analysis of the archival material from Persepolis, which has been unequivocally recognized as the inescapable source for present and future Achaemenid studies.<sup>265</sup> In the face of the quantity and quality of data brought to light by an ever-expanding documentary corpus (which includes archaeological material as well as epigraphic evidence and palaeozoological findings across a space that spans regions as diverse in geography, sociology and history as, to mention but a few examples, Judea, Gedrosia, and Arachosia), the fundamental argument of scholars such as Wouter Henkelman, namely that the Achaemenid Empire was a machine of unprecedented complexity, capable of radically transforming the societies (and in some cases even the landscape) of its subject regions, cannot be disputed.<sup>266</sup>

The temptation one should resist, however, is to be blinded by this - in some ways indeed dazzling - image of efficiency, sophistication, and capillarity as it emerges from the Persepolis archives (and to some extent also from the *ADAB* documents), to the point of no longer being able to grasp, and adequately assess, the particularities of the different local contexts or, to borrow a graphic formula by one of the most assertive supporters of precisely such a model, namely Pierre Briant, «the dynamics of contradictions» arising from these very regional peculiarities.<sup>267</sup> The point here, of course, is not to deny that the local environment(s) - in our case represented by the Baktrian landscape, as defined by Curtius *multiplex et varius* - and, above all, the native population(s) were 1. undoubtedly, 2. Profoundly, and 3. lastingly influenced by the systematic nature and no less systematic inceptive capacity of the Achaemenid «imperial paradigm».<sup>268</sup> However, it is important to stress that both the landscape(s) itself and especially the Central Asians with their local knowledge and know how must have been able to dictate modifications (and impose limits) to the spreading and rooting capabilities of the imperial paradigm itself (and this, one could say, precisely by virtue of the

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<sup>263</sup> For a classification of the Empires of antiquity based on their different tax regimes see Monson and Scheidel 2015, 6-12.

<sup>264</sup> Briant 1982, 405-431; 2002, 324-330.

<sup>265</sup> Henkelman 2017a, 81. See moreover Henkelman *et al.* 2017.

<sup>266</sup> See most recently Rollinger 2023 as well as King 2021, 266-314 on Arachosia.

<sup>267</sup> Briant 2002, 331, but see however also Briant 2017a, 54-56 as well as most recently on Baktria Briant 2020.

<sup>268</sup> The latter ought to be understood, following Henkelman's terminology, as a structure capable of being expanded and adapted following the growth and development of the Empire as well as capable of being copied (in contexts other than Fārs, for the control of which such a structure was originally conceived).

latter's flexibility).<sup>269</sup> Moreover: it is also possible to assume that such modifications, and such limits, were not always predictable - and less than ever welcome - in the circles around the imperial court or those of its regional extension, i. e. the network(s) of the satrap and his collaborators.<sup>270</sup>

As pointed out by Lori Khatchadourian, this, of course, is not intended to deny the real, coercive and in her words sometimes even «totalizing» effects of (Achaemenid) imperial domination.<sup>271</sup> Nevertheless, the impact of the aforementioned local context(s) - in the combined form of human action and ecological factors - on the system first planned and then implemented by the Achaemenids in the territories they conquered (including of course Central Asia) deserves to be emphasized more strongly than hitherto has been the case because, being it a direct product of the «ultimate imperial agents», as Khatchadourian has aptly called the Achaemenid Kings, the primary sources available - and this applies, one should never forget it, to both the royal inscriptions and the imperial archives, be they of central (Persepolis) or provincial (Baktra) origin - could (and wanted) not «go particularly far in elaborating the limitations of imperial sovereignty»: and indeed of the latter, at least at first glance, in such evidence there is not but the slightest trace.<sup>272</sup> Despite the peculiar perspective offered both by the inscriptions and - albeit in a different way - by the Persepolis tablets, the paradoxical nature of the dialectic between imperial aspirations for control and extraction on the one hand and, on the other, the dynamics of local contradictions, seems to have been perceived rather clearly by the inner circle of the imperial upper echelons. Needless to say, among these people, the theorists - whom Khatchadourian does not hesitate to call «the ideologists» - of the Empire, a group whose most famous representatives, not least by virtue of the media they used to express themselves, from palaces to bas-reliefs to inscriptions, are obviously the Persian Kings themselves, should undoubtedly be included.<sup>273</sup> In the *Bīsutūn* text, the word chosen to indicate both the range of action and the boundaries of imperial power (and consequently that of the King's subordinates), namely «satrap» and - by virtue of translate - «satrapy», makes its first appearance in our surviving corpus of documentary evidence. Since one of these occurrences concerns Baktria, a closer study of this term, to which the last section of this chapter is devoted, seems necessary to clarify at least in part how the Achaemenids imagined, described, and attempted to enforce the power they claimed over the people (and through them the lands) of Central Asia.

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<sup>269</sup> See most recently Briant 2020; 2021 on the limits of Achaemenid (presumptive) universal rule especially, but not only, in Afġānistān.

<sup>270</sup> Of considerable importance are Klinkott's following remarks (2005, 16): «Since local peculiarities were taken into account by the Persian administration showing considerable flexibility, regional variables in the characterization of the satrap's office should be expected to be the rule [and not the exception or the symbol of a «weak» Empire or a «rebellious» satrapy]».

<sup>271</sup> Khatchadourian 2016, 22.

<sup>272</sup> Khatchadourian 2016, 22.

<sup>273</sup> Khatchadourian 2016, XXXI.

## 2.5. «Satrap in Baktria»

Let us now return once again to the inscription of Bīsūtūn: «Proclaims Darius, the King: A country called Margiana rebelled against me. A man named Frāda, a Margian, they made their leader. Against them I sent a Persian named Dādêršiš, my servant, satrap in Baktria [manā bandaka, Bāxtrīyā xšaçaṣpāvā]». <sup>274</sup> This is a very important sentence, if only because, with the exception of Vivāna, none of the other individuals mentioned by Darius as his helpers in the fight against Gaumāta and the other liar kings is qualified by a similar title. <sup>275</sup> Questions pile up. <sup>276</sup> Could it be mere coincidence that these two officers (moreover active in contiguous territories such as Baktria and Arachosia) are referred to as satraps? And if this is not a coincidence, should it be inferred that the other satraps in the other regions involved in the upheavals were killed by the rebels? If this were the case, we would then have a rather blatant testimony to how, according to Briant's judgment, still imperfect the integration of the conquered territories into the Achaemenid Empire was. In turn, this observation would only underline the decisive importance of the loyalty shown to Darius by Dādêršiš and Vivāna, which would consequently bring the question to the fore as to the reasons for this loyalty while making it all the more pressing. <sup>277</sup> Since the Bīsūtūn inscription is the only surviving source that provides a somehow detailed narrative concerning the events in question, and since such a narrative presents interpretative problems that in the current state of research appear not easy to overcome, it is likely that such also remain the reasons behind the choice of Dādêršiš and Vivāna to support Darius in the civil war that shook the newly formed Achaemenid οἰκουμένη. However, if we consider that, as far as we know, at the time of Cambyses' death it is highly probable that Darius had no authority whatsoever to appoint a satrap, the most logical reasoning suggests that both Dādêršiš and Vivāna were already in office at the time when riots broke out in Margiana and, from Persia, the armies of Vahêyazdāta and Fravartiš attempted to overthrow imperial power in Arachosia. <sup>278</sup> If this conclusion is sound enough, the consequence would be that, at least starting from the reign of Cambyses - but given its rather short duration, it is plausible to assume that things were like this already under Cyrus - the territories of Central Asia were structured and organized as satrapies, headed by a satrap (Persian

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<sup>274</sup> DB<sub>p</sub> col. III § 38 (translation following *TPE*, 146). See moreover *WAI*, 284-285 on xšaçaṣpāvān- and Jacobs 2021, 835-836 with further references. As previously mentioned, the Ēlāmite and Akkadian versions of the inscription are consistent with the Old Persian one, with the former translating into Ēlāmite the Old Persian word: Schmitt 1976, 374 with references.

<sup>275</sup> Compare e. g. DB<sub>a</sub>, 23, in which the Urartean Dādêršiš is only called qallū (bandaka), but not satrap. See Bae 2001, 127-140 for a full account of the (two) Urartean campaigns.

<sup>276</sup> Bae 2001, 157-162 for an account.

<sup>277</sup> Cf. Briant 2002, 120.

<sup>278</sup> Rollinger 2006, Schwinghammer 2011.

or native). Such a hypothesis would also be in line with what has been argued above, i. e. that the first conceptual elaboration of the space of the dahāyāuš of Baktria (Bāxtrīš) was the product of the Teispid «imperial gaze» following Cyrus' conquest of the territories East of the Caspian.<sup>279</sup> Having said that, the question that needs to be focused on can only be the following: what is, exactly, a satrap?

### 2.5.1. Xšāyaθiya and Xšaçapāvā

In modern European languages, the word for «satrap» is the result of various (and not always successful) attempts by Greek authors - and in their wake Latin writers - to render into their own language the complex (barbaric) phonology of the Old Persian compound word xšaçapāvā.<sup>280</sup> The first part of this compound (xšaça-) is of deverbative origin (from xšay); this verbal root can in turn be translated as «reigning/ruling over», and it is no coincidence that the term used to identify the Achaemenid overlord in the Bīsutūn inscription derives from there.<sup>281</sup> Xšāyaθiya, in fact, literally designates «the one to whom the sovereignty/the kingdom belongs».<sup>282</sup> From a literal point of view, therefore, xšaça- originally denotes both the kingdom in the totality of its parts and the authority by virtue of which its owner governs the kingdom itself: one could even argue, in other words, that the possession of the xšaça- is - much more than the x'ārənah – what truly identifies the Achaemenid King as such, i. e. in the plenitude of his functions. Otherwise stated, xšaça- denotes both the abstract principle (royal sovereignty) and the material entity that is the object of that sovereignty (the royal possessions, the Empire as a whole).<sup>283</sup> As for the second part of the compound, -pāvā, it is a present active participle indicating «one who defends/protects»: a xšaçapāvā, therefore, is «one who protects the territory (or territories) over which the king displays his sovereignty».<sup>284</sup> One aspect that should

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<sup>279</sup> See most recently Goršenina 2017 regarding a similar process of renaming and redefining Central Asian space following the incorporation within the Tsarist – and later Soviet (Hirsch 2005) - imperial structure.

<sup>280</sup> Klinkott 2005, 31: the Greek rendering of the Persian xšaçapāvā varies, including for example forms such as σατράπης, σατραπεύω, σαδράπης, ζατράπης or ξαδράπης. Some examples from modern Indo-European languages: English satrap and its French correspondents satrape, German Satrap, Italian satrapo, Russian царпан or Spanish sátrapa.

<sup>281</sup> Schmitt 1976 still provides one of the most authoritative and detailed linguistic accounts of this critical word.

<sup>282</sup> See for example DB<sub>p</sub> col. I § 2: «θatīy Dārayavauš xšāyaθiya [Saith Darius, the King]» (translation according to *TPE* I, 141). For an extensive etymological analysis of the word xšāyaθiya cf. Cheung 2007, 451-452, *WAI*, 286-287.

<sup>283</sup> Lincoln 2007, 45 (according to whom xšaça- describes both the royal power and the territories in which this power is possessed), a definition taken up and elaborated on by Khatchadourian 2016, 3. According to the *WAI* (p. 284), the word indicates both sovereignty (Herrschaft) and Empire (Reich), the latter also marked in the inscriptions with the term būmī (meaning «hearth»: *WAI*, 154-155).

<sup>284</sup> This equals to say the kingdom and/or parts of it: cf. Klinkott 2005, 28-29 and King 2021, 376. Such is the modern origin (but perhaps it would be more appropriate to say the Herodotan understanding) of the satrapy as an administrative region within a given kingdom/Empire. In at least two passages of the *Histories* (1.192; 3.89), in fact, Herodotos uses the term ἀρχή to designate, in rather general terms, the area of authority of a given administrative jurisdiction. In *Aesch. Pers.*, ll. 5-7, the title «satrap» is not explicitly mentioned, but the paraphrase used to designate the function of the elders composing the chorus («chosen by Darius' son, by King Xerxes, to guard the kingdom») offers an almost literal translation of the Persian xšaçapāvā, which once again raises the question about the sources available to Aeschylus: cf. Klinkott 2005, 2 as well as the issue of his (alleged) dependance on Herodotos' account – or the other way round.

be stressed is that, at least from the Persian point of view, the actual (and only) holder of both power and the territory over which that power is displayed (in other words, the legitimate owner of the xšaça-) is not the satrap, but the Great King. The satrap's task, in fact, is only that of defending (-pāvā) the xšaça- that has been entrusted/conferred to him by his master, on whom the former would - at least in theory - be entirely dependent, since it is only the King who has the power and the faculty of government (the second part of the compound designating him, xšāya-θiya, derives in fact from the Old Persian \*xšayaθa, which precisely marks «dominion» or «possession»). This complex relationship of dependence is reflected by the term bandaka, which not by chance, as we have seen, recurs in the Bīsutūn text to identify Darius' two satraps active in Central Asia at the outbreak of the civil war.<sup>285</sup> In spite of such a link of subordination, which could lead one to assume that the satrap had an extremely limited range of action, subject as the latter would be to the prior authorization of the King, even a superficial look at the available sources shows that the breadth of maneuver granted to (or obtained by) the satrap was anything but negligible. This is valid - it must be stressed - both in matters of local administration, as one would expect in the case of such an office, and, much more remarkable, in what today would be called foreign policy (or extraterritorial jurisdiction, since, except in the case of borderlands, «beyond» the territory - or the sphere of competence - of a satrap there was at least in theory only that of another satrap).<sup>286</sup> As pointed out by Klinkott in a detailed study devoted to the matter, therefore, within the territory of his satrapy, a satrap (xšaça-pāvā) was responsible for, to name but a few examples: 1. deciding on matters of law, 2. the sphere of military activity, which included the control and supply of troops scattered through the different regions of the satrapy.<sup>287</sup> In addition, 3. the satrap was also endowed with economic and administrative powers, which could range from tax (or tribute) collection to the setting up of a bureaucracy equipped with

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<sup>285</sup> Klinkott 2005, 29, with further bibliography. See also Cheung 2007, 451 and Potts 2014, 189, who describes a similar hierarchy within the Mongol society of Temüjin's time, in which a leading figure (noyan or köbägün) «owned» (in the sense of a bond of alliance, not slavery) entire family groups – most likely the former's selectorate, to whom he was obliged to guarantee land for grazing (nuntuq) and food for the animals (bälčigär).

<sup>286</sup> Briant 2002, 65-67, Klinkott 2006. King 2021 (cf. e. g. pp. 266-313 on Arachosia) forcefully argues that satrapal jurisdiction extends as far as the latter household's reach, which makes the office far less territorially and more socially bounded as usually admitted. The value to be attached to information from Greek and Latin sources should be the subject of a detailed and organized case-by-case study since, to give just one example, the mere language barrier is likely to lead to misrepresentations and inaccuracies that may in turn distort the image of the satrap and his powers as we are able to reconstruct them. This is illustrated once again by Herodotus, whose testimony is obviously of paramount importance in this and other matters, but the complexity of reconstructing the sources available to him (and the never resolved question of his linguistic skills), combined with an increasingly clear perception of the literary reworking of the material available to the historian continues to hinder scholars in their attempts to establish 1. whether and 2. to what extent his testimony can be taken as the starting point for a historical assessment of (among other things) the political institutions of the Persian Empire. See in this regard Jacobs 1994, 9-31, Rollinger 2014a; 2017a; 2017b and Rollinger and Bichler 2017. A quite detailed overview of the literary evidence concerning the figure of the satrap can be found in Klinkott 2005, 25-27.

<sup>287</sup> It seems quite clear that, from the very beginning of the Empire, similar garrisons housed both Persian and local contingents, not least because the recruitment mechanisms themselves were locally based (Briant 2018a, 218-221). This can be argued, for instance, from the story of Oroetes as told in Hdt 3.127.1 ff. The historian describes the Persian official as a powerful man, even a «governor» of Phrygia, Lydia, and Ionia, who had a personal guard of 1000 Persians in his retinue: «εἶχε δὲ νομὸν τὸν τε Φρύγιον καὶ Λύδιον καὶ Ἰωνικόν».

infrastructures capable of meeting the demands of the imperial court (including, it should be noted, the measurement of the territory of the satrapy and the subdivision of this latter into tax units, the main instrument, according to James Scott, of any attempt by a supra-local power to impose its control over the population subject to it).<sup>288</sup> Finally, with regard to what we have defined as extraterritorial competence, the satrap's tasks included 1. his function as the king's representative (think of the Roman *legatus Augusti*, and one could perhaps speculate on the analogies – of linguistic nature, for example - between the etymology of the Latin *legatus* and that of the Persian *bandaka*), 2. his role as «ambassador», which made him responsible for maintaining diplomatic contacts (in the case, to mention another example, of satrapies fading into the territories populated by mobile groups of the Central Asian steppes or the Caucasus mountains) and, finally, 3. the authority granted to him to enforce legal contracts and to act as a guarantor of their effectiveness, as well as to ensure that they were honored as it was expected.<sup>289</sup> In the face of such an idealtypic classification of the satrap's duties and responsibilities, it is perhaps not idle to wonder whether a taxonomy of this official's tasks such as the one just elaborated reflects, more or less faithfully, the situation *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist* in Central Asia at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE. To the discerning eye, this question will immediately appear of considerable importance, all the more so if, as the research of the last ten years seems to have shown rather convincingly, in all probability there were no precedents whatsoever in Baktria (as opposed to Egypt or Babylonia) that could have served as a model for the Persian rulers and their acolytes in order to consolidate their power in Central Asia in the immediate aftermath of the conquest.<sup>290</sup> What are we to deduce from what has been said so far about the situation of Dādêršiš and Vivāna? Did they already embody the highest juridical authority in Baktria and Arachosia by the

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<sup>288</sup> See for example Hdt. 6.42 and Diod. Sic. 10.25.4: following the conquest of Ionia, the Persian governor (i. e. satrap) Artaphernes imposed φόροι (*bāji*-, i. e. amount of fiscal extraction) on each πόλις based on a new census of the polyadic territory. It is not possible to know, unfortunately, if similar measures were taken also in the case of Central Asia, but the Ionian evidence is at least a hint that such tasks (the hallmark of any project of state legibility) were within the satrap's sphere of competence. See Scott 1998, 11-22; 2009, 98-126; 2017, 150-182.

<sup>289</sup> For an overview see Klinkott 2005, 37. Among the classical sources, a detailed description of the satrap's duties is provided by Xenophon (*Cyr.*, 8.6.10-16 and *Hell.*, 3.1.12-14). The (Aristotelian) treatise on economic matters Arist. [*Oec.*], 2.1.4. further dwells on the duties - in this case, as it is to be expected, mostly economic - of the satrap. See also Due 1989, 117-146 on the sources available to Xenophon for the *Cyropaedia*, Mueller-Goldingen 1995, 216-250 on the organization given to the Empire by Cyrus according to Xenophon (but see also Bichler 2020) and, more recently, Tamiolaki 2017, 176-177 on the reliability (which the author considers - relatively - high) of the *Cyropaedia* as a historical source (for an opposite view see Degen 2020). Finally, the contributions of Vlassopoulos 2017 (especially pp. 365-370) and Jacobs' (2017c) volume on Xenophon's knowledge of Persian history and Persia itself are also worth mentioning. According to Vlassopoulos 2017, 370, we should acknowledge Xenophon's sufficient acumen regarding how to interpret Persian customs; his descriptions of Persia – the scholar further argues - largely depend on the context and the goals for which they are functional. On the comparison between the *legatus* and the *bandaka* see the relevant entry in the *TLL* (Vol. VII.2 coll. 1119 ff.).

<sup>290</sup> Cf. the contrasting positions on Central Asia by Jacobs 1994, 209 and Minardi 2015a, 64-86 who, although mainly focused on the study of Chorasmia, has nevertheless put forward convincing arguments questioning the existence of a pre-Achaemenid Empire in Central Asia (be it the notorious Ḥayānid domain or something else). This notwithstanding, Matarese 2021, 49 (who is apparently not aware of Minardi's work), does not rule out the possibility of Baktria having been «a pre-Persian Empire, which Cyrus perhaps subdued after having conquered Babylon».

30s of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE? Did they already preside over an administrative apparatus capable of maintaining a line-up of officials (tax collectors, scribes), for which they were responsible (just as they were equally responsible - and this is not insignificant - for enabling this apparatus to train other tax collectors and scribes in the territory)? An affirmative answer to such questions would have important consequences on the now long standing issue of whether the political and territorial organization of the Persian Empire merely replicated (by adapting it) a model elaborated against the background of the administration developed to rule over Fārs in the years before the imperial expansion (Henkelman's view) or (as Jacobs argues), whether the organization of the Achaemenid domains was fundamentally based on the administrative structures of the kingdoms existing in this or that territory (including Central Asia) prior to the Persian conquest. A third question, of course, finally concerns the (more or less dialectical) nature of the relationship between the original model and previous structures (if any): i. e. the extent to which the imperial project of extraction and control altered local equilibria and whether - and if so to what extent - it was in turn influenced by the latter.<sup>291</sup>

In the opinion of some scholars, the presence of the satrap in a given region would not imply, per se, either the existence of a satrapy (in the sense of a clearly defined territorial unit) or that of an administrative apparatus as sophisticated as a cursory analysis of the classical sources, from Herodotos to Xenophon, from Thucydides to Plutarch to the Alexander's historians (Arrian, Curtius Rufus, Dexippos, and Diodoros above all), and the biblical sources (the books of Esther, Daniel, Nehemiah or Ezra), not to mention the Persepolis archives, would lead one to believe.<sup>292</sup> This seems in any case all the more plausible when discussing the years in which the Bīsūtūn inscription was conceived and engraved, but the same can also be argued for the decades preceding it. The fact that the supporters of this view include Pierre Briant has contributed to considerably strengthening the legitimacy of this opinion. According to him, the term *xšaçaṗāwā* in fact first and foremost refers to loyalty to the King on the part of the person so designated. In other words, being entrusted with the satrapal tasks would not automatically imply the existence of a territory entrusted to their holder. Long story short, according to Briant's argument, a satrap was primarily, if not exclusively, the

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<sup>291</sup> Further details on this debate can be found in Klinkott 2005, 12-18 and in Jacobs 2017a. Very recently, Düring and Stek 2018a, 10 have emphasized with vigor the «trial-and-error nature» of efforts to consolidate imperial power. This is, of course, not to deny the existence of any masterplan behind the process of entrenching imperial control (which Düring and Stek themselves refer to as a «repertoire of rules»: that is, the cultural toolkit developed for the purposes of imperial control). However planned such efforts to consolidate imperial power may have been, one should not forget that similar projects were at the same time inevitably limited by the characteristics of both the conquered societies and the territories they inhabited, the accessibility of resources (and the cost of such accessibility) necessary to entrench and consolidate the Empire's control, and finally the goals («agendas», «agency») pursued by an extremely large number of social actors - not infrequently in competition both 1. with each other and 2. with the Empire - including those that Düring and Stek call (cf. 2018a, 9-12) «imperial collaborators», i.e., for instance, the satrap himself. Taken together, all these factors must have been able to impact the repertoire of rules developed by the Empire in a not insignificant way, and this independently of the projects (what Richardson would have called ambitions or even desires) of the Great King.

<sup>292</sup> Klinkott 2005, 21-27. On Biblical sources and the Achaemenid Empire see the collection of essays in Fitzpatrick-McKinley 2015.

«personal representative» of the Persian King.<sup>293</sup> In order to further support the soundness of his hypothesis, Briant also points out that, in the Bīsūtūn inscription, both Vivāna and Dādêršiš are qualified as satraps in, not of Baktria and Arachosia.<sup>294</sup>

However, the notion of complete («total» in Briant's words?) loyalty to the king is already expressed by a term such as *bandaka*, and from Darius' account it seems moreover quite evident, as Briant himself acknowledges, that both Vivāna and Dādêršiš had been charged with carrying out missions in a specific territory. This last remark gives further plausibility to the comparison made earlier between the role of the two Achaemenid officers and that of the Roman *legatus*, who implements the ruler's imperium – not by chance called *imperator* – over the legions and consequently over the province in whose territory they are deployed. The consequence of this is not insignificant, because it makes likely the hypothesis that, at least since Cambyses – but perhaps already starting with the reign of Cyrus, when it was a matter not only of reorganizing the conquered territories, but also of coordinating them with each other – the satrapy developed as the fundamental political and administrative unit of the Empire. Such a conclusion is also suggested by one of the possible meanings of such a polyvalent root as *xšaça-*, i. e., according to the view of the Iranist and historian of religion Bruce Lincoln, the different provinces within which the power of the King is wielded.<sup>295</sup> The documentary record probably makes it impossible to definitively resolve the controversy in favor of (or against) the skepticism expressed by Briant and, in his wake, by other scholars regarding the causal link between the appointment of the satrap and the existence of the satrapy. In any case, however, what seems to emerge convincingly from the analysis of the term *xšaçaṣpāvā* in the light of what we know about the upheavals in Central Asia – in particular, the logistical skill and coordination capacity that Dādêršiš and Vivāna (as well as, but evidently not enough, their opponents) demonstrated to possess – is the following: namely the hypothesis, based predominantly if not exclusively on a single (and much-discussed) passage of Herodotos' *Histories*, that the transformation of the Achaemenid Empire into a uniformly administered political entity (according to what Henkelman would call a large-scale application of the Achaemenid imperial paradigm) began – or at

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<sup>293</sup> Briant 2002, 65. A similar position has been voiced by Khatchadourian 2016, 5-6. This remark gives validity to the comparison made earlier with the role of the *legatus*: he was in fact a delegate, chosen by the emperor, in whose stead he held the imperium over the legions and/or the province in which these legions were stationed; moreover, as in the case of the *bandaka*, also in that of the *legatus* the root is the same as the verb *lego* («to choose», «to select»). A heartfelt thanks to Prof. Elvira Migliario (Trento), unmatched guide in the field of Ῥωμαϊκά.

<sup>294</sup> DB<sub>p</sub> col. III § 38 reads Bāxtriyā xšaçaṣpāvā, while § 45 reads Harauvatīyā xšaçaṣpāvā, where Bāxtriyā and Harauvatīyā should be interpreted as singular locatives of Bāxtrīš (Baktria) and Harauvatīš (Arachosia): cf. Kent 1953, 61, and the same interpretation underlies Rüdiger Schmitt's translation (*API*, 65). See finally the table of the singular locative in Skjærvø 2016, 59. See however DB<sub>a</sub>, 68-78: there the two officers are called satraps of Baktria and Arachosia. The Ēlāmite text is consistent with the Old Persian one (DB<sub>e</sub>, §§ 31, 45). It ought to be taken into account, moreover, the possibility that, especially in territories lacking previous developed system of administration, the territory of the satrapy, and therefore the scope of the satrap's action, was born out of the purview of a prominent strongman's household, according to the model developed most recently by King 2021, 366-380.

<sup>295</sup> Lincoln 2007, 45.



least was substantially developed - from Darius' reign raises more questions than it can in fact answer. Consequently, it looks almost unavoidable to backdate the establishment of the satrapy of Baktria as (however loosely conceived) some sort of administrative entity, at least to the reign of Cambyses.<sup>296</sup> Far from being a remote outpost barely or not at all integrated within the socio-political fabric of the Achaemenid Empire (which includes, of course, being subject to the control by the King and/or his appointees), Baktria appears on the contrary to have acquired a rather clearly defined status since the dawn of Persian power in Central Asia. In addition to this, the presence on the field of a guardian of imperial power (this is in fact the meaning of *xšaça-pāvā*) and not only of a «loyal servant» (*bandaka*, *φίλος*: are we to infer from this a hierarchy of titling?), as seems to have been the case in Armenia or, say, even the often assumed as being paramount territory of Media, is sufficient on its own to point out the political and economic (if not ideological, in the light of the – alleged – role as ancestral homeland of *Zaraθuštra*, of whom the Achaemenids would have been devout followers) importance of Central Asia and especially of the two *dahayāva* of Baktria and Arachosia.<sup>297</sup>

### 2.5.2. *Seinem König treu (?) ergeben*. Becoming *Xšaça-*: Some Remarks on Method

However, it is possible to go even further in our assessment of the above-discussed evidence. In fact, in the same way that the Great King needed, in Briant's words, the complete loyalty of the satraps in order to maintain stable control over the territories he ruled, so too the satrap, in order to be able to fulfil his role as protector (*-pāvā*) of royal power, could not rely exclusively on his own resources, or even on those of other members of the Persian diaspora.<sup>298</sup> Like the Achaemenid ruler, the satrap also needed the support of his *bandakā*. That this is true at least in the case of the satrap - thus at the highest levels of the imperial hierarchy - is evident from Xenophon's account of Orontas' trial, who was accused of plotting against Cyrus the Younger.<sup>299</sup> Once the sentence had been passed, - as Xenophon reports - Orontas was in fact escorted out of Cyrus' tent by the men of an armed party to be put to death, «and when the men who in past years flocked to pay homage to him saw him, they did not fail to show him their respect, although they knew that the guards were leading him to the

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<sup>296</sup> The passage from the *Histories* which is referred to in the text is the well-known Hdt. 3.89: «After settling these affairs [i. e. liquidating *Gaumāta*] in Persia, he [Darius] divided his possessions into twenty provinces, which they [the Persians] call satrapies [it should be noted, however, that in the *Bīsūtūn* text an explicit term for satrapy as such does not occur]; and after dividing the territories he conquered and appointing governors, Darius obliged each subject people to pay him tribute».

<sup>297</sup> See Zarghamee 2013, 2-5. Such a hypothesis, by the way, does not reckon with an equally enduring tradition, mainly represented by Arabic-speaking writers from the 9<sup>th</sup> century CE onwards, from *ibn Ḥordādhbeh* to *al-Balādhurī* and from *Qazvīnī* to *Abū al-Fidā'* to the late Middle Ages (11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries), who instead present a drastically different account of *Zaraθuštra*'s origins and life, both focusing on Northwestern Irān and Azərbaycan: cf. Potts 2014, 65.

<sup>298</sup> Briant 2002, 345, on the contrary, only focus on the relationships which bound the Persian aristocratic clans to the king

<sup>299</sup> Xen. *Anab.*, 1.6.10. See on this topic the recent remarks by Laurianne Martinez-Sève (2020b, 92).

gallows»; from the context of the description it seems difficult not to recognize in the «men who in years gone by flocked to pay homage» to Orontas the bandakā of the now disgraced powerholder. If this is true, one must also consider the fact that, at least in the case of the local government, only a small part of these bandakā could have come from Fārs.<sup>300</sup> It is on the contrary far more likely that they were recruited from within the ranks of the élites living in and already wielding power over the territories conquered by the Persians. These men, although decisive and impossible to dispose of (or do without) because of the latitude of their network power as well as – and above all - knowledge of the territory, at the same time imposed considerable limits on the projection of power by the ethno-classe dominante.<sup>301</sup> For this reason, it would perhaps be appropriate to replace Briant's formula with the more flexible concept of herrschende Gesellschaft, roughly translatable as «ruling class», in the wake of what some German scholars have proposed in the context of an important reassessment of the mechanisms underlying the functioning of the Seleucid Empire especially - but not exclusively - in the Irānian satrapies and, according to researchers such as Thomas Brüggemann and Sonja Plischke, perhaps even at court.<sup>302</sup> The main benefit of such a concept, and which for the purposes of the present study is of particular relevance, is its greater emphasis on the negotiating nature of imperial power, thereby highlighting the far from secondary role played (at the very least) by the leading members of indigenous societies within a given Empire, an aspect obscured by the almost exclusive focus of the idea of the ethno-classe dominante on the Persian milieu (in the sense of the powerholders (ethnically) Persian and coming from Pārsa).<sup>303</sup>

There are arguably very concrete arguments to support the suitability of such a shift in terminology and in theoretical outlook. One thinks, for example, of the political and social landscape of Mesopotamia in the Old Babylonian period (ca. 2000-1500 BCE, thus also in this case a phase d'installation similar to the 6<sup>th</sup> century in the Teispid Achaemenid context).<sup>304</sup> Despite the thunderous

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<sup>300</sup> Compare King 2020 on Late Antique Bactria, where the local origin (and vested interest) of many second-rank but nonetheless crucial powerholders appears most glaringly in the written evidence available.

<sup>301</sup> It is no coincidence that, in a Politburo (Политбюро) dominated by Russians, moreover of European background, culture, and mentality, Lenin resolved to entrust the extremely sensitive role of commissioner for nationalities (по делам национальностей, literally «for national affairs») to someone who was not Russian, that is to say, to Stalin: cf. Baberowski 2012, 13-33 for an appreciation, among other things, of the - immense - power derived by Stalin in the long run from that post. It is equally not by chance that, in an Azerbaijani republic characterized by multi-ethnicity and a very strong Russian presence, key roles within the local party were soon taken over on Stalin's mandate by members of local society (as well as his loyalists), for example Mir Cəfər Bağırov (1896-1956), not least because of the latter's portentous ability 1. to keep his own network of alliances and clientele under control and 2. to systematically eliminate the clientele of others: cf. Baberowski 2003, 791-830. On network power see most recently Grewal 2008 and Versluys forthcoming.

<sup>302</sup> According to Brüggemann 2010, 38, this formula indicates «the sum of those persons who, within the Seleucid Empire [or any other pre-modern Empire] held positions in the administrative, economic-fiscal or military sector, for the management of which they were directly answerable to the sovereign or to the person whom the latter had appointed as their superior». See also Mehl 2003, 155-159, Ramsey 2009, 188-220; 2011 and Plischke 2014, 32-35.

<sup>303</sup> On Briant's concept see most recently the discussion in Basello 2021, 863-866. Especially at the beginning of the military expansion, the contribution of local élites cannot be underestimated: Kuhrt 2021.

<sup>304</sup> Richardson 2012, 23-25. Boivin 2022 for a recent and thorough historical overview of the period, with references.

proclamations by the rulers of that major player within the Mesopotamian world (Babylon itself) that they had subdued every land «from the upper sea to the lower sea» (which means, literally, from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea and, metaphorically, «the whole world»), a careful reading of their own inscriptions reveals an extremely fragmented landscape. Such a landscape, moreover, was often populated by individuals as anonymous (a certain Ammi-īštamar, called «chief of the Amorites» or another Ambuna-ahi, simply a «commander») as politically decisive for the control of men and – therefore, as argued most recently by King, resources.<sup>305</sup> Such a state of the art appears to have been true especially in those contested territories (according to Richardson, «non-sovereign-lands») from which the pre-modern Empires drew military personnel and vital supplies, but whose control was dramatically limited by a permanent (and ineliminable) state of competition between local leaders and on local issues. It is particularly important to stress, however, that such a competition should be conceived as having been both 1. internal and 2. trans-scalar, i. e. between the king, his official delegates and what the sources brandmark, from Mesopotamia to Mongolia, as «enemies» and «brigands», namely the representatives of those «lower-level political communities», as Richardson has called them, through whose intermediation these territories could indeed be profitably exploited by the imperial administration.<sup>306</sup> Therefore, the scenario emerging from Mesopotamian sources is, in short, that of a balance of weak powers, resulting from the inability (of each of the players on the stage) to subject the others to their will or to oust it: in other words, a perfect Middle Ground situation, from which the contender presenting itself as endowed with greater authority/legitimacy (the Babylonian monarchs, the Persian Great Kings) attempted to gain the maximum advantage by presenting itself as the guarantor of the safest context within which rivalries and disputes could be pacified. To put it otherwise, this was often achieved by the highest bidder for power by claiming for itself the role of an impartial arbiter (and *super partes* because more powerful than each of such *partes* taken individually).<sup>307</sup> The primary purpose of such a strategy, which more often than not rested on the skillful dosing of persuasion and punishment (and of the display of both in a narrative fashion – the technical term is storytelling – as the one which is showcased at Bīsūtūn), was the masking of the (reduced) *de facto* power of the state in the guise of its ambitions (presented as a *power de iure*), in

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<sup>305</sup> Cf. King 2021, 66: to increase the capacity of exploit local resources by powerholders meant to empower the Empire writ large.

<sup>306</sup> Richardson 2012, 16. See e. g. *RIME* 4 nos. 401 and 404 for the above-mentioned Ammi-īštamar and Ambuna-ahi. Such individuals can be profitably compared both with the ὄπαρχοι to be found in classical sources and to the Xiōngnú that documents excavated in Chinese military stations all along the Empire's borderlands simply call «the enemies» (Giele 2011), because they must have been omnipresent to the point of not even needing further qualification. As Dr. Kathrin Leese-Messing, whom I thank here, pointed out to me, it is striking to note how closely the tone (and the terminology) of the documentary sources mirrors that of the written evidence (for example the *Shiji*). This leads one to wonder whether the latter could in some ways have provided a model (and concepts) within which to frame the bureaucrats' own life experience, a phenomenon investigated with great insight by Orlando Figes (2008) with regard to GuLag's memoirs compared with the text that was soon to become canonical on the subject, Solženitsyn's Archipelago.

<sup>307</sup> Richardson 2012, 27-29. This is precisely what happened in Soviet Central Asia: Fragner and Kappeler 2006, 175.

this way in fact self-generating both that power and to a certain extent the polity itself.<sup>308</sup> However, what both the Babylonian rulers and their Achaemenid counterparts centuries later present in their inscriptions as power over human groups should - in fact - be understood, at most, as power of, i. e. the ability to organize clientele and (sub)groups of political, social and economic agency with the intention of pursuing aims that are extremely limited in space if not - at least ideally - in time. This is all the more true in the absence of the actual ability to influence, let alone control these clientele and subgroups of political, economic and social capability given their absolutely unavoidable role in order to spread the Empire's paradigm of rule.<sup>309</sup> How and why conceiving the *Rise & Organization* of the Achaemenid Empire (and particularly of the satrapy of Baktria) in terms of what we may call, following Richardson, a «continuously emerging project» and «by definition» one never to be actually completed might represent an extremely fruitful theoretical and methodological positioning for the understanding of the dynamics underpinning the interaction between the different actors involved in this process within Persian-ruled Central Asia becomes even clearer with a sufficiently astute analysis of the representation of the power claimed by the Achaemenid rulers over their subjects (bandakā included), but paradoxically implemented by the former through the latter.

In fact, although the exclusive property of the King alone, personally conferred on him - as Darius claims - by Ahuramazdā and only entrusted by him to his subordinates (bandakā) so that they could guard it and wield it in his name, the power of the Great Kings (their xšaça-) was nevertheless, by virtue of its very nature, structurally fragile and subject to the constant threat of destruction.<sup>310</sup> This is shown quite clearly by a careful reading of those «dynamics of contradiction» mentioned by Briant within the Bīsūtūn text itself, which, paradoxically, is both the most eloquent manifesto of the self-representation of Persian imperial power that has been preserved and an elaborate – to some extent surprisingly outspoken - reflection on the limits of that same power celebrated in and through it.<sup>311</sup> After all, throughout the entire inscription Darius himself does not fail to (stubbornly) emphasize that each of the liar kings is punished precisely for having attempted to usurp the xšaça- (i. e. at the same time 1. the royal title and 2. the power over a specific territory) which, as he states, «has long belonged to our [Achaemenid] house».<sup>312</sup> In the case of Gaumāta, the inextricable link between the abstract

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<sup>308</sup> Richardson 2012, 32-34.

<sup>309</sup> Richardson 2014, 74.

<sup>310</sup> The fact that the royal power (xšaça) had been conferred on him by Ahuramazdā himself is said quite explicitly by Darius in the text of Bīsūtūn, the main place of the autogenesis - at least on the ideal level, of what Richardson calls the «ambition» and Garrison designates as the «hoped-for-fantasy» - of the Achaemenid imperial power: cf. DB<sub>p</sub> col. I § 13: «by the will of Ahuramazdā I became king; Ahuramazdā gave me royal power [Ahuramazdāha adam xšāyaθiya abavam. Ahuramazdā xšaçam manā frābara]» (translation following *TPE* I, 143).

<sup>311</sup> Khatchadourian 2016, 4.

<sup>312</sup> DB<sub>p</sub> col. I § 12 (translation following *TPE* I, 143): compare DB<sub>e</sub>, 11 as well as DB<sub>a</sub>, 17-18. As Lincoln 2012, 376 points out, such a claim is at least suspicious. All that is known of Darius' past outside what he tells about himself comes from Herodotos (Hdt. 3.139), who claims that Vīštāspa's son held the position of spearman (δορούφορος, řštibara in Old Persian) under Cambyses at the time of the latter's campaign in Egypt (see Tuplin 2018a on chronology). This allows us

principle of royal authority and the concreteness of the territory over which this authority is displayed is expressed as clearly as it could be. After taking possession of the former, in fact («he took it [the xšaça-] away from Cambyses»), Gaumāta started to claim the territories of the Empire as if they belonged to him by right: «he took Persia and Media for himself, together with the other territories/peoples [dahayāva]; he made them his own, he became king».<sup>313</sup> It is remarkable that, albeit with some slight lexical nuances, the same concept is repeated by Darius for each of the other claimants to the throne, from Nidintū Bēl in Babylonia to Frāda in Margiana, and from Fravartiš to Vahēyazdāta in Pārsa. By claiming the xšaça- for themselves, each of Darius' adversaries threatened to turn upside down, if not actually destroy, the entire imperial architecture, which the Achaemenid ruler, at least on the basis of the surviving documentation, repeatedly represents as a mirror of the cosmic order established by Ahuramazdā and entrusted to him by the latter in order to be preserved and if possibly even expanded ad maiorem gloriam of himself [Ahuramazdā and Darius], his lineage, and all mankind (cf. the formula šiyāti martiyahyā of DEa § 1, to be rendered as «happiness for mankind»)<sup>314</sup> The insistence on the violation of a principle of a super-human (if not even of cosmic-religious) nature helps at least in part to explain the outpouring of brutality with which some of the rebels (starting with Gaumāta) were punished, although it must be remembered that a similar rhetoric - and its representation, if one decides to admit a more or less significant discrepancy between what is said (and portrayed) and what really happened - has very deep roots in the traditions of the ancient Near East and in particular in the Assyrian world, which constitutes in all likelihood the most immediate precedent of the most ruthless forms of Achaemenid criminal law.<sup>315</sup> Moreover, it should not be forgotten that, as pointed out by Graeber and Sahlins, a religious discursive and legal framework to account for punishment more often than not (un) masks crucial political issues at stake.<sup>316</sup>

But this is not the only aspect worth discussing here, nor perhaps the most important one. More remarkable seems indeed the fact that, despite the bias of his account - or perhaps because of it - Darius' version of the events of 522-521 BCE shows a distinct perception on the part of theorists of Achaemenid monarchy, in this case the ruler himself, of what following a suggestion by Lori

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to deduce, as indeed his career would suggest, that he was a man of considerable lineage, but not necessarily a member of the ruler's innermost circle, let alone a designated heir to the throne. The picture is further complicated by the fact that some sources (Xen. *Cyr.*, 7.5.66-68 and later Ath. 12.514b-c) claim that Cyrus also recruited individuals of non-aristocratic lineage from among the 10000 spear bearers who made up his guard: see Briant 2002, 272-273.

<sup>313</sup> DB<sub>p</sub> col. I § 12 (translation following *TPE* I, 143).

<sup>314</sup> Lincoln 2007, 67-81; 2012, 59-88 and Tuplin 2017b. Cf. moreover *API*, 97.

<sup>315</sup> Rollinger 2010, Lincoln 2012, 404. Vahēyazdāta was impaled along with 52 of his allies. Both Čiçantaḥma and Fravartiš were mutilated of their noses, ears, and tongues, Darius personally gouged out one of their eyes (as the king himself does not fail to point out in DB<sub>p</sub> col. II § 32) and were, finally, themselves impaled, one in Ekbatana, Media, and the other in Arbela (Arbīl, in present-day Iraq). The followers of Fravartiš were instead hanged in the fortress of Ekbatana. See most recently Boucharlat 2018 on the Achaemenid royal palaces at the site.

<sup>316</sup> Graeber and Sahlins 2018, 65-138.

Khatchadourian one might call the rough and constantly in fieri nature of Persian imperial power.<sup>317</sup> Despite the fact that, at least in theory, both the abstract principle and the material counterpart (the territory) of the xšaça- belonged exclusively to the King - this is ultimately the meaning of the Old Persian word xšāyaθiya, namely he who wields power (one aspect of xšaça- ) over a given territory (a second aspect of xšaça-), i. e. «the King»: cf. the Latin imperator -, his statements of absolute power appear in reality, on a careful reading of the text itself, to be little more than declarations of intent, of «aspiration to sovereignty», fragments of what Richardson defined as «a cohering discourse of desire».<sup>318</sup> A second point worth stressing is also the fact that this sovereignty, absolute, eternal, and inviolable (because of divine origin, i. e. bestowed and sanctioned by Ahuramazdā) as it might have been portrayed was in fact constantly at risk of being questioned, challenged, usurped («taken away», in Darius' very words) and – eventually - destroyed. The most important consequence of all this seems to have been the need for the Achaemenid rulers to constantly negotiate with actors at least partly outside their sphere of influence, 1. the extent and 2. the limits of their - theoretically – unrestrained (literally universal) power in both time and space: this is why, in Garrison's words, Bīsutūn and the other Persian royal inscriptions should be read first and foremost as an ideal space, in which little or nothing of real life functions as a proscenium for the staging of «a hoped-for-fantasy».<sup>319</sup> Worthy of consideration is also the fact that the «approximate», «asymptotic», and «inherently limited» nature of Achaemenid sovereignty does not concern only what we might call the theoretical aspect of xšaça-, i. e. «the abstract principle of imperial power» studied by Bruce Lincoln and, in his wake, by Lori Khatchadourian. On the contrary, such a nature directly affects and conditions also the *material* aspect of the concept of xšaça-, and this both in the imperial homeland, in Fārs, and in the more recently acquired territories, among which, in the case at issue in these pages, Central Asia and more specifically Baktria. From this point of view, it is therefore not without interest to note that, starting precisely from the Bīsutūn text, in the entire corpus of Achaemenid royal inscriptions «the earthly referent» of xšaça- is first and foremost Pārsa (today's Fārs, hence Persia).<sup>320</sup> This would seem to provide at least partial confirmation of the hypothesis according to which, not differently from other satrapies, in the same way Baktria was also conceived, at least since Darius'

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<sup>317</sup> Khatchadourian 2016, 16: «tentative and always emergent nature of Persian imperial power».

<sup>318</sup> Richardson 2012, 4.

<sup>319</sup> Garrison 2011, 18, Khatchadourian 2016, 21. Put differently, in the absence of the satrap and his (the latter's) allies (bandakā), the Achaemenid ruler would not have been able to protect and preserve his xšaça-. Paradoxically, the necessary condition of absolute monarchy is the possibility (the need) of relying on someone different, in role and (to a greater or lesser extent) in intentions and interests, from the ruler himself. Such figures have recently been defined by Düring and Stek 2018a, 10 as «imperial collaborators [which is quite different from the collaborationists referred to in Colburn 2020a, 180 ff.]». Here again, the circumstantial and negotiated nature of Achaemenid imperial power pointed out by Lori Khatchadourian emerges quite clearly, which in turn justifies the comparison, suggested above, with the Mesopotamian polities studied by Seth Richardson.

<sup>320</sup> Lincoln 2007, 70. Compare *API*, 12-27 for an overview of the dataset.

takeover, as what Ando calls a «constitutive outside» of the imperial heartland (i. e., again, Pārsa). In other words, and taking up Khatchadourian's formulation, the territories of Central Asia would have been organized as «replicative and reproductive units [of the structure] of the imperial center», implying that, at least in theory, they should have been governed following the same principles (namely through the application of what Bleda Düring and Tesse Stek call a given «repertoire of rules») originally developed in order to administer the territory of Pārsa itself.<sup>321</sup> After all, in the context of a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual Empire, subdividing the territory into units that were functionally similar and reproduced (in Henkelman's terminology) the «imperial signature» of governmental planning was a powerful symbolic tool, as well as a formidable method of extraction and control, or at least it was planned as such.<sup>322</sup> If all of the above is true, the most significant consequence for the purposes of the discussion carried out so far and for the overall economy of the present research on pre- and perhaps also post-Alexandrian Baktria lies in the fact that, as much as the King, the satrap too was faced with the same difficulties and the same limitations encountered (and recognized as such) by the Achaemenid overlords in their attempt to preserve the xšaça-. This should not come as a surprise, if we consider that, as it was said before, the satrapal court was structured, at least from a theoretical point of view, as a mirror (again, the «constitutive outside») of the organization and of the governing principles running the imperial one, although – of course - on a smaller scale.<sup>323</sup>

In the case of the satraps, the sheer size of the Empire conquered by Cyrus, to say nothing – to name but a few - of the social, economic, and ecological complexity of the subjugated territories, suggests that, at the time of recruiting «imperial collaborators» - which means, at the time of selecting the officials in charge of running the satrapy at the «micro» level, namely that of village or valley units - the satraps were in all likelihood forced to look beyond the Persian diaspora, all the more so if, as we have tried to show, it was by no means obvious that they themselves (always) came originally from that diaspora.<sup>324</sup> It is in fact a number of rather plain demographic considerations - also applicable, for example, to the Seleukid Empire - that make it highly probable that in the satrapies the (socio)ethno-classe dominante was forced to negotiate the conditions of its hegemony with the

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<sup>321</sup> Khatchadourian 2016, 4, Ando 2017b, 119, Düring and Stek 2018a, 10.

<sup>322</sup> See Scott's enlightening analogy (1998, 55) with the plan according to which the castrum of the Roman legions was built and the reasons behind such planimetric simplicity (above all the ability to replicate the model almost indefinitely and at extremely low cost). On the imperial signature see now the seminal Henkelman 2017a (to which 2018c provides a critical supplement, focused as it is on landed estates) and the overview in Henkelman 2021a.

<sup>323</sup> Briant 2002, 345-347.

<sup>324</sup> Düring and Stek 2018a, 9-12. But even if they had been ethnically Persian, the parallel of the (unsuccessful) reforms attempted by Gorbačëv in Central Asia by means of – among other things - a huge effort to replace local Party cadres with elements coming from Russia or other republics clearly shows how the construction of clientelist networks was a phenomenon so deeply rooted in the local political fabric that it reproduced itself regardless of the origin of the officials charged with fighting it: see Fragner and Kappeler 2006, 174-179.

representatives of the communities and territories (nominally) subject to it. This reasoning is a fortiori plausible in the case of the first decades after the conquest, if one takes into account factors such as the already mentioned logistical constraints, including, above all, the transportation costs, which made it prohibitive to send officials from the court to every corner of the Empire at least before the system we see through the Persepolis archive was established, which cannot have been a matter of just a few years.<sup>325</sup> In the case of the Seleukids, recently evaluated by Christian Mileta, it is evident that, despite the legendary urban planning policy promoted by the rulers, demography must have played against the Graeco-Makedonian kings. While the flow of colonists towards the Irānian Plateau is unlikely to have exceeded 10% of the general population (around half a million individuals) over the course of the entire dynasty, it is possible to estimate that the total number of subjects in the upper satrapies was around 20 million men (25 if we also consider Eastern Irān), resulting in a ratio of 98 natives for every 2 new settlers.<sup>326</sup> The unavoidable consequence of these figures is that the size of the presence of people of non-Graeco-Makedonian origin within the Hellenistic neo-foundations (and the role within them of such individuals) should be drastically reconsidered.<sup>327</sup> A similar reasoning could be fruitfully applied to the case of the Persian (socio)ethno-classe dominante, at least during its phase d'installation within the territories that were to become the upper satrapies, and particularly in Central Asia.<sup>328</sup> One domain in which it is perhaps possible, if not to demonstrate, at least to argue in favor of the role played by such factors - which at first glance might seem self-evident, but which in reality are often obliterated by conceptions of the functioning of pre-modern Empires that are as misleading as they are deeply rooted in both (at least in (Western)European-fashioned) political thought, which however still informs contemporary research theory to a great extent, and the collective imagination - is that of the army.<sup>329</sup> In the Akkadian version of the Bīsūtūn inscription, for example, it is stated that Vivāna's forces, which faced Vahēyazdāta's troops on at least three occasions, consisted of roughly 4600 units (4579 according to the text) while, judging from the Aramaic version of the same document, no less than 5200 insurgents were killed in Margiana, suggesting that the troops commanded by Dādêršiš must have amounted to at least a comparable

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<sup>325</sup> On the logistical difficulties of pre-modern Empires in a comparative perspective see the by now classic Engels 1978, several studies by James Scott (1998, 262-306; 2009, 41-50; 2017, 37-67), Briant 2012; 2018b as well as, in a more theoretical perspective, Düring and Stek 2018a, 7-9.

<sup>326</sup> Mileta 2016, 121-123. For an estimate of the population of the upper satrapies during Seleukid times see Aperghis 2004, 40-44. These numbers would be very high but not unrealistic, if one considers that, according to the data provided by Potts 2014, 250, the population of Irān alone around 1900 amounted to approximately 10 million inhabitants (9860000).

<sup>327</sup> This does not exclusively apply to Central Asia: Mairs and Fischer-Bovet 2021 on Seleukid and Ptolemaic urban policies.

<sup>328</sup> On demography in the Achaemenid period see now Wiesehöfer 2021b. The evidence we have allows little more, sometimes less, than thought experiment, but a case could still be made for the argument developed here.

<sup>329</sup> A different perspective regarding how pre-modern Empires functioned has been provided e. g. by Strootman 2014, 121-123 and Duindam 2016, 1. On the Achaemenid army see most recently Manning 2021 with Tuplin and Jacobs 2021.



number.<sup>330</sup> These are, however, conservative estimates, and since the account of the events suggests that the Baktrian troops had to coordinate their movements with those of Vivāna's militia in the face of considerable distances and prohibitive terrain, it is not unreasonable to assume an even greater number of soldiers at the order of Dādêršiš.<sup>331</sup> Now: even if we admit - while not granting - that the troops mentioned at Bīsūtūn were predominantly if not exclusively made up by Persians, it seems highly unlikely that the latter equaled the totality of the satrapal manpower, and perhaps not even its predominant share. A yardstick for an estimate might perhaps be Herodotos' account, according to which the satrap appointed by Cyrus in Asia Minor (and thus in charge of such important territories as Phrygia, Lydia, and Ionia), a man named Oroetes, had with him a contingent of Persians not exceeding a thousand units.<sup>332</sup> Even if a ratio of 1:4 between the Persians and the local soldiers were considered excessive (but the figures given in the Aramaic version of Bīsūtūn concerning the Baktrians under the command of Dādêršiš would suggest a ratio of at least 1:5, if we assume that he too had a contingent similar to that of Oroetes), it is nevertheless difficult to doubt that, if we remain cautious, in the last quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE around the half of the troops stationed in Achaemenid Central Asia were recruited from the local populations (which means through local powerbrokers, as later documentary evidence clearly suggests).<sup>333</sup> The case of the Roman army,

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<sup>330</sup> Genito 2013, 627 reports the figure of 55423 Margians killed and 6972 prisoners, dismissing the data provided by the Aramaic version of the Bīsūtūn text as «undoubtedly exaggerated» (and see now Hyland 2014 on the casualty figures at Bīsūtūn). While this may - perhaps - be true in the case of the victims, regarding the prisoners any hasty judgement in one sense or another should be critically examined, since the data provided in the case of Baktria are comparable with those mentioned concerning Vivāna's army in Arachosia. From them it can be deduced that the number of troops stationed in Central Asia by the Achaemenid Kings at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE was hardly less than 10000, by all standards a considerable figure. As a touchstone, Alexander, whose organization of the upper satrapies in the aftermath of the conquest is usually regarded as having been much more hasty - and patched up - than that of the Achaemenids, left 10000 men in Baktria alone. Those are at least the figures according to Arr. *Anab.*, 4.22.3 (who speaks of 13500 men, a thousand infantry, the rest cavalry), Curt. 9.7.1-11 and Diod. Sic. 17.99.5-6. The 3000 soldiers mentioned by Diodoros rebelled as soon as reports of Alexander's alleged death in India around 325 spread through Baktria (nothing similar happened, as far as we know, in the case of Darius, although it is possible to assume that similar rumors, which are equally difficult to verify, circulated at the time): see Bernard 1985, 30 and Widmer 2015, 52-57. According to the calculations by Naiden 2019, 170, the total number of Alexander's soldiers would have been around 23000, a view already supported by Stanley Burstein (2012, 98), who indeed suggests that Alexander stationed more than 20000 men in Baktria. Despite the contrary opinion voiced by Holt 1988a, 81, these are remarkable numbers, all the more so if one considers that other categories of settlers and veterans should probably be added to them. In the light of this reasoning, the figures of the Aramaic version of Bīsūtūn do not appear so absurd.

<sup>331</sup> Briant 2002, 118, *TPE* I, 146, DBa, 68-77.

<sup>332</sup> Hdt. 3.127.

<sup>333</sup> This is a field of antiquarianism in which, as well as, but perhaps more than, others, it is almost impossible to put forward reliable statistical material because of the available sources. However, the figures suggested in these pages might find some comfort in the observations made by Mischa Meier (2020, 1182 fn. 43, with further bibliography) who points out that, in the case of Constantine's army (272-337 CE), although there is no evidence to claim, as has been done in the past, that under his reign the number of troops of trans-limitanean origin increased in absolute numbers or even in proportion, it seems however indisputable that «approximately one quarter [of the imperial army] consisted of non-imperial troops». If, in the case of Constantine, part of the responsibility for this phenomenon must probably be attributed to military reverses (above all Adrianople, but also Mursa, today Osijek in Croatia, almost 30 years earlier, in 351 CE), a similar emergency circumstance cannot be excluded in the case of the Persians since, if we want to give at least partial credit to Herodotos, following the campaign in Transoxiana, the Achaemenid contingent in Central Asia may have needed urgent reinforcements. Local élites as suppliers of military manpower in later Baktrian history: King 2020, 249-255.

especially in the most sensible borderlands, from Britannia to Africa, should make one think about the possibility that particularly eminent individuals within a given territory could have made a career through the ranks of the Persian military apparatus: a certain Crocus, for instance, seems to have been present at the time of Constantine's father's passing (indicating his high position within the latter's troops) and it is not excluded that he played a leading role at the time of the future emperor's acclamatio. In addition to this, already in pre-Constantinian times there is epigraphic (and literary) evidence of high-ranking officers recruited from the barbaricum.<sup>334</sup> Such an assumption is further made plausible by the almost unanimous description of the Persian armies in the accounts of classical sources.<sup>335</sup> Paradigmatic in this respect (not least by virtue of the fact that it is the only narrative of any detail on the subject) is Herodotos' catalogue of the Central Asian troops who accompanied Xerxes on his expedition against Greece: in it - significantly - the only Persian mentioned is the commander (whether or not he was the local satrap, as is usually assumed).<sup>336</sup>

Similar considerations raise a number of important issues: how was the Achaemenid military structured at the time of the revolts over which Darius finally prevailed?<sup>337</sup> Or, to put the question in only partially different and more general terms, how are we to imagine the composition of the administrative apparatus of the satrapy (assuming, of course, that one existed at the time, a hypothesis that cannot be proved or disproved at the present state of knowledge)? And again: who were the *bandakā* on whom Dādêršiš was able to rely upon during those crucial months? This question cannot be answered directly based on the extant sources other than Bīsūtūn (which, as mentioned, even ignore Dādêršiš's very existence). However, from some hints scattered through their works by authors such as Xenophon, whose ethnographic expertise in the field of Περσικά there is no reason to doubt on the one hand and, on the other, on the basis of a handful of historical and ethnographic parallels,

<sup>334</sup> On Crocus see e. g. *Epit. Caes.*, 41. and Meier 2020, 338-339. For epigraphic documentation see for example *CIL* III, 10981. Regarding the literary sources, note for example *SHA* Prob., 14.7, *SHA* Marc., 21.7 and Zos. 1.68.3 (the latter particularly favorable regarding the integration of «non-imperial» troops into the ranks of the Roman militia).

<sup>335</sup> On this topic see most recently Manning 2021, 261-344.

<sup>336</sup> Cf. Hdt. 7.64.1 for the Baktrian contingent, Hdt. 7.66.1 for the Sogdian, Gāndhārān one and those of the Dadikae (Δαδίκαι, perhaps a ἔθνος from the Karakorum), whose link with Baktria is made plausible by their panoply, which is described by Herodotos as closely resembling that of the Baktrians (τὴν αὐτὴν σκευὴν ἔχοντες τὴν καὶ Βάκτριαι ἐστρατεύοντο). See also Aesch. *Pers.*, ll. 306-307 and ll. 318-319, where two Baktrians are mentioned, probably as commanders of units within Xerxes' army: «the noble Tenagon, a native of Baktria [Τενάγων τ' ἀριστεύς Βακτρίων ἰθαγενής]» and «the Baktrian Artabes [Ἀρτάβης τε Βάκτριος]». Of course, in the case of Aeschylus, distinguishing between literary reworking and historical fact is extremely difficult, and perhaps not even advisable, and this all the more so because it is not entirely clear whether and to what extent the latter's Persian ethnography depends on Herodotos or has instead in some way influenced the description in the *Histories*. As Omar Coloru, whom I thank, pointed out to me, the traditionally accepted date of birth of the historian (ca. 484 BCE) is in fact based exclusively on the chronology provided by Aulus Gellius, which in turn is structured based on the floruit system, which is notoriously unreliable (cf. Gell. *NA.*, 15.23). It is therefore not to be excluded that Herodotos was born some years (or decades?) earlier, and that some of his material circulated within selected circles such as those that Aeschylus undoubtedly frequented before the tragedian composed the *Persians*. For a rather revolutionary Herodotean chronology (especially regarding the date of writing of the *Histories* concluding chapters) see Irwin 2018.

<sup>337</sup> For a recent assessment see Manning 2021, 115-154.

it is perhaps possible to elaborate a picture at least of general order (a scenario) of the situation to be then compared with the traditionally accepted model, i. e., that of the almost exclusive pre-eminence of the ethno-classe dominante in the affairs of the Achaemenid satrapies. The overarching goal of this enterprise is to verify which of the two is 1. more economical as well as 2. more in agreement both with what we know from similar contexts and 3. more coherent with the picture that emerges from the available sources for periods subsequent to the one under consideration here.<sup>338</sup>

In the 8<sup>th</sup> book of the *Cyropaedia*, Xenophon states that «in the past it was a tradition among them [the Persians] that those who owned land were required to provide cavalry units on the basis of their possessions and that these units, in the event of war, had to go into battle».<sup>339</sup> An assessment of this passage from a comparative perspective of Eurasian scope shows that, contrary to what – following Briant’s lead - is usually done, this recruitment system should not be interpreted exclusively from the - limiting - perspective of the context of dependency relations between the Great King and the Persian aristocracy (in the sense of the ethno-classe dominante).<sup>340</sup> From a testimony of the *Hànshū*, for example, we learn that some prominent officers within the Xiōngnú imperial hierarchy, known as «valiant/wise kings» (in Chinese túqí wáng 屠耆王) owned land and grazing rights in exchange for the obligation to recruit cavalry in accordance with the requests of the Shányú (單于).<sup>341</sup> Especially noteworthy here is 1. that this system of military conscription seems to have enjoyed significant continuity within the Eurasian steppe world, and it might be fruitful asking whether it was not also the basis for the recruitment of cavalry in contexts such as Sogdiana or Chorasmia, which links with the steppes appear indisputable and 2. that the Xiōngnú túqí wáng did not personally recruit the manpower to be placed at the disposal of the Shányú, but used other officers subordinate to them (according to a mechanism closely resembling that of the bandakā) over whom, however, both they and the Shányú were not always able to exercise strict control, with not infrequent embarrassing results in the context of diplomatic relations with China.<sup>342</sup> Read in the light of evidence of this kind, the (precious little) information we have about Achaemenid, and Hellenistic, Bactria takes on a whole new dimension. A few examples will help to clarify the point: the dangerousness and dexterity of the Bactrian cavalry was a τόπος of ancient warfare literature, and seems to have remained so at least until the time of Polybios in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, who in fact does not fail to mention it as the feather

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<sup>338</sup> On the use of the *Cyropaedia* as a historical source see Tuplin 1996 and Degen 2020. On Xenophon as ethnographer of the Persian see Vlassopoulos 2017.

<sup>339</sup> Xen. *Cyr.*, 8.8.20. See Manning 2021, 179-186 on topics such as ethnicity and service as well as bowmen and cavalry within the Persian army.

<sup>340</sup> Cf. most recently Manning 2021, 174-175 on the Ḥaṭṛu system of recruitment as well as concerning other options available to both the king and the satraps. Note also Tuplin and Jacobs 2021 and Tuplin 2021 on mercenary forces.

<sup>341</sup> *Hànshū* 94B 3810-3811. I would like to thank here both Dr. Kathrin Leese-Messing (Freiburg) and Dr. Silvia Nico (Rome) for their invaluable help and the great patience in dealing with my linguistic shortcomings.

<sup>342</sup> See more over Di Cosmo 1994; 199b; 2013 as well as, for a Central Asian comparison, King 2020, 249-255.

in the cap of Euthydemus' armed force, the latter being one of the most important kings of Bactria in the Seleukid period.<sup>343</sup> What deserves to be emphasized in the historian's account is the fact that, as Lauren Morris recently observed, the Euthydemidian cavalry, (thus including that of his son Demetrios, the conqueror of India), «probably was comprised of a substantial portion of indigenous Bactrian nobles».<sup>344</sup>

Let us try now to provide an interim summary of the previous discussion: after a comparison between this passage, the information contained in the *Hànshū* (and the *Shǐjì*) about the functioning of the Xiōngnú cavalry and above all, as we shall see, the most recent evidence available from archaeology as well as from primary sources (the *ADAB*) concerning the mechanisms of the imperial administration in the Central Asian satrapies (at least in the late Achaemenid period), it is fair to wonder whether the dynamics of tributary extraction and military recruitment described by Xenophon did not concern only «Persian nobles of the imperial diaspora» as Briant claims, but perhaps also people such as Arimazes, Catanes, or Spitamenes, all of them called ὑπαρχοί by the Alexander historians and all of them at the head of military contingents of a certain size (in the case of Spitamenes, for instance, of a deadly cavalry, able to deliver some of the most crushing defeats suffered by the Makedonian army during Alexander's whole military campaign).<sup>345</sup> By virtue of these remarks, it would perhaps be advisable to read the Polybian passage in a similar manner, and to assume that the notables (and the contingents made available by them) who made up the selected units of Euthydemus' army might have represented, at least in a phylogenetic perspective, the descendants of the ὑπαρχοί of the Achaemenid period, who drew their economic and military power from their landed estates and their clientelist networks and not - or at least not only - by virtue of royal munificence, as implied instead by Briant's model.<sup>346</sup> In fact, the case of Spitamenes and of his close collaborator - and later traitor - Dataphernes leaves little room for doubt, since the portrait of the two men as it surfaces from the historiographical sources implies in itself 1. that both were individuals of absolute prestige within especially, but by no means only, Sogdian society, 2. that they

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<sup>343</sup> On Euthydemus and his reign see Tarn 1938, 71-128, Coloru 2009, 175-186, Strootman 2020c, 22-24 and, from a numismatic perspective, Glenn 2020b, 65-87.

<sup>344</sup> Morris 2019a, 73. Cf. the account of the battle at the Harīrūd in Polyb. 10.48: the Bactrian ruler Euthydemus was able to deploy impressive ranks of Bactrian cavalry and mounted archers against the Seleukid king Antiochus III at the time of the latter's advance into Central Asia in the context of his famous Irānian Anabasis. For a diachronic overview of Bactrian war equipment see Nikonorov 1997 and most recently Manning 2021, 238-239 on the archaeology of warfare in Achaemenid Eastern Irān. Nikonorov and Savčuk 1992, on the other hand, focuses more on the Hellenistic period. On Demetrios see most recently Marcinkiewicz-Joseph 2016 and Glenn 2020b, 87-106.

<sup>345</sup> In addition to Arrian and Curtius Rufus, other authors of the so-called *Vulgata*, as we have seen, should be considered to study both Alexander's campaign and, what is of more interest here, the administrative and sociopolitical geography of (at least) 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE Achaemenid Bactria: see e. g. Rapin 2014.

<sup>346</sup> Cf. Briant 2002, 66, which is arguably problematic because it only considers the ethnically Persian component of the Empire, whereas the above-mentioned passage from Polybios rather emphasizes the role of local notables, at least as far as military affairs in late 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE Bactria are concerned, which in itself would be an extremely important fact. For an overview of Achaemenid archaeology of warfare in the provinces see Manning 2021, 223-260.

owned land and livestock - in all likelihood their personal property or at least that of their familiar network - and 3. that they contributed significantly to the imperial tax system. The consequence of the above is that part of these tax contributions consisted, to an extent that is, however, difficult to assess with certainty, in the sending of military contingents to meet the demands of the satrap of Bactria (i. e. Bessos). Finally, the history of the origins of the first O‘zbek Qağanate (in the post-Tīmūrid era) further provides a useful yardstick against which to assess the plausibility of the considerations made so far. Around 1506, Muḥammad Šāyḃānī Ḥān conquered the oasis of Buxārā, inflicting a very hard blow to the last Tīmūrid rulers, in fact laying the foundations of the first O‘zbek Empire (Ḥānate/Qağanate) in history.<sup>347</sup> Three years later, at the time of launching a massive campaign against the Qazaqs, which was to cost him his life, Šāyḃānī Qağan discovered – not without disappointment - that he was entirely dependent on the former Tīmūrid governor of the towns and oases he had just conquered, since this official was the only one able both to provide for regular tax collection in the rich Buxārān oasis and to carry out efficient military conscription (especially, and interestingly enough in the light of what has been just said about Achaemenid Northern Central Asia, of the Sogdian cavalry units).<sup>348</sup>

### 2.5.3. Avam ubṛtam abaram: Hegemonic Ambitions and Imperial Collaborators

The implications of what has been discussed above - it seems to me - are significant. Although, for the time being, the scarcity of documentation makes it impossible to be more specific about this in the absence of a certain degree of speculation, it is nevertheless feasible to assume with relative confidence that (regardless of their socio-cultural background), both Dādêršiš and Vivāna had to rely on local communities when recruiting the military contingents at the head of which they were able to quash the revolts in Margiana and Arachosia. Since, moreover, as Briant has argued, the uprisings of 522-521 were led by the local ruling factions, whose members had been very careful to keep the profits from the exploitation of the land and people for themselves rather than share them with the new ruling class of Persians, the fact that, at least as far as we can tell, nothing comparable occurred

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<sup>347</sup> For the historical context of such events see Golden 1992, 333-339; 2011b, 91-104, Beckwith 2009, 209, Biran 2009, and Bregel 2009.

<sup>348</sup> Manning 2021, 215-222 on a similar «feudal theory» in the context of the Achaemenid armed force. Of course, the point is not to claim that Empires as different in times and (to some extent) even space, worked exactly in the same way (but see now Bang *et al.* 2021 I for a thorough study of structural features of what they call The Imperial Experience, which indeed allows comparisons in a world-historical perspective to be pursued as a fruitful method of historical enquiry). Moreover, as King 2020 has convincingly shown, in Central Asia (and particularly in (Greater)Afġānistān, as defined by Payne and King 2020), both environmental and social constraints can be shown to have played a major role in local history across many centuries. To this point could be also added that the evidence at hand often requires the historian to approach Central Asian history from a *longue dur e* perspective. As chapter 2 has tried to elucidate, such a strategy can be very rewarding.

in the two key satrapies of Central Asia is something worth noting.<sup>349</sup> The emphasis placed by the Achaemenid Kings on the harmonious and peaceful collaboration of the populations of each satrapy (among themselves and with their overlords) for the prosperity and glory (*šiyāti*) of the imperial project is therefore only one side of the coin, the only one - one might say - worthy of being represented and glorified within a self-celebratory and ideologically dense framework such as that of the imperial inscriptions. The other side - also present although, for obvious reasons, much less prominent - speaks, on the contrary, of the conditioned and co-constructed nature of a sovereignty that cannot, although perhaps it would like to, be conceived as the fruit of the dynastic pact only between the members of the (socio)ethno-classe dominante, but must be based (both metaphorically and literally, as Naqš -i Rostam shows) on a much wider, heterogeneous, and complex ruling class (*herrschende Gesellschaft*), the latter being structurally (and not contingently) open to the representatives of local communities and therefore inevitably sensitive to the interests of these indigenous powerholders (Düring and Stek's «imperial collaborators»); with the latter often competing both with each other and sometimes even with the satrap or the King.<sup>350</sup> The fundamental ambiguity of this relationship between the ruler and his subjects (*bandakā*) is summed up with rare plasticity by the reliefs that adorn Darius' tomb at Naqš -i Rostam, a few kilometers Northeast of the modern city of Šīrāz. As Margaret Root has shown in a still landmark study, in fact, the theme of the dynast seated on the throne supported by the personifications of the subjugated peoples (or territories) embodies the visual representation of the benevolent support to the imperial cause (a «hymn of praise», in her words) offered by the subjects symbolized by the countries in which they live (the *dahayāva*).<sup>351</sup> This is a figurative stylistic pattern of immense fortune which, limiting the scope of our comparative analysis to the Mediterranean context, goes from Pharaonic Egypt to imperial Rome.<sup>352</sup> The reciprocity of intents and the overlapping nature of interests between the King and the body politic of the Empire thus appears, based on the evidence provided for example by the reliefs at Naqš -i Rostam's, to be a fundamental component of Achaemenid imperial ideology.<sup>353</sup> This reciprocity of intents, however, is not without its grey areas and amphibologies. Indeed, even though it is in fact only apparent and does not conceal at all, but on the contrary aims at underlining its character of «unequal friendship», the dominant position of the Persian overlord - advertised 1. at a spatial level

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<sup>349</sup> Briant 2002, 120-121.

<sup>350</sup> Lincoln 2012, 144. From this point of view, the celebrated stele of Udjaḥorresnet is - literally – a monument to the ability of a member of such a class of «collaborators» to preserve, if not further expand, its members' capacity for action and power latitude within a drastically changed political horizon: see Colburn 2020a, 131-189.

<sup>351</sup> Note most recently Álvarez-Mon 2018 for an assessment of the Ēlāmite background of such an iconography, which has usually gone underappreciated.

<sup>352</sup> Root 1979, 153-161 (especially p. 160) as well as Root 2000.

<sup>353</sup> Agamben 1998, 5 ff. For a definition of the body-(bio)politic. Compare Xen. *Cyr.*, 8.7.13-14 and Degen 2022, 312-322: the King's power depends on his élite networks (the *bandakā*), for those strongmen are the real pillars of the Empire.

and 2. by the disproportion in size between the depiction of the Great King and that of every other actor on stage - cannot however completely disguise the fact that, although towering over the representatives of the *dahayāva*, it is at the same time based, in the truest sense of the word, on those very populations («the devout subjects» in Root's terminology) that the King of Kings - «one king of many, one lord of many» - claims to rule «not having to account to the city», taking up Aeschylus' famous phrasing.<sup>354</sup> In an attentive examination of this visual apparatus, Bruce Lincoln has underlined how a constitutive part of the very metaphor of the «devout subjects» who - literally - hold up the throne, the latter to be understood metonymically as «the Empire», at the same time embodies the possibility, for obvious reasons never explicitly addressed, and nevertheless ominously impending, «of a refusal». If even one of the «bearers» (the sculptural representation of the «imperial collaborators») were to lower his arms or stop singing the «hymn of praise» in the name of both the King and the Empire, the entire project would run the risk of collapsing in on itself.<sup>355</sup> Such might have been the scenario had Darius not emerged victorious in his struggle against the liar kings: as the inscription itself shows, on the death of Cambyses no fewer than nine «collaborators» refused to renew their support for the imperial throne (effectively disavowing the «dynastic pact») which, as Darius claimed, «had long belonged to my house». Put differently, in the absence of support, real and metaphorical, from the *bandakā*, imperial power could not have survived itself. But the very - vital - existence of such support nevertheless bound the holder of the throne, and the power he wielded (at least to a certain extent) to a stage of eternal *fieri* or, to borrow Richardson's formula, to a «presumptive» condition.<sup>356</sup> Such an interpretation of both the textual evidence and the iconographic device of the inscriptions allows us to properly appreciate the insistence with which Darius, starting - one would say not by chance - from *Bīsūtūn* and then several times in the rest of the corpus known to us, celebrates the merits and importance of «the man who collaborates»: «*martiya, haya hamataxšatā manā viθiyā*», literally «the one who has spent himself for my house».<sup>357</sup> Such an individual, he says both at *Bīsūtūn* and *Naqš i- Rustam*, «I have protected in accordance with his loyalty; he who plotted [against me], however, I have punished in accordance with his duplicity. I loathe him who plots evil, nor can I bear that he should not be punished. I loathe him who plots evil, and I cannot bear that he should not be punished if he sins».<sup>358</sup> Following this line of reasoning,

<sup>354</sup> Root 1979, 133-138 (especially p. 133). Cf. moreover Aesch. *Pers.*, l. 212: «κακῶς δὲ πράξας, οὐχ ὑπεύθυνος πόλει». This image of Persia and the Persian people as the dominion of a despot authorized to treat his subjects as his personal domain will experience a renaissance in the memoirs of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, also due to the venality of the sovereigns of the *Qāğār* dynasty (in power between 1794 and 1925): see Potts 2014, 278 fn. 66.

<sup>355</sup> Root 1979, 160-161 and Lincoln 2012, 127-143. The arguments developed by Khatchadourian 2016, 9-11 considerably elaborates on those put forward by Bruce Lincoln.

<sup>356</sup> Richardson 2012.

<sup>357</sup> *DB<sub>p</sub>* col. IV § 63 (see *DB<sub>e</sub>*, § 51, *DB<sub>a</sub>*, 104).

<sup>358</sup> *DNb* § 4 (the translation follows Lecoq 1997, 222).

Dādêršiš and Vivāna (but the same could be said of Udjaḥorresnet) should be considered as eminent representatives of «the man who cooperates»: their (undoubtedly self-interested) loyalty as resolute supporters of the dynastic pact seems to have been instrumental in securing Darius' power in Central Asia, in fact paving the way for the Achaemenid dynasty's control over the upper satrapies for almost two centuries, until the arrival of Alexander's troops.<sup>359</sup> But, as the documentation discussed so far should hopefully have shown, on the model of the Great King, in their turn the satraps too were forced to rely on other collaborators. Similarly to what Seth Richardson suggests in the case of the Babylonian polity, it would be appropriate to reflect on the fact that the Achaemenid Empire did not emerge out of nothing thanks to the political and military genius of Cyrus and Darius, «with an intact apparatus of territorialism, membership, legal authority, economic coextension». On the contrary, it should rather be understood as a collection of «networks of local and [semi-] professional actors with closely circumscribed goals and interests», i. e. as the result of a precarious and constantly renegotiated collaboration of «discontinuous powers», over which the rulers claimed authority even in areas [of social life] where they did not want, or could not, assume real decision-making (and problem-solving) responsibilities.<sup>360</sup> Therefore, these considerations bring us back to the main question whose theoretical premises and documentary background have been discussed in this chapter, and from which it seems now possible to attempt to provide some answers. How was it possible that, in less than twenty years, Achaemenid power had been able to take root in a territory such as Bactria to the point of preventing, in Central Asia, the challenge launched by individuals such as Gaumāta, Nidintū Bēl, Frāda or Fravartiš from being enthusiastically taken up by the population of the territories recently conquered by Cyrus and subjected to an imperial power whose control of the space it claimed to govern «by the will of Ahuramazdā» was anything but impervious to the «dynamics of contradiction», as events in regions as diverse as Armenia, Babylonia, Media, Hyrkania - and even in Pārsa itself - suggest?<sup>361</sup>

### 3. Conclusion. «That land became mine»

Since at least the 1980s, Irānian philologists and archaeologists have raised doubts concerning the possibility of reconstructing the history of Central Asia prior to its conquest by the Achaemenid Empire.<sup>362</sup> Despite these reservations, the hypothesis has never been completely abandoned: on the

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<sup>359</sup> Mutatis mutandis, élite descendance and familiar (or personal) loyalty to the Empire in a time of troubles is what granted that Bēlšunu, the son of Bēl-ušuršu, became satrap in Syria (Xen. *Anab.*, 1.4.10 and King 2021, 199-217 with further references).

<sup>360</sup> Richardson 2014, 75.

<sup>361</sup> Briant 2002, 120.

<sup>362</sup> Cf. Gnoli 1980, 97-102 (with previous bibliography), Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1988 and Rollinger 2008; 2011; 2020 and 2021a concerning the historical plausibility of a Median Empire. According to Manning 2021, 113 «in Media, which had



contrary, although impossible to make clear sense of even in its vaguest contours, the historicity of a pre-Achaemenid political entity in Baktria has been taken for granted in some seminal studies concerning the political and/or administrative organization of the Persian Empire and has not been seriously questioned since then (more than a quarter of a century ago).<sup>363</sup> Two observations show the influence of such an assumption: first, there have been several attempts, even in fairly recent years, to use archaeological data (which in more than one case would itself provide the explanandum and not the explanans) to confirm the existence of such a political entity, and this despite the obvious *μετάβασις εἰς ἄλλο γένος* (the «leap from one category to another»), and the circular nature, characteristic of such an argument; from a - hypothetical - temple and/or fire altar it is not possible to argue the existence of a Ḫayānid Empire, nor can this material be used to prove the historical soundness of the traditions which, from the *Avestā* to Ferdowsī, seem to insist on Baktria and Baktra as foci (in the geometrical sense of the term) of a more or less divinely sanctioned kingship, by which it is usually understood, more or less explicitly, «pre-Achaemenid kingship».<sup>364</sup> Secondly, the idea that the complexity of the organization of the Achaemenid Central Asian territories as it emerges from the sources, primary as well as secondary, can only be explained by recourse to an equally complex precedent is based on an assumption concerning the genesis and functioning of pre-modern Empires which research carried out on the subject in recent years has convincingly shown to be unable to satisfactorily explain the features, limits, and potential of such socio-political entities.<sup>365</sup> As the discussion carried out so far has tried to show, in the light of the available documentation, albeit with all the interpretative problems related to it, the Bīsūtūn inscription must be considered the 1. oldest and 2. most reliable evidence from which to try to make sense of the beginnings of Baktrian history in the context of the Achaemenid Empire. The results of a reading of the entire narrative device of

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once been a collection of Assyrian provinces, there are also few signs of a centralized, bureaucratic state. Despite Herodotos' picture of the Medes as Persians *avant la lettre*, it seems that they rejected the Mesopotamian idea of kingship and instead organized themselves as some kind of federation of tribes or cities». See moreover Minardi 2015a, 1-7 and Morris 2019a, 53.

<sup>363</sup> Cf. Jacobs 1994, 39, 236, as well as Jacobs 2006; 2017a.

<sup>364</sup> A similar argument was put forward years ago by Jan Kellens (Kellens 1976, 49), who tried to show how, at most, it can be argued that Darius made use of strains from the Avestān tradition to ennoble his own lineage (i. e., following the argument of Garrison 2011; 2017b, to transpose the latter and himself onto the level of the numinous). See also Kellens 1997; 2012; 2021. From a passage in the *Historical Library* (17.114.4-5) Briant (2002, 250) has deduced the existence of an official cult closely linked to «the person and majesty of the sovereign».

<sup>365</sup> See the recent contribution of Düring and Stek 2018a on the definition of what a pre-modern Empire is and how it functions. Duindam 2016 is to date the most recent and intellectually stimulating comparative study of dynastic dynamics. Over the last ten years, the study of the Seleukid Empire has produced important theoretical reflections supporting the formulation of a more complex model of the functioning of pre-modern Empires in Western Eurasia: see Engels 2011; 2017a; 2017b (for a comparison between the Achaemenid and Seleukid courts), Strootman 2011; 2018; 2020a; 2020c. For a comparative overview of Hellenistic Empires and their dynamics see most recently von Reden 2019b, Bang *et al.* 2021 II, 167-197.

the inscription (as Garrison has it, 1. iconography, 2. «text» and 3. «TEXT») coupled with an adequate *mise en abîme* of such evidence are basically three.<sup>366</sup>

1. It can be stated with some confidence that the mention of Bactria as it occurs in the text is not only to be understood in purely ethnographic terms («the place where the Bactrians live»), but as referring to a geopolitical entity («the minimal unit of imperial administration» in the effective words of Lauren Morris), and that this was the result of the Achaemenid conquest. The inscription of Bīsūtūn should therefore be considered the first evidence attesting to the birth and development of the idea of Bactria as «imperial space»: not (only) a borderland then, and even less a «wilderness» at the edge of the world, but a constituent part of a new, the first of its kind, οἰκουμένη of truly Eurasian breath.<sup>367</sup>

2. The text of the inscription testifies to the importance of Bactria within the architecture of the Persian Empire. The possibility – a quite real one - that a satrap was active in this region of Central Asia at least from the time of Cambyses provides unequivocal evidence of the attempt by the Achaemenid administration to organize the territories North of the Hindūkūš (but the same can be said by analogy of Arachosia) based on principles similar to those developed with the aim of governing the satrapy of Fārs (that is to say, the imperial homeland). To achieve these goals, there was no need for pre-existing political entities in Central Asia itself.

3. Perhaps the most important result concerns however the study of terms such as *xšaçaṣpāvā* and *bandaka*, from which it emerges that the processes underlying the development of Bactria as a «minimal unit of imperial administration» cannot be adequately understood in terms of a simple handover from the Ḥayānid rulers – who moreover probably never existed - to the Achaemenid Great Kings, but neither in terms of the conquest (as Wu Xin has it) of a «virgin land», a rather unfortunate metaphor which is nevertheless still extremely common when it comes to assessing the extent of the impact of the Achaemenid conquest on both Bactrian economy and society.<sup>368</sup> The attention that some scholars in recent years have devoted to aspects such as the dependence of Persian imperial power (of the king and equally of his delegates) on the one hand and, on the other, the paradigmatic shift triggered by the reflection on the «approximate and constantly emerging» nature of kingship in the ancient Near East demand a radical rethinking of the ways in which Achaemenid power succeeded in 1. legitimizing - and thus 2. entrenching – as well as finally 3. expanding itself in a space such as that

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<sup>366</sup> Garrison 2011.

<sup>367</sup> Cf. Morris 2019a, 53, from whose reflections - which I was privileged enough to share - both the idea of Bactria as a constitutive unit of imperial administration and that of Central Asia as imperial space are borrowed.

<sup>368</sup> See Wu 2018 for the most recent contribution on Achaemenid transformation of Central Asian landscape and society as the conquest of a «virgin land».

of Bactria while, at the same time and more broadly speaking, making its way into the Central Asian lands «from the lower river» (the Amudaryo) «to the upper river» (the Syrdaryo).<sup>369</sup>

#### 4. Afterthought: Towards a New Understanding of Achaemenid Borderlands in Central Asia

In the light of the fact that, as it has recently been pointed out, both the power and the fragility of an Empire is ultimately based on what happens in the «marginal regions» over which it claims rulership, rethinking the dynamics underpinning (and often shaping if not even triggering) the development of the Northeastern borderlands of the Achaemenid Empire may be important for at least two reasons.<sup>370</sup>

1. Because such a reassessment can help us to understand in more detail the complexity of the Persian Empire in its systemic dimension. 2. Because a study based on such premises may prove fruitful in a long(er)-term perspective which aims to account for historical and social changes in this region of ancient Eurasia. For if, as Lauren Morris has recently argued - and shown with excellent arguments - interconnectedness, prosperity, and innovation during the post-Alexander era of Eurasian history (ca. 330 BCE-330 CE) can be associated with the development of Central Asia «as a new imperial center, or even as a new core region», such a development itself cannot be properly understood without adequately taking into account the almost two and a half centuries of Achaemenid imperial sway in the context of that very same space (and in fact further beyond, given that Alexander's purview fell short of a crucial region such as Chorasmia, which was on the contrary very much integrated into the Achaemenid Empire).<sup>371</sup> However, if one chooses - as the (re)assessment attempted so far would recommend - to renounce the postulate of the Ḥayānid Empire, the Median kingdom, or any other political entity of supra-regional scope prior to Cyrus' conquest of Central Asia, how can one account for the fact that, at the latest 20 years after the rise of Achaemenid power, in Bactria it is possible to find clear traces of a system of territorial control and resource mobilization (inter alia of what might perhaps be called Baktrian manpower) analogous to the military and economic logistical apparatus implied by the exploits of Dādêršiš and Vivāna celebrated by (and self-ascribed to) Darius at Bīsūtūn?<sup>372</sup> To provide some answers, it might be appropriate to start with two further questions, which are as simple as they are fundamental. Firstly, what do we actually know about the territory of

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<sup>369</sup> See Khatchadourian 2016, 4 on the concept of «dependance» as one of the chief features of Achaemenid imperial power.

<sup>370</sup> Düring and Stek 2018a, 3 provide some valuable remarks on the importance of frontier zones as the touchstone for an insightful study of what Walter Scheidel and Ian Morris have called (2009) *The Dynamics of Ancient Empires*. See now Versluys forthcoming and Rollinger 2023. On the importance of borderlands as a proxy to understand imperial dynamics as a whole see now Favereau 2021, 224.

<sup>371</sup> Morris 2019a, 57. A similar argument has been developed in Rollinger 2023.

<sup>372</sup> DB<sub>p</sub> col. III §§ 39, 48: «īma, taya manā kṛtam Bāxtrīyā», «īma, taya manā kṛtam Harauatīyā». Dādêršiš and Vivāna (both mentioned in the previous paragraph) are now gone for good.

Baktria and its inhabitants that might shed light on the phase d'installation, to use once again Briant's well-known formula, of Achaemenid power in the aftermath of Cyrus' conquest?<sup>373</sup> Secondly, what is the potential, and what are the limits that this territory (and yet, mindful of the definition of Baktria as *multiplex et varia*, we should perhaps more accurately say these territories) and the communities settled in it/them presented to the ambitions (the «desires») of a pre-industrial Empire, however sophisticated as the one built by the Achaemenids?<sup>374</sup> Since the nature of the answers to these questions decisively affects the interpretation of the available evidence with respect to the following centuries of Persian history (especially as it comes to the age of Darius and the last decades of the Empire, arguably including its downfall), the next chapter aims at critically evaluate the solutions that research has so far reached in dealing with these issues; if necessary, alternative interpretative frameworks shall also be suggested for making (better?) sense of both the available evidence and of other pieces of information which a methodologically judicious use of the comparative method can provide so as to shed further light on what we do (not) know with respect to the Persian experience of Baktria. Let us then go back to Cyrus.

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<sup>373</sup> Following Morris 2019a, 60, in view of the considerable level of terminological confusion encountered when trying to define a certain space within this area of the world (in antiquity as well as nowadays), the term «Baktria» is used in this work to refer to the «core territory» of Central Asia, including the regions adjacent to it (without insisting too much on, and in fact actually doing away with, rigid boundaries). On the «terminological chaos» that hinders an unambiguous definition of Central Asia, see the lucid discussion of the issue by Svetlana Goršenina (2014, 539-544).

<sup>374</sup> From a theoretical point of view, an important concept to keep in mind in this context is that of affordance, which is used to refer to what the environment offers to individuals and/or a given human community. It also implies the study of how such individuals and communities structure their perceptions of - and interactions with - this environment, and finally how these impact on (or are affected by) the ability of subjects acting in and in relation to the landscape to modify it: see Ingold 1992, 42-44, and now the illuminating Weaverdyck *et al.* 2021. On *Empire, Borders, and Ideology* in the context of the Achaemenid Easternmost borderlands see most recently Rollinger 2021b and Rollinger and Degen 2021 (a and b).

## Chapter 4

### The Road to Oxiana: *Reconstructing a Presumptive Satrapy*

πᾶρ πυρὶ χρῆ τοιαῦτα λέγειν χειμῶνος  
ἐν ὄρῃ || ἐν κλίνῃ μαλακῇ,  
κατακείμενον, ἔμπλεον ὄντα, πίνοντα ||  
γλυκὺν οἶνον, ὑποτρῶγοντ' ἐρεβίνθους·  
|| τίς πόθεν εἰς ἀνδρῶν, πόσα τοι  
ἔτε' ἐστί, φέριστε; || πηλίκος ἦσθ', ὅθ' ὁ  
Μῆδος ἀφίκετο;

[By the fire in winter, these are the sort of conversations you have to have when you are lying full on a soft couch, enjoying sweet wine and munching on chickpeas: “Who are you, and what country are you from? What is your age, my friend? How old were you when the Mede came?”]

- DK 21[11] 22.

ταύτην τὴν μάχην, ὅσαι δὴ βαρβάρων  
ἀνδρῶν μάχαι ἐγένοντο, κρίνω  
ἰσχυροτάτην γενέσθαι, καὶ δὴ καὶ  
πυνθάνομαι οὕτω τοῦτο γενόμενον.

[This fight I judge to have been the stubbornest of all fights that were ever fought by men that were not Greek; and indeed, I have learnt that this was so].

- Hdt. 1.214.1.

#### 1. An Elusive Empire: Cyrus in Baktria

##### 1.1. When

To establish, even tentatively, the chronology of Persian breakthrough in Central Asia following the fall of Sardis (traditionally dated to 547 BCE) is at least as complex as making sense of the years between the death of Cyrus and Darius' rise to power.<sup>1</sup> To date, research seems to agree on (little more than) the following, scanty evidence: the fall of Babylon is dated to 539 BCE and, thirteen years later, under Cambyses' lead, the Achaemenid Empire expanded Southwards, conquering Egypt.<sup>2</sup> From this it has been deduced that the conquest of Central Asia must most likely be dated within such

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<sup>1</sup> Hdt. 1.177-178. On the Persian conquest of Ionia and the events following it see the different positions of Dandamaev 1994, 41, Asheri *et al.* 2007, 181 and Panitschek 2016, 85 for an overview of the debate on the interpretation of Herodotus' text. See however Rollinger 2020, 197-198 against the hypothesis that the passage in the *Nabonidus Chronicle* (ii 15-18) usually taken as proof of Cyrus' conquest of Sardis in 547 BCE does indeed refer to Lydia. According to him, «the chronicle becomes an important testimony also for Median history, for it proves that Cyrus' conquest of Ekbatana did not imply that he was also in control of Eastern Anatolia». Could it therefore be argued that Cyrus had already marched into Central Asia? It is something that, at the present state of our knowledge, the available evidence does not help to clarify (but note Waters 2010 and now Kuhrt 2021).

<sup>2</sup> Tuplin 2018a has provided documentary evidence in favor of a higher chronology than that traditionally accepted for the Persian conquest of Egypt (525 BC), on which see the account provided by Briant 2002, 50-55.

a time frame. According to Hdt. 1.117-178, Cyrus is said to have conquered «Assyria» (i. e. Babylon) «after having subdued the whole of the East»: from this passage a terminus ante quem has been inferred to chronologically situate the advent of Teispid power in Central Asia.<sup>3</sup> Herodotos' testimony is usually backed up by a fragment by the Hellenistic historian Berossos, who is supposed to have had access to first-hand documents (including astronomical calendars, a precious though somewhat laconic source): according to the author of the Βαβυλωνιακὰ, Cyrus in fact conquered Mesopotamia «after subjugating all of Asia».<sup>4</sup> Finally, further support of this chronology has been usually recognized in the Bīsutūn text, and in particular in a section of it (the already mentioned § 6), dated between 520 and 518 BCE. Here, among the dahayāva through which, to take up the famous formula of DNα § 4, the «spear of the Persian Man has delivered battle» are listed all the territories of Central Asia North and South of the Hindūkūš, from Baktria to Arachosia, and from Margiana to Gāndhārā. From this it has been argued that the one waged by Darius to the East of the Caspian must have been a war of (re)conquest of territories previously already part of the Empire Cyrus founded, as his successor has it, «indeed away far from Pārsa».<sup>5</sup>

## 1.2. Where

Further information – which are however of little help at least as far as chronology is concerned - on the beginnings of Achaemenid hegemony in the Far East of the would be Empire can be found, for example, in Pliny the Elder, who reports the siege - with the ensuing conquest and sacking - of a settlement known to him as Capisa (Kāpīśā) probably near the modern Afgān city of Bagrām.<sup>6</sup> The fact that a place named Kāpīśi is mentioned both in the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* (*The Eight Chapters*) of the grammarian Pāṇini and in the archives of Persepolis, as well as supporting the validity, at least at this juncture, of Pliny's sources (in all likelihood Alexander's bematists), raises important questions about both the existence (or not), in the late 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, of a satrapy of which the city, restored (?) by

<sup>3</sup> Hdt. 1.178.1: «ἐπείτε τὰ πάντα τῆς ἡπείρου ὑποχείρια ἐποιήσατο». Cfr. Jacobs 1994, 31-38.

<sup>4</sup> *FGrHist* 680 F 9 (153): «τοῦ δὲ Ναβοννήδου οὐχ ὑπομείναντος τὴν πολιορκίαν, ἀλλ' ἐγχειρίσαντος αὐτὸν πρότερον, χρησάμενος Κῦρος φιλανθρώπως καὶ δούσ οἰκητῆριον αὐτῷ Καρμανίαν, ἐξέπεμψεν ἐκ τῆς Βαβυλωνίας. Ναβόννηδος μὲν οὖν τὸ λοιπὸν τοῦ χρόνου διαγενόμενος ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ χώρῃ κατέστρεψε τὸν βίον». See Lerner 2015, 304, according to whom the Persian conquest of Baktria and of the neighboring regions in Central and South Asia was completed «by Cyrus (r. 549-530 BCE) between 545 and 539 BCE». According to de la Vaissière (2004, 17), Cyrus reached Sogdiana «around 540 BCE». See most recently Manning 2021, 113 on the difficulties of precisely dating even Cyrus' conquest of Lydia (or of Urartu: Rollinger 2021b with references) based on cuneiform evidence. For chronology cf. also Kuhrt 2021 and Stark 2021, 697.

<sup>5</sup> Asheri *et al.* 1990, 382-387. Cf. DB<sub>p</sub> I §6 and DPe, where 23 and 26 dahayāva respectively are enlisted. On the logic underpinning the satrapies «lists» see the hypothesis discussed in Klinkott 2005, 67-86 and the overview in Jacobs 2017a.

<sup>6</sup> Ball 2019 n. 122. Dandamaev 1994, 40 quotes Plin. *NH.*, 6.92, but there seems to be a mistake here. In the 1980 edition of the *Naturalis Historia* translated and commented by André and Filliozat, in fact, the passage at stake here is *NH.*, 6.25.23: «A proximis Indo gentibus montana. Capisene habuit Capisam urbem, quam diruit Cyrus», and the same is true as far as the Loeb edition is concerned (1949).

Cyrus, could have been the administrative core center, and concerning the geographical location of this very satrapy.<sup>7</sup> Centuries after the events, Ptolemy mentions a Καπίσα among the cities of the Paropamisadae, but the archival sources in which the poleonym is attested (e. g. Fort. 0140-101) all come from an «Arachosian dossier», which does not help in clarifying the geopolitical setting of the Achaemenid East in greater detail.<sup>8</sup> For his part, Arrian records at least one expedition carried out by Cyrus «in the regions bordering on Indian territory» where the king (unlike Alexander, the historian seems to suggest) suffered a heavy defeat.<sup>9</sup> Even in this case, we are faced with a rather vague reference, because we know both from other sources and from the *Anabasis* itself that «Indians» were attested in a rather wide ranging territory along what is traditionally considered one of the main borderlands of the Indo-Irānian territories (the Hindūkūš).<sup>10</sup> Long story short, once again a clear definition - if there ever was one - of the Achaemenid imperial space in Central Asia from the time of its founder is extremely difficult if not impossible to come at.<sup>11</sup>

### 1.3. Who, with whom and against whom?

Although its reliability is a matter of debate among scholars, a fragment by Nikolaïos of Damascus deserves attention in this context. In it, the Augustan historian argues - partly echoing Ktesias - that, following Cyrus' victory over Astyages, many peoples of Eastern Irān (and some of the Central Asian communities, which probably means: the steppe dwellers) did not hesitate to recognize the latter's hegemony. Among them, Nikolaïos mentions the Hyrkānians, the Parthians, the Baktrians and - interestingly - the Scythians.<sup>12</sup> The remarkable aspect of the Damascene historian's account consists, on the one hand, in the fact that it mirrors rather closely the version of these events given by Cyrus himself in his famous cylinder (§§ 28-29), and, on the other hand, as already noted by Briant, in the

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<sup>7</sup> *Aṣṭādhyāyī* 4.2.99 with Henkelman 2017a, 2014 referencing and commenting this passage. Cf. moreover PF 1520 with the commentary in Henkelman 2017a, 203-205, providing text and translation of the tablet. That Kāpīsa could have been a satrapal main seat (perhaps even the Kāpīśakāniš of the Bīsūtūn inscription, thus in Arachosia) has been argued recently by Henkelman 2017a, 214-217.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Ptol. *Geog.*, 6.18.4 and Henkelman 2017a, 205-207 for the annotated edition of Fort. 0140-101 (with further commentary on the implication of this tablet for Achaemenid Eastern geography and administration in Henkelman 2017a, 208-217). It should nevertheless be noted that the toponym in Pāṇini cannot be taken, per se, as a clue to its historical context of origin, since the chronology of the Indian grammarian is among the most debated topics in the discipline (compare Henkelman 2017a, 214). On Pāṇini, see most recently Dwivedi 2019a, 102; 2019b, 423-438 for a detailed overview (however from the standpoint of economic history) of the literary sources on the early historical period in Southeast Asia (Indian peninsula and Śrī Lankā). Henkelman 2017a, 174-186 for a thorough discussion on Pāṇini ('s scribe) and the Fortification archive.

<sup>9</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 6.24.3: «ἐς τοὺς χώρους τούτους ὡς ἐσβαλοῦντα ἐς τὴν Ἰνδοῶν γῆν».

<sup>10</sup> Note Coloru 2021 on Achaemenid India with Ruffing 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. e. g. Curt. 6.6.36, which mentions a Barsaentes as satrap of Arachosia and Drangiana at the time of the deposition of Darius III. On Alexander's arrival, he fled to the court of a certain Samaxus, in «India» (Arr. *Anab.*, 3.25.8, Curt. 8.13.3-4), who however handed him over in 326 to the by now new king, who had him executed: Heckel 2006, 69.

<sup>12</sup> *FGrHist* 90 F 66 (46): «ὁ τε Παρθυαῖος καὶ Σάκης καὶ Βάκτριος καὶ οἱ ἐφεξῆς ἅπαντες κτλ.», to be compared with *FGrHist* 688 F 9 (= F9a Lenfant).

emphasis placed by both sources on the marriage policy which, it is claimed, Cyrus pursued in Central Asia.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the sources further claim, it was precisely because of this policy - in addition to an authentic or fictitious Median genealogical heritage - that Cyrus was able to secure the Baktrians' loyalty for himself and, it implicitly follows, to lay the foundations for his imperial quantic leap.<sup>14</sup> Once again, however, nothing more specific can be determined about the status enjoyed at this chronological stage by the Central Asian territories, and above all by Bactria.



**Map 4.1. *The Day After Tomorrow: An Overview of the Achaemenid Far East.* © Peter Palm**

In the light of both Ktesias' and Nikolaïos' insistence as well as – and perhaps above all - of arguably the most famous parallel of bridal diplomacy in Central Asian history (Alexander's marriage to Rōxanē and the corresponding, even greater if compared to his peers, latitude acquired by Oxyartes, the girl's father), Hilmar Klinkott has recently put forward a hypothesis that deserves some attention. By virtue of the surprisingly small number (8 in a span of more than two centuries) of satraps attested in a territory of clear geostrategic and economic importance, the scholar raised the possibility that, at least in the first decades after the conquest (i. e. until the time of Darius' rise to the throne), Bactria enjoyed a client status, not unlike the position that - at least from the point of view of the rulers - the

<sup>13</sup> Waters 2010 and Hyland 2018 on marriage diplomacy and the (early) Teispid-Achaemenid history.

<sup>14</sup> Briant 1984, 36, 70, who nevertheless suggests a higher date for Cyrus' conquest of Central Asia (between 550 and 540), thus before the fall of Babylon (a possibility supported more recently by Waters 2010). From this it might be argued that the Teispid King's campaigns to the Far East of his newly acquired Empire must have been at least two.



satrapy would have held within the Seleukid Empire.<sup>15</sup> This suggestion, it should be noted, would fit rather well with another one, which was put forward in the previous chapter, of a local origin of the Persian *bandakā* in Central Asia, and would also have the advantage of fit into a pattern of other - though still far from being clarified in detail - episodes of creation, by an imperial power, of its own «selectorate», to quote Kiser and Levi's formula. That is to say, the manipulation of a relatively small circle of privileged spokesmen to whom a given King delegate a share, even an extremely significant one, of the government affairs' management within a given territory.<sup>16</sup> The scarcity of the available evidence does not allow a more detailed examination of this hypothesis' soundness. However, the possibility that Cyrus did in fact manage to enter into fruitful relations with at least some of the most eminent representatives of the (numerous) Central Asian communities should not be excluded, especially if we consider two similar anecdotes preserved by Arrian and Diodoros.<sup>17</sup> In fact, both authors mention a remote community of Drangianians (ἐν ἐρήμῳ χώρῳ, a formula that could imply, as often happens in Strabo, that the latter were perceived, at least by Diodoros, as (semi)mobile pastoralists ) whose members would have done well in the eyes of the king because, during his Central Asian campaign, they would have supplied him with stocks of grain - an interesting example of economic differentiation in a region traditionally considered to be predominantly «nomadic» and therefore, ipso facto, with little or no interest in (if not dedication to or skills for) agriculture -, thus earning exemption from the tax levy as a reward for their deeds.<sup>18</sup> Trivial as it may seem, this anecdote is in fact especially relevant when compared with Cyrus' more famous Central Asian expedition, which he allegedly paid for with his life, in 530 BCE.<sup>19</sup> The main difference is in the names of the peoples against whom Cyrus waged war, varying from the Ktesian *Derbikkae*, perhaps comparable to the *Dropii* of Hdt. 1.125, to the more famous *Dahai* mentioned by Berossos, at least according to the Armenian version of Eusebios of Kaisareia's *Chronographia*, which has preserved the fragment.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Engels 2011, Wenghofer and Houle 2016, Wenghofer 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Klinkott 2005, 455. Chrubasik 2016, 47, for example, has recently argued that, in the Seleukid Empire, «local power holders» represented a constant feature of the «imperial landscape», without by this implying an even partial containment of the emperors' powers: see on this topic Strootman 2017 and Engels 2018.

<sup>17</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 3.27.4 and Diod. Sic. 17.81.1. See moreover Curt. 7.3.1-3.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *FGrHist* 688 F 9 (8) = Fr. 9 Lenfant as well as its assessment in Panitschek 2016, 84. In his commentary on the 17<sup>th</sup> book of the *Historical Library*, Paul Goukowski (1976, 232) has argued that in the Greek sources the term ὀροσάγγαι (which he translates as «benefactors») alludes to a distinction (a court title?), awarded by the Achaemenid ruler to individuals as well as to entire ἔθνη, a hypothesis he claims to base on two passages of Herodotos, namely Hdt. 6.119 and 8.85, but in both textual *loci* the term quoted by Goukowski, unless I am mistaken, cannot be found. The mention of the grain stocks provided by the Drangianians should be compared with another passage in Diodoros' account (19.19.3), in which it is claimed that the *Kossaeans* (another population traditionally considered 1. barbarian and 2. nomadic) produced large quantities of acorn meal. See Balatti 2017, 220-246. Henkelman 2017a, 47-49 for a compelling study of a similar context in Arrian (on which more below in chapter 5) from the standpoint of the Achaemenid institutional landscape. The background of the story addressed here, however, should remind us of the crucial role played by local subsistence strategies in implementing and fueling the Empire's infrastructure of extraction and control.

<sup>19</sup> See most recently Bichler 2021 on this episode.

<sup>20</sup> A people carrying the name of *Derbikke* is attested in later sources from Ptol. *Geog.*, 6.10.2. to Pliny (*NH.*, 6.18) and from Pomponius Mela (3.5.4) to Aelian (*VH.*, 4.1.). As for the Berossos' passage (*FGrHist* 680 F 10) cf. Dandamaev

Curiously, the episode referred to by Diodoros and Arrian is hardly ever mentioned when discussing the phase of installation of Achaemenid power in Central Asia, to the advantage of the narrative to be inferred from the other already mentioned sources, namely the one which portrays the upper satrapies - and Baktria in particular - in terms of a (if not the) *Perilous Frontier* of the Persian Empire, with the latter, moreover, never fully able to gain effective control over the former.<sup>21</sup> As we will try to show in this chapter, in its dichotomous nature, this perspective appears excessively schematic, as it does not account any space for adequately grasping neither the social nor ecological complexity of the Central Asian space, therefore hampering a proper understanding of the sophistication of the control and exploitation strategies which Achaemenid power, especially in the embryonic stages of its consolidation, may have had (or being compelled) to employ in order to tap into Central Asian (multiple and abundant) resources.

#### 1.4. *The Boundless Steppe: Complexity and the Longue Durée*

In order to understand both the aforementioned complexity and to develop a scenario which may convincingly describe how the Achaemenid infrastructural power managed to take roots while at the same time doing justice to that very complexity, after a brief but – hopefully not superficial - review of the evidence available concerning the twenty years or so between Cyrus' death and the rise of Darius, the present discussion will start – in a third section - from a «deep history» of the Central Asian territory from a perspective that takes into account the diversity of this space (especially in ecological terms) and the multiplicity of interactions both between the different human groups inhabiting it and of the latter with the surrounding environment. The latter is considered here, instead of a container within which human groups move and act, as a historical and social actor of equal dignity to individuals or communities trying to appropriate it for the most varied purposes, from sustenance to political control to symbolic production, in accordance with the results achieved in the last twenty years by the most sensitive and anthropologically informed research on this and similar, related issues.<sup>22</sup> Based both on the most recent results of Central Asian archaeology (*lato sensu*, both chronologically, from the Bronze Age to the Achaemenid period, and spatially, thus not limited to

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1974; 1989, 67. The passage quoted by Eusebios in his (Armenian) chronicle runs as follows: «Ասպս ի դասսս դաշտի յայլ նախսսս սնեալ վախճանէր». Here the translation, which I owe to the kind help of Ani Stephanjan: «[...] after these events, in the plain of the Dahai, he died fighting another enemy».

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Wu 2010; 2014, as well as the parallel drawn by Potts 2018 with Sāsānid Irān at the time of Türkic campaigns (by Kidarites and Hephthalites, thus between the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE) into imperial territory. On the Hephthalites «short term Empire» see most recently Wiesehöfer and Rollinger 2020.

<sup>22</sup> Of crucial importance in this regard are the essays collected in Ingold 2000 as well as the remarks in Scott 1985, 48-86; 1998, 262-306. See most recently Weaverdyck *et al.* 2021 and Hoo 2022, 21-28 for some insightful remarks on space, place, and inbetweeness.

Baktria alone but including neighboring territories, above all Chorasmlia) and on a careful exploitation of conceptual categories and interpretative paradigms provided by ethnographic research and historical comparison, this approach provides us with the starting point for the elaboration, developed in a following paragraph, of a scenario which seeks to account for the processes underlying 1. the territorial, 2. social and, consequently, 3. political appropriation of the Baktrian space by the Achaemenid Empire which does justice, as far as possible given the quantity, if not the quality, of the available sources, not only to the organizational capacity of the Persian Kings and their officials, but also to the diplomatic shrewdness and bargaining ability to protect their interests, even in the face of an evident imbalance of power relations, of the local communities, whose voices (and agency) the historian manages to perceive - or to assume with a fair degree of plausibility - only indirectly through the intermediary of the most prominent individuals (the *élites*) of these same communities. A concluding section finally seeks to highlight the more far-reaching implications of the scenario elaborated during the chapter when interpreting the - relatively - richer documentary corpus available to us for the years of Darius' rule, which is discussed in the chapter following the present one.

#### 1.4.1. Mòdún (冒頓), Tomyris, and Skunkha; Hàn Gāozǔ (漢高祖), Cyrus, and Darius

Before going any further, however, it is necessary to dwell briefly on the evidence available from the sources concerning the - allegedly - permanent or even recurring hostilities characterizing the relations between the Teispid-Achaemenids, first embodied by Cyrus, then by Darius (nothing is known about Cambyses involvement in Central Asia, and precious little concerning Bṛdiyā ), and the inhabitants of the semi-arid and steppe areas between the Caspian and the Syrdaryo, crossing which, according to Herodotos' engaging narrative, the founder of the Persian Empire met his and his army's ruin in what the historian describes as the «fiercest battle ever fought by men who were not Greeks».<sup>23</sup> In spite of their anecdotal nature and the uncertainty as to the reliability of the authors who report them, such pieces of evidence nevertheless deserves to be addressed with caution; for arguably they have the potential to reveal important aspects of the «repertoire of rules» through which, according to the studies recently carried out by Richardson, Düring, and Stek, pre-modern Empires sought to delimit what we might call a «discursive order» on power politics and projection as well as on its limits.<sup>24</sup> If the simple remark that, contrary to what is usually assumed, this goal – namely the affirmation of one's right to the monopoly of force, i. e. the exercise of power – 1. is never achieved

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<sup>23</sup> Hdt. 1.214.1. On this episode and its meaning for Cyrus' successors – especially Darius – cf. Waters 2014, 76, Rollinger and Degen 2021b. On Herodotos' narrative thereof and its Fortleben down to the Christian era see Bichler 2021.

<sup>24</sup> Richardson 2017, Düring and Stek 2018a; 2018b.

once and for all and 2. if achieved, it never remains uninterruptedly consolidated, is undoubtedly an important step forward on a theoretical and methodological level, trying to understand why this is possible and what consequences this has in and across a borderland such as Baktria is an endeavor which is as ambitious as it is worth pursuing. From this point of view, of particular relevance is the mention by Ktesias, in turn quoted by Diodoros Siculus, of a certain Spitakes, whom Cyrus is said to have appointed as the «satrap» of the Derbikkae, one of those «barbarian» peoples from the steppes and/or mountains against whom the Achaemenid Kings allegedly waged constant warfare.<sup>25</sup> The Ktesian fragment is rather terse, but the aforementioned parallels of Hdt. 1.125 (who speaks of the Dropii) and Berossos (who for his part mentions, more generically, the Dahae), has suggested that Spitakes' Derbikkae could be identified with a branch of that larger family of peoples speaking Irānian languages (from the glottological point of view «Spitakes» can rather easily be identified as an Irānian name) which in the *Geography* Strabo reports to be extremely diverse as it comes to their sociopolitical landscape, and which he places, rather generically, in the territories East of the Caspian.<sup>26</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapters, Ktesias is a source to be handled with considerable caution, but the parallel and opposite case of the Sakā tigraxaudā and of their commander Skunkha should give us pause, and food, for thought. In the Bīsūtūn inscription, Darius in fact claims to have defeated Skunkha (prominently depicted in the relief at the end of the liar kings' party) and to have replaced him with another Scythian, thus subjecting «that land/people» to his and Ahuramazdā's will: avadā aniyam maθištam akunavam || yaθā mām kāma āha; || pasāva dahayāuš māna abava.<sup>27</sup> A more astute interpretation of the geophysical space in which these events took place, namely not as a motionless backdrop but as an arena, in a physical and socio-anthropological sense, (inter alia) of competition between different human communities and, more or less contextually, within one or more of them, might perhaps provide a useful perspective in the light of which to reread both Darius' scanty report and the passage from Ktesias' Περσικά. In other words, one could assume that, both in the case of the Derbikkae and in that of the Sakā tigraxaudā, first Cyrus and after him Darius had interests whose nature remains obscure, but that one could suggest was – among other things - of an economic nature (the acquisition of resources, tapping into far-flung sociopolitical networks ) within that space

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Diod. Sic. 2.2.2-4 (= *FGrHist* 688 F 1b Lenfant). Compare Arr. *Anab.*, 3.27.4-5, Curt. 7.3.3-4 on Alexander's (and Cyrus') encounter with the Aria(m)sps, possibly inhabitants of Drangiana or Arachosia: Jacobs 1994, 250 and Degen 2022, 230-236 with further literature.

<sup>26</sup> Strab. 11.8.9 and see on this issue the remarks to be found in Petit 1990, 71 and Lenfant 2004, 112. On Spitakes' name see Schmitt 2006, 191-193 and, more in general on the Irānian anthroponyms preserved in the Graeco-Roman accounts the evidence collected in the *IPNB*. Further details on this passage in Ktesias in Potts 2014, 99-100.

<sup>27</sup> DB<sub>p</sub> col. V § 74. Cf. Rollinger 2013, 61. This is a policy attested more than once during Achaemenid history: see e. g. Hdt. 5.104 and Plut. *Vit. Artax.*, 14.1 as well as the account (once again in Herodotos: 3.15), of the Persian King's interventionism within the internal affairs of neighboring powers. To further support the arguments put forward in the text, it is worth recalling that Briant (2002, 767) has argued that the establishment of «client kings» was one of the favorite tools of Achaemenid foreign politics.

that the self-representation of the Empire itself has over time portrayed as «peripheral», «wild» and, therefore, in need of the pacifying intervention of the King (and of his god: it is not by chance that Darius justifies his invasion of the territory controlled, among others, by Skunkha, with the intention of preventing the spread among his Scythians of the drauga, that Lie against which he proclaims to fight on behalf and by the will of Ahuramazdā himself).<sup>28</sup> Against such a background, it does not seem entirely far-fetched to suggest that both Cyrus and Darius exploited - and perhaps, with their advance into Sakā territory, even caused themselves - social tensions within the non- (or semi)-settled Transcaspians and/or Transoxian communities, the consequence of which would have been an increase in the power of individuals such as Spitakes and the (anonymous) successor of Skunkha who, for reasons that remain unknown to us, were better able to play their socio-political cards «when the Medes came» in the territories they to some degree controlled.<sup>29</sup> Before discarding such a hypothesis out of hand as mere speculation, one should at least bear in mind that a similar scenario has been suggested - and defended in a very convincing way thanks to the support of ample and detailed historical and archaeological records - by Nicola Di Cosmo concerning the rise to power of the great Xióngnū leader (Shányú 單于) Mòdún (冒頓): as a consequence, it might not be specious to recognize in a parallel situation of socio-economic stress (and therefore of intra-social competition) the origin of the imposing army gathered by Tomyris, following which, in Herodotus' account, the Massagetae gave battle to the Persian troops led by Cyrus in Central Asia sometimes around 530 BCE.<sup>30</sup> What resources Cyrus might have coveted in the case of the - hypothetical - clash with the peoples to whose groups those headed by Spitakes also belonged is suggested by the same fragment from Ktesias' lost work: for in fact it mentions an ambush set by the Derbikkæ, in which elephants would have been deployed.<sup>31</sup> In contrast to Herodotus' account, which focuses exclusively on Cyrus' activities in the steppes along or beyond the Syrdaryo, the detail of the elephants is nonetheless not entirely unbelievable, since it would imply, at least, an interest on the part of the Persian Great King in the area of Gāndhāra. In this context, it is not out of place to point out that Alexander's historians stress a contiguity in terms of at least socio-economic relations, when not actually of administrative

<sup>28</sup> Lincoln 2012, 20-41. Cf. DB<sub>p</sub> col. V § 75: avaj sakā arikā āha, || utā naj A. uramazdāšām ayadiya. The Sakā, according to Darius, «lacked faith [arikā]», for in fact «they did not worship Ahuramazdā». The translation follows *API*, 91. On the self-perception of the Achaemenid Great King(s) as the grantors of peace, law, and order within the Empire see Briant 2002, 175-194. Tallet 2020 for a compelling parallel case study devoted to Old Kingdom's Egypt encroachment in territories out of its political reach but deemed crucial for its economic development such as the Eastern desert and the negotiating power held by local communities and élites. Trudnovskaja 1979 for important Central Asian evidence.

<sup>29</sup> Graeber and Sahlins 2018, 166 for an astute analysis of the implication of imperial encroachment in local politics.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. the narrative in Hdt. 1.207-216. With regards to the social, economic, and political context behind Mòdún's rise in the steppes see Di Cosmo 2002, 161-205, Miller 2009, 93-111 as well as the useful overview in Brosseder 2019.

<sup>31</sup> *FGrHist* 688 F 1b (16).

subordination of the former to the latter, between the inhabitants of Gāndhāra and those of Baktria.<sup>32</sup> This is to say that, while waging war in Baktria and, possibly, Sakā territory, it is fair to assume that Cyrus was in fact attempting at controlling much wider spaces, the entangled nature of, and the vested interests in, which were by no means obscure to him. Admittedly, nothing else is known of the relations between the Achaemenids and the Derbikkāe - whether they were settled in Gāndhāra or further North, between Sogdiana and Chorasmia - until the battle of Issos (333 BCE), in which they took part, according to Curtius Rufus, with a contingent of over 40000 infantrymen and 2000 mounted units.<sup>33</sup> Even assuming the historicity of (recurrent?) clashes between the forming Achaemenid power and the local populations (or some representatives of some of them), it seems much more cautious to frame these skirmishes, whose actual scope escapes us, within the normal physiology of the development of a political entity such as the Persian Empire which - it must be remembered - for extension, complexity, and (not least) hegemonic ambition, was unparalleled in the whole of Eurasia, rather than reading them as evidence of the difficulty, or impossibility, for the Achaemenids to govern a (whole and moreover widely differentiated in its different parts) territory by virtue of the indomitable and warlike nature of the (entire) indigenous population settled therein.

#### 1.4.1.1. Skunkha Reloaded: a (Counter)History of Resources and Control

If, in the light of the undoubtedly historical account related to Mōdún's rise to power in the steppes, one were to recognize a *particula veri* in the narratives concerning Spitakes and Skunkha on the one hand and Tomyris on the other, it would not seem unreasonable to identify in their vicissitudes different outcomes of that policy of «trial-and-error» which Düring and Stek have singled out as a structural characteristic of imperial consolidation efforts: the attempt to apply a similar instrument of political and economic control (one among the options of the «repertoire of rules» available to the Persian Kings) to what the two scholars call practical «situations on the ground» and which, in the case of the Derbikkāe and the Massagetae, seem to have been considerably different, led to equally different (and in the case of the Scythian expedition apparently disastrous) results.<sup>34</sup> Unfortunately, we know too little about the political and economic social context of the populations to which Tomyris' *Μασσαγέται* also belonged to even try to speculate why in the case of Cyrus' invasion of

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<sup>32</sup> Of little to no help are the later (of imperial Roman epoch) information to adequately pinpoint on a map the place(s) where the Derbikkāe lived: Ptol. *Geog.*, 6.10.2 places them «in that region of Margiana which borders with the Oxus river», and the same does Pliny: *NH.*, 6.48. On the possibility that Gāndhāra might have been a satrapy on the same (administrative) level of Baktria see Henkelman 2017a, 208-210 with references and a thorough assessment of the evidence coming from the Persepolis archive.

<sup>33</sup> Curt. 3.2.7.

<sup>34</sup> Düring and Stek 2018a, 10.

the Transoxian territories a political and territorial entity comparable to the Xiōngnú was not formed - or did not survive his most charismatic representative, as in the latter case indeed happened. Even adopting a rather cautious approach, however, two conclusions emerge with some clarity from a sufficiently careful reading of the meagre written information available. First, the need to rethink in a substantial way the dynamics of «collaboration» (by which is meant, in archaeological and anthropological jargon, both peaceful interactions and conflictual situations) at work 1. in, 2. because of, and 3. through the landscapes of the so-called «peripheries» or – better – frontier- or border zones of the Empire.<sup>35</sup> Second: the equally pressing need, highlighted with particular emphasis by Düring and Stek, to devote more attention to the «resources available to establish [imperial] control» and the «agency of imperial collaborators, non-state actors» as well as of both the population and local élites.<sup>36</sup> The remainder of this first part of the chapter will therefore be devoted, on the one hand, to a summary of the information made available by the sources concerning the period between the death of Cyrus (530 BCE) and Darius' *annus mirabilis* following Cambyses' death (522-521 BCE).<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, to a critical evaluation of the different perspectives adopted by scholarship when assessing the impact on Central Asia of the first two decades or so of Teispid-Achaemenid hegemony. The main aim underpinning this discussion is to put forward, in the second part of the chapter, a different reading of this nebulous but crucial period of Baktrian imperial history that tries to do adequate justice both to the above mentioned «practical situations on the ground» and to the multiplicity of social actors involved in, and sometimes significantly shaping, them.

## 2. From Cyrus to Darius: What We Do (Not) Know

According to the testimony of Curtius Rufus, Baktria alone, at least in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, made for one third of the entire territory of Achaemenid (Central) «Asia», and its contribution in military terms to the army of the Great King was equally impressive.<sup>38</sup> Other sources agree that, at least in the last years of Cyrus' reign, Baktria was already one of the most important satrapies of the Empire: hence the decision to entrust its administration, in a significant number of the – indeed rather few -

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<sup>35</sup> It is important to point out that competition about landscape always implies collaboration, meaning working together or one against another, for by using a landscape people interact with other people using a single landscape in different ways, which in turns causes conflict and/or competition of interests: note Weaverdyck *et al.* 2021, 301-304.

<sup>36</sup> Düring and Stek 2018a, 10. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>37</sup> For a recent assessment see moreover Schwinghammer 2021.

<sup>38</sup> Curt. 5.10.3. With the term «Asia» it is likely that Curtius Rufus did not have in mind Baktria as defined, with the distinctions mentioned above (Morris 2019a, 59-62), by contemporary scholarship, but included in this understanding also the territories *de iure* or *de facto* dependent on it and over which the satrap - in theory - exercised his power: see Jacobs 1994; 2006; 2017a and Hoo 2022, 21-28 on the history and pitfalls of the concept of Asia in both ancient sources and modern scholarship.

cases that we are able to verify, to members, by blood or by affiliation, coming from (or related with) the royal house, a practice well known in other strategically important *dahayāva*.<sup>39</sup> The fact that, according to some Greek and Roman authors, in the case of Baktria Cyrus' choice fell on his second son *Bṛdiyā* has led scholars to argue that the latter's rank should be understood in terms of a regent prince, and that although Cambyses was assured a position of pre-eminence, as stressed by the title «King of the Countries» by which he is referred to in Babylonian documents, the founder of the Empire would not have wanted to preclude himself the opportunity of a diarchic system of imperial government. If Cambyses was supposed to obtain the Western part of the Achaemenid domains, *Bṛdiyā* would have inherited the Eastern half, the future upper satrapies, which he would have administered, as centuries later Antiochus I did, from the seat of Baktra. Although it cannot be ruled out *per se* - and some specimens of Achaemenid glyptic depicting the King between two other individuals carrying spear and quiver (interpreted as representing Cyrus' two sons) have been produced as evidence of its plausibility - such a interpretative framework is not unanimously accepted by scholars, mainly because of the extreme patchiness of the surviving evidence and, perhaps a more substantial argument, because nothing similar as co-rulership is known in the further centuries of Achaemenid imperial history.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, the period between the death of Cyrus and Darius' coming to power still ranks as one of the unresolved issues in Achaemenid historiography, and the discussion concerning both the chronology and the nature of the events themselves, although it has now generated a sprawling bibliography, is still far from over.<sup>41</sup> For the purposes of the present discussion, however, it is useful to dwell further on some particularly relevant aspects of the debate. The first concerns the scope of *Bṛdiyā*'s power, assuming that reports of his appointment in the East are to be considered reliable.<sup>42</sup> According to what can be gained from the scanty information scattered through the historiographic sources, about ten years after the conquest of Baktra and its transformation into the political and administrative center of the satrapy, it seems to be possible to conclude that a delegate (a *bandaka*, however eccentric? compare the position of Cyrus the Younger a century later faced with his brother Artaxerxes I) of the Achaemenid ruler was able - at least in theory - to govern an immense territory, which included, at the very minimum, Chorasmia, Parthia, Sogdiana, and another region between Carmania and Arachosia, if not both, besides, of course, Baktria itself.<sup>43</sup> This alone should suffice to give an idea of the degree of formalization achieved by the Persian organization of its

<sup>39</sup> Klinkott 2005, 54-56; 2006, 60: this was for example the case in Lydia, Egypt, and Babylonia.

<sup>40</sup> Zarghamee 2013, 374-381 and especially p. 378, where the hypothesis of a «triarchy» is explicitly ventilated: but see however the very different standpoint voiced in Petit 1990, 68 fn. 236.

<sup>41</sup> On such issue relevant are at least the contributions by Wiesehöfer 1978, Dandamaev 1989, 108-127, Briant 2002, 96-107, Rollinger 2006, 40-53, Schwinghammer 2011; 2021, and Lincoln 2012, 393-424.

<sup>42</sup> Briant 2002, 101 speaks of a «major» district somewhere in Central Asia.

<sup>43</sup> *FGrHist* 688 F 9 (8). The text appears to be corrupt and, considering what we know about the geography of the Achaemenid territories, it has been proposed (Petit 1990, 67 fn. 231) to amend «καὶ Καρμανίων» in «καὶ τῆς Ἀραχωσίων».



Eastern domains, to the extent that some scholars have gone so far as to claim that, at the time of Cyrus' death, Baktria was probably the richest and most important of all the upper satrapies of the newborn Empire.<sup>44</sup> The second, but no less important, aspect concerns the exact nature of both the title by virtue of which Bṛdiyā occupied the seat of Baktra and, consequently, that of the power he wielded in Central Asia. The qualification of δεσπότης ascribed to him by classical sources has been interpreted by some scholars as indicating a higher qualification than that of σατράπης.<sup>45</sup> If this were true, but it is a hypothesis that is very difficult to prove on a purely philological level, especially in light of the analysis of the (emic) term xšaçaṗāwā, the argument - repeatedly put forward - of a pre-eminent role compared to the other Eastern satrapies (including Arachosia) attributed to Baktria and its governor within the hierarchy of imperial power could be founded on more solid ground. This in turn would make it possible to explain the fact that, according to the converging testimony of various classical authors, from Herodotos to Plutarch, the satrap of Baktria was considered as «the second after the King».<sup>46</sup> That that of the Baktrian satrap was indeed an exceptional role within the hierarchy of Achaemenid officials has also been argued based on the fact that, of the eight names attested in the written (both literary and epigraphic) evidence and attributable with more or less certainty to the same satrapal office, at least four have been identified by scholars as cadet sons and/or brothers of the king in office.

From this consideration two consequences have been deduced that are quite relevant to the present discussion: first that, far from pointing to the exceptional nature of Bṛdiyā's status, the title of δεσπότης Βακτρίων should rather be read as a courtly rank. Secondly, that the crucial importance of the region within the imperial chessboard would have prompted the Achaemenid Kings to limit access to this office as much as possible, confining it - at best - exclusively to the closest members of the royal family.<sup>47</sup> Even assuming the feasibility of such a contention - but we have seen that, at least in the case of Dādêršiš and Vivāna, there are arguments militating against the hypothesis of such a

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<sup>44</sup> Lindström 2009a, 243.

<sup>45</sup> Petit 1990, 67 fn. 235, Klinkott 2005, 28-38. As for the title allegedly bestowed on Bṛdiyā, it is attested for example in *FGrHist* 688 F 9 (8) and Hdt. 3.30. Xen. *Cyr.*, 8.7.9-11 gives a significantly different version of the same events: according to the account in the *Cyropaedia*, Bardiya (whom Xenophon calls Tanyoxartes) was appointed σατράπης of the Medes, the Armenians and Cadusians. Zarghamee 2013, 377 argued that this would have been a second appointment, following both the one in the east and Cyrus' death. If, as some scholars, of whom the most authoritative is undoubtedly Briant (2002, 101-103), have argued, relations between the two brothers deteriorated rapidly, Cambyses' choice could be interpreted as an attempt to remove Bṛdiyā from a position that the new Great King considered too dangerous to leave in his hands. Cf. Tiberius' decision to remove Germanicus from the Rhine front by sending him, at the same time invested with extraordinary powers and under the potestas of the local legatus, Piso, to Syria, a history discussed in detail by Braccisi 2015.

<sup>46</sup> García Sánchez 2014 with further literature and references.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Klinkott 2005, 506-507. Such a strategy fits rather well with the fact that, according to the classical sources at least, the rule over Baktria was not infrequently assigned to a cadet of the imperial family. As noted by Strootman 2007, 111-114; 2014, 105, the «moral superiority» of the father and/or elder brother «would have ensured the loyalty of the cadet prince». See also Llewellyn-Jones 2013, 30-35; 2019.

limitation of access to satrapal office, what are we to think of the other four individuals whose names have been preserved by the sources? As in particular a detailed study of the evidence provided by the *ADAB* (which will be the subject of a dedicated chapter in this study) seems to suggest, one of the fundamental thrusts of the present work is to argue that what we know of such individuals, from Aḥvamazdā to Bessos himself, allows to draw some conclusions about the dialectic between the imperial court and local power(s) at work in Achaemenid Central Asia. Moreover, as the discussion around Dādêršiš has tried to suggest with some degree of plausibility, it is possible to argue that the positions held by both people like him and their subordinates, and which only through the *ADAB* we are able (yet) to study in some detail, show to what extent the imperial collaborators discussed by Düring and Stek were able to interact with the «repertoire of rules» promoted by the imperial court (or its satrapal extension) for the benefit of their own «selectorate», often appropriating and twisting it to their own advantage.<sup>48</sup> In fact, it seems rather clear that, by virtue of the extension and complexity of the territories subjected, at least nominally, to the purview of the δεσπότης Βακτρῶν, the latter was compelled to surround himself with advisors on whom he could rely and to whom he could delegate the government of what Jacobs has called the *Hauptsatrapien*, and which in the previous chapters we have called, following Lauren Morris' more precise – paradoxically, because more flexible – formula, «the basic administrative units of the Empire».<sup>49</sup> As numerous ethnographic examples show, in the absence of such, in a more or less figurative sense, «guides», a new Empire, especially during the dawning phase of its power, is literally forced to grope its way through a territory which its officials – not to mention the court – do not know, and therefore cannot control.<sup>50</sup> In the light of these considerations, it might be suggested that, in the absence of conclusive, or at least very solid, evidence of direct descent (and not a genealogical link of «intentional» nature – in Gehrke's sense – or acquired by marriage) of a given Baktrian satrap from the imperial family, it would be at a minimum feasible to see in them particularly prominent members of the local aristocracy. Having begun their «imperial» careers as administrators of a smaller territorial unit (perhaps, as in the case of Vivāna, of spaces that were already part of their own, or their community's, patrimonial holdings) under the aegis of the imperial authority, it is not outlandish to assume that these individuals exploited their position of privilege over their internal rivals to acquire closer ties with the imperial family (e. g., as said, through marriage), thereby further strengthening their position both in the arena of local power and with respect of the king himself.<sup>51</sup> The result of this process would have been a decisive

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<sup>48</sup> Petrie and Magee 2007, 4 argued that, to appreciate most appropriately the nature of authority on the Eastern borderlands of the Achaemenid Empire, it would be instructive to consider «indigenous contexts, imperial intentions and indigenous responses»: see now Petrie 2020 on Southeast Asia.

<sup>49</sup> Jacobs 1994, 103-104, Morris 2019a, 53.

<sup>50</sup> Scott 1998, 54 ff.; 2009, 358 fn. 83.

<sup>51</sup> After all, this is precisely what Darius himself did, for example in Pārsa: Hyland 2018.

strategic edge even in critical phases such as a succession to the imperial throne, which could have sheltered these individuals from the temptation, for a new King almost ever-recurring, to replace, at least at the highest levels of the hierarchy, the old guard with men loyal to and, possibly, dependent on, him.<sup>52</sup> From the point of view of imperial power, such a scenario made a virtue out of a necessity, namely being forced to exploit, while relying on them, individuals whose interests did not necessarily overlap with those of the Great King; thus a situation of, albeit limited and implicit, dependence: and this because, since the aforementioned local notables derived a considerable component of their strategic purchase in terms of political (and probably economic and military) power from their direct link with the Kings' extended family, their loyalty could be considered relatively solid. Consequently, in the absence of a cadet son ready to hold the position of δεσπότης Βακτριῶν, it does not seem illogical to assume that a small circle of local aristocrats constituted an extremely important resource for the crown, not least because their appointment did not bring with it the vagaries systematically arising from the joint power of two (or more) brothers, to say nothing of half-brothers and other illegitimate children, a circumstance not to be underestimated in a society almost certainly no stranger to polygamy like the Achaemenid (courtly) one.<sup>53</sup> Although difficult to prove beyond any doubt, such a hypothesis could give a more satisfactory account than hitherto of the alternation, at first sight rather puzzling, at the head of one of the most important satrapies of the entire Empire, of the king's closest relatives (sons and/or brothers) with individuals whose background is essentially unknown, and which in this work is suggested ought to be sought within that very imperial élite within the Baktrian aristocracy whose creation, or enlargement, and empowerment, was probably among the first and most significant fruits of the Achaemenid conquest of Central Asia.<sup>54</sup> For such a scenario to be at any rate feasible, it should at least attempt to explain based on which principles (Düring and Stek's «available resources») this Baktrian imperial élite was created and by virtue of which criteria it is possible to assume that a given strongman was privileged over another. This is one of the fundamental

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<sup>52</sup> Jacobs 2006. One of the most effective strategies to achieve similar goals was through a shrewd marriage policy: Zarghamee 2013, 405 and Llewellyn-Jones 2019. Arguably, the pre-eminent position of these families within the local context even before the advent of Persian hegemony was further consolidated by the entrenchment of Achaemenid infrastructural power (Wouter Henkelman has repeatedly spoken of «institutionalization»), the latter proceeding in turn hand in hand with the creation of some form of administrative subdivision (whether more or less rigid than the model elaborated by Jacobs 1994) of Central Asia in the aftermath of the takeover. Consequently, when it came to appointing an official to be entrusted with the control of a given territory, it is highly improbable that - even if they wanted to - the satrap and even the King could have avoided choosing from within a small circle of local notables, thus further strengthening the latter's power both vis-à-vis their internal rivals - who, as the history of Alexander's campaign shows, were not lacking - and, a point which should not be overlooked, vis-à-vis the Achaemenid rulers themselves.

<sup>53</sup> Strootman 2007, 55: every brother (and even half-brother) was at least potentially a danger to the ruling King. See Briant 2002, 569-573 for a shining example of a dynastic crisis caused by an overabundance of pretenders to the throne who, since they were all descended from the same father, could in fact equally forcefully claim succession rights.

<sup>54</sup> Such a scenario has the advantage of interpreting the power dialectics within the Achaemenid Empire in the light of more recent studies on the sociology of courtly life, which have forcefully drawn attention to the fact that the ruler's might, despite the din of his boasts, was never as absolute as it claimed to be (again, the «hoped-for-fantasy» we encountered at Bīsutūn): see Duindam 1994, 81-97 and Strootman 2014, 31-42.

goals of the working hypothesis (because in the current state of research it cannot be more than this) that will be proposed during this chapter. At the end of the present section, however, it is appropriate to briefly discuss the (admittedly not very abundant) previous interpretative paradigms developed by past scholarship against the evidentiary background we have considered so far.

## 2.1. Who Conquered Whom How? Imperial Signature and Archaeological Invisibility

Among the many problems facing scholars of the historical, political, and social development of the Persian Empire - and especially in the Eastern half of its domains, from the Irānian Plateau to Central Asia - one of the thorniest has been for decades, and continues to be today, the disturbing discrepancy between the literary sources (though not plentiful, not so meager as it is usually thought), which more or less agree, at the very least, on the significant activism of the ruling family in the Achaemenid Far East on the one hand, and, on the other, the almost total archaeological invisibility of an Empire which, on the ground, seems to have left few, if any, easily detectable traces.<sup>55</sup> Although the most recent excavations carried out by the *DABA* seem to promise to dispel, at least in part, the Baktrian «mirage» lamented by Foucher at the end of the 1920s, the satrapal main settlement still only surfaces in the more or less legendary evocation of the *Avestā*, in the accounts of Greco-Roman historians and in just but one of the documents that make up the *ADAB* collection, and therefore chronologically belonging to the final phase of Achaemenid hegemony in Baktria.<sup>56</sup> The Persepolis archives provide irrefutable evidence, as we shall see in the next chapter, that the apparent documentary void seemingly emerging from the archaeological investigation does not in itself constitute proof of the lack of «integration» (whatever one means by this term) of Baktria within the Persian political and economic systems, a remark already made by Pierre Briant in a study that is exemplary, among other things, for its methodological sophistication and farsightedness.<sup>57</sup>

### 2.1.1. A Pot is just a Pot, isn't it?

Be it as it may, the point stays the rather significant increase in the amount of information available not only about the oasis of Baktra, but also concerning the surrounding territories, especially Sogdiana and the Syrdaryo catchment's area, has only multiplied the questions concerning the strategies adopted by the Persian Great Kings to control the people, spaces, and therefore resources, of Central

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<sup>55</sup> Lyonnet 1990; 1997, 83-118.

<sup>56</sup> The document at stake here is Naveh and Shaked 2012, 174 ff. C1 = Khalili A21. At ll. 3 and 51, in fact, the Aramaic text mentions the toponym *bḥtry* (בְּחַתְרִי), which renders the name of Baktra (Balḥ).

<sup>57</sup> Briant 1984, 57-68. See now Henkelman 2017a and especially King 2021, 266-365.

Asia with an effectiveness which might be able to do justice to the evidence of the archival documents. A few examples will help to clarify the point: starting from Baktra itself, the impressive ceramic analysis of the entire available corpus carried out in very recent years by Charlotte Elizabeth Maxwell-Jones has provided results comparable with the equally detailed study carried out by Bertille Lyonnet on the artefacts collected during the survey of Eastern Baktria (the plain of Dašt -i Qal‘a, where Āi Xānum is located).<sup>58</sup> With the partial exception of a few specimens usually associated with the Achaemenid period (from carinated to horizontally rimmed bowls to vertical beak vases, sometimes of considerable size), neither in terms of type nor of manufacture is it possible to identify diagnostic features that would allow a clear distinction to be made between the end of the so-called Yaz II period (the beginning of which varies, depending on the school of thought, between 1110 and 600 BCE) and the so-called Yaz III period, usually identified with the phase of Achaemenid rule over Central Asia.<sup>59</sup> To this must be added the persistence of typically local typologies rooted in a much older tradition, dating back even to the Bronze Age and which finds close parallels in particular in the oasis of Geoksyur and in the adjacent area of the Teġen river delta, an offshoot of the Harīrūd, in the Southwest of present-day Türkmenistan.<sup>60</sup> Even the introduction of specimens that are more refined than the ceramic of the Yaz II period, modelled on the potter’s wheel rather than by hand, cannot be considered indicative of an event as momentous as the Achaemenid conquest, since stylistic-typological analysis reveals that the new creations were undoubtedly based on local traditions and models coming directly from artisanal strands already attested during the Bronze Age.<sup>61</sup> Similar conclusions were also reached by the Czech archaeological mission directed by Ladislav Stančo in the most updated publication on the chronology of the Sherabāddaryo valley, where for the period investigated in these pages the ceramic analysis has found a significant typological and stylistic continuity from the Early Bronze Age (Yaz I, ca. 1500-1100/1000 BC) to the Kušāno-Sāsānid period (also called Kopaŋo paŋo - Kušānošao in Baktrian), i. e. up to the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE (more exactly with a terminus post quem non around 365 CE).<sup>62</sup> No less problematic is the situation in Sogdiana and in the area of the Zarafšān and Syrdaryo catchment basins.<sup>63</sup> Here too, indeed, despite the fact that some scholars - among whom Claude Rapin stands out in particular (as much for the vigor of the argument

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<sup>58</sup> See the diachronic discussion of Baktra and his regional context in Maxwell-Jones 2015, 470-507 and now Lhuillier *et al.* 2021 for an overview of the latest archaeological state of the art.

<sup>59</sup> Lyonnet 1997, 108-118.

<sup>60</sup> Wu 2005, 143-144 and Kohl 2007, 204 ff.

<sup>61</sup> Wu 2005, 146-147. More generally on Bronze Age Central Asia from an archaeological perspective see the overview by Ciro Lo Muzio (2017, 9-37) as well as the dedicated chapters (especially nos. 10, 13 and 16) in Lyonnet and Dubova’s edited volume (2020, 333-366, 305-424 and 457-486, the latter devoted to the rural archaeology of the BMAC’s core area). Compare Junker 2021 for a similar discussion concerning Hellenistic pottery in Baktria.

<sup>62</sup> Stančo 2019, 357 and the still fundamental – although by now somewhat outdated – chronology provided by Lyonnet 1997, 115-117. On the Kušāno-Sāsānid period in Baktria see most recently Rezakhani 2017, 72-85.

<sup>63</sup> Negus-Cleary 2015 I, 257-261 on the ceramics of a prominent site such as the Akchakan-kala.

as for the authoritativeness of the proponent) - wanted to recognize, based on the architectural development of the site, the transition from phase II to phases IIIa and IIIb of Kōktēpe's settlement history, Northwest of Afrāsyāb, as representing a revealing clue to the Achaemenid presence in Sogdiana, the most recent studies of the ceramic material coming from the entire region and neighboring territories have provided results that are on the whole consistent (and equally disappointing) with those reached in the case of Baktria. From an archaeological point of view, what Gianluca Bonora has recently defined as the Achaemenid «cultural horizon» in the upper satrapies remains very difficult, if not impossible, to identify to this day.<sup>64</sup> Such a pattern of slow evolution, on a regional scale, and apparently impervious to political events which momentum, on the contrary, the literary tradition would lead to believe must have left a significant imprint - by which we mean often a visible one - on the Central Asian landscape contributes in a not insignificant way, among other things, to discredit once more (if not once and for all) the already mentioned hypothesis of a Ḥayānid Empire extended even in Sogdiana and centered on Marakanda, which a geographical treatise probably composed in Sāsānian times but published under the 'Abbāsīd caliphate, the *Šahrestānīha ī Ērānšahr*, claims to have been established by the son of the legendary Kavi Ḥaosrauuah, Siyāvāḥš, both related to the equally legendary ruler of Baktra, Vištāspa by name.<sup>65</sup> Contrary to what has recently been claimed, namely that the surviving textual evidence (in this case the *Šahrestānīha*) would allow the hypothesis that the city of Samarqand «was founded by an Iranian political entity that predates the Persian conquest», nothing in the archaeological record suggests, either before or after the year in which, to quote Xenophanes, «the Mede came», the presence of that «imperial signature» which the Persepolis archives, and a few scattered but very significant clues - above all the Aramaic green chert objects from Qandahār - lead to recognize as well present and deeply rooted in Central Asia; the latter an unequivocal sign, according to Henkelman, of the Achaemenid «paradigm» of governmentality and, overall, of some sort of imperial administration from which the newcomers might have been inspired.<sup>66</sup> Even the discovery, in the area of Goṅurtēpe (60 kilometers North of Merv, in present-day Türkmenistan), of samples of seals with typological parallels believed to be close to Mesopotamian glyptic and, moreover, dated at least a millennium earlier than the Yaz

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<sup>64</sup> On Kōktēpe cf. the important contributions by Rapin 2007, 36-44; 2017b, 420-426, Lyonnet 2012, Rapin and Isamidinov 2013. A detailed chronological and typological discussion of Sogdian pottery is to be found in Raiano 2014; 2019. See Bonora 2019 for an assessment of the Achaemenid «cultural horizon» around the Syrdaryo delta.

<sup>65</sup> See the edition and commentary by Daryāyī 2002. In the *Yašt* (5.49, 9.21 and 15.32), Ḥaosrauuah is referred to as arša airīanāṃ daḫ iīunāṃ, i. e. the «stallion of the airy lands» and xšaθrāi haṅkərəṃō, the latter an epithet of uncertain meaning (sometimes also transmitted in the form haṅkərətō) which Skjærvø, in the entry devoted to the Ḥayānid dynasty in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/kayanian-vii>, accessed May 9, 2022) translates respectively as «... for command» and «put together» (regarding the form haṅkərətō).

<sup>66</sup> On this alleged Irānian kingdom centered on Marakanda before the coming of the Persians see Wu 2005, 158-159. For a detailed study of the Achaemenid imperial paradigm as witnessed in Arachosia see Henkelman 2017a, 102-109 and passim in the same article.

III ceramic period (i. e. the Achaemenid epoch), provides much more convincing evidence of the travelling capacities of such a class of objects (small in size but of high added value) as well as of the range of mobility in the ancient world than of some – no better defined - cultural or political «influence» of Old Period Babylonia on Central Asia’s political and social structures.<sup>67</sup> In what remains of this section, we will briefly review and discuss, at first, what to the best of my knowledge appear to be the two - antithetical - interpretations of the bewildering gap between what we (think we) know of the initial decades of Achaemenid power in Central Asia, taking into account both the written sources (from the classical tradition to what can be gleaned from the Bīsūtūn text) and the archaeological record. In a subsequent paragraph, however, a considerably different interpretative framework will be suggested, one that does not attempt at reconciling two documentary sets to tease out a narrative which, if not coherent, seems at least not to be patently contradictory (an undertaking that, as Di Cosmo has persuasively argued regarding the reconstruction of the prehistory of the Xiōngnú Empire and its relations with China, is not methodologically feasible). Instead, an attempt shall be made at contextualizing more adequately than hitherto the physical and anthropic space of Bactria, along with the neighboring satrapies, in the wider (Central)Eurasian context, in order to lay the foundations for the development, to which the rest of the chapter shall be devoted, of a new scenario for the phase d’installation of Achaemenid hegemony in these territories.<sup>68</sup>

### 2.1.2. To Be, or Not to Be? This is the Empire

As already mentioned above, Briant’s contributions dedicated to the study of the interactions between Achaemenid power and the peoples of Central Asia have ended up setting the scholarly standard in the course of the last 40 years: and rightly so, not least because of the farsightedness of some of his deductions (above all the hypothesis according to which it was not possible that – although not (yet) recovered – a satrapal archive did not exist at Baktra) which, formulated on the basis of an archaeological documentation even scantier than the present one, have been confirmed as

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<sup>67</sup> Cf. Wu 2005, 158-159; more recently, Wu and Lecomte 2012, 313 and Lo Muzio 2017, 16. Just as no one would venture to assume direct contacts between Pharaonic Egypt and Central Asia based on lapis lazuli findings (albeit originating from Badahšān) in the Nile valley: see Bavay 1997, Starr 2015, 34 with further bibliography and most recently the introductory chapter (pp. 7-66) in Lyonnet and Dubova 2020 for an attempt to explain those movements in terms of itinerant workmen and long-distant commercial relationships. Note also Vidale 2018 on Ēlām and Central Asia.

<sup>68</sup> Both through this chapter and more generally in the present work, the term «scenario» is consciously preferred to the usually employed «model» since the latter, as proposed and discussed in the context, for example, of the Roman Empire, or the Hellenistic world, imply a level of coherence that the evidence available for Achaemenid Bactria simply does not support. On the other hand, «scenario» allows for considerably greater flexibility, which at the same time enable us to consider 1. what we know in terms of evidence - literary, archaeological, epigraphic; 2. what ethnographic data allow us to suggest; 3. the broader Eurasian context and finally 4. what we know about 4.1. other borderlands, 4.2. other Empires and 4.3. the interactions between different social actors within these contexts. See Hoo 2021 for a similar argument for a global economic history of ancient Afro Eurasia.

soon as new sources of information became available.<sup>69</sup> All through the monumental synthesis of the *History of the Persian Empire*, the general lines of what, taking up Henkelman's formula, we could label the diplomatic-administrative «imperial paradigm» elaborated by the Great Kings for the purpose of a profitable, though not always easy, interaction with the «non-state» populations, from the Arabian deserts to the Zagros mountains and the steppes of Central Asia, have demonstrated with insightful analysis and an abundance of examples the breadth and flexibility of the «repertoire of rules» available to the Kings, which alone explains the centuries-long history of Achaemenid hegemony over a territory as vast and complex as that conquered by Cyrus and held more or less as a whole (with Egypt being the only, and moreover transitory, exception) with determination by all his successors, up to - and including - Darius III.<sup>70</sup> In the light of all this, it is perhaps surprising to note that, when discussing the premises and causes of the civil war that would lead Darius I to the throne, Briant seems somewhat doubtful about the actual solidity of Achaemenid power in Central Asia in the last quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE. For in fact he comes closer to the archaeological narrative of an «elusive» Empire as he did in several other studies, even arguing that the foundations of Persian hegemony would have had to be reconstructed, on grounds at least in part differing from the initial premises, by that Darius the Conqueror who, both in the vivid fresco of the historian's opus magnum (chapter 4) as well as in several other studies, assumes the role of authentic (re)founding father of an Empire which, after Cambyses' death, had been on the verge of disintegrating, at its very center as well as, a fortiori, in its furthest outreaches. It is an interpretation, the latter, which, it should be noted, stirs in a more cautious direction - one would be even tempted to say «conservative» - the opinion expressed years ago in the slim but very valuable booklet dedicated to *L'Asie centrale et les royaumes proche orientaux du premier millénaire*, which advocated a middle way between, on the one hand, the most radical skepticism, particularly widespread among archaeologists then and sometimes even now, regarding the effective penetration of Persian infrastructural (and, according to Mann, despotic) imperial power to the East of the Irānian Plateau - which is something different from what is visible to the eyes of the historian and/or archaeologist - and, on the other hand, the opposite, «Baktriano-centric» attitude (of a more philological-literary imprint) aimed at making Baktria not only the most important satrapy of the entire Achaemenid East but even of the Empire as a whole, as a hypothetical land of origin (the Airiianəm vaējō of the Avestān texts) of the dynasty itself, of the Irānian peoples, of Zaratuštra and

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<sup>69</sup> Briant 1984; 1985 and, for an overview of broader scope, see Briant 2017b; 2020; 2021.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. at least Briant 1983 as well as the, by now classic, discussion of the functioning of political and diplomatic relations with the montagnard peoples of the Persian (and wider) hinterland in Briant 1975; 1976 and, more recently, 2002, 726-733. On the Uxians and the Mardians, see most recently Balatti 2017, 209-219. For a discussion in perspective of the political stability of the Achaemenid Empire even in its most troubled final phase see Briant 2009a; 2009b as well as the historiographical chapters in Briant 2018a now with Degen and Rollinger 2023.



so on, going back in (mythical as well as historical) time.<sup>71</sup> If, taking up the title of this section, Briant's caution can be elected as the representative par excellence of a «nihilistic» perspective (in Central Asia, at the waning of Cyrus' lineage, the Empire «is (almost) no more», and needs to be reconquered and rebuilt *vašnā* A. *uramazdāha*), in recent years, although relying, at least in part, on different documentary corpora, both Wu Xin and Wouter Henkelman have strongly supported a standpoint which, on the contrary, we might define as «voluntaristic» (the Empire «is» the main - if not the only - engine of urban, demographic, and economic development of Central Asia until the Makedonian invasion and to a certain extent, and thanks to its (infra)structures, even after it).<sup>72</sup> Of particular interest for the purposes of the present study are the positions, in their apparent contradiction in fact all but irreconcilable as they are the result of the same interpretative framework, developed since the mid-2000s by Wu Xin. On the one hand, the scholar does in fact not hesitate to speak of «revitalization of urban civilization» following the Achaemenid conquest of Baktria; on the other hand, she has however repeatedly insisted on the pervasiveness of rebellions, conflicts, and wars along the entire Eastern borderlands of the Persian domains, going so far as to define in no uncertain terms both the Sakā and, more generally, all the Central Asian peoples (from the Chorasmians to the Sogdians to the Baktrians themselves) as the «enemies of the Empire».<sup>73</sup>

We will have the opportunity to discuss the arguments put forward by Wu Xin in support of her claims in more detail further below (see especially chapter 6). However, it is important to note already at this stage that, apparently, in order to escape from the archaeological invisibility that afflicts the entire territory of the upper satrapies, Central Asia in general, and Baktria in particular, seem to have only two options available. To emerge from documentary silence thanks to the evidence from the Persepolis archives, thus providing a textual basis for the ideology expressed in both the Apadāna and Naqš -i Rostam reliefs (namely the narrative of the *dahayāva* devoted to intoning, in the form of their representatives, the «hymn of praise» to the severe but benevolent King discussed by Margaret Cool Root) or by taking their place, next to the Greeks and the Egyptians, in the list of «rebellious» peoples, never completely tamed by the imperial yoke and finally responsible, in the person of Bessos, for his ruinous fall.<sup>74</sup> In the belief that, as the studies of a new, but extremely promising, stream of

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<sup>71</sup> Briant 1984, 57-80) make up for an extremely stimulating reading even today, some 40 years after the first edition of the booklet. For a more cautious position on the actual establishment of Achaemenid power in Central Asia see Briant 2002, 97-106. On Darius le Conquérant see Briant 2002, 139-164.

<sup>72</sup> The summa summarum of Henkelman's thought on the Achaemenid imperial paradigm and related issues consists, for the time being, of the following, seminal, contributions: Henkelman 2008b; 2017a; 2017b, 2018a; 2018b, 2021a; 2021b; 2021c; 2021d.

<sup>73</sup> See Wu's several contributions on the matter (e. g. 2005, 148, 2010; 2012; 2014; 2017).

<sup>74</sup> The «war-mongering» thesis has been put forward and supported with a wealth of arguments and documentation especially in Wu 2014. For a highly modernized portrayal of the «insurrectionary» image of Baktria see Holt 2005 (with the fitting rebuttal of both Howe 2016 and Briant 2017a, 26 fn. 91) and, on a level, by virtue of the anthropological slant, apparently more neutral and yet not without a certain amount of stereotyping, Barfield 2010 (but see already Barfield 1989, providing the template for his Afgān model).

scholarship have shown very persuasively, Central Asia deserves to be studied not (or at least not only) «as a function» of the Empires that have sought throughout its history to control its spaces, resources, and peoples, but *iuxta propria principia* (qua Bactriana, in the words of Rachel Mairs), the last part of this section aims at proposing a third alternative, which seems to be at the same time more tuned on the peculiarities of the space (both physical and human) of the satrapies of Baktria and Sogdiana, while remaining in line with the incontrovertible results of research on the organization and functioning of the Achaemenid Empire carried out in recent years in the wake of the pioneering studies (among others) of Briant, Henkelman, and now most recently King.<sup>75</sup>

## 2.2. The Oasis in its Geo-Anthropoc Context: Drafting an Alternative Scenario

In 1881, while crossing the territory (Šahrestān) of the Mamasanī shepherds, Captain Henry Lake Wells noted in his diary how it was not uncommon to come across groups of Luristāni, inhabitants of the region carrying the same name (Luristān) of Eastern Irān, who were considered heirs of a «primordial» tradition of nomadism characteristic of the whole of Persia, while in reality they led a life in every way similar to that of other populations traditionally regarded as sedentary and devoted to agriculture, which in the evolutionary thought of the time situated the latter on a more advanced civilizational stage.<sup>76</sup> However, in order to escape the suffocating Qāğār taxation system, the Luristāni lived in extremely light dwellings, which could be dismantled in little more than a couple of hours and reassembled a few kilometers further away in a territory, such as that of the district of today's Ḥorramābād, whose physiology made it, until fairly recent years, a safe haven for those who were interested, for the most diverse reasons, in keeping political authorities perceived as belonging to the world outside the extended family unit at a safe distance.<sup>77</sup> Twenty years later, on the eve of the Buxārān expedition that would cost him his life, another British officer, Arthur Conolly, described a similar situation with regard to certain Türkmen groups (at the time both the «nomads» par excellence, and feared - especially by the Russians - slave traders), which he divided into Čarwar and Čomoor, i. e. «bandits» and «settlers».<sup>78</sup> According to the British captain's observations, the ratio between the former and the latter was about 1:3, but he had had the opportunity to learn that this state of affairs was only temporary, and that with «interchangeable cadence», the Čomoor would become

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<sup>75</sup> See at least Maris 2014b, Hoo 2018; 2020, 562-563; 2022, 33-37, Morris 2019a, and Iliakis forthcoming for a consistent attempt at recentring the history, and historiographies, of Central Asia during the Achaemenid and Hellenistic period.

<sup>76</sup> Kidd forthcoming on the problematic nature of these, and similar, taxonomies.

<sup>77</sup> Potts 2014, 294-295 for this account and the context in which it was drafted, with further references. Compare Puschnigg *et al.* forthcoming for a contemporary ethnoarchaeological case study in the central Zagros.

<sup>78</sup> Conolly 1838 II, 41-42. The history of Captain Conolly in Central Asia has been narrated with unmatched skills in Hopkirk 2010, 236-279.

Čarwar at the first sign of danger coming either from the aforementioned Qāğār fiscal harassment or from the punitive expeditions of the Tsarist officers posted in Russian Turkestan or, again, from the notorious strongman of Buxārā, Nasrullah Ḥān (1802?-1864). Even though it would not be difficult to multiply anecdotes of this kind and others of a similar nature, it should not go unnoticed that in the literature - especially that concerning antiquity - on Central Asia one can witness the remarkable persistence of the understanding of 1. the ecology and 2. the anthropology of these territories according to models that, although their genesis can be reconstructed historically and the trust placed in their heuristic power can (and should) be criticized based on epistemological premises as well as on a documentary basis, have nevertheless significantly shaped historical research on the «imperial» history of the space under scrutiny in these and the following pages. In its less sophisticated form, this is the classic (in both a literal and a metaphorical understanding of the term) distinction between «civilization» and «barbarism», in particular in its declination along the axes of «urbanism»/«countryside» (or mountainous territory) and «agriculture»/«nomadism». <sup>79</sup> Applied to the case of Central Asia, these categorizations (and other of similar nature, albeit terminologically more refined) have had the consequence of dividing the territory into oases, whose predominant, if not exclusive, economic regime would be irrigated agriculture, and the surrounding regions, steppes and other semi-arid zones, home to non-sedentary pastoralists. <sup>80</sup> Once this geographical (and anthropological) subdivision has been sanctioned, which would seem to be supported by the morphology of the territory itself, the interactions between these two ecological niches have been interpreted, even by scholars of non-sedentary societies, starting from a premise whose importance it is difficult to emphasize enough: namely that of the structural unsustainability, for example from both the nutritional and economic points of view, of the (different, and acknowledged as such) form of pastoralism characteristic of Eurasia. <sup>81</sup> From this - as the argument goes on - it would follow the dependence of non-sedentary societies on their sedentary «twins» for the acquisition of a whole range of goods, from foodstuffs and prestige or luxuries up to weapons and slaves to be ransomed or sold elsewhere, which, not least by virtue of a second - and no less hypothetical - structural weakness of the peoples settled at the oases' fringes (i. e. the military one, at least as far as the same number of troops is to be deployed in the field), could be acquired in principle through two main ways: trade - just think of the traditional representation of the commercial fortunes of both the Arsakids and the

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<sup>79</sup> Beckwith 2009, 320-362, Potts 2014, 430-443. In the classical world, a glaring example of the elaboration of a theory that we could define as social evolutionism can be found in a passage of the *De re rustica* (2.1.3-5), taken up centuries later by Porphyry in his *De abstinentia* (4.1.2), in which the history of what Marxist critics would have called «modes of production» is recapitulated according to an explicitly teleological scheme. See now Kidd forthcoming for a critical assessment of such categories based on a lush evidentiary repertoire coming from Central Asia.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. the - rightly critic - remarks by Negus Cleary 2015b, 117-119.

<sup>81</sup> Khazanov 1992; 1994<sup>2</sup>, 119-197. See however - although in another (this time Inner Asian) context - the by now classic study by Yú 1967 as well as Barfield 1989, 1-31 and Turchin 2009.

Kuṣāṇa - or predation (or extortion under threat of predation), by no chance also known as the «rade or trade» model.<sup>82</sup> Agrarian societies would in turn have reacted to this challenge by intensifying their military and defensive capacities, thus triggering a spiraling process which would be at the origin of what Barfield has called «shadow Empires»: i. e. political structures which, in order to secure their own «parasitic» existence through the exploitation (by plundering) of the resources of the oases or - in the Chinese case - of the alluvial plains such as that of the Yellow River (Huáng Hé 黄河) would have been forced to emulate in a mirror-like fashion (hence the definition of «mirror Empires» recently adopted by Peter Turchin to describe the phenomenon at stake here) the settled societies in the attempt, a matter of life and death, to constitute (or remain, by virtue of the contextual arm race of the potential prey) at least a sufficiently credible threat in order not to limit their extortionate capacity. According to Turchin and Barfield, it would have been these processes that gave rise, in Inner Asia, to the most famous steppe polities in Eurasian history, from the Xiōngnú Empire to the Türkic Qağanates of the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE up to Temüjin and Tīmūr; while in Central Asia, on the other hand, such dynamics ought to be seen as the background for the perennial state of tension to which were subjected the (North)Eastern borderlands of Empires – from the Achaemenids to the Sāsānids – attempting, with varying degrees of success, to exert at least *de iure* if not *de facto* some form of control over Bactria and the neighboring regions.<sup>83</sup>

If, in the case of Inner Asia, a real paradigm shift occurred in the last decade, with its supporters having in fact refuted point by point the «parasitic» theories and their derivatives, as far as the case of pre-Islamic, thus including Hellenistic, Bactria is concerned, the analytical framework described above still can be regarded as the shared opinion among a large majority of scholars. With regards to the Achaemenid Empire, the above-mentioned contributions by Wu Xin provide the best evidence for the persistence of this interpretative model even in the context of research on Persian-ruled Bactria.<sup>84</sup> The basic argument at the heart of this chapter argues, on the contrary, that there are well-

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<sup>82</sup> See the summary of the debate on «exchanges and interactions» between the Empires of Eurasia in Kim *et al.* 2017 as well as the introduction to the first volume of a recent important collective study by Sitta von Reden (2019a). Against the stereotype of the Kuṣāṇa as middlemen, Lauren Morris (2019c, 681-68) has most recently spent herself with convincing arguments. On the Arsakids see Fabian 2019 and Taasob 2021, stressing the agrarian nature of the Empire's wealth.

<sup>83</sup> See e. g. Barfield 2001, Turchin 2009, Turchin and Neferov 2009, 1-34, Potts 2014, 120-157; 2018.

<sup>84</sup> Coloru 2009, 231-240, which summarizes much of the previous literature. In more recent years see at least Francfort 2013b. Remarkable in the caution with which she investigates the issue, still today at the center of a heated debate, of the *Decline and Fall* of Greek hegemony in Bactria, is the reasoning developed by Rachel Mairs in at least two contributions (2013d; 2014b, 146-176, which takes up and reworks the main arguments developed in the previous article). The Xiōngnú bibliography has grown exponentially over the last ten years. Apart from Di Cosmo's very important 2002 study, which had already contributed significantly to criticize the «parasitic» model of the processes of imperial genesis in the steppes of inner Asia, a radical - arguably conclusive - refutation has been developed on an archaeological basis by Bryan K. Miller (2009, 297-377). Within the framework of the «archaeology of knowledge» underlying the arguments put forward in these and the following pages, a decisive role has been played, among others, by the following studies: Miller 2014; 2015, Brosseder 2015, Cioffi-Revilla *et al.* 2015, Di Cosmo 2015; 2018, Honeychurch 2015, Kradin 2015a; 2018, Honeychurch and Makarewicz 2016, Brosseder and Miller 2018, Golden 2018.

founded reasons to radically rethink - similarly to what has occurred in recent years in Inner Asian studies (e. g. in the context of Hàn-Xiōngnú relations on the one hand or, on the other, those between the Táng (唐) and the Türkic people) - the categories through which both the role of the Achaemenid Empire in the transformation of Central Asian space and the modalities of interaction between *Ancient Persia and its enemies* have been conceived so far, as one might put it paraphrasing the by now famous title of Nicola Di Cosmo's major work.<sup>85</sup> The reasons for this revisionism are of three fundamental - and closely interconnected - orders: 1. archaeological, 2. ecological, and 3. theoretical. The remainder of this section will therefore be devoted to a - hopefully - clarifying exemplification of each of these reasons, while in the following paragraphs arguments and evidence drawn from each of these research fields shall be put forward in an attempt to sketch an alternative - and arguably all the more economical as it is more heuristically insightful - scenario of the structures underlying the functioning of the «minimal unit» of Achaemenian administration in Northern Central Asia, namely the satrapy of Baktria.

### 2.2.1. Hammer & Shovel: on the Archaeology of the Central Asian Oasis

Let us start with some archaeological considerations. Thanks in no small part to a political situation - at least as far as non-residents are concerned - incomparably more favorable than that of the former Soviet Union (including the previous political administration, up to and including 2016) as well as that of modern neighboring countries, today's republic of Uzbekistan (O'zbekiston Respublikasi) has hosted over the last twenty years an increasing number of archaeological missions, often working in close collaboration with local institutions, whose results deserve to be assimilated by the historiographical debate (even outside the - rather esoteric - circle of specialists) much more than it has happened so far. For the purposes of the present discussion, the excavations carried out by the Australo-Qaraqalpag (KKAE) mission in Chorasmia deserve special attention, and in particular the studies carried out on the settlements (qal'a or, in Russian terminology, gorodišči (городищи), i. e. «fortresses») scattered in large numbers along both banks of the Amudaryo delta, on the border of the Sarýgamýş basin, the latter being a lake depression on the slopes of the Üstýrt (Үстүрт) Plateau, at the crossroads of today's Qazaqstan, Türkmenistan and Qaraqalpag'iston (itself an autonomous republic within Uzbekistan).<sup>86</sup> In a number of contributions devoted to the study of the architectural

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<sup>85</sup> Kim 2009; 2010, Chin 2010, and Di Cosmo 2010 discuss, among other things, the criteria underpinning the historical ethnography of steppe peoples in the Chinese literary tradition. On the relationships between the Chinese Empire and the nomadicum in later times see for example Skaff 2012; 2017 (on Táng China), Kim 2017 (on the (late)Roman world), and Golden 2018.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. the excavation reports published by the research group directed by Alison Venetia Graham Betts (e. g. 2001; 2002; 2009; 2012) as well as the more popular overview by Betts and Yagodin 2006 and, more recently, Minardi 2015a, who

and functional features of the qal'a (a term preferred to the Russian городищи for the latter being functionally loaded) in the context of a broader regional study of Chorasmia's interactions with neighboring territories, including Baktria, one of the members of the *ККАЕ*, the archaeologist Michelle Negus-Cleary, has pointed out that, at the roots of the traditional interpretation of these settlements – namely their being strongholds to control deserts and steppes, guard posts to defend agricultural settlements in the Amudaryo delta or urban sites, to name but a few of the most successful theories from the time of Sergeĭ Tolstov's foundational *Древний Хорезм (Ancient Chorasmia)* onwards - rests a significant misunderstanding of the ecology of Central Asian oases.<sup>87</sup> One of the main reasons for this is that, in such spaces, in the words of the scholar herself, the «presence and practice» of non-sedentary communities and the existence of an economy based neither exclusively, nor perhaps prominently, on agriculture, has to be regarded as almost certain since, in terms of layout and functionality, the archaeology of the qal'a is not compatible with the hypothesis of urban settlements, for it lacks all the characteristics that the latter would require, starting with a clearly decipherable urban grid.<sup>88</sup> Even in the case of the most impressive examples in terms of extent, from Kalalĭ-gĭr 1 (63 ha) to Kiuzelĭ-gĭr (25), dated respectively between the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE and the 6<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, Negus-Cleary pointed out that the almost total absence of evidence of urban development and, on the contrary, the presence of abundant animal remains (from large cattle to horses and camels, as well as the ubiquitous sheep/goats) is best explained by assuming a multifunctional nature of the qal'a – from elite residences (at Kiuzelĭ-gĭr, but not only there, a palatial complex is attested within the main walled enclosure, but no other evident signs of conurbation has so far been detected) to temples, caravanserais, stables, or manor houses - within an environmental context that, so the scholar continues, is characterized by significant environmental factors affecting the oases' ecology as a whole (and, remarkably, not only of the areas apparently more suited to an economic regime of mainly if not exclusively agricultural orientation).<sup>89</sup> Particularly important is the fact that, in Negus-Cleary's opinion, a similar argument to the one she developed for sites such as Kiuzelĭ-gĭr remains valid a fortiori for all the sites smaller than 5 ha (a threshold from which, traditionally, it has been considered possible to speak of «urban centers» - when not actually of «cities» - in their turn interpreted as constituting the beating heart of the alleged Chorasmian «state» and starting from if not growing out of it, of the subsequent satrapy). The reason underpinning such a statement is that, of the approximately 75 fortified sites (qal'a /городищи) currently known and

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also gives an account of the impressive legacy of the комплексная экспедиция (multipurpose expedition) led and directed by Sergeĭ Pavlovič Tolstov and active for over fifty years in the region: cf. on its legacy most recently Aržantzeva and Härke 2019. Most recently on the Sakā settled in this region(s) see Jacobs and Gufler 2021, 687.

<sup>87</sup> On which see now Negus Cleary 2015a I, 71-88 on Central Asia more in general and with a special focus on Chorasmia.

<sup>88</sup> Negus-Cleary 2015a I; 128-171; 2015b, 117.

<sup>89</sup> Negus-Cleary 2007, 18; 2017, 292.

spanning a chronological period reaching from the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE and even beyond, no more than five show signs of intramural habitation. And this, to put it mildly, does not support the «urban» model still so widely shared among scholars.<sup>90</sup> Instead, her suggestion is to interpret the qal‘a as part of «an extensive rural landscape» that developed from entirely local premises and thanks to the decisive contribution of community members whose subsistence regime the archaeologist proposes to understand against the background of a new theoretical and methodological paradigm, namely that of «mobility» (as opposed to another – and still predominant – one, which is however cumbersome in its static nature, for it requires constant proliferation of new terminology and – sometimes questionable – distinctions, a sort of Ptolemaic epicycles more anthropologico, i. e. the many theories of and on «nomadism»).<sup>91</sup>

One of the (many) strengths of such a paradigm is that, while it does not exclude the use of agricultural regimes as part of a much wider repertoire of subsistence strategies, it is at the same time inclusive and flexible enough to accommodate the bewildering polyphony of spatial practices, political and social organization, exploitation of the natural environment, and (not least) symbolic production and «intentional history» that, as the Soviet scholar Il’ja Pavlovič Petruševskii (1898-1977) observed with regard to the – unsuccessful – attempts of the Šafavīd Empire (ruling between 150-1736 and, notably, no stranger itself to traditions of mobility) to cope with the complexity of the anthropic landscape of its domains, represent an unmistakable mark of the inhabitants of vast sectors of the Eurasian steppe belt over a huge landmass, from Ukraine to Manchuria.<sup>92</sup> Following Lauren Morris’ terminology, in the framework of a book devoted to the *Rise & Organization* of Achaemenid Central Asia in terms of what she defines as an «imperial space», Negus-Cleary’s remarks are of crucial importance (and arguably still rather underestimated outside of the scholarly discourse on Chorasmia), because they overlap, too neatly to be the outcome of mere chance, with the results of studies carried out in contexts – from the Qashqadaryo valley to the steppes of the Dašt -i Muğān – which, from a socio-environmental point of view are very similar with Chorasmia. Moreover, from the vantage point of the history of scholarship, all those space remarkably share the status of liminal dahayāva, judged to have been scarcely or, at least in a desultory manner over time, not at all, subject to Achaemenid political control, and nevertheless also reputed to have been of considerable

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<sup>90</sup> Negus-Cleary 2013, 84.

<sup>91</sup> See most recently Kidd forthcoming for a Sogdian case study on precisely these issues. Zachary Silvia’s forthcoming volume on the rural archaeology of Central Asia promises to shed further light on the topic.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Petruševskii 1949, 94-95, Potts 2014, 247 and, regarding the concept of «mobility» and the advantages of its use over other – now impossible to count – definitions of «nomadism» see the notable discussion in Frachetti 2009, Negus-Cleary 2013, 78-80; 2017, 276-278. The Fassungslosigkeit of the Šafavīd administrators in keeping track of the origin (not to mention the actual location) of the inhabitants of its Empire can be somewhat compared to the difficulty showed by Graeco-Roman sources in locating (on an already inaccurate map) the proliferation of «nomads» who inhabited the lands under the rule of the ultiores gentes in Parthia and lands further East: see e. g. Plin. *NH.*, 6.19, who claims that the Dahae were «a Scythian race [gens]». See Olbrycht 1998a, 31-32; 1998b, 176 ff.

importance to the Empire itself in terms of (mainly, but not only, human and animal) resources eagerly coveted by the Great King, as it is unequivocally shown by the Apadāna reliefs.<sup>93</sup> As the subsequent sections in this chapter aim to show, the application of Negus-Cleary's interpretative framework to the context of Bactria and Sogdiana is able to explain much more satisfactorily than has been the case so far both the reasons for the (undoubted and unquestionable, it must be repeated) success of the Achaemenid «imperial paradigm» and those for its (not least because of the type of sources currently available to us) no less real limitations.

### 2.2.2. The Unbearable Lightness of Being (Mobile)

The second set of reasons calling for the questioning of *both* models that have traditionally been used by (even opposing) historiographical trends concerning the relationships between the Persian Empire and the Bactrian space (and its inhabitants) - especially as it comes to the thesis centered on the dialectic of «conflict and predation» defended with particular vigor by Wu Xin - is of an ecological nature.<sup>94</sup> In other words, the information that can be drawn both from the travel reports of Western diplomats and soldiers from the late Middle Ages onwards (from Clavijo to James Baillie Fraser) as well as from the results of the archeozoological and ethnographic investigations carried out in the Ordos and other (outer) Mongolian territories, makes it imperative to re-evaluate the traditionally held view of the structural dependence of mobile communities on the sedentary ones, a pillar of every «rade [and/]or trade» model of diplomatic relations between an Empire and its «enemies» throughout the history of Central Asia (not only during antiquity).<sup>95</sup> Taking as his starting point a rather banal observation (and at the same time a Leitmotiv in studies of the interactions of non-settler communities with what Anatolii Khazanov has called the outside world), namely that peoples subject and not subject to a particular state were naturally destined to become business partners, since the more the state grew in population and wealth, the more its trade «with neighboring barbarians» grew in proportion, James Scott has put forward the provocative hypothesis according to which, contrary to the theories of «shadow» or «mirror» Empires, of the two partners it was in all likelihood the state the one being predominantly dependent on its «barbarian neighbors» rather than the other way round.<sup>96</sup> Fundamentally – the scholar rather convincingly argues - the reasons for this are to be found

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<sup>93</sup> Stride 2005 and Lhuillier 2018 on Central Asia, Khatchadourian 2016, 81-117 and Ristvet 2018 concerning Armenia and more broadly the Caucasus.

<sup>94</sup> Among the absolute pioneers of arguments partly analogous to those put forward in the following paragraph is Owen Lattimore, whose reflections on what he calls «Reservoir» and «Marginal Zone» (1988, 238-254) still deserve careful reading and thoughtful consideration.

<sup>95</sup> Honeychurch 2015, 54-56.

<sup>96</sup> See Scott 2017, 226. Similar arguments have been vigorously put forward by William Honeychurch (2015, 11) in the context of a new flowering of studies on the archaeology of the peoples living in the Mongolian, Mǎnzú (滿族) and



in the (until very recent times) structural dependence of every political organization with claims to territorial hegemony similar to those of almost all pre-modern kingdoms and/or Empires (but the argument could also be applied rather well to contexts - at least chronologically – later than the industrial revolution, e. g. Tsarist Russia or the Soviet Union as well as to Maoist China) on a restricted range of cereal crops (wheat and barley in the case of Mesopotamia or the Mediterranean world, irrigated rice farming in China and Southeast Asia).<sup>97</sup>

Even before – and, in fact, much more - than for reasons of economic or nutritional efficiency (such as caloric yield per unit of cultivated land), the paramount reason for the predilection of this specific type of crops (note in fact the conspicuous absence of other, more nutritious candidates, from legumes to the entire family of rhizomatous plants) is to be found, according to Scott, in the possibility that cereals such as barley, wheat or, above all, irrigated rice offer to a given administrative apparatus of concentrating remarkable numbers of individuals in relatively small spaces, which would be unthinkable under other economic regimes. Consequently, a radical simplification, in the name of predictability, of both the landscape and, above all, the lifestyle of the population (the harvest needs in fact constant care and ripens all at once) follows. In their own turn, as the anthropologist puts it, both landscape and, most crucially, population thus become «readable»: this means, in the first place, taxable, enforceable for military purposes and, ultimately, politically and economically controllable.<sup>98</sup> The price of this massive operation of socio-ecological engineering (the scale of which should not be underestimated), Scott further continues, must have been extremely high in terms of environmental sustainability, both if considering the surrounding territories and the ecosystem regulating the life of the communities themselves. The previously unheard-of concentration of a small number of plant species and, conversely, an equally massive number of individuals (and of their livestock) in a relatively small space due to the prohibitive transportation costs (what Scott calls «the friction of the terrain»), while providing an ideal breeding ground for germs and bacteria specific to that - restricted - group of flora and fauna purposely concentrated in a space made artificially «transparent», this main tool for the «primary accumulation» of imperial power was also an ideal target for more mobile

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Transbaikalian steppes: «nomadic pastoral peoples» - argues the archaeologist, were in fact more than just an extension of their subsistence economy (see Khazanov 1994<sup>2</sup>, 68-84 for a very different position) and not even «primitive or unsophisticated», but on the contrary have to be seen as deeply entangled in «unique forms of political complexity». Cf. moreover the ethnographic (and pertaining to the history of diplomatic relations) remarks in Kendirbai 2020 (e. g. pp. 134 ff.) on the evolution of the Russian Empire's borders with the Kalmykian and Qazaq people between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, where the proactive role of pastoral communities in driving those processes is rightfully underlined.

<sup>97</sup> Scott 2017, 116-149. According to the review of the literature on state formation in the pre-modern era carried out some two decades ago by Adam T. Smith (2003, 90-94), the structural weaknesses pointed out by Scott apply at least to «sedentary, high-capacity, administratively hegemonic, and politically centralized political systems», a definition that fits rather well, though not without some qualifications - above all the emphasis on malleability and adaptability to the local context(s) - to the portrait of the Achaemenid «imperial paradigm» recently developed by Wouter Henkelman (2017a). On the hegemonic (universalistic) ambitions of premodern Empires, including the Seleukid one, see most recently Strootman 2020a. Note also Scott 2017, 116-149.

<sup>98</sup> Scott 2009, 64-97.

human groups, and this, it should be noted, not because they were unable to procure any resources that might have been preyed upon in any other way, but because it was an extremely economical method (not least in terms of the ratio between units of time invested in such an enterprise as compared to profit – so to speak – thus harvested).<sup>99</sup> Transferred from the context of the Mesopotamian floodplain - from which a significant part of Scott's exemplifications are drawn - to an ecologically complex and polyvalent territory such as that of Central Asia, in which, as the studies by Negus-Cleary discussed above have convincingly shown, irrigated agriculture constituted, even in the major oases, one among (and perhaps not even the prevalent) subsistence strategies employed by the local population, the large-scale investment in an intensive agricultural economy - as seems to be particularly evident from the analysis of the settlement distribution in the Dašt -i Qal'a plain during the Seleukid-era - in all likelihood became one of the most vulnerable spots of the same political power that drew the essential condition of its very subsistence from the systematic application of these «modes of production».<sup>100</sup>

None of these constraints apply, however, to the economy (and to the ecology providing the former's basis for subsistence) of highly mobile populations. This is so not only because of the considerably sophisticated system of mutual assistance which, as Nikolaï Kradin has pointed out, was one of the most effective resources among pastoral communities for coping with even sudden changes in the climatic, demographic, or political conditions of their environment, but also, and perhaps above all, because of the ability, illustrated by Cheryl A. Makarewicz with abundant examples from the most recent archaeological research carried out in the Xiōngnú territory, to set in motion, through careful supervision of the diet and reproductive cycles of the herds (from sheep to horses to camels), an impressive economy of scale capable of fulfilling an exorbitant number of functions: from the trade in dairy products and leather goods with the settled communities - which, due to obvious problems of logistical nature, were not even remotely able to procure such goods in the quantities required, not so much, per se, by the population of this or that agricultural community, but rather by the overarching governmental structure, notoriously keen to draining resources - down to warfare and related activities, the latter being a traditional means of acquiring personal prestige by fostering intra- (and inter-) élite competition within human groups characterized by a lifestyle of (more or less long-range) mobility.<sup>101</sup> A particularly illustrative example of the multifunctionality of the subsistence

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<sup>99</sup> On the ecological frailty of what he evocatively calls «the domus complex» see Scott 1998, 262-306; 2017, 95-116.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Havlík 2018, 52-59, 63-81, 102-111; 2021 for a detailed discussion of the settlement topography of Eastern Baktria during the Hellenistic period.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. Makarewicz 2011, Honeychurch 2015, 56 (who points out that the inter-local dependence generated by these strategies of mutual welfarism could also be at the origin not only of a more intense trans-local contact but also of inequality relations between communities without any «state» form being per se necessary), Kradin 2015b, 44, Chang 2018, 47-50 as well as Simpson and Pankova 2021, 663, emphasizing that «the Scythians knew how to manage reproduction within their herds and did not rely on a small numbers of stallions for siring». Moreover, «their breeders

regimes available to the non-sedentary (or at least not permanently so) populations of Eurasia and of the orders of magnitude of the economic surplus within their reach (a temptation difficult to resist for any imperial power, including those of non-sedentary ancestry, such as the Mongols and Tīmūrids) is offered by some chapters of the *Historia del Gran Tamorlán* compiled by the Spaniard Ruy González de Clavijo (? -1412) at the time of his diplomatic mission to Central Asia. According to the latter, some (which means that the following numbers are likely some orders of magnitude smaller than the actual movable capital of the communities he encountered) of the representatives of the alabares (perhaps a mispronunciation of Barlas, the name of one of the clans of the inner circle of the ruler installed at Shahr-e Sabz), then settled in Ḥurāsān, paid Tīmūr a tribute of 3000 camels and 15000 sheep (this latter observation is also interesting in view of the fact that the composition of the Alabarean herds bears striking similarities to what we know about the Xiōngnú flocks, suggesting the existence of a zootechnical strategy common in time and space to the non-settled peoples of the Eurasian steppe).<sup>102</sup> In addition to this, in another passage of the *Embajada* of no less interest, Clavijo points out that, on the way back from Samarqand to Tabrīz, his party came across what the diplomat describes as «land owned by nomads, cultivated with rice, with which they fed their horses», a fact that points in a direction convergent with the conclusions, derived from zooarchaeological analysis of equine remains found in mound tombs from Mongolia to Ukraine (known in Russian as курганы, kurgans), according to which it has been argued that at least some of the non-sedentary populations of the «steppe belt» fed their animals diets specifically aimed at increasing their physical performance (most likely on the battlefield).<sup>103</sup> In the light of these considerations, it is perhaps possible to go a

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selected a diversity of endurance and speed potential», as recent DNA analysis on burial samples shows. Further compelling comparative evidence attesting the breeding skills of (recently developed as) mobile societies can be found in Hämäläinen 2008, 245. The dizzying list of resources from literally every corner of the Persian οἰκουμένη to be found in DSf (the so-called «Susa foundation charter») provides a striking example of the extractive capacity of an Empire with universal ambitions such as the Achaemenid one: see *API*, 127-134. Cf. also Hdt. 4.126-127, in which a frustrated Darius receives from the Scythian chieftain Idanthyrsos (Ἰδάνθυρσος) a veritable lectio magistralis on the meaning and the implications of mobility within the steppe world, a point also raised by Honeychurch 2015, 6.

<sup>102</sup> *Clavijo* 9 (from Solṭāniyeh to Neyshāpūr), 107. Picking up on some earlier - and pathbreaking - reflections on reindeer hunting (and herding) among the peoples of the Arctic Circle, Ingold (2000, 76 ff.) pointed out that the focus of scholarly attention on a given population's productive activity should be an understanding of the intentionality behind such practices as well as of agenda that characterizes them, thus interpreting each of these activities in social terms, for they are mainly aimed «at obtaining resources». Moreover, he also rightly stressed that pastoralism should be conceived first and foremost in terms of a «social system of appropriation» and not merely as an economic regime».

<sup>103</sup> *Clavijo* 17 (from Samarqand to Tabrīz), 309. On this passage in the Spaniard's account see Potts 2014, 212 - who however follows a different pagination - and Makarewicz 2011, 190 offering interesting comparative material (drawn from her studies on the Xiōngnú) regarding the livestock subsistence strategies in vogue among the non-settled populations of Eurasia. More discussion on the evidence coming from the *Embajada* in Weaverdyck *et al.* 2021, 313-317. Staying closer to the Achaemenid context, in the framework of the narration of Alexander's campaign, both Arrian (*Anab.* 3.30.6) and Curtius Rufus (7.6.10) record that, as soon as he reached the site of Xenippa (probably known as Nīḥšapāia in Achaemenid times, today in the territory of the Uzbek town of Qarši), the Makedonian and his army began a massive requisitioning operation of livestock (especially fresh horses for the army), thus severely damaging the entire ecosystem of a region that, judging from the *ADAB* collection (Naveh and Shaked 2012, 97), must have been one of the most important reservoirs for the supply of horses (and perhaps camels) of the entire Central Asia in Persian times: see Mairs 2020a.

step further than the observation made decades ago by - at the time pioneering - scholars of the modes of interaction on the periphery of the agrarian Empires of antiquity (from Owen Lattimore and Yú Yīngshí 余英時 in the case of China to Richard McCormick Adams with regard to what he called the lands beyond Baḡdād), who although starting from different premises converged in arguing that, as Scott puts it, «the usually sacred and impenetrable boundary between farmers and pastoralists» should be blurred in order to integrate a - rather wide-ranging and socially complex - category of «amphibious peasantry», whose members were very much capable of navigating with great dexterity the multiple streams of the «connections between nomads and sedentaries». As McCormick Adams already did not fail to note, moreover, to the above might be added that these connections ought to be conceived as a continuum which was extremely sensitive to environmental and social pressures and therefore, to use Scott's words, in principle extremely «opaque» in the eyes of the imperial administration, a situation which vocally called for «simplification» at the hand of an agrarian power aiming at tapping into those resources and networks.<sup>104</sup>

In fact, contrary to what is usually implied by the argument of a supposedly «nomadic dependence», and as an abundance of anecdotal evidence – which is all more interesting the more partisan it is - suggests, the transition from an «amphibious» to a resolutely «aquatic» nature (i. e. fleeing, one might rightly say, «bag and baggage (and horses)» into «barbarian» territory) seemed to have been attractive not only to more or less numerous hordes of impoverished peasants who had been exploited by avaricious tax collectors. On the contrary, it can be argued that it found a considerable number of supporters also among more than one member of those local élites who, at the first sign of the willingness on the part of the political power nominally above them in the territorial hierarchy to restrict their range of (political as well as economic) action or, to put it in slightly different words, to (further) modify to its own advantage the terms of the «social contract» lying at the foundations of the dynamics of provincial domination, found it far easier, instead of starting a large-scale revolt (whose chances of success must have seemed rather ephemeral to those who had had close experience of interaction with any imperial polity), to make themselves «invisible» to this or that king's eye – as well as to the cataloguing drive of the archives - by exploiting both the aforementioned friction of the terrain and the superior flexibility of those who, just like the much deprecated «barbarians», proved themselves to be unmatched masters of what Scott called *The Art of Not Being Governed*.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Owen Lattimore's detailed analysis (1988, 103-205) of the ecologies and economies of the territories «between deserts and steppes», to use Cunliffe's catchy title (2015, 203-252), from Manchuria to Central Asia, including therefore also the space of interest to the present discussion, is very instructive. See also Yú 1994<sup>2</sup>, 122 and Scott 2017, 212 concerning the «amphibious» nature of a not insignificant part of the rural world of the pre- (and until very recent years also post-) industrial era.

<sup>105</sup> Scott 1985, 28-47 for an extensive sample of other *Weapons of the weak* as well as Scott 2009, 1-40 for a more in-depth discussion of the significance of a parameter such as the «potential escape rate» as a historical, anthropological, and geographical yardstick. Flexibility as a virtue, and not as a shortcoming, of Empires from a world historical

Such solutions seemed all the more inviting the more the «state's» (in our case Empire's) claims to control and exploitation extended to those territories that van Schendel has suggestively defined as being characterized by a high «rate of potential evasion» (a category into which, it should not go unnoticed, both the steppes and the Central Asian mountains fit particularly well).<sup>106</sup> In the context of Achaemenid Central Asia, considerations of this kind give, among other things, a rather different meaning than the original one to a very famous statement by Thucydides regarding the true nature of the civic community - in our case of the imperial satrapy - that is, its being made, *iure naturae*, of the population living in it rather than by the «signs» with which a social power tends to make itself recognizable in space (e.g. the civic walls).<sup>107</sup> Put in other words, the subjects (both the imperial ones and/or those of a given state), are the *sine qua non* condition for a supra-regional power - structurally limited as it is in its range of action by the infrastructural and ecological reasons discussed in these pages - to be able to wield, and not just claim, more than nominal control (again, Garrison's «hope-for-fantasy») over a much larger space than the resources available to a hypothetical ethno-classe dominante would per se allow.<sup>108</sup> And a similar line of reasoning applies, of course, to a considerable number of those «imperial collaborators» who alone can ensure the skills (spatial, social, ecological) indispensable to ensure the acquiescence of the population itself to the imperial court and to its administrative extension (the satrap), in the process making both human and natural resources available to the imperial apparatus.<sup>109</sup> The necessity of the simultaneous fulfilment of the conditions listed above (which, taken individually, are indeed necessary, but not sufficient) for a stable maintenance of imperial hegemony illustrates in a rather straightforward way the «presumptive» nature - in the sense discussed in the previous chapter - of Achaemenid power in Central Asia and leads us to the third reason, as defined above of a more abstractly theoretical order, which justifies a «revisionist» attitude to the study of the history behind the genesis and functioning of the Achaemenid satrapy of Bactria, namely the vital, rather than potentially lethal, role of the Empire's frontier

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perspective has been studied by Burbank and Cooper 2011, 1-23 and by Chrubasik 2016, 37-45 regarding Seleukid Bactria (on which see also Martinez-Sève 2020b, 90-91). Cf. Scheidel 2018, 232-254 for an overview of peasant (and not only of the humblest among them) uprisings «before Lenin came» discussing the reasons for their very limited chances of success. As Manning 2021, 154 puts it, moreover «individuals with connections in the border districts may have driven [imperial] policy», a point hammered home very convincingly by both Versluys forthcoming and Rollinger 2023.

<sup>106</sup> See most recently on Afġānistān Payne and King 2020.

<sup>107</sup> Thuc. 7.77.7: «ἄνδρες γὰρ πόλις, καὶ οὐ τεῖχη οὐδὲ νῆες ἀνδρῶν». A similar notion - albeit in a very different context but, one should note, with a somewhat similar aim, i. e. the attempt at developing a concept of oneself and of one's mission as a community that is as independent as possible from, though not unconnected to, mundane events (and reversals) - is to be found in Augustine's *De civitate Dei*: cf. Meier 2020, 43.

<sup>108</sup> See King 2020 for a compelling (Late Antique) Baktrian case study.

<sup>109</sup> van Schendel 2002, Scott 2009, 73-97. See moreover the suggestive case of Achaemenid Armenia discussed in Khatchadourian 2016, 153-193.

zone(s), the true litmus test, to quote Düring and Stek's judgement, of the success of every (pre-modern) strategy of «Empire building».<sup>110</sup>

### 2.2.3. On Raw Savages and Cooked Barbarians: Powers, Peoples, and Desires in an Emerging Space

In a 12<sup>th</sup> century document from the island of Hǎinán (海南) in the South China Sea, a curious anthropological classification is preserved of the «barbarian» hordes that apparently infested the Southern borderlands of the Middle Kingdom, especially in an area stretching across the present-day province of Yúnnán (雲南) and the modern states of Việt Nam, Laos, and Myanmar. According to this taxonomy, which would be taken up centuries later by the famous general, statesman, and intellectual Wáng Shǒurén (王守仁, 1472-1529, better known as Wáng Yángmíng 王阳明), the people at the Southernmost outreaches of Chinese power should be divided into «raw» (shēng 生) and «cooked» (shú 熟) barbarians.<sup>111</sup> By means of a sophisticated investigation of this mapping of the Southern borderlands of the domains under the Son of Heaven (Tiānzǐ 天子 as the Chinese ruler called himself, with a distinctively imperial display of modesty), anthropologist Magnus Fiskesjö has illustrated the underlying logic of this cataloguing, reaching conclusions strikingly similar to the analysis of the internal frontiers zones of the Mesopotamian kingdoms during the Old Babylonian period (ca. 2003-1595 BCE) developed in more recent years by Seth Richardson and which can be just as profitably geared towards a more sophisticated understanding of the nature (and limits) of Achaemenid imperial power in Central Asia, especially in its auroral phase, which is the main subject of the present chapter.<sup>112</sup> According to Fiskesjö, the marked ethnicization illustrated using terms such as shēng and shú - to which a whole intermediate «culinary» spectrum should be added, since the process of «cooking» the borderland populations seems to have been anything but smooth, let alone teleological - suggests 1. that «the very idea of civilization of China [expressed by the term Zhōngguó

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<sup>110</sup> Düring and Stek 2018 (a and b), Favereau 2021, 224. See moreover Versluys 2014, Pitts and Versluys 2015 and, as it comes to a (re)assessment of Afġānistān, its space and its peoples, as a «cradle» and not a «graveyard» of Empires in Eurasian antiquity, the remarks in Canepa 2020.

<sup>111</sup> Compare Kim 2015 on the origins of Việt Nam and Fox Brindley 2015 on ancient Chinese relationships at the Southeastern border of the Heavenly Kingdom, with the contributions in Higham and Kim 2022 for a thorough overview of the broader region.

<sup>112</sup> Fjaskesjö 1999. See also the already mentioned contributions by Seth Richardson (especially 2012; 2014; 2016). Similarly instructive are the pages of the *Hànshū* (94.3833-3834) in which it is said of the Xiōngnú and other peoples gathered under their aegis that «they seek refuge and habitation in the Northern regions, in desolate, cold and damp lands. [...] they follow their flocks across the pastures. It is not possible to plough their land [this is demonstrably false, as shown for example by Di Cosmo 2010], the inhabitants of this land cannot be considered subjects; consequently, they must be considered external [«raw»] and not internal [if not «cooked» at least «edible»], as foreigners and not as relatives». Italics are mine. For the translation from the Chinese, I owe a considerable debt (which I am happy to acknowledge) to Dr. Silvia Nico's patience and friendship.

(中國), i. e. what Fiskesjö calls «the central state» and which indeed still is the indigenous term for «China»] necessarily and continuously required [the existence of] “barbarians” on the periphery as its corollary»; moreover - and even more remarkably - 2. that, since the Việt, Laotian, and Myanmarese peoples, but also some inhabitants of Yúnnán itself, continued to be classified as «crude» even after becoming «deeply implicated» in the affairs of «the civilized realm», the conclusion must be drawn that such designations persisted «because of their precious position as the very foundation of imperial sovereignty».<sup>113</sup> As noted by James Scott, this terminology suggests that the state of «barbarism», far from constituting a stage along a straightforward process of civilization (as also it is implied in *Cat. Agr.*, 2.1.3-5) or Empire (state) building, actually should be interpreted as a choice («positionality»), i. e. as a conscious «political location vis-à-vis stateness».<sup>114</sup> Notably, the latter is an assessment that neatly overlaps with Richardson’s, according to whom it is precisely the attempt by the administration of urban centers (from Larsa to Lagaš and from Nippur to Babylon itself) to take away room for maneuver from «warlords, tribes and merchants» who were indeed much more capable of guaranteeing access to - and exploitation of - land and/or water, animal or forest resources, the main reason which set the conditions for the emergence of a (mobile) group self-perception which was based on the concept of «liminality» in explicit contrast to a multitude of political entities whose power, despite the bombastic proclamations of their various rulers, was in reality far more hypothetical («aspirational») than it was «operational».<sup>115</sup>

In the context of Achaemenid Central Asia, the basic argument that I would like to put forward and try to defend in this chapter as well as in the overall framework of the present study is that the similar

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<sup>113</sup> Fjaskesjö 1999, 139. «Raw» and «cooked» seem even compliments if compared to the profusion of blatant insults («dog», «barbaric beast» and the more respectful – for it is imbued with reverential awe - «son of darkness», however promptly joined by a more familiar «hated by God» - ὁ θεομίσητος) with which Byzantine sources (above all Theodoros Synkellos, an eyewitness, and author of a fundamental *Chronicle* where the events at stake here are narrated in great detail) calls the Qağan (Χαγάνος, his real name has not been transmitted to us) of the Avars who, on the 29<sup>th</sup> of July 626 CE appeared - so say the witnesses of an event that more than one in the city considered to be the harbinger (it is by no chance explicitly mentioned as a παρουσία) of the end of the world - at the head of 80000 men (other «barbarian beasts», «a savage people whose only way of life consists in war» according to Synkellos himself) under the Theodosian walls of Constantinople demanding its unconditional surrender: see Meier 2020, 16-17. Regarding the tendentious nature of the imago recepta of the steppe dwellers (pars pro toto the notorious description of the Huns by Amm. Marc. 31.2.1-11., according to which one could hardly distinguish where the horse ended and the rider began), Meier 2020, 1122 points out that, in a rather short time (kurzfristig, as he has it), the Avars were able to raise an army whose order of magnitude was probably greater than what «the *Imperium Romanum* of late antiquity was able to mobilize only in exceptional situations». Italics in the original.

<sup>114</sup> Honeychurch and Amartuvšin 2006, and Michael D. Frachetti (2008; 2012; 2015), among others, have argued persuasively in favor of the thesis that the pastoral societies of Inner Asia (but a similar argument applies equally to Central Asia, as the ethnographic evidence collected and discussed by Christian Teichmann (2016) shows beyond any doubt) had a marked ability, not unlike their settled farmers and peasants – alleged - antagonists, to modify the landscape according to both traditional and innovative logics depending on the context and needs of a given community. Pastoral nomadism, Honeychurch (2015, 12) continues, was (and still is) a flexible strategy, made possible by the mutual sharing of flocks and the «cultural embedding» of mobility.

<sup>115</sup> Scott 2009, 121, Richardson 2014, 73, and Kendirbai 2020, 222: according to her, «at least until the first decades of the nineteenth century», in the Qazaq and the Kalmyk steppes nomadism was and remained «a political choice, in the first place, rather than the product of some specific ecological and climatic conditions of the Eurasian steppe».

ethnicization that can be found in Persian primary sources (from inscriptions to glyptic) obey the same logics studied by Fjaskesjö, Scott, and Richardson, namely the attempt by the administration of the would-be Empire, an attempt made necessary by a structural operational inferiority in terms, for example, of efficiency and territorial control capacity with respect to other socio-political actors present in the Baktrian space, to «talk [as it is shown at Bīsūtūn] and conjure himself into being» by means of a purely fictitious distinction, to be understood exclusively in political, and not cultural, terms, between «us» and «them», between «civilization» and «barbarism».<sup>116</sup> In other words - and in significant opposition to the still predominant opinion within scholarship on these issues - instead of recognizing in the innumerable representations of Central Asian «barbarians» a more or less detailed cartography of the «enemies of the Empire», threateningly lurking at the threshold of the most dangerous (perhaps with the sole exception of the Caucasus and the Muḡān steppes) of its borderlands, I would suggest instead to reverse the perspective and read these representations as a cartography of the ambitions (of, among other, territorial nature) of an imperial power constantly in the process of structuring itself and of rooting its power: or, to put it otherwise, as a political and cultural history, to borrow Richardson's effective formula, «of things not [yet] working».<sup>117</sup> Although perhaps (too) daring at first sight, in my opinion such a hypothesis gains considerable weight and plausibility if one thinks of the countless stories, from the Danubian limes to the Great Wall (Wànlǐ Chángchéng 萬里長城 literally «the great wall of 10000 lǐ») in its various editions, of «desertions» of imperial citizens (the «amphibians» studied by Yú Yīngshí) and of their consequent enlistment in the (ever growing) ranks of the «barbarians».<sup>118</sup> Once again, the history of Hàn-Xiōngnú relations offers illuminating material in this regard, and this for two fundamental reasons: firstly, by virtue of the abundance of information - some of which, including almost certainly much of what can be found in the *Shǐjì*, is first-hand, not to say autopsy-based -; secondly, because of the sometimes baffling

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<sup>116</sup> Richardson 2012, 32.

<sup>117</sup> Richardson 2014, 70: the history of the Soviet Caucasus and Central Asia (Baberowski 2003, Northrop 2004, Kindler 2014 and Teichmann 2016, to name but a few) can just as fruitfully be read through the use of the categories independently elaborated by Fjaskesjö, Scott, and Richardson, and the same can be said of the «imperial theology» elaborated and developed firstly by Justinian, but brought to its apogee by Heraklios (575-641) following the triumphs celebrated both against the Sāsānids and, above all, by virtue of Constantinople's victorious resistance to the Avar's invasion: cf. Canepa 2009, 111-127, Kaldellis 2017 and Meier 2020, 39-50.

<sup>118</sup> The Roman world, especially since the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE, is full of such anecdotes: see at least Barbero (2005; 2006) as well as, for a detailed analysis of the strategies adopted by the Empire to cope with this and similar population drainages, the acute investigations by Nečaeva (2014; 2018) and Palazzi 2014. Meier 2020, 22 points out that, on the occasion of the siege of Constantinople in July 626, some of the most eminent Byzantine notables had to stand by and listen to - to their ears no doubt as monstrous as they were arrogantly outrageous and, of course, inadmissible - the new conditions of the city's capitulation put forward by the Avar Qaḡan, while the three Sāsānid delegates, whom a Slavic patrol had apparently managed to smuggle through the Byzantine defenses to the allied camp - no doubt extremely smugly - were listening too, while however remaining comfortably seated. The «barbarians», Meier concludes, had learnt very well to make use of the refinements of late antique diplomatic ceremonial and to exploit in all its power the very dense symbolic network of the latter. Rollinger and Nickel forthcoming for a survey of *Chinese Walls around the World*, their histories and functions within and beyond the societies which built them.



candor with which the (countless) reasons for desertions of imperial subjects into «barbarian» territory are listed and commented upon and which, judging at least from some of the preserved accounts, seem to have reached worrying (numerical) dimensions and even more alarming frequency.<sup>119</sup> The case of Hán Xìn (韓信, ?-196 BCE) is in many ways symptomatic.<sup>120</sup> One of the most brilliant generals of his time, counted among the «three heroes of the first Hàn dynasty» (Hàn chū sān jié 漢初三傑) together with his colleagues Zhāng Liáng (張良, ?-186 BCE) and Xiāo Hé (蕭何 ?-193 BCE), Hán Xìn fought for a long time in the Northern frontier territories and then deserted - for reasons that are not clear, but that some suggest might have been related to excessive interference (or attempted interference) by the emperor Gāo Zǔ in his own (Hán Xìn's) status in the context of the borderlands under his purview - to the ranks of the Xiōngnú and spend years in the steppes before being assassinated by order of Lǚ Hòu (呂后), wife of Gāo Zǔ and regent as empress dowager (with the name of Hàn Gāo Hòu 漢高后) until 180 BCE. Picking up on Fjaskesjö's line of reasoning, Hán Xìn's transformation from one of the most glaring champions of «All Under Heaven» (Tiānxià 天下, i. e. Chinese «civilization» and imperial project) into a «raw» savage, shows how the imperial representation of the «Other» has only and exclusively to do with the degree of (in)ability of the Empire itself to wield its power over certain spaces it covets (and sometimes even over territories it - formally - occupies) as well as over the «human capital» whose components such spaces and the resources present in them are capable of controlling.<sup>121</sup> However, it is from the voice of the eunuch

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<sup>119</sup> Beckwith 2009, 76, Chin 2010 and Chin's highly refined, in more ways pioneering, literary analysis of the Chinese historiographical genre (2014, 143-190). *Shiji* 93.2649 is, for example, particularly explicit in pointing out that the prospect of joining the ranks of the Xiōngnú, far from representing a regression to a state little more (and in many cases, according to literary sources, especially those following Sīmǎ Qiān, much less) than animal-like, on the contrary represented in many cases the only alternative not only for peasants afflicted by unsustainable fiscal and military burdens while threatened by military levers and confiscations of all kinds, but also for many aristocrats who, cornered by the policies of Emperor Gāo Zǔ (Liú Bāng 劉邦 ca. 256-195 BCE) and by the pressure exerted on their territories by his generals, some of whom, as recounted for example by *Shiji* 55, would later become renegades themselves (!), not infrequently went over more than willingly, literally «bag and baggage», to the troops of Mòdú, and some among them even went so far as to spend long periods of their lives with the Xiōngnú. At the time of Alaric's sacking of Rome, to cite a more familiar example, a furious Salvian (*Gub.*, 5.5.21) states that not a few of the Roman subjects sought from the barbarian Goths the clemency (*humanitas*) that the «civilized» Romans were no longer able (or willing) to offer. Cf. Meier 2020, 33-34.

<sup>120</sup> His biography is part of book 93 of Sīmǎ Qiān's work. Equally interesting is the passage in the *Στρατηγήματα* (11.4) of the Byzantine emperor Mauritianus (539-602), who points out that the Slavs (Σκλαυηνοί) were in the habit of offering their prisoners of war the possibility, after a certain time, to join, as free men, their troops until they became full-fledged Σκλαυηνοί: see Meier 2020, 145-146.

<sup>121</sup> See Honeychurch 2015, 2. As he has it, «These events [namely the Chinese rout in the face of Mòdún's armies] would forever alter China's notion of world order. The established idea of an expanding and inclusive civilization [think of the analogous Roman ideology, which - with the partial and very problematic exception of the Sāsānid Empire - did not, could not, and would not recognize any political entity outside itself] meant to unify «all under heaven» was replaced with a new world view – a view of exclusion and dichotomy where frontier truncated any possibility of China's expansion northward». Italics are mine. Opinions still differ on the precise location of this clash, which has gone down in history as the Battle of Bādēng (白登之戰). While some, including Honeychurch himself, tend to locate the events in question -

Zhōngháng Yuè (中行說), the most famous among His Majesty's subjects who succumbed to the lures of China's «heaven's other half», that we learn in the most outspoken manner possible the reasons for a choice that imperial rhetoric portrays in a pervasive – and very much heated - rhetoric as a fool's renunciation of nothing less than human nature.<sup>122</sup> Indeed, in a δισσός λόγος that closely resembles the Thucydidean dialogue between Melians and Athenians (5.84-114), Zhōngháng Yuè claims in front of a, presumably astonished, Chinese envoy, that all that the Hàn court had to offer was nothing but exploitation and oppression, and that the hostile attitude of the Xiōngnú was nothing but the more than understandable reaction to the attempt of the Chinese emperors to appropriate by force men and resources of which the much reviled imperial «periphery» knows no shortage, and whose possession provide moreover the only really solid basis of imperial hegemony itself: not only over the «barbarians» but, and this is the decisive point, over the Chinese very own subjects.<sup>123</sup> In the words of the Briton nobleman Calgacus, another famous debunker of the «heavy burden» of imperial civilization, even the Hàn armies (and bureaucrats) ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant.<sup>124</sup>

To sum up, this chapter aims at showing how, far from being a mere static container of historical events, space - and that of the frontier zone(s) of a political entity such as an Empire in particular - is itself an actor, whose characteristics change over time by virtue of the (often conflicting) goals, that different social actors aspire to achieve through interaction 1. with the space itself and 2. with other human groups present in that space or wishing to enter it, which in turn engage with it as well as with

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reported in detail in the *Shiji*, near the present city of Liángchéng 涼城县 in the autonomous region of Inner Mongolia (Nèi Měnggǔ 內蒙古, Öbür Monggol - Өвөр Монгол - in Mongolian), other scholars prefer a location a little further south, in the present province of Shānxī (山西).

<sup>122</sup> Cf. the desperate lament of a Hàn princess sent as a bride (in itself a very remarkable fact) «to the king of the Wūsūn [烏孫]» at an unspecified date around the 2<sup>nd</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> century BCE and reported in the *Hànshū* (96B.3903, translation thanks to the help of Dr. Silvia Nico): «My family sent me to the other half of heaven to marry; || they sent me many miles away, to a foreign country, to the king of the Wūsūn. || A domed dwelling is where I live, with felt walls; || my nourishment is meat, fermented milk [кымыз in Kyrgyz, cf. the Turkish kımız] its garnish. || I live in constant grief for my country, my heart overflows with suffering; || Oh could I be a golden swan and migrate back to the country where I belong». Another poet, also condemned to spend his days in a place - so he claims - that was as foreign as it was threatening, has left a record of the men with whom he now lived and their customs that bears more than one analogy with the verses transmitted by the *Hànshū*: cf. *Ov. Tr.*, 5.10.37-38.

<sup>123</sup> *Shiji* 110.2895-2898 and *Hànshū* 48.2241, with the remarks provided by Tamara Chin (2010, 324-336). Also, by virtue of his social origin, Zhōngháng Yuè recalls the story of a merchant from Viminacium (Kostolaz, Костолац, in Romanian Caștelu, nowadays in Serbia) who, after losing everything in the Hunnic invasion of those territories in 441/442 CE had earned the trust and confidence of Onegesius, a close collaborator of Attila himself, who would eventually redeem the man's freedom. In front of an astonished Priskos (F 11.2, to whose narration we owe the episode), the former merchant, still able to address the Roman ambassador in Greek (a blessed «χαῖρε» within a world of incomprehensible – so Priskos argues - barbarian languages) told of having married a Hun woman, of having adopted the lifestyle (βίος Σκυθικός) of the latter and, finally, of living a better life than the previous one: Meier 2020, 80-84. It could of course be argued that both stories entail a great deal of literary embellishment, and should therefore be taken with a pinch of salt: however, the cumulative evidence discussed in this pages suggests, at the very least, that such stories mirrors an embedded awareness, both within and outside ancient Empires, of the power dialectics engrained in their system, and the possibilities that their refusal entailed.

<sup>124</sup> *Tac. Agr.*, 30.

other neighboring spaces 2.1. in different ways and 2.2. at different times. In other words, we are not dealing with abstract, timeless categories, but with realities which are both living and imagined, constantly produced and reproduced, negotiated and modified through interactions with humans and other animals.<sup>125</sup> To put it in yet another way, the real *raison d'être* of devices such as the Great Wall, the vallum Adriani or, to remain in the Irānian world, the «red snake» of Gorgān or the «furthest» settlement erected, according to classical sources, by Cyrus the Great in Central Asia (Κυρούπολις, Κυρέσχατα) - all of them very straightforward examples of politically conceived and meticulously implemented projects of geo-spatial engineering - did not, or at least not only, consist in keeping the so-called barbarians out of the civilized world but, at least equally, in keeping the latter's subjects in it: out of love or, when the option was not available, out of force.<sup>126</sup> Coming to the end of these long, but arguably necessary, theoretical and methodological preliminary remarks, the following pages seek to explore 1. what and 2. of which kind were the resources coveted by the Achaemenid Empire's administrative and governmental machinery in the context of the (being conjured into being) satrapies of Central Asia. The fact that, unlike the other examples above mentioned, in Baktria there is no trace, either archaeological or literary, of massive works of containment (be it of the - more or less «cooked» – barbarians and/or of disgruntled subjects), being hardly the outcome of chance, raises the question as to what strategies the Persian Empire managed to elaborate, and to effectively put in place, in order to reduce as much as possible the economic and human costs of the «normalization», as Gary Reger has it, of the Central Asian steppe: that is, of its transformation into an «imperial space» which was legible, transparent, and therefore controllable and exploitable.<sup>127</sup> This seems in fact to have been the indispensable premise, from Baktria to Armenia and from the mountains of the Zagros to the marshes of the Euphrates' delta, for Darius and his successors to be able to boast, without fear of such a claim being exposed as a «cosmological bluster», that «that land became mine».<sup>128</sup>

<sup>125</sup> Cf. most recently the important introductory note by Lara Fabian in Weaverdyck *et al.* 2021, 301-304 with references.

<sup>126</sup> Cf. Ael. *NA.*, 16.3, Arr. *Ind.*, 4.2.3-4, Curt. 7.6.19-20 and Ptol. *Geog.*, 6.12.5, who tellingly calls the settlement «Κυρέσχατα», something like «Cyrus' last abode». Similar information can be found in Strab. 11.11.4, which defines the κτίσμα as «the last bulwark [ὄριον] of Persian power [ἀρχῆ]» («τὰ Κῦρα, ἔσχατον ὄν Κύρου κτίσμα ἐπὶ τῷ Ἰαξάρτη ποταμῷ κείμενον, ὅπερ ἦν τῆς Περσῶν ἀρχῆς»). For further bibliography on the subject see the fundamental Cohen 2013, 254. Cf. on the issue of the Sāsānid «red snake» the very astute analysis by Richard E. Payne (2017). To all this one must also add that, as recently the studies of Harmanşah (e. g. 2015, 30-53) and Canepa (2018) have shown with an abundance of sources and sophistication of analysis, the representational narratives of landscapes - to take up Lara Fabian's considerations - are not infrequently able to transform *physical* spaces into symbols embedded within one or more very specific contexts, more often than not fulfilling the role of markers of territorial legitimacy, and there is no need to insist further on the symbolic meaning of a spatial device such as a wall in light of these considerations. That the meticulous delimitation (and defense) of territory especially in the «peripheral» regions of an Empire was a requirement of the Empire's ruling class and did not respond to (or even less contradict) what constituted the cultural and behavioral universe of the population is underlined by Meier 2020, 110, who notes that «precisely on the borders of the [Roman] Empire, and especially in its frontier regions, it was apparently quite unproblematic for individuals to display different ethnically connoted identities». On this last point see again Colburn 2020c, 60-62.

<sup>127</sup> See Reger 2017 on «normalization» processes in the context of the Ptolemaic and – later - Roman Egyptian desert.

<sup>128</sup> DB<sub>p</sub> col. III § 39: «dahayāuš manā abava». On (supposed, «presumptive», as Richardson has it) states and Empires' «cosmological blusters» see Scott 2009, 112. Honeychurch 2015, 58 rightly points out that «the process of maintaining

### 3. *Nomadi e no.* Towards a Human Geography of the Baktrian Space

#### 3.1. (Not) Counting People in (pre) Achaemenid Baktria: Complex and Dynamic Ecologies

During the millennium between roughly 2500 and 1500 BCE, according to the most recent results of prehistoric research, sedentary («proto-urban») communities and mobile herders from the steppes developed, through a dense web of contacts and relationships, a multiple web of networks of which, as it has recently been written, they both soon became «integral agents» and which perhaps for the first time in history «bridged the Far East and southwest Asia, millennia before the historically known Silk Road». <sup>129</sup> Among the earliest and most important examples of these complex, multi-layered communities is a cluster of settlements found at the site of Dašly, in an oasis located approximately 30 km South of the Amudaryo, in an area predominantly characterized by a complex environment of steppe-like nature, which however, at least during antiquity, was watered by several branches of the Balḥ-āb delta, and which was discovered thanks to the excavations carried out - starting from the 1970s - by Soviet archaeologists, whose investigations, carried out under the aegis of Boris A. Litvinskiĭ, brought to light the discovery of at least ten burial mounds. <sup>130</sup> The cemetery of the site known as Dašly 1, for example, was located on the ruins of a fortified settlement of the same name, and the fact that it is not a single, autonomous structure, but seems on the contrary to have evolved directly from the settlement below it, would suggest a chronology even earlier than the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE marking the beginning of settlement activities of some significance in the Balḥ-āb oasis, a conclusion that is apparently confirmed, at least in part, by the most recent surveys undertaken by the *DAFA* in the oasis of Baktra as well as in the surrounding areas. <sup>131</sup> The material brought to light by the excavations proved to be of great importance for an adequate understanding of the socio-economic features of the cultures that settled in what was to become the Achaemenid satrapy of Baktria during the Bronze Age, starting from the site of the future satrapal seat (perhaps royal, when the king happened to be around) and its immediate vicinity on the edge of the oasis. A notable example of this is the site known as Dašly 3, approximately three kilometers North of Dašly 1, at which what archaeologists have interpreted as the ruins of a temple were found, the nature of

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early regional polity was not one of the stable institutional domination as much as ongoing negotiation among diverse factions».

<sup>129</sup> Kuz'mina 2008, Frachetti – Rouse 2012, 687 (where the quote comes from), Spengler *et al.* 2014 and Frachetti *et al.* 2017.

<sup>130</sup> Litvinskiĭ and P'yankova 1991, 380, Ball 2019 n. 256 (which dates the site around the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE) as well as the discussion of the site in the relevant chapters of Lyonnet and Dubova 2020 (e. g. 37, 89, 387 ff. on the Dašly 1 settlement) as well as 12, 16, 89, 93, 100 on its oasis and its environmental changes).

<sup>131</sup> Marquis 2018, 161-164, and now Lhuillier *et al.* 2021.

which has not yet been uncontroversially clarified.<sup>132</sup> Worthy of note, however, is the fact that, at Dašly 3, scholars also unearthed a pit containing five tumuli and a necropolis built within the temple structure, containing no fewer than 87 graves.<sup>133</sup> As provisions for their afterlife journey, the individuals buried in these pits carried with them the remains of sheep/goats. Should one be inclined to take up an approach similar to the one - rightly cautious - suggested about the society of Western Irān by Daniel Potts, the least that can be said is that the inhabitants of Dašly 1 and Dašly 3, despite being settled in what was - and would remain - the most fertile oasis in the whole of Central Asia, nevertheless practiced a differentiated economy, in which cattle-breeding must have played a major role, as the funerary findings forcefully suggest.<sup>134</sup> The burial deposits discovered include a wide variety of objects, mostly consisting of ceramic utensils, ranging from a minimum of one or two items to a maximum of 15 or 20 per tomb; about 90% of the pottery was established to be the result of potter's wheel work, testifying to the antiquity of the introduction of this technique in Central Asia. Especially representative of the sample collected at Dašly 1 and 3 are vases, with and without stems, as well as jars, goblets, small basins, and vessels in the shape of a teapot and fitted with a spout, as well as some stone tools and woven baskets. However, more precious objects were not absent either, in particular bronze mirrors, bracelets, fibulae, and short daggers. In some tombs, although looted in antiquity, terracotta seals were found in abundance, which can be compared to some similar objects recently found at Ulugtēpe (in the Ahāl province in Southwestern Türkmenistan) and dated to the Early Iron Age.<sup>135</sup> A remarkably interesting aspect of the results of the excavations carried out at Dašly 1 and 3 is the fact that at least part of the pottery specimens found there could be matched with samples of the ceramic material unearthed in East Bactria during the *DABA* survey in the 1960s and 1970s, which provides a rather strong indication of the slow spread of a facies of material culture throughout the Bactrian territory that has characterized the entire archaeological horizon since very early times and – even more remarkable for our discussion - extended through human groups that archaeologists would otherwise be inclined to identify as distinct from each other.<sup>136</sup> This is the case, for example, of the communities responsible for the construction of a series of Bronze Age kurgany (burial mounds) discovered during the 1960s along the lower sectors of the Vahš (the Ochus/Ὠχος of the classical sources, e. g. Strab. 11.7.3) and Qyzyl-su rivers by a group of Soviet archaeologists under the direction of Litvinskii. Although in a rather uneven fashion, five sites have been excavated

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<sup>132</sup> On the «temple» see most recently the relevant pages in Lyonnet – Dubova 2020 (e. g. 146-147, 159-60).

<sup>133</sup> At the site a «palace» was also found (see in Lyonnet – Dubova 2020, e. g. pp. 21, 39, 168-169).

<sup>134</sup> On the identification of the site see Ball 2019 n. 257. On the existence of a polyvalent, but not «nomadic» economy according to the model derived from the shared understanding of Mongolian herdsman in prehistoric Southeastern Irān, see Potts 2014, 47-87.

<sup>135</sup> Wu and Lecomte 2012.

<sup>136</sup> Lyonnet 1997, 59 ff.

in this region: Vaxš 1, Tigrovaya Balka, Ojkul', Jara-Kul (the latter located along the lower reaches of the river, on the right bank) and Makan -i Mar (located on the right bank of the Qyzyl-su). Altogether, the excavations brought to light no less than 233 kurgany, attributed by archaeologists to the same cultural facies (from its find place called Vahš culture).<sup>137</sup> Interesting for the purposes of a discussion related to the anthropic landscape of Bactria starting well before the rise of the Achaemenids is the widespread presence, in an area otherwise suited like few others in the region to agricultural activity, of burial methods (the kurgany) traditionally identified as the hallmark of non-settled populations, among which the most famous are the Sakā/Yuèzhī (月氏) believed to be among the main responsible for the conquest of the Greek kingdom of Bactria in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE.<sup>138</sup> Similar ceramic finds from other oases in the Baktrian territories, along the Oxus river, or from the Čāč region (Toškent), offer a similar panorama, which can be interpreted in two possible ways: either by theorizing a much more massive presence of non-sedentary populations in the oases of Central Asia than previously thought, or, which seems more reasonable an option, as evidence of the coming into being of a single but extremely porous and layered society, within which individuals and larger nuclear groups (from extended families to multi-family gatherings) adapted over time to the challenges of a highly differentiated and internally changing environment.<sup>139</sup> This claim might be supported by the fact that such a scenario fits well with similar models that have been developed by archaeology in recent years with particular attention to the case of Mongolia, namely another territory that (contrary to the stereotype of the eternal nomad roaming in an immense and monotonous space - a trivialization that is largely the result of the mythology built up around Temüjin and his soldiers, the Wandering Shepherds in Asia), presents on the contrary a bewildering ecological complexity, which requires the population to be highly adaptable and almost inevitably leads to the adoption of subsistence strategies that are as diversified as possible both in space and in time.<sup>140</sup> In particular, the ethnographic study of a wide range of very different pastoral societies, from the Irānian (but of Türkic - Oğuz - origin) Qašqāyī to the Qazaqs and the Kalmyks down to the Paḫtānə/Paštūn groups now building a considerable slice of Afġānistān's population, have in fact shown that, in spite of any easy

<sup>137</sup> Litvinskiĭ and P'yankova 1991, 382, Lyonnet 1997, 75 ff. See most recently Vinogradova 2020, 655 on Tigrovaja Balka and Makan -i Mar (called Makoni Mor) as well as further contributions in Lyonnet and Dubova 2020 (e. g. pp. 718-719 on Ojkul').

<sup>138</sup> See e. g. Lyonnet 1997, 165-69, Benjamin 2007; 2018, 29-40, Rapin 2007, 51, Coloru 2009, 231-241 as well as the remarks in Morris 2021a, 191-194. Compare moreover a list of some of these ἔθνη in Strab. 11.8.2: «μάλιστα δὲ γνώριμοι γεγόνασι τῶν νομάδων οἱ τοὺς Ἕλληνας ἀφελόμενοι τὴν Βακτριανήν, Ἄσιοι καὶ Πασιανοὶ καὶ Τόχαροι καὶ Σακάραι, ὁρμηθέντες ἀπὸ τῆς περσικῆς τοῦ Ἰαξάρτου τῆς κατὰ Σάκας καὶ Σογδιανούς, ἣν κατεῖχον Σάκαι».

<sup>139</sup> On early Čāč see now Burjakov 2011. To phrase the question in slightly different terms, comparably to the dimorphic structure (lowlands and highlands) that played such a crucial role in the development and its resilience of the Ēlāmite kingdom in the early first Millennium (Gorris and Wicks 2018 with references), the coming into being of early Iron Age Bactria might be envisaged as the outcome of an ethnogenetic process involving the acculturation of oases and steppe groups into one multilayered, flexible, but yet distinctive culture.

<sup>140</sup> Christian 2000; 2018 I, 21-120, Honeychurch 2015, 79-156, Honeychurch and Makarewicz 2016.

distinction between «hunter-gatherers», «pastoralists», and «sedentary farmers», most of the members of these communities in the course of their history have in fact traditionally preferred, for obvious reasons of economic and food security, to differentiate their subsistence base and strategies by investing in at a minimum two of the above regimes, precisely because of the variety of the environmental contexts within which they have traditionally moved, a variety that offered (and still offers) opportunities at least as numerous as the risks that are inevitably linked to them.<sup>141</sup>

In the case of Central Asia, the adoption of an interpretative paradigm based on «mobility» and «long-distance farming» (also called «semi-sedentary pastoralism») in the context of the study of Bronze Age and Early Iron Age communities seems to be particularly promising, since it allows to explain in a more economical way than the traditional dichotomy, more or less finely grained, between «nomads» (the inhabitants of the steppe) and «sedentary» (those of the oases), the development, already in a very remote age and starting from a context that seems exclusively local, of a complex array of strategies for the exploitation of different landscapes and the extraction of resources (from livestock breeding - especially of camels - up to even very complex hydraulic undertakings) that will become characteristic of the anthropic world of Bactria in the centuries to come.<sup>142</sup> Take for example the case, better documented also from a historical and archaeological point of view, of the frontier zones of the Mesopotamian world: here the movement of the native peoples dwelling in (and around) the semi-desert steppe in the surroundings, for example, of the famous city of Ḥaṭrā is constrained by the extent of the winter pastures of the valley's inhabitants, while in summer it is the latter's territory that becomes coveted by the shepherds settled on the plateau of today's Southeastern Turkey and Northwestern Irān (in the present-day Šahrestān of Tabrīz). Such a framework provides in fact further interesting material for reflection on the genesis and development of the society that, in the course of time, would become part of the Persian Empire in Central Asia, and it is therefore worth further closer scrutiny.<sup>143</sup> Traditionally interpreted as a paradigmatic example of a so-called «caravan town», a settlement such Ḥaṭrā should in fact be more adequately assessed - according to a model entirely analogous to that proposed by Negus-Cleary especially (but not limited to them) for the Chorasmanian qal'ā and which, as will be shown in the course of this chapter as well as in the following pages, could be also very satisfactorily adapted to the Bactrian and Sogdian sociopolitical landscape - in the broader context of the surrounding hinterland as having represented

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<sup>141</sup> The case of nomadism in Afġānistān is discussed in detail by Jentsch 1973, 21-52, while a thorough assessment of the ecological and environmental background for pastoralism in the country can be found in Grötzbach 1990, 17-55 and, more recently, in Schroder 2014. A more general reflection on the greater economic (and ecological) sustainability of «multifunctional» pastoralism compared to the oligo-cultures characteristic virtually without exception of all pre-modern polities is developed by Scott 2017, 61. On the flexibility of Qazaq society in response to the ecological and economic challenges posed by the Russian imperial expansion see most recently Kendirbai 2020, 113 ff.

<sup>142</sup> Khazanov 1994<sup>2</sup>, 23, Potts 2014, 4 as well as Negus-Cleary 2015b, 125.

<sup>143</sup> Cf. recently Weaverdyck *et al.* 2021, 310-313 with references.

a focal point of interaction between different, but closely related, local (and international) agents.<sup>144</sup> The late Hellenistic and Roman Imperial period, to which we owe the vast majority of the surviving documentation, provides first-hand evidence in support of such an interpretative framework, and suggests compelling explanatory models enabling scholarship to picture in more sophisticated terms than hitherto the interactions between different human communities forming part of the same Central Asian society in the centuries before the rise of the Persian Empire. A few more concrete details are at place here to better clarify the point. As pointed out, among others, by Lara Fabian, in the city's epigraphic record, the two most frequently mentioned communities are the Ḥaṭreans (חַתְרִיא in Aramaic, ḥṭry'), probably the individuals residing within the urban settlement proper, and the Arabs (עַרְבִיא, 'rby').<sup>145</sup> The interesting aspect is that, as the most recent studies on the available evidence seem to show, in the local context the term עַרְבִיא would neither indicate an ethnic group («the Arabs») nor represent a generalization for «pastoral population» (on the model of the Greek Σακῦθοι). On the contrary, the label would rather designate the entire population dwelling outside the urban complex of Ḥaṭrā and which could be defined, taking up the formula of the Africanist anthropologist and sociologist Georges Balandier, as «ambivalent» or, moving into the context of the Xiōngnú steppes studied by Yú, as «amphibious». In other words, this is a definition by which scholars classify human groups which are impossible to describe as entirely (but not even as «predominantly») «nomadic» or «sedentary» but which, as Briant already remarked in a pioneering study on the state and its mobile subjects in the ancient Near East, are very much able to adapt their lifestyles to changing environmental situations as well as to the political and social context of the moment.<sup>146</sup> Remarkable concerning the case of Ḥaṭrā is the fact that the epigraphic record reveals, from an ethnological and cultural point of view, a distinction between the civic settlement and the spatial and economic context of the latter which must have been much more nuanced than what can be inferred from the description provided by the classical sources, which on the contrary strikingly insist on the barrenness of the Ḥaṭrean landscape.<sup>147</sup> According to the inscriptions, in fact, the most prominent individuals of the civic body, themselves residing in Ḥaṭrā and apparently wielding their power over both components

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<sup>144</sup> Compare Taasob 2021 and now Morris 2021 (a, b, and c) on Graeco-Baktrian and Kuṣāṇa structures which might have made use of, if not developed from, Achaemenid precedents.

<sup>145</sup> Weaverdyck *et al.* 2021, 301-304 with bibliography.

<sup>146</sup> Balandier 1970. On the «amphibious» population of Ḥaṭrā see Fisher 2019, 25-66, while on the Sino-Mongolian context in diachronic perspective see Miller 2009, 183-208 and Skaff 2012, 23-52. More in detail on the Central Asian context of the Achaemenid period (but also taking into account earlier epochs) and in comparative perspective with other frontier societies in the ancient Near East see the still useful Briant 1983 (e. g. p. 48, where the complementarity between the economies and societies of the «state» and of the «pastoralists» is stressed).

<sup>147</sup> Two – ideologically very loaded – descriptions of Ḥaṭrā's landscape among others from the evidentiary corpus of classical historiography: Cass. Dio. 68.31.1, Amm. Marc. 25.8.5.



of the local society (i. e. both the *הַתְּרִיָּא* and the *עֲרַבִּיָּא*) are not called, as one would expect, «rulers of *Ḥaṭrā*» but, instead and rather strikingly, «kings of the Arabs».<sup>148</sup>

Although, of course, in the case of Bronze Age Central Asia there are no written records, and even to speak of urban centers would most likely be anachronistic and misleading, it seems nevertheless fruitful to try to conceive of sites such as *Dašly 1* or *Koktēpe I*, which undoubtedly must have represented in the context of their landscape spatial nodes - also from a visual point of view - of considerable importance, in terms of gravitational centers favoring interactions between human groups otherwise dispersed in space, according to a model that both Michelle Negus-Cleary in the case of Chorasmlia and Lori Khatchadourian in the case of Armenia have called of «non-nuclear settlement».<sup>149</sup> The latter is in fact likely to have constituted, on several occasions in the course of local history, the standard form of settlement strategy in various parts of Central Asia, a conclusion which has not insignificant implications when it comes to imagining the satrapal administration's actual ability to control a territory organized at a political and social level according to parameters of such limited «legibility».<sup>150</sup> What is worthy of note about the environmental context of *Dašly 1* and *3* studied by Litvinskii is moreover its spatial extension (which makes it plausible that we are not dealing with an isolated case but with a conscious strategy of land use), since similar phenomena have been detected and studied in territories much further West, in a comparable chronological framework. Just to mention a few - but particularly evocative - names, communities settled around the last quarter of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE at the foothills of the *Köpetdağ*, in *Türkmenistan*, and on the slopes of *Boysuntov* (Southwestern *Uzbekistan*, an area alternately referred to, depending on the archaeological schools of thought, as «Southern Sogdian» or «Northern Baktrian»), where indisputable evidence of agricultural activity has been found, seem at the same time to have had very close contacts with the *Irānian Plateau* and Eastern Central Asia, connecting for example the resources, especially the products of mining activities (such as lapis lazuli and carnelian in *DSf* § 10, not by chance mentioned as originating in Central Asia), from the *Hindūkūš* with sites such as *Šōrtūghai* (*Taḥār* province in Northeastern *Afgānistān*) or *Šahr-i Soḥta* (along the course of the *Helmand* river, in today's *Irānian* province of *Sīstān* and *Balūčīstān*).<sup>151</sup> Moreover, the first evidence of irrigation canals in *Baktria*, traditionally interpreted as the hallmark par excellence of an imposing state (in our case imperial) power, seems to date back to precisely these communities.<sup>152</sup> Trying to

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<sup>148</sup> Weaverdyck *et al.* 2021, 312.

<sup>149</sup> Negus-Cleary 2013, 91; 2015a I, 140, Khatchadourian 2016, 45-60 (the latter however more focused on the fragmented nature of the social power deriving from a settlement pattern of this kind) and Ristvet 2018, 178-186.

<sup>150</sup> Scott 2009, 74.; 2017, 147).

<sup>151</sup> On these networks of (human and commercial) mobility, see most recently in Lyonnet and Dubova 2020 the discussion at pp. 42-47, 527-550, 607-634.

<sup>152</sup> Gentelle 2005, 97. Melting pots with sediments of copper, gold and lead artefacts have been found at the site of *Šōrtūghai* (Ball 2019 n. 1089), which also testifies to the existence of sophisticated metallurgical production in *Baktria*

reconstruct the «cultural biography» of an object such as lapis lazuli, for which a prominent, though not unique, source during Eurasian antiquity was located in the Badaḥšān mines, as well as that of other goods, e. g. broomcorn millet, can be an effective strategy in order to map a dense web of interactions between different communities operating at a strictly local or, at most, regional levels (that of a valley, or along a certain stretch of river) while at the same time acknowledging, however, that each of them was acting in response to stimuli coming from the closest community, the latter in turn being conditioned by its own relations with actors external (and possibly even not at all related) to the first one. Far from being indexical of underdevelopment, such networks enable said societies – and the most prominent members among them - to build, in the absence of an overarching political structure, chains of diffuse interactions of extremely wide scope, in this case extended through the whole of Central Asia and capable of establishing very long-lasting contacts between groups otherwise completely distinct from each other, such as those located in Indus valley or even as far as Assyria.<sup>153</sup>

A particularly noteworthy, although much more recent, example of the findings discussed so far, which clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of this widespread infrastructure of trans-regional communication, is represented by the impressive quantity (9 tons) of lapis lazuli claimed as tribute by the Assyrian ruler Tukultī-Apil-Ešarra († 727 BCE), which was imposed on a population that he characterizes as originating from «the Middle East», but which in turn it is almost certain had acquired the precious material further away (which in this context means «from Central Asia») without this implying (and this is an important point) the existence of Empires of any kind (Median, Ḥayānid or otherwise) that could secure itself access to these resources.<sup>154</sup> Again in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE, another famous king of Assyria, Aššur-ahu-iddin (better known as Ešarhaddon, r. 713-669 BCE) also mentions the much coveted lapis lazuli among the goods tributed to him, once again, by «Median» peoples, which he locates in one of his inscriptions «near the great salty desert», a geographical reference that scholars have been inclined to pinpoint to the South of the Caspian region, near the Damāvand, an imposing peak of the Elburz mountain range.<sup>155</sup> With the exception of these cases (which are probably better documented not least because of the «spectacular» nature of the tribute

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several centuries before any imperial input (cf. in Lyonnet and Dubova 2020 esp. pp. 799-826). As attested by the most recent studies on the subject (Francfort 2013a, Thomalsky *et al.* 2013, 203), Šörtūghai seems to have been a prominent center of gemstone production and processing, which would help to explain from an economical and strategic perspective its persistence both in Achaemenid times and during the Graeco-Baktrian hegemony of the Hellenistic period).

<sup>153</sup> On such a phenomenon see Honeychurch 2015, 28-46 and Parzinger 2020<sup>3</sup>, 390-431.

<sup>154</sup> On the cultural biography of things (and on their social life) see the contributions collected in Appadurai 1986; 1996, 76. On pre-Achaemenid Media cf. now Jacobs and Stronach 2021 and Rolliger 2020; 2021a.

<sup>155</sup> Briant 1984, 21. On the very thorny issue of (possible) references to Central Asia in contemporary cuneiform sources see most recently in Lyonnet and Dubova 2020, 66-81 with previous references. Francfort and Tremblay 2010 for a seminal assessment of the evidence concerning Marḥaši in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Millennium BCE, which they identify with the future area of the satrapy of Marguš (Margiana), but note Steinkeller 2018 for a rebuttal.

demanding by the Assyrian rulers) of long-distance interactions between Central and Southeast Asia, the most recent archaeological investigation in the steppes North of what in Achaemenid times would become Sogdiana has shown how networks of contacts «widely spread but of low intensity», to use the categories employed by William Honeychurch in his assessment of the genesis of sociopolitical space in prehistoric Mongolia (until the rise of Mòdún) were probably also extended to the steppes North and West of Bactria, with which the inhabitants of these areas nevertheless maintained very close relations.<sup>156</sup> The latter might in turn also largely be traced back to the breeding and grazing strategies of the herds, especially of camels and perhaps also of horses, which, compared to the other quadrupeds traditionally present in the pastoral economy of these regions (sheep, goats and, more recently, cattle), require much wider space and more extensive movement in order to satisfy their caloric needs.<sup>157</sup>

In the case, for example, of the communities of shepherds settled in the territories adjacent to the Džungar mountain range (in present-day Qazaqstan), recent palaeobotanical studies have demonstrated the existence of a sort of Millet Road linking, along the entire mountainous and hilly stretch of Inner Asia, Southwestern Central Asia (thus including the territory of the would-be Achaemenid satrapies of Bactria and Margiana) with China, where this cereal probably originated, as early as the late 3rd millennium BCE.<sup>158</sup> In the words of Michael Frachetti and Lynne Rouse, who have studied this phenomenon with particular attention, «the multidirectional access to a wide host of economic and political interactions, as well as a wealth of natural resources, shaped unique strategies of production and interaction in both the Central Eurasian steppe [especially Qazaqstan] and Southern Central Asian oases».<sup>159</sup> Significant evidentiary support for such claims comes from palaeobotanical research carried out at the site of Begaš (Southeast Qazaqstan, in the Žetisy/Semireč'e region). Here, on the slopes of the Džungar mountains, archaeologists found charred seeds of broom millet (*panicum miliaceum*), foxtail millet (*setaria italica*), and wheat (*triticum aestivum* and *triticum turgidum*), which the C<sup>14</sup> analysis dated to between 2460 and 2150 BCE. The striking aspect of this discovery is that the territory of Semireč'e, but more generally the whole of Qazaqstan,

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<sup>156</sup> Cf. Bonora 2020, who moreover pointed out that such pastoral communities might have been extensively involved in the local mining activities, an issue extensively explored by Mariana Castro in her forthcoming dissertation, with a special focus on turquoise extraction and circulation along (also) mobile-controlled networks centered on the Kyzylkum: note already Trudnovskaja 1979 for some compelling archaeological insights. On Central Asia and the steppes in a *longue durée* perspective (taking into account also Achaemenid power networks) see most recently the brilliant Stark 2020 and Stark forthcoming.

<sup>157</sup> Honeychurch 2015, 109-110 with references. See moreover Humphrey and Sneath 1999, 218-276 and Parzinger 2020<sup>3</sup>, 486-521. Sala 2022 for a recent natural and human history of the (not just Baktrian) camel.

<sup>158</sup> Frachetti and Rouse 2012, 689.

<sup>159</sup> Frachetti and Rouse 2012, 690. Cf. the similar considerations made by William Honeychurch (2015, 148) about the formation of the Mongolian social space during the Late Bronze Age: «these transfers [of both technologies and food resources, especially of those coming from the pastoral economies] were gradual, incremental and probably transpired on a community-to-community basis, but this piecemeal sharing of practices, beliefs, and symbols eventually prefigured the shape of later political consolidations during the first millennium BC». On prehistoric Qazaqstan see now Chang 2018.

has traditionally been inhabited by more or less numerous groups of mobile shepherds who, however, as the discoveries at Begaš seem to incontrovertibly testify, combined a regime of vertical transhumance of sheep and goats with knowledge of, and the ability to domesticate, cereal plants such as millet, which may have been introduced to Central Asia from this very region. To paraphrase the considerations developed by Frachetti and his colleagues, individuals living around this time in the Žetisy basin appear to have been elemental agents in the process of transmission of numerous technologies and various products across the steppes, promoting networks of interactions between different economies and societies from East to Southwest Asia and Europe «as early as the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> millennia BCE». <sup>160</sup>

### 3.1.1. The Steppe or the Sown? Oasis and Steppes from a (Co-)Constructivist Perspective

The results of the archaeological investigation carried out in the Semireč'e area and in other sites along the Džungar range over the last few years thus show with some clarity how the mobility paradigm provides useful conceptual tools for understanding the establishment of complex and shifting webs of entanglement, starting as early as the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE, between different communities with a mixed economic regime («multifunctional pastoralism») within an extremely vast territory, stretching roughly from Central Asia to Mongolia across the steppes of Qazaqstan. <sup>161</sup> Further pieces of – scattered but converging – evidence confirming the prominent role played by semi-settled (or partially mobile) communities in the formative processes of not only economic but also socio-political solidarities during the Bronze Age in Central Asia comes from material excavated at the site of Ojaklydēpe, in the Murğ-āb valley (modern Türkmen territory) and dated between 1700 and 1500 BCE. As at Begaš, archaeologists found that the inhabitants, although actively engaged in transhumant farming (mainly sheep and goats), had nevertheless access to millet, a cereal which, as noted by Barbara Cerasetti and colleagues, is «not identified in the domestic agricultural package of Southern Central Asian farmers until the early Iron Age, that is, some centuries after Ojakly's occupation». <sup>162</sup> As noted in the previous section, although millet appears to have been unknown to farmers in the Murğ-āb valley during the Bronze Age, it starred prominently within the spectrum of resources available to semi-settled pastoralists (transhumant or seasonal pastoralism, along the lines of the model developed by Anatolii Khazanov in relation to Southern Central Asian peoples), the

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<sup>160</sup> Frachetti *et al.* 2010, 994, Honeychurch 2015, 137-138.

<sup>161</sup> Frachetti and Rouse 2012, 703, Honeychurch 2015, 159-167.

<sup>162</sup> Cerasetti *et al.* 2018, 23.

former being the inhabitants of the communities dwelling in the Žetisy basin.<sup>163</sup> This has led archaeologists to conclude that mobile shepherds similar to those settled at Ojaklydēpe must have played a significant role in the process of introducing the crop to the area (the Murġ-āb delta). In other words, the archaeobotanical evidence collected at the site of Ojaklydēpe provides a solid bedrock for the hypothesis that the emergence of what has been termed «pastoral cultivation(s)» can be traced back to the existence of communication channels, the exact socio-economic organization of which escapes us at present, but which can be assumed to have transcended the simple nature of economic exchange. On the contrary, it is reasonable to assume that they included more complex processes of socio-political inte(g)ra(c)tion - which more recent archaeological research on the non-sedentary populations of Central and Inner Asia is increasingly inclined to recognize as a constant feature of this human and geographical space - with the obvious consequence that any too clear-cut distinguishing between «oasis» and «steppe» and between «nomads» and «farmers» needs to be drastically questioned.<sup>164</sup> The information made available by the Ojaklydēpe excavations is important for several reasons: firstly, because such evidence provide testimony for the «participation of Murghāb [different orthography for Murġ-āb] based mobile pastoralists in practices [mainly but, as mentioned, not only of economic nature] shared across great distances», the latter providing a remarkable vantage point – not least in terms of social prestige - over communities dependent on subsistence practices more bounded to farming agriculture and with whom the shepherds of Ojaklydēpe are likely to have interacted on a much more regular basis than so far thought.<sup>165</sup> In this way, it should incidentally be noted, not only is the traditional interpretative framework of «dependence» of non-settler communities on their farming neighbors being seriously questioned, but there is perhaps even reason to assume that the desire to take possession of the new crop may have acted as an important catalyst for the alluvial peoples' attempts to penetrate the steppe, which consequently appears increasingly to have acted as a reservoir of resources (and therefore a bone of contention) for the settled communities and not, or at least not only, a threat: the many-times evoked Central/Inner Asian *Perilous Frontier*.<sup>166</sup> Secondly, such ancient traces of wheat and millet, whose

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<sup>163</sup> Khazanov 1992; 1994<sup>2</sup>, 19-23, who distinguished between summer (yaylāq) and winter pastures (qišlāq/qishloq the latter being a term which even in Soviet-era Central Asia was employed to identify a «village»: Teichmann 2016, 263) as well as Frachetti *et al.* 2010 and Potts 2014, 14.

<sup>164</sup> See on this issue the insightful contributions by Søren Stark (e. g. 2012; 2020) and the overview by Jacobs and Gufler 2021. Despite these unquestionable improvements of our dataset, it should be pointed out that such a reassessment is still far from having gained foothold among scholars of Central Asia's *Age of Empires* (from the Achaemenids onwards). This is true both when it comes to the study of the sociopolitical and the economic landscape of Bactria and neighboring regions, though with some commendable exceptions (Morris 2019a; 2021a; 2021b; 2021c).

<sup>165</sup> Cerasetti *et al.* 2018, 23.

<sup>166</sup> Scott 2017, 128-137. See moreover Kendirbai 2020, 130, highlighting, on the one hand, how access to foreign goods provided a very powerful tool within 17<sup>th</sup> century Qazaq community to enhance the social power of local élites 1. within their community and 2. in the broader context of Qazaq (steppe) politics. Moreover, she has rightfully pointed out how vital for the Russians themselves (the Qazaqs' counterpart) it was for maintaining such political bonds in order for them to tame the steppe as a mean of suiting their – growing, and therefore increasingly costly - imperial needs.

domestication process seems not only to have been mastered but even introduced into the oases' territories by populations with a predominantly non-sedentary socioeconomic regime, raise questions of absolute importance also for the period under study in the present work, since it is possible to compare them with similar palaeobotanical findings surfaced at the important site of Kyzyltēpe (in present-day Southwest Uzbekistan).<sup>167</sup>

As it shall be discussed later, although both wheat and millet do not find a particularly favorable environment in the Surxondaryo valley, since both require an amount of water that, in itself, would not be compatible with the natural conditions of the area surrounding Kyzyltēpe, the findings at Begaš and Ojaklydēpe should lead to caution among those scholars who, on this ground alone, are keen to interpret the flourishing of the site, especially during the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE, as an unequivocal sign of the operational extent of both economic and spatial engineering undertaken by the imperial (Achaemenid) administration in Baktria.<sup>168</sup> Indeed, the framework outlined above points on the contrary towards the existence of a sophisticated network of local skills (and/or of actors not exclusively linked to the oases' economy and society) in the field of agriculture, including irrigation, which has existed for a long time, even in Baktria. These are skills which, while representing an intangible asset of undoubted interest in the eyes of a political power with supra-regional ambitions (and therefore structurally dependent on the production and accumulation of significant quantities of agricultural produce), nevertheless made the holders of these skills capable of administering their territory even in the absence of such political power.<sup>169</sup> Ethnographic material collected as late as the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century in the pre-Aralic territories of Chorasmia (modern Qoraqalpog'iston), these being areas with a very high concentration of mobile population - mainly engaged in sheep farming and camel breeding - and historically difficult to control by centralized political structures, including the Tsarist Empire and the modern Uzbek nation state, provides interesting analogies.<sup>170</sup> In these territories, in fact, to mention but one striking example, the (still flourishing) pumpkin cultivation was practiced by a wide range of pastoral families following a method (apparently) quite unsophisticated (which means, in reality, very simply, difficult to read by an administrative apparatus with supra-regional claims to political and economic control), namely that of the so-called «flooding agriculture».<sup>171</sup> In the words of James Scott, this strategy of «landscape sculpting» presents striking analogies with other methods of cultivation (e. g. slash-and-burn agriculture) favored by hunter-

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<sup>167</sup> See e. g. Sverčkov *et al.* 2013 and the recent discussion by Stančo 2021 as well as further below (chapter 6) for more details and references.

<sup>168</sup> This is still the trend to be witnessed for example in the (from other respects very important) studies by Wu Xin and colleagues (cf. e. g. Wu *et al.* 2017, Wu 2018).

<sup>169</sup> Scott 2017, 128-139.

<sup>170</sup> Andrianov 1969 for a seminal study, now made accessible in English, of the hydraulic history of the pre-Aral region.

<sup>171</sup> Note for example Andrianov 1969, 146-164 on the Sar'ygam'ış basin and the pre-river delta area.

gatherers and/or other populations whose members' overriding interest can be summed up in the formula of «community autonomy and ecological independence».<sup>172</sup> In such an agricultural regime, Scott points out, a «field» is prepared by the removal, for example by controlled burning, of unwanted vegetation, a process which results in the deposition of particularly soft, fertile soil which is suitable for working for short periods of time and at low cost per unit of land and time employed.<sup>173</sup> In other words, the findings of Begaš and Ojaklydēpe could not only, according to the opinion – among others - of Michael Frachetti and Lynne Rouse, be regarded as the first tangible evidence of a network of mobility and contacts between Western China (today's Xīnjiāng 新疆, from which the domestication of millet and wheat would have originated) and Southeastern Central Asia much older than the by now notorious Silk Road(s), but they could also suggest a model of territorial and (multifaceted) ecological exploitation of said spaces which, although completely independent from the mechanisms of control and extraction developed by the Achaemenid imperial administration, was nevertheless an extremely sought-after prey in the eyes of the latter, and this precisely because of the extremely convenient relationship between the resources invested in the exploitation of the territory itself and the return that the ecological and spatial competence of the subject population guaranteed.<sup>174</sup> At the same time, the «humble» nature of the economic strategies just described makes them, as mentioned above, extremely difficult to organize in the absence of active and widespread cooperation on the part of the holders of what in the context of Herodotos' narrative strategies Nino Luraghi has called «local knowledge» and which Scott defines as *μητις*.<sup>175</sup> How the Achaemenid administration learned to (ultimately succeedingly) secure such widespread cooperation will be explored further in the following. Going back to the findings of Begaš, the evidence currently available seems to indicate that the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE marked the terminus a quo for the diffusion of some of the most important crops in Central Asia during the whole of antiquity, an event of enormous historical importance which allows us to shed - however faint - glimmers of light on an important Northeast-to-Southwest axis within a network cutting across the Qazaq steppes and which, as we shall discuss, seems to have remained very active even during the Achaemenid period. The fact that, as already stressed decades ago by Pierre Briant, the region of and around Lake Balqaš (Балқаш/Балхаш), to the South of which the site of Begaš is located, should most likely be identified as the area of origin of the so-called Scytho-Sarmatian (Saka) archaeological culture flourishing between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Scott 2009, 178-219.

<sup>173</sup> Scott 2017, 67.

<sup>174</sup> Frachetti and Rouse 2012. It goes without saying that the establishment of the Achaemenid administrative and infrastructural apparatus does not imply that former methods of landscape exploitation were sidelined and replaced: more likely, the new system integrated, and relied upon, the old framework and its actors.

