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Edited by:

Edward Anson ✦ Michael Fronda ✦ David Hollander

Timothy Howe ✦ John Vanderspoel

Pat Wheatley ✦ Sabine Müller ✦ Alex McAuley

Catalina Balmaceda ✦ Charlotte Dunn



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Contents of volume thirty-three

Numbers 3-4

- 81 Julian Degen, *Xenophon and the Light from Heaven*
- 108 Kelly Wrenhaven, *Laughing at Slaves: the Greek Comic Slave and the American Blackface Minstrel*
- 127 Hamish Cameron, *Founder of Babylon and Master of Asia: Semiramis and the Parthians in Strabo's Geography*
- 142 Mareile Große Beilage, *Four Observations on Mark Antony and the Triumviral Narrative*

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Xenophon and the Light from Heaven

Julian Degen

Abstract: In the discussion about Xenophon's view about Persia and Achaemenid kingship an ancient Near Eastern perspective, until now, was almost marginalized. This paper enhances the recent discussion about Xenophon's view on the ancient Near East as a traveller and author, providing new insights on two passages out of the Xenophontic corpus. Specific occurrences in the *Anabasis* and *Cyropaedia* can be denoted as light phenomena which announce transmission in Xenophon's narrative. These light phenomena share the same motif and contexts as the presentation of the divine good-will towards the ancient Near Eastern king. Hence, this article for the first time discusses the presence of ancient Near Eastern motifs within Xenophon's works by concentrating on the question how Xenophon gained his information and how he used it for his narratives.

Keywords: Xenophon, *Anabasis*, *Cyropaedia*, light phenomenon, Cyr. 4.2.15, An. 3.1.11, melammu, ancient Near Eastern motifs, Persian décor, aura, halo.

Xenophon's works are viewed among the most important Greek sources for Achaemenid history. However, in individual cases their capabilities and qualities for ancient Near Eastern history are hard to estimate.¹ Mainly the author's biographical background as leader of the so-called *Ten Thousand* gives his *Anabasis* the quality of an eye-witness report only at first sight. An exact observer, however, realizes the work's primary and intentional focus on military strategy and leadership, exemplified by the Achaemenid prince Cyrus the Younger, the mercenaries' leader Clearchus and the author himself as the three main protagonists.² Nevertheless, the *Anabasis* is a valuable source because it provides a detailed view on the internal structure and geography of the Achaemenid empire's North-Western satrapies, where the Greek mercenaries on their way back home passed by. According to recent research, which compares Xenophon's account with indigenous sources, one should not underestimate the quality of some of his statements. Scholars with an interdisciplinary approach, for instance, highlighted the ancient Near Eastern background of specific gestures and pioneer techniques mentioned in the *Anabasis*.³ It seems, therefore, that

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¹ Kuhrt 2007 provides a collection of the most important sources in English translation.

² Cf. the recent prosopography by Manning 2018.

³ Esp. Rollinger 2013a, 27–32 and Rollinger 2016a, 138. Furthermore, specific forms of physical violence which are also attested in cuneiform texts are mentioned by Xenophon. In the case of the treatment of Cyrus the Younger's corpse, for instance, parallels to Assyrian and Achaemenid punishments for rebels can be detected (cf. Xen. An. 3.1.17: ὃς καὶ τοῦ ὁμομητρίου ἀδελφοῦ καὶ τεθνηκότος ἤδη ἀποτεμῶν τὴν κεφαλὴν

Xenophon gained first-hand information on ancient Near Eastern culture and used it for certain purposes as author in this work.

This may apply to *Anabasis*, but scholarship, in contrast, treats the *Cyropaedia* differently as one of Xenophon's later works. Due to its theoretical treatment of the exercise of power and leadership in general, as well as its deviations from the extant Greek tradition about Cyrus the Great, scholarship disqualifies it as a source for the historical Cyrus II.⁴ A handful of studies of experts on the Achaemenid Persian Empire such as Christopher Tuplin, Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg and others emphasized Xenophon's aim to give his work a Persian setting, thereby relating it more to literary décor than to historical research.⁵ For this reason, there is no consensus regarding the *Cyropaedia*'s qualification as a source for Persian history. On the one hand, some experts used *Cyropaedia* to assess aspects of Persian kingship such as royal ideology.⁶ On the other hand, its Persian décor is considered to be anachronistic and to have little in common with the contemporaneous Greek works on Persia.⁷ Recent case studies present a compromise by stressing out *Cyropaedia*'s accordance with autochthonous sources from the ancient Near East.⁸ Already in the 1960ies Samuel K. Eddy hinted at the Xenophontic Cyrus' procession and its coincidence with the relief on the Apadāna in Persepolis.⁹ In addition, Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg underlined the parallels between Xenophon's episode of Cyrus' death with the second part of the old Persian inscription on Darius' I tomb in the royal necropolis of Naqsh-e Rostam.¹⁰ In his study about toponyms and onomastics, Simo Parpola showed that in addition to the Achaemenid layer of information, sources from the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian period can also be brought into the discussion.¹¹ Furthermore, some of the battle scenes of *Cyropaedia* have striking parallels to Neo-Assyrian battle reports.¹² On these grounds the modern reader wonders why Xenophon lost almost no words on key themes of Greek authors regarding the Persian kings, such as court ceremonials.¹³ This is a good reason why one should be careful not to rely too much on his statements about Persia and Persians in his life of Cyrus. Over all, care needs to be taken when prematurely arguing about the presence of ancient Near Eastern elements in *Cyropaedia*.

The present paper sheds new light on two similar episodes one in the *Cyropaedia* and one in the *Anabasis* about a light phenomenon and their connection to ancient Near Eastern motifs. Due to the fact that Xenophon made use of these motifs in two of his works, the

καὶ τὴν χεῖρα ἀνεσταύρωσεν); cf. Klinkott 2017 (Persian context); Radner 2015 (Assyrian context); Schwinghammer 2011 (Persian context); Rollinger 2010 (forms of ancient Near Eastern physical violence in Herodotus and Ctesias); Jacobs 2009 (Persian context).

⁴ Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1993, 513. For a discussion of *Cyropaedia*'s genre see Madreiter (forthc.) with references.

⁵ Gruen 2011, 53–65; Heller 2010, 67–70; Cf. the anthology Tuplin 2004 especially Azoulay 2004, idem 2000 and Petit 2004; Tuplin 2003; idem 1997; Mueller-Goldingen 1995; Tuplin 1990; Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1987; Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1985. A recent overview is Rollinger 2016a.

⁶ Knauth 1975.

⁷ Tuplin 1990; Due 1989, 38–42.

⁸ A detailed discussion of ancient Near Eastern traditions in *Cyropaedia* is Degen forthc. a.

⁹ Eddy 1961, 53.

¹⁰ Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1985.

¹¹ Parpola 2003.

¹² Dezső/Vér 2018.

¹³ Tuplin 2010, 220.

second question will be about the purposes the author pursued by using these specific motifs and the ways he gained knowledge about them.¹⁴ At first, the two episodes need to be discussed in the context of Xenophon's work.

Textual evidence for light phenomena in Xenophon's works

The *Anabasis* offers a striking and eye-catching episode. Right before Xenophon makes a transition in his work – from the narrative about Cyrus' the Younger's failed campaign against Artaxerxes II to the story about the countermarch of the so-called *Ten Thousand* Greek mercenaries – he writes as a narrator about a dream he had as a character of the plot.

Now when the time of perplexity came, he (scil. Xenophon) was distressed as well as everybody else and was unable to sleep; but, getting at length a little sleep, he had a dream. It seemed to him that there was a clap of thunder and a bolt fell on his father's house, setting the whole house ablaze. He awoke at once in great fear, and judged the dream in one way an auspicious one, because in the midst of hardships and perils he had seemed to behold a great light from Zeus; but looking at it in another way he was fearful, since the dream came, as he thought, from Zeus the King and the fire appeared to blaze all about, lest he might not be able to escape out of the King's country, but might be shut in on all sides by various difficulties. Now what it really means to have such a dream one may learn from the events which followed the dream.¹⁵

Up to now, research mostly focused on the way the dream is woven into *Anabasis*'s further narrative as well as the ways it triggers Xenophon's biography as expatriate from Athens, rather than on the motif of the prominent light itself.¹⁶ Hence, some basic observations can be made. Xenophon's dream is a complex episode about his father's house being ablaze with light (καὶ ἐκ τούτου λάμπεσθαι πᾶσα) through fire caused by *Zeus basileus*' thunderbolt, which signifies transition as divine sign in Xenophon's narrative. The author interprets this great light from *Zeus basileus* (φῶς μέγα ἐκ Διὸς) in two ways: at first, Xenophon considers it to be an auspicious oneiric image, but secondly, the dream causes fear in him because the light turns into fire (ὅτι ἀπὸ Διὸς μὲν βασιλέως τὸ ὄναρ ἐδόκει αὐτῷ εἶναι, κύκλῳ δὲ ἐδόκει λάμπεσθαι τὸ πῦρ). The reader of the *Anabasis* is certainly not wrong by understanding the dream as a lightning strike in Xenophon's father's house. However,

¹⁴ Tuplin 2010, 205: "So, historical questions about what Cyrus did or did not establish are not the important issue, only questions about the accuracy of Xenophon's knowledge about more-or-less contemporary Achaemenid phenomena and the way in which he has used that knowledge in the construction of 'Cyrean' behaviour." Cf. Tuplin 2013, 68–69.

