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EDITED BY  
VALEVA,  
NANKOV, AND  
GRANINGER

A COMPANION TO  
**ANCIENT  
THRACE**

EDITED BY  
JULIA VALEVA, EMIL NANKOV,  
AND DENVER GRANINGER



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# A COMPANION TO ANCIENT THRACE

*Edited by*

**Julia Valeva, Emil Nankov,  
and Denver Graninger**

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## CHAPTER 21

# Persia

*Maya Vassileva*

### 21.1 Persians in Thrace

Oriental influences had been felt before the Persians invaded the Balkans (ca. 513).<sup>1</sup> Eighth–seventh-century bronzes from Thrace reflected a style and a repertoire of objects that had been common in the Iranian world after an adaptation of earlier Near Eastern prototypes (Venedikov 1969; Venedikov and Gerassimov 1973, 25–33). A number of other features of early Thracian “geometric art” echoed Oriental traits and reached Thrace via Anatolia. Most of them were further sustained and developed in later times influenced greatly by Achaemenid art.

These are however only the most easily visible results from the interactions between Thrace and the Oriental world best represented in the second half of the first millennium by the Achaemenid Empire. Historical processes, as well as military, political, and trade activities could be considered within the framework of the Persian impact on southeastern European lands. However, impact in this chapter refers to the results that more or less can be assigned to the direct encounter between Thracians and Persians and to the presence of the latter in Thracian lands. Influence is used to denote long-term, often mediated and locally reshaped Achaemenid elements in Thracian culture. The latter of course would include adoption, adaptation, and emulation (on influence and emulation: Miller 2007).

The Thracian lands came into direct contact with the Iranians when the Achaemenid Empire spread over Anatolia and the Great King launched expeditions against the Skythians, Macedonia, and eventually Hellas. The Thracians living in Asia were the first to experience Persian rule when Asia Minor was subjugated (the fall of Sardis: ca. 546).

European Thracians encountered the Persian army on Darius I’s (520–486) campaign against the Skythians in 513 when the Great King marched through eastern Thrace to reach the Istros River (Danube) (Fol and Hammond 1988, 235–243). After crossing the Bosphorus over a pontoon bridge, Darius proceeded through Thrace. The Persian army stopped for three days at the sources of the Tearus (Hdt. 4.90–91). The river is not securely identified: it was probably a smaller tributary of the Agrianes (Ergene) which in its turn flowed into the Hebros River (Maritsa). After commemorating the fine water of the springs with an inscribed stela Darius moved further into Thrace, reaching the Arteskos River which

flowed through the land of the Odrysians (Hdt. 4.92). The route of the Persian army to the north is widely debated (see for example: Venedikov 1970; Tuplin 2010, 285–286); the coastal Pontic (Black Sea) road, which led from Heraion on the Propontis (the Sea of Marmara) to Apollonia Pontica (Sozopol), is preferred by a number of scholars (Asheri, Lloyd, and Corcella 2007, 645). It seems less likely that the Persians would have turned west and gone much inland in Thrace. Herodotus, who is our main source for the Persian activities in Thrace, says that the Thracians of Salmydessos and those who lived beyond Apollonia and Messambria, known as Skyrmiai and Nipsaioi, surrendered to the Great King. The first serious resistance he met was offered by the Getae, “the most manly and law-abiding of the Thracian tribes,” who lived in northeastern Thrace and were finally reduced to slavery by the Persians (Hdt. 4.93). The unnamed Thracians of Salmydessos were most probably the Thynoi (Thynians).

If we are to believe Herodotus, the Thracians must have observed imperial propaganda and representation of royal status by Darius I during his march through eastern Thrace. First, near Byzantium he erected two stelae with inscriptions in “Assyrian” and Greek letters (Hdt. 4.87), then the inscription at the Tearus River (the script and language are not specified) (Hdt. 4.91), and, finally, at the Arteskos River the Great King made every soldier deposit a stone in passing by, thus leaving huge heaps of stones behind the army (Hdt. 4.92). Setting up stelae or statues with texts in several languages is not an uncommon Achaemenid practice: such were set up by Darius in Egypt (Asheri et al. 2007, 644). Isolated communications about finds, long lost, have not been confirmed, thus archaeological evidence is simply missing about such monuments in the Balkans (Balcer 1995, 150). Nevertheless, we can connect Herodotus’ evidence with the practice of leaving royal marks at far lands and natural phenomena reached by the Persians.

Before crossing back over to Asia, Darius left Megabazos as *strategos* (commander) ordering him to conquer Thrace (Hdt. 5.2). The conquest of Thrace was a multi-staged operation that started with Darius I’s Skythian campaign and was further carried out by Megabazos, Mardonios, and finally Xerxes (Balcer 1988, 8–13). Despite Herodotus’ statement that Thrace was occupied up to the Istros (Hdt. 4.99), his further account of Persian activities show that their control was exercised along the northern Aegean coast (clearly stated about Megabazos’ campaign: Hdt. 5.10: *ta parathalassia*; Picard 2000, 241).

Persian power was most unstable in the area of the Propontis and the Hellespont (the Dardanelles) where they had to subdue Byzantium several times in addition to other poleis that were reconquered. The area was equally attractive to Persians, Athenians and Thracians.

Megabazos first subdued the Perinthians and then continued further west. He was ordered by Darius to reduce the Paonians and deport them to Asia. With the help of Thracian guides he started for Paonia and was able to overcome its inhabitants only by a deceit. The tribes near Mt. Pangaion and on the Lake Prasias (present-day Lake Doyran) were not conquered (Hdt. 5.15–16). Persian envoys were sent to the court of Amyntas I, king of Macedonia, to ask for “earth and water” for the Great King (Hdt. 5.18). Amyntas’ young son, Alexander I, managed treacherously to kill Persian heralds after a lavish feast (Hdt. 5.19–21). Despite this slaughter Macedonia was not punished and maintained good relations with the Achaemenids as Alexander’s sister Gygaie was given as wife to the Persian Bubares. The event more resembles a dynastic marriage on concluding a treaty than the action of a subdued country (Balcer 1995, 155). The Macedonian king was only nominally the Great King’s vassal. The actual situation can be deduced from Herodotus’ statement that later, in 492, Mardonios added Macedonia to the conquered lands (Hdt. 6.44).

