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Art of the Achaemenid Empire, and Art in the Achaemenid Empire

Abstract: This chapter introduces two major aspects of the study of Achaemenid Persian art, namely its definition, and the analysis of quotations of other artistic traditions. Achaemenid art is best defined as consisting of two categories of material. One is the art *of* the empire, that is, art produced in furtherance of imperial goals. The other category consists of art *in* the empire, or the artistic production of regions subject to Achaemenid rule. Though this art often took an outward form typical of its local context it was always produced in dialogue with the art of the empire. In both of these categories visual quotations of other, often earlier, artistic traditions figured prominently. These quotations were utilized by individuals as a means of constructing and negotiating visually their positions in the social order of the empire, and by parsing these quotations it becomes possible to reconstruct some of the social conditions in which they were selected. This concept is illustrated in three case studies that demonstrate the breadth of Achaemenid art and its value as a historical source for the study of the empire.

Keywords: Achaemenid Persian Empire, art, imperialism, ideology, identity

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Introduction: The Sea Change in Achaemenid Historiography

Since the 1970s there has been a significant reorientation in the study of the art of the Achaemenid Persian Empire (c. 550–330 BCE). Previously, Achaemenid art was typically viewed through the lens of aesthetic sensibilities derived ultimately from Greek art. This approach, especially when combined with ancient Greek biases towards the Persians (bolstered by modern orientalist prejudices), led to pejorative assessments and offhand dismissals of it as derivative, repetitive or, as Bernard Berenson (1954: 186) famously put it, resulting from the "originality of incompetence" (Root 1994). Beginning in the 1970s, however, some students of the empire began to consider Achaemenid art not as a failure to reproduce classical illusionism or as an eclectic pastiche of other artistic traditions, but rather on its own terms as a deliberate construction that utilized these traditions to create a specific visual effect and thereby

communicate a specific set of ideas.[1] This paradigm shift was accompanied by parallel developments in Achaemenid historiography that sought to place the Persians themselves at the center of the discourse, rather than viewing them solely from the standpoint of the Greeks (see McCaskie 2012), undermining earlier preconceptions about the weakness and ephemerality of Achaemenid rule. In the past, such preconceptions have informed notions of the scarcity of the empire's material remains, especially in the satrapies, and this scarcity in turn contributed to these notions of weakness, creating a vicious circle driven by what Margaret Root (1991) has called "the politics of meagerness." Now, as these preconceptions are increasingly challenged and found wanting, so too is this scarcity undermined, and indeed there are presently many scholars identifying and studying Achaemenid art in a wide variety of contexts and media (Khatchadourian 2012). Thus the corpus of Achaemenid art is ever increasing. Indeed, one particular collection of material, the seal impressions preserved on the clay tablets of the Persepolis Fortification Archive, includes an estimated 3000 to 3500 individual seals, making it one of the largest extant bodies of ancient art.

The effect of this sea change is that Achaemenid art is now better suited than ever to answer questions about the nature of the Achaemenid Empire, and it is the purpose of this chapter to examine how this may be done. The first section seeks to define Achaemenid art in a manner that includes all artistic material produced in the Achaemenid political ambit, regardless of its outward appearance. Even an object that seemingly betrays no trace of the empire's presence or influence is nevertheless informative of the relationship of its producer and owner to the power structures and cultural practices of the empire. The second section explicates how one of the most common methodologies in the study of Achaemenid art – examining the quotation of foreign artistic traditions from past and contemporary groups alike – can be used to reconstruct aspects of the social conditions throughout the empire. The utility of this methodology is demonstrated by three case studies that also illustrate the diversity both of the art produced within the empire and of the experiences of the individuals responsible for its creation.

Defining the Corpus

Achaemenid art is best understood as comprising two interrelated categories of material. The art *of* the Achaemenid Empire consists of the artistic output of the imperial centers, especially Persepolis and Pasargadae, and of monuments and objects that seemingly bear close affinities to this output. This was the official art of

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1 This is not to say that prejudicial scholarship on the Achaemenid Empire does not still persist; see Colburn 2011.

the empire, planned centrally by imperial officials with the purpose of communicating and disseminating a specific ideological agenda (Root 1979; 1990; 2000). Perhaps the most emblematic example of this art is the Bisitun Monument of Darius I. This monument (Fig. 1), carved into the living rock high on a mountainside in western Iran, consists of a relief that represents symbolically Darius' overthrow of the usurper Gaumata and his defeat of nine other rebel pretenders, and a trilingual inscription in Old Persian, Elamite and Babylonian Akkadian narrating those same events (see Kuhrt 2007: 141–57 for the inscription in translation); versions of the relief and the inscription (in Aramaic) have been found at Babylon and Elephantine in southern Egypt, respectively, suggesting both were disseminated throughout the empire in various forms. In the relief, Darius draws on the composition and style of victory monuments of earlier Assyrian, Iranian and Egyptian kings as a means of communicating his royal status. But he does not simply copy these monuments; rather he eschews the violent imagery of the earlier monuments in order to make an ideological statement about the nature of Achaemenid imperialism, and he manipulates these quotations of earlier traditions in order to represent his uniquely divine position (Root 1979: 194–226; 2013; Feldman 2007). He also introduces new features, such as the trilingual inscription (Finn 2011). In doing so Darius and his advisors created something new and distinctly Achaemenid, and consequently this art provides the foundation of our understanding of how Achaemenid kings conceived of themselves and their world.

