

A Contribution to the Discourse Regarding a Teispid-Achaemenid Dynastic Divide*

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Abstract: This paper evaluates the recent scholarly trend of characterizing Cyrus II and Darius I as belonging to two distinct dynasties: the former being a Teispid and the latter an Achaemenid. In the process, it seeks to address important methodological questions pertaining to the use of primary source material, such as the Cyrus Cylinder, Bisutun Inscription, and Herodotus. The ideologically charged Bisutun Inscription is of particular relevance, and comparative data is marshaled to show that, despite the obvious advantages to Darius of linking himself to Cyrus, neither the text itself nor the alleged circumstances of Darius' accession compel a conclusion that he lied on the point of his claimed dynastic connection to Cyrus. In addressing the inconsistencies and difficulties in the arguments for a dynastic divide, the paper also addresses related theories that portray Cyrus II as an Elamite (as opposed to a Persian or Iranian) ruler or, alternatively, as a Persian or Iranian ruler with strong Elamite affinities. As part of its overall argumentation, the paper evaluates overlooked aspects of the terminology used in the Cyrus Cylinder, the limitations of David Stronach's foundational arguments for Darius' single authorship of the Pasargadae inscriptions, and onomastic evidence regarding members of the Achaemenid family mentioned by Herodotus. Without denying the hazards of accepting the Bisutun narrative uncritically or that much about the early history of the Persians (including the subject of this article) cannot be proved, this paper strives to show that the two-dynasty theory seems less likely when one takes a holistic view of the evidence and, as such, should not constitute the presumptive model for characterizing the history of the first Persian Empire.

Key Words: Achaemenid dynasty, Bisutun Inscription, Cyrus II, Cyrus Cylinder, Darius I, Teispid, Persian history

When Darius I “the Great” gave the order to prepare his famous Bisutun Inscription, he obviously thought that it would benefit him to recount his lineage five generations to a certain Achaemenes (§§ 1–4):

I am Darius, the Great King, King of Kings, King in Persia, King of the Lands, son of Hystaspes, grandson of Arsames, an Achaemenid.

Says Darius the King: My father (is) Hystaspes. Hystaspes' father (is) Arsames. Arsames' father (was) Ariaramnes. Ariaramnes' father (was) Teispes. Teispes' father (was) Achaemenes.

Says Darius the King: Therefore, we are called Achaemenids. From long ago, we have been *āmātā* [noblemen]. From long ago, we have been kings.

Says Darius the King: (There have been) 8 of my family who previously were kings. I am the ninth. 9 *duvitāparanam* [in an eternal lineage/now as before/two at a time?] we have been kings.¹

Darius intended for his genealogy to legitimize his rule. Elsewhere in the inscription, Darius emphasizes that the imperial founder Cyrus II “the Great” and his son Cambyses II belonged to his family (DB §§ 10, 12). Therefore, one may reasonably assume that Darius understood these kings to be among his eight Achaemenid predecessors, and for many years, this was the prevalent view in Achaemenid studies. However, the current tendency is to regard the Bisutun genealogy as a fabrication, intended to create an artificial bond between Darius and his predecessors, Cyrus and Cambyses, who are deemed to be members of a separate Teispid dynasty.

Certain articulations of Darius’ dynastic affiliations are, to be sure, more nuanced than others. For example, Pierre Briant and Amélie Kuhrt have been less committal on whether Cyrus and Darius were blood relatives. Instead, they have focused on how Darius “redefined what it meant to be ‘Achaemenid’” by creating “an eponymous ancestor, Achaemenes, which justified his rights a posteriori”² It is indisputable that Darius incorporated the term “Achaemenid” into his standard titulary, as presented in monumental inscriptions, whereas the only epigraphical sources to describe Cyrus’ Achaemenid ties are the controversial inscriptions at Pasargadae. However, this innovation does not mean that Darius invented the name of his dynasty or, for that matter, an eponymous ancestor; moreover, focusing on Darius’ prerogative to update the past to reflect desired realities has served only to facilitate the acceptance of a dynastic divide. On the whole, Briant and Kuhrt seem inclined toward a two-dynasty model, which has become all but doctrinal in Achaemenid scholarship.³

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1. On the meaning of this term, which is a *hapax legomenon*, cf. Ahmadi 2014 (two at a time); Schmitt 1991: 49 (now as before); Waters 2014b (in an everlasting lineage, which tracks closest to the Babylonian and Elamite versions, but may just be a pro forma statement, not to be taken literally).

2. Briant 2002: 110; Kuhrt 2007: 137. I thank an anonymous reviewer for highlighting the nuance in their views, as well as on the issue of Darius potentially implementing the victor’s prerogative in propagating a reformulated vision of dynastic history (see the main text immediately below).

3. See Briant (2002: 110): “There is not one text [aside from Bisutun] to demonstrate that Darius’ line came from a related line of descent.” Similarly, Kuhrt (2007: 137): “But, and this is significant, Cyrus made no mention of Achaemenes among his royal ancestors, so that many scholars suspect that Darius is here trying to forge (in both senses of the word) a link between his own family and that of Cyrus ... At best, the impression is that, while it is possible that Darius may have belonged to the extended Achaemenid clan to which Cyrus’ dynasty also ultimately belonged, the connection between Darius’ lineage and Cyrus’ family was a remote one.” See also Henkelman 2011. Waters (2004) contends that Cyrus’ marriage to the Achaemenid princess Cassandane is what justified Darius’ assertion that he belonged to the Achaemenid family. However, as explained in footnote 70 below, the evidence indicates that dynastic affiliations depended on patrilinear descent; moreover, the strong

The contrast between Darius' intent and the outcome of his efforts is so stark that it invites close scrutiny. Was Darius a clumsy liar, who perpetrated a dynastic fraud so transparent that modern scholars with relatively few sources at their disposal could easily detect it? Or has modern scholarship rushed to judgment against Darius' credibility on this issue?

In recent years, some scholars have pushed back against the notion of a dynastic divide.⁴ Amir Ahmadi has composed a lengthy criticism of those aspects of the recent discourse on Darius' overall veracity (of which the dynastic issue is just one aspect) that appear to evidence circular arguments or subjective imputations of motive to Darius. His work offers a worthwhile admonition: scholarly consensus in the absence of empirical proof is no assurance that a given viewpoint is correct.⁵

More recently, Michael Roaf has published an overview article suggesting that Cyrus should be treated as an Achaemenid.⁶ In it, Roaf touches upon many issues pertinent to the topic, including some that we will discuss below. Specifically, he discusses:

- Why the characterization of Cyrus and his actual and putative ancestors as Anshanites in Babylonian and Elamite texts may be irrelevant to his dynastic affiliations, as the scribes who prepared these documents were likely non-Iranians and, therefore, used non-Iranian nomenclature to describe the area that these kings ruled (more on this concept below);
- What the Persians and Greeks understood Achaemenid affiliations to signify;
- The relative consistency in the cuneiform and classical accounts of the genealogies of Cyrus, Darius, and Xerxes, which, in Roaf's estimation, should be interpreted as evidence of a historically accurate tradition; and
- Which of Cyrus' and Darius' ancestors may have ruled as kings.

Given Roaf's high standing in the field of Achaemenid studies, it will be interesting to see whether his article gains traction. It certainly raises valid and timely questions of method. However, his arguments are not exhaustive and do not address all the theories that have fed into the notion of a Teispid-Achaemenid divide.⁷ Thus, although Roaf's piece constitutes an

implication from the Bisutun inclusion of Teispes in Darius' pedigree that the text contemplated mutual descent from a common ancestor.

4. See Ahmadi 2020, upholding Darius' overall veracity; Bahari (forthcoming); Roaf 2023, deeming Darius to have lied regarding a Magian usurpation but to have more or less accurately conveyed his genealogy.

5. Ahmadi 2020: 3, 37, n. 40.

6. Roaf 2023.

7. See my comments below regarding the evidence that Roaf (2023) brings to bear on Cyrus' Anshanite titulature reflecting Mesopotamian scribal traditions. Roaf also does not address the onomastic argument for Cyrus' supposed Elamite heritage. In addition, Roaf's argument at 271, regarding the relative consistency of the genealogies, boils down to an intuition that Darius simply may not have lied: "it may be that Herodotus repeated the official propaganda of Darius, but that does not necessarily mean that the reiterated genealogies are false." Roaf also does not delve into the authorship of the Pasargadae inscriptions, except to state that it has been debated and that "the fact that Darius may have commissioned the inscriptions at Pasargadae does not necessarily mean that Cyrus was not an Achaemenid" (274). This is a valid methodological point, as I mention below, but there is much more that may be said about these texts.

important step toward balancing scholarly opinion on the dynastic affiliations of Cyrus and Darius, there is room for further input, which may use his work as a foundation.

In proceeding down this path, my purpose is not to rehash points that have already been made but to highlight overlooked or minimized evidence. To this end, I will begin with an explanation of Darius' supposed dynastic fraud. This will be followed by a discussion regarding other occurrences of royal impostures in ancient and more recent times (which serve to show that the ploy is not entirely unusual), the supposed cultural or ethnic separation between Cyrus and Darius (a notion that has fed into the recent scholarship on a dynastic divide), and, most importantly, a revisitation of David Stronach's foundational argument that Darius authored all the Pasargadae inscriptions in Cyrus' name. My objective is not to provide a definitive reconstruction of historical facts. Rather, it is to address a methodological question: what approaches should scholars take in working with the ancient sources? Source criticism is an intrinsic part of the historian's craft, especially when dealing with ideologically charged texts such as the Bisutun Inscription, but scholars also have an obligation to ground their conclusions in evidence.

Darius' Supposed Dynastic Fraud

The skepticism that scholars have shown toward Darius' dynastic claims largely reflects their perception of the credibility of the basic narrative of the Bisutun Inscription. According to this text, Cambyses II lost his kingdom to a Magian usurper named Gaumata. The latter claimed to be Cambyses' younger brother Bardiya, whom Cambyses had executed before invading Egypt in 525 BCE. The pretender ruled for approximately seven months, after which Darius, with the support of six Persian nobles, put him to death and seized the throne for himself.

Rost was the first modern scholar to impugn Darius' account, with its seemingly bizarre tale of a royal imposter, as a propagandistic fabrication meant to cover up his assassination of the true son of Cyrus, but this interpretation really attracted attention with Albert Olmstead's thorough treatment of the topic.⁸ Since then, an increasing number of scholars have regarded the central tenet of Darius' accession tale as fraudulent.⁹ Many such works take the matter for granted, despite the fact that none of the Greco-Roman historians accused Darius of concocting the figure of the Magian usurper, even though they clearly received, in addition to traditions

8. Rost 1897: 107–109. Olmstead 1948: 92–93, 107–12. Before him Beloch 1914: vol. 2.1, 4, n. 1 hinted at the possibility.

