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Achaemenid Audience Imagery: An Appraisal of its Aspirational and Subversive Artistic Responses in the Achaemenid Period*

Among the extant symbolic monumental reliefs adorning the royal complex of Persepolis – ceremonial capital of Achaemenid Persia – the royal audience scenes are especially fascinating, compositionally and ideologically. This article explores the powerful ideology behind Achaemenid audience imagery in its original setting in Persepolis, its notable dissemination, and adaptations in various artistic media within and beyond the empire (550–330 BC). Here, we seek to ascertain how and why such adaptations differed from the original contextually, visually, and ideologically; to identify what motivations patrons and artists had for reconfiguring the audience scene, regarding what messages they sought to communicate, chiefly aspirational and subversive, and what attitudes towards Achaemenid rule they reveal. We ultimately demonstrate the diverse flexibility and adaptability of artistic responses to Achaemenid audience imagery, forming an apt template for transmitting particularly polarising socio-political and ideological messages; aspirational ones within the empire strive for assimilation and self-aggrandisement, subversive, beyond, for constructing the "Other".

Keywords: Achaemenid, Great King, audience scene, ideology, aspirational, subversive, adaptations, empire

* I would like to thank everyone at SUC for this opportunity to publish my paper, which I dedicate to Dr. Shane Wallace, as well as my loving parents & my dearest friends, Emma & Khushi, who have been there for me at every step of the way.

Introduction

Aulic encounters with Persian kings in Greek literature engross all its readers, via colourful descriptions and "Othering"[1]; yet through the prism of court art, we can directly discern how the Achaemenids expressed themselves, ideologically. This article thus centres on appraising the striking impact of and attitudes to Achaemenid power imagery, specifically the royal audience scene in Persepolis, within and beyond the empire. To approach this, we first examine what the motif meant for the Achaemenids, then assess how and why it spread and became variously adapted by patrons/artists, aspirationally within the empire and subversively beyond. Using extant depictions of the motif on seals and elite funerary monuments within, and Greek vase-painting and sculpture beyond, we aim to uncover social motivation, stressing contextual, visual, and ideological differences from the original, and argue how the audience scene formed an apt template to artistically convey polarising attitudes to Persian rule.

Achaemenid Audience Imagery

The royal audience scenes in their full scale comprised two large mirror-image limestone reliefs, originally forming the central panels of both the northern and eastern double stairway façades of the so-called Apadana (great columned audience hall) – the largest structure of the royal complex in Persepolis, built in Darius I's reign (522–486 BC).[2] Opposite the panel of the northern façade lay Xerxes' so-called 'Gate of All Lands' providing visitors entry to the most visible and accessible part of

[1] See Stevenson (1997).

[2] Measuring 65 m^2. Construction began c. 515 BC, evident from the foundation text DPh and associated coins, see Root (1986–1987); (1979: 86–95).

Fig.1 Achaemenid Audience Scene originally on the Apadana, Persepolis. P57121.
Courtesy of the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures of the University of Chicago.

the Persepolis terrace.[3] These panels were designed to be seen, impress, and communicate the ideology of Achaemenid empire and kingship.[4]

They (Fig.1) depict a splendidly clad, enthroned, and long-bearded Persian king with staff and lotus flower in hand, who rests his feet on a footstool upon a raised dais supporting the throne with lion paws, elevating visually and hierarchically both himself and a resembling Crown Prince behind. In respectful attendance are the king's servants, courtiers, and guards, where one official[5], deferentially addresses him (proskynesis[6]). Royal appurtenances include the raised dais, two censers, and the baldachin with a winged disk above enclosing the whole scene; together, they define the royal space and visually demarcate ruler from ruled. Further reinforcing the social hierarchy, the royal figures are rendered larger than the humble attendants, denoting their preeminence.

Indeed, great symbolism surrounds the audience scene. As the guards firmly grasp their spears reflecting the empire's strength, discipline, and security, the king himself holds a staff, exerting his power

[3] Root (2015: 36).
[4] They were later moved to the Treasury probably under Artaxerxes I, replaced with a panel of guards – why so remains unclear, see Tilia (1972: 91).
[5] For debate on his identity, see Abdi (2010: 277–278).
[6] E.g. the chiliarch Artabanus instructs Themistocles to perform proskynesis before the king in Plut. *Them*. 27, 2–7. See Fyre (1972).

and authority, but also a lotus blossom projecting goodwill and vitality.[7] The Crown Prince standing assuredly behind the throne, also with a lotus, serves as a harbinger of stability and secure dynastic succession.[8] The audience scene underlines the empire's attempt in balancing both strength and tranquility.[9] As Achaemenid art comprises a holistic and eclectic mix of Mesopotamian and Egyptian themes and styles – chief models for visually expressing their empire and monarchy[10] – the Achaemenids drew on the audience motif from earlier Neo-Assyrian examples conveying royal dominance, such as depictions of grand enthroned kings with staff and footstool on a wall relief from Sennacherib's South-West palace (r.704–681) at Nineveh[11], and a fresco in the reception room of Tiglath-Pileser III's palace (r.744–727) at Til Barsip.[12]