But there is also another category of art that is similarly invaluable for understanding the Achaemenid Empire. This is the art *in* the empire, which includes the artistic output of all the regions subject to Achaemenid rule. This corpus is somewhat difficult to delineate in all regions and periods because the extent of Achaemenid control is not always clear. It is important to recognize too that this control was uneven, with some regions of the empire more autonomous than others (Briant 2002: 726–33). The corpus of art in the empire is skewed significantly towards the western half of the empire because this region has been subject to more archaeological investigation than the eastern half, and to more scholarly attention in general. There is also a large category of material originating outside of the empire's borders but that is in dialogue with the art of the empire nevertheless (see Miller 1997). This material is certainly instructive, but more so for foreign perceptions of Achaemenid imperialism than for the social conditions of Achaemenid rule. Thus it is not included here with art in the empire, even though the methodologies discussed below are similarly useful for its study.

Art in the empire is a valuable source of evidence for studying Achaemenid imperialism, whether it is from Babylon or Bactra. As with the art of the empire, this art also made selective reference to different artistic traditions according to the context of its production and decisions made by the artists and patrons responsible for its creation. These references provide valuable clues as to the prevailing social conditions at the time and place of an objection's production and deployment. In
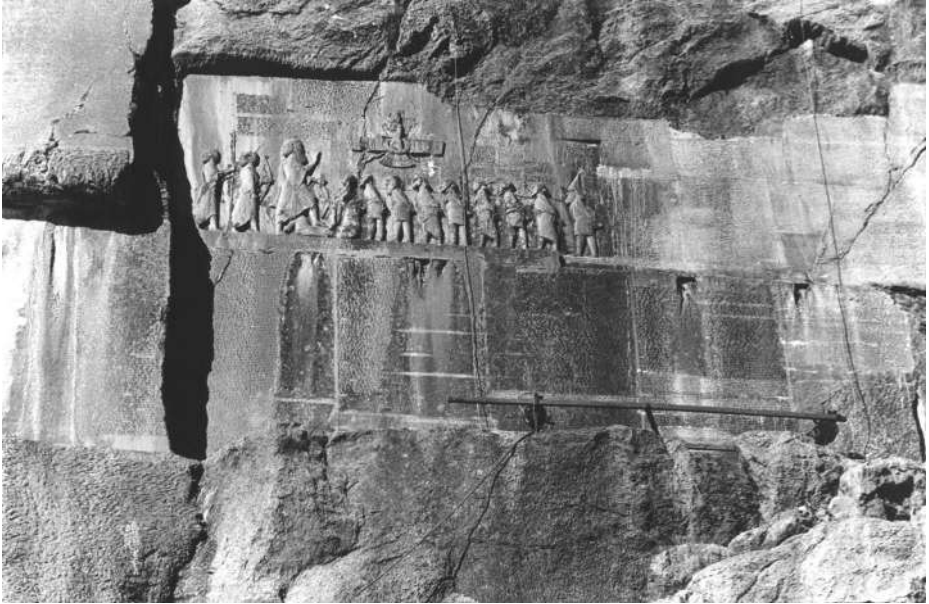
Figure 1: Bisitun Relief of Darius I. Reproduced courtesy of the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, University of Michigan.

some cases, it is possible to discern a reorientation in these conditions as a result of Achaemenid imperialism; in others, the empire is conspicuous by the absence of any apparent reference to it. In this approach agency resides with both the Great King (that is, with the imperial apparatus tasked with planning and producing art), and with the individual subjects of the empire, albeit only those of such social and economic standing as to be involved in the commissioning and production of art as it is visible now.

The reason for articulating these two categories of material is not to accentuate the differences between them, but rather to enlarge the corpus of artistic evidence used to study the Achaemenid Empire. Indeed, in many cases it is impossible or impractical to determine to which category a given object belongs. This is nicely exemplified by Achaemenid metalware, especially drinking vessels. There is a certain corpus of vessel shapes that is typically associated with the Achaemenids, including *phialai* (shallow drinking bowls) and *rhyta* (drinking horns, typically with animal protomes).[2] Certain silver *phialai* bear inscriptions indicating their production in the

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2 One of the endemic problems in the study of Achaemenid art in general and metalware in particular is the lack of reliable provenances, and this is certainly the case with the vessels discussed here. This is not the place to examine this topic in detail, and readers should consult Oscar Muscarella's contribution to this volume for a fuller treatment. Here it suffices to note that the authenticity of the vessels themselves is reasonably assured on account of their construction, metallic content, and weights

Figure 2: Line drawing of a relief from the tomb of Petosiris, Tuna el-Gebel, Egypt.
From Lefebvre 1923–24.

context of the imperial court (Gunter and Root 1998). This would place them in the category of art of the empire, since they were produced at the behest of the Great King and distributed as royal gifts in furtherance of imperial goals. But not all such *phialai*