When Megabazos leading the Paonians to Asia reached Sardis he was replaced by Otanes as commander of the coastal area (*strategon tōn parathalassiōn andrōn*). The latter had to recapture Byzantium, and then he conquered Chalkedon and the islands of Lemnos and Imbros, the latter still being inhabited by the Pelasgians (Hdt. 5.25–26).

The Ionian revolt (499–494) temporarily loosened Persian control over the Aegean. The Great King had to reconfirm his rule over Miletos and other Ionian cities and islands. A new military campaign was necessary for Achaemenid power to be resettled in Thrace and Macedonia.

In 492 Mardonios, Darius I's son-in-law and general, started a military and naval campaign along the northern Aegean coast. Herodotus says that he first subdued Thasos without resistance and continued west towards the Macedonians. All peoples to the east of Macedonia were already under Persian rule. When trying to go around Athos, a violent gale raged and many Persian ships were wrecked. At the same time the troops on land suffered heavy losses by the Brygi, a Thracian tribe (Hdt. 6.45). Mardonios himself was wounded. Nevertheless, the Persians finally subdued the Brygi. The serious casualties suffered by the Persian army and fleet made Mardonios return back in Asia.

Scholars agree that only after Mardonios' campaign to the west was Persian power stable and effective in Thrace, and Macedonia was now a vassal kingdom (Balcer 1988, 13). Scholars have long debated whether European Thrace was organized in a Persian satrapy, presumably called Skudra. Some tend to accept such a European satrapy (Fol and Hammond 1988, 43–46, although the reasons of the two authors differ; Jordanov 2003). Skudra and Skudrians are mentioned in royal inscriptions from the reign of Darius I and Xerxes among the subjects of the Persian Empire (four from Darius I's reign: from Naqš-i Rostam, two from Suza, and on a statue of Darius from Suza: DNa, DSe, DSm; and one from Xerxes: XPh) (Kent 1953). They are listed between the "Ionians wearing broad-brimmed hats," or "Ionians who dwell across the sea" and "Pointed-cap Saka" or "Saka across the sea." It is a common opinion that these Persian lists were not catalogues of satrapies or of tax and administrative units, but of peoples and countries that the Persian King claimed were under his rule (Briant 2002, 177). It is possible that the Thracian and Macedonian population along the northern Aegean coast was perceived by the Persians as Yaunâ (Ionians, Greeks). Representatives of the conquered peoples are portrayed on the façades of the Achaemenid royal rock-cut tombs at Naqš-i-Rostam as throne bearers. Only on Darius I's tomb are the figures labeled (No. 25: Schmidt 1970, 109–110, fig. 44). The Skudrian wears trousers, a knee-length coat, and holds two spears. Variations of his clothing and attributes (*petasos* and *akinakes*) appear on the other tombs and on the depiction of the Skudrian delegation on the Apadana reliefs in Persepolis (No. 19: Schmidt 1953, 89; Balcer 1988, 20; Rehm 2010a, 148; if this identification holds!). This "northern" attire however is used for representations of Skythians, Thracians, and Persians on Greek vases and suggests that Persians and Greeks alike did not mark a clear difference between Skythians and Thracians.

The identification of Skudra as Thrace has its opponents. Some opt for a location of Skudra in western Asia Minor (Kaloyanov 1988) or in northern central Anatolia (Pontos: Gropp 2001). An etymological hypothesis tries to explain the name through Iranian languages and bring it closer to the Skythian ethnonym, not convincingly (Rehm 2010a, 149; Tuplin 2010, 297). The name finds onomastic parallels in Thrace, Macedonia, and Asia Minor but cannot be defined as Thracian (Hdt. 7.30: *Kydrara* in Phrygia; Strabo 7.7.9: a Brygian city of *Kydrai*; Ptol. 3.12.36: *Skydra* in Emathia; Steph. Byz. 578.8: *Skydra*). Some authors stress the Phrygian parallels (Archibald 1998, 84 n. 29).

Skudra is also listed in later royal inscriptions when the Persians had long lost their control in Europe (Kent 1953; Balcer 1995, 153). Skudrians are attested in the Persepolis Fortification Tablets as a dependent population of agricultural workers (*kurtaš*) in Darius I's royal estates in Persia and Elam (Balcer 1995, 154; Izdimirski 2009).<sup>2</sup> The hypothesis that these *kurtaš* were the Paenonians deported by Megabazos (Balcer 1995, 152; Archibald 1998, 84; Tuplin 2010, 298) lacks supporting evidence. The absence of Skudrians in the texts of Persepolis

Treasury Tablets (dated 492–458) has not yet found a satisfactory explanation: it might be just accidental or due to the Persian withdrawal from Europe after 479 (Balcer 1995).

The words satrap and satrapy were only rarely used by Greek authors. Persian generals in charge of certain cities or areas along the northern Aegean were described as *hyparchos* or *strategos*. Their functions and activities there did not match those of a satrap. Although Herodotus says that eventually Darius I started receiving taxes from the European population up to Thessaly, he does not specify any administrative division there, or any particular income (Hdt. 3.96, 7.108). The archaeological record shows no evidence of Achaemenid administration or strong Persian presence, like the cylinder seals, bullae, and coins, for example, found in the satrapal centers at Sardis and Daskyleion, and in smaller numbers even in Gordion (Bacheva 2012, 14–17). None of the cities mentioned by the ancient authors as important Persian posts along the Aegean coast is a good candidate for a satrapal center (Balcer 1988, 3–4). Recent research has confirmed that newly subdued areas and countries on the fringes of the Achaemenid Empire (like Nubia, Libya, and Skudra) were to a different extent dependent territories, but were neither incorporated in the administrative division nor turned into satrapies (Balcer 1988; Briant 2002, 905).

