

CYRUS THE GREAT AND THE GREEKS OF ASIA MINOR: THE DIPLOMATIC CONTACTS

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The actuality of this paper is due to the research of the diplomatic relations between West and East, which is carrying out in the modern scholarship. The aim of the paper is to investigate the diplomatic relations between the Persian King Cyrus the Great and the Greeks. The paper is built up on the comparative analysis of the Greek narrative sources that enabled us to give a detailed consideration of the relations between Cyrus and the Greeks. The novelty is that no other works in the literature that consider this subject specially. The main problem of this paper is to clarify how Cyrus the Great did achieve his objectives in the foreign policy by means of a diplomacy. The analysis of the sources shows that Cyrus the Great used diplomacy only to threat to the Greeks. It is argued that this Persian King was deprived of any diplomatic flexibility. It is concluded that he preferred to discuss all the matters with the Greeks relying only to the military pressure. The results of this paper may be used for the investigation of the history of international relations and diplomacy, the history of the Persian Empire and Ancient Greece.

Keywords: Greeks ; Persians ; Cyrus the Great ; diplomacy.

INTRODUCTION

This paper considers the importance of diplomacy in the expansion of the Achaemenid Empire in the West before the Persian Wars. It demonstrates that diplomacy was a very significant factor for the Persian Kings in the achievement of their foreign policy goals regarding the Greek world, and it examines how the Greeks reacted to the Persians diplomatic actions in the time of Cyrus the Great (558–530). There are no works in the modern historiography in which this topic is considered more specially. However, some scholars briefly comment on Cyrus' relations with the Greeks in some general books devoted to the Achaemenid Persian Empire (Olmstead, 1948; Cook, 1985; Briant, 2002), Greek history (Sealey, 1976), and the history of the Greco-Persian relations (Balcer, 1984; 1995; Green, 1996; Cawkwell, 2005). These scholars pay an attention mainly to the military conquest of the Asian Greeks by Cyrus and do not consider the diplomatic situation.

The historical situation before Cyrus' diplomatic relations with the Greeks looks as follows. In 547/6 B.C. Cyrus crushed the Lydian kingdom of Croesus and established himself as lord of Asia Minor. Thereafter he became to threat to the Greeks of the Asian coastline who had been dependents of the Lydians (Radet, 1893). The Persian conquest of the Greeks of Asia Minor has been anticipated by diplomatic negotiations through which Cyrus had attempted to subdue them without military force. These Cyrus' actions got him involved into the diplomatic relations with the Balkan Greeks also, e.g. the Spartans.

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METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The aim of my paper is to consider the diplomatic relations between the Persian King Cyrus the Great and the Greeks. It is intended to consider Cyrus' relations with the Asian Greeks. The paper is built up on the comparative analysis of the Greek narrative sources that enabled us to give a detailed consideration of the relations between Cyrus and the Greeks. The novelty is that no other works in the literature that consider this subject specially. Some modern scholarly works are taken into consideration also. The main problem of this paper is to clarify how Cyrus the Great did achieve his objectives in the foreign policy by means of a diplomacy. The comparative analysis of the Greek narrative sources shows that Cyrus the Great used diplomacy only to threat to the Greeks. It is argued that this Persian King was deprived of any diplomatic flexibility. It is concluded that he preferred to discuss all the matters with the Greeks relying only to the military pressure.

RESULTS

Cyrus the Great and the Greeks of Asia Minor

Herodotus (I. 141. 1-3) says that the Persian King demanded that the Ionians revolted from Croesus and joined him even before the Lydian War, but the Greeks declined. When the Persians conquered Lydia the Ionians and Aeolians themselves sent messengers to Cyrus, offering to be his subjects on the same terms as those, which they had enjoyed under Croesus. There are two traditions in the sources relating to the negotiation of their future position with respect to Great King of Persia. Herodotus (I. 141. 1-2) tells us that when the envoys of the Asian Greeks visited Cyrus and presented their proposals to the Persian King he answered them by story in which he compared the Greeks of Asia Minor to fish gathered by him in a net.