(which combined make a round figure in Persian *sigloi*); see Curtis *et al.* 1995; Gunter and Root 1998. The argument that the inscriptions are modern additions is based on a *hapax legomena*, which, given the small size of the corpus of Old Persian inscriptions, is hardly surprising. There are similar problems with Achaemenid metal *rhyta* as well (see Muscarella 1980).

bear inscriptions, and bowls of this shape were produced in other parts of the empire, such as Anatolia (Miller 2010). Likewise, the clearest and most direct evidence for the production of *rhyta* comes not from southwestern Iran but from Egypt. Some of the reliefs decorating the interior of the tomb of Petosiris at Tuna el-Gebel in Middle Egypt (Lefebvre 1923–24; Cherpion *et al.* 2007), dating to the late fourth century BCE, depict craftsmen at work, some of whom are shown making *rhyta* of a seemingly Achaemenid sort (Fig. 2). Though the setting for these scenes is not readily apparent they do suggest the production of such vessels in an Egyptian context, implying that vessels closely associated with the Achaemenid cultural ambit could be made far from the centers of the empire.

Together these two categories of material constitute the corpus of Achaemenid art. Many objects in this corpus also clearly belong to other artistic traditions, but since they are produced in dialogue with other examples of Achaemenid art they have the potential to inform us about the empire in at least some small way.

The Analysis of Visual Quotations

The study of Achaemenid art has been focused primarily on the identification of quotations of other artistic traditions within it. This is especially true for the art of the empire (see, for example, Root 1979 and Boardman 2000, who employ this technique to very different ends), in large part due to the assumption that the Persians had no tradition of monumental art prior to the foundation of their empire by Cyrus and that they accordingly employed craftsmen from among their newly conquered subjects to create it. The identification of these artistic quotations was a means of identifying the various "sources" of Achaemenid art. The assumptions that inform this approach, however, can be challenged on a variety of grounds that undermine it considerably. The first of these, that the Persians were imperial parvenus with no artistic tradition of their own, requires reassessment in light of the clear links between the Elamite glyptic art of Susa and that of Persepolis, mediated by heirloom seals from Anshan, Cyrus' original seat of power (Root 1979: 28–42; Garrison 2002; 2011a). These links are highly suggestive of Elamite-Iranian acculturation in the centuries leading up to the foundation of the empire, resulting in the creation of a Persian identity that included artistic attributes in addition to religious and linguistic ones (see also Henkelman 2011).

The role played by foreign craftsmen, Lydians and Greeks especially, in the creation of art of the empire is often overstated (for example, Boardman 2000: 128–34). It is evident that foreign workers were employed at Persepolis and Pasargadae; Elamite administrative tablets from the Fortification and Treasury archives at Persepolis make ample reference to non-Persian workers, some even in the context of artistic production (Henkelman and Stolper 2009; Roaf 1980), and the masonry techniques used at Pasargadae have clear and deliberate affinities with Lydian and Ionic Greek architecture (Nylander 1970). The most spectacular evidence for foreign

craftsmen is the so-called Foundation Charter from Susa (DSf; Root 2010: 178–86; Kuhrt 2007: 492–95), a trilingual cuneiform text in which Darius proclaims that his palace at Susa was built by workers from throughout the empire using materials brought from their respective homelands. Among these are Ionian and Sardian stone-cutters, providing, it seems, confirmation of the importance of Greek and Lydian artisans at this imperial center (and by extension other centers as well). But the Foundation Charter was not intended to be a literal record of the palace's construction. Rather, it is an ideological statement of the extent of Darius' power and the great variety of peoples and resources at his command (Root 2010: 185–86). The wording of the inscription is vague, and in at least one instance illogical, since the Egyptians were unlikely to have supplied the silver given the scarcity of their natural sources of it. Also, the Greeks and Lydians are only two among several groups of workers listed in this text, and if the wages provided to sculptors in the Persepolis Treasury Tablets are any indication they were no more important than any other type of craftsman (Roaf 1980: 69). The conception, design and planning of Achaemenid imperial monuments clearly took place at the highest levels, while the craftsmen themselves mostly just followed directions (Root 1979: 15–23; Roaf 1990). So although Greeks and Lydians certainly participated in the production of art at Persepolis, Pasargadae and Susa, it was not in a creative capacity. Rather, they did so because their participation furthered the objectives of the Great King in creating the specific visual effect that he wanted.