The Thracians living in Asia, however, were included in the third satrapy or tax district (*nomos*), according to Herodotus (Hdt. 3.90), together with the population of the Hellespont, the Phrygians, the Paphlagonians, and the Mariandynians. These were the Bithynians who later joined Xerxes' army. Hypothesizing about a European satrapy combining the Hellespontine and Propontis areas ruled from Daskyleion is very tempting in view of the strategic points that would have thus been united, but lacks convincing evidence (Rehm 2010a, 151).

Thus, Persian control in Thrace and along the Aegean coast was exercised in strongholds and fortresses at strategic sites. The two major fortresses were the Royal Fort built by Darius I at Doriskos during his Skythian campaign, and Eion which had probably been established by 492. Sestos and Abydos were the preferred points for crossing to and from Europe. We do not know when Boryza was founded, but it is mentioned as a Persian city in the land of the Thynians, along the southwestern Black Sea coast (Hekataios: FGrHist 1F166; Steph. Byz. 176.11). The city is not located and the date of its foundation is debated: before or during Darius I's campaign against the Skythians (Detschew 1976, 76; Bacheva 2012, 13). It may have been another Persian garrison or stronghold on the Thracian coast not far from Byzantium.

In 480 in his campaign against Hellas, Xerxes (486–465) gathered military contingents from all subdued peoples. Herodotus mentioned among his Asian troops the Thracian contingent after the Phrygians and the Lydians, and before the Pisidians, describing in ethnographic detail their clothing and armor. He further specifies that these Thracians became known as Bithynians after they had migrated from the Strymon valley to Asia (Hdt. 7.75). The Phrygians used to be called Brygoi while they lived together with the Macedonians and changed their name only when they came to Anatolia (Hdt. 7.73). This detail is not mentioned when Mardonios suffered a defeat by the Brygoi in Europe, although Herodotus writes that such a story about the Phrygians was told by the Macedonians. Nevertheless, the Brygoi joined Xerxes' army (Hdt. 7.185).

The Great King seems to have marched through subjugated territories in coastal Thrace. Serious opposition is not reported. Herodotus enumerates the Thracian tribes through whose territories the Persians advanced westward. His account is especially detailed for the southernmost Thracian lands, to the west of the Hebros River and near the mouths of the Nestos and the Strymon Rivers, where he names: Paitoi, Kikones, Bistones, Sapaioi, Dersaioi, Edoni, Satrai, Eordoi, Bottiaci, Brygoi, Pieres, Perraboi, Enienes, and Dolopes (Hdt. 7.110–111; 185).<sup>3</sup> The Thracian population of the region both voluntarily and by force joined the Persian navy and army, and only the Satrai remained independent. The latter statement means that

the Persians did not gain control over the Pangaion area where the Satrai lived. The only act of hostility was performed by the king of the Thracian Bisaltae and Krestonia who punished his six sons for their participation in the Persian expedition against Greece by gouging their eyes out (Hdt. 8.116). Herodotus says that the road which Xerxes' army took was held in reverence by the Thracians and remained untouched to his day: no crops were sown on it (Hdt. 7.115). Doriskos was still the major Persian fortress in Thrace where the Great King numbered his troops at the beach (Hdt. 7.59). In Thrace food was stored for his campaign at: Leuce Acte; in Tyrodiza near Perinthos; in Doriskos; and in Eion (Hdt. 7.25).

After the battle at Salamis Xerxes fled back to Asia Minor but Mardonios and his army wintered in Thessaly and Macedonia in preparation for a new clash with the Hellenes (Hdt. 8.126, 133). The Achaemenids were finally defeated at Plataea in 479. In addition to Greeks from Thessaly and Macedonians, Phrygians, Thracians, Mysians, and Paeonians were also summoned to Mardonios' army for this final combat (Hdt. 9.32).

The death of Mardonios in the battle at Plataea and the Persian failure at Mykale in 479 marked the beginning of the Achaemenid retreat from Europe. The joint Hellenic fleet was able to retrieve most of the cities on the Hellespont. The rest of coastal Thrace remained under Persian control. Only isolated examples of acts of Thracian aggression towards fleeing Persians are reported: a Persian named Oiobazos was sacrificed by the Apsinthian Thracians to their local god Pleistoros, in accordance with their custom (Hdt. 9.119). Herodotus relates in an anecdotal way how the Thracians who lived along the upper Strymon River captured from the Paeonians the sacred chariot of Zeus (i.e., of Ahura Mazda, the supreme Iranian deity) which Xerxes had left with them on his way to Hellas (Hdt. 8.115).

Eion was taken by the Greek fleet in 476, while Doriskos remained the last Achaemenid stronghold in Thrace. Persian power became less effective after the defeat of the Persians at Eurymedon, Pamphylia (Asia Minor) (ca. 466) and probably faded away somewhere in the 450s (Jordanov 2003). However, not all Persians evacuated Europe. There were a number of reasons for individuals to stay – previous grants of land, intermarriage, and refugee status, for example – which although not attested in Thrace are known from other regions.

## 21.2 The Achaemenid Impact

The Persian presence in the northern Aegean coast lasted approximately 40 years. It was in this period that we first hear of the Odrysian kingdom which was to become the most powerful Thracian polity in antiquity. The exact date of its foundation cannot be determined. Thucydides described King Teres (known as Teres I), father of Sitalkes, as the first ruler to unite a greater territory under Odrysian control (Thuc. 2.29.1–2). His first diplomatic interactions with the Skythians (Hdt. 4.80) can probably be dated in the second quarter of the fifth century (Archibald 1998, 103). Teres might have not been the very first Odrysian king, though, and the beginning of the kingdom can possibly be placed in the late sixth century. The scarce written evidence suggests that Darius I's Skythian expedition and his retreat from the northeastern Balkan lands stimulated Thracian-Skythian political activity.

