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Gender and Sex

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1 Theoretical and Methodical Considerations

“The social organization of the relationship between the sexes,” as Joan W. Scott (1988:28) points out, is much more complicated than one usually imagines. It may be organized on the basis of various and differentiated criteria, such as age, ancestry, or physical characteristics. Indeed, based on ideas about ‘health’ and ‘sickness,’ or ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal,’ as well as on opinions about physical differences between men and women, one’s physique acquires a structuring character. Furthermore, the fact of dividing human beings exclusively into two apparently complementary sexes has proven an important means of organizing social relationships (Scott 1988). In order to specifically analyze how societies define bodies as male or female (= sexual differences) and to trace the significance attributed to these sexual differences (= gender) necessitates the use of analytic categories. Following Joan W. Scott’s essay “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis” (Scott 1988), we have to distinguish between the perception of sexual differences and various attributions that are based on these perceptions (Scott 1988: 42-50). These attributions of meanings are often established by societies as generalized understandings and not so much as something constructed and performed. In this context such attributions of meanings also function to legitimize existing social hierarchies (Scott 1988) Moreover, we recognize here Judith Butler’s later contribution: inquiring how our socialization determines the perception of sexual difference. Thus sexual differences are not essential entities, but historical and social constructs (Butler 1990 and 1993; see also Scott 1988: 48; Bahrani 2001: 9). Based on this theoretical view, our own socialization is invariably reflected in any scholarly examination of societies dating from the Antiquities, which in turn requires additional deliberation (see also Van de Mierop 1999: 138; Bahrani 2001: 3-4).

Dealing with gender and sexual differences as an important organizational basis of societies it may be necessary here to briefly address the term ‘society.’ Theodor

Geiger's definition (1988: 39) is still useful: society is the "essence of persons living together in a common space or temporarily united in a given space."¹ With regard to this broad definition, a common feature may be determined for the peoples living under Achaemenid rule: They are dependent on the Great King. Indeed, this relationship of dependency, which may of course be expressed in highly diverse relationships of power, is a central structural element within the Achaemenid empire.² On the basis of these general considerations, this article focuses on gender relationships, which are expressed in the various power relationships, as Scott (1988) has observed theoretically.

2 Synthesis of the Current Scholarship and Aims of this Paper

Neither standard works on Achaemenid history (e.g. Briant 2002; Wiesehöfer 2004³) nor recently published source books (Kuhrt 2010; Lenfant 2011) have paid much attention to gender relations. Theoretical reflections on gender are limited to specific regions of the ancient Near East, such as Mesopotamia (e.g. Asher-Greve 1998; Van der Mieroop 1999; Bahrani 2001; Parpola/Whiting 2002; Bolger 2008).

Until now, the research has mainly concentrated on the history of women in the Achaemenid period. Maria Brosius' *Women in Ancient Persia* (1996, reprint 2002), for example, offers key insights into the living conditions of women at court as well as their opportunities in the economy of the court at Persepolis.³ The general focus on women's history is also reflected in the fact that the entries for 'women' in relevant encyclopedias do not have a corresponding lemma for 'men' or 'gender' (e.g. The New Pauly: Brosius 1998; EnIr: Brosius 2010).

A few studies have raised the issue of the state of the source materials and the question of possible historical interpretations. In 1983, for example, Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg (reprint 1993) demonstrated in a relevant article that Western views on Achaemenid women are distorted by classical sources. Nonetheless, precisely these Western sources continue to provide the basis for a few recently published works.⁴

This article aims at investigating gender in the Achaemenid period (550-331 BC) by focusing on concepts of manliness and femininity. Proceeding from the methodological considerations and the possibilities provided by records dating from the Antiquities, our main concern relates to the question of whether we may draw

conclusions about gender relations in the Achaemenid society beyond the literary discourse.

3 Writing about Sexual Differences: The Literary Sources

The following remarks are based on the indigenous sources of the Achaemenid heartland (the Persis/Fars) and on Greek and Latin texts that deal with the Achaemenid society. Authors of the latter texts provide outsiders' perspectives on ancient Persia. They are especially interested in the king and his circle, but they mainly reflect Greek and Roman views about manliness and femininity, even when writing about foreign societies. For this reason, these sources should be interpreted in light of the literary discourse. We would like to qualify the statements of the classical sources to the extent that we understand them as narratives, which convey contemporary conceptions of manliness and femininity.