The centrality of Persian initiative to the creation of art of the empire does not diminish the importance of these quotations for understanding the meaning and purpose of this art; rather, the transfer of agency to the Persians increases the value of this art as evidence for how Achaemenid ideology was envisioned and constructed. This was first made clear in a fundamental study by Margaret Root (1979), wherein she argued that the quotations and manipulations of other artistic traditions, Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Greek alike, that appear at Persepolis and elsewhere could only have resulted from a Persian royal directive. The Persians had ample opportunity for exposure to the arts of Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and even central Asia in the course of the campaigns of Cyrus (recounted by Briant 2002: 31–49), and further exposure to Egypt in the reign of Cambyses; indeed, many of the ranking Persians of Darius' day would have served on these campaigns, including Darius himself (in Egypt; Herodotus 3.139), and therefore seen firsthand, and perhaps plundered as well, the products of many different artistic traditions. Moreover, in the years following these inaugural campaigns the empire was interconnected by a system of roads and way stations that facilitated the easy movement of people, objects and ideas between the imperial centers and the furthest reaches of the empire; this created environments in which peoples of different cultures and backgrounds could and did interact (Colburn 2013). For example, in an Aramaic letter (Porten and Yardeni 1986–99: A6.12; Kuhrt 2007: 819) the satrap of Egypt, Aršama, writes to his Egyptian steward to instruct him to pay a sculptor whom he had brought to Susa to make copies of some statues, and then to

ship those copies to him. It is unclear where Aršama was at the time of writing, but regardless, this letter shows how the Persians could effect the movement of objects and artisans throughout the empire.

Persians like Darius and Aršama, then, had an extensive visual repertoire on which to draw for the planning and design of imperial monuments, and this repertoire also informed the objects that they commissioned for themselves. These quotations were the visual dimension of an ideological program that emphasized the creation of a unified political entity, the Achaemenid Empire, from a variety of different peoples with different cultural and material traditions. They were also used to represent the relationship between the king, the people, and the god Auramazda; in particular, the king was frequently placed in a position that was in other artistic traditions reserved for deities. A full interrogation of the religious significance of these depictions is beyond the scope of this essay (see instead Garrison 2011b; Root 2013), but it seems the king wished to make this aspect of his representation intelligible in a variety of cultural contexts. Indeed, these quotations ensured that someone from anywhere in the empire would find at least some aspect of the art of empire to be somewhat familiar, even if he was unable to interpret its significance more specifically.

In the study of art in the empire, quotations of Achaemenid material culture in local artistic traditions play a particularly central role. Studies of the impact of Achaemenid rule on a given site or region often rely exclusively on the presence of art of the empire as a means of gauging the breadth, depth, or density of that rule; the apparent absence of this art, and of anything readily identifiable as Achaemenid material culture, leads to conclusions that Achaemenid rule was either very tolerant of local cultures or simply anemic. This approach is quite crude in that it assumes a linear and overly simplistic relationship between imperialism and material culture and obscures the many complex ways in which they interact. Moreover, it also emphasizes the scarcity of material correlates of Achaemenid rule. Margaret Root has challenged this scarcity on several grounds; most relevant here is her argument that quotations of Achaemenid material culture are much more prevalent in the empire than this conventional methodology would suggest, in large part because the objects featuring these quotations are frequently classified according to the apparent geographical and cultural context of their production (Root 1991). Perhaps the most telling example of this is the category of material often identified as "Greco-Persian" (for example, Boardman 2000: 152–74). The objects placed in this category tend to have one or more ostensibly Greek features among all their other formal characteristics, and they are resultantly attributed to a Greek (or Lydian) production context. But the seal impressions preserved in the Persepolis Fortification Archive demonstrate the range and variety of motifs and styles that the seal carvers of Persepolis were capable of quoting, and indeed among these are impressions of seals that do include apparently Greek features of some sort. In essence the "Greco-Persian" label gives priority to Greek features over quotations of any other artistic tradition, with the result that material that is clearly in dialogue with the art of the empire, and therefore evidence

of an instance of Achaemenid rule, is viewed instead as evidence of the diffusion of Greek art (Gates 2002).

There are many more ways in which Achaemenid imperialism could potentially affect the artistic output of the satrapies than just the quotation of Achaemenid imperial iconography. This is well demonstrated in a recent study of Achaemenid Sardis by Elspeth Dusinberre (see also examples in Khatchadourian 2012). In her examination of funerary practices, she observes a significant increase in the number of tumulus burials during the period of Achaemenid rule (Dusinberre 2003: 128–57). In earlier times tumuli were the exclusive prerogative of the kings of Lydia, so the adoption of these tombs was a reference to Lydian cultural and material practices. But these tombs also contained funerary couches, which were not a feature of the earlier royal tumuli. Also, much of the jewelry recovered from these tombs (as well as from other contemporary tombs at Sardis) appears to quote the art of the empire. Dusinberre argues convincingly that, despite the Lydian associations of tumuli, their use as burial markers had more to do with the deceased's socioeconomic standing than with their ethnic identity. The prevalence of tumuli in this period was a result of Sardis' prosperity as a satrapal capital and major imperial center. This illustrates how Achaemenid rule could affect local material culture in a way that did not result in overt references to the art of the empire; it shows too the importance of examining all of the visual quotations discernible in an object before using it to address a broader question about the nature and impact of Achaemenid imperialism.