¹⁵ Xen. An. 3.1.11–12: ἐπεὶ δὲ ἀπορία ἦν, ἐλυπεῖτο μὲν σὺν τοῖς ἄλλοις καὶ οὐκ ἐδύνατο καθεύδειν: μικρὸν δ' ὕπνου λαχὼν εἶδεν ὄναρ. ἔδοξεν αὐτῷ βροντῆς γενομένης σκηπτὸς πεσεῖν εἰς τὴν πατρῶαν οἰκίαν, καὶ ἐκ τούτου λάμπεσθαι πᾶσα. περίφοβος δ' εὐθὺς ἀνηγέρθη, καὶ τὸ ὄναρ τῇ μὲν ἔκρινεν ἀγαθόν, ὅτι ἐν πόνοις ὦν καὶ κινδύνοις φῶς μέγα ἐκ Διὸς ἰδεῖν ἔδοξε: τῇ δὲ καὶ ἐφοβεῖτο, ὅτι ἀπὸ Διὸς μὲν βασιλέως τὸ ὄναρ ἐδόκει αὐτῷ εἶναι, κύκλῳ δὲ ἐδόκει λάμπεσθαι τὸ πῦρ, μὴ οὐ δύναίτο ἐκ τῆς χώρας ἐξελθεῖν τῆς βασιλέως, ἀλλ' εἴργοιτο πάντοθεν ὑπὸ τινων ἀποριῶν. ὁποῖόν τι μὲν δὴ ἐστὶ τὸ τοιοῦτον ὄναρ ἰδεῖν ἔξεστι σκοπεῖν ἐκ τῶν συμβάντων μετὰ τὸ ὄναρ. Translation by C.L. Brownson.

¹⁶ Haywood 2016, 93–97 (narratological interpretation); Huitink/Rood 2016, 221–222 (leadership); Buzzetti 2014, 119–122 (Socratic interpretation); Flower 2012, 126–130 (leadership); Ma 2004, 336 (exile). See now Gray 2011 about Xenophon on leadership.

the way the author interprets this oneiric image raises the suspicion that this dream is not about an ordinary light or fire. The fire finally circles, thereby underlining its specifics and hindering him to flee from the Persian Empire. Xenophon, therefore, interprets the light phenomenon on his father's house in two ways: at first it encourages him, but a moment later it frightens him not to escape from the great king. Hence, this dream is not merely about a lightning stroke setting fire to a house, but rather about a divine light causing fear and terror as well as being linked to escape. The fact that this interpretation is correct is proven by Xenophon referring to the events following to understand the dream's meaning. In the subsequent episode, Xenophon is becoming the leader of the *Ten Thousand*.¹⁷ Moreover, Jan Haywood recently pointed toward another meta level of this episode by emphasizing that leadership and "...the potentially divine origins and causes of the march..." are the dream's topics.¹⁸ In addition, Michael A. Flower underlines that Xenophon was pointing out the merits of his person being commander because he was certain regarding Zeus' guidance and deliverance.¹⁹ Nonetheless, the dream can also be viewed from a perspective not concentrating on Xenophon. Only in fact, the dream is the starting point of the *March of the Ten Thousand* back home under Xenophon's command, which can be interpreted further as flight from the Persian king's grasp.²⁰ Moreover, Eric Buzzetti points to the dream's deep connection to Achaemenid kingship by viewing the thunderbolt as punishment for the Greeks' injustices towards the legitimate Persian great king.²¹ Hence, the suspicion arises that Xenophon is rationalizing a specific idea by interpreting the light phenomenon in two ways. A short digression provides further insight on this.

Probably the ancient reader may have been reminded of a similar scene of a light from heaven in Xenophon's biographical account on the Persian empire-builder Cyrus II. This scene takes place in *Cyropaedia's* fourth book, where the main theme is Cyrus' campaign against the Assyro-Lylian alliance. Right before the Xenophontic Cyrus decisively defeats his opponents, an occurrence appeared in front of his troops.

As they (scil. Cyrus' troops) proceeded, night came on, and it is said that a light from heaven shone forth upon Cyrus and his army, so that they were all shivering fear for the divine (symbol) but with courage to meet the enemy. And as they were proceeding in light marching order with all dispatch, they naturally covered a great distance, and in the morning twilight they drew near to the army of the Hyrcanians.²²

¹⁷ Buzzetti 2014, 121: "In other words, why does Xenophon seek to become a ruler of the army? He has stressed that the key to the meaning of the dream lies in *that* reaction." (Italics Buzzetti). Cf. Huitink/Rood 2016, 221–222.

¹⁸ Haywood 2016, 97. On the scholarly discussion on this episode see Haywood 2016, 95 with references.

¹⁹ Flower 2012, 130: "What the narrator wants us to believe is that Xenophon alone took courage when no one else did, and literally stepped up to take command because he felt that Zeus had promised him deliverance."

²⁰ Xen. An. 3.1.4; cf. Lendle 1995, 148. This meta narrative conforms with Carleton L. Brownson's interpretation of the significance of Zeus *basileus* in Xenophon's dream as the Persian king, who frightens Xenophon because of the fiery light. Brownson 1921, 423 fn 1: "King Zeus in the dream is the Persian King in the interpretation."

²¹ Buzzetti 2014, 78.

²² Xen. Cyr. 4.2.15: πορευομένων δὲ ἐπεὶ νύξ ἐπεγένετο, λέγεται φῶς τῷ Κύρῳ καὶ τῷ στρατεύματι ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ προφανὲς γενέσθαι, ὥστε πᾶσι μὲν φρίκην ἐγγίγνεσθαι πρὸς τὸ θεῖον, θάρρος δὲ πρὸς τοὺς

Again, Xenophon does not mention an ordinary light because he lays emphasis to a detailed description of that occurrence: a massive beam of light (φῶς) shines from heaven (ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ) above and causes the sudden change from night to daytime. Furthermore, it causes fear on Cyrus' troops who perceive it as a divine symbol (πρὸς τὸ θεῖον), but it finally encourages them to meet the enemy (θάρρος δὲ πρὸς τοὺς πολεμίους). In any case, this light phenomenon needs further examination. An overview of all the evidences of φῶς within *Cyropaedia* shows that this specific light is not only the light emanated by the sun, but also a term for the intense and dazzling light of fire.²³ Hence, this occurrence is exceptional and cannot be compared with ordinary daylight. After this occurrence, Cyrus exposes his battle plan to his troops, where he predicts that his adversaries will flee like slaves (ὥσπερ δούλων ἀποδιδρασκόντων).²⁴ In this case, Xenophon uses the literary technique of *vaticinium ex eventu*, which is revealed in the following episode.

And when light came, some of the enemy wondered at what they saw, some realized at once what it meant, some began to spread the news, some to cry out, some proceeded to untie the horses, some to pack up, others to toss the armour off the pack-animals, still others to arm themselves, while some were leaping upon their horses, some bridling them, others helping the women into the wagons, and others were snatching up their most valuable possessions to save them; still others were caught in the act of burying theirs, while the most of them sought refuge in precipitate flight. We may imagine that they were doing many other things also—all sorts of other things—except that no one offered to resist, but they perished without striking a blow.²⁵

The term φῶς in this passage means morning light. It is not the cause of the Lydians' and Assyrians' flight, but the Xenophontic Cyrus' excellence in strategy, which he developed as general. Aside Cyrus' personal features, the role of the gods as his supporters is also important to explain the military success because a few lines earlier, the light phenomenon proves the divine good will towards Cyrus. It is also important to mention, that this light phenomenon occurs in the context of an important battle, where the Persian alliance routed their enemies decisively without any resistance (πλὴν ἐμάχετο οὐδεὶς).²⁶ In the context of the story beneficence is shown by two things: firstly, firm acquisition of the Hyrcanians as allies and, second, the walkover defeat of the Assyrian-Lyidian army. Hence, the light phenomenon in *Cyr.* 4.2.15 is a divine symbol and shows that Cyrus is the divinely selected king achieving his success due to divine good will.²⁷ This passage thus creates the

πολεμίους. ὥς δ' εὖζωνοὶ τε καὶ ταχὺ ἐπορεύοντο, εἰκότως πολλήν τε ὁδὸν διήνυσαν καὶ ἅμα κνέφα πλησίον γίγνονται τοῦ τῶν Ὑρκανίων στρατεύματος. Modified translation of W. Miller.