Cuneiform scripts should also be used cautiously. Official royal inscriptions concentrate on the male elite and their ideal virtues. They attest only the contemporary elite discourse and are ideologically biased. And although archival texts from Persepolis do provide some indications about female members of the Achaemenid court and about women of lower ranks, there are still only a slight number of edited texts, which thereby prevents general inferences.

The following section examines the evidence as regards sex differences and gender relations. First, however, a few thoughts on gendered writing and speech.

3.1 Manliness and Femininity in the Achaemenid Empire: The Cuneiform Sources

Sexual Differences and Gender in Script, Language, and Grammar

Sexual differences are established linguistically. Elamite and Old Persian use Sumerian logograms as sex markers in the written language. The determinative MÍ prefixes a woman's name or a woman's occupation; the determinative LÚ ('man') a man's. Sex is indicated by the written system, not by the spoken language, which influences linguistic concepts. Breast-fed babies are called '(young) man or person' (GURUŠ, e.g. Fort. 9189: 4); girls are called 'female offspring' (^fpuhu ^fmuti). This means that the sex is only indicated by the female determinative, which is prefixed to the term *puhu* or '(male) offspring.' The same practice is also common for older boys (^mpuhu GURUŠ.na: PF 1201: 5–8) and girls (^fpuhu MUNUS.na: e.g. PF 1424: 5).

Apparently, it was more important to be the ‘son’ or the ‘daughter’ of someone (e.g. *sunki pakri* ‘the king’s daughter’: PFa 5), since the primary social stratification within the Achaemenid society was defined by rank and occupation.

Gender differentiation may be observed in the grammar as well. Elamite has grammatical sex, which has nothing to do with the two sexes ‘male’ and ‘female.’ Rather, *nomina* are considered either as personal (animated) or impersonal (unanimated). Sex is either unmarked or lexically distinguished (e.g. *adda* = ‘father’ / *amma* = ‘mother’; *iki* = ‘brother’/ *šutu* = ‘sister’; *tempti* = ‘lord’; *zana* = ‘lady’).

In terms of language, there is also the peculiarity that both Elamite and Old Persian lack the vocabulary that would denote gender transgressions (eunuchs, effeminates). Both languages reflect a gender dichotomy for the Achaemenid society.

Concepts of Royal Manliness

Royal and noble women hardly ever appear in either the inscriptions of the Achaemenid kings or the reliefs in their residences. The sources deal mainly with the body of the king. The Achaemenid royal ideology is based on manliness. Thus our discourse on royalty and imperial power cannot be generalized for the entire male Achaemenid society. This discourse concerns members of the leading clans, members of the court, or the satraps, who all had to imitate the king. It was not for ordinary Persians.

Since the Achaemenids are heirs of the Mesopotamian and Elamite royal ideologies, their official documents concentrate on the image of the perfect ruler, for instance Cyrus the Great in the so-called Cyrus Cylinder (Kuhrt 2010: 70-2). Particularly since the regency of Darius I, the cardinal virtues of the Achaemenid kings are stereotypically repeated in writings. His merits are highlighted, for example, in the stone inscriptions in Naqš-e Rostam (DNa and DNb⁵): The king has been instated to his office by Ahura-Mazda (the highest deity) in order to establish order out of chaos. This cosmic order is a result of righteous wars, pursued at the far reaches of the world (DNa § 4). The king is an outstanding warrior, archer, and equestrian lancer (DNb § 2g-h; § 8g-h). Furthermore he is a perfect hunter and a hero, who overpowers wild beasts or mythical monsters in face-to-face duels (see PFS 7*, a seal of Darius I). Only the king is capable of subduing these powers of chaos. He is not only the cultivator of the land but also its creative Maker (DSe § 5); he restores dilapidated buildings and plans new residences, such as Persepolis (DPf) or Susa (DSf). The king

is a just ruler, who can distinguish between right (OP *arta* ‘truth/order’) and wrong (OP *drauga* ‘lie,’ DNb §2a; DB § 63-4). He does not have a violent temper: “I keep that under control by my thinking power. I control firmly my impulses” (DNb § 2b). This ability to think and his intelligence enable him to recognize rebellions and to solve problems (DNb § 2f; § 8g). His subjects’ duties are their obedience and loyalty to him. Cooperation is rewarded (DNb § 2c.e; § 8c), whereas apostasy is severely punished: “I am furious in the strength of my revenge” (DNb § 2h; DB § 64).

