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What does “being “Graeco-Persian” mean? An introduction to the papers

In the last twenty to thirty years, and especially in the last few years, discussions about what has traditionally been termed ‘Graeco-Persian’ art have increased dramatically. Originally conceived of as art made for Persians by Greeks, therefore showing Persian themes in a Greek style, examples of the themes grouped under this heading can be found in various media, especially reliefs from Western Anatolia, and gems and seals, which are found more widely through the Achaemenid Empire’s provinces¹. Typical themes include hunts, battles, Persian-looking soldiers and banquets. Early studies tended to be formalist, focusing on distinguishing the ‘Greek’ and ‘Persian’ elements combined within the imagery, above all the Greek aspects, and discussion of the themes and their meaning for those who used them was limited.

Debate about the nature of this art came in the 1960s, with the discovery of new grave stelai near Daskyleion, the Persian satrapal residence in North Western Anatolia, and Jurgen Borchhardt’s long essay on other ‘Graeco-Persian’ reliefs from Cilicia in the Southeast². Although Borchhardt’s article includes formalist analysis of the style of the reliefs, he importantly articulated the view that such reliefs were the product of a syncretism particular to the Anatolian Persian territories and incorporated local ‘epichoric’ elements as well as Persian and Greek³. His further work on Sidonian and Lycian reliefs led the way to studying the images on tombs as representations of the tomb owners, and hence invaluable tools for archaeologists investigating the history of Western Anatolia and the Levant⁴.

Just a few years after the publication of the Daskyleion stelai, the discovery of two tombs in North Lycia, the Kızılbél and the Karaburun II tombs in North Lycia, contributed further examples of Anatolian choices, the latter of exceptionally elegant Graeco-Persian style paintings⁵. But it was only in the later 1980s, with the publication of Bruno Jacobs’ thesis on the tomb art of Lycia that there was a further breakthrough in the analysis of ‘Graeco-Persian’ art.⁶ Following the lead of Borchhardt, Jacobs focused on discerning the local as well as the foreign, and on understanding the representative qualities of the art within Western Anatolia. He stressed that the themes chosen by Lycian elites suited their status claims, peculiar to their political context. And considering problems of transmission, he importantly pointed out how especially

¹ FURTWÄNGLER 1900, where he coined the term for motifs on gems. Also RODENWALT 1933, on the Lycian art.

² AKURGAL 1966; BORCHHARDT 1968; DOLUNAY 1966; HANFMANN 1966; METZGER 1967.

³ BORCHHARDT 1968, esp. 162 and 190.

⁴ For example: BORCHHARDT 1980, 1983. More recently: BORCHHARDT 1998, 2002.

⁵ MELLINK 1970, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1974, 1975, 1976; MELLINK *ET AL.* 1998

⁶ JACOBS 1987. Before him SHAHBAZI 1975. With Jacobs should also be added ASHERI 1983, BRUNS-ÖZGAN 1987 and VON GALL 1989, for varied ideas on the historical conditions and dynamics of the emergence of ‘Graeco-Persian’ art.

Persian elements in art such as the Karaburun II tomb paintings could be seen as emulations of *realia* imported into Western Anatolia by Persians rather than the influence of Persian art.

Following Jacobs, an increasing number of scholars have studied elements of Achaemenid Western Anatolian material culture, and the widely accepted view that the materials represent Western Anatolian emulation of Persian nobles has encouraged the adoption of a new term, ‘Perso-Anatolian’. Much of the scholarship continues to concentrate on the wealth of material from Daskyleion, with scholars such as the director of the excavations there, Tomris Bakır, as well as Margret Nollé and Gurcan Polat (on the sculpture), Deniz Kaptan (on the bullae) and Suat Ateşlier (on the architecture) making notable contributions⁷. Kaptan in particular addressed the problem of terminology in her study of the bullae found at Daskyleion, the stylistic range of which would not permit simplistic terms such as ‘Graeco-Persian’. Contemporaneously, Achaemenid studies have flourished, and the material from Western Anatolia has played an important role in the story of the impact of the Empire on the populations under their administration⁸. New finds such as the burials from the Biga Plain in Northwest Anatolia and the restudy of painted timbers from the Tatarlı Tomb in Southwest Phrygia continue to enrich the sample⁹.

