

NOWRUZ IN THRACE?

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Introduction

The title of this article is derived from the contribution by H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg to the Achaemenid Studies, vol. VII (1991), "Nowruz in Persepolis". Its subject is the relief on the E stairçase of the *apadāna* at Persepolis, showing delegations of ethnic groups bringing gifts to the King of Kings. Venedikov & Gerassimov (1979: 69) compare the reception by Seuthes II, described by Xenophon (*An.* VII.iii.21-33), especially the bringing of gifts for Seuthes by the guests, with the bringing of gifts as presented on the *apadana*-relief. In my commentary on this part of the *Anabasis* (Stronk 1995: 211-2) I have discussed this comparison but briefly. The main argument not to enter more deeply into the matter was (and I still think so) that the comparison may be somewhat far-fetched. Within the framework of a commentary on the *Anabasis* an elaborated treatment of the *apadana*-reliefs seemed, therefore, generally out of place. The Persepolis-relief is, however, so interesting that I think a more thorough review of this material, in combination with Xenophon's text, certainly justified.

Xenophon's text

I present here the English text as I have used it in my commentary. The key paragraphs for Venedikov and Gerassimov, on which they based their comparison with the Persepolis-relief, are VII.iii.26-7.

VII.iii.21

When they had come in for the dinner—the noblest of the Thracians who were present, the generals and the captains of the Greeks, and whatever embassy from any state was there—the dinner was served with the guests seated in a circle; then three-legged tables were brought in for the whole company; these, numbering about twenty, were full of meat, cut up into pieces, and there were great loaves of leavened bread fastened with skewers to the pieces of meat.

VII.iii.22

In general the tables were placed opposite the guests in each case; for the Thracians had a custom which Seuthes now took the lead in practising, —he would pick up the loaves which lay beside him, break them into small pieces, and throw the pieces to whomever he pleased, following the same fashion with the meat also, and leaving himself only enough for a mere taste.

VII.iii.23

Then the others in the vicinity of whom the tables were placed, set about doing the same thing. But a certain Arcadian named Arystas, a terrible eater, would have none of this throwing about, but took in his hand a loaf of three choenices, put some pieces of meat upon his knees, and proceeded to dine.

VII.iii.24

They carried round horns of wine, and all took them; but Arystas, when the cupbearer came and brought him his horn, said to the man, after observing that Xenophon had finished his dinner, "Give it to him; for he's already at leisure, but I'm not as yet."

VII.iii.25

When Seuthes heard the sound of his voice, he asked the cupbearer what he was saying. And the cupbearer, who understood Greek, told him. So then there was an outburst of laughter.

VII.iii.26

When the drinking was well under way, there came in a Thracian with a white horse, and taking a full horn he said: "I drink your health, Seuthes, and present to you this horse; on his back pursuing you shall catch whomever you choose, and retreating you shall not fear the enemy."

VII.iii.27

Another brought in a boy and presented him in the same way, with a health to Seuthes, while another presented clothes for his wife. Timasion also drank his health and presented to him a silver bowl and a carpet worth ten minas.

VII.iii.28

Then one Gnesippus, an Athenian, arose and said that it was an ancient and most excellent custom that those who had possessions should give to the king for honour's sake, and that to those who had nought the king

should give, "that so," he continued, "I too may be able to bestow gifts upon you and do you honour."

VII.iii.29

As for Xenophon, he was at a loss to know what he should do; for he chanced, as one held in honour, to be seated on the stool nearest to Seuthes. And Heracleides directed the cupbearer to proffer him the horn. Then Xenophon, who already as it happened had been drinking a little, arose courageously after taking the horn and said:

VII.iii.30

"And I, Seuthes, give you myself and these my comrades to be your faithful friends; and not one of them do I give against his will, but all are even more desirous than I of being your friends. &c."

VII.iii.31

And now they are here, asking you for nothing more, but rather putting themselves in your hands and willing to endure toil and danger on your behalf. With them, if the gods so will, you will acquire great territory, recovering all that belonged to your fathers and gaining yet more, and you will acquire many horses, and many men and fair women; and these things you will not need to take as plunder, but my comrades of their own accord shall bring them before you as gifts."

VII.iii.32

Up rose Seuthes, drained the horn with Xenophon, and joined him in sprinkling the last drops. After this there came in musicians blowing upon horns such as they use in giving signals, and playing upon trumpets of raw ox-hide not only measured notes, but music like that of a magadis.

VII.iii.33

And Seuthes himself got up, raised a war-cry, and sprang aside very nimbly, as though avoiding a missile. There entered also a company of buffoons.

