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The Language of the Achaemenid Imperial Diplomacy towards the Greeks: The Meaning of Earth and Water

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Summary: The problem of the meaning of earth and water in the context of the language of Achaemenid imperial diplomacy towards the Greeks is considered in this paper. It is concluded that the Persian demand for subjugation was a verbal expression of Persian diplomacy while earth and water themselves as material things that could have different symbolic meanings for different peoples was its non-verbal expression. The Greeks might have perceived the giving of earth and water simply as an acknowledgement of the Persians' superiority by both land and sea. It is argued in this paper that the Persian official conception of earth and water would have been dependent on imperial ideology seeing the earth as meaning a land/territory and the water as symbolizing seas or / and rivers as limit of this territory.

Keywords: Achaemenids, Diplomacy, Earth-and-Water Ceremony, Greeks, Persians

1 The language of diplomacy

For two centuries, the close contacts between Greeks and Persians determined interstate relations in the Eastern Mediterranean, from the birth of the Achaemenid Empire in the mid-sixth century B.C. to the conquests of Alexander the Great. The conflicts, such as the Greco-Persian Wars or Alexander's campaign, may be considered as the most significant episodes in the development of Greco-Persian relations, the diplomatic contacts their most characteristic feature.¹ A lot of diplomatic documents, which have survived in the Greek historical tradition, attest to the diplomatic activity of the Achaemenid Kings towards the Greeks.

¹ See in general: E. Rung, War, Peace and Diplomacy in Graeco-Persian Relations from the Sixth to the Fourth Century B.C., in: Ph. De Souza – J. France (eds.), War and Peace in Ancient and Medieval History, Cambridge 2008, 28–50; more recently: M. Brosius, Persian Diplomacy Between „Pax Persica“ and „Zero-Tolerance“, in: J. Milker (ed.), Maintaining Peace and Interstate Stability in Archaic and Classical Greece, Mainz 2012, 150–163.

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They were all transmitted in Greek and by Greek sources, though there are some hints that they had been translated earlier from Aramaic or Old-Persian.²

What do we mean by ‚language of diplomacy‘? Scholarly literature knows several definitions of this term. Some scholars argue that it is only language in which diplomatic procedures are usually expressed;³ others think that the language of diplomacy (or diplomatic language) is the verbal expression of some rituals and symbols used in the foreign policy of a state;⁴ and there are scholars who consider the language of diplomacy to have been the verbal or non-verbal expression of thoughts or feelings, a view I accept.⁵ The aim of this paper is to reconsider the Persian demands for earth and water as part of the language of Achaemenid imperial diplomacy. I shall deal with a number of aspects of this topic: (a) the meaning of earth and water in Greek as well as Persian eyes as symbols of dominance and subjugation; (b) the tone of the King's letters to the Greeks demanding earth and water; (c) the character of the royal ceremony of earth-and-water giving.

2 The idea of earth and water

The most important method of Persian diplomatic pressure upon the Greeks in the period of Achaemenid imperial expansion into Europe in the late sixth and early fifth centuries B.C. was the demand for earth and water. The Persian kings

2 A. T. Olmstead, A Persian letter in Thucydides, *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 49, 1933, 154–161; C. Nylander, ΑΣΣΥΡΙΑ ΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΑ. Remarks on the 21st Letter of Themistokles, *Oath* 8, 1968, 119–136; R. Schmitt, Assyria grammata und ähnliche: Was wußten die Griechen von Keilschrift und Keilinschriften?, in: C. W. Müller – K. Sier – J. Werner (eds.), *Zum Umgang mit fremden Sprachen in der griechisch-römischen Antike*, Stuttgart 1992, 21–35; A. Piras, Ethnography of Communication in Achaemenid Iran: The Royal Correspondence, in: G. P. Basello – A. V. Rossi (eds.), *Dariosh Studies II: Persepolis and its Settlements: Territorial System and Ideology in the Achaemenid State*, Naples 2012, 431–443; L. Allen, The Letters as Object: On the Experience of Achaemenid Letters, *BICS* 56.2, 2013, 21–36; A. Kuhrt, State Communications in the Persian Empire, in: K. Radner (ed.), *State Correspondence in the Ancient World*, Oxford 2014, 127–134.

3 R. A. Roland, *Interpreters as Diplomats: A Diplomatic History of the Role of Interpreters in World Politics*, Ottawa 1992, 44; G. Butler – S. Maccoby, *The Development of International Law*, New Jersey 2003, 35.

4 C. Jönsson, Diplomatic Signaling in the Amarna Letters, in: R. Cohen – R. Westbrook (eds.), *Amarna Diplomacy: The Beginnings of International Relations*, Baltimore 2000, 193. Cf. C. Jönsson, Theorising Diplomacy, in: B. J. C. McKercher (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Oxford 2012, 22 pointed out that common diplomatic language includes the linguistic sense and the sociological sense of common codes and conventions of expression.