To fully appreciate the ideology behind the audience scene, we must not view it in isolation. Flanking both sides of the central panel were reliefs, visually and ideologically connected (Fig.2).[13] On Wing A Persian nobles in alternating courtly and equestrian attire await the ceremony to begin. On Wing B in three registers 23 gift-bearing and ethnically distinguished delegations from the empire's lands move towards the central panel with honorific tribute for the Great King, demonstrating their loyalty, as each leading delegate takes the hand of a Persian usher to be presented before the king – a formal gift-giving ceremony.[14] Significantly, the monarch, being the largest rendered figure, forms the centrepiece of the network of reliefs of Persian nobles and imperial del-

[7] For an overview of the lotus in Mesopotamian art, see Neumann (2023).
[8] Bachenheimer (2017: 105).
[9] Ibid. 61.
[10] Root (1979: 240–262).
[11] Collon (1995: fig. 117).
[12] Stronach (2002); Portuese (2020: fig.29). For royal Assyrian court and ideology, see Portuese (2020).
[13] Root (1979: 237).
[14] Allen (2005: 43); Root (2015: 21).

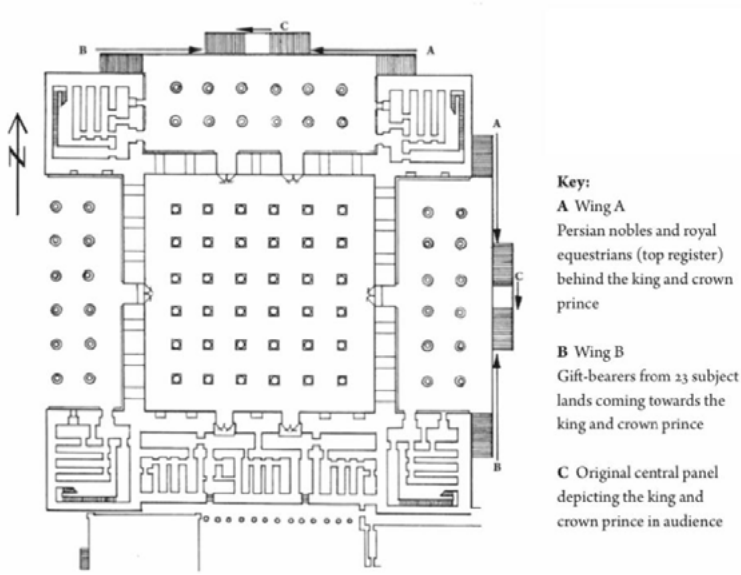


Fig.2 Plan of the Apadana showing relief sculpture programme on the north and east façades. After Root (2015: fig. 1.13). Courtesy M. C. Root.

egates, where all objects and figures harmoniously coalesce, creating a symbolic imperial entity (Fig.3).[15] The Apadana reliefs together convey a rhetoric of serene integration, unity, and collaboration.[16]

Another Persepolitan audience scene occurs on the northern and southern doorjambs of the so-called Hall of 100 Columns built in Artaxerxes I's reign (465–424 BC). More condensed, this specific scene retains

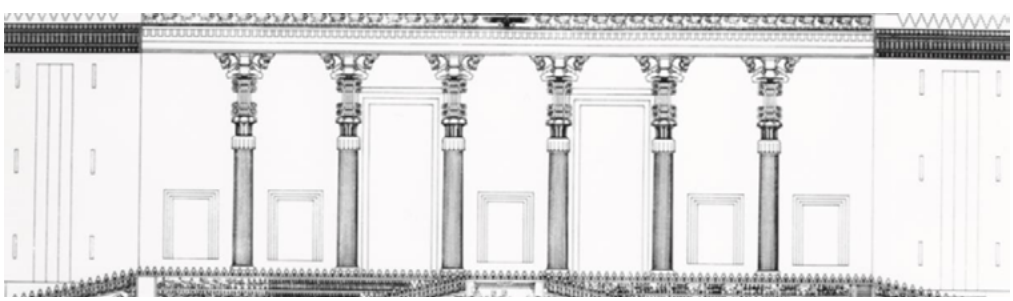
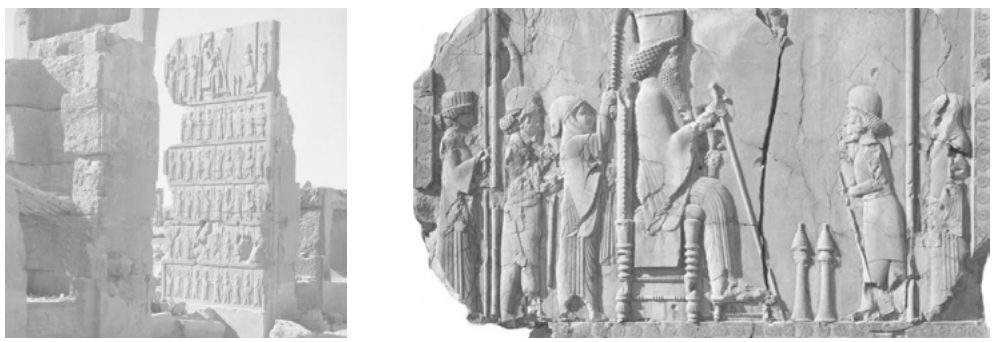


Fig.3 Reconstruction of the staircase façade of the north portico of the Apadana, with the original central panel (After Root (1979: fig.11) Courtesy M. C. Root).