The apadana

The *apadana* is one of the buildings erected on the platform (Takht-i Jamshid) of Persepolis (cf. Fig. 1; Pl. 1-4). The translation of the word *apadana* is not completely certain: Kent (1953: 168, s.v.) translates it as 'palace'. Another translation may be 'courtyard' (cf. Moorey 1988a: 23). On the platform the main ceremonial buildings and the treasury were

concentrated. Next to the *apadana* those buildings included the *tacara*, the 'palace' (Kent 1953: 184, s.v.) or 'summer-palace' (Moorey 1988a: 23), and the *hadis*, 'seat, abode, palace' (Kent 1953: 213, s.v.) or 'royal residence or seat' (Moorey 1988a: 23). The principal buildings on the platform were designed by King Darius I (c. 522-486 BC), but the Persepolis we know is mainly the work of Xerxes (486-465 BC). Also succeeding kings contributed to the building activities, with the result that the whole platform was filled between 450 and 330 BC (cf. Fig. 1). In 330 BC Alexander the Great set fire to the complex: it was nearly completely destroyed (cf. Bosworth 1994: 817 and n. 47).

"Darius had begun the Persepolis apadana but had died soon after the sculptures along the north front had been completed. It was left for Xerxes to carry on the magnificent structure upon which he lavished all his interest and thus produced the most impressive building on the terrace. To reach its higher level, there were monumental staircases on the north and east. On either side, two facing stairways met in the center, while two more were set deeper near the corners. To a length of 292 feet along the north and east face the terrace was covered by sculptures which show Persian art at its very best. Those to the north were first seen by the visitor but are now sadly weathered; those to the east repeated the scenes but in reverse order. Thanks to the soil which has protected the latter since Alexander's wanton destruction, their recent excavation has made them live again in all their pristine beauty" (Olmstead 1959: 274).

The east wall, measuring 81 m in length and about 3 m in height was excavated in 1932 by Ernst Herzfeld, but he did not live to publish the excavated material completely. In 1968, however, Walser published a series of posthumous papers written by Herzfeld under the title *The Persian Empire*, including Herzfeld's interpretation of the peoples presented in the parade of the delegations on the *apadana*-reliefs (Herzfeld 1968: 350 ff.).

The reliefs

Several artists were responsible for the creation of those magnificent reliefs of the Persepolis *apadana* as may be deduced from the various mason marks. They have been extensively studied by Roaf (1983). Here, we will mainly concentrate on the contents of the reliefs of the east side of the *apadana*.

The reliefs of the east wall may be divided in two groups: standing in front of the wall, the right-hand side depicts a procession of soldiers and both Persia and Median nobles (cf. Pls. 10-2). To the left we are shown a parade of delegations, bringing gifts. Such parades are among the traditional representations of the ancient Near East (cf. Walser 1966: 11-9 and notes). Here 23 delegations present their gifts to the Achaemenid (cf. Fig.

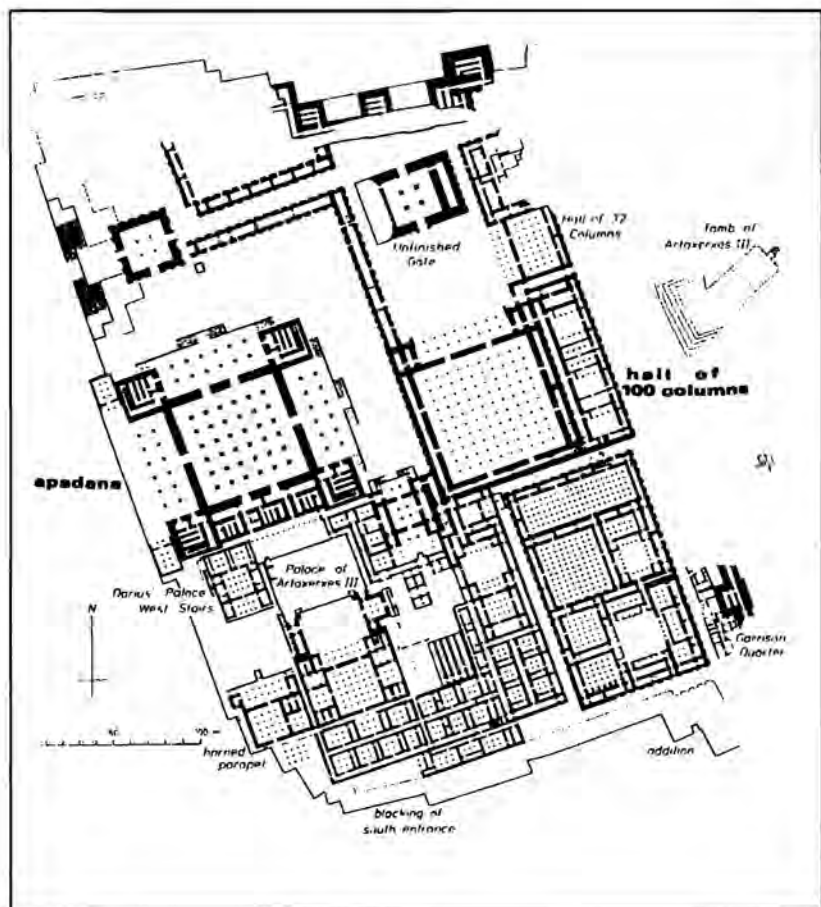


Fig. 1. The buildings of the Persepolis terrace c. 450-330 BC.