“As soon as the Lydians had been subjugated by the Persians, the Ionians and Aeolians sent messengers to Cyrus, offering to be his subjects on the same terms as those which they had under Croesus. After hearing what they proposed, Cyrus told them a story. Once, he said, there was a flute-player who saw fish in the sea and played upon his flute, thinking that they would come out on to the land. Disappointed of his hope, he cast a net and gathered it in and took out a great multitude of fish; and seeing them leaping, “You had best,” he said, “stop your dancing now; you would not come out and dance before, when I played to you.” (translation by A. D. Godley)

Herodotus comments that the reason why Cyrus told this story to the Ionians and Aeolians was that the Ionians, who were ready to obey him when the victory was won, had previously refused when he sent a message asking them to revolt from Croesus. S. W. Hirsch (1986), in considering the historicity and reliability

this passage, draws attention to the parallels between this Cyrus story and references in earlier Assyrian documents where there is mention of conquered peoples as being captured like fish. Hirsh came to the conclusion that Herodotus' version of Cyrus' story about fish may be of Near Eastern origin and reflects the attitude of a land power (such as Assyria and Persia) toward people who dwells by the sea coast or on islands in the sea (such as the Greeks of Asia Minor).

Herodotus does not tell us what the conditions were on which Cyrus wanted the Greeks to surrender to him, but it seems probable that the Persian King had not offered any special conditions and simply expressed his intention take to revenge upon them for their refusal to support him in the Lydian War. There is a different account of these events in Diodorus (9. 35. 1-3). According to him, the key figure in the negotiations with Asian Greeks from Persian side was not Cyrus, but his general Harpagus, who told them a story not about fish, as Cyrus did in Herodotus' account, but an episode from his private life: Diodorus provides us with more precise information about the conditions on which the Greeks had agreed to make terms with Cyrus and those which Cyrus had offered them instead. When the Greeks of Asia sent an embassy to Cyrus they wanted to make a treaty of friendship with him, but instead the Persian King demanded submission from them, which he expressed by saying that "he would receive them as slaves if they would throw themselves upon the good faith of the Persians". This raises two further, interrelated questions: What were the terms of friendship that the Greeks offered to Cyrus during their meeting with him? What were the terms of submission Cyrus offered to the Greeks instead? It may be supposed that the terms of friendship were the same as those on which the Greeks subordinated themselves to Croesus.

Herodotus (1. 141. 4; 143. 1) says that only with the Milesians did Cyrus make a treaty on the same terms as that which they had with the Lydian king. Afterwards the Milesians pursued a policy of neutrality because of this treaty (Hdt. 1. 169). So, it is certain that the Milesians' treaty with Cyrus would have been similar to that which all the Asian Greeks unsuccessfully offered to conclude during the negotiations with Cyrus. Diogenes Laertius (1. 25) stated that the counsel of the Milesian Thales prevented the Milesians from consummating a military alliance with Croesus, which provided the salvation of the *polis* when Cyrus obtained the victory. Therefore the Milesians had not renewed the parity treaty with Croesus, and following Croesus' conquest of Miletus, the Lydian subjugation of the Milesians prevented a resumption of parity as Croesus would have demanded the more favorable and restrictive clauses of a treaty of vassalage. In this, Miletus became obligated to supply troops to protect Croesus if he were attacked. When Cyrus attacked Sardis the Milesians rebelled against Croesus, refused to contribute a military contingent to aid Croesus, and instead supported the Persians, a decision which Cyrus gratefully rewarded. In form, Cyrus' treaty raised Miletus to the status of a semi-autonomous province within the greater Persian imperial system, similar

