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## On the Interpretation of the Pasargadae Inscriptions

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In offering these remarks to my friend of many years, Carl Nylander, I wish to express my admiration for his many signal contributions - and most especially for his finely articulated, fundamental explorations of issues connected with the art and architecture of early Achaemenid Iran. In what follows I will indeed have occasion to refer many times to one of his valued early papers: a paper with the apt title, «Who Wrote the Inscriptions at Pasargadae?».<sup>1</sup> Needless to say, it is not my purpose in this context to rehearse each and every nuance of that perceptive article, but I do wish to stress the importance of the fresh approaches that were commended in that study, particularly with reference to the historical significance of the Pasargadae inscriptions<sup>2</sup> and, secondly, with reference to the sometimes neglected perspective of the detailed testimony of the surviving monuments at Pasargadae.<sup>3</sup>

As all who have addressed the issue of the authorship of the Achaemenid building inscriptions at Pasargadae are well aware, there is an obvious antithesis between Pasargadae's first-person trilingual CMa inscriptions reading (in Old Persian as well as in Akkadian and Elamite) «I, Cyrus, the King, the Achaemenid» and the evident claim of Darius, in paragraph 70 of the Elamite version of the Bisitun inscription, «in Aryan which formerly was not». In other words, the difficult choice - ever since F.H. Weissbach first found it necessary to stress the considerable obstacles that stood in the way of accepting Darius as the author of the Pasargadae texts (Weissbach 1894, 664 ff.) - has been to come down on the side of Cyrus the Great (559-530 B.C.) or Darius the Great (522-486 B.C.) as the inventor of the Old Persian script.

As the title of this offering no doubt makes plain, one objective of the present enquiry is to document something of the changes in interpretation that have overtaken the Pasargadae inscriptions during the course of the past seven decades. In this respect the brief headings which punctuate the balance of these notes are intended to provide a series of «guidelines» which describe (in the order in which they came to be explored) the essence of the agency that was thought to have been responsible for the inscriptions. It should be stressed, however, that the ultimate purpose of the paper is not to offer a bare recitation of the vagaries of modern opinion in this one area (and I am abundantly conscious of the fact that far from every contributory voice stands acknowledged in what follows), but rather to try to show how these same interpretations often fitted the expectations of a given time - and how, still more significantly, they often stood in the way of a proper understanding of the history of the period.

*Attributed to Cyrus, before 550 B.C.*

Following the completion of Ernst Herzfeld's single six-month season of excavations at Pasargadae in 1928 (Herzfeld 1929-30, 4-16) a total of three separate inscriptions became available for study. These consisted of the above-mentioned CMa inscriptions, which are known to have stood in prominent, elevated positions, either in doorways or on antae, in each of Cyrus' three palatial structures (Gate R, Palace S and Palace P);<sup>4</sup> the CMc «garment inscriptions» which marked the robes of the royal figures in the doorway reliefs of Palace P;<sup>5</sup> and the fragmentary, again trilingual copies of the CMb

inscription which appear to have originally stood above the just-mentioned reliefs in the opposed main doorways of Palace P.<sup>6</sup>

In Herzfeld's opinion each of these inscriptions represented the handiwork of Cyrus; and, as such, the royal titles attested in them had to be taken as a guide to that monarch's view of his status at the time they were carved. It did not matter that the text of the CMc inscription (reading «Cyrus, the Great King, an Achaemenid») exhibited a title different from that found in the CMa inscription (i.e. that it read «Great King» instead of «King») since both titles remained relatively modest. Accordingly, each of Cyrus' palatial structures could be ascribed to the first decade of his reign, i.e. to the period before 550 B.C. when he was still a vassal of Astyages of Media.<sup>7</sup>

*Attributed to Cyrus, before and after 550 B.C.*

For A.T. Olmstead the evident change in Cyrus' titulary from «King» to «Great King» could be directly ascribed to the impact of his victory over Astyages in 550 B.C. In other words, Cyrus was thought to have been content with the lesser title before that epochal event and to have adopted the more prestigious style in its aftermath (Olmstead 1948, 62-64). Once again, the inscriptions in question were taken (in concert with what was known of the overall history of Fars in the middle years of the 6th century B.C.) to offer an unimpeachable guide to the chronology of early construction at Cyrus' capital. That is to say that Gate R, Palace S, and Palace P were each founded (as the humble nature of the CMa texts duly affirmed) before 550 B.C., even if part of the construction work at the last of these major buildings could be understood to have continued into the period directly following the defeat of Astyages.