In contrast to classical sources, the sexual activity of the king, his virility, or the fact that he possesses many women is not emphasized in Achaeminid inscriptions or reliefs. Yet the designation of the successor still during the rule of a king indicates the importance of male offspring for the preservation of the dynastic lineage (e.g. Xerxes by Darius: XPf § 4). In Elamite there is the term *ruhu*, which marks a ‘legitimate offspring’ (EW II 1046). This is possibly contrasted with the term *taqar* or ‘bastard’ (EW I 287: verification for this term appears only in the Middle Elamite period). Since transmitted Persepolis Tablets indicate that ordinary Persian women received a double allowance for the birth of boys, one may determine a general preference for sons. Yet this does not indicate that girls were killed, since the transmitted numbers show an equilibrium of female and male babies. The source material demonstrates that the royal inscriptions and reliefs only emphasize the superiority of the male sovereign. The king exceeds all other men in physical prowess and beauty. His authority and omnipotence is visualized in the reliefs (by which he is always depicted as taller than all other persons).

Concepts of Elitist Femininity: Women in the Royal Milieu

As mentioned above, royal and noble women were not officially portrayed in the Persis.⁶ This resembled Assyrian and Babylonian practice, whereby queens were either never depicted or, if at all, only with the king. Thus the absence of women in official art cannot be explained by a lack of source material. Rather, it is a result of the Achaemenid idea of the male ruler. He, his power, and his magnificence are important; the queen or female aspects of royalty are not.

The indigenous sources indirectly support the distinction drawn in the classical sources between ‘legitimate wives’ and other female companions of the king, since the Elamite term *ruhu(r)* seems to signify the ‘son of a legitimate wife’ (EW II 1044). An Old Persian expression for ‘concubine’ has thus far not been attested, but philologists

reconstruct an original **harčī-*, derived from the Armenian **harč* as ‘second wife, concubine.’ Until now, however, there has been neither written nor archeological confirmation of a secluded ‘harem.’ Likewise there is no evidence for the large number of women, to which the classical sources attest.

The Persepolis Tablets use at least three categories of women: *mutu*, *irti*, *dukšiš* (Brosius 2002²: 25-6). The title *dukšiš* (pl. *dukšišbe*) denotes women who belong to the king’s family, such as the princess(es), the king’s wife, his sisters, and also the ruling queen, such as Amestris (wife of Xerxes). The term *irti* (‘wife’) has a somewhat broader meaning, which is used also for non-royal or aristocratic relations. These kinship terms were secondarily used also for court ranks. The Elamite *mutu*, ‘(ordinary) woman,’ by contrast, appears connected to motherhood and is prefixed to female personal names.

In official texts, royal and noble women mainly remain anonymous, as was also the case in older neighboring cultures. This holds true also for many of the Persepolis Fortification Tablets. A daughter of King Darius I (perhaps Artazostre in Hdt. VI 43, 1), is described as “the wife of Mardonius, daughter of the king” (PFa 5: *Mardunuya irtiri sunki pakri*). This means that her status as wife and the fact that of her kinship to the king are significant, not however her individual personal name. In addition, there is reference to the father, as head of a clan: Three of Darius I’s sisters were identified as ‘daughters’ (*pakbe*) of Hystaspes, although Darius was already king at this time (PFa 31).

In those cases in which royal women acted independently, their personal names are handed down in the Persepolis Tablets. These sources indicate that women had their own property and could travel around the country to enable them to control their estates and workforce. The women used their personal seals, which stylistically emulated those of the men, with images of heroic duels (Artystone: PFS 38) and hunting scenes (Irdabama: PFS 51). They were not passive; rather, they had their own areas of activity where they could obtain social prestige by imitating men. For example, they could organize their own banquets or give audiences (e.g. seal impression PFS 77*; Brosius 2010⁷).