5 S. Nick, Use of Language in Diplomacy, in: J. Kurbalija – H. Slavik, *Language and Diplomacy*, Malta 2001, 39–47, 39.

seem to have hoped to achieve certain aims in their foreign policy by demanding earth and water from the Greeks, primarily to avoid unnecessary military operations. The Greeks who gave earth and water expected to save their territory and cities from fire and devastation.

There are only five explicit examples of demands for earth and water by the Persians in Herodotus' work. All those episodes can be dated to the reigns of Darius I and Xerxes: (i) Darius' Scythian expedition in 513 (Hdt. 4. 132); (ii) the Persian subjugation of the Macedonians under Amyntas I (Hdt. 5. 17–18); (iii) Artaphernes' demand for earth and water from the Athenians in 508/7 (Hdt. 5. 73); (iv) Darius' sending of heralds to Greece in 492/1 (Hdt. 6. 48–49); (v) Xerxes' sending of heralds to Greece in 481 (Hdt. 7. 32, 132–133). That is the full list of occasions on which the Persians demanded earth and water according to Herodotus.

There are no examples of Persians demanding earth and water before Darius or after the Persian Wars. This does not, however, imply that this ceremony should only be connected with the foreign policies of Darius and Xerxes. The giving of earth and water also only rarely attracts the attention of modern researchers, although most of them would agree that this gesture was a symbol of subjugation to Persia.⁶ As Amélie Kuhrt emphasized, it does not usually appear necessary to writers of textbooks on the Persian Empire to waste too many words on the concept of earth and water, but the fact itself that no explanation seems to be necessary raises a problem: if it is simply a way of indicating surrender to the Persians, why is it phrased in this particular way?⁷ Prior to Kuhrt only Louis L. Orlin attempted to define the exact meaning of earth and water by assigning it a place in Zoroastrianism. Orlin noted that earth and water have recognizable functions in the Zoroastrian world-view:⁸ Earth, *ârmaiti*, represents ,right-mindedness,

⁶ In general see A. T. Olmstead, *The History of the Persian Empire (Achaemenid Period)*, Chicago 1948, 159; H. Bengtson, *The Greeks and the Persians from the Sixth to the Fourth Centuries*, London 1969, 47; V. Ehrenberg, *From Solon to Socrates: Greek History and Civilization During the 6th and 5th Centuries BC.*, London – New York 1973, 133; R. Sealey, *A History of the Greek City-States, 700–336 BC.*, Berkeley 1976, 181, 200; P. Cartledge, *Sparta and Laconia. A Regional History*, London 1979, 129; J. F. Lazenby, *The Defence of Greece, 490–479 BC.*, Warminster 1993, 45; P. Green, *The Greco-Persian Wars*, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London 1996, 29; N. A. Doenges, *The Campaign and Battle of Marathon*, *Historia* 47, 1998, 1–17, 2; D. J. Bederman, *International Law in Antiquity*, Cambridge 2001, 55; P. Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire*, Winona Lake, Indiana 2002, 157, 402, 528.

⁷ A. Kuhrt, *Earth and Water*, in: A. Kuhrt – H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg (eds.), *Achaemenid History*, vol. iii (Method and Theory), Leiden 1988, 87–99, 87.

⁸ L. L. Orlin, *Athens and Persia ca 507 B.C.: A Neglected Perspective*, in: id. (ed.), *Michigan Oriental Studies in Honor of G. G. Cameron*, Ann Arbor 1976, 255–266, 265–266; J. M. Balcer, *The Persian Conquest of the Greeks 545–450 B.C.*, Konstanz 1997, 155 also designates earth and water

humility, propriety'; water, *haurvatât*, represents ‚wholeness, completeness‘. When the Greeks made overtures to the Persians, they were to offer these natural materials as a preliminary to the making of a treaty. It is evident that earth and water were, along with others, sacred symbols of Zoroastrianism,⁹ but the question arises whether we are to consider them only in the framework of this religious tradition. Kuhrt is, however, reluctant to find the origins of the earth-and-water ceremony in the Zoroastrian religious system. Instead, she proposes to connect it with the ritual of oath-taking that is testified to by Faustus of Byzantium (4. 54), an Armenian author of the fifth century A.D., who refers to earth and water in a ceremony by which the Sasanid king Shabuhr II received an oath of loyalty from the formerly rebellious king of Armenia Arshak.