[15] Root (2015: 34).
[16] Gunter (2020: 139).

most features of the central panel, yet excludes the Crown Prince, gaining a beardless fly-whisk bearer (eunuch) behind the king (Figs.4a–4b). Beyond its monumental setting, the motif appears on Persepolis seals used to ratify transactions and documents via impressions on clay tablets for palace administration,[17] such as PFS 22, featuring a long-bearded seated figure with staff and lotus, receiving a visitor led by a courtier's hand, recalling the delegate scenes on the Apadana (Fig.5).[18]



Figs. 4a–b Audience Scene on Hall of 100 Columns, Persepolis. P316 and P-135a. Courtesy of the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures of the University of Chicago.

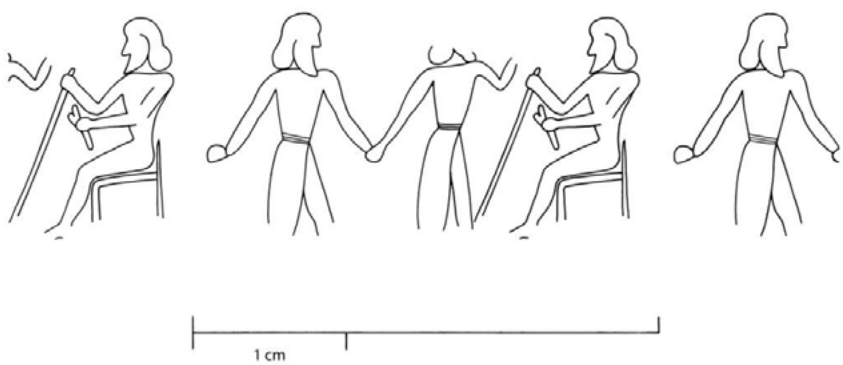


Fig.5 Collated line drawing of PFS 22 from the Persepolis Fortification Archive; after Garrison (2017: Fig. 2.34a); drawing courtesy M. B. Garrison, M. C. Root, and the Persepolis Seal Project.

[17] Garrison (2021: 770).

[18] Allen (2005: 47). Garrison–Root (Forthcoming). Female audience scenes also occur on Persepolis seals, with Persian elite women enthroned – they too held audiences: e.g. PFS 77, see Brosius (2010: figs.13.1; 13.9).

Dissemination

Significantly, the visual formula of the royal audience scene formed an apt template that would spread and become adapted. To demonstrate just how flexible and adaptable this centralised motif became within and beyond the empire, we must outline how artists/patrons could have cognised such Achaemenid imagery. One way in which representations of audience scenes could circulate empire-wide was through their depiction on portable seals for administration, denoting the different functional contexts where such imagery bore meaning.[19]

Daskyleion, satrapal capital of Hellespontine Phrygia in north-west Anatolia, has yielded many seals with various local styles, some imitating the Persepolitan court style based on the palace reliefs, such as the king heroically battling or hunting, and holding audiences.[20] Strikingly, visible on twelve sealed clay bullae, the audience scene on seal DS4 closely resembles that from the doorjamb of the Hall of 100 Columns, regarding the inclusion and specific placement of the enthroned king, footstool, lotus, censers, guards, and attendants – where one gestures deferentially before the king, and another holds a fly-whisk behind him (Fig.6).[21] Bearing the royal name of Artaxerxes in Old Persian cuneiform, this seal, produced and used in local satrapal operations, differs slightly in detail, such as the position of the winged disk in the middle rather than above the baldachin (for spatial reasons), and the king appears to raise his hand in greeting than hold a staff. While record-keeping practices were likely exported to Anatolia, the seal owner perhaps cognised such imagery via the circulated seals, visits to Persepolis or other satrapal palaces, or even a copybook.[22]

[19] Allen (2005: 48).
[20] Kaptan (2002); Miller (2006: 119).
[21] Kaptan (2002: 31–41; for all twelve, see DS 4, 1–12).
[22] Dusinberre (2013: 66; 249).