²³ See φῶς also as the light of fire in *Xen. Cyr.* 7.5.27; Cf. Strack 1969, 151.

²⁴ *Xen. Cyr.* 4.2.21.

²⁵ *Xen. Cyr.* 4.2.28: τῶν δὲ πολεμίων, ἐπεὶ φῶς ἐγένετο, οἱ μὲν ἐθαύμαζον τὰ ὀρώμενα, οἱ δ' ἐγίνωσκον ἤδη, οἱ δ' ἠγγελλον, οἱ δ' ἐβόων, οἱ δ' ἔλυνον ἵππους, οἱ δὲ συνεσκευάζοντο, οἱ δ' ἐρρίπτουν τὰ ὄπλα ἀπὸ τῶν ὑποζυγίων, οἱ δ' ὠπλίζοντο, οἱ δ' ἀνεπήδων ἐπὶ τοὺς ἵππους, οἱ δ' ἐχαλίνουν, οἱ δὲ τὰς γυναῖκας ἀνεβίβαζον ἐπὶ τὰ ὀχήματα, οἱ δὲ τὰ πλείστου ἄξια ἐλάμβανον ὥς διασωσόμενοι, οἱ δὲ κατορύττοντες τὰ τοιαῦτα ἠλίσκοντο, οἱ δὲ πλείστοι ἐς φυγὴν ὤρμων: οἴεσθαι δὲ δεῖ καὶ ἄλλα πολλὰ τε καὶ παντοδαπὰ ποιεῖν αὐτούς, πλὴν ἐμάχετο οὐδεὶς, ἀλλ' ἀμαχητὶ ἀπώλλυντο. Translation by W. Miller with slight modifications by the author.

²⁶ *Xen. Cyr.* 4.2.28.

²⁷ Tuplin 2013, 85 on *Cyropaedia*'s construction of Persian kingship. Cf. *Xen. Cyr.* 1.6.1 for divine symbols to show that Cyrus is the gods' favourite: ... ἐπεὶ δὲ ἔξω τῆς οἰκίας ἐγένοντο, λέγονται ἀστραπαὶ καὶ

image of an easy victory of the Persian troops. If *Cyropaedia*'s light phenomenon is viewed in the wider frame of Xenophon's whole account about Cyrus the Great, the protagonist's role as "instrument of destiny" is clearly recognizable in casu.²⁸ This is of special importance because a closer look on Xenophon's portrayals of Cyrus and the nameless Assyrian king as the two main counterparties reveals that they are painted in black and white. While Cyrus is the divinely-selected king, his Assyrian opponent is portrayed as his wicked counterpart (ἀνόσιον βασιλέα).²⁹ The whole episode about Cyrus' victory against his Assyro-Lydia enemies (Cyr. 4.2.15–28) is about Cyrus being divinely selected, which Xenophon emphasizes by mentioning the light phenomenon, and achieving military success because of his personal excellence.

Finally, this light phenomenon is in conformity with its pendant in the *Anabasis*. Similar to the φῶς of the *Anabasis*, it is also associated with warfare and a Persian king. Together, both light phenomena of the Xenophontic corpus discussed here, share rulership and/or leadership, fortunes of war, and escape as their contexts. What the two episodes also have in common is the appearance of signs originating from a god which express the divine goodwill to the person who sees the light. The basic link between the two passages is therefore the appearance of a bright light in circumstances where light would not naturally appear. In addition, the two light phenomena are sufficiently unusual in a purely Greek context. Therefore it is plausible to postulate the stimulus of a non-Greek conception.³⁰ On this ground it is justified to raise the question of the motif's cultural context.

The broader context: Xenophon's passages in the light of ancient Near Eastern sources

We only have access to a limited corpus of royal inscriptions of the Teispid and Achaemenid kings, for which sources from the preceding empires need to be consulted to assess the ideological frame of Persian kingship.³¹ It is, therefore, important to contextualize Persian kingship within the broader context of ancient Near Eastern history

βρονταὶ αὐτῷ αἴσιοι γενέσθαι. τούτων δὲ φανέντων οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἔτι οἰωνιζόμενοι ἐπορεύοντο, ὥς οὐδένα ἂν λύσαντα τὰ τοῦ μεγίστου θεοῦ σημεῖα.

²⁸ Georges 1994, 230.

²⁹ Xen. Cyr. 7.5.32: οἱ μὲν δὴ ταῦτ' ἐποιοῦν. Γαδάτας δὲ καὶ Γωβρύας ἦκον: καὶ θεοὺς μὲν πρῶτον προσεκύνοιν, ὅτι τετιμωρημένοι ἦσαν τὸν ἀνόσιον βασιλέα, ἔπειτα δὲ Κύρου κατεφίλουν καὶ χεῖρας καὶ πόδας, πολλὰ δακρύοντες ἅμα χαρᾶ καὶ εὐφραινόμενοι. According to Tuplin 2013, 85 in the case of *Cyropaedia* Xenophon was under no obligation to introduce a light-related divine sign at all for defining the Xenophontic Cyrus' legitimation. In the case of *Anabasis*, one has to enter the reservation that Xenophon might actually have had such a dream.

³⁰ Another light phenomenon is Diod. 15.50.2. Diodorus' source for his account about a celestial phenomenon has interpreted the sign as the preannouncement that an empire will fall. The celestial phenomenon occurred before the battle of Leuktra (371 BCE) in which the Spartans lost their hegemony, cf. Diod. 15.50.2: ὥφθη μὲν γὰρ κατὰ τὸν οὐρανὸν ἐπὶ πολλὰς νύκτας λαμπὰς μεγάλη καομένη, ἀπὸ τοῦ σχήματος ὀνομασθεῖσα πυρίνη δοκίς. Possibly Callisthenes (FGrH 124) served as source for Diodorus' account, which is presumed on the base of Aristotle's explanations (Aristot. Meteor. 343b 23), who argues that this ὥφθη μὲν γὰρ κατὰ τὸν οὐρανὸν was a "kind of a meteor" (Liddell/Jones/Scott 1996, 443). For the case of Aesch. Pers. 167–169, Hdt. 8.137.4, Deinon of Kolophon (FGrH 690 F 10) and Plut. Alex. 30 see the discussion below.

³¹ About the distinction of the Teispid from the Achaemenid dynasty see Henkelman 2011; Jacobs 2011 and Rollinger 1998.

through bringing Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian sources into discussion.³² Especially the Neo-Assyrian kings' representation by their royal inscriptions is composed with a wide range of specific imageries and motifs, which have their roots in both ancient Near Eastern religion and the epic tradition.³³ The aim of the royal Assyrian propaganda was to highlight the righteousness and legitimation of the Assyrian king and his deeds by drawing on popular motifs. Furthermore, these imageries were used to legitimize the royal status of the Assyrian king through emphasizing his special relation to the gods. This is highlighted by his divine guidance, the selection of his person by the gods and the divine support of his person.³⁴ The Assyrian kings' special relation to the gods is an important element in their reports about warfare. The concept of the divinely selected Assyrian king as victorious fighter in battle serves to portray the king as the gods' favourite who fights against an illegitimate and wicked enemy.³⁵ An important feature of the divine support of the Assyrian king in battle is the occurrence of the *melammu* (sum. ME.LÁM). It can be defined as the radiance and awe-inspiring radiance of deities. This imagery was often used for the iconographic and literary presentation of deities along with the kings with the aim to communicate the cosmic power of its holder.³⁶ An absolute majority of Neo-Assyrian inscriptions mention this divine aura or radiance of the king, especially in the case when the legitimate Assyrian king fights an illegitimate adversary. Hence, it is possible to imagine the presence of the *melammu* as an aura radiating a revealing light that causes terror and fear (*pulḫu*) in the rows of the enemy army.³⁷ As elements of the superordinate concept of the divinely selected Assyrian king as victorious fighter in battle *melammu* and *pulḫu* occur in Neo-Assyrian times in three various types.³⁸

Case 1: The melammu of Aššur on the battlefield:

An example for the divine support of the Assyrian supreme deity Aššur is given in the case of Shalmaneser's III (858–824) annals on the so called Kurkh Monoliths. In his accessional year, Shalmaneser III subdued the land Nairi and made it tributary to his empire thanks to the deity's support.