Faustus reports that half of the tent in which the two rulers were to meet for the oath-taking ceremony was covered with earth and water from Armenia. The Persian king was then to observe closely the variations in speech of the Armenian according to whether the latter was standing on his own earth and water or not. Whenever the Armenian ruler stood on ‚homeground‘ he invariably spoke the ‚truth‘ (i. e. his insubordination and untrustworthiness became apparent) whereas on the king's soil he made gestures of obedience and loyal submission. Kuhrt argues that the giving of earth and water to the Persian king was an acknowledgement of the latter's superior strength and of the Armenian's recognition of his own inferiority. The Persian king laid some kind of claim to the oath-giver who now came under his protection – a situation which the Greeks conceived to be similar to becoming the king's slave.¹⁰

as „the sacred Zarathustrian symbols of vassalage“, but he does not comment on it further. A. Keaveney, *Persian Behaviour and Misbehaviour: Some Herodotean Examples*, Athenaeum 84, 1996, 23–48, 39, n. 80 associates the earth and water with the Iranian doctrine of the Seven Creations. The Sky, or first Creation, is conceived as a round empty shell of stone or metal. Its lower half is filled with water, the second Creation, while the third Creation earth, lies upon this. Men dwell in these two creations and of these men the Persians are the greatest (Hdt. I. 134). As Keaveney concludes, the yielding of their portions of earth and water by the lesser races symbolizes their submission and inferiority. And recently M. Waters, *Ancient Persia. A Concise History of the Achaemenid Empire, 550–330 BCE*, Cambridge 2014, 123–125 also claims to be tempted to apply some religious significance to earth and water in an early Zoroastrian, or Mazdaean context.

⁹ According to Herodotus (1.131), the Persians sacrificed to the sun and moon and earth and fire and water and winds. Cf. Yasn. 1.16; 3.17; 4.21; 7.18; 19.1; 37.1; 44.4; 68.6. On the meaning of earth and water in the world of Zoroastrianism see, for example: M. Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, vol. 1, Leiden – Köln 1975, 133, 137; A. de Jong, *Traditions of the Magi. Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin literature*, Leiden – New York – Köln 1997, 305ff.

¹⁰ Kuhrt (n. 7) 96 M. W. Waters, *Earth, Water, and Friendship with the King: Argos and Persia in the Mid-fifth Century*, in: M. Kozuh – W.F.M. Henkelman – C. E. Jones – C. Woods, *Extraction & Control: Studies in Honor of Matthew W. Stolper*, Chicago 2014, 332 follows A. Kuhrt's assessment of the general significance of earth and water when stating: „The request for earth and water was closely tied in with Achaemenid imperial ideology, which established through ritual the trustworthiness

However, we can suppose that Faustus' description of the ritual of oath-taking might have been considered only as a particular case of the use of earth and water by the Sasanian Persian King Shabuhr II. This example does not prove (i) that this ceremony was repeated regularly in all cases, and, (ii) that it was used in the time of the Achaemenid Empire (though, of course, we have many instances of Ancient Near Eastern traditions surviving into Late Antiquity: e. g., the washing of weapons¹¹ or the flogging of enemies).¹²

Since the publication of Kuhrt's important article „Earth and water“ another explanation has been put forward. Mark Munn refers to a Lydian inscription that leads him to conclude that in Lydia earth and water occur in a context that accounts for the origins of these symbols of sovereignty.¹³ This is an early fourth century B.C. Lydian-Aramaic funerary inscription from Sardis that is dated to the 10th year of Artaxerxes (II?), the King; it runs as follows:¹⁴

„If anybody to the land does damage, then may Artemis of Ephesos and Artemis of Koloe, his holding and his house and his soil and water and everything of his destroy.“ (transl. by E.R.M. Dusinberre)

As Munn writes, among the Lydians and Ionian Greeks earth and water signified the source of life, the foundation of the *oikoumenē*, and the basis of sovereignty. The tokens of earth and water, as this historian argues, were derived from the religious and cosmological principles that underlay the Lydian kingdom. By demanding the submission of earth and water the Persians were asserting that they themselves were the rightful custodians of the basis of human life everywhere on the face of the earth.¹⁵ According to Munn, under the Persians, in the time of Darius, the demand for earth and water was seen to emanate from the lords of Asia who controlled Sardis, and the Persians demanded earth and water specifically from peoples who

and loyalty of the contracting party to the King. Those Greek poleis that complied with the request acknowledged the King's superiority in exchange for his protection or patronage.“

11 R. Rollinger, From Sargon of Agade and the Assyrian Kings to Khusrav I and Beyond: On the Persistence of Ancient Near Eastern Traditions, in: G. B. Lanfranchi et al. (eds.), *Leggo! Studies Presented to Frederik Mario Fales on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, Wiesbaden 2012, 725–743.

