Persianism in Antiquity

Edited by
Rolf Strootman and Miguel John Versluys

Alte Geschichte

Oriens et Occidens 25

Franz Steiner Verlag

Persianism in Antiquity
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ORIENS ET OCCIDENS

Studien zu antiken Kulturkontakten und ihrem Nachleben

Herausgegeben von Josef Wiesehöfer

in Zusammenarbeit mit Pierre Briant, Geoffrey Greatrex,

Amélie Kuhrt und Robert Rollinger

Band 25

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Cover illustration:
Nemrud Dağı (Kommagene), around 50 BC. West Terrace, South Socle 2, depiction of the Persian king Xerxes I (ruled 486–456 BC), detail of the upper part of the stele. Preserved *in situ*. Photo: R. Strootman.

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek:
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

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© Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 2017
Druck: Hubert & Co., Göttingen
Gedruckt auf säurefreiem, alterungsbeständigem Papier.
Printed in Germany.
ISBN 978-3-515-11382-3 (Print)
ISBN 978-3-515-11386-1 (E-Book)

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To Henk Versnel at the occasion of his 80th birthday

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many of the papers in this book originate from the two-day colloquium *Persianism in Antiquity*, held at the Netherlands Institute (NIT) in Turkey, Istanbul, on 24–25 April 2014. This colloquium was such an inspiring and intellectually rewarding event thanks first of all to the participants. Damien Agut-Labordère, Eran Almagor, Matthew Canepa, Omar Coloru, David Engels, Richard Fowler, Richard Gordon, Albert de Jong, Judith Lerner, Margaret Miller, Rahim Shayegan, Michael Sommer, and Josef Wiesehöfer all accepted our invitation to travel to Istanbul and discuss Persianism with us. To complement the original line-up with important topics not addressed in depth during the colloquium itself, several chapters in this volume (those by Touraj Daryaee, Benedikt Eckhardt, Bruno Jacobs, Charlotte Lerouge-Cohen, Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, Sonja Plischke, Felipe Rojas and Valeria Sergueenkova) were later commissioned.

The Istanbul colloquium was dedicated to the cultural and political memory of the Achaemenid Empire during Antiquity, and aimed specifically at discussing how the concept of "Persianism" can help us to better understand the intracultural entanglements by which such memory is created, and so move beyond the traditional separation between West and East that still pervades the grand narratives of ancient history and cultural studies. The ideal place to question this dichotomy of course was Istanbul, the city allegedly constituting the bridge between "East" and "West".

The conference would not have been possible without the enthusiasm and commitment of the director of the NIT, Fokke Gerritsen. We wish to express our sincere gratitude to him and to the other NIT staff members for their hospitality and their help with the organization; Güher Gürmen in particular. For her much appreciated help during the colloquium we would like to thank Milinda Hoo. Back home, Marinde Hiemstra and Merel Kosters (Utrecht) as well as Marike van Aerde (Leiden) assisted us with the editing of the papers and the bibliography.

The conference and this publication were financed by the NWO (Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research) VIDI project "Cultural Innovation in a Globalising Society", directed by Miguel John Versluys. Last but not least, we are most grateful to Josef Wiesehöfer and the other editors of *Oriens et Occidens* for agreeing to include *Persianism in Antiquity* in this distinguished series.

We dedicate this book to our mentor Professor Henk Versnel, at the occasion of his 80th birthday. Through his teaching and research, Henk has made us uniquely aware of the complexities and ambiguities of cultural dynamics in Antiquity. *Ad multos annos*.

Rolf Strootman (University of Utrecht)
Miguel John Versluys (University of Leiden),
February 2016

FROM CULTURE TO CONCEPT: THE RECEPTION AND APPROPRIATION OF PERSIA IN ANTIQUITY

Rolf Strootman & Miguel John Versluys

The conquest of Persia meant not the conversion of Persia to Islam, but the conversion of Islam to Persianism (Muhammed Iqbal)

INTRODUCTION

In the late 5th-century BCE, the (in)famous Athenian Alkibiades won the first price at the Olympic games with his four-horse chariot. It was the crown on a remarkable career; his triumphant presence in Olympia "was enhanced by a luxurious tent, a gift from the Ephesians, described as 'Persian'".[1] Almost a millennium later, in the second half of the 5th century CE, and in a different part of Eurasia, we hear about a certain Gobazes, king of Lazica, a mountainous country on the south-eastern Black Sea coast. When this local monarch is allowed to visit the Byzantine emperor, Leo I, he shows up, as the *Life of S. Daniel the Stylite* recalls, "dressed in *Persian* attire".[2]

These two examples indicate that the Achaemenid (imperial) model apparently had a strong and long-lasting allure throughout Antiquity. This was not just an idea, an "imaginary Persia" that mattered to poets, philosophers and travel-writers, – from Herodotos to the 19th-century European Orientalists – and that is still with us today.[3] As the examples above show, ideas and associations revolving around concepts of Persia were already strong and indispensable symbolic currency for both the Ephesians *and* Alkibiades; for Gobazes *and* the Byzantine emperor – or that is, at least, what the king of Lazica hoped for and expected. Large parts of post-Achaemenid Antiquity thus perhaps indeed should be characterized as "living in the shadow of Cyrus", as beautifully formulated by Garth Fowden.[4]

This shadow, or, in other words, the *ideas and associations revolving around Persia and appropriated in specific contexts for specific (socio-cultural or political) reasons* we propose to call *Persianism*. This is not to suggest that the strategy of the Ephesians in the 5th century BCE or that of Gobazes in the 5th century CE were identical cultural practices, or that in both cases "Persian" had a similar meaning. On the contrary, Persianism is not to be understood as a monolithic concept. As this book will show, there are many different and differing *Persianisms*. In that

1 Shapiro (2009); Miller and Hölscher (2013), p. 402 for the quotation.

2 Fowden (1993), p. 3–4 with references.

3 The canonisation and development of such ideas, and their relation to one another, is at the core of the field of Imagology, for which see Beller and Leerssen (2007), esp. p. 3–75.

4 Fowden (1993), p. 7.

respect *context* – chronological, topographical and cultural – is key. On the other hand, it seems that it is exactly *through* its appropriation and reworking in these many different and differing contexts over time, that *Persianism* acquired, as it were, its remarkable strength. The epigraph to this essay is a quote from the famous 19th/20th-century scholar, poet and politician Muhammed Iqbal. In his analysis of the spread of Islam, Iqbal refers to the popular view that the conquest of Persia did not have the conversion of Persia to Islam as a result, but on the contrary, the conversion of Islam to (what he calls) *Persianism*.[5] This narrative of how a cultural and spiritual force can ultimately overcome the military might of a conquering power – an allusion to Horace's *Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit*[6] – says a lot about the strength and efficacy of what apparently had become a powerful *socio-cultural imaginary*, an idea so formidable that according to some it was able to transform Islam.[7] To understand this strength and efficacy, it is therefore necessary to study the many different *Persianisms* over a longer period of time and from a wider array of cultural contexts in relation to one another. That is what this volume sets out to do, focusing on the origins of the idea of Persia, in the period of Antiquity.

With regard to the history and archaeology of the Ancient World specifically, the concept of *Persianism* was first used by Miguel John Versluys in the framework of his research on Nemrud Dağı and what was commonly defined as the "Greco-Persian" style and propaganda of its first century BCE ruler Antiochos I of Kommagene.[8] The term promised to be a convenient shorthand to understand various forms of reception of, and references to, the Achaemenid Empire in the Ancient World that are distinct from direct Achaemenid cultural influence. This latter form of interaction in the context of Persian imperialism during the empire's existence (*c*. 550–330 BCE) is commonly known as *Persianization*.[9] A third term that is of relevance here, is *Iranism*, and the related "Idea of Iran", *i.e*., the idea of the political and cultural unity of Greater Iran which was introduced in Late Antiquity by the Sasanian Dynasty as a concept of empire known as Ērānšahr or Ērān (Iran). Broadly speaking, "Iran" is in origin a concept of the eastern Iranian world that later travelled to the west, while "Persia" originally is a Mediterranean and West-Iranian

5 Iqbal (1908), p. 154–155; quoted in Iqbal (1964), p. 82; Sherwani (1977), p. 155.

6 *Epistles* 2.1.156: *Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit et artes intulit agresti Latio*, "Captive Greece conquered her savage victor (*sc*. Rome), and brought the arts into rustic Latium". Iqbal in fact *disapproved* of the alleged Persianization of the Muslim world, as he believed that Persian "mysticism" had destroyed the original virility of Islam. But his indirect allusion to the concept of "Hellenism" hints at an important point to which we will return: the centuries-long, dialectic interaction between *Iranian* constructions of "Persia" (as "self") and *non-Iranian* constructions of "Persia" (as "other" – in both negative and positive colorings, as we will see).