<sup>175</sup> Luraghi 2001. On state projects of extraction and control on the one hand and local *μητις* on the other see the compelling pages in Scott 1998, 309-341.

centuries BCE - which would make it the direct antecedent of the Sakā we find in Persian inscriptions and reliefs - raises more than one question about the socio-political complexity of the world of the steppes, from Central Asia to Mongolia.<sup>176</sup> Moreover, by overturning the traditional interpretative framework concerning the development of the «social complexity» in – and across - these territories, the evidence discussed so far leads one to wonder how and to what extent the Achaemenid «imperial paradigm» had to adapt to (as well as modify itself in order to suit) the «practical conditions on the ground», to borrow the formula recently employed by Düring and Stek, which limited its simple application through conquest on the Central Asian peoples and, therefore, to the territories they controlled and exploited.<sup>177</sup> Thus, from this perspective, it seems possible to put forward the hypothesis that both the imperial landscape of Kyzyltēpe (an important agricultural and plausibly also administrative center, controlling large sectors of a strategically crucial valley in the upper Surxondaryo, a valuable proxy for the model of Achaemenid landscape appropriation across Northeastern Central Asia) and, more generally speaking, of the entire satrapy of Baktria, did not at all arise *ex novo*, but rather by 1. coordinating and 2. expanding social and political structures that predated the coming of the Empire itself, according to a pattern that, although difficult to trace as far as the Hellenistic period is concerned, certainly seems to have been at work during Kuṣāṇa times, and this despite the immense role played by Buddhist monastic communities in terms of infrastructural organization and spatial control.<sup>178</sup>

### 3.1.1.1. *Quiet Flew the Oxus*

If we now turn our gaze further East, the Amudaryo plain on the border between Northeastern Afġānistān and Southwestern Taġikistān offers a privileged vantage point for tacking stock of the process of construction of the human landscape within Baktria in the centuries before the rise of Persian power. Not unlike what was discovered at Begaš, archaeology has been able to identify, in this extremely well-documented area (conventionally called Eastern Baktria), a deep symbiosis at the level of micro-territorial units between communities relying on different, and sometimes competing,

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<sup>176</sup> Swart 2021, 245-247 on Chorasmians and Saka in the Persepolis reliefs, with a discussion of their possible geographical location and an assessment of their historical background.

<sup>177</sup> Briant 1984, 184, Cerasetti *et al.* 2018, 23. On the process of the emergence, during the Bronze and Early Iron Ages, of a «society of societies», consisting of human groups interacting with each other across wide geographical expanses without implying *per se* the existence of a central government and extending from the steppes of Qazaqstan and Southern Central Asia to Eastern Mongolia see Honeychurch 2015, 185-221. See Düring – Stek 2018a on the «practical situations on the ground» faced by Empires attempting to establish infrastructural power.

<sup>178</sup> See, for example, about Central Asian hydrological landscapes from a *longue durée* perspective, Gardin and Gentelle 1976, Gardin 1998, 114-119, Francfort and Lecomte 2002 and Stride 2005 I, 303-330 emphasizing the recovery by the Kuṣāṇa of more than one irrigation canal (from the Sherabāddaryo to the plain of Āi Xānum) which fell into ruin during and immediately after Graeco-Makedonian hegemony. On Buddhist strategies of territorial and political control during the Kuṣāṇa period see most recently Beckwith 2020 and the remarks in Morris 2021b; 2021c.



strategies of exploitation of the same particularly favorable environmental context, ranging from annually irrigated to seasonal agriculture, with or without the addition of a more mobile pastoral component, for the period prior to the conquest of Cyrus, although in itself it is not possible to rule out the possibility that, instead of dealing with several distinct human groups, we are in fact confronted with evidence left by several individuals who were (directly) part of a single community - and indirectly, of even more than one - particularly attentive at making the most of the entire range of ecological resources made available by an ecosystem such as that of the valleys that distinguish Eastern Baktria. This is a hypothesis which, if one thinks of the observations on the management of the territory and of its economy by the local population which were collected as late as 1932 (almost at the end of the first пятилетка) by the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissariat of the Taġik Soviet Socialist Republic, Abdurraxim Xodšibaev, does not seem so farfetched as it may appear at first glance.<sup>179</sup> On the contrary, the multi-functionality of the economy underpinning both the subsistence strategies and the forms of social interactions in Baktria at this time seems to be suggested by the aforementioned findings from the so-called Vaḡš culture, which scholars distinguish by virtue of the decorative repertoire shared by the latter with other archaeological cultures found in the oasis territories of large sectors of Central Asia (and traditionally identified, perhaps not entirely correctly, as «sedentary» societies) throughout the Late Bronze Age and characterized by a rather significant range of findings distribution within the Oxus catchment area. According to Boris Litvinskii, in fact, the closest analogies with Vaxš pottery ought to be found in the remains of the agricultural settlements of ancient Baktria, as practically the entire spectrum of Vaḡš ceramics (with the sole exception of round-bottomed kitchen utensils) can be fruitfully compared with the production of the settled populations of the whole of Northern Afġānistān.<sup>180</sup> Therefore, in the eyes of the archaeologists, the pottery found in Southern Baktria would be very similar to the entire repertoire known from the Vaḡš culture, in particular the ovoid and biconical pottery characteristic of many among the recovered vessels which have been preserved almost intact. Regional differentiation appears minimal, except for the somewhat anomalous case of the Sherabāddaryo valley during the Late Bronze Age (so-called Sapalli culture) which shows a strictly regional development.<sup>181</sup> The closest similarities were detected with the ceramic production of Northern Afġānistān: the typology of stemmed goblets and hollow high-stemmed vessels presents the most remarkable parallel with otherwise unique specimens in the

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<sup>179</sup> Teichmann 2016, 156-163. Experience would have shown that, in such a landscape (again, made of a - very impervious - valley along the course of the Vaḡš), any attempt at social control and economic exploitation of the region that tried to do without the active involvement of the local population and its grandees was doomed to failure.

<sup>180</sup> Litvinskii and P'yankova 1991, 385 as well as Vinogradova 2020, 644-645, 647-648 for examples of this and related ceramic cultures in the Vaḡš area. Cf. moreover Lyonnet 1997, 68-81 and Maxwell-Jones 2015, 41-469 for the most complete and up-to-date typological and chronological analysis of the ceramic landscape of one of these Central Asian oases, namely that of Baktra.

<sup>181</sup> Stančo 2019, 353-356.

context of the Vaḥš culture, while in the case of ceramics collected South of the Oxus - e. g. in the territory of the oasis of today's Mazār -i Šarīf -, specimens were found that could have served as prototypes for the production of the those attested in the context of the Vaḥš culture.<sup>182</sup> Finally, as far as metal production is concerned, which was not absent in Eastern Bactria at this date, and the organization of the cemeterial sites, both show characteristics that are well known from predominantly, if not exclusively, agricultural populations. Although the hypothesis has been put forward several times that the Vaḥš culture had its origins in a series of movements from the North of non-sedentary peoples who adapted over time to the sedentary lifestyle of the oases, the fact that, around the end of the Bronze Age, a substantial part of this territory seems to have reoriented its livelihood in a decidedly pastoral and mobile direction, without however abandoning agriculture entirely, once again demonstrates the versatility of a population forged over the centuries by their interactions with(in) a landscape that is as rich and varied as it is demanding, and which seems to have required uncommon adaptive skills from human communities wishing to exploit its - enormous - potential.

The intense archaeological investigation carried out, also by virtue of the relatively advantageous political situation, both in Sogdiana (in the Surxondaryo valley) and in the lower Murḡ-āb (at the site of Chopantam, for example) has allowed scholars to conclude that the flexibility in terms of both economic strategies and settlement patterns found in the case of the Vaḥš culture is not alien to other territories of the would-be Großsatrapie of Bactria either, which suggests that we are not dealing with isolated cases, but with a structural feature of the mechanisms of exploitation and spatial control proper of Central Asian populations, to whose resourcefulness and capacity to adapt (and intentionally modify) their environment, such clear-cut categories as «nomadic» and «sedentary» do evidently not, or very hardly, apply.<sup>183</sup> In the case of Surxondaryo, the information available as a result of some intensive survey activities carried out by different groups of researchers (by permanent or aggregated members of the *MAFOuz* as well as, more recently, by archaeologists from the *Česká expedice*) has convincingly demonstrated that, even in Sogdiana - a region traditionally associated in Greek historiographical tradition with «Scythian barbarism» - the population tended in fact to practice at least a mixed economic regime, the latter being mainly geared towards goat and equid rearing (especially horses, but probably also donkeys and other transport and pack animals), but which included however also agriculture. This was mainly of a predominantly arid type, while at the same time it did not ignore more extensive cultivation, particularly where climatic conditions (e.g. in the

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<sup>182</sup> See the detailed maps in Ball 2019, 484-486 with regards to the most important among the Baktrian oases South of the Amudaryo (apart from that of Baktra itself).

<sup>183</sup> Lhuillier and Mashkour 2017, Cerasetti *et al.* 2018, 24 ff. See Scott 2017, 68-93 for an engaging description of the different «landscaping» strategies available to human communities not only (or even predominantly) embedded within societies with a strong agricultural propensity.

Zarafšān valley) allowed it, as evidenced by finds such as those of scythes, millstones and pestles recovered there.<sup>184</sup> As far as Chopantam is concerned, recent excavations by a team led by Barbara Cerasetti have shown that, even in the Murġ-āb delta, the (non-settled) inhabitants of the oasis were engaged in activities similar to those detected in the alluvium, thus appropriating some aspects of settled life as it is attested in the valley.<sup>185</sup> As a result, scholars were able to record traces of on-site storage and processing of grain, as well as the presence of artificial canals that could potentially bring water for irrigation purposes to the desired site. Comparably to what has already been observed in the cases of Ojaklydēpe and Begaš, at Chopantam too we are therefore able to reconstruct, albeit in a rather approximate manner, traces of irrigational infrastructures not very different to those built at similar times in Bactria, which would have proved crucial, firstly, to the establishment and, then, to the expansion of imperial power in the newborn satrapy, both in the Achaemenid and, perhaps even more so, in the Seleukid epoch, at least if we limit ourselves to the assessment of the - impressive - development of the Dašt-i Qal‘a plain during the Hellenistic period.<sup>186</sup>

Further traces of irrigated crops (in addition to wheat, once again millet and barley - *hordeum vulgare*) have been found in areas with an established pastoral tradition, from Chust and Dal’verdžin in the valley of Farġāne to Kōktēpe in Sogdiana, the latter being located exactly on the edge of what archaeologists active in the region, above all Claude Rapin, define as a veritable ecological niche bordering with the steppes further to the North.<sup>187</sup> Of particular interest for our discussion in this section is the discovery of earthen storage pits and barn-like buildings, which to archaeologists suggest «a semi-nomadic way of life», characterized by the presence of human groups engaged in seasonal mobility in parallel with cereal cultivation during rest periods, the latter made possible by the natural irrigation of the countryside.<sup>188</sup> As we shall discuss in more detail in the next chapter, the presence 1. in a landscape apparently so unsuited to a regime of agricultural exploitation and 2. at such an early epoch of infrastructures capable of securing the accumulation of resources for considerable periods of time could allow us to read in a different light – which pays more attention to both the level and the extent of local actors’ engagement and skills - one of the processes that scholarship writing in the last years has considered symptomatic of the capillary expansion of the Achaemenid «paradigm» of political rule and territorial control in the satrapies, arguably the most

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<sup>184</sup> Cf. recently in particular Havlík 2018 on Eastern Bactria North and South of the Oxus with the map in Havlík 2021, 10. Strab. 11.11. 3 for instance goes not too deep into anthropological subtleties in stating that, while it is almost impossible to distinguish the Bactrians from the Sogdians (and the former in turn from the peoples of the steppes, as their way of life would have been «Scythian in the highest degree», - πολὺ μὲντοι σκυθικώτερον), the latter were nevertheless, if possible, even more barbaric than their Southern neighbours: «τὸ μὲν οὖν παλαιὸν οὐ πολὺ διέφερον τοῖς βίοις καὶ τοῖς ἔθεσι τῶν νομάδων οἱ τε Σογδιανοὶ καὶ οἱ Βακτριανοί, μικρὸν δ’ ὅμως ἡμερώτερα ἦν τὰ Βακτριανῶν».

<sup>185</sup> See Cerasetti 2020, 488-489.

<sup>186</sup> Cerasetti *et al.* 2018, 25. Cf. moreover Martinez-Sève 2015; 2020a, Ball 2019 n. 18 (Āi Xānum).

<sup>187</sup> Rapin 2007; 2017b, Rapin and Isamiddinov 2013. See also Lo Muzio 2017, 40-43.

<sup>188</sup> See Lhuillier and Mashkour 2017, 667.

lasting result of the Persian conquest of Central Asia: namely, the creation of what Henkelman calls an «institutional landscape» characterized, among other things, by the construction of an impressive number of granaries even in the (seemingly) most remote territories of the Empire.<sup>189</sup>

Dynamics comparable to those described both in the case of the sites related to the Vaḥš culture and in Sogdiana as well as in the Farḡāneḡ valley regarding Chust and Dal'verdžin can be detected in yet another region of Eastern Bactria, namely in the Beškent valley (in Southwestern Taḡikistān), where the local community, although permanently oriented towards an agricultural subsistence regime, seems to have included a significant presence of pastoral groups.<sup>190</sup> This is once again shown both by ceramic finds and by the funerary deposition methods as well as by metal artefacts distinctive of populations with close ties to the steppes (a dagger related by scholars due to stylistic analysis to Eastern Qazaqstan was found in the oldest layers of a settlement called Tulxar, together with two knives characteristic of the so-called Andronovo culture, which developed over a large territory between present-day Qazaqstan and Southern Siberia from the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium and probably lasted until the 10<sup>th</sup> century BCE).<sup>191</sup> However, the emergence of an anthropologically distinctive typology such as that distinguishing the Beškent culture must probably be traced back to a higher degree of social complexity than current archaeological knowledge suggests, and if the ethnographies of the Taḡik valleys from the Soviet and even contemporary periods, with their incredible ethnic and linguistic polymorphism, offer a valid benchmark for comparison, it does not seem far-fetched to assume that, as early as the Bronze Age, Beškent society was as composite as its landscapes, and that it absorbed, re-modelled, and transformed - in accordance with its own local specificities - social and perhaps even political features of human groups originally coming from very different territories and backgrounds. The extent of the range of these interactions is difficult to assess, but the appearance at Tulxar of underground shelters (called «catacombs» in the specialized literature) enriched with goods bearing compelling stylistic similarities to the Vaḥš cultural complex shows that it must have extended at least across the territory of what would become Northeastern Bactria (straddling the still very sensitive border between the present-day Afḡān and Taḡik states). One may ask, of course, what triggered the marked change in subsistence strategies that archaeologists seem to be detecting during the late Bronze Age. The traditional answer has insisted on the extremely favorable conditions offered by the alluvial plains of Northern Bactria, but by virtue of the observations made both about a site such as Begaš and the territories of the Murḡ-āb delta, it might perhaps not entirely be ruled out the possibility that, rather than assuming «incursions» of

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<sup>189</sup> Henkelman 2017a, 82-97.

<sup>190</sup> Note now the seminal Lindström 2020 on the archaeology of Southern Taḡikistān, which although focused on the Hellenistic period provides invaluable reference (including a significant amount of Russophone scholarship).

<sup>191</sup> Litvinskii and P'yankova 1991, 385, Kuz'mina 2008, 40 ff. as well as Lo Muzio 2017, 31-34 for an assessment of the most prominent features of the so-called «steppe bronze». For a general overview see Kohl 2007, 203-211.

sort by non-settled populations into the oases' territories, one should in fact think in terms of restructuring, by communities that have been in contact with each other for a long time, of their respective strategies of territorial exploitation – the latter scenario growing out as the result of a change in the climatic context, from the course of the rivers to the salinization of the soil following its over-exploitation – according to patterns that are widely attested by the ethnography of these regions over at least the last 200 years of their sociopolitical history.<sup>192</sup>

### 3.1.1.2. The History of a «low-intensity» Imperial Space: a First Interim Assessment

Let us now attempt to draw some preliminary conclusions from the discussion of the material evidence carried out so far. By the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE at the latest, in a territory extending from (at least) the Surxondaryo valley in Uzbekistan to Beškent in Taġikistān, ecologically borderline territories in Central Asia, i. e. situated along the ridge of the most fertile oases in the region and the surrounding semi-desert steppes - or mountain ranges - seem to have been the focus of intense (re)settlement activity, characterized by the increasingly prominent role of subsistence strategies of a predominantly pastoral character. Rather than justifying - as is still the practice in some trends of current archaeological research - these perceptible changes as the result of incursions by Northern tribes into the territory of the oases (a model that still favoured in both Western and (post) Soviet scholarship especially when it comes to assess the century and a half immediately preceding Cyrus' political rise from Anatolia to Central Asia is concerned), against the background provided by the available dataset, it would seem more plausible to assume an endogenous movement of progressive increase in social complexity and interdependence between human groups characterized by a considerable capacity for economic differentiation and a high level of mobility, at least as far as some of their members were concerned.<sup>193</sup> In spite of the - significant - chronological distance, the persistence of features such as those listed above in large strata of the Central Asian population until extremely recent times would seem to justify the hypothesis, put forward in these pages but which will be taken up and further explored in the following ones, that proposes to interpret the birth and development of some of the most significant Achaemenid sites in Bactria and Sogdiana (e. g. Kyzyltēpe, in all likelihood Altin Dilyar Tēpe and Čašma-ye Šifâ) not, or at least not only, as the result of the reorganization of the Central Asian territory as a mere mirror-like image of the imperial needs for control and economic exploitation, but rather as the outcome of the latter's adaptation to a physical landscape and – most importantly - to a society which came into being through centuries of

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<sup>192</sup> Gentelle 1989, 75 ff.

<sup>193</sup> Compare Vogelsang 1992b; 1998, and, most recently, Adalı 2017 with the dymorphic state model (lowlands and, remarkably resilient, though archaeologically underexplored, highlands in Gorris and Wicks 2018 for Ēlām).

mutual interaction within a larger Central Asian context, ideally extending as far as the Northernmost outreaches of Qazaqstan. For example, in the case (by far the most and best documented to date) of Kyzyltēpe, the fact that the Achaemenid site arose at the exact boundary of an ecological niche, where the agricultural economy characteristic of the Southwest and the pastoral economic regimes of the Northeast met, namely in the context of an area - that of the upper Surxondaryo - which is otherwise very unattractive in terms of imposing projects of landscape engineering (mainly of hydraulic nature), arguably suggests the following. 1. That the development of the site obeyed to logics of control and spatial «normalization» (of the space itself and its inhabitants) which chronologically and politically came before the economic exploitation of both the ecological niches themselves. 2. It makes moreover plausible that the scope of the imperial entrenchment in this territory was primarily aimed at establishing control over an area that, although (apparently) being rather marginal from a geographical point of view, it was in fact extremely attractive precisely because of the stratified and multifaceted nature of its landscape – which implied access to a wide range of human and, therefore, natural resources.<sup>194</sup> 3. Finally, it suggests that this process of entrenchment of imperial control could not have taken place despite the existence of one, or more, local communities already from centuries accustomed to exploiting that same territory in ways and for purposes which were not necessarily congruent with those of the Achaemenid administration. On the contrary, we are compelled to think that the imperial rooting in Central Asia happened rather by means of the conscious participation of the local communities in the process. 3.1. It is moreover unthinkable that at least some of the most significant representatives of those communities did not see in such a radical turnaround of the geopolitical landscape of the areas in which they lived and with which they communicated, not only (or just, or even mainly) a threat the scale of which they could not underestimate, but also, if not above all, an extraordinary opportunity in order to consolidate their position, and this from the most varied points of view, from the economic to the political one first and foremost at the level of their very same communities, thus for reasons of internal competition.<sup>195</sup> As mentioned above, the recent excavations carried out along the Murg-āb delta (and in particular at the site of Chopantam) seem to provide some clues in favor of the argument envisioning a genetical process of (social) spaces of economic appropriation and sociopolitical interaction (Handlungsräume) in Bactria as the outcome

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<sup>194</sup> As pointed out by Jonathan Skaff (2012, 257) in the case of the steppe borderlands of the Táng Empire, Chinese policies, in providing Türk and Mongol communities (and single powerful individuals) with «economic incentives to live on the Northern fringes» of the Empire and serve in the military, «also benefitted imperial finances». For in fact, as the scholar further emphasizes, «tribes living in the borderlands gave the Sui [Suícháo 隋朝] and Tang [Tángcháo 唐朝] access to highly skilled cavalry soldier equipped with their own horses»: and – as it shall be argued in the course of this and the following chapter – this is just but one example of the benefit the Achaemenid might have gained by adopting a steppe (and mountain) policy comparable to the Chinese one described (among others) by Di Cosmo (2002) and Skaff (2012; 2017).

<sup>195</sup> Wu *et al.* 2017, 315. On the other sites mentioned in the text see Ball 2019 nos. 38; 186.

of long-lasting phenomena strongly rooted in the social and ecological fabric of the region and not - or not only and perhaps not primarily - as the outcome of a *deus ex machina* such as imperial intervention, for the latter seems on the contrary to have tried with all its might to exploit and to «tame» these (already existing and functioning) spaces much more than to have created them *ex nihilo* in the first place.<sup>196</sup> To take up once more the thoughts developed by Barbara Cerasetti, at Chopantam we are able for example to observe with astonishing clarity how groups of mobile shepherds occupied larger spaces or abandoned but suitable areas for their flocks and how, at the same time, they did not however fail to take advantage of their geographical position, situating themselves politically and socio-economically at a reasonable distance - both in peacetime and during more turbulent periods - from permanent settlements and ancient irrigation canals. This process is likely to have facilitated encounters between different groups and initiated the building processes underlying relations with farming communities, following a pattern that, remarkably, would only intensify over time.<sup>197</sup> As we shall see in more detail later on, the evidence recently provided by the excavations at Kyzyltēpe can be interpreted rather easily in the light of this scenario. Here, not unlike Chopantam, it is possible to observe at work a very efficient mechanism of cooperation between pastoral communities and agricultural settlements, characterized as much by mutual economic relations aimed at securing a more solid basis for the subsistence of both groups as well as at satisfying the needs of an overarching political entity (the Achaemenid satrapy of Bactria) which sought to extract the greatest possible gains from the efficiency of such cooperation in terms of both economic exploitation and political control. Before going further in delving into the ways in which human communities might have interacted both with each other and with their surroundings, a quick dive into the socio-economic space of Mongolian society provides a salutary memento against any temptation of a Linnean classification of the human groups making up the «raw» (but by no means inert) matter of the future imperial society within Achaemenid Bactria (including what we have termed its *herrschende Gesellschaft*).<sup>198</sup> In Mongolia, then, the unit of association immediately larger than the extended nuclear family and/or made up by a cluster of many of the latter, namely the *хот айл* (*hot ail* or, in its Türkic – e. g. O‘zbek and Qazaq – variant, *aul* or a combination of the former), has been recognized by ethnographers as a structure that can easily divide up the - sometimes very large - flocks on the basis of species and age in order to graze them in spatially dispersed subgroups, thus making better

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<sup>196</sup> Baberowski 2015, 77-109 provides a very instructive discussion concerning both the delimitation of social space and of the concept of «space» itself as a socio-anthropological category. On the mechanisms underlying the «normalization» process(es) developed by an Empire to cope with a territory perceived as alien both from an ecological and socio-cultural viewpoint see the brilliant studies by Reger 2017 and Weaverdyck *et al.* 2021, 304-310.

<sup>197</sup> Cerasetti *et al.* 2018, 27. See moreover the essays by Kradin 2015a, 15-22; 2015b as well as Meier 2020, 161 (on the steppe ecology and the relationships between the latter’s inhabitants and the «sedentary» populations).

<sup>198</sup> See for example the definition in *Pan. Lat.*, 7.3.4 of the «barbarians» allegedly defeated and «normalized» by emperor Constantine as *materia vincendi*.

nutritional use of the actual location of each component of the same хот айл.<sup>199</sup> The members of each family, as pointed out by William Honeychurch, usually carried - and sometimes still carry - groups of different species of similar age taken from the common herd of the whole хот айл and then dispersed with them over days of grazing, even across extremely long distances.<sup>200</sup> Based on this analogy, it is perhaps possible to envisage comparable processes underlying the interactions between different members of different communities scattered across the landscape of Central Asia, from Begaš to the Murg-āb delta, in the centuries before the year «in which the Mede came».<sup>201</sup>

### 3.1.2. «And I will make of Thee a Great Nation»: the Space and its Inhabitants

In the light of the considerations developed so far, it is possible to put forward an argument that, although it departs from the traditional interpretations of the genesis of Achaemenid power in Central Asia in a rather significant way, seems nevertheless to be in better agreement both 1. with the conclusions reached in recent years by archaeologists engaged in studying the processes of sociopolitical development in Central and Inner Asia in the period prior to the Persian invasion, as well as 2. with a more general tendency on the part of some historians and anthropologists to critically rethink the actual spatial extent and political effectiveness of the coercive capacity of Empires (or would-be such) prior to at least the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>202</sup> As it has been vocally emphasized in recent years in particular by James Scott and Seth Richardson, despite a narrative of self-representation (as it is to be found, for example, in royal inscriptions from Mesopotamia to Thailand) distinguished by a sometimes hammering emphasis on the expansion of a physical space, at the heart of the interests of a polity with ambitions of supra-regional hegemony was in fact first and foremost the control of the population settled in a given territory rather than the territory in itself.<sup>203</sup> The reason for this, as both Scott and Richardson persuasively argue, can be detected in the simple yet fundamental fact that only an adequate concentration and mobilization of the latter as a workforce (not infrequently, as we shall see, all the more sought after because its members were highly specialized) was capable of ensuring the conquest, and the conquerors, an adequate return in terms of resources which, once «dis-embedded» from their socio-economic and spatial context of origin, were then inserted within a larger

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<sup>199</sup> Broadbridge 2022 for a survey of community and family structure under the Mongols,

<sup>200</sup> Honeychurch 2015, 91 and, most recently, the conclusions of Kendirbai's insightful study on the steppe politics of Kalmyks and Qazaq societies faced with Russia's expansion into the steppes (2020, 221-223).

<sup>201</sup> As it can be argued based on the comparative evidence discussed in Cerasetti 2020, 488-489.

<sup>202</sup> See e. g. Honeychurch 2015, 211-220 concerning the social development of «pre-imperial» (namely before the Xiōngnú's rise to power) pastoral societies in Mongolia, Transbaikalia and Qazaqastan, while Richardson 2016 develops similar thoughts in the context of the Assyrian Empire.

<sup>203</sup> See especially Scott 2009, 64-97; 2017, 150-181 and now the arguments developed in King 2021, 289-305 on the Achaemenids in Arachosia.



system, according to a dynamic that, since the important study by Shmuel Eisenstadt (1969) on the *Political System of Empires*, has been recognized as both the cause (Thucydides' «truest explanation») and effect of the rooting of the «infrastructural power» of all the imperial structures in the course of antiquity.<sup>204</sup> However, and from a theoretical point of view this arguably represents the most significant contribution brought by the most recent historiography on – in the words of Walter Scheidel and Ian Morris – *The Dynamics of Ancient Empires* (if compared, for example, to Eisenstadt's nevertheless still seminal reflections), the comparative analysis of the effective margin of action of political structures, from the Mesopotamian kingdoms to the Andean Empires, shows how socio-spatial engineering, despite its being glorified (for example) in official documents, can in fact only partially be interpreted as the fruit of a planned operation promoted and directed exclusively by and according to the wishes of imperial power itself. On the contrary, such processes should be more usefully thought of as the result of a development - the outcome, no doubt, of (multiple) negotiations, compromises, tactical retreats, and attempts, on both sides involved, to gain the upper hand - of a pre-existing social, political, and territorial background of exploitation, which it is reasonable to assume was modified under pressure from imperial desires, at least to the same extent to which the latter had to modify themselves in order to cope with this very background.<sup>205</sup> These considerations are of significant relevance when it comes to rethink on the basis of the new archaeological discoveries and the superior knowledge about the organization of what William Honeychurch has called the *Spatial Politics* of non-settled societies in Central and Inner Asia acquired in recent decades, the dynamics underpinning (and conditioning) the formation of the Achaemenid satrapy of Bactria.<sup>206</sup> The remarks made already some decades ago by Briant, according to which the history of the upper satrapies should be read in the light of a «structural interaction between “nomads” and “settlers”», an argument which, in the case of at least the Vahš valley during the Bronze Age, has been taken up on an archaeological ground (and supported essentially thanks to ceramic finds), can be further qualified by arguing - as has been done recently - in favor of the development of social orders which need to be understood 1. as the result of centuries of experimentation across the broad territories of what we have previously termed «Central Eurasia» and 2. as interacting with each other based on what, in Honeychurch's words, can be described as deeply interrelated and contingent

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<sup>204</sup> Cf. Eisenstadt 1969, 33-49 as well as, more recently, Goldstone – Houle 2009.

<sup>205</sup> Scott 1998, 103-146 describes in detail the functioning of this dialectic and the results which can flow from it even against the will of those who set it in motion. On the importance of population control as paramount even compared with the control of a given space in pre-modern societies see Scott 2009, 66 ff.; 2017, 150-182 and Richardson 2017. An interesting parallel with the dynamics of infrastructural power in the context of the Inca Empire is recently provided by Covey 2017. Comparative analysis of different imperial regimes across world history shows that Empires are interested in people because their control allows the space to be exploited more easily than vice versa.

<sup>206</sup> See most recently on Central Asia the remarkably instructive Chang 2018.

relationships.<sup>207</sup> A rather indicative example of what is meant by such a formula is offered by the accounts of Western travelers and diplomats working on the border between Irān and present-day Türkmenistan during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. While not failing to emphatically underline the fundamentally «predatory» nature (at the time associated with, and indeed considered a «natural» consequence of, a non-sedentary lifestyle) of the countless ethnic Türkmen communities populating (but in the face of the surviving accounts one would almost say «infesting») the territories South of the Caspian, at the same time, however, these writers were very much aware of the fact that the Türkmen were organized on the basis of a complicated system of family solidarity – remarkably more often than not sanctioned by marriage - with a large number of neighboring communities, settled on either side of what were supposed to be the borders of the Şafavīd Empire, and whose members therefore could hardly be described as «entirely», or even only «seasonally», nomadic.<sup>208</sup>

In the light of a scenario such as the one sketched so far, the archaeological record collected, among others, by scholars such as Boris Litvinskiĭ and Ljudmila P’yankova concerning Bronze Age Baktria and interpreted based on a diffusionist model (penetration into the oases of mobile groups from the Sogdian steppes or from the territories Northeast of the Farġāne followed by a process, the duration of which is still the subject of debate, of assimilation into the local - agricultural - population, resulting moreover in an increase in social complexity and possibly political stratification), could perhaps be more profitably reinterpreted in the light of information coming – over the course of a comparable time span - from Mongolia and Qazaqstan.<sup>209</sup> The latter, in fact, actually point in the direction of a more blurred process of alliances shaping and attempts at cooperation (including economic partnership) between even very distant communities (the origin of which has been hypothesized to have been rooted, among other things, in an increase in the importance of horse breeding by virtue of a more diversified range of social functions than can be argued for the pre-Final Bronze and Early Iron Age), the most notable outcome of which would have been the formation of a network of steppe communities, the latter interacting both with one another and within each of those same communities by means of close cooperation between common people and their élites.

In the opinion – among others, of Honeychurch and Kohl - this collaboration would have been based on (and would in turn have been fostered by) a mutual system of economic support and political protection (from élites belonging to other, and competing, «expanded networks»), the most evident

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<sup>207</sup> Cf. Honeychurch 2015, 215, as well as, on Baktria, Briant 1983, 190-203; 1984, 81-84. On the ceramic evidence related to this period see e. g. Lyonnet 1997, 65 ff. As far as the *Spatial Politics* of Central and Inner Asian Empires see Honeychurch and Amartuvšin 2006; 2007.

<sup>208</sup> See e. g. Khazanov 1992, 73; 1994<sup>2</sup>, XXXIII, Abdullaev 2007, 83-86, Rapin 2007, Plischke 2014, 67-68 and again Kendirbai 2020, 103-117 on the Qazaq steppes during the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>209</sup> Supporting archaeological evidence – backed moreover by a broader range of ethnographic data - favoring the scenario reconstructed here comes from Iron Age Qazaqstan: see most recently Chang 2018.

specificities of which were still observable in Šafavīd and later Qāğār times to visitors from Eastern Irān and the Central Asian Ḥānates in both late Medieval and modern times.<sup>210</sup> These considerations should impose caution on those who, even recently, have proposed to interpret the signs of «development» (e. g. in terms of the extension of the space devoted to irrigated agriculture) in Baktria exclusively, or even predominantly, in terms of imperial interventionism in the region.<sup>211</sup> In fact, both the evidence discussed so far as well as traces of not inconsiderable diversification in terms of economic and ecological exploitation of spaces traditionally considered «beyond» the Achaemenid horizon (from the Fargāne valley to the pre-Aralic steppes of Chorasmia), leads us to believe, on the contrary, that, similarly to what is suggested by the most recent studies on the society of Central and Southeastern Mongolia between the late Bronze and the early Iron Age, even the Sakā «nomads» who appear both in Achaemenid inscriptions and classical sources (from the Massagetae to the Dahai) cannot be studied in isolation from the oases communities with which, as Michelle Negus-Cleary recently argued, they not only had «symbiotic» relations, but of which it is even likely that, at least on a seasonal basis, they formed part of the population itself which was settled in the oases of Central Asia from Chorasmia to Sogdiana, and of course including Baktria.<sup>212</sup> The consequences of such a scenario - which, as we shall see, seems to find at least partial confirmation in the most recent results of archaeological investigation in Baktria and Sogdiana, as well as in the light of a critical re-examination of the evidence acquired to date - are not negligible. It is not out of place here to emphasize the two that seem to be perhaps the most relevant for the discussion at the heart of the present chapter as well as to the overall framework of this work. The first is undoubtedly the fact that a reading of the archaeological data based on the theoretical premises illustrated so far provides rather solid arguments supporting the hypothesis of the existence - long before the «planning» of the satrapal political and territorial structures by the Persians - of a remarkable continuity of settlement and territorial exploitation in Central Asia, albeit relying on more complex premises than the traditional dichotomy between «steppes» and «oases» from which historiographical analysis has so far usually taken its cue, couched as they are within the framework of an evolutionary outlook that should now be utterly discarded.<sup>213</sup> The second, and perhaps more important, implication concerns the meaning to be attributed to these large-scale «developments» (especially of irrigated agriculture) evident at least in some areas of the territory of Baktria and Sogdiana (from the Kyzyltēpe oasis to the Dašt -i

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<sup>210</sup> Honeychurch 2015, 215. Cf. moreover Askarov *et al.* 1991, 466 and Kohl 2007, 183-196.

<sup>211</sup> See e. g. Wu 2018; 2020, 603-608.

<sup>212</sup> Briant 1984, 220, Negus-Cleary 2015a I, 399-411; 2015b, 117; 2017, 298-299.

<sup>213</sup> On such issues see most recently Søren Stark's contributions (2020, 80-82; forthcoming) as well as the important volume edited by Simpson and Pankova (2021).

Qal‘a plain, the latter especially in Seleukid times due to the almost unrestrained expansion of the site of Āi Xānum).<sup>214</sup>

Rather than framing this «development», as it still sometimes to be found in the literature, in the context of a teleological narrative that is ultimately the result of imperial self-representation (most evident in the Achaemenid inscriptions, which repeat to the point of obsession the story of a world constantly on the verge of sinking into chaos and which the King – of course vašnā Ahuramazdāha – is in charge of bringing back as close as possible to the primordial idyll of its origins), one might think, following James Scott’s suggestive analysis, that such processes rather represent a coherent and stubborn attempt to «simplify» the socio-economic landscape of the region for the purpose of political control. Among the goals of such a strategy, as for his part Seth Richardson argued in the course of his pioneering study of the Old Mesopotamian kingdoms, there was the attempt at limiting as much as possible the agency (Handlungsräume) of «non-state actors» (among whom Richardson enlists «warlords, merchants, travelers, herders») whose interests often competed with those of the Empire, and who, moreover, had on their side a much more developed territorial competence - and a solid network of social relations - which, in combination, enabled them to take 1. themselves and 2. the resources they were both interested in and competing for, away from the arms of the Achaemenid administration.<sup>215</sup>

According to Scott, the aim of the latter, as of any other governmental structure in pre-industrial times, has always been predominantly if not exclusively «to maintain, amplify and expand the agro-ecological setting that is the basis of its power by what we might call state landscaping. This has included repairing silted channels, digging new feeder canals, settling war captives on arable land [the notorious – and very much condemned in Greek sources – Achaemenid «deportations», in which notably Baktria features quite prominently from Herodotos to Kariton’s novel], penalizing subjects who are not cultivating, clearing new fields [given the prominent role played both during Stalin’s tenure and in the following Xruščëvean years by Qazaqstan and more broadly Central Asia it is not out of place here to mention the gigantic (and misguided) agricultural projects sponsored by the Soviets as well as the Virgin Land Campaign - освоение целины – in Siberia between 1954 and 1960], forbidding [or trying as much as possible to limit their spreading] nontaxable subsistence activities such as swiddening and foraging, and trying to prevent the flight of its [the Empire’s]

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<sup>214</sup> King 2020, 255-263 and Morris 2021c, 706-713 on the Hellenistic and post-Hellenistic period, with insights concerning Achaemenid strategies of land exploitation relying on the involvement of local technicians and powerbrokers.

<sup>215</sup> Richardson 2014, 77-83. Cf. Kendirbai 2020, 134-149, arguing that, from the earliest contacts in the 16<sup>th</sup> century down to the establishment of the Turkestani governorate, one of the main goals of Russian imperial policy was to restrict and to regulate as much as possible the Qazaqs’ mobility radius for reasons of mainly political control and economic exploitation. As shown by Kindler 2014, 109-178, Stalin’s aims were by no means different. What dramatically changed was the ruthless determination with which those objectives were pursued and eventually achieved.

subjects ».<sup>216</sup> Against such a background, one of the aims of this chapter is to put forward the strongest possible arguments in support of the hypothesis that at least some of these strategies of «state landscaping» were at work already in the early stages of the «imperial» history of Baktria. The remainder of this third section is therefore devoted to investigating the ecological and anthropic premises making up the space that the Achaemenid administration aimed at «taming» (i. e. making it «legible», normalizing it) through the application of its imperial paradigm.<sup>217</sup> By contrast, the next section focuses on the one hand on the evaluation of the limits to which this hegemonic project was structurally subjected, while at the same time seeking to highlight how the «collaborators» chosen by the Empire as the real cornerstone of what Ando has called the «construction and maintenance of a single social order» were able to use 1. creatively and 2. in their own exclusive interests, the new social, political, and economic landscape created by the Achaemenid conquest and chiefly designed following principles of methodical extraction and relentless control.<sup>218</sup>

### 3.2. Yet Another *History of Decline & Fall*?

The so-called Baktria-Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC) can with some justification be considered if not the culmination then at least the clearest evidence of the developments described in the preceding pages.<sup>219</sup> In the Central and Eastern regions of present-day Southern Türkmenistan, bordering with the Northwestern territories of the future satrapy of Sogdiana, from about the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE, at sites such as Namazga, on the slopes of Köpetdağ, a highly sophisticated archaeological culture emerged which, like the settlements in the Vahş valley mentioned above, can be considered as the cumulative outcome of a «political community» (to be understood in Honeychurch's sense as «a novel collective, formed at an expanded social scale and composed of those who identify with a respective political process by virtue of their participation») arising from the interactions between different communities settled within the catchment area of the Murğ-āb delta - as recently shown by the excavations that have been carried out in the alluvial fan of the river at

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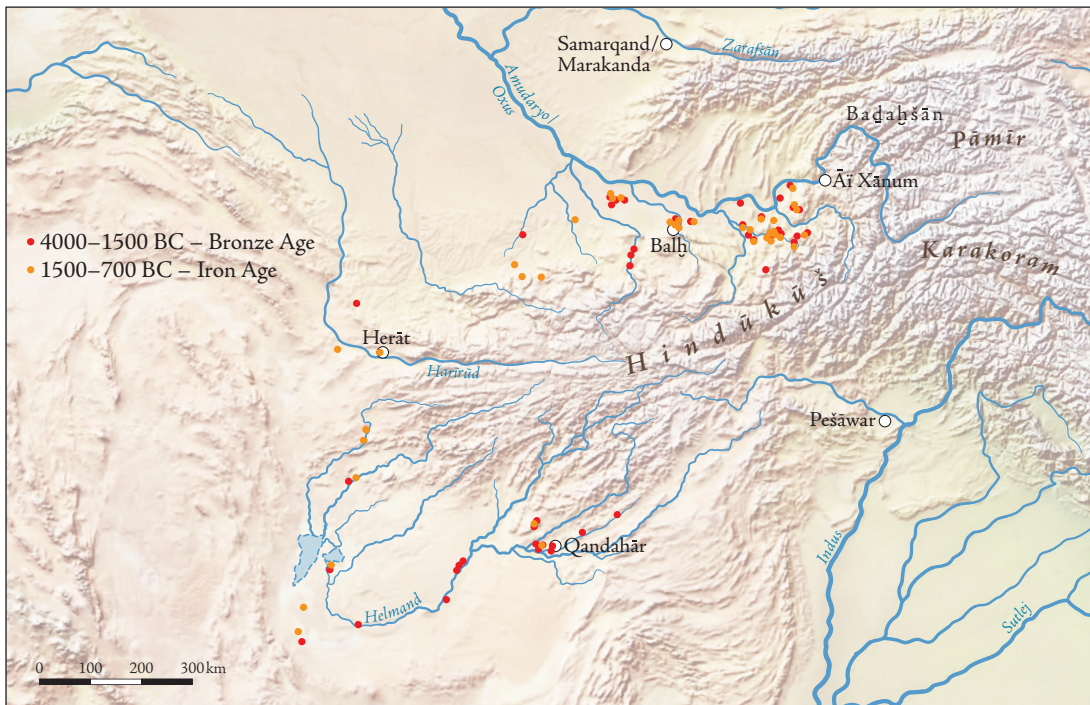
<sup>216</sup> Scott 2017, 23: italics are mine. From such a viewpoint, the alleged «deportation» (ἀνδραποδισμός) of some Libyan communities to Baktria of which for instance Herodotos (4.204 and 6.9) recounts, takes on a quite different meaning compared to the traditional interpretation of Baktria as a «land of exile» (Coloru 2009, 123-124) at least during the Achaemenid period: cf. Mendoza-Sanahuja (2016a; 2016b) and Matarese 2021 on Achaemenid deportations as well as their Near-Eastern precedents and sociopolitical (and economic) meaning within the broader («globalized»: Colburn 2017) context of the Empire.

<sup>217</sup> Foundational in this respect is the impressive Henkelman 2017a.

<sup>218</sup> Ando 2017b, 119.

<sup>219</sup> Lyonnet 1997, 45 ff., Kohl 2007, 182-244, Salvatori and Tosi 2008, Frachetti and Rouse 2012 and, last but not least, Lo Muzio 2017, 14 ff. as well as the contributions collected in Lyonnet and Dubova 2020 (esp. pp. 143-524 on the so-called «core area»).

sites such as Adji Kui, the aforementioned Ojaklydēpe, Togolok 1, and Yaztēpe.<sup>220</sup> One aspect that deserves to be emphasized right at the outset of the present discussion concerns the difficulty, comparable to that experienced in other areas of Central Asia undoubtedly subject to Achaemenid stimuli, dictated by the impossibility of pinpointing a clear watershed within the archaeological horizon that can be profitably interpreted in terms of a geopolitical turnabouts on the scale of Cyrus' conquest.



**Map 4.2. Collapse, Decline, or Restructuring? Greater Afġānistān from the Bronze to the Iron Age. © Peter Palm**

This, once again, should lead us to rethink the categories with which the process of annexation of Central Asia to the Persian Empire has been interpreted so far as well as, one might add, the role of local communities within it. Indeed, if one takes into account traditionally-held diagnostic indicators

<sup>220</sup> On this definition of «political community» see Honeychurch 2015, 42 as well as the similar formula used by Smith 2003, 109. On the more recent archaeological activity in the Murġ-āb delta area the synthesis of Cerasetti *et al.* 2018, 18 ff. provides very useful insights (and see moreover Cerasetti 2020). On the slopes of Kōpetdaġ, further excavations have been carried out in very recent years at Ulugtēpe (a site to which we shall return) and Altintēpe, near Namazga (or Namazgatēpe). In this area, archaeologists have unearthed several pottery sherds bearing traces of slip whose shape, which can be traced back to small-format jars, is not common to the region, and has no direct analogies, but can be compared with other pottery finds of Chorasmian origin as well as with those from Sīstān (on the border between Irān and Southwestern Afġānistān). Pottery comparable in terms of both morphology and production technology has moreover been found in Chorasmia and in tombs of non-settled populations located near the Aral Sea (cf. Lhuillier and Bendezu-Sarmiento 2018, esp. p. 345). Although dated to a period much later than the one under consideration here (the last quarter of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE according to archaeologists), the ceramic fragments and the settlement distribution they imply in the territory of Ulugtēpe and its surroundings might perhaps reflect only the surface of an older pattern of multifunctional settlements such as those described by Michelle Negus-Cleary (2015a I, 348-398) precisely with reference to the Chorasmian context at least from the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE onwards.

such as, for example, ceramic typology or the irrigation network, in both Sogdiana and the Murǵ-āb delta what is striking is the persistence of practices of clear Central Asian origin in both domains, suggesting the importance of interactions at a micro-regional level between different communities in areas that are significantly different from each other from many points of view (starting with their climate), which proved vital in the preservation and not infrequently even the development of infrastructures crucial for the subsistence of each of the social actors active in a given «ecological niche».<sup>221</sup> As mentioned in the previous section, in particular the surveys carried out by the Italian mission coordinated by Barbara Cerasetti have in recent years provided the most convincing clues confirming the slow but steady emergence, especially but not only in the Murǵ-āb delta of the Middle and Late Bronze Age, of a «political community» (sensu Honeychurch) within which, to quote her own words, «even as mobile pastoralists become more physically integrated with farming communities in the Murghab and possibly take up aspects of agricultural production themselves, they maintain affiliation with more distant mobile pastoralists (the so-called “Andronovo” cultural sphere) through their material expressions and behaviours». Similarly to the case of the Vaḥš area, also for the Murǵ-āb valley, Cerasetti stresses, at this date «there is thus no clear and static dichotomy between farmers and pastoralists, but superimposed layers of practices that alternately link and differentiate the two groups dynamically through time».<sup>222</sup> Although the excavations on which basis these conclusions were formulated refer to a chronological period much earlier (ca. 2250-1700 BCE, to which a – crucial – later phase should be added, beginning around the 16<sup>th</sup> century BCE) than the one dealt with in this study, they cannot be neglected within the framework a long-term history - as the one underpinning the present work aims to be – focused on the genesis of the Achaemenid satrapy of Bactria and of the Persian Empire’s organization of its physical and anthropic space in (Northern) Central Asia.<sup>223</sup>

The considerations summarized so far, and others that will be discussed later, can in fact be profitably compared with the results of the most up-to-date studies on the political structures of the peoples dwelling in the steppes, to whom Central Asia is undeniably entangled, and not only as far as regions such as Sogdiana or Chorasmia, which feature in our literary sources as the most barbarian (σκυθικώτεροι, according to Strabo) of the already barbarian Achaemenid East, are concerned. For such scholarship has recently called for growing emphasis to be placed on the endogenous nature, protracted over time and able to extend even to communities, such as those settled in different regions

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<sup>221</sup> Lyonnet 1997, 77-81, Genito 2013, Raiano 2014; 2019, Bonora 2019.

<sup>222</sup> Cerasetti *et al.* 2018, 18.

<sup>223</sup> Bendezu-Sarmiento *et al.* 2013 on the «different forms of wealth» of Central Asian societies before the rise of the Achaemenid Empire and Luneau 2020 on the sociopolitical transformations at the end of the BMAC as well as in the following centuries, which the scholar held as instrumental in shaping the (sociopolitical) landscape with which Cyrus would have been confronted while campaigning in Central Asia.

of the Mongolian plateau, distant from each other as they are, of social movements capable of encouraging the active participation - of élites and lower social strata alike - in dynamics of political decision-making, with the latter in turn being capable of effectively organizing the management of a territory, the mediation of conflicts, and the weaving of both alliances and relationships of subordination even in the absence of a superordinate political power (Scott's «state») capable of lasting, and of producing traces visible to archaeology, for more than some – usually few - generations.<sup>224</sup> The attempt to read the (still fragmentary, though steadily increasing) data on pre-Achaemenid Central Asia in a (broad) diachronic perspective in the light of the comparative models offered by the archaeology of Inner Asia could therefore be suggested as an essential step towards understanding the mechanisms underlying the establishment of Persian power in Bactria (and its - remarkable - stability) in the light of a paradigm capable of integrating within itself, in as seamless a manner as possible, both the propulsive force (and its limits) of the imperial machinery and the «repertoire of rules» developed over the course of time by the native society and whose weight within the dialectic between «local» and «global» (or between «center» and «periphery») has so far not been adequately taken into account except in an almost exclusively - and demonstrably heuristically weak - antagonistic (either/or) perspective.<sup>225</sup>

Going back to the archaeological record, although separated (East to West) by almost 1000 kilometers, the major sites - including funerary ones - of the so-called Namazga VI period (corresponding to the Late Bronze Age) seem to reflect the sharing of a homogeneous material culture, probably formed in accordance with the process, sketched above, investigated by Cerasetti.<sup>226</sup> This is for example the case at Adjı Kui 1, at which the oldest and at the same time clearest traces of inte(g)ra(c)tion between economic regimes with a prevalence of agriculture and (semi-)mobile pastoralism have been found throughout the Murğ-āb area (part of the future satrapy of Margiana). More specifically, the intermingling of pottery obtained through the help of the potter's wheel with other handmade specimens has even led scholars to suggest the coexistence of different - in terms of, for example, subsistence strategies – groups within the same physical space, at least for limited periods of time during the season.<sup>227</sup> These observations do not contradict, on the contrary - if anything - confirm and further refine, those stimulated by excavations carried out in the territories of

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<sup>224</sup> Honeychurch - Amartuvšin 2006, Honeychurch 2015, 244-260, Rogers 2015; 2017, Honeychurch and Makarewicz 2016. On the brokering role of «communities able to perceive their own intermediary functions [vermittelnde Funktionen]» along the Eastern border of the Roman Empire with the «Arab» world of steppes and deserts see most recently Meier 2020, 281.

<sup>225</sup> See e. g. Wu 2012, the latter to be compared with Kidd *et al.* 2012.

<sup>226</sup> See on these and related issue in Lyonnet and Dubova 2020, 333-366 (on the so-called «royal necropolis» at Goňur Depe), 386-404 (on the animal burials) as well as the comparison with the funerary rituals from Ulugtēpe and Džarkutan at around the same period (pp. 405-424).

<sup>227</sup> Cerasetti *et al.* 2018, 18-22.



the Eastern satrapies of the Empire in the past decades. The latter gave rise to the theory, put forward in its first - and still most articulate - formulation by Bruno Jacobs, and which has since become almost canonical, of the existence of a political and territorial unity of which the homogeneity of the material culture revealed by the excavations would in some way be an outcome. Such polity, moreover, ought to be identified, albeit indirectly, in Herodotos' description of the Central Asian units enlisted in Xerxes' army. And this is because, it is assumed, the subdivision of the Achaemenid East into satrapies might be reflected in the assemblage of the military units described by the Halikarnassian. Furthermore, according to such a viewpoint, the comparable results of the excavations in the Vaḥš valley and in Murğ-āb would help in this respect to explain why, at least according to what we can gain from Bīsūtūn, Margiana was administratively subordinated to Baktria).<sup>228</sup>

In the previous chapter, the attempt has been made to show 1. how and 2. why these assumptions (which are in any case called into question by the anomalous position of Chorasmia, inexplicably - given the premises - assigned to Media) are to be rejected as theoretically weak and not adequately supported by the archaeological evidence. However, as the case of the societies of the Mongolian steppes prior to the political rise of (a political faction among, or of?) the Xiōngnú seems to show quite vividly, the absence of a territorially organized political (a Ḥayānid – or whatever else - Empire) in the territories of pre-Achaemenid Central Asia does not represent an obstacle to the interpretation of the uniformity of material culture over even considerable spaces that emerges, over a very wide chronological span, in the future territories of the upper satrapies as an indication of the existence of political communities (as defined above) capable of integrating within exchange relationships, cooperation and/or alliance, subordination as well as, in some cases, conflict, multiple - albeit distinct from each other – human groups through what Achaemenid ethnography (and against its background classical historiography) would have classified as the Sakā territories on the one hand and, on the other, the would-be satrapies of Baktria, Parthia, Chorasmia, Sogdiana, or Gāndhārā.<sup>229</sup> Accordingly, if we are to disregard the absence, in late 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE Central Asia, of an individual apparently endowed with exceptional ability and charisma such as Mōdún in order to justify the failing of the development - despite the hypotheses put forward, but not adequately supported, by Vogelsang - of a Sakā Empire in the territories of the upper satrapies in the face of the ever increasing pressure Achaemenid expansion put on them, and which peaked in 530 with Cyrus' invasion of the steppes (a

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<sup>228</sup> Litvinskiĭ and P'yankova 1991, 391, Jacobs 1994, 210 ff. and, more recently, Kohl 2007, 235 ff. See for textual references on which Jacobs' theory is largely based Hdt. 7.64 ff., Xen. *Cyr.*, 5.1.2, Diod. Sic. 2.6.2 and the commentary on the subject by Briant 1984, 38, who shows himself to be possibilistic at least as it comes to the plausibility of recognizing «a relic of ancient political groups externally characterized by the adoption of a certain panoply taken from a predominant political power [in this case the Medes]».

<sup>229</sup> Dan 2013, Rapin 2018b, Rollinger 2021c.

chain of events that, as mentioned, presents more than one similarity with those behind Xiōngnú hegemony in Inner Asia), the reasons for this are perhaps to be sought, on the one hand, in the more fragmented nature – at least if compared to the Mongolian Plateau or the steppe and deciduous forest belt that connects the latter through Cisbaikalia to Manchuria – of the Central Asian territory, a factor that may have significantly hindered possible, but at the present stage of our knowledge unprovable, attempts at coordinating different communities scattered along this territory by figures such as the Herodotean Tomyris.<sup>230</sup> On the other hand there are, no less important, the consequences (which must have been momentous) undoubtedly caused, a few years after the death of Cyrus himself, by the devastating civil war in Persian territory - at the end of which Darius would have come out as the victor and heir to the «Teispid» Empire of Cyrus and Cambyses. For they can reasonably be assumed to have overturned, not differently from what happened along the Northern frontier of the Hàn Empire, any previously established political-diplomatic relations between (several) members of the local aristocracies on one side and the officers of the Persian power on the other. Although at the present state of our knowledge this must remain somewhat speculative, it is by no means outlandish to suggest that, in such a whirlwind, men like Vivāna and Dādêṛššiš are most likely to have greatly profited both in the face of their (former as well as new) imperial overlords and, especially, to the detriment of rival competitors. Moreover, pushing this interpretation a little further, one might even infer the scale of such a new (re?)arrangement of said relations and of the newly conquered lands from the, rather ambiguous in its elusive phrasing, chronicle of Darius' Scythian expedition «beyond the river» (i. e. in the Aralic or Sogdian steppes) following his victories against the liar kings.<sup>231</sup> In any case, what is important to stress at this juncture is that, starting at least from the Bronze Age, what the archaeological research of recent years, from Central Asia to Mongolia and Manchuria, is helping to bring to light in an increasingly convincing manner, is the existence of an articulated process of (endogenous) development of steppe societies which must probably be interpreted not only in terms of the structuring of an autonomous, differentiated but coherent cultural κοινή, but also from the point of view of the elaboration of strategies for the 1. economic and 2. social control of the territory with which, as it shall be argued, the Persian Empire would have had to constantly contend throughout its history, but which it is not hazardous to suggest would have weighed particularly heavily in the auroral phase of the Empire itself (at least until Darius' securing of his power): that is,

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<sup>230</sup> Cf. especially Vogelsang 1992b; 1998 and, critically, Francfort 2005.

<sup>231</sup> DB<sub>p</sub> col. V § 70: see on this passage in the Bīsūtūn inscription, on the one hand, the brilliant ethnographic discussion of the dynamics of the river crossing in Rollinger 2013 and, on the other, the socio-anthropological and religious commentary in Lincoln 2012, 437-446 (with further references to the other, at least according to Herodotos by far and wide less lucky Scythian campaign waged by the King). On the «Teispid-Achaemenid» Empire see e. g. Rollinger 2014b and now Rollinger and Degen 2021b on Cyrus' (and Darius') Scythian campaign.

in the decades of gestation and testing of the «imperial paradigm» that we see applied with the well-known - and startling - consistency in the administrative practice of the Persepolis archive(s).

At the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE, therefore, archaeology makes it possible to assume with relative confidence the existence of close links (some have spoken, perhaps exaggerating, of real «migrations» of entire communities) between some of the most important Baktrian oases and the area of the Murğ-āb delta.<sup>232</sup> This region of Southern Türkmenistan, the future core (around the oasis of Merv where, not by chance, almost all the sites of the period in question mentioned so far have been identified) of the Achaemenid satrapy of Margiana, may therefore have constituted one of the crucial nodes underlying the processes of formation of «political communities» across the territories of the oases and the adjoining steppes mentioned above. The reason for this assumption, as observed by Frachetti and Rouse among others, is that it can be demonstrated that agricultural communities of the plains and groups of shepherds settled in the nearby mountains and steppes on their slopes were closely entangled with each other at least since the early Bronze Age. This interpretative framework deserves to be taken into consideration because it provides (further) archaeological grounds for the suggestion, put forward years ago by Briant, according to which it would even be possible to believe that the mobility («nomadism») considered – most likely wrongly - to be an everlasting characteristic of the Central Asian steppes, in fact developed from communities originally, at least partially, devoted to agriculture. This implies that we are dealing with a strategic adaptation (Scott's «positionality») which ought to have been triggered, again according to Briant, by the desire of these human groups to exploit as much as possible the invaluable resource constituted by the herds of horses stationed in habitats such as the Syrdaryo delta (including the Northern area of the Üstýrt Plateau and the Sarýgamýş basin) as well as the semi-desert plains of today's Kyzylkum desert.<sup>233</sup> It should further be noted that, in the Achaemenid period, this latter area - through Chorasmia - seems to have been constantly at the center of the controlling ambitions of the satrapal administration established by the Persians in Baktria.<sup>234</sup> Similar conclusions come from the excavations carried out, starting in the

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<sup>232</sup> Cf. the map in Cerasetti *et al.* 2018, 18.

<sup>233</sup> On mobility as a carefully planned (and extremely flexible) strategy of *political* negotiation - as well as if not even more than economic adaptation – in the Eurasian steppes see most recently Kendirbai 2020.

<sup>234</sup> See Frachetti and Rouse 2012, 695, Briant 1984, 183-184 as well as, more recently and with particular attention to the economic significance (for the Achaemenid as well as the Kuşāna Empire) of regions such as the Üstýrt Plateau or the Sarýgamýş basin, Minardi 2015a, 82-84; 2018, 120. See also Scott 2017, xi who argues, with rather convincing arguments, for the tendentiousness and incorrectness of the widely held view both within the academy and, a fortiori, among the general public, according to which sedentary agriculture (and thus the domestication of plants and animals characteristic of what the scholar calls, on pp. 68-92 of the same volume, «the domus complex») would represent a later (and therefore higher) stage of social development than pastoralism and livestock breeding, since it can be demonstrated that the range of skills required, for example, to capture and train ungulates such as horses or camels can only have developed over time thanks to the existence of other strategies of economic sustenance able to ensure the subsistence of a given community while these skills were acquired. See also Potts 2004; 2005 (for a concise but informed history of the Camelus Bactrianus) and, more generally on the archaeology of nomadism, Potts 2014, 1-16. On camel breeding see most recently Dioli 2020 and Sala 2022.

1970s, in the Northwest of the modern Uzbek province (viloyat) of Surxondaryo, and more precisely in the vicinity of the present-day settlement of Bandykhan: here, the study of numerous hillside settlements (called Tēpe - «hill» - by the locals, hence the suffix of many names of modern archaeological sites) made it possible to reconstruct the settlement history of the region from the late Bronze Age, in the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, to the early Middle Ages (7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century CE); and it is important to note that, even in the Achaemenid period, this very region seems to have been one if not the main focus of an important hub within the imperial road system, probably developed, some archaeologists have argued, with the specific intention of monitoring and exploiting the seasonal movements to and from Sogdiana - another important source of supply for the Achaemenid cavalry - of non (or partially) settled communities.<sup>235</sup> The case of Bandykhan is particularly significant since numerous tēpe have been found in the vicinity of the present-day settlement, which archaeological investigation has shown to belong to different periods. Such finds provide therefore an important touchstone for data coming from other sites which have recently received renewed attention in the territory of Surxondaryo (e. g. Kyzyltēpe or Džandavlattēpe) as well as from areas further to the North but still belonging, as far as the Achaemenid period is concerned, to the same political-administrative horizon (Koktēpe in Sogdiana is the most remarkable example in this regard) and for which it is possible to reconstruct the settlement history with some accuracy.<sup>236</sup> Similar to a pattern whose existence was suggested on a palaeobotanical basis in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE at the site of Kyzyltēpe, the analysis of soil samples taken from Majdatēpe, Southwest of Bandykhan, has brought to light traces of numerous cereals, including barley, wheat, sorghum and lentils (i. e. of crops, especially the first two, which require significant infrastructural investments to ensure an adequate yield in a context that one would be tempted to classify as distinctly pastoral).<sup>237</sup> This is clear from the abundant finds of goats/sheep, but also, more remarkably, cattle (in a pattern comparable with the palaeozoological finds at Kyzyltēpe) discovered at the site, which scholars have deemed to be an important addition to the local diet, in accordance with a nutritional regime particularly suited to the varied landscape of the region. It was also pointed out that, in the context of such a landscape, areas of semi-desert steppe are at the same time surrounded, at different altitudes, by pastures and forests of poplars and tamarisks, themselves a resource not to be underestimated in the framework of a multifunctional economy such as that which seems to have been characteristic of

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<sup>235</sup> See on this and similar issue the recent contributions by Sebastian Stride (2007) and Wu Xin (2018, esp. 211-212). Establishing physical devices – such as road networks or even walls – for fiscal and more broadly political reason is a well-known strategy of imperial control in Central Asia (Weaverdyck *et al.* 2021, 313-317) with likely parallels already in the Achaemenid period: King 2021, 353-361. Rollinger and Nickel forthcoming provides a compelling comparative historical assessment of what they call *Chinese Walls Around the World*.

<sup>236</sup> Boroffka 2009, 135.

<sup>237</sup> Note however Lyonnet and Fontugne 2021 for the problems related to the Iron Age chronology of Southern Central Asia.

Majdatēpe. These findings are in turn consistent with the samples collected from the sites in the Murg-āb valley mentioned above (e. g. at Adji Kui 1), where the demographically significant existence of communities based on an economic regime of mobility is suggested once again by the presence, among the palaeozoological finds, of sheep and goats: an integral part, from Mongolia to Arabia, of the livestock heritage of pastoral populations. As ethnographic research on these communities has repeatedly shown, they do in fact provide a critical source of meat, dairy products, hides and fibers, not only for the local population, but also - and this is a point that deserves to be strongly emphasized - for adjoining communities. However, and in accordance with the dialectic already observed several times, for example, in the case of the Vaḥš valley, mobile herding communities seem in turn to have incorporated elements of the diet of their sedentary neighbors. «Archaeobotanical analysis of flotation samples yielded a number of domestic grains and legumes, including broomcorn millet [already known to us from the Begaš findings], free-threshing wheat, [the domestic variety, with the «hulled wheat» being its wild counterpart], barley, peas and lentils».<sup>238</sup> All in all, the results of the archaeological investigation discussed so far are mutually supportive and contribute in strengthening the argument according to which, at least from the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE, a very large area, including – to be cautious - the future satrapies of Baktria and Margiana, was inhabited by a rather consistent population (as suggested by the pottery found, for example, in Eastern Baktria, which can be dated to this period) and yet engaged in a surprisingly varied spectrum of different and complementary economic activities, making the most of the polymorphous nature (*Baktria natura multiplex et varia est*) of the surrounding environment.<sup>239</sup> The level of social complexity and economic sophistication characteristic of Central Asia during the BMAC period is also evidenced by the contacts, the exact nature of which is still debated, that the region seems to have entailed with the coeval societies of Ēlām and Mesopotamia behind which, as mentioned above regarding the hints of «tributes» paid by «Medic» peoples to rulers such as Ešarhaddon, archaeological research in recent decades seems increasingly inclined to recognize a mechanism based on the export of raw materials (mainly animal products, but specialized workforce might have been involved as well) from Central Asia to the West, in exchange for finished products (weapons, for example, or prestige goods) particularly appreciated in (semi-)pastoral contexts, in which social distinction through the display of exclusive ties advertised, for example, by the origin of certain objects is known to have been (until very recently) a factor of great importance.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Cerasetti *et al.* 2018, 21. Cf. Boroffka 2009, 136.

<sup>239</sup> Gentelle 1989, 35-49.

<sup>240</sup> Frachetti and Rouse 2012, 695. See most recently, from a Central Asian perspective, the introductory chapter in Lyonnet and Dubova 2020 as well as, from an Ēlāmite one, Vidale 2018 (with the – contested – assessment in Francfort and Tremblay 2010). On prestige politics in the Qazaq society see Kendirbai 2020, 86 ff. providing compelling ethnographic parallels from the early modern (and still expanding) Russian Empire.

Whether and to what extent the existence of these communication channels between Central and Southwest Asia was known to the descendants of the so-called «migration of the Iraniāns» (alleged to have taken place around the 11<sup>th</sup> century BCE) is at the present stage of research still widely unclear.<sup>241</sup> What is of interest here - and what the archaeological evidence currently available seems indeed to confirm, however - is the existence, dating back in time and constant in space, even in the territory of the oases, of socially and economically very diversified and sophisticated communities, whose interactions in and with the landscape(s) provide the background for the physiognomy of that territory which, from the 6<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the Persian Empire, in the person of Cyrus «king of Anšan», would have (eventually successfully) attempted to include within its sphere of political control. It is therefore to a more detailed study of the characteristics of this space (in ecological-geographical as well as in socio-anthropological terms) that the following sections of this chapter are devoted.

### 3.2.1. Modifying the Landscape While Adapting to It: Central Asia and *The Art of Not Being Governed*

If, therefore, it is now increasingly clear from archaeological enquiry that the communities which developed at the time of the Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex, and were able to survive its demise - the origins and dynamics of which are still unclear - were able to cultivate complex links of economic, social, and political interaction with Southwest (Central) Eurasia, from Ēlām to Mesopotamia, it follows that the cultural horizon of the territories North and East of the Irānian Plateau during the Middle and Late Bronze Age, as well as that of the Iron Age prior to the Achaemenid conquest (Yaz I and II) cannot be limited to the – however flourishing - oases societies.<sup>242</sup> In fact, it is equally clear that, at the same time, other communities, no more alien than those of the oases to the socio-political context of the BMAC, but characterized by a subsistence regime (mainly) of pastoral mobility, worked just as hard to build their own, no less intensely active links with the wider context of the Northeastern steppes: and they are likely to have achieved this through a space which was closely interconnected, although in many respects discontinuous (because of its sociopolitical organization, linguistically, culturally, or religiously) and which, from the Sarṃgamṃṣ basin, can be considered to have extended as far as central Mongolia through the forests of Cisbajkal Siberia. The importance of this far-flung area within (and for) the dynamics of interaction between, on the one hand, the so-called «sedentary» Empires from Hān China to Achaemenid Persia

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<sup>241</sup> Witzel 2000; 2013.

<sup>242</sup> Hoo 2022, 224-228 for an instructive discussion on the perception (and production) of local and global, with Appadurai 1996, 185.

and Sāsānid Ērān down even to Byzantium and, on the other, their respective borderlands, has only recently attracted the attention of a growing number of specialists even outside the Sinological debate concerning the history of the Northern frontier(zones) of the «Celestial Empire(s)».<sup>243</sup>

In Southern Taġikistān, for example at Kangurt-tut or Zardča Ҳалифа, traces of economic interdependence - which the comparative study of pastoral societies of the Mongolian steppes during a similar time frame (late 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE) leads one to believe that were inextricably linked to the formation of political alliances at the origin of those groups which the written sources of later times catalogued rather imprecisely under the label of «nomads of the steppes» (Sakā, Μασσαγέται, Xiōngnú, Huns) - have been suggested based on similarities in land-use practices which have been detected at settlements (e. g. Kumyrtepe and Kaktepe, in the Zarafshān valley), whose links with the Sogdian steppe world further North are beyond question and can be traced, at least in the case of Kaktepe during its so-called phase 1, rather easily to the Bronze Age.<sup>244</sup> This is shown quite distinctly by the traces of settlements that have been defined, not without some ambiguity, as «proto-urban» but which, following the model developed by Michelle Negus-Cleary, could perhaps be interpreted more cautiously and more precisely as multifunctional sites in a context of communities distinguished by 1. low and 2. dispersed demography, and which appear to have developed to a considerable extent as far as eight centuries before the Achaemenid conquest of the region.<sup>245</sup> The fact that it is precisely in contexts such as Kaktepe, which both the geographical location and the (albeit much later) literary tradition (Alexander's historians) consistently associate with the world of the «Scythian» communities of the steppes, where traces of dry farming have been found dating back at least to the Late Bronze Age (Kaktepe 1) and which appears to have been sustained through the exploitation of water from a neighboring mountain stream, presents interesting analogies with what we now know about the sophisticated flexibility and versatility of land-use strategies of mobile herding communities (and according to more recent ethnographic evidence, even Buddhist monks) in Mongolia.<sup>246</sup> If placed besides the insights provided by modern ethnological studies of the communities of modern Central Asia (often made of mixed semi-settled pastoralists and partially mobile farmers) until at least the late 1950s, the archaeological evidence from sites such as Kaktepe 1 or Zardča Ҳалифа owes its

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<sup>243</sup> See e. g. Brosseder and Miller 2018, Di Cosmo 2018; 2020, Golden 2018 as well as Miller and Brosseder 2013; 2017 as well as the in-depth diachronic study by William Honeychurch (e. g. 2015, 221-261).

<sup>244</sup> Rapin 2017b on Kaktepe, with references.

<sup>245</sup> Rapin 2007, 32-33; 2017b, 419-420. For an interpretation in a more Central Asian context (from the oases of Chorasmia to sites such as Old Qandahār) of similar settlements in the light of the «mobility» paradigm, i. e. as «nodes» of political, economic, and possibly also religious importance within a landscape otherwise characterized by «low density of dispersed settlements», see Vogelsang 1992a, 289-290 and, on a more solid archaeological basis, Negus-Cleary 2013, 91 ff. On the Amudaryo basin under the Achaemenids see the discussion in Havlík 2021.

<sup>246</sup> On the archaeological evidence related to the Mongolian context see Honeychurch 2015, 96-105, while on Kaktepe 1 cf. especially Lhuillier and Hasanov 2013, Rapin and Isamidinov 2013 as well as, more generally on the flexible nature of Central Asian pastoral communities' flexibility in (re)shaping their subsistence strategy from an ethnographic perspective see Khazanov 1992, 69.

importance to the fact that it enables to assess against the light of a more sophisticated model than the simple contrast, however nuanced, between the world of the oases and that which surrounds them, some of the salient features of the (*lato sensu*) Baktrian population which members were later to be integrated into the Achaemenid political framework.

Regarding the closely interrelated issues of interaction between ecology and processes of community formation, Frachetti has effectively summarized the salient features of the socio-political landscape of late Bronze Age Central Asia: according to the scholar, it would best be understood as a system of 1. multi-lateral and 2. multi-directional contacts, to further borrow Honeychurch's vocabulary, within which power relations (thus including marriage alliances, redistribution of prestige goods, at least from the steppe perspective, originating from «exotic» societies, economic dependence, shared herd management and bargaining over grazing rights, to name but a few examples) can be constantly negotiated and reshaped in response to periods of social, environmental, and economic stability (or lack thereof), both within a local territorial context and on a broader geopolitical scale. As recently pointed out by Negus-Clearly in the case of both the Chorasmian settlements along the Amudaryo delta and, even more interesting in the context of the present study, in that of the Balḡ-āb estuary or the Surxondaryo basin (Talaškantēpe I-III), a stance similar to Frachetti's can be extended to the whole ecological spectrum of Central Asia (thus to what we might call the oasis cum steppa system), including the Semireč'e basin and even the area of the Southern Urals, the populations of whose forests seem to have been to all intents and purposes involved in the dynamics of socio-economic interaction of this large macro-region of Eurasia, both in the period under consideration and in later times, and with particular intensity following the formation of the Xiōngnú Empire at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE.<sup>247</sup> Narrowing the scope of our discussion to the territories of the future satrapies of Baktria and Sogdiana, the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages (the so-called Yaz I and II periods) are, for instance, characterized by the widespread presence of a sophisticated irrigation system by means of canals amply capable of supporting an agricultural economy. And this even though the broader ecological framework is one predominantly marked by the diffusion of goat and sheep breeding, as it is shown by the abundant findings of zoological evidence collected in numerous sites from the Fargāneḡ valley to the settlements on the slopes of the Köpetdaḡ, up to Dehistān in Western Türkmenistan.

This in turn suggests that, in the face of a minimum subsistence level ensured by the annual practice of transhumant breeding, the development of an agricultural economy might have served other

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<sup>247</sup> Frachetti 2009, 41. With regards to the «multilateral and multidirectional contacts» through which the steppe people were able to keep contacts, across a chronological time span extended at least between the 13<sup>th</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE and encompassing territories as far away and internally diversified as the Mongolian Plateau, Northeastern Qazaqstan, and Southern Siberia see Honeychurch 2015, 198. For an in-depth archaeological overview through space and time of *Eurasia's Early Peoples (Die Frühen Völker Eurasiens)* see the monumental Parzinger 2020<sup>3</sup>.



purposes, for example, as suggested once again by the case of Mongolia in the Xiōngnú period and earlier, the support of neighboring communities in economic difficulty in exchange for the stipulation of socio-political and military alliances.<sup>248</sup> In spite of the unquestionable time lag (and the considerably higher order of magnitude), the fact that similar patterns of land use are attested centuries later in key sites under Achaemenid control in Central Asia (e. g. the aforementioned settlement of Kyzyltēpe or Lolaltēpe, both in the Surxondaryo valley), leads one to wonder whether the apparent «Persian miracle» of the cultivation of territories which, at first glance, appear unsuitable for this purpose, cannot instead be considered as an attempt, undoubtedly protracted over time, and the results of which it would be improper to imagine along a (deceptively teleological) line of a conflict-conquest-integration-assimilation model, on the part of the imperial administration, to become part of mechanisms of economic exploitation and socio-political negotiation that predated it and which, on the contrary, were already characteristic of the economies - and of the political ecologies - of steppe society, albeit with the due regional variations.<sup>249</sup> The fact that such a hypothesis should not per se remain confined to a few punctiform cases in different, and not necessarily interconnected - at least not at such a high date as the one under scrutiny in these pages - (micro)regional contexts, but is more likely to be indexical of a real system of adaptation of Central Asian societies to the ecological variety of an extremely complex landscape (*terra multiplex et varia* in Curtius' insightful words), also for the purposes of «community building», is implied by Johanna Lhuillier's remarks concerning an overall assessment of the currently available data on the livelihood strategies adopted by Bronze Age communities in Central Asia along the entire territory of the future upper satrapies, from the Merv oasis in Türkmenistan up to Sogdiana. Paraphrasing her words, in fact, it is possible to argue that economic dexterity and flexibility in an undoubtedly impervious environment has favored the development of subsistence strategies ranging from sedentary agriculture to «full scale nomadism» (along with a wide range of intermediate options) allowing mobility across different ecological niches (in her words, of «ecotones») to optimize both land use and settlement opportunities.<sup>250</sup>

A good example of this scenario comes from the Merv oasis (the site of Goñur-N), where archaeologists have recently unearthed what appears to have been a pastoral encampment used for limited periods of residence. Here, in striking similarity with Michelle Negus-Cleary's hypothesis

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<sup>248</sup> Honeychurch 2015, 91.

<sup>249</sup> Wu 2017, Stančo *et al.* 2018. On the dichotomy between «dwellers» and «claimers» in ecologically contested spaces between different interacting communities, see the important remark on India's forests and their dwellers in Weaverdyck *et al.* 2021, 317-322, with further bibliography. On the concept of «political ecology» see also the enlightening considerations recently put forward in Weaverdyck *et al.* 2021, 302-304 (with literature) as well as, explicitly dedicated to Afġānistān, the remarks in Barfield 2020.

<sup>250</sup> Lhuillier and Mashkour 2017, 669. To all this should be added, taking up Scott's (1998, 185; 2017, 239) effective formula, the fundamental option of «voting with one's feet», i. e. the ability to renegotiate, through temporary or permanent *mobility*, poorly tolerated relations of alliance and/or political subordination: a classic, but extremely powerful, *Weapon of the Weak* (Scott 1985).

regarding the (multiple) functions of the Chorasmian - and Baktrian – qal‘a, independent communities and the élites of the Baktrian and Margian alluvium are likely to have met to feast or exchange gifts in a context, it has been suggested, of negotiation (whether or not included within a religious or otherwise ritual framework, a possible option at least in the case of Koktëpe) of the modalities of land – and pastures – usufruct (notoriously a bone of contention between closely interdependent communities such as those settled, to take just one abundantly studied example, in the highly disputed – not least because they were both socially extremely complex and ecologically very stingy - semi-steppic territories along the borderlands between the modern states of Irān, Armenia, and Azerbaiġan, in the present-day autonomous republic of Naxçivan), which present, from both points of view, more than one analogy with the area covered by Lhuillier’s study.<sup>251</sup>

In such a scenario of interactions and interdependencies (in the context of Inner Asian societies, historians and anthropologists increasingly tend to speak of «entanglements»), the so-called «peripheral» spaces, i. e. those ecologically mixed areas, which are the object of the interests and economic practices of both communities, acquire a particular importance, and this not, as it might sometimes be heard, as «transitory zones» and/or delimitation area of their respective space of (political as well as economic) competence, a more or less disputed «buffer» between «oasis» and «steppe», but on the contrary - in a literal and metaphorical sense – as a terrain for negotiating ways of living together within a socio-environmental context perceived by the actors involved as unitary and even, as recently suggested by Miguel John Versluys, as a laboratory for innovative solutions capable of being repropounded, subject to appropriate modifications and adaptations, at imperial (i. e. «global») level.<sup>252</sup> In this respect, Goñur-N makes a compelling example of a socially defined and recognizable space within the landscape of the Merv oasis in which, by means of élitist dining practices, representatives of the communities settled there may have met, perhaps even on a regular basis, as Lori Khatchadourian argues in the case of the dahayāuš of Armenia, in order to formalize the modalities of reciprocal coexistence within the territory, according to a model that can be more clearly distinguished in the context, from the point of view of the historian much more favorable by virtue, among other things, of a long epigraphic tradition, of the Southern limes of the Roman

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<sup>251</sup> Lhuillier and Mashkour 2017. Cf. moreover Frachetti and Rouse 2012, 697 (with further bibliography) as well as Lhuillier *et al.* 2018 with regards of the site of Džarkutan. An in-depth study of the interactions between different communities in the territory of Naxçivan during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (again, until Stalin’s forced industrialization, which was responsible for a carefully planned and stubbornly pursued upheaval of social and economic relations in the entire region) was published two decades ago by Jörg Baberowski (2003, 512-552).

<sup>252</sup> Cunliffe 2015, 236, Versluys forthcoming: they can be envisioned, in the words of Johannes Preiser Kapeller (2021, 167) as «areas of mutual provocation and inspiration for the development and adaptation». In a wide-ranging assessment on the impact of the Achaemenid Empire over the societies of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE Robert Rollinger (forthcoming) had already shown keen awareness of these issues.

province of Africa.<sup>253</sup> Staying within the chronological and spatial framework of Bronze and Early Iron Age Central Asia, it is perhaps not idle to point out that, in the opinion of some scholars, the construction and maintenance of such «transitional spaces», as they have been defined, may have been in the interest, if not exclusive then prevalent, of the communities (and their respective élites) dwelling in the oases, since only through regular and sustained contacts with the outside world would it be possible to explain, according to the study carried out by Frachetti and Rouse, the presence and use of raw materials such as semi-precious stones and metals that were extremely important within the symbolic universe of the BMAC inhabitants.<sup>254</sup>

Now: although the chronological gap is considerable and therefore discourages us from postulating too schematic evolutionary processes, it is nevertheless feasible to argue that at the current state of research we have sufficient evidence at least to advance the hypothesis that sites such as Goñur-N may have represented the archetype of a pattern of regulation strategies of sociopolitical ties and of the ways in which the resources available within a given territory were exploited, which we see resurfacing, and constantly being readapted to changing circumstances, not only of political (on a micro-, macro- and trans-regional scale), but also of environmental nature, in other «transitional spaces» across Eurasia that over time would have become the constant object of imperial attention, from Armenia in the immediately pre-Achaemenid period to Xiōngnú- ruled Mongolia. This seems to have been the case, for example, of the Chorasmanian qal‘a discussed by Michelle Negus-Cleary who, as already mentioned above, has proposed to study their origin (at least from the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE) and their functionary evolution within an «extensive rural landscape», in the context of which the qal‘a would have played both a symbolic and infrastructural role of great importance for the economic, spatial, as well as socio-political interactions being negotiated in the surrounding space.<sup>255</sup> Crucial to the discussion developed in this chapter is the scholar’s observation that the construction and functional use of the qal‘a most likely had its origins in a long local process of contestation-negotiation for the use of land and water, which seems to have shaped the power hierarchies within the Central Asian communities generations and generations before the Persian Empire claimed these territories as its own, which consequently leads to the suggestion that, far from intervening at will in a land that was «virgin» in terms not only of demography, but also of socio-economic structures and political alliances, the Achaemenid administration was forced to adapt its «repertoire of rules» of

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<sup>253</sup> Cf. Cordovana 2007, 212-234 and Meier 2020, 231, who explicitly speaks of «transitional spaces» (in German Räume des Übergangs). On Armenia cf. Khatchadourian 2016, 90-102.

<sup>254</sup> Frachetti and Rouse 2012, 697 as well as, on the imaginary of the BMAC people, the relevant chapters in Lyonnet and Dubova 2020 (e. g. 178-292). Some years ago, in particular David Christian (2000, who openly speaks of Steppe Roads) and William Honeychurch (2015) have stressed the importance of goods accessible to the steppe people thanks to their wide-ranging connections (for example with the forest economies of Southern Siberia) to the material and symbolic economies of the settled societies, from Central Asia to China. See now Stark 2020.

<sup>255</sup> Negus-Cleary 2007, 14-16 with further bibliography as well as, in more detail, Negus-Cleary 2015a I, 399-417.

Empire building (Henkelman's paradigm) to the demographic and environmental contingencies of the Central Asian landscapes.<sup>256</sup>

A similar argument was recently put forward concerning the territory of the would-be dahayāuš of Armenia by Lori Khatchadourian, who observed that the presence at sites such as Godintēpe (in the Kangāvar valley, located in the modern-day Irānian province of Kermānšāh), Tēpe Nuš -i Ğan, some sixty kilometers south of Ekbatana, or Erebuni, at the outskirts of modern-day Yerevan, of columned buildings that bear, albeit on a significantly reduced scale, striking similarities with some of the most famous Achaemenid representational buildings (most notably the Apadāna), could be interpreted in a radically different way from what has happened so far - i. e. as evidence of the imperial impact on a remote periphery - by considering such buildings as «sites of congregational politics for leaders of disparate groups inhabiting the Northern highlands [of the future dahayāuš of Armenia and of what was once the Urartean Empire, from where such political practices most likely originated] – agriculturalists and pastoralists alike – who were empowered and obliged not to hold the reins of institutionalized violence but instead [...] “to speak” sites».<sup>257</sup> Put in a nutshell, according to Khatchadourian the representatives of the different communities settled in this «transition zone» straddling steppes, neighboring plains, and surrounding hills and mountains along the current Irānian-Caucasian border would have conceived of places like Erebuni or Godintēpe as nodes within a shared and contested landscape where they would gather, in her words, to «deliberate on collective actions, resolve disputes, store surplus, engage in commensal consumption, and indeed cooperate in the very upkeep of the built structures [the «built environment» recently discussed in the important studies by Ömür Harmanşah and Matthew Canepa] that helped establish and enforce the terms of their relations».<sup>258</sup> As well as by virtue of the - remarkable - consistency with the most recent interpretations of the multifunctional nature (in socio-political as well as economic and ecological terms) of the Central Asian qal'a discovered from the Amudaryo delta to the sites of pre-Achaemenid Afrāsyāb and Qandahār, Khatchadourian's considerations are exceptionally relevant for the purposes of this chapter and in the more general context of a reappraisal of the *Rise & Organization* of the Achaemenid Far East by virtue of the role that the scholar argues such structures (it must be repeated, in all likelihood the result of - and obedient to - strictly local logics of management of the coexistence in, and exploitation of, the landscape) played in the process of encroachment of the Empire's

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<sup>256</sup> Negus-Cleary 2007, 18.

<sup>257</sup> Khatchadourian 2016, 91-102, in particular p. 101, from where the quotation is taken. Cf. such a point of view with the conclusion reached after years of fieldwork in Chorasmia by Michelle Negus-Cleary (2015b, 122; 2017, 299-301; 2018) regarding the multifunctional versatility of a spatial device such as the qal'a.

<sup>258</sup> Khatchadourian 2016, 101. Emphasis is mine. For an overview of the Caucasus under the Achaemenids see Knauss 2021 with bibliography. Fabian 2021 for further insightful remarks on local (dis)continuities and their impact on the Hellenistic and Roman period. On the built environment and strategies of imperial self-representation in the Ancient Near East compare Canepa 2018 and Harmanşah 2014; 2015.

infrastructural power in areas, such as those we are considering, distinguished – to borrow once again Scott’s terminology - by a high rate of «state evasion». The reason for this, it should be stressed, rests not least in the impervious nature of the territories under scrutiny here, as well as in the considerable obstacles in both logistic and communication caused by the landscape itself (the aforementioned «friction of the terrain», a practically insoluble puzzle for any Empire that did not have easy and widespread river communication routes within its borders).<sup>259</sup>

In Khatchadourian’s view, in fact, the reproduction, this time more Persiano, of similar buildings astride the imperial domains (a process she labels «captivation and delegation») is likely to have fulfilled the main task of sustaining and defining practices and values critical to the reproduction of imperial sovereignty.<sup>260</sup> In other words, and taking up Clifford Ando’s terminology, this means the creation of a «constitutive outside» of the governmental mechanisms elaborated by the ethno-classe dominante originally settled in Pārsa through the appropriation and reconversion, within the imperial context, of structures and institutions (of physical, symbolic, and socio-political order) originally elaborated in a different (micro)regional context. Remarkably, this line of reasoning finds evidentiary support with the data recently acquired by scholars working in a context such as that of Ègiin gol, in the Northern part of Central Mongolia, entrenched in an alluvial valley a few kilometers Southwest of the Russian city of Irkutsk (in central Siberia), where comparable processes of community building and sociopolitical hierarchization have been archaeologically detected.<sup>261</sup> Starting from the case study of Ègijn gol, and analyzing on archaeological grounds the processes of socio-political interaction in a multiscale perspective that preceded, and in his opinion were essential to, the birth and development of Xiōngnú supremacy, William Honeychurch has recently observed how, in ecologically multifaceted and socially diverse territories such as the steppes of Central and Inner Asia, irrespective of how a given political entity was originally formed, the ways in which it proved capable of enduring over time needed to be innovated through a constant process of political negotiation and experience involving a wide range of communities (or, as he explicitly calls them, «factions», a term that wisely does not obscure conflictual dynamics among and within those communities).<sup>262</sup> Even in a highly

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<sup>259</sup> See on this matter Heather 2005, 127 ff. and Meier 2020, 242 concerning the case study of the limes Africae of the (late) Roman Empire (from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE onwards).

<sup>260</sup> Khatchadourian 2016, 68-74 for terminological and conceptual definition.

<sup>261</sup> Khatchadourian 2016, 102-110, Ando 2017a and, with regarding to Ègijn gol, Honeychurch and Amartuvšin 2007, 47-48). The latter is an especially significant contribution because in its pages - based on palaeobotanical finds of grains (e. g. millet and soft wheat, or triticum aestivum) - it is argued that these hubs of sociopolitical aggregation were also used for agricultural purposes, for example during the summer, from June to October, during the settled periods coinciding with the breeding of the flocks.

<sup>262</sup> Honeychurch 2015, 232 (where he speaks of «factions» within Mongolian and other coeval pastoral societies – a point on which see most recently Kendirbai 2020, 103-117) and 246. Cf. moreover on such matter Ando 2017a, 7, for according to him «statal orders are no longer granted the ontological security that they claim for themselves, but are understood as requiring continuous renewal and reconstitution. A philologist might well say that the origins of “state” in Latin statio are at last revealed. Statio, meaning “position” or condition, itself derived from a perfective passive participle: a statio is not a fact about a thing or the world, but something established through agential action. Statal orders are not historical givens,

mobile context such as Mongolia, the scholar further argues, the establishment of supra-local structures for extraction and control (otherwise stated: an Empire) could never be achieved by coercive means alone, but always required a sophisticated combination of other factors, including beliefs, symbolic grammars, redistribution of wealth for the purpose of building (and strengthening) reciprocal ties and, most importantly, through power-sharing arrangements.<sup>263</sup> From this point of view, therefore, at the foundation of any process of Empire building there would not only be - and in socio-spatial contexts such as Central Asia, the Transcaspian steppes, the Caucasus, and Mongolia, perhaps not even to a prevalent extent - the setting up of an elaborate bureaucracy capable of sustaining dynamics of authority centralization (as one would be led to believe by virtue of the perspective illusion caused by a source such as the Achaemenid imperial archives), but rather the extremely delicate question of how to sufficiently «enfranchise» various territorial power holders in order to achieve a - potentially unstable, but nevertheless relatively tolerated - political consensus sufficient to hold together a vast and complex socio-political organization such as that of a pre-modern Empire.<sup>264</sup>

Following in the footsteps of John Daniel Rogers, we might therefore argue that, in the context of steppe societies, a high level of vertical and horizontal integration (both at an intra- and inter-community scale) and the ability to synthesize very different cultural elements was the key enabling (some of the) political entities dwelling in such an environment to function effectively on a macro-regional scale. What needs to be stressed here is, however, their common starting point, namely from locally elaborated conditions in a context of constant negotiation between interacting communities within a space contested between (multiple: economic, sociopolitical, symbolic) needs that were not always easy to accommodate (and sometimes in open conflict with, and competition against, each other).<sup>265</sup> The most significant benefit of such a theoretical framework lies in the fact that it allows to assess in a new light the role and the actions of some individuals, for example of the ὕπαρχοι mentioned in classical historiographical sources (and even of a man of Spitamenes' latitude), that scholars have long recognized as analogous to the generals-merchants of the Hàn period defined by Yù as «hybrid» or «frontier» peoples. In other words, men able to provide the Empire with invaluable channels of privileged communication with the neighboring and cross-border communities (mostly mobile shepherds) by virtue of their mastery of the cultural codes - first and foremost, most probably of the linguistic ones – proper to the different worlds (but it would perhaps be more appropriate to speak of networks of social, economic, and political relations) in which they moved and which

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but forever captured *in statu nascendi*». Emphasis in the original. Similar points have been raised by Rogers 2018, 301-308.

<sup>263</sup> Honeychurch 2015, 246-247.

<sup>264</sup> Honeychurch 2015, 240-250, in particular p. 246.

<sup>265</sup> See e. g. Rogers 2012.

constituted perhaps the most sought-after human capital an Empire could sought to appropriate; both during its (extremely delicate) auroral phase and, following Richardson's suggestions, throughout a history that we should conceive of as constantly and structurally «becoming» (in statu nascendi) and under negotiation (the «presumptive state»).^266

On closer inspection, this is not a situation peculiar to Central Asia alone, since the broader context of the Achaemenid imperial οἰκουμένη provides innumerable examples of liminal situations in which the Persian Empire is proven to have had recourse, on several occasions, to carefully selected «imperial collaborators», chosen as such precisely because of the latter's ability to make versatile and cunning use of a wide repertoire of «situated identities», or in light of their skills, according to Bryan K. Miller's suggestive words, in *Navigating and Negotiating the Middle Ground*.<sup>267</sup> Precisely in the territories of what was once Achaemenid Babylonia, for example, the marshes of the Tigris and Euphrates deltas have traditionally constituted, until their reclamation by Ṣaddām Ḥusayn, both a favorite territory – to pick up another concept from James Scott's insightful anthropological research - of «escape» and of «rejection of the processes of state appropriation», as well as an authentic breeding ground for the most expert among Miller's «Argonauts of the Middle Ground» who, throughout the history of pre-modern Empires, represent the handbook example of the officer active in the borderlands. These men are in fact, at the same time, irreplaceable apparatčiki (the statesmen) as well as (at least potentially) extremely dangerous would be rebels. Both these sociopolitical roles are quite well exemplified by the story of the Chinese - but of Sogdian origin - officer Ān Lùshān (安祿山), assassinated in 763 CE at the end of a revolt which seriously threatened to undermine the stability of the Táng Empire (notably not only in the Far East where he had been dispatched, but of the whole polity, which in fact never totally recovered).<sup>268</sup> What, however, distinguishes the interpretation of the - admittedly rather scanty - evidence available proposed in this section from the mainstream literature on the topic is that, instead of tracking the whole mechanism of social stratification and of what Turchin and Nefedov have called «overproduction of elites» back to the outcome of the process set out by the conquest and integration of Central Asia within the Achaemenid

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<sup>266</sup> For an insightful study of the «amphibious» official of the Hàn Empire see Yù 1994<sup>2</sup>, 122 as well as Skaff 2017, 50 concerning the situation under Táng rule. As far as the *limes Africae* during Late Antiquity (4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> BCE, at least until Justinian reconquista) is concerned see Meier 2020, 239-241: this latter space is of particular importance here because of the amount of testimonies it provides. The theoretical and methodological background of the arguments put forward in this section comes from the research of scholars such as Bleda Düring and Tesse Stek (2018a; 2018b), Lori Khatchadourian (2016) and Seth Richardson (2012; 2016).

<sup>267</sup> Giangiulio 2010c, Miller 2015. From a comparative perspective see moreover the important study by Irad Malkin (2002).

<sup>268</sup> Cf. Briant 1984, 169 and Xen. *Anab.*, 1.4.19. On Ān Lùshān cf. de la Vaissière 2004, 215-220, Beckwith 2009, 145-146 and Skaff 2012, 190-193. On the marshlands at the borders of the modern nation states of Irān and Iraq see Scott 1998, 187; 2009, 170; 2017, 56. Concerning the «navigation» of the *Middle Ground* along the Hàn-Xiōngnú borderlands consult Miller 2015.

polity (thus stressing the top-down nature of this dynamics), the scenario put forward in this chapter emphasizes on the contrary the following aspects: 1. the long-term perspective of the dynamics themselves (which therefore are assumed to have taken place not over just a few decades following Cyrus' conquest, but instead as having stretched over several centuries) and 2. the endogenous origin, specific to Central Asian communities, of the development of «spatial policies», as Honeychurch called them, capable of organizing the economy and society of the future Achaemenid upper satrapies centuries before their «imperial» history. In addition to this, the hypothesis developed in this chapter and the previous one finally suggests 3. that, in order to effectively take root in the conquered territories (which is to say, to gain acceptance in the local societies, or at least among their élites), the Persian administration had to take on board - to use Lori Khatchadourian's terminology by symbolically «capturing» them - characteristics of local sociopolitical negotiation practices in order to insert them into its own «repertoire of rules» of imperial control, thus subjecting the latter (and this is the fourth fundamental point of the argument proposed here) to modifications that were not only unexpected, but potentially dysfunctional for the purposes of imperial control itself which, however, in the absence of this process of «captivation» and «delegation», would not have been conceivable to the extent and with the level of efficiency that is testified, as already observed by Briant in a study that has become classic, by the evidence of the imperial history itself if considered over the *longue-durée*.<sup>269</sup>

Returning to Goñur-N, the processes of «materialization» of the Late Bronze Age Baktrian ideology that some scholars have believed to be at work at the site in the form – for example – of 1. developed activities of processing raw materials (coming from areas external to the BMAC itself) into refined finished products, 2. in the planning of multifunctional structures (in analogy to the «columned halls» of Tēpe Nuš -i Ğan or Erebuni) as well as 3. in the progressive expansion of the control of vast areas located around the deltas of the local watercourses by means of hydraulic works of considerable sophistication, could be profitably interpreted as early expressions of the processes of political negotiation and community building involving a broad spectrum of human groups at the origins of the Central Asian «political communities» which predated, but were essential to its success, the rise and spread of Achaemenid power in the region.<sup>270</sup> It is precisely the question of the control and exploitation of water resources in Central Asia (at least since the time of Herodotos *Histories*: see,

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<sup>269</sup> On the concept of «Elite overproduction» cf. Turchin and Nefedov 2009, 11. On «Spatial politics» in the context of steppe societies see e. g.: Honeychurch and Amartuvšin 2006, Honeychurch 2015, Meier 2015; 2020, 156-171, the latter mainly devoted to the dialectic between what he calls «non-state-peoples» and the representatives of the Imperium Romanum. For a thorough definition of the processes of «Captivation» and «Delegation» see Khatchadourian 2016, 87 ff., the latter being two concepts on which we shall come back in further detail in the next chapter. On the Achaemenid *longue durée* see Briant 2009a as well as, previously, the still unmatched overview in Briant 2002, 693-768.

<sup>270</sup> Honeychurch 2015, 246. For further details see Kohl 2007, 186-198 as well as Abdullaev 2017 and, in Lyonnet and Dubova 2020, pp. 178-214 on the Baktrian «ideology» of the Late Bronze Age.



paradigmatically, Hdt. 3. 117), i. e. the main symbol of the mechanisms underlying the percolating of Achaemenid infrastructural power into the territories and societies of the upper satrapies, which allows us to apply the interpretative framework elaborated so far with some degree of consistency to the Central Asian context: not too far from the Merv oasis, in fact, at least three sites (Kelif, Kerki, and Mirzabek, all three dating back to the Bronze Age) were identified not long ago. Remarkably, all of them were strategically located along the course of the Amudaryo and, according to Pierre Leriche, their most likely function would have been of a mixed nature, namely, to combine the control of the local fords with the irrigation of neighboring territories.<sup>271</sup> Given that, as it has been argued among other scholars by Frachetti and Rouse, the entire political economy of Late Bronze Age Baktria depended on the acquisition of raw materials from external sources, the latter to be then reused locally for purposes of social distinction (in Bourdieu's sense) and consequently with the goal of underpinning the structuring of a socio-political hierarchy, it is perhaps not too far-fetched to assume that sites such as Kelif, Kerki, and Mirzabek combined the ability of local communities (including, as we have said, those that were not - or only partially - settled) to exploit water resources for agricultural production with their strategic position along an artery, the Amudaryo, the course of which represented until the entire Kušāna period a privileged access route to the societies of the steppes and their political-economic networks.<sup>272</sup> Such an interpretation of the three Margian sites reiterates and strengthens the analogy with the multifunctionality of both the Chorasmanian qal'a of (pre)Achaemenid times and the Sogdian πέτραι, at least as they are described by classical historiographic sources. This is so because, in all three cases, it seems feasible to grasp the existence of - at least - a dual strategic role for these sites, i. e. of territorial control (of a hydrological nature), combined however with agricultural production within a predominantly pastoral context such as that of the Amu delta or of the territories bordering the oases - as in the case of Kelif, Kerki, and Mirzabek - where it is difficult to imagine a given human settlement as fulfilling an exclusively, or even predominantly, goal of (only) economic subsistence. Therefore, it might be advisable to interpret these three sites in the light of the evidence coming - once again - from Mongolia and specifically from the aforementioned site of Ègijn gol.<sup>273</sup>

With regard to the latter, archaeologists who have studied the site have recently argued that the cyclical processes of increased agricultural production in an otherwise pastoral context attested there should be interpreted in terms of a strategy - on the part of local élites, whose links with a broader

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<sup>271</sup> Cf. Leriche 2007, 128.

<sup>272</sup> On the mechanisms underpinning social differentiation see the classic Bourdieu 1979. The strategic importance of the Oxus river as a thoroughfare for bringing steppe society into contact with the alluvia (and the other way round) has been stressed in a recent important contribution by Minardi 2018, but see however already Rtveldadze 2001; 2010, Olbrycht 2010, and Lerner 2014.

<sup>273</sup> On the πέτραι in Sogdiana see e. g. Rapin 2013; 2018a.

network of interactions across the North-Central Mongolian Plateau and the Siberian forest peoples appear to be well attested - to establish a tributary mechanism that would provide them with valuable resources that they could in turn redistribute to areas where cereal production was less easy (e. g. in the areas of the Gobi desert) in order to increase their political influence. By way of comparison, one might perhaps think of the resources stocked by Arimazes in his πέτρα, the latter located in a geographical context such as the upper Surxondaryo (but other similar sites could be mentioned in areas such as the Eastern Köýtendağ or the slopes of the Boysuntov) which is characterized by a semi-arid and cold climate with seasonal temperature variations. This means that there is very little, if any, scope for agricultural activities, for the latter can in fact only rarely benefit from sustained irrigation, but more often have to make do thanks to a «dry» regime.<sup>274</sup> In addition to this, the case of Ègijn gol moreover shows how the ability to differentiate the economy of a given territory potentially enabled the élites in control of these resources to acquire levers of political and social influence of considerable purchase in order to bind local communities (even those not entirely dependent on agricultural output) to predictable locations during the summer and autumn seasons, the latter being precisely those of highest mobility and, from the point of view of the local strongmen themselves, a period in which the location of family units (namely their clientele or, in the words of Kiser and Levi, their «selectorate») was subject to the greatest uncertainty and needed therefore to be somehow disciplined (another attempt at state legibility by – paradoxically – an allegedly «non-state» entity par excellence).<sup>275</sup>

Here we are faced with considerations of capital importance for the elaboration of a reconstructive scenario of spatial control strategies (in the physical sense and as it comes to social spaces) in Achaemenid Central Asia that aims at taking into account both the local background and native agency, since the parallel of Ègijn gol implies that those mechanisms of «simplification» and «legibility» that James Scott has recognized as distinctive marks of the transformation ad usum imperii of a given geo-anthropoc environment may have been in the making centuries earlier (and in deference to significantly different socio-political agendas) thanks to the representatives of that sort of powerbrokers between the local population and the satrapal administration that in the (late)

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<sup>274</sup> Curt. 7.11.1-6 as well as Weaverdyck *et al.* 2021, 313-317. A similar scenario had been suggested by Yù 1994<sup>2</sup>, 127-128 and Di Cosmo 2002, 250 with regards to the control (the exact nature and extent of which is still debated among scholars) imposed by the Xiōngnú leaders over (at least some of) the communities settled in modern-day Xīnjiāng, from which steppe élites would have been able (starting at the very latest around the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE) to command taxes, forced labor, and the access to both agricultural products and luxury wares to be redistributed through the steppe networks of allegiance and political solidarity both in Mongolia and far beyond, for example in the regions of Central Siberia such as the territory of Tuva. See on this latter point the relevant chapters in Parzinger 2020<sup>3</sup> as well as the remarks by Nicola Di Cosmo (2002, 35 ff.).

<sup>275</sup> See the (very similar) conclusions reached by Honeychurch 2015, 248 concerning the *Spatial Politics* adopted according to his view by «nomad» Xiōngnú communities to tap into the networks of the entire Sèlèngè valley and in particular at Ègijn gol. For a Qazaq case study cf. Chang 2018, 6-13.

Achaemenid era the Greek and Roman sources designate with terms, generic and therefore not easy to interpret in their precise local meaning, such as *reges*, *duces* or, as we have already mentioned in chapter 2, ὑπαρχοι.

In the context of societies such as those of Ègijn gol and of the oasis-cum-steppa units characteristic of more than one ecological niche within the Achaemenid Central Asian macro-space, the remarks put forward so far regarding the superior economic flexibility of some communities within this same space - characterized, as shown by the ethnographic evidence collected over the last two centuries, by long-lasting and not always smooth processes of negotiation of power relations, which proved however to be decisive in defining the modalities of exploitation of the available resources and of their redistribution (especially, but not only, of the agricultural output), allow us to suggest with some degree of plausibility the emergence - even before the Achaemenid conquest - of forms of hierarchization of the local Central Asian society comparable to what we know about the so-called *xiǎowáng* (小王, or «petty kings», «small local chieftains») of the Xiōngnú period. As far as the evidence allows to tell, these were individuals able to negotiate directly with the Shányú their role within the expanding imperial society of the steppe precisely because of their ability to 1. control and 2. redistribute resources that were extremely important even for the imperial court, but 3. difficult for the latter to acquire without the brokering role of local «collaborators». By virtue of these dynamics, however, such notables in this way acquired negotiating leverage vis-à-vis the authority supposedly superior to them, which could then subsequently be profitably reinvested in the context of horizontal competition (namely between peers) for the maintenance of proximity to the court itself. As for the latter, thanks to precisely this process, which one might argue was weakening its capacity of influencing local politics, on the contrary it can be shown to have progressively extended its infrastructural power in space and to have strengthened within indigenous societies, on whose members cooperation said power ultimately depended.<sup>276</sup>

Going back to the Achaemenid world, this is exactly the same pattern that we see attested, from Karia to Syria, in the case of officials such as Pixodaros or Mausolos - whom Aulus Gellius calls *rex terrae Cariae* but who, the scholar points out, «the authors of Greek history call “prefect of the province of Caria”, which is what the Greeks used to call satrap [in the Latin text *satrapen*]» - or Hadad-yith'i who, in the famous bilingual (Akkadian and Aramaic) of Tel Feḥīrīe (in today's Syrian governorate of al Hasakat, near the river Ḥābūr), does not hesitate for a second to call himself, in Aramaic, nothing less than «king» (*melek*, מלך). The fact that this is an emic (indigenous)

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<sup>276</sup> Comparable dynamics are discussed by Kendirbai 2020, 74-95, 134-139 in her study on the creation of the Russian institution of «protection» (протекция) in the Kalmyk steppes on the one hand and of the «confirmation» (конфирмация) in Qazaq territory.

qualification, perhaps reflecting the local status of Hadad-yith'i, is however made evident by the fact that, in the Akkadian version, the presence of an appellation such as šaknu, i. e. «governor», signals without any possible misunderstandings the subordinate nature - compared to the local satrap - of his function.<sup>277</sup> Further considerations can be added to what has been said so far. The extent of the management process - for example of logistical nature - of supplies such as those that Curtius Rufus suggests were amassed in the fortress of Arimazes (or, as we shall see later in this study, of animals of crucial importance - real imperial assets - such as camels), on a regional or - as it can be argued from another anecdote in the *Historiae*, this time concerning Alexander's Gedrosian expedition on which we shall return in the next chapter, trans-regional scale - allows us (based on the evidence discussed in the previous pages) to suggest that it fell under the responsibility of those who, for example in the context of the history of the Hàn-Xiōngnú frontier, the historical sources describe as individuals performing administrative functions apparently not linked (at least on a formal level) to any particular territory under – or even beyond - imperial rule.<sup>278</sup> In this regard, it is perhaps not out of place to recall Briant's remarks about the term xšaça-, indicating, according to him, first of all a mandate on a given space without being formally and administratively bound to it; therefore, satrap in, not satrap of this or that territory. Given that, as discussed in the previous chapter, in the case of Dādêršiš there are elements which allow to suggest that the bandaka Bāxtrīyā xšaçaṗāvā was indeed «satrap of Baktria», it is not excluded that his appointment formalized («institutionalized», in Wouter Henkelman's words) one single individual within a much more fluid context of informal relations and political «migrations» or inter-élite marriage ties that may have helped to connect a political community (in Briant's words «to tie the state together») across considerably distant territories. From the archaeological point of view, the site of Baga Gazrijn Čuluu (Бага Газрын Чулуу «The Land of Small Stones», located in the district of Dēlgértzagt (Дэлгэрцогт), deep into the Gobi) has recently provided interesting evidence confirming the existence, in pre-Xiōngnú Inner Asia, of what Honeychurch calls «inter-spatial dependencies, possibly linked to the itinerant movements of [local] elites». As far as Baktria is concerned, the only sources at our disposal that open up a glimmer of insight into the socio-political landscape of the upper satrapies at a level that, rather than «lower», it

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<sup>277</sup> Cf. Gell. *NA.*, 10.18.2 on Mausolos as well as, beyond the well-known Xanthos inscription (originally published in the *Fouilles de Xanthos*, vol. VI in 1979), Arr. *Anab.*, 1.23.8 and Strab. 14.2.17 on Pixodaros and his family ties. With regards to the Tel Feḥīrīe inscription see Briant 2002, 767-768. A similar argument might be put forward with regards to a certain Perikles of Limyra (Briant 2002, 672), whose (self)proclamation to king should *not* be read in the light of an attempt by this man to start a revolt against the Great King (then Artaxerxes II). On the contrary – and even more likely in the light of the evidence discussed – his was probably an attempt at advertising his sociopolitical status in the framework of *local* politics and against his own rivals in Asia Minor, for many of such petty chieftains are indeed attested in the historiographic tradition until (and included) the reign of Darius III, from Lydia (Arr. *Anab.*, 1.17.6) to Karia (Diod. Sic. 15.90.3) down to Phrygia (Arr. *Anab.*, 2.3).

<sup>278</sup> Curtius Rufus on Alexander and Gedrosia: Curt. 9.9.17 ff., the latter to be read against Arr. *Anab.*, 6.27 with Henkelman 2017a, 45-49 for the Achaemenid background of the episode.

is perhaps more appropriate to define as «complementary» to that of the satrap, and therefore suggesting a scenario of similar «inter-spatial dependencies» are the historians of Alexander's campaign.<sup>279</sup>

At the time of Alexander's invasion, for example, when he first set foot in Baktria, the family of Oxyartes, who in the words of Curtius Rufus was to become praetor Bactrianorum and – remarkably – lord of «further, larger territories» (probably in or around Gāndhārā), including the future «queen of Asia», namely Rōxanē, was hosted at the residence (πέτρα) of another aristocrat, probably in a satrapy different from the territory under Oxyartes himself. This suggests the existence of complex (and by no means always peaceful) networks of sociopolitical relationships between these members of the local élites which were to a considerable degree external to the hierarchies established by the Great King and his satraps.<sup>280</sup> And if the historiographical tradition may appear excessively flawed by the authors' agenda and by all sorts of misrepresentations of the local context which have recently been studied in great detail by Claude Rapin, the *ADAB* provide, on the contrary, important first-hand evidence of phenomena of «inter-spatial dependencies» capable of significantly influencing the politics of the Baktrian satrapy at least in the course of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE.<sup>281</sup> To put it another way, a thorough assessment of the available archaeological evidence from large and diverse (especially, but not only, in terms of ecological configuration) spatial contexts in pre-Achaemenid Central Asia in the light of the information recently acquired from studies of the prehistory of the steppe Empires in Inner Asia makes it perhaps possible to put forward the suggestion that, far from disappearing from the political scene by virtue of their «assimilation» into the ethno-classe dominante following the Achaemenid invasion in the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century, the representatives of local communities, on the contrary, were able, by virtue of their role as mediators through different socio-political contexts formed in a regime of widespread mobility and high permeability between spatially dispersed but strongly interrelated human groups, to act as «constructive agents» in the process of political and administrative (re)organization of the would-be upper satrapies of the Persian Empire.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> Briant 2002, 693-696 on the methodological caveats necessary when interpreting these and similar sources as well as on the reasons why they are indispensable for a historical analysis of sociopolitical institutions, especially in the Irānian Plateau and Central Asia during both the (late)Achaemenian period and other epochs (or other topics, e. g. courtly life) of the Empire. On this issue see further below chapter 8.

<sup>280</sup> For a comparable scenario see King 2020 (notably again on Baktria, although in later times).

<sup>281</sup> Curt. 9.8.9-11: «amplioris imperii donatus est finibus». On Graeco-Roman (mis)representations of the Central Asian space see most recently Rapin 2014 as well as Goršenina and Rapin 2020, 195-202. With regards to the *ADAB* as providing evidence of a way of interpreting more Bactriano the art of not being governed see Tuplin 2017a and further below especially chapter 7.

<sup>282</sup> Christian 2000, 5-6, de la Vaissière 2004, 41, Honeychurch-Amartuvšin 2006. Nor should one underestimate in this context the constant supply of goods such as meat and dairy products by the «frontier» pastoral communities which, although naturally not absent from the Achaemenid economy, had however to be often acquired through channels «outside» the semi-closed circuit of the imperial political economy: see Henkelman 2005; 2011.

The convenience of such a system for both the actors involved (the Empire and its «subjects») should not be underestimated since, for example, it enabled the «strong» partner within the relationship (namely the imperial administration) to acquire 1. with regularity and 2. at relatively low-cost resources that were as strategic as they were not easily available without interfacing with networks and groups situated «outside» the Empire itself (think for example of horses and pack animals, especially camels). At the same time, however, it also made it feasible for the «weak» counterpart (for example, the representatives of the pastoral communities settled along the borderlands of areas formally recognized, or claimed as such, as being under imperial authority, i. e. the oases) to maintain, and indeed enhance, the multiplicity of their socio-political affiliations, of which dispersed but consistent traces can perhaps be recognized starting already from the material culture of the Bronze and/ or the early Iron Age. Moreover, as Frachetti has recently argued, it does not seem too far-fetched to go one step further and suggest that it was precisely the economic flexibility dictated by a regime of high mobility on the part of Central Asian pastoral communities that proved to be a trump card over time in order not only to maintain but even to strengthen their (élites') political clout by virtue of the role played by such human groups as «constructive agents» of social and economic links between different communities (and with the ascendancy of the Persian Empire between them and a completely new – and wider - political entity). In this context, the representatives of the steppe communities would have taken on the role of guarantors of the maintenance of such ties - or they might even have been entrusted with such a task by the satrapal administration itself - in the light of the exceptional capacity of these individuals (or even of entire communities: a savoir faire built up over time and from both strictly local conditions and locally-driven needs), to «constantly negotiate social relations capable of defining their own [namely of the communities of what we have called the oasis-cum-steppa complex] political social structures», as well as defining the terms of their position as collaborators (in Frachetti's words «partners») of different political systems.<sup>283</sup>

To summarize the main argument developed in this section, one could say that, based on the dataset currently available, there are compelling reasons to believe that, within the socio-economic landscape of pre-imperial Baktria, the so-called mobile herding communities were not marginal (much less so adversarial) entities but instead represented, by virtue of a constant symbiotic interaction with the oases' populations (and it might even be argued that we are often dealing with the members of the same communities enacting different subsistence strategies at different times of the year), the «building block» of the sociopolitical fabric of «urban» prosperity in Bronze Age Central Asia and played moreover a major role in the construction of the system of cultural, economic, and political

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<sup>283</sup> See on this latter point Frachetti 2009.

interactions of the time.<sup>284</sup> As Bertille Lyonnet shrewdly noted thirty years ago, the remarkable stability of subsistence economies (which comparative evidence from Mongolia shows were able to rise far beyond the threshold of mere subsistence) among the pre- and protohistoric peoples of Southern Central Asia could thus adequately explain their - remarkable - ability to resist and absorb even extremely significant transformations in terms of material conditions and political organization.<sup>285</sup> This consideration, in turn, would help to explain the - at first sight baffling - almost total archaeological invisibility of the Persian Empire in the territory of the entire region: by reversing the perspective traditionally adopted, in other words, it could be argued that, instead of having incorporated and shaped the local «society» within, in Scott's terms, the overarching «state-like» structure of the Empire, it is at least equally – if not more - plausible, to assume that it was indeed the latter that had «watered down» itself not as a sign of weakness, but in order to gain more and deeper foothold into the former.<sup>286</sup> As the following pages seek to show in more detail, at the archaeological level the two Baktrio-Sogdian valleys of Surxondaryo and Zarafšān are to be understood as sites of crucial importance for the study of the socio-ecological context that - as it has recently been argued - must be recognized as paramount in (and for) the development, in economic respect and consequently also in terms of socio-political complexity, of the Baktrian space already significantly earlier than the imperial history of the latter. In the case of the Zarafšān valley, for example, repeated archaeological surveys carried out both on the Tağik side of the valley (at sites such as Jukov and Sarazm) and in the context of the Samarqand oasis (Kāfir Qal'a), have shown the chronological depth, extending from the Bronze Age at least until the early Middle Ages (8<sup>th</sup> century CE), of the socioeconomic complexity of an area which - as the aforementioned excavations at Kōktēpe show - has throughout history played the role of an authentic transmission belt between the world of the Central Asian oases and the steppes further to the North.<sup>287</sup>

Similar conclusions can also be drawn from the diachronic study of the Surxondaryo valley, for example of its Northeastern offshoot, in the present O'zbek administrative district of Boysun: here, the excavations begun about ten years ago at the site of Majdatēpe have contributed in radically questioning the traditionally-held view of a regional «decline» starting around 1400 BCE, the latter being allegedly the result of «nomadic invasions», the consequences of which would be reflected, in terms of the archaeological record, in the introduction at the site of ceramic types different than those previously attested. Contrary to this hypothesis, a different suggestion has been put forward, arguing instead in favor of a process of differentiation of livelihood strategies within a territory that, by virtue

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<sup>284</sup> Cf. Frachetti - Rouse 2012, 698.

<sup>285</sup> See especially Lyonnet 1990.

<sup>286</sup> Cf. most recently Lhuillier 2018.

<sup>287</sup> See Khazanov 1992, 73, Mantellini and Berdimuradov 2005 and Mantellini 2014.

of an extremely suitable hydrographic context and, consequently, of an extremely productive soil, looks like as having fostered the development, alongside the traditional transhumant breeding of goats and sheep, of a significant agricultural output that could have contributed in triggering mechanisms of redistribution of resources as well as – and going parallel to the former – dynamics of social stratification. The latter, it has been argued, would seem to be reflected, on the one hand, in the construction - and careful restoration over many decades - of residential structures of considerable size and scenic impact (think of the dual function of the Chorasmian qal‘a studied by Michelle Negus-Cleary: to look at the surrounding territory and at the same time to be looked at from it). On the other, in the production of sumptuary goods that appear to have been used within networks of prestigious exchanges which, undoubtedly through multiple intermediate channels, looks like as having linked an apparently obscure and peripheral O‘zbek valley with the Indian Ocean. At first sight the latter might be held as a rather bold deduction, but it is however one which is made extremely likely by the discovery, in situ, of some remains of shells originating precisely in those distant lands.<sup>288</sup> If we limit ourselves to the local context, thus excluding the implications of wider contacts, the exact features of which in any case currently elude us, an economy with contours similar to those sketched by the excavations at Majdatēpe presupposes a mastery of extremely complex irrigation techniques, once thought to have been introduced into Central Asia by the Greeks (the so-called «miracle» of the Āi Xānum plain), which were then backdated to the transformative action of the Achaemenid Empire, and which now appear in turn to already have been stock of what, to borrow a by-now famous formula by Howard Gardner’s, we might call the «ecological intelligence» of the Baktrian communities, the latter rooted in the Central Asian territory long before the birth of any imperial hegemony in the area.<sup>289</sup>

According to the results of an overview study synthesizing more than 40 years of archaeological activity in Baktria and Sogdiana penned by Henri-Paul Francfort and Olivier Lecomte, for example, as far as the area of Samarqand (Marakanda/Afrāsyāb) and its immediate surroundings are concerned, the existence of structures for channeling the waters of the local catchment area can be dated to a time span swinging approximately between the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE, in an anthropic context moreover which, at least from the following millennium, records the constant presence, both on today’s O‘zbek and Tağik sides of the lower Zarafšān valley, of communities mainly devoted to an economy characterized by semi-settled, if not entirely unsettled («full-scale-nomadism») pastoralism.<sup>290</sup> The consequence of such a survey of the evidence is the emerging of a

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<sup>288</sup> Boroffka 2009, 136, Negus-Cleary 2015b, 150.

<sup>289</sup> Note Gardner 2006 on multiple forms of intelligence and Scott 1998, 309-341 on locally embedded environmental skills.

<sup>290</sup> See Francfort and Lecomte 2002.



socio-economic framework that fits rather well with the definition developed a few years earlier by Soviet archaeologists (in particular by Litvinskiĭ and P'yankova) in order to describe the main features of prehistoric Baktria's anthropic landscape, the correct understanding of which it has been claimed above, is an unavoidable step towards an adequate modelling of the process upstream of the organization and steering the satrapy's functioning during the Persian imperial period. This definition sounds as follows: according to Litvinskiĭ and P'yankova, distinctive features of the Baktrian geo-anthropic landscape would be a population «with traditional dried mud architecture», relying on an economy based both on irrigated agriculture and a considerable proportion of transhumant livestock farming, «with a sophisticated craftsmanship, particularly in the production of ceramics, the latter having developed from earlier [local] traditions, such as that of the Anau culture [Änew, from the Fārsi Āb-e now, or «new water», developed from the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE]: these are some of the distinguishing features of the Baktrian population».<sup>291</sup>

Let us now try to draw some more general conclusions. Since the publication, over a period of many years, of the results of the imposing surveying activity carried out in Eastern Baktria by the research group led by Jean Claude Gardin (1974-1978) has shown in an increasingly convincing manner a tenacious resilience of material culture and - at least according to what can be gained from the analysis of the settlement distribution - of an equally solid consistency of the dynamics of community development (thus not only «urban» in the strictest sense of the word) at least across the centuries-long span from the Late Bronze Age to the entire Achaemenid period inclusive of the latter (i. e. approximately 1500 to 330 BCE), it is perhaps possible to attempt to explain the apparent archaeological invisibility of the Empire in Central Asia by suggesting that this is due to a conscious government strategy aimed at transforming, on the model of the Armenian «columned halls», local socio-spatial nodes of territorial and resource control (by coopting the native population by means of élite recruitment) into, in Khatchadourian's words «delegates» of imperial power.<sup>292</sup> The purpose of such strategy, the argument might go on, was mainly, if not exclusively, to make available to the needs of the imperial administration and with the least possible expenditure of energy and means - first and foremost human and economic - assets of capital importance such as the distribution of water supplies or transhumance routes crossing (for example) a region crucial for the internal connectivity

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<sup>291</sup> Francfort and Lecomte 2002, 640. Cf. moreover Litvinskiĭ and P'yankova 1991, 391 with the remarks in Olbrycht 1998a, 16-17.

<sup>292</sup> Khatchadourian 2016, 68-70. Compare Minardi *et al.* 2017, 14 on the case of Chorasmia, where, perhaps following the local developments in Baktria, in turn steered, if not triggered, by the Persian conquest, «multiple rows of columns in order to roof large, enclosed spaces» were dedicated to the hosting of social events, according to a «distinctive aspect of imperial Achaemenid self-representation».

between the territories of the various satrapies such as the ford of the Amudaryo, North of the Baktra oasis where the political power was first established.<sup>293</sup>

Taking up the example already discussed in the second chapter of this work of the construction of the Chorasmian «royal dams» accounted for in Hdt. 3.117, the aspect that the interpretation of the available evidence proposed in these pages seeks to highlight is that, to obtain the maximum result with the minimum effort, the primary goal of the imperial administration was not so much to create ex nihilo a new imperial élite nor, in an impervious territory like Central Asia, to concentrate the key resources of the satrapy in the hands of a restricted ethno-classe dominante. On the contrary, the ultimate aim, which from an archaeological point of view is notably very difficult to detect on the ground, seems instead to have been the creation of the socio-economic premises that would secure the Empire itself a third party-role in the intra-aristocratic conflicts for the control of the region's resources, taking on the task, through persons of selected trust (the «imperial collaborators», able in turn to use the social capital thus acquired in the internal political arena, on a local and micro-regional scale), of settling disputes and administering resources.<sup>294</sup> This is probably the logic reflected, albeit in a mythologized (one might even say «hagiographic») fashion, in the speech stuffed in Cyrus' mouth by Xenophon following the former's conquest of Assyria: the maintenance of the socio-political structures that predate the advent of Persian hegemony was explicitly intended to serve a dual purpose, not only of political (the famous Achaemenid «tolerance»), but also of strictly economic order, namely the logistical management of human capital, property, and therefore territorial assets.<sup>295</sup>

Consequently, in the case of Baktria the process of «watering down» the Empire within local social structures (which is to say the construction of Clifford Ando's «constitutive outside»), far from signaling the ineffectiveness of Achaemenid control in Central Asia, ought on the contrary to be interpreted as the only truly effective premise for ensuring the sustainability of the - few - strategic nodes that advertised in space the presence of imperial power (the satrapal seat of Baktra, with the imperial archives, the garrisons, some borderland outposts, for example Cyropolis), as well as for guaranteeing the possibility of drawing, at the lowest possible cost, from the unvaluable pool of local (highly qualified) labor force which élite networks controlled and might have made available. In particular the latter, as the Xo'jayevev affair discussed above shows beyond any reasonable doubt,

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<sup>293</sup> Lyonnet 1997, 76 ff. See moreover a recent reassessment of such issues by Havlík 2018; 2021. With regards to the process of transformation into imperial «delegates» sociopolitical devices developed as to wield territorial control on a local scale see Khatchadourian 2016, 118-152.

<sup>294</sup> This is exactly what enabled Russia – which notably started from a defensive position – to acquire a role of paramount influence within the Central Asian steppe during its imperial expansion, as recently shown by Kendirbai's insightful study (2020, 22-42, 103-117, 171-183).

<sup>295</sup> Briant 1982, 179-180. Cfr. Xen. *Oec.*, 4.11, Xen. *Cyr.*, 7.5, Hdt. 1.192. See moreover Tilly 2005 with regards to (among others interpersonal) trust as a crucial political weapon in the hands of a ruler planning his/her own strategy of rooting and expansion of his/her infrastructural power as the direct outcome – but in not few cases even as a condition – of a conquest brought to be manu militari.

provided in fact an indispensable strategic asset for the maintenance of infrastructures that were critical not only to the permanence, but also to the progressive expansion, of the Empire's extractive apparatus (most spectacularly embodied, one example among many, by the imposing irrigation canals).

### 3.2.1.1. Non-Nuclear Settlements and Socio-Spatial Control

As mentioned in the foregoing pages, and as the remainder of this chapter aims to show in further detail, underpinning the arguments developed so far is the adoption of two interpretative paradigms that have been elaborated in a comprehensive manner only in recent years and which, although in sharp contrast to the *opinio communis* of even recent research on the relations between «center» and «frontier zones» in Achaemenid Bactria, are nevertheless extremely promising. That is to say, on the one hand, that of mobility as a crucial feature - not limited, therefore, to the territories «outside» the oases' ecological and geopolitical space - of the socio-economic organization of ancient Central Asia, at least until the Makedonian conquest; on the other hand, a scenario of territorial control and community organization defined by Michelle Negus-Cleary and Johanna Lhuillier as «non-nucleated» and «diffuse» within a spatial context of enormous biological diversity (from the semi-arid steppes, suitable for transhumant grazing, to the so-called *tugaï* (тыгай) forests, typical of Central Asian floodplains and distinguished by riparian vegetation and reeds), capable of allowing significant economic differentiation. Among other things, this implies that, far from being the «natural» development of the region, any spatial increase in agricultural production in a landscape such as Bactria's (including, but not limited to, the context of the oases), which is in itself multi-purpose to the extreme, must be traced back to a specific political intention (in Scott's words, a «positionality»), and as such requires to be properly explained.<sup>296</sup> An investigation of archaeological data, e.g. of the settlements' distribution, from sites such as the Dašt -i Qal'a plain (Āi Xānum and, in the case of the Achaemenid period, the so-called *ville ronde* of Kuhna Qal'a) or the already mentioned Koktēpe and Kyzyltēpe, up to the evidence obtained more recently from Southeastern Uzbekistan (the

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<sup>296</sup> As a way of example, see the – although among them widely differentiated – positions supported by Wittfogel 1957, Briant 1984, Lyonnet 1990 (voicing skepticism in particular with regards to the Wittfogelian model) as well as, more recently, Wu Xin's many contributions (2005; 2012; 2014; 2017; 2018; 2020) on the one hand and, on the other, those supported by means of archaeological and ethnographic evidence by Michelle Negus-Cleary (2007; 2013, 77; 2015a I; 2015b; 2017; 2018) and Michele Minardi (2015a; 2018). Add moreover the remarks by Ursula Brosseder (2011; 2015; 2019), William Honeychurch (2015) and Bryan Miller (2009; 2011; 2015) with regards to the adoption of the mobility paradigm to (better) explain trans-regional interactions in a context such as that of ancient Eurasia. Of paramount importance for the development of an interpretative scenario of «diffused» and «non nucleated» settlement patterns which however does not imply a given human group not being able to effectively take stock of and to control the landscape it claims is the recent contribution by Johanna Lhuillier (2018, 264: see now Lhuillier et al. 2021). Lo Muzio 2017, 37-55 finally provides a useful overview of the status quaestionis from the vantage point of archaeological evidence.

Sherabāddaryo district, for instance at the site of Yultēpe) from a bottom-up (context-specific) perspective of territorial organization and of the communities dependent on it, indeed seems to suggest that what Düring and Stek have called «practical situations on the ground», namely the socio-political, economic, and spatial (ecological) structuring of a given territory, played a much greater role within the strategies of control and extraction developed by the Persian Empire for the purpose of administering the Baktrian satrapy; and this by virtue of the fact that all these factors seem to have compelled a sort of regulatory plan within, and in function of, which constrains the Persian «imperial paradigm» - which we shall explore in more detail in its operational features in the following chapters - must volens-nolens have adapted (rather paradoxically) precisely in order not to deprive itself of effectiveness and propulsive thrust within a local context otherwise dominated by social, political, and economic institutions 1. prior to 2. distinct from, and 3. not infrequently competing for the same space and the same resources with it.<sup>297</sup> Which is to say, with the imperial administration in its numerous, and - in the person of the officials on the ground - not always actively cooperating manifestations.<sup>298</sup> If such an argument is indeed sound, and this chapter has so far been devoted to laying the groundwork for an affirmative answer to this question, in this way we begin perhaps to understand in more detail how, and through what intermediaries, from an extremely remote period - what Seth Richardson has called the phase «before things worked» - political entities as diverse as the first communities of the Mesopotamian alluvium and the Achaemenid Empire made an attempt, the results of which could never be taken for granted, to manipulate to their own advantage both the economic and the socio-political arenas of the spaces over which they claimed power (in our case Central Asia), thus venturing into a process that, in order to be effective, implied the involvement of actors outside the imperial structure (the «conquering society» at the origin, according to the model developed by Briant, of the ethno-classe dominante), not so much through instruments such as the delegation of power, since the real holders of power «in the field» were and would largely remain the natives - as we shall see -, but much more through the bestowal on the latter (or at least on some of them) of a «second level» authority, beyond that already held by a given Baktrian «big man» in his

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<sup>297</sup> Note that this is not an either-or dichotomy, for it can be argued that one of the main reasons for the Empire's longevity was the ability of its (intrinsically exploitative: Tuplin 1987) paradigm to provide enhanced livelihood for its subjects, at least for its élites (note Wu 2018 on Kyzyltēpe's increase in agricultural output under the Achaemenids). Such considerations, let it be noted in passing, let the downfall of the dynasty an even more surprising phenomenon: see now Degen and Rollinger 2023.

<sup>298</sup> See Stančo 2018 and, as far as Kuhna Qal'a is concerned, Ball 2019 n. 631. On the importance of «the *practical situation on the ground*, that is, the nature of preexisting [if compared to the Empire itself] society and economy in a given region and its economic and strategic importance» cf. Düring and Stek 2018a, 10 (emphasis is in the original) as well as, on top of that, the remarks by Negus-Cleary 2007, 18. Of further interest are moreover Briant's considerations (1984, 10), according to which – despite the capillary penetration of Aramaic in almost every corner of the Empire thanks to the spread of Achaemenid bureaucracy - the role played by local languages should nevertheless be held as instrumental in having made possible – and perhaps even smoothed – the diffusion and the rooting of imperial power in the satrapies' territory (thus of course including Baktria) and even in the most impervious among them.

own local context. That is to say, the patent of legitimacy as a representative of the (otherwise absent, or very weakly perceived, but by no means inexistent or ineffective) imperial authority.

As recently pointed out by Mischa Meier regarding - for instance - the case of Imru' al-Qays ibn 'Amr, «king of all the Arabs» - according to at least one of his famous inscriptions - and a very precious ally of the *pars Orientis* of the *Imperium Romanum* along the Sāsānian border, the acknowledgment of such frontier («amphibious») figures as agents in the name and on behalf of both Empires represented, in the context of the communities of origin of the former, a very precious reserve of social capital to be exploited with profit in internal competition, thus cleverly taking advantage of a position that Greg Fisher has recently defined as «in-betweenness», a concept which, especially thanks to Milinda Hoo's studies, is proving to be a theoretical tool with great heuristic potential also in the context of scholarship on Central Asia (especially in the Hellenistic period, but especially her most recent monograph has shown how and how much Achaemenid scholarship might considerably profit from the adoption of similar methodological outlooks).<sup>299</sup> Far from being taken as extraneous socio-political entities - an ideological construct carefully cultivated especially by the historiographical tradition of Graeco-Roman ascendance - from Central Asia to the Arabian Desert, ancient Empires as well as their respective «enemies» seem on the contrary to have had innumerable advantages to draw not only from the existence, but also from the prosperity, of their respective neighbors. This is a remark which, in the context of Achaemenid Bactria, challenges us to rethink on a significantly different basis the conflictual paradigm (in Wu's words «adversarial relationship») currently dominant in the historiography of relations between the Empire and the steppe world, which shall be discussed in more detail in a later chapter.<sup>300</sup> As Michael Frachetti and Lynne Rouse have already remarked with regard to Central Asia in the Late Bronze and Iron Ages prior to the Persian conquest, the redistribution - for example in ritual contexts of aristocratic commensality such as those that Lori Khatchadourian has argued characterized the «meeting points» of Erebuni or Tēpe Nuš -i Ğan - of prestigious goods, raw or processed, acquired through privileged channels, and therefore classifiable as *élite*, must have been regarded as privileged means for constructing social hierarchies

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<sup>299</sup> Fisher 2011, 29-34; 2019, 81-90, Meier 2020, 284-286. On «in-betweenness» in the context of Central Asia see most recently Hoo 2018; 2022, 229-270 as well as the pathbreaking Mairs 2012a; 2013b.

<sup>300</sup> On the «adversarial relationship» between Achaemenid Central Asia and the Empire see Wu 2010; 2014. Cf. Richardson 2017 for the development of a «soft power» model aimed at interpreting the birth and development of the process of community building in Mesopotamia that offers a valuable methodological toolkit to be applied, as attempted in this and the previous chapter, to the phase d'installation of Achaemenid hegemony in Central Asia in general and in Bactria in particular. The construction of a discourse of ontological otherness between the imperial «civilization» and the peoples outside it, especially if they were not settled, is well exemplified by Ammian's judgement (Amm. Marc. 14.4.1-7) regarding the Arab populations, with whom he claims the Empire preferred not to have anything to do (*nec amici nobis umquam nec hostes optandi*).

in a manner perhaps not unlike the use we see being made today of (new categories of) exotic and valuable objects.<sup>301</sup>

Remarkable in this regard is the fact that, in the context of social differentiation and hierarchical organization discussed in their study by Frachetti and Rouse, the circulation of all the most distinctive of these exotica (ranging from metals to precious stones to certain sorts crops, millet, for example, to technological innovations) within Eurasian societies, which is to say in a trans- and multi-scalar process capable of involving - albeit indirectly - an immense number of communities otherwise completely distinct from each other and thus entangling their members within a cultural κοινή which has been compared by some scholars to the «international style» known in the context of the pre-archaic Mediterranean world, seems to have occurred in the absence of central(ized) structures or institutions which are usually supposed to have guided (and have drawn profit from) such flows across vast spaces. Similarly to what William Honeychurch observed about pre-Xiōngnú Mongolia, when such institutions (i. e. a polity of «imperial» nature, or ambitions) become (archaeologically and/or through literary tradition) visible, what changes is not so much the quality (which is to say the modalities, the processes) of its network of political networks and devices of governmentality, but rather the scale on which it is now projected: its «productive capacity». And if it is true that there is a relationship between a process of so-called upscaling (namely quantitative increase) and a qualitative transformation of social dynamics, it is also true that, in Mongolia as in Bactria, this upscaling seems to have taken place 1. through and 2. by virtue of connections, skills, and «human capital» that already existed and were part of extremely well-oiled networks of social relationships and political-economic exchanges and not, or not only, by virtue of the incorporation of these societies into the global «world system» resulting from the Persian conquest.<sup>302</sup> The excavation activity carried out in recent years in the Sherabāddaryo oasis by the research group led by Ladislav Stančo seems to provide further plausibility to the interpretative scenario proposed here in the Baktrian context, at least as far as the regimentation of water and the cultivation of the oasis' territory are concerned, for the latter appears in fact to have developed from a simple yet very effective system of canals a little more than a few kilometers long, organized according to an extremely efficient scheme of water

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<sup>301</sup> See on such point Frachetti and Rouse 2012, 705, Naerebout 2010, Versluys 2014, and Richardson 2016, with the latter being particularly important because of the scholar's discussion of the process of *mutual* acknowledgment between élite groups typical of the Assyrian Empire in territories which the latter controlled mainly by way of *claiming* them as belonging to the Empire (Scott's «cosmological blusters»).

<sup>302</sup> Honeychurch 2015, 41-47. Cf. Wallerstein 2004 on his concept (which has however undergone strong criticism especially as far as scholarship on the ancient world is concerned) of «world system». Regarding globalization theories applied to understand a pre-industrial society see Jennings 2011, Pitts and Versluys 2015, Hodos 2017 and the other contributions collected in her *Handbook of Archaeology and Globalization* (esp. Colburn 2017 on the Achaemenid Empire). A good overview of this recent scholarly trend is provided from an economic perspective by Hoo 2021.

redistribution for the benefit of individual plots structured around a larger site. With regards to this issue, two points deserve to be particularly stressed.

The first concerns the fact that, as Stančo himself noted, such an arrangement of space could well have been achieved by the local population in the absence «of the will and resources of a centralized state».<sup>303</sup> The second is that this precise pattern of territorial management and exploitation is attested in key sites of the Achaemenid satrapies of Baktrian and Sogdiana, above all at Kyzyltëpe, which confronts us with the at least plausible archaeological confirmation of a phenomenon that, as we shall have the opportunity to discuss, the ethnographic evidence collected as late as the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century illustrates in a blatant manner. Namely that, in Central Asia, even for a centralizing and vertically oriented state like the Soviet Union, the optimal exploitation of its territory and resources was not only unfeasible, but even inconceivable in the absence of the exploitation, by cooptation, of skills largely external to the managerial cadres of the state itself, and therefore, for the most part, difficult, or just impossible, to control, as on the contrary it was theoretically envisaged by the bureaucratic-administrative organization as well as by the power hierarchies in force - at least on paper - in the territory of the Central Asian Soviet Socialist Republics, from the Caspian to the Pāmīr mountains.<sup>304</sup> In a territory such as that of the future Achaemenid satrapies of Baktria and Sogdiana, characterized as it was by a geographical complexity (in terms – to name but a few examples - of soil and climate) whose repercussions on the socio-spatial organization of the indigenous communities (and even more so of those who, like the Graeco-Makedonians, had to become accustomed to such an ecological context) have been the subject of detailed study by Soviet archaeologists and ethnographers - who were the first to identify, in just one of the territories they surveyed, the presence of no less than six different climatic niches -, it is easier to appreciate how the mastery of the resources made available by the territory (namely its affordances) on the part of the indigenous communities constituted a decisive asset for the effective rooting of the Empire's infrastructural power.<sup>305</sup>

To mention only a few of the most studied cases of this ecological polyvalence of the Baktrian territory, starting from floodplains such as those of the Amudaryo or Surxondaryo, conditions change abruptly as soon as one approaches the slopes of mountain ranges such as the Kōýtendağ, Tujuntov, Boysuntov or the Hişār (in the Southwest of present-day Uzbekistan and Northwest Tağikistān, respectively).<sup>306</sup> Here, in fact, the landscape becomes at the same times both more composite and more rugged, as the alluvium gives way to semi-arid hills and mountain slopes on the one hand while, on the other, the higher-lying belt of steppe and pastureland unwinds, the latter

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<sup>303</sup> Stančo 2018, 187 and now his 2020 overview (though focused on the Hellenistic period).

<sup>304</sup> See most recently Stančo 2019. With regards to the ethnographic evidence from Soviet times see Northrop 2004, Hirsch 2005, Kindler 2014, and Teichmann 2016, in each case with further bibliography.

<sup>305</sup> See e. g. Stride 2005 I, 118; 2007 as well as, most recently, Weaverdyck *et al.* 2021, 313-317.

<sup>306</sup> Cf. the pioneering Érghešov 1974.

having historically formed a transmission hinge between the (political) nodes of the oases fed by the rivers downstream. This remarkable diversity, however, should not make us forget that a definition of the Baktrian space in terms of «ecological niches» primarily serves classificatory purposes, and that the true effectiveness of such a descriptive system can only be understood if a given study's final aim is not the individual niche, rather the landscape as a whole, since archaeological and ethnographic investigation reveals in fact how the latter was organized according to what may appear to us to be divisions of a cultural nature («steppes» and «oases») and which in fact were developed only according to the potential of each of these niches for the exploitation of closely interacting human groups. This is why it appears unwarranted, although especially in the non-archaeological literature it is a constant in the discussion on the Baktrian landscape, to distinguish between physical and anthropic characteristics in Achaemenid Central Asia, and it would instead be more prudent to speak, as Sebastian Stride has done, of «human space», the latter composed of (and exploited by) symbiotically interacting and mutually conditioning sociopolitical units.<sup>307</sup>

The central factor that needs to be emphasized here is the breadth of subsistence strategies that an ecological context such as the one just described structurally implies, as well as the consequent socio-political complexity of the communities settled in such a space, all of which are capable, as Negus-Cleary has already observed with regards to the Amudaryo delta, of imposing non-negligible limits on the spectrum of governmentality strategies available to those who wish to control such territories.<sup>308</sup> As attested, for example, by the ethnographic research carried out in Qaraqalpag'iston at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, these subsistence strategies can in fact range from the most varied forms of agriculture («dry» and/or «flooded») to the many nuances of steppe pastoralism, which in itself is extremely differentiated not only by virtue of the strategies adopted (transhumance, vertical pastoralism or the so-called «semi-sedentary» herding, i. e. based on the seasonal practice of farming a few, very specific products besides livestock breeding), but also of the specialization(s) of such pastoralism, since the needs of animals such as sheep, goats, cattle, horses, and camels are different from each other, and consequently condition how a given community perceives (and works to manipulate) the space it inhabits and experiences.<sup>309</sup> As the next section will attempt to show (once again based on a hydrological example), the joint results, both in terms of the accumulation of new information, especially the evidence coming from Xiōngnú-ruled territories, and from a renewed - and apparently fruitful - dialogue between scholars

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<sup>307</sup> Stride 2005 I, 35.

<sup>308</sup> Negus-Cleary 2007, 18.

<sup>309</sup> On such dynamics the anthropologist Tim Ingold (2000) has written insightful pages. Sala 2022 for an insightful ecological history of the camel (both Baktrian and Arabian).



of «marginal» and «contested» spaces and societies (precisely because of their being «in-between») which has shown with great clarity the remarkable «generative» (creative) potential of innovations that later became widely diffused within what - in a reversal of perspective - we could define the Empire as a frontier (viz. the Empire's frontiers), of the last decades of Central (Eur)Asian research would suggest to the scholar of Achaemenid Central Asia at least three preliminary conclusions, from which in no small measure the picture we are able to draw of the organization and functioning of the satrapy considerably depends.<sup>310</sup>

The first is that the ecological complexity of even relatively small territories such as the Surxondaryo valley constitutes a highly compelling argument against the hypothesis of a distinction, however blurred, between the inhabitants of the Central Asian space, the structuring of whose relational universe followed - in all likelihood - criteria of political affiliation (and of the invention of those social (and even genealogical affiliations), i. e., to quote Hobsbawm, of traditions) closely linked to the local context.<sup>311</sup> Secondly, and arguably even more importantly, the environment is not a static object within which human groups move in accordance with their «traditions» (conceived themselves as static «customs»), but is itself, in part, both shaped by non-anthropogenic factors and actively serving specific and potentially competing political and economic agendas. These agendas are, in addition, constantly open, by virtue of their interaction in and with the space within which the human groups that are the proponents of these agendas find themselves, to contamination, adaptation, and modification often (but by no means exclusively) brought to be as a response to changes of a historical or environmental nature, or of both. Even if we were to remove the anthropic component from our interpretative framework for a moment (which we cannot), studying, as it is usually still the case, the impact of the Achaemenid conquest on the Baktrian context without taking adequate account of the structural limits to which the environmental background subjected the imperial modelling of Central Asian space appears to be a workflow which is intrinsically methodologically flawed.<sup>312</sup> The third, and for the purposes of

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<sup>310</sup> See e. g. the remarks in Meier 2020, 1070-1088 and Versluys forthcoming.

<sup>311</sup> Cf. for example the works by Digard 1990, Zadneprovsky 1990, Khazanov 1992 and especially Stride 2005 I, 143-144. A useful introduction to the socio-spatial context of contemporary Afġānistān is provided by Barfield 2010, 32-40. Although by now almost 50 years old, Jentsch 1973 still remains fundamental as far as the organization of social and economic life of mobile herders in Afġānistān and neighboring territory is concerned. One of the reason for the importance of this study is its emphasis on the issue of mobility (on which see most recently Kendirbai 2020 within a Central Asian context) as a mean of establishing and keeping up contacts with far away regions over rugged territories: in the case of Afġānistān, this made possible, among other things, that vital sociopolitical ties over a territory which has to be regarded as a *continuum* between different (modern) political entities did not broke up even during the most troubled times in Southeastern Central Asia before the rise of the Tālibān (namely the Taġik civil war between 1992 and 1997).

<sup>312</sup> See on this latter issue the insightful remarks by Briant 1983, 48, Gentelle 1989, 35-49, as well as, more recently, Fisher 2019, 1-23 and Meier 2020, 276-289 (the latter focused on case studies methodologically very similar to the one discussed in these pages concerning the sociopolitical relationship at the frontier of the Imperium Romanum). Crucial to an adequate understanding of the spatial context within which the action of a given human community unfolds is Weaverdyck *et al.* 2021. From the perspective discussed here, the publication, by Richard Payne and Rhyne King, of a

this work truly decisive, conclusion, can be further articulated in two subpoints. 3.1.: The traditional, and still recurrent, distinction between a «sedentary» Baktria and a «Scythian» Sogdiana (not to mention Chorasmia) as well as the identification of the corresponding boundary of Achaemenid diplomacy – if not, straightforwardly, impact - along the watershed between «oasis» and «steppe» must be abandoned in favor of a more complex scenario of the socio-political organization of the communities settled in Central Asia prior to the Achaemenid conquest.<sup>313</sup> Just as in the case of the *limes Africae* it was never possible to separate (too) clearly between Romans and «barbarians», in the same way there is reason to think that, at best, a distinction between «Persians» and «non-Persians» in Baktria and Sogdiana was only contextual (evoked, for instance, for purposes of self-representation, as in the case of *Bīsūtūn*), but had little to do with the everyday reality of the satrapy. This, obviously, has important consequences for the picture of imperial society in Central Asia that the historian is able to pierce together.<sup>314</sup> Finally, 3.2., following an important intuition from Scott's research according to which the absence, or disappearance, of identifiable «central» nuclei and/or structures of power in a given space - a phenomenon generally summed up by the rather generic use of terms such as «weakness» or «collapse» - is in fact much more likely to reflect dynamics of «reformulation and decentralization» of a system of socio-spatial control rather than «the dissolution of a civilization», what remains of this chapter seeks to demonstrate how the interpretative paradigms adopted in the course of the present study (above all that of mobility and the diffuse, «non-nucleated» nature of the settlement system) allow at the same time 1. to explain the reasons for the archaeological invisibility of the Empire in Baktria without having to assume a not better defined «weakness» of the latter in Central Asia, while 2. helping in clarifying, in a manner as economical and effective as possible, 2.1. the reasons for the stability of an imperial project which, it should be remembered, based on what we know at the present stage of research, seems to have remained firmly in control of the upper satrapies for two and a half centuries, as well as 2.2. the structural limitations entailed in a paradigm of governmentality which, precisely to be effective, needed however to be constantly reasserted and readapted to the «practical

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very recent volume (2020) devoted to *The Limits of Empire in Ancient Afghanistan* is therefore particularly welcome: see e. g. their co-authored introduction for further insight on the methodology adopted through this chapter.

<sup>313</sup> A case in point is the Herodotean cataloguing of the inhabitants of the Pontic steppes (e. g. *Hdt.* 5.3, 5.17.2, 5.18.1), from which it clearly emerges that, in fact, at least some among classical authors were perfectly aware that there was nothing «Non-Scythian» about agriculture: see moreover Briant 1984, 220 and Minardi 2015a, 7, whose remarks can be compared with the results of the excavations carried out by a German-O'zbek research team at the site of Bandykhan in the Surxondaryo valley (Boroffka 2009, 135-136).

<sup>314</sup> Categorical distinctions of this kind have been shown to be much more the result of the ideological agendas of ancient ethnographers than of the reality on the ground: see for instance *Strab.* 11.11.2 (but *Xen. Anab.*, 1.4.19. shows, perhaps unintentionally, a much more refined sensibility) and the commentary by Briant 1984, 169. More in detail on the - questionable - attempts to classify the non-sedentary population of Central Asia in pre-Islamic times see Khazanov 1992, 73, 1994<sup>2</sup>, XXXIII, Abdullaev 2007, 83-86, Rapin 2007, 20-27, and Plischke 2014, 67-68. Giangiulio 2010c is an illuminating contribution to the *situational* nature of ethnicity (but see most recently on the same issue in the context of the Achaemenid Empire Colburn 2020a, 131-188; 2020c).

situations on the ground» within those sociopolitical contexts that the Achaemenid Kings and their satraps intended to control and exploit through the paradigm itself.<sup>315</sup>

The main reasons accounting for what might legitimately be called The Limits of Empire in Achaemenid Afġānistān are to be found, as we will try to show, in the social complexity which, especially, but by no means only, in contexts such as Bactria, Sogdiana, and Chorasmia, paradoxically ought to be regarded as one of the greatest strengths of the very same imperial paradigm: in other words, in the dialectic between, on the one hand, the acknowledgment of native élites at imperial level and, on the other, the ties of 1. dependence, 2. conflict, and 3. competition on a local and trans-regional scale, both within power groups which were at the same time rival and neighboring (or rival because of their being such) and, as it shall become clearer thanks to the evidence provided by the *ADAB*, between the former and the satrapal administration itself.

### 3.3. *In suos quisque vicos dilapsi*: a Microphysiology of Political Negotiation



**Map 4.3. Of People and Empire: an Overview of Northeastern Achaemenid Central Asian Settlement.** © Peter Palm

The Roman historian Curtius Rufus opens the section devoted to the war of attrition between Alexander and Bessos in Bactria with an anecdote from which it may be useful to start in this section in order to proceed in more detail in order to develop the reconstructive scenario underlying the interpretation offered in this chapter concerning the genesis, development, characteristics, and limits of Achaemenid hegemony in Bactria. According to the author of the *Historiae Alexandri*, therefore,

<sup>315</sup> See Scott 2017, 186.

Bessos marched into Central Asia at the head of «eight thousand Baktrians who faithfully obeyed his orders». However, as soon as it became clear that the new Great King (Artaxšassa V, i. e. the (former)satrap of Baktria, Bessos himself) had no intention of facing his opponent in the open field and that «the harshness of their [of the country of the Baktrians] climate» would not deter the Makedonians from continuing their pursuit, «they left Bessos as one man and took refuge in their own villages».<sup>316</sup> With the sole – although particularly authoritative - exception of Pierre Briant, to my knowledge this passage from Curtius has so far received less attention than it deserves, and it is to the analysis of this episode developed in the *History of the Persian Empire* by the French scholar that we owe, in its essential lines, the elaboration of a hierarchical model of the imperial organization as it might have looked like in the Central Asian territory at the time. According to this hypothesis, the «eight thousand faithful Baktrians» would represent an intermediate category (given the state of our sources is at present practically impossible to be more precise) between the satrap, to whom they were at least formally subordinate, and the local population, which this sort of small landed nobility (which does not per se rule out that its representatives came from a non-sedentary society of warrior shepherds, or at least aspired to present themselves as such) governed and for which - as well as for the resources that the latter was able to extract from the landscape, including, perhaps, from other human groups living in this spaces - they were answerable to the satrap as well as, in the last instance, to the Great Achaemenid King himself.<sup>317</sup>

Undoubtedly due to the extreme scarcity of available sources, as far as I am aware no one has tried since Briant's studies to go further in the assessment of this passage. This might have been done, for example, by trying to guess what kind of reciprocal relations might have existed *between* these individuals and how the presence of such a high number of local strongmen, even if we want to consider the mention of eight thousand aristocrats owners of «villages» - because such they must have been, since they are described as «allies» (clientes, perhaps a rendering of the Old Persian *bandakā*?) of the former satrap of Baktria, now Great King - following Bessos as an exaggeration, we are in any case talking about, at least, of several tens, if not several hundreds of Central Asian notables, scattered throughout the territory of the satrapy influenced its organization - not to mention the methods of co-optation and control - by the Empire itself. Taking my cue, on the one hand, from the study of the Chorasmian *qal'a* as sociopolitical and spatial devices as well as of their functional, if not architectural, equivalents scattered throughout the territory of the Armenian *dahayāuš* developed by Michelle Negus-Cleary and Lori Khatchadourian while, on the other, drawing from the

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<sup>316</sup> Curt. 7.4.20: «Octo milia Bactrianorum habebat armata Bessos; quae, quamdiu propter caeli intemperiem Indiam potius Macedonas petituros crediderant, oboedienter imperata fecerunt: postquam adventare Alexandrum conpertum est, in suos quisque vicos dilapsi Bessum reliquerunt».

<sup>317</sup> Briant 1983, 208-226; 1984, 81-86; 2002, 743-754.

reflections developed by Owen Lattimore and William Honeychurch, I would be keen to recognize in the behavior shown by the eight thousands who deserted Bessos a sign of the existence, at least in 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE Bactria, of what Honeychurch himself has called «spatial politics»: that is to say, the application, in order to negotiate political relations, of infrastructural power underpinned by the exploitation of a given space's shared knowledge and of the ability to move within it.<sup>318</sup> This definition brings with it several implications, which shall be further explored in what follows.

Read through the lenses of spatial politics theories, Curtius' evidence suggests, at the very least, 1. that the various non-settled communities (and according at least to the catalogue of Darius III's army at Gaugamela as reported, for example, by Arr. *Anab.*, 3.8.3, it seems clear that some of their representatives were an integral part of the Baktrian contingent led by Bessos) had, and were able to effectively apply, different versions of their bargaining and military strategy both with respect to their peers and to the political entity within which they were integrated or to which they were, temporarily, allied. From the above passage, moreover, it might be argued 2. that the quality of such politics could change as the scale of reference (imperial, satrapic, micro-regional) shifted and, finally, 3. that in a landscape such as the Baktrian one, «extensive and differentiated through deserts, pastures, forests and mountains», far from constituting an impediment to a complex system of social organization, interaction at the intra-community level through mobility practices in a context of high demographic dispersion (in suos vicos quisque [octo milia Bactrianorum] dilapsi) ought on the contrary to be treated as a formidable strategy aimed at coordinating 1. individuals, 2. families, and 3. communities both in systems of mutual solidarity (the point of view of the eight thousand rebels who decide to renounce the «protection» of Bessos in favor of organized defense of their territory from a bottom up perspective and starting at a lower administrative level than that of the satrapy) and of unequal relations (the outlook preferred, on the contrary, by the Empire and which, at a certain point during Alexander's campaign, it is clear that Bessos was no longer able to enforce).<sup>319</sup>

Therefore Curtius Rufus' crucial testimony suggests that, apart from the «organizing thrust» of the Empire, evident as it is in the system of military co-optation - which Arrian calls σύλλογος - and which allowed such village units to be managed by the satrapal administration, the «deep history» of Bactria's rural hinterlands was geared towards (and steered by) the domains of the local aristocracy, whose members were endowed with much greater authority than, for example, the beneficiaries of royal gifts (e. g. the Gonghilidae enlisted in Cyrus the Younger's army).<sup>320</sup> From the perspective of

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<sup>318</sup> Honeychurch 2015, 66-67. Cf. with regards to this issue also Negus-Cleary 2017 (who - notably - does explicitly refer to Xiōngnú settlement patterns as a useful touchstone to make sense of Central Asian archaeological evidence).

<sup>319</sup> Curt. 7.4.21. See moreover a similar phrasing in Arrian's text: Arr. *Anab.*, 3.28.10 («οἱ δὲ τῶν Βακτρῶν ἰππεῖς ὡς φεύγειν ἐγνωκότα ἔμαθον Βῆσσον, ἄλλος ἄλλη ἐπὶ τὰ σφῶν ἕκαστοι ἀπηλλάγησαν»).

<sup>320</sup> On the (Persian? Persian developing local traditions?) institution of the σύλλογος cf. Arr. *Anab.*, 4.1.5. On the Gonghilidae see Xen. *Anab.*, 2.1.3. Of paramount importance are Briant's remarks on the matter (2002, 748-750).

any given ruling class, as Owen Lattimore (who speaks of «an empowered elite») already stressed some decades ago, the adoption of policies of control, surveillance, and of power management that make strategic use of topographical and mobility skills in order to engage individuals or, on a different scale, entire communities, in relationships aimed at backing the interests of one faction at the expense of those other communities - and of those other individuals - held to be competitors or directly antagonistic, can be recognized as a staple of any Empire, whether «nomadic» or not, but having considerable interests (e. g. more or less extensive borderlands) located in territories - such as the Eurasian steppes – distinguished by an elevated rate of «state-flight potential». The main reason for this is that, as recently stressed also by scholars of ancient Central Asia, the overarching goal of every imperial strategy of governmentality is to secure «control over the rights of movement of the population» and, consequently, the effective political and economic domination of a given space.<sup>321</sup>

In other words, while trying to make sense of the defection of the «eight thousand faithful» from Bactria and their retreat «into their own villages», it is perhaps possible to suggest that the literary tradition has transmitted to us - obviously without being (entirely?) aware of it - a cross-section of the organization, at a micro-territorial level, of Achaemenid power in Bactria (and of its «imperial collaborators» over an even wider space), which must therefore have been based on the satrap's ability, by virtue of his *bandakā*'s cooperation, to monitor, mobilize, accelerate, channel and, if necessary, restrict (what Bessos evidently was no longer able to do) the movements of populations, resources, and objects «within a highly dynamic framework». As Lattimore aptly remarked, those are all skills which consistently provided the ruling class of a rural community as well as, at a broader scale, of a satrapy or of an Empire with considerable leverage through which to assert its political interests.<sup>322</sup>

Perhaps the most intriguing consequence in applying an interpretative framework such as the one proposed here to Curtius Rufus' passage is that it makes possible to take into account the different agendas (both in the same context and, more importantly, at a socio-political level below the satrapal one, at which the gaze of the available sources mostly stops) underlying the application of «spatial politics» to a context such as Bactria's.<sup>323</sup> In fact, as it has been pointed out on the one hand by Scott and, on the other, by Honeychurch and Khatchadurian, even from the viewpoint of social actors whom we would not incline to classify as élites (but on whose consent and cooperation the men we identify as such – for example an individual like Spitamenes - depended to a substantial extent), the use of their spatial expertise in political negotiation provided a highly effective tool in situations (such as

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<sup>321</sup> Negus-Cleary 2015b, 125-128; 2017, 303-307.

<sup>322</sup> See Lattimore 1988, 67.

<sup>323</sup> Tuplin 2017a on the challenge of making sense of the sociopolitical organization of Achaemenid power in the satrapies below the highest levels of the imperial hierarchies (for the *local* ones are even more difficult to assess – but see for an attempt in this direction e. g. Briant 2017a, 502-510).

the one accounted for by Curtius) of fragmentation and resistance, as well as for the purpose of accommodating «asymmetrical power structures» to one's own advantage. This could for example be achieved – as Honeychurch remarks - through the acquisition and redistribution of products, from animals to furs and metals, characteristic of the steppe sociopolitical and economic networks.<sup>324</sup>

From the close reading of this passage, therefore, what surfaces is a more precise characterization of the social, political, and economic-ecological landscapes of Central Asia in the form, to use Honeychurch's terminology once again, of a negotiating environment within which authority, control, but also goods and resources cannot be concentrated or easily monopolized either socially or spatially.<sup>325</sup> However, as emerges very clearly from the analysis of Persepolis' archival documents (and to some extent from the *ADAB* themselves), it is precisely this aspiration to centralization and monopoly that seems to have constituted one of the central elements underpinning the Achaemenid imperial project (but many other examples might be quoted, from the Andean Empires to China). Nevertheless, and despite the «ambitions» (Richardson's desires) of the Persian Kings, the opacity of the social structures on which the premises for the effectiveness of the Empire's extractive and redistributive capacities rested indicates, rather bluntly, the limits of Achaemenid power to intervene directly within the socio-political organization of the territories it (nominally) controlled, which on the other hand only underlines once again the decisive role of the autochthonous component within and for the functioning of the satrapal administrative machine.

Considerations of this kind, together with some penetrating remarks recently put forward by Miguel John Versluys, it should be noted, make it possible to drastically rethink the meaning of Bactria's borderlands (of those internal as in the case of the semi-desert territories at the oases' outskirts, as well as of the external ones, as in the case of the territories «beyond the river», such as the Fargāne, according of the mental map which can be gained from the royal inscriptions, theoretically, already beyond imperial reach) during Persian hegemony. As a short aside, it may also be of some interest to further investigate if and to what extent a similar line of reasoning might fruitfully be applied also to subsequent epochs. Rather than representing a territory subject to - and source of - constant threat, thus to be militarily close-guarded, and in which to stage shows of force for preventive purposes (e. g. the Scythian expedition against Skunkha), Achaemenid Central Asian borderlands should perhaps rather, and better, be understood as a – both physical and symbolic - space of enormous opportunity for the Empire. According to such a perspective, the chief aim of its ruling class ought to be seen not so much in isolating an allegedly *Perilous Frontier* from a more peaceful «space of control and intervention». On the contrary, recent scholarship on imperial borderlands has

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<sup>324</sup> Scott 2009, 127-177, Honeychurch 2015, 68, Khatchadourian 2016, 181-185.

<sup>325</sup> Honeychurch 2015, 72, Stark 2020.

made the strong case that the paramount objective much more often was to carve out a deal which was as advantageous as possible with the representatives of powers external to imperial hierarchies (and nevertheless at the same time considerably involved in the power games of local societies within the Empire itself): and this because precisely such powerbrokers were, and in view of their superior ability to navigate them were recognized as being, the actual masters of these spaces. This is true, it can be shown, both from the perspective of a territorial as well as from that of a cultural and symbolic competence of a given liminal space.<sup>326</sup> From Hàn (and later Táng) China to the *limes Africae*, and from the Great Wall to the so-called red snake of Sāsānid-ruled Gorgān, several Empires (and, noteworthy, the Achaemenid one does not seem to have been among them) in the course of their history have adopted countermeasures (another example of «spatial politics») to somehow master the opacity (and permeability, the latter also – in Scott’s terms - a symptom of «illegibility») of their borderlands and therefore to get the upper – or even just a better – hand of the population mastering said borderlands and their much coveted resources.<sup>327</sup>

However, if until quite recently the prevailing trend among scholars has always been to see in such territorial engineering tools the expression of defensive mechanisms against dangers coming from the outside, authors such as Nicola Di Cosmo, James Scott and, in a particularly convincing way with regard to Sāsānid Ērān, Richard Payne, have instead advanced, and supported with very strong arguments, the opposite claim, that is, that the purpose of devices such as those mentioned above was, first and foremost if not exclusively, to avoid as much as possible the disintegration of the imperial frontier from within by individuals (including, undoubtedly, more or less restless representatives of local élites) whose interests and social, political (of domination as well as of dependence) as well as economic ties gravitated much more beyond the (artificially constructed and never officially formalized) imperial frontier zones than on this side of it.<sup>328</sup> This is all the truer – the scholars further argue - by virtue of the fact that, as it is typical of any imperial worldview, court ideology did not know nor could tolerate any kind of boundaries to its power, which of course implies the (theoretical) impossibility of acknowledging other political entity but itself.<sup>329</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> On the relationships between Central Asia and the steppes in Achaemenid as well as later times see Stark 2020; 2021, while as far as the «creative» role played by frontier zones in the framework of global(ized and «globalizing») «inter-imperiality» see Doyle 2018; 2020, Versluys forthcoming and, for an Achaemenid case study, Rollinger 2021c; 2023.

<sup>327</sup> See on Táng China most recently Skaff 2017.

<sup>328</sup> Rollinger and Nickel forthcoming for an insightful comparative discussion of such spatial devices across world history.

<sup>329</sup> The immense bulwark (roughly 195 kilometers in length) stretching across the territory of once Achaemenid Hyrkānia (and known to the local Turkic-speaking populations as *qizil yilan* i. e. «red snake») was part of a sophisticated process of monumental and symbolic redefinition of the imperial space undertaken by the Sāsānid dynasty at a particularly critical moment of its history (cf. Canepa 2018, 271-290). On this strategy of territorialization of Sāsānid Irānian frontier cf. the radically different positions of Payne 2015; 2017 on the one hand and, on the other, Daniel Potts (2014, 156 and reiterated with further details concerning in particular the disastrous campaign of Pērōz I in 484 in Transoxiana against the Hephthalites (Ἐφθαλίται in Byzantine sources) in Potts 2018). On these events see also Meier 2020, 731-743. Weaverdyck *et al.* 2021, 313-317 on (post) Hellenistic walls in Central Asia as well as King 2021, 353-361 for a compelling Achaemenid case study based on the *ADAB* documents.



As Curtius Rufus' passage suggests, the possibility for the Central Asian populations (or at least a privileged group within their ranks) to make themselves invisible to the Empire in response to measures perceived by the latter as detrimental to their (most prominent representatives') «particular» interest (as per Guicciardini's *Ricordi* 110) ought to be regarded as a weapon constantly available to the Achaemenids' political counterparts in Central Asia; and the latest stages of Bessos' (and after him of Spitamenes') career show what consequences the deployment of such a weapon on a large scale could entail for the stability not only of a satrapy, but of the Empire as a whole. The fact that nothing comparable to the Gorgān wall is known in the context of Achaemenid Bactria neither from archaeological nor from literary sources (which surely would not have failed to exploit the opportunity of piling up more evidence supporting their portrait of the crumbling imperial power), rather than providing evidence of the precariousness of Persian control of the satrapy, raises instead the question concerning on which grounds the satrapal administration felt sufficiently confident of its collaborators' loyalty – if not outright support - not to resort to spatial engineering measures of this kind, for there can be no doubt about the ability to successfully implement them if one only considers an endeavor such as Darius' construction of an Achaemenid version of the Suez Canal.<sup>330</sup> In order to attempt to answer this question, however, it is crucial to delve further into the ecological-spatial context of Northern Achaemenid Central Asia's borderlands (both the inner and the outer ones). Starting from an ecological perspective, this shall be the focus of the reminder of section 3 of the present chapter, while the same issue will be tackled through the lenses of ethnography in section 4.

### 3.3.1. *Imperium sive natura*: Contested Ecologies in Bactria

Underlying the approach developed in these pages is, as mentioned above, a dynamic, dialectical (one might perhaps say «constructivist») understanding of the interactions between human communities on the one hand and the environment on the other. In recent years, this approach has gained foothold in archaeological research under the name of «political ecology».<sup>331</sup> Among the several reasons recommending the adoption of such a theoretical framework for the analysis of Bactria's spaces, especially during the auroral phase of Achaemenid Central Asian imperial history, the following deserve to be explicitly underlined. Firstly, by emphasizing both «natural» and «cultural» factors, and in particular by stressing the political importance of geographical space and its use by human communities as well as individuals within them (what scholars of human geography

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<sup>330</sup> See Tuplin 1991 as well as Colburn 2018 on the considerable transformation of Egyptian landscape under the Achaemenids to suit imperial needs. On the sociopolitical logics underpinning other analogous projects of spatial engineering see the considerations developed by Chandra Mukerji (2008; 2015) and the remarkable Westerman 2002.

<sup>331</sup> Weaverdyck *et al.* 2021, 302-304, with further bibliography.

call «spatial politics/practices»), a study of Achaemenid Bactria which takes the lead from the perspective of ecological politics makes it possible to circumvent determinist assumptions and reifying visions of the physical environment, while also leaving open the stage for comparative analysis. Secondly, by virtue of such a understanding of landscape as a dynamic and ever-changing social actor, scholarship on political ecology opens up interesting avenues for discussing how factors as diverse and (apparently) unrelated as climate change and the redefinition of the geopolitical landscape are able to restructure human behavior without, however, disregarding the constantly-shifting nature of the relationship between human beings themselves and the physical and symbolic world in which they are immersed and with which they interact.

A good example of the restructuring of community behavior that seems to have marked the socio-spatial organization of pre-Achaemenid Bactria comes from the most recent results of excavations carried out at the sites of Džarkutan and Ulugtēpe, located respectively in the modern states of Uzbekistan and Türkmenistan).<sup>332</sup> Consistent with Scott's observations regarding the fallacy of judging the effectiveness of a given social system by virtue of its territorial visibility, archaeologists who have studied the two settlements both in their broader spatial context and over time, from the Bronze Age to the Achaemenid and early Hellenistic periods, have come to the conclusion that, following the (misleadingly) so-called «collapse» of the civilization(s?) that had given rise to the Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex, the available information does not suggest, as hitherto believed, the beginning of a kind of Central Asian «dark age» which would have ended by virtue of the Persian conquest, but rather indicates more simply a different organization of the territory, centered on «small village units» that seem to have replaced sites of a proto-urban character and extended into new (meaning over larger) territories.<sup>333</sup>

Taking up Scott's words, that as far as the post-BMAC communities are concerned we are dealing with the «reformulation and decentralization» of a given society rather than with its «collapse» is shown, in the case of Džarkutan and Ulugtēpe, on the one hand, by the existence of a sort of «lapis lazuli road» still capable of connecting the Northeastern Afġānistān (to the Southeast of the two sites) with both the Mediterranean and regions even further East (the Tarim - Tālimù 塔里 - basin, and beyond, as far as China itself) as well as, on the other hand, by the expansion into liminal areas of the oasis-cum-steppa complex. This is the case, for example, with the fringes of semi-desert land located at the oases' outskirts (Baktra being a case in point) or along the foothills of the Surxondaryo and

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<sup>332</sup> Lo Muzio 2017, 38-40.

<sup>333</sup> On this crucial phase at the end of the BMAC see Lhuillier 2019, 115 as well as Luneau 2020. Note moreover Scott 2017, 186 (on the methodological flaws of a concept such as «collapse» in archaeological theory) as well as Lhuillier 2018, 263-265 (on Achaemenid archaeological invisibility and the thorny issue of territorial control such invisibility implies).

Qashqadaryo valleys. To these factors one might also add the continued presence, if not the increase, of agricultural production in the area<sup>334</sup>. Taken together, these elements consistently point towards the implementation of even more sophisticated land-use strategies by post-BMAC communities than those of their (already refined to the extremes) predecessors.<sup>335</sup>

The most immediate consequence of these considerations, which in fact has not escaped archaeologists' notice, is that, contrary to what is assumed by the model of a «virgin land» cultivated by and thanks – exclusively or even predominantly - to the efforts the *deus ex machina* represented the imperial administration, in the course of the (considerable) chronological interval between the Baktrio-Margiana Archaeological Complex and rise of the Achaemenid Empire, the ability of local communities to control, organize, and exploit their space was never reduced: at most, it took different forms compared to those attested earlier and, at least in part, also compared to those which would come later (or, to frame it only slightly differently, compared to the «ideal» physiognomy of the Empire's paradigm of extraction and control as scholars now assume firstly developed in the imperial heartland).<sup>336</sup> What deserves to be stressed at this juncture is that the results obtained from the excavations at Džarkutan and Ulugtëpe can be fruitfully compared with other cases, ranging from the Čăč region (the – today ever increasing - territory of Toškent) to the Fargāne valley up to the oasis of Samarqand and Northern Afġānistān (from Tillyātëpe to Jaxtëpe). Here is in fact also possible to detect the development of a settlement pattern based on small inhabited (perhaps not even permanently throughout the year) nuclei centered on a very precisely defined territory. In the words of Johanna Lhuillier, these data consistently point in the direction of the development, in post-BMAC and pre-Achaemenid Central Asia, of forms of «non-centralized power», which developed within a context of «tribal confederations» based on the common construction and maintenance of irrigation canals, thus reproducing a pattern, which is possible to track down almost unchanged as far as Soviet times, which can be held as distinctive of the socio-spatial organization of other territories multiples et varii, such as the steppes straddling the borderlands across Northeastern Irān and today's Caucasian republics (especially in Azerbaiġan) or the Amudaryo delta.<sup>337</sup> But that is not the whole story: at Ulugtëpe in particular, archaeologists have moreover found traces of what, in analogy to the multifunctional model developed to describe the Chorasman qal'a by Michelle Negus-Cleary, have

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<sup>334</sup> On long-distant exchanges and human mobility during Central Asia's Bronze Age see especially the introductory chapter in Lyonnet and Dubova 2020.

<sup>335</sup> Lhuillier 2013, Zarghamee 2013, 10, Lhuillier and Bendezu-Sarmiento 2019, 98. On the end of the Oxus civilization in Baktria see Lo Muzio 2017, 35 and most recently Luneau 2020.

<sup>336</sup> Lhuillier 2019, 124.

<sup>337</sup> Lhuillier 2019, 117. See also Lhuillier and Mashkour 2017 as well as, for a comparative study on post-Urartu as well as pre-Achaemenid Armenia cf. Khatchadourian 2016, 81-117 and Ristvet 2018 (to be compared now with Knauss 2021). Baberowski 2003 provides a considerable wealth of ethnographic evidence concerning the same territories during the late Tsarist and early Soviet period (down to Stalin's Perelom).

been defined as «proto-state fortified buildings». Their exact function at the moment is still a matter of debate, but the possibility should be taken into account that such structures may have included residential activities (of a small, privileged circle whose members precisely through the erection of such architectural complexes aimed at advertising their distinction from the surrounding society), religious functions and, in some cases, may even have constituted «the administrative center of the oasis». According to said reading of the evidence, such «fortified buildings» would therefore have been a place, to echo the interpretation put forward in the case of Erebuni or Godintēpe by Lori Khatchadourian, where rituals of inter-élite socialization, negotiation of political influence, and access to resources might have been fruitfully negotiated.<sup>338</sup>

Among the conclusions drawn by archaeologists based on the evaluation of the material mentioned above, two are of special relevance to the present discussion. Firstly, and in a manner consistent with the observations developed by Negus-Cleary as well as with the scenario suggested by Honeychurch for pre-Xiōngnú Mongolia, even in the case of pre-Achaemenid Baktria and Sogdiana, what can be argued from the archaeological evidence is the development of a system of flexible hierarchies (in Honeychurch's terms «soft», to be compared with Richardson's model of «low-intensity power») organized by and around local élites, whose representatives were able to adopt a collective form of land management within which the power of each was determined, at least in part, by his (or his group's) ability to control water resources and consequent access to pastures and/or plots of land suitable for agriculture.<sup>339</sup> Secondly (and as a logical consequence of the above), the social status and political influence of both an individual and his reference group was formalized (in the sense of «taking shape», in German *verdinglicht werden*, which more aptly underlines the almost ontological nature of the process) through the extension of the territory and/or the appropriation of higher quality areas of the same or neighboring regions that the individual and/or the group in question was able to

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<sup>338</sup> Lhuillier 2019, 118, Lhuillier and Bendezu-Sarmiento 2019, 108. Cf. moreover Khatchadourian 2016, 98-103: columned buildings structurally similar to those described by Khatchadourian are attested in Chorasmia during the Achaemenid period and find their maximum development in the following centuries; and since Michele Minardi has recently argued (2018, 104) that architectural innovations of this kind are likely to have entered the region via Baktria, one can legitimately wonder whether such complex devices of congregation and socio-political control were not also present in Baktria, perhaps developing precisely based on the model of the *qal'a* such as those attested at Talaškantēpe or the buildings discovered at Džarkutan and Ulugtēpe.

<sup>339</sup> A factor not to be overlooked in this context is the role that women may have played within the communities settled during this period (but there is no reason, as we shall see for example in the case of Spitamenes' wife, to believe that things were too different in Achaemenid times). Archaeology has in fact shown that, as early as the Bronze Age, representatives of the Central Asian aristocracy (mostly, but not only, coming from the oases' societies, if this distinction is still meaningful) possessed precious goods in considerable quantities (from lapis lazuli and carnelian to gold and even alabaster vases): cf. Vogelsang 1989, 167 and Lhuillier and Bendezu-Sarmiento 2019, 99. If a passage from the *Histories* (Hdt. 7. 64-65) preserves ethnographic evidence of any value, it might be inferred, as has been done (e. g. by Vogelsang 1989), that a significant amount of gold dust originating in Gāndhārā and India (present-day Eastern Afġānistān and Pakistān) reached the imperial court via Baktria (whose satrap must therefore have been in charge of controlling the flow of this resource) in the form of tribute from the Dadikae (Δαδικαί in Herodotos), most likely inhabitants of the Baḡaḡšān mountains and neighboring territories: cf. Strab. 15.1.44 and Ptol. *Geog.*, 7.1.42.

control (which in itself does not mean, however, that such territory coincided in whole or in part with the space inhabited by such individual and/or such group).<sup>340</sup> These assumptions can be tested particularly fruitfully using the Surxondaryo valley as a case study. The latter has in fact been the subject of numerous, meticulous archaeological surveys in recent years, the results of which can be generalized with a certain degree of confidence to the whole of the Baktrian area by virtue of the close similarities, albeit on a smaller scale, of the valley's geography and (equally complex) ecology, which make it, in the words of Sebastian Stride, «a miniature depiction of the whole of Baktria».<sup>341</sup> The aim of this and the next section is, therefore, to explore more closely the data obtained from the geographical and ecological study of the Surxondaryo from the perspective of political ecology, in order to try to understand in more detail than has been done so far the tenets (and limits) of the political morphology of the Achaemenid satrapy of Baktria, for it was through it that the Empire claimed power over the whole of Central Asia North of the Hindūkūš and East of Media.

The first question one might legitimately ask, therefore, sounds as follows. What elements do we have to assume, as suggested by the archaeologists who excavated at Džarkutan and Ulugtëpe, the existence of a system of «flexible hierarchies» based (at least in part) on the control of certain portions of the landscape in Central Asia prior (for the sake of the argument we might postulate a few generations) to the Achaemenid takeover? According to Sebastian Stride's in-depth study of the Surxondaryo valley's territory, the morphology of this space, composed as it is of a dense mosaic of different (but closely interconnected) ecological niches (called «regions» in the specialist literature) provides a solid argument for a scenario of socio-territorial organization similar to that developed in order to make sense of the evidence collected at Ulugtëpe.<sup>342</sup> Following his classification, the landscape of the Surxondaryo – but, as mentioned above, similar considerations can fruitfully be applied to Baktria as a whole - can be divided into at least five basic ecological units. 1. Regions of considerable extension and endowed with remarkable potential in terms of agricultural capacity of the soil (both in absolute terms and, more importantly, in comparison with neighboring territories), morphologically coherent (thus more «legible» from the viewpoint of any kind of political power) but nevertheless capable of supporting different livelihood strategies and, finally, endowed with a strategic positioning. A description of this kind is rather well suited to the major alluvial valleys of

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<sup>340</sup> Lhuillier 2019, 119-122. Cf. moreover Stride 2005 I, 146, who underlines the remarkable affinities with the context of the Buxārā oasis (see now Schwarz 2022), from the medieval period to the one immediately antedating the Soviet conquest, thus including the entire Tsarist epoch. In this case, in fact, the oasis inhabitants' conception of the space they lived in was intimately linked to the possibilities (political as well as economic) that this environment offered to a given group to pursue its own interests against both external enemies and neighboring, competing powers: cf. Ingold 1992, 44 and most recently (on the Qazaq steppe) Kendirbai 2020, 103-117.

<sup>341</sup> Stride 2005 I, 100. See most recently (and with new data having entered the database as well as previous sites locations having been corrected) Havlík 2018; 2021 and Stančo 2018; 2020.

<sup>342</sup> Stride 2005 I, 417-419.

Achaemenid Central Asia, from the Murġ-āb to the Zarafšān delta as well as, and not surprisingly, to the Balḥ-āb oasis (the site of the future imperial foundation of Baktra).<sup>343</sup> 2. Following Strides classification further, we find regions of smaller size than the previous group, but which however are still homogeneous from a geomorphological standpoint and are also capable of sustaining a diversified economy, including multiple (and not mutually exclusive) strategies of pastoralism. The major difference with the first set concerns the topographical location of the regions belonging to this category: in the Surxondaryo, in fact, it is also possible to differentiate between, on the one hand, 2.1. areas of smaller size than, say, Baktra's oasis, but nevertheless extremely valuable from a strategic point of view, as well as advantaged compared to neighboring territories from the perspective of the carrying capacity of the environment itself (e. g. of the pastures), as is the case with the oases of Shahr-e Sabz and Qundūz while, on the other hand, 2.2. there are areas which are strategically less advantageous, either because they are difficult to connect to the main communication routes of the satrapy (above all the course of the Oxus and its tributaries) or because they are endowed with an impervious territory, which makes their control - for example by virtue of the involved transportation costs - more complicated than in an area such as the Murġ-āb delta (this is, for example, the case of Čaġānīān, North of Termiz). 3. A third territorial category embraces regions that are even smaller in size and consequently have even less potential for exploitation (especially in agricultural terms, i. e. greater «visibility» for the imperial administration), both quantitatively and qualitatively. These areas are clustered around a territory beyond which there are spaces of particularly challenging access, e. g. mountain ranges or deserts. However, what we might call the core of these territories is still large enough to accommodate and host a settlement of some significance, such as a military garrison and/or its associated housing complex (a small town such as a fortified village or a simple garrison). In turn, the regions of this grouping can be divided into 3.1. areas whose strategic position, for example guarding a mountain pass or close to a ford, justifies the logistical effort needed to control them (two cases in point are Termiz - with its surrounding territory - and the Āi Xānum plain) and 3.2. even more peripheral regions, such as the Sherabāddaryo valley or the landscape delimiting the settlement of Qarši (perhaps the Xenippa mentioned by classical sources?), in Western Uzbekistan.<sup>344</sup> 4. In Stride's classification, next follow territories that are modest in terms of both size and carrying capacity, in which moreover, at least before 1900, agricultural development was simply not feasible without considerable infrastructural effort, and in any case not beyond a radius of a few kilometers. This is the case, for example, with the Miršade oasis, located in the modern district (viloyat) of

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<sup>343</sup> From Xen. *Oec.*, 4.5-11 it can be argued that it is exactly in areas of such kind where the strategically most important infrastructure aimed at controlling a given region within the satrapies, or the satrapy itself, were usually located: see the insightful discussion in Tuplin 1987b, 173. On the topography of the Balḥ oasis see most recently Barfield 2020, 7-8 and now Lhuillier *et al.* 2021 for an updated archaeological overview.

<sup>344</sup> Cf. Curt. 8.2.13-15.

Kyzyldžar. 5. The list ends with regions that are almost isolated from the surrounding territory (at least from a strictly topographical perspective, which still says nothing about the social relations developed within it), as it is the case with the areas around the settlements of Ulanbulak and Bandykhan.

If cobbled together with the material discussed so far, the results of Stride's survey allow, or at least so it seems to me, to sketch with a certain clarity - in comparison with the information available to us - the outlines of a reconstructive scenario concerning the structuring of socio-political hierarchies in pre-Achaemenid Bactria. The outcomes of such dynamics, it should be stressed, 1. cannot have been so easily ignored by the new conquerors, for the reasons we shall immediately explore further below; 2. moreover, the suggested scenario dispenses the historian from postulating the existence of «pre-», «proto-» or «para-statal» (-imperial) structures which must remain, at best, speculative.<sup>345</sup> Let us now attempt to summarize some of the most historically relevant consequences (in terms of «political ecologies») of the survey carried out by Stride in the Surxondaryo valley. First, it is only in regions such as the Balḥ oasis that the conditions exist for a regional power center to be able, at least in theory, to extend its control over adjoining territories. The fact that this did not happen in the period prior to the Achaemenid conquest is not in itself an argument against the hypotheses developed here, since environmental conditions, as mentioned, are necessary but not sufficient for a given social phenomenon to develop. Similarly to what Khatchadourian observed in the case of post-Urartean Armenia, it is in fact quite plausible that the groups settled in the territory of (and around) Balḥ took advantage of its auspicious position to defend their gardens and livestock from their neighbors and to negotiate, from a commanding position, grazing rights or usufruct of Amudaryo's course without this advantageous situation necessarily turning into a project of political expansion. It is nevertheless significant that the Persians chose exactly this, and not another, type of «regions» (sensu Stride, namely the landscapes of Balḥ, Merv, Samarqand, and Qandahār), to establish the centers of satrapal, and therefore imperial, power in Central Asia. Secondly, the territories included in the remaining categories can be ordered in a matrix of dependencies that can be compared to that of a Russian matrěška. To give but an example, it is in fact almost impossible, or at least very difficult,

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<sup>345</sup> Zarghamee 2013, 163-165 (and see moreover the bibliography at the end of the book which is supposed to support the arguments in the text). To the best of my knowledge, he has been the most recent (and vocal) supporter of the hypothesis according to which we should accept the possibility – which he seems to take as a historical fact – of the existence of an antique Baktrian «state» (or, if you like, a Ḥayānid Empire) around the same time of the Assyrian and the Median polities and which political status would have been comparable to the former. Moreover, starting from a well-known (and already discussed in chapter 2 of the present work) passage of Herodotos' *Histories* (3.117), Zarghamee has put forward an argument supporting the historical plausibility of an ample Chorasmian Empire, centered on Herāt (in the Harīrūd valley, thus hundreds of kilometers further Southwest of the – ancient as well as modern – oasis of Xwārezm) and which, according to him, would have held sway over the populations whose members, according to Herodotos, received their life-precious water from the Akes river. As far as I can judge, Minardi 2015a has convincingly disproved at least the second part of Zarghamee's arguments.

for a given human group, let alone for an individual, which is settled in a region of category 4. to accumulate sufficient power to control and exploit the resources - starting with the labor force - of individuals or groups settled in a region of category 3., while the opposite is much more likely to happen.

However, and this is something that deserves particular emphasis, such a hypothesis does not in any way imply a deterministic framework (dictated by the environment or otherwise): on the contrary, the actual socio-political map of a territory with these characteristics is nothing more than the result of a synergistic process involving 1. a given environment, 2. the potentials («affordances») it makes available and 3. the individuals who live in and interact with it. Accordingly, we are confronted with a context which does not exclude, but on the contrary makes further plausible, the existence of those «spatial politics» that William Honeychurch recognized at the origins of the «political community» in the steppes prior to the rise to power of the Xiōngnú confederacy.<sup>346</sup> In fact, at least in theory, a power group located within one of the two «privileged» niches (levels 1 and 2 of Stride's scheme) is in a position to negotiate alliance agreements with a counterpart in order, for example, to gain access to the resources of a region of type 4. even if this latter is located at a great distance, thus bypassing other potentially opposing competitors located in a region of type 3; and this even if the latter is geographically closer to the bone of contention (a region of type 4. or 5.) and therefore, at least in principle, better able to exert its influence.<sup>347</sup> According to the - rabid in their manifest frustration - reports of the land surveyors unleashed far and wide across the Russian territory at the time of the agrarian reforms engineered by Pëtr Arkad'evič Stolypin (862-1911) in an attempt to redefine the landscape and along with it the social and power relations of the Empire's countryside according (to him: as for the viewpoint of the peasants themselves, no one even bothered to think they had one) to more rational criteria - i. e. for the use and abuse of the Tsarist administration -, the pattern described above represented a constant in village communities even in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Remarkably, even in this case (take, for example, the village of Novoselok, in the oblast' of Novgorod), in the context of a multifunctional subsistence regime which ranged from livestock farming to cultivation and the forest economy, social relations - very difficult to understand for any observer coming from outside the community (obščina) itself - were structured by virtue of the access of the various households to

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<sup>346</sup> Ingold 1992, 44. To give another example, cf. the case study (dealt with in detail by Meier 2020, 350) of the reges of the natio of the Alamanni described by Amm. Marc. 16.12.23-26. In fact, and with striking similarities with what we are able to understand concerning the steppe people bordering the Hàn domains or the Sakā groups settled along the borderlands of Achaemenid Central Asia (but as I have argued and will try to show in further detail below in the course of this study, at least some of those Sakā people must have been part of local, imperial society according to the «amphibious» modalities described by Honeychurch, Yú, and Chinese historiography), far from representing anything like coherent ethnic units, were on the contrary, according to Meier's own words, are dealing with «coalitions put together on the basis of very specific needs».

<sup>347</sup> Stride 2005 I, 423.



more or less fruitful portions of land. However, and in addition to this, the plot of land owned by each household could be distributed over a considerable area - and therefore it was not contiguous - in order to make the best possible use of the variety of the landscape itself. This, in turn, led to the emergence of social relations and dependencies that were completely autonomous and detached from the residence of the family group at stake.<sup>348</sup>

Another example is at place here to better clarify my point. As Kathrin Leese-Messing sharply pointed out with regard to the so-called Héxī corridor (Héxī Zǒuláng 河西走廊, also known as Gānsù 甘肅 corridor after the name of the Chinese province where it is located), the difficulty for the historian – who, as Stolypin’s land surveyors, is also an external observer, and this moreover on several levels - to understand the functioning in socio-spatial terms of environments of this kind stems from the fact that almost all the descriptions of them handed down to us (and the Héxī «corridor», starting from its very name, ought to be regarded as an handbook example in this sense) is vitiated by the vantage point from which the authors - and the commissioners - of those very descriptions (which we define here for convenience as «the state/Empire») looked at these spaces; i. e., following Scott’s arguments, from a «bird’s-eye view» and starting from an agenda external to the local context. As a consequence, such accounts tells us much more about the imperial claims over these spaces (in the case of Héxī, for example, the anti-Xiōngnú connection with Central Asian populations it might have provided) than about indigenous perceptions and practices, both of which existed, as the example of Novoselok shows, and which were indeed very much capable of hindering the imperial process of appropriation of a given space to a considerable extent, as demonstrated by the reports which reached Stolypin’s office from the Russian countryside.<sup>349</sup>

The hermeneutic potential of such an interpretative scenario for a more sophisticated understanding of the socio-political landscape of Bactria and thus of its history as an «imperial space» to be studied *iuxta propria principia* is arguably as considerable as it is currently underestimated, not least by virtue of the fact that it helps to explain in a much more coherent - and more economical - way than the theories elaborated so far, both the reasons and the sociopolitical goals underlying the choice, as we are able to reconstruct it, by the Achaemenid administration of certain strategies of territorial development and distribution of resources for the purposes of control 1. of the population settled within the satrapies which were to be established and 2. consequently, of the resources these very

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<sup>348</sup> Scott 1998, 38. Cf. a comparable case study in Wickham 2005, 186 ff. and Meier 2020, 898-899 in the context of Merovingian France. Both scholars in fact do not fail to point out that, as it came to inheriting (and thus parting) the land of one or more households, conflict might have been triggered between different interest groups which were indeed able to put in considerable danger the political stability of the Regnum Francorum as a whole and not just of this or that province.

<sup>349</sup> Cf. most recently the contributions in Weaverdyck *et al.* 2021 as well as Morris 2021a; 2021c.

territories contained, and which the related populations were able to mobilize (as well as, if the need arose, to conceal). In this perspective, it is important to bear in mind that, at the time «when the Mede came», the political ecology of Baktria revolved around spaces that could be classified as type 4, i. e. «diffused» and «non-nucleated» (micro)centers of power (along the lines of the scenario reconstructed in the case of Ulugtëpe by Johanna Lhuillier and colleagues) capable of controlling, albeit in an extremely effective and productive manner – indeed even more productive than the predecessors of the BMAC -, a rather limited territory.<sup>350</sup> Now: archaeological research in recent years has been actually able to identify, at least since the second third of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE the progressive development of certain sites (e. g. Xalčajan and Afğāntëpe, in the territory of Denau, in the O‘zbek province of Surxondaryo), which offered ideal conditions in terms of soil quality, access to water, and lack of significant topographical features for the development – in the words of Negus-Cleary - of a «node of power» which would have favored a sufficient concentration of resources as to guarantee a position of pre-eminence for the human groups settled in this area and in other similar spaces within the same geo-ecological context.<sup>351</sup>

Starting from this background, members of a given group which were to start building their regional power disposed of a considerable trump card over their competitors located in less environmentally privileged areas in the race to extend - e. g. through the redistribution of the agricultural surplus they were able to produce - their control over neighboring regions, thereby creating a hierarchy of power and sociopolitical entanglements within the new, enlarged territorial unit(s).<sup>352</sup> In turn, this process seems to have enabled the depositaries of such «ecological capital» (as we might call it) to extend their sphere of influence still further - in some cases even by means of settling new population - into adjacent territories, for example along the course of a river (like the Tupolang, as it is most clearly

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<sup>350</sup> See especially the most recent contributions on these issues by Johanna Lhuillier (2018; 2019 as well as Lhuillier *et al.* 2018; 2021). That such a model played a paramount role in the (e. g. fiscal) organization of the Empire has recently been argued by King 2021, 32-37 with regards to the satrapal house(s) in Anatolia.

<sup>351</sup> Stride 2005 I, 414-416. The formative process of these power groups could be traced back to the percolating, at least from the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, into the future territories of Media, Baktria, and Transoxiana (Sogdiana) by peoples of the steppes already known to Assyrian sources as Gimirri (Gi-mīr-a-a, cf. the Κιμμέριοι mentioned by classical sources), on which see Vogelsang 1992b, 184, Kim 2010, 121, Zarghamee 2013, 29-31 and most recently Adalı 2017. Such evidence should further caution against drawing too sharp a distinction between the («nomadic» and/or - even worse - *vs.* «sedentary») populations of Central Asia in the pre-Achaemenid period. On Denau and the polyfunctionality of its ecological contest see Stride 2007, 108.

<sup>352</sup> Compare King 2020, 255-258 for dependance networks in Late Antique Baktria built thanks to the leverage provided by agricultural produce. Modern globalization theorists (see e. g. Grewal 2008, 106-166) would speak of «power networks». About the process just described, Ingold’s words (cf. among other contributions 2000, 157-189) are particularly appropriate: as the British anthropologist notes, in fact, an environment’s history is the history of the activities of all those organisms, human and non-human, contemporary and ancestral, that have contributed to its formation. The landscapes (*terra multiplex et varia*, and I purposefully emphasize the plural) of Achaemenid Baktria, therefore, also have a history, both an ecological and a socio-anthropological one, which in turn cannot but have affected the strategies adopted by the Persian Empire to pursue its own interests, not least against those of some of the «users» of that same landscape.

the case at a settlement such as Xalčajan).<sup>353</sup> The process of socio-political structuring that (albeit in its dawning stage) we sense at work around Denau, can be adequately understood through the category of «political community» developed - independently from each other - a few years ago by Adam T. Smith and William Honeychurch. With this concept, the two scholars intend in fact the formation, on a regional scale, of a community not held together by a formalized practice of government (what they call «statecraft»), by beliefs or institutions, but precisely by informal, fluid, and dynamic conditions that motivate different individuals to participate in the negotiation of their interests.<sup>354</sup>

Particularly interesting is also Honeychurch's remark – which he developed based on the archaeological evidence excavated from several scattered sites in the Mongolian Plateau and in Transbaikalia dated to pre-Xiōngnú times - according to which these social arenas would have usually arisen from political contexts in which numerous, but restricted, communities characterized by the existence of privileged élites and more or less marked inequalities had already existed for a long time. The takeaway here is that these pieces of evidence emphasize the fact that, unlike what is still often repeated in scholarship on the interactions between the Empires of Eurasia and their barbaricum, the mechanisms underpinning and shaping the political life of the former were perfectly understood and perfectly tolerated as preconditions even on a larger social scale. The Baktrian communities, put another way, were in all likelihood already equipped with the social skills needed to interact with a political entity of the complexity of the Persian Empire, in a way entirely similar to what, as Ekaterina Nečeva and Mischa Meier have recently pointed out, even the most barbaric among the barbarians – namely the Huns and the Avars (not to mention the Xiōngnú as portrayed, centuries earlier, in Chinese historiography) - were perfectly at ease in the swampy context of diplomacy (and of its symbolism) typical of each of the Empires, from East to West, with which those «savage» communities were confronted.<sup>355</sup> Accordingly, the working hypothesis that at this point I would like to advance can be summarized more or less in the following terms: in the face of the 91 sites archaeologically attested so far and dated to the Achaemenid period in Afġānistān alone - of which 69 are located in the satrapy of Baktria south of the Oxus, with a very high concentration of them - not by chance, given the scenario suggested here - in the Balḡ oasis – and of which at least 18 show

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<sup>353</sup> A useful benchmark is provided by the archaeological evidence from Ēlām during the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE discussed by Potts 2016<sup>2</sup>, 289-397 (see moreover on this very last period of Ēlāmite supremacy the recent overview by Gorris and Wicks 2018): not differently from what has been suggested in the case of pre-Achaemenid Baktria, also in the Ēlāmite territory, for example in the area of the modern Irānian province of Ḥūzestān, the existence of a (large) series of principalities has been identified, distributed throughout the whole Plateau as well as in Western Fārs. See also Vogelsang 1989 for a discussion of further comparative evidence coming this time from ethnographic reports concerning Nūrestān during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>354</sup> Smith 2003, 109, Honeychurch 2015, 41.

<sup>355</sup> See e. g. two recent important contributions by Ekaterina Nečeva (2014; 2018) as well as Meier 2020, 406-434.

compelling signs of continuity between the Iron Age (Yaz I and II periods, thus starting at least from the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE), I would suggest to interpret this continuity in the light of Stride's observations concerning Xalčajan and Afġāntēpe. That is to say, as an attempt, on the part of the Achaemenid administration, to adapt to a socio-political landscape made up (following Honeychurch and Smith) of a regional «political community» whose trans-local political identity must have been structured, similarly to what Khatchadourian has argued concerning the case of the Armenian dahayāuš, based on consensus and participation which are simultaneously asymmetrical and differentiating, but also integrative precisely because of the constant processes of intra-(and inter-)community negotiation that, echoing the remarks put forward by Negus-Cleary, it is possible to assume took place in spatially (and therefore socially) privileged contexts when it comes to strategies of power building, as is the case with the most imposing among the Chorasmanian qal'a.<sup>356</sup> The hermeneutical gains of the hypothesis put forward here are basically twofold. In the first place, it is not in contradiction with the material data, but rather derives – on the one hand - from the most recent and theoretically more sophisticated interpretations of the latter, not only limited to the Achaemenid context (and even in this case, across a wide geographical space, which suggests that the more convergences are found the more it is likely that they imply structural phenomena and are not the outcome random contingencies) as well as, on the other, from a comparative perspective within the broader Eurasian context, of which Bactria (and Central Asia as a whole) must be considered an integral part. Secondly, the scenario outlined in this section takes into account both the imperial perspective (the intent to control territory and resources at the lowest possible cost, a goal pursued, as was the practice, through a careful process of scouting, within the élites of the conquered societies, of «collaborators» by means of a shrewd policy of granting privileges and sociopolitical recognition) and, consequently, the impact of Achaemenid intervention on the socio-political landscape of the would-be satrapy, as well as the ability, developed as mentioned over the course of many centuries, on the part of the representatives of the indigenous communities to skillfully navigate the symbolic landscape of their competitors/opponents/allies, with the intention of pursuing their own interests (again, at the lowest possible cost given the existing power relations at any given time).

In this regard, it should be recalled that, before referring to an appropriate contextual framework for what - for lack of better terms - we call the «colonial encounter» or cultural «accommodation»,

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<sup>356</sup> Honeychurch 2015, 42, Negus-Cleary 2015a I; 2015b; 2017. For a detailed overview of the sites on Afġān territory for which some form of settlement continuity is attested between the Iron Age (Yaz I and Yaz II periods, ca. 1500-700 BCE) and the Achaemenid period see most recently Ball 2019, 558-559 (and it might also be useful to compare pll. 4 and 5). In Ball's authoritative catalogue, Bactria is enlisted for the first time under the Achaemenid period (n. 99), but see the considerations put forward by Charlotte Elizabeth Maxwell-Jones (2015) and Philippe Marquis (2018) concerning the challenges, if not the impossibility, of distinguishing a clear break in material culture between the Achaemenid epoch and the previous one in the oasis' social life, for the latter was clearly inhabited already before Cyrus' conquest. As far as the Surxondaryo valley is concerned see another important catalogue in Stride 2005 III and now Havlík 2018.

Richard White's by-now classic concept of the Middle Ground describes exactly this: a stalemate within which neither of the two (or more) actors involved - in our case the Achaemenid Empire on the one hand, the Central Asian communities, including those of the steppes, on the other - possessed the effective capacity to dispose of their, more or less welcome, interlocutor(s).<sup>357</sup> In Mischa Meier's words, the outcome of this forced draw was historically translated into the construction of «spaces of maneuver [Handlungsräume]» modelled *ad usum imperii* by virtue of the superiority - in terms 1. of economic capacity and 2. of military resources - of the latter, but which communities, and not infrequently even individuals *volens-nolens* forced to move within this new grammar, quickly learned to exploit, since the «global» context dictated by participation in the socio-economic, political, and cultural life of an(y) Empire allowed those who had the means and skills to take advantage from, and to shrewdly manoeuvre, in a strictly local framework, resources (and institutions, for example, tributary economy over a trans-regional scale) that only the Empire was able to offer.<sup>358</sup>

In the next section, the Baktrian irrigation system as it is known following the French survey carried out during the 1970s will be taken as a case study to test the plausibility of the hypotheses put forward so far, in order to draw some preliminary conclusions regarding the instruments available to the subjects of the (at the time would-be) Empire to exploit for their own use the new socio-spatial landscape that the latter was forging with the ultimate aim, as Tuplin astutely pointed out, of guaranteeing order and exploiting the territory.<sup>359</sup> The last section of the chapter will instead be devoted to a second case study, with the aim of evaluating the validity of the scenario developed so far in another context, namely that of the steppe, whose involvement - not only on antagonistic terms - within the economy (in both a metaphorical and a very concrete sense) of Achaemenid Central Asia has so far been underestimated or, at least, not adequately explored.

### 3.3.2. *Gutta cavat regem*: Local *μητις* and Imperial Ambitions

The choice of Baktrian hydrology as the first case study in the light of which to test - and further investigate - the scenario outlined in the previous section is not accidental: in the words of Jean Claude Gardin, «the history of the peopling of Baktria must begin with the study of the irrigated or potentially irrigated regions of the modern landscape»: and this by virtue of the fact that, over the last 5000 years, the hydrographic, pedological, and geological conditions of the Central Asian territory have remained remarkably stable, thus allowing, with all due caution, to advance certain retrospective hypotheses in

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<sup>357</sup> Cf. especially White 1991<sup>2</sup>, 52 and Meier 2020, 367.

<sup>358</sup> See moreover Honeychurch 2015, 42-43 as well as Rollinger 2023 focusing on the Achaemenid Empire in the broader context of 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE Ancient Near East (and beyond).

<sup>359</sup> See Tuplin 1987a, 109.

terms of the local landscapes' affordances, all the more so by virtue of the fact that, especially in some areas of countries such as Afġānistān, Taġikistān or even Uzbekistan itself, the large-scale use of technological means capable of drastically altering the connotations of the territory over an imposing scale dates back no earlier than the late 1950s (namely to Xruščġv's campaign of settlement and agricultural expansionism).<sup>360</sup> In some particularly privileged contexts, such as that of the Āi Xānum plain, human occupation seems to have been radically interrupted at the very earliest around the Mongol period, which helps to explain, at least in part, why Eastern Baktria has been the focus of the most important geo-archaeological investigations in the history of Central Asian research.<sup>361</sup> In the wake of the results generated by the first surveys and excavations, Āi Xānum was considered for decades the indisputable proof that the real transformation (implicitly equated to a «development») not only of the Dašt -i Qal'a plain, but also, pars pro toto, of the whole of Baktria, was to be attributed to the grandiosity of the Seleukid (read: «Greek») imperial project, compared favorably to the «invisibility» - synonymous with «non-existence» or, at best, «weakness» - of the Persian intervention (and thus an index for the absence of political control). Only the Greeks would have in fact been capable, according to the first scholarly assessment of the evidence, of carrying out the impressive infrastructural works kick-starting the transformation of a relatively remote and insignificant Central Asian valley into a territory which, in the words of Strabo, «produced everything with the sole exception of olive oil».<sup>362</sup> From the point of view of the history of historiography, it is perhaps not without interest to note that, even though archaeology has, in the course of a relatively short time, modified the opinions summarized above in an almost integral manner, they have nevertheless largely kept currency within the historiographical Vulgata, which has so far proved to be insufficiently receptive (especially as regards to the Achaemenid period) to the implications that the long-term perspective characterizing the analysis of hydraulic and settlements' developmental patterns of both

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<sup>360</sup> Compare e. g. Gardin 1980, 484.

<sup>361</sup> Gentelle 1989, Lyonnet 1997, Gardin 1998. The Dašt -i Qal'a, where the site of Āi Xānum is located, has been the focus of systematic studies by Gardin and colleagues aimed at a better contextualization of the excavations carried out at the city itself by Paul Bernard starting with the mid 1960s (see most recently Ball 2019 n. 18 with further bibliography). The discovery of this settlement, arguably one of the most sensational events in archaeology of all time, constituted the first concrete contribution to the dispelling of that «Baktrian mirage» which Alfred Foucher, the first director of the *DAFA*, had spoken of some forty years ago, following the first, as tiring as they were frustrating, excavation seasons at Baktra: cf. Foucher 1929, Mairs 2014b, 1-27, and Fenet 2020. About the theoretical, methodological, and historiographical «paradoxes» generated by the discovery and study of materials from Āi Xānum see e. g. Hoo 2018; 2020; 2022, 205-228 on Hellenism and its paradoxes in the context of scholarship on Hellenistic Central Asia.

<sup>362</sup> Strab. 2.1.14: «πάμφορον δ' εἶναι καὶ τὴν Βακτριανὴν πλὴν ἐλαίου, πλησίον τῇ Ἀρίᾳ παρακειμένην». How reliable this statement is (bearing in mind the cultural density, in the Greek context, of olive oil) is not easy to establish, but upon the basis of ethnographic evidence acquired by American engineers on a mission to a remote Vaḥš valley (not too far from Āi Xānum, although the site was still unknown), according to which the local population, including numerous groups of shepherds, cultivated, among other things, maize, melons, wheat, and even grapevines, should invite caution when placing limits on the productive capacity of the Baktrian soil and its inhabitants: cf. Teichmann 2016, 145 for further details.

the Āi Xānum environment and - as shown by recent excavations - of Baktra's oasis, unavoidably brings with it.<sup>363</sup>

In both cases - by virtue of the present geopolitical context, it is currently wishful-thinking to hope for an expansion of the available dataset, and it is for this reason that the survey carried out in the territory of Surxondaryo, which has already been mentioned several times, plays a role of particular importance from a comparative outlook - the information in our possession contributes in telling a very different story from that of the «Greek miracle» (or, for that matters, even of an «Achaemenid» one), thus forcing the historian to discard theoretical models of sudden rupture and radical transformations, favoring instead a more complex scenario, made out of adaptations and transformations on a multigenerational timeframe, without this in itself implying the underplaying of the actual game-changing nature of certain «accelerations» or drastic turnabouts in the general context of local developments (for example, as we shall discuss, Alexander's invasion or, even more dramatically, the Mongol conquest). To mention just one emblematic case, one of the most important conclusions reached by archaeological investigation, and which historiographic discussion does not seem to have adequately taken into account in its general assessment of the period, is that judging the level of «integration» of a territory such as Baktria within a given polity and the impact of the latter on the social structures - and more specifically on the human-environmental ecosystem - of the former solely by virtue of «monumental» evidence such as the undoubtedly impressive urban planning agenda of post-Seleukid Āi Xānum is a methodologically questionable undertaking.<sup>364</sup> This is demonstrated, for example, by the fact that, following the abandonment of part of the settlement's population (the urban élite alone?), the degree of destruction evident for the civic center is not matched by the wider context of the surrounding plain.<sup>365</sup> Contrary to what has been believed up to quite recent years, the new conquerors (but it is still debated whether this was actually an abandonment and whether, if so, it should be ascribed in whole or in part to a conquest of Āi Xānum and of the surrounding valley - and not, for instance, to local upheavals) seem to have settled in village units (remember Curtius: in suos quisque vicos dilapsi) scattered throughout the territory of the Dašt-i Qal'a plain, apparently taking up settlement patterns that predated the conurbation dictated by the Seleukid and post-Seleukid development of the site (especially under Eukratides). Not only that, but the irrigation canals appear to have been carefully preserved and, outside the city perimeter, there

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<sup>363</sup> See Bernard *et al.* 2006 and Fouache *et al.* 2009.

<sup>364</sup> Lyonnet 1990, but see more recently the important contributions by Laurianne Martinez-Sève (2014; 2015).

<sup>365</sup> See most recently the intriguing overview study by Martinez-Sève 2018a; 2020b on the issue of «Control and Resistance» in Hellenistic Baktria.

seems to be no trace of demographic declines on a scale such as is implied by an event as important as the «fall of Greek power» in Baktria.<sup>366</sup>

Without by any means wishing to underestimate the impact of the Alexander's army's invasion on the geopolitical - and within a few generations also social - context of Central Asia, the combined analysis of sources such as the imperial archives (from Persepolis to the *ADAB*), archaeological evidence - to which we will return shortly - and information gathered from the study of the societies of the Central Asian steppes and Inner Asia from both an historical and ethnological point of view, is however contributing to a considerable shift in emphasis from an «imperiocentric» perspective towards the study of social structures active on a regional and micro-local scale, whose (stakeholders') role for the mobilization of resources and workforce to be integrated into the imperial infrastructural networks (a clear hallmark of «globalization», as it has recently been argued), appears increasingly evident as having been among the very purposes of territorial expansion and of the (local) development of Achaemenid governmental structures (Henkelman's paradigm).<sup>367</sup> This is also true, it should be stressed, for the Āi Xānum plain, whose populating and intense exploitation, albeit in a different way, which we could define as «extensive» - compared to the «intensive» conurbation patterns witnessed starting with the Seleukids, going on almost unabated in the subsequent period and which however most likely were not less, indeed perhaps even more effective, at least from a long-term perspective - can be dated, as recent studies seem to confirm, to the centuries of Persian hegemony in Baktria.<sup>368</sup> Clear traces of artificial irrigation prior to the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE have in fact been detected precisely in those places where Hellenistic engineers (they may have been Greeks, but there is nothing to prevent the hypothesis that indigenous labor was also employed) expanded or in some cases simply took care of maintenance work - and it is possible to assume that the Persians behaved no differently (at least as far as the Dašt -i Qal'a is concerned) - actually building on the incredible level of sophistication achieved already in the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE by the Harappan civilization, as shown for example by the excavations carried out at Šörtūghai.<sup>369</sup> In fact, the inhabitants of this Bronze Age settlement, located no more than 20 kilometers North of Āi Xānum, were not only capable of producing fine handicrafts or of engaging in a flourishing trade in precious

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<sup>366</sup> Gardin and Gentelle 1978, 88 ff., Bernard *et al.* 2006, Coloru 2009, 181 ff. See moreover Scott's remarks (2017, 32) on the assumptions entailed – especially if starting from the perspective of an urban and agricultural society – of a term such as «collapse» (but the same might be said of «fall» and the like). As he fittingly puts it, «Many kingdoms were, in fact, confederations of smaller settlements, and “collapse” might mean no more than that they have, once again, fragmented into their constituent parts, perhaps to reassemble later. [...] Civilizations should never be confused with the states that they typically outlast, nor should we unreflectively prefer larger units of political order to smaller units».

<sup>367</sup> See most recently – and authoritatively – Briant 2020.

<sup>368</sup> Cf. on this issue two contributions by Henry P. Colburn (2013; 2017). On the exploitation of the Āi Xānum plain during the Achaemenid period see Gardin and Gentelle 1976, 78-80 as well as, more recently, and taking stock of a considerable wealth of new data (especially coming from Southern Uzbekistan), Havlík 2018, 51-52.

<sup>369</sup> Ball 2019 n. 1089. A useful general introduction to this period of Indo-Irānian civilization has been provided by Parpola 2015, but see however Lyonnet and Dubova 2020, 551-606.



metals (from gold to copper and lead) and semi-precious stones, above all lapis lazuli, of which they controlled the most productive quarries of the entire region (and as a consequence of the whole of Eurasia).<sup>370</sup> The comparative study of materials obtained from excavations in what is now Northwest Pakistān has in fact also made possible to demonstrate the permanence of irrigation methods that were widespread along the border of the Indo-Irānian world and have recently been dated to prehistoric times.<sup>371</sup>

Even if one were to abandon the idea of «a complex Baktrian political entity, no matter what features one wishes to assign to it», what emerges more and more clearly from the archaeological dataset currently available (from ceramics to canal works to the structure - and function - of the qal‘a) is the nature, at once deep in time and widespread in space, of strictly local traditions and skills essential to the infrastructural - and consequently economic - flourishing of the satrapy during both the Achaemenid and the Hellenistic period as we are able to reconstruct them today.<sup>372</sup> Considered from such a perspective, the interest of an Empire such as those of the Achaemenids in controlling a region like the Āi Xānum plain (which, as Stride’s analysis discussed above has highlighted, from a strictly ecological point of view would not be suitable for supporting the needs of a site of the size of the Hellenistic settlement) may above all, if not exclusively, have rested on the strategically crucial role of the Dašt -i Qal‘a for the control of the resources coming from the surrounding territory (nor should the site’s extremely advantageous location at the confluence of two tributaries of the Oxus be underestimated in terms of communication routes). In other words, the foundation by the Achaemenids of a post such as Kuhna Qal‘a must have answered to the need of taking control of an already existing landscape - and of its related social fabric - and not, as an excessively «imperiocentric» perspective still would be inclined to suggest, of creating it *ex nihilo*.<sup>373</sup> After all, such a conclusion should raise relatively little sensation, especially if one bears in mind what we know about the Empire’s strategy of land appropriation in contexts such as Egypt and especially Babylonia, where it is only thanks to the preservation of written records that we are able to identify

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<sup>370</sup> Martinez-Sève 2015, 21, with further bibliography. As the French scholar has in fact not failed to point out, as the Greeks came, a considerable part of the land suitable for agriculture was already irrigated. Taking up some recent consideration put forward by Lauren Morris (2019a, 63), it should moreover be stressed that rich gold mines are located in the Badaḡšān mountains, while silver deposits are to be found in the Afġān province (wilayat) of Parvān, in the valley of the Panġišīr river, some kilometers to the North of Kābul. Among the other mineral resources worth mentioning there is copper, which as far as we know was obtained in remarkable quantities from the site of Mes Aynak, located in modern-day Logar province, to the north of Gardēz (Noori *et al.* 2019, 107-109 form possibly Achaemenid mining activities in the area). Finally, the mines of Zarkašan, situated in the present province of Ġaznī provided, beyond copper, also iron and zinc: see Thomalsky 2016, 649-651. According to the information provided by Ktesias (*FGrHist* 688 F 45 (6) = Fr. 45g and which one might have to take more seriously as it is usually the case) his knowledge of Baktrian silver mines would have originated from local «merchants». See moreover Stoneman 2019, 29.

<sup>371</sup> Gentelle 1989, 84.

<sup>372</sup> Gardin 1999, 180-190. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>373</sup> Martinez-Sève 2020b, 99 argues in fact that among the main purposes of the fortress there was the control of the Vaḡš and its fords as well as the access route to the Āi Xānum plain from the Kyzylsu valley.

traces of Persian intervention in irrigation planning or other similar infrastructural undertakings. Moreover, as Briant noted already several years ago, the persistence of local 1. techniques, 2. labor, and 3. sociopolitical practices on the one hand, and varying degrees of imperial dirigisme on the other, are not mutually exclusive phenomena.<sup>374</sup> For this reason, it is of particular importance, for the purposes of the present study, to review what we know about Baktrian hydrology, starting however from an eminently local perspective, in order to elaborate a hypothetical typology of the resources, especially in terms of ecological and territorial skills, that the human capital of the satrapy (as noted above, by far the most coveted asset of any pre-modern Empire) was able to put at the service of the Achaemenid administration. As we will see especially in the following chapter, such a critical positioning has the advantage, among other things, of explaining at least to a considerable extent, the reasons for the (indeed uncommon) prestige that the labor workforce parties (*kurtaš*) from Central Asia and from Baktria in particular seem to have enjoyed, according to what we know from the Persepolis archives.<sup>375</sup> The provision of highly qualified human capital (and not only in the field of hydraulic engineering) may, in short, have been one of the main instruments of social ascendancy for the Baktrian élites within the new imperial structures and institutions (what Mischa Meier calls the *Handlungsräume* created by the establishment of an imperial power within a given «native» society).<sup>376</sup>

### 3.3.2.1. *(Im)possible Engineering*

Among the countless features of Baktrian hydraulic engineering that astonish modern observers, including those with a technical education, perhaps the most impressive aspect is the size of the infrastructures discovered so far. In the Dašt -i Qal‘a plain alone, archaeological surveys have in fact identified canals 30 to 50 kilometers long, with a vertical projection (in French *emprise au sol*) of between 15 and 20 meters.<sup>377</sup> Equally dazzling is the topographical expertise involved in the construction of such infrastructures (some of which, it must be reiterated, date back centuries before the invasion led by Cyrus), as well as the mastery in terms of construction skills, all of which point clearly in the direction of a highly talented workforce (or at the very least one that had been used to

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<sup>374</sup> In addition to the famous passage in *Hdt.* 2.99 (and see most recently Tuplin 2018a regarding Herodotos’ entire Egyptian *λόγος*) cf. most recently on Achaemenid hegemony in Egypt Colburn 2018 and Colburn 2020a, 27-130 (regarding what the scholar calls «urban» as opposed to «rural» experience). On Kuhna Qal‘a see most recently Ball 2019 n. 666. Consult finally Briant 1984, 54; 2017a, 43-73 on the coexistence of imperial planning and local autonomy in implementation.

<sup>375</sup> King 2021, 283-312 on Arachosia, providing a considerable amount of so far unpublished evidence (and an insightful assessment thereof) on which the next chapter considerably relies.

<sup>376</sup> Rollinger 2023 for the same argument in the framework of his assessment of the Empire’s impact in the world of the 1<sup>st</sup> Millennium BCE.

<sup>377</sup> Gardin 1980, 492.

carrying out similar operations for generations and had been able to pass on the – all but trivial – know-how required over the centuries, if not millennia). Such a conclusion is dictated by the complex geology of Eastern Bactria, which poses, as already Stride noted, significant obstacles to large-scale irrigation projects: among these, one of the most remarkable is undoubtedly that represented by the porous nature of the soil (aeolian sediments called löss and high presence of cobblestones) and in particular of riverbeds, which exponentially increases the risk of water loss. In order to channel the water so that it reaches the terraces of the plain, which are the only areas of the Dašt -i Qal‘a capable of withstanding an intensive agricultural regime, it was necessary to build the canals by challenging the slope of the river beds until they reached the level of the terraces themselves. This is an endeavor, it will not be idle to note, that even modern engineers, despite the means at their disposal, have not always been able to replicate; no less impressive are the results of the canalizations found along the course of the Kokča, one of the two rivers on whose banks the Hellenistic site of Āi Xānum was built, especially when compared to the state of the country’s agricultural infrastructure as recently as 30 years ago, at the end of the vicious conflict with the Soviet Union but before the Ṭālibān rise and the US-led NATO invasion dealt the deathblow to what had survived, amidst a thousand difficulties, from the previous decade.<sup>378</sup> A few more technical details will help to better understand the extent of the infrastructural complex we are describing. In the Dašt -i Qal‘a, the edges of the terraces are at least 15, sometimes 20 meters above the height of the river beds from which the water was drawn, and many of the canals whose traces have been found by archaeologists were dug along the slopes. Consequently, they reached the top of the terraces of the Āi Xānum plain, approximately 2 kilometers downstream, after having travelled another 10 kilometers (with respect to the intake of the rivers).<sup>379</sup> From at least the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE i. e. more than 1000 years before the rise of Persian power, the population of Eastern Bactria was able, if necessary, to cultivate the foothills of the valley, which were more fertile and, by virtue of their elevated position, more defensible, despite considerable orographic difficulties. The latter were dictated, as observed by the French archaeologists who carried out the survey, by the fact that the configuration of the relief would in itself allow water to be carried only to the slopes of the hill terraces, thus forcing the canals to travel no less than 15 kilometers through these terraces.<sup>380</sup>

From all of this, it is possible to deduce at least the following: first of all, as mentioned above, the considerable level of territorial expertise possessed by the indigenous population, since the orders of magnitude of the workload necessary to ensure the functioning of the canals discovered by the

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<sup>378</sup> Gardin and Gentelle 1979, 20. See Grötzbach 1990, 90-122 for a comparison with the modern standpoint of agricultural infrastructure in the country.

<sup>379</sup> Gentelle 1989, 91-105.

<sup>380</sup> Gardin 1980, 495, Gentelle 1989, 92 ff.

archaeologists presupposes either a millenary experience or physic, mathematical, and hydraulic knowledge that still in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were able to flummox modern engineers. Secondly, it should be noted that a system of such complexity seems to imply some form of social stratification, of which, however, the clearer contours elude us, since an infrastructural program of this magnitude can only be justified considering the precise desire to increase the agricultural productivity of the region (which in turn may have been at the origin of redistributive mechanisms like those studied at Ēgijn gol by William Honeychurch). This conclusion is made even more plausible by the observation that, compared to other areas in the same plain, which could have been irrigated with less expenditure of energy and resources, the yield of many of the historically attested canals is rather low, implying a clear planning behind their realization.<sup>381</sup> The consequence, which seems almost inescapable, is that, at least in the case of some of the major canals that crossed the Dašt -i Qal‘a in the Achaemenid (as well as during later) period, for example those known as AKh1 and AKh3, they should not be considered the result of imperial interventionism (be it of Persian or Graeco-Baktrian nature), but rather belonged already to the infrastructural heritage of Eastern Baktria as it came into being over the previous centuries.

This raises the question, which at the present state of our knowledge must remain unsolved, but which it is nevertheless not idle to ask, about the identity of the social actors able to control the resources necessary to build, and maintain active, such a system and, secondly, about the role that they could play within the new imperial hierarchies (at least at the satrapal level) once the process of conquest by the Achaemenids was completed: consider, for example, an individual such as Arimazes, who derived much of his influence - which judging by the treatment reserved to him by Alexander should not have been negligible, and on the contrary made him an opponent to be taken very seriously - precisely from the control of the water potential of a river like the Machai Darya.<sup>382</sup> Similar remarks can be made about the Arčī plain, also located in Eastern Baktria, on the right bank of the Kokča.<sup>383</sup> Also in this case, in fact, it is possible to conclude that the population (and the ruling class) of the Hellenistic period limited itself to expanding towards the hilly terraces of the plain the irrigation of a territory which, as far as the bottom of the valley is concerned, it is possible to date back to a much earlier period. But even in this case it would be hasty to interpret the expansion of the cultivable surface of this landscape (only) as the outcome of the Graeco-Makedonian initiative. This is clearly shown by the - monumental - project of the Rūd -i Šāhrawān together with its tributaries, for the latter was responsible for the irrigation of the entire plain of Arčī and, having been conceived at least during

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<sup>381</sup> Gardin and Gentelle 1978, 69, Lyonnet 1997, 72, Gardin 1998, 39, Francfort and Lecomte 2002, 638.

<sup>382</sup> Cf. Heckel 2006, 44 as well as the narrative related to this (very powerful) Sogdian noble in Curt. 7.11.1-29, *Epit. Mett.*, 15-18, Strab. 11.11.4 and Polyæn. 4.3.29.

<sup>383</sup> Ball 2019 n. 54.

the Achaemenid period, presents characteristics suggesting the massive employment of local labor force, with members thereof perhaps remained active even in the Hellenistic period, when the construction of the canal was finally completed.<sup>384</sup>

This having been said, it should be noted that the expansion of the cultivated area, as it is attested at Arċi and elsewhere in Eastern Bactria, is not in contradiction with the hypothesis of a numerous and active presence of pastoral populations - or of the flexibility of the subsistence strategies of the local population, including those settled in the valley territory - since, as palaeobotanical research has recently helped to show, the communities in these territories seem to have provided for the greatest possible differentiation of the crops they attended to (e. g. sesame and flax, while at the same time not disdaining to resort to the widespread use of dry farming) in order both to enrich their diet and to coordinate harvest times with other economic activities, including livestock breeding, with the aim, as mentioned above, of exploiting to the maximum the ecological diversity of the territory in which they were living. The fact that, besides agriculture, livestock breeding - including transhumance - constituted an essential resource also in the territory of the Arċi plain is made very probable by the variety of paleozoological remains found, among others, in the burial grounds of both Bactria as well as Sogdiana further to the North.<sup>385</sup> Remarkably, the information gained from the archaeological surveys of the Āi Xānum plain shows structural similarities with other key territories of the Achaemenid administration system in Bactria, from the very oasis of Baktra to that of Taškurgan (Tāšqurgān, a site known as Ḥulmi (ḥlmy, חלמי) in the *ADAB* documents and to which we shall come back in more detail in chapter 7) on the one hand and, on the other, with the catchment area of the Qundūz territory.<sup>386</sup> At each of these important sites, in fact, where both Achaemenid and Hellenistic presence has been recognized for a long time but for which, according to the results of some recent excavations, it is possible to assume with a fair degree of confidence the existence of earlier layers of occupation, it is clearly attested the deployment of huge resources necessary to make the best use of the rivers coming from Hindūkūš which, as it is well known, were by no means easy to regiment. According to one of the leading experts on the subject, the French geologist Pierre Gentelle, we possess sufficient data to assume the existence of at least one canal connecting the left bank of the Qundūz-āb river with the Ḥulmi oasis, no less than 113 kilometers to the West, and as the *ADAB* show, a space disputed between the jurisdiction of several sub-units of the satrapal administration. This last consideration inevitably leads one to wonder whether the exploitation of the water resources derived from this impressive work of hydraulic engineering might not have represented one of the

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<sup>384</sup> Gardin and Gentelle 1976, 80-85, Ball 2019 n. 959: the site is located in the province of Taḥār, to the East of Qundūz.

<sup>385</sup> Gentelle 1989, 189-195, Lhuillier and Mashkour 2017, 657.

<sup>386</sup> Ball 2019 nos. 1151-1152 concerning both the site of Tāšqurgān more in general and the latter's Bālā Hiṣār. On Afḡān Bactria from an archaeological perspective see most recently Martinez-Sève 2020c.

factors of (at least potential) frictions between the different levels of the Baktrian administrative hierarchy that we perceive to have existed at the very latest during the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE.<sup>387</sup>

A similar landscape can be reconstructed both in the case of the right bank of the Oxus, in the present-day Vahš and Kafirnihan valleys (Кофарниҳон, today part of Tağikistān) and, on the O‘zbek side, in the lower Surxondaryo. In both cases, these were areas of considerable interest for the Achaemenid administration, as the widespread presence of ὑπαρχοὶ attested by historiographic sources clearly suggests.<sup>388</sup> Also in this important alluvium, a real hinge between Baktria, Sogdiana, and the strategically very much sought-after Fargāne valley (according to some scholars, perhaps the land of origin of the Sakā haṃmavargā mentioned in the Achaemenid inscriptions – Herodotos’ Ἀμυργίοι Σάκαι?), excavations carried out since the end of the 1970s have brought to light a complex system of canalizations that could be interpreted as a sign of economic development of the region, at the same time cause and effect of the population increase that archaeology suggests occurred during the Achaemenid period.<sup>389</sup> The greatest significance of the results gained from the surveys carried out in the territory of the Surxondaryo must be recognized in the fact that they allow us to draw some conclusions of a more general nature (on a regional scale) starting from the data provided by the investigations in Eastern Baktria, to date the most detailed available, at least with regard to the phases and methods of territorial exploitation, and in particular of the satrapy’s soil.<sup>390</sup> In a major synthesis article published a few years ago on the diachronic development of land use technologies (starting with water resources) over Baktrian history, Henri-Paul Francfort and Olivier Lecomte drew scholarly attention to three different geographical areas («regions» in Stride’s terminology) in which hydraulic engineering projects took on different characteristics in deference to the ecological peculiarities of each of these areas, i. e. floodplains, foothills, and reliefs.<sup>391</sup> According to the two authors, considered from a bird’s eye perspective, the emergence and progress of irrigation techniques not only in Baktria, but in Central Asia as a whole, can only be understood in close connection with the existence of urban centers and the development of highly complex political entities. In their view, such a dynamic would be at work, on the one hand, in the case of the plain of Čul -i Abdān (in the Qundūz province and also known as the plain of Asqalān), whose cultivation was ensured by the derivation of a canal from the

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<sup>387</sup> Gentelle 2005, 100. To be fair, it must be said that an exact dating of this impressive canal is still a matter of debate among scholars, and suggestions vary from the Kušāna down to the modern period. However, since traces of settlements dating back to at least the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE are attested at Hūlmi, a (much) earlier date is by no means ruled out.

<sup>388</sup> See especially Rapin 2013; 2018a, Martinez-Sève 2020b.

<sup>389</sup> On such issue see most recently Havlík 2018, 98-102, who is particularly focused on the Sherabaddāryo valley, a micro-unit within the (Western part of the) Surxondaryo.

<sup>390</sup> Gardin – Gentelle 1979, 23, Besenval and Marquis 2008, Marquis 2018, Lhuillier *et al.* 2021. On the Sakā (perhaps) inhabiting the territory of the Fargāne: cf. DNa § 3 as well as Hdt. 7.64.2 (who enlists them among the ἔθνη partaking in Xerxes’ campaign in the famous catalogue representing a considerable part of the 7<sup>th</sup> book).

<sup>391</sup> Francfort and Lecomte 2002, 633.

local waterway, the Bangī through an aqueduct no less than 20 kilometers long.<sup>392</sup> On the other hand and, again according to Francfort and Lecomte, the result of «a great collective enterprise», we have the case represented by the deviation of the Tāleqān river into the Rūd -i Šāhrawān, the latter realized in order to cultivate the plain located between the Kokča and Vahš rivers through the territory of Šoratu, and completed by digging a channel 20 meters deep and no less than 800 meters long.<sup>393</sup>

However, this is but one, and perhaps not even the most relevant, part of the story, especially in the light of what more recent studies concerning human-environment interactions in contexts characterized by high mobility and low population density, as seems to have been the case in Baktria still throughout the Achaemenid period, have recently brought to light. As we will discuss shortly, a model such as the one elaborated (among others) by Francfort and Lecomte runs the risk - in compliance with a historiographic tradition that goes back at least to Wittfogel - of emphasizing in an excessively one-sided way the coercive capacity (and the sociopolitical agenda) of what – following Scott - we have defined «the state» to the detriment of a local context that, as we have tried to show in these pages, presented within itself numerous sociopolitical agendas and possessed coercive capacities of a different nature but by no means less effective than those available to the «state», and often even competing with it.<sup>394</sup> Despite the two scholars' acknowledgement of the importance of the technical and infrastructural heritage of the Bronze and Iron Ages in the process of constructing the (geographical, economic and, consequently, political) landscape of Baktria, the «imperial» perspective is still the dominant one, which, however, paradoxically translates into the rather contradictory image of a polity such as the Persian Empire, able to modify (*motu proprio* and in an extremely significant way) the features of an entire region without succeeding in holding stable control over it, to say nothing of its otherwise archaeological invisibility.<sup>395</sup>

Given the considerations developed so far, the need to imagine in more complex terms the sociopolitical landscape (and the consequent repercussions of the latter's physiognomy on the process of «environmental engineering») of Baktria immediately prior to the Persian conquest should have clearly emerged, with all the implications that this entails for the interpretation of the very dynamics underpinning both the conquest itself and the following establishment of Achaemenid hegemony in Central Asia. Taking up the formula employed by Francfort and Lecomte, in order to adequately understand the ways in which «enormous collective enterprises» such as those described above - because such they are undoubtedly - may have been carried out, some theoretical considerations are

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<sup>392</sup> Ball 2019 n. 218.

<sup>393</sup> Gentelle 1989, 101, Gardin 1998, 71. Further bibliographical details in Ball 2019 n. 1141.

<sup>394</sup> Wittfogel 1963: a very stimulating critical discussion of the arguments put forward in this by now classic study can be found in Westerman 2002.

<sup>395</sup> The latter is for example the standpoint which can be found in the otherwise very important contributions by Wu Xin (cf. e. g. 2017; 2018 and the recent 2020 synthesis).

necessary, which will be developed in the next section and shall hopefully provide further support for a scenario of «complex political society» as the main feature of the Baktrian (*human*) landscape both in the pre-Achaemenid period and during the years immediately following Cyrus' takeover. This in turn might allow to account, in a more insightful way than it has so far been the case, for the sociopolitical landscape of the satrapy as it seemed possible to reconstruct it proceeding backwards from the Bīsutūn inscription, as it has been attempted both in chapter 3 and in the previous pages.

### 3.3.2.2. *The Waste Land* and the Birth of an Empire

In a recent critical re-examination of both Wittfogel's theory and its subsequent reworkings, two Dutch scholars, Maurits Ertsen and Kyra Wouters (respectively an archaeologist and a hydraulic engineer) have convincingly argued for the need to replace the paradigm of a hierarchical and centralized structure as the *primum movens* of landscape transformation projects - even of impressive ones - with another one, which they call an «archaeology of the everyday». Such a theoretical shift would be needed, according to their argument, by virtue of the fact that societies (certainly ancient ones, how much this applies to post-modern nation states is difficult to say for the time being), are built through the collaboration - and sometimes the clash - of the entire spectrum of social actors of which they are made up, and not only by the élites, whether local or imperial ones. Since moreover, as the two scholars further point out, the representatives of said élites also deployed their influence («agency») on a day-to-day basis, it follows that the need to devise - and implement - solutions to certain problems (i. e. «the enactment of the power to do something») inevitably required a joint effort by élites and non-élites.<sup>396</sup> To substantiate this allegation, Ertsen and Wouters refer to three examples, very different from each other and for this reason particularly convincing once taken together. In 20<sup>th</sup> century Sudan, the entire Ĝezīra plain was transformed into a gigantic hydraulic project by a directorate, as composite as it was apparently incongruous, composed of colonial officials, engineers from a private British company, and simple local peasants, through a process of collaboration, delegation, and coercion which, albeit under significantly different circumstances, is rather reminiscent of how, 3000 years earlier, the Assyrian Empire succeeded in building its own «imperial landscape» in the territory of present-day Iraq, and the same can be observed archaeologically in the case of another example among the «vertical» and «centralizing» state par excellence, namely the Maya Empire of the Classic period (ca. 250-900 CE).<sup>397</sup> All three of these case studies show, according to Ertsen and Wouters, how in each of these societies, while so different from each other,

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<sup>396</sup> Ertsen and Wouters 2018, 4 ff.

<sup>397</sup> Ertsen 2016.



«imperial development» was shaped by the daily action exercised «as much in government offices as in muddy fields».<sup>398</sup> Several reasons, I believe, might be advocated which suggest the feasibility of applying an «archaeology of the everyday» interpretative framework to the hydrological history of Baktria during the Achaemenid period as well as, perhaps, to its subsequent imperial epochs. Among them, to cite but one example, there is undoubtedly the important theoretical and methodological premise of recognizing that what archaeologists are used to call «development» or «increase in social complexity» is, by definition, local in nature and always occurs within and through the interaction of social networks involving different actors. From this it follows, in the words of Ertsen and Wouters, that concepts such as micro and macro are irrelevant, since the micro transforms the macro while being in turn affected in the process. Likewise, «inside» and «outside», «local» and «context» are relative concepts, since each of these temporal, geographical, socioeconomic layers are constantly (re)created.<sup>399</sup> The same is true also when it comes to hierarchies, social arenas, and institutions, for they, too, are constantly being constructed, confirmed, or set aside to the advantage of other strategies of governmentality and negotiation thereof.<sup>400</sup> Against this background, the suggestion put forward in the second chapter of this work further gains in plausibility. In the light of the ethnographic evidence provided by the story of the Amudaryo's containment which was mandated on Fayzulla Xo'jayev on the one hand, and the theoretical framework developed by Ertsen and Wouters on the other, the famous passage in the *Histories* in which Herodotos describes how the King's «infrastructural power» was turned into a despotic one at the expenses of «the land of the Chorasmians, the Hyrkanians, Parthians, Sarangians, and Thamanaei» thanks to the control over their water resources should actually be regarded as nothing more than a sophisticated literary construction. In other words, Herodotos' narrative is masking (for the benefit of his worldview) a status quo resulting, instead, from constant - and never fully formalized - negotiations between the representatives of the imperial administration (in the form of Baktrian satrap?) and the multiple representatives of the local élites (at the regional and, not infrequently, at a lower, village-unit level), which further implies that it ought not to be taken as a textbook example of a planned territorial exploitation devised and enforced from a centralized power irrespective of the «practical situations on the ground» it was forced to face.<sup>401</sup>

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<sup>398</sup> Ertsen and Wouters 2018, 4. To these, another case study might be added, namely the construction of an imperial landscape such as that of the Eastern desert in Egypt under both Ptolemaic and especially Roman rule, as shown most recently by Sidebotham *et al.* 2019 and Weaverdyck *et al.* 2021, 304-310.

<sup>399</sup> Hoo 2022, 237-243 for a similar argument, building on key concepts of globalization literature such as complex connectivity, time-space compression (a critical Marxist concept: Harvey 2001), and what she calls translocalism.

<sup>400</sup> Ertsen and Wouters 2018, 14.

<sup>401</sup> Hdt. 3.117. One just needs to think at a fragment from Priskos of Panion (F 14) in which a certain Berikos, one of Attila's lieutenants, is described. According to Priskos, in fact, he was «one among Attila's λογάρδεις, and owned numerous villages [again something comparable to Curtius' vici?] in the land of the Scythians». See on this latter passage and its historical context most recently Meier 2020, 421-436. On Herodotos' Weltanschauung see Harrison 2018 with literature.

Considerations of this kind are full of implications, the most obvious of which is that, if accepted, a scenario like the one sketched above forces us to raise questions about the effectiveness, duration, depth, and mechanisms underpinning Achaemenid power in Baktria from a perspective diametrically opposed to the one that is dominant in research today, and which on the contrary finds a certain resonance with the theoretical standpoint formulated by Eduard Gibbon in a very famous passage of his *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Taking up Ertsen and Wouters' argument, in fact, it is true that we can observe hierarchies that appear solid and well-oiled, but this does not mean that they should be taken for granted. On the contrary, one should strive to study how these hierarchies could (not) be maintained.<sup>402</sup> The study of the archaeological evidence coming from such different contexts as the Dašt-i Qal'a plain, Baktra's oasis, the Murğ-āb delta, and the Surxondaryo valley carried out so far should have shown beyond any doubt that, at the time of the Persian conquest, in Baktria existed, and in some cases were in the process of further, slow but progressive development, interrelated social networks which moreover were interacting in a trans-scalar perspective enabling their stakeholders to link up, over a centuries-long period, not only with Central Asia as a whole, but even with territories further away from each other and from Baktria itself, such as the Indus basin on the one hand and Mesopotamia on the other, probably thanks to the contribution, whose exact contours are however yet difficult to further understand, of communities of mobile shepherds deeply and actively involved in the life of the major oases scattered across the regional landscape.<sup>403</sup> By virtue of these considerations, the level of social complexity detected by Francfort and Lecomte starting from their assessment of Baktrian hydrology (and described, not without a certain poetic élan, as «wise and intelligent») could just as well, and perhaps more fruitfully, be interpreted not as the most visible outcome of some hard-to-grasp pre-Achaemenid polity's coordinated and conscious top-down effort. On the contrary, it seems more feasible to read our evidence in terms of a much more complex process of social stratification and community interaction acting simultaneously through different local networks interconnected by virtue of the innumerable (political, economic, social, perhaps even religious) needs of the multiple social actors living in the regional landscapes and contesting their use. Lacking enough sources, these are dynamics we can reconstruct today only in their roughest outlines, as is the case for example of the so-called «lapis lazuli route» which used to entangle already during the Middle Bronze Age several communities across a space extended from the Badaḥšān mines to Egypt. However, this is not a reason enough to

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<sup>402</sup> Ertsen and Wouters 2018, 5. Put it otherwise, the real question one should ask is not so much «why did Achaemenid power in Central Asia fall», but instead «how was it possible to preserve said power at a level of sophistication such as that attested by the *ADAB* documents over such a long time».

<sup>403</sup> See on these and related issues of long-distance mobility fostered by mobile networks across Eurasia Frachetti 2008; 2009; 2012; 2015, Frachetti and Rouse 2012, Frachetti 2015, Spengler *et al.* 2014, Frachetti *et al.* 2017 as well as Parzinger 2020<sup>3</sup>, 317-329, 390-419, 486-518, 645-678, 786-815.

argue that they did not exert lasting influence over the sociopolitical and economic framework of the would-be imperial satrapy.<sup>404</sup>

It follows that the remarkable demographic development and the expansion of arable territories in Baktria, as can be argued took place during the Persian period, ought perhaps to be interpreted 1. as the tip of a much deeper iceberg than has been thought so far, the roots of which moreover go back, without any discernible continuity break, at least to the Bronze Age, as the ceramic evidence strongly seems to suggest, as well as 2. in terms of a process within which the social structures and environmental affordances of a territory closely linked to the subsistence strategies of its inhabitants must have shaped the dynamics of imperial building which were fostering the administrative institutions in charge of governing the satrapy to no lesser an extent than the scale at which the latter shaped (or at least attempted to shape) the former.<sup>405</sup> A sign of this phenomenon could perhaps even be seen in the choice, by the Persian administration, of the key locations in which to establish its headquarters, since, from Eastern Baktria to Sogdiana (for example in the Zarafšān valley), archaeological research has been able to identify several major imperial decision-making centers – Stride’s type 1. and 2. «regions» (such as Baktra’s oasis) – across which landscape, however, the ultimate authorities on crucial matters such as the distribution of water resources, and therefore of social status, economic power, and consequently political influence has been assumed based on plentiful ethnographic evidence collected in different regions of Central Asia between the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first 30 years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to have been represented by a relatively small number - and reciprocally related at various degrees of proximity - of strongmen heading extended families (chefferies). These individuals, and their broader network, while being acknowledged as the masters over a given (usually rather small) territory, where however at the same time endowed with social connections and political-economic influence of much wider range.<sup>406</sup> In Northeastern Afġān Baktria, there are at least two sites that present said characteristics and wherefrom Persian power might have chosen (as most likely did) to concentrate its resources in order to take root in the region, thus not only accelerating, but even kick-starting a «quantic leap» within the dynamics of social differentiation and intra-élite competition (in all likelihood already) underway within these areas, as it was most likely the case of Xalčajan in the Surxondaryo valley. A good example is provided by the fortress (Bālā Hišār) of Qundūz, an imposing structure of about 600 x 400 meters inserted within a larger settlement system including, no less prominent in the landscape (500 x 500 meters), the polygon of

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<sup>404</sup> Bavay 1987 as well as the recent assessment of pre-modern mining activities in Central Asia by Thomalsky 2016, 651-652 and Noori *et al.* 2019. See moreover Lyonnet and Dubova 2020, 799-826.

<sup>405</sup> Gardin 1998, 156 ff., Francfort and Lecomte 2002, 639.

<sup>406</sup> Stride *et al.* 2009. For a detailed theoretical discussion of the socioeconomic (and religious) latitude of those individuals both within their respective communities and in the context of sociopolitical entities of – theoretically – overarching power see the monumental synthesis by Graeber and Sahlins 2018.

Qūnsai. Both of them can be classified as *qal‘a*, therefore arguably serving as multifunctional buildings similar to those dated from the 7<sup>th</sup> century around the Amudaryo delta. According to the understanding of these structures coming from excavations carried out elsewhere in Central Asia, most notably Chorasmia, a device such as Qūnsai could represent, at the same time, a point of reference and a sophisticated structure of control in the context of a region in which the available land had already begun to be cultivated at a time much earlier than the Hellenistic period.<sup>407</sup> The second, fundamental, decision-making center within the Baktrian landscape seems to have been the one composed of the ecological unit (as we defined it, the oasis-cum-steppa complex) of Balḥ which, as has recently been shown by some important French excavations, presents an impressive settlement continuity from the Bronze Age until at least the Kuṣāṇa period, but which appears to have assumed its crucial role within its would-be «imperial space» precisely starting from the Achaemenid epoch.<sup>408</sup> As it shall be elaborated further below in this chapter, the interest of the imperial administration in Baktria must not have been limited to the oases alone, but on the contrary is likely to have also - if not particularly – extended to the surrounding borderlands by virtue of the potential of such areas to be «disputed» between different human groups because of their economic versatility. The site of Altin Dilyartēpe, dated from the 6<sup>th</sup> century onwards and located about 22 kilometers South of the Amudaryo and roughly 20 kilometers North of Dāulātābād in the Balḥ oasis, offers some extremely interesting bits of information which deserve to be taken into consideration at this point in our discussion.<sup>409</sup> The site consists of a «city» (more precisely: a *qal‘a*) of some 15 hectares, dominated by an elevated structure (about 28 meters), near which quite significant remains (approximately 4 meters in width) of irrigation structures were found, apparently planned to provide for the subsistence of other smaller settlements, recently detected along a narrow strip of land near the banks of the Amudaryo. These discoveries have been interpreted by archaeologists as an indication of the attempt, by the satrapal administration, to take possession of an internal borderland by means of a conspicuous infrastructural investment (traces of an aqueduct have been found near the site): this is most likely indexical of a process of territorial appropriation that must have been of significant chronological duration and which moreover probably involved a significant transformation of the landscape (once again by means of infrastructures such as forts, aqueducts, and roads). Otherwise said, we are confronted with dynamics analogous to those at work in the Egyptian Eastern desert under Roman

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<sup>407</sup> Leriche 2007, 129, Ball 2019 n. 933.

<sup>408</sup> For an up-to-date bibliography concerning the ancient site of Balḥ see Ball 2019 n. 99, Fenet 2020 for the history of (French) archaeology in Baktria as well as Martinez-Sève 2020c, 225-227 and Marquis 2018 and Lhuillier *et al.* 2021 for an overview of the oasis. Maxwell-Jones 2015 provides the most recent diachronic study of the entire local ceramic corpus to have been published so far.

<sup>409</sup> Ball 2019 n. 38.

imperial rule, which Gary Reger has called «territorial normalization».<sup>410</sup> Against the background of the scenario developed so far, the evidence we have might be read as signaling the imperial desire (of both the Achaemenids and the Romans) to become a more important social player within a socio-economic fabric that was already developed and regarded as strategic for reasons that shall be discussed in more detail in the next section.<sup>411</sup> In short, Altin Dilyar can be interpreted as one of the most ancient antecedents of a model of infrastructural development for the purposes of territorial control and exploitation which, at the present stage of our knowledge, is most clearly detectable at a site such as Kyzyltēpe, in the upper Surxondaryo valley (and to which we will return). This is because here, in an apparently insignificant - at least from a modern, predominantly «urbanocentric» perspective – regional swath, the Persian administrative apparatus appears to have massively invested on the expansion, on a much wider scale than what the local context would seem to require, of a complex infrastructural network (from irrigation canals to roads) in order to both foster the ambitious development of the agricultural potential of a region with a strong pastoral presence and - notably – with the overarching goal of building an administrative hub (the presence of a archives has recently been suggested) in a valley of paramount importance for the connection of the main satrapal seat (Baktra) with some of the major nodes within the socio-political and economic landscape of Northern Central Asia (above all the Sogdian valleys of Zarafšān and Qashqadaryo). However, it is crucial to stress that such an imposing program did not shape the settlement, and its environment, *ex nihilo*, therefore implying that there was already a local context to which such a wide-ranging master plan had to adapt precisely in order to be more effective.<sup>412</sup> For the very success of the infrastructural project aimed at establishing, and consequently expanding and rooting out, Persian power cannot be ruled out - and indeed is quite likely - to have involved local skills and manpower on a large scale, since each of the sites we have mentioned so far developed from much earlier precedents, sometimes even dating back to the Bronze Age, in the apparent absence of detectable signs of settlement discontinuity, similarly to what has been observed with regard to Eastern Bactria.<sup>413</sup> The implication of the above being that local power networks were already in place at all the previously mentioned

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<sup>410</sup> On this point see Reger 2017 as well as the recent synthesis by Sidebotham *et al.* 2019. Note moreover Weaverdyck *et al.* 2021, 304-310.

<sup>411</sup> On the most recent archaeological projects carried out in the oasis of Baktra see Besenval and Marquis 2008, 988, Fouache *et al.* 2009, 1052-1054, Marquis 2018 and Lhuillier *et al.* 2021 (with special focus on the oasis' occupation during the Iron Age).

<sup>412</sup> Wu 2018, 211; 2020, 606-608, with the suggestion of satrapal archive having been installed at Kyzyltēpe.

<sup>413</sup> See most recently Lyonnet and Fontugne 2021 on the Iron Age chronology of Southern Central Asia, suggesting among other things that Kyzyltēpe might have been not (only) the outcome of an imperial fiat.

sites, whose main representatives needed to be addressed, and if possible taken on board for the better sake of the Empire, if not of themselves.<sup>414</sup>

In the light of this evidence one is compelled to wonder based on of what kind of agreements was it possible for the imperial administration, especially in its phase d'installation and at least until the aftermath of the civil wars that brought Darius to the Achaemenid throne, to lure in and employ the labor force necessary for the implementation (and the further upkeep) of infrastructures of the complexity of those that we see attested in the Baktra oasis, in Dašt -i Qal'a plain or, again, in the Surxondaryo valley. As Francfort himself pointed out, based on the available evidence it is difficult to reconstruct a picture of Achaemenid Baktria sub specie archeologiae that is coherent with the literary sources (for example Herodotos), with the latter depicting the King - and his satraps - as the main, if not the only, actors of some purchase in the social arena of the Central Asian satrapies. On the contrary, what surfaces from the documentation acquired in the last 40 years of excavations is a much more intricated picture, which is indeed revealing «of the permanence of territories that had been made the target of irrigation projects through the use of traditional methods, which seem to have developed little over time and [whose origin] can always be traced in the same basins [catchment areas, i. e., from Murg-āb to Vaḥš to Balḥ-āb] from the Bronze Age to Achaemenid times».<sup>415</sup>

This important consideration, the merit of which consists above all in underlining the fact that the first Empire in Baktrian history came into being starting from local premises strongly rooted in a territory extended at least from Northeastern Afġānistān to the Murg-āb valley in Türkmenistan, should not make us forget that, in turn, these «local premises» arose and developed within a political and cultural horizon that was much broader, geographically distributed, socially complex, and yet effectively interconnected than one would have been ready to think, and even less keen to admit, until a few years ago.<sup>416</sup> In particular, the persistence, over the centuries up to the Hellenistic period (and their resumption in the following decades until at least the Mongol conquest), of topographical choices and building techniques in the design and construction of Baktrian hydraulic infrastructure provides a strong indication supporting a *longue durée* history of both the skills widespread among the indigenous population and the social networks capable of coping with the maintenance of the existing infrastructural fabric (and if necessary even to its expansion). In both cases, these are essential components for an effective exploitation of the satrapal resources, and which therefore the Achaemenid overlords must have endeavored to maintain also, if not above all, by virtue of the gains

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<sup>414</sup> As pointed out by Cátia Antunes (2020, 305) «Perhaps the most successful mechanism of inclusion in empire is the act of individual and communal participation in the opportunities provided by empire building. Many of these opportunities were paramount for the prosperity of communities and the wealth of particular individuals».

<sup>415</sup> Francfort and Lecomte 2002, 655.

<sup>416</sup> Gentelle 1989, 81-91, Lyonnet 1997, 81 ff., Kohl 2007, 182-192.

made available to them by the possibility of tapping into said social networks and the skilled manpower, and natural resources, their leaders commanded.

This hypothesis does not lose its thrust even when we take into consideration areas of Central Asia where, although the potential was (and is) not lacking, to date it has not been possible to recognize tangible signs of investment in agricultural infrastructure on a scale comparable to what the resources of the region would have allowed. This is for example the case of the Murǵ-āb delta, where, although not at all absent, agriculture seems to have relied predominantly, even in historical times, on the exploitation of paleo-channels, whose labyrinthine network has been reconstructed using aerial photography and detailed field surveys.<sup>417</sup> The interesting aspect of these structures consists in their double capacity both to channel the alluvial waters of the Murǵ-āb and to drain them in case of excessive increase of the flow rate, so as to ensure a considerable economic differentiation even in areas, at least speaking from the point of view of the technology employed - which is different from what was known to the local population -, which was not precisely the cutting edge within the Central Asian context. Known among other names under the label of «residual agriculture», examples of this economic strategy were still observable to the soldiers and diarists who in the 19<sup>th</sup> century visited the (now) O‘zbek region of Qoraqalpog‘iston (Northwest of the Buxāran oasis), in which territory the inhabitants – not by chance mostly highly mobile shepherds communities - were able to cultivate melons, millet, and pumpkins in the almost total absence of any form of infrastructure, simply by exploiting the flooding regime of the Amudaryo: a scenario probably not too different from that with which the Persians were confronted at the time of the conquest of vast territories in Central Asia by Cyrus’ armies.<sup>418</sup> What is important to stress, in this context, is that the apparently backward nature of a given society’s economic (and social) organization, far from being indexical of «primitivism» or, worse «barbarism», as Scott has forcefully pointed out is in fact often a strategic choice, consciously made and consequently enforced, i. e. a political positioning with respect to (and not infrequently more or less openly against) a political entity 1. from which one cannot free oneself by force, 2. which structures and institutions can, at least in theory, offer enormous opportunities in terms of power and prestige to be exploited, again, within the domestic socio-political arena, but 3. which one chooses in full awareness to keep as much distance as possible from, since those same structures and institutions (the «vortex of the state» as Mischa Meier has it) are clearly perceived as being catalysts of social, economic, and political dynamics whose consequences, in the medium and especially in the long term, are neither always easy to predict in advance, nor welcome.<sup>419</sup>

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<sup>417</sup> See most recently on (although mainly Hellenistic and post-Hellenistic) Margiana the overview in Puschnigg 2020 with references.