Concepts of Subordinated Manliness: Members of the Elite

In the Bisutun inscription, the term *šalu* (‘princely,’ DB § 3; OP *amātā-* Fort. 2874: 5) is used to denote ‘noblemen’ (*^mšá-lú-ip*: EW II 1128; also e.g. in PF 1017: 7), whose

relationships of dependency to the king varied. One such structure is also confirmed in the Persepolis Tablets, which name the ‘son of the royal house’ (*mišapuša*: EW II 936), who was a close relative of Darius I (PF 1793; PFa 24; PFa 29). Similar to women’s titles, this designation was later used for a court rank.

This information notwithstanding, details on the Achaemenid elite are sparse. Only a few persons are individually named and officially inscribed in the written records (e.g. Parnakka). Apart from Darius I’s co-conspirators (DB § 68) in the Bisutun inscription, only Gobryas and Aspathines are depicted standing behind the king at his grave in Naqš-i Rostam (DNc-d).

According to the inscriptions, the status of the male elite does not correspond to a peer group with the king; it is a status of subordination. Old Persian uses the expression *bandaka* for this type of relationship, derived from **banda* (‘girdle,’ ‘belt’), literally ‘the ones who wear the girdle of allegiance.’ *Bandaka* describes the personal bond of loyalty, which bound the elite to their king. The king “demotes them from a peer group to servants” (Kuhrt 2010: 620), whose past deeds for the king are celebrated, thereby whose families had been awarded prestige, and yet who had no special rights. The elite did not have a place next to the omnipotent king and his hegemonic manliness. Their (the elite’s) manliness is defined by rank, which while visualized in reliefs by different types of clothing is not more precisely specified in texts. Rank differences in the Tablets are graspable only through differing dispensations of allowances.

Concepts of Subordinated Masculinity and Femininity: Ordinary Persians

In the official inscriptions, references to ‘Persian men’ (OP *martiya*) are relatively frequent: e.g. DPd, “this country Persia which Ahura-Mazda bestowed upon [him is] good, possessed of good horses, possessed of good men” (also DNa; DSab; cf. Hdt. I 136). The subjects are – like horses – above all ‘useful’ as part of the military power. The role of ordinary Persian women in this context is unknown.

By contrast, the Persepolis Tablets provide insight into the everyday life of the male and female workforce of the Achaemenid palace economy. Ordinary workers are named according to their rank within the working group or the factories that employed them. Some craft workers (i.e., weavers) appear to be exclusively reserved for one sex, but most professions include male and female workers, often in mixed groups. Female managers head teams of female workers as well as co-ed teams. The

arāššara pašabena, the “female supervisor of *pašap* (women)” had a prominent and privileged position among the workingwomen (Brosius 2002²; 146-7). She received the highest monthly allowances within the workgroup (e.g. PF 847). Yet despite her high position, men were the main benchmarks in the lists of allowances, since men were named first. Another group which is mentioned in the Tablets are specialized male and female workers who earned equal pay. Thus there was no obvious pay difference based on sex. But in general, scholars suggest that women in unskilled professions received a third less pay than men (Brosius 2002²: 186).

Ordinary Persians are also seen as *bandaka*. The king expects loyalty from them (cf. DNb § 2c-h). At the same time, however, they symbolized the basis of his power. Several depictions clearly illustrate this, such as at the royal graves in Persepolis and Naqš-i Rostam, where subjects bear the enthroned king.

3.2 Manliness and Femininity in the Persian Empire: The View of Greek and Latin Authors

Greek and Latin sources provide many images of Persians. We may read how Persians act, behave, or even about what they look like. But all of this information about manliness and femininity comes from outsiders’ perspective, which above all expresses how Greek and Roman authors wish to record the Persians in a literary discourse (as Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1993² demonstrated concerning women). The source book of Amélie Kuhrt (*The Persian Empire* 2010) makes clear that with a certain frequency, Persians are largely mentioned regarding two activities: the sphere of political and military actions and that of the royal banquet. We thus focus on these two areas, after which we will analyze the conveyed images of femininity and manliness.