To some extent the formation of political entities can be perceived from the earliest Thracian tribal coins (Yurukova 1992). They appear in the western part of the North Aegean, in the areas close to the gold and silver mines of Mt. Pangaion. Their dates coincide with the Persian presence in the region. The archaeological record shows that, while mines in the area had been used in earlier times, the minting of coins by the Greek cities (Thasos and Abdera among others) and Thracian tribes started in the late sixth century and continued up to the 460s (Balcer 1995, 166; Picard 2000). A date before 500 cannot be confirmed for any of the Thracian coinages (Balcer 1995, 162; Archibald 1998, 89–90). The names of the

following Thracian tribes (some of them unattested in literary evidence) can be read on the legends of the coins: Derroni, Orreski, Ichnii, Edoni, Tynteni, Bisaltae. The name of the Edonian ruler Geta appeared as well. Both iconographical and metrological studies suggest that several Thracian tribes probably organized common minting and that something like a monetary union existed between the tribes in the Pangaion area and the Thasians (Picard 2000, 246).

Many Thracian tribal coins were found in hoards in different parts of the Achaemenid Empire (Asyut, Egypt; Elmali, Lycia) which suggests an increased Persian quest for silver (Yurukova 1992, 11–26). Scholars usually explained them as an export of bullion or as tribute paid to the Achaemenid administration. Since there was no European satrapy, the latter explanation (despite the vague mention of European revenue in Herodotus) can only have a limited value. Like the gold Persian coins, the *darics* introduced by Darius I (Briant 2002, 409), these early Thracian coins were symbols of power and prestige. Their use in trade cannot be completely ruled out (Balcer 1995, 157, 168).

Persian rule over the northern Aegean intensified trade by opening it to the vast eastern markets. Not only Persians but Greeks were also now more active in the area. Around the Straits and to the north the Kyzikene stater that equaled a *daric* was the international currency. Nearby cities minted their own coins following the Persian weight standard. To the west of them, up to the Strymon valley, the cities used the so-called Thraco-Macedonian standard, while those in the Chalcidice used the Euboean-Attic standard. The Thraco-Macedonian standard tried to combine Oriental and Greek weight measuring systems and coin denominations as the heavier coins were struck under eastern standards meant for larger amounts of precious metals (most recently: Delev 2012).

Although multiple factors account for the coinage in the region, it was not a mere coincidence that this early minting decreased rapidly after 478 and stopped somewhere in the 460s, after the Achaemenid withdrawal (Picard 2000). Few of the previously minted tribal coins continued after this time, including those of the Derroni, Oreski, and the Edonian King Getas; coins of the Bisaltae and King Mosses appeared now for the first time. Persian influence can be felt both directly and indirectly through the coinage and trade activities of the Ionian cities and their colonies.

Both the Persian presence in the Aegean and its retreat stimulated political consolidation and state formation among the Thracians, most prominently among the Odrysians, which can be followed in the early relations (and conflicts) between the Odrysians and the Skythians (Hdt. 4.80, 6.40) as well as with the Greeks in the Thracian Chersonese (Strabo 7.1.22). Local tribal coinage began in southwestern Thracian lands, as well as in Macedonia under Alexander I. On the Aegean coast Thracians and Greeks alike were open to the much larger market of the Empire and engaged in Persian military, engineering, and building activities; they also helped to provide supplies for the Persian army, navy, and strongholds. Thracians were also exposed to Achaemenid political and administrative practices and, more importantly, to the Persian way of displaying aristocratic status. It is traditionally accepted that the withdrawal of the Persians from the Aegean opened a political vacuum which was filled by the Thracian polities. The title *basileus* was struck for the first time on the Edonian coins and those of Mosses after the Persians returned to Asia.

Bulgarian scholarship claimed for a long time that Thracian (royal) names ending in *dokos*, *-tokos* were Hellenized forms of Iranian origin. The hypothesis cannot find satisfactory support either on linguistic or historical grounds (Mihailov 1977, 345; 1989, 60). Another element in Thracian personal names can be assigned to the Iranian languages: *-sades*, *-sadas*, as in Berisades, Medosades, Parysades, and others. Sadalas also belongs here as a derivative from *-sades* (Detschew 1976, 408–410). The exact cause and the mechanism through which these Iranian elements occurred in Thracian cannot be defined.

After the Graeco-Persian wars Anatolia remained Achaemenid territory and contacts between the European Thracians and the Persians continued, especially in the Propontis area, while Thracians in Asia were among the various subjects of the Empire. Achaemenid influence was also diffused through the interactions with the east Greek poleis. This is partly reflected by the few hoards of Achaemenid regal and satrapal coins found in northeastern Bulgaria, as well as in Romania (at ancient Orgame, near the Danube Delta). Three hoards of *sigloi* contain coins of the “Royal-Archer Type.” Although possibly minted earlier they were treasured during the first half of the fourth century (Penchev 2005). The same is valid for the coins of the Persian satrap Tissaphernes, while those of the Persian governor of Rhodes are dated to the second half of the fourth century (Dzanev 2008). All of these coins are worn out, bear countermarks, and had been in circulation for a long time, probably in Anatolia. Their occurrence along the northeastern Black Sea coast should be seen as a result of trade with the Greek poleis in Asia Minor. The hypothesis that they were brought back by Thracian mercenaries (Dzanev 2008, 36) cannot find a convincing proof.

Literary evidence shows that there were indeed Thracian mercenaries engaged in the military conflicts in Anatolia, especially in the Propontis region during and after the Peloponnesian War. They were used by Greeks and Persians alike. In the late fifth century Alcibiades forced the Bithynians to side with him (Xen., Hell. 1.3.2–4). Xenophon tells us about Klearchos, a refugee from Sparta, who fought first against the Thracians, who lived beyond (north of) the Hellespont (Xen., Anab. 1.1.9, 3.4; 2.6.2, 5), but then used Thracian contingents to help Cyrus the Younger (Anab. 1.2.9, 5.13). The survivors of the Ten Thousand encountered the Mysians on their way back, who controlled large and rich cities in the land of the Persian king and were hostile to him (Anab. 2.5.13, 3.2.23–24). At the feast organized for the Greek soldiers by the Paphlagonians, Thracians and Mysians distinguished themselves in warriors’ dances. The Thracians sang the Sitalkas song (Anab. 6.1.2–6, 9–13).