12 R. Rollinger – J. Wiesehöfer, Kaiser Valerian und Ilu-bi'di von Hamat. Über das Schicksal besieger Feinde, persische Grausamkeit und die Persistenz altorientalischer Traditionen, in: H. Baker – K. Kaniuth – A. Otto (eds.), *Stories of long ago. Festschrift für Michael D. Roaf*, Münster 2012, 497–515.

13 M. Munn, *The Mother of the Gods, Athens, and the Tyranny of Asia*, Berkley – Los Angeles – London 2006, 221.

14 E. Littmann, *Sardis: Publications of the American Society for the Excavation of Sardis*, vol. VI, pt.1, Leiden 1916, 23–38; E.R.M. Dusinberre, *Aspects of Empire in Achaemenid Sardis*, Cambridge 2003, 229.

15 Munn (n. 13) 224, 226.

lived across the sea that defines the shores of Asia. Submission of these tokens was an acknowledgement of the unity of the earth and its life-sustaining waters, and an acceptance of the notion that the Persian king was, as he claimed to be, „lord over all men from the rising to the setting of the sun“.¹⁶ Munn's arguments, however, are not convincing, since it is not surprising that, as in Zoroastrianism and other contexts, earth and water were sacral symbols in various societies including Lydia. Nothing speaks in favour of the Achaemenid kings having immediately borrowed the earth-and-water ceremony from Lydia, and, besides, one can note that the inscription referred to by Mann belongs to the Persian period.

So, some different and controversial explanations for the meaning of earth and water have been put forward in the scholarly literature but not all are based on Achaemenid material. Under these circumstances the most reasonable proposal was made by Arthur Keaveney:

„Earth and water, though, mean different things to different people. To the Persians themselves they signified overlordship and the right to impose obligations. For people like the Aleuadae they mean help against an enemy. For some other Greeks they were no more than an insurance policy. They were given in the hope of placating the Persians and in the expectation (sometimes fulfilled) they would interfere no further.“¹⁷

The Greeks might have perceived the giving of earth and water simply as an acknowledgement of the Persians' superiority by both land and sea.¹⁸ This follows from an ancient commentary on Aeschylus' „Persians“:

„Darius [...] sent to the Athenians a basket to put there earth and water claiming to be the overlord of both land and sea.“¹⁹

When the Persian kings demanded earth and water from various peoples they could have followed some Iranian traditions. But what were those traditions? The famous Herodotean story of Darius' Scythian expedition refers to the Persian interpretations of gifts offered to the King in response to his demand for earth and water. Herodotus (4. 132–133) reports that the Scythian kings sent a herald to Darius with the gift of a bird, a mouse, a frog, and five arrows. The Persians asked

¹⁶ Munn (n. 13) 225.

¹⁷ A. Keaveney, *The Medisers of Thessaly*, *Eranos* 93, 1995, 30–38, 34.

¹⁸ G. Nenci, *La formula della richiesta della terra e dell'acqua nel lessico diplomatico achemenide*, in: M.G.A. Bertinelli – L. Piccirilli (eds.), *Linguaggio e terminologia diplomatica dall'antico oriente all'impero bizantino. Atti del Convegno Nazionale, Genoa 19 Novembre 1998. Serta Antiqua et Mediaevalia IV*, Rome 2001, 33–42.

¹⁹ Schol. Aeschyl. Pers. hyp. vers.: ὁ Δαρεῖος [...] ἔπεμψεν Ἀθηναίοις σπιρίδα, γῆν καὶ ὕδωρ αἰτῶν ὡς δῆθεν ἐντεῦθεν δόξαι γῆς καὶ θαλάττης εἶναι κύριος.

the bearer of these gifts what they meant; but he said that he had only been told to give the gifts and then leave at once; he told the Persians to figure out for themselves what the presents meant, if they were smart enough. When they heard this, the Persians deliberated over the question. Darius' judgment was that the Scythians were surrendering themselves and their earth and their water to him; for he reasoned that a mouse was a creature found in the earth, eating the same produce as men, and a frog was a creature of the water and a bird especially like a horse; and the arrows signified that the Scythians surrendered their fighting power.

Christopher Tuplin supposes that, in Herodotus' view at least, the earth was specifically connected with the growth of food, that earth and water therefore symbolize the donor's offering of territory and resources to the Great King.²⁰ This scholar also concludes: „To me it seems most likely that the ritual connotes the cession of a right to the basic productive resources of the donor land“.²¹ However, one can argue that Herodotus' interpretation does not necessarily represent an official Persian conception of earth and water that would have been dependent on imperial ideology and, as Tuplin stresses, there was a disagreement among the Persians on the interpretation of the Scythian gifts to Darius (cf. Hdt. 4. 132).