Kakia, king of the land Nairi, and the remainder of his troops became frightened in the face of the flash of my weapons (*namurrat kakkūia iplaḫuma*) and took to rugged mountains (for refuge). I climbed up the mountains after them. I waged mighty war in the mountains (and) defeated them. I brought back chariots, troops, (and) teams of horses from the mountains.

³² Rollinger 2016c; Rollinger 2014, 155–163; Waerzeggers 2014; Rollinger 2012; Salvini 2012 (with Urartian sources); Head 2010; Lanfranchi 2003; Dandamayev 1997. About Assyrian elements in Greek historiography about Persian affairs: Bichler/Rollinger 2017, 1–12; Rollinger 2017; Degen forthc. A; Degen forthc. b; Degen 2019; Degen 2017, 56–67; Rollinger 2016b and Huber 2005.

³³ Parker 2011, 359–364; Parpola 2010, 36–39; Holloway 2002, 178–193; van de Mieroop 1999, 76–85.

³⁴ Fuchs 2011; Parpola 2010, 35–36; Parpola 1999.

³⁵ Oded 1992, 145–162. Cf. Lang 2010, 19–20.

³⁶ Ataç 2007, 310; Krebern timer 1993–1997.

³⁷ Pongratz-Leisten 2013, 4419; Ataç 2007, 295–296; Krebern timer 1993–1997, 35.

³⁸ For full evidence of *melammu* in Akkadian texts see CAD 10, 2, 9–12. For additional discussion of this concept see Oded 1992, 13–18.

Overwhelmed by fear of the radiance of Assur (*pulḫi melamme*), my lord, they came down (and) submitted to me. I imposed upon them tribute and tax.³⁹

Although the inscription mentions the martial features of Shalmaneser III as the flash of his weapons which alarmed the enemy (*namurrat kakkūia iplaḫuma*) it is the verdict of Aššur's radiance which broke the enemy's will to resist. For this reason, the divine *melammu* served to emphasise Shalmaneser's III divine support and success on the battlefield. This motif occurs as a frequently used formulaic phrase in nearly all Neo-Assyrian inscriptions.⁴⁰

Case 2: The *melammu* of the Assyrian king:

It is not only the god Aššur whose fearful light alarms the enemy. The *melammu* can also emanates from the king himself highlighting his position as the god's favourite. The king's divine aura, for instance, is the decisive feature during Sennacherib's (705–680) famous third campaign in 696/95 against the insurrectionary cities in the Levant.

On my third campaign, I marched to the land Ḫatti. Fear of my lordly brilliance (*pulḫi melamme bēlūtia*) overwhelmed Luḫi, the king of the city Sidon, and he fled afar into the midst of the sea and disappeared. The awesome terror of the weapon (*dunni pulḫi melamme*) of the god Aššur, my lord, overwhelmed the cities Great Sidon, Lesser Sidon, Bīt-Zitti, Šarepta, Maḫalliba, Ušû, Akzibu, (and) Acco, his fortified cities (and) fortresses, an area of pasture(s) and water-place(s), resources upon which he relied, and they bowed down at my feet.⁴¹

Sennacherib's presence on the battlefield is a beam of divine light which causes terror in the rows of his enemies. The term *pulḫi melamme* aims to create the idea of Sennacherib as martial superior king, who can subdue his enemies through the divine support of his conquest. Through mentioning Sennacherib's radiance, we can image the king's presence as a shining light on the battlefield, which causes fear in the lines of his opponent's army and leads his own troops to victory. The king's *melammu* is like the previous example also a formulaic phrase in royal Assyrian inscriptions.⁴² In the case of Sennacherib's *melammu*, it is also important to mention that his enemy Luḫi fled into the midst of the sea (*qâbal tamtim*), which means to undefined distance where not even the Assyrian king in the time of Sennacherib can catch him.⁴³ This emphasises Sennacherib's martial sovereignty over the

³⁹ RIMA 3 A.O.102.2 i ll. 20b'–23a': ^mka-ki-a MAN KUR na-i-ri Û si-te-et ÉRIN.ḪI.A.MEŠ-šú TA pa-an namur-rat GIŠ.TUKUL.MEŠ-ia ip-la-ḫu-ma KUR.MEŠ-e dan-nu-ti iṣ-ba-ḫu EGIR-šú-nu ana KUR-e e-li MÊ dan-nu ina qē-reb KUR-e aš-ku-un BAD₅.BAD₅-šú-nu am- ḫa-aṣ GIŠ.GIGIR ÉRIN. ḪI.A.MEŠ ANŠÉ.KÚR.RA.MEŠ LAL-at GIŠ.GIŠ TA qē-reb KUR-e ú-te-ra púl-ḫi me-lam-me šá aš-šur EN-ia. Cf. ibid 30' and 74'. Translation by Kirk A. Grayson.

⁴⁰ See for further evidences CAD 10, 2, 11 esp. 1c.

⁴¹ RINAP 3 1 22 ii ll. 37'–46': i-na šal-ši ger-ri-ia a-na KUR.ḫat-ti lu al-lik ^mlu-li-i LUGAL URU.ṣi-du-un-ni pul-ḫi me-lam-me be-lu-tia is-ḫu-pu-šu-ma a-na ru-uq-qí qa-bal tam-tim in-na-bit-ma šad-da-šú e-mid URU.ṣi-du-un-nu GAL-ú URU.ṣi-du-un-nu TUR URU-É-zi-it-ti URU.ša-ri-ip-tu URU.ma-ḫal-li-ba URU.ú-šu-ú URU.ak-zi-bi URU.ak-ku-ú URU.MEŠ-šú dan-nu-ti É BÂD.MEŠ a-šar ri-i-ti ù maš-qí-ti É tuk-la-te-šú ra-šub-bat GIŠ.TUKUL ^daš-šur EN-ia is-ḫu-pu-šú-nu-ti-ma ik-nu-šú še-pu-ú-a. Translation by K.A. Grayson.

⁴² See for further evidences CAD 10, 2, 11–12 esp. 2'.

⁴³ This idea changes in the time of Esarhaddon, cf. Lang/Rollinger 2010, esp. 232

former rebellious Levant.⁴⁴ It is also worth mentioning, that the awesome aura is not limited to deities and kings, also temples and shrines can emanate *melammu*.⁴⁵

Case 3: Kings and deities as splendid flame nablu šurruḫu:

Nevertheless, the motif of the divinely selected king as a victorious fighter in battle does embrace some more specific imageries related to deities. One of these imageries is the so-called splendid flame (*nablu šurruḫu*) attributed to the victorious Assyrian king.⁴⁶ The clay prisms of Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076) from the Middle Assyrian period give an insight what this imagery reveals.

Tiglath-pileser ... radiant day whose brilliance overwhelms the regions, splendid flame (*nablu šurruḫu*) which covers the hostile land like a rain storm and, by the command of the god Enlil, having no rival defeats the enemy of the god Aššur.⁴⁷

Nearly 400 years later, the same imagery was used by Esarhaddon (680–669), who accounts in his *res gestae* on the Zinçirli stele his martial power during the invasion in Egypt.

To whose lordship they (scil. Aššur, Šamaš, Nabû and Marduk) gave their merciless weapons as a gift; the king, [whom] the lord of lords, the god Marduk, made greater than the kings of the four quarters, whose lordship he made the greatest; the one who made the lands, all of them, bow down at his feet (and) who imposed tribute and payment on them; the one who conquered his enemies (and) destroyed his foes; the king whose passage is the deluge and whose deeds are a raging lion — before he (comes) it is a city, when he leaves it is a tell. The assault of his fierce battle is a blazing flame, a restless fire (*nablu muštaḫmiṭu Girra la āniḫu*).⁴⁸

A variation in the depiction of the gods' support on the battlefield portrayed as flame can be found in Assurbanipal's II (687–627) report about his campaign against the Arabs.

Ištar who lives in Arbela was dressed in fire and a formidable glance (*melamme*) let fire rain down on the land of the Arabs. The heroic Girra,

⁴⁴ Lang/Rollinger 2010, 232–238.