Although the critical force of these various initial interpretations need hardly detain us for too long, it is perhaps worth observing that Olmstead's calculations clearly failed to take account of the evidence contained in Cyrus' celebrated Babylonian foundation document; for, in that same document the royal titulary of each of Cyrus' named ancestors is already given as «Great King, King of Anshan» (Pritchard 1969, 316). Equally, Herzfeld's contention that Cyrus managed to complete most of his building projects at Pasargadae even before he overcame his suzerain,

Astyages, might well have been more vigorously challenged than it seems to have been. To begin with, the geographical position of Pasargadae (in the very northernmost portion of Fars) hardly equates with an appropriate location for any such act of defiance; and, secondly, this same location - on the most probable line of any Median advance towards the south - only serves to fortify the very different testimony that is to be found in various Classical sources. As Strabo relates, with reference to Cyrus' bid for independence (XV.3.8), «Cyrus held Pasargadae in honor because he there conquered Astyages the Mede in his last battle, transferred to himself the empire of Asia, founded a city and constructed a palace as a memorial to his victory».

Equally unfortunate, of course, was Herzfeld's inflexible conviction that the doorway reliefs of Palace P had to be ascribed to a date before 550 B.C. This opinion led him to assert that the reliefs in question were far more distinct from the late 6th century and early 5th century reliefs of Persepolis than they actually were<sup>8</sup> and it also led him to conclude - in the face of many indications to the contrary - that the Achaemenid drapery style had somehow evolved independently from that of Archaic Greece.<sup>9</sup>

*Attributed to Cyrus and Darius, as «joint authors»  
ca. 20 years apart*

By the time that Nylander came to confront the problem of the authenticity of the inscriptions in Cyrus' name in his 1967 study, he found it necessary to give serious consideration to a rather complex solution that had not been entertained hitherto. Since it still seemed obvious, especially given the use of the first person pronoun in the CMa text, that Cyrus ought to have written some part of the Pasargadae texts, and since it had also become clear - at least since the late 1950's - that the very fragmentary trilingual CMb text from Palace P contained part of the name of Darius (and that still other not negligible clues suggested a post-Bisitun date for each of the Old Persian inscriptions at Pasargadae),<sup>10</sup> Nylander suggested that *both* Cyrus and Darius could have contributed in different ways to the extant corpus. In this reconstruction it was proposed that Cyrus was responsible for the Elamite and Akkadian versions of the CMa and CMc texts and

that Darius, apart from adding the trilingual CMB text on the upper part of the main doorjambs of Palace P, had also added the Old Persian versions of the first two texts «in the same places» wherever they happened to occur.<sup>11</sup>

Once again, it is interesting to see how such proposals played out in terms of interpretation. In a necessarily hypothetical reconstruction of the fragmentary CMB text - a text ascribed to Darius on the basis of the possible presence of the last part of this monarch's name in the first line of the Akkadian version - the inscription was thought by Borger and Hinz to refer to Palace P as a monument that was built and decorated by Cyrus prior to being inscribed by Darius.<sup>12</sup> Carl Nylander's solution also demanded, needless to say, a date before 530 B.C. for the completion of the Palace P sculptures, even if certain «formal refinements in the rendering of the drapery» could only be explained by the more or less immediate transfer of conventions that had only arisen in the west «about 540 and later» (Nylander 1970, 137).