The quotations of foreign artistic traditions in both the art of and the art in the empire were the result of choices made in the process of their creation, both by the artisans responsible for their production and by the patrons or customers who ultimately consumed them. The production of an object can be conceived of as a sequence of choices, often called the *chaîne opératoire* by anthropologists (Bleed 2001). In the production of lithic tools, the field in which this concept was first deployed, the choices were typically about the selection of raw materials or where to remove the next flake. In the production of art the choices are much more varied and numerous, and include the selection of an artisan by a patron, as well as decisions about design and composition, in addition to those made in the actual course of production. Some of these choices related directly to an object's material properties or physical function; a bowl, for example, requires one of a certain range of shapes in order to be successful as a bowl, and the artisan made choices in the course of making the bowl in order to achieve a successful bowl shape. Other choices, however, are between functionally equivalent alternatives, and the artisan chose between them on much less tangible grounds, such as tradition, habit, expectations as to how a certain sort of object should look, appropriateness to a given context or individual's identity, ideological goals, etc. (Carr 1995; Schiffer and Skibo 1997). In the course of making such choices artisans and patrons drew on visual repertoires that included foreign artistic traditions, and elected to quote such traditions when they believed it advanta-

geous. The specific reasons informing these decisions were not always clear to those making them; as often as not the artisan or patron would not be able to say exactly why he chose one alternative over another, and indeed he may not always be aware he was making a choice at all. But all of these decisions, conscious or otherwise, were made in order to achieve what was perceived as a desirable result.

It is this expectation of success that makes these quotations especially valuable for reconstructing the social conditions in which an object was created. This is because the decisions made in the process of design and production to make these visual references did not take place in isolation. Rather, they were made with the expectation of a certain outcome that, if reasonable, was informed by the broader circumstances and conditions current at the time and place of production. This concept is best articulated by Michael Baxandall in his classic book *Patterns of Intention*, and is nicely illustrated by his study of the Forth Rail Bridge in Scotland (Baxandall 1985: 12–40). The form of the bridge, he argues, was informed by a wide variety of factors. Some of these pertained directly to the bridge's physical function and its need to support train traffic and withstand winds. Others pertained more specifically to the bridge's form. Indeed, the bridge's designer, Sir Benjamin Baker, defending his design against the criticism of the pre-Raphaelite poet William Morris, who called it "the supremest specimen of ugliness," explained that "the object had been so to arrange the leading lines of the structure as to convey an idea of strength and stability" (quoted in Baxandall 1985: 24–25). In order to achieve this goal Baker drew in part on the design of Asian cantilever bridges (Baxandall 1985: 19–20). The decisions made by Baker in his design process were based on his own notions of what a bridge should be, his training as an engineer, and the intellectual and social climate of Victorian Britain. As Baxandall so elegantly demonstrates, the visual results of these decisions point to the conditions in which they were made.

Similarly, the decisions made by the maker and owner of Gordion Seal 73 (Dusinberre 2005: no. 38), a conoid chalcedony stamp seal excavated at Gordion, resulted in a distinctly Neo-Babylonian appearance, in terms of both the style of carving and the motif of the worshipper before an altar (Fig. 3). Though we cannot say specifically what the seal's owner hoped to achieve through his or her selection of a seal that quotes Neo-Babylonian glyptic, this selection was presumably made in a context in which the imagery of Neo-Babylonian glyptic had some currency. Indeed, there are similar such quotations on sealings from Uruk, Nippur, Persepolis, and Daskyleion (see references in Dusinberre 2005: 59), as well as on a stamp seal excavated at Taxila (Marshall 1951: 677 no. 1); in light of these conditions it stands to reason that the owner of Seal 73 constructed his identity in a manner that transcended the local trends at Gordion. The great variety of seals from Achaemenid Gordion, a stark contrast to earlier periods, shows that he was not alone in doing so, and despite its relative political unimportance in this period, Gordion was nevertheless a heterogeneous place, with social links to other parts of the empire (Dusinberre 2005: 24–27).
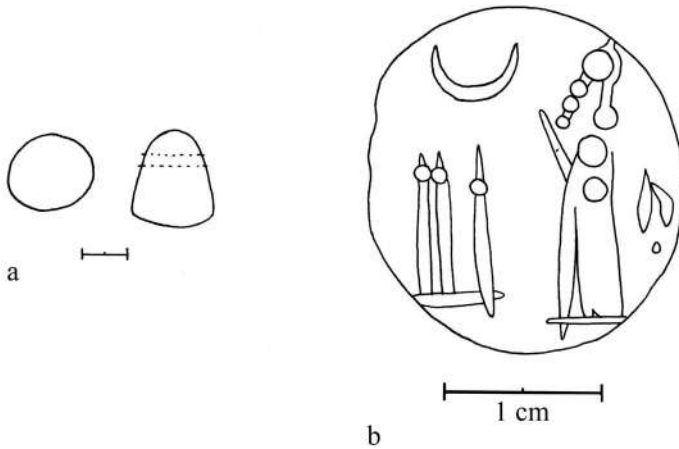
Figure 3a and 3b: (a) Gordion seal 73. Reproduced courtesy of the Gordion
Archaeological Project, University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology
and Anthropology. **(b)** Line drawing of impression of Gordion seal 73. Reproduced courtesy
of Elspeth Dusinberre.