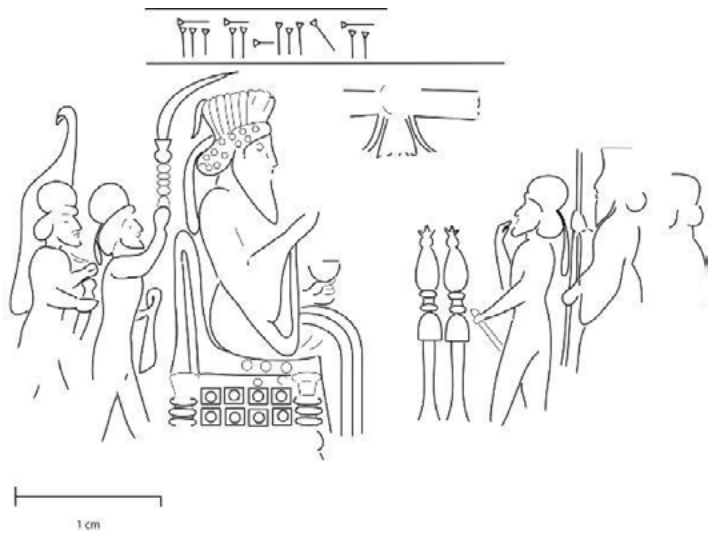


Fig.6 Drawing of Audience Scene on seal from Daskyleion (DS4). After Kaptan (2002: 65; fig. 45).

By depicting on the seal a Persepolitan audience scene, imagery projecting Achaemenid power and authority, and inscribing Artaxerxes' name in Old Persian, the patron has consciously highlighted their familiarity with the visual language and symbols of imperial authority, significantly articulating their loyalty to the Achaemenids, their assimilation, and perhaps distantly evoking close or aspirational engagement with the king.[23] The seal exemplifies a royal motif conveyed through a different artistic vehicle, carrying great symbolic authority.[24] Questions are raised as to whether the influence of this specific rendition reflects the Achaemenid imposition to educate the elite in its imperial ideology[25] or, rather, the aspirational assimilation of local elites; we argue for the latter.[26]

With its dissemination, the Achaemenid audience motif notably transcended its Persepolitan setting, becoming openly interpreted and adapted according to locale within and beyond the empire in different

[23] Garrison (2021: 770; 777).
[24] Dusinberre (2013: 250).
[25] Ibid. 251.
[26] Jacobs (2021: 761).

artistic media and contexts, altering in meaning and ideological message transmitted. Despite variations in detail, these adaptations retain some identifiable features, characteristic of those from Persepolis. We will now discuss some fascinating examples of such adaptations and identify who reconfigured the audience scene, the socio-political and ideological motivations behind them, and their attitudes to Achaemenid rule.

Aspirational Responses

Interestingly, most adaptations of the audience motif within the empire's provinces occur in funerary contexts – a striking contrast to Persepolis. Certain local dignitaries, while still living, would commission the construction of their monumental tombs or sarcophagi, selecting imagery and themes (e.g. hunting, combat, banquets, and audience scenes) centrally important to them, in terms of glorifying their exploits, proving themselves honourably legitimate, and memorialising their elite status to the gods, even if idealised.[27] As the audience scenes adorning the Apadana ideologically projected the king's grandeur, legitimacy, authority, and secure dynastic succession under a collaborative and diverse imperial whole,[28] adaptations of such imagery – utilised by local potentates to enhance the value and performativity of their funerary monuments – were very much aspirational, regarding their self-aggrandisement, great sense of authority, and projection of their assimilation into the Achaemenid court.

Remarkable examples of adapted audience scenes on funerary monuments come from Xanthus in Lycia, Anatolia (see below), Sidon in

[27] Jacobs (2021: 759).
[28] Gunter (2020: 139).

Fig.7 Drawing of Djedherbes richly enthroned on stela.
After Mathieson et.al. (1995: fig.3) Courtesy E. Bettles.

Phoenicia (e.g. the Satrap Sarcophagus – 440–400 BC[29]), and Saqqara in Egypt (e.g. the Achaemenid-period stela of Djedherbes, where the bottom register depicts him in a banquet setting, long-bearded, in Persian court-robe on an elaborate throne with lion paws, and footrest, holding a lotus flower and bowl on his fingertips – a Persian drinking affectation[30] – served by attendants, projecting his assimilation into Persian court luxury [Fig.7][31]), denoting its circulation west of the empire.

Here, local aspirational elites would intentionally portray themselves commandingly and splendidly enthroned, evocative of the Great King, with either staff or lotus in hand, feet on a footstool, and attended by courtiers/servants, to signal their importance and affiliated or idealised membership in the Achaemenid court elite.

[29] Gabelmann (1984: no. 22, pl. 9).
[30] See Xen. *Cyrop*. 1, 3, 8.
[31] See Mathieson et al. (1995) and Colburn (2020: 168–171; 216–218).

Indeed, three known tombs of local dynasts from Xanthus, built in their lifetime, feature an adapted audience scene: the so-called Harpy Tomb (480–470 BC), where the east face shows the large, enthroned, long-bearded ruler holding a staff and lotus flower, with a retinue behind him, receiving a gift from a visitor presented by a servant (Fig. 8)[32]; the west face of the Pavaya Sarcophagus[33] (c. 360 BC), belonging to a Xanthian governor (Pavaya), depicts the impressively enthroned Lydian satrap Autophradates clad in the Persian 'riding habit'[34] (tiara[35], sleeved cloak and shirt, trousers) before Payava and a delegation – an event worth memorialising (Figs.9a–9b); and lastly, the Nereid Monument, monumentally conveying the ruler's aspirations (Fig.10).[36]

Fig.8 Audience Scene on east face of the Harpy Tomb © The Trustees of the British Museum.