According to Xenophon, Thrace in Asia lay from the Bosphoros to Heraklea Pontica and was inhabited by Thracians and Bithynians, or Thracian Bithynians (Xen., Anab. 6.2.18–19, 4.1–3; Bithynian Thrace: Xen., Hell. 3.2.2), who were unfriendly to the retreating Greek troops. The land was soon to become known as Bithynia and the Bithynian kingdom would be founded there.

The activities of these Thracian contingents probably facilitated the eastern, Achaemenid influences observed in Thrace. Diplomatic moves by the Odrysians (see Seuthes’ envoy to Xenophon: Anab. 7.1.5, 2.23–24) could have advanced contacts and exchange of goods, fashion, and ideas with Achaemenid Anatolia. Hieron Oros and Heraion Teichos on the northern shore of the Propontis were a sacred place and a fortified residence (and a treasury) respectively of the Odrysian king Kotys I (383–359) and later controlled by Seuthes II (Xen., Anab. 7.1.14; Dem. 23.104; Strabo 7 fr. 55). It was precisely in the fourth century that numerous elements of Achaemenid influence were best displayed in Thrace.

### 21.3 Persian Influence

The Achaemenid presence in the northern Aegean for several decades and contacts with neighboring Anatolia afterwards accounted for the Persian affinities of some Thracian (mainly Odrysian) artifacts. Trade and exchange with the east Greek cities contributed to the process as well. However, the more profound reason for the Achaemenid influence upon Thrace was the similarity between Persian and Thracian society: a similar structure of a ranked society ruled by aristocrats. Thracian *paradynastes* resembled Persian satraps. Odrysian kings ruled from fortified residences not unlike the several capitals of the Achaemenids. The surroundings of the banqueting hall (*hestiatorion*) where Kotys I (383–359) and Philip II met (Theopompos:

FGrHist 115 F 31) resembled the parks (*paradeisos*) of the Persian nobles (Xen., *Anab.* 1.2.7, 2.4.14; Cyr. 1.3.14). The otherwise curious passages in Herodotus about Thracian reverence for the road of Xerxes and their theft of the sacred chariot left by him with the Paonians (see above) might reveal similar aristocratic values. The Great King proceeded behind this chariot drawn by eight white horses when he started his expedition at Sardis (Hdt. 7.40). White horses and chariots drawn by them are recurrently mentioned by ancient authors as emblematic for the Thracian kings (see King Rhesos in the *Iliad* 10.435–441). The road of Xerxes' army was probably considered a continuation of the Royal Road and thus sacred.

Ancient authors compared Thracian and Persian practices of gift exchange. In a discussion of Sitalkes' kingdom, Thucydides states that the tribute which was gathered by the Odrysian kings was supplemented by gifts in gold and silver, as well as plain and embroidered textiles and other objects. The latter were intended not only for the king but also for the *paradynastes* and other nobles (Thuc. 2.97.3–4). The ancient historian notes that unlike the Persian custom, the Thracians were more accustomed to receiving gifts than giving them, and this was especially true for the Odrysians. However, when Heracleides was soliciting Seuthes' Greek guests for gifts he said that "the greater the gifts you bestow upon this man, the greater the favors that you will receive at his hands" (Xen., *Anab.* 7.3.20), thus contradicting Thucydides' statement. The available evidence shows that Thracian gift exchange practice did not much differ from that of the Persians or Near Eastern royal protocol in general. Political complications and Athenian distrust of Sitalkes' military intentions during the Peloponnesian war might have been a reason for the historian's negative remark (Stronack and Zournatzi 2002).

Xenophon described the ceremony of presenting Seuthes with gifts: a white horse, a slave, clothes for his wife, a silver cup, and a rug (Xen., *Anab.* 7.3.26–27). Almost the same range of objects and animals (excepting the camels) can be seen on the reliefs of the gift-bearers on the Apadana (Audience Hall) staircase in Persepolis. Textual evidence confirms this assortment of items offered (voluntarily and obligatorily) to the Great King (Briant 2002, 394–396).

Thus, it was easy for the Odrysian élite to borrow and emulate means of displaying status. Naturally, Persian influence can be best perceived in monuments and objects of Thracian/Odrysian aristocrats.

Objects of Near Eastern affinity were produced in Thrace before the coming of the Persians. Pre-Achaemenid Iranian traits were distinguished in some bronze objects like miniature cult axes and animal representations (dated eighth–seventh century) (Venedikov 1969; Venedikov and Gerassimov 1973). The animal protoma and figurines on axes and amulets, as well as the famous stag figurine from Sevlievo (seventh century) echo features of Iranian (Luristan, Ziwic) and Anatolian (Gordion) figurines. These examples were the local response of the so-called Animal Style which was popular from western China to Skythia.

Shallow bowls and omphalos phialae of the first millennium most probably originated in Assyria where earlier eastern types had been developed, and then spread to the west. Nevertheless, the earliest omphalos phialae discovered in Thrace find close parallels in the bronze bowls from Tumulus W and MM at Gordion (ninth century and ca. 744 respectively): a plain bronze omphalos phiale from Sofronievo, district of Vratsa, and three gold vessels from Daskal Atanassovo, district of Stara Zagora (both finds dated cautiously to the seventh or early sixth century). The best preserved from the latter is decorated with thin stylized pointed leaves (Lotosphiale), a type which would become more popular in Achaemenid times.