9. An exhaustive bibliography on the topic is impossible. However, particularly influential treatments include Burn 1962: 91–93; Bickerman and Tadmor 1978; Wiesehöfer, 1978; Cook 1983: 52; Briant 2002: 97–106; Kuhrt 2007: 135–39; Lincoln 2007: 9, 45, and 2012. Darius' modern critics generally place undue weight on Aeschylus' inclusion (*The Persians* 773–75) of Mardus (i.e., Bardiya) in the list of Darius' predecessors. However, all this signifies is that Aeschylus knew of a Median or Persian king who ruled under the name “Bardiya,” which is perfectly consistent with the Bisutun narrative.

dependent on the Bisutun account, some conflicting with it and, in one case, decidedly hostile toward Darius.¹⁰

The increasingly prevalent perception that Darius lied about the identity of the man whom he killed has prompted speculation about what other details of the Bisutun Inscription may be false. Although the possibility had been raised before, the notion that Darius falsified his lineage to forge a dynastic connection to Cyrus gained considerable prominence in Achaemenid studies during the 1990s, largely based on a series of publications by Stronach, which remain influential, and a renewed appreciation for the Bisutun Inscription's status as an exemplar of a particular genre of Near Eastern literature that served to justify the accessions of kings who attained power under irregular circumstances.¹¹ Matt Waters succinctly summarizes the current trend:

Darius has been viewed as an unabashed liar ... As typical of the genre of royal *apologia*, the truth therein reflects the truth as the sovereign portrayed it, with historical accuracy, as we would define it, not a priority. It was certainly not beyond Darius to fabricate a connection to his royal predecessors where none existed.¹²

Aside from the general presumption that Darius was mendacious, the key detail that has been cited to support this proposition was the absence of Achaemenes, Darius' earliest named ancestor at Bisutun, or the term "Achaemenid" in the few extant Akkadian inscriptions that Cyrus commissioned in Babylonia. In the Cyrus Cylinder, the sole text in which the imperial founder details his genealogy beyond a single generation, he traces it back to his great-grandfather Teispes:

I am Cyrus ... son of Cambyases, Great King, King of (the city of) Anshan, grandson of Cyrus, Great King, King of (the city of) Anshan, great-grandson [or descendant] of Teispes, Great King, King of (the city of) Anshan.¹³

The presumption is that the Teispes mentioned in the Cyrus Cylinder is the same individual identified as Achaemenes' son in the Bisutun Inscription. This would result in the reconstructed genealogy set forth in **Figure 1**. The dynastic fraud that Darius is said to have perpetrated involves inserting Teispes, with whom he had no relation, into his own pedigree as the son of his own eponymous ancestor, Achaemenes. According to Stronach, this manipulation resulted

10. See, e.g., Herodotus 3.67, providing that "all the dwellers in Asia mourned his [the Magian's] loss exceedingly, except only the Persians"; Aeschylus (*The Persians* 776), mentioning Artaphernes [Intaphrenes] as the leader of the plot against the Magian and the one who killed him, both details contradicting DB § 13.

11. Stronach 1990, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 2000, 2003. Briant 2002: 16–17, 110–11; Brosius 1996: 59; Frye 2003: 111–14; Henkelman 2003; Kuhrt 2007: 136–39; de Miroschedji 1985; Potts 2005: 7–28; Rollinger 1998; Waters 1996, 2004, 2014a: 49–50, 2014b, 2022: 195–207; Wiesehöfer 1978.

12. Waters 2004: 91.

13. On the text of the inscription, cf. Finkel 2013: 6; Schaudig 2001: 552–53; Waters 1996: 14.

in a twofold benefit to Darius: first, it allowed Darius to claim a kingly lineage through Teispes, and second, by presenting Teispes as Achaemenes' son, it subordinated Cyrus and his ancestors to Darius' own Achaemenid clan.¹⁴

The proponents of this theory have been quick, perhaps too quick, to dismiss contradicting information as reflections of Darius' propaganda. This includes, as Roaf highlights, Herodotus' presentation of Cyrus as an Achaemenid, which is explicitly stated in two passages (3.75, 7.11) and implicit in a third (1.125).¹⁵ Other evidence that has been called into question includes the previously mentioned Pasargadae inscriptions that describe Cyrus as an Achaemenid. According to advocates of the two-dynasty model, Darius commissioned these texts shortly after his accession to solidify the dynastic claims reflected in his Bisutun Inscription.¹⁶ Developing hand in hand with the notion of a dynastic divide was the above-referenced perception of a potential cultural or ethnic differentiation, the idea advanced by some being that Cyrus and his ancestors were not Persian in the same sense as Darius and the Achaemenids.

The Prevalence of Royal Impostures and the Difficulty of the Hoax Attributed to Darius

As so much of the recent discourse has flowed from the presumption that the Bisutun account of a royal imposter is fundamentally false, it is worthwhile to address this issue briefly, even though it is not by itself decisive on the question of a dynastic affiliation between Cyrus and Darius. The idea of an imposter passing himself off as a major political leader or head of state is preposterous by modern standards. With the significant public exposure and media coverage that important present-day political figures receive, most are easily recognizable.

In ancient times, the situation was different. Political figures had limited public exposure, such that impostures were easier to carry out. Not only does Darius mention other royal imposters in his Bisutun Inscription (§§ 16, 24, 49), including a second False Bardiya (§ 40), but the late Republic and early Principate witnessed seven prominent cases of imposture (see **Table 1**); these include no less than three individuals who claimed to be the deceased emperor Nero.¹⁷ To this dossier may be added other cases. From English history, we have the example of Perkin Warbeck, who led multiple insurgencies against Henry VII from 1490 to 1497 while claiming to be Richard of Shrewsbury, the Duke of York. The latter, along with his older brother Edward V, was one of the famous "Princes in the Tower." This was the name given to the two heirs of Edward IV who were imprisoned in the Tower of London in 1483 and shortly thereafter,

14. As most clearly laid out in Stronach 2003.

15. Roaf 2023: 282–83. For recent works tacitly or explicitly dismissing Herodotus' testimony as derivative of Darius', see, e.g., Brosius 1996: 59, dismissing Herodotus altogether ("The Bisutun Inscription would lead us to assume Cyrus and Cambyses were Achaemenids like Darius, but such an assumption would be mistaken because there is no evidence that the first Persian kings belonged to this family or clan"); Briant 2002: 16–17 ("a past revised and corrected by Darius hardly allows historians to sharpen their knowledge of the epoch of the early kings"), 110–11.

16. See, especially, Stronach, 1990, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 2000. See also the following sources, all citing Stronach's works: Briant 2002: 16–17; Brosius 1996: 59; Henkelman 2003: 193; 95; Kuhrt 2007: 139; Potts 2005: 14; Waters 2004.

17. Grünwald 2007: 137–60.

according to various sources, likely murdered in secret on the orders of Richard III.¹⁸ What is notable about Warbeck's case is that his royal pretensions were endorsed by various dignitaries and foreign kings for political gain and not because they believed that he was the real Duke of York.¹⁹ This is instructive, inasmuch as Darius' critics have tended to discount the Gaumata narrative based on assumptions that prominent Medes and Persians would have been unlikely to believe an imposter.²⁰ Less attention has been paid to the possibility that important factions may have endorsed Gaumata to advance their own agendas, regardless of whether they readily accepted his claims.

Russian history provides three examples of pretenders who claimed to be the deceased prince Dmitry Ivanovich between 1605 and 1612. Among these pretenders, the first actually seized the throne and ruled for nearly a year 1605–6. He, too, was backed by powerful individuals who did not necessarily believe his claim to have been the youngest son of Ivan the Terrible.²¹ Iranian history provides its own antecedents, including the case of Shahmir-e Qalandar who claimed to be the deceased Safavid ruler Ismail II, some time after the latter's death in 1577.

These analogies do not prove that Darius told the truth. However, they provide an important corrective to any a priori notion that Darius must have lied about the royal impersonator. To this end, we should also not forget the salient observation of Willem Vogelsang that the revolt of the second False Bardiya, Vahyazdata, was probably in the works before the date on which Darius claims to have assassinated Gaumata (September 29, 522 BCE). The evidence for this is that, already on December 29, 522 BCE, the army that Vahyazdata had sent from Fars to eastern Afghanistan fought a battle at Kapishakanish, near Kabul, some 1,200 miles away.²² This chronology strongly suggests that even Darius' enemies believed that someone other than Bardiya had seized the throne.

18. The potential secret assassination of these princes negates the skepticism of Bickerman and Tadmor (1978) and Kuhrt (2007: 137) regarding the supposed unusualness of Darius' claim that Cambyses suppressed the news of Bardiya's assassination. In any event, Achaemenid history itself provides an example of how the death of the king himself (Artaxerxes II) could be concealed for a long time (ten months); see Shahbazi 1994, citing Polyaeus *Stratagemata* 7.17.

19. Macdougall 1989: 118–41.

20. E.g., Balcer 1987: 55; Briant 2002: 100–101.

21. Dunning 2004: 83–90.

22. Vogelsang 1998. Vogelsang did not grasp the significance of his chronology because he assumed, without explanation, that Darius killed the real Bardiya, Kuhrt (2007: 137) erred in stating that Vahyazdata's rebellion shows that "Darius did not succeed in convincing everyone of the imposture." All it shows is that certain groups rejected the tale of Bardiya's secret assassination.

Table 1. List of Political Imposters during the Late Roman Republic and Early Principate

Actual Identity	Assumed Identity	Approximate Dates	Principal Source(s)
Trebellius Calca	Publius Clodius Pulcher	32 BCE, approximately twenty years after Clodius Pulcher's assassination	Valerius Maximus (9.15.4)
Clemens, slave of Postumus Agrippa	Marcus Agrippa Postumus, grandson of the emperor Augustus	Imposture commenced shortly after Marcus Agrippa Postumus' death; imposter died in 16 CE	Cassius Dio (57.16.3–4), Suetonius (<i>Tiberius</i> 25.2), Tacitus (<i>Annals</i> 2.39–2.40)
Name unknown, possibly the son of Marcus Silanus	Drusus Caesar, son of the emperor Tiberius' one-time heir apparent, Germanicus	Imposture commenced while Drusus Caesar was in prison and continued after his death (33 CE); imposter's fate is not mentioned by Tacitus, but according to Cassius Dio, he was taken prisoner	Cassius Dio (58.25.1), Tacitus (<i>Annals</i> 5.10)

Actual Identity	Assumed Identity	Approximate Dates	Principal Source(s)
Name unknown, slave or freedman	Alexander, son of Herod I	Imposture commenced shortly after Herod's death in 4 CE, some eleven years after Alexander's execution by Herod (7 BCE); imposter sentenced to the galleys by the emperor Augustus	Josephus (<i>Jewish Antiquities</i> 2.7.1–2.7.2, <i>The Jewish War</i> 17.12.1–17.12.2)
Name unknown, reputedly a slave from Pontus or freedman from Italy	The emperor Nero	69 CE, one year after the death of the real Nero; imposter executed by the governor of Galatia and Pamphylia	Cassius Dio (64.9.3), Tacitus (<i>Histories</i> 2.8–2.9)

Actual Identity	Assumed Identity	Approximate Dates	Principal Source(s)
Terentius Maximus, a freedman from the province of Asia	The emperor Nero	79 or 80 CE; imposter arose in Asia and made his way to Parthia for a while but ultimately was executed by the Arsacid king once his true identity became known	Cassius Dio (66.19.3), John of Antioch (fragment 104)
Unknown	The emperor Nero	86 CE; imposter operated from Parthian territory and may have been surrendered to the Romans	Suetonius (<i>Nero</i> 57.3), Tacitus (<i>Histories</i> 1.2.1)

Once we rid ourselves of the notion that Darius' story is so patently absurd that it *must be* disbelieved, we may assess the dynastic fraud attributed to him more critically. At the heart of the two-dynasty theory lies a contradiction that its proponents have never addressed. On the one hand, the theory presumes that Darius' position was insecure to the point that he felt compelled to fabricate a genealogical connection to Cyrus. On the other, the theory takes for granted that Darius was so politically entrenched that he could freely manipulate genealogical information that was ostensibly known to his contemporaries, many of whom had been subjects of Cyrus and Cambyses, without fear of harming his own credibility and reputation.²³