This imposing temple tomb, dating stylistically to the early 4th century BC, was constructed for the Xanthian dynast, Erbinna. According

[32] See Jenkins (2006: 163–168); Brosius (2010: 142–143).
[33] Both here and at Persepolis there is a figure introducing others to the ruler, see Jenkins (2006: 179–184).
[34] See Messerschmidt (2021).
[35] On the tiara, see Tuplin (2007).
[36] See Jenkins (2006: Ch. 8).


Figs.9a–9b Detail of enthroned satrap and audience scene on the Pavaya Sarcophagus

to a 4th-century elegy inscribed on a statue base in the sanctuary of Leto in Xanthus, recording his deeds, Erbinna reconquered Xanthus, Telmessus, and Pinara from their annexation.[37] The dynast thus reunited Lycia under one great authority, which he reflected and sought to legitimise in his tomb and its iconography. Reconstructed in the British Museum, this sumptuous tomb richly combines Greek and local Lycian craft, taking the form of an ionic Greek temple raised on a podium decorated with two friezes, with Nereids between the column capitals.[38] While the podium's lower frieze features Greek heroic combat, with Erbinna linking himself with heroic victory in war,[39] the upper notably focuses on his own valorous exploits, mentioned in the statue base inscription, such as his successful siege and storming of the three Lycian cities.[40] There is also an impressive audience scene (Fig.11).

Occupying the centre of the relief, the proudly presented Erbinna with short beard wears a soft-felt Persian-style tiara, sitting on a high-

[37] Elegy transcription and reconstruction by Bousquet (1975: 143–148); English version by Bryce (1986: 96); Jenkins (2006: 156–157).
[38] Curtis (2004: 45–46).
[39] Llewellyn-Jones (2023: 85).
[40] Jenkins (2006: figs. 187–188).

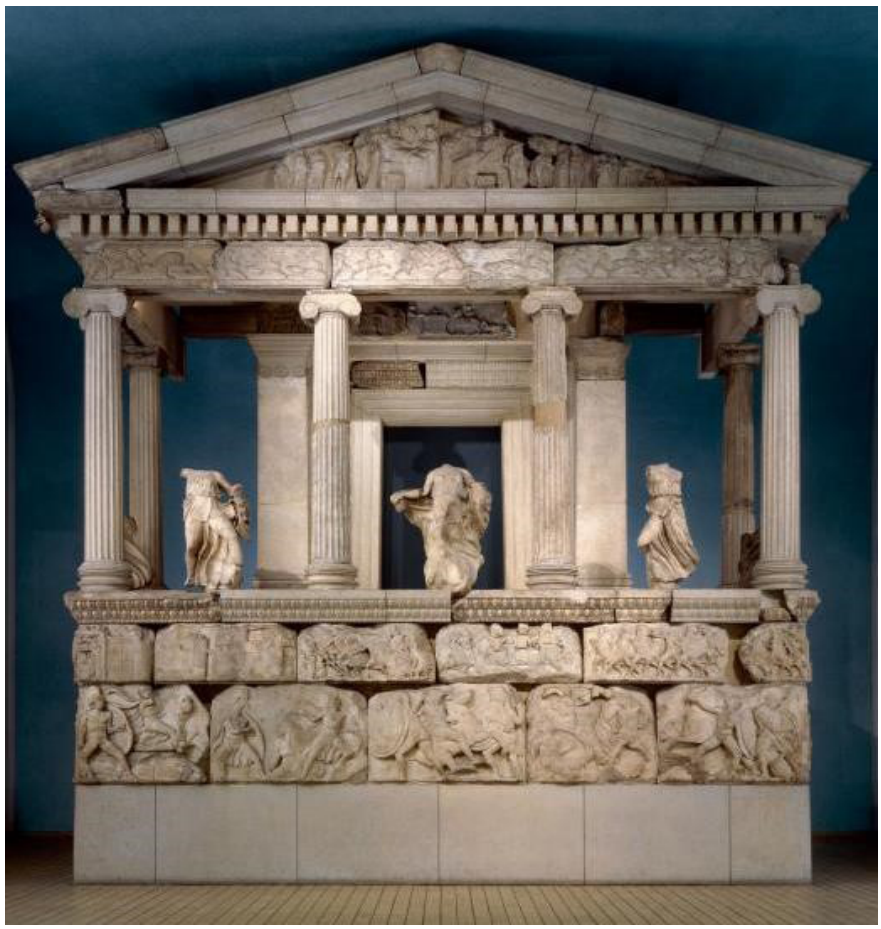


Fig.10 The Nereid Monument © The Trustees of the British Museum.

backed throne terminating in lion paws (just like those supporting the king's throne on the audience reliefs in Persepolis), while resting his feet on a footstool under the shade of a parasol carried by a servant behind him, imitating the Persian king, as seen in a relief from Xerxes' Palace (486–465 BC).[41] In his right hand, though not preserved, he likely held a staff, further exerting his authority. In attendance are three guards behind Erbinna and, before him, two bearded old men in tunics and himatia, who raise their right hands in entreaty, perhaps representing

[41] Llewellyn-Jones (2023: fig. 92).