Concepts of Royal Manliness

According to the indigenous sources, the Great King is also described in the classical sources as a ruler with universal authority (Arist. Pol. VII 6-7), who decides about peace, war, and the law. He is described as well as a successful hunter (Xen. Cyr. I 4-5), as a ruler over wild beasts (Ctes. FGrH 688 F 14, 43), and as the one who makes the right decisions (Ath. XII 548c, Nep. Kings 1, 4). Further we read that the beauty and height of the king towers above all else (Hdt. VII 187, 2; Str. XV 3, 21; Nep. Kings I 4; Plut. Alex. 21, 6).⁸ Strikingly, although some authors’ depictions (such as

Herodotus') at least partially pick up Achaemenid propaganda, the positive self-portrayal of the Achaemenid kings is often inverted; that is, individual episodes may attest unjust, irascible, and cowardly kings.

Greek and Latin sources provide different images of royal manliness among the Achaemenids. These are conveyed via particular literary figures and their interactions. Three types of rulers who dominate the literary discourse may be distinguished: The despotic and unrestrained king, the cowardly and weak king, and the perfect king.

The despotic king is well exemplified in the figure of Xerxes I. Aeschylus depicts him as a despotic ruler, who shows no consideration to traditions or to divine right. He cherishes only a desire for luxury. The despotic ruler, according to Herodotus, too, transgresses the *nomoi*. In this context, violence against women counts as one of the three worst crimes a tyrant may commit (Hdt. III 80, 5; see also the examples in Hdt. III 32; Hdt. IX 111 ff.). A further feature for this type of ruler is lack of restraint and excessiveness (*hubris*). No human being, no secular rule can stop kings' excessiveness because the king not only represents the law, he is the law. See Cambyses, for example: "The king can do everything he wants" (Hdt. III 31, 4). He rules arbitrarily by handing out death sentences, without considering the social rank of the victim (Hdt. III 35, 5: Cambyses orders twelve noble Persians to be buried alive head first). In connection with the concept of the despotic ruler there are other features, which are mentioned and negatively connoted. For example, the invisible king (Ps-Arist. de mundo 398a), the secluded king (Plut. Artax. 5, 5), and the deified king, who requires homage from his subjects (Isocr. Paneg. 151; Ath. XIV 652b; Plut. Them. 27, 4). Kings may also be negatively characterized because of their sexual practices. Cambyses is described as sexually deviant for marrying his full-sister (Hdt. III 31, 1–2; cf. also I 136).

Another type of poor ruler is conveyed by the literary figure of Darius III. Darius III symbolizes the cowardly king, who frequently flees the battlefield, abandoning his army and ultimately the royal court as well (e.g. Arr. Anab. II 11, 2. 4; II 13, 1; III 16, 1). The image of the cowardly ruler is already handed down by Ctesias (e.g. Artaxerxes II: FGrHist 688 F 16, 67). But it is not only the individual figure of the king who acts without courage. In certain contexts the classical sources create a portrait of cowardly Persians as a collective. Thereby they work with literary motifs, e.g. women who push on the coward and fleeing Persian soldiers (Nic. Dam. FGrH 90 F 66, 43–4).

Cyrus the Great is one of the few rulers who fulfill the concept of a perfect king. A main characteristic for this type of ruler is – according to indigenous sources – military prowess. If the king is the best commander and fighter, then he may lead his army successfully. But the king does not win a battle alone; he needs courageous soldiers on his side. Thus just as the motif of the cowardly Persian is generated in literary discourse, we also find the motif of the courageous Persian. The brave Persians are raised in a special way. From childhood on, they are trained for hunting and war. They are also made familiar with activities that distinguish one as an honorable and loyal Persian (Xen. Anab. I 9, 3–4; Xen. Cyr. I 2, 15). In the view of Greek and Latin authors, it behooves men to raise boys once they have turned five (Hdt. I 136; Str. XV 3, 18). The influence of women should be avoided as much as possible for this period of the child's development, since it leads to unmanly royal behavior, as may be read in Plato (Nom. III 694 d–e; III 695 a–b).

The perfect ruler not only dominates the battlefield but also efficiently arranges favors (e.g. Xen. Cyr. VIII 2, 7–8; Plut. Artax. 14, 5. 15, 2; Plut. Alex 69, 1). In addition, the king presents himself as a donor, who shows his splendor at banquets (e.g. Heraclides FGrH 689 F 2). At the same time he puts into force a domineering social order: The status of the invited guests is expressed by the seating arrangements and the thereby generated relative proximity to (or distance from) the king.