The more common use of phialae of precious metals in Thrace started at the time of the Persian presence in the North Aegean and its boom was in the fourth century. It is hard to claim these finds as Achaemenid imports in view of the fact that we know very little about metal production in the Persian heartland. Most of the Achaemenid metal vessels come from peripheral areas of the Empire. No direct Persian imports are known to date in Thrace. It seems better to speak about Achaemenizing or Persianizing objects.<sup>4</sup>

Two silver bowls, one with alternating almond-shaped lobes, the other with radial leaf-like grooves found in the Mushovitsa and Kukova Tumuli respectively from the Duvanli necropolis (near Plovdiv) (late sixth–early fifth century) (Filow 1934) are the earliest phialae of “Achaemenid” type (Marazov 1996, 11; Valeva 2006, 23–24). A more exquisite pattern of alternating almond lobes and lotuses became very popular in the fifth and fourth centuries (one of the earliest is the silver phiale from Grave 22 at Sindos, near Thessaloniki: late sixth century). Thracian responses to this Achaemenid decorative design can be seen on a number of vessels from the Rogozen treasure (nos. 2, 42, 81) (Figures 21.1 and 21.2). One of the most luxurious Rogozen plates displays Persian/eastern features in its decoration with palmettes and four pairs of affronted lion-griffins (no. 97) (Marazov 1996, 30–32) (Figure 21.3).

The best example of an Achaemenid-style vessel is the silver amphora-rhyton from the Kukova Tumulus at Duvanli (fifth century) (Filow 1934, 46–50) (Figure 21.4). It has two handles in the shape of griffins and a spout on one of them. Such a type of vessel is again represented on



**Figure 21.1** Phiale No. 2 from the Rogozen Treasure. Photo by Dimo Georgiev.



**Figure 21.2** Phiale No. 42 from the Rogozen Treasure. Photo by Nikolai Genov.



**Figure 21.3** Phiale No. 97 from the Rogozen Treasure. Photo by Nikolai Genov.



**Figure 21.4** Silver-gilt amphora-rhyton from Kukuva Mogila, Duvanli. Photo by Nikolai Genov.

the Persepolis reliefs of the gift-bearers as well as in the wall-paintings of the Karaburun tomb, Lycia (early fifth century). The delegations whose members hold these vessels have however been identified as Lydians (or Syrians) and Armenians. The decoration of the body of the Thracian amphora with palmettes and flutes prompted scholars to assign its production to a Greek workshop. The gold amphora-rhyton from the Panagyurishte treasure whose handles are shaped as centaurs can be considered a Hellenized successor of the same type of vessel (Venedikov and Gerassimov 1973).

Carinated bowls with everted rim are also among the gifts on the Persepolis reliefs. Such vessels are found in great numbers in Thrace. Cylindrical and biconical beakers also display Achaemenid affinities.

The horn-shaped rhyta with an animal forepart are considered an Iranian and Achaemenid type of vessel. Several examples in precious metals found in Bulgaria fall within this Iranian tradition, although often embellished in a Greek manner. Horizontal fluting of the horn is generally accepted to be an Iranian feature. The silver-gilt bull rhyton from the Borovo treasure (fourth century, near Ruse, northeastern Bulgaria) seems thus to be the closest to the Iranian pieces. The posture of the horse head of the other rhyton from the same treasure is modeled after Achaemenid examples, though its flutes are vertical (Ebbinghaus 1999, 390–391). A banqueting scene is represented on the vase from the Borovo treasure where two male figures hold a horn rhyton and a phiale each, probably intended for a libation and/or drinking (Marazov 1998, 222–225). One of the rhyta features a sphinx head, the other that of a griffin. Quite similar scenes of feasts are depicted on the reliefs of the so-called Nereid Monument at Xanthos, Lycia, of the same period where seven animal-headed rhyta are shown.

Two fourth-century gold signet rings show horsemen with a horn rhyton: on one, a horseman is represented as holding a rhyton, while on the other he is presented with it by a female figure (from Brezovo, Plovdiv district and from Glozhene, Lovech district) (Marazov 1998, 180, nos. 110, 112). In both cases the rhyton is a symbol of power and elite status.

Xenophon described the use of drinking horns in the court of Seuthes (Anab. 7.3.24). The wine rhyta were offered to the guests in person. He also narrates about the feast held by the Paphlagonians for the Greek commanders when they, after sacrificing animals, reclined on couches and drank from horn cups popular in the country (Anab. 6.1.4).

The sets of drinking vessels that show Persian affinities are related to the custom of feasting on official and ritual occasions common to the Thracians and to the Achaemenids, as well as to other peoples. Late sixth–early fifth-century sympotic sets excavated at Sindos and Vergina demonstrate similar “Persianized” traits further west (Paspalas 2006, 100). Banqueting scenes, however, are much more often represented in Achaemenid Anatolia: on stelae, seals, wall-paintings, and elsewhere. But we cannot doubt the existence of the same practice in Thrace as it has been attested by both literary and archaeological evidence. As the Anatolian vessels of precious metals originate from areas close to both satrapal centers, Sardis and Daskyleion, they more readily emulate signs of power known from the Persian heartland, thus producing somewhat peculiar combinations (Miller 2007). No such examples are known from Thrace. Thracian vessels can be regarded as emulation of noble status in general but more so as reflecting an actual practice.

Anatolian monuments produced the modern term “Graeco-Persian” which can also be applied to a number of Thracian objects. Often the hybrid results show more “Greekness” than the items from Asia Minor, thus prompting scholars to argue for a minimal Persian influence in Thrace (Boardman 2011). It is usually assumed that Thracian metalware was produced in the Greek cities along the North Aegean coasts. Nevertheless, the Hellenistic area and northwestern Anatolia are the best candidates for the production of the majority of Thracian “Persianizing” vessels.

Thracian vessels attest to another practice shared with the Empire: gift exchange and tribute collection in objects of precious metals. Metrological studies of the vessels show that a certain weight standard was followed, thus suggesting a central control. We lack written evidence for how this functioned in Thrace. However, the silver phialae inscribed with the names of Odrysian rulers Satokos, Kotys, Amatokos, and Kersebleptes found in northern Thracian lands imply princely gifts. Some of them bear names of cities in the Hellespontine area and might be considered as tribute or gifts to the Odrysian kings. The formula of the inscriptions on the silverware – “Kotys’/Kersebleptes’ (vessel), from Apros/Ergiske/Beos, etc.” (Mihailov 1989, 50) – parallels to some extent the inscriptions on Achaemenid metal vessels (Zournatzi 2000). The suspicion that silver vessels were also monetary instruments may gain further support by two inscriptions: on the handle of a silver jug and on the neck of a silver calyx their weight in “Alexandrian tetradrachms” (fourth century, from the Golyama Kosmatka Tumulus: Kitov 2005, 52).