<sup>418</sup> Lyonnet 1990, 86, Betts *et al.* 2001; 2002; 2012, Minardi 2015a.

<sup>419</sup> Scott 2009, 178-219. Cf. moreover Meier 2020, 440-470 (using the case study of the Attilana *societas* within the Hunnic – short-term – Empire during the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, on which see now Heather 2020) where the

In the light of the model of social complexity development elaborated by Maurits Ertzen and Kyra Wouters, considerations of this kind thus decisively reintroduce the question of the constantly in statu nascendi nature of imperial power in pre-modern Central Asia (things would in fact have changed drastically, and not even in this case definitively, during the «cannibal years» - the 1930s - of Stalinist Soviet Union). As a consequence, they greatly contribute in replacing an overly simplifying dichotomy, which limits itself to distinguish between «dominators» and «dominated», with a dialectical scenario characterized, in the words of anthropologist Stefano Allovio, by a situational «forest of alliances» and tactical (re)positioning within which, although in the context of an institutional and normative framework - at least in theory - very well defined (the Achaemenid imperial paradigm) the question of who «really» exercised power (and in what context: i. e.: at what scale of observation) cannot be resolved with the usual sharpness.<sup>420</sup> The hypothesis, moreover, that we are not dealing with isolated cases, but that the scenario suggested here can fruitfully be applied to the entire Central Asian context is supported by the results of the excavations carried out in the territory of Achaemenid Hyrkānia (Ἰρκανία, Vaṛkāna in the Persian royal inscriptions), and more precisely in the present territory of Dehistān (Western Türkmenistan).<sup>421</sup> In fact, here, too, moreover in a region, such as the Transcaspian one, particularly favored by mobile shepherds (among which the most famous are undoubtedly the Türkmen communities of the Qāḡār period) traces have been found of a sophisticated system of water collection and conservation that must have been in place before the Persian conquest and whose maintenance seems to have been provided by a society structured, not unlike post-Urartean Armenia as described by Lori Khatchadourian and Lauren Ristvet or the 7<sup>th</sup> century Chorasman landscape studied by Michelle Negus-Cleary, according to «non-nucleated» settlement patterns: meaning low density and high mobility.<sup>422</sup> This evidence, incidentally, could at least partly explain the traditional attributes of semi ferine barbarism attached to the Hyrkanians (most notably the members of the would-be Arsakid dynasty) in our extant classical sources.<sup>423</sup> Not differently from the cases of the Surxondaryo valley and the Toškent oasis (Čăč) studied by Sebastian Stride and colleagues, in fact, in the Dehistān it is also possible to assume with some plausibility that the process of expansion (and in some cases of implementing ex novo) of a

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socioeconomic dynamics triggered by the «imperial vortex» in the communities interacting with a system such as Rome are insightfully pointed out. Rollinger 2023 makes a similar argument for the Achaemenid Empire.

<sup>420</sup> Scott 1985, 308 and Allovio 2007.

<sup>421</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 3.25.1, where what most likely was a satrapal seat is mentioned («Ζαδράκαρτα, τὴν μεγίστην πόλιν τῆς Ἰρκανίας»), Polyb. 10.48.1. and Ptol. *Geog.*, 6.9.1-3. For an overview of the Achaemenid East from an archaeological perspective see Genito 2013, Lo Muzio 2017, 37-55 as well as Wu 2020 (mainly on Bactria and Sogdiana) and Petrie 2020 (on the territories of Hidûš, namely Achaemenid-ruled (or *-claimed*) Southeast Asia, with Coloru 2021).

<sup>422</sup> See most recently Negus-Cleary 2017 and Ristvet 2018.

<sup>423</sup> Shayegan 2011, Gregoratti 2014; 2017a; 2017b, Fabian 2019a and Bruno 2020 on the Arsakid Empire, its social structure as well as its relationship with the steppe world (a topic which has been studied in numerous contributions by Marek Jan Olbrycht: see e. g. 2015a; 2015b). Wiesehöfer and Müller 2017 on the Arsakids seen through Graeco-Roman eyes.



significant water network not only for irrigation purposes, but also to support the imperial postal system, as suggested by the famous Polybian passage on the qanāt (known in Fārsi as kārīz) was indeed the outcome of a negotiation process fostering economic (and political) interests *shared*, albeit from different perspectives and for different purposes, between the imperial administration and the representatives of local communities. That the former could not do without the latter (thus implying some forms of native élite stockholding at satrapal, if not wider, scale) is compellingly suggested by Polybios' very account, for he reports that, as late as the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, only the locals had the topographical skills necessary to effectively exploit this crucial territorial infrastructural asset.<sup>424</sup> Analogous to what has been suggested concerning other Central Asian satrapies (from Sogdiana to Chorasmia and Baktria itself), it seems possible to argue that the reason for the archaeological invisibility of the Persian Empire in the region should not be identified, as is sometimes still the case, in its alleged weakness (of political nature or otherwise), but rather be taken as carefully planned and coherently pursued decision aimed at recruiting, through mechanisms that shall be explored more closely further below, some representatives of the local communities in order to develop on a larger scale and to better coordinate an infrastructural network which - as stunning as it may appear in its final stage - was in fact the result of dynamics 1. dictated by strictly local contingencies and needs closely linked to the nature of a given environment (its affordances), and 2. spanned through many (at least 7) centuries.<sup>425</sup>

From what seems possible to learn from the available evidence, therefore, the level of socio-economic complexity that we see emerging in Central Asia on the eve of the Achaemenid conquest does not imply either the - forceful - involvement of thousands of workers reduced to (semi)slavery, as assumed by Wittfogel or, as it is sometimes still currency in contemporary historiography, of a (despotic, «oriental») centralized power, especially if the latter, which the *ADAB* clearly show as having been all but absent, could indeed rely on a complex and widespread network of local «political communities» (sensu Honeychurch) able to compensate for the obstacles posed for example by the rugged terrain of a country such as Baktria. It is therefore perhaps no coincidence that, at least according to the available sources, no more than two satraps (from Dādêršiš and Vivāna under Darius I - and probably Cambyses - to Bessos and Barsaentes under Darius III) sufficed for controlling and making available to the Empire the immense wealth of men and resources from Chorasmia and

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<sup>424</sup> Cf. Polyb. 10.28 (who, however, says that only the locals were able to identify the wells, which is highly unlikely), Briant 2001b and Starr 2015, 38-39.

<sup>425</sup> Compare Antunes 2020, pointing out that the Portuguese made use of the full set of Melakka's institutions (and appointed powerbrokers) decades after the ousting of its last ruler to efficiently exploit their new imperial domains in Southeast Asia.

Baktria to Arachosia and India: for they were in fact the most prominent, but by no means the only imperial stakeholders in Achaemenid Central Asia.<sup>426</sup>

### 3.3.3. *Brave (Old)New World*

The Soviet invasion of Afġānistān (started in 1979 and appropriately called Sovietnam in a recent study) marked the beginning of a vicious loop of devastation, from which– 40 years later - the country has still not been able to free itself and which, alongside tragedies too numerous to count, has made - and in certain areas still makes - archaeological research in the country prohibitively to say the least.<sup>427</sup> However, during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the *Dafa* reopened, albeit on an extremely small scale, its activities in Kābul: among the most significant consequences of this important event there is undoubtedly the resuming of excavations in the Balḡ oasis, of which some preliminary results have already been published.<sup>428</sup> Although nothing even remotely comparable to the findings at Āi Xānum has (yet) emerged, the central role played the oasis in the political and economic context of Central Asia North of the Hindūkūš is gaining more definite contours, which is why some of the conclusions reached by *Dafa* as well as Central Asian and Afġān scholars deserve consideration in this chapter, not least for a proper contextualization of this key territory within its (macro)regional context.<sup>429</sup> The surface of Baktra's oasis stretches, in an East-West direction, along the approximately 70 km separating the modern cities of Mazār -i Šarīf and Āqča, near which no less than four irrigation canals have been found, some dating back to the Bronze Age (e. g. in the case of the Dašly complex), while others have been attributed by archaeologists to the so-called Yaz III period (i. e. from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, therefore during the years of Achaemenid hegemony over Central Asia), and whose central function seems to have been to supply water to a macro-settlement unit the population of which apparently increased considerably starting from the Persian period.<sup>430</sup> Along a South-North axis, on the other hand, the oasis extends for about 40 km between the peaks of the Kūh -e Albruz, an imposing natural landmark which, however, was crossed by watercourses – the most important being the Balḡ-āb - and a chain of sandy dunes that today (but it is possible that things were significantly different in the past) separates the oasis from the banks of

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<sup>426</sup> Jacobs 1994, 116 ff. Cf. Polyb. 28.4 for a very interesting example of power delegation to political and administrative structures of remarkable *local* nature in the context of Seleukid Central Asia (on which see most recently Martinez-Sève 2020b and Strootman 2020c).

<sup>427</sup> Penter and Meier 2017 on the context which caused Soviet intervention and its consequences.

<sup>428</sup> Marquis and Besenval 2008: see most recently the overview article by Marquis 2018, Martinez-Sève 2020c (mainly focused on the Hellenistic period) and Lhuillier *et al.* 2021.

<sup>429</sup> Maxwell-Jones 2015, 470-508 has carried out a similar study from the viewpoint of the ceramic evidence.

<sup>430</sup> For Āqča see Ball 2019 n. 42, while on the Dašly complex see Ball 2019 nos. 256-259.

the Oxus, approximately 20 km North of the Northernmost tip of the oasis itself.<sup>431</sup> The survey activities carried out in the last few years have shown that, not differently from what has been observed for example in the case of the Murġ-āb delta, the irrigation regime of the Balġ-āb for agricultural exploitation has very ancient origins: a terminus a quo has been identified in the Achaemenid period, but an even higher dating cannot be excluded. During the Bronze Age, in fact, the river seems to have been endowed with sufficient strength to reach, through a dense bundle of minor streams, the main course of the Amudaryo, whose waters having been exploited by the local population to balance the salinity of the Balġ-āb, the latter a consequence of the saturation zone («phreatic layer/zone») of the same river.<sup>432</sup> The latter is one of the most significant results contributed by aerial photography in the excavation activity around the oasis, because it considerably helped in revolutionizing the *imago recepta* of the upper course of the Balġ-āb, which was believed to have dried up since the Neolithic period. On the contrary, the morphological analysis of the terrain allows us now to show that, because of some climatic changes occurred around the Upper Pleistocene (100000-15000 BCE), several natural channels had in fact succeeded in carving their way through the sedimentation cones inherited from the Ice Age, while in the lower course of the river dispersion phenomena had taken place on a smaller scale.<sup>433</sup> To this must be added the recurrence of floods of significant momentum, responsible for repeated shifts in the river course across the plain. This latter is a feature which, it should be noted, at least partially helps to explain the rather curious topography of the Balġ-āb branches. The reconstruction of the plain's settlement cartography was not least facilitated by the fact that, in the course of time and until extremely recent years, beds now devoid of water were repeatedly used by the local population, whose members were able to transform them into irrigation canals, a further testimony to the persistence of ecological-territorial skills essential to the exploitation of entire region's significant economic potential.<sup>434</sup>

A second result of paramount importance achieved by the excavations of the *DAFA* has to be seen in having unearthed the first unequivocal traces of human activity datable to the Achaemenid period in the entire Baktra oasis: moreover, said activities to the current state of knowledge look like as having been much more intense than previously thought. For example, excavations at Tēpe Zargarān, a site located along a road of great strategic importance between Baktra and Mazār -i Šarīf, brought to light a dense network of irrigation canals seemingly having fulfilled the purpose of supplying water to the fortress, the latter located in what (nowadays) is the semi-desert area spanning North of the

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<sup>431</sup> Fouache *et al.* 2009, 1036 ff.

<sup>432</sup> Marquis 2018, 159-162.

<sup>433</sup> Besenval and Marquis 2008, 974, Fouache *et al.* 2009, 1036 ff.

<sup>434</sup> Fouache *et al.* 2009, 1046 ff.

Baktra oasis towards the Oxus and equipped, at its top echelons, with a structure (the Bālā Hiṣār) surprisingly similar to the so-called ville ronde of Kuhna Qal‘a, in the plain of Āi Xānum.<sup>435</sup>

The information obtained from the excavations at Tēpe Zargaran could be interpreted, in the light of the model proposed by Stride, as an indication of the expansionist strategy adopted by the Achaemenid Empire in Baktria, namely the foundation (or the granting of the economic and logistical support necessary for expansion) of settlements strategically located in certain regions considered to be of particular importance (from the topographical and/or economic point of view), which seems to have been followed by an impressive infrastructural development (caravanserais, granaries, supply stations for imperial couriers, implied for example by the Polybian information concerning the qanāt still existing in Hyrkania at the time of Antiochus III), all coordinated with a proportional widening of the irrigation system as to support - and further expand - the growth of a key territorial node such as Baktra’s oasis within the regional geopolitical framework.<sup>436</sup> Tellingly, the case of Baktra is unlikely to have been an isolated one, and this has even prompted scholars to suggest that, as far as the plain of Āi Xānum is concerned, the breadth and fertility of the territory already cultivated during the Achaemenid era (about 7500 ha) would be such as to justify the existence of an administrative center of considerable respect, and perhaps even the presence of a treasury.<sup>437</sup> It is moreover noteworthy that structures such as those mentioned above (especially granaries and caravanserais), the existence of which can be guessed from the descriptions of the πέτραι belonging to the Sogdian ὕπαρχοι preserved in the literary sources, not only fulfilled the task of storing food supplies (the result of tax collection?) coming from the countryside: moreover, and coherently with the scenario suggested by archaeologists based on the evidence from Ēgijn gol, they also provided to maintain «organic relations» with the neighboring territories. Therefore, they fulfilled another crucially important task, for they connected different nodes of the new satrapy’s administrative fabric. As it is possible to assume from the considerations made so far, the latter is likely to have arisen thanks to

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<sup>435</sup> See on this issue the recent contribution by Lhuillier *et al.* 2018; 2021, as well as Ball 2019 n. 99: although now somewhat outdated, Bernard *et al.* 2006 is nevertheless important because it provides one of the first (although preliminary) excavation reports on the new activities carried out by the *DIFA* in the oasis. The attribution of Tēpe Zargaran to the Achaemenid period appears supported by ceramic evidence, which has moreover allowed to reconstruct a settlement continuity with the Hellenistic period comparable to what is known from Āi Xānum. This provides further evidence of the paramount role played by the oasis even in the context of the gigantic infrastructural investments which took place in Eastern Baktria (Martinez-Sève 2015; 2020c). Incidentally it should be noted that such evidence significantly calls into question (vocally supported by Brian Kritt) of a radical shift in geopolitical balance to the advantage of Āi Xānum during the Seleukid period. See Kritt 1996; 2015; 2016.

<sup>436</sup> Gardin 1998, 138. For an interesting comparative example of the link between fortresses guarding irrigated plains of strategic interest and the creation of an extremely complex network of small housing units («villages»: remember Curtius’ vici) capable of sustaining themselves thanks to the demand coming from the men stationed within the garrison and the economies of scale these entanglements generated see Weaverdyck 2010; 2016.

<sup>437</sup> That such a facility existed cannot be doubted at least as far as the Hellenistic period is concerned, and one might legitimately wonder if such an important innovation in Seleukid Baktria such was indeed and did not instead develop an Achaemenid precedent. See Rapin 1992a on the Hellenistic treasury and Mairs 2014c on Achaemenid Āi Xānum. An interesting parallel is provided by the Arachosian evidence discussed in King 2019.

already existing socio-territorial networks, thus transforming into units of the satrapal administration semi-private centers of (economic, political, in the case of Kōktēpe perhaps even religious) power. This was almost certainly the case with the columned halls of Erebuni, and there is good chance that similar patterns apply to Vivāna's irmatam.<sup>438</sup> In other words, in this case we would be confronted with the - although uncertain and fragmentary - archaeological evidence of the formative process of the «constitutive outside» explored by Ando in a very shrewd analysis devoted to the development of Roman infrastructural power. Such an argument, moreover, might be supported by an interesting passage coming from the 15<sup>th</sup> book of Strabo's *Geography*, in which the infrastructures of Susa are described. According to the geographer, «in the citadel [of Susa] every sovereign built, as a testimony of the administrative activity of his government, a palace for himself, treasuries and warehouses for the preservation of the tribute [in kind]».<sup>439</sup> This passage, combined - on the one hand - with the plentiful evidence of the stubbornness with which the Persian bureaucratic apparatus strove to create an administrative landscape as homogeneous as possible, provides a solid argument supporting the hypothesis that the structures necessary for the development of such a landscape were set up in the Eastern satrapies 1. either by creating them ex novo or 2. by transforming, through a process defined by Lori Khatchadourian as «capturing», devices for the display of local power into extensions («delegates») of the imperial xšaça- to be then framed within the imperial paradigm which was supposed to take command of such local instruments of power and territorial control.<sup>440</sup> Such a suggestion gains further plausibility if we consider the recent discovery, at the site of Afrāsyāb, of one of these infrastructures (a granary) which, although dated to the Hellenistic period, is very likely to have had a predecessor, by virtue of the size (a perimeter of 70 stadia) that historiographic tradition attributes to the settlement, thereby identifying it as an, indeed very prominent, center of Achaemenid power in Sogdiana (and it will not be idle to recall that the site of Altin 10 II, in Bactria, may have had during Achaemenid times precisely the same food-storing function. The possibility that we are dealing with a pattern is made further likely if we consider Arrian's apparently random (and precisely for this reason particularly valuable) mention of the colossal granaries which Alexander would providentially have stumbled upon in the middle of the otherwise bleak («ἔρημα») territory of Gedrosia.<sup>441</sup> For in fact even this allegedly remotest of the Eastern satrapies was most likely perfectly entangled within the imperial administrative and road network, and it is moreover possible to guess

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<sup>438</sup> Briant 1984, 204.

<sup>439</sup> Strab. 15.3.21: cf. Ando 2017a; 2017b, 119 on the concept of «constitutive outside». The spread into the territory (and the respective societies) within the Empire of a system of administration and government originally developed in (and for) Pārsa but which possessed, among its chief features, the flexibility necessary for being replicated in other contexts has been stressed by Henkelman 2017a, 149.

<sup>440</sup> On imperial «capturing» of certain kinds of objects aimed at fulfilling goals of sociopolitical and territorial control see Khatchadourian 2016, 73 ff.

<sup>441</sup> Henkelman 2017a, 45-49 for an astute reading of this geo-ethnographical construct against the grain.

that enjoyed, as it shall be discussed in the next chapter, excellent contacts with the satrapies further to the North, at least with Areia and, notably, Baktria itself.<sup>442</sup>

Coming back to the archaeological evidence, the map sheets published contextually with the excavation reports have made it possible to show that, similarly to the most studied sites in the region (for example in Eastern Baktria), the settlements located in the Baktra plain and dating back to the Achaemenid and Hellenistic periods were located both, as one would expect, in the vicinity of irrigation canals still in use and, more interestingly, very close to older thalwegs (i. e. the course of more ancient rivers which, as we have seen, the population was able to effectively exploit for agricultural purposes). Moreover, the fact that, as recently stated by Philippe Marquis, many of the most important sites in the oasis conceal Bronze Age settlement layers hidden further below the soil could be taken as further supporting the hypothesis that the Achaemenid peopling of the Balḥ-āb delta and of the entire oasis did not develop arbitrarily, but rather by 1. adapting and 2. trying to exploit to the advantage of the imperial apparatus the demography (and the sociopolitical hierarchies resulting from it) of a territory with a long history of settlement and of sophisticated land exploitation.<sup>443</sup> Interesting, it is only after the demise of the (post) Hellenistic Empires that the intensive as well as the extensive exploitation of the Balḥ plain gained again momentum on a large scale, flowering again under the Kušāṇa (a possible testimony to the different imperial strategies of the Achaemenids compared to their successors in Central Asia).<sup>444</sup>

The assumption of a close relationship between, on the one hand, imposing projects of territorial exploitation and, on the other, the consolidation of imperial power through investments aimed at strengthening the internal position of some members of the local élite (in this case those living in the Baktra oasis) by making them regional expressions of Achaemenid authority could find support if, as has been argued in recent years - since its discovery - the recently excavated site of Čašma-ye Šifā («the gorge of the healing spring» roughly 20 km South of Balḥ) were to be identified, as suggested, either with the imposing fortress of Aornos (Ἄορνος, therefore another πέτρα to be placed side by side with the Sogdian ones, and moreover within the very territory of Baktra) conquered by Alexander after a hard siege or, as recently claimed by Warwick Ball, with the Zariaspa mentioned several times in the Graeco-Roman historians and turned into the stage of an important meeting (a σύλλογος,

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<sup>442</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 6.22.2. See moreover Grenet 2004 on pre-Mongol Marakanda (and Lyonnet 2020 more in general on post-Achaemenid Sogdiana) as well as Martinez-Sève and Baratin 2013 on the Hellenistic granary recently discovered at the site. On the pre-Hellenistic settlement of Afrāsīyāb see Curt. 7.6.10-12 and Arr. *Anab.*, 3.30.6, who explicitly calls it «βασίλεια τῆς Σογδιανῶν χώρας». On Altin 10 II cf. Lo Muzio 2017, 45 and Ball 2019 n. 37 (according to Ciro Lo Muzio, this might have been the prototype for the Hellenistic treasury of Āi Xānum).

<sup>443</sup> On Alexander's foundations in Central Asia see most recently Giangiulio 2020.

<sup>444</sup> Marquis 2018, 163. The extent of the economic potential of Baktra's oasis - which is still waiting to be adequately assessed - is all the more evident if we take into consideration the recent discovery of some copper mines that seem to have been exploited at least since the Bronze Age: cfr. Thomalsky *et al.* 2013, 225. Besenval and Marquis 2008, 982. Mairs 2014b, 57-102; 2014c on the Āi Xānum plain from the Achaemenid to the Hellenistic period.

therefore it was hardly an arbitrarily chosen place) of all the regional strongmen convened by Alexander (and deserted en masse) in the - dramatically failed - attempt to pacify the region during his two-years campaign after Darius' murder.<sup>445</sup>

Leaving aside the – considerable - difficulties in reconciling historiographic evidence with archaeological data, the exceptional location of the site (where the Balḥ-āb crosses the last chain separating it from Afġān Turkestan, whose extreme Northern limit coincides with the course of the Amudaryo) makes Čašma-ye Šifā a place of strategic interest impossible to underestimate, which not surprisingly attracted the attention of the imperial administration. The latter may have manifested itself in the fortification of a promontory located on the right bank of the Balḥ-āb and known to locals as Kāfir Qal'a.<sup>446</sup> On the opposite bank of the river, the ridge reaches the upper part of the Kūh -e Albruz, which implies that the qal'a developed on both sides of the river. The excavated section of the site can be described as a 7 x 4 km rectangle, massively fortified according to a technique closely resembling Altin Dilyar, and it has been argued that, in both cases, the main goal of the emplacements had been to protect the irrigation canals situated nearby. This is a pattern that we have already encountered at the Machai Darya, near the Derbent gorge in Uzbekistan, in accordance with a strategy of civilian engineering - but easily readaptable to defensive purposes - that, again in the Balḥ oasis, has been recognized at the site of Čehel Sutūn, and that was taken up and further developed in the Kušāna period.<sup>447</sup> A similar strategy can also be detected in Eastern Bactria, specifically at Kulūhtēpe, at least until the time of the so-called Great Kušāna (75-225 CE).<sup>448</sup> Even in the very same territory of Āi Xānum, the impressive hydraulic engineering works undertaken by the Šāybanīd Ḥān Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh II (1598-1583) in the plain of Imām Šāhib and described in detail by his biographer, Ḥāfiẓ Tanīšh (ca. 1549-1588), simply resumed and expanded masterplans dated by French archaeologists not latest than the Kušāna, but which cannot be excluded were in fact much older.<sup>449</sup> Further supporting the feasibility of Negus Cleary's suggestion, one of the reasons for the

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<sup>445</sup> Ball 2019 n. 186. Cf. Arr. *Anab.*, 4.1.5., Ptol. *Geog.*, 6.11.7, Polyb. 10.49 («εις πόλιν Ζαριάσπαν τῆς Βακτριανῆς») Steph. Byz., s. v., who explicitly posits an equivalence with Baktra («Ζαριάσπα· ἢ Ζαριάσπη, πόλις Βακτριανῆ, Στράβων ἰα. Ἡ ἐκαλεῖτο καὶ Βάκτρα»). Against such overlapping between Zariaspa and Bactria has to my mind very convincingly argued Claude Rapin (2018a, 263-271). On the siege of Ἰστρονός by Alexander's army see Rollinger 2014c as well as the narrative in Arr. *Anab.*, 3.29.1 ff. As far as the σύλλογος gathered by Alexander at Zariaspa see Arr. *Anab.*, 4.7.3 as well as Briant 1984, 85 (to be read against another assessment of the same passage, compared with Arr. *Anab.*, 4.15, in Briant 2017a, 476-479) and Klinkott 2005, 283-284 on the function of such an institution within the military context of the Achaemenid Empire. Coherently with his reading of the events in that year, Rapin 2018a shifts the place of the σύλλογος in Sogdiana. Degen 2022, 302-408 on Alexander and Achaemenid imperial ideology (on which see also Rollinger 2021c).

<sup>446</sup> This is most likely the site enlisted in Ball 2019 n. 496 under the name of Šāh Anġīr. The name Kāfir Qal'a, literally «the citadel of the infidel» is both extremely vague and extremely frequent in Afġānistān. Therefore, if further details are lacking, it cannot be so easy to precisely pinpoint those sites on the map.

<sup>447</sup> The site is also known under the name of Čehel Duhtarān: see Ball 2019 n. 191.

<sup>448</sup> Gardin 1998, 116. See moreover Marquis 2018 and Lhuillier *et al.* 2021. On the settlement of Kulūhtēpe cf. Ball 2019 n. 640, while on the Great Kušāna see most recently Morris 2019a, 74-83 and Morris 2019b for a valuable overview of the sources.

<sup>449</sup> Bernard 1985, 81.

singling out of the site of Kāfir Qal‘a as we can reconstruct it from the expansion and fortification of which it was the target during the Achaemenid period is almost certainly its versatility. From the promontory it was in fact possible to control some of the most important routes that crossed the oasis, for example the one which, following the upper course of the Balḥ-āb, connected Baktra to Bāmiyān further South, or the one linking up the imperial foundation with Irān through Yakāwlang, and finally with India through Čārikār (North of Kābul), Baḡrām, and Ġalāl Ābād.<sup>450</sup> In addition to this, from the same peak it was also possible to control the first natural landmark (with the exception of the Oxus, both exploitable both for connecting purposes as well as a bulwark) that peaceful as well as hostile individuals and/or groups meet when passing through Afḡān territory coming from Central Asia further North. Finally, the site of Kāfir Qal‘a secured its occupants a privileged position within the plain itself, thus fulfilling another crucial function of the pre-Achaemenid infrastructures described by both Negus-Cleary and Khatchadourian, namely that of seeing and being seen at the same time. And it is precisely because of this powerfully symbolic function of delimitation (and, consequently, appropriation) of a given territory that the Achaemenids did not fail to innervate the plain with canals, in turn probably dating back at least to the Pleistocene (as the pedological analysis of the terrain seems to show). Moreover, such a picture in turn leads to the fairly reasonable assumption that the site of Kāfir Qal‘a was occupied during the entire course of its history, and this despite the fact that the first monumental traces of such history at the settlement start with the Persian period.<sup>451</sup>

On the whole, what the comparison of the evidence discussed so far seems to show (and this especially with regard to the cases of the Dašt -i Qal‘a and of the Balḥ-āb oasis) is a remarkable correlation between canals (sometimes even very ancient ones) and multifunctional settlements of particular importance in the economy (also from a symbolic perspective) of the landscape within which they are enmeshed. Rather than simply interpreting this correlation, as has been done so far, as a sign of the continuity of the «agricultural improvement» (*mise en valeur agricole*) of these territories at least since the Bronze Age - and thus as an outcome of the exclusive (or even only predominant) role reserved for agriculture in these areas – following the interpretation put forward for other (but remarkably similar) would-be imperial borderlands by Michelle Negus-Cleary and Lori Khatchadourian, I would be keen to identify also sites such as the complex of Čašma-ye Šifā as places of meeting, conviviality, and negotiation (e. g. of grazing rights or water exploitation) of both intra-

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<sup>450</sup> See most recently Rapin and Grenet 2018 on the route to India available to Alexander (which equals to say that it was already active during the Achaemenid period): further note Petrie 2020 and Coloru 2021 on India under the Achaemenids. On the other sites mentioned see respectively Ball 2019 nos. 100 (Bāmiyān), 122 (Baḡrām), 176 (Čārikār) and 464 (Ġalāl Ābād).

<sup>451</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 4.28.1-4.30.4, Curt. 7.11.24, Besenval and Marquis 2008, 983, Fouache *et al.* 2009, 1050 ff., Rollinger 2014c. On the military function involved in advertising the spatial control of the Central Asian qal‘a see both Negus-Cleary 2007, 9-12 and, more recently, Lo Muzio 2017, 46-48.



and inter-élitarian nature characteristic of the oasis-cum-steppa complex of pre-modern Central Asia.<sup>452</sup>

What distinguishes the Achaemenid period, however, is the «quantic leap» caused 1. by the increased cultivation of the available land (in some cases, such as Kyzyltëpe, an obvious political choice due to the environmental conditions of the site) and 2. by the construction of an infrastructural network aimed at connecting the single (and in previous times arguably both dispersed and competing with each other) nodes of the Baktrian landscape 2.1. among themselves and 2.2. with the outside world, from Sogdiana to India and Persepolis itself (and/or Susa).<sup>453</sup> In addition, it is not idle to point out that, as shown again recently by the *DABA* surveys lead by Roland Besenval and his colleagues, particularly in the case of sites such as Čašma-ye Šifâ and Altin Dilyar a key function of these settlements should probably be recognized in the access secured by their position (and perhaps by the social capital at the disposal of their former masters?) to the oases' borderlands, i. e. to the territories located in the semi-desert steppe up to the course of the Amudaryo.<sup>454</sup> In cases where a development comparable to that of the sites previously discussed is not detectable archaeologically, this may have much to do with a conscious choice by the Persian administration to interfere as little as possible in local dynamics and to delegate the extraction of necessary resources (in terms of imperial self-representation - think of Susa's foundation charter - or of economic-administrative practice, above all the maintenance of the cavalry) to their own trustees (chosen precisely by virtue of the strategic convenience of the territory controlled either directly by them or by their retinue) and not with an allegedly weak imperial footprint on Baktrian soil, whether in political, economic or cultural terms. Not only does the evidence just discussed suggest a rather different picture, but the *ADAB* documents can be taken as the ultimate proof against this hard-to-die hypothesis.<sup>455</sup>

Starting from the best attested cases of Kuhna Qal'a in the Dašt -i Qal'a plain and of Čašma-ye Šifâ and Altin Dilyar in the Baktra oasis, it is possible to recognize in the - massive - expansion of these settlements the result of an equally conscious political choice by the imperial administration to

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<sup>452</sup> Negus-Cleary 2013; 2015a I; 215b; 2017, Khatchadourian 2016, 81-117.

<sup>453</sup> Briant 2018a, 268-273 on working parties travelling from Central Asia to Susa as well as in the opposite direction.

<sup>454</sup> Cf. Fouache *et al.* 2012 and Marquis 2018, 166, who interprets the function of sites such as Čašma-ye Šifâ from a prevalently defensive point of view, while it is my opinion, as it shall be argued in the last section of this chapter, that an equally - if not more - important role should be attributed to the imperial will to appropriate the resources of these borderlands, whose importance as nodes of socio-political and technological innovation in a trans-imperial context should not be underestimated. On such issue cf. respectively Nicola Di Cosmo's several contributions (1999a; 1999b; 2002, 44-92 on the importance for imperial polities of appropriating the steppe landscape and its resources) and most recently Versluys forthcoming, Rollinger 2023 (on the creative role of imperial frontier zones).

<sup>455</sup> Briant 1984, 217 with further bibliography. See on the contrary the (to my mind much more convincing) position voiced with coherence most recently by Johanna Lhuillier (2018). On the Baktrian cavalry it might be remembered that, according to Curtius Rufus (5.8.3-4), at the time of his retreat towards Ekbatana and from there heading to the upper satrapies, Darius III had among his followers no less than 3000 mounts, several of whom came exactly from Central Asia. On the archaeological evidence of Central Asian warriors in Achaemenid armies see most recently Manning 2021, 238-239.

concentrate its infrastructural efforts (which means, necessarily, its political influence within the indigenous communities) in specific areas of the future satrapy, and the discussion so far allows to assume with some confidence that such investments were made possible exclusively thanks to the recruitment of local skills and manpower. Incidentally, such a scenario makes, perhaps, even possible to explain in a more convincing way than what has been done so far why the, very troubled, phase of transition to the Hellenistic period (and the subsequent Yuèzhī-Kuṣāṇa conquest) has affected some areas of the former Achaemenid satrapy more than others. If, on the one hand, it could be assumed that the impact of such political upheavals was not as devastating as previously thought - which, however, at least as far as Alexander is concerned can be doubted with some degree of confidence -, equally plausible, and not mutually exclusive, is the possibility that the strategic importance, and environmental constraints, of certain regions were too conspicuous to be simply ignored by any power aspiring to claim as its own the Baktrian territory, including therefore the highly organized - and endowed with resources never seen before in the whole history of Central Eurasia – Teispid-Achaemenid Empire.<sup>456</sup>

### 3.4. *Famous Last Words*: a Second Interim Assessment

Having gone so far, let us try to draw some conclusions from the discussion of the archaeological evidence about Baktrian hydrology in the light of the theoretical frameworks laid out in the previous sections of this chapter to interpret the available dataset. If, on the one hand, it is possible to distinguish quite clearly a precise and recognizable logic behind the expansion of some, spatially and ecologically well-defined, sites, from the plain of the Dašt -i Qal‘a to the Surxondaryo and the oasis of Baktra, a fact that allows the Persian point of view (the imperial «agenda») to distinctively emerge, on the other hand, of no less relevant impact, and in my opinion so far considerably underestimated, is the contribution in terms of skills, knowledge, and social structures strongly rooted in the (human as well as environmental) history of a given territory, and this spanning through a huge spectrum of activities of extreme importance for the maintenance, and further expansion, of the imperial polity: from the construction of canals to the exploitation of the soil for the best - more profitable, but also more easily «readable» - crops up to, as it shall be addressed shortly, the breeding of different species of livestock in the best conditions and with the most satisfactory results. In each of the cases mentioned above, we are dealing with practices which, it should be noted, although fundamental to

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<sup>456</sup> During the Hellenistic period, the irrigated territory of the Āi Xānum plain reached the astounding extension of 16600 ha. The scale of such a Greek «miracle», however, appear in a rather different light if one does not lose sight of the fact that, as Laurianne Martinez-Sève (2012, 384) rightly pointed out, of such area already 12400 were *already* exploited (and with considerable gain) during the previous centuries if not millennia.

the economy of an Empire, 1. do not require its existence in order to be carried out (even through sweeping spaces) and 2. are not exploitable by the Empire itself to their full potential (and in some cases are not accessible at all) without compromising with the society that holds such very knowledge and skills. The latter have been catalogued by James Scott under the category of *μητις* which, «broadly understood», he defines as «a wide array of practical skills and acquired intelligence in responding to a constantly changing natural and human environment». Moreover, as Scott shows based on the example of Odysseus (tellingly called *ἄνθρωπος πολύτροπος* in Hom. *Od.*, 1.1), the nature of *μητις* does not resolve exclusively, «in his [Odysseus'] deceiving of Circe, the Cyclops, and Polyphemus and in binding himself to the mast to avoid the Sirens, but also in holding his men together, in repairing his ship, and in improvising tactics to get his men out of one tight spot after another». Such examples, Scott further argues, underline both «Odysseus's ability to adapt successfully to a constantly shifting situation» and «his capacity to understand, and hence outwit, his human and divine adversaries».<sup>457</sup>

In an investigation that shines for methodological rigor, richness of examples, and (last but not least) moral commitment as much as for human participation, Scott has been able to demonstrate how the renunciation of this intangible heritage, or the pretension to exploit it *ob torto collo* without taking into account the requests of its bearers has revealed itself, in a medium-long term perspective (from a few years to some, even in this case not too many, decades) catastrophic, and has moreover inevitably forced the imperial administration of the time to a hasty as well as drastic - and more or less clumsily disguised – retreat to more negotiation-opened positions.<sup>458</sup> Among the most impressive – indeed frightening - examples of this phenomenon, the campaign of sedentarization and collectivization (a full-fledged revival, worsened, of rural serfdom) unleashed by the last of the great «non-nomadic» Empires of history (Stalin's Soviet Union) against a segment of its population considered - wrongly - «extraneous» (alien) to the socio-cultural universe of that Empire, namely the non-sedentary shepherds of Qazaqstan, stands out for both its proportions and consequences.<sup>459</sup> In

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<sup>457</sup> Scott 1998, 313 ff. Referring to the Aristotelian concept of *φρόνησις* («practical intelligence»), Esther Eidinow has recently pointed out (2016, 48-49) how mythology itself (think precisely of the example of Odysseus) constitutes a kind of imaginary space within which to collect, and transmit from generation to generation, modes of environmental and social knowledge: it is not out of place to observe that, with regard to ancient Bactria, we know next to nothing about the mythological and symbolic universe of the local population (see most recently on the subject Lyonnet and Dubova 2020, 178-214), but this is by no means to say that such an imaginary space did not exist and that it did not act, not unlike the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*, as a «tribal encyclopedia» of numerous *mētē* knowledge whose importance within the imperial history of these spaces has until now been dramatically underestimated.

<sup>458</sup> The classic study on these matters is the by now classic Detienne and Vernant 1978, 1-55. Worth mentioning are however also Scott's more general remarks (1998, 309-341).

<sup>459</sup> Qazaqstan's example has for many reasons been almost completely overshadowed in the shared imaginary of Western public opinion concerning the history of Stalinist Soviet Union by the famine – wrongly held as an attempted genocide – which between the end of the 1920 and the beginning of the 1930 hit, besides and beyond Ukraine, wide regions of Central Russia (e. g. the oblast' of Tambov – Тамбовская область, Western Siberia and Kuban' - Кубань, also called Pšyžë, Пшыžэ, in the local Caucasian language, Adəgəbzä/адыгабзэ). Against the background of an almost boundless

the vast Soviet republic (more than 2.5 millions of square kilometers, mostly devoted to mobile pastoralism not least because of demanding environmental conditions), the result of the first five-year plan (пятилетка) was the almost complete destruction of the country's entire livestock population, which meant a far from negligible percentage of that of the entire Soviet state, with the result that, on pain of the economic collapse of the Union itself, the political leadership in Moscow (namely Stalin) was forced, between half-hearted admissions, hammering propaganda of non-existent successes and an unrestrained whirlwind of purges, to rely entirely on that very μῆτις of which it had thought – unwisely and improperly – it was ripe for exploitation exclusively to its own advantage and, in case this proved too complicated (not least because of the negotiations necessary to benefit therefrom), it would have succeed in eradicating with impunity.<sup>460</sup> At the end of this long demographic-hydrological section, I would therefore plea in favor of recognizing in the techniques of territorial exploitation attested in Baktria centuries, if not millennia, before the rise of Persian power, distinct characteristics of mētīc nature, and this by virtue of the fact 1. that these are skills very often – although not always – «contextually located», that is, linked to a precise knowledge of the territory and ecosystems that regulate it. A set of knowledge, moreover, that are usually precluded to external actors and can be acquired only at the price of long and arduous practice. However, it is necessary to add 2. that these characteristics are, as precisely in the case of the hydraulic engineering more Baktriano, flexible enough to be exploited with profit, after the inescapable negotiation with the holders of this repertoire of skills, in different areas of the Empire: this last remark would help, for example, to explain why, as soon as the documentary evidence allows it, we are confronted with contingents of Baktrians – notably: explicitly defined as such – travelling over very considerable distances in order, it seems sound to argue, to perform very well-defined tasks (thus requiring «contextually situated» expertise). Even more intriguing, the members of such parties are made the object of a treatment unknown to other groups of kurtaš as far as the published evidence allows us to sense.<sup>461</sup> Each of the features highlighted by Scott (plasticity, «contextually situated» nature, and «divergence» – Pascal's esprit de finesse) are fundamental characteristics of μῆτις, and it is reasonable to speculate that the very possession of the latter (and/or the ability to mobilize its possessors in large numbers) constituted a formidable weapon at the disposal of local élites in order to tactically position

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bibliography on both Soviet industrialization and the consequences of Stalin's rural policy and politics see Scott 1998, 193-222 (with some – unsettling – analogies with similar megalomaniac undertakings going on at the same time in the US), Baberowski 2003, 669-752 (on the Caucasian Republics, especially Azerbaïĝan) and Teichmann 2016, 114-141 (on Central Asia, in particular Uzbekistan and Taĝikistān). On Qazaqastan see most recently Kindler 2014, where previous literature is conveniently summarized

<sup>460</sup> Kindler 2014, 109-178, 232, 311.

<sup>461</sup> Scott 1998, 251 on the contextually situated nature of mētīc knowledge. Henkelman 2018a on Baktrians in Persepolis.

themselves in the face of the Achaemenid Empire both (perhaps especially) during its phase of installation as well as repeatedly in the course of the next 230 years.<sup>462</sup>

#### 4. *A Biography of No Place: Achaemenid Baktria as a Presumptive Satrapy*

As mentioned above, and as most recently the remarkable assessment of the archaeological evidence accomplished by Sebastian Stride has shown in detail, a reliable touchstone of the possibilities at hand, in Central Asia, for a political entity of the complexity of the Persian Empire in order to exploit the resources of the territory it controlled (and of its respective borderlands) on the one hand as well as, on the other, of the opportunities available to the imperial subjects to successfully negotiate their position within the aforementioned structure through their own mētīc resources is the valley of Surxondaryo, immediately North of Baktra's oasis, in today's Southern Uzbekistan. This space is conventionally delimited, to its North, by a mountain range such as the Hişār, which is a textbook example of «inner frontier zone», difficult to control due to the high «friction of the terrain» and - at the same time - thanks to its mountain pastures and passes, a transmission chain of invaluable importance between different regions of Northern Central Asia, and therefore constantly object of Achaemenid (and of successive Empires through history) attention. To the South, it is framed by the course of the Oxus river. The most interesting aspect of Surxondaryo is to be found in the fact that, in a relatively small territorial extension (less than 21000 square kilometers), it is possible to find an astonishing variety (even for Baktrian criteria, which says quite much) of ecological niches, which consequently allow the coexistence of a very wide range of subsistence strategies, they in turn providing, as Scott remarks, a considerable obstacle to the hegemonic projects (Richardson's desires) of a pre-modern Empire.<sup>463</sup> According to Stride's results, the geological, pedological, and climatological data collected in over 30 years of archaeological surveys and ethnographic studies conducted mostly by Soviet scholars, allow to distinguish at least four distinct basic units that are of great importance for the purpose of a description of settlement patterns and strategies of resource exploitation within the Central Asian space, of which the Surxondaryo valley can be understood as a kind of projection on a reduced scale. They are respectively «the sites, oases, provinces and secondary river valleys».<sup>464</sup> To this first subdivision, it is also possible to add the «territories», defined by Stride as coherent spatial units that may be exploited by a given human group for irrigated as well as dry agricultural activities, but which do not exclude their use as fallow and/or for grazing purposes within

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<sup>462</sup> Scott 1998, 332. On the *Weapons of the Weak* as well as on the dialectic between *Domination and the Art of Resistance* see Scott 1985; 1990; 2009.

<sup>463</sup> Scott 2009, 127-219.

<sup>464</sup> Stride 2005 I, 100.

the context of a multipurpose pastoral economy.<sup>465</sup> Compared to the other regions of the satrapy of Baktria-Sogdiana, in which it is possible to identify some of the geo-ecological categories listed above, the peculiarity of Surxondaryo consists in the simultaneous presence in the valley of all these «anthropic landscapes», which makes it possible to use the information extracted from the analysis of local features of the landscape in order to suggest some generalizations about the ways in which the different communities living in ancient Baktria interacted 1. with each other and 2. with an external – but locally very much influential - entity (in our case the Achaemenid Empire).

Among the most noteworthy conclusions of Stride's impressive synthesis is undoubtedly the identification (on an archaeological and ethnographic basis) of a close correlation between the geology and geography of human population on the one hand and, on the other, subsistence strategies and social interactions (at both the micro- and trans-regional levels) over a considerable period of time, well before the rise of Achaemenid power in the region and extending beyond it until at least the 1950s (when – ironically enough in a decidedly Stalinist fashion, although much less violently - Xruščëv's projects dramatically altered both the physical and the human landscape of the region). By virtue of the much more limited presence of water resources than in the territories immediately to the South and West (Baktra's oasis on the one hand and the Murğ-āb valley on the other), Surxondaryo also provides a particularly advantageous case study for exploring the flexibility of non-settled societies in an environment which, until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, could not be equipped with a canal system sufficient to irrigate an area greater than 1/20<sup>th</sup> of the valley's extension (i. e. just over 1000 square kilometers). However, even such a prohibitive environment does not seem to have posed insurmountable problems to the local population, and therefore the information gained from the study of the Surxondaryo valley is of particular interest in comparative terms for the discussion of other climatically similar areas (the Sogdian steppes or the semi-desert areas North of the Baktra oasis providing two extremely important example for our purposes) where evidence is less abundant. Particularly worthy of mention are the results obtained from studies conducted in the North of the valley, on the slopes of the Hişār range, where irrigation (still today) is a prohibitively expensive undertaking and where, however, the inhabitants - ethnically very diverse but divided into semi-sedentary and partially mobile communities on a family and, within the latter, functional basis - have proven over time to be able to exploit, similarly to what is known from the Vaḥš valley of the 1930s, extremely sophisticated forms of dry farming.

This is most evident in the case of the cultivation, the results of which are particularly remarkable, of sorghum, a cereal that seems to have been part of the local repertoire since antiquity, as witnessed by some passages in the botanical works of Theophrastos and, perhaps in his wake, by Pliny the Elder,

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<sup>465</sup> Stride 2007, 99-105.

although the anecdotal and sensationalistic nature of their narratives (devoted to the prodigious fertility of the Baktrian soil tout court), hampers, at least for now, the feasibility of drawing more specific conclusions regarding the methods of exploitation of that soil and the related anthropic landscape during antiquity.<sup>466</sup> We are therefore dependent on ethnographic evidence. However, as the last section of this chapter aims to show, the information that can be extracted from the latter is extremely valuable in order to integrate the picture that has emerged from the study of Baktrian hydrology with the analysis of what, contrary to the opinion of the most recent historiography but, as we have tried to demonstrate, in accordance with the material evidence as well as theoretical and, more broadly speaking, environmental considerations, it has surfaced in the course of these pages as its indispensable counterpart, namely the economy of the steppe. In fact, such socioeconomic regime appears to have been mainly sustained by the exploitation of dry farming in order to provide forage for livestock, both on a seasonal and annual basis: the most obvious consequence is to be found in the development over time of a symbiotic system between the different human groups settled within a given territory (*sensu* Stride, i. e. of «ecological unity») still active in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in regions that are very different from each other across the entire territory of Central Asia.<sup>467</sup> As for the Surxondaryo, about the history of which we are better informed, even in Soviet times - and in spite of collectivization - no less than four different but complementary economic activities were practiced in the valley, and each of them was the specific domain of a well-determined human group specialized in it (according to the Polish ethnographer Wawrzyn Gołab, to whom we owe most of the information in our possession, even in the 1950s it was still possible to distinguish at least four such groups, one composed of Taġiks and three of O'zbek families, in turn each distinct from the other). Once again, what ethnography reveals is a complex, carefully planned, and efficiently exploited symbiosis between human groups that are distinct from each other yet constantly interacting to make the most of an extremely impervious territory. Moreover, precisely because of these interactions, these people were capable of sustaining simultaneously, a considerable production of sorghum (and where possible rice and cotton - which, incidentally, as is well known, requires a non negligible consumption of water and therefore infrastructures up to the task) on the one hand and, on the other, the semi-sedentary breeding of livestock such as goats, sheep, and the much prized camels.<sup>468</sup>

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<sup>466</sup> Theophr. *Caus. pl.*, 3.16.3-4, Theophr. *Hist. pl.*, 8.4-5, Plin. *NH.*, 18.70. Cf. on the case study of the Valjš valley and of its inhabitants Teichmann 2016, 145 ff.

<sup>467</sup> Wawrzyn Gołab 1951.

<sup>468</sup> Aperghis 2004, 68 argued in favor of a more centralized model of economic production than that proposed by Wawrzyn Gołab. According to him, it is likely likely that extensive irrigation systems, expanded and maintained by the royal administration in Baktria and Margiana or any other arid region in possession of a strategic water source constituted «an imperial monopoly»: as the analysis of Hdt. 3.117 has shown and as it shall be further discussed shortly, however, there is reason to believe that the situation was much more complex. See Morris 2021b480: irrigation canals in Baktria «were probably (as ever) constructed and maintained on a community basis rather than directly by state agents». Regarding the cultivation of cotton, Cohen 2013, 241 states that Strabo mentions the cultivation of rice in Baktria and other neighboring

A comparison with the nearby Sherabāddaryo plain, northwest of Termiz, confirms the observations derived from the Surxondaryo and at the same time authorizes testing the heuristic validity of the symbiotic model elaborated by Stride based on, among others, Wawrzyn Gołab's ethnography, to other «inner borderlands» or «liminal areas» of Achaemenid Central Asia. A similar scale of socio-economic differentiation was in fact found also in the Sherabāddaryo basin, and this despite an environment that - at first glance - would appear both homogeneous and particularly disadvantageous (until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century the Termiz district was devoid of any kind of canalization). However, research projects comparable to those carried out in Northern Surxondaryo have compellingly suggested that, even in the Sherabāddaryo plain, we are actually dealing with a multiplicity of geo-ecological units («territories» in Stride's terms), each characterized by distinctive physical features peculiar to it and, consequently, also in this case inhabited by different communities, each of which specialized in the management of some of the resources made available by the territory but linked to cooperation with the others so that the entire valley could be exploited to its maximum potential for the benefit of all the communities settled in it.<sup>469</sup> By virtue of these considerations, the question at the heart of the chapter's last section can be formulated as follows. Firstly, what tools do we possess enabling us to critically comb the image of both «inner frontier zones» and «liminal spaces» (from mountains ranges to semi-desert steppes) of Central Asia that we find in the imperial evidence (for example at Bīsūtūn); that is, that of an anomic and dangerous space - the reign of the drauḡā -, which the Great King alternately takes charge of civilizing or, where this is not possible, struggles to isolate it from the οἰκουμένη that Ahuramazdā has entrusted to him so that he may bring it as close as possible to the primordial stage of «happiness» (šiyāti), thus pushing it back beyond the boundaries of the (Achaemenid) world, which is to say into the barbarism of what in Sāsānid times would become known as Tūrān?<sup>470</sup> Secondly, it is moreover worth asking if, also in the case of the Baktrian steppes, and in analogy with what it has argued about hydrology, it is possible to identify traces of that dialectic between imperial ambitions of control and extraction (what we might call «presumptive claims») on the one hand and local μῆτις on the other, with the latter being born and developed exactly to escape - or in the worst-case scenario to limit - such ambitions. Otherwise stated, the last section of this chapter is devoted to the quest, in the context of the Central Asian steppes, of the same dynamics we have singled out in the previous pages as a distinctive feature of the long formative process of the

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regions as well as the need to irrigate the crops. However, the passage he provides in support of such a claim (Strab. 15.3.18) contains no explicit reference to the satrapy. Possible hints at cotton cultures in Central Asia might be found in *FGrHist* 139 F 37, Theophr. *Hist. pl.*, 4.4.8, Plin. *NH.*, 12.13.25 and Pomp. Mela 3.62 (perhaps drawing on Teophrastos). Cf. moreover Stoneman 2019, 109 (however more focused on the territories to the South of the Hindūkūš as well as on India).

<sup>469</sup> Stride 2007, 105.

<sup>470</sup> Cf. for example DSe § 1 and Lincoln 2012, 3-20.



Achaemenid imperial landscape in Central Asia, a process which began, but never definitely ended, in the fateful year «when the Mede came».

#### 4.1. *Smugglingstān*. Being some Thoughts on *The Silent Steppe & The Limits of Empire*

In a passage from the *Tā'riḥ -i Buxārā* (تاریخ بخارا), penned between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries CE by the historian and scholar Muḥammad Abū Bakr Ğa'far Ibn Naršaḥi (899-959 CE), the reader suddenly comes across a curious anecdote about the city of Ṭawāwīs (طواویس), on the Northern outskirts of the oasis along an important route that linked Buxārā with Samarqand, about «seven parasangas» from the center of the oasis itself (and therefore directly facing the Chorasmian steppe), which deserves to be taken into some consideration.<sup>471</sup> Naršaḥi tells us that in this city, as well as in other settlements, such as Kargata (کرگت), built further North in order to avoid the payment of taxes imposed by the Buxārān administration, on the occasion of important fairs, during the month of Tīr (تیر), thus approximately between June 22<sup>nd</sup> and July 22<sup>nd</sup>, no less than ten thousand people used to meet annually, coming from regions as far away as Čāč (some 1000 kilometers to the East, where today's Toškent is located), the valley of Farġāne (even further East) «and other places», in order to traffic in «defective or stolen goods [the word attested is *masrūqāt*, مسروقات], without any possibility of compensation» and, what appears to have been the most important aspect, sheltered from the city administration, thus making «the fortune of the villagers [of Ṭawāwīs], and the reason for this was certainly not agriculture».<sup>472</sup> The *bāzār* of Ṭawāwīs must in fact have represented a genuine local attraction capable, by itself, of making the economy of the entire settlement flourish, since the site is mentioned in the same terms («a large and populous city») by the polymath Abū al-Rayḥān Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Bīrūnī (973-1048) in an astronomical work, the *Kitāb al-Taḥfīm* (کتاب التعمیم). Here the following description is to be found: «Even the magi of Sogdiana have their recurrences and festivals of a religious nature, which they call *Aḥam* [. ...] and in their *bāzār* [...] in which stolen goods are sold [again, the Arabic word is *masrūqāt*], and great confusion reigns in them, nor is it possible to obtain repayment [...] and the fair of Ṭawāwīs, a large and populous city, lasts for seven days from the 15<sup>th</sup> of Mazhīhandā, during the festival of Kišmīn [کشمین], which lasts for seven days».<sup>473</sup> Although apparently in all respects analogous to Naršaḥi's, al-Bīrūnī's testimony, particularly authoritative because it comes from an astronomical (and thus technical) text, provides a revealing detail (the dating «from the 15<sup>th</sup> of Mazhīhandā»), in the light of which the anecdote of

<sup>471</sup> *Tā'riḥ* 4. On Naršaḥi see Starr 2015, 575 and now Stark forthcoming.

<sup>472</sup> Further details and bibliography on Ṭawāwīs are provided in the magisterial survey by Florian Schwarz (2022, 134-136).

<sup>473</sup> *Taḥfīm* 10. Further details on al-Bīrūnī's life and work in Starr 2015, 269-278, which are devoted to his research on astronomical and hemerological matters.

Ṭawāwīs' «black market» acquires a much deeper significance, and becomes therefore of considerable interest for the historian. From the calendar under discussion in the passage of al-Bīrūnī, the Sogdian one, it can in fact be deduced that the month of Mazhīhandā fell during the Autumn, which seems particularly plausible by virtue of the fact that the visitors from Čāč and Farḡāne were in all probability members of pastoral communities who took advantage of the winter migrations to sell their products, which had to be particularly coveted - and therefore sold at corresponding prices -, to the point that both at Ṭawāwīs and Kargata the goal was to shelter as much of the (mutual) earnings as possible from the rapacious eye of the Buxārān administration.<sup>474</sup>

But there is more in such an apparently trivial anecdote than what first meets the eye: since a situation like the one described by Naršaḥi and al-Bīrūnī appears to be closely related to geo-ecological opportunities («affordances») provided by the local landscape, it is perhaps not specious to wonder whether dynamics comparable to those of Ṭawāwīs do not have a much more ancient history and whether, for example, places like the Baktrian and Sogdian qal'a studied by Negus-Cleary ought not to be taken as remote forebearers of the «great and prosperous city» mentioned in the *Tā'riḥ-i Buxārā*. Such a suggestion would provide a rather convincing explanation to the attention, archaeologically detectable for example in the oasis of Baktra, devoted by the Achaemenids to the expansion of their own sphere of territorial control - in the form of garrisons, post stations or, not least, by means of concessions and privileges to some members of the local élite (think of Vivāna's irmatam) - in border and impervious territories, with the aim, if the Buxārān parallel has any heuristic value, not to circumscribe and protect the imperial space from external «barbarism» but, on the contrary, in an attempt to tap into what Scott called «non-state zones» because of the resources that exclusively these (allegedly) no man's lands (which in fact means little more than not - yet - incorporated within the Empire, therefore «raw», shēng 生, as Chinese sources have it,) were able to provide.<sup>475</sup> What kind of resources, however, must we more concretely imagine were the subject of those exchanges which, according to the argument proposed here, might have taken place at the limits of what Barfield has recently called the «archipelago» of Achaemenid political control?<sup>476</sup> In order to suggest some possible answers, we have to come back to Naršaḥi and the fair of Ṭawāwīs.

As discussed above, the mention of «stolen goods» (مسروقات), has created more than one headache for scholars, since the hypothesis that these were the fruits of raids carried out elsewhere fits particularly poorly with the mention of visitors coming from places hundreds of kilometers away for a purpose that could undoubtedly be satisfied within a much more limited radius. Things, however,

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<sup>474</sup> Stark forthcoming.

<sup>475</sup> Scott 1998, 419 fn. 55; 2009, 23-25; 2017, 155.

<sup>476</sup> Barfield 2020.

change radically if one accepts an elegant - and for this reason all the more convincing since it does little to no harm to the text - proposal for amendment that argues in favour of a corruption, paleographically far from improbable, from ق to ف, thus suggesting a much more plausible reading for the text of the *Tā'riḥ*, namely *masrūfāt* (مسروفات), or «articles eaten by woodworms (?)».<sup>477</sup> On the other hand, it is clear that not even such a (indeed brilliant) conjecture solves all the problems, and on the contrary, the possibility of seeing silk behind such *مسروفات* articles runs the risk of re-proposing once again the stereotype of the nomadic middleman, committed to shuttling between China and the West through the Central Asian oases, bringing with him caravans packed with luxury goods.<sup>478</sup> As Honeychurch has recently pointed out corroborating his assertions with plenty of both archaeological evidence and insightful ethnographic parallels, it seems to me on the contrary much more feasible that also in the case of Ṭawāwīs we are dealing with goods, whatever it is to be understood behind the cryptic *مسروقات/مسروفات*, coming from a network of relations (a «political community» in Honeychurch's words) accessible to the population settled at and around Ṭawāwīs (and to the Buxārān administration) exclusively through the intermediation of the peoples of the steppe, consequently overturning the persistent, and in my opinion erroneous, *imago recepta* of a structural dependence of the nomadicum on The Outside World, whereas the anecdote recorded by Naršaḥi clearly shows how it was the latter who was tenaciously looking for goods coming from circuits of exchange and mobility laying beyond the community of Ṭawāwīs (and of Buxārā itself).<sup>479</sup>

If such an interpretative framework were well-founded, the inescapable question to ask next is: on what resources from the steppe world (and more generally from relational networks of wide mobility) could the Achaemenid Empire in Central Asia have been so dependent – and consequently coveting them with the same ardor as the Ṭawāwīs inhabitants? The most plausible answer, the details of which we will explore in later chapters, but which it is appropriate to justify here at least in part, includes in my view (to be cautious) three categories of «goods»: horses, camels and, last but not least, the skilled workforce necessary to adequately take care of the first two.<sup>480</sup>

Indeed, if it is true, as Christopher J. Tuplin pointed out in a detailed study some years ago, that from a military point of view there is no reason to assume, contrary to what has been argued for example

<sup>477</sup> For this, indeed extremely elegant (and therefore suggestive and alluring in its simplicity), hypothesis see the discussion in Smirnova 1970, 122-154 and now Stark forthcoming with further bibliography.

<sup>478</sup> Such is the picture drawn by Benjamin 2007; 2018; 2021 concerning the Yuèzhī, the Arsakids, and the Kušāna. See the theoretically much more refined assessment of Leonardo Gregoratti (2017a; 2019 on the Arsakids) and the critical remarks by Lauren Morri (2019c, 681-688 concerning what she rightly labels a sort of crystallization into doctrine of the myth – for such it is – of the Kušāna middleman).

<sup>479</sup> Honeychurch 2015, 86-99. Cf. with regards to the (questionable) argument of structural dependence of the steppe economy from other (agricultural) networks Khazanov 1994<sup>2</sup>, 68-84 and (more recently, using the Huns as a case study) Meier 2020, 406-470, Beckwith 2009, 320-362, Scott 2017, 116-150, as well as Heather 2020.

<sup>480</sup> Taking up a remark in Horden and Purcell 2000, 100, we might argue that Ṭawāwīs, and especially its *bāzār*, seems to have been a locus «of contact or overlap between different ecologies».

by Marek Olbrycht, a particularly prestigious role reserved for cavalry - and horsemen - within the Persian army, it is nevertheless equally true that, especially in the second phase of the Achaemenid imperial trajectory (roughly from the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century to the death of Darius III in 330 BCE), the use of highly mobile units (on horseback and camel), made up especially by non-Persians (in the sense of «composed of peoples not originating in Pārsa», the so-called barbarian cavalry of classical historiographers) seems to have been very widespread.<sup>481</sup> Moreover (and perhaps far more importantly), it should be noted that, with the exception of Media, repeatedly mentioned as an almost inexhaustible source of horses, and especially of the - apparently exceptionally valuable - Nisean specimens (Νησαῖοι καλεόμενοι ἵπποι according to Herodotos), the sources of supply available to the Achaemenid Great Kings do not seem to have been many and, for the present discussion a remarkable point, they appear to have been mostly located in areas notoriously difficult to control, from the Negev desert (נגב, i. e. «South [of Israel]») to the Armenian Plateau up to the Sogdian steppes and the Fargāne valley, whose semi-legendary «celestial horses» (in Chinese known as dàyuānmǎ 大宛馬) still in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE populated the fantasies of the «Martial Emperor» Hàn Wǔdì (漢武帝), who in fact considered their acquisition indispensable for his (massive) campaign against the Xiōngnú.<sup>482</sup> Now: according to what we can guess from the Persepolis archives, apart from the rather interesting cases of individuals on horseback coming from Bactria and Chorasmia and mentioned, perhaps in a military context, as active in Egypt, even more remarkable is the existence of a hierarchy among the imperial officials (mudunra or mudunup) in charge of the care and breeding of horses, some of which explicitly belonged to the King (or to what Henkelman calls «the royal economy»: see as a way of exemple PF 1668 and PF 1669). Moreover, it seems that among the criteria behind the establishment of such a hierarchy was the quality of the horse bred, as is suggested by the titles of aššabattiš («head of horses») as well as, and above all, pasanabattiš, i. e. the «head of the excellent filies». Further evidence is then provided by the remarkable fact that in at least four cases (PF 1793, NN 0751, NN 1289, and NN 1352) officers with this title were used to be given meat rations, which could indicate

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<sup>481</sup> Manning 2021, Tuplin and Jacobs 2021 on the Achaemenid (and Teispid) armies.

<sup>482</sup> Cf. the different positions on the importance of Persian cavalry expressed by Tuplin 2010 and, conversely, the numerous studies on the subject by Marek Jan Olbrycht (2007a; 2013; 2015b; 2017). The importance of «barbarian» cavalry is explicitly formulated in Nep. *Dat.*, 8 and Diod. Sic. 14.99.2 (see most recently Manning 2021, 183-187). About Media as a satrapy ἵπποβότης par excellence see at least Hdt. 3.106, Polyb. 5.44, Strab. 11.13.7, and *FGrHist* 156 F 17 (8), with the archaeological evidence presented in Jacobs and Stronach 2021, 217 (compare also Boucharlat 2018 on Achaemenid royal investments in Ekbatana). That both Bactria and Sogdiana were a valuable source of mounts even in the Hellenistic period has been most recently stressed by Lauren Morris (2019b, 382-383). For the Nisean horses the main source is Hdt. 7.40.2: whether these horses were of Median origin or should be identified with the dàyuānmǎ coming from Fargāne and mentioned by the *Shiji* (in the famous chapter 123, on which see for example Posch 1995) is a question that will probably remain unsolved. Other horse reserves in Armenia and Middle Atropatene (modern Azərbaycan and Northwestern Irān): see Potts 2014, 78, *SAA* I no. 29, *SAA* V no. 171 and Balatti 2017, 127-134.

their special social status.<sup>483</sup> Not only that: in one of the most important - and controversial - documents that make up what remains of the *ADAB* archives (dated between November and December 330 BCE), line 33 of the first column records the procurement of an unspecified commodity in a place called Asparāsta (ʿsprst in the Aramaic text, i. e. אַספָּרְסַת), a toponym interpreted by the editors as indicating «“(a place) for horses, a hippodrome”?».<sup>484</sup> Although lacking adequate context, the mention of (only one?) אַספָּרְסַת, if the proposed etymology were correct, would be an extremely interesting piece of information, and this for at least two reasons. The first is the existence of a similar infrastructure attested in Idumea under the name of rkšh (רַכְשָׁה) and which Tuplin suggests to interpret as indicating «a ranch» intended for the breeding - unfortunately we do not know if by locals, but it would not be a hypothesis to be excluded - of horses on a large scale (a similar operation to the one carried out in Gaugamela, this time however for camels, at least according to Plutarch).<sup>485</sup> In addition, it is worth remembering incidentally that horse breeding (and their trade for «imperial» buyers) has historically been a very profitable activity for groups of non-sedentary shepherds - from the O‘zbek to the Türkmen down to the the Aimāq - who were able to supply the thriving Balḫ-āb oasis markets along networks spreading as far as India.<sup>486</sup> The second concerns the parallel, in my opinion worthy of further study, between facilities such as the אַספָּרְסַת of Baktria, the Idumean «ranch», or Gaugamela itself and the infrastructural network - of immense proportions - set up by the Táng dynasty on the Northern border of their domains, in the direction of present-day Inner Mongolia and Manchuria, and especially in the Ordos Plateau (known in Chinese as È’ěrduōsī 鄂爾多斯), with the dual purpose of 1. acquiring, if necessary militarily, the specimens bred by the Türko-Mongolian speaking peoples, including the famous Prževal’skii mounts, named after the Tsarist officer (of Polish

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<sup>483</sup> On the aššabattiš and the occurrences of this office in the heartland’s record see Tuplin 2010, 132-133 for the unpublished tablets mentioned in the text. About Central Asian detachments (of Baktrian, Chorasmians, but also other Irānian groups) in other satrapies of the Empire (not only Egypt but also Asia Minor) see e. g. *TADAE* D2.12 and *TADAE* D3.39 with the relevant commentary by Tuplin 2010, 155-156 as well as the mention by Arrian (*Anab.*, 4.4.4) and Polyainos (7.8.1) of the peculiarities of the «Scythian» art of warfare (including the famous «Parthian shot», which however does not seem to have been the prerogative of the peoples of the steppes, let alone of the Parthians alone: see Overtoom 2020, 46-56 for further details on Central Asian warfare tactics). On the royal economy of Persepolis see e. g. Henkelman 2005; 2010 (the definition mentioned in the text can be found at p. 675). Regarding the titling that occurs in the archive: mudunra or mudunup are attested in PF 1018 and NN 2184 (referenced in Tuplin 2010, 132, fn. 129, stressing the uniqueness of this kind of workforce, in the two tablets Skudrians, as so far recorded in the archive). An aššabattiš is mentioned in PF 1978 and as for pasanabattiš at least two occurrences can be quoted: PF 1947 and PF 1972. See also Tuplin 2010, 132-135, who postulates that the title of «horsemen» in the sense of «attendants to horses» was a rank of some importance within the imperial administrative hierarchy, but points out (p. 133) that meat rations could be a «one-off» donation and not the normal payment of these officers.

<sup>484</sup> Shaked 2004, 32-33, Naveh and Shaked 2012, 174 ff. C1 = Khalili A21: see on such issue Tuplin 2010, 178-179 and Naveh and Shaked 2012, 184 for the etymological reconstruction of the hypothetical toponym אַספָּרְסַת.

<sup>485</sup> Tuplin 2010, 120-122 on the Idumean ranch, with further references. On Gaugamela see Plut. *Vit. Alex.*, 31.3. Compare the evidence coming from early Medieval China discussed by Skaff 2012, 258-262.

<sup>486</sup> Barfield 2020, 15 with further ethnographic bibliography and now Morris 2021a, 193: at the Hellenistic site of Kampyrṭēpe, horse remains have been found on a scale which suggested that they could have been raised by local specialists (as in the Chinese case and very much in line with the example of camels: King forthcoming). After all, Curt. 7.4.30 reckons Achaemenid Baktria cavalry strength at 30000 units.

origin) Nikolaj Mixajlovič Prževal'skiĭ, who first described them, considered among the best for military purposes, and 2. of procuring a sufficient number of stallions and mares - as well as the necessary workforce to maintain them - to start a domestic breeding on a scale that the available figures, recently studied in considerable detail by Jonathan Karam Skaff, allow us to define as «industrial».<sup>487</sup>

Considering the war resources - in terms of «barbarian» cavalry - that both Bessos and, especially, Spitamenes seem to have been able to mobilize starting, in the case of the latter, from hotbeds such as Kōktēpe, not by chance situated along the *Shadow Line* between Achaemenid territory and the Scythian steppes, it does not seem too far-fetched to assume that the expansion of this and other sites (Čašma-ye Šifā, Altin Dilyar) served the primary purpose of gaining access, following the Ṭawāwīs model through tax collection and, if necessary – according to the Táng example - through military incursions (Darius' Scythian expedition, for instance), to their portion of the «heavenly horses». In the latter case - it must be emphasized - we are dealing with a scenario within which there was ample room for manoeuvre for the so-called «gate keepers», i. e. individuals and/or social groups capable of guaranteeing the Achaemenid administration access to the desired resources at the lowest possible cost (including those – far from negligible – of military expeditions). In turn, these men acquired a very important negotiating lever when coming to terms with a, undoubtedly cumbersome, presence like that of the Achaemenid Empire and of its representatives, themselves with their own agendas to promote. By virtue of its strategic position in close contact with the Üstýrt Plateau, it is easy to think that Chorasmia played a significant role in this economy: the possibility of the existence of some kind of Ṭawāwīs ante litteram at least in this region - in Achaemenid times under the control of the satrap of Bactria, as we should never forget - seems to be suggested by the existence, at least from the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE, of numerous sites (the Russian archaeologist Sergeĭ Bolelov has found about eighty of them), each equipped with granaries for storing agricultural produce, wine presses, and even kilns.<sup>488</sup>

In Bolelov's opinion, the main purpose of these small agricultural settlements (whose occupation seems to have been of semi-permanent nature) was to produce consumer goods that could be exchanged with the surrounding pastoral groups (in Tsarist times mainly Türkmen): the emergence of these sites on the border of the agricultural territory of the surveyed area suggests the intention of the oasis inhabitants to (literally) come as close as possible to the steppe dwellers, which in turn leads to the assumption that the interest in keeping alive this space of socio-political and economic

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<sup>487</sup> Skaff 2012, 241-270; 2017, in both cases with previous bibliography. Between 590 and 837 CE, the Táng Empire was able to establish a network of ranches in territories bordering with the Inner Asian frontier of China which covered some 16000 acres, which around the early 8<sup>th</sup> century CE was made of some 65 ranches in which several hundreds of thousands of livestock were sheltered (766000 animals in 725 CE according to *Xīn táng shū* 50.1337, among which 43000 horses).

<sup>488</sup> Bolelov 2006.

interactions was greater on the part of the former than of the latter.<sup>489</sup> Finally, the discovery of a small fortress at the site of Baštēpe - once again projecting into a borderland - constitutes an important clue supporting the hypothesis that the limes of the Central Asian steppe was an area of interest for several social actors, some of which, for example the Achaemenid Empire, must have spared no resources in their attempt to become part of exchange circuits such as those revealed by the survey carried out by Bolelov and by the anecdote told by Naršaḥi, in Chorasmia and beyond over the territory of Achaemenid ruled (or claimed) Central Asia, including Sakā inhabited land along (and beyond) the shores of the Syrdaryo.<sup>490</sup> What about, for example, a settlement (better: a cluster of settlements) such as Cyropolis?<sup>491</sup> Strabo calls it «Cyrus' furthestmost foundation [κτίσμα] on the banks of the Jaxartes», and adds that it served as the «bulwark [ὄριον] of the Persian domain (τῆς ἀρχῆς)».<sup>492</sup> Situated, according to the majority of scholars, near the present Taḡik city of Xuçand (Хучанд, in Russian Худжанд: it is the Soviet Leninābād), at the entrance - not by chance? - of the Farḡāne valley, the purpose of the foundation was, according to the prevailing opinion among historians, which in turn is ultimately based on Strabo's assessment, to guard one of the privileged access points to the Achaemenid territories from attacks by the peoples living beyond imperial borders in the nomadicum.<sup>493</sup> Although nothing certain is known about the pre-Achaemenid Xuçand, the examples of Ṭawāwīs and, above all, of Baštēpe, allow us to assume a similar function for Cyropolis, namely

<sup>489</sup> Crescioli 2017, 140 on the possibility that on the Empire's frontier territories («mainly Bactria, Sogdiana», but in the light, for example, of Michele Minardi's studies – e. g. 2021 - I would be rather tempted to add Chorasmia as well), «workshops (e. g. for jewellery) specialized in the production of objects for the nomads» flourished, most likely sponsored by the imperial administration itself in the attempt of tapping into the steppe's sociopolitical network, which Minardi 2020, 18 fn. 26 with references has convincingly shown that, starting from Chorasmia, were able to reach as far as the Ural mountain range.

<sup>490</sup> Cf. Stark 2012, 111; 2017; 2020 (on Central Asia and its relationships with the steppes); 2021; forthcoming. See moreover Jacobs and Gufler 2021. Recently, the *Uzbek-American Expedition to Buxārā* directed by Stark himself and Fiona Kidd (New York University) has discovered – August 2021 – a diagnostic fragment of Achaemenid pottery coming from Baštēpa (formerly thought to have been founded ex nihilo during the Seleukid period). Against the background of the previous pages, the hypothesis that the Persian administration in Bactria (through Chorasmia?) had interests in the Buxārān steppes comes as little to no surprise, especially if one thinks that it is exactly from this area that Spitamenes was able to draw much of his cavalrymen as he was fighting against Alexander. Cf. in this regard Strabo's account, in which it is recorded that the Sogdian notable was able to take shelter «among the Chorasmians» (11.11.8).

<sup>491</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 4.1.3, Curt. 7.6.19-20, Ptol. *Geog.*, 6.12.5: see moreover Briant 2002, 747 and most recently Strootman 2020c, 20 concerning the two settlements which replaced Cyropolis during post-Achaemenid times, namely Alexandria Ἐσχάτη and Antiokia in Scythia.

<sup>492</sup> Strab. 11.11.4: «καὶ τὰ Κῦρα, ἔσχατον ὃν Κύρου κτίσμα ἐπὶ τῷ Ἰαξάρτη ποταμῷ κείμενον, ὅπερ ἦν ὄριον τῆς Περσῶν ἀρχῆς». See most recently Briant 2021, 55, pointing out that «the cultural and commercial relations between the two [the Empire and the *Sakā* people] were significant», although he also does not rule out the possibility of «a state of structural and permanent hostility between the Empire and the Scythian confederations».

<sup>493</sup> For modern literature on the site see Bernard 1985, 167, Holt 2005, 48, Cohen 2013, 252-255, and Rapin 2018a, 272, who argued for a different location, in the area of Zaamin, «between Jizak and Kurkat», i. e. in Uzbekistan, to be precise near today's Tamerlane's gates (*Tīmūr Darvaza*), the only relatively easy transit point through the Nuratau range in the direction of the Zarafšān valley, therefore also in this case a «liminal» position of great strategic importance. Most recently regarding the *Perilous Frontier* of Central Asia from the viewpoint of the Irānian Empires see Potts 2018 and Meier 2020, 731-742. Cf. Briant 2021, 56: «a recognized frontier existed between the two sides» of the Syrdaryo, but – as far as I see it – it should be emphasized that they have to be conceived in purely (flexible) administrative and not cultural (and even more so) economic terms.

that of an imperial bridgehead towards the steppe world with a proactive rather than defensive purpose: for example, with the intention of controlling, rather than curtailing, wide-ranging movements such as those of caravans or, more simply, transhumance routes. Perhaps levies might have been imposed on those caravans (and/or the mobile shepherds roaming in the area), presenting them as protection money against other inhabitants of that territory, naturally reserving the possibility of moving on to openly hostile actions should one or more of such, it must be stressed, numerous interlocutors – one might just think about the fate occurred to Skunkha – turned out not to be too much keen to dialogue. This suggestion, notably, fits well into a pattern described in detail by Nicola Di Cosmo within the context of the relations between the Hàn Empire and the so-called *Perilous* (for the «nomads» at least as much as for China) *Frontier* in the North, especially in the Ordos and Inner Mongolia.<sup>494</sup>

Even assuming – while by no means granting – that Cyropolis did indeed perform a presidary function, the cases discussed by Richard Payne (focused on Sāsānid Ērān), Seth Richardson (Old Babylonian kingdoms) and James Scott (Southeast Asia in a long-term perspective) provide enough material to suggest that the main purpose of such – hypothetical – presidium (ὄριον) was not at all to keep the «barbarians» out, but rather to prevent, as much as possible, those who lived, by love or by force, within the imperial borders from trying to escape, attracted as they might have been, especially in the case of the less privileged social strata, by the conditions of life in the nomadicum, which as argued by Beckwith and Scott were indeed probably much better than those available within the Achaemenid «civilization».<sup>495</sup> Otherwise stated, it could be argued that, to use Payne's words, in the case of Cyropolis we could be confronted with another strategy of «territorialization» put in place for purposes of socio-demographic control and in the absence of which the effective administration (and relative exploitation) of a given space would have proved impossible.<sup>496</sup> Both camels, the second category of steppe «goods» at the centre of imperial attention, and their unavoidable importance, will be discussed in more detail starting with the next chapter. Suffice it to mention here, as an appetizer of sort, Herodotus' account of the Achaemenid conquest of Lydia, according to which the excellent local cavalry, among the best in Asia, was defeated thanks to the use of camel-mounted troops, the

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<sup>494</sup> This is precisely the strategy that, according to Clavijo (11) had made «the lord Tīmūr the sole master of the Iron Gates, and the revenue for his state, which is considerable, comes from the taxes that all merchants heading from India to the city of Samarqand and beyond are forced to pay». On taxing movement in Achaemenid Baktria see King 2021, 347-361. Against the model developed by Barfield 1989; 2001 see the convincing argumentation of Di Cosmo 1999b; 2002 pp. 44-92. Such a scenario is *not* in contradiction with the hypothesis that sites such as Cyropolis and the «seven cities» in its surroundings acted as Achaemenid garrisons, as suggested among others by Tuplin 1987b, 181 and most recently by Canepa 2020, who argues that the Empire adopted a subtle (soft) infrastructural imprint for its project of settlement expansion(ism) in Baktria.

<sup>495</sup> See most recently Scott 2017, 219-256 and the sweeping overview on the Sakā empires by Beckwith 2023. A similar issue is discussed in Hämäläinen 2008, 257-258. That the only (not even the main) aim of Cyropolis was to protect the Empire's borders against the Sakā is still a shared opinion among scholars: see e. g. Matarese 2021, 52.

<sup>496</sup> Cf. respectively Scott 2009, 23-25; 2017, 166-162, Richardson 2012, Payne 2015; 2017.



origin of which we can only speculate on but whose ranks would not be far-fetched to assume that came from Central Asia, all the more so if the conquest of Sardis were to be placed after at least one of Cyrus', apparently numerous, expeditions to the upper satrapies.<sup>497</sup> It is, however, the third of the above-mentioned «goods» that needs to be studied – albeit quickly – in some further depth, and this because of the research prospects it could open up (although at the moment, perhaps, with the - partial - exception of the *ADAB*, an incontrovertible demonstration does not seem possible) with regard to Achaemenid society, especially across its borderlands, as well as to the possibilities of social ascent available to - local - depositaries of mētīc skills. Horses as well as camels, even once preyed upon in «barbarian» territory, require in fact skillful and meticulous care. As the history of Qazaq collectivization show, to muster such technical know-how was by no means an easy game. It is probably for this reason that, in Táng China, as much coveted as the Prževal'skiĭ horses (if not more, which says everything) was the labour force (think of the «head of horse» of the Persepolitan archives). The reason therefor is that only professionals secured 1. the welfare, 2. reproduction rates and 3. optimal yield of the herds: how crucial such workers were is laid bare by the sources: a prisoner of war from the steppes could cost - on the Chinese slave market - up to three times as much as a not equally qualified equivalent (and this despite the ubiquitous derogatory descriptions of the steppe world to be found in historical texts – for example in the work of Bān Gù).<sup>498</sup>

The available sources (e. g. the invaluable *Xīn táng shū* 新唐書 or *New Táng Annals*) testify to the origin of this particularly prized category of labor force within ethnic minorities (especially Sogdians), and from some biographies of these men we can guess what career opportunities within the imperial administration the possession of skills in this specific branch of veterinary medicine was able to ensure.<sup>499</sup> Wáng MàoZhōng (王茂中), for example, a native of the Korean peninsula (*Koguryŏ* 高句麗), even became head of the imperial stables together with Zhāng Wànsuì (張萬歲), who was also a provincial, for he was in fact a native of the city of Mǎyì 馬邑, or «city of horses», in what is now Shānxī province (山西). As for Lǐ Lìngwèn (李令問), he was appointed vice-minister in 713 CE and for years held extremely important diplomatic appointments (including state murder, therefore a sort of assassin) in particularly sensitive areas along the Western borderlands of the Táng Empire by virtue, it should be noted, of his very close contacts with the steppe world, which he acquired through

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<sup>497</sup> Cf. Hdt. 1.79-80. Arist. *Hist. An.*, 2.1.10-15 focuses with considerable detail on the physical description of the animal, explicitly teasing out its main differences with its «Arabic» counterpart (namely the dromedary).

<sup>498</sup> Skaff 2012, 295; 2017, 48. For what might have been a Babylonian equivalent during the «long 6<sup>th</sup> century» see Manning 2021, 184-185 on the šušānu, most likely «herders and gardeners from areas of steppe and semidesert whom ambitious kings tried to force to settle down».

<sup>499</sup> Sogdian was almost certainly a certain Mǐ Zhēntuó (米真陀), another official appointed to cavalry duties (therefore, in Tuplin's terminology (2010), a Chinese «horse master» of sort): cf. Skaff 2012, 263-264.

marriage with the Uyğur élites then settled in today's Gānsù.<sup>500</sup> The most interesting story, however, is perhaps that of a certain Mù Bōsī (目波斯) whose name, literally, means «Persia», a fact that makes his Central Asian origin – once again most likely Sogdian - extremely probable. Sometime around 750 CE, this individual was in fact taken from the same Gānsù (then called Hélixī) in which a few decades earlier Lǐ Lǐngwèn had been active from the imperial court by virtue of his fame as a veterinarian and transferred with all honors to China.<sup>501</sup> As previously mentioned, the evidence currently available does not allow to draw up a prosopography even remotely comparable to that of Táng China: however, the comparative dataset explored in these pages allows to consider in a significantly new light the – precious little - information on individuals such as Spitamenes or Arimazes as well as the more detailed, but mostly context-free, evidence coming from the *ADAB*.<sup>502</sup>

As this chapter has tried to show and as will be seen in more detail in the next and in the seventh, it prominently surfaces the need to consider Achaemenid Baktria within its own Central Asian context, which means, in the framework of a very deep and multiform (because of its being multipurpose) relationship with the world of the steppes and with its socio-political networks.<sup>503</sup> Therefore, the aim of the remaining pages of this chapter is, on the one hand, to delve further into the dynamics underlying this relationship and, on the other, to show how it simultaneously provided the means for the imperial administration to seize the tools necessary to control its functioning, and to the actors involved – to a certain extent willy-nilly - in this (in principle unequal) dialectical relationship, the means to negotiate their social position (and their political and economic Handlungsräume) both within their own community (what we called their «selectorate») and within the new institutions built - but not entirely controlled - by the new masters of Central Asia. Put it otherwise, according to such

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<sup>500</sup> *Xīn táng shū* 133.4547-8, Skaff 2012, 209 and 2017, 51 with further bibliography as well as other textual references

<sup>501</sup> Skaff 2017 p. 52: think, on the one hand of the Krotonian Demokedes (Δημοκίδης), «the most skilled physician of his time» according to Hdt. 3.129 ff., who served and was highly regarded at Darius' court to such an extent that, in Herodotos' account, he had to resort to subterfuge in order to leave the gilded prison at Susa in which the Achaemenid ruler intended to keep him, and, on the other hand, to the observations of Kauṭīliya (कौटिल्य) in the *Arthaśāstra* (अर्थशास्त्र: e. g. 2.32.15-16: see the comments in Dwivedi 2021, 238-240) about elephant breeding (on which see also Trautmann 2009; 2015, Weaverdyck *et al.* 202, 317-322): even after capture - in itself a complex and risky job, which therefore also required skilled labour - and training, the maintenance of a pachyderm required the employment of no less than 14 people, including veterinarians, tamers, stockers (see Hack 2011 on the exorbitant daily consumption of a single animal) and so on.

<sup>502</sup> Evidence such as PF 1943 shows that «Master of the Horses» served at the Persian court and were highly prized for their services: it would not be surprisingly if at least some of them came, not differently than Mù Bōsī, from regions of the Empire, such as Media, Armenia or Kilikia (but also from Sogdiana, Chorasmia, Baktria and even the lands of the *Sakā*) where horse breeding was part and parcel of the local way of life and economy (cf. Diod. Sic. 17.110, Strab. 11.13.7-8 as well as Hdt. 3.90). Further on the Chinese comparandum see Cunliffe 2015, 248.

<sup>503</sup> Arguments like those discussed in this section have also been recently put forward by Rhyne King (2020) considering the evidence coming from an important documentary *corpus* originating from the district of Rōb (some 80 kilometers South of Samangān) in the context of a study dedicated to the relations between aristocrats, subjects, and imperial regimes: see moreover Payne and King 2020. King's words (2021, 26-27) are again worth quoting: «Imperial administrators moved laborers from Arachosia to the imperial core because labor, in particular skilled labor, was the resource the Empire desired most». The steppes, I contend, provided access to this very needful thing.

an interpretative framework what we were witnessing here would therefore be a dynamic of participation rather than (sole) coercion, as recently argued by Rhyne King in the context of (Late Antique) Baktria.<sup>504</sup>

#### 4.1.2. Back to the Surxondaryo

Following Stride's terminology, it can be argued that what he calls «regions» are indeed the human counterpart of landscapes, which means that they are composed of a series of neighboring territories combining to form a larger coherent whole.<sup>505</sup> Their interdependence - both ecologically and on the anthropological level - is shown by the fact that, in order to be exploited as efficiently as possible, the soil in these spaces must be made the subject of a wide-ranging and synergistic array of economic strategies. Once again, the upper Surxondaryo provides a perfect example of this phenomenon, since (even today) it groups together a multitude of territories that are significantly different from each other in terms of soil, water resources, and productive capacity, within which no less than three communities, in turn subdivided into innumerable smaller subsets, interact. On the one hand, there are, for example, groups of mobile shepherds, who inhabited - and to a large extent still inhabit - the Northern part of the plain; they are flanked by farming communities further South, near watercourses, and finally by hill dwellers, whose economic regime can be described as «differentiated», since they combine dry farming with semi-settled pastoralism.<sup>506</sup> The internal coherence of this region, and its distinction from other areas within the Surxondaryo valley, can be seen from the fact that, until very recent years, human groups that differed greatly in their subsistence strategies and life cycles shared a single reference point, the present-day town of Denov/Denau, a few kilometers North of the important archaeological site of Dil'berdžintëpe. As ethnographic studies have shown, by virtue of a more favorable ecology, the Northern communities seem to have exerted a predominant position within the valley, the latter signaled by the sharing of a single settlement center used as a «node» in the landscape for meeting, socializing, and sharing resources between the different representatives of these communities: on the contrary, the human groups settled further South seem to have been more fragmented and less self-sufficient, as is indicated by the absence of a center similar to that of Denov, which seems to have catalyzed the economic, political, and social life of this micro-territory within the Surxondaryo valley.<sup>507</sup> This last consideration brings with it important consequences if one wishes

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<sup>504</sup> King 2020, 263-264.

<sup>505</sup> Stride 2007, 105, Stride *et al.* 2009b.

<sup>506</sup> Cf. Stančo *et al.* 2017 for a recent report of survey activities carried out along the foothills of the Köýtendağ, near the Northern border of the valley.

<sup>507</sup> Stride 2007, 107

to understand both the level of economic specialization of the territories of the future satrapies of Bactria and Sogdiana in a diachronic perspective and, consequently, the strategies adopted for the control of these spaces by the Empires claiming overlordship over them from the years immediately following Cyrus' conquest onwards.<sup>508</sup> The explanatory effectiveness of the model traditionally adopted in the case of Achaemenid hegemony - and even more so for the Hellenistic period - namely of a centralized political and administrative system, hinged on a main center (Baktra in the Achaemenid period, Āi Xānum in the Seleukid and especially post-Seleucid era) and supported by a policy of widespread urbanization (Justin's Bactria «of a thousand-city») would be dramatically limited in the case under consideration, as can be deduced from the fact that, even today, Denov's bāzār is 1. much better supplied, 2. considerably more frequented (and therefore, from the point of view of the social actors involved in the region, 3. incomparably more important) than Termiz's, 150 kilometers further South; and this despite the fact that the latter is at least twice as large as Denov and, from the point of view of the topographical planning of today's O'zbek government, by far the most important urban center in the region, and indeed (not least because of its bordering with Afġānistān), one of the strategically most crucial sites of the whole country.<sup>509</sup> This apparently trivial consideration is, however, extremely indicative of the ecological-demographic complexity of a land that Curtius Rufus not by chance defined as *multiplex et varia* and that consequently requires, in order to be effectively controlled, the adoption of strategies designed and tailored to the local context which (as James Scott has effectively demonstrated), in the territories that make up the world of Zomia, can change abruptly not only as the horizontal distance varies, but also according to the orography (think for example of the mountain ranges surrounding the Surxondaryo or a landscape such as the Hindūkūš, which the literary sources not by chance draw in rather gloomy tones).<sup>510</sup> From all the above it follows, on the one hand, that any general consideration of the possibility of a given polity

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<sup>508</sup> According to Klinkott 2005, 126-127, the administrative subordination of Sogdiana to Bactria (which he claims to be attested in the literary sources not before 328 BCE: see Jacobs 1994, 208-217) could be explained by virtue of the Persian administration's need of integrating the steppe economy within the Baktrian networks, allegedly more related to the oases and thus to agriculture. See Arr. *Anab.*, 4.17.3 and Curt. 8.2.14. A similar pattern, so the argument goes on, could be witnessed in the case of Parthia and Hyrkana: see Strab. 11.8.3 - and further 11.9.1 - as well as Jacobs 1994, 187-190.

<sup>509</sup> Cf. Just. *Epit.*, 41.1.8 and Strab. 15.1.3 on Bactria as the land «of a thousand cities»: see on this regard the important Leriche 2007. Worth mentioning are also Barfield's comments (2010, 67-71; 2020) concerning the geographical and - most importantly - *social* conditioning with which political entities are confronted, which in the course of history claimed over-regional political control over both Afġān territory and its population(s). In recent years (2015; 2016), particularly vocal have been Brian Krittr's arguments suggesting that Āi Xānum became the capital of the Seleukid satrapy. He has moreover claimed that, at least starting around the mid 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE (but see on such a date and its implications Wenghofer - Houle 2016, Wenghofer 2018, and most recently Jakobsson 2020) the same should have been for the last (both only as far as its geographical and chronological extensions are concerned: see Bordeaux 2018, Stoneman 2019, Dumke 2020) of the Hellenistic Empires of Eurasia (on such a definition for the Graeco-Baktrian Empire see Morris 2019a).

<sup>510</sup> Scott 2009, 54-61, Barfield 2020. On the Hindūkūš (the Paropamisadae of Graeco-Roman sources) cf. e. g. Amm. Marc. 22.6.71, Arr. *Anab.*, 4.22.7 ff., Curt. 7.3.5-12, Diod. Sic. 17.82.1, Plin. *NH.*, 6.18.48, Ptol. *Geog.*, 6.17.1 ff. and Strab. 15.2.9.

with supra-regional ambitions to control a territory with such characteristics should be examined in the light of the specific features of the space in question and of its components. On the other hand, such considerations underline once again the crucial role of the «imperial collaborators» in the process of rooting and expansion of an Empire within the context of an environment so resistant to any mechanism of «simplification» and «legibility». For these men, and their networks, have to be regarded as the essential cogs (the human capital, as one might say) for the building and upkeep of a complex (and however sophisticated, inevitably cumbersome by virtue, to give but one example, of unavoidable technological shortcomings) administrative apparatus such as that of any pre-modern Empire.<sup>511</sup> A similar conclusion is voiced also by Stride, who in fact in his work emphasized the need, on the part of both the Achaemenids and their successors, to adopt extremely flexible strategies to solve, or at least contain, the problems of governmentality (e. g. first and foremost logistical issues) presented by a territory such as the landscape of Bactria and Sogdiana. Moreover, he has not failed to add that an indispensable part of each of these strategies, especially at a local (sub-satrapal) level, passed through the recruitment - probably sanctioned also by marriage alliances, as shown by the repeated offers in this sense received by Alexander from numerous local strongmen active both in Achaemenid territory and beyond the latter's limes - of individuals representing native communities, who controlled limited but strategically crucial (micro)territories.<sup>512</sup> Here we are dealing with a point of crucial importance, since it is necessary to recognize, along with the results of Negus-Cleary's studies, that despite the undoubted human capacity to modify and adapt the environment to one's own advantage, in a complex ecology such as that of the fundamental demographic unit of the Central Asian landscape (the oasis-cum-steppa complex), insurmountable constraints even until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (for example and most notably the possibility of intensively cultivating large segments of land without damaging the grazing economy) made the multiplication of settlements on the scale of Āi Xānum impossible. The city is in fact an exception also from the point of view of the ecological landscape in which it is located, and it cannot be ruled out that the maintenance of such a settlement in an unsuitable context played a role in its abandonment, apparently accompanied by revolts of the local population, around the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE.<sup>513</sup>

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<sup>511</sup> Curt. 7.4.26 on Bactria as a terra multiplex et varia. On imperial strategies of space legibility and landscape simplification see the detailed analysis of the issue developed from an anthropological perspective by James Scott (e. g. 1998, 35-45; 2009, 74-76; 2017, 139-147).

<sup>512</sup> This is for example the case of the already mentioned Arimazes, on whom see Curt. 7.11.1-29, *Epit. Mett.*, 15-18, Polyæn. 4.3.29 and Strab. 11.11.4. As for the «translimitanean» marriage proposals (but it should be noted that the proposers – as it is clear from the narrative context - had very close relations with the neighboring Achaemenid satrapies) received by Alexander, according to the historiographic tradition, during the latter's campaign in Central Asia, see for instance Curt. 8.1.8.

<sup>513</sup> Stride 2005 I, 417-419, Martinez-Sève 2018a, 407; 2020b. See moreover Negus-Cleary 2007, 18 on the environmental constraints which the sociopolitical life within the oasi-cum-steppa complex has to deal with.

In Stride's view, even in the case of Kyzyltēpe (which, it should be noted, is located near the present-day town of Shurchi, just south of Denov), we are dealing with an anomaly, since the surrounding area does not seem to have had the possibility of maintaining a settlement of any significance, and this because of the fact that the arable land in the Miršade oasis is less than 1000 acres, barely enough, according to his judgement, even to feed a single village.<sup>514</sup> In the light of what has been discussed so far, however, one should not make the mistake of confusing the territorial extent of a given site with its importance within the context in which it is located. The inhabitants of Kyzyltēpe, as we shall see later in this study, had at their disposal an extremely varied range of resources that ensured their prosperity even in such a prohibitive environment, as evidenced by the interest that the Persian administration seems to have taken in this oasis, despite its at first sight remarkable unattractiveness. The modern parallel of Denov (and the strategic position of the site along one of the most important transhumance routes in the valley) suggest what may have been - along the lines of Ṭawāwīs and Cyropolis - the key factors behind the Persian choice to concentrate part of the resources available to the satrapal administration in consolidating its position in what appears to all intents and purposes to be a «node» of the regional territory, the control over which – or over the people dwelling there – secured access to vital resources in an area much larger than that of the site proper.<sup>515</sup> To name but one other particularly significant example in the context of the geopolitical organization of Achaemenid Central Asia, such seems to have been the case of Afrāsyāb (the Marakanda of classical historiographic tradition, near the modern town of Samarqand). Here, a careful evaluation of topographical maps (especially Soviet ones collated with their forerunners of the Tsarist-era) on the one hand and, on the other hand, the results of both aerial photography and survey activities, have led scholars to conclude that the settlement process in the entire area - from the Early Iron Age to the Hellenistic period - was closely dependent on the maintenance of a system of micro-channels of mountain streams (called *saī* in the specialized literature).<sup>516</sup> This irrigation system, while guaranteeing the possibility of a multifunctional exploitation of the area's considerable resources, did not require the permanent presence of an urban center, which nevertheless arose from the Achaemenid period onwards with the explicit intention - once again - of securing control of a strategic outpost as to oversee both the transhumance routes through the neighboring hills and protect the water sources responsible for the site's first phase of expansion.<sup>517</sup> The hypothesis of investments (e. g.

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<sup>514</sup> Stride 2007, 108.

<sup>515</sup> Stride 2005 III n. 257, who however dates the most ancient strata of the site to the early Achaemenid period (P1 in his classification, thus between the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE); see more recently Wu *et al.* 2017, Wu 2020.

<sup>516</sup> Stride *et al.* 2009b, 78.

<sup>517</sup> Cf. Stride *et al.* 2009a. As already noted by Frantz Grenet (2004) and Ladislav Stančo (2016, 32), the irrigation system of the Samarqand plain remained almost unaltered until the Mongol invasion in 1220, which provides the very watershed of the ecological (if not also of the political) history of pre-modern Central Asia, even more than Qutayba's campaign or

infrastructural ones, such as the construction of roads) similar to those implied by the archaeological evidence collected at Kyzyltēpe also in the context of other Baktrian sites (like Čašma-ye Šifā) to be taken as a diagnostic fossil of the strategy of territorial expansion in Central Asia is not in itself mutually exclusive with respect to the pursuit of a second line of research, namely that of the recruitment, by the satrapal authority installed at Baktra and its direct emanations (e. g. at Afrāsyāb), of men of trust settled in the broader (and as stated many times, considerably challenging) territory of the satrapy. On the contrary, it is complementary to it. Once again, the case of Surxondaryo (this time the lower part of the valley, closer to the Oxus course) allows us to get an idea of the results to which the pursuit of both strategies listed above might have led. In an area which (from a geographical point of view) was as limited as it was fragmented and, moreover, at least from the early Iron Age (Yaz I) demographically characterized by a high degree of settlement dispersion, the evidence provided by the Alexander's historians testifies to the existence of a very large number of individuals, formally subject to the authority of the Baktrian satrap but perfectly capable of acting in total autonomy with respect to the central government (Bessos had been dead for months) and, what is more, in perfect mutual coordination, to the point of forcing Alexander and Krateros into an exhausting series of «special military operations» in order to create the conditions for the prosecution of the campaign into Indian territory, which required the securing of precisely these strategic territories.<sup>518</sup>

#### 4.2. *Timeo Persas et dona ferentes*. Being some thoughts on *Confide et impera*

From what has been pointed out so far, it does not seem out of place to argue that, from a micro-territorial and long-term perspective, the history of the borderlands (including the internal frontier zones) of Bactria and Sogdiana appears to have developed in the absence of, or at least independently from, a centralized political power according to the model adopted by scholars of the Achaemenid East before Cyrus' conquest and, to a certain extent, even after it, although from ca. 530 BCE this history was now framed within the «global» context of the Empire. Of course, this does not equal to argue that any form of power (including the related hierarchies, forms of sociopolitical inequalities as well as inter- and intra-community tensions, especially among the corresponding élites) was absent. What it does mean, however, is the need to acknowledge that, in order to function effectively, a political entity with supra-regional ambitions could not avoid relying heavily on social structures strongly rooted in the local context – which in turn was characterized by a high demographic

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Alexander's conquest. See moreover Nicholas Purcell's remarks (2013; 2017) on the importance of riverine routes and (pede)mountain environments for an Empire to build its own «topography of power» on fairly solid ground.

<sup>518</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 4.21 ff. See Rapin 2013, 75.

dispersion. These circumstances, consequently, makes said power less archaeologically visible (if not almost undetectable) without implying its ineffectiveness or, worse, its non-existence, as a device of extraction and control.<sup>519</sup> Even in the Sāsānid period, during the reign of Šābūhr I, the information available from archaeological surveys allows us to draw a picture from which (at least) two rather different entities emerge. On the one hand, isolated rural fortresses (think again of the *irmatam*(s?) owned by Vivāna in Arachosia) comparable, with all due caution, with the landscape of Early Medieval Europe (in which, to borrow some acute remarks by Damián Fernández, the «state» is conspicuous by its absence); on the other hand, semi-autonomous urban nuclei (with, for example, their own legal status and the right to mint coins in their own name), within which the (local) «king» performed little more than a function analogous to that of a *primus inter pares*, and the heritability of this title was far from being taken for granted.<sup>520</sup> Such a scenario suggests therefore a landscape in which natural boundaries (rivers or mountain ranges), not to mention administrative ones - assuming they ever existed with the clarity with which we tend to reconstruct them today, mostly on the only (often biased) basis of classical sources - must have played a much smaller role in the socio-spatial perception and practices of local communities than the subdivision of Central Asia implied - among others - by a model such as the one developed by Bruno Jacobs would tend to suggest. Moreover, to revert to the hydrological issue, so central as it is to the study of the ways in which Achaemenid hegemony was established in Central Asia, it seems entirely consistent with the analysis developed so far to conclude, as some scholars have done, that the control of irrigation systems alone - assuming it could be achieved without the active involvement of the local population - was certainly not sufficient to guarantee, as such, forms of social stratification and territorial and demographic control tight enough to ensure a position of predominance in the local political arena(s).<sup>521</sup> Such attempts at simplification are conditioned, as Nicholas Purcell has noted, by the point of view of our sources - whose perspective, it should never be forgotten, is often that of the prevailing political power (or one that aspires to present itself as such) - which are always quite happy to present an object of conquest as if it were a *tabula rasa*, a *terra incognita*.<sup>522</sup> The evidence coming from the royal inscriptions show that the Achaemenid rulers were no exception in this respect, and it is worth noting that Darius explicitly chose to advertise his conquest of both Central Asia and the steppe beyond it by mentioning the fording - by the troops he commanded - of the most important rivers in the region (notably the

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<sup>519</sup> Lhuillier 2018.

<sup>520</sup> de la Vaissière 2004, 151-153. Cf. Wickham 2005; 2010 for an extremely detailed and insightful overview of rural geography of Early Medieval Europe (as well as of the related sociopolitical implications) and, more recently, the important study by Fernández 2017 on post-Roman Iberia. On the Eastern outskirts of Sāsānid Ērān see most recently Rezakhani 2017, 46-86; 2022 (focused on the Kušāna).

<sup>521</sup> See e. g. the considerations by Hunt and Hunt 1976, 403 and Brüggemann 2016, 5.

<sup>522</sup> Purcell 2013, 379. See moreover the remarks in Rapin 2014 (on Central Asia) and von Reden 2019c (on India).



Syrdaryo).<sup>523</sup> As the investigation of numerous (post-)colonial contexts (e.g. Southeast Asia from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards, not to mention Africa, including modern nation-states) has, however, conspicuously highlighted, there is a rather perceptible difference between the idea one has of a given space from the outside (and the corresponding cartographic projection, the main instrument of what in anthropology is called «institutional domination») and the local point of view. This is because, though its representatives gladly would, there is no form of external power which can do without the natives' territorial know-how (a typically mētīc skill).<sup>524</sup> The inevitable consequence of such socio-spatial constraints has usually been the recruitment, not infrequently on a large scale when it comes to Empires, of the aforementioned external skills in an attempt to normalize them: which means, to make them (and their bearers) one's own; to domesticate them in the face of the fact that they could not be eliminated (again: participation instead of - mere - coercion). There is an abundance of ethnographic material collected during several ethnological expeditions carried out in China and former Soviet Central Asia (in a pioneering way especially by Tolstov's legendary Экспедиция) accounting for this dialectic between «imperial» authority and the «local» context(s) actively at work in even extremely ambitious projects of territorial transformation, both from a physical point of view and, consequently, from the standpoint of the socio-economic perception and practices within the landscape. In fact, as Stride points out, even in the 1980s, the inhabitants of the most remote offshoots of Surxondaryo were still able - not least because of their superior knowledge of the terrain - to build more solid and reliable irrigation systems than those provided by Moscow-trained engineers, despite the fact that the latter had the most advanced technology available at the time at their disposal (which incidentally goes on a great deal in explaining Xo'jaev choices even in the context of a life-or-death challenge).<sup>525</sup> A few decades earlier, anthropological research in Chinese Turkestan (today's Xīnjiāng) and along the (presumed) borders between the Achaemenid satrapies of Baktria and Sogdiana and the surrounding steppes have recorded societies within which the decision, sometimes of vital importance, of 1. when, 2. how and 3. where to build a given canal was usually delegated to the representatives of local communities, in the *complete absence* of intervention by the central government, was it located at Toškent or at Ürümqi (烏魯木齊 - ئۈرۈمچى).<sup>526</sup> The investigation by Stride and his colleagues in the Surxondaryo and Middle Zarafšān valley has allowed them to reconstruct a socio-economic landscape that fits very well with the scenario outlined so far. According to the results of their studies, in fact, both territories in question are characterized by the presence of

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<sup>523</sup> On this matter see Robert Rollinger's illuminating studies (2013, 83-89; 2014a; 2021c, Rollinger and Bichler 2017 and Rollinger and Degen 2021b).

<sup>524</sup> Scott 1985; 1998, 223-261.

<sup>525</sup> Stride *et al.* 2009b, 80.

<sup>526</sup> Wawrzyn Gołab 1951, 153.

two subsystems: that governed by farmers, with a predominantly sedentary population, and that of mobile herders. Both of these subsystems show a considerable degree of specialization within them and a sophisticated division of labor between them. As a whole, the system represents a combination of different methods of landscape exploitation, which guarantees a highly efficient use of different ecological niches. Moreover, the two subsystems do not merely interact, but have emerged in a process of co-evolution and consequently the resulting space should be conceived as a single complex unit.<sup>527</sup>

Considerations of this kind should warn against applying too quickly to Achaemenid Central Asia a model within which the Empire is, 1. at all times and 2. in all places, the most important (not to mention the only) social actor at play. On the contrary, the evidence discussed in the previous pages makes concrete the suggestion that the satrapal administration limited itself to choose, in its own interest, 1. which places - and 2. which social groups - to support, if necessary, also economically, in order to make them in loco agents of imperial power (Düring and Stek's «imperial collaborators»).

At the same time, however, it is also reasonable to assume that the actual infrastructural developments and upkeeps (from irrigation canals to roads) were carried out on the ground directly by the locals. For they already had the necessary expertise, but this expertise was now being applied, so to speak, on a larger scale and in a perspective that was no longer simply regional, but on the contrary aimed at linking up with the broader, Achaemenid context, both on the (macro)regional and on the «global» (pan-imperial) level.<sup>528</sup> The Dargom canal, one of the most important water infrastructures in the Samarqand plain, provides a striking example of the situation described by Stride and colleagues, and in contrast to the above-mentioned passage in Hdt. 3.117, Polybios' description of the management of water resources in other parts of the Irānian Plateau suggests how the Achaemenid ruler held formal sway over the water infrastructure within a given satrapy (the *qanāt/kārīz*), but also how, at the same time, the way in which it was exploited was the sole responsibility of the indigenous communities' representatives. From a legal (administrative) point of view, the land remained the property of the Great King, (*χώρα βασιλική* in the words of the 4<sup>th</sup> century (Pseudo)Aristotelian treatise known as *Oeconomicus*), but the community was left with de facto rights over it, including the exploitation of local resources (*καρπίζεσθαι*, as Polybios has it), which the satrapal administration must have immediately understood such communities were able to manage at the maximum level of efficiency feasible and (from the Empire's perspective) at the lowest cost.<sup>529</sup> This undertaking - and other similar ones could be mentioned, for example the breeding of livestock,

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<sup>527</sup> Stride *et al.* 2009b, especially p. 83.

<sup>528</sup> Briant 1982, 425.

<sup>529</sup> Polyb. 10.28.3, on which see Briant 2001b. Mileta 2008 has put forward a very similar model of territorial exploitation in the context of Western Asia Minor, which would have been considerably modified by Alexander in the aftermath of his conquest.

necessary as it was for the incredibly resource-demanding economy, not least on the ritual front, of the Empire - of fundamental strategic value, at one time (not too long ago) interpreted as tangible evidence of the Achaemenid organization's ability (of which no one doubts, just not in this form) to mobilize enormous masses of workers, often forced or directly enslaved, in order to build «pharaonic» infrastructures, appears, on closer inspection of the available material, to have been the outcome of a much longer, more complex process with an uncertain outcome: the result, in short, of an agreement (or alliance) that was at least partly consensual in nature between the various parties involved on the ground, each of which could have had interests, albeit not convergent and possibly at times even competing, to be pursued through the construction - or extension - of an important infrastructure such as a canal or even a (royal) road.<sup>530</sup> This is made even more likely by some important anthropological studies which have shown that, not infrequently, cooperation agreements between distinct social groups (and sometimes even between different ethnic groupings) are primarily the result of convergent, or at least not immediately conflicting, economic interests.<sup>531</sup>

In the light of these considerations, it is possible to consider the particular case of the Dargom canal and that, more generally, of the Zarafšān valley as a whole, as relevant clues supporting a model of «emerging» power (negotiated, «presumptive» or, following the overlapping arguments of Mark Garrison and Lori Khatchadourian, perpetually in *statu nascendi*) through which to interpret the little information we have in order to evaluate the modalities of both the Persian conquest of Central Asia and the subsequent hegemony over it, and especially with reference to what have been defined here as «internal borderlands» (the semi-desert areas at the oases' outskirts, the mountain ranges such as the Kōpetdağ) as well as, more generally, to the world of steppes North and East of Baktria and Sogdiana (e. g. in the Farḡāneḡ valley). In the case of the Dargom canal, too, based on the latest excavation data it is in fact possible to conclude that its construction and subsequent maintenance relied on a project which combined natural watercourses with artificial sections, with the former often keen to become canals on their own while the latter not infrequently turned back into natural rivulets. Once again, it all seems to start from a strictly (micro)regional context, in which the imperial imprint is conspicuous by its absence. And the same applies to one of the most important Achaemenid sites in Sogdiana (i. e. Kōktēpe).<sup>532</sup> In the light of the results of the most recent geo-archaeological surveys, therefore, it would seem possible to conclude that, if we want to maintain the model developed by

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<sup>530</sup> See Henkelman (e. g. 2005; 2010) on the mechanisms regulating the courtly economy on an Empire-wide scale as well as on the satellite activities caused by it also in relation with people formally not, or at least only partially under imperial authority (see Henkelman 2011). On the scale of the religious branch of the imperial economy in Fārs see Henkelman 2017b.

<sup>531</sup> Patterson 1975, 346-349.

<sup>532</sup> On the Dargom canal see e. g. Stride *et al.* 2011 (esp. p. 394). On the (local) context responsible for the genesis and the development of Kōktēpe not only before, but even during the Achaemenid period as well as in subsequent epochs see Francfort and Lecomte 2002, 632, Stride *et al.* 2009a, 27, Rapin 2007, Rapin and Isamidinov 2013, 120 ff.

Jacobs for the sake of convenience, the key to imperial control of the landscape, from the micro-territorial units to the macro-regional scale of the Großsatrapie should be recognized in the need, on the part of the satrapal administration, to secure the cooperation - or at least avoid open hostility - of those individuals who become visible to us only at the end of Achaemenid history in the form of the ὑπαρχοὶ featuring large in the narrative of the extant literary tradition (which not by chance Alexander did not hesitate to systematically eliminate if he had not succeeded in recruiting them into his ranks). Such strongmen, however, need to be acknowledged as the true protagonists of Central Asian politics over a chronological period much longer than the approximately two and a half centuries of Achaemenid hegemony.<sup>533</sup> In fact, it is probably no coincidence that, even in the Early Middle Ages, the construction and maintenance of the fortress of Kāfir Qal‘a, 11.75 kilometers Southwest of Samarqand and a strategic pawn in the game for the control over the Zarafšān valley at the time, could have taken place in a manner similar to that of its Northern twin, namely Kōktēpe.<sup>534</sup>

Of course, neither of the two cases discussed so far (the Zarafšān and the Surxondaryo) can be studied without taking into account the geo-ecological framework within which both valleys are set (in one case as well as in the other a landscape of rugged hills and reliefs surrounded by semi-desert steppes), which Stride has defined as «mixed» areas, within which agriculture - irrigated or dry - constitutes a complementary resource in a predominantly pastoral context. Incidentally, such a geo-ecological framework still dawns in all its clarity to anyone venturing along the road (90 km among the most impervious in the whole of Uzbekistan, which in itself speaks volumes) that leads from Samarqand to Shahr-e Sabz.<sup>535</sup> The extreme variability of the landscape and of the resources available in territories hosting numerous - though numerically circumscribed - human groups potentially competing with each other for their exploitation ought to be seen as the main reason for the flourishing of the symbiotic system described in the previous pages and which can still be sensed from the historiographic narrative of Alexander’s campaign as soon as attention is shifted from the exploits of the conqueror to the swarming of ἔθνη active in the areas he crossed - and sacked - as well as in those immediately surrounding.<sup>536</sup> The most important consequence for the present study lies in the (methodologically dubious) feasibility of distinguishing too sharply between «Baktrians», «Sogdians», and Sakā (and this all the more so the further back we go in time). Within an ecosystem such as the one described in this chapter, the interactions (and interrelationships) between the different

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<sup>533</sup> Cf. Scott 2017, 150-157 on the issue of the absolute priority, for a pre-modern Empire, of controlling the human capital as a *prerequisite* to control the territory in which they were settled and not (as one might legitimately think) the opposite way. As far as I am aware, Briant 2020, 31 provides the most recent and consequential critic to the model of administrative division (as well as of its implications on a (micro)local level) developed starting with the by now classic 1994 monograph by Bruno Jacobs.

<sup>534</sup> Mantellini and Berdimuradov 2005, 108.

<sup>535</sup> Stride 2007.

<sup>536</sup> Rapin 2018a, 271-286.

communities settled in a given landscape cannot but be very close - which does not imply at all that they were always, and perhaps not even predominantly, peaceful ones. From this it follows, as I would be inclined to argue, that the linchpin of the effectiveness of the capillary spread of Achaemenid infrastructural power is to be sought precisely in its capacity (effective as well as persuasive) to act as a third - regulating and coordinating - instance of these relations on a supra-regional scale and not, as has recently been argued, in a redefinition of said sociopolitical (and economic) entanglements according to socio-spatial criteria which, in addition to being alien to any universal Empire of antiquity, could hardly have been implemented with any pretense of effectiveness.<sup>537</sup> This is blatantly demonstrated by the case of Ṭawāwīs, which was born and flourished precisely because of the *Logiques métisses* that dominated social relations in Central Asia at least until the invention of nation states at the time of the Soviet ethnic policy (коренизация).<sup>538</sup> Even assuming that the Achaemenids had been able to redraw the socio-political map of Central Asia at will - which appears more than unlikely for the reasons discussed especially in chapter 2 - it is not clear *why* they would have wanted to deprive themselves spontaneously of extremely sophisticated relational networks capable, as Jean-Pierre Digard has forcefully argued, of developing - and coordinating among themselves - forms of labor division across multiple geospatial scales, from the village unit to the regional context.

Going into further detail, the study of the Xiōngnú communities also helped to show how, even in the socio-political context of pastoral populations, the coexistence and interaction of different professional groups within the same economic system was the order of the day. This is a human capital that no pre-modern Empire would have been willing to give up on, and the havoc unleashed on Qazaqstan's landscape and society by Stalin's collectivization - which has now been shown to have programmatically not included economic efficiency among all its aims - demonstrates the consequences for any ruling class that was arrogant enough to assume that, even in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it could do without that capital (Scott's μῆτις).<sup>539</sup> In particular, the existence of a refined specialization of individuals or groups within a homogeneous production system represents a very important element in the light of which to study the evidence that has recently emerged from the

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<sup>537</sup> See for example Vogelsang 1992b «Linnean» attempt of classification compared with the (rightly) cautious remarks in Paul 2003, 31-33 (and this even though the latter's case study comes from a considerable later period).

<sup>538</sup> When it comes to *Logiques métisses*, the to-go reference is still Amselle 1990. Cf. moreover Richardson 2016 for an important contribution arguing that *mutual* acknowledgement and acquaintance was of paramount importance (as argued some years earlier by Tilly 2005) in laying the groundwork for any kind of sociopolitical cooperation between the Assyrian Empire (as most recently stressed by Liverani 2017, Lanfranchi 2021, and Rollinger 2023 a prominent forerunner of – and model for – the Achaemenids) and the local élites in Mesopotamia. See moreover Lo Muzio 2017, 11 ff. for the archaeological evidence as well as Barfield 2020, 18-19 who stresses the remarkable impact (from an ecological perspective) of the *Affirmative Action* (as one might say taking up the title of an important study by Terry Martin) of the Soviet Empire.

<sup>539</sup> Digard 1990, 101. Makarewicz 2011 provides an insightful study on Xiōngnú economies of scale while Kindler 2014, 109-178 explores the goals pursued by the Bol'shevik Herrschande Gesellschaft through the politics of forced settlements in Qazaqstan.

Persepolis archives, which attest to the presence, in numerous areas of the Empire, of workers (kurtaš) of Central Asian origin - especially Arachosians, Sogdians, and Baktrians - whose high level of professionalism (again, an example of μῆτις) seems to have been exceptionally appreciated by the imperial administration, compared to other ethnic groups we know about in the tablets. This is convincingly shown, among other things, by the commitment, and costs, (not least from a logistical point of view) brought to bear by the Persian organizational machinery to employ such individuals: not least by means of remunerating them in proportion to their importance, in the Achaemenid main political centers as well as in some of the most strategically important places of the Empire (among which the Būšehr peninsula in the Persian Gulf area, particularly stands out).<sup>540</sup>

The results of the ethnographic survey carried out by Wawrzyn Gołab in Western Xīnjiāng provide an instructive touchstone for comparison with the picture that has emerged so far in (Western) Central Asia, since in such a space, too, the Polish anthropologist was able to reconstruct a socio-economic landscape of extreme sophistication (and based on no less delicate tradeoffs) structured on the basis of no fewer than four distinct areas of interaction, each situated along the line of a continuum. At its respective ends, it comprises, on the one hand, the steppe economy, characterized by seasonal migration, low population density and, politically, by the dominant presence of human groups organized according to what Ted C. Lewellen has called «tribal societies». On the other hand, there were human groups distinguished by a greater degree of sedentariness (which may also mean: by more restricted travel cycles), by a greater use of cultivation techniques, and consequently more numerous in numbers and clustered around a small amount of urban centers in close dependence on each other - although not always in peaceful relations. These range from settlement of comparatively little extension such as Denov in Surxondaryo to the larger communities of the Tarim oases, in some ways not dissimilar to that of Baktra, which according to the scenario outlined in these pages, was the starting point of Achaemenid expansion in Central Asia mainly, if not exclusively, for reasons of spatial order and of the related political ecologies.<sup>541</sup> However, other considerations can be added to those outlined above. If one in fact compares the results of the archaeological investigation carried out in the last 40 years, from Eastern Baktria to the Zarafšān valley up to the most recent studies in the Köýtendağ area, settlements of the size of Afrāsyāb, Kyzyltēpe, Baktra (as far as it can be reconstructed) and especially Hellenistic Āi Xānum, are the exception rather than the rule. Of the

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<sup>540</sup> Cfr. NN 1858 (as referenced in Henkelman 2018a, 230-232) and Ptol. *Geog.*, 6.4.7.

<sup>541</sup> Lewellen 1992, Barfield 2010, 66-109; 2020, 6-8. Some years ago, Nikolai Kradin (2011a; 2011b) has argued that – contrary to an increasingly spreading opinion among modern social anthropologists – a term such as «tribe» still maintains a certain degree of heuristic potential and one should carefully think about setting it aside in order to substitute it with other terms which however define the same concept only in other, more fashionable ways. See more recently and in comparisons with the results of Wawrzyn Gołab's study the insightful monograph by Bellér-Hann 2008, 55-178, devoted to the period immediately precedent to the one studied by Wawrzyn Gołab) as well as, for a general overview from the vantage point of a cultural history of this region see Millward 2007.

more than 800 sites so far located in Eastern Bactria alone, in an area roughly ranging from Qundūz to Rustāq, and from Tāleqān to Aškameš, Āi Xānum - but it would be more correct to refer more generally to the plain in which the site is located - is the only settlement potentially capable of fulfilling a political and economic role of supra-regional importance, and it is probably no coincidence that the urban development of the new imperial capital of the Hellenistic period seems to have been nourished at the expense of a dense network of smaller settlements in the rest of the Dašt -i Qal‘a plain.<sup>542</sup> Such a phenomenon - which at least according to the evidence currently at hand seems to deviate significantly from the settlement strategy adopted by the Achaemenids in Central Asia - has most likely structural reasons. As Stride has shown, the agricultural expansion of the oases of Bactria and Sogdiana is in fact limited by the territory of the neighboring ones. This has extremely relevant consequences from a socio-political point of view, since the development - demographic, of the settlement patterns, of political control, to name but a few examples - of a given community beyond a certain ecological threshold risks transforming the symbiotic cooperation between the pastoral groups settled in the steppes as well as along the bordering foothills and the inhabitants of the oases into a struggle for survival that could jeopardize the social structures, and therefore the capacity for effective control, of the entire territory. Recent studies of the ecology of the Ancient Near East (particularly of the Zagros) provide clues, in terms of economic and demographic sustainability, supporting the scenario discussed in these pages with reference to the Central Asian landscape.<sup>543</sup>

A second aspect that deserves to be underlined concerns the supra-regional (i. e. extended beyond the oases' territory) cohesion of the Balḥ-āb area, which was - and still is - rendered extremely fragile by virtue of the fact that the latter are, in the absence of paved roads, notoriously difficult to connect. This in turn implies that, lacking solid relational networks in situ, the control of this or that oasis, however important, did not guarantee the safety of the neighboring territory, and even less so the build-up of a network between the different political and administrative centers (oases, in fact) of the (would-be) satrapy.<sup>544</sup> The possibility of overcoming these logistical hurdles by simply expanding the cultivation of the «virgin land» also came up against further ecological constraints, which Stride recognized mainly in the proximity of the Eurasian steppes, mobile pastoralism, and the social structures characteristic of that world. Like China (the Xīnjiāng studied by Wawrzyn Gołab and Bellér-Hann), Central Asia is in fact also in direct contact with the steppe world and yet, unlike the

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<sup>542</sup> For the geographical location of the site mentioned in the text see Ball 2019 nos. 930 (Qundūz), 960 (Rustāq) and 1142 (Tāleqān). See most recently the results of the archaeological investigation carried out by Havlík 2018, 51-81; 2021. Kosmin 2014a, 183-221, Canepa 2018, 307-323; 2020, 53 focus on the transformation operated by the Seleukids on the topography of power within the entire territory of the former Achaemenid Empire, thus of course including Bactria.

<sup>543</sup> Cf. Stride 2005 I, 319 ff. and Balatti 2017, 33-50.

<sup>544</sup> See most recently Barfield 2020, 11-12.

Heavenly Kingdom, much of the territory of Central Asia is suited to a mobile lifestyle.<sup>545</sup> Such considerations bring with them at least two important implications, which ought to be explored in some detail. Firstly, the presence of communities firmly rooted in the socio-ecological context of the steppes, even within - or in the immediate vicinity of - the Baktrian and Sogdian oases, must not be considered the exception, and even less so as being indexical of a situation of (even only potential) conflict. It was, on the contrary, the norm, especially if one takes into account the evidence discussed above relating at least to the Late Bronze Age, which attests to countless cases of human groups that are difficult to characterize, if not over limited periods of time or as the consequence of political choices (again: Scott's «positionality») as «nomadic» or «sedentary».

As shown by the, in many ways parallel, cases of the Sogdian Spitamenes and the Táng official Lǐ Lǐngwèn, from the imperial administration's standpoint the links of such subjects with the territories (at least formally) located «beyond the map» were held as a resource of great importance, and consequently they guaranteed the strongmen controlling them significant possibilities of social ascent within the cadres of the new ruling class - Achaemenid or Táng. The second, and perhaps more important implication (precisely because it is counterintuitive, and so far considerably underestimated in modern scholarship) can be summed up with a formula that is perhaps resolute but not exaggerated: in a context such as that of Baktria, it is outside the irrigated plains that power hierarchies and social structures are established, and if necessary (re)negotiated.<sup>546</sup> If this is particularly evident in the case of Spitamenes and his acolytes - who seem in fact to have drawn most of their military resources from the worlds of the steppes (and not only from those immediately adjacent to the Baktrian or Sogdian oases), and who moreover would have died there and because of the sociopolitical alchemy of these landscapes - it is not superfluous to wonder to what extent this could have been true for individuals such as Dādêršiš, Darius' trustee (bandaka) in the last quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup> century and even more so a few decades earlier at the time of Cyrus' conquest, for which, however, at the moment we simply do not have sufficient elements that would allow us to dare any assumptions which might be grounded in evidence. Such a line of reasoning, of course, does not in any way underplay the importance of settlements such as Afrāsyāb (whose foundation, according to Rapin, marked an important stage in the redefinition of the sociopolitical hierarchies of Sogdiana - to the detriment of Kōktēpe), Kyzyltēpe, or the oasis fortifications around Baktra, each of which - in its own way - provides on the contrary concrete evidence of the Empire's ability to adapt the landscape of the territories it conquered 1. to its own advantage (if not to modify it «in its own image, after its likeness») and 2. in accordance

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<sup>545</sup> Stride *et al.* 2009b, 81, to be compared with the similar situation at the border of the Regnum Vandalorum in 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century Africa skillfully studied by Mischa Meier in his path-breaking *Geschichte* (Meier 2020, 716 ff.).

<sup>546</sup> Stride *et al.* 2009b, 81-83.



with its own strategic needs: and this from both a military and an economic point of view.<sup>547</sup> However, since the dataset available concerning the settlement history and the way in which human communities dwelling in the Baktrian territory interacted with each other and with their surroundings is still both extremely patchy and scanty, what the discussion carried out so far suggests should be at the very least a more cautionary approach with regards to explanatory models neglecting the socio-environmental context in which the (under Cyrus still in the making) imperial administrative machine came into existence, making moreover the latter the only relevant actor within a scenario whose complexity we have attempted to describe in these pages. The results of the study of a region such as the Surxondaryo clearly show that the strategies which proved - perhaps, if Rapin's hypothesis is correct - to be effective in the Zarafshān valley or in Eastern Bactria (namely demographic control from a prominent political-administrative center such as Afrāsyāb or Kuhna Qal'a, not to mention Hellenistic Āi Xānum), were not - or might not have been - so effective elsewhere. And as Rhyne King convincingly showed, in order to claim power over Bactria it was not enough to control just those territories without the mastery of local power networks.<sup>548</sup> Within a space predominantly characterized, to quote Michelle Negus-Cleary, by «non-nucleated» settlements and high degrees of mobility, any study of the establishment and permanence, over a period of more than two centuries, of Achaemenid power cannot avoid a comparison, first and foremost from a theoretical and methodological point of view, with the political and economic influence of local actors (the individuals controlling the *vici* mentioned by Curtius Rufus, for example) to whom it is not impossible, to cite a particularly relevant case, that the satrapal court was forced to resort in order to achieve the expansion of the irrigation network of an ecologically difficult to exploit (but strategically paramount) territory such as the plain surrounding Termiz, still in Hellenistic times a transit junction of fundamental importance between the lands North and South of the Oxus.<sup>549</sup>

#### 4.3. *Die Steppe der Anderen*. Being Some Thoughts on Living in, and Claiming, the Space

For the present study, the most important consequence of the issues discussed above is the need to rethink the dynamics fueling the making of Achaemenid Bactria from a perspective that, on the one

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<sup>547</sup> Cf. Rapin 2017b, 426 on the dialectic between Afrāsyāb and Kōktēpe in the centuries immediately antedating the rise of the Persian Empire in Central Asia.

<sup>548</sup> King 2020. This issue will be dealt with in more details in chapter 7.

<sup>549</sup> Stride *et al.* 2009a, 25-28 and Martinez-Sève 2015, 22. It is probably starting from the site of Kuhna Qal'a – located but a few kilometers to the Northeast of the future Hellenistic settlement – and perhaps thanks to one of its «imperial collaborators» that the Achaemenid power held sway over the Dašt i Qal'a plain. Cf. Kosmin 2014a, 193 and Canepa 2015; 2018, 170-187 on the revolution of the previous political and administrative topography of power (which was moreover by no means devoid of powerful symbolic and ideological undertones) brought to be in the territories of Eastern Irān and Central Asia by the Seleukid dynasty. On the «non nucleated» model of settlement patterns in Chorasmia and probably extended more widely through Achaemenid central Asia see especially Negus-Cleary 2013, 91 ff.; 2017.

hand, takes into serious consideration the physical geography and - more generally - the ecological features (which means also including aspects of what today we would call human geography) of this portion of Central Asia. Otherwise stated, we ought to consider local landscapes to all intents and purposes as social actors, different from each other but working in a synergistic manner, and as able (moreover) to condition human behavior through both the various opportunities (affordances) they offer, and the limits imposed by them. On the other hand, the critical approach that this chapter has set out to adopt, and which has been defined above by the concept of «political ecology», emphasizes that the multiple landscapes emerging as a result of the aforementioned human-environment entangled relationships are neither static nor constant, but are continually (re)produced based on interactions between a wide range of subjects, each endowed with his or her own (group) proactive capacity (agency), from individuals, to broader communities, to Empires, over the course of time.<sup>550</sup>

It is only against such a background, therefore, that it is possible to think constructively about how supra-regional entities (endowed, consequently, with supra-regional ambitions) such as Empires are able - or not - to fit into these social, economic, political, and symbolic networks, as well as about the role that Empires themselves have played, in the Central Asian scenario, in shaping the interactions between themselves - in the form of their representatives -, local communities, and the environment.<sup>551</sup> The hermeneutic potential of this theoretical framework for the study of the Baktrian context, it seems to me, is tremendous, not least by virtue of the fact that it allows us to understand dialectically both the characteristic aspects of the Achaemenid transformation of Baktria (Henkelman's «imperial signature») into an «imperial space» and the unavoidable role played within this same process by social actors who, for different reasons, the evidence – both archaeological and, a fortiori, epigraphic or literary - does not allow us to clearly distinguish (or consciously tends to obscure). That such actors not only existed, but also contributed decisively to the successes of the Achaemenid Empire (celebrated, for example, in the Apadāna or in the Susa founding charter) can be argued from the very needs – for example in terms of natural resources or labor of a polity as complex as the Persian Empire was, which must have generated in various regions of the territories «far away from Pārsa» where, as Darius has it, «the spear of Persian Man has delivered battle» entire economic

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<sup>550</sup> Similar conclusions (especially as far as the *non*-deterministic nature of the processes described in this chapter) have been reached by Barfield 2020.

<sup>551</sup> Cf. e. g. Ingold 1993, 156, who rightly points out that each landscape should be understood as the world as it is known from those who inhabit it, who dwell in the different places (*sensu* Tuàn) of which this same space is made out and who moves through its different parts. See most recently the enlightening contribution by Weaverdyck et al. 2021. The ever-changing nature of the spatial context in which the imperial paradigm aims at tapping into might therefore be understood as one of the reasons which help to explain the *in statu nascendi* condition of Achaemenid imperial power (what Lori Khatchadourian suggestively calls «The Satrapal Condition»).

and social «micro-systems» born out, and therefore conditioned by, while at the same time conditioning them, what Düring and Stek calls the (local) practical situations on the ground.<sup>552</sup>

Examples of these micro-systems are particularly evident (thanks to the *ADAB*) at the end of Achaemenid history, but there is no reason to assume that they did not exist previously (the Persepolis archives, as we shall see, provide more than one clue in this sense). Not only that, but it is even reasonable to claim that it was precisely the new conditions (social, political, and in some ways environmental: think of the infrastructural investments in irrigation, not to mention road networks) created by the rise of the Empire that decisively contributed to the birth, and the further expansion, of these systems.<sup>553</sup> Indeed, given that the vast majority of currently known Achaemenid sites in Baktria and Sogdiana appear to have developed settlements antedating the Iron Age - and in some cases, such as Koktêpe, even the Bronze Age -, it does not seem at all far-fetched to advance the hypothesis that one of the strategies implemented by the imperial administration in order to establish itself in the territory was to link previously autonomous settlements (or interacting on a situational basis, on the ground of specific, contingent problems) within the satrapal networks – for instance those created by the establishment of imperial roads, or more specifically, through the extraction of taxes to the administrative facilities and the broader structure of government in the satrapy – 1. among themselves and 2. with the new regional gravitational center (Baktra, Kuhna Qal‘a or Afrāsyāb in Sogdiana).<sup>554</sup> In other words, in the light of the interpretative categories elaborated in the course of this chapter, the results of the most recent archaeological investigation provide greater contextual depth to the documentary (and literary) evidence - in turn allowing the former to be better interpreted through the latter - making it possible to conclude, with Wouter Henkelman, that the main goal of the Achaemenids consisted in the creation of a «network of networks» extending across the entire - until then unprecedented - surface of the Empire.<sup>555</sup> Crucial in this context, however, is to point out, as suggested by Johanna Lhuillier, that the imperial novelty (the «quantic leap», Meier’s «imperial

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<sup>552</sup> Cf. *API*, 103 (DNa § 4).

<sup>553</sup> Cf. Ertsen and Wouters 2018, 15, who point out that, even were we able to detect on the ground clearly structured sociopolitical hierarchies, they should *never* be taken for granted. On the contrary, the fundamental question driving research should be 1. how and 2. why such hierarchies could (not) be maintained. In the case of (Northern) Baktria, Stride 2007, 105-108 has for example noted that, to exploit the landscapes in the most efficient way possible, Achaemenid administration was in no small measure dependent on the recruitment of local personnel, which would not have happened for free. This is even more plausible if one considers, as Stride further argues, that such very recruitment most likely happened through the intermediation of «polimorphous» individuals, capable of capitalizing the power they derived from their capacity of moving through different (physical as well as social) landscapes: see Antunes 2020. To these (per se crucial) consideration, following Ando 2017a, 10, it might further be added that a recurrent feature of pre-modern Empires should be seen in their attempt at what he calls the material expansion of state power through local labour force. As the previous sections tried to show, the development of Baktrian irrigation canals from the Bronze Age demonstrates how such considerations can fruitfully be applied to the Achaemenid imperial paradigm.

<sup>554</sup> Henkelman and Jacobs 2021 on roads and communication in the Empire.

<sup>555</sup> Henkelman 2017a, 81.

whirlwind») is represented by the (attempted) coordination of pre-existing networks, not by the creation of these networks *ex nihilo*.<sup>556</sup>

Among the most noteworthy assets of such a scenario at least the following should be highlighted: 1. the different indigenous communities are taken into account as social actors with their own agency more than previous interpretative models have done so far; 2. it programmatically renounces the - overly schematic - separation between «invaders» (the Persians) and «conquered» (the Central Asian population); 3. starting from the assumption of the satrapy's genesis as the result of alliances characterized by 3.1. inevitable constraints imposed by the short time span between the conquest on the one hand and, on the other, the civil war of 522 BCE which can be assumed as having turned the table of the established hierarchies in many contexts of the (by then very young) Empire, especially at its borderlands as well as 3.2. by a decisive situational component inherent to the Persian claims to have established their absolute rule «at world's end», 4. the hypotheses developed in this chapter take into account parallel scenarios discussed in the most recent scholarship on other contexts of Empire or «state» building, from Babylonia in the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE to Late Antiquity in the West through the foundation of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in Britain during the 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries CE and, last but not the least, Inner Asia, as it shall be discussed.<sup>557</sup> Taken together, such comparative evidence provide the history of Achaemenid Central Asian borderlands with a useful touchstone against which to tease out the inner functioning of imperial dynamics which Greek and Roman sources are all too keen to conceal (or to misrepresent). The consideration of both Henkelman and Lhuillier can in fact be profitably compared, as has been done several times in these pages, with the results of the most recent studies on the formation of the Xiōngnú Empire. If, as Honeychurch in particular has convincingly shown, neither war nor conquest *manu militari* can be considered the main means of consolidation and power centralization in the steppes prior to the rise of Mòdún, this makes it necessary to elaborate more complex hypotheses accounting for the processes of political formation within the pastoral societies of Inner Asia. This is a remark, as we have tried to show, which also closely concerns pre-Achaemenid Central Asia, where what for the sake of clarity we might call the «steppic component» played a major role in the formative stage of the landscape the Persians claimed as their own at the very least from Darius onwards («that land became mine»)<sup>558</sup> Drawing on the concept of «regional political communities» developed independently by Honeychurch and, in the context of (pre)-Achaemenid Caucasus, by Khatchadourian and Lauren Ristvet, this chapter has

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<sup>556</sup> Lhuillier 2018; 2019. See moreover Garrison 2017a, 523 and the relative bibliography.

<sup>557</sup> Meier 2020, 941: as the German historian rightly points out, in each of these contexts, «the dichotomy between Romans and Barbarians was steadily put aside in the face of political consideration of the most opportunistic nature». As a consequence, the (political and ideological) limes between the two worlds was anything but structured, and even less stable over time.

<sup>558</sup> Honeychurch and Amartuvšin 2006.

emphasized the socio-environmental conditions underpinning processes of negotiation, interdependence, and cooperation based on shared interests, which are paramount for the development of inter-communal solidarity at 1. local and 2. trans-regional levels. Notably these are all distinctive features of the social relations governing human groups settled both in Central Asia and in Mongolia, and particularly within pastoral communities.

In the Caucasus, as in Central Asia, an essential factor for understanding the connection between processes of socio-political interaction at the (micro)local level and the ability of the actors involved to juggle effectively within a polity of infinitely larger proportions – and means - such as an Empire claiming overlordship over both (local) spaces and (local) peoples is to be found above all in the flexibility of decision-making processes - dictated not least by the conditions imposed by the surrounding environment and by the need to adapt to it in order to exploit its full potential - at the local level, which are constantly confronted with a macro-regional context characterized by high mobility, increased reciprocal interactions, and (consequent) increased uncertainty. Within this framework, a category such as that of «political community» has the not inconsiderable advantage of not depending on coercion, conquest or strategic masterplanning in order to explain the rise of socio-political and economic influence groups (what, for lack of a better term, we tend to call the – once local, now imperial - élites). On the contrary, it raises questions about the social, political and economic circumstances (including inter- and intra-communal competition for the exploitation of the same territory with different intentions, thus with different territorial affordances, in mind) that ensured the recognition of such power groups, which main representatives most likely ought to be identified in the forerunners of that regional élite (or «ruling group», the herrschende Gesellschaft) – existing alongside, and not infrequently concurring with, the (Persian) ethno-classe dominante -, which came to understand itself as such (meaning a political actor connected across vast spaces) not least thanks to, and perhaps in order to contest, while exploiting its institutions, the establishment of Achaemenid power in Baktria. As Cyropolis' foundation strongly suggests, such dynamics are likely to have reached way beyond the oases, deep in the steppe world.<sup>559</sup> It is from this perspective that it is perhaps possible to interpret some of the most prominent Achaemenid sites in Baktria, Sogdiana - and based on Negus-Cleary's studies, even in Chorasmia -, from Altin Dilyar to Qundūz's Bālā Hişār, from Kuhna Qal'a to Čašma-ye Šifâ or Koktēpe, as centers of local power transformed by the satrapal government into nodes of the political-administrative network of the new territorial unit of the Empire, with all the consequences in terms of restructuring of the power relations within the local

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<sup>559</sup> Honeychurch 2015, 246, Khatchadourian 2016, 81 ff., Ristvet 2018. See the insightful remarks by both Gary Reger (2017) and more recently Weaverdyck *et al.* 2021, 304-310 with references) devoted the inhabitants of the Eastern Egyptian desert and on the Ἰχθυοφάγοι pointing out the stunning variability of the affordances provided by a given environment based on the *goals* which a given human group set for itself to *best* exploit such an environment.

social and political hierarchies that such a phenomenon must have caused.<sup>560</sup> Important parallel evidence of similar strategies adopted by the Achaemenid administration in spaces equally complex to manage comes from the oases of the Western Egyptian desert. Similarly to the interpretative scenario developed in these pages with regard to Bactria, Sogdiana, Chorasmia and the steppes, the progressive expansion of Persian settlements in territories such as those of the Ḥārğa oasis - and, a point not to be underestimated, in its borderlands - appears to have been fueled by the transformation of groups of potential marauders or rivals for the control of desert resources into representatives of Persian authority, not least through the recognition of property rights and/or usufruct of landed estates (the very same process, incidentally, reconstructed by Briant with regards to the Hyrkanian *kārīz* based on Polyb. 10.28).<sup>561</sup>

While such a mechanism undoubtedly describes in a rather precise manner what Briant has called the Achaemenid spin imprinted on the organization of the conquered territories by the satrapal administration (again, Henkelman's «imperial signature»), it should not be lost sight of the fact that the recruitment and management of the logistical resources - one thinks for example of the draught animals - and the labor force necessary to carry out works of the magnitude implied by the unprecedented scale of imperial needs, must have remained the prerogative of the local élites, whose members now no longer acted, as before, *motu proprio*, but as representatives of Achaemenid power, subject - often in little more than a formal manner (as in the case of an individual such as Spitamenes, to all intents and purposes Bessos' peer) to the authority of the Persian satrap itself.<sup>562</sup> In some cases, the strategic needs of the satrapal administration appear to be responsible for a drastic reconversion of the entire economy of a given territory to foster the development of a given settlement, to the advantage of the local big men, 1. in the internal sociopolitical chessboard and 2. on an imperial scale. One of the most evident examples of this phenomenon is undoubtedly that of Termiz, in the lower Surxondaryo, since the site corresponding more or less to the area of the current O'zbek provincial capital was transformed, almost instantaneously, from a remote hinterland of a relatively peripheral oasis into a strategic node of paramount importance for the connection between the two banks of the

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<sup>560</sup> On the Bâlâ Hişâr at Qundūz see Leriche 2007, 129. Martínez-Sève 2012, 384 provides further details on the Āi Xānum plain (but has less to say on the site) during the Achaemenid period. The archaeological surveys carried out in the surrounding of Afrāsīyāb further strengthen such hypothesis: cf. Grenet 2004, Stride *et al.* 2009b, 78 and Stančo 2016. On the excavations at Altin Dilyar see Marquis and Besenval 2008, 988 and Fouache *et al.* 2009, 1052-1054.

<sup>561</sup> Colburn 2018, 103; 2020a, 95-130. On Hyrkania see Briant 2017a, 352-356.

<sup>562</sup> Briant 1984, 54. Cf. moreover Wawrzyn Gołab 1951, 153 and Stride *et al.* 2009b, 80. The already mentioned passages of Hdt. 3.117 (Chorasmia) and Polyb. 10.28.3 (Hyrkania) might therefore be interpreted, starting from the above remarks, as a literary (re)interpretation of dynamics analogous to those described by Henry Colburn as having taken place in the Ḥārğa oasis within the Central Asian context. Both might in turn be compared to patterns of land exploitation and of territorial management in Asia Minor as argued by Christian Mileta (2008). Taking up some recent remarks by Clifford Ando (2017b, 143), it might therefore be possible to argue that the involvement of local societies in infrastructural projects (from the building – and consequently upkeeping – of a road network to irrigation canals) represented a very effective instrument to bound such communities both between them on a macro-regional scale and to the imperial economy (to be understood *lato sensu* in sociopolitical terms).

Amudaryo, as well as a crucial stop along the route to Marakanda. As Sebastian Stride has persuasively argued, seen from the perspective of the local élites, an active collaboration with the satrapal administration was a highly remunerative investment, since it was nothing else but the satrapal administration itself (with central, imperial backing) the political – and economic - entity which ensured the settlement's prosperity in relation to the surrounding regions, its increased importance in the context of the whole of Surxondaryo, and its very existence as a site of supra-regional importance, while at the same time securing for itself much coveted resources and manpower from the broader steppe world.<sup>563</sup> A similar pattern can be reconstructed, although not as clearly, in other Central Asian contexts, starting from the oasis of Baktra to Eastern Afġānistān (the Dašt -i Qal'a plain), in the Sherabāddaryo and, as both the findings of Baštēpa and Naršaġi suggest, in the hinterland of Buxārā or even further Northwest into the Kyzylkum.<sup>564</sup>

Taken as a whole, the information thus collected allows one - among other things - to make sense of the apparently chaotic political landscape of Central Asia described by Alexander's historians from significantly new premises, since it makes possible to explain, from a social, ecological, and economic «emic» (internal) background, both the power wielded, as plenipotentiaries of the imperial political mandate, by individuals such as Bessos, as well as the status - and the consequent, remarkable, wealth - of figures only apparently subordinate to the former in the context of the local hierarchies (from Spitamenes to Arimazes and Dataphernes), who in fact continued to give the Greek-Makedonian intruders a hard time long after the disposal of the Baktrian satrap: the latter remarkably achieved by (some of) these very strongmen.<sup>565</sup> For they could in fact be fruitfully described as the 4<sup>th</sup>-century counterpart of the 6<sup>th</sup>-century élites settled in the territory of Termiz (and the possibility remains open that a similar line of reasoning also concerns historical characters as Dādēršiš and Vivāna), whose territories offered crucial affordances for the expansion(istic) strategy implemented in Central Asia by the satrapal administration, which seems to have decided to invest heavily in their development, and consequently in the recruitment of the most prominent local representatives as «imperial collaborators». Therefore, settlements such as Kyzyltēpe, Altin Dilyar, Koktēpe (and indeed, perhaps most notably, Cyropolis itself) could be interpreted as milestones advertising - both

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<sup>563</sup> Cf. Stride 2005 I, 425-427, 2005 III n. 131 (Termiz) and Wu 2018, 211 for an attempt at reconstructing the road network in Baktria and Sogdiana during the Achaemenid Empire, to be compared with Henkelman and Jacobs 2021.

<sup>564</sup> Stride 2005 I, 189-200, Stančo 2018; 2019. See now Stančo 2020 on Southern O'zbekiston and Martinez-Sève 2020c on Afġān Baktria.

<sup>565</sup> It should not be forgotten that a relatively marginal (in comparison with Bessos or Spitamenes, and perhaps as well with regards to Arimazes) figure in the local power hierarchy such as Chorienes according to Arr. *Anab.*, 4.21.10 nevertheless disposed of abundant stocks of food supplies (from salted meat to grain and wine, the latter a potentially revealing clue about his status, as we shall explore later in the next chapter). Following Briant 2020, 38, Arrian's account clearly suggests that he was master of *extensive* terrains devoted to agriculture and of no less wide pastures, which perfectly fit the model of mixed economy such as that of the Vaxš valley studied by Teichmann 2016 based on ethnographic evidence provided by both Soviet administrators and American diarists.

physically and ideologically - the presence of imperial authority within a spatial context otherwise entirely removed from satrapal control (think again of the example of Ṭawāwīs): a hypothesis whose validity will be explored in more detail in the following chapters of this study. Therefore, the main purpose of such outposts should be understood in their function as spatial nodes enabling the agents of Persian (and in the following centuries of other imperial) powers to negotiate the conditions of their own overlordship with other social actors active on the local stage.<sup>566</sup> However, as clearly illustrated by both the case of Ṭawāwīs and - although in a context in many respects (but, remarkably, not in that of concern here) considerably different - namely the vast forested areas of the Indian subcontinent recently studied by Mamta Dwivedi, the coercive capacity of the imperial authority rarely extended beyond the territory of such settlements (what Greek sources call the *χώρα βασιλική*). This is a further indication that, in a context so profoundly shaped by mobility phenomena on multiple scales as that of Baktria and Sogdiana, the equation of the expansion of the oases' irrigated areas by the Persians with a corresponding expansion of territorial control by the Empire is extremely misleading, since it is based on a model of socio-territorial entrenchment of infrastructural power that does not adequately take into account the multiplicity and diversity (including internal diversity) of local actors (not to mention the variety of strategies for exploiting a given landscape) and of their agendas, which in some cases was consistently devoted to the very purpose of escaping the centralizing influence of a political power based on the intensive exploitation of agricultural land.<sup>567</sup> In Baktria, Sogdiana, and Chorasmia, the landscape is in fact characterized, as has been repeatedly stressed in these pages, by micro-regions, between which it is extremely difficult to establish reliable communication routes without the intervention of the local populations, who knows, and not infrequently controls, the areas of obligatory passage (from mountain passes to river fords), which puts these communities in a very advantageous negotiating position when it comes to settling their status within the new geopolitical framework that a pre-modern Empire sets out to draw on the map of territories over which it claims the Weberian monopoly of the legitimate use of force - and consequently the control over its resources.<sup>568</sup> From this point of view, the case of the so-called

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<sup>566</sup> See most recently on this issue (the process of construction and confirmation, through negotiation) of a topography of power, Canepa 2018; 2020.

<sup>567</sup> Weaverdyck *et al.* 2021, 313-322 with references. As pointed out by Mamta Dwivedi, such a perspective conceives of sedentary agricultural societies as the culmination of an evolutionary socio-economic history, thereby ignoring the wide range of economic activities that were probably underrepresented, when not completely ignored in the available documentary corpus and which however ensured the livelihood of pastoralists and forest dwellers for millennia against the backdrop of the rise and decline of Empires and other political communities. To this it should moreover be added that such human groups never remained in absolute isolation or autarky, but on the contrary maintained deep relationships with sedentary and agriculturally dependent societies 1. socially, 2. politically, and 3. economically. See moreover Scott 2009, 216 ff.; 2017, 137 for an insightful discussion of the conscious nature (what he calls a «positionality») of «barbarian» subsistence strategies such as the slash and burn agriculture and even pastoralism itself (which makes them particularly interesting as it comes to the Central Asian case study).

<sup>568</sup> From this viewpoint it is all but surprising that Strabo (17.1.45) devotes a particularly inspired praise of Roman roads, for they are in fact understood as the main instrument of (imperial) «normalization» of the landscape, and this particularly



(improperly, since this definition is completely foreign to ancient Chinese literature and implies more than one prejudice regarding its possibilities of use) «corridor» located in the Hécǐ (Gānsù) region provides an enlightening parallel.<sup>569</sup> Recently, and with to my mind rock-solid arguments, Kathrin Leese-Messing has in fact shown that the much-celebrated function of connector between the Hàn Empire, the Tarim communities, and Central Asia was only one (and moreover rather secondary) reason for the extreme interest the imperial administration based in Cháng'ān took in this space(s). Indeed, decades after the conquest and the (massive) colonization of the Hécǐ region, the forms of economic exploitation of this area seem to have remained extremely varied, nor does the role of the locals within the territory appear to have diminished in any way, let alone disappeared; and this despite the fact that historiographic sources bombastically claim that the region was «deserted» (kōng kōng, literally «empty») before its supposed civilization by the emperor (without however, and quite paradoxically, being able to avoid mentioning the presence of clearly non-Hàn communities present and active, for example in horse or pig breeding, in the decades and centuries following the Chinese conquest, which probably aimed not least at gaining possession of such an important resource in the context of the Empire's confrontation with the Xiōngnú).<sup>570</sup>

In such contexts, no Empire could afford to ignore the demands of local communities (and of their respective élites), unless at the price of the perennial risk of potentially devastating revolts. The history of Čaġīnġān (a region located on the right bank of the Amudaryo and also characterized by the coexistence of pastoral communities alongside agricultural settlements - largely dependent on sorghum cultivation) between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries provides another eloquent example in this regard. Once again, the observable pattern is that of a multifunctional economy structured around the different but often complementary needs of numerous communities, symbiotically linked by the sharing of both the same geographical space (a «region», in Stride's terms) and a common pool of resources, thus forming a system capable of functioning profitably as a single complex unit, and whose subdivision along social (ethnic, for example) or economic lines could not take place without

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in those spaces (such as the Egyptian desert(s), Anatolia or Armenia) which can be classified as possessing an (from an imperial perspective alarming) high rate of «state-evasion» (van Schendel 2002). See however the (much more sober) picture drawn by Plin. *NH.*, 6.26.103 concerning that very same context and the remarks on both passages in Weaverdyck et al. 2021, 304-310.

<sup>569</sup> Similar remarks could be made with regards to another famous «corridor» of Central Asia, namely that of the Wāhān (واخان, in Taġik rendered as Baxon), located at the Northeastern outskirts of Afgānistān: cfr. Lerner 2016a.

<sup>570</sup> See on the one hand the (grossly simplifying) remarks in Benjamin 2018, 35 and, on the other, Weaverdyck et al. 2021, 322-328 with references, which are briefly summarized here. According to the *Account on the Xiōngnú* (*Xiōngnú lièzhuàn* 匈奴列傳) of *Shiji* 110.2912, imperial troops active in the Gānsù around 112 BCE «did not come across a single Xiōngnú» («不見匈奴一人»), while the *Account on the Qiāng* (*Qiāng lièzhuàn* 羌列傳, also known as *Nán Xiōngnú lièzhuàn* 南匈奴列傳, literally *Account on the Southern Xiōngnú*) preserved in the (later) *Hòu Hànsū* (87.2877) without neither any trace of shame nor, clearly, any fear of being exposed as patently lying, claims that «the land to the West of the Yellow River [Huáng Hé 黃河] were empty» («河西地空»). I thank Dr. Kathrin Leese-Messing for both the references and the translations, which I have adopted here.

encountering fierce resistance on both sides of the supposed political border.<sup>571</sup> According to these considerations, therefore, it seems possible to conclude that, in Baktria, the degree of success of an(y) imperial policy of territorial rooting can be assessed, on the one hand, in the capacity of the latter to effectively negotiate its participation - albeit from a position of pre-eminence - within the regional networks that constitute the connective tissue of that space without upsetting what Düring and Stek have effectively defined the practical situation(s) on the ground. On the other, in being shrewd enough to offer a few, carefully selected, members of the local élites sufficiently attractive conditions to make them willing to partake (in their own interest, of course) in the process of 1. consolidation and 2. further expansion of the infrastructural, economic, symbolic, and so on power of the Empire itself.<sup>572</sup>

The fact that this explanatory scenario retains its heuristic capacity even when applied to periods and socio-political contexts significantly different from the Achaemenid one (e. g. the Central Asian Empires following the conquests of Genghiz Hān) leads us to believe that we are faced with structural, and not contingent, features of the mechanisms of genesis and preservation of imperial power within the Central Asian space.<sup>573</sup> We know, for example, that Tīmūr had at least two monumental palaces (at Samarqand and Shahr-e Sabz), and the sources do not fail to describe the magnificence of its gardens and parks, perhaps reminiscent of similar symbols of imperial majesty in Persian times (what in Greek sources is called a παράδεισος).<sup>574</sup> Nevertheless, the «Iron Amīr» seems to have been extremely aware of the importance, for the maintenance of his power, of the extra-urban realities of his domains: also for this reason - and not only, as Clavijo implies, because of the power of the ancestral heritage or, as one might assume based on a more astute sociological analysis, for reasons of social distinction signaled by the display of «nomadic» features by the new herrschende Gesellschaft - the itinerant court was never abolished and indeed, not infrequently important local or foreign dignitaries were received in a distinctly non-urban context (a jurt camp), and a similar argument can be made about the successors of the Tīmūrids in Central Asia. In fact, when in the 16<sup>th</sup> century the O‘zbek qağan Muḥammad Šāybānī took possession of the great oases of Central Asia, including the Zarafšān valley, despite the dominant role of Buxārā in the sociopolitical organization chart of his newly founded Hānate, both he himself and the members of the Šāybānīd élite were particularly careful not to affect the sensibilities (which means: not to harm the interests) of local powerbrokers strongly rooted within a culture and society that Wolfgang Holzwarth has described as

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<sup>571</sup> Bosworth 1990, 616 ff., Potts 2014, 89, Honeychurch and Makarewicz 2016, 343.

<sup>572</sup> Düring and Stek 2018a, 10.

<sup>573</sup> See moreover the case of the Hephtalites discussed in Meier 2020, 731-742. Barfield 2020 has recently provided an assessment of both the geography and the geopolitics (which he considers as an outcome of the former) of what with Cheung 2017 we might call the land of the Afġāns (thus embracing a broader, and more complex, territory of Afġānistān proper) from a Braudelian *longue-durée* perspective.

<sup>574</sup> On Persian royal gardens and their cultural meaning within the Achaemenid and the broader Eurasian context see Allsen 2006, 34-52 and Lincoln 2012, 59-80. Cf. most recently Tuplin 2018b with references.

nomadic and segmentary.<sup>575</sup> A third example of an Empire «on horseback», whose history - although still largely difficult to outline in its most minute details - is nevertheless coherently inserted within a long-lasting context profoundly influenced by the Hellenistic and Achaemenid precedents, namely the Kuṣāṇa, can be analyzed, as already proposed some decades ago by Gardin and Gentelle, by resorting to categories similar to those adopted in the course of the present chapter.<sup>576</sup>

At the present stage of research, it seems possible to distinguish the following characteristic elements, whose affinities with the scenario elaborated in this chapter to explain the genesis of Achaemenid imperial power in Bactria should not be overlooked. 1. Conquest of one or more areas with great agricultural potential (the oasis of Baktra, the plain of Āi Xānum: this is the most immediate source of tax revenue) without this entailing the implementation of an urban plan of any significance, paying instead minute attention to the mechanisms of land exploitation, and in particular to the maintenance of the irrigation system.<sup>577</sup> 2. The control of these resources makes it possible to start the process of expansion beyond the oases' territorial nucleus, tapping imperial power into the social and economic networks of the surrounding areas through processes of redistribution - of goods as well as offices and the related prestige - aimed at ensuring the cooperation of some representatives of the local élites to the advantage of other (lower ranking) power brokers – in turn endowed with their own connections. In this way, the King and its officers secure access to further resources at the lowest cost, which in turn can be redistributed to repeat the process of recruiting further «imperial collaborators» in areas increasingly distant from the epicenter of the military conquest (in Cyrus' case likely Baktra and its oasis, Marakanda and, beyond the reach of direct satrapal control, Cyropolis and its broader environment, with the powerholders settled there providing the first «selectorate» of the Empire in Northern Central Asia).<sup>578</sup> In this context, particular attention seems to have been paid to those borderlands and «barbarian» peoples that written sources - not only Greek and Roman - stigmatize as being at the antipodes of any form of civilization. Far from representing «sworn» enemies of the oasis communities (and of the Empires that had become their masters), peoples such as the Dahai or the numerous members of Massagetic societies (confederations?), on the contrary,

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<sup>575</sup> *Clavijo* 7. Comparable examples from the Surxondaryo region are discussed in Abdullaev 2014, 5 ff. On the showcasing of (emphasized) «barbarian» features as a mean of social distinction by a conquering élite see Meier 2020, 707-714 (on post-Roman Africa under the Vandals). The evidence coming from Šāybānīd period is discussed in Holzwarth 2006, 331-350.

<sup>576</sup> The study of the Kuṣāṇa dynasty within its Central Asian context (which means, considering *both* the Achaemenid and especially the Hellenistic precedents and not treating the latter Empire as unrelated to the former) appears to me one of the most innovative contributions to this scholarly field by Lauren Morris (cf. 2019a and her brilliant 2020 paper). Note moreover Canepa 2020, 66-74.

<sup>577</sup> Gardin 1998, 163. Incidentally, the fact that even a «nomadic» Empire, according to the archaeological evidence, was so attentive to the hydraulic infrastructures of the territory implies that the «nomads» of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE were hardly strangers to such strategies of territorial exploitation, which we have seen to be deeply rooted in the ecological history of the Baktrian territory, and not the exclusive prerogative of settled societies.

<sup>578</sup> Gardin and Gentelle 1976, 98.

should be considered - not least because of the animals they owned (especially horses and camels, a constant target of imperial desires) - as interlocutors of paramount importance to a satrapal administration whose fundamental interests should include access, at the lowest possible cost – for example in military and logistical terms – to a wide range of natural resources, the control and extraction thereof, as the parallel cases of the Héxī «corridor», the Deccan forests or the Eastern Egyptian desert show, were the characteristic prerogative of human groups that had been active since ancient times in areas - from the slopes of the Köpetdağ to the steppes surrounding the Murğ-āb delta or the oases of Baktra and Buxārā up to Farğāne. To describe such spaces in terms of «periphery» or «borderland», then, ought to be seen much more as the result of the perspective distortion caused by the sources referring to them in their accounts than as the actual role the landscapes (and the populations settled therein) played within the socio-political and economic dynamics at work on the ground.<sup>579</sup>

It is against this background that one can best appreciate the significance of Stride's description of the cultural landscape of pre-modern Central Asia as being characterized by two subsystems, the one determined by sedentary agriculture and the other by mobile pastoralism in order to understand the reasons for the achievements (and failures) of imperial conquests and rule in Baktria. They are in fact ultimately to be sought in the ability (or not) of a given polity to exploit both of these subsystems - and their many internal articulations. Put another way, in Central Asia imperial power is synonymous with flexibility and adaptive capacity, not just, or not so much, with control and extraction: at best, it can be argued that the former provides the precondition of the latter.<sup>580</sup> This brings us back, it should be noted, to one of the main characteristics of the «satrapal condition» identified in the previous chapter as a structural limitation to the transformation of the infrastructural power of all pre-modern Empires into a despotic one.<sup>581</sup> This has to be identified in the Empire's dependence on actors (the – multiple - local élites) who are on the contrary only partially dependent on the imperial apparatus itself for the control of the most important of the resources available for effective territorial domination, namely, as James Scott has repeatedly pointed out, the population inhabiting (and exploiting) a given landscape.<sup>582</sup>

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<sup>579</sup> Potts 2014, 119. Cf. the similar situation attested by Arr. *Anab.*, 3.7.1 and Ptol. *Geog.*, 15.3.4 within an «internal» borderland in Pārsa, namely considerable payments in kind (horses, sheep, and goats) demanded by the imperial administration to the «Uxians of the mountain». Comparable taxes were levied century later on other semi-settled people by the Qāğār dynasty, whose members ruled Irān from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>580</sup> Stride *et al.* 2009b, 83 and King 2020 (on Early Medieval Baktrian society faced with its (self-proclaimed) Sāsānid, Türkic, and Caliphal masters).

<sup>581</sup> On infrastructural and despotic power see Mann 1984 and now Ando 2017a.

<sup>582</sup> See most recently and insightfully Meier 2020, 763-764 on the entire array of agreements reached by Byzantine imperial authority with the representatives of the communities dwelling in the Arabian Peninsula, some of whom even obtained extremely prestigious titles (among which special mention is due to those of patricius and φύλαρχος: see for example Fisher 2011, 78-80). Notably, such (external, imperial) titles turned out to be crucial within the intra-élite competition carried out by those individuals on a purely local level. Therefore, such agreements can be understood as a

In fact, in the areas (which notably according to scholars include Afġānistān and thus at least part of ancient Baktria) out of which the territory of Zomia is made, the natives have always had at their disposal a weapon that is as rudimentary as it is effective in evading the panoptic ambitions of the imperial administration: the flight. It is by no means the outcome of pure coincidence, as Scott has vocally stressed in his scholarship, that there is a copious tradition of governmental wisdom, ranging from the biblical *Book of Proverbs* to Chinese state manuals down to royal mockery in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Siam (สยาม, modern Thailand), emphasizing that, for the purposes of the establishment and preservation of any imperial power, it is the number of subjects capable of being mobilized (and not the surface area) that is truly decisive in assessing the effective power of a (presumptive) king – as well as, one might consequentially add, a source of constant concern for the guardians of order within the Empire’s very borders.<sup>583</sup> Drawing on considerations developed by both Owen Lattimore and Richard Payne, one might therefore conclude that the conspicuous absence, in the Achaemenid context, of devices of demographic-spatial containment (not only and not so much of the «invaders» of but much more of would-be fugitives from the Empire) such as those evident in both the Sāsānid Empire and China can be interpreted as indexical of the success of the sociopolitical negotiations undertaken by the representatives of Persian power - perhaps starting with Cyrus himself during his

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very powerful (although double-cutting) weapon in the Empire’s hand in order to play the complex game of the negotiating process with the representatives of such communities in order to secure their collaboration against the Sāsānids, who in turn tried to achieve the very same results, which incidentally contributed in remarkable ways to the birth of the Caliphate, which destroyed one of the two players and went short to conquering even the second. Arguably the most sensational case is the story of a certain Al-Ĥārīt ibn Ġabālah, known to Greek-speaking sources as [Φλάβιος] Ἀρέθας and one of the most influential representatives of a very powerful group known as the Ġāfnids (sometimes called in the sources Ġasāsids: Meier 2020, 1020 describes them as two *different* groups, contrary to what can be found for example in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, cf. vol. II, 1020-1021, where the two ethnics appear as different labels for the *same* entity) and strategically crucial allies of Byzantium against the Sāsānids. Between 529 and 529 CE, this man was able to obtain from no one less than emperor Justinian the «royal dignity» («ἀξίωμα βασιλέως»), a clearly courtly title on which exact meaning scholars have not yet reached an agreement. According to Mischa Meier (2020, 763) we are most likely dealing with the acknowledgement, on the part of Justinian, of a *local* title (perhaps that of «king» or מֶלֶךְ, *mēlek*, in Arabic *malik* - ملك). The consequence of such an event must have been for Al-Ĥārīt a crucial strategic advantage against his peers in the struggle for local supremacy. See moreover Fisher 2011, 45-55. Against such a body of evidence, one is compelled to rethink the process of formation of the imperial Achaemenid élite in Central Asia in a thoroughly different way than the traditional «adversarial» paradigm developed e. g. in Wu 2014.

<sup>583</sup> Scott 2017, 150-151: *Prov.*, 14.28 for example, argues that the honour of the king depends on the abundance of his people, but in the lack thereof hides the king’s demise. Centuries later and thousands of kilometers away, royal worries are the same, as it is shown by the clever answer given in 1680 by the king of Golconda (located near the modern Hyderābād, حیدرآباد in Urdū, హైదరాబాదు in Tēlugu), in the Indian federal state of Telangana (تلنگانہ, తెలంగాణ), to a Thai

envoy who, with badly disguised malice, incidentally, noted that the territory of his king was considerably broader than that of the Indian ruler. This was the latter’s answer. «It is true, I admit, that [the Thai ruler] has a much larger kingdom than I do, but you must in turn admit that the king of Golconda [i. e. the speaker] rules over men, while the king of Siam rules over forests and mosquitoes». See Scott 2009, 64 ff. as well as King 2021, 12, who notes that the Achaemenids sought to govern people before territories, for indeed, following the king of Golconda, who controlled the former dominated the latter.

Central Asian stays prior to the fateful Scythian campaign - against the forerunners of individuals such as Spitamenes, Arimazes, or Bessos himself.<sup>584</sup>

In fact, these strongmen alone were truly able to secure and provide, with their (obviously by no means disinterested) collaboration to the imperial enterprise, those resources - not only of agricultural nature - indispensable to guarantee the Achaemenid ruling class - which promoted this (again, very much interested) enterprise in the first place - a significant economic profit: therefore, and at the same time, securing an acceptable level of social and political order, the latter being an indispensable premise for the prosperity of the territories (*dahayāva*, a term which, perhaps not by chance, maintains a significant ambiguity between its spatial and anthropic referents) which, as Darius boasted at Bīsutūn, «became mine».<sup>585</sup> And this irrespective of the will of Ahuramazdā.<sup>586</sup>

#### 4.3.1. *Die Expropriation weniger Usurpatoren.* Being Some Thoughts on Hor. *Ep.*, 2.1.56 and Achaemenid Baktria

Contrary to an opinion still deeply rooted in historiography, which tends to describe the relations between the Achaemenid Empire and the populations of the Central Asian satrapies - and especially with regards to the pastoral communities settled along and across the (allegedly) satrapal borderlands - in terms characterized by violence, insubordination, and predatory ambitions (on the part of the «nomads»), the evidence discussed so far seeks to paint a much more complex scenario, which main features ought to be summarized as follows: both the collaborators and the «enemies» of the Empire are one of the most - and in a long-term perspective the most - notable protagonists and guarantors of the very process of Empire building in Central Asia.<sup>587</sup> In order to better control - and more effectively exploit - its Perilous Frontier with the peoples of the steppes, the Hān Empire conceived, and implemented for decades, a sophisticated policy known as *tūsī* (土司), a word whose meaning the

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<sup>584</sup> On the crucial role played by trust (control through persuasion) as a weapon of sociopolitical domination at disposal of both pre-modern Empires and contemporary nation states see Scott 1985, 23 and Tilly 2005. In contrast with a long-lasting scholarly tradition, Martinez-Sève 2020b, 94 has (to my mind commendably) stressed that the Graeco-Baktrian kings «also create a network of military settlements designed to ensure the protection of Baktria and Sogdiana against potential enemies, but also probably against the local population».

<sup>585</sup> On the strategies of spatial engineering developed by both the Chinese and the Sāsānid Empire see Lattimore 1988, 84 and the important studies by Richard E. Payne (e. g. 2015; 2017). See moreover Tuplin 1987a, 109 for an astute assessment of the rationale behind the setup of every imperial bureaucracy (and chiefly so in the case of the Achaemenids) as well as Meier 2020, 760-761 on the paramount importance, for an imperial polity (in the case he discusses *both* the Byzantines and the Sāsānids: note already Amm. Marc. 16.9.1) of securing the active cooperation of charismatic individuals within Arab communities to gain the military support of entire confederations.

<sup>586</sup> See Manning 2021, 136-139, who points out (p. 137), that in the Babylonian version of the Bīsutūn text, «in many cases a *uqu*, a land, and a people seem to be more or less the same thing» and, moreover, «many of these *uqu* belong to a particular land». Emphasis in the original.

<sup>587</sup> See on the one hand Wu Xin's several contributions supporting this line of reasoning (2005, 40-100; 2010; 2012; 2014) and, on the other hand, Meier 2020, 764-766, whose approach I find much more convincing and grounded in the evidence available.

literary sources gloss as «use of barbarians to govern other barbarians». In its essence, this meant the selection of a prominent individual within a given community, to whom titles and privileges were bestowed upon, in effect transforming him into a delegate of the Hàn Empire among the Empire's own («cooked») barbarians, for whose behavior such an individual was held responsible.<sup>588</sup> The sources available for the Achaemenid period (and especially for what concerns the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE) are too patchy and scanty to allow anything more than a hypothesis, but the mention of Spitakes (the «satrap of the Derbikkae») on one hand and, on the other hand, the peculiarities of the narrative related to the Scythian expedition led by Darius against Skunkha, I think authorize, based on what we know about the Hàn policy or with respects to the quite similar one carried out in the Arabic peninsula both by the Sāsānids and by Byzantium, to recognize in these individuals two examples, one more successful (Spitakes), and one that instead seems to have required further adjustments (Skunkha), of such a policy of «control of barbarians by means of other barbarians» by the Persian Empire. If true, such dynamics mark the beginning of processes of social differentiation, ethnogenesis, emergence of new élites as well as inter- and intra-social competitions of crucial momentum (among which outcomes might even have been the tensions behind Cyrus' Transoxian expedition in 530 BCE) that we can still distinguish in the attempt - recognizable as desperate precisely because of the violence with which it manifested - of a very large number of Central Asian «warlords» (think of the revolts unleashed by Alexander's campaigning in Baktria) not to be cut off from the social, political, and economic horizon of the Empire to which these notables owed their pre-eminence within the societies they belonged to. In short, we are dealing with a clear example of the local fallout of the «global» political strategy of a pre-modern Empire.<sup>589</sup>

Of no less importance, however, is the opposite phenomenon, namely the use of this administrative-ethnographic fiction which, to take up once again the terminology employed by James Scott, had been «institutionalized by courts, tribute, payments, lower native officials, land records, and public works, structuring that part of native life that involved contact with the state» by individuals and communities subject to this fiction to their own advantage and sometimes even against the creators of such language (and of the related sociopolitical institutions), namely the Empire itself.<sup>590</sup> In the words of the American anthropologist, in fact, «a “people” originally conjured out of whole cloth by administrative fiat might come to adopt that fiction as a conscious, even defiant, identity». What is

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<sup>588</sup> Di Cosmo 2002, 204. The details of this strategy as adopted by the Hàn Empire are explicitly addressed in *Hànshū* 49.2281, *Shǐjì* 110.2985 as well as in the compendium of the «five classics» of Chinese literature (*Wǔjīng* 五經), for example in a treatise known as *Shūjīng* (書經, 8 ff.). Taking the ethnicization of Africa as a case study, Jean-Loup Amselle (1990) has convincingly demonstrated how such a process of *antropo-poesi* (literally «humanity making», cf. Remotti 2013) turned out to be decisive – and on the long run devastating – in the framework of conquest and subsequent domination of European colonial powers in the continent

<sup>589</sup> See Meier 2020, 753-772, Rollinger 2023, Degen and Rollinger 2023 for three insightful analysis of this very process.

<sup>590</sup> Degen 2022, 32 on the concept of imperial language.

described here is, in other words, the conversion of an instrument of social control into a warranty of one's own ability to act within the frame of possibilities defined by imperial power, but starting from an agenda that is often different from (and sometimes even concurring with) that of those who had worked to set up this very frame of possibilities.<sup>591</sup> In a context of symbiotic relations between different communities and between different individuals within each of those communities on a macro- (and with the advent of the Persian Empire trans-), regional scale, the scenario outlined so far implies that the starting point of any discussion about the relations between the different social actors in the political landscape of Achaemenid Bactria should be the acknowledgement of the existence of multiple loyalties within the same satrapy, arising from the multiple levels on which individuals (and their communities of reference, the «selectorate» of men such as Spitamenes and most likely Skunkha or even Dādêršiš) moved: namely as representatives of the Empire on the one hand and, at the same time, «big men» on the other, simultaneously acting in the same context but with purposes not always congruent with (and sometimes openly contradictory to) the role that, from the viewpoint of the satrapal administration, they were supposed to play.

The example of the magister militum Plinthis (and the even more striking one of his colleague Aetius), who we see engaged, in the midst of the invasion of Thrakia and Makedonia (422 CE) at the hand of Ruga's Huns - which the sources say were composed of bands of warriors subject to «countless rulers» (πολλῶν ἀρχόντων) and socially divided «in lineages and families (κατὰ φύλα καὶ γένη) -, on the one hand to fight the barbarians; on the other hand, and with equal alacrity, in an attempt not only to keep active, but even to monopolize the official channels of diplomatic communication with the Huns themselves, which the magister militum evidently considered of fundamental importance for the purposes of his own political positioning within that same Roman Empire that he was theoretically called to defend from Ruga's «scourge» provide an extremely relevant clue in support of the arguments laid out in this chapter.<sup>592</sup> Therefore, following the same line of reasoning, it is perhaps possible to conclude that – similarly to what has been shown with regards to China's Inner Asian frontier(s) by Nicola Di Cosmo, any study of the relations between *Ancient Bactria and its Enemies* must strive to go beyond the macro-political level (which ultimately reflects the imperial perspective) of the comparison between participants and outsiders in the Achaemenid ecumenical project, and turn instead to the study of those micro-relations, constantly (re)negotiated at a local level which, when at least partially recoverable (as in the case of the evidence provided especially by the *ADAB* documents) shed an entirely new light - and moreover significantly

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<sup>591</sup> Scott 2017, 236.

<sup>592</sup> Heather 2005, 376; 2020, Meier 2020, 401. Similar considerations could be made based on a study of the sociopolitical hierarchies internal to the Xiōngnú Empire. See for example Miller 2009, 61-75, 337-378 as well as Di Cosmo 2011; 2013.



consistent with what is known from other, analogous contexts within the Eurasian chessboard in antiquity - on «what happened in Bactria» starting from the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE.

## 5. Conclusion. (Re)discovering Cyrus

The fundamental goal pursued in this chapter has been to reconstruct, as far as the evidence allows, the different (ecological, social, political, and economic) scenario from which it is possible to order the documentary material available for the study of Achaemenid Bactria and its broader Central Asian context in order to reconstruct the (again, social, political, and economic) dynamics characteristic of the imperial history of this area of Eurasia during the centuries ranging from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> BCE. Taking up some insightful considerations provided by James Scott, in the previous pages it has been suggested to interpret the available evidence for the period prior to the creation of the Achaemenid satrapy from a socio-spatial context characterized by a remarkable variety of what the scholar calls «elementary units of political order» active in that space, which - with some approximation - can be described along a spectrum ranging «from nuclear families to segmentary lineages, bilateral kindreds, hamlets, larger villages, towns and their immediate hinterlands, and confederations of such towns».<sup>593</sup> In spite of both the fluidity and «positional» shifting nature characterizing them, Scott continues, it is precisely these devices of socio-political organization that constitute a staple in a space such as the Central Asian one, whereas it is instead the «dynastic states» that ought to be understood as «rare and ephemeral appearances». Moreover, the measure for the success of the political project of such states and Empires should be assessed starting from their ability to *interact* with the *minimum* possible degree of conflict with the aforementioned «elementary units of the political order». For this reason, the first important methodological conclusion of this chapter can be summarized in the suggestion that we should consider both the new geo-political arrangement of the Achaemenid satrapy and the herrschende Gesellschaft charged with governing the latter «less as a unity than as a “complex web of contractual mutualities”», the origins and consequences of whose constraints provides one of the fundamental keys for a proper understanding of functioning not only of the individual satrapy of Bactria, but of the entire imperial machinery (Henkelman’s paradigm) in Central Asia over the course of its bi-secular history.<sup>594</sup> The second major conclusion can be identified in the need to rethink the role of the satrapal «borderlands», i. e. the world of the steppes, within the social, political, and economic processes of Baktrian society, the transformation of whose space into what Lauren Morris calls the «basic unit» of a supra-regional Empire can be said to have made more strategic, opportunistic, and flexible the political and economic negotiation strategies of the inhabitants now

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<sup>593</sup> See especially Scott 2009, 36-38 and Honeychurch 2015, 60.

<sup>594</sup> The quotation comes from Scott 2009, 37-38.

dwelling in the (from the Achaemenid point of view) new satrapal frontier zone in order, as pointed out by William Honeychurch in the context of his study of Xiōngnú ethnogenesis, to mediate effectively through a highly articulated sociopolitical context.<sup>595</sup> As the previous discussion has tried to show, such a conclusion is implied by the results of the archaeological investigation carried out in particular by Michelle Negus-Cleary and Johanna Lhuillier on the socio-territorial organization of pre-Achaemenid Bactria and Chorasmia. These studies have in fact convincingly demonstrated how, in significant analogy with pre-Xiōngnú Mongolia as explored by Honeychurch, the integration within an expanding Empire of social structures characterized by a high rate of mobility must have taken place in a manner significantly different from those traditionally associated with the agrarian Empires of antiquity.<sup>596</sup>

The investigation carried out in these pages allows us to isolate at least four of these modes: 1. a predisposition - one would be tempted to say the need – to distribute decision-making responsibilities throughout the territory (hence the importance of social actors hierarchically subordinate to the satrap but from the point of view of political power «on the ground» not at all inferior to him). 2. The conscious decision of tolerating progressive levels of autonomy as the distance (both as the crow flies and «vertically» - just think of the mountain ranges) from the imperial administration's gravitational centers increased 3. A much more marked tendency to incorporate elements of flexibility into the organizational structures of the satrapy than what a source like the archives would suggest at first glance; and 4. political techniques of territorial government based on limited intervention strategies compared to a more articulated «micro-management», as Honeychurch has it, at the local level.<sup>597</sup> The third conclusion, notably a direct consequence of what has been summarized so far, is to be found in the fact that the processes of political «centralization» and exploitation of the resources at hand within a given territory (which constitute a crucial aspect of what Morris and Scheidel call the *Dynamics of Ancient Empires*, including of course the Achaemenid one) require to be rethought in their operational workflow in light of a context such as the one just discussed in this chapter. Moreover, from our discussion has further emerged the need to acknowledge that, in turn, such a reassessment of the dynamics of Persian power in Bactria implies admitting the existence, within the *same* imperial paradigm, of different forms of political-social organization.<sup>598</sup> To the perspective mirrored in sources such as the imperial inscriptions on one side and, on the other side, the Persepolis

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<sup>595</sup> Honeychurch 2015, 67.

<sup>596</sup> Negus-Cleary 2015a I; 2015b; 2017 and Lhuillier 2018 sum up the archaeological evidence to which the present chapter has tried to apply the results of the socio-anthropological studies carried out in particular by James Scott (2009; 2017) and William Honeychurch (2015). See most recently Payne and King 2020, King 2020.

<sup>597</sup> Cfr. Honeychurch 2015, 66-68 (especially p. 67) and Barfield 2020.

<sup>598</sup> A similar argument has most recently been made by Pierre Briant (2020, 39) precisely in the context of a (re)assessment of (the limits of) Achaemenid imperial power in Bactria.

archives (which – even if starting from different premises – are nevertheless equally committed to a work of cataloguing for the purpose of simplifying, rationalizing, and «legibility» of the physical and human environment of which the (self-crowned) owners of both proclaimed themselves - not entirely wrongly – masters), in a context such as the Central Asian one, similarly to what can be argued in the case of Mongolia, characterized as it was by a long pre-imperial tradition of territorial government (Scott's «statecraft») distinguished by features such as dispersion and mobility, another point of view should be added, which ought to be not to ignore the persistence on the ground of other (and different) types of complex political communities, characterized, among others features, by decentralization, resilience, and a high level of horizontal integration (e. g. through different ecological niches by virtue of the complementarity of livelihood strategies within a given territory).<sup>599</sup> Among other things, (which brings us to the fourth conclusion of the present chapter), this implies the need to handle in a more cautious way concepts such as «centralization», «bureaucratization», and even «institutionalization», not to mention the distinction (often employed in an oppositional - «adversarial», in Wu's terms - perspective) between «nomadic» and «sedentary» communities.<sup>600</sup> In each of the multiple geographic and ecological zones that make up the Baktrian landscape (Stride's «territories» and «regions») it is indeed possible to argue that relations and spaces of political engagement were negotiated and situated at local and subregional levels, despite the fact that the rise of something like the Achaemenid satrapy made it inevitable that individuals and communities acting on such scale(s) must have increasingly relied on numerous other transactions in an ever wider context in order to legitimize themselves in their own territory.<sup>601</sup> Put another way, and in accordance with similar conclusions formulated by scholars of the sociopolitical history of Inner Asia (from China to the Northern steppes to Transbaikalia) each of the «regions» (sensu Stride) that make up the mosaic of Central Asian Achaemenid satrapies should be conceived as primarily characterized by «local» sociopolitical dynamics although, by virtue of their integration into the Empire, the consequences and ramifications of such dynamics must have been perceived at an increasingly «global» level not only within the Achaemenid οἰκουμένη, but also, as it shall be discussed in subsequent chapters, more broadly in the context of what in the introduction to the present study we called Central Eurasia.<sup>602</sup>

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<sup>599</sup> See on this latter point most recently Martinez-Sève 2020b, 90, who rightly points out that «nomads were a component of Central Asia populations, fully integrated into local societies». Although they could be dangerous for the sedentary people, «they were mostly partners, with whom exchanges were constant». Drawing on both Scott's conclusions as well as on the archaeological and ethnographic work of, among others, Barbara Cerasetti (see most recently 2020) I would go even further in assuming that «nomads» and «sedentary people» were different positionalities of one and the same Central Asian societies as it emerged in the crucial period after the demise of the BMAC (Luneau 2020).

<sup>600</sup> On the «institutional landscape» created in the different satrapies by the Achaemenid administration see the foundational Henkelman 2017a (e. g. p. 67).

<sup>601</sup> Honeychurch 2015, 69-70.

<sup>602</sup> See the very detailed archaeological studies by Ursula Brosseder (2015) and Brian K. Miller (Miller and Brosseder 2017) as well as Brosseder and Miller 2018 for a «global» perspective of Xiōngnú strategies of political and ideological (self)representation.

Resorting once again to an analogy with the dynamics fueling the development of the Xiōngnú Empire, the fifth conclusion of this chapter consists in the hypothesis, which the preceding pages have attempted to support based on the available evidence, which sees the process of regional consolidation of pre- and later Achaemenid Baktria as having taken shape out of the interactions between complementary and interdependent political communities on different scales, from the micro-local to the supra-regional level. By the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE at the latest, numerous communities in various regions of Central Asia, from the Murǵ-āb delta to the Baktra oasis and Sogdiana, seem to have been able to negotiate positions of political prominence within their own social context, which in turn appear to have favored particular groups or factions able to control specific territories. These relations underlying the political authority of such groups - and within them of certain individuals - at the local level should not be considered self-sufficient, however, but rather, following the example of Armenia studied by Lori Khatchadourian, dependent on further relations at the supra-local level involving other local élites and their respective factions.

Building on what has been observed in the context of the Mongolian Plateau, this chapter has advanced the hypothesis that (in Central Asia) in the centuries prior to Cyrus' conquest, these conditions of (increased) interdependence made the maintenance of the sociopolitical status of different élites more uncertain, and thus more prone to conflict: the result of this phenomenon can be described in terms of the creation of highly competitive sociopolitical arenas, continually subject to tension and change, which is highly unlikely to have excluded broader regional sociopolitical networks extending beyond the oases (the focus of such arenas of increased competition). Moreover, it is also reasonable to suggest that the *in statu nascendi* imperial structures in Central Asia must have sought to exploit the conflict arising in such sociopolitical arenas to their own advantage, according to patterns characteristic of the so-called Warring States period which marked the politics and policy of the major players within the political landscape of Northern China between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the mid 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BCE: the kingdoms of Qín (秦), Zhào (趙), and Yān (燕). The seemingly very different fates of Spitakes, Skunkha (and his successor, whom Darius explicitly claims to have placed in charge of the Sakā Tigraxaudā), and of the historical counterparts of Herodotos' Tomyris – Mòdún Shányú - show the range of possibilities made available to these regional networks of inter-dependent political communities for the consolidation of their social, economic, and political positions by the coming on the stage of an actor of the weight - and ambitions - of the Achaemenid Empire. Interestingly enough, such a scenario is consistent with a dynamic that can still be observed at work, two thousand years later, in the context of the last Empire of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (the Soviet Union), between the government in Moscow and the (old-new) regional networks of inter-dependent political communities (namely the parties of the Republics, especially in the Caucasian and Central Asia), on which the former in

turn depended, similarly to what it has been suggested here in the case of the Achaemenid satrapal administration, for the purpose of an effective social (and therefore territorial) control.<sup>603</sup>

The outcome – disastrous and to a certain extent similar to another (and no less momentous) project by his Chinese counterpart Hàn Gāo Zǔ - of Cyrus' attempt at redefining to his own exclusive advantage the sociopolitical relations within the territory over which he claimed sway on the one hand and, on the other, the ability of individuals such as Dādêr̥šiš and Vivāna to juggle in the turbulent context of the late 6<sup>th</sup> century civil war, provide significant evidence supporting the hypothesis that, once again by analogy with the Xiōngnú Empire, in the case of the Achaemenid satrapies of Central Asia we are dealing with an «improvisation» (in Richardson's words a «hypothesis») born from the regional starting conditions (Düring and Stek's «practical situations on the ground») that have been the main focus of the discussion developed through the previous pages.<sup>604</sup> Among the fundamental reasons justifying such an assessment - the sixth, and last, conclusion of this chapter - there is the fact that, contrary to what both the historiographic tradition coming out of Herodotos and Ktesias on the one hand and, on the other, the narrative developed at Bīsūtūn, would suggest, Achaemenid Baktria was not born from a background of isolated agricultural communities surrounded by hordes of marauders dependent on the former and organized according to a model of egalitarian poverty with vaguely Arkadian contours; nor – and much less so – it was born in vacuo, as the result of the conquest and «civilization» of a «virgin land» by the Achaemenids, but rather from groups with behind them something like 800 years of socio-territorial experimentation characterized, following Honeychurch assessment of (pre)Xiōngnú societies in Inner Asia, by hereditary inequalities, locally centralized circles of power, and extremely sophisticated techniques of political negotiation.<sup>605</sup> In other words, the preconditions for the sociopolitical complexity characteristic of Achaemenid-era Baktrian society are rooted in a long build-up process of cultural, political, and ecological competence on a micro-local scale, against the backdrop of what in these pages has been termed the oasis-cum-steppa complex.<sup>606</sup> In the next chapter, devoted to Darius and his time, the perspective shall again be shifted to the (imperial) «center», in an attempt to more closely investigate the functioning of the dialectic, the premises of which have been explored so far, between Empire and local élites, with the dual aim

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<sup>603</sup> In the last 20 years, the German historian Jörg Baberowski (see e. g. Baberowski 2001, 94-134; 2012, 212-294; 2015, 133-194) has provided a very shrewd sociological analysis of the mechanisms of intra-social competition and the logic of violence that is not infrequently unleashed by the tension which can be seen a natural consequence of the new order of magnitude of infights experienced by a territorial élite grappling with a power with hegemonic ambitions but extremely limited local power and yet able to adopt, under certain circumstances (including an explicit political will - hence the impossibility of thinking Stalinism without Stalin and its character of «civilization», as Kotkin 1995 put it), a military, social, and economic pressure simply inconceivable for a pre-modern Empire (and for several other modern and post-modern ones).

<sup>604</sup> Honeychurch 2015, 71. See moreover Cioffi-Revilla *et al.* 2011; 2015, Rogers 2015; 2018.

<sup>605</sup> Compare Beckwith 2009; 2023.

<sup>606</sup> Honeychurch 2015, 215. See Briant 2002, 49 for an overall assessment of Cyrus' expedition in Central Asia around 530, which however consistently differs from the one suggested here at least as its outcomes are concerned.

of highlighting, on the one hand, the strengths of the Achaemenid strategy of sociopolitical and territorial control while pointing out how, on the other hand, precisely these strengths nurtured potential fracture lines of the imperial paradigm, the extent of which we are able to fully grasp only in the context of the invasion of Central Asia by Alexander, and especially in the crucial two-year period of 329-327 BCE.

## Chapter 5

### *Thus Saith the Lord: Darius, Son of Vīštāspa*

θātiy Dārayavauš xšāyaθiya: pasāva  
dahayāuš manā abava: ima tya manā  
kṛtam Bāxtriyā.

[Saith Darius, the King: after that [i. e.  
the events between 522 and 521 BCE]  
that land [*dahayāuš*] became mine. This  
is what has been done by me in Baktria].

- DB<sub>p</sub> col. III § 40.

#### 1. Δεσπότης, τύραννος, κάπηλος: Kabūjiya, Bṛdiyā (Gaumāta, Σμέρδης), Dārayavauš

##### 1.1. More than ἀνδράποδα

The portrait of Darius, of the organization he gave to the (re)conquered territories once he ascended the throne and, more specifically, the image of Baktria at the time of his reign as they appear in Herodotos' account can provide an adequate - though perhaps not entirely conventional given the decidedly laconic nature of the information which can be gained from the *Histories* in this regard - starting point in order to frame the perimeter within which, at the present stage of our knowledge, a study of Achaemenid Baktria during the 36 years of Darius' reign (from 522, when, as he himself writes in the Bīsutūn inscription, «that land became mine», to 486 BCE, the date of Xerxes' succession) can move. Taken as a whole, these four decades represents the second phase (after Cyrus' conquest) of what Briant has called the era of the Empire's builders, and therefore another crucial phase for the emergence of the fundamental structures through which (and of the dynamics which) ruled Baktria until Alexander's invasion in 330.<sup>1</sup> As mentioned in chapter 2, the evidence available is, at least from the quantitative point of view and from the perspective of the so-called *histoire bataille*, rather meager. All the more interesting is therefore to note that the treatment of Baktria under Darius in Herodotos' work is structured according to two guidelines - one might say two stereotypes - which we already identified in the introduction to this work as characteristics of the Mediterranean view of Eastern Irān, and especially of Central Asia. On the one hand, we have in fact a land extraordinarily rich and that (this is the aspect that interests us most here), the Great King wasted no

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<sup>1</sup> DB<sub>p</sub> col. III § 40: «pasāva dahyāuš manā abava». Cf. Briant 2002, 31-164; Rollinger and Degen 2021c for a detailed narrative of the events between Cyrus' death in the Sakā steppes and Darius' with a careful evaluation of the available sources on these fateful years. Note moreover Rollinger 2006; 2014b, Schwinghammer 2011.

time in organizing in accordance with the general principles of the political economy of the Empire which - in their own way (that is mostly through the distorting lens of an allegedly vexatious fiscal pressure and a continuous drainage of resources to be hoarded in the royal palaces) - the classical authors recognized as being in force (and applied with equal determination, even if not always with the same degree of success) from one end of the Empire's territory to the other. On the other hand, and this must be underlined with some emphasis, parallel to the above picture, we have the dystopian image of Central Asia as a land of exile, an ultima Thule if sort (literally) in the heart of the Empire and destined to receive - as threatened by Darius' emissaries sent to Ionia to persuade the restless local πόλεις to milder advice - individuals or communities unwise enough to dare challenging the new order (re)emerged after 522, and proudly proclaimed, not without religiously charged tones, at Bīsūtūn.<sup>2</sup> That we are dealing with a stereotyped image, much more revealing of the mental maps of an author like Herodotos (and/or of his audiences imagination and/or expectations) than with anything providing reliable information on Baktria's status and role within the Empire, is beyond doubt. This does not mean, however, that the tales of Baktrian deportations featuring in the *Histories* – all, significantly, set in the time of Darius' reign - should be too hastily dismissed as simply elements of folklore. If properly contextualized, in fact, these anecdotes might reveal something very meaningful about the (structures overseeing the) functioning of the imperial organizational-extractive machine, on which it is appropriate to reflect in this chapter, not least because it is precisely for the period under study here that we have first-hand sources allowing such an undertaking to be attempted in some depth. Let us then start again from the case of Barke: conquered in 510 BCE also thanks to the intervention of the Egyptian satrap, the Libyan πόλις was sacked, a considerable part of the civic body's members slaughtered, and the survivors were exiled (ἀνδραποδιζόμενοι) in an unspecified locality deep into Baktrian territory, in which these unlucky ones founded a new πόλις, homonymous of their homeland, according to Herodotos still existing at his time, which means at least some half a century after the events narrated in the 4<sup>th</sup> book of the *Histories*.<sup>3</sup> If, as a by now large body of literature devoted to the sociology of warfare in the classical world - think for example of Hans van Wees' studies - has claimed, the ἀνδραποδισμός has to be taken as the destruction of a given community insofar as it deprived it of its sociocultural context of reference (starting from the

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<sup>2</sup> Coloru 2009, 123. See moreover Hdt. 6.9 (on Darius' envoys in Ionia). According to classical authors, similar fate did not spare the very same members of the ethno-classe dominante. If we have to believe Ael. VH., 6.14, for example, a certain Aribazes would have suffered the unenviable fate of being sent to India and Scythia. On the sacral component – even taking the explicitly religious references to Ahuramazdā aside - of the Bīsūtūn text see Panaino 2015, 96-102.

<sup>3</sup> Hdt. 4.204.4: see Matarese 2021, 45-56. See now Härtel forthcoming for an insightful assessment of what Herodotos apparently knew but consciously decided not to tell about Baktria in his work. The author convincingly concludes that this narrative strategy aimed at presenting Baktria to his audience as a frightening no-man's-land at the outmost extremes of the known world: this might well be taken as another proof of the historian's ability to rework Achaemenid material and ideology (Rollinger 2021c, Rollinger and Degen 2021c on the Persian understanding of Central Asia's position «at world's end») to fit his own purposes.



language: it is not by chance if Curtius Rufus (7.5.29) describes the members of a Milesian community settled in Central Asia at the time of Alexander as a *domestico sermone degeneres*), from the point of view of the Achaemenid administration, as illustrated in detail by Pierre Briant and, more recently, by Marc Mendoza and Chiara Matarese, the mobilization of, even quite large, human groups was often an investment, to be brought to bear with profit in strategically crucial areas of the imperial territory particularly in need, at a given time, of manpower – moreover often also highly skilled one.<sup>4</sup> Just to give but a few (and nevertheless highly indicative) examples, the evidence from the Persepolis archives clearly shows not only that several groups of *kurtaš* (both of Persian and of non-Persian origin) included women and children within them (this is evident for example in the case of Fort. 9408, in which 141 Lykians are subdivided into women and men, boys and girls, according to a refined categorization).<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the tablets demonstrate 1. that often women and children were enlisted within groups for which the central administration seems to have planned a permanent residency in the destination territory - a fact which in itself implies the creation of a (new) fiscal unit, from which it is inferred that these individuals had to be able to feed themselves and to be productive in the settlement territory - and 2. that, often, the women present in such contingents received what can be conceived as birth premiums (notably, we evidence of such dynamics in the case of Central Asian women, for example from Sogdiana and Baktria).<sup>6</sup> As Wouter Henkelman has most recently pointed out, the very existence of these rewards presupposes family structures, or at any rate groups capable of reproduction. Moreover, the numerous attestations of groups of Greeks, Lydians or other communities originally from Asia Minor as active both in Pārsa as well as in other satrapies of the Empire (including Baktria or Sogdiana, as with the case of the Branchidae) and who would allegedly have been «freed» by the Makedonians by all intents and purposes in fact refer to offsprings of the *kurtaš* (or other groups) employed within the institutional economy documented by the Persepolis tablets. This latter one (it should not go unnoticed) is an observation that significantly shifts scholarly attention toward the functioning of the Empire's political economy and the role - anything but

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<sup>4</sup> Briant 2002, 742 with regards to the Armenian case. See more recently on this topic two insightful contributions by Marc Mendoza-Sanahuja (2016a; 2016b). On the sociology of warfare in the ancient world, and especially concerning how the experience of *ἀνδραποδισμός* was perceived and culturally elaborated in the Greek world see Hans van Wees' bibliography (e. g. 2003; 2010; 2011; 2016 and the relative bibliography).

<sup>5</sup> As pointed out in Henkelman 2018a, 240. See moreover the text edited and translated in Arfa'ī 2008, 149-151, which is followed here.

<sup>6</sup> This is true for example in the case of the Greeks (Rollinger and Henkelman 2009, 334-336: cf. PF 1224 and PF 2072) as well as in that of the Lykians (PF 0857). Evidence of similar rewards granted to individuals of Central Asian origin can be found in other dossiers coming from the archive and discussed in detail in Henkelman 2018a. See e. g. PF 1132 (on the Sogdians: Hallock 1969, 329 for text and translation) and PF 1947 (on Baktrian women and, interestingly, irrigation workers: Hallock 1969, 539-545 for text and translation of the tablet). For a general discussion of the matter still very much useful are Maria Brosius' study (1996, 171-178) as well as, of course, Briant's remarks (2002, 435-439.)

secondary - assigned within it by Achaemenid officials to members of the subject populations including, of course, those from Central Asia.<sup>7</sup>

## 1.2. «The Persians called Darius the huckster»

The functioning of such a system - implicit in, though distorted by, Herodotos' narrative - presupposes an extremely wide range of infrastructures, from the most obvious road system capable of connecting, with a certain speed and safety, places as distant from each other as Barke and Baktria, to the accounting of rations to be distributed to the kurtaš along the road, up to the fiscal records and a full-fledged department of vital records of sort that would allow, for example, to orientate the demographic policy of the Empire in the territory of all the satrapies and in a transversal way to the - very numerous - ethnic groups featuring in its population. Although there is every reason to believe that the conception and the first steps towards the implementation of a mechanism of such ambition and scope date back to the earliest days of the Empire, it is however only from Darius' time that we have sufficient evidence to give, *mutatis mutandis*, a reasonable amount of substance to Herodotos' opinion that the «tax organization» imposed by the King on the territories of the Empire - and probably already in place since 518 BCE, as according to Rapin can be argued from the comparison between the evolution of the so-called «lists» of Achaemenid satrapies (*dahayāva*) featuring in the royal inscriptions and the notorious one in the final chapters of book 3 of the *Histories* - «should be identified as one of the most striking manifestations of the territorial power held by Darius» over his Empire.<sup>8</sup> Admittedly, as shown by Kai Ruffing's recent examination of the crucial introductory passage to the Herodotean catalogue of imperial satrapies (3.89), according to which the Persians would have called «Darius a huckster (κάπηλος), Cambyses a tyrant (δεσπότης) and Cyrus a father (πατήρ)» by virtue of the fact that, contrary to the magnanimity of the Empire's founder and the folly

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<sup>7</sup> Henkelman 2018a, 240-241. According to Diodoros of Sicily (17.69.3-9), some 800 (Curt. 5.5.5-24 accounts for no less- and probably more - than 40000 individuals) Greeks would have been transferred to Pārsa during the almost 250 years of imperial history. And while the former explicitly states that we were dealing with craftsmen (τέχνας: 17.69.4), the latter even mentions an *ergastulum* within which such men (and possibly women) were employed (5.5.14). In his forthcoming *ÉPHÉ* dissertation (Paris) Yazdan Safa'ī shows, among other things, that women were actively employed in precisely such *ergastula* as wavers. Moreover, they received administrative rations (including meat, as is the - rather exceptional - case of PF 1790, in which 5 *araššara* women are given 4 head of sheep/goats per year each, thus pointing out their value for the administration: Hallock 1969, 487 for text and translation). As for Herodotos (6.119) he knew of citizens of Eretria as having set up a community «in Kissia» (namely in Ēlāmite territory: see on this point Diod. Sic. 17.110.4-5, who even claims that those Greeks had been able to perfectly master the new language, and had therefore become *δίφρονοι*), and who were employed in highly valuable mining activities (peat and salt extraction).

<sup>8</sup> Briant 2002, 415: see Hdt. 3.89 as well as Rapin 2018b on the logic behind the so-called satrapal lists. According to the French scholar (p. 46), 518 BCE - most likely the approximate date of the carving of the Bīsūtūn text - should be held as a *terminus a quo* for the establishment of the tributary system which Herodotos describes as the outcome of Darius political decision (and greed). Jacobs 1994, 9-30 for a classic (critical) evaluation of the Herodotean list.

of his successor, the third did not miss an opportunity «to make even modest profits (ἐκαπήλευε) by any means», such a characterization of Darius is far from accidental, and even less neutral.<sup>9</sup>

In fact, not only does such a portrait fit into a broader narrative scheme within the *Histories*, by virtue of which the immoderate accumulation of wealth (think of Kroisos or Pythios, another Lydian) inevitably leads to a ruinous fall, but the – indeed not very praiseworthy – description of Darius as a scheming huckster shows, according to the brilliant interpretation recently put forward by Robert Rollinger, a sophisticated narratological and ideological construction operated by Herodotos with some elements of Near Eastern and Achaemenid culture (for example, certain distinctive features of kingship and prerogatives, physical but also moral ones, of the Great King) in order to build his own «character» of Darius with the goal of substantiating the sinusoidal trajectory of imperial rise and decline that the author singled out as a distinctive feature of both (political) History and of the stories (the individual destinies of men, from Polykrates to the very same Kings of Persia up to more anonymous individuals such as the slave trader Panionios of Kios or Tellos of Athens) of which he, in the *Histories*, became at the same time chronicler, scholar, and judge.<sup>10</sup> This, however, does not imply in any way that Herodotos' general remarks about the capital importance of the organization of the «tributary economy» (but to speak of political economy is perhaps more appropriate, since this term better emphasizes the - crucial - organizing and unifying component of such a project, an initiative of territorial legibility, to put it in Scott's terms, without precedents, and as far as we know very few heirs, in Eurasian history) promoted by Darius in order to root, and consequently, in a self-incremental process of sort, expand the Achaemenid infrastructural power in the territory of each of the imperial satrapies should be dismissed as being little to no reliable at all.<sup>11</sup> On the contrary, a detailed study of first-hand archival evidence from both Persepolis and, in the rarer but not non-existent cases, of other local realities (not least including Central Asia) allows us to flesh out, contextualize, and deepen Herodotos' assessment to a degree and on a scale of which the historian himself was most likely completely unaware. Having come this far, it is therefore not entirely out of place to spend a few words on the (immense) potentialities and constraints (not to be underestimated) of the documentary corpus which will represent - if not the only one - certainly a pillar of the investigation developed in this and the following chapters, aimed as it is at elucidating some, in my opinion particularly relevant, local aspects (i. e. particularly sensitive to the socio-environmental

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<sup>9</sup> Ruffing 2018, 160-161 with literature.

<sup>10</sup> Rollinger 2017a. See Harrison 2018 for a recent assessment of the «moral of History» within Herodotos' *Histories*. Thomas 2021 on *The Wealthy Orient* in the eyes of classical authors.

<sup>11</sup> See on this point Goldstone and Haldon 2009, Wiesehöfer 2009 (specifically devoted to the Achaemenid Empire) and, albeit from a more theoretical perspective, Clifford Ando's introduction to an important edited volume (2017a) on *States and State Power in Antiquity*.

features of the Baktrian context) of what Ian Morris and Walter Scheidel have aptly called *The Dynamics of Ancient Empires* as well as of their contradictions and limits.<sup>12</sup>

### 1.3. An Imperial Paradigm

Originally mainly devoted to the remarkable task of understanding the Irānian-Ēlāmite acculturation processes from a historical-religious perspective, over the years Wouter Henkelman's scholarly activity has expanded to an overall examination of the evidence from the Persepolis archives, which he understands as a key instrument not only for the economic management of the Empire, but also as a veritable cornerstone of the political project of the Persian Great Kings. This in-depth analysis, together with Hallock's editio princeps and Briant's several articles and books, is probably the most important contribution to the study of the Persian Empire as a whole, as well as of those territories, such as Central Asia, which are particularly disadvantaged in terms of the quantity (and often in terms of the quality) of the sources available to reconstruct their history during the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE. The reasons therefore are several.<sup>13</sup> The first, and perhaps most obvious, is the impressive work of textual edition and commentary thereof which, if, on the one hand, has led over the course of several years, to the substantial enrichment of a dataset numbering today several thousand texts - not only in Ēlāmite, but also in Greek, Aramaic, Old Persian and Akkadian, to name a few examples of the linguistic variety of the archives. On the other, it has also substantially contributed, in the wake of the work begun by Richard Hallock, in reshaping our understanding of the functioning of what Henkelman himself defined as «a unitary artifact» of extreme complexity (as well as of astounding sophistication and subtlety).<sup>14</sup> Just a few numbers shall suffice in giving a better idea of the challenge that such an undertaking must face: for the period covered by the only tablets that can be securely dated (years 13-28 of Darius' reign, corresponding roughly to the period between April 509 BCE and the spring 493), it has been calculated an output nearing 100000 tablets.<sup>15</sup> However, the fragments currently under study (about 15000, although some estimates are set at around 25000 units) have allowed to return a number of texts not exceeding 7000 specimens.<sup>16</sup> The organization of this very rich, but also very difficult to handle, material in a database accessible not only to specialists capable of reading it in the original language(s) would represent a commendable result in itself. What most

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<sup>12</sup> Wieschöfer 2009, Briant 2017b.

<sup>13</sup> See for example Henkelman 2005; 2008a; 2008b as well as, most recently, the brilliant Rollinger 2023.

<sup>14</sup> Henkelman 2013, 531.

<sup>15</sup> Garrison and Henkelman 2020, 174: «Tablets and fragments written in Elamite cuneiform alone stem from 15,000 or more original tablets; of these, at least ca. 7000 are legible and analytically meaningful». Their recent study on «local information handling in Achaemenid Pārsa» was based on «an edited corpus of ca. 6700 texts».

<sup>16</sup> Henkelman 2008b, 79-82 and Garrison and Henkelman 2020, 172-188 (at p. 173 the scholars point out that recently edited texts extend the chronological scope of the archive as far back as 518 BCE, which might be significant also for the inception of the administrative system reflected by the extant documentation concerning Central Asia).

distinguishes Henkelman's research activity, however, is the systematic study of the implications (at least in part already sensed by Briant) of the archive's nature as a «unitary artifact». In fact, the thousands of fragments recovered from the Persepolis excavations represent, the scholar insightfully explains, the vestiges of a single, coordinated ancient archive: an artifact that brings together and integrates (among other writing systems) Ēlāmite and Aramaic into a bureaucratic and archival system organized according to the format of (and by virtue of the synergy between) letters, seals, and sealing practices.<sup>17</sup> Given the complexity of the contemporary bureaucratic administrations within which we live, such an observation might seem relatively obvious, even trivial. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that, for the first time in their history, the territories from Ionia to Hindūkūš and from the valleys of Farḡāneḡ and Zarafšān to the Egyptian cataracts figure within an object codifying a coherent administrative model aimed at organizing in detail the whole of the huge Achaemenid domains according to common principles which moreover - a crucial aspect - were clearly recognizable as such by the individuals who lived in such territories.<sup>18</sup> That this is the case is shown, for example, not only by the diffusion of imperial Aramaic (and, according to a recent suggestion put forward by Antonio Panaino, also of Old Persian, at least in one of its κοινή versions) in the four corners of the Empire (not least in Bactria and Arachosia), but also, and perhaps in particular, by the almost total homology of vocabulary - including some terms of clearly bureaucratic and administrative nature -, syntax and in some cases even of spelling 1. which were detected in documents coming from contexts very distant from each other 1.1. in space (from Egypt to Bactria) and 1.2. in time (from Babylonia of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE to Mauryan India almost two centuries later). In addition to this, the point raised above is supported by the fact that 2. in some geographical areas (again, Bactria is a fitting example in this regard), the persistence of such terminology or, more generally, of the administrative practices it betrays, is still evident centuries after the demise Achaemenid power itself. Among other things, this is indexical of the momentous transformation in terms of governmental practices (at the macro-territorial level as well as at the micro-regional and semi-private levels) of local societies caused by the centuries-long presence of a political, social, economic, and military footprint of an Empire such as the Achaemenid- Persian.<sup>19</sup>

As Henkelman himself recently pointed out, these observations - of a purely philological nature (it

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<sup>17</sup> Henkelman 2013, 530.

<sup>18</sup> As recently stressed in a very sensitive study by Henry P. Colburn (2013), this was, for example, a feature with (for its scale and complexity) distinguished the Achaemenid road system from all its Near Eastern precedents, which were of course no trivial achievements themselves.

<sup>19</sup> See on this issue King 2020 (as well as Rollinger 2023: this is exactly the «meaning» of the rise of the Empire in the Eurasian context of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE - and as both King and Henkelman and Folmer 2016 demonstrate, widely beyond - studied by the Austrian scholar). On the so-called Imperial Aramaic note Folmer 2017; Gzella 2021a. Panaino 2015 has argued for the existence of a phenomenon similar to that of Hellenistic Greek (a service language for the purpose of, at least, inter élitarian communication) also in the context of the Achaemenid Empire through Old Persian as it is known from the royal inscriptions (above all Bīsutūn).

is a fact, for example, that the *ADAB* document shows remarkable similarities with the Egyptian correspondence of Aršāma and that both archives use a technical lexicon with a vocabulary very similar to that of the Persepolis archives) - allow us to assume with fair degree of certainty the existence of centralized scribal schools and the detachment of administrative staff in almost every corner of the Empire, including its Northeastern borderlands, from Chorasmia to Bactria and the steppes of Sogdiana.<sup>20</sup> If the above were already not enough, other important considerations can be added. In fact, it is necessary to stress 1. the nature of the Persepolis archives as a «unitary artifact» (which means internally coherent) - and of similar objects found (as with the *ADAB*) in other regions of the Empire, or whose existence can be deduced based on more sporadic evidence (but no less cogent: for example, coming from Judea or Arachosia) - and 2. the bureaucratic-administrative model (again, of political economy) underlying it. The reason for this is given by the fact that, in Henkelman's words, both the aforementioned aspects constitute the identifying features of a general principle (which the scholar calls the «imperial paradigm») of organization 1. of the territory 2. of its resources and 3. of the population subject to Achaemenid control, which must be assumed every time the sources, no matter how meager they are, and especially if they are primary ones, suggest the presence of one or more of these elements. The reason for this is that since, in parallel with the diffusion - which by now documentary evidence proves to have been capillary - of imperial Aramaic, these clues ought to be seen, to quote Ginzburg, as a «circumstantial paradigm», which in turns allows scholars to conclude, as Henkelman has pointed out, that the Achaemenid government was actively engaged in the spread of entire administrative systems aimed at the development and control of whole regional economies.<sup>21</sup> The fact that, according to what we are able to understand, the region controlled by Persepolis (Achaemenid Pārsa, roughly today's Fārs) extended over an area more or less similar to that of modern Switzerland, is a further clue supporting hypothesis that this must have been roughly the extension of what Lauren Morris has called «minimal units of imperial administration» (the *Kleinsatrapien* of Bruno Jacobs's model).<sup>22</sup> This in turn further strengthens the argument, strongly supported by Henkelman in several studies, according to which it was precisely the administrative and economic model developed at Persepolis and mirrored in the archives that was meant to be replicated, based on a serial principle, in the different territories of the Empire.<sup>23</sup> Among those principles the following are of particular importance. 1. Principle of traceability, identification and -

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<sup>20</sup> Henkelman 2018a, 244.

<sup>21</sup> Henkelman 2013, 532. On these and related matter reference is due to at least the following contributions: Briant 2002, 447-471; 2009a, 145-155 (on the *ADAB* evidence), Henkelman 2008b, 78-79; 2017a.

<sup>22</sup> Henkelman 2013, 535 on the comparison between Pārsa and Switzerland.

<sup>23</sup> Henkelman 2008b, 110-125; 2013, 535 and Morris 2019a. On Jacobs' model (1994 and later contributions) see Jacobs 2017a and the critical remarks (especially important because developed starting from a Central Asian – Baktrian – case study) in Briant 2020.

often reciprocal - control of the officials appointed across Achaemenid territory from Sardis to Marakanda, as in the case of those in charge of «storage and supply» operations and their colleagues, probably of a higher rank, responsible for «logistics and rationing» operations, a mechanism, the latter, which is detectable thanks to the (at least when seen from the outside) very much complicated system of marks and seals that can be reconstructed from the documentation brought to light in Persepolis as well as in the provinces (from Egypt to Central Asia).<sup>24</sup> 2. The underlying planning - and implementation - of an administrative system that the Persepolis archives (but the same applies to its regional counterparts) embodies as a model for the creation of other institutional economies, especially in regions, as in Central Asia, lacking or with a less developed history of administrative accountability.<sup>25</sup> 3. The existence of similar structures and protocols at various levels of administration, which authorize to assume the existence of conscious, stubborn, and, most importantly, systematic planning, based on a well-thought-out and extensively tested precedent (namely that developed at and around Persepolis itself).<sup>26</sup>

These are the distinguishing features of what Wouter Henkelman, in an article of the size, complexity, and richness of a monographic study (more than 200 pages) devoted to the study and expansion of numerous dossiers that not only show what he calls «the imperial signature» at work, but also – and most importantly - the underlying attitude of the Achaemenid administrative enterprise, has called «the imperial paradigm»; in order to study such dynamics, he concludes, the Persepolis archives is by far the most important and instructive source.<sup>27</sup> By Henkelman's own admission, such claims are not entirely new: that intricate parallels between satrapal administrations on the one hand and that at work in the heartland on the other existed and were extremely articulate, even in regions probably lacking previous administrative traditions (from Drangiana to Chorasmia and from Gedrosia to Bactria) was indeed one of the core arguments of *L'Asie et les royaumes proche-orientaux* as well as of the subsequent contributions by Pierre Briant who, over the course of almost half a century, vocally opposed to the skepticism of archaeologists the picture (which became famous as *une vision dure*) of an Empire which, at least since Darius' time, was widely present in each of the conquered territories, if not through an architectural imprint (temples, palaces, the same irrigation works) at least through a meticulous organization of the landscape, its resources, and its inhabitants, an assessment of the Persian political and administrative machinery that the new sources available, above all the

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<sup>24</sup> Henkelman 2008b, 126-162; 2013, 536.

<sup>25</sup> Garrison and Henkelman 2020, 173: «Most critically, it [scil. the archive and the principles of its internal organization] appears to have served as a template for developing outlying regions with no or little pre-existing bureaucratic and administrative structures, such as Bactria and Arachosia».

<sup>26</sup> Henkelman 2017a, 81.

<sup>27</sup> Henkelman 2017a with extensive bibliography.

*ADAB*, have not only thoroughly confirmed, but even further deepened and refined.<sup>28</sup>

What is unprecedented in Henkelman's studies, however, is, on the one hand, the fine grain of the level of his analysis; on the other hand, its territorial range. Combined, these two elements dispose once and for all of the long-lasting (and flawed) view of an Empire which, to quote the rather unflattering definition developed by Tarn with regards to the Seleukids (not by chance often judged, for better - and above all for worse – having been the «heir» of the Achaemenid Empire), would have had «nothing organic about it», in the sense in which for example – in his view - the Roman Empire (Tarn speaks of «state»), «up to a certain date, was organic» but rather had the features «of a crustacean [...] encapsulated within an external skeleton; [...] a framework that included a multitude of peoples, languages, and cities». On the contrary, – and rather paradoxically, given the historiosophic ambitions of the Halikarnassian – Henkelman's approach goes a long way in giving greater breath and insight to Herodotos' astute intuition regarding the «scopic» (or «globalizing», according to the recent phrasing adopted by Henry Colburn) nature of the political economy and imperial organization resulting from Cyrus' conquest and the (re)organization of the latter's Empire at the hand of Darius (and of his «collaborators»).<sup>29</sup>

### 1.3.1. *And Where Have All the Baktrians Gone?*

Leaving for a moment the *ADAB* aside, to which we will return in more detail in due course (although this chapter and the next one will not fail to make timely reference to them) what do we know about the imperial paradigm in Central Asia between the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> and the first decade of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, i. e. the time span covered by the Persepolis tablets? As mentioned earlier in the second chapter of this work, Wu Xin's pioneering study of the *corpus* edited by Hallock has left little doubt as to the frequency (and importance) of contacts between Central Asia and the political heartland(s) of the Empire.<sup>30</sup> One third of the tablets studied by the Chinese scholar and recording rations and/or travel orders outside the immediate area of interest of the archives (Pārsa) does in fact mention India (which would in itself suggest that a transit through Baktria was, if not certain, at least extremely probable). Arachosia is attested at least 9 times (approximately 1/10, alone, of the entire relevant documentation then available) and, in one case (PF 1557), the presence of no less than 547 kurtaš of Egyptian origin

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<sup>28</sup> Briant 1984; 1985; 2002, 743-761 and 2020, to mention but some among the historian's most important contributions to this and related issue.

<sup>29</sup> Tarn 1938, 4. See more recently Panitschek 2016 and the last decades of Seleukid bibliography, among which most interesting specimina are the following: Plischke 2014, Chrubasik 2016, Strootman 2018; 2020c (devoted to the topic of Seleukid rule in Central Asia). On «globalization» as a theoretical framework which can provide useful insight on the Eurasian territories unified by the Achaemenid Empire (and on those bordering this new political entity) see Colburn 2017 and to a considerable extent Rollinger forthcoming.

<sup>30</sup> See e. g. Wu 2005, 103-126 (focused mainly on Persepoli). As Briant 2018a, 269-273 clearly demonstrates, Susa was however no less entangled with Central Asia than Persepolis. More recent figures in King 2021, 273.



is recorded.<sup>31</sup> In year 21 of Darius' reign (501-500 BCE), these men were sent all the way over to the Persian Gulf - the strategic port of Tah(u)makka - from or through Arachosia, as shown by the travel permit (halmi) issued to a certain Babakabaduš, clearly an individual of some standing acting in the area, given the number of workers he was entrusted with.<sup>32</sup> Such a piece of evidence, besides laying bare the logistical capabilities of the imperial administration (even in the upper satrapies), makes moreover Herodotos' account about the fate of the Barkeans considerably more believable than many commentators would have been willing to admit until very recent years. Furthermore, in at least two cases there is the intriguing, but (at least until a few years ago) not easy to contextualize, mention (PF 1377, PF 1379) of a «tribute» (bāji-, literally «the share [of the king]») transported to Persepolis possibly from Central Asia (Krmāna) and escorted along the way by a procession of no less than 100 individuals, while in another document (mentioned by Hallock as Q 2139) a «treasure» (kapnuški: was it perhaps gold? or should we instead think of precious stones, e. g. lapis lazuli?) is recorded as traveling, again, from Central Asia headed towards Western Irān.<sup>33</sup> The list could easily be extended to include groups of women (probably prominent members of local societies destined to concubinage) «on the road» to Susa and Persepolis (one is mentioned in PF 1550, with her retinue, including an élite guide) as well as the very much renowned imperial mail service (pirradaziš: cf. for example PF 1321), apparently up and (effectively) running across the entire Central Asian territory.<sup>34</sup> This is, of course, information of paramount importance, since – for example - it allows us to demonstrate beyond reasonable doubt that Central Asian populations - and in some cases this seems to have been especially true of the Baktrians, as it shall be further discussed in this chapter - were fully included within the social structures that the Persians 1. maintained, 2. developed, 3. expanded, and 4. adapted to their new (world) imperial context.<sup>35</sup> From the Sogdians to the Arachosians, including the Baktrians and «Indians» (i. e. most likely people coming either from Hidûš and/or Gāndhārā), members of Eastern Irānian communities appear in the archives as homogeneous groups (although this does not imply any principle of segregation on an ethnic basis) and moreover openly recognized as such, not as an undifferentiated mass of «foreigners» (namely identified as just being «non-Persians»). Arguably, we are dealing in this case with yet another element of considerable importance, because this evidence shows, among other things, the awareness, on the part of Achaemenid officials,

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<sup>31</sup> Wu 2005, 114-115 for a tabular list of travels from and to Arachosia.

<sup>32</sup> Note the table in Wu 2005, 118, which provides the figures mentioned here.

<sup>33</sup> Wu 2005, 123 for the mentioned tablets. On the house of Bakabaduš, at the time the local satrap, and the imperial paradigm at work in Arachosia during Darius' reign see most recently the thorough discussion in King 2021, 266-314, providing extensive bibliography and the context within which to frame the present discussion.

<sup>34</sup> Hyland 2019 for a detailed study of the pirradaziš system in Anatolia. A similar infrastructure must have been active in Central Asia as well, as the evidence discussed in this chapter and especially in King's treatment of the Arachosian file suggests.

<sup>35</sup> Henkelman 2018a, 243. See moreover Briant 1984, 59-60.

of existing differences in both specializations *and* in degrees thereof within the Empire, which in turn implies 1. the ability, on the part of administrative and governing bureaucracies, to recognize the local peculiarities within the οἰκουμένη that resulted from Cyrus' conquest - and from Darius' reconquista - as well as 2. the political willingness to exploit this multiplicity of skills to their own (i. e. to the members of the imperial herrschende Gesellschaft) advantage. However, even an exhaustive catalogue of the «contacts» between Persepolis and Susa on the one hand and the imperial borderlands on the other (from Central Asia to Libya) that does not highlight the general principle by virtue of which, for example, the movements of the kurtaš had to be organized (not least in loco, i. e. starting from the local background of each satrapy) or the taxes to be paid would inevitably lose sight of a crucial element of the Achaemenid paradigm, namely precisely its systemic nature, which made it an instrument 1. capable, not unlike the cartographic patterns underlying the satrapal lists featuring in the imperial inscriptions as reconstructed by Rapin, of being expanded and adapted in accordance with the growth and expansion of the Empire, 2. that moreover could be copied (as it most likely happened in the case of the territories East of the Indus, later incorporated into the Mauryan Empire), and 3. that could be made valuable use of as to 3.1. administer, 3.2. monitor, and 3.3. develop other regions of the Empire than Persepolis (where the paradigm was originally conceived), and particularly at its Eastern offshoots.<sup>36</sup> Since the latter represent three essential points in order to understand in the totality of its implications the meaning of the application to the Central Asian space of a (both theoretical and very much practical) device such as the imperial paradigm, not least in order to better highlight, so to speak e contrario, the limits that the exclusive adoption of its perspective imposes on the historian who seeks to provide 1. a study of the structures (deep history in Scott's terminology) and 2. from a longue durée perspective of Achaemenid power in Central Asia, having come so far even in this case a couple of examples are only fitting in order to better clarify the overarching point of this section.<sup>37</sup> The first: precisely because of the identifiable structural similarities between the (little of) readable text engraved on two apparently anonymous clay fragments found (in a garbage pit) during excavations carried out in the late 1970s near the site of Old Qandahār in Southern Afġānistān on the one hand and, on the other, 1. known specimens of what, following Hallock, we might call diaries and accounting records 2. what some literary sources (e. g. the (pseudo)Aristotelian treatise known as the *Oeconomicus*) describe as tasks strictly pertaining to the satrapal administration, and 3. similar «accounting registers» among the *ADAB* parchments (above all *ADAB* C1, C3, and C4) has allowed, in the words of Stolper and Fisher, to assume with almost

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<sup>36</sup> Henkelman 2017a, 80. See moreover the plates attached to Rapin 2018b.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Scott 2017 and the bibliography of this important study.

absolute certainty the existence of an «Arachosian Fortification Archive» modeled on Persepolis.<sup>38</sup> According to the two scholars, the systemic nature of the Persepolitan archives, and its replicable model, means that the presence of even a single, isolated witness provided with similar vocabulary and/or content to what is known from the heartland leads to the inescapable conclusion that in that area of the Empire, too, there must have been in place: 1. a process of cataloguing resources and population similar to that attested in the imperial homeland (Pārsa). This in turn implies 2. the existence of at least one archive organized on similar principles; from this follows 3. a collection of primary documents from which the local administration was able to calculate revenues and expenditures (as it is again attested by the Pseudo-Aristotelian *Oeconomicus*); which, conversely, implies 4. the presence of administrative nodes (one might think for example of Vivāna's irmatam) capable of producing such documents and of a central administration endowed with facilities at which the relevant information was collected and processed. Moreover, and finally, the above implies 5. an administrative province (the «minimal unit of imperial administration» mentioned by Lauren Morris) from which main seat(s) these very same central administrations were controlled and further organized according to regional and imperial needs.<sup>39</sup> The fact that all of this - and the presence of an entirely homologous system active, at the very least, in Baktria, Sogdiana, Gāndhārā, and wherever else in the Empire some of these «guideline fossils» appear - can be deduced from a few cuneiform engravings on two clay fragments no bigger than 5.6 x 2.6 x 2.8 cm speaks volumes about the capacity and the as yet unexpressed potential of the Persepolis archives to illuminate the mechanisms fueling and underpinning, if not of the *Rise*, certainly of the *Organization of the Achaemenid Empire*, even hundreds of kilometers away from the ideological, political (and probably economic) heart of the Empire itself: as Darius' has it, «far away from Pārsa» indeed.<sup>40</sup> The second example takes us even further to the (South)East of Baktria, in a territory, on the border between the two (main?) satrapies of Gāndhārā and Hidūš, in which the Achaemenid presence (not to mention the effectiveness of political, military, and economic control asserted by the Empire) has long appeared, if possible, even more feeble than in Central Asia and concerns a symptomatic case of what, in the wake of the studies of Ingold, Scott and, most recently, Colburn and Ando, we might rightly call «landscape production»: that is to say, the creation, by an over-regional power with hegemonic (following Strootman's lead one might even say ecumenical) ambitions of an infrastructural - and therefore semiotic - network capable of providing cultural unity and recognizability (once again, an operation

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<sup>38</sup> Stolper and Fisher 2015, 19-20. On the tablets of Old Qandahār (Ball 2019 n. 522) see already Briant's remarks (1984, 59-60, 92) as well as *TPE* II, 814-815 and the thorough discussion of this and other related evidence in Henkelman 2017a, 157-174; 2018a, 244. On the «satrapal economy» see e. g. Arist. [*Oec.*], 2.3.

<sup>39</sup> See Stolper and Fisher 2015, 20-21 as well as Ball 2020, 361 on Old Qandahār. The argument presented above has most recently and thoroughly been laid out by Henkelman 2017a.

<sup>40</sup> Vogelsang 1992a, Henkelman 2008b.

of legibility) to an ecological context which, in itself (that is to say, with the words of Claude Lévi-Strauss, in terms of «nature»), would instead lead to fragmentation and particularism.<sup>41</sup> In an inscription of the Mauryan emperor Aśoka (ca. 304-232 B.C.), engraved near the Laḡmān river, in today's province of Ġalāl Ābād, along the road connecting, on a North to South axis, Kābul to Pešāwar, but which in the opposite direction almost certainly reached Baktra, the reader is offered some interesting information.<sup>42</sup> To begin with, and by analogy with what was found on a milestone discovered a couple of decades ago in the region of Persepolis, it is possible to read (l. 8) the distance that in all probability separated two stopping points (the *σταθμοί* mentioned several times in classical sources, most famously in Hdt. 5.52 ff.) in accordance with a logic characteristic of the Achaemenid organization of the road system (and – according to Henkelman - an identifying feature of the imperial paradigm across the satrapal territories).<sup>43</sup> Secondly, the road itself is identified through the use of a term, *krpty* (כרפתי), which Henkelman suggests to interpret as a loanword from the Old Persian \**kāra-paθī*, i. e., «road equipped [for the passage of the army], road suited for heavy load transportation».<sup>44</sup>

If such an interpretation were to be accepted, this would be a revealing detail, since it would almost necessarily imply that the Mauryas inherited (and/or further developed) a network of carriageable infrastructures built by Achaemenid officials at the time when the Empire held (or claimed – in Scott's words «blustered») some form of control over the Southeastern offshoots of what Richard Payne and Rhyne King have recently called «the land of the Afġāns», a sort of cultural Afġānistān not entirely superimposable - because more extended - to today's geopolitical boundaries, as well as on the immediately neighboring territories: which is to say, remarkably, on another space with a consistently high rate of «state evasion» which through the introduction of the road network attested by the Aśokan pillar the Great Kings somehow tried to «normalize».<sup>45</sup> That such a hypothesis is not at all as far-fetched as it might appear at first glance is suggested by the fact that, when describing some of the most remarkable aspects of the Mauryan imperial polity, our most detailed (if not the most reliable) source, the Seleukid diplomat Megasthenes, dwells precisely on the infrastructural system - and in particular on the road system -, defining as a «royal road» (ὁδὸς βασιλική) one of its main arteries

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. Ingold 2000, 294-348, Scott 2009, 74, Colburn 2013; 2018, Ando 2017b and most recently Payne and King 2020 on the (greater) Afġān landscape (which extended beyond the actual borders of modern Afġānistān) as imposing considerable obstacles to imperial claims of *Law & Order* (a point which according to Cheung 2017 might even have been at the origin of the very name of «the Afġāns», meaning something like «unrutable people», «barbarians»). On the imperial political and economic organization of the Empire from the Pañjāb to the Indus delta see Briant 2002, 754-758 as well as, more recently, Petrie 2020 and Coloru 2021 (with the newest archaeological results from the important site of Barikot).

<sup>42</sup> On the Mauryan dynasty see Dwivedi 2019a, 98-103 as well as Jansari 2020a.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Callieri 1995 on the milestone of the Marvdašt as well as, more recently (and critically) Henkelman 2017a, 63-80. On roads and communication in the Empire see also Henkelman and Jacobs 2021.

<sup>44</sup> Thapar 1961, 94 ff., Callieri 1995, 90 ff. and most recently Henkelman 2017a, 66-67, from which these linguistic remarks (as well as, critically, their historical implications) are taken.

<sup>45</sup> Payne and King 2020.

which, according to him, would extend from Taxila (Takṣaśīlā) to Patna (Pāṭaliputra) and then continue until it reached the Eastern coasts of the subcontinent.<sup>46</sup> Although the exact chronology of Megasthenes is still highly debated among scholars, a «high» hypothesis concerning his dating, i. e. placing his diplomatic activity towards the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE - and perhaps even in the midst of the age of the Diadochi, since Arrian claims that he «lived in Arachosia with Sibirtios, the local satrap, and visited Sandrokottos [Chandragupta], the ruler of the Indians» - would make the supposition that with the expression «the royal road» the author of the Ἰνδικά was indeed referring to (at least originally) Achaemenid infrastructures anything but implausible.<sup>47</sup> As a (possible) confirmation of what has been argued above, there is the fact that it is Aśoka himself who, in the 7<sup>th</sup> of his rock edicts, gives a detailed description of the road system that innervated the Empire he inherited from Chandragupta, the Achaemenid «background noise» of which is too distinct not to be captured by a trained ear.

The diagnostic element, of course, are the postal stations, located at regular intervals along the way: it is therefore no coincidence that Monica Smith has defined the Maurya Empire as a whole «a network of networks», using a formula taken up a few years later by Henkelman, this time with the aim to characterize the Persian infrastructural apparatus. But there even more in this than that: no less symptomatic is in fact the word used by Aśoka to qualify this system of what we might call σταθμοί Ἰνδικοί, namely addakhosikyāni. According to the interpretation provided by Giovanni Pugliese Carratelli, such a term would mean roughly «separated by a half [ardha] kos [approximately 4 km]» or, according to another reading, which is also quite plausible from the linguistic point of view, «separated by eight [atta] kos».<sup>48</sup> The most remarkable aspect of this Aśokan statement is the fact that the system it describes closely resembles the one built by the Achaemenids, and the possibility that there was indeed a Persian precedent at the origin of the Maurya infrastructures in the Lagmān valley is made even more likely by a further consideration made by the king himself and found in the same 7<sup>th</sup> rock edict, according to which «kings of the past» (and given the chronology this can only mean the Great Kings of Persia) had tried their hand at similar works.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Strab. 15.1.11-12 (= *FGrHist* 715 F 6c) and Arr. *Ind.*, 3.4: see Henkelman 2017a, 66 for this argument and Schunk 2019 specifically devoted to Arrian's Indian description. Megasthenes' account runs as follows: «τοῦτο μὲν οὖν πλάτος τῆς χώρας τὸ τ' ἐλάχιστον καὶ τὸ μέγιστον. μήκος δὲ τὸ ἀπὸ τῆς ἐσπέρας ἐπὶ τὴν ἕω· τοῦτου δὲ τὸ μὲν μέχρι Παλιβόθρων ἔχει τις ἂν βεβαιότερος εἰπεῖν (καταμεμέτρηται γὰρ σχοινίοις, καὶ ἔστιν ὁδὸς βασιλικὴ σταδίων [δισ] μυρίων), τὰ δ' ἐπέκεινα στοχασμῶι λαμβάνεται διὰ τῶν ἀνάπλων τῶν ἐκ θαλάττης διὰ τοῦ Γάγγου ποταμοῦ μέχρι Παλιβόθρων· εἴη δ' ἂν τι σταδίων ἑξακισχιλίων. ἔσται δὲ τὸ πᾶν, ἧ βραχύτατον, μυρίων ἑξακισχιλίων, ὡς ἔκ τε τῆς ἀναγραφῆς τῶν σταθμῶν τῆς πεπιστευμένης μάλιστα λαβεῖν Ἐρατοσθένης φησί· καὶ ὁ Μεγασθένης οὕτω συναποφαίνεται, Πατροκλῆς δὲ χιλίοις ἑλαττόν φησι». Stoneman 2019, 186-198 most recently on geography and history in Megasthenes' (lost) work.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Arr. *Anab.*, 5.6.2: «Μεγασθένης, ὃς ξυνην μὲν Σιβυρτίωι τῶι σατράπῃ τῆς Ἀραχωσίας, πολλάκις δὲ λέγει ἀφικέσθαι παρὰ Σανδράκοττον τὸν Ἰνδῶν βασιλέα». For an up-to-date general overview of 1. the personality 2. the literary activity and 3. of the scholarly debate concerning Megasthenes see the recent discussion in Stoneman 2019, 129-197. Von Reden 2019c on Graeco-Roman Indography (and see moreover Mairs 2020b).

<sup>48</sup> Pugliese Carratelli 2003, 92-95.

Every infrastructural project intended to last over time, in addition to the actual infrastructures, obviously needs a body of officials in charge of their upkeep, and also in this case there is a concrete possibility of finding traces of the imperial paradigm in the space which, paraphrasing Rachel Mairs' book, one might call *The Achaemenid Far East*. According again to an information transmitted by Megasthenes, in fact, in India there was a system of milestones arranged at intervals of ten stadia: the supervision of the correct positioning of these landmarks was the task, the historian continues, of a corps of rural magistrates that he calls ἀγορανόμοι, adding shortly thereafter that these men could sometimes be also called ἀστυνόμοι.<sup>49</sup> According to the interpretation of one of the most authoritative historians of the period, Romila Thapar, Megasthenes' wording would translate the indigenous (Indian) rājūka or rajjugāhaka, i. e. «those who hold the rope». According to Thapar, these bematists were in charge not only of the measurement and distribution of arable land, but also of resolving legal disputes in cadastral matters that had arisen in the area under their pureview.<sup>50</sup> Now: on the one hand, the description of the tasks entrusted to the rājūka rather closely resembles that of the Achaemenid bematists, whose activity is attested by no less than 33 occurrences within the Persepolis archives. Like their Indian counterparts, Henkelman argues, they constituted a customary phenomenon along the imperial roads, and were not merely assigned to control the movements of the court. On the contrary, they in fact ought best to be seen as a unit specialized in the inspection of the roads in the broadest sense. In addition to this, archival documents (accounting records and travel receipts) show that this corps of officers acted as a professional department of «spear bearers» (cf. Hdt. 7.41), who were tasked, among other things, with supervising, offering audience, maintaining records, and, presumably, setting the rate of various types of taxation. The individuals belonging to these units were in fact very mobile and inspected the countryside armed with royal or at least satrapal authorization.<sup>51</sup> In the light of this information, therefore, it causes a particular sensation (or perhaps it should not cause any sensation at all) that the presence of the same title of ἀγορανόμος was found on a sherd of pottery (ὄστρακον) coming from the excavations carried out at Āi Xānum.<sup>52</sup> To be sure, from a Hellenistic (or Hellenocentric) perspective it would be all too easy to counter that, by virtue of the distinctly «Greek» character of a settlement such as Āi Xānum, all that can be inferred from the ὄστρακον is the presence of a civic magistrate, an officer of the ἀγορά

<sup>49</sup> *FGrHist* 715 F 31 (50): «τῶν δ' ἀρχόντων οἱ μὲν εἰσιν ἀγορανόμοι, οἱ δ' ἀστυνόμοι, οἱ δ' ἐπὶ τῶν στρατιωτ<ικ> ὄν, ὄν οἱ μὲν ποταμοὺς ἐξεργάζονται καὶ ἀναμετροῦσι τὴν γῆν ὡς ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ, καὶ τὰς κλειστὰς διώρυγας, ἀφ' ὧν εἰς τὰς ὀχετείας ταμιεύεται τὸ ὕδωρ, ἐπισκοποῦσιν, ὅπως ἐξ ἴσης πᾶσιν ἢ τῶν ὑδάτων παρείη χρήσις. οἱ δ' αὐτοὶ καὶ τῶν θηρευτῶν ἐπιμελοῦνται, καὶ τιμῆς καὶ κολάσεώς εἰσι κύριοι τοῖς ἐπαξίοις. καὶ φορολογοῦσι δέ, καὶ τὰς τέχνας τὰς περὶ τὴν γῆν ἐπιβλέπουσιν – ὑλοτόμων, τεκτόνων, χαλκέων, μεταλλευτῶν. ὁδοποιοῦσι δέ, καὶ κατὰ δέκα στάδια στήλην τιθέασιν, τὰς ἐκτροπὰς καὶ τὰ διαστήματα δηλοῦσαν».

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Thapar 1961, 108 ff. as well as *Arthasāstra* 2.6 and Strab. 15.1.50 with Henkelman 2017a, 66-67 fn. 32 for thorough discussion of these two passages and further bibliography.

<sup>51</sup> Henkelman 2017a, 73. See moreover Colburn 2013, 47.

<sup>52</sup> *IEO* n. 322: «ἐπὶ ἀγορανό[μου] Χαιρέας». For more information and bibliography on the site Ball 2019 n. 18.

with the task of regulating the practicalities of buying and selling and ensuring that smooth business was carried out in the city marked not differently as it would have been the case at Athens.<sup>53</sup>

However, this would be a considerably narrow-minded view, at least for two reasons: the first concerns the much less «Greek» character of Āi Xānum than what historiography has long been able (or willing) to acknowledge, which in turn ought to lead scholars to questions of terminology and, in our case, concerning the function of a given title and the related office, which in earlier periods may have had a completely different meaning. Incidentally, how crucial such cautionary remarks are for a proper understanding of Central Asian history as been sharply pointed out by Milinda Hoo with regards to the (re)contextualization and (re)embedding in Seleukid and post-Seleukid times (in fact, notes Laurianne Martinez-Sève, all that we know of Āi Xānum dates to Eukratides at the earliest, in the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE) of local, Central Asian, and Achaemenid, imperial, precedents.<sup>54</sup> The second, and no less important, reason relates to the organization - and the consequent taxation - of the entire Dašt -i Qal‘a plain, which the Seleukids (and there is no reason to believe that the Graeco-Baktrian rulers behaved differently) decided to exploit in a much more intensive way was than previously the case, thus significantly differing from the Achaemenid strategy of territorial exploitation in Baktria as we have reconstructed it in the previous chapter.<sup>55</sup> An undertaking of this kind entailed a logistical effort that should not be underestimated: seen through the lens of Persepolis, therefore, the ὄστρακον of Āi Xānum takes on a very special value and provides, if not proof, certainly a rather concrete indication of the continuation, centuries after the demise of Persian power, of practices of territorial organization and exploitation of its resources, most likely deriving from the imperial paradigm elaborated in the Persepolis’ plain and applied, apparently with considerable success, from Memphis to Marakanda.<sup>56</sup> Taking up Darius’ boast, it can rightly be argued that research carried out over the last 15 years on the royal archives has made us «aware of this»: it was not only «the spear of the Persian Man» that conquered «far away from Pārsa», but also the scribe’s stylus and the bematist’s rope.<sup>57</sup>

#### 1.4. *The Sound of Silence*. The Limits of an Empire (and Those of its Paradigm)

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<sup>53</sup> Similar individuals are recurring presence in the literary sources: see Hippoc. *Epid.*, 4.25 or Lys. 22.16.

<sup>54</sup> Hoo 2018; 2020 and the important monograph Hoo 2022, 80-100 for an overview of the site. On Āi Xānum from an urbanistic perspective see Martinez-Sève 2014; 2015.

<sup>55</sup> Martinez-Sève 2016; 2020a.

<sup>56</sup> See Briant 2017b as well as Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 209-211 for undeniable evidence of the persistence (down to Late Antiquity) of administrative strategies of territorial organization in Baktria as outcomes of those experimented by the Achaemenids centuries before.

<sup>57</sup> DNa § 4: «Pārsahyāa martiyahyā dūraj īštiš parāgmatā; adataj azdā bavāti».

The importance of the information that can be drawn from the Persepolis tablets - not least because they provide a touchstone against which to compare the eventual, fortuitous discovery of new corpora, as in the case of the *ADAB* parchments (and tallies) - cannot be underestimated, and one is often astonished when faced with the widespread diffusion, through the most far-flung territories of the Empire, of extremely sophisticated devices of «extraction and control» by virtue of which, apart from the (albeit crucial) inspections of the itinerant court and of its satrapal counterparts - an extremely effective tool of imperial rule, as demonstrated for example by the history of the so-called «stateless Empire» of Ottonian Europe in the early Middle Ages -, the political and administrative center of the Achaemenid structure was able, in the course of almost two and a half centuries, to organize and direct with an effectiveness and punctiliousness that were perhaps matched only by the Chinese, the largest terrestrial Empire that Eurasia had known up to that time.<sup>58</sup> This having been stressed, such a panoptic scenario should in itself invite a certain caution since, as suggested by the comparison with ancient Mesopotamia (an undoubted model for the Achaemenids) studied in a fundamental contribution by Seth Richardson, in this and similar cases it is legitimate to think that we are dealing with realia (the Persian road system existed and functioned based on certain principles and in accordance with a model clearly identifiable through evidence scattered through the Persepolis tablets) as well as with self-representations, aimed at projecting an image of oneself and of one's power (be it a King's or a whole Empire's), even - and above all - beyond the effective range of action of that power itself.<sup>59</sup> Taking up a graphic definition by James Scott, the above-mentioned imperial panopticon as it emerges from the archives would be (at least to a certain extent) a «cosmological bluster» aimed at casting a beam of the imperial gaze's (self)reassuring light also (perhaps especially) on those shadow lines that structurally characterize the management of territory and subjects which ought to be seen as a typical, unavoidable feature of premodern Empires (and, as the case of the Soviet Union shows, also of the most ambitious ones of the industrial age).<sup>60</sup> It goes (almost) without saying: as pointed out above, the very concept of imperial paradigm not only implies, but indeed presupposes a certain (admittedly surprisingly high) degree of flexibility - more appropriate would perhaps be to speak, with a loan from neuroscience, of «plasticity», since this term better highlights the adaptive capacity, therefore of strategic change, of a given system, from the human brain to the Achaemenid

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<sup>58</sup> On the issue of «extraction and control» as the paramount goal of Achaemenid political economy see Waerzeggers 2014 as well as the other contributions (especially Pierre Briant's on official communications within an itinerant Empire) collected in an edited book with this very title by Michael Kozuh, Wouter Henkelman, Charles Jones, and Christopher Woods. On the comparative model provided by the Ottonian *Herrschaft ohne Staat* see Althoff 2013. On the organization of Qin and Han and their transformation into a bureaucratic Empire out of scattered and rivalling kingdoms (incidentally, a process resembling, although on a bigger scale, the scenario suggested in the case of pre-Achaemenid Baktria and to a certain extent Armenia) see the useful overview by Kathrin Leese-Messing (2019a, 133-138 and the bibliography at the end of the paper).

<sup>59</sup> Richardson 2012; 2017.

<sup>60</sup> Scott 2009, 112.



Empire - and the case of the Mauryan agronomists (but Wouter Henkelman's contributions make it possible to expand the dossier to a considerable degree) is there to demonstrate to what extent an apparently worn-out formula such as «unity in diversity» has, in the context of Persian history, not only a very precise meaning but also the sense opposite to that which has long been attributed to it (think of Tarn's judgment on the Seleukids). However, even in the face of these caveats, it is difficult to escape the impression that, as Lieutenant Yolland thoughtfully remarked, even a conceptual tool of such immense heuristic power as the imperial paradigm inevitably leads to «erode» some aspects of crucial importance for an adequate understanding of the dynamics of ancient Empires.

In the course of at least the last 10 years, the historiography, and in particular that of archaeological imprint, of (pre-industrial) Empires has in fact emphatically underlined the importance, in the absence of technologies characteristic of the modern state (from the communications system to the coercive apparatus) of – to name but a few examples - communication in the idioms of local cultures, the co-optation of local élites (anything but gratuitous in terms of restrictions imposed on the «despotic» nature – sensu Michael Mann - of imperial power) and, an aspect that has emerged particularly in the scholarship of most recent years, in the creation of «archipelagic» spaces, i. e., within which direct control (exercised, that is, through the massive territorial presence of representatives of the established power, for example through the institution of an archive) was limited to a few (albeit strategically and/or symbolically crucial) spatial units (a regional main settlement, a garrison, a post station with its relative *ergastula*).<sup>61</sup> However, beyond these minimal (sub)units of imperial administration, the capacity of control and government - sensu Weber - diminished with a rapidity directly proportional to the extent of the (claimed) territorial hegemony – which was (ideally) universalistic in nature - of those Kings and emperors who, against their wishes, found themselves much more dependent on the local populations than they would have liked and were, consequently willing to acknowledge: think of the oleographic story of concord of intentions, loyal solidarity, and paternal(istic) care that is offered to the visitor of a site like Naqš -i Rostam. This is not only true (though it is so proportionally to the share of local power in their hands) of the élites, whose representatives were for their part endowed with their own agendas and with the (not always negligible) ability to put them into action, or to resist to the methods of government that during the

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<sup>61</sup> About the importance of communication in the idioms (which means not only in language, but also through symbolic codes) of *different* imperial populations see e. g. Jacobs 2012, Kosmin 2014b and now Degen 2022, 32. Khatchadourian 2016 and Düring and Stek (2018a; 2018b) offer some of the most interesting insights that have emerged from the recent archaeological debate regarding the conative («aspirational») nature of imperial power. Also worthy of consultation are some of the contributions collected in the *Routledge Handbook of Archaeology and Globalization* edited (2017) by Tamar Hodos (e. g. Robert M. Rosenswig's study of the *Mesoamerican archipelago of complexity* background of what the scholar calls the Olmec globalization of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE. As we saw, a similar archipelago was most likely behind the sociopolitical and territorial organization of Central Asia in the centuries before the rise of the Achaemenids without the need of a centralized (and centralizing) Empire fulfilling this role of *primum movens* of social transformation.

course of history kingdoms and Empires have always wanted to impose on such (theoretically subordinated) social actors, but even of fairly humbler people as peasants or camel drivers.<sup>62</sup>

In the light of these observations, and of the fact that, as persuasively argued by Nicola Di Cosmo and Michael Maas in the introduction to a recent collection of essays about *Empires and Exchanges in Eurasian Late Antiquity*, the flourishing of phenomena - of extraordinary political and cultural relevance (from the spread of Christianity and Buddhism to the creation of supra- and trans-regional fiscal systems) - characteristic of the period roughly comprised between the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE and the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the following one (until at least the advent of the Caliphate and probably beyond) coincide with a long historical phase in which the territories of today's Afġānistān - and its offshoots to the North as well as to the South - were integrated into (or at least coveted prays for) a whole array of Empires, a shift of research attention towards the *responsive* phenomena caused by the efforts made by said Empires in order to govern these spaces and the populations settled therein comes to the fore as a particularly pressing need.<sup>63</sup> In this respect, Bactria provides a particularly inviting case study: first, spatial elements such as the Hindūkūš, the Hišār range, the Üstȳrt Plateau, or the Sogdian steppes contribute substantially to the creation of an archipelago-like structure characterized by the sinusoidal alternation of highlands and valleys that Scott's studies (but the same could be said of some recent research on the topic of the strategies of «governmentality» characteristic of the Kušāna Empire) have identified as particularly limiting of the power range of any pre-modern Empire.<sup>64</sup> These territorial affordances, as moreover pointed out by Thomas Barfield, provide a much more effective perspective than the traditional administrative subdivisions (Bactria, Sogdiana, Gāndhārā, all attempts – one should incidentally note - to rationalize a given territory to the advantage of what Henkelman called «the Persepolitan lens», i. e., the archival organization of imperial space) from which to study the socio-political and economic phenomena taking place within these spaces, since such artificial subdivisions of the landscape (and of the societies dwelling therein) conceal - like modern political maps, as noted by Lieutenant Yolland - the ecological challenges that each of the above-mentioned environments poses to any process of (pre-modern) Empire building.<sup>65</sup> Secondly, and in parallel to an interpretative outlook that looks at the Bactrian landscape and at its societies *sub specie imperii* (top-down), the opposite perspective, i. e., one seeking to study the Persian Empire starting from Central Asia (bottom-up), helps to better highlight the participation of the local population in (which can also mean opposition to) the Achaemenid imperial project. As it has been stressed in chapter 2 of the present work, this is a perspective which a source such as the

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<sup>62</sup> Scott 1985; 1990, Smith 2003, Payne and King 2020.

<sup>63</sup> Di Cosmo and Maas 2018.

<sup>64</sup> Scott 2009, Vorderstrasse 2020.

<sup>65</sup> Barfield 2010, 17-65, Henkelman 2018a, 243.

Persepolis archives structurally tends to leave in the shade (and that other sources such as the royal inscriptions completely – and consciously - erase). That such a theoretical positioning is not (only) the outcome of an equal and opposite reaction to the imperial discourse but, on the contrary, reflects some crucial aspects of the political and social history of a context such as the Baktrian one seems to be confirmed, according to the considerations recently put forward by Richard Payne and Rhyne King, by the very etymology of the word «Afgānistān» which refers, following their interpretation, to a highland space characterized by recalcitrant resistance to the ambitions of pre-modern Empires (and even to those of modern nation states).<sup>66</sup> From its first occurrence in Baktrian until at least the Medieval Persian and Arabic literature, in fact, the term *αβαγαβο* (obvious ancestor of today's Afgānistān) would indicate, in the light to the most recent philological assessment of the word, «mountain dwellers doggedly independent of any central authority» or, which after all from the vantage point of the state's positionality is the same, «inhabitants of the highlands», and in particular of the Southern offshoots of the Hindūkūš, towering over the most fertile agricultural valleys looking towards Kābul and Pakistan (but one just needs to think of the Baktra oasis further North for another conspicuous example, surrounded as it is by mountain ranges and semi-desert steppes).<sup>67</sup> Not surprisingly, as argued by Johnny Cheung, the most remote origin of the ethnonym would be identifiable, in an Old-Persian form that the Paris-based linguist suggests goes back to the Old Irānian \*apāka-āna-, i. e. «the peoples of a remote land [beyond Baktria]». <sup>68</sup> For this reason, Payne and King further suggest, «without positing anything resembling ethnic unity or continuity, the idea of a “country of the Afghans” as territories of organized highlanders [but it would not at all be preposterous to add to this sample the steppe dwellers, as we have seen in the previous chapter] resistant to imperial rule usefully turns attention from the aspirations [here Seth Richardson's study provide an invaluable touchstone] and claims of imperial inscriptions, administrative documents, and monuments» toward the generally undocumented, in the current state of our knowledge, populations whose members «challenged, constrained, and negotiated them». <sup>69</sup> These theoretical and methodological remarks justify – I would argue - the structure underscoring this chapter. After examining, from a Central Asian perspective, the (scanty) available information concerning the events that brought Darius to power, the discussion continues along three main lines, which might be useful to explicitly (although rather concisely) detail here. 1. The search for clues allowing to identify the presence, in the territory of the satrapies of Baktria and Sogdiana, of the imperial paradigm (in itself, it should be noted that, once the homology between the Kleinsatrapien and the territory of

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<sup>66</sup> Payne and King 2020, IX with references.

<sup>67</sup> Cheung 2017, 36-37.

<sup>68</sup> Cheung 2017, 46.

<sup>69</sup> Payne and King 2020, X.