A general feature that is found in each of the three ruler types is the possession of many women, which was referred to by Herodotus (I 136, 1; III 69) and Strabo (XV 3, 17) as a general Persian custom. Referring to Heraclides of Cumae, Athenaeus (XII 514b) indicates 300 women of the (anonymous) Persian king. The ruler keeps watch with a jealous eye over them (e.g. Plut. Artax 27, 1: “do not touch the royal concubines”; in a more generalized sense, one that relates to all Persians, see also Plut. Them. 26, 5). Interpreting this indication of the possession of many women is challenging for scholars, because the ancient sources provide no clear information about polygyny among the Persians. We interpret it here as a strategy to illustrate the ruler's omnipotence. Possessing many women evokes the image of a sexually active ruler who is able to sire many offspring.

The Concept of Elitist Femininity: Women in the Royal Milieu

Classical sources mention the possession of many women (Hdt. III 2; III 69) living in segregated rooms (Hdt. III 68). They also inform us about the practice of a king

assuming his predecessor's wives (Hdt. III 88, 2; Curt. VI 6, 8). In general Greek and Latin texts distinguish between the king's 'legitimate wives', who have the distinction of bearing the king's legitimate heirs (Hdt. III 2), and other female partners (Hdt. I 135; Ath. XIII 556b; Plut. Artax. 27, 1). A hierarchy among the royal women is attested, since concubines, for example, must prostrate themselves in front of the queen (Ath. XIII 556b). Indeed, in this social framework, the queen receives special treatment even from the king himself. Furthermore, only concubines – and not the queen – are expected to see the ruler drunk and exuberant (Plut. Mor. 140b). At the same time, "the king rules his wife as absolute owner" (Ath. XIII 556b). Therefore the royal women are alongside the ruler even on his military campaigns (e.g. Hdt. VII 184–187; Diod. Sic. XVII 38, 1; Arr. Anab. II 11, 9–10). This expresses royal women's dependency on the king.

In considering the characterization of the noble Persian women, we may recognize analogies in and also differences to the Greek and Roman norms. The ideal virtues of a woman are expressed in motherhood (Hdt. I 136, Str. XV 3, 17), beauty (Ath. XIII 609a; Arr. Anab. IV 19, 5–6; Plut. Alex. 21, 6, 10), seclusion (Plut. Artax. 26, 5–9; Ath. XIII 576d), and obedience (Ath. XIII 556b). These women are marked by their function in the family as mother, daughter, wife, or also concubine, whereby the king also represents the benchmark for this characterization.

However, classical sources also describe feminine behaviors of Persian women that contrast the Greek and Roman norms. Women in the royal milieu are occasionally depicted as active: for example, they autonomously punish people (Parysatis: Ctes. FGrH 688 F 15, 52; F 15, 56–57, Amytis: Ctes. FGrH 688 F 9, 6); they are engaged in politics (Phaedymia: Hdt. III 66-9; 88; Parysatis: Plut. Artax. 2, 3–4, 1); they cause (Nitētis: Hdt. III 1–3; Ath. XIII 560d–e) or initiate (Atossa: Hdt. III 134, 2) wars; they are cruel (Parysatis: Ctes. FGrH 688 F 15, 51ff.; F 16, 66) and jealous (Amestris: Hdt. IX 108ff.); and sometimes they even behave manly (Atossa: Hellanicus of Lesbos FGrH 678a F 7; Roxane: Ctesias FGH 688 F 15 (55); Amestris the Younger: Ath. XII 514b–c). At times queens act at men's behest (Phaedymia: Hdt. III 66-9; III 88; Atossa: Hdt. III 133f.).

Achaemenid queens and noblewomen are frequently depicted as faceless characters who appear as a collective, sometimes even namelessly. The women serve merely to better characterize the king. They stand in as beautiful property. The female body is also a tool, an object of desire and a means of depicting the king's power.