7 For the concept of social imaginary – *sc*. "the creative and symbolic dimension of the social world" (Johnson 1984, p. 6), *i.e*. the basic, collective conception by a large group of people of the world they live in, and carried by shared images, stories, and legends (rather than in a theoretical sense) – see Castoriadis (1975/1987); Taylor (2004); James and Steger (2013).

8 See now extensively Versluys (2016a), elaborating earlier presentations of the concept in Versluys (2012; 2014a; and 2014b). The word has earlier been used in as a shorthand for the adoption of Achaemenid royal style at the Argead court by Paspalas (2005); beyond the field of ancient studies, "Persianism" is sometimes used as a linguistic term.

9 See below, note 39.

concept that travelled to the east, as we will see below. The concept of Persianism thus allows us to study the genesis of the "Idea of Persia/Iran" in both Iranian and non-Iranian historical contexts.

In what follows, we will elaborate on the differences between, and overlaps of, Persianism, Persianization, and Iranism, and outline the position of the present volume towards earlier scholarship to further explain (and problematize) our definition of the concept.

THE LEGACY OF PERSIA IN WORLD HISTORY

Achaemenid Persia was one of the most successful empires of the Ancient World. Like all great empires, the Persian Empire has known an enduring legacy, and remains to this day in the popular imagination of the "West", together with the Roman Empire, the best known and most studied empire of Antiquity – and like the Roman Empire *also* in an ambiguous sense, as e. g. the recent success of the film *300* (Zack Snyder, 2006) demonstrated. In modern Iran, the Achaemenid Empire has been conceived as a cultural predecessor and (moral) point of reference for present-day Iranians. The evocation of Achaemenid grandeur by the last shah, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, at the 2,500 year anniversary of Iranian monarchy at Pasargadae and Persepolis in 1971 is a well-known example of a modern use of the "heritage" of Persia to legitimize power and enhance secular state formation.[10] The Revolution of 1979 removed the Achaemenid past from the heart of official national identity, but the association of modern Iranians with the Ancient Persians survived for the sake of tourism at such sites as Naqš-e Rostam and Persepolis, and among Iranian exile communities in the UK and USA.[11] But there is also a rich positive tradition in the West. Until the eighteenth century, the Achaemenids were mainly associated with the pro-Persian tendencies in the Biblical tradition.[12] Islamic-age "Persia", and the Iranian cultural heritage in general, became in the nineteenth century a considerable focus for scholarship, and a genuine fascination developed in art and literature for what the West came to think of as the highpoint of "Oriental" civilization – a form of appropriation epitomized by Edward FitzGerald's extraordinary popular and influential adaptation of Omar Khayyām's poetry (1859).[13] And like so many other

10 A good overview of Pahlavi secular politics and the ideological uses of a pre-Islamic, *viz.*, Achaemenid heritage is provided by Garthwaite (2007), p. 221–252, with further literature on the modernization of Iran at p. 293–294.

11 More recently there has been a revival of interest in the Achaemenid past in Iran itself, too. Significantly, the ruins of Persepolis and the rock-cut tombs at Naqš-e Rostam in the wake of this development became a popular backdrop for photographs of Iranian women removing their headscarves in the context of "My Stealthy Freedom", a movement initiated in 2014 by the London-based journalist Masih Alinejad, who asked Iranian women to post pictures of themselves on Facebook without the obligatory hijab; the movement attracted considerable attention from the Western media.

12 For the image of the Achaemenids in Ancient Judaism see Gruen (2005), and the contributions by Eckhardt and Fowler to this volume.

13 A process that for now culminates in the *Prince of Persia* franchise (1989–), consisting of a

non-Western cultural imports that were "translated" in the West, the transcultural exchange continuously went forth *and* back.[14]

Of course, this concerns images of Iranian culture during the "medieval", Islamic period: the idea of a "Golden Age of Persia", as it was beautifully evoked, and consistently advocated, above all by the late Richard Frye.[15] However, although the words originally had quite different meanings, "Persia" and "Iran" did become interchangeable terms, in which as a cultural term "Persian" normally is preferred to "Iranian", even though said Golden Age of "*Persia*" (a *western* Iranian region) is associated first of all with eastern Khorāsān, and Central Asia in general, and moreover involves the cultural agency of Arabic- and Turkic-speaking peoples.

This volume is aimed at better understanding the origins of "Persia" as a social imaginary. The idea that the Iranian world under the name of "Persia" is one of the principal civilizational cores in human history, comparable to "Classical Greece" or "China", originated, we argue, in Antiquity in specific Achaemenid and post-Achaemenid contexts. How did Persia develop from the first world empire in history into an even more extensive "empire of the mind", to quote the title of a recent book on the cultural history of Iran?[16] As the title of that book once more shows, the primarily *cultural* idea of "Persia" somehow joined hands with the mostly *geographical* idea of "Iran", a name and a concept that likewise originated in Ancient times. The dialectic cross-fertilization, and ultimately coalescence of "Persia" and "Iran" is another major focus of the present volume.

series of video games, two graphic novels and a Disney movie: though vaguely set in the time of the Sasanian Empire, costume and set design are entirely based on the "Golden Age" of Central Asia, *viz.*, Khorāsān (c. 900–1100 CE), drawing also on the culture of Timurid and Mughal India, to create an imaginary, timeless, and conspicuously non-Muslim "Persia" that is at once Late Medieval and pre-Islamic. On the influence of Khayyām in the West see Biegstrate (2008), with further references.

14 Muhammed Iqbal's rejection of the "Persianization" of Islam (above, n. 5) is a revealing case in point, for the "Persian" mysticism that Iqbal – a native of British India and one of the founding-fathers of the anti-colonial movement in what is now Pakistan – took issue with, was precisely the form of Persianite "Islamic culture" that European, *viz.*, British, scholars and savants appreciated above all. By juxtaposing the feminine spirituality of "Persia" and the alleged strong, "masculine" nature of *original* Islam, Iqbal moreover used western orientalistic stereotype to construct a static "other" in contrast to the modern, regenerated Islamic world that he himself advocated in opposition to British imperialism. For Iqbal's views on tradition and modernity see Mir (2006), p. 123–124, and for the socio-intellectual context Mishra (2012); see Buruma and Margalit (2004) for the subversion of "Western" ideas in anti-colonial discourse, lightly based on Homi Bhabha's notion that (colonial) mimicry, *i.e.* the selective adoption of imperial culture by subalterns, "is at once resemblance and menace" (Bhabha 1994, p. 86). The concept of "decadence", leading to cultural stagnation and moral decline, had already been employed by European historians to construct the degeneration of "despotic" so-called Oriental Monarchies such as the Ottoman Empire or the Achaemenid Empire – as indeed the theme of Persian decadence originates with Herodotos' view that after the establishment of their empire the once-strong Persians became soft and lethargic under influence of the Medes (Redfield 1985). On the theme of Persian decadence see Sancisi-Weerdenburg (1987); Briant (1989a; 2002); Colburn (2011); Lenfant (2001); Llewellyn-Jones (2013); Tuplin (2014).

15 Frye (1988); also see Frye (1962; 1996); Bausani (1962); Axworthy (2008); Starr (2013).

16 Axworthy (2008).

As we already saw, "Persia" as a concept beyond Iran itself has also been used to do something very different, namely to constitute the quintessential (Oriental) Other. The antipathetic views of Persian 'despotism' sometimes expressed by some Greek writers of the Classical period have often been appropriated by European states from the early modern period. Thus Aischylos' play *Persians* was recited – probably in Latin, or perhaps Venetian translation – to the people of Zante (Zakynthos) in 1571 to celebrate the victory against the Ottomans in the Battle of Lepanto (Zante and other Ionian islands had contributed ships to the Christian fleet).[17] During the Greek War of Independence (1821–1832), the Greek-Persian Wars of the early fifth-century BCE were evoked for the sake of "liberating Hellenism from the Ottoman Empire". The Romantic conceptualization of the Christian inhabitants of Ottoman Greece as the racial and spiritual descendants of the Classical Hellenes, was mirrored in the presentation of the Ottomans as the New Persians, in a popular narrative that juxtaposed "Western" freedom and "Oriental" despotism,[18] best known from Byron's famous lines,

> The mountains look on Marathon–
> And Marathon looks on the sea;
> And musing there an hour alone,
> I dream'd that Greece might still be free;
> For standing on the Persians' grave,
> I could not deem myself a slave.[19]

Over the last decades, it has become clear how Orientalistic stereotypes have distorted scholarly views of the Achaemenid Empire itself. Especially in the 1980 s, leading scholars of the so-called New Achaemenid History like Pierre Briant, Amélie Kuhrt and the late Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg questioned the reliability of narrative sources for the Achaemenids written in Greek, such as Herodotos or Xenophon.[20] We will not further discuss the important topic of Hellenocentric bias and Orientalistic "othering" here.[21] We do want to emphasize however that the simultaneous construction of "Persia" as the summit of civilization *and* as the antithesis to the rival civilizational ideal of "Europe" / "the West", has in our time again placed the Ancient Achaemenids central stage in scholarly debates on the dialectics of East-West imagology; specifically in the wake of 9-11 and the War on Terror, the European interpretation of the Greek-Persian wars as a confrontation

17 Rosenbloom (2006), p. 157; Hall (2007).

18 Van Steen (2010); for the use of Classical Antiquity in the construction of national identity in modern Greece see the illuminating studies in Hamilakis (2007).