As to the political implications of Darius' now acknowledged activities at Pasargadae, these were not seen to be overly significant at the time. In Nylander's view Darius merely added new lines «in the third - or rather first - imperial language, now that this was possible». Accordingly, the new lines in Old Persian were seen to document a certain «tribute» to Cyrus as well as «a natural action» that helped to assure the desired completeness of a site that already was, and would long remain, the coronation city of the Achaemenid dynasty.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, however, Nylander's luminous insights into the nature - and the origins - of early Achaemenid masonry (so deftly explored in his magisterial study, *Ionians at Pasargadae*), at long last determined, beyond any doubt at all, that Cyrus' building program at Pasargadae could not have begun until after the conquest of Sardis, i.e. not until after 546 B.C. (Nylander 1970, 127).

*Attributed to Cyrus and Darius, as the respective authors of the CMA text and the CMB and CMc texts*

In putting together a report on the cumulative researches that had taken place at Pasargadae down to the late 1970's (Stronach 1978), I know that I did rather less than I might have done to address the many problems that still surrounded the authorship of the Pasargadae texts. In this all-too-personal

account I can perhaps confess that I knew the issues to be ones to which I would have to return outside the frame of an excavation report.

In one positive development, however, I did find it possible to indicate that the beginnings of the Achaemenid drapery style were not to be found at Pasargadae but rather in Darius' great rock relief at Bisitun. I will not repeat the detailed arguments that were used to support a post-520 B.C. date for the Palace P reliefs (Stronach 1978, 96-97), but will simply make the point that these same reliefs unquestionably stand, in stylistic terms, between the pioneer examples of the Achaemenid drapery style that occur at Bisitun and the fully evolved examples of this same style that are attested at Persepolis.

With this basic information in hand it was obviously impossible to continue to suppose that Cyrus had commissioned the royal images in Palace P. Equally, it followed that not only the CMB inscription, but also the CMc inscription, could only be owed to Darius - and that only the CMA inscription could still prove to belong, in whole or in part, to Cyrus himself.

At this point I found it necessary to make one of many (always warmly anticipated) post-excavation «return visits» to Pasargadae since a close re-examination of each of the two still extant versions of the CMA text (on the one surviving anta of Palace S and on the comparable, only surviving anta of Palace P) was obviously called for. From the nature of the cuttings in the stone I could find no indication - in either case - that the two-line Old Persian version of the CMA text had been added to the rest of the composition at some separate, later moment. There was also another factor that had to be taken into account. This consisted of the strict symmetry of the two lines in Old Persian and the single lines in Elamite and Akkadian: something which strongly suggested - with reference to *each* language - that the exact choice of words within each line had indeed been known from the first (Stronach 1987, 102).

If nothing tangible was left to commend Nylander's elegant (and, at first sight, promising) «joint authorship» solution, it was now clearly necessary to choose - at least where the CMA inscriptions were concerned - between the authorship of Cyrus or that of Darius. At the time I could not think of any compelling reason why Darius would have wished to erect a pseudonymous inscription in his predecessor's name, not merely once but many times, and I there-

fore opted for Cyrus as the most likely author. All the same, electing to come down on this specific side of the argument clearly created numerous problems. I was well aware that two of the three supposed «Cyrus texts» had become «Darius texts» and it seemed only too likely that the third example (complete with its late word-dividers) was now destined for a similar fate.

In terms of a general interpretation, the most that I could bring myself to conclude was that it was perhaps legitimate to maintain that certain «very brief» Old Persian inscriptions did indeed date back (like the CMa text) to the reign of Cyrus.<sup>14</sup> But even within the bounds of this limited assertion I necessarily ran into difficulties when I tried to account for the well known fact that the Old Persian labels on the Bisitun relief each appeared to be squeezed in and hence later in date than the equivalent Elamite and Akkadian labels on the same monument.<sup>15</sup>

*Attributed to Darius, as sole author*

By 1985 a cogent archaeological objection to the notion that the CMa inscriptions were the work of Cyrus was at last identified. That is to say that, if it was never standard Achaemenid practice to add inscriptions or delicate reliefs to a building prior to the end of any given program of construction, Cyrus could not be held responsible for the surviving copy of the CMa inscription palace P; and since this example of the text could not be attributed to Cyrus, it followed that none of the other examples ought to be owed to him either. As I noted at the time (Stronach 1985, 845, n. 7), the problem was no longer «the true date» (or authorship) of the hitherto variably dated CMa inscriptions, but rather «the elusive motive» that lay behind the introduction of these multiple texts during the first years of the reign of Darius.