Persepolis has been recognized - not least in terms of the territorial area covered by an Achaemenid regional archives - the very existence of the satrapies constitutes the most macroscopic of these clues).<sup>70</sup> 2. The study of some of the crucial devices set up by the Persians to ensure the effectiveness of this method of «extraction and control» (from the fiscal, military, and political organization of the territory to the already mentioned road system) and, last but not least 3. the investigation, starting from a documentary corpus (some specimens of gold smithery for symposiastic use) which, to my knowledge, until today has not yet been the subject of adequate study from this theoretical vantage point, of the strategies adopted by the Achaemenid administration (both at the level of the royal court as well as at that, dependent on and, albeit sui generis and on a lesser scale, mirroring it, of the satrapal networks) in order to secure the services (cooperation, if not loyalty) of those «imperial collaborators» who, at the very least from Cyrus to the Barmakids, carried out the crucial task of «gatekeepers» of the Empires seeking to claim control over «the land of the Afġāns».<sup>71</sup>

If, following in the wake of the most recent results of contemporary research, some of which have been sketched above, the first two points aims first of all at further investigate some questions of (relative) detail already addressed by scholarship, the third one attempts at exploring more closely an aspect, namely that of the co-constructive, and therefore mutually dependent, nature of imperial (but it would be more appropriate to say regional) power(s), which - not least given the state of the available documentation - the study of the dynamics of the Achaemenid Empire in spaces such as the Caucasus or Central Asia has so far left rather to the margins of the scholarly debate. Taking a cue from an idea recently developed with regard to the study of a similar problem in the context of the Armenian *dahayāuš* by Lori Khatchadourian and, with regard to the process of cultural exploration (and appropriation) of social spaces in the French Mediterranean coast during the Iron Age, by Michael Dietler, the last section of this chapter finally aims to show how even a tool conceived (and not infrequently – literally - produced) at the heart of the political structures of Persian imperial power for the precise purpose of domesticating (*sensu* Foucault) the sociopolitical and cultural landscape of Central Asia such as luxury tableware - a distinctive element of what Khatchadourian calls the «imperial matter» - was unable to escape, to borrow Bleda Düring and Thesse Stek's words, the dialectic of the «practical situations on the ground».<sup>72</sup> This means, after all having being said and done, the impossibility for the imperial devices of extraction and (above all) control to escape the creative (re)use of such «imperial delegates» by the local (subject) population. Net of the hieratic solemnity of a text like *Bisutūn* and of the scenario - the more irenic the more dominated by the figure

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. Henkelman 2013, 535 on the most likely territorial extension of what Jacobs would call a *Kleinsatrapie*.

<sup>71</sup> King 2020. On the homology between the imperial and the satrapal court see among others Brosius 2007, 35-36 and Miller 2010, 854-856.

<sup>72</sup> Düring and Stek 2018a, 10.

of the King - celebrated at Naqš -i Rostam, such dialectic in fact invariably ends up in strengthening those very dynamics of co-dependence, and with it the structural «aspirational» nature of imperial power, which, in the intentions of those who had conceived such devices in the first place, ought on the contrary have contributed in considerably weakening, if not in eliminating it altogether.<sup>73</sup>

## 2. *The Day After Tomorrow*: Central Asia Between Tyrants and Hucksters

The questions surrounding Darius' involvement in the court conspiracy that culminated in the assassination of Bṛdiyā, Cyrus' second son, seem destined to remain unsolved, despite a never-ending debate among scholars.<sup>74</sup> As mentioned above in the context of the evaluation of the information which can be gained from a careful reading of the Bīsutūn inscription attempted in chapter 3, much clearer appears – instead - the capital role played by the Eastern dahayāva (and in particular by those located in what – following Payne and King - we might call the «land of the Afḡāns») in the contest for power after Cambyses' death. At the time when, as Darius does not fail to point out, «the people rose in rebellion and abandoned him [Cambyses]», the future King's father, Vīštāspa, was active East of Ekbatana (in Hyrkania, but according to some scholars, for example Briant, he held military posts in Parthia). This is a fact that, if it is feasible – at least in this specific context - to take Darius at his word, raises the fundamental question, similarly to the one with which this chapter section opened, probably impossible to clarify once and for all, about the Achaemenid family's links with Eastern Irān and, more specifically, with Central Asia.<sup>75</sup> The inscription's wording does not allow us to clarify Vīštāspa's position as we would like to: however, the fact that he was at the head of a contingent of armed men makes the conclusion (almost) inevitable that, even if he did not hold the satrapal office (the formalization of which, assuming it ever took place in the terms understood, for example, by classical sources, cannot be dated with certainty), there is however no doubt that he was entrusted with a respectable position within the ranks of the imperial administration of the time. Whether this office had been assigned to him 1. by Cyrus in the aftermath of the conquest, 2. by Cambyses or 3. by Bṛdiyā at the time of the latter's appointment as plenipotentiary in the East or whether, again, one

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<sup>73</sup> Dietler 2010, 75-130, Khatchadourian 2016, 138-141.

<sup>74</sup> According to DB<sub>p</sub> col. I § 10, Cyrus' younger son had been murdered by Cambyses himself, but there have been many scholars who raised considerable skepticism concerning the reasons we do (not) have to trust Darius' version of the events: cf. Briant 2002, 112-113, 121, Rollinger 2006, 51-53, Vallat 2011. In the opinion of Gundula Schwinghammer (2011, 682-683), the very same fact that, in contrast to the other liar kings (which were not more – and perhaps to a certain extent even less dangerous than Gaumāta), the Magian was neither impaled nor exposed to the public scorn would be a compelling argument supporting the suggestion that Bṛdiyā had indeed been murdered not by Cambyses but by Darius. For his part, Monson 2015, 175 takes as a matter of fact the hypothesis of Darius being a usurper, without however further explain what such a term is supposed to mean within a context of civil war such as that which threatened to destroy the entire imperial polity around the last quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE. See moreover DB<sub>a</sub>, 11-14 and DB<sub>c</sub>, § 10, coherent with DB<sub>p</sub>.

<sup>75</sup> DB<sub>p</sub> col. II § 35.

or all three of the aforementioned rulers (volentes-nolentes) had simply sanctioned a position already held - de facto if not de jure - by Darius' father within his territory of (alleged) origin, it is not possible to say, although, despite the different context in which he lived and acted, the story of an individual such as Udjaḥorresnet makes the last hypothesis anything but implausible.<sup>76</sup>

Given the background of a name such as Vīštāspa, whose associations with the Central Asian territories (and more specifically with Baktria) are too many to be ignored, one would even be tempted to assume that, during his stay in the East as a δεσπότης, Bṛdiyā did his utmost, not least foreseeing a showdown with his brother (think of Cyrus the Younger a century later), to build up a «selectorate» within the circle(s) of the local strongmen.<sup>77</sup> Although intriguing, not least because of the relations between the future King and individuals such as Dādêršiš or Vivāna – which at the present state of research are far from clear and perhaps beyond recovery (but the outcome of the events at least suggests that Darius must have taken good care of his «selectorate» in Central Asia during the years of the civil war, if not before), this is a suggestion that cannot be proven at the current state of our knowledge.<sup>78</sup> The fact remains, however, that the loyalty of the two Central Asian lieutenants proved decisive in securing Darius' victory in the East and, by virtue of the challenge launched, for example, in Arachosia by an individual such as Vahēyazdāta, whose credentials for Cambyses' succession do not appear to have been any worse than those of the future Great King, in securing him the throne, this cannot but raise questions about the reasons for such a political alignment on the part of Dādêršiš and Vivāna.<sup>79</sup> As in turn both Bessos and Spitamenes two centuries later would have learned at their own expenses, the strategic opportunism characteristic of more than one of the representatives among the Central Asian aristocracy explains little (or at least not enough), since even the - far from neutral - narration provided by Bīsutūn suggests that, at the time of Frāda's Margian revolt and

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<sup>76</sup> On this man see most recently Colburn 2020c. On Bṛdiyā's (alleged) regency see recently Thomas 2017, 10-11 with references and discussion.

<sup>77</sup> Holt 1988a, 40 even goes so far as to speculate on a Baktrian background for Darius' family, since, as he argues, his most direct ancestors («if not his own parents») may have been the famous early converts to the new religion (in Holt's opinion Zoroastrianism). At best, this cannot be proven; at worst, it is pure speculation.

<sup>78</sup> DB<sub>p</sub> §§ 38, 45. As discussed in more detail in chapter 3, the fact that Darius calls both «my satraps» says little about the status, and even less about the origin, of the two Central Asian lieutenants. In 522 BCE, in fact, Vīštāspa's son had no authority whatsoever to appoint officers of that rank (or officers tout court). In addition to this it must be remembered that, based on information such as that provided by Hdt. 3.15.2 and Diod. Sic. 9.31.3, it is possible to assume that, already decades before the first attested cases of members of the local élite ascending to the satrapal office (e. g. a certain Bēlšunu under Darius II: cf. Stolper 1985, King 2021, 199-265), the Persian Kings had chosen to entrust «imperial collaborators» (Düring and Stek 2018a) co-opted from among members of the local ruling class with the control of a given territory. See in this regard Klinkott 2005, 29 and Khatchadourian 2016, 5. The hypothesis that Dādêršiš and Vivāna were members of the highest levels of respectively the Baktrian and Arachosian society would help to explain the position they held at least from Cambyses' time: in turn, this ought to be taken as indexical evidence that the satrapal office (xšačapāvān) was, at least in the Empire's formative stage, nothing more than the formalization of a position of personal power. After all, and, as shown recently by Rogers 2018, this is in fact a classic strategy of consolidating imperial authority in a newly (re)acquired territory.

<sup>79</sup> Briant 2002, 107-114, 117-121, Lincoln 2012, 393-398. On Darius' marriage politics see Hdt. 3.88 (to be read against Henkelman 2018b).

Vahēyazdāta's expedition to Arachosia, the line-up of individuals such as Dādēršiš and Vivāna had already been decided, and this despite the fact that Darius' final victory was far from certain at the time. What we do know for sure is that, as soon as he ascended the throne, and perhaps even earlier, closely following Bṛdiyā's death (or murder), Darius hastened to marry his wife, Parmys. Extracting a narrative from the very few - and never entirely reliable - pieces of information we have is not an easy task, and perhaps not even a sound one since the source based on which such an undertaking can be attempted are more or less the (few and biased) same available to the very first decades of Achaemenid research; and nevertheless, there are some points which deserve to be highlighted.

Firstly, there is a surprising unanimity among historiographical sources in claiming that, in Central Asia, the ruling Achaemenid house (perhaps it would be more appropriate to speak of an «extended family», if not of a «clan») enjoyed, throughout the entire history of the Empire, a very considerable prestige, which seems to have remained unscathed substantially until the route of Gaugamela, and in some circles (e. g. Artabazos') even beyond, as we shall see later in this work.<sup>80</sup> As for Bṛdiyā, the precious little that can be gained of his politics in the East allows us to assume that he had taken some measures (for example on the fiscal level) aimed - perhaps, prospectively, from an anti-Cambyses standpoint - at securing him the support, or at least in order to avoid the opposition, of the Central Asian «selectorate».<sup>81</sup> Moreover, against the backdrop of what we know of the internal dynamics of the imperial harēm in the Persian period (and of its former Near Eastern counterparts), it does not seem too far-fetched to assume that Darius' move pursued two closely related goals, on a local (Central Asian) and imperial scale: i. e. to claim for himself the right of succession as he was related (through Bṛdiyā's widow) to Cyrus' family and thus, as a consequence, to present himself to the latter's audience in Central Asia (his «selectorate») as the best party to rely on in the difficult transitional phase that opened with the dynastic crisis following Cambyses' death.<sup>82</sup>

The state of the available documentation does not allow us at the moment to test the plausibility of this hypothesis, nor to clarify whether and to what extent Vīštāspa (who nevertheless certainly was not an unknown and/or powerless player in Central Asia) acted as a broker in favor, if not of his son,

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<sup>80</sup> Cf. Hdt. 8.113 and Curt. 4.13.5, 5.10.2.

<sup>81</sup> Briant 2002, 97-107 and more recently Zarghamee 2013, 398. Nor should the interest of the local families be forgotten in becoming familiarly related with a man of Darius' purchase, for such a policy promised considerable gains in the internal political arena in which these families were enmeshed. As pointed out by Skaff 2012, 238-239 in his study of kinship negotiation across the Táng Empire's borderlands, in fact, a Türk aristocrat «who monopolized external marriage and investiture relations» with the imperial household «made it more difficult for internal rivals to challenge his power».

<sup>82</sup> Cf. DBp § 10, Rollinger 2006, 46. According to Llewellyn-Jones 2019, 537, securing the bride of one of the predecessors on the throne secured its possession to the successor. Moreover, he further argues that the control of the harēm gave the new King a bedrock for claiming imperial overlordship through the physical possession of the patrimony («household», in the Biblical and Latin sense of patrimonium, therefore including the bride) of the previous ruler. On the term harēm (from the Arabic harīm, حريم), literally «forbidden, inviolable place» and the crucial importance of this institution, because such it was, in the courtly society of the Near Eastern Empires see Llewellyn-Jones 2013, 96-122. For the role of royal women at court in a global perspective see most recently Duindam 2016, 87-155.

certainly of his own *factio* during the years of his mandate in Parthia. If one however thinks, for example, of the influence wielded by the Sogdian Apama, Spitamene's daughter and, at the time of her comeback to the upper satrapies, queen mother of the newborn Seleukid Empire, even after years of absence from the territories over which her father held sway until his death, which, however, should not be ruled out at all.<sup>83</sup>

Be it as it may, what is not in question is not only the (*per se* rather self-evident) fact that Darius consistently tried securing the alliance of the Central Asian strongmen, but that he chose to do so by presenting himself 1. as the perpetrator of a tradition of government which 2. had apparently also shown, through one of the most prominent members of its ruling class, a caring eye for the territories East of Ekbatana. These considerations, moreover, compel one in raising a point of considerable importance for a proper understanding of not only the dynamics behind Darius' triumph in the East, but those fueling and underpinning the «time of troubles» following Alexander's invasion of Baktria: namely the fact that, in Central Asia, on several occasions throughout history local powerbrokers have been extremely responsive in understanding the immense potential that a political entity like an Empire was able to provide them with.<sup>84</sup> A prerequisite for the survival of such a structure, however, was political stability, and it is therefore not surprising how quickly individuals such as Dādêšiš chose the candidate (in this case Darius) who seemed best able to guarantee the permanence of the established order on which their position and privileges depended (or to ensure their rise to more prestigious positions against internal rivals whom they were not strong enough to dispose of on their own). Faute de mieux, these considerations provide the most cogent clues 1. against the long-held view of a superficial or null impact of Cyrus' conquest on the socio-political chessboard of Central Asia and 2. supporting the suggestion that indeed an attempt – in the light of Darius' victory, eventually successful – was indeed made by imperial representatives from the very beginning of the Teispid imperial experience in Central Asia, to provide the local élites with sufficient incentives as to secure their participation in the imperial project. An idea of the kind of incentives offered by the Achaemenid rulers to their (would-be) imperial collaborators comes, as mentioned in chapter 3 of

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<sup>83</sup> Engels and Erickson 2016, Ramsey 2016. See most notably Henkelman 2018b, 811, arguing that Irdabama (possibly Darius' mother) might have been a prestigious «part of the old Elamite élite», rich and powerful woman «taking part in the Elamite-Iranian acculturation (Irdabama is an Iranian name)» and therefore «an attractive party for a Persian like Hystaspes». I would argue that a similar scenario is feasible in the Central Asian case as well, and singles out the relevance of landed estates in the formative stages of imperial society not only in Ēlām and more broadly speaking in the heartland (as rightly pointed out in Henkelman 2018c) but in Baktria as well (the case of Vivāna in Arachosia is particularly compelling here in the light of what has been said in chapter 3).

<sup>84</sup> The formula «times of trouble» (Смутное время) comes from Russian history and hints at a period of political crisis which began in 1598 with the death of Fëdor I (Fëdor Ivanovič, the last Rurikid) and ended in 1613 with the coronation of Mixail I from the House of Romanov: see Hildermeier 2016<sup>3</sup>, 281-302. The comparison is not entirely out of place, because in both cases after the death of both a king and the (rather mysterious) murder of one throne heirs, a civil war started at the end of which a new dynasty rose to power, and which provided the local élites with great opportunities for enhancing their own local influence in the face of the imperial court.



this work, from the Bīsutūn inscription (col. III §§ 45 - 47), which can now be re-examined in the light of the evidence coming from the Persepolis archives and, in particular, from the Arachosian dossier recently assembled by Wouter Henkelman and studied in an insightful article by Rhyne King.<sup>85</sup> In the inscription two fortresses (called irmatam in Ēlāmite and didā in Old Persian) are mentioned, named respectively Kāpišakāniš and Ršādā. These were the places where, in the winter between 522 and 521 BCE, one of the decisive clashes between Vivāna's and Vahēyazdāta's troops took place. And it is precisely in the light of the Arachosian dossier, and of the implications, mentioned above, of a document of the importance of the Qandahār tablets published a few years ago by Stolper and Fisher, that the nature and function of these two sites acquire clearer contours: if put together with, on the one hand, the - to date more than 60 - occurrences of official journeys to and from Arachosia attested at Persepolis and the mention of other irmatam such as those coming from the so-called *Aramaic Ritual Texts from Persepolis* (on which more later on), it is clear that both Kāpišakāniš and Ršādā were just two examples of what Henkelman called local administrative nodes scattered across the satrapies' territory.<sup>86</sup> In other words: they were in all likelihood private estates of the local aristocracy (not only ex officio tenures of Persian satraps, as supposed by Briant) transformed into administrative and resource accumulation centers at regional level. Consequently, each of these facilities was equipped with infrastructures able to connect them 1. with each other, 2. with the wider infrastructural network of the satrapy, 3. with the satrapal seat itself (in the case of Arachosia (Old) Qandahār) and, finally, 4. with Persepolis (or Susa), where, not by chance, the objects on which the inscriptions published by Bowman and mistakenly believed to refer to Zoroastrian religious rituals were engraved were in fact discovered.<sup>87</sup> The fact that these objects, as clearly attested by the inscriptions, which in addition to their documentary (most likely fiscal) importance added the intrinsic value of the material from which they were made - a splendid chert of a deep green color -, were produced in situ under the purview of men who look like officials of local branches of the imperial administration and then were transported to Pārsa (think of the kapnuški, probably the «treasure» of Q 2139) suggests that, although these were the personal properties of individuals such as Vivāna (and his peers, lords of e. g. Prkn, Hst and Srk, other toponyms popping up in the corpus

<sup>85</sup> Henkelman 2017a, 102-107, 150-174. See moreover King 2020 for Late Antique parallels as well as 2021, 277-305.

<sup>86</sup> On the objects (mortars, pestles, and in some cases dishes) published by Bowman, see the recent contributions by King 2019 and Schütze 2021, 404-411 (for a detailed overview of the evidence). In the ARTP (e. g. nos. 81, 120, 140) several terms (prkn, hst, srk, i. e. the Aramaic פרכן, הסת, סרך) appear, which Bowman interpreted, erroneously, as referring to the ritual ceremony of the haumā plant beating, while more recent studies (Henkelman 2017a, 102 ff.) clearly show that they were irmatam in every way comparable to Kāpišakāniš or Ršādā.

<sup>87</sup> Henkelman 2017a, 173.

edited by Bowman), such *didā* were also subject to (imperial and therefore centrally regulated) taxation.<sup>88</sup>

Not only that, but the uncommon nature of this obligation – which is made tangible by the materiality of the chert from which these objects were carved - would suggest, as stressed by Henkelman, the existence of a direct link, «of a personal nature», between, on the one hand the local élites owing payment to the treasury (in some of the *ARTP* texts the term *bzy* appears, probably an Aramaic rendering of the Old Persian *bāji-*, i. e. the King's share) and, on the other hand, those in charge of tax farming as well as, finally, with the Achaemenid court, which had demanded this levy and which took care of recording its harvesting.<sup>89</sup> Although in both and administratively and chronologically different context from that of the *ARTP* such as that of the *ADAB*, the mention of a granary in need of repair (byt wsm, בית וסם) perhaps hints at the presence, also in 4<sup>th</sup> century Baktria, of facilities comparable in every respect to those revealed by the Arachosian dossier, which obviously presupposes the existence of a similar system of fiscal obligations and socio-political dependence in place on both sides of the *Hindūkūš* over the best part of Central Asia's imperial history under the Achaemenids.<sup>90</sup> From what has been said, it is possible to deduce that, at the very moment when the new overlords tried to implant in - and adapt to - Central Asia some of the key structures developed in *Pārsa* in order to organize and exploit their conquered territories (thus fulfilling – as already noted by Christopher Tuplin, the two paramount aims of every imperial enterprise, namely those of «extraction and control», not by chance two distinctive hallmarks of the imperial paradigm), the officials appointed in the newly created satrapies could only but resort to the most prominent members of the - territorially extremely fragmented - local society, and the choice was therefore to transform into productive units of territorial exploitation with administrative functions what, before the year «in which the Mede came», were, in the words of Paul Bernard, nothing more than the «personal fiefs»

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<sup>88</sup> Such a hypothesis has been put forward most recently in the lucid reassessment of this evidence by Schütze 2021. Also note King 2021, 287, with more tablets discussed.

<sup>89</sup> Henkelman 2017a, 162, King 2019, 196 and Wu 2020, 602, according to whom it is possible that private property in Central Asia was subject to some form of taxation by the satrapal (and imperial) government. For the occurrences within the corpus of the term *bzy* (sometimes *bz*, Aramaic בַּז and בּוּז) see *ARTP* nos. 91, 92, 112, 116. Cf. again on Arachosia in the Persepolis archives, e. g. PF 1256 and PF 1495 (on the latter see now King 2021, 287). More on the production of the «ritual objects» in Schütze 2021, 412.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Naveh and Shaked 2012, 112 ff. A6 (= Khalili IA 5), l. 8. The content of both this letter and the previously mentioned tablets (as well as of the *ARTP* inscriptions) can be usefully compared with other known material from the Western half of the Empire: Aperghis 2004, 137-148. Structures such as the Arachosian *irmatam* constituted a very effective lever in the hands of the local élites when it came to negotiating their members' level of (in)dependence from imperial power: as Jeroen Duindam (2016, 241) observes, in fact, the hereditary transmission of landed estates - and the infrastructures therein- ought to be seen as the phantom of all forms of government, as it combined power delegation with land grants. Put another way, even once transformed into imperial collaborators, local powerbrokers still held sway - literally – over a stronghold of (and for) personal power which enabled them, if need be, through mutual interaction within what King 2020 has called the network of aristocratic ties to challenge the satrap's power at the very moment they offered it a formal act of deference.

of (constantly competing among themselves in order to exploit local resources) Central Asian notables such as we know them from the Alexander's historians.<sup>91</sup>

It is therefore precisely by virtue of the transformation of these fiefdoms into components of the imperial administrative apparatus (post stations with warehouses and stables for changing horses, tribute collection centers with archives, watchposts, and much more) that the Persian government was able to efficiently organize and functionally connect vast, territorially complex, and inaccessible regions to the wider imperial network of (among others) administrative infrastructures.<sup>92</sup> From this it could be deduced that, apart from the territorial subdivisions postulated by Jacobs, the fundamental unit of Achaemenid territorial control at the (micro)regional level was not so much a (territorially vague) *Kleinsatrapie*, but rather the *irmatam* of the individual who, before the conquest, was nothing more than an Arachosian, Sogdian, Baktrian or Chorasmian «big man» and who, after the conquest, was included, for example, into the hierarchy of the satrap's *bandakā*.<sup>93</sup> To be honest, it ought to be acknowledged that, given the evidence available, this is little more than an assumption, the speculative nature of which could however be at least partly mitigated based on the comparison with what we know, thanks to Diodoros Siculus, about the division of Media into eparchies: Rhagai, today's Irānian Šahr-e Rey is in fact singled out by the historian as a subsection, precisely an eparchy

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<sup>91</sup> Bernard in Henkelman 2017a, 166. On the process of extraction and control as the ultimate goal of any imperial project see Tuplin 1987a. Remarkably, in classical sources (e. g. Strab. 15.3.3) the Greek equivalent of Perseopolitan terminology (*byrt*’, בורתי, *didā*, *irmatam*) is βασιλεια. In support of this argument, i. e. the transformation of former private estates into imperial infrastructures, reference can be made to the archaeological documentation that has recently come to light thanks to some excavations carried out at sites (e. g. Tsaghkahovit, Օսղկահովիտ, North of the Armenian capital Yerevan) dated between the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age: cf. Khatchadourian 2016, 153-194 and Risvet 2018, 181 (focusing instead on the semi-desert steppe area of Naxčivan). These studies have in fact shown that at least some of the most prominent members of the local society were able to control strategically located strongholds in environments comparable to the mountainous areas of Baktria and Arachosia from which they could exert their power over villages (think of Curtius Rufus' *vici*) and groups of (semi-)sedentary shepherds that could number up to 10000 people. Such figures give an idea of the strength and capillary extension of the power, logistical capabilities, and economic purchase of at least the most prominent of the «non-state actors» recruited by the Achaemenids during their expansion into borderlands such as Central Asia and the Caucasus.

<sup>92</sup> Colburn 2017, 874-876: the creation - and subsequent staging (just think of the Marvdašt milestones) - of wider, faster, and more efficient connectivity across significant distances is a key feature of globalization processes: as persuasively argued by the American scholar, some of these features are already discernible, *mutatis mutandis*, in the context of the Achaemenid Empire, or at the very least this can be a useful framework starting from which the Empire as an historical phenomenon might be explored. And since there was at least one crucial road axis running through Baktria, linking it to Ekbatana in the West and India in the East (Rapin and Grenet 2018, Jacobs and Henkelman 2021), it is reasonable to argue that it was thanks to the efforts of the Persian administration if the territories North and South of the Hindūkūš were for the first time in their history entangled in a political system (a conscious choice of scalar expansion then, not entrusted to the mobility and initiative of individuals, as it was most likely the case in BMAC times) that extended far beyond Central Asia itself.

<sup>93</sup> See for example in Hdt. 3.94, which mentions what would seem to be a territorial subdivision of Arachosia (Παρκάτιοι). The name comes close to the one attested for a fortress (prkn, פרקן, perhaps from an Old Persian \*Parikāna or \*Barrikāna: cf. Koch 1990, 136) mentioned both in the ARTP and in the tablets of the archive proper (Persepolis). If the two toponyms were indeed connected, which seems far from implausible, one might argue that what Herodotos mentions as an Achaemenid district created *ex nihilo* by Darius' so-called administrative reform would in fact have developed around (and from) the territory of one of the members of the Arachosian élite, whose «fortress» was transformed into one of the administrative centers of the satrapy. See in this regard Dandamaev and Lukonin 1989, 206-209 and Henkelman 2018a, 245.

of the satrapal territory of Media (εις τὴν ἐπαρχίαν τὴν προσαγορευομένην Ῥάγας).<sup>94</sup> Since, in the Bīsutūn inscription, Darius calls the same place (Ragā), which like Kāpišakāniš was also the stage of a crucial battle against the troops of one of the «liar kings», in this case Fravartiš, as a «district», one wonders whether in this case too we are not dealing with an irmatam from which, once the revolt had been quashed, the Diodorean «ἐπαρχία ἢ προσαγορευομένη Ῥάγας» had eventually arisen, according to the same pattern we see attested in Arachosia thanks to the combined evidence of the *ARTP* and of the terminology employed while referring to Vivāna's fortress.<sup>95</sup> Even more suggestive is the case of Media Atropatene, and this by virtue of a significant unanimity of the sources in attesting that, in this region (located in Northwestern Irān South of the Caspian Sea), the territory was divided into administrative subsets, each independently subject to fiscal levies, the harvesting thereof, like the control of the territory, it is reasonable to think was entrusted to the government of local aristocrats: for example to a man such as Orxines who, according to Curtius Rufus, was «satrap» of a persica gens settled in the territory of Pasargadai and who might therefore provide a fitting example for the pattern suggested by the accounts to be found in the (Graeco-Roman) literary evidence.<sup>96</sup>

It is worth elaborating further on the reasons why both contracting parties to what Briant, with reference to the dynamics internal to the Persian ethno-classe dominante, has called «the dynastic pact», stood to gain from such an organization of the imperial territory (and from the related distribution of (local) power).<sup>97</sup> If, in fact, on the one hand, agreements of such a kind provided the satrapal administration - and consequently the imperial court - with access to territories the direct control of which (through, for example, a massive military presence, as in the case of Alexander's garrisons in Baktria, or through a very ambitious, and in many cases unfinished, urban planning project, as in the case of the Seleukids) would have been extremely costly. On the other hand, it offered Central Asian notables the opportunity of becoming part of a system capable of securing (material as well as, and perhaps even more so - symbolic) resources that could be redeployed locally in order to sustain the development of their territories (and therefore of their power) on a scale previously unimaginable and beyond the reach of any single of these individuals.<sup>98</sup> As already pointed out in the previous chapters, such a scenario helps clarifying why two individuals such as Vivāna and Dādêršiš turned out to be decisive in Darius' (re)conquest of Central Asia; moreover, it supports the suggestion that their appointment dates back at least to the previous generation. Likely originating

<sup>94</sup> Diod. Sic. 19.44.4, a passage which might be compared with what a few paragraphs later (19.95.2) he has to say concerning Idumea, hundreds of kilometers to the West and coming from a considerably different background.

<sup>95</sup> DB<sub>p</sub> col. II § 32: «θᾶτιϋ Dārayavauš xšayaθiya: pasāva hauv Fravartiš hadā kamnaibiš asabāraibiš amuθa Ragā nāmā, dahyauš Mādaiy». Compare DB<sub>e</sub>, § 32 and DB<sub>a</sub>, 59-60.

<sup>96</sup> Curt. 10.1.22, to be compared with Diod. Sic. 19.22.2 and Plut. *Vit. Alex.*, 37.1. See moreover Briant 2002, 736-739.

<sup>97</sup> Briant 2002, 354ff on the «dynastic pact».

<sup>98</sup> This latter point has recently been stressed with particular emphasis by Payne and King 2020 and, starting from a (to my mind illuminating) historical parallel with Late Antique Baktria, King 2020.

from the local aristocracy (comparable, for instance, with the case of an individual such as Orxines), the recruitment of both into the would-be «institutional landscape» of Achaemenid Central Asia must have turned Darius' two future into the main representatives (*bandakā*) of Bardiya's authority in the region (hence Darius' haste to establish or to claim, through Parmys, some sort of continuity with his predecessor's networks and therefore policy, if not genealogy).<sup>99</sup>

The benefit of such a hypothesis lies, among other things, in the fact that it helps to account, based on the reconstruction provided by Sebastian Stride of the Central Asian landscape, for the rationale behind the creation - and progressive expansion over the years - of coordination centers on a supra-regional scale such as Qandahār and Baktra: according to his interpretative scenario, one the fundamental tasks of such settlements might have been precisely to keep an eye on such individuals (and if necessary to punish their insubordination).<sup>100</sup> However, the power vacuum generated by Bardiya's death on the one hand and, on the other, the ensuing civil war (with the consequent revolt of Frāda in Margiana and the invasion of Arachosia by Vahēyazdāta's troops) must have unleashed, not too differently from what happened in the Mongol steppes at the time of Mōdūn, a fierce inter-aristocratic struggle. The outcomes thereof (i. e. Dādêršiš and Vivāna conquering Qandahār and Baktra, together with – and likely thanks to - their «selectorates») are reflected, albeit cleverly reworked, in the very words of Bīsutūn (where the only protagonist is and remains Darius: not by chance, in fact, the account of the campaigns lead by Dādêršiš ends with a peremptory, and telling, «this is what has been done by me in Baktria»).

In 522 BCE, therefore, the situation hung by a thin thread (which is demonstrated, among other things, by the outburst of violence following the rebels' capture, prominently in the case of Vahēyazdāta) and Darius' options were considerably limited.<sup>101</sup> In the event that he wished to secure the support of Central Asia, and thus of a not insignificant slice of the military potential at stake, this man who would-be King had no choice but to ratify the status quo he found on the ground. For what reason, at least from 500 BCE (cf. PF 1287), Dādêršiš vanishes from the record and in his place Irdabanuš (Old Persian \*Arta-bānu, perhaps the Ἀρτάβανος mentioned several times by Herodotos) appears is – and is most likely to remain - unknown.<sup>102</sup> To be cautious, and also by virtue of the fact that this policy seems to have remained unchanged from Xerxes onwards, at least until Bessos, the

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<sup>99</sup> Recently, Reza Zarghamee (2013, 166) has argued, without however providing any cogent arguments supporting his claims, that Vivāna might have been the scion of a local family that claimed to be descended from Avestān heroes. On the reasons behind Darius' marriage with Parmys see Henkelman 2018c, 30.

<sup>100</sup> Henkelman 2017a, 172. At both Qandahār and Baktra central archives were in fact kept, in which scrupulous accounts were preserved of every aspect of local administration (including, of course, tax records).

<sup>101</sup> On the «extreme violence» of the sanctioning measures implemented by the Persian rulers, see the thoughtful and well-documented study by Rollinger 2010.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Hdt. 4.83, 7.10-12, and 7.52-53, to mention but a few well-known examples. In his list of attested Baktrian satraps during the Achaemenid period, Hilmar Klinkott (2005, 506-507) makes no mention of this individual, who nevertheless surfaces from the Persepolis archives as a man of central importance to the Achaemenid government in Baktria.

replacement of Dādêršiš by a member of the closest circle of the Achaemenid «clan» shows in a striking manner the awareness, on the part of the Persian Kings, of the importance of keeping control of the Baktrian main political center(s) as close as possible not only to the environments of the court, but to the innermost networks of the ruling family itself.<sup>103</sup> In fact, if, within the web of relations brought about by the development of the imperial administrative apparatus, the regional autonomy of individual functional units (and of the officers heading them) was not only tolerated, but actively promoted, it is at the same time also true that this could only happen on condition that the power of such individuals (including therefore the right to expand it, for example at the expense of internal rivals) was made strictly dependent on that of the satrap, who for this reason, as the case of Bṛdiyā already shows, was usually a member of the King's extended family. As Rudolf Strootman pointed out in the context of his insightful study of the Hellenistic courts, however, the guarantees offered by such a stratagem were far from solid, since the appointment of a cadet son or brother (even of a half-brother) concealed no smaller, and in some ways perhaps, as the story of Cyrus the Younger shows, even greater, pitfalls than the bestowal of such a crucial office on a member of the local ruling class (or on a favorite).<sup>104</sup> This consideration brings us back to Darius' marriage policy since, as we shall see in the next section, the use of women originating from the local aristocracy (as well as of those belonging to the royal family) as very effective instruments of territorial control (not only, but also, from an economic point of view) seems to have provided the Achaemenids (and perhaps already the Teispids) with a valuable in order to escape the contradictions characteristic of what the scholar has called «the paradox of power».<sup>105</sup> In addition to this, as shall be discussed below, thinking through the status and social role of these women can help to better understand the territorial organization (including the spaces outside the major centers of Achaemenid administrative power, which after all made for the vast majority of the imperial domains) imposed by the kings of Persia on their conquered lands: which is to say, it might shed some further light on another - crucial - aspect of the imperial paradigm and on its underlying dynamics.

## 2.1. Beyond the Satraps: *Cherchez la femme* in Achaemenid Baktria

Let us therefore start again from Darius' marriage of Bṛdiyā's widow. Nothing of this woman is known to us, but what we are aware of about Near Eastern (and more specifically Achaemenids') «harēm diplomacy» during the whole dynastic trajectory, leads to think that she too was, as for example Otanes' daughter Phaidimē, scion of a family of Central Asian notables, and that Bṛdiyā had

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<sup>103</sup> Cf. Briant 1984, 204 and Klinkott 2005, 504-506.

<sup>104</sup> Strootman 2007, 53; 2014, 102.

<sup>105</sup> Strootman 2007, 169; Strootman 2014, 121-123.

resolved to marry her with the twofold aim 1. of cultivating his own «selectorate» in the region and 2. of strengthening the position of his own factio (Cyrus' «clan», recently risen to the top of the new imperial social pyramid) in a territory the control of which the latter considered of vital importance for the reasons we have tried to highlight in the previous pages.<sup>106</sup> In the case of Darius, marrying Bardiya's widow was in his interests for at least two reasons. First, as mentioned above, this allowed him to present himself to his sought-after allies as partaking in a line of genealogical continuity with the «clan» of Cyrus (and this notwithstanding the «Achaemenid» solipsism that pervades a text such as the Bīsūtūn inscription).<sup>107</sup> In terms of imperial policy in the context of the civil war, this choice was perhaps even more compulsory, since at stake was Darius' ability to respond convincingly to the ambitions and claims of other throne suitors, above all Gaumāta, who opposed Vīštāspa's son from a family background of at least comparable, if not greater, prestige.<sup>108</sup> In the context of Central Asia, however, Darius needed to present himself to his audience at least as willing to carry on Br̥diyā's policy (and thus as a guarantor of the latter's agreements with those same powerbrokers whose support Darius now was after), even more than in a genealogical perspective, i. e. as the legitimate heir of Cyrus and Cambyses, an aspect that perhaps not by chance is completely glossed over at Bīsūtūn.<sup>109</sup> In any case, dynastic reasons (in the sense of the more or less artificial construction of an imperial genealogy) do not seem to have been the only ones at work, and it is therefore appropriate to take the context of local politics into closer consideration.<sup>110</sup> For an Achaemenid Great King, in fact, marrying - or in any case welcoming into the courtly harēm - prominent members of provincial families meant weaving precious networks of personal ties that allowed the latter to counterbalance - by fostering inter and intra élite competition - those built, and modelled precisely on the imperial court itself, by the satraps in the territories entrusted to them.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>106</sup> About Phaidimē see the account of Hdt. 3.68.1-3 ff. as well as the remarks in Llewellyn-Jones 2013, 96 ff.; 2019, and Zarghamee 2013, 105. The state of the evidence prevents from knowing whether and to what extent Parmys' family played a proactive role, but this should come as no surprise, since, if the parallel with Kleopatra, Alexander's sister, teaches us anything, the inter-aristocratic competition for the favor of Cyrus' son stationed in the East must have been fierce: cf. Strootman 2016, 220. Nor must this competition have been limited to Central Asia. In the case of the Indian territories, Cameron and Magee (2007, 16) note, for example, that being connected to the king's family was an absolute priority for local notables even in Alexander's time, and the story of the marriage between the Makedonian and Rōxanē is only the best-known case preserved in our dataset.

<sup>107</sup> See Garrison 2011, Jacobs 2011; 2017c.

<sup>108</sup> There is an extensive bibliography on the threat posed to Darius' by individuals such as Gaumāta: see Dandamaev 1974, 108-126, Wiesehöfer 1978, 61-123, Briant 2002, 122-127 and Lincoln 2012, 398-401. Herodotos' use of the term «Achaemenids» is also remarkable, since it points not so much to a *dynasty* as to a family *clan* (φρήτριη, cf. Latin factio). According to Rollinger 2017a, 23, «by avoiding to employ [in his narrative] the decisive argument for Darius himself regarding the legitimacy of his ascent to the throne, namely his supposed descent from the royal family of the Achaemenids, he [Herodotos] removes a cornerstone from his [Darius'] ambitions for legitimacy».

<sup>109</sup> Brosius 2006, 90, Llewellyn-Jones 2013, 115, Zarghamee 2013, 441-444. On Darius' marriage policy and the crucial role most likely played by Parmys in this context see moreover Brosius 1996, 47-64.

<sup>110</sup> On Darius' «invention» of his (and his family's) own tradition see most recently Manning 2021, 49.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Hdt. 1.135, Strab. 15.3.17 and Xen. *Hell.*, 3.1.10: the latter passage provides without question one of the most valuable sources at our disposal in order to understand the dynamics underpinning what Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones (2013, 116) calls the Persian's «harem networking». On the Achaemenid court life see most recently Llewellyn-Jones 2021.

This suggestion appears particularly compelling in a context like that of Bactria, in which the strategy of favoring the internal competition among the members of the local aristocracy made for a tactical advantage favouring the Great King not to be underestimated. For the latter, in this way, was in fact able 1. to further expand his own sphere of influence and 2. at the same time, to limit the discretionality of the satrap within that process of network building which, in the long run, risked weakening the hold of the King himself over the satrapal territory (by means, again, of hollowing out is despotic power over a given «selectorate»<sup>112</sup> These considerations help us to understand why, to take up some of Rhyne King's recent remarks, the Baktrian élite seem to have developed an outstanding talent for juggling the (often conflicting) agendas of the powers which, for various reasons, claimed a hegemonic position in the territories they controlled, exploiting with considerable skill the opportunities offered for example by the creation, through the rise of the Achaemenid Empire, of new socio-political arenas in which a shrewd marriage policy could prove to be an extremely powerful weapon.<sup>113</sup> But there is another aspect that deserves to be highlighted in the context of the present discussion. As recent studies have shown in detail based on a wide repertoire of primary sources, in the Achaemenid Empire women from the most exclusive circles of court society (i. e. not only mothers or wives of kings) were entrusted with tasks of crucial economic and administrative importance.<sup>114</sup> To mention but one of the most striking examples - a point to which we shall return later -, it has been shown that they owned, on a personal basis, (sometimes immense) landed estates in numerous regions of the Empire, which they administered with significant, if not total, autonomy from the court, and which moreover they did not fail to visit on a regular schedule, a fact that the classical sources are consistent in highlighting and that the evidence coming from Persepolis has amply confirmed.<sup>115</sup> In addition, these royal women were even allowed to hold court on their own and held the right to settle legal disputes in the territories under their (or their husbands'/sons'/fathers') jurisdiction.<sup>116</sup> Third, and this is probably the most important aspect among those highlighted so far, we now have abundant evidence that the Achaemenid noblewomen were

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<sup>112</sup> The reason for this is that concubines also bore children who, because they owed their social status to their fathers' role at court, not their mothers', could be appointed satraps. This helps to explain rather convincingly the institution of concubinage as a real courtly position in which, something worth noting, women from non-Persian high stand seem to have been particularly active: see Brosius 1996, 32; 2007, 25-31 and Llewellyn-Jones 2013, 120.

<sup>113</sup> King 2020. It is worth stressing (with King 2021, 23), that, if from the perspective of the king, fostering élite competition «encouraged the maximal investment of personal satrapal resources», from the standpoint of the local powerbrokers this same mechanism «allowed them an avenue to renegotiate their standing in the eyes of the King of Kings» and, I would further argue, within the local and regional network(s) they were enmeshed in (see further chapter 7 on the possible consequences of this dialectic in 4<sup>th</sup> century Bactria).

<sup>114</sup> See for example the very detailed assessment by Maria Brosius (1996) and, more recently, Wouter Henkelman (2010). Worth mentioning are moreover the considerations to be found in Llewellyn-Jones 2013, 98 and Henkelman 2017a, 77.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. Plat. *Alc. I*, 123c-124a, Plut. *Vit. Artax.*, 5.3, and Xen. *Anab.*, 1.4.9. See moreover Brosius 1996, 127; 2006, 95 and Panitschek 2016, 36.

<sup>116</sup> Llewellyn-Jones 2013, 112. Yazdan Safa'i (Paris) is currently working on a dissertation on the royal women's estates and the underlying economy.



placed at the head of an extraordinarily complex bureaucratic and administrative apparatus which, despite being modelled on that of the King (yet another confirmation of the political intentionality behind the setup of the imperial paradigm), was at the same time largely independent of the latter, which implies, among other things, that the scope of these aristocrats' activities as we are able to estimate it based on the Persepolis archives is approximate by defect, since there must have been other archives specifically dedicated to the accounting of estates located beyond the geographical area under the direct purview of the Persepolis bureaucracy.<sup>117</sup>

Once again, the historian is forced to reckon with the uneven geographical (and often also chronological) distribution of the available documentation, so that it is not easy to demonstrate directly that what we are able to observe at work in Pārsa, Babylonia or Egypt was common currency also in the Eastern satrapies in the same (or at least in a fairly comparable) way. However, such a (remarkable) structural limitation is compensated in no small part thanks to some of the fundamental characteristics of the imperial paradigm as discussed above, first and foremost its systemic nature: therefore, when a Persepolis tablet mentions a Gāndhārān noblewoman returning from Susa to her home region accompanied by a respectable escort led, moreover, by officers of rather high rank, it is difficult to resist the temptation to compare her to the most prominent among the aristocrats originating from Fārs (one name for all: Irdabama), and to suggest that, in a context whose contours currently escape us, she had gone to Susa for fiscal reasons, perhaps bringing with her the proceeds of taxation (*kapnuški*) of her landed domains, according the model attested in Arachosia by the *ARTP*.<sup>118</sup> Similar clues, although even more difficult to interpret as they are almost devoid of context, come from 4<sup>th</sup> century Bactria. In a frustule preserved in the *ADAB*, in fact, the (anonymous) wife of what seems to have been a local strongman (according to the document, he held a judicial position,

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<sup>117</sup> Cf. PF 0733, PF 0724, and PF 2035 with the comments in Safa'ī forthcoming, wherefrom the reference to the tablets is taken, as well as Klinkott 2005, 387. The above remark was also valid for the satrap who, being responsible for sectors of the administration as different as the management of finances, the organization of the economy and the activity of jurisprudence, was also endowed with an administrative apparatus distinct, even if in no way entirely autonomous, from that of the Great King. The same phenomenon can be observed at work in the case of the Achaemenid aristocracy in Pārsa (Klinkott 2008) and, by analogy, in other provinces of the Empire, including Bactria. It was not, in any case, a prerogative of the Persian princesses alone: in the Hellenistic world, as Strootman 2014, 106 points out, there are (sporadic) testimonies of homologous structures.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. PF 1550 and, with regards to Arachosia, PF (Q) 2049 (with Wu 2005, 113), King 2019; 2021, 277-288. Such a claim might find further support if, as assumed by Henkelman 2017a, 208-210, Gāndhārā was indeed a satrapy on the same administrative level as Bactria and Arachosia, which would made inescapable to imagine the presence of a local «fortification archive» and therefore a system of land tenure like that attested in Pārsa. Among the other Eastern satrapies mentioned in the Persepolis archives as the place of origin and/or destination (some tablets provide evidence for round trips) of travelers, often on official missions, there are, besides the already mentioned Arachosia, Hidūš (India), Paropamisadae (Gāndhārā), Parthia, Hyrkania and even the apparently much more remote Drangiana (but cf. the more recent results of the excavations at Dahan-i Gulāmān, on which see Genito 2013, 625-626). In addition to this, no less than 10 documents attest that Sogdiana was also firmly embedded within this process: see the full list in Henkelman 2018a, 225 fn. 8.

as suggested by the presence, in line 3, of the Aramaic *rt*, רת, i. e. the rendering of the Old Persian *ratu*, «judge») appears engaging in a commercial transaction on behalf of her husband.<sup>119</sup>

Despite the deplorable state of preservation of this parchment fragment (156 x 86 x 96 millimeters), it is nevertheless possible to argue that the woman had just signed a contract securing her, on behalf of her husband, a given quantity of a produce the exact nature of which is difficult to establish, but which was probably of vegetable origin (a batch of grain?).<sup>120</sup> That said, this is in any respect an important piece of evidence, because it shows how such transactions must have been the norm in the rural context of (late) Achaemenid Baktria: indeed, in the fragment two other qualities of the items handled by the *ratu*'s wife are mentioned a little further on, and based on what is possible to guess from the words employed, one of them seems to be edible. In addition to this, the text mentions the presence of yet another official overseeing the transaction, whose role is unclear, but who may have been the (or a) treasurer of the household that had produced the goods under negotiation in the parchment.<sup>121</sup> The most macroscopic consequence that emerges from these sources is the need, on the part of the historian, to acknowledge also (though not only) an economic rationale behind the inclusion of representatives of the provincial aristocracy within the courtly *harēm*, all the more so since even a source that is anything but benevolent towards both enterprising female figures (especially if coming from an «oriental» background) and the Achaemenid courtly milieu such as classical historiography, cannot fail to note the enormous prestige that these women enjoyed with the King and his lieutenants in the satrapies, as shown for example by the fact that they were admitted to partake to the royal hunt.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 122 ff. A9 (= Khalili IA15).

<sup>120</sup> The Aramaic term featuring in the fragment, *smyn* (סמין, l. 1), is translated by the editors as «drug»: cf. Naveh and Shaked 2012, 125 (but «medicine» and «pigment» are also alternatives). The precarious state of conservation (the document appears preserved almost in its entirety, but the text is eroded in several places) of the parchment makes it risky to assume the existence of one or more plantations of this product (whatever its nature) under the supervision of the wife of the Baktrian *ratu*. However, it is also not possible to dismiss it out of hand by virtue of what we know about other aristocrats active in the territories of the Persian Empire (above all Irdabama and Irdaštuna, on which see in great detail Henkelman 2010).

<sup>121</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 122 f. A9 (= Khalili IA 15) l. 3: the editors translate (hypothetically) the Aramaic expression *zy qdm* (זי קדם) as «in the presence, before the judge», but the precise meaning is far from being established with certainty (according to Schütze 2021, 411, it indicates «a physical presence of the sub-treasurer»). As for *zrtn* (זרתן), i. e. Zartani, the possibility, also destined for the moment to remain speculative, that it is a toponym would allow us to suggest that this was the name of the property or at least of the territory on which it was located.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. Llewellyn-Jones 2013, 96-109. On the participation of concubines in the Achaemenid rulers' hunting parties see *FGrHist* 689 F 1 and *FGrHist* 690 F 27. Once again, the presence of a similar etiquette at the Maurya court could lead one to suspect an Achaemenid heritage (a custom that, in India, lasted until the entire Mughal period (1526-1857), a fact that the Greeks, at least according to Megasthenes' account, interpreted because of the conquest of India by Dionysus: Stoneman 2019, 209). Moreover, even in the Hellenistic kingdoms, as shown by a passage from Polybios (14.11.2-5, cf. Strootman 2014, 182 ff.) it was not impossible for an aristocrat to rise to the rank of court favorite. Returning for a moment to the Achaemenid context, the fact that the Kings' concubines could not have been of Persian origin, as stated by Brosius 1996, 31-32, makes the hypothesis plausible that, lest for Alexander's entering the stage, Apama and Rōxāne would one day have been destined to become part of the *harēm* of Darius III or of one of his successors, since their belonging to the highest levels of Baktrian-Sogdian society is to be taken as a fact in the light of their fathers' place within the Central Asian cadres of the Empire.

Seen from the viewpoint of their (scil. the royal concubines) families, the reward in terms of power and personal (and group) prestige - to be then spent within the power politics of one's own community of origin - that could derive from being included in this mechanism, not too differently from what is known about the Ottoman *devşirme*, must have been enormous, especially by virtue of the fact that, as can be argued from Apama's story, it was very unlikely that, even after the girl's transfer to court, the ties with the land (and enlarged family) of origin would be completely severed.<sup>123</sup> At this point, the question is: apart from the deductions, however stringent, that can be drawn from Persepolis and from the few (and difficult to read) lines of a parchment fragment (probably: *ADAB* A9 is not dated) coming from the Eastern imperial borderlands somewhere in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, do we have further elements to support the hypothesis of the existence, also in Central Asia, of a system of organization of landed property similar to the one that can be deduced from the study of the Persepolis archives, with the related socio-political and economic implications that such an analogy would entail in view of what we now know about the mechanisms that regulated the imperial paradigm?

### 3. *Paradise Lost*: Rural Landscapes in Achaemenid Central Asia

In a recent comprehensive article devoted to a general assessment of the knowledge on the Achaemenid urban landscape (and of its rural hinterland) acquired over the last 40 years thanks in particular to the excavations carried out by French archaeologists (above all Rémy Boucharlat) in various sites in Irān, and in particular at Susa, Persepolis, and Pasargadai, Sebastien Gondet has compiled a valuable catalogue of the distinctive features of the urban model - but we could also speak, in a broader sense, of settlement strategies – developed by the Achaemenids over the territories of their Empire starting from Pārsa which, if used as an interpretative grid through which to filter the data coming from the archaeological studies of the landscape recently carried out on the territory of Baktria and Sogdiana, may prove of enormous usefulness for a deeper understanding of the configuration (and therefore of the functioning) of the - physical as well as anthropic – landscape envisioned by the Persians in Central Asia.<sup>124</sup> According to Gondet, therefore, one of the unmistakable features of the Achaemenid urban planning project - also because, in his view, it would represent a significant break with what is known, for example, in the Mesopotamian context, and in particular at Babylonia - is the constant presence, clearly distinguishable as early as the foundation of Pasargadai, of large open spaces formed by various settlements conceived for housing the inhabitants and hosting the economic-administrative activities of a given site. However, such open spaces were scattered over an area of hundreds of hectares and interspersed with huge green areas (at

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<sup>123</sup> Ramsey 2016.

<sup>124</sup> Cf. Boucharlat *et al.* 2012 and Boucharlat 2020 for previous bibliography on this topic.

the site of Pasargadai, scholars have detected an exemple thereof which alone was no less than 20 acres large, and most likely was not the only one).<sup>125</sup> This «urban» pattern, probably already brought in place during Cyrus' reign at the time of the experimentation which took place around the building of Pasargadai and then were adopted systematically in other «royal foundations», above all at Persepolis, makes it extremely difficult, and probably pointless, according to Gondet, to draw a clear distinction between the city space and the countryside, since it is precisely this morphology, characterized as it is by the predominance of recreational and prestige structures (such as parks and gardens) but also of more distinctively economic ones, as it is the case of orchards and other cultivated plots, that is distinguished by the planned integration of the urban and rural spheres «within a single project to enhance the [Persepolis] plain».<sup>126</sup> Drawing on these empirical evidence, Gondet suggests to identify the peculiarity of the Achaemenid project, in contrast, for example, with the Seleukid period (in which on the contrary the main feature was the stubborn building of «imperial cities» aimed at creating «a dense urban network»), in the promotion of forms of urbanization that the scholar defines as «acentric and dispersed» or «diffuse»: the fundamental goal of what to all intents and purposes appears to have been a model designed to be replicated in other areas of the Empire (a distinctive feature, as we have seen, of the imperial paradigm) was, according to Gondet, the realization of a large-scale land management project.<sup>127</sup> At the imperial level, such enterprise involved the construction of a few, but clearly predominant dynastic settlements within the surrounding landscape: from temples to imperial residences, the latter deliberately conceived as a perpetual building site in order to convey, in the most suggestive manner possible, the sense of control exercised by the King, and by the apparatus he commanded, over the resources of the countries he subjugated and their respective inhabitants. At the satrapal level, as astutely pointed out by Josef Wiesehöfer, the primary aim likely was the creation of several regional centers (the so-called satrapal capitals or, perhaps better, in Gondet's words «imperial foundations» from Baktra to Qandahār) capable of coordinating their respective bureaucracies 1. among themselves and 2. with the Persepolis administration, while at the same time intervening both imperceptibly and radically within the local ecosystems, especially in those regions, such as Eastern Irān or Central Asia, where settlement history

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<sup>125</sup> Gondet 2018, 186 as well as Boucharlat 2020, 65: «Taking Pasargadai as a precedent – the French archaeologist writes – we may see large empty spaces as intended for various types of gardens, perhaps, in case of the largest spaces, even for parks». This pattern can be witnessed in Baktria as well, also concerning the most imposing sites (e. g. in the Dašt -i Qal'ā plain: Havlík 2021, 15. Cf. on the issue of Persian gardens Tuplin 2018b, 480 with previous bibliography as well as Wiesehöfer 2021a. On the produce to be harvested from such a landscape see Henkelman 2021d, Stolper 2021, Henkelman and Stolper 2021.

<sup>126</sup> Gondet 2018, 197; but compare also the conclusions in Boucharlat 2020, 67-68.

<sup>127</sup> Martinez-Sève 2020b, 91 comparing the Achaemenid and the Seleukid strategies of settlement planning.

had developed along significantly different lines than was the case in Babylonia or Egypt, not to mention Lydia or Ionia.<sup>128</sup>

A key instrument in this policy of reorganization of what Matthew P. Canepa has called the «topography of power» should be identified in the satrapal paradises (which must have been present - and of considerable size - in Central Asia too, according at least to an anecdote reported by Curtius Rufus who claims that, during a single hunting party, Alexander and his men killed no less than 4000 animals sheltered in one of these facilities, which the historian places somewhere in Sogdiana).<sup>129</sup> According to the American Iranist, both the properties of Achaemenid notables in the provinces and the satrapal residences (which were build according to one and the same pattern, if Gondet's arguments were sound) «reconfigured the relationship of a region or province to its landscape» and were thus both a powerful means of self-representation of imperial might and a highly effective device for undermining local networks of inter-aristocratic solidarity. Following Canepa, «while their methods might vary, their goal was the same: to systematically subordinate previous sites of power, be they living cities, conquered citadels or significant natural features».<sup>130</sup> One of the greatest strengths of this line of reasoning, in my view, lies in the fact that it makes possible to account for the (almost total) archaeological invisibility of this phenomenon of «paradise spreading» through the imperial lands in a way that is both economical and hermeneutically sophisticated, without at the same time distorting the material evidence available.<sup>131</sup> Given that, precisely because of their different urban planning traditions, territories such as the Caucasus and Central Asia already featured an «acentric» and «diffuse» pattern of settlement distribution, it is reasonable to assume that the Persian administration's preferred strategy in these contexts was to transplant what we might call the *irmatam cum vico* system - which seems to have been the norm from Armenia to Sogdiana - within the imperial institutional (political) economy, precisely by replicating the Pasargadaian and Persepolitan model of «open» urban landscape studied by Gondet, in this way in fact «watering down» the imperial infrastructures within the local ones: or, rather, following the terminology employed by Lori Khatchadourian in her recent study of similar phenomena at work in the territory of the Armenian *dahayāuš*, «capturing» some key functional aspects of the latter by transforming them into

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<sup>128</sup> Cf. moreover Wiesehöfer 2009, 78, Gondet 2018, 205. Remarkable in this context is the fact that Curt. 5.4.6 describes some territories within the Empire as dotted («frequen[te]s») «vici atque urbibus». As pointed out by Briant (see e. g. 2021, 58), «the term “capital” should be avoided», for there was no capital in the modern sense of the word in the Empire.

<sup>129</sup> Curt. 8.1.11-12. On the strategies adopted by the Iranian Empires (including the Seleukids) at least until the Arab conquest in order to build their own topographies of power see most recently Canepa 2018; 2020.

<sup>130</sup> Cf. Canepa 2020, 52. A passage in Xenophon (Xen. *Oec.*, 4.20-25) moreover suggests, among other things, that such flourishing hunting grounds symbolized both the wealth of the territory in which they were built (in the case of Curtius Baktria and Sogdiana, especially the first of the two renown as a land of legendary abundant resources) and the virtues of the satrap which was charged with that given territory's administration. See moreover Allsen 2006, 37-41. On the Achaemenid παράδεισοι as part and parcel of the imperial landscape see most recently Wiesehöfer 2021a.

<sup>131</sup> Bonora 2019 on the Achaemenid «archaeological horizon» in the Zarafšān valley and, for a more general treatment of the archaeological evidence for the Achaemenid Empire in Central Asia see Lhuillier 2018.

«delegates» of the former.<sup>132</sup> If this is true, by virtue of the complete formal (and *functional*) homology dictated by the replicative (systemic) nature of the imperial paradigm, it is easy to understand why, from an archaeological point of view, one is at pain in distinguishing - assuming it is possible to detect them on the ground in the first place - a satrapal estate (with its *παράδεισος*) from that of the local strongmen (for example of an individual such as Oxyartes): it is only the epigraphic documentation (the *ARTP* or the *ADAB* parchments) that allows us to understand the power relations 1. between the individual members of the Baktrian landowning aristocracy and 2. between them and the satrap (or any other representative of the imperial authority).<sup>133</sup>

The case of the sites located at a place known in the archaeological literature as Altin 10 (1 and 2) is a good example of the heuristic potential (to the best of my knowledge still largely to be explored) of the hypothesis outlined in these pages following Gondet's model.<sup>134</sup> Located in the modern province of Ğüzğān (30km Northeast of Āqča), this area is characterized by the presence of two buildings (excavated in the late 1970s by Sarianidi and Kruglikova) of considerable size - 36 x 36 and 80 x 55 meters respectively -, the first divided into two porticoed courtyards, while the second had a large empty space at its center, possibly an impluvium, surrounded by a series of closed rooms.<sup>135</sup> Sarianidi's interpretation (temple structures, alternatively «palaces») struggles to adequately account for the plan of the two buildings. Much more plausible - because it is coherent with the evidence from Persepolis - is the recent reconstruction suggested by Canepa, who sees in Altin 10 (1 and 2) the remains of a more widespread complex of structures (both residential and economic) that ought to be related with «a sub-satrapal or elite residence affiliated with the Empire, perhaps representing a sort of Achaemenid satrapal “toolkit”, if not a direct colonial implantation reflective of the center as at Dahan-Gholayman or Karačamirli». <sup>136</sup> If this were true, we would be dealing with two examples of the «toolbox» used by the Achaemenid administration, in a way that

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<sup>132</sup> Khatchadourian 2016, 68-70, Canepa 2018, 26; 2020, 65. According to Canepa 2020, 52 «any Achaemenid additions or modifications [to a given local «topography of power»] were most often integrated into preexisting palatial districts, which is very similar to their approach to established sanctuaries». In Central Asia and in the Caucasus, instead of «palatial districts» we ought to imagine that Canepa's «additions or modifications» involved places such as Erebuni or the Baktrian irmatam. See also Boucharlat 2020, 68, arguing that the «new imperial “urban” image» as it is reflected at Pasargadai, Persepolis, and Susa «reflects a concept of power different from that which previous Empires sought to convey»; a political motivation might therefore account for the «nature of the disposition and appearance of the royal residences», not only in the heartland, but also in the satrapies (as it was most likely the case with Dahan-i Ğulāmān).

<sup>133</sup> See on this matter Xen. *Cyr.*, 8.6.12, where Cyrus explicitly suggests to his lieutenants to build new *παράδεισοι* in the conquered satrapies as a spatial and political device needed to expand Achaemenid infrastructural power: Miller 2010, 854. *Neh.* 2.8 records a «*παράδεισος* keeper», which most likely was an official title (cf. the discussion in Tuplin 2017a, 626). The fundamental question in the Baktrian context, of course, is if at a place such as Altin 10, the role of «*παράδεισος* keeper» might have been played by the previous owners of the site.

<sup>134</sup> Ball 2019 n. 37.

<sup>135</sup> Lo Muzio 2017, 44-45.

<sup>136</sup> Canepa 2020, 54: different renderings of the two toponyms, respectively, Dahan-i Ğulāmān and Qaracəmirlı. For an overview of the Kura basin under the Achaemenids, with precious multilingual bibliography, consult Fabian 2021, 364-365. See moreover Knauss 2021 on Achaemenid Caucasus.

was both wide-encompassing and flexible, to tap into the economic and productive networks of a territory such as Baktria, in which structures like those found at Altin 10 must have made for the basic elements of spatial organization (and production regimes, as well as sociopolitical articulation in the territory, as it was the case elsewhere in the would be imperial domains, for example in Armenia).

This scenario – it should be stressed here - is not at all in contradiction either with the hypothesis of an anything but ephemeral presence of the Persian Empire in the territories it controlled or with the argument, at the heart of the present study, highlighting the considerable autonomy secured by local élites not despite, but precisely by virtue of, the pervasiveness of Achaemenid infrastructural power, and this for the following reasons. In the first case because, as Martinez-Sève has pointed out, Achaemenid territorial «embeddedness» should be conceived above all in terms of «the staging of an administration at work», a fact that both the Persepolis archive and its counterparts, for example at Qandahār, the existence of which is proven by the two fragments published by Stolper and Fisher, show beyond any reasonable doubt.<sup>137</sup> In the second, because, in Briant's words, the continuity of local declinations of material culture or institutions - including, therefore, the inter-aristocratic power relations structuring the Central Asian socio-political landscape – is not not indexical for the Empire's weakness, but rather a distinctive feature of flexibility (plasticity) and, therefore, a remarkable asset.<sup>138</sup> In other words, it is a strategy consciously pursued in order to tap into local institutions as effectively as possible with the broader aim of pursuing its own (the Great Kings') interests in the matter, which can be summarized, once again, through the formula of «control and extraction».<sup>139</sup>

### 3.1. *Vicis atque urbibus frequens*: Imperial Paradigm and the Rural Archipelago

In a very recent overview of the settlement's history development in the region between the Hindūkūš and the Hišār (i. e. those territories usually referred to in the literature as - Central, Eastern, and Northern – Baktria, plus Southern Sogdiana), the Czech archaeologist Jakub Havlík has drawn up an extremely detailed catalogue of known sites that can be dated, with a satisfactorily degree of plausibility, to the Achaemenid and Hellenistic periods, which he divides into four basic units: 1. (using Gondet's terminology) «imperial foundations»; the best-known examples of which are Baktra, Marakanda, Qandahār and, possibly, Kuhna Qal'a in the plain of Āi Xānum); 2. «residential units» known as tepē (such as Altin 10); 3. «groups of tēpe whose density of concentration» certainly in space and, perhaps, also in time, appears to be more reduced (the numerous - anonymous - sites

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<sup>137</sup> Cf. Martinez-Sève 2020b, 91.

<sup>138</sup> Briant 2020, 39; but see also Ball 2020 on the territories South of the Hindūkūš between the Achaemenids and the Diadochi. Petrie 2020 and Coloru 2021 on Achaemenid Southeast Asia.

<sup>139</sup> Canepa 2020, 58.

identified by French archaeologists around centers such as Kul'tepe II or Qira Qira in the Surxondaryo valley) and, finally 4. «sites identified based on surface ceramic finds, from which it is, however, extremely difficult to formulate hypotheses regarding the characteristics of the settlement in question».<sup>140</sup> Such a regional study provided by Havlík is based on the subdivision of the territory of Baktria into four macro-areas, according to a pattern developed in 1998 by Jean-Claude Gardin and his research group at the time of the archaeological exploration of Eastern Baktria. Proceeding counterclockwise, starting from the Northeast, they can be described as follows. 1. The area delimited by the Eastern tributaries of the Oxus: the Vaḥš, the Kyzylsu, and the Kafirnihan, 2. to the Southeast, the plain irrigated by the Oxus and its tributaries on the Western bank: the Rostāq, the Kokča, the Qundūz-āb, and the Tāleqān, 3. to the Southwest, the area of the great Baktrian oases to the South of the Oxus: Baktra, Tāšqurgān, Āqča and, finally, 4. in the Northwest, the Surxondaryo up to the slopes of both the Kōytendağ and the Boysuntov in the West as well as of the Hişār even further North, heading towards Sogdiana.<sup>141</sup> The comparison between the previous archaeological literature (including – most notably – the huge amount of evidence collected by Soviet scholars) and the more recent results of the surveys carried out (especially in the Surxondaryo) by the Czech mission led by Ladislav Stančo allowed Havlík to set up a database which, together with the one elaborated by now almost two decades ago (and only limited to the Surxondaryo valley) by Sebastian Stride as well as the recent - and radically revised, updated, and corrected - catalogue included by Warwick Ball in his monumental *Archaeological Gazetteer of Afghanistan*, provide researchers with the most reliable dataset available today for the purpose of tracing a typology of Achaemenid settlements in Baktria and Sogdiana, from which then to put forward some hypotheses concerning the functioning of the imperial paradigm in such a crucial matter as the organization of the rural territory of the (so-called Great) satrapy.<sup>142</sup> A caveat before a discussion of the most significant results of this impressive collection and systematization of archaeological data is, however, unavoidable: Afġān geopolitical history over the last 40 years, the radical transformation of the rural landscape in Uzbekistan since the 1950s and the not always flawless excavation methodology (not to mention the material quality of the publications, especially as far as photography is concerned) characteristic of Soviet research confront scholars with three considerable hindrances, the most obvious effects of which can be summarized as follows.

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<sup>140</sup> Havlík 2018, 43-46. My sincere thanks to Dr. Marie Tauchmanová, whose patient translation work allowed me to access this important Master Thesis, originally written in Czech, a language which unfortunately I do not master. On Kul'tepe II see Stride 2005 III n. 545, and for a description of the site of Qira Qira see Stride 2005 III n. 597.

<sup>141</sup> Havlík 2018, 45; 2021, pointing out (e. g. p. 15) that in Eastern Baktria, for example, during the Achaemenid period only 7 sites (8.9%) are bigger than 4 ha, while almost 40% do not exceeds 0.47 ha. Cf. its precedent in Gardin 1998 as well as, again from an archaeological perspective (although mainly devoted to the Hellenistic period) Martinez-Sève 2020c (on Afġān Baktria), Stančo 2020 (Southern Uzbekistan), and Lyonnet 2020 (Sogdiana).

<sup>142</sup> See Stride 2005 III and Ball 2019, 558-559.



1. The - sometimes insurmountable – toponymy confusion (just think of the different transliteration criteria adopted to render the local toponymy), which often makes it very difficult, if not impossible, to understand whether two homonymous sites actually constitute two distinct objects or not (and satellite mapping technologies do not always help to settle the matter).<sup>143</sup> 2. The often deplorable (especially, but not only, in the case of Afġānistān: think of Āi Xānum) preservation state of most of the sites themselves (this is especially true of small rural settlements): the latter, combined 3. with the systematic lack of adequate stratigraphic analysis, especially in Soviet publications, prevents a precise dating of most of the sites we know of. A resounding case in this regard is precisely – despite its being an unavoidable research tool in this field - Ball's *Gazetteer* in which, with the exception of Āq Kupruk and Hazār Gusfand, all 91 Achaemenid sites known to date in Afġān territory (70 of which are located North of Hindūkūš, thus likely under the administrative purview of Baktra) are systematically dated «between the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE», without any further chronological partitioning, which of course makes it arduous to establish more fine-grained evolutionary patterns over time.<sup>144</sup> That having been said, the data collected in these datasets provide extremely interesting information on the Achaemenid territorial organization of the regions under study in these pages. For, on the one hand, they seem to provide solid arguments highlighting the consistent application of the urban model described by Gondet, and thus providing further credibility both to Canepa's deductions regarding the crucial function of the «(sub)satrapal» paradises as instruments at the disposal of the imperial government to reshuffle the relationship of a given region or satrapy with the surrounding landscape and to Henkelman's conclusions regarding the function of local strongmen's estates as organizational nodes across the satrapal territory (à la Vivāna). On the other hand, they however highlight with no less prominence (to take up Johanna Lhuillier's terminology), the tenacious persistence of a «diffuse» and polycentric settlement pattern, the latter already characteristic of the Early Iron Age (18 of the 36 Baktrian sites belonging to this period - Yaz II - catalogued by Ball are identifiable as still inhabited during the Achaemenid epoch) and moreover they look as if based on what – following in the footsteps of Ladislav Stančo - Havlík identifies as a pattern structured around

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<sup>143</sup> This often translates into, sometimes significantly different, estimates of the total number of sites present in the individual (macro)areas under study: while Havlík 2018 thus counts no less than 93 Achaemenid sites alone in the Baktrian territory South of the Oxus (assuming however a maximum number of 114), Ball's catalogue stops at 70. And in the case of Surxondaryo, the 51 Achaemenid sites catalogued by Stride 2005 III are contrasted by the 56 sites reported by Havlík: in this case, however, the difference is less significant and is largely due to the progress of research (e. g. in the Sherabāddaryo oasis: Stančo 2019) in the time between the setup of Stride's catalogue and the documentation underpinning Havlík's database.

<sup>144</sup> As mentioned, the only two exceptions are nos. 46 (Āq Kupruk, along the course of the Balḡ-āb, in a strategic elevated position, probably guarding this stretch of the river and the four smaller sites below) and 422 (Hazār Gusfand), to the East in the Badaḡšān mountains, also a strategic position by virtue of the mines of precious stones (especially of, but not limited to, lapis lazuli) in the region, both dated around 600 BCE and therefore, at least in theory, symptomatic of the Achaemenid geopolitical design aimed at securing, through the creation of (or even the transformation of local settlements into) a few strongholds, carefully scattered throughout the territory of the (at the time still largely in statu nascendi) satrapy to be established, the crucial nodes for the control of the landscape's resources: cf. moreover Noori *et al.* 2019.

a major center insisting on a variable number of micro-productive units (farms oriented towards agro-pastoralism, as already observed by Pierre Leriche) scattered across the surrounding countryside at varying distances from the main settlement. This is a pattern which, as Havlík further points out, seems to have been incorporated within the Achaemenid institutional economy, thus further supporting Canepa's suggestions concerning Altin 10 (1 and 2).<sup>145</sup>

Among the most notable consequences of such patterns is the fact that some of these sites would have benefited, for reasons of strategic interest (ranging from the control of specific important transhumance routes to the securing of links between the territory of certain key valleys for the control of the fundamental North-South carrefour between Baktria and Sogdiana), from massive investments, in turn responsible for their territorial expansion as well as for an exponential growth in the number of settlements in areas the ecology of which had previously led local communities to rely on population strategies mainly dictated by different ranges of mobility.<sup>146</sup> Symptomatic in this sense is the scenario which can be reconstructed in the territories of Shurchi and Denov, in the upper Surxondaryo: here the site of Kyzyltēpe, to which we shall return in the next chapter, appears to have been by far and wide the greatest beneficiary of imperial infrastructural attention, and one of the driving reasons for this choice is probably to be sought, similarly to the case of Ṭawāwīs described by Naršaḥi and al-Bīrūnī, in the positioning of Kyzyltēpe along the ecological edge of several territories (*sensu* Stride) that constituted, by virtue of the different subsistence strategies characteristic of the local population, an area with a very high «state escape rate». At the same time, however, they were also located at the heart of one of the crucial satrapies of Achaemenid Central Asia, a fact that made this space (the apparently irrelevant Miršade oasis) a special watch (and therefore a privileged target) by the satrapal administration.<sup>147</sup> Of particular relevance for the suggestions developed in the preceding pages are in particular the results of the analysis carried out by Havlík on the 69 sites (48 of which certainly datable to the Achaemenid period) belonging to the third region of his catalogue: 15 in the oasis of Tāšqurgān, 1 in that of Šebergān, and 32 in that of Balḥ; the latter figure, it should be stressed, provides substantial backing to the model developed by Sebastian Stride regarding the «ecological hierarchy» (and therefore its related «politics») of the Baktrian oases, with that of Baktra standing out for its prominence and importance, which consequently must have been made it the

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<sup>145</sup> Cf. Ball 2019, 561-562 (maps 4 and 5). For a description of such a pattern see Havlík 2018, 101-102, Stančo 2018 as well as the remarks put forward some years ago by Pierre Leriche (2007, 129) concerning the marked agro-pastoral component of some of the major Achaemenid settlements in the Surxondaryo (as it is most remarkably the case with Kyzyltēpe, on which see most recently Wu 2020, 606-608 with the critical remarks in Lyonnet and Fontugne 2021, especially when it comes to the chronology of the site, which however might actually be taken as a hint concerning the existing of more ancient patterns of landscape exploitation underpinning the establishment of Achaemenid power, as suggested in this and the previous chapter).

<sup>146</sup> Havlík 2018, 127.

<sup>147</sup> Havlík 2018, 101-102.

object of particular attention on the part of the imperial administration: this is all the more understandable at the time when, following both Cyrus' conquest and Darius' rise to power in the aftermath of the civil war, the imperial paradigm in Central Asia was yet in its embryonic stages.<sup>148</sup>

The case of Tāšqurgān is also extremely indicative: similarly to the site of Kyzyltēpe in the Surxondaryo, also in this very important oasis East of Baktra (and which figures prominently in the *ADAB* collection, as it shall be explored in more detail in chapter 7), the preferred settlement pattern seems to have been one centered on a small number of larger settlements (Ajatantēpe or Burattēpe), stretching across an area of approximately 15 acres and, at least in the case of Ajatantēpe, protected by a 60 x 60 metre wall around which – consistently with the model of a «broad rural landscape» developed by Gondet in the case of Persepolis - rural settlements were found very much similar to the Kyzylča (at least 11 of which have been detected, but it is possible that originally there was more of them) which grew around the orbit of the (micro)regional gravitational center, namely Kyzyltēpe itself.<sup>149</sup> As for the territory around Balḥ, it is not by chance that it has the largest number of medium-to-large settlements (from Mundigaktēpe to Altin Dilyar, passing through the two fortifications of Bārkhāh and Čašma-ye Šifā), with the last two seeming to have been built with the precise intention of guarding the main gateway, from North and South, to the oasis' heartland, and thus to the satrapal seat itself as well as, for example in the case of Altin Dilyar, the gateway to the semi-desert steppes between the Balḥ-āb delta and its junction with the Amudaryo.<sup>150</sup> However, such centers appear to have been the exceptions rather than the rule (building on Canepa's terminology, the nodes in the fabric of the oasis' topography). Far more widespread - and in accordance with Gondet's model, suggesting therefore the systematic application of a pre-existing urban pattern to a territory which, for the reasons discussed in the previous chapter, lent itself particularly well to such an experiment - appear to have been settlements of considerably smaller size, which Havlík has termed «multifunctional urban sub-units» (a definition which fits rather well with that of the Arachosian *irmatam* recently studied by Henkelman and King), often interspersed with wide spaces - sometimes as wide as 3 or 4 km and (remarkably) within the territory of the oasis itself – dotted by apparently uninhabited areas which however, following Sebastien Gondet's reconstruction of the (sub)urban landscape of Persepolis, is not unreasonable to think that were occupied by hunting grounds (παράδεισοι), gardens or other kind of orchards oriented to the production of an agricultural surplus

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<sup>148</sup> Havlík 2018, 82-83. Cf. moreover Stride 2005 I, 417-419.

<sup>149</sup> Cf. Ball 2019 nos. 65 e 141. On the Kyzylča see Stride 2005 III n. 258 and the relative bibliography.

<sup>150</sup> Ball 2019 nos. 38 (Altin Dilyar), 186 (Čašma-ye Šifā), 745 (Mundigaktēpe), and 2013 (Bārkhāh), as well as the description provided by Havlík 2018, 83 of the settlement patterns characteristic of the oasis.

aimed (among other things) at supplying the satrapal (or – when it happened to visit Baktria - the royal) court – as well as its, highly expensive, table(s).<sup>151</sup>

Reassessed in the light of the macro-regional framework that can be deduced from the data collected by Stride, Havlík, and Ball, the hypotheses formulated by Canepa regarding the function of sites such as Altin 10 (1 and 2) gain further plausibility, all the more so if one considers that exactly the same settlement dynamics were detected, albeit on a smaller scale than at Kyzyltēpe, in other neighboring sites in the upper Surxondaryo valley, from Dunjotēpe (which, like Ajantēpe, also had fortifications) to Novruztēpe.<sup>152</sup> According to the conclusions reached Jakub Havlík at the end of his discussion of the excavation data he collected and thoroughly analyzed, leaving aside a (limited) number of major centers, from Baktra to Marakanda and Qandahār, the rural landscape of Achaemenid Central Asia seems to have been distinguished by the widespread presence of landed estates characterized by a political-administrative center of variable size, but rarely exceeding 15 acres, around which settlements of much smaller size gravitated. 73% of the catalogued dataset (135 units out of 185), do not exceed two acres in size: such data, it should be pointed out, frame into a new light Curtius' remarks concerning the vici the Baktrian strongmen disappeared into once they deserted Bessos in the fateful 330 BCE. Interestingly, and coherently with the scenario we have suggested in the previous chapter, Havlík proposes to interpret these sites as «transmission nodes within a wider commercial or administrative network».<sup>153</sup> Translated into the terminology of the imperial paradigm developed at (and for the administration of) Persepolis, this definition indicates nothing more (but nothing less) than the landed estates of the local aristocracy, which the Achaemenid conquest had transformed, in the words of Clifford Ando, into «constitutive outsides» of the model of territorial extraction and control underlying the political and economic management of the Persepolis plain (and before that of the territory around Pasargadai).<sup>154</sup> Too precise to be simply the result of pure chance, the structural homologies between the organization of the rural landscape of Pārsa and that of the Central Asian provinces also imply a homology of socio-political relations at work on the ground. Just as the coincidence of vocabulary and content between the Qandahār and Persepolis tablets makes the hypothesis of the presence of what Stolper and Fisher call an «Arachosian Fortification Archive» almost a certainty, the similar coincidence of settlement patterns and typology strongly suggests the existence of economies parallel to that of the court (of the royal as well as of the satrapal one) in the

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<sup>151</sup> Havlík 2018, 86-87, Gondet 2018, 196-197, Tuplin 2018b. Further discussion of the evidence coming from Persepolis (which might well have provided the model for the «institutionalization» of the Baktrian landscape) in Boucharlat 2020, 59-65.

<sup>152</sup> See Stride 2005 III nos. 528 (Novruztēpe) and 600 (Dunjotēpe), as well as the already mentioned considerations developed by Matthew P. Canepa (2020, 52-58).

<sup>153</sup> Havlík 2018, 119-122.

<sup>154</sup> On the concept of «constitutive outside» see Ando 2017a.

Baktrian countryside under the Achaemenids, and in the management of which – moreover – individuals such as Rōxanē and Apama (but also the anonymous wife of the ratu mentioned in *ADAB* A9 or Spitamenes’ life companion and would-be assassin) must have played a role in every way comparable to that of the more famous Irdabama or Irdaštuna. Among other things (including their baffling beauty), all the above might help to explain the attractiveness of these princesses in the eyes of both the Achaemenid Kings and, centuries later, of the Makedonian conquerors.<sup>155</sup>

It is therefore difficult to disagree with Pierre Briant when he states that, although 1. the archaeological evidence gathered in recent decades, at least since Stride’s studies, 2. the geographical distribution – and 3. the morphology – of the sites known to date compel us to believe that both the latter two are the result of a massive and capillary imperial planning project, at the same time there are no less compelling reasons to argue that «the Achaemenid conquerors did not treat the Bactrian past as a tabula rasa. Even where they created new centers, they certainly needed to rely on local elites and to call on local technicians».<sup>156</sup> Consequently, both the local rooting and the diffusion of the imperial paradigm cannot be separated from its appropriation and reuse (to the advantage of interests sometimes, but not always, convergent with those of the imperial administration) of the stakeholders of the Baktrian «aristocratic network» studied, albeit along a different chronological span, in a recent – and illuminating – article by Rhyne King.<sup>157</sup> This assumption does not lose its validity, and on the contrary, it can even provide further ground for exemplification supporting it, if we turn from the micro-local context to the supra-regional one of the «network of networks», most strikingly embodied by the road system, which a growing number of scholars, from Monica Smith to Henry Colburn via Wouter Henkelman, have recognized as a distinctive feature of pre-modern Empires in general and of the Achaemenid one in particular.<sup>158</sup>

#### 4. All Roads Lead to Baktra

In his catalogue (clearly reminiscent of Homeric precedents) of Xerxes’ army marching towards Greece on the eve of the second Persian invasion of Europe, Herodotos mentions a certain Vīštāspa, son of Darius and Atossa, who is said to have held the prestigious position of commander-in-chief of the Baktrian unit (this was, incidentally, the same office entrusted to Bessos at Gaugamela) within

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<sup>155</sup> Brosius 1996, 130, Henkelman 2010. On the implications of the Qandahār tablets see now King 2021, 274.

<sup>156</sup> Briant 2020, 34 (emphasis in the original). See moreover Stride 2005 I, 205, 297-301 and Briant 2017a, 51.

<sup>157</sup> King 2020.

<sup>158</sup> Smith 2005, Colburn 2013, Henkelman 2017a, 109-113, Henkelman and Jacobs 2021 and especially the forthcoming monograph on the topic by Wouter Henkelman, suggestively entitled *This Wide Earth with many Lands in it*, which shall be devoted to a study of *Satrapal networks, roads, travel and transport in the Achaemenid empire*.

the Great King's army.<sup>159</sup> Although there is no way of establishing whether this Vištāspa was actually satrap of Bactria at the time and, if so, whether he was a direct successor to the Irdabanuš mentioned in the Persepolis archives, it is nevertheless clear that the bestowal of such a position on a brother of the ruler only stresses the active involvement of the closest circle of the imperial family in the internal affairs of the region.<sup>160</sup> As the previous section has tried to show, the most immediate result of this involvement seems to have been a wide-ranging project of infrastructural investments (some of them, like the provincial archives, can be guessed from the Persepolis documentation, others, like the post stations or the παράδεισοι, can be deduced from the results of archaeological research, especially if devoted to the study of the rural landscape), the general goal of which, to quote a recent opinion by Henkelman, can be identified in a long-term strategy - perhaps planned as early as Cyrus, certainly detectable at the time of Darius - aimed at «weaving» the Eastern satrapies «into the tapestry of the Empire».<sup>161</sup>

The overarching aim of this section is to further support the conclusions reached in the previous paragraphs by adding examples as to shed additional light on some of the salient features of this «weaving» process as it has been described by Henkelman. Among its main goals, once again, there is to show, moreover, how - and with what consequences in socio-political terms -, during Darius' reign, the systematic application of a full-fledged method of government (the imperial paradigm) contributed in changing the (institutional as well as physical) landscape of Bactria, to the point of transforming a land conquest on spear's tip into the first of those «imperial spaces» which, according to a recent argument convincingly put forward by Lauren Morris, made for the prehistory of the rise of Bactria itself, in the post-Seleukid era, to the rank of an wide-ranging Central Asian Empire - and of its subsequent expansion, starting under Demetrios I, into the Indian territories (an expansion that in itself is difficult to imagine as having taken place *ex nihilo* or *in vacuo*, but which it is reasonable to believe made use, not unlike the case of Alexander, of infrastructures and resources that preceded the rise to power of Euthydemos' house).<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Hdt. 7.64. See moreover Hdt. 9.31-32, a passage in which the historian informs his readers about the way in which similar contingents were recruited and about the organization of the units that were then deployed in battle. The importance of these ethnographic overviews lies in the fact that they allow - or could allow - us to deduce some details about the territorial order of these squadrons' native territories (or at least of those areas in which they were recruited), since it was from this subdivision that the conscription of troops was structured on both the satrapal and the imperial scale: cf. Briant 2002, 748-750.

<sup>160</sup> Klinkott 2005, 506-507, for example, does not mention this Vištāspa at all in his catalogue of Baktrian satraps known from the (primary as well as secondary) written evidence.

<sup>161</sup> Henkelman 2017a, 169. On this issue see once again some fundamental contributions by Pierre Briant (2012; 2018b).

<sup>162</sup> Morris 2019a as well as Rollinger 2023 on the paramount importance of the Achaemenid precedent to understand other imperial developments in the lands the Persians once ruled (thus including Central Asia). For a chronology of these events see Coloru 2009, 175-208, while more specifically on the figure and the reign of Demetrios I see Marcinkiewicz-Joseph 2016 and Glenn 2020b, 87-106. Degen 20219 on the Near Eastern imperial context of the ideology of the «spear-won land», usually regarded as a hallmark of the Hellenistic world.

In particular, the construction and the steadfast, capillary development of a complex infrastructural network such as the road system appears to have played a crucial role in this process of entrenchment of Persian infrastructural power since, thanks to the integration of the Central Asian territories within a system that was not only organized on an institutional basis (e. g. through post stations or the dislocation at strategic places of facilities such as the granaries) but also recognizable as such by both locals and individuals from other satrapies, the Achaemenids were able, in the course of their hegemonic trajectory in Central Asia, to mobilize a volume of natural and human resources on a scale hitherto unknown, in effect claiming for themselves the role of leading actors in the process of building a homogeneous and functional institutional landscape across all the territories of the upper satrapies.<sup>163</sup> Even in this case, and despite the unquestionable level of sophistication of such an apparatus, its exquisitely bureaucratic orientation, and its systematic nature (Henkelman explicitly speaks of a «matrix»), which presumes its repetition in a measure as similar as possible to the structure developed at Persepolis precisely in order to preserve the internal coherence of the apparatus itself, it is nevertheless important to keep constantly in mind the need, an indispensable premise for its success, for the imperial paradigm to adapt to local contingencies (once again the «practical situations on the ground»)<sup>164</sup> Far from providing an example of «tolerance» on the part of the Achaemenid government, this characteristic - which we have previously defined as one of strategic adaptation – ought to be interpreted, on the contrary, as a precondition for the perpetuation of imperial power itself, in a dialectical process - not without its contradictory dynamics - that Lori Khatchadourian has graphically defined as «the satrapal condition» or which, following Düring and Stek, one might call the «patchwork-like» nature of ancient Empires.<sup>165</sup> And – just like the devil of Warburg’s famous motto - it is precisely in the characteristic details of the dynamics underpinning such dialectic that lies the opportunity (or what we might call the «political affordance»), at least for the most influential members of the Central Asian élite, to turn to their own advantage the rules of a system originally designed to subject them to the organizing will of the imperial project (in Darius’ words, «pasāva dahayāuš manā abava»)<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Cf. Briant 2012, Henkelman 2017a, 77; 2018a, 227 as well as Wu 2020, 600-605 on the internal coherence of the imperial institutional landscape and its recognizability as such by the subjects, as well as on the aims underlying the implementation of a project of this magnitude, lucidly unmasked by Tuplin 1987a, 109. Imperial administration – according to him - is concerned primarily with two things: the accumulation of profit for the benefit of the ruling power and the maintenance of control (from which stems the possibility of further exploitation).

<sup>164</sup> Henkelman 2017a, 108.

<sup>165</sup> Khatchadourian 2016, 1-11, Düring and Stek 2018b. See moreover Bang *et al.* 2021 I, 288-317.

<sup>166</sup> From a theoretical point of view, one could argue that the imperial paradigm studied by Henkelman reflects the distributive aspect of power, i. e. the power wielded by A over B. However, the ability of local élites to pursue their own interests not only by evading Achaemenid power, but even by modifying the latter’s functioning mechanisms, highlights the collective (or functional) aspect of power, i. e. the ability to achieve a certain result vis-à-vis an external entity and/or on the natural environment itself through cooperative strategies, for instance by means of the instruments offered by the «aristocratic network» that Rhyne King has recently discussed not by chance starting from a Central Asian case study (2020, 259-263). See moreover in this regard Mann 1986, 6-10.

What remains of the present section, and to an even greater extent the next one, is therefore devoted to the study of some of the strategies available to members of the Baktrian aristocracy in order to preserve (and if possible further expand) their spaces of autonomy (Mischa Meier's *Handlungsräume*) within the framework dictated by the structures of the imperial paradigm, which, like a scenic backdrop, will therefore at the same time be the object of further study in some of its most evident manifestations. Given the - at least in theory (Garrison's «hoped-for-fantasy») - totalizing and «panoptic» nature of the apparatus of extraction and control set up by - and reinforced through - the imperial paradigm, the ability of Baktrian powerbrokers to preserve, albeit conditional, margins of autonomy should by no means be taken as a foregone conclusion. But since we know they succeeded in the enterprise, the backdrop which made such an exploit possible are in further need to be properly contextualized and understood.

#### 4.1. «The imperial paradigm plus the paving of the whole country». Connecting the Satrapy

As was argued some years ago in an important study by Monica Smith, states (but – in her opinion - the same applies to all other human socio-geographical systems) can be analyzed as resource acquisition networks within which territories and their boundaries are porous, permeable, flexible, and selectively defended.<sup>167</sup> One of the crucial aspects of such a definition has to be seen in the ability of such human socio-geographical systems (from villages to Empires) to connect a point on the map with other points within a given territory, and the latter with further nodes in the landscape within a polity (at least nominally) under the authority of the same government. In a recent paper, Henry Colburn has shown in detail the heuristic potential of systematically applying Smith's model to the study of the dynamics underpinning the working practices of Achaemenid imperial administration.<sup>168</sup> In the case of Baktria and Sogdiana, the results of the most recent surveying activity carried out by several international archaeological missions around the foothills of the Kōytendağ have brought to light traces of sites, such as Maraztēpe or Sultankultēpe which, according to Havlík's interpretation, may have fulfilled the function of post houses or garrisons positioned to guard an important road axis that ran through the entire Surxondaryo valley. The recent discovery of other sites, this time from the Hellenistic period (from Kurganzol to Uzundara) helps to illuminate the impact of the construction

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<sup>167</sup> Smith 2005, 835 (note the analogy with the archipelagic model developed by Thomas Barfield in numerous studies and which has recently been resurfaced, with appropriate modifications, in several contributions within the *Handbook* edited by Tamar Hodos in 2017). For an assessment in analogous terms of imperial borderlands (also of those within) polities see Parker 2006, Cherry 2007, and Versluys forthcoming as well as the multi-sited and comparative study by Weaverdyck *et al.* 2021. Foundational in this regard are Rollinger 2021c; 2023.

<sup>168</sup> Colburn 2013. In Colburn 2017, 881 the American archaeologist explicitly speaks of «connectivity» to describe the main features of this phenomenon. See moreover Henkelman and Jacobs 2021, Henkelman forthcoming.



and constant expansion of an infrastructure such as the Achaemenid road system (and of its successors) on the control strategies applied to the Central Asian satrapies.<sup>169</sup>

As Pierre Briant has repeatedly pointed out, the mere attestation in the Persepolitan archives of travel orders issued by an individual such as Irdabanuš implies per se the existence of a system of post stations similar in every way to the «royal road» described by Herodotos (Hdt. 5. 52-54): a hypothesis that has recently found documentary confirmation thanks to the publication of the *ADAB*, a section of which (the so-called group «C», labelled by the editors as «lists of supply») provides first-hand evidence of the existence of precisely that «network of networks» studied by Henkelman based on the Arachosian evidence. Such a multilayered web, according to him, ought moreover to be interpreted as one of the most compelling hints at the widespread presence of the imperial paradigm on both sides of the Hindūkūš.<sup>170</sup> This aspect had not escaped the attention of two among the most careful observers (though not always reliable narrators) of the Achaemenid world such as Ktesias and Herodotos: and although the earliest Achaemenid primary documentation does not date back any further than year 13 of Darius' reign (ca. 509 BCE), there is no reason, at least this time, not to give credit to the author of the Περσικά when he claims that, already in the earliest years of the Empire, it was possible to reach Baktra from Pārsa with relative ease. As for Herodotos, the statement that, at the time of Xerxes' expedition against Greece, provisions for the army were brought «from every corner of Asia» is very likely to allude, on the model of what we know today thanks to the *ADAB* parchments, to the widespread diffusion of such a system of transport and communication (with the related infrastructure and facilities), precisely «in every part of Asia», thus including the upper satrapies and perhaps even beyond in the steppe world.<sup>171</sup> Therefore, while following the assessment put forward by Briant in the *History*, there are very good reasons for arguing that – from a structural perspective of power management - Darius simply continued in the wake of his predecessors (including Bṛḍiyā in Central Asia). However, what seems to mark the greatest discontinuity between

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<sup>169</sup> On this matter see Havlík 2018, 99-100 and Stančo 2019. On the fortress of Uzundara as well as on the defensive system within which (at least during the Hellenistic and Graeco-Baktrian period) such a facility was embedded see Dvurečenskaja 2015 and Dvurečenskaja and Šeïko 2016.

<sup>170</sup> See on this point, besides the path-breaking study by Wouter Henkelman 2017a (63-80), Briant 2012; 2018b. Within group C of the *ADAB* parchments, particular attention deserves, for reasons addressed below, Naveh and Shaked 2012, 174 ff. C1 (= Khalili IA21). The model developed by Monica Smith is distinguished by the attempt to theorize, and to identify in the evidence, structures designed to foster interaction between the different territories of an Empire 1. on different scales and 2. connected not only with a single central hub but also between them. In a «network», nodes and transmission belts are in fact dependent on each other, which produces many combinations allowing these connections to remain both robust and flexible: see Smith 2005 and Parker 2006, 82. Translated to the Central Asian context, such a scenario allows us to read some literary sources (e. g. Strab. 11.8.9) as well as, more importantly, the Achaemenid primary documents and the archaeological data, as witnesses of a similar «network» centered, in the case of the territories North of Hindūkūš, on the oasis of Baktra and able to connect, along a North-South axis, Sogdiana, Chorasmia, and the Paropamisadae (Gāndhārā). Cf. Thapar 2003, 40 and Morris 2019a.

<sup>171</sup> *FGrHist* 688 F 9 (5) = Fr. 9d\* Lenfant. According to Brosius 1996, 114 fn. 75, the history of Petisakas is most likely related with Baktria.

the period before 522 BCE and the decades (and centuries) that followed is the *scale* on which the system firstly elaborated by Cyrus and developed by his heirs becomes visible, as well as the corresponding level of sophistication that we are able to detect.

Ktesias again offers another piece of evidence worthy of attention, showing how the infrastructure network inherited by Darius was progressively expanded during his reign.<sup>172</sup> At the stage at which it was known to the Knidian (writing decades after Darius' death), there was in fact at least one main artery (perhaps a continuation of the stretch known to - and described by, which is not always the same thing - Herodotos) linking Ionia to Central Asia, and in particular to Baktria, by means of a system of provisioning stations located along the route at regular intervals, a fact which acquires considerable plausibility when compared with what is reported in the Aśoka edicts discussed above.<sup>173</sup> In addition to this, it also seems possible to deduce from a passage by Diodoros Siculus' *Historical Library* that the aforementioned expansion of the road network was not simply limited to the extension of existing carrefours, but included the construction of new arteries. This is at least what can be argued from the mention of a branch of the main thoroughfare (running through Ekbatana) that connected Central Asia to the neighboring satrapies and further beyond heading to India. In this specific case, in addition to facilitating communication with Media itself - precisely through Ekbatana, the largest settlement in the region - the road axis described by Diodoros seems to have fulfilled the primary task of linking Baktria with the Caspian satrapies, particularly Hyrkania and (notably) Chorasmia, whose proximity to the world of the steppes made it a strategic target of paramount importance, which therefore needed to be made rapidly accessible to officials of the satrapal administration as well as to imperial troops.<sup>174</sup> Although fragmentary and decontextualized, if properly compared with some of the data from the archaeological record discussed above, these snippets of information provide substance to the supposition, in turn derived from the study of the Persepolitan documentation, that the Baktrian infrastructural network would have been systematically expanded, both within the satrapy itself and in order to facilitate the movement of men and resources across the entire territory of the Empire's Central Asian domains. The discovery of a granary's remains which must have been of considerable size at the site of Altin Dilyar (Northern Afgānistān) can therefore perhaps be interpreted in the most fruitful way exactly from this very perspective (as a

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<sup>172</sup> In her commentary to Ktesias' fragment previously mentioned, Dominique Lenfant (2004, 258-259) does not provide further information concerning an, albeit tentative, location of the historian's Βαρκάριοι. See moreover Hdt. 7.25 with regards to the organization of Xerxes' (disproportionate) army supply machine.

<sup>173</sup> *FGrHist* 688 F 33 (= Fr. 33 (76) Lenfant) and Diod. Sic. 2.13.5, the latter a passage which might allude to a branching of such carrefour, which linked Hyrkania with Baktria through Chorasmia in order to further reach the Northernmost slopes of the Hindūkūš. See moreover on this topic *TPE* II, 735 and Panitschek 2016, 96. On the road linking Baktria with Herāt and Bagrām see Rapin 2005, 162 ff. as well as Rapin and Grenet 2018 for the stretch linking up the Indian offshoot of the Central Asian road network which, in its Northern branch, hinged on Baktria.

<sup>174</sup> Diod. Sic. 19.19.2.

post station for imperial couriers, a sorting center for official correspondence, or (and) even a regional archive).<sup>175</sup> Once again, it is by virtue of the systemic nature of the imperial paradigm that an apparently isolated discovery such as that of the Altin Dilyar granary acquires a much deeper value and allows, incidentally, to give a completely different depth to a statement such as that by Pliny the Elder, according to whom Baktria was the true «gateway to the East» of both the Persian Empire and of its successors in later centuries. In fact, according to the Roman Flavian scholar, who perhaps based his information on Ktesias' account, further routes radiated from Baktria, making it possible to reach other Central Asian centers of paramount importance such as Herāt in the West and Bagrām in the Southeast, not to mention the branch connecting Arachosia to the coast of the Persian Gulf through Krmāna (Carmania) and the infamous (at least according to the – quite biased, as it shall be argued – picture painted by the sources) Gedrosia, thus in this way linking a landlocked territory like Central Asia with the strategic port cities of the Empire's Southern coast (think of Taḥ(u)makka, destination of numerous contingents of Central Asian kurtaš), the latter apparently having been the target of particular attention by Darius, as shown, among other things, by the Herodotean anecdote concerning the maritime expedition of Skylax of Karyanda.<sup>176</sup>

The imperial administration seems indeed to have paid a great deal of attention to the consolidation of routes that would have eased and sped up connections between Baktria and – for example - the Paropamisian peaks, both overland (again, think of the Aśoka edicts) and via riverine highways, the latter of which, by virtue of the considerable «friction of the terrain» characteristic of a landscape such as that of Central Asian mountain ranges, must have represented a strategic asset, but about the exploitation of which in Achaemenid times we unfortunately still know too little.<sup>177</sup> After all, securing access to a site such as the Kābul valley (or, further North, to the Badaḥšān alluvia) must undoubtedly have been a priority for the imperial administration, not least because of the huge mineral resources present in these territories, since, in Persian times, no less than six mines seem to have been active in the Kābul valley alone. The fact that, as reported in the Pseudo-Aristotelian *Oeconomicus*, the exploitation of mineral resources was explicitly entrusted to the satrap shows, among other things, that mining could be a fertile breeding ground for conflicts of interest across the different scales of imperial administration: from the King who demanded these resources to the satrap in charge of

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<sup>175</sup> Klinkott 2005, 399, Ball 2019 n. 38. Maxwell-Jones 2015, 470-507, Marquis 2018, and now Lhuillier *et al.* 2021 for different but complementary assessments of the Baktrian oasis within its regional context.

<sup>176</sup> Plin. *NH.*, 6.29.98. See moreover Hdt. 4.44 on Skylax and his Περίπλους (together with Matarese 2021, 70-73 on Darius' interests in controlling the maritime space between the Gulf and (Achaemenid) India). Potts 2016; 2021 stresses that the Gulf was fully embedded in the Achaemenid imperial matrix: compare Degen 2022, 335-336.

<sup>177</sup> Cf. for example Strab 11.8.9; 15.2.8, Plin. *NH.*, 6.21, 6.24 as well as the discussion of this and other evidence in Rtveladze 2010, Lerner 2014, and most recently Minardi 2018 (on the Oxus riverine connection between Chorasmia and the satrapies further to the South, starting with Baktria). With regards to the «friction of the terrain» as a constraining factor of the expansive capacity of imperial infrastructural power in the territories of Zomia (thus including Afġānistān.), see e. g. Scott 2009, 44-51 and Barfield 2010, 67 ff.

maintaining the necessary infrastructures, to the local notables who were in all probability contracted to recruit the personnel to be employed in this exhausting work, not least because they were undoubtedly also the best providers of logistical services for the transport of the raw material (this latter being a mētīc competence capable of securing its owners considerable margins of negotiation, as we shall see shortly).<sup>178</sup>

If we add to all the above the evidence of a document such as the so-called foundation charter of Susa, in which Baktria and Sogdiana are identified, among other things, as a source of precious stones (lapis lazuli and rubies, in all probability), it is easy to see how mining must have made for one of the most economically flourishing sectors in Central Asian economies North of Hindūkūš at the time of Darius.<sup>179</sup> Reexamined from such a perspective, even the story of the aristocrat Pythios of Lydia, who under Xerxes had amassed extraordinary wealth in a region that was also not without mineral resources (think of the gold coming from the Paktolos river), also provides further arguments in support of a suggestion already put forward by Briant against the backdrop of a detailed study of a passage in Herodotos' *Histories* in which this individual appears as a particularly powerful representative of one among the local aristocratic families which undoubtedly still held important positions within the satrapal hierarchies and who moreover were authorized to enjoy (part of) the rights of extraction of the resources coming from the subsoil, which therefore, as also attested by the pseudo-Aristotelian *Oeconomicus*, ought not to be considered as a royal monopoly.<sup>180</sup> It is worth dwelling for a moment on this (particularly) little-studied aspect of the Baktrio-Sogdian economy since, although there is archaeological evidence of Central Asian gemstone mining and trade whose chronology can be traced back millennia before Cyrus' takeover, the unprecedented socio-political context in the region that, from the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE onwards, prompted the intensification of such extracting activities on an unprecedented scale provides another interesting example from which to study the local dynamics of the imperial paradigm.<sup>181</sup>

According to a recent hypothesis put forward by Rhyne King following a meticulous analysis of the *ARTP* evidence, far from preserving traces of a religious ritual (which Bowman, while publishing the editio princeps, not too surprisingly imagined to be of Avestān origin), the presence on green chert

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<sup>178</sup> Cf. Aperghis 2004, 117-135 as well as Arist. [*Oec.*], 2.1.4.

<sup>179</sup> DSf, on which see the remarks in Bernard and Petitot-Biehler 1975, 67 and, more recently, Francfort 2013a. According to Stoneman 2019, 231, rubies such as those found in place of the eyes and adorning the navel of an Ištar statue from 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE Babylonia could only be of Indian origin. Darius' inscription provides a clear rebuttal to this claim, and moreover shows incontrovertibly that there were other options available: see on this subject, for example, Lyonnet 2020, 314 as well as Parzinger 2020<sup>3</sup>, 649-667, raising the possibility that pastoral peoples were involved in mining activities in Central Asia as far as Eastern Qazaqstan (Bonora 2020).

<sup>180</sup> Cf. Hdt. 7.27-29 for the story of this important Lydian big man as well as more generally on the extractive activities in the lands of the Empire Briant 2002, 400-401.

<sup>181</sup> Note Noori *et al.* 2019, 107-109 for possible evidence of Achaemenid-period copper mining at the site of Mes Aynak in the Logar province of Afġānistān (Ball 2019 n. 19).

objects found in Persepolis of a clearly bureaucratic language and protocol terminology - as well as a revealing word such as 'škr (i. e. the Aramaic אשכר), which Bowman wrongly interpreted as an intoxicant analogous to haṣmā but which is instead linguistically demonstrable to be nothing other than the Akkadian iškaru, i. e. a tax obligation well known from Babylonia - it is possible to argue that the (local) production of these items aimed, on the one hand, at keeping an account of individuals (natural and legal persons) subject to taxation in Arachosia.<sup>182</sup> On the other hand, such a production aimed at converting the amount of bāji- (remarkably, a term which is also present in the *ARTP*), which not infrequently must have been collected in kind, and which the imperial administration – both at the satrapal level and on an imperial scale – had every interest in transforming into higher-added-value goods, such as gemstones or silver. The main reason therefore was that such surplus could then be put to further use in other sectors of the Achaemenid political economy, for example in order to pay the army's salary. Moreover, such items were suitable for being reinjected into the networks underpinning the dynamics of unequal exchange, both within the royal court and as an instrument of local politics, to create, strengthen or widen a «selectorate».<sup>183</sup> Having come this far, a small side note will not be out of place here: a mechanism such as that which can be deduced from the study of the *ARTP* inscriptions, among other things, allows us to re-evaluate, in a much more favorable sense than some, more or less recent, interpretations of the passage in question have been inclined to do, Herodotos' estimate of the 360 talents of gold (by no means a trivial amount) which, annually, would have constituted part of the fiscal levy which the imperial administration was able to squeeze out of what the historian calls the 12<sup>th</sup> tax district of the Empire, «ἀπὸ Βακτριανῶν δὲ μέχρι Αἰγλῶν».<sup>184</sup> Against the evidence we have at hand, such a lump-sum (however it was effectively collected) might even have been the proverbial tip of the iceberg.<sup>185</sup> However, the story does by no means end there: the supply to the court of precious materials such as gold, silver or semi-precious stones (not to mention ivory or spices) in the form of in-kind taxation was only the first step in that complex process

<sup>182</sup> Full treatment of this evidence in King 2019, on which the present discussion heavily relies.

<sup>183</sup> Cf. Henkelman 2017a, 102-109; 2018a, 244, King 2019, 196-199, Schütze 2021, 419. See moreover Wu 2005, 133.

<sup>184</sup> Härtel forthcoming on Herodotos' description (apparently purposefully vague, especially if contextualized in his survey of Darius' alleged administrative reforms) of the 12<sup>th</sup> nome and the possible reasons behind such a literary choice.

<sup>185</sup> Hdt. 3.92.2a. Be that as it may (the point here is not to take Herodotos at face value, but to show the possible Achaemenid «background» of his account), it is in any case feasible to suggest that, at least up to a certain point, the fiscal output mentioned by Herodotos was also the result of personal relationships (as suggested by the *ARTP*) between the satrap of Bactria and some members of the local aristocracy, to whom was delegated the task of finding the resources required by the central administration: cf. Henkelman 2017a, 165. In return for these and similar services, such strongmen might have been granted cash subsidies and even troops to help them maintain - and in some cases perhaps even *expand* - their regional hegemony, this one being an argument which was already raised some years ago by Willem Vogelsang (1989, 163-166). In addition, from a passage in Polyainos (7.3.11) and an anecdote by Plutarch (*Reg.*, *Cyrus 3 = Mor.*, 172F) it is possible to suggest that local élites enjoyed considerable negotiating power with the satrapal government in matters of taxation, and it is not at all improbable to think (as King 2019 recently did) that a non-negligible part of the taxes levied returned to Central Asia (and to the other satrapies) in the form of imperial investments, in a circular process recognized by Versluys 2014 as one of the salient features of the «globalizing» nature of Roman imperial paradigm (but see Colburn 2017 for an Achaemenid comparison). See also Monson 2015, 175 in this regard.

of production of objects with high added value (particularly famous are the torques depicted on the Apadāna reliefs at Persepolis and held in the hands of some among the representatives of the so-called satrapal «delegations») which, as it shall be addressed later in this chapter, played a pivotal role in the gift economy studied, among others, by Pierre Briant and which can be recognized as one of the most powerful tools available to the Achaemenid King to bind to himself, through the imperial «unequal exchange», at least some above the main representatives of the local élites.<sup>186</sup> Following Lori Khatchadourian, it was therefore a matter of «capturing» the resources of a satrapy and transforming them into devices of socio-political control («imperial delegates»): accordingly, it is plausible to assume that the increase in Central Asian mining activity witnessed by the number of quarries found to date in the upper satrapies and dated to the Persian period might have been closely connected, on the one hand, to the growing demand from the imperial court and, on the other, to the desire of the representatives of the Central Asian aristocracy (from Bactria to Sogdiana, Margiana and the - only apparently - remote Chorasmia) to conform to the styles and tastes of the Achaemenid court, a desire that the latter actively promoted precisely by means of the redistributive economy and the unequal exchange.<sup>187</sup>

Before arriving at Persepolis or Susa, and before being transformed into symbols (Khatchadourian's «delegates») – of course after having been granted the favor of the Great King – of belonging (or at least affiliation) to the new imperial herrschende Gesellschaft, these resources had to be extracted and transported to the imperial centers responsible for their collection, processing, and sorting. It is precisely from this need of the Persian court, the satisfaction of which constituted an inescapable premise for the functioning of the imperial paradigm and the setting in motion of its socio-political outcomes, that it is possible to identify one of those spaces for maneuver (Mischa Meier's Handlungsräume) that those same members of the local élites that the system of redistributive economy aimed to subjugate could exploit to their advantage in order to acquire a privileged position, for example as intermediaries, within the Persian social hierarchy, both locally (in competition with

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<sup>186</sup> Cf. e. g. Briant 2002, 470, Gazali 2003 and especially Kistler 2010, 418-419, who pointed out that in the case of the Apadāna reliefs (on which see Gropp 2009 and now Swart 2021) we would be faced with the representation of a ceremony of «making alliances between powerful personalities». However, with the rise of Persian power, the principle of reciprocity underlying this exchange of gifts in the context of individual local communities (or of peer diplomacy) would have been «broken and transformed into a redistribution system generating hierarchies». Note Bang *et al.* 2021 I, 437-459 imperial ecology are based on a process of unequal exchange involving – among other things – natural resources.

<sup>187</sup> Khatchadourian 2016, 102-103. Francfort 2013a, 95-125. Willem Vogelsang (1989, 169) has argued that the gold mentioned in the Susa inscription might have reached the Achaemenid capital from the Dardistān highlands (again, Eastern Afġānistān and the Indo-Pakistāni territories) via Bactria, for instance following the course of the Kokġa, one of the two rivers that washed the banks of Āi Xānum, a hypothesis that is particularly intriguing because it would provide a further functional explanation for the choice of founding a site such as Kuhna Qal'a, not to mention Hazār Gusfand, dated by Warwick Ball (2019 n. 422) to the 6<sup>th</sup> century and strategically placed to guard the Baġaġsān and its precious lapis lazuli mines. Cf. Mairs 2014c and, on the «gold of Baktra», note Plin. *NH.*, 37.65.

internal rivals) and in the wider macro- and trans-regional context of the Empire (potentially in competition with the satrap himself).<sup>188</sup>

Against this background, what is one supposed to make of yet another anecdote sketched by Ktesias, who tells of a Baktrian «merchant» who, in a not-so-right attempt to ford a river, lost a load of some 500 precious stones?<sup>189</sup> A first interpretation of the passage, in contrast with a (too) literal reading of the text, which would suggest a picture in some way forerunning the (misleading) myth of the Kuṣāṇa middleman, could be that the «Baktrian» in question was in charge of managing the transit of this strategic resource from India through Central Asia to Irān, and that, moreover, he had been able to secure a contract of such latitude by virtue of the good relations with those individuals à la Arimazes who, at the head of their respective communities and not too differently from the «Uxii of the mountain» mentioned in the Hellenistic sources, controlled the passes securing and gatekeeping the transit through Gāndhārā coming from (or heading towards) Baktria and India. In turn, such advantageous positionality enabled those capable of commanding such geographical features to profitably negotiate with the imperial representatives their access to strategic resources in exchange for political purchase or economic backing.<sup>190</sup> That this was (also) the case cannot of course be ruled out. However, in light of the evidence discussed so far (think again of the references to bāji- travelling from Central Asia to Persepolis attested for example in PF 1377 or PF 1399, not to mention the above-discussed Arachosian kapnuški recorded in a document such as Q 2139), it is at least as reasonable to assume an administrative-institutional context for the «Baktrian merchant» recorded by Ktesias.<sup>191</sup> This man ought therefore to be identified as one of those treasurers mentioned in the *ARTP* as the head of the Arachosian irmatam (without per se implying that the two perspectives suggested here were mutually exclusive, for in the light of the evidence available from the broader context of the Empire such scenarios, but not the middleman theory, are both quite plausible). If we were to accept the plausibility of the second interpretation suggested here, once taxes had been collected among his peers on behalf of the Great King, our Baktrian would therefore have set heading towards one of the Achaemenid «imperial foundations» in the heartland with the precious cargo. If such a scenario were feasible, we would be dealing with an official of anything but secondary rank, to which the latter may

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<sup>188</sup> For definitions and theoretical background cf. most recently Khatchadourian 2020, 601-609.

<sup>189</sup> *FGrHist* 688 F 45 (= Fr. 45 (6) Lenfant). Cf. Briant 2002, 377 as well as Lenfant 2004, 293-294 and Henkelman 2018a, 247, who mentions another comparable tale which, although having been transmitted from a much later source (of Byzantine epoch) still preserves a very distinct Ktesian flavor, which in turn might betray some features of the Achaemenid imperial paradigm.

<sup>190</sup> Briant 1984, 73 as well as, more recently, the rebuttal of the Kuṣāṇa middleman theory in Morris 2019c, 681-688. Incidentally, such an anecdote provides further support for the hypothesis that considers the range of action of the two most influential Achaemenid satraps in the East, that of Baktria and Arachosia, to have been much wider than the territorial division postulated by Jacobs 1994 would lead to think: see Henkelman 2017a, 155.

<sup>191</sup> See Wu 2005, 121-122 on these travels (from Carmania to Susa) and now King 2022 on trips to the King as recorded in the archive (also from the Eastern satrapies).

have had access precisely because, for reasons that we are unable to establish (but a set of hypotheses has been sketched in the preceding pages), his – this time Baktrian - irmatam had been elected as a point of reference and node of transmission within the new topography of Persian imperial power.<sup>192</sup>

Ktesias, one might argue not without a (certain) degree of reason, is not to be trusted. Even adopting such a (hyper)skeptical stance, however, the discovery in Sogdiana of infrastructures comparable to those uncovered at Altin Dilyar makes it possible to suggest, even in this region, a far from negligible impact of the imperial paradigm over the local economies. This can be argued both based on the evidence for movement to and from Central Asia suggested by indexical evidence of Achaemenid administration such as granaries or post stations *and* on evidence (properly contextualized) as the one provided by Ktesias and just discussed: for the latter suggest that the satraps (on behalf of the Kings), took care in increasing the pace, and possibly the radius, of mining activities in Bactria and Sogdiana. Moreover, the archaeological record suggest that such extractive activities were not limited to the materials mentioned in the Susa inscription. The recent discovery, on the slopes of Kōýtendağ, of numerous sites rich in iron, lead, zinc, and copper, which appear to have been exploited as early as the Achaemenid period, enriches in fact the catalogue of resources that the Persian administration was able - again, not without the involvement of local powerbrokers - to collect from Šuguda.<sup>193</sup> In the light of such a scenario, there are two (directly related) aspects that need to be pointed out. First, the mutual dependence between the development 1. of a road system like the one implied by Ktesias' fragment (if the context in which the Baktrian «merchant» was moving is of an institutional nature, it is extremely unlikely that he was doing it alone and/or *motu proprio*, and it is on the contrary to be believed that he had an escort similar to the one, for example, of the Gāndhārān princess mentioned above), and 2. of the relative administrative apparatus necessary to keep up and running, since the existence, and progressive expansion, of the latter was an indispensable premise of the existence, and progressive expansion, of the former.<sup>194</sup> The second particularly noteworthy aspect of the evidence under scrutiny is the impact that the widening and tightening-up of the «network of networks» underpinning the imperial paradigm's spread into the productive and socio-political fabric in the context of both Central Asia and its neighboring territories (from India to the steppes) must

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<sup>192</sup> Once he reached Persepolis, among the several tons of treasures that the Makedonians pillaged while they were making their way through imperial treasuries, Alexander found (which is indeed noteworthy if one thinks of their origin in antiquity), both lapis lazuli and turquoise from Sogdiana: Naiden 2019, 143.

<sup>193</sup> See e. g. Thomalsky 2016 on the Kābul valley. Sverčkov 2009 provides an overview of modern research on mining activities in the modern territory of the O'zbek Republic, while the evidence coming from the Surxondaryo valley had already been collected by Sebastian Stride (2005 I, 258). Martinez-Sève and Baratin 2013 provide the details of the recent discovery of a Hellenistic-epoch granary at Marakanda which, given the regional importance of the site – explicitly called by Arrian (*Anab.*, 3.30.6) as a satrapal seat («ἐπὶ Μαρακανδα [Alexander is the subject here] ἦγε· τὰ δὲ ἐστὶ βασιλεία τῆς Σογδιανῶν χώρας»), it is implausible that it did not have one (and more likely *several*) predecessors during the Achaemenid period.

<sup>194</sup> Briant 1984, 59-61.



have generated, since – as we have seen - it opened up spaces for maneuver (and arenas of internal competition) for local élites on a scale unseen before in the history of the region.<sup>195</sup> Taking up a point made by Christopher Tuplin, at the very moment when it made the mechanism of extraction and control (the ultimate rationale, as we have seen, of any imperial conquest) as effective and extensive (and effective because it was so extensive) as possible, the immense increase in personnel, infrastructures and consequent complexity of the imperial bureaucracy - not least the result of the need to adapt to a terrain, in a physical and social sense, significantly different from that of Pārsa, Mesopotamia or even Egypt - provided spaces for negotiation and (as the story of the Ktesian «merchant» would seem to imply) for social ascent to large strata of the local élite. This contributes in no small way to explaining why Achaemenid imperial rule was welcomed in numerous - and very different - geopolitical contexts not so much *ob torto collo*, («tolerated», whatever the word actually imply), but rather enthusiastically and even as an opportunity not to be missed; not least, it must be stressed, because it constituted by far the most reliable guarantee of the possibility not only of keeping the members of the most select circles of the local aristocracy safe from the pitfalls of neighboring rivalries (which in such a sociopolitical context did not lack), but also – perhaps especially, because it made possible, if necessary to the detriment of a competitor, to expand the personal (or group) purchase of those who, in Meier’s words, had entered «the imperial whirlwind».<sup>196</sup> As we shall see, Baktria seems to have been no exception to the reproduction of socio-political dynamics of this kind.

It is possible to further deepen - and expand - the thoughts outlined in the previous paragraph. Let us start from the first aspect: the significant increase of Central Asian documentation recorded in the painstakingly editorial process on the Persepolis archives gives the historian today the possibility, on the one hand, to support on an empirical basis Briant’s already mentioned intuition regarding the crucial significance, as a symptom of the existence in Baktria of institutions similar to those developed at Persepolis, of the presence in the known documentary corpus of travel authorizations for groups of kurtaš 1. originating from, 2. coming from, and/or 3. going to Baktria and Sogdiana issued by an individual such as the (likely) successor of Dādêršiš at the head of the satrapy (Irdabanuš, i. e. the Old Persian \*Ṛtabānuš, the Ἀρτάβανος known to Herodotos for example in book 7 of the *Histories*).<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Cf. Strab. 15.1.11, Arr. *Ind.*, 3.4 as well as Thapar 1961, 94-108 with regards to India. The argument here follows Henkelman 2017a, 66, who discusses these sources at further length.

<sup>196</sup> Tuplin 2011, 39-40. See moreover the insightful remarks in Tuplin 1987a; 1996.

<sup>197</sup> Briant 1984, 67. On this individual see e. g. PF 1287 and PF 1555. It might be possible – and the suggestion has in fact been made, despite the chronology provides some obstacles in this sense – that the Ἀρτάβανος mentioned in Hdt. 7.65 as the father of one of Xerxes’ generals and the Irdabanuš recorded in the Persepolis archive might have been one and the same person. As it has been mentioned in the previous pages, however, it is perhaps more reasonable to suppose that the Achaemenid official was in fact the same Ἀρτάβανος known to (and staged by) Herodotos as Darius’ brother and therefore as uncle (and unwisely ignored adviser) of Xerxes. See Hdt. 7.9-19, Henkelman 2018a, 230, and Degen 2022, 317.

On the other hand, and this is what interests us particularly here, access to *new* primary sources has made it possible to grasp with greater clarity some of the dynamics at work in the organization, both logistical and economic (which at the end means political), of the Baktrian satrapy. We know, for example, that during Darius' reign, the movement of military units to and from Central Asia North of Hindūkūš was not an occasional phenomenon and was, moreover, supported by an apparatus of considerable sophistication and territorial scope. This is shown, for example, by the recent publication of two Ēlāmite tablets mentioning the disbursement by the satrapal administration of considerable resources («2150 [liters of flour?] received» in one case, «25 [goats/sheep] received from Datukka and Unukama» in the other) allocated to two groups, identified in the tablets respectively as hallinup and haldabe, heading in the first case for Baktra and, in the second case, from that satrapy coming, and going towards Susa.<sup>198</sup> Unfortunately, everything is obscure about these individuals: we know nothing about their precise ethnic and cultural background (as least as perceived by the administration), neither is the precise nature of these journeys currently clear nor, finally, are the types of tasks acknowledged to which the groups mobilized and involved in these displacements were meant to be assigned. That said, evidence such as this does nevertheless allow to note at least three things. Firstly, that the groups of Central Asian (young) men whom Briant had already identified as constituting communities - of a size that is difficult to establish, but which was not necessarily negligible - dispatched, following conscription, to various satrapies of the Empire, for example in Asia Minor, ought not to be regarded as exceptions. They are, in fact, indexical of movements in the opposite direction: this in turn brings to the conclusion that that Baktria, and more generally Central Asia as a whole, was not merely a quarry for the extraction of (natural and human) resources, but also a territory in which to – sometimes massively - invest.<sup>199</sup> Secondly, the (quite uncommon) rations recorded in the two documents testify to the equally uncommon nature of the recipients and, as it shall be explored below, we have further evidence allowing to understand how the Baktrians represented, even within a (relatively) marginal social group like the kurtaš, a category that was the target of particular attention by the imperial administrative apparatus. Finally, but in virtue of what has been said so far this should by now be only relatively surprising, the new (and expanding) dataset shows beyond any doubt the «high level of connectivity» between the major imperial centers in Southwestern Irān and Central Asia, and in particular, once again, and not by chance, with its two

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<sup>198</sup> Henkelman 2018a, 228-229, whose argument is summarized and followed here. It might not be out of place here to remember how several Aramaic documents coming from Egypt (most famously the Elephantine papyri) record the presence – besides Babylonians, Medes, Jews and other dahayāva, of Baktrians settled along the Nile: *TADAE* III, 71 and Wu 2017, 264.

<sup>199</sup> Briant 1984, 92-94, Matarese 2021, 167-198.

major administrative hubs in Baktria and Arachosia, namely Baktra and Qandahār.<sup>200</sup> The detectable transformations within the Sogdian territory provide an idea of the phenomenon in question, since especially the two important valleys of the Sherabāddaryo and the Surxondaryo, now crucial strategic nodes along the Baktra-Marakanda axis, seem to have been the target of particular attention by the Achaemenid administration, to the extent that some scholars have argued that the distribution in this area of sites certainly dating to the Achaemenid period reflects a «physical manifestation» of the development of the Persian infrastructural system (and specifically of the road network) in Central Asia North of the Hindūkūš. The plausibility of such an assumption is considerably enhanced by the fact that, similarly to what was suggested by the Aśoka edicts in the case of Arachosia and the «Indian» territories, in Baktria and Sogdiana, too, numerous sites dating from the 6<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE, from Shortēpe to Termiz and from Khajtabadtēpe to Dabil Kurgan, were all located approximately one day's journey apart, i. e. between 18 and 35 kilometers, a distinctive feature, as already noted by Herodotos, of the organization of the Achaemenid transport infrastructure.<sup>201</sup> In addition to this, numerous other sites (from Kučuktēpe II to Karatēpe, and from Chigatajtēpe to Dunjotēpe) were systematically placed in strategic positions, guarding mountain passes or rivers, for example in the case of Termiz and Shortēpe, in all probability with the aim of ensuring transit between the oasis of Baktra and the major centers of Sogdiana. Not only Marakanda but also present-day Qarši (perhaps the *Χερίππα* known to Greek sources) or Kiš, in the territory of present-day Shahr-e Sabz.<sup>202</sup> In the case of Khajtabadtēpe, for example, the site was not only located in the only place that could guarantee an easy ford of the Surxondaryo river, but it was also in a position which secured the control of both an important water source to supply the artificial irrigation necessary for the prosperity of the site and another artery of the road system that proceeded westwards to Baktra, and from there to Margiana.<sup>203</sup>

For its own part, not only was Shortēpe guarding one of the most important fords of the Oxus along a route linking Baktria and Sogdiana, but travelers were moreover able to reach other key nodes of the regional topography, such as Talaškantēpe and the aforementioned site of Dabil Kurgan, with relative ease. This has recently led Wu Xin to conclude that such a dataset provides the overall

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<sup>200</sup> Henkelman 2018a, 232 as well as Arist. [*Oec.*], 2.1.4 on the duties and scope of what the author calls the «satrapal economy», the priorities of which were undoubtedly dictated by the Achaemenid court. However, at the same time the satrap could not ignore the demands of the local «selectorate», whose members' collaboration alone allowed an effective fulfilment of the demands coming from the center. See also Canepa 2018, 23-41; 2020 on the Achaemenid «topography of power» in Central Asia.

<sup>201</sup> See, for example, Stride 2005 III nos. 32 (Khajtabadtēpe), 131 (Termiz), 154 (Dabil Kurgan) and 326 (Shortēpe, which was fortified around the period that Stride defines as P2, which means at the latest starting with the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, from which one might infer its use as a post station or administrative center). A good comparison of this infrastructure network is offered by the Inca Empire: from Argentina to Bolivia, archaeological research has been able to identify several thousand of post and supply stations, located on average 20 km apart over a notoriously demanding territory. See D'Altroy 2015<sup>2</sup>, 411, Covey 2017, Bang *et al.* 2021 II, 692-717.

<sup>202</sup> See the entries in Stride 2005 III, respectively at the nos. 334, 356, 411, and 600.

<sup>203</sup> Stride 2005 I, 295.

impression of careful planning by Achaemenid officials of both the location and the purpose of the infrastructural investments undertaken in Central Asia from, at the very least, Darius' reign onwards.<sup>204</sup> The analogy of this system with what is known from the edicts of Aśoka and the Arachosian documentation from Persepolis studied by Henkelman allows us to deduce that, also in Baktria, the distances between each of these sites were meticulously recorded in the satrapal archives and known to the users of the road network, who must have been aware of the fact that each of these nodes of the landscape was meant to connect with the others within the satrapal territory and, consequently, to further link the latter with the rest of the Empire.<sup>205</sup> Recent studies of historical geography leave little doubt that this hypothesis is not based solely on analogical reasoning. According to Judith Thomalsky and her colleagues, in fact, no less than 35% of all archaeological sites so far discovered on Afġān territory (even the most apparently insignificant ones) were located at most 1 km away from a paved road, which means, if one considers Herodotos' description of some of them within Achaemenid territory as «heavy-load carrying highways» (ἀμαξιτοί), they must have been able to support (also) heavy traffic of the kind implied by troop movements. These are assumptions which dovetail with the hallinup and haldabe movements to and from Baktria mentioned above.<sup>206</sup>

Moreover, the percentage recorded by Thomasky increases to 54% and then even to 69% if the search radius is extended to no more than 3 km, a figure that suggests how vital it was, from the point of view of the satrapal administration, to ensure both the intra- and inter-regional communication of its key sites (and even more so of those such as Vivāna's irmatam) located within the Central Asian territory.<sup>207</sup> In a few pages of considerable insight, Briant had already observed how, even within Pārsa, the need for both the Great King and his lieutenants to expand communication and transportation infrastructures across a terrain that was far from user friendly provided at least some local communities with the opportunity to negotiate material privileges and social status in exchange for easy access (and supplies) to representatives of the Persian government settled in or moving across their territories: this was the case, for example, of the «Uxians of the mountains».<sup>208</sup> Unlike the latter, however, in the case of Baktria some of the irmatams that must have been transformed into centers

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<sup>204</sup> On the two sites of Talaškantēpe see Stride 2005 III nos. 227 and 228 as well as Wu 2017. Dabil Kurgan might have been established for the purpose of salt mining: Stančo 2020, 279, Morris 2021c, 715. This is yet another hint at the interests cultivated by the Achaemenids in mineral exploitation, following increasingly imperial demands which opened ample maneuvering space to local powerbrokers capable of providing the workforce required for these activities.

<sup>205</sup> Wu 2018, 211. As it has recently been argued by both Henry Colburn (2013) and Wouter Henkelman (2017a, 63-80; forthcoming), this not only implies highly specialized administrative skills, but even and perhaps most of all the existence of a general understanding of the imperial space as such, as well as that of a (both mental and physical) cartographic system of considerable complexity. See on this matter most recently Rapin 2018b and King 2021, 312.

<sup>206</sup> Hdt. 7.200, Xen. *Anab.*, 1.2.21.

<sup>207</sup> Thomalsky *et al.* 2013, 207-208.

<sup>208</sup> Briant 1976, 214-221; 2002, 726-733.

of (sub)satrapal administration similar to those recorded in the *ARTP* (think of the *πέτραι* conquered by Alexander in Sogdiana, not coincidentally in the territory of the Surxondaryo valley), occupied vital ganglia of the regional topography, for example some hydrological systems such as that of Machai Darya in the Derbent region, and not, as in the case of the Uxians, «a remote territory»: the result was therefore most likely a proportional increase in the bargaining power available to the representatives of indigenous communities when they signed up for entering the «dynastic pact», by virtue of which they agreed to become part of what David Engels a few years ago called the network of «vassallatic» relations on which the capillary diffusion of Persian infrastructural (and, at least in theory, despotic) power was based.<sup>209</sup> From all this it should have become clear that the implementation (and above all the subsequent, demanding, process of upkeep) of an apparatus of such size and complexity required the mobilization of a corresponding mass of resources (e. g., but not only, foodstuffs) that needed to be preserved, recorded, stored, and made available to the network's users.<sup>210</sup>

Once again, thinking of the accomplishment of this project in terms of a paradigm, i. e. emphasizing its systemic nature, helps to grasp in its deepest implication the significance of structural homologies between examples of such infrastructures as the granaries which an interpretation «through the Persepolis lens» and, at the same time, the most recent results of archaeological investigation from Armenia to Sogdiana, are able to highlight, thus revealing nothing less than an extremely dense network of post stations, garrisons, farms, and administrative centers capable of considerably modifying the landscape of the imperial satrapies. Taken together, such facilities all physically advertised in the landscape the Empire's geopolitical purchase making it visible as «ad administration at work» even in the furthest territories (at least if seen from the Aegean) under the power of the King of Kings.<sup>211</sup> Coming back for a moment to the imperial passes and the official documentation that users of Persian road infrastructures were required to show when receiving travel rations for themselves and their kurtaš, and which had to have been issued by an authority recognized as such, made identifiable (from Bakabaduš and Irdatakma in Arachosia to the aforementioned Irdabanuš in Baktria) for example by the highly sophisticated sealing practice attested by the Persepolis tablets, it

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<sup>209</sup> On Central Asia see Briant 2002, 743-754, Rapin 2013, 66-69; Rapin 2017a, 48. With regards to the Achaemenid «feudalization» as well as on similar phenomena through the ancient Near East of the following centuries see Engels 2011, 2017a, 23-24 (and the extensive bibliography quoted in the latter contribution) as well as Wenghofer and Houle 2016, Wenghofer 2018, Strootman 2020a; 2020c (with particular attention devoted to the Seleukids and to their likely Achaemenid precedents).

<sup>210</sup> Henkelman 2017a, 63-79 has most recently pointed out that there is every reason to believe that Central Asian satrapal administrations employed a non-trivial share of their resources in order to upkeep the local road system.

<sup>211</sup> Cf. Henkelman 2017a, 46 on Gedrosia and Stančo 2019, 356-361 as far as Baktria is concerned. The archaeological evidence collected by Lori Khatchadourian (2016, 193 ff.) during several excavation seasons at the Armenian village of Tsaghkahovit provide further insight into the ability of Achaemenid satrapal administration of imposing its methods of governance and administration, and this despite the attempts (some of them apparently crowned by a certain degree of success) by the local population at resisting, escaping, and subtly challenging the Persian imperial project.

is perhaps first and foremost in this - impressive - ability to formalize a system of homogeneous bureaucratic protocols, identifiable as such by the entire population of the Empire, that the effectiveness of the Achaemenid presence (Henkelman's imperial signature) in the territories conquered by Cyrus and (re)organized under, if not by, Darius should be acknowledged.<sup>212</sup>

This having been said, the case of the Uxians makes it clear that, in the light of both the costs and the logistical difficulties inherent in an enterprise of this magnitude - especially in the context of a pre-modern Empire - however carefully planned, the tumultuous development of Persian infrastructure in Central Asia would not have been conceivable (and even less feasible) without the active involvement - acquiescence was of course a *conditio sine qua non*, but would probably not have been sufficient - of local élites.<sup>213</sup> A fitting example, in its dimensions, which is not too exaggerated to call apocalyptic, of the persistence of such dynamics is given by the carnage (more than half of a herd of almost 30000 animals) of camels caused by the logistical needs of the newly formed Maoist Red Guard, which was making its way through the openly hostile territory of Tibet, to supply a regiment of troops threatened with starvation by requisitioning beasts of burden from the (no less hostile) Mongolian steppe in order to transport the tons of rice needed to refurbish the stranded soldiers.<sup>214</sup> By virtue of the fact that such a waste of livestock capital would have far exceeded what any Empire of the pre-industrial era (and more generally, it seems, with the sole exception of the Soviet and Chinese governments, of human history) would not only have been able to endure, but even willing to allow, to say nothing of tolerate, there is reason to believe that a not insignificant - and, as Havlík's study suggests, one would be tempted to say «preponderant» - number of the nodes within the «network of networks» built by the Achaemenids in Baktria arose from (and, as assumed in the previous chapter, probably developed out of) the rural households of the local landed aristocracy. In exchange for a share of the profits (not least in economic terms) deriving from their participation in the imperial structure and from the corresponding dividends of its expansion, these aristocrats were probably commissioned by the satrap to provide for the maintenance of the roads and other infrastructures that the imperial administration had built in the territories that had once been the exclusive domain of these strongmen: such a solution, among other things, ensured a

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<sup>212</sup> PF 1348, PF 1351 (where Arachosia - in Ēlāmite Haraumatiš - is explicitly mentioned), NN 0431, NN 1898. See Stolper and Fisher 2015, 21 wherefrom the here mentioned sources are taken, and Henkelman *et al.* 2017.

<sup>213</sup> After all, it does not seem too far-fetched to argue that it was the local elites themselves who actively promoted the development of a system that they clearly recognized as bringing enormous personal benefits: on the other hand, those who, while not ignoring the risks involved in the operation, did not wish to be cut out of the game - perhaps to the advantage of a neighboring rival - were therefore in turn encouraged (or forced) to become part of the network, thus contributing to its further strengthening and expansion: cf. Grewal 2008, 10. The case of the Roman Empire is in this sense illuminating: for many (starting with the local elites), in social, political, and economic terms, being excluded from the imperial network would have been much more damaging than being included in it, also in terms of preserving their local power.

<sup>214</sup> Scott 2009, 47.

not inconsiderable saving in terms of both men to be sent to the field and additional costs for the upkeep of the network itself. These are considerations the importance of which should never be underestimated.<sup>215</sup> While until a few years ago such a hypothesis could only be supported by recourse to probabilistic and/or analogical arguments, the combined use 1. of the results of archaeological research, 2. of new studies based on the evidence coming from the Persepolitan corpus and 3. of a systematic comparison with ethnographic material gathered by anthropologists in territories that are undoubtedly very different from each other but share some important structural similarities such as the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Mongolia, allows us to claim with a reasonable degree of confidence that, in some cases up to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, in these regions of Eurasia the task division between central (imperial) power and indigenous networks was still by far the most effective (and most convenient in both economic and political terms) solution for the intensive (and above all long-lasting) exploitation of local territorial resources.<sup>216</sup>

Additionally, it is possible to argue that the distribution of the economic shares generated by the Empire's extractive apparatus could take many forms at the (sub)satrapal level, including, for instance, the recruitment of some members of the Achaemenid «selectorate» in the provinces (e. g. men such as Vivāna and Dādêr̥šiš) into the ranks of the Persian administration, not infrequently in positions of absolute prominence. This is a crucial aspect for the overall conclusions of this study since, partly due to the lack of primary sources, partly because of the influence of Briant's model of the ethno-classe dominante, by far the most widespread opinion among scholars has been that, at least as far as top positions within the satrapal ranks are concerned, the main - if not the only - beneficiaries of the Persian conquest were the (ethnic) Persians themselves.<sup>217</sup> Leaving aside for the moment the thorny question of the ethno-cultural self-perception of at least the most prominent members of the provincial élites in a Vielvölkerstaat such as the Achaemenid Empire, it is worth noting here that the evidence available today, not least thanks to the exponential growth of the Central Asian dossier, would arguably require a reassessment of the question in terms of greater complexity. Let us take, for example, the case of the *laissez-passer*, a crucial source in support of Henkelman's thesis of the systematic nature of the application of the imperial paradigm across the Empire and, implicitly,

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<sup>215</sup> Cf. for example the mention of food quotas in late 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE Bactria recorded in one of the *ADAB* documents as «provisions for the road»: Naveh and Shaked 2012, 197 ff. C3 (= Khalili IA22). It would not be implausible to look for the origin of these agricultural produce in one of the estates of the local landed aristocracy, whose representatives oversaw both the stretch of road that crossed their domains and the imperial infrastructure that insisted on these stretches of road. While at a material level the initiative fell to local officials and representatives of regional élites, the commissioning authority and its motivations, according to Ando 2017b, 121, came from the imperial administration. Based on the analogy with the Roman road system, the subject of Ando's study, the Achaemenid counterpart equally shows the complex interrelationship of (imperial, global) authority and (local) capacity for initiative.

<sup>216</sup> Wawrzyn Gołab 1951. As argued by Ando 2017a, 10, in ancient Empires it was not uncommon that both the establishment and, perhaps especially, the maintenance of infrastructures similar to those discussed in these pages required the mobilization of networks of social dependency external, at least formally («notionally»), to the state apparatus.

<sup>217</sup> See Briant 1988; 2002, 324-356.

following Briant's example, of the self-replicating nature (to the advantage of the very social group that this paradigm had elaborated and exported at the tip of the spear) of the power that the paradigm itself served to establish and helped to nourish, being in turn further reinforced in the process.

Now: apart from the much renowned and praised express mail system, the existence of such passes in Bactria also implies the widespread presence of infrastructures capable of educating a not inconsiderable number of locals to the profession of scribe, since 1. official communication from one end of the Empire to the other seems to have taken place either in Ēlāmite or in Aramaic (both in their «Achaemenid» variant) and perhaps, as recently argued by Panaino, in a form of Old Persian κοινή, and 2. since such an - anything but subordinate - administrative position was unlikely to have been covered in each of the Achaemenid dahayāva by native speakers of even one of these languages (and/or by massive contingents of Ēlāmite bureaucrats deployed throughout the imperial road system in Central Asia).<sup>218</sup> This hypothesis finds substantial confirmation if we focus on regional treasuries, whose existence in Central Asia, especially in Arachosia, thanks to the *ARTP* and, in the case of Bactria, based on the *ADAB*, must now be considered an established fact. In the first case, we have texts that explicitly mention the existence of a rather articulated hierarchy, at the head of which was a group of «treasurers in Arachosia» (gzb[r'] bhrhwt, גזברא בהרהותי).<sup>219</sup> Under their authority there were other officers, called «subtreasurers» (\*hupaganzabara, אפגזבר), who were stationed in numerous posts strategically located along the Empire's roads and, symptomatically, designated as «fortresses» - byrt' in Aramaic (בורתי). As mentioned above, this was most likely the equivalent of the σταθμοί known to Herodotos and mentioned in his description of the royal road linking Sardis to Susa.<sup>220</sup>

This must also have been the structure behind the production, collection, and subsequent shipment to Persepolis (or Susa) of the mortars, pestles and green-chert dishes inscribed in Aramaic and erroneously taken by Raymond Bowman while preparing them for publication in his *Aramaic Ritual Texts of Persepolis*, as evidence of *Avestā*-based cultic practices.<sup>221</sup> An example will help to better understand the articulation of this hierarchy of officers and the functioning of the system (probably of tax collection) over which it presided. «In the fortress [byrt', בורתי] of Parikana [\*Parikāna, a name which, etymologically, can be traced back to the Old Persian word for «wall», which suggests that

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<sup>218</sup> Hdt. 5.14; 8.98 and Xen. *Cyr.*, 8.6.17 on the Achaemenid mail system. The terminus technicus used to refer to the scribes seems to have been *astandēs*, while Greek-speaking sources call them γραμματοφόροι. On the – very likely – existence of scribal schools in the upper satrapies see Tuplin 2011, 52 and Henkelman 2017a, 172. Panaino 2015 provides a detailed discussion supporting the hypothesis of a kind of Περσική διάλεκτος based on a simplified (but not too different from the language attested at Bīsūtūn) version of Old Persian.

<sup>219</sup> See King 2019 and Schütze 2021 for a detailed treatment of this evidence.

<sup>220</sup> In the context of Achaemenid Imperial Aramaic, a word such as byrt' (בורתי) was not limited to the designation of a fortress but, as most recently pointed out by Rhyne King (2019, 187), it could also be used in order to identify an administrative center. See moreover the bibliography cited by the American scholar at fn. 20 of the same page in this precious article as well as his dissertation on the same topic (administering Achaemenid Arachosia).

<sup>221</sup> See the introduction to the editio princeps of the *ARTP* (Bowman 1970), still today the only comprehensive study of such documentary corpus.



these were fortified centers]; under the authority of the segan [sgn', סגנא] Mithrapata; Athavana gave orders to make [so this is probably the individual on whom the tax mentioned a little further on was imposed] this mortar of worked stone [and ...]; under the authority of Datamithra, the treasurer residing in Arachosia [bhrḥwty, בַּהֲרַחוּתִי]; in the presence of Mahidata, the subtreasurer; the iškaru [אִשְׁכַּר] tax of the year 18 [of the reign of Xerxes]». <sup>222</sup> As pointed out both by Matthew Stolper and Wouter Henkelman, this implies the existence of an administration organized 1. on a regional basis in Arachosia, but similar conclusions can also be reached in the case of Baktria, as demonstrated by the presence in the *ADAB* parchments not only of officers with the same title, but also of very comparable protocol formulas, which must have developed from the model known from Pārsa, i. e. of a central treasury overseeing several district centers and 2. according to hierarchical principles, since, if in the *ARTP* the name of the «treasurer» appears in relation to more than one byrt', while that of the sub-treasurers is always linked to only one of them, it can be deduced that the latter were responsible for a (relatively) small geographical unit, for example within the territory under the authority of a single byrt'/irmatam, while the treasurer had a supra-local jurisdiction. <sup>223</sup>

Taken as a whole, the information discussed so far based on the recently published (or thoroughly reassessed) evidence allows us to advance - and to convincingly support - the hypothesis that, at least from Darius' reign onwards, and certainly stubbornly during it, the Baktrian landscape, dotted as it was with villages, aristocratic strongholds, small rural productive units, and landed estates was transformed into a network of such spatial devices, each connected to the other and all linked 1. with the satrapal main administrative center, 2. with the territories of the adjoining satrapies, and 3. with Persepolis as well as the other major imperial foundations by means of a capillary system of infrastructures, above all the road networks. <sup>224</sup> What is more, the Persepolis tablets also gives a fairly detailed idea of the orders of magnitude, in terms of men and resources, that such a project was able to put at the satrap's disposal. This was true, as the evidence compellingly suggests, not only in the case of Baktria itself, but also the major neighboring satrapies, from Sogdiana to Chorasmia, as well as for regions further afield, perhaps even as far as Farḡāne. <sup>225</sup>

<sup>222</sup> Cf. King 2019, 186, where considerable previous bibliography is recorded. Schütze 2021, 408-409 on the chronology of the so-called ritual objects (compare already *ARTP*, 56-62 and Henkelman 2017a, 103-104). On the etymology of Parikana see Tavernier 2007, 389-390.

<sup>223</sup> On the «green chert objects» discovered at Persepolis see most recently Henkelman 2017a, 154-174 and King 2019. Stolper and Fisher 2015 provide a discussion of the \*ganzabara. According to King 2019, 192-193, out of 112 legible inscriptions on the cherts, the name of this magistrate is attested no less than 69 times, while that of the sub treasurer can be read on 39 of the 97 items on which the title can be identified. On the officials attested in the texts see now Schütze 2021, 411-418.

<sup>224</sup> Cf. Briant 2009a and, more recently and above all, Henkelman 2018a, 243.

<sup>225</sup> Henkelman 2018a, 235, who nevertheless rightly points out that the administrative texts in the Persepolis archive do not primarily document ethnic differentiations but, on the contrary, reflect administrative subdivisions. This means that, on a formal level, non-Persian human groups in Achaemenid Persia were not distinguished except based on the official documents they carried, and which identified them as coming from a particular satrapy, without this being taken directly as a clue to the ethnic self-perception of the individuals recorded on the tablets. In Henkelman's words, individuals settled

This last point is well illustrated by a document such as NN 0939, which makes simultaneous mention of Baktrian and Indian kurtas.<sup>226</sup> This is in all probability a formula symptomatic of the range of action of the satrapal jurisdiction in Baktria to which, as it is possible to guess even from the literary sources alone, was almost certainly delegated the task of recruiting - and sending to Persepolis or elsewhere across the Empire - not only Baktrians *stricto sensu*, but also Sogdians and Gandhārāns and even, as attested by the above-mentioned tablet, hinduyap, that is «inhabitants of the satrapy of Hidûš».<sup>227</sup> Coming back to the scribes, whose presence in Baktria is extensively recorded in the ADAB, their social standing is made evident by the fact that they are identified by the use of a word, 'zgnđ' (𐎧𐎲𐎠𐎫𐎧), which would seem to identify the employees within the imperial mail service.<sup>228</sup> By virtue of the fact that this office was held only by extremely prominent members of Achaemenid society (the emperor Darius III himself, according to a well-known anecdote reported by Plutarch, was a γραμματοφόρος), it would not be surprising if, similarly to what has been observed with reference to the scribes, also in the case of the 'zgnđ' the selection of personnel in the satrapies took place through the recruitment of the local élites, for example in exchange for the transformation of an *irmatam* into a post station within the satrapal territory.<sup>229</sup> The situation does not change if, instead of the more mobile officers, we consider the administrators active in loco in different (sub)regional contexts: documents such as the ARTP and the ADAB only confirm, and moreover further detail, the picture painted by Herodotos, who repeatedly stresses the crucial role of these individuals in the context of the King's court as well as at the satrapal one, mostly suggesting (an aspect which is of particular interest for the present argument) that access to this prestigious office was *not* the exclusive prerogative (nor could it have been) of the Persian aristocracy. In fact, both the Halikarnassian and, independently, Xenophon record the existence of «royal secretaries» (γραμματιστὰς δὲ βασιλείους) present in every satrapy (οἱ πάντες ὕπαρχοι ἔχουσι), and the fact that Xenophon himself feels the need to specify that the «royal scribe» Megaphernes he mentions in a passage from the *Anabasis* was a

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in or coming from Arachosia or Achaemenid Gandhārā might have called themselves «Indians» or been perceived as such by foreign observers, but they figured as Gandhārāns or Arachosians in the eyes of the imperial administration.

<sup>226</sup> This tablet has been published in Henkelman 2018a, 233-234, and I follow his interpretation of this document here.

<sup>227</sup> See Arr. *Anab.*, 3.8.3, Curt. 6.2.9-10 and Hdt. 7.66, who explicitly speaks of Γανδάριοι as close kins (at least from an administrative point of view) of the Baktrians, a fact which has been recently pointed out in Henkelman 2018a, 234 fn. 50. However, as noted by Henkelman 2017a, 208-2010, the status of Gandhārā might not have been, taking up Jacobs' terminology for the sake of clarity (cf. 1994, 219-220), that of a Kleinsatrapie, but instead it might have stood on equal foot with Baktria or Arachosia

<sup>228</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 55: the name of the messenger in question here, a certain Vaxšuvahišta, which in itself betrays, if not ethnic, at least clear *cultural* affiliation with Baktria, despite the methodological difficulties inherent in every argument exclusively based on onomastic evidence, might suggest that locals (who moreover must have been of considerable social stand) were recruited and employed in crucial branches of the satrapal administration. Cf. moreover Briant 2009a, 149 and Colburn 2013, 38 ff.

<sup>229</sup> See Plut. *Vit. Alex.*, 18.7 on Darius III.

Persian (ἄνδρα Πέρσσην Μεγαφέρην, φοινικιστὴν βασιλείον) suggests that this was *not* the norm in the territories that were not Pārsa and its immediate offshoots.<sup>230</sup>

Having said this, the very setup and management of similar hierarchies from Egypt to Arachosia and the capillary diffusion of the same - and moreover constant over time - protocol jargon provide a very solid argument in support of Henkelman's claims regarding the Persian government's planned development of an «institutional landscape» characterized by well-defined rules, a project which, however, as Clifford Ando has pointed out, does not exclude at all, but rather requires the active participation of members coming from indigenous networks in order to ensure that this very same institutional landscape (the imperial paradigm) may indeed take root as uniformly as possible throughout the conquered territories that the Empire's herrschende Gesellschaft – thus including at least some members of the local élites themselves - wish to govern.<sup>231</sup> The *ADAB* provide to date the first direct confirmation (moreover coming from a primary source) that the Baktrians were among the ἔθνη from which the imperial administration recruited highly qualified personnel to meet the demand coming from the satrapal chancelleries (as well as from the royal court); and although the entire corpus dates from the (late) 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, the presence of revealing paleographic details (e. g. graphic archaisms known so far only from Egypt a century earlier, such as the use of the preposition 'l, i. e. «to») testify to the «familiarity of 4<sup>th</sup> century Baktrian clerks with older epistolary traditions».<sup>232</sup> Apart from the «royal messengers» mentioned in Herodotos' narrative, the *ADAB* also allow us to further extend our knowledge of the articulation of the Baktrian imperial bureaucracy, showing that it was not uncommon for individuals (judging by their names, if not of local origin, then undoubtedly deeply integrated into Central Asian culture and society) to occupy highly respected positions within the administrative apparatus itself. According to the authoritative judgment of Margaretha L. Folmer, who has studied the Baktrian evidence from a comparative perspective with known corpora from other satrapies (above all Egypt), this is for instance the case of officers such as the b'lt'm or the spr'.<sup>233</sup> Following her interpretation, the former was in fact in charge of transmitting instructions and orders (originally formulated orally in Persian or Aramaic, which therefore presupposes the mastery of several languages) from the imperial court, while the latter is likely to have had a function more similar to that of the «royal scribes» described by Herodotos.<sup>234</sup> As will be discussed in more detail in chapter 7, the fundamental importance of the *ADAB* parchments (and

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<sup>230</sup> Hdt. 3.128.3, Xen. *Anab.*, 1.2.20 and the remarks by Briant 2002, 447-448.

<sup>231</sup> See Ando 2017b and Henkelman 2017a.

<sup>232</sup> Folmer 2017, 436. Note Hdt. 3.128.3-4 and the comment *ad locum* by Christopher Tuplin (1987a, 118); but see moreover Asheri 1990, 341. On the Baktrian evidence consult Naveh and Shaked 2012, 66 ff. A1 (= Khalili IA6).

<sup>233</sup> Here some evidence for the two titles: the b'lt'm (ב'לטמ[...]) is attested in Naveh - Shaked 2012, 100 ff. A5a (= Khalili IA3), l. 5, while the spr' (ספרא) is recorded in Naveh - Shaked 2012, 76 ff. A2 (= Khalili IA4), l. 7.

<sup>234</sup> Folmer 2017, 424-430.

tallies) consists, among other things, in showing very clearly how, in addition to being a crucial instrument for the shaping, transversally across the whole of Central Asia, of the Achaemenid «institutional landscape» detailed studied by Henkelman in several recent contributions, the diffusion of the imperial paradigm through, for example, the development of bureaucratic infrastructures and the consequent multiplication of offices, also constituted an extremely powerful resource fostering the flourishing of clientele and ties of personal dependence capable of opposing in a sometimes extremely resolute (and effective) manner, the centralizing and «normalizing» thrusts of the paradigm itself which, without relying on those very social networks, would not have achieved its main goals in the way we are able to grasp from the archives.<sup>235</sup>

#### 4.1.1. Camels *Über Alles*

Having come this far, it is necessary to dwell for a moment on what we have previously termed the impact generated by the development of the Achaemenid political economy in Central Asia. Given that 1. the consequences of this phenomenon, not least in a long-term perspective, appear to have been momentous (think again of the implications of Aśoka's statements about the «kings of old» as the architects of the Mauryan(-further developed) road system) and 2. in the light of the fact that a not insignificant part of these activities appear to have benefited from the socio-political networks that predated the Achaemenid conquest and from the mētīc expertise of the local population, the study of the local impact of the establishment of a global (imperial) network of networks such as the one put in place by the Great Kings allows us to better appreciate the strategies by virtue of which some of the most prominent members of local societies could, often successfully, attempt to derive the maximum personal profit from the expansion of the imperial paradigm underpinning Achaemenid rule in Central Asia.<sup>236</sup> Let us take the case of the kurtaš as an example: the orders of magnitude that can be deduced from the Persepolis tablets imply that the sheer mobilization of very large groups of skilled workers, each one in charge of performing not infrequently high added-value activities not only in the satrapy of origin (ethnic or administrative is not so relevant in this context, although it is a difference that should be kept in mind), but also across the whole imperial territory over a period of

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<sup>235</sup> See on this point Tuplin 2017a. Such dynamics were not, however limited, to the bureaucracy. See for example what Manning 2021, 171 has to say about the recruitment of what he calls «contingents from the subject dominions» (a case which can be fruitfully compared with the Šāyābānīd evidence mentioned above). According to the scholar, in fact, «“contingents of the subject domains” had a wide range of relationships with the Achaemenids, and [...] personal relationships were just as important as established agreements [another feature of the «institutional landscape» brought to be by the systemic application of the imperial paradigm]. A leader who had carefully cultivated a network of friendships and favour-exchange [the Baktrians quickly mastered the game, as it shall be shown below] could raise more and better soldiers than one who was not known and trusted [see Tilly 2005 on *Trust and Rule*].»

<sup>236</sup> Hoo 2021; 2022, 229-243 for a detailed discussion of globalization theory's toolkit and vocabulary and its potential for a better understanding of economic and cultural entanglements in the ancient world.

several years, implied in itself the need to recruit a very wide spectrum of professional figures (e. g. the guides heading the travel parties recorded in the archive) who were most likely hired on a local basis by the most prominent members of the indigenous aristocracy (even if under imperial mandate, and the same can most likely be said about the army, especially across frontier territories such as Baktria, Sogdiana, and especially Chorasmia: Spitamenes and his cavalry are a case in point).<sup>237</sup>

One of the reasons for this phenomenon is that, precisely because of their greater territorial know-how, it was more efficient and cheaper for the Great Kings' delegates (starting with the satrap) to entrust the representatives of the local communities not only with the recruitment of the *kurtaš* - which is believed to have taken place, similarly to military conscription, at a village level - but also with the organization of the travel parties, as well as with the supply of the necessary equipment.<sup>238</sup> Symptomatic in this sense might be, for example, the case of a man named Munna, mentioned on at least two occasions in the dataset available (PF 1287 and PF 1555). During year 22 of Darius' reign (approximately April-May 500 BCE), he seems to have visited Baktria at least twice, which would suggest, as Henkelman has recently argued, that he was in fact a professional guide.<sup>239</sup> Once again, this example suggests that individuals such as those known from Alexander's historiographers, from Oxyartes to Arimazes via Spitamenes and Chorieneas, not to mention the peers (colleagues and rivals) of Bagavanta in Baktria, were able to negotiate as equals with the highest representatives of imperial power their role (and privileges) in this process.<sup>240</sup> In exchange for logistical support and the ability to provide crucial men and resources to meet the needs, in the final instance, of the imperial court, these strongmen were able either to carve out positions of absolute privilege within the satrapal hierarchy – under Alexander and his successors Oxyartes would become praetor Bactrianorum according to Curtius Rufus - or, more simply (but one option does not exclude the other, as shown by both the *ADAB* as well as, and most likely not by chance, by the story of Oxyartes himself), to preserve, and in some cases even expand the scope of their political purchase over territories of considerable extension.<sup>241</sup> However, and as the aforementioned mass-killing of camels by the Chinese

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<sup>237</sup> Henkelman 2018a, 244. On the army see Manning 2021, 171-175.

<sup>238</sup> Cf. Briant 2002, 794: because of the (exponentially increased: Colburn 20131; 2017; 2021) horizontal mobility across the Empire, entire communities of Baktrians and Sogdians were for instance settled in Asia Minor at the time of Alexander's invasion. On the professional figure of the guide in the context of the Achaemenid institutional landscape see Rollinger - Henkelman 2008, Henkelman 2008b, 313; 2017a, 213.

<sup>239</sup> Wu 2005, 217-218, Henkelman 2018a, 229. On the local recruitment of both the *kurtaš* and the army see Henkelman 2017a, 159 and Diod. Sic. 17.58.1.

<sup>240</sup> King 2020, 251-255 for some compelling parallels from Late Antique Baktria.

<sup>241</sup> Cf. Arr. *Anab.*, 4.22.5 and especially Curt. 9.8.9-10 for the definition of Rōxanē's father Oxyartes as praetor Bactrianorum. Moreover, it should be noted here that it is precisely in the area of military recruitment that we have comparative evidence of great importance in order to understand the extent of the negotiating purchase of the local élites vis-à-vis the imperial authority. In 1509, preparing to undertake a massive military expedition against the Qazaqs, the successor of the Timūrids, Šāyḃānī Ḥān, discovered to his own great disappointment that he was entirely dependent on the local governors of the O'zbek provinces he had just conquered, since both the military draft and the taxation were their exclusive prerogative (and see in the case of the Achaemenid recruitment system Manning 2021, 171).

People's Liberation Army (Zhōngguó Rénmín Jiěfàngjūn 中国人民解放军) should have pointed out, it is thanks to the study of the supply chain necessary to keep the communication system active and functional that the Achaemenids built and expanded across their domains, inter alia in Baktria, that we are able to gain a privileged vantage point for studying how and to what extent the manipulation of an «institutional landscape» according to the principles of the imperial paradigm could open up exceptionally wide margins of maneuver to members of the local aristocracy for the purposes of their own sociopolitical positioning as individuals and as a group.<sup>242</sup> Mention has already been made of the thousands of camels seized by the Makedonians when transporting the spoils of the sack of Persepolis and therefore put to a considerable better use than the Máoists did.<sup>243</sup> What should be noted in the context of the present discussion is the far from insignificant fact that the very existence of such herds required 1. a constant supply of livestock, 2. the infrastructural apparatus to - literally - foraging so many heads, and 3. the professional figures with the not-at-all-obvious skills needed to keep the herd stable. As a whole array of comparative evidence (from Maurya India to Táng China) suggests, and as it is illuminated by both the Persepolis tablets and the *ADAB*, not infrequently such professionals were recruited, even within Pārsa, from pastoral communities partially (or not at all) integrated within the ranks of the provincial administration. What is more interesting, these men (and perhaps women?) were mostly sought after precisely across those borderlands that our sources (perhaps – also – misrepresenting trends of imperial discourse?) as hotbeds of barbarism.<sup>244</sup> All the more worthy of attention, then, is the recording in an unfortunately extremely fragmentary *ADAB* document of a number - unspecified, but which the archaeological parallel from the Kyzylča suggests might have been substantial - of settlements surrounded by pastures specifically devoted to camel-breeding. In another parchment from the same corpus, the mention of provisions specifically stored in the imperial granaries for «camel drivers», a sort of Baktrian equivalent of the Indian mähūt, provides documentary evidence of a specific professional class, which based on comparative evidence from Táng China can be assumed to have been largely, if not exclusively, made up from local (pastoral) peoples.<sup>245</sup>

Two aspects are particularly noteworthy here: the first concerns the jargon and the orders of magnitude featuring in the two Baktrian documents, both of which are almost certain indications of

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<sup>242</sup> See most recently Kendirbai 2020 for the study of analogous dynamics involving Russian expansion in the Kalmyk and Qazaq steppes between the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>243</sup> Plut. *Vit. Alex.*, 37.2.

<sup>244</sup> Henkelman 2008b, 431-433; 2011, Briant 2018b, 63.

<sup>245</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 192 ff. C3 (= Khalili IA22) l. 22 (lgmln, «יָמַלְגַּל»). For a single line within a single document most likely coming from a well-furnished archive overseeing a considerable territory (at least some 300 km in radius), the figures are remarkable: 2 ardab of flour and 6 se'a of hay, i. e. more than 70 litres in total. On imperial stables in Táng-era China, see Skaff 2017 with literature.

an imperial institutional context and symptomatic of the existence of a highly developed and specialized, for example in terms of logistics, system of camel breeding on a scale that it is no exaggeration to describe as not falling short of industrial standards.<sup>246</sup> The second concerns the, almost certain, presence of individuals originating from Central Asian society, and as we shall see with good probability pertaining to (fairly) high echelons thereof, within the ranks of this crucial branch of Achaemenid administration. We are dealing here with a phenomenon, it must be reiterated, which is dictated in no small measure by the ability of the Central Asian élites to exploit 1. the superior knowledge of the territory and 2. the margins of maneuver made available to them by their social networks of clients and dependencies to mobilize labor and resources with the intention of turning a device of extraction and control such as the imperial paradigm into a tool for negotiating (new, wider) spaces of political autonomy.

Among the case studies which, if properly investigated, allow us to explore this phenomenon at work in a rather clear way is Alexander's Gedrosian expedition.<sup>247</sup> Two episodes deserve our attention in the context of this chapter, the first reported in some detail, though at least as confusingly, by Arrian and – albeit in a much more cursory manner - in Strabo's *Geography*. The second comes from Curtius Rufus: incidentally, the way our spokesmen handle the information under scrutiny here might further strengthen Rapin's case concerning the genealogy of the manuscript tradition dealing with Alexander's campaign into the upper satrapy as it is provided us by Greek and Roman authors.<sup>248</sup> Let us then move first to the Empire's Southeast. In the 6<sup>th</sup> book of his *Anabasis*, Arrian's account claims that, while marching back towards Persepolis through the desolate (ἐρημα, cf. Arr. *Anab.*, 6.22.2) Gedrosian moorland, devoid as it was of water supply of any kind (6.23.1) and flanking a similarly bleak littoral (6.23.2) populated by villages of wretched fishermen reduced to an almost feral subsistence economy (6.23.3), the by now almost worn out army of the Makedonians headed by Alexander almost by chance (or at least this is what Arrian would have the reader to believe) came across «a place where wheat [σίτος] was more abundant [than elsewhere]». After seizing it, the King [i. e. Alexander] «marked it [the grain] with his own seal [σημηνάμενος τῆ ἑαυτοῦ σφραγίδι] and ordered it to be carried to the sea. But while it was on its way to the post station [σταθμόν] nearest to the sea, the troops, including the bodyguard, showing contempt for the seal, appropriated the grain,

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<sup>246</sup> King forthcoming.

<sup>247</sup> Cf. Bosworth 1998, 166-185, Gehrke 2002<sup>2</sup>, 80-84, Henkelman 2017a, 45-54 and Degen 2022, 375-379, providing insightful ideological Near Eastern background.

<sup>248</sup> Rapin 2018a, 258-263. The first of the two accounts can be found in Arr. *Anab.*, 6.23.4-6, while Strab. 15.2.5 provides a more synthetic narrative. Almost nothing entered Pluratch's *Life (Vit. Alex.*, 66.3). As for Diod. Sic. 17.105.6 and Just. *Epit.*, 12.10.7, in narrating the Gedrosian ordeal they are completely silent on the matter accounted for by Arrian and Strabo. The second of our case studies can be read in Curt. 9.9.17-22 (on which most recently and insightfully Henkelman 2017a, 62, whose argument is followed and summarized in this section).

dividing it among those who were suffering most from hunger».<sup>249</sup> The account does not end here. In fact, Arrian's narrative goes on as follows: «for his part, Alexander sent Kreteos of Kallatis to organize the transport of all the resources he had been able to procure from the region's warehouses to supply the fleet. The inhabitants were also instructed to grind all the grain they could and bring it to the coast from the inland regions together with dates and livestock for the army's market [«ἐς ἀγορὰν τῷ στρατῷ»], and he also sent Telephos, one of his companions, to another location with a small supply of ground grain».<sup>250</sup>

Seals, an economy that, net of the primitivist picture painted by Arrian, appears to have been extremely differentiated (fishing, agriculture, livestock breeding), able moreover to exploit in the most rational and efficient way possible the different «affordances» characteristic of the Gedrosian landscape (today's Irānian Balūčistān), warehouses, post stations: as Wouter Henkelman has rightly noted in what, to date, stands out as the most detailed study of this passage and its geostrategic and economic implications, the Arrian's account «in a deceptively casual way is [...] a brief glimpse of an institutional landscape, reminiscent of that documented by the Persepolis Fortification Archive [...] and Alexander's well-informed use of it».<sup>251</sup> In the light of what has been discussed so far, even without considering - and indeed in clear contradiction with - the ideology (the «literary portrait», in the words of Vasileios Liotsakis, providing one of the *Anabasis* narrative pillars) that pervades Arrian's account, it is possible to conclude with reasonable certainty not only that the Achaemenid Empire had been able to imprint its own «signature» from one end to the other of its domains (including deep into the alleged wasteland of Gedrosia), but it can moreover be argued that the widespread diffusion of the administrative and governmental paradigm underlying such signature had transformed the socio-political and economic landscape of local communities in a far from negligible manner (one thinks, for example, of the implications of the presence, which the passage in the *Anabasis* suggests was considerably widespread, of infrastructures such as mills scattered throughout the territory of Gedrosia).<sup>252</sup> If, therefore, the first of the two passages discussed here offers a cross-section of the dynamics underpinning the Achaemenid imperial project from a centripetal perspective, the second account, transmitted by Curtius Rufus' *Historia Alexandri*, allows instead a centrifugal positioning, making therefore possible to study in some detail at least one of the strategies available to local élites in order to negotiate their own Handlungsräume against the satrapal administration

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<sup>249</sup> See Henkelman 2017a, 46.

<sup>250</sup> On the two individuals mentioned here («[scil. Ἀλέξανδρος] ταῦτα κομίσοντα πέμπει Κρηθεά τὸν Καλλατιανόν. καὶ τοῖς ἐγχωρίοις προσετάχθη ἐκ τῶν ἄνω τόπων σῖτόν τε ὅσον δυνατοὶ ἦσαν κατακομίσει ἀλέσαντας καὶ τὰς βαλάνους τὰς τῶν φοινίκων καὶ πρόβατα ἐς ἀγορὰν τῷ στρατῷ. καὶ ἐς ἄλλον αὖ τόπον Τήλεφον κατέπεμψε τῶν ἐταίρων σὺν σίτῳ οὐ πολλῷ ἀηλεσμένῳ» see Heckel 2006, 100, 261.

<sup>251</sup> Henkelman 2017a, 46-47.

<sup>252</sup> On the ideology underpinning Alexander's portrait as it can be inferred from Arrian's *Anabasis* see most recently Liotsakis 2019 and Degen and Rollinger 2022.



(both at a regional and on an imperial level). Much more serious than the (in the light of an assessment *Against the Grain* of Arrian's narrative perhaps even not so dramatic) lack of food supplies seem to have been the shortage of the necessary means of transporting them, i. e. pack animals and especially camels. According to the account provided by the *Anabasis*, being aware of the risks the army was exposing itself to by attempting to cross Gedrosia (in itself a consideration that raises questions about the existence or otherwise of pre-Alexandrine maps of the Empire, including of the upper satrapies), Stasanor and Frataphernes, respectively the satraps of Aria and Parthia hastened, apparently *motu proprio*, to send a considerable number of animals in order to supply the soldiers.<sup>253</sup> Even more remarkable, however, is the testimony of Curtius Rufus who, although he claims that the initiative was taken by Alexander, nevertheless notes that a caravan of camels set out from Parthia carrying *cocta cibaria* for soldiers on the verge of starvation.<sup>254</sup> The latter one is a remark which is all the more interesting in that it can be placed alongside a passage from Diodoros which recounts that «culinary preparations of all sorts» reached Persia from Babylonia in order to feed the royal table, suggesting that similar infrastructures (within which, as mentioned, «semi-institutional» actors such as pastoral communities were prominently active) were also widespread in other territories of the Empire: such evidence, again, confronts interpreters with the systemic (matrix-like) aspect of the imperial paradigm.<sup>255</sup> The orders of magnitude of the provisions being shipped, the fact that they were cooked (thus more suitable than fresh provisions to withstand the rigors of the Southern Irānian climate, but obviously requiring prior planning and storage infrastructure) and the speed with which, from Parthia across extremely challenging terrain, these camels were sent to Gedrosia, if on the one hand, one time more, quite clearly betrays an underlying imperial context (Henkelman's paradigm) and points to a developed system in terms of logistics and operational capacity, implying moreover the large scale of the camels' breeding process itself, at the same time singles out the undoubted involvement of the local élites in the provision of this crucial asset, if one thinks for instance that, once having reached a most likely life-saving agreement with Alexander after the conquest of his own Sogdian *πέτρα*, one of the conquered local strongmen was able to deliver to the Makedonians no less than 2000 camels (and numerous other pack animals), the latter, again, laden with *cocta cibaria*.<sup>256</sup> To this episode we could further add 1. the crossing, in record time, of Polydamas and two «Arabs» (perhaps other two specialized guides of Munna's stock) of the Central Irānian desert, from Drangiana to Media, 2. the mention by Diodoros Siculus of «δρομάδας καμήλους» sent to help Alexander and 3. the presence, in the Persepolis archives, of numerous references to camels originating from the Central Asian

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<sup>253</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 6.27.6.

<sup>254</sup> See the discussion of this apparently unassuming remark in Henkelman 2017a, 55.

<sup>255</sup> Diod. Sic. 17.67.4: cf. Briant 2002, 286-297.

<sup>256</sup> Cf. the insightful remarks by Henkelman 2017a, 55-63, especially p. 56, which interpretation I follow here, as well as Curt. 8.4.19-20 on the Sogdian episode (the man involved here is Sisimithres).

satrapies (for example from Gāndhārā), employed in large numbers within what was probably a network of (long-distance) economic exchanges connecting Central Asia to Persia via a Southern land route (a counterpart to the more famous Northern twin, active at least since Assyrian times) and the operational capacity of which depended entirely on the provision of numerous herds of camels.<sup>257</sup>

Two conclusions of fundamental importance follow from this evidence (and much more examples might be mentioned). Firstly, the testimonies discussed so far clearly shows that, to quote Henkelman's assessment, «sending supplies on camelback to Alexander was not an ad hoc action, but an operation embedded in institutional structures and testifying to the longstanding and specialized deployment of camels in the Iranian lands».<sup>258</sup> Based on a comparison with the *ADAB* dataset, it can moreover be added that the breeding and care of these animals was often contracted out by the satrap or his representatives to members of the local community (most likely having taken into account their technical skills), who were able to reap considerable benefits from such employment: not least the granting of land, possibly for pasturing their own and/or their communities' flocks.<sup>259</sup> It is not excluded, however, that another (contextual?) benefit that these individuals were able to negotiate in exchange for the zootechnical services made available to the Empire might have been the bestowal of specific appointments within the satrapal administration ranks. From this perspective, it is particularly interesting that in a page of his *Anabasis* Xenophon records an individual whom he defined as a «dynast among the hyparchs» (εἰς τῶν ὑπάρχων δυναστῆς), who would have played a crucial role in ensuring Cyrus the Younger access to the treasuries and, particularly significant in the context of the present discourse, to the food stores located along the route to the heart of the Empire at the time of the prince's revolt.<sup>260</sup> Incidentally, the case of the Orontes celebrated in an inscription dated around the 4<sup>th</sup> century (*IG II<sup>2</sup>*, 207a), who was awarded Athenian citizenship (!) for having sold a shipment of grain to Athens at a time when the crisis in which the πόλις was

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<sup>257</sup> Diod. Sic. 17.105.7, but see however Curt. 7.2.18. At least 12 camels coming from Gāndhārā are mentioned (most likely in the context of official (round?) trips in NN 0431 (dated to 501 BCE: Henkelman 2017a, 58) as part of a caravan made up of no less than 290 individuals. As most recently shown by Henkelma 2017a, 57, the Persepolis archive preserves further material demonstrating the existence of hundreds of animals being herded locally (to mention but a few examples, NN 0757:01-09 records no less than 435 heads: King 2021, 341 fn. 82), and some of them even belonged to «royal herds» (as it is explicitly stated in PF 1786 and PF 1787). Compare Degen 2022, 404 on the importance of local knowledge (and reliable imperial collaborators).

<sup>258</sup> Henkelman 2017a, 63. Italics in the original.

<sup>259</sup> Further details on the specific Baktrian context see Briant 1984, 81-88; 2002, 930 and 2009a, 149. See moreover *ALBL* I, 96 ff. for a comparison with the socio-institutional context within which an individual such as Aršāma moved and Seland 2014 for Palmyrene evidence supporting the hypothesis that in return from their services (pastoral) Baktrio-Sogdian communities obtained grazing land in the territory of the main satrapal oases. Note Parzinger 2020<sup>3</sup>, 695, who points out that mobile pastoralists with close ties with Sakā culture(s) were already settled across the borderlands of the Baktrian oases around the Yaz II period, thus centuries before the rise of the Achaemenids.

<sup>260</sup> Cf. Xen. *Anab.*, 1.2.20 as well as Xen. *Hell.*, 3.1.12 and the remarks by Briant (2002, 625). For a comparison with the situation in Israel and neighboring territories see *Esd.* 6.9 as well as Joseph. *AJ.*, 11.16 (on which Briant 2002, 452-454). Arist. [*Oec.*], 2.1.3 provides a detailed testimony of the relationships between the satrap and the speakers of the local communities in the Empire's territories.

enmeshed prevented the latter from paying the μισθός to its mercenaries, besides reminding us of the resources that the satraps (and the local populations from whose lands part of them were extracted by means of tax collection mechanisms similar to those we can deduce, for instance, from the *ARTP*) had at their disposal, is somehow reminiscent of the story of Spitakes and his Derbikkae, honored by Cyrus for precisely the very same reason mentioned in Curtius' narrative, namely for having provided his army with supplies during a period of food-shortages at the time of his Central Asian campaign(s).<sup>261</sup>

Despite their rather heterogenous (but not incoherent) nature, it seems therefore reasonable to argue that the evidence discussed in these pages consistently points towards the same conclusion: at the very moment in which the systematic implementation of the imperial paradigm dramatically contributed in transforming the socio-political and economic landscape of the Achaemenid domains, (re)organizing it according to the needs (and – according to Herodotos – the greed) of the court and the administration controlled by it (thus including the satrapal entourage), the imperial «institutional landscape» also turned out to be a fertile breeding ground for nourishing the ambitions of high-ranking representatives of indigenous societies. For these men were in fact now able to negotiate their own position(ality) – as well as that of their respective «selectorates» - no longer, as previously was the case, within their (micro)regional context of origin, but on the infinitely larger (and therefore potentially much more remunerative) scale of the Achaemenid world Empire.

#### 4.1.2. The Empire and the Baktrians, the Baktrians in the Empire: Who, Where, How Many, How

Having abandoned Gedrosia, it is time to come back once more to Bactria, not before a short pit stop in Persepolis. The reason therefore is that one of the most noteworthy results of the expansion of the Central Asian dossiers coming from the archive is the unprecedented resolution of the picture currently available of the functioning of the imperial infrastructure, the exponential growth in connectivity between Bactria (and adjoining territories) and the rest of the Empire, as well as – and perhaps most noteworthy - the social status of some of these individuals: as such and perhaps even as a professional group (from what seems possible to argue from the tablets performing highly specialized tasks in different regions of the Achaemenid domains). Alongside a dataset of some 60 documents mentioning Arachosians, 23 devoted to «Indians» and 10 accounting for Sogdians, at least

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<sup>261</sup> The case of the Inca polity once again provides a useful touchstone, since it is possible to demonstrate how, within this Empire, the economy of certain regions particularly challenge to reach (for example the highlands above 4000 meters as well as the lowlands at the foothills of the mountains, where the forest began) was primarily driven by labor obligations that the local élites coordinated for the benefit of the Inca ruler, in a process that must have opened up considerable room for political negotiation and the acquisition of prestige for the most powerful members of the Andean ruling class: see D'Altroy 2015<sup>2</sup>, 351-417, Covey 2017.

than nine entries in the recently published travel records attest in fact to the movements of Baktrian parties of no less than 25 persons (and sometimes considerably bigger) travelling along the roads of the Empire.<sup>262</sup> As it were perhaps to be expected not least because of the nature of the archives itself (which were centered on the territory of the most important among Persian «imperial foundations», Persepolis and Susa are the most frequently mentioned destinations, but other key regions of the Empire (for example Media) also feature in the evidence. The same is the case, remarkably, for even apparently less important settlements, if one thinks that even a relatively remote village in the heartland of Pārsa is attested as destination of these travelling parties.<sup>263</sup> In another dozen cases, however, we are there is evidence available showing the constant arrival in Fārs of groups of kurtaš of considerably variable size (from less than 10 to more than 150 individuals), who appear to have been selected, equipped, and sent to the heartland following patterns in every respect comparable to those known in the case of Arachosia. This is a clue that, once again, clearly shows how the satrapies of Eastern Irān and Central Asia had become an integral part of a complex bureaucratic-administrative network (which means: of the mechanisms of the imperial political economy) within the Achaemenid organization of the conquered territories.<sup>264</sup> As evidence, however, of the fact that we are not (only) dealing with a predatory mechanism, the Persepolis tablets show how, alongside the regular and cadenced arrival of rather heterogeneous groups (often men, but as we have seen, women, with or without children, were not rare) of Central Asians in numerous localities scattered through Pārsa, there was no lack of movements in the opposite direction, in turn testifying to the fact that, even from the Persepolis' perspective, Baktra was much less distant than literary sources are wont to suggest.<sup>265</sup>

If on the one hand, as already mentioned with regard to the statements engraved in the Aśoka edicts, documents of this kind shed light on the extremely high horizontal mobility within the entire imperial space - the psychological effect of which on the population must have been considerable, since the institutional framework within which this mobility took place and was organized provided the most tangible evidence of the (ideological-cultural, political, economic, and geographical) unity of the Achaemenid domains -, on the other hand, some of the tablets recently published thanks to the work of Wouter Henkelman and of the entire team working at the *Persepolis Fortification Archive Project* has also made it possible to show some of the reasons for such intense mobilization of human resources from Central Asia, namely the technical skills (which, following James Scott's remarks, we have called mētīc knowledge) that made the Central Asians - and apparently the Baktrians in

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<sup>262</sup> Besides Wu 2005, King 2019; 2021 provides the most up-to-date overview of Arachosia in the Fortification archive.

<sup>263</sup> Fort. 1316-101 provides a good example in this sense: Henkelman 2017a, 133 for text and translation of this unpublished tablet.

<sup>264</sup> Henkelman 2017a, 169, Briant 2018a, 268-273.

<sup>265</sup> Cf. for example Fort. 1316-101: 05'-06' and the commentary in Henkelman 2018a, 229.

particular - a group with a high degree of human capital, and therefore particularly sought after by the imperial administration.<sup>266</sup>

If one bears in mind what has been observed in the previous chapters about the engineering challenge posed to Central Asian peoples by the regime of the largest of the watercourses flowing through the region, it should not come as too much of a surprise that such skills were required by officials acting on behalf of Achaemenid power even outside the satrapy of origin of the Central Asian kurtaš, and that precisely such canalization works were among the main reasons behind the travel orders involving numerous groups of individuals from Baktria and the neighboring provinces, at least as far as we know. As far as can be gauged from the evidence available, the case of the port hub of Taḥ(u)makka, located on the Būšehr peninsula in the Persian Gulf, is by far the best-known example. A single entry in the travel registers kept in Persepolis, to mention but one particularly striking case, records 74 Baktrians active in the area together with a contingent of 72 other kurtaš, this time of Sogdian origin.<sup>267</sup> The value of such a testimony lies, among other things, in the fact that it substantiates with first-hand information the allusions, repeated in the classical authors and particularly insistent in Herodotos, to Darius' keen interest in the development of the imperial riverine network as a powerful trans-regional infrastructural tool within the conquered territories and, at least in intention, as a lever to be used against the local élites who owned land in an area affected by the crown's investments.<sup>268</sup> Furthermore, the evidence from Būšehr helps in supporting the long-standing and highly debated hypothesis concerning the existence (and extension in Achaemenid times) of a series of river connections between Central Asia and the Western offshoots of the Empire, for example the Black Sea, which would have been fostered by means of a branch of the Oxus known as the Uzboy Canal. This is, as mentioned, a very contentious issue among scholars.<sup>269</sup> However, the

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<sup>266</sup> On the psychological aspect of the construction of an infrastructural system recognizable as such and functioning according to the same principles from Sardis to Leninābād (Хучанд) both Henny Colburn (2013; 2017) and, once again, Wouter Henkelman (2017a, 63-80; forthcoming) have recently written important pages.

<sup>267</sup> Cf. NN 1858 and NN 0862 (see Henkelman 2018a, 229 ff., with a detailed discussion and edition of the primary sources addressed here). There are currently ten known texts recording the presence of kurtaš from Sogdiana, some of extremely significant size (at least 200 people in PF 1175); see Henkelman 2018a, 225 fn. 8. Taḥ(u)makka is probably also mentioned by Ptolemy (*Geog.*, 6.4.7), although the exact location of much of the toponymy of the *Geography*, especially regarding the upper satrapies, is still far from being established with certainty. Further details regarding the strategic importance of this settlement and the labor force at work there are provided by Henkelman 2008b, 308-309. The Central Asian file under scrutiny here, among other things, suggests that Taḥ(u)makka was not the first destination outside the home territory of the kurtaš active at the site. Matarese 2021, 167-178 underestimates the difficulties in moving even few tens of men on a scale never before attempted in Eurasian history: compare for a rather different assessment of the issue and of its implications in King 2021, 289-305.

<sup>268</sup> See Hdt. 4.44 with the relative commentary in Asheri *et al.* 2007, 613 and Rollinger 2014a, 96. With regards to infrastructures such as the irrigation canal seen as an imperial device adopted in order to tame local élites see Tuplin 1991 as well as, more recently, Mukerji 2008; 2015.

<sup>269</sup> Sources on this topic are discussed mainly by Pierfrancesco Callieri (2001; 2013), Marek Jan Olbrycht (2010), and Édvard V. Rtveladze (2010). Recently, Rapin 2017a, 42 expressed serious doubts about the plausibility of the existence of this river artery: see, however, Abdullaev 2007, 78 (as well as Minardi 2018) for a cartographic rendering of its supposed course based on a comparison between the literary documentation and what was known archaeologically at the time of the publication of the contribution. A possible reminiscence of such river connectivity may have been preserved

most recent archaeological research carried out in the territory of Chorasmia has brought to light some traces of the Uzboy's ancient bed, which seems to have been capable of connecting the satrapy with the Sar̄ygam̄ȳš basin, and the latter with the Caspian, thus giving new impetus to a scenario that, until a few years ago, could only be supported by recourse to sporadic pieces of evidence found in classical sources, whose geographical competence in Central Asia has been repeatedly subjected to severe criticism by interpreters.<sup>270</sup>

Nevertheless, the Taḥ(u)makka dossier on the one hand, the information that can be obtained regarding the Baktrian mēt̄ic expertise in the field of hydrology and, finally, the ethnographic evidence coming from Chorasmia itself in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as well as, and above all, in the Stalinist period, make the hypothesis of a systematic employment of local (lato sensu Central Asian) labor in projects of landscape engineering along the Uzboy not only more plausible than before, but even more economical, and this in light of the existence, which the documentary sources relating to Būšeḥr confirm beyond doubt, of ambitious infrastructural projects in the field of water regimentation through the construction of massive canals, carried out under the aegis of the imperial administration in several Irānian satrapies, and not only just in Egypt or Babylonia.<sup>271</sup> It has been mentioned in the preceding pages that, among the most revolutionary features characterizing the new evidence on Achaemenid Central Asia that has recently come to light (or for the first time made accessible in a reliable scientific form), is undoubtedly the fact that it allows to dive below the level of the satrapal court or of the narrower circles of the local aristocracy, shedding therefore an however faint glimmer of light on the social status, and living conditions, of (relatively) common individuals coming from Central Asian society during the centuries of Achaemenid hegemony over the region.

A first point that needs to be highlighted in this regard is the mention, in several recently published documents, of rations 1. higher than average in quantity (and this notwithstanding the fact that the entire organization of the supply system for the kurtaš suggests that the ability of these groups to provide for their own sustenance was taken for granted) and 2. more valuable in terms of quality than what known from the rest of the evidence so far available for study. This in particular is a rather

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in sources such as Ptolemy (*Geog.*, 6.10) and especially Strabo (11.8.2; 11.9.2-3). Also important are the comments on the long-standing issue of river connections between Central Asia and the rest of the Empire by Rapin (2001, 203), and Frantz Grenet (Rapin and Grenet 2018, 146).

<sup>270</sup> Minardi 2015a, 2. See also Lerner 2014, 164-166 making the case for a climatic change around the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE that would have dramatically altered the hydrology of the region, as well as Minardi 2018 for the hypothesis of a river route connecting Baktria and Sogdiana to Chorasmia via the Oxus and Zarafšān. On the Central Asian «incomprehensible geography» featuring in the literary evidence note Rapin 2001; 2005; 2014; 2018a, 260.

<sup>271</sup> See also Polyb. 10.28 on other hydraulic construction sites in Central Asia that may have required local highly specialized labor. Indexical of the ability to communicate directly with territories even extremely distant from those of the Empire, the discovery of a cylindrical seal of Anatolian-Persian origin in the territory of the Russian city of Anapa (Анапа, in today's Krasnodar – Краснодар - region) gives an idea of the logistical capabilities of the imperial and satrapal courts. This makes the case for a connection between Central Asia and the regions North of the Black Sea far from implausible, especially if one considers Achaemenid interests in the area. See Miller 2010, 875, Burstein 2021, and Tsetskhladze 2021.

telling sign of social distinction or, at least, of the consideration that certain groups of Central Asians, and specifically of Baktrians, enjoyed in the eyes of the imperial administration.<sup>272</sup> Significant from this point of view is the record of dried fruits (in some cases even fresh, a remarkable fact in view of the perishable nature of such goods) in substantial amounts - in one case an annual supply of apples to a group of Baktrians is recorded - and even meat, which recently prompted Wouter Henkelman to argue that the recipients of such delicacies must have been specialized working teams (in his words «dedicated taskforces») such as aides-de-camp, pages or (satrapal? royal?) secretaries.<sup>273</sup> Alongside dried fruit, the mention of meat in particular is of extreme importance: as shown, on the one hand, by the rations assigned to the groups of hallinup and haldabe coming from - and going to - Baktria and, on the other hand, by an even cursory perusal of the Perseopolitan evidence published to date, it is clear that meat rations were usually assigned to members of the royal court, to officers of the highest rank and, indeed, to individuals worthy of special treatment by virtue of the highly specialized nature of the services they provided.<sup>274</sup> From this point of view, the most sensational document in the entire dossier known to date is undoubtedly NN 1507, since this single tablet records the disbursement of no less than 46 sheep/goats - the equivalent of a small flock - to (once again) a group of Baktrians.<sup>275</sup>

Apart from the amount of livestock itself, which has almost no parallel in the record known to date, what makes this piece of evidence truly exceptional is the absence of two additional snippets of information normally found in the ration books referring to the kurtaš, namely: 1. the ration lists and 2. the share of the ration. This is a notable absence because, usually, these two pieces of information make it possible to deduce the (usually rather modest) per capita portion that was due to each of the members of one of these (often extremely numerous) groups, over a (often extremely long) given time. In addition, the very phraseology of the document, which explicitly states that the cattle in question were paid or, according to another possible translation, made available to the Baktrians, deserves not to be overlooked. In fact, as Wouter Henkelman points out in his commentary on this precious document, this is a very peculiar formulation, which suggests that, at the very least in this specific case, we are dealing with rather high-ranking officers or, alternatively, highly skilled

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<sup>272</sup> See Manning 2021, 172 who, following Elspeth Dusinberre's judgement, argues that «differences in rations were a key marker of status».

<sup>273</sup> Henkelman 2018a, 236; 2021d, 144 for discussion of this topic. In some cases, it is even possible to establish a direct connection of these contingents (and others, e. g. of Arachosian origin, within whose dossier «elite travel companies» are attested to have visited Persepolis) to prominent members of the imperial family, above all the already mentioned Irdabama, perhaps the mother (according to others *one* of the wives) of Darius. See Henkelman 2017a, 52-53. For the - indeed extraordinary - annual commission of apples see Fort. 2319-101: 17'-18': here the fruits are called zippi, i. e. a kind of «bonus rations».

<sup>274</sup> See Henkelman 2005, 158; 2008b, 417-419; 2018a, 238. On different amounts of rations as indexical of social status see King 2021, 275.

<sup>275</sup> Cf. the critical edition (with commentary) of this tablet in Henkelman 2018a, 249-250 and King 2021, 299-300 on specialization of the workforce as the rationale of behind the movement of comparably small travel parties from Central Asia to the imperial core, which suggests that Baktrians (or Arachosians) were sought after specifically for their skills.

workers. The reasons for this suggestion, he further claims, are basically two: 1. the quotas for the distribution of the meat supply seem to have been delegated to the group itself and not, as is usually the case in such circumstances, predetermined by the administration issuing the laissez-passer; 2. the only other known parallels of similar meat disbursements concern, in one case, a group of Babylonian «specialists» (perhaps – notably - scribes) receiving 45 heads of cattle and, in the second, a team of 𒀠AR-huttip (literally something like «stonecutters»), whose members were gifted with no less than 71 goats/sheep.<sup>276</sup> As if this were not enough, it is appropriate to add here that another element of absolute exceptionality singling out NN 1507 is provided by the very fact that it was issued by no less an individual than the likely predecessor of Pharnakes (known in Ēlāmite as Parnakka) at the head of the Persepolitan administration, a man known to the sources as Irdumartiya.<sup>277</sup> That an individual of such socio-political purchase personally took the trouble (and not delegating his chancellery or his subordinates, of whom he was undoubtedly not lacking) to issue an official order - moreover of the kind just described - destined to the sustenance of a group of kurtaš is something noteworthy in itself. It is moreover suggestive, at the very least, of the uncommon status enjoyed by the recipients of such goods for reasons that, unfortunately, remain unknown to us. The picture, in many ways so extremely detailed and revealing of the pervasive nature of the imperial paradigm, nevertheless presents some grey areas, some more, some less obvious. There are at least four of such *Shadow Lines* that need to be stressed with particular emphasis in the context of the present discussion, namely: 1. the uncertainty, dictated in no small part by the (significantly greater) percentage of the Persepolis archives still unpublished, regarding the actual density of the administrative «network of networks» and, to an even greater extent, of the number of personnel employed, although at least in the first case the evidence currently available suggests that the network described in these pages was, if not extremely dense (in terms, for example, of number of post stations or garrisons per square kilometer), certainly extremely efficient. 2. With the exception of rather sporadic and generally poorly documented episodes (the case of the so-called tally sticks, on which something has already been said, but on which more shall be said in the next) the almost complete invisibility of the local population outside the imperial administrative networks must be noted. Moreover, 3. the concrete possibility of further deviations from the Persepolitan paradigm imposed by the specificity of the regional contexts is a particularly thorny issue and, finally; 4. one has to deal with the (relative) difficulty of identifying changes on the diachronic axis, both as regards the pre-

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<sup>276</sup> Henkelman 2018a, 238. See moreover NN 2503 (where a single stonecutter was summoned from Arachosia, which might be explained in the light of his skills: King 2021, 303-304), NN 2513, PF 1592, and PF 1633 (where the 𒀠AR-huttip are mentioned: these primary sources are all edited and discussed in Henkelman 2018a, 236-239, whose analysis I follow here). According to Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1995 (mentioning PF 1793 and 1794) «one sheep for ten persons seems to be a normal ration».

<sup>277</sup> See on this individual and the system the running of which he was entrusted with for example Henkelman 2008b, 127.



Achaemenid context and, more importantly, when it comes to the effects of the system of extraction and control set up in the Central Asian satrapies following Cyrus' conquest or at least from the time of Darius. This last liability is particularly relevant, since it entails the alarming potential of threatening (at least to a certain extent) one of the strongest benefits of an interpretative frameworks such as the imperial paradigm, namely its replicable (matrix-like) nature, both in space and – crucially – in time.

It will not have gone unnoticed that, in the case of the last three points, these limitations are dictated not so much (or at any rate not only or perhaps even predominantly) by the quantity, but rather by the quality of the available sources. As James Scott has painstakingly emphasized, and as discussed in the second chapter of the present study, a device such as an archive (and those of Persepolis are indeed no exception) not only represents, by definition, a snapshot of a more or less compressed chronological span, so that it cannot be excluded that, a generation before or a generation after the period it covers, some aspects - though perhaps, given the peculiarities of the Achaemenid case, not the structural ones - of the picture the archival evidence puts in front of us might have changed. However, it is also an extremely partial source, offering those who consult it a very precise image, oriented towards clarity, order, and coherence, of the often ambiguous, confused, and contradictory reality that it aims to order, catalogue, and simplify.<sup>278</sup> Precisely for this reason, in an attempt to grasp at least some deviations from the Persepolitan paradigm (even if, very often and not without a paradoxical component in all this, generated and even fostered by it), in the last section of this chapter we shall turn our attention to another documentary corpus, made of items pertaining to the domain of the aristocratic banquet, and especially to luxury tableware.<sup>279</sup> If, on the one hand, this kind of evidence also provides yet another demonstration of strategies (after the «rapid» integration process dictated by the road infrastructure studied by Henry Colburn and the «slower» process exemplified by the movements of the kurtaš all over the imperial dahayāva addressed in detail by Henkelman) aimed at strengthening the integration of the Great King's lands and peoples into the matrix of the empire, on the other hand, the objects featuring in the following pages offer the opportunity to highlight the sophistication of some of the strategies of «state evasion and resistance» devised by members of the local aristocracy not in spite, but precisely because of the widespread pervasiveness of the Achaemenid imperial paradigm.<sup>280</sup>

## 5. *The Golden Bowl*

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<sup>278</sup> Henkelman 2018a, 240.

<sup>279</sup> See Ebbinghaus 2018.

<sup>280</sup> Cf. Colburn 2013 and Henkelman 2018a, 232.

In 2002, the Miho Museum (ミホミュージアム) in Kyōto (京都) hosted an exhibition - with the catchy title *Treasures of Ancient Bactria*, henceforth *TAB* - that caused a sensation among both the general public and (especially) scholars: the most recent acquisitions from the museum's collection, totaling 215 objects, were showcased for the first time.<sup>281</sup> Among these, the greatest excitement was undoubtedly stirred by a rather large group of items, comprising gold plaques and at least six statuettes, generally dated between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE, with an unmistakably religious subject (officiants dressed according to the etiquette of Zoroastrian cults as attested in written sources, not infrequently holding the ritual barəsman) that bore striking similarities with some of the known specimens from the so-called «Oxus treasure». So much so that, according to the opinions of authoritative scholars - above all that of Igor' Rubenovič Pičikjan, one of the archaeologists who excavated the temple at Tāxt -i Sāngīn, in Southern Tağikistān, which is by far the most important cultic building in pre-Kušāna Bactria – the findings presented at the Miho exhibition had to be interpreted as coming from a «second» Oxus treasure.<sup>282</sup> The objects on display at the Miho, which were immediately recognized as having the potential to lastingly reshape our knowledge of the cultural history, metallurgical techniques, and religious traditions (to name but a few examples) of Achaemenid and post-Achaemenid Bactria, have at the same time sparked a fierce debate - not without some rather unpleasant moments - since, to put it mildly, the opaque circumstances of the discovery of these objects, the systematic – and, to tell the truth, anything but surprising - refusal by the Japanese museum to provide details about the history of the lots that came into its possession, the suspicion moreover, on the part of other scholars (Osmund Bopearachchi in particular) no less authoritative than those who assured the Tağik origin of the objects, that some (or even all) of the items on display in fact came from Afğānistān and, to be more specific: that they once were part of the immense treasure of Mir Zakah, to which a misleading provenance was attributed in order to

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<sup>281</sup> Inagaki 2002. To be more precise, the museum is located in Shigaraki (信楽町) which is about 30 km east of Kyōto.

<sup>282</sup> See in the catalogue the nos. 48 (a-d), 49 (a-b), 64, 65 (a-d), 66 (a-k), 67 (a-i), 68 (a-p), 69 (a-j), 70 (a-w), 71, 75 (a-j), 76 (a-m), 77 (a-l), 78 (a-u), 79 (a-u), 80 (a-h), 81 (a-q), 86, 87 (a-m), 88 (a-o), 89 (a-c), 90 (a-b), 91, 92 (a-c), 94 as well as nos. 95-96. For an assessment of these findings in relation to the Oxus treasure (on which see e. g. Dalton 1964, the – very critical – remarks by Muscarella 2003 and a less skeptical judgement by Curtis 2004 and 2012), worth mentioning are especially the following contributions: Pičikjan 1992; 1996, Litvinskiĭ and Pičikjan 1996. On the Oxus temple, besides Litvinskiĭ and Pičikjan 1981; 2000 see most notably the contributions by Gunvor Lindström (2008; 2010; 2016; 2020 for a thorough archaeological overview of the Tağik evidence dated to the Hellenistic and later periods) as well as the important Francfort 2012. For a thorough analysis of the broader religious context of ancient (especially Hellenistic) Bactria, see Martinez-Sève 2010; 2018b, Lindström 2014; 2017; 2020, Hoo 2022, 109-126 on the Oxus temple, and Melloni 2020; 2023. Remarkable for the discussion that will be developed in the following pages is the parallel, noted by Miller 2010, 858, between the gilded oivoχόνη with the lion-shaped handle from the Oxus treasure (Dalton 1964 n. 17) and two similar pottery vessels discovered in the tomb of İköztepe, which again suggests a somewhat centrally controlled production of these precious objects. In addition, Margaret Miller has noted that in both cases these items may have reached the *Far West* (and the *Far East*) of the Empire in much the same way as Colburn (2020a, 207) argues for Egypt, i. e. as gifts from the ruler to the local satrap or other prominent Persian who would then hand them over to one of their *local* supporters (as already seen in the previous chapters a very effective strategy of «selectorate» building).

evade the repatriation requests coming from Kābul - as well as with the goal of avoiding rather embarrassing questions regarding the identity of the sellers, not to mention the use of the proceeds from the transaction - have helped to cast more than a shadow on the possibility, not to mention the legitimacy and similar, anything but trivial, ethical issues, of using the objects on display at the Miho for historical analysis. This is said, moreover, leaving aside the opinions, put forward particularly vocally by some art historians, of those suspect (at least parts of) the Miho collection being one of the most blatant forgeries in the history of Central Asian archaeology.<sup>283</sup> Of particular weight against the hypothesis – vigorously defended by Igor’ Pičikjan - that the objects on display at the Miho belong to a «second Oxus treasure» is the fact (repeatedly stressed by Oscar White Muscarella) that to date the origin of each of these objects remains unknown, and the same applies to the British Museum collection (the «first» Oxus treasure). It follows, the scholar claims, that any argument based on the purported Oxus origins of the Miho items is extremely tenuous.<sup>284</sup>

This is not the place - and the lack of an adequate legal background would not allow me to do so in any case - to dive deeper into the thorny juridical and, given the geopolitical, historical, and cultural context we are talking about, no less crucial deontological issues surrounding the history - to a certain extent shrouded in novelistic contours - of the Miho collection, to say nothing of the questions concerning its future. Crucial for the purposes of this chapter (and more generally of this study), however, are two further remarks. The first one, which might be seen as preliminary to the whole discussion which shall be developed in these pages, concerns the fact that, up to now, although there are still crucial (and multiple) dating problems for many among the *TAB* objects, with proposals ranging from two to three centuries (6<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> BCE, and so on), it seems possible to assume that at least some of them are authentic pieces (and - relevant to the present argument - this seems to be the case especially for the luxury tableware to be dealt with below). This is made at least likely thanks to chemical analyses of the gold alloy composition (and particularly of silver’s decay due to the contact with the terrain) carried out on some specimens of the Treasure coming from the British Museum, which have confirmed the ancient date seems to conclusively prove an ancient date (6<sup>th</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE) of the collection. While waiting for similar opportunities with the Miho objects, this kind of insights undercuts at least one of the branches on which the argument against the feasibility of the stylistic parallels between the two collection sits: given their similarities, it follows that, if the Treasure from the British is authentic, this might well be the same at least for some pieces of the

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<sup>283</sup> See on this issue at least Bopearachchi and Flandrin 2005 (with bibliography) as well as Ball 2019 n. 728 on the site of Mir Zakah.

<sup>284</sup> This is the larger point of the arguments raised in Muscarella 2003 but see however Curtis 2004 arguing in favor of the Baktrian origin at least of the objects preserved in the British Museum, the similarities of which with the Miho items are striking.

Japanese one.<sup>285</sup> The main takeaway of the above is that, apart from the - it should be reiterated - inescapable juridical problems and the even more pressing ethical issues that must and cannot leave indifferent the scholarly world working on Central Asia, the potentially inestimable value of the Miho evidence also makes it impossible to bracket it off from a historical treatment devoted to the understanding of the socio-political, economic, and cultural dynamics characteristic of the Achaemenid imperial experience in Central Asia.<sup>286</sup> The second point, closely related to the previous one, concerns the composition of the corpus showcased at the Miho: (understandably) dazzled by the similarities between the objects from the British Museum and the «votive» plaques of the *TAB* (undoubtedly the highlight of the exhibition), critics seem to have paid insufficient attention to the rest of the dataset, a closer analysis of which, especially if based on proper contextualization and a sound theoretical framework, might be able to tell us a great deal about some crucial aspects of the interactions between the Achaemenid court (which, as we shall see, and contrary to a still widely shared view among interpreters, was certainly involved in the process of production and circulation of such precious objects – especially the drinking vessels) and the local élites from a different - and perhaps less centripetal - perspective than that offered by the Persepolis archives. The central purpose behind the last section of this chapter, therefore, is to provide an initial contribution along this line of research.

Before moving on, however, two preliminary steps are necessary, which shall be taken simultaneously in the following (sub)section: first, a quick but as thorough description as possible of the objects featuring the discussion to be developed in the following pages. Second, an assessment of some among the most characteristic social dynamics of the Achaemenid court will help to understand *why* the Miho vessels can provide crucial insights on 1. another, only apparently more sophisticated and less coercive, feature of the imperial paradigm and 2. the refined dialectics characteristic of the strategies of compliance, subordination, and defiance implemented by the representatives of the Baktrian aristocracy in order to gain the maximum benefit from their participation in the established imperial culture, while at the same time keeping intact - and if possible even expanding - their *Handlungsräume vis-à-vis* the court itself, both that of the satrap and the one around the Great King.

### 5.1. Τόνδε χρυσίτην Περσικὸν ἡμίλιθον

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<sup>285</sup> Mongiatti *et al.* 2010. Muscarella himself (2003, 273), despite his critical remarks, is quite clear in stating that he does not believe that all of the Miho objects are fakes, and – interestingly - he does not raise any skepticism concerning the drinking vessels.

<sup>286</sup> See Curtis 2012, Lindström 2020, and Hoo 2020, 555-562 for insightful methodological remarks.

Let us therefore start with the dataset. Adopting an extremely conservative stance (not least because of the chronological fluctuations mentioned above), and therefore excluding from discussion, as a prudential measure, all objects from the Miho collection the suggested dating for which is lower than the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE (but, as we shall see shortly, it will be necessary to leave room at least for a partial exception), next to the much celebrated, and equally often discussed, golden votive plaques, the *TAB* collection includes four other categories of objects that deserve a discussion of some detail. Of clear symposial background, or in any case closely related to the aristocratic banquet, are the following items. 1. The 5 gilded silver ῥῶθα (precious containers traditionally used for pouring liquids), averaging between 13 and 31 cm in height and with a diameter also varying between 10 and 15 cm, to which a high-footed, golden cup (a censer?) should be added (9.8 cm in height with a diameter of 7.6).<sup>287</sup> 2. The 28 bowls (some of them being more concave, other rather shallow), of varying size and depth (there are examples over 30 cm in diameter and weighing more than 1.5 kg), finely embossed and decorated with motifs such as rosettes or lotus flowers of unmistakable Achaemenid inspiration. To the above may be added 2.1. a gilded silver φιάλη of 18.6 cm in diameter, a situla (another kind of drinking vessel) also made of gilded silver and splendidly decorated in the form of a lion's head - which, however, because of its extremely uncertain date (5<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE) will not be included in the discussion below - and 2.2. a silver ladle 25 cm long and 6 cm in diameter.<sup>288</sup> In particular, the bowls (in both types mentioned above) and the φιάλη represent a piece of evidence of considerable importance, because they can be fruitfully compared with some of the (few) similar objects found in contexts of controlled excavation (e. g. the acropolis of Susa). Said comparison shows that, at the very latest from the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, such vessels were commonly

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<sup>287</sup> Inagaki 2002 nos. 19, 21, 116, 117, 122, 141, the latter being the censer. Here follows its catalogue entry (p. 246): «This high-footed cup form is thought to originally have been a censer. The foot with its rounded bottom is incised from the center of the base with a radiating pattern of thin lines which rise up the sides of the foot. This may have been designed to represent the rising smoke of the incense. The upper body of this censer is covered with a grooved pattern of long flower petals, and there is a round protruding band between vessel foot and body, an area also circled by a narrow band of lotus and palmette design [typical features of Achaemenid decoration on such a kind of bowls]. The upper edge of the vessel rim is cut into a diagonal cut form, while the grooved pattern length differs depending on the shape of the vessel. Four equally spaced rings are attached to the interior point of attachment between body and rim, and these are thought to have been used to attach chains». As for the ῥῶθα, in two cases (nos. 19 and 21) a Thracian origin of the items is suggested in the catalogue, although the possibility that (p. 233) «some examples of this type of vessel are said to have been made by these Eastern Greeks for the Scythians» does not rule out that the same was true for Central Asia, since it is known that *Sakā* élites were eager to purchase luxury goods coming from Achaemenid-ruled territories (see Parzinger 2020<sup>3</sup>, 659-666 as well as the evidence discussed in Peterson 2020 together with Morris 2021a, 196-197).

<sup>288</sup> Inagaki 2002 nos. 35 (the ladle), 101 (the φιάλη), 115 (the situla), 100, 102, 107, 110, 111, 113 as well as the nos. 123-142 for the bowls (apart from the already mentioned goblet, n. 141). Here the catalogue entry of the φιάλη (p. 243): «The vessel has 12 almond-shaped protrusions that are hammered outward from the interior surface. The center of the interior is fitted with a 28 petal rosette, and there is a gilded silver hemisphere attached to the middle of the rosette. The middle of the exterior base of the work is decorated with a 24 petal rosette, and there is a small hemispherical protrusion in the center of that rosette». A silver spoon with a (fragmented) oval bowl has been found as far as the Issyk kyraň (Southeastern Qazaqstan) bearing strong resemblances with similar examples discovered at Pasargadai, which makes it very likely it was an Achaemenid import, perhaps coming from Baktria (Simpson and Pankova 2021, 504). Similar findings further enhance the plausibility of an Achaemenid origin of items such as the ladle displayed at the Miho.

circulating in the social environment of Achaemenid «imperial foundations», thus suggesting that the *TAB* objects may have been produced, if not under direct supervision, at least on behalf of the imperial court.<sup>289</sup>

A third category - more intuitively traceable to that set of practice centered on both consensus-building and the development of bonds of dependence between the Great King and his *bandakā* investigated in detail by Briant in the *History* includes 8 gold and silver torques (the order of magnitude is about 9.9 x 3.4 x 0.8 cm) in every way similar to those depicted in the hands of some of the so-called «envoys» starring in the delegations portrayed on the Apadāna staircases. They, too, are dated between the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE.<sup>290</sup> To the above can be added five further examples of bracelets, one group of which contains examples adorned with lion protomes, also worked in gold, and moreover four specimens of earrings (in one case a pair, in another a single piece further decorated with turquoise and glass inserts).<sup>291</sup> Finally, special mention is due for two other entries in the catalogue (nos. 196 and 199), consisting of 19 and 8 items respectively.<sup>292</sup> In the first case, we are dealing with (golden) rings on which hard stones (made of different materials, from garnet to obsidian) are carved to form seals, while in the second case, only the stones are preserved, and even in this case the sample includes materials of great value, from carnelian to agate and amethyst. In view of the methodological precautions outlined above, these items shall not be dealt with in what follows since, on the one hand, their date ranges between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century in the rings' case and between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century for gems, while on the other the iconography of some of the specimens

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<sup>289</sup> Cf. Colburn 2020a, 194 (and in particular his fig. 5.1). As a way of example, entry n. 100 (p. 243) is given here, describing a bowl with a rosette pattern dated between the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE: «The center of the base is decorated with a 18 petal rosette. From this rosette grooves radiate up as far as the encircling linked beads beneath the rim», to which it might be compared entry n. 123 (p. 254) of a golden shallow bowl dated to the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE (notably the same date of the Susa findings, which therefore provide an even more reliable touchstone): «This shallow bowl has an almost flat rim. The exterior surface of the vessel base is decorated with a 29 petal rosette pattern».

<sup>290</sup> Briant 2002, 234-235. Cf. Inagaki 2002 nos. 33 (an exceptional case in terms of size and refinement of manufacture, since the diameter exceeds 25 cm, sports a precious pendant, measuring 4.5 x 6 cm, and in addition to the noble metal there are inserts in turquoise, lapis lazuli, glass, and carnelian, all of which but the glass (see however Francfort 2013a) are materials which in DSf are systematically mentioned as being of Central Asian origin, from Sogdiana to Chorasmia to Baktria itself), and nos. 145-150. See also Bernard and Inagaki 2000 on *TAB* 33 as well as the entry catalogue describing n. 146 (end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE): «This tubular gold torque is decorated with a twisted cord spiraling design. Each end of the torque is fitted with a lion's head. The cylindrical section which fits into the lion's neck is divided vertically into two round disk separators which would have been originally fitted with gems or glass. These separators can also be found on the torques and bracelets (nos. 117, 118, and 120) from the Oxus treasure at the British Museum and [notably] the torque excavated at Susa. The lion's eye sockets are hollowed and their foreheads have triangular hollows. These areas would have been inlaid with precious gems or glass».

<sup>291</sup> On the bracelets see Inagaki 2002 nos. 151-154, 158, 164, while for the earrings see instead the nos. 170, 173, 175 and 177.

<sup>292</sup> Inagaki 2002 nos. 196 (a-s) and 199 (a-h). To exemplify those finds, two entry catalogues for each group are cited here (p. 251, respectively 196c, 199f, 199g). «A gold ring is inlaid with an oval piece of obsidian carved in intaglio with seated zebu facing left. The zebu has right foreleg extended forward and bulls and other cloven hoof animal images in this pose were a traditional design motif in Iran»; «The flat surface of oval pieces of milky quartz have been incised with figures of deer facing to the right. The deer on Seal f is seated, while that on Seal g is standing. The stones are pierced horizontally, and they are thought to have been originally strung on a gold circlet».

(e. g. nos. 196g, perhaps representing Herakles, or 199 a and b, featuring Athena) are likely of Hellenistic origin. However, if one bears in mind the previously mentioned passage from the *Anabasis*, in which Alexander is described as making use of one of these very seals while cataloguing the booty resulting from his army's raids in the Gedrosian hinterland («σημηνόμενος [scil. σίτον] τῆ ἑαυτοῦ σφραγίδι»), it is difficult not to recognize in these objects - literally - the symbol for the resilience of organizational, governmental, and exploitative patterns of the Central Asian landscape, of its resources, and of its population, which were first developed under the Achaemenids and which apparently lived on (with what modifications it is difficult to say), over decades and centuries after the Empire's demise in Baktria because of their remarkable efficiency.<sup>293</sup>

To be properly studied, however, the evidence described above calls for appropriate contextualization. This is possible, I believe, by putting the following three pieces of information into an adequate framework: the first concerns the process behind the origin of *other* precious objects, the pestles, plates and mortars from the *ARTP* dossier, which – as it has been mentioned above - Rhyne King has recently claimed, with very convincing arguments, should be understood within the satrapal institutional economy, suggesting moreover that they were primarily aimed at the production of added value from a tax originally raised in kind.<sup>294</sup> The second relates to the already mentioned Ktesian anecdote concerning the careless Baktrian «merchant» and his load of gems, which in the light of both the *ARTP* and, even more so, of the two Miho clusters, it would not be too far-fetched to argue that it might have come from an environment quite similar to the Arachotian one studied by Henkelman and King. Consequently, this would imply that, also in Baktria, compared to the total amount of taxation harvested in the satrapy, at least a part of these revenues (the *bāji*-, whose meaning, not by chance, is that of «share [of the king]») was sent to the court in order to provide the Kings with the «original accumulation» necessary to feed the (re)distributive economy characteristic of the social relations within Achaemenid courtly society.<sup>295</sup> What about the rest of our evidence, however? According to a passage from Strabo (which presents extremely interesting analogies with what Herodotos has to say about Kilikia and which ought to be taken as the third piece of information

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<sup>293</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 6.23.4. Cfr. Henkelman 2017a, 47-49. On the economic and administrative background of the Hellenistic Baktrian Empires see Morris 2019a, 63-74 (the Seleukid aftermath) and Strootman 2020c (on the Seleukids). In view of the publication of both lots, the question arises whether at least some of the precious material (especially stone) found in the treasury of Āi Xānum (Rapin 1992a, 167-182) could not have been used, at least in the intentions of the clerks active at the sites, to produce objects similar to those now part of the Miho collection.

<sup>294</sup> King 2019. Cf. Schütze 202, 419: Egyptian(izing) objects comparable to the «green chert objects» were found in the Persepolis treasury and interpreted as royal tableware. Some of the Miho *TAB* (e. g. n. 123) might have served similar purposes.

<sup>295</sup> See for a general overview of the dynamics of courtly life in a comparative perspective Duindam 2016, 156-226, while for a case study devoted to the Achaemenids cf. Kistler 2010, 420-421 and Wiesehöfer 2010, 511-512.

needed to properly contextualize - in whole or in part - the *TAB*), part of the fiscal output of the Achaemenid satrapies remained in loco.<sup>296</sup>

Such a kind of statement may come as little to no surprise. Much more relevant, however, is the fact that, again according to Strabo, this share of the *bāji*- was usually transformed into precious objects, which could be then redistributed (likely by the satrap) in the form of prestige gifts, thus following the same mechanism characteristic of the imperial court's strategies of «selectorate» building featuring the Kings' *bandakā*. Alternatively, the geographer claims, such items were hoarded in facilities specially built for the purpose («πρός τε τὰς δωρεὰς ἐκεῖνα κεχαρισμένα νομίζειν μᾶλλον καὶ πρὸς κειμηλίων ἀπόθεσιν»)<sup>297</sup> If in particular the second part of Strabo's account, with its reference to the hoarding of resources in gigantic «royal treasuries» and the implicit reference to the *τροφή* typical - according to Greek sources - of the Persian court, appears rather suspicious insofar as it is consistent with a well-established shared imagery emblematic of classical authors' attitudes towards Achaemenid royal society and, more generally, Near Eastern wealth, the reference to the redistributive practice on the part of the satrap and his officials ought to be taken as a remarkable piece of information, and this for several reasons.<sup>298</sup>

To begin with, and especially when considered in the light both of the Persepolis tablets and of what landscape archaeology has recently uncovered about mining in ancient Central Asia, the fleeting information in the *Geography* sheds some light on a seemingly unimportant sector of the Baktrian economy, allowing a more adequate contextualization of a refined artistic school which, according to Francfort, can be regarded as a «forgotten» chapter in the cultural history of the Achaemenid *Far East* (and of the Empires following the Persians in claiming overlordship over Central Asia).<sup>299</sup> Secondly, and at this point this needs to be particularly stressed, the *TAB* evidence presented above provides the background against which to attempt a more thorough assessment, in the context of Central Asia, of the main features of what Briant called a «semiology of power» inspired by ideological and iconographic codes taking up and adapting to their own context impulses and models emanating from the court of the Persian Great King. As mentioned above, the ultimate aim of this adoptions through adaptations was, paradoxically, to escape the «orthopedic» dynamics (sensu Foucault) entailed in the advertisement of such cultural practices and objects by the royal and satrapal court.<sup>300</sup> However, before exploring in more detail the functioning of these socio-political phenomena

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<sup>296</sup> Hdt. 3.90 (on Kilikia) and Briant's commentary (2002, 408).

<sup>297</sup> Strab. 15.3.21.

<sup>298</sup> Wiesehöfer 2011b, Madreiter 2012. Thomas 2021 on *The Wealthy Orient* in the eyes of the Graeco-Roman sources.

<sup>299</sup> Francfort 2013a.

<sup>300</sup> Briant 2002, 672. On Persian *τροφή* see e. g. Ael. *VH.*, 7.2, who based his account most probably on early sources like, for example, *FGrHist* 115 (especially interesting is F 103 on Perikles of Limyra, in Kilikia – modern province of Antalya in Turkey). See most recently King 2021, 29-141 on wealth and satrapal networks in Western Anatolia.



within their local context – both in Baktria and further beyond in Northern Central Asia - it is necessary to get confident with the native environment of both the objects against which the *TAB* were likely modelled and the lifestyles they embodied. Otherwise stated, we have to look more closely at that social arena which was the imperial court.

### 5.1.1. *Nunc est donandum!* On Courtly Life from Persepolis to Baktra

Once again, and following in the footsteps of the *Achaemenid History Workshops*, it was Pierre Briant who laid the foundations for a systematic study of the Achaemenid court and its socio-political ecosystems that would move as far away as possible from the image, with its sometimes caricatured contours and yet endowed with an extraordinary longevity, that surfaces from classical historiographic sources. Starting with Herodotos - once more a true maître à penser of unrivalled influence – Graeco-Roman authors are in fact above all intent on telling a story of decadence, extravagance, and alcove turpitudes of all kinds. The overarching goal of such narratives, it has been pointed out many times, was to provide on an «empirical» basis a general mindset claiming the superiority of morality and continence as distinctive traits both of the individual lifestyle (the philosophical βίος) and of the government of a political community since, as Herodotos himself does not fail to emphasize several times in his work – and in one case by stuffing a graphic aphorism summarizing his worldview in the mouth of a Persian - «it is the god’s way to bring low all things of surpassing bigness».<sup>301</sup> Nor is it a coincidence that, having to exemplify the distinctive traits of this *History of Decline* (and eventually fall), ancient authors particularly favored the very substantial gossip surrounding the Great Kings’ table. If in the *Cyropaedia* Xenophon cooks a tasty episode focused on *The Years of Apprenticeship* of the future Great King in Media to show how, although not without contradictions, under the enlightened leadership of a wise ruler the Persians were able to resist the temptations of Ekbatana’s court, being then paid back with the domination first of Media and then the whole of Asia, for his own part, Herodotos presented the genesis of Pausanias’ «tyrannical» drift (an episode which would have been resumed and further detailed by Thucydides) as the result of an encounter with the culinary delicacies to which the now «Medized» Persian notables (above all Xerxes and Mardonios) had access and which clashed so much with the frugality of both

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<sup>301</sup> Hdt. 9.122.3: «Κῦρος δὲ ταῦτα ἀκούσας καὶ οὐ θωμάσας τὸν λόγον ἐκέλευε ποιέειν ταῦτα, οὕτω δὲ αὐτοῖσι παραίνεε κελεύων παρασκευάζεσθαι ὡς οὐκέτι ἄρξοντας ἀλλ’ ἄρξομένους: φιλέειν γὰρ ἐκ τῶν μαλακῶν χώρων μαλακοὺς γίνεσθαι: οὐ γὰρ τι τῆς αὐτῆς γῆς εἶναι καρπὸν τε θωμαστὸν φύειν καὶ ἄνδρας ἀγαθοὺς τὰ πολέμια». For a recent and very detailed study devoted to the last pages of the *Histories* see Irwin 2018. On Artabanos’ λόγιον see 7.10e1: «ὄρᾳς τὰ ὑπερέχοντα ζῶα ὡς κεραυνοῖ ὁ θεὸς οὐδὲ ἐᾷ φαντάζεσθαι, τὰ δὲ σμικρὰ οὐδὲν μιν κνίξει· ὄρᾳς δὲ ὡς ἐς οἰκῆματα τὰ μέγιστα αἰεὶ καὶ δένδρεα τὰ τοιαῦτα ἀποσκήπτει τὰ βέλεα: φιλέει γὰρ ὁ θεὸς τὰ ὑπερέχοντα πάντα κολούειν», on which see Harrison 2018.

Spartans and of the Persians of old. As for other authors, from Polyainos to Aelian via Athenaios (each of them, in all likelihood, under Ktesias' spell), indulge in endless catalogues of debauchery to which they can counterpose virtuous examples of *aurea mediocritas* or with the simple aim of pinning a moralizing sentence to the canvass of corruption (actively promoted by oblique characters such as the eunuchs – most famously Bagoas -, or by the princesses and/or queen mothers) rampant at the Achaemenid court, not least in order to explain both the fall of the dynasty to Alexander and the latter's transformation into an «oriental» (meaning despotic, paranoid and cruel) king.<sup>302</sup> As mentioned above (especially in chapter 2), to all of this Briant has been able to contrast, through a skillful work of deconstruction of the accounts of those same sources that for at least a century had contributed decisively to feed the stereotypes already described (and many others), the much more sophisticated image of a skillfully developed device of socio-political control (governed by and centered on the person of the Great King), the main purpose of which would have been, according to the French scholar, to tangibly mark the socio-political distinction (to be understood in Bourdieu's sense) of the Achaemenid ruler, while at the same time emphasizing his crucial role in the constant re-proposition, under conditions clearly dictated by himself and constantly (but unilaterally) renegotiable, of the «dynastic pact».<sup>303</sup>

Over the last few years, also thanks to the pioneering work carried out by Jeroen Duindam in his comparative studies on modern courts, both Briant's argument for the Kings' position as the «unmoved movers» of court dynamics and his conception of the court itself as an instrument (following Norbert Elias) of domestication or, in Foucauldian terms, as the epicenter of the elaboration and diffusion of orthopedic techniques aimed at countering the (local) power of the ethno-classe dominante have been subjected to critical discussion and even further refined.<sup>304</sup> In particular, Josef Wiesehöfer has stressed the importance of cooperation between the King and his subordinates: although this cooperation could undoubtedly be promoted even to the detriment of this or that potentially unruly member of the imperial ruling class (e. g. by stimulating inter-aristocratic competition to the advantage of the political control of the person, i.e. the Great King himself, who had the ability to intervene as an arbitrator in disputes generated by the struggle for access to limited

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<sup>302</sup> The possible examples are almost countless: Xen. *Cyr.*, 1.3.4-6 on Cyrus' sociopolitical apprenticeship in Media (including the banquet episode), while *Cyr.*, 8.8.9 is already in the vein of a moralizing commentary on the drift of the imperial court, a topic on which Ath. 12.515a-e stubbornly insists on. Cf. Hdt. 9.80-82 on Pausanias' encounter with Persian culinary art and Polyæn. 4.3.32 for one of the richest descriptions of the pantagruelic gigantism of the Persian royal table (with commentary by Llewellyn-Jones 2013, 90). Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1995 still provides a milestone in the study of the classical sources' construction of stereotypes of the Persian world (especially in relation to the court environment, but see more recently Madreiter 2012) through culinary anecdotes.

<sup>303</sup> See e. g. Briant 2002, 286-297.

<sup>304</sup> Cf. the ground-breaking (critical) study of the model put forward in the 1960s by Norbert Elias in Duindam 1994. On the Achaemenid court see in more recent years Brosius 2007, Llewellyn-Jones 2013, Engels 2017b as well as the several contributions in the volume edited (in 2010) by Bruno Jacobs and Robert Rollinger on *Der Achaimenidenhof*.

resources such as titles, lands or the right to attend the court), it could however not be extorted. Crucially, this is a consideration which further emphasizes the relational nature (and thus open to dynamics of refusal, mutual conditioning, and open defiance) of the dialectic out of which courtly life was made.<sup>305</sup>

Developing against the background of the historical trajectory of the Hellenistic Empires some of Duindam's most astute observations, Rudolf Strootman and, in the Persian context, Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, have further expanded on Wiesehöfer's scholarship, coming to the conclusion not just that, although undoubtedly the most important player, the Achaemenid King was however not the only one; moreover, they also stressed that he himself was unescapably caught up in the dynamics of reciprocity and the granting of privileges and favors. As an outcome of these dialectics, at least in theory the King's position was made no less (and to a certain extent perhaps more) unstable than that of his subordinates: once again, Herodotos has preserved a famous story which emblematically provides support to this scenario.<sup>306</sup> All this inevitably leads to questions being asked, following in the footsteps of Lori Khatchadourian, about the strategies available to the imperial élites in order to turn a situation of ideological, economic and, not least, politico-military dependence to their own advantage.<sup>307</sup> Of even greater interest for the purposes of this paragraph, however, are the results of the investigations carried out by Bruno Jacobs', starting in particular from an insightful study devoted to the «courtly lifestyle» and the «showcasing of material wealth» interpreted by the scholar as a distinctive trait of such way of life (and of the related political business).<sup>308</sup>

According to Jacobs, the most productive way to study the Achaemenid court would be to conceive it - by analogy with what is known from countless parallel cases, from Early and Late Medieval Europe to the Byzantine Empire and the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate - as a semiotic system whose correct interpretation, and careful manipulation, was instrumental in providing its users with «at the same time spaces of demarcation and social integration».<sup>309</sup> Developing a sagacious insight from Durkheim, Jacobs goes on to observe that the primary means of constructing the social spaces referred to above is «representation», since «ideas and values are rooted in life and are only able to guide action if they attach themselves to material objects».<sup>310</sup> According to Henry P. Colburn, who has

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<sup>305</sup> Wiesehöfer 2010, 511-512. See e. g. Hdt. 8.90, Thuc. 1.123.3 and Xen. *Anab.*, 1.9.14-22 (as well as *Cyr.*, 8.1.39) for some examples of the strategies through which the Great king tried to foster inter-aristocratic competition as an instrument of socio-political control of his *bandakā*.

<sup>306</sup> Kistler 2010, 433-436.

<sup>307</sup> Llewellyn-Jones 2013, 229 ff. and Strootman 2014, 31-41. See moreover Panitschek 2016 and Khatchadourian 2016, xix-xxxviii.

<sup>308</sup> Jacobs 2010. In the original German the main title of the article runs as follows: *Höfischer Lebensstil und materielle Prachtentfaltung*.

<sup>309</sup> Jacobs 2010, 381.

<sup>310</sup> Cf. Dietler 2010, 59. According to him, in fact, «objects “materialize” cultural order – they render abstract cultural categories visible and durable; they lubricate the negotiation of social interaction in various ways, and they structure perception of the social world».

recently made use of modern globalization theories to better understand both certain aspects of the material culture that spread through the territories of the Achaemenid Empire and the sociopolitical consequences thereof, it is precisely objects that, in a socio-cultural context characterized by a relatively high rate of illiteracy, mediate interactions and relationships that are significant from a political, economic or social point of view, helping therefore to establish and strengthen those links between both humans and communities which Carl Knappett has called «ties».<sup>311</sup> Against such a backdrop, the lavishness on which the classical authors so acrimoniously insist takes on a radically different meaning: for it in fact represents, according to Jacobs, «a distinctive feature of the court as a social system», which he suggest to call «magnificence». He defines this concept as the «ambition for the highest quality and distinction [from those who for whatever reason are excluded from this system or who are not full-fledged members thereof]».<sup>312</sup>

Taking up Wouter Henkelman's remarks about the imperial paradigm as a (not only, but also symbolic) system which drew its strength - among other things - from its ability to be exported (and adapted) to environments other than its place of origin (i. e. Pārsa and more specifically the plain of Persepolis and its surroundings), one understands why the tales of Greek and Roman authors set in the context of the satrapal courts resemble so much those staged in the rooms of the imperial palace, since it is precisely the reproduction of the Kings' court «magnificence» in the local contexts of the Empire that served as a social marker attesting to – or at least claiming - the participation of those actively engaged in the promotion of this lifestyle 1. in the Achaemenian courtly *societas*, as well as (crucially) 2. to the political and economic dividends secured by the former. Particularly interesting in the light of evidence such as the *TAB* objects introduced above is the fact that the production and circulation of precious articles not only (the case of the torques), but also, if not especially, related to the symposiastic context, played a crucial role in this process, to the extent that, in Wiesehöfer's opinion, it would be possible to consider that such goods were indeed invested with an «archetypal character of munificence [and of what Jacobs called «magnificence»]» characteristic of the repositories of power within the Persian courtly environment.<sup>313</sup> Both the consume within and the distribution of such precious tableware among the courtly élites (in Pārsa as well as in the satrapal courts scattered throughout the Empire), seem to have been regulated by extremely sophisticated symbolic codes, within which wine drinking played a predominant role.<sup>314</sup> Athenaios, for example, mentions among the host of servants catalogued in a famous - and in all likelihood apocryphal - letter

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<sup>311</sup> Jacobs 2010, 381, but see also Wiesehöfer 2010, 510 as well as Colburn 2017, 873.

<sup>312</sup> Jacobs 2010, 382, 395.

<sup>313</sup> Wiesehöfer 2011b, 514-515. Here too there is no lack of evidence from ancient authors supporting this assumption: cf. Ael. *VH.*, 1.32, Plut. *Vit. Cim.*, 9.5 (a passage in which *torques* are explicitly mentioned) and again Xen. *Anab.*, 1.8.29 (drinking vessels and other luxury tableware).

<sup>314</sup> See most recently on this subject Balatti 2021, 173-183 (focusing on wine consumption at the King's court).

written by Parmenion to Alexander as being part of the booty he had captured in Damascus, no fewer than 17 ποτηματοποιοί and 70 οιβονηταιί, to which a wide range of other specialists in the culinary arts was added, the latter being a clear sign of the social distinction of the host that such a banquet was able to provide.<sup>315</sup> Similarly to the case of the παλλακαί, repeatedly looming large in the widespread anecdotal evidence which makes up the best part of Greek and Roman tales on the Achaemenid court, it cannot be ruled out that also individuals such as those mentioned in the letter purportedly written by Parmenion to Alexander made for not so much (or at least not only) a category of «slaves», but on the contrary a rank - how uplifted is difficult to say - within the hierarchy of the Kings' (or satraps') φίλοι precisely because they were entrusted with the, anything but trivial, task of pouring wine, which in itself secured (among other things) a considerable level of proximity to the ruler, the latter being a notoriously coveted (because of its scarcity and contested nature) commodity in courtly circles.<sup>316</sup> The converging testimonies of several authors suggest not only that complex hierarchies of this kind did indeed exist in the most select environments of Achaemenid high society, but also that they were established and (re)negotiated in a symposiastic context thanks to the intermediation of both the sharing of wine (one thinks of the fact that only the very few even among the royal φίλοι were admitted to such banquets and that they were the place where important resolutions were apparently passed) and the gift and exchange of tableware as well as other items related to food consumption.<sup>317</sup> Curtius Rufus, for example, notes how within the royal court the circulation of such objects played a crucial role in promoting (or not) the status of a given individual, and in a very famous fragment, Ktesias contributes to support the Roman historian's claim by reporting an episode centered on the fall from grace of a Persian notable, which was not by chance advertised to his peers by the gift of clay instead of golden tableware or silver tableware. On the contrary, according to Lysias, Plato's half-brother Demos was gifted with precisely one such cups, thus considerably boosting his status and sociopolitical purchase.<sup>318</sup> Finally, for his own part

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<sup>315</sup> Ath. 13.608a: see moreover Briant 2002, 293, Jacobs 2010, 387-393 as well as the several entries in the Persepolis archive recording wine «poured in front of [PN, for example Irdabama or Karkiš or, of course, the King]» discussed at length in Henkelman 2010. Incidentally, the testimonies examined in this remarkable paper provide at least partial evidence supporting the figures given by Greek authors (e. g. Herodotos 1.133, where mention is made of «set of oxen or horses or camels or asses, roasted whole in ovens») concerning the huge amount of food served at the most exclusive tables of the imperial herrschende Gesellschaft.

<sup>316</sup> Wiesehöfer 2010, 516. See moreover Tuplin 2017a, 627: at Mylasa there was somebody charged of taking care of the banquet.

<sup>317</sup> Llewellyn-Jones 2013, 128. Greek and Roman authors (from Hdt. 1.133 to Strab. 15.3.22 down to Plut. *Vit. Artax.*, 6.1 and Ael. *VH.*, 12.1) take pleasure in recounting more or less sensational - and sensationalistic - anecdotes about the Persians' fondness for wine, with often allegedly fatal consequences for the stability of the imperial throne (Hdt. 3.34 on Cambyses). Apart from the feuilleton-like fashion of these tales, the capital socio-political function of such gatherings is highlighted by other (and notably in no way less critical of Persian society) sources: cf. Diod. Sic. 16.52.1, again Strab. (15.3.20) and Ath. 4.144-146. On this aspect of Persian politics, Briant 2002, 307-3012 is still foundational. See more recently Engels 2017b.

<sup>318</sup> Compare Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1995, 296 (with further literature), who makes plainly clear that «the banquet was the place where the king rewarded with gifts those that had served him well or outstandingly» and further points out that «the

Athenaios does not fail to point out that, at the Great Kings' table, the variety of drinking paraphernalia used and given away, and especially of precious vessels, obeyed basically two criteria, namely the type of drink and the rank of the guest. To this one might moreover add that other authors, from Plutarch to Herakleides of Kyme, point out that it was precisely the bestowal of cutlery and other precious utensils that could occur in conjunction with the awarding of an official (courtly) title.<sup>319</sup>

In addition to these testimonies, archaeology has recently provided further material in support of the arguments developed by Jacobs and Wiesehöfer: in several sites in Southeastern Irān, from Farneškān to Borāzġān, and from Fīrūzābād to Qalēh-ye Kalī, an increasing number of facilities known as «pavilions» in the scientific literature have been the object of thorough excavation in the last 20 years. The result has been the discovery of palatial-type residential complexes, the purpose of which seems to have been to house the travelling court (of the King as well as of his royal women, from Irdabama to Stateira or Irtaštuna) during their periodical inspections of the imperial territory; this is a mechanism, it should be noted, that the *ADAB* have recently attested to have been well established in Baktria even on the eve of Alexander's invasion, which raises the for the purposes of the present discussion far from marginal question concerning the existence or otherwise of similar structures (clearly belonging to the top echelons of imperial societies) in other satrapies, including of course in Central Asia.<sup>320</sup> The case of Qalēh-ye Kalī, located near the modern village of Ğenġān, in the district of Dastān -e Rustam-e Yek, is particularly suggestive in this sense. In fact, in the words of the archaeologists who excavated it ««the extreme delicacy of the glass and the high quality of the fine stone table ware fragments [...] are consistent with usage, if only periodically, by an élite, possibly Royal, clientele. Although the bulk of the recovered ceramics were not fine, and many sherds belonged to storage vessels of substantial dimensions, this kind of material is to be expected» at a site where not an inconsiderable number of servants, local agricultural workmen and perhaps craftsmen, too, «was resident, probably throughout the year [and in this context one might think of the pottery production centers studied by Sergeġ Bolelov and discussed in chapter 4]. The presence of such a support staff in no way contradicts the periodic arrival of élite visitors whose glass and stone plates,

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table is used as an illustration of a general system of alliances between the dynasty and the great aristocratic families». According to her, moreover, «the ideology of this system» must be understood in terms of «an exchange of services against honours». I would be tempted to argue that this is the background against which we should look at the drinking vessels showcased in the Miho collection.

<sup>319</sup> Curt. 5.6.5, Ath. 11.484c-e, *FGrHist* 688 F 40. On the close relationship between the bestowal of an official title and the granting of material gifts of very high value see *FGrHist* 689 F 5 and Plut. *Vit. Artax.*, 22.1-12. The story of Demos is narrated in Lys. 19.25, where the orator argues that the possessor of this object coming from the Great King's court (significantly a φιάλη) «on the basis of that gift alone would be able to obtain abundance of goods and money in the whole continent [Asia, i. e. «in whatever place at the four corners of the Empire»]. On this passage see moreover the remarks by Erich Kistler (2010, 423-424).

<sup>320</sup> Potts *et al.* 2007, and see more recently Henkelman 2010, 727 ff. On comparable networks in Baktria see Naveh and Shaked 2012, 112 ff. C3 (= Khalili IA22) as well as Briant 2018b.

as well as opulent quarters, suggest that this was not a roadhouse for the ordinary traveler. There may have been a royal storehouse, or even a distribution center for “normal” messengers located at or near Qaleh Kali [sic]. However, the building indicated by the massive bell-shaped column bases, like the meals and beverages consumed in the exquisite glass and stone vessels, reflect the élite quarters at the site, not the sort of storehouse referred to so frequently in the Persepolis fortification texts». <sup>321</sup>

Settings such as Qalēh-ye Kalī can provide, I would argue, a compelling touchstone against which to imagine the institutional and social functions of other sites, from Erabuni to Chorasmia via the several (for the time being difficult to pinpoint on a map) place names recorded by the *ADAB* parchments, from Maithanaka to Varnu and Varaina. Taking up Ando’s concepts, all of them ought in fact to be regarded as the «constitutive outsides» of something comparable to Qalēh-ye Kalī scattered across the empire. Not only that, but such structures may moreover have been (some of) the places deputed to the performance of similar important activities of aristocratic socialization within a (physical as well as symbolic) space which, if once again provided the King and his lieutenants with the opportunity to entangle their *bandakā* in the imperial hierarchy through the practices of binding gifts studied in detail by Briant and – according to Jacob’s interpretation - the sharing of the same semiotic system (the rules for the correct interpretation of which however, and without fail, came from the court itself), at the same time alongside the opportunities for (more or less forced) integration into the imperial paradigm also offered the local élites (to which it is possible that infrastructures such as those discovered at Qalēh-ye Kalī belonged in other provincial territories: think for example of Altin 10) no less significant margins of demarcation, and this both with respect to the King and his subordinates as well as, and most importantly, faced with the peer group within the local aristocratic network. <sup>322</sup>

A case study aimed at further highlighting the two poles of this dialectic will be the subject of the next and last section of this chapter: in the light of Xenophon’s testimony, according to which no less officials than the spear bearers (*δοφύφοροι*, moreover moving in ad hoc task forces) used to travel through the region where the Great Kings’ court was camped in search of the finest quality grapes that could enrich the royal table, it does not seem out of place to start from the analysis of two examples that might provide so far rather overlooked evidence testifying to the impact of this central aspect of the «courtly lifestyle» on the socio-cultural ecosystems of the conquered territories in

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<sup>321</sup> Potts *et al.* 2007, 298. To this description can be compared the Polybian account (Polyb. 5.81.5) of Ptolemy IV erected in the king’s camp on the eve of the battle of Raphia against Antiochus III (217 BCE), as well as the mention by Ath. 11.781f, of no less than 73 Babylonian talents in gold cups found by Parmenion at Damascus, to which were added another 56 talents of cups studded with precious stones (a total of over two tons: cf. Colburn 2020a, 193).

<sup>322</sup> On Chorasmia see for instance Kidd *et al.* 2012, 101 (and Tuan 1972, 150-191 remarks concerning similar environments as well as the «sense of place» they were able to convey). On Baktria see, in order: mytnk (מיתנה) in Naveh and Shaked 2012, 174 ff. C1 (= Khalili IA21) l. 2, vrn (ורנו), possibly the Greek Ἰαπωνος(?) and vryn (ורין) in Naveh and Shaked 2012, 203 C4 (= Khalili IA 17) l. 35. On the concept of «structural exteriority» see Ando 2017b, 119.

Central Asia. In a second step, the attempt shall be made to suggest through what kind of mechanisms and sociopolitical dynamics such an instrument of imperial control, paradoxically, could have contributed in reinforcing that (mutual) dependence between central government and local strongmen which Lori Khatchadourian has singled out as the - unresolved – Gordian knot of the Achaemenid imperial project.<sup>323</sup>

## 5.2. Drinking Like a Persian

### 5.2.1. From the Nile Delta to Tsaghkahovit...

Among the reliefs depicting the so-called «delegations» of the peoples making up the Empire's ethno-political mosaic that adorn the Apadāna staircases, some members of the procession (from the Babylonians, who are displayed as composing the 5<sup>th</sup> delegation, to the Assyrians (8<sup>th</sup>) and from the Armenians (3<sup>rd</sup>) to the Baktrians (13<sup>th</sup>)) appear walking towards the columned hall of the building while holding an object in their hands – apparently specimens of cups designed to contain precious ointments and/or drinks - which, by virtue of the subject matter of this paragraph, merit special attention. Copies of similar artefacts have in fact been found in various materials, from silver to terracotta, at the antipodes of Achaemenid territory (from Egypt to Gāndhārā) over a longer chronological period than the very lifespan of Persian political hegemony.<sup>324</sup> The distribution of these objects, and their reproduction even in more modest forms (i. e. not only through space, but – remarkably – also across different social environments), provides material support for Jacobs' intuition regarding the capacity of certain symbolically «dense» objects, in this case distinct classes of consumption goods, from the metallic torques to certain types of tableware, to «entrench ideas and values and orient the action» of distinct human groups. Following the historian's argument, through their «materialization» (understood in the dual sense 1. of the material out of which these objects were created and 2. of their diffusion 2.1. horizontally across multiple territories and 2.2. vertically along the social ladder of a given community within a space), these commodities in fact allow,

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<sup>323</sup> Cf. Xen. Ages., 9.3 concerning the units of lancers sent in search of wine delicacies to offer to the Achaemenid kings (Strab. 15.3.22 is aware of a particularly luxurious Syrian quality: «Χαλυβόνιον μόνον οἶνον [*scil.* ὁ βασιλεύς] ἔπινευ»). It seems therefore quite clear that whoever was able to provide such a sought-after commodity had undoubted advantages to draw from it in sociopolitical terms: the fact that, as shown by both archaeological research (Gardin - Gentelle 1976, Gardin 1998; 1999, Francfort and Lecomte 2002) and, above all, by first handwritten evidence (Naveh and Shaked 2012, 76 ff. A2 (= Khalili IA4)) Central Asia and in particular Bactria produced wine even before the Makedonian conquest fully justifies the Fragestellung of this chapter's last sections.

<sup>324</sup> Petrie *et al.* 2008 with regards to Gāndhārā, perhaps a satrapy with its own administrative autonomy (at least according to a suggestion made by Henkelman 2017a, 208-210), although a long scholarly (e. g. Jacobs 1994, 217-220) supports its political dependence, according to an articulation that in its exact details still eludes us, on Bactria. On Achaemenid Southeast Asia see most recently Petrie 2020 and Coloru 2021.



according to Baines and Yoffee's insightful remark, to extend an ideology beyond the local group in which a given object originated, and to communicate the power of a central authority to a wider population.<sup>325</sup> From Egypt to the Caucasus, and from Anatolia to Central Asia, it is possible to argue that the diffusion - which archaeological research in recent years has shown to have been much more widespread than previously thought - of similar objects united as they appear to be by a homogeneous visual language, moreover (at least in the first decades of the Empire's life) clearly recognizable as originating in a well-defined social environment (namely that of the Achaemenid court and/or, more generally, the socio-cultural context of the «Persians» as the members of the new imperial herrschende Gesellschaft) was orchestrated at different levels of the imperial power apparatus - expanding in concentric waves from the closest environment to the King towards the satrapal courts and from there further being adopted (and, notably, adapted to different local contexts) throughout the satrapies - with the intention of carving a universe of symbols, habits, and values common at least to the representatives of the élites throughout the entire imperial space.

As recently pointed out by Henry Colburn, the ultimate aim of a similar (very sophisticated) enterprise would most likely have been that of strengthening the political cohesion of the Empire itself and, implicitly, the power of the ruling class that was at its head and whose members became part of that symbolic universe precisely through the circulation and consumption of these objects: for they advertised their owners' (purported) contacts with the Empire's uppermost echelons. In other words, we would be faced in this case with a continuation «by other means» of the (systemic) mechanisms of widespread diffusion of the imperial paradigm.<sup>326</sup> These and related arguments take on particular significance in relation to a specific category of objects, namely those linked to food practices.<sup>327</sup> As has been observed in both sociology and anthropological studies, the world of the culinary arts is in fact a privileged field of study for investigating whether and to what extent certain social hierarchies and power relationships (of both symbolic and/or economic nature) are reinforced, subverted or even give way to completely new relations. The main reason therefore is that, in a generally rather conservative sphere (like funerary practices) of human life, even minimal changes in what Gunnar Dumke has called the «horizon of meaning» within a given community can provide important clues as to the socio-political processes underway among its members.<sup>328</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> Baynes and Yoffee 1998, 235. Cf. more recently Kidd *et al.* 2012, 93-95 and Tuan 1972, 150-172.

<sup>326</sup> Colburn 2017, 878 (on the Achaemenid-related torques, on which see also Kidd *et al.* 2012, 112-113); 2020a, 204.

<sup>327</sup> Dietler 2010, 183-185 has for instance shown how food makes for a very powerful «agent of change» and is moreover able to play a paramount role within power relations in a colonial context.

<sup>328</sup> Starting from a sociological perspective, Pierre Bourdieu (1990, 52-65) has explored the dynamics underpinning the development, also through food practices, of habitus, i. e. contexts capable of structuring social relations within a community and between different human groups. From an anthropological perspective, on the other hand, Jack Goody (1982, 97-153) has pointed out, for example, how idiosyncratic types of tableware can be used to signal a given group's access to resources judged to be exclusive, and the same can be said of the consumption of particularly refined or energy-

Given this theoretical background, the appearance in territories as diverse as Egypt (Tel el-Maskhuta, a site also known as Pithom, פִּיתוֹם) and Armenia (Erebuni) of specimens of φιάλαι and ῥῥθᾶ in precious metals (especially but, as it shall be discussed below, not only silver) is worthy of the greatest attention.<sup>329</sup> Both the literary record (starting once again with Herodotos) and, above all, some very rare, and therefore all the more precious, specimens found not only in a known archaeological context (Susa) but, at least in one case, of direct courtly origin (an inscription in Old Persian engraved on one of these objects mentions the name of Artaxerxes I), strongly suggest that both the φιάλαι and the ῥῥθᾶ were perceived outside Pārsa as particularly powerful markers of social status, and therefore might be taken as one of the most coveted assets both by representatives of the local élites (not least because of the direct association with the King that the possession of a specimen of that class of objects suggested, since it was known that they were, or at least could be, distributed as a munificent gift) and by anyone, even if of much more modest extraction, who wanted to present himself as a participant of the culture that those objects embodied and contributed to advertise beyond their original sociocultural environment.<sup>330</sup> The fact that, both in Egypt and Armenia, we are aware not only of the diffusion of specimens in precious materials (probably produced under the supervision of imperial ergastula precisely because of the importance of the political-cultural message conveyed by stylistic homogeneity) but also of reproductions in more modest materials (even in local clay) in places such as the Tsaghkahovit district or the area of Suwā', which were rather distant from the satrapal centers of power (e. g. Memphis, where nevertheless the sources also attest to the wide circulation of these status markers), represents a very strong argument in favor of significant changes in the socio-cultural environment of these satrapies following the Achaemenid conquest.<sup>331</sup> Among the reasons that can be put forward in support of this assumption, one of the most compelling is to my mind the fact that the ubiquitous diffusion of the objects in question does not merely reflect the boast, on the part of their respective owners, of possessing an «imperial» identity and/or influential sociopolitical ties (just think of Udjaḥorresnet who, in the inscription he had engraved on his famous naophoros statue (a kind of dedication to a god), does not fail to mention that he received «from his

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intensive dishes (this is especially true in the context of pre-industrial societies): Hastorf 2017, 39-42. On the concept of the «horizon of meaning» see Dumke 2013.

<sup>329</sup> On the Armenian evidence see the historical discussion in Khatchadourian 2016, 128-132 as well as Ebbinghaus 2018, 153-155, dating the ῥῥθᾶ between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Treister 2015 provides a detailed study of the Armenian dataset which dates it squarely into the Achaemenid period. Colburn 2020a, 205 on Egypt.

<sup>330</sup> Cf. Ath. 4.145e, who explicitly attests to the redistributive practice of such valuables, and Hdt. 7.119.3. In this latter passage, the historian describes in detail the existence of a hierarchy at the Great King's table, articulated on various levels according to 1. the sharing of the meal with the Achaemenid King and the receiving of gifts 2. the right to the former without receiving the latter 3. the failure to receive both. For the Susa specimens see Colburn 2020a, 194-195 (to be compared with some of the description of the *TAB* vessels provided above). The inscriptions on the Susa bowl are still regarded by some scholars with considerable suspicion. However, in a recent paper Henry Colburn has (to my mind conclusively) demonstrated that such skepticism is unwarranted: see Colburn 2020b, 115.

<sup>331</sup> Colburn 2020a, 190. On Tsaghkahovit see most recently Khatchadourian 2020, who extensively excavated the site.

Masters [among whom is certainly Cambyses]» «a gold necklace» [in all probability a torque such as those displayed in the Miho collection]), but it also shows with at least equal strength the «aspiration» (Richardson's «desires») on the part of various representatives of indigenous societies to build up an image of themselves as members of a social group whose membership was deemed advantageous even outside exclusive environments such as the imperial (or satrapal) court.<sup>332</sup> In other words, this self-staged imperial affiliation was as a tool to be appropriated and reused, «re-functionalizing» it, in the socio-political arena of greater proximity, which is to say against the rivalling peers.<sup>333</sup> If in the case of Erebuni the lack of a precise archaeological context makes risky any hypothesis about the way in which both φιάλαι and ρῦθα similar to those found at Susa could have entered Armenia, as far as Egypt is concerned the inscription engraved on one of the φιάλαι found at Tell el-Maskhuta, in which a certain «Kainu, son of Gešem, king of Kedar» is mentioned, makes it likely that such specimens were given by Cambyses (or by his satrap in Egypt) to the leaders of the same community of «Arabs» that Herodotos mentions as allies of Cyrus' son during his invasion of Egypt in 526 BCE, and a garrison of whom was later installed to guard the canal linking the newly conquered satrapy to the Red Sea built during the reign of Darius.<sup>334</sup>

By virtue 1. of these objects' origin (the top echelons of the - new - regional power pyramid, which had introduced them as an explicit token rewarding political loyalty and military support) and 2. of the characteristic ways in which they were used (sporting ρῦθα in a banquet implies in itself a very precise conception of commensality and the adherence to a specific cultural habitus), both factors distinctly associated with the symbolic language elaborated in - and propagated by - the Persian court, the diffusion of precious tableware from the Nile delta to the highlands of Armenia allows us to chart how, like apparently more invasive infrastructures such as post stations, archives, or irrigation canals, the Persian imperial paradigm, in its sympothic version, functioned as a highly effective instrument for the creation of new social distinctions (sensu Bourdieu) which, through inter-aristocratic

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<sup>332</sup> This might be the reason why, while by no means giving up his Egyptian self-representation, Udjahorresnet took great care in styling himself to his (most likely very composite) audience with clearly (sociopolitical before than ethnic) Persian traits: Colburn 2020c. Further discussion of the (Persianizing) Egyptian banquet in Agut-Labordère 2017, 147-149.

<sup>333</sup> Cf. Khatchadourian 2016, 170-185 and Colburn 2020a, 209-212. On the sociopolitical environment of Memphis around the date of the Persian conquest (on which see Tuplin 2018a) see Briant 2002, 294-296 and Ath. 11.784b. On Udjahorresnet's inscription see *TPE* I, 245-245, Colburn 2017, 877; 2020a, 179-187. On the dynamics driving the «refunctionalization» processes of a given object coming from a certain sociocultural context in another see Hodos 2017, 5, Colburn 2017, 874, and Hoo 2022, 244-251 for what she calls «a translocal approach» to the material culture of Āi Xānum.