2). The number of delegates varies between three to nine men. Each delegation is preceded by a court dignitary carrying a rod. The delegations are separated from each other on the relief by schematically presented cypresses. All delegations move into the same direction, towards the central staircase. The dress of the delegations makes it distinctly clear that the delegations represent different peoples. It is, however, sometimes hard to identify the provenance of the delegations precisely, since no names are given.

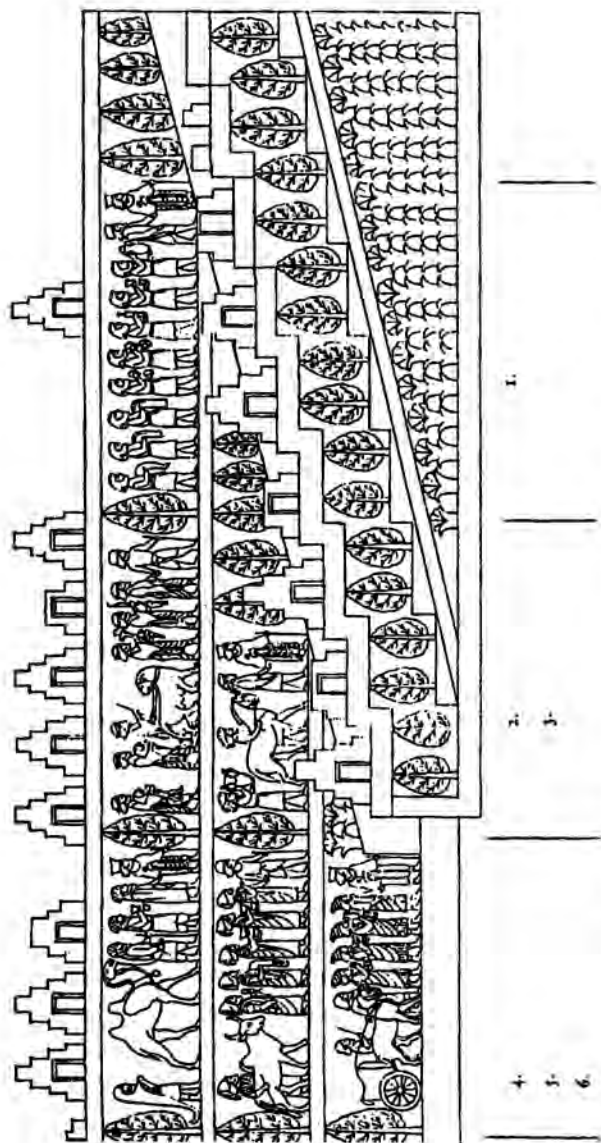
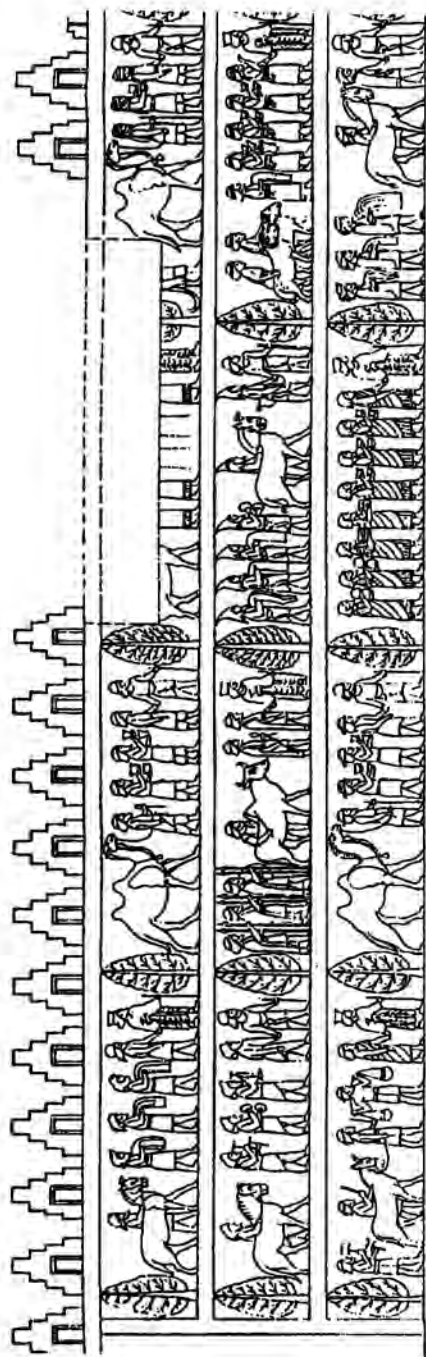


Fig. 2a. The delegations of peoples on the relief of the *apadana*.



- | | | | |
|-----|-----|-----|----|
| 16. | 13. | 10. | 7. |
| 17. | 14. | 11. | 8. |
| 18. | 15. | 12. | 9. |

Fig. 2b. The delegations of peoples on the relief of the *apadana*.