*Attributed to Darius, as a member of the ruling royal family*

Once every available archaeological and linguistic variable could be seen to point in the same direction as far as the authorship of the Pasargadae texts was concerned, the outstanding problem boiled down to one issue. What was the political imperative that impelled Darius to act as he did?

The notion that Darius sought to «honor» his great predecessor<sup>16</sup> was never very attractive given the distant (even conceivably hostile?) attitude of Darius towards the line of Cyrus - an attitude that emerges implicitly from the text of the Bisitun inscription, where Cyrus barely receives any mention.

When I began to cast about for an answer to this conundrum some six years ago, I did so on the premise that Darius was, as his own self-proclaimed genealogy suggested, a member of the royal house. He was clearly not the direct heir; he was (if one went so far as to calculate the matter) a mere third cousin of Cambyses II (530-522 B.C.), the childless son of Cyrus. In a situation which inevitably called for a measure of self-justification, it was possible to note how Darius, a decidedly junior member of the royal family, had shrewdly sought to stress his one apparently incontestable claim to the throne: namely, the credentials that he bore as a member of the Achaemenid family. Accordingly, it was to Darius' obvious advantage to depict Cyrus, as soon as he could find an appropriate setting in which to do so, as an individual who also «chose to be known, his impeccable antecedents notwithstanding», as nothing more, nor less, than an Achaemenid.<sup>17</sup>

With reference to the CMa text, the use of the first-person singular (with the concomitant implication that Cyrus himself was «the acting agent») would then also have served to give extra force to the message that Cyrus was *par excellence* «an Achaemenid». At the same time, however, Darius' actions could also be interpreted as going beyond the bounds of mere self-justification. That is to say that Cyrus, who might have chosen to continue to call himself «an Anshanite» even in the context of a home inscription, came to be defined, at the last, by Darius' new, distinctively Persian label as a quintessential «Achaemenid». <sup>18</sup> Equally, the traditional terms «Anshan» and «Anshanite» were effectively replaced within the last quarter of the sixth century B.C. by such terms as «Parsa» and «Achaemenid» - yet further indications, if such indications were needed, of «a quickening sense of Persian identity». <sup>19</sup>

*Attributed to Darius, as the founder of a new dynastic line*

Within the past two years a number of Achaemenid historians have begun to question whether

Darius had any familial claim at all to the throne that he seized.<sup>20</sup> As has long been noted, Darius' account of his origins in his Bisitun inscription fails to carry a ring of conviction; rather than suppose, therefore, that it fell to Darius, a member of the cadet branch of the royal family, to restore the throne to its rightful heirs at the time of the death of Cambyses, the suggestion has been put forward that a «family name», i.e. the name of Achaemenes, «was used to create a founding father in order to achieve contemporary legitimacy» (Sancisi-Weerdenberg 1995, 1038). More than this, the stratagem of naming Achaemenes as the father of Teispes, the earliest known ancestor of Cyrus (Pritchard 1969, 316), had the effect of making each member of the line of Cyrus - together with each member of the line of Darius - an integral part of the same all-embracing Achaemenid family.<sup>21</sup>

The opportunity to introduce this durable conception (which is quite at variance with Cyrus' description of each of his named ancestors as «Great Kings, Kings of Anshan») could very well have been partly available to Darius because of his predecessor's curious reluctance to inscribe his home monuments. At all events, if the new claim was to take permanent hold, Darius must have sensed that it was imperative for him to take up the task of completing certain aspects of the construction at Pasargadae in such a way that suitable inscriptions would blanket the main palaces. Such was the fame of Cyrus (and such were the specific intentions of Darius) that the CMA inscription (now better thought of, I suggest, as the DMA inscription) could afford to omit (a) any mention of the name of Cyrus' father and (b) any mention of anything but the most minimal title (in an instance where the term «King», written out in full, may have best suited the length of the proposed two-line text in Old Persian), always provided that (c) Cyrus also stood defined, with absolute clarity, as «an Achaemenid».