23. As an anonymous reviewer kindly points out, a similar tension may be noted for the entire Bisutun narrative of Darius' activities, as he is both constantly threatened and yet always victorious. As set forth in the conclusion, I tend to see this as an indication that certain rebellions presented less of a real danger than the inscription suggests. Certainly, the first two Elamite uprisings may have been minor and lacking in widespread support, as the people themselves handed over the ringleaders to Darius without a struggle. It may well be that some of the other uprisings were localized minor disturbances that never stood a chance of success, either for lack of support or political-military organization. Aside from Gaumata's uprising, the really significant uprisings

In this connection, insufficient attention has been paid to the unusualness of the fraud attributed to Darius and the practical difficulties that he would have encountered in propagating such a fiction. It is more complex than the pro forma accusations of injustice and impiety found in ancient Near Eastern *apologia*.²⁴ Nor does it fit the frequently encountered pattern of an upstart king or leader claiming to belong to the established dynasty (as encountered in the biblical tale of Moses and later Iranian traditions that made Alexander a scion of the Persian royal house). To reiterate, Darius' supposed fraud involved rebranding the clan and dynastic affiliations of a supposed Teispid dynasty that had been entrenched in power in Fars for at least some four decades and possibly more than one-and-a-quarter centuries before his accession.²⁵ Yet, the mainstream view seems to be that, for Darius to rewrite the dynastic history of the empire to legitimize his own rule, it would have sufficed for him to work with only the handful of texts that we know of today. In other words, all that was necessary was to record his false genealogy at Bisutun, disseminate copies of the inscription or oral renditions of it throughout his empire, and commission a few texts in Cyrus' name at Pasargadae declaring the imperial founder to have been an Achaemenid. In reality, the undertaking may have had to be far more thoroughgoing, as Darius would have been constrained by the memories of his contemporaries and any conflicting information in archives that existed at the time of his accession.²⁶

Regarding the latter point, the evidence suggests the existence of a governmental bureaucracy within the Iranian heartland during the reigns of Cyrus II and Cambyses II, if not earlier. The Book of Ezra (6:2) mentions a royal archive at Ecbatana during Cyrus' reign, and even if this reference is anachronistic, it is difficult to imagine that this king could have constructed palaces at Pasargadae and Borazjan in Fars without a functioning bureaucracy. Enhancing the probability of an early imperial bureaucracy are the continuities between the recordkeeping system reflected in the Persepolis Fortification Archive and that of the Neo-Elamite period. Also relevant in this connection, is the use of heirloom seals at Persepolis, such as PFS *93, which bears the Elamite legend, "Cyrus the Anzanite, the son of Teispes" (Anzan being the native

seem to have been the rebellions of Nidintu-Bel in Babylonia, Phraortes in Media, Vahyazdata in Persia, and, unless the casualty count in the Akkadian version is grossly exaggerated, Frada in Margiana. Of course, one also wonders whether Darius purposefully omitted or minimized any setbacks that his forces may have suffered. On the other hand, see fn. 26 for an example of Darius including information in the Bisutun Inscription that was not favorable to him.

24. On the standard claims, see Bickerman and Tadmor 1978: 244–45.

25. This assumes that the individual styled as Kurash King of Parsumash who famously paid homage to Ashurbanipal in 646 or 640 BCE and Cyrus I, son of Teispes, mentioned in the Cyrus Cylinder, are the same person. Chronological arguments have been raised against this identification on the basis that the latter lived too far back in time to have been the grandfather of Cyrus II; see Brosius 1996: 41; Stronach 2003b: 358; Rollinger 1999; Briant 2002: 18; Henkelman 2003: 195, n. 49. However, such objections envision an overly systematic view of early Achaemenid family customs and presumptive durations of reigns. If Cyrus I came to power around 640 BCE and his grandson Cyrus II died in 530 BCE, the difference would be 110 years. This would be only slightly longer than the 106-year gap between the accession of Artaxerxes I (465 BCE) and the death of his grandson Artaxerxes II (358 BCE). See also Shahbazi 1993; Potts 2005: 20, n. 59. Of course, it is also possible that Kurash of Parsumash was a brother or cousin of Teispes, a point suggested by Henkelman 2011: 602, n. 71.

26. Cook 1983: 9. That Darius was not entirely free to manipulate well known facts may be indicated by the Bisutun Inscription's reference to a rebellion in Egypt (§ 21) without mention of its suppression, which likely did not occur before the text was commissioned. The implication for the careful reader of the inscription would be that Darius lost control of Egypt, which is hardly flattering of him.

Elamite rendering as opposed to Mesopotamian *Anšan*, “Anshan”). Only its impression has survived, but it is commonly attributed to Cyrus I, grandfather of Cyrus II.²⁷ Assuming this attribution to be correct, rulers in the Persian highlands must have maintained written records and, by extension, archives for at least three generations before Darius.

To perpetuate his fraud effectively, therefore, Darius would have had to alter not just the few inscriptions that have come down to us, but also *any* written reference to an ancestor of Teispes in *any* text available not just to the public but also to members of his own bureaucracy. Now, I do not wish to push the point of what information may or may not have existed in archives of the pre- or early imperial era, as no such cache of documents has survived, or to give the impression that the Persians were a literate society in the same sense as the Greeks, Mesopotamians, or Egyptians. However, the key issue is that, for Darius’ hoax to have succeeded, in addition to overcoming the memories of his contemporaries, he may have had to alter, destroy, or otherwise render inaccessible a potentially vaster corpus of texts than those about which we have direct knowledge today. This implies a greater level of effort than has been assumed for Darius’ supposed deception. This, in turn, calls into question the appropriateness of presenting the two-dynasty model as a probable or even likely scenario, even though it is correct to regard the Bisutun account critically as a work of political propaganda.

The Absence of Convincing Evidence for a Meaningful Cultural Separation

As mentioned above, the notion of a dynastic division between Cyrus and Darius evolved in concert with the idea of an ethnic disparity, or difference in enculturation, between the two. This idea, in turn, has been premised on two assumptions. One is that Cyrus’ use of Anshanite titulary in his Akkadian inscriptions manifests at least a sort of elective affinity toward Elamite culture (as it existed in the highlands of Fars), as opposed to political or bureaucratic expediency.²⁸ The other is that the very names of Cyrus and, perhaps, other Teispid kings are linguistically Elamite, rather than Iranian, like those of Darius and other Achaemenids.²⁹

The adherents of an Elamite (or Anshanite) identity for Cyrus speak of an Iranian reorientation or cultural revolution under Darius, who in his later inscriptions proudly declared himself to be “a Persian, son of a Persian, an Iranian, of Iranian lineage” (Old Persian *pārsa*

27. Roaf 2023: 266–267; Garrison 2011. Young 2003: 244–45 and de Miroschedji 1985: 282–83 regard it as a product of the reign of Darius I. In that case, it is tempting to identify the seal as belonging to an otherwise unknown cousin of Cyrus II or Cambyses II. Note that the absence of a reference to Achaemenes or the Achaemenids on PFS *93 is unindicative, as even Darius I’s seals (PFS 7, BM 89132) do not mention these terms.

28. E.g., Pierre Amiet 1992; Henkelman 2003: 193–196; de Miroschedji 1985; Potts 2005; Stronach 1997a, 1997b: 356–57, 1997c: 684–685, 2000: 326, and 2003. It is perhaps significant that in his later publications, Stronach (2013, 2019), distanced himself from the notion that Cyrus was not Persian. For simplicity’s sake, I will use the term “Elamite” in this aspect of the discussion to apply also to theories that regard the Anshanite culture of the sixth century BCE as distinct from the milieu from which Darius and his immediate ancestors emerged.

29. See the sources in the previous note, to which should be added Henkelman 2014; Kellens 2002: 421–422; Tavernier 2007: 528. These works all implicitly or explicitly revive the theory of Andreas 1904: 93–99.

pārsahya puça ariya ariyaciça).³⁰ This notion was more popular some ten or fifteen years ago.³¹ Nevertheless, it continues to appear in the scholarly literature and was sufficiently interdependent with the idea of a dynastic divide to merit detailed discussion, especially since its most extreme articulation (Daniel Potts' theory that Cyrus was an Elamite) may be interpreted to preclude any common genealogy between Cyrus and Darius.³²

Now, some scholars, such as Wouter Henkelman, have suggested that the issue of Iranian or Elamite heritage in the highlands of Fars is largely irrelevant, due to several generations and, possibly, centuries of side-by-side coexistence that led to the fusion of the two cultures and the ethnogenesis of a distinct southwestern Iranian or Persian identity.³³ In this connection, William Sumner once theorized that the Persians first entered Fars around 1600 BCE, meaning that the two ethnic groups would have had ample time to intermingle.³⁴ However, not all scholars accept so early a date for the Iranians' arrival, since Sennacherib refers to Anshan and Parsua as distinct entities regarding events that transpired in 692 BCE.³⁵ Although there can be no doubt about the multicultural milieu of pre-imperial Fars and the eventual acculturation of its inhabitants, two considerations point to some degree of ethnic differentiation still during the early imperial period. First, at least as used in the royal inscriptions, the Old Persian language is relatively devoid of Elamite loanwords, and second, of the approximately 2,000 personal names evaluated in the Achaemenid epigraphical corpus captured in Jan Tavernier's 2007 study, not a single example exists of a name that combines Elamite and Iranian onomastic components.³⁶ Given the prevalence of theophoric names in the Achaemenid onomasticon, this last observation also provides a potentially significant data point regarding the extent to which Iranian and Elamite cults may – or may not have been – integrated, despite Henkelman's persuasive demonstration

30. Potts 2005: 23; Waters 2004: 98. See the following inscriptions DNa § 2; DSe § 2. Also XPh § 2. These inscriptions all postdate Bisutun, but this does not mean that the underlying ideology first emerged at that time.

31. When it was cited, among other things, to support theories regarding the development of the so-called Achaemenid "court-style" (e.g., Garrison 2014: 572) and the interpretation of the Apadana reliefs (e.g., Root 2011, especially 460–63, interpreting the gifts brought by the Elamite delegation as symbolic of Darius' subsummation of the non-Persian Teispid dynasty).

32. E.g., Silverman 2020: 5: "Politically, two key dynamics shaped this early period for the Judaeans. First is the relationship between the Teispid Dynasty of Cyrus and the Achaemenid dynasty of Darius ... The pre-history of Anšan-cum-Persia (in southwest Iran, modern Fars) is murky. Nevertheless, there is little reason to doubt Cyrus's claim to be heir to an Anšanite dynasty. Most likely, this dynasty was a Neo-Elamite dynasty that had successfully managed to negotiate the fracture of the Neo-Elamite state, the rise and fall of Neo-Assyrian imperialism, and the infiltration of Iranian-speaking nomads." Also, note that Kuhrt 2007: 47, which remains the basic textbook on Achaemenid primary sources, uses quotations in describing Cyrus' dynasty as "Persian," the intent obviously being to cast doubt on this proposition. Although Potts considers the issue of a dynastic divide to go hand in hand with an ethnic distinction, it should be noted that the ancient Persians were polygamous, such that their chieftains may well have had wives belonging to different ethnicities. This makes it eminently possible that their children had different cultural affinities. The history of the Abbasid caliphate provides a useful comparandum in this regard.