3 Earth, water and the greatness of the Achaemenid Empire

Fortunately we have some Greek evidence that resembles the Achaemenid material and enables us to define more convincingly the true Persian view of earth and water. Aeschines, in his oration *In Ctesiphontem* (132.5), seems to cite a phrase from an original letter of Xerxes to the Greeks, probably composed at the royal court:

„[...] the king of the Persians – he who channeled Athos, he who bridged the Hellespont, he who demanded earth and water of the Greeks, he who dared to write in his letters that he was lord of all men from the rising of the sun unto its setting [...]“²² (transl. by C. D. Adams)

²⁰ C. J. Tuplin, *Revisiting Dareios' Scythian Expedition*, in: J. Nieling – E. Rehm (eds.), *The Achaemenid Impact in the Black Sea: Communication of Powers*, Aarhus 2010, 291; cf. more recently: C. J. Tuplin, *Managing the World. Herodotus on Achaemenid Imperial Organization*, in: R. Rollinger – B. Truschnegg – R. Bichler (eds.), *Herodot und das persische Weltreich / Herodotus and the Persian Empire*, Wiesbaden 2011, 39–63, 44.

²¹ Tuplin (n. 20) 44.

²² Aeschyl. 3.132..5: [...] ὁ μὲν τῶν Περσῶν βασιλεύς, ὁ τὸν Ἄθω διορύξας, ὁ τὸν Ἑλλήσποντον ζεύξας, ὁ γῆν καὶ ὕδωρ τοὺς Ἕλληνας αἰτῶν, ὁ τολμῶν ἐν ταῖς ἐπιστολαῖς γράφειν ὅτι δεσπότης ἐστὶν πάντων ἀνθρώπων ἀφ' ἡλίου ἀνιόντος μέχρι δυομένου [...].

Surely, this letter relates to the earth-and-water ceremony. It is also probable that it originally was written in one of the official languages of the Persian Empire (possibly in Imperial Aramaic) and then was read out by Persian interpreters who accompanied the heralds. Plutarch, in his „Life of Themistocles“ (6), describes the treatment of the interpreter in the company of those who were sent by the King to demand earth and water as tokens of submission. Themistocles caused this interpreter to be arrested, and had him put to death by a special decree for presuming to publish barbarian orders and decrees in Greek:

„When the king of Persia sent messengers into Greece, with an interpreter, to demand earth and water, as an acknowledgment of subjection, Themistocles, by the consent of the people, seized upon the interpreter, and put him to death, for presuming to publish the barbarian orders and decrees in the Greek language.“²³ (transl. by J. Dryden).

There is no mention of earth and water in the quotation from the King's letter. But Xerxes' claim in Aeschines' report resembles that of some Neo-Assyrian and Achaemenid formulas that assert the greatness of the King's power including earth and water in a particular context.

Most resembling the language of Xerxes' letters (in Aeschines) are the Assyrian royal documents. References to the Kings' lordship over the lands from the rising to the setting sun occasionally occur in the royal inscriptions between the end of the second and the beginning of the first millennium B.C.²⁴ Tukulti-ninurta I receives the tribute of the land of the rising and of the setting sun (AR [AB]. I. 163, 1). Assur-nāsir-pal II reports that he has forced the kings from the rising of the sun unto the setting of the sun to acknowledge his supremacy (AR [AB]. I. 483, 488, 510, 517) and that he has brought into subjection at his feet all the countries from the rising to the setting sun (504); Shalmaneser III brought under his sway mighty mountain (regions) from the rising sun to the setting sun (AR [AB]. I. 685, 689). Tiglath-pileser III states that, from the rising of the sun to its setting, he has scattered (lit., counted) all of his foes to the wind(s) and has maintained (his) sway (AR [AB]. I. 781). Sargon II's inscriptions report

23 Plut. Them. 6: ἐπαινεῖται δ' αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ περὶ τὸν δίγλωσσον ἔργον ἐν τοῖς πεμφθεῖσιν ὑπὸ βασιλέως ἐπὶ γῆς καὶ ὕδατος αἰτησιν. ἐρμηνέα γὰρ ὄντα συλλαβὼν διὰ ψηφίσματος ἀπέκτεινεν, ὅτι φωνὴν Ἑλληνίδα βαρβάρους προστάγμασιν ἐτόλμησε χρῆσαι. Cf. Scholia ad Aeschyl. Pers. hyp. vers: Νῦν δέ τινα Σάμιον ἐρμηνεύσαντα τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις τὰ Πέρσου γράμματα κατὰ τινας μὲν ἀνεῖλον (it is reported that this interpreter was the Samian by descent). See also: F. J. Frost, Plutarch's Themistocles. A Historical Commentary, Princeton, New Jersey 1980, 96 for other sources reported this episode.