As someone who had already explored the combined power of the written word and the sculpted image in his dramatic monument at Bisitun, Darius probably also welcomed the opportunity to introduce representations of Cyrus, cast in the same mould as images of himself, for which he presumably could - and did - take credit in his still enigmatic CMb/DMb text. As far as the CMc/DMc garment text is concerned, Darius no doubt found it acceptable, in terms of the remembered titulature of the

founder of the empire, and in terms of a setting where there was no necessity for each of the three texts to adhere to any strict, predetermined length, to give Cyrus the more historically appropriate title of «Great King».<sup>22</sup>

Finally, the sense of the urgency that drove Darius to make these various additions to the existing monuments at Pasargadae is very possibly reflected by inconsistencies in the way in which the trilingual CMA/DMA inscriptions came to be carved. In Gate R and Palace S, for example, the Old Persian, Elamite and Akkadian versions were cut as separate entities mounted one above the other (Stronach 1978, pls. 43b and 64a) whereas, in Palace P, the three versions were combined into one whole by connecting side lines (Stronach 1978, pl. 70). It is fair to assume, in short, that an interval of several years' duration must have intervened between the execution of the work in the two former, already wholly complete structures, each of which could have been inscribed without delay, and the latter building, which had been left unfinished by Cyrus and which must have remained the focus of numerous building operations for quite some time after Darius came to power.<sup>23</sup>

#### *Concluding remarks: Darius at Pasargadae*

The successive interpretations that have been given to the Pasargadae texts during the present century assuredly combine to illustrate a singular cautionary tale. When Herzfeld embarked on his pioneer excavations at Pasargadae in 1928 the site itself had only been identified beyond all reasonable doubt for a period of less than forty years (Curzon 1892, 70-90) and the focus of the work was very naturally on the recovery of material that would begin to document the reign of Cyrus in material terms - and by the same token the still little understood, earliest phases of monumental Achaemenid construction. In this situation scant consideration was given to the possibility that any inscription that included the name of Cyrus could have any association with the activities of a later monarch. Furthermore, if the very nature of Cyrus' «diffident» titles could only point to the introduction of such texts before 550 B.C., then this same high date necessarily had to be ascribed to the site's sophisticated big stone masonry, to the precocious drapery style attested in the Palace P reliefs, and, not least, to

the time frame within which the Old Persian cuneiform script first began to be used.

To-day, however, the significance of these same significant texts could hardly be defined more differently. As we have seen, each of the individual inscriptions has to be taken to be the work of Darius; and, as such, they also represent - somewhat ironically - a remarkable, contemporary guide to the true pattern of events that took place in the wake of the death of Cyrus and that of his childless heir, Cambyses II.

Without a proper understanding of the significance of the DMA text (as we must now think of it), and without an appreciation of exactly why these same texts came to be broadcast in such numbers throughout the Palace Area at Pasargadae, we cannot

in fact draw a complete picture of either the nature of the message that Darius was intent on conveying in the Bisitun inscription or of the nature of the abrupt caesura that divides the line of Cyrus from the line of Darius. The subtleties of the language in the prologue to the Bisitun inscription are such that it is, in the end, the stark evidence of the Pasargadae inscriptions that does as much as anything else to expose Darius' long-successful dynastic subterfuge. In sum, these long-mysterious - and long-misunderstood - late 6th-century additions to the fabric of Cyrus' renowned capital can now be seen to hold vital clues to the complex internal history of south-west Iran at the very moment that this remote Zagros region suddenly became the somewhat unlikely hub of an unparalleled world empire.<sup>24</sup>