33. Henkelman 2008, a magnum opus encompassing arguments found also in other works by the same author directly relevant to the subject matter of this article, including Henkelman 2003 and 2011.

34. Sumner 1994.

35. Roaf 2023: 265, n. 1, alluding to a forthcoming work that will address this issue.

36. Tavernier 2007: 471–72, discussing "Hybrid Iranica."

that the imperial administration deemed both sets of deities to be native to Fars. Accordingly, the question of ethnic affiliations remains open for discussion.

Anshanite Titulary

Anshan, or in its Elamite form, Anzan, was the age-old toponym for the once great urban center at present-day Tal-e Malyan in the Bayza Plain of Fars (i.e., Persia), as well as its surroundings. The specific argument is that Cyrus, because of his Elamite connections, deliberately used the title “King of Anshan,” rather than “King of Persia” (see **Table 2**). By contrast, Darius refers to himself at Bisutun (§ 1) as “King in Persia” (*xšāyaθiya pārsaiy*), and neither he nor his successors mention the toponym “Anshan” in their titulary.

Table 2 – Cyrus II’s Anshanite and Persian Titulature in Akkadian Inscriptions of the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid Periods (not including the Cyrus Cylinder)³⁷

Source	Title
Sippar Cylinder of Nabonidus (i. 29)*	“Cyrus King of (the land of) Anshan”
Brick from Uruk*	“I am Cyrus, builder of Esagila and Ezida, son of Cambyses, the strong king”
Brick from Ur*	“Cyrus, King of the World, King of Anshan (Aššan), son of Cambyses, King of (the land of) Anshan (Aššan)”
Nabonidus Chronicle (ii. 1)*	“Cyrus King of Anshan”
(ii. 15)*	“Cyrus King of Persia (<i>Parsu</i>)”
Bisutun Inscription (Akkadian version, § 11)	“Cyrus King of Persia (<i>Parsu</i>)”

(*) denotes inscriptions commissioned or based on texts commissioned during Cyrus’ reign or that of his contemporary, Nabonidus.

37. Adapted from Waters 2004: 94. Another text deemed relevant to this discourse include the Dynastic Prophecy. The Dynastic Prophecy is a Hellenistic text that purports to anticipate the rise and fall of various empires that ruled in Babylonia. In the prophecy relevant to the Persian conquest of Babylonia, Cyrus is referred to as a “King of Elam”; see Grayson 1975b: 33. However, this reference is hardly probative since the Dynastic Prophecy is replete with archaisms as Grayson himself acknowledges, the most prominent example being the designation of the Macedonians as Hannaeans, originally a tribe from Syria.

The argument that Cyrus' titulary belies a non-Iranian cultural disposition only holds true if "King of Anshan" was his true and exclusive title. The argument falls apart if it turns out that Cyrus also carried the title "King of Persia," or if Anshan and Persia did not signify the same concept or geographical area. It is also weakened if the use of Anshanite titulary were to reflect adherence to non-Iranian literary traditions or the adoption of a non-native protocol for political reasons. None of these scenarios, any one which would negate the possibility of a non-Iranian cultural disposition, can be excluded.

The Bisutun Inscription (§ 40) describes Anshan as one of several regions within Persia, which may have been politically fragmented during the seventh and, perhaps, early sixth century BCE.³⁸ Daniel Potts has suggested that an active Anshanite settlement near Tal-e Malyan existed during the sixth century BCE.³⁹ It could be that Teispes and his descendants adopted the title "King of Anshan" when they first conquered this region, and that they retained their original titlature even after they spread their authority across other regions in Fars. Such a plain, regional interpretation of the title would readily explain Darius' abandonment of Anshanite territory, as this ruler's immediate ancestors may not have had a particular attachment to the area around Tal-e Malyan and he himself was likely born after Fars' political unification.

Not all scholars accept this limited interpretation of the term "Anshan," however, preferring, instead, to regard the two terms, "Anshan" and "Persia," as geographically identical and encompassing the whole of Fars. However, even this interpretation does not compel a conclusion that Cyrus was somehow less Persian than Darius, as many of the Great Kings showed a willingness to tailor their royal protocols situationally to conform to native titulary. For example, Cambyses II and Darius I commissioned inscriptions in Egypt styling themselves as native pharaohs, and administrative tablets from Babylonia show Cyrus, Cambyses, and Darius each bearing the title, "King of Babylon, King of the Lands" (notably, without mention of dynastic or clan affiliations). On this basis alone, it cannot be excluded that Cyrus and his forbears carried a separate Persian titulary in addition to calling themselves kings of Anshan.

Such titulary is, in fact, attested for Cyrus in two cuneiform texts: (1) the so-called Nabonidus Chronicle, which calls Cyrus "King of Persia" in the entry for the Babylonian king's ninth year (547–46 BCE) and (2) in Section 11 of the Akkadian version of the Bisutun Inscription.⁴⁰ Neither inscription was commissioned by the imperial founder himself, for which reason it has been suggested that the two texts may apply anachronistic terminology and, therefore, should not be emphasized. We may entertain this argument with respect to the Bisutun Inscription, to allow for the possibility that Darius tampered with the historical record. However, it is harder to explain in the case of the Nabonidus Chronicle, which attributes both titles, "King of Anshan" and "King of Persia," to Cyrus. Some have suggested that the final redactor of the chronicle was

38. The reference to Anshan is clearest in the Elamite and Akkadian versions. The Old Persian uses the term *yadā*, which could also be an abstraction and not the Old Persian rendering of this toponym. See also Henkelman 2011: 598–99 regarding references to Anshan in the Persepolis Fortification Archive.

39. Potts 2011. See also Vallat 2011: 263–84, postulating, based on a literal interpretation of the Cyrus Cylinder, that Cyrus' forbears ruled only the city (Akkadian *URU*) of Anshan, subject to the ancestors of Darius; Zournatzi 2011, argues that the Cyrus' Cylinder's portrayal of Cyrus and his forebears as urban kings was necessary to cast the conqueror as a normative Mesopotamian ruler.

40. Grayson 1975a: 107; von Voigtlander 1978: 55.

responsible for introducing this anachronism.⁴¹ But then one must account for why the anachronism was introduced into a single entry in the chronicle and not in the passage describing the overthrow of Astyages, which styles Cyrus as a “King of Anshan.” The simpler conclusion is that the Babylonians also recognized Cyrus as a Persian king, a proposition enhanced by the possibility that the Anzanite Cyrus named in PFS *93 was the same individual as, if not a relative of, the “Kurash King of Parsumash” (“Cyrus King of Persia”) mentioned by Ashurbanipal (see fn. 25).⁴²

Waters’ appeal that “only Cyrus the Great’s usage is of immediate consequence to indicate what he, as king, labeled his own kingdom” is certainly true, but this does not mean that other texts, such as the Nabonidus Chronicle should be excluded from consideration when there is no explicit reason to suspect tampering.⁴³ Doing so runs the risk of narrowing the field of evidence to only that which may yield a particular result.

As with the appropriation of Egyptian and Babylonian protocols, the use of a dual titulary may have been politically motivated, as appeasing the Elamite population of Fars was likely a more important consideration during the seventh century BCE than under Darius. It could also have reflected something less politically expedient. As pointed out by other recent critics of the two-dynasty model, the scribes who composed the relevant texts may have merely followed non-Iranian convention in the identification of toponyms.⁴⁴ Roaf has made this point with respect to both PFS *93, which was presumably inscribed for use by bureaucrats fluent in Elamite before the invention of an Old Persian script, and Cyrus II’s Babylonian inscriptions. Regarding the latter, Roaf focuses on the Cyrus Cylinder’s use of the spelling *Anšan* rather than Elamite *Anzan*, which appears also in Nabonidus’ Sippar inscription.⁴⁵ This distinction may be relevant, but it is not a particularly strong lynchpin to an argument, as it can be explained on the basis of scribal variations of the sort commonly encountered in the renderings of ancient toponyms (for example, Cyrus’ brick inscription from Ur employs a third spelling, *Aššan*).⁴⁶

There is, I believe, stronger evidence to support the point that Roaf seeks to make regarding the Babylonian texts: each of the Cyrus Cylinder, Sippar Cylinder, and Nabonidus Chronicle denotes the Medes not by the proper Akkadian rendering of their ethnonym (*Mādai*) but as the Umman-Manda, the “Hordes from Who Knows Where.”⁴⁷ This was a pejorative term that Mesopotamian scribes gave to hostile mountain tribes of the Iranian plateau since the second

41. Kuhrt 2007: 50. See also Waerzeggers 2015: 104, 112–13; Waters 2011: 288.

42. In this connection, it bears emphasis that the distinction between Cyrus I and Kurash King of Parsumash is essential to the viability of the Elamite theorists, whereas the equation of the two is not essential to the argument presented in the main text above. Generally speaking, theories that are less attenuated and less dependent on unprovable assumptions tend to be sounder.

43. Waters 2011: 288. Note also Zawadski 2010: 145: “Although the present copy of the Chronicle might be dated to the time of Darius I there are sufficient arguments for dating the editing to the period shortly after the occupation of Babylon by the Persians.” Although I disagree with his thesis that the Chronicle was a propaganda piece composed on Cyrus’ orders, this view would actually support my argument regarding Cyrus’ Persian titulary.

44. Roaf 2023: 262; Zournatzi 2011.

45. Roaf 2023: 267–69.

46. Ibid.: 268, n. 10.

47. The brick inscriptions are so short they do not allow for comparative evidence.

millennium BCE.⁴⁸ It is exceedingly unlikely to have formed part of the native or routine protocol employed by the court of Cyrus, who, as Herodotus relates, had close ties to the Medes and appointed Median officers to high military commands. Other archaisms in the relevant texts reinforce the notion that the appearance of Anshanite titulary is no indicator of Elamite affiliations. For example, they refer to Media or Elam as “Gutium” and to the city of Babylon itself as “Shuanna.” The styling of Cyrus and his forebears as rulers of Anshan, a place known to the Mesopotamians and featured in their epic literature since the third millennium BCE, is consistent with this overall terminology.⁴⁹

Now, it is notable that the terminology evident in the Cyrus Cylinder and certain earlier texts cease to appear in the Akkadian versions of Darius’ inscriptions, which strive to accurately reflect the names of peoples and places of the Iranian plateau. However, this is but one of many changes, some extending to syntax and word order, which appear in Achaemenid Akkadian beginning during Darius’ reign.⁵⁰ A number of these changes indicate the influence of Old Persian (perhaps, because many of these texts were carved by scribes proficient in Akkadian based in the Iranian heartland).⁵¹ Thus, to the extent that Cyrus’ Anshanite titulary tells us anything about his cultural attitudes, it may be only about his respect for Babylonian scribal traditions as well as, perhaps, those of the Elamites, if we assume that he carried Anshanite titulary in Fars. This by itself may reflect a conscious ideological decision (a form of political pragmatism and respect for local traditions), but not one that would impose a cultural divide between him and Darius.

The Names of Cyrus and the Other So-Called Teispid Kings

Regarding the onomastic argument for Cyrus’ Elamite identity, its proponents as far back as Friedrich Carl Andreas have emphasized the rendering of Cyrus’ name in Elamite (and Akkadian) as *Kuraš*, instead of *Kuruš*, the form that appears in Old Persian. The crux of the argument is that *Kuruš* could have been accurately rendered in Elamite, which has many examples of names ending in -uš, whereas an anthroponym ending in -aš would have been rare, if not anomalous, in Old Persian.⁵² Considering further that the root *kur*, “splendor, care,” has a clear and positive connotation in Elamite, it has been stated that *Kuraš* must have been the original form.