⁴⁵ For evidence see CAD 10, 2, 12 1d.

⁴⁶ Winter 1994.

⁴⁷ RIMA 2 A.0.87.1 I ll. 40–45: *e-liš ù šap-liš u₄-mu né-par₅-du-ú ša me-lam-mu-šu UB.MEŠ ú-saḫ-ḫa-pu nab-lu šur-ru-ḫu šá ki-ma ti-ik ri-iḫ-ši a-na KUR nu-kúr-te šuz(*)-nu-nu-ma i-na si-qir^d en-líl ma-ḫi-ra la-a i-šu-ú ú-šam-qi-tu gi-ir^d a-šur*. Translation by A.K. Grayson.

⁴⁸ RINAP 4, 184 rev. ll. 7b–14: *ú-kin-nu GIŠ.TUKUL.MEŠ-šú-nu la pa-du-u-ti a-na ši-rik-ti EN-ti-šú iš-ru-ku LUGAL [ša] EN EN.MEŠ^d AMAR.UTU UGU LUGAL.MEŠ-ni ša kib-rat LÍMMU-ti ú-šá-te-ru ú-šar-bu-u EN-u-su KUR.KUR DÙ-ši-na a-na GÌR.MEŠ-šú ú-šak-ni-šú bil-tu ù man-da-at-tu UGU-ši-na ú-kin-nu ka-šid a-a-bé-e-šú mu-ḫal-li-qu ga-re-e-šú LUGAL šá tal-lak-ta-šú a-bu-bu-um-ma ep-še-ta-šú lab-bu na-ad-ru pa-nu-uš-šú URU-um-ma ar-ke-e-šú ti-lu qit-ru-ub ta-ḫa-zi-šú dan-nu nab-lu muš-taḫ-mi-ṭu GIŠ.BAR la a-ni-ḫu*. Translation by E. Leichty.

having organized the battle array (overthrew my enemy) (*Girra qardu anuntu kušsurma*).⁴⁹

Similar to the imagery of the *melammu* as threatening light, the splendid flame *nablu šurruḫu* also aims to underscore the divine support of the Assyrian king. Hence, these imageries are all connoted with martial superior leadership terrifying the enemy, thereby denying the legitimation of the adversary through the Assyrian king's divine guidance. Nearly the same imagery was used to report about the defeat of the Elamites in another royal inscription of Ashurbanipal. Like in *Anabasis'* dream an oneiric image occurs, which is an epiphany of the goddess Ištar with fire. Rightly before Ashurbanipal decided to wage war against the king of the Elamites Teumman, an interpreter of dreams (*šabrû*) told his king an explanation of a dream he had after the king prayed to Ištar.

During the course of the night that I had appealed to her, a dream interpreter lay down and saw a dream. He woke up and (then) reported to me the night vision that the goddess Ištar had shown him, saying: 'The goddess Ištar who resides in the city Arbela entered and she had quivers hanging on the right and left. She was holding a bow at her side (and) she was unsheathing a sharp sword that (was ready) to do battle. You (Ashurbanipal) stood before her (and) she was speaking to you like (your own) birth-mother. The goddess Ištar, the sublime one of the gods, called out to you, instructing you, saying: 'You are looking forward to waging war (and) I myself am about to set out towards my destination (the battlefield).' ... She took you into her sweet embrace and protected your entire body. Fire flared up in front of her (*pānušša Girra innapiḫ*). She went off furiously outside. She directed her attention towards Teumman, the king of the land Elam with whom she was angr[y].⁵⁰

In this dream Ištar appears as a mother, who gives shelter to the king like to a child, as well as a warrior, who is ready to face the enemy. Hence, A. Zgoll stated that Ištar's epiphany goes conform with the common Assyrian belief of how a goddess should appear in front of the king: on the one hand she protects the king like a mother does with her child and on the other hand she is a frightening warrior, defeating the king's enemy.⁵¹ Like in the text about Ištar fighting the Arabs, the goddess' connotation with the divine fire from the fire goddess Girra (^dGIŠ.BAR) is one of her attributes which intimidates the enemy on the battleground. In further consequence, the approach of the Assyrian army freighted

⁴⁹ Streck 1916, 78, ix ll. 79–82: ^{ilu}ištar a-ši-bat ^{alu}arba-ilu ^{ilu}išātu^m lit-bu-šat me-lam-me na-ša-a-ta eli ^{mātu}a-ri-bi i-za-an-nun nab-li ^{ilu}Gira (Ura) kar-du a-nun-tu ku-uš-šur-ma. Translation by the author. For the problematic phrase "Girra qardu anuntu kušsurma" see CAD 1, 2, 150.

⁵⁰ RINAP 5 Ashurbanipal 003 v ll. 48b–72: ina šat mu-ši šu-a-tu šá am-ḫur-ši 1-en LÚ.šab-ru-u ú-tu-ul-ma i-na-aṭ-ṭal MÁŠ.GI₆ i-gi-il-ti-ma tab-rit mu-ši ša ^d15 ú-šab-ru-šú e-ru-ba-am-ma 15 u 2.30 tu-ul-la-ta iš-pa-a-ti tam-ḫa-at GIŠ.PAN ina i-di-šá šal-pat nam-ša-ru zaq-tú šá e-peš ta-ḫa-zi ma-ḫar-šá ta-zi-iz ši-i ki-ma AMA a-lit-ti i-tam-ma-a it-ti-ka il-si-ka ^d15 šá-qut DINGIR.MEŠ i-šak-kan-ka ṭe-e-mu um-ma ta-na-aṭ-ṭa-la a-na e-peš šá-áš-me a-šar pa-nu-u-a šak-nu te-ba-ku a-na-ku at-ta ta-qab-bi-šá um-ma a-šar tal-la-ki it-ti-ki lul-lik ^dbe-let GAŠAN.MEŠ ši-i tu-šá-an-nak-ka um-ma at-ta a-kan-na lu áš-ba-ta a-šar maš-kán-i-ka a-kul a-ka-lu ši-ti ku-ru-un-nu nin-gu-tú šu-kun nu-³i-id DINGIR-ti a-di al-la-ku šip-ru šu-a-tu ep-pu-šú ú-šak-šá-du šu-um-me-rat lib-bi-ka pa-nu-u-ka ul ur-raq ul i-nār-ru-ṭa GÌR.II-ka ul ta-šam-maṭ zu-ut-ka ina MURUB₄ tam-ḫa-ri ina ki-rim-mi-šá DÜG.GA taḫ-ši-in-ka-ma taḫ-te-na gi-mir la-ni-ka pa-nu-uš-šá ^dGIŠ.BAR in-na-pi-iḫ šam-riš ta-at-ta-ši a-na a-ḫa-a-ti e-li mte-um-man MAN KUR.ELAM.MA.KI ša ug-gu-ga-ta pa-nu-uš-šá taš-kun. Translation of J. Novotny.

⁵¹ Zgoll 2006, 209.

Teumann, who finally fled from the battlefield.⁵² According to the royal inscriptions, Ashurbanipal's success, ultimately, originates from the divine good-will of Ištar.⁵³ On these grounds, the two dreams of Ashurbanipal and Xenophon have the same ambivalence of the divine figure as protagonist in common.

Nevertheless, there are other tropes for expressing divine good-will in the context of battle in Neo-Assyrian inscriptions. The display of the gods' good-will towards the Assyrian king as light phenomenon on the battlefield is not solely limited to *melammu* and *nablu šurruhu*. Divine selection of the king also had an impact in the way how he defeated the enemy. For instance, Sennacherib portrayed himself as a ruler with the ability to strike his enemies with lightnings because of his status as both divine selected and pious king.

Sennacherib, great king, strong king, king of Assyria, unrivalled king, pious shepherd who reveres the great gods, guardian of truth who loves justice, renders assistance, goes to the aid of the weak, (and) strives after good deeds, perfect man, virile warrior, foremost of all rulers, the bridle that controls the insubmissive, (and) the one who strikes enemies with lightning (*mušabriqu*).⁵⁴

The trope of the king who strikes enemies with lightning is a frequent element in Sennacherib's presentation of his royal qualities.⁵⁵ This is of special importance since Mesopotamian texts strictly link the act of striking someone or something with a lightning (*barāqu*) as a supernatural incident to gods.⁵⁶ Hence, the trope of lightning as light phenomena in the context of battle was meant to highlight the special relation of the king to the gods without any doubt. However, this metaphor was not limited to the act of fighting. As it is depicted in Esarhaddon's report about his campaign against Egypt, lightnings were also the preannouncement of the advancing Assyrian army which was marching through the desert to attack the surprised Egyptians.⁵⁷

[In accordance with the god Aššur, m]y [lord] (and) by my own intelligence, [it occurred] to me [...] in water skins (and) bags [...] wh[ere] snakes (and) scorpions [...] in (its) midst, he heard my prayer [... The god Adad] produced heat lightning high [over the] entire [sky]. In the city [... inter]twined [trees] that I saw, the l[ight ...]⁵⁸

⁵² RINAP 5 Ashurbanipal 003 v ll. 79b–86.