Distant Achaemenid traits can be followed in some of the fifth–fourth-century gold and silver jewelry and pieces of personal adornment. Though highly Hellenized, bracelets with animal head finials replicate Near Eastern and Achaemenid types of jewelry (Tonkova 2000–2001).

Gold pectorals so often found in Thracian tumuli would become more popular in northern Greece and Macedonia only in the Hellenistic Age. This type of adornment is of an eastern origin. The best example of Achaemenid-influenced gold decoration is the pectoral from the Bashova Tumulus, Duvanli, late fifth century, with an image of a lion (Filow 1934, 67). The shoulder of the animal is rendered in a typical Persian manner as a loop. The recently discovered fifth-century large gold pectoral in Tumulus I near Chernozem (the Duvanli necropolis) (Kisyov 2005, 48–51), though Hellenized, falls within the eastern tradition (see a similar large piece from Dulboki, district of Stara Zagora, now in the Ashmolean Museum). Besides the Medusa image in the center, three lions and two deers are represented in repoussé around it. The lions stand on plinths which possibly suggest animal statues, or anyway resemble eastern/Anatolian animal representations. A fourth-century gold pectoral from Strelcha portrays a lion, a boar, and a sphinx. Boar hunting (see below) is also depicted on a silver-gilt belt from Lovets (North Central Bulgaria): the mirror arrangement of the scenes flanking the Tree of Life reflected Achaemenid patterns (Marazov 1998, 59, 175). The images of the archers behind the horsemen look “Persianized.”

Another way of displaying noble and royal status in Thrace and especially among the Odrysians was through the construction of stone-built tombs. Most are dated between the fifth and third centuries, the largest number of which fall within the fourth century. Anatolian Achaemenid features can be traced in some of them.

The sepulchral complex in the Ostrousha Mound, near the town of Shipka in Central Bulgaria, fourth century, was compared with Anatolian monuments since its discovery. The general silhouette of the monolithic chamber and the stereobate on which it was mounted recalls the Tomb of Cyrus at Pasargadae as well as the tomb at Buzbazar. Parallels can be drawn with other monuments in western Anatolia like the so-called Pyramid Tomb at Sardis, the Taş Kule rock-cut monument near Phocaea, and that at Antiphelos (Lycia) (Valeva 2005, 14–16; Vassileva 2010). The sepulchral monument, eventually a mausoleum, with a chamber raised high on steps (finally resembling a Greek temple), would become a popular type in Anatolia in the Hellenistic age. The Ostrousha Tomb displays a peculiar hybrid nature, which combines elements of Greek architecture and wall-painting style with an Achaemenid inspiration, thus producing a unique monument for a Thracian aristocrat.

The door frames of Thracian tombs find parallels in Ionian monuments of the period. A fragmentary painted relief of a lion with his head turned back, probably one of a pair, found in the Zhaba Mogila near Strelcha recalls the relief decoration of the fourth-century façades of sepulchral monuments in Lycia as well as in Daskyleion (Figure 21.5).



**Figure 21.5** Lion relief from the Zhaba Mogila tumulus near Strelcha. Photo by Lyubava Konova.

The few examples of wall-paintings in Thracian tombs can also offer material for comparisons with Achaemenid Anatolia. The visual program of the wall-paintings in the dome of the Alexandrovo tholos tomb (district of Haskovo, southeastern Bulgaria) finds a compelling parallel in the scenes depicted on the sarcophagus from Çan (in the Troad) which was also found in a domed chamber. Both monuments date to the fourth century. Boar-hunt and stag-hunt scenes alternate on the ceiling of the Alexandrovo tomb, while the two hunting scenes on the Çan sarcophagus are divided by a tree. In both cases the wild boar is attacked by two dogs: one on his back, biting his neck, the other attacking his belly, a pattern well known from ancient hunting scenes. The boar hunt is a popular theme in minor arts both in Thrace and in Persia. A recently found example is the gold finger-ring from the Psychoiva Tumulus at Starosel portraying a horseman attacking a boar with a spear. The boars are already wounded in the Thracian examples, unlike the Persian representations where a spear is aimed at the boar's eye. The boar-hunt scenes find parallels on some of the "Graeco-Persian" stelae from northwestern Asia Minor (the closest one is the stele from Çavuşköy) (Vassileva 2010). Persian seals and finger-rings were probably the most convenient medium for transferring iconographic schemes and patterns. Though not yet found in Bulgaria they are known from Anatolia.

The similarities in the clothing of the riding hunters on the Çan sarcophagus and in the Alexandrovo tomb are even more obvious. All of them wear *anaxyrides* (trousers) and soft shoes of textile or leather. The Thracians are represented as wearing a "Median costume": two are shown wearing long-sleeved tunics. The saddle blanket is almost identical with the Persian horse cloth: it is decorated with a border of stepped half-merlons. The same type of saddle blanket can be seen on the horse painted in the main chamber of the Kazanluk tomb.

Although the Thracian paintings fall to a great extent within the Greek artistic tradition, the choice of the iconographic program betrays another taste. The type of society in both Thrace and Persia defined similar preferences in displaying a royal/noble status: hunting and battle scenes (both present in Alexandrovo and Çan) were a natural common option. Not surprisingly the closest parallels come from Anatolia under the Achaemenids. Both areas show hybrid monuments and objects that combine "Greekness" and "easterness" in an indigenous manner.

It is not always easy to detect the foreign elements that contributed to the Thracian artistic style of the fifth and fourth century. It appears as if an unconscious competition between Greek and Persian elements in the shaping of the Thracian objects and monuments (Boardman 1994, 184). Eastern influence reached Thrace both directly and indirectly through the eastern features already adopted by the Greeks. The fourth-century Achaemenid influence in Thrace was mainly Lydo-Persian or “Graeco-Persian,” coming from Achaemenid Anatolia. Similar processes can be observed in Macedonia and Northern Greece (Paspalas 2006).