48. Adali 2011; Lanfranchi 2003: 90–91.

49. Waters (2022: 196–97) acknowledges the overall penchant for archaisms but suggests that the title “King of Anshan” should still be accorded significance as this title lacks identifiable precedent in Mesopotamian inscriptions. However, this argument seems unprovable. His further statement that Cyrus, if he wished to use an archaism with Babylonian resonances, would have been better served to style himself as a “King of Elam” can also be countered. As Sennacherib’s account of the Battle of Halule demonstrates, Elam and Anshan were different geographical locations. In describing these and other terms used in Cyrus’ Babylonian inscriptions as “archaic” or “archaism,” I mean only that they could be construed as old-fashioned and not that they must have fallen out of use. In addition to Sennacherib’s reference to Anshan, other Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian texts apply the terms Gutium and Umman-Manda to various Iranian groups. See, e.g., Vogelsang 1992: 184–185.

50. Daneshmand 2015: 326–29.

51. Ibid., 329–33.

52. See, e.g., Andreas 1904; Henkelman 2003: 194–95; Potts 2005: 15–16; Tavernier 2007: 528.

At a glance, this theory seems compelling and ultimately it may be correct. The only real counterarguments would be that: (1) the entire discussion assumes an undue degree of precision in our understanding of the phonetics of Cyrus' name, as well as in the methods employed by ancient scribes in rendering it in different languages, or (2) the Elamite rendering represents the assimilation of an original Iranian name to pre-existing models ("folk etymology") in Elamite and, perhaps, Akkadian, as suggested by Ran Zadok.⁵³ Neither possibility is provable, but there is, I believe sufficient reason to at least entertain the second one.⁵⁴

The principal reasons for considering the possibility of a folk etymology in Cyrus' case are twofold: (1) the fact that most attestations of the name belong to the period when the Iranians were present in Fars, and (2) the prosopography of the known bearers of the name. Only five individuals named *Kuraš* are attested in cuneiform records beyond the sources pertinent to Cyrus II. Of these, two might relate to Cyrus I, who may have been known to the Assyrians as a "King of Persia" and whose son, called Arukku in the Assyrian inscription, almost certainly had an Iranian name, **Aryauka*, featuring the root **Arya*, "Aryan, Iranian."⁵⁵ Another Cyrus, dating to the Neo-Babylonian period (*circa* 540 BCE), also seems to have been Iranian, to judge from the name of his son, Mardu, reflecting Old Iranian **Mrdva*, "soft, mild."⁵⁶ This leaves only two other attestations. One is a certain *Kuraš* mentioned in the Susa Acropole archive (MDP 9, no. 98, rev. 1) from the early sixth century BCE. Prosopographical information for this individual is missing, but he, too, may have been Persian, as ten percent of the all the personal names attested in this archive are Iranian. The remaining occurrence is a certain *Kùrášu* from an Akkadian text of the Ur III period, but his ethnicity is unclear.⁵⁷

Thus, three or, if we count the individual named in the Susa archive, four of the five attestations of the name concern individuals in an Iranian milieu, with three occurrences involving individuals whose children had Iranian names.⁵⁸ I do not know of another Elamite name for which the prosopographical context is similar. Based on this evidence, it may cautiously be suggested that the name *Kuraš* had a particular association with Iranians or Persians. This, in turn, enhances the possibility that the seventh and sixth century BCE attestations of the name reflect the assimilation through Elamite folk etymology of an existing Iranian form.

53. Zadok 1976: 62, 1991: 237.

54. Folk etymologies have been well-studied regarding the Greek forms of Old Persian names (cf. Armayor 1978), and Thierry Petit (1990: 52, n. 168) has identified one seemingly clear example from Achaemenid royal texts involving the Akkadian rendering, on Darius' tomb inscription, of the name of this king's loyal supporter, Gobryas the Patischorian. Specifically, Petit notes that, whereas the Old Persian anthroponym *Gaubaruva* is consistently rendered in Akkadian as *Gubaru* or *Gubara* in other contexts, in the inscription on Darius' tomb, it is rendered as *Kabarra*, which also happens to mean the "Great One" in Akkadian.

55. Assuming that Cyrus I is the Kurash of Parsumash who sent his son, Arukku, to Ashurbanipal as a hostage around 640 BCE.

56. Dandamaev 1992: 98.

57. Potts 2005: 16; Tavernier 2007: 528.

58. If Cyrus I, Kurash of Anzan, and Kurash of Parsumash are the same individual, then we must also account for the name "Cambyes," for which see the main text below.

Multiple Iranian etymologies have been adduced for Cyrus' name. The principal ones are summarized below:

- Vasily Abaev and János Harmatta: Derived from the Indo-Iranian root **kur-*, “youth, child,” with the latter scholar suggesting a connection with the custom of ultimogeniture.⁵⁹
- Wilhelm Eilers: Related to Middle Persian *kor* and New Persian *kur*, meaning “blind,” linked to a postulated Indo-European myth of a blind king, reflected in the tales of Oedipus Rex, Lear, and, most importantly, Dhrtarastra from the *Mahabharata*.⁶⁰
- Karl Hoffman (endorsed by Manfred Mayrhofer and Rüdiger Schmitt): meaning “humiliator (of the enemy),” reversing the derogatory initial component **ku-*, “small, weak.”⁶¹
- Wojciech Skalmowski: “Doer, maker,” more specifically, “One who acts in religious rituals.”⁶² This etymology contemplates a derivation from Indo-Iranian stem **kṛ-nu-*. However, because this stem leads to Old Iranian **kunu-*, Skalmowski suggested a borrowing from Old Indic, during the early stages of its differentiation from Old Iranian.

Some of these explanations are more attenuated than others, and no real alignment exists on which etymology makes the most sense. Nevertheless, the lack of consensus does not negate the overall possibility of an Iranian origin. Bolstering the likelihood of such an origin is the apparent correspondence between Old Persian *Kuru-* and *Ka^mbujiya*, “Cambyses,” on the one hand, and the ethnonyms of the Kurus and Kambojas, on the other.⁶³ This correspondence has been widely accepted among the proponents of an Iranian background to Cyrus' name as far back as the nineteenth century, despite differences of opinion regarding the precise etymologies of the two ethnonyms. The Kurus and Kambojas were Indo-Iranian tribes, mentioned in various Indian sources, including the *Mahabharata*, as inhabiting what is today northeastern Afghanistan, far away from the cultural limits of ancient Elam.⁶⁴ Arnold Toynbee's speculation

59. Abaev 1965; Harmatta 1971.

60. Eilers 1974.

61. Mayrhofer 1979: 23; Schmitt 2011: 219. Also, Zadok 1976: 62, 1991: 237, who often cited as advocating an Elamite etymology for Cyrus' name – e.g., Henkelman 2003: 194, n. 95; Potts 2005: 21, n. 85; Tavernier 2007: 258 – but he mentions the possibility only in passing while pleading for an Iranian background.

62. Skalmowski 2005; Schmitt 2011: 219; Zadok 1976: 62, 1991: 237. The last source is often cited as advocating an Elamite etymology for Cyrus' name – e.g., Henkelman 2003: 194, n. 95; Potts 2005: 21, n. 85; Tavernier 2007: 258 – but he mentions the possibility only in passing while pleading for an Iranian background.

63. E.g., Eilers 1974: 5–9; Herzfeld 1947: 91. *Pace* Henkelman 2003: 195, n. 44, it seems inappropriate to discount the significance of these ethnonyms on the premise that they could have been influenced by the names of the “Teispid” kings. The only justifiable basis for this presumption would be the chronological disparity of the onomastic attestations, and it seems *a priori* unlikely that distant tribes roaming the borderlands of Bactria and Gandara would have assumed the names of Persian kings. In any event, *Kuru-* appears as an onomastic component in the Rig Veda (10.32.9, 33.4), in the name of the prince *Kuruśravana*.

64. The evidence of the fourth-century BCE Sanskrit grammarian Yaska (2.1.3–4) leaves no doubt that the Kambojas spoke an Iranian, as opposed to Indian language, and the *Jataka* (6.110) attributes to them the same habit of killing noxious creatures that the Magi and authors of the Young Avestan *Videvdatta* featured. These

that septa of the Kurus and Kambojas migrated to Fars during the pre-Achaemenid period, where they merged with the Persians, is notable, if not provable, given the occurrences of other eastern Iranian ethnonyms in Herodotus' list (1.125) of the ten Persian tribes (e.g., Daans/Dahae, Dropici/Derbices).⁶⁵

Several scholars have suggested that any ambiguities regarding the nature of Cyrus' name should be settled in favour of an Elamite origin because Teispes himself bore an Elamite name that does not recur among the true Achaemenids.⁶⁶ Here, we have a name otherwise unattested in either the Indo-Iranian or Elamite onomastica. Potts has suggested that the second component, *piš*, reflects the Elamite root "renew, restore."⁶⁷ However, the first element is more difficult to explain. Henkelman has suggested an Elamite etymology arising from a reduplication of the verbal base *šepi/šip(i)* "vow": *šepšepēš < šepšpēš < šēšpēš. By contrast, Tavernier concluded that "good Elamite etymologies are non-existing" for the initial component *Ziš/Šeš*.⁶⁸ Several plausible Iranian etymologies exist for "Teispes," including "sagacious" (from *ciθ*, "intelligent," + *pi-*, "swell, overflow") and "growing" (based on analogy to Sanskrit *śiśvi*).⁶⁹

Furthermore, the notion that the name "Teispes" does not appear among the "real" Achaemenids may be true only with respect to epigraphical sources. Herodotus (4.43) mentions an Achaemenid prince named Teaspis who had married Darius' sister.⁷⁰ Although the first two vowels are problematic, no shortage of scholars has seen in this name an alternative rendering of "Teispes," with the variation due to Herodotus' reliance on different sources.⁷¹ Assuming that this interpretation of his name is correct, the fact that this individual belonged to the same generation as Darius strongly suggests that he received his name without regard for the political

indications of an Iranian cultural heritage supersede the concerns of Kellens (2002: 422) regarding the etymology of their name.

65. Toynbee 1963: 652–54.

66. Potts 2005: 15; Henkelman 2014; Kellens 2002: 421–22.

67. Potts 2005: 15.

68. Tavernier 2007: 519.

69. Eilers 1974: 17; Harmatta 1971: 7–8; Schmitt 2011: 369–371; Skalmowski 2005: 71–72, n. 10; Tavernier 2007: 519. Herzfeld (1947: 91) argues that the name should be read as *Cahišpiš*, based on the Greek rendering.