19 From 'The Isles of Greece', in *Don Juan*, Canto III (1821). It belongs to the tragedy of his last years that according to his own letters and journals, Byron (who was in fact well-acquainted with the *real* Greece), knew better than that. For Byron's attitude towards Greece in his later life Beaton (2013) is now fundamental; still valuable is the down-to-earth, though at times condescending, account by Nicolson (1924).

20 See e. g. Sancisi-Weerdenburg (1987) and the essays collected in Kuhrt and Sancisi-Weerdenburg (1987). On the New Achaemenid History see McCaskie (2012), and Harrison (2011a).

21 For Orientalistic tendencies in modern scholarship concerned with the Achaemenid Empire see Harrison (2011a), p. 91–108; Colburn (2011).

between oppositional “Eastern” and “Western” civilizations obtained a second life in the popular imagination.[22]

Paradoxically, in the course of many centuries Persia also came to be identified with such things as beauty, artistic refinement, sensuality, spirituality, and mysticism. The roots of this civilizational ideal are commonly located in the great empires of Iran’s pre-Islamic past. The evolution of this idea of Persia has been well-studied for post-antique periods.[23] Often it is crystal-clear that we are not dealing with a simple form of cultural continuity, or “authentic tradition”, but rather with reception and appropriation – and therefore partly a form of “invention of tradition”.[24] In his opening speech for the 2,500th anniversary celebrations at Pasargadae, 13 October 1971, Muhammad Reza Shah invoked Cyrus the Great as the founder of the modern nation-state of Iran:

> O Cyrus, Great King, King of kings, Achaemenian King, King of the Land of Iran! I, the Shahanshah of Iran, offer these salutations from myself and from my nation. At this glorious moment in the history of Iran, I and all Iranians, the offspring of the Empire, which thou founded 2,500 years ago, bow our heads before thy tomb. We cherish thy undying memory, at this moment when the new Iran renews its bonds with its proud past […]. [25]

Of course there is a connection between the celebration of empire and dynasty at Persepolis by Darius I and again by Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, about 2,500 years later. But that relationship is different from the one between Darius and, say, his successor Xerxes I. The Pahlavi shahs’ allocation of Iranian origins in pre-Islamic Antiquity is different from the more common forms of retrospective nationalism, with its emphasis on citizenship and territory. The difference, we argue, lies in the development of an universal *idea* of Persia, that later became associated with the Sasanian imperial concept of “Ērānšahr” (see below), and later with the modern Iranian nation-state as it developed under the Qajars (1795–1925),[26] and especially the Pahlavis (1925–1979).[27] In other words, Persia already had an extensive cultural

22 A surge in popularizing accounts of the Greek-Persian Wars framed the battles fought during these wars as defining moments in history that *Saved Western Civilization* (Strauss 2004, on Salamis), *Changed Western Civilization* (Billows 2010, on Marathon), or *Changed the World* (Cartledge 2006, on Thermopylai); consider also Holland 2005, promoting the Greek-Persian wars in his bestselling book *Persian Fire* as essentially a *Battle For the West*. We already mentioned how Zack Snyder employed Orientalistic clichés for narrative and artistic purposes in his 2006 fantasy film *300*; the sequel, *300: Rise of an Empire*, directed by Noam Murro (2014), introduces contemporary political issues more blatantly by equipping the Achaemenid fleet at Salamis with oil tankers and by having suicide terrorists wearing explosive belts attack the Greeks.

23 See e. g. the *Idea of Iran* series published by I. B. Tauris, London, now consisting of 6 volumes.

24 The recent volume edited by Boschung, Busch, Versluys (2015) now takes stock of current theoretical understandings, explores the application of “inventing traditions” for Antiquity, and underlines the importance of the concept for the study of cultural dynamics in the ancient world.

25 Cited from Garthwaite (2007), p. 253. The identification of the so-called Tomb of the Mother of Solomon (where the ceremony took place) with the tomb of Cyrus is uncertain; see Jacobs (2010), p. 91–92.

26 On Qajar uses of the Achaemenid past see Lerner, this volume.

27 The Pahlavi shahs in particular encouraged the creation of a cohesive national identity that

biography prior to the introduction of nationalism in 19th-century Iran. Current debates about the development of Iranian identity have mostly taken a historicizing approach, focusing on the Iranian past and debating in particular whether modern Iranian identity is based on authentic or invented traditions. This is usually referred to as "the Idea of Iran", or as "Iranism". Our concept of "Persianism" takes a broader, more complex view, drawing into the discussion the transmission and adaptation of historical knowledge about "Persia" beyond (Greater) Iran.

To simplify, for Darius and Xerxes, Persia had been a socio-cultural reality: a region (Pārsa) and a locus for dynastic identity. But for the Pahlavi shahs it constituted an "empire of the mind": a *concept* that also many beyond Iran had been familiar with for more than a century.[28]

In addition to the enduring legacy of the historical Achaemenid Empire as the cultural concept of "Persia" – that is, as mnemohistory – the historical social sciences provide us with another reason why the study of Ancient Persia has a relevance that extends far beyond the traditional concerns of Near Eastern philology and archaeology.[29] For the hegemonial system created by the first Persian kings, Cyrus and Kambyses, and maintained by the rulers of the Achaemenid Dynasty who succeeded them, was the first in a sequence of universalistic world empires that dominated the history of Afro-Eurasia until the modern age.[30] The Achaemenid dynasty can be said to have established the organizational and ideological foundations on which various succeeding empires in the same region were built. Moreover, by loosely uniting the crucial central land mass of what Ian Morris aptly called Afro-Eurasia's "lucky latitudes",[31] the Achaemenid dynasty also laid the basis for the

glorified Iran's pre-Islamic past and saw the Achaemenid Empire retrospectively as the direct predecessor of modern Iran, see Vaziri (1993); Fragner (1999); Marashi (2008). There is some irony here, as Gene Garthwaite (2007, p. 229) pointed out: in 1935 Reza Shah decreed that the modern state should no longer be known as "Persia" but as "Iran", while at the same time claiming the ancient civilization commonly known as "Persia" as Iran's cultural foundation.

28 The enormous international prestige of "Persia" is perhaps best demonstrated by the widespread idea that the Cyrus Cylinder, a 6th-century building inscription from Babylon containing rather generic Babylonian monarchical ideology, as the world's first declaration of human rights. A replica of the original Cylinder (which is now in the British Museum, London, with a small piece in the collection of Yale University, New Haven) has long been displayed in the central hall of the United Nations building in New York. On the Cyrus Cylinder and its modern uses see most recently Van der Spek (2014). On the myth of Achaemenid "tolerance" see Harrison (2011a), p. 73–90, and for a crass example of believe in this myth Chua (2009) p. 3–28, cf. Axworthy (2008), p. 15, heaping myth upon myth by explaining the alleged Achaemenid policy of tolerance from "the spirit of moral earnestness and justice" of Zoroastrianism.

29 For the extend of Achaemenid networks and cultural influence beyond the supposed borders of the empire see i.a. Allen (2005); Francfort, Ligabu, and Samashev (2006), p. 125–126; and Pshenichniuk (2006).

30 For empire as the predominant form of political organization in premodern and early modern Afro-Eurasian history see e.g. Darwin (2007); Bang & Bayly (2011). The most extensive recent history of the Achaemenid empire and its institutions is Briant (1996/2002); for recent approaches see the papers collected in *i.a.* Curtis & Tallis 2005; Tuplin (2007); Jacobs & Rollinger (2010); Jacobs & Rollinger (forthcoming).

31 That is, the latitudinal band with the highest agrarian productivity, roughly between 20–35 degrees; see Morris (2011), 81–89.

direct connectivity between the eastern and western extremities of Afro-Eurasia, *sc*. China and the Mediterranean, that would be strengthened during the Hellenistic Period (*c*. 300 BCE–100 CE), and remain the principal artery for global cultural and economic exchanges until the early modern period.