Fig.11 Audience scene on the Nereid Monument © The Trustees of the British Museum.

an embassy from the conquered city negotiating a surrender.[42] Erbinna has thus ideologically affiliated himself with the power the Great King exudes, utilising the audience motif to further convey and enhance his own grandeur and authority over reunited Lycia. Further evidence of Erbbina's ideological affiliation to the Achaemenid court is found on reliefs from the architrave frieze depicting a procession of tribute-bearers wearing Persian headdresses who carry gifts of gaunaka (Fig.12) (a long-sleeved tunic and trousers with built-in feet), the exact same as those brought by the Cappadocians on the Apadana reliefs for the Persian King (Fig.13).[43] Erbinna was surely acquainted with such scenes and their symbolic value.

Overall Erbinna in his magnificent self-aggrandising tomb portrays himself as a conquering hero, making aspirational and affiliating links to the Great King by employing meaningful Achaemenid-inspired audience and tribute scenes to further communicate and legitimise the great authority he wielded over Lycia under the Achaemenid Empire.

[42] Jenkins (2006: 194); Robinson (1999: 372).
[43] Llewellyn-Jones (2023: 86).

Fig.12 Frieze of gift bearers with gaunaka for Erbinna on Nereid Monument

Fig.13 Cappadocian delegation bearing gaunaka for the Persian king on Apadana, Persepolis. P29001. Courtesy of the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures of the University of Chicago.

Subversive Responses

Adaptations of royal audience scenes not only occur within the empire, but, strikingly, also beyond it, in the Greek world, though in an utterly different context, with starkly contrasting ideological intentions and messages conveyed. The following appropriations are not aspirational, but subversive, in motivation, seeking to undermine Achaemenid rule. To contextualise, as a result of the early 5th-century Greco-Persian Wars and creation in 478 BC of the Athenian-led Delian League against potential Persian invasion, Achaemenid Persia then and in the ensuing generations emphatically became a popular subject in Greek drama, literature, and art. Combining literary accounts of perceived Persian aulic

Fig.14 Midas as the Persian King on Attic red-figure stamnos © The Trustees of the British Museum.

life[44], imagination, and adapted Achaemenid audience motifs,[45] Greek artists distorted the image of the Great King enthroned in audience through fantastical representations of his opulent court,[46] derision, and projecting Greek supremacy over the Persian "Other", in turn moulding Greek (Athenian) self-identity.[47]

Subversive examples include Attic depictions on elite-owned vases of mythical foreign rulers, who fitted the *tyrannos* mould, as proxies for the Persian king, notably Midas of Phrygia[48] and Bousiris of Egypt.[49]

[44] E.g. the *Persica* of Ctesias, Deinon, Heracleides, see Stevenson (1997: 1–3).
[45] Greeks could be au fait with royal Persian imagery, see Miller (1997: esp. 56).
[46] E.g. the enthroned king's court opulence with female fan-bearer, dancers, musicians on an Attic red-figure bell-krater c.400 Vienna Kuntshistoriches Museum 158, see Llewellyn-Jones (2017: fig. 5).
[47] A Greek account of an audience with the Great King, see Philostr. *Imag*. 2, 31; Allen (2005: 56).
[48] For Midas, see Miller (1988).
[49] For Bousiris, see Miller (2000); Mcphee (2006: 50).

Indeed, Midas, famed for his fabulous wealth[50] and avarice in the golden touch parable[51], resembles an approximate Persian king on an Attic red-figure stamnos (440 BC) portraying the presentation of the captured Silenus before him, set in a royal Eastern court (Fig.14).

Attended by a guard in generic Near-Eastern attire (headdress, long-sleeved patterned robes)[52] and a female fan-bearer, Midas is depicted enthroned with a long beard, feet on a footstool, and holding a staff, like the Great King, but also derisively with donkey ears, to signal his foolishness.[53] He is portrayed as a foreign ruler whose love of wealth begets moral decay – as luxury-led-decline is a prominent topos with which Greek authors have polemically associated the Achaemenids.[54] The female fan-bearer, if not a misinterpretation of the beardless fly-whisk bearer on audience reliefs in Persepolis, may reflect a deliberate distortion, alluding to concubines and slanderous notions of effeminacy and dissipation, to which Greek writers relate the Persian court (e.g. Plato conceptualises the imperial harem producing effeminate boys and royal decadence).[55] The artist thus aimed to deflate Midas' authority, and by extension, due to his resemblance, that of the Persian king and royal court.[56] The Darius Vase (c.330), an Apulian volute krater, also undermines Persian rule by combining an adapted audience scene (of Darius richly enthroned with staff and footstool, attended by guards and courtiers), tallying and tribute scenes of the king's wealth, and a gathering of gods predestining Greek victory, as Athena protects Hellas, and Apatē (of deception) guides Asia.[57]

[50] Aristoph. *Wealth*. 286–287.
[51] Aristot. *Pol*. 1257b16.
[52] See Persian guard description in Hdt. 7, 61. 6th-century vase depictions of long-sleeved and trousered Scythians could be a model, see Miller (2006: 109).
[53] Aristoph. *Wealth*. 287.
[54] E.g. Hdt. 9, 82; Xen. *Cyrop*. 8, 1–27; Ath. 12, 539b.
[55] *Laws* 694b–696a. On Persian decadence, see Briant (2002).
[56] Fraser (2023: 115); for the effeminisation of Attic throne scenes of Persians deflating their authority, see Miller (2006: 120) with more examples.
[57] See Llewellyn–Jones (2012: 329–340; fig. 17.2).