⁵³ The relevance of dreams for the Assyrian king's official representation gained more importance in the late period of the Neo-Assyrian empire, which the entry of this motif in Ashurbanipal's inscriptions illustrates, cf. Pongratz-Leisten 1999, 120–127.

⁵⁴ RINAP 3 Sennacherib 001 ll. 1'–3' ^{md}EN.ZU-ŠEŠ.MEŠ-eri-ba LUGAL GAL LUGAL dan-nu LUGAL KUR aš-šur.KI LUGAL la šá-na-an RE.É.UM mut-nen-nu-ú pa-liḥ DINGIR.MEŠ GAL.MEŠ na-šir kit-ti ra-ḡ-i-im mi-šá-ri e-piš ú-sa-a-ti a-lik tap-pu-ut a-ki-i sa-ḥi-ru dam-qa-a-ti eṭ-lum gīt-ma-lum zi*-ka-ru qar-du a-šá-red kal ma-al-ki rap-pu la-ḡ-i-ṭ la ma-gi-ri mu-šab-ri-qu za-ma-a-ni. Translation by A. Kirk Grayson and J. Novotny.

⁵⁵ RINAP 3: 2, 1; 3, 1; 4, 1; 5, 1; 8, 1; 9, 1; 15, 1; 16, 1; 17, 1; 18, 1; 22, 1; 23, 1; 24, 1; 27, 1; 31, 1; 46, 1; 136, 1; 153, 1; 154, 1; 213, 1; 230, 3.

⁵⁶ CAD 2, 103 s.v. *barāqu*: "to strike with lightning... to flash (said of lightning)."

⁵⁷ Cf. Radner 2008. About the Greek reception of these campaigns see Rollinger 2004; Rollinger/Lang 2004.

⁵⁸ RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 036 ll. 4'–8': [(...) ki-i' qí-bit' AN.ŠÁR' EN]-ia' ina ṭè-me ra-ma-ni-ia ina GEŠTU.II-[ia ib-ši-ma ...] ina KUŠ.na-a-di KUŠ.ḥi-in-ti x [...] x ṛa¹-[šar] MUŠ.MEŠ GÍR.TAB.MEŠ [... a]-na' qer-biš iš-ma-a su-up-pi-ia [...] ṛIŠKUR ina AN]-e DAGAL.MEŠ šá-qiš iš-ša-nab-bur ina URU.[...] [...] iš-ši ḥi-it]-lu-pu-ti šá e-mu-ru pa-[an ṽUTU-ši ...]. Translation by E. Leichty and J. Novotny.

The trope of lightning striking the enemy became a frequent used element in the propaganda of Mesopotamian kings from this time on.⁵⁹ Although, the royal inscriptions of the 1st Millennium BCE offer a wide range of imaginaries to the reader, the king is in every case the *persona agens* due to their unchanged formulae.⁶⁰ Thus, in the world of Assyrian propaganda it is of no significance whether the light phenomena address only the enemy or the Assyrian army, since in every case the divine guidance of the king's campaign has priority. For that reason the light phenomenon of *Cyropaedia* perfectly fits in the context of ancient Near Eastern kings' propaganda. The motif of Xenophon's passage is a mixture of ancient Near Eastern light phenomena, because a definite attribution to one of them is not possible. Nevertheless, all the texts discussed here communicate the divine goodwill towards the legitimate king, despite the wide range of their variations in detail. The persistence of light phenomena as trope used for royal representation in Achaemenid times must be the next focus of the argument.

The close connection of divine light with the Achaemenid dynasty

The association of kingship with light phenomena is not limited to Assyrian times. A range of different sources attest the transmission and translation of this idea into royal Achaemenid representation. An Achaemenid seal, for instance, found on the North-East coast of the Black Sea, shows the goddess Anahita standing on a lion with *melammu* appearing in front of a Persian king.⁶¹ It is still a matter of debate whether the Iranian **chvarnah* is related to the *melammu*, which cannot be taken for granted due to a lack of textual evidence for the Achaemenid time.⁶² Furthermore, there is no scholarly consensus about the interpretation of the iconography of the man in the winged disk, who is integral part of royal Achaemenid iconography, because we know of both Auramazdā and Aššur depicted in winged disks.⁶³ However, the context of its appearances in Achaemenid time fits perfectly with the doctrine of divine right of Achaemenid kingship.⁶⁴ Anyway, on the one hand the similarities in the visual vocabulary of Neo-Assyrian and Achaemenid gives proof to the persistence of Mesopotamian motifs and conceptions of royal qualities in Achaemenid time. On the other hand, these motifs were translated into the Persian context and were adapted for the reason of specific cultural claims. That's hardly surprising because Mesopotamian scribal tradition and intellectual culture continued in the ancient

⁵⁹ RiBO 7 Nabopolassar 05 i ll. 19'–24': "When, by the commands of the gods Nabû and Marduk, the beloved of my royal majesty, and (with) the strong weapon of the awesome god Erra, the one who constantly strikes my enemies with lightning..." *e-nu-ma i-na qí-bí-a-ti d'na-bi-um ù d'AMAR.UTU na-ra-am šar-ru-ti-ia ù GIŠ.TUKUL-kí da-núm ša d'èr-ra ra-šu-ub-bu mu-uš-<ta>-ab-ri-qu za-à-ri-ia*. Translation by R. Da Riva and J. Novotny.

⁶⁰ Exhaustive treatments of this topic are van de Mieroop 1999, 40–85 and Oded 1992.

⁶¹ Parpola 2000, xxi; for further evidence for light phenomena on seals see Dusinberre 2008.

⁶² There is no textual evidence for *melammu* in the Achaemenid Empire according to autochthonous sources. On the Iranian **chvarnah*, cf. Root 2012, 52–54; Garrison 2011, 47–51; Garrison 2009; Ehrenberg 2008; Gnoli 1999; Jacobs 1987. Also the Elamite *kitin* comes into question Henkelman 2008, 364. A survey over the iconographic and textual evidence is Soudavar 2010.

⁶³ The depiction of Aššur in the winged disk from the reign of Ashurbanipal II and the so-called "man in the winged disk" on reliefs of Darius I have the same iconography, cf. Garrison 2011, 36 fn. 74.

⁶⁴ Stronach 1998, 235; Dusinberre 2008; Garrison 2009; Rollinger 2011, 20–22 with references.

Near East under Persian rule and passed its heritage on to the next generations.⁶⁵ There is, therefore, every indication that, on the one hand, the two traditions have much in common, because their semantics are harmonizing and coalescing. However, on the other hand, we need to assume the independence of both traditions.

Although, literary sources from the Achaemenid period do not mention any light phenomena, the well-known Greek accounts about Persians and Persia are helpful in this case. These accounts are, nonetheless, tendentious but insightful sources for the conception of Achaemenid kingship if one reads them with the cuneiform evidence in mind.⁶⁶ Passages from Aeschylus' classical play *Persae* and Plutarch's *Vita Alexandri Magni* come in here as signs of Greek awareness of light phenomena in the context of Achaemenid kings. Aeschylus' awareness of the close connection of Achaemenid kingship with light cannot be overlooked in some passages about Atossa and Xerxes. The mother of the great king is portrayed as equal to the eyes of the god which are associated with light (φῶς):

But look, here is a light like the eyes of the god, the mother of our king, my Queen. I bow low before her. It is fitting also that we all address her with words of salutation. The elders prostrate themselves and then rise to their feet. Their leader continues.⁶⁷

Another passage of the *Persae* clearly shows that light is associated with the salvation of Xerxes as great king and head of the royal Achaemenid dynasty.⁶⁸

It is for this reason that there is a double concern in my mind: neither to hold in honor vast wealth without men, and that the light of success does not shine, in proportion to their strength, on men without riches. Our wealth, at all events, is ample, but my anxiety is for the light, the salvation of the house, which I regard to be the presence of its lord.⁶⁹

These passages proof the Greeks' awareness of the close connection of light (φῶς) with the Achaemenid dynasty. However, this goes even further. In Plutarch's biographical account about Alexander the Great, is a testimony that Plutarch's sources knew that too.⁷⁰ When Alexander caught Darius' wife after his victory in the battle of Issus, the Macedonian conqueror treated her very well, at least according to the tradition.⁷¹ A striking example for this treatment is the episode about her death, when Alexander provided her a Persian-style

⁶⁵ Schaudig 2019; Waerzeggers 2015; Parpola 2010, 39–42; Jursa 2013; Jursa 2007.