24 The references to the Assyrian inscriptions are given according to D. D. Luckenbill, Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia, vol.1–2, Chicago 1926–1927 (with translation by same author).

that this King brought under his sway all lands from the rising to the setting sun (AR [AB]. II. 137), the people whom, from the rising sun to the setting sun, he had subjugated (188). Esarhaddon's texts include the same formula: „the men in his hands young and old, as many as there are from sunrise to sunset, those over whom Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, exercises kingship and lordship“;²⁵ „I who marched triumphantly, relying on their might, from the rising to the setting sun, and had no rival, who brought in submission at my feet the princes of the four quarters (of the world)“ (AR [AB]. II. 507); „first of all princes, who marched from the rising sun to the setting sun“ (668). In some Assyrian texts the limits of the King's power became connected with the water / sea. Tiglath-pileser III explicitly reports that he has brought under his sway the lands from the Bitter Sea of the rising sun to the sea of the setting sun, as far as Egypt, from the horizon to the zenith and has exercised kingship over them (AR [AB]. I. 787). Adad-nirari III's inscription states: „from the great sea of the rising sun to the great sea of the setting sun his hand prevailed against (the conquered), and he brought under his sway, every land (lit., all of everything)“ (AR [AB]. I. 743). The most striking is Senacherib's inscription: „from the upper sea of the setting sun to the lower sea of the rising sun, all humankind (lit., the black-headed race) he (the god Assur) has brought in submission at my feet“ (AR [AB]. II. 233); „from the upper sea of the setting sun to the lower sea of the rising sun, all princes of the four quarters (of the world) he (Assur) has brought in submission at my feet“ (300). Assurbanipal' cylinder records: „From the Upper sea to the Lower sea, the kings of the rising and the setting sun brought their tribute“ (AR [AB]. II. 889). Thus, one can conclude that earth and water could symbolize the greatness of an empire in both Achaemenid and Assyrian traditions. The Kings claimed to have been lords in the whole world washed by waters from one edge of the world to the other.²⁶

Old Persian royal inscriptions refer to the earth (*būmi*-) as a significant component in the conception of Achaemenid world domination.²⁷ They categorize the

²⁵ S. Parpola – K. Watanabe, *State Archives of Assyria*, vol. 2 (Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oath), Helsinki 1988, 28.

²⁶ R. Rollinger, *The View from East to West: World View and Perception of Space in the Neo-Assyrian Empire*, in: N. Zenzen et al. (ed.), *Aneignung und Abgrenzung. Wechselnde Perspektiven auf die Antithese von ‚Ost‘ und ‚West‘ in der griechischen Antike*, Heidelberg 2013, 93–135.

²⁷ On the meaning of *būmi*- see: R. Schmitt, s.v. *būmi*-, in: *Wörterbuch der altpersischen Königsinschriften*, 2014, 154–155. On the importance of earth for Achaemenid royal ideology see: G. Ahn, *Religiöse Herrscherlegitimation im achämenidischen Iran*, Leiden – Louvan 1992, 258–271.

Persian monarchs as the kings in this great earth far and wide²⁸ or in great earth;²⁹ the kings of countries containing all kinds³⁰ or many kinds of men;³¹ kings in all the earth³² or in this earth (i. e. creation of Ahuramazda);³³ the kings of the realm from the Saka in Sogdiana to Cush, and from India to Lydia.³⁴ The sacral status of the earth (*būmi-*) in the Achaemenid royal inscriptions is attested by references to Ahuramazda as the creator of the earth.³⁵ It is obvious that the Persian kings in their inscriptions regularly refer to their landed possessions. Conversely, the water (*ab-*) has no ideological significance in the Old Persian texts,³⁶ though there are several mentions of 'sea' (*drayah-*) relating to the delimitation of land territories: those who are beside the sea; Ionians who are of the mainland and those who are by the sea, and countries which are across the sea; Scythians who are across the sea; Ionians, those who are by the sea and those who are across the sea; Ionians, those who dwell by the sea and those who dwell across the sea.³⁷ However, the water was always perceived in Ancient Near Eastern societies as a limit of territorial possession.³⁸ Some Achaemenid texts in Akkadian may be taken into consideration here.

28 *xšāyaθiya ahyāyā būmiyā vazrkāyā dūraj api* (DNa. § 2E; DEa § 2E; DZc § 2E; XEa § 2E; XPa § 2E; XPb § 2E; XPc § 2E; XPd § 2E; XPf § 2E; XPh § 2E; XVa § 2E; D2Ha § 2E; A2Hc. § 3C). Here and elsewhere references to Old Persian inscriptions are given according to the latest edition of R. Schmitt, *Die altpersischen Inschriften der Achaimeniden. Editio minor mit deutscher Übersetzung*, Wiesbaden 2009.