70. This was the father of the prince Sataspes, whose mother was Darius' sister and who incurred Xerxes' wrath by forcing himself upon a Persian noblewoman. He may also have been the Teaspis who was the father of the Persian commander Pharasmenes (7.79). Herodotus, in fact, calls Sataspes an Achaemenid, but this could only mean that his father belonged to the royal family, too, for the Persians did not refer to those who married into the royal family as Achaemenids. Consider that Herodotus (e.g., 6.43.1, 7.5.1, 7.82) never uses the Achaemenid patronymic in relation to Gobryas the Patisschorian or the latter's son, the famous general Mardonius, even though (a) Gobryas was simultaneously Darius' father-in-law and brother-in-law, as he (Gobryas) had given his daughter in marriage to Darius before the latter became king and had himself married one of Darius' sisters, and (b) Mardonius was born to this sister of Darius and would later marry Darius' daughter Artozostre, thereby making him at once Darius' nephew, brother-in-law, and son-in-law. The principle that patronymic descent dictated clan affiliations militates against the theory of Waters (2004) that Darius reckoned Cyrus as an Achaemenid because Cyrus had married Cassandane, daughter of the Achaemenid Otanes.

71. Asheri et al. 2007: 612; Herzfeld 1947: 91; Hüsing 1908: 128; Keiper 1884–1885: 355; Justi 1895: 323; Stonecipher 1918: 63. Although Schmitt (2011: 360) does not explicitly accept Teaspis as an alternative rendering of Teispes, he admits that no good alternative exists, largely due to its being an i-stem. Moreover, he compares "Teaspis" to the Iranian anthroponym rendered in Elamite as *Zaišpišiya* in PF1801, which Tavernier (2007: 518) and Schmitt (1976: 28) himself at one point have associated with Old Persian *Cišpiš*.

fraud that Darius allegedly perpetrated. Moreover, it would suggest that Darius indeed had an ancestor named Teispes, for, as Rüdiger Schmitt observes regarding ancient Iranian name-giving practices:

The most concrete motive for choosing some particular name ... is without doubt to emphasize family ties. Most common is the custom of choosing a name that has already appeared in some previous generation of the father's (or the mother's) family.⁷²

Other Indications of Cultural Proximity Between Cyrus and Darius

In terms of the big picture, the origin of one's name is not necessarily indicative of one's ethnicity.⁷³ It seems overly reductive to adjudicate the issue of Cyrus' cultural outlook based solely on the etymology of his name and his titulary, as set forth in Babylonian inscriptions. The names that he selected for his own children, as well as his religious orientation, constitute more significant indicators. In this connection, it is relevant that all of Cyrus' known children – Cambyses, Bardiya, Atossa, Artystone, and Roxane – had Iranian names.⁷⁴ In the case of his eldest daughter, Atossa, the name corresponds to that of the greatest female figure in the Avestan tradition, Hutaosa, the wife of Zoroaster's reputed patron Kavi Vishtaspa.⁷⁵

Similarly, the open-air fire altar and stepped plinth that Cyrus constructed at Pasargadae are clearly of the same genre as the ritual structures depicted on the tombs of Darius and his successors; according to Mary Boyce, the Pasargadae structure is the first known example of a Zoroastrian fire altar.⁷⁶ The characterization of early Achaemenid religion as Zoroastrian or otherwise is a contentious issue, and I do not wish to opine on it in this paper. What matters for our purposes are the apparent continuities in religious practice with Darius, which militate against the existence of a cultural divide.⁷⁷

72. Schmitt 2005.

73. A point made by Henkelman 2011. Also, Kellens 2002: 427, who speaks of Iranianization rather than Persian ethnogenesis, acknowledges that intermarriage with the local substrate population (including the Elamites) was an important factor in changing the cultural landscape of the Iranian plateau. This process could have resulted in the adoption of Elamite names in certain lineages within the same family without necessarily resulting in a strong cultural affinity for Elam on the part of the bearers of the names. We could have been especially true in the case of Cyrus, who was, at least, the second bearer of the name in his family.

74. Even most advocates of an Elamite etymology for Cyrus concede that Cambyses' name is Iranian; see Henkelman 2003: 195, n. 44; Potts 2005: 15; Tavernier 2007: 18.

75. Boyce 1988: 28.

76. Ibid.; Stronach 1978: 145, conceding the likely Zoroastrian nature of the fire altar, a point that he never reconciles with his notion of a non-Persian heritage or cultural outlook for Cyrus.

77. Some scholars have pointed to the different styles of the tombs of Cyrus (a gabled hut) and Darius (a sepulcher carved into a rockface) as evidence of a religious divide. However, Jacobs (2010) makes a strong argument against this notion with an eye toward the diverse styles of Lycian sepulchers and, to a lesser extent,

In the same vein, the very fact that Cyrus named his palace complex Pasargadae (Old Persian **Pāθragadā*, Elamite *Batrakataš*) is relevant. This was the name of a prominent Persian tribe that persisted in southern Iran into the Hellenistic period. The question of tribal affiliations has been largely glossed over in scholarly works that portray Cyrus and Darius as having different cultural orientations. That Cyrus chose Pasargadae as the name of his capital strongly suggests that he belonged to this tribe. In Herodotus' day and thereafter, the Achaemenids were the leading clan (Greek *phratry*) of the Pasargadae (Hdt. 1.125), and the Achaemenid king doubled as the titular chieftain of the Pasargadae. The implication is that Cyrus and Darius shared a common tribal background. Not only does this militate against a cultural divide between the two, even though tribal identity and ethnicity are not necessarily synonymous, but it suggests that they were more proximately affiliated than proponents of the two-dynasty model seem to acknowledge.⁷⁸

The Inscriptions at Pasargadae

We can now turn to the Pasargadae inscriptions that describe Cyrus as an Achaemenid. Recent scholarship has largely attributed the authorship of these texts to Darius and regarded them as products of his propaganda, though this view is not universal.⁷⁹ As a starting premise, two points bear emphasis. First, the burden of proof should be on those who would contest the authenticity of monumental inscriptions such as the Pasargadae texts, and second, as Roaf properly emphasizes, logic does not dictate that the substance of the Pasargadae inscriptions must be false, even if Darius authored them.⁸⁰ A third consideration that should be borne in mind is that the inscriptions in the royal palace were not generally accessible to the public, which minimizes their utility as propaganda pieces intended to convince Darius' subjects of his legitimacy, though one should perhaps not overstate the significance of this detail as even these brief inscriptions may have served as proxies for a wider political discourse during his reign.

The discourse on the Pasargadae inscriptions concerns two texts, which read as follows (brackets signify hypothetical reconstructions):

CMa: "I (am) Cyrus the King, the Achaemenid."

CMc: "Cyrus, the Great King, the Achaemenid."

the fact that both Cyrus' and Darius' tombs seem to have satisfied Iranian religious requirements regarding the protection of the earth from rotting flesh. Jacobs' argument would derive support if the tomb at Takht-e Rostam near Persepolis, which may well have contained a structure similar to the gabled hut structure of Cyrus' mausoleum at Pasargadae, belonged to Darius' father, Hystaspes; see Callieri 2021: 1277.

78. The distinction between tribal and ethnic identity is a central theme of Potts 2014.

79. E.g., Lecoq 1997; Rossi 2010; Vallat 2011.

80. Roaf 2023: 274.

A possible third inscription, CMb is poorly preserved, and the various translations that have been proposed are highly speculative, for they are based on compilations of fragments that may not all belong to the same text.⁸¹ It is best dropped from consideration.

The CMa inscription was once widely distributed on antae and doorjambs throughout the structures currently identified as Palaces P, R, and S. Today, only two copies of the CMa text have survived: one on the lone standing anta at Palace P and another on the single remaining anta at Palace S. In each case, the inscription appears as a trilingual text, with the Old Persian version set above the Elamite and the Akkadian at the bottom. The CMc inscription may have been trilingual, too. However, only portions of the Elamite and Akkadian versions currently survive, carved onto the pleats of the robe of the figure of Cyrus carved in bas-relief on the door jamb of Palace P.

The notion that Darius, and not Cyrus, carved these texts to propagate his new dynastic ideology is premised on two bases. One is the uncontested fact that Darius completed Cyrus' constructions at Pasargadae.⁸² The other basis is a controversial reading of § 70 of the Old Persian version of the Bisutun Inscription and the corresponding Elamite text, which purport to make Darius the inventor *ex nihilo* of the Old Persian script. Specifically, in publications from the 1950s and 1960s, various scholars, including most notably Walther Hinz, interpreted Darius' claim to have "made this *tuppe.mi* [an Elamite term] in Aryan, which formerly was not," to signify his invention of Old Persian cuneiform.⁸³ This interpretation was based on an earlier reading of the text just after the turn of the twentieth century by Franz Weissbach, who, notably, changed his mind before his death.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, Hinz's revival of Weissbach's theory facilitated a fresh wave of speculation that Darius had authored the Pasargadae inscriptions.

However, Hinz's interpretation of DB § 70 hardly received universal acceptance in his own day, and recent advances in the study of the Old Persian and Elamite versions of this crucial passage, particularly in the understanding of what Elamite scribes meant by the term *tuppe.mi*, suggest that Darius made no such claim. Scholars such as Philip Huyse, Enrique Quintana, Hassan Rezai Baghbidi, Francois Vallat, and Adriano Rossi have separately concluded that § 70 does not refer to the invention of a new script.⁸⁵ Rather, most such scholars regard the passage as signifying the translation of those passages of the greater inscription that specify Darius' name and lineage, into "Aryan," i.e., Old Persian. A notable exception is Rossi, who suggests that the reading "Aryan" is altogether wrong, and that the text serves only to signify that the memorial was carved on the rockface.⁸⁶ Be this as it may, the bottom line remains the same. As Rossi put it in his 2010 article summarizing the state of research on this topic: "practically all scholars

81. Herzfeld 1938: 3.

82. Stronach 1978: 103, 1997b.

83. Hinz 1952: 28–38, 1968: 95–98.

84. Weissbach 1911: lx–lxix. For his revised position, see Weissbach 1936: 41.

85. Huyse 1999; Quintana 2001; Rezai Baghbidi 2009; Vallat 2011: 264–268, and 2013: 35–38; Rossi 2000, 2010. For other arguments against Darius's invention, see Bahari 2001; Diakonoff 1970; Hallock 1970.