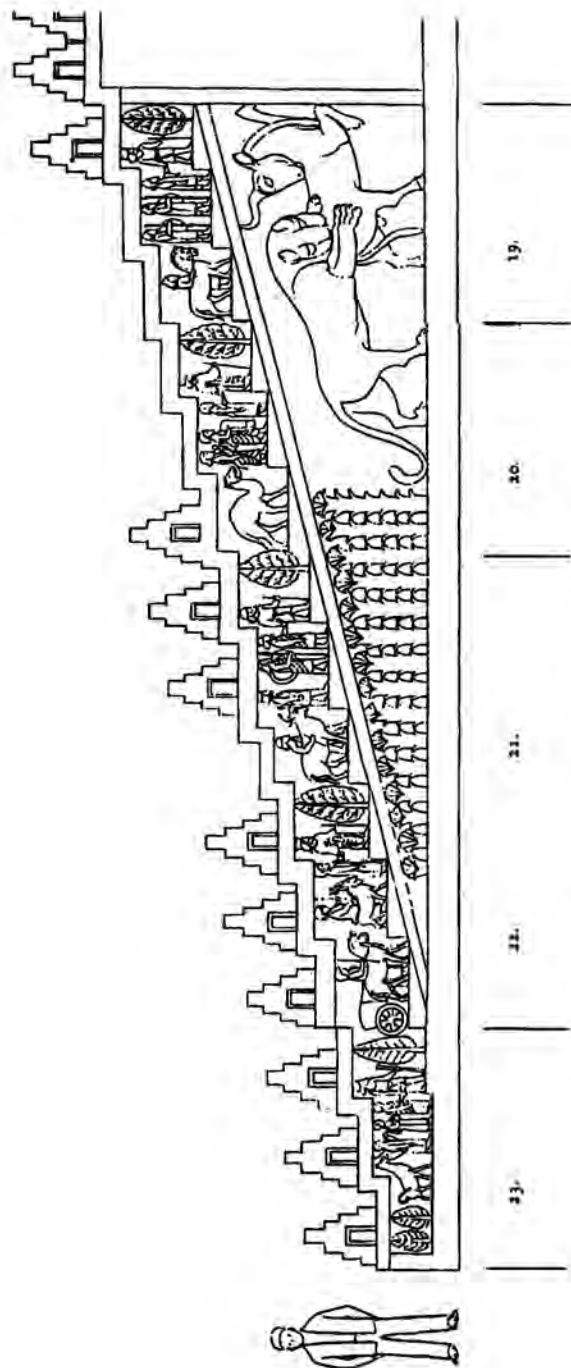


Fig. 2c. The delegations of peoples on the relief of the *apadana*.

Among the texts from the Persian Empire are several lists of peoples that were ruled by the Persian Kings. These lists are (presented in the fashion adapted by Kent—in which the first capital indicates the name of the king and the second the provenance of the text) to be found at Behistun (Bisitun) DB I, § 6 (Kent 1953: 119), Persepolis DPe, § 2 (Kent 1953: 136), the Suez Canal DZa-c (Kent 1953: 146-7), Persepolis and Hamadan DPh and DH (Kent 1953: 136-7 and 147), Naqš-i-Rustam DNa, § 3 (Kent 1953: 137-8), Susa DSe, § 3 (Kent 1953: 141-2) and Persepolis XPh (also known as the 'Daiva-inscription'), § 3 (Kent 1953: 150-2). Apart from these lists of subjected peoples we also have a Greek text, presenting a list of *satrapies*, including the names of the peoples or tribes that constituted each *satrapy*: Herodotus III.90-7. Using both the Greek and the Persian texts and known stylistic characteristics it has been tried to identify the delegations of the *apadana*-relief.

The delegations on the apadana-relief

The following identifications have been proposed for the various delegations.¹ Delegation I is Median, II from Elam, III Armenian (according to Schmidt possibly, according to Roaf probably). Herzfeld, assuming a division of Armenia into two parts, calls it Armenia I. For delegation IV the opinions are divided between Arians or Arachosians. Walser 1966: 75-7, who slightly favours an identification as Arian, states that IV represents an east Iranian tribe, be it Arian, Drangianan or Arachosian. V is Babylonian, VI Syrian or Lydian (Barnett, Roaf and Moorey). VII is again an east Iranian tribe, Arian, Arachosian or Drangianan (Roaf, as a possible identification). Most think delegation VIII is Cilician, but Barnett thinks they are Sogdians while Roaf and Moorey state they are Assyrians. On delegations IX, X and XI all agree: Cappadocians, Egyptians and Scythians (or more generally *Saka*). Delegation XII is most probably Ionian, though Walser thinks they also may be Lydians. Apart from Roaf and Moorey, who think they are Bactrians, all think that the people of XIII are Parthians. On delegation XIV all agree: they are Gandarans, though Moorey remarks they may also be *Maka*. With XV returns the problem how to distinguish between Parthians and Bactrians. Delegation XVI may have consisted of Sagartians, though Roaf and Moorey concede that the identification is doubtful. Herzfeld calls them Armenians I. XVII may be Sogdians and/or Chorasmians. XVIII cer-