29 *xšāyaθiya ahyāyā būmiyā vazrkāyā* (DSab § 3E; DZb § 1E).

30 *xšāyaθiya dahyūnām vispazanānām* (DNa § 2D).

31 *xšāyaθiya dahyūnām paruzanānām* (XEa § 2D; XPa § 2D; XPb § 2D; XPc § 2D; XPd § 2D; XPf § 2D; XPh § 2D; XVa § 2D; DHa § 2D).

32 *xšāyaθiya haruvahyāyā būmiyā* (DSb § 1E; DSf § 5B; D2Ha § 3D).

33 *xšāyaθiya ahyāyā būmiyā* (DSd § 1E; DSf § 4E; DSi § 2C; DSj § 1D; DSt § 1B; DSy § 1E; A²Ha § 1E; A²Hc § 2E; A²Sa § 1E; A²Sc § 2E; A²Sd § 1E; A³Pa § 2E).

34 *ima xšačam, taya adam darāyāmi, hacā Sakaibiš, tayaṭ para Sugdam, amata yātā ā Kūšā, hacā Hindaṭ amata yātā ā Spardā* (DPh. § 2D–H).

35 *baga vazrka A. uramazdā haya imam būmīm adā* (DEa § 1B; DNa § 1B; DSe § 1B; DSf § 1B; DSt § 1B; DSab § 1B; DZc § 1C; XEa § 1C; XPa § 1B; XPb § 1B; XPc § 1B; XPd § 1B; XPf § 1B; XPh § 1B; XVa § 1C; A²Ha § 1B; A²Hc § 1C; A²Pa § 1B).

36 The references to a water (of Tigris): the waters was unfordable (*utā abiš nāviyā āha*: DB. § 18G); the rest was thrown into the water, (and) the water carried it away (*aniya apiyā āhyatā, apišim parabara*: DB § 19L–M).

37 *tayaṭ drayahyā* (DB § 6H); *Sakā tayaṭ paradraya* (DNa § 3T); *Yaunā tayaṭ uškahyā utā tayaṭ drayahyā utā dahyāva tayā para draya* (DPe § 2K–M); *Yaunā tayaṭ drayahyā, Sakā tayaṭ paradraya, Yaunā tayaṭ paradraya* (DSe § 4I–K); *Yaunā tayaṭ drayahyā dārayanti utā tayaṭ paradraya dārayanti* (XPh § 3Q–R).

38 R. Rollinger, Dareios und Xerxes an den Rändern der Welt und die Inszenierung von Welt-herrschaft. Altorientalisches bei Herodot, in: B. Dunsch – K. Ruffing (eds.), *Herodots Quellen*.

The famous Cyrus Cylinder that has survived for us in the Babylonian version, runs: „all kings who sit on thrones from every quarter, from the Upper Sea to the Lower Sea (iš-tu tam-tim e-li-tim a-di tam-tim šap-li-tim), those who inhabit [remote distri]cs (and) the kings of the land of Amurru who live in tents, all of them brought their weighty tribute into Shuanna and kissed my feet“ (28–30).³⁹ An old Babylonian inscription of Darius I on the south wall of the Persepolis terrace wall states that the King's power is in the whole world washed by waters from one edge of the world to the other and underlines the extension of the Achaemenid Empire (DPg):

„§ 1. A great (god is) Auramazda, who is the greatest among all the gods, who created heaven and earth, created mankind, who gave all well-being to mankind who dwell therein, who made Darius king, who bestowed on Darius the king kingship over the wide earth in which there are many lands: Persia, Media and the other lands of other tongues, of mountains and plains, from this side of the sea to that side of the sea, from this side of the desert to that side of the desert.

§ 2. Darius the king speaks: With the protection of Auramazda, there (are) the lands, who did this, who gathered here: Persia, Media and the other lands of other tongues, of mountains and plains, from this side of the sea to that side of the sea, from this side of the desert to that side of the desert, as I commanded them.“⁴⁰

But if the Cyrus Cylinder uses a regular Akkadian word *tāmtu* in the meaning of sea/ocean,⁴¹ then Darius' inscription uses *marru*, „bitter“, „brackish“ as referring to water in a more generic sense such as sea or river.⁴² The notices of Deinon of Colophon, in his „Persian History“ (FGrH 690. F.23b) referred to by Athenaeus (2. 74) and Plutarch (Alex. 36), give similar explanations when confirming the Persians' view of the world, but only from a Greek perspective:

„Deinon in his ‚Persian History‘ [...] does say that ammoniac salt is sent up to the king from Egypt, and water from the Nile.“⁴³ (transl. by C. D. Yonge)

Die Quellen Herodots, Wiesbaden 2013, 95–116 has demonstrated that the Persian Kings followed this conception as well.