<sup>334</sup> For the inscription see *TADAE* D15.4 and Kistler 2010, 417. On Cambyses' Arab allies cf. the testimony of Hdt. 3.9 as well as Colburn 2020a, 206-212. With regards to the Armenian vessels, it should however be noted that, in a recent important paper, Susanne Ebbinghaus not only seems to accept the authenticity of the objects (which would be in itself a notable fact), but does moreover point out (pp. 153) that they might even have been produced specifically targeting «non royal owners» who were attempting at promoting their own image as royal dinner guest, regardless of whether they had really dined with the king (which would not have been easy to demonstrate in any case) or not. Should we imagine something of this kind as going on in Baktria?

competition generated by the desire to gain access to this crucial resource, the possession of which was however limited and conditioned by an external power, could potentially reshuffle power relations at a regional level to the advantage of the King and his acolytes. As pointed out by Susanne Ebbinghaus, however, at the same time objects such as the *TAB* vessels ought to be seen as commodities eagerly sought-after by the local strongmen in the satrapies, for they clearly saw how appropriating such symbols of affluence and political prestige enable them to considerably promote their own standing within their own communities, thus providing useful help in pursuing their own (local) agendas.<sup>335</sup> Specimens of such vessels discovery have meanwhile been discovered as far East as Gāndhārā, and once is taken into consideration that examples thereof are portrayed in the hands of representatives of other Central Asian dahayāva (from the cups carried by the Baktrians to the torques wore by the Sakā), the conclusion follows that dynamics comparable to those which have been detected in Egypt or Anatolia were also at work in Central Asia. Newly discovered evidence allows to support this claim, as the next section set out to show.<sup>336</sup>

### 5.2.2. ... and from the Aral Steppes to Bactria

The importance of an adequate contextualization of the *TAB* objects in order to fully understand the socio-cultural dynamics underlying their production is shown, on the one hand, by the recent discovery, at the site of Akchakan-kala (one of the most important in the entire network of the imposing Chorasmian городищи), of an ivory ρῦθον fragment dated between the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE and the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE and, on the other hand, by the no less sensational finding at a site known as Isakovka Burial Ground 1 (located near the Russian city of Omsk – Омск - in Southwestern Siberia) of three cups similar to those starrng at Persepolis. These finding bore inscriptions (believed to have been engraved after the manufacture date of the respective supports) in Aramaic characters, the latter however used to reproduce the Chorasmian language and dated between 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE.<sup>337</sup>

<sup>335</sup> Cf. Bourdieu 1979, Kistler 2010, 425, Ebbinghaus 2018, 137 and Colburn 2020a, 219. Compare Dietler 2010, 220 discussing the impact of wine consumption (first Etruscan and Greek, then Roman) in the Celtic societies of the Rhone delta and the surroundings of modern Marseille.

<sup>336</sup> The case of the so-called Gilgit ρῦθον (Oxford, Ashmolean Museum EA 1963.28), discussed by Henry Colburn in a forthcoming paper, makes it very likely that similar (perhaps even more refined) exemplars were casted in Bactria, and this for at least three reasons. 1. The connection of the Gilgit ρῦθον with the imagery of the royal hunt, for which there seem to have been facilities in both Bactria and Sogdiana (Curt 8.1.11-12). 2. The (local) Baktrian school of stone carving and metal working, which is to be believed that – not differently from the Armenian case discussed by Ebbinghaus 2018, 153-155 – also served steppe-based customers (Francfort 2013a, 41-50, and compare now Morris 2019c). 3. A passage in Herodotos' *Histories* (7.119) who argues that it was a civic duty to provide gold and silver drinking cups while hosting the king, and since the paramount role played by Baktra in the Central Asian chessboard, it would indeed be astonishing if at least some of the objects showcased at the Miho were not originally conceived within such a sociopolitical framework.

<sup>337</sup> See Minardi 2016, 283 and Ebbinghaus 2018, 137-140, recording another calf-shaped ρῦθον from the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography of the Russian city of Ufa (Уфа, in Baškir Өфө, inventory number 831/386) dated between

Of course, in both cases the probable chronology of the objects puts them beyond the time horizon of this study. However, they make for a revealing clue to at least two factors that deserve to be emphasized. Firstly, both the  $\rho\tilde{\upsilon}\theta\omicron\nu$  from the Akchakan Kala and the bowls discovered at Isakovka provide (further) evidence of the ability of the Chorasmian élites, still in the midst of the Hellenistic and later Kušāna periods, to wisely select from the pool of cultural stimuli originating in territories neighboring those of their respective spheres of influence, in order to re-adapt them creatively to the social context in which they were enmeshed: and this despite the fact that the region had been only tangentially affected by geopolitical dynamics (above all Alexander's invasion) that had radically transformed the surrounding territories, starting with Baktria.<sup>338</sup> Secondly, and this is what interests us most here, these objects allow for some conclusions which, although retrospective and - at least in part - deductive, are entirely consistent with what has been observed about Egypt and Armenia, thus further supporting one of the main arguments of this chapter, namely the exponential increase, during Darius' reign, of several sociopolitical and economic networks creating a «dense connectivity» which Justin Jennings has identified as one of the salient features of phenomena of socio-economic transformation dictated by the inclusion of a given territory (for example following an imperial conquest) in a web of exchanges and relations of trans-regional significance and scope.<sup>339</sup>

Moreover, it is not immaterial to note that it is by no means certain that the Akchakan-kala  $\rho\tilde{\upsilon}\theta\omicron\nu$  was imported from Baktria because it was perceived as a mark of the (Greekish) lifestyle flourishing there at the time (and therefore considered culturally - if not politically - attractive). The fact that Central Asia, in particular, but not only, Baktria, was familiar with vine cultivation before the Graeco-Makedonian conquest was already known from classical sources, and Chorasmia seems to have been no exception.<sup>340</sup> What, however, looks like to have radically changed at least since the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, as the surveys carried out starting in the 1930s with the works by Sergeï Tolstov had already helped to elucidate, is the scale of this cultivation, and it is therefore difficult to resist the temptation to establish a causal link between this increase and the Persian conquest: precisely because of the

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the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup> century which was found together with an Achaemenid golden amphora sporting zoomorphic handles. Giving the location of the Baškir republic (Башкирия), it is very likely that such an item reached the territory of Ufa through Achaemenid-ruled Chorasmia and the local élites networks with the steppe people, for both were closely related to Baktria (Minardi 2015a; 2018).

<sup>338</sup> Minardi 2015a, 110; 2016 p. 284. To these finds it might perhaps also be added evidence such as the silver amphora from the Filippovka-1 burial mound, dated between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup> centuries and featuring an exquisite zoomorphic handle made using the lost-wax casting technique (Simpson and Pankova 2021, 519, King 2021, 358-359), which provides compelling evidence supporting the hypothesis that the dynamics we can infer as lying behind the Isakovka bowls were most likely already taking place in Achaemenid-ruled Chorasmia several decades before. On Achaemenid influence in the Southern Ural region see now also the extensive treatment by Yablonskii and Treister 2019.

<sup>339</sup> Jennings 2011, 118 and Colburn 2017, 881-882 focusing on the Achaemenid Empire. Perhaps the most astounding example of such a phenomenon is Fort 1912-103: King 2021, 313-314 for a discussion of this document.

<sup>340</sup> On the agricultural wealth of Baktria see Strab. 11.11.1, while on Chorasmia cf. Minardi 2016, 279.

socio-political significance of wine consumption within the symbolic system of Achaemenid culture (especially within, but not limited to, courtly environments).<sup>341</sup>

In fact, the discovery of drinking vessels' *pottery* samples dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE sporting significant similarities with comparable utensils (this time however casted in precious metals) found at Tāxt -i Sāngīn (in Baktria) strongly suggests that, within what Michele Minardi judges to have been a «general change» of the material culture that can be recorded in Chorasmia from the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE onwards it should also be ascribed the introduction of the forerunners of objects such as those discovered at both the Akchakan-kala and at Isakovka, not too differently as in the case of Egypt studied by Henry Colburn and (what is of particular importance here) with the very same socio-political aims.<sup>342</sup> In support of this argument, two of the inscriptions (which, as mentioned above, are later than the objects on which they were engraved) scratched on some of the specimens found at Isakovka can be brought to bear, which read, respectively, «his majesty King Amuržam, son of King Wardān» and «this cup weighing [?] 120 staters... to the sovereign Wardak... a reward for him, through Ruman [?], Tīr». As pointed out by Michele Minardi in a careful study of these pieces of evidence, in fact, such inscriptions attest both the existence of a dynastic tradition within the territory of Chorasmia in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE (which means: of multiple - and probably competing - local strongmen from which the Empire could recruit its collaborators, at least if one has to judge from the fortifications shoring up the satrapal territory) and the circulation of precious tableware connected to a symposiastic context as a marker of social distinction, according to patterns comparable to what has been observed by Henry Colburn in Egypt and Lori Khatchadourian in Armenia.<sup>343</sup>

Taking up some penetrating considerations elaborated by Margaret Miller, in short, it is possible to argue that, contrary to the opinion of authoritative scholars (e. g. Heleen W. A. M. Sancisi-Weerdenburg), the archaeological and documentary evidence now coming not only from the Western half of the Empire indicates with increasing clarity 1. the existence of patterns of imitation of the behavior emanating from the imperial court in the redistribution of gifts (including precious tableware in gold, silver, and glass) by the satraps, with the intention both of strengthening relations between the Irānians in the satrapies and (what is of greater interest here) of developing relations with the local

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<sup>341</sup> On the implications of the introduction of an institution such as the «royal table» in the sociopolitical contexts of the satrapies see Henkelman 2010, 693-713 and Miller 2010. According to Minardi 2020, 24, «in the satrapal capitals of Central Asia, later the Upper Satrapies, under the stimulus of the central Achaemenid power before the impact of Hellenism, a courtly art was implemented». North of the Hindūkūš, such a process most likely originated in Baktria: Francfort 2009.

<sup>342</sup> What the classical authors (e. g. Hdt. 1.113, Strab. 15.3.20) ridiculed as a (typically Persian and – not by chance - Scythian) inclination to drunkenness. On the changes in Chorasmia's material culture that can be traced back to the Persian conquest through the influence of Baktria, see Minardi 2015a; 2015b; 2016, 264.

<sup>343</sup> Cf. Livšits 2003, 162 and Minardi 2016, 283. Cf. Kistler 2010, 415, who notes that «the material value of a gift was related to the [purported? Cf. the case of Erebuni discussed in Ebbinghaus 2018, 153-155: we are dealing with realia at least as much as with (self)representations] personal proximity to the sovereign». See moreover Xen. *Cyr.*, 8.4.24 and Petrie 2020, 644 on the Southeast Asian offshoots of Empire and the sociopolitical dynamics characteristic of that context.

élites; 2. the development of the production of prestige objects under satrapal patronage for the purposes of courtly consumption, binding exchange and gift giving on a local level and even perhaps the sending of symbolic tributes to the center (one might think here of the *ARTP*, whose value was however in all probability eminently economic) as well as, finally 3. the parallel production of prestige objects outside the satrapal workshops in emulation of courtly art with the related exchange and gift-giving networks (which as we have seen were instrumental in the building and reinforcement of local «selectorates»<sup>344</sup>).

Other considerations can be added to these, which contribute to enrich and at the same time further elucidate the picture outlined so far. Take, for example, the site of Dinghil'dže (Дингильдже), a rural estate of not inconsiderable size, and most likely owned by individuals similar to «his majesty King Amuržam» or the «sovereign Wardak» mentioned on the Isakovka bowls, which can be compared to the agricultural estates of Aḥvamazdā in Baktria as attested in the *ADAB* correspondence.<sup>345</sup> Excavations carried out at this site (dated to the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE based on the ceramic evidence collected there) have uncovered a whole panoply of symposiastic utensils which strongly suggest that, in this case too, the people living in the area displayed objects (and the lifestyle dictated by their use) with a distinctly «imperial» flavor in order to show, at the very least, their desire to be perceived as belonging to a socio-cultural group distinct from those making up the human landscape of the surrounding area. By itself, such a behavior implies a political claim - how legitimate it is not known - not only at the imperial level, but also within the social context in which such individuals were moving, thus aiming at supporting the personal power of some representatives of these Central Asian élites against their own peers.<sup>346</sup>

The fact, moreover, that traces of extensive winegrowing have been found around the perimeter of the site allows – it seems to me - for two further conclusions. On the one hand, this kind of spatial organization provides evidence backing Gondet's arguments regarding the pilot experiment nature of the «open» urban planning of the two imperial foundations of Persepolis and Pasargadai, since also Dinghil'dže seems to replicate the same pattern of a settlement core surrounded by large green spaces, the original surface area of which appears to have been expanded (thanks to imperial/satrapal investment?) in order to support the site's wine production, this being yet another confirmation, also

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<sup>344</sup> Miller 2010, 856. From such a vantage point, Ebbinghaus' remark (2018, 142) that several workshops producing objects such as those under scrutiny here were set up across different satrapies in the Empire begs the question on what grounds one should exclude that one (or more) of them were not located in Baktria.

<sup>345</sup> Naveh - Shaked 2012, 112 ff. A6 (= Khalili IA5). On Dinghil'dže see Minardi 2015a, 78-81; 2021, 72. Further on the Isakovka bowls see Kistler 2010, 419 and now Yablonskij – Treister 2019 on the Southern Urals and the Empire.

<sup>346</sup> Kistler 2010, Minardi 2016, 281. According to Minardi 2021, 72 fn. 16, «the Achaemenid expansion of the late 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BC kick-started the appearance of substantive social differentiation among the local populations», a phenomenon the consequences of which are still very much apparent in Egypt at the end of the Empire (as the case of Peṭosiris discussed by Colburn 2020a shows).

in terms of urban planning, of the systemic nature of the Persian imperial paradigm.<sup>347</sup> On the other hand, the mention in the *ADAB* parchments of various qualities of wine («of Arachosia», «of Čistakana», «sweet wine in Asparabaga») made available to an important Persian official (perhaps even Bessos himself) travelling through the territory of the satrapy, provides an evocative parallel to the passage in the Xenophontean *Agesilaos* (9. 3) in which the Greek historian recalls that there were special squads of spear bearers engaged in combing the territory of the Empire while looking after culinary delicacies (including wine) with which to enrich the table of the Great King.<sup>348</sup>

Now: since the evidence coming from Persepolis (e. g. the case of Karkiš, who appears to have been satrap in Kṛmāna) proves beyond any doubt that institutions such as the Great King's table were reproduced in the satrapies not least with the precise intention of reshaping - to the advantage of the new imperial ruling class, of course - local power relations, by linking the results of the excavations carried out at Dinghil'dže with the *ADAB* parchments, the hypothesis that the socio-economic status of the Chorasmian estate's owner (another irmatam comparable to Vivāna's?) benefited from its transformation into an «official supplier» of the Baktrian satrap's table does not sound so outlandish.<sup>349</sup> What seems almost certain, however, is that also in the case of Central Asia, the introduction of a well-defined category of objects (luxury tableware, and in particular heavily symbolically loaded vessels such as ῥῶθα and φιάλαι), as well as the cultural habitus that their use entailed, contributed in no small measure in creating - and subsequently consolidating - new social hierarchies, and this in two ways, according to a pattern that can be found in the context of other societies participating in what we might call the «Achaemenid exchange».<sup>350</sup> 1. First of all, by underscoring the respective owners' access to a sociopolitical environment made exclusive 1.1. by the contact (real or purported: it must again be stressed that in these cases we are dealing with realia at least to the same extent as we are confronted with aspirations or, to paraphrase James Scott, with «social blusters») with the representatives of the new political order, whether they be the satrap's entourage, the satrap himself or even the King of Kings, and 1.2. by the adoption of refined practices and élitist consumption (in terms of quantity and/or quality of the products consumed: just think of

<sup>347</sup> Gondet 2018 with earlier literature.

<sup>348</sup> Cf. respectively Naveh and Shaked 2012, 174 ff. C1 (= Khalili IA21) ll. 30-31, Naveh - Shaked 2012, 112 ff. C3 (= Khalili IA22) ll. 40-43 and Naveh - Shaked 2012, 203 C4 (= Khalili IA 17), 52-53. It should also be noted that, according to Herakleides of Kyme (*FGrHist* 689 F 2, on which see also Kistler 2010, 422), even the diners of the Great King were not allowed to drink the same wine as the latter. The different qualities attested in the *ADAB* might therefore suggest the existence of similar mechanisms of social differentiation at the table of the [ϐϐ] (Bayāsa, possibly Bessos?) which in document C1 of the *ADAB* parchments is attested in the context of what looks like one of the official inspections of the satrap (or the last (would be)king of the dynasty?) in one of the territories under his purview. In addition, as noted by Miller 2010, 874, the very proliferation in the Greek sources of technical terminology related to precious vessels circulating in Persian symposia might allude, among other things, to the different social function of such objects, and thus to the more or less exclusive nature of their consumption. See moreover Wiesehöfer 2021a, 87.

<sup>349</sup> Kistler 2010, 412, Henkelman 2010, 704-713; 2017a, 49-55.

<sup>350</sup> Kistler 2010, 415, who describes the circulation of luxury goods (including food-related ones) coming from the royal table as «the Great King's way through power». See moreover Xen. *Cyr.*, 8.2.2.



the Arachosian wine mentioned in the *ADAB*, for example).<sup>351</sup> 2. Secondly, through the process of redistribution and circulation of goods (especially, as mentioned, precious metal tableware) which, like Udjahorresnet's golden torque, were meant to be indexical of royal connections and elite status.<sup>352</sup> And if it is true, as Lysias claims, that a golden φιάλη granted as a gift by the Achaemenid rulers was able to provide the holder of such a token of his connections with «abundance of resources and money in the four corners of the continent [Asia, which means: everywhere in the entire imperial territory]», it is not difficult to understand how aristocratic competition 1. within a given satrapy and 2. at pan-imperial level within the courtly society itself represented, along with the others highlighted in this chapter, a very powerful device of social engineering in the hands of the Achaemenid Great King and of his lieutenants in the conquered territories in order 1. to construct, while paying attention to local differences, a common symbolic code capable of providing the new subjects (and not only the narrower circle of provincial societies) with a distinctly recognizable ideology characteristic of the new political power and 2. to «discipline» the local élites by uprooting their sources of power from their respective territorial networks and transferring them, according to the dynamics underpinning the «unequal exchange» studied in numerous contributions by Briant, within the sociopolitical framework of the itinerant court (of the King himself as well as of its satrapal mirrors).<sup>353</sup>

### 5.3. All That Glitters is Not Gold. *Imperial Matters*, Imperial Paradigm, and «the Dynamic of the Contradictions»

Although capable of revealing the underlying mechanisms of some aspects of the sociopolitical dialectics of Achaemenid Central Asia at a level of depth that was unthinkable until a few years ago, if it stopped here the story told so far starting from the evidence coming from the *TAB* would be

<sup>351</sup> Compare Herodotos' description (1.133) of the different types of banquet characteristic of Persian (courtly) society, these differences being a function of the respective resources and sociopolitical standing of both hosts and participants.

<sup>352</sup> Colburn 2020a, 199: «These gifts, mainly drinking vessels, marked one's royal connections and elite standing [...] Such royal gifts conferred privilege, elite status and authority on their recipients, and at the same time created and sustained bonds of loyalty to the king. In this respect they were crucial to the cohesion of the Empire». Note the double (local and «global») scale of the power dialectic: «elite status and authority» could be thrown in the arena of inter-aristocratic competition, while «bonds of loyalty to the king» reinforced the dynamics underpinning the spread of Mann's «despotic power» into the satrapal territories by means of the imperial paradigm.

<sup>353</sup> Lys. 19.25-26: «πολλῶν γὰρ ἀγαθῶν καὶ ἄλλων χρημάτων εὐπορήσειν διὰ τὸ σύμβολον ἐν πάσῃ τῇ ἡπείρῳ». Cf. on the mechanisms that presided over redistribution, in particular of objects such as the φιάλαι, Kistler 2010, 417-429 and Miller 2010, 875-878 as well as Hdt. 7.119.3 and Athen. 4.145e concerning the competition within the (aspiring: in Seth Richardson's words «presumptive») provincial élite that the desire for access to these resources could generate (an aspect the latter also underlined by Colburn 217, 878). On Achaemenid imperial ideology see most recently Gates-Foster 2014 (as well as the remarks of Kistler 2010, 413, who refers to the work of E. Dusinberre - especially 2003, 8) together with the foundational Rollinger 2021c, stressing the role of borderlands as harbinger of ideology production. See finally Jennings 2011, 125-129; 2017, 14-16 for an evaluation of the last two phenomena described in terms of «deterritorialization» and «standardization».

incomplete. If it is indeed true that, from Persepolis to Rome, and from the Chinese imperial court to the British Empire, the production and distribution of objects bearing the unmistakable mark of imperial authority for the most diverse reasons (from silver  $\rho\theta\alpha$  to industrial soap), mainly served the purpose of promoting individual-material entanglements aimed at reproducing and consolidating relationships of dependence and subordination (the main purpose for both the production and circulation of such objects outside their context of origin), the most recent studies in fields such as social archaeology have consistently pointed out how human intentionality and what Düring and Stek called the «practical conditions on the ground» could not infrequently contribute to thwart, sometimes with spectacular (or catastrophic, depending on one's point of view) results, the plans of the authority presiding over this mechanism of «material entanglements».<sup>354</sup> According to Michael Dietler, for example, the consumption of foreign goods promotes correlation processes [«entanglements»] that connect societies into new cultural, economic, and political relationships. Over time, the interdependencies arising from these relationships can have initially unintended consequences, associated with numerous possible transformative effects, which in turn depend on the nature and history of the correlations themselves.<sup>355</sup>

The Danubian limes of the Roman Empire during the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries CE can be singled out as an exemplary case of how (to put it mildly) these transformative effects did not always play in the hands of those who had kick-started and supported them in the first place. Both the flow of precious donatives (royal gifts) towards the barbaricum supported, among others, by the emperor Constantine (a process within which a not insignificant part must have been played by objects at least partly comparable to the luxury goods discussed in this chapter, since a fragment of John of Antioch attests that gems engraved with words such as «as a gift to the best» were sent in large quantities to Germanic - and Hunnic - notables, according to a pattern remarkably similar to the Achaemenid redistribution of sympotic luxury tableware) and the power relations they generated within local élite networks to whose members these gifts were directed, far from domesticating the limes, in fact ended up accelerating processes of social inequality that contributed in no small measure to the undermining of local hierarchies, thus considerably damaging precisely the geopolitical stability that such objects were supposed to help consolidate.<sup>356</sup> Commenting on the socio-political reasons behind such outcomes, Mischa Meier has acutely observed how, by dramatically affecting the power balances regulating the sociopolitical dynamics of borderland societies by forcing the respective big men to

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<sup>354</sup> Kistler 2010, 438-439 and Khatchadourian 2016, 51-63.

<sup>355</sup> Dietler 2010, 74.

<sup>356</sup> Heather 2010, 87-98 and Meier 2020, 125-138. See moreover the remarks in Miller and Brosseder 2017, 480 on the circulation in Xiōngnú territories of Hàn luxury goods of (at least perceived) courtly origin, where it is however shown that at least some among Xiōngnú powerholders proved capable of exploiting these flows to strengthen their own position within the Empire's hierarchies. Further evidence discussed in Vorderstrasse 2020.

resort more and more often to imperial donations to satisfy the - increasingly pressing - requests for redistribution of symbols of social distinction by the «selectorate» that made for the sole basis underpinning the power of these individuals (the case of Attila's Huns is emblematic in this respect), the diplomatic strategy implemented by the Roman Caesars, sucking into the «whirlpool of the Empire» their own trans-limitean interlocutors - which means: into the whirlwind of the institutions brought about by the Empire's very existence and which had ended up becoming the only ones capable of guaranteeing even to the «enemies» of the latter ample and concrete possibilities for consolidating their own (Attila's, Alaric's or Genseric's) internal power - would have ended up making Rome itself dependent, in the intent of securing its frontier zones' socio-political stability, on the constant expansion (which in the long run proved unsustainable) of a system in principle aimed at ensuring the subjection of others.<sup>357</sup> In Inner Asia, an in-depth and wide-ranging re-examination of the mechanisms regulating the circulation of luxury goods of Chinese origin in Xiōngnú territory, long considered the main instrument of the Hàn court's strategy of political subjugation targeting steppes strongmen, has made it possible to show the consummate ability of the local aristocracy to orient and direct - in accordance with agendas entirely internal to the pastoral world of Mongolian warrior societies (including the maintenance and expansion of Xiōngnú élites' respective spheres of sociopolitical influence even to the detriment of internal or adjoining rivals) - flows of goods resulting, as in the Achaemenid case, from an exponential growth of political and economic interconnections (supported by systematic investments in infrastructure) whose primary, if not only, goal was, once again, to lock the customers (of these circulating goods) into relations capable of binding them to the Empire.<sup>358</sup>

Therefore, if we try to look at our Achaemenid evidence starting from the vantage point of social archaeology, which considers consumption (meaning: as much the links that the circulation of objects, ideas and cultural practices creates as their re-functionalization in the contexts of arrival) as «an active process, through which the social categories [also those of origin, on which these new flows impact] are made visible and reinforced», then, the capacity by each among the individuals involved in the mechanisms of extraction and control promoted by the imperial paradigm to enact - precisely through the use of the fundamental devices of that same instrument of domination - what Alexeï Yurčak has called «minute internal displacements and mutations» which «do not have to contradict the political and ethical parameters of the system and, importantly, may even allow one to preserve the

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<sup>357</sup> Meier 2015; 2020, 616-617, describing patterns which have been observed at work also by William Honeychurch (2015, 31-32) in the steppes of Inner Asia at the dawn of the formation of the Xiōngnú imperial polity.

<sup>358</sup> Khatchadourian 2016, 132. On the circulation of luxury goods of (especially, but not only) Chinese origins into the steppes see Brosseder 2011; 2015, while on the ability of Xiōngnú élites in (re)orienting such flows in order to suit their own political agendas see Miller and Brosseder 2017, 479.

possibilities, promises, positive ideas, and ethical values of the system while avoiding the negative [...] constraints with which these are articulated» should never be lost sight of.

The main reason for this is that, as the last part of this section seeks to show, such a standpoint allows us to highlight, in a way that most of the available sources (above all the imperial archives) do not, the conditional nature of a sovereignty which, as pointed out most compellingly by Lori Khatchadourian, in the context of pre-modern Empires, «is only possible if it is partial; that it is grounded in an irreconcilable tension between practices that at once erode and buttress a sovereign's prerogative».<sup>359</sup> The reproduction, in contexts outside the institutional ones of the imperial and/or satrapal court, both in equally valuable materials (silver, copper, glass) as well as in much more modest variants (local clay) of objects ideologically charged with sociopolitical implications such as Achaemenid drinking vessels - a phenomenon that recent archaeological research leads to believe was rather widespread from one end of the Empire to the other (from Lydia to Egypt, and from Armenia to Gāndhārā) - provides a convincing example of those «minute internal displacements and mutations» explored by Yurčak in a masterly study on the dynamics regulating the dialectic between another (this time modern) Empire – the Soviet Union of the «long 1970s» - and its society.<sup>360</sup> This is true, in the first case, because, as a piece of evidence such as the Peṭosiris stele demonstrates, the (re)production of objects whose social power must have been evident to everybody within a given sociopolitical context (in this case late Achaemenid and proto-Hellenistic Egypt) allowed at least some of those imperial subjects whom (in theory) the process of circulation, gift (and counter-gift/tribute) giving and unequal exchange aimed to enmesh within practices aimed at reproducing the logic of their own subjugation, to «usurp», in the words of Henry Colburn, prerogatives of exclusive satrapal, when not directly royal, competence to their own advantage or that of the social group in (and for) which favor they were acting. Many examples of these prerogatives could be made, ranging from the (re)production of symposiastic pottery in gold and silver to the foundation of a temple: this is not by chance the case of an individual like Peṭosiris who, in his being impudent, demonstrated however to be no less aware of the rules of the Achaemenid political and sociocultural game: moreover, his actions demonstrate that he possessed enough power to be able of violating them in

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<sup>359</sup> From the first to the third, the quotations in the text come from Kistler 2010, 414, Yurčak 2006, 28 (quoted also in Khatchadourian 2016, 185), and Khatchadourian 2016, 193. See however Dietler 2010, 53 and Richardson 2020 on the hiatus between Babylonian «imperial disposition» and the actual condition of Mesopotamian sovereignty, which was *meant* to be forever until, taking up Yurčak suggestive title, *it was no more*. On the processes of refunctionalization of a given item of material culture in a different context which takes Central Asia, Hellenistic Parthia, and Babylonia as case studies see Hoo 2018; 2020; 2022, 243-270), to whom the theoretical framework adopted in this section owes a great deal.

<sup>360</sup> On this issue see Miller 2010, 877-878.

impunity at the appropriate time.<sup>361</sup> In the second case, as illustrated by the examples of the clay *ῥῶθον* from Suwā‘ and, above all, of an entire clay set of what Khatchadourian has called «proxies» (copies made of different, usually humbler material) of some of the most emblematic symbols of Achaemenid courtly culture like bowls, amphorae with handles shaped as animal protomes or zoomorphic *ῥῶθα*, recently unearthed in the Tsaghkahovit plain in Armenia, 1. the evident substitutive function (of their more valuable metal counterparts) of such «dense objects», 2. the mimetic nature of the production process, moreover 3. the material itself out of which they were made, the characteristics of which imposed different affordances (and thus different final outcomes) than silver or gold, and finally 4. the context - certainly not an official one, betraying instead a more intimate and domestic setting - in which such objects circulated allowed, as Khatchadourian insightfully pointed out, to loosen what she calls «the conventions of use» (Bourdieu’s habitus) characteristic of the metal specimens.<sup>362</sup>

Not only that: the choice of a material that was widely accessible in the local context (at both Suwā‘ and Tsaghkahovit, scientific analysis has shown the almost entirely indigenous origin of the clay used to fabricate the drinking vessels under discussion, suggesting that the workshops in charge of their production were also local) also entailed recourse to local networks of extraction and relations of interdependence between human beings and the materials used to reproduce these symbolically so meaningful vessels which allowed, while not failing to conform to the new imperial aesthetic, to eschew the bonds of dependence implicit in the adoption of the more prestigious, but much more conditioning, courtly lifestyle (and related paraphernalia) promoted by the Great King and his satraps.<sup>363</sup> Although, to date, with the possible exception of Chorsmia (the case of Dinghil’dže) nothing similar to the Egyptian, Anatolian or Armenian «proxies» has yet emerged in Baktria, thus leaving us in the dark as to the possibility, for less prominent social strata among Central Asian populations, of «escaping without leaving» from the nets of socio-political and economic dependence triggered by the diffusion of certain trademarks characteristic of Achaemenid symposiastic culture,

<sup>361</sup> On Peṭosiris cf. Miller 2010, 861, Colburn 2020a, 219-220. His might well have been a form of «cultural persianism»: on the use (and abuse) of the Achaemenid precedent in Egypt after the fall of the Empire see Agut-Labordère 2017, 149 ff.

<sup>362</sup> Khatchadourian 2016, 184. Khatchadourian 2018 for a full typology of the pottery discovered at the site so far.

<sup>363</sup> Khatchadourian 2016, 185. In the scholar’s very penetrating words, «The proxies at Tsaghkahovit were not contrarian, not discernibly defiant of, say, onerous demands for tribute or troops. And they may well have held open the possibility of preserving the promises and values of their delegates [i. e. the golden and silver courtly drinking vessels]. On present evidence, however, their efficacy in creating imperial subjectivities can best be described as partial, as they, along with their makers and users, sometimes worked tactically as bricoleurs to allow conformity that evades, escape without leaving. Such are the workings of the conditionals of sovereignty that define the satrapal condition». Most notably, the Gilgit *ῥῶθον* too was made of humbler material (bronze and copper) than the silver-gilded vessels and golden bowls showcased at the Miho, which might therefore suggest that also in this case it was produced locally (think for example at the site of Mes Aynak, some 40 km to the Southeast of Kābul – therefore likely to have been located in the satrapy of Gāndhārā -, which name not by chance means «the little copper well»), perhaps fulfilling goals similar to those described by Lori Khatchadourian in the case of the Armenian highlands.

the presence (which – if authentic - the *TAB* drinking paraphernalia discussed in these pages suggest was anything but sporadic) of the «upper» variant of this form of sociolect in Baktrian territory leads one to reflect on the possible - and from the point of view of the Empire and its representatives far from welcome - effects of the «material entanglements» caused by the circulation of such objects among the Baktrian (and Sogdian, and Chorasmian: think again of the lord of Dinghil' dže) élite all the way down the social ladder to the effectiveness of the process of domestication of local power networks promoted by the Great Kings and their satraps in each of the conquered territories.<sup>364</sup>

In fact, as Erich Kistler and Miguel John Versluys have argued, as a constitutive part of the relational universe that makes up human societies, objects - and the material of which they are made - are themselves creative actors within the social process(es), and consequently the study of the socio-cultural phenomena that the presence of certain objects makes possible (compels, or curtail) can be extremely useful in order to highlight some of the unforeseen effects of which scholars such as Michael Dietler and Mischa Meier have explored precisely with regard to the spread into the socio-political circuits of alleged «subjects» of a given Empire (the Gallic populations in one case, the Huns in the other) of prestige goods (wine, Roman money or the precious stones mentioned by John of Antioch) aimed at facilitating, and then consolidating, relations that bound these objects' users to the very political authority that their redistribution had promoted.<sup>365</sup>

These considerations lead us back to an aspect of the *TAB* evidence discussed in this section the centrality of which for elucidating some crucial features of the dialectic between the Achaemenid Empire and the socio-political context of contemporary Baktrian society seems to me to have been rather underestimated until now, namely the material itself (gold and silver) of which the objects discussed in the preceding pages were made, as well as the material entanglements within which this imperial matter was able to envelop not only the targets of the imperial paradigm, but also (in some ways above all) its architects and promoters (namely the Persian King and its entourage).<sup>366</sup> Matter and function, instrumental value and social significance, are in fact closely linked concepts: especially in the case of silver, numerous testimonies show how this metal, coined or simply reduced to the state of ingots or so-called hacksilver, i. e. fragments obtained from a finished product which, once

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<sup>364</sup> Minardi 2021, 76-80 on the possibility that, in the aftermath of the Persian conquest, the Chorasmian landscape underwent a process of institutionalization (very likely directed from Bactria) in order to supply the royal economy with natural resources (as suggested by the evidence gathered at Dinghil' dže, where wine jars have been detected) as well as with the overarching aim of tapping into the social networks of the local powerbrokers with the steppe peoples, not least as a mean to acquire precious stones such as those showcased in the Susa inscription – DSf -, the mining of which was demonstrably controlled by locals: Trudnovskaja 1979.

<sup>365</sup> Kistler 2010, 439, Versluys 2017a, 76; 2017b, 185-248. See moreover Hoo 2020, 558-559.

<sup>366</sup> Khatchadourian 2016, 127. As noted by Daniel Miller (2005, 11), when material forms have consequences for individuals independently of the capacity for human action, they may be deemed to have the capacity for action that caused these effects. What matters may often be not so much the entity itself, human or otherwise, but rather the network of agents and the relationships between them.

weighed, fulfilled the function of money, was inserted into a complex mechanism of distribution, in the course of which the hoarding in the royal (or satrapal, think of the lapis lazuli of Āi Xānum) palaces represented only one stage among many of the social life of this imperial asset.<sup>367</sup> To give but a few examples, it could be used, as we have seen, for diplomatic exchanges or munificent gifts, as well as for the payment of the kurtaš, as shown by some entries in the Persepolis archives discussed by Briant.<sup>368</sup>

From an ontological point of view, it could be argued that, regardless of the form it took during its social life, the matter «precious metal» belonged to a system of flows and counterflows «in which silver [but the same could be said of gold or rare stones: think of green chert objects from the *ARTP*] was recurrently transfiguring from the liquid to the solid state, from monetary instrument to iconic enabler of the feast, from wrought spectacle to hacked fragments of crumpled, folded, twisted metal, from larger to ever-smaller bits of hacksilver, then back into the furnace and on to another finished form».<sup>369</sup> The result of this process of what, following a famous definition by Arjun Appadurai, we might call «tournaments of values», seems, in Khatchadourian's words, to have bestowed on some of the *Imperial Matter(s)* (a shortlist of which is showcased in the foundation charter of Susa) the prerogative of determining «political effects» in the Achaemenid territories. «As a medium of tribute», so the scholar's argument continues, they in fact «determined the grounds of compliance and noncompliance, of economic viability and vulnerability». As a medium of royal prestige goods and royal gifting, these materials became «a “matter” of imperial dependence, a locus of autonomous power, whose continuous and regulated flows were critical to sustaining the sovereign's prerogative», and the same could be said with regards to his subordinates in the satrapies, from Egypt to Lydia and from Gāndhārā to Gedrosia. For they too benefitted to a considerable extent of the flows of matters promoted by the imperial paradigm with the main goal of imposing Achaemenid overlordship over the conquered territories and the local élites.<sup>370</sup> If we add to this the Herodotean description of the workflow that the organization of a royal banquet (the stage deputed par excellence to the fulfilment of the social function of the imperial matter in one of its guises in the form of drinking paraphernalia), was able to set in motion - with sociopolitical consequences far from negligible, even in a πόλις like Thasos - provides a rather indicative benchmark for the «creative capacities in the social context» of this very particular category of objects, which not by chance in the imagination of Greek authors

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<sup>367</sup> Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1989.

<sup>368</sup> Briant 2002, 422.

<sup>369</sup> Khatchadourian 2016, 133-134: compare these words with Strabo's brief essay on the social life of some among Achaemenid *Imperial Matter* (Strab. 15.3.21).

<sup>370</sup> Appadurai 1986, 21, Khatchadourian 2016, 134.

assumed with time an almost metonymic character not only of opulence, but also and above all of the political power of the Achaemenid Great Kings and of their satraps.<sup>371</sup>

It is however crucial to point out that this highly sophisticated, and extremely effective, process of «delegating» coercive power to certain classes of materials (and – even more crucially - to the objects that could be obtained from them) came at a cost, which can be identified in nothing less than the dependence of imperial power itself on the very material that had become the symbol of that power (as well as, and this is the most important aspect for the purposes of this study, on the sociopolitical networks that presided over the acquisition of that material: think once again of the Baktrian «merchant» featuring in the Ktesian anecdote discussed above). An illuminating example of this (yet another) «paradox of power» is provided by the socio-cultural status of marble in the Roman world, at least since the Augustan age.<sup>372</sup> From civic architecture to baths and theatres to statues and basilicas, Leah Long and, following in her footsteps, Lori Khatchadourian, have pointedly noticed how the diffusion of this stone in every corner of the Empire made possible the «practical mediation» of Roman authority, thus fulfilling a function entirely homologous to that which Elspeth Dusinberre, Margaret Miller, and Erich Kistler have identified as proper to Achaemenid drinking vessels made of precious metal.<sup>373</sup> Promoting, spreading, and maintaining this «dependence on marble» in the territories subject to the power of the Caesars (the latter dictated by the fact that the use of this imperial matter defined, among other things, «the terms of political competition, leisure, and conspicuous consumption» in provincial societies), forced the Roman authority to set up a complex marble trade industry, which eventually extended far beyond the reach of the Empire itself (thus implying a dependence on actors outside the Roman sphere of influence for operations such as quarrying and transport of the stone itself, according to a pattern not very different, for example, from the one regulating Táng – and as we suggested in chapter 4 perhaps Achaemenid – dependence on pastoral specialists for the breeding of their horses’ – and camels’ - flocks).<sup>374</sup> Not only that: this authentic «political fixation with marble», as Khatchadourian has called it, had the undoubtedly unwelcome but inevitable result of «fettering imperial agents to a material without which the total apparatus of

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<sup>371</sup> Hdt. 7.119, on which see the comments in Kistler 2010, 430 and, above all, from the vantage point of the evidence coming from Persepolis Henkelman’s contributions (e. g. 2005; 2010, 729-730; 2017b). Remarkably, the figures featuring in the archives help showing that the orders of magnitude of such events as given in Herodotos are by no means as outlandish as scholars long believed.

<sup>372</sup> Suet. *Aug.*, 28.3: «Urbem neque pro maiestate imperii ornata et inundationibus incendiisque obnoxiam excoluit adeo, ut iure sit gloriatus marmoream se relinquere, quam latericiam acceperisset», taken up in Cass. Dio 56.31.4: «τὴν Ῥώμην γήϊνην παραλαβὸν λιθίνην ὑμῖν καταλείπω».

<sup>373</sup> Khatchadourian 2016, 68-70, who designates the objects (and the materials out of which they were made) fulfilling similar functions as «delegates». Cf. moreover Dusinberre 2003, Dietler 2010 (specifically devoted to wine) Kistler 2010, Miller 2010 and Colburn 2020a, 189-220.

<sup>374</sup> Long 2012, 41-50.



imperial sovereignty could not be maintained in its desired form».<sup>375</sup> As shown by Leah Emilia Long in a thorough investigation of the marble-mining and logistics economy in Roman Asia Minor, the sector required an ever-expanding workforce, the ever-increasing use of administrative resources and resulted in the exponential growth of costs for maintaining the provincial «cityscape», thus generating economic effects which, in the long run, appear to have been detrimental to the budgets of the Empire as a whole.<sup>376</sup>

Although in the context of Achaemenid Central Asia the state of the available evidence does not allow to study in the same depth the organization, for instance, of the lapis lazuli mining economy in the Baḍaḥšān region, the evidence of the Persepolis archives (and more recently of the *ADAB* parchments and tallies), which show the existence, even in Pārsa itself, of dynamics of delegation to semi-institutional or extra-institutional actors - e. g. pastoral communities - of the supply of goods of primary importance for the functioning of the administrative (and religious) apparatus of the Empire - and the case of Central Asian camels discussed above is indicative in this sense - should give pause for thought. Like Roman marble, the Achaemenid «imperial delegates» in Central Asia, ranging from Baktrian lapis lazuli and gold to Chorasmian turquoise, Sogdian carnelian, and the ubiquitous camels, bestowed as they were by the King and his representatives in the satrapies with the power to reproduce, as both ideology and as practice, the essential features of the Achaemenid imperial paradigm, may in time have ended up exerting a not insignificant level of influence on those very individuals (the satraps, the Great King himself) who had made such matters – and the objects carved out of them - the repositories of such power precisely because of the need for the materials which these objects were made of. Put differently, «sovereignty comes to be contingent on the delegate materials on which it relies. The polity becomes unviable or inconceivable in their collective absence».<sup>377</sup>

If we wanted to condense the results of the discussion carried out in this section into a formula, we could say that, also in Central Asia, *Imperial Paradigm* and *Imperial Matter* appear to be enveloped in a dialectical dynamic of mutual dependence: the latter depended on the former for the acquisition of its social status (and of the power connected to it), the former was forced to rely on the latter «for the preservation of the social order», which of the paradigm itself founded both the role and the function within the Persian political structure. And given that behind abstract concepts such as

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<sup>375</sup> Khatchadourian 2016, 68. «The Roman Empire as we know it – the Armenian scholar goes on – it is simply unthinkable without marble, a powerful substance that palpably made its own difference in the perdurance of Roman sovereignty». If we have to judge from the Graeco-Roman authors anecdotes on courtly (symposiastic) life, it might not be entirely out of place to suggest that something very similar could be said with regards to Achaemenid luxury tableware.

<sup>376</sup> Long 2012, 284-292.

<sup>377</sup> Khatchadourian 2016, 70. Achaemenid imperial matters, therefore, compelled their agents «not only to instrumentally use them but also to care for them», which opened to the agents able to procure thanks to their mētīc skills and social networks considerable Handlungsräume in the face of imperial power and of its representatives in the satrapies.

«matter» and «paradigm» there are in fact individuals, each with his/her own agenda and social networks of relations, one is compelled to conclude that, despite the assertiveness of a text such as *Bīsutūn*, power dynamics within Achaemenid (courtly) society were far less clear - and above all far less stable - than the Kings were interested in (and let alone wished to) admit.<sup>378</sup> Having started from the study of the functioning of *habitus* whose ultimate goal was the creation and subsequent reinforcement of new social practices aimed at strengthening the political power of the Achaemenid ruling class, the investigation of the dialectics regulating the social life of some of the *Needful Things* part of the *TAB* objects showcased at the Miho Museum has led us back to the insoluble conundrums of the «satrapal condition» and of the power that went hand in hand with it.

## 6. Conclusion. *The Achaemenid Far East*

This chapter has pursued a twofold agenda. On the one hand, it has shown how the study of the imperial paradigm, of the mechanisms underlying its functioning and further implementation, of the structural implications that its architecture determines for the understanding of the organization of *all* the territories through which «the Persian Man waged battle far indeed from Pārsa» and of the socio-political, infrastructural, and environmental transformations caused by its systematic application to date make for the most reliable and profitable tool in order to investigate in all its complexity the (infra)structures, institutions, and resulting social forms out of which resulted the political mosaic of the Achaemenid Empire, even in the Central Asian provinces, still not so long ago - and erroneously, as we have seen - considered remote, neglected from the imperial «center», and therefore underdeveloped (whatever such a concept over a time span of over two centuries might have meant). As recent research has not failed to point out, and as the Herodotean anecdote devoted to the fate of both Barke and the Barkeans exemplifies in a graphic manner, one of the most significant consequences of the replication of the same method of government (and of the devices necessary to make it effective) from Libya to Central Asia is undoubtedly the panoply of measures aimed at increasing the quantity and the quality of the interconnections 1. between the satrapal «imperial foundations» (such as Baktra and Qandahār), 2. between them and their subordinate territories, and 3. between them and the imperial court, irrespective of the physical location of the court itself, for after all the Achaemenid court was where the king happened to be.<sup>379</sup> In other words, what we see at work at least since Darius' time, but which - as Pasargadai's urban experiments suggest - is very likely to be the natural outcome of processes that had already begun in the preceding decades, can be

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<sup>378</sup> Long 2012, 15-39, 64-87 on the Roman quarrying industry in Asia Minor and its socioeconomic effects on the long run as well as Khatchadourian 2016, 70 and Richardson 2020 on the conditioned nature of an imperial power which was only meant to be eternal and unrestrained.

<sup>379</sup> Henkelman 2017a.

described as a monumental process of institutionalization of the Empire's (physical and administrative) landscape, the results of which can be summarized as follows. 1. «Space-time compression» and «standardization» (e. g. of the fiscal regimes and of the administrative languages), which made an immense space functionally smaller and thus easier to govern.<sup>380</sup> 2. The diffusion, through the whole territory of the Empire, of a shared visual and symbolic vocabulary, capable of allowing some individuals to construct their own self-representation in terms that were no longer (or not only) strictly local, thus in turn significantly contributing to the development of a supra-regional ruling class, doubly linked to the centers of imperial power for the purposes of maintaining a position of supremacy (and consequently able to reproduce the rules of social interaction promoted by the Empire to their own advantage) in their respective territories of origin, a dynamic which remarkably helped in spreading Persian «infrastructural» and «despotic» powers in the satrapies at crucially low costs.<sup>381</sup> This repeated application and reproduction of centralized mechanisms and structures across the Great King's territories, which Henkelman has argued represented one of the main features of what he calls «the imperial signature», played a decisive role in the process of transforming Baktria into one of the pillars of Achaemenid political hegemony in Central Asia, a role which the satrapy (and its ruling class, including the local aristocracy) would continue to fulfill until the very *Last Days* of the Empire itself.<sup>382</sup>

On the other hand - and thereby we come to the second aim pursued in this chapter - the emphasis on such crucial aspects should not lose sight of the fact that one of the key factors in the success of such a policy lay, taking up Henkelman's remarks, in the ability (of the imperial paradigm) to readily adapt and fruitfully include local elements.<sup>383</sup> As the study of the Armenian and Egyptian «proxies» helped to show, however, any mimetic mechanism and every strategy of power-sharing *necessarily* imply a «dilution» of imperial power itself.<sup>384</sup> In a world, such as the Achaemenid one, characterized by constant «flows» (of ideas and ideologies, people and consumption goods, images and messages, techniques and technologies) and by the pervasive presence of what Appadurai called «moving objects», the study of a corpus such as the drinking vessels on display in the *TAB* collection of the Miho attempting at taking seriously - as Versluys suggests - the capacity of things (and of their materiality) to act historically can significantly contribute to a more sophisticated understanding of

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<sup>380</sup> Hodos 2017, 4, Colburn 2017, 881-882.

<sup>381</sup> On the mobilization of human capital and natural resources through the application of uniform bureaucratic-administrative devices as one of the salient features of any Empire see Eisenstadt 1969, 33-49.

<sup>382</sup> Henkelman *et al.* 2017, XI. See now Degen and Rollinger 2023 on the End (?) of the Achaemenid Empire.

<sup>383</sup> Henkelman 2017a, 173. The presence of individuals of non-Persian extraction in key positions in the imperial apparatus is underlined by Naiden 2019, 36, who notes that Cyrus had a gift for recruiting talented generals and did not fail to employ local notables as administrators.

<sup>384</sup> Khatchadourian 2016, 181.

*The Dynamics of Ancient Empires* in at least two ways.<sup>385</sup> First, by highlighting the mechanisms through which certain objects of «desire and distinction» can contribute, as Henry Colburn has shown with regard to Egypt, to the creation of new social relations and power dynamics, playing a proactive role, not infrequently independently of their creators, in strengthening imperial hegemony within a given territory and its societies.<sup>386</sup> Secondly, such an interpretative outlook nevertheless simultaneously accounts for the inherently ambiguous nature of this process, and provides moreover a very powerful heuristic methodology to search for those internal displacements and mutations that can preserve - and in some cases further expand -, not infrequently in spite of imperial desiderata, spaces for maneuver, dissent, and creative (re)positioning on the part of both regional élites and (which is all the more significant in the context of a complex (social) space such as the Baktrian one), the countless anonymous individuals who, from the Suwā' desert to the Tsaghkahovit plain, and from the steppes of Sogdiana to the peaks of the Hindūkūš, chose on some occasions to work «tactically as bricoleurs to allow conformity that evades», escapes without leaving; in other words, to put into practice, in the most diverse guises, and despite the undoubted transformations that have occurred from one end of (Central) Eurasia to the other since the year in which «the Mede came», the time-honored *Art of Not Being Governed*.<sup>387</sup> If, as Darius boastfully proclaimed at Bīsūtūn, «that land became mine», it is at least equally true that Baktria capta was never really deprived of the tools enabling her inhabitants to plan, and sometimes achieve, the conquerors' (re)conquest. The challenge now is to follow the traces of the imperial paradigm, and of the silent, but no less effective, responses to - paradoxically made possible precisely thanks to the creative use of - it that could be launched, more or less explicitly, in the context of the new institutional space of the Baktrian dahayāuš by at least some of the most influential representatives of the local élites, along the century and a half leading from Darius, the son of Vīštāspa, to Alexander.

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<sup>385</sup> See most recently Pitts and Versluys 2021, 367. and their concept of «objectscape» as a mean «of writing new kinds of histories of human-thing entanglements, in which objects in motion have roles to play – beyond representation – over both the short and long term».

<sup>386</sup> Appadurai 2000, 5, Versluys 2017, 76, Khatchadourian 2016, 129. See on this topic Mairs 2017 and, with specific regards to the Baktrian context, Hoo 2018; 2020, 555-562.

<sup>387</sup> Scott 2009, Khatchadourian 2016, 185, Payne and King 2020.

## Chapter 6

### Uno fumavit Baktria tota rogo? *Achaemenid Baktria from Xerxes to Ahvamazdā*

Βακτρίων δ' ἔρρει πανόλης δήμος † οὐδέ τις γέρων.

[And the whole community of the Baktrians is perished and gone, with not one survivor].

- Aesch. *Pers.*, 319.

Ὁ δὲ Μασίστης οὐδὲν κω ἀκηκῶς τούτων, ἐλπόμενος δὲ τί οἱ κακὸν εἶναι, ἐσπίπτει δρόμῳ ἐς τὰ οἰκία. ἰδὼν δὲ διεφθαρμένην τὴν γυναῖκα, αὐτίκα μετὰ ταῦτα συμβουλευσάμενος τοῖσι παισὶ ἐπορεύετο ἐς Βάκτρα σὺν τετοῖσι ἐωυτοῦ υἰοῖσι καὶ δὴ κου τισὶ καὶ ἄλλοισι ὡς ἀποστήσων νομὸν τὸν Βάκτριον καὶ ποιήσων τὰ μέγιστα κακῶν βασιλέα· τὰ περ ἂν καὶ ἐγένετο, ὡς ἐμοὶ δοκέειν, εἰ περ ἔφθη ἀναβάς ἐς τοὺς Βακτρίους καὶ τοὺς Σάκας· καὶ γὰρ ἔστεργόν μιν καὶ ἦν ὑπαρχος τῶν Βακτρίων. ἀλλὰ γὰρ Ξέρξης πυθόμενος ταῦτα ἐκείνον πρήσσοντα, πέμψας ἐπ' αὐτὸν στρατιὴν ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ κατέκτεινε αὐτόν τε ἐκείνον καὶ τοὺς παῖδας αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν στρατιὴν τὴν ἐκείνου. κατὰ μὲν τὸν ἔρωτα τὸν Ξέρξεω καὶ τὸν Μασίστεω θάνατον τοσαῦτα ἐγένετο.

[Knowing naught as yet of this [cf. Hdt. 9.108 ff.], but fearing evil, Masistes ran speedily to his house. Seeing the havoc made of his wife, straightway he took counsel with his children and set forth to journey to Baktra with his own sons (and others too, belike), purposing to raise the province of Baktra in revolt and work the king the greatest of harm; which he would have done, to my thinking, had he escaped up into the country of the Baktrians and Sacae; for they loved him well, and he was viceroy over the Baktrians. But it was of no avail; for Xerxes learnt his intent and sent against him an army that slew him on his way, and his sons and his army withal. Such is the story of Xerxes' love and Masistes' death].

- Hdt. 9.113.

#### 1. «È una storia da basso impero»

«Xerxes, the ruler of Persia, once the scarecrow of the world, began to be hated by his own subjects»: «he led an ill-fated expedition against the Greeks and, on his return from it, ended his life ignominiously, murdered during the night by his own son, who surprised him in his bed».<sup>1</sup> In outlining this disheartening abrége of one of the mightiest Achaemenid rulers' reign, Justin and Aelian fit (in a paradigmatic manner) into a long historiographic tradition which, until fairly recently, has sought to identify the year 479 BCE (the aftermath of Plataiai and Mykale, interpreted as a catalyst of court intrigues and in general of a widespread political instability echoes thereof would have spread

<sup>1</sup> Compare the two accounts respectively in Just. *Epit.*, 3.1.1 and Ael. *VH.*, 13.3. Recent discussion of this (and related) evidence in Thomas 2017, 24-35.

throughout the Empire) the point of no return, at least, of the reign of Xerxes. The latter was in turn depicted, in sharp contrast with his predecessor and in (suspected) analogy with Cambyses, as puerile and cruel, manipulated at will by eunuchs, courtiers (and courtesans), but especially by the women of the royal house.<sup>2</sup> In this picture of disintegration and incipient anarchy, Baktria would, once again, have played a role of absolute importance, in this way providing context supporting yet another time an inveterate historiographic interpretative scenario which is all too keen to see in the Central Asian satrapy the «graveyard of the Empires» par excellence, starting exactly with the Achaemenid polity.<sup>3</sup> According to a tradition preserved by Plutarch - but which is also mentioned in Justin's *Epitome* - the «time of troubles» in Central Asia would have begun even earlier, at the very moment of Xerxes' succession to the throne following the death of Darius (486 BCE), thus highlighting even more the role of the negative turning point represented by the new emperor's rise to power.<sup>4</sup> The parallel, repeated several times and with great emphasis in classical historiography (e. g. in Herodotos), between Xerxes and Cambyses in itself speaks volumes about the teleological approach to a reconstruction of the Achaemenid imperial trajectory (in Central Asia but not only there) that identifies in the year 479, or even earlier, a watershed between the glorious era of the «founders of the Empire» and a hypothetical - and very long: about a century and a half - «decline», instead attributable exclusively to the (equally hypothetical) shortcomings of the Kings who followed Darius.<sup>5</sup> That such a narrative is much more a spokesman for streams of Greek (and Roman) historiographical discourse on the subject of Περσικά than for snippets of useful information in order to make sense of Central Asian events after Darius' death can be shown with some ease just starting from the σύγκρισις between Xerxes and Cambyses. In both cases, it is precisely their reckless and ill-prepared military expeditions to the borders of the Achaemenid domains - a traditional *locus*, at least since Herodotos (think of Cyrus' campaign again into Central Asian (borderland) territories, namely in the steppes), of imperial defeats - to be identified by classical authors as *the* cause of a phase of instability (which when it comes to Xerxes is portrayed as no longer healable) which in the long run proved to be fatal for the Great Kings' hold of the territories under their control, especially in the satrapies farthest (and richest, such as - not by chance - Baktria) from the court.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, no less an intellectual than Aischylos had already stated in no uncertain terms that the Salamis route, significantly epitomized in the powerful image of the almost total destruction of the

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<sup>2</sup> Rollinger and Degen 2021c, 430-440.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the effective synthesis in Briant 2002, 515 as well as Holt 2005, 1.

<sup>4</sup> The main character driving the upheaval would have been Ariaramnes, brother of the king and at the time satrap in Baktria Cf. Just. *Epit.*, 2.10.1-11 as well as Plut. *Reg.*, *Xerxes* 1 (*Mor.*, 173B) and, for a historical assessment of this and other evidence, Wu 2010, 546.

<sup>5</sup> See the scenario depicted in Arr. *Anab.*, 4.11.6. while more generally on the questionable nature of such a theoretical framework see Briant 2009b; 2017a; 2018a, and now Rollinger and Degen 2022.

<sup>6</sup> Konstantakos 2016.

Baktrian contingent (which means: of a far from negligible slice of the Persian military might) made for the «graveyard» of Persian imperial power, now «hold in the blood-soaked soil of the sea-washed isle of Aiakes», in fact developing an imagery destined to become topical in the case of Central Asia, especially in a European (colonial) environment imbued with classical culture.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, and putting aside for a moment the interpretative problems potentially brought to be by the - remarkable – later date of the sources in question, the insistence of authors such as Plutarch, Aelian, and Justin on court intrigues, kingly ineptitude and family rivalries as the triggering events of the riots that led to the loss of Achaemenid control over Bactria reveals, even at a superficial glance, a more than suspicious genesis in the thinking of some cornerstones of the classical historiographic discourse on Persia, namely Ktesias and Herodotos (with the so-called Masistes' novel quoted at the beginning of this chapter providing an incredible influential narrative benchmark).<sup>8</sup>

A last, but not less important, reason for skepticism regarding the sketch painted above derives, as already mentioned in the second chapter of the present work, from the very peculiar point of view (centered as it is on Mediterranean geopolitics, the real focus of attention of classical historiography, to the detriment of the Empire's Eastern domains) with which the authors following Herodotos looked at Central Asian history. This is true for a whole array of authors as different as Thucydides and Plutarch down to the often mishandled Diodoros Siculus, who is however of paramount importance where it not for the simple fact that he provides one of the very few, if not the only source of information on the territories East of Asia Minor throughout the entire chronological span between Darius' demise and Gaugamela, when the upper satrapies reenter the historiographical cone of light, albeit often through the prism, no less distorting, of the *Rerum Gestarum Alexandri*.<sup>9</sup> As Pierre Briant already observed in an important essay anticipating the publication of the *corpus*, the information that can be extracted from the *ADAB* parchments (and, importantly, tallies), would be sufficient on its own to do justice to the long-lasting picture of Central Asia as a cluster of satrapies that had moved away - or were constantly on the verge of doing so - from the orbit of Achaemenid power, since these

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<sup>7</sup> Aesch. *Pers.*, 596-597: «Αἶαντος περικλύστα || νᾶσος ἔχει τὰ Περσῶν». Cf. paradigmatically Holt 2005 and, on the other hand, the recent reassessment by Matthew P. Canepa (2020), aimed at underlining the crucial role of Afġānistān as cradle and «center» of a long tradition of Empires in Central Eurasia, from the Achaemenids to the Kušāna and, it could be argued, following for instance Wickham 2010, 330 ff. as well as Starr 2015, up to the Caliphate itself (and in particular of the 'Abbāsīd one, since the founding father of the dynasty came from Eastern Irān).

<sup>8</sup> Briant 2002, 515-518 and more recently Madreiter 2012, 103-125 (specially devoted to the study of the construction by classical author of a trend of historiography dedicated to the psychology of Achaemenid kings and queens): to take up a famous title by Robert Tucker, building an entire tradition of *Studies in History & Personality* where «facts» and «fiction» often intermingle to the point of not being easily distinguished from one another. Note Thomas 2017 for an insightful assessment of the succession issues (and related court murders) in Achaemenid history.

<sup>9</sup> Briant 2002, 516, Liotsakis 2019. See, for instance, Thucydides' account (1.89 ff.) of the growth of the Athenian ἀρχή or the Plutarcean *Life of Themistocles* (*Vit. Them.*, 31.3). From these passages – and much more could be mentioned in order to further support this point - it is clear, among other things, the different perspective with which Herodotos and his successors look at the Persian Empire and more generally at the οἰκουμένη of Eurasia, or at least at the portion of it unified by Cyrus' conquest.

precious testimonies provide the first documentary evidence of the persistence, even on the eve of the Makedonian invasion, of the entire panoply of tools underpinning the imperial paradigm, which we can reconstruct - as it has been hopefully illustrated in the previous chapter - starting from the Persepolis archives.<sup>10</sup> Having said this, to go *beyond* a statement that is as truthful as it is (in its vagueness) of little analytical insight, such as the identification of some kind of (not better explained) «continuity» during the «long 5<sup>th</sup> century» of the Achaemenid imperial experience in Central Asia of the dynamics of governmentality in force already during the «golden age» of imperial history, is not an easy undertaking. This is because, both in absolute and, what is more important, in relative terms with respect, for example, to the reign of Darius (covered as it is, and even in this case only partially, by Persepolis), the primary evidence - what Briant has called «the sources from the center» from which to patch together a narrative differentiating itself from that underpinning the accounts of classical historiography, thins out to the point of disappearance, thus thwarting at the outset any attempt to reconstruct, even in its broadest terms, an *histoire bataille* of some depth of the Achaemenid Eastern territories during the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries. Consequentially, our dataset moreover makes any generalization concerning the social and economic processes characteristic of this period extremely risky, since it could constantly be exposed to the accusation of being based on speculations that are not adequately supported by reliable evidence.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, this chapter aims at showing how, even starting from such limiting circumstances, it is however still possible to reconstruct, in a perhaps less fragmentary and hypothetical way than scholars were inclined to believe only a few years ago, at least some of the dynamics driving the Achaemenid Empire in Central Asia during this long (little less than a century and a half) and almost completely neglected period of Persian rule North of the Hindūkūš. To this end, the discussion to be developed in the following pages is divided into four main sections, which in turn are articulated into further sub-units. In the remainder of the introduction, the literary sources relating to Baktria during (what from a Graecocentric point of view is known as) the classical age will be reviewed in more detail. The main goal of this undertaking is to investigate whether, between the lines of the *History of Decline & Fall* Greek and Roman authors chiefly contributed to write, it is nevertheless possible to glimpse, however fleetingly, some features of Persian territorial power's articulation along three of the scalar gradations making up the main focus of the present work: the imperial horizon, the satrapal level, and the local context, in which both the imperial «collaborators» and their superiors/allies/enemies were especially active. In a second step, attention will be paid to the other two sets of evidence deemed crucial to the chapter's investigation, namely archaeology and the

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<sup>10</sup> Briant 2009a.

<sup>11</sup> Briant 2002, 518.



ethnographic comparison. The second macro-section is devoted more specifically to the precious little we are aware of concerning the relationship between the Great King and Central Asia during the reign of Xerxes. It opens with a quick summary of the - from a Central Asian perspective, as mentioned, very few - known political and diplomatic events. This is followed by an assessment of some of the insights that can be drawn from other available sources, especially archaeology, which allow, it is the claim which will be made in these pages, to detect with a certain confidence the persistence, if not the multiplication, in the territory of Bactria, of some constitutive elements of the imperial paradigm, with all the relative consequences regarding the political dialectic between the court (both imperial and satrapal) on the one hand and local élites on the other. Such a dichotomy, as already argued and as the entire chapter seeks to illustrate against the backdrop of further evidence, is moreover significantly complicated by the crucial presence of pastoral populations, whose participation in the co-construction of socio-political hierarchies in (Achaemenid ruled) Central Asia deserves to be appreciated in a much more resolute way, both from the quantitative and the qualitative point of view than it has been the case so far.<sup>12</sup> The third section, which is also articulated in two sub-units, covers the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century (up to the *ADAB*, to which a separate chapter is devoted, for reasons already previously mentioned – at least in part - but which will be further detailed below). In analogy with the method adopted for Xerxes' time, the first (sub)part summarizes the information - if possible, even more scanty and patchy - known from the literary sources, compared both with the archaeological data and with what, albeit in retrospect, can be argued from some recent studies carried out on the *ADAB*. In the second one, the attention is focused again – to critically discuss it - on the model understanding Bactria as the «unrutable» satrapy of the Empire, for in recent years it has been forcefully brought on stage again and backed with a rather overlooked but extremely interesting body of material evidence (war scenes from Persian glyptic).<sup>13</sup> In the fourth and last section of the chapter, archaeology, documentary evidence (the Persepolis archive looking forward, the *ADAB* in retrospect) and ethnographic comparison work synergistically in order to demonstrate, through the detailed analysis of a case study (the site of Kyzyltëpe, in the upper Surxondaryo valley) 1. that, 2. how, and 3 why, over the 156 years between Darius' death and the execution of the last King at Ekbatana, the dynamics triggered by the imperial paradigm explored in the previous chapter (and the genesis of which the present work attempted to trace back to the very

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<sup>12</sup> See Stark 2020, 81-82 with further bibliography on the strong and multiple ties (of political, diplomatic, economic, and even familiar nature) between the populations living in Bactria and Sogdiana on the one hand and the steppe world on the other already before the Achaemenid conquest.

<sup>13</sup> The to-go reference for the discussion of this material is now Tuplin 2020, where a full catalogue of the warfare-related seals is to be found (pp. 389-440). Wu Xin, to my knowledge the most consistent (and staunch) advocate of the notion of an endemic conflict between the Achaemenid Empire and the peoples of the Central Asian satrapies from at least the time of Xerxes' reign, has significantly titled one of her recent essays (2017) *Land of the Unrutable*.

first decades of Achaemenid hegemony in Central Asia), far from having even temporarily grounded to a halt, show instead considerable vitality, the latter in this case too being characterized by a complex dialectic between normative demands, conquest, adaptation, resistance, and repositioning which, as Michael Dietler has recently pointed out, is a distinctive feature - even centuries after the first contacts - of that phenomenon, characteristic of almost all ancient societies (and even more so of multi-ethnic Empires such as the Achaemenid one), which the French scholar has called «the colonial encounter».<sup>14</sup> Summing up the main points of the investigation developed in the previous pages, the conclusion aims at the same time at outlining the coordinates within which to read the information made available thanks to the publication of the *ADAB*, to which the (strictly speaking) last Achaemenid chapter of the present work shall be devoted.

### 1.1. «Una storia un poco scontata»

Let us therefore start again from the Aischylos' threnody on the ἀπόλλυσις of the Baktrian soldiers at Salamis. By virtue of the tragedy's chronology, it can rightly be taken as the forerunner of that literary tradition which has decisively contributed to consolidate, both within the circle of specialists and, a fortiori, among the general public, the master narrative portraying Baktria as the archetype of 1. an imperial backwater and, (perhaps precisely for this reason) 2. cyclically prone to revolt - when not to actual «secessionist tendencies» - and therefore, throughout its history 3. almost impossible to subjugate: the ideal forerunner, according to some commentators, of the Afġānistān ruled by Ḥān Dost Mohammad (1793-1863) or of the Central Asian basmačestvo upsurges during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (1916-1934) up to the most recent events of local geopolitics.<sup>15</sup> Even wanting to limit ourselves - for the sake of the argument developed here - to an analytical discourse within classical historiography alone, the soundness of an assessment such as the one just summarized appears inversely proportional to its (as it is easy to see from the examples given, quite remarkable) fortune. The reason therefor is that, within the limited Baktrian dossier dealing with the decades following Darius' death, upon careful scrutiny is not difficult to find quite plentiful evidence of the obstinacy with which the Great Kings seem to have tried, until at least Bessos' (self)proclamation as Artaxerxes V in 330 BCE and (apparently) not without some degree of success, to hold firm control over the satrapal seat of Baktra, and through it over the whole of Central Asia North of the Hindūkūš.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Dietler 2010, 1-26.

<sup>15</sup> See Petit 1990, 202-204, Holt 2005, 1-23 and Barfield 2010, 110-271. On the basmačestvo movement in (Soviet claimed) Central Asia see Northrop 2004, 314-343 with literature.

<sup>16</sup> Compare Degen 2022, 275 on Xerxes and Babylonia.

The soundness of such a claim is shown, to give only the most striking example, by the fact that the (only) three satraps known from the literary tradition in the period - it must be remembered, more than 150 years long – separating Xerxes' reign from Darius III, can be traced with a certain degree of confidence to the closest circle of the imperial family: a very eloquent clue of the Kings' desire to maintain a monopoly position over local powerbrokers (not only of Central Asian extraction: think of the network of patrons revolving around the satrapal court – according to Briant also belonging to the Persian aristocracy - in the other provinces of the Empire) at least as far as the highest political, and military, and legal, and administrative, office in the crucial Central Asian territories was concerned.<sup>17</sup> Usually sent to Bactria endowed with the prestigious title (it is still debated today whether or not this was an official position or on the contrary reflected a special relationship of proximity to the Persian emperor, if not our sources' view of courtly dynamics) of «second after the king», these officers usually were, at least according to what can be assumed based on the available dataset, the younger brothers of the ruling King, who had in turn succeeded the father of both: a procedure, it will be recalled, whose first attestation seems to date back to no less than the founder of the Empire (through Cambyses' crowning as heir to the throne, as attested not least by official Babylonian documents, and Bṛdiyā's appointment to Central Asia).<sup>18</sup> It is precisely the analogy with Bṛdiyā and Cambyses' cases, however, that allows us to observe how what appears to have been a strategy of gate keeping aimed at protecting the King's overlordship from the «paradox of power» (i. e. the delegation thereof as an instrument of its own reinforcement, especially in geographically and/or socio-politically complex territories, which, however, at the same time ended up, at least potentially, in weakening it) was, nevertheless, by no means exempt from pitfalls, in principle moreover much more insidious than the rebellion of a «liar king» comparable to the situation(s) Darius I had to face at the time of his bid for the throne.<sup>19</sup> In the context of the Hellenistic courts, Rolf Strootman has pointed out how, as potential rivals along the patrilineal line, the King's brothers were endowed with a status that was not without ambiguity, to the point of being «almost systematically excluded from the representations of imperial propaganda».<sup>20</sup> The famous «Masistes' romance» (a later tradition - exemplified among others by Plutarch - claims that the name of the Achaemenid cadet in question was Ariaramnes, and it is still debated whether they are two distinct individuals or not), placed by Herodotos in a prominent position within the narrative of the 9<sup>th</sup> book of the *Histories*, provides an interesting parallel with the situation accounted for by Strootman, since this revolt, at least according to the historiographic tradition, seems to have been one of the greatest dangers for the

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<sup>17</sup> Klinkott 2005, 526.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. García Sánchez 2014, to the best of my knowledge the most up-to-date contribution on the subject. Interesting, though controversial, observations are to be found in Zarghamee 2013, 369-381.

<sup>19</sup> Strootman 2007, 169.

<sup>20</sup> Strootman 2014, 96-97.

stability of Persian power in Central Asia, and this as far back in time as the year of Vahêyazdâta's invasion of Arachosia.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, the episode also shows elements of difference from what is known, for example, from the patterns which are attested in the Seleukid Empire, since Masiste/Ariaramnes had obtained the satrapy of Baktria, similarly to what Cyrus had established decades earlier, in compensation for not ascending the throne.<sup>22</sup>

Another element that differentiates the managerial strategies of crucial posts within the Achaemenid imperial polity from those adopted by their immediate successors, and which at the same time provides further evidence of the obstinacy with which Darius' heirs strove to maintain vigilant control at least over the top levels of the political and military hierarchy of the satrapy of Baktria, is provided by the mention, in the very famous Herodotean catalogue of Xerxes' army on the eve of his Greek campaign (7.60 ff.), of a second brother of the king leading a Central Asian contingent. From this we can deduce that, apart from the ideological discourse and the narratological needs that pervade the Masistes/Ariaramnes story, some of the Great King's closest relatives could hold important positions within the administrative apparatus of Baktria at least from the early years of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE.<sup>23</sup> By virtue of the fact 1. that we know almost nothing for certain about the family background of either Dādêršiš or Irdabanuš and 2. that Achaemenid prosopography in Central Asia is patchy to say the least, we are unfortunately unable to answer with certainty two crucial questions, namely, 1. whether, at least in the case of the former, his appointment should be interpreted, as proposed in chapter 3, in the light of the context of the civil war that brought Darius to power in terms of an appropriation, by a particularly influential individual coming from (or at least strongly related with) the local aristocracy, of a position that, at least in Cyrus and Cambyses' intentions, should have remained precluded to him and his peers, and, if so 2. whether the appointment of Masistes/Ariaramnes by Xerxes should not therefore be explained as the acceptance of a - far from negligible - risk such as that of dynastic feud, with the paramount aim of limiting the range of action of the (local) satraps in

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<sup>21</sup> See the, although cursory, mention of the episode in Matarese 2021, 8, who seems to regard Xerxes' brother (as he features in Herodotos' account) as historical.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Hdt. 9.108-113 as well as the two slightly different versions in Plut. *Reg., Xerxes* 1 = *Mor.*, 173 B-C, Plut. *De amore frat.*, 18 = *Mor.*, 488 D-F, Plut. *Vit. Them.*, 14.3 and the already mentioned Just. *Epit.*, 2.10.1-11. The onomastic perplexities concerning the Herodotean character, as well as the consequent ones related to the prosopography of the royal family, derive from the suspicious similarity between the Greek name (Μασίστης) and the Old Persian word \**maθišta*, which would mean roughly «chief, commander», as attested, for example, by a famous inscription of Xerxes: XPf § 4. According to some scholars (e. g. Klinkott 2005, 507 fn. 27), this fact ought to be taken as solid evidence against the historicity of Herodotos' Masistes. This does not mean, however, that Xerxes did not actually have a brother (perhaps the Plutarchean Ariaramnes) who, having been appointed satrap in Baktria, for reasons unknown to us ended up revolting, nor does the possible ahistorical nature of Herodotos' account allow us to doubt that this revolt presented a real danger to the King's throne, forcing the him to take a drastic measure such as the murder of a prominent family member. In addition, Herodotos mentions at least one other individual with a name very close to that of Xerxes' brother (a certain Μασίστιος is recorded in Hdt. 7.79). It could be therefore argued that even the Μασίστης featuring in the 9<sup>th</sup> book might indeed *not* have been an interpretatio Graeca of an imperial courtly title.

<sup>23</sup> Hdt. 7.82. For a comparison between the Achaemenid and the Seleukid courts see Panitschek 2016 as well as Engels 2017b. On Seleukid strategies of power management in Central Asia see most recently Strootman 2020c.

terms of building a power base potentially detrimental to the interests of the court itself in the socio-political framework of Central Asia.

That this concern was high on the agenda of the Great Kings (and rightly so) may be suggested by a detail not to be overlooked in Herodotos' narrative, namely the historian's mention of Masistes' intention, on his return to Baktria, to raise against Xerxes not only the population of the satrapy, but also «the Scythians».<sup>24</sup> If the considerations made in the previous chapters concerning the demography of the Central Asian oases were to be accepted, in fact, one could argue that under the collective name of Scythians should be understood not only some, further unspecified, *Sakā* populations (with whom, as we shall see, relations during the 5<sup>th</sup> century seem to have been particularly tight), but perhaps also some communities settled on the edge of territories such as Sogdiana and the steppes North of the Syrdaryo (think of a key site such as Koktöpe, a real recruiting ground for Scythian horsemen at the time of Spitamenes), as well as some groups of Chorasmians and, through them, other Cisaralic confederations. Although in an elliptical manner and likely not being himself aware of this, Herodotos is thus perhaps outlining the extent of the (institutional and relational) power of the Baktrian satrap around the middle of Xerxes' reign.

#### 1.1.1. *En attendant Ahvamazdā*

For the period between Xerxes' murder (465 BCE) and the reign of Artaxerxes III (358-338 BCE, to which, with one possible exception, the documents of the *ADAB* are dated), the information available to us from the literary sources becomes, at the same time, if possible scarcer and even more controversial: over a period of almost 130 years, in fact, we only know the names of two other satraps, and there is not even complete certainty as to whether they are really two distinct individuals or a single official called in the sources by different names.<sup>25</sup> On the one hand, in fact, Ktesias mentions a certain Artabanos, satrap of (and later also rebel in) Baktria at the time of the transition from Darius' son to Artaxerxes I (known as Ἀρταξέρσης Μακρόχειρ in the Greek sources, as Longimanus in the Latin ones, and in office from 464 to 428 BCE). According to the interpretation of some scholars, he could have been the son of another Artabanos, i. e. the satrap mentioned in the Persepolis tablets during the time of Darius I's reign. According to Ktesias' account, he led an uprising of the entire upper satrapies, taking advantage of the period of instability following Xerxes' death, but his forces were crushed by the new ruler and Central Asia was reduced to obedience.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand,

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<sup>24</sup> Hdt. 9.113: «καὶ ποιήσω τὰ μέγιστα κακῶν βασιλείᾳ· τὰ περ ἂν καὶ ἐγένετο, ὡς ἐμοὶ δοκέειν, εἴ περ ἔφθη ἀναβὰς ἐς τοὺς Βακτρίους καὶ τοὺς Σάκας».

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Lenfant 2004, 266, Klinkott 2005, 507 and more recently Zarghamee 2013, 466.

<sup>26</sup> *FrGrHist* 688 F 14 (35).

Diodoros Siculus again mentions a brother of a Persian emperor (this time Artaxerxes II - Ἀρταξέρσης Μνήμων -, 405-358 BCE), called Vīštāspa - a name we have seen repeatedly associated with the satrapy of Baktria - in office at Balḥ at the time when the father of the new Great King fell victim to a courtly intrigue.<sup>27</sup> Diodoros' testimony shows that, at the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, Xerxes' strategy of pinning cadet sons in prominent positions in Central Asia (and in particular in Baktria) was still well established: this suggests that, despite Masistes/Ariaramnes, the system was considered sufficiently advantageous not to be relinquished. Admittedly, the account featuring in the 11<sup>th</sup> book of the *Library* is so meagre as to make it impossible to elaborate any further argument about the nature of Vīštāspa's relationship with his brother, but at least two considerations seem sufficiently reasonable. In the first place, since Vīštāspa was able to escape the slaughter unleashed by the new Great King on his accession to the throne only by virtue of the fact that he was hundreds of kilometers «far away from Pārsa», the existence of tensions between the various branches of the imperial family cannot be excluded. Secondly, and this is the most interesting fact in this context, the recurrent feuds within the line of succession to the throne do not seem to have altered the socio-political framework in Baktria very much, if not even at all.<sup>28</sup>

### 1.1.2. A first (Re)Assessment

In the light of this review of the available historiographical sources, do we have sufficient backing to support the image, likely become famous at least since Aeschylus' *Persians* and still popular with many scholars, of Baktria as a satrapy constantly on the verge of escaping Achaemenid control?<sup>29</sup> The reasons for a negative response are many, and it will not be out of place to discuss them in some detail here. First and foremost, as one might have already guessed, is the very nature of the evidence at hand and, a point to be stressed, not only its genesis or, more generally, the discourse in which the sources participate (contributing in turn to its very construction), but especially the content of that evidence.<sup>30</sup> Beyond its extremely fragmentary nature, in fact, from Herodotos to Ktesias and from

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<sup>27</sup> Diod. Sic. 11.69.2. According to a famous passage by Berossos (*FrGrHist* 680 F 11), already discussed in the second chapter of this study but to which we shall briefly return later, and which represents one of the very few additional pieces of information the literary sources have on Central Asia during this period, during the reign of Artaxerxes statues of the goddess Anāhitā were erected in various satrapies of the Empire, including Baktria.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas 2017, 64.

<sup>29</sup> Holt 1988a, 11-51. For a critical interpretation of such a perspective see the by now classic Eddy 1961 (e. g. pp. 92-95) as well as (more focused on Central Asia) Briant 1984, 75-77. For her own part, Amélie Kuhrt (2014, 169) has convincingly argued that the increasing amount of available evidence (e. g. coming from Babylonia) is showing Xerxes has having been «one of the most important architects of a stable and successful Persian Empire»: see now Rollinger and Degen 2021c, 430-440.

<sup>30</sup> A similar argument is further developed in Thomas 2017, 70-78, discussing the decline and fall pattern behind many of our (literary) sources assessment of Achaemenid history, starting at least with Xerxes I. See already Madreiter 2012, 116.

Diodoros to Plutarch and Justin, the historiographical tradition, at a closer look, does nothing but display before the readers' eyes, and not without a certain complacency, an apparently endless series of family feuds invariably linked to the mechanisms of succession (as more than one Emperor, from Augustus to Stalin, had to get acquainted the hard way with the true Achilles' heel of every imperial project). However, this still says nothing about the stability of Achaemenid power within the local context of the individual satrapies, since the latter was in fact dependent on balances that did not necessarily overlap (in every respect) with those that characterized the court and the King's closest circles.<sup>31</sup> As already noted in respect to Darius, in fact, the marriage policy of the Persians Kings provided them with a particularly effective device in order to reduce, at least in part, the rate of risk linked both to succession dynamics and to the appointment of a «second after the King» in the person of a cadet son to the satrapal office. The case of Bessos, referred to by Arrian as Darius III's οἰκειότης (namely something like «member of the (enlarged) family of the King») is but the best-known outcome of this strategy, which consisted in directly link up with a number at once rather small and yet large enough to make for a suitably powerful «selectorate», with the most prominent members of the local aristocracy.<sup>32</sup> The advantage of such a mechanism was at least twofold: on the one hand, it ensured the loyalty of crucial individuals within the territorial administration (think for example of the military) directly to the Great King, thus limiting the satrap's patronage capacity; secondly, such men represented, at least in theory, an alternative always available to be unleashed against a too restless brother.<sup>33</sup> There is moreover a second, and in my opinion more important, reason to question the picture sketched above, which is also - significantly - internal to the literary tradition (and for this reason all the more compelling). The account of Alexander's historiography, in fact, although lopsided - especially in the case of Arrian, but Curtius himself provides some fine examples thereof - by the laudatio of the Makedonian prince, offers an overview of Achaemenid Central Asia that appears in stark contradiction with the image of Baktria as a satrapy in a state of perpetual revolt.<sup>34</sup> At least until Bessos' in Sogdiana (around 329 BCE, i. e. at the beginning of the systematic looting of the satrapy's territory by Alexander and his men), the new Great King appears to move with

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<sup>31</sup> Llewellyn-Jones 2013, 120-122.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Arr. *Anab.*, 3.21.5, Curt. 4.6.4; 6.6.16 and Diod. Sic. 17.73.2. According to the *LSJ* (s. v.), the term οἰκειότης can indicate both a parental relationship and intimacy as well as friendship (to be understood, of course, in a political sense: cf. φίλια). This linguistic observation reinforces the hypothesis that Bessos, clearly a bandaka of Darius III, became a member of the imperial family through one of the king's daughters, or in any case a princess of the royal house close enough to Darius to grant the Baktrian strongman access to the closest circle of the king's οἰκειότα.

<sup>33</sup> Note Degen 2022, 315: Artaxerxes I came to the throne after killing his father, and Artaxerxes III got rid of his brother before becoming King. None of these events affected the stability of the Empire, which means that the two Achaemenids had taken care of securing acceptance within the imperial collaborators from Lydia to Baktria.

<sup>34</sup> Briant 2002, 743-754. According to Andrew Monson (2015, 176), in the reign of Xerxes himself what the scholar calls the «index of instability» he calculated for both the Achaemenid and the Seleukid Empires through their history would be even lower than under Darius, which in itself gives an idea of the potentially destructive scope of the civil war that broke out after Cambyses' death (or murder). On Arrian's «language» see now Degen and Rollinger 2022.

remarkable ease - as the *ADAB* help to show - within an institutional framework (which means both from a political-economic as well as a social point of view) that looks at the same time like having been too complex and too well-oiled to be interpreted as the snapshot of an ephemeral re-establishment of imperial power over a territory alternately prey, on a cyclical basis at least since Xerxes' reign of Xerxes, to rebellist or «autonomist» drives.<sup>35</sup>

However, it is perhaps the logic itself underpinning Achaemenid power in Central Asia - the fundamental features thereof have been described in the two chapters preceding the present and which can be summed up through the formula of the imperial paradigm - that to my mind represent the decisive argument against the picture of disintegration drawn in such gloomy colors by classical historiographers. Even a text as ideologically charged as the Bīsūtūn inscription, in fact, if read carefully shows the very lucid awareness, on the part of the Persian Kings of the fact that, although undoubtedly the most important players on the imperial chessboard (the proverbial «bigwigs»), they were not, however, the only and, in the (micro)local economy of a territory as (from the Persepolis' viewpoint) remote but strategic as the semi-desert steppe of Naxçivan in the Caucasus or the Üstÿrt plateau in Chorasmia, perhaps not even the most important ones.<sup>36</sup> The story of Dādêršiš (and at the opposite end of the imperial trajectory Oxyartes' fate) provides indeed a clear demonstration of the possibility, available to the Central Asian aristocracy, to negotiate - at a level far from negligible - the conditions and the very nature of imperial power within the satrapy directly with the representatives of the Achaemenid administration to the benefit of strictly particular interests (which we have defined as those of their *factio* or «selectorate»), in this way securing in the most solid manner the loyalty of these individuals not so much (or not only) to one or another King, but to the imperial institution as such. This was because, as Mischa Meier has acutely pointed out with regard to the relations between the Roman Empire and the barbaricum, it was exactly the Empire alone which provided, at a level hitherto unknown, the structural conditions - in terms of ideology, infrastructure, and much else - most suitable for the consolidation and progressive expansion (in local terms, after all, the first, if not last, interest of these élites) of the power of each of the participants in the Achaemenid enterprise, thus transforming big men at the head of extended families of semi-settled shepherds and/or partially-mobile peasants into representatives of an infinitely larger and more complex polity, in a process of (partial) deterritorialization of local power, the effects of which, as a

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<sup>35</sup> As mentioned above, such an interpretation appears to be deeply influenced by the international politics that have affected Afġānistān over at least the last 40 years: see Holt 1988a, 42; 2005, 9-10, 51 and Barfield 2010, 66-109. A radically contrasting (and in my opinion considerably more sensitive) view is expressed by Matthew Canepa (2020).

<sup>36</sup> Stark 2020, 78-79.



sufficiently astute assessment of the processes of globalization, in ancient times as in more recent ones, does not fail to show, should never be underestimated.<sup>37</sup>

The story (the contours of which are far from clear) of Xerxes' assassination provides clear evidence of the transformative outcomes that the «whirlpool of Empire» (according to Meier's inspired definition) could have on the individual destinies of these strongmen. According to Diodoros Siculus, in fact, among the masterminds of the plot that led to the King's death there was a certain Artabanos, head of the royal bodyguard; in the version of events reported by Justin (*Epit.*, 3.1), this individual is called praefectus, while Diodoros designates him as «τῶν δορυφόρων ἀφηγούμενος».<sup>38</sup> Artabanos' alleged Hyrkanian origin shows, at the very least, the plausibility in the eyes of classical authors of the fact that, still around the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, positions of extreme prestige (as they implied a very close proximity to the person of the Great King himself) could be bestowed apparently without the slightest surprise to members of the Central Asian élite. Such a conclusion, of course, does not fit in well with the hypothesis that the satrapies East of the Caspian became somehow extraneous to the recruitment mechanisms of the ruling class (or at least that the most prominent among the notables coming from there were no longer involved in the courtly life) of the Empire.<sup>39</sup> In addition – and assuming, of course, that Ktesias' parallel account of the same events does not provide us with a piece of pure (pulp) fiction - it is not without interest to note that, according to him, this Artabanos was not a favorite (notwithstanding, by the way, the black legend of the ubiquitous and constantly intriguing eunuchs), but was instead even a descendant of a family among the most eminent within the local aristocracy, since the father of this man, who in the Περσικά is called Artasyras, would have held a role of similar prestige already at Cambyses' court, and would moreover have been able to maintain his position by virtue of the support granted to Darius during the latter's annus mirabilis of 522 BCE. Assuming – while not granting - that this is not spurious material, far from being trivial information, Ktesias' report would on the contrary shed significant light on the deep roots Central Asian élite were able to take in the highest spheres of Achaemenid power. Such dynamics, it should moreover be noted, would date back at least to the dawning decades of imperial history: such an information in turn would therefore provide a remarkably clear example of how individuals such as Artasyras had everything to gain from the presence (within the dialectic characteristic of the «satrapal condition»),

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<sup>37</sup> Stride 2005 I, 427. The issue of the radical transformation of the game's rules within the societies that came into contact, in the course of their history, with the Roman Empire runs through the entire treatment of Meier's monumental *Geschichte der Völkerwanderung* (2020). As for the processes of deterritorialization of local power resulting from globalizing dynamics, see Jennings 2011 and numerous contributions in the *Handbook of Archaeology and Globalization* edited by Tamar Hodos (2017), for example in the section (pp. 705-832) devoted to Southeast Asia. On the Achaemenid Empire see now Rollinger 2023.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Diod. Sic. 11.69.2 (who explicitly argues that Artabanos was held in great esteem by the king: «δυνάμενος δὲ πλεῖστον παρὰ τῷ βασιλεῖ Ξέρξη»).

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Briant 2002, 564, as well as the record of the plot in Arist. *Pol.*, 5.10.1311b. Plut. *Vit. Them.*, 31.3 equally reports of turmoil in the upper satrapies («ἄνω»).

of the stable presence) in both the time and space within which they moved, of something like the Persian Empire.<sup>40</sup>

But what can we say, instead, concerning a hypothetical (and, as we have seen, not at all unlikely) conflict between the satrap (especially if in some way able to make claims of succession: the case of Cyrus the Younger is the most famous example in this sense) and the Achaemenid king?<sup>41</sup> For obvious reasons - above all the transversality of the obligations that bound the local aristocracy to both the satrap and the Persian ruler - such a situation was by far and wide the most delicate scenario in which an individual of Oxyartes' latitude could find himself (and put his family into, as Intaphernes' fate shows).<sup>42</sup> However, if one bears in mind, on the one hand, the social structure of Baktria as we have tried to reconstruct it in the previous chapters and, on the other, the logistical limits imposed by the territorial affordances to the supralocal (presumptive) power of pre-modern Empires, it does not appear exaggerated to advance the suggestion that, also in this case, the Baktrian and Sogdian magnates (not to mention the Chorasmians or the successors of Skunkha further Northeast and West into the steppes) were in a much more favorable situation than their Ēlāmites or Anatolian peers. The most strategically rational solution, in fact, would have been to offer the satrap (who still represented the closest and therefore most dangerous coercive power) the minimum degree of support necessary to avoid a punitive expedition without, at the same time, openly siding against the established power of the King, and then waiting for the outcome of the clash between the two.<sup>43</sup> At the end of the day, even in the event of a victory for the ruling monarch, the latter would have been able to do little more than liquidate the rebellious satrap since, for the very effectiveness of the territorial control that he wished to (re)assert, the Baktrian aristocracy made for an indispensable cog in the political, economic, and military organization of the Empire in the territories North of Hindūkūš (therefore not only within Baktria itself).<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Briant 2002, 566.

<sup>41</sup> Briant's answer to this question (2021, 70 for a recent assessment) is soundly negative: as he puts it, in fact, Cyrus' revolt «was of a dynastic nature. Namely, it was not intended to destroy the Empire, but to replace the Great King (Artaxerxes) by his brother». Otherwise stated, given the benefits it brought for the herrschende Gesellschaft, the imperial enterprise as an institution was far more important than the Great King as a person. The implications of this would have become clear during Alexander's campaign (Briant 2021, 71 with previous literature as well as below chapter 8).

<sup>42</sup> Hdt. 3.118.

<sup>43</sup> The dynamics of the involvement of the Eastern satrapies (and of non-Graeco-Makedonian notables, most prominently Oxyartes) in the wars of the Diadochi unleashed by Alexander's death offer an extremely instructive parallel in this regard: see most recently Mendoza-Sanahuja 2017 and Stark 2020, 82-83.

<sup>44</sup> As we shall see in the next chapter, the *ADAB* provide overwhelming evidence in this respect: even for the satrap (from a mere logistical point of view, the representative of imperial power in the easiest position for the purpose, and therefore a fortiori for the Great King, who for considerable part of the year(s) was many thousands of kilometers far from Baktria), confronting his subordinates with their responsibilities was anything but easy, and both of them had moreover to rely on those (not always very loyal) men in order to secure imperial control over the territories of frontier zones such as Central Asia or the Caucasus: Payne and King 2020.

In other words, it is once again in a tight and flexible dialectic between the meticulous administration promoted by the Empire, the main goal of which was and remained, even in the course of the «long Achaemenid 5<sup>th</sup> century», the most capillary control of its territory (and of the resources and the population settled therein) possible on the one hand, and, on the other, the negotiating capacity of the local actors, to whom the development of that same mechanisms of extraction and control were ultimately delegated, that we must seek the reasons for both the duration and the widespread diffusion (i. e. the success), which even in the age of «Alexander, the king» - according to an emblematic dating formula to be found in one of the *ADAB* parchments - appear indisputable, of the imperial signature impressed by the Achaemenid emperors on Central Asia. «This land - Darius might therefore have boasted referring to Baktria if the necromancy staged in the *Persians* had been repeated by his successors until the end of Kodomannos' reign - became, and remained, mine».

## 1.2. Frontier Archaeology on a Frontier Zone

In order, if not to prove, at least to support as convincingly as possible the hypothesis put forward at the end of the previous section, archaeology seems to provide, at the current state of our knowledge, the greatest amount of information and, if adequately supported by a solid methodology, the most effective equipment. Numerous excavation campaigns - supported by international projects involving various institutions in Europe as well as within Central Asia itself – carried out in particular in Southern Uzbekistan, have contributed, over the last 15 years, to significantly change the image of Achaemenid power in Central Asia from that, still in vogue at the beginning of the new millennium, of an Empire that was essentially «invisible» (and therefore implicitly held to have been almost totally absent) on the ground.<sup>45</sup> In fact, as will be shown in particular in the last section of this chapter, despite the - not trivial - dating problems of most sites from the pre-Islamic period, not unlike the first phase of Achaemenid expansion in Baktria (in Sebastian Stride's terminology this is the so-called P1 period), even in the second (the P2 phase, which spans the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries up to the early Hellenistic period, coinciding in this case with Alexander's departure for India in 326 BCE), it seems possible to reconstruct a trend in the evolution of settlement patterns in Baktria and Sogdiana that appears entirely consistent with the continuation, throughout the entire chronological span under investigation, of the structures defining the imperial paradigm as we have characterized it in chapter

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<sup>45</sup> See in particular Bertille Lyonnet's studies (e. g. 1990; 1997) as well as – for a considerably different assessment, the recent overview by Lhuillier 2018. Because of his consistent archaeological background, Wu 2005 is also very much worth consulting, not least because to the best of my knowledge it represents the first thorough assessment of the Achaemenid Empire in Central Asia on a monographic scale (but note now King 2021, 315-365).

5 of the present work.<sup>46</sup> Of particular interest, as it shall be argued, is the emergence, or the expansion, of fortified sites that seem to have developed from what Soviet archaeologists had already interpreted as rural residences belonging to the local élite (think once again of Vivāna's irmatam in Arachosia), which fit perfectly - and indeed significantly contribute to its identification - within the complex, and extremely articulated, imperial road system, as we saw in the previous chapter being among the most irrefutable signs of careful planning, which presupposes both political power and the resources to put the latter into practice, of the political-economic structure of the satrapy as foreseen by the Achaemenid administration.<sup>47</sup> In addition, and as far as I am aware for the first time in the history of Central Asian archaeology devoted to the study of this period, we have at least one detailed palaeobotanical and palaeozoological study that allows us, by systematically comparing 1. the *ADAB* documentation, 2. the already known materials from Persepolis, and the results of the studies carried out in situ, to sketch both an outline of the economic strategies of a region within Achaemenid Baktria both on a local (micro)scale and to place such strategies, and the outcomes thereof, within the broader imperial context.<sup>48</sup>

Taken as a whole, the available dataset discloses a remarkably diversified production, which can be interpreted in a coherent way in the light of the urban planning patterns studied, among others, by Sebastien Gondet, and which show quite clearly the constant development of the satrapy as a whole (and in particular of some regions evidently considered strategic for reasons that will be discussed later) until Alexander's invasion, the latter being, after Cyrus' conquest, the second (third if one were to include also the decline of the Oxus civilization) watershed in the history of pre-Islamic Central Asia. In such a perspective, the analogies between Gaugamela on the one hand and the battle of al-Qādisiyya on the other, which about a millennium later - 636 CE - would have opened the Byronic *Road to Oxiana* (1937), i. e. the route towards Eastern Irān and the steppes of Tūrān to Caliphal troops, are less superficial than one might think at first sight.<sup>49</sup> Before going any further, however, it is necessary to stress one more methodological point. While it is in fact clear that none of the processes discussed in this chapter would be conceivable outside (or in the absence of) the gravitational center represented by the Achaemenid expansion - at least not in the orders of magnitude that archaeology has recorded - it is nonetheless equally essential to highlight the ability of local élites to exploit to their own advantage the immense mobilization of resources which, as Eisenstadt had

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<sup>46</sup> Stride 2005 I.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Pierre Briant's remarks Briant (1982, 175-225; 2017a, 370-372; 2018a, 227-245; 2018b; 2020), Wu 2018 and Henkelman forthcoming.

<sup>48</sup> Wu *et al.* 2015.

<sup>49</sup> Briant 2002, 518. See on the Muslim conquest of Northern Irān and beyond now Azad 2020.

already noted, represents the most visible aspect of the impact, on a given territory, of the rise and spread of any imperial political power.<sup>50</sup>

Picking up on a brilliant insight from Miguel John Versluys, and thus putting back on its feet what previously walked on its head a long-standing - and in my view erroneous - conception of Achaemenid borderlands, one could argue that, in the context of an Empire that Henry Colburn's recent research has shown to be both «globalized and globalizing» (or at least which can usefully be understood through these categories), far from accounting for the last stage in the process of diffusion of innovations (on the political, economic, religious, cultural, and many other fronts) conceived in the heartland (and accessible to us thanks to Persepolis), the borderland(s) should on the contrary be understood as an effervescent laboratory of experimentation and innovation, from which profoundly original solutions could often be elaborated, moreover capable of then circulating, appropriately modified, along the spokes that make up the imperial system, thus involving (and affecting) in turn the center itself.<sup>51</sup> Not only that: based on of the considerations developed by Düring and Stek, the triptych of the present chapter and of the two that, respectively, precede and follow it, has the ambition, if considered diachronically in the light of the premises of the first imperial century and, above all, in retrospect «from the tower of the year 326», to show how it is precisely the balances that matured in the complex space of the *Middle Ground* at the borders - in a literal and figurative sense - of the Empire what provides the most effective interpretative matrix through which to investigate both the strengths of the Achaemenid imperial paradigm and, no less effectively, the fault lines along which, at least in Central Asia, the entire project would eventually come to a (temporary) end, to be reborn, under radically different auspices, in the Seleukid era.<sup>52</sup>

## 2. «Adam Xšayaršā, Dārayavahauš xšāyaθiyahyā puça, Haxāmanišiya»

The approach adopted by Colburn in the context of his treatment of the Persian Empire as an interconnected organism is, among other things, particularly useful in drawing Bactria out of the doldrums of the «exceptional case» in which its geographical distance from the scenarios (which the sources represent as) central to the geopolitical destiny of the Achaemenid world contributed in no small measure to strand it.<sup>53</sup> Years ago, moreover, in a study that can rightly be described as

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<sup>50</sup> Eisenstadt 1969.

<sup>51</sup> See on this issue e. g. Versluys 2014, Pitts and Versluys 2015, Colburn 2017, and most recently Versluys 2022.

<sup>52</sup> Düring and Stek 2018(a and b). See also White 2011<sup>2</sup>, 52 for a – in the scholarly debate, at least within ancient history, rather overlooked - definition of the *Middle Ground* in *political* rather than *cultural* terms, assuming, of course, that such a distinction is always so clearly delineated. On the fracture separating the Achaemenid and Seleukid geopolitical visions, especially in Central Asia, see most recently the suggestive account sketched by Paul J. Kosmin (2014, 59-78).

<sup>53</sup> Colburn 2013; 2017. See moreover Colburn 2018; 2021.

pioneering, Briant rightly argued that the entire Central Asian imperial trajectory could not be adequately understood if separated from its Near Eastern neighborhoods (meaning from the Irānian Plateau to Anatolia) and over the *longue durée* (the entire second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE) of the history of this section of (Central) Eurasia.<sup>54</sup> Even Herodotos' account of the Masistes' affaire, considered from these premises, contributes in no small measure to downscale the narrative of power fragmentation, of the (because of its being uncontrollable) uncontrolled growth of political particularism as well as of the autonomist outbursts of ambitious local satraps. Consider, for example, the catalogue of officers presented to the reader by the Halikarnassian when he sets of enlisting the generals at the head of the various contingents of the Persian army marching against Greece: «the Kilikian Siennesys, son of Oromedon, the Likian Kybernis, son of Kossikas, the Karian Histiaios, son of Tumnes, Pigretes, son of Hysseldomos and Damasithymos, son of Kandaules».<sup>55</sup> In Briant's words, such a list shows how, not only along the coast of Asia Minor - in some ways, given its geographical position, the opposite mirror-image of Central Asia – power was itself fragmented (*parcellisé* in the original French, «*parceled*» in the English translation) among small principalities, without this hindering in any way the efficiency of the Persian military force, let alone constituting an obstacle, as is emblematically shown by the case of Artemisia, whom the historian presents as the «ruler» of crucial territories such as Halikarnassos, Kos, Nisyros, and Kalymnos as well as contributing in her own right with no less than five vessels to the Persian expedition, to the desire of representatives of the Persian and local élites to distinguish themselves in the eyes of the Great King, a proven method of acquiring prestige and potentially a driver of significant social ascent 1. within the broader framework of the imperial ranks and 2. consequently, at the local level in the satrapies.<sup>56</sup> This simple consideration alone would suffice to demonstrate two things: first, that, at the time of Xerxes' accession to the throne in 486 BCE, the mechanisms underpinning the functioning of courtly society (around the circle of the emperor, but also, given the systemic and specular nature of the Achaemenid socio-political apparatus, within the individual satrapal contexts), which has been explored in the previous chapter, and which ought to be taken as a device of primary importance for the reproduction and consolidation of the Kings' power, were perfectly operational throughout the whole of the imperial territory (think of the Central Asian contingent under *Vīštāspa*), and this despite the - alleged - rebellion of Masistes/Ariaramnes. Secondly, as argued above, it is evident that,

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<sup>54</sup> Briant 1984. See most recently Rollinger forthcoming.

<sup>55</sup> Hdt. 7.98.1: «καὶ Κίλιξ Συέννεσις Ὀρομέδοντος, καὶ Λύκιος Κυβερνίσκος Σίκα, καὶ Κύπριοι Γόργος τε ὁ Χέρσιος καὶ Τιμῶναξ ὁ Τιμαγόρεω, καὶ Καρῶν Ἰστιαῖός τε ὁ Τύμνεω καὶ Πίγρης ὁ Ὑσσελδώμου, καὶ Δαμασίθυμος ὁ Κανδαύλεω».

<sup>56</sup> Briant 2002, 498. On Artemisia see the very well-known portrait in Hdt. 7.99. About the political-territorial fragmentation of the Microasiatic coast and interior, consider also the Siennesys «king of the Kilikians» (τοῦ Κιλικῶν βασιλέος Συεννέσιος) of Hdt. 5.118.2, whose personal power, probably transmitted in a (para)dynastic manner, can be deduced from the presence, almost a century later, of a homonym within the circle of Cyrus the Younger (Xen. *Anab.*, 1.2.12).

however relevant, the dynamics within the royal family are not enough, in the absence of an adequate consideration of what Düring and Stek called «the practical situations on the ground» (i. e. an assessment as accurate as possible of all the social actors at play and of their respective interests), in order to understand, in its specific peculiarities, the phenomenology of the sociopolitical dialectic in Baktria during the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE. Therefore, we must turn to other categories of evidence.

## 2.1. «In the year 18 [of the reign of Xerxes, the King]»

The first of these categories of documentation consists of the corpus of so-called *Aramaic Ritual Texts from Persepolis* engraved on numerous (more than 200) high-value objects (pestles, mortars, in some cases even plates) found in the Persepolis treasury and of Arachosian origin, discussed in the previous chapter.<sup>57</sup> Their importance lies in the fact that they provide first-hand evidence, datable at least to the reigns of Xerxes and Artaxerxes I based on the chronology recurring in the inscriptions, of the existence, in the territory of one of the two most important satrapies of Central Asia, of a very sophisticated tax system which, among other things, seems to have adopted accounting devices developed earlier in Babylonia.<sup>58</sup> This observation makes it possible - let it be said in passing - to show at work the capacity of the imperial administration to adapt the most refined instruments at its disposal to govern its territory in a very uniform manner even in regions that lacked those toolkits, thus contributing substantially to accelerating that process of homogenization (quite different from an indistinct homologizing flattening) which, according to Jennings' studies, is an unmistakable symptom of a globalizing phenomenon, in that, by significantly reducing transaction costs - by standardizing, for example, administrative practices from one end of the Empire to the other - it contributes decisively to reinforce, in the experience of individuals, a common horizon of intelligibility. The latter, in turn, was recognized by Colburn as both the ultimate goal of Achaemenid power within the Great King's domains as well as one of the primary and most effective means of reinforcing it.<sup>59</sup>

The persistence, well into the 5<sup>th</sup> century, of a system of such complexity - and that the mention of at least three irmatam within a relatively small dossier (if compared, for example, to the Persepolis archives) suggests that it was widespread throughout the entire Arachosian territory - is in sharp contrast, as is quite evident, with an overall geopolitical picture of unrest: it is in the year of Xerxes

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<sup>57</sup> A very careful study of this material in the light of the information contained in the Persepolis archive is the - fundamental - Henkelman 2017a (especially pp. 102-109 and 154-174), but see now Schütze 2021.

<sup>58</sup> King 2019, 187. This section relies considerably on previous assessment of the evidence discussed here, especially King 2019, 202, 277-304, and Schütze 2021.

<sup>59</sup> Jennings 2017, 15, Colburn 2017, 874-876. See now Colburn 2021 on the Southernmost borderlands of the Empire.

(or Artaxerxes) the king that tax payments through the objects on which the *ARTP* are inscribed are recorded, and it is not far-fetched to argue that the first measure any rebellious satrap would have taken would have been to seize the governance mechanisms of such a crucial infrastructure, and it cannot be ruled out that such a political turnabout would have resulted in a change in the dating system, if not in the personnel in charge of that administrative machinery. Significantly, the *ADAB* parchments bear witness to precisely this phenomenon. To such an argument one could counter that, after all, the *ARTP* do allow one to make deductions regarding Arachosia, but that analogical reasoning is not sufficient to translate the results of observations drawn from the analysis of this corpus to the Baktrian context. By virtue of the very close relations between the two satrapies (it must be remembered that, at the time of the civil war which broke out in 522 BCE, given the extension and the geographical complexity of the Central Asian front, there is every reason to believe that Dādêršiš and Vivāna acted in concert), not least by virtue of the capillary diffusion of the road network - thanks to which, it must not be forgotten, decades later, Alexander's army could be supplied in Gedrosia from Baktria and Parthia -, the argument appears less compelling than one might at first think, since it is rather unlikely that upheavals of the magnitude of those alluded to in the literary sources on the Baktrian chessboard would have left the situation in Arachosia unchanged.

There is, however, a further factor that can be put forward, this time positively, to support the use of the *ARTP* documentation as a litmus test of the solidity, also in Baktria, of the imperial paradigm during the decades under study in this chapter, and this concerns the very material of which the objects found in the Persepolis treasury are made. While in fact almost all the satrapies of Northern Central Asia (in particular Chorasmia, Baktria, and Sogdiana) are mentioned in the so-called foundation charter of Susa as sources of precious stones, Arachosia on the contrary - next to India - features as a producer, or supplier, of ivory (pīruš), and to my knowledge no traces of a lithic industry comparable to that known for Baktria in the territories South of Hindūkūš have been detected so far.<sup>60</sup> By virtue of the instrumental role that - in the reconstruction of the Arachosian taxation regime proposed against the backdrop of a methodical study of the *ARTP* by Rhyne King - was played in the creation of surplus value with respect to the original fiscal burden, in all probability to be harvested in kind, of a valuable material such as the chert, the question as to the origin of this mineral imposes itself with some force.<sup>61</sup> Although, it must be acknowledged, there are currently insufficient elements to support such a hypothesis, the combined information coming from the Susa inscription on the one hand, and from mining studies on the other, perhaps allows us to imagine a Baktrian origin, or at most a Gāndhārān one (for example in the Kābul valley, a territory with which, also from an administrative point of

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<sup>60</sup> DSf § 11. See on this topic Francfort 2013a. *WAI*, 234 on pīruš and Colburn 2021.

<sup>61</sup> King 2019, Schütze 2021.



view: think of Oxyartes, Bactria seems to have entertained very close relations), of the raw material used in Arachosia in order to tax the local élites.<sup>62</sup>

The most obvious benefit of such a scenario has to be seen in the fact that it would allow to illustrate, based on structural reasons (i.e. motivated by the very nature of the imperial paradigm and its underlying aims), those processes of «space-time compression» that, following Jennings and Colburn, can be recognized behind the movement of men and resources as reflected in an emblematic manner in the Persepolis documentation, but which is also exemplified, as we have seen, in the *ADAB* parchments, in which there is evidence of a flow - which there is no reason to believe was dictated by contingent circumstances and is likely instead of having been common currency - of Arachosian wine to Bactria.<sup>63</sup> In particular, the latter evidence seems to offer a rather convincing parallel in support of this hypothesis (and one could even go further, claiming for example that wine reached Bactria in exchange for chert or other valuable produce from the mines – beyond lapis lazuli, Bactrian mines were blessed for example with alabaster – which it is now known were exploited since at least the Bronze Age), thus providing a solid example of those interrelations («entanglements» as Michael Dietler has it) between individuals and matter which, from Egypt to Central Asia, seem to have substantially transformed life in these regions following the establishment of Achaemenid power.

## 2.2. Surxondaryo, again

The arguments developed so far may not have sufficiently convinced the skeptics. In such a case, the best solution is to turn one's attention, yet another time, to the Surxondaryo valley which, because of its extraordinary ecological complexity, can be considered, in the words of Sebastian Stride, as a veritable mirror, albeit on a small scale, of the whole of Bactria, and which, by virtue of an almost unparalleled (in terms of quantity, if not (always) in terms of quality) research tradition, provides the best *Moreh Nevukhim* (מורה נבוכים, i. e. Maimōnides' *Guide of the Perplexed*) available to us for the purpose of investigating the Achaemenid imperial paradigm's state of health in Central Asia following the death of Darius I.<sup>64</sup> Referring to Stride's partition of the sites known to date detected in the valley, which, compared to other classifications, has the not inconsiderable advantage of delineating, although with all due caution, a subdivision (albeit not a particularly subtle one) between

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<sup>62</sup> Sverčkov 2009 on the history of (ancient) mining in Uzbekistan as well as the already mentioned Francfort 2013a. See now Noori *et al.* 2019. If this line of reasoning were to be proven right, one would have to make sense of the administrative status of Gāndhārā, which might have been more prominent than usually thought (Henkelman 2017a, 208-210). Could it be possible that the Arachosian «green chert objects» were produced working an «imperial matter» mined in Gāndhārā? Such questions show us once again how little we know on the organization of the Eastern territories of the Empire.

<sup>63</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 174 ff. C1 (= Khalili IA21) ll. 30-31. On the concept of «time-space compression» see Jennings 2017, 14.

<sup>64</sup> Stride 2005 I, 100.

a *first* and a second phase of the Achaemenid period - the dividing line for which can be set, not without a certain amount of arbitrariness, within the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. The outcome of Stride investigation and data collecting may be summarized more or less as follows. Of the 12 settlements that can certainly be dated to the first period (P1) of Achaemenid hegemony in Central Asia, no less than 6 (Kučkūtēpe, Pshaktēpe, Bujrachitēpe, an anonymous one and the two very important settlements of Bandykhantēpe II and Kyzyltēpe, discussed below), continued to be inhabited even in the second period (P2: the situation at the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE will be very different).<sup>65</sup> Even more importantly, for the P2 phase alone, archaeologists were able to identify a further 33 settlements, which seems to confirm beyond doubt the ability of the Achaemenid administration to shape the territory of the Baktrian satrapy following principles that cannot have been dictated (exclusively) by local logi(sti)cs, but which can only be fully understood from a pan-imperial perspective. This is, once again, a powerful confirmation of the arguments put forwards with prominent authority, among others, by Wouter Henkelman regarding the density of the network of connections that put in communication (with profoundly transformative effects) the different territories of a satrapy 1. among themselves and 2. each of the satrapies with the entire Achaemenid structure (a dynamic which is, metonymically, symbolized by the «panoptic» archive of Persepolis).<sup>66</sup> Remarkably, some of the sites catalogued by Stride, from Khajtabadtēpe to Talaškantēpe (I and II) to Pachmaktēpe and Obishir via the strategic ford of Shortēpe, West of Termiz along the course of the Oxus heading towards the Sherabāddaryo oasis and the Köýtendağ mountain range, provide exceptionally convincing evidence corroborating the assumption made above.<sup>67</sup> As it shall be seen in more detail further below in this chapter while addressing what, to the present state of our knowledge, stands out as the most important among the known settlements in the entire valley (and among the most important in the entire territory of Bactria and Sogdiana, probably flanked only by Baktra, Marakanda, Kōktēpe and a few others), i. e. the «red hill» of the upper Surxondaryo (this is the meaning of the O'zbek name of Kyzyltēpe), an accurate study of the topography of these sites in the light of the Persepolis archives and of the most recent information provided by the *ADAB* makes it possible to reconstruct with a hitherto unknown degree of precision the infrastructural network of the satrapy, within which the above-mentioned localities served as authentic nodes (namely of points of concentration, within a given system, of the flows that make up the system itself) clearly recognizable to users within the landscape of the satrapy, of whose institutionalization - according to the

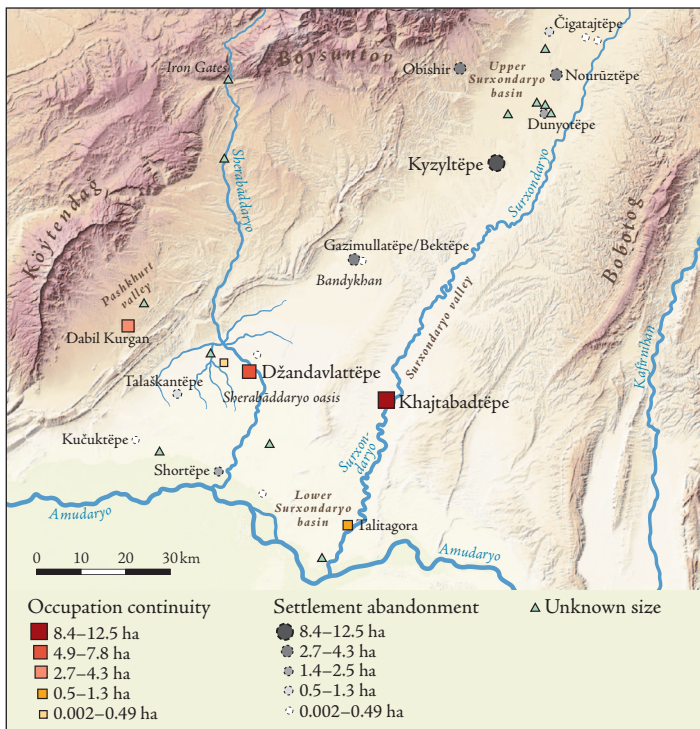
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<sup>65</sup> Stride 2005 III nos. (in the order as they are mentioned in the text) 265, 266, 292, 462, 292, and 257.

<sup>66</sup> Colburn 2017, 881-882, Henkelman 2017a, 169. Note Henkelman and Jacobs 2021.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Stride 2005 III nos. 32, 228, 229, 235, 290, 326 and Wu 2020, 604. See moreover Stančo and Pažout 2020.

terminology adopted by Henkelman - they represented by far the most macroscopic example (not least because it can still be identified as such today).<sup>68</sup>



**Map 6.1. The dahayava which King Darius held. The Surxondaryo and Sherabaddaryo Oases under the Achaemenids. © Peter Palm**

Should even the above picture not have been sufficient in persuading the supporters of what we might call the «crisis scenario» of Achaemenid political power in Central Asia from Xerxes' reign onwards, the studies in landscape archaeology recently penned by a research group led by Ladislav Stančo on the Sherabaddaryo territory, backed by excavations and surveys carried out particularly inventively in the vicinity of the modern village of Pashkhurt, have made it possible to recognize strategies of territorial organization bearing similarities with what is known from the Surxondaryo which are too startling to be the result of mere chance. Moreover, they consistently point in the direction of the systematic replication of the procedures discussed in the previous chapter, which bear the revealing mark (the Achaemenid signature) of imperial planning and which moreover impacted on a space that, by virtue of its proximity to important pastures intensively exploited by mobile populations, seems to have attracted the interest of the satrapal administration early on in the history of Persian hegemony over Central Asia, according to pattern comparable to those we have suggested in the case of Cyropolis' establishment in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE.<sup>69</sup> If, then, there is a particula veri in

<sup>68</sup> Henkelman 2017a, 173; forthcoming.

<sup>69</sup> Stančo 2018. See moreover the diachronic synthesis in Stančo 2019 and, on the Pashkhurt area, Mokrobodov 2021.

the dictum according to which two clues make a proof, the vitality displayed by what, for the sake of exposition, we have called Achaemenid urbanism (although it is, to put it cautiously, a very peculiar form of urbanism) provides further support for the central argument of this chapter. During the «long 5<sup>th</sup> century», at least from the point of view of the Empire and its representatives in Central Asia, the assumption holds according to which *Im Osten nichts Neues*.

### 2.3. *Sakā haṃmāvargā* and *Sakā tigraxaūdā*: Empire and *Middle Ground* from Bactria to the Altai

The third important source that allows us to outline a framework of the socio-political dynamics at work in the territories of Achaemenid Central Asia after Darius' death comes from the rich funerary equipment of the five kurgany (курганы, i. e. burial mounds characteristic of the pastoral cultures of the Eurasian steppe) discovered in two localities south of the Russian city of Novosibirsk, namely Pazyryk - which yielded the most famous finds, today kept in the Siberian collection of Peter the Great at the Ėrmitage Museum in Saint Petersburg - and the Ukok (Укок) Plateau.<sup>70</sup> The excavations - first carried out by Mixaiĭ Gryaznov at the end of the 1920s (1927-1928) and later (1947-1949) by Sergeĭ Rudenko, whose monograph on the *Frozen Tombs of Pazyryk* is still an inescapable reference point - brought to light an extremely rich harvest of artefacts, including numerous objects made of perishable materials (wood, leather, felt), which the permafrost had preserved in an exceptionally good state.<sup>71</sup> This documentation provides the richest evidence of the social, artistic, and religious practices of the pastoral populations of the Altai in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE, and features prominently in any discussion of non-settled civilizations in pre-modern Eurasia.<sup>72</sup> The main reason justifying a discussion of these spectacular finds in the context of a study of Achaemenid Central Asia is related to some of the objects recovered by Soviet archaeologists in the курганы of the Pazyryk culture, as this archaeological complex, spread over an immense territory between Northeastern Qazaqstan, Southcentral (Siberian) Russia, China, and Mongolia - and which united numerous non-settled communities during the Iron Age - has become known in the specialist literature: from the famous felt carpet found in the so-called Kurgan 5, decorated with overlapping scenes of horsemen paying their respects to what appears to be a female deity, to precious metallic objects such as a gold plate and a silver spoon found in the territory of Semireč'e (more precisely in the so-called Issyk Kurgan

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<sup>70</sup> Wu 2005, 322-325. See Simpson and Pankova 2021, 134-155 for an up-to-date assessment of the evidence together with Linduff and Rubinson 2021.

<sup>71</sup> King 2021, 357-359 for an astute discussion of the Pazyryk carpet as a testament of economic exchange between the Achaemenid Northeastern satrapies (especially Bactria) and the world of the Eurasian steppes taking place thanks to, and to the advantage of, the satrapal household and the infrastructural network it was meant to upkeep and supervise.

<sup>72</sup> For a chrono history of the excavations see Rudenko 1970, 13-44. Parzinger 2020<sup>3</sup>, 659-662, 790-795 provides one of the best and most up-to-date ecological and socio-historical overviews of the region. See moreover Stark 2020, 83.

in Qazaqstan) to the shabrak (the saddle cover of steppe horsemen), found in both Kurgan 1 and Kurgan 5 at Pazyryk, numerous elements of the funerary equipment of the individuals buried in the frozen tombs - undoubtedly belonging to the highest strata of local society - show in fact significant points of contact with certain recurrent motifs of Achaemenian art and in particular with stylistic features clearly related to a courtly environment.<sup>73</sup> For example: the shabrak discovered in Kurgan 5 sports a decoration depicting felines (probably lions) advancing in single file, portrayed according to a style almost identical to some famous bas-reliefs from Persepolis, while the one from Kurgan 1 was decorated with one of the most renowned among the Apadāna motifs, i. e. a hunting scene with a lion (in Pazyryk replaced by a winged feline) in the middle of life or death fight with an ox (which in the context of the Altaj culture(s) has become a mountain goat).<sup>74</sup> Of even greater interest, not least because bronze specimens were found in the territory of Semireč'e, which would suggest that they are local reproductions of originals made of more precious metal, are the inserts of the shabrak found in Kurgan 1, which faithfully reproduce the torques represented on the staircase of the Apadāna in the hands of, among others, representatives of the so-called Scythian delegation while from Kurgan 2 come finely chiseled gold earrings decorated with floral motifs (lotus flowers, rosettes), also hallmarks of Achaemenid courtly art: as one will recall, this motif is repeatedly found on pottery casted from precious metal, another distinctive feature of the Persian royal (and satrapal) table.<sup>75</sup>

These striking similarities, the rather high dating of the курганы (which fluctuates between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, but a terminus post quem non around the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century has been suggested) and, above all, the even higher chronology of some of the objects found in the tombs - above all the earrings, which Rudenko dated, on stylistic grounds, to the late 6<sup>th</sup> century or, at the latest, to the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE raise pressing questions about the significance of the presence of such artefacts (and of some very peculiar artistic stylistic features) in the local context of the Iron Age Altaï culture, as well as about the historical implications of the networks of communication and exchanges that allowed them to travel along a route of thousands of kilometers through extremely prohibitive territories, such as those of Northeastern Qazaqstan, from the

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<sup>73</sup> Dandamaev 1989, 227.

<sup>74</sup> See Wu 2007, 132 and the remarks by Elena Korol'kova in Simpson and Pankova 2021 pp. 221-223, arguing in favor of the hypothesis of «interactions between Achaemenid Persia and the nomad cultures of Central Asia, Southern Siberia and Iran». Swart 2021, 254-248 on the Sakā engraved on the Apadāna reliefs.

<sup>75</sup> Rudenko 1970, 229-237, Wu 2005, 330 ff.; 2007, 136. On the Sakā depicted at Persepoli cf. e. g. Gropp 2009, 293. It might not be out of place to recall that in 2012 a pair of golden torques dated between 500 and 450 BCE were discovered in a burial mound in the cemetery number 6 at Taksai-1 (Western Qazaqstan, south of the Russian city of Ural'sk – Уралъск), which were worn by an élite female individual (Simpson and Pankova 2021, 510). To answer the question how such magnificent objects (which crafting technique strongly links them with Achaemenid metalwork) travelled as far as Taksai-1 is not an easy task, but it cannot be ruled out that they entered networks of steppe diplomatic élite gifting coming from the Achaemenid Central Asian satrapies, where they fulfilled the aim of securing bonds of alliance between the (Baktrian?) satrap and the local strongmen in Baktria, Sogdiana, and most likely also Chorasmlia.

Achaemenid Empire to the Pazyryk valley and the Ukok Plateau.<sup>76</sup> As an alternative to models - still quite popular in Central and Inner Asian archaeology - of a diffusionist and acculturative nature that are clearly unbalanced on the Achaemenid front alone and which, moreover, do not adequately account for the interpretative «errors» (or, to use a more sensitive terminology «creative misunderstandings») that characterize the iconography of, for example, the shabrak, which make for a clear hint at refunctionalization processes aimed at adapting an object of external origin, considered for some reason attractive, to the local semiotic and cultural context(s), a more productive solution might be to focus on non-settled groups (whose very high mobility is attested since the Bronze Age), which at least from the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE were dwelling in at least five closely interconnected territories: central Qazaqstan, the Syrdaryo and Amudaryo deltas, the Farġāne valley, the Ili river delta and the territory of Semireč'e (southeast of Lake Balqaš).<sup>77</sup> In particular, the communities settled in the latter area may have been known, however vaguely, to Herodotos if, as Wu Xin has argued, the description of the territories inhabited by the «bald men» West of the Issedonians could indeed be traced back to the landscape of Semireč'e, on the slopes of the Tiānshān mountains (which might in turn imply, given Herodotos' sources, that these peoples were not unknown to the Achaemenids).<sup>78</sup> The hypothesis of contacts between these populations, in particular the inhabitants of the Semireč'e territory, of Farġāne and of the Ili valley on the one hand and, on the other hand, the (internally undoubtedly much more differentiated, as archaeological research and ethnographic evidence strongly suggest) groups of Sakā attested since the Achaemenid inscriptions under the name of haṃmāvargā and tigraxaudā are made, if not certain, at least extremely probable due to the existence of a - so far not adequately published and even less adequately studied - terracotta statuette in the National Museum of Taġik Antiquities (Dušanbe) depicting a horse decorated in a style that closely resembles the pattern of the saddle reproduced on one of the carpets found in Kurgan 5 at Pazyryk.<sup>79</sup>

The date and archaeological context of this significant and neglected specimen are unfortunately unknown. However, two considerations are worth notice at this point. First, there is the fact that a material such as clay is unlikely to travel over long distances, suggesting that the Dušanbe figurine (of which at least one other specimen is known) was produced locally. Secondly, one ought to

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<sup>76</sup> Rudenko 1970, 107 (on the possible date of the earrings). On the chronology of Pazyryk see the different opinions in Wu 2005, 324-328 (second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE) and Wu 2007, 121 (between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BCE). According to the estimates of Parzinger 2020<sup>3</sup>, 599, курганы 1 and 2 would be dated between 490 and 410 BCE, while курган 5 would range between 490 and 410, with only Tuetka I being allowed an earlier date, in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE. The most recent chronology is to be found in Simpson – Pankova 2021, 136: Tuetka I is dated here between 440 and 414 BCE, the Filippovka курганы between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the Issyk курган to the 4<sup>th</sup> and the Pazyryk burials respectively to 300-282 (Pazyryk 2), 299 (Pazyryk 3), 295 (Pazyryk 1), 264 (Pazyryk 4) and 250 (Pazyryk 5).

<sup>77</sup> Wu 2005, 389 (the lake is known as Балқаш Көлі by the locals and its name might be transliterated as *Balkhash* following the Russian spelling of it namely Озеро Балхаш) as well as Frachetti and Rouse 2012, Stark 220, 82-83.

<sup>78</sup> Wu 2005 p. 303: see Hdt. 4.23-26. Morris 2021a; 2021c discussing intriguing comparative evidence for élite steppe networks economic agency in the (post)Hellenistic period.

<sup>79</sup> Wu 2005, 273-277; 2007, 125.

acknowledge that the stylistic similarities between the decoration of the latter and that of the shrabaks reproduced on the Kurgan 5 carpets are such that the independent reproduction of a motif widespread among (most likely) interrelated human groups should be ruled out. Taken together, these remarks strongly suggesting that such objects may have been originally produced in Central Asia, for example in Ustrūšana and their motives later copied (making use of humbler materials) along the social ladder of the Sakā communities, following patterns indeed not very different from those accounted for in the case of the drinking vessels discussed in the previous chapter.<sup>80</sup> If we add to these observations that the scientific analysis carried out on the manufacturing techniques of the felt objects found at Pazyryk, including the famous carpet on display at the Ērmitage, suggests that the manufacture of these artefacts should be traced back to Central Asian factories (probably in Sogdiana), an extremely complex picture begins to take shape, in which the production and circulation of objects made across the borderlands of the Achaemenid domains (think of a center such as Cyropolis, which perhaps not by chance arose in the most likely area of origin of the Dušanbe statuette) had the specific purpose of establishing relations - at least in part diplomatic, as suggested by the discovery of bronze torques in the Semireč'e area - with the Sakā (for whom we know just two (ethnic) names, namely haumāvargā and tigraxaudā) populations, whose massive presence within the territories of the Central Asian Achaemenid satrapies (from Chorasmia to Sogdiana - think of a settlement such as Koktēpe) no longer appears to be in doubt today and who must have been the main recipients (and possibly even the commissioners) of these prestige-laden objects.<sup>81</sup>

Since, as the most recent studies on the dynamics of globalization in antiquity have helped to show, the intrinsic logic of «transregional networks» such as those reflected in the furnishings of the Pazyryk курганы requires the presence of mutual benefit arising from the exchanges those networks oversaw and controlled, it does not seem too far-fetched to speculate that the circulation of objects so distinctively linked to the world of the Achaemenid court reveals the Persian Empire's constant attempt, in the form of its representatives in the satrapies over a chronological span of almost two centuries, to tap into the diplomatic and economic networks of steppe societies - the primary aim, as argued in chapter 4, of the foundation of a settlement such as Cyropolis or of the power projection in the Farġāneġ valley and in the Chorasmian territories, up to Üstȳrt Plateau and the Sarȳgamȳş basin - in order not only to recruit skilled cavalymen (whose presence in the ranks of the Baktrian contingents would in any case remain a constant throughout the history of the Empire) but also, and perhaps above all, of specialized personnel to be employed in strategic sectors such as horse (and

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<sup>80</sup> Wu 2005, 321.

<sup>81</sup> Wu 2005, 274, 330, Simpson and Pankova 2021, 239. Stark 2020, 81-82 has rightly pointed out that Baktria (namely: the élites settled there) must have been in contact with the steppe power circles at least two centuries before the rise of the Achaemenid Empire, as suggested by the discovery of lapis lazuli in the Tarbaġataġ (Тарбаġатаġ) region of Eastern Qazaqstan.

camel) breeding - according to a mechanism that finds a very close parallel in the steppe diplomacy characteristic of the Chinese reign of Zhào (趙, 403-222 BCE) in the course of which history there is in fact evidence of the existence of factories and, in some cases, actual markets, built specifically to supply neighboring élites circles in Manchuria and Mongolia in exchange for valuable horses.<sup>82</sup> The Sogdian steppes, in other words, still represented in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries a territory of strategic interest for the Achaemenid satrapal administration.<sup>83</sup> The presence, in some of the grave goods, of other luxury imports (e. g. from India and China) alongside the more prestigious symbols of Achaemenid political affiliation (such as, most strikingly, the torques) provides clear evidence of the ability of the Sakā élites, to use a formula employed by Bryan Miller in the context of the Xiōgnú Empire, to navigate the Middle Ground created by Achaemenid expansion towards the steppes of Central Asia.<sup>84</sup>

The recurrence of specific features of the Achaemenid iconographic repertoire in the Frozen Tombs suggests that the objects found at Pazyryk, and their original models, may have been produced on commission from the most exclusive circles of the societies of the Sogdian steppes, Chorasmia and the Ili valley.<sup>85</sup> This suggests, on the one hand, their ability to deal on an equal footing with the representatives of Achaemenid power in the Central Asian satrapies; on the other hand, the equally clear awareness of the opportunities, in terms of increasing one's personal and/or group prestige in the context of highly competitive societies, provided by the existence of an entity of the power and complexity of the Persian Empire.<sup>86</sup> Similarly to what can be argued from the analysis of settlement patterns development in the Surxondaryo during the so-called P2 period, as well as from the study - within the parameters provided by the Persepolis archives - of the *ARTP* evidence, the funerary

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<sup>82</sup> Emblematic in this regard are the numerous contributions collected by Tamar Hodos in the recent *Handbook of Archaeology and Globalization* (2017) and in particular, within the American section (pp. 171-276), the study by Robert M. Rosenswig investigating the coming into being, under Olmec élites' purview, of an «archipelago of complexity» able to link, through the circulation of objects of prestige, territories that were either very distant from each other or with very high «friction of the terrain» as well as another very thought-provoking essay, by Frances F. Berdan, on the commercial diplomacy of the Aztec Empire, which shows how a distinct social group of professional merchants known as *pochteca*, was able to exploit the exchange circuits set in motion by the Aztec conquest of Central America to accumulate enormous wealth and social prestige by virtue of controlling the flow of goods whose demand in Aztec territory was almost inexhaustible. Note Hyland 2020, 254 on the local impact of market exchanges fostered by imperial demands in Egypt and King 2021, 347-361 focused on Bactria against the background of the *ADAB* evidence.

<sup>83</sup> Stark 2020, 83. The same was most likely true in the case of Chorasmia, pace Parzinger 2020<sup>3</sup>, 673-677, 810-813, arguing that from the 4<sup>th</sup> century the region broke away from the Persian Empire entering an historical phase on its own, as no more (significant) contacts with the territories further south existed, a view which most recently challenged by Minardi 2021.

<sup>84</sup> Miller 2015. See moreover the impressive pair of gold bracelets (torques) from burial 4 at Filippovka-1 (dated between the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE: King 2021, 358-359) and strikingly resembling the objects depicted in the hands, among others, of the members of the Sakā «delegation» engraved on the Apadāna (Simpson and Pankova 2021, 500 ff. for detailed photographs and technical discussion of the manufacture of these objects).

<sup>85</sup> Compare Peterson 2020 on the Tillyātēpe burials. Lerner 1991 remains foundational for a critical assessment of the origin(s) and circulation of several among the Achaemenid-looking Pazyryk objects.

<sup>86</sup> Wu 2005, 317-321.



equipment of the Pazyryk курганы testifies to the stability of a system which, throughout the entire chronological span discussed in this chapter, stubbornly sought to keep open the exchange networks with the world of the steppes, which were evidently considered vital for the economy (*lato sensu*) of both Baktria and of the Empire as a whole. Particularly symptomatic, in the light of these observations, is the apparent breakup of the flows discussed in the preceding pages at a given point during the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, which, although it is not easy to determine more precisely, against the backdrop of the evidence coming from the two burial mounds of Kuturguna and Ak Alakha 3, located on the Ukok Plateau, can be dated to around the middle of the century ( $363 \pm 39$  years according to the most recent estimates).<sup>87</sup> If accurate, this chronology would carry with it two implications, the first only probable, the second almost certain: namely 1. that the interruption of Achaemenid imports characteristic of the Pazyryk culture is somehow related to Alexander's invasion of the Eastern satrapies and, for the purposes of this discussion much more importantly, 2. that the hypothesis of an «independence» - at the very least - of Sogdiana and Chorasnia occurring around the reign of Artaxerxes II (405-358 BCE) still taken almost for granted in scholarship, is not adequately supported by documentary evidence.<sup>88</sup>

### 3. After *\*Maθišta: The Desert of the Tartars*

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, if the information we have about Baktria during Xerxes' reign patchy and scanty, for the later period it is essentially reduced to zero. The only exception is - for the reasons we have discussed - the mention of some family feuds that would have afflicted the royal house, the most nefarious of which seems to have taken place at the time of Artaxerxes I. According to literary sources, the rebel this time was a brother of the king, again named Vīštāspa, who was appointed in Baktria as satrap.<sup>89</sup> The latter is said to have taken up arms, stirred by a certain Artabanos (not to be confused with the man bearing the same name who and was directly involved in Xerxes' murder - perhaps even as the plot's mastermind): in this case too, however, the insurrection was put down, and from this moment on, until Alexander's expedition, Central Asia disappears from the horizon of Graeco-Roman literary evidence.<sup>90</sup> Unfortunately, primary sources are of no more help: the Babylonian astronomical diaries, for instance, record with Olympic nonchalance the power transition between Xerxes and his successor (Arses). This obviously does not mean, as Briant already observed, that there were no frictions whatsoever within the royal family: much less likely, however, is that, if they did indeed take place, they were of a magnitude even

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<sup>87</sup> Wu 2005, 360-377.

<sup>88</sup> Dandamaev 1989, 304-305, Wu 2005, 378.

<sup>89</sup> Thomas 2017 for a thorough assessment of the available literary evidence.

<sup>90</sup> García Sánchez 2014.

remotely comparable to that which Greek and Latin historiographers would suggest in their accounts of this period. The silence of Persian official sources conveys, above all else, the impression of a system solid enough to be able to afford to wash away from its historical memory (which means from dynastic history) any periods of turmoil, even if they had involved, for a time that we are unable to determine, a crucial satrapy such as Baktria.<sup>91</sup>

This impression of stability continues unaltered in the following decades, at least according to the picture that can be gained from the Egyptian papyri, from the inscriptions of the wādī Hammāmāt, or from the royal inscriptions engraved by Darius II. After Xerxes' death, and throughout the course of the entire 5<sup>th</sup> century, there is in fact nothing to suggest even a single change in the geopolitical organization of the Achaemenid territories following the punitive expeditions of Artaxerxes I in the Eastern satrapies that could be even remotely related to the hypothetical «secession» of the Central Asian domains that these uprisings would have helped to cause.<sup>92</sup> Even in the case of Cyrus the Younger's campaign against his brother (Artaxerxes II), which resulted in the latter's victory - but at a high price given the rebel Achaemenid prince's means - and in the death of the 10000 Greeks paymaster at the battle of Cunaxa (401 BCE), Diodoros Siculus and Xenophon jointly claim that Artaxerxes II brought in troops «from all over the Empire», with the Central Asian contingents gathered at Ekbatana under the leadership of a «bastard brother» of the king («νόθος ἀδελφός»: another, not otherwise known, satrap of Baktria?). All in all, such evidence provides a rather cogent clue supporting the hypothesis, repeatedly endorsed by Pierre Briant, according to which the Irānian Plateau and Central Asia would have continued to provide soldiers when a general mobilization was called upon (and this will be further confirmed at the time of the dispositions taken in 333-331 by Darius III against Alexander's invasion of Achaemenid territory).<sup>93</sup> Further backing these assumptions, a source which is certainly not benevolent towards Darius III, such as Curtius Rufus, states that, even a few years before the Gaugamela route, the Achaemenid King was able, in perfect analogy with the foundation charter of Susa (the flagship and paradigmatic example of the Achaemenids' policy of extraction and control during the reign of Darius I), to collect at court prestigious gifts originating from the most remote parts of the upper satrapies (elephants and, significantly, «racing» camels, which probably indicates, as we shall discuss in the next chapter, the

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<sup>91</sup> Briant 2002, 565-566, Rollinger and Degen 2021c. Note Briant 2021, 59: «it is inappropriate to construe the revolts of the satraps as the structural cause for the Empire's fragility».

<sup>92</sup> Briant 2002, 602-603. See also recently the conclusions on *The Achaemenid Experience of Egypt* reached by Henry Colburn in an important study (2020a, 246-258). Cf. also Rollinger 2021b, 381: «the newly established Empire of Darius I remained stable for two centuries».

<sup>93</sup> Briant 2002, 680. See the two testimonies in Diod. Sic. 14.22.1-2 and Xen. *Anab.*, 2.4.25.

persistence of close ties with the world of the steppes).<sup>94</sup> The conclusion seems, once again, unavoidable: even in the midst of what in all probability represented the most serious threat to the stability of the *entire* imperial polity between Vahêyazdâta's expedition to Arachosia and Alexander, the Achaemenid dominions, to quote an graphic formula taken from Ktesias' epitome penned by Photios in the 9<sup>th</sup> century CE, continued to extend compactly, and firmly governed through the meticulous application of the imperial paradigm, «from Ephesos to Baktria and India».<sup>95</sup>

Before going any further, it is perhaps possible to add one more piece to the mosaic that has been built so far, namely the mention, in one of the best preserved among the ADAB documents, of a series of provisions (8 ardab of white flour - ḥwry, or the Aramaic חורי, a word that probably alludes to the peculiar quality of the product - and 15 mari of wine) to be allocated as libations for the bgn' lbyl (בגנא לביל), i. e. «the temple - according to some interpreters «altar» - of Bēl».<sup>96</sup> The presence of a Babylonian deity in a late 4<sup>th</sup> century administrative document from Baktria (*ADAB* C1 is dated to December 330 BCE, «in the month of Kislev, year 1 of Artaxerxes the King») raises the question of the possibility of an interpretatio Baktriana of an Irānian deity, e. g. of Ahuramazdā. However, several elements militate against this hypothesis. First, there is the fact that, in the context of official sacrifices celebrated even in the territory subject to the Persepolis administration, the tablets in the archive show an extremely diversified religious landscape, in which, moreover, Ahuramazdā holds a far from prominent position.<sup>97</sup> Secondly, as Christopher Tuplin has pointed out, «if Bel can be substituted for Ahuramazd and the star of Ishtar for the winged-disk figure as apparently occurred in Babylon, there might seem to be no limits to divine-name-substitutions».<sup>98</sup> Moreover, the same testimony of the *ADAB* highlights how, still in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, a religious (and administrative) calendar of Mesopotamian type apparently coexisted without any problem with the persistence of local cults (especially those related to the Oxus river). What is striking, if anything, and especially by virtue of the very famous testimony of Berossos about the diffusion in Central Asia of the cult of Anāhitā after royal intervention, is the conspicuous *absence* of uncontrovertible evidence of the presence of Zoroastrian cults in the region.<sup>99</sup> Consequently, from a methodological point of view, it seems more prudent to take the testimony of *ADAB* C1 as literally as possible, and to accept the hypothesis that, on the eve of the Makedonian invasion, Bēl was indeed part of the cultic landscape of Achaemenid

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<sup>94</sup> Curt. 5.2.10 on elephants and camels («Dromades cameli inter dona erant velocitatis eximiae, XII elephantia a Dareo ex India acciti»). Cf. moreover Briant 2009a for a perspective (re)evaluation of the reign of Darius III (as well as most recently Briant 2015).

<sup>95</sup> *FGrHist* 688 F 33.

<sup>96</sup> Naveh -and Shaked 2012, 174 ff. C1 (= Khalili IA21), l. 37.

<sup>97</sup> Henkelman 2008b, 108-304; 2017b; 2021b. See Naveh and Shaked 2012, 36 for the Mazdean hypothesis.

<sup>98</sup> Tuplin 2019, 36.

<sup>99</sup> *FGrHist* 680 F 12: cf. Tavernier 2017b, 118-120 and Tuplin 2019, 37-40.

Baktria.<sup>100</sup> After all, the attestation of the cult of Irānian deities in Anatolia is usually interpreted as evidence of the presence of Irānian soldiers in the region, a pattern that is at least partially reflected in the quartering of Jewish and Aramean troops at Elephantine in Egypt: all the more so by virtue of a testimony such as that of Fort. 0517-002, which mentions supplies for groups of *haldabe* (probably soldiers) travelling through the Empire's territories to and from Baktria during the reign of Darius I, can we really exclude that, in the following decades, contingents of Mesopotamians were able to reach – and perhaps to stay permanently in - Central Asia?<sup>101</sup>

This hypothesis could be strengthened *e contrario* by the few scraps of information available about an individual such as Pharnuches, who was sent with Menedemos, Karanos and Andromakos against Spitamenes and perished, together with most of the Makedonian squadron, in the ambush set up by the latter against Alexander's troops near the river Polytymetos.<sup>102</sup> Enlisted in the ranks of the invading army after the death of Darius III, although a native of Lykia, this man was nevertheless able to effortlessly master the languages (thus perhaps also some of those spoken by the *Sakā* communities?) current in Baktria and Sogdiana, leading therefore to the assumption that he joined the Makedonian expedition following, for instance, the sack of Persepolis, where Pharnuches might have been employed as a scribe and/or interpreter. This meagre biography is nevertheless a strong indication in favor of the possibility that, in this case, we are dealing with a member (at least of the second generation) of the Central Asian diaspora in the Empire's territories, a fact that, if put together with Briant's observation concerning the expansion, during Xerxes' reign, of the Persian diaspora in the territories of the satrapies - particularly in Asia Minor (but this does not in any way mean that the phenomenon concerned only Anatolia) - further strengthens the impression of solidity of the Empire's fundamental structures. In fact, what we (don't) know about Pharnuches' life forcefully supports the hypothesis that, even during the 4<sup>th</sup> century, in the eyes of the subjects of the Great King the Achaemenid world was clearly configured as *one*, from Lykia to Sogdiana, something that would hardly have been possible if the revolts mentioned in classical historiographic sources had had the destructive impact usually attributed to them.<sup>103</sup>

### 3.1. The Land of the Afġāns. The Graveyard of the Empire?

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<sup>100</sup> Tuplin 2019, 36. Moreover, given the mobility through imperial territories recorded in the archives and the presence (for example at Āi Xānum) of apparently Mesopotamian religious architecture (compare Rapin 1992b), one should not be surprised by the presence in Baktria of craftsmen trained in Babylon or in neighboring areas of the Ancient Near East.

<sup>101</sup> Henkelman 2018a, 229 for text, translation, and discussion of this unpublished tablet.

<sup>102</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 4.5.3-9, *FGrHist* 139 F 27, Heckel 2006, 207.

<sup>103</sup> Briant 2002, 567-568.

In spite of this, however, the discourse on Central Asia (and in particular Bactria) as the «Graveyard of the Empire» and on its inhabitants - above all the Sakā and the populations believed to be most closely linked to them, such as the Sogdians and the Chorasmians - as some of the fiercest enemies and adversaries of the Great Kings does not seem to have been affected by the implications that the evidence discussed so far would entail. On the contrary, and not without a certain paradoxical twist, the renewed interest in (especially, though not exclusively, Hellenistic) Central Asian history seems to have made it necessary, in the eyes of some scholars, to emphasize its exceptional character - in contrast, among other things, to the cautious warnings of Pierre Briant, who already in *L'Asie centrale* (published in 1984) was wary of considering Bactria as some kind of a unicum within the tapestry of the Empire. It is as if, to justify an in-depth treatment of these territories and of the peoples settled in them within an imperial history, one perceived the need to highlight the challenge to the (Achaemenid, Seleukid, Graeco-Baktrian) Empire as a precondition for including the Central Asian communities within a history of the Empire itself. This is, in my view, a highly questionable perspective, which deserves for both this and for other reasons that shall be explored in more detail in a moment, a discussion of some length, if only in order, by means of questioning said assumptions, to reaffirm on a more solid ground the central arguments of this chapter.

### 3.1.1. *Bactria Awakens*: Sources, Methods, Problems

In recent years, and with particular impetus since the submission of an important doctoral dissertation devoted to *Central Asia in the Context of the Achaemenid Persian Empire*, the most consistent advocates of a constant (and progressively growing, at least from Xerxes' reign) threat to the stability of the Empire allegedly posed by the Central Asian populations has been the Chinese historian and archaeologist (but American-trained: University of Pennsylvania) Wu Xin.<sup>104</sup> Her arguments deserve to be taken particularly seriously by virtue of the fact that, to my knowledge, she has substantiated them by resorting to the detailed analysis of a documentary class of evidence (Achaemenid glyptic depicting warfare scenes), which until then had received marginal attention, if any, within the historiographical debate, at least in relation to the images related to Central Asian subjects.<sup>105</sup> Since these are primary sources, not infrequently of a provenance closely linked to the (imperial or satrapal) court but nevertheless able, by virtue of the dynamics underlying the circulation of these seals, to illuminate issues otherwise destined to remain in the shadows concerning, for example, aspects of the ideology shared by the Achaemenid ruling class throughout the whole

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<sup>104</sup> Wu 2005, 40-138; 2010, 254; 2020.

<sup>105</sup> Wu 2014.

territory of the Empire, the study of this corpus could theoretically revolutionize our perception of the political history of Achaemenid Central Asia during the last 150 years of its history. Hence the relevance of an assessment of Wu's arguments in the context of the present study. Among the thousands of seals (partly preserved intact, partly reconstructed from the impressions they left on the bullae that guaranteed the integrity of the documents to which they were attached) that were found during the excavations at Persepolis, particularly in the area of the so-called treasury, there is a group of about a hundred specimens that makes for the dataset underpinning Wu Xin's argument of Central Asian peoples as the «enemies of the Empire».<sup>106</sup> The peculiar nature of these specimens is twofold. On the one hand, they depict, with a great deal of detail and a surprising attention to ethnographic information, battle scenes (roughly divisible into two main categories: a narrative one, i. e. aiming at the reproduction in extenso of a given war episode or of a specific snapshot thereof, and a didactic one, generally focused on the outcome of the fighting), a fact which is already quite rare in itself. On the other hand, and this is perhaps the most important aspect, taking pride of place in the seals' visual plot appear, in the role of adversaries, 1. one or more individuals clearly identified as members of the imperial herrschende Gesellschaft - for example by their clothing and some distinctive accessories (the turreted crown, which not infrequently encircles the head of the main subject depicted on the seals, as well as the so-called Medic garment stand out) - and 2. three categories of opponents to these representatives of the Empire. In decreasing order of number of specimens so far attested, about 60 representations of Greeks are followed by a group of 18 exemplars (2 molds and 16 seals, 6 of which reconstructed from casts on the bullae) depicting war episodes involving Central Asian peoples (Baktrians, Sogdians, Chorasmians, perhaps Parthians, certainly - as revealed by the presence of the unmistakable pointed hat, or *başliq* - members of *Sakā* communities) and, finally, 3 cases in which, in the guise of «enemies of the Empire», the Egyptians appear.<sup>107</sup>

Taking as a starting point some fundamental studies by Margaret Cool Root aimed at demonstrating how, in the context of the cultures of the Ancient Near East (from Pharaonic Egypt to Assyria and the Neo-Babylonian Empire), visual narrative was as important - and in some cases even more so, due to the multi-ethnic and polyglot nature of these Empires, whose ruling class needed to communicate the same ideological content as effectively and as effortlessly as possible - as much as the written text in order to represent historical events and preserve their memory, a fact which, according to Wu Xin, would essentially make the artistic representation independent of the presence or absence of a textual component in order to assess its historical content, the Chinese scholar has

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<sup>106</sup> See, in general on the accounting practices through seals in vogue in Persepolis, *PFS* and the numerous contributions by Mark Garrison (most recently: 2017a; 2017b and the relevant bibliography).

<sup>107</sup> Wu 2014, 50-254 for a detailed description of the dataset and a rich bibliography. See most recently Tuplin's catalogue (2020), in which 65 glyptic warfare-related images are enlisted, among which roughly one third features combat between Achaemenid looking individuals and Central (Eur)Asian looking «enemies».

argued that, far from representing stereotypical motifs such as hunting scenes or depictions of a «heroic encounter» between an individual variously associated with the imperial court (perhaps even a mythical-metonymic representation of the «Persian Man» - Pārsa martiya - mentioned by Darius I at Naqš - i Rostam) and a long gallery of semi-fantastic creatures, the battle scenes that make up the above-mentioned corpus allude in fact to historical events. Therefore, they would make for a set of evidence which ought to be taken as independent from the written accounts available and, what is more important, in some way would reflect the Achaemenid perspective (not only, it is important to underly, that of the King and more generally of the court, as is the case for example with a testimony such as the Bīsutūn inscription), on the war effort sustained by the Persian Empire throughout its history in order to «pacify» and «normalize» the territories of Central Asia.<sup>108</sup> In support of this argument, Wu Xin points out that, since war is an act of «institutionalized violence» between two or more groups, its representation, all the more so through a medium with a very high rate of circulation as in the case of imperial seals, had to be equally organized and sanctioned by an official authority. Consequently, the events depicted should be considered historical at least to the extent that the individuals and groups depicted had to be real, and/or had to be perceived as such.<sup>109</sup> Two further methodological observations are made by Wu in support of the feasibility of an investigation from a historical perspective (and not only from an artistic standpoint, or from the viewpoint of the history of ideology) of the representations of war episodes impressed on the seals she studied.

Firstly, the plausibility of the hypothesis that we are confronted with a visual narrative of a historical event must be considered directly proportional to the level of detail of 1. the war event itself and 2. of the representation of the contenders, and in particular of the adversaries of whom, for the sake of convenience, we shall call «the Persian Man» (but the scholar does not rule out the possibility that individuals in flesh and blood were indeed depicted, as in the case of the cycle of reliefs on the famous Çan sarcophagus, which has been judged by authoritative experts, including John Ma, to be a veritable «metonymic autobiography» of the deceased).<sup>110</sup> Since, especially in the case of the Central Asian group, 1. the precision of the ethnographic rendering - or at least the effort to differentiate the single ἔθνη - is evident, and 2. the quality of the representation (one thinks especially of the blue chalcedony specimen - of particularly fine workmanship - kept in the British Museum or, for a stylistic comparison, of some pieces from the Oxus treasure also kept in London) makes it extremely probable

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<sup>108</sup> Cf. Root 1979, 186-187, 192-194; 2012, 60 and Wu 2014, 215-221.

<sup>109</sup> Wu 2010, 555-556; 2014, 225.

<sup>110</sup> On the difference between 1. iconography, 2. «text», and 3. «TEXT» see Garrison 2011. Wu, 2005, 57-99; 2010, 554-558; 2014, 229-230, 238, 252 provide a thorough discussion of the theoretical and methodological issues underpinning the main argument developed in these contributions. Her arguments have however been criticized by Tuplin 2020, 377-378 (see especially fn. 114, where it is noted that «the presence of additional elements is not necessarily a sign of historical specificity»).

that we are dealing with examples of the so-called «official court style» - with the latter institution acting as a guarantor of the (historical) content of the representation -, the inevitable conclusion, according to Wu, would be that the intention behind the commission of such objects was to preserve traces of events which, in the collective memory (at least) of the participants in the events, were considered as being of remarkable significance.<sup>111</sup> Secondly, the scholar continues, if in the case of the Attic vase representations with Persian themes in one case and with regards to the much smaller (only three specimens) Egyptian corpus in the other, there has so far been no hesitation in linking these depictions with otherwise documented episodes of war - above all, of course, Xerxes' expedition against Greece - there would be no reason to treat the evidence sporting Central Asian subjects any differently. Given these premises, the result would be the confirmation either of repeated episodes of hostility between emissaries of imperial power and representatives of Central Asian peoples, or of a widespread perception, within the circle of the users of such «visual historiography», of the endemic nature of the «adversarial relationship» (as Wu calls it) between the Achaemenid Empire and the peoples of Central Asia, since, as the scholar herself argues, what really matters would not so much have been what happened, but what was believed to have happened. Therefore, the mere fact that the idea of recurring hostilities in the context of Central Asia was thought plausible within

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<sup>111</sup> See respectively BM 124015 and Dalton 1964 nos. 111 and 116. Here follows the description of the first of the three items taken from the website of the Museum ([https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W\\_1897-1231-114](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1897-1231-114), accessed on the 21<sup>st</sup> of February 2022): «Blue chalcedony cylinder seal engraved in intaglio with two battle scenes in unequal compartments divided by vertical lines, the larger scene depicts a royal figure (henceforth "king") with a pointed beard marked by vertical lines and hair worn in a page boy style with an unusual fillet or net which resembles an inverted graduated comb, the widest section fitting over the back of the head with narrow front knobbed over the forehead and tied at the back leaving two free ends; he is dressed in a Persian robe partially drawn up to reveal one knee, the remainder falling in a great fold from his shoulder, its pendant sleeves are decorated across the shoulder with a row of dots; his shoes are shown with three straps; he is engaging in combat with two other bearded men, while two additional bearded men dressed in similar clothing lie prostrate on the ground beneath; the king has a bow-case, ornamented with three swinging pom-poms or tassels, slung on his back which contains a bow with a curved extremity and arrows, and with one hand he grasps the wrist of one opponent wearing a jacket or tunic with a belt tied at the front and high boots tied around the tops, and who has fallen upon his left knee, his right being pierced by an arrow; with his right hand the king drives his spherical-butted spear into the shoulder of this wounded man, who holds a dagger or arrow in his right hand and a small compound bow in his left, and who looks backwards to a second figure standing behind. This second figure is similarly attired but wears a high cap with fillet falling backwards from his head and a bow-case slung on his back, and who raises his left arm while attempting to lift his fallen comrade with his right. Between the king and this second figure is a winged disc above a circle enclosing the head and torso of a bearded male figure (Ahuramazda?) facing right. The second scene is similar to the first and likewise shows an imposing royal figure (the victor) in Persian gown and with a tasselled bow-case slung on his back, in this case driving a spherical-butted spear into the back, between the shoulder blades, of a stooping bearded man dressed in a belted tunic and high boots and who is holding a dagger in his right hand which has been turned towards his own head by the victor and a bow in his other hand; directly below these figures is a prostrate bearded figure in belted tunic and high boots, and above is a bearded bust (Ahuramazda?) arising directly out of a winged disc, its lower edge forming a crescent, and facing left away from the victor. The action portrayed in the two compartments is seen to be a continuing one, with the fight depicted in the smaller compartment taking place over the bodies of the fallen in the larger one. The seal surface is lightly but extensively patinated, although the surface whitening is more extensive than usually produced by patination during burial; some minor chipping along both edges».



courtly environments would provide evidence of actual tension brewing in the territories of the upper satrapies.<sup>112</sup>

But there is even more in this than that: once the historical referent behind the images impressed on the seals has been accepted, the fact that in some cases it is possible to date them ad annum by virtue of the tablets on which they were sometimes impressed, would even make it possible to chart a chronology of Achaemenid war operations in Central Asia, with a level of precision that is unmatched except at Bīsūtūn, but with the considerable advantage of not depending, for the purposes of an overall interpretation, on the ideological conditioning that permeates the text (not to mention the iconography) of the famous Darius' manifesto. A few examples: PTS 30, a paradigmatic representative of the «court style», was found engraved on PT 4655, which can be dated, by virtue of the text engraved on it, between 470 and 469 BCE, while PTS 29, also finely carved and engraved on PT 4830, was dated, by virtue of stylistic analysis and comparison with specimens for which a secure chronology is available, again, based on the inscriptions engraved on the tablet, to a period between 485 and 467 BCE.<sup>113</sup> Against the background the above-mentioned premises, the conclusions are clear: apart from the Masistes/Ariaramnes revolts, the study of Achaemenid primary sources would make it possible at least to argue (at best to demonstrate) that hostilities in Baktria lasted throughout Xerxes' reign, and it might even be possible to date them to an earlier period, since PTS 29 has been found engraved on other tablets (PT nos. 804, 830, 980, 1016 and 1021), all of which can be dated before 485.<sup>114</sup>

The scenario does not change, and in some ways even seems to worsen, as the chronology progresses into the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE: scenes of conflict involving individuals (represented as being) of clear Central Asian origin recur in at least two seals from Babylon found in the archives of the Murašû family.<sup>115</sup> The first, which can be dated between 424 and 418 BCE, i.e. between the 36<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Artaxerxes I and the 6<sup>th</sup> of Darius II, was owned by a certain Ribat, son of Šamašaja, while the second belonged to a man called Mīnû-ana-Bēl-dānu, a land administrator of some latitude. Based on both the known replicas of the seal and the chronology of the tablets on which it was impressed,

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<sup>112</sup> Wu 2010, 559; 2014, 229-230. See however Tuplin 2020, 373-374 for some critical remarks concerning Wu's interpretation of the evidence (which is not equivalent to deny, as he himself admits at p. 378 of his exhaustive contribution, that «fighting in Central Asia played a larger part in the Persian *monde imaginaire* than one might suppose from the Greek historical tradition – and even that it did so because there was more actual fighting there than that tradition knows of»). Emphasis in the original. The point is, however, that we are not entitled to assume, as Wu 2010, 547 for example does, that «the Central Asians» (and the same goes for that matter also for «the Greeks» or «the Egyptians») were particularly troublesome because of their being Central Asians (and/or «nomads»). Ethnicity, whatever we mean with this word, is *not* the point at stake. Issues of (internal) political and economic nature related to the local impact of the Empire (Rollinger 2023) should instead be considered, but for such an endeavor Wu's dataset is not as supportive as she claims. Worth consulting on these matters is also Simpson and Pankova 2021, 598-604.

<sup>113</sup> Wu 2005, 63; 2010, 549 fn. 20; 2014, 243-244.

<sup>114</sup> See Wu 2005, 63-69.

<sup>115</sup> See the references in the classic book on this entrepreneurial Mesopotamian family: Stolper 1985, 89, 288-289.

this last piece of evidence can be dated in the middle of the last quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Darius II (418-414 BCE).<sup>116</sup> All things considered, Wu Xin concludes her thorough assessment of this body of evidence, these dataset presented above conveys a clear picture of a state of «permanent insubordination» in the Eastern satrapies, which would help, among other things, to explain why such a highly ambitious building project as the monumentalization of a site like Kalalāy-gūr 1 (dated between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE because of architectural and decorative reminiscences that strongly recall the visual landscape of Persepolis), was left unfinished, thus providing further support for the long-lasting argument suggesting the definitive breakaway of Chorasmia from the Achaemenid imperial polity at a point that is difficult to specify in more detail at the present stage of research, but which should be seen as laying within this time span.<sup>117</sup>

### 3.1.2. «*Marīkā, dṛṣam azdā kušuvā, ciyākaram ahi, ciyākaramtaḡ ūnarā, ciyākaramtaḡ parīyanam*»

Although it is an extremely innovative hypothesis - if not in its content, certainly in the form in which it was put forward - and defended moreover through a consistent display of remarkable erudition, Wu's thesis is nevertheless problematic for several reasons. To begin with, it shall not go unnoticed that, in numerous subsequent studies, the scholar has taken a somewhat diametrically opposed stance, arguing (incidentally: in an extremely convincing manner), in favor of a pervasive control of the territory of the Eastern satrapies by the Persian Empire (an argument welcomed and further supported by Wouter Henkelman thanks to his edition of several documents within the Baktrian dossier from Persepolis) until the whole of the advanced 4<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, Wu goes so far as to argue, employing a parallel that speaks volumes about the perspective adopted in her work, that the economic flourishing of the Surxondaryo during the entire Achaemenid imperial trajectory, as it can be reconstructed from the archaeological evidence, provides the clearest proof of the extent and duration of Persian investments in Central Asia, which alone would have allowed - by analogy with the mammoth campaign of clearing and cultivation of the «virgin lands» in Central Asia (and not by chance with particular vigor in the Surxondaryo) and in the Soviet Far East promoted from the mid-

<sup>116</sup> Wu 2005, 72-73; 2014, 552-553.

<sup>117</sup> Wu 2005, 87, 98; 2014, 247. On the scholar's deductions regarding Kalalāy-gūr 1 see, however, Minardi 2015a. It could be argued, however, that the mere fact that an individual like Pharasmanes (probably settled in an area Northwest of present-day Buxārā: cf. Arr., *Anab.*, 4.15.4-5, thus several hundreds of kilometers away from the heart of the Baktrian-Sogdian satrapy) took the trouble - and perhaps not the pleasure - of negotiating his position in the forthcoming imperial framework Alexander (Curt. 8.1.8) speaks volumes about the relations the Chorasmian élites had with the Achaemenid world, a consideration, this latter, confirmed by the fact that, when preparing for resistance against the Makedonian invasion, Bessos seems to have relied on his support (Curt. 7.4.6), and the same can be said of Spitamenes, whose relations with the steppe world enabled him to lead a very effective guerrilla warfare against the Graeco-Makedonian troops for a long time (Strab. 11.8.8, see also Stark 2020, 81-82).

1950s by the then GenSek Nikita Xruščëv, the expansion of cultivated land (and consequently the proportional demographic growth) that the development of the regional settlement patterns allows us to sense.<sup>118</sup> Leaving aside, for the sake of the argument, the seemingly problematic contradiction between these two perspectives, there are other reasons, both internal to the same reasoning carried out by Wu and of a more general nature relating to the ideology behind the production, circulation, and consumption of images - and of the related media on which they were carved - depicting warfare within a Central Asian background (but the same could be said in the case of the «Greek» and the «Egyptian» representations) that lead to caution when drawing conclusions of the magnitude of those underpinning the studies carried out by the Chinese historian starting with the submission of her (it is only fair to stress it again: remarkable) doctoral dissertation.

Let us try to proceed step by step: against the backdrop, on the one hand, 1. of a famous passage by Herodotos in which the historian claims that Xerxes used to keep note of individuals who had particularly distinguished themselves in battle in order to reward them generously later on and, on the other hand, 2. taking the lead from an equally famous apostrophe addressed by Darius in one of the inscriptions of Naqš -i Rustam to a «young man» (Marīkā), challenging him to bear in mind - and not forget - his own temperament, «of what nature» he is and «what behavior» befits him (an invitation, according to Wu's interpretation, to members, or aspiring ones, of the imperial élite to distinguish themselves on the battlefield, thus emulating the model of the Great King himself) as well as, finally, 3. by virtue of the observation that some of the scenes depicted on the seals (e. g. those in BM 124015) must have been copies of much larger pictorial cycles, similar perhaps to those recently discovered in today's Sīstān (at the site of Dahan-i Ġulāmān) which appears to have graced the walls of the reception rooms of the local élites' palaces (and possibly of the various satrapal courts), the Chinese scholar has argued that the spread of the images carved in objects as symbolically dense as the seals contributed to the construction of a collective imagination – and a sociopolitical discourse - centered around the sharing of the experience of war across the imperial borderlands (particularly in Central Asia), thus reinforcing group solidarity and, not least, loyalty to the Great King, who would have bestowed the seals as a reward for the bravery shown by his officers during their military careers.<sup>119</sup>

This hypothesis, in itself far from implausible, nevertheless raises a crucial question, and one not adequately addressed by the scholar, regarding the composition of the audience (we might say «the customers») 1. of the images and 2. above all, of the objects (the actual seals) in question. To begin with, in some cases it is not always so easy to distinguish clearly between the «Persian Man» and his rivals, and Wu herself is forced to admit that, in certain circumstances (e. g. PTS 29), the former

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<sup>118</sup> Wu 2017; 2018; 2020, Wu *et al.* 2017.

<sup>119</sup> Hdt. 8.85, DNb § 11. On the wall paintings at Dahan-i Ġulāmān see Wu 2014, 235 fn. 50, Ball 2020, 374 and the relative bibliography concerning the excavations carried out at the site.

might depict «individuals of Central Asian extraction» enlisted in the ranks of the Achaemenid Empire and fighting against other Central Asians (possibly rivals for local or regional supremacy?).<sup>120</sup> The fact that socio-political identity does not systematically overlap with ethnic origin should be an established fact. Should it not (yet) be, the existence of a gold seal dated 57 BCE and of exceptional workmanship (which also suggests that it originated in a courtly environment), bearing the following - remarkable - inscription: «The commander Xiōngnu under the Hàn, slayer of the barbarians», shows in a striking manner how, beyond the classifications resulting from the rationalizing needs of the imperial administration, the «practical situation on the ground» was in fact much more fluid, and it makes moreover clear how the agenda of all the actors involved in dynamics similar to those characteristic of Achaemenid society (but a similar argument could be made for any other multi-ethnic Empire, starting from Rome) must be taken into account while trying to make sense of the surviving evidence.<sup>121</sup> Although apparently marginal for the purposes of the present discussion, these observations are in fact of paramount importance, for at least two reasons: firstly, in the light of the study penned by Bryan K. Miller and Ursula B. Brosseder on the circulation of prestige objects of Chinese origin among the Xiōngnú élites of the Mongolian steppes, even if one were to accept en bloc the premises underlying Wu Xin's argument, one would nevertheless come to the opposite conclusions as those reached by the scholar.<sup>122</sup> Far from providing the queen's proof of a state of endemic insurgency among local élites, the production, and especially the circulation (even in Central Asia, as the Oxus treasure might suggest and as the drinking vessels from the Miho make even more plausible) of objects such as seals would demonstrate, if anything, the desire on the part of Baktrian, Sogdian, and Chorasmanian notables (and even of the Sakā strongmen) to show off their ability to access lucrative extra-regional networks in order to consolidate their respective local power, since it cannot be ruled out that - similarly to what has been observed for the luxury tableware - a token of imperial

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<sup>120</sup> Wu 2014, 244 fn. 63. See moreover some recent remarks by Sean Manning (2021, 333), who rightly pointed out that, when battle scenes in ancient art portraying Achaemenid forces are involved, «it can be very much questioned whether an ancient observer would have interpreted the scene as “the Persians defeating the Greeks”. Many Carians [i. e. the case study under scrutiny in Manning's pages] and Lydians used “Greek” equipment, and some Greeks experimented with Scythian bows or Thracian shields. A visitor to the newly completed tomb [of Karaburun II, dated ca. 470 BCE] might have thought in terms of individuals or political factions instead of nations: “the king's men defeating rebels” or “my father killing Teucer”». Worth mentioning is moreover the history of Commandant Hé (何, 616-700 CE) reported in Skaff 2012, 64, for «his background provides evidence that representatives of the Táng government in the area [the administrative circuit of the Empire's capital Cháng'ān] were not necessarily Hàn». As the scholar rightly points out, «if men like Commandant Hé were representative of local administrators and military officers, they were “Táng people” [and in our case «Persian men»] by virtue of their service to the dynasty, not their cultural preferences».

<sup>121</sup> On this particular seal see Vorderstrasse 2020, 178, which summarizes the previous bibliography. See also Meier 2020, 898-903. James Scott (2009; 2017) has written important pages about the «ethnographic obsession» as a fundamental instrument in the hand of a political power in order to construct its own discursive universe (and, not least, a «readable» sociopolitical landscape). See also the important study by Hirsch 2005 on the titanic enterprise of ethnic cartography characteristic of the Soviet Union in the 1920s as well as the relevant chapters on Soviet national politics in Fragner – Kappeler 2006.

<sup>122</sup> Miller and Brosseder 2017, 481-483.

favors such as a seal carved in the «court style» was likely to live different social lives, being therefore endowed with different meanings within other circuits, outside of courtly environment and thus developing agencies and affordances more directly related to local power networks.

In other words, and taking up the conclusions also reached by Mischa Meier following a careful study, from the *internal* perspective of the respective societies, of the political biography of individuals such as Alaric and Genseric, what the proliferation of war-themed visual narratives involving various representatives of Central Asian societies suggests would be nothing other than a tumultuous process of intra-regional social hierarchization triggered not by the weakening, but rather by the very strong presence - if not expansion - of imperial power. Accordingly, local aristocrats would not at all have tried to escape the «whirlpool» crafted by, for example, the demands of the imperial economy, but would on the contrary have fought bitterly (even among themselves) in order to carve out a place within the social, political and economic structures and institutions (Meier's Handlungsräume) emanating from it, the sheer presence thereof was clearly impacting their own (trans)local social networks.<sup>123</sup> We would not therefore be facing an endless pattern of revolts against Achaemenid hegemony, but on the contrary, we would be witnessing a fierce struggle between some representatives of the Central Asian élites for dominance in and over economic, social, and ideological communication circuits, which should be interpreted – in the light of the Roman parallels - as the most glaring result of decades of systematic application of the imperial paradigm in and across the Northeastern borderlands of the Achaemenid domains. As a possible support for such an argument one could bring onto stage the figure of the already mentioned Mīnû-ana-Bēl-dānu, son of Tahḫua and proud owner of one of the seals looming large in this discussion.<sup>124</sup> An official of considerable rank in the territory of Nippur, as suggested by the title he bears, LÚ.GAL um-mu, he had obtained his position (and the related benefits, including, it would seem, the seal itself) by virtue of the importance of the landed estates at his disposal, the territorial organization of which - a major center surrounded by several villages in the countryside - distinctly recalls the pattern observed at work also in Bactria, which leads one to wonder, 1. whether also in the case of Mīnû-ana-Bēl-dānu, we are not dealing with a local aristocrat transformed, in compliance with the regulatory mechanisms of the imperial paradigm, into a representative of the Empire in his own territory (which would have earned the seal as a testimony of the new position acquired and not, as Wu's argument would suggest, as a result of a heroic military service, his or of some ancestor, in the remote - and rebellious - Central Asian steppes) and 2. if and to what extent such a scenario is not plausible a fortiori in the case of the possible recipients of objects such as the precious tableware gracing the *TAB* collection, the owner of

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<sup>123</sup> Miller and Brosseder 2017, 479, see moreover, among the many examples possible, Meier 2020, 649-730.

<sup>124</sup> Wu 2014, 259 ff.

the estates of Dinghil'dže in Chorasmia or an individual such as Bagavanta, whose position within the imperial hierarchies as it emerges from the *ADAB* appears somewhat comparable, if not superior, to that of Mīnû-ana-Bēl-dānu.<sup>125</sup>

Having said that, the remarkable problem still remains of explaining why three apparently very strongly connotated ethnic groups (and not others) are specifically portrayed in the images engraved on the seals.<sup>126</sup> Robert Rollinger and Reinhold Bichler have shown, in several important contributions, how even in this case it is necessary to properly contextualize, against the background of the *longue durée* of Ancient Near Eastern history, the testimonies of rulers - and of their representatives - engaged in campaigns «at world's end», whether Assyrian monarchs, the Great Kings of Persia or the Sāsānid Šāhanšāh.<sup>127</sup> According to their interpretation, we were dealing here with a discourse that is at once geographical, political, and cosmological: staging the repeated reaching, and subsequent overcoming (think of the narration of the expedition against Skunkha provided by Darius in Bīsutūn) of the *finis terrae*, Ancient Near Eastern kings from Sargon to Ḫusraw (including Alexander) would have done nothing but reiterate the idea of an Empire both universal (because of its – purported – being *sine fine*) and in continuous expansion, while reaffirming at the same time their overlordship over the territories on this side of the theatre of action chosen from time to time. Nothing better exemplifies the ideology behind this powerful (self) representation of what we have called – following Seth Richardson - the Achaemenid «presumptive state» than a famous statement by «Darius, the King: this is the Empire of which I am the lord, from the Sakā beyond Sogdiana to Kūš, and from India to Lydia, this is the kingdom with which Ahuramazdā, the greatest of all gods, has endowed me. May Ahuramazdā protect me, me and my descendants [viθam, a much debated word, the literal translation of which could be «house», and therefore, metaphorically, the dynasty, and the whole of the Empire]».<sup>128</sup>

From Sogdiana to Lydia – which of course means the entire Ionian coast with the Greek πόλεις - as far as Nubia (bordering, not by chance, on Egypt), we are faced (according to the interpretation followed here) with the geographic equivalent of the ethnic cartography that we find depicted, in great

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<sup>125</sup> Minardi 2021, 79 for example points out that, at the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, «the lesser lord of Dinghil'dzhe, entitled to use signet rings and chalcedony seals and in possession of objects of Achaemenid taste» was «the chief of a rural district» which might indeed have grown out of the institutionalizations of the territorial domains his family controlled before the Persian takeover of the region. Against Wu's interpretation of this Babylonian evidence see Tuplin 2020, 381: in his opinion, the idea that these seals were «cut to commemorate the owner's activities» in Central Asia «would be entirely arbitrary».

<sup>126</sup> In the words of Tuplin 2020, 377, «it [...] seems reasonable to believe that the general limitation of the seal image repertoire to certain contexts is significant». The problem, of course, is to understand what such meaning(s) might be.

<sup>127</sup> Rollinger 2014a; 2017b; 2021c, Rollinger and Bichler 2017, Rollinger Degen 2021a; 2021b. Compare Degen 2019, 61-67. On the (Mesopotamian) ideology underpinning one of the most blatant of all imperial «cosmological blusters», namely that *Empire Means Forever* see Richardson 2020.

<sup>128</sup> DHa: see *API*, 98.

detail, in the courtly glyptic studied by Wu Xin.<sup>129</sup> Picking up on Henry Colburn's insightful remarks, even without wishing to deny the principle of historicity defended by Wu, instead of providing evidence of an Empire besieged by enemies huddled at its borders, the war scenes engraved on the seals discussed in these pages offer, on the contrary, a very elaborate sample of a common visual imagery that could be used, as in fact it was (just think of Udjaḥorresnet's inscription), not least by the élites of two of the alleged hotbeds of «enemies of the Empire», namely Egypt and Central Asia, in order to construct their own social identity in a constant dialectic between 1. the local level and 2. the ecumenical dimension of the Achaemenid world, that is to say on a scenario - for the criteria of the time - that was truly «global».<sup>130</sup> If these remarks suggest, at the very least, a certain caution when drawing hasty conclusions from the textual and iconographic evidence available, the time has now come (after having dealt with the *pars destruens* of the present chapter) to attempt a *construens* assessment of the period covered in these pages, with the aim, which informs the structure of the entire work, of identifying, 1. on the diachronic axis, convincing traces of the imperial paradigm at work, as well as, 2. on the synchronic one, of highlighting in all their complexity the strategies of evasion and/or creative appropriation of the paradigm itself implemented by the various representatives of the local élites in Baktria and Sogdiana. To this end, it is necessary to come back to the Surxondaryo valley, and more precisely to its most representative site, the «red hill» of Kyzyltēpe.

#### 4. From Ṭawāwīs to Kyzyltēpe. Being Some Thoughts on *The Economies of the Edge*

The reasons behind the decision to focus exclusively on the site of Kyzyltēpe as a case study against which to test the central arguments underpinning the treatment of this chapter and, more generally, the basic assumptions underlying the present study as a whole, can be summed up, quite simply, in the observation that, to date, this settlement in the upper Surxondaryo makes for the richest and best-documented source of information available to us, not least because of a tradition of studies that began in Soviet times and has reached - not without some considerable ebbs and flows - up to the present day.<sup>131</sup> Moreover, the pioneering nature of some of the analytical techniques adopted during the most recent excavations alongside traditional stratigraphic methods and the study of ceramic finds

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<sup>129</sup> Colburn 2021 on the Achaemenid *Far South* and Howley 2020 for a deep history of Nubia in the 1<sup>st</sup> Millennium BCE.

<sup>130</sup> Colburn 2017; 2020a, 131-188; 2020c, Rollinger 2023. See moreover the insightful remarks by Tuplin 2020, 375: «the primary message of combat and prisoner images was about imperial success in policing the edges of what is otherwise implicitly a peaceful space», to be read against Rollinger 2021c and Rollinger and Degen 2021b.

<sup>131</sup> For a detailed bibliographical overview on the excavations carried out at the site of Kyzyltēpe see Stride 2005 III n. 257 as well as, more recently, Wu *et al.* 2017.

(especially palaeobotanical analysis, archeozoological studies, and dendrochronology), make Kyzyltēpe a unique case in the context of Achaemenid archaeology in Central Asia.<sup>132</sup> Finally, the continuity of the settlement's life attested at the site over a considerable portion of the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE (approximately from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the late 4<sup>th</sup> century, i.e. from the establishment of Achaemenian hegemony in Bactria to Alexander's campaign) makes it, on the one hand, the privileged context for diachronically investigating some of the processes described in the previous chapters, and, on the other, the ideal framework within which to contextualize the *ADAB*, as it shall attempted in greater detail over the following chapter.<sup>133</sup> Against such a background, this last section has been divided into three parts. The first aims to offer essential information for an adequate spatial and chronological setting of the site, it then briefly summarizes the history of the excavations and finally presents its structure, in an attempt to show, with the help of the most recent data coming from the excavations, the reasons that justify the attention - which may appear disproportionate - that Kyzyltēpe has enjoyed in recent years within part (though not - yet - the majority) of the scholarly community devoted to (Achaemenid) Central Asia. In the second section, the results of the palaeobotanical and archeozoological investigations carried out at the site will be presented. The overarching aim of these pages is to sketch an «ecological» (sensu Bateson) profile of the settlement and of its surroundings, in order, among other things, to support, on the ground of a solid material dataset, some of the hypotheses put forward in chapter 4 concerning the prehistory of the Achaemenid imperial paradigm and the crucial role played by the relational networks with the steppe world in the process of genesis and structuring of Persian hegemony in Central Asia, which we could summarize through the formula of the «Ṭawāwīs model».<sup>134</sup> The third part, finally, aims at widening again, and in concentric waves, the view from 1. a strictly local perspective to the broader - and, of course, closely related - 2. satrapal, 3. macro-regional, and 4. imperial scale(s).

The purpose of such an approach is twofold. On the one hand, it seeks to show - based on the reflections developed in recent years, among others, by Tamar Hodos and Justin Jennings - how an adequate understanding of both the historical evolution of the Empire as a whole and of the transformations caused by his historical trajectory in the individual social, cultural, and environmental contexts that became part of the Achaemenid polity, requires a dialectical standpoint, which investigates the «global» scale of the imperial structures starting from the impacts on it of the dynamics triggered by this very same trans-regional structure in the «local» contexts of the satrapies,

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<sup>132</sup> Lyonnet and Fontugne 2021 for a critical assessment especially of dendrochronological data gathered at the site.

<sup>133</sup> Wu 2020, 606-608.

<sup>134</sup> See on this latter point Stark 2020, 80-82 as well as the rich literature (including Soviet contributions, the value of which should not be underestimated despite the overarching ideological background informing in some cases their conclusions, as it was the case with Tolstov's work on Chorasmia) collected at the end of the contribution of the German archaeologist.



which need in turn to be contextualized in the broader framework of sovra-regional relational networks enlarged, strengthened, and intensified (if not created *ex nihilo*) by the integration of such local contexts in the framework of an entity - such as an Empire - which was by definition universal were it only in the intentions of its rulers.<sup>135</sup> On the other hand, taking up Versluys' claim that the borderlands of ancient Empires more often than not worked as a laboratory for innovative experimentation, this section aims to show how an astute cultural geography of the Northeastern borderlands of the Achaemenid Empire provides a privileged vantage point from which to investigate some structural aspects of this historical experience that transformed the political, economic, ideological, and cultural horizon of a large portion of what, in the introduction to this work, we have called Central (Eur)Asia.<sup>136</sup>

#### 4.1. When, Where, What, How

The site of Kyzyltēpe (38° 03' 16.6'' N, 67° 43' 16.4'' E) is located in the Miršade oasis, a small portion of alluvial land in the Altynsay district of the Surxondaryo region of present-day Southern Uzbekistan. Although placed near the junction of the Kyzylđžara and Xodža Ipak rivers, on the slopes of the Boysuntov mountain range, 487 meters above the sea level, the low rainfall (an average of 230 millimeters per year, usually moreover concentrated in the winter months) makes the oasis a rather unfavorable environment for permanent settlement.<sup>137</sup> According to studies carried out in the region by Sebastian Stride, these climatic characteristics and the close proximity of the mountains have contributed to the fact that, since prehistoric times, this area - a real ecological frontier between the alluvial valley of the Surxondaryo and, to the South and North, a more arid environment distinguished by the constant presence of semi-desert steppes - has witnessed the coexistence of an extremely wide range of strategies for adapting to (and exploiting as effectively as possible) the resources of the land, including different forms of pastoral economy.<sup>138</sup> The history of excavations at Kyzyltēpe can basically be divided into three main phases.<sup>139</sup> The first dates back to the years 1970-1971, when the site was first identified and investigated by an expedition led by Galina Pugačenkova (*UzIskE*). In a second stage, dating from the second half of the 1970s (1974-1978, before the Soviet invasion of Afġānistān radically transformed the geopolitics of Southern Uzbekistan, with effects still visible today to anyone who ventures as far South in the country as Termiz), the surrounding countryside

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<sup>135</sup> Hodos 2017, Jennings 2011; 2017 and Stark 2020, 75-80.

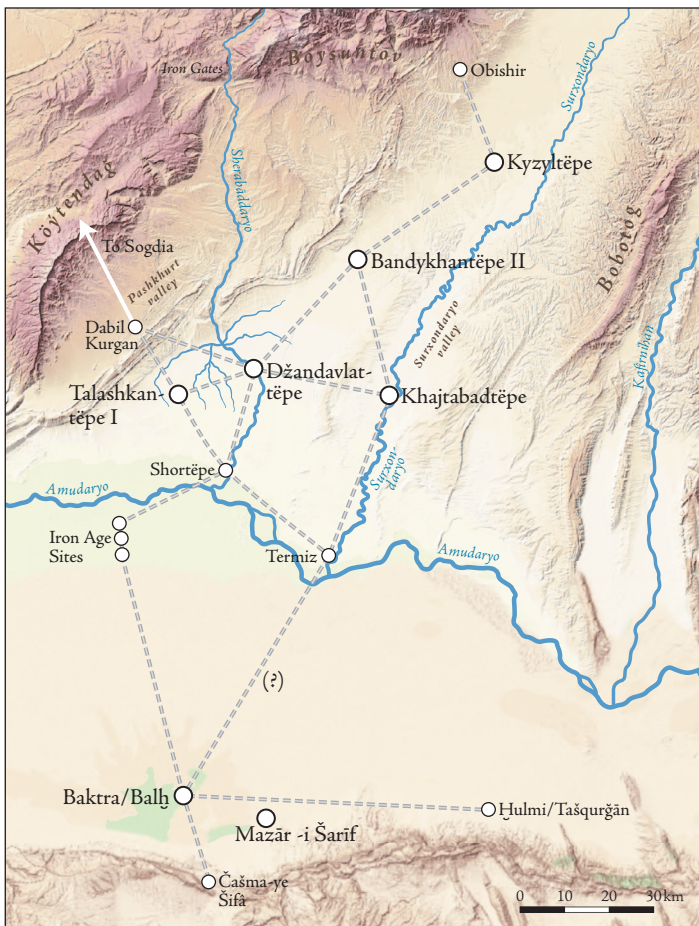
<sup>136</sup> Stark 2020, 75-80, Versluys forthcoming, Rollinger 2023.

<sup>137</sup> Stride 2005 V pl. 44, Wu *et al.* 2015, 95 ; 2017, 285. See most recently the (critical) overview on the site's chronology in Lyonnet and Fontugne 2021, 354-359.

<sup>138</sup> Stride 2005 I, 144-149, Stride 2007, Wu *et al.* 2015, 94.

<sup>139</sup> Wu *et al.* 2017, 285-288, Wu 2018, 191-192.

and more generally the oasis' territory was explored, in an attempt to reconstruct the administrative morphology of the upper Surxondaryo against the backdrop the account of – what it is assumed to have been – the same space provided by Alexander's historians (above all Arrian) in the context of the campaign launched by the Makedonian against Spitamenes and the other local powerbrokers.<sup>140</sup> For example, according to the authoritative opinion of Édvard Rtveladze, one of the most experienced scholars working in the area, Kyzyltëpe would have been the capital of a sub-unit of the Baktrian satrapy located at its Northernmost offshoot (which the literary sources call the Paraetakenē).<sup>141</sup> After a long period of standstill, excavations resumed in 2010 as part of a joint project involving New York University's *Institute for the Study of the Ancient World (ISAW)*, the *Deutsches Archäologisches Institut (DAI)* and the *Institute of Fine Arts* of the Uzbek Academy of Sciences (*ORFA*) under the direction of Leonid Sverčkov and Wu Xin and with the collaboration of Nikolaus Boroffka.<sup>142</sup>



**Map 6.2. *Sinews of Empire: Kyzyltëpe and the Outside World.* © Peter Palm**

<sup>140</sup> Cf. Arr. *Anab.*, 4.22.1.

<sup>141</sup> Rtveladze 2002, 133. On the Paraetakenē see the testimony of Curt. 8.4.21-30 and the account provided by the *Metz Epitome* (28-31).

<sup>142</sup> Sverčkov *et al.* 2013, Wu *et al.* 2017.

To date, three seasons of fieldwork have been carried out (2010, 2011, 2015): while the main goal was initially to verify the results of research carried out by Soviet archaeologists and to more accurately investigate the transitional process from the pre-Achaemenid to the imperial period at the site and the surrounding valley, the new stratigraphic investigations have shown that, in its «urban» (i. e. monumental) stage, Kyzyltēpe was founded around the late 6<sup>th</sup> century, i. e. at the dawn of Achaemenid hegemony in Baktria.<sup>143</sup> In addition, and contrary to what was previously believed, the abandonment of the site has been dated, on dendrochronological grounds, to the early Hellenistic period, whereas according to Pugačenkova and Rtveladze it still occurred during the Persian period. From these considerations alone it follows rather clearly that Kyzyltēpe offers a (new and unexpected) opportunity to study, on the one hand, the social, political, and economic landscape of Central Asia in the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE in the context of the Achaemenid Empire; on the other hand, that the presence of Hellenistic strata, which seem to make for the last known period of occupation of the entire valley until the 1950s, allows to study in considerable depth the very complicated, and still by no means clear, final phase of Persian hegemony in Baktria based on the transformations in the archaeological horizon caused by the changed geopolitical context.<sup>144</sup>

From a spatial point of view, Kyzyltēpe is structured on two levels. On the one hand, there is the so-called «lower town», accessible through a gate located near the Southeastern corner, but it is possible that there was also a second gate, which recent excavations may have identified along the Western side of the settlement.<sup>145</sup> From there, a main street developed, flanked by a series of workshops which, based on the material found in situ, may have housed metallurgical activities and, alternatively, potters' workshops. Kyzyltēpe's main thoroughfare led to the second core of the settlement, the so-called «citadel», a bipartite structure of approximately hexagonal shape, built on top of two natural hills and characterized by a main courtyard and a series of terraced environments, including rooms, corridors, and a tower on the Western hill, of which only traces have been found. The entire structure was surrounded by an imposing defensive wall and extended over an extremely large area (100 x 75 meters, i. e. roughly twice the size of the most important pre-Achaemenid site currently known in Central Asia, namely Ulugtēpe, at the border between the present-day states of Irān and Türkmenistan, where the citadel measures 43 square meters.<sup>146</sup> All in all, with its approximately 20 hectares, Kyzyltēpe represents by far and wide the largest site in the whole of Surxondaryo, and one

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<sup>143</sup> Lyonnet and Fontugne 2021 for a (critical) evaluation of the commonly accepted chronology of the Iron Age in this region. As the authors points out (2021, 357), the presence in the site's archaeological record of cooking ware and stone sickles as well as of crooked-rim jars among the pottery assemblage of phase 1 (cf. Wu *et al.* 2017, 359) suggest possible continued occupation from a much earlier date (Yaz II at the earliest). This is, however, not an argument against the scale of Achaemenid investment on the site, which transformed Kyzyltēpe into a center of clearly (over)regional latitude.

<sup>144</sup> Wu 2017.

<sup>145</sup> Wu 2018, 193-194.

<sup>146</sup> Wu 2020, 597, with further literature.

of the most important in the entire territory of Baktria, which implies its position of absolute prominence within the satrapal topography of power.<sup>147</sup> Given the far from auspicious ecological context of the Miršade oasis, such a major investment by the imperial administration is by no means self-evident, and therefore needs to be properly explained. A possible answer to this question could come from the settlement history of Kyzyltēpe, which the most recent stratigraphic investigations have reconstructed as divided into five macro-phases (the so-called «pre-citadel» phase and the subsequent periods Kyz. I-IV, corresponding to three main architectural stages), with the oldest levels dating to the late 6<sup>th</sup> century, while the most recent levels can be identified as belonging to a time frame spanning more or less the last 40 years of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, which could perhaps be extended as far as the following 20 years.<sup>148</sup> Of particular interest is the first phase (so-called «pre-citadel»): during architectural stage I (corresponding to the «pre-citadel» stratigraphic level), the Kyzyltēpe acropolis did not yet exist, and the first traces of settlement - which pre-date the construction of the site proper - seem to have been structured around one of the two hills on which the later citadel would then be built.<sup>149</sup> The fact that the citadel makes for a «single integrated structure», probably built in the course of a single construction project (Phase II, corresponding to stratigraphic levels 0-1) following a huge fire - indicated by the dense ash layers below the citadel's foundation levels - suggests that it was the nucleus of the first Achaemenid settlement, and the traces of destruction detected by stratigraphic analysis may indicate that the conquest of the territory upon which the site was built (or expanded) did not occur peacefully.<sup>150</sup>

More specifically, it could perhaps be assumed that, similarly to what is known in Armenia against the backdrop of excavations at sites such as Erebuni and Godintēpe, the tower, which occupied the side of one of the two hills on which the Kyzyltēpa of the Achaemenid period was later built and which was also situated on top of a loess slope from which it was possible to overlook the entire surrounding plain while in turn being itself visible from several kilometers away, represented an important meeting point for the communities of the upper Surxondaryo – and not only for the inhabitants of the plain, as we shall see shortly -, therefore apparently fulfilling a role comparable to that tentatively attributed to the «columned halls» characteristic of the most imposing settlements located in Urartean territories.<sup>151</sup> Such a scenario fits in very well with the reconstruction of the

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<sup>147</sup> Wu *et al.* 2017, 284-287,

<sup>148</sup> Wu 2017, 273-278.

<sup>149</sup> Wu 2018, 198.

<sup>150</sup> Wu *et al.* 2017, 294.

<sup>151</sup> Wu 2018, 205. Remarkably, a similar pattern is attested during the Neo Ēlāmite period in Hūzestān where, according to Elynn Gorris and Yasmina Wicks (2018, 267), «open-air pilgrimage sites» were built in order «to gather tribal (agro-) pastoralist groups occupying areas outside the major centers and in border areas of Khuzistan's west, north and east to reinforce their relations with the king». Given the importance of the Ēlāmite heritage in the process of the so-called Persian ethnogenesis, it might be argued that such strategies aimed at constructing a «complex political system relying

settlement landscape - and of the inter-community relations underlying it - proposed by Johanna Lhuillier and already considered in chapter 4.<sup>152</sup> In this case, too, we would in fact be faced with a landscape featuring low population density – as it is assumed it was the case with the Chorasmian qal‘a - populated by communities relying on extremely diversified subsistence regimes and meeting periodically (for reasons that could range from religious festivities to the negotiation of rights to use the region’s – rather meager - water resources) at sites of particular topographical and/or symbolic cultural importance: a valid parallel to this Chorasmian (and Armenian) background is provided for example by the site of Koktēpe prior to the foundation of Marakanda.<sup>153</sup> Drawing on the analogy of what is known about other sites across the Surxondaryo, from Pachmaktēpe to Pshaktēpe, the information available from the auroral phase of Achaemenid Kyzyltēpe allows us to reconstruct a framework within which an important regional center was likely conquered by the Persians and transformed, through a drastic operation of spatial engineering (destruction of the tower, its replacement by a citadel, and the simultaneous setup of a platform - perhaps also for cultic use - that closely resembles what is known at Čašma-ye Šifâ, in the oasis of Baktra), into a new political headquarter of the oasis (where the term is to be understood here both in the topographical sense as well as, according to Sebastian Stride’s terminology, as defining what he calls the «propulsive center of imperial expansion» in the neighboring territories), therefore following a radial pattern of territorial control very close to the scenario we have suggested took place in other crucial areas of Central Asia, for example in the case of the first stage of Achaemenid expansion in the territory of the Balḡ oasis.<sup>154</sup>

Coming back to the settlement’s spatial organization, the access to the citadel was regulated by an imposing gateway (nine meters wide) to the North of the site. Sometime after its construction, the citadel area underwent a series of repeated renovations, aimed among other things at reinforcing its defenses: the extent of these works can be deduced, among other things, from the fact that a tributary of the Kyzylđžara was diverted and converted into a moat.<sup>155</sup> That these precautions were not without justification seems to be shown by the fact that this second construction phase, closely associated with the process of enlarging and renovating the citadel, once again ended violently: the stratigraphy reveals in fact traces of a fire of considerable proportions, which seems to have significantly damaged the citadel itself, and in particular the outer part of the Eastern wall, at which base arrowheads were found, probable evidence of wartime events, the nature of which is, however, difficult to reconstruct

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on a network of loyalties» were taken over by the Persian, embedded in the imperial paradigm, and then adapted to the conquered territories, including in Central Asia.

<sup>152</sup> Lhuillier 2018; 2019. See also Henkelman 2005, 159-164.

<sup>153</sup> Grenet 2005, 49, Shenkar 2007, 177, Rapin 2017b.

<sup>154</sup> Stride 2005 I, 298. On Čašma-ye Šifâ see Marquis and Besenval 2008, 997-998, and Marquis 2018. Compare now Lhuillier *et al.* 2021.

<sup>155</sup> Wu 2018, 199.

in more detail.<sup>156</sup> In spite of such ebbs and flows, the settlement nevertheless demonstrates remarkable resilience, which can be attributed either to the remarkable stubbornness of the inhabitants or (although the two aspects are not necessarily mutually exclusive) to the importance attributed to the site in the geopolitical and economic context of the region (of the single oasis of the Miršade as well as of the larger framework of the upper Surxondaryo) by the satrapal administration, which seems to have spared no effort to keep Kyzyltēpe operative against all the (environmental and sociopolitical) odds.<sup>157</sup> Compelling evidence supporting such a claim comes from the development, datable to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and last architectural phase of Kyzyltēpe, of the so-called «lower town», also built within a walled enclosure with towers and a walkway between 200 and 220 centimeters wide. What strikes the most of this last stage of the settlement's history is the fact that its development was carried out even though the region in which it was located during this chronological phase was exposed to considerable stress, as it is suggested by the study of the findings discovered in this area of the site. Especially telling are the dwellings, which are much more modest than those of the citadel, but the same might be said of the fortifications of the «lower citadel» themselves, for they appear in fact to have been erected without a careful plan, therefore indicating that the construction work were speeded up at the expense of their quality, which has been interpreted as the most visible consequence of a period of considerable unrest affecting the area.<sup>158</sup>

At the end of Phase III, the traces of violence multiply: in addition to repeated evidence of fires, the citadel walls were demolished, and the settlement was almost entirely abandoned.<sup>159</sup> Sporadic traces of occupation are still recognizable in the «lower town», but these are only just after the destruction of the citadel, and following the flight (or death) of the last inhabitants, Kyzyltēpe disappeared from the map until the team led by Galina Pugačenkova unearthed it more than 2000 years later. By virtue of both its importance in the Bactrian regional framework and the unprecedented scale of its (pluriseccular) settlement history, it has been suggested that the violence that marked its demise ought to be attributed to an event of equally exceptional magnitude.<sup>160</sup> Alexander's Central Asian campaign is the most likely, though obvious, suspect, and the credibility of this hypothesis might recently have been significantly increased since the dendrochronological analysis of a wooden fragment datable, by virtue of its stratigraphic position, to the last phases of the citadel walls' renovation and strengthening phase would allow, according to the excavators, to chronologically situate this

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<sup>156</sup> Wu 2018, 201.

<sup>157</sup> Further details on the architectural phases demarcating the history of Kyzyltēpe in Wu *et al.* 2017, 310-315.

<sup>158</sup> Wu 2018, 198-201.

<sup>159</sup> Wu *et al.* 2017, 315-317.

<sup>160</sup> Wu 2018, 202-204. For a different interpretation of Wu's reading of the *ADAB* evidence against the background of her excavations see King 2021, 353-362, who interprets the construction of the walls as a way of controlling the territory and levy taxes. This may of course be true, but the reasons behind the demise of a settlement such as Kyzyltēpe – profitable and strategically important as it was also within King's convincing framework – still needs to be answered.

specimen around the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, more precisely somewhere close to 349 BCE. This is because the last ring of the Kyzyltēpe fragment was formed 21 years before the outermost ring of another wooden artefact, this time from the fortress of Kurganzol (dated by its main excavator, L. Sverčkov, to 328 BCE and interpreted by him as having been put to use by Alexander in an attempt to shore up his conquests in Baktria during the culminating phase of the campaign against Spitamenes and his men).<sup>161</sup> The results of the dendrochronological analysis carried out on the finds from both Kyzyltēpe and Kurganzol need to be confirmed by further studies, so caution should be required when drawing macro-historical conclusions.<sup>162</sup> That we are dealing with something more than speculation, albeit cleverly coated with a patina of scientific (or scientistic) assertiveness, is nevertheless made extremely likely by the documentation, almost contemporary with the highest possible date for the wooden fragment from Kyzyltēpe (the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, as mentioned) of the *ADAB* parchments, which in at least one case suggests that fortification work on a scale that must not have been laughable was in progress throughout the entire territory of the satrapies of Baktria and Sogdiana (and in particular in the strategic Qashqadaryo valley, a key link to the steppe world).<sup>163</sup>

Two conclusions can be drawn from all the above. First: if the evidence excavated at Kyzyltēpe and the *ADAB* documents were really to be read against the background of Alexander's campaign, they would provide joint evidence that even an apparently marginal oasis located in the upper Surxondaryo was fully embedded within the wider Achaemenid geopolitical horizon, since the possible echoes of a general mobilization of the troops stationed in the upper satrapies - or of the alerting of the officers stationed in Baktria, from the satrap to his subordinates - seem to have had palpable repercussions on the organization of local communities' life (this providing incidentally a further argument against the skeptical positions regarding the capillarity of the Achaemenid presence in Central Asia – and not even just in Baktria - at this chronological height).<sup>164</sup> Secondly, in view of the fact that the fate of Kyzyltēpe is not, as we shall see in the last chapter of this work, an isolated case, it seems logical to assume that, apart from the specific episodes of violence, the vertical demographic decline that affected the Surxondaryo valley at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century as it can be reconstructed from the most recent studies of its settlement patterns between the Achaemenid and the early Hellenistic periods must be attributed to the destruction of a system that had secured, and provided for, its prosperity in

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<sup>161</sup> Sverčkov *et al.* 2013, 67 (but see the critical assessment of these data in Stančo 2021, 68) and Rapin 2018a, 286-292. Cf. Stančo 2021, 74 for an updated description with bibliography.

<sup>162</sup> Most recently on the chronology of the site cf. Lyonnet and Fontugne 2021 (esp. p. 365, providing several arguments for an earlier date of the settlement, possibly already in the Achaemenid period). This latter is an interesting suggestion, for it would add one more piece to the mosaic of local-turned-to-imperial nodes in the networked Central Asian landscape, which the two authors do not exclude having originated already in the aftermath of Cyrus' conquest (see here chapter 4).

<sup>163</sup> See e. g. Naveh - Shaked 2012, 94 ff. A4 (= Khalili IA1).

<sup>164</sup> Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 159-160 for a similar argument developed against the background of the so-called «D» section of the *ADAB* (in which the tally sticks are published).

the preceding decades (and more probably over the whole two centuries of the valley's Achaemenid imperial experience).<sup>165</sup> This prosperity is not least evidenced by the exceptional size of Kyzyltēpe itself, which must have been one of the cornerstones of the administrative systems likely put in place already by the Teispids in the aftermath of their conquest within the regional framework between the Oxus and Sogdiana. To gain a better understanding of the underlying reasons for this prominent role in the context of the economy (both literally and figuratively) of Achaemenid Baktria, it is necessary to take a closer look at the mechanisms underpinning the functioning of this representative site (which, as it shall be argued, was not an isolated case within the satrapal institutional and social landscape).

#### 4.2. *Exploiting the Virgin Land? A Socio-Economic Profile of the «Red Hill»*

Scientific analyses of the organic remains found during the most recent excavation campaigns at Kyzyltēpe provide a more solid documentary basis supporting the claims advanced by Sebastian Stride against the backdrop of his ecological and landscape study of the Surxondaryo valley.<sup>166</sup> The most evident factor brought to light by the fieldworks carried out in the last years is in fact the widely diversified nature of the economy of the site and of its countryside, ranging from agriculture, practiced on an intensive scale despite the not ideal climatic conditions, to a developed pastoral activity - oriented towards the market within a framework, as it shall be discussed in a moment, that was moreover not only strictly regional (much like Ṭawāwīs) - to metallurgy. The importance of such a flourishing and complex center is already evident from this brief overview, all the more so when compared to the territorial affordances of a valley which, until then, and especially by virtue of the comparison with, for example, oases such as those of Baktra or Qandahār, had held a secondary position within the regional framework of Central Asia North of the Hindūkūš.<sup>167</sup> However, and this is an aspect that should be emphasized from the outset here, if the pre-eminence acquired by Kyzyltēpe reflects significant changes in the landscape organization and in the exploitation of its resources to an extent that it makes challenging not to attribute to the direct intervention of the Achaemenid political economy in the territory and in the socio-political equilibrium of the valley, it is equally true that, according to what can be argued from the archaeological survey, these transformations took place neither in vacuo nor ex nihilo, but rather exploited, expanded and, above all, connected 1. with each other and 2. with the broader horizon of the newly established satrapy, already existing infrastructures (especially as far as the (agro-)pastoral economy is concerned), whose

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<sup>165</sup> Cf. Havlík 2018 and Wu 2020, 612.

<sup>166</sup> Stride 2007, Wu 2018, 205.

<sup>167</sup> Wu *et al.* 2015, 93.



development and sophistication may even have motivated the interest of satrapal power just put in place at Balḥ in extending its influence in an apparently remote territory - which, therefore, does not mean, per se, neither irrelevant nor marginal - such as the Miršade oasis. It is therefore necessary to proceed step by step in our evaluation of the available evidence, first by reviewing the most important results of the scientific analysis carried out at the site and cross-referencing the dataset available with other categories of evidence at hand in order to gain a deeper perspective on the functioning of the economic-administrative machinery of Achaemenid Bactria and, consequently, to reach more general conclusions on the socio-political dynamics underlying the mechanism regulating the imperial paradigm at work in the satrapy.

#### 4.2.1. *Котлован*

Let us then start with the palaeobotanical evidence. The materials unearthed by archaeologists at the site can be divided into three main categories: cereals, legumes, and fruit.<sup>168</sup> The former includes varieties such as 1. barley (in a variant known as six-row barley, which requires more humid soil than two-row barley which, because of the limited rainfall in the Kyzyltēpe oasis, implies per se the existence of artificial irrigation). Notably, there might have been a very specific reason for the choice of this more demanding variety, namely its being extremely versatile, making it therefore suitable for use both as an edible cereal and as fodder; 2. an indigenous species of wheat, attested to since the Neolithic period, which testifies, as in the more fortunate context of the Dašt -i Qal‘a plain, to the widespread practice of agriculture even in contexts characterized by the marked presence of (semi)pastoral groups; and finally, 3. by far the most important discovery, millet, in the two varieties of *panicum miliaceum* and *setaria italica*. The crucial significance of the discovery of millet is the fact that this cereal requires irrigation in summer.<sup>169</sup> Since, as already pointed out, at Kyzyltēpe the - sporadic - rainfall is concentrated in the winter months, the presence of millet is an almost certain indication for the development of an annual irrigation system, aimed at extracting a higher yield from the same amount of land, another indicator of the existence of both extensive and intensive agriculture.<sup>170</sup> The sustainability of the latter must have rested on canalization works that were anything but insignificant, and thus provides a remarkable indication in support of the (considerable

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<sup>168</sup> Wu *et al.* 2015, 96-102.

<sup>169</sup> See most recently King 2021, 331-332 drawing on Wu *et al.* 2015 for an economic assessment of Kyzyltēpe in the light of the *ADAB* documents (as already attempted by Wu 2018).

<sup>170</sup> See however Strab. 5.1.12 and the comment in Spengler III 2019, 74-75, making a rather strong case in favor of the claim that millets, including both *panicum miliaceum* and *setaria italica* were «especially well-suited for integration into a mobile pastoral economy» such as the one which might well have existed in the territory of and around Kyzyltēpe well before the Achaemenid conquest. King 2021, 328-329 notes that «summer irrigation in arid environments such as Bactria» implies infrastructural investments whether by the Achaemenids or by local producers.

landscape engineering processes which must have followed the establishment of Achaemenid power in the oasis.<sup>171</sup>

Traces of the construction of an imposing canal system detected by Soviet archaeologists further support this hypothesis and strongly suggest that, in addition to local workers, kurtaš coming from adjoining regions and perhaps even from other satrapies also participated in the realization of this project (think of the group of 100 women, perhaps from Anatolia or the Black Sea area, and of a unit of Greeks travelling to Persepolis after carrying out tasks in Arachosia recorded in the tablets). Incidentally, such pieces of information provide – more - solid evidence for the presence, also in the upper Surxondaryo, of an administrative and infrastructural system modelled on the Persepolitan imperial paradigm.<sup>172</sup> In addition to this, the mention of the same cereal in the *ADAB* documents, where it appears as part of the «rations» disbursed to two (or two classes of?) «servant-boys» - in Naveh and Shaked's translation: (think of the puhu attested in the Persepolis archive) - «for the month of Tammuz» strongly suggests that Kyzyltēpe was not an isolated case, but that we are confronted instead with a conscious and coherent strategy of intensification of the satrapal agricultural output. In the context of the economy underlying the functioning of the imperial road system, which required a constant supply of the mail stations located along the entire infrastructure network, such a scenario raises little to no wonder.<sup>173</sup>

In order to avoid misunderstandings, it must be stressed that the changes we are able to observe are much more quantitative than qualitative: the Achaemenids, in other words, did not bring agriculture either to Central Asia or to the Miršade oasis, and even less did they supplant local regimes of land exploitation with the imposition of one (or a limited number) of «imperial» monocultures (one thinks, conversely, of the rice cultivation practiced and promoted in the territory of the Hân Empire). This is demonstrated, for example, by the presence, within the flora found at Kyzyltēpe, of grapevine traces. It is known that this cultivar was widespread in Central Asia - for example in Chorasmia, perhaps as a result of contacts with Baktria - before the rise of the Persian Empire, and equally attested is the continued exploitation of a wide range of wild plants, some of which originated in regions as far away from Central Asia as the Zagros and even Anatolia, which may have been a useful supplement to the

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<sup>171</sup> Wu *et al.* 2015, 98, Wu 2018, 205. It should not go unmentioned that, in both Baktria and Margiana, millet was already known and domesticated during the Bronze Age, perhaps originally imported from the steppes, as the find of Begaš discussed in chapter 4 suggest (cf. moreover Simpson and Pankova 2021, 669). According to the ethnographic data gathered by ibn Faḍlān (877-960) on the lower Volga, millet was an essential component of both the Bulgar tribes as well as of the Oğūz Türks settled in Chorasmia. Such evidence allows therefore the case to be made that Sakā skills (and the *mētīc* know-how they implied) was not alien to the development of the agricultural landscape of Achaemenid-ruled Kyzyltēpe. See moreover Chang 2018, 17, arguing that at the site of Talgar, some 25 km West of Almatı in Qazaqstan, a slow but steady «demographic expansion of agropastoralism» was responsible for the channeling of the entire fan (in which wheat, barley and – remarkably – millet was cultivated) by agro-pastoralists ruled by a highly mobile élite.

<sup>172</sup> Sagdullaev 1987, 8, Wu 2020, 606. On the two travelling parties mentioned in the text see Henkelman 2017a, 133-134.

<sup>173</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 203 C4 (= Khalili IA 17) ll. 26-28 (dḥn', namely the Aramaic 𐤁𐤇𐤍).

local diet (with the further advantage of providing shelter from the satrapal administration's tax regime).<sup>174</sup> Given the social prestige they enjoyed in the Achaemenid world (in the Persepolis archives such commodities feature as a delicacy worthy of only the most exclusive echelons of imperial society), the presence at Kyzyltēpe, alongside vine, of cherries and plums, could help making the case for the existence, in the territory of the upper Surxondaryo, of a branch of the courtly economy (at least at the satrapal level) specializing in the production of distinctive ingredients to be used to grace the table of the Achaemenid imperial élite. If we add to this evidence the discovery, at the settlement itself, of a large sample of tools, ranging from sickles and millstones to mortars and pestles, it seems logical to deduce that, following its foundation, Kyzyltēpe was transformed into a major agricultural center, capable of redefining the hierarchies of production, distribution, and consumption in the entire region. These dynamics, it has been convincingly argued, are all indexical of the imperial paradigm being at work here, since no other power than the Achaemenid one would have had the interest in (and the means to) alter the regional landscape in such a significant way.<sup>175</sup>

Even if this reconstruction is accurate, it does not account for the whole story of this site. In order to better appreciate such a claim, it is sufficient to look further into the Kyzyltēpe countryside, and in particular to focus on a series of smaller settlements (known as Kyzylča and thoroughly studied during the second excavation campaign lead by Soviet archaeologists), each of them located within a radius of slightly more than 1 kilometer from Kyzyltēpe and a maximum of 3 kilometers from its nearest counterpart.<sup>176</sup> In at least one case (Bujrachitēpe I), the stratigraphy allows a date earlier than that of the oldest phase of Kyzyltēpe: this suggestive of the fact that, contrary to the misleading image of a «conquest of the virgin land» vehiculed by the massive landscape transformation caused by the establishment of the citadel at Kyzyltēpe, this site was in fact part of an already developed, and likely still developing, social fabric characterized by the widespread presence of rural settlements (the oft-mentioned *irmatam*, the *vici* starring in Curtius Rufus' account) belonging to relatively wealthy representatives of local society.<sup>177</sup> The comparison with the Sherabāddaryo on the one hand and, on the other, with the territory of the Qashqadaryo valley, speaking of which Curtius Rufus himself mentions a settlement pattern consisting of numerous villages structured around a major center, reinforces the hypothesis that the case of Kyzyltēpe only represents the best-documented example of the process of Achaemenid entrenchment into the rural frameworks of Central Asia in the course of

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<sup>174</sup> Wu *et al.* 2015, 98. On the adoption of specific types of cultivars as a conscious «state-repelling technique» see e. g. Scott 2009, 181-191.

<sup>175</sup> Wu *et al.* 2015, 95, Henkelman 2018a, 245, Wu 2018, 196.

<sup>176</sup> Sagdullaev 1987, Stančo 2018, 184-186. Wu 2018, 207. There are currently 14 Kyzylča known in the Kyzyltēpe district, but Sagdullaev has argued that, originally, they may have been even more numerous, a claim that dovetails with Johanna Lhuillier's (2018; 2019) thesis of a «sporadic» but «diffuse» settlement pattern characteristic of the rural landscape of Late Iron Age Baktria: see most recently King 2021, 333, supporting this claim based on *ADAB* A6.

<sup>177</sup> Stride 2005 III n. 269.

the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE.<sup>178</sup> The fact that a similar process of territorial development can be detected in Pārsa provides perhaps the decisive element supporting the conclusion that, through the lens of Kyzyltēpe, we are indeed able to observe in the making the dynamics driving the application of some of the distinctive aspects of the imperial paradigm studied by Henkelman, of course while being adapted to the local peculiarities of the Central Asian context.<sup>179</sup>

Given these considerations, it is clear that the development - and the needs - of a center of the size of Kyzyltēpe opened up previously unthinkable room for maneuver for the representatives of the local communities (settled in the territory of the Kyzylča), since the inevitable infrastructural transformation of the territory on which their properties were located, converted as they very likely had been into a crucial junction of the new administrative geography of the region, implied the opportunity to become part of the imperial communication and supply networks, a process that must have translated, at least for *some* of these individuals, into an exponential growth of their social capital, as well as into an economic gain probably of no lesser magnitude.<sup>180</sup> If Claude Rapin's suggestion, which proposes to identify the citadel of Kyzyltēpe in the «fortress of Chorienes» mentioned by Alexander's historians, were correct, it could even be assumed that, following the establishment of the new Achaemenid power center, among the representatives of the groups that used to gather at the pre-imperial site (identified by the remains of a tower whose function is still sub iudice among specialists), the satrapal administration chose one - or some - of them in order to lift them up to the rank of lieutenants of Persian power (the hyparchs mentioned several times in the accounts of the Graeco-Roman historiographers), thus exploiting inter-aristocratic competition in order to further consolidate the Empire's influence on the local sociopolitical hierarchies, and consequently its hold on the territory and on its resources.<sup>181</sup>

The analysis of the palaeobotanical samples found at Kyzyltēpe, therefore, contributes significantly in supporting the conclusions advanced in chapter 4 of this work against the backdrop recent research on landscape archaeology and reiterated in the following chapter in the framework of the assessment of the Persepolis documentation concerning Baktria. Since its foundation, therefore, and given what we are able to gauge from the data provided by the site's settlement history, throughout the course of the entire Achaemenid trajectory in Central Asia, the institutionalization of the landscape and economy of the Miršade oasis (i. e: its integration within the imperial political, administrative, and therefore economic networks) went on hand in hand with - but it might perhaps be claimed that, to a

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<sup>178</sup> Curt. 8.2.14. See on this point Rapin and Grenet 2001 and Arr. *Anab.*, 4.22.1. On the Sherabāddaryo valley see Stančo 2018; 2019.

<sup>179</sup> Stančo 2018, 185-186, Wu 2018, 207.

<sup>180</sup> On the dialectic between central power and local demands in the context of imperial infrastructural development in rural areas see Ando 2017b, 139.

<sup>181</sup> Rapin 2018a, 293. See e. g. Arr. *Anab.*, 4.21.10 and Curt. 4.4.21-30.

significant extent, it was based on – the recruitment of (some) representatives of the communities that had previously wielded of some kind of (political, economic, perhaps even religious) control over the territory of Kyzyltēpe and its resources, both human and material ones.<sup>182</sup>

Originally the private property of a few wealthy individuals - or at most of a small number of extended families - with the tumultuous growth of the new political, economic, and administrative hub of Kyzyltēpe, the Kyzylča had to be converted into production units, storage facilities of various sizes and types, craft centers, warehouses and farms.<sup>183</sup> Similarly to what has been proposed for Dādêršiš and Vivāna, therefore, the study of the expansion process of a remote center under the purview of agropastoral communities in a far-off valley of the Surxondaryo provides circumstantial evidence supporting the claim that, in Bactria as in Sogdiana, the expansion of Achaemenid infrastructural power took place thanks to the contribution of the most influential members of the local societies, who were transformed, in exchange for their services and the provision of their landed property in the interests of the satrapal economy, into imperial collaborators, and representatives to the respective «selectorates» now enrolled in the ranks of the satrapy's administration: more importantly, the evidence discussed allows to illustrate in relative detail *how* this process unfolded over time.<sup>184</sup> In addition, the scenario proposed in this section allows us to show how the benefits of this relationship (which, judging from the stratigraphic documentation relating to the transition from the «pre-citadel» phase to the properly Achaemenid period(s), must not have been the result of (entirely) voluntary adhesion to the imperial project) did not remain the exclusive prerogative of the new masters of the Surxondaryo: by placing at the disposal of the Great King and of his representatives men and resources from their own possessions, in fact, the representatives of the local communities were able to obtain in exchange a part of the profits gained from the new horizon within which they found themselves, willingly or unwillingly, to be inserted, while at the same time maintaining a certain margin of autonomy (as it appears to have been century later the case of individuals such as Choriēnes or Arimazes).<sup>185</sup> If the above picture already appears to be sufficiently rich and complex, we have additional information allowing us to add further - relevant - details.

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<sup>182</sup> Henkelman 2018a. See moreover Wiesehöfer 2021a, 85, Henkelman 2021d, 148, Henkelman and Stolper 2021 and Stolper 2021 showing the degree of investment in the creation and upkeep of parks/gardens (παράδεισοι) and, as a consequence, «of the administrative structures and networks» which made such an enterprise possible over the longue durée of imperial history (and most likely not only in Pārsa).

<sup>183</sup> This is, again, a pattern that seems to have been originally developed in order to better manage Pārsa: Boucharlat *et al.* 2012, Henkelman 2017a, 83; 2021a, Gondet 2018. Cf. Wu 2018, 208-209.

<sup>184</sup> As Wu Xin noted in an important essay (2018, 209) on the development of the Miršade oasis in the Achaemenid period, some of the larger buildings and smaller settlements in the Kyzyltēpe district may have belonged to representatives of the Achaemenid administration at different levels of the satrapal power hierarchy. According to her opinion, moreover, it might be feasible to argue that perhaps some of these individuals worked at Kyzyltēpe, while others owned real estate or land tenures [«properties»] in the vicinity but lived mainly elsewhere. Cf. moreover Stride 2005 I, 294-298.

<sup>185</sup> See Payne *et al.* 2016, 18 for an extremely indicative example of the Handlungsräume that were open to those who were sufficiently cunning (and/or powerful) to successfully fit into the expansion(ist) mechanisms of Achaemenid imperial power: the Babylonian merchant Marduk-rēmāni was not only able to preserve his business, but even expanded

#### 4.2.2. *Animal Farmers*

The palaeozoological analysis carried out on an extremely large sample of bone remains (5353 specimens, of which at least 1238 were large animals) represents a significant innovation in the field of Achaemenid archaeology, especially in Central Asia, and raises moreover extremely interesting questions concerning the economic life of Kyzyltēpe as well as, more generally, the diversification strategies for the exploitation of territorial resources implemented by the imperial administration in the valley's territory, the effects of which appear to have extended far beyond the site itself and its immediate ramifications in the oasis' landscape.<sup>186</sup> When considering quadrupeds, osteological analysis revealed the presence at Kyzyltēpe of goats and sheep (at a ratio of roughly 2:1), cattle, pigs, horses, donkeys, and camels: the latter being a remarkable fact not least because of their strategic importance as pack animals and as a true asset especially, but by no means only, for the Central Asian economy. These animals were in fact so important that, from Gaugamela to Bactria itself, textual evidence records the existence of «royal herds» reared on a very large scale. Although excavations have so far discovered a rather small number of specimens (4 compared to, for example, 16 donkey fragments, 12 coming from equine, 329 of bovine origin and 150 remains from sheep/goats), the fact that among the palaeobotanical finds archaeologists have detected abundant evidence of the cultivation of *acacia erioloba* (also known as alhagi or, significantly, «camel thorn» and widely used by pastoral populations as hay for their ungulates' herds), the possibility should not be ruled out that Kyzyltēpe represented (or was evolving into) a specialized center for the breeding of these valuable animals, which made for a highly sophisticated sector of pastoral economies, as we noted already in chapter 4. Moreover, this evidence might hint at the fact that the expansion of animal breeding as an outcome of imperial investments in the Miršade oasis may have attracted skilled labor from neighboring areas. That such a workforce was certainly not lacking can be argued from the geographical setting of Kyzyltēpe, located as it was along an ecotone straddling territories with an extremely variable ecology, and characterized moreover by the widespread presence of what has been called «multifunctional pastoralism» in the scholarly literature.<sup>187</sup> It is true that the large number of sheep and - above all - cattle bears significant witness to the development of irrigation technology in the area, but the equally consistent stock of goats is an equally irrefutable indication of the

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it within the territories of the Irānian Plateau, something that would have been very difficult for him to do without the Achaemenid infrastructure - and the economic networks it supported.

<sup>186</sup> Wu *et al.* 2015, 102-104, Wu 2018, 206-208 and now King 2021, 332.

<sup>187</sup> Wu *et al.* 2015, 98, 103, where a table is added (Tab. 3) which usefully sums up the results of osteological analysis carried out on the bone remains discovered at the site. On the strategies characteristic of pastoral economies in Afġānistān and adjoining territories in Central Asia see Jentsch 1973, 117-158.

differentiated nature of the Kyzyltēpe economy and the marked presence of non-sedentary pastoralism. Indeed, goats are able to survive on much poorer soils than those required to support sheep and, a fortiori, large livestock: the fact that no less than 1176 bone specimens were found, the morphology of which does not allow a definitive attribution, thus making it impossible to distinguish between sheep and goats, strongly suggests that the satrapal administration was trying to exploit intensively each of the ecological niches of the valley, a need that may have been dictated, as can perhaps be guessed from the progressive concentration of bone specimens in the later levels of the site, by an increase in population, a further refutation, incidentally, of the suggestion of a loss of control by the Achaemenid power over the Baktrian territories during the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>188</sup> Moreover, the hypothesis of the importance of non-sedentary pastoralism in the economic life of Kyzyltēpe during the Achaemenid period could be supported by two further considerations.

The first relates to the age at which the animals were slaughtered, as can be reconstructed from the teeth and the state of wear and tear of the bone joints. The study of the available samples indicates that most of the livestock present at Kyzyltēpe were usually killed between 6 months and 3 years of age, a curve suggestive that the primary goal of the local administration was the production of foodstuffs with a high nutritional content (milk, cheese, butter, and of course meat), to which must be added the careful planning of livestock conservation strategies, a skill which is far from trivial to acquire, and which could therefore be a further indication of the presence - cyclical over the course of the year or, in some cases, even stable - of specialized breeders, as suggested by the presence of very young specimens (no more than 1 year old) among the samples found at the site, since this implies that at least a portion of the flocks from which Kyzyltēpe drew its protein sources were reared in loco. Against the background of the *ADAB*, it might perhaps be further argued that such pastoralist presence at the site was regulated based on the stipulation of regular contracts by the satrapal administration.<sup>189</sup> The second derives instead from the presence, within the osteological dataset unearthed at the settlement, of traces of fauna *not* indigenous to the oasis' territory, but originating from the steppes to the North and South of Kyzyltēpe, including gazelles and corsac foxes, the latter perhaps hunted for their valuable fur.<sup>190</sup> The fact that the exploitation of the flora and fauna of the steppes by semi-settled human groups in Baktria and Margiana goes back to a very long tradition of highly specialized hunter-gatherers from at least the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE allows us to assume that, even in Achaemenid times, the supply chain of the new centers established (or enlarged) by imperial

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<sup>188</sup> Wu *et al.* 2015, 103, 108. See also Stride 2007, 103-104, pointing out that, in the Surxondaryo valley, the differentiated exploitation of numerous ecological niches, even over considerable distances, was an almost compulsory choice for the resident population.

<sup>189</sup> Possibly accorded to a pattern such as the one suggested in Henkelman 2005.

<sup>190</sup> Wu *et al.* 2015, 103.

power made abundant use of similar consolidated and far-ranging local networks.<sup>191</sup> This – I would argue - provides solid backing to the assumption that the economic landscape of Achaemenid Central Asia developed against the backdrop of the *oasis cum steppa* unit, i. e. relying on intensive exploitation of non-agricultural land, the control of which is probably at the origin of the imperial expansion strategy in an area such as the Miršade oasis itself.<sup>192</sup>

Having come to this point, it will not be inappropriate to recall the situation described by Naršaḥi in his *Tā'riḥ -i Buxārā* about the town of Ṭawāwīs and its seasonal fair. Like the latter, Kyzyltēpe was also situated on an ecological frontier (on the edge of the Miršade oasis but at the same time projecting towards the pastures of the Boysuntov and the Hiṣār to the North as well as of the Babataḡ range to the South), from which it was possible to reach at least six important - and if necessary militarily controlled - transhumance routes, which in turn ensured access, especially in the case of the thoroughfare crossing the Hiṣār and of its offshoots, to the Qashqadaryo and eventually to Sogdiana.<sup>193</sup> Although it is not easy to prove this at the present stage of research, it cannot be ruled out that, prior to the Achaemenid conquest, the hill of Kyzyltēpe, monumentalized by the presence of a building such as the tower identified by excavations along the Western side of the Persian citadel, served precisely as a meeting point for pastoral groups from the wider area, who used to meet in the Miršade oasis at regular intervals to exchange products, celebrate cults, and negotiate access to the valley's resources with the agricultural populations of the alluvium.

Similarly to the case of Termiz and Shortēpe, and in perfect consonance with what is known from the testimony of al-Bīrūnī about Ṭawāwīs, it was precisely the strategic position of the (pre-Achaemenid) site of Kyzyltēpe that attracted the attention of the imperial administration: according to Nikolaus Boroffka, the construction and subsequent fortification of the citadel had the primary purpose of ensuring Persian control over the pastoral routes that crossed the Boysun range in Sogdian territory, a strategic carrefour of fundamental importance for the control of the steppes South of the Buxārān oasis and, as evidenced by the case of Spitamenes, from there even of territories further Northwest towards Chorasmia.<sup>194</sup> If one zooms out from the Miršade oasis to the whole of Southern Uzbekistan, the fact that at sites such as Gazimullahtēpe, located approximately 65 km South of Kyzyltēpe, the process of monumental building at the settlement followed a similar trajectory, provides a very concrete clue in support of the hypothesis that a central driving force behind the development of Achaemenid settlements in Bactria - and of their subsequent expansion during the course of imperial history in Central Asia - is to be found in the attempt by the satrapal administration

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<sup>191</sup> Compare e. g. Kohl 2007, 132 ff., Frachetti 2009, 21 ff., Lhuillier and Mashkour 2017, 666 ff.

<sup>192</sup> The parallel with the Chorasmian scenario provides further support to the arguments put forward in these pages: see e. g. Negus-Cleary 2013, 94-95.

<sup>193</sup> Cf. Stride 2005 III n. 257, Stride 2007, 108, Wu 2017, 208; 2018, 206.

<sup>194</sup> Boroffka 2009, 137. Compare Stark forthcoming.



to fit into the territory's sociopolitical networks, subsequently redirecting them in favors of its own needs within the framework of the political economy underlying, among other things, the supply of the road system's mail stations and of related facilities.<sup>195</sup>

Once again, the *ADAB* provide a valuable touchstone against the backdrop of which to test the reliability of the hypothesis put forward here. Within the correspondence between two high local officials (Aḥvamazdā and Bagavanta: more on them in the next chapter), document A2 mentions, in the plural, the presence, in the territory of the oasis of Tāšqurgān, of mḥzt' (מחזת), a word that the editors of the corpus translate, not without some ambiguity, as «remote province, market».<sup>196</sup> Against the background of the scenario in place at Ṭawāwīs, the joint testimony of the *ADAB* and of the archaeological evidence discovered at Kyzyltēpe perhaps allows us to make sense, at least in part, of both Achaemenid rural landscape's physiognomy and the effects that its establishment (and further development) must have brought with it in the context of local societies, some of whose members must have been attracted by the economic opportunities, and perhaps also by the considerable social prestige, that the presence of a site like Kyzyltēpe made available to those daring (and wealthy) enough to take advantage of them. Rather than limiting themselves to subsistence hunting and breeding, or restricted to seasonal petty trading, some of the region's pastoral communities are likely to have drastically altered the scale of their economies, going over to hunting and breeding animals for the new, flourishing satrapal market(s) as well as for the Kings' table.<sup>197</sup>

#### 4.2.2.1. «Consumed before the satrap»

The impact of these transformations on the hierarchies within local communities should not be underestimated, since there is reason to believe that, beyond the (far from negligible) new course imposed to the scale of the economy of both the oasis and its surroundings by the need to supply a

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<sup>195</sup> For the site of Gazimullahtēpe see the bibliographical record in Stride 2005 III n. 273. As for Talaškantēpe (Stride 2005 III n. 227, Wu 2020, 604), Pachmaktēpe (Stride 2005 III n. 586), Bektēpe and Burgut Kurgan (Augustinová 2018), each of these settlements was also located near important pastoral routes that crossed the entire Surxondaryo valley from West to East, therefore further supporting the suggestion that Achaemenid settlement development in the region aimed, to a not insignificant extent, at controlling these important communication networks and the resources that could be extracted from them.

<sup>196</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 76 ff. A2 (= Khalili IA4), l. 5 (further comments in King 2021, 344-354: fn. 97 argues that the context suggests «administrative significance, but one which is unclear»). Cf. Naveh and Shaked 2012, 29, 280 and Wu 2018, 207.

<sup>197</sup> Wu *et al.* 2015, 108, Wu 2017, 281. See also Curt. 5.6. and Strab. 16.1.18, painting a similar picture regarding the interactions between the Empire and Mardoi communities settled in Pārsa. Here, too, numerous villages clearly embedded in the context of the imperial economy derived a not insignificant source of their livelihood from the contribution of the pastoral communities settled in the surrounding hills (compare Briant 1983, 71, Balatti 2017, 213-220). In a somewhat impressionistic but no less relevant manner, it is not superfluous to note that a similar situation can still be observed today in the context of the villages scattered around the sites of Varaxša and Paikend, respectively 30 km North and 60 km Southwest of Buxārā, in an environment that in many respects resembles that of Kyzyltēpe.

site of the size - and population - of Kyzyltēpe, tapping the upper Surxondaryo within the mechanisms of the political economy of the Achaemenid court (no doubt that of the satrap, perhaps even that of the Great King), played a not insignificant role in reshuffling the regional topography of power, while at the same time is likely to have contributed (through the widespread diffusion of consumption and lifestyle habits) to consolidate the position of Persian power in this strategically crucial segment of the Baktrian territory. The same would have happened to those who, among the representatives of the regional power networks, had managed to carve out a role for themselves within the supply chain revolving around the «king's» (or «satrap's») table. This is suggested by the discovery at the site of at least 14 specimens of bird bones (13 of goose, 12 of chicken and, in one case, of a duck).<sup>198</sup>

The documentary evidence coming from the Persepolis archives, which, among other things, explicitly distinguishes between farmyard animals and game (the term used is *kuktikka*), the supply of which was entrusted to professionals outside the Persepolitan administration proper, and the consumption thereof was closely associated with courtly environments, offers adequate contextualization to the finds of Kyzyltēpe.<sup>199</sup> In the case of ducks, the tablets clearly indicate that the granting of rations of the meat of these birds was considered to be a royal gift, since it does not appear either as part of the so-called «bonus rations» (e. g. the yearly *zippi* of apple in Fort. 2319-101: 17'-18') or, even less, in the basket usually allocated to the *kurtaš*.<sup>200</sup>

The mention of the same specimens (poultry and, albeit to a lesser extent, geese) in a document such as *ADAB C1*, which records the provisions made available to an individual of absolute prestige (perhaps Bessos himself), ought to be taken as hinting at the development - according to the pattern of an «open landscape of fields and pastures» reconstructed by Gondet in the territory of Persepolis - of the system fueling the courtly economy also in the Miršade oasis.<sup>201</sup> Should this assumption find support in future research, the most immediate consequence would have been the momentous expansion of the scale of the socio-political and economic relations of the local communities, whose horizon was now no longer limited to the territory of Kyzyltēpe or even just to the Surxondaryo, but had instead expanded to integrate - at the very least - the entire satrapal (administrative) landscape, as it had become part (yet another «node») of the «network of networks» characteristic of the imperial

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<sup>198</sup> Wu *et al.* 2015, 103-106. See moreover Lhuillier and Mashkour 2017, 669 with regards to the range of breeding strategies which is characteristic of the Central Asian steppe societies.

<sup>199</sup> Henkelman 2010, 774-776: compare Henkelman 2021a.

<sup>200</sup> Henkelman 2010, 742 and Henkelman 2018a, 238 for text and commentary on Fort. 2319-101. See already Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1995, 294-295, pointing out that, in just two tablets (PF 697-698) a total amount of 566 birds is recorded. They are referred to in the tablets as «consumed before the king», and, interesting, the figures attested are perfectly comparable with the Polyæn. 4.3.32. In her words, «it is quite obvious, then, that the Greeks were not exaggerating when describing Persian royal meals» and given the prominence of Baktra in the context of the Eastern satrapies North of the Hindūkūš it seems not unjustified to speculate that the order of magnitude of the «conspicuous consumption» (Goody 1982, 82) taking place at the local satrapal seat must have been of comparable magnitude.

<sup>201</sup> King 2021, 330: «The small quantities of poultry relative to sheep in C1—five geese and 30 chickens compared to 166 total lambs or sheep—imply that poultry consumption was similarly privileged in late Achaemenid Baktria».

paradigm in Central Asia.<sup>202</sup> There is a further source that sharpens even more our understanding of the functioning of the processes described in these pages, and it comes, once again, from the *ADAB*. Besides the more spectacular parchment documents, there are 18 wooden tally sticks marked with notches which, according to both the vocabulary used and the parallels offered by abundant ethnographic documentation, can be said to have recorded receipts for credits issued (apparently in silver) by representatives of the Achaemenid administration to a range of «semi-external» (to the imperial administration) socioeconomic actors in order to regulate, by means of rather refined forms of contract, economic transactions with the world of the steppes beyond, but by no means isolated from, the satrapy's sphere of political and economic influence, which indeed the Great King and his lieutenants - once again in analogy with what is known from the story of ʾTawāwīs - had every interest in expanding precisely into these borderland territories.<sup>203</sup> As far as I am able to judge, the fundamental reasons in the light of which the testimony provided by the Aramaic tallies published as section «D» of the *ADAB* deserves special attention in the context of an economic assessment of Kyzyltēpe from the vantage point informing the present study are the following two.

First, the tallies provide textual (primary) evidence that the division between the worlds, on the one hand, of the oases and, on the other, of the surrounding (sometimes interspersed) deserts and steppes was much less clear-cut than the imperial rhetoric itself has long led to believe (think Darius' bluster about his fording of the Syrdaryo, staged at Bīsūtūn in terms of a heroic conquest of a *terra incognita*).<sup>204</sup> Secondly, and although too incomplete to allow anything more than tentative hypotheses, however circumstantial, evidence of this kind seems to indicate at least a negotiating space open to local élites - the volume of the imperial economy makes it in fact rather unlikely that the beneficiaries of the credits attested in the tallies were simple shepherds, suggesting instead that we are dealing with individuals capable of mobilizing a not inconsiderable amount of resources, as most clearly shown by *ADAB* A1 - in order to bargain a space of manoeuvre (*Handlungsraum* in Mischa Meier's terminology) within the frameworks of the satrapy by appropriating – and turning to their own advantage - both the language and the taxation templates emanating from Baktra, which in this way became, to use Damián Fernández's effective formula, part of the local magnates' political and social identity (*persona* in the text) or, in Scott's words, a «positionality» enabling those «non-

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<sup>202</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 174 ff. C1 (=Khalili IA21), ll. 12-13. See moreover Henkelman 2005, 139 and Wu *et al.* 2015, 105-106. On the organization of the Achaemenid rural landscape, which must have relied heavily on the estates of the aristocracy of the individual satrapies, see Boucharlat *et al.* 2012, 253-256), Gondet 2018 as well as Canepa's suggestions (2020) concerning Altin 10 in Baktria.

<sup>203</sup> Henkelman 2018a, 245-247 for a concise and yet very insightful treatment of this evidence and from whom the concept of «semi-external actors» is borrowed.

<sup>204</sup> Rollinger and Degen 2021b.

state actors» to extract the highest possible amount of profit from their participation in the imperial enterprise unfolding in Baktria.<sup>205</sup>

At this point it will not be out of place to note that the process of institutionalization of the (physical, but also, inevitably, sociopolitical) landscape described in these pages as most likely at work since the earliest years of the Empire and, based on the evidence coming from Kyzyltēpe (but one could extend these considerations to the whole of the Surxondaryo valley: just think of a site like Termiz), apparently in vogue without noticeable discontinuity throughout the entire Achaemenid imperial trajectory in Central Asia, finds a fitting counterpart at the opposite extreme of Persian domains, namely in the Egyptian oases of Ḥārġa and Dāḥla, in the Western desert.<sup>206</sup>

According to the results of Henry Colburn's thorough investigation, even in these Southern borderlands, the Achaemenids linked themselves up with social networks that had been well-established since the Pharaonic period, while at the same time disrupting (or at least trying to do so) the power relations internal to those regional landscapes by virtue of the - momentous - changes imposed on the local administrative panorama by their integration into the Egyptian version of the Achaemenid imperial paradigm. Indexical of this phenomenon is the fact that both oases were connected with the Nile valley and with territories further East, therefore becoming part of a larger administrative and political project, which paramount aim consisted, once again, in making these areas (and the resources that from there could be extracted – not least thanks to the collaboration of at least some of the local powerbrokers) quickly accessible from other centers of imperial power in Egypt and vice versa.<sup>207</sup> The fact that, in this context, the satrapal administration wasted no time in establishing ties, even of a personal nature (think of the circulation of drinking vessels as a token of such alliances), with prominent individuals from the oases' communities leads us to believe that a similar scenario was at work, at the other end of the Empire, in an area such as the Miršade oasis and even more so across strategically Paramount territories such as Sogdiana (think of the Zarafšān valley or the Qashqadaryo), whose ecological conformation – remarkably - is not too different from the landscape of the Egyptian Western desert, which means that the territorial affordances available to the Persians (and the challenges they had to face) in order to establish their infrastructural power must

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<sup>205</sup> Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 179-193, Henkelman 2018a, 247. For a historical parallel from 7<sup>th</sup>-century CE Spain see Fernández 2017, 244.

<sup>206</sup> From a comparative examination of the Egyptian administrative documents and the *ADAB* we know, moreover, that in both corpora the same administrative language was employed - from the most general formulas to grammatical stylistic devices (Folmer 2017: cf. Gzella 2021a) -, so it is not surprising to find a uniformity of settlement and land use strategies in the two contexts, for it is very likely that the estates controlled (by whatever means: namely either directly as land grants or indirectly thanks to the local strongmen) by the imperial officers were administered in the same way according to the matrix-like principles regulating the imperial paradigm and the accounting logic of the archives, both at Persepolis and in the satrapies, as pointed out for example by Stolper and Fisher 2015.

<sup>207</sup> Colburn 2018, 102-107; 2020a, 95-130; 2021.

have been analogous, and therefore the solutions adopted comparable.<sup>208</sup> The picture outlined above can be further enriched, since the development of specialized pastoral terminology in the administrative documentation, which can be deduced from the *ADAB*, supports the hypothesis that the development (in the entire Surxondaryo but – at least in the upper part of the valley - centered on Kyzyltēpe) of a very sophisticated (agro-)pastoral economy in order to satisfy not only the supply needs of the inhabitants but also the demands, of incomparably greater magnitude, of the courtly economy likely kickstarted a complex process of transformation of local societies, attracting progressively more subjects into Meier's «imperial whirlwind».<sup>209</sup>

Sticking to just one - but in my opinion extremely indicative - example, *ADAB* C4 records the existence of an officer, called dmydtkn (דמִידְתְּכַן), active in an unspecified location in Northern Baktria or Sogdiana in June 324 BCE.<sup>210</sup> Most likely representing the Aramaic transliteration of the Old Persian \*dāmya-data-kāna, the dmydtkn performed the functions of a «cattle attendant», and it is possible, as assumed by the editors of the text, that this appellation stands for an official title characteristic of the Achaemenid administration in Baktria.<sup>211</sup> If this were the case, the most immediate parallel would be with the «district chief» mentioned by Briant as characteristic of the institutional economy attested in Pārsa, namely with an individual being in charge - a revealing detail in the Central Asian context - of herding flocks, including those of closest interest to the courtly economy. The task of this official consisted, on the one hand, in subsidizing the specialized shepherds in charge of the cattle, and, on the other, in presiding over fiscal levies on the occasion, for example, of important religious festivals, which represented the main context within which the consumption of meat took place in large quantities outside the more exclusive circles of Achaemenid (royal) society.<sup>212</sup> Similarly, it seems possible to assume that, in an ecological and social context such as that of the Surxondaryo valley, individuals like the dmydtkn of *ADAB* C4 were entrusted with the crucial task of establishing relations with the representatives of the surrounding pastoral communities in order to secure the supply of dairy products, meat, and the precious game birds in sufficient quantities to meet the needs of an environment so demanding and resource-consuming as the satrapal court and/or even the table of the Great King during one of the recurring journeys of his inner circle (it

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<sup>208</sup> Compare Weaverdyck *et al.* 2021, 301-310.

<sup>209</sup> According to Düring and Stek 2018a, 8, the development of factories and market profitable agriculture («cash crops») whose development was closely dependent on trade in the *wider* imperial context represents a typical strategy of building and consolidating imperial power itself. This consideration helps to understand the rationale behind the sustained investments in seemingly marginal areas such as the Miršade oases in Baktria and, in Egypt, those of Ḥārġa and Dāḥla.

<sup>210</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 203 C4 (= Khalili IA 17), l. 18.

<sup>211</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 55 and Tuplin 2017a, 627-633 making the case of this word being an official title.

<sup>212</sup> Briant 1982, 342. Cf. PF 692-695 and PF 2033, recording the procurement of livestock «for the king» (and cf. Sancisi-Weerdenbugr 1995, 296-300). See moreover Henkelman 2005; 2017b; 2021c on meat consumption in religious contexts, with further references from Persepolis.

should not in fact be forgotten in this context that the «capital» of the Achaemenid Empire was located where the ruler was, and that the court of the latter was itinerant).

Although the pre-Achaemenid tower was destroyed prior to the erection of Kyzyltēpe's citadel, the presence of an imposing raised platform on one of the site's largest hills suggests that rituals of some kind (the presence of a fire altar has been assumed but, as we have seen, caution is required before drawing more specific conclusions about the precise nature of the religious landscape in Achaemenid-epoch Bactria) proved long-lasting in the Miršade oasis, and it is safe to argue that they made for an important opportunity for local communities to socialize while at the same time providing a resource of considerable importance available to the Persian administration, and to the officials active within its ranks, in order to weave fruitful relationships of socio-political dependence with neighboring pastoral communities.<sup>213</sup> Also in this case, the ADAB credit slips provide valuable material - at least two very likely cases - to support the argument of an active recruitment of members of the local non-settled communities within their respective patronage networks (in the form of *bandakā*?) by Achaemenid officials in order to control the caravan flows and transhumance routes active at the outskirts of the satrapy's major oases (think again of the account of the *Tā'riḥ -i Buxārā*). According to Wouter Henkelman's recent interpretation, «semi-institutional actors» - similar perhaps to the so-called Bactrian merchant featuring in Ktesias' anecdote discussed in the previous chapter - may have received silver capital in order to acquire, evidently using networks outside the imperial circuits to which they had access, goods whose nature the receipts do not specify, but which must have been at the top of the list of the satrap's and his acolytes' desiderata.<sup>214</sup> Amongst these, perhaps not surprisingly, the Bactrian camels ranked critically high.<sup>215</sup> The breeding of these animals could be an extremely lucrative business, and the whole chain of grazing, herding and trading - not unlike the horse «industry» on the of Táng China's Northern borderlands - involved an extremely diverse spectrum of individuals bound together by complex bonds of solidarity and dependence, from the breeders and their family networks to the satrap and other top officers within the imperial administration.<sup>216</sup> Gary Reger's process of «normalization» (i. e. the transformation and integration

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<sup>213</sup> Wu 2018, 204. It is also plausible that other officers in charge of similar tasks were active in *other* regional centers since, in the territory of present-day Uzbekistan, no less than 25 sites potentially suitable for this purpose have been identified in the valleys of Ulanbulak (the presence of at least three Achaemenid sites is significant, given the extremely modest ecological potential of the area: Stride 2005 I, 264), Sherabāddaryo, and Surxondaryo itself: cf. Leriche 2007, 128. For a recent and extremely detailed review of the practice of entrusting flocks to shepherds under contract using tools like the ADAB wooden sticks see Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 199-200. The argument for the existence of a Zoroastrian cult at Kyzyltēpe, which *might* be strengthened by the discovery of a temple structure built on one of the hills of the site and (possibly) equipped with a fire altar, has recently been supported by Wu 2020, 609-610, with bibliography.

<sup>214</sup> Henkelman 2018a, 247. See moreover Naveh and Shaked 2012, 232 ff. D1 (= Khalili T1) and Naveh and Shaked 2012, 236 ff. D2 (= Khalili T2). ADAB C6 and C7 might record textiles which is suggestive of long distance trade in high-value but low-bulk goods the satrapal administration was likely interested to tax: King 2021, 353-361.

<sup>215</sup> Arist. *Hist. An.*, 2.1.498b-499a. On the history of (Achaemenid) camels and the display of natural exotica at the King's court see, among others, Potts 2004; 2005, Llewellyn-Jones 2017 with Dioli 2020 and Sala 2022.

<sup>216</sup> Skaff 2012; 2017.

within the larger imperial framework) of the Egyptian Eastern desert in the Hellenistic (and later Roman) period provides a further benchmark for imagining the ways and means of Achaemenid expansion along the geographical and ecological frontier of Central Asia, as well as the local socio-political transformations caused by this colossal undertaking to transform the regional topography of power. In both cases, it is clear that the marked presence of the imperial signature in these spaces, i. e. the construction of garrisons, post stations and settlements, should not only be interpreted from the point of view of territorial control for mere political and military purposes, although such concerns of course played their role.<sup>217</sup> To at least an equivalent extent, imperial investments in Central Asia fulfilled the no less important task of negotiating access to flows of goods and resources through relational and economic networks which were 1. well tested and 2. in the hands of individuals whose acquiescence could not only be extorted using force, but most often needed to be bargained for in the - flexible and constantly in need (re)codification) space of the *Middle Ground*, in a dialectical process from which all parties sought to gain as much profit as possible. Against such a backdrop, it comes as a modest surprise to discover that the patchwork of responsibilities, powers, positions, identities, alliances, and challenge thereof characteristic of the entire history of Central Asia (not only of the Achaemenid-ruled upper satrapies), but which is particularly visible in the last decades of the Empire's life thanks to the testimony of the *ADAB* parchments and tallies, can best be made sense of precisely starting from a document concerning camel-related issues: but this will be dealt with in more detail in the next chapter.

#### 4.2.3. *How the Silver was Tempered*

A final note at the end of this section. Excavations carried out both at the «citadel» and the «lower town» have uncovered several traces of furnaces which, at least according to the preliminary results of scientific analysis carried out in situ, suggest the presence of significant metallurgical activity at Kyzyltëpe.<sup>218</sup> In addition to the production of agricultural equipment, the discovery of locally made ceramic fragments reproducing diagnostic examples of Achaemenid drinking paraphernalia (above all – remarkably - the *φιάλη*), provides a clue not to be overlooked in favor of the possibility that, alongside the court of Baktra and centers of undoubted importance such as Marakanda and - perhaps – Achaemenid Āi Xānum, Kyzyltëpe too played in the course of its history the important role of producer and distributor of objects with a very strong symbolic meaning, perhaps even among those pastoral communities whose élites - according to what the evidence discussed so far allow us to

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<sup>217</sup> Reger 2017 and Weaverdyck *et al.* 2021, 304-310.

<sup>218</sup> Wu *et al.* 2017, 308, 310, 312, 314, 355-356.

assume - were the object of repeated and constant courtship by the cadres of the Achaemenid administration in Baktria.<sup>219</sup> The stratigraphic dating of some of these factories to the site's earliest architectural phase underlines the importance of this production in the eyes of the new masters of the Miršade oasis, and it cannot be excluded that such a phenomenon should be correlated with the exploitation of mineral and metal deposits in the region, whose chronology should therefore be dated to the years immediately following Cyrus' conquest: an unmistakable sign - should there still be any need thereof - of Baktria's capital importance in the overall framework of the imperial political economy, of which the region, even in its apparently more remote offshoots, had become a fundamental component, and would have remained such until the proverbial *Last Days* of Achaemenid hegemony in Central Asia.<sup>220</sup>

#### 4.3. 50 *Miršades of Empire*. Kyzyltēpe, Baktria, Central Asia, the Achaemenid Persian Empire

By virtue of the structural homologies detected in the terminology of the *ADAB* when compared with the administrative documents of Persepolis, Wouter Henkelman has authoritatively argued that this phenomenon must reflect the duplication and entrenchment of the centralized administrative system characteristic of the Achaemenid imperial paradigm in Baktria and that, by virtue of this event of paramount importance in the political, economic, and social history of Central Asia, a massive transformation of the landscape took place in order to make it functional (by «institutionalizing» it) to the needs of extraction and control both of the imperial court and of its representatives embodied by the satrap (at Baktra) and of the latter's *bandakā* - the «imperial collaborators» - in the hinterland: one thinks of the numerous localities mentioned by the *ADAB* themselves, from the oasis of Tāšqurgān to present-day Qarši and from Shahr -e Sabz to the, still difficult to identify, Artadatana, Araivant, Maithanaka, and Varnu.<sup>221</sup> If from the territory of the Miršade oasis alone one zooms out to include the entire satrapal territory extending, at the very least, between the Balḥ oasis (including a site of the importance of Čašma-ye Šifā, probably a true Southern gateway to the administrative and political heart of Baktria) to the South and, to the North, the Hišār range as far as Derbent, it is possible to grasp in all its complexity at least in its contours the profile of the Achaemenid institutional landscape within which a site like Kyzyltēpe must be placed in order to fully understand its role both within its local context and against the background of the broader imperial horizon.<sup>222</sup> Similarly to what can be observed, for example, in the Sherabāddaryo oasis (think of settlements such as

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<sup>219</sup> Wu *et al.* 2017, 302; 2018, 203.

<sup>220</sup> Wu *et al.* 2017, 312. On Achaemenid mining activity in Central Asia (Kābul area) cf. Noori *et al.* 2019, 107-109

<sup>221</sup> Henkelman 2018, 243. See moreover Naveh and Shaked 2012, 21-22.

<sup>222</sup> Wu 2020, 600-603.



Talaškantēpe I or Dabil Kurgan), also in the upper Surxondaryo the Achaemenid sites - both those (few) from the earlier period, such as Bujrachitēpe, as well as those that flourished during the P1 and, even more so, P2 phases - appear to have been organized according to a carefully thought after pattern, in clusters hinged around a larger settlement, the latter being probably in charge of administrative functions.<sup>223</sup> At the present stage of research, seven have been identified in Surxondaryo alone, all of them distributed more or less evenly across the valley: five on the slopes of the surrounding mountain ranges - as noted by Boroffka, probably in an attempt to regulate access to transhumance routes and alpine pastures - and two (centered on Shortēpe, West of Termiz) guarding one of the Amudaryo fords.<sup>224</sup> Based on the size of the sites that make up these clusters, it is possible to deduce that at least the largest of them, such as Bandykhan II, Džandavlattēpe, Khajtabadtēpe and Kyzyltēpe itself, included, and perhaps even developed, original private estates, moreover organically enmeshed into the institutional economy of the Empire in its regional scale, thus acting as nodes within the developing administrative landscape of the satrapy and, in addition to this, fulfilling a crucial function as the transmission belt at the micro-territorial level, spreading and coordinating in the countryside the political-administrative directives emanating from the satrapal court based at Baktra.<sup>225</sup> A significant clue in support of this hypothesis is provided by the distances that separate the major sites in the valley, for they are so regular as to appear suspicious: in fact, likely they are indexical of the systematic application of a preordained model of territorial development - and which we assumed in the previous chapter to date back to the inception of the Persepolitan (but likely starting with Pasargadai) administrative landscape. On average, each of the major settlements in the Surxondaryo valley dating from the Achaemenid period is separated from the next closest one by a distance ranging between 32 and 39 km (with an average of 35).<sup>226</sup> According to calculations developed by Elena Efimovna Kuz'mina, such a stretch could be covered in a maximum of 7 hours by an individual on foot travelling over terrain that was not particularly rough (such as that of the Surxondaryo alluvium), while a caravan equipped with Baktrian camels was able to travel, even in less favorable conditions, no less than 40 km per day, a distance that could increase by 50% in case of need - and of course of a lighter load: think of the «racing camels» mentioned by classical historiographers -, thus making it possible to connect the entire region in an extremely short time, all the more so if, as the osteological

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<sup>223</sup> Cf. Stride 2005 III nos. 145 (Dabil Kurgan) and 227 (Talaškantēpe I), as well as Stančo 2018, 178-182. On the «clusters» datable to the Achaemenid period see Rtveldze 2002, 131-133 and Stride 2005 I, 298.

<sup>224</sup> Boroffka 2009, Wu 2018, 210.

<sup>225</sup> Cf. Briant 2002, 470, Henkelman 2010, Boucharlat *et al.* 2012 and, most recently, Gondet 2018, Canepa 2020, 59.