Following on the pioneering work of Josef Wiesehöfer, the recent surge in academic output concerned with Sasanian history by scholars such as Rahim Shayegan, Touraj Daryaee, Richard Payne, and Matthew Canepa, among others, has given the Sasanian Empire a central place in the study of Late Antiquity,[32] and few would still deny the importance for global history of "the other empire" as compared to the Late Antique Mediterranean under Rome and Constantinople.[33] It probably is only a matter of time before Achaemenid studies, too, will free themselves of the curbs imposed by the traditional, Eurocentric concept of the "Near East".[34]

The study of the Achaemenid empire and its legacy therefore is highly relevant from the perspective of global history as well. The recent emphasis in historical and archaeological studies on long-term, global developments – climate change, globalization, migration, economic world systems, and so forth – has shifted scholarly attention away from a Eurocentric view of world history (with its traditional focus on the nation-state and the postcolonial experience) towards non-European forms of imperialism and premodern, Afro-Eurasian processes of globalization and cultural encounters.[35] This book aims to play a role in that important development as well.

FROM PERSIANIZATION TO PERSIANISM

Central to the investigation undertaken in this book and many of the articles, is the question how we should conceptualize the difference between Persianization and Persianism. Studies of the post-antique reception of the Persian Empire are logically more concerned with the *idea* of Persia (concept) than with the first Persian Empire as a historical reality (culture). Studies of the cultural impact of the Achaemenids in Antiquity itself, on the other hand, most often think in terms of straightforward historical continuity alone. We argue, however, that already in Antiquity the idea of Persia plays an important role with all kinds of cultural and political developments. Various post- (or even *circum*-) Achaemenid contexts seem to have been able to construct their own "Persia", resulting in many different, sometimes even conflicting or incoherent, "Persias". What we put forward as a hypothesis, on the basis of

32 See e. g. Canepa (2009); Daryaee (2009); Shayegan (2011); Payne (2015).

33 Rome and Persia are now often discussed in tandem, particularly in the context of "the end of Antiquity", *sc*. the rise of Islam; see e. g. Greatrex (1998); Howard-Johnston (2006); Dignas and Winter (2007); Fisher (2011).

34 The present trend in emphasizing "Near Eastern" influences on the "West" of course does not help to deconstruct the essentialistic view of a bounded, amorphous "Near East", as opposed to the alleged "Classical" cultures (a term that has been all but abandoned by historians and archaeologists concerned with the Ancient Mediterranean; cf. Strootman (MS).

35 For current trends in history see Armitage and Guldi (2014). For Ancient History also see the papers collected in Pitts and Versluys (2015).

the overview that the papers in this book provide, is that it was particularly in the Hellenistic and early Roman Eastern Mediterranean and Near East that the idea of Persia fully developed as a more or less coherent concept.

From the second century BCE, a varied cultural habitus developed that can be described as Persianistic as it revolves around the appropriation of an idealized past through the re-use or invention of imagery and ideas associated with the Achaemenid past. At the heart of Persianism therefore is the concept of cultural memory – that is, the deliberate construction of meaningful common knowledge of an historical period, often for political, or other socio-cultural, purposes[36] – and Jan Assmann's dictum that the past is constantly "modeled, invented, reinvented, and reconstructed by the present."[37]

The Achaemenid "revival" of the late Hellenistic period took place especially among former Seleukid vassal dynasties in western Iranian lands such as Pontos, Kappadokia, Armenia, and Kommagene. Here kings like Mithradates VI of Pontos or Antiochos I of Kommagene claimed descent from Achaemenid ancestors. How was in these kingdoms knowledge of the Achaemenid Empire transmitted, translated, excerpted, interpreted, rewritten, re-imagined and represented? It is remarkable that the Arsakids of Parthia, even though they controlled the Iranian Plateau after *c*. 150 BCE, and had access to Persepolis and the rock reliefs at Bīsotūn (to which they added several more reliefs themselves), seemed not very knowledgeable of the Achaemenids or interested in an Achaemenid revival. Could the difference be that the western rulers, who often were (or at least claimed to be) of mixed Macedonian-Iranian descent, had better access to Classical Greek writings on Persia than the post-Seleukid rulers in Iran itself?

It is through the continuous appropriation, reception studies have taught us, that there (slowly) develops some core understanding of what the idea of "Persia" would be in a long-term process of canonization. It is important to realize that this process started already in Antiquity itself from the moment that the Persian Empire emerged to play its remarkable historical role on the Mediterranean and Near Eastern stage. Culture and concept may overlap, as we will continue to stress below. Margaret C. Miller has shown throughout her important work, and in her contribution to the present volume, that "Persia" was already in part a deliberate construct from the heartland, Pārsa, *sc*. the hybrid dynastic identity of the Achaemenid family; in part it was dependent upon local patterns of reception. The "Persian" fashion in Athens after the Persian Wars, called "Perserie" by Miller (a variant of the Turquerie and Chinoiserie of eighteenth-century Europe) has been well studied by her and others.[38]

There exists, however, no long-term study of the idea of Persia, what we perhaps should call the *cultural memory* of Persia, and its contextual appropriations in Antiquity. Most scholars understand the relations between the Achaemenid Empire, its neighbors and its successors in the Ancient World in terms of acculturation and cultural tradition: what can be characterized as *Persianization*. The concept of *Per-*

36 For the concept of 'cultural memory' see Assmann (1992).

37 Assmann (1997), p. 9.

38 See e. g. Miller (1997; 2010).

sianization has been defined as the cultural influence of Achaemenid Persia on other peoples and cultures resulting in the selective adoption of Persian cultural traits.[39] *Persianization*, thus, is a (specific) form of acculturation. *Persianism* is something different and implies that there is a certain distance, in time and/or space, between the Persian Empire as a historical reality and Persia as a concept or idea. *Persianism* thus differs from *Persianization* in that it is less a response to the Achaemenid Empire as a political reality but rather the post- (or *circum*-)Achaemenid construction of cultural memory in the context of new and varied political and cultural contexts (e. g. the collapse of the Seleukid Empire in the later second century BCE or new cultural encounters in the Roman Mediterranean and Near East). Of course, as already underlined above, Persianism will have been in part informed by, and itself will have influenced, ongoing processes of Persianization. There may well have been functioning Persianisms within the Persian Empire itself – "Persianisms from the heart", to speak with Margaret Cool Root.[40] At the same time, the diffusion of Persian cultural traits may stretch over time when they have taken the form of a genuine "Persian tradition": "going Persian" is in itself a form of cultural formation, and thus there is indeed overlap between Persianization and Persianism. However, it may still be useful to try and distinguish between what most often are very different cultural processes. Studying Persianism therefore is not only important to better understand Persianization in Antiquity but also to understand the "birth" and the first and formative phase of that remarkable long and still enduring fascination with the idea of "Persia".

Focusing on *Persianism* therefore implies that we should reserve, in our interpretations, much more room for the fact that *continuity is a historical product* and that antiquity mattered greatly in Antiquity.[41] We thus propose to use the term "Persianism" to show how the boundaries between culture and concept, between tradition and invented tradition, or between continuity and appropriation often are far less clear-cut than we are inclined to think. This is a pivotal point. As we already pointed out, the appropriation of concepts is in itself a form of cultural formation. What matters about traditions is not the question whether they are real or invented, from our (-etic) perspective, but rather whether they are *perceived* as real and genuine by the community in question (-emic). In that respect there indeed is only a thin

39 Brosius (2010). Cf. the critical remarks by Tuplin (2010). For imperial-local interactions in the Achaemenid Empire Dusinberre (2003) is fundamental, cf. Katchadourian (2012); Colburn and Hughes (2010). It is particularly for the Anatolian province that archaeologists have been trying to make sense of the interplay between "Greek", local and "Persian" cultural styles, see e. g. Nollé (1992); Summers (1993); Miller (1997); Lintz (2008); Summerer (2008); Kaptan (2013); Katchadourian (2013); Dusinberre (2015); Nieswandt and Salzman (2015); and Briant (2015). Recent studies of cultural interactions in the Hellenistic Near East and Central Asia have suggested that powerful individuals and social groups selectively adopted elements of court culture to construct and negotiate their position *vis*-à-*vis* the (Seleukid or Ptolemaic) empire, and something similar may be envisaged for local styles in the Achaemenid world (see now the excellent treatment by Colburn 2013).

40 Cool Root (1991).

41 Sahlins (2000). For the past in the past see Ker & Pieper (2014); Porter (2006); Marincola, Llewellyn-Jones, Maciver (2012).

line separating what an individual in Antiquity understood as Persianization and what we, from our 21st century scholarly perspective, might define as Persianism. As Richard Gordon underlines in his contribution to this volume: Roman-period 'mystagogues' "exploiting" (in our terms!) the alleged Persian origin of Mithras probably thought of themselves as continuing and affirming a genuine tradition they had inherited. Here Persianization and Persianism meet – even centuries after the fall of the Achaemenid Empire itself.