The Concept of Subordinated Manliness: The Nobleman Who is Not the King

Achaemenid society, as stated above, was dominated by one person: the king. A society that is so strongly focused on a hegemonic manliness and structured on a basis of gender dichotomy and gender hierarchy must at the same time provide space for further concepts of manliness in order for everyday life to function. For the Achaemenids, concepts of non-hegemonic manliness, which were defined by their dependency on the king, can be determined. As Kuhrt (2010: 620) clearly exposed for noble Persians, “in relation to the king, they had no special rights, no greater claim on his person than anyone else. They were all the king’s *bandaka*.” This ‘bond’ to the king is depicted in various episodes, all of which illustrate that the connection to the king is more important than that to the family (Xen. Anab. I 6, 1; Xen. Hell. IV 36; Diod. XVII 30, 4). Thus the education of the nobles concentrates on fulfilling the duties towards the royal dynasty.

How the hierarchical relationships between king and nobility are organized depends on the rank of the respective subject (Curt. X 1, 22-3). Being born into a higher rank enables men to acquire social prestige (through royal gifts: Hdt. IV 143, 2-3). To be a member of a higher rank also provides men the possibility to participate in political power: e.g. as an advisor (Mardonius: Diod. Sic. XI 1, 3; Nep. Paus. 1, 2; Artabanus: Hdt. VII 10, VII 18; VII 46–52; Megabyzus: Ctes. FGrH 688 F 14, 43). One’s social position is extremely important and made visible: through clothing (Strab. XV 3, 19), forms of greeting (Hdt. I 134), and the allocation of food. The social position of a Persian is seen also in the seating arrangement at a banquet. The closer one is able to sit to the king, the higher the social status (Hdt. VIII 67, 2-68, 1).

Impressions of Subordinated Manliness and Femininity: Ordinary Persians

Precise information about ordinary Persians are few. They are known for having many sons and for their “prowess in fighting, the chief proof of manliness” (Hdt. I 136; cf. also Str. XV 3, 17, Plut. Alex. 69, 1). In general the classical view of the Persians is highly distorted. Quite frequently they are mentioned in this perspective as merely a passive tool, entirely subjected to the mercy of the king and his family. Persian soldiers thus become victims of a despotic king who impels them into battle (e.g. at Thermopylae, Hdt. VII 221). Xerxes even beats his soldiers at the crossing over Hellespont (the Dardanelles; Hdt. VII 56, 1). The soldiers were occasionally

depicted as cowardly (Nic. Dam. FGrH 90 F 66, 3–4). Sometimes they were even described as the king's slaves (Hdt. IX 16).

Women servants appear as the queen's tools (Hdt. I 134; Ath. XIII 556b; Plut. Artax. 19, 8-9) or as objects of the king's desire (Ath. XII 514b). Only seldom are ordinary Persian women described as brave (Nic. Dam. FGrH 90 F 66, 43–4) or otherwise attributed with a male habitus, whereas men are not rarely characterized as womanly (Hdt. VIII 88, 3).

Effeminates and Eunuchs: A Cause for Friction in Western Perceptions

Various modern Western studies start from the assumption that effeminates and eunuchs were an inherent element of Persian society.⁹ Indeed, the classical sources provide some indications that allow for such an interpretation. We repeatedly find narratives about persons in the royal milieu who stand out because of their physical appearances (Curt. VI 6, 8). From the viewpoint of Greek and Latin sources, these persons appear as something peculiar, as people who do not fit into the concept of a dichotomous two-sex system. Effeminates and eunuchs represent neither masculinity nor femininity, even though they are endowed with feminine attributes (Parsondes: Nic. Dam. FGrH 90 F 4, 3; Ath. XII 530d). This vagueness is used as a tool for a negative characterization of the persons in question. We read about eunuchs either connected to assassination attempts (Ctes. FGrH 688 F 9a; Ctesias FGrH 688 F 15 (54)) or are responsible for them (Plut. Artax. 17, 5–6). By contrast, classical sources also report on the merits of eunuchs as loyal companions (Xen. Cyr. VII 5, 59–65; Plat. Alc. 121d). We read as well about how eunuchs came to be so (Hdt. VIII 105). All of these indications about effeminates and eunuchs in the classical sources serve at times to create the image of an exotic 'Orient,' which strongly differs from the life of Greeks and Romans.