<sup>226</sup> The distance as the crow flies is even shorter (18 km on average: Wu 2018, 210), but as noted by Scott 2009, 48, it was much more useful to know not so much the *distance* as the *time* needed to move over rough terrain such as that in Central Asia. It is therefore significant that distances were roughly uniform in this respect too. Compare the evidence discovered across the Empire and discussed in Henkelman and Jacobs 2021, 727-728. Foundational is Henkelman forthcoming.

analysis carried out at Kyzyltēpe suggests, the presence in situ of camelid specimens should be considered as an indication of the existence of post stations comparable to those known to Herodotos and which he describes while making his audience acquainted with the the organization of the Persian «royal road» in (one of) its Western section(s) linking Sardis to Susa.<sup>227</sup>

Considering the fact, 1. that, when placed on a map, sites such as Talaškantēpe I, Shortēpe and the citadel of Termiz appear aligned along a West-to-East axis running parallel to the course of the Amudaryo and that 2. in the light of the Persepolis tablets it was possible to estimate the intervals' length between the post stations located in Pārsa, which does not differ too much from that established in the case of Central Asia (according to some scholars between 21 and 24 km, according to others between 37 and 43, in any case perfectly in line with the average range of a day's journey by camel), the most economical conclusion appears to be admitting - similarly to what is known from Aršāma's Egyptian correspondence - that also the Surxondaryo territory was organized according to the Achaemenid road infrastructure, a hypothesis that appears to be incontrovertibly demonstrated by the *ADAB*, since an entire section of the corpus (the already mentioned section «C») is made of «supply lists» spiced up with an unmistakable institutional zest.<sup>228</sup> In a recent contribution, Wu Xin has offered a preliminary reconstruction of the Achaemenid road infrastructure in the Surxondaryo, which she suggests was centered around sites such as Talaškantēpe I (positioned parallel to the course of the Boysuntov, at the mouth of an important pass that, through Dabil Kurgan, allowed access to Sogdiana), Khajtabadtēpe (at the opposite end of the valley and guarding a ford of the eponymous river, which contributed to feeding an imposing artificial canal located in the immediate vicinity), the aforementioned Shortēpe guard post (further South, on the Oxus and potentially able to link up with Baktra via a smaller oasis South of the river where traces of settlements dating back to at least the Iron Age have been found) and, further North, Džandavlattēpe (located at the center of the valley), Bandykhanatēpe II and, of course, Kyzyltēpe, the hub of the entire Miršade oasis.<sup>229</sup> According to the Chinese historian, an analysis of the topographical distribution of these settlements makes it possible to identify at least three major road axes, which she understands as being part of a complex infrastructure system that ran the length and breadth of the Surxondaryo landscape, making this valley the real transmission belt between two of the most important Baktrian oases (those of Balḡ and Tāšqurgān) on the one hand and, on the other, the major centers of Sogdiana (Qarši and Shahr-e Sabz

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<sup>227</sup> Hdt. 5.52-54, Diod. Sic. 17.80.3 and Colburn 2013. On the estimates concerning the daily marching capacity of the Baktrian camel see Kuz'mina 2008, 38 and Benjamin 2018, 112.

<sup>228</sup> Henkelman 2008b, 114-115. On the daily frequency of food distributions to the users of the Achaemenid road system see *PFT*, 42-48. On the *ADAB* provision lists (section «C», in particular documents 1 and those from 3 to 7) see Naveh - Shaked 2012, 16. See now Henkelman and Jacobs 2021, 730-731, King 2021, 289-314 (focused on Arachosia), and Henkelman forthcoming.

<sup>229</sup> Stride 2005 I, 295-299, Wu 2020, 605.

in the Qashqadaryo, Marakanda further to the North).<sup>230</sup> The first, oriented in a Southwest-Northeast direction, connected Takashkhantëpe to Obishir via Džandavlattëpe, Bandykhantëpe II and Kyzyltëpe. The second, running in an East-West direction, made it possible, starting from Khajtabadtëpe, to reach Dabil Kurgan and from there Sogdiana. Finally, the third allowed the imperial administration to easily control the entire course of the Oxus North of Baktra along the Termiz - Shortëpe - Talaškantëpe I line.

This reconstruction, which seems to rest on very solid foundations, allows two observations, which it is not out of place to put forward here at the end of the investigation carried out in these pages. Firstly, the hypothesis advanced by Wouter Henkelman against the backdrop of textual and archaeological parallels (from Pārsa to Judea, Hārğa, and Dāhla, with a stop in Arachosia) concerning the existence of a planning and inspection system of the imperial territory, preparatory to an imposing modification of the local topography of power in order to exploit and control the resources and the population of the single satrapies, finds an important confirmation in Central Asia, where the permanence of this complex communication system can be demonstrated to have remained operational until the last days of the Empire's life.<sup>231</sup> In addition to this, and in accordance with Henry Colburn's research on the Egyptian oases, the radical transformation of the (physical as well as socio-economic and political) space must not have been limited to a simple imposition from above, but it is reasonable to assume that it involved in a systematic but differentiated way, adapting flexibly to the «practical situation(s) on the ground», the representatives of local communities, some of whom were undoubtedly able to draw significant profits (think of the case of Dinghil'dže in – perhaps geographically, but by no means politically or institutionally - faraway Chorasmia) from the new geopolitical order established by the Persians North and South of the Hindūkūš, echoes of which went even further beyond in the Eurasian steppes (arguably as far as the territory of Semireč'e).<sup>232</sup> If this had not been the case, one would be hard pressed to account for the Olympic bliss with which an individual like Bagavanta was able, at the same time, to cultivate his own clientele in spite of the interests of his direct superiors and to preside - though not always flawlessly - over tasks which, in their diversity (digging a ditch, unrelentingly fighting a grasshoppers' invasion, moving troops and repairing a granary), qualify him without fear of contradiction as a representative, and a prominent one indeed, of that local officialdom charged with maintaining, and if possible expanding, the Achaemenid imperial paradigm in Central Asia.

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<sup>230</sup> Wu 2018, 211.

<sup>231</sup> Henkelman 2017a; 2018a; forthcoming as well as Wu 2020, 611-612.

<sup>232</sup> Colburn 2018; 2020a, 95-130.

## 5. Conclusion. «È una storia un po' complicata; una storia sbagliata»?

In the preceding chapter, the aim had been to show how, and at what level of complexity, Central Asia had been incontrovertibly included (starting at least from Darius' reign) within the regulatory mechanisms of the political and economic life of the Achaemenid world, which we have summarized, following Wouter Henkelman, through the formula of the imperial paradigm. The foregoing pages have adopted a specular perspective, with the overarching goal of assessing, through the combined analysis of different types of documentary evidence (from the - meagre and often misleading - literary sources to the finds of the *Frozen Tombs* of Pazyryk and from archaeology to the *ADAB*), whether and to what extent the signature of the Achaemenid imperial paradigm left its mark on the territory and on the institutions regulating the life of the various Central Asian communities, especially in Baktria. Despite a state of affairs that, from the point of view of the written sources, appeared - and in some ways really *is* - extremely prohibitive, this chapter has tried to show how it is nevertheless possible to reconstruct an extremely articulated picture, within which the two horizons, the «global» (as mirrored in the Persepolis archive) and the «local» one (the organization of the territory of a small oasis in the upper Surxondaryo) were inextricably entangled, both reciprocally and with a broader context, namely that of the Central Asian steppes and of the numerous communities belonging to this ecosystem, which can be considered neither as something foreign to the Achaemenid world in Central Asia nor as linked to it exclusively based on conflictual (in Wu Xin's words «adversarial») dynamics.

The study of a site like Kyzyltëpe and of the wider regional context in which it was ensnared, in particular, allows us to observe along the diachronic axis and on different scales 1. the birth and 2. the development of complex socio-political and economic ties between territories and communities that were once very distant from each other and that, by virtue of the dynamics triggered by the Achaemenid conquest of Baktria and of the whole of Central Asia, appear to have become progressively dependent on one another, to the point that events originating at one end of the Central Asian imperial web were capable of impacting, in a far from insignificant manner, on realities that were apparently several hundred kilometers apart, as the aftermath of Alexander's campaign very effectively (and dramatically, as chapter 8 sets out to argue) illustrates.<sup>233</sup> At the moment still an exceptional case in the panorama of ancient Central Asia - but perhaps, in a long-term perspective, not an entirely unique one, as we shall see in the next chapter - the *ADAB* provide the opportunity to situate some of the structural remark developed in these chapters (concerning, for example, the transformations kick-started by the emergence of the imperial infrastructure in Baktria) in the context of the peculiarities of the local socio-political dynamics, thus offering an exceptionally interesting

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<sup>233</sup> Compare Jennings 2011, 239 and now Rollinger 2023.

cross-section of Central Asian society against the backdrop of the Achaemenid world Empire of which, for almost two centuries, this spaces had been an integral part, thus making it possible to place side by side, next to a history of extraction and control, another narrative, specular but not for this reason antithetical to the first and indeed incomprehensible in the absence of it, devoted as it is to the study of those minute translations and internal mutations or, in Khatchadourian's words, of «evasions» which were not however entirely meant to leave that enabled the Baktrian élites to creatively adapt to the imperial paradigm, and to a certain extent even to exploit it to their own (and of their «selectorate»'s) advantage.<sup>234</sup> As Fabrizio de André sang, it is a «somewhat complicated» story: it is the story, in other words, of the Achaemenid Imperial Experience, and of the limits it was faced with in the land of the Afġāns.

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<sup>234</sup> Yurčak 2006, 28, Khatchadourian 2016, 185.

## Chapter 7

### *My Kingdom for a Camel. On Satraps and Powerbrokers in 4<sup>th</sup> Century Achaemenid Bactria*

其畜之所多則馬、羊，其奇畜則橐駝、驢、羸、馱駝、駒駝、驛駝。逐水草遷徙，毋城郭常處耕田之業，然亦各有分地。

[Most of their domestic animals are horses, cows, sheep and they also have rarer animals such as camels, donkeys, mules, hinnies and other equines known as *táotū* and *tuóxī*. They move according to the availability of water and pastures, they have no walls: they do not own fixed residences, nor do they practice agriculture, but each of them owns a plot of land].

- Sīmā Qiān 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記, 110.2879

In animalibus sunt divites valde, in camelis, bobus, ovibus, capris; de equis et iumentis tantam multitudinem habent, quantam non credimus habere alium totum mundum; porcos et bestias alias minime habent.

[The Tatars have an extraordinary wealth of animals: camels, cattle, sheep, goats and so many horses and mares that I never thought there were so many in the world].

- John of Plano Carpini, *Historia Mongalorum*, 2.7.

But what need have I of houses and walls? || Talk to me of wealth, booty, mares and the fat of goats and sheep; || come, summer or winter, and see, admire what tulip gardens I possess!

- Traditional Şahsevænler song.

#### 1. *Aramaic Documents from Ancient Bactria*. An Overview

Purchased on the London antiquities market from the fund of the very influential - and equally wealthy - family of the Irānian-born patron Nāşer Ḥalīlī at an unspecified date in the early 2000s and presented, albeit in a preliminary way, on repeated occasions over the following years, the *Aramaic Documents from Ancient Bactria* (known as *ADAB* in the specialist literature) were finally published in an impressive and luxurious editio princeps by Joseph Naveh and Saul Shaked in 2012. This discovery, it has been repeatedly stated, can legitimately be regarded as one of the most sensational events in Achaemenid studies in general - and in Central Asian scholarship in particular – over the course of the recent decades, and it is easy to assume that, despite the flourishing of contributions that the publication of this invaluable corpus has triggered, many more will follow since, as the authors themselves candidly state in the opening page of the volume, the questions raised by this material are far greater than the answers their landmark study could have wished to provide.<sup>1</sup> The *ADAB* as we

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<sup>1</sup> On *ADAB* history cf. Shaked 2004, Briant 2009a, Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 133-134.

know them today were originally part of a lot that must have contained at least 50 (and possibly more) specimens.<sup>2</sup> The evidence so far published by Naveh and Shaked consists of 30 parchment documents and 18 wooden fragments (called tally sticks) bearing inscriptions, sometimes more and sometimes less legible, in a form of Aramaic that, despite some spelling inaccuracies and a certain simplification of grammar and syntax, can be clearly identified as a vivid example of the imperial chancery language as it is known, thanks especially to several testimonies provided by the Egyptian evidence (e. g. the Elephantine papyri or, even more clearly, Aršāma's correspondence) in the Western part of the Empire during the 5<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> Leaving aside for a moment the wooden tallies, for they deserve special treatment, the evidence on parchment can be divided into the following 5 subgroups. 1. An isolated letter (*ADAB* B10) accounting for an exchange between two otherwise unidentifiable individuals that the editors have dated, on paleographic grounds, to the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. 2. The correspondence between Aḥvamazdā and Bagavanta (*ADAB* A1-A8), probably the most famous section of the entire *corpus*, which can be placed side by side with other epistolary dossiers (*ADAB* B1-B9). These other letters, if from the point of view of their content appear closer to the testimony of *ADAB* B10 – which is to say, they account for the correspondence between private individuals in contrast with the not only official, but eminently «institutional» nature of *ADAB* A1-A8 - from the paleographic point of view (lacking dating formulas) can however be chronologically situated within the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, making them therefore almost contemporaries with the Aḥvamazdā letters.<sup>4</sup> 3. There follows a small group (*ADAB* C1 and C3-C7) of, as the editors call them, «supply and ration lists»: to this can be added, on the one hand, a single line of text (*ADAB* C10) which the editors classify, by virtue of its content («this is the document [of] Gaukana Barya») as a «label», and on the other hand, the more problematic *ADAB* C2. The latter, still intact at the time of its purchase by Ḥalīlī and accompanied by a sumptuous seal depicting a scene of «heroic encounter» (or perhaps of – idealized - hunting?) of clear courtly inspiration could be dated to the reign of Xerxes by virtue of one of the individuals - certainly a man of considerable social standing- mentioned in the text (a Vīštāspa krny.<sup>5</sup> More on this man below), which would seem - but opinions among scholars differ on this point - to isolate chronologically the parchment from the rest of the group, bringing it closer to *ADAB* B10.<sup>6</sup> 4. Two lists of names (*ADAB* C8 and C9) follows and, finally, 5. there are two isolated

<sup>2</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 15-18.

<sup>3</sup> Shaked 2004, 22-29, Naveh and Shaked 2012, 37. Gzella 2021a; 20221b on Aramaic sources for the Achaemenid Empire and on Baktria. See for a comparison *ALBL* III and now, for the most up-to-date overview of the Bodleian Letters, note the extensive introduction, edition, and commentary in Tuplin and Ma 2020 I and II.

<sup>4</sup> See most recently the important Folmer 2023 on the Aramaic to be found in the letters.

<sup>5</sup> Hyland 2013, Luther 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 229-230. As far as *ADAB* C6 and C7 are concerned, King 2021, 355-357 convincingly argues in favor of interpreting the two texts as customs documents, for the goods recorded (textiles, perhaps harnesses for horses) are significantly different from those attested in, say, *ADAB* C1 or C4.

specimens (*ADAB* A9 and A10) which seem to have preserved, in one case (*ADAB* A9) in a very fragmentary manner, evidence of some transactions of goods the context thereof is not easily discernible by virtue, as mentioned, of the state of preservation of the documents themselves.<sup>7</sup>

With the - very conspicuous - exception of *ADAB* C4, explicitly dated «in the 7<sup>th</sup> year of Alexander, the King», the whole dataset covers a rather narrow time span (about 20 years) in the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE. If in fact at least in the case of *ADAB* A1-A8 there are solid reasons to date the correspondence between Aḥvamazdā and Bagavanta to the time of Artaxerxes III (he would be in fact the mlk' - king - Artaxšaθra, i. e. the Aramaic 'rḥšš mentioned for example in the exergue of *ADAB* A1 as being in his 8<sup>th</sup> regnal year), when it comes to the tallies, they are systematically dated during the reign of a Darius (drywhwš) who, by virtue of the two chronological extremes given above, can be none other than the Kodomannos who was treacherously murdered at Ekbatana on his way to Central Asia (we are therefore around 333, since the regnal year recorded by the documents is «the third of Darius, the king»<sup>8</sup>). In the light of what has been discussed in the preceding chapters, the brief presentation of the corpus provided above should have made it easy to understand at least some of the (several) reasons why the *ADAB* are - literally - a unique source for an investigation such as the one underpinning the investigation that has so far been developed in this work. Nevertheless, it is perhaps not entirely inappropriate to take stock of the situation in a somewhat more systematic way.

In the remainder of this introductory paragraph, therefore, the attempt shall be made to illustrate some of the potentials of this corpus in order, on the one hand, to explain in more detail some of the - by all standards considerable - progress that has been made by historiography in the few years elapsed since the first full-fledged publication of the documents, and, on the other hand, to highlight, in contrast, the interpretative angle from which the evidence shall be tackled in the following pages. The second paragraph will be devoted in more detail to the evaluation of the wooden tallies following in the footsteps of, and summarizing the evidence collected in, a recent pilot study which, drawing on both an exhaustive philological analysis and a detailed ethnographic investigation, provides valid support for some of the central arguments put forward in the preceding pages, especially with regard to the relationship of the Achaemenid satrapy of Baktria with its geographical and anthropic context, not only within the major oases scattered across its territory, but also with the broader surrounding steppe world.<sup>9</sup> The third paragraph, as anticipated, although it is based on some fundamental studies that have been conducted on the *ADAB* since their publication, sets itself another goal, the potential of which appears so far to have been rather overlooked. Namely, it seeks to investigate the sociology of power the dynamics of which can be grasped in particular from Aḥvamazdā's correspondence

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<sup>7</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 16.

<sup>8</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 15-18.

<sup>9</sup> Henkelman and Folmer 2016: cf. Henkelman 2018a, 245-247.



(*ADAB* A1-A8) in order to substantiate, and at the same time - by means of an adequate contextualization - to relativize the editors' claim that the corpus they published provides a hitherto inaccessible window on some of the fault lines of imperial power along which Achaemenid hegemony in Central Asia is said to have broken down during the Makedonian campaign launched by Alexander in 329 BCE.<sup>10</sup> To this end, the comparison, which will occupy the fourth and last paragraph of the chapter, with analogous documentary evidence coming from the Baktrian territory during the Sāsānid period and the following centuries, up to the first Islamic expansion in Afġānistān, will prove particularly useful. The cross-investigation of these two bodies of written evidence, it is hoped, will provide the opportunity to assess to a considerable degree of resolution at least some characteristics (of a part) of Baktrian society over the course of its imperial history. These features, it shall be argued, were 1. of a no less systemic nature than the imperial paradigm investigated by Henkelman and 2. indexical of the level of, no less remarkable, conditioning exercised by such sociopolitical features on the development of the satrapy's history in the context of its élites' dialectic with and within the Persian Empire until the very end of its own historical trajectory in Central Asia. Moreover, as the last chapter of this study will argue and shall try to show, the sociopolitical dynamics which emerge from an attentive reading of the *ADAB* provide moreover a valuable contribution to an adequate understanding of the convulsive years of the Alexandrian campaign of conquest *and* of its aftermath, thus making it possible, at the same time, to put forward some diagnostic hypotheses regarding the dynamics that presided over the decline of one era (the Achaemenid World Empire) and fueled the dawn of another (Seleukid hegemony), therefore paving the way for the rise of Central Asia's first Empire in history.<sup>11</sup>

### 1.1. *Aramaic Documents from Ancient Bactria*. Why

Let us begin with the most obvious fact singling out the material published in the *ADAB*, namely the chronology of the documents: the latter in fact covers a crucial period in Achaemenid history, and it has been pointed out by several scholars that, for example, the comparative study of this evidence against the grain of the most recent results of archaeological investigation - one thinks of the excavations in the Surxondaryo valley and in particular at Kyzyltēpe - is potentially able to illuminate fundamental aspects of the processes that led from Persian hegemony in Central Asia to the

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<sup>10</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, xx.

<sup>11</sup> On the history and the dynamics underpinning Seleukid rule over the former Achaemenid upper satrapies see Strootman 2020c while for a thoughtful assessment of the dynastic impact on these territories, which ought to be seen as providing the crucial breeding ground for the emergence of the Graeco-Baktrian Empire (Hoo and Wiesehöfer 2022) cf. the remarks in Kosmin 2014a, Morris 2019a, and Canepa 2020.

consolidation of Seleukid possessions in these regions of their Empire.<sup>12</sup> For example, the mention, within Aḥvamazdā's correspondence, of fortification building activities (e. g. of a wall and a moat) around the site of Nīḥšapâia (נהשפי, a key settlement in the context of Alexander's expedition and probably known to Greek and Roman historians as Xenippa) testifies – perhaps - a state of unrest on the Northeastern borderlands of the satrapy a little more than a decade (the document is dated between June 348 BCE and the same month of the following year) before the Makedonian invasion, which might have been dictated by a general mobilization of local troops called by Artaxerxes III in the light of Makedonian movements in the Aegean.<sup>13</sup> And in the case of the now famous list of provisions of *ADAB* C1 (dated «in the month of Kislev, in the year 1 of Artaxerxes, the King»), is it not possible to glimpse the preparations made by Bessos (according to the editors mentioned in the second line of the document) for the defense of certain Baktrian strongholds in the aftermath of Darius' murder?<sup>14</sup> Because of its obvious historical implications, the dating of the parchment to 330 BCE (i. e. year 1 of Artaxerxes V, notably the royal name adopted by Bessos after his regicide) has been the subject of a heated debate among scholars, which has not yet completely settled and on which it is not out of place to dwell briefly here, since it provides a further opportunity to understand the range of information that the *ADAB* present scholars with. For example: the editors of the parchment themselves, unable as they were to justify the simultaneous presence, moreover in the same text, of two different names possibly referring to the same subject (Bessos/Artaxerxes V), have proposed to backdate *ADAB* C1 to the reign of Artaxerxes IV (thus between 337 and 336 BCE).<sup>15</sup> This suggestion has been welcomed by Wouter Henkelman and Margaretha Folmer, who have recently pointed out that the loss of dramatic impact caused by the new dating of the parchment would nevertheless be largely compensated by the institutional context that the document illustrates, since it would put us in front of the first written evidence of an Achaemenid satrap in Baktria (Bessos, whose identification behind the Aramaic [יִס] - i. e. bys, Bayāsa - the two scholars do not seem to challenge) engaged in one of those official administrative tours of the territory under his purview which have become familiar thanks to the detailed information provided once again by the Persepolis archive.<sup>16</sup>

Incidentally, this would make it possible to prove based on a primary source the presence, and the widespread territorial diffusion, of characteristic elements of the imperial paradigm in 4<sup>th</sup> century

<sup>12</sup> Wu Xin (2017; 2018; 2020) has forcefully insisted on this point. And all this is to say nothing of the potential, highlighted among others by Briant 2009a and Vacante 2012, that the *ADAB* offer regarding a more adequate understanding of the accounts of the Makedonian campaign provided by classical historiography.

<sup>13</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 76 ff. A2 (= Khalili IA4), l. 2: nḥšpy (and see most recently Lyonnet 2020, 316). On Xenippa see Arr. *Anab.*, 4.22.1, Curt. 8.2.14 and Rapin and Grenet 2001.

<sup>14</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 174 ff. C1 (= Khalili IA21), ll. 1-2 (and see also the editors' remarks at p. 179).

<sup>15</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 259.

<sup>16</sup> Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 135-138. See in particular the remarkable dossier related to Karkiš, an individual of absolute distinction (perhaps even the satrap) within the framework of the imperial administration in Kṛmāna discussed in detail by Wouter Henkelman (2010).

BCE Baktria, since the mere existence of a document such as *ADAB C1*, notably regardless of the identity of [𐤁]𐤂, provides indisputable evidence of an administrative system centered on Balḥ and equipped with several branches across the satrapal territory (Maithanaka, Varnu, probably even Nihšapâia itself further North in Sogdiana).<sup>17</sup> For her part, Rachel Mairs has defended the dating of *ADAB C1* to 330 BCE (thus taking both the rḥšš mlk' of the first line of the parchment and the bys of the second as reference to Bessos). She intriguingly tried to account for the apparently contradictory presence of the double onomastics claiming that the strongman would appear, in one case, as the issuing authority of the document (namely the Great King), while in the second case he would be identified as a local big man (for such he surely was) able to rely on his socio-political dependency networks in the territory he had formerly been appointed (and/or from where he might even have come from) in order to mobilize resources to supply his army faced with the Makedonian invasion.<sup>18</sup> At least for the time being, the controversy seems destined not to be decisively cleared: nevertheless, Henkelman and Folmer's emphasis on the unmistakably Perseopolitan «background noise» of the scenario that emerges from a document like *ADAB C1* is fully justified, all the more so if compared with another, similar parchment (*C4*), whose only distinguishing feature recognizable as not (anymore) belonging to the Achaemenid period is its dating in «year 7 of Alexander, the King».<sup>19</sup> To be conservative in our interpretation of the evidence, the least that can be said is that even in June 324 BCE, with Alexander long gone headed towards India (and several times declared dead somewhere in the Subcontinent), at least in the territory of one of its main oases the satrapal administration still apparently preserved traces of the Achaemenid infrastructures, and this by virtue of the fact that the document testifies to the activities of a local hierarchy reporting to a central authority.<sup>20</sup> This is anything but a foregone conclusion and, in the light of the repeated changes at the top echelons of the Balḥ cadres - a hint at a situation that, despite the apparent Makedonian military supremacy, must have been extremely fluid and not without tensions, whose repercussions on the functioning of the entire system of government in the territories beyond Baktra's direct political

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<sup>17</sup> Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 140. The presence of a «treasurer» (\*ganzabara, gzb[r'], i. e. Aramaic גזברא) within an extremely fragmentary letter of the corpus (Naveh and Shaked 2012, 170 ff. B10 = Khalili IA28), although probably earlier than *ADAB C1* cannot be considered accidental (cf. *Esd*, 1.8, clearly alluding to an administrative and bureaucratic context, as well as the comment by Basello 2013, 67), nor is it possible to assume that such an office was no longer present in the following decades, since realities such as Maithanaka or Varnu, not to mention Ḥulmi (ḥlmy, i. e. Aramaic חלמי, most likely in the oasis of Tāšqurḡān) must have required the presence of such individuals, given their economic and administrative importance within the regional fabric.

<sup>18</sup> Mairs 2016, 2042-2043. Unfortunately, she does not provide comparative evidence from the known dataset in Imperial Aramaic, thus somewhat weakening her suggestive argument.

<sup>19</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 203 C4 (= Khalili IA17).

<sup>20</sup> Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 139. This is most likely true in the case of the major local political center (namely Baktra) for the archive (partially) preserved in the *ADAB* possibly originated there. As for the situation in other places of the satrapy at the time of the *C4* parchment we simply do not know, but one should be cautious before assuming perfect homogeneity between the main nodes of the satrapy and the rural landscape, especially in the aftermath of Alexander's campaign.

control there is every reason to believe were anything but negligible – it is worthy of the greatest consideration. That said, the picture of apparent «calm after the storm» conveyed by *ADAB* C4 raises, on closer reflection, questions no less thorny than those relating to its twin C1, not least because the date of 324 BCE, although defended by the editors, is not certain, and June 330 would be a no less plausible chronology: who is then at the top of the apparatus of which the parchment provides evidence?<sup>21</sup> Artabazos?<sup>22</sup> Kleitos?<sup>23</sup> Amyntas, the son of Nikolaos?<sup>24</sup> And what about Oxyartes, known at least to Curtius *Rufus as praetor Bactrianorum*?<sup>25</sup> Far from being an erudite detail, this question on the contrary bears extremely significant implications in terms, for example, of the satrapy's new geopolitical structure and the role played in this extremely delicate transitional phase by the local élites who had survived the two-year military campaign launched by the Makedonians, which makes for the indispensable (and still in many respect obscure) background for a proper understanding of the dynamics underlying the establishment of Seleukid power in Central Asia.

Limiting oneself to both the chronological horizon of the Achaemenid Empire and the dynamics of the imperial paradigm such as we know them from Persepolis, the abundance of toponyms attested in the *ADAB* provides moreover an exceptional opportunity to attempt to reconstruct, on a macro-regional as well as on a strictly local level, the administrative and infrastructural articulation of the satrapy.<sup>26</sup> Baktra (בַּחְטְרַי, בַּחְטְרַי, by which is probably referred both to the site in the valley of the Balḫ-āb and, pars pro toto, the satrapy) is mentioned in at least two circumstances (*ADAB* A8 and C1), which comes as little to no surprise. More relevant is to note that the term is exactly the same as the one that surfaces several decades earlier in Egyptian documentation (*TADAE* D2.12), which records the presence of Baktrian soldiers at Elephantine. Consequently, this demonstrates that the mobility of men and resources across the entire imperial territory (including the Central Asian satrapies), far from ending or even fading away with the reign of Darius I, remained a constant feature of the political, economic, and administrative life of the Empire, which says a lot about the solidity of the institutions (in the sense in which the concept has been developed in the works of the economist Douglass North) capable of ensuring the regular maintenance of these flows.<sup>27</sup>

Such a claim is supported by the fact that, even at the time of the *ADAB*, it is possible to see how Achaemenid Baktria was an active part of the imperial economic (and therefore sociopolitical)

<sup>21</sup> Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 135, 139 fn. 15.

<sup>22</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 3.29.1. See most recently Heckel 2018 on the political career of this man in the *Lands beyond the Caspian*.

<sup>23</sup> Curt. 8.1.19.

<sup>24</sup> Curt. 8.2.14.

<sup>25</sup> Curt. 9.8.9-10.

<sup>26</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2021, 22 for the full list of place names, sporting some 20 items, which in the context of (not only Achaemenid) Central Asia is truly a remarkable number.

<sup>27</sup> Folmer 2017, 414 with comparison to the Egyptian material and the implications of the detectable correspondences for example in syntax, word choices and *toponomastics*. On North's works and its suitability for ancient historians see Seland 2014 with bibliography.

networks. If the already mentioned record of wine-growing qualities brought, according to *ADAB* C1, from Arachosia (hrḥwny) and - in all probability – from the Herāt region (šstkn) suggest the nodal role played by the satrapy in the whole Central Asian chessboard, the mention (in *ADAB* C6 and C7) of a place called kptwk - כפתוך -, behind the spelling of which could even be hidden the Aramaic rendering of the toponym for Kappadokia, from where specimens of precious fabric (including «purple brocade» and, perhaps, harnesses for horses) are said to have been sent to Bactria, stirs much greater sensation.<sup>28</sup>

At first sight rather peregrine, such an interpretation of the toponym appears however much less outlandish if one takes into account the fame that Asia Minor enjoyed as a center for the manufacture of wool, to the point that, according to Strabo, the precious fabric was part of the tax levy that these areas of the Empire paid to Persepolis.<sup>29</sup> The context of *ADAB* C6 and C7 is not known (dating is absent, and the same goes for any anthroponym that could even potentially provide additional information useful in contextualizing the two documents); but in view of what was argued in chapter 5 about the depth of the transformations brought to the aristocratic lifestyle of the Central Asian élites by the spread of the characteristic «magnificence», according to Jacobs, of the courtly lifestyle promoted by the Empire, it is perhaps not pure speculation to imagine that a particularly wealthy individual residing in Bactria intended to advertise his own distinction (with respect first of all to his peers and, perhaps, even in the face of the satrap himself) through the purchase of sumptuary goods coming from the most exclusive craft centers of the entire Achaemenid world, from which no other than the King was also supplied. It should not be overlooked that the toponymic richness of the *ADAB* finds a non-negligible limitation to its use as historical source even in the light of the difficulty, apart from a few exceptions (Baktra, Ḥulmi, perhaps Varnu - if the identification with the Ἰαπωνός of the *Anabasis*, near today's Qundūz, is valid - the two Sogdian localities of Nīḥšapâia and Kiš), to pinpoint them with certainty on the map.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, the recurrence of these place names in several documents of the corpus (including the correspondence of Aḥvamazdā) on the one hand and, on the other hand, the information available concerning the organization of the Achaemenid road system and the infrastructures deputed to its functioning (in the Central Asian context one thinks only of Gedrosia or the Surxondaryo), allow us to conclude with some degree of confidence that the toponyms mentioned above were only the main centers - along the lines of the situation that can be

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<sup>28</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 22, 217. See Minardi 2020, 18, supporting this interpretation of the *ADAB* evidence and especially King 2021, 355-361, if indeed *ADAB* C6 and C7 records high value per unit items being traded (and taxed) along the infrastructures overseen by Aḥvamazdā's household. Here again the steppe route(s) as one among many different sources of such prestigious items looms large over our understanding of the broader sociopolitical and economic ecosystem of Achaemenid Bactria.

<sup>29</sup> Strab. 15.3.21, Briant 2017a, 264, and King 2021, 73 on luxury textiles as index of élite status. The Persepolis dossier currently under studied by Yazdan Safa'i is likely to add more valuable evidence to the discussion.

<sup>30</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 15. On the place called Ἰαπωνός in Arr. *Anab.*, 4.30.4 see Rollinger 2014c.

reconstructed in the territory of Kyzyltēpe - of a much denser network built by the satrapal administration (again not without recourse to the resources of local élites) South of the Oxus, in an attempt to extend the scope of the extractive capacity of the imperial government apparatus beyond the centers of the oases: which is to say, to name but one example, in the semi-desert steppes of Afġān Baktria, as the mention (*ADAB* A2) of an Artadatana (ʾrtdtnh) located near a «desert» suggests. The latter, because of a reference 1. to horses that apparently belonged to the territory of Artadatana itself and 2. to another place, called Artuki (ʾrtwk, which name also occurs in *ADAB* A6) and with which Artadatana appears to have been somehow related, seems to have functioned as one of those post stations built on the edge of territories with a high presence of pastoral communities so characteristic of the region, with the double intention of 1. securing access to the resources of these territories - similarly to what is known from Kyzyltēpe: and it is not excluded that the supply of horses (and/or of camels) made for the primary reason behind the construction of the site - and 2. extracting profit, through the levy of taxes, from the regulation of transhumance movements across the borders of the major satrapal oases.<sup>31</sup> Not only that: next to Nīḥṣapāia and Kiš, the probable mention of Marakanda (called zrympt byrtʾ in *ADAB* A8, with a likely misspell for zryspy) in Aḥvamazdā's correspondence - on which more shortly below - provides a concrete clue about the (very considerable: some 300 km over remarkably rough terrain) range of action of the highest-ranking Baktrian officers, which still extended in the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century up to Sogdiana. A significant case in point is Bagavanta (the main interlocutor of Aḥvamazdā in *ADAB* A1-A8), who was able, from his headquarters at Ḥulmi, to manage the movement of soldiers and other valuable manpower in the Qashqadaryo valley in order, among other things, to eradicate an invasion of locusts that threatened the local harvest.<sup>32</sup> It makes sense fleetingly note that such evidence leads to an important conclusion: within a few decades of Alexander's invasion of Central Asia, Sogdiana and its neighboring territories still have to be seen part and parcel of the Empire (much to the chagrin of speculation about a general loss of control over the territories North of Derbent in the decades following Xerxes' death), and it is probable that the political influence of Achaemenid officials was not extraneous even to the affairs of Ustrūšana (and consequently to the coveted pastures of the Farġāneḡ valley), if the Amainakana - 'mynkn - mentioned in *ADAB* C4 had to be identified (as it has been argued based on philological arguments) with the Medieval Mīnak.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 82. Compare the tantalizing case of a 733 CE Tāng contract issued at the Turfan (吐魯番) market recording the selling by a Chinese military officer (although of Sogdian origin) of a «frontier» horse to another Sogdian merchant (Skaff 2012, 68-69). In Skaff's words, «the sale of the “frontier horse” is a reminder that Turfan also had characteristics of the borderland periphery with ties to the grasslands», and I would argue that this might be at least one among the possible scenarios behind the *ADAB* tallies and perhaps even *ADAB* A1.

<sup>32</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 94 ff. A4 (= Khalili IA1), l. 3.

<sup>33</sup> See the map published in Naveh and Shaked 2012, 15. Folmer 2017, 414 argues that the place called Zariaspa in the parchments ought to be situated in Baktria, but Rapin 2018a, 263-270 has shown with remarkably compelling arguments

The seemingly disproportionate vastness of the purchasing power of the Baktrian officers is healthily put into perspective (and profitably framed within the regulatory mechanisms of the Achaemenid institutional landscape) when compared with that of Aršāma's chancery, whose letters provide perhaps the most adequate benchmark for an assessment, starting with Aḥvamazdā's correspondence, of crucial aspects of Achaemenid provincial administration such as the functioning of the satrapal bureaucracy or the composition of the officialdom and the tasks assigned to the various individuals comprising the cadres of Achaemenid power in the conquered – and at the time of the *ADAB* already exposed since several decades to the impact of the imperial paradigm - Central Asian territories.<sup>34</sup> From this point of view, particularly enlightening have been, on the one hand, the philological and paleographical studies carried out on the corpus by Jan Tavernier and Margaretha Folmer; on the other hand, Tuplin's prosopographical investigation devoted to the titling of the officers mentioned in the *ADAB* parchments. The simple comparison between the proemial formulas used by Aḥvamazdā in Baktria and, some decades earlier, Aršāma in Egypt, allows in fact to suggest that, in the case of *ADAB* A1-A8, we are dealing with official letters, probably exchanged between two individuals both of extremely high rank, but in turn separated by a clear hierarchy.<sup>35</sup> The laconism of the proemial greetings, together with 1. the imperative tone, 2. the abundance of reprimands and 3. the not sporadic presence of (not even too concealed) threats dispel any doubt about Bagavanta's subordination to Aḥvamazdā, who, by virtue both of the personnel he seems to have at his disposal and, above all, of the properties over which he appears to wield some form of power (or being able to *claim* it), probably held the office of satrap in Baktria, since the entire surviving correspondence gives the impression of having been issued, or at least somehow processed, by his chancellery.<sup>36</sup> The latter must have been an extremely sophisticated institution, which can be guessed at only by virtue of the extent of the territory it was in charge of. In at least one case (*ADAB* A6), the mention of a ppyd', a title for a clerk attested at two different places (Dastakani and Vahumati, of which little is known) and which occurs in the very same form in a letter of Aršāma (*ALBL* A6.3, as a subordinate of the Achaemenid prince) as well as in the biblical *Book of Esther* (2.3) in fact leaves (relatively) little doubt as to the functional homology of Aḥvamazdā and Aršāma.<sup>37</sup>

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that the toponym must be referring to the major Achaemenid center in Sogdiana after the reshaping of the local topography of power to the disadvantage of Kōktēpe in the years following the conquest of the lands beyond the Oxus (see on this issue also Rapin 2017b).

<sup>34</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 23-26.

<sup>35</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 22-27, Folmer 2017, 442-445.

<sup>36</sup> King 2021, 315-326 on Aḥvamazdā's house and the question of whom, or where, do the *ADAB* letters actually belong. See Schmitt 2020 and Luther 2021, 137 for a different spelling of the official's name (as \*Haxā-mazdā-) which however does not seem to have gained traction in current scholarship.

<sup>37</sup> See on A6.3 most recently the text edition and extensive commentary in Tuplin and Ma 2020 I, 22-23, 61-87.

To these preliminary remarks, others can be added: the presence of palimpsests within the corpus (*ADAB* A2 is for example particularly important, since it is quite well preserved) allows some important deductions regarding – among other things – 1. the organization of the satrapal chancellery of Baktria at this chronological height, 2. the career patterns of the officers active in it and 3. perhaps even their social background. Analogously to the 'Aḥpepi of *ALBL* A6.8, in fact, whose name suggests if not an origin, at least rather close ties to Egyptian networks, in the same way the Daizāka repeatedly featuring within Aḥvamazdā's correspondence may have been recruited by the Persian administration from an élite milieu of Baktrian society, since even in the case of this anthroponym, in Folmer's words, «a Bactrian or other regional element» is recognizable, which suggests «that local people could be appointed to these positions».<sup>38</sup> In one case as in the other, it should be noted, the posts held by the two individuals (that of spr) must have been rather high up in the hierarchical ladder. The combined analysis of the text of *ADAB* A2 and of its palimpsest, in fact, suggests that – while fulfilling his role as spr, Daizāka had access to the archives of an individual of Aḥvamazdā's latitude, and it is even possible that he had the freedom to choose which documents coming from his archive it was necessary to preserve and which (as in the case of the palimpsest of *ADAB* A2, originally an official letter coming in drafted form from Aḥvamazdā's environment) could be reused in order not to waste precious writing material. In other words, the Baktrian archival material provides concrete evidence of the fact that opportunities for careers that were anything but subordinate within the political-administrative framework of the Empire were largely within the locals' reach, a fact to be taken into account when suggesting that «adversarial relationships» between the representatives of Achaemenid power and the aristocrats of Central Asia were the norm, and this by virtue of the fact that both had everything to gain from mutual (which means: profitable for both parties) understanding and cooperation.<sup>39</sup> Further considerations might be added. The linguistic and stylistic evaluation of Aḥvamazdā's correspondence offers interesting insights into both the diachronic evolution of bureaucratic protocols within the Achaemenid Empire (a phenomenon at least partly undoubtedly dictated by the geographical, not to mention linguistic, differences between the individual satrapies, which must have to some extent thwarted the normalizing ambitions spreading from Persepolis) as much as the latter's ability to oppose, to similar potentially disruptive factors - or at least harmful to

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<sup>38</sup> Folmer 2017, 430 for the analysis of this document, which is accepted and followed here. On A6.8 compare Tuplin and Ma 2020 I, 32-33, 131-146.

<sup>39</sup> Folmer 2017, 429, Tuplin 2017a, 636. King 2021, 318-319 argues instead that the letters belonged to Bagavanta's archive, because in two documents (A9 and A10) Aḥvamazdā is not mentioned, and they pertain exclusively to the officer in Ḥulmi; the same goes, he suggests, for the tally sticks. See most recently Lemaire 2022 on A9, also pleading for the whole lot as having been part of Bagavanta's archive. The «careless» nature of the writing (Naveh and Shaked 2012, 16) he interprets in terms of «power differential» (King 2021, 318).



the efficiency of the system - a regulatory model of enormous influence, actively supported through the recruitment and training (in loco) of specialized personnel.

If in fact the absence of the addressee on the external side of Aḥvamazdā's letters - a feature on the contrary present in a much more systematic way in the corpus originating from Aršāma's bureaucratic environment - suggests a simplification of administrative procedures within the Baktrian context, the presence of the Aramaic preposition 'l (as opposed to the Old Aramaic 'l, progressively replaced in Achaemenid documentation throughout imperial history) on the contrary represents an exceptional linguistic piece of evidence, since it attests to the familiarity of the 4<sup>th</sup>-century Baktrian chancery with (considerably) older epistolary traditions hitherto known only in the Western half of the Empire (for example in Egypt).<sup>40</sup> From this it can be deduced, at the very least, the widespread presence in Central Asia of scribal schools devoted to the training of administrative personnel, which, moreover, must have been established in Baktria from a rather high date, since the graphic conservatism recognized by Folmer would otherwise be inexplicable.<sup>41</sup> We are therefore faced, as one may have noticed, with a goldmine of information the systematic exploitation of which is only just beginning. For the purposes of this chapter, there is perhaps one more characteristic of the *ADAB* that deserves to be underlined, and that is the repeated mention of at least 14 different titles of officers involved in the satrapal government, whose relationships were apparently regulated according to an extremely complex system the patterns of which, by virtue of the laconism of the documents themselves (a fact which is indeed not at all surprising, since archives, by definition, are a *closed* system, whose grammar, syntax, and vocabulary is known to the users and therefore does *not* need to be detailed), are by no means easy to make sense of.<sup>42</sup> Recently, Christopher Tuplin has embarked on a sophisticated comparative exercise in an attempt to ascertain whether, and to what extent, a comparison between the terminology employed in the classical sources on the one hand and, on the other, that attested in the Aramaic sources (from the *Old Testament* to the Aršāma correspondence to the Elephantine papyri and the *ADAB* themselves) to designate what with an acceptable level of confidence can be recognized as official positions within the imperial political and administrative framework allows one to answer three fundamental questions, which the scholar summarizes as follows: «(1) do official titles signify the same thing in different times or places? (2) Do different titles signify the same thing in different times or places (3) Are there coherent hierarchies or stratifications of offices that recur in different times or places?»<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Folmer 2017, 430 and now the remarks in Gzella 2020b, 953.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. moreover on this topic Tavernier 2017a, 355-371.

<sup>42</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 24, Tuplin 2017a, 660-669 provides a very astute example of deciphering such an articulation of Achaemenid administrative procedures in Baktria as attested by the *ADAB*.

<sup>43</sup> Tuplin 2017a, 633.

In each of the three cases, the conclusions that can be reached are not unambiguous. A few examples will help to get an idea of the issues at stake (in itself a clear reflection of the sophistication of the Persian provincial administration, which had to ensure a minimum level of uniformity in its structures while adapting to very different socio-political contexts, to say nothing of the cultural environments of the satrapies it attempted to rule).

Let us then start from point 1 investigated by Tuplin. Particularly conspicuous, because of the frequency of the attestations, is the case of the Micrasiatic and, more broadly, Aegean «hyparchs» (associated with the figure of a satrap - from Pharnabazos to Ariobarzanes and Tissaphernes, but it should be noted that in some cases, for example in a fragment of Ephoros, the term «satrap» is used with a certain ease to identify an office subordinate to individuals as prominent as those previously mentioned) since, despite the terminological analogy, it is not easy to establish 1. if and 2. to what extent their role is comparable to that of the Baktrian ὑπαρχοι, with their contingents of several thousand cavalrymen.<sup>44</sup> This - compelling - difficulty is caused by the fact that, among other things, we do not have the crucial information regarding the extent of the territory entrusted to *each* of these individuals in Central Asia, and if we except the few names reported by the (Graeco-Roman) sources, their actual number is also unknown.<sup>45</sup> In at least one case (*ADAB* A2), however, it is possible to assume that the Baktrian b'lt'm (an office known in Akkadian as bēl tēmi and whose holder had scribal functions, according to at least one passage in the *Book of Ezra*) did not hold an appointment too different from their Egyptian namesakes, and the same can perhaps be deduced in the case of the ppyd' attested in *ADAB* A6 as well as in the correspondence of Aršāma, from which the term emerges as indicating an attendant to the landed properties of the satrap.<sup>46</sup> As for point 2, except in cases where two different titles (as it happens for Choriēnes, called both hyparch and satrap by Alexander's historians) are attributed to the same person, our (already meager) certainties even further – and drastically - decrease.<sup>47</sup> Let us limit ourselves here to one Baktrian case. It is possible to argue that the rab ḥayla recorded at Syene and Elephantine (which the classical sources define respectively as φρούραρχος in Greek and as *custos regiae pecuniae* in Latin) oversaw the supervision of the collection of the fiscal levy in the territory under his purview. This hypothesis, which can be confidently supported by the available evidence, would allow to compare him, on the one hand, both to the *gzb[r']* mentioned in the *Old Testament* (again by Ezra), by the *ADAB*, and in the documentation from Persepolis as well as, on the other hand, to the \**uvabara/yawabara* (ywbr', יוּבְרָא i. e. something like the «superintendent [or supplier] of barley») featuring in one of the provisions' lists among the

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<sup>44</sup> Most recently on the ὑπαρχοι in the (Eastern) satrapies see e. g. Matarese 2021, 96 with literature.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. e. g. Curt. 7.6.14-15.

<sup>46</sup> *Esd.* 4.8 with King 2021, 155-175. On the Egyptian documentation see for example *TADAE* A6.2 as well as *ALBL* II A6.9 (text, translation, and extensive commentary in Tuplin and Ma 2020 I, 34-35, 147-169).

<sup>47</sup> Tuplin 2017a, 641. On Choriēnes see Arr. *Anab.*, 4.21.6-10, *Epit. Mett.*, 28 and Vacante 2012, 97 ff.

Baktrian parchments (*ADAB C4*).<sup>48</sup> Equally complex is the picture that surfaces if one attempts to answer the third of the questions raised by Tuplin: in his words, in fact, «the evidence for hierarchy in any one place essentially must come either from narratives that presuppose or express inter-relationships [...] or from formal listings of three or more officials that may enshrine a pecking order».<sup>49</sup> *ADAB C4* and, above all, the correspondence of Ahvamazdā seem to offer the most abundant material for this purpose, but even in such a case the pitfalls are not lacking: if on the one hand not all the individuals mentioned in the first document can be coherently ordered within a strict administrative hierarchy, *ADAB A1-A8* present for their part an entirely similar problem, to which are added 1. frequent cases of homonymy in which it is not easy to distinguish whether one is dealing with two distinct individuals or not, and 2. the tendency to withhold the name of the office (if there ever was one) of some of the individuals who are indeed recorded in the letters.

This last feature of the documentation under scrutiny here, which Tuplin acutely defines as «the rhetoric of the absence of titulature», brings to the forefront the question, of fundamental importance, regarding the relationships (not only of an institutional nature) existing among the people active within the teeming and complex world of the *ADAB*, some of whom, as we shall see in the second part of this chapter, although they appear to be invested with assignments that are anything but marginal, can at the same time be described as «cadres» (i. e. embedded into a hierarchical and formal manner within the administrative apparatus of the satrapy) only in a rather imperfect way.<sup>50</sup> Appointment and power are not in fact (at least not entirely) co-extensive categories, and this is all the more so in a world in which, to take up Tuplin's remarks once again, the importance of certain individuals was so well known as to make reference to the function by virtue of which they acted in a certain way entirely superfluous. Suffice it to think of certain episodes, reported for example by Xenophon, in which representatives of the Achaemenid power theoretically subordinate to the satrap were in fact able to act against the latter's interests by virtue of a privileged relationship, for example, with the Great King himself.<sup>51</sup> This last remark is of particular importance against the background of the world portrayed in the *ADAB* and especially, as this chapter aims to show, if the goal is to

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<sup>48</sup> Tuplin 2017a, 629 for the argument summarized here, with further evidence from Egypt and an extensive comparison with the literary evidence in Greek and Latin of similar, or arguably comparable offices. On the subject of the *custos regiae pecuniae* see also Nep. *Dat.*, 5 and Curt. 5.5.3: in the latter case, the mention of an individual (Tiridates) holding this office at Persepolis may call to mind the Arachosian treasurers attested in the *ARTP*.

<sup>49</sup> Tuplin 2017a, 644. On the Persepolitan background (and elasticity) of the system described, for example, in *ADAB C4* see Garrison and Henkelman 2020, 254-256: worth mentioning is the fact that, as the two scholars remark, these hierarchies were by no means static, and in Baktria as well as in the heartland we ought to keep in mind that career paths were open to officers (thus including local employees) coming from a wider background than both those of the ethno-classe dominante and of the oases.

<sup>50</sup> Tuplin 2017a, 644 (emphasis is in the original), but see however, in the same contribution, to which much of the analysis carried out here is considerably indebted, pp. 618-620. Note moreover the two (rather different) positions of Shahbazi 1997 and Briant 2002, 355-356.

<sup>51</sup> As it is the case, to mention but two easily accessible examples, Xen. *Anab.*, 1.6.6 and Xen. *Oec.*, 4.

investigate, next to the aspects of strict bureaucratic-administrative relevance of Aḥvamazdā's correspondence, the dynamics of sociopolitical relations that emerge from it and that through it this very prominent holder of the imperial power tried, not always successfully, to influence. Even to a rather superficial reading of the documentation, in fact, it appears quite clear the effort of the Achaemenid officer and his chancellery to rationalize in an institutional way (that is: to insert in a coherent way within the structures of the imperial paradigm) a system of clientele and personal relationships which was extremely intricate, fluid and, perhaps what counts the most, not entirely dependent from the dynamics of sociopolitical power dictated by the very same imperial paradigm: which means, they were extremely hard to discipline, to say nothing to eradicate. By virtue of the apparent inability (and perhaps, for the reasons discussed above, also in the absence of an effective political will in this sense) to dismantle these networks at their roots, both Aḥvamazdā as well as his superiors appointed at Persepolis are therefore likely to have opted for the most functional solution, that is, to negotiate a terrain of mutual intelligence and cooperation with the individuals belonging to these networks which were at the same time (geographically) internal to the cadres of the satrapy and yet (socio-politically) not entirely subordinate to them, with the dual intent of using them to the advantage of imperial needs and to keep their representatives as much as possible under control.<sup>52</sup>

### 1.2. *Aramaic Documents from Ancient Bactria*. A First Assessment and a Working Hypothesis

Against the backdrop of the discussion developed so far, it seems possible to conclude that, at the current state of research, what differentiates the *ADAB* from all the primary sources known until now about Achaemenid Central Asia is the fact that these documents allow us to grasp, at the same time, both the complexity and the incredible efficiency of the system of government developed over the decades by the Persian imperial administration in Bactria and, importantly, some of its structural weaknesses (what Briant's «dynamics of the contradiction»)<sup>53</sup>. The most evident, as well as potentially the most destructive among them - and which against the background of Aḥvamazdā's correspondence this chapter aims to study in more detail - must probably be identified in the (at least) dual nature of most of the individuals that the *ADAB* record as depositaries (in various capacities or, as we have said, even in the explicit absence of a title hinting to this) of a power position both within the Baktrian society and in the Persian imperial ranks. From the London parchments, such notables

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<sup>52</sup> A useful term of comparison is offered by the situation described in *Ezd.*, 4.8-16. From the *ADAB* it is in fact clear that an individual like Aḥvamazdā, perhaps even in his dual function of satrap and influential politician in the local hierarchies of power by virtue of his origins, had at his disposal a complex network of officers under his direct dependence, although they were stationed in territories under the jurisdiction of Bagavanta, the latter in turn endowed with articulated, and far from irrelevant, relationships: see Naveh and Shaked 2012, 23.

<sup>53</sup> Briant 2002, 331.

emerge in fact at the same time as members of the imperial élite and as local strongmen (which also means that they were charged with responsibility towards a given «selectorate») whose interests did not necessarily overlap, neither always nor fully, with those 1. of the Great King, 2. of the satrap, 3. of the other satrapal cadres (whether Persian or not) and finally 4. of those who, for different reasons, were excluded from those imperial networks or, a possibility not to be underestimated, were cut off as a result of more or less violent aftershocks: think of the case of an individual like Dādêrșiš at the dawn of the Achaemenid imperial trajectory in Central Asia or, at its conclusion, of a figure such as Oxyartes (and in Seleukid times of an Euthydemos).<sup>54</sup> It will not be out of place, having come this far, to take up some insightful remarks voiced already years ago by Sebastian Stride, who has rightly pointed out that the most macroscopic consequence of the ecological, socio-economic and, consequently, political complexity of a territory such as that of Bactria lies precisely in the fact that the stability of a given power structure can never be considered as being guaranteed a priori. The reason for this, in his words, is to be found in the fact that, in a regime of high competition for access to (natural as well as ideological) resources of rather limited availability, «a symbiotic relationship can easily degenerate into conflict».<sup>55</sup> As we approach the *Last Days* of Achaemenid hegemony in Central Asia on the diachronic axis of our discussion, it seemed appropriate to devote the remainder of this chapter to an analysis of the *ADAB* with the precise aim of illustrating, based on concrete examples pertaining to the by now hopefully familiar dialectical relationship between local context and imperial («global») framework, both the symbiotic aspects of this relationship (which throughout the work we have tried to demonstrate to be 1. long-standing, 2. very close and 3. bidirectional) between the Persian government apparatus and the local élites - including, of course, the steppe worlds and their inhabitants - i. e. the two driving factors of the historical development of Baktrian society in the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE - as well as potential nodes of conflict within

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<sup>54</sup> Decades ago, Vogelsang 1992a, 313-315 had postulated the existence, in the Achaemenid Eastern satrapies, of an administrative hierarchy articulated on at least four distinct, but communicating and often interfering, levels of control: at the top, of course, the King, followed by the plenipotentiary in the conquered territories (the satraps), the local élites and the humblest population strata. The *ADAB* seem, at the same time, to provide substance to (and further complicate) this already crowded picture. To this it is perhaps necessary to add, at least based on the little information available, that the organization of power in the Irānian Plateau and Central Asia during the Seleukid period presents structural similarities with the scenario outlined so far, a fact which, especially by virtue 1. of the long-lasting effects of Alexander's conquest and 2. of the otherwise radical discontinuity imposed by the new dynasty on *other* aspects of its imperial project (to say nothing of the Achaemenid precedent, think only of the topography of power: Canepa 2015; 2017; 2020) requires to be highlighted with some force: cf. Ramsey 2009, 222-235. On Euthydemos cfr. Strootman 2020c, 23 as well as, against the background of the current available numismatic evidence, Glenn 2020b, 65-86. Most recently on Bactria under Seleukid rule note Wünsch 2022, 287-304.

<sup>55</sup> Stride 2005 I, 439. A consideration of this kind acquires further heuristic capacity in the present context of investigation if one considers, against the grain of Michael Mann's model (1986, 14) the relationship between the Achaemenid Empire and the members of the Baktrian elite in terms of a symmetrical alliance or, in the words of the scholar, of an informal [«loose»] confederation of stratified alliances. The stability of such a system, in fact, could only be guaranteed in the case in which the holder of distributive power (in this case: the Persian administration) proved capable of 1. guaranteeing internal security and 2. ensuring substantial income in economic terms (and of sociopolitical prestige) to the other members of the alliance.

this very same system. To put it in only slightly different terms, the following pages will concomitantly attempt a short but insightful history of the reach of Achaemenid imperial power (as mainly embodied by its paradigm) in ancient Central Asia and of its limits in the land of the Afġāns.



**Map 7.1. If My Lord Aġvamazdā Deems it Appropriate. Mapping the ADAB. © Peter Palm**

Downplayed, if not eliminated, not least by virtue of the mutual gains resulting from the prosperity – at the same time cause and effect of political stability - of the entire satrapy ensured by the position enjoyed by within the Empire’s structure and system, the disruptive forces inherent in the potential contradictions between the interests (in principle capable of conflicting in the same person, as shown emblematically by an individual such as Bagavanta) of the Achaemenid administration on the one hand and the Baktrian élite on the other, would be detonated in all its force by the invasion of Alexander. The reasons for this, in the light of Stride’s observations, are relatively easy to understand. The two years of fierce military campaign that saw the Makedonians as protagonists from one end of the satrapy to the other should in fact be considered responsible for the triggering of more than one of the phenomena identified by the archaeologist as fatally damaging - in the absence of immediate and radical countermeasures (which clearly appear not to have been available at the time) - of the

delicate (despite its incredibly well-oiled mechanisms) balance of power relations during the entire history of pre-modern Baktria: a failed harvest, political instability and consequent social crisis, the forced - and inadequately planned - movement of a substantial portion of the local population. Before delving further into the meanders of Aḥvamazdā's archives, however, it is necessary to say a few more words about the 18 wooden fragments that, together with the most spectacular parchments, ought to be considered as an integral part of the *ADAB* evidence. It is perhaps legitimate to maintain that it is precisely by following what Wouter Henkelman and Margaretha Folmer have suggestively called «the trail of the tally» that it becomes in fact possible to observe at work in all its sophisticated complexity that symbiosis between different (sociopolitical, economic, and much more) interests on the one hand and mētīc skills on the other which in the pages of this work it has been attempted to show represented the trait that arguably is both more contextually «situated» (which means, inevitably, historically embedded, and therefore ephemeral) and surprisingly «universal» (in its recursiveness through time and space) of this - apparently - so distant and «alien» region of Eurasia and to which it probably largely owes its considerable charm.<sup>56</sup>

## 2. «With Bagayaza from Gauza. In the year 3 of Darius, the King ». Crediting the Empire in Baktria

### 2.1. Anatomy of an invoice

The 18 tally sticks which make up section «D» of the *ADAB* are wooden fragments of variable length (7.5 cm the shortest, *ADAB* D18, 25.3 cm the longest, *ADAB* D4) making for the surviving half of an original object of roughly cylindrical shape. In the flat part, the result of the splitting, they bear a short inscription, which in some cases also continues on the concave part of the stick (the outside), from which the bark has been carefully removed. The style of the inscriptions is uniform. With the sole exception of *ADAB* D1 and D2, to which we shall soon return, and which add (little, but decisive) further information – as well as *ADAB* D18 - the formula that is consistently repeated on each document runs as follows: «With [PN 1] from [PN 2]. In the third year of Darius, the King».<sup>57</sup> In the case of D18, both the date and the information about the individual from whom the wooden fragment «comes» (mn, or the Aramaic 𐤌) are absent, but it is worth noting right from the start here, for the reasons discussed below, that this preposition is not attested in four other cases (*ADAB* D7, D8, D10, D11 and D13), where instead the other preposition, which refers to the «possession» ( 'm, or the

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<sup>56</sup> Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 201 ff.

<sup>57</sup> See for example Naveh and Shaked 2012, 255 ff. D16 (= Khalili T16): «'m npwzt mn 'prwn bšnt drywhwš mlk'», which can be translated as «With Nāfavazāta. From Uparivana. In the year 3 of Darius, the King».

Aramaic 𐤒𐤕 which can be translated in English as «with» or «pertaining to») occurs instead systematically throughout the entire corpus, from which it is possible to deduce a different relevance of the two pieces of information, since one could be omitted, while the other, apparently, was held to be indispensable.<sup>58</sup> On one side of the tallies (in some cases, e. g. *ADAB* D1 and D3, it is the upper side, while in others, e. g. *ADAB* D4 and D11, it is the lower side) it is possible to recognize different types of engravings, which can occur either in isolation or in combination within the same document, as is the case for example of *ADAB* D11. In the *editio princeps*, Naveh and Shaked had identified three of them, but following a new in-depth study of the published evidence, Henkelman and Folmer recognized a fourth; such notches can in fact be divided, respectively, in 1. superficial and vertical engravings, without the removal of wooden material; 2. deeper incisions, with an additional cut to remove a small portion of wood; 3. superficial incisions, but this time oblique, which have preserved the object intact and finally 4. deeper incisions, also oblique and followed by the removal of a small portion of wood.<sup>59</sup> To these preliminary observations, it is possible to add a few more.<sup>60</sup>

First: the *uniformity* of the entire dataset, both in terms of the vocabulary used and of the accuracy with which the engravings were made as well as, finally, with regards to the coherence of their orientation with respect to the tallies' shape and to the writing direction, are all aspects that are anything but obvious. In fact, taken together they suggest, on the one hand, an expert hand behind the production of these objects; on the other hand (and consequently), the fact that they belonged to an official context, since their production implies the systematic use of a rather complex protocol (of which - as observed by Henkelman - parallels are known for example in 12<sup>th</sup> century England, as attested by the *Dialogus de saccario* compiled around 1176 by the royal treasurer Richard fitzNigel).<sup>61</sup> Secondly, a careful scrutiny of the evidence shows that there is a proportional relationship between the length of the single sticks and the number of engravings made on each one among those published by Naveh and Shaked: far from being a trivial observation, this fact - which fits very well with the description to be found in the *Dialogus* and pertaining to the same procedure - implies that whoever made the notches knew *in advance* how many of them were necessary, a further indication (as remarked by Henkelman and Folmer) of the bureaucratic and protocollary function of

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<sup>58</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 31, Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 181.

<sup>59</sup> Compare Naveh and Shaked 2012, 231 on the one hand and, on the other, Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 161. As will be seen, this monumental (over 100 very dense pages) study to the best of my knowledge represents the most up-to-date and full of implications analysis of this section of the *ADAB*: the following pages owe a great deal to the considerations developed by the two scholars. Compare Morris 2021b, 483 for an assessment of the impact of this (likely Achaemenid-developed) device on later period Central Asian imperial economies.

<sup>60</sup> This section follows and summarizes the insights provided by Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 158-193, on which the present discussion is heavily reliant, while at the same time trying to fit the scholars' discussion of the tallies in the broader picture of the former chapters and of the sections to follow in the present one.

<sup>61</sup> Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 155-157, whose interpretation of the evidence to be drawn from this rather overlooked source is followed here.



the tallies.<sup>62</sup> Third: despite the fact that the date «in the year 3 of Darius, the King» attests to the fact that this section of the *ADAB* also undoubtedly belonged to the political-administrative horizon of (late) Achaemenid Baktria, about half (8 out of a total of 17) of the names recorded in the tallies cannot be traced back to an Irānian etymology, and it is therefore possible that they belonged to individuals with different linguistic and/or socio-cultural backgrounds.<sup>63</sup> In light of the considerations advanced in the preceding pages about the complexity of the Baktrian anthropic landscape, after all, such a conclusion should not come as too surprising. However, even this simple linguistic detail should not be underestimated, as it allows us to understand the breadth of the socio-economic context within which the Achaemenid satrapal bureaucracy in Baktria was enmeshed. Incidentally, such a conclusion is in line with the hypothesis put forward in the previous chapter regarding the mechanisms underlying the functioning of a site like Kyzyltēpe which, although firmly anchored within the institutional landscape of the Achaemenid-ruled Surxondaryo valley, nevertheless had close relations with a much wider geographical - and therefore plausibly socio-cultural - horizon. Given these premises, it is convenient to briefly recapitulate here the main interpretative suggestions that have been put forward concerning (the function of) the Baktrian tallies, since an in-depth discussion of this precious corpus allows both to test on a textual basis - and to enrich with further details and implications - some of the central arguments of this study concerning both the profile of the sociopolitical actors present on the Achaemenid Central Asian stage and the dynamics regulating the reciprocal interactions between the latter and the former.<sup>64</sup>

### 2.1.1. *Reading the Signs: Attempting an Interpretation*

In the introductory section to their 2012 edition, Naveh and Shaked were quick to note that, based on comparison with similar usages within surviving testimonies of the Aramaic language (e. g., the biblical *Book of Tobit*), the presence of a preposition such as 𐤎𐤅 («with») preceding a person's name suggests that, even in the case of the *ADAB*, the relevant linguistic context is that of the economic lexicon of borrowing.<sup>65</sup> Accordingly, the 18 tallies would testify to an accounting system designed to keep track of «loans or deposits» of a given asset between two parties.<sup>66</sup> Starting from these considerations, the two authors moved on in reconstructing a scenario of the following kind: each of

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<sup>62</sup> Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 170.

<sup>63</sup> See Naveh and Shaked 2012, 57-60 for a thorough list of the personal names attested in the *ADAB* as well as Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 181, 191. This is likely not to have been just the case of 4<sup>th</sup> century Baktria. To speak an Eastern Irānian language, otherwise stated, was *not* a precondition for being a Baktrian (or a Sogdian, or a Chorasmian).

<sup>64</sup> As per the investigation of the evidence carried out in Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 179-193.

<sup>65</sup> Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 223-229 for full treatment of the subject.

<sup>66</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 31-32.

the individuals whose name follows the preposition  $\text{𐎠𐎵}$  would have contracted a debt with the second individual, whose name in this case is preceded (although - as mentioned - in a non-systematic way), by the preposition  $\text{𐎠𐎫}$ , which in this case would indicate the authority issuing the loan or the payment of the good which originated the recorded transaction, whose quantity would then be indicated by the notches engraved on each tally.<sup>67</sup> Because of the fact 1. that the dating according to the royal year of Darius (III) implies that we are dealing with a document of an official nature, similar to the lists of supply of *ADAB* section «C», which are also dated according to a dynastic calendar, and 2. that the onomastics of those who appear as the authority issuing the tallies (i. e. the creditors) is extremely reduced (four names in total: Abudi in six cases plus one, D11, in which he appears next to a certain Paritana, Gauza in another six and Uparivana in the remaining three), Naveh and Shaked suggested that, given the analogy with what is known from Persepolis, the object of the transactions recorded in the tallies had also in this case to be rations, in liquids or solids (for example in flour), intended for the kurtaš or other personnel enlisted within the administrative apparatus of the satrapy.

Consequently, Abudi, Gauza, Paritana, and Uparivana would be imperial officials covering a role (their title is not specified in the tallies) similar, for example, to the \*upadīta or the \*piθfakāna recorded in *ADAB* C4, i. e. a sort of «dispatcher» in charge of supervising the food supplies distributed in the different satrapal warehouses responsible for feeding the workforce needed, for example, to maintain the Baktrian road system: a task which, as attested by several sources, not least the pseudo-Aristotelian treatise known as *Oeconomicus*, was the responsibility of the satrap and of his government apparatus.<sup>68</sup> As for the debt, according to the two scholars' interpretation, it would consist in the amount of the single rations distributed by the treasury to the workers or soldiers (one may think of the expedition sent by Bagavanta to eradicate the locusts in Sogdiana). The imperial administration, according to this model, would have therefore anticipated the necessary amount by subtracting it from the salary of each individual to whom the commodity dealt with in the transaction was finally given. Such salary, Naveh and Shaked further argue, was probably calculated on an annual basis, as suggested by the dating (in fact organized according to a yearly pattern) of the single sticks. Following such an assessment of the evidence, the two scholars conclude that the tallies had to be issued from year to year by the competent (satrapal) authority.<sup>69</sup> In the event that further disbursements became necessary, so continues the argument of the *ADAB* editors, the two halves would be reunited in the presence of the proper officers, and further notches would have been added to the margin of both fragments, in order to prevent any attempt at fraud, since neither party involved could add, or attempt to remove, the markers attesting the credit/debit in the absence of the other half

<sup>67</sup> Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 140-142.

<sup>68</sup> Arist. [*Oec.*], 2.2.38. Cf. Engels 1978, 76, Briant 2002, 451-456; 2018b, 65 as well as Henkelman 2018a, 228.

<sup>69</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 32.

without the forgery immediately coming to light. Not least by virtue of the much greater research attention devoted since the very first year of their publication to the documents on parchment, Naveh and Shaked's interpretation of *ADAB* D1-D18 became, and until very recently remained, the standard one without undergoing further discussion. However, this reconstruction is actually less solid than one might at first glance believe.

The reasons for such skepticism have been discussed in detail by Wouter Henkelman and Margaretha Folmer in an article exemplary for both philological expertise and exegetical depth.<sup>70</sup> Among the many reasons that make the contribution of the two scholars a milestone in the economic and social history of an instrument such as the one to which the Baktrian corpus bears witness, there is undoubtedly the impressive range of ethnographic parallels (from England to the Kievan Rus' and Norway in the Medieval period - around the 12<sup>th</sup> century - up to Switzerland and Wallakia in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, passing through 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE Sparta, late (and post-)Sāsānid Central Asia down to the Tarim basin), which endows the documentation belonging to the Achaemenid period with an entirely new social and economic context, whose fundamental contours need to be summarized here in order to proceed further in the discussion of the implication of the evidence provided by the tallies for the purposes of the present study.<sup>71</sup> 1. The eminently institutional feature of the tallies, testified not least by the quality of their manufacture - and also recognized by Naveh and Shaked - needs to be stressed with particular emphasis in the light of what it is known about the functioning of the Persepolitan bureaucracy, whose protocols it is quite plausible also regulated the production - and the use - of the Baktrian sticks (as can be guessed, among other things, from the fact that it is always the same half of the tallies that was preserved by the administration).<sup>72</sup> As already Henkelman did not fail to point out, the *Dialogus de saccario* offers in fact a clear indication of fitzNigel's awareness of the power that the use of such instruments conferred on him, since he acted (and was perceived by others as such) as a representative of the ruler, whose possession of the lands and resources involved in the transaction was symbolized by the apparently very modest wooden fragments, the delivery of which to the contracting parties may even have taken place within a ceremonial context. 2. Even more important is the fact that, against the background of the evidence provided by the ethnographic comparisons, although the presence of tallies is attested in the most disparate circumstances, it is nevertheless difficult to dispute that the common denominator for their implementation was usually a situation which can be generally described as involving the issue of some kind of credit.<sup>73</sup> Among the various options available for imagining an appropriate context for the tallies' employment are the

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<sup>70</sup> Henkelman and Folmer 2016; but see also a short but very accurate summary of the general conclusions reached by the two scholars in Henkelman 2018a pp. 245-247.

<sup>71</sup> Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 201-222.

<sup>72</sup> Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 174-177.

<sup>73</sup> Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 141-142. See also Naveh and Shaked 2012, 111.

deferred payment of a salary or a purchase (or delivery), the advanced fulfillment of tax obligations or, a possibility that needs to be kept in mind for reasons that will become clear shortly, as an invoice recording a loan (usually in silver).<sup>74</sup>

Equally remarkable, because it provides a not insignificant argument against the interpretative framework suggested by Naveh and Shaked, is the fact that, from Medieval Bryggen to 8<sup>th</sup> century CE Panḡikant, there is no evidence of the use of the tallies (and especially of those split in two halves, such as *ADAB* D1-D18) as receipts issued against the delivery of food rations, which perhaps, if one thinks of the functioning of the Persepolis administration, is surprising only to a certain extent since, for example, there would have been no need on the part of the beneficiaries of the rations themselves to keep a copy of the transaction.<sup>75</sup> The objection is further strengthened, as Henkelman and Folmer have pointed out, by the fact that, from the point of view of a provisioning system similar to that attested at Persepolis (and, especially, by documents such as *ADAB* C1 or C4), the notation system of the tallies appears remarkably inconsistent.<sup>76</sup> *ADAB* D1-D18, in fact, do not show any trace of a decimal-notation system, as one would expect if indeed dealing with issues of flour or similar goods, but instead they bear witness for a rather complicated mixed system, which sometimes followed a decimal, sometimes a sexagesimal basis, and for which the closest parallel in the Persepolis archives comes from the records of payments in cash (usually in silver). This is a further clue supporting an interpretation of the tallies within a financial context, which would fit remarkably well with what is known from the ethnographic evidence spanning several centuries and the most disparate sociocultural contexts.<sup>77</sup> This having been said, the probably decisive argument against the hypothesis according to which the object of the transactions recorded in our corpus were rations of flour or other foodstuffs consists in the fact that, against the background of the quantities of solids or liquids assigned by the imperial administration to its employees (even to the wealthiest among them), the figures that would emerge from the tallies would not find comparable examples in the entire documentation known so far.<sup>78</sup> 3. To be fair, it should be mentioned that in a preparatory study for

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<sup>74</sup> This hypothesis has been put forward, and convincingly substantiated, in Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 189-193, and their arguments are condensed below in the present chapter.

<sup>75</sup> On the functioning of this branch of the Persepolis administration see Henkelman 2008b, 126-143. Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 215-216 on the evidence from Mount Moḡ and de la Vaissière 2004, 169-172 on this body of evidence.

<sup>76</sup> Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 164-169.

<sup>77</sup> Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 157 (regarding the hypothesis concerning an «institutional environment» within which *ADAB* D1-D18 would have been employed as a uniform (in their words «standardized») financial instrument and pp. 166-168 regarding the notation system employed alongside that in use both at Persepolis in the context of the ration lists and in Baktria based on what surfaces from the remaining *ADAB* documents, which strongly suggest they fulfilled different functions.

<sup>78</sup> Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 171-172. In the case for example of Naveh and Shaked 2012, 241 ff. D4 (= Khalili T11), the simple calculation derived from one single type of the notches engraved on the tally would yield a total of roughly 263 liters, which, at most, could indicate an annual provision. However, as Henkelman and Folmer note, it is difficult to explain the individual payments: why in one case 3 liters while in another 9 were issued? See also Brosius 1996 and

the 2012 edition, Naveh and Shaked already suggested recognizing in the tallies the equivalent of a (monthly? yearly?) credit that the first of the two individuals mentioned in each of the documents could have used to obtain flour - or other goods - until the available quota was exhausted.<sup>79</sup> This is (as one may have noticed) an only slightly modified version of the hypothesis put forward in the introduction to the *ADAB*, and it is therefore subject to the same counter arguments: first, there is the problem that the almost random variation of the quantities indicated by the notches engraved on the wood starkly contrasts with the extremely uniform nature of the units of measurement attested at Persepolis (and in the *ADAB* parchments themselves) for the kind of purposes suggested by the editors for the tallies. Second, Henkelman and Folmer have rightly pointed out that such a scenario does not explain why the satrapal administration felt the need to establish relationships of a personal nature such as those attested by the tallies with individuals like the kurtaš, who on the contrary are never mentioned ad hominem in the Persepolis tablets.<sup>80</sup>

Finally, in the face of the meaning of the prepositions מן and עם, the hypothesis of the tallies as representing the bookkeeping of a line of credit defended by Naveh and Shaked would be confronted with the considerable disadvantage of going against the letter of the text, in that it would make the imperial administration a debtor of the individuals «with» (מן) whom a given tally was «located», a possibility that comparison with the broader corpus of Aramaic literature leads one to exclude.<sup>81</sup> 4. In introducing the documentation of *ADAB* D1-D18, a very precise correspondence was observed between the length of the material support and the number of notches engraved on it, an indication (according to Henkelman and Folmer) that the issuing authority was aware in advance of the amount of the transaction, which is hard to imagine - as Naveh and Shaked suggested in their edition - if the function of the tallies had been that of a payroll.<sup>82</sup> From the *Dialogus de saccario*, moreover, it is clear that the procedure of engraving these accounting devices was not a trivial operation, and the neatness of the notches on the Baktrian documents strongly suggest that they were engraved before the division of the stick into two halves.<sup>83</sup> Finally, if we consider the ethnographic documentation coming, for example, from the Swiss alpine pastures of the late 1800s or similar rural contexts, the fact that the Baktrian tallies are not pierced makes the hypothesis of their use as payrolls of pieceworkers even less plausible, since in these cases the employer used to keep the receipts of his

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Henkelman 2010, 741 for numerous examples of the units of measurement employed at Persepolis by the Persian administration to supply users of the road system (e. g. royal couriers), kurtaš, or the King's own table.

<sup>79</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2003, a hypothesis the latter still credited in Wu 2020, 603 («18 wooden tally sticks for bookkeeping»), a contribution that seems to ignore Henkelman and Folmer's study, which is significantly absent from the bibliography.

<sup>80</sup> Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 177.

<sup>81</sup> Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 185-187, and now Gzella 2021a on Aramaic sources for the Achaemenid Empire.

<sup>82</sup> Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 169-174.

<sup>83</sup> Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 174-178.

employees in groups tied together (hence the need for the holes).<sup>84</sup> In other words, the mere physical analysis of such objects (and of their counterparts over a span of several centuries and through different societies) shows that the significance of this particular subgroup within the *ADAB* is most likely to be found in the realm of lending, depositing, and/or financing. Of no less importance, the systematic survey of the ethnographic literature leads to the hypothesis that, even in the case of Achaemenid Baktria, the purpose of the tallies was unlikely to have been to regulate transactions between the issuing authority and individuals (such as the kurtaš) in various capacities within the same administrative system that had issued those receipts. More likely is instead the supposition that - not differently from what is attested in other contexts in which these instruments were widely used, from Medieval Novgorod (Земля новгородская) to Sogdiana under prince Dewāštič (self-proclaimed king from his fortress of the Kūh-e Moğ in the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE before being overwhelmed by the advance of Caliphal troops), the most usual function of a device such as the tallies collected in *ADAB* D1-D18 was to institutionalize relations between social actors 1. coming from a different socio-cultural (and perhaps even linguistic) background, 2. between whom there was an imbalance of power relations (which does not mean, per se, that the latter always and in any case leaned on the side of the issuing authority, as the discussion to be developed sets out to suggest) and 3. whose reciprocal business was not otherwise regulated, which provides support, among other things, to the hypothesis, put forward earlier, that the corpus under study here might have mirrored the relations established by the satrapal administration with a socio-political context which was wider than the one encompassed by the satrap's direct power (as reflected for example in the *ADAB* «C» section).<sup>85</sup> Having come this far, it seems essential to take a closer look at the inscriptions, since they alone, perhaps, are able to tell us more, on the one hand, about the object of the transactions regulated through the tallies; on the other hand - and consequently - they alone seem to allow us to trace, albeit hypothetically, a profile of the 16 individuals «with whom» the documents were «located», i. e. the interlocutors of the three (perhaps four) Achaemenid officials, Abudi, Paritana, Gauza, and Uparivana, active in Baktria «in the year 3 of Darius, the King».<sup>86</sup>

## 2.2. «In exchange for gifts»

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<sup>84</sup> Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 146-155.

<sup>85</sup> On Dewāštič and his (very much troubled) world see de la Vaissière 2004, 161-162, 200, 272 as well as, more recently, Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 151-152.

<sup>86</sup> In three cases, *ADAB* D1, D9, and D18 the same name recurs: ttk, or the Aramaic תתק, which the editors render as Taitaka: see Naveh and Shaked 2012, 60. It should be noted, incidentally, that ttk is among the anthroponyms for which the two philologists have not been able to reconstruct a convincing Irānian etymology, and it is therefore possible, at least in principle, that Taitaka belonged to a sociolinguistic group external (though not at all alien) to the context of Achaemenid Baktria, within which the Irānian component likely made for the majority among the personal names in circulation.

With the exception of D17 (whose inscription, however, does not differ in any way from those present on the other tallies, as it also limits itself to attesting to the dating of the wooden stick during the reign of Darius III), the only texts that are anomalous to some extent are those present on the outer part (the convex one, from where the bark was removed before proceeding to the incisions and the subsequent division of the tally) of *ADAB* D1 and D2.<sup>87</sup> Below are the two, brief inscriptions. On the inner (flat) surface, D1 bears the following words: «with Taitaka from Gauza, in the year 3 of Darius, the King»; on the outer surface, the expression appears: tyn (תנין), i. e., «a second [tally]».<sup>88</sup> As for D2, if the inner surface attests, as usual, to an individual - named Bayagaza - as the receiver (‘m), and another (Gauza again) as the issuing authority, the outside of the stick adds additional information: «three white [and] shining [...], in exchange for gifts».<sup>89</sup> This apparently terse remark requires some discussion.<sup>90</sup> The mere fact that Taitaka (tk) shows up in two other documents within the same corpus (D9 and D18) constitutes yet another point against both the payroll and the accounting hypotheses: the explicit mention of a second agreement that linked Taitaka to the imperial administration in some capacity only further complicates the picture, since, as Henkelman and Folmer rightly observe, even if we were to assume that Taitaka was employed as a middle man, this would not help much to explain his presence as a «debtor» (in whatever sense) of Gauza, since the former too was part of the cadre of the local bureaucracy. Within a similar scenario, an instrument such as the tally would appear useless, for in fact officers with a role similar to the one putatively attributed to Taitaka are regularly framed in those kinds of hierarchies that can be glimpsed at through the world of the ration and supply lists.<sup>91</sup> A possible solution to the riddle, as suggested by Henkelman and Folmer, comes from *ADAB* D2 and in particular from the presence of the adjective ḥwr, i. e. «white, shining». The perusal of the occurrences of this adjective within the known Aramaic documentation (from the Hebrew of Babylon to Syriac and from Aramaic to Samaritan) carried out by Margaretha Folmer strongly suggests that the term ḥwr was usually used in reference to silver, a hypothesis that appears to be further supported by a careful review of the occurrences of the equivalent Akkadian term in the testimonies of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE carried out by the same scholar since, under the entry for «silver» (peṣû), the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* points out how the mention of the metal recurs in a fixed formula next

<sup>87</sup> Full discussion of the notches featuring in the tallies see Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 170-174.

<sup>88</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 234: tk also appears on two other occasions (D9 and D15), but in the commentary the editors do not venture to speculate as to whether either of these two ought to be identified with the owner of the «first tally» implied by *ADAB* D1.

<sup>89</sup> Because of the importance of this document, it is not out of place to quote the Aramaic text and its transliteration in full. «הור בנו 3 חלף שהדן» (הור בנו 3 חלף קלן 3 בנח חלף). According to Naveh and Shaked 2012, 237-238, the term bnw may constitute a calque from the Old Irānian \*bānu- («ray or beam of light»: on this issue see Tavernier 2007, 549). In Avestān, the two scholars continue, a noun with this meaning is indeed attested, and consequently the corresponding adjective in Old Persian would be \*bānuvant-, and the corresponding noun \*bānuva, hence the Aramaic בנו.

<sup>90</sup> Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 187-189, whose argument is followed here.

<sup>91</sup> Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 189.

to the adjective kapsu, meaning precisely «white».<sup>92</sup> Taken in its entirety, the whole inscription recorded on the outer surface of the Baktrian wooden fragment might therefore be understood in these terms: «splendid white(-silver?) [unit of measurement and/or object not specified] 3, in exchange for gifts».<sup>93</sup> If placed in the broader context of 1. Achaemenid accounting for silver sums and 2. the satrapal economy in Baktria as it can be reconstructed, for example, based on the recent excavations at Kyzyltëpe, the inscription of *ADAB D2* suddenly makes (more) sense and acquires a historical depth that it is not exaggerated to describe as dizzying. Once again, because of the rather complex nature of the reasoning involved here, it will be appropriate to proceed step by step following Henkelman and Folmer's argument.

Point number 1. The joint testimony of Diodoros of Sicily, Plutarch, and Xenophon provides an argument of no small importance in support of the possibility that the Aramaic *ḥwr* attested on the Baktrian tally actually refers to silver.<sup>94</sup> The author of the *Historical Library* reports in fact of the attempt (which spectacularly failed) by the Spartan Gylippos, to embezzle part of the booty (1500 talents of silver) sent to Sparta by Lysander in the aftermath of Aegospotami. This sum probably derived from the war reparations imposed on the Ionian cities by the Lakedaemonian winners: this right of exaction, the sources however state, came to the Spartan general from no one less than Cyrus the Younger who, so at least Plutarch claims, had granted to Lysander full powers over the coastal cities of which he had taken possession. Plutarch's claim appears to find support in a passage of Xenophon's *Ἑλληνικά*, from which it is clear that the levies collected by Lysander came from cities assigned by the Great King of Persia to his brother, which in principle implies that Cyrus was gifting the Spartan out of his own purse («ἰδιοί»). Of particular relevance in this context, as Henkelman and Folmer astutely point out, are the reasons behind the failure of Gylippo's attempt. The Spartan – Diodoros claims – had in fact not noticed that the sacks from which he had drawn contained a σκυτάλη, to which was accompanied a note (ἐπιγραφὴν) reporting the exact amount sent home by Lysander.<sup>95</sup> By virtue of the original Achaemenid provenance of the money sent by the general to Sparta, the hypothesis that, from Ionia to Central Asia, an instrument such as the tallies was indeed used in order to record sums of money and any related transactions, appears extremely seductive. The mention of a further support next to the σκυτάλη is not at all an obstacle to this interpretation, since – according to Henkelman and Folmer – the ethnographic material coming for example from (Medieval as well as Modern) Europe provides abundant evidence that, although the (legally) binding

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<sup>92</sup> *CAD* XII, 333 (s. v. pešû, § 2'h): see Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 192-193 with references.

<sup>93</sup> Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 191-193.

<sup>94</sup> Diod. Sic. 13.106.9, to be read against the evidence provided by Plut., *Vit. Lys.*, 9.2 and Xen. *Hell.*, 2.1.14 as per Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 205-207.

<sup>95</sup> See the investigation of this affair – and the study of the key term σκυτάλη (the possible Greek version of the Baktrian tallies) – carried out in Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 203-208, on which results this section relies.



authority remained that of the wooden support – for it was in fact more difficult to falsify, as mentioned above - the presence of an additional support on writing material for documentary purposes was not a rarity.<sup>96</sup> A scenario similar to the one described by Diodoros in his account of Gylippos' story - let it be noted here in passing - could also lie behind the text of the so-called (Baktrian) Amphipolis parchment, published some years ago by Willy Clarysse and Dorothy J. Thompson, which attests to the payment, «in the year 30» of the Graeco-Baktrian king Antimachos, of «100 drachmas of minted silver» to a group (perhaps in the number of 40) of «Scythians» (τῶν τεσσαρά [κοντα - -] Σκυθῶν), probably mercenaries hired by the king in the context of the turbulent political scene of Central Asia in those years (around the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE).<sup>97</sup> The almost total absence of an adequate context based on which to interpret the parchment's (very poorly preserved) text imposes caution, but against the background of the Diodorean anecdote - and of its Achaemenid broader context - it is perhaps not hazardous to assume 1. that a mechanism similar to the one that allowed the Spartan ephors to unmask Gylippos was still active a couple of centuries later in Baktria (the case of Dewāštič shows to what extent a tool of this kind was rooted in Central Asian society, since split tallies appear to have been still widespread in Sogdiana more than a thousand years after the Achaemenids' demise) and 2. that the Sakā contingents attested by Arrian at Gaugamela might had been enlisted by Bessos - by order «of Darius, the King» - by resorting precisely to the use of a tool such as the tallies.<sup>98</sup> At the present stage of our knowledge, the one sketched above is, it must be admitted, nothing more than a suggestion, though not without both its own internal coherence and (at least it seems to me) a certain degree of fundamentum in re.

The considerations that can be made about point 2. of our assessment of Henkelman and Folmer's study of the *ADAB* tallies are, on the contrary, much less speculative. In spite of what has been said about the considerable pastoral component active within (or related to) the economy of Kyzyltēpe, it is worth noting that in the Persepolis archives there are numerous records of loans (in silver) granted by the imperial administration to a wide plethora of individuals who, it must be stressed, 1. were *not* part of the Persepolitan institutional horizon but, as Henkelman puts it, came from «spheres» (the surrounding mountains, the world of the steppes, to name but two among them) «external» to the

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<sup>96</sup> Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 161.

<sup>97</sup> Clarysse and Thompson 2007, 276 for the text, the photograph of the document, and its translation. As for the Βασιλεύς Ἀντίμαχος mentioned by the parchment, admitting (while not granting) an origin of the latter in the Baktrian territory, it could be either Antimachos I or Antimachos II, dated by Coloru (2009, 263) between 176 and 171 BCE. On the chronology of this intricate period of Graeco-Baktrian history see also Rapin 2010 and the remarks in Jakobsson and Glenn 2018 based on another parchment (where the place-name Asangorna occurs) published some years ago by Rea *et al.* 1994 and discussed already by Bernard and Rapin 1994. Compare most recently Morris 2021b for a discussion of the (economic) historical context for these and other documents.

<sup>98</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 3.8.3. See moreover the 34 wooden fragments published by Nicholas Sims-Williams in his *Bactrian Documents from Northern Afghanistan* (henceforth *BDNA*), which provide further evidence (predating Dewāštič's by about 3 centuries), of the widespread dissemination of this tool in Central Asia and – what it counts most – within social contexts that bear too close a resemblance to be coincidental with the *ADAB*.

direct political influence of the imperial officials – which means that they had therefore to be actively recruited - and 2. were employed within an extremely sophisticated *partagée* system of livestock breeding (mainly sheep and goats, but larger animals, including horses and - above all – camels were by no means excluded) whose volume of business must have been enormous.<sup>99</sup> A few examples will help to get an idea of the orders of magnitude we are talking about. PT 50 records disbursements in silver in favor of no less than 370 individuals (paid in a differentiated manner, which makes it possible to assume that they covered tasks of different importance), employed in cattle breeding in different districts of the territory afferent to Persepolis.<sup>100</sup> Even more interesting is the testimony of PF 1442: based on the quantity of flour (105 *BAR*) made available by a certain Zazzap, who is recorded as in charge of «a locality called Hišema» (Ēlāmite *Hi-še-ma-mar*), of a contingent entrusted with transporting from Persia to Susa «the King’s sheep», and was moreover apparently «affiliated» with a treasury (it is not clear whether this means that these individuals were dependent on the latter (perhaps located at Hišema?) or if, on the contrary, they were moving as members of a travel party following the treasury itself: think of the kapnuški traveling from Arachosia to the West mentioned above in chapter 5), Richard Hallock has calculated that, assuming a daily ration of 1 *QA* and a half (roughly 1.8 liters), the entire contingent must have amounted to no less than 700 individuals, which in turn implies that the flock of «King’s sheep» was around 100000 heads.<sup>101</sup> Given these numbers, and the fact that the mention of the Achaemenid King might suggest, for example, that we are faced with particularly valuable specimens which might perhaps have been destined to the royal table (think of the 33 «sheltered» sheep, as opposed to the 100 «pastured» one of *ADAB C1* made available to Ba[yāsa] «when he went from Baktra to Varnu»), there is every reason to believe that the plethora of «shepherds» mentioned in the text was made of specialized personnel, and as such was given a certain amount of salary by the Baktrian administration.<sup>102</sup> Such an inference is in line with another document coming from the archive, the very long PF 1987, which is essentially a comprehensive list of shepherds who were recruited by the imperial administration in exchange for payment: the latter is recorded as having taken place in the form of rations, but the repeated mention of apples, figs, and other fruit (all valuable foodstuffs, as seen in chapter 5), together with the presence (ll. 6-7) of a revealing term such as zippi, i. e. «bonus rations», says a lot about the uncommon status of these individuals, and leaves open the possibility that other payments, this time in silver, but of which we

<sup>99</sup> Henkelman 2010, 736 ff. Now King forthcoming on camels in Baktria and at Persepolis.

<sup>100</sup> Briant 2017a, 258-268 for an in-depth discussion of the evidence discussed in this section, which relies considerably on the scholar’s insightful analysis.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. *PFT*, 406 and Briant 2017a, 259. Even the spearbearers (an appointment of remarkable prestige, as shown for example in Hdt. 3.70.1) could oversee supervising «royal» flocks: incidentally, this provides yet another indication of the social standing of an individual like the camel driver Vahuvaxšu (and of his attendants), as well as of the *Vīštāspa* featuring in *ADAB C2*.

<sup>102</sup> Naveh - Shaked 2012, 203 ff. C1 (= Khalili IA 21) ll. 9, 11.

have no knowledge, occurred on other occasions.<sup>103</sup> Further examples could be brought to bear, but it will suffice to recall here, following in the footsteps of Pierre Briant, 1. that Babylonian evidence provides numerous testimonies of the recruitment - by the local administration - of specialized workers from outside its own territories.<sup>104</sup> Likely, those workers were men originating from the surrounding steppes or from the marshy areas of the delta of the Tigris and the Euphrates, and the Babylonian landlords and temples employed them – like in the Achaemenid case, against payment - during the shearing period. The latter was an operation of great importance in the framework of the imperial economy by virtue of the value in which certain qualities of wool were held by the King and his court. Additionally, 2. it should be kept in mind that the system attested at Babylon reflects the adoption and adaptation (on a scale previously unknown), of means and procedures of production which in their features antedated the Achaemenid conquest but were instead distinctive of the economic regimes of the (agro)pastoral communities settled in the territories framing the Mesopotamian alluvium.<sup>105</sup> From this follows 3. that the cadres of the satrapy (in Babylon as elsewhere) must have had every interest in attracting these sociopolitical groups within the mechanism underpinning the economy of «unequal exchange» through which the Great King and his lieutenants attempted to regulate their relations with the «semi-state» populations dwelling in the territory of the Empire.<sup>106</sup>

That among the «gifts» alluded to in *ADAB D2* could therefore have been included heads of cattle, other products from the pastoral economy and perhaps even work services obtained by the Baktrian administration from the steppe (and mountain) people in exchange for the «white, shining silver» mentioned in the wooden stick is a hypothesis that, against the evidentiary background discussed so far, it seems prudent not to dismiss out of hand in the absence of solid arguments able to disprove or at least to seriously question it.<sup>107</sup> In a somewhat provocative manner but, perhaps, not entirely without foundation, one could therefore conclude that the various Āduāpa, Nayaka, Patiyāra, Vikanavant, Bagaicha, Xšaθraka, Axvapavya, Nāfavazāta, Ciθriyakara and, of course, Taitaka

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<sup>103</sup> Briant 2017a, 262 for a detailed discussion of this text and *PFT*, 589-593 for text and translation of the tablet. See now Henkelman 2021d and Stolper 2021 for a full overview of the agricultural produce recorded in the archives.

<sup>104</sup> Briant 2017a, 263-264.

<sup>105</sup> Compelling comparative evidence comes from the Táng Empire, which is known to have acquired horses in trade with owners of private ranches, from bridle tribes and – a point not to be overlooked against the background of the evidence discussed here, «independent pastoral nomadic powers» not rarely dwelling along the steppe borderlands of the Empire itself: see Skaff 2012, 262-266 (the quote comes from p. 262).

<sup>106</sup> As a mean of comparison, take for example the case of a member of a Türk pastoral people (the Chùmì 處密, originary settled both in the Tiānshān mountains and the Džungarian basin to the North of Turfan and bound to the Táng by agreements as old as the mid-7<sup>th</sup> century CE) who in 762 was brought to court for having injured two Sogdian children while driving an ox cart (something with which he was evidently not very familiar). As pointed out by Jonathan Skaff (2012, 70), this man «evidently took advantage of his inclusion in the Táng polity to pursue employment» within imperial borders. The establishment of the Baktrian satrapy is very likely to have represented a huge pull factor for many individuals dwelling in the surrounding steppes and mountains of Central Asia.

<sup>107</sup> Briant 2017a, 265, 269.

mentioned in the Baktrian tallies are likely to have represented the Central Asian equivalent of both that Ākaufačiya (called not without a hint of ethno- (or imperio-)centrism a «mountain dweller») who figures in PF 1829 as the depository - upon payment? - of an entire flock while acting as the overseer of another group of 31 shepherds mentioned in NN 2541.<sup>108</sup> Especially in instances of this kind, it seems quite safe to assume that the preservation of the livestock heritage was one (if not *the*) priority of the Persian administrators, and consequently it cannot be excluded that the lines of credit (probably) attested by the *ADAB* tallies were functional to the construction of infrastructures such as stables and other similar shelters (the example of *ADAB* C1, once again, does not appear out of place here) even outside the territories of direct relevance for the imperial administration, and the presence thereof, together with the economic and social world that they imply, is reflected in the Baktrian documents (both the parchments and the wooden sticks). Besides providing for the wellbeing of the animals, in fact, such an endeavor also offered to the representatives of the imperial power (similarly to the – attempted - expansion of an outpost such as Ṭawāwīs in the territory of the Buxārān steppes), an excellent opportunity to insert themselves - through some of the infrastructural devices characteristic of the imperial paradigm - in the socio-economic networks of communities dwelling across the borderlands. Put it another way, a few years before Alexander’s outbreak in Baktria, the *ADAB* tallies most likely face us with the material evidence of a constant feature of Achaemenid policy in Central Asia which, as argued in chapter 4, it is likely to have begun with the conquest itself, namely since the times of Cyropolis’ foundation.<sup>109</sup>

### 2.3. Eurasia *Coast-to-Coast*: Navigating the Imperial Paradigm Across Imperial Borderlands

«Ktesias describes a precious stone called pantarbē [παντάρβη], which, when thrown into a river, once recovered had attached to it 477 gems and other rare stones that belonged to a Baktrian merchant [ἦν τοῦ Βακτρῖων καπήλου].<sup>110</sup> «The merchants, both Baktrian and of other provenance [οἱ Βάκτριαι καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι οἱ ἐμπορευόμενοι], on business trips on the back of camels [ἐπὶ τῶν καμήλων] in the Indian lands carry such fabrics to Persia, and they resell the specimens thus woven [i. e.: woven from fibers of various colors of camel’s wool] at a very high price. The Persians hold them in great esteem,

<sup>108</sup> See Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 199 with further literature (note especially Henkelman 2005) for a discussion of the two tablets mentioned in the text.

<sup>109</sup> As already mentioned, this is not an entirely new suggestion: compare e. g. Briant 2002, 747, 1026 and Strootman 2020c, 20. What must not go unnoticed, however, is that for the first time the Baktrian tallies might provide substantial primary evidence supporting the arguments underpinning the hypothesis developed in the previous pages.

<sup>110</sup> *FGrHist* 688 F 45 (6). Centuries after Ktesias, the παντάρβη was apparently still known to Flavios Philostratos (Philostr. *VA.*, 3.46).

and the king of the Indians sends them as a gift to the ruler of Persia».<sup>111</sup> The two passages mentioned above - already evoked in chapter 5 - come respectively from the *Library* of the Byzantine patriarch Photios (810-891 CE) and from a miscellany of a zoological nature (the *Sylloge on the history of animals*) datable, based on its close codicological relationship with the *Excerpta Constantiniana*, to the following (namely the 10<sup>th</sup>) century. The opportunity of quoting them in extenso at this point of the discussion is given by the fact that, in view of what emerged from the study of *ADAB* D2, it is perhaps possible to advance a further hypothesis regarding both the function of the tallies in the context of Achaemenid Bactria and the sociopolitical realities which the satrapal administration is very likely to have been engaged with at the same time intensively and over a considerable time span.

This seems all the more justified by virtue of the fact that, in a passage following the one epitomized by Photios, Ktesias openly states that, in Bactria, «the silver mines are deeper» (by which it is possible he meant richer?) than those to be found in India.<sup>112</sup> Commenting on this long fragment, Dominique Lenfant had advanced the suggestion that most of the information (at least in their essential form, prior, let's say, to the labor *limae* of the historian on his text) in possession of Ktesias on the Achaemenid East came from the Bactrian merchants: and it should not go unnoticed that – after all - the presence of «royal camel drivers» within the correspondence of Aḥvamazdā contributes substantially to the Achaemenid «background noise» of even such a later piece of evidence such as the passage of the *Συλλογή τῆς περὶ ζῶν ἱστορίας*.<sup>113</sup> Not only that: if put in a system, even in their diversity these testimonies lead one to wonder if the «white, shining [silver?]]» mentioned in *ADAB* D2 could not have been used (also) to subsidize an individual like the merchant who, thanks to the prodigious properties of the *παντάρβη*, managed to recover his precious cargo or who, like his colleagues recorded in the *Συλλογή*, might have been engaged in the trafficking of precious fabrics from India to Persia.<sup>114</sup> If the suggestion, presented in chapter 4, to identify in Cyropolis not so much (or at least not *only*) the Strabonian «ὄριον τῆς Περσῶν ἀρχῆς» but instead – and against the backdrop, for example, of the analogy with the *Ṭawāwīs* recorded in the *Tā'riḥ -i Buxārā* - to regard the settlement as an imperial bridgehead towards the sociopolitical and economic networks of the steppe world (to the North, towards Syrdaryo, but also to the East, towards Ustrūšana and the Fargāne valleys), were to hit the mark, one would perhaps be justified in arguing that the route «from Ephesos to Bactria and India» (*FGrHist* 688 F 33) was not the only one along which sumptuary goods such

<sup>111</sup> *Συλλογή τῆς περὶ ζῶν ἱστορίας*, 2.474: see Lenfant 2004, 293-294, Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 195 (with the Greek text and a translation), as well as Henkelman 2018a, 247 fn. 108 (further references).

<sup>112</sup> *FGrHist* 688 F 45 (26). See now Thomas 2021, 114-118 on Ktesias' understanding of Achaemenid mineral resources.

<sup>113</sup> Lenfant 2004, 293 ff., Briant 2009a, 149. Compare now Degen 2022, 283 for another example from a Babylonian context.

<sup>114</sup> This hypothesis is now considerably strengthened by Rhyne Kings' insightful analysis of documents such as *ADAB* C6, C7 and, to a considerable extent, A1: King 2021, 348-361.

as the finely embroidered carpets mentioned in the *Συλλογή* used to travel along Achaemenid roads. On the contrary, the evidence of the *Frozen Tombs* of Pazyryk strongly suggests the involvement of the governmental apparatus headed by Balḥ in other networks of exchange and/or (more or less stable) circuits of sociopolitical alliances.<sup>115</sup> In such a scenario, objects such as the gilded torques of which copies have been found in the territory of Semireč'e or the highly-skilled manufactured products such as the textiles gracing the burial mounds deep into the Altaï mountains could have been part of the cargo of caravans similar to those alluded to by *Συλλογή*, subsidized with Achaemenid silver and directed, under the guidance of Baktrian merchants and/or prominent members of Sakā communities, towards territories such as the Ili valley in the Fargāne in order to satisfy the imperial demand for resources such as the legendary local horses (think of the obsession of the Chinese emperor Hàn Wǔdì for these valuable specimens), the no less coveted Baktrian camels (on which, as *ADAB* A1 seems to attest, it is even possible that the King had advanced rights of pre-emption) or even skilled labor to meet the needs of the pastoral component of the economies of scale of a center such as Kyzyltēpe.<sup>116</sup>

As already mentioned, the strategies implemented by Táng economic diplomacy along the imperial borderlands dominated by the Türko-Mongolian populations between the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> century CE provide perhaps the most informative (in view of the abundant written documentation preserved) historical parallel for the dynamics suggested here with regards to the Achaemenid world that is currently accessible to scholars.<sup>117</sup> To be fair, it has to be acknowledged that the heterogeneous nature of the sources used to support this scenario could raise allegations of impressionistic comparativism or even outright speculation, especially with regard to the involvement of mobile populations settled across the borderlands (but in this work it has been argued on several occasions that they were also an integral part, at least during certain periods of the year - for example in winter - of the satrapy's population) of the imperial (Far) Eastern. However, we have at least another touchstone (the organization of the Palmyrene caravan trade between the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries CE) which, by virtue, among other things, of the structural similarities between the Syrian center and a settlement such as Cyropolis - both of which are in fact part of an ecosystem (to be understood in the proper as well as in the translated sense) extremely complex and capable at the same time of allowing each of the social actors present in it to diversify their respective subsistence

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<sup>115</sup> This has most recently been stressed by King 2021, 353-361, but see already the remarks in Simpson and Pankova 2021, 509-519, forcefully arguing for steppe élites as economic drivers in the broader socioeconomic space of Central Asia, possibly even to the point of commissioning the production of Achaemenid precious tableware and jewelry. Linduff and Rubinson 2021, 59-61 also briefly discuss the possible relationships between Pazyryk and the Empire.

<sup>116</sup> A historical (and profoundly Achaemenid-coloured) background for the two passages had already been suggested by Henkelman (see most recently 2018a, 247 ff. as well as the conclusions reached by King 2021, 359-361). Here the attempt has been made to further broaden the scope of his research bringing into the discussion the steppe world based on both the evidence discussed e. g. in Wu 2007 and in the light of Stark's remarks (2020; 2021; forthcoming).

<sup>117</sup> Skaff 2012, 258-271; 2017, with full references.

strategies in a considerable manner -, offers at the same time a solid documentary basis and a no less sophisticated hermeneutical apparatus against the background of which 1. to contextualize the testimony of *ADAB* D2 and 2. to evaluate the degree of plausibility of the implications that derive, as argued in these pages, from an accurate study of the inscription attested on the tally.<sup>118</sup>

In a brilliant study devoted to the reconstruction of the mechanisms capable of sustaining (in the context of a less than favorable environment) the economic fortunes of Palmyra and – notably – of its surroundings, the Norwegian historian Eivind Heldaas Seland has proposed, based on a theoretical paradigm derived from the scholarship of the so-called neo-institutional economics, an ideal typical model of the Palmyrenean caravan trade as the result of collaboration, made possible by - and negotiated through - institutions (or, in the terminology of Douglass North, the «rules of the game») made available by political entities such as the Roman and the Arsakid Empires (in turn lively actors deeply involved themselves in the economy hinging on Palmyra), of at least three further social groups, namely 1. the civic élite, 2. the merchants and 3. the representatives of those σκηνίται that Graeco-Roman sources, from Strabo to Pliny the Elder, attest as settled in the semi-desert steppes near the city, whose relations with the other protagonists of the economic and political life of the region must have gone well beyond the inveterate model of «rade & [more rarely «or»] trade» which the extant literary evidence is so fond of.<sup>119</sup> Starting from the concept of «revenue», defined by North as the gain, deriving from a given good, which exceeds what the good itself would be able to provide in the best of alternatives, Seland argues that each of the components of Palmyrene society was able to make available to others resources capable of ensuring the entire system a return greater than the value of the resources themselves invested in the same system (in this case the preparation of a caravan and the maintenance of trade over long distances, a scenario that fits remarkably well in the – Achaemenid and Central Asian - context within which it is reasonable to frame both the passage recorded by Photios and the one from the *Συλλογή*)<sup>120</sup> If, on the one hand, the Empire (which is to say, in the case of Palmyra, both the Romans and the Arsakids, most likely – as it was in the case of Armenia – competing against each other for the control of these borderlands, thus creating a sociopolitical framework from which, it shall not go unmentioned, the other actors involved in the exchange had everything to gain) provided considerable investments in 1. capital and 2. what Seland calls «leadership» (namely the institutions – the «rules of the game» - concerning both the containment and, if necessary, the use of violence), on the other hand the merchants (a considerably

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<sup>118</sup> Seland 2016 for a recent overview synthesis of the sociopolitical and cultural context of Palmyra but see however even more recently Weaverdyck *et al.* 2021, 310-313 with literature.

<sup>119</sup> Seland 2014, 209 and King 2021, 340, highlighting the institutional context of camel breeding in Achaemenid Baktria as suggested by even a text as fragmentary as *ADAB* B8. On the σκηνίται see e. g. Plin. *NH.*, 5.65 (who, significantly, underlines camel breeding as one of the main economic activities of these populations) and Strab. 16.1.8.

<sup>120</sup> North *et al.* 2009, 19. See King 2021, 361 for a discussion of these categories in the context of Achaemenid Baktria.

loose sociopolitical category, to which however civic élites were not extraneous, as the evidence from Ḥaṭra clearly attests) contributed to the enterprise of setting up a caravan by supplying goods, equipment and – last but not least – skilled personnel.<sup>121</sup> As for the σκηνίται, their contribution was no less essential, since it was from their networks that the other participants in the enterprise drew indispensable resources such as animals and other services of the outmost importance for ensuring its success, for example protection from other rival groups - who could resort to raiding not so much to respond to a need (the old myth of the non-self-sufficiency of «nomadic» communities) - but with the primary purpose of negotiating their entry into a mechanism which, as Seland observes, promised socio-economic returns perceived as far from negligible.<sup>122</sup>

In addition to material goods and subsidies, in exchange for logistical and military support, the non-sedentary communities active in the Palmyrene trade could aspire, for example, to access to pastures located on the edge of Roman settlements. This was an especially precious (and coveted) commodity in a context, as ethnographic research shows, in which – still not too long ago - the transhumance routes in the area could extend up to 1600 km per year. More than that, and beyond land, another asset of crucial importance in these territories (at the borders) of the Empire were clientelist relations with the imperial power apparatus, for they provided an inexhaustible source of social capital to be reinvested, with considerable profit, in the internal competition of the respective groups making up the variegated Syrian (and in our case Central Asian) pastoral society.<sup>123</sup> Having gotten this far, the question that we must inevitably ask ourselves is: do we have any evidence to justify a sociology even analogous to that of the Palmyrene σκηνίται in order to make sense of (one of the modalities of) the relationship between the Achaemenid Empire and the steppe people of Central Asia? The complexity of the issue and the difficulties in interpreting the evidence - which have been both repeatedly stressed in the previous pages - require extreme caution. This having been said, I believe it is nevertheless possible to answer this question (at least partially) positively because of the following factors.

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<sup>121</sup> See Weaverdyck *et al.* 2021, 304-313. In the Baktrian context, it is not difficult to imagine something similar for an individual like Spitamenes, whose relations with the world of the nomadicum are widely attested in the sources and who was at the same time undoubtedly part of the Achaemenid urban society (and of the imperial cadres at a remarkably high level) in Sogdiana.

<sup>122</sup> Seland 2014, 201-202. See already Horden and Purcell 2000, 74 on Kyrenaika for a similar line of argument.

<sup>123</sup> Seland 2014, 206-207. Compare most recently Heather 2020 and Meier 2020, 397-470 developing a comparable model to explain both the sudden expansion and the dissolution of the Hunnic Empire in the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE. As pointed out by Skaff 2012, 244-245, in fact, one of the «most crucial obligations» for the leaders of pastoral societies across Eurasia (e. g. for the Türk Qağan in 6<sup>th</sup> CE Mongolia) «was to defend pastures of his followers and [crucially] expand» them. Allocating pasture was, according to Skaff, one of the chief duties of these steppe leaders in their quality as «patrimonial ruler» (*sensu* Weber). As Hämäläinen 2008, 126 points out, the request made in July 1787 by the Comanche chief Paruanarimuca to Spanish authorities in Santa Fe to build an *establecimiento fijado* for his people might have been occasioned by the need to secure «a secure supply depot inside Comanchería to help his [Paruanarimuca's] followers through the hard times». Similar goals might well have been pursued both by the representatives of σκηνίται communities as well as by pastoral people in Achaemenid Baktria.



First: a close scrutiny at Alexander's military campaign in Central Asia - especially during the Sogdian period, i. e. in 328 BCE - that is nourished, on the one hand, by the constant comparison between the classical sources accounting for the different phases of the resistance mounted by Spitamenes and his allies (not only Arrian: Curtius Rufus and Strabo offer further details that deserve careful consideration); on the other hand, by the results of the excavations carried out at sites such as Koktëpe and - as previously argued - at Kyzyltëpe, from which clearly emerges the crucial importance of the (agro)pastoral component in the framework of the Persian political economy, not only on a regional but, as suggested by the capillarity of the Achaemenid road network, also satrapal and more broadly imperial scale.<sup>124</sup> Second: some recent studies carried out in environments such as the Murğ-āb delta of the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age (approximately 1750-900 BCE, a period thought to be crucial for the development of Central Asian societies in the centuries *before* the Achaemenid conquest) have helped to challenge many of the preconceived notions about the organization and subsistence patterns of these human groups (the Baktrian forerunners of Strabo's σκηνίται).<sup>125</sup> The Italian archaeologist Barbara Cerasetti, for example, has strongly supported the hypothesis that, far from constituting two completely different populations, each endowed with its own lifestyle, ideologies, and material culture, the (so-called) nomads settled on the outskirts of the Central Asian oases are in fact much more likely to be identified as the same individuals within the same ethnic group (with regards to the inhabitants of the oases themselves) who however, in accordance with the needs of their respective communities, exchanged roles, turning into shepherds out of farmers and the other way around as the circumstances demanded.<sup>126</sup>

In support of this assumption - so the scholar goes on arguing - there is the compelling testimony of ethnography: even today, in fact, the inhabitants of the village communities (one might think again of the Baktrio-Sogdian *vici* mentioned by Curtius Rufus) settled on the border of the deserts surrounding the territory of the modern Türkmen city of Mary (former Merv, the major center of ancient Margiana) are used to switch between their, multiple, regime of subsistence - and therefore of mobility - depending on the needs of the social group of reference. Of even greater importance, Cerasetti rightly points out, is the fact that, during the pastoral «phase» of these individuals, contacts with the community are firmly maintained by other members thereof, who are used to shuttle back and forth between the desert and the village to supply their fellow villagers with food and water: this essential activity, which today is conducted with the help of off-road vehicles and other similar transportation means, until the years immediately preceding the Stalinist «great fracture» (Великий

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<sup>124</sup> See at least Rapin 2007; 2013; 2017a; 2017b; 2018a as well as Wu 2018; 2020.

<sup>125</sup> Compare e. g. Cerasetti *et al.* 2018 and the important contribution by Elise Luneau (2020).

<sup>126</sup> Cerasetti 2020, 488. Compare Kidd forthcoming and Puschnigg forthcoming for further ethnographic insights from, respectively, ancient Sogdiana and contemporary Western-Central Irān.

Перелом, i. e. the launch of the five-year plans and of the forced collectivization, the so-called «revolution from above») was based on the use of horses - of which the Türkmén are, traditionally, expert breeders - and, above all, of the indispensable camels.<sup>127</sup> The review of the available evidence carried out in this paragraph has pursued the overarching goal of sketching, through the combined use of different sources but starting from a reasonably solid textual background (as the detailed study by Henkelman and Folmer in my opinion shows in a very convincing way) a reconstructive scenario of the functioning of some institutions (sensu Douglass North) characteristic of the Achaemenid administration in Central Asia during the 4<sup>th</sup> century - but the testimony of Ktesias, in the light of this evidence, perhaps authorizes us to backdate the birth of the system we have come to describe to at least one century, and possibly even more down to the *Rise & Organization* of Persian power in Bactria itself.

Not only this: the previous discussion has also attempted to show the ways in which actors from different backgrounds and simultaneously linked to different socio-political and cultural contexts (which means, in Cerasetti's words, responding to a variegated range of «social demands» at least potentially conflicting with each other) could draw mutual benefit from the existence of the Achaemenid infrastructural apparatus as well as from the mechanisms that, at the same time, regulated this political, economic, and administrative entity and from which they in turn drew further support.<sup>128</sup> In a world, such as that of pastoralist societies characteristic of Afġān territories still in extremely recent times (which ethnographic studies have described as part of an economic system of animal herding, agriculture, handicrafts and, not lastly, trade), the scenario reconstructed by Henkelman and Folmer which has been summarized and closely followed in the pages above acquires further plausibility: sites such as Koktġpe and Kyzyltġpe, in other words, may indeed have represented the ideal *Middle Ground* in which to negotiate the interests of both actors involved, namely the Achaemenid administration and the Central Asian σκηνίται.<sup>129</sup>

In addition, through the comparison with the world of the Palmyrene caravan trade and its complex web of relational entanglements, the previous pages have tried to show how – based on the currently available evidence - the access of each of the actors involved to the resources (which they needed and whose acquisition, at least in part, can be considered at the origin of the establishment of the imperial governmental apparatus itself in the satrapies) in possession of the other interlocutors active on the

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<sup>127</sup> Cerasetti 2020, 489 with further literature, both archaeological and ethnographic.

<sup>128</sup> On multiple (and sometimes conflicting, but embedded in a world of shared values and needs) social demands in the Central Asian - especially Türkmén - steppe see Cerasetti 2020.

<sup>129</sup> Khazanov 1994<sup>2</sup>, 202-212, Barfield 2010, 17-65. However, think also of the excavations by Sergeġ Bolelov (whose results were published, for example, in an important contribution of 2006) discussed in the course of chapter 4: a further confirmation, it seems to me, of the soundness of the parallel with the geo-anthropoc context of Ṭawāwġs (note Stark forthcoming, on whose insights the ideas developed in this section are massively indebted).

chessboard was not at all automatic nor could it be guaranteed by the simple use of force, since, as North observes and as Clavijo's testimony concerning the (far from negligible) customs revenues of the Tīmūrid Empire patently shows, in the long run the economic return guaranteed by violence is systematically lower than that achieved through agreements from which all those who stipulate them are able to benefit.<sup>130</sup> On the contrary, the importance of the σκηνίται (the Syrian equivalent of the pastoral communities still today settled in the Murğ-āb delta) for the maintenance of an organization as complex as the long-distance traffic hinged on Palmyra suggests that basic goods such as the «king's camels» attested in the Achaemenid sources reached the territories of the Empire by virtue of an elaborate (and constantly open to modifications and adaptations) negotiation process, implying, among other things, that competition for access to the market represented by the Persian government in Baktria must have been considerably high. Far from losing their validity once we leave the world of the tally sticks, such considerations are indeed exceptionally useful for the purposes of a sociopolitical study of Aḥvamazdā's correspondence, which will be the subject, directly and indirectly, of the next two sections of the present chapter. As already mentioned, *ADAB* A1-A8 provide in fact an exceptional opportunity to observe dynamics similar to those we have tried to reconstruct in these pages, not only across the borderlands of the King's Central Asian, but even within the Achaemenid government apparatus in Baktria. In addition, the correspondence of what, with a certain amount of plausibility, we are authorized to think was Bessos' forerunner, exemplifies as best as possible Stride's assumption about the difficulty with which, in the ancient Central Asian world, it is possible to draw in a clear-cut way the boundary that separates the resistance to imperial power (and to the ambitions – Richardson's desires - of its representatives) from the submission to (or the appeasement with) both. Or, to put it only slightly differently, to separate too neatly symbiosis from conflict, the Empire's purchase and its limits. The ambition of the following pages is to offer an essay (however preliminary and tentative) of the potentialities of the study of these eight parchment drafts within a context such as the one which emerged - among others - from the study of *ADAB* D2 for a more adequate understanding of the logic which provided the background 1. of the affirmation of Persian power in Central Asia, 2. of its consolidation in the decades following Cyrus' conquests 3. of its *extension* towards the world of the steppes, from Üstȳrt to Farḡāne, during the reign of Darius and of his successors as well as, last but not least, 4. of its eventual demise at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

### 3. Serving the Satrap. Or not?

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<sup>130</sup> North *et al.* 2009, Seland 2014, 198-201.

In the month of Marḥešvan, in the 6<sup>th</sup> regnal of an «Artaxerxes, the King» (šnt 6 'rthš[sš] mlk', in all probability Artaxerxes III, i. e., between November and December of 353 BCE), an individual named Aḥvamazdā, as already anticipated above perhaps even the satrap of Baktria, certainly a man of exceptional power within the administrative hierarchy of the region, sent a very harsh letter «to Bagavanta and the magistrates» ('lbgwnt wdyny'). These people, as we can infer from the continuation of the letter and from the entire correspondence preserved by the *ADAB*, must have been subordinates - in turn of a rank that was anything but negligible - of Aḥvamazdā, from whom we are informed that they were (mainly) active in the region of Ḥulmi (*ḥlmy*, in the oasis of Tāšqurḡān), which can be located about 80 kilometers East of Balḥ.<sup>131</sup> Having disposed of the greetings in a very snappy manner, Aḥvamazdā goes straight to the point: we thus learn that a certain Vahuvaxšu, son of Čiṯrabarzana, had forwarded a vibrant complaint directly to the satrapal seat of Balḥ (in the text Vahuvaxšu's own words are reported, who had allegedly complained already earlier to «his lord Aḥvamazdā» - qdmnm qblt lmr'y 'ḥmzd) about repeated acts of misappropriation committed by 1. Bagavanta, 2. by the other «magistrates» active in Ḥulmi and 3. by yet another man called Ahuradāta, apparently another individual of a certain importance active within the branch of the satrapal administration at the head of which was placed Bagavanta himself.<sup>132</sup> According to the testimony of Vahuvaxšu, acting in concert with his associates, Bagavanta would have repeatedly harassed some camel drivers - the «apprentices» (*hnškr*) of the same Vahuvaxšu - demanding the (undue) payment of a tax (*bhlk'*).<sup>133</sup> Faced with the refusal of the camel drivers, Bagavanta and his men would have retaliated at first by stripping the unfortunate *hnškr* of any possession: the situation, however, apparently quickly went out of hand, so much so that these men, perhaps because of yet another refusal, would even have been imprisoned. The testimony of Vahuvaxšu goes on to point out that, in this way, the «apprentices» would have been unable to perform their duties, which consisted mainly in looking after the herd entrusted to them («the camels of the king»: *gmln zy mlk'*).<sup>134</sup> This seems to have had negative repercussions on the animals' health: certainly, the text suggests that the men employed by Vahuvaxšu were not able, for a certain period of time, to provide regular feed for the camels.<sup>135</sup> At the end of the letter, with an extremely laconic closing (which betrays, besides the

<sup>131</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 17. See moreover Naveh and Shaked 2012, 66 ff. A1 (= Khalili IA 6), where the Aramaic text is given, followed by its transliteration and translation as well as by a rich commentary.

<sup>132</sup> At line 8 of the text (Naveh - Shaked 2012, 66 ff. A1 (= Khalili IA 6)), Ahuradāta (Aramaic 'hrdt, אהרדט is called Bagavanta's *prtrkh* (פּרַתְרַכָּה), this being an official title which might be translated as «superintendent» or something of the like: see Tuplin 2017a, 652 for a detailed list of the Aramaic testimonies of such a word in other Achaemenid corpora.

<sup>133</sup> King 2021, 348-353 for the most recent and detailed study of this crucial piece of evidence.

<sup>134</sup> So far, the published evidence from the Persepolis archive contains but one tablet carrying this formula (cf. PF 1787, in which 33 camels of the king (ANŠE.A.AB.BA<sup>MES</sup> HAL-EŠŠANA-na) are mentioned receiving 99 liters of flour): King 2021, 343 with references.

<sup>135</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 66 ff. A1 (= Khalili IA 6) ll. 2-4. As King 2021, 344 points out, such a designation «was an administratively specific piece of information [...], that was recognized by the administration in both Pārsa and Baktria (and presumably elsewhere)».

different hierarchy between sender and addressee, a clear displeasure on the part of the former) Aḥvamazdā renews the injunction to Bagavanta to release the camel drivers of Vahuvaxšu and to present himself to Balḥ in order, the Persian officer threateningly adds, to account - once again - for his actions (in the very words of Aḥvamazdā «you will be interrogated when you come into my presence»<sup>136</sup> Because of the exceptional importance of this document for the purposes of the present chapter, it is not out of place to quote the letter in its entirety.

*Recto* «From Aḥvamazdā to Bagavanta and the magistrates. And now: Vahuvaxšu, son of Čiθrabarzana said thus: “I complained earlier to my lord Aḥvamazdā concerning Bagavanta and the magistrates, how they removed [things] from the camel-keepers, my apprentice-servants; they despoiled and detained them, and extracted [from them] a tax [hlk’] which they [scil. the camel keepers] are not obliged [to pay], not letting them guard the camels of the king. As a result of this, there will be [?] a flow [?] and a renewed flow [? nwtšy: could this be a hint at a disease which spread among the animals? This is at least the suggestion put forward by Naveh and Shaked] among the camels of the king. Therefore I informed [my lord: shall we understand that, after having come back to Tāšqurgān, Bagavanta retaliated against Vahuvaxšu’s hnškr̥t for the denunciation?]. Thereafter, Bagavanta was interrogated by my lord. In the meantime, before the decision was issued to him, the same Bagavanta went [back] to Ḥulmi [!]. I again [!!] complained to my lord. Afterwards [a message] was sent to Bagavanta [and] an order was given to him to release those men, the detained camel keepers, and to proclaim a prohibition concerning the camel keepers [it might be suggested that the grant of some kind of – legally sanctioned? – protection is hinted at here] and [that which he] removed to give back. The same Bagavanta refused [!!!] to release those men. I again complained to my lord. Afterwards, [certain] men were appointed by the court of my lord, who released those men, the camel keepers, from prison, and [who] issued a prohibition to Bagavanta. Afterwards, finally, after the [issue of the] prohibition, because those men complained [again? or is instead Vahuvaxšu referring to the cahiers de doléances already sent to Baktra? in the latter case, we would clearly be confronted with a retaliation; in the former, with a no less remarkable recidivism], Bagavanta, Ahuradāta his foreman and the magistrates removed from the camel keepers one bull, two donkeys [and] 34 [sheep? worth noting is the far from negligible scale of such a requisition carried out against the «apprentice-servants»]. Furthermore, they imposed on them a surcharge [?] more than [is imposed on] another land. If my lord Aḥvamazdā deems this appropriate, may he consider [the issue] in my favor concerning this matter”. And now: because you are removing [things from] those men and are

<sup>136</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 66 ff. A1 (= Khalili IA 6) l. 10. The key expression here is tšt’lwn (תשתאלון): according to the commentary of Naveh and Shaked (2012, 79), it contains in itself the notion of punishment, which contributes to accentuate the threatening tone of Aḥvamazdā’s letter, a clear sign that the nature and/or scope of the misdeeds Bagavanta was accused of must have been anything but trivial, or (but the two are not excluded), that this was not an isolated case.

imprisoning [them] against my decree [!!!!], when you come [to me] you will be interrogated. But now, what you have removed, give back to them. Furthermore, *Verso* do not extract [from them] a surcharge [?] more than what they owe. Also, release those men, the camel keepers, to do their own work. Do not impose on the land [a tax] which they do not have to pay. Hašavaxšu the scribe is aware of this command [hšwḥšw spr' yd't'm' znh]. To [blank space] Bagavanta and the magistrates, who are in Ḥulmi. [...] of Marḥešvan, year 6 of Artaxerxes, the King. Concerning a tax. Bring this letter». <sup>137</sup>

The reasons that make *ADAB A1* perhaps the most interesting testimony within a corpus that, since the news of its purchase by Nāšer Ḥalīlī, has been unanimously judged as being exceptional, are several. The first, of specific interest in the context of this chapter, concerns the figure of Vahuvaxšu. The patently theophoric element of the name alone suggests, if not an origin, at least a close connection with the Baktrian sociocultural background. In addition, the activity with which Aḥvamazdā himself seems to have entrusted him, namely supervision of the care and grazing of «royal» camels - it may be that they were part of the satrap's cattle, but it is by no means excluded that the expression should be taken literally -, lead to believe that he could have been a counterpart of the Ktesian «merchant» whose (dis)adventure during the ford of a river has already been mentioned (and note that, also in this case, the hypothesis that similar individuals acted, at least, on the satraps' mandate, is made extremely likely by a testimony such as *ADAB D2*). <sup>138</sup> The clues that conspire in favor of the plausibility of the suggestion of Vahuvaxšu's belonging to the highest strata of the Baktrian (and indeed imperial) society are numerous and, I would argue, compelling: below are listed only those that at the same time appear more solid (because they can be more easily deduced from internal elements of the correspondence) and more relevant (because from them we are able to learn something concerning 1. the physiognomy of Achaemenid power in Central Asia at this chronological level and 2. the functioning of the networks of (personal) solidarity and/or dependence tangent to, but not entirely superimposable on, the official hierarchies as can be reconstructed, for example, from the Persepolis archives or from a document such as *ADAB C4*). <sup>139</sup> The first of these clues is, as mentioned, the very position held by Vahuvaxšu, since it implied, albeit indirectly, a proximity to the top echelons

<sup>137</sup> The text reported here follows the translation suggested by Naveh and Shaked 2012, 69-70, to which a few comments have been added in square brackets. For a recent discussion of this crucial text see King 2021, 348-353, who however is more focused on the following three questions (p. 347): if «entrepreneurial trade» occurred in the Empire; if such an exchange happened «via the same infrastructure of movement that the state itself used and maintained»; «what did the state administrators gain from allowing this entrepreneurial exchange»? To the best of my knowledge, a sociological investigation along the line suggested here has so far not been carried out on the letter.

<sup>138</sup> Individuals with similar functions are attested elsewhere in the Achaemenid Empire, for example in a locality known as Ḥumadēšu, in the surroundings of Persepolis: see Henkelman 2017a, 146-148. As noted above, Vahuvaxšu explicitly claims that his apprentices were tasked with looking after the king's camels (gmln zy mlk', גמלן זי מלכא): see now King forthcoming.

<sup>139</sup> The importance of such distinction to properly understand the power hierarchies within the Achaemenid satrapies has been stressed most recently in Tuplin 2017a, whose analysis is at the core of the present discussion.

of Achaemenid power: both at the satrapal and, perhaps (if the adjective «royal» has to be taken at face value), even at a pan-imperial level. The second comes from the mention of the attendants (who in turn, as we shall see, are unlikely to have come from a (too) humble social context). The third is given by the bombastic name of Vahuvaxšu's father, since Čiθrabarzana means in fact, no more and no less than «of noble descent».<sup>140</sup> The fourth, almost needless to say, is to be found in the relationship of trust and respect that Vahuvaxšu seems to have with Aḥvamazdā. Of course, the latter is called «my lord», but this does not mean, per se, that such a formula only advertises subordination, but should rather be interpreted as a rhetorical movement in a relationship set on equal terms: this is suggested, for example, by section «B» of the *ADAB* parchments - which oozes epithets of this type - and by a very rich Central Asian epistolary tradition, from which it appears quite clear that the use of elaborated greeting formulas was an integral part of the etiquette defining local inter-aristocratic social life.<sup>141</sup> Given the conclusions reached in the previous paragraph, the information that can be gained concerning the figure of Vahuvaxšu based on the letter of Aḥvamazdā leads to wonder if it is possible to identify in this character the Achaemenid equivalent of a village chief of the (agro)pastoral communities still active in territories such as the Murg-āb delta, and if his appointment as royal camel driver was not, at least in part, the result of his position within his social context of reference, which would have made him almost ex officio the privileged interlocutor of the administration of a political entity constantly on the lookout, from Armenia (Hdt. 5.49) to Phrygia (Plut. *Vit. Eum.*, 8.9) to Media (Strab. 11.13.7), of personnel to whom to entrust the care of its (considerable) zoological assets.<sup>142</sup> By virtue of the undoubted prestige that the assignment of a task of this nature must have conferred on Vahuvaxšu, it is not superfluous to try to understand more specifically what could have motivated a man in the position of Aḥvamazdā to entertain a relationship of this type with him: that is, what

<sup>140</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 70 for the etymology concerning the name of Vahuvaxšu's father: in the Aramaic text it is recorded as štrbrzn (שתרברזן), but compare Tavernier 2007, 551, arguing in favor of a Median origin of the name, the Old Persian equivalent being Čiça. This could be taken as evidence against the Central Asian origin of Vahuvaxšu (or his family), Median being a Western, and not Eastern, Iranian language, as it would be expected in Central Asia. But the tally sticks make clear that the linguistic landscape of Baktria was more complex than an east/west dichotomy implies, and it should moreover be asked what language exactly the Aramaic of the texts reflects. Be that as it may, given the ecology of Baktria (Barfield 2020, King 2020), which requires imperial administrators to rely on established aristocrats and the outsourcing strategies attested in the tally sticks, even if Vahuvaxšu's family actually belonged to the Persian ethno-classe (cf. Pharnabazos' case in Anatolia) and not to the local aristocracy, it could still be argued that he had a considerable amount of latitude in Baktria by the time the *ADAB* documents were drafted. Moreover, even admitting that such a name was sheer blustering, it might still say something about how such people presented themselves to their imperial interlocutors. As noted by Skaff 2012, 12, in fact, «assertions of elite status should be viewed as a strategy of “symbolic violence” in competition for power». At the Northwestern frontier of the Chinese Empires, in fact, «false assertions of descent from illustrious ancestors were common» and were moreover used as a «social convention» to negotiate an individual (or group) positionality in the face of an external power such as an Empire.

<sup>141</sup> Suffice it to mention here the case of Naveh and Shaked 2012, 157 ff. B5 (= Khalili IA8), in which an anonymous person addresses his interlocutor (whose name also has not reached us), calling him «my lord» (mr'y) and wishing him «much peace and strength». For a late antique parallel see de la Vaissière 2004, 43-70 and, especially, the letters published in the second volume of the *Bactrian Documents from Northern Afghanistan (BDNA II)* by Nicholas Sims-Williams, to which we shall come back in due time. King 2021, 350-351 lists Vahuvaxšu within the Persian ethno-classe.

<sup>142</sup> See the seminal treatment in Briant 2017a, 253-258.

could be, in practice, the revenue (in North's terms) that the Achaemenid administration could legitimately expect from its investment - because such must have been Vahuvaxšu's appointment if the reconstruction proposed so far is correct - in a share of the stock of social capital within Baktrian society.<sup>143</sup>

A possible answer to this question could come from the networks of solidarity that an individual like Vahuvaxšu (as well as – most likely - his father before him) must have had at his disposal and that, based on the evidence discussed in the previous chapters, it is reasonable to assume extended beyond the territory of this or that oasis, embracing on the contrary the adjoining world of semi-state pastoralism, since it has been repeatedly observed how members of the same village could belong simultaneously to both these social universes. The case of Fayzulla Xo'jayev - at the same time a Party cadre among the most influential and a point of reference for many communities of shepherds settled in the surroundings of the would-be Stalinist Buxārā - is but one particularly striking example of these dynamics in a context such as the Central Asian one. The evidence of the widespread recourse, on the part of the Persian imperial administration, to figures of this kind in order to secure the functioning of the - substantial - pastoral economy of the Empire are, as mentioned, numerous.<sup>144</sup> At this juncture, however, it is appropriate to emphasize how a relationship such as the one that *ADAB* A1 reveals existed between Aḥvamazdā and Vahuvaxšu, if questioned in the light of what is known about the administrative hierarchy of Persepolis, allows to advance interesting hypotheses also concerning the organization of the Baktrian bureaucratic apparatus.<sup>145</sup> From the tablets recovered from the archive, a complex hierarchy does in fact emerge, the essential outlines of which can be summarized as follows: at the top was the figure of Parnakka, the general superintendent, who had at his disposal an officer named Ziššawiš, who in turn was in charge of supervising a large number of administrative branches (responsible for supplies of wine, beer, poultry, fruit, grain - see for example the chain of officers recorded in *ADAB* C4), one of which was in charge of sheep-farming, not least in order to supply the «royal» tables of the King and the satrap.<sup>146</sup> Now: from the director of this

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<sup>143</sup> On the terminology employed here see North *et al.* 2009, 15-20.

<sup>144</sup> Henkelman 2011, 6-8. From the correspondence, it is perhaps possible to infer that Vahuvaxšu was a kind of professional hired by contract (see PF 1987 and Briant's 2017a, 262 ff.). Again, this says something about his social status (at the very least) in the community of origin: that it was not laughable can be confidently argued from the mere fact that, from the text of the letter, he recognizes no other authority outside of Aḥvamazdā himself (meaning, ultimately, the King) as his superior. The parallel with the situation in Visigothic Spain allows us to suggest that Vahuvaxšu fully embodied the figure of one of those «non-state actors» hired by the imperial administration (of the post-Roman kingdoms in one case, Achaemenid in the other) in order to perform, taking up the concept developed by Fernández in a recent contribution to the issue of *Ancient States and Infrastructural Power* (2017, 248), crucial tasks in the absence of which the monarchy and its representatives would not have been able to draw on certain economic resources. The procurement of «royal camels» may have made for one of these tasks.

<sup>145</sup> Briant 2017a, 261.

<sup>146</sup> On Ziššawiš cf. PF 1811-1828 as well as the detailed discussion in Henkelman 2008b, 132 ff. On the organization of the Persepolis archive and in particular on the so-called «departments chiefs» see Briant 2002, 425-426 as well as, for a general treatment, Henkelman 2013.



department of the satrapal administration (\**gaitāstāna*, a term that can be roughly translated as «supervisor of the royal flocks») other officers depended, each responsible for a very specific category of livestock, from cattle to sheep to goats, who in turn seem to have been in charge of managing relations with individual shepherds on the ground, to whom the animals were entrusted or from whom they were taken if specific agreements with the representatives of the local communities provided for the payment of a tax levies (or «gifts») in exchange for the King's goodwill (this is the case of the «Uxians of the mountain» mentioned by Arrian's *Anabasis*): PF 2009 provides an illuminating example of how this mechanism worked.<sup>147</sup> Is it possible to imagine that Vahuvaxšu was the head of one of these departments, in this case that of the royal camels (next to that of cattle and sheep, a far from improbable division of the satrapal Baktrian apparatus in charge of the management of the imperial livestock)? Several elements can be brought to bare in support of such a scenario.<sup>148</sup>

First: the figure of Mithradates, the shepherd who, according to Herodotos, would have raised Cyrus after saving him from certain death following his exposure.<sup>149</sup> Notwithstanding the folkloric motifs that permeate the historian's narrative, the detail - irrelevant to the purposes of the story, and therefore all the more worthy of consideration - that Mithradates had other shepherds under his purview charged with the care of the herds for which he was responsible on behalf of the king of Media could be interpreted as an indication of the existence of a similar organization within pre-imperial Irānian societies, which the Persians would then have institutionalized and extended to the conquered territories, in perfect conformity with the regulatory mechanisms of the imperial paradigm as illustrated by Wouter Henkelman.<sup>150</sup> Second: in 503 BCE, in a locality called Uranduš, a tablet from the Persepolis archives mentions a man named Makama active under the title of *kasabattiš* («superintendent of livestock») to whom (as in the case of Mithradates and Vahuvaxšu) numerous mountaineers and farmers were subordinated, some of whom are explicitly labeled as «[employees?] of the King».<sup>151</sup> Third: the definition of the camels in *ADAB* A1 as «royal» seems to come straight away from an institutional context: the imperial archives preserve in fact ample evidence, for

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<sup>147</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 3.17.6: these *Mountain People* (Balatti 2017, 273-285 on livestock trade and 167-195 for the sources related to the relationship between the Achaemenid Empire and the communities settled in the Zagros) alone sent annually to the Great King 100 horses, 500 oxens and no less than 30000 sheep. See text and translation of PF 2009 in *PFT*, 610-614 and discussion in Briant 2017a, 260-262, whose arguments and conclusions are followed here.

<sup>148</sup> Indeed, as King 2021, 351 remarks, Bagavanta's men took 34 sheep from Vahuvaxšu's attendants, which suggests that they oversaw movement of considerable herds, as far as 680 animals if what the «magistrates» took equaled 5% of the quadrupeds entrusted to the camel keepers. Against the evidence provided by zooarchaeological analysis of the bones collected at Kyzyltepa (Wu *et al.* 2015, 109) it could be argued that Vahuvaxšu might have been in charge of a similar meat industry, as recently argued by King forthcoming.

<sup>149</sup> Hdt. 1.110-113.

<sup>150</sup> See Jacobs *et al.* 2017 as well as Henkelman 2017a.

<sup>151</sup> PF 2025: see in this regard Briant 2002, 426, Henkelman 2008b, 422 fn. 975; 2021a, 895. As the scholar points out, in the document in question, no less than 574 sheep (or perhaps goats) are recorded as «royal tax», while in PF 2070 (l. 6) mention is made of «shepherds of the king», a formula that rather closely resembles the context of the Baktrian parchment.

example, of «royal rams» placed under the direct «competence of the [Persepolis] treasury» (kanzaika), which helps to explain the importance of Vahuvaxšu's complaint, which seems to have had a separate file within the satrap's archive as shown by the very draft from which we happen to know from the entire story, where mention of several previous petitions is made.<sup>152</sup> The Persepolitan parallel implies in fact that the management of camels by this individual (and probably by a large group of his colleagues) was subject, in each of the districts – in the Baktrian case: the oases - in which the territory of the satrapy was divided, to the authority of a treasurer (\*ganzabara), the latter responsible, as in Arachosia - think of the *ARTP* «green chert objects» - for the accounting of an administrative and manufacturing center (an irmatam?) which insisted on a given territory and at the head of which there were individuals such as Bagavanta, who should have been responsible for the proper functioning of this system.<sup>153</sup> This is made plausible not only by the fact that such was the organization of the (agro)pastoral economy of other important imperial centers (from the Susiana plain to Matezziš up to Rakkan), some of which – incidentally - were under the direct administration of (female) figures of absolute prominence within the imperial household, but also, and perhaps above all, by the repeated mention in the tablets of centers for the collection and shelter of livestock (baribataš) uniformly distributed throughout the territory of the satrapies and pertaining to places comparable to the Ršādā mentioned at Bīsūtūn, where, among other things (as is clear from the joint testimony of the Persepolitan archives and of Xenophon), the proceeds of imperial taxation were collected before being sent to the «imperial foundations» and/or to the court.<sup>154</sup> Fourth: the study of the tallies (with some results thereof having been addressed in the preceding section), does nothing but further support the hypotheses under discussion. Suffice it to recall here that, in the opinion of Henkelman and Folmer, there is enough evidence to recognize in them a hint at contracts made with third parties and, more concretely, of the diffusion of the impact of the institutions regulating the Achaemenid administrative apparatus beyond the official courtly economy.<sup>155</sup> In other words, the hypothesis that based on the arguments put forward so far I would like to advance is that it seems possible to identify Vahuvaxšu as a likely peer of Taitaka: *ADAB* A1 and *ADAB* D2, in short,

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<sup>152</sup> See most recently King forthcoming for an assessment of such an administrative formula. It should moreover be noted in passing that the same classical authors do not fail to testify to the existence of «royal» herds (βασιλικά) subject, from Media to Babylon to Aeolis in Asia Minor, of careful care by specialized administrators, the latter not infrequently, certainly in the case of Media, of local extraction. Examples are legion and have been discussed at some length by Briant (2002, 419-422, for example): see at least Hdt. 1.191, Polyb. 10.27.1, Strab. 11.13.7, Arr. *Anab.*, 7.13.1, and the aforementioned Plut. *Vit. Eum.*, 8.5.

<sup>153</sup> King 2019 and Schütze 2021 on the *ARTP* texts, with the former vocally emphasizing the broader historical implications of this corpus for the understanding of Achaemenid imperial management in Arachosia (and arguably Baktria).

<sup>154</sup> Cf. PF 1342 (Matezziš) and PF 1947 (Rakkan). PF 1442 records the «royal» rams as being under the aegis of the Persepolis treasury. PF 675, 2025, and 2070 mention the baribataš: see moreover Xen. *Oec.*, 4.5-11 (on the role played within such a system by the postal network) and Briant 2017a, 260, discussing these testimonies and providing further literature.

<sup>155</sup> Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 196.

contribute one to the understanding of the other, and together allow us to outline the contours of a very important branch of imperial administration (and of the economy it oversaw) in Baktria.<sup>156</sup>

Notable in Vahuvaxšu's deposition are two other details that can be gleaned from the text as it is reported by Aḥvamazdā. First: the accusation made against Bagavanta of having imposed a land surcharge on the attendants entrusted with the caring for the royal camels.<sup>157</sup> Second: the fact that, following the injunction of their release coming from Baktra, Bagavanta and his people retaliated against the unfortunate camel drivers by seizing from them «one bull, two donkeys, and 34 [sheep?]». The mention of large livestock as the property of these individuals is in itself significant, for it denotes a certain level of material well-being of these «servants», since, in pastoral societies, alongside the size of the herds an essential factor in assessing the wealth (and corresponding sociopolitical prestige) of an individual or a social group is given by the composition of the herd itself.<sup>158</sup> Even more relevant, however, is the allusion to a land tax, as it is possible to deduce that the «apprentices» of Vahuvaxšu also owned plots (maybe orchards, or pasture fields).<sup>159</sup> It is not out of place to recall in this regard Herodotos' testimony who, again in the context of the story of Cyrus' childhood, speaking of the figure of Mithradates, reports that the latter - and the same could be said of his peers - was in possession of pasture areas around specific villages.<sup>160</sup> The evidence addressed in the previous pages leads to believe that, both in the case of Mithradates and in that of the camel drivers of *ADAB* A1, the concession of the exploitation of pasture lands within the jurisdiction of specific settlements (against this background, the case of Kyzyltēpe provides a very fitting example) to those who in all probability were particularly influential representatives of pastoral communities traditionally involved - at least during certain periods of the year, in the season of mobility - in regular exchanges with the groups settled in the alluvium should be interpreted as a strategy elaborated ad hoc by the satrapal administration in order to integrate at least some representatives of that «wider socio-economic context» with which, in Henkelman's words, the imperial economy in Baktria was viscerally interrelated and on which, taking up Scott's remarks, we could assume that, to a certain extent, it even depended.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Cf. the remarks by Llewellyn-Jones in Simpson and Pankova 2021, 249: documents such as PF 1942 attest that horses' attendants 1. operated within a hierarchical system and 2. were provided with sumptuous rations, suggestive of their high rank at court. It would not be surprising if similar status was enjoyed by «Masters of the Camels» such as Vahuvaxšu.

<sup>157</sup> King 2021, 348-350 for a discussion of the fiscal vocabulary occurring through the letter.

<sup>158</sup> Khazanov 1994<sup>2</sup>, 28-36.

<sup>159</sup> King 2021, 349 (and see moreover his note 111) provides a different interpretation of this passage, arguing that the Aramaic *mt'* (מתא) refers to a town (a possibility mentioned also by Naveh and Shaked 2021, 75), and interpreting the fee (*hlc'*) as a generic term for tax.

<sup>160</sup> Hdt. 1.114 and Briant 2017a, 270. Chinese literary evidence (see the relevant references in Di Cosmo 2002 and Miller 2009) do not fail to mention that Xiōngnú notables owned land too.

<sup>161</sup> Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 200, Scott 2017, 116-149.

It might therefore be argued that the vocabulary of the letter, being undoubtedly a mirror of the terminological conventions characteristic of the language of Achaemenid political subordination (the first written example of which is the Bīsūtūn inscription) translated, according to the sociolect of the imperial bureaucracy, rather different sociopolitical realia. Accordingly, my suggestion is to recognize in Vahuvaxšu's *hnškr* not «servants» but associates (*bandakā*), perhaps even members of his own community of reference. The analogy of the Palmyrene *σκηνίται* perhaps allows us even to recognize Vahuvaxšu and his people— taking up Seland's terminology – as a group of individuals organized for the purpose of common action aimed at making a profit through interaction with a political power (at least to a partial extent) external to their social horizon of reference: the Roman - and Arsakid - Empire in the case of Palmyra, the Achaemenid administration in the Bactrian context.<sup>162</sup> The latter, for its part, had every interest in organizing in a systematic way, expanding and regulating the breeding (especially of camels) in order to guarantee services of fundamental importance both within the imperial territory itself (for example, ensuring a regular change of mounts at the post stations) and, not less important, in order to support a long distance trade whose prosperity is hinted at not only - and perhaps not so much - by the anecdotes preserved by Ktesias and the *Συλλογή*, but also, if not first and foremost, especially by the archaeological evidence discovered as far as the Pazyryk mounds.<sup>163</sup> It is important to keep in mind the strategic nature (Scott's «positionality») of the contacts that a cooperative dynamic such as the one we have reconstructed so far represented for individuals like Mithradates and Vahuvaxšu: the parallel of Palmyra shows in fact how, besides the material return secured, for example, by the concession of pastures for the community's herds, contacts of a personal nature with the representatives of the imperial power represented an important source of social capital.<sup>164</sup> If it is in fact highly probable that the privileged relationship with Aḥvamazdā allowed Čiθrabarzana's son (and his «selectorate», most prominently – but perhaps not exclusively - represented, according to the reconstruction proposed here, by the

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<sup>162</sup> Cf. Seland 2014, 203. See moreover Henkelman 2017a, 55-63; 2018b, 805, pointing out that «it may well be that this Irānian extension of the emerging camel trade network predated the rise of the Persian Empire». Incidentally providing support to the arguments developed in chapter 4, these remarks suggests that in Central Asia the Achaemenids are likely to have expanded the imperial paradigm in the conquered territories tapping into previously existing socioeconomic network, thus opening up considerable *Handlungsräume* for individuals such as Vahuvaxšu.

<sup>163</sup> Henkelman 2017a, 56 fn. 14 provides additional bibliography and establishes a useful parallel with known information from Ptolemaic and later Roman Egypt (on which also Reger 2017 and Weaverdyck *et al.* 2021, 304-310). This should be complemented by the evidence of classical authors, who suggest that a system not too dissimilar to the one reconstructed here was already active in Mesopotamia during the reign of Darius (I): cf. Strab. 16.1.3 and, especially, Plut. *Vit. Alex.*, 31.7 (on the etymology of Gaugamela). On camels between Bactria and Persepolis see now King forthcoming. On the Pazyryk «economic topography» of the Pazyryk culture see now Linduff and Rubinson 2021, who however are (too much) focused on the relationships of the Altaï dwellers with Mongolia and China, remarkably bracketing out the Achaemenid Empire.

<sup>164</sup> Seland 2014, 204-205. See moreover Skaff 2012, 253, who argues that «emergency aid and protection could win the loyalty on newly submitted tribes in the short term, but grass was one requirement to retain long-term allegiance of pastoral nomads». This must have been deeply rooted in the mind of imperial administrators across Eurasia, especially when dispatched in frontier zones such as Bactria or Sogdiana, to say nothing of Chorasmia.

«attendants» harassed by Bagavanta and his men) to increase in a non-negligible way his influence inside and outside his own community of reference, it is just as reasonable to think that it provided him with a large number of enemies.<sup>165</sup> Among them, Bagavanta seems to have been by far and wide the staunchest (and, according to the letter, he was moreover solidly backed up by his «selectorate», perhaps identifiable in the «magistrates» of Ḫulmi and in Ahuradāta) - probably because he was without comparison the most powerful among them. This is, of course, a difficult hypothesis to prove, but in a scenario such as the one outlined so far, it does not seem entirely specious to assume that, by virtue of his direct link with Aḫvamazdā (of which he would have been a *bandaka* outside the institutional cadres of the satrapy), Vahuvaxšu was able to override the authority of Bagavanta and his circle, in fact proposing himself as a – fierce and influential - competitor.<sup>166</sup> Since moreover, against the background a document as difficult to interpret as *ADAB A9*, it seems reasonable to infer that Bagavanta had private interests (the nature of which is not easy to specify, but which cannot be excluded pertained to the economic sphere, given that in another document he appears as a guarantor of a loan) not only in the territories under his direct jurisdiction, the rancor he harbored toward Vahuvaxšu could be explained in the face of the fact that the latter’s activities conflicted - or were perceived to conflict – with Bagavanta’s business.<sup>167</sup> To give but a conspicuous example, access to (and control of) the transhumance routes with which Vahuvaxšu and his people were undoubtedly familiar represented, after all, an extremely desirable economic resource, and it is reasonable to assume, therefore, that the increased demand for goods and services resulting from the needs of the satrapal court (to say nothing of the royal table when the King happened to be around) contributed substantially in increasing competition outside and within the imperial power apparatus in the region.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Cf. Heather 2020, 77 who notes that an «imperial» (in his case Hunnic but we can safely translate such remarks within our Achaemenid context) sociopolitical identity – which is something considerably different from an *ethnic* one, if such a thing ever existed – was not there for all (and there was many of them) who wanted to join the party, since it implied 1. higher status and 2. material advantages, and was therefore ipso facto a limited resource, for which provincial élite were likely to fight rather mercilessly, to the point of endangering the Empire’s stability itself, as according to Heather happened in the case of the Huns.

<sup>166</sup> See in support of the likelihood of the suggestion put forward here Tuplin’s remarks (2017a, 618). It is important to note the strategic importance of such patron-client ties in the context of Eurasian borderlands. As pointed out by Skaff 2012, 172, in fact, «investiture on the steppe could signify control over people and livestock»: a paramount concern of imperial polities in antiquity. Diplomatic investiture such the one which might have involved Vahuvaxšu should therefore be viewed «as a *formal* type of patrimonial patron-client bonding [hence Vahuvaxšu’s attendants landed estates which were unduly taxed by Bagavanta] with political dynamics that can be compared profitably to the *informal* patron-client relationships». Emphasis in the original.

<sup>167</sup> Lemaire 2022 discusses *ADAB A9* in the context of a reassessment of the dossier’s provenance (from Bagavanta’s or Aḫvamazdā’s archive), but the social scenario the, admittedly very fragmented – parchment might disclose is left unaddressed.

<sup>168</sup> See Garrison and Henkelman 2020, 181, pointing out the (indirectly inferred) existence of herding contracts written in both Élamite and Aramaic within the documentation coming from the Persepolis archive. The same authors (2020, 195) moreover remark that, although being primarily a form of taxation, contributions to the royal table «conveyed social prestige on the donor»: note a similar point recently made by Hyland 2020, 254. Against this background one might even

It is worth spending a few words at this point on Vahuvaxšu's persecutor. Regardless of the question of his socio-cultural background (there are in fact no elements to suggest - but not even to exclude - a Baktrian origin of his), it is not easy to doubt the high social standing of an individual such as Bagavanta. In the correspondence with Aḥvamazdā, he is called paḥtā (פחתא) of Ḥulmi (בחלמי).<sup>169</sup> Comparison with contemporary evidence for this title in the Aramaic documents of the Achaemenid period indicates that we are dealing with a leading figure in the administrative hierarchies of the satrapy. He must have been the governor of a territorial district (therefore in charge, among other things, of the supervision of livestock collection centers - the already mentioned baribataš - which we know were distributed on a district basis within the territory of the satrapy) and, at least from a formal point of view, subject to the authority of the satrap.<sup>170</sup> This last point is unequivocally demonstrated by the tone (and the form) of the correspondence between the two: however, although Aḥvamazdā does not miss any opportunity to emphasize his hierarchically superior position, it cannot escape notice the fact that Bagavanta himself had a power that was anything but laughable and, a no less crucial point, extended over a considerable territory (a radius of several hundred kilometers has been calculated), indeed much larger than that of the oasis of Tāšqurḡān, in itself a strategic area within the framework of Afḡān Baktria.<sup>171</sup> A few examples are in order here. We know from the letters that Bagavanta had land holdings, some of which produced wine (like the Chorasmian lord of Dinghil'dže) and other produce that seem to have attracted the satrapal administration's interests; in another parchment, moreover, Aḥvamazdā mentions a military unit directly under Bagavanta's authority. We have no further details, but the parallel with the 7000 Baktrian horsemen under the command of the ὕπαρχοι who deserted Bessos on the eve of Alexander's invasion helps to give an idea of the man's rank and of his influence - at least within the local context of the satrapy.<sup>172</sup>

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speculate that Bagavanta and Aḥvamazdā might have been concurring for precisely this kind of privilege through their attendees (in the latter's case Vahuvaxšu).

<sup>169</sup> Such a term is for example attested in Naveh and Shaked 2012, 76 ff. A2 (= Khalili IA4) verso l. 8. Although in a slightly different graphic form, (pḥh/peḥah, פּחַח), the term is also attested in Samaria around the same time of the ADAB (between 345 and 322 BCE, which raises the question, not easy to solve, concerning the functional homology, in the two different territories, of the same title): see Briant 2002, 374 and Joseph. *AJ.*, 12.302. Since the document in question is dated «on the third day of Marḥešvan [in the year] 8 of Artaxerxes, the King», i. e., March 19<sup>th</sup> of 355 BCE, we know for certain that Bagavanta was paḥtā in Ḥulmi very shortly before Darius III's accession to the throne. The terminology used is not irrelevant either, since it demonstrates, as Folmer (2017, 436) had already observed with regard to Egypt, 1. the diffusion, and 2. the maintenance, of a common administrative language in territories as distant from each other as Baktria and Samaria, a further indication of the solidity of imperial institutions still at this date (think for example of the scribal schools). Not only that, but the date is also significant because it testifies to how courtly turmoil, as long as it remained confined within the royal palaces, had little or no influence on the power hierarchies (and networks) at the local level. Bagavanta seems to have kept his place, and one wonders if the same happened with Aḥvamazdā, although in this case a high dating of ADAB C1 (prior to Darius' assassination) would not agree with the identification of Bessos, since it would not be easy to assign him a role within the satrapal framework.

<sup>170</sup> Briant 2017a, 259.

<sup>171</sup> Martinez-Sève 2020c on Afḡān Baktria from an archaeological perspective.

<sup>172</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 76 ff. A2 (= Khalili IA4) recto l. 6. Such a detachment of soldiers is called in the text kāra-tanuka, (k[r]tnk', כַּרְתַּנְכָּ). The fact that it is not so easy to distinguish sharply between the private possessions of Bagavanta (but the same could be said of Aḥvamazdā) and those managed by them by virtue of their respective functions

To all this can be added, as mentioned above, the testimony of *ADAB* A10, in which Bagavanta appears as guarantor of a debt contracted by two other individuals named Dathušafarnah and Frādaka (and could this not be the archival support of a transaction similar to the one attested, for example, by *ADAB* D2, in which the tallies alone had legal value)?<sup>173</sup> The exact interpretation of the parchment is still sub iudice: however, if the reading of the document provided by Naveh and Shaked could be defended, it might be argued that Bagavanta, probably taking advantage of the additional power deriving from his role within the Achaemenid satrapal ranks, was intent on building (or maintaining) his own client network, parallel to and - as the case of *ADAB* A1 shows - in some cases potentially conflicting with, that of his direct superior at Balḥ, namely Aḥvamazdā.<sup>174</sup> In spite of his officially (which means: at the imperial level) subordinate position towards Aḥvamazdā, who in fact did not fail to threaten nothing less than the confiscation of his properties in case of failure to comply to his requests or (further) delayed execution of his orders, at the local level Bagavanta was undoubtedly an individual of great influence, to whom other notables, not necessarily only subordinate of his, or of Aḥvamazdā, thought it wise (or perhaps inevitable) to turn to in case of need: this is a sociopolitical scenario that finds a surprisingly exact correspondence, as the next section seeks to show, across Baktrian history, as soon as the written evidence allows scholars to take a closer look at the sociopolitical tapestry of this part of Eurasia.<sup>175</sup>

Let us now try to summarize the scenario sketched: the correspondence of Aḥvamazdā shows several times the ability of Bagavanta to conduct his affairs in significant autonomy with respect to the will of his direct superior, and in some cases he is even able to act (multiple times) in clear violation of

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within the imperial political and administrative apparatus even several decades after the consolidation of Achaemenid hegemony in the region reinforces the suspicion that this was true a fortiori in the case of individuals like Vivāna and, in all likelihood, of Dādêršiš himself. As Mairs 2016, 2042 has pointed out, this is evidence of the deep involvement of the Achaemenid administrative apparatus and its personnel in the local affairs and socio-economic structures of the territory under their purview (see also Mairs 2020a on the imperial paradigm's impact on the agricultural landscape of Irān and Central Asia, which chiefly involved a plurality of interests and potentially conflicting agendas): as argued in the previous chapters, it is even possible that the former (the administrative apparatus of the satrapies) developed - not without significant changes - from the latter (the socio-economic structures of a given territory). See also Shaked 2004, 30.

<sup>173</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 127 ff. A10 (= Khalili IA14). Although the meaning of the word 'ḥry (אֲחָרַי) is not entirely certain, «guarantor» is undoubtedly a plausible translation, as suggested, for example, by *TADAE* D1.17 b7 according to the *Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon Project* database (<https://cal.huc.edu> accessed last on December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2022): see the editors' commentary ad locum (Naveh and Shaked 2012, 128, without however any reference to the *TADAE*).

<sup>174</sup> Grewal 2008, 17-43 for a detailed discussion of the social dynamics underpinning a «power network»: compare Versluys forthcoming.

<sup>175</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 112 ff. A6 (= Khalili IA5), ll. 10-11 about the - apparently rather ineffective - threats of Aḥvamazdā. As Duindam 2016, 283 has noted, in the ancient and, to a large extent, also in the modern and contemporary world (Baberowski 2003, 512-552; 2012, Sebag Montefiore 2003, Schnell 2012, and Kindler 2014 for an impressive review of case studies from the Stalinist era, with special focus on Central Asia and the Caucasus), however harnessed in official structures and limited by the coercive power of protocols and norms, it is in fact essentially impossible to completely eliminate clientelistic networks and alliances built on personal relationships between individuals and/or social groups pursuing the same interest. Compare the assessment of the Achaemenid élite network as a pillar of the Empire in Degen 2022, 312-322.

orders received from the latter.<sup>176</sup> The most evident demonstration of such a claim is provided by Vahuvaxšu's very complaint: the fact that Bagavanta, in concert with his associates at Ḥulmi, continued undaunted (and unpunished, perhaps because he was not so easily punishable) to harass the camel drivers even after repeated (no less than three according to the letter) warnings of a very annoyed Aḥvamazdā deserves to be strongly emphasized. If this were already not enough, the network of relations on which Bagavanta could count on (next to the judges a prominent role in the story seems to have been played by Ahuradāta) is no less important. Such a picture could lead to the objection that Vahuvaxšu is not exactly what one would call an impartial source: even living space for undue dramatization with rhetorical-persuasive purposes, the conclusion that Ahuradāta was as much involved as Ḥulmi's «magistrates», if not even more so, seems nevertheless hard to escape. From this one might infer a commonality of interests with Bagavanta, which would lead to recognize in Ahuradāta another figure of some latitude within the local (and satrapal) power hierarchies active at Tāšqurgān. What exactly were his relations with Bagavanta (a peer? a subordinate?) we unfortunately do not know, or at least are unable to determine. Vahuvaxšu (or perhaps Aḥvamazdā reporting Vahuvaxšu's words), calls him \*frataraka (prtrkh, פרתרכה): usually translated as «superior», this title would lead one to believe that Ahuradāta was either in charge of a territorial sub-unit within the oasis, or, but it is impossible to prove it, acted as Bagavanta's trustee outside of Tāšqurgān, in one of the other districts over which the latter's jurisdiction must have extended, according at least to the toponymy of the *ADAB* that it is possible to pinpoint on the map.<sup>177</sup> This hypothesis runs into some difficulty by virtue of the fact that, in the corpus, the word פרתרכה is attested only twice: in addition to Ahuradāta, a certain Azdāyāpa is in fact also mentioned, and it is said that he «belongs» to another officer (a similar formula is also used in the case of Ahuradāta), which makes an effective assessment of their hierarchical positioning within the satrapal cadres rather complex.<sup>178</sup> That said, such an office

<sup>176</sup> On the relations between Aḥvamazdā and Bagavanta see Naveh and Shaked 2012, 27-29. Because of the available documentation (and taking cue from Jacobs 1994, 208-227), it could be argued that, at least in Baktria, the term paḥtā with which Bagavanta is identified indicated the governor of one of the administrative sub-units in which the major satrapies (both in terms of importance and by virtue of their respective territorial extension) were divided. Tuplin 2017a, 641 has pointed out, however, that, especially if, as in Jacobs' case, one postulates the systematic application of such an arrangement across the Empire, it is not easy to account for dissimilarities such as those inferred from the Egyptian evidence, to cite but one particularly well-known and well-documented case. Notable by virtue of the considerations set forth in this section are the examples collected by Bang 2015, 551 of other imperial élites particularly adept at frustrating, circumventing, and manipulating the imperial structures to which their respective members were theoretically subjected in the context of Roman Egypt during the 1<sup>st</sup>-century CE.

<sup>177</sup> An almost identical title is attested in Persia in the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE: Wiesehöfer 1994, 129-136, Engels 2017a, 247-306, Strootman 2017, 177-201. According to Klinkott 2005, 143, the frataraka would have been a «high-ranking district administrator», to whom legal functions could also be delegated (e. g. he could participate in trials, although he was prevented from pronouncing sentence). Tuplin 1987a, 126 adds further Egyptian evidence.

<sup>178</sup> Tuplin 2017a, 630. In the first case (Naveh and Shaked 2012, 66 ff. A1 (= Khalili IA 6), l. 8), Ahuradāta seems to answer to Bagavanta's authority, the latter as said being the pḥt' (paḥtā, פהתא). In the second, however (Naveh - Shaked 2012, 100 ff. A5a (= Khalili IA3), l. 4), Azdāyāpa is subordinate to the authority of Vaxšuvahišta (note the theophoric element in the name), namely the \*azaganda ('zgnđ', אזגנדא). See now King 2021, 321-337 on Aḥvamazdā's house.



does indeed seem to be linked in no small measure to some degree of social prestige and political influence: in Seleukid and post-Seleukid times, for example, *fratarakā* appear to perform important local government functions (e. g., in Persia), and it is perhaps worth noting that what appears to have been the functional Greek equivalent of the Aramaic term was closely associated with the court. According to some sources, no less a man than Darius III himself would have held a similar position before ascending the throne.<sup>179</sup>

The testimony of *ADAB* A1 alone should discourage from venturing too far into speculation, and yet it seems quite clear that, despite the undoubted authority bestowed on him by his office (whatever it actually was, there is no doubt that we are dealing with a very important function within the satrapal hierarchy) *Aḥvamazdā* had to deal with more than one insubordinate official: said otherwise, the camel drivers' affair is likely to show an ongoing conflict of interest between the satrap's official authority, if such was *Aḥvamazdā*'s appointment, and at least one local power group, headed by Bagavanta and Ahuradāta, which was exploiting the position of some of its prominent members within the Achaemenid ranks in Baktria for purposes external to (and conflicting with) the latter's agenda. We find here exemplified an unresolved crux of the «satrapal condition» characteristic of Persian hegemony in Central Asia (and perhaps not only there): although Bagavanta and his acolytes were to all intents and purposes subject to the power of the satrap, these individuals were at the same time able to repeatedly and successfully oppose his orders in case 1. they conflicted with their own interests (or with those of their reference group) or - but these are not mutually exclusive options - 2. they were perceived as limiting the ability to influence - directly or through intermediaries - the management of the affairs of the territory entrusted to them for a different purpose by the imperial administration itself, whose representatives apparently had no other choice but to rely on such local powerbrokers even if they would have wished otherwise, since there is no reason to think that (if only he could) *Aḥvamazdā* would have hesitated even for a second to get rid of a cumbersome collaborator like Bagavanta.<sup>180</sup> Against such a backdrop, it is perhaps worth exploring further the correspondence of *ADAB* A1-A8, since it perhaps allows to deepen the analysis of (sub)satrapal organization of imperial power in Central Asia according to the parameters formulated in a recent article by Christopher Tuplin and to reconstruct, at least in part, some of the relational networks that appear to

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<sup>179</sup> Tuplin 2017a, 639-640. On the issue of Darius III's position within the Achaemenid hierarchies before becoming King see Plut. *Vit. Alex.*, 18.7. Given that the satraps soon promoted and later maintained a courtly apparatus modeled on that of the Great King (Xen. *Cyr.* 8.6.1 ff.), the Baktrian letters apparently suggest that the new status acquired by these individuals within the imperial hierarchy provided a powerful incentive for the Baktrian notables to conform their social habits to those of the ruler and of his circle. And since both the Great King and the satrap had an \**azganda* at their disposal, it is little or no surprise that Bagavanta wasted no time in providing himself with a similar official, and it seems safe to assume that it was a man of his confidence.

<sup>180</sup> On the *fratarakā* during the post-Achaemenid period cf. Plischke 2014, 298 ff. with references and see now a full treatment of these officials in Wünsch 2022, 237-254.

have structured the universe of territorial agency within 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE Bactria. In this light, two additional figures of some significance, probably linked to what we might call Bagavanta's house, appear to have been Vaxšuvahišta and Azdāyāpa.<sup>181</sup> *ADAB* A5, in which the two are mentioned, is a valuable document not least because, like *ADAB* C4, it seems to contain indications of a hierarchy of the officers mentioned in it, within which Vaxšuvahišta emerges as having occupied a rather prominent position, and this both by virtue 1. of the tasks which overseen by him and, above all, 2. because of his title ('zgnđ', אַזדאַיָאַפּאַ) as well as, finally, 3. given the fact that Azdāyāpa (called «superintendent»), therefore he too was likely to have been something more than a simple sparring partner or a «servant»), figures as being at his dependance.<sup>182</sup>

Not without significance is the consideration of the area in which this 'zgnđ' was active, namely the territory of (and – likely – around) Kiš, in the Qashqadaryo (several kilometers from Tāšqurgān but despite this, apparently to some extent integrated into Bagavanta's sphere of authority): if – against the background of Vahuvaxšu's case - we admit Vaxšuvahišta's non (merely) subordinate position, it could be inferred that he had developed with Bagavanta some bond of political and/or economic solidarity (analogous, again, to the relationship existing between Aḥvamazdā and Vahuvaxšu, which seems to have gone beyond the official sphere, regulated by the Achaemenid bureaucracy). Crucial in this context, however, is to note how this partnership existed within the system formally presided over by Aḥvamazdā, whose institutions (sensu North) were at the same time exploited to defend interests closely related to the respective sociopolitical group of each of the actors involved in the affaire. We would therefore be faced, in the case of Vaxšuvahišta and Azdāyāpa, with two individuals who, at the same time, would act as appointees of the satrap (Aḥvamazdā) and as clients – bandakā - of the local big man, namely Bagavanta.<sup>183</sup> The fragmentary nature of the documentation, to which one must moreover add 1. a certain opacity in the terminology used to define (or not) positions and offices within the institutional apparatus of the satrapy as well as - last but not least – 2. the recursive nature of many names, make for obstacles that ought to be taken into account when advancing hypotheses such as those proposed in these pages. There are in fact many cases in which, comparing

<sup>181</sup> Cf. Naveh - Shaked 2012, 100 ff. A5 (= Khalili IA3).

<sup>182</sup> Likely from Old Persian \*azaganda, meaning something like «chief superintendent of workers». It should be noted, however, that the term can also be roughly translated as «messenger» or even «chief superintendent», according to a usage that also occurs elsewhere in the *ADAB* documentation: Naveh and Shaked 2012, 112 ff. C3 (= Khalili IA22), l. 4. The term employed here is \*sarakāra (סַרְכַּר), but the formal diversity does not seem to be matched by a functional difference in the nature of the power the two officers held. The situation is further complicated by the fact that, from Aḥvamazdā's correspondence, it seems possible to guess that, contrary to what has been observed above, the same term could sometimes also indicate different tasks, since there appears to have been a difference in importance between the tasks performed by the \*sarakāra mentioned in Naveh and Shaked 2012, 76 ff. A2 (= Khalili IA4) and those under the responsibility of the same official who appears in Naveh and Shaked 2012, 100 ff. A5 (= Khalili IA3).

<sup>183</sup> In this regard, the French and German history of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries provides an interesting parallel: as pointed out by Mann 1986, 391, in fact, in both historical contexts it is frequent to observe cases in which local notables owed formal obedience to more than one superior: it should be noted that, in case of conflict between them, these aristocrats were powerful enough to be able to pick their side, in not rare cases resulting decisive in the solution of the conflict itself.

the *ADAB* parchments, it is not clear whether, faced with a case of homonymy recurring in two (or more) separate documents, we are dealing with the same person holding different positions in different circumstances and in different years (remember the case of Daizāka, for whom Margaretha Folmer has identified in the *ADAB* texts, albeit hypothetically, traces of probable career advancement) or with two distinct individuals at all.<sup>184</sup> That said, what the story of the men of Vahuvaxšu shows beyond any doubt is, I would contend, the following.

First, the ability (which would seem, based on what we have seen about *ADAB* D2, to betray a need) on the part of the Achaemenid officers to co-opt into their ranks a not insignificant number of individuals originating from the regional aristocracy, in this way guaranteeing themselves access to a reservoir of resources - and to the infrastructures necessary for their exploitation, not only in Baktria, but as we have seen - at a macro-regional level – on the wider scale of Central Asia: and this, what perhaps needs to be stressed, even outside the space directly under imperial control. Second, and at the same time, *Ah̄vamazdā*'s correspondence shows with no less clarity the price paid by the King and his lieutenants, starting with the satrap, for the construction (and maintenance, and expansion) of the imperial paradigm. That is, the enormous room for maneuver granted, and punctually - and dexterously – exploited, to some representatives of the Baktrian élite (the «imperial collaborators» discussed by Düring and Stek, transformed from local strongmen into bearers of imperial authority), who did not miss an opportunity to appropriate, turning them to their advantage, the instruments of government developed by the conquerors for an entirely different purpose, the latter effectively summarized in the formula of «extraction and control».<sup>185</sup> Not infrequently bound together in dense webs of solidarity sanctioned, among other things, by matrimonial ties (more on this below), the most prominent members of this upper echelons of Central Asian society - from Bagavanta to Spitamenes and Oxyartes himself - seem to have been able, when necessary, to circumvent, if not to openly challenge, the power of the satrap and, consequently, of the Empire itself, confident as they most likely were in the fact that the solidity of the latter was based in no small measure on their active collaboration. As Clifford Ando has aptly pointed out, after all, resistance to power exists in a mimetic relationship with the forms assumed by power itself.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Tuplin 2017a, 613-623 constitutes to date one of the finest methodological reflections on the difficulties inherent in reconstructing the universe of sociopolitical relations at the sub-satrapal level in the Achaemenid Empire. Another case of (possible) career promotion in the *Achaemenid Far East* (Arachosia) is discussed in Schütze 2021, 414.

<sup>185</sup> Tuplin 1987a.

<sup>186</sup> Ando 2017b, 138, Payne and King 2020, and now Degen 2022, 312-322. It is not superfluous to note, following Strootman 2007, 169; 2014, 121-123), that this paradox in the management of local power by an authority with universalist and centralizing claims (such as the Achaemenid Empire), constitutes a 1. structural and 2. unresolved dilemma of any Empire, ancient and modern. Baberowski 2012, 212-361 rightly points out in this regard that the so-called Great Terror would represent nothing but an, unheard of, attempt to cut off the Gordian knot of the paradox of power that harnessed, not least in the Central Asian Soviet Republics, the authority of the Muscovite ruling class (which means, at the end of the day, of Stalin and his circle, which competed with the local magnates - think of men such as Bağırov or even Berija himself – for power and resources).

In the light of what has been said so far (and based on what we know about the dynamics of Persian regional power in other contexts, for example in Anatolia), it seems to me that it is possible to interpret some of the offices attested in the *ADAB* in terms of political-administrative devices developed, even in Central Asia, by the satrapal government with the precise aim of limiting as much as possible the centrifugal potential inherent in the power that it was inevitably forced to delegate to local magnates.<sup>187</sup> In keeping with a tried and tested policy of «divide and rule» (facilitated in no small measure by the competition for access to resources such as those which the construction of a center like Kyzyltēpe must have set in motion), by flanking the officers posted in a given region with other individuals who, however, answered directly to Baktra (this may have been the case of Vahuvaxšu) and, at the same time, exploiting the flexibility of individuals such as scribes and imperial couriers, whose tasks we know to have extended well beyond the simple function of draftsmen and bearers of letters and other official documentation, as well as, finally, through the promotion of favorites, individuals such as Aḥvamazdā aspired to wedge themselves within the group solidarities that cemented the power of figures such as Bagavanta at the micro-territorial level, in the interstices of the satrapal power structure.<sup>188</sup> The reluctance of Ḥulmi's paḥtā to effectively fulfill the orders of his superior illustrates what the primary purpose of this strategy was: namely to prevent that, once infiltrated into the apparatus of imperial power, these networks of (among others) Central Asian aristocrats would end up eroding -for example, by exploiting the newly acquired means in order to clear the field from internal adversaries (who had now become colleagues) - Achaemenid control over Baktria, to say nothing of borderland territories, in which the constantly in statu nascendi nature of Persian hegemony is likely to have appeared even more tangible and open to challenge.<sup>189</sup> In this regard, it is particularly interesting to note that similar goals would have been pursued by Alexander, who managed to get the better of individuals such as Spitamenes only by exploiting the internal divisions of a Baktrian élite that, now orphan of the imperial institutions which, at the same time, had kept the rate of belligerence at bay by guaranteeing conspicuous incomes for the greatest possible number of actors involved, had tried, through the mediation of those who had the most to lose from an overturning of the Persian status quo - first and foremost Spitamenes himself - to unite forces against the enemy with the sole goal of preserving interests that we could perhaps define as being of a corporate nature.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Tuplin 2017a, 617-620, who discusses to a considerable extent several literary sources (especially, but by no means only, Xenophon).

<sup>188</sup> King 2020 identified precisely in this ability to act in the interspaces of the fabric of imperial power a distinctive feature of the power held by figures à la Bagavanta throughout the entire history of Ancient Baktria.

<sup>189</sup> Degen 2022, 315-318 on the accumulation of satrapal power in borderland regions.

<sup>190</sup> Note Degen 2022, 302-312, pointing out how crucial it was for Alexander to stage himself as an alternative to Darius, and then Bessos (but not to imperial power) to win the local élites, and through them the Empire.

To test the validity of this hypothesis, we shall now proceed to review some of the appointments whose existence can be deduced from the *ADAB* following the methodology developed by Tuplin and presented above. If Vahuvaxšu's story has provided a cue to show through which mechanisms the recruitment of Baktrian aristocrats among the ranks of the satrapal administration could represent, at the same time, an indispensable resource and a danger not to be underestimated for the good functioning of the Persian government in Central Asia, in the following pages it shall be attempted to show how this threat could be contained (although never completely neutralized), by resorting to other individuals recruited within that same élite. In further support of the arguments set forth in this chapter, through recourse to another extremely important Baktrian documentary corpus, the last section seeks to sketch a sociological profile of those networks of aristocratic solidarity within which, as suggested, individuals such as Bagavanta and Vahuvaxšu himself seem to have moved during their entire political career. In order to study *The Dynamics of Ancient Empires* in Central Asia (therefore way beyond the Achaemenid case), to gain a better sense of these power networks and of their logics is a fundamental step, as this entire work has tried to illustrate.<sup>191</sup>

### 3.1. *Resistenza e intesa*. All Aḥvamazdā's Men

At the risk of being redundant, it is necessary to preface this section with a methodological disclaimer: by its very nature, the available evidence makes it impossible to avoid a certain degree of speculation. By virtue of the fact that the *ADAB* parchments swarm with individuals without any title but whose actions (as Tuplin rightfully pointed out) might nevertheless reflect an official role of theirs that it is not possible to reconstruct today, the attempt to identify traces of dependency or hierarchical relationships between these men and others, whose position within the ranks of the satrapal administration appears instead assured by the explicit mention of their respective office, is therefore an extremely complex endeavor.<sup>192</sup> A good example of such difficulties is provided by the «men appointed by the court of my lord» mentioned in *ADAB* A1, who tried, apparently without much success - in itself a relevant fact in the light of the discussion above - to intervene in favor of the camel drivers on a (direct and personal) mandate of Aḥvamazdā, yet another clue concerning the social standing of both the harassed hnškr̥t and of Vahuvaxšu.<sup>193</sup> Although there is no way, at least given the evidence at hand, to clarify in more detail the nature of their role, it seems in any case quite clear that those men's intervention was made necessary by the extent - which to Baktra must have

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<sup>191</sup> On modern (Soviet and post-independence) Central Asia see the relevant chapters in Fragner and Kappeler 2006 with full references.

<sup>192</sup> Tuplin 2017a, 623.

<sup>193</sup> Navch and Shaked 2012, 66 ff. A1 (= Khalili IA 6), l. 7.

appeared at a certain point rather worrying - of the power accumulated by Bagavanta in Tāšqurḡān and not only there (think of the presence of Vaxšuvahišta, clearly linked to him, at Kiš). To these preliminary considerations we can moreover add that Aḥvamazdā's choice must have been carefully pondered. Consequently, we are justified in assuming that the inspectors (if this is what they were) appointed ad hoc by the satrapal seat at Baktra had to come 1. from a geographical area sufficiently distant from Bagavanta's sphere of influence, to prevent the latter from retaliating against them as it happened with the camel keepers, and 2. from a socio-economic context that made them impervious to attempts at corruption, which in such a context it is easy to imagine were frequent.<sup>194</sup>

The comparison between the *ADAB* and the evidence (both in classical languages and in Aramaic) coming from other contexts within the Empire warrants the suspicion of the existence of officers who, although they theoretically carried out tasks of a non-strictly administrative nature, were nevertheless endowed with a kind of operational capacity at the expense of their superiors within the local hierarchy in the event that there were indications of an improper behavior on the part of the latter or that their loyalty to Persian power appeared to be wavering.<sup>195</sup> This is for example the role in which seems to have been active an individual known by the name of Vahya-ātar. He appears in one of the letters of Aḥvamazdā as his «servant»: from the document we learn that he was deputed to oversee the landed properties of his superior, which, however, were located in the territories under Bagavanta's jurisdiction. The latter, for his part, should have taken care of the sowing, harvesting and maintenance of granaries and other strategic infrastructure scattered across the territory belonging to the possessions of the superior of both (namely Aḥvamazdā himself).<sup>196</sup> Assuming the functions of what historiographical sources, e .g. Herodotos and Xenophon, call the «eyes and ears of the satrap [or of the King]», Vahya-ātar had taken it upon himself, we learn from the letter, to personally inform Aḥvamazdā about Bagavanta's shortcomings, thereby triggering a wave of rather bombastic threats from the satrap: whether they were followed by concrete measures, we are unable to say, but the testimony of *ADAB* A1 provides elements to believe that this was not as obvious as the tone of the

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<sup>194</sup> Bang 2015 for some examples coming from a different context (both in terms of geography and chronology) but very much comparable to those discussed here.

<sup>195</sup> Tuplin 2017a, 618: a similar case, which however in this circumstance seems to have involved even the satrap, is reported by Xen. *Anab.*, 1.6.6: it is unnecessary to emphasize that such an institution could have given rise to all sorts of whistleblowing practices aimed at continuing, «by other means», the inter-aristocratic competition that, *before* the advent of Achaemenid power, had to rely mainly on military confrontation.

<sup>196</sup> The title by which Vahya-ātar is referred to in the text is ppyd' (פּקִידָא'): Naveh and Shaked 2012, 112 ff. A6 (= Khalili IA5) and King 2021, 325. The context of the letter can be compared to that of *ALBL* A6.6, in which Aršāma's trusted man, the famous Neḥtiḥōr, is identified using the same word, which could, at least in theory, suggest a functional homology between the tasks of the two: see text, translation, and commentary in Tuplin and Ma 2020 I, 28-29, 108-110. A Vahya-ātar also appears in another document (Naveh and Shaked 2012, 174 ff. C1 (= Khalili IA21)), and we are perhaps entitled to assume that, at least in this case, it is the same person, since in both scrolls a place is mentioned, called Artuki (l. 49: 'rtwky, i. e. אַרְתּוּכִי), in which Vahya-ātar would be active as a ppyd'. What is almost sure is that Aḥvamazdā must have had other subordinates such as Vahya-ātar across his domains in Baktria, not least because the ppyd' was instrumental in maintaining relationships with other élites across a given territory: see on this point King 2021, 155-175.

parchment would suggest.<sup>197</sup> It is worth mentioning at this point that, in his policing duties, Vahya-ātar does not seem to have been alone: although in a much less transparent context, in a second letter sent by Aḥvamazdā another officer assigned to investigative tasks peeps out, namely the \*patifrāsa.<sup>198</sup> Once again, Bagavanta's deficiencies (too recurrent even in the small corpus at our disposal to be attributed simply to sloppiness or to mere chance find) reach Aḥvamazdā's ears thanks to the zeal of some individuals active in places that can be identified as garrisons or post stations, probably located in some strategic point of the territory under the administration settled at Ḥulmi. In his reply (the only text that has come down to us and from which we can try to reconstruct the course of events), Aḥvamazdā delegates to another officer, a scribe named Daizāka, the task of providing for the harvest and the disinfection of locusts, both tasks pertaining to Bagavanta, to which he apparently came short once again. Similarly to what has been observed about Vahya-ātar, also in this case it seems quite clear that, despite the impossibility by Aḥvamazdā of removing his in subordinate deputy, the latter was at least able to rely on other officials in order to stem the damage caused by Bagavanta's negligence. Could it not be, therefore, that, alongside the function of superintendent of the royal camel drivers, Vahuvaxšu was entrusted with tasks somewhat similar to those of the \*patifrāsa? This would help, at least in part, to account for the resentment shown by Bagavanta and his circle (part of his house?) towards the son of Čiθrabarzana.<sup>199</sup>

Despite the extremely lacunose nature of the text, it is perhaps possible to advance a similar hypothesis also in the case of the judge (\*ratu): mentioned in *ADAB* A9, he too seems to have belonged to a category of officials not too different from that of the \*patifrāsa or the ppyd': he too, in fact, for what little we can sense from the parchment, appears to have been employed in a branch of the imperial administration whose exact function, however, we are unfortunately unable to establish with certainty.<sup>200</sup> By far the most interesting aspect of the text in which he appears is the fact that the transaction recorded in the parchment (which directly involved Bagavanta, albeit through the intermediary of his wife) seems to have been under his (the judge's) supervision. Consequently, one would be tempted to argue in favor of the hypothesis that would recognize in the \*ratu yet another official employed by Aḥvamazdā in an attempt to keep under control the activities of the most powerful (and least cooperative) among his direct subordinates.<sup>201</sup> Possible support for this

<sup>197</sup> The testimony of the *ADAB* thus provides material supporting the hypothesis that, although not officially formalized within the Achaemenid political-administrative hierarchy, the office of «eyes and ears of the king» attested, for example, in Hdt. 1.114 and Xen. *Cyr.*, 8.6.16 was something more than an extravagant exotic detail. See in this regard Shahbazi 1997 and Briant 2002, 344 for further discussion of the issue.

<sup>198</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 94 ff. A4 (= Khalili IA1): see moreover Tuplin 2017a, 630-631.

<sup>199</sup> Cf. Tuplin 2017a, 631.

<sup>200</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 124 f. A9 (= Khalili IA15), l. 3: the Aramaic text reads 𐤓𐤕, namely *rt*. On this very problematic, but extremely intriguing specimen see Tuplin 2017a, 626.

<sup>201</sup> Evidence from the Babylonian «long 6<sup>th</sup> century» discussed in Pirngruber 2021, 1093 makes an origin within the ranks of the local élites of the Baktrian *ratu* fairly likely.

hypothesis is provided by the Persepolis archives, for they record a certain Bakabada (also called «judge» [databara] of Parnakka) who was in charge of the sorting of wine rations destined to his superior: from this we might deduce that, at Persepolis as well as in Baktria, functions of an investigative/legal nature did not prevent the holders of such appointments from carrying out other tasks, more strictly connected to the administration of the territorial resources (and especially of the agricultural produce).<sup>202</sup>

Daizāka already entered the discussion, but it is worth insisting a little more on this individual since his case offers an interesting insight into the world of the scribes and of other officials in charge of managing the flow of information in the context of late 4<sup>th</sup> century Achaemenid Baktria. It is therefore possible to add at least the following considerations. First: the *ADAB* show with some clarity that officials belonging to this category of personnel were recruited within the most exclusive circles of imperial society, and in more than one case we have evidence that this important position was not precluded to members of local communities in the individual satrapies.<sup>203</sup> Second: far from limiting themselves to the, in any case by no means trivial, task of drafting official documents, some of them were in charge, for example, of coordinating armed troops or of managing building works obviously considered strategic by their superiors, and this despite the fact that the monopoly on coercion remained in the satraps' hands; in at least one case, moreover, men such as Daizāka were directly involved in the management of the food resources of the satrapy as well as of the horses, a fact that is particularly noteworthy and that reflects rather well the importance attributed by the highest officials of the Empire to the planning of the movement (and acquisition) of men and goods at (and from) the borders of the Baktrian oases.<sup>204</sup> Put another way, the presence, explicitly mentioned or arguable from the context, of a facility such as a baribataš implied by its very nature the function of an individual like Daizāka. Worthy of some comment in this regard is the case of *ADAB* A4 (dated between 348-347 BCE), from which we learn that Daizāka and a colleague of his, an individual named Spaita, had been commissioned to supervise the performance of critical infrastructural works in the territory of a place called Nīḥšapâia, probably near the modern O'zbek city of Qarši (also known as

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<sup>202</sup> E. g. PF 1272, on which see the comment in Briant 2002, 468. That this judge might have been a local officer (possibly of local origin?) is made likely by evidence coming from 4<sup>th</sup> century Egypt and Samaria: see Schütze 2021, 416 with bibliography.

<sup>203</sup> This is almost without doubt the case of Nurafratarā (nwrprtr, נורפרתר), recorded in Naveh and Shaked 2012, 112 ff. A6 (= Khalili IA 5), l. 11 (whose names means something like «of a sharp mind» or «foremost») and of Nāfabarzana (Naveh - Shaked 2012, 203 ff. C4 (= Khalili IA 17)), l. 3. Such personal name (nḥbrzn, נפברזן), which can be translated as «belonging to an outstanding family», would lead to think that, in this case as well as in that of Vahuvaxšu, we might be dealing with a (Baktrian?) aristocrat recruited within the ranks of the Achaemenid satrapal hierarchy.

<sup>204</sup> Such was for example the task of Anumisa and Āθfiya at least according to Naveh and Shaked 2012, 76 ff. A2 (= Khalili IA4). In another scroll, this time undated, (Naveh - Shaked 2012, 132 ff. B1 (= Khalili IA7) we find mention of Mithrafarnah and Upadavara who, together with their subordinates Nakor and Vachadata, are intent in carrying out tasks somewhat comparable to those in which the first two were employed.



Naḥššab), in the Qashqadaryo valley.<sup>205</sup> It is necessary to dwell on two aspects emerging from a careful reading of the scroll in question. The first concerns the date: 20 years before Alexander's invasion, Achaemenid power appears to be in (remarkably) good health in a territory crucial for the administration of Sogdiana, a fact that has been questioned several times, even in quite recent years.<sup>206</sup> As for the second point, *ADAB* A4 shows that, despite - or maybe because of - the fact that the jurisdiction was that of Bagavanta, who perhaps even held estates in the area, Aḥvamazdā felt the need to flank his subordinate with other officers, most likely men of his trust, therefore active in competition with Bagavanta (when not directly entrusted with the task of keeping an eye on him). At least in the case of Āθfiya, it seems certain that he belonged to the most selected circles of the environment in which Aḥvamazdā moved (therefore being sort of φίλος/bandaka?), since this man is mentioned alongside another Daizāka (but is it possible to categorically exclude that it is not the same officer mentioned in *ADAB* A4?) in a letter that - a detail not to be overlooked - seems to refer to the supply of horses at the border of a semi-desert area (called Artadatana): are we therefore faced with a context similar to the one, according to the reconstruction provided by Henkelman and Folmer, attested in *ADAB* D2?<sup>207</sup>

At this point it should be noted that the probable Baktrian origin of at least some of these (important) officials (Daizāka is a good example next to Vahuvaxšu) helps to support one of core hypotheses at of this chapter: faced with the progressive accumulation of power by the Baktrian notables - one name above all: Bagavanta -, in turn a consequence itself of the inevitable delegation of authority and tasks by the Balḥ administration, the latter seems to have tried to remedy, apparently not without some degree of success, by striving to enhance the level of competition within the same Central Asian élite

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<sup>205</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 24-26. Regarding this document see Folmer 2017, 415 and King 2021, 336-337, noting that the «troops» mentioned in the document «were by no means deployed exclusively in military roles». The editors of the correspondence interpret the name of the settlement to which these men were commanded as «[city] guarding the frontier». This is a hypothesis that might find at least partial confirmation in the *ARPT*: the latter, in fact, attest to the existence of a dense network of (probably fortified) centers of production of an administrative nature that seem to have been coordinated by the government apparatus stationed at Qandahār (cf. Stolper and Fischer 2015). Briant 2002, 458 for a comparison with Ēlāmite documentation attesting to the existence of similar infrastructure in other satrapies of the Empire (on which also Henkelman 2017a; 2018b, 810-812).

<sup>206</sup> Wiesehöfer 1978, Dandamaev 1994: see most recently the considerations of Wu Xin (2005; 2014). According to Naveh - Shaked 2012, 14, some of the scrolls of the Ḥalīli collection may have originally come from places located North of the Syrdaryo, i. e. in what, according to Strab. 11.11.2, would have been «nomadic» territory: once again we find support for the hypothesis that the political-administrative geography does not always, nor uniformly, correspond to the map of economic and social relationships.

<sup>207</sup> See King 2021, 329-330 on the importance of pastoralism in Achaemenid Baktria (and the satraps were very much aware of that) as well as on the mutually beneficial nature of the partnership for all the parties (the satrapal household, the imperial economy, and the (agro)pastoral communities) involved in the exchange. In the document he is called bēl ṭēmi (ב'ל ט'מ, בעל טעמ), a position that appears to be attested elsewhere in the Empire as well, e. g. by *Ezd.*, 4.8: the meaning of this title would be something like «master of procedure», according at least to the interpretation of Tuplin 2017a, 642. Following the scholar's judgement, there is little doubt that Āθfiya belonged to the inner circle within the bureaucracy headed by Aḥvamazdā. From this it can be deduced that whoever was intimately involved in the management of the satrap's orders (as Āθfiya was) must have been an individual of remarkable sociopolitical standing. On the issue of the φίλοι of the Achaemenid court see most recently Engels 2017b, 70.

by increasing the recruitment of personnel coming from that very same world, taking care, however (it is possible to assume), to appoint in potentially conflicting positions individuals whose local interests were – or might have been - competing with each other.<sup>208</sup> Although documented in a surprisingly detailed way by the *Ahḫvamazdā* correspondence, the headaches of the Baktrian administration should not be so surprising: if we widen our view to the whole imperial territory, in fact, the case of Bagavanta is perhaps the best attested, but certainly not the only one. In analogy with the story of the «Amminapes the Parthian» who negotiated the surrender of Egypt to Alexander, also in the context of Bactria and Sogdiana it is reasonable to assume - as Briant had already done to a certain extent - the widespread presence of individuals who, although lacking, as far as we know, official titles within the framework of the local administration, nevertheless carried out essential tasks within certain territories, and who consequently held a power the extent of which should not be underestimated.<sup>209</sup> In the context of Achaemenid Central Asia, the most striking case is that of the ὕπαρχοι mentioned several times by Alexander’s historians.<sup>210</sup>

In the wake of the Bagavanta affaire, it might be reasonable to assume 1. that figures such as Arimazes, Chorienes, Sisimithres or Austanes also held, following Tuplin’s remarks, some kind of uplifted position below the satrap and 2. that this position sought to frame within the political-administrative cadres of Achaemenid-ruled Bactria and Sogdiana (in Henkelman’s terms, to «institutionalize») what originally must have been nothing more than a power of a personal nature wielded by these individuals over the territory of their respective communities or, as in the case of Vivanā’s fief, corresponding neither more nor less to their land holdings.<sup>211</sup> The events of the Makedonian campaign on the one hand (in particular those related to the final phase of the confrontation, namely in 328 BCE) and, on the other hand, primary, albeit later, Baktrian sources, consistently point in the direction of the existence of very close relationships (although not always free from conflict and more or less dormant tensions) between these individuals. Their group solidarity, even though constituted a formidable tool of territorial control, could however at the same time become a real threat not so much and not only for the satrap, from whose proximity many members of this élite derived a not insignificant slice of their own power, but in extreme cases for the

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<sup>208</sup> In the terms of Grewal 2008, 166-193, it is possible to speak here of a strategy of *containment* of power networks.

<sup>209</sup> Amminapes is mentioned in Arr. *Anab.*, 3.22.1. A second example of some interest is a man called Aspis «who governed Kataonia» recorded in Nep. *Dat.*, 4, and a third is Mazaïos (Curt. 5.1.18, Diod. Sic. 17.55.1), whose grudges with Darius III over power issues may rest behind his behavior once faced with Alexander: Degen 2022, 317-318: overlap of personal and imperial interests here turned the table in favor of the Makedonians at a crucial stage of Alexander’s invasion. Of course, it goes without saying that the dataset available extreme caution, since in cases where no title appears in the sources this does not imply that a corresponding function did not *exist*, or that individuals who appear without a formally attested office were also without power, as appropriately noted by Tuplin 2017a, 645.

<sup>210</sup> See already Rapin 2013; 2018a.

<sup>211</sup> Tuplin 2017a, 620-623. See Henkelman 2018b, 810-811, suggesting that there might have been considerable economic reasons behind Vīštāspa’s choice of marrying Irdabama (assuming that she indeed was Darius’ mother), namely the extent and wealth of her land estates in Ēlāmite territory.

Achaemenid (would-be) King himself. Just such a dynamic would have been experienced, to their own detriment, in turn, by Darius III, Bessos, Spitamenes, and in some ways the even by Alexander himself.<sup>212</sup> If Athens cries, Sparta does however not laugh: it is in fact worth noting that, if the satrap did not always trust his subordinates (apparently not entirely without reasons), the imperial court had in turn grounds for not placing unconditional trust in the satrap himself.<sup>213</sup> In order to cope with this (by no means negligible) difficulty, and in perfect analogy with what is known from the evidence coming from other satrapies - for example in Asia Minor - the solution adopted by the Achaemenids in Bactria must have been to appoint officers whom Tuplin has defined as subordinates of the King rather than of the satrap. In other words, in this case the strategy appears to have consisted in institutionalizing, by transforming them into an office, relationships of personal loyalty capable of overriding the very authority of individuals such as Ahvamazdā.<sup>214</sup> Such figures are also known to classical sources, which call them κάρανοι: this is a word apparently taken by weight from the Old Persian \*kārana-, the meaning of which is usually understood as indicating an «army commander (of royal stature)».<sup>215</sup> A remarkable fact in all of this is that, in Central Asia, a position of such prestige and responsibility seems to have been entrusted to members of the local élite: the only evidence in our possession concerns the very last years of Achaemenid hegemony East of the Caspian, which naturally raises the question, given the state of our documentation probably destined to remain unanswered, of 1. whether and 2. to what extent the sources we have at our disposal constitutes an innovation or instead reflects established practices in the management of satrapal power (and of the risks inherent in its paradoxes).

<sup>212</sup> Cf. Curt. 7.11.1-19 as well as Polyaeus 4.3.29.

<sup>213</sup> It is in other words the old issue of «who shall control the controllers?» already discussed Plat. *Rep.*, 3.403e or *Juv.*, 6.31-32. A problem of this kind must have been felt with particular urgency in such crucial areas as Asia Minor, the Caucasus, and, of course, Central Asia, in which the appointment of a cadet member of the imperial family to the satrapal office could generate extremely dangerous tensions, especially at the time of succession to the throne. In accordance with the reading of the documentation suggested in these pages, Bagavanta could be considered a representative of those «intermediate elites» which, according to Duindam 2016, 254, constituted fundamental pawns by virtue of their ability to ensure control by the Empire «over the population as a whole». Indeed, they were in the best possible position to act as mediators, taking advantage of the access their respective representatives enjoyed to the distribution of honors (in our case, as we have seen, also of material goods such as the drinking vessels) within the court in order to satisfy their followers at the local level. Access to imperial resources through the structures of the satrapy was therefore fundamental for individuals such as Bagavanta, since it was precisely these structures that provided them with the means through which they could consolidate their respective networks of patronage on the territory that put them in a position, as Vahuvaxšu experienced, to act in blatant opposition to the orders of the very institution that guaranteed their power (even at the local level) in the event that the interests of the Empire and their own or of their «selectorate» came into conflict.

<sup>214</sup> Tuplin 2017a, 615 calls such individuals «supra-satrapal officials». They are attested in other territories of the Empire: cf. Ariaeus and Pasiphernes in *Hell. Oxy.* 22 and the Terituchmes mentioned in *FGrHist* 688 F 15 (56).

<sup>215</sup> Tavernier 2007, Plischke 2014, 25: cf. PF 1300 and PF 1384. This position is explicitly attested in Xen. *Hell.*, 1.4.3 (τὸ δὲ κάρανον ἔστι κέρτιον), but it is also worth comparing with Xen. *Hell.*, 4.3 and Xen. *Anab.*, 1.9.7. Worth consulting is also Klinkott 2005, 324-330 as it comes to the appointment of the κάρανος and of his duties. When not a direct calque from the Old Persian \*kārana-, the term is usually rendered by Greek authors using the word στρατηγός: Sekunda 1988, 74, Briant 2002, 352, Klinkott 2005, 321 and Manning 2021, 192.

In a parchment included by the editors of the *ADAB* within section «C» of the corpus, the one dedicated to the «supply lists», and which was still sealed at the time in which it was purchased by the family trust of Nāṣer Ḥalīlī, we read in fact of a certain Vīštāspa κάρανος (krny wšt'sp) intent on supervising a transaction of 40 sheep (as we have seen, anything but a trivial amount) between two individuals named respectively Kaufadata and Vaidyura.<sup>216</sup> The interest of this document, remarkable in itself, is further increased by the fact that both Curtius Rufus and Arrian are aware of the existence of a man with the same name active in Baktria in a position of absolute prominence within the satrapal hierarchy. According to the Latin historian, who calls his Hystaspes «magni et ipse exercitus praetor», the Vīštāspa in question would have been the husband of a niece of Artaxerxes III, which is enough to explain the subsequent qualification attributed to him in the *Historia Alexandri Magni*, namely that of propinquus of the Great King (think of Bessos, according to Arrian and other sources οικειότης of Darius III).<sup>217</sup> As for the author of the *Anabasis*, he seems to refer to the same powerholder mentioned by Curtius Rufus when he alludes to an Irānian aristocrat, perhaps part of the closest entourage of Bessos himself: not to be overlooked, the historian of Nikomedia explicitly designates this individual with the appellation of Baktrian, in fact excluding the possibility of a Persian (in an ethnic sense) origin; everything conspires therefore in favor of the hypothesis according to which, even rejecting the possibility of a Central Asian background of Bessos, it should not be inferred from this that the highest levels of Achaemenid power in Baktria were ipso facto precluded to representatives of local élites.<sup>218</sup>

One last remark, as a partial conclusion of the present discussion: in the narrative context of the *Anabasis*, Vīštāspa appears as ἡγεμὼν of a selected squadron of the Irānian cavalry formed by Alexander in 324 BCE. Now: in the event that the ἡγεμὼν of Arrian and the Vīštāspa of *ADAB* C2 were the same person (a hypothesis difficult to prove, but which, in view of the evidence discussed

<sup>216</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 190 ff. C2 (= Khalili IA20) l. 1: רשתאסר כרני. We have seen above that another Vīštāspā (Ἰστάσπης) held a position of great prestige in Baktria between 486 and 465 BCE, and in the opinion of Brosius 1996, 111, it is even possible that he was the satrap. The 5<sup>th</sup> century, however, appears to be too high a date for the Baktrian scroll purchased by Ḥalīlī, since it gives as a chronological indication the year 1 of an unidentified ruler (but it cannot be excluded that this is simply the year 1 of Vīštāspā as the holder of his office). A comparison with the Babylonian calendar leads to believe that *ADAB* C2 should be dated between 330 and 329 BCE: see Naveh and Shaked 2012, 189. Hyland 2013 and Luther 2021 for two somewhat different but convergent discussions of this testimony.

<sup>217</sup> Curt. 6.2.7. See Briant 2002, 801 ff. In Old Persian the term kārā- usually has a military connotation and implies a very high rank, which seems to suggest that Vīštāspā was probably in the direct service of the Great King: Tuplin 2017a, 617, but see however Manning 2021, 137-138, 227. On Bessos as the οικειότης of Darius II see Arr. *Anab.*, 3.21.5, Curt. 4.6.4 (but also 6.6.16) and Diod. Sic. 17.73.2.

<sup>218</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 7.6.2. If, as suggested by Hyland 2013, the Aramaic krny (כרני) did not only allude to the office of Vīštāspā but, as has been suggested, to the very prestigious family of Kāren, which is attested in extremely influential positions even in Arsakid and Sāsānid times, *ADAB* C2 would be one of the most valuable documents known to date from Baktria: this by virtue of the fact that, among other things, it might provide textual evidence of how an (eminent) military officer such as the κάρανος could be at the same time active in the economic and social life of the satrapy under his purview: it should moreover not be forgotten that Vīštāspā had another officer in his employ, exactly as in Egypt Aršāma - the best parallel we have dated to Achaemenid times - had Neḥtiḥōr. Cf. Panitschek 2016, 83.

in these pages, does not seem entirely implausible), we would be in a position to identify in this individual one of those Baktrian notables who turned their backs on Bessos in 330-329, the same year – as it should be kept in mind - to which the parchment recording the activities of the κάρανος is most likely to be dated. This would allow, incidentally, to explain the fact that, although not many Baktrian aristocrats survived unharmed Alexander's two-years stay in Central Asia, Vīštāspa was instead able to maintain (beyond his life) his position *and* its power, and perhaps even to expand them, in a significant analogy with what we can grasp of the life of one of the most prominent protagonists of those turbulent years and of the following epoch, namely Oxyartes, praetor Bactrianorum, father of Rōxanē and, last but not least, father-in-law (therefore an οἰκειότης) of the last Achaemenid King.<sup>219</sup>

#### 4. *Just send me words*: Bagavanta's World Between Two Archives and Several Empires

##### 4.1. The Future is History

Since the beginning of the 1990s, a large number (more than 150) of documents recorded in Baktrian - an Eastern Irānian language written however using the Greek alphabet - mainly of a legal nature, to which it is possible to add a substantial group of letters, began to appear on the international antiquities market. Notwithstanding the little (if any) reliable information about the provenance of these documents, the careful study of the corpus pioneered by Nicholas Sims-Williams and other experts has made it possible to locate most of these materials, known under the name of *Baktrian Documents from Northern Afghanistan*, in the Northern-central region of today's republic, roughly in the area between Balḥ and Bāmiyān, both places mentioned in the documents.<sup>220</sup> Chronologically, most of the material published in the *BDNA* is dated between the year 110 and the year 549 of an era not otherwise specified, but which can reasonably be identified with the chronological computation begun in 227 CE following the accession to the throne of Ardašīr, the founder of the Sāsānid dynasty.<sup>221</sup> By virtue of this dating, the *BDNA* would thus be earlier than another group of texts (about 30 in number), most of which come from the archives of the family of a certain Mīr, son of Bek, active in Baktria at least between the years 130 and 160 of the Muslim calendar (i. e. in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE). Next to the work of Sims-Williams, the *Arabic Documents from Early Islamic*

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<sup>219</sup> For a thorough discussion concerning the meaning and function of a κάρανος in the Achaemenid Empire see Rung 2015. Most recently on kny wšt'sp cf. Luther 2021. Alexander as the last Achaemenid: Briant 2002, 876.

<sup>220</sup> Sims-Williams 2020, 236.

<sup>221</sup> Sims-Williams 2020, 233, with previous bibliography and references.

*Khurasan*, edited by Geoffrey Hān, provide the most solid philological backdrop from which to approach this important documentation.<sup>222</sup>



**Map 7.2. And I Have Sent One Dīnār to Your Lordship. The World of the *BDNA*. © Peter Palm**

Building on a recent, brilliant study by Rhyne King on the sociology of power in Late Antique Bactria as can be guessed from a careful analysis of the material briefly presented here, in particular the letters published in volume II of the *BDNA*, the last section of this chapter aims to compare (starting from the protagonists' voices), the world of the Bactrian landed aristocracy in the Sāsānid and High Islamic period with that which has emerged from the correspondence of Aḥvamazdā in order to establish a comparison with the society within which, as assumed in the previous pages, an individual like Bagavanta is likely to have moved. This will be made possible in particular by a comparison of the corpus edited by Sims-Williams with the only section of the *ADAB* that has so far remained outside the present investigation's focus, namely private letters B1-B9.<sup>223</sup> It is the claim of what follows that such an approach allows to visualize the structure of Achaemenid power in Central

<sup>222</sup> Sims-Williams 2020, 231, Wiesehöfer and Rollinger 2020, 318-319.

<sup>223</sup> King 2020 on the sociology of power surfacing from the *BDNA*: compare Morris 2021b, 466-470.

Asia as «a hierarchical network of local elites and their trans-regional, imperial superiors»: each of these individuals, as Richard Payne and Rhyne King have recently pointed out, «were bound together through the communicative exchange of letters and the political-economic exchange of gifts and persons».<sup>224</sup> Like the *BDNA*, it is the contention of this section that in the case of the *ADAB* it is also possible to show that the surviving correspondence not only illustrates in great detail the development of the political, social, and economic institutions of a province embedded in what Henkelman calls an «imperial tapestry» (the perspective of the «virgin land» formulated and repeatedly defended by Wu Xin) but also provides multiple examples, an aspect at least as important and, in the context of this study, of preeminent interest, of the strategies through which the local Baktrian élite was able to mediate between 1. imperial regimes (stressing the plural is important here), 2. their respective aristocratic counterparts, and 3. their own subordinates (Kiser and Levi's «selectorate»). Put another way, the study of this material provides further plausibility to the arguments put forward (among others) by Lori Khatchadourian, Seth Richardson, and James Scott which provide one of the theoretical and methodological pillars of this chapter and of the preceding ones: participation and not (only) coercion is the key word if one wishes to understand the process underlying the entrenchment of any imperial power in the societies it claims to control, all the more so in a space such as that of Ancient Afġānistān.<sup>225</sup> At the twilight of Achaemenid imperial hegemony, we thus return to the starting point of this historical phase and to one of its distinctive features: the inextricable paradoxes inherent in the «satrapal condition».<sup>226</sup> Before going any further, however, it will be appropriate to offer a brief overview of the *BDNA* and of the sociopolitical context that formed the backdrop to their drafting.

#### 4.1.1. Kuṣāṇṣāhān and Ḥulafā': Surviving the Empires Within the Empire

Based on the chronological distribution of both the contracts and the letters published by Sims-Williams, the *BDNA* can be divided into six groups.<sup>227</sup> The first one, consisting of five dated documents and 24 others without chronological references, must have been drawn up between, at the latest, 332 and 400 CE.<sup>228</sup> Most of the documentation comes from the region of Rōb (Southwest of Surḥ Kotal), which seems to have been at the dependencies of a certain Ḥar, a lieutenant - probably of local extraction - belonging to the top echelons of Sāsānid administration, namely the

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<sup>224</sup> Payne and King 2020, XVIII.

<sup>225</sup> Barfield 2020.

<sup>226</sup> Khatchadourian 2016, 1-11.

<sup>227</sup> Sims-Williams 2020, 241-243 with literature: compare Morris 2019b, 412-414.

<sup>228</sup> Sims-Williams and De Blois 2018 for a thorough discussion of the chronology of these documents.

Kuṣāṇṣāhān.<sup>229</sup> Interesting fact, in some of these documents mention is made of a «satrap», or «Persian satrap» (the Sāsānid equivalent of the Vīštāspa κάρανοϛ of *ADAB C2?*) sent to Baktria with the intention of overseeing the activities Rōb's Ḥar, whose role within the power structure of the last Irānian Empire could perhaps be compared to that of Bagavanta. The second group contains 11 documents - 5 of which are dated - and spans the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE. It collects essentially material from Kadagstān, apparently an administrative subdivision of contemporary Baktria subject to the rule of another official (who apparently answered directly to the Persian Šāhanšāh and who was known as the Kadag-bid.<sup>230</sup> There follow 34 specimens datable approximately to the reign of Pērōz and coming both from Kadagstān and Rōb (reliable chronological indications are available only in 8 cases). The context is that of the disastrous military campaigns of the Sāsānid King of Kings against the Hephthalites, as suggested by the presence in the documentation of the Kanārang, a senior officer of the Persian army in charge of securing the imperial borderlands in the East.<sup>231</sup> In a political scenario characterized by such tensions (both Kadagstān and the territory of Rōb seem at a certain point to come under the political hegemony of the invaders), the resilience of some of the members of the Baktrian aristocracy is striking: in fact, in at least one case, we have incontrovertible evidence of the permanence in positions of some prestige of a landowning family in defiance of the turnover in power, in order, of the Hephthalites, the Türk Qağanate, and the conquest of (Northern) Afġānistān by the Caliphal armies of Qutayba, which means spanning some 3 centuries and perhaps even more while Empires of all sorts rose and fell around those men and their networks.<sup>232</sup> The fourth group, consisting of 5 documents, all dated, spans the height of the Hephthalite power in the now former Sāsānid satrapy. Despite bearing a title declaring its (at least formal) subjection to the Qağan of the Western Türks, the office of the Ḥar of Rōb (who, a not irrelevant detail, was still able to hold court) remains attested: we are in 629 CE. As it was already pointed out while evaluating the (alleged) turmoil caused by Xerxes' ascension to the Achaemenid throne, the ability of local notables to operate in the interstices between their subordinates on the one hand and the imperial power on the other – a resilience which seems to have been the result of a stubborn maintenance, not alien to constant

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<sup>229</sup> Rezakhani 2017, 46-86; 2022 (on the Kuṣāṇa background of Sāsānid Eastern Irān), Wiesehöfer and Rollinger 2020, 320-321.

<sup>230</sup> Rezakhani 2017, 120 ff.

<sup>231</sup> On these events see e. g. Payne 2017, Potts 2018, Meier 2020, 731-742. On the Hephthalite (short-term) Empire see most recently Wiesehöfer and Rollinger 2020.

<sup>232</sup> Payne and King 2020, XVIII. The case in question is that of the Šābūrān family, first attested at Malr in 517 CE. (*BDNA* I, J, 54-62) but perhaps, as the name seems to suggest, connected in some way with Sāsānid power from much earlier times. Notable about this family is the fact, as King 2020, 254-255 points out, that a descendant of the same gens (a man called Fruma-rizm), appears in 629 as tapaghliġh iltābir of the Türk Qağan who, in order to secure the services of this Baktrian landowner, had made him an imperial official in spite of the political past of the family, a position that was moreover maintained by the descendants (for example by a Zhun-lad Šābūrān), in the following decades. Zhun-lad is in fact attested as tapaghliġh iltābir still in 671, well over a century after his ancestor, thus coming out unscathed even from the Arab conquest. In 747 CE, a member of the Šābūrān is once again attested in the surviving documentation in a position of power: see *BDNA* I, W, 126-135.



renegotiations, of sophisticated networks of solidarity and mutual assistance - contributed to protect these individuals in a measure sometimes surprisingly effective from changes at the top of the political entities that, for various reasons, advanced hegemonic claims on the territories in which such individuals and their families wielded influence and power. As the evidence from the *ADAB* discussed in the previous pages suggests (especially the – possible – case of Vīštāspa and in particular the political career of Bagavanta), patterns similar to those attested by the *BDNA* are likely much older, implying that we are dealing with structural features of imperial management, and the limits thereof, in a territory such as the one of Afġān Baktria or Sogdiana, therefore allowing a comparison between the two corpora discussed in this chapter. As for the fifth group, datable between 655 and 680 CE, consists of 6 documents (only one of them undated): remarkable in this case is the fact that the enterprising Ḥar of Rōb, perhaps taking advantage of the tensions between the Türk power and the Táng Empire (from the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century onwards), appears to have been able to expand its sphere of influence as far as the territory of Samingan (between Ḥulmi and Baġlan), which is described as «the market of the Ḥar of Rōb». This brief review concludes with a series of 17 documents (of which 11 are dated) drafted between the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century and 772 CE: although Caliphal rule in the region seems rather well established, as attested by the mention of levies such as the *barīd* and the capitation tax, namely the *ġizya*, the unabated presence of Rōb’s Ḥar strongly suggests that, even for an Empire built *In God’s Path*, renouncing to (however treacherous) «local collaborators» was not a viable option.<sup>233</sup> This simple consideration fully justifies, it seems to me, the desirability of delving to some extent into the social dynamics that, from Cyrus’ to the invasion of Qutayba, enabled the likes of Bagavanta and his colleagues of the Sāsānid and later periods to prosper in spite of the waning power of those who had deluded themselves into proclaiming masters of such individuals and of the territories in which they lived, regardless of the former being the Persian Great King (or the Šāhanšāh), the Türk Qaġan or the Muslim Caliph, the commander of the believers.

#### 4.2. *The Social Network*: from Bagavanta to the Šābūrāns

Before delving into the analysis of some of the texts included in the three volumes of the *BDNA*, it is worth noting some structural similarities - and pointing out other, no less important, differences - between the evidence gathered in this collection and the material published in the *ADAB*. The feature most clearly distinguishing the two corpora is undoubtedly the fact that, while the *ADAB* come from an official context, the origin of the *BDNA* is the world of the private archives of the local aristocracy. In any case, both corpora (especially the Aḥvamazdā correspondence, which, due to the preserved

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<sup>233</sup> Hoyland 2015.

letters' nature as preparatory drafts, differs from other imperial archives, starting from the one discovered at Persepolis), if carefully investigated, allow to access with a surprising degree of detail the socio-political and economic universe of the local élite; moreover, and perhaps above all, both collections allow us to observe at work, sometimes even in the most apparently trivial - but precisely for this reason more informative – activities «a vast and complex web of patrimonial landowners, the key to ruling» the mountainous spaces (to which we should add the territories bordering the steppes) of Bactria and of the nearby Sogdiana.<sup>234</sup> While *ADAB* A1 provides only a snapshot of some of the phenomena under discussion in this chapter - namely, the dynamics of the dialectic between imperial (in our case Achaemenid) power and its collaborators/antagonists -, the inestimable value of the *BDNA* parchments lies in the fact that they make available a large harvest of highly instructive examples of the ways in which, by exploiting the need of the governmental structures claiming right of rule over Bactria at this or that historical junction to rely on pre-existing social networks and webs of influence in order to extend the imperial infrastructural power beyond the agricultural oases (the only territories that could be controlled with a certain ease and in a continuative way), the local aristocracy proved to be able to draw considerable profits from the strategic position of its members within the imperial apparatus. Otherwise stated, these individuals, and their extended networks (in Achaemenid terms, their houses) proved able to turn the power derived from their partaking the imperial experience to the advantage of the social groups of reference of each of the members of the aristocracy itself, who emerge from the investigation of the available testimonies as true masters in the art of moving in the gaps between the apparatus of their (theoretically) superordinate authorities and the complex (in a geographical as well as anthropic sense) space(s) of Norther Central Asia.<sup>235</sup>

In a territory such as that of Bactria, the geographical characteristics of which posed considerable obstacles to the construction and maintenance, outside of the major oases (not by chance the seat, from the Achaemenids to the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate, of regional imperial authority), of the infrastructures capable of securing the political hegemony of an Empire, it is interesting to note for what purposes the collaboration of the local élites was necessary: from the *ADAB* to the *BDNA*, it is striking to observe the recursive nature of at least two basic tasks, namely fiscal leverage and troop coordination (think of the men commanded by Bagavanta in Sogdiana).<sup>236</sup> This scenario provides the framework within which to understand the behavior of local strongmen, who must have been well

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<sup>234</sup> King 2020, 245.

<sup>235</sup> See on this issue especially Barfield 2010, 66-109; 2020, 17-19), in which Afġānistān's landscape is approached from the perspective of ecological anthropology.

<sup>236</sup> Scott 1998, 25-26. Since, as already noted (Scott 2009, 122), a large part of the population in these territories could very easily and effectively respond to the coercion exercised by the imperial authority very simply (but extremely effectively) by fleeing, the mētīc competence and the networks of dependence and solidarity of the local élites proved to be indispensable resources for the ambitions of extraction and control of any pre-modern Empire claiming rights of ownership over both people and resources concentrated in the territories of «the land of the Afġāns».

aware of their negotiating power: the latter – it should be noted - was such only within the dialectic with the imperial government apparatus, which provides a solid clue - let it be said in passing - in favor of interpreting the «revolts» we learn about from the sources during Achaemenid times not, as has long been done, in «irredentist» terms (the «Land of the Unrule-able» argument), but as part of the political dialectic itself, aimed at (re)negotiating the position of the «rebels» within the system of imperial structures and power hierarchies. A good example of the delegation of political and administrative functions mentioned above to representatives of local power groups is provided by a certain Muzd Ḥahragan, an acolyte of the Ḥar ruling in the territory of a locality called Mount Drematigan and probably, as his surname suggests, a member of the family of the local aristocrat (precisely the Ḥar) in charge of tax collection – on behalf of Sāsānid authority (we are in 249 CE).<sup>237</sup> Worth noting in this document is the mention of the office held by Muzd Ḥahragan, namely that of «supervisor of the granary», a title rather closely reminiscent of the \*upayāta (’pyt’, i. e. אפיטא) of *ADAB* C4, the latter probably also a «royal supplier of provisions».<sup>238</sup> The figure of the Sāsānid official could suggest that, even in Achaemenid times, a function of such importance was entrusted to influential members of local communities by virtue of the fact that they had the ability to mobilize directly on the ground the labor necessary to perform vital functions for the proper management of the imperial machinery in the satrapies. Another notable example of these dynamics - not least because it concerns the administration of livestock, and thus can be compared both to the wooden tallies and, perhaps, to *ADAB* A1 itself, is given by *BDNA* II, jh. In this parchment, in fact, the person in charge (σαρολαρο, roughly the «chief») of a locality called Ulišagan is forced to send one of his trusted men to collect a tax (τωγο) that the local administrator (φορομαλαρο) insisted on not paying. In response, and without much ceremony, the latter arrested [!] the envoy from Ulišagan, as the same does not fail to observe in his letter. And if, as insightfully pointed out by Daniel J. Rogers, it is undeniable that by virtue of their representing «mobile capital» cattle and other livestock ranked among the invaluable component of the economy of pastoral-based («nomadic») Empires - the ruling class of which by no chance invested considerable amounts of resources in order to gain as much as possible from the taxation of herds, not least by taking advantage of the infrastructures provided by sedentary societies, as it strikingly shown not least by *BDNA* II, jh - the evidence discussed in the second paragraph of this chapter leaves little doubt concerning the paramount role played by flocks and other units of this «mobile capital» within the economy (both stricto and lato sensu) of Achaemenid policy in Baktria, Sogdiana, and Chorasmia. And this is all the more understandable within spaces, such as those of Central Asia, where (agro)pastoral communities were numerous if not

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<sup>237</sup> *BDNA* I, G-H, 42-43 for text and translation of this document. King 2020, 249-252 for an insightful discussion of this evidence, whose main arguments and conclusions are followed here.

<sup>238</sup> Cf. Henkelman 2010, 710-711.

predominant.<sup>239</sup> In the light of these considerations, are we not entitled to suppose that, given Bagavanta's several shortcomings, Vahuvaxšu had been entrusted with the task (which he was held as being capable of carrying out exactly because of his relational networks – embodied in our documentation by his «servants») of soliciting overdue payments from Hūlmi's official(s), thereby incurring a fate similar to that of the appointee of Ulišagan's *σαρολαρο*?<sup>240</sup>

Against such a backdrop, in which namely the demands of imperial power offered the most influential members of Central Asian society ample space to negotiate their personal power, the sudden shifting of allegiances that we observe in the course of Baktrian history (let us repeat here once again) have nothing to do with autonomist aspirations, but simply reflect the attempt by these individuals to maximize their earnings, thus offering their (much coveted) services to the authority that presented itself as the guarantor of greater profits, for themselves and, above all, for their social group of reference.<sup>241</sup> This is – by the way - a crucial aspect for understanding the dynamics behind the dissolution of Achaemenid power in Central Asia, as it shall be argued in more detail in the next chapter.<sup>242</sup> Two letters belonging to the oldest group of *BDNA* (the one related to the territory of Rōb) deserve to be mentioned here, both because they open a window on the possible functioning of the military conscription mechanisms that, in the Achaemenid Empire, were entrusted in Baktria and Sogdiana to those *ὑπαρχοι* with whom Alexander had to deal during the years of his Central Asian campaign, and because from them we may be able to derive an adequate context in which to place the mention, at first sight rather obscure, of some horses coming from the «desert of Artadatana» and directed to Artuki, which surfaces in a parchment of the *ADAB* (document A2).<sup>243</sup> The two letters in question (both undated) illustrate the complexity of the relationship between imperial institution and local strongmen in the best possible manner. In the first case (*BDNA* II, ca), Yamš-ḥadew-bandag addresses two other individuals informing them that a fourth - most likely an imperial appointee - will shortly arrive to collect horses for reasons that, although not directly stated, can nevertheless - also in the light of the term used (*υαργο*) – be understood as being military-related. In the second letter (*BDNA* II, cb), the same person writes to yet another individual (with whom he must have had a rather close relationship, whether of an institutional nature or not, as suggested by the respectful

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<sup>239</sup> According to Sims-Williams (*BDNA* II, 26), the linguistic evidence suggests that the terminus post quem of this scroll is the Hephthalite rule in the region (meaning after the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE). This is important because it would show the permanence of the characteristic fiscal structures of Sāsānid Empire in the context of the later - «nomadic» - polities. On the fiscal centrality, in the economy of the latter, of livestock taxation see Rogers 2015, 76-77. On the Achaemenid context see again Henkelman and Folmer 2016 and Briant 2017a, 253-270.

<sup>240</sup> King 2020, 250.

<sup>241</sup> King 2020, 249.

<sup>242</sup> See Degen 2022, 317-318 in the context of Alexander's invasion of the Western satrapies.

<sup>243</sup> Navch and Shaked 2012, 76 f. A2 (= Khalili IA4), l. 2 as well as the still fundamental Briant 1984, 82-84.

title «Your Lordship») requesting, on behalf of a certain Nawaz Ḥarugan - who thus appears to be at the top of this complex hierarchy - the sending of troops to defend a fort (λιζο).<sup>244</sup>

As rightly pointed out by Rhyne King, both documents show very well the necessity, on the part of the imperial power of the day, to rely on local power networks in order to 1. rapidly and 2. efficiently mobilize both troops and other indispensable «war material», such as horses (and in the Achaemenid case we might safely add camels as well).<sup>245</sup> Not only that, but in the face of a demand that must sometimes have taken overwhelming proportions, it is possible to observe how the same local powerbrokers resorted to lower ranks of the Central Asian landed aristocracy, which means to other networks of dependence and solidarity, probably extended outside the former's respective spheres of influence. Indeed, it would not be possible to explain otherwise the need for Nawaz Ḥarugan to mobilize the entire supply chain that the letter allows us to observe if he had been able to personally (or through his network(s) alone) provide the troops necessary for the defense of the λιζο (in turn representing a Late Antique epiphenomenon of the Achaemenid *irmatam*?). In the light of the tallies (*ADAB* section «D») and of these two testimonies, it does not seem impossible to imagine that both the Bessos' cavalry and the animals from Artadatana were acquired by the Achaemenid administration through a mechanism similar to that attested in the *BDNA*.<sup>246</sup> Like the *ADAB*, which (with the partial exception of the tallies), given their origin within the bureaucratic apparatus of the provincial government, focus predominantly on the properties of the satrap (or of the King himself) and on the imperial infrastructure, the world of the *BDNA* – as it emerges both from the letters as well as from the legal texts - appears to be restricted to the landed properties of the wealthiest members of the Baktrian aristocracy.<sup>247</sup> In some circumstances, however, they do not fail to shed a (however weak) light on certain aspects of the networks of socio-political dependence in which these individuals were entangled. This happens, moreover, from a perspective that is perhaps unexpected but for this reason extremely interesting, since some examples of such documentation show the bonds contracted by the Baktrian landowners not only towards their superiors at the imperial level, but also - and this is quite remarkable - towards their subordinates (their «selectorate») at the local level.

As insightfully pointed out by King, in the case of a bad harvest, for example, the landowner was compelled to provide for the sustenance of his workers and, more generally, for the members of his community (his social group of affiliation): that this was an unavoidable imperative (and not a choice

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<sup>244</sup> See the remarks in King 2020, 252, whose conclusions are accepted and summarized in this section, and the discussion carried out by Wiesehöfer and Rollinger 2020, 325.

<sup>245</sup> Henkelman 2017a, 55-63, King 2021, 338-344; forthcoming on camels in Achaemenid Bactria and beyond.

<sup>246</sup> «The Achaemenid political and military structure – notes King 2021, 106 – depended on the ability of [local] elites to be able to muster troops»: cf. e. g. the importance of a (rather low-ranking) man such as Mithradates, who had 30 horsemen under his command (Xen. *Anab.*, 3.3.1-2: this man and the context in which he appears are discussed in King 2021, 42-43).

<sup>247</sup> Morris 2019b, 466-470 for a careful assessment of this evidence and the world they bring to light.

or a gesture of liberality) is shown by *BDNA* I, K, from which it can be deduced that two landowners, a certain Tet (apparently another member of the Šābūrān family) and a man named Piy, both residing in the locality of Sursah, were forced, probably as a result of a lean cow year, to request a rather large loan (aimed at covering the needs of four months) from another aristocrat, called Muzd Pazburan.<sup>248</sup> As King aptly observes, in spite of their power, individuals such as Tet, Piy - and as the classical sources clearly show, centuries earlier men such as Spitamenes and Bessos - were fully aware of the importance of evergetic practices (if not outright mutuality) in order to preserve their respective positions of prestige within the community of reference, the support of whose members was a function of the munificence deployed by those who, like the notables in question, had the resources to practice it, and who drew from it - and from its constant implementation - the authority they enjoyed.<sup>249</sup> Turning back to the *ADAB*, Bagavanta's stubborn opposition to Ahvamazdā's directives would be explained at least in part if it had responded, at least to a certain extent, to demands similar to those that drove Tet and Piy into debt with Muzd Pazburan, who of course would not have failed, at the right time, to bring his credit to bear. From this point of view, Bagavanta's priority aim would have been to defend the interests of those (the «magistrates» of Ḥulmi? Ahuradāta? maybe both) who, with their support - logistical, for example: one thinks of the dense network on which somebody like Yamš-ḥadew-bandag could rely when a swift supply of troops and horses was required - guaranteed to individuals like the Achaemenid paḥtā the maintenance of the position he held 1. within the society of Tāšqurḡān and, 2. by virtue of this, within the cadres of the Achaemenid satrapy of Baktria-Sogdiana at large. The possibility that the harassment of Vahuvaxšu and his associates originated precisely from a conflict of interests capable (at least in the perception of the Ḥulmi-based powerbrokers) of threatening the circle to which Bagavanta was somehow accountable receives support from the - albeit fragmentary - evidence of a Baktrian parchment that shows the ties woven by these landowners not only with (semi-)dependent agricultural workers - in fact, the world of the *BDNA* is not only made up of slaves, who were in any case able to acquire a certain substance, to the point of gathering the wealth needed to buy their own freedom - but also with the pastoral communities settled in the neighboring territories. In this document (mutilated at the beginning, which makes its contextualization very problematic) in fact no less than 14 names appear, which we can imagine to have been the Late Antique equivalents of Taitaka and of the other individuals mentioned in the *ADAB* tallies: this is a hypothesis whose plausibility is greatly increased by the reference, which

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<sup>248</sup> *BDNA* I, K, 98-103 and the discussion in King 2020, 255-258. Remarkable in this regard is the parallel provided by Naveh and Shaked 2012, 141 ff. B2 (= Khalili IA23), in which a certain Bagaicha seems to have received (a loan of?) flour from Vahucha.

<sup>249</sup> King 2020, 258. Compare Xen. *Cyr.* 1.9.24-27 and *Anab.* 1.9.12: Achaemenid satraps had dominion over the body of members of their household, and as a consequence were supposed «to maintain these very bodies» (King 2021, 75).

appears in the previous document (aj), to a monetary transaction involving cattle.<sup>250</sup> The (enormous) market established by the Achaemenid satrapal administration (and by the King's table when he or a member of his family happened to be around) must have kick-started a bitter competition among the pastoral groups in the area, who were comprehensibly willing to enter into a relationship with the oases' landowners (though this implied to be taxed by them, as the Baktrian scroll compellingly suggests) provided that the latter made available 1. grazing land in the winter months - and perhaps, as the Persepolis documentation seems to imply, also infrastructures such as stables and similar shelters - but also, and above all, 2. that they guarantee these people and their communities access to the economic networks (and the resulting dividends) of the imperial economy.<sup>251</sup> In other words, Vahuvaxšu may well have had rivals who would not have hesitated to put pressure on their main interlocutor, in the case of *ADAB* A1 Bagavanta, to intervene to protect their interests, which, for the reasons mentioned above, were ultimately also his.

#### 4.2.1. «I shall be grateful to you for everything and I shall make recompense [to you]»

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the documents edited by Sims-Williams, however, is the vocabulary they employ. This is especially true in the case of the formulas of salutation, as these bear «complex social meanings», which in turn open up an exceptionally interesting glimpse into the extent of the ties that bound the members of this landed aristocracy to each other, the sophisticated practices of (re)negotiating the internal power relations within the world of its members and, consequently, the sociopolitical network without which, to borrow Rhyne King's fitting words, any claim to imperial hegemony in Baktria «would have been purely fictive» (Garrison's hoped-for-fantasy, once again).<sup>252</sup> Crucial to the present discussion is the very strong analogy of the stylistic features adopted by the Baktrian notables in both the Sāsānid period and in the following centuries with those that can be read in the letters, unfortunately undated and lacking details that help their contextualization, which compose almost entirely - except for a single, older specimen - the so-called section «B» of the *ADAB*. In view of the stability, already observed with regards to Achaemenid official correspondence (Aḥvamazdā, Aršāma), of certain characteristic aspects of the epistolgraphic tradition in Central Asia (among which, precisely, the greeting formulas), it seems justified to assume

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<sup>250</sup> *BDNA* I, ak, 160-161 (the parchment is not dated) with the discussion in King 2020, 258. Compare Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 199-200.

<sup>251</sup> Cf. Briant 2017a, 260 as well as Naveh and Shaked 2012, 166 ff. B8 (= Khalili IA26), which, also by virtue of its deplorable state of preservation, is the twin of a witness such as *BDNA* I, ak: here too reference is made to cattle (camels, again), «grazing on a hill» (compare e. g. NN 1058, where grazing camels are also recorder: King 2021, 341). See on the Baktrian parchment within the framework of the Persepolis administration King 2021, 340-344.

<sup>252</sup> King 2020, 259. The same can be said concerning the relationships of the satraps between themselves, the King of Kings and (lesser)élites through the Empire: see King 2021, 369.

for *ADAB* B1-B9 a social context similar to the one that emerges in particular from the letters published in the second volume of the *BDNA*.<sup>253</sup> Let us take, for example, the case of the letter sent to Nawaz Ḥarugan by his «servant» (βανδαγο) Bag-waraz. The document begins by sending «a thousand [and] ten thousand greetings [and] homage», then continues as follows: «and [since] I have heard that your lordship [is] healthy, therefore I am happy; but then I would be more happy when I myself might see [you] healthy». <sup>254</sup> By comparison, the opening of *ADAB* B1 seems much more sober («from Mithrafarnah to my brother Upadavara, I send you wishes for deep peace and strength»), but the parallel appears to me as too significant to be ignored: we are dealing, as Naveh and Shaked themselves suggest, with two individuals of equal rank, who moreover appear from the correspondence to be engaged in the management of affairs not very different from those looming large in Yamš-ḥadew-bandag's mind, since later in the letter (ll. 3-5) reference is made to troop movements, which the two were apparently in charge of coordinating.<sup>255</sup> The ubiquity of the term βανδαγο (evidently the Baktrian rendering of the Old Persian *bandaka*) is a clue of paramount importance for understanding the kind of relationships that underlie both this Late Antique correspondence and, if the interpretation proposed in these pages is sound, that of documents such as *ADAB* B1-B9. «To be bound to another – Rhyne King aptly points out – was neither good nor bad, but simply a feature of aristocratic life in the intertwined Baktrian networks, a nest of families bound to one another through fosterage, gift-giving, and service obligations». <sup>256</sup>

A textbook example of (following Scott we might say «positional») munificence aimed as it was at strengthening bonds of solidarity between Baktrian aristocrats is provided by the document cc.<sup>257</sup> Nawaz Ḥarugan had promised his colleague Bag-waraz a dog, which the latter had requested. However, the gift was a little too long in coming, which prompted Bag-waraz to write to his colleague informing him that he had sent one of his employees (another βανδαγο?) to Nawaz Ḥarugan's court in order to retrieve the desired quadruped. Leaving aside Bag-waraz's (shameless) insistence - which in itself, however, implies that he could indeed afford to behave in this way - the reciprocity implicit in this exchange is evident from what follows, since he does not fail to add that if the dog sent by «your lordship» Nawaz Ḥarugan does indeed live up to expectations, Bag-waraz will not fail to be «grateful for everything» and to reward him accordingly. Particularly interesting is the fact that,

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<sup>253</sup> King 2020, 260 with further bibliography: the tradition of these epistolographic practices is very old, and it seems therefore extremely probable that the form used in Late Antiquity by the Baktrian scribes dated back to the conventions elaborated since the Achaemenid period (as it has been suggested by Henkelman and Folmer 2016 also concerning the use of tallies). To the best of our knowledge, *ADAB* B1-B9 may therefore be the first attestation of this complex rhetorical code in Central Asia.

<sup>254</sup> *BDNA* II, cc, 72-73.

<sup>255</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 133 ff. B1 (= Khalili IA7).

<sup>256</sup> King 2020, 261.

<sup>257</sup> *BDNA* I, cc, 72-73: King 2020, 262.



according to King's interpretation of a document such as cq, in the world of the Late Antique Baktrian aristocracy (but there is no reason to suppose that the scenario was radically different in the Achaemenid period), acts of munificence could take on what we might call a preventive function. This seems to have been the case of Kalu-ardag, who took the trouble, as far as we know without any solicitation having been received (on the contrary, it is Kalu-ardag who needs grain) to send some cattle and a dīnār to another notable, a certain Ram, taking care to introduce himself as «[your] serving man» (μαρηγο μαρδο). In King's words, «nothing suggests that Ram needed cattle, but Kalu-ardag sent it because he knew that his gift obligated recompense»: hence, as he points out, the preventive scope of his liberality.<sup>258</sup> The influence of an individual such as Bagavanta, I think one can rather safely assume against the background of the documentation provided so far, must have been based on ties similar to those illustrated by the correspondence between Bag-waraz and Nawaz Ḥarugan. If the latter could legitimately expect benefits from the simple gift of a dog, a fortiori Bagavanta's intervention against Vahuvaxšu must be considered strategic in nature, i. e. aimed at binding reciprocity (in terms, for example, of protection offered from the foreseeable intervention of Aḥvamazdā, which from his officer's letter - again: a βανδαγο - we learn had failed no less than three times) targeting all those who had been advantaged by the confiscation of the «royal camels» and the subsequent detention of Vahuvaxšu's «apprentices», who in turn are likely to have been competitors for access to the Achaemenid agro-pastoral market in Baktria.

Relationships of this kind, it should be noted, served as much a function of mutual aid (for example, in order to protect the patrimony of a family group in the event of war, practices such as adoption proved particularly useful) as they were meant to reproduce, and to strengthen, relationships of subordination and dependence. The most common strategy for this purpose seems to have been, based on the available evidence, the handing over of hostages, and the threat, more or less explicit, of recourse to violence only serves to underline the inequalities that can be glimpsed - muffled behind the profusion of obsequious rhetoric - in the letters' openings, and which it is easy to imagine fueled tensions of no small importance within Baktria's «aristocratic network» both during the centuries in which the *BDNA* were written and before, in Achaemenid times.<sup>259</sup> Moreover, it should not be underestimated that, as explicitly attested by our dataset, those who were in a position to do so used to demand from their subordinates the sending of a very specific category of hostages, possibly close

<sup>258</sup> King 2020, 263. Cf. *BDNA* I, cq, 96-99.

<sup>259</sup> A good example is provided by Rōb's Ḥar, who in *BDNA* I, cm, 90-91 leaves little room for misunderstanding: «[if] you do not send a hostage, then, when I come thither [to you], I [shall] demand [from] you a hostage with severe unpleasantness, and likewise I [shall] complain to the lords [his (the Ḥar's) superiors?], [and] consequently you [will] incur severe harm»: King 2020, 262. It is also worth noting that, as Tuplin 2017a observed about the *ADAB*, also in the *salutationes* featuring in the *BDNA* letters the presence (or absence) of certain titles or attributes is a carefully calculated *choice*, the latter imposed by the power relations that (the absence of) such epithets imply.

members of the family circle. This is well illustrated by a passage in a *BDNA* letter: according to the writer of this testimony, the Panikan family would not be able to comply with this request, and he adds immediately after that if «your lordship» (namely the one who requested the hostages) would not be satisfied with servants (υπαρηγο) or other subordinate members of the Panikan domus (ικαροι) he would have to give up his claims tout court, since «there is no one left in the house».<sup>260</sup>

In the light of such a record, the allusion made by Alexander's historians to the fact that Rōxanē - and her sisters, of whom nothing else is known - were hosted at the fortress (πέτρα) of Chorienes at the time of the Makedonian invasion suddenly loses the quality of anecdote, to assume - it seems to me - an unexpected historical depth. If the future mother of Alexander IV had been in the Surxondaryo as a hostage, we would understand much better the behavior of her father, who did not hesitate for a moment to side with the newcomers in order, we may presume, to get rid, once and for all, of the cumbersome protection of the Sogdian «lordship» of whom, it could be argued, he was one of the bandakā, or at the very least with whom he had incurred a debt as collateral for which he had no choice but to offer prominent members of his family circle. Admittedly, this suggestion contrasts with King's conclusion that «ultimately, the threat of violence against foster children and hostages made the Baktrian aristocratic network more stable».<sup>261</sup> Such a judgement, however, is valid either in a context, such as that of Late Antique Bactria, in which constant political uncertainty and widespread violence imposed social cohesion on pain of the annihilation of the group as a whole, or, as in the case of the *ADAB*, in the framework of institutional solidity, internal security, and economic prosperity guaranteed by the presence of the Empire and of its representative, but not, as in Oxyartes' case, when other options were available and ready to be exploited in order to reshuffle local power hierarchies.<sup>262</sup>

This, I would contend, goes a long way towards explaining the active desire on the part of the Baktrian élite themselves to participate in the strengthening of Persian power, of which they in turn constituted, in King's effective formula, «the reification of imperial pretentions» in the ecologically impervious territories of the domains claimed by the Achaemenid rulers as well as by their successors through history.<sup>263</sup> At the first useful opportunity to redefine the regional hierarchies by taking advantage of the rise of a new hegemonic political authority which, however, in order to assert itself could not have renounced to a certain extent the old power structures, the tensions that we see

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<sup>260</sup> *BDNA* I, cp, 94-95 with the commentary in King 2020, 262-263.

<sup>261</sup> King 2020, 262.

<sup>262</sup> This is precisely what happened with Mazaios in Asia Minor and Transeuphratene: Degen 2022, 317-318. Siding with Alexander allowed him to settle the scores he had with Darius III and provided him with considerable military and economic support to pursue his interests against those of his peers who remained loyal to the King after the Makedonian takeover.

<sup>263</sup> King 2020, 264.

emerging between the lines of the Panikans' letter and which, as it has been suggested, find their counterpart during the (late) Achaemenid period in Rōxanē's (more or less forced) stay at the court of Chorienes, would have deflagrated. The eventual outcome of this process was, at the same time, the decline of the Empire and the sealing of the fate of the claims to kingship made by an individual such as Bessos who, as argued in the next chapter, these very tensions was supposed in some way to recompose, but failed in the attempt, thereby losing the contest for the throne, his overlordship over Central Asia, and eventually his life.

## 5. Conclusion. *Sub umbra floreo*

Although at the present state of our knowledge it is impossible to prove its validity beyond doubt, the picture outlined in the preceding pages has two advantages that, I believe, justify at least in part its adoption as a working hypothesis. Firstly, it is consistent with the profile and the characteristic mechanisms of the political-administrative organization of Achaemenid Baktria the reconstruction of which has been attempted in the previous chapters. Secondly, as illustrated especially in this last section, dedicated to the complex world of the Baktrian aristocracy in a long-term perspective, it provides a rather effective interpretative framework from which to examine the paramount events of Alexander's Central Asian campaign. In fact, as long as the political stability within the imperial domains acted as an almost certain guarantee of economic return (and therefore as a source of social prestige, an indispensable element in the political dynamics within the world of the Central Asian élites), the Great Kings of Persia had at their disposal all the necessary tools to combine their own interests with the ambitions of their *bandakā* from one end of the Achaemenid domains to the other, thus building over the decades an extremely sophisticated system of - at the same time - cross-checks and mutual solidarity. The outcome of these dynamics, as has been argued throughout these seven chapters, was the *de facto* uninterrupted maintenance (at least starting with the aftermath of Darius' staged triumph in 522 BCE) of the authority of the «Persian Man» in the territories of Central Asia, from Arachosia to Sogdiana and from Parthia to Carmania: this applies, of course, also in the case of Baktria, which John Hyland has recently defined, not without reasons, as «one of the Empire's most vital regions».<sup>264</sup> However, the state of emergency triggered by Alexander's invasion on the one hand, not to mention the situation of the following decades, characterized as they were by an almost uninterrupted series of bloody feuds between the heirs (or would-be heirs) of his conquests, which in fact sanctioned the end, until at least Seleukos' rise to imperial power, of the *pax Persica* which had constituted the indispensable (pre)condition for the stability of the system we have described so far

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<sup>264</sup> Hyland 2013, 5.

and, on the other hand, the profoundly ambiguous position of individuals such as Bessos (who arguably tried to play at the same time the roles - which were difficult to reconcile - of aspiring King, revolting satrap, and local strongman), Spitamenes or Oxyartes himself, would have ended up bringing to the surface, with catastrophic effects for the stability of Achaemenid power, the latent contradictions which, until that moment, had been kept in check, but not eliminated, by the well-oiled mechanisms of the imperial paradigm.<sup>265</sup> It seems therefore not inappropriate to assume that with the *Naked Year* of 329 BCE, a new chapter in the history of Baktria as an «imperial space» was opened, to which we now turn in the final chapter of the present work.<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> For a comparable example showing how competition among local notables might endanger the entire satrapal (if not imperial) system cf. Xen. *Hell.*, 3.1.8 on Dercyllidas' campaign in Asia Minor. As pointed out by King 2021, 123 in his assessment of the episode, «although satrapal competition generally worked to the Achaemenid Empire's advantage [...], if an outside party were able to manipulate the system, satrapal competition could have deleterious effects on imperial stability». This remains true when one considers the relations between officers at a lower level of the hierarchy, as this chapter has tried to show. In the next we shall see how both Alexander and local powerholders were able to take advantage of this structural weakness of the imperial paradigm in order for each to pursue his own maximum gain.

<sup>266</sup> Morris 2019a, 53-59.

## Chapter 8

### Голые Годы. *Alexander in Baktria*

ὡς ἔγωγε δοκῶ ὅτι οὔτε τι ἔθνος ἀνθρώπων οὔτε τις πόλις ἐν τῷ τότε ἦν οὔτε τις εἷς ἄνθρωπος εἰς ὃν οὐ πεφοιτῆται τὸ Ἀλεξάνδρου ὄνομα.

[In my own view there was no race of men, no city in those days, no single man whom the name of Alexander had not reached].

- Arr. *Anab.*, 7.30.2.

Fu un generale di vent'anni, occhi turchini e giacca uguale. || Fu un generale di vent'anni, figlio di un temporale.

- Fabrizio De André (1981). *Fabrizio De André, Fiume Sand Creek*, s. I, ll. 3-4.

А за окном шелестят тополя: || «Нет на земле твоего короля...».

[And outside the window the poplars rustle: «There is no king of yours on earth...»].

- Anna A. Axmatova (1910). *Сероглазый король*, ll. 13-14.

#### 1. *Im Osten nichts Neues?* The Makedonians' Expedition and the Administrative Paradox

In the summer of 324 BCE, Alexander III of Makedon had left Central Asia for India about two years earlier.<sup>1</sup> According to the account of the expedition as transmitted to us by historiographical sources, Baktria and Sogdiana seem to have left a rather deep mark in the collective memory of the conquerors (among whom, it should be remembered, are some of the most important sources of the surviving tradition).<sup>2</sup> The picture that emerges from the narrative of the *Anabasis* and the *Historia* of

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<sup>1</sup> On the route probably followed by the Makedonian army, see the very recent and extremely detailed contribution by Rapin and Grenet 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Naiden 2019, 168: «The worship of Anahita accounted for burial customs very different from those of the Makedonians and Greeks. Since Iranians regarded groundwater as sacred to the goddess, they kept corpses out of contact with watercourses and the soil. Sometimes they embalmed corpses in wax. More often, stone or ceramic caskets kept out water. Cyrus lay in such a casket at Pasargadai. If the Iranians did not insulate a corpse, they exposed it on a platform, to be devoured by dogs or birds kept in the shrine. Once the bones were picked clean, relatives put them in ossuaries. They never burned remains. Like water, fire was sacred. The Makedonians and Greeks did the opposite: they buried or burned

Curtius Rufus, to name but two prominent examples, sometimes borders on dystopia: an intolerable climate in the two extremes (sometimes alternating with surprising - and devastating - rapidity) of the most torrid heat and the most unbearable cold, a landscape as unusual to eyes accustomed to the Aegean world as it is, consequently, frightening, hordes of bloodthirsty Scythians, more barbaric than anything the Makedonians had ever encountered before (it was rumored that some of these pastoralist bands were related to no one else than the Amazons) and finally, to crown it all, a rural population devoted to the most inhuman customs and rituals, with a particular predilection for abominable funerary practices.<sup>3</sup> Regardless of any possible rhetorical exaggeration and the conventions of the literary genre (to say nothing of the intention of setting the perfect stage for the heroic Alexander), it is difficult to escape the general impression that - as claimed by the sources - in 326, those who left Baktria did so without any particular regrets, while much less satisfied were those who - for love or force - were forced to stay.<sup>4</sup> A very different matter is however to assess the impact on the socio-political and economic fabric of the Central Asian satrapies (in particular, given the scope of the present study, of Baktria and Sogdiana) of Alexander's campaign and of the Graeco-Makedonian (re)organization (arguably with decisive local support) of the conquered lands during the following decades. Despite the fact that the expedition North of the Hindūkūš lasted two full years (far from a negligible period of time), the most widespread opinion among scholars could be summed up in the observation that Alexander, if he ever wanted to, had neither the time - and perhaps not even the ability or the political will - to make radical changes to the governance structure of the Eastern satrapies (and more generally of the entire Achaemenid Empire), and that for this reason, too, he limited himself to adopting the Achaemenid legacy, a hypothesis that would be confirmed, among other things, by the fact that the Makedonian's territorial conquests did not add an inch of land to

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human remains. What they saw in Baktra offended them». Cf. the famous anecdote in Hdt. 3.38 and, for an emic perspective on Central Asian funerary traditions, the classic Grenet 1984 as well as, more recently, Abdullaev 2017 and the relevant contributions (although related to the Bronze Age) in Lyonnet and Dubova 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 3.29.1-4, Curt. 8.4.1-3, Pompon. 3.5.38, Strab. 11.11.5 on Baktrian geography and climate, Arr. *Anab.*, 4.15, Curt. 8.1.8, Diod. Sic. 17.77.1-3, Just. *Epit.*, 12.3.4-7 on the Sakā and their alleged genealogical ties with the Amazons. See finally Strab. 11.11.3 (and the related comments in Grenet 1984, 65-76, Mairs 2007, and Abdullaev 2017) on Baktrian and Sogdian funerary practices. In partial justification of the nightmarish picture drawn by the classical sources about the Baktrian climate, it must be pointed out that even in the 1920s, at the time of Mr. and Mrs. Foucher's expedition to Afġānistān (including an Odyssean journey from Kābul to Baktra), conditions could have been prohibitive, also because of the climate: cf. Fenet 2020, 150.

<sup>4</sup> An example for all is Kleitos, Alexander's companion who was made lieutenant at Marakanda before being killed at the very (in)famous Sogdian banquet of 328, who welcomed his appointment, according to the testimony of Curt. 8.7.35 with an unequivocal «I am fed to wild beasts»: cf. Holt 1988a, 83, Dumke 2015, 36. This is all the more remarkable considering that the destination of the Makedonians was India, since time immemorial the place par excellence of all sorts of teratological curiosities: Karttunen 1989 and more recently Stoneman 2019. However, the Baktrian campaign does indeed seem to have had an extremely significant influence on the perception of the newcomers (including, it must be repeated, some of the future diarists underpinning the accounts of the sources that have come down to us) towards the populations of the Achaemenid Far East. As Bosworth 1998, 144 points out, this very powerful phenomenon of «alienation» may have been at least partly causally linked to the lavish violence of the Indian campaign. See Degen and Rollinger 2022 on Arrian's reworking of his sources, his literary and ideological goals.

what had already been the domain of «the Persian Man» celebrated by Darius I at Naqš -i Rostam.<sup>5</sup> This, the argument goes on, would be after all hardly surprising, given that similar phenomena are characteristic and structural of any imperial transition (the Achaemenids themselves did not behave too differently in Egypt or Babylon): in addition, the discovery of new documentary evidence from Bactria dated to precisely this timeframe has provided scholars with further insights supporting this and similar claims.<sup>6</sup>



**Map 8.1. A volte i pesci cantano sul fondo dell'Oxus. On Alexander's Tracks from Pella to Marakanda, and Back.**

© Peter Palm

The most famous example that can be mentioned in this context is a long parchment fragment contained in section «C» of the *ADAB*, (the now famous and often quoted C4), which records in great

<sup>5</sup> Within a gigantic bibliography it is worth mentioning, among the many possible, the view expressed in Walbank 1981, 44-54 and Gehrke 2002<sup>2</sup>, 67-72. Note, however, the radically different position taken by Pierre Briant in several contributions (cf. Briant 2017a), in which the French scholar, while acknowledging and indeed emphasizing the crucial importance of the Achaemenid precedent in the framework of the development of Alexander's Empire, has at the same time underlined how the latter was far from being incapable of political or administrative insight. See now Degen 2022, 243-249, stressing Alexander's Empire building strategies and his careful self-presentation towards the Achaemenid élites during the whole of his campaign and afterwards.