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#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Nylander 1967.
- <sup>2</sup> Nylander 1967, 136.
- <sup>3</sup> Nylander 1967, 144 ff.
- <sup>4</sup> See, conveniently, Kent 1953, 107, 116; Nylander 1967, 144-146; Stronach 1978, 101-103, fig. 32, and pls. 43, 64, 70, 71a.
- <sup>5</sup> Kent 1953, 107, 116; Nylander 1967; Stronach 1978, 100-101 and pls. 80-81.
- <sup>6</sup> Herzfeld 1938, 2 ff. and pl. II; Kent 1953, 107, 116; Nylander 1967, 148-149; and Stronach 1978, 97-99.
- <sup>7</sup> Herzfeld 1929, 15; 1935, 29; and 1941, 221.
- <sup>8</sup> Cf. Stronach 1978, 95-97.
- <sup>9</sup> For a succinct summary of the «striking formal similarities» between the Greek and Achaemenid treatments of drapery, not to mention the chronological observation that the use of stacked folds with a zigzag edge was already well represented in many parts of the Greek world ca. 550-540 B.C., see especially Nylander 1970, 132.

<sup>10</sup> See Nylander 1967, 176, n. 65, especially with reference to the presence of «evolved» word-dividers at Pasargadae.

<sup>11</sup> Nylander 1967, 176.

<sup>12</sup> Borger - Hinz 1959, 117-125.

<sup>13</sup> Nylander 1967, 177.

<sup>14</sup> Stronach 1978, 102.

<sup>15</sup> Stronach 1978, 201, n. 43.

<sup>16</sup> See Prašek 1910, 4.

<sup>17</sup> Stronach 1990, 200-201.

<sup>18</sup> Stronach 1990, 201, n. 43.

<sup>19</sup> Stronach 1990, 201, n. 43.

<sup>20</sup> See especially, Kuhrt, 1995, 665; Briandt 1996, 27; and Waters, 1996, 16 ff.

<sup>21</sup> Stronach, forthcoming.

<sup>22</sup> Notwithstanding my original suggestion that a fragmentary garment inscription from the northern edge of the Palace Area at Pasargadae ought to have been part of one of the lost exemplars of the Old Persian version of the CMc/DMc text from the doorway reliefs in Palace P (Stronach 1965, 29 and pl. VIe), I now have specific reservations about the validity of this hypothesis. In the first place, the deep-cut cuneiform characters in this «Zendan North inscription» look larger and rougher than those that are displayed in the still extant Elamite and Akkadian garment inscriptions (Nylander 1967, figs. 4 and 6 and Stronach 1978, pls. 81 and 83b) and, secondly, the fragment as a whole looks more than likely to have come from some otherwise unattested statue in the round (Stronach 1990, 202, n. 45). This latter suggestion is probably not as far fetched as it sounds. Such a freestanding statue with gold inlays (matching those that would have been visible in the Palace P reliefs) could quite possibly have formed

an integral element in Darius' overarching scheme - always provided, of course, that the monument in question duly carried the familiar, trilingual legend of the CMc/DMc inscription.

<sup>23</sup> With reference to those occasional instances where an early traveller drew the now missing CMA/DMA inscription from Gate R with connecting side lines, it is probably preferable, as Nylander has already indicated (Nylander 1967, 167, n. 52), to trust the more careful «documentary aim» of such French travellers as Flandin and Coste (and indeed Texier), who show the inscription without any connecting lines. Furthermore, in necessary accord with the priority in time that must now be granted to the earliest CMA texts (i.e. those without connecting side lines in Gate R and Palace S), it now seems only appropriate (cf. Stronach 1990, 202) to relabel the CMA text as the DMA text and to refer to the later CMB and CMc texts as the DMB and DMc texts respectively. (In addition, these new proposals should be taken to supercede Borger and Hinz's earlier assumption that the CMB text represented Darius' first firmly attested inscription at Pasargadae - and the corresponding «CMB/DMA» equation which was born of this viewpoint nearly forty years ago.)

<sup>24</sup> Inevitably enough, this enquiry has had to take issue with virtually every assumption that Ernst Herzfeld ever made concerning the interpretation of the inscriptions from Pasargadae. In this regard - and I do not doubt that Carl Nylander would join me in this thought - it is only appropriate to acknowledge Herzfeld's pivotal, pioneer role in stimulating those debates which to this day continue to refine our knowledge of Achaemenid Iran. It is also to be hoped that Pasargadae itself - a true «deep well» for the studies of so many of us - has by no means exhausted its ample capacity to surprise.