We believe such debates to be crucial for a proper understanding of the cultural dynamics taking place, but we hope to show with this volume that we can only engage in these debates if Persianism is recognized as an important historical phenomenon and acquires a place of its own in research agendas for (post-) Achaemenid Antiquity and the development of the modern "idea of Persia/Iran". So far that has explicitly not been the case, as to date Persianization remains the overarching concept to understand the "diffusion" of Persian elements. In studying the "Persian legacy" in the post-Achaemenid Near East and Iran in particular, scholars have rarely made use of a reception-studies approach and concepts such as collective (cultural) memory or invention of tradition. Instead, they seem to reason, often implicitly, in terms of diffusion, tradition and acculturation: "things Persian" in the Hellenistic, Roman and Parthian Near East would have something to do with Persia, with Persians (in diaspora or not), or with things "originally Persian".[42] Even for areas not overlapping with what once was the Achaemenid Empire, such a framework of interpretation often prevails. This is why we emphatically think in terms of an *ongoing* process of appropriation and transculturation, thus building into our model of Persianism the element of (re-)assimilation of western ideas about Persia in the Iranian east, and *vice versa*.

The scholarly debate on the "Persian" god Mithras provides a significant example.[43] Our evidence for the cult of the Old-Persian deity Mithrā in the Middle East ends in the fourth century BCE, as this god apparently was somehow linked to the Achaemenid monarchy. From the Flavian period onwards, after a period of 400 years, Mithra becomes popular once again, but now in the Mediterranean, in the form of the well-known Roman deity Mithras. What can we say about the relation between the Persian god Mithrā and the Roman god Mithras? Reasoning in terms of diffusion presupposes some kind of direct link between the Persian and the Roman Mithra(s) and many scholars have intensively searched for precisely that. Thus far, however, no evidence has been brought to light that there indeed was a Hellenistic phase connecting the Old-Persian Mithrā and Roman Mithras.[44] A reception studies

42 De Jong, this volume.

43 See Gordon (2007) and his contribution to this volume.

44 Indeed, the first appearance of a post-Achaemenid "Mithra" takes place only after the collapse of the Seleukid Empire, centuries later, and not in Iran: on Mount Nemrut, the god, though ostensibly presented as "Persian" in the accompanying Nomos Inscription, is dressed in contemporaneous local (Armenian?) attire and associated with the Seleukid patron deity Apollo-Helios (see Jacobs, this volume). See also Hollard (2010), arguing that in the 4th century the Sasanians adopted Roman Sol-Mithra as Iranian Mithrā after the defeat of Julian the Apostate in 363.

approach in terms of Persianism might therefore be more useful in understanding the Roman Mithras. It will redirect our attention to the contemporaneous *use* of the idea Persia in the context of contemporaneous Mithraism. This will also raise a new and perhaps more fruitful question: *why* did people in the second-century Roman Mediterranean find it important to (re-)invent such a tradition and claim that the deity they worshiped was in fact "Persian"?

It will always remain difficult for us to establish whether from the perspective of the people involved they themselves were, so to speak, practicing Persianization or Persianism (see above), or perhaps both. Both concepts date back to Achaemenid times itself. What we now call Persianization – the adoption of selected cultural traits associated by contemporaries with the Achaemenid Empire, viz., the Achaemenid court – has been well attested in the archaeological record, particularly in western Asia Minor.[45] After the Greco-Persian Wars, Greek writers used the word "Medism" (μηδισμός) pejoratively for non-Persians working together with the empire and adopting the (luxurious) customs of Medes and Persians in clothing and behavior (*mēdízein*, *μηδίζειν*).[46] This indicates that already in Antiquity there was an awareness of Persia as a *cultural* concept.[47]

PERSIANISM AND THE MNEMOHISTORY OF ANTIQUITY

The best illustration, perhaps, of the importance of distinguishing between Persianization and Persianism is to draw into the discussion a comparable paring of concepts: *Hellenization* and *Hellenism*. Debates on their meaning have clearly shown that where the majority of scholarship until recently used to think in terms of *Hellenization*, *sc*. the unidirectional flow from a (superior) sender culture to a receiving culture, the employment of *Hellenism* to understand what is "Greek" in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds might be more appropriate. "Hellenism" in recent scholarship has transformed from a term associated with the modern notion of "Classical" Greece, or even with European imperialism and colonialism, into a *non-ethnic* cultural term. In studies dealing with the culture of the Hellenistic Near East and Central Asia, the prevailing notion that non-Greek populations and Greek newcomers remained distinct from each other, emphasizing the *continuity* of "Oriental" culture, have been given up in favor of more complex models of interactions in which cultures are no longer seen as bounded, static entities.[48]

45 For an overview of "provincial Achaemenid archaeology" see Katchadourian (2013).

46 Consult Graf (1984) for the uses and meaning of these words, with Graf (1979); cf. Fowler, this volume.

47 See the contributions by Almagor and Fowler to this volume. Also see Kaptan (2013).

48 There is a vast body of recent literature. "Indigenous" resistance to Hellenization is emphasized by e. g. Eddy (1962) and Will (1985). Kuhrt and Sherwin-White (1987); Briant (1990); Aperghis (2008); Briant and Joannès (2009); and Dihle (2009) emphasize the resilience of Near Eastern traditions. Recent approaches more often see the development of Hellenistic-period "Greekness" as a series of complex changes rather than linear continuity or bipolar cultural interaction, emphasizing the agency of specific social groups within societies, see e. g. Ma (2003); Kouremenos, Chandrasekaran, Rossi (2011); Stavrianopoulou (2013); Mairs (2013); Naerebout

As underlined above, it is exactly that perspective – of *Persianism* (the appropriation of a concept) as opposed to *Persianization* (an acculturation process) – that this book seeks to explore. There is much to say about the fact that where Hellenism is now commonly understood as something of a "global glue" holding the Hellenistic and Roman worlds together, as a term (or concept) Persianism did not even exist. This, of course, has to do with the fact that from the early modern period scholars and intellectuals in western Eurasia have constructed Greece as their main point of historical reference. The overview provided by the present volume will show, however, that in the eastern parts of western Eurasia and in central Eurasia this was rather different. Places where Hellenism and Persianism meet, therefore, like the temple-tomb of Antiochos I on Nemrud Dağı, are of special importance for our project, as they might provide clues about the meanings of Hellenism and Persianism in relation to one another.[49] This is not to say, however, that Persianism and Hellenism are functioning in a similar way or would even be comparable concepts in terms of character and content.

The Persianistic self-presentation of Mithradates VI Eupator, the iconographical program of Antiochos I of Kommagene, or the quasi-traditional coin images and titulature of the *fratarakā* rulers of Persis bear witness to this development: they all seem to construct an Achaemenid identity for these dynasties but in all cases this takes place in a Seleukid, or post-Seleukid political context.[50] These "Persianisms" perhaps were first and foremost political cultures, connected with dynastic identity, as Matthew Canepa and Rolf Strootman stress in their contributions to this volume. However, as Canepa also argues, "[Persianism] shared with Hellenism its capacity to provide an open, encompassing space", apparently because several interest groups were able (or felt the need) to relate to the concept. What matters to us in aligning them is to stress that we are dealing, in both cases less with history than with mnemohistory.[51] This also allows us to compare the phenomenon we study in a wider, comparative perspective, because besides Persianism and Hellenism there are other important imaginaries constituting the Ancient World, for instance Egyptianism.[52]

(2014); Honigman (2014); and Strootman (2007; 2014a). Recently, studies have also focused on the uses and changing meanings of Greekness *after* the Hellenistic period, see e. g. Swain (1996); Török (2005); Kaldellis (2007); Zacharia (2008).

49 This is why Versluys (2016a) sees Nemrud Dağı as a key to understand the late Hellenistic world (which covers large parts of both western and central Eurasia) – and why in discussions during the conference Kommagene was referred to constantly. We are very grateful to Bruno Jacobs, who could not be present in Istanbul, for contributing a paper dealing with Kommagene and questions of Hellenism and Persianism.