<sup>6</sup> On the strategies adopted by the Achaemenid Empire in newly conquered territories see most recently the contributions of Henry Colburn (2017; 2018; 2021), with abundant earlier literature, as well as the very important Rollinger 2023, in which however the point is clearly made that adapting to what Düring and Stek 2018a call «the practical situation on the ground» does not mean that even remarkable changes did not happen. On the contrary (and following Henkelman 2017a) it can be safely argued that the Achaemenid imperial paradigm took advantage of preceding (infra)structures which were however integrated (and therefore inevitably changed) into the administrative system born out of centuries of Êlāmo-Îrānian acculturation in Fārs: Henkelman 2018b.

detail the process of collection and distribution of resources of the (agro)pastoral economy in several districts of the late 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE in Bactria by a large number of officers in charge of various tasks: some of them, as can be inferred from the second part of the scroll, were of a religious nature.<sup>7</sup> Similarly to the rest of the documentation contained in the corpus, the language (imperial Aramaic), the terminology, and the administrative protocols illustrated by the parchment can be perfectly compared with similar evidence originating from other satrapies, from Judea to Arachosia and Egypt: even in terms of spelling, of the characters' layout, and the formulas adopted, this Bactrian document also appears to be fully embedded in the templates of the Persian imperial paradigm.<sup>8</sup> Not only that, but also the procedures by which the activities recorded in *ADAB C4* are carried out are perfectly suited to the cultural horizon of the Achaemenid satrapal administration. The officials attested to in the parchment seem for the most part to have been Persians, but the presence of a number of theophoric names with very strong epichoric connotations (assuming that after almost two and a half centuries of Persian rule in Central Asia the distinction still made sense in the eyes of the population and of the imperial masters) suggests the presence of Bactrians within the ranks of the local government apparatus, and not only in subaltern positions.<sup>9</sup> The system of collection, storage, and (re)distribution that we know from the evidence of the Persepolis archives seems to be in full operation also in Bactria at this chronological height, and the same looks like to have been true also for the relations between the local administration with its suppliers: this is suggested for example by l. 54 of the parchment, if the mention of «cattle breeders» is to be interpreted - as would seem quite reasonable based on what is implied by a document such as *ADAB D2* - in terms of a contract of some kind with private third parties belonging to populations not (or not entirely) part of the system of the imperial political economy in order to ensure the regular supply of meat and other important products to the districts to which the administration mentioned in *ADAB C4* belonged.<sup>10</sup>

Despite its obsequious adherence to every single aspect of the style and administrative language known from the heydays of Achaemenid rule, there is one - crucial - detail that attests to the fact that, politically at least, *ADAB C4* literally belongs to another era: as its proemial formula states, we are in fact «in the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Sivan, in the year 7 of Alexander, the King». This highly

<sup>7</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 203 f. C4 (= Khalili IA 17).

<sup>8</sup> Mairs 2016, 2039. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the most detailed philological-linguistic studies on the Bactrian documentation edited by Naveh and Shaked available today are Folmer 2017, Tavernier 2017a and, with regard to the tallies, Henkelman and Folmer 2016. See moreover Tavernier 2017b and to a certain extent Tuplin 2019 on the religious information that can be deduced from the *ADAB*.

<sup>9</sup> This is for example the case of Vaxšubradata, son of Xšathrakana, (wḥš[w']brdt br ḥštrkn, והש[וא]ברדת בר השתרכן, attested at l. 41 of the parchment, or of the Vaxšudata (wḥšwdt, והשודת), the «barley supplier» (ywbr, יוברא) recorded at l. 20.

<sup>10</sup> The Aramaic text of the document reads gwrz 1 (גורז 1): the exact meaning of such a word is not yet established beyond doubt: Naveh and Shaked 2012, 212 suggest a possible origin from the Old Persian \*gau-varza-, which might perhaps be translated as «cattle breeder» or, alternatively, «he who works with cattle».



suggestive mixture of old and new raises the question (of paramount importance) of both the nature and the depth of the transformations that such a dating inevitably implies. A few years ago - and with particular authority - Rachel Mairs stood out among those who argued most vocally in favor of a long-term perspective, maintaining the permanence of structural and substantial continuities between the socio-political and economic organization of Achaemenid and (early) Hellenistic Bactria. In her own words, in fact, «in a very literal sense, the Aramaic documents do indeed record “business as usual”: the continuing regulation of the province’s economic life according to existing practices, within existing administrative hierarchies, and written down in the same language according to the same templates. In dating formulae, the Persian kings give way seamlessly to Alexander the Great, the “last Achaemenid”». <sup>11</sup> To this, she further argues, should be added the fact that the archaeological record does not allow for the identification of any traces of a break in the horizon of material culture that can be attributed with certainty to the political upheavals of the late 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE as reported by the literary sources. By virtue of the fact that, not too differently from what must have happened in other regions of the now (at least politically) waning Empire, the Bactrian administration provided the human capital (and the institutions, and the infrastructure) indispensable for the maintenance and expansion of the would be Hellenistic Empires, from the Seleukid domains to the first Bactrian(based) Empire in history, Mairs has argued that «by far the most attractive hypothesis» is to view much of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century as a long transitional period, during which Greek presence would have made itself felt in a gradual manner, undertaking programs (regardless of whether they were centrally directed or not) for the intensification of settlements and the exploitation of agricultural territories in Eastern Bactria, thus ideally linking the eclipse of imperial power North of the Hindūkūš under the Achaemenids and its new expansionary phase in the Diodotid period (especially during the reign of Demetrios I, under whose aegis the conquest of a considerable portion of Northwestern India was achieved). <sup>12</sup> Although this is undoubtedly a very seductive working hypothesis, there are, it seems to me, several reasons that make the claim that Alexander’s invasion had no (or even no significant) impact on the socio-political, and economic, structures of the Central Asian territories under consideration here at least worthy of careful scrutiny. The first, and undoubtedly one of the most important, is the very nature of the document underlying Mairs’ entire chain of reasoning. It is certainly a well-known fact that

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<sup>11</sup> Mairs 2016, 2043; 2020a, 657-658. A similar point of view is to be found in Widmer 2015, 18.

<sup>12</sup> Mairs 2016, 2043-2044; Mairs 2020a, 564-567, 572-573. Cf. in the first of the two contributions mentioned especially p. 2056, where the British scholar goes on to argue that continuity in personnel can be ascertained at most up to the early years of Alexander’s reign, but is likely to have lasted much longer. This last point is of paramount importance, and an attempt shall be made in this chapter to put it into perspective. More generally with regard to the «continuity» argument, if, as been pointed out recently by Monson and Scheidel 2015, 22, the maintenance of institutions (economic or otherwise) is contingent upon (and dependent on) political stability, how is it possible that two years of fierce warfare, to say nothing of the era of the Diadochi, left the Bactrian institutions entirely (or even partly) intact? For a comparison of settlement policy in the Hellenistic world see Mairs and Fischer-Bovet 2021.

structures (and the cadres in charge of them) are particularly stable elements within a given political order for the very good reason that they make for its cornerstone, since they are indispensable, for reasons previously explored, in order to exert more than nominal control over a given territory (and over its population, and therefore over the available resources).<sup>13</sup> The fact that any political power tries hard to preserve both still says relatively little about the economic and social consequences of a military conquest comparable to that of the Central Asian satrapies by Alexander outside the horizon of an archive (all the more so if, as in our case, we are dealing with a single specimen, however relevant in the light of the systemic nature of the Achaemenid imperial paradigm). By virtue of this - rather mundane, but for this reason alone of no less importance - preliminary observation, the vantage point offered by *ADAB C4* is, at the very least, partial, since it appears restricted to some rather peculiar aspects (in the sense of involving only some branches of the local administration among the many which were established by the Persians) of the socio-economic life of late 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE Baktria. From this point of view, in fact, the conquest by the Umayyad Caliphate first and then by the ‘Abbāsīd armies of Byzantine territories in the Levant and, in successive waves (again by virtue of a strenuous resistance not least by local powerholders), of the Sāsānid domains in Central Asia provides a term of comparison the implications thereof should not be underestimated.<sup>14</sup> For this reason - and here we come to the second noteworthy aspect of our discussion - it would be unwise to obliterate the (for once to some extent detailed and coherent) testimonies of classical authors, who repeatedly emphasize the extremely harsh nature of the fighting that without almost any interruption marked the two Central Asian years of Alexander and his men.<sup>15</sup> To provide a sense of the context, it is estimated

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<sup>13</sup> Rollinger and Gehler 2014, 20 ff.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. for a general overview Wickham 2005, 241-242; 2009, 286-289, Humphreys 2011 (for a regional study of the Levant and Syria) as well as Wiesehöfer 2011a (about Eastern Irān and Central Asia), Marsham 2021, 362 for a different assessment (destruction only limited to the top élites, middle-ranking clerks, and with them the structures of the former Empire, not affected at all) and Azad 2020. In the case of Syria, for instance, it seems that none of the Byzantine administrators suffered dramatic patrimonial losses, but from this fact one cannot in any way infer that the Caliphal conquest of the region was followed by the management of the Syrian economy in a «business as usual» manner, especially given the ubiquitous evidence of an intense (and very bloody) war that ravaged the area during the years of the Byzantine rout. As for the case of Central Asia, the invasion led by one of the most remarkable generals of the time, Qutayba ibn Muslim (669-715 CE), of the territories of Baktria and Sogdiana, called in Arabic sources respectively Ṭohāristān and «[the land] beyond the river» (Mā warā’ al-nahr), although undoubtedly endowed the ‘Abbāsīd Empire with some among its most important and capable administrators, above all the members of the Barmakid family, who were of Central Asian origin, does not imply that the process itself unfolded as nothing less than a vicious military expedition, which in not rare cases gave no quarter to the adversaries, devastating their territories and proceeding to the systematic extermination of those who resisted: de la Vaissière 2004, 269. As King 2020 points out, some among the members of the «aristocratic network» survived the conquest and even flourished under Arab rule, but we are talking about extremely well-off and influential families: the Šābūrān’s fate was not the average one even among the local notables, not least for reasons to be further explored in this chapter.

<sup>15</sup> For a detailed reconstruction of Alexander’s campaign in Central Asia see Holt 1988a; 1988b (on Rōxanē); 1994; 2005, 23-84 (but it should not go unmentioned that the value of the latter contribution is remarkably affected by the widespread modernizing and dubiously relevant comparisons, as noted by Howe 2016). Bosworth 1998, 133-165 devotes particular attention to the dimension of violence unleashed by the Graeco-Makedonians against the rural population of Baktria and Sogdiana and, later, in the Northwestern territories of India. From a sociological point of view, it is perhaps not out of place to argue that the dynamics of the warlike confrontation between Alexander and some members of the Central Asian

that the Makedonian army suffered more losses during this period than during the entire *Anabasis* in Achaemenid territory, during which there was no shortage of opportunities for copious bloodshed.<sup>16</sup> The response of the new (at the time still would-be) Great King and of his generals (to say nothing of the troops) to this situation of extreme danger was, according to the compact testimony of the sources, which can be accused - especially in the case of Arrian - of anything but hostility towards the Makedonian (and we are still a long way, it should be noted, from the notorious «oriental involution» that followed at least the so-called «conspiracy of the pages» and the assassination of Kleitos and which looms large in the extant portrait of Alexander's conquest of the Empire), the systematic deployment of violence, which was used on such a vast scale as to make the claim that the consequences of such an enduring state of diffused warfare were negligible extremely improbable. Such a judgement (a point that should not be forgotten) concerns both the rural population, of whom we know little to nothing, and a far from negligible share of the local ruling class (the cadres mentioned above), as a careful reading of the available account shows.<sup>17</sup>

To these two preliminary remarks one could add a third one, which addresses the dataset available from the archaeological record. While, on the one hand, it is true that it has not yet been possible to find conclusive evidence of population movements on the scale implied by the portrait to be found in the sources concerning the devastation caused by the Makedonian invasion, it is equally true that claiming that there are no traces at all of some sort of break (e. g. as regards the settlement patterns) seems unwarranted.<sup>18</sup> As argued in more detail in the following pages, the rapid increase of the available evidence (especially coming from the Surxondaryo valley) allows on the contrary to support with more than some plausibility the opposite claim, namely that the events triggered by the

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aristocracy, for reasons to be clarified further below, at a certain point took on the features of what Baberowski 2015, 133-195 has called a «space of violence» (Gewaltraum), an interpretative category that seems particularly useful to account for the qualitatively entirely new phase of the Central Asian expedition and the consequent tone that pervades the surviving narratives. A few examples chosen more or less at random among many possible ones: Arr. *Anab.*, 4.6.5. and Curt. 7.9.20-22. As argued by Degen 2022, 302-312, Darius' death changed the rules of the game in the expedition, and forced Alexander to adapt in order to meet his audiences' expectations. In Central Asia, this process seems to have been less smooth than elsewhere in the Empire.

<sup>16</sup> According to Holt 2005, 107, the losses between the Greeks and the Makedonians far exceeded those suffered during Alexander's campaigns up to that moment. If we are to believe the account of Curt. 7.5.1-5 and Plut. *Vit. Alex.*, 42.5-10, the situation took a dramatic turn in a surprisingly short time after the (apparently effortless) conquest of Baktra: and this despite the fact that our main sources (especially Arrian) try hard to downplay the scale of Makedonian losses in order to portray Alexander's heroic military skills: Degen 2022, 379-382.

<sup>17</sup> Tuplin 2017a, 642.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Stančo 2020, 260, who has recently argued that the «study of the settlement dynamics shows clearly that many of the Achaemenid settlements were abandoned, as Alexander marched north of Oxus pursuing the “king slayer” Bessos». To be fair, it should also be mentioned that, in the sentence immediately following the one just quoted, the Czech archaeologist glosses that «abandonment, however, does not mean intentional destruction», which is undoubtedly true, for the Makedonians indeed badly needed both settlements and strongholds through which both oversee the territory and feed themselves, their war horses, and the pack animals. Be it as it may, the fact remains 1. that (contrary to Rachel Mair's argument) there is apparently evidence of radical changes occurring at this chronological height and 2. that the order of magnitude of such changes cannot fail to have had far-reaching consequences on the socio-political and economic organization of the region, especially in the light of Stride's assessment (2005 I, 430 ff.) of the region's sociopolitical and economic soft spots. Compare now Havlik 2021.

Makedonian conquest indeed caused extremely significant fractures within the highly efficient but equally fragile socio-economic landscape of Achaemenid Central Asia. In some areas, the effects would still have been visible in the Soviet era, i. e. in the first repopulation phase of areas once crucial for the political-administrative organization of the satrapy after the decline of the Persian Empire.<sup>19</sup>

These considerations make it necessary to pause and reflect on the new power structures that must have resulted from such radical changes in the hierarchies of regional government, both at the center as well as in liminal territories and impervious areas (Late Antique Rōb provides a good touchstone). This is a crucial step for a thorough historical assessment of the conquest's aftermath, because it is precisely on the new arrangements determined in these convulsive years that the solutions which the heirs of both Achaemenid power and of Alexander's conquests in Central Asia - namely the Seleukid and then, through them, the Graeco-Baktrian rulers - were forced to adopt substantially depended. The socio-political framework of this chapter, it should also be stressed, is characterized by extreme fluidity, and in such a context the weight of both individual and group agency takes on a completely different significance compared to the previous era, when in the background there was a (solid) imperial structure acting as an inescapable (and at least in theory overwhelmingly more powerful) interlocutor of those actors and of their «selectorate».<sup>20</sup> At this point, it will not be inappropriate to recall some of Mischa Meier's remarks about individuals such as Flavius Constantius and Aetius who, it seems to me, by virtue of their «amphibious» nature (according to Yú's definition), i. e. at the same time members - among the most prestigious and influential - of the imperial power apparatus and strongmen involved in socio-political dynamics which followed agendas only partly overlapping with the interests of the Empire they were meant to serve, can be compared not without some gain to individuals such as Spitamenes or his Sogdian acolytes. In the words of the German scholar, «in the progressively fragmented political landscape of the 5<sup>th</sup> century [CE], aristocratic ties became fragile, more limited in their objectives [zielgerichteter] and consequently more unstable; together with the resources available within the framework of a progressively disintegrating [langsam kollabierend] Hesperium Imperium (Western Empire), the time of decay [Halbwertszeit] of political loyalties also decreased, - a phenomenon that triggered a chain of civil wars from which it drew further

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<sup>19</sup> One example will suffice for the moment: in the territory of the Surxondaryo valley, the area around Kyzyltēpe, which we have seen to have been among the most prosperous in the entire region in Achaemenid times, was inhabited again only from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century onwards, when the Soviet government took charge of the transfer of a considerable number of inhabitants from other regions of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Uzbekistan in the context of massive campaigns of urbanization and industrialization (as well as culture on an intensive scale) of the region. In this regard, it is striking to note, following Wu 2017, 315, that the name of two modern villages built nearby, Yangiaryk and Tangiabat, means in O'zbek «new canal» and «new garden» respectively, implying, according to the Chinese historian and archaeologist that the whole area was resettled ex novo and equipped (again ex novo) with an irrigation system, which we know was undoubtedly present in Persian times: see Wu *et al.* 2015.

<sup>20</sup> Note Degen 2022, 402-408.

acceleration».<sup>21</sup> To put the question in only slightly different terms: what are we to make of the label «Baktrian élite» between 324, the «year 7 of Alexander, the King» and 305 BCE, the date when, according to Appian's account, Seleukos «conquered the Baktrians», thereby effectively claiming for himself control of the whole of Central Asia North of Hindūkūš?<sup>22</sup> And secondly (an issue of no less importance), how are we to conceptualize the relations between these élites and the new imperial power(s), at the time, much more conspicuously than during Cyrus' years, both still in statu nascendi or – following Richardson, «presumptive» - that ended up seizing large portions of what once was Achaemenid Central Asia?

### 1.1. Who is the Fairest One of All?

Against such a backdrop, the chapter's aim is to put forward some hypotheses that might help, if not to resolve, at least to adequately frame the above questions within the socio-political horizon of the late 4<sup>th</sup> century Achaemenid upper satrapies. This goal is dictated by a simple consideration. Although it is still central to an impassioned (sometimes quite virulent) debate among scholars, both the chronology and, above all, the topography of the Makedonian campaign in Central Asia have been the subject of in-depth studies in fairly recent years, which have significantly contributed to modify the scenario in which the events narrated by the sources took place, and which will therefore provide the linchpin of the following discussion.<sup>23</sup> In the face of these (remarkable) developments, however, much less attention has been paid to the dynamics of the sociology of power at work in the context of contemporary Baktria. This is all the more noteworthy given that, as a veritable catalyst of Greek and Latin historiographic attention, the Makedonian expedition to Central Asia can rightly be considered one of the best-documented episodes in the entire history of the region until at the very least the Muslim takeover. The benefit of resuming a detailed discussion of Alexander's campaign today is given, among other things, by the fact that the most recent critical acquisitions in terms of local topography can be fruitfully combined with the information that can be obtained - as hopefully emerged from the discussion above on the power dynamics within a (micro)regional context - from a study as exhaustive as possible of the *ADAB* documents. Starting from these premises, also (some

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<sup>21</sup> Meier 2020, 398.

<sup>22</sup> App. *Syr.*, 9.55. According to Strootman 2020c, 13, Appian's formula is clearly reminiscent of a Seleukid court environment by virtue of the universalist claims it conceals (see also Strootman 2020a). Remarkable in any case is the importance that the historian's passage attributes to the upper satrapies (in the list he provides, 8 of the 11 mentioned, including Sogdiana, Arachosia and, precisely, Baktria, i. e., in essence, the foundations of Achaemenid power in the region).

<sup>23</sup> Among the most important contributions on the subject, it is worth mentioning at least Grenet and Rapin 2001, Rapin 2001; 2005; 2013, 2017a; 2018a, Rtveldadze 2009; 2019 Lerner 2016b (harshly – arguably unwarrantedly – critical of Rapin's earlier contributions). See also Martinez-Sève 2020c, 221-222 for an overview of the scholarly debate and additional bibliography.

of) the information scattered through the literary tradition can be tackled from a different perspective, which allows to shift the focus of attention from Alexander's circle to the local socio-political context(s) within which the confrontation took shape and developed, in a first phase, between the Makedonian and Bessos, in a second stage between the former and Spitamenes and, at the same time, between the last two individuals and the other Baktrian, Sogdian (Chorasmians and Sakā) powerbrokers.<sup>24</sup> Contrary to what seems to be suggested by the continuity of administrative practices attested by what (presumably) must have been Baktra's archive, the following sections seeks to show 1. how and 2. to what extent the two years of vicious confrontation - followed, it should not be forgotten, by almost 20 more years of no less acute infights - contributed in drastically reshuffling the staff, and consequently, to a certain extent, also the structures, underpinning local power management.<sup>25</sup> A second section will attempt to explore this line of inquiry in greater depth, this time however focusing on the demographic - which inevitably also means economic - effects of the troubled transitional phase from Achaemenid hegemony to the birth and consolidation of the Seleukid satrapy of Baktria. To avoid any misunderstanding, it must be stressed here once again that the available dataset makes such an undertaking particularly difficult, and the results to be achieved can only be considered preliminary, and in need of further study, discussion and, if necessary, drastic revision. That said, the following pages set out to show that a careful reading of the sources, together with the results of the most recent archaeological investigation (which also includes a thoughtful re-examination of the earlier literature) allows to sketch, at least in its fundamental features, the effects of the Makedonian expedition on the Baktrian space - by which we mean above all the organization of the power structures (and of the power relations within said structures) at a territorial level, both on a macro-regional scale and in the context of the single territories - *sensu Stride* - of which the space under study was composed, both in economic and in social terms. The results of this investigation, it must be stressed, are of decisive importance in the framework of the present discussion, both from a retrospective and prospective point of view. If, in fact, it is possible to deduce from the inquiry to follow (contrary to what is maintained by the advocates of the «business as usual» theory) that the effects caused by both the war and, above all, by the subsequent prolonged period of instability, were of such magnitude that they forced Alexander's successors to adopt drastic (counter)measures with the intention of stabilizing their control in an area the importance of which

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<sup>24</sup> Müller 2016, 277-306 for a study of social dynamics similar to the one proposed here in the context of the Makedonian army. Degen 2022, 402-408 for an insightful discussion of this topic against the background of the entire campaign (with pp. 40-51 providing sensitive methodological guidelines).

<sup>25</sup> Holt 2005, 107 openly argues, not without some - questionable - emphasis that Alexander «invented Total War» and that he chose it «as the lesser evil». In an article published several decades ago in a miscellany of studies devoted to the *Antike Abhängigkeitsformen in den griechischen Gebieten ohne Polisstruktur*, Pierre Leriche had already argued (1985, 73) that the social structures of Baktria and Sogdiana were radically disrupted by the conquest and the massacres of the population perpetrated by the Makedonians in both satrapies, but especially in Sogdiana.

was - still - perceived as crucial, it follows, on the one hand, that the distinctive features of Seleukid Baktria as they have emerged from the most recent studies cannot be understood but against the backdrop of the sensational upheavals caused by the Makedonian expedition and, on the other hand, that - at least in Central Asia - the often invoked «continuity» between the Seleukids and the Achaemenids (of whom the former are said to be «heirs» in various ways, not only in the light of the domains they claim to rule) must be radically questioned.<sup>26</sup> In the third section of this chapter, an (albeit provisional) socio-anthropological assessment of the impact of the Makedonian invasion on Baktrian history shall be attempted, the results of which have a decisive influence on the study of Central Asian society in the Hellenistic period, a subject that has been the focus of numerous debates since at least the first cultural history of this region of Eurasia, namely Rachel Mairs' influential *The Hellenistic Far East*.<sup>27</sup> Given the considerable number of soldiers (at least in proportion to the Makedonian army's manpower) quartered by Alexander in Central Asia in the aftermath of the conquest, in what terms should we imagine, following Briant's terminology, 1. the first years of this phase of installation and 2. the demographic composition of the new Baktrian ethno(?)-class dominante?<sup>28</sup>

Again, this is an issue of enormous importance, not least because the profile of the first generation of Hellenistic inhabitants of Baktria depends substantially on the answers to these questions. This has moreover severe consequences when it comes to fundamental topics related to the debate within the historiography of Hellenism in this area of the new-born Greek-speaking οἰκουμένη (e. g. the long-debated question of the self-perception of the Greeks of Central Asia or the no less sensitive topic of their position within the multi-ethnic society of which they were now at the top). There is, however, yet a further aspect that justifies a treatment of some detail of the issues briefly summarized above: the years covered by this chapter (roughly 330 to 305 BCE) are crucial, among other things, because during them the formative processes of a new élite (if not in its underpinning mechanisms, at least in part in its composition, which is no small thing) took place, with whose representatives the Seleukids had to deal, not always starting from a position of strength, during the reconquista by the dynasty's founder of the Empire that was Alexander's and, before him, belonged to the Great Kings of Persia. Moreover, as the story of Euthydemus remarkably shows, the post-Achaemenid (Graeco)Baktrian élite would have played a crucial role in the region at least until the rise of the Kuṣāṇa, if not even

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<sup>26</sup> Strootman 2020c, 13-19. On the alleged «continuity» between the Seleukids and the Achaemenids see the contrasting views of Kuhrt - Sherwin-White 1993 and Panitschek 2016 on the one hand as well as the radically different opinion of Paul Kosmin (2014; 2018) and, although more cautious, Capdetrey 2007. It is also worth consulting Engels 2017a. On the administrative consequence of Alexander's expedition in Baktria and Sogdiana cf. most recently Iliakis 2021, 41-42.

<sup>27</sup> The English scholar has written extensively on these topics: see at least Mairs 2006; 2013b; 2014b for an overview of the issues at stake in the debate.

<sup>28</sup> Briant 1978; 1988.

beyond.<sup>29</sup> The 20 years or so that elapsed between Alexander's death in Babylon and Seleukos' Central Asian campaign represent (yet another) little or not at all known period in the history of Baktria. Perhaps not surprisingly, only patchy and scanty evidence is available for this crucial phase, and the sources' main focus is moreover concentrated mainly around a few thematic nuclei that do little to help us understand the complexity of the events taking place in the region: among the most recurring there are repeated depositions of satraps, discontent among the local population (again, the stereotype of the rebellious Baktrians), and even insubordination among the new settlers themselves, nostalgic, in Diodoros' words, for «the Greek way of life and culture». We know that there were mass uprisings, one of which was bloodily quashed in a battle the proportions of which help, if nothing else, to give a fairly clear idea of both the scale of warfare in the Hellenistic period and of its «globalized» dynamics, from which Central Asia was by no means excluded.<sup>30</sup> In the last section of the chapter, however, it shall nevertheless be attempted to sketch a different interpretative scenario. Faced with a narrative - both in the sources and in historiography - excessively focused on Empires as the exclusive (or at least preponderant) driving force of historical development in Central Asia, which consequently tends to dismiss the almost 20 yearlong interlude between the death of Alexander and Seleukos' bid for power in Central Asia as a «dark age» of turmoil - in this way, among other things, contributing in reinforcing the prejudice of Baktria as the «unrule-able» region of Eurasia -, the case shall be made that through the analysis of the available dataset in the light of a more sophisticated methodological toolkit, it is possible to show how the years under discussion were, on the contrary, a period of considerable creativity, during which original solutions were experimented with to deal with problems that were partly structural (the dialectic between an Empire and its borderlands), but were made peculiar by the historical contingencies in which the social actors involved in the processes under examination had to act.

Having come this far, two aspects deserve particular consideration. If, on the one hand, it is now certain that the Seleukids' interest in the government of Baktria was - at least until the end of Antiochos I's reign - in no way inferior to that of the Achaemenids, on the other hand, it is no less true that the (new) local élites - according to dynamics already observed, albeit now in different circumstances - must have been quick to recognize their participation in the Seleukid imperial enterprise (Euthydemos' case is very instructive in this respect) as the most profitable strategy for the - overarching - purpose of consolidating their local power in the territories where they settled.<sup>31</sup> As a

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<sup>29</sup> Compare at least Lerner 1999, Coloru 2009, 164-194, Marcinkiewicz-Joseph 2016, Strootman 2020c, 222-225 and now Hoo and Wiesehöfer 2022, Rezakhani 2022.

<sup>30</sup> Strootman 2020c. On the allegedly homesick colonists see Diod. Sic. 18.7.1 and Dumke 2015.

<sup>31</sup> That in Seleukid times Baktria played a crucial role in the imperial framework is shown, among other things, by the imposing temple of Tāxt -i Sāngīn, most likely an imperial foundation of the early Hellenistic period (perhaps financed



result, the dialectic between the instances of extraction and control characteristic of any pre-modern Empire (what Michael Mann has called the strategy of «compulsory cooperation» and which - echoing Henkelman - we could identify as the codification of a new imperial paradigm) and the - parallel - increase in centrifugal forces dictated by the strengthening of the local power networks (in turn indispensable for the entrenchment of the paradigm itself) seems to have been started at full steam once again.<sup>32</sup> The apparent immutability, in its cyclical recurrence, of these power dynamics must, however, be put into perspective: in fact, the - radically changed - geopolitical, economic, and social horizons resulting from Alexander's expedition and the wars of the Diadochi accelerated, indeed arguably giving them a significantly different direction, processes that in the course of this study it has been argued were in fact deeply rooted in the socio-political history of Central Asia. The ultimate result was, starting from approximately the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, the creation of an «imperial space» that was in many ways significantly new, and the historical trajectory of which shall not be investigated here, but which, however – as argued in the following pages - cannot be adequately understood if not against the background of the events studied in this chapter. The latter, finally, ought to be framed as the result of the dialectic between the «global» (the Achaemenid Empire and its paradigm) and the «local» (the geo-anthropocentric space of Baktria), which has been the overarching topic, and a red thread of sort, of the present work.<sup>33</sup>

## 2. *Per un pugno di ὑπαρχοι*

In Strabo's opinion, «the description given of these mountainous lands [i. e. the upper satrapies of Eastern Irān and Central Asia] would be better understood if one investigated in more detail which route Alexander travelled during his pursuit of Bessos from the Parthian lands to Baktria».<sup>34</sup> There are, it seems to me, at least two possible ways to interpret this statement. On the one hand - and this was undoubtedly the focus of the author's interest – beyond a confrontation with the contemporary intellectual milieu and the (ancient) scholarly tradition on Alexander and his world, the Makedonian's campaign – and its Achaemenid background – provided an inescapable reference point in the framework of a discourse on universal rule and Empire in which Strabo, his sources, and those who

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by Antiochos I himself): see Lindström 2016, 289 ff. (on the possibility of Greek-inspired cults at the site); 2020, 295 (on the supra-regional role played by the temple).

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Mann 1986, 146-155, 176 and, on the radically mutated circumstances in which Seleukid politics had to operate see Strootman 2018 and Overtom 2020, 65-188.

<sup>33</sup> Compare Morris 2019a on Baktria as an imperial space.

<sup>34</sup> Strab. 15.2.10: «Γνοίη δ' ἄν τις τὰ περὶ τὴν λεχθεῖσαν ὀρεινὴν ἔτι μᾶλλον, προσιστορήσας τὴν ὁδόν, ἣ ἐχρήσατο διώκων τοὺς περὶ Βησσόν ὡς ἐπὶ Βάκτρων Ἀλέξανδρος ἐκ τῆς Παρθουηνῆς».

wrote after him, were deeply embedded.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, apart from Alexander's (mis-)deeds – a sourcebook for generations of writers devoted to the topic of how (not) to be a King, starting with eyewitnesses of Alexander's campaign both in the intellectual environment of Greece and Makedon as well as in the Near East -, retracing the stages of the Makedonian *Anabasis* also makes it possible (and this is what interests *us* most here) to reconstruct the Persian organization of the Eastern satrapies with a degree of detail unknown in previous epochs.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, and even more importantly, if read against the background of the material presented in the previous pages, the available evidence provides extremely interesting information on the power relations which considerably shaped, while in turn being affected by it, the templates of imperial rule over this space.<sup>37</sup> Consequently, the primary objective of this section will be to provide some examples illustrating the extent to which the second interpretation of Strabo's statement is valid. In recent years, in fact, archaeological research and a radical re-examination of some historiographical evidence (in particular Curtius Rufus and the so-called *Vulgata* tradition) allowed to considerably advance our knowledge of the route followed by Alexander during his campaign in the territories East of the Caspian: this, in turn, has made possible a deeper understanding of the strategies adopted (and the reasons therefore) during these crucial years both by the Makedonian and, what from our point of view is even more relevant, by his adversaries. In the case of the two Baktrio-Sogdian years, faced with a narrative by Graeco-Roman historiography that appears at first sight both confused and confusing, the contribution of archaeology has been of particular importance. If in fact, as somewhat pessimistically pointed out by Ladislav Stančo, a precise identification on the map of the places mentioned in Arrian or Curtius Rufus' accounts - with the exception of a few major centers - seems impossible, the investigation on the ground is nevertheless crucial for shed some light on the consequences of the two years of war 1. on the territory of Baktria-Sogdiana and, consequently, 2. on the redefinition of what Canepa has suggestively called the «topography of power» in Central Asia during the decades following Alexander's campaign.<sup>38</sup> These two aspects are fundamental in order to investigate a third one, namely the evolution of the relations between the Central Asian élites and the imperial power, which was embodied, within a few years, by Darius III, Bessos, and Alexander. Each of these men, it must be stressed, while being all

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<sup>35</sup> Alexander's campaign in the *Far East* is usually taken as the source of most of Hellenistic (and later) geographical knowledge on these areas: Lindström 2009a, Karttunen 1997, von Reden 2019c. As most recently, and convincingly, shown by Julian Degen (2021; 2022, 363-381), however, it is much more fruitful to frame the topic of Alexander and (Achaemenid) geography, especially when it comes to borderlands and frontier zones, within a discourse on universal rule and Empire which goes back to age-old, and influential, Ancient Near Eastern models. Compare Rapin 2018b and especially Rollinger and Degen 2021a.

<sup>36</sup> Degen 2022, 302-312.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Jacobs 1994 for a (by now classic) study of an administrative-institutional nature and the contributions by Claude Rapin (2013; 2017a; 2018a, 263), who adds valuable sociological insights and a very detailed discussion of the archaeological data to the perspective adopted by Jacobs.

<sup>38</sup> Compare Rtveldze 2002; 2019, Lerner 2016b and Rapin 2017a with Stančo 2020, 257-258; 2021.

embedded in a (vicious) fight for supremacy which unfolded within the framework of a well-established ideological discourse and under the scrutiny of sensitive (and much interested) audiences, pursued their overlapping goals from different positionalities, and consequentially adopted different strategies. The evolution of Middle Ground for mutual understanding and negotiation between each of this claimant to the Empire (or its legacy) on the one hand, and the «selectorates» they targeted on the other, would profoundly influence the history of Central Asia in the Hellenistic period.<sup>39</sup> Approaching the conclusion of the present study, there is therefore perhaps no better way to appreciate the impact of Achaemenid hegemony over the *longue durée* than to observe whether, to what extent and, above all, why, the management of this space by the Empires that followed in the footsteps of «the spear of the Persian Man» differed from the precedent established by Cyrus.<sup>40</sup>

A second aim of these pages is therefore to adequately assess the full extent of the destructive consequences of the two years of Makedonian campaign on the carefully constructed (at the same time effective and fragile) sociopolitical and economic environment providing the background for fruitful cooperation between the imperial authority and the most influential representatives of the local communities. What the fault lines within such a system were, and why a breaking point was not reached earlier should have emerged from the previous discussion.<sup>41</sup> The order built (and maintained, not without a cost) by the Achaemenid rulers was undermined, thus creating a power vacuum which, contrary to what is usually claimed, was only partially filled again by the «compensatory marriage», as it has been defined, between Alexander and Rōxanē, if only by virtue of the fact that, willingly or unwillingly, the Baktrian princess represented only one among the many factions struggling to carve out a spot in the sun under the new Graeco-Makedonian order (incidentally yet another proof of the fact that neither Bessos nor Spitamenes was trying to make Baktria or Sogdiana «independent»: the only goal was to negotiate the price for entering the new imperial framework from the front door).<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> See on this topic the sensitive discussion in Degen 2022, 29-33.

<sup>40</sup> As far as I am aware, Vacante 2012 makes for a partial exception to the general indifference of historiography with respect to a study of the socio-political dynamics within the Baktrio-Sogdian (and steppe) élite during this crucial period. The two major limitations of this essay are, however, on the one hand, the fact that it almost entirely neglects the results of both archaeology and the research on historical geography, and when such studies are mentioned, it is only to criticize them (there is for example no trace, apart from only two, albeit not particularly relevant, mentions, of the fundamental contributions by Frantz Grenet and Claude Rapin). On the other hand, the author does not seem to have considered the *ADAB* evidence (neither the edition by Naveh and Shaked, nor the authors' preparatory studies or the insightful Briant 2009a).

<sup>41</sup> Stride 2005 I, 439. As soon as the Achaemenid administration (simplifying: Aḥvamazdā and his associates) was no longer able to control appointments, the distribution of the Empire's dividends and, above all, internal security, the tensions - which, as seen in the previous chapter, must have been latent, but by no means eliminated - between the most prominent members of the local power groups deflagrated, with considerable effects not only, as is obvious, for the stability of Persian power but also, probably (and this being a much more interesting fact), for the consolidation of the Makedonian conquest itself. See on this issue King 2021, 168 fn. 94: «Maintaining the surplus-extraction of the Achaemenid elite ensured their continued support for the institutions of the imperial state».

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Holt 1988a, 62; 1988b; 2005, 85-104, Ogden 1999, 43-47, and Naiden 2019, 174. To argue, therefore, as Bosworth 1981, 10-11 does, that with the maiden went the entire satrapy is true only to a certain point, although as claimed before in this study the economic relevance of marrying local princess must have been pivotal in influencing satrapal and even

The sheer size of the contingent stationed in Baktria at the time of the new King and his men's departure to India testifies (I would argue) both to the importance (still) held by the satrapies on the chessboard of the Empire in the eyes of its new masters - as Strootman, for example, maintains - and to the precariousness of the successes accumulated in the course of two challenging years. And this despite the profusion of rhetoric to be found in the sources (Arrian and Plutarch above all): the fact that Bessos was able to mobilize 8000 cavalry units - roughly a quarter of the entire military potential of Baktria alone - apparently with little to no effort does not at all mean that these were Persian soldiers stationed in the satrapy to ensure order; on the contrary, it is more likely to reflect both the purchase of the Achaemenid house down to the very last days of the Empire and the crucial role played by local aristocratic networks in ensuring the effective functioning of the imperial paradigm.<sup>43</sup>

In other words, there is reason to believe that, when around 327 BCE Alexander resumed his route to Bagrām heading towards India, the Baktria - to say nothing of Sogdiana - that he left behind must not have looked too different (at least from the point of view of power organization «on the ground», thus not counting the devastation of two years of fierce warfare) from the space Cyrus conquered some two centuries earlier: a space, that is, fragmented into a swarm of small local big men among whom tensions could erupt at any time and which could lead to armed conflict (not least to get their hands on the - scarce - resources of a territory exhausted and now meant to support additional population) without any of them having however the necessary strength to emerge as the dominant figure in a network of relationships of dependence that the war (both the one of conquest waged by Alexander and the following infights) had torn apart.

Finally, by virtue of the demographic changes dictated both by the Makedonian expedition and by the events that in the coming decades would have impacted the entire Hellenistic world from one end to the other, when this fabric - without which, as previously argued, the imperial government was condemned to remain, in the words of Rhyne King, «purely fictive» - was eventually sewn back together to make up the new Baktrian élite under the Seleukids, its features would have been markedly different from the preceding ones, thus marking a clear break with the Achaemenid past of Baktria.<sup>44</sup>

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royal bridal choices during the Achaemenid period (see e. g. Henkelman 2018b, 810-811 on Irdabama). One of the arguments underlying this chapter is that the power Oxyartes seems to enjoy in the historiographical sources was at least partly a direct consequence of the upheavals caused by the Makedonian campaign, which he was able to exploit to his own ends and first of all *against* his internal rivals. See also Howe 2017, 107-108, arguing that much of Alexander's strategy in Central Asia followed in the footsteps of his Illyrian experience.

<sup>43</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 4.22.3. Cf. most recently Strootman 2020c, 11-13 and Degen 2022, 309-312 on the authority enjoyed by the Achaemenid dynasty all over the empire until (and arguably beyond, given Bessos' role in the events) the death of Darius III, which required from Alexander a carefully planned strategy in order to win over enough collaborators for his bid to the throne to have any chance of succeeding. On the numbers of the famed (and feared) Baktrian cavalry note Curt. 4.12.6-7 (8000 units) but see again in the *Historia* a passage such as 7.4.30-31 (in which the effectives of Central Asian cavalry has increased four times). Tuplin 2010 and Manning 2021, 183-187 for a critical assessment of the strength and relevance of Achaemenid cavalry through both space and time.

<sup>44</sup> King 2020, 259 on the indispensability of the «aristocratic network» for the effectiveness of imperial control over men and resources in a territory like Central Asia.

In such a situation of momentous transformation, however, something seems to have remained unchanged, which based inter alia on substantial comparative evidence from different times and places of Eurasian history it has been argued made for a structural aspect regulating the dialectic between Empire and regional aristocracies in Central Asia. Such a constant can be identified in the firm awareness on the part of the local contenders for power in Bactria and the adjoining territories (be they members of the new élite or survivors of the (late) Achaemenid one) that only within an imperial polity would they be able to gain 1. adequate protection against their rivals and 2. access to socio-political and economic networks which were essential to obtain 2.1. a status capable of justifying the power they claimed for themselves – incidentally a decisive tactical advantage in the local arena - 2.2. a greater capacity for action (think of the case of a man such as Bagavanta) and 2.3. last but not (never) least, economic prosperity beyond what any of them would ever have been able to achieve independently from imperial power and outside of its framework.<sup>45</sup> It is here, and not, as still argued by many scholars, in an alleged power transfer to the advantage of the Graeco-Makedonians alone (and this is true even if one wanted to limit it to the upper strata of the new imperial hierarchies: the government of the satrapy, to speak clearly, since we have seen how, in the absence of a collaborative «selectorate», the satrap was almost powerless outside the territory of Bactria) that I believe it must be sought the reasons for the - perhaps only apparent - ease with which Seleukos and after him Antiochos were able to reannex Bactria to the rest of the Empire.<sup>46</sup> Both Alexander's general and, above all, his son embodied in fact both the authority and the privileges - which the former inevitably implied - of «the Empire», the latter to be understood as a *system* of government and not (only) as a dynasty ruling over a territory and the people settled therein.<sup>47</sup> The challenge now is to understand why one epiphenomenon of that system (embodied by the Achaemenid paradigm) eventually fell apart, and with what consequences.

## 2.1. The king is dead! Long live the king!

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<sup>45</sup> See Mann 1986, 391-392 and Meier 2015; 2020, supporting this claim drawing on several examples such as the history of Alaric, Genseric, and or Attila himself: compare Heather 2020.

<sup>46</sup> As argued by Degen 2022, 33-40, 322-332, Alexander's (and Seleukos') was a Makedonian world Empire: however, if the focus is on how its structures worked on the ground (Düring and Stek 2018a), it immediately becomes clear that what makes a certain appointment powerful is also a matter of perspective and scale. In absolute terms, Aḥvamazdā was both more important and more powerful than Bagavanta. Measured against the background of the local context in which he was active, however, the latter wielded at least as much, if not more, power than his superior, who in fact not only was not able to dispose of him, but had ultimately to rely on his (and his networks) services to fulfill his duties in the eyes of the King and even to pursue his own interests in Bactria and beyond.

<sup>47</sup> Gehler and Rollinger 2014 for a seminal introduction on what makes (and what means) an Empire. Compare now Bang *et al.* 2021 I.

Alexander's properly Central-Asian expedition arguably begun de jure (if not de facto) in 330 BCE, i. e. even before his troops had set foot in one of the two nodal centers for the control of that area of the Persian dominions, namely Baktria and Arachosia. In that year, in fact, near the Caspian gates, in an unidentified location between Rhagai (today's Tehrān district, where also Darius I had scored some decisive victories at the time of his accession to the throne) and Hekatompylos (Qūšeh), Darius III of Persia had fallen victim to a conspiracy led by Bessos, the satrap of Baktria and - a fact worth emphasizing - the undisputed authority (at least for the time being) within the closest circle of notables surrounding the now deposed Great King.<sup>48</sup> In the (by now conspicuous) history of scholarship on these events, the opinion that the Putsch was a direct consequence of the defeats (with the consequent ignominious flight) of Issos and Gaugamela has been put forward and repeatedly reiterated, in one form or another: they would in fact have made patently clear the King's inability to successfully oppose the invader, thus falling short of one among the crucial tenants of Achaemenid royal ideology.<sup>49</sup> From a symbolic point of view, such a standpoint might at first sight appear more than justified: however, one should not forget that 1. as Briant rightly observes, from a Persian perspective, the King's evasion of capture was not only a logical choice, but almost an unavoidable imperative since, after all, the Empire existed to a large extent in the person of the ruler himself; in addition, 2. it should not be lost sight of the fact that, from the extant sources, it is rather difficult to reconstruct the court dynamics that drove Bessos to the coup, and even less clear are the reasons why the party he led eventually got the upper hand.<sup>50</sup> This last aspect constitutes an essential (and too often neglected) factor in the analysis of the events under discussion here. Against the picture provided by the historiographical sources, in fact, it is clear that Bessos' move did not meet with the unanimous consent of the Persian magnates, and indeed the former had to overcome vocal resistance.<sup>51</sup> This is a

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<sup>48</sup> Curt. 5.9.5-16. Arr. *Anab.*, 3.21.5, as already mentioned several times in the previous pages, calls Bessos Darius' οἰκειότης. Of the previous cursus honorum of this man (unfortunately) nothing is known. However, the sequence of events on the one hand and, on the other, a document such as *ADAB* C1 (despite all the uncertainties regarding the identity of the people mentioned therein) prevent us from ruling out a priori that he 1. was of Baktrian origin (as argued most recently by Heckel 2018, 101 without however providing new evidence backing this claim or 2. that he had been active in Central Asia for a sufficiently long time to make it possible for him to weave and consolidate a solid personal power base (this is for example the opinion voiced by Mairs 2016). Be that as it may, what cannot (or not very easily) be questioned is the authority he enjoyed among the Central Asian notables, which is evident, among other things, from the fact that it was he who led the mutiny that led Darius to his death. It is however likely that he had long held important positions within the imperial ranks, given that the *earliest* attestations of the pre-eminence of this individual date back at least to Issos (Naiden 2019, 117). At Gaugamela (Arr. *Anab.*, 3.8.3) he is recorded in no uncertain terms as the satrap of Baktria. If the individual mentioned in *ADAB* C1 is the same as the one known to classical sources it is possible that he was the successor of Ahvamazdā (nothing is known, of course, about the reasons for this change), and this by virtue of the fact that the latter is attested at the head of the satrapy in all probability at least until 347 BCE: see Rapin 2018a, 277.

<sup>49</sup> Briant 2002, 884-886, Naiden 2019, 145. See moreover Diod. Sic. 17.74.2, Just. *Epit.*, 11.15.5-13 and Plut. *Vit. Alex.* 43-44.

<sup>50</sup> Briant 2015, 394 ff.

<sup>51</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 3.21.2, Arr. *Anab.*, 3.30.4., Curt. 5.13.3. Remarkable in Arrian's account is the fact that, at this date, both Oxyartes and, above all, Spitamenes, are conspicuous by their absence. In view of the role which they played in the following events, it is worth asking if they were some members of Bessos' clientele and, if so, if and why they were left

symptomatic piece of information, which needs to be strongly emphasized: already at this date, significant tensions can be sensed brewing within the inner circle of the Persian government apparatus, which greatly facilitated the Makedonian conquest. Clues in support of such a claim can be found, for example, already in Hyrkania, where Alexander would have been welcomed with great favor by the holders of Achaemenid power in the satrapy, who showed themselves more than willing to negotiate (for themselves and their networks) a role within the new imperial framework.<sup>52</sup> This is a fleeting piece of evidence that cannot be detailed further, but it perfectly highlights the importance, in the eyes of the local élite, of the Empire as an institution – sensu North - capable of ensuring political stability and (consequently) economic privileges together with sociopolitical latitude to those who belonged to it. In other words, at least at this stage the system seems therefore to have been much more important than its representatives (in this case Darius III, who no longer appeared to be an authoritative guarantor of it): the Hyrkanian context is remarkable, among other things, especially when compared with the situation we are confronted with in Baktria and Sogdiana, where resistance was remarkably bitter and lasted two years. This calls for some kind of explanation.<sup>53</sup> Such remarks provide the framework from which to investigate the multiple levels on which the game for the inheritance of Darius' throne seems to have been played: next to the more strictly military one (which of the competing forces would eventually have come out victorious) paramount were questions of symbolic-ideological order (the ability of the Great King, or those who proclaimed themselves as such, to meet the expectations of those who were deputed to recognize his authority) and finally, closely related to the first two, the economic issue (the impact of the war on the territories controlled by local élites and by their «selectorates»<sup>54</sup>). Such different levels must have been simultaneously well in the eyes of both the local ruling class and of the two main contenders (Alexander and Bessos).<sup>55</sup> In the face of the former's maneuvers to wedge himself into the sociopolitical fabric that

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in Central Asia. A possible option might be that they were meant to manage current affairs while the most important of this *Nest of Gentlefolks* followed Darius III into battle: see Rapin 2018a, 276.

<sup>52</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 3.23.4-5, Curt. 6.4.8-14. According to Monson 2015, 175 intra-élite tensions proved pivotal in securing Alexander's conquest of the Persian Empire, a point recently stressed by Degen 2022, 317-318.

<sup>53</sup> Curt. 5.8.6 ff. knows of a meeting held in an unspecified location in Media, in which two factions of the court, led respectively by Artabazos and Nabarzanes, bitterly confronted each other. The disagreements could not be composed, and the result seems rather to have been a deepening of the rift, the ultimate result of which was Darius' murder.

<sup>54</sup> This argument reappears cyclically in historiography: see Briant 1982, 380 ff., Wiesehöfer 1994, 39 ff., Plischke 2014, 15 and Panitschek 2016, 218-219. According to the latter, the exceptional position of Baktria within the imperial governmental structure would justify the choice of Bessos to proclaim himself king only when he reached the satrapy, i. e. his own power base: see also Müller 2016, 294 and Degen 2022, 312-332 on the importance for Alexander to win, as it were, the hearts and minds (and arguably the pockets) of the imperial élites.

<sup>55</sup> It has been noted, for example, that - in perfect Achaemenid style - Alexander may have made extensive use of the «king's table» during the Central Asian anabasis in an attempt to strengthen his ties with *some* among the local notables (and the same did Peukestas, the Makedonian satrap of Persia) against *others* within the Achaemenid élite itself, principally Bessos and, after him, Spitamenes. Cf. in this regard the testimony of Athen. 4.146c = *FGrHist* 126 F 2 (with commentary by Spawforth 2007, 100-101). Other sources can be brought to bear: Arr. *Anab.*, 3.25.3, Arr. *Anab.*, 4.7.3-4.9.9, Curt. 6.2.6, Curt. 6.6.13, Diod. Sic. 17.74.2, Diod. Sic. 17.77 and Plut. *Vit. Alex.*, 45.

evidently bound together the most prominent members of the imperial ruling class, the latter seems to have reacted by (self)proclaiming himself Great King, evidently aware of the importance of the authority that the office of the Achaemenid ruler (as representative of the system on which the power of the other aristocrats ultimately depended) still embodied: and if we are to judge from the reaction of individuals like Satibarzanes, the satrap of Areia, such a move, at least at first, had the desired effects.<sup>56</sup> Although in the beginning the latter had in fact surrendered to the Makedonians, when the news of the ascent of Bessos to the office of Great King (with the name of Artaxerxes V) reached him, he decided to revolt, causing not a few headaches to the Makedonian army, which could not afford turmoil in its rear. The sudden - and apparently unmotivated - insubordination of Satibarzanes should not be underestimated: in fact, it provides a rather strong indication, on the one hand, of the influence that the royal authority still enjoyed regardless of the power relations (it was Alexander, and not Bessos, who led the offensive at that time); on the other hand, and this is perhaps the aspect most deserving emphasis, the episode clearly illustrates the position of pre-eminence, within the socio-political networks of Central Asia, of the satrap of Baktria, since it seems to have been exclusively by virtue of the office he held (which in no small measure means his networking capacity) that Bessos was able to impose his authority on his associates, in the case of Satibarzanes even without the latter being under the direct influence of the former.<sup>57</sup> Bessos, therefore, seems to have consciously played his own game on a double level, claiming for himself the royal prerogatives without, however, abdicating those of influential Central Asian big man, since, by virtue of the exceptional state of the imperial chain of command, he needed both networks of socio-political dependence that the two offices were able to mobilize in order to launch an effective counter-offensive in the territories of the upper satrapies.<sup>58</sup> This is the scenario in which it seems at least feasible to read the already mentioned *ADAB* C1 parchment in order to support the interpretation thereof voiced by Rachel Mairs. For such a framework would allow to make (some) sense of its onomastics while providing clear evidence of the dominant position of the satrapy of Baktria for the purposes of political and economic organization of Achaemenid Central Asia (at the very least in the territories North of the Hindūkūš). The crux of the document, as mentioned above, is given by the first three lines: following the date «in the month of Kislev, in the year 1 of Artaxerxes, the King»

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<sup>56</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 3.25.1, Curt. 6.6.1-12: the role of factions within what remained of the Achaemenid ruling class should not be underestimated: Müller 2020, 90. Might the following passage in the *Historia Alexandri Magni* (5.8.3: «xxx milia peditum sequebantur, in quibus Graecorum erant iiii milia fide vetere erga regem ad ultimum invicta») be taken as a hint at the fact that the soldiers' fides (and all the more so of their leaders) went to the king as the representative of the imperial power and not (or not only) to Darius as a man or even as an Achaemenid?

<sup>57</sup> On Satibarzanes see Arr. *Anab.*, 3.28.3, Curt. 7.4.33-37, Diod. Sic. 17.83.4-6 and Heckel 2006, 245.

<sup>58</sup> Howe 2016, 161. See also *ABC Chron.* 8 (with commentary by van der Spek 2003, 301 ff). Naiden 2019, 146 argues that, although Bessos could not be crowned, «according to Persian custom» the position he held as satrap in Baktria made him the heir in pectore.



(which is to say most likely between November and December 330 BCE), the document begins to list a large amount of supplies stored in a place called Maithanaka and intended for an individual called «B[ys], when he went from Baktra to Varnu [probably Qundūz]». <sup>59</sup>

The simultaneous presence of the two names in two (supposedly) different functions has prompted some commentators - including the editors themselves, who had previously accepted the identification of «King Artaxerxes» with the «B[ys]» featuring in the lines below without any particular problems - to suggest a backdating of the document to the reign of Artaxerxes III. <sup>60</sup> However, in the light of what has been said so far, the hypothesis put forward by Mairs, according to which in *ADAB* C1 Bessos would in fact be covering two different functions, namely that of the issuing authority of the parchment on the one hand (which he held, according to Naiden's interpretation, de jure after Darius' overthrow) and, on the other, that of a powerful local strongman capable of mobilizing both the administrative apparatus of Baktria and his own networks of clients (think of Aḥvamazdā and Vahuvaxšu) in order to supply his army in a moment of crisis retains its charm, and should therefore not be dismissed too lightly in the absence of strong counter arguments. <sup>61</sup> Such caution is justified not least by the fact that, beyond the testimony that this controversial document offers regarding the wealth of coeval Baktria and the articulation of its administrative apparatus at this chronological height (yet another, definitive disavowal of the inveterate claim of Achaemenid «decadence» at the time of Darius III and the other, no less tenacious one, of the Kings' partial or total loss of control over the *Far Eastern* reaches of the Persian domains), *ADAB* C1 is perhaps also able to show, albeit against the grain, the web of some of the networks of sociopolitical solidarity and/or dependence on which Bessos could rely, and which Alexander worked so hard to neutralize, and if possible to recruit. <sup>62</sup> This last, crucial aspect might perhaps be deduced from the mention in the parchment of 1200 liters of Arachosian wine (by any standard a respectable load): we do not know why the latter was brought to Baktria (where there was no shortage of such a commodity) from so far away in a context such as 330 BCE, but it cannot be ruled out that it was some sort of levy imposed by the satrap of Baktria on his counterpart South of the Hindūkūš, who seems to have been in charge of the, logistically quite challenging, transportation of such a good (the close

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<sup>59</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 174 ff. C1 = Khalili A21, ll. 1-3. In the Aramaic text the name in question, recorded at line 3 of the parchment, is only partially preserved and is reconstructed by the editors as [𐤁]𐤎 i. e., by virtue of the vocalization, Bayāsa (Greek Βῆσσαος, in Arrian's words (3.8.3.) «ὁ τῆς Βακτρῶν χώρας σατράπης»).

<sup>60</sup> Rapin 2017a, 115 fn. 152.

<sup>61</sup> See Mairs 2016, 2042 (see contra Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 137-138). In the words of the British scholar, *ADAB* C1 provides a cogent clue that «the incorporation of powerful local “big men” – whether men of Persian origin who had built up Bactrian powerbases [meaning: a network of clientele analogous to Bagavanta's or those we see reflected in the *BDNA*], or the scions of powerful local families of longer standing – was, I would argue, one of the great strengths of the Achaemenid administration in Bactria»: unfortunately, Mairs does not provide comparative evidence from the known Aramaic dataset, by far the best strategy to back her hypothesis.

<sup>62</sup> Briant 2009a.

association thereof with a context of royal standing has already been noted). The context may have been that of an inspection tour, by the newly (self)proclaimed ruler, of some strategic territories in Central Asia, the latter accompanied by the demand for a pledge of allegiance to his *bandakā* at the time of tightening ranks before mounting a counterattack against the invading enemy.<sup>63</sup>

Such an interpretation of the provision of Arachosian wine does not seem to be excluded even by Henkelman (otherwise very critical of the possibility of recognizing in «Artaxerxes, the King» Bessos' royal name): according to the scholar, *ADAB* C1 offers in fact undoubted evidence of an official visit that the Achaemenid satrap of Baktria (namely Bessos) would have made in compliance with his offices and by virtue of which he needed large amounts of provision to sustain splendor, devotion (in the text ritual offerings are also mentioned) and magnificence (the latter a distinctive feature, according to Jacobs, of both the King's persona and of his environment) characteristic of the Great Kings' representatives. Moreover, Henkelman points out the close parallels between the *ADAB* text and the official trips of an individual like Parnakka (incidentally another *οικειότης* of a Darius, this time *Vīštāspa*'s son) as they are documented by the Persepolis archives.<sup>64</sup> In particular, the mention of distinctive elements of the King's table (which, although on a smaller scale, was mirrored by the satrapal one) such as poultry and an apparently more valuable category of meat - «sheltered lambs» are referred to in the parchment - leaves open the hypothesis that, in the intentions of those who commanded this chain (i. e. Bessos himself), these resources had to be used according to the redistributive patterns discussed in chapter 5 in order to consolidate, through an evergetic act of clear royal favor, his position both in relation to his own peers (hence the request for donations from Arachosia, the seat of the most important within such a social group in Central Asia), who now had to submit to his authority, and in relation to Alexander.

Pure speculation, one might say. And yet, Alexander's behavior in response to the news of Bessos' mutiny, which reached him while he was still in Tuš (in present-day *Ḥurāsān*), clearly suggests that the subtleties of Achaemenid politics were far from unknown to the Makedonian: in addition, the path taken by the army appears to reflect a carefully planned strategy, aimed at neutralizing Bessos' attempt to rally around him his (former) peers in the Eastern satrapies before reaching a head-on confrontation.<sup>65</sup> First, in fact, Alexander forced-marched towards Parthia and Areia, except then to head not, as might have been expected, directly Eastward in the direction of Baktria, but on the

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<sup>63</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 174 ff. C1 (= Khalili A21), l. 31. The Aramaic text records in fact 120 mry (מרי) of Arachosian wine. As King 2021, 331 remarks, the amount of wine attested in *ADAB* C1 «is higher than any single travel ration recorded in the Persepolis texts». For an attempt at localizing the different places mentioned in the parchment see e. g. Rapin 2005, 148 and Naveh and Shaked 2012, 19-21.

<sup>64</sup> Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 139. Concerning Parnakka (Pharnakes) see, for example, Briant 2002, 332-353 as well as Henkelman 2008b, 150 ff.; 2017a, 52 fn. 8.

<sup>65</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 3.25.5, Diod. Sic. 17.78.1. Alexander's deep knowledge of (and confidence with) both Achaemenid imperial ideology and the language thereof is thoroughly discussed in Degen 2022, 332-402.

contrary taking a detour towards Drangiana and Arachosia, further to the South, therefore reaching the slopes of Hindūkūš, where he set up winter camps, at the end of 330 BCE.<sup>66</sup> In view of the Arachosian supplies recorded in *ADAB C1*, it might be argued that the digression was carefully planned and pursued at least two main goals: to guarantee his advance's safety by clearing the rear of any possible obstacle and, at the same time, to cut off supplies (of military nature as well as provisions) to the adversary - Bessos – now on the run towards the North. While difficult to prove, it cannot be ruled out that Satibarzanes' murder who - despite an initial act of submission - had later attempted to join Bessos' troops at the head of 2000 horsemen, played a priority role within this strategy.<sup>67</sup> But, as mentioned, Alexander seems to have been fully aware not only of the honors attached to the office of the Achaemenid ruler, but also of the burdens it entailed, primarily with respect to the *bandakā*, and it very much looks like he attempted to turn the latter to his own advantage.<sup>68</sup> From this point of view, the razing of Areia after the death of Satibarzanes is of central importance to understand the subsequent Baktrian developments (starting from the progressive erosion of Bessos' authority among his supporters, which up to that moment - think of the mutiny against the Great King Darius - had seemed remarkably solid): the plundering should be understood as a deliberate gesture, aimed at showing the inability of the aspiring Great King to guarantee internal security, and therefore political stability and the consequent economic dividends, in the territories of which he proclaimed himself supreme and legitimate ruler; and it should not go unnoticed that the failing of providing such guarantees was exactly one of the main reasons behind the overthrow of Darius himself.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Curt. 7.3.22, *Epit. Mett.*, 32. The fact that, as far as we know, Alexander did *not* appoint another satrap in the Helmand valley after Bessos' ally in the region crossed the Bolān pass on his way to India (Naiden 2019, 158) might, at least in theory, suggest that the Makedonian thought it possible to rule Arachosia through Baktria.

<sup>67</sup> Rapin 2017a, 78-95. See moreover Curt. 6.6.33-35.

<sup>68</sup> According to Arrian (*Anab.*, 3.12.5), in addition to Bessos' authority, which in any case seems to have been exercised primarily - which does not mean in any case exclusively - over his Baktrian horsemen and over some steppe people (Arr. *Anab.*, 3.24.3, Diod. Sic. 17.74.1), among the priority reasons that drove the Central Asian satraps to gather around their Baktrian colleague there was the paramount objective of maintaining their positions: this shows once again the importance, for the continuation of the local power networks, of a solid imperial structure, the defense of which at the time of Alexander's invasion became one among Bessos' most important goals in order to underpin his position on an imperial scale: Briant 2002, 745-746.

<sup>69</sup> Curt. 6.6.25-32. Satibarzanes' men were killed, and the region was sacked: the consequences of such measures on the local economy - leaving aside the effects on the population - should not be underestimated. This strategy represents one of the two aspects of the ideological campaign orchestrated by the Makedonians, since it showed in the most obvious way possible the inability of Bessos to provide for the needs of his subjects as the role he claimed for himself required (see the parallel case of Persepolis' staged destruction discussed in Degen 2022, 178-202). The other is related to Alexander's repeated attempt to deny Bessos legitimacy by taking charge, in his place, of tasks traditionally delegated to the Great King, such as the sumptuous funeral organized for the murdered emperor: Arr. *Anab.*, 3.22.1., Diod. Sic. 17.73 and the remarks in Briant 2015, 24-38. It is even possible (as has been argued, for example, by Kosmin 2013b, 675), that the (in)famous adoption of Achaemenid clothing was a planned reaction, on Alexander's part, to Bessos' act of (self-)coronation: cf. the account of Curt. 6.6.1, Diod. Sic. 17.77 and Plut. *Vit. Alex.*, 45.1. And although no evidence has come down to us explicitly attesting to the Makedonian's use of the title of Great King, there is no shortage of occasions when he is portrayed acting in such a manner (Plischke 2017, 166): perhaps the most striking example is his assumption of the

In this tight political-ideological «stichomythia», a role of great importance is likely to have been played by the approaching winter season. Faced with the steady advance of the Makedonian forces, Bessos changed his strategy. Instead of waiting for his adversary in Baktria, the new Great King opted for a Northern retreat in order to gather all the forces he had at his disposal by mobilizing his associates across the Oxus (including several contingents of Scythian cavalry - the Dahai), and therefore crossed the river heading to Sogdiana.<sup>70</sup> According at least to the testimony of the literary sources - not wishing to repeat the mistake he had made by leaving Arachosia and its (considerable) resources in the hands of his foe - Bessos coupled his retreat with a targeted policy of requisitions and destruction of the logistical infrastructure necessary to sustain the enemy army during the harsh winter months.<sup>71</sup> This version of the events, which is widely accepted by scholars, could perhaps find documentary support in the parchment of *ADAB* C1: within the above sketched interpretative framework, in fact, the «official inspection» discussed by Henkelman may have been accompanied by requisitions - the scale of which is unknown to us, but which, based on the figures attested in the list, must have been considerable - aimed at taking away from Alexander strategic resources not only, it should be noted, in order to refuel the army, but also from a logistical point of view (that pack animals are recorded is symptomatic in this sense).<sup>72</sup>

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task of «avenging» Darius' murder, a cunning move designed to deny Bessos the authority the latter claimed: cf. the testimony respectively of Diod. Sic., 17.73.4 and Arr. *Anab.*, 3.22-30.

<sup>70</sup> *Epit. Mett.*, 4, Strab. 11.13.6. About the fords that Bessos (and chasing him Alexander) may have crossed when arriving in Baktria see the numerous contributions by Édvard Rtveladze (2002, 43-57; 2009; 2019, 7-13). In Sogdiana, the satrap of Baktria must have planned to reunite forces with Spitamenes and Dataphernes, in all likelihood two of his most influential *bandakā*, whose power base has recently been identified by Claude Rapin (2018a, 282-283) in the Qashqadaryo and Zarafshān valleys, whose major centers at the time were Marakanda, Shahr -e Sabsz, and Qarši (at least two of them very likely recorded in the *ADAB*).

<sup>71</sup> This hypothesis was put forward a few years ago by Pierre Leriche (2007, 130). Note also Rapin 2017a, 96; 2018a, 277 and Briant 2018b, who has repeatedly pointed out that the supply of Makedonian troops is unthinkable in the absence of Achaemenid infrastructure (see now Degen 2022, 404-405). Regarding Bessos' tactics, the main sources are Arr. *Anab.*, 3.28.8 and Curt. 7.4.22. After crossing the Hindūkūš in the spring of 329 BCE, the Makedonians discovered, not without dismay, that Bessos had destroyed everything he could, from wells to - notably - vineyards (Naiden 2019, 159). Such a picture could account for both the Arachosian provisions (assuming, as mentioned, that one accepts the low date of *ADAB* C1) and the massive desertion by the Baktrian notables in Bessos' retinue: some of them may in fact have been among the owners of the ransacked estates.

<sup>72</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 174 ff. C1 (= Khalili A21), ll. 9-16 mentions, among other things, 33 «sheltered» sheep, 33 lambs, 100 «grazing» sheep and 100 ardab of hay. A possible alternative to the interpretation of the document advanced here might be - based on the parallel Persepolis testimony - to read *ADAB* C1 as a kind of tax imposed on the property of one (or more) local aristocrats. PF 2070, for example, mentions four individuals belonging to an important estate near a place called Miturna. Following Brosius 1996, 128, it is not out of place to point out here that according to the document the payment was collected in small livestock, taken by a certain Umiza on the mandate of Raybasa, an employee of Parnaka. A woman, named Madamiš, for example, had to pay a tax in the amount of 7 goats and 1 (female) sheep. In one case as in the other, the presence of particular categories of herds (the «sheltered» sheep) leaves the possibility open that they were indeed «royal» flocks (similar therefore to those grazed by Vahuvaxšu in Baktria, called in fact «royal camels»), on which therefore now Bessos, by virtue of his new function, could exert claims. After all, it has already been noted that a special branch of the Persian administration was devoted to the management of this sector of the provincial economy (Klinkott 2005, 151-152), and it is on the men in charge of this system that Bessos must have relied in the circumstances reported by *ADAB* C1. As von Reden 2007, 79 ff.; 2010, 93-94) points out, the collection of taxes in kind is not at all an indication of poor economic development, since grain and even more so livestock had a special monetary function which developed in close connection with the proper cash economy: it is therefore entirely plausible that, if it was a matter of

From a purely tactical point of view, this decision is nothing but understandable. However, from the standpoint of the internal relations within its own power network, it seems to have dealt a considerable blow to the authority of the self-proclaimed Artaxerxes V, moreover further exacerbating the contrasts within the already far from compact rebels' front: some of its members, at this point, are in fact likely to have been touched in the flesh of their economic interests.<sup>73</sup> In addition, the massive requisitions - especially of livestock - may have damaged in no small measure also the pastoral communities settled on the borders of the region's major oases, from Baktra to Hūlmi, up to the Surxondaryo and the lower Qashqadaryo, where Bessos had just gone.<sup>74</sup> Rachel Mairs rightly observes that the requisition of large numbers of livestock - especially young heads such as the 33 lambs - attested in *ADAB* C1 (which is just but one testimony of an arguably considerably bigger archive) is likely to have taken away immediate sources of protein (milk and meat) but also to have had more long-term effects, since it might have impacted the reproductive capacity of the flocks, while at the same time leading to a loss of the wool that would have been shorn in the spring (from an economic perspective no trivial matter). Nor should the extent of flour and hay requisitions be downplayed; before the next harvest, Mairs sensitively points out, there were in fact still at least six more months, and it is unclear to what extent stocks had already been depleted.<sup>75</sup> If we add to this scenario the possible destruction of infrastructures vital to the functioning of the regional economy (like the wells), it is evident that the new tactics adopted by Bessos irreconcilably clashed with the primary interests - being eminently local, of internal politics - of both those who were supposed to act as the pillars of the former satrap's power from a logistical and military point of view: namely the landed aristocracy and the representatives of the pastoral communities. These men, in turn, not infrequently represented (as Bagavanta's case demonstrates) a cornerstone of the social standing of the very same Central Asian aristocratic network. This complex social framework bound such individuals, as shown by the *BDNA*, to put the interests of their «selectorate» before anything else (including their loyalty to this or that representative of imperial power), on pain of complete delegitimization, with deadly consequences in terms of political influence. This was a price that,

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collection in the case of *ADAB* C1, the tax burden was borne by wealthy landowners, who usually are never too happy (as history shows) of such attention coming from the King and/or his representatives.

<sup>73</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 3.28.8-9. Having found himself in a similar situation a short time before being overthrown, Darius apparently could not convince himself (despite the heartfelt advice in this sense by such a staunch supporter of his such as Memnon) to resort to a scorched earth policy, perhaps foreseeing the reaction of the aristocrats mostly affected by this decision: Naiden 2019, 148.

<sup>74</sup> Rapin 2018a, 273. Cf. moreover Briant 1976, 198, Grenet 2004, 1053 and Mairs 2006, 64. The fact that among Bessos' followers there were «Δάαι οἱ ἀπὸ τοῦ Τανάϊδος» (Arr. *Anab.*, 3.28.10) deserves to be emphasized, as it shows Bessos' ability to mobilize allies even from territories located *beyond* (in this case beyond the Syrdaryo) what, in the opinion of most scholars, should have been his sphere of influence. As previously argued, on the contrary, the «nomads» were part and parcel of the anthropic landscape of the Achaemenid satrapies, and their subsistence strategies were closely linked to those of the imperial economy: see Stride 2007 and Lyonnet 2020, 326.

<sup>75</sup> Mairs 2020a, 568.

evidently, none of the members of Bessos' entourage was willing to pay.<sup>76</sup> Basic physics shows that to every action corresponds a *reaction*, and in the case of Bessos the most immediate one was that, as soon as Artaxerxes V crossed the Oxus and set fire to the rafts he had used in an attempt to hinder Alexander in his pursuit, the considerable number of 7000 Baktrian horsemen turned their backs on him. Not only that, but they literally passed, as it were, bags and baggage (and weapons) to the enemy in what can hardly be interpreted otherwise than as a – rather desperate, given the fate met by Satibarzanes - attempt to save their possessions (and with them their socio-political pre-eminence in the areas in which they were active).<sup>77</sup> The account of the literary sources concerning this extremely important juncture needs to be examined with caution. According to Arrian, as soon as Bessos reached Sogdiana, the vast majority of his followers went into hiding, each seeking refuge in its own dominions, the defense of which seems to have become the priority goal of each of these individuals.<sup>78</sup> The testimony of Curtius Rufus (in suos quique vicus dilapsi) does not differ from that of the *Anabasis*.<sup>79</sup> Now: if, on the one hand, adequate stock is taken of the *ADAB* and, on the other hand, the pictures gained from the most recent archaeological excavations concerning the organization of Persepolis' or Pasardagai's rural space is brought to bear in this context, it is legitimate to recognize in these accounts (and especially in the vici mentioned by Curtius Rufus) a rather accurate description of the landed estates of the mutinous Baktrian cavalry (undoubtedly made of wealthy and powerful individuals, at least within the local context), whose members must have been recruited by Bessos precisely on a territorial basis: such an evolution of the events, therefore, deprived him at once of a considerable part of his offensive potential and, at the same time, of crucial logistic support as well as of resources.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> It has already been noted that one of the unavoidable tasks of the Achaemenid ruler (not unlike the regional aristocracy, as the *BDNA* parchments strikingly show) was to protect the territory of the Empire *and* the population, starting with the representatives of the court society, on whose solidarity in fact the power of the Great King was based in no small part: Klinkott 2005, 225-226, Khatchadourian 2016, 11-22. See also Tuplin 1987a, 143 ff. This is, among other things, the precise reason for Arsites' (Arr. *Anab.*, 1.12.9) refusal to adopt such a strategy in an attempt to halt Alexander's advance. Mazaios, who instead had pronounced himself in favor, had to face the not trivial accusation of having behaved like an invader and a bandit: Curt 4.9.14 and Diod. Sic. 17.55.1.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. the analogous situation described by Arrian (*Anab.*, 1.5.4). The alternative is that at least part of these individuals had already been affected by the measures taken, and therefore desertion ought to be understood as an extreme gesture of protest against a policy that was perceived as no longer responding to their respective interests.

<sup>78</sup> To date, it is still unclear what Bessos' powerbase in Sogdiana was. Among the hypotheses that have been advanced are Kiš (Qarši/Padayaktêpe) and Nautaka/ Shahr -e Sabsz, both in the upper Qashqadaryo and important nodes within the road network that led to Marakanda: Rapin 2018a, 262.

<sup>79</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 3.28.9-10 and Curt. 7.4.20-22.

<sup>80</sup> Briant 1984, 85-86, Engels 2017a, 151 and Gondet 2018. The latter, in the context of a discussion on the permanence of the administrative apparatus capable of guaranteeing rural taxation in the transitional period between the end of Achaemenid hegemony and the establishment of Seleukid power, observed that «the continued existence of a system of landed property hinged on the possession of land by the Great King also suggests the permanence of private possessions by the local aristocracy [think of Arrian's *ἰππεῖς*]. On balance, the two were inseparable, since such estates were crucial in financing the - extremely expensive - equipment of the heavy cavalry, which seems to have been enlisted based on village units, a fact that is also well attested in the case of the Achaemenid army not only in the West, but also in the Eastern half of the Empire». In light of such remarks, the consistent downplaying of the cavalry's importance (including the Baktrian one) by Manning 2021, 215-222 seems to me unwarranted. Emphasizing the role of the local landed

However, this is not yet enough. The fact that an individual like Oxyartes (according to Claude Rapin head of the Baktrian Hauptsatrapie, undoubtedly one of the most prestigious notables in the region) appears in the sources among the deserters already at this height is of great importance in order to understand the evolution of the political geometries in Central Asia and the power dynamics in the area as they evolved under the pressure of Alexander's march.<sup>81</sup> Oxyartes' move shows in fact the extent to which the strategies adopted by Bessos were perceived by his acolytes (and supposed allies) as detrimental to their respective interests (and of those of the networks which they were leading, and on which they also depended to a certain extent). When the self-appointed Great King was perceived as no longer a reliable guarantor of these interests, he was abandoned, thus losing the local basis of his authority, which in this phase was at one with that which he was able to exercise as Achaemenid ruler.<sup>82</sup> It will not have escaped the attentive reader's notice that, from a structural point of view, this is the same logic that can be seen at work against the grain of the correspondence between Ahvamazdā and Bagavanta, whose relations it is plausible were analogous to those between Oxyartes and Bessos.<sup>83</sup> The crucial difference, however, is given by the context: if in fact, in the first case, the general internal stability and the lack of alternatives to the Achaemenid authority as guardian of the imperial system made possible, though undoubtedly not without effort, the accommodation of tensions, the state of emergency brought about by the Makedonian advance (to which must be added the fact that, for the first time, individuals such as Oxyartes could choose the highest bidder to grace with their, much priced, services) acted as the catalyst for a rapid landslide in the network of local alliances that proved deadly for Bessos' ambitions.<sup>84</sup> The reasons for the mass defection recorded in our sources should therefore be interpreted as an attempt on the part of Oxyartes and his peers (as well as of his bandakā, under pressure from whom, similarly to the case of Bagavanta, it is plausible that he was pushed to action) to protect as much as possible their own position within the richest and

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aristocracy and of the latter's relations with the world of the steppes, in fact, does not in any way mean supporting any theory of «Iranian feudalism» (one of the *idola specus* – or perhaps *fori* – most, and rightly so, criticized by Manning). On the contrary, it only gives adequate prominence to what Düring and Stek 2018a, 10 call «the practical situations on the ground» which, as discussed in previous chapters, must have influenced in no small way the functioning of the Achaemenid imperial paradigm in the satrapies as well as in the heartland.

<sup>81</sup> On the Baktrian «main satrapy» cf. Jacobs 1994, 206 ff.

<sup>82</sup> The information reported by Arrian (*Anab.*, 4.21.1), according to which on the «rock of Chorienes» had taken refuge «a large number of hyparchs» (καὶ ἐς αὐτὴν [*scil.* αὐτὴ Χοριήνου ἢ πέτρα] αὐτὸς τε ὁ Χοριήνης ξυμπεφεύγει καὶ ἄλλοι τῶν ὑπάρχων οὐκ ὀλίγοι) suggests 1. that the overall number of them was anything but small and 2. - providing by the way support to the assumptions made about the *ADAB* parchment - that there was an internal hierarchy, the power relations thereof Bessos had to take into account both as an internal member of the group and as Great King, in an overlap of positions that may have generated a fracture which caused fatal developments for the aspiring (new) emperor: Briant 2002, 748-749.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Rapin 2018a, 276 for the assumption that Oxyartes was active as Bessos' lieutenant in one of Baktria's oases south of the Oxus river (and see most recently Martinez-Sève 2020c, 221-222).

<sup>84</sup> Briant 2017a, 70: as already the politics of Cyrus the Younger had shown, if it is true that there was no alternative to the Achaemenid monarchical ideology for many (if not all) local powerholders, in Central Asia Alexander for the first time since 522 BCE provided the possibility to reshuffle political relations within the system built by the Achaemenids during their 1. political and 2. ideological hegemony: compare Petrie 2020 on Achaemenid India.

most important region of entire Baktria (the Balḥ oasis and neighboring territories), according to a dynamic that had already occurred in other satrapies, from Egypt (Mazakes and Amminapes) to Asia Minor (Mithrenes).<sup>85</sup> It should therefore be stressed once more that, in one case as in the other, we are not dealing with an act of rebellion against the Empire as such (the (in)famous, many times supposed and never supported by adequate evidence claims of «Baktrian autonomist drives»), but with a carefully calculated move –Scott’s «positionality» -, aimed at preserving, and if possible expanding, these strongmen’s influence in the new order imposed by the conquerors, who - and this must have been very clear to individuals such as Oxyartes - could not avoid coming to terms with those who had been smart and farsighted enough to overcome the (always critical) juncture of a throne succession, to say nothing of a dynastic change. The agreements reached by Alexander in Hyrkania (and, conversely, the fate of Satibarzanes) made for precedents as unequivocal as they were encouraging. At this chronological level, in other words, in the eyes of the Baktrian notables - of which Oxyartes is only the best-known example - the stipulation of an alliance with Alexander had, quite simply, much more to offer than loyalty to Bessos.<sup>86</sup> Not only that, but at the same time it also gave them the opportunity to get rid of an undoubtedly very inconvenient, because extremely powerful, internal rival. The defection of the Baktrians allowed Alexander to conquer the crucial satrapal seat without a blow: this was a remarkable success since, having he already consolidated his hold on Arachosia, the control of the Balḥ-āb oasis made the Makedonians de facto masters of the economic and logistic resources of the two neuralgic centers for the control of entire Central Asia.<sup>87</sup> However, perhaps with the intention of further exploiting to his own advantage the divisions within the enemies’ ranks - of which he must have been perfectly aware at least since the time of his entry into Hyrkania - Alexander decided to replace Oxyartes (and, one must infer, those who had followed him in the mutiny) with the Persian Artabazos, one of the staunchest supporters of the now deceased Great King and a proud opponent of Bessos at the time of the conspiracy of 330.<sup>88</sup> Now: the sources

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<sup>85</sup> Cf. in this regard Arr. *Anab.*, 3.22.1, Curt. 4.1.27-33 and Diod. Sic. 17.48.2-5, together with the commentary in Briant 2002, 842-845. On Amminapes see most recently also the biographical record in Heckel 2006, 22, as well as pp. 156 (Mazakes) and 168 (Mithrenes).

<sup>86</sup> Degen 2022, 317-318.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Holt 2015. It is not known whether and, if so, how much of the treasure that was undoubtedly stored at Baktra left the oasis following Bessos as he advanced into Sogdiana. However, not differently from the case of the major imperial centers, from Babylon to Susa and Persepolis, also in the case of Baktria it is to be believed that a considerable part of the satrapal economic resources (which even only from Hdt. 3.92 is to be assumed were considerable) fell into the hands of the Makedonians at the time of Alexander’s entry into the region: this is a fact of no small importance, since it is possible (cf. Vacante 2012) that at least part of it was used by Alexander in compliance with the redistributive dynamics characteristic of the political economy of the Great King (into whose footsteps he now consistently moved: Degen 2022, 302-322) that is, in order to secure the cooperation of some of the local notables in the most difficult moments of the campaign.

<sup>88</sup> About this individual cf. Arr. *Anab.*, 3.29.1, Curt. 5.9.1. Worth mentioning are the remarks by Heckel 2018, 104-108 and Müller 2020, 90, who emphasize the family ties that bound this man to Darius III and the absence of such ties in the case of his relations with Bessos: hence an opposition of factions that would have influenced in no small way the development of events in Central Asia from 330 BCE.



are completely silent on the matter, but the importance of the episode should not be underestimated. In fact, and especially against the backdrop of the sociology internal to the local aristocracy that surfaces from the cross-reading of the *ADAB* and the *BDNA*, it is reasonable to argue that such a move had two fundamental consequences (a hypothesis, by the way, that considerably gains in plausibility in light of the subsequent events, at they are reported in the literary sources). First: Alexander's decision de facto sealed Bessos' destiny, since it quickly dawned on his (more or less coerced) Sogdian supporters that the only chance left to them to maintain their positions within the power structure of the satrapy (while sparing themselves fiscal levies - or worse - by either of the two contenders) consisted in surrendering the former satrap, and it is perhaps not mere speculation to assume that some of them (starting with Spitamenes, by far the most powerful, and therefore in principle also the most exposed) had cherished the possibility of expanding their influence to the detriment of their Baktrian counterparts, who had made the mistake of coming empty-handed before the new authority with whom they were now forced to negotiate (i. e. Alexander). Second: at the same time, Artabazos' presence in the region (not to mention his appointment as Makedonian plenipotentiary) is likely to have represented a source of considerable discontent within the circle of the deserters, since they must have perceived their own political influence as once again under threat, all the more so 2. 1. in view of the fact that the Persian was an additional internal rival, and 2.2. against the background of the rift that occurred in 330, it is by no means excluded that those who had sided with Bessos had nothing good to expect from the man who only the year before had become a political opponent. Even though a considerable number of his family members had been taken prisoner in Damascus (Curt. 3.13.13-14), Artabazos had in fact remained indefatigably loyal to Darius III, and it is therefore more than fair to assume that he harbored no sympathy for the assassins (and their accomplices and allies) of the King.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, if one considers the importance within the ethic of cooperation promoted by the Achaemenid rulers (and very evident in the inscriptions of Darius I) of a concept such as loyalty, it appears all the more understandable that, in the eyes of the (former, and soon to be again) conspirators, the position conferred on Artabazos by Alexander was ill news, and the man an ill guest. A text such as Naqš -i Rostam's, after all, left little room for misunderstanding: «The man who collaborated, I have rewarded in accordance with his loyalty; he

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<sup>89</sup> That the appointment of Artabazos was greeted with extreme disappointment by the Baktrian notables has been argued, among others, by Vacante 2012, 88 and Heckel 2018. See moreover the thorough assessment of the question in Iliakis 2021. Against the backdrop of the gradual disintegration of the sociopolitical dependency structures set up by the Achaemenids, it is evident that ranks and rewards became a bone of contention between factions rather than a tool capable of connecting the different power groups with the imperial authority (which, in a sense, simultaneously no longer existed and were not yet (again) reborn): see Duindam 2016, 241. On the loyalty of Artabazos and his family circle see Briant 2002, 845 and Müller 2020.

who plotted, I have punished in accordance with the extent of the damage done».<sup>90</sup> The following year, Alexander made the same mistake a second time (or was he perhaps consciously following his own strategy of Empire building?).<sup>91</sup> As soon as he arrived in Sogdiana, in fact, he wasted no time in removing from their positions men whom, it seems, he trusted little or nothing at all. At this point, before a second Artabazos could install himself at Marakanda, foreseeing the risk of being cut off from the imminent restructuring of regional power, Spitamenes and his men revolted, plunging (especially, but probably not only) Sogdiana into two years of bitter warfare, which would have substantially altered the geography of power of the entire Central Asia North of Hindūkūš in the decades to come. To support the scenario outlined so far, a somewhat detailed account of these events is in order at this point.

## 2.2. 329 BCE: from Baktra to the Syrdaryo and *Back Again*

As already mentioned in the previous pages, in the early spring of 329 BCE (possibly in March), Alexander crossed the Hindūkūš to the important center of Surḥ Kotal, in what is now Baḡlan province.<sup>92</sup> A few months earlier, during the march through Sogdiana and Arachosia, the local satrap, an individual named Barsaentes and one of the most powerful allies of Bessos in all of Central Asia (not least because of the importance of the region under his control), had gone into hiding in the valleys of Gāndhārā, where both of them could count on logistical and military support.<sup>93</sup> The flight of Barsaentes, let it be said here in passing, provides another indication that the tactics adopted by Bessos (together with his inability to stop the invaders' advance) must have caused important fractures within the entire framework of Achaemenid power in Central Asia, both at its top echelons (think of the surrender, and subsequent rebellion, of Satibarzanes) and, of special interests here, at the level of the supporters (and of the internal opponents) of each of the individual satraps, as

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<sup>90</sup> DNb § 4: «martiya, haya hantaxšataj, anudim hankṛtahyā avaθā paribarāmi; haya vināθayati, anudim vinastahyā avaθā prsāmi». Cfr. *API*, 105-107.

<sup>91</sup> Degen 2022, 249 forcefully arguing in favor of clearly distinguishable policies developed by Alexander during his reign.

<sup>92</sup> Curt. 7.3.22, *Epit. Mett.*, 32. Cf. Rapin 2017a, 88 and Martinez-Sève 2020c, 221-222. For a recent account of Alexander's wars in Northeastern Central Asia see now Heckel 2020, 171-200.

<sup>93</sup> See Arr. *Anab.*, 3.25.8 and Curt. 8.13.3-4. In the case of Bessos, an example of the clientele he may have enjoyed in Gāndhārā consists of such a figure as Sisicottos (Śaśigupta), who seems to have been a lieutenant of the satrap of Baktria in the region of the Paropamisadae. Following the conquest of his own major stronghold (the Indian ᾿Αορνος mentioned in Arr. *Anab.*, 4.30.4 and Curt. 8.11.25) by the Makedonians, he too sided with Alexander. This is yet another example of a local aristocrat who, when cornered, had to choose a side to protect his interests in the region over which he wielded power. Cf. most recently Petrie 2020 on Achaemenid Southeast Asia's political landscape.

suggested by the desertion of a part, however substantial, of Bessos' retinue at the time of his ford of the Oxus.<sup>94</sup>



**Map 8.2. Into the Land of Bones. Alexander's Quest for the Empire in Bactria and Sogdiana. © Peter Palm**

The behavior of Barsaentes (and of Oxyartes in Bactria) was the prelude for Bessos' downfall, for he was overthrown and put in chains by the same notables who, for reasons which remain obscure, had chosen to accompany him to Sogdiana in spite of the defection of the 7000 horsemen from Bactria (instead already dilapsi in their own villages, as reported by Curtius).<sup>95</sup> Despite the often rather confusing narrative of the literary sources, these events follow a pattern closely reminiscent of what happened a few months ago when Bessos himself conspired against Darius. At the same time, however, the Sogdian affaire, if carefully investigated, provides useful material for the purpose of

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Cameron - Magee 2007 for an analysis of the consequences on his position of the inability of Bessos to stop Alexander's advance in Indian territory (including therefore Eastern Arachosia). The fact that the Makedonians had managed almost effortlessly to take possession even of the most important oases of Eastern Bactria (from Baktra itself to Qundūz, on which see – from an archaeological vantage point - Martinez-Sève 2020c, 229-235), possibly further accelerated the decision by the Sogdians to surrender the now completely delegitimized ruler: see in this regard *Epit. Mett.*, 4, Widmer 2015, 34, Rapin 2018a, 282.

<sup>95</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 3.29.6-30, *Epit. Mett.*, 5-6.

reconstructing with even greater precision than in the Baktrian case, the internal dynamics of the local power structures, which the policy pursued by Bessos must have threatened to the point of pushing the respective territorial representatives into acting against him. It is interesting to note that, among these men, it is possible to argue that there were also individuals that we could only partially frame within the hierarchy of the satrapal offices, but who nevertheless held important positions in these regions. From a passage of Curtius' *Historiae*, in fact, we learn that, while planning for the march to Marakanda, Bessos had in mind to collect numerous contingents of Sakā cavalry (which since at least Xerxes' time made for one of the élite divisions of the Central Asian units enlisted into the ranks of the Achaemenid army).<sup>96</sup> Curtius Rufus' testimony should be read against the background of the narrative provided by Arrian who, in describing the troops deployed under Bessos command at Gaugamela (including the Sakā, since the latter was in charge of the conscription of all the Achaemenid forces mobilized in the Central Asian territories North of Hindūkūš), notes that they - and their respective commanders - served under the King's insignia by virtue of ad hoc agreements, probably institutionalized by virtue of ceremonies regularly repeated in the course of time based on a principle of evergetism and munificent donations (think of the drinking vessels and the torques found at Semireč'e), the use of which must not have been (contrary to what Arrian argues) the prerogative of the Great King alone, but instead is likely to have equally involved all the other strongmen active in the satrapies, since, as mentioned, the Sakā communities were essential players in the local sociopolitical scene: which means that they too had their own interests to protect.<sup>97</sup>

The (precious little) information available, however, focuses on three individuals, evidently three very close collaborators of Bessos in Sogdiana and not by chance at the head of the revolt that sealed his fate, namely Spitamenes, Dataphernes and Catanes. A careful scrutiny of the evidence concerning their actions and the context in which they were enmeshed allows, I would argue, to investigate in more detail the logic behind their behavior.<sup>98</sup> To begin with, there seems to be no question that, in all three cases, these individuals were prominent members of the local landed aristocracy in Sogdiana. This means (once again) that the primary goal of the mutiny must be found in the attempt of such notables to preserve their respective properties (on which their socio-political power rested) from the

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<sup>96</sup> Curt. 6.6.3. Nikonorov 1997 I, 19. Cf. Hdt. 7.64-66.

<sup>97</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 3.8.3. On the subject of the «unequal exchange» that governed sociopolitical relations with pastoral communities across the Empire's territories see Briant 1983, 90; 2002, 316-323. Examples of similar policies adopted by representatives of the Achaemenid Empire towards exponents of (in Henkelman's definition: cf. Henkelman 2010, 766 ff. and Henkelman and Folmer 2016, 199) other «semi-external» communities abound in the classical sources (which tend, moreover, to grossly misunderstand the principle underlying these relations): cf. Arr. *Anab.*, 3.17 (the «Uxians of the mountains») Xen. *Anab.*, 3.5.16 (on the Kardoukians) and Plut. *Vit. Artax.*, 24.4 (the Kadusians in Media Atropatene). Degen 2022, 379-381 for an assessment of Alexander's confrontation with the mountain people in Irān against the background of Achaemenid's imperial knowledge (compare Balatti 2017, 167-194). It is also worth consulting in this regard Klinkott 2005, 348 and Simpson and Pankova 2021, 509-519 on Achaemenid production of vessels and ornaments in relation to a Sāka audience.

<sup>98</sup> Heckel 2006, 72-73. On Catanes cf. Curt. 7.5.21, while with regards to Dataphernes note Arr. *Anab.*, 3.29.6.

fate undergone by, for example, the estates owned by Satibarzanes in Areia. Not being able to get rid of Alexander, it was much more convenient, in other words, to try to come to terms with him, starting by satisfying his demands (i. e., in this case, catering him Bessos' head).<sup>99</sup> To these preliminary remarks we can add, in the light of the location of their respective strongholds provided by the sources, that the fact that the territories under the purview of these Achaemenid «imperial collaborators» were all located between the valleys of the Qashquadaryo and the Zarafšān on the one hand, and the territory of Buxārā on the other, provides a concrete clue supporting the hypothesis that the three owed at least in part their position within the satrapal nomenclature to the importance of the networks of relations with the world of the steppes adjacent to each of these strategically crucial areas. In other words, the Sakā that Bessos was trying to mobilize cannot be excluded to have belonged (at the same time) to the circle of bandakā of each of the Sogdian officers who captained the revolt against him.<sup>100</sup> Given these premises, it becomes easier to understand why the dual function held by Bessos at this juncture, namely (according to Mairs' arguments), both that of Great King and of Baktrian big man, could be perceived by individuals such as Spitamenes and his allies as a real danger to the prerogatives of each of these representatives of the Sogdian élite. In fact, if on the one hand - as Great King of Persia - at the end of the day only Bessos could embody the supreme authority (but under normal circumstances he would have been sufficiently distant, at Susa or Persepolis, not to disturb the internal political balance of the local communities) to which, de jure, the Sakā contingents were bound in alliance (thus becoming his own bandakā), on the other hand, as an influential Baktrian aristocrat (and until the year before the local satrap), it is reasonable to assume that he could have been at the same time very much interested in exploiting his presence in Sogdiana during a particularly critical moment in order to consolidate his position in the area to the detriment of allies (and at least in theory subordinates, such as Spitamenes or Dataphernes), who were - and were known to be - as much indispensable as they were potentially dangerous. A similar logic, as argued in the previous chapter, seems to have been at the origin of the presence - remarkably in the same territories which happened to be the focus of Bessos' Transoxian expedition - of land properties by Aḥvamazdā, which are attested several times by the *ADAB* letters.

Bessos' betrayal, therefore, should be interpreted (in the light of the balance of power within the local «aristocratic network») no more and no less than as the result of a utilitarian calculation or as a strategic positionality: in an increasingly uncertain political scenario, in which the Empire's highest

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<sup>99</sup> Rapin 2018a, 275-277.

<sup>100</sup> In view of the distribution of the population in each of these territories this is almost certainly the case for Dataphernes, most likely the hyparch in charge of Xenippa (Erkurgan) or, alternatively, of Nautaka (Shahr -e Sabsz). As for Spitamenes, it is even possible that the prestige he undoubtedly enjoyed within the Sakā communities even *beyond* the Sogdian territory (more on this below) was based at least in part on family ties: Holt 1994, 53. As demonstrated among others by Antunes 2020, power networks' overlaps and multiple allegiances are a common feature of empires.

authority was no longer able to guarantee internal security, the priority goal of Spitamenes and the circle gathered around him became that of protecting their possessions as much as possible from the foreseeable devastation caused by the advance of a hostile army. However, the latter was likely perceived at the same time as a real (and unforeseen) possibility - which in the area had not been given at least since the times of Vahêyazdāta and Frāda - to get rid of a very uncomfortable internal rival.<sup>101</sup> Put another way, it seems reasonable to argue that Alexander's presence acted as a catalyst for an unprecedented (at least in the living memory of the actors involved) reshuffling of the hierarchies within the Central Asian cadres. The fact that it occurred at this historical juncture and not before can be explained once the inhibiting function exerted on these potentially disruptive processes by the devices set up by the Achaemenid government apparatus, namely the inter-aristocratic competition regulated through the dynamics of court life on the one hand and, on the other, the infrastructures of logistical and economic control that can be deduced from sources such as the Persepolis archives, the *ARTP* and, of course, the *ADAB* parchments (and tallies) is taken into proper account. Alexander's alternative, however, was a game changer, and the consequences of this new framework were quickly felt.<sup>102</sup> The fact that, according to a source as valuable as usually neglected as the *Metz Epitome*, once arrived at Marakanda Alexander found Spitamenes waiting for him is a piece of evidence of extreme importance in support both of the reconstruction proposed in the previous pages and of the hypothesis, already put forward in chapter 6, that - in the eyes of powerbrokers such as Oxyartes and Spitamenes himself - the crucial element was an institution (such as the Empire, no matter if it was called Achaemenid or not), which acknowledged them as local representatives of its own authority, thus making available to them - and to their «selectorate» - resources and infrastructures, adequate to 1. maintain, and over time 2. expand, the privileges they (and their bandakā) enjoyed.<sup>103</sup> After having disposed of Bessos, who had now become more of a liability than an asset, the evidence available suggests that, by virtue of the prominent role he had played in the conspiracy, Spitamenes in particular expected the new - would be - King to recognize him a position at least similar to Artabazos' (which must in fact have been Oxyartes' main reason for deserting Bessos): namely to be appointed satrap of Sogdiana, thus at least de jure no longer subject

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<sup>101</sup> The scenario suggested here contrasts with the opinion of those scholars (e. g. Holt 1988a, 52) maintain that, in the face of Alexander's advance into Central Asia in the first months of 329 BCE, «the situation was very tense, but not entirely changed». Naiden 2019, 164-165 has pointed out that, apparently, Alexander and his men did not understand that Bessos' disposal was only the first step in the long process of consolidation of the new power in Baktria and Sogdiana. In the absence of precise assurances regarding their respective positions within the developing new hierarchies, the local notables would have continued the struggle with renewed fury rather than surrendering: the appointment of Artabazos in Baktria and, in Sogdiana, the liquidation of figures such as Spitamenes is unlikely to have shaped good faith, and with it the proper environment for negotiation: Heckel 2018 and Tilly 2005 on trust as a pinnacle of (imperial) rule.

<sup>102</sup> Degen 2022, 302-332 on Alexander as an imperial alternative to Darius first and, after him, Bessos.

<sup>103</sup> *Epit. Mett.*, 7. It can be assumed that the Makedonians entered Sogdiana following Bessos' own path, fording the Oxus at Shortêpe (*Epit. Mett.*, 4): Goršenina and Rapin 2020, 200.

to the political authority of Baktra.<sup>104</sup> At this point it becomes particularly complex to understand the motivations of Alexander's behavior, and this even more because of the tactics he adopted in Hyrkania. If also in this case he had limited himself to confirm his interlocutors in their respective functions, in this way implicitly taking Spitamenes' offer, he could have continued undisturbed to India, with the not negligible advantage of being able to count not on one, but even on *two* loyal satraps (Artabazos in Baktria, Spitamenes in Sogdiana), who at this point would have had every interest in keeping at bay individuals like Oxyartes who, having played their cards wrong, would have been cut off from the reorganization of Central Asia in the aftermath of Bessos' deposition and trial. Wanting to avoid undue speculation about the temperament of the Makedonian (an ever-popular topic, in and out of academy) or anything of the kind, one might simply observe that hindsight is a privilege enjoyed only by historians.<sup>105</sup> The most reasonable explanations for the decisions that followed the entry into Marakanda - according to the available accounts and to the context emerging therefrom - are essentially two: on the one hand, it is perfectly feasible to assume that, quite simply, Alexander did not fully understand the *arcana imperii* that governed the socio-political and administrative landscape of Baktria and Sogdiana; on the other hand, however, it is not possible to exclude the opposite hypothesis, i. e. that he consciously pursued the objective of redefining *ex novo* that very same landscape precisely for the reason that he perfectly understood (and consequently feared) how local power networks worked. After all, both the affair involving Satibarzanes in Areia and (perhaps above all) the Darius' and Bessos' Βίοι Παράλληλοι – and especially the end thereof – might have provided the Makedonian with enough arguments in order to mistrust individuals such as Spitamenes (and the same goes in Baktria for Oxyartes).

Be that as it may, what can be ascertained is that, the moment he set foot in the major center of Achaemenid power in Sogdiana, Alexander took a series of measures that in a very short time alienated him the favor (which apparently initially was not lacking) of the entire Achaemenid ruling class - or what was left of it - in Central Asia: not only, it is important to point out, to the North of the Hiṣār, where, however, the presence of the army is likely to have had the greatest impact – not least from the point of view of the pressure its presence put on the local economy (and therefore, once again, on the power groups whose interests the top of the local élite could not afford to disregard) -

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<sup>104</sup> The accounts of Arr. *Anab.*, 3.30.6 and Curt. 7.6.10 leave little to no doubt that Marakanda was the neuralgic center of Achaemenid power in Sogdiana (according to the *Anabasis* it was indeed «the royal residence of the Sogdian land»), and it is reasonable to assume that, similarly to the case of Bagavanta in Ḥulmi, as plenipotentiary of Bessos beyond the Oxus, Spitamenes resided there or nearby (cf. Rapin 2018a, 282-283). The latter's behavior, i. e. the fact that he waited for Alexander in the city, can only be explained in the light of Spitamenes' expectation of a reward of some kind, which would have further strengthened his power in the region by elevating his social standing and power against his own very allies/subordinates/rival and – eventually - traitors.

<sup>105</sup> Degen 2022, 11-26 on (Ir)rationalist assessments of Alexander's policy and personality.

in fact transforming an apparently pacified region into a battle ground for the next two years.<sup>106</sup> As mentioned above, the first armed revolt in Sogdiana broke out for the same reasons that had led to the fall of Bessos: by refusing to come to terms with the likes of Spitamenes, Alexander was in fact perceived by his audience as a (new) threat to the political - which inevitably meant economic - interests that he, in accordance with his new role, was actually called upon to protect. Against this background, it is therefore little surprise that the Makedonians finally succeeded in getting to grips with part of the Central Asian opposition by appealing to another part of that same opposition. Actively involved in the ranks of the latter were individuals such as Oxyartes, who proved particularly adept at exploiting the context of total political uncertainty and wartime upheaval to their advantage in order to regain lost ground to the detriment both of their rivals and, to a certain extent, even of the new lords of Central Asia themselves (who, it is worth pointing out again, had at first thought of disposing of them but eventually proved not powerful enough to do so). Strabo's statement quoted above is thus further substantiated: reconstructing Alexander's movements in Baktria and Sogdiana in these years, in short, allows to access the topography and sociology of Central Asian power at this chronological height with a level of depth comparable only to that provided by the *ADAB*, which in turn makes it possible to better understand the strategies adopted by each of the - numerous - actors involved in this very intricate (and no less dangerous) scenario.

Let us therefore start again with Alexander's march through Sogdiana: contrary to a still widely shared belief, it is highly unlikely that his army's crossing of the region went unnoticed, let alone that it was well received. Spitamenes' wait at Marakanda must be seen as a last attempt to reach an agreement, not as an unconditioned surrender. Put differently, his (networks') revolt was far from being a sudden (and treacherous) event, as historiographic sources suggest. It is precisely the latter, moreover, that (almost unwillingly) provide sporadic, but revealing, clues to the reasons behind the crisis of 329. According to the converging testimony of Arrian and Curtius Rufus, in fact, as soon as Alexander and his troops reached the important center of Xenippa (in all probability Achaemenid Nīḥšapâia, today's Qarši in the Qashqadaryo valley), the Makedonian general staff gave orders to

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<sup>106</sup> Plut. *De Alex. fort.*, 2.10 (= *Mor.*, 341F) describes the military confrontation between Alexander and the Central Asian contingents in the following terms: «Who but Alexander would not have trembled and given up organizing and arming his troops, laying siege to cities, crushing rebellious opponents several times over, chastising desertions and suppressing insurrections? Who but he would have been able to hunt down untrustworthy ringleaders in Baktria, Marakanda and Sogdiana [a possible reference to the Sakā territories in Ustrūšana?], as if he were cutting off the heads of the hydra, which always grow back twice as numerous?»: cf. Holt 2005, 66-84, dancing to the very same tune. The scenario that both the ancient writer and the modern historian describe in their turgid pages can be more soberly interpreted in terms of a power vacuum caused by the disappearance of the symbiotic system of alliances and co-optation built over time by the Achaemenid Empire and which, as Stride (2005 I; 2007, Stride *et al.* 2009b) has argued on several occasions, was essential in order to ensure political stability in the region while guaranteeing the greatest dividends to the largest number of social actors involved. After the collapse of this system without the Makedonians (yet) being able to (re)build a new one (this would have been achieved – and not for free – by the Seleukids), each side fought for its own self-interest, including, of course, the choice of the side that seemed to offer the best prospects for oneself and the social group to which one had to answer.



requisition fresh mounts for the troops across the territory.<sup>107</sup> Thanks to the *ADAB*, we know that, within the regions directly under Achaemenid control, this area of Central Asia represented one of the most important reserves of horses, and the existence of the tallies suggests that the acquisition of both this and other similar precious resource (for example camels) was regulated by agreements resulting from carefully regulated negotiation with the local pastoral communities, whose cooperation was fundamental both for the maintenance of the satrapy's livestock wealth and for military conscription (as suggested not least by the comparative evidence provided by the *BDNA*).<sup>108</sup> The measures adopted by the newcomers must therefore have met with resistance both from the local population and from the network of individuals who, in Persian times, had acted as intermediaries with the representatives of Achaemenid power in the major satrapal centers, since the Makedonian requisitions threatened, for the first time in a concrete manner, to deprive both of their role and thus of their bargaining power *raison d'être* within an imperial framework. Based both on the *ADAB* and the *BDNA* it can be suggested that among the fiercest opponents of cattle requisitions ought to have been individuals like Vahuvaxšu from *ADAB* A1, whose ability to influence the political actions of their referents within the imperial institutions should not be underestimated. Unfortunately, enough information is lacking to establish with certainty whether the opposition of the pastoral communities in the area was spontaneous or whether (and if so, to what extent) it was somehow coordinated by Marakanda at the behest of Spitamenes' circle, in an attempt to push Alexander to reach an agreement quickly in order to avoid the imposition of an external authority (similar to what happened in Baktria with the Artabazos' appointment).<sup>109</sup> However, the presence in the territory of the Qashqadaryo of at least two important regional political-administrative centers (Qarši and Sahr -e Sabsz) under the control of members of the local aristocracy – arguably the roughly Sogdian equivalent of Bagavanta – leaves open the hypothesis that one of these figures might have been behind the first upheavals that surface in the sources' narrative.<sup>110</sup> On the other hand, in the light of what has been argued concerning the mutual entanglements involving the various social actors settled in Achaemenid Central Asia, even in the case of a spontaneous revolt it would have been very difficult for the major cadres to

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<sup>107</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 3.30.6, Curt. 7.6.10. Although, at first, he seems to have encountered little or no resistance, for reasons that are not entirely transparent to us, Alexander took to treating his interlocutors with a hitherto unknown harshness: to be fair, the first symptoms of this reversal were recorded, as mentioned, already in Areia: cf. Curt. 6.4.4-7 and Naiden 2019, 150.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. Naveh – Shaked 2012, 97 and, more recently, Wu 2017, 270.

<sup>109</sup> In any case it seems beyond doubt that the thesis, however suggestive, of a sort of Indian summer which allegedly unfolded during the whole of 329 BCE in Baktria and Sogdiana (vocally supported by Holt 2005, 45-48) may, at the very least, lead to erroneous assessments. In fact, the assassination of a Great King and the handing over of his successor to an enemy army marching through one of the crucial territories of the Empire speaks volumes about the tensions at the top of local power networks at that time.

<sup>110</sup> A possible candidate for this role is Chorieneš, whose Paraketene stronghold may have been located in one of those areas North of the Oxus which, according to archaeological evidence at least, suffered most from the Makedonian invasion: see Rapin 2013, 75, Stančo 2020, 260-261; 2021 (a critical discussion of archaeological record and its interpretation in modern scholarship).

pursue an appeasement strategy with the Makedonians, on pain of the complete loss of the socio-political reference base, and therefore automatically of any contractual power.<sup>111</sup> What cannot be doubted, in any case, is that even the slightest hint of resistance to the Makedonian army's policy of self-sustainment was immediately met with harsh repression. A particularly striking example of this is found in Diodoros Siculus, who states that when riots broke out in Sogdiana Alexander reacted by ordering an expedition that claimed tens of thousands of victims.<sup>112</sup> It could of course be argued that the numbers provided by the historian are unreliable, and yet recent archaeological surveys in the modern district of Sherabāddaryo, in Southern Uzbekistan, suggests caution when dismissing this and similar evidence coming from the *Historical Library* or from other literary sources (especially those of the so-called *Vulgata* tradition) without further scrutiny.<sup>113</sup> The almost complete destruction of crucial sites for the territory's economy and logistics such as Talaškantēpe and Džandavlattepe, for which - as mentioned - we have evidence attesting to their existence from the early Persian period and even to their expansion from at least the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, seems to provide relatively solid evidence of the effects of Alexander's expedition through Sogdiana, since only an event of extremely significant magnitude can justify a similar break in the settlement continuity of such prominent centers within the local socioeconomic landscape.<sup>114</sup>

On the sole basis of this little information which, it should not be forgotten, has to be contextualized before Alexander's arrival at Marakanda to take Bessos into custody, there is reason to believe that Spitamenes and those who had supported him in the mutiny found themselves in a situation no less delicate than the one from which they had tried to extricate themselves by handing over one (would be) Great King to the other. On the one hand, in fact, the decision to get rid of the last Artaxerxes made them, if possible, even more dependent than individuals such as Oxyartes on reaching an agreement with Alexander and his men, since the betrayal of, first, Darius and then Bessos is likely to have deprived them of any possible ally within the factions of the now waning Achaemenid ruling class.<sup>115</sup> On the other hand, however, Alexander's attitude made this option, too, ultimately unavailable, since the Makedonian policy of robbery against the region's pastoral communities seriously jeopardized the very social linchpin on which these individuals based their negotiating skills in the face of the new claimants to hegemony. In other words, if it was not possible to compromise

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<sup>111</sup> *Epit. Mett.*, 9 and Curt. 7.7.6.

<sup>112</sup> Diod. Sic. 17 *Arg.*, 33.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. Stančo 2018; 2019.

<sup>114</sup> Rtveladze 2002, 66-84, Rapin 2018a, 281. See the bibliographical records compiled by Stride 2005 III (nos. 155 (Džandavlattepe), 227 and 228 (Talaškantepe I and II) respectively). They are the *largest*, but by no means the *only* sites – located moreover in an extremely fertile region equipped with a sophisticated network of irrigation canals - to have suffered very heavy repercussions: another example that can be cited is the site of Kulughshahtēpe (Stride 2005 III n. 162).

<sup>115</sup> Naiden 2019, 165-166. However, contrary to the latter's claims, it seems at least unlikely that Spitamenes (and his men's) aim was «to be left in peace»: much more reasonable is to believe that their goal was 1. to recover and 2. if possible, to expand the prerogatives of which Bessos' policy risked depriving them.

with the Makedonians, there was no choice but to fight them, for it must have been clear to everyone involved that Bessos was now in chains precisely because he had procrastinated the confrontation for too long, thereby alienating the support of those individuals (and of their «selectorates») on whom his power ultimately rested. As previously argued, the most auspicious moment for a fruitful negotiation would have been Alexander's stay at Marakanda, which he probably reached in the summer of 329 BCE. However, the latter seems to have had other plans: firstly, he tried to summon all the regional powerholders at a sort of assembly, according to the sources with the intention of supplying the army with auxiliary troops for an expedition into Sakā territory.<sup>116</sup> With the - very notable - exception of Spitamenes and of his inner circle (incidentally a(nother) clear sign, it seems to me, of how badly they *needed* recognition of their position by a supra-regional power outside of the local socio-political dynamics), the σύλλογος was deserted en masse. Fully consistent with the heroic portrait that permeates the entire *Anabasis*, Arrian's explanation appeals to the cowardice of the barbarians and the terror instilled in them Alexander's naked name.<sup>117</sup> It is however reasonable (to say the least) to suggest that the causes for such a behavior were in fact quite different ones, and the most convincing I believe must be found in the unwarranted nature, in this region of the Persian Empire, of any simplifying distinction between «sedentary» oasis dwellers and «nomads» (usually identified as only belonging to this or that Sakā group) settled beyond a hypothetical border, since both archaeology and ethnographic investigation have in fact repeatedly shown that the latter were deeply entangled with the economy and the territory in which the former were settled.<sup>118</sup>

Picking up on Cerasetti's insightful observations, from the Murg-āb delta to Sogdiana, the subsistence strategies of the entire population of the Central Asian Achaemenid satrapies were based on a symbiotic system between the different regimes of ecological exploitation of the land, arranged according to an extremely delicate balance, the dynamics underpinning which had emerged over time

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<sup>116</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 4.1.5. According to Briant's seminal study on the matter (cf. 1984, 85), Arrian's account allows to speculate that the σύλλογος might have been an official institution characteristic of Achaemenid rule in ecologically and demographically complex territories such as Central Asia through which the satrap and (or) the Great King aspired to negotiate the exploitation of the resources of local communities directly with the representatives of the latter (see also Briant 2017a, 476-479). Comparative ethnographic evidence, however, leaves open the possibility that the Persians indeed did no more than appropriate (and institutionalize) some form of *local* strategies of political interaction: see e. g. Hämäläinen 2008, 105. Be it as it may, participation in this assembly must have been a not insignificant litmus of the position within the (local) hierarchies of (imperial) power: from a passage in Xenophon (*Oec.*, 4.7) we learn in fact that the σύλλογος were attributed legal functions, a hypothesis that seems confirmed by the fact that, according to Arr. *Anab.*, 4.7.3, Bessos was judged and sentenced to death by just such a council. See more recently also Klinkott 2005, 283-284 and Manning 2021, 192 for some considerations on the competences of the σύλλογος in the military sphere.

<sup>117</sup> See most recently Liotsakis 2019 and Degen and Rollinger 2022 on the *Literary Portrait* of Alexander underpinning Arrian's *Anabasis* as well as Howe 2021, 54 on Bessos' capture as «an intentional literary construct». There is something Homeric in the enemies being struck by fear just because of the hero's coming on the stage: cf. e. g. Hom. *Il.*, 18.245-248: «Τρῶες δ' αὐθ' ἐτέρωθεν ἀπὸ κρατερῆς ὑσμίνης || χωρήσαντες ἔλυσαν ὑφ' ἄρμασιν ὠκέας ἵππους, || ἐς δ' ἀγορὴν ἀγέροντο, πάρος δόρπιοι μέδεσθαι. || ὀρθῶν δ' ἐσταότων ἀγορῆ γένετ', οὐδέ τις ἔτλη || ἔξεσθαι πάντας γὰρ ἔχετρόμος, οὐνεκ' Ἀχιλλεύς || ἐξεφάνη, δηρὸν δὲ μάχης ἐπέπαντ' ἄλεγεινῆς».

<sup>118</sup> Compare e. g. Skaff 2012, 33-39 on the settlement patterns of Türkic pastoral populations at the Mongolian (and Manchurian) borderlands of the Chinese Empire during the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries CE.

from (at least) the late Bronze Age onwards.<sup>119</sup> The case of Kyzyltēpe investigated in chapter 6, moreover, should have demonstrated to what extent the maintenance of these balances was vital to the regulatory mechanisms of the Achaemenid economy across the entire satrapy of Baktria-Sogdiana, and not only to the pastoralist communities located beyond its (alleged) borderlands.<sup>120</sup> From all this it follows that, from the point of view of Alexander's interlocutors, he was in essence attempting, at best, to mobilize some members of the local élite against other members of that same élite; at worst to set them against their very own socio-political base, which helps to a considerable extent explaining both why the summoning of the σύλλογος so spectacularly failed and why, from that moment on, the situation rapidly escalated out of the control of all the actors involved. Alexander's reaction, in fact, was as swift as it was harsh, and played a not inconsiderable role in further precipitating events. Perhaps suspecting that Spitamenes was no stranger to the mass defection of the σύλλογος by his peers (an unlikely contingency, as argued above, since the latter's presence at Marakanda until the last available moment testifies to the absolute necessity on his part to negotiate), the new Great King in pectore decided to liquidate him and – pursuing the same strategy adopted with Artabazos in Baktria - appointed another satrap to rule Sogdiana, taking care at the same time to leave a handful of soldiers to guard the citadel.<sup>121</sup> Having gathered his troops, Alexander then entered the Zarafšān valley, which he put to fire and sword.<sup>122</sup> The response - predictably - was an extremely violent counter-attack by the locals, which severely engaged the Makedonian columns patrolling the area: not far from today's Tīmūr gates, Alexander was severely wounded.<sup>123</sup> At least according to the (the narrative provided by the) evidence available, this episode marked a turning point in the entire campaign.<sup>124</sup> For the first time since he set foot on Persian territory, Alexander seems to have attempted, for reasons that are likely to remain unclear, to impose momentous changes on the socio-political organization (which inevitably entailed remarkable economic consequences) resulting from several decades of application - and negotiation - of the Achaemenid imperial paradigm in Central

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<sup>119</sup> See in this regard Khazanov 1994<sup>2</sup>, 202-226, Cerasetti 2020 and, for the Achaemenid period, Rapin 2007 and Lyonnet 2020. Despite, or perhaps exactly because of his bias against non-settled peoples and «nomadic» way of life, it is not out of place here to mention Strabo's statement that it was not at all easy to distinguish between the lifestyle of the Baktrians and the Sogdians, although the formers were usually considered less feral (by virtue of their - supposed - greater inclination to agriculture).

<sup>120</sup> Wu *et al.* 2015; 2018; 2020, 600-608. As pointed out by Skaff 2012, 15-18, moreover, such kind of borderlands are inevitably subjected to variations of any kind over time due to changes of the environmental conditions, the reshaping of alliances (the latter by the way often of purely personal nature between two individuals or groups), warfare, and much more.

<sup>121</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 4.15.7, Curt. 7.6.12.

<sup>122</sup> Curt. 7.4.32: Alexander «sacked the villages and then set them ablaze».

<sup>123</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 3.30.10-11. Cf. also Curt. 7.6.1-11 who, however, places these same events further south. In one case as in the other, the mere fact that the Makedonian forces were attacked by squads of Sakā not too far from Marakanda is a not insignificant indication that considerable groups of «nomads» were well acclimatized in Sogdian territory, or at the very least by no means alien to the satrapy, which might even mean that they had landed interests there (according e. g. to the model provided by Seland 2014).

<sup>124</sup> Fraser 1996, 151-153, Cohen 2013, 250, 252-255 and, most recently, Giangiulio 2020.

Asia. The presence of a conspicuous number of small settlements scattered along the entire Southern bank of the Syrdaryo up to the valley in which the present Tağik city of Xuçand is located (a pattern quite similar to the one recently studied, for instance, at Kōktēpe a few kilometers further to the South or in Chorasmla) provides the most compelling evidence of the porosity of the Northeastern frontier – which might perhaps have been a political, but certainly was not an economic, and much less so a social one - of Achaemenid domains on the one hand and, on the other, of the territories traditionally identified as having been under Sakā control (most likely the haṃvargā of the royal inscriptions) or at least of interest for such communities. It is moreover not at all excluded (and I would on the contrary argue that it is very much likely) that such borderlands were cyclically subjected to redefinition processes based on – among other things - agreements stipulated between the imperial power and those who, on the other side of the river, at a given time happened to be settled there or to nurture interests, and to wield power, in the area.<sup>125</sup> In all likelihood relying on the tried and tested tactics adopted in the Balkans during the early years of his reign - which, however, contrasted starkly with more than two centuries of Achaemenid diplomacy in Central Asia - Alexander resolved to implement a radical reorganization of the territorial administrative geography.<sup>126</sup> It is only by virtue of this hypothesis that one can at least try to understand the - by no means obvious - decision not only to conquer, but – subsequently – to destroy a far from laughable number (the sources speak of at least seven) of the settlements which he found scattered across this area.<sup>127</sup> By far and wide, the most important site targeted by the Makedonians in the region was undoubtedly Cyropolis: the reaction of the local communities to Alexander’s destruction of the vici provides further evidence to support the hypothesis put forward in Chapter 4, namely that Cyrus’ foundation was a fundamental pole of attraction (and not – only – Strabo’s ὄριον τῆς Περσῶν ἀρχῆς) for the human groups settled along the course of the river and of its tributaries in the area as well as for the pastoral communities inhabiting the adjoining hills and possibly even for those further away.<sup>128</sup> In fact, its strategic position also made Cyropolis the ideal candidate for hosting fairs similar to those described in the *Tā’riḥ -i Buxārā*,

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<sup>125</sup> A compelling model providing several reasons justifying borderlands renegotiation is provided by Skaff 2012, 6-19. The area of Xuçand was known to 9<sup>th</sup>-century Arabic speaking sources (al-Balādhurī, al-Ya’qūbī) by the name of Ustrūšana, which is still common in scholarly literature today. On the policy adopted by the Achaemenids in this region of Central Asia see Brüggemann 2016 and Panitschek 2016, 95. Once he had defeated the local big man (namely Skunkha), Darius I boasted that he had conquered the entire country «beyond the the river» (i. e. the Syrdaryo). That this was a rhetorical move is shown 1. by the fact that the same Bīsutūn inscription mentions that Skunkha was replaced by another individual (most likely a peer of the deposed (but was he really killed like the other liar kings?) Saka, perhaps he might even have been one among (?) Skunkha’s internal opponents) and 2. by the parallels pointed out by Rollinger 2016a; 2021c with the traditional self-representation of Near-Eastern monarchs as universal rulers precisely by a staged crossing of a river (Degen 2022, 362-375). Certainly, Darius never attempted to turn Sakā territories into an Achaemenid satrapy such as Baktria, let alone to establish a border between Sogdiana and the lands beyond, access to which was on the contrary crucial to the imperial economy (lato sensu). Cf. moreover Rollinger 2013, 61.

<sup>126</sup> Rapin 2018a, 284.

<sup>127</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 4.1.3-6, Curt. 7.6.16-23.

<sup>128</sup> Curt. 7.6.19-20, Ptol. *Geog.*, 6.12.5.

which constituted a crucial moment in the economic life of the region - while at the same time exerting a much wider appeal -, thus constituting the ideal Middle Ground both for the satrapal administration in Sogdiana (as well as for the representatives of imperial power located further to the South in Bactria, since to this day we are not certain that an equivalent of Bessos (or Aḥvamazdā) existed beyond the Oxus) and for the élites at the head of the different communities whose interests (especially, but by no means only, of an economic nature) revolved around a settlement such as the one sized by Alexander.<sup>129</sup>

Having taken possession of the territory through the conquest of its main foundation (as the Achaemenid arguably did when they established their rule over Baktr(i)a), the second phase of the Makedonian project seems to have envisaged the replacement of the network of Persian sites (which, as argued in the case of Kyzlyltēpe, obeyed a very precise logic ensuring their overall functioning only as a system interacting with the wider regional context) with a single outpost, emblematically located at the entrance to the main route that from the Syrdaryo valley in the North secured the quickest access to the territory of Marakanda.<sup>130</sup> Both the position and the size of the new stronghold make clear its eminently defensive purpose, or at least suggest that the main aim pursued was the control of (its own) territory, in striking contrast to the projective function of Cyropolis, which was instead conceived as a bridgehead into Sakā (controlled) territory: at the same time, it is also possible that Alexandria «the furthest» (Ἐσχάτη, this is in fact the name of the new settlement we know from the sources) had the aim of replacing Marakanda as the neuralgic center of Sogdiana, another possible indication of the extent of the changes in the local topography of power brought about by Alexander.<sup>131</sup> First excluded from the reorganization of the regional political-administrative political hierarchies and now, with the destruction of Cyropolis, deprived of one of the most important gate to the networks of exchange and alliances with the Sakā world, Spitamenes and his men broke the

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<sup>129</sup> Holt 1988a, 55-58.

<sup>130</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 4.1.3, Curt. 7.5.36, Just. *Epit.*, 12.5.12 («et ut his terris nomen relinqueret, urbem Alexandream super amen Tanaim condidit»), *FGrHist* 239 B 7 Cf. Bernard 1985, 167 and Cohen 2013, 252-255. According to Rapin 2018a, 272, Alexander's new foundation should be located in the territory of Zaamin, between modern Jizak and Kurkat, in present-day Uzbekistan. From a geographical point of view, this location fits particularly well with the hypothetical function of a military outpost, the aim of which would have been, unlike Cyropolis, no longer to project towards the steppes beyond the Syrdaryo, but instead to guard the access to the river itself and to the lands on this side of it.

<sup>131</sup> Curt. 7.6.25 speaks of a system of fortifications no less than 60 stadia long. See also Briant 1976, 252. From the point of view of the *Sakā* powerholders, Alexander's decision must have been received as badly as it was by Spitamenes and his circle: in fact, the foundation of a site like Alexandria Ἐσχάτη likely was aimed at significantly reducing the bargaining power of the latter within a territory which - contrary to what is claimed by the sources, e. g. Strabo, who put forward a completely different conception of the Central Asian space - the previous Achaemenid administration had until then treated as a Middle Ground of sort, a meeting point in the context of which cyclically (re)negotiate mutually advantageous agreements with the steppe communities: cf. Hdt. 7.64.2. According to Briant 1978, 78-80, moreover, the new settlement would have aimed at expanding the *χώρα βασιλική* to the detriment of a much more fluid territorial organization, which he identifies as the distinctive feature of Achaemenid diplomacy in the context of regions that, following Scott 2009, 167-177 we could rightly define as endowed with a high potential for «state evasion».

hesitations and openly turned to armed struggle.<sup>132</sup> The fact that the uprisings swiftly spread through the entire territory of Sogdiana, involving both shores of the Syrdaryo on the one hand and, on the other, the composite nature of the insurgent front, gives an idea of the extent to which the Makedonian policy threatened (or at least was clearly perceived as capable of doing so) the economic fabric of the Empire's extreme Northeastern frontier; and if we moreover consider (as attempted in the previous chapter), that to a far from negligible extent the latter represented (one of) the pillars of the (socio)political relations on which the power of both the Sogdian aristocrats and of their Sakā counterparts at the local level ultimately rested, it is not surprising that they decided to form a common front against the Makedonian newcomers.<sup>133</sup> At this point, by virtue of the role he played in the events discussed in the following pages, it is worth spending a few more words on Spitamenes' position, trying to assess it from the point of view of the balance of power within the Central Asian front, since in doing so it becomes easier to understand the revolt's scale (both in terms of territorial extension and of - unprecedented - violence). In a formula, one could in fact argue that he now found himself in the position Bessos had been just a few months before. With the deposed satrap now in the hands of the Makedonians (precisely because of a conspiracy he had hatched or in which his role must undoubtedly have been prominent) and with Artabazos having for the time being sidelined Oxyartes, whether he liked it or not Spitamenes became the last representative of what had been Achaemenid power in Central Asia, a role which in fact compelled him to wage war against the invading Makedonians. On the other hand, as arguably the most prominent Sogdian big man on stage, his power was conditioned in no small part by the support of his peers, both in Makedonian-occupied Bactria and, above all, in Sogdiana and in the Sakā territories across the river. Now: if, as had been at least partly the case with Darius, evading confrontation and leaving the field free for Alexander in the region would have meant losing face and therefore power, a prolonged war was no less dangerous, and this by virtue of the fact that, just as happened with Bessos, today's allies could have decided to get rid of him tomorrow in an attempt to protect their own possessions from the Makedonian raids. Pushed into a corner, and backed by another local strongman, Catanes, whose properties in lower Surxondaryo it is reasonable to believe had been damaged by the Makedonian crossing of the valley no less than those of Choriēnes, who in fact not by chance had already clashed with the intruders, in an attempt to take advantage of Alexander's absence from the Zarafshān Spitamenes decided to aim directly at the bull's eye, and laid siege to Marakanda.<sup>134</sup>

The gamble - a considerable one, given the contingent left to garrison the citadel of Afrāsyāb - seems to have caught Alexander off guard: but instead of attempting to settle the Northern front and hastily

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<sup>132</sup> Rapin 2018a, 284.

<sup>133</sup> Rapin 2017a, 97.

<sup>134</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 4.3.6, Curt. 7.6.14. Cf. Rapin 2018a, 284-286.

return to Sogdiana, the Makedonian responded to the insurgents' initiative by sacking Sakā territories in the entire Syrdaryo valley, which - understandably - only further upset the latter, who reacted by multiplying their attacks, both in number and intensity.<sup>135</sup> Unable to intervene in person at Marakanda, Alexander chose at this point to dispatch a squadron to support the garrison that had been left to defend the fortress: although the reconstruction drawn from the sources is fraught with interpretative difficulties, the succession of events allows at least two considerations. Firstly, it shows how the tactics adopted by the Makedonians had extremely significant repercussions on a much wider territory than the one directly involved in the confrontations, which incidentally clearly shows the extent to which the different communities settled in this area of the Empire were closely interdependent; secondly, and as a direct consequence, it offers an instructive example of the web of social, political, and economic relations that made up the power networks characteristic of the administrative landscape of Achaemenid Central Asia.<sup>136</sup> Attempting to chart the latter at this chronological height helps to better understand the extent to which the events investigated in this chapter contributed to its (arguably long-lasting) transformation. Although Alexander does not seem to have been aware of this fact (and even though scholars are not unanimous as far as this issue is concerned), it is possible to assume that the siege laid by Spitamenes at Marakanda and the riots along the Syrdaryo were somehow coordinated. There are at least two elements supporting this assumption. The first is chronology: according to the sources, the two uprisings were almost simultaneous: by virtue of the fact that, even in the following months, Spitamenes was repeatedly able to mobilize numerous cavalry contingents from territories beyond Sogdiana's (alleged) political borders to the North, it is reasonable to suggest that his dual function as the in pectore representative of Achaemenid power in the territory (one thinks of the ad hoc agreements made by the Sakā with the Great King and mentioned by Arrian as the only reason for their presence at Gaugamela) and as the local big man made him the privileged interlocutor, because of his being by far the most authoritative and powerful individual on stage, of the local potentates in the lands «beyond the river».<sup>137</sup> The second concerns the revolt's logistics. While he was busy encircling Marakanda, Spitamenes was informed of the approach of the two relief columns sent by Alexander with the aim

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<sup>135</sup> Curt. 7.6.13-23 and Widmer 2015, 40.

<sup>136</sup> The reconstruction proposed here necessarily retains a certain degree of speculation due to a very complicated textual tradition (Rapin 2014), to which one must add the rather approximate knowledge of the surviving sources of Central Asian topography, which further hampers the reconstruction of the exact stages of Alexander's movements in the region. However, it is still possible to suggest scenarios which are more plausible than others: Grenet and Rapin 2001, Rapin 2001; 2005; 2013.

<sup>137</sup> Curt. 7.7.1 on the one hand and, on the other, *Epit. Mett.*, 8 mention the name of a certain Carthasis, the brother of a Sakā king «who lived beyond the river [the Syrdaryo]». According to Curtius' account, the latter was sent by his superior to destroy Alexander's recent foundation, this being further evidence of the hostility stirred by the Makedonian's policy in the region. Arrian, for his part (*Anab.*, 4.4.8: he calls this individual Satrakes), claims that the Sakā prince was killed in battle. Vague as they are, these snippets of information could nevertheless be interpreted as scattered clues to the network of relations Spitamenes maintained on both sides of Achaemenid Central Asian borderlands.



of regaining control of the Zarafšān valley, which had been endangered by the insurgents.<sup>138</sup> This demonstrates, among other things, the efficiency of the Persian infrastructural system, which – thus supporting Wu Xin’s recent hypothesis - must have been widespread not only in Baktria, but also further North, at least as far as Marakanda, and probably even beyond.<sup>139</sup> The Sakā intelligence proved crucial, since it enabled Spitamenes to transform a stalemate which was keen to turn into a defeat into one of the most resounding setbacks Alexander ever suffered. Making the best out of the information provided by his allies, Spitamenes succeeded in planning his counter-move in good time, ambushing the Makedonian troops near a river to the North of Marakanda and crushing them, without being forced to completely lift the siege of the citadel, which of course would not have been possible had he been caught from behind by Alexander’s soldiers returning from the Syrdaryo.<sup>140</sup> Once the mission was accomplished, the Sogdian notable managed in fact to quickly returning to Marakanda with his troops and, according to the testimony of Curtius Rufus, the siege was at least partly rewarded, since the rebels indeed eventually took possession of Marakanda’s fortress (Afrāsyāb).<sup>141</sup> The approach of the second contingent, led by Menedemos, induced Spitamenes to make a strategic retreat, once again to the North, where he was yet another time able to draw heavily on the reserves of the Sakā (Dahai) cavalry. The Makedonians were defeated a second time, Menedemos himself fell in the fighting and the few survivors were forced to seek refuge in a small fortress on a hill, perhaps similar to a site like Kurganzol in the Surxondaryo, which the insurgents again besieged. Alexander paid the whole episode with at least 1500 men: given that the sources are usually rather terse when it comes to discussing Makedonian losses, such figures are indicative of the rout’s scale, or at least of its emotional impact.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> It is worth noting that one of the two contingents was led by a certain Pharnuches, a Lykian who had joined Alexander’s expedition earlier and who is nevertheless very likely to have been a descendant of one of those families of the Central Asian élite who had reached the West of the Empire as soldiers and/or officers at the head of special contingents (e. g. cavalry) following Cyrus’ conquest: on him see Heckel 2006, 207. The fact that Pharnuches was explicitly chosen as interpreter is an indication of a not insignificant level of literacy (he might have been a scribe): at the same time, the story of this individual provides yet another confirmation of the fact that communication between Central Asia and the rest of the Achaemenid world was *never* interrupted during the Empire’s whole life. Otherwise one would be hard pressed to explain how Pharnuches was still able to fluently speak Sogdian, given the fact that, as Panaino (2015) noted, the linguistic differentiation between the various Irānian varieties spoken in the Empire’s territories must have been so great by the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century that mutual intelligibility between speakers of different (although originally closely related: both Baktrian and Sogdian being Eastern Irānian languages) varieties was by no means obvious and in fact according to him very much unlikely. In addition to the Achaemenid institutional sources, mention should also be made of the testimony of a man of letters such as Diogenes (ca. 400 BCE) who, according at least to Ath. 14.636c, was aware of the existence of «Lydian and Baktrian maidens» who were taught to dance on the banks of the Halys (today’s Kızılırmak).

<sup>139</sup> See the remarks in Briant 2009a, 149; 2018b, Colburn 2013, 38 and now Henkelman forthcoming.

<sup>140</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 4.3.7. According to Rapin 2018a, 285, it would even be possible to identify the exact location of one of the two ambushes, i. e. near the Ljajljakuy ford on the left bank of the Qaradaryo, given the large number of harrow heads discovered in this area and dated around the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE: Inevatkina 2010, Inevatkina - Sučilin 2015, but note the methodological remarks in Stančo 2021.

<sup>141</sup> Curt. 7.6.24.

<sup>142</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 4.5.6, Curt. 7.7.31-39. On Kurganzol cf. Stančo 2020, 266-269 as well as Lyonnet and Fontugne 2021. Naiden 2019, 167 reports even greater losses, going so far as to claim that the «two thousand» Makedonians who perished

This brief overview of the events as we know them from the literary sources is sufficient to provide a picture of the strategic and logistical difficulty of the entire operation. Its success, which involved coordination along a front approximately 200 km long across not infrequently impervious territory, helps to understand the extent, efficiency, and capillarity of the relational networks enjoyed (and commanded) by an individual like Spitamenes. At the same time, the fact that he was able to recruit Sakā contingents in the order of several hundreds of men (the sources speak of at least 600 mounts, and in some accounts it is even mentioned that he managed to send troops from Baktria) suggests 1. that, as argued several times, multiple Sakā communities were permanently established in the territory of the Achaemenid Central Asian satrapies and, more importantly, 2. that they made for a not insignificant portion of the «selectorate» of the local landed aristocracy, which from these contacts may have drawn at least part of the influence that had made possible for some of its representatives to secure prestigious positions within the imperial government apparatus.<sup>143</sup> By virtue of route's scale, which should not be underestimated, it is not unreasonable to suggest that this episode had a considerable impact on the rest of the army, thus contributing at least in part in shaping the Baktrian imagery (in Iliakis' words the «Mirage») we find in the surviving sources, portraying the satrapy as a land of ferocious and indomitable barbarians.<sup>144</sup> It was certainly enough to force Alexander's retreat from the Syrdaryo with the whole army in tow (one of the primary objectives of both the Sakā and arguably of Spitamenes himself), since after the defeat inflicted to Menedemos and Pharnuches the defense of Marakanda was becoming increasingly challenging. The forced march through Sogdiana, it should be noted, witnessed a new, systematic deployment of violence: the entire Zarafshān valley was sacked for a second time, and this seems to have had significant repercussions on the compactness of Spitamenes' army.<sup>145</sup> Unable to hold his positions at Marakanda (perhaps due to desertions, similar to those which plagued Bessos sometime earlier?) he was forced to retreat to Chorasmia: this is, once again, an important piece of information, since it allows to reconstruct, albeit patchily, the networks of solidarity on which the Sogdian notable could rely. Even at this date, in fact, he seems to have enjoyed considerable authority with (some of) the local strongmen, through whom he was even able to recruit further troops among the communities settled in the pre-Aralic steppes and even further West towards the grasslands of present-day Turkmenistan, the climatic framework of which was

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in the ambush amounted to more than the amount of men Alexander had left on the ground in any other military confrontation since he left Europe.

<sup>143</sup> Rapin 2013, 53, Rapin and Isamiddinov 2013, 117-119. Kōktēpe's fertile surroundings must have been the ideal pasture ground for the Sakā horses, and based on the model developed by Sealand 2014 and discussed in chapter 7 it is not excluded that they had indeed obtained from Spitamenes – who by no chance owed no small part of its military potential to this alliance – the right to graze in the area in exchange for cavalry power. On the Baktrians see Arr. *Anab.*, 4.1.5 and Curt. 7.6.13-14.

<sup>144</sup> Holt 2005, 55 and, more recently, Iliakis forthcoming.

<sup>145</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 4.6.5. Compare Iliakis 2021.

likely significantly different from that in place today.<sup>146</sup> Although there is no doubt that the success against the two Makedonian contingents was the best result achieved by any commander (or would-be commander) of Central Asian troops up to that time, it came at a remarkable cost, namely the retaliation unleashed by Alexander from one end of the satrapy to the other, the impact of which on Spitamenes' authority is likely to have been considerable. Proof of this is the fact that, as winter approached, he had to face the first defections (a worrying sign of the breakdown of group solidarity to the advantage of individual interests), which forced the Sogdian to retreat once again, with the consequence of having to postpone the counter-attack planned at the time of his flight to Chorasmia until the following spring.<sup>147</sup> This gave Alexander precious time to plan the replenishment of the Makedonian post at Marakanda with a large - in proportion to the amount of forces available - contingent of soldiers (about 3000 infantrymen). At this point, he headed back to Baktra, and once he arrived in what was still to be the neuralgic center of imperial power in the entire area, the new King took care to ratify Bessos' death sentence.<sup>148</sup> This pronouncement was introduced by an extremely solemn ceremony which, in scrupulous deference to Achaemenid etiquette, aimed to emphasize as strongly as possible Alexander's exclusive right to Darius' legacy.<sup>149</sup> Bessos was a traitor, and as such ought to be executed: as a traitor's traitor - the message went quite straightforwardly on - Spitamenes' claims were even shakier. In other words, the Empire - and the advantages of partaking it - was now embodied by Alexander, who consequently had the right and the material capacity both to mercilessly punish rebels and to reward with conspicuous generosity those who were ready to collaborate. Not having succeeded in capturing his opponent alive, Alexander decided at this point, drawing on the implications of Darius I's old (but by no means aged), message, to isolate him from a symbolic and, conversely, political and therefore social point of view.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Strab. 11.8.8. On the local climate (and hydrology) in antiquity see Lerner 2014, 167 and Cerasetti 2020 on the subsistence strategies employed by the local population since (very) ancient times. Minardi 2015a, 39 is also remarkable: Spitamenes' retreat to Chorasmia offers the most persuasive evidence that Alexander's invasion plunged the whole of Central Asia into a civil war of sort, subjecting the local alliance system to tensions the consequences of which would still be perceptible years after the conquerors' departure for India.

<sup>147</sup> Rapin 2018a, 286. On group solidarity and power dynamics among pastoral peoples with special attention to the Sakā case see Simpson and Pankova 2021, 30-42.

<sup>148</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 4.7.3-4, Curt. 7.10.10, Diod. Sic. 17.83.9.

<sup>149</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 3.30.3-5, Curt. 7.5.40, Diod. Sic., 17.82.9. On the symbolic significance of the tortures inflicted to Bessos see Lincoln 2007, 83-97; 2012, 393-406 and Kosmin 2013b, 674. On staged violence in the Near Eastern world see Rollinger 2010.

<sup>150</sup> Not unlike the civil war of 522 (neither differently from the situation of a few years earlier, at the time of the confrontation with Darius III), military requirements were inextricably linked to a very dense - and extremely relevant - political and in some cases even religious symbolism: see Naiden 2019, 75. Compare Degen 2022, 199 on the destruction of the Persepolis' palace as a symbol of the end of the dynastic pact (including its economic consequences) between Darius III and the imperial élites not only in Pārsa, both across the whole Empire.

### 2.3. 328 BCE: Three Rocks and a Princess

The retreat to Chorasmia has been repeatedly interpreted by scholars – based on the merciless, and demonstrably biased, judgement of classical authors - as a sign, if not of Spitamenes' cowardice, certainly as an indication of the progressive weakening of his power in Sogdiana.<sup>151</sup> It is however the contention of these pages that a less lopsided assessment of the events of the war's second year, 328 BCE, allows in fact to reconstruct a rather different scenario, more indicative of the complexity of the local socio-political entanglements. The Chorasmian sojourn seems indeed to have been carefully planned by Spitamenes, who not by chance returned to the battlefield with new resources and fresh soldiers: he may not have been able to regain control of the whole of Sogdiana, but nevertheless had sufficient offensive potential to put the - as mentioned, by no means negligible - Makedonian contingent stationed in the satrapy under serious pressure.<sup>152</sup> Nor is it to be believed that his absence had any particular effect on his influence in Sogdiana (a sure indication of the entrenchment of Spitamenes' power in the region), as is shown by the fact that, as soon as he returned and at least partly availing himself of the tactical advantage given by Alexander's absence – who at the time was busy at Baktra legitimizing his position through Bessos' - he made the whole territory North of the Hiṣār revolt once again. Testifying to the Sogdian's far from declining authority, the rebel front expanded with great rapidity from the Surxondaryo to the entire district of Marakanda, where a particularly important role was played by the fortress of Koktēpe, as far as can be deduced representing one of the most important bastions held by Spitamenes in Sogdiana: the result of this new wave of upheaval was that the Makedonian hold on Central Asia North of the Oxus suddenly appeared much weaker than the (re)conquest of Afrāsyāb might have suggested at first glance.<sup>153</sup> It is worth noting at this point that, although the reconstructions of events provided by the literary sources are far from clear (especially given the questionable topographical knowledge of the secondary, and arguably even primary, authors), it is nevertheless possible to guess that the riots were not limited to Sogdiana.<sup>154</sup> If, on the one hand, there is no doubt that the fortress of Baktra (and

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<sup>151</sup> Rapin 2013, 52; 2018a, 286. See moreover Curt. 7.10.10.

<sup>152</sup> Rapin 2017a, 98. According to Naiden 2019, 169, in 328 BC the guerrilla warfare resumed, «more ferocious than ever» also by virtue of some gestures made by the Makedonians and perceived as particularly hostile towards, among others, local cults, including the destruction of the sanctuaries of the goddess Anāhitā (who may have been worshipped in Central Asia within an extremely complex religious landscape: cf. *FGrHist* 680 F 9, on which among others Tavernier 2017b, Tuplin 2019 and Wu 2020, 608-612, who does not fail to note the *political* component of the local cultic landscape as it had been constructed by the Achaemenids). On the subject of Alexander's (im)piety in Central Asia see, in addition to Naiden himself, the careful examination of the evidence carried out by Mendoza-Sanahuja 2019, 211-220.

<sup>153</sup> Curt. 8.2.15-18: one of them can be confidently located in the area of Qarši, in the region of Qashqadaryo, which insists on an extremely important road axis to the oasis of Buxārā, as we have seen a key territory for Spitamenes and his allies, by virtue of the access from there to the pre-Aralic communities and to their cavalry.

<sup>154</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 4.16.1.

therefore the entire oasis) remained firmly in Makedonian hands, on the other there is no lack of evidence suggesting that Spitamenes still enjoyed some form of authority (and/or of coercive power), at least in Eastern Baktria, where some of the local ὑπαρχοί - settled in an area extending roughly between Ḥulmi in Afġānistān and Kūlob (Кӯлоб) in Taġikistān - joined the insurgents.<sup>155</sup> In light of the area's crucial strategic importance (clearly evidenced by the power held by somebody like Bagavanta), such a development of events further aggravated the threat to the stability of Makedonian control over Central Asia, since from this region it was possible to control the major communication routes to both Sogdiana and India; to this must be added the fundamental economic importance of the territory, given that Eastern Baktria was home to the richest (and in the case of lapis lazuli, the only) reserves of precious stones and metals in the entire satrapy, to the intensive exploitation of which, it should not be forgotten, non-settled communities had contributed substantially from very remote times – incidentally yet another clue of the tight entanglements between the latter and the Persian Empire, which made significant profits from mining in this region.<sup>156</sup> However, Spitamenes' growing involvement in territories that were undoubtedly beyond his sphere of competence as a representative of Persian power came at a price, namely that of increasingly alarming his allies, his present ones and, to a much greater extent, those who had joined him - and Bessos - at the time of the conspiracy against Darius III. Moreover, the possibility, which in view of the development of the events was far from remote, of the re-opening of the front in Baktria was in all probability an even greater threat to the latter than to the Makedonians. The reasons for this are not difficult to guess: by stirring the local notables settled along the upper Oxus to open rebellion, Spitamenes threatened to deprive his peers in the greater oasis (of whom Oxyartes is the best known, but likely not the only representative) of human capital, material resources and, above all, the network of dependencies on which their power rested. Although the sources are totally silent on this matter - which is not surprising, since they almost exclusively focus on the Makedonians - there are compelling reasons to suspect that, similarly to what happened to Bessos at the time of his fording into Sogdiana, Spitamenes' activism (to which, as we have seen, he was forced to a considerable extent) made him progressively more and more unpopular in the eyes of the other local strongmen, especially in Baktria. Moreover, in view moreover

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<sup>155</sup> Curt 8.1.3-6 lists among the rebels who joined Spitamene not only Sogdians and Sakā but also «disinherited Baktrians». The latter were most probably members of the local aristocracy at the head of some of the rural clusters of settlements scattered in the oases of Eastern Baktria (Martinez-Sève 2020c, 229-235) or of strategically located garrisons guarding important fords, such as Kuhna Qa l'a (Martinez-Sève 2020c, 227-229) and who must have been removed from their posts (similarly to what happened to Oxyartes) following the Makedonians' conquest of the territory. On Southwestern Taġikistān (all but ignored in the geopolitical organization of the region by the Achaemenids) see Lindström 2020, 295-297 on the Kūlob oasis.

<sup>156</sup> Rapin 2005; 2017a, 48. According to Rapin 2013, 51, Alexander's route to Sogdiana was significantly determined by the need to crush a series of insurrections by local notables in several territories of Eastern Baktria, from the oasis of Qundūz to the area of Kurġan Tyube (Кӯрġонтеппа: cf. Lindström 2020, 289), Kašguzar and even in the Dašt -i Qal'a plain (the destruction of Kuhna Qal'a might have happened in this context).

of the fact that, as the siege of Marakanda had shown, it was becoming increasingly clear that he did not command enough manpower and financial resources to defeat Alexander, the insurrectionary tactics adopted by Spitamenes are likely to have been quickly perceived as capable of causing nothing but disruption within the socio-economic landscape of the entire satrapy, the stability of which was on the contrary directly functional to the power of the local landed aristocracy. Consequently, when in the spring of 328 BCE Alexander left Baktra (which nevertheless remained heavily protected) for a *new* expedition into Sogdiana, it is possible to assume that he was not alone, and that some of the most influential members of the Baktrian ruling class accompanied him with the intention of persuading at least some of Spitamenes' supporters to defect. As far as it can be argued, the development of events seems to support this hypothesis, and although the sources, once again, do not allow to reconstruct with certainty the reasons behind the actions of these individuals, there is perhaps the possibility of identifying at least two. The first, and the most obvious in the light of what has been discussed so far, must be recognized in the desire to put an end as quickly as possible to a war the costs of which, in both military and economic - and therefore political - terms were becoming increasingly difficult to sustain. The second may have had to do with the appointment of Artabazos, who is likely to have represented - for individuals such as Oxyartes - a significant as well as cumbersome competitor in the struggle for (the maintenance of) regional supremacy.<sup>157</sup> The opportunity to get rid of Spitamenes would have constituted, from this point of view, an important card to play in the attempt to remedy the strategic error committed at the moment of siding with Bessos two years earlier: in this, they appear to have been driven by the very same motives which pushed Spitamenes. For he too had sought until the very end an agreement with Alexander that would have secured him at the lowest possible cost the preservation of his local power within the (new) imperial hierarchies. If carefully combed, there are instances in which the available literary sources offer hints apparently supporting the scenario outlined so far (and which becomes even more plausible when compared with the Indian campaign, where these power intrigues must have been the order of the day).<sup>158</sup> It is therefore reasonable to claim that, contrary to what authors such as Arrian or Plutarch (and to a certain extent Curtius Rufus himself) never tire of claiming, Alexander did *not* conquer Central Asia solely on his own merits as a strategist and war leader.<sup>159</sup> At least comparable importance must be attached to the feuds within the local power networks and to the decision of some members of these networks to side with the new representative of the imperial institutions once they realized

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<sup>157</sup> Heckel 2018, 108 ff.

<sup>158</sup> See most recently on this topic Petrie 2020, 629-634, 642-645 with extensive bibliography.

<sup>159</sup> Degen 2022, 402-418 compellingly argues that it was Alexander's imperial knowledge much more than his military genius the trump card which secured him the Persian Empire.

that he could no longer be disposed of (and that he perhaps even provided a concrete and powerful alternative to the interference of the likes of Spitamenes in their own local business).

The unfolding of the events over the next few years proved them right. For once Alexander had left Central Asia for India, having cleared the field of some of their most influential internal rivals, those among the Baktrian notables who had managed to stay alive were able to re-establish themselves as major players within the regional power chessboard, perhaps even on a scale previously out of their reach - in some cases even rising at the very level of those who, in theory, should have been their new masters. If carefully subjected to critical scrutiny, the dynamics of the events characterizing Alexander's campaign can therefore provide a wealth of information to be used both in retrospect and prospectively to elaborate interpretative scenarios accounting for the functioning of the Central Asian political dialectic between an(y?) imperial entity and what King has called the regional «aristocratic networks» from the Achaemenid era at least to Qutayba's invasion.<sup>160</sup> As argued in chapter 4, when Cyrus entered the Baktrian stage for the first time there is no reason to believe that the problems he had to face were structurally different (and on the contrary the events of the civil war of 522 BCE, discussed in chapter 3, indeed suggest that a rather strong case can be made supporting such a claim). As for the (few) sources available concerning Seleukos, what can be reconstructed suggests that, even in his case, the laborious process of rebuilding the infrastructural and relational fabric necessary to (re)transform Central Asia into an imperial space could not do without the – active - participation of the (new) Baktrian élite formed during the 40 years or so which elapsed between Bessos' delivery to Alexander and the proclamation (ex post facto) of the year 1 of the Seleukid era, in many respects the starting point (not only in Central Asia) of what with benefit of hindsight it is called the Hellenistic period.<sup>161</sup>

### 2.3.1. «Non desiderarne la sposa». From Choriene to Spitamenes' Wife

The spiraling of the fighting in Baktria on the one hand and, on the other, the inability of the new satrap in Sogdiana to keep Spitamenes and his allies at bay prompted Alexander to undertake yet another (this time massive) expedition in early spring.<sup>162</sup> In contrast to the previous year, this time Alexander took a Southeastern route.<sup>163</sup> There seem to have been two reasons for this choice: firstly,

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<sup>160</sup> King 2020.

<sup>161</sup> Kosmin 2018b, 19-44.

<sup>162</sup> On Alexander's satrap in Arachosia see cf. Arr. *Anab.*, 4.15.7. On the route taken at this stage by the army see Rapin 2013, 82 ff.; 2014, 183.

<sup>163</sup> According to a recent reassessment of the topographical information provided by some authors of the *Vulgata* tradition (e. g. Curt. 7.10.15, according to this interpretation for several reasons a more reliable source than Arrian), the Makedonian army entered Sogdiana through the confluence of the Oxus (Amydaryo) with the Darya -i Pandğ (the Ὠροσ)

in order to regain control of the strategic region of Eastern Bactria, threatened by the network of alliances woven by his adversary and, secondly, with the aim of regaining possession of the main routes thoroughfares linking the two satrapies, the control of latter being one of the rebels' greatest strengths. Finally, the new campaign also offered the possibility of clearing the field once and for all of those pockets of regional power over which Spitamenes was still able to exert his influence and which - as shown by the Chorienes affaire of some months before - were able at the same time to engage the Makedonian army on their own and to supply Bessos' late collaborator (and ultimately de facto murderer) with men and resources indispensable for the continuation of what had by now turned into an exhausting war of attrition. Although the chronology of the site is still the subject of intense debate (especially as regards its most ancient stratigraphic phases), it is possible to suggest that the destruction of the important fort guarding the Dašt -i Qal'a plain can be traced back to the time of Alexander's second Sogdian campaign: it would have been rebuilt and subsequently enlarged only in Seleukid times, a few kilometers further South, on the site of Āi Xānum as we know it from its heydays during the Graeco-Baktrian period.<sup>164</sup> This also seems to have been the place where the Makedonian gave the order to divide the army into several units, each responsible for patrolling a portion of the territory during the advance, while clearing any pockets of resistance in the process: archaeological research carried out especially in Southern Uzbekistan has shown that, on this occasion too, the troops' entrenchment into satrapal territory must have coincided with a massive deployment of violence, recognizable in the levels of destruction found at a significant number of Achaemenid fortifications and, what is most important here, across their agro-pastoral hinterland.<sup>165</sup>

This scenario is particularly visible in the Surxondaryo, from which it has been deduced that precisely this region was the main target of Makedonian war operations. By virtue of its strategic nature as an area characterized by a dense network of oases, rivers, streams, and mountain ranges, the nodes of which were placed under the control of a leading member of the local landowning élite in charge of the defense of one or more fortresses (irmatam, thus also strategical production facilities

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of the Greek sources, e. g. Strab. 12.7.3) in Eastern Bactria: see Grenet and Rapin 2001, 80-81, Rapin 2005, 146; 2018a, 259.

<sup>164</sup> Mairs 2014c, 6-13, Martinez-Sève 2015; 2020c, 222-229.

<sup>165</sup> The Makedonian army was first divided into five columns, a number later reduced to three and placed under the leadership of Hephastion, Ptolemy, Perdikkas, Koinos (with, remarkably, Artabazos at his side, who may even have been the one actually in charge, not least because of his diplomatic and personal links with the Makedonian court, and the new role assumed by Artabazos daughter Barsine after 330 BCE: Müller 2020, 88-89) and Alexander himself: cf. Arr. *Anab.*, 4.16.2, Curt. 8.1.1-3. With regards to the archaeological evidence see Stančo *et al.* 2018, 140. In an area extending from the valley of the Surxondaryo to the so-called Tīmūr Gates, Makedonian forces destroyed crucial nodes of the Achaemenid infrastructural fabric that ensured the organization and exploitation of the territory as well as communication through it in both Eastern Bactria and Sogdiana. Among the most relevant examples that can be given is undoubtedly Bandykhan, and to it could be added the pre-Hellenistic strata of Kurganzol (if not the fortress itself, given that the building technique looks very much a traditional, Central Asian one: Lyonnet and Fontugne 2021, 359-366), Uzundara, possibly Payon Kurgan, on which cf. recently Stančo 2021, 85 and – against the background of the literary evidence - the hitherto unidentified fortress of Margania: see Rapin 2013, 79; 2017a, 48 and Wu 2018, 206-211.



and perhaps harboring administrative infrastructures) guarding fords and/or passes, this is not surprising.<sup>166</sup> The route followed by the columns of Alexander's army, among other things, only makes sense if and once put in the context of the Achaemenid road and administrative system as it emerged from chapter 6: the latter in fact allowed the imperial polities claiming rights over Baktria, on the one hand, to easily reach and defend every corner of the satrapy, even the most remote; on the other, it secured a constant channel of communication with the pastoral communities settled on the oases' edges.<sup>167</sup> In a nutshell, this system represented the cornerstone of Spitamenes' operational and logistical capacity, since a considerable number of the notables settled in the area were among his allies, which explains the harshness with which the Makedonians carried out their operations in this area. Between March and April 328 BCE, Alexander's column laid siege to the first of these strongholds guarding the Surxondaryo passes. It was headed by Chorienes, perhaps the ὑπαρχος appointed in Paraetakene.<sup>168</sup> He may have been among the initiators of the first insurrections that broke out in 329, at the time of Alexander's advance into Sogdian territory as he was heading towards Marakanda.<sup>169</sup> Situated in an area that, over time, had been targeted by massive infrastructural development (with the consequent growth of agricultural production) by the imperial administration, the πέτρα held by Chorienes represented one of the reference nodes within a dense network of administrative and production centers stretching across the entire valley, and that secured rapid and efficient communication between the major Baktrian oases and the Sogdian foundations South of the Hiṣār range: this is enough to recognize in Chorienes an individual of absolute prominence within the satrapal hierarchies.<sup>170</sup> Further evidence in support of this assumption is provided by literary sources, which are unanimous in claiming that, at the time of the Makedonian siege, the fortress was home to some high-ranking members of the Baktrio-Sogdian families, with their wives and children in tow; among them, most remarkably, there was Rōxanē, Oxyartes' daughter.<sup>171</sup> Against the background of

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<sup>166</sup> *Epit. Mett.*, 17-18. Indeed, as has been observed on several occasions by Claude Rapin, one of the leading experts on the area, the entire landscape of Baktria and Sogdiana must be interpreted through the lens of the steppe world (cf. Stark 2020; 2021, Jacobs and Gufler 2021), controlled as it was by (agro)pastoral populations or by communities with an even greater degree of mobility. The strongholds conquered by the Makedonians must have fulfilled, among their many functions, that of a transmission belt between these worlds and the imperial administration (which relied on their representatives, not least for military conscription). See Rapin 2013, 79; 2017a, 48; 2017b; 2018a.

<sup>167</sup> Cf. Wu 2018, 206-211. In the Boysuntov district, for example, a very precise mapping of the course of several historical routes has recently been carried out based on data acquired from the excavations of the Czech-O'zbek archaeological mission: among the most significant results are the reconstruction of the important passage leading from Derbent to the Machay Darya and Mount Sarymas, that of the Sary Shato and the Sairob-Uzundara-Shurob route. See Stančo *et al.* 2017a; *et al.* 2018 as well as Stančo and Pažout 2020.

<sup>168</sup> Rapin 2018a, 288. According to Heckel 2006, 25; 2018 «Chorienes» ought to be taken as a title of Sisimithres. However, this hypothesis has been disproved by Rapin's studies of the administrative geography of the Central Asian territory on the one hand and, on the other, by a careful philological re-examination of the manuscript tradition: Rapin 2014, 187 ff. Arrian's text is still in need of such kind of scholarly attention: see however Degen and Rollinger 2022.

<sup>169</sup> Diod. Sic. 17 *Arg.*, 33. Cf. furthermore Curt. 8.4.21 and *Epit. Mett.*, 28.

<sup>170</sup> Wu 2018, 210-211.

<sup>171</sup> Rtveladze 2002, 139-142, Rapin 2013, 60.

the testimony provided by the *BDNA* and suggested in the previous chapter, this information becomes of paramount importance, since it allows to assume that the princess dwelled in the Surxondaryo as a hostage. If this on the one hand only showcases Chorienes' power, on the other hand it leaves open the possibility that the devastation of the territory around the fortress, which must have contributed to his eventual surrender, could have been the result of the combined planning of Alexander and some of Chorienes' peers following in the Makedonian retinue, who had everything to gain from a curtailment of the latter's influence.<sup>172</sup> This is the background against which Oxyartes' role ought to be investigated, for it seems to have been crucial in obtaining the relatively painless surrender of a stronghold which (as the sources attest) had abundant supplies - incidentally another sign of the site's function as a logistical-administrative center - such as to allow it to sustain a prolonged siege. It is also interesting to note that, unlike many of his colleagues, Chorienes was not executed, a possible outcome of the diplomatic action of an undoubtedly very influential individual such as Rōxanē's father. The latter's goal, it might be argued, must have been at least threefold: to protect his family members from the consequences of a conquest *manu militari* of the fortress by the Makedonians, to regain ground on Artabazos, who - following Alexander's orders - had ousted him from the upper echelons of the Baktrian hierarchy and, finally, to cut Chorienes down to size.<sup>173</sup> In other words, the case can be made for the Makedonian coming on the regional stage as having provided Oxyartes with the ideal opportunity to reshuffle the cards to his own advantage: in exchange for a peaceful surrender (and of the withdrawal of support from Spitamenes' side), Rōxanē's father - who notably was present on the scene while the stronghold was besieged - apparently eventually succeeded in securing Chorienes the preservation of his territory (or what was left of it) as well as a position, this time subordinate to him, within the (at the time in *statu nascendi*) cadres of the Alexandrian satrapy of Bactria-Sogdiana.<sup>174</sup> A second argument, which, although it is impossible to prove it directly, can nevertheless be assumed to have been used during the negotiations, might have been that Chorienes' turnabout would have been at least partly rewarded with shares coming from the possessions of other among Spitamenes' allies who had (or would have) been less accommodating towards the Makedonians. It should not be forgotten that, although they were all representatives of Achaemenid power within the imperial framework, each of these Central Asian notables was a competitor with the neighbors for territorial supremacy and for the exploitation of economic resources within the satrapy

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<sup>172</sup> Rapin 2017a, 99. Recently, archaeological investigation seems to have brought to light concrete evidence that could be related to Makedonian operations in the territories covered by the sources' accounts: Lindström 2009a, 246, Rapin 2013, 76, Sverčkov *et al.* 2013, 74 (but note Lyonnet and Fontugne 2021, Stančo 2021). If, as already assumed by Briant 1984, 85, in Bactria and Sogdiana almost every village (thus naturally including those making for the rural landscape of the fortresses besieged by the Makedonians) constituted a fiscal unit, it almost inevitably follows that the sacking of the region led to the ruin of the entire system of production and local government.

<sup>173</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 4.21.9-10, *ma* but see moreover the parallel example in Curt. 7.11.1.

<sup>174</sup> On the role played by Oxyartes at this junction see the remarks in Rapin 2018a, 289.

as well as for socio-political influence in the pastoral communities. Behind the foedus which, according at least to the authors of the *Vulgata* tradition, Alexander was able to stipulate with Choriēnes, it is therefore not to be ruled out that there might have been (also) this complex web of local relations (and rivalries) which, in the context of the disintegration of Achaemenid capacity to impose what Michael Mann calls despotic power (i. e. the monopoly of the legitimate use of force), came to the surface in all their centrifugal capacity.<sup>175</sup> As the attentive reader might already have guessed, the whole episode is of paramount importance because it shows in the clearest possible way that - as in the case of Bessos and to some extent even of Darius himself - the battle for the spoils of power in Achaemenid Central Asia cannot be reduced to a confrontation, military, symbolic, or otherwise between just two particularly prominent individuals (in this case Alexander and Spitamēnes). Equally decisive seem on the contrary to have been the relations within the subordinate ranks of the local élite, since the redefinition of these ranks (made possible by the military presence of the Makedonians on the satrapal territory) would have influenced in a very substantial way, perhaps even more than the conquerors themselves would have liked, the power balance of the satrapy and, to a certain extent, of the would-be Empire itself. From this it follows that, even for the preceding decades (at least in terms of method), only a multi-scalar perspective on socio-political relations active on the ground allows to fully understand the local effects of phenomena apparently involving only the top echelons of the imperial power apparatus and, conversely, the ability of local events to redefine the very structure of the Empire, both of the waning one, in fact tearing it apart, and of the one which was coming into being.<sup>176</sup> These are however issues to be addressed further below in this chapter: let us for now resume the thread of the Makedonian expedition.

The advance of the army proceeded in a Western direction. Later in the spring of 328 BCE, the Makedonians entered the valley of the Sherabāddaryo, and near Marginia, in the vicinity of the present-day village of Boysun, Alexander came across a series of fortified villages.<sup>177</sup> Clustered (notably, analogous to the settlement pattern found, inter alia, at Kyzyltēpe) around a larger site in accordance with the tried and tested Persepolitan model as it has recently been reconstructed by Gondet, they represented productive units for the agricultural exploitation of the oasis' territory, one of whose tasks was undoubtedly to supply raw materials - also, but not only, for fiscal purposes - to the seat of imperial administrative power in this sub-unit of the satrapy (known in the sources as

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<sup>175</sup> Curt. 8.2.32, *Epit. Mett.*, 19, 28. In the case of Choriēnes, Arrian speaks of πίστιν ἐς φιλίαν granted to the latter by Alexander (Arr. *Anab.*, 4.21.8). On despotic (as opposed to infrastructural) power see Mann 1984 and Ando 2017a.

<sup>176</sup> Hoo 2020, 560-562; forthcoming for a comparable «translocal» approach.

<sup>177</sup> Curt. 7.10.16. Cf. Rapin and Grenet 2001, 82, with the following philological hypothesis: Margiana < Margania < \*marga-aina-, meaning «field». It is worth noting in this context that the name of the modern O'zbek village of Margilan (Marghīnān), in the Farḡāne, probably comes from the same root: Cohen 2013, 248-250, Rapin 2013, 51.

Ox(e)iana).<sup>178</sup> To the North of Derbent, close to Mount Sarymas and guarding the strategic ford of the Machai Darya, one of the few access routes through the Hişār range to and from Sogdiana, the fortress of the ὕπαρχος Arimazes, one of the powerful and most resolute allies of Spitamenes, guarded the so-called «Iron Gates» (Temir qapïğ), near one of the main routes from Baktra to Nautaka, and from there to Marakanda itself.<sup>179</sup> Both the size of the fortress and its position at a key junction in the satrapy's road network help to better understand the social position of its owner.<sup>180</sup> The topography of the territory itself shows how the region was subdivided into an extremely complex system of micro-units (Stride's «territories»), each hinging on a valley and (or) on a hydrological system, according to a pattern which, although it undoubtedly exploited the geological conformation of the space (thus taking advantage of one of its affordances), must have been at least partly the result of strategic planning.<sup>181</sup> This is made plausible by the organization of the irrigation canals as reconstructed from archaeological surveys carried out both in the Surxondaryo and, since the mid-1970s, in plains of Āi Xānum and Arči, Southwest of the probable site of the Arimazes fortress in Afġān Baktria.<sup>182</sup> Since, in Martinez-Sève's words, it was necessary to coordinate efforts on a regional scale since canals covered long distances between different areas and challenging terrain, it is highly probable that, both in the Hellenistic period and earlier, projects of this kind were supervised by officials of a certain latitude within the (sub)regional satrapal administration. It is therefore very plausible that one of Arimazes' tasks was to organize the infrastructure necessary for the irrigation of the region he was responsible for.<sup>183</sup> This assumption draws strength from the model developed in numerous studies by Sebastian Stride, according to which the power and economic wealth of local notables were both a direct function of the control they were able to exert over such resources, as well as of their ability to regulate access to the valleys they controlled.<sup>184</sup> Moreover, a similar scenario helps to understand why the *ADAB* reveal the strong interest nurtured both by Aḥvamazdā and, more remarkably, by the closest members of the latter's relational networks (e. g. Bagavanta who, not being

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<sup>178</sup> Rapin 2013, 64-65.

<sup>179</sup> Rapin 2018a, 289, Wu 2018, 211, Stančo 2020, 254, who provides further bibliography (but cf. Stančo 2021 for a critical overview of Rapin's hypotheses). Arr. *Anab.*, 4.16.3 provides only indirect information about the fortress, while a much more detailed account can be found in Curt. 7.11.1-3.

<sup>180</sup> *Epit. Mett.*, 14-18 claims that the rock was as big as 20 (or even 30) stadia in diameter, which (notably) is to say no (much) less than the acropolis of Marakanda itself.

<sup>181</sup> Such a model of territorial exploitation (which also determined social ranking among both higher and lesser local élites) is supported by the comparative evidence coming from the Talgar fan in Qazaqstan: Chang 2018, 103-107.

<sup>182</sup> Cf. most recently Martinez-Sève 2020c, 230.

<sup>183</sup> Rapin 2013, 66-69; 2017a, 48 and Martinez-Sève 2020c, 230. It might be assumed, among other things, that the control he was able to claim over the ford of the Machai Darya translated into a considerable source of tax revenue for Arimazes: cf. in this regard Jursa and Moreno García 2015, 138 arguing that, at the time of Darius I, payment for the rights collected over the control of water resources in the territory of Babylon was due to the local landed aristocracy and not, as one might expect, to the crown (which by the way requires, as argued in chapter 2, a re-reading of Hdt. 3.117 from a radically different perspective than Briant's still very influential outlook).

<sup>184</sup> Stride 2007.

the satrap, had no institutional motives behind his actions) in the area under Arimazes' purview.<sup>185</sup> In other words, the possession of landed estates in these territories ought to be interpreted as a spatial surveillance device that enabled the satrap and some of the most influential members of the Baktrian élites to exert more effective control over the intermediate bodies in other areas of Northern Central Asia. The latter, for their part, are likely to have been recruited within the imperial administrative apparatus precisely because of the strategic position of the territories they controlled as local big men. These individuals made at the same time for an invaluable resource and a threat for the satraps and the King, and this because, while instrumental to the imperial goals of extraction and control, they pursued at the same time other agendas by taking advantage of the Empire's infrastructure. While impossible to dispose of, they were also very difficult to control. Following the disposal of Bessos and, shortly afterwards, the removal of individuals such as Oxyartes from their power positions in Baktria and neighboring territories - and thus of unwieldy internal competitors for control of natural resources beyond the territory of the Baktra oasis, Arimazes seems to have succeeded in expanding his sphere of influence Southwards, towards the Sherabāddaryo basin, becoming at this point a threat to the likes of Choriènes, with whom the former was now battling both for control of the region's water resources and - perhaps above all - for the ability of commanding the passes and transhumance routes that connected the Boysuntov range both with the rest of the Surxondaryo and, Northwards, with the Qashqadaryo (hence the interest in supporting Arimazes on the part of Spitamene's network).<sup>186</sup> This alliance also posed a significant threat to the Makedonians, since Arimazes, being able to seal the Derbent gorge, at least in theory held the main communication route between Baktria and Sogdiana, thus threatening to jeopardize the supply chain vital for the detachments left to guard Marakanda and the other Makedonian strongholds in Sogdiana. In order to curtail - if not utterly eliminate - this risk, Alexander's troops, at this stage joined by columns led by Koinos and Artabazos (whose involvement in the internal feuds of the Achaemenid magnates in Central Asia should never be underestimated) laid siege to the fortress in which Arimazes had entrenched himself, once more not before having systematically destroyed the surrounding settlements, in all likelihood with the intention of isolating the latter from his own clientele in Ox(e)iana, making it clear to those individuals that support for the hyparch would bring them nothing but inconveniences, if not worse.<sup>187</sup>

In this context, a piece of information preserved by Strabo is of great importance, for it might be deduced from it that the strategy described in the previous paragraph (which it is reasonable to assume had been at least tolerated, if not directly encouraged, by some of Arimazes' local rivals, starting from Choriènes, who already experienced the effectiveness of such methods) eventually paid off. In fact,

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<sup>185</sup> Cf. Naveh and Shaked 2012, 94 ff. A4 (= Khalili IA1) and Naveh and Shaked 2012, 112 ff. A6 (= Khalili IA 5).

<sup>186</sup> Rapin 2013, 68; 2018a, 290. See moreover Curt. 8.2.20-22.

<sup>187</sup> Curt. 7.11.1-29.

according to the *Geography*, the fortress was handed over to the Makedonians by means of treachery, which resulted in Arimazes' execution on the spot along with the closest men in his circle.<sup>188</sup> There are several factors that impose caution in dismissing out of hand the plausibility of the scenario outlined by Strabo, and the most decisive one is the consideration that, if it is true that the elimination of Arimazes was an absolute priority of Alexander's campaign against Spitamenes, no less interested in such an outcome must have been the likes of Chorienes who, once united - for love or force - with the Makedonians, had only to profit from the disappearance from the chessboard of a very dangerous internal rival.<sup>189</sup> To this we must add a second aspect that should not be overlooked, namely the direct involvement of Artabazos (the latter, it must be remembered, had been appointed as plenipotentiary in Baktria in the aftermath of Bessos' arrest and later execution) in the siege first and then in the negotiations for the surrender. Taking an active part in the liquidation of Arimazes, therefore, must have offered a golden opportunity also for some of the now former bandakā of the local satrap (above all Oxyartes and his acolytes), on the one hand, to make up for lost ground in the race to gain Alexander's favor; on the other, in order to limit the sphere of influence of the new satrap in a region whose strategic importance for the maintenance of the networks of socio-political dependence within a small circle of local strongmen was evident to each of the actors involved.<sup>190</sup> The whole story of the capture of the Arimazes' stronghold, therefore, provides another useful case study to show to what extent and according to what logic Alexander's invasion kick-started an enormous reshuffling of power relations within the circles of Central Asian élites, whose leading members were now intent on exploiting as much as possible the variable introduced by the military power of the Makedonian army with the intention of redefining by force the relationships of dependence structured during decades of Achaemenid rule.<sup>191</sup>

The death of both Arimazes and of those who were in the fortress at the time when it was stormed had, among other things, the result of depriving Spitamenes of an invaluable strategic ally, since the Makedonian control of Derbent at this point prevented him from taking the main route to Baktria, thus further reinforcing his isolation within the territory of Sogdiana North of the Hişār range.

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<sup>188</sup> Strab. 11.11.4. Compare *Epit. Mett.*, 18 and Curt. 7.11.26-28 with Vacante 2012, 108.

<sup>189</sup> Diod. Sic. 17 *Arg.*, 34 regarding Arimazes' involvement in the campaign against the Makedonians at Spitamenes' side.

<sup>190</sup> Curt. 7.11.5 claims that the role of intermediary in these enervating negotiations aimed at the surrender of Arimazes' fortress was carried out by Kophes, Artabazos' son. Assuming Strabo's reliability, it may be argued that one of the objectives behind the betrayal of the besieged was to deprive Kophes of his negotiating role, thus counteracting the cumbersome influence of his father. See moreover Heckel 2018, 106, who points out that Artabazos' networks laid much further to the West. Therefore, he was at the same time dependent on Alexander's backing for the establishment of his own power in Baktria and very much hated by the local magnates, who moreover had not forgotten that the Persian had sided with Darius back in 330 against Bessos.

<sup>191</sup> Cf. Naiden 2019, 197: a few months later, at the time of the Indian campaign, some of the potentates settled in the Pañjāb, from Taxilas to Poros, would have adopted a tactic in every way comparable to the one assumed here in the case of Chorienes and Oxyartes, namely that of using the presence of the Makedonian army to resolve internal disputes within their respective social contexts of reference. On Taxilas (Ταξιλης, while in Sanskrit he is known as Ambhi) and Poros (Πῶρος, in Sanskrit perhaps Paurava?) see Heckel 2006, Petrie and Magee 2007, 10-12 and Petrie 2020, 629-634.

Nevertheless, the Sogdian notable proved incredibly resilient, managing to regain the Zarafšān valley, the bastion of his power North of the Iron Gates. Once again resorting to the support of the Sakā cavalry (this time under the lead of Dataphernes, alongside Arimazes among Spitamenes' most powerful and effective lieutenants), as summer approached he was able to recruit a contingent strong enough to attack the Makedonian garrison posted at Xenippa, whose commander, Attinas, was taken by surprise by the maneuver and killed in battle.<sup>192</sup> In this context of sudden changes of front and general confusion, the fact that among the forces deployed by Spitamenes there were «disinherited Baktrians», if not a rhetorical device of our sources, could be an indication that, despite the Makedonian victories and the continuous defections that plagued the rebel front, the game could by no means be considered over, and that Alexander's supremacy still rested on rather precarious foundations.<sup>193</sup> The speed of Spitamene's actions prevented the Makedonian forces from organizing themselves quickly enough to intervene and capture the rebels. While Alexander remained in the Qashqadaryo flanked by Krateros, who had joined him from Marakanda, and in the meantime taking the opportunity to further spread panic in the local countryside by setting fire to numerous vici, Koinos and Artabazos tried, without success, to intercept Spitamenes on his way to Marakanda.<sup>194</sup> As for Hephaistion, his presence in Sogdiana was probably decisive in guaranteeing the support necessary to maintain Makedonian positions in the crucial nodes of the Zarafšān: according to Arrian, he was even given the task of providing partial repopulation of the area around Marakanda itself, which had been severely affected by raids (both by the invaders and by the Central Asians) during the clashes of the previous year.<sup>195</sup> Taking full advantage of Krateros' absence, Spitamenes managed, despite the manhunt launched by the Makedonians, to return to the Zarafšān valley and escape Hephaistion. After sacking Kōktēpe, which Alexander's lieutenants had evidently attempted to occupy, he again attempted to seize Marakanda. The results of the incursion were remarkable: the garrison was defeated, the commander in charge killed and the rebels captured a booty that sources claim to have been substantial.<sup>196</sup> Nevertheless, before managing to retreat to the oasis of Buxārā, out of Alexander's reach, the Sogdian troops were intercepted by Krateros, who had finally returned; a vicious clash ensued, which ended with Spitamenes escaping yet again, but in which many of his men, including a very large number of Sakā, lost their lives on the battlefield.<sup>197</sup> More serious still,

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<sup>192</sup> Curt. 8.1.3-6.

<sup>193</sup> Curt. 8.2.14-15, Rapin 2013, 52; 2018a, 290-291.

<sup>194</sup> On Alexander's campaign in the Qashqadaryo see Arr. *Anab.*, 4.16.3. The umpteenth Makedonian punitive expedition may have been at the origin of the subsequent mass defection that delivered the fatal blow to Spitamenes' authority within the insurgents' front. On Koinos and Artabazos see Curt. 7.11.29.

<sup>195</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 4.16.3-4.

<sup>196</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 4.17. Cf. Rapin 2018a, 269 for an overview of the archaeological evidence which can be related to some extent to the events described by the literary sources: Stančo 2021 for a critical evaluation of the same evidence.

<sup>197</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 4.17.1-2.

the defeat suffered deprived the rebels of an extremely important strategic base, in fact limiting the range of action of their most prominent leader only to Western Sogdiana, between the lower Zarafšān (indeed crucial as a direct access route both to the oasis of Buxārā and, from there, even further West towards the Chorasmian steppes) and the upper Qashqadaryo: in other words, making the Sogdian notable further dependent on socio-political circuits outside (and potentially in conflict with) his own.

The consequences of these events came quick. In particular, the squeezing of Spitamenes towards the West must have alarmed those members of the local élite who, up to that moment, had only benefited from their alliance with the powerful Achaemenid lieutenant (hence the logistical and military support granted to him in 329 at the time of the first Makedonian advance), but who now, worried at the idea of a possible Makedonian invasion of the territories West of the Zarafšān with the intention of finally capturing the fugitive rebel, began to test the water in search of an agreement with Alexander. Once again, domestic political qualms are likely to have played a role in this (re)positioning, and the results of the archaeological research carried in recent years in Chorasmia provide material of considerable relevance potentially capable of shedding some light, at least in part, on the local socio-political context and the internal dynamics of the power arena in Northwestern Bactria, thus contributing to the overall interpretation of the events under scrutiny here.<sup>198</sup> To mention but one striking example, the massively fortified landscape that the excavations brought to light in this region, for a long time closely linked to the main power center in Bactria, clearly shows that the political landscape of Chorasmia was fragmented into a dense nebula of local potentates, in all likelihood constantly competing with each other 1. for control of resources, from water to flocks, and 2. for the favors of the representatives of the imperial power firmly installed in the (South) East.<sup>199</sup>

For almost two and a half centuries, the Achaemenids had in fact been the only interlocutors for both these Chorasmian aristocrats and other very important local actors, usually identified in the Sakā communities that in classical sources go by the name of Massagetae or Dahai. Alexander's arrival, however, similarly to what happened in Bactria, offered an unprecedented opportunity to those who - for various reasons - had remained (or had been pushed) on the margins of the circuits built by the Persians, both to reduce the influence in their own internal affairs of a mediator as valuable (and cumbersome) as Spitamenes surely was (whose familiarity with Chorasmia's geopolitics is moreover made very likely, if not proven, by the strategic role he attributed to the territory of Buxārā) and, a fact of no small importance, to reshape to their own advantage the internal hierarchies of the local aristocracy itself. In the light of this picture, it cannot be ruled out that the one Pharasmanes mentioned in historiographical sources as the «king [in the singular] of the Chorasmians» was in fact none other

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<sup>198</sup> Minardi 2015a, 39-41. Compare the older, but still compelling David 1976, 134.

<sup>199</sup> Cf. especially Negus-Cleary 2015a; 2015b; 2017; 2018.



than one of the many big men settled between the Qaraqum and the Üstÿrt Plateau (think of the owners of the precious tableware found at Isakovka) who, well aware of the local repercussions of a global event such as the dissolution of Achaemenid authority in Central Asia, were busily searching for a new interlocutor able to provide them with better guarantees than Spitamenes; alternatively, Pharasmanes may even have been one of the rivals of Spitamenes' clientele, who saw in Alexander a valuable ally to expand his own sphere of influence to the detriment of his competitors (the Chorasmian *bandakā* of Spitamenes).<sup>200</sup> The episode involving Pharasmanes - little more, and indeed something less, than a footnote in the account of classical historians - is nevertheless symptomatic 1. of the extent of the influence of the most prominent members of the Achaemenid governing apparatus in Bactria and Sogdiana as well as (and consequently) 2. of the extremely wide-ranging impact on the geopolitical balances of the whole of Central Asia of Alexander's campaign North of the Hindüküş. In fact, the disempowerment (when not the physical elimination) of the most important representatives of the Achaemenid *herrschende Gesellschaft* that had been formed - at least - in the course of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE seems to have triggered, judging from the available evidence, a veritable chain reaction with unforeseen and unpredictable results for the new conquerors themselves. This seems particularly true if we shift our attention from the top of the hierarchy (Bessos, Spitamenes) to the lower levels along the scale of what King has called «the aristocratic network», since it is precisely on these figures (Arimazes, Bagavanta, Oxyartes himself), as well as on their networks of solidarity, that the efficiency of imperial control over the resources and population of the Central Asian territories ultimately depended. The removal – and/or the assassination - of the individuals in charge of guaranteeing the functioning of the Achaemenid extraction and control apparatus on the ground, to which one must add the length of the campaign itself, with the partly outlined consequences on the local economic system (and therefore on the social base of those individuals) had the effect, already suggested by Sebastian Stride, of transforming the symbiotic relationship - whether forced or not - 1. between the representatives of imperial power and those of the local élites, and 2. between the members of these élites themselves, into a ruthless conflict, the rules thereof were now dictated exclusively by the protection of their respective interests (and those of each «selectorate» ).<sup>201</sup>

Against the backdrop of these considerations, it is therefore unavoidable trying to understand the political career of both Bessos and Spitamenes not only in the light of the - albeit fundamental -

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<sup>200</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 4.15.1-5, Curt. 8.1.7-10. On the populations settled in this area, see Leriche 1985, 67. According to Strootman 2020a; 2020b, the Chorasmian aristocrat would have offered his services to Alexander with the explicit intention of being recognized as an «autonomous vassal», probably the status that, for reasons unknown to us, he had been denied by the Persian administration (in all likelihood to the advantage of an internal competitor): cf. Heckel 2006, 206. On Pharasmanes' relationship with both Bessos and Spitamenes note Minardi 2018, 93.

<sup>201</sup> Stride 2005 I, 439. See more recently the remarks in Widmer 2015, 41.

Achaemenid context, but also in the light of the socio-political dynamics specific to the Central Asian environment in which they were entangled as well as taking stock of the tensions existing within the «aristocratic network» which Persian power, faced with the crisis caused by the Makedonian invasion, was no longer able to control.<sup>202</sup> While it is in fact undoubtedly true that the control exercised by the Achaemenids over the satrapies of Baktria and Sogdiana rested in no small measure on a methodical process of what authoritative scholars have called the «institutionalization» of the (both physical and anthropic) landscape of contemporary Central Asia, it is equally true, however, that this process depended to a non-negligible extent on the active participation (the «man who cooperates» celebrated at Naqš -i Rostam) of local powers, whose capacity for influence appears to the historian in its full extent only at the moment when the Makedonian presence offered some of these individuals an alternative to the patterns of power management adopted until then: an opportunity that they were able (and some of them very much willing) to seize, thus decisively contributing – accounting for their respective socio-political agendas - to the transition from one imperial order to another.<sup>203</sup> Almost needless to say, the first step along this rugged and treacherous path was at this point the removal of Spitamenes, as subsequent events would have proved.

Following Krateros' success, Alexander gathered the Makedonian troops now scattered throughout Sogdiana with the specific intention of launching a massive attack against Spitamenes' positions in the Qashqadaryo.<sup>204</sup> The invasion of the valley posed an enormous danger to the latter, since it would undoubtedly have entailed the – for the war effort untenable - desertion of the Sakā: for this reason Spitamenes tried to act in advance, aiming at storming the Makedonian garrison stationed at Xenippa (most likely the Achaemenid Nīḥšapāia recorded in the *ADAB*).<sup>205</sup> The attack must have been carefully calculated, as shown by the decision to strike just before the onset of winter's rigors, with the (not even too much concealed) intention of making the most of the logistical difficulties involved in sending reinforcement troops through the region in such a climatic context. From this viewpoint, incidentally, the presence among the Sogdian forces of «exiles» from Baktria is quite remarkable, for it would suggest that, even at this chronological level, in the satrapal main seat itself the situation was far from peaceful, as contrarily claimed by the sources: the opening of an umpteenth front would have led to a further fragmentation of the Makedonian offensive potential, the only real possibility of

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<sup>202</sup> Petrie 2020 for a similar suggestion concerning Eastern Arachosia and Achaemenid-ruled India (Coloru 2021).

<sup>203</sup> See Wu 2018, 210-212; 2020, 604-608 on the process she refers to as the «institutionalization» of the economic and sociopolitical landscape of Baktria as well as Henkelman 2017a, 67 for the most coherent definition of this phenomenon, which he traces to the systematic application of a method of land governance across the entire extent of the Empire. Much instructive in this respect are the events in Asia Minor (Degen 2022, 224): for many πόλεις, Achaemenid authority, which we are thus allowed to understand was anything but waning in the region, still offered a better alternative than whatever Alexander had to offer. This must have been the case also in Central Asia until Bessos proved unable to back the interests of his selectorate.

<sup>204</sup> *Epit. Mett.*, 19, Curt. 8.2.14.

<sup>205</sup> Curt. 8.2.18.

success for the rebels, as the ambushes of the previous year had abundantly demonstrated.<sup>206</sup> As further proof of the capabilities and means at Spitamenes' disposal, the attack was at first successful, the latter made evident by the death on the field of the *φρούραρχος* appointed by Alexander to guard Xenippa, a Makedonian named Attinas; however, the Sogdian's plans were thwarted by two concomitant events, which proved decisive in sanctioning his definitive defeat.<sup>207</sup> On the one hand, the arrival from Nautaka of troops under Hephaistion's leadership gave Alexander an overwhelming military superiority, which enabled him to launch a powerful counter-attack, as a result of which a very large number of Sakā horsemen were slaughtered. This ought to be considered a crucial turning point in the frameworks of the events. The prisoners were spared, a striking reversal of the policy adopted in the case of Arimazes and a possible sign that, perhaps also thanks to the advice of - anything but disinterested - «local (would be imperial) collaborators» (possibly even the same ones who had taken action at the time of negotiating Choriene's capitulation), the Makedonians were indeed learning the language of Central Asian diplomacy.<sup>208</sup> On the other hand, and probably as a consequence of these same diplomatic movements, shortly after the attack launched by Spitamenes' forces on Xenippa, another of his prominent allies, Sisimithres, defected to Alexander, who was returning to Nautaka at the time.<sup>209</sup> Yet another big man settled near the strategic passes guarding Derbent, Sisimithres had fled a few months earlier, at the time of the siege launched by the Makedonians against the positions of Arimazes, when the territory of Ox(e)iana - a portion of which he controlled - had been sacked by the expeditions of Alexander's soldiers, and he had taken refuge near Akrobat, on a hill identified by recent archaeological prospecting as the peak of Kapkagly-auzy.<sup>210</sup> Not unlike Arimazes himself, Sisimithres (whose relationship with the former is unfortunately obscure) was a formidable obstacle to communication between Baktria and Sogdiana -

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<sup>206</sup> In fact, at this chronological height, Baktria must have been less heavily guarded than before, since, on the one hand, Artabazos - who had followed the Makedonian troops into Sogdiana, no doubt with a large contingent of men - had stepped aside in the autumn, and on the other, Kleitos, who had been appointed Alexander's plenipotentiary in his place and who, according to at least to our narrative sources, had also been engaged in the manhunt against Spitamenes, had been assassinated by Alexander himself during the inauspicious banquet held at Marakanda (Curt. 8.1.19). To this must be added the not trivial information (Arr. *Anab.*, 4.17.3, Curt. 8.2.14, *Itin. Alex.*, [54] 103) that the new in pectore satrap, i. e. Amyntas, son of Nikolaos, had not yet reached the destination of his new post. A certain interest - and to a not lesser extent, reason for suspicion - is aroused by the sources' explanation (and usually (too) readily accepted by critics) for Artabazos' renunciation of his post (i. e. old age, «nonsense» according to Heckel 2018, 94). As mentioned above, it cannot be ruled out that he indeed fell victim to the plots of individuals such as Oxyartes (among whom he was undoubtedly very much disliked), the effects of which were seen at the time of the failed negotiations for a peaceful surrender of Arimazes' fortress (lead, remarkably, by Artabazos' son). Moreover, that even in 328 there was still tension within the powerholders assembled at Baktra is evident from the flight of the «exiles» who joined Spitamenes at Xenippa (Curt. 8.2.15-16). Kleitos' murder must have further exacerbated the crisis, causing Artabazos' (forced?) resignation.

<sup>207</sup> Attinas' family background is unknown (Heckel 2006, 64). He attempted to confront Spitamenes at the head of 300 horsemen, but he too was ambushed in the vicinity of Xenippa and the reinforcements sent by Alexander did not arrive in time to prevent the massacre: Arr. *Anab.*, 4.16.4-5 and Curt. 8.1.3-5.

<sup>208</sup> Curt. 8.2.11-14: cf. Rapin 2018a, 291.

<sup>209</sup> *Epit. Mett.*, 19.

<sup>210</sup> Rapin 2013, 72-73, Curt. 8.2.19-33.

and therefore a most valuable ally for Spitamenes -, since its strongholds regulated the passage through an important route linking the Surxondaryo (and thus Baktria) with the most important centers North of the Iron Gates, from Xenippa (where Spitamenes, despite repeated defeats, was still powerful) and Nautaka. This makes clear both the reasons for Sisimithres' position within the Achaemenid cadres in the region and the Makedonians' compulsion to seize strongholds under his authority.<sup>211</sup> The conquest of the πέτρα by a battalion of assault climbers is perhaps one of the most famous episodes of Alexander's entire anabasis and has been repeatedly celebrated, by both ancients and moderns, as a shining example of the invaders' military supremacy and in particular of Alexander's tactical genius.<sup>212</sup> However, the fact that the ubiquitous Oxyartes also took part in the negotiations in this case strongly suggests that, as with Chorienes sometime earlier, the long wave of the processes of rearrangement of the hierarchies within the local élite played a no less decisive, perhaps even preponderant, role in enabling Alexander not only to seize the stronghold, but also, most importantly, in securing for him a new ally, namely the hyparch itself.<sup>213</sup> Once Arimazes had been disposed of (from which it can be deduced that, of the three, he was the most prominent individual), both Chorienes and Sisimithres now found themselves in a position to expand their dominions along the Southern slopes of the Hişār range, sharing the spoils of their superior - and in all probability rival - in the Sherabād and Surxondaryo basins.<sup>214</sup> As a result of these developments, Spitamene and the now (alarmingly thinned) ranks of his allies (after Sisimithres' surrender restricted only to Dataphernes and a few - increasingly unruly, not least because of the exorbitant losses suffered - Sakā notables) found themselves squeezed between the Qashqarayo and the steppes bordering the Buxārā oasis. Having managed to evade Alexander's men once more after the failed attempt to overthrow the Makedonian garrison at Xenippa, Spitamenes fell back to the Zarafšān valley at the turn of the year: here he was still able (perhaps thanks to the networks controlled by Dataphernes through the Qaraqum), to gather yet another contingent of Sakā and, at its head, launched a further attack against the Makedonian positions, in all probability near Kōktēpe (already an Achaemenid stronghold and evidently a center of crucial importance in the eyes of Spitamenes), with the intention, from there, of aiming again at Marakanda.<sup>215</sup> However, the defeat suffered at the hands of Koinos' troops proved to

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<sup>211</sup> Rapin 2013, 71; 2018a, 292.

<sup>212</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 4.18.4 ff., Curt. 8.2.20, *Epit. Mett.*, 15-18.

<sup>213</sup> See the discussion in Vacante 2012, 114: this is in all probability the context behind the fleeting reference to the «amity» (amicitia) reported in Curt. 8.2.32 and *Mett. Epit.*, 28, but see also Arr. *Anab.*, 4.21.6-8). Degen 2022, 402-408 points out that it was Alexander's success in dealing with the local strongmen much more than military success what eventually secured him the Empire.

<sup>214</sup> It cannot be excluded that the mention made by Curt. 7.11.29 to «slaves» taken from the fortress of Arimazes (among whom there may have been also some members of the families of other notables, his opponents and/or bandakā?) and handed over as war booty to the conquerors may allude to precisely this process, from which - it has been argued - not only the Makedonians, but also the former allies (and rivals) of Arimazes (who may for example have regained possession of the hostages they had to hand over to him) considerably benefited. Cf. Olbrycht 2011, 29.

<sup>215</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 4.17.4-7.

be fatal: at first, Spitamenes retreated Westwards, following the course of the Zarafšān towards the oasis of Buxārā, according to a well-worn pattern that had already borne fruit on numerous occasions. When he arrived there, however, he was betrayed by the Massagetae, who more than others had suffered from the repeated clashes with the Makedonians over the previous months. It is to be believed that, faced with the capture of Nautaka, these people (meaning: their main representatives) feared the massive penetration of Alexander and his troops further to the West, the consequences of which they had already experienced since the appearance of the Makedonian troops along the course of the Syrdaryo.<sup>216</sup> Equally alarmed at the approach of Alexander, the Dahai broke the hesitations and also handed over Dataphernes to the Makedonians.<sup>217</sup> The fall, and subsequent execution, of the two powerful notables not only sealed the de facto end of Alexander's campaign in Baktria and Sogdiana: more significantly, this episode sanctioned in a very emblematic manner the disintegration of the network of alliances and dependencies that the Achaemenids had patiently woven over the course of almost 230 years of application of the imperial paradigm across the whole of Northern Central Asia.

#### 2.4. 327 BCE: «I pochi che hanno una donna e qualcosa». Alexander and Rōxanē

After wintering at Nautaka, Alexander returned to Baktria in March 327 BCE. In the preceding months he probably discussed the reorganization of the conquered territories with his new allies: in return for their surrender, both Sisimithres and Chorienes are likely to have obtained permission to expand their respective domains in the direction of the much sought-after Eastern Baktria, more precisely in the area of today's Kafirnihan (ancient Bubakene?).<sup>218</sup> How crucial it was to have secured the alliance of these individuals - the direct result, as argued, of Oxyartes' activism - proved (literally) vital when, having left the Qashqadaryo valley, the Makedonian army ran into a blizzard which, if

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<sup>216</sup> It will have been noted that, in this case, we are faced with the same pattern as in the case of Pharasmanes: Arr. *Anab.*, 4.15.4-5, Curt. 8.1.8.

<sup>217</sup> Curt. 8.3.16 and *Epit. Mett.*, 23 refer to the capture of Dataphernes, while for that of Spitamenes see Arr. *Anab.*, 4.17.7, Curt. 8.3.1-16 and *Epit. Mett.*, 20-23. Apart from the openly moralizing (and no less veiledly misogynistic) tones that innervate the account of the *Historia Alexandri*, Curtius' testimony regarding the involvement of Spitamenes' wife in the latter's murder is interesting for several reasons. Firstly, it shows both the social status and the agency of a woman belonging to the highest levels of both the local aristocracy and, as a result, the Achaemenid satrapal leadership, as is evident from the fact that she was able to conduct diplomatic negotiations on an equal footing with Alexander's men. Secondly, it cannot be ruled out that Spitamenes' influence within Massagetic territory was in some way linked to this woman, who may herself have come from these networks. Despite Heckel 2006, 275, such a hypothesis is not at all excluded by the simple fact that *Epit. Mett.*, 20 calls her a Baktrian, and this because, as repeatedly observed, Sakā groups represented a far from insignificant portion of the satrapy's population. If one moreover thinks at the reasons which might have stirred Darius I to marry Irdabama (and/or the other way round Henkelman 2018b, 810-811), it is perhaps possible to argue that this woman was trying to defend her (and her family?) interest from the consequence of a possible Makedonian invasion of Sakā territory to the Northwest of Baktria.

<sup>218</sup> Rapin 2017a, 102; 2018a, 293.

we are to believe the sources, caused heavy losses and supply shortages.<sup>219</sup> The approximately 2000 camels (to which other beasts of burden must be added in an unspecified number) sent with abundant provisions from Sisimithres - a concrete indication of the logistical capabilities of the Baktrian aristocracy even after the two-year military campaign - avoided the worst.<sup>220</sup> Alexander repaid his debt by sacking, again, Sakā territory South of the Hiṣār, once under Arimazes' sphere of influence: the booty of more than 30000 sheep sent to Nautaka was a sign of the new geopolitical order following the decline of Achaemenid hegemony.<sup>221</sup> The culmination of the process of (re)building of the new satrapal cadres was the spectacular collective marriage between the elders of the Makedonian army and the daughters of the survivors of the former Achaemenid élite in Central Asia, which was probably celebrated in one of the residences of Chorienes that had escaped (unlike their respective suburbs) the Makedonian raids during the early months of 328 BCE.<sup>222</sup> Of all the bandakā once around Bessos and Spitamenes, the one who benefited most from the campaign's outcome was undoubtedly Oxyartes. At first cornered by the appointment of Artabazos as satrap in Baktria, he had nevertheless managed to make the best possible use of the resources at his disposal during the most critical phase of the confrontation with Spitamenes, taking full advantage of the divisions within his opponents' front (and perhaps even contributing to exacerbating them); thus proving instrumental in securing the Makedonians' eventual victory.<sup>223</sup> Against such a background, the marriage of his daughter (the famous Rōxanē) with Alexander must be interpreted as the final act of a long and very astute diplomatic operation: having become the son-in-law of the new lord of Asia, Oxyartes was thus able to secure a position of absolute pre-eminence not only with regards to the other Irānian notables, but also faced against the Makedonians who in not a few cases were flanking the survivors at the top positions of the satrapal government.<sup>224</sup> In Arrian's words, one could therefore say that the father of

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<sup>219</sup> Curt. 8.4.1-18, Diod. Sic. 17.38: according to Naiden 2019, 173, the cause of the mishap was the unfamiliarity of the Makedonians with the local climatic conditions. There is of course the possibility of our sources lionizing Alexander's bravery (compare Curt. 7.3.5-12). However, the whole episode can be read as a testimony 1. of the locals' mētīc skills and 2. of the vital role of the Achaemenid infrastructural system all over the satrapy: Henkelman forthcoming.

<sup>220</sup> Curt. 8.4.19. The episode shows once more the level of territorial control that the Achaemenid administration had managed to achieve, as well as the systemic nature of the satrapy's infrastructural apparatus (even in the undoubtedly less-than-optimal state in which it might have been after the campaign), which nevertheless relied on the logistical skills and territorial knowledge of the local notables (as well as on the resources they were able to mobilize), on whom the safe transit through the various regions of Central Asia depended: see Wu 2017, 266-269; 2018, 208-209.

<sup>221</sup> Curt. 8.4.19-20.

<sup>222</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 4.21.10, Rapin 2013, 79. Rtveladze 2002, 133 and Sverčkov *et al* 2013, 74 recognized in Chorienes' rock the citadel of Kyzyltēpe. See most recently Wu *et al.* 2017, 310-315; 2018, 191-204; 2020, 606-608.

<sup>223</sup> Müller 2013, 293.

<sup>224</sup> There are several accounts of Rōxanē's marriage: Arr. *Anab.*, 4.18.4 ff., Curt. 8.4.21, *Epit. Mett.*, 29-31, Plut. *Vit. Alex.*, 47.7. According to Panitschek 2016, 223, Alexander concluded that Baktria needed special attention from those who aspired to present themselves as the legitimate rulers of the Empire. This is a hypothesis that is impossible to prove; however, the potential of the princess in terms of the ideological construction of a royal imaginary is at least suggested by her name: *FGrHist* 688 F 13 (14) = Fr 13 Lenfant, *FGrHist* 688 F 15 (54) = Fr 15b Lenfant, *FGrHist* 688 F 15 A55 = Fr 15 Lenfant, *Suid.* ed. Adler, 1938. s. v. Ἀλέξανδρος. See also Beckwith 2009, 145 fn. 18 and Schmitt 2011, 313 ff. for possible etymologies. Perhaps more interesting is Heckel's remark (2018, 106) that Alexander might have realized that

Rōxanē succeeded in replacing Bessos by becoming the οἰκειότης of the (new) Great King.<sup>225</sup> After the celebrations came to an end, Alexander again divided his troops into three columns.<sup>226</sup> While he, in the company of his new bride, followed the course of the Surxondaryo to its confluence with the Amudaryo, near the Achaemenid fort of ancient Termiz, troops under the command of Krateros and Polyperkhon were left behind to liquidate the last pockets of resistance in Southeastern Sogdiana.<sup>227</sup> Once again the sources are of little to no help in shedding light on the internal dynamics of the surviving Baktrian élite, but it is to be believed that the most prominent individuals, starting with Choriēnes (now taking advantage of the symbolic capital acquired by hosting the wedding celebrations), took an active part in the operations, since gaining control of this area would have made it possible for him to make up, at least in part, for the losses suffered during the prolonged Makedonian stay in the valley. In addition, once the field had been cleared of Austanes and Catanes, courtesy of the Makedonian intervention Choriēnes remained the only ὑπαρχος in the whole of the Surxondaryo.<sup>228</sup>

Finally, in the spring of 327 BCE, Alexander left Central Asia never to come back. Following more or less the same route he had taken in the winter of three years before, he crossed the Hindūkūš at Surḥ Kotal, then continued Eastwards to Bagrām (perhaps on the occasion renamed Alexandria in the Caucasus) and finally turned West along the course of the Kābul river to Ğalāl Ābād (Nagara).<sup>229</sup> Early in the autumn, the Makedonians reached the territories that, in the Achaemenid organization of the Indo-Irānian borderlands, perhaps marked the frontier zone between the Central Asian satrapies and those of the subcontinent, to be located according to recent estimates approximately 80 km East of today's Afġān capital Kābul.<sup>230</sup> It is worth noting that the irenic picture of a complete and secure

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he needed men with regional connections in order to rule the satrapy and the population settled there and in the territories across.

<sup>225</sup> Rōxanē's far from subordinate role at Alexander's court is made clear by the fact that she immediately became pregnant (Curt. 10.3.11, *Epit. Mett.*, 70). Despite the hardships of the journey, moreover, she is said to have followed Alexander throughout the entire Indian campaign and even during the return journey to Babylon. See Holt 1988b and Heckel 2006, 242. After two years of no-holds-barred struggle, it thus seems that Alexander had to resort heavily to Achaemenid precedents to gain the support of at least one faction within the composite world of the Central Asian élite: Briant 1978, 73 ff., Bosworth 1981, 11, Jacobs 2017a, 34-35. Sisti and Zambrini 2004, 540 have argued that Oxyartes' appointment as praetor Bactrianorum (cf. Curt. 9.8.9-10, Arr. *Anab.*, 4.22.5 and Arr. *Anab.* 5.20.7) might suggest that Alexander had granted his father-in-law an *ad hoc* title, which to some extent made him independent of the new satrap of Bactria (if true, this was much likely to stir conflict in the long run, as it eventually turned out to be the case).

<sup>226</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 4.22.1-2, Curt. 8.5.2.

<sup>227</sup> According to Sisti and Zambrini 2004, 423-433, the stage of the events should be located on the right bank of the Oxus, in the mountainous region of Kūh -i Nor, «where today's route connecting Dušanbe with Bal'žhuan crosses the river». For other possible identifications of the wedding palace see Vacante 2012, 117 and Rapin 2018a, 293-294.

<sup>228</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 4.22.1, Curt. 8.5.2, *Epit. Mett.*, 23. Cf. Heckel 2006, 81-82. The fact that Metz *Epitome* (a far from secondary source, as Rapin's studies have convincingly shown) claims that Catanes was handed over to his rivals by a group of *Sakā* settled in the territory [!] graphically illustrates to what extent the Makedonian campaign had broken down local solidarities among the Central Asian élites.

<sup>229</sup> This might have been the route described by Strab. 15.1.26, through Bactria and the Kophen (the Kābul river) and from there towards India: cf. *Epit. Mett.*, 32 as well as Arr. *Anab.*, 4.22.4.

<sup>230</sup> Rapin - Grenet 2018, 156-161 and Stoneman 2019, 42-45, to be compared with Strab. 15.2.8.

pacification of Baktria and Sogdiana following the assassination of Spitamenes that occupies so much space in the narrative of the sources is mitigated at least in part by the large contingent that Alexander left to guard the territories North of the Hindūkūš. It seems that, from the point of view of sociopolitical chemistries, not even Rōxanē constituted in Alexander's eyes a sufficient guarantee of the Baktrian élites' domestication, and it is perhaps even conceivable that he sensed the danger to internal stability inherent in the inevitable concessions he made to his bride's father.<sup>231</sup> Thus, we are taken back to the image, no less reassuring in the apparent immutability of bureaucratic (infra)structures and personnel, conveyed by *ADAB C4*. In the light of the above discussion, it should have become clear why skepticism is justified in taking both accounts (the one provided by the literary sources and the one suggested by the parchment) at face value. Certainly, as many scholars have pointed out, there is no doubt that the document testifies to the fact that, still years after Alexander's departure, in Baktria (but where exactly in the satrapy?) there was still an archive managed by officers in charge of maintaining a system of government similar to that set up by the Achaemenids in more than two centuries of stubborn application – and arguably expansion, trying for example to integrate the oases' borderlands - of the imperial paradigm. However, to conclude from this testimony that the entire mechanism of extraction and control implied by the parchment existence had remained intact throughout its entire chain and in every corner of the Central Asian territories dependent on Baktra seems at least risky, and in the light of the archaeological evidence perhaps even unwarranted.<sup>232</sup> If in fact, for the reasons given both in this and the previous chapters, it cannot be seriously doubted that, by removing some of the key men (and their respective clientele) of the Persian administration in Central Asia, Alexander disrupted to a degree perhaps only comparable to the civil war of 522 BCE the regional structures of socio-political and economic management across the satrapal territory, trying to understand how he proceeded to reorganize it is a much more complex undertaking than the use of a (hermeneutically rather empty) concept such as that of «continuity» suggests at first glance.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 4.22.3 (who speaks of 13500 men, 1000 infantry and the rest cavalry - leading to the assumption that a considerable number of Irānians, perhaps from other satrapies, were present in Baktria at the time), Curt. 9.7.1-11, Diod. Sic. 17.99.5-6. The 3000 or so soldiers mentioned by Diodoros Siculus rebelled as soon as they heard the (false) news of Alexander's death in India in 325 BC: cf. Bernard 1985, 30 and Widmer 2015, 52. According to Naiden 2019, 170, the total number of troops stationed in Baktria could easily have reached 23000, a view also shared by Burstein 2012, 98, who estimates that «more than 20000» troops remained in Baktria on Alexander's orders. Despite Holt 1988a, 81, these are considerable figures (Martinez-Sève 2020b, 86), all the more so if one considers that the pool of newcomers included other social categories and interest groups, not only internal to the Graeco-Makedonian world: cf. Widmer 2015, 57.

<sup>232</sup> The parchment mentions very few centers (Airavant, twice at l. 3 and 6, Amainakana at l. 6, Varaina at l. 35 and Zartani at l. 22). Of these only one can be identified with a center of some importance (moreover not in Baktria, which raises more than a few questions about the actual territorial coverage of the archive, since it is reasonable to assume that we are dealing with a place in Ustrūšana, known in later times as Mīnak: Naveh and Shaked 2012, 208). It goes without saying that such a small sample makes it very difficult to speculate about the state of the art in other regions of the satrapy.

<sup>233</sup> According to Kuhrt - Sherwin-White 1993, 9, Alexander left no administrative center worth of this name in Central Asia. This view has recently been taken up by Naiden 2019, 224, who argued that throughout the entire imperial East, centuries-old satrapal boundaries made way for «zones of occupation». This means that, at best, the new administrators of post-Achaemenid Central Asia found themselves entirely dependent on the governing apparatus of their predecessors,



Hence the need to deepen the analysis of the impact of Alexander's conquest on the (institutional and anthropic) space of Bactria – an undertaking which shall be attempted in the next section: it is in fact an essential step in order to properly understand the full extent of the challenges that Alexander's successors in Central Asia had to face when they claimed the conqueror's legacy both in the West and across the Easternmost offshoots of the territory that the Makedonian, in perfect Achaemenid style, had claimed to have conquered by means of his spear.<sup>234</sup>

### 3. «Quando il sole alzò la testa fra le spalle della notte»: *After Alexander*

It has been argued several times in the course of this work, and the preceding pages have attempted to substantiate such a claim as coherently as possible, that Alexander's campaign in Central Asia ought to be considered as a watershed in the history of the entire Achaemenid East, and not only in that of Bactria. In spite of the - crucial - role played by this satrapy and its main seat, especially at the time of Bessos' capture in 329 BCE (as well as later during the campaign – e. g. in 327), the rise of Makedonian power, which means, first of all, the dismantling of the previous government apparatus, had repercussions, directly or indirectly, not only on the entire territory of what Bruno Jacobs has called the Großsatrapie (thus including at least Sogdiana and the Paropamisadae), but also on those regions indirectly controlled from and through Baktra (such as Chorasmia and Ustrūšana), whose ruling class depended for the maintenance of its hegemony within the (far from conflict-free) local communities on complex networks of alliance with, patronage from, and dependence on the Baktrian satrap.<sup>235</sup> In the course of the two years of the campaign, the very sophisticated (but equally fragile) system of territorial control built up over time by the Persian administration, which was based on the integration of the properties and estates of the regional strongmen (as well as of those of their respective clientele) within a structure that was both hierarchical and incredibly flexible, was overturned, in some (not a few) cases permanently.<sup>236</sup> Particularly fraught with consequences was the physical liquidation of a far from negligible number of the most influential governors in the territory of the two satrapies which were crucial for the control of the territories North of the Hindūkūš, namely Bactria and Sogdiana. In fact, it caused a gigantic power vacuum that the reorganization of the conquered territories, hastily planned in the context of a geopolitical situation that was still rather unstable during the late winter of 328-327 BCE, was only able to fill in part and, moreover, in a rather

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or at least of what was left of it (but see, critically, Briant 2017a). Following Degen 2022, 243-249, it can be argued that, indeed Alexander pursued his own strategy of Empire building, but his untimely death prevented him from addressing as he likely wanted the issues he left behind in Central Asia.

<sup>234</sup> On the Achaemenid (and more broadly speaking near Eastern) antecedents of the τόπος of the «spear-won land» see Degen 2019. On Alexander *At World's End* see Rollinger and Degen 2021a, Degen 2022, 332-379.

<sup>235</sup> Rapin 2018a, 204.

<sup>236</sup> Jacobs 1994, 206 ff.; 2006.

superficial way.<sup>237</sup> Paradoxically, the reason for all this lies precisely in the systemic nature of the administrative and geopolitical (and social) networks of extraction and control built by the Persians during their imperial trajectory in Central Asia, which had contributed in no small measure, as thoroughly demonstrated by Wouter Henkelman, to ensuring the stability (and efficiency) of those very networks over time.<sup>238</sup> In fact, the greatest strength of the imperial paradigm can be identified in the very close - arguably mutual - dependence between, on the one hand, the directives and models of territorial management coming from the major administrative centers (originally conceived and developed at Persepolis) and, on the other hand, the ability of the local powerbrokers to apply these principles at the level of (micro)territorial units of the territories over which they claim to rule.<sup>239</sup> In contrast to this picture, the most profoundly transformative aspect of the Makedonian invasion must probably be recognized in the fact that it not only wiped out of the scene most of the local cadres (or at least a considerable number of the most powerful – which means best connected – ones), thereby severing a fundamental node along the chain of transmission between the satrapal imperial foundations (above all Baktra) and the borderlands, especially, but not only, in Sogdiana; even more importantly, it affected in a sometimes irreversible manner the internal balances driving the ecosystem of socio-political and economic relations within the different ecological spheres that made for a distinctive aspect of the organization and management of the Central Asian territories at the time of Achaemenid hegemony. This double attack prevented the system (at least in the forms it had taken under the Persians) from developing timely countermeasures which might have been efficient enough to ensure its survival, ultimately causing its dissolution.<sup>240</sup> Once they had become masters of this space, Seleukos and his heirs would have been faced with the (daunting) task of rebuilding this infrastructure from scratch, but the radically changed circumstances in which they had to act forced them to undertake this enterprise according to mechanisms that, for the most part, would have been significantly different. Hence the radical break in the history of ancient Central Asia represented by the long interlude between the assassination of Darius III and the (retrospective) proclamation of the beginning of a new history, or from history anew: the year 1 of the Seleukid era.<sup>241</sup>

### 3.1. Baktria of a thousand cities?

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<sup>237</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 4.18.1-2, Curt. 8.3.17.

<sup>238</sup> Henkelman 2017a, 78.

<sup>239</sup> Stride 2005 I, 156-162; 2007.

<sup>240</sup> Wu 2018, 212.

<sup>241</sup> Kosmin 2018b, 77-104.

Needless to say, assessing the impact of the Makedonian campaign on the territories of Baktria and Sogdiana in demographic and economic terms is a far from easy task, since the narrative sources usually provide rather vague information and almost always lack figures (and when they do appear, it is difficult to establish to what extent cannot be trusted), which obviously makes it almost impossible to develop a quantitative analysis of their accounts. However, when compared with some of the results gained from the most recent research in landscape archaeology (in particular the study of the development of the settlement distribution, one of the most reliable parameters available), it is perhaps possible to reach some general conclusions, the implications of which only become clear against the background outlined in the previous chapters. Let us therefore start with the historiographic sources, noting at the outset that one aspect not to be underestimated - also and above all by virtue of the generally anything but hostile attitude of Greek and Roman authors towards Alexander - is their unanimity in reporting (sometimes not without a certain amount of complacency) the apparently unstoppable growth of violence deployed by the Makedonians against their adversaries (or presumed adversaries) once they had reached Central Asia. The first signs of this trend can be traced as far back as the invaders' stay in Hyrkania.<sup>242</sup> Following the invasion of Baktria a few months later, even the rapid and (as far as can be sensed from the surviving narratives) relatively easy capture of the satrapal seat does not seem to have prevented the Makedonians from plundering the countryside several times (a choice difficult to make sense of, given that it is unthinkable that Baktra lacked the necessary supplies to sustain even a large number of troops for a prolonged period of time): it may be, but it is not possible to prove it, that these developments were dictated at least in part by the first contacts with the Sakā populations settled in the territory of the oasis and across its borderlands.<sup>243</sup> In any case, what seems beyond doubt is the continuous spiraling out of control (in terms of both territorial extension and intensity) of the conflict once Alexander's army entered Sogdiana in 329.<sup>244</sup> It was noted before that both the latter and his generals gave explicit orders to the soldiers to sack all the settlements the marching army came across on its way from the Oxus to Marakanda and beyond: although such a strategy was not without precedent (just think of the case of the Mardoī in the Zagros, whose settlements were razed to the ground after a bloody conquest), the sheer scale of the territory in question in Central Asia and the duration - two years - of the campaign suggest that the scale of the looting was incomparably greater here, and it is therefore only logical to infer that the effects on

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<sup>242</sup> Naiden 2019, 150.

<sup>243</sup> On the oasis and its role within the political and administrative framework of the satrapy see Marquis 2018, 164-166, Lhuillier *et al.* 2021 as well as Martinez-Sève 2020c, 225-226. Following Degen 2022, 178-202, one might argue that the pillage of the countryside was meant to symbolize Bessos' loss of legitimacy over the territories he claimed to rule. If that was the goal, at the same time it succeeded and backfired.

<sup>244</sup> According to Bosworth 1998, 27, the sources provide «a ghastly catalogue» of carnage that opened with the revolt in Sogdiana. Some telling examples: Arr. *Anab.*, 4.2.4 and Curt. 7.6.16.

the local economy must have been proportionately severe.<sup>245</sup> Moreover, while it is true that it has not, yet, been possible to detect direct evidence of the movement of large masses of the population (as would be expected based on the narrative of Alexander's historians), it is no less true that more recent studies of landscape archaeology have produced results that not only fit the picture emerging from the literary sources, but in some ways complicate their account even further, providing an idea, however indicative, of the phenomenon's dimensions. Of special importance in this context are the numerous explorations carried out in recent years by the Czech-O'zbek archaeological expedition active in various areas of Southern Uzbekistan, both in the Sherabād and in the Surxondaryo valley.<sup>246</sup> It will not be idle at this point to provide some statistics. In this second area alone, it can be argued with some confidence that between 87.5% and 92% of all the sites known today that can be dated to the Persian period suffered massive and widespread damage towards the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, effectively ceasing to exist.<sup>247</sup> Worthy of emphasis in this instance is the fact that the above figures are by no means limited to the smaller rural centers, although the latter undoubtedly bore the brunt of the army's (and probably the insurgents') raids, as a consequence being systematically destroyed, in many cases not to be built again.<sup>248</sup> On the contrary, even much larger and more complex settlements, which Achaemenid investments had contributed significantly to transforming (and/or expanding) into complex production units capable of sustaining the economy of entire valleys, with the consequence of making them strategic nodes within the infrastructural network that capillary branched out through the territories of Bactria and Sogdiana, experienced a sudden and irreversible decline, a phenomenon that can only be explained against the backdrop of an exceptional event such as the Makedonian invasion. It is therefore crucial at this point to emphasize that the two years of furious fighting were not limited to causing the flight (or death) of the ὑπαρχοὶ in charge of the administration of these

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<sup>245</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 5.18.6, Curt. 6.5.20, Diod. Sic. 17.76.7-8, Plut. *Vit. Alex.*, 44.4. This is due in no small measure to the fact that, as already noted, in both territories each village represented at the same time a *fiscal* unit, moreover closely (symbiotically) connected with the pastoral hinterland, as argued by Briant 1978, 78 and Wu *et al.* 2015: it follows that the destruction of the former affected the latter, with the effect that an entire oasis (as seems to have been the case at Miršade) could be transformed from a highly efficient and thriving productive center into a desolate heath in relatively short time.

<sup>246</sup> See e. g. the field reports published in Stančo *et al.* 2017a; 2017b; 2018 as well as the recent overview articles in Stančo 2018; 2019; 2020. Note Havlík 2021.

<sup>247</sup> Stančo 2020, 254; but see already Havlík 2018. Morris 2021c, 701 also points out «an initial phase of large-scale abandonment of Achaemenid-period settlements as a result of Alexander's conquest».

<sup>248</sup> Such a phenomenon would have been no less significant even if the destruction had been confined (and, as shown, it was not) to the smaller rural settlements, and this by virtue of the fact that the hybrid nature of the economy of the two satrapies (but especially of Sogdiana), characterized as it was by the flexibility of the livelihood strategies of the local population, makes it highly unlikely that centers of the size and complexity of Baktra, Marakanda or Kyzyltēpe represented the norm within the regional landscape. On the contrary, they must have been the exception, precisely because they were the pinnacle of a system the rationale of which was to coordinate the rural estates scattered over the territory and to manage their production in accordance with the needs of the imperial administration. For example, in the territory of Bandykhan, which probably belonged to the district of Arimazes and which was the target of considerable infrastructural investments during the Achaemenid period, almost all of the sites surveyed today measured between 0.1 and 2 hectares (as is the case, for example, of Bandykhantēpe I and II or Gazimullahtēpe). They were all destroyed at the twilight of Persian hegemony in the region: cf. Stride 2005 III nos. 268, 269, 270, 271, 273 and Stančo 2018, 184-187.

centers, as well as of the members of their respective patronage networks: in addition, they shattered the - productive as well as logistical - system capable of linking these productive units with the economic, logistical, and infrastructural network of the satrapy, therefore causing their decline, which was inevitably followed by that of the macrostructure itself. For in fact the latter drew its sap from the former in a circle of mutual dependencies that, as pointed out above (chapter 4), was as effective as it was fragile.<sup>249</sup> The case of Choriēnes stands out as a particularly compelling one. Although in fact Oxyartes' brokering role decisively contributed to saving his life, and despite the fact that the ensuing alliance with the Makedonians must have played a crucial role in allowing him to expand his sphere of influence to the detriment of some of his internal rivals (starting with Arimazes), historiographical evidence suggests that, like the rest of the valley, during the two expeditions led by Makedonian generals known to us, his territory in the upper Surxondaryo was put to the sword by Alexander's troops, with consequences that are difficult to quantify in a long-term perspective, but which must have been significant: if not for him personally, certainly for his social base. Particularly devastating seems to have been the campaign of 328, which (perhaps not by chance) led to the capitulation of the Sogdian notable: in order to make Oxyartes' mediation more persuasive, the major centers located in the territory controlled by Choriēnes were razed to the ground, effectively depriving the entire region of a considerable portion of its economic potential (not only in terms of agricultural production).<sup>250</sup> In spite of the fact that, as far as can be argued, after the death of Arimazes he remained with Sisimithres the almost undisputed master (Austanes and Catanes were eliminated shortly afterwards) of the whole Surxondaryo, in fact, it does not seem due to chance that it was however Sisimithres who undertook the - anything but trivial - logistical challenge and the financial outlay necessary to bring help to Alexander during the snowstorm that allegedly hit the Makedonian army around January 327.<sup>251</sup> From the surviving narratives emerges that Choriēnes was left with little more than a residence sumptuous enough to host the collective wedding that sanctioned the alliance between Alexander and his new *bandakā*: however, the system of supplies and communications that had helped to establish this Sogdian notable as a regional strongman during the Achaemenid era apparently was significantly damaged, a hypothesis that seems all the more likely if, as Rapin has recently suggested, the Gazaba which hosted the festivities might indeed be identified with the fortress of Kyzyltēpe.<sup>252</sup>

And, at the current state of our knowledge, it is precisely this last settlement (not only the citadel, but also the wider hinterland of the oasis, which in fact depended on and at the same time contributed

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<sup>249</sup> Cf. Leriche 1985, 67 and more recently Stančo 2018, 187.

<sup>250</sup> Rapin 2018a, 272. On Choriēnes see Arr. *Anab.*, 4.21.1, Curt. 8.4.21 and *Epit. Mett.*, 28.

<sup>251</sup> Rapin 2018a, 293.

<sup>252</sup> Rapin 2018a, 293-294, with further bibliography. See now Rapin 2021 on the Achaemenid (Far) East.

to feeding it) that provides the best dataset against which to test the soundness of the hypotheses put forward so far. Since, to date, it is by far the most thoroughly investigated of the major settlements known in the whole of Central Asia during the Achaemenid period, Kyzyltēpe provides a valuable case study based on which to assess the consequences of the Makedonian invasion on both the economic and the institutional landscape built in Baktria and Sogdiana by the Persians during the approximately two and a half centuries of their hegemony North of the Hindūkūš.<sup>253</sup> Once a relatively small site in a valley with little agricultural potential (but strategically located and most likely the focus of a dense network of pastoral economies), the gradual Achaemenid expansion along the Kyzylǰara had transformed Kyzyltēpe, as discussed in Chapter 6, into one of the most important centers not only of the Surxondaryo, but of Sogdiana as a whole, to the extent that it has been suggested it housed an archive and perhaps even some kind of cultic structure(s).<sup>254</sup> From the citadel, the authorities installed at the site were also able to coordinate the activities of at least a dozen minor settlements (but according to the ceramic evidence collected during the excavations, it has been suggested that the total number of the Kyzylča could in fact have been even higher), most probably farms or (agro)pastoral production units, one of the crucial features thereof was undoubtedly their role as collection, sorting, and connecting facilities linking the valley with the mobile herdsmen groups that crossed it following the transhumance routes through the Northern offshoots of the Surxondaryo valley, not far from the major site of the Miršade oasis.<sup>255</sup> The evidence gathered thanks to the detailed field studies carried out in the region, as well as in the neighboring oases, over the last few years has clearly shown that this particular organization of territorial exploitation and of its resources, which guaranteed the most effective form of integration within - and interaction with - the imperial structures of the different human groups settled in Central Asia, was systematically taken up (and re-proposed, and extended) in other contexts in both Baktria and Sogdiana. Evidence gathered from sites such as Talaškantēpe or Kučuktēpe (in the Sherabāddaryo oasis) shows that such minor sites must have had functions similar to those suggested for the largest of the settlements that made up the Kyzyltēpe complex.<sup>256</sup> And again, significantly, around the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE all these important centers show clear signs of destruction, being subsequently abandoned and vanishing from the map. Even more remarkably, not all of them were able to recover during antiquity; when they did, 1. it was not before the Kušāna period (centuries after Alexander's expedition) and 2.

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<sup>253</sup> Wu *et al.* 2015, 105-110.

<sup>254</sup> Wu 2018, 209-210; 2020, 606-612.

<sup>255</sup> Stančo 2018, 184-185.

<sup>256</sup> Cf. Stride 2005 III ff. 155 (Džandavlattēpe), 154 (Dabil Kurgan), 235 (Pačmaktēpe), 366 (Džarkutan). More recent research especially in the Western Boysun (the territory of Pashkhurt) and Sherabāddaryo allows the list to be further extended to sites such as Burgut Kurgan, Yalangoyogota and others: Stančo 2018, 174; 2021 for an overview of the settlement in this area and at the Köytendağ piedmont, the latter a contribution in which many of the identifications proposed by Rapin 2013; 2018a are challenged.

not in all cases they returned to the splendor of their Achaemenid past. What is clear, however – providing by the way evidence for the dynamics behind the origin of these settlements - is that the major impulse for their reconstruction came from the need, on the part of an imperial polity (which of course was, a point not to be forgotten, endowed with sufficient means and, above all, sufficiently interested in the undertaking) to reconstruct a system of networks similar to that elaborated by the Persians in order to connect 1. among themselves and 2. with the centers of imperial power itself, the territories over which its ruling class laid hegemonic claims.<sup>257</sup>

This having been said, it has to be pointed out that even such sweeping considerations alone would suffice to show some of the structural differences between the Makedonian strategy for conquering the Central Asian space and the tactic implemented centuries earlier by the Achaemenids. Whereas the success of the approaches employed by the latter during the – surely not easy - process of establishing their own hegemony over Bactria rested mainly on the ability (which, however, presupposes political will) to integrate dispersed and isolated political and economic networks across the entire territory within a structure that was both hierarchically structured and extraordinarily flexible (a network of networks, in Henkelman's words), the Makedonian seizure of power, on the contrary, seems to have been distinguished by the exclusive intention to occupy only the major administrative and economic centers (basically Baktra and Marakanda, to which one might add, by virtue of their strategically crucial position, the area around Termiz and, perhaps, the plain of Āi Xānum). This result, however, was obtained at the price of the destruction of the infrastructural networks of the countryside, that is, as a consequence, of the drastic reduction in the capacity of the major centers themselves to control their own hinterlands, not to mention the more distant territories across a notoriously prohibitive terrain. To pick up Henkelman's effective metaphor, the most obvious outcome of Alexander's conquest seems to have been to have profoundly lacerated the political, economic and infrastructural tapestry that the Achaemenids, their satraps, and the local élites had patiently woven from the time of Cyrus' conquest onwards.<sup>258</sup> The matter, moreover, does not end there. Perhaps the most momentous aspect of the whole process can be seen in the fact that the campaign destroyed much of the system which had made it possible for individuals like Aḥvamazdā (and even more so Bagavanta) to control with relatively little expenditure of energy territories (meaning, the *bandakā* settled therein as well as their networks: the case of a man such as Yamš-ḥadew-bandag discussed in the previous chapter is symptomatic in this sense) several dozen kilometers from their headquarters in the main oases. From this it follows that, paradoxically, despite the conquest of all the major centers of power, after the elimination of the last pockets of resistance

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<sup>257</sup> Stride 2005 I, 252-254.

<sup>258</sup> Henkelman 2017a, 169.

in 327 BCE, Makedonian control of the two Central Asian satrapies rested on much less solid foundations than those of the now defeated adversaries, since Alexander and his men ended up destroying the very system that united, through a multiplicity of links as intense as they were fragile, the district main seats with their borderlands (both internal and external to the territory of the satrapy), on which, at the end of the day, the ability to exploit the territory, its population and, consequently, its resources within and outside its borders substantially depended.<sup>259</sup> And such a scenario, of course, does not even take into account the fact that, judging from both the scale and nature of the economy attested to by the excavations at a site such as Kyzyltēpe, there is every reason to believe that the disappearance of the latter and similar centers must triggered momentous fallouts on more than one member of the local elite (thus further limiting the Makedonians' ability to dominate the territory outside the major oases while at the same time becoming even more dependent on those members within the local aristocracy itself who had escaped the massacres and were now willing to collaborate with the new imperial power). Deprived, in whole or in part, both of access to the resources that the imperial apparatus was able to mobilize and of the social position that the belonging to such a structure implied, the Central Asian magnates are likely to have regressed to a stage similar to that in which Cyrus must have found them in the year «when the Mede came»: namely a swarm of local potentates, each intent on waging war on its neighbor in a struggle for available resources the ferocity thereof was inversely proportional to the abundance of these (moreover significantly reduced after two years of a military campaign such as that described in the previous sections).

The hypothesis of a vertical decline of the Achaemenid infrastructural networks not only in Sogdiana (where it appears to have been both more rapid and more extensive), but also in Baktria itself, and of the consequent limits to the Makedonians' ability to effectively control the territories they were now supposed to be able to govern, can be supported, at least in part, by the evidence available concerning the nature of the new settlements that sprang up in the period immediately following Alexander's conquest of the two satrapies. Indeed, while during the heydays of Persian overlordship over these spaces the percentage of fortified sites amounted to no more than 21% of the total of those identified to date, from the last decades of the 4<sup>th</sup> century onwards and continuing through the Hellenistic period, a marked increase in foundations of an eminently (if not exclusively) defensive nature is clearly identifiable, amounting in percentage terms to a significant 43% (i. e. more than double).<sup>260</sup> Their very location, moreover, is indexical of the shrinkage, if not the disappearance, of those infrastructural networks which linked Sogdiana 1. with Baktria and 2. with the rest of the political, economic, and administrative system of the Empire. Sites such as Kyzyltēpe or Talaškantēpe (I and II), which formed

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<sup>259</sup> Wu 2018, 212.

<sup>260</sup> Havlík 2018, 52-56; 2021 on settlement patterns in post-Achaemenid Baktria.



the backbone of this structure, were in fact razed to the ground during this period, and a similar pattern can be detected in the territory of other key communication areas between Baktra and the rest of the satrapy. To give but one example, this is precisely what landscape archaeology has brought to surface in the territory of Angor, located North of an important ford on the Oxus.<sup>261</sup> Both the excavations and the field surveys carried out over the last decade in this area have in fact allowed to identify several clusters of sites, the largest of which may have played the role of hubs of an economic and administrative system similar to that attested in the Miršade oasis at Kyzyltēpe. In addition to this (diagnostic) cluster-like nature, the most relevant analogy between the two contexts lies in their location on the edge of a very complex ecological frontier, which even before the Persian conquest seems to have delimited their territory.<sup>262</sup> Taken as a whole, the picture that can be sketched suggests that, following a pattern also known with respect to Baktra's oasis, also in the case of Angor the Achaemenid administration first planned, and then supported, the infrastructural penetration of the Qattaqum desert, aiming at an effective «normalization» of this important internal borderland.<sup>263</sup> Control over it was undoubtedly a priority for both the satrap of Baktria and his lieutenants to the North, since one of the main arteries linking Baktra with the ancient fortress of Termiz and the latter with Khajtabadtēpe, further up in the Surxondaryo (whose supra-regional importance should have become clear from the previous chapters) ran along the edge of this very territory.<sup>264</sup>

In the light of the above, it is particularly remarkable that, as shown by archaeological surveys, the demise of Achaemenid control in this area also coincides with a remarkably consistent reduction in the number of known settlements (indeed too significant to be accidental or the result of a patchy dataset): the three most important sites in the entire area of Angor were definitively abandoned, while further West only the crucial hub conceived to guard the Oxus' ford at Shortēpe seems to have survived into the Hellenistic period. This fate was not, however, shared by the other 12 (and perhaps more) settlements in the immediate vicinity, which were destroyed and never recovered.<sup>265</sup> The process described above did not spare even the most important of the sites guarding the Oxus crossing points North of Baktra, where the site of old Termiz was situated. In this case too, only the main fortress remained intact: since, however, we have solid evidence attesting to considerable destruction for another site in the immediate surroundings, it is reasonable to assume that, in Persian times, there was a much more ramified and complex structure in charge of patrolling the course of the river. The

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<sup>261</sup> Stride 2005 V pl. 48.

<sup>262</sup> Stride 2005 I, 227, Wu 2017, 267.

<sup>263</sup> The control of so-called ecological boundaries (internal as well as external) was one of the top priorities of any human community before the industrial revolution, be it a microscopic village in rural Greece or an Empire of the size and complexity of the Achaemenid one: see Cherry 2007, Fachard 2017, Reger 2017 and now Weaverdyck *et al.* 2021.

<sup>264</sup> Wu 2018, 211.

<sup>265</sup> For a catalogue of the sites identified to date in the territory of Angor see Stride 2005 III nos. 263, 334, 344 (Angor, Kučuktēpe and Aisaritēpe respectively). For the area of Shortēpe see Stride 2005 I, 228-230.

latter must have borne the brunt of the campaigns in the area starting with the first Makedonian advance into Sogdiana in 329 BCE, when Alexander pushed North in pursuit of Bessos.<sup>266</sup> Yet more evidence might be added to this file: the perspective does in fact not change even if one moves into the very heart of the Baktrian region, and a quick glance at further crucial centers of Achaemenid power in other Central Asian satrapies helps to enrich our dossier and therefore to support the claims made above in this section.<sup>267</sup> At Čašma-ye Šifâ, the crucial importance of which was mentioned earlier, there is widespread evidence of abandonment in the lower town and in the fortress itself. Further North, the paramount system of aqueducts and fortifications that had secured both the control and the exploitation of the semi-desert Afgân steppe between Baktra and the Amudaryo was destroyed, and if one zooms out to the (South)West, both the oasis of Merv and the fortress of Dahan-i Ġulāmān appear to have been depopulated around this date, the last to never recover.<sup>268</sup> Significant in their own right, these considerations become even more indicative when taken as a whole, as they show beyond doubt that, in a highly connected and interdependent system such as Achaemenid Central Asia undoubtedly was already before the imperial takeover (which only further fueled these dynamics), damage inflicted on one part of the system had the potential to cascade kilometers away from the epicenter and, in the worst case, to destroy the system in its entirety. Far from providing evidence of the weakness of the system itself and/or of its ineffectiveness in fit the territory conquered by the Persian in the imperial paradigm, such a phenomenon on the contrary shows its sophistication, which makes clear the need to study the territories that became part of the Achaemenid Central Asian satrapies as a complex and stratified unit, formed over time with the primary purpose of functioning in synergy with the larger imperial framework.<sup>269</sup> This elaborate structure of territorial control and economic valorization (of course for primarily exploitative reasons) seems to have been largely replaced - and for a far from negligible time - by military garrisons, usually quite small, some of which (as is the case, for example, of the one attested at Khajtabadtēpe) were built directly within the previous Achaemenid settlement, or in what was left of it.<sup>270</sup> Other military settlements of vital importance in the (Graeco-Baktrian) imperial era (but perhaps already built under the Seleukids, such as Uzundara, or even before, like Kurganzol) appear to have been limited to functions of territorial control and defense, all the more so since, with the fading away of Achaemenid infrastructures, the control and maintenance of the road network through the Derbent pass was a vital necessity in order

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<sup>266</sup> Stride 2005 I, 231.

<sup>267</sup> Martinez-Sève 2020c.

<sup>268</sup> Marquis 2018, Wu 2020, 607, Lhuillier *et al.* 2021.

<sup>269</sup> Jennings 2017, 16 for some important theoretical reflections on the «vulnerability» of highly «globalized» systems.

<sup>270</sup> Cf. Coloru 2009 and Leriche 2009. Although apparently still in operation during the Hellenistic period, the Achaemenid fortress of Khajtabadtēpe was nevertheless burnt down and razed to the ground by the marching Makedonian army.

to preserve the hold on Marakanda - and therefore in fact on the whole of Sogdiana.<sup>271</sup> However, (and this is a point worth stressing) there is no evidence to suggest that a system even remotely comparable to the multifunctional complexity of Kyzyltēpe was put back into operation: the evidence summarized so far should therefore be interpreted in terms of a structural change in the strategies of territorial control and exploitation, which it is reasonable to believe represented by far the most significant outcome of the entire Makedonian campaign of conquest in Central Asia. In other words, both Baktria and, even more so, Sogdiana, could be patrolled, but no longer exploited as extensively and systematically as before.

Several aspects of this process deserve to be emphasized: however, by far the most important, especially in view of the developments which took place in the following decades, seems undoubtedly the increasing bargaining power acquired by those among the most prominent representatives of the Baktrio-Sogdian élite who were able to survive the campaign. If, in fact, under the auspices of the Achaemenids, a system such as the one that can be glimpsed against the grain through a careful analysis of the *ADAB* allowed the satrapal administration both to exploit the aristocratic solidarity networks to their full potential and to protect itself from the risks inherent in the ambitions of one or another of the regional strongmen (firstly, by fostering one or other of the internal rivals of the unruly notable of the day from among those installed in the immediate vicinity of a given power center or even choosing its own candidates from within the nomenklatura of a given region), the crisis of this system made the survivors among the local powerholders even more indispensable (because they were fewer in number) than they had been before, since they were now the only ones in possession 1. of the relational networks indispensable for the extraction of those resources that guaranteed the Empire's control over the conquered satrapies, and 2. the ability to manage these networks, a task that was far from easy, as the Bagavanta affaire and the Late Antique archival evidence published by Sims-Williams clearly show.<sup>272</sup> The picture outlined in the previous pages can be further enriched. In

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<sup>271</sup> For a general overview see Leriche 2007, 130-134, Stančo *et al.* 2018 and Stančo 2020. With regards to Kurganzol see Sverčkov *et al.* 2013, Simpson and Pankova 2021, 72-77 and now Lyonnet and Fontugne 2021. Preliminary field reports concerning the Uzundara excavations have been published e. g. in Dvurečenskaja 2015 (and see most recently the bibliography collected in Stančo 2021, with a short description of the site at p. 79). Another crucial factor must have been the surveillance (and taxation) of the movements of pastoral populations, which in the absence of a system of government such as the Achaemenid one must have been a very daunting task: hence, one might argue, the need for massive fortification of the Iron Gates carried out at the very least during the Graeco-Baktrian period according to Stančo 2020, 261-269. Under Achaemenid rule, on the contrary, the presence of an individual such as Arimazes made the enterprise both less expansive for the satrapal administration and, for the reasons highlighted above, more efficient.

<sup>272</sup> Bosworth 1998, 98 has argued that both Alexander and his generals, and even more so the soldiers, found themselves in Central Asia in a situation of «cultural isolation», which he claims contributed in no small measure to the Rossinian crescendo of violence during the campaign. This may have been partly true: however, the available evidence suggests at least as compellingly that the invaders became progressively more and more involved in local power (which are of course also cultural) dynamics and ended up depending substantially on those among the local notables who chose (for reasons of mere personal calculation - or related to the interest of their own factio) to side with the newcomers. A good historical parallel in this sense is provided by the – considerable - social standing enjoyed by an Aztec (undoubtedly very prominent already in her native environment) woman called Malinche (it is possible that her name was Malineli Tenepatl) or Doña

the small valley of Pashkhurt, for example, the control of which made it possible to regulate access to an important watercourse that flowed into the Sherabāddaryo basin, as well as to keep under control a network of pastoral routes that crossed the Köýtendağ in the direction of today's Southeastern Türkmenistan (the ancient Persian satrapy of Margiana), the situation seems to have been even worse than the one (far from rosy) described so far. According to the most recent surveys that have been carried out in this area, from the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, almost all of the known settlements, some of which were permanently occupied from prehistoric times until the Achaemenid conquest and beyond, were abandoned and the valley as a whole - a far from minor breakthrough in the regional landscape - appears to have remained uninhabited at least until the late Kuşāna period.<sup>273</sup>

On the whole, the data gathered from archaeological surveys in the Surxondaryo valley (still the best studied area in Central Asia) show a decrease in settlements between the Achaemenid epoch and the first decades of the Hellenistic period, of an order of magnitude nearing an impressive 90%.<sup>274</sup> There are at least two considerations that make it possible to consider these statistics a reliable touchstone for an overall estimate of the impact of the Makedonian campaign on the territory of the entire satrapy of Baktria-Sogdiana. Firstly, as noted earlier in this work, both for ecological reasons and because of the essentially unparalleled settlement continuity in the region (which therefore allows for a highly comprehensive diachronic assessment) the Surxondaryo valley can be considered as a small-scale model of the whole of Baktria, which consequently makes it possible, albeit with due caution, to extend the results gained from the study of this territory to the adjoining areas.<sup>275</sup> The second - which has already been mentioned in this chapter - is that we are not dealing with an isolated phenomenon. In fact, once taken into consideration the traditional subdivision of the Baktrian space into four basic quadrants (or regions), in at least another of these, the statistics available today offer numbers that are in every way comparable to those coming from the Surxondaryo, i. e. a contraction

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Marina among the Spaniards who invaded present-day Mexico in the 16<sup>th</sup> century: Todorov 1982, 122-123. The rescue expedition organized by Sisimithres and the similar (and no less providential) intervention of the satraps of Central Asia during the crossing of Gedrosia (Curt. 9.9.17-22 with Degen 2022, 375-379, stressing the ideological significance of the episode but not the Achaemenid background, on the contrary discussed at length in Henkelman 2017a, 45-63) only further support this hypothesis. It can therefore be argued that it is at least unlikely that those among the local notables who remained alive to do so did not claim (and in all likelihood also obtained) a prominent position within the new cadres of the Makedonian satrapy.

<sup>273</sup> According for example to Augustinová 2018, 42 traces of human activity are absent during the Hellenistic, Graeco-Baktrian and even early Kuşāna periods. See moreover Mokroborodov 2021, 107 detecting a considerable settlement decrease from the Achaemenid to the (early) Hellenistic period.

<sup>274</sup> Havlík 2018, 98-111: according to his calculations, the exact figure would be 93% (see especially p. 129). To the best of my knowledge, the most up-to-date catalogue of all known sites in the Surxondaryo from prehistoric to Islamic times remains Stride 2005 III. It should be noted at this point that the data acquired by the Czech-O'zbek mission as a result of several field surveys carried out in recent years and summarized for the period under study here in Stančo 2019; 2020, while undoubtedly contributing, as they are already doing in part, to considerably enrich the picture, are unlikely to radically change the outline sketched in this section, and indeed it is evident e. g. from Havlík 2021 that they are only further detailing and refining it. Cf. moreover Rapin 2021, 318: «the life of the main cities was partially interrupted during the first decades of the Makedonian power».

<sup>275</sup> Stride 2005 I, 100; 2007, 99.

in the number of known settlements, compared to that available for the Achaemenid period, nearing 92%.<sup>276</sup> Even in the Dašt-i Qal‘a plain, which, according to what can be reconstructed based on the scanty information provided by the literary sources, seems to have been only marginally involved (and for a relatively short period of time) in the operations of the Makedonian campaign, the results of the archaeological survey - although much less dramatic than those coming from Surxondaryo - nevertheless contribute to shaping an overall picture which seems to hint , if not at an irreversible crisis, certainly at a radical change in the strategies of organization and exploitation of the territory and, consequently, of the settlement patterns. In fact, even in this area, which in the Hellenistic period would have made for one of the pivotal centers of the rising Seleukid (and later Graeco-Baktrian) imperial power, at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, of the sites known from the Achaemenid period 31 had disappeared, which in percentage terms means approximately 42%.<sup>277</sup> In addition to this, if up to the time of the Makedonian expedition to Eastern Baktria no more than five fortified sites have been identified so far throughout the two and a half centuries of Persian power, in the Hellenistic period they increase fourfold: in fact, to date 22 fortresses have been identified in the Dašt-i Qal‘a plain and in the immediately neighboring regions as belonging to a time frame spanning from the late 4<sup>th</sup> to the mid 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE.<sup>278</sup> Now: rather than viewing these numbers as an indication of the ephemeral nature of Persian power in Central Asia by comparing them to the - alleged - policy of intense urbanism pursued by Alexander (according to a pattern that research has been inclined to adopt until still extremely recent times), they could just as legitimately be read, and - I would argue - perhaps even more profitably, in the opposite way, as evidence of the need, on the part of the new masters of Central Asia, to massively intensify military pressure on a territory that they were no longer able to control in its entirety by any means other than the large-scale, and very costly, deployment of military force.<sup>279</sup> The evidence from the *ADAB* not only provides valuable clues in support of the reconstructive scenario elaborated by Stride regarding the Achaemenid strategy of territorial conquest and control; at the same time, it also shows why the imperial administration does not seem to have felt the need for a military presence of any significance (as shown by the story of the grasshoppers’ invasion in *ADAB* A4, it is even possible that the only soldiers present in the satrapy at the time were armed peasants employed by individuals such as Bagavanta) in order to ensure an effective control over the territory, its resources, and the people living therein.<sup>280</sup> In fact, the «network of networks»

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<sup>276</sup> Havlík 2018, 98-106. For this subdivision of Baktria’s territory in the archaeological literature see Leriche 1985, 68.

<sup>277</sup> Stančo 2020, 255 raises this percentage to 58%.

<sup>278</sup> Gardin 1998 tab. 3.9-3.10. See furthermore Leriche 2007, 128 and Havlík 2018, 129.

<sup>279</sup> Coloru 2009, 125. Cf. Narain 1957, 1 ff. and Will 1966 I, 28 (who refers to Baktria as «this periphery of the known world»). Among the most well-known accounts of Alexander’s activity as city builder there are those by Diod. Sic. 17.83.2, Just. *Epit.*, 12.4.2-11 and Strab. 11.11.4. See now on the topic Giangiulio 2020.

<sup>280</sup> Stride 2005 I, 423.

that Wouter Henkelman has singled out as the defining feature of the Persian strategy of imperial rule from Lydia to Arachosia allowed for a very conspicuous level of power decentralization, while at the same time balancing, by virtue of its very structure, the risks inherent in the delegation by the satraps of a share of this power to «imperial collaborators» for the stability of the imperial hold over such territories and over the *bandakā*.<sup>281</sup>

From all of this it follows (as one may have guessed) that a second - very significant - consequence of the very marked contraction (if not outright demise) of this system was by no means limited to the - albeit far from negligible - problems inherent in communication and viability through the satrapy and between it and the surrounding territories. At the same time, and in direct correlation with the dynamics explored in the previous pages, there is reason to believe that for the same major centers now in the hands of the Makedonians, access to the resources once available to the Achaemenids (in terms of both variety and sheer quantity) became progressively more complex and costly. Among the causes of this development, a role of no small importance is undoubtedly to be assigned to the devastation inflicted on the communities of semi-settled shepherds who, as pointed out, represented an element of utmost importance within the Persian administrative mechanisms in the two Central Asian satrapies «between the rivers».<sup>282</sup> In an attempt to find remedies to this crucial and problematic issue, it is therefore plausible that the Makedonians definitively abandoned the previous model of territorial exploitation (which in fact seems to have resurfaced, at least in part, only under the *Kušāna*), aiming instead consistently in the direction of a much more centralized administrative strategy, pivoting on a limited number of major urban centers devoted to the intensive (especially agricultural) exploitation - contrary to the extensive pattern of the Persian model as reconstructed by Gondet - of the immediate hinterland of the territory over which these centers held sway.<sup>283</sup> The earliest, and to date most conspicuous, signs of such a change in the territorial organization of the satrapy can be traced to Eastern Bactria, where the Hellenistic settlement of *Āi Xānum* replaced (and dwarfed) any currently known precedent.<sup>284</sup> Although the chronology - especially in its higher phases - of the site is still a matter of debate, there are compelling reasons to assume that it was first founded during the early years of Alexander's expedition. Among the most important was undoubtedly the strategic importance of the site to patrol and keep under control both the Northern foothills of the middle Oxus

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<sup>281</sup> Düring and Stek 2018a.

<sup>282</sup> Wu 2017, 282. See most recently Lyonnet 2020 arguing in favor of a consistent diffusion of *Sakā* communities in the territory of Achaemenid Sogdiana.

<sup>283</sup> Lyonnet 1997, 153, Gardin 1998, 46.

<sup>284</sup> Rapin 2013, 55; 2017a, 99. More recent research does not agree on the date of the city's foundation. For example, Coloru 2009, 149, Martinez-Sève 2012, 371 and Plischke 2014, 111 assume Seleukos as the possible founder and give a date around 300 BCE. See Cohen 2013, 225. Posch 1995, 15-23, for his part, argued for a chronology closer to that suggested by Rapin.

valley with its string of major oases and, at the same time, the nearby mountainous regions of Badahšān, rich as they were in mineral resources.<sup>285</sup>

In addition, one should consider the presence of a fertile agricultural plain, which had already been cultivated well before the Makedonian conquest by a local population and which would have been able to provide sustenance and considerable opportunities for enrichment to the new occupants. The intensive exploitation of such a site must have been made even more indispensable now that the canals capable of supporting the Achaemenid administration in all its ramifications were no longer (or significantly less) able to accommodate the needs of the inhabitants of much of the territory in case of a bad season or any other kind of unforeseen event. The newborn settlement, built near (approximately 2 km to the South of) the previous Persian one, may have had the double task of fueling the accelerated exploitation of the rich plain and, at the same time, of securing a strategic internal buffer zone which, however, in spite of the considerable military superiority of the Makedonians, does not seem at all to have prevented Spitamenes from recruiting part of his men precisely from among the members of the Baktrian landed aristocracy that had suffered most - perhaps even in the territory of the Dašt -i Qal'a - from the Makedonian reorganization of the hierarchies within the satrapal territory and, one may suggest, from the redefinition of the mechanisms of exploitation of the territory itself.<sup>286</sup> To be honest, the latter is nothing more than an old hypothesis, which can now however be supported by a more substantial body of information. Already Brian Bosworth had in fact suggested that Makedonian military settlements in the Achaemenid East were designed to dominate a substantial portion of the landscape within which they were built, the latter in turn being divided into κλέροι scattered around a larger urban site (such as Āi Xānum). Each κλέρος would then be assigned to a soldier, thus turning him into a settler.<sup>287</sup> Behind such a strategy, it has been authoritatively argued, there would be a more general conception by Alexander of the space he ruled in terms of a distinction between πόλεις and χώρα which presupposed, or rather required, a sedentary subject population without however «taking into adequate consideration lifestyles characterized by greater mobility».<sup>288</sup> Should this hypothesis be correct, it would be possible to

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<sup>285</sup> Guillaume 1991, 170. It should be noted incidentally that this must have been the same reason behind the establishment of Achaemenid sites in the valley: see both Martinez-Sève 2015, 20-26 and Widmer 2015, 113, according to whom «a group of Western settlers» would have been able to take possession of the plain as early as 328 BCE, which supports the hypothesis of a foundation concomitant with Alexander's second expedition to Sogdiana in 328 BCE.

<sup>286</sup> Bernard 1967, 71-95.

<sup>287</sup> Bosworth 1981, 10 ff.

<sup>288</sup> This would allow, among other things, to account for the particularly harsh interventions against the so-called «nomads» in Central Asia by the Makedonians (and to a large extent after them by the Seleukids themselves). Concerning Alexander's distinction between πόλεις and χώρα see Mileta 2008, 20-41 (and in particular pp. 33-36, whose theses, although at a preliminary stage with respect to the monograph, have been criticized rather strongly by Briant 2017a, 573-578, who observes, among other things, (p. 578) that «Alexander solved a local situation deeply embedded in the history of the Achaemenid Empire, using the experience of acting as a king inherited from his father and his own Makedonian practice», emphasis in the original). Even this was the case in Central Asia as well, Alexander's attempt appears to have been way less effective than in the case of Priene discussed by Briant.

understand even better to what extent (and why) the interventionism of the new Great King within the administrative framework of Baktria and Sogdiana made for a radical change also in the spatial management of the satrapy and of its resources, which affected in an extremely invasive way models of landscape exploitation that were centuries (if not millennia) old and – most crucially - the result of very delicate negotiations between populations mutually dependent in order to ensure the survival, if not the prosperity, of all the actors involved (including the imperial representatives). These considerations offer a further explanation, alongside those put forward above, for the unprecedented level of violence by several - and probably wrongly perceived as unrelated to each other - human groups with which the newcomers had to deal.<sup>289</sup> Such considerations inevitably lead to an (however tentative) assessment of the consequences of the Makedonian campaign on the economy and lifestyles of some of these groups (whom the sources group under the labels of «nomads» or «Scythians») who, as pointed out, ought to be taken as a far from negligible component of the local demography (not only in Sogdiana). Again, this is an issue of considerable importance in the context of the present study, since the policies adopted by Alexander (and, from what is possible to guess, never entirely relinquished even by his Seleukid successors) seem to have considerably influenced the development of the Greek imperial trajectory in Central Asia. Empires, it has been argued, have a legacy: in Baktria, this might have been part of Alexander's.<sup>290</sup>

### 3.2. The Gold of Baktra

It will not be out of place to reiterate that an economic (and consequently social and political) assessment of the impact of Alexander's expedition as well as of the strategy of territorial control he adopted during (and after) his campaign in Central Asia is far from an easy task, since the necessary sources 1. are almost absent and 2. when available, usually provide very few (highly stereotyped, and arguably biased) figures. Nevertheless, it might be argued that a scrupulous analysis of the surviving evidence in the light of 1. the information provided by archaeology which has been presented above and 2. the general sketch of the functioning of the Achaemenid economy (and conversely of Achaemenid (socio)politics) in Central Asia attempted in the previous chapters may indeed prove rewarding. In the light of the aristocratic networks that constituted - at various levels - the imperial power base within the territories of Baktria and Sogdiana, trying to understand which groups were most damaged by the two years of war within this area could shed considerable light on the dynamics that led to the formation of the new élite that actively participated in the government of Baktria and

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<sup>289</sup> Briant 1982, 71-74; 1984, 81-88. Cf. moreover Holt 1988a, 54-60; 2005, 45-55.