The use of other artistic traditions as a means of locating oneself in the broader social order is not a phenomenon unique to Achaemenid art. It has a long history in the Near East in particular (Garrison 2012), but it also is a social strategy employed by a wide variety of societies and cultures. In an important and wide-ranging study, Mary Helms (1993) has shown that in many early and traditional societies, individuals and political entities derive their charismatic authority, both political and social, from connections, both real and imagined, to "superordinate centers" of social order. These centers were distinguished by their remoteness, which was sometimes geographical and sometimes chronological or cosmological (and no distinction was made between these types of remoteness). Achaemenid art fits neatly into this schema: the visual quotations of different artistic traditions demonstrated ostensible connections to superordinate centers, some of which, like Persepolis, were real places, and others, like Assyria, were constructs based on collective notions of past importance. The identification of these superordinate centers is particularly valuable for reconstructing how different people in the empire viewed the world in which they lived.

Case Studies

The following case studies are intended to illustrate the principles discussed above in a manner that demonstrates the utility of parsing visual quotations in order to understand the social context of a given object's creation. They are not meant to be exhaustive discussions by any means; rather, they are examples that serve to introduce the methodology articulated in the previous section, as well as the diversity and variety of Achaemenid art.

The Statue of Darius from Susa

The first case study considers the freestanding statue of Darius I found at Susa on Christmas Eve, 1972, by the Délégation archéologique française en Iran and now housed in the National Museum of Iran (Fig. 4). Both the statue's trilingual cuneiform inscription (DSab) and the Egyptian greywacke from which it was carved (Yoyotte 2010: 268–69) attest to its creation in Egypt. Yet it is undoubtedly an example of art of the empire because it was made at Darius' command "so that whoever sees it in time to come will know that the Persian man holds Egypt" (Kuhrt 2007: 478), and thus served as a vehicle for communicating Achaemenid ideology. That it was made by Egyptian sculptors for a seemingly Egyptian audience does not change this characterization, since as discussed above foreign craftsmen were frequently employed at Persepolis in the creation of official imperial art. Although the date and circumstances of its removal to Susa from Egypt remain uncertain its integration into a monumental gateway at the palace at Susa (and its possible reproduction there;

Figure 4: Statue of Darius from Susa. Reproduced courtesy of Jean Perrot.

Razmjou 2002: 87–89) shows that in antiquity it was considered representative of the imperial decorative program.

The statue is preserved from the neck down; originally it would have stood approximately 3 m high, making it over life-size. It depicts Darius in a striding pose with his left foot further forward than his right. He holds his left arm horizontally across his chest and his right straight down at his side. He wears a full-length robe with flaring sleeves gathered high on his waist with a belt; a dagger in a scabbard is tucked into the belt at the front. In his left hand he holds what seems to be the stem of

a flower, the top of which is not preserved, and his right hand is filled with a cylinder, in keeping with Egyptian sculptural practice. At the back of the statue is a dorsal pillar that runs its entire preserved height. The cuboid base of the statue features incised decoration; at the front and back is a well-known Egyptian image, the "uniting of the two lands," and on either side is a row of kneeling figures representing the peoples of the empire (Yoyotte 2010: 288–96; Roaf 1974). The statue is inscribed with a trilingual cuneiform inscription (DSab) on the lower folds of Darius' garment; there are hieroglyphic inscriptions on the belt and lower folds of the garment, as well as on the top and sides of the base. No traces of the statue's head survive; presumably it was largely consistent with the representations of the Great King at Persepolis and Naqš-e Rustam (Luschey 1983), though it is also possible that it had a more Egyptian aspect (Traunecker 1995).

As the preceding description has indicated, the statue of Darius quotes Egyptian artistic tradition in a number of places. Most distinctive is the representation of the "unification of the two lands" on the base of the statue (Yoyotte 2010: 282–84). This image shows two fecundity figures representing Upper and Lower Egypt binding together a lotus and a papyrus plant (the two plants also representing Upper and Lower Egypt), with the hieroglyph for "unite" in between them. This image goes back well into the Old Kingdom, and it is typically placed beneath the king, either below a cartouche containing his name or on a throne or statue base (Schäfer 1943). Thus its inclusion on the statue of Darius is a straightforward appropriation of Egyptian iconography and of the royal ideology underlying it. Similarly, the figures representing the subject peoples of the empire have distinctive Egyptian antecedents, namely the depiction of foreign prisoners of war (Roaf 1974: 75–76; Root 1979: 138–47; Calmeyer 1991). Prisoners are identifiable as such because of their non-Egyptian attributes, especially their beards and clothing, and because their ethnonyms are written in studded cartouches representing city walls. Since the predynastic period they were depicted kneeling and bound, and placed in a location where they were either beneath the king, or in some cases actually trod upon by him (Ritner 1993: 113–36). The placement of the subject peoples on the base of the statue, and therefore below the king, where they are effectively trampled by him, is consistent with Egyptian iconography, as is their kneeling pose and the cartouches that accompany them. The connection with Egyptian kingship is also reinforced by the hieroglyphic inscriptions (Kuhrt 2007: 478–79), which praise Darius as pharaoh and frequently invoke the Egyptian god Atum (Yoyotte 2010: 278–81). Other aspects of the statue are also clearly borrowed from the Egyptian visual repertoire. Darius' right hand is filled by a stone cylinder. This is a common feature of Egyptian statuary, and it has been interpreted variously as a shortened staff, a roll of linen, or simply a convention for representing an empty hand (see discussion in Fischer 1975). Likewise, the striding pose of the statue, with the left foot in front of the right, and with the stone in between them left in place, is also a regular feature of Egyptian statuary in particular.