in nature to that which Cyrus established with Cilicia, Cambyses would contract with the Phoenician harbor states, and Xerxes would unsuccessfully offer to Athens in 479 (Balcer, 1984). The general conclusion that we can draw is that the Milesians made a treaty with Cyrus that included a tribute obligation and gave them internal autonomy, much as the Asian Greeks had previously concluded before with Croesus. They could have considered it a treaty of friendship and attempted to negotiate it unsuccessfully with Cyrus. Herodotus (1. 27) says us that Croesus imposed a tribute upon the Asian Greeks and Xenophon (Hell. 3. 4. 25) later emphasized that the Persian perception of Greek autonomy included the payment of tribute (Balcer, 1989). What did Cyrus offer to the Greeks of Asia Minor, other than Miletus? It was also a treaty which deprived the Greeks their internal autonomy and therefore could have been described by Diodorus (9. 35. 3) as a treaty on which Cyrus would receive the Greeks as slaves, if they would throw themselves upon the good faith of the Persians. So only the Milesians remained neutral and the other Greek *poleis* of Asia Minor fortified themselves with walls and prepared to resist Cyrus (Hdt. 1. 141. 4).

DISCUSSION

Scholars usually comment on the position of Miletus under the treaty with the Persians. R. Sealey (1986) thinks that Cyrus renewed a special status which the later Lydian kings had granted to Miletus. V. Gorman (2001) considers that Miletus had made a separate peace with the Persians on the same terms that they had enjoyed under Croesus.

J. M. Balcer (1984) observes that the nature of Cyrus' treaty with Miletus in contrast to the Persian treaties with the Ionian *poleis* following their conquest remains problematical. Herodotus simply does not clarify the two, and any modern speculation or reconstruction remains tenuous. Balcer draws the attention to Herodotus' statement (1. 22. 4) that early in the sixth century the Milesian tyrant Thrasybulus and the Lydian King Alyattes, following a stalemate in the Lydian war upon Miletus, ceased hostilities, whereupon the two leaders verbally agreed "to be friends one with another" and "to be military allies". As Balcer further notes, the treaty between Alyattes and Thrasybulus was not that of overlord and subject, but one of parity, whereby Miletus remained independent, sovereign and equal in status with Lydia. Balcer comes to conclusion that Cyrus renewed with Miletus a treaty that was not on the basis of parity, yet which placed the Milesians in a privileged status compared to the status imposed by Harpagus upon the rebellious Ionians, and this privileged status may have been a clause which affirmed Milesian internal self-determination, even while governed by Persian established tyrants, Histiaeus and Aristagoras. R. A. Bauslaugh (1991) and G. Cawkwell (2005) consider the Milesian-Persian treaty to have been same in its terms as previous Milesian-Lydian treaty. The authors of a recent commentary on Herodotus assume

that Cyrus renewed the conditions of alliance and *xenia* that Alyattes had established with Miletus at around 611 (Asheri, Lloyd, Corcella, 2007). But Balcer (1984) rightly concludes that the treaty of parity agreed upon apparently lasted only while both leaders remained alive and ended with the death of either one, to be renewed as desired by their successors.

CONCLUSION

The main conclusions of this paper are as follow. (i) Cyrus the Great used a diplomacy in order to subjugate the Greeks of Asia Minor without direct military interference, however, the failure of the negotiations led to the need of military conquest. (ii) Cyrus' diplomacy was a reflection of his imperial policy aimed at the expansion of the Persian Empire. It is certainly that Cyrus the Great used diplomacy only to threat to the Greeks, He was deprived of any diplomatic flexibility. Instead, he preferred to discuss all the matters with the Greeks relying only to his military pressure. It is understandable that in the conditions of emergency of the Achaemenid Empire the main strategy of the Persian kings was the expansion to the West. The Achaemenid monarchs were able to agree to compromise terms with the Greeks only after the defeat in the Persian wars as the subsequent history of the Greco-Persian diplomatic relations clearly shows.

Recommendations

The results of this paper may be used for the investigation of the history of international relations and diplomacy, the history of the Persian Empire and Ancient Greece.

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