50 See Canepa, Lerouge-Cohen and Strootman in this volume; cf. Strootman (2015a).

51 For this concept see Assmann (1992).

52 A concept explored by M.J. Versluys in several recent publications (Versluys 2010; 2012a; 2013; 2015b; 2016b).

TERMINOLOGY: FROM PERSIA TO IRAN AND BACK AGAIN

Before concluding this introduction, a few words on terminology and etymology are in order, to clarify the uses of the words "Persia(n)" and "Iran(ian)", among others. The key term in this book obviously is Persia, as this is the name by which the modern world commonly knows one of the most successful empires of the Ancient World: the Achaemenid Empire (*c*. 550–330 BCE). "Persia" however can be used to describe various things, and its meanings often shifted in the course of history. To begin with etymology, Latin "Persia" is derived from the Greek toponym "Persis" (Περσίς), which in turn is a cognate exonym of Old Persian "Pārsa", a highland region in the southwest of the vast Iranian Plateau.[53] Ancient Pārsa (modern Fārs) today is a province of approximately the size of New York State or modern Greece, but its Ancient outlines are imprecise.[54]

The empire was created through the conquests of Cyrus (from Gr. Kyros / OP Kūruš; r. 559–530 BCE), the "King of Anšan", and his son, Kambyses (Kambūǰiya; r. 530–522). "Achaemenid" is a modern designation for the dynasty that came to power with the usurper Darius I (Dareios/Dārayava(h)uš; r. 521–486 BCE), and goes back to a name first used on the trilingual imperial inscription of Darius I at Bīsotūn, where the king is described as descendent from a Hakhāmaniš (Gr. Achaimenes), and as an "Achaemenian" (DB-OP § 1–2).[55] Cyrus and Kambyses are sometimes seen as constituting a separate dynasty, called "Teispid" by some;[56] the matter is of little significance, as Darius himself in his self-presentation emphasizes dynastic continuity and no profound changes in monarchical style or imperial practice took place – only the political center of gravity shifted from Media to Elam and the Pārsa highland.[57]

53 The name Pārsa is first recorded in the third millennium as the Old-Assyrian toponym *Parahše*, which in the Late-Assyrian and Babylonian forms *Parsumaš*/*Parsua* designate a region and a people in the Middle Zagros mountains, roughly corresponding to Media (now Hamadān Province); the name later became attached to the country known to the Greeks as Persis, modern Fārs, perhaps because the Parsumaš people migrated to the south and took the name with them; see De Planhol (1999); Rollinger (1999). See also Graf (1984) for Cyrus' possible connections to Media.

54 On the Ancient country of Pārsa and its (elusive) boundaries consult Wiesehöfer (1994b), p. 11–22, and (1999); Rollinger (1999); for a detailed overview of the geography and archaeology of Pārsa see recently Henkelman (2012).

55 For commentary, references and translation (of the Babylonian version), consult Kuhrt (2007), p. 141–157.

56 Darius' relationship with Cyrus is indistinct at best; moreover, in the early 1970 s it was shown by Lambert (1972) and Reiner (1973) that Anšan was in fact a site known as Tall-e Malyan, an Elamite city in the border region between lowland Elam and highland Pārsa (Potts 2005). However, though Old Persian and Elamitic are distinct languages, the two regions are now thought to have been to a considerable degree integrated in other aspects of culture, including religion (Carter 1994; Potts 1999; Briant 2002, p. 13–27; Henkelman 2003 and 2008, cf. 2011 for a discussion of Cyrus' connections with Elam and Elamite culture).

57 Jacobs (2010), p. 93, with Graf (1984) for the transition from "Medes" to "Persians". A sharp break in royal style between Cyrus/Cambyses and Darius, *viz*. a transition from a "pagan" to an exclusive Zoroastrian religious affinity, as has been posited by philologists in the past, is no

Narrative accounts of Achaemenid history are provided by several contemporaneous Greek authors from the empire's periphery, including Herodotos and Xenophon. They do not consider the Persian Empire to even remotely resemble a state. Rather they refer to the conquest clan associated with the dynasty: an inner group within the mostly Iranophone "ethno-classe dominante" of Pierre Briant,[58] initially known as the "Medes" (Μῆδοι, from OP Māda) but since the reign of Darius I mainly as the "Persians" (Πέρσαι).[59] This probably reflects an empire-wide practice that is first attested on the Bīsotūn Inscription, where the troops and individual nobles fighting for Darius are described as "Persian". In a similar type of text, the trilingual "Daivā" Inscription, Darius' successor Xerxes I proclaims:

> I am Xerxes, the Great King, King of Kings, king of countries containing many kinds of people, king in this great earth far and wide, son of King Darius, an Achaemenian, a Persian, son of a Persian, an Aryan, of Aryan stock.[60]

In addition to "the Persians", Greek sources simply speak of the "Great King" (βασιλεὺς βασιλέων) to denote the Achaemenid imperial presence in Europe and Asia – a rather accurate rendering not only of the Achaemenids' self-presentation as universal rulers,[61] but also of the actual centrality of the dynastic household within the intricate, ever-shifting network of reciprocal allegiance and protection that was the essence of the empire. In sum, in both official dynastic representation and contemporaneous historiographical writings, "Persian" is a socio-cultural term describing the dynasty, the central imperial elite and the core of the army; and in both cases "Persian" stands out as the key term to denote the Achaemenid imperial project.

The nature of this "Persian" culture however is difficult to grasp. It likely was much more than simply the sum of Pārsa and Elam. If anything, Achaemenid imperial style is selectively eclectic, as the rhetoric of the great inscriptions, the visual style of the reliefs, and the architecture of the major sites in the Persian heartland deliberately incorporate elements also known from Iranian, Elamite, Babylonian, Urartian, Anatolian, and Aegean *local* contexts to create a global and thus truly

longer tenable; see Jacobs (2010), esp. p. 93–94. The legitimacy of Darius' succession is still an open question; on this debate see Rollinger (1998); Tuplin (2005).

58 Briant (1988).

59 Graf (1984).

60 XPh § 2 = lines 6–13; transl. Schmitt (2000), p. 88–95. The OP version of XPh has been preserved on two slabs from Persepolis and one from Pasargadai, in addition to a Babylonian and fragmentary AE version, both from Persepolis. The significance of "Aryan" (OP *ariyā-*, precursor of MP Ērān), remains on open questions, though it seems likely that "Aryan" on this and two other early Achaemenid texts is no more than an ethnic label for the Iranophone people from the Pārsa region who constituted the core of Darius' and Xerxes' *Gefolgschaft*, and who appear to have based their identity on a shared narrative of nomadic origins and migration.

61 On both the Bīsotūn Inscription and the "Daivā" Inscription the empire is presented as the sum of the peoples inhabiting the known world (DB § 6–8; XPh § 3), and in typically imperial fashion is identified with the whole (civilized) "earth" (*būmi*), cf. Hdt. 7.8 and see Herrenschmidt (1976); the universality of Darius' and Xerxes' kingship is emphasized also by their use of the imperial titles King of Kings (OP *xšâyaθiyânâm xšâyaθiya*) and Great King (OP *vazraka xšâyaθiya*).

imperial style.[62] The imperial inscriptions make use of Old Persian, Elamitic, and Babylonian, while Aramaic is usually seen as the empire's "administrative" language in which orders were issued to governors and other military commanders.[63] The god Ahuramazda (meaning "Wise Lord") is presented on the royal inscriptions as a dynastic tutelary deity of sorts from the reign of Darius, but the once-popular assumption that the Achaemenids therefore were devout Zoroastrians, and that they propagated an empire-wide, proto-monotheistic "religious policy" is no longer widely accepted.[64] In other words, though originally associated with a "conquest clan" of Iranophone nobles from Pārsa and the Middle Zagros, "Persian" culture for the Achaemenids above all seems to have been a "political culture", *viz.*, a form of *dynastic identity* emanating from the dynastic household. Like the later, "Greek" culture of the Seleukid and Ptolemaic courts, "Persian" imperial identity was simultaneously multi-ethnic *and* linked to a specific land and culture: the vaguely delineated country of Pārsa, where since the reigns of Darius and Xerxes the principal dynastic centers and sanctuaries were located, and which in due time would become the geographical nucleus of Sasanian dynastic identity.[65]

"Iran" derives from "Aryan", an ethnic term of sorts that was sometimes used in the writings of Ancient Iranophone peoples as a reference to their own identity. The word first appears as OP *ariya-*, on three inscriptions of Darius and Xerxes from the early 5th century BCE.[66] Its meaning however remains an open question – and a source of controversy.[67] In the early Achaemenid texts, *ariyā-* probably was not yet a *Gesamtname* for the Iranian Plateau or the empire, let alone evidence for a pan-Iranian consciousness,[68] and scholars may have overemphasized the significance of the rare occurrence of this term in the time of Darius and Xerxes only.[69] Later variants and uses are too divergent to allow generalizing statements before the early 3rd century CE, when the Sasanians began using the names Ērān and especially Ērānšahr to denote the territorial extend of their empire.[70] This usage, too, has its own controversies. According to Gnoli in his seminal essay on *The Idea of Iran*, Ērān/Ērānšahr as a geographical term was an innovation initiated by the Sasani-

62 Nylander (1970); Cool Root (1979); Seidl (1994); Boardman (2000); Talebian (2008); Roaf (2010); Colburn (2013). An older use of "eclectic" in this context as a pejorative term to deny the Achaemenid cultural agency – found e. g. in Schlumberger (1969), p. 217–218 – has been all but abandoned. For "eclecticism" as a form of cultural innovation see Versluys 2016a.