The statue of Darius, then, draws heavily on Egyptian representations of kingship in order to present Darius as a royal figure. At the same time it also utilizes visual references to Mesopotamian and Iranian art to nuance this presentation and adapt it to fit Achaemenid imperial ideology. For example, Darius is depicted wearing "court garb" (Stronach 2011) and carrying an Elamite dagger (Henkelman 2003: 190–91); both are accoutrements of the Persians on the Persepolis reliefs and part of Darius' representation of himself as a "Persian man," as alluded to in the statue's cuneiform inscription and referenced in the art of the empire in various media. The figures representing the subject peoples on the base of the statue have also been adapted to better fit Achaemenid imperial ideology. The figures hold their arms up in front of them, with their open palms facing upward. This is in sharp contrast to the depiction of prisoners, whose arms are always bound behind their backs. Rather, in Egyptian art this pose is used to represent carrying or support (Roaf 1974: 77), and the spatial relationship between the subject peoples and the figure of Darius imply that they are supporting the king. This imagery has close analogies at Persepolis and in the façades of the royal tombs at Naqš-e Rustam. There the king is depicted on a platform supported by two or three rows of subject peoples in an "atlantid" pose with their arms raised and their palms facing upward (Schmidt 1953: 116–20, 134–37; 1970: 77–118). The atlantid pose has a long history in Mesopotamian art, where it usually denotes a divine context. Its use at Persepolis and Naqš-e Rustam to support the king is a means of representing the relationship between the king and the people of the empire, that is, it reinforces the king's amalgamation of political and religious authority with the support of his subjects (Root 1979: 131–61; Garrison 2011b: 43–47). This notion is furthered by the inclusion of Persians among the subjects of the empire, at Persepolis and Naqš-e Rustam, as well as on the statue of Darius (Roaf 1974: 94–98; Yoyotte 2010: 289), which, visually at least, puts the Persians on a par with everyone else rather than emphasizing their (military) superiority. Finally, the trilingual cuneiform inscription on the statue (written in Old Persian, Elamite, and Akkadian) is a feature of Darius' ideological program, and served as a linguistic epitome of the empire's ecumenical nature (Finn 2011).

The statue of Darius was intelligible in two different contexts. In an Egyptian context it was a statement of Darius' role and legitimacy as pharaoh. In the context of the imperial court it communicated Darius' ideological program in which he cast himself as a Persian heroic figure, who straddled the earthly and cosmic realms with the support and participation of all the peoples of his empire. Moreover, at the court, the Egyptian visual references made in the statue contributed to the notion of the universality of the empire, and in Egypt the adaptation of the Mesopotamian atlantid motif to the Egyptian prisoner motif contributed to the notion that Achaemenid rule was different from other forms of imperialism, emphasizing cooperation over domination. The selection of the specific assortment of visual elements that comprise the statue also provide a window into how Darius and the others involved in its design and execution conceived of their larger world. The combination of Mesopotamian,

Persian, and Egyptian features implies that the cultures that informed these different artistic traditions were the superordinate centers from which Darius drew his charismatic authority.

The Seals of Parnakka

The seals of Parnakka (PFS 9* and 16*), chief administrator at Persepolis between 506 and 497 BCE (Briant 2002: 425, 466–71), are preserved through impressions on many tablets of the Persepolis Fortification Archive. Though these seals were commissioned and used by a high ranking official of the empire with close familial ties to the Great King (he was either Darius' uncle or his cousin) and very likely produced in the environs of Persepolis, their style and iconography reflect the personal preferences of Parnakka rather than any imperial artistic program. Thus these seals are perhaps best considered an example of art in the empire, one that speaks to conditions at Persepolis itself, since although they draw on similar imagery and visual traditions as art of the empire, their distinctiveness suggests they are the result of his choices as an individual.

PFS 9* (Garrison and Root 2001: cat. no. 288) is the earlier of the two seals, and was in use between 505 and 500 BCE. It features a hero engaged in combat with an ostrich, with a rampant goat in the terminal field (Fig. 5a). The hero wears an "Assyrian garment" and grasps the ostrich by the neck. The inscription, in Aramaic, reads "Parnakka." The seal is carved in the Fortification Style, a style of carving endemic to Persepolis and quite prevalent among the seal impressions preserved in the Fortification Archive (Garrison and Root 2001: 18). Parnakka replaced PFS 9* with PFS 16* sometime between May 21 and June 6 of 500, and the change is noted in at least two tablets from the Fortification Archive (PF 2067 and 2068; Hallock 1969: 639). PFS 16* (Garrison and Root 2001: cat. no. 22) also features a heroic encounter, this time in a "master of animals" pose with the hero holding two rampant lions to either side of him by the throat (Fig. 5b). Once again the hero wears an Assyrian garment, and the Aramaic inscription reads "Seal (of) Parnakka, son of Aršam." This seal is carved in the Persepolitan Modeled Style, a highly plastic style with clear links to earlier traditions of Assyrian and Babylonian seal carving (Garrison and Root 2001: 16–17).