¹The following studies have been used: Junge 1941, Herzfeld 1948, Schmidt 1953, Barnett 1957, Walser 1966, Roaf 1983 and Moorey 1988b. See Figs. 2-3.

tainly are the Indians, while XIX may be the Skudrians (Thracians), though Roaf doubts it and leaves XIX open. That group XX consists of Arabians seems certain, like the identification of XXII (Libyans; Herzfeld is the only one with a different view: he thinks that this group represents people from Putaiya/Oman) and XXIII (Nubians/Ethiopians). The identification of delegation XXI is very dubious: it varies from Lydians (Junge) through Drangians (Schmidt and Barnett), people from Akofaciya (Herzfeld) and a Median tribe (Walser) to Carians (Roaf and Moorey).

Though not all identifications are beyond all doubt or even certain, one thing is clear: the delegations all represent distinct ethnic groups or peoples. Together with the Persians (who were represented on the right hand side of the central staircase), virtually all main ethnic groups or peoples within the Persian Empire might recognise themselves on the *apadana*-reliefs (cf. Fig. 3).

The nature of the gifts

Walser (1966: 103) presents an elaborated schedule, a "Statistik der Geschenke des »Tributzuges«", including the precise number of delegates for each delegation. I will not present the gifts as detailed as he does. Twenty-one of the delegations offer animals: horses (8), camels (5), cattle (3), rams (1), lions (1), mules (1), goats or "Schraubenziege" (1), and giraffe or antelope (1). Next to the animals the gifts consisted of vessels (10), "die nach Form und Character meist kostbare Edelmetallgefäße gewesen sein müssen" (Walser 1966: 23), dresses (7), arms (7), jewellery (4), and various raw materials, including ivory (6).

Walser (1966: 20) connects this parade of delegations with the celebration of Nowruz (New Year's day). He remarks that as late as 1923 AD local dignitaries in Persia received various gifts from the population in similar manner. Today the practice may have disappeared, though the word has survived: in March 1995 there still were reports of the celebration of Newruz (Kurdish New Year). In this context, Walser argues that these gifts were no real tribute (taxes), but only an homage, a (compulsed) voluntary output presented apart from the regular tribute (Walser 1966: 23-5). In this we may have a parallel with the situation in Thrace. Thucydides mentions (II.xcvii.3) that the Odrysian king Seuthes I received as annual tribute (*phoros*) 400 talents of silver coin, paid in silver and gold, and an equal value of various gifts "not only of gold and silver, but besides these all manner of stuffs, both embroidered and plain, and other articles for household use, (...)" (translation C. Forster Smith, *LCL*). Obviously, Thucydides clearly distinguishes between real tribute (*phoros*) and "free gifts". Thucydides' comment (II.xcvii.4) that the

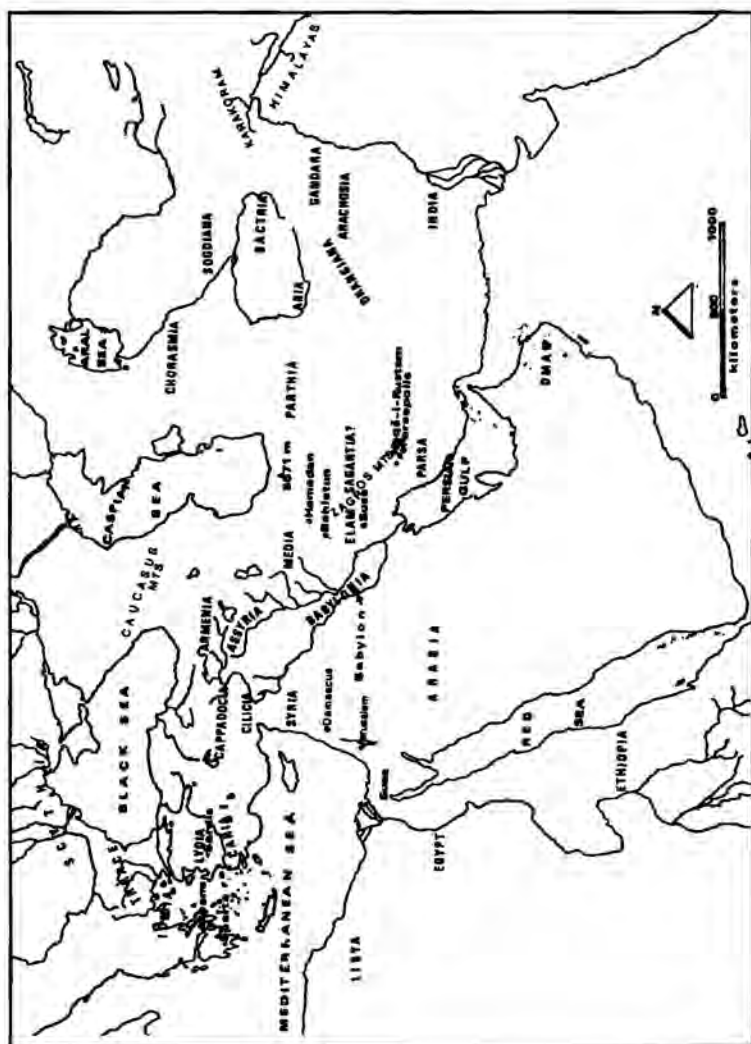


Fig. 3. Peoples within the Achaemenid Empire.