⁶⁶ On the presence of ancient Near Eastern motifs and elements in Greek literature see Rollinger 2017; Rollinger 2013b; 2011; Haubold 2013; Klinkott 2017; Klinkott/Kramer 2017; Degen 2017; Degen forthc. A; Degen forthc. b. On mirroring Greek history in the history of ancient Near Eastern empires see Degen/Rollinger 2019; Ruffing 2009; Ruffing 2016. On Greek stereotypes towards Persians see Madreiter 2012; Briant 2002; Hutzfeld 1999.

⁶⁷ Aeschyl. Pers. 150–154: ἀλλ' ἤδε θεῶν ἴσον ὀφθαλμοῖς φάος ὀρμαῖται μήτηρ βασιλέως, βασίλεια δ' ἐμή; προσπίτνω; καὶ προσφθόγοις δὲ χρεῶν αὐτὴν πάντας μύθοισι προσαυδᾶν. Translation by H.W. Smyth.

⁶⁸ Cf. Garvie 2009, 96; 111.

⁶⁹ Aeschyl. Pers. 165 –170: ταῦτά μοι διπλῇ μέριμνα φραστός ἐστιν ἐν φρεσίν, μήτε χρημάτων ἀνάνδρων πλῆθος ἐν τιμῇ σέβειν μήτ' ἀχρημάτοισι λάμπειν φῶς ὅσον σθένος πάρα. ἔστι γὰρ πλοῦτός γ' ἀμεμφής, ἀμφὶ δ' ὀφθαλμῷ φόβος; ὅμματα γὰρ δόμων νομίζω δεσπότου παρουσίαν. Translation by H.W. Smyth.

⁷⁰ Cf. Plutarch's sources Müller 2014, 124–128; Hammond 1993; Hamilton 1969. On the presence of ancient Near Eastern elements in historiographical accounts on Alexander the Great see Degen 2019b; Howe 2008.

⁷¹ See the discussion of this episode in full length in Müller 2011.

funeral. It is of high significance that the only thing missing at the funeral was the light of her husband Darius III (τὸ σὸν ὀρᾶν φῶς) as a herald reported to the great king.⁷²

From this we may conclude, that an analysis of all the Greek evidence for light phenomena reveals the Greeks' knowledge of the close connection between the royal Achaemenid dynasty with light in contexts where normally no light appears. For attesting an ancient Near Eastern background of *Cyropaedia's* passage about Cyrus and the light from heaven, the fact that Xenophon used the light motif in a Persian context matters most. In addition, the Xenophontic episode has the same contexts in common as the ancient Near Eastern evidence, just as the portrayal of Cyrus' and his adversary!⁷³

In conclusion, on the one hand, *Cyropaedia's* light phenomenon has obvious parallels with both Assyrian propaganda and the presentation of royal Achaemenid qualities. Hence, the ancient Near Eastern evidence can be seen as the core at the bottom of Xenophon's episode about the light from heaven. It needs to be stated that *Cyropaedia's* light phenomenon highlights Cyrus' status as divinely selected king achieving his victories on divine good-will,⁷⁴ but the military success in *Cyr.* 4.2.28 is based on his excellence as a general as one of the work's main topics. The light from heaven is meant to be the Xenophontic Cyrus' distinctive mark for his divine guidance for what the ancient Near Eastern role model for *Cyropaedia's* episode is clearly recognizable. On the other hand, in the light of ancient Near Eastern evidence, Xenophon's dream in the *Anabasis* is more an interpretation as a sheer citation of a Mesopotamian idea, whereby its origins may be found in Greek oneiromancy and religious beliefs.⁷⁵ This raises the question about the channels of transmission.

⁷² Plut. *Alex.* 30.3: οὔτε γὰρ ζῶσῃ τῇ δεσποίνῃ Στατεΐρᾳ καὶ μητρὶ σῇ καὶ τέκνοις ἐνέδει τῶν πρόσθεν ἀγαθῶν καὶ καλῶν ἢ τὸ σὸν ὀρᾶν φῶς, δὲ πάλιν ἀναλάμψει λαμπρὸν ὁ κύριος Ὀρομάσδης, οὔτε ἀποθανοῦσα κόσμου τινὸς ἄμοιρος γέγονεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ πολέμιων τετίμηται δάκρυσιν. οὔτω γὰρ ἔστι χρηστὸς κρατήσας Ἀλέξανδρος, ὡς δεινὸς μαχόμενος. Although the light in this episode did not attract any interest in scholarship so far, elements of Persian religion already were highlighted therein, cf. Hamilton 1969, 78.

⁷³ The motif of the panic flight of the legitimate king's opponent is also attested in the second part of Darius' I. tomb inscription (DNb (op.) §2g), which was later also copied by his Xerxes I. (XPl (op.) §2g). In these texts the old Persian term *aḫunā-* "to fear for one's life" (Schmitt 2014, 126: "panische bzw. Todesangst") occurs, what is in all possibility an echo of the Assyrian concept of *hattu*, cf. Rollinger 2017, 205; Rollinger 2016c.

⁷⁴ Tuplin 2013, 85.

⁷⁵ In Greek thought it is *Zeus basileus* who sends dreams to the humans, cf. *Il.* 2.6–7. For the Greek context see the 8th book of the *Iliad*: Zeus hurled one of his white lightning-bolts before the horses of Diomedes "...and a terrible flame arose of burning sulphur, and the two horses, seized with terror, cowered beneath the car." (*Il.* 8.134–136: βροντήσας δ' ἄρα δεινὸν ἀφῆκ' ἀργῆτα κεραυνόν, καὶ δὲ πρόσθ' ἵππων Διομήδεος ἦκε χαμᾶζε· δεινὴ δὲ φλόξ ὤρτο θεοῦ καιομένοιο, τῷ δ' ἵππῳ δαίσαντε καταπτήτην ὑπ' ὄχεσφι. Translation by A.T. Murray.) On the presence of ancient Near Eastern motifs in the *Iliad*, cf. Rollinger 1996. The motif of Zeus hurling thunderbolts, which set fire is surely a specifically Greek idea, but in the Homeric epics no light phenomenon occurs as sign of divine selection. For instance, in the case of a lightning destroying a house, the place became a taboo, cf. Kitchell 1996 with suggestions about evidence from the Early Helladic period on. On different Greek religious ideas of Zeus hurling lightning-bolts see Braund 2001, esp. 20–26 and Calhoun 1935.

Channels of transmission and raison d'être

To answer the question of the way Xenophon could have gained knowledge on the ancient Near Eastern light phenomena, different scenarios can be assumed.⁷⁶ Firstly, the “source quotation” of the passage in *Cyropaedia* needs to be analysed. In the beginning of his episode about the light phenomenon, Xenophon states that this story derives from oral sources (λέγεται). For this reason, it seems probable that the author relied on his personal experience with local traditions and stories he heard during his time in the Persian Empire.⁷⁷ One of the many examples of *Anabasis* can be quoted here: for instance, Xenophon mentions that conversations between him and local elites took place.⁷⁸ One can assume that the author on this way found something out about the local history and tales. This conforms to the academic consensus that oral history had a major influence as a channel of transmission of ancient Near Eastern motifs into the Aegean worlds.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, other possible scenarios apart from first-hand experiences from Mesopotamia are worth considering. Stephen Mitchell, for instance, showed in his epigraphical study about the onomastics in sanctuaries from Western Asia Minor that from the 6th century BCE onwards many Iranian names were attested in local temples.⁸⁰ This observation becomes more important if a closer look is taken on one episode of the *Anabasis* in which Xenophon reports about his contact with a certain Megabyzus, who was the sacristan of Artemis’ of Ephesus sanctuary (καταλείπει παρὰ Μεγαβύζῳ τῷ τῆς Ἀρτέμιδος νεωκόρῳ).⁸¹ This name is of interest because it is the official title of the sacristan at the Artemision in Ephesus and has an Iranian root: *Bagabuxša-* is the Old Persian form of Μεγάβυζος, with the meaning of “who delights the god(s)”.⁸² To conclude on this, the light phenomenon in *Cyr.* 4.2.11 does not necessarily refer to a tale related to the historical Cyrus II. Xenophon could also have learned of it through contacts with local population in the West of Asia Minor.⁸³

Secondly, another scenario could be that Xenophon was inspired by a similar motif from the *Histories* of Herodotus, written previous to the Xenophontic corpus. The Halicarnassian narrates a story about the origins and establishment of the Argead dynasty in Macedonia. The three brothers Gauanes, Aeropus and Perdiccas from Argos worked awhile for an unnamed τύραννος in Lebaea and asked their employer to pay for their

⁷⁶ Theoretical approaches to cross-cultural literary parallels are Rollinger/Van Dongen 2015; Haubold 2013; Bernabé 1995; Tigay 1993. Cf. Metclaf 2015 and Bachvarova 2016.