4 Summary and Conclusion

The inscriptions of the Achaemenid kings in various locations in Persis/Fars point to a normative male matrix. They reflect the official discourse about the ideal ruler, but not of a universal ideal Persian manliness. The Achaemenid queens as well as the elite women are not present in official depictions and are only mentioned by name in a few of the archival texts, which also name ordinary Persian women, albeit as receivers of allowances. Effeminates and eunuchs, who play an important role in Western

conceptions and perceptions about Achaemenid society, are irrelevant in the indigenous sources. Classical sources concentrate on Achaemenid customs and traditions and the relationships between elite men and women. They conjure up stereotypical images of the king, the queen, and others in their entourage. These characterizations reflect Greek and Roman patriarchal norms.

Comparing ‘oriental’ and ‘occidental’ concepts of manliness and femininity, one may determine a few major aspects as regards Achaemenid society. Language and social stratification indicate a gender dichotomy. One may also ascertain a gender hierarchy, in which women – independent of their rank – are subordinate, and in which men hold the dominating positions in government, economy, military, and commerce. Within groups of men and women, additional hierarchies may be observed. The mutual dependency between gender and rank here is thereby obvious. The result is the concept of hegemonic manliness, embodied by the king. Nevertheless, general statements on gender relations beyond the literary discourses are limited in scope. Possibly the inclusion of pictorial representations of Persians on Greek as well as Persian artifacts with a focus on the body will broaden our perspectives.

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Van de Mieroop, M. (1999). *Cuneiform Texts and the Writing of History*. London/New York: Routledge Chapman & Hall. See especially the chapter ‘Gender and Mesopotamian History’ for the place of gender in Ancient Near Eastern studies.

Abstract

Following J. W. Scott’s theoretical considerations, the literary sources of Antiquity are examined in terms of gender and sexual differences within the Achaemenid society. To that end, classical sources are compared with indigenous Achaemenid evidence, in order to subvert the ‘occidental’ literary discourse and its depiction of ‘oriental’ women and men. The issue about how gender relations were actually experienced is examined by means of conceptions of manliness and femininity. Based on the available sources, the focus lies on the Achaemenid elite and the king, who is perceived as the embodiment of hegemonic manliness.

Key words:

Gender – stereotypes – Achaemenid society – manliness – femininity – sexual differences – social differences – elite – hegemonic manliness

¹ We thank Laurie Cohen for reading through the English manuscript, for her suggestions, and translations of Geiger’s definition. – This definition is still used in introductory sociology textbooks. See Kopp, J., Schäfer, B. (eds.) (2010¹⁰). *Grundbegriffe der Soziologie*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, p. 89.

² For other models of the Achaemenid society (e.g. focusing on the so-called ethno-class) see Basello, this vol. chapter VII 72 and chapter VI 60); Briant (2002: 88) divides the social fabric into king/elite, priests, soldiers, and farmers. Dandamaev/Lukonin (1994: 152) compare the structures with Mesopotamia and, according to their legal status, distinguish three social groups.

³ Brosius' results pick up from Wouter Henkelman (1999), among others, and extend them.

⁴ E.g. on Herodotus, see Boedeker 2011; on Ctesias, e.g. Gera 2007; Truschnegg 2011; Madreiter 2012; on Athenaeus, e.g. McClure 2003.

⁵ A nearly identical diction is used by Xerxes in XPI. See also the Aramaic version of Darius's Bisutun text from Elephantine (TADAE III C2.1 pp. 70–1) or the account of the local dynast Arbinas.

⁶ But Brosius (2010) refers to representations of royal or elite women on reliefs in Egypt, at Dascylium (Asia Minor), and on a carpet from Pazyryk (Siberia), which are all situated at or even beyond the borders of the Achaemenid Empire.

⁷ Similar scenes are depicted on two more seals and on funerary stelae from Asia Minor; see details in Brosius 2010.

⁸ In general Briant (2002: 225-7); with a special focus on Herodotus' *Histories* see Gufler (2010).

⁹ Recent studies also deal with the etymology and meaning of the Greek term "eunuch" and the Akkadian *ša rēši*: e.g. Jursa (2011); Pirngruber (2011); Lenfant (2012); and Madreiter (2012).