Thracian practice rather differed from the Persian, because the Persian kings rather gave than took, though seemingly confirmed by Xenophon (*Cyr.* VIII.ii.7), seems, however, an idealization and perhaps more theory than practice. There is, of course, the account of Herodotus (IX.110) that "on that day [*i.e.* the King's birthday, JPS] (and none other) the king both anoints his head and makes gifts to the Persians". It is reported that the costs involved with the royal birthday, including the banquet for 15,000 men, amounted to 400 talents (*cf.* *Ath.* IV.146c). Nevertheless I think that Thucydides' remark cannot be maintained against the evidence from the *apadana*-relief.

Comparison of the situation on the reliefs and in Xenophon's description

The first thing that draws our attention when we compare the two receptions is the organized formality of the Persian situation and the somewhat loosely manner of its Thracian counterpart. The latter may be the result of the fact that Seuthes' reception was organised "on the spot", while the Persian seems to have been a recurrent, annual, formal occasion.

The second, important, difference between the Persian and the Thracian occurrence is that (perhaps apart from the Persian nobles at the right-hand side of the central staircase) the delegations at Persepolis all represent distinct ethnic groups or peoples, while at Seuthes' court there seems (including the Thracian nobles) to be only a meeting of individuals. Here, however, may be a problem. Xenophon states (VII.iii.21) "(...) and whatever embassy from any state was there (...)". In his account he only has indicated the presence of an embassy from Parium (VII.iii.16), but this remark leaves the possibility that embassies from other states were also present entirely open. In that case Seuthes' reception may have been attended both by delegations of states and individuals. We may, however, argue whether we have to look upon the generals and captains of the 'Cyreans' as upon one single group or to consider them as a number of individuals. I am inclined to the latter because of the number of Greeks present. If only the generals had been invited, perhaps including some captains, I would rather have considered them as a delegation. In this particular case, however, they outnumber the size of a normal delegation.² Moreover the fact that Heracleides approached them one by one (VII.iii.18-9), though it may be explained as striving for maximum profit, leads me to consider the Greeks as present as individuals.

² Cf. however X., *An.* VI.vi.30, where the "Cyreans", threatened to be outlawed from Greece and in order to avoid the execution of one of their captains and a soldier, sent the generals and captains, together with Dracontius "and such others as seemed fitted for the mission", as a delegation to the Spartan *navarch* Cleander.

As for the presents, there seems, apart from the aspect of scale, to be some similarity between the gifts offered to the Persian king and the gifts received by Seuthes. The striking difference, as I see it, is that no people were offered to the Persian king. Slaves were, however, a Thracian commodity, just like horses.

As to the eating, the music, and the entertainment of the guests we have no comparison between the receptions of the Achaemenids and those of Seuthes (or the Odrysian kings in general).

Conclusion

Reviewing the evidence I think it is insufficient to connect, as Venedikov and Gerassimov have done, the reception by Seuthes with the reception that is depicted on the *apadana*-reliefs. Though, horse, dress, silver vessel, and perhaps also carpet were shown among the gifts to be presented to the Achaemenid, slaves were not. On the other hand garments were obviously also among the gifts received by the Thracian king Seuthes I from "the barbarian territory and from all the Hellenic cities over which the Odrysians acquired sway (...)" (Th. II.xcvii.3). As stated above, slaves and horses were Thracian commodities: most of the gifts were therefore, one might say, natural (as were, I think, the gifts presented to the Achaemenid: there, too, most presents seem to have been typical products from the respective regions. The *Skudra* offer the King of Kings a horse, spears and shields). For the gifts of Timasion we may say that he had them in store: there is no indication that he selected them for a special reason. The main reason, however, why I think the comparison far-fetched is that the reception as presented on the *apadana* appears to show a carefully directed formal occasion, while the reception of Seuthes was a meeting improvised on the spot.

In connection with the drinking to Seuthes' health, the libations (VII.iii.32) and the nature of the gifts (especially the white horse, a royal gift; cf. Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1980: 201 ff.), Fol and Marazov (1977: 56) suggest that Seuthes' feast served as a kind of ritual deifying of the living king, the king at the same time acting as the dispenser of food to his subjects (cf. also Fol & Marazov 1977: 48). The last remark may very well be close to the truth, but for the first suggestion I can find no hard evidence in Xenophon's account. It is, I think, mainly based on Marazov's belief in the combinations king-high priest and king-mythical hero, for which (due to the lack of sufficient sources) Marazov can only adduce circumstantial evidence and interpretation. He may be right but, I repeat, there is no firm evidence for his theory.