63 Gzella (2010), cf. Folmer (1995). See however Tavernier (2008), drawing attention to the essentially multilingual character of Achaemenid communication, as also local languages, *viz.*, professional translators, were employed, and Elamite was preferred to Aramaic for record keeping at the dynastic centers; cf. Henkelman (2008), p. 86–89, for an inventory of the languages used in the Persepolis Fortification Archives.

64 See the summary of recent discussions by Colburn (2011), p. 89.

65 For "Hellenicity" as imperial culture in the Macedonian empires see Strootman (2014a; 2016a), and for the Sasanian revival of Achaemenid *lieux de mémoire* Canepa (2010).

66 DNa, DSe, and XPh.

67 For discussions see *i.a.* Gnoli (1994; 2002); Kellens (2005); Rossi (2010) and Rossi (forthc.).

68 Gnoli (2002), p. 86 n. 17, following Geiger (1882).

69 See Tuplin (2005), 226.

70 In this volume, the idea of Ērānšahr is discussed by Daryaee and Wiesehöfer; also see Wiesehöfer (1986); Canepa (2010); Daryaee (2010); Payne (2013).

ans; Gnoli moreover argued that the Sasanians in creating the notion of Ērān(šahr) appealed to the Achaemenids through their associations with the quasi-mythical Kayanids and the addition of their own monumental imprint the Achaemenid imperial sites at Bīsotūn and Naqš-e Rostam.[71]

The Sasanian idea of Ērān above all was an imperial concept, as it conceptualized the empire (Ērānšahr) as peaceful and united, surrounded by a barbaric, chaotic periphery (Anērān) that is to some extend controlled by the Sasanians. The concurrence of the (civilized) world and the (imagined) world empire characterizes also other universalistic empires of the Ancient World.[72] Sasanian Ērān(šahr) was not primarily an ethnic construct as also non-Iranians were included in its pretensions.[73] The real innovation was, that in contrast to most other empires the geographical extend of Ērānšahr was rather well-defined, as expressed e. g. in the Middle Persian text *Šahrestānīha ī Ērānšahr*, in which the empire coincides more or less with the Iranian Plateau.[74] This area was known in Hellenistic times as the "Upper Satrapies", and a Seleukid origin of the geographical concept Ērān should not a priori be excluded.[75]

Already in Parthian times, the idea of "Persia" became obsolete in the lands to the east of the Zagros, surviving only as a provincial name, and under the Sasanians was given up in favor of the new idea of "Iran". The Achaemenid "Persians", however, had a long and varied afterlife in the Hellenistic Near East and the Roman Mediterranean. At our conference in Istanbul, it became increasingly clear how

71 Gnoli (1989). The idea that the Sasanians tried to recreate the Achaemenid Empire, as suggested by Yarshater (1971; 1983), has incited thunderous disagreements among scholars because only Greco-Roman sources of Late Antiquity *explicitly* link the Sasanians to the Achaemenids; for this discussion see e. g. Wiesehöfer (1986); Roaf (1988); Huyse (2002); Kettenhofen (2002); Börm (2008); Briant (2009). See now the take on this old problem by Shayegan (2011), who argues that the Sasanian engagement with the Achaemenid past was a response to Roman expansion in the east; see further Canepa (2010); Shayegan (2008; 2012). As Daryaee in this volume emphasizes, Sasanian cultural memory of the Achaemenids does not necessarily have to be historically correct, but can also take the form of a mythical past prior to the coming of Alexander, whose appearance, in the *Šāh-nāma*, marks the transition from mythical to historical time. The bibliography for Alexander (Aleksandar/Eskandar) in Iranian traditions is extensive; for the cultural memory of Darius III in particular see Briant (2003/2015).

72 Liverani (1979) is still valuable for his analysis of this ideology. For universalism as characteristic of premodern empires see Bang (2012); Strootman (2014b). Specifically Sasanian was the reference to Avestan cosmology implied in the appellation 'Iranian' (ēr), which, in the words of Payne (2013), p. 6, "evoked the sacred history of those who had promoted the struggle of Ohrmazd, Zoroastrianism's good deity, against the evil Ahreman, under the tutelage of Iranian kings from creation to the present." For the Zoroastrian dimension of the Ērān-Anērān dualism see Gnoli (1993) and Shaked (2008), and for the place of Ahreman/Angra Mainyu in post-Achaemenid Iranian religions see Duchesne-Guillemin 1981.

73 See Payne (2015), p. 23–58, arguing persuasively against "the myth of Zoroastrian intolerance".

74 Daryaee (2002); on the boundaries of Ērānšahr see Daryaee, this volume. For the ambiguous position of the Roman Empire in Sasanian imperial cosmology see Canepa 2009, Wiesehöfer (2005), and Wiesehöfer, this volume.

75 For the structural misrepresentation and underestimation of Seleukid influence on Iran in current historiography see Strootman (2011b).

crucial the Hellenistic period, and especially the Seleukid Empire, was for the development of Achaemenid cultural memory in both east and west. While the first Seleukid kings encouraged a *damnatio memoriae* of the Achaemenids,[76] their imperial rivals, the Ptolemies, presented themselves as the champions of civic freedom by equating their enemies, the Seleukids, with the Achaemenids.[77] Perhaps in response to the Ptolemaic and later Roman presentation of the Seleukid east as a new Persian Empire, also a positive cultural memory of the Persians developed when several dynasties in Anatolia and Armenia created dynastic identities in which the Achaemenids were explicitly evoked as precursors and ancestors; the Greek historiographical tradition may have played a significant role in the construction of this cultural memory, as several contributors to this volume suggest.[78]

The 5th-century BCE Greek image of the Achaemenids as aggressive despots aiming at world conquest was revived also by the Romans in the context of their war against Antiochos III, from 191 to 188 BCE. This war began when the Seleukid "Great King" invaded Greece, claiming to be the champion of Greek freedom: by presenting the Seleukids as the New Persians, the Romans created a counter-narrative in which they themselves became the liberators of Greece from Asian oppression; this is also the context in which the Romans first appropriated the memory of Alexander, and gave him the title of The Great in response to Antiochos III's assumption of that title.[79] Similar imagery was later also used against Mithradates VI of Pontos and against Rome's Parthian enemies. The Roman-Parthian peace treaty of 20 BCE spurred the development of a new image of the Arsakid kings of Parthia, this time derived from the image of the later Achaemenids as decadent and impotent despots in the Greek *Persika* literature of the 4th century BCE.[80] the Parthian realm was thereby redefined "as an *alter orbis*, a degenerate world whose conquest was undesirable for Rome".[81] In the first half of the 3rd century CE, yet another cultural memory of the Persians was highlighted by the Romans, when the emperors Septimius Severus, Caracalla and Severus Alexander sought support for their campaigns against the Arsakids and the first Sasanians by evoking Alexander's invasion of the Achaemenid Empire. As Shayegan has argued, the Sasanians

76 Strootman (2013a); for the early Seleukids' attitude to the Achaemenids Plischke, this volume.

77 Funck (1996); also see Agut-Labordère in this volume.

78 See Canepa, Lerouge-Cohen, and Strootman in this volume.

79 Strootman (2016a), cf. Overtoom (2013) on Polybios' favorable comparison of Roman hegemony with Alexander's empire. For the Roman image of Antiochos as an "Oriental" king see Flamerie de Lachapelle (2012), cf. *id.* (2010), and for the Roman appropriation of Alexander in general Spencer (2002); Kühnen (2008).

80 Shayegan (2011), p. 334–340, and Almagor, this volume.

81 Shayegan (2011), p. 340; cf. Gregoratti (2013). For the representation of the "Oriental" other in Augustan visual culture see Schneider (1998; 2007), with Lerouge-Cohen (2007) for a full discussion of the Greco-Roman image of the Parthians; for the image of Parthian "decadence" in the age of Trajan see Almagor (2014) and Almagor in this volume. For the underlying image of the Achaemenids in the Persika genre as a fascinating rather than dangerous "other" consult Llewellyn-Jones (2012) and Lenfant (2014), cf. Lenfant (2011), Burstein (2010).

responded to Roman anti-Persian propaganda by developing a positive counter-narrative of "Achaemenid revival".[82]

Another important form of Hellenistic Persianism, is the image of the Achaemenids as liberators and protectors of the Jews, as it developed in Judaism – discussed in this volume by Eckhardt – and subsequently became part of Christian traditions, too.[83] As a result, a positive view of the Achaemenids probably was widespread common knowledge in the Roman Near East, including Arabia, by the time of the Arab conquests in the 7th century CE. Though the conversion of Iranian peoples to Islam was a slow and complex process,[84] the Arab conquest of the Iranian Plateau had the immediate effect of the substitution of the name "Iran" by "Persia",[85] and the amalgamation of western Persianism with the Sasanian idea of Iran. The discontinuity of Iran first of all was connected with the fact that this was a name for the Sasanian Empire (as Ērān/Ērānšahr), and the Sasanian Empire had been overrun by the Arabs.[86] But that does not explain the new prominence of that old appellation "Persia". To understand the abrupt transition, Sarah Bowen Savant in an important 2008 article, followed by a book-length study in 2013, associated the preference for "Persia" with the western origins of Islam: in the Roman part of the Middle East, "Persia" had remained the dominant word for Jews, Christians and ultimately Muslims, and the introduction of this word on the Iranian Plateau, Savant argues, was one of several strategies employed by the new, Arabic-speaking rulers to replace existing identities focused on the Sasanian Dynasty by a new identity focused on Islam.[87] Thus, a cultural memory of the Achaemenids imported from beyond Iran may have profoundly influenced Iranian identity during the first five centuries of Islam, and thoroughly ingrained the idea of Persia in the collective memory of populations east of the Zagros.