Fig.15 Polydamas conquers a Persian guard at Darius II's court on statue base. Courtesy Hans R. Goette.

Another subversive example features a scene in relief from a stone base (in the Museum of Olympia) that once supported the bronze statue of the famous pankratiast, Polydamas of Skotoussa, Olympic victor in 408 BC.[58] The statue and base were set up in the second half of the 4th century. The pankratiast was renowned for his exploits of great strength and wrestling, which, Pausanias notes, are listed in an inscription accompanying the statue, such as conquering a lion without weapons, as he desired to rival Heracles' strength. Hearing of his mighty exploits, the Achaemenid king Darius II invited Polydamas to his court in Susa, promising him gifts.[59] Pausanias reports the pankratiast's challenge to fight three Persian 'Immortals'[60] – whom he killed – and how his deeds were later represented on a dedicatory statue base at Olympia. Remarkably, corroborating Pausanias, the statue base, despite its poor weathering, depicts two of these very exploits: on the side, Polydamas' wrestling and defeat of the lion; on the front, his encounter in audience with the Great King (Fig.15).

Polydamas in heroic nude, back facing the king, shows his mighty strength by lifting the body of the Immortal well above his head in between four women and Darius II who, astonished, flail their hands in

[58] Paus. 6, 5, 1–7.
[59] Paus. 6, 5, 7.
[60] The king's royal bodyguard, see Hdt. 7, 40–41; 7, 83.

the air. The enthroned king, clad in his long-sleeved robe and tiara, with his feet on a footrest, holds a staff in his left hand (now lost), as the artist employs royal Achaemenid insignia.[61] Breaking artistic tradition, the king's right hand flails upwards (echoing the women), astounded by Polydamas' sheer strength, who significantly takes centre stage, relegating Darius to the left. No censers nor baldachin define his royal space, now occupied by the victorious Greek, who conquers the Persian Immortal – all underlining Greek supremacy over Persia. The robust and dominant Polydamas violates the tranquil ambiance of the Achaemenid audience scene, as he turns his back on the Great King – utterly inverting the original honouring the king's grandeur, authority, and preeminence.[62] Achaemenid authority is brutally subverted here.[63] If we read the relief as a past moment cast into the late 4th century, via this inversion, it acts as a metaphor for the overthrow of the empire.[64]

This sense of Persian downfall leads us to our final example of a subversive adaptation of the audience motif: the so-called 'Alexander' Sarcophagus.[65] Dating to the late 4th century BC, notably after the fall of the Achaemenid Empire, this royal sarcophagus from Sidon – featuring Alexander the Great in battle versus the Persians – contains an extraordinary copy of the audience scene. A direct quotation, it appears on the shield interior of a retreating Persian soldier struck down by a heroic nude Greek warrior (Fig.16).

Here, an enthroned Great King holds his staff in his left hand, his right raised to acknowledge or command a visitor in tunic and trousers, who bows respectfully before him, while a servant behind bears

[61] Allen (2005: 53–54).
[62] Ibid. 53.
[63] Greek defiance in audience with the Great King: e.g. the Spartans Bulis and Sperchis refused proskynesis before Xerxes – Hdt. 7, 136.
[64] Llewellyn-Jones (2012: 345).
[65] For publication, see von Graeve (1970).

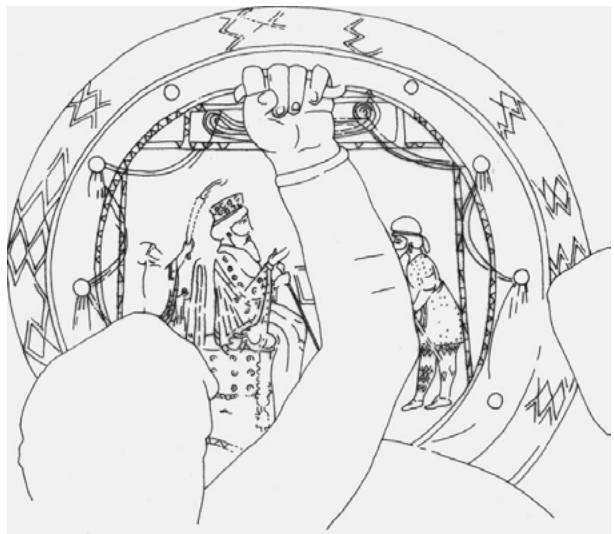


Fig.16 Drawing of audience scene on Persian soldier's shield on Alexander Sarcophagus.
After von Graeve 1987: fig.6; Courtesy V. Graeve.