The plethora of publications, justice to which cannot be done in this short overview, has included much in the way of new finds and new ideas. The aim of this session is to contribute further observations from relatively new voices within the discussion. Of particular interest is the topic that concerned Jacobs – understanding the genesis of particular iconographies in relation to historical and social contexts of Western Anatolia. The phrase “being ‘Graeco-Persian’” was chosen as the title of this session in order to deliberately play on a tension between the rather old-fashioned term and the associated formalist approaches, which focused on the ‘etymology’ of the images, and a contrasting approach which focuses on the social and cultural identities the art was designed to convey. The idea is that some of the iconographies which have been called ‘Graeco-Persian’, and which are largely peculiar to Western Anatolia in the Persian Empire, developed because people were trying to ‘be’ new things within that context.

Indeed, they were trying to be many things; one of the threads which has emerged from the papers is that, contrary to some recent views, cultural, regional or ethnic identity may have mattered to elites within the Persian Empire. Rather than development of a homogeneous Perso-Anatolian culture, some combinations of grave images suggest a recognition of and desire to affiliate with one or more cultural groups. The same might be true of the varied assemblages in and architecture of tombs in Güre in Eastern Lydia¹⁰. It is hoped that the session will prompt further questions about whether Graeco-Persian or Perso-Anatolian art is distinctively mixed-looking partly because it is designed to claim multiple cultural identities. Other questions might also be asked about social identities and their intersection with cultural identities. What kinds of social roles were emphasized by elites and which are associated with the adoption of Persian costume, for instance? As well, there is the issue of temporal, regional and social variation: how varied is ‘Perso-Anatolian art’? How much can we further nuance Achaemenid Western Anatolia, so that one can see

⁷ Select bibliography: ATEŞLIER 1999, 2001; BAKIR 1995, 2001, 2003; ERDOĞAN 2007; GUSMANI and POLAT 1999; KAPTAN 2001, 2002; NOLLÉ 1992; POLAT 1998, 2007. Numerous other Turkish theses on aspects of Daskyleion have been completed and are in the course of preparation.

⁸ See the Proceedings of the Achaemenid History Workshops. Also: BAKIR, SANCISI-WEERDENBURG *ET AL* 2001; BRIANT 2000, 2002 (originally in French published in 1996); BRIANT and BOUCHARLAT 2005; CASABONNE 2004; DUSINBERRE 2003; GATES 2005. Most recently: DELEMEN *ET AL* 2007; TUPLIN 2007. For emulation in Greek contexts: MILLER 1997. Also: DARBANDI and ZOURNATZI 2008; GRUEN forthcoming (including important papers by M. Miller, M. Brosius and C. Tuplin on ‘Persianisation’) and SUMMERER *ET AL* forthcoming. My attention was belatedly brought to GATES 2002

⁹ Biga Plain: ROSE 2007; SEVINÇ and ROSE 1996, 1998, 1999; SEVINÇ *ET AL* 2002; STEUERNAGEL 1998. Tatarlı: Summerer 2007a, 2007b, 2008; SUMMERER and VON KIENLIN 2009.

¹⁰ ÖZGEN and ÖZTÜRK 1996. The Aktepe Tomb from this region is addressed in Baughan’s paper. This kind of hybridisation is most consciously used in the sculptures of King Antiochus I of Commagene in the later Hellenistic period. Similar cultural selectivity has been seen in the architecture and sculptures of the Carian Hekatomnids and the later Lycian dynasts, especially in the Nereid Monument at Xanthos. The process of hybridisation in other contexts is a current topic of discussion: a recent Oxford conference on hybridisation in the Hellenistic East, the proceedings of which will be published in the future, raised important questions about the range of cognitive processes to which this short hand term might refer. NB. VON GALL 1989, 155 sees multi-cultural allusions in ‘Graeco-Persian’ art.

variations in identity strategies that relate to 'micro'-contexts within the larger context of the Persian occupation?

Originally, five papers were planned for the session, which because of unforeseen circumstances were pared down to four. Three are published here. All focus on tombs, particularly tomb paintings. The first paper, by this author, focuses on the genesis of new military identities in the context of the Persian Wars, including the quintessentially 'Graeco-Persian' convoy. Elizabeth Baughan's paper presents a new analysis of the paintings on the kline in the Aktepe Tomb from Güre, and suggests that the multiple styles may deliberately invoke multiple cultural references. Maya Vassileva's paper takes its place within a series of papers by that author, which draw parallels between the cultures of Thrace and Anatolia, particularly Northwest Anatolia¹¹. Different from the first two papers, Vassileva's aim is not so much to focus on the genesis of new art forms and identities, but to show that Thrace belonged to the same world as Western Anatolia in the Achaemenid period, when 'Graeco-Persian' art emerged.

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¹¹ See also VASSILEVA 1994, 1995.

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