⁷⁷ Most scholars see oral tradition as channel of transmission, cf. the overview provided by Tamiolaki 2017, 174; 176–177; Vlassopoulos 2017, 364. Due 1989, 31 thinks that Xenophon imitates Herodotus. Cf. Wiesehöfer 2018.

⁷⁸ In *Xen. Ana.* 4.6.28 Xenophon had dinner with a village headman in Armenia. For intercultural communication in the case of *Anabasis* see Vlassopoulos 2013.

⁷⁹ Wiesehöfer 2018; Madreiter 2018; Vlassopoulos 2017; Shayegan 2012; Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1994. Different opinions for channels of transmissions for some of *Cyropaedia*’s passages are Lanfranchi 2010 (Assyrian archives surviving the empire’s downfall); Parpola 2010 (lost source); Dezső/Vér 2018, 100–101 (Aramaic traditions).

⁸⁰ Mitchell 2007.

⁸¹ *Xen. An.* 5.3.6–7.

⁸² Schmitt 2002, 61–62 with evidence of this name for the pre-Xenophontic time; cf. also Schmitt 2005. Lendle 1995, 314–315 argues that Megabyzus was not an individual name but a title for the castrated chief-priests of Artemis of Ephesus.

⁸³ For Xenophon’s manifold contacts to Iranians in Asia Minor cf. Vlassopoulos 2017, 361–364.

efforts. The ruler, however, points to the sunlight shining through the chimney (ἦν γὰρ κατὰ τὴν καπνοδόκην ἐς τὸν οἶκον ἐσέχων ὁ ἥλιος) as their merit.⁸⁴ The youngest brother Perdicas knows to appreciate this and cuts out the sunlight from the floor of the house and gathers it three times up into the fold of his garment (ἐς τὸν κόλπον τρις ἀρυσάμενος τοῦ ἡλίου).⁸⁵ After this episode, the three brothers fled and managed to establish their rule over Macedonia. Scholarship interpreted the light phenomenon as different occurrences of Greek goddesses such as Dionysus or Zeus *basileus* or as ancient Near Eastern pictogram for the divine glance and the handover of power as well as fortunes of war.⁸⁶ This case of a light phenomenon is similar to the one of *Anabasis*, because Herodotus does not describe a usual sunlight. The sunlight in 8.137.4 is literally streaming in (ἐσέχων) the same way as water poured out of a watering can,⁸⁷ which designates this sunlight as light phenomenon from divine providence. Experts on the history of the Argeads attribute quality to this episode as source for the royal self-representation of the dynasty because it seems that Herodotus was aware of the dynastic propaganda or even visited the court.⁸⁸

While Xenophon is aware of the Herodotean light phenomenon cannot be proved, it shares, nonetheless, the same connotations of leadership, divine selection and warfare. A pool of information should be considered as well, whereby ancient Near Eastern ideas were transferred into the Aegean worlds.⁸⁹ For instance, according to Cicero the 4th century Deinon of Kolophon (BNJ 690) mentioned a similar story in his *Persika* about Cyrus II having a dream, in which he gained kingship through grasping the sun.

Why should I present from Dinon's *Persika* the interpretation offered by the magi to that famous prince, Cyrus? For as he slept, he dreamt the sun was at his feet. Three times (Dinon) writes that he tried to grasp it with his hands in vain, the sun turning away, escaping him, and went away. (Dinon says) that the magi—who are the wisest and learned race among the Persians—told him that his grasping of the sun three times portended that he would rule for thirty years. And so it happened; for he lived to be seventy, beginning to rule at the age of forty.⁹⁰

Like in the case of Ashurbanipal's dream, professional diviners interpreted the dream for the king, who are in this case the Iranian *magi*. Therefore, the ancient Near Eastern kernel of this passage is evident.⁹¹ But we cannot give definite answers to the question how much the *Histories* or circulating stories, which found entry in the now lost *Persika*-literature, affected Xenophon. Nevertheless, the Greek evidence (Aeschylus, Deinon of

⁸⁴ Hdt. 8.137.4.

⁸⁵ Hdt. 8.137.5 following A.D. Godley's translation.

⁸⁶ Müller 2016, 88–89 (overview of research); Kleinknecht 1966, 139–141 (“chaverno” as ancient Near Eastern motif).

⁸⁷ Macan ad loc.

⁸⁸ Vasilev 2016, esp. 36–37; Müller 2016, 91; Müller 2009, 180–183 (even Lacedaemonian elements are detectable therein referring to the Argeads' origin from Argos); Rosen 1988.

⁸⁹ Cf. Luraghi 2013; ibid 2001 for the case of Herodotus.

⁹⁰ BNJ 690 F 10 = Cic. De Div. 1.46: *quid ego quae magi Cyro illi principi interpretati sint ex Dinonis Persicis proferam? nam cum dormienti ei sol ad pedes visus esset, ter eum scribit frustra adpetivisse manibus, cum se convolvens sol elaberetur et abiret; ei magos dixisse – quod genus sapientium et doctorum habebatur in Persis – ex triplici adpetitione solis triginta annos Cyrum regnaturum esse portendi. quod ita contigit: nam ad septuagesimum pervenit, cum quadraginta natus annos regnare coepisset.* Translation by E. Almagor.

⁹¹ Almagor 2018 ad loc.

Kolophon and Plutarch) clearly proves that the inhabitants of the Aegean Worlds knew about the importance of light in the Achaemenids' representation of kingship. For this reason, Xenophon used his audience's knowledge about the ancient Near Eastern origin of the motif to give his *Cyropaedia* a Persian setting which was thought to be authentic.

Let us now draw our attention to the light phenomenon in *Anabasis*. Although Xenophon's dream has much in common with ancient Near Eastern concepts of royal qualities, it is most likely explaining some contextual parallels with the heavy influence of Mesopotamian intellectual culture on Greek oneiromancy and religion.⁹² In this case, thus, there is no evidence supporting a direct ancient Near Eastern influence on Xenophon. At the end, it can be said, that Xenophon used an ancient Near Eastern motif to highlight the divine selection and ability for good leadership in the case of his account about Cyrus the Great, and he did, so to say, the same with a Greek motif in *Anabasis* aiming to underline his personal excellence as a leader. Although there is no strong evidence for Xenophon's manifold usage of ancient Near Eastern motifs in his work, it is hard to deny his knowledge about Achaemenid conceptions of royal qualities.

Conclusion

It was demonstrated that the two light phenomena in the works of Xenophon have the same meaning, but have different cultural backgrounds. In the case of the *Cyropaedia*, the comparison with cuneiform documents reveals the Mesopotamian origin of the motif, but Greek texts can be used to point both to adoptions and to changes during the Achaemenid period. Xenophon probably adopted this motif because his audience associated it with the Achaemenids, as the works of Aeschylus, Herodotus, Deinon of Kolophon and Plutarch suggest. In this specific case, the author wanted to give his story an authentic Persian atmosphere which his audience could have expected. Nevertheless, the situation is different with the light phenomenon in *Anabasis*. The origin of this motif is Greek, but the context is similar to the ancient Near Eastern presentation of divine selection. At the end, the two episodes therefore undoubtedly prove that good leadership is the central theme of both Xenophon's works and that the Aegean Worlds' knowledge of the Achaemenid representation of power was not modest. Nonetheless, it is not possible to decontextualize Xenophon from his Greek context. For this reason, the denomination as an "ancient Near Eastern historiographer" would be going too far.

JULIAN DEGEN

LEOPOLD-FRANZENS UNIVERSITÄT INNSBRUCK

INSTITUT FÜR ALTE GESCHICHTE UND ALTORIENTALISTIK

⁹² Cf. Maul 2007; e.g. Oppenheim 1956.

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