<sup>290</sup> See Rollinger and Gehler 2022 on imperial afterlives.



the neighboring territories during the Hellenistic period (not only under Seleukid hegemony). In addition, such a study would also make it possible to understand some of the features of the functioning of the relationship between the members of this new ruling class and the imperial government apparatus that replaced both the Achaemenid infrastructure, and the organization chart tentatively put in place, and heavily affected, by Alexander before his departure for India. The first step when embarking on such an endeavor is to clearly distinguish the perspective (meaning: the goals) of the locals from that of Alexander.<sup>291</sup> From the latter's point of view, in fact, it cannot be denied that the campaign resulted in a considerable success. Contrary to a stereotype already much in vogue in the ancient sources (not least because it was instrumental in portraying a once temperate and just young prince seduced by the wealthy and debauched East) and duly taken over in modern scholarship according to which the Makedonian would essentially have been on the verge of bankruptcy when he set off against Darius, to the point that it has been argued that financial need in fact provided the rationale for the expedition, although inordinately rich (it has been calculated that, by the time he landed in Persia, Alexander was already able to mint a quantity of money comparable to the amount of Athenians' issues at the height of their maritime Empire over a period of some 300 years), during his campaign in Eastern Irān - i. e. after the sack of Persepolis, Babylon, and Susa -, the young king was able to further (significantly) expand his wealth.<sup>292</sup> An idea of the orders of magnitude implied comes from Strabo, according to whom «Darius fled with 8000 talents from Media, which his treacherous assassins plundered».<sup>293</sup> We do not know whether Alexander was ever able to get his hands on this considerable sum (about 48 million drachmas according to the most recent estimates). However, if he did manage to do so, and if, as is quite probable – after all it had not been any different in Achaemenid times - all or even a part of these talents remained in the Central Asian satrapies (as the same sources seem to suggest, for they claim that the new Great King set fire to most of his baggage while still in Baktra before going on to India), it becomes clearer how this huge capital provided the new local administrators with a respectable patrimony ready to be used either to buy their safe-conduct back to Greece or, as in fact happened, to secure political supremacy

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<sup>291</sup> Iliakis 2021.

<sup>292</sup> For a comparison between the resources available to Alexander and the Diadochi on the one hand and the capital of the Greek πόλεις on the other hand see von Reden 2010, 82-84. A radically different view was held by Mileta 2008, 21 in line with the framework of Plut. *Vit. Alex.*, 15.2., against which Holt 2016, 23-44 has argued rather persuasively. Thomas 2021 on the fascination of Greek sources for a rich, and therefore corrupted and corrupting Ancient Near Eastern (especially Achaemenid) world. Such an attitude of our sources, incidentally, says something concerning how conscious ancient authors were of the Empire massive power.

<sup>293</sup> Strab. 15.3.9: «τὰ δὲ Δαρείῳ φυγόντι ἐκ τῆς Μηδίας συνεκκομισθέντα τάλαντα ὀκτακισχίλια διήρπασαν οἱ δολοφονήσαντες αὐτόν».

in Baktria and the neighboring regions, a process to which it is unlikely the Irānian aristocrats could have been even partially excluded, though of course attempts in this respect did not lack.<sup>294</sup>

This working hypothesis seems to be supported by what is known about monetary circulation in Eastern Irān and Central Asia both during the Achaemenid period and during the first decade of Alexander's Empire. Satrapies such as those of Baktria, Sogdiana, and Gāndhārā (Paropamisadae) show in fact a scarce, if any, use of the instrument «minted coinage» during the centuries of Achaemenid rule: as pointed out by Tuplin, in fact, in the Persian *Far East* money as such was not the privileged tool for economic activity (which does not mean that it did not exist or was not developed and flourishing elsewhere in the Empire). In addition, in these satrapies, the discovery of monetary treasures prior to the Hellenistic period shows the almost total absence of any impact attributable to the monetization of Achaemenid treasures, and even the Seleukids themselves, at least until the time of Antiochos I, to a large extent used land instead of cash to attract military settlers.<sup>295</sup> Such a picture, as one may have guessed, contrasts rather starkly with an inveterate interpretative paradigm (the basis of which were laid at least by Plutarch and developed especially by Droysen) that sees Alexander as the main driving force behind the mobilization of the resources crystallized in the Persian wealth, until then hidden in the coffers of the royal treasuries in the major centers of the Empire - which, of course, include Baktra.<sup>296</sup> However, since, as recently pointed out by Frank Lee Holt, only three of all the coin hoards catalogued in the *Inventory of Greek Coin Hoards* known to date as originating in either Baktria, Sogdiana, the Paropamisadae or India (i. e. the whole of Central Asia except Arachosia) have returned specimens struck in Alexander's name, which means about 200 pieces in total, and all of them from the Oxus hoard, it seems quite likely that the extent to which Alexander put Achaemenid gold and silver found in Central Asia into circulation in the form of minted coin has been greatly overestimated by past and more recent research.<sup>297</sup> If this were true, it would be possible - among other things - to give a better account of the proportions and intensity (these time indeed massive) of Seleukid investments in Central Asia under the aegis of Antiochos - appointed plenipotentiary by his father and almost certainly resident in Baktra - who would therefore have been the first to make sustained use of the treasures plundered by Alexander at the time of his soldiers' capture of the satrapal main seat North of the Hindūkūš. In other words, the 8000 talents

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<sup>294</sup> Diod. Sic. 17.94.4, Just. *Epit.*, 12.4.2-11. See Holt 2015; 2016, 89 for an estimate of the scale of economic resources available to Alexander if he had been able to seize at least part of the treasures that fell into the hands of Darius' assassins at the time of the conspiracy. The extent of Sōphytos' emissions (which, it must be acknowledged, is still a matter of debate: see most recently Jansari 2018; 2020b) could provide further support for the hypotheses put forward here, since this man - more on him below - could have made use of at least part of Alexander's (once Achaemenid) treasures with the intention of carving out his own power base in Baktria. See also Mendoza-Sanahuja 2017.

<sup>295</sup> Tuplin 2014, 128 and Holt 2016, 171-172.

<sup>296</sup> Briant 2017a, 429-436.

<sup>297</sup> Holt 2016, 171 fn. 109. Cf. *IGCH* 1822.

mentioned by Strabo would be, literally, the most valuable inheritance of the entire expedition left by the Makedonian to his successors.

If we look however, as it were, at the other side of the coin and try somehow to make sense of the outcome of the Makedonian expedition from the point of view of the *locals*, the general impression, as mentioned above, is that the two years of war meant a cataclysm of incalculable proportions both for the humblest strata of the local population (especially, but not only, the village communities most dependent on agriculture) and for most of the local élites, who owed no small part of their political influence to the revenues from that economy and from their dealings with the steppe world, also massively affected by the Makedonians. In the light of a non-superficial look at the - unfortunately, as mentioned, scanty and patchy - figures provided by the narrative sources, Holt's statement that the pillage of Sogdiana and India was particularly ruthless does indeed not seem so exaggerated, against the background of the evidence gathered and discussed in the studies of (among others) Jakub Havlík and Laurianne Martinez-Sève it is reasonable to lump together into such an assessment also other regions of Northern Central Asia, including Baktria.<sup>298</sup> From Arrian, for example, we learn that the Makedonian army was supplied thanks to massive requisitions of livestock across Baktrian territory (although, if we accept Rapin's hypothesis, it is possible that all these events took place in Sogdiana alone, which would only increase the impact of the expedition on this region). According to the *Anabasis*, during a single expedition Ptolemy was able to provide his men with no less than 23000 head of cattle.<sup>299</sup> Moreover: the fact that, among Alexander's expenditures during this time of which we know something, no less than 4500 talents (more than 24 million drachmas according to Holt's calculations) went into «subsidies» should not deceive us. In fact, here we are probably dealing with the policy of prestige and conspicuous consumption adopted by the Makedonian as the self-proclaimed legitimate successor of Darius in the struggle against Bessos, and it is therefore possible that these disbursements precede the entry into Central Asia or follow the campaign's conclusion.<sup>300</sup> Plutarch writes, and the same can be said - with even stronger undertones - of Arrian in his concluding panegyric, that «Alexander was by nature extraordinarily generous, and this to an even greater extent as his successes increased». It is not easy, however, to understand exactly who (in any case certainly an extremely small number of notables) could really benefit from such an outpouring of liberality

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<sup>298</sup> Holt 2016, 94.

<sup>299</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 3.30.6, Arr. *Anab.*, 4.25.4. Of course, this may be a case of calculated hyperbole: however, the parallel - and independent - account of Curt. 9.8.29 leaves little doubt that requisitions of herds did in fact take place, and that they were carried out on an enormous scale. For the geography of the territories in question see most recently Rapin 2013; 2018a and Goršenina and Rapin 2020, 197-202.

<sup>300</sup> Holt 2016, 96. Regarding the multiple natures and forms that a gift can take and the politics behind it, see, in addition to the classic study by Marcel Mauss, the more recent Algazi 2003 and the related bibliography. In any case, it cannot be ruled out, as argued by Vacante 2012, that at least part of the talents that fell into the hands of the Makedonians served to buy the loyalty of part of the Central Asian aristocracy in the hardest moment of the entire campaign.

since, as Bosworth already observed and as the statistics coming from the Surxondaryo seem to confirm to a large extent, in Central Asia the conquest took place primarily through the systematic use of terror, violence, and plunder.<sup>301</sup> Even more importantly, it is necessary to keep in mind that in the ancient world (but the same could be said of most later periods, at least until the industrial revolution), the concept of wealth 1. encompasses a much wider spectrum of goods than gold and silver and 2. as anthropology shows, is culturally determined. If one approaches the sources from these premises, it will become easier to get a sense of what sort of goods Alexander and his men hoarded during the two years of the Central Asian expedition and what the consequences of this policy, which cannot be defined as anything other than predatory, were on the economies - the plural, as we have seen, is mandatory - of the regions that were mostly affected by the campaign. In 329 BCE, the settlement of the Brankidae, most likely to be situated in an unknown location somewhere in Sogdiana, was sacked and razed to the ground. In addition to punishing this community for having allegedly handed over to the Persians the sanctuary of Apollon at Didyma at the time of Xerxes' invasion of Greece, the Makedonians got their hands on an unspecified number of talents, and given the context of the local society, within which sanctuaries were perfectly embedded (as clearly shown by the *ADAB* parchments), there is every reason to believe that the booty was made of goods in kind and not just precious metals.<sup>302</sup> This episode was followed by the aforementioned ransacking of Sogdiana, and it is worth pointing out that a not insignificant part of the plunder this time consisted of horses, probably taken from the Sakā communities that we know were present in large numbers in the pre-Aralic steppes as well as in upper Sogdiana, namely in the neighboring territories (especially, but not only there) of the Zarafšān valley - hence the importance of a site like Koktēpe - and in the Qashqadaryo.<sup>303</sup> In the same year, another seven settlements between Sogdiana and the Fargāne (Cyropolis and its surroundings) were besieged, stormed, and destroyed. Once again, the precise amount of the booty and its nature do not seem to interest the sources: however, if one bears in mind the composition of the provisions that, according to the testimony of Curtius Rufus, were amassed in the fortress of Arimazes, it is more than legitimate to assume that also in the case of Cyropolis it was

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<sup>301</sup> Plut. *Vit. Alex.*, 39.1, Arr. *Anab.*, 7.28.3. See also Bosworth 1998, 142 and, more recently, Naiden 2019, 150. It is possible to assume that at least part of Alexander's disbursements (the 4500 talents known to the sources) came from requisitions carried out against defeated (and in the case of Arimazes executed) opponents, and that through a judicious policy of redistributing these resources the Makedonians sought to secure the support of other Central Asian notables, from Chorienes to Sisimithres.

<sup>302</sup> Curt. 7.5.28-35, Plut. *De Sera* 12 (= *Mor.*, 557B), Strab. 11.11.4, Amm. Marc. 29.1.31: see the discussion in Matarese 2021, 127-138. On the panhellenic revenge as a driver of Alexander's expedition see now, critically, Degen 2022, 129-201, interpreting Alexander's actions as planned according to the expectations of his audience (the practical situations on the ground). This much discussed episode (if not a fabrication by Kallisthenes' work, as assumed by Naiden 2019, 365 fn. 25: cf. Degen 2022, 287), is difficult to properly assess in its historical, or even ideological, meaning. What seems clear from the available evidence on (non) Greek self-perception and Alexander's policy is that it might not even be directly related to Alexander's time: Degen 2022, 241.

<sup>303</sup> Rapin 2018a, 271, Arr. *Anab.*, 3.30.6

substantial. Not only that, but it is also possible that it consisted at least in part of supplies for the winter and/or for the subsequent sowing of the locals, thus increasing exponentially - on a medium-long term perspective - the impact of the raid.<sup>304</sup> From the available account it can additionally be inferred that, besides provisions of any kind, also high number of slaves were carried away by the Makedonians.<sup>305</sup> Furthermore: along the slopes of the Kōytendağ range, some small or very small oases, which bear traces of widespread (albeit low-density) settlement throughout the Bronze and Iron Ages, appear to have been completely depopulated from the late 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE onwards, only to recover slowly - though never completely - six centuries later, from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE onwards under the impetus of the Kušāna administration.<sup>306</sup> Again, the most logical conclusion is that these changes in settlement patterns are closely linked to Alexander's invasion and to the large-scale abandonment of entire sites as well as to the depopulation of large regions that were among the most prosperous during the Achaemenid period in the whole of Northern Central Asia.<sup>307</sup> In addition to all this, it is also possible to argue, based on the chronology of events suggested above, that at least some of the Sakā communities settled in the Zarafšan and in the Qashqadaryo valleys paid a double price for the Makedonian invasion of Bactria and, above all, Sogdiana. At an unspecified time during 329 BCE some of their members tried to secure the favors of the newcomers by offering them an unspecified amount of «gifts». We do not know if they were accepted; what is certain, however, is that this attempt did not protect them from a massive requisition of livestock carried out the following year with the aim of rewarding the new ally Sisimithres for his services.<sup>308</sup> Incidentally, in light of the importance of reciprocity within the Baktrian aristocratic networks as it emerges from the evidence provided by the *BDNA*, it cannot be ruled out that some of the anti-Makedonian insurrections may also have been fueled by Alexander's failure to observe diplomatic etiquette.<sup>309</sup> Be that as it may, this was soon followed by the (systematic and repeated) plundering of the Zarafšan

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<sup>304</sup> These goods were undoubtedly stationed in the rocks, as is shown by Arrian (*Anab.*, 4.21.10), who, in reporting that, in the spring of 328 BCE, Choriēnes supplied the Makedonians with wine and grain, does not fail to specify that they were taken «from the storehouses of the fortress», an unequivocal indication of the nature of the latter as an administrative center of at least regional importance. The imperial paradigm was then still up and running in the year «when the Yauna came».

<sup>305</sup> Curt. 7.11.1-6. The sack of the seven «Sogdian cities» is reported in Arr. *Anab.*, 4.2.1 (but see also 4.3.5) and in Curt. 7.6.10 (cf. moreover 7.6.16-23).

<sup>306</sup> Augustinová *et al.* 2018, 129–130.

<sup>307</sup> Cf. the remarks in Stančo 2019; 2020 (with bibliography) and the social dynamics studied in Weaverdyck *et al.* 2021, 313-317 which are likely to have been heavily affected by the invasion.

<sup>308</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 4.15.2, Curt. 8.4.20. See also Arr. *Anab.*, 4.5.4. In this last passage, the author of the *Anabasis* states that the Sakā delivered to Spitamenes at least 600 horses. It is not excluded that the latter also obtained them by force, thus further alienating the sympathies of his former allies. Moreover, Arrian's testimony on the one hand and that of «sheep» reported by Curtius Rufus on the other are confirmed by (zoo)archaeological data, which testify to the existence of a developed and highly complex (agro)pastoral economy in various parts of Central Asia, especially, but not only, in Sogdiana: cf. Khazanov 1994<sup>2</sup>, 25-33, Frachetti 2009, Plischke 2014, 70, Lhuillier and Mashkour 2017, Lhuillier and Bendezu-Sarmiento 2018 and most recently Lyonnet 2020.

<sup>309</sup> *BDNA* I, 32-35, nn, C, cc: cfr. King 2020, 262.

valley, the richest and most fertile region of the entire Sogdiana - and a crucial territory for the neighboring pastoral communities -, which yielded the Macedonians an unspecified (but from the context of the narrative arguably far from negligible) number of talents of loot.<sup>310</sup> Finally, in 328 came the capture of the three Sogdian strongholds, once again not before the surroundings of all of them had been plundered and the villages in the area reduced to rubble. Because of the particularly tenacious resistance he put up, we are only informed in detail about the fate of Arimazes and his *πέτρα*. Here again, Alexander and his men did not miss any opportunity to grab as much booty and slave as they could, for in fact we are informed that both were captured in considerable amount.<sup>311</sup> On the whole, therefore, it seems rather difficult to underestimate the impact of such an unrelenting predatory policy on the whole (eco)system of socio-economic relations within the satrapal territories of Northern Central Asia, all the more so given the systemic nature of the Achaemenid imperial paradigm which, while on the one hand guaranteed the (eco)system's very own efficiency, on the other hand exposed it to general repercussions in the face of shocks inflicted even on a single link in the chain, especially if it was important enough for the economy (*lato sensu*) of the satrapy (as for example in the case of Kyzyltēpe).<sup>312</sup>

### 3.3. «Οὐ πολὺ διέφερον τοῖς βίοις καὶ τοῖς ἔθεσι τῶν νομάδων»

This overview of the literary evidence concerned with the effects of Alexander's expedition on the ground in the economic fabric of the satrapies of Bactria and Sogdiana needs to be further refined through a more detailed assessment of the local actors involved in and affected by these events. Archaeological research carried out especially in Sogdiana over the last two decades has repeatedly shown that, certainly at the time of the Macedonian advance in Central Asian territory, and almost certainly also in the preceding centuries, the areas under discussion here were populated by numerous Sakā communities, whose interactions (in various capacities) with the inhabitants of the major Achaemenid administrative centers must undoubtedly be considered as one of the salient features of the entire regional economy.<sup>313</sup> Besides the better attested case of Kyzyltēpe, this is particularly true as far as the Qashqadaryo valley is concerned, where the most imposing administrative centers (from Kiš to Nīḥšapāia and from Padayataktēpe to Uzunkir) ought to be considered, among other things, the main junctions between the Achaemenid administration (and the imperial élites established there) and the economies of the steppes - in some cases as far as the territory of Semireč'e in faraway

<sup>310</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 4.6.5-7, Curt. 7.9.22-23, Diod. Sic. 17 *Arg.*, 23.

<sup>311</sup> Curt. 7.11.28-29, Rapin 2018a, 289-290, Stark 2020, 80 ff.

<sup>312</sup> See now Iliakis 2021.

<sup>313</sup> Cf. e. g. Rapin and Isamidinov 2013.

Qazaqstan and, more or less (in)directly, further Northeast towards Pazyryk.<sup>314</sup> In addition to this, the establishment of alliance networks with representatives of the Sakā communities provided a source of (especially military) power of considerable importance for the most prominent representatives of Persian interests in Sogdiana and of the Central Asian aristocracy such as Spitamenes and Dataphernes, not by chance the two individuals most often mentioned in the sources as being closely linked to the pre-Aralic steppes and the Fargāne.<sup>315</sup> Further North, in the Zarafšān valley, settlements such as Marakanda (and even more so Koktēpe, not coincidentally one of the main focuses of Spitamenes' strategic interests) fulfilled an entirely similar task since, from the moment when Alexander first entered the area in pursuit of Bessos' now former allies, historiographical sources do not fail to refer to the widespread presence of groups of mobile pastoralist and cattle breeders - variously called Massagetae, Dahai (perhaps in itself a term alluding to socio-political network of cooperation and strategic alliance, as it seems linguistically akin to the Persian bandaka) and, of course, the macro-category of the «Scythians».<sup>316</sup> In all probability it is therefore no coincidence that, during the course of the entire campaign, Spitamenes was able to muster the largest number of cavalry units precisely from these territories.<sup>317</sup> It therefore seems reasonable to argue that, during the entire period of Achaemenid hegemony in Northern Central Asia, the borderlands stretching across the areas under satrapal administration and those pertaining to the Sakā communities were anything but clearly defined (and such an undertaking was arguably not in the interests of either party), since considerable groups of these populations already lived within the imperial territories. Moreover, the evidence discussed in the previous chapters allows for the case to be made that these individuals and their families in addition maintained rather strong ties with the communities far beyond Achaemenid (political) borders.<sup>318</sup> It follows that the establishment of diplomatic contacts, alliances, and trade relations that satisfied both contracting parties was a priority for the Sakā as well as, and in some ways above all, for the Achaemenid satraps and even for the Great King himself.<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>314</sup> Wu 2005, 321-380; 2007 and Linduff and Rubinson 2021 for a recent treatment of the Pazyryk culture which is however mostly oblivious of the Achaemenid Empire.

<sup>315</sup> Cf. Rapin 2018a, 267-271.

<sup>316</sup> See Witzel 2013, 436: the Avestān word *dā:ha*, the name of a population originally located at the Western edges of the BMAC (and clearly related to the names in Greek and Latin sources designating some of the Sakā populations) maintains close contacts with the Vedic term for «slave» (*dāsa*). As in the case of *bandaka*, however, it cannot be ruled out that this was not simply a matter of subjugation, but of more complex socio-political alliance relations the terms of which were indeed negotiated by both parties involved, as recently argued by King 2020, 259-264 based on Late Antique Baktrian evidence.

<sup>317</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 4.17.3, Curt. 8.2.15-18 and Leriche 1985, 77.

<sup>318</sup> Note Minardi 2020; 2021 on Chorasmia.

<sup>319</sup> The importance of the Sakā territories within the economy of Achaemenid rule in Central Asia is shown as clearly as possible by the functional importance of the representation of one of their leaders, «Skunkha, the Scythian» in the Bīsūtūn inscription. As Rollinger 2016a, 150 has noted, in fact, Darius decided to destroy part of the then already completed Bīsūtūn monument to include the Saka chieftain in the list of those who had been ousted by his campaign «beyond the river». Leaving aside here the rhetoric of universal rulership (albeit of crucial importance in the construction of Achaemenid mental maps: Rapin 2018b, Rollinger 2021c), a plausible explanation for Darius' expedition across the

Such a background is particularly useful for understanding the construction of settlement clusters such as the one centered around Cyropoli along the course of the Syrdaryo, where we know that the concentration of Dahae communities was particularly high.<sup>320</sup> Further to the Northwest, the integration of Chorasmia within the orbit of Achaemenid Bactria responded to similar needs, since the region acted as a crucial bridgehead in order to establish profitable links with the Sakā settled along the banks of the lower course of the Amudaryo and with the communities established in the pre-Aralic steppes, on the Üstürt Plateau or in the Sar̄gam̄ȳs basin.<sup>321</sup> As for the Massagetae, they were in all likelihood among the most important (and far from disinterested) mediators of precisely these contacts, since they lived in not insignificant numbers in the steppes of Southern Türkmenistan up to the middle Amudaryo: moreover, according to Marek Jan Olbrycht, one of the greatest experts on these peoples, the Massagetae also constituted the population «most present in the Uzboi valley and in some areas of the Ustyurt plateau».<sup>322</sup> After all, as Spitamenes' movements clearly show, this latter region was a crucially important junction ensuring contacts between the Achaemenid satrapies of Bactria and Sogdiana on the one hand and the aristocratic networks in the hands of both Sakā and Chorasmian élites on the other.<sup>323</sup> Until not so long ago, it was customary to deny that the Persian Empire ever maintained close relations with the political entities established in Chorasmia, and indeed it was claimed that there were none. At best, starting with the 5<sup>th</sup> century at the latest, it was argued by scholars that whatever ties indeed bound Chorasmia with the Empire were severed.<sup>324</sup> In fact, this opinion needs to be radically revised in the light of the most recent results of the archaeological investigation in this area, one of the main merits of which is undoubtedly that it has brought to the attention of a wider academic public the outcome of a very active, decades-long (and in many cases pioneering) research activity carried out by Soviet archaeologists from the 1930s until at least the

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Syrdaryo (Rollinger 2013, 61, and now Rollinger and Degen 2021b) must probably be found in the Great King's desire to get rid of a rebellious local big man in order to carve out more room for maneuver to protect Achaemenid interests in the area. A significantly different view has been vocally defended by Wu Xin (2010; 2014), with arguments that - in my opinion - are only partially convincing.

<sup>320</sup> Leriche 1985, 70.

<sup>321</sup> Minardi 2015a, 7-11.

<sup>322</sup> Olbrycht 2015a, 270. According to Lerner 2014, the climatic conditions in this area of Central Asia during the Iron Age would have been significantly different from those known today, and instead of a desolate wasteland of impassable deserts, one should imagine a rich steppe suitable for grazing, which, moreover, would make it possible to account for the extremely powerful cavalry of the peoples settled there and, consequently, to make sense of the Achaemenid interests in these territories, and thus the need to control, if not the space as such, at least the resources which could be extracted from there, of course not without the collaboration of the local élites which, needless to say, came at a price.

<sup>323</sup> Minardi 2015a, 45. See moreover Olbrycht 1996, 156-158 and Holt 1999, 24. On the ties linking Spitamenes with the Chorasmian steppes see the testimony of Strab. 11.7.1.

<sup>324</sup> This is for example an opinion authoritatively supported by Parzinger 2020<sup>3</sup>, 673-677. In this regard, it is worth consulting the - rather brief - discussion of this territory in Briant 2002, which at least has the remarkable merit of pointing out (2002, 400) that tributes in the form of turquoise were regularly paid to the imperial court, as already clearly attested in the inscriptions of Darius at Susa (the so-called foundation charter). Compare Bonora 2020 on the background history of the mineral wealth showcased in the inscription.



collapse of the Union.<sup>325</sup> What needs to be stressed here, is the fact that among these Chorasmian political networks there might indeed have been those Sakā that in the classical sources are called - due to shaky topographical knowledge - «those living on the Bosphoros».<sup>326</sup> Discoveries such as the курганы at Filippovka, in which - as seen in chapter 5 - distinctive elements of the Persian artistic courtly style were found alongside refined artefacts engraved and decorated with sophisticated techniques (from granulation to cloisonné) attest beyond doubt to intense contacts between local powerbrokers (including the Sakā) and imperial power centers, with Bactria at the forefront.<sup>327</sup>

It is in fact highly probable that objects such as those found at Filippovka were the result of the activity of Baktrian workshops and were then offered to representatives of the Sakā élites, who may even have commissioned them as diplomatic gifts (as suggested by the reliefs from the Apadāna at Persepolis, in which the Sakā are portrayed with torques in their hands, in all likelihood a symbol of socio-political alliance).<sup>328</sup> Excavations at the so-called tomb 4 of курган 4/2006 at Filippovka have brought to light material that even suggests that members of the Achaemenid aristocracy in Bactria and Sogdiana (both of Persian and, a fortiori, autochthonous origin) attempted to establish marriage-like ties with their Sakā counterparts.<sup>329</sup> The presence of distinctly Achaemenid-style plaques found on the dress of a woman of certain social distinction has in fact been considered a cogent clue in support of the argument that Central Asian princesses (somebody of the social stand of Rōxanē and her sisters, for example, or of Apama, Spitamenes' daughter) were usually sent in marriage to Sakā notables.<sup>330</sup>

Even the literary evidence (from the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE to Alexander's time), if carefully mined, provides further clues as to the relations that bound Central Asian societies to the various Sakā groups (and it is far from excluded that the latter were only the more mobile counterpart of the former along a socio-economic continuum). One of these communities, the so-called «European Scythians», was in fact among the allies (bandakā) of the Baktrian satrap. In fact, they participated in Xerxes' campaign against Greece under the banner of the local satrap (Vīštāšpa), and about two centuries later

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<sup>325</sup> Betts *et al.* 2001; 2002; 2012, Goršenina 2012, Minardi 2015a; 2016. Further bibliography in Fabian 2019b, to which one can now add Goršenina and Rapin 2020.

<sup>326</sup> The names of these communities reflect the (as said rather approximate) understanding of Central Asian (physical as well as human) geography of our extant literary sources: Rapin 2005; 2018a, 260 and Rathmann 2006, 83-89. However, as suggested among others by Rollinger 2021c, it is also possible that the Sakā geography of our sources somehow mirrored an Achaemenid topography of (universal) power: Rollinger and Degen 2021b, Degen 2022, 332-381.

<sup>327</sup> Olbrycht 2015a, 268, Minardi 2021. Cf. Polyaen. 7.11.8 and now Yablonskii and Treister 2019 on Achaemenid impact as far as the Southern Ural.

<sup>328</sup> See already Briant 1982, 206-218. On the role of the Baktrian workshops in the crafting of Achaemenid valuables from precious stones see the important study by Francfort 2013a. As for Achaemenid diplomatic gifts - having as recipients also the Sakā élites see Colburn 2017, 876-880.

<sup>329</sup> See now on the Filippovka finds King 2021, 358-359 with further references.

<sup>330</sup> Olbrycht 2015a, 268. This further strengthens the hypothesis that Spitamenes' wife (Curt. 8.3.1, *Epit. Mett.*, 20-23) may well have been a Saka princess who married one of the most important members of the Achaemenid ruling class in Central Asia.

they are again among the contingents that Bessos led to the West on behalf of Darius III, fighting alongside the Baktrian soldiers at Gaugamela.<sup>331</sup> Finally, another crucial space for the (re)negotiation of the terms underlying these contacts was located in Ustrūšana (roughly today's Fargāne valley), where groups of Sakā called «Abioi» - possibly the haṃvargā mentioned in the Achaemenid royal inscriptions, used to graze their legendary horses.<sup>332</sup> Even this quick review only supports an hypothesis such as the one put forward in chapter 4, according to which the settlement cluster centered on Cyropolis must have been conceived by the Persian administration as the most suitable theatre against which background it was sensitive to organize events aimed at establishing through ritualized (or institutionalized) protocols bonds of alliance or at least, if nothing better could be achieved, what Briant has called «controlled hostility».<sup>333</sup> From what has been said so far, it is easier to understand 1. how and 2. why Alexander's policy led to a significant break with the strategy developed over decades by the Achaemenids. A remarkable clue in this sense is constituted by the clear refusal of the Makedonians to the offer of an alliance forwarded to them by the «king» (in all probability one particularly influential representative) of the «European Scythians» who, probably acting in the wake of a well-established diplomatic code dating back to Persian times, had tried - in vain - to ensure both his own autonomy and that of his reference group as well as, and above all, access to the major imperial (political-administrative and economic) nodes of the territory by offering the new representative of the supra-regional authority («Alexander, the King») to marry his daughter.<sup>334</sup> The devastation of Cyropolis and of the settlements connected to it dealt a further blow to the communities settled on both sides of the borderland: the foundation, a few kilometers to the West, of Alexandria Ἐσχάτη aimed in fact at nothing less than a conservative redefinition of the imperial frontier zones, thus severing important economic and social ties (in all likelihood even family networks), effectively preventing, on the one hand, the Sakā from accessing the resources that the satrapies ruled by the Achaemenids once made available to them; on the other, depriving the Baktrian and Sogdian notables of extremely valuable horses and equally valuable military support.<sup>335</sup> In any case, it is worth

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<sup>331</sup> Hdt. 7.64, Arr. *Anab.*, 3.11.3 (who calls them Dahai and Massagetai), Curt. 4.12.6. It should not be forgotten that, according to Herodotos, while planning his rebellion against Xerxes, Masistes' relied on large numbers of Sakā troops, who must therefore have fallen under his jurisdiction in one way or another and, more important, they could apparently be counted as belonging to Masistes' bandakā (Hdt. 9.107-113).

<sup>332</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 4.3.2-4, Curt. 7.6.19-20, Olbrycht 2015a, 267-270, Rapin 2018a, 272.

<sup>333</sup> Briant 2002, 726-733. On the concept of the «contact zone» as a territory specifically conceived as a space for ritualized entanglements between a ruler and the élite(s) of his Empire see Strootman 2007, 249; 2014, 19, Ulf 2014 and, more generally, Rollinger 2023. Note most recently Versluys forthcoming for a theory of the frontier zone as a space for innovation.

<sup>334</sup> Curt. 8.1.8.

<sup>335</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 4.3.2-4, Curt. 7.6.19-20, Olbrycht 2015a, 267-270, Rapin 2018a, 272, but it is also worth considering *FGrHist* 239 B7. On the impact of imperial border strongholds on pastoral communities settled on the (political and ecological) frontier zones of an Empire see Boozer 2018, 213. From a landscape-historical perspective, Stride 2007, 115 has rightly pointed out that the severing of ties between two ecological frontiers is a sure sign of an exceptional situation, since usually the favored strategy is the exact opposite.

reiterating once again that the consequences of the Makedonian invasion were in no way limited to the communities located along and across the Northeastern imperial borderlands in Central Asia.<sup>336</sup> As already noted in the case of Sogdiana, the campaign must be held responsible in no small measure for a massive contraction of the satrapy's settlement fabric *as a whole*, thus forcing entire communities to flee from their villages (which were in fact destroyed), and whose resources were systematically plundered.<sup>337</sup> Although it is now clear – especially thanks to the groundbreaking studies by Claude Rapin – that the greatest devastation took place in Sogdiana, there is nevertheless reason to believe that Baktria was not spared either. Of the 138 sites that the new edition of the *Archaeological Gazetteer of Afghanistan* catalogues across entire Achaemenid Afġānistān (98 of which – remarkably – are located North of Hīndukūš), no more than 70 survived the Makedonian expedition (and of these 55 are located in Eastern Baktria alone, in the area between Qundūz and Tāleqān).<sup>338</sup>

Let us now try to draw some conclusions. Although the evidence available is still too fragmentary to elaborate anything more than working hypotheses, nevertheless the orders of magnitude involved are such as to leave little doubt concerning the radical extent of the changes brought about by this two-year period of the Makedonian campaign, on a scale, moreover, that should not have spared any of the territories affected by the satrapal power of Baktria, and the magnitude of which is further enhanced by the *speed* with which said changes occurred. It has even been argued that the events triggered a process which, from the vantage point of a long-term perspective, may have been responsible for what Thomas Brüggemann has called «tribal slippage», which contributed in no small measure to the end of Greek power in the upper satrapies, from Parthia to Hyrkania and even to Baktria itself.<sup>339</sup> According to the German historian, among the most important consequences of Alexander's policy in Central Asia were, in the first place, the separation of two «ecotones» of fundamental importance for the socio-economic life of the area (with the agricultural plains of the oases on the one hand and, on the other, the steppes and the slopes of the mountain ranges). A second, but closely related, effect would then have been to sever community and even family ties, both *within* the satrapal territories and, above all, in and across the borderlands such as the Qashqadaryo or the area around Cyropolis.<sup>340</sup> According to Brüggemann, the end result of all these momentous processes was what he calls an «existential impediment» that greatly damaged the local population, many of

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<sup>336</sup> Rapin 2021 for an overview.

<sup>337</sup> Leriche 1985, 72.

<sup>338</sup> Thomalsky *et al.* 2013, 211. See moreover Ball 2019 and Martinez-Sève 2020c. Qundūz had been a regional center of great importance during the Persian period, as is well shown by the canalization works that were completed in the area before the Makedonian expedition: Leriche 1985, 69.

<sup>339</sup> Brüggemann 2016, 10. See now Hoo and Wiesehöfer 2022 on the Graeco-Baktrians.

<sup>340</sup> Leriche 1985, 71.

whose members were forced to flee their settlement territories, while others found themselves in the position of being forcibly (re)settled within the new boundaries of the Makedonian satrapy.<sup>341</sup> A similar view has also been voiced by Marek Olbrycht. According to him, although there is no denying that Alexander finally emerged victorious from the confrontation with Spitamenes and his allies, this came at a very high price, which seems to raise at least a doubt about the actual success of the entire expedition. This is suggested, among other things, by the fact that he lost a considerable amount of time, men, and resources fighting to the death against a Central Asian aristocracy on the support of whose members (whom he had to pay – according to Strabo literally - in gold) he was eventually forced to rely anyway in his attempt to capture Spitamenes. In addition to this, especially due to the widespread destruction of the infrastructural and socio-political networks that had sustained Persian power, the authority of the new conquerors in Northern Central Asia, especially in sociopolitical areas of great importance such as Sogdiana and the Syrdaryo catchment basin, proved to be far more fragile than it had ever been the case in Achaemenid times, with consequences that would still be felt during Seleukos' *Anabasis*.<sup>342</sup> If not unwilling at least apparently unable to preserve the (as effective as it was fragile) system set up by the imperial administration in the previous centuries, Alexander therefore left Baktria in 327 in a state similar in every way to the one immediately following (if not even *preceding*) Cyrus' conquest, i. e. when the imperial paradigm was still in its cradle, or at least had not yet been feasible to systematically apply it to the Central Asian territories: in other words, a space that was extremely fragmented into small pockets of local power which, if they could be controlled with relative ease, were much more difficult to coordinate (and therefore exploit) from the - by now isolated - seat of the (new) imperial power, which was necessarily located once again at Baktra.<sup>343</sup> This meant that the whole system had to be rebuilt almost from scratch: however, in the immediate aftermath of the war, the Makedonians found themselves without the men with the necessary skills (which included, of course, well-established social networks) to carry out this task. The most conspicuous consequence of this state of affairs is to be found in the opportunity it offered to those members of the local élites who had survived the campaign (of whom Oxyartes is the best known, but very likely by no means the only one) to (re)gain those positions of power and influence

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<sup>341</sup> In the light of Brüggemann's hypotheses, the repeated mention in the sources (e. g. Curt. 8.1.3) of groups of «Baktrian exiles» or «disinherited Sogdians» among the ranks of Spitamenes' troops would gain in plausibility, for it is now given a proper context. Although I personally disagree with the German historian's view that the process he describes became «irreversible at least from the 80s of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE onwards», his overall analysis is nonetheless worthy of the highest consideration, since it raises crucial questions about, among other things, problems of economic inequality and resource acquisition which, not least because of the lack of sufficient written evidence, are still largely neglected by scholarship on Central Asia in both Achaemenid and Hellenistic (as well as later) times. For a very useful introduction to the topic in the framework of ancient Mediterranean studies see the miscellaneous volume edited by Pascal Derron and Sitta von Reden (2017).

<sup>342</sup> Olbrycht 2017, 199. See on this issue Vacante 2012.

<sup>343</sup> Henkelman 2017a, 81.

within the imperial hierarchies that had at first been threatened by the appointment - strategically ill-advised, as it turned out - of individuals such as Artabazos or Kleitos.<sup>344</sup>

#### 3.4. *I viceré*. «If everything changes on the outside, everything stays as it is»

The considerations developed so far play a major role when assessing the significance of Alexander's so-called military reforms, which were initiated as early as the Central Asian campaign and were characterized by the gradual involvement of Irānian notables both within the cadres of the Makedonian army and in the more restricted circles of the new Empire's courtly society.<sup>345</sup> In addition to making for an issue of great importance for a better understanding of Alexander's plans to govern the newly acquired territories, questions concerning the position of Central Asian leaders within the hierarchies of Alexander's Empire are crucial for the purpose of assessing the sociopolitical structures underlying Seleukid power in Baktria, which until recently was considered to be based eminently, if not exclusively, on elements of Graeco-Makedonian extraction.<sup>346</sup> For if it is true, as the previous section has tried to show, that Alexander's campaign had an extremely significant impact on Baktrian society, the opposite process has also to be taken into consideration. Indeed, in the course of the expedition, some of the most influential members of the local Central Asian élites were able to exert a progressively growing influence on the miniature society that was the court gathered around Alexander.<sup>347</sup> In view of the fact, as scholars have not failed to point out, that the monarchical power of the Makedonian was by nature of military extraction and that its foundations rested on the army, the fact that the composition and character of the latter reflected the changes within the ruling class of the Empire, while at the same time providing the notables in the conquered satrapies with a powerful tool for influencing the social system built around the new King's inner circle, seems a more than logical consequence of the phenomena discussed above.<sup>348</sup> Historiographic sources agree that, at least from 330 BCE onwards, the Irānian component became more and more numerous and important within the army (also in very prominent offices): at the time of launching the Indian campaign, there were already contingents of Baktrians, Sogdians and - remarkably - Dahai and other Sakā (perhaps Massagetai), the latter in all probability enlisted in the retinue of their traditional Baktrian allies according to a pattern that is known at least since Arrian's account of the battle at

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<sup>344</sup> Heckel 2018, 106-108.

<sup>345</sup> O'Neil 2002.

<sup>346</sup> Cf. Coloru 2009, 139-155, who also provides further bibliography. For a slightly different position see Coloru 2013, to be compared with Bosworth 1981.

<sup>347</sup> Spawforth 2007, Kosmin 2013a, 671-676.

<sup>348</sup> Olbrycht 2015b, 196. On the salient features of the Makedonian monarchy see most recently Müller 2016, 26-28 with previous literature as well as the contributions in the volume on *The History of the Argeads* edited by Sabine Müller *et al.* (2017). Degen 2022, 402-408 on Alexander's network building during his campaign in Irān.

Gaugamela.<sup>349</sup> The first units of Central Asian soldiers (especially horsemen) were created while pursuing Bessos: presenting himself as Darius' legitimate successor, if not heir to the Achaemenid throne, starting with the conquest of the satrapal seat in Hyrkania, Alexander wasted no time in enlisting the main representatives of the local power networks (and their respective «selectorates») in an attempt to progressively isolate his adversary from his Central Asian clients.<sup>350</sup> This strategy was continued in Arachosia, at a stage when it had become essential to cut off Bessos from the routes of communication with the other satrapies (beyond that of his direct jurisdiction, i. e. Baktria), over which he was proving capable of still wielding some – considerable - form of authority. According at least to a report provided by Curtius Rufus, 200 «aristocrats» were recruited by Alexander during his march to the Hindūkūš passes.<sup>351</sup> For reasons which are not difficult to guess, this trend apparently ground to a halt during the two years of fighting in Baktria and Sogdiana, only to start again around the end of 328 BCE with the creation of two cavalry detachments, first the *δορυφόροι* and then the *ἐπίγονοι*.<sup>352</sup> It is usually argued that Alexander was driven to this decision by the increasing difficulties in obtaining troop reinforcements from Greece and Makedonia: from what we know, he had in fact received the last reinforcements from Europe in 331, and the total amount of troops that joined him at Ekbatana (approximately 6000 infantrymen and 500 cavalry) can hardly be considered sufficient to replace the fallen.<sup>353</sup>

Although there is little to no doubt that such considerations played a very important role in influencing the Makedonian's decisions, the chronology of events dictates that we should not exclude on principle the hypothesis that the granting of these important military posts may be counted among the forms of reward negotiated by individuals such as Oxyartes and his acolytes in exchange for their cooperation in the war against Spitamenes and the latter's allies. The rifts within the Makedonian general staff caused by the execution of Philotas and the assassination of Parmenion (which deepened until they peaked in the assassination of Kleitos at Marakanda) must have provided the Central Asian élite who had left Bessos in 329 with a valuable opportunity to carve out a new position within the court hierarchy, since the bestowal of power on the latter allowed Alexander himself to effectively counterbalance the Makedonian notables, who for their part were increasingly uncomfortable with Alexander's engagement with Achaemenid language of self-legitimation. The reason therefore is not,

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<sup>349</sup> Olbrycht 2007, 309; 2015b, 196. See moreover Arr. *Anab.*, 5.11.3, Arr. *Anab.*, 5.12.2, Curt. 8.14.5, Curt. 9.2.24 and Curt. 9.2.33.

<sup>350</sup> Rapin 2017a, 65-78. Degen 2022, 302-312 rightly points out that, not being able to claim family ties to the dynasty, Alexander could not aim at (Achaemenid) kingship. This forced him to elaborate his own strategy in order to find support among imperial élites and consequently to win over the Empire.

<sup>351</sup> Curt. 7.3.4

<sup>352</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 3.28.1-4, Curt. 7.3.4, Curt. 7.10.9, Diod. Sic. 17.77.4, Olbrycht 2015b, 204.

<sup>353</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 3.16.10, Curt. 5.1.39-42, Diod. Sic. 17.65.1, Diod. Sic. 17.95.4 as well as, most recently, Anson 2020, 236 and Rollinger and Degen 2021a, 333 (with references).

as so often argued, because of some sort of Makedonian conservatism or the despise of Oriental habits (the Argead court was on the contrary very much fluent in these cultural codes), but because individuals such as Parmenion, who paid for his opposition with his life, clearly sensed that the main goal of the prince was to get rid of the courtly élite he inherited from his father and whose main representatives had still the power to effectively oppose him.<sup>354</sup>

The conclusion of an alliance (albeit a tactical and provisional one) with certain members of the Central Asian aristocracy therefore proved crucial for Alexander, also in order to free himself once and for all from dependence on the factions within the Makedonian court that had characterized his father's reign and which, under his leadership too, had played a crucial role, at least up to that time.<sup>355</sup> Despite the fact that this event proved decisive in overcoming the forms of collegial government that Alexander had inherited from the Argead monarchical tradition and which were increasingly under pressure against the background of a world empire such as the one he won over, this repositioning of Alexander concerning his ruling strategies had the somewhat paradoxical result of making him much *more* dependent on local power networks than his Achaemenid counterparts had ever been. Both the death of Kleitos and the pages' conspiracy, in fact, graphically show that it was becoming increasingly difficult for Alexander to continue the traditional policy of replacing men he felt he could not trust with individuals coming from the circle of the Makedonian élite.<sup>356</sup> The solution adopted was to forge, in the words of Anthony Spawforth, a «new, artificial elite», recruiting an ever-increasing number of Central Asian notables both in the cadres of the army and in the ranks of the courtly aristocracy.<sup>357</sup> At the same time, Alexander did not fail to take their children hostage (a practice, notably, that was far from unknown within these aristocratic circles), ensuring that they were trained within the garrisons, separated from their social context of origin and supported by Greek teachers, with the ultimate aim of securing the loyalty of their fathers.<sup>358</sup> It follows from all this that Alexander's new

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<sup>354</sup> Müller 2016, 296-300: this shows once again the importance of social networks within Central Asian political dynamics: proof of this is the fact that Alexander was able to conquer the satrapy only when he resolved to build a stronger (meaning more ramified) specimen thereof than Spitamenes', a hypothesis already shrewdly formulated by Bosworth 1981, 11. Degen 2022, 322-332 on élite culture in Makedon. Note Duindam 2016, 307: according to him, in fact, local power circles are not merely representatives of a state's interests, nor do they simply oppose them, but rather aim to manipulate a given system in accordance with their own interests.

<sup>355</sup> Müller 2016, 305-306.

<sup>356</sup> Jacobs 2006, Strootman 2007, 100, Müller 2016, 299-300.

<sup>357</sup> See on this issue Olbrycht 2017, 194, arguing that «Alexander created a concept of monarchy based mostly on Iranian traditions, but it was not a direct continuation of the Achaemenid rule in terms of monarchical ideology» (emphasis is mine) as well as, most recently, Anson 2020. What was he planning in the long run can only be speculated. Degen 2022, 409-418 stresses the Makedonian structural aspects of Alexander's world Empire, suggesting that the role of native élite was conceived from the start as that of a (however crucial) supporting cast. Be that as it may, his untimely death reshuffled the cards once again, with momentous consequences «from Ephesos to Baktria and India».

<sup>358</sup> Spawforth 2007, 106-112; but see also Plut. *Vit. Alex.*, 47.6. It should not escape notice that this strategy of controlling imperial élites did not end with Alexander: Strootman 2014, 136-137 for the Hellenistic period and Duindam 2016, 207 for a comparative overview of the modern era. Comparative imperial history shows that hostage taking was a staple of Empire building strategies from Qīng China to the Ottomans, and the same was true at the Šafavid and the Mughal courts.

strategy of building the social infrastructures intended to govern the Empire in Central Asia led him to progressively abandon the imperial paradigm (with all its implications in terms of communication, economic, and administrative networks) that had defined the centuries of Achaemenid hegemony. On the contrary, the strategy he was developing was based almost exclusively on elements such as proximity to the king, which was expressed through the use of symbolic and ritual acts such as the bestowal of the diadem and, finally, through family ties.<sup>359</sup> In turn, proximity and loyalty were rewarded with positions and privileges both within and outside the court itself.<sup>360</sup> If only because of his prominence in the sources, the typical case of what has been anticipated is that of Oxyartes: not only did he prove capable - perhaps also aided by his daughter, whom we must not in any way imagine as a passive pawn in his, or Alexander's tow - of recovering his position within the highest hierarchies of the new Baktrian ruling class; on the contrary, he was even rewarded with a larger territory than the one over which he once ruled. The prominence of this individual in the literary record, it is reasonable to assume, should be attributed exclusively to his family relationship with Alexander, not to the exceptional nature of the whole affaire.<sup>361</sup> In view of the problems that Alexander's authority faced during the harshest phases of the Central Asian campaign and in the immediate post-war period, it may be concluded that the new strategy he adopted proved at first to be extremely effective, in that if, on the one hand, it allowed him to deprive the Makedonian factions of power, at the same time it earned him the unconditional loyalty of the new officers, who owed their position in the newly created satrapies solely and exclusively to the king (and no longer, or at least not to such an extent as before, to the *local* socio-political networks).<sup>362</sup> However, the greatest weakness of the whole system was, of course, the fact that it depended on the physical presence of the ruler on the field, since he alone had enough purchase to keep the ambitions and rivalries of his subordinates at bay. On the contrary, as

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<sup>359</sup> Anson 2020. It is arguably no chance that a parental-like vocabulary was employed in describing the relationship between Alexander and his (new) courtly elite.

<sup>360</sup> Briant 2002, 350-359, Spawforth 2007, 11. On the diadem worn by Alexander and the reactions it provoked in Makedonian court circles, see Arr. *Anab.*, 7.9.9, Curt. 10.6.4, Diod. Sic. 17.116.4, Just. *Epit.*, 12.3.8, Strootman 2007, 366-372 with the previous bibliography and Strootman 2014, 220.

<sup>361</sup> Cf. Curt. 9.8.9-11. On the role played by Rōxanē in securing his father's power within the ranks of the Baktrian aristocracy see Ogden 1999, 43-47.

<sup>362</sup> On this point see Panitschek 2016, 232 and, conversely, Strootman 2014, 116-117, who argues that Alexander would *not* have been able, at least at the beginning, to remove the Irānian notables from their positions even if he had wanted to. Seleukos' campaign to (re)conquer Central Asia (Bactrianos expugnavit according to Just. *Epit.*, 15.4.1) and the career of an individual like Sōphytos suggest that Baktria was one of those regions within the now waned Achaemenid Empire where Alexander's process of creating Spawforth's «artificial» élite met with the least success. In fact, on the one hand Artabazos was deprived of power because of his opponents' plotting within what remained of the Persian satrapal aristocracy, while on the other hand Kleitos was assassinated by Alexander himself. This inevitably opened a power vacuum that was probably exploited to their advantage by the still active Baktrian magnates and by their clientele, whose members proved extremely dexterous in regaining their positions, thus forcing the new king to reach an agreement with them in order not to lose control of the entire satrapy. On the protagonists of these events see Arr. *Anab.*, 4.17.3, Curt. 8.1.19 and the contributions by Waldemar Heckel (2006, 55; 2018, 104-108). Moreover, as Arrian himself attests (*Anab.*, 6.27.1) already when Alexander was still alive there were cases of satraps who took advantage of his absence to pursue their own factional interests with impunity (at least until the *Return of the King*).



argued throughout this work, the stability of Achaemenid overlordship over Central Asia and the Empire as a whole rested precisely on the creation of a sophisticated system of checks and balances that protected the continuity of power within the satrapy from possible turmoil within the court and from friction between the court and the local satrap.<sup>363</sup> As soon as Alexander left, the (as the case of Artabazos shows, not even too much) latent conflict between the newly minted ruling class on the one hand and, on the other, the Makedonian élite supported by the soldiers who had been stationed in the satrapy as settlers (a conflict that the new king had been able to check as long as he was physically present in the satrapy) erupted with renewed violence, the extent of which is evident from the fact that it seriously jeopardized the very hegemony of the Makedonians in Central Asia. From what can be guessed based on the evidence, in fact, some components of the newly formed Baktrian aristocracy of the Alexandrian period even managed to carve out their own positions of power in the satrapal territory, proving strong enough to challenge – successfully, as it seems - the authority of the Makedonian administrators appointed at Baktra. Once the latter had been reconquered, the most important (and difficult) task awaiting Seleukos and his heirs was undoubtedly that of rebuilding a system that would have proven capable of withstanding the absence - and at best even the death - of the king(s).<sup>364</sup> As forcefully argued by a recent and at the same time already quite solid trend in scholarship on the Seleukid Empire, this was achieved through the creation of *new* networks of patronage that made the ability to act of the new Central Asian ruling class more dependent on *direct* links with the imperial family than had previously been the case under Achaemenid rule.<sup>365</sup> The study of this process lies beyond the scope of the present work. However, a somewhat detailed discussion of the 20 years or so which elapsed between Alexander's departure for India and Selukos' (re)conquest of Central Asia following the latter's final takeover of Babylon may help to give an idea of the dynamics at work in this crucial time span, the importance of which derives from the fact that, on the one hand, they are instrumental in order to assess the defining features of the break between the Achaemenid and subsequent periods in this area of the Empire; on the other, because taking stock of these dynamics is crucial for charting the range of possibilities available to the founders of the first

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<sup>363</sup> According to Chrubasik 2016, 243, the «structural weakness» of Alexander's strategy of power building in Central Asia - which the Seleukids would have inherited - lies first and foremost here. In his words, within the Seleukid Empire, individuals were able to become kings without becoming the Seleukid kings. By virtue of his military conquest of the Persian Empire, Alexander had destroyed this crucial feature of Achaemenid success. In the absence of the Achaemenid ethno-classe dominante and through the introduction of individual success as a qualifying element for kingship during the age of the Diadochi, the scholar further argues, the possibilities for individuals to become kings increased exponentially. According to other voices within recent historiography on the Seleukids, however, this position must be at least partly mitigated by the fact that the strategies adopted by the new lords of the Achaemenid East to tackle this (real and serious) problem proved to be quite effective for a long time, even and not least in - crucial - territories such as Central Asia. See Strootman 2018; 2020c.

<sup>364</sup> Cf. Strootman 2014, 140-144.

<sup>365</sup> On the Seleukid client networks as by far the most important instrument available to the new lords of Asia for maintaining their power, see e. g. Ramsey 2009, 188-204 and the related chapters in Engels 2017a.

Central Asian Empire in history as they made their own bid for power in the region. In other words, the one leading *From Alexander to Seleukos* is a swing door in the history of pre-Islamic Bactria.<sup>366</sup>

These processes are therefore the subject of the concluding sections of this chapter and, with it, of the present study. In the first, a discussion of the settlers' revolts that followed Alexander's invasion of India (and the uncontrolled spread of news about the king's fate) seeks to shed light - insofar as this is allowed by the available evidence - on the socio-political dynamics active within the satrapy and involving the Graeco-Makedonians on the one hand and, on the other, those members of the local élite who had joined the ranks of the ruling class which Alexander tried to shape. Closely linked to this topic is the question of the demography of the first generation of inhabitants after the conquest, which in turn is of fundamental importance to draw a profile of those élites with whom the Seleukid rulers (and their governors) had to deal during their attempt at consolidating their power over Bactria.

In the second (and final) section, an attempt shall be made to show that, although scarce and laconic to the point of paroxysm, the dataset at hand perhaps at least allows to guess how, taking advantage of the instability of the system built by Alexander (or perhaps, more appropriately, of the remains of what had survived his passing), some members of the new Bactrian ruling class - a remarkable fact, probably not only Graeco-Makedonian - managed to secure a position of personal power that seems to have been largely independent of that of the satrap. This situation forced the Seleukids to implement a series of measures the importance thereof would prove decisive for the history of Central Asia in the decades to come: a further centralization of the political and administrative apparatus within Bactria, the institutionalization of a diarchic system of government in order to control (in the absence, or given the relative weakness, of the Achaemenid «aristocratic networks» as they emerge from the *ADAB*) as effectively as possible the territory which they, at least nominally, claimed for themselves and finally the progressive, slow, but inexorable delegation of power. The long journey of the Diodotids (and, above all, of Euthydemos and his heirs) towards the conquest of Central Asia arguably begins here, at the same time in which ours approaches its end.<sup>367</sup>

#### 4. *Back to the Future*: at the Roots of the Bactrian Empire Between Alexander and the Seleukids

Seven years after his first attempt to forge a new courtly society in Central Asia, Alexander died, perhaps struck by malaria, on a fateful Babylonian summer day. This of course makes it difficult - and perhaps pointless - to speculate on what form his project of Empire-building would have taken had he lived longer.<sup>368</sup> Having said this, what can be deduced from the sources is that, if at first he

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<sup>366</sup> Grainger 1990, 76-113.

<sup>367</sup> Wenghofer 2018, Jakobsson 2020. See now Hoo and Wiesehöfer 2022, 277-288 on both history and features of the first Central Asian Empire (but note also Morris 2019a, 63-74).

<sup>368</sup> Spawforth 2007, 112. That one such project however existed has been convincingly shown by Degen 2022.

had made abundant use of Central Asian notables to rein in the Makedonian circles active at court, he soon felt the need to get rid of at least the most senior members of that same élite, whom he evidently still trusted little, and whom he would never trust enough.<sup>369</sup> In his plans, so at least it seems, a decisive role for this purpose was to be played by the ἐπίγονοι, whom Alexander might have conceived as destined to become the new ethno-classe dominante of the Empire.<sup>370</sup> Here lies a - further - miscalculation. If, in fact, many of Bessos' lieutenants (and for the most part his bandakā) proved extremely quick to come to terms - in not a few cases with enthusiasm - with the new course of the Empire, it is worth noting that the most significant problems for the stability of the political regime built by Alexander came in large part not from them, but from the Graeco-Makedonian settlers and the highest ranks of the army that the new king had posted in the satrapy with the intention of administering the region.<sup>371</sup> A nice example of such dynamics is given by the fact that in 325 BCE, when word spread during Alexander's campaign against the Malli people that he had been mortally wounded, violent riots broke out in Baktria.<sup>372</sup> According to the sources, the turmoil was spearheaded by a typical representative of the new Makedonian ruling class that had been appointed in the new settlements in Central Asia: an officer (who in the - distinctly hostile - narrative of the available sources becomes a mercenary) named Athenodoros. With the support of a group of fellow plotters, he led an army and attempted to seize nothing less than the satrapal seat by force. During the revolt, Athenodoros and his men put to death a large number of opponents.<sup>373</sup> The fact that the uprising was led by an army officer is in itself interesting, as it seems to reveal a degree of discontent among the settlers already in the immediate aftermath of the war: the latter, it may be assumed, was due - among other things - to the fact that, after being ousted from the levers of power, the Baktrian notables had managed to regain their positions within the local hierarchies, a development that must have been far from welcome by the Makedonians.<sup>374</sup> According to Curtius Rufus' account, the riots started *circa*

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<sup>369</sup> Strootman 2007, 100 fn. 20.

<sup>370</sup> This seems to be implied by Curt. 10.2.8 when he states that «Alexander believed that Asia could be controlled by an army of modest size, since he had stationed garrisons in many places and had populated the newly founded cities with settlers who had no desire for a change of regime». These inhabitants were most probably members of the ἐπίγονοι. According to Olbrycht 2011, 27, members of the aristocratic families of Central Asia formed the core of this élite guard: cf. Diod. Sic. 17.108.1 and Just. *Epit.*, 12.4.9-10.

<sup>371</sup> Cf. Olbrycht 2013, 161. According to him, in fact, there were entire military contingents in Irān and Central Asia that were predominantly composed of Irānians, since Makedonians were few in those places and the Greeks proved en masse to be politically unreliable.

<sup>372</sup> On Alexander's campaign against the Mallians (also called Malaya) see Arr. *Anab.*, 6.11.1, according to whom the Makedonians «slaughtered everyone and left neither woman nor child alive», as well as the commentary by Bosworth 1998, 94 and Naiden 2019, 202-204.

<sup>373</sup> Curt. 9.7.1-3. Heckel 2006, 60. A possible allusion to these murders seems to transpire from *FGrHist* 100 F8. It is not known whether Athenodoros' opponents included only the Baktrian aristocrats or whether they were at least partly supported by the ἐπίγονοι, but this does not seem impossible per se, since both these categories had everything to gain from maintaining political stability and internal peace.

<sup>374</sup> Just. *Epit.*, 12.5.13, Plin. *NH.*, 6.138. Cf. also Müller 2016, 297-300: questions concerning the organization of the satrapy already loomed large over the infamous banquet at Marakanda and it has been repeatedly suggested that it was disagreements on this subject that caused the altercation that led to Kleitos' death.

Bactra, but quickly expanded into Sogdiana, an inference that seems almost certain by virtue of the historian's reference to Sakā territories that were involved in the confrontations.<sup>375</sup> For his part, Omar Coloru suggested that the epicenter was located in one of the garrisons set up in the territory under the purview of the main satrapal seat, perhaps that Ἀλεξάνδρεια κατὰ Βάκτρα which appears in Stephen of Byzantium's list of Alexandrian foundations.<sup>376</sup>

The insurrection spread to such an extent that it almost entirely escaped the control of the local authorities, so much so that even the satrap who had succeeded Kleitos in office, Amintas son of Nikolaios, was most likely killed during the siege of Baktria: in fact, with the exception of Justin, he does not appear in any of the surviving literary accounts after 325 BCE.<sup>377</sup> As a result of these events, a new power vacuum was opened within the political and administrative cadres of the satrapy. Athenodoros made some attempt at fixing this situation by proclaiming himself king, but he was assassinated shortly afterwards, perhaps not without the Central Asian notables (who no doubt had much to lose from a redefinition of the status quo sanctioned by Alexander) being completely unaware of these developments.<sup>378</sup> Despite its general obscurity, the episode nevertheless sheds light on several major issues concerning the balance of power within the new power networks lobbying for influence in post-Achaemenid Baktria. Firstly, the revolt shows that, at least in the early phase following the conquest, some of the Graeco-Makedonians must have felt growing unease about the (increasingly extensive) powers granted to the Baktrian notables who had offered to collaborate with Alexander during the final months of the campaign against Spitamenes. Indeed, when sources such as Diodoros Siculus or Curtius Rufus claim that the insurgents were planning to overthrow the existing order, it is not outlandish to assume that one of the main objectives of Athenodoros and his men was to liquidate their - unwieldy - Central Asian counterparts.<sup>379</sup> The second aspect deserving consideration is that - similarly to what happened within the Achaemenid front in 330 BCE - Athenodoros' position did *not* meet with unanimous approval from the Makedonians themselves. It is no coincidence that he was assassinated thanks to a conspiracy led by another «mercenary», namely a certain Bithon. To further complicate the picture, we learn that the latter could count on the support of a Baktrian named Boxos: from this it might be argued that, at least in Baktria, within a few years, power factions had already formed the members thereof considered the agreements sanctioned by Alexander as potentially very advantageous, and consequently sought to compromise with the Makedonians left behind by the king

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<sup>375</sup> Curt. 9.7.1

<sup>376</sup> Steph. Byz. s. v. Ἀλεξάνδρεια and Coloru 2009, 131. On Alexander as a city founder, see now Giangiulio 2020.

<sup>377</sup> Curt. 9.7.9-11, Diod. Sic. 18.3-7, Just. *Epit.*, 13.4.23.

<sup>378</sup> Curt. 9.7.3-5.

<sup>379</sup> Iliakis 2013, 187-190. Cf. Curt. 9.7.1, Diod. Sic. 18.7.1.

in Central Asia.<sup>380</sup> It therefore seems reasonable to conclude that a certain level of cooperation between (at least some of) the newly established settlers and the locals had already been achieved by the time Alexander left for India, and the evidence at hand suggests that this cooperation went far beyond the minimal objective of «getting rid of each other», as argued by many scholars.<sup>381</sup> This is, of course, of considerable importance, if only by virtue of the fact that the scenario proposed here has been repeatedly rejected in favor of a picture in which every branch of the former Achaemenid administration would have fallen to the Makedonians, while the locals would have been confined outside the perimeter of the newly founded «Greek» cities.<sup>382</sup> How entrenched such claims are in the scholarly discourse can be inferred from the mere fact that, even when the sources attest to the presence of individuals clearly linked to the Baktrian world as being actively involved in the satrapal administrative machine, it is customary to maintain that they occupied only marginal positions, whereas all the most important offices would have been exclusively in the hands of the Graeco-Makedonians.<sup>383</sup> Several reasons could be put forward to support a significantly different interpretation of our (scanty to the extreme) evidence. First, as already noted, at least from 331 onwards Alexander faced an increasing difficulty in obtaining reinforcements from the West, and it is at least unlikely that the situation on the administrators' or other specialists' front (who were in fact badly needed to govern a territory like Bactria) was much different, or even better. Secondly, a document such as *ADAB* C4 clearly shows that, at least in the vital ganglia of the government apparatus, Alexander was in fact forced to leave in place the officers he came across at the time of the conquest (whether Persian, Baktrian, Sogdian or otherwise), since they made for human capital instrumental for securing Makedonian control over the satrapy. They knew the system from the inside, and possessed the kind of mētīc skills that no Makedonian could, at least for the time being, boast of (to which we must add the equally fundamental clientele).<sup>384</sup> If, therefore, it is undeniable

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<sup>380</sup> On Boxos cf. Strab. 16.4.20 = *FGrHist* 688 F 66, Curt. 9.7.4-5, Heckel 2006, 73. On Bithon see Heckel 2006, 72-73. If this holds true, the reaction of the Greco-Makedonian settlers, and of some Irānians (nobles?) could be interpreted as a sign of discontent towards the representatives of a new class of royal «favorites», who were accumulating considerable power by virtue of their being close to the king. Their existence threatened both the position of the Irānian aristocracy of Achaemenid descent (one should never forget that a man as powerful as Artabazos had to leave his office) and that of the settlers, who won of the war and whose power was now being taken over by Alexander's protégées.

<sup>381</sup> Holt 1988a, 83. Cf. also Dumke 2015, 36.

<sup>382</sup> Canali De Rossi 2004, 209 ff. and Burstein 2012, 99, and *contra* Widmer 2015, 64. Remarkable in this regard is the fact that the results of excavations carried out at Āi Xānum *beyond* the administrative center of the citadel provide cogent evidence *against* such a view, as shown in particular by Martinez-Sève 2014, 278; 2016, 101-102; 2020b.

<sup>383</sup> Holt 2012b, 164 ff.

<sup>384</sup> Naveh and Shaked 2012, 203 ff. C4 (= Khalili IA17). Although it has already been pointed out that a single document ought to be taken as far too small a sample for any kind of generalization, it is nevertheless worth noting that «on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Sivan, in the year 7 of Alexander, the King» there were no less than 10 officers of probable Irānian (if not Central Asian) extraction in charge of the - crucial - supply chain of the satrapy, and that in at least two cases they held positions of absolute prestige, in some way comparable (e. g. the «barley supplier») to that of the οἰκονόμος of the Hellenistic period. On the contrary, there is no trace of a single Graeco-Makedonian official. Concerning the possible functional homology between the barley supplier (\*uvabara/yawabara, rendered in Aramaic as ywbr', i. e. יוּבְרָא) and the treasurer of the Achaemenid period (\*ganzabara, in Aramaic gzb[r'], i. e. גּוּזְרָא; an official of absolute pre-eminence) see

that in the course of the 329-327 campaign an extremely large number of Baktrian administrators - not infrequently from the highest strata of local society - were eliminated, it is equally true that at least some of the middle-rank managers (individuals such as Bagavanta, whom were no less crucial to the functioning of the government apparatus) who survived were able 1. to retain their posts and 2. in the face of the liquidation of the competition, to acquire even greater bargaining power. Although, of course, we do not have the evidence to prove this, it is nevertheless possible that, precisely because of the disappearance of their former superiors, such individuals were able to achieve some sort of social advancement, not least by dexterously exploiting the frictions between Alexander and other members of his (former) power network. At the time of the new king's departure, such Central Asian individuals seem to have been able to rebuild their client networks, allying themselves (as the Boxos affaire suggests) with some of the formal holders of political power with the primary intention of protecting their newly (re)acquired positions from possible upheavals, according to a pattern that can be observed, albeit only against the grain of our evidence, at least as early as the time of Dādêršiš.

Such a scenario helps to explain, among other things, why, still seven years after Alexander's entry into Central Asia and despite two insurrections led by settlers dissatisfied with the status quo, some members of the Baktrian élite still appear in prominent positions alongside their Makedonian masters/allies (as they had done, albeit within a significantly different framework, in Achaemenid times). As a result, it does not seem unreasonable to argue that, even if a new ethno-classe dominante in Central Asia did indeed replace the Persian one, the latter's socio-cultural profile is likely to have been much more composite than has long been believed and is still largely maintained. This process, which had already begun in the aftermath of Alexander's conquest, produced developments that could not be ignored by the Seleukids.<sup>385</sup> Such considerations inevitably lead to another very thorny issue, namely that of the demography of the new settlements (ἀποσκευαί) allagedly founded by Alexander, and more likely by his successors, in Central Asia.<sup>386</sup> This topic has been widely debated since the dawn of scholarly research on *The Greeks in Baktria and India*: however, against the background of recent developments especially as far as the theoretical and methodological toolkit needed to tackle

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Tuplin 2017a, 629 ff. Although there is no doubt that at least some of the individuals recorded in the parchment (e. g. the Nāfabarzana mentioned at l. 3) descended from important families of the Persian élite who immigrated to Baktria as a result of the Achaemenid conquest or - for example - in order to supervise the installation of scribal schools or other crucial components of the imperial paradigm, it is reasonable to assume that others among those listed in *ADAB* C4 were of local origin. This applies for instance to the Vaxšudata of l. 2 (remarkably, and perhaps not accidentally, one of the two yawabara mentioned) or the Vīštāšpa of l. 35 (the other יִוּרָא) and again finally to Vaxšubradata and Mithravaxšū (ll. 41 and 47). Of course, after more than two centuries of Achaemenid rule, distinguishing in a too clear-cut way between Central Asians and Persians might not be a sound enterprise. Perhaps, all that can be acknowledge is that to a certain extent the individuals featuring in *ADAB* C4 belonged to the imperial élite settled in Baktria, and they knew they were such.

<sup>385</sup> Cf. Ramsey 2009, 24 and Strootman 2011, 89.

<sup>386</sup> Giangiulio 2020, Mairs and Fischer-Bovet 2021, 48-64.

this question in concerned, an at least preliminary attempt to look at the surviving evidence from a different perspective is not out of place here. The reason for this, beyond the interest of the problem as such, lies once again in the fact that, depending on the solutions provided to the question, one gains access to a significantly different picture of both the features - and the reasons - of the self-representation strategies adopted by the Seleukids in Baktria and of the salient events in the political history of the Baktrian Empire starting from the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE.<sup>387</sup>

#### 4.1. «Pilgrim mothers»

The problems inherent in assessing the demography of those communities which, in the period between Alexander's expedition to India and the consolidation of Seleukid power in Central Asia, contributed to shaping the main social features of Hellenistic Baktrian society are not only important from the viewpoint of the cultural history of what, for the reasons mentioned in the introduction, is usually improperly called Hellenistic culture in the (former) Achaemenid *Far East*.<sup>388</sup> They play a crucial role also - perhaps above all - from a chiefly political perspective, since the physiognomy of the Seleukid ruling class in Baktria and, consequently, a picture of the relations between the new imperial government and the élites who survived Alexander's expedition and the upheavals of the Diadochi period depend to a not insignificant extent on the answers to the questions these issues raise. It is therefore somewhat surprising to note that such a topic has either been almost entirely ignored in the scholarly debate or, when discussed, has played a rather marginal role. The crux of the problem is the following. From 327 BCE onwards, Alexander settled in Baktria almost exclusively men, nor does the situation seem to have changed much until at least the reign of Antiochos I, when new residents were brought in from the West of the Seleukid domains with a certain regularity over a period, it seems, of at least a few decades.<sup>389</sup> However, by the time the hereditary prince took possession of the upper satrapies at the behest of his father, a Greek-speaking ruling class was already firmly established in Baktria. Since Arrian argues that the wives of Alexander's soldiers did not accompany their husbands to Asia, the basic question concerns the nature of the process underlying the formation of such a ruling class in Central Asia at the time of Antiochos' Baktrian regency.<sup>390</sup> The most popular solution among scholars has been (in variously nuanced versions) to argue that, in

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<sup>387</sup> Rachel Mairs' research (note 2008; 2013a; 2013b; 2014b; 2014d) has been instrumental in laying the foundations for a cultural history of Hellenistic Baktria, with special attention paid to issues such as cultural contact or the sociopolitical positioning of the population - and not only of the élites.

<sup>388</sup> See Hoo 2018; 2020; 2022.

<sup>389</sup> For the late period of Alexander's reign this seems to be implied by a passage from Arrian (*Anab.*, 7.12.2). On the immigration movements to the upper satrapies promoted by Antiochos I see Burstein 2012, 98, Coloru 2013; 2017b.

<sup>390</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 1.24.1.

the – allegedly - few cases where mixed marriages occurred, colonial soldiers married local women.<sup>391</sup> Such a position faces at least two fundamental objections. First, if marriages did indeed occur «in a few cases» (moreover, within the very small number of the Graeco-Makedonian settlers compared to the indigenous population, or at any rate coming from the Achaemenid demographic background of the satrapy), it is not clear how the survival of the Greek-speaking community over a period of almost two generations would have been possible.<sup>392</sup> Some seminal studies of diaspora societies in colonial environments have in fact shown that any exclusivist attitude on the part of the exogenous group was systematically destined to condemn that community to extinction in a rather short time.<sup>393</sup> Secondly, the above hypothesis cannot be easily reconciled with another suggestion (also very popular among scholars, including those who claim that mixed marriages took place - wenn überhaupt - in small numbers), namely that of recurrent tensions between the two communities (the Graeco-Makedonians and the Baktrians), which would have pushed the members of the former to reduce those of the latter to a state of political and social dependence, to the point of denying them access to the centers of local power (i. e., in essence, in the case of Āi Xānum, the lower town).<sup>394</sup>

In an attempt to escape this glaring contradiction, a few years ago Stanley Burstein came up with a rather ingenious solution. While not denying the hypothesis of enduring conflicts between the different components of the Baktrian society in the aftermath of Alexander's conquest, through a study of the social dynamics underlying modern warfare as attested at least from Xenophon onwards, the scholar argued that the wives of Makedonian colonists in Central Asia made for (a substantial) part of the spoils of war accumulated by the soldiers during the course of the entire expedition through

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<sup>391</sup> Tarn 1938, 36-39, in this followed, among others, by Briant 2010, 118 and (albeit against the background of the Makedonian conquest of India) in more recent years by Stoneman 2019, 377. At least partly similar to Tarn's position is the view, still widely held among scholars, that unions with members of the local ruling class were forced by Alexander on his generals as well as on soldiers, and that these were dissolved immediately after Alexander's death (Müller 2013, 200-202). It is however worth noting that van Oppen de Ruiter 2014, 25 (with further bibliography) offers cogent arguments against such a long-lasting opinion. Recently, Müller herself (2020, 82-85) has emphasized «the importance of [family] clans within the political structures» of the Empire.

<sup>392</sup> It might be noted in passing that the actual influence of Alexander's alleged settlement policy, and even during the Seleukid period down at least to the course of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, when for the first-time imitation of Mediterranean vessel shapes are attested, on the local Baktrian (cultural) demography and its spread could be questioned on several grounds. Considering the pottery tradition and its related eating and drinking habits, as previously noted a distinct thermometer of social change, Kristina Junker has persuasively shown (2021, 58-59, 2022) the persistency of local production techniques and motives against an overwhelming scholarly literature advocating for a shift in material culture to be taken as a mirror of the political context.

<sup>393</sup> Cf. Patterson 1975, 322-330 as well as, more recently and for a general assessment of the issue, the classic study by Richard White (2011<sup>2</sup>, 64-68). It is not superfluous to note that Tacitus (*Hist.*, 3.34.1) explicitly states that it was precisely mixed marriages (adnexu conubiisque gentium) that ensured the prosperity of the Roman colony of Cremona in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE. On Tacitus' account and the Roman colonization strategy of the Italic peninsula see Ando 2017b, 128.

<sup>394</sup> Canali De Rossi 2004, 209 ff., Burstein 2012, 99. A somewhat more sophisticated view has been expressed by Coloru 2009, 268-269, albeit with reference to the situation in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries BCE.



the Persian Empire.<sup>395</sup> In his view, the imposition of both an occupying army and other individuals from communities with which the Baktrians «had nothing in common» (which, given what is known about mobility in the Achaemenid period, seems dubious to say the least), would help explain the tensions that led to the uprisings that followed Alexander's departure for India.<sup>396</sup>

Among the various theoretical assumptions and methodological pitfalls, albeit to varying degrees and from different perspectives, by the positions summarized above, it is possible to isolate at least two particularly significant ones. On the one hand, there is the ethnic and cultural complexity of the Baktrian society already during the Achaemenid period, as unequivocally shown by Henkelman's studies of the Persepolis archive.<sup>397</sup> On the other hand, they overlook and unduly minimize the ability of local élites - and especially of the women within them - to defend their status and interests (their own and those of their family or social group) in situations of political upheaval and/or social crisis. Based on what is known about the characteristic dynamics of community-building processes in a diasporic context and about the social skills and status enjoyed by women in the upper strata of ancient Central Asian societies, it seems possible to suggest a significantly different scenario. The hypothesis put forward here, said otherwise, argues that those among the Baktrian notables who survived Alexander's campaign contributed decisively to the formation of the new ruling class of the age of the Diadochi, which in turn was destined to become (part of) the élite of Seleukid Baktria. While it cannot be ruled out that access to this new social group was not limited to Graeco-Makedonians and Baktrio-Sogdians, but on the contrary also extended to some members of the previous Persian ethno-classe (insofar as such a distinction can still be meaningful after more than two centuries of Achaemenid rule in Central Asia), it remains almost certain that exogamous marriages between the new settlers and the women of the surviving (composite) local élite must have been the norm and not, as still sometimes argued, the (grudgingly accepted) exception.<sup>398</sup>

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<sup>395</sup> The dynamics studied by Burstein is known in Greek as ἀνδραποδισμός and has been repeatedly discussed in the sources. Here are a few examples without any claim to exhaustiveness: Arr. *Anab.*, 2.27.7, Diod. Sic. 17.70.6, *FGrHist* 138 F 15 (= *Itin. Alex.*, 37), Just. *Epit.*, 38.10. 2 and Polyæn. 4.6.13.

<sup>396</sup> Burstein 2012, 101-103. Matarese 2021, 167-199 discussing (empire-driven) mobility in the Achaemenid Empire.

<sup>397</sup> Plischke 2014, 31, Henkelman 2018a. Apart from the - very compelling - evidence coming from the Achaemenid period attesting to the contrary, acknowledging this aspect alone makes Burstein's hypothesis that the Baktrians had «nothing in common» with other peoples within the Empire (even from satrapies outside Central Asia) rather unlikely. This is compounded by several methodological problems, which are well discussed for example by Meeus 2013 and van Oppen de Ruiter 2014.

<sup>398</sup> Mairs 2013b 446-447. Rather cogent comparative evidence for the arguments presented here comes, among other things, from the study of Greek colonies in the Archaic period, for which see most recently Skinner 2012, 87; 2018, 194-206. To this one should also add that it does not seem methodologically advisable to limit the ethnic component of a site like Āi Xānum (the source of almost all the currently available evidence on Hellenistic Central Asian urban life) to Graeco-Makedonians and Irānians. According to Kritt 2001, 67-68, in fact, it is entirely reasonable to assume at least the presence of Indians (almost certainly originating from Arachosia or Gāndhārā) within the population of the site in its founding phase. The story of Sōphytos in Baktria provides further plausibility to this hypothesis, and this despite Jansari 2020b.

The above considerations imply two major consequences for the issue at stake in these pages. If, on the one hand, they at least invite for a drastic revision of the socio-cultural categories relating to Hellenistic Central Asia in the light of a more sophisticated methodology, on the other hand they call into question both the arguments (still widely shared) claiming an almost exclusive Graeco-Makedonian predominance within the political and administrative hierarchies of the new Seleukid satrapy and the very idea of a «Greek» kingdom of Baktria, which would have arisen from the weakening of Seleukid authority over Eastern Irān and Central Asia.<sup>399</sup> Contrary to Tarn's opinion (and of many others in his wake), the literary sources in fact suggest that, already during Bessos' pursuit in the territories East of Ekbatana, where Alexander succeeded in securing the favor of the local rulers, Makedonian settlers were established by welcoming groups of locals (most likely also through the inclusion of members belonging to the local satrap's networks, the main architect of the agreements with the would-be king) alongside soldiers destined to carve a leaving in this new environment.<sup>400</sup> Besides the importance of politically isolating Bessos from his own (former) supporters - and subordinates - in Central Asia, the fact that the socio-political weight of the most influential local families within the cadres of the new Makedonian satrapies had to be considerable is made even more probable by a fact as trivial as it is usually ignored, namely the number of the settlers themselves. In fact, it has been pointed out that although militarily powerful, the Graeco-Makedonians were still a (small) minority, and consequently had no choice but to largely take into their accounts the aspirations of the indigenous population and of their élites.<sup>401</sup> Put another way, this means that ample socio-political room for maneuver was open to the most influential individuals of the remaining Achaemenid ruling class (including its - relatively - more modest cadres) to carve out a prominent position for themselves within the ranks of the new political power: and in the same way apparently suggested, generations earlier, by the entrenchment of Bṛḍiyā's authority in the same territories, the best way to achieve such a goal had been, and remained, marriage, not least because of the fact that the local princesses owned land, and therefore power and networks of dependance enabling them to command manpower and resources.<sup>402</sup> Remarkably, we have evidence of the foundation of such communities as early as 330 in strategically crucial areas of Central Asia, from Arachosia to the Paropamisadae.<sup>403</sup>

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<sup>399</sup> Hoo 2018, 15-18, 2020; forthcoming for an up-to-date overview of new theoretical and critical methodologies that can be fruitfully applied to the study of the cultural history of the *Hellenistic Far East*, including therefore the period under scrutiny here. On the «Graeco»-Baktrian Empire see now Hoo and Wiesehöfer 2022, 281-288.

<sup>400</sup> In this regard cf. Arr. *Anab.*, 4.22.5, who records both locals (περίοικοι) and soldiers now unfit for combat as members of the civic body of the Makedonian settlements in the (Southern) territory of Central Asia.

<sup>401</sup> Olbrycht 2013, 160.

<sup>402</sup> Vogelsang 1992a, 125-126, Zarghamee 2013, 131. See now also Kuhrt 2021.

<sup>403</sup> Curt. 7.3.23 on Arachosia and Diod. Sic. 17.83.2, who mentions no less than 7000 «barbarians» settled in a colony in the Paropamisadae. Such a number is roughly double - perhaps even more - than that of the Makedonians: this makes it very plausible that, to preserve political stability in such an important region (from which they could control the major

In Baktria, and likewise in Sogdiana, this process ground to a halt due to the outbreak of the insurrection led by Spitamenes and the subsequent all-out war. It is worth noting, however, that as soon as a fraction of the Baktrian notables (arguably led by Oxyartes), in an attempt to regain the terrain they had lost in the satrapy's organization chart to Artabazos, initiated the diplomatic drills that led to the gradual fraying of the rebel front and, finally, to Spitamenes' fall, the available record provides once again traces of settlements foundations in which, alongside the Graeco-Makedonians, the population was made of Baktrians, Sogdians, and probably other (especially, but by no means only, Irānian) groups. Of particular interest is, for instance, the mention of some of these settlements in the territories formerly occupied by Cyropolis and in the Zarafšān valley, both areas in which numerous villages had been destroyed during the first year of the war. Equally remarkable is the information available concerning the implementation of similar patterns even further to the North, in the vicinity of the new settlement of Alexandria Ἐσχάτη.<sup>404</sup> There is indeed reason to believe that, for those among the Baktrian notables who had sided with Alexander at an early stage of his campaign, it became of paramount importance to maintain (or to re-establish) links with the regions in which they or their deposed opponents had held power, and it could also be argued that the Makedonian settlement policy in these regions benefited at least in part from the advice of these individuals, who, in turn, took advantage of the entire process for their personal interests (and those of their social group).<sup>405</sup>

Undoubtedly, the greatest political victory of Oxyartes and his men came in the spring of 327 BCE, when the marriage between Alexander and Rōxanē was celebrated against the backdrop of what remained of Chorienes' estates in the Surxondaryo.<sup>406</sup> In a prelude of sort to Susa's weddings, other Makedonian generals and members of Alexander's inner circle took Baktrian and Sogdian princesses as wives, thus contributing in no small way to the consolidation of the role of these maidens' fathers within the satrapal hierarchies (and it is only fair to assume that everybody who was involved in the process, including the girls, must have been well aware of all the implications of such an event).

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passes leading to Baktria), the Makedonians were forced to reach some kind of compromise with the local powerholders, as was their practice, sanctioning them with strategic marriage alliances. In addition, since the Paropamisadae is likely to have been answerable to the administration of Baktria (but see the evidence gathered by Henkelman 2017a, 208-210 which might further complicate the administrative organization of these territories), cutting deals with the locals during the Makedonian advance had the not inconsiderable advantage of undermining Bessos' power in a geopolitically crucial region: see Olbrycht 2011, 23.

<sup>404</sup> Rapin 2018a, 290-291 as well as the account in Curt. 7.6.27 and Just. *Epit.*, 12.5.12

<sup>405</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 4.16. 3 (according to the *Anabasis* Hephastion was given orders to «settle individuals within cities in Sogdiana»): although it seems almost certain that local aristocratic families (and/or the widows of those who had fallen in battle) were among those Hephastion had been commissioned to (re)settle, it is possible to suggest that he, like other Makedonian officers, availed himself of the (anything but disinterested) advice of local aristocrats: think of the role, which is unlikely to have been limited only to that of interpreter, of an individual like Pharnuches (Heckel 2006, 207), a Lykian but of (probably aristocratic) Central Asian origin - still able at the time of his recruitment to speak both Sogdian and Baktrian.

<sup>406</sup> Rapin 2018a, 293.

Leaving aside Oxyartes, at this point, by virtue of his connection with Alexander by far and wide the most influential of all the local magnates, this must also have been the case with Amyntas (Nikolaos' son and for a - brief - period satrap in Bactria following Kleitos' murder).<sup>407</sup> Indeed, although the contrary has often been argued, there is no reason (and indeed there are compelling arguments pointing in the very opposite direction) to believe either that these marriages were the result of a whimsical act by Alexander to the detriment of his reluctant trustees or that these brides were relinquished as soon as the Makedonian left the stage over that momentous Babylonian summer day.<sup>408</sup> On the contrary, it seems much more reasonable to assume that the stipulation of these (highly symbolic) unions kick-started the formation of a new ruling class composed for the most part both of members of the military leadership gathered around Alexander and of those among the local strongmen who had managed to maintain a position of some importance within the territories they once administered or at any rate somehow controlled, if not even beyond them.<sup>409</sup> Moreover, the common goals of these two factions involved in the coup d'état against Athenodoros (in which, as mentioned above, it seems that members of the Baktrian élite played no small part) appear much more comprehensible against such a background. In later years, Antigonos Monophthalmos would have experienced at his own detriment the solidity of these socio-political ties.

Finally, returning briefly to Burstein's arguments, apart from the fact that they support a now rather outdated understanding of the functioning of inter- (and intra-) community relations within the Achaemenid Empire, they significantly neglect the ability of local aristocratic women to play a proactive role within the local political arena.<sup>410</sup> One of the best parallels at hand for understanding the context in which both Makedonians and Central Asians as well as (and perhaps especially) their mothers, wives, and sisters found themselves entangled is provided by the period of so-called archaic mobility in the Mediterranean (roughly between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE). In this case as well, in fact, to mention only the most structurally similar features within a very complex phenomenon, the - so called - colonial expeditions were 1. made of extremely small groups, especially if compared to the population of the territories in which they settled, and 2. were formed in almost all cases by men.<sup>411</sup> Nevertheless, both the literary evidence and the archaeological record (to which we must add

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<sup>407</sup> Cf. *Epit. Mett.*, 28-31, Diod. Sic. 17 *Arg.*, 25 as well as Bosworth 1988, 156 and Ogden 1999, 44. That the sources are completely silent about the family background of Amyntas is not in itself a decisive argument against the fact that he (and other notables of his own kind) was not among the beneficiaries of such a marriage: see Meeus 2013, 88-92. As stressed by van Oppen de Ruiter 2014, 30, we only know something about 8.7% of those who were married at Susa. Nothing is said for example of Meleagros or Polyperkhon, to say nothing of the royal bodyguards such as Peukestas or Lysimachos, and it is inconceivable that none of them (and many others could be mentioned) were given Achaemenid brides. The same reasoning applies to Amyntas.

<sup>408</sup> van Oppen de Ruiter 2014, 32. See however Müller 2013, 200-206.

<sup>409</sup> Olbrycht 2007; 2013, 167.

<sup>410</sup> Olbrycht 2013, 159-160. For a general discussion of this topic focused on the Hellenistic and Roman period cf. van Bremen 1996, 205-272.

<sup>411</sup> Gallo 1983, 704.

the conspicuous ethnographic parallels) help to show beyond any possible doubt that the drive towards exogamy was a constant phenomenon, which rapidly led to the formation of communities within which, at least during the first generation, there was no substantial difference in social status - and therefore to some extent also in power - between the newcomers and the women of the local élite, whom the former often married precisely in order to enter the political networks commanding the territories (and the respective resources) in which the colonists aimed to settle.<sup>412</sup>

The fact that brides of such a social standing were particularly coveted by would-be settlers is relatively unsurprising: much less obvious, and for this reason all the more important (and therefore highlighted in the literary accounts), is the fact that in some cases it was the women themselves who chose the bridegroom.<sup>413</sup> In Central Asia, not least because of the very tight networks with the pastoral communities of the (present-day) Türkmen and Kyrgyz steppes, the status and sociopolitical role of women guaranteed them incomparably greater room for maneuver than – say - in mainland Greece: it follows, therefore, that a union with the rising Makedonian élite represented for quite a few of the Baktrian and Sogdian princesses (even more so for they were the widows of the - numerous - aristocrats who had fallen during Alexander's campaign) a shrewd strategic choice in order to preserve their own interests and, above all, those of their children, those already born as well as those yet to come.<sup>414</sup> At the same time, the colonists themselves were looking for no less strategic advantages to be gained from their marriages. From a passage in Polybios' *Histories*, in fact, it is possible to guess that, at least in the course of the first generation, the stipulation of bridal unions with women of the local aristocracy was considered favorably by the newcomers (who, by the way, within their own communities of origin did not always play a role comparable to that of the brides), and this by virtue of the fact that the latter constituted the means through which εὐγένεια would be introduced into the family and, more importantly, passed on to the children.<sup>415</sup> Calculations of this

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<sup>412</sup> Skinner 2012, 224 has recently pointed out that in some cases this might also have been true for women of lower social status. A remarkable testimony is provided by *FrGrHist* 90 F 15: here the word ἐπιγαμία is attested in the context of a marriage between Phokaeian settlers and the local population. This provides a rather strong argument against skeptics that something similar could have occurred in late 4<sup>th</sup> - early 3<sup>rd</sup> BCE Central Asia. In addition, 3<sup>rd</sup> century epigraphic evidence leaves no doubt that, in case of a demographic crisis, the πόλεις had no problem in recruiting women from other communities, even if they were already married, granting them nothing less than citizenship. There are several examples thereof: *I. Milet.* I 3.34 col. a ll. 10-13 and col. h ll. 1-2 (228/227 BCE), *I. Milet.* I 3.38, col. q 2 ll. 1-2 (223/222 BCE) and *I. Milet.* I 3.149 (183/164 BCE). Particularly noteworthy is the case of *I. Milet.* I 3.40.43 (dated around 250 BCE), which testifies to the bestowal of citizenship on 99 Cretan women, even though 43 of them were already married (of course outside the community into which they were now integrated).

<sup>413</sup> Pind. *Pyth.*, 9.182, Just. *Epit.*, 43.3.4.

<sup>414</sup> On the social status and political role of women in the (mobile) societies of ancient as well as modern Central Asia see David 1976, 137-151 and more recently Duindam 2016, 91, with further bibliography. Of course, this phenomenon was even more evident the higher up the social ladder the woman in question ranked. The same classical literary sources allude to similar situations in the steppes around Pontos, whose inhabitants, among other things, were closely linked culturally (which obviously implies the organization of society) with the Sakā settled (even much) further East: cf. Hdt. 4.26, Hippoc. *Aer.*, 17 and Diod. Sic. 2.34. For a discussion of these and other testimonies see Kim 2010 and Skinner 2012, 80. That of Amastris (van Oppen de Ruiter 2014, 34; 2020) is another remarkable case in point.

<sup>415</sup> Cf. Polyb. 12.5.6 and Gallo 1983, 719.

sort must have been very much in the minds of the Makedonians not least by virtue of the fact that, despite their membership to the upper echelons of their own society, in Irān and Central Asia, as Olbrycht has observed, concepts such as élite status were understood - and thus needed to be demonstrated - through the lens of Irānian (meaning both Achaemenid and local) tradition, and moreover in Irānian (Central Asian) garbs. Consequently, the acquisition of εὐγένεια through the matrilineal branch had to remain a priority even for Alexander's companions (from this perspective therefore Seleukos' appears as perhaps the most prominent case, but by no means the only one).<sup>416</sup>

In conclusion, the formative process of that social body which in the following decades would become the ruling class of Seleukid Baktria must in all probability be traced back to the aftermath of Alexander and Rōxanē's marriage. On the one hand, and contrary to the opinion of a long and authoritative scholarly tradition, there is evidence to suggest that family ties between the Makedonians and the daughters of the local élite (in at least some cases perhaps even promoted by the latter in order to safeguard both their own social position and the economic interests of their families of origin) must have occurred to a considerable extent, at least enough to provide Antiochos I with a group of officers from whom to build the backbone of the latter's governmental apparatus in Baktria. On the other hand, and contrary to the opinion, among others, of Burstein and Holt, the hostilities charactering at least the whole of 329 BCE, from late 328 onwards are likely to have gradually given way to attempts at collaboration between the representatives of the old and the new herrschende Gesellschaft, following - albeit starting from significantly different circumstances - a pattern that from Cyrus' time onwards had repeatedly proved to be the only source of mutual benefit for the parties involved. The most significant consequence of this process was the consolidation of a network of alliances both within the satrapy's territory and, by virtue of the geo-political weight within the Central Asian chessboard of Baktria, capable of extending beyond its borderlands. Such a new socio-political horizon not only would prove capable of facing, not without a considerable amount of success, the threats coming from the West but, with time passing, once the new conquerors managed to secure the loyalty of the newly born Baktrian élite, it was transformed into a formidable instrument of power management, which allowed the members of this élite to maintain the position

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<sup>416</sup> Olbrycht 2013, 170. The fact that, in the course of time, both the brides and the children born from these marriages were integrated, at least on an official level, into the cultural horizon of the colonists could at least partly help to explain why in Hellenistic Baktria there are - at least on the surface - so few testimonies of «local» cultures: on this phenomenon cf. Hdt. 4.186.2 and the remarks by Gallo 1983, 711 ff. However, this in no way means that, within the family context (as opposed to the public space), the non-Graeco-Makedonian (Baktrian and/or Iranian lato sensu) component ceased to play a role in shaping the cultural heritage of the new generations (an argument already advanced about Hellenistic Egypt by van Minnen 2002). As Milinda Hoo (2018, 13; 2020; 2021) wisely observes, moreover, the cultural and historical equation of ethnicity and material culture is inherently flawed. Ethnic identity, she further points out, is not a summation of similarities (and differences) in terms of cultural traits, but rather ought to be understood as a contextual and affiliative process of self-construction that can be preserved despite cultural changes. People can claim to be ethnically different while practicing the same culture as those they report as ethnically «other» and express themselves differently in cultural terms while belonging to the same ethnic group.

they had reached within the political landscape of the satrapy even when faced with the Seleukid king himself (as most glaringly shown by what is known of Euthydemos' career).<sup>417</sup>

All the above brings us to the final section of this chapter. In these concluding pages it shall be attempted - albeit briefly - to show how, in Baktria, the barely 20 years between Alexander's marriage to Rōxanē and the rise of Seleukos as the new lord of Asia, seems to have been - at least judging from the information which can be gained from the (once again, meagre) evidence available - a period of considerable experimentation in terms of strategies of territorial control and power management. A direct heir to the sweeping transformations kick-started by Alexander's expedition, the ultimate outcome of these experiments would have conditioned the policies adopted in Central Asia by the Seleukids in a not insignificant manner, ending up by conferring on the new local aristocracy which had emerged from two decades of almost uninterrupted warfare a power that had no equal in the region's past history. From this standpoint to the (self)appointment of Diodotos (I? II? certainly of Euthydemos) as king in and of Baktria would have been – literally - only a matter of time.<sup>418</sup>

## 5. The Year in Which Seleukos Came

The - numerous - problems posed by Alexander's death immediately emerged as particularly pressing in the Eastern satrapies, the source of conspicuous, and by all those competing for the succession highly coveted, military and economic resources: however, it was not at all easy to determine how those who controlled those resources at the time would behave.<sup>419</sup> Taking up the words of Andreas Mehl, how was it possible for the Diadochi gathered at Babylon to remain meaningfully present in (Central) Asia, both politically and militarily?<sup>420</sup> It was also for this reason that the officials gathered around the dead king's shroud chose to make as few changes as possible to the organization chart drawn up by Alexander, not least in view of the fact that, given the uncertainties surrounding the succession, the most influential of his heirs do not seem to have had, at least initially, a clear plan

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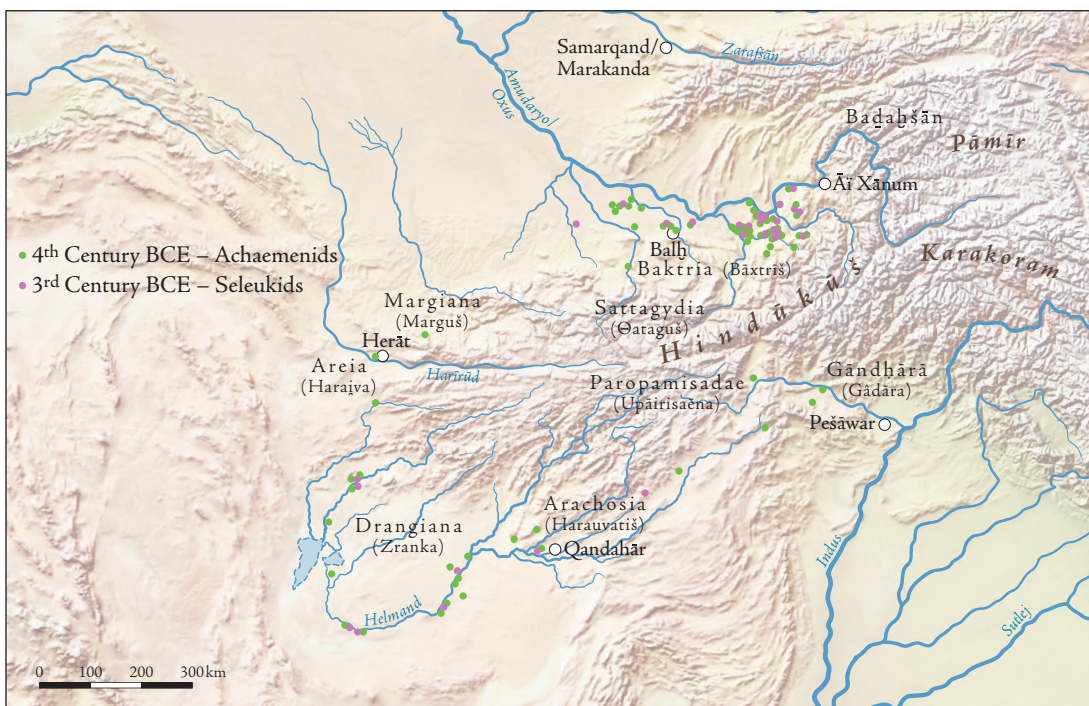
<sup>417</sup> See now Strootman 2020c.

<sup>418</sup> Wenghofer and Houle 2016, Wenghofer 2018, Jakobsson 2020 (but note the remarks in Bordeaux 2018, 80 ff.; 2020).

<sup>419</sup> On the last days of Alexander's life see, among others, Holt 1999, 1, Romm 2011 and the account in *Lib. Mort.*, 87-102, as well as Panitschek 2016, 545. The precise date of the king's death is attested in a Babylonian astronomical diary (*ADB I-322B obv.* 8), while other evidence is offered by Arr. *Anab.*, 7.25-26 and Plut. *Vit. Alex.*, 76. Regarding the events after the death of the ruler, see most recently Naiden 2019, 251-263. As recently shown by Kyle Erickson (2019, 46), Seleukos' manipulation of Alexander-related iconography and symbolism clearly shows the difficulties inherent in defining what it meant to be king and successor of Alexander in the immediate aftermath of the conqueror's death. This of course also applies to Central Asia, a space in which there were numerous, and often competing, images and models of kingship. The durability and success of Seleukid power in Baktria may have been due not least to the ability of the new rulers to build an imperial narrative and imagery that was at once meaningful to the Graeco-Makedonian colonists and the Central Asian and Irānian élites (see Engels - Erickson 2016). As thoroughly demonstrated by Degen 2022, 302-408, this had also been Alexander's main goal during his entire campaign across Achaemenid territory.

<sup>420</sup> Curt. 7.4.30 estimates the military potential of the Baktrian army alone at about 30000 cavalry units (and it is rather unlikely that it was exclusively made of mounted archers: Manning 2021, 77-82, 183-193). See also Mehl 1986, 20.

for the management of the imperial space of which they had become overlords.<sup>421</sup> The agreements reached at Babylon in the aftermath of Alexander's death left the situation in the upper satrapies largely untouched, as it surfaces from the extant narrative accounts, which all agree on the list of satraps to the East of Media. In the Indian territories, Taxiles and Poros were left in their place, «as it had been established by Alexander».<sup>422</sup> Oxyartes was confirmed at the head of a territory extending from Bactria to the Paropamisadae – thus expanding his previous dominions - while Sibirtios retained control over Arachosia and Southernmost Gedrosia. Stasanor of Soloi (Cyprus) remained in Areia and Drangiana, while following the death of Amyntas, Bactria and Sogdiana were assigned to Philip.<sup>423</sup>



**Map 8.3. *Paradise Lost, Empire Recovered.* Settlement Patterns and Imperial Transition from Darius III to Antiochos I. © Peter Palm**

The only account deviating from this picture is Justin's, from which it emerges that Amyntas was appointed to lead Bactria, while a certain Staganor, not elsewhere attested, was given Sogdiana (thus treated as a separate satrapy: a possible indication of the difficult political situation, which required a

<sup>421</sup> Walbank 1981, 69-73.

<sup>422</sup> Diod. Sic. 18.3.3. The decisions of the Diadochi gathered at Babylon and then at Triparadeisos were at the same time acts of political will and decisions imposed by circumstances (the practical situations on the ground) and the (re)actions of their respective adversaries.

<sup>423</sup> *FGrHist* 100 F 8, *FGrHist* 156 F 9 (35), *Lib. Mort.*, 121. Compare moreover Klinkott 2005, 76.



more massive military presence in the territory?).<sup>424</sup> This is an important piece of evidence, all the more so in the light of the fact that, following the Makedonian campaign North of the Hişār range, it is to be believed that Marakanda and the surrounding territories lost, at least temporarily, much of their geopolitical centrality. If, on the other hand, following the bulk of the available sources, one believes that no governor was appointed in Sogdiana, it follows that, at least in principle, the Achaemenid model of division of Central Asia remained broadly in place, and that both Bactria and Arachosia retained their pivotal role as major power centers in Central Asia. From this point of view, and in the light of the fact that Amyntas was in all probability assassinated during the uprisings which took place 325 BCE, it seems reasonable to assume that «Staganor» is nothing but a misspell for «Stasanor» (paleographically seen all but unlikely); alternatively, if this second Cypriot official really existed, his position must have been subordinate to the plenipotentiary of Bactria (Philip) in 323, similarly to the position of Spitamenes with respect to Bessos under Persian rule.<sup>425</sup> However, although at Babylon the inner circle around Alexander tried to act as circumspectly as possible, in the eyes of many players across the Empire, the death of the king sounded like a remission of their duties of obedience, which in certain cases rapidly turned into a free for all.<sup>426</sup> Among them were the contingents of soldiers stationed in Bactria (according to Justin at least 10000 infantrymen and 3500 cavalry), who did not fail to express their disappointment at the uncertainty of their status within the satrapal hierarchy as emerged from the conquest.<sup>427</sup> Alarming enough, similar dissatisfaction had already been voiced by some of Alexander's closest confidants during the Indian campaign.<sup>428</sup> When the rumors of Alexander's death in faraway Babylonia gained firmer contours, these dissatisfied settlers felt the time had come to renegotiate their position in the new post-Alexandrian world and took the road to the West.<sup>429</sup> Such a movement of highly trained fighters prompted Perdikkas, who - for the time being - held a prominent position within Alexander's imperial cadres, to act without further ado. It has been argued that his main goal was to prevent the disbanded soldiers from being

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<sup>424</sup> Just. *Epit.*, 13.4.23, Just. *Epit.*, 41.4.1. Cf., Klinkott 2005, 130, Heckel 2006, Plischke 2014, 207, Mendoza-Sanahuja 2017, 47.

<sup>425</sup> In passing, it is possible to speculate that the Cypriot origins of the most important administrator of the Alexandrian *Far East* were indexical of his distrust of the old Makedonian guard. Furthermore, in light of the dense and long-standing contacts of the island with Achaemenid culture and languages, it has been suggested by Olbrycht 2013, 161 that both Stasanor and (if there ever was one) Staganor were appointed with the explicit intention of establishing the strongest possible ties with the Central Asian élites in an attempt to consolidate Makedonian political power without alienating the Irānian strongmen (the strategy pursued by Peukestas).

<sup>426</sup> Curt. 9.7.1. Riots among the soldiers had already broken out in 325, when (unwarranted) rumours spread that Alexander had died in India.

<sup>427</sup> This is equivalent to saying that they had not come to terms with the role still played by those who theoretically should have been among the new subjects of the Empire: see in this regard Grainger 1990, 20, who is among the most authoritative supporters of the hypothesis that among the rebels of 323 there were Greek mercenaries who had been left in Bactria by Alexander as colonists.

<sup>428</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 5.27.5, who explicitly states that there were Greeks (τῶν δὲ ἄλλων Ἑλλήνων) among those who were dissatisfied with their situation in Bactria and Sogdiana. See moreover Olbrycht 2011, 30.

<sup>429</sup> Just. *Epit.*, 13.4.23. Cf. Bernard 1985 appendix 3, Iliakis 2013, 185 and Dumke 2015, 33.

employed by one or other of the factions that were emerging while the eventual showdown between the generals themselves was approaching, but it is equally possible that, from the point of view of an Empire the center of gravity thereof was located in Mesopotamia, there was (no longer) any guarantee of maintaining more than nominal control over the Eastern satrapies in the absence of a conspicuous (Graeco-Makedonian) military presence on the ground.<sup>430</sup> Otherwise stated, this was the price of the dissolution of the Achaemenid socio-political and administrative networks. From the point of view of Philip and the other satraps, however, things must have appeared differently, since it is otherwise difficult to explain why - according to the evidence at hand - they did nothing to try to dissuade such a large number of soldiers from leaving Central Asia. One possibility is that both he and his colleagues were of the opinion that getting rid of the soldiers might even had been an asset since, in fact, the upper satrapies could be ruled otherwise than by military presence, i. e. precisely through the (re)construction of patronage networks (Rhyne King's «aristocratic network»), the basic structure of (and the – new - framework for) it was argued begun to take shape thanks to the strategic alliance with those local élites who had sided with Alexander also due to the diplomatic savoir faire of individuals like Oxyartes and his acolytes.<sup>431</sup>

Based on the account of the insurrection provided by the literary sources and the scarce Near Eastern record, it can be argued that the Diadochi opted for a drastic solution. Indeed, an entry in a Babylonian astronomical diary dated between 8 June 323 and 6 January 322 BCE attests to the movement of troops heading towards Bactria «to fight against the army of Hani».<sup>432</sup> The contingents mentioned are probably those of Pythias, who was sent by Perdikkas at the head of 3800 men with the task of putting down the revolt by recruiting additional troops from the territories he would pass through on his march from Babylon to Central Asia; this seems to have been the case, since the Makedonian officer arrived at the time of the military confrontation with an army six times larger than the one leading which he had left Mesopotamia.<sup>433</sup> It is not easy to make much sense of the events which followed. The two armies faced each other not far from Bactria (an unspecified location in Areia is generally assumed): a violent battle ensued which, thanks to an act of treachery on the rebel front, led to the massacre of a large number of them. Instead, the survivors seem to have reached an agreement with Perdikkas' lieutenant, who planned to recruit them as his own troops in order to be found ready once all the others would have started settling the scores.<sup>434</sup>

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<sup>430</sup> Coloru 2022 for a careful evaluation of the available evidence concerning these crucial events.

<sup>431</sup> Olbrycht 2013, 162-163 on the role played by Oxyartes in the upper satrapies.

<sup>432</sup> *ADB* 1 n. 322 *ob. l.* 22. Cf. *ADB*, 529-531, Bernard, 1990, 529 and Del Monte 1997, 11-12.

<sup>433</sup> Diod. Sic. 18.7.1. On the revolt and its causes see Bernard 1985, 127-128.

<sup>434</sup> Diod. Sic. 18.7.1-9, Just. *Epit., Prol.*, 13.

The exact number of the casualties is still debated today: however, it seems rather difficult that, as claimed by Diodoros Siculus, all the escapees from Baktria (23000 men) perished in the battlefield.<sup>435</sup> More likely, once the fighting was over, some - if not most - of them returned to Baktria, a hypothesis supported by the fact that the sources attest Graeco-Makedonian contingents among the satrapal troops in 321 BCE, when the top echelons in the satrapy started changing at a rather alarmingly rate. For reasons we are unable to guess, Philip was sent to Parthia in that year, while the former governor of Areia and Drangiana, Stasanor, moved to Baktria.<sup>436</sup> The Cypriot satrap is a rather obscure figure, since nothing is known about him and his career in the satrapy, apart from the fact that he had in the past demonstrated remarkable military skills. During his tenure in Areia, Stasanor seems to have been able to forge fruitful relations with prominent elements of the local ruling class, including the satrap of Hyrkania Phrataphernes. This probably played a role in the preparation (organized in coordination with the latter's son Pharismenes) of the expedition of pack animals and provisions that came to Alexander's rescue during the crossing of the Gedrosian desert.<sup>437</sup> Recently, some scholars have argued that it was Stasanor's ability to mediate with the Central Asian élites that facilitated his appointment in Baktria, and this by virtue of the fact that, given the crucial strategic importance of the satrapy, it was there that problems relating to the new socio-political order needed to be resolved as a matter of priority. To give but one example, at the time it was still not at all clear what the position within the satrapy of the Sakā communities and other pastoral groups in the area would be: if in fact some of them had been granted considerable privileges, others - starting with those who had belonged to the Arimazes' networks - had been handed over «to the colonists in the new settlements next to a cash prize».<sup>438</sup> Then there was the question of the - considerable - number of individuals following those soldiers who had been dispatched to settlements such as Āi Xānum, Alexandria Ox(e)iana and further North at Alexandria Ἐσχάτη. Also in this case, determining the social position of these people within the new satrapal hierarchies posed questions that were not easy to solve. In fact, as mentioned, a not insignificant component of Alexander's army must have formed family ties during the years of the expedition, and the social status of their children needed to be regulated, which was another very thorny issue.<sup>439</sup> Finally, the (agro)pastoral communities of Sogdiana and the surrounding steppes, both East and West, who had suffered most from the development of the events during the previous years but who still maintained economic interests (and probably also community and family ties) in

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<sup>435</sup> Cf. Holt 1988a, 90-91, Dumke 2015, 39.

<sup>436</sup> Diod. Sic. 18.39.6, *FGrHist* 100 F 8 (1), *FGrHist* 156 F9 (35). Olbrycht 2013, 163 seems to share Diodoros' view that the entire Makedonian contingent was annihilated by the Irānians who took part in the battle at the behest of the Central Asian satraps: the latter, in the scholar's view, shared the same political interests with Perdikkas, since he allegedly appeared to them to be the guarantor of the continuity of Alexander's «pro-Iranian policy».

<sup>437</sup> Arr. *Anab.*, 6.27.3-6: cf. Heckel 2006, 206.

<sup>438</sup> Curt. 7.11.29.

<sup>439</sup> Iliakis 2013, 185; but see moreover Olbrycht 2011, 31 ff. as well as Mendoza-Sanahuja 2017, 49-51.

now Makedonian-ruled territories, also had to be dealt with. From all this, it is clear that, from the outset, the demography of Hellenistic Baktria required non-trivial diplomatic skills from those wanting to claim the region as their own.

The year 317 BCE marks an important turning point in the history of the upper satrapies during the early Hellenistic period. If, to a certain extent, the Central Asian territories had not been directly involved in the quarrels related to Alexander's succession, the revolt of the colonists and the consequent reaction of Perdikkas forced the local administrators to take a stand.<sup>440</sup> Following the failure of Python's attempt at unifying the Central Asian satrapies under his command (which now hinged on Media), a process the most significant results thereof was the death of Philip - perhaps in the fighting which took place in Areia -, the latter's colleagues decided to support Eumenes against Antigonos the one-eyed.<sup>441</sup> In the decisive battle of Paraetakenē, the satrap of Paphlagonia was in fact able to deploy contingents from almost all the Eastern territories, from Parthia to the Indus.<sup>442</sup> Unfortunately, once again very little information is available about the Baktrian troops, which raises the question of the strategy adopted by Stasanor, who had succeeded Philip at the head of the satrapy. The evidence at hand indicates that, while he did not refuse to provide soldiers, (and in clear contrast to the behavior of other satraps who were much more involved in the confrontation by virtue of their geographical proximity to the claimants, like Peukestas), he made however sure not to take sides himself: in fact, the (admittedly rather modest) Baktrian contingent was led into battle by Stasander, an (other) Cypriot who had become satrap precisely in Areia and Drangiana (thus in all likelihood a member of Stasanor's network).<sup>443</sup> Our literary – to say nothing of epigraphic or documentary - record is such that extreme caution is required when assuming correlations between various events mentioned in the sources within a much broader framework or between different pieces of information that might (but might as well not) be linked in some way by a common context.<sup>444</sup> That said, judging from the development of the events as we know them, and by virtue of what happened to others among his colleagues, it seems reasonable to argue that Stasanor's behavior was at least partly dictated by the agenda of the members of that coalition between certain factions of Graeco-Makedonians who revolted against Athenodoros and the members of the Central Asian élites, acknowledged by Olbrycht as one of the decisive factors in shaping the politics of the territories East of the Media during the Diadochi period.<sup>445</sup> On the one hand, the dispatch of a contingent to Susiana

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<sup>440</sup> Coloru 2009, 133 and the account in Diod. Sic. 18.7.3-4.

<sup>441</sup> Olbrycht 2013, 166-167.

<sup>442</sup> Diod. Sic. 19.14.5-8, Diod. Sic. 19.27.3.

<sup>443</sup> Concerning the available evidence on Stasander see Heckel 2006, 255. With regards to the positioning of the other Central Asian satraps when confronted to the war opposing Antigonos to Eumenes see among others Diod. Sic. 19.43.6 and Plut. *Vit. Eum.*, 16.1.

<sup>444</sup> Meeus 2013, 92.

<sup>445</sup> Olbrycht 2013, 168.

shows to what extent Baktria was still involved in the affairs of the newly founded Hellenistic οἰκουμένη; on the other hand, the fact that Stasanor was able to resist Eumenes' call to arms is indexical of how much power, in an extremely short period of time, the ruling class of post-Alexandrian Baktria had managed to concentrate in its hands, to the extent that it could afford to successfully challenge imperial authority in the figure of its (would-be) representatives among Alexander's successors and by far and wide most powerful generals.<sup>446</sup> The same cannot be said for Stasander and even for Eudamos, the latter leading the other paramount satrapy for the control of Central Asia, namely Arachosia. Eumenes was in fact able to recruit both, and as a result they perished on the field.<sup>447</sup> As a consequence of such events, the former's possessions initially passed to Antigonos, who appointed a certain Evitos, while Arachosia fell into the hands of the Mauryan prince Chandragupta, who seems to have been skillful enough to exploit the internal conflicts rampaging among the Diadochi at this juncture.<sup>448</sup> Such a development of events - especially the Mauryan expansion into Arachosia - must have played a major role in further strengthening the dominant position of Baktria within the Eastern satrapies of the Graeco-Makedonian dominions and, consequently, the power of Stasanor and the circle around him. A compelling clue supporting this hypothesis is the fact that, after defeating Eumenes, Antigonos attempted to redefine the power hierarchies in Central Asia to his own advantage but proved unable to remove from office both Stasanor and, significantly, Oxyartes (perhaps an ally of the latter, certainly still one of the most influential political actors in the region at the time), and this by virtue of the fact that - at least according to the extant accounts - both enjoyed wide support from the rest of the local élites.<sup>449</sup>

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<sup>446</sup> One of the reasons for this phenomenon must probably be found in the crisis - if not in the actual disintegration - of the system of government developed by the Achaemenids as attested by the *ADAB*. If in fact the imperial paradigm provided members of the local élite with the most suitable conditions for them to find it convenient to collaborate with the satrap in supporting the Achaemenid imperial enterprise, at the same time provided the latter with an array of very effective instruments to prevent - or at least keep under control - the formation of factions and/or clientele strong enough to challenge Persian authority. As recently argued by Naiden 2019, 258, Alexander's invasion dealt a deadly blow to this system without the new ruler having time enough to replace it with anything remotely comparable in terms of efficiency. The result of this process was the transformation of Baktria into a patchwork of local powers held together only by the common distrust for Alexander's heirs in the West, whose primary objective appeared to have been the (unilateral) redefinition of the power hierarchies in the East. According to Olbrycht 2013, 162, it could be argued that it was precisely in this phase that the new Baktrian ruling class began to accumulate the power necessary to govern the region independently of the imperial authority in place elsewhere. At first (through the appointment of Antiochos as plenipotentiary in Baktria) the Seleukids tried to limit as much as possible this centrifugal tendency (Engels 2011), but eventually ended up adapting to it, cleverly exploiting it to their own advantage (Wenghofer 2018, Strootman 2020a, b, and c).

<sup>447</sup> Bernard 1985, 31.

<sup>448</sup> At Paraetakenē the Arachosian troops appear in a different contingent from Eudamos' soldiers, at least according to the testimony of Diod. Sic. 19.14.6-8 and Just. *Epit.*, 15.14.20. On Evitos see Diod. Sic. 19.48.2 and for an overview of the political stage in contemporary Southeast Asia see Dwivedi 2019a, 101-108 and Jansari 2020a.

<sup>449</sup> Cf. Diod. Sic. 19.48.1-2 and Olbrycht 2013, 163-164. An anecdote reported by Porphyry (*Abst.*, 4.21.22-27) has often been taken as evidence of the tensions still existing between the Makedonians and the local élites in Baktria at the time of the Diadochi. The - late - date and above all the highly rhetorical and moralizing context within which the tale is woven, impose caution: the sources (Hdt. 1.216.; 6.12, Strab. 11.8.6-8, Cic. *Tusc.*, 1.45.108, Eus. *Praep. Ev.*, 1.4.8 among others) indulge complacently in horrific accounts of Central Asian funerary traditions (also the focus of Porphyry's indictment)

The winning move on the part of Seleukos in his battle for the conquest of the upper satrapies must therefore in all probability be seen in the recognition of both Stasanor's authority and the latter's «selectorate» in Baktria, thus institutionalizing a situation which was already established in other territories of the former Achaemenid Empire (e. g. at Pergamon) and which Strootman recently called «vassalization».<sup>450</sup> In other words, while granting the local power networks both legitimacy and ample room for maneuver in the exercise of their respective prerogatives, which translated in considerable political autonomy under the Seleukid imperial umbrella, Seleukos at the same time forcefully asserted his rights over the territories administered by those who were now to all intents and purposes territorial dynasts, and this because he, and no one else, embodied the role of guarantor of the latter's authority.<sup>451</sup> Despite the absolute silence which, after Eumenes' death, falls on the fate of both Stasanor and Oxyartes (not to mention the eclipse from the extant sources' narrative of the other members of the local ruling class), the numismatic evidence perhaps allows to support on a somehow firmer documentary basis some of the hypotheses put forward above. Indeed, although still largely shrouded in mystery, the career of the man who may have been Stasanor's successor - and his ally before? -, the «enigmatic ruler» of Baktria Sōphytos, is reminiscent in several respects of the one of the Cypriot satrap.<sup>452</sup> In light of the fact that, from the (re)conquest of Seleukos to the crisis that engulfed Āi Xānum around the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, the dialectic between, on the one hand, the Baktrian élites (including the Diodotids and their overthrower-successor) and – on the others - the emperors in the West was characterized by the constant tension between the bestowal of - more or less - political autonomy and the demand for symbolic submission, the story of Stasanor and Sōphytos may be particularly instructive in illuminating some aspects of the historical development of Hellenistic Baktria until the satrapy's transformation into what Lauren Morris has called an «imperial space» (but this time on its own terms).<sup>453</sup>

### 5.1 *The Man Who Would Be Satrap*

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to demonstrate the savage and barbaric nature of the locals (for a discussion of the archaeological evidence Grenet 1984, 73-75 is still highly recommended). What we know for sure is that such customs must still have been in use in the late Hellenistic period (Frye 1984, 190) and that Stasanor remained in its place. Even if he really did take measures that caused tension, it seems that he was able to promptly remedy to the problems he might have caused: on the sociopolitical status of Baktria and Sogdiana in the aftermath of the battle of Gabiene (316 BCE) see Grainger 1990, 81 and Mendoza-Sanahuja 2017, 60. An interesting parallel in the light of which to assess the problems Stasanor might have faced is offered by Qīng administered Tibet in the 18<sup>th</sup> century: Dabringhaus 2014, 120-121.

<sup>450</sup> Strootman 2018; 2020a; 2020c. Hannestad 2020 provides a recent reassessment of Seleukos' life and of his Empire.

<sup>451</sup> Mehl 1986, 120. See moreover Capdetrey 2007, 39-43 and Chrubasik 2016, 34-45.

<sup>452</sup> Bopearachchi 1996.

<sup>453</sup> Morris 2019a. For a recent assessment of Sōphytos' coinage and historical role cf. Bordeaux 2021.

Before Seleukos reached the Easternmost frontier zones of Alexander's domains, there is evidence in Baktria of the introduction, for the first time on a noteworthy scale, of minted coinage. At least 17 different dies were in fact used to produce the types of which we are aware so far. Since it has been estimated that each of them was capable of minting between 10 and 40000 specimina on average before it wore out, the three different series of tetradrachms, drachmas, and their lower-value nominals signals a significant change in the economic policy of a region which, until then, had been characterized by a significantly reduced - or perhaps even non-existent - circulation of minted coinage.<sup>454</sup> The reasons behind this significant shift in the Baktrian economic policy have been discussed several times, but even today scholars seem far from having reached a widely shared opinion. Some have argued, for example, that the presence of the Graeco-Makedonians should be recognized as the most important factor behind this first wave of issues. The latter, however, is unlikely to have been the sole reason for the phenomenon, since it is not easy to explain the – by any standard remarkable - scale of the minting activity attested simply to meet the needs of a population that, however numerous it was, was still a (distinct) minority within the territory of Baktria and Sogdiana.<sup>455</sup> Based on some specimens of the third series of these types (pseudo-Athenian issues and double darics), on which the letters ΣΤΑ-MΝΑ are engraved, some scholars have recently argued that the issuing authority may have been that of Stasanor. According to such a view, he is in fact likely to have needed the money in order to enlist in his ranks the veterans of the military confrontation with Python in anticipation of the imminent showdown between Antigonos and Eumenes.<sup>456</sup> This hypothesis, however, does not seem particularly solid, since at least as far as the darics are concerned, they were struck immediately after Alexander's death, and although there are some similarities with Athenian imitations bearing the image of the owl, enough evidence is lacking to attribute them to anyone in particular. The so-called Sōphytos issues, i. e. a group consisting of about 70 specimens mainly in silver and bronze, struck according to two different weight units, an Attic one (about 16 grams for the tetradrachms and some didrachms) and a local one (about 3.5 grams for the drachmas and lower numerals), are a different matter.<sup>457</sup> On the obverse there is a portrait of a man wearing a helmet and looking to the right, with three legendae (monograms) around his neck: 1. MNA, 2. MN

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<sup>454</sup> On the monetary policy of the Achaemenids in the upper satrapies until Alexander's invasion, see Strab. 15.3.21 and the discussion in Bernard - Guillaume 1980, 12-16, Amandry - Nicolet-Pierre 1994, 44, Kritz 1996, 25, Bernard *et al.* 2004, 285 fn. 32, Plischke 2014, 176 and Tuplin 2014. According to the estimates of Howgego 1995, 32, it was possible to mint between 11000 and 28000 specimina with the same reverse die (being keener to wear out than the obverse): see also Glenn 2020a.

<sup>455</sup> Coloru 2009, 138, Olbrycht 2013, 160 argued that, however powerful, the Graeco-Makedonians were a minority, and they had therefore to recognize to a considerable extent the aspirations of the native population (which means: of the local élites and their «selectorates»).

<sup>456</sup> Amandry - Nicolette-Pierre 1994, 53, Mendoza-Sanahuja 2017, 63. Widmer 2015, 22 favors the identification of the issuing authority with a man called Stamenes, of whom however nothing else is known.

<sup>457</sup> 59 specimens bearing the name Sōphytos are recorded in Coloru 2009, 130 ff. In a very recent and detailed contribution (2018, but see also 2020b), Sushma Jansari has provided the most detailed catalogue of Sōphytos issues available to date.

and 3. M; on the reverse the name ΣΩΦΥΤΟΥ is flanked by the image of a cockerel.<sup>458</sup> Both sides are decorated with a bossed profile. Among the smaller specimens, Sōphytos also minted diobols and obols of local weight; moreover, several specimens of small bronzes related to Sōphytos' issues by virtue of close similarities with the types on the reverse have been found during excavations at Āi Xānum. For the latter, the most likely hypothesis is that they were minted to meet daily expenses (they are therefore coins with a short circulation range, which suggests a possible correlation between the finding of the specimens and the power radius of the issuing authority).<sup>459</sup> Both archaeological and numismatic data, therefore, strongly suggest that the Sōphytos specimens were minted in Bactria.<sup>460</sup>

This conclusion has not yet been accepted by all scholars, since the name on the issues is almost certainly of Indian origin.<sup>461</sup> Because another Sōphytos is known from historiographic sources as an autonomous dynast in the territories of Jelhum or Pañjāb, it has been suggested to recognize in the two men one and the same person; according to a different interpretation of the evidence, however, the numismatically attested Sōphytos should be located in Arachosia, perhaps fulfilling the role of Sibirtios' successor in the satrapy. This view has been contested by authoritative numismatists such as Osmund Bopearachchi and Olivier Bordeaux, who believe that the issuer of the coin specimens and the Sōphytos mentioned by Alexander's historians can only be two different individuals.<sup>462</sup> Although apparently supported by the considerations summarized above, and in particular against the backdrop of the bronzes' circulation pattern, the matter is far from being settled.<sup>463</sup> According to the well-informed opinion of Sushma Jansari, a cogent piece of evidence in favor of the identity of the two Sōphytos - and of the sphere of influence of the coin-issuing authority South of the Hindūkūš - would be the cockerel engraved on the known silver specimens: it would in fact represent a symbol of an Indian deity (Skandra-Kārttikeya).<sup>464</sup> Further support of this hypothesis would allegedly come

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<sup>458</sup> Approximately half of the specimens struck by Sōphytos bear the letters M, MN or MNA engraved below the neck of the male head: see Jansari 2018, 80.

<sup>459</sup> Bernard - Guillaume 1980.

<sup>460</sup> Bopearachchi 1996, 21-25, Bopearachchi and Flandrin 2005, 196. Recent archaeological surveys on the Achaemenid site of Marakanda have uncovered other examples of Sōphytos issues circulating in Sogdiana: Ataxodžaeu 2013, 221-222 and on Marakanda Cohen 2013, 281.

<sup>461</sup> This too, however, has recently been challenged: Mendoza-Sanahuja and Verdejo Manchado 2019.

<sup>462</sup> In a recent (2019) and very detailed paper, Lloyd Taylor studied the owl, eagle, and cockerel coinage coming to the conclusion that it did not belong to Sōphytos at all, as usually is assumed, but to Andragoras, the Seleukid satrap of Parthia.

<sup>463</sup> Jansari 2018, 76 argued, not without reason, that there is no indication whatsoever that the male figure on the coinage of Sōphytos is in fact a portrait (no matter how faithful) of Sōphytos himself.

<sup>464</sup> Martinez-Sève 2010, 4-5 offers an interpretation of this symbolism that differs radically from that of Bernard and Jansari. According to her, both the caduceus and the cockerel are emblems of Hermes. On religion in Bactria, see also Martinez-Sève 2018b. Mendoza-Sanahuja and Verdejo Manchado 2019, 180-181 fn. 6, for their own part, state that «the representation of this animal on the coins of Sōphytos links up directly with a deeply rooted Greek tradition, rendering it unnecessary to seek ties with other cultures».



from the literary evidence: a passage in Aelian's *Varia Historia* in fact claims that this bird enjoyed great popularity (perhaps even a cult) in the East, which is understood to allude to India.<sup>465</sup>

However, the fact that the coinage of Sōphytos is characterized by elements of undeniable continuity with the series previously attested in Baktria during this period makes it highly probable that the specimens in question were issued in the name of the same authority, i. e. that of Sōphytos himself, a conclusion that studies carried out in particular by the numismatic school trained under Osmund Bopearachchi would seem to confirm.<sup>466</sup> Without discarding out of hand the possibility of an Indian context or the symbolism of the cockerel and the caduceus, it has been pointed out that they could also have had a meaning in the Baktrian context, which seems all the more reasonable given the notorious ethno-demographic complexity of the satrapy (where ethnic Indians might well have been settled, as previously argued).<sup>467</sup> Taken as a whole, the extant evidence seems to suggest that, North of the Hindūkūš, and more precisely in the Oxus valley, where all the specimens linked in one way or another to Sōphytos have been found, an individual of unknown origin (although it cannot be ruled out that he belonged to the new local élite, whatever his ethnic or family background) was able to seize power in the satrapy after Stasanor's death - and perhaps even to extend it into Sogdiana, since some specimens struck in his name have been found at Marakanda.<sup>468</sup> If it were possible to interpret the volume of Sōphytos' emissions as an indication of the power he was able to accumulate, it would perhaps be feasible to advance the hypothesis that he managed to replace Stasanor as the highest political authority in Baktria.<sup>469</sup> This may have occurred as a consequence of the latter's appointment as head of the entire upper satrapies (ὁ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄνω σατραπειῶν), following the defeat of Nikanor by Seleukos himself.<sup>470</sup> Having come this far, two fundamental questions remain that need to be discussed here: the first concerns the origins of Sōphytos and his (hypothetical) role at the time of Stasanor's rule in Baktria-Sogdiana. The second concerns the end of the authority wielded by Sōphytos himself and his relationship with Seleukos and his heirs.

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<sup>465</sup> Ael. *VH.*, 2.28. About the Sōphytos mentioned by classical historiographers cf. Strab. 15.1.30, Diod. Sic. 17.91.4, Curt. 9.1.24, Curt. 9.1.27, Curt. 9.1.35, Just. *Epit.*, 12.8.10, *Epit. Mett.*, 66 and Arr. *Anab.*, 6.2.2 (the following forms of the name are attested: Σωπειθός, Σωπειθήν, Σωπειθούς in Greek and *Sophites*, *Cofites*, *Cufides* and *Cufices* in Latin: see on this issue Bernard *et al.* 2004, 310-312, Coloru 2009, 140 with previous bibliography and the (critical) remarks in Mendoza-Sanahuja and Verdejo Manchado 2019, 182 fn. 11. Generally speaking, the two authors challenge the hypothesis (defended most vocally in Bernard *et al.* 2004 and Jansari 2018) of the Indian origin of both Sōphytos' name and of the man himself, arguing instead in favor of Sōphytos' provenance from Seleukos' entourage.

<sup>466</sup> Bernard 1985, 20-21, Bopearachchi 1996, 26-28, Bopearachchi and Flandrin 2005, 197-201. A different position was supported by Jansari 2018, 83. According to her, there would be no information on where the Sōphytos coins were found, and it would therefore not be possible to support the argument of a Baktrian origin of the mints that struck the specimens.

<sup>467</sup> Plischke 2014, 177. Coloru 2017b, 106 calls Sōphytos «a local dynast». See moreover Kritz 2016, 64.

<sup>468</sup> In Jansari's very important article, there is no trace of Ataxodžaev's study.

<sup>469</sup> For a methodology of this kind, i. e. using numismatic analysis to infer information about the political power exercised by a ruler in his territories, see Marcinkiewicz-Joseph 2016, 1-33, 179-204 (on Demetrios I of Baktria) as well as Glenn 2020b.

<sup>470</sup> Diod. Sic. 19.100.3. Engels 2017a, 215 on Stasanor being appointed satrap in the upper satrapies.

Point number 1. Although there is no compelling reason to deny the Indian origin of Sōphytos' name, it should not be inferred from this that he himself was a native of - or active in - the subcontinent at the time he struck the coin.<sup>471</sup> If he was a native of Arachosia, as has in fact authoritatively been suggested, he could have settled in Baktria in the wake of Alexander's campaign during the (at the time would-be) king's reorganization of the Achaemenid satrapy, where a city was founded in a strategic location.<sup>472</sup> However, Sōphytos could also have already been in Baktria at the time of the Makedonian invasion, since the mobility between one satrapy and another in Central Asian society – not only – a point to be stressed here - of kurtaš and «merchants» such as the one attested in Ktesias (who might in fact have been a much more powerful individual) but also involving the highest members of the governmental hierarchy - during the Achaemenid period is widely attested and should be considered the norm until proven otherwise.<sup>473</sup> It could therefore be assumed that Sōphytos was one of those members of the old ruling class who chose to collaborate with Stasanor during the latter's mandate as plenipotentiary in Baktria, perhaps as one of his direct subordinates in charge of the complex operation of monetizing the satrapy. This hypothesis would contribute at least in part to explain the double standard of the first groups of issues in terms of an attempt to meet the expectations of the locals towards the coinage while introducing the new weights.<sup>474</sup> An issue of extreme importance - and still hotly debated today - obviously concerns the reasons behind the minting of currency in quantities which, if the four series were really to be traced back to a single authority, should not be underestimated, as it still is sometimes the case among scholars.<sup>475</sup> The easiest solution would be to assume payment for mercenary troops, since it has been argued that, at least in the case of issues bearing the name of the (alleged) dynast, 1. the scale of production would be too small and 2. no Sōphytos bronze (a metal usually needed for everyday transactions) has been found. The consequence thereof would be that he started minting money for a specific, ad hoc reason.<sup>476</sup> Is it

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<sup>471</sup> For a comprehensive philological discussion of the name see Bernard *et al.* 2004, 261-263, Jansari 2018; 2020b.

<sup>472</sup> Curt. 7.3.4-5, *FGrHist* 781 F 2 (19). On Alexander's foundation in the east see most recently Giangiulio 2020.

<sup>473</sup> Henkelman 2018a.

<sup>474</sup> Kritt 2016, 70, although he proposes a considerably lower chronology than is usually accepted.

<sup>475</sup> They are the double darics, the eagle and Zeus series on Athenian imitations and the specimens bearing the portrait (perhaps) of Sōphytos: Jansari 2018, 72-81.

<sup>476</sup> Jansari 2018, 83: however, this argument seems to disregard Coloru 2009, 139 ff. (strikingly absent from Jansari's bibliography), who instead reports bronze specimens among the coins minted by Sōphytos. According to the testimony of Strab. 15.1.30, there were silver mines in the «land between the two rivers» where Alexander is said to have met the Indian Sōphytos. However, this information is not conclusive evidence in favor of the identification of the two individuals, since gold and silver are also attested in significant quantities in Baktria and Sogdiana (and even non-sedentary populations took part in their extraction over the millennia): Diod. Sic. 2.7.1, Curt. 9.7.11-14, Arist. *Mir. Ausc.*, 46, Ael. *NA.*, 4.27, Bonora 2020, Thomas 2021, 108-123. See also Karttunen 1989, 171 ff.; 1997, 218 for an overview of Indian sources on the issue. Assuming the minimum values of production per flan, the amount of Sōphytos' production does indeed seem large enough to have enabled him to pay an army of mercenaries, especially in a region where the previously minted coinage did not in fact exist, leading to the conclusion that wages were still largely paid in kind. If then, as recently suggested (Kritt 2016, 64), the issues with the owl were indeed connected to those of Sōphytos, the case could be made that he struck at least part of his own coinage for military reasons. See also Mendoza-Sanahuja 2017, 64 for a similar

possible that one of these reasons was an attempt to (re)gain influence among the Sakā populations of Sogdiana and neighboring territories who had been cut off from the satrapy's networks (including the economic ones) because of Alexander's policy? For the time being, the recent findings at Marakanda/Afrāsīyāb leave the question open.

Point number two: the question of the chronological extent of Sōphytos' power. It is possible to divide scholarly opinions into two groups. The first is in favor of a high chronology, between 315 and 305 BCE. According to such a view, following the death of Stasanor Sōphytos proclaimed his authority over Baktria by striking double gold staters similar to those discovered among the 48 specimens of the so-called Aqtča treasure (on its authenticity, however, opinions differ).<sup>477</sup> Such an argument could explain the reference in Justin and Orosius to military skirmishes between Seleukos and «the Baktrians» at a time when the former was engaged in reconquering the upper satrapies before the showdown in the West (at Ipsos) with Antigonos Monophthalmos.<sup>478</sup> The second school of thought advocates a lower chronology, dating Sōphytos after the Seleukid (re)conquest, i. e. between 305 and 290 BCE.<sup>479</sup> According to the supporters of this view, Seleukos succeeded in taking control of Baktria, but as soon as he was forced to leave the satrapy his power was challenged by Sōphytos himself, who replaced him as strongman in the satrapy. Two assumptions underpinning this second interpretation of the evidence appear rather problematic. The first is related to the claim that the Seleukids, including the founder, were «weak» rulers, who had moreover no special interests in their Central Asian domains (a viewpoint recently challenged and widely discarded in scholarship). The second is that it resurrects the image of Baktria as an untamable and rebellious satrapy, which is untenable in the light of the evidence available on Seleukid policy in Central Asia.<sup>480</sup> Against the backdrop of these considerations, it is perhaps possible to make a third suggestion in order to account for the role of Sōphytos in the framework of Seleukos' (re)organization of the territories of Central Asia.<sup>481</sup> Indeed, it could be argued that Sōphytos' rule of in Baktria ought to be dated between the

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hypothesis, although he argues that the issuing authority was Stasanor. On mencenary wages in the Hellenistic period see Griffith 1935, 294-306 and more recently Trundle 2004, 96-98.

<sup>477</sup> Bopearachchi and Flandrin 2005, 195-201.

<sup>478</sup> Just. *Epit.*, 15.4 (Bactrianos expugnavit). Cf. moreover Oros. 3.23.

<sup>479</sup> Bernard *et al.* 2004, 317 ff., although the authors of this fundamental study argue in favor of both the Indian origin and the range of Sōphytos' activity in the subcontinent (or at most in Arachosia). In a recent study of the precious metal minted at Āi Xānum, Kritt 2016, 70 argued in favor of a chronological span extended between 295 and 270 for the three groups of Sōphytos' issues (the so-called Athenian imitations, the group with the eagle and the one bearing the portrait of Sōphytos). It will not escape notice at this point that, the lower the chronology of this individual is assumed, the more pressing becomes the need to explain, in the face of the presence in loco of Antiochos I, the power he seems to have had, a point that appears to have been ignored in the last contributions dedicated to this indeed challenging topic of (early) Hellenistic Baktrian scholarship. According to Mendoza-Sanahuja and Verdejo Manchado 2019, 178, «the coins bearing the portrait of Sophytos must date from later than 307-303 BC».

<sup>480</sup> Engels 2017a, Strootman 2020c.

<sup>481</sup> Compare the similar suggestion made by Mendoza-Sanahuja and Verdejo Manchado 2019, 190. According to them, «Sophytos could be posited as the governor of the province of Baktria-Sogdiana in the late 4th century BC, after the conquest of the region by Seleucus I, as part of his Eastern campaign between 308 BC and 306 BC».

first commemorative issues minted by Seleukos at Susa after reshaping the Eastern borderlands of his Empire and the appointment of Antiochos I as co-regent in the upper satrapies in 294 BCE.<sup>482</sup> While it cannot be ruled out that the turmoil in Baktria that followed the rapid change of satraps in adjoining Arachosia forced Seleukos to act when he arrived in the area, the available dataset suggests that both Sōphytos and the apparatus (including his «selectorate») which he undoubtedly was able to master must not have been so easy to dispose of.<sup>483</sup> Consequently, and all the more so in view of the impending war in the West, an agreement had to be reached, which there is reason to believe followed in the footsteps of the deals cut by Alexander with individuals such as Chorienes and Sisimithres, of whom Sōphytos can be considered the last heir of the (late) Achaemenid era and at the same time the first example, under changed circumstances, of the Hellenistic period. Sōphytos would therefore have been acknowledged as paramount authority in Baktria and as a representative of Seleukid power (the first of the new rulers' «vassals», φίλοι, bandakā) and, in exchange for recognition of imperial authority, would have maintained a considerable degree of autonomy.<sup>484</sup> Such a scenario has the advantage of explaining the different reaction of the local élites towards Seleukos compared to their attitude towards Python, Eumenes or even Antigonos himself.<sup>485</sup> If in fact, as has recently been argued by Paul J. Kosmin, the Indian campaign began in 305-304 BCE, this chronology necessarily implies that Seleukos had already been able to secure a solid position in Baktria (and perhaps Sogdiana as well) before turning towards the subcontinent.<sup>486</sup> In pursuing such a strategy, Seleukos had much more ambitious goals than simply preserving the status quo he had found in Central Asia. On the contrary - perhaps also under pressure from the circumstances and in the face of the local socio-

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<sup>482</sup> Kosmin 2014a, 59. Concerning the Seleukid emissions from Susa see Newell 1938 I, 121-122, Houghton - Lorber 2002 I 1, 68-78 and Jansari 2018, 74 beside the account of Diod. Sic. 20.53.4. For a long time, critics have believed that Antiochos was appointed plenipotentiary of the father in the upper satrapies in 293 BCE. This claim has been definitively refuted by the discovery of a cuneiform tablet with the date of 18 November 294 as that of the appointment of the Seleukid prince: Bernard 1985, 36, Engels 2017a, 114 and now Hackl 2020 on the coregency of Antiochos I.

<sup>483</sup> Chrubasik 2016, 47 classifies local powerholders as «remnants of former Empires, creations of temporal weakness in certain regions, and pockets of independent power that were too costly or too labor-intensive to remove»: a definition that fits the case of Sōphytos rather well (but it should also be added that, as Chrubasik himself does not fail to point out, «beyond their traditional or accidental origins», these men «also fulfilled specific functions» which might have been very useful, indeed badly needed to any would-be king struggling for power in the world *After Alexander*. After all, one shall further point out, this is the same situation Antigonos faced when he tried (and soundly failed) to remove Stasanor; and while he was unable to come to terms with the satrap as well as with his power networks, Seleukos proved to be more dexterous in bargaining with them, for he obtained the satrapy and his men in return and defeated Antigonos at Ipsos (also) thanks to the Baktrian cavalry (as noted by Olbrycht 2013, 168, who emphasizes its role even at the expense of the famous elephants provided by Chandragupta) and eventually became king.

<sup>484</sup> Widmer 2015, 61 and Strootman 2020a for a similar hypothesis. Against such a background, the power held by Sōphytos should be interpreted as the first experiment of a strategy of power management that the Seleukids would have adopted several times during their trajectory as Great Kings of Asia. Incidentally, this provides yet further proof of the importance of borderlands as fertile ground for the elaboration of globally (meaning: at an imperial level) applicable solutions to particular problems. See also the remarks in Rollinger 2023 and Versluys forthcoming

<sup>485</sup> Capdetrey 2007, 42.

<sup>486</sup> See the discussion in Kosmin 2014a, 31-58. On the Seleukid (and Alexandrian, which ultimately equals to say Achaemenid) outermost limits of the Empire see the discussion in Rollinger and Degen 2021a and now Degen 2022, 302-408.

political and economic situation - he was rather developing a new strategy for the management of territorial power, based on granting local rulers much greater margins of maneuver than those (by no means negligible) available to the Achaemenid satrap, provided of course that the exercise of these offices did not threaten the authority of the king and consequently the stability of the Empire. Not too differently from what Stasanor might have done before him, Sōphytos may therefore have ruled as an independent authority over Bactria. However, he depended on the formal recognition of the Seleukid emperor: he had become, in other words, an imperial vassal or a collaborator.<sup>487</sup> From the point of view of the new kings of Asia, on the other hand, the prompt acceptance of Sōphytos' role can be interpreted - against the long-lasting backdrop of the diplomatic relations in force within the various territories of the Empires claiming overlordship over Central Eurasia - as an attempt to reconstruct that ruling class (which was not necessarily limited to the Greek and the Makedonians) which, as Briant observed in the conclusion of his monumental work, on the one hand, Alexander's campaign - with the tensions it caused between the Irānian magnates and the factions of the itinerant Makedonian court - and, on the other hand, above all, the wars of the Diadochi, had helped to destroy, with results that proved to be disastrous both in terms of the efficiency and the stability 1. of satrapal (infra)structural power and, conversely, 2. of imperial purchase itself in the Central Asian territories.<sup>488</sup> However, as it can only be expected when dealing with rulers claiming universal power, there were conditions limiting the scope of intervention of the governors appointed (or left in place) by Seleukos.<sup>489</sup> One of them - as mentioned - was the respect, at least formally, of the hegemonic authority of the king. If we accept the low chronology for Sōphytos' appointment, the sudden disappearance of this individual from the record (and the almost contemporary dispatching of Antiochos' in the upper satrapies as his father's junior king) could perhaps be explained as the outcome of an attempt on Sōphytos' part to question this cornerstone of the (new) dynastic pact. A possible clue to this might come from Sōphytos' issuance of gold coins, usually taken by scholars as a declaration of kingship. It might have followed that Seleukos felt compelled to take countermeasures, which he did by appointing Antiochos.<sup>490</sup> Although the symbolic value of the gold

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<sup>487</sup> Olbrycht 2013, 162. See also Strootman 2007, 28; 2020c, Engels 2011. For a discussion of the development of this strategy throughout the history of the Seleukid Empire and its implications for relations between the imperial court and satrapal Plites (especially in Central Asia) see Wenghofer and Houle 2016 and Wenghofer 2018. In the words of Kosmin 2014a, 60, «his [Seleukos'] may be explained by a policy of light-footed tolerance (retaining personnel; limiting tribute demands; not interfering with administrative structures) that asserted only formal authority». Note moreover Boppearachchi 2004, 47 and Chrubasik 2016, 48-57.

<sup>488</sup> Briant 2002, 875-876: of considerable importance is moreover the chapter on Alexander's «power networking» in the recent *Geschichte Makedoniens* (2016) by Sabine Müller.

<sup>489</sup> Boppearachchi 2004, 354-355.

<sup>490</sup> Kosmin 2014a, 216 and Engels 2017a, 125 suggests a different solution. Based on the testimony provided by Malalas, they argue that Seleukos' two nephews, Nikomedes and Nikanor, who had been appointed officers in the upper satrapies, either fell into disgrace or were assassinated or simply - which seems to me rather unlikely - resigned their posts: Malal., *Chron.*, 8.198, Plin. *NH.*, 6.117, *FGrHist* 781 F 2. Although it is far from easy to establish the degree of reliability of a source such as Malalas, it could perhaps provide further evidence of the Seleukid inclination to delegate power in the

issues is not in question, they seem to have been a necessary but not sufficient condition to cause repressive intervention by imperial authority.<sup>491</sup> Hence the unsuitability of considering Sōphytos a usurper merely by virtue of the fact that he appears to have acted as an independent powerbroker in Baktria.<sup>492</sup> If his career really ended in the aftermath of Seleukos' reconquest of Central Asia, it has to be concluded that Sōphytos must have threatened imperial power in Baktria in a far more serious manner, such as to cause his forced removal (perhaps by means of Antiochos' intervention) and the subsequent disappearance of this – indeed enigmatic - man from the extant record.<sup>493</sup> The dynamics brought about by Alexander's conquest of Central Asia forced Seleukos to concentrate imperial power even more in Baktria. Since, however, the disintegration of the Achaemenid infrastructure (both in physical and – perhaps even more important – in socio-political terms) had made it extremely difficult to effectively control Central Asian territories from the West - in the absence of a developed (micro-)territorial network in an impervious environment - the Seleukids found themselves, probably against their own will, largely dependent on their subordinates. While this mechanism proved very effective, the lack of a sophisticated system of counterweights like those developed by the Achaemenids (as it can be argued against the grain of the evidence provided by the *ADAB*) made the whole system even more fragile. The cases of Stasanor and Sōphytos could therefore exemplify the two poles of the spectrum within which the Seleukids attempted to build their hegemony in Central Asia. From 294 BCE until at least the Diodotids, the dynasty would swing between a rather high degree of interventionism in the Eastern satrapies on the one hand and, on the other, a progressive delegation of power to local strongmen. A complicated mix of repressive measures, ritual forgiveness and flexibility attempted, in the course of time, to cope (with a new toolkit the adoption and adaptation

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Eastern satrapies to ensure easier control in the absence, it is worth stressing once again, of the Achaemenid infrastructure: on Nikanor as governor of Mesopotamia see Kosmin 2014a, 216.

<sup>491</sup> The gold issues of Sōphytos seem to be attested for the moment only by a stater (moreover of doubtful authenticity, as noted by Jansari 2018, 89-90) published in Boppearachchi and Flandrin 2005. Even if one accepts that this is an authentic specimen, one must consider the fact that, contrary to what is argued, for example, in Bordeaux 2018, not all numismatists agree that the minting of gold coins was an unequivocal sign of breaking away from imperial authority. On the contrary, as long as the position of the king was not threatened militarily (as in the case, for example, of the Molon revolt in the reign of Antiochos III, which was in fact ruthlessly repressed and the insurgent killed in the most gruesome way), the granting of extensive powers and genuine political autonomy to local powerbrokers seems to have been widely tolerated throughout Seleukid history: see in this regard Le Rider 1998 II, 627-639 and Chrubasik 2016, 13.

<sup>492</sup> Just. *Epit.*, 15.4. See Panitschek 2016, 291, who argues that Seleukos took the title of βασιλεύς in 305/304 BCE when he was (still) in Baktria or (already) in India. If this chronology turns out to be correct, Sōphytos' might represent the first known case of «vassalization» (Engels 2018, Strootman 2011; 2020a) within the Seleukid Empire, since sizing the royal title by the king does not seem to have excluded the possibility for a man like Sōphytos to wield fully recognized political powers (the symbol of which would have been precisely the authority to mint coins).

<sup>493</sup> A different position has recently been taken by Engels 2017a, 140-143, who assumes that Sōphytos was still in power during the reign of Antiochos I. If the scholar is right, one should conclude that the insubordinate official was reduced to a more lenient position by the Seleukid heir to the throne and inserted into the satrapal hierarchy as a client king: this is not to be ruled out at all since, as shown by Chrubasik 2016, 47, local magnates made for a fundamental asset within the political landscape of the Empire. The case of Sōphytos, by the way, would represent an important precedent based on which to judge the numismatic evidence of the fratarakā, attested as client kings even in Pārsa, once the heartland of the (Achaemenid) universal Empire: Strootman 2017.

of which was made unescapable not least by the fact that the resources at disposal of the Seleukids were now – for the reasons previously discussed – more limited than those available to the Achaemenids) with the recurring paradox of power besetting any political power that has to control boundless territories without the means accessible to states and empires of the industrial era (and the case of the Soviet Union clearly shows the extent of the challenges at stake in a context such as the Central Asian one).<sup>494</sup> The dynamics that led to the transformation of Baktria into an imperial space *sua propria principia* around the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE are rooted here.

## 6. Conclusion. *Так это было. Baktria as an Imperial Space From Nabonidos to Antiochos*

Departing from some trends found in more recent historiography which have consistently downplayed it, this chapter has on the contrary attempted to show how and why Alexander's campaign had in fact an enormous impact in political, social, and economic terms on the structures built over the centuries by the Achaemenids in Central Asia, which have been the main focus of this study. Reconstructing the path followed by the Makedonian army makes it possible to better understand the administrative geography of (late) Achaemenid Central Asia, while a careful analysis of the available evidence - especially if carried out against the background of the imperial context established in previous generations as it emerged from the foregoing chapters - allows to show that the Makedonian campaign severely damaged (and in some cases utterly destroyed) a system of alliances and mutual dependence that had ensured both an effective control of the territory and the ability of the imperial satrapal administration to mobilize and extract resources in massive quantities over a centuries-long period. The most recent results of the archaeological investigation, together with a detailed study of the – albeit meagre - information transmitted by the literary record, also enable to draw up a balance, however tentative, of the impact of the military expedition on the various territories of the satrapy in both economic and demographic terms. The consequences were extremely significant. Despite the defeat of the two major Central Asian notables (the credit for which, it may be argued, should not be attributed entirely to the Makedonians), Alexander and his generals found themselves, paradoxically, in a much weaker position after the victory than the Achaemenid satraps who had preceded them. With the notable but insufficient exception of the region's major urban center (Baktra) and a few other strongholds, the Makedonian army in Baktria was able to exert only partial and punctiform control over the rest of the – immense and ecologically challenging - satrapal territory, especially when compared to the complex, multiform, and stratified Achaemenid administrative apparatus. In the light of the extent of the devastation caused by the war and its consequences for the

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<sup>494</sup> Chrubasik 2016, 214-226.

population (among which feature prominently the Sakā populations settled in valleys such as those of the Qashqadaryo and the Zarafšān, crucial as they were for the upkeep of the steppe networks), it is perhaps not unwarranted to assume that Alexander lost control of Sogdiana, nor is it easy to establish whether and to what extent the Seleukids were ever able to recover the satrapy.<sup>495</sup> Further paradoxically, this unprecedented (at least since the civil war of 522 BCE) upheaval provided those among the members of the Achaemenid élites who managed to survive the first two years of the Makedonian campaign with a degree of negotiating power such as they never had during the two centuries of Persian hegemony. Led by some of the cadres settled at Baktra whom Alexander had at first attempted to liquidate, these Central Asian magnates were able to feed the Makedonians the support they so badly needed to defeat Spitamenes and his allies. Not only did this enable them to regain their lost positions within the satrapy's frameworks - which some of them managed to strengthen further through shrewd matrimonial policies - but the deaths of several former colleagues (and rivals) also made it possible for these notables to further expand their regional latitude (e. g. Oxyartes, by no chance known to the sources as praetor Bactrianorum, possibly also Chorienes, and Sisimithres). At the time of Alexander's departure for India, the alliances forged between the survivors of the Achaemenid ruling class and a fraction of the new settlers proved decisive in securing the new Graeco-Baktrian élite control of the satrapy. As shown by the events surrounding Athenodoros' revolt - at least as far as they can be made sense of from the evidence - it was precisely the common interests between (part of) the new Makedonian élite and the surviving representatives of the old Achaemenid herrschende Gesellschaft (who were and remained, first and foremost, local strongmen) that enabled the defeat of those rebels whose actions threatened to undermine the new (and mutually beneficial) status quo. Even the armies of Antigonos Monophthalmos failed in countering this front; indeed, some of its most prominent representatives (Stasanor, the ubiquitous Oxyartes, perhaps Sōphytos) in the aftermath of Gabiene actually governed Baktria as if it were an autonomous territory. However, two centuries of Achaemenid hegemony had repeatedly shown that the «imperial paradigm» offered these local élites power, prestige and, not least, protection from *external* rivals - as well as, and perhaps more decisively, from internal ones - to an extent that each of the actors involved was unable to achieve on his own. Seleukos became Great King of Asia because he was able, as Cyrus and then Darius had done centuries before, to offer the newborn Graeco-Baktrian powerholders a secure place within the hierarchies of the Seleukid Altneuland: they accepted the offer, and because of this Alexander's former lieutenant took over, apparently without major effort, the whole of Central Asia.

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<sup>495</sup> Lyonnet 2020.



Taking up the words of Tolkien's king Elessar Aragorn, son of Arathorn, how he and his descendants «unto the ending of the world» succeeded in wielding their power over the «ornament of all Ariana», as – according to Strabo - Apollodoros of Artemita called Baktria in his work, shall be the topic of another study.<sup>496</sup> In the year 1 of the Seleukid era, in fact, a whole new history began - or at least this was what the new masters of the Achaemenid *Far East* wanted their subjects, and perhaps even themselves, to believe.<sup>497</sup> Therefore, with the conclusion of what, paraphrasing the title of a recent book by Richard Stoneman, we might call *The Persian Experience of Baktria*, the present narrative also finds its endpoint here.<sup>498</sup>

«The events after these will perhaps be the concern of somebody else».<sup>499</sup>

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<sup>496</sup> Strab. 11.11.1 = *FGrHist* 799 F 7a: «In brief, Apollodoros says that Baktria was the ornament of all Ariana» (καθ' ὅλου δέ φησιν [scil. Ἀπολλόδωρος] ἐκεῖνος τῆς συμπάσης Ἀριανῆς πρόσχημα εἶναι τὴν Βακτριανήν). Note especially the important, and because of its having been written in Italian still too much overlooked, Coloru 2009.

<sup>497</sup> Kosmin 2018b.

<sup>498</sup> Stoneman 2019.

<sup>499</sup> So wrote Xenophon, at the end of the Ἑλληνικά (Xen. *Hell.*, 7.5.27), in a year which in his mind likely took the shape of what anthropologist Ernesto De Martino called *The End of the World*, namely the radical breakdown of everything that is known (and makes sense) within a given cultural system in the impossibility of guessing whether there will be an aftermath and what its features will be: «Ἐμοὶ μὲν δὴ μέχρι τούτου γραφέσθω· τὰ δὲ μετὰ ταῦτα ἴσως ἄλλω μελήσει».

## Chapter 9

### Everything Was Forever, Until it Was No More. *Some (Almost) Concluding Remarks*

Bir bor ekan, bir yo‘q ekan...

[Once upon a time...]

- O‘zbek traditional introduction to folktales.

E la vita non conclude.  
Non può concludere.  
Se domani conclude, è  
finita.

- Luigi Pirandello, *Uno, nessuno e centomila* (1926), p. 80.

Don't cultivate grapes; you will  
be bound. || Don't grow grain;  
you will be ground. || Pull the  
camel, gather the sheep. || Your  
day will come; you will be  
crowned.

- Traditional song of pastoralist  
people.

In a seminal doctoral dissertation discussed a few years ago at the University of Pennsylvania, Wu Xin set out to study in admirable detail *Central Asia in the context of the Achaemenid Persian Empire*.<sup>1</sup> In the light of the progress made by scholarship since that date (2005), the aim of the present study was to deepen Wu's investigation and integrate its results by considering *The Achaemenid Empire in the context of Central Asia*, i. e. to bring to light the mechanisms through which the application of the imperial paradigm studied by Wouter Henkelman modified the political, social, and economic structures of the satrapy, being in turn affected, impacted, and modified by the «practical situations on the ground» peculiar to the Baktrian context (to be understood, as chapter 1 and especially 4 tried to show, in a broader sense than the – today still hotly debated – political boundaries of the region under direct Persian control).<sup>2</sup> In other words, in the preceding pages it has been attempted to show to what extent and through what strategies the representatives of the Achaemenid Empire (thus including the local Central Asian élites) succeeded, in the course of a centuries-long process, in integrating Baktria into the wider network of administrative and economic structures, transforming this region into one of the pillars of the organization of what was at the time the largest and most complex political entity in Eurasian history, while at the same time arguing that the internal socio-political development of Baktria had repercussions on the structure and organization of that very same political entity (namely the Empire). This overarching aim was pursued through a series

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<sup>1</sup> Wu 2005 and see most recently the overview article in Wu 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Düring and Stek 2018a, 10.

of stages, which as a way of a (provisional) conclusion are briefly summarized below. In doing so, some potentially fruitful avenues for future research shall also be highlighted.

1. The general introduction has tried to position the recent historiography on Central Asia, (especially, but not only, under Achaemenid rule), within a wider tradition of scholarship, the development thereof has been outlined and some of the most important innovations (especially on the methodological front) have been highlighted. The Eurasian perspective, i. e., looking at the Baktrian and Achaemenid Empires against the background of a broader historical and sociopolitical context, both in synchronic and diachronic perspective, is in my opinion a theoretical standpoint the implication of which need to be further explored, not least because it provides an opportunity of exploiting comparative evidence of incalculable value in order to test the plausibility of reconstructive scenarios, for example, concerning the formative stages of the satrapy itself (as exemplified by chapter 4) where the documentary evidence is particularly scanty.<sup>3</sup>
2. The chapter devoted to the available sources, especially in its section on the ethnographic record, has attempted to substantiate as thoroughly in a manner as possible the argument summarized in the previous paragraph. As Lauren Morris has argued in an extremely convincing way with regard to the Hellenistic and Kuṣāṇa periods, the major problem is not so much, or at least not only, the absence of sources, but on the contrary the interpretative challenges they pose.<sup>4</sup> The development of ever more refined critical methodologies - for example through the application of paradigms such as those of cultural memory, intentional history, or the perspectives developed by the Imperial Turn - that can be profitably employed in the (re)assessment of known sources as well as in the study of those that may come to light in the future ought to be taken as a primary goal of (not only Achaemenid) scholarship on Central Asia: this work should therefore be taken as a trial test of precisely such strategies.<sup>5</sup>
3. In spite of the largely still open debate on the problems posed by the hypothesis of the existence (or not) of a pre-Achaemenid political entity in Central Asia capable of influencing the features characteristic of Persian power in the region, and despite the presence of a rich tradition, perhaps predating the imperial conquest and destined to enjoy wide popularity until the late Middle Ages, which closely associates Bactria with semantics of power and kingship, it has been tried to show that the unavoidable starting point (because the safest, most

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<sup>3</sup> A valuable example of the methodology underpinning the present work is provided by Hoo 2022 which, even though focused on the Hellenistic period, sets Central Asia within a broader Eurasian context.

<sup>4</sup> Morris 2019b.

<sup>5</sup> Rollinger and Gehler 2022 on the Imperial Turn.

contextualizable, and informative) for reconstructing the genesis of the satrapy and the mechanisms that ensured its control by the Empire is the Bīsutūn inscription. The non-existence of a pre-Achaemenid Empire in Central Asia is not, however, tantamount to claiming that Cyrus faced a remote (to say nothing of «primitive» or «underdeveloped» or utterly *blank*) space. On the contrary, the study of the socio-political organization of the steppe communities provides valuable information for the reconstruction of the Central Asian landscape in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, i. e. the conditions to which the method of administration and government developed by the Teispid (and later Achaemenid) dynasty had to adapt, even though - and indeed precisely with - the ultimate aim of modifying that same landscape in accordance with imperial political goals.<sup>6</sup> If in fact, based on the currently available evidence, it seems highly probable that the geographical and administrative configuration of Baktria (perhaps even its very name) should be interpreted as the result of the inclusion of Central Asia in the Persian political and administrative framework, it appears at the same time no less evident that the process of this inclusion took place according to a very precise pattern, dictated to a not inconsiderable extent by 1. ecological and 2. socio-political contingencies. These two factors were chiefly responsible for the creation, already in the years immediately following the conquest, of an extremely sophisticated system of territorial exploitation capable of integrating, while at the same time being inevitably modified by them, structures built up over the previous centuries for the functioning of which it was essential to offer 1. economic, 2. social and 3. political guarantees to actors capable of controlling these structures and the relational networks which fueled them. Not only were these structures not dismantled, but to a considerable extent they were exploited to their own advantage by the Persians, who even took care of their further expansion and development within the imperial infrastructures.

4. This process, arguably one of the cornerstones of the successful penetration and consolidation of Achaemenid power in Baktria, appears today with increasing clarity to have been coordinated from the seat of Baktra, the pivotal center of the satrapy and the headquarter of both the Great King's representative (the satrap) and of extremely powerful local factions, which exploited to their own advantage the transformation of the oasis into the main hub of an infinitely more vast, complex, and interconnected system. Because of the premises developed in the previous three chapters, the main body of the present work (chapters 5, 6, and 7) has been devoted to the diachronic study, starting precisely from Cyrus' conquest, of the mechanisms underlying the structuring and functioning of Persian power in Baktria. Notwithstanding the complex documentary situation concerning the period prior to the

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<sup>6</sup> Note Honeychurch 2015.

Persepolis archives, more recent research suggests that, in the formative phase of the satrapy (and of the Empire itself) the foundations were laid - according to dynamics that can be made sense of at least in their essential outlines - for the lasting socio-political and economic control, through Baktria, of all of Central Asia North of the Hindūkūš (which means Sogdiana, Chorasmia, perhaps Margiana itself and the Sakā territories, for example in the Fargāne valley). In a first stage, the establishment at Baktra of the satrapal seat provided the logistical premise for the expansion of imperial power into the neighboring territories, again not without the decisive help of the sociopolitical networks that were structured during that - crucial - historical phase which stretches from the late period of the Baktria-Margiana archaeological complex to the early Iron Age (Yaz I-II).<sup>7</sup> Perhaps the most important consequence of these events was that they kick-started a sweeping process of hierarchization within the local ruling class. The direction taken by this momentous transformation seems to have been dictated, on the one hand, by the proximity of the members of the Central Asian élites to the new nodes in the topography of local power and, on the other, by the roles assigned to each of them within the administrative and bureaucratic apparatus of the Empire, the spreading thereof on the ground was immediate, far reaching, and capillary. In addition, the present work sought to show 1. that Cyrus' attention to the peoples of the steppes should not be understood simply in a polemological and antagonizing sense and 2. that these communities played a crucial role in the structuring and development of the Achaemenid imperial project in Central Asia. Far more a constitutive part of the region's socio-economic landscape than a threat to the stability of its borderlands - which should perhaps be understood in administrative terms, certainly never accordingly to social, economic or demographic parameters - following the invasion of Central Asia, the Persians consistently sought to exploit the - numerous - advantages deriving from flexible agreements with the major representatives of the steppe peoples, who in turn did not fail to exploit to their own interests the opportunities opened up to them (and to their «selectorates») by what Mischa Meier has repeatedly described as «the imperial whirlwind».<sup>8</sup> Last but not least, even what (precious little) we know about Bardiya's role in Baktria suggests that (and to what extent) policies of alliance, for example on a matrimonial basis, with local magnates were a crucial tool for Persian rulers and their satraps to ensure the stability of their power in the region.

5. This is largely confirmed - and exacerbated by the circumstances of the civil war - by the complex events leading up to Darius' accession to the throne in 522 BCE. The long reign of

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<sup>7</sup> Lhuillier 2018, Luneau 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Meier 2015; 2020. See moreover Heather 2020 and Rollinger 2023.

this king ought to be taken as a crucial step for the consolidation and further expansion of Achaemenid power in Central Asia which, however, can only be adequately understood against the backdrop of previous developments.<sup>9</sup> Transformations indeed took place and they were enormous, but this did not happen either in vacuo or ex nihilo. At least in part, the capital importance of Darius' reign is dictated by the fact that it is from his tenure of the imperial throne that we have, more consistently than before (and to a large extent also in comparison with later periods until at least the last years of the Empire), a documentary corpus wide ranging enough to explore in detail the systematic application, by both the imperial court and its local branches, of a system of power management and resources exploitation (both natural and human) of the territory developed at first in Pārsa and then transferred, with the necessary - though not always desired - changes and tactical adaptations to almost every other region of the Empire. It is from Darius onwards, then, that we can clearly discern an «imperial signature» being impressed by the Achaemenid administration on Baktria and, against this background, it becomes possible to appreciate the transformations dictated by the application of this device of governmentality to the economic, administrative, and sociopolitical landscape of the whole of Central Asia, including its immediate neighboring territories, to the North and South, from Arachosia to Chorasmia and Sogdiana. As the last paragraph of chapter 5 in particular aims to show, this process (undeniable and of crucial importance to understand in all its complexity the dynamics of the Achaemenid Empire, not only in Central Asia) is in no way in contradiction with the fundamental role played by local notables and their wives and daughters, a fact that deserves at the same time to be strongly emphasized and to be further investigated in the future. On the contrary, as the primary sources increase (not least thanks to the fundamental work of publishing the Persepolis archive and the interpretative effort carried out on such astonishing body of evidence), they show how, under Darius and his heirs, members of what were undoubtedly some of the most influential local families came to occupy positions of paramount importance within the ranks of the satrapal hierarchy. This made possible, on the one hand, the constant imperial control (and its progressive expansion over time) over people and resources across the complex Central Asian space; on the other hand, it ensured that these magnates strengthened their power both vis-à-vis the imperial administration itself, to which they owed their rise, and, perhaps more importantly, vis-à-vis their internal rivals on the regional chessboard, which remained for the entire duration of the Empire the first, though by no means the only, socio-political horizon of these individuals.

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<sup>9</sup> Rollinger and Degen 2021b; 2021c.

6. In the absence of the primary evidence provided by the Persepolis archives, the available record concerning Baktria during the reign of Xerxes until Alexander's invasion is, with the - very notable - exception of the *ADAB*, almost non-existent. In addition, the perspective of the classical sources, focused as it is on the political events of the Mediterranean and strongly characterized by a smug vein of exoticism (which is particularly noticeable when it comes to accounting of court life), has contributed in no small measure to consolidate the thesis - still widely in vogue in historiography - of the progressive weakening of Achaemenid power, especially in the *Far East*. In the case of Baktria, this optical distortion is even more clearly perceptible, since almost all Greco-Roman historiographers who (however cursorily) dealt with Central Asian events are particularly diligent in portraying a history of desertions and revolts against imperial power. From this follows the image (revived also in rather recent years) of Baktria as a satrapy structurally impossible to govern and constantly on the verge of escaping Achaemenid control, not least because of the strenuous opposition to it on the part of the steppe populations. The acquisition of new material, both archaeological and documentary on the one hand and, on the other, a re-examination of the known sources in the light of more sophisticated interpretative models makes it possible, however, to sketch a radically different scenario. All that can be gleaned from the literary sources, in fact, is nothing more than a series of intra-family feuds linked to the delicate dynamics of succession to the throne, but from this it is not possible to argue anything concrete about the stability (or lack thereof) of Achaemenid power in the Central Asian satrapies. In the specific case of Baktria, on the contrary, it seems to have remained unchallenged until the demise of the Persian Empire as a whole. The archaeological research of the last two decades has shown, for example, that throughout the 5<sup>th</sup> and much of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE the process of infrastructural and economic development of Baktria continued uninterrupted and undisturbed by the tensions, which may well have occurred, between the local satrap and the Achaemenid rulers. To a considerable extent, this seems to be due to the fundamental role of the regional ruling class, and this by virtue of the fact that the Baktrian magnates were both instruments and beneficiaries of imperial policies in Central Asia, and without them the economic prosperity and social complexity that one senses from the - far from impartial - accounts of Alexander's historians at the time of the Makedonian invasion would simply not be conceivable. A point worth stressing here, recent excavations at Kyzyltēpe have provided crucial evidence consistently supporting these hypotheses. Indeed, the economic development of this settlement, situated in an ecologically complex and relatively marginal position but strategically very important (among other things because of the contacts that its control and

expansion secured with the economic and political networks of the steppes), offers an extremely instructive example of the mechanisms underlying Achaemenid power in Baktria: the same can be said of other similar sites identified by archaeologists in both Northern Afġānistān and Southern Uzbekistan. Thus, if cases such as Kyzyltēpe or (Old) Termiz emphasize the directional component imposed by the Achaemenid administration on the development of Baktrian history, a methodologically astute study of primary testimonies such as seals on the one hand and, on the other, archival sources, allows at the same time to place adequate emphasis on the agentic capacity of local actors. In this way, the arguments of Ertsen and Wouters, according to whom the «micro» element contributes to structuring the «macro» one, while at the same time being created and shaped by the latter, finds plastic and detailed confirmation. The entanglements entailed in the dynamics of such a dialectic between 1. imperial paradigm and 2. local «situations on the ground» is one of the most interesting research perspectives among those to be pursued today, especially considering the methodological developments that can be witnessed, for example, in the study of material culture of the Hellenistic and Kuṣāṇa periods.<sup>10</sup>

7. The *ADAB* represents a further - invaluable - source for the study of the processes on which the discussion carried out in these pages focused. The value of this dataset lays, on the one hand, in its nature as a primary source that illustrates in a detail unknown until its publication the functioning of the strategies and structures of Achaemenid power in Baktria, as well as the resources – material as well as symbolic - underpinning both. Comparative analysis with similar material from 1. different regions within the Persian domains and 2. from Central Asia itself in later periods clearly shows the systemic character of the imperial paradigm promoted by the Achaemenids and its immense impact on the organization of 1. imperial and 2. local power in these territories over a period of several centuries (this is particularly evident in the case of the so-called split tally sticks).<sup>11</sup> The stubborn and relentless application of the Persian governing paradigm across Baktria's landscape and through local societies helps to explain the transformation of the satrapy into an imperial space that was not only - relatively - easy to govern (and to exploit), but also recognizable as such by all the inhabitants of the Persian οἰκουμένη. The impact of this phenomenon should not be underestimated: the consequences of the integration of Baktria within an area that was perceived - with all the inevitable contingent peculiarities - as a political, ideological, and in certain respects also cultural unity extending from the Eastern coasts of the Mediterranean to the peaks of the Hindūkūš would

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<sup>10</sup> Hoo 2022, Morris 2020.

<sup>11</sup> Henkelman and Folmer 2016, Henkelman 2018a.



still have been felt in the Seleukid period (and perhaps even at the time when Baktria became an Empire on its own terms). At the same time, the *ADAB* shows a system of socio-political networks (the, not always clearly defined, hierarchies thereof could therefore be constantly questioned, negotiated and, in some cases, openly challenged) capable of involving in a symbiotic relationship (which means, taking up the remarks put forward, among others, by Lori Khatchadourian, Richard Payne, and Rhyne King, of mutual dependence) all the social actors present in the territory of the satrapy, from the satraps of the Great King to the stewards of a camel driver.<sup>12</sup> Such a «network of networks», as Henkelman put it, although undoubtedly (and incredibly) sophisticated and effective, was nonetheless in no small measure sensitive to what, not without a poetic vein, Sebastian Stride has called «the flutter of the butterfly's wings».<sup>13</sup> The outcome of tactical agreements between social actors representing potentially *conflicting* interests, this (at the same time solid and precarious) balance was able to secure solidarity between the imperial power and the Baktrian élites as long as - and to the extent that - the first of the two proved capable of ensuring political stability and, consequently, economic security to its allies on the ground (in the words engraved by Darius I at Naqš - i Rostam «the men who cooperate»).

8. When in 329 BCE a not yet 30 years old Makedonian prince set foot in Baktria and claimed for himself the inheritance of an ignominiously murdered Achaemenid King, none of the guarantees on which the social contract sketched above rested could be honored any longer. The advent of this young (very skillful, and equally ruthless) adventurer was destined to open a new page in the history of the relations between the Baktrian élites on the one hand and, on the other, the representatives of the Empires that, from the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE to the Красный Октябрь, as it was once called, claimed hegemonic rule over this part of the world and on the peoples living therein.

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<sup>12</sup> For a compelling analysis of the reach of a camel driver's sociopolitical networks see Samuels 2016.

<sup>13</sup> Stride 2005 I, 439.

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<sup>1</sup> Greek and Roman sources are abbreviated according to the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.) and the *Neue Pauly*, Band 3, XXXVI-XLIV. Fort. (followed by 4 digits) refers to the Persepolis Fortification tablet in the National Museum of Irān edited by G. G. Cameron, collated by Hallock, Jones, and Stolper, collated and published by Arfa'ī 2008, and recollated by Henkelman. Fort. (followed by 7 digits) are unpublished PFT edited by Stolper. NN reminds to the unpublished PFT edited by Hallock, collated and prepared by Henkelman for publication, while PF hints at the publication by Hallock 1969.

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## Zusammenfassung

### *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft: Entwurf und Ziele einer (post)moderne baktrischen Dissertation\**

«Как тихо, спокойно и торжественно, совсем не так, как я бежал, — подумал князь Андрей, — не так, как мы бежали, кричали и дрались; совсем не так, как с озлобленными и испуганными лицами тащили друг у друга банник француз и артиллерист, — совсем не так ползут облака по этому высокому бесконечному небу. Как же я не видал прежде этого высокого неба? И как я счастлив, что узнал его наконец. Да! все пустое, все обман, кроме этого бесконечного неба. Ничего, ничего нет, кроме его. Но и того даже нет, ничего нет, кроме тишины, успокоения. И слава Богу!»

[«How quiet, calm, and solemn, not at all like when I was running, - thought Prince Andrei - not like when we were running, shouting, and fighting not at all like when the Frenchmen and the artillerists, with angry and frightened faces, were pulling at the swab—it's quite different the way the clouds creep across this lofty, infinite sky. How is it I haven't seen this lofty sky before? And how happy I am that I've finally come to know it. Yes! everything is empty, everything is a deception, except this infinite sky. There is nothing, nothing except that. But there is not even that, there is nothing except silence, tranquility. And thank God!...»]

- Lev N. Tolstoï, *War and Peace*, I, 4, 16, 62.

ἐγὼ δὲ περὶ μέντοι τούτων οὐκ ἔρχομαι ἐρέων ὡς οὕτω ἢ ἄλλως κως ταῦτα ἐγένετο, τὸν δὲ οἶδα αὐτὸς πρῶτον ὑπάρξαντα ἀδίκων ἔργων ἐς τοὺς Ἕλληνας, τοῦτον σημήνας προβήσομαι ἐς τὸ πρόσω τοῦ λόγου, ὁμοίως σμικρὰ καὶ μεγάλα ἄστε ἀνθρώπων ἐπεξιών.

[For my part, I shall not say that this or that story is true, but I shall identify the one who I myself know did the Greeks unjust deeds, and thus proceed with my history, and speak of small and great cities of men alike].

- Hdt. 1.5.3.

## 1. Ziele der Arbeit

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\* Die Anspielung auf Nietzsches Buch von 1882 soll die erfreulichen Aspekte hervorheben, die die Forschungstätigkeit jenseits aller Schwierigkeiten kennzeichnen. Wenn es stimmt, dass ein Gelehrter sein Leben per definitionem dem Wissen widmet, so ist zu hoffen, dass dieses Engagement nicht ohne Freude bleibt. Wenn nicht, stellt sich die Frage, ob und inwieweit sich eine solche Investition wirklich lohnt.

In einer wichtigen Doktorarbeit, die vor einigen Jahren an der University of Pennsylvania vorgelegt wurde, hat sich Wu Xin daran gemacht, *Central Asia in the context of the Achaemenid Persian Empire* in bewundernswerter Ausführlichkeit zu untersuchen.

Angesichts der Fortschritte, die die Wissenschaft seitdem (2005) erzielen konnte, ist es das Ziel der vorliegenden Studie, Wus Untersuchung zu vertiefen und ihre Ergebnisse zu integrieren, indem *The Achaemenid Empire in the context of Central Asia* betrachtet wird. Mit anderen Worten strebt diese Dissertation an, die Mechanismen ans Licht zu bringen, durch die die Anwendung des von Wouter Henkelman untersuchten *Imperial Paradigm* (2017) die politischen, sozialen und ökonomischen Strukturen der Satrapie modifizierte, die wiederum von der «practical situation on the ground» (Düring – Stek 2018) beeinflusst und umgestaltet wurden, die dem baktrischen Kontext eigen waren.

Wie Kapitel 1 und insbesondere Kapitel 4 zu zeigen versuchen, diese «practical situation» im baktrischen Kontext zu kennzeichnenden, müssen in einem breiteren Sinn als die - heute noch heftig diskutierten - politischen Grenzen der Region unter *direkter* persischer Kontrolle, aufgefasst werden.

Anders gesagt: Eines der Hauptziele dieser Arbeit ist zu zeigen, 1. in welchem Ausmaß und 2. mit welchen Strategien es den Vertretern des Achämenidenreiches (den lokalen zentralasiatischen Eliten eingeschlossen) im Laufe eines jahrhundertelangen Prozesses gelang, Baktrien in das größere Netzwerk administrativer und wirtschaftlicher Strukturen zu integrieren und diese Region zu einer der Säulen der Organisation des damals größten und komplexesten politischen Gebildes in der eurasischen Geschichte zu machen (Rollinger 2021a), wobei gleichzeitig argumentiert wird, dass die interne sozio-politische Entwicklung Baktriens Rückwirkungen auf die Struktur und Organisation eben dieses politischen Gebildes (nämlich des Reiches) hatte.<sup>1</sup>

Um dieses übergeordnete Ziel zu erreichen, wurde eine diachrone *und* thematische Expositionsstrategie gewählt, die sich einerseits in der internen Gliederung der einzelnen Kapitel (insgesamt 8) widerspiegelt, aus denen sich die vorliegende Arbeit zusammensetzt, andererseits in den Querverweisen zwischen den Kapiteln selbst, deren Absicht darin besteht, die Argumentation eines bestimmten Kapitels ausgehend von den im vorangegangenen Kapitel aufgestellten Prämissen schrittweise zu entwickeln.

Was von dieser kurzen Zusammenfassung übrig bleibt, soll dem Leser einen ebenso knappen wie - hoffentlich - erschöpfenden Überblick über die wesentlichen thematischen Knotenpunkte bieten, die im Verlauf der Arbeit angesprochen wurden, und gleichzeitig die zentralen Fragen des hier untersuchten Forschungsfeld aufzeigen, auf die versucht wurde, Antworten zu geben. Gleichzeitig

---

<sup>1</sup> Zu den oben genannten Faktoren kommt natürlich noch der religiöse Aspekt hinzu, insbesondere im Hinblick auf die Aufmerksamkeit, die die Achämeniden den lokalen Kulturen schenkten, ein Phänomen, das selbst im Herzen des Reiches (Pārsa) durch die Tafeln von Persepolis reichlich bezeugt wird. Vgl. Henkelman 2017b, 2021b (dem Kernland des Reiches gewidmet) und Tavernier 2017b (bezüglich Baktrien).

sei es nicht vernachlässigt, einige der Fragestellungen zu erwähnen, mit denen, so schien es bei der Abfassung dieser Arbeit, man sich in Zukunft noch gewinnbringend auseinandersetzen könnte.

## 2. Grundrisse

### 2.1. Warum genau Baktrien? Eine (kurze) Einführung

Das erste Kapitel (**Why Baktria? An Introduction to *Altneuland***) verfolgt einen dreifachen Zweck. Zunächst soll es, wie es die Aufgabe jeder Einleitung ist, eine Untersuchung des der Diskussion der gesamten Dissertation zu Grunde liegenden Themas, nämlich der achämenischen Satrapie Baktriens, im Kontext der internationalen, besonders aber *nicht* ausschließlich, akademischen, Debatte anbieten (§1).

In einem zweiten Schritt wird versucht, die Forschung zu dieser Weltregion in den Kontext einer *breiteren* Reflexion innerhalb der Historiographie der Imperien zu stellen (Bang *et al.* 2021): Das primäre Ziel dieses Abschnitts besteht darin, die Bedeutung - die sich im Laufe der Arbeit als grundlegend erweisen wird - einer vergleichenden Untersuchungsmethode hervorzuheben, die sich gleichzeitig auch bereit erwiese, Erkenntnisse und Belege aus Kontexten zu berücksichtigen, die sich von dem Quellenspektrum welche den Rahmen der Abhandlung bestimmen, auch beträchtlich unterscheiden mögen (§2).

Die Gründe für dieses Vorgehen werden ausführlich im dritten Abschnitt der Einleitung erläutert, der einer detaillierten Darstellung und kritischen Diskussion der methodischen Prinzipien gewidmet ist, die die Architektur der gesamten Dissertation strukturieren und die den Prozess der Analyse und Interpretation des dokumentarischen Materials geleitet haben (§3).

Der letzte Abschnitt stellt den Inhalt und die Fragestellungen dar, die jedem der Kapitel, aus denen sich die vorliegende Arbeit zusammensetzt, zugrunde liegen (§4).

### 2.2. Der Stoff des Reiches

Auch das zweite Kapitel, wie beim Titel selbst angedeutet (***Baktria in Wonderland: Sources and Methods on Achaemenid Central Asia***) hat einen stark methodischen Einschlag. In der Gesamtarchitektur der Dissertation fungiert es als Scharnier zwischen den unmittelbar vorangehenden und den folgenden Teilen: Die ersten drei Kapitel stellen somit eine Art *allgemeine* Einführung dar, in der zugleich die Leitgedanken der gesamten nachfolgenden Behandlung

offengelegt - und der Prüfung einer Fallstudie unterzogen - werden (die letzte an sich Gegenstand einer vertieften Diskussion in Kapitel drei).

In einem einführenden Abschnitt (§1) werden in allgemeiner (man könnte sagen: idealtypischer) Weise die beiden Grundprobleme der Forschung zum vorislamischen Baktrien dargestellt und kritisch hinterfragt: zum einen der - immer wieder beklagte, aber bis vor kurzem nie wirklich bewiesene - Mangel an Dokumentation, vor allem literarischer Art; zum anderen die Schwierigkeit (dies ist in der Tat ein äußerst dorniges Thema), die geeignetste Methodik zu finden, mit deren Hilfe man die vorhandenen Belege, seien sie literarischer (wie die griechische und römische Geschichtsschreibung) oder archäologischer Natur, fruchtbar verwerten kann.

Die nächsten drei Abschnitte widmen sich jeweils einem möglichst systematischen Überblick über jede der drei Arten von Zeugnissen, auf die sich die Argumentationsführung der gesamten Dissertation in den folgenden Kapiteln stützt.

Wenn, auf der einen Seite, die literarische Dokumentation und die Archäologie - innerhalb derer man der darstellerischen Zweckmäßigkeit halber auch die epigraphischen Zeugnisse einbeziehen kann, unabhängig von der Art des Materials, auf dem sie eingraviert sind - die offensichtlichen Arbeitsmittel des antiken Historikers sind, und daher in diesem Fall die Abhandlung eine explizitere didaktische (Überblicks)Funktion übernimmt, stellt die dritte vorgestellte Dokumentenart (nämlich der ethnographische Fund, der Gegenstand der Diskussion in §4 ist), so schien es zumindest während des Schreibprozesses dieser Arbeit, eine gewisse Neuartigkeit dar; und daher muss ihre Verwendung entsprechend begründet werden.

Wie die Einleitung zu verdeutlichen versucht, ist es eines der grundlegenden Ziele des gesamten Forschungsprojekts, auf dem dieser Arbeit basiert, einige der Strukturen zu identifizieren, die der Organisation der achämenidischen königlichen Macht in Baktrien zugrunde lagen. Das *Wirken* eben dieser Strukturen (deren Physiognomie auf der Grundlage literarischer und in einigen Fällen archäologischer Dokumente rekonstruiert werden kann) innerhalb des besonderen zentralasiatischen Kontextes hing jedoch eng mit der Dynamik zusammen, die den in diesem Kontext herrschenden sozialen Beziehungen unterstanden. Ohne deren adäquates Verständnis ist es äußerst schwierig, sowohl den Einfluss der achämenidischen Macht auf die baktrische Gesellschaft und den Raum als auch den Einfluss der letzteren auf die erstere in zufriedenstellender Tiefe zu erfassen.

Eine angemessene anthropologische Theorie und eine möglichst vielfältige (was aber auf keinem Fall oberflächlich oder sogar willkürlich ausgesucht bedeutet: §§4.1 und 4.2) Kasuistik der ethnographischen Dokumentation stellen, wie ich im letzten Abschnitt des Kapitels zu argumentieren versucht habe (siehe auch das Fazit im §5), genau die Art von Informationen zur Verfügung, die eine differenziertere Analyse der Dialektik der politischen und sozialen Kräfte ermöglicht, die im Baktrien



während der Achämenidenzeit am Werk waren und an denen die vorliegende Arbeit besonders interessiert ist

### 2.3. Geschichte benennen

Das dritte Kapitel (*Nomina nuda tenemus*) konzentriert sich auf eine möglichst erschöpfende Untersuchung des nach heutigem Forschungsstand ältesten uns vorliegenden Belegs für den Namen Baktrien (Bāxtrīš im Altpersischen, Βακτριανή/Βακτρία in den griechischen Quellen, Bactriana in den lateinischen), nämlich der dreisprachigen Inschrift von Bīsūtūn. Neben vielen anderen ist einer der wesentlichen Gründe, warum eine solche Untersuchung notwendig ist, dass wir in Bīsūtūn die ausführlichste Beschreibung des achämenidischen Reichsraumes finden, wie ihn sein (zweiter) Gründer, der Großkönig Dareios I. (Großkönig 522-486 v. Ch.), vor den Augen seiner Zeitgenossen darstellen und der Nachwelt überliefern wollte.

Die philologische Untersuchung bestimmter Schlüsselbegriffe, die im Text der Inschrift wiederkehren, vor allem des Substantivs *xšaçaṣpāvā* («Satrap») und anderer, die von der gleichen Wortwurzel abgeleitet sind (*xšay*, was «regieren», «Macht besitzen/ausüben» bedeutet), zielt darauf ab, das von Dareios entworfene Bild in dem er als alleiniger und unangefochtener Machthaber im Reichsraum erscheint und das durch die Inschrift selbst dargestellt und damit zumindest in seiner Intention verifiziert (sowohl im Sinne von «sanktioniert» als auch von *verum facere*, «in die Wirklichkeit gebracht») wird, einer kritischen Prüfung zu unterziehen.

Wenn man allerdings in Anlehnung an die semiotische und narratologische Lektüre, die Seth Richardson auf die Inschriften der mesopotamischen Könige anwendet, versucht, Bīsūtūn nicht als einen wie auch immer gearteten Bericht über eine Reihe von Ereignissen zu betrachten, die bereits stattgefunden haben, sondern als Ausdruck eines *Anspruches* (oder eines Bestrebens), wird man mit einer ganzen Reihe neuer Fragen konfrontiert. Was meint Dareios genau, wenn er von «Baktrien» spricht? Und was hat er in dem Moment im Sinn, in dem er anpreist, dass «jenes Land» sein («mein») wurde? Mehr dazu: Wer sind genau Dādêršiš und Vivāna, Dareios zwei *bandakā* - so behauptet er zumindest - in Baktrien und Arachosien? Und, obendrein, auf welche Grundlagen stützt sich die Macht, die diese beiden Männer (offenbar im Auftrag des Dareios selbst) an den beiden Hängen des Hindūkūš gehabt zu haben scheinen? Und schließlich: Welche Konsequenzen hat es, wenn man sich die Ausbreitung der achämenidischen Macht in Baktrien ähnlich wie im Fall von Sūmû-El von Larsa vorstellt, d.h. wenn man das von Persern beherrschte Zentralasien als «mutmaßliche» (*presumptive*: Richardson 2012, 2020) Satrapie betrachtet, zumindest so lange, bis Dareios seine Gegner im Bürgerkrieg 522-519 v. Chr. vernichten konnte?

Die Umsetzung eines solchen theoretischen Grundgerüsts wäre nicht möglich, wenn man, wie es einige der maßgeblichen Spezialisten zum Thema immer noch behaupten, den Ursprung des achämenidischen Baktriens als nichts (oder nur wenig) mehr als die Annexion eines riesigen zentralasiatischen Königreichs durch Kyros auffassen müsste, aus dessen Unterteilung in kleinere Verwaltungsbezirke schließlich die verschiedenen persischen Satrapien hervorgegangen wären (soweit es für die vorliegende Arbeit von Interesse ist, die von Baktrien, Sogdien, Chorasmien, Margiana und, höchstwahrscheinlich, die Paropamisadaï), und zwar mit den oben erwähnten Einheiten, die um die beiden wichtigsten von ihnen strukturiert waren: Baktrien im Norden und Arachosien im Süden des Hindūkūš, interessanterweise genau die beiden *dahayāva*, die Dareios seiner *bandakā* anvertraute.

Wie es aber im Lauf der Kapitel argumentiert wird (siehe z. B. §2), unterstützt eine aufmerksame Lektüre der literarischen Quellen, die den archäologischen Beweisen die gebührende Aufmerksamkeit schenkt, eine solche Hypothese nicht unterstützt, was man *de facto* wieder zu Bīsutūn zurückführt. Hieraus folgt die übergeordnete Frage, die die in den vorangegangenen Seiten entwickelte Diskussion zum vierten Kapitel der Arbeit überbrückt: Welche Art von Landschaft (sowohl physisch als auch gesellschaftlich) sollte man sich vorstellen, mit der Kyros konfrontiert war, als er in der zweiten Hälfte des 6. Jahrhunderts v. Chr. zum ersten, wenn auch nicht zum letzten Mal die zentralasiatische Bühne betrat?

Es ist übrigens bemerkenswert, dass bereits auf dieser Stufe der Untersuchung die Auffassung der *formalen* (politischen, administrativen, bürokratischen) *Aspekten* an der Wurzel der achämenidischen Macht und ihrer Fähigkeit, sich durch Expansion in den eroberten Gebieten zu erhalten, nicht verblasst, sondern vielmehr durch eine Reflexion über die *sozialen Bindungen*, die diese Strukturen am Leben hielten, weiter bereichert wird; das ist ein Faktor, den einige Strömungen der neueren Forschung mit besonders fruchtbaren Ergebnissen untersucht haben. In der Tat gehen manche ihrer Vertreter sogar so weit, zu argumentieren, dass gerade das Haus des Satrapen (was bedeutet: die durch die Figur des letzteren und die von ihm abhängigen Männer vermittelten sozialen «Figurationen»), nach Norbert Elias nämlich die Wirkungsmechanismen, die das Fortbestehen des soziales Zusammensein von Individuen in spezifischen Umgebungen versichern), und *nicht* die Satrapie (in einem abstrakt geographischen Sinne) die wesentliche Maßeinheit des Achämenidenreichs ausgemacht hätte (King 2021).

#### 2.4. Als die Perser kamen

Kapitel 4 (*The Road to Oxiana: Reconstructing a Presumptive Satrapy*), das sich mit dem etwa 20-jährigen Zeitraum zwischen der Eroberung Baktriens durch Kyros und der Besteigung des persischen Throns durch Dareios befasst, ist - zumindest aus methodischer Sicht - wohl das dornigste Kapitel des gemeinsamen, der vorliegenden Arbeit zugrundeliegenden Forschungsprojekts. Mit der alleinigen Ausnahme der - ziemlich umfassenden - Erzählung in Buch 1 der *Historien* des Herodots ist nämlich kein einziges schriftliches Zeugnis (sei es Handschriftlich tradiert oder ausgegraben) überliefert, das uns helfen könnte, etwas Licht in diese entscheidende chronologische Spanne zu bringen. Wir sind daher gezwungen, uns ganz auf die Archäologie zu verlassen.

Die Ergebnisse einiger neuerer Ausgrabungen, die sowohl im Gebiet des antiken Baktrien als auch in einem anderen Gebiet (z. B. das *dahayāuš* von Armenien, das sich durch eine beträchtlich hohe Rate dessen auszeichnet, was James Scott (2009) als «Staatsfluchtpotential» bezeichnen würde) durchgeführt wurden, scheinen jedoch sehr interessante Informationen über die sozial-räumliche Organisation eines Territoriums wie dem (frühen) achämenidischen Zentralasien zu liefern.

Verbunden mit einer allgemeinen Theorie darüber, was das Territorium einem Eroberungs- und Verwaltungsprojekt wie dem persischen erlaubte - und mehr noch, was es *nicht* erlaubte -, können archäologische Belege wichtige Informationen liefern, um die Hypothese zu stützen, die dieser Studie zugrunde liegt - von der Entstehung und Entwicklung (*The Rise & Organization* in den Worten W. Vogelsangs) der achämenidischen Macht in Zentralasien als einem komplexen Phänomen, die aus einem Prozess der *Ausverhandlung* und Ko-Konstruktion einer gemeinsamen Basis resultierte; diese habe es den verschiedenen Akteuren ermöglichte, ihre jeweiligen Stärken und die ihres Gegners zu erkunden, während sie langsam, aber stetig lernten, sich gegenseitig besser kennenzulernen (um sich gegenseitig besser ausnützen zu können).

Es sollte sich fast von selbst verstehen, dass, mit der - zumindest teilweisen - Ausnahme dessen, was man hier nur der Einfachheit halber als «das Reich» bezeichnet, die Eigenschaften dieser Akteure nicht aus den archäologischen Zeugnissen abgeleitet werden können, wie es in der Vergangenheit immer wieder (und untauglich) versucht wurde. Glücklicherweise bieten einerseits die beachtlichen Fortschritte, die in den letzten Jahren bei der Erforschung eines anderen zentral- und innerasiatischen Randgebietes *Zomias* (Scott 2009, 2017) als der mongolischen Steppe (sowohl im Ordos als auch in Transbaikalia: Honeychurch 2015) gemacht wurden und, andererseits, eine sorgfältige Analyse der Informationen, die die Ethnographie sowohl des Kaukasus als auch Zentralasiens vor Stalins erstem Fünfjahresplan (пятилетка: Baberowski 2003, Kindler 2014, Teichmann 2016) geliefert hat, den Forschern ein reiches Vergleichsrepertoire, sowohl was die Evidenz betrifft als auch - was vielleicht am meisten zählt - was die konzeptionellen Kategorien angeht, auf deren Grundlage dieselbe Evidenz fruchtbar untersucht werden kann.

Wie im Lauf der Kapitel wiederholt zu zeigen versucht wird, zielt die kombinierte Verwendung dieser Quellen darauf ab, ein nuancierteres - aber hoffentlich, wenn auch etwas paradoxerweise, überzeugenderes - Bild der Beziehungen (und Konflikte) zu erarbeiten, die der Entstehung des achämenidischen imperialen Raums in Zentralasien zugrunde lagen. Die Komplexität dieser Interaktionen und die Sensibilität der Gleichgewichte, auf denen sie beruhten, sind weit davon entfernt, die Vorstellung eines «schwachen» (oder «schwer fassbaren») Reiches zu stützen, sondern sollten sie im Gegenteil dazu veranlassen, über die *Anpassungsfähigkeit* der beteiligten Akteure nachzudenken, von denen *jeder* als erstes und vielleicht einziges Ziel hatte, für sich selbst und seine soziale Gruppe den maximalen Gewinn aus den soziopolitischen Beziehungen zu ziehen, in die *alle* der oben erwähnten Akteuren *unausweichlich* eingebunden waren.

Nicht viel anders - und vielleicht nicht weniger überraschend - als die Franzosen und Algonquianer in den *Pays-d'en-Haut*, scheinen auch in Baktrien die Akteure auf der Bühne recht schnell erkannt zu haben, dass die volle Verwirklichung ihrer strategischen Ziele nicht trotz, sondern im Gegenteil *aufgrund* der Existenz ihrer jeweiligen Gegenspieler möglich war, auf die sie in manchen Fällen wahrscheinlich gerne verzichtet hätten (Meier 2020, King 2021, Rollinger 2021a). Aus einer solchen Perspektive betrachtet, erhalten selbst die arrogantesten Behauptungen von Herrschaft und Aneignung von Territorium, Menschen und Ressourcen durch die Achämeniden-Herrscher eine andere Wendung. Um zu bekommen, was es möchte - und nicht selten auch *braucht* -, ist das «Zentrum» (das Reich) also gezwungen, das zu geben, was die «Grenzzone» erbittet und - nicht selten - auch *fordert*.

Obwohl im Verlauf der gesamten Dissertation die Verwendung von Begriffen wie «Zentrum» und «Peripherie» so sorgfältig und konsequent wie möglich vermieden wurde, ist dennoch anzumerken, dass im Gegensatz zu den theoretischen Rahmen, die zuerst von Immanuel Wallerstein ausgearbeitet und später von seinen Anhängern entwickelt wurden (und bis zu einem gewissen Grad in der Altertumswissenschaften immer noch, wenn auch mehr oder weniger verschleiert, verwendet werden), in der vorliegenden Arbeit diese und ähnliche Bezeichnungen, wenn überhaupt, nur mit einer rein *denotativen*, räumlichen Funktion zu finden sind.<sup>2</sup> Wie sowohl eine mögliche Lesart der sogenannten *dahayāva*-Listen als auch eine bekannte Passage bei Herodot (6.9) nahelegen könnte, war in der Tat Baktrien (oder auch Griechenland) von Persepolis aus gesehen weiter entfernt und damit in gewissem Sinne «peripherer» als etwa Susa oder Babylon.

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<sup>2</sup> Über Wallersteins Werk vgl. seine 2004 veröffentlichte *Einleitung*. Im Rahmen der vorliegenden Arbeit weist der Begriff «denotativ» (im Gegensatz zu «konnotativ») darauf hin, dass Termini wie «Zentrum» und «Peripherie», wenn sie überhaupt verwendet werden, in einem rein *räumlichen* Sinne zu verstehen sind und keine politischen oder historischen Verwicklungen mit sich bringen. Mit anderen Worten: Aus der Sicht der Archive von Persepolis ist Baktrien zweifellos peripherer als Susa, aber aus der Perspektive der in den *ADAB* erhaltenen Korrespondenz ist umgekehrt Baktra das politische und administrative, wenn nicht sogar soziale, Zentrum des gesamten Systems.

Im Gegenteil, in Anlehnung an die Arbeiten zahlreicher Wissenschaftler wie u.a. Jörg Baberowski, Bleda Düring und Tesse Stek, James Scott, Miguel Versluys und der Forschungsgruppe um Sitta von Reden ist in diesem und in den nächsten Kapiteln der geographischen Liminalität eine deutlich stärkere Bedeutung beigemessen, die in mehr als einem Fall in der Lage ist, die Entscheidungen des «Zentrums» (des Imperiums) maßgeblich zu beeinflussen. Es sollte nicht übersehen werden, dass es die dialektische, sogar zirkuläre Natur eines solchen Prozesses ist, die die beträchtlichste Innovation des theoretischen Standpunktes darstellt, den die vorliegende Arbeit auf den (achämenidischen) baktrischen Fall anzuwenden versucht.<sup>3</sup> Anstatt das Lackmus zu sein, an dem die - angeblichen - Schwächen des persischen imperialen Systems gemessen werden, dienen stattdessen die zentralasiatische(n) Grenzzone(n) hier als Testfeld, auf dem der Grad der *Ausgereiftheit* und vor allem der *Flexibilität* und *Widerstandsfähigkeit* desselben Systems beurteilt werden kann (siehe besonders §§3 und 4).

## 2.5. «Ich [bin] Dareios, der große König, König der Könige, König der Länder mit allen Stämmen»

Es ist eine bekannte Tatsache, dass das späte 6. und das beginnende 5. Jahrhundert des Achämenidenreiches mit dem unschätzbaren Vorteil gesegnet sind, zumindest teilweise durch die immense Menge an Beweisen abgedeckt zu sein, die das Archiv von Persepolis liefert (Henkelman 2021a mit früherer Literatur). Dieses unschätzbare Material bildet die Grundlage für die im fünften Kapitel der vorliegenden Arbeit entwickelte Abhandlung (*Thus Saith the Lord: Darius, Son of Vištāspa*). Im Lichte der Informationen, die sich aus dieser Quelle - wie auch aus den anderen, in jüngerer Zeit publizierten Tafeln - gewinnen lassen, soll in diesem Abschnitt das altbekannte Thema der Einbindung Baktriens in das durch die Gründung des persischen Reiches etablierte «Weltwirtschaftssystem» (heute würde man vielleicht sogar von «globales System» sprechen) im Zuge dieses neu erweiterten Korpus noch einmal diskutiert werden. Folglich wird damit versucht, die Debatte einen (wenn auch kleinen) Schritt über die Schlussfolgerungen von Briant hinaus voranzutreiben, die durch neuere Studien (e. g. Folmer 2017, Henkelman 2017a und 2018a, King 2021), die sich dem Arbeitsprozess der achämenidischen Verwaltung innerhalb der kaiserlichen Domänen widmen, weiter verfeinert wurden.

Dass Menschen, Tiere, Informationen, Rohwaren, Luxusgüter und vieles mehr in großen Mengen, in beachtlichem Tempo und mit großer Häufigkeit von einem Ende des Reiches zum anderen wanderten (Colburn 2013, 2017, King im Druck), ist dank dieser bedeutenden Werke in der Tat

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<sup>3</sup> Versluys 2014 für die Aufwendung eines solchen theoretischen Standpunkt im Fall der Archäologie des römischen Reiches.

wiederholt gezeigt worden und muss eigentlich als selbstverständlich vorausgesetzt werden. Wenn wir die Hypothese einer *ausschließlich* räuberischen Gesinnung beiseitelassen, die aus vielen Gründen (einige davon sind besonders im Kapitel 6 und 7 näher erörtert) ausgeschlossen werden muss, so ist es noch viel weniger selbstverständlich, auf welche Weise solche Bewegungen am gewinnbringendsten verstanden werden müssen. Mit dem Ziel, etwas (mehr) Licht auf diese Frage zu werfen, stützen sich die in diesem und den nächsten Kapiteln vorgebrachten Hypothesen auf die folgenden Hauptelemente.

Erstens, wenn man den Stand des Beweismaterials betrachtet, ermöglicht es die jüngste Veröffentlichung eines ganzen Satzes neuer Tafelchen, die Zahlen, Qualifikationen, Aufgaben und Zahlungen der Baktrier (und Sogdier, und vielen anderen Inwohnern der östlichen Satrapien) auf dem Weg durch die königlich-achämenidischen Infrastrukturen aus einer wesentlich anderen (und tieferen) Perspektive zu studieren, als es bisher möglich war. Über den dokumentarischen Nachweis der Behauptung hinaus, dass Baktrien eine herausragende Rolle in der Wirtschaft des Reiches spielte - was übrigens an sich schon eine bemerkenswerte Tatsache ist -, erlaubt es sogar das neu verfügbare Material, besser zu verstehen, *warum* eine solche Behauptung zutrifft, und welche Konsequenzen sowohl für das Reich selbst als auch für das Territorium und die Gesellschaft der Satrapie sich daraus ergeben.

Zweitens, und das hängt noch enger mit den kritischen und methodologischen Aspekten zusammen, bringt die Würdigung der theoretischen Einsicht, die der sogenannte *material turn* in der Untersuchung dessen mit sich bringt, was Miguel John Versluys (2014) *Objects in Motion* genannt hat, und seine Einführung im Bereich der Achämenidenstudien durch Lori Khatchadourian (2016, 2020) den Historiker in die ziemlich privilegierte Lage, Begriffen wie «Kontakte», «Netzwerke», «Austausch» und «Interaktion» deren ausufernde Vermehrung innerhalb einer bestimmten Studie oder sogar einer wissenschaftlichen Disziplin manchmal den Verdacht aufkommen lässt, umgekehrt proportional zur analytischen Schärfe desselben Konzepts bzw. derselben Konzepte zu sein, einen beträchtlichen heuristischen Wert zu verleihen (§4).

Trotz der Tatsache, dass das völlige Fehlen eines verlässlichen archäologischen Kontextes in äußerst vielen Fällen eine auch nur hypothetische Interpretation der überwältigenden Mehrheit von Objekten (angeblicher) zentralasiatischer Provenienz zu einem bemerkenswert schwierigen (und riskanten) Unterfangen macht, zwingen die Entwicklungen der sozialanthropologischen Forschung in Bezug auf das *soziale Leben der Dinge* den Historiker des achämenidischen Zentralasiens dazu, Fragen zu stellen wie u. a.: Welche sind die Gründe für die Beobachtung, dass ein mit ziemlicher Sicherheit im Fargāne-Tal gefertigter Teppich sich in einem in den Sajany-Bergen errichteten Grab, etwa 5000 km von seiner ursprünglichen Produktionsumgebung entfernt, wiederfand und begraben wurde? Und was

soll man zu den erstaunlichen (in ihrer Schönheit, ihrem Wert und ihrem erlesenen Geschmack) goldenen und silbernen Objekten sagen, die bei den sowjetischen Ausgrabungen im Heiligtum von Taxt -i Sāngīn im heutigen Taġikistan ans Tageslicht kamen und von Archäologen (zugegebenermaßen meist aus stilistischen Gründen) in die achämenidische Zeit datiert wurden?

Wie sollen wir darüber hinaus die allem Anschein nach achämenidischen Gegenstände aus dem bekannten (und immer noch heiß diskutierten) Oxos-Schatz verstehen? Angesichts ihres - im Vergleich zu den beträchtlich ausgeklügelten Akkulturationstheorien - wesentlich größeren analytischen und hermeneutischen Potenzials, könnten theoretische Konzepte wie das der *Community of Praxis* (was ein bestimmtes Publikum *mit* und *aus* einem bestimmten Objekt macht und welche Funktionen und Bedeutungen es nicht aufgrund dessen, was es ist, sondern aufgrund des Kontexts, in den es eingebettet ist, angenommen haben könnte), die Verhandlung der identitären Zugehörigkeit und der intentionalen Geschichte in der Lage sein, aus solchem Material eine bisher unerwartete Vielstimmigkeit herauszuarbeiten. Damit würden (vor allem) *anderen* sozialen und politischen Akteuren als dem Großkönig und seinen Höflingen sowohl Stimme als auch historische Handlungsfähigkeit zurückgegeben. Mehr dazu, und gleichzeitig, den Einfluss, den sie 1. bei der Produktion, 2. bei der Zirkulation solcher Objekte und 3. bei den damit verbundenen Ideen und Ideologien hatten, keineswegs heruntergespielt würde. Das gilt bezeichnenderweise sowohl, wenn man die Aufmerksamkeit auf die breitere, imperiale, Ebene als auch – wenn nicht besonders – die lokalen, baktrische, richtet (§5).

## 2.6. *Qualis pater, talis filius*

Beginnend mit der Herrschaft von Dareios' Sohn Xšāyāršā - in Griechenland als Xerxes bekannt – (485-465 v. Chr.) fast bis zum Auftreten Alexanders im Jahr 330 wird die dokumentarische Landschaft über Zentralasien wieder karg: In den wenigen Fällen, in denen unsere erzählenden Quellen Baktrien tatsächlich erwähnen, hat der Ton, der solche Berichte prägt (beginnend mit Herodot und seinem sogenannten Μασίστης-Roman (Hdt. 9.108-113), an sich ein wahres Meisterwerk des Genres) hat viel dazu beigetragen, im kollektiven Gedächtnis (sowohl innerhalb als auch außerhalb der Wissenschaft) das Bild dieser Satrapie als den anomischen und unbezwingbaren Raum *par excellence* zu festigen.

Mit dem Ziel, eine solche Einschätzung der dritten Phase - nach Kyros und Dareios - der (achämenidischen) baktrischen Reichsgeschichte zumindest herauszufordern, wenn nicht gleich zu widerlegen, wurde der etwas provokante Titel von Kapitel 6 gewählt: *Uno fumavit Bactria tota rogo? Achaemenid Bactria From Xerxes to Ahvamazdā.*

Die Ausgangsvermutung ist gegeben durch die Erkenntnis, dass eben jene Quellen (über deren Parteilichkeit inzwischen viel gesagt und geschrieben wurde), die mehrfach die Aufstände erwähnen, die - nach modernen Auslegern - vom Tod des Dareios I. bis zum Untergang des Reiches selbst (oder, nach anderen, bis zu seinem Fortbestand *sub specie Alexandri*) den achämenidischen Osten in fast zyklischer Wiederkehr heimgesucht hätten, es dabei nicht versäumen, darauf hinzuweisen, dass die Regierung Baktriens fast ständig einem (engen) Verwandten des persischen Monarchen anvertraut wurde, der zudem den Titel «Zweiter nach dem König» erhalten zu haben scheint. Wie ist es dann möglich, wenn es überhaupt möglich ist, diesem scheinbaren Widerspruch gerecht zu werden? Und was wäre, wenn die gleiche, fast katalogartige Erwähnung dieser Umwälzungen in unseren klassischen Quellen, anstatt ein Indiz für ihre Häufigkeit zu sein, im Gegenteil das genaue Gegenteil zeigen würde, nämlich ihren eher *außergewöhnlichen* Charakter? (§1)

Denn während eine üblicherweise als äußerst zuverlässig geltende schriftliche Quelle wie das chinesische *Shiji* - das zudem zumindest bei einem Teil der von ihm aufgezeichneten Ereignisse Zeitgenosse ist, was z. B. im Fall Baktriens fast *nie* der Fall ist - mitunter geradezu besessen von der Anwesenheit massiver, bedrohlich an die Grenze des Hán-Reiches drängender Xiōngnú-Scharen erscheint, zum Erstaunen der Gelehrten, die sich mit diesem Material beschäftigen, wird in den Archiven der an der chinesischen Nordgrenze gelegenen Garnisonen, die in immer größerer Zahl über ein Gebiet von der östlichen Mandschurei bis zur westlichen Mongolei ans Tageslicht kamen, das Wort Xiōngnú *kein einziges Mal* erwähnt. Es versteht sich fast von selbst, dass die logischste Schlussfolgerung, die man daraus ziehen kann, nicht ist, dass es *keine* Xiōngnú gab, denn wir haben reichlich Belege (unter anderem dasselbe *Shiji*), die genau das Gegenteil nahelegen. Es bleibt also kaum etwas anders übrig als anzunehmen, dass sie einen so häufigen Präsenz besaßen, dass man es nicht einmal für nötig hielt, sie mit ihrem Namen zu benennen (und in der Tat hören wir meistens von «dem Feind»).

Daher scheint es auch nicht so unangemessen zu sein, zu argumentieren, dass im Laufe von mehr als einem Jahrhundert gerade die eher *unerwartete* Natur der in Baktrien stattfindenden Umwälzungen das Überleben ihrer Erzählung in unseren historischen Quellen sicherte (abgesehen von ihrer bekannten Vorliebe für die Darstellung der unaufhaltsamen Abwärtsspirale, in die das Reich nach Dareios Tod angeblich verwickelt war). Aber das ist noch nicht alles: Neben den Fragen der großköniglichen Nachfolge (Duindam 2016 Ss. 87-154 für einen weltgeschichtlich ausgerichteten Überblick) ist zu fragen, zu wessen Vorteil ein politischer Umbruch (mit dem damit verbundenen fast sicheren militärischen Eingreifen) auch nur annähernd vergleichbar mit den von Dareios nach Kambyses' Tod niedergeschlagenen Aufständen - wie der erste zumindest sie nannte, gewesen wäre.



Auch abgesehen von der literarischen Gattung - man denke etwa an die assyrischen Inschriften - geben die Zehntausende von Opfern in den Reihen der zentralasiatischen «Aufständischen», auf die in einigen Versionen der Bīsūtūn-Inschrift verwiesen wird (etwa in der babylonischen aber, interessanterweise, *nicht* in der altpersischen), eine Vorstellung von dem zerstörerischen Ausmaß, zu dem eine großangelegte Eroberung, wie die die von Dareios' Truppen unternommen wurde, fähig war; und man muss außerdem berücksichtigen, dass sich das Reich 522 v. Chr. von Babylon bis zum Indus in Aufruhr befand, eine Tatsache, die in nicht geringem Maße dazu beigetragen haben muss, die Reihen der «Loyalisten» zu lichten (§2).

Alles in allem ist es daher schwer vorstellbar, dass insbesondere auf zentralasiatischer Seite (einschließlich der lokalen Eliten) jemand wirklich ein Interesse daran hatte, den *status quo* zu ändern. Bemerkenswerterweise lässt sich das Gleiche aber auch im Falle des Reiches selbst feststellen. Wie insbesondere Kapitel 5 zu zeigen versucht, bedeutete Zentralasien aus der Sicht der Buchhaltung von Persepolis natürliche Ressourcen, hochspezialisierte Arbeitskräfte, potentielle königliche Bräute von berühmter Schönheit und nicht minder legendären Begabungen (wie das fast schon sprichwörtliche Beispiel von Alexanders Frau Rōxanē gezeigt hat) und - *last but not least* - die berühmteste und gefürchtetste Kavallerie von ganz Eurasien, zumindest bis zum Aufstieg des Xiōngnú-Reiches und ihres *Shányú Mòdún* (冒頓單于, 234-173 v. Chr.) in Innerasien und. Wenn man bedenkt, was für beide Seiten auf dem Spiel stand, scheint es ziemlich wahrscheinlich, dass die Meuterer schnell liquidiert wurden, nach einem Muster, das sich bezeichnenderweise bis zu dem endgültigen Niedergang des Reiches selbst wiederholen sollte (§3).

Dass es in der Tat ganz erhebliche Gründe gibt, an der Vorstellung zu zweifeln, Baktrien sei während des gesamten 5. und eines guten Teils des 4. Jahrhunderts in einen dauerhaften Guerillakrieg verwickelt gewesen, zeigt zum einen das Studium einer Gruppe von Belegen, die bisher ziemlich konsequent übersehen wurde, nämlich die imperiale zentralasiatische Thema gewidmete Glyptik (Tuplin 2020, siehe in diesem Kapitel §3.1.2); zum anderen die jüngsten Ergebnisse archäologischer Untersuchungen, vor allem aus dem Gebiet von Surxondaryo (Surxondaryo viloyati oder Сурхандарьинская область), im Süden Usbekistans (§4).

Insbesondere die Ausgrabungen am Fundort Kyzyltēpe (in der Oase Mirshade im oberen Surxondaryo) und die Ergebnisse der - in der Forschung zum achämenidischen Zentralasien eher bahnbrechenden - paläoökologischen Analyse von Proben der geborgenen Funde haben es ermöglicht, ein Bild zu zeichnen, das dem sogenannten Goldenen Zeitalter des Reiches, wie es sich im Archiv von Persepolis widerspiegelt, deutlich ähnlicher ist als der Untergangsgeschichte, wie sie sich aus der (meisterhaften) Herodot-Erzählung ergibt, deren Einfluss auf das westliche Denken über das achämenidische Gemeinwesen so nachhaltig war - und im Falle Baktriens bis zu einem gewissen

Grad noch ist. Ein solches Ergebnis ist umso bemerkenswerter, wenn man bedenkt, dass der Μασίστης-Roman von einem Raum erzählt, über den der Halikarnassier, der in der Tat in der Lage war, trotz großer geographischer Entfernung und vielfacher sprachlicher Barrieren auffallend zuverlässige Informationen über andere Regionen des Reiches zu sammeln (Dan 2013, Rapin 2018b), nach dem zu urteilen, was er im Laufe des ganzen Buches über Zentralasien berichtet, wenig, wenn nicht gar nichts gewusst zu haben scheint (siehe besonders §4.3 und das Fazit).

## 2.7. Kamele (und Satrapen) über alles

Die außerordentliche Bedeutung der Entdeckung, des Erwerbs und der Veröffentlichung des *Aramaic Documents from Ancient Bactria* verlangt, dass diesem unschätzbaren Korpus der ihm gebührende Platz eingeräumt wird. Aus diesem Grund zielt das siebte Kapitel der vorliegenden Arbeit (*My Kingdom for a Camel. On Satraps and Powerbrokers in 4<sup>th</sup> Century Achaemenid Bactria*) darauf ab, die Untersuchung der Fülle an Informationen voranzutreiben, die dieses Zeugnis über die Mechanismen der Gouvernamentalität in der Satrapie geben könnte. Es versucht darüber hinaus, eine solche Analyse unter Berücksichtigung eines möglichst breiten Spektrums sozialer Akteure durchzuführen, von Aḥvamazdā, dem angeblichen lokalen Satrapen, der sicherlich ein sehr mächtiger Beamter war, die soziale Leiter hinabsteigend bis hin zu den Soldaten, die mit der undankbaren Aufgabe betraut wurden, Heuschrecken von den Feldern einer wichtigen lokalen Autorität auszurotten (§1).

Erlauben uns solche Dokumente einerseits, die effiziente Solidität jener systemischen Dynamik der Verwaltung, Organisation, Kontrolle, Gewinnung und logistischen Verwaltung menschlicher und natürlicher Ressourcen (Henkelmans *Imperial Paradigm*), die ihre Triumphe feiert, um nur einige Beispiele zu nennen, im monumentalen Theater der *dahayāva*-Personifikationen entlang der Stufen der Apadāna in Persepolis oder im schwindelerregenden Katalog der sogenannten Susa-Gründungsurkunde (DSf), in einer bisher unbekanntem Weise zu zeigen, legen die *ADAB* andererseits – gleichzeitig, und nicht minder deutlich – die Brüchigkeit des *Middle Grounds* nahe, von dessen Stabilität der in den Königsinschriften zur Schau gestellte Ruhm des Reiches im Osten so wesentlich abhing (§1.2).

Kaum getarnt unter dem Schleier der Höflichkeitsformeln, die die meisten der erhaltenen Dokumente des Korpus zieren, bieten die *ADAB* Dokumente bei sorgfältiger Auswertung einen unvermuteten Zugang zu einem unentwirrbaren Bündel von Widersprüchen, die aus konkurrierenden Interessen, latenten Konflikten und *ad hoc* (d.h. strukturell prekär) getroffenen Vereinbarungen. Im Rahmen eines solchen Umfelds, versuchte jeder der beteiligten Akteure, sich nur dann an die andere

Partei zu binden, wenn und soweit dies den höchsten - persönlichen und/oder für die jeweilige(n) Gruppe(n) - Ertrag sicherte, sei es in Form von wirtschaftlichem, symbolischem oder sozialem Gewinn (King 2021, vgl. aber hier schon §3).

Um diese - meines Wissens nach - bisher übersehene Möglichkeit der Lektüre dieses Dossiers weiter zu untermauern, soll das *ADAB*-Korpus mit einer anderen Gruppe von Dokumenten (den sogenannten *Bactrian Documents from Northern Afghanistan*: siehe zuletzt Sims-Williams 2020 für einen Überblick) verglichen werden, die aus Gründen, die man im entsprechenden Teil des Kapitels erläutern werden (§4.1), viele Einblicke in die gesellschaftspolitische Welt des 4. Jahrhunderts. Chr. in Zentralasien erlauben (§4.2).

Trotz der geringen, von ihnen beleuchteten Zeitspanne (etwa 30 Jahre in der 2. Hälfte des letzten Jahrhunderts der persischen Herrschaft) bieten die ersten - und bisher einzigen - ausgegrabenen Texte, die aus dem achämenidischen Baktrien geborgen wurden, dennoch ein solides Textfundament, auf dem eine langfristige Interpretation dieses Raumes aufbauen kann. Folglich wird in der vorliegenden Arbeit die (natürliche wie die gesellschaftliche) Landschaft Baktriens als Nährboden betrachtet, von dem aus bemerkenswerten Experimenten unternommen wurden, welche ständig zwischen zwei Instanzen ringen, die gleichzeitig widersprüchlich und doch durch eine subtile, aber feste Dialektik miteinander verbunden waren.

Auf der einen Seite findet nämlich man in der Tat das Bedürfnis des Reiches, das Chaos wieder in die Ordnung zu bringen (wie es ihm laut Dareios Ahuramazdā selbst befohlen hat), die Undurchsichtigkeiten zu zerstreuen und alles, von der Landschaft bis zu den sozialen Beziehungen, so transparent wie möglich zu machen: das ist es, was Pierre Briant imperiale Kontrolle genannt hat (siehe letztlich Briant 2020).

Zum anderen muss man aber auch andere, multiple Bedürfnisse sehr ernst nehmen, nämlich die aller Bewohner *Zomias*.<sup>4</sup> Wie Scott eloquent gezeigt hat (2009), haben alle diese sozialen Gruppen im langen Lauf der imperialen Weltgeschichte immer wieder ihr Lebenselixier aus solchen - scheinbaren - Unordnungen und Undurchsichtigkeiten geschöpft: anders gesagt, und wie die Geschichte Zentralasiens in Zeit Sowjetischer Herrschaft ganz deutlich zeigt (Fragner – Kappeler 2006, Baberowski 2012, Teichmann 2016) kann imperiale Kontrolle *nicht* ohne lokale Macht verstanden – um kaum von ausgeübt zu sprechen - werden.

Einer der Gründe für das, was auf den ersten Blick ziemlich paradox erscheinen mag, liegt laut Scott (1998) genau darin, dass nur das, was in den Augen der «archivalischen Rationalität» des modernen Staates (oder des antiken Imperiums) als Unordnung und Undurchsichtigkeit erscheint, im Gegenteil

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<sup>4</sup> Für eine Begriffsbestimmung dieses Konzepts, das sich auf hügelige und gebirgige Gebiete bezieht, die von einer externen Macht, z. B. einem Imperium, nur schwer unterworfen werden können, siehe die Darlegung in Scott 2009 Ss. 1-39 und Payne and King 2020.

den Trägern dieser zweiten Instanz (den «Einheimischen», seien sie nun Mitglieder der sogenannten Elite oder nicht) erlaubt, ihre Sozialität, ihre(n) Raum(e) und ihre Zeit nach Regeln zu organisieren und bestimmen, die von nichts anderem herrühren als von den Bedürfnissen eben jener Gemeinschaft, die diese Regeln zum Ausdruck bringt, und/oder von der Umwelt, die diese Regeln erlauben und tolerieren: *sub umbra floreo*.

Wie zuletzt von Richard Payne und Rhyne King (2020) argumentiert wurde, ist der Hindūkūš nur einer, wenn auch ein sehr wichtiger, unter jenen Orten, an denen das Imperium zur gleichen Zeit sein Maximum an Integrationskraft, taktischer Flexibilität und Anpassung erreicht, wobei es unausweichlich mit seinen Grenzen konfrontiert wird (Canepa 2020).

## 2.8. Der Untergang

Das letzte Kapitel (**Голые Годы. Alexander in Bactria**) zielt darauf ab, einige der wichtigsten Merkmale des achämenidischen Zentralasiens, wie sie in dem Lauf der vorliegenden Arbeit herausgearbeitet wurden, nämlich Anpassungsfähigkeit und Widerstandsfähigkeit, aus dem sehr eigentümlichen Blickwinkel einer Übergangszeit zu untersuchen.

Wenige Persönlichkeiten der Geschichte waren faszinierender - und spaltender - als Alexander III. von Makedonien (der Große: vgl. z. B. Schliephake 2019 mit Literatur). Viele Jahrhunderte lang im Gefolge von u.a. Arrian und Plutarch als Theophore einer neuen Ära der Menschheitsgeschichte gefeiert, wurden in den letzten Jahren zunehmend Aspekte des Lebens des Makedonen wie Gewalt, Zerstörung und Ruin Zerstreung (beispielweise bei Bosworth 1998).<sup>5</sup> Dies deutet auf eine Neupositionierung der historischen Bewertung seiner Eroberung des persischen Reiches hin, die, obwohl zweifellos notwendig, nach Meinung vieler Gelehrter (am maßgebendsten Briant: siehe zusammenfassend die Beiträge in seinen 2017 und 2018 auf Englisch übersetzten *Kleinen Schriften*) zu sehr auf das Individuum und zu wenig auf den breiteren sozio-anthropologischen, politischen und kulturellen Kontext (sowohl im Mittelmeerraum als auch in Vorder- und, wie hier argumentiert ist, Zentralasien) fokussiert hat, innerhalb dessen Alexander ein enorm bedeutender, aber nicht einziger und wahrscheinlich (zumindest zu Beginn seiner Expedition) auch nicht der wichtigste - Akteur war.

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<sup>5</sup> Trotz des gewaltigen Reichtums dieser Auslegungstradition (die sich eindeutig bei Droysen und Tarn findet, um nur einige berühmte Beispiele zu nennen), sollte man nicht vergessen, dass es bereits in der Antike abweichende Stimmen gab, aus deren Erzählungen ein ganz anderes Alexanderbild hervorging. Liotsakis 2019 bietet eine detaillierte Studie über Arrians Verarbeitung der Gestalt Alexanders, der sich eines nicht unbedeutenden Teils der Tradition bewusst gewesen sein muss, die ihm vorausging und gegen die er Stellung ergriff, und zwar in einer Weise, die dem modernen Ausleger aufgrund des Verlusts der meisten Quellen, die einem Mann von Arrians sozialer Stellung und Kultur (nicht) zugänglich waren, manchmal schwer nachzuvollziehen bleibt.

Durch die Untersuchung von Alexanders zentralasiatischem Feldzug (330-327 v. Chr.) auf der Grundlage einer Reihe von wichtigen neueren vertiefenden Übersichten, die sich auf jahrzehntelange archäologische Forschung und Studien der historischen Geographie stützen (Rapin 2013, 2014, 2017, 2018a), besteht das primäre Ziel dieses Kapitels darin zu zeigen, wie das (Öko-)System, dessen Merkmale in den vorangegangenen Seiten (z. B. in Kapitel 4 und 6) beschrieben wurden, auf die bedeutendste äußere Störung reagierte, der es seit der Zeit von Dareios I. ausgesetzt war; und es scheint sogar legitim zu behaupten, dass Alexanders Eroberung für Jahrhunderte eine solche geblieben wäre, zumindest bis zum Ausbruch der Kalifenarmeen unter dem Kommando des ‘Abbāsīdischen Feldherrn Qutayba.

Vor der Kulisse eines zweijährigen Militärlagers, das von einem Ausmaß an Gewalt geprägt wurde, die - trotz der Vorsicht, welche die in den Quellen sehr aufgeladene Rhetorik unausweichlich macht - angesichts der jüngsten Ergebnisse der archäologischen Forschung (Stančo 2020) nicht zu übersehen ist, scheint es gerechtfertigt, sich über die historische Bedeutung eines Zeugnisses wie *ADAB C7*, dem jüngsten unter den bisher veröffentlichten Pergamenten aus der Ḥalīlī Sammlung, zu wundern. In einem Stil verfasst, der sich in keiner Hinsicht von chronologisch früheren Exemplaren unterscheidet, ist diese scheinbar anonyme Liste von landwirtschaftlichen Gütern, die in Baktrien produziert (und über das Territorium umverteilt) wurden, in einer Art und Weise formuliert, die in jeglicher Form an achämenidische Verwaltungsverfahren erinnert, dennoch datiert «am 15. Tag des Monats Sivan [סיון], im siebten Jahr des Königs Alexander». Ist also daraus zu schließen, dass der makedonische Feldzug - die noch zu Lebzeiten Alexanders zur (zweideutigen: eines Helden und/oder eines blutdürstigen Tyrann) Legende wurde - tatsächlich nur ein Epiphänomen in der Geschichte der Region darstellte, da die vorherigen Verwaltungsstrukturen intakt geblieben zu sein scheinen, so als ob nichts Wesentliches in Bezug auf die Art und Weise der (persischen oder anderen) Machtausübung in einem Baktrien geschehen wäre, welche immer noch integraler Bestandteil eines großen multiethnischen Reiches war, das sich immer noch von der Ägäis bis zum Indus erstreckte? Dies scheint die Ansicht zu sein, die bei zahlreichen maßgeblichen Wissenschaftlern am meisten im Trend liegt (z. B. sehr explizit in Mairs 2016).

Wie die in dem Kapitel entwickelte Diskussion zeigen soll, stellt das ins Betracht gezogenen Zeugnis (*ADAB C4*) jedoch einen Sonderfall innerhalb des Korpus dar und muss daher mit Vorsicht behandelt werden, vor allem im Lichte der jüngsten Ergebnisse der archäologischen Untersuchung lokaler Siedlungsstrukturen, aus denen sich ein Bild ergibt, das es schwierig macht, die Hypothese zu stützen, dass nach Alexanders Abreise in Richtung Indien in Baktrien *business as usual* wieder aufgenommen wurde, als ob nichts Bemerkenswertes geschehen war (§1).

Ohne in irgendeiner Weise versuchen zu wollen, die eher beunruhigenden Aspekte militärischer Expeditionen imperialer Eroberung, wie sie von Alexander - und von so vielen anderen vor und nach ihm - durchgeführt wurden, abzuschwächen (§§2.1-2.4), besteht eines der grundlegenden Ziele dieses abschließenden Kapitels darin, zu zeigen, wie die Empfindlichkeit des im Verlauf der vorliegenden Studie dargelegten Wirtschafts- und Sozialsystems als Folge mit sich brachte, dass es viel weniger als einen «totalen Krieg» (Vernichtungskrieg, wie ihn z.B. Holt 2005 für Alexander behauptet) nötig war, um es nahezu irreparabel zu beschädigen. Im Lichte solcher Überlegungen (§3, insbesondere Unterabschnitte 3.1-3.3) gibt es Grund, das zugegebenermaßen wichtige, im Moment aber noch isolierte Zeugnis von *ADAB C4* in einem deutlich weniger optimistischen Licht zu betrachten. In der Tat gibt es allen Anlass zu der Annahme, dass das, was vom achämenidischen Verwaltungssystem den militärischen Feldzug Alexanders und seine Nebenwirkungen überlebte, sich darauf beschränkt haben muss, die Kontrolle über einige städtische Zentren und strategische Knotenpunkte aufrechtzuerhalten, aber nichts (oder wenig) mehr.

Der Grund dafür ist vor dem Hintergrund der vorangegangenen Kapitel hoffentlich relativ einfach zu erraten, und um ihn herauszufinden, muss man noch einmal auf die sozialen Netzwerke zurückblicken, die entscheidend zur Aufrechterhaltung, Fortpflanzung und Ausdehnung des achämenidischen Herrschaftssystems beitrugen. In Ermangelung der Voraussetzungen von Vertrauen, gegenseitiger Abhängigkeit und vor allem aufgrund des Fehlens an Männern, die in der Lage waren, um es mit den Worten Bryan Millers zu sagen, es effektiv zu verhandeln (*navigating and negotiating*), war der *Middle Ground*, welcher das Glück des achämenidischen Baktriens ausgemacht hatte, dazu bestimmt, sich in der - zumindest für einige der beteiligten sozialen Akteure - lebensrettenden Weite der Steppe und der abgelegenen Unzugänglichkeit der Täler und Schluchten von Ustrūšana aufzulösen.<sup>6</sup> Denn wenn Verhandlungen, die zum persischen Imperialsystem in Baktrien *strukturell* gehörten, nicht mehr möglich sind, haben die Bewohner Zomias - wie (bezeichnenderweise) schon Herodot über die Skythen bemerkte, die er für die Urheber «einer der genialsten Entdeckungen, die ich kenne» hielt - eine Waffe auf ihrer Seite, gegen die sich jedes Imperium stets bemerkenswert und frustrierend machtlos zeigte: die Flucht.

Es hätte des ganzen diplomatischen Geschicks und der sprachlich-kulturellen Kompetenz des wahren «Letzten der Achämeniden» (wie Briant Alexander berühmtlich nannte), nämlich Antiochos I. - der nicht zufällig der Sohn einer zentralasiatischen Prinzessin, der Sogdierin Apama, war - sowie einer mühsamen diplomatischen Arbeit von mehr als einem Jahrzehnt bedurft, um solche Netzwerke wieder aufzubauen, wenn auch von deutlich anderen Prämissen ausgehend. Damit wurde sogleich jenen offenen Raum der Verhandlung und der gegenseitigen Abhängigkeit durch Ausbeutung

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<sup>6</sup> Vgl. Miller 2015.

zustande gebracht, welches letztendlich die Voraussetzungen bereitstellte, dessentwegen Zentralasien *After Alexander* nicht nur in der Lage wurde, unbeschadet aus den Wirren des Seleukidenreichs hervorzugehen, sondern sich sogar in einem der faszinierendsten *imperial spaces* (Morris 2019a) der eurasischen Geschichte zu entwickeln (Strootman 2020c, vgl. hier §4). Der Ruhm dessen Raumes, ihres Völkern und ihres Ressourcen - vor allem die legendären Pferde aus dem Fargāne-Tal, von denen es hieß, sie würden Blut schwitzen - überquerte in späteren Jahrzehnten Berge und Wüsten, bis er das weit entfernte Cháng'ān (長安) erreichte. Und von den Straßen und Märkten der blühenden Hān-Hauptstadt fand diese (und wohl viele andere) Geschichte(n) den Weg durch den Hof zu den Ohren eines ebenso rücksichtslosen wie ehrgeizigen Kaisers, nämlich Wǔdì (漢武帝, 157-87 v. Chr.)

Aufgrund eines Expansionsprojekts innerhalb des Steppengebiets, an das sich China zumindest seit Jahrzehnten nicht mehr erinnern konnte und begierig darauf, möglichst viele dieser Wunder in die Hände zu bekommen, beschloss der «kriegerische Kaiser» bald, einen kühnen Entdecker, Zhāng Qiān (張騫), in Länder zu schicken, in die sich seit Menschengedenken kein Bewohner von Tiānxià je gewagt hatte. In gewisser Weise, und zumindest was die Mythopoiese betrifft, war dieses Unternehmen bestimmt, eine neue Phase in der Geschichte der afro-eurasischen Welt eröffnen, und in dessen Legende (der letzten *Fata Morgana* Baktriens) wir noch heute leben, vielleicht auf besonders akute Weise.

## 2.9. Das Ende der Geschichte?

Indem er die wesentlichen Punkte zusammenfasst, die in den vorangegangenen Kapiteln diskutiert wurden, will der letzte Abschnitt (**Everything Was Forever, Until it Was No More. Some (Almost) Concluding Remarks**) schließlich einige mögliche Wege aufzeigen, denen die Forschung der kommenden Jahre noch mit Gewinn folgen könnte, wenn nicht unbedingt sollte.

## Abstract

### ***The Twelfth District. Towards a Connected History of Achaemenid Northeastern Central Asia***

«When the Persian king referred to his Greek “subjects” in their various subcategories, he certainly may have included the entire Greek world in this claim, whether it held “true” or not for those Greeks included in his list of imperial subjects. The same applies to the Saka who lived in the vast territories of the north and the east. The dynamic between these two concepts manifested in the imperial border zones that developed within the tension between these two competing concepts, which are contradictory only at first glance».

- R. Rollinger, *The Persian Empire in Contact with the World*. In *The Oxford History of the Ancient Near East. Volume V. The Age of Persia*, ed. K. Radner, N. Moelle, and D. T. Potts. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 928.

### **1. *And I Think It's Gonna Be a Long Long Time. Once Again on Bactria: Why and How***

The present dissertation to study the processes - and to identify their underlying actors – which fueled the emergence and development of the most important satrapy of the Achaemenid Empire in the East (Bactria and the neighboring regions of Sogdiana and Chorasnia). It does so by adopting three mutually complementary perspectives: the «imperial» (top-down), the «local» (bottom-up) and the «liminal» (frontier studies). At the same times, it subjects the sources (both written and archaeological), to an innovative methodology in this field of studies by making extensive use of the ethnographic record on the one hand and, on the other, a wide range of secondary literature focusing on historical and human geography.

In the face of the great vitality shown by research on Hellenistic and post-Hellenistic Central Asia over the past fifteen years, the Achaemenid period still remains comparatively little explored, although both archaeological investigation and some very recent documentary discoveries have significantly increased the body of sources available for the study of this region. Moreover, due to the geopolitical events of the past forty years, research on Central Asia in general - and pre-Hellenistic Asia in particular - has faced remarkable challenges. In the case of Achaemenid Bactria, the dearth of literary sources on the one hand and, on the other, the linguistic obstacles arising from the hindrances, for most Western scholars, of accessing the – bodacious - Russophone archaeological literature, has meant that, since the time of some seminal studies by Pierre Briant (1983, 1984, 1985), this region of the Empire has been neglected in favor of contexts, such as Babylonia or Egypt, which



are better covered by the extant evidence. In recent years, however, there has been a significant reversal of this trend. The publication of the results of a massive survey of Eastern Afġānistān (Gardin *et al.*, 1989-1998) has shown that, contrary to earlier assumptions, even before the rise of the Seleukid satrapy and the kingdom of Baktria (Coloru 2009, Morris 2019a), the region enjoyed a highly complex infrastructure, such that it was a key piece in the Achaemenid imperial mosaic.

The discovery of some parchment documents that can probably be traced back to the archives of an important Achaemenid official on the eve of Alexander's invasion (329-327 BCE, Naveh - Shaked 2012) also showed the deep level of Central Asian integration within the imperial administrative machinery (King 2021). This has been further confirmed by the publication of a new dossier of tablets from the Persepolis archives, from which we can see the very high regard in which workers (*kurtas*) originating from Baktria as well as the officers assigned to their escort were held (Henkelman 2018a). Although to date it has been impossible to bring to light the archaeological levels of the capital of the satrapy (Baktra), the work of the French Archaeological Delegation to Afġānistān (*DAFA*) in the oasis of Balḥ has recently uncovered a complex system of fortifications apparently intended to control the surrounding steppes by means of garrisons located at strategic points in the oasis: this seems to further back hypotheses put forward by Briant regarding the strategic importance of the city as a stronghold of Achaemenid power in Central Asia (Maxwell-Jones 2015, Marquis 2018).

Despite these significant advances, the image of Baktria still in vogue among both some scholars and the wider audience is that of an ungovernable province, a breeding ground for «autonomist» drives on the one hand and, on the other, under constant threat from the «nomads» of the steppes. Conquered by Cyrus II and integrated into the fold of the Empire by Darius I, the satrapy would progressively have removed itself from Achaemenid power beginning with the reign of Xerxes: from there, it has been argued, regions such as neighboring Sogdiana would become «independent» from Achaemenid control, finally erupting, by the time of Darius III, into a state of «anarchy» culminating in the invasion of Alexander (Holt 2005, Wu 2010).

Distancing itself from such narratives, the present dissertation intends on the contrary to show how, throughout the *entire* history of the Empire, the *whole* of Central Asia (not only the oasis territories, but also the steppes) remained an integral part of its framework, and a critical one – economically, socially, and politically – at that. To this end, its overarching goal is to analyze the relations between the political-administrative center of the satrapy and the surrounding territory in greater depth than has been done so far, since the ecology (and thus the politics) of the Central Asian oases cannot be understood without adequate consideration of the surrounding steppes and deserts.

Put it otherwise, given the significant increase in documentation over the past decade, the present dissertation sets for itself the goal of calling into question the mainstream view of Baktria as a

*Perilous Frontier* (however important it might have been) of the Achaemenid Empire still so popular among both researchers, especially historians, and the wider public today. At the same time, it seeks to develop a new understanding of this region and the surrounding territories as a «complex space», in which different social actors - not only the Empire and its administration, but also the peoples of the steppes, whom some important recent studies (Miller 2014) have shown to be decisive actors on the Baktrian chessboard - move around and constantly negotiate the terms of mutual coexistence and mutual exploitation (White 2011<sup>2</sup>).

Key to this effort through the work is moreover a critical examination of categories such as of mobility and fixity (Horden-Purcell 2000) in light of the most recent studies on interactions in frontier spaces in Inner Asia (Di Cosmo 2015, 2018). Such a wide-ranging comparative approach in the context of Achaemenid historiography ought to be taken as perhaps the boldest – and as the 8 chapters of the work strive to show, fruitful – contribution of the present dissertation to current scholarship on pre-Hellenistic Central Asia.

Such a strategy is necessary because of the fact that, unlike more recent research on post-Achaemenid Baktria, which has turned decisively toward cultural history (Mairs 2014, Hoo 2020), the study of the Persian satrapy appears exclusively interested in investigating the impact of the Achaemenid conquest on Central Asia, thereby relegating a multitude of local actors to the background of the historical trajectory of Persian rule. However, the ever-expanding dataset of primary sources available today offers an opportunity to critically reevaluate concepts such as «center» and «periphery», as well as to significantly deepen our understanding of the social complexity of Achaemenid Baktria. In doing so, the present dissertation aims at giving back voice and agency to actors (starting with the steppe people) that have been overly neglected until now.

A qualifying point of the work as a whole, and one that distinguishes it from all previous research focused the same subject, is the attempt to place Achaemenid Baktria squarely within is (Central)Eurasian, in the wake of some important recent studies (for example Kuz'mina 2008 and Beckwith 2009) that have emphasized the importance of this space as a subject of historical action and not as a remote periphery (Morris 2019a). To this end, extensive use is be made through the entire dissertation of comparative evidence and methodological insights drawn from studies on, among others, the relations between the Hán China and the Xiōngnú nomads. (Di Cosmo 2002, Miller 2015). There reason behind this choice is that this disciplinary field provides the scholar of Achaemenid Baktria with important ethnographic material, which the present dissertation tries to exploit to the bottom of their remarkable potential in order to analyze in a new perspective (co-dependence rather than opposition) the relations between the Achaemenid Empire and the Central Asian people.

## 2. Of The Earth With Many People: A Survey of the Present Work

The general introduction (**Why Bactria, after all? An Introduction to *Altneuland***) aims at centering the recent scholarly debate on pre-Islamic Central Asia within a wider tradition of historical, anthropological, and archaeological research. Here the case is made for adopting a connected, truly Eurasian perspective, which looks at *both* Bactria and the Achaemenid Empires against the background of a broader historical and sociopolitical context, in synchronic and, crucially, diachronic perspective. This, it is argued through the chapter, provides valuable opportunities for making the best of a wide array of comparative evidence and methodological approaches which might prove crucial, as several chapters in the work set out to show, to shed better light on the formative stages and the inner workings of the Northeastern borderlands of the Empire, especially during time periods (such as the long 5<sup>th</sup> century, from the reign of Xerxes onwards), where the documentary evidence is particularly scanty.

Chapter 2 (***Bactria in Wonderland: Sources and Methods on Achaemenid Central Asia***) focuses on the the available sources. It has recently been suggested that, as it comes to the Hellenistic or the Kuṣāṇa periods, the real challenge for scholars is how to profitably exploit the extant evidence, which a thorough investigation of the record shows being not as scanty as usually bemoaned. The five sections of the chapter are meant to show that the same can be said concerning the Achaemenid period. In order to achieve this goal, besides taking stock of the usual Greek and Latin accounts, of the royal inscriptions and the Persepolis tablets, of recent archaeological research and of excavated texts, the present work makes use of a wide set of theoretical approaches and methodologies (from cultural memory and intentional history to the scholarship of the so-called Imperial Turn). The case study of a famous passage in Herodotus (3.117) on Achaemenid hydraulic infrastructure in Chorasmia is offered at the end of the chapter as a trial test to show how such a comparative, sometimes heavily theoretically informed approach as the one pursued through the present work can help in paving the way towards a less imperiocentric, bottom-up oriented assessment of the Achaemenid imperial experience in Central Asia.

Chapter 3 (***Nomina nuda tenemus***) ought to be taken as an excursus of sort, for it critically addresses a long-lasting debate on the – several time suggested, sometimes uncritically accepted, but in many respects problematic – hypothesis of a pre-imperial history of Central Asia. A survey of the scholarship, and a discussion of the (mostly archaeological) evidence available suggests that the unavoidable starting point for reconstructing the genesis of the satrapy and the mechanisms that ensured its control by the Empire is the Bīsūtūn inscription. That no pre-Achaemenid Empire (Ḥayānid, Mede, or otherwise) existed before Cyrus, however, is not the same as to claim that the

conqueror was faced, upon entering Central Asia, with a remote periphery or a politically blank space. This is made particularly clear by a close reading of a crucial paragraph in the Bīsutūn inscription, which for the first time mentions a «Persian» as «satrap in Baktria». As suggested in the second part of the chapter, once read against the grain of a growing body of literature on Empire formation and of the messy nature of its working on the ground, Darius' terse statements open a window on an intriguing process of power negotiations in which local communities and their élites were able to considerably affect imperial goals and ambitions.

With these premises established, chapter 4 (***The Road to Oxiana: Reconstructing a Presumptive Satrapy***) attempts to reconstruct the sociopolitical and economic landscape of Central Asia during the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE. This is, it is argued, a critical step towards a better understanding of the conditions faced by the Teispid (and later Achaemenid) administrators once they tried to consolidate their conquest of Baktria and the neighboring regions. To this end, the few narrative and archaeological pieces of evidence available are integrated with a thorough discussion of the socio-political organization of the steppe, ranging much wider than Baktria proper both in space and time. If in fact, based on the currently available evidence, it seems highly probable that the geographical and administrative configuration of Baktria (perhaps even its very name) should be interpreted as the result of the inclusion of Central Asia in the Persian political and administrative framework, it appears at the same time no less evident that the process of this inclusion took place according to a very precise pattern, dictated to a not inconsiderable extent by 1. ecological and 2. socio-political contingencies. These two factors were chiefly responsible for the development of an extremely sophisticated system of territorial exploitation capable of integrating, while at the same time being inevitably modified by them, structures built up over the previous centuries for the functioning of which it was essential to offer 1. economic, 2. social and 3. political guarantees to actors capable of controlling these structures and the relational networks which fueled them. Not only were these structures not dismantled, but to a considerable extent they were exploited to their own advantage by the Persians, who even took care of their further expansion and development within the imperial infrastructures.

Chapter 5 (***Thus Saith the Lord: Darius, Son of Vištāspa***) is chiefly devoted to Darius' reign, which thanks to the Persepolis Fortification Archive stands out as by far the better-known period of Achaemenid rule in the East. It is divided into two main parts. The first one offers an overview of the current scholarly standpoint on the Persian administration in the region, combining both literary and documentary evidence. It shows how and to what extent the Empire was able to extract material and human wealth from the territories it conquered, and furthermore shows how, thanks to their remarkable skills, Baktrians and other Central Asians critically integrated into the administrative

framework of the Empire considerably beyond the Northeastern satrapies of their origin. In the second part, however, the focus shifts to a more local perspective. By investigating the production and circulation of luxurious specimens of material culture such as drinking vessels, the chapter closes by pointing out how and to what (considerable) extent locals succeeded in negotiating their position as subjects of the Great King, while never giving up on their remarkable agency.

From Xerxes' reign down to the middle 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE (the scope of Chapter 6: **Uno fumavit Baktria tota rogo? Achaemenid Baktria from Xerxes to Ahvamazdā**), we are left with close to nothing to investigate local and trans-regional development in Northeastern Central Asia. Given moreover that the literary evidence covering – however scantily – this period is filled with court intrigues and prudish anecdotes, it has become commonplace in scholarship to frame this period as one of stagnation if not of decay. The main goal of the chapter is to question such an assessment. It does so, on the one hand, by critically reexamining Greek and Roman evidence on Baktria and, on the other, by bringing such accounts in dialogue with both archaeology and excavated texts (such as the *Aramaic Ritual Texts from Persepolis*). The case study of a major Achaemenid-period site in Southern Uzbekistan (Kyzyltēpe), is extensively discussed in order to show that, if from its excavations a thorough picture emerges of the imperial administrative footprint during the long 5<sup>th</sup> century, a proper contextualization of the findings against scholarship on pastoralism remarkably brings to the fore the agentic capacity of local actors.

The *Aramaic Documents from Ancient Bactria (ADAB)* deserve a detailed treatment on their own, and therefore they are thoroughly discussed in Chapter 7 (***My Kingdom for a Camel. On Satraps and Powerbrokers in 4<sup>th</sup> Century Achaemenid Baktria***). The value of this dataset lays, on the one hand, in its nature as a primary source illustrating, in astonishing details, the inner working of Achaemenid power in Central Asia from a regional, at times micro-historical perspective. Once again, the chapter is divided into two main sections. The first takes stock on the scholarly debate sparked by the publication of this remarkable body of evidence, and shows how, even at the very eve of Alexander's campaign, the Persian imperial paradigm in and across Baktria had transformed the satrapy into a political, economic, and cultural unity linked both to the rest of the Empire and to regions beyond it, where Achaemenid power was nominal at best. At the same time, the *ADAB* shows a system of socio-political networks capable of involving in a symbiotic relationship all the social actors present in the territory of the satrapy, from the satraps of the Great King to the stewards of a camel driver. Such a network, even though was critical to securing Persian overlordship over the land, its resources, and its people, could however also be exploited by local powerbrokers to pursue their own aims and goals, sometimes openly defying the satrap's authority. In order to better understand this apparent contradiction, in a second part of the chapter the *ADAB* are put into dialogue with the *longue durée*

of Central Asian social and administrative history. Against this backdrop, a dialectical relationship once again emerges between central power and regional authorities, which the comparative approach presented in this chapter shows to have been at the same time, and over a remarkably long time-span, both profitable, and therefore solid (by virtue of the mutual dependence of the two players) and fraught with tensions, and therefore sensitive: to understand its social mechanisms, the conclusion argues, is crucial in order to make better sense of the reasons for the expansion, consolidation, and fall of the Empires, at least the pre-modern ones, in this region of Eurasia.

Finally, Chapter 8 (**ГОЛЫЕ ГОДЫ. *Alexander in Bactria***), discusses how – and why – the unexpected coming on stage of a young conqueror from the Empire’s periphery ended up in the opening of a new chapter in the history of the relations between the Baktrian élites on the one hand and, on the other, representatives of imperial power. In the first part of the chapter, the two-year Central Asian campaign is reviewed, paying particular attention to its impact on local resources (especially in the steppes) and the texture of communal – not only élite – solidarity. In a second step, the outcome of the expedition is evaluated against Seleukos’ reconquest of the former Achaemenid East. In doing so, it is shown why the system established by the Persians came to an end, and why Alexander’s heirs had to fight hard (and eventually to come to terms with those élites who survived the campaign), to rebuild some sort of it in order to substantiate their claims on the lands which once the Great Kings ruled.