The name Iran returned once again after the Mongol conquest in the 13th century, when the rulers of the Il-Khanate revived the Sasanian idea of Iran's political and cultural centrality.[88] Ferdowsi's *Šāh-nāma*, the *Book of Kings*, was an important focus of these Irano-Mongol cultural politics: it was in the Il-Khanate era that

82 Shayegan (2011), p. 340–349, cf. p. 361–368, for comparable views of the Sasanians as the New Persians during Julian the Apostate's campaigns in the east, a century later, and Börm (2007) for the Roman image of the Sasanian enemy in the age of Justinian. See also Almagor and Sommer in this volume. Also see Daryaee 2007, arguing that the Sasanians promoted a positive image of Darius III (Dārā) to counter Severus Alexander's *imitatio Alexandri*, and finally assimilated also Alexander (Iskandar) himself. For the image and memory of Darius III see Briant (2003/2015).

83 The image of the Persian kings as liberators may for a significantly degree have been based on the Macedonian (Argead, Seleukid, Ptolemaic) self-presentation as liberators from Persian 'suppression'; see Strootman (forthcoming) and Agut-Labordère, this volume.

84 Bulliet (1979), p. 18–19; De la Vaissière (2008); cf. Savant (2013), p. 4–5 with n. 7.

85 Savant (2008).

86 Wiesehöfer (1996), p. xi–xii, suggesting that the name Ērān may have become politically suspect under the new rulers; also see Shahbazi (2005), p. 106; Savant (2013), p. 5–12.

87 Savant, (2008), p. 76.

88 For the Iranian revival under the Il-Khanate see Krawulsky (1978) and Krawulsky (1989), 113–130; also see Kennedy (2009), suggesting that the Il-Khans worked in tandem with Iranian-speaking dynasties that had survived on the fringes of the Abbasid Empire.

this collection of epic poetry, written around 1000 CE but going back to Sasanian traditions, first became Iran's "national epic", and Ferdowsi the "national poet" of Iran.[89] The pre-Islamic character of the *Šāh-nāma* linked the Iran-centered Il-Khans and succeeding dynasties to the mythical kings and heroes of a primordial Iranian past located in the time of the Achaemenids. The period of the Il-Khanate also saw the beginning of another "quintessential" aspect of Persian culture associated most of all with the *Šāh-nāma*: the tradition of illuminated manuscripts, which flourished particularly under Safavid rule in the 16th–17th centuries.[90] A final blend of Iran and Persia took place in the late 19th and 20th centuries when the Qajar and Pahlavi rulers assimilated in their self-presentation modern European views of the Achaemenid Empire as the greatest of the "Seven Great Monarchies of the Ancient Eastern World", to use Rawlinson's words, as we have already seen above.[91]

UNDERSTANDING PERSIANISM: THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

This volume consists of three parts. Part I, *Persianization, Persomania, Perserie,* serves as a theoretical introduction by means of case studies. The authors explore in their contributions several of the categories and their definitions discussed in this introductory essay; they thus add depth and detail to what we have sketched above in a more general and theoretical vein. Albert de Jong deals with the important question what the term "Iranian" meant and how it functioned in what he calls the Achaemenid commonwealth itself. Margaret Miller shows us a similar contemporary perspective but one from the Achaemenid periphery, from Athens. In their analyses both authors illustrate that the line between culture and concept often is indeed a thin one. They also show that some concept of "Persia" developed already during the Achaemenid period. Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones discusses an important stage in this development: the distinctly Athenian, Greek discourse of Persia as the oriental Other. Together these three papers show how *ideas and associations revolving around Persia and appropriated in specific contexts for specific (socio-cultural or*

89 Marashi (2009). Non-Iranian cultures beyond the Iranian Plateau that absorbed to a significant degree Iranian visual culture and political ideology are sometimes referred to as "Persianite" in modern scholarship (e. g. the Moghul and Ottoman empires).

90 Babaie (2013), p. 30–36; cf. Babaie (2001); Melville (2011).

91 So already J.A. Lerner (1988), p. 165–166, suggesting that the Qajar interest in the Achaemenid heritage was in large part stimulated by Rawlinson's decipherment of Darius I's inscription at Bīsotūn; cf. Harrison (2011), p. 53: "the crucial turning point in the representation of ancient Persia seems to coincide with the growth of contact between western Europe and Iran in the 19th century". For Qajar uses of the Achaemenid past see further Lerner in this volume. It has often been pointed out that the modern idea of a singular, continuous Iranian identity – with a single defining language (NP Fārsī, the language of the *Šāh-nāma*), religion (Shia Islam), and world view (the Avestan heritage) – reaching back directly to Medieval or Ancient times, discards the local, religious and linguistic (Turkic, Armenian, Arabic) heterogeneity of the Iranian past and present; for discussions see Gnoli (1993; 1998); Vaziri (1993); Fragner (1999); Marashi (2008); and in defence of the modernist view Bausani (1962, 1975); Ashraf (2006); and Axworthy (2008).

political) reasons looked like, how they functioned and how they started to develop when the Achaemenid Empire was still existing as a historical reality. The second set of three papers from Part I aims at doing exactly the same thing, but then for the early-modern and modern periods, and thus from what unmistakably is a reception approach. Omar Coloru shows how the perception of pre-Islamic monuments developed in early modern Iran, highlighting the important role of western travelers in their conceptualization. Judith Lerner discusses the fascinating case study of the revival and use of Achaemenid art in 19th century Iran. David Engels, lastly, zooms out and shows us the place Persia had in Oswald Spengler's philosophy of art, thus, in a way, testifying to "the result" of 2,500 years of Persian reception and its influence on a leading, 20th century European intellectual. As a contrasting set, the articles thus provide the reader with an idea of the reception and appropriation of Persia *during* the Achaemenid period and *very long after* the Achaemenid period, thus preparing the reader for Parts II and III in which the period in between is dealt with.

The seven papers in Part II deal with Persianisms in the East during the Hellenistic period, the three centuries after the collapse of the Achaemenid Empire. Damien Agut-Labordère first discusses how negative views of the Achaemenid Empire came into being in early Ptolemaic Egypt, showing how the new Macedonian rulers in association with Egyptian agents substituted the archetypal foreign enemies in the cultural memory of Egypt, the Assyrians, with the Persians. This laid the basis for the subsequent association of the Persians with the Ptolemies' archenemies, the Seleukids. Sonja Plischke then focuses on the Seleukids themselves, and in particular their sporadic use of the title "Great King". Contrary to a widespread belief, there is no evidence that the Seleukids ever used that title as a reference to the Achaemenids; however, Plischke argues, the Seleukids transmitted it in Greek form to the rulers who succeeded them, some of whom adopted the title to construct a memory of the Achaemenids. Rolf Strootman discusses the political background to the emergence of Persianistic identities among the dynasties of late Hellenistic Iran. Considering the emergence of these dynasties in the context of Seleukid imperial policy, he argues that increasing cooperation between the imperial court and local vassal rulers encouraged the development and pronunciation of Iranian identities by these rulers. Concentrating on rulers in the Anatolian and Armenian highlands during the late Hellenistic period, Matthew Canepa thereupon analyzes how after the fall of the Seleukids these former satrapal dynasties referred to the Achaemenids to create for themselves new political, dynastic identities in a world of rapidly changing power relations. Charlotte Lerouge-Cohen's contribution deals with one of these post-Seleukid rulers, Mithradates Eupator of Pontos, and his claims to Achaemenid ancestry, showing how these claims reinforced his actual Seleukid ancestry to gain prestige and legitimacy among a wide variety of peoples and polities. Bruno Jacobs discusses a comparable theme, as he sets out to investigate how Seleukid and Achaemenid ancestry were integrated in the dynastic iconography of Antiochos I on Nemrud Dağı, giving special attention to the question what models Antiochos had at his disposal for (re)constructing Persian royal style. Finally, Benedikt Eckhardt discusses another example of politically motivated Persianism in a post-Seleukid context: the Hasmonean "Achaemenid revival", which, in contrast