86. Rossi 2010: 48–52.

discussing problems of the Bisutun monument have felt bound to gather evidence against Hinz' interpretation on the *Schrifterfindungsparagraph*, even in very recent times.”⁸⁷

Even if Darius invented the Old Persian script, the Elamite and Akkadian versions of some of the inscriptions may have been engraved on Cyrus' orders. This, in fact, was the thesis of Carl Nylander, which David Stronach, one of the foremost experts on Achaemenid art and architecture, sought to refute in a series of publications beginning in 1990.⁸⁸ Nylander developed his theory in the wake of the growing acceptance of Hinz's argument that Darius invented the Old Persian script. Sensing that the tide of scholarship was turning in favour of Darius' authorship of *all* the Pasargadae texts, Nylander argued for the joint authorship of the Pasargadae inscriptions by both Cyrus and Darius. Despite conceding that Darius created the Old Persian script, Nylander highlighted important differences in execution between the CMA text in Palace P, on the one hand, and, on the other, the copy of the same inscription extant in Palace S (**Figure 2**), as well as a now-lost copy shown in a nineteenth century drawing of a portion of a doorjamb in Palace R (**Figure 3**). In the extant Palace P copies of CMA, the horizontal bands containing the Old Persian, Elamite, and Akkadian versions are framed together by vertical connecting lines (**Figure 4**); by contrast, the bands are unframed and freestanding in the Palace R and S versions.⁸⁹

For Nylander, these distinctions suggested different dates of composition. He, therefore, concluded that the extant Palace P texts were carved all at once under Darius, whereas the Palace R and S versions, as well as perhaps other copies of CMA in Palace P, were carved in two phases – the first involving the composition of the Elamite and Akkadian versions during Cyrus' reign, and the second the addition, by Darius, of the Old Persian version.⁹⁰ Nylander also made salient observations regarding Cyrus' role in authoring the CMc text. Specifically, he pointed out that the Elamite and Akkadian versions of the inscription occupied the whole length of the hem of Cyrus' robe, such that the Old Persian version, if it existed, must have been carved elsewhere on the relief, thereby distinguishing the placement of the CMc text from all other known examples of Achaemenid reliefs featuring a king's inscribed robe.⁹¹

In his publications, David Stronach attempted a systematic dismantling of these and other points that Nylander raised in support of joint authorship. Stronach denied Cyrus' authorship of CMc, because the pleats in the robe of the royal garment on the figure of Cyrus more closely resemble the pleats in the reliefs of kings at Persepolis and of the royal guardsmen at Susa than they do the folds of the robes of Darius and other figures at Bisutun.⁹² For Stronach, this detail suggested a post-Bisutun date of c. 510 BCE for both the Pasargadae sculpture and the CMc inscription. This opinion has been challenged by Margaret Cool Root, who warned against presumptions that Achaemenid monumental art evolved linearly based on her work in the field

87. Ibid.: 42.

88. Nylander 1967.

89. Ibid.: 166–67, 170.

90. Ibid.: 168–70.

91. Ibid.: 167–68, 174.

92. Stronach 1978: 96–97, and 1997b: 352. Garrison 2014: 572 maintains that Darius must have introduced the “court style,” but he bases this opinion, in part, on the unlikelihood that Darius would have borrowed artistic elements from the time of Cyrus as the latter was an Anshanite (Elamite).

of glyptic, where uniform, unidirectional evolution in the renderings of royal robes did not occur during Darius' reign.⁹³

Her admonition merits consideration given the distinctive placement of CMc, the possibility that it was not rendered in Old Persian, and certain features of the Elamite text. Pertinent to the last point, as both Nylander and François Vallat observed, the orthography of the Elamite version of the CMc inscription exhibits archaizing features that do not appear in the CMa text and are more consistent with Neo-Elamite usage, though some have analogues in the earliest texts that Darius commissioned at Bisutun (e.g., DBa).⁹⁴ Vallat took these idiosyncrasies as proof that Cyrus inscribed CMc. Even if Vallat overstated the absence of Achaemenid parallels for the relevant features and CMc must be dated to Darius' reign based on art historical considerations, the lack of uniformity in the rendering of Cyrus' name (for which the determinatives differ between CMa and CMc) or the spelling of "Achaemenid" hardly enhances confidence that all the extant copies of these texts were inscribed on Darius' orders.⁹⁵

Regarding CMa, a major aspect of Stronach's argument for Darius' sole authorship focused on the apparently anomalous manner in which this text (a) referred to its supposed royal author by the simple title "King," as opposed to the more lavish epithets "King of Kings" or "Great King," and (b) omitted mention of the ruler's father.⁹⁶ Stronach interpreted these features of CMa as indicative of what must have been a pejorative attitude on the part of Darius toward Cyrus, who, in Stronach's reckoning, belonged to a different dynasty. As pointed out by Vallat, however, CMa is not unique in these respects.⁹⁷ No less than thirteen monumental inscriptions of Darius and Xerxes refer to their respective subjects by the simple title "King" (DPb, DPc, DPd, DPi, DSL, DSn, DSo, DSp, DSq, DSt, XPi, XSa, XH) and two inscriptions of Xerxes make no mention of this ruler's father (XPk, XSa).

One aspect of Stronach's argument regarding CMa that has escaped attention is his heavy focus on the inscriptions at Palace P.⁹⁸ This should have raised eyebrows, given that Nylander was more willing to concede that the extant copies of CMa in this structure were probably inscribed *in toto* by Darius due to the presence of a unifying frame, whereas the copies in Palaces

93. Root 1979: 49–58, 1999: 169.

94. Nylander 1967: 147, n. 23, 168; Vallat 2011: 278. Mikolajczak (2013: 286). The argument of Waters (2014a: 149), that Darius must have inscribed the Pasargadae inscriptions, because "it defies imagination why Cyrus would not use the title 'King of Anshan' in the region of Anshan itself ... at his capital Pasargadae in that very region" would carry more weight but for the fact that neither Darius I nor any of his successors explicitly calls himself a "King of Persia" in their inscriptions at Persepolis. In fact, in all the Old Persian inscriptions of these kings, the title "King of Persia" – technically, "King in Persia" (*xšāyaθiya pārsaiy*) – appears once, and that is in the opening lines of the Bisutun Inscription, located in Media.

95. This is not to say that other Achaemenid texts are devoid of such inconsistencies. Von Voigtlander (1978: 73) notes how the Babylonian version of the much lengthier Bisutun Inscription features four different spellings of Ahuramazda's name, albeit among more than sixty attestations. Still, her study shows that, on the whole, the various scribes involved in carving this version of the inscription harmonized spellings, as among the dozens of anthroponyms and toponyms repeated in the text, alternative spellings occur with respect to only three names.

96. Stronach 1990, 199–200.

97. Vallat 2011: 278.

98. Stronach 1990: 195–201.

R and S, which lacked such framing, were likelier to be partially commissioned by Cyrus.⁹⁹ Stronach addressed this stylistic discrepancy only in a footnote, chalking up the absence of a unifying frame in Palaces R and S to “the degree of urgency that Darius attached to the first CMA protocols at Pasargadae – at a time, assumedly, when his own work at Palace P was by no means finished and at a time when the formula of a single, unifying frame ... had not yet been introduced.”¹⁰⁰ Not only is the attribution of such an imperative to Darius unprovable, but in resolving that the Palace R and S copies of CMA must have predated the Palace P copy, Stronach functionally validated an important aspect of Nylander’s joint authorship theory. Now, it is true, as Stronach pointed out, that the use of horizontal brackets without vertical margins also appears at Bisutun.¹⁰¹ However, to accept Stronach’s argument for Darius’ sole authorship based on this parallel to Bisutun, one must assume that Cyrus (and Cambyses) would have been content to leave the completed buildings at Pasargadae uninscribed.¹⁰² Never likely to begin with, this scenario seems even less probable since fragments of an inscription have been discovered at the site of the monumental gate at Tal-e Ajori in the Marv Dasht, which either Cyrus or Cambyses built.¹⁰³

The foregoing is not intended to invalidate the work of such an eminent scholar, especially since no single observation is decisive in refuting Stronach’s findings. Rather it is to show that, overall, the argument for sole authorship by Darius is not bullet-proof. It, too, entails major assumptions, the most important being that the Old Persian script did not exist under Cyrus, that Cyrus did not care to have his name placed on his structures, and that Darius’ scribes and masons did not settle upon a harmonized system of framing their inscriptions or rendering key names.

99. Nylander 1967: 166–67. In view of possible arguments that the unifying frame may have been introduced under Cyrus, Stronach (1990), 198, cited a “well known” principle of ancient Persian architectural practice, whereby “royal builders almost always took the precaution of carving delicate reliefs and inscriptions at the end of any given programme of construction.” Based on this alleged principle, Stronach concluded that Darius must have carved all the CMA texts in Palace P, since he, and not Cyrus, completed the construction of this building. Stronach predicated this alleged principle primarily on the inscription that Xerxes set up at the Tachara (XPc) at Persepolis following his enthronement. According to this inscription, the construction of this palace was begun by Darius and completed by Xerxes. Moreover, the Tachara contains inscriptions that many scholars accept as having been commissioned by Darius himself (DPa, DPb, and DPC). It also includes one inscription (XPk) on the robe of a royal figure that identifies the subject of the relief as “Xerxes, the son of King Darius, the Achaemenid.” The absence of the appellation “king” in reference to Xerxes makes this inscription unique among those that serve to identify individual Achaemenid’s portrayed in relief and contrasts sharply with the text (DPb) identifying the royal figure on the opposite wall of the doorjamb. The latter text reads “Darius the Great King, the son of Hystaspes, the Achaemenid.” The simplest explanation is that the inscriptions and the reliefs on the two walls of the doorjamb were commissioned during the reign of Darius, while Xerxes was crown prince. See Calmeyer 1976; Henkelman 2010: 30–31, *pace* Rossi (2012), who tends toward a construction date under Xerxes, though he, too, confesses the hazards of drawing stark conclusions in this regard.

100. Stronach 1990: 201, n. 41.

101. *Ibid.*

102. See Nylander 1967: 168. Stronach 1990: 198, argues that Cyrus would have left his palaces uninscribed because he had no pressing imperative to legitimize his rule with an inscription, but is every building inscription a plea for political acceptance?

103. Chaverdi et al. 2014. The lack of an inscription on Cyrus’ tomb is not indicative of a general aversion to building inscriptions, since, among the Achaemenids, only Darius identified himself on his tomb inscription.

Back to the Cyrus Cylinder

The open possibility that Cyrus commissioned the inscriptions at Pasargadae leads us back to the Cyrus Cylinder. Is there a valid reason why the same king might emphasize his Achaemenid heritage at Pasargadae but omit reference to Achaemenes in his cylinder inscription? Given the Cyrus Cylinder's strict conformity to Mesopotamian literary patterns, Ahmadi and Roaf have suggested that its author did not feel compelled to identify Cyrus' clan affiliations (which, we may add, may not have mattered much to the Babylonians anyway) or to trace his genealogy back to a dynastic founder, as Assyrian kings seldom did so.¹⁰⁴ In this connection, it is worth emphasizing that the only references to Darius' Achaemenid heritage in Babylonian texts occur in translations or accompaniments of Old Persian inscriptions. They do not appear in the standard dating formula for business transactions conducted during his reign.

Another possibility, entertained by Ahmadi and Roaf is that Achaemenes, unlike Teispes, may not have been remembered as a king, or at least a king of Anshan.¹⁰⁵ This view has been articulated since the early twentieth century.¹⁰⁶ There is, I believe, a modicum of support for this proposition in the cuneiform record (see below and postscript) as well as in Greek literature. The classical authors never called Achaemenes a king and, instead, remembered him as a hero from which the Persian rulers were descended (e.g., Plato *Alcibiades* 1.120e, Nicolaus of Damascus *FGrHist* 90 F 6).

I would like to elaborate on this point by venturing two reasons why Cyrus may have avoided naming a non-royal ancestor in his genealogy. One is aesthetical, as the inclusion of such a person would have disrupted the otherwise impressive chain of forebears who carried the lofty titles attributed to Cambyses I, Cyrus I, and Teispes.¹⁰⁷ The other reason is ideological. The Assyrians and Babylonians had a distinct and unflattering term for a ruler who was not of royal blood; they described such kings as “having nobody” or being the “son of a nobody” (*mār lā mammān*).¹⁰⁸ This concept was so deeply engrained that even Neo-Babylonian rulers who rose from aristocratic or priestly backgrounds to the pinnacle of power, such as Nabopolassar and Nabonidus, referred to themselves in this manner.¹⁰⁹ Given Cyrus' efforts to present himself as a normative Babylonian ruler and the fact that the cylinder inscription is partly a polemic against Nabonidus, which actually accuses the latter's son of being low born (line 3), it would have done Cyrus no good to risk introducing this concept into his propaganda, or even to hint at it.¹¹⁰

104 . Ahmadi 2020; Roaf 2023: 281.