## NOTES

- 1 All dates in this chapter are BCE.
- 2 Otherwise, *kurtaš* designated other occupations as well: craftsmen, stockbreeders, masons at Persepolis, etc.: Briant 2002, 429–435.
- 3 Neither the exact territories which these tribes inhabited, nor their ethnic identity can be securely confirmed.
- 4 Attempts to better classify Persian-style objects and label them as displaying, for example, “Court style,” “Odryasian court style” (Archibald 1998, 261), “Satrapal style” and “Perso-Barbarian” vs. “Graeco-Persian” (Rehm 2010b), cannot be productive in view of the various elements blended in them and the lack of information about the workshops that produced them.

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- Vassileva, Maya. 2010. "Achaemenid Interfaces: Thracian and Anatolian Representations of Elite Status." In *Roma 2008 – International Congress of Classical Archaeology. Meetings between Cultures in the Ancient Mediterranean. Bollettino di Archeologia on line*, [http://www.academia.edu/1304243/Achaemenid\\_Interfaces](http://www.academia.edu/1304243/Achaemenid_Interfaces), accessed September 22, 2014.

- Venedikov, Ivan. 1969. "Predahemenidiski Iran i Trakiya." *Izvestiya na arheologicheskiya institut*, 31: 5–43.
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- Zournatzi, Antigoni. 2000. "Inscribed Silver Vessels of the Odrysian Kings: Gifts, Tribute, and the Diffusion of the Forms of 'Achaemenid' Metalware in Thrace." *AJA*, 104: 683–706.

## GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

- Boardman, John. 2000. *Persia and the West*. London: Thames & Hudson. A brilliant study of Persian–Greek interactions, although the entry on Thrace is rather short.
- Borza, Eugene N. 1990. *In the Shadow of Olympos. The Emergence of Macedon*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Offers a good overview of Persian activities in Thrace with a focus on Achaemenid–Macedonian relations, and a summary of the discussion on the Skudra satrapy.
- Cook, B. F., ed. 1989. *The Rogozen Treasure: Papers of the Anglo-Bulgarian Conference, 12 March 1987*. London: British Museum Publications. Useful contributions on the blending of Greek and Oriental elements in Thracian silverware as well as on its functions, metrological issues, etc.
- Draganov, Dimitar. 2000. *Monetite na makedonskite tsare. Chast I: ot Alexander I do Alexander Veliki*. Yambol. There is a useful chapter on the early coinage of the Thraco-Macedonian and Paconian tribes, although the author puts some of the tribal issues rather early, starting from the 530s.
- Ebbinghaus, Susanne. 2000. "A Banquet at Xanthos. Seven Rhyta on the Northern Cella Frieze of the 'Nereid' Monument." In *Periplous. Papers on Classical Art and Archaeology Presented to Sir John Boardman*, edited by Gocha R. Tsetsckhladze, A. J. N. W. Prag, and Anthony M. Snodgrass, 99–109. London and New York: Thames & Hudson. An exhaustive study of the friezes which provides good comparative material for the emulation of Persian elite status by the Lycians and the Thracians.
- Gruen, E. S., ed. 2011. *Cultural Identities in the Ancient Mediterranean*. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute. Offers a very interesting and useful Second Part "Perceptions and Constructions of Persia," 66–182, considering the interactions with the Persian world in a more theoretical way; unfortunately, Thrace is again almost missing from the picture.
- Isaac, Benjamin. 1986. *Greek Settlements in Thrace until the Macedonian Conquest*. Leiden: Brill. Believes that the Persians had no economic interest in the Pangaion area and the exploitation of the silver mines.
- Izdimirski, Miroslav. 2011. "Nahodki sadarzhsharti persiyski moneti ot severoiztochna Trakiya. Sastoyanie na prouchvaniyata." *Acta Musei Varnaensis VIII–2: Terra Antiqua Balcanica et Mediterranea. Sbornik v chest na Alexander Minchev*, 7–16. Varna: Ongal Publishers. Reexamines and corrects the first publications of the regal and satrapal coins found in northeastern Bulgaria.
- Miller, Margaret C. 2006. "Betwixt and Between: Western Anatolia in the Persian Period." In *Proceedings of the XVIth International Congress of Classical Archaeology, Boston, August 23–26, 2003*, edited by C. C. Mattusch, Alice A. Donohue, and Amy Brauer, 225–227. Oxford: Oxbow Books. A righteous criticism of the term Graeco-Persian.
- Nieling, Jens, and Ellen Rehm, eds. 2010. *Achaemenid Impact in the Black Sea. Communication of Powers (Black Sea Studies 11)*, Aarhus: Aarhus University Press. The entire volume is useful for the Black Sea peoples' local responses to the Achaemenid impact, in addition to the articles listed above in the References section.
- Sideris, Athanasios. 2008. "Achaemenid Toreutics in the Greek Periphery." In *Ancient Greece and Ancient Iran. Cross-Cultural Encounters. 1st International Conference. Athens, 11–13 November 2006*, edited by Seyed Mohammad Reza Darbandi and Antigoni Zournatzi, 339–353. Athens: National Hellenic Research Foundation / Cultural Center of the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. A modern treatment of the Achaemenid contribution in the metalware of the Greek periphery with an account of earlier Near Eastern influences. However, the Thracian material is almost invisible in this study.

- Stoyanova, Daniela. 2007. "The Greek Door in the Tomb Architecture of Macedonia, Thrace and Asia Minor." In *Ancient Macedonia VII. Macedonia from the Iron Age to the Death of Philip II. Papers read at the Seventh International Symposium Held in Thessaloniki, October 14–18, 2002*, edited by Danai Kaplanidou and Irini Chioti, 531–50, Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies. A comprehensive study of the fifth–fourth-century Ionian influences on Thracian sepulchral architecture.
- Tuplin, Christopher. 1996. *Achaemenid Studies (Historia Einzelschriften 99)*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner. Contains a useful and exhaustive chapter on Achaemenid *paradeisoi*, 80–131, and the Greek perception of these Persian gardens, stressing the relatively late use of the word by Greek writers.