a fly-whisk. Details such as the baldachin and winged disk are also visible, and, though blocked by the soldier's arm, censers presumably separated the king from his courtier – all hallmarks of the royal audience scene.[66] Since it closely resembles such scenes in Persepolis, denoting great familiarity with the motif and how well-known it must have been, perhaps the artist copied the image from a visit, or its depiction on portable media (e.g. seals) and perishable material like textiles, or even from a painted Persian shield obtained as captured weaponry.[67] Given the sarcophagus' sculptural and structural grandeur, date, and location, scholars have argued that it had been built for king Abdalonymos of Sidon – installed by Alexander.[68] The owner utilised Alexander's image and defeat of the Persian army (and by extension, the Achaemenid Empire itself) as a tool to assert affiliation to the new regime and project his elite status and right to rule.[69] By depicting heroic nude Greek warriors

[66] Brosius (2010: 345).
[67] Allen (2005: 61).
[68] Curt. 6, 1.15f; Allen (2005: 60); von Graeve (1970: 125–27).
[69] Morgan (2016: 296).

against the Persians, the artist explicitly conveys Greek/Macedonian cultural, political, and military supremacy over Persia, highlighted by the retreating doomed Persian soldier, who ineffectively holds up his shield revealing the royal audience scene signifying Achaemenid imperial power, authority and kingship; yet such symbols are undermined here. Not simply shield decoration, it metaphorically subverts Achaemenid ideological supportive power, signaling its looming end.[70]

Conclusion

Overall, Achaemenid audience scenes are striking in their wide flexibility and adaptability, since, as shown, the motif offers a highly apt visual template for patrons to utilise and articulate particular ideological messages.[71] For the Achaemenids, such messages centred on projecting the Great King's earthly preeminence, power, authority, legitimacy, goodwill, secure dynastic succession, and when considering the flanking reliefs of Persian nobles and the 23 delegations from the empire's lands who bring tribute, a rhetoric of serene integration, unity, collaboration, coalescing into an imperial Persian entity.

Adaptations within the empire mostly occur in funerary contexts and reflect the aspirations of certain local dynasts who commission to have themselves intentionally depicted commandingly and splendidly enthroned, richly dressed, with staff and footstool, attended by servants and holding audiences on their funerary monuments, similar to representations of the Great King himself. With such aspirational adaptations and other self-aggrandising imagery, these elites sought to highlight their own grandeur, social status, authority, also loyalty and affiliation to the Achaemenid king, court and empire. Although this centralised

[70] Allen (2005: 61).
[71] Ibid. 57.

royal imagery did spread (e.g. on portable seals) mostly to western regions (Asia Minor, the Levant, Egypt) with pre-existing pictorial habits, these responses are not the result of an imposing initiative from the imperial centre to disseminate their representational art.[72] The desire to adapt came from the provincial dynasts, who understood its ideological benefits and so aspired to reach great heights.[73]

Starkly contrasting these aspirational adaptations are those from beyond the empire; they contain both basic cognised Achaemenid visual audience motifs (e.g. enthroned kings, staffs, footstools, attendants) and Greek imagination, seeking to conceptualise the inaccessible opulent Persian court, in which they were fascinated, or, as a coping mechanism, deflate Achaemenid authority through derision (e.g. the Attic red-figure stamnos of Midas resembling a Persian king but with donkey ears), and projecting Greek cultural and military supremacy over the inferior Persians (e.g. the Polydamas statue base and the Alexander Sarcophagus) – ideologically distant from the original in Persepolis.

These various artistic responses thus highlight the notable impact the Achaemenids and their court art had on (western) provincial elites within the empire, aspirationally, and on Greek imagination in "Othering" the Persians; they serve as a telling gauge of contrasting socio-political and ideological attitudes to Persian rule: aspirational and subversive. Indeed, the audience scene is just one example of few such Achaemenid power imagery reappropriated so, to reflect both local elite ambition and Greek intrigue in Persia.[74]

[72] Jacobs (2021: 775).
[73] Ibid. 761; Sommer (2005: 145–146).
[74] E.g. hunting scenes exuding Persian prowess, see Miller (2006: 122); on funerary monuments, see Dusinberre (2013: Ch. 5).

Abbreviations

DPh	Darius I's Persepolis Inscription h This system follows Lecoq (1997: 11).
DS	Daskyleion Seal
PFS	Persepolis Fortification Seal

Classical Authors

Aristoph. *Wealth.*	Aristophanes, *Wealth*.
Aristot. *Pol*.	Aristotle, *Politics.*
Ath.	Athenaeus, *The Learned Banqueters.*
Curt.	Quintus Curtius Rufus, *History of Alexander.*
Hdt.	Herodotus, *The Histories*.
Paus.	Pausanias, *Description of Greece*.
Philostr. *Imag.*	Philostratus, *Imagines*.
Plut. *Them.*	Plutarch, *Themistocles.*
Xen. *Cyrop.*	Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*.

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