39 Most recent translation and commentary see: I. Finkel, The Cyrus Cylinder: the Babylonian Perspective, in: id. (ed.), The Cyrus Cylinder: The King of Persia's Proclamation from Ancient Babylon, London 2013, 4–34.

40 See A. Kuhrt, The Persian Empire. A Corpus of Sources from the Achaemenid Period, Oxford 2007, 483 for translation of this inscription.

41 CAD, s. v. *tāmtu*.

42 CAD, s. v. *marru*. That is why J. Haubold, The Achaemenid Empire and the Sea, MHR 27, 2012, 5–24, 11 translates this phrase as „of this side of the Bitter River and the far side of the Bitter River“.

43 Athen. *Deipnosophistae* 2, 74: Δίνων ἐν τῇ Περσικῇ πραγματείᾳ [...] φησι καὶ ἄλας Ἀμμωνιακὸν ἀπ' Αἰγύπτου ἀνατέμπεσθαι βασιλεῖ καὶ ὕδωρ ἐκ τοῦ Νείλου.

„Deinon says that the Persian kings had water also brought from the Nile and the Danube and stored up among their treasures, as a sort of confirmation of the greatness of their empire and the universality of their sway.“⁴⁴ (transl. by B. Perrin)

Tuplin, in his commentary on this statement, simply notes that it does affirm some abiding claim to land including or bordering on the Danube.⁴⁵ Deinon in Plutarch' citation only speaks about water but not about earth. However, his report explicitly suggests that at least the gift of water was meant to underline the limits of the Achaemenid Empire. In this way the Persian Great Kings might have demanded earth and water from their subjects not only as a token of subjugation (the subjects conceded their own earth and water as symbols of their country immediately to the conquerors), but also as a symbolic expression of the greatness of the Empire as well as an indication of the numbers of peoples or countries under their sway, as we can deduce from Deinon's direct evidence.

It is possible that the Persian demand for earth and water was part of a royal ceremony regularly repeated on the occasion of the coronation of a new king in Persia, or in other circumstances. This may be deduced from Herodotus' story of two Persian missions to Greece, which were sent by Darius and Xerxes, and also from Deinon's mention of a regular sending of Nile water from Egypt to Persia. Thus, the earth-and-water ceremony strongly reminds us of the conclusion of treaties that always required the confirmation of their conditions. There is a possibility that earth and water might also have been brought to Persepolis and Susa by delegations, among other customary gifts to the King.⁴⁶ If this is true, then earth and water might have been stored in the royal treasuries at Persepolis, Susa, Babylon and might have been used by the Persian administration when compiling the land registers, an action that surely took place after the accession of a new

⁴⁴ Plut. Alex. 36: Δείνων δέ φησι καὶ ὕδωρ ἀπὸ τε τοῦ Νείλου καὶ τοῦ Ἰστροῦ μετὰ τῶν ἄλλων μεταπεμπομένους εἰς τὴν γάζαν ἀποτίθεσθαι τοὺς βασιλεῖς, οἷον ἐκβεβαιουμένους τὸ μέγεθος τῆς ἀρχῆς καὶ τὸ κυριεύειν πάντων.

⁴⁵ Tuplin (n. 20) 291.

⁴⁶ On the gift-giving to the Persians see in general: H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, Gifts in the Persian Empire, in: P. Briant – C. Herrenschildt (eds.), *La Tribut dans l'empire perse: Actes de la Table ronde de Paris 12–13 Décembre 1986*, Paris 1989, 129–146, 140–141; L. G. Mitchell, *Greeks bearing Gifts. The Public Use of Private Relationship in the Greek World, 435–323 BC.*, Cambridge 1997, 111–113. On this occasion the delegations depicted as gift-giving in the royal reliefs may also be carrying earth and the water (on these reliefs and inscriptions on Apadana see especially E. F. Schmidt, *Persepolis vol. 1 (Structures, Reliefs, Inscriptions)*, Chicago 1953, 85–90 and more recently: G. Gropp, *Die Darstellung der 23 Völker auf den Reliefs des Apadana von Persepolis*, *Iranica antiqua* 44, 2009, 283–359.

Great King and which is demonstrated by the lists of *dahyāva* in the corpus of the Achaemenid royal inscriptions.

To conclude: the Persian demand for subjugation was a verbal expression of Persian diplomacy while earth and water themselves as material things that could have different symbolic meanings for different peoples was its non-verbal expression. Thus, the earth-and-water ceremony symbolised the verbal and non-verbal language of Achaemenid imperial diplomacy towards the Greeks from the late sixth to the early fifth century B.C.

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