105. Roaf 2023: 281.

106. How and Wells 2012: vol. 1, 386–88.

107. I suspect that a similar concern moved Darius to refrain from applying the title king to any of his ancestors at DB § 2.

108. Karlsson (forthcoming).

109. Beaulieu 1989: 67; Da Riva 2013: 62; Karlsson (forthcoming).

110. The risk of introducing this concept through mention of Achaemenes is patent if Teispes was the first king in the line. However, it would not necessarily disappear were Achaemenes himself to have been a king in some capacity, if one assumes that Cyrus followed Neo-Assyrian protocols, as Rollinger (2021: 380–82) suggests. Consider that the Assyrian King List (line 41) applies the term “son of nobody” to Adasi, the founder of Assyrian monarchy according to the inscriptions of Esarhaddon.

Conclusion

Darius' accession was a watershed event in Persian history. The alleged circumstances, involving a royal imposter, are certainly unusual, though not as anomalous as one might think in the grand scheme of history. Although we may never know what exactly transpired, recent scholarship seems too quick to discount the basic outline of events, and the trickledown effect has been to impugn other statements made by Darius, including those involving his dynastic affiliation with Cyrus II. It is worthwhile to consider all the unprovable assumptions that must fall into place for the two-dynasty model to be true. If any one of them does not, then theory goes up in smoke:

- Darius lied about his genealogy at Bisutun (in other words, he could not have been a distant relative of Cyrus who took advantage of the political instability to seize the throne for himself).
- Herodotus' assertion that Cyrus was an Achaemenid was influenced by Darius' propaganda and was not independently derived, although both the Halicarnassian historian and Aeschylus were aware of traditions concerning the events of 522–21 BCE that fundamentally differed from the Bisutun account.
- Cyrus was content to leave his finished monuments at Pasargadae uninscribed, and Cambyses II made no attempt to attach his father's name to these structures posthumously.
- Darius ordered *all* the extant inscriptions at Pasargadae, which were then carried out with variations in orthography (the differences in the Elamite versions of the CMC inscription and CMA text) and style (the bracketed and unbracketed versions of CMA).
- Even if Darius ordered all the Pasargadae inscriptions, he did so to propagate a dynastic fiction and with little regard for the possibility that his contemporaries may have viewed such efforts negatively.

There is ample room for different opinions, but to me, these attenuations are cumulatively more difficult to explain than the main impediment to characterizing Cyrus as an Achaemenid – the absence of a reference to Achaemenes or the Achaemenid clan in a cylinder inscription inscribed in Mesopotamia in accordance with Babylonian norms.

Of course, the bigger picture is the need to be wary of drastic paradigm shifts. As with other recent objections to the two-dynasty model, I believe that the discourse should pay closer attention to how individual observations fit into the bigger picture, as well as to questions of presumption, where the burden of proof should lie, and the relative strengths and weaknesses of various pieces of evidence. The purpose of this piece is not to pursue absolute historical truths but to caution against leading with interpretations that are not grounded in the sources.

None of this is intended to smooth over Darius' claims to legitimacy; he may have been a usurper, even if we accept his genealogy and claim to have killed an imposter. The Bisutun Inscription is certainly propagandistic and needs to be assessed critically. At minimum, I suspect that the inscription embellishes both the odds that Darius faced (some of the rebellions that he describes, particularly those in Elam, seem minor) and skips over certain events to show his ability to overcome all resistance without suffering a single setback. Furthermore, by couching things in cosmic terms (e.g., the spread of the Lie), it glosses over what seems to have been

widespread discontent with the imperial program that Darius claims to have re-established. Given observations made above regarding the timing of Vahyazdata's rebellion, it may well even exaggerate Darius' role as the only individual brave enough to instigate a counterinsurgency, and certainly, it is silent on the existence of members of the royal family with stronger dynastic claims than the son of Hystaspes. Nevertheless, I have strong reservations about accepting, as a starting proposition, a dynastic reconstruction that is the complete opposite of what appears at Bisutun and is suggested by the Pasargadae inscriptions and Herodotus. Darius may well have lied about being related to Cyrus. However, this viewpoint is still best presented as an alternative interpretation that cannot be proved and, therefore, should not be presumed.

Postscript

One last piece of evidence relevant to the issue of the dynastic affiliations of Cyrus and Darius is the Old Persian inscription in the name of Darius' great-grandfather Ariaramnes (AmH). Because of its controversial nature and the fact that it does not change the analysis in the main text, I address this artifact only in a postscript.

This text was reportedly discovered in Hamadan around 1930, when a number of apocryphal artifacts had surfaced in the antiquities market. Some scholars accept it as authentic, but most regard it, along with a similar text attributed to Arsames (AsH) that was discovered in 1940, as a forgery. Furthermore, the prevalent view is that these two inscriptions are not modern fabrications but date to the fourth-century BCE, when either Artaxerxes II or III commissioned them to honor – or perhaps aggrandize – their remote ancestors.¹¹¹ This view is predicated on the existence of several orthographical and grammatical errors, consistent with those found in the inscriptions of Artaxerxes II and other later Achaemenids, who reigned when Old Persian was no longer the vernacular, which already was transitioning to Middle Persian. Some scholars still insist upon the authenticity of the Ariaramnes and Arsames inscriptions, on the logic that inscriptional Old Persian may not have reflected the vernacular even during the sixth century BCE and that many Old Persian texts contain errors of some sort.¹¹² Nevertheless, the high concentration of errors in these relatively brief inscriptions militates is difficult to explain.

Assuming that AmH does in fact date to the late Achaemenid period, it stands to offer valuable insights into how Darius' descendants remembered, or wished to present, the early history of their dynasty. Their perception is relevant, given that it likely reflects the lingering

111. See, e.g., Kent 1946, 1953: 107, 159; Schmitt 2009: 33–34; Smith 1944: 123. Roaf (2023: 272) treats it as an Achaemenid artifact. Fattori (2022) has recently contended that the inscriptions must be modern based on a paleographical analysis of the seemingly anomalous rendering of three Old Persian signs (the characters for <t^u>, <d^u>, and the <DH₂> logogram for *dahyu-*, 'land') in these and other artifacts found on the Hamadan market during the first half of the twentieth century. However, as he himself concedes, two of the three anomalous sign-renderings (d^u and <DH₂>) occur in other Achaemenid texts (XSd and A³Pa). Moreover, whereas Fattori argues that Tolman's manuals on Old Persian served as the guidebooks for the forgers, the fact is that the DH₂ sign on the artifacts in question differs from that drawn by Tolman, as the vertical wedges in the latter's manual are markedly longer. Moreover, Fattori's conclusion would cast doubt on the authenticity of the A¹I inscription, which others deem more likely to be genuine. Cf. Colburn 2020; Curtis et al. 1995.

112. Lecoq 1997: 179–80; Vallat 2011: 279

effects of Darius' propaganda. Attention is therefore due to the titles of the various figures mentioned in AmH, which identifies its purported author as:

Ariaramnes, the Great King, King of Kings, King of Persia, the son of King Teispes, the grandson of Achaemenes.¹¹³

It is beyond the scope of our investigation to discuss whether Ariaramnes ever held such lofty titles or the implications of his titulary regarding the potential division or sharing of power between the ancestors of Cyrus and Darius, as these matters are beyond the scope of this paper. What matters is the manner in which both Ariaramnes and Teispes are identified as kings, whereas Achaemenes is not.¹¹⁴ This distinction is unlikely to be accidental, for, if one were to impute a royal title to Achaemenes, the formulation presented here would differ from all other Old Persian texts in which an Achaemenid king names a grandfather who ruled in the same capacity as himself.

Not only does the possibility that Teispes was the first king in Darius' lineage provide a ready pretext for Cyrus' omission of Achaemenes in his cylinder inscription, but it casts doubt on the nature of the fraud that Darius allegedly perpetrated, which, as explained above, supposedly had as a partial objective the subordination of Cyrus' ancestors to his own. Of course, one could decouple the notion of Darius seeking to subordinate the Teispids from that of his fabrication of a genealogy that made him part of the same family as Cyrus and Cambyses. A way to achieve the latter goal would have been to create a common ancestor (presumably his own forebear Achaemenes) and to insert him into the pedigree beyond Cyrus' earliest known royal antecedent. However, if this was all so easy to achieve and Darius could freely manipulate the past, why deny Achaemenes royal honors? One explanation might be that Teispes' status as the first king of his line or as a member of the first generation of rulers in his family was sufficiently well known that Darius had to honor it. But then should we not also consider the possibility that Teispes' clan or dynastic affiliations were also common knowledge to the point that Darius could not tamper with them?

Ultimately, it is best not to overemphasize the importance of AmH given the questions surrounding its authenticity. Yet, even the potential need to account for it highlights the hazards of presumptions favoring a two-dynasty model.

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113. Kent 1953: 116.

114. Herzfeld 1947: 68, 91.

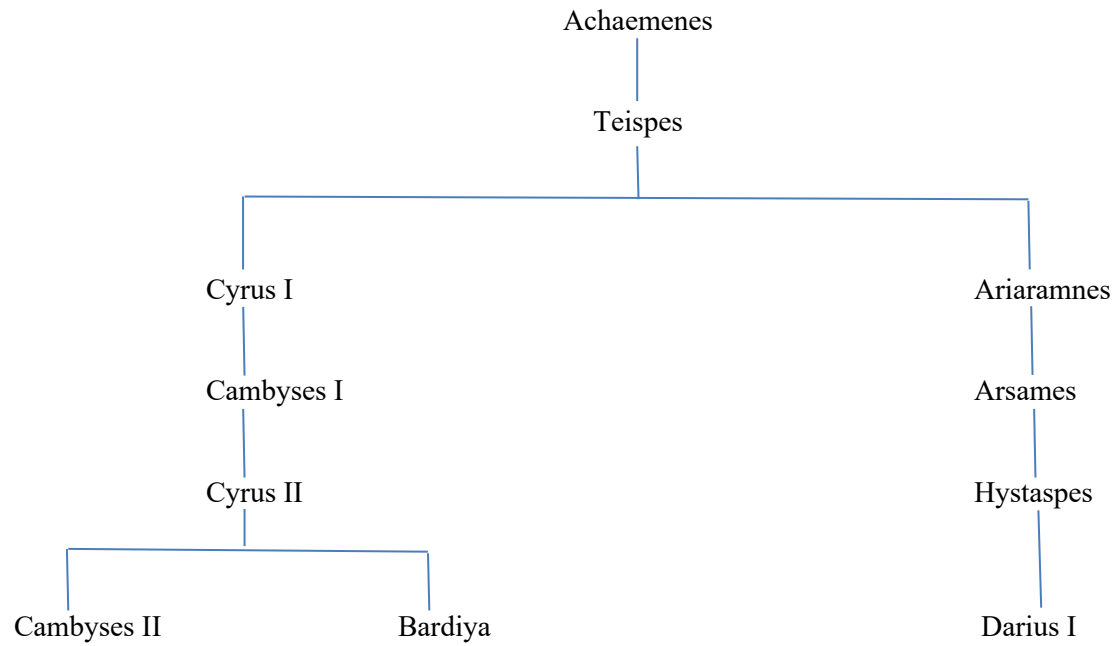


Figure 1 – Traditional Reconstruction of the Achaemenid Family Tree



Figure 2 - CMa in Palace S with individually bracketed lines



Figure 3 - Line drawing showing the now lost copy of CMa in Palace R, with individually bracketed lines



Figure 4 - CMa in Palace P with fully framed text

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