Such observations, however, do make clear that the relation which Venedikov and Gerassimov thought present is not easily to be detected.

This in itself does not mean that there may be no connection at all. As Thucydides already indicated especially Odrysian kings had, at least as early as Seuthes I (424-410 BC), raised the art of receiving gifts to great heights. Since Thrace had been incorporated into the Persian Empire, during which time the Odrysians had been faithful allies of the Persians (cf. Stronk 1995: 45-9), and Thracians had presented themselves at Nowruz at Persepolis—as goes from the reliefs—the nature of the Nowruz-reception may have inspired the Odrysian kings. After all, Persian court life appears to have been rather overwhelming, as, e.g., also Alexander the Great was to experience (cf. Bosworth 1994: 819 and 873 ff.). However, a possible connection between Nowruz and Thracian practices is, of course, pure speculation. Just like in the case of the theory brought forward by Fol and Marazov, I have to underline here that there exists no firm evidence whatsoever for such a relation.

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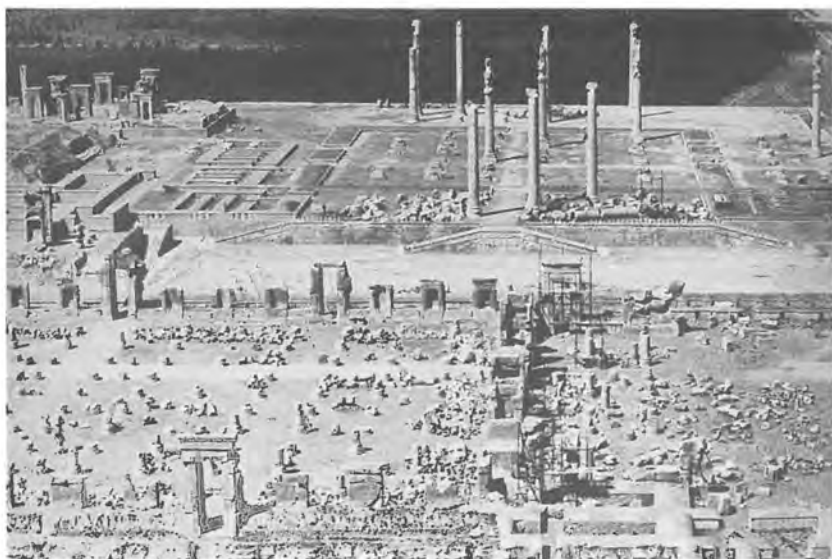
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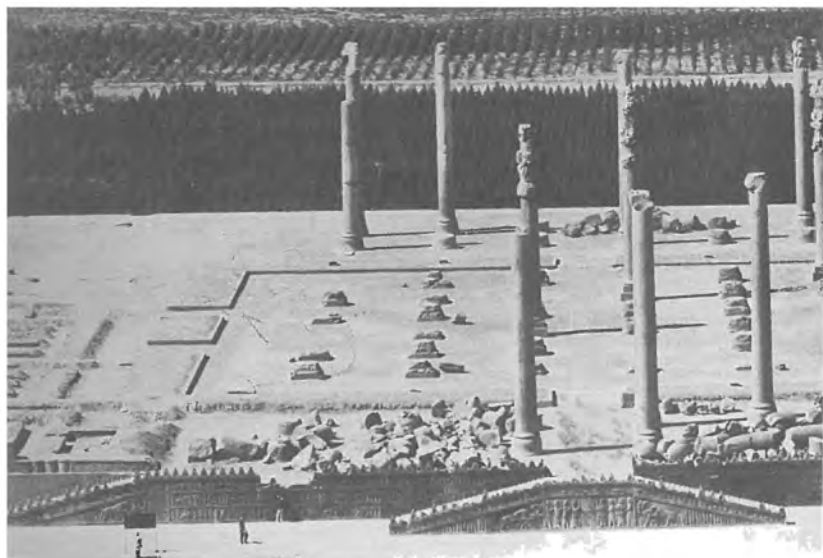
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Pl. 1. View of the Persepolis terrace from SE. The tall standing columns mark the *apadana*, to its E the Hall of 100 Columns. On the foreground office and museum accomodation.



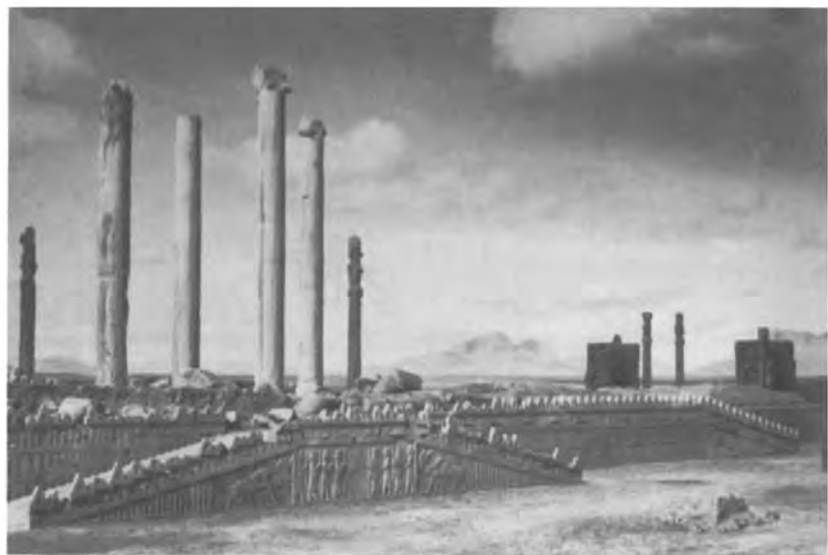
Pl. 2. View from E of the Persepolis terrace. In the background the *apadana*.



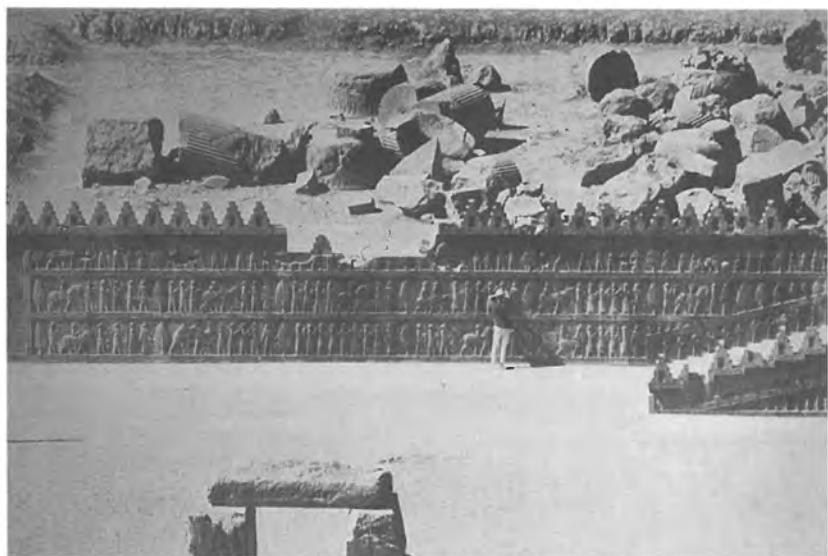
Pl. 3. The *apadana* from the E.



Pl. 4. W face of the terrace with *apadana*. Looking NE.



Pl. 5. C part of E stairway of the *apadana*.



Pl. 6. E stairway of the *apadana*: the delegations of gift-bearers.



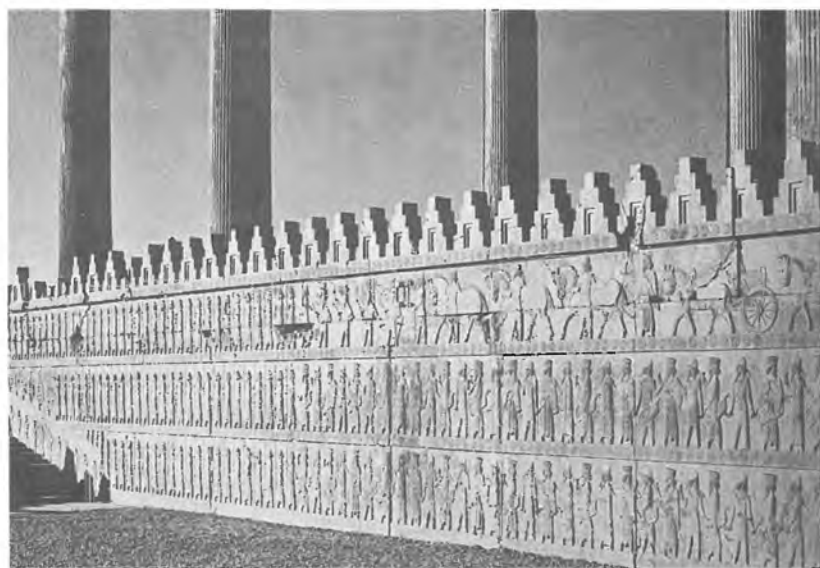
Pl. 7. C part of E stairway of the *apadana* with the new central panel that was placed in the 2nd quarter of the fifth century BC, replacing the original (= plate 8) panel.



Pl. 8. Original central panel of C stairway. The king is shown enthroned, with the crown prince standing behind him.



Pl. 9. A recurrent motif at Persepolis, here on the S section of the C façade of the E stairway of the *apadana*.



Pl. 10. *Apadana* E stairway: the nobles and the guards.



Pl. 11. *Apadana* E stairway: the nobles and the guards.



Pl. 12. *Apadana* E stairway: Persian and Median nobles.