These brief descriptions do not do justice to the seals of Parnakka, but the aspects of these seals listed above do provide a basis for reconstructing the conditions and intentions informing their creation. PFS 9* includes a number of features that refer to earlier Assyrian and Babylonian artistic traditions. Most striking in this regard is the motif of the heroic encounter with an ostrich, a motif that occurs in Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian glyptic (Collon 1998; Herbordt 1992: pl. 5 nos. 3, 5), as well as in other media. The garment worn by the hero, a wrapped robe over a short undergarment, is an Assyrian iconographic trait that appears in both glyptic and relief sculpture (Garrison and Root 2001: 505). PFS 16* also features a hero wearing an Assyrian garment,
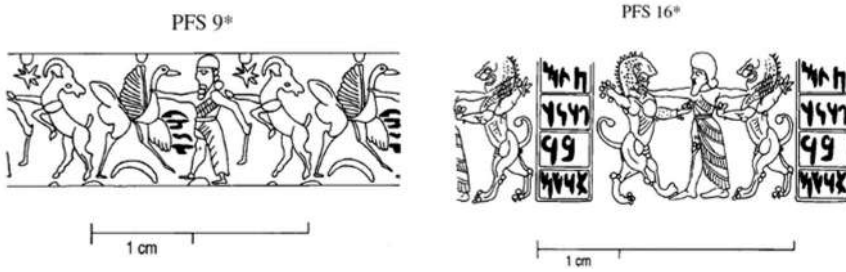
Figure 5a and 5b: Line drawings of impression of PFS 9* and 16*. Reproduced courtesy of the Persepolis Seal Project.

and the composition of the image on this seal, a heroic encounter in which the hero controls two creatures to either side of him by grasping their necks, has close ties once again to Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian glyptic (Garrison 2010). Finally, the carving of PFS 16* is characterized by plastic modeling and intricate detail, especially in the musculature of the lions, and has much in common specifically with the monumental tradition of Assyrian art (Garrison 1991: 8–9).

Whatever Parnakka's specific reasons were for selecting and commissioning these two seals, there are two things about his choice that are reasonably clear. The first is that he believed these seals were appropriate to his identity, as an ethnic Persian, as a member of the royal family, as the chief administrator at Persepolis, etc. The second is that he distinguished himself from the rest of the population of seal users at Persepolis through his selection of these decidedly Assyrianizing seals. Although there are numerous Assyrianizing features among the corpus of Persepolis seal impressions, Parnakka's seals still stand out among them. Apart from the Aramaic inscription PFS 9* could be taken for an actual Neo-Assyrian seal, and PFS 16* vividly evokes Assyrian palace reliefs in a manner unparalleled in Persepolitan glyptic. The distinctiveness of these seals was further enhanced by Parnakka's application of them. Nearly half of the preserved applications of PFS 16* show the entire scene, impressive given the large size of the seal (approximately 2.1 cm tall and 1 cm in diameter); PFS 9* was also usually rolled out completely (Garrison and Root 2001: 94, 406). The Aramaic inscriptions on these seals would also have distinguished Parnakka. Aramaic was the administrative language used most widely throughout the empire, whereas Old Persian and Elamite were presumably the main spoken and written languages, respectively, at Persepolis. So although there was also a significant population of people conversant in Aramaic there as well (as indicated by the Aramaic tablets in the Fortification Archive), these inscriptions linked Parnakka to the wider world of the empire as opposed to the local sphere of Persepolis.
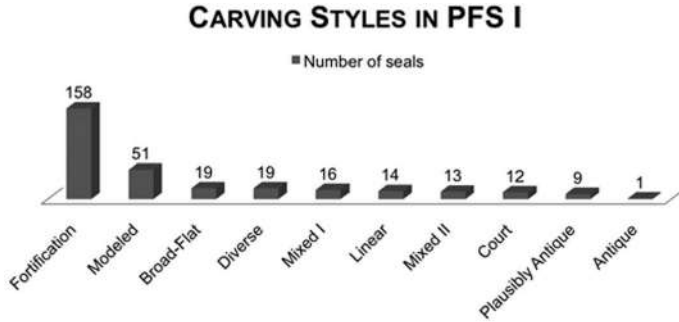
But there are other aspects of Parnakka's identity that these seals communicate as well, albeit in a more subtle manner than his choice of imagery. The carving styles of

PFS 9* and 16* are Fortification Style and Persepolitan Modeled Style, respectively. These styles are modern categories developed as heuristic tools and were not necessarily recognized in antiquity; nevertheless, they are sufficiently distinctive from each other that their differences must result from deliberate choices rather than random variation. In the case of Parnakka, he would certainly have been aware of the differences in carving between his old seal and his new one, and though carving style was not the only factor under consideration when he commissioned these two seals it must have played a role in his decisions. With that in mind it is interesting that he chose seals carved in these particular styles. The Fortification Style, to which PFS 9* belongs, was the local carving style at Persepolis and was seemingly a descendent of Neo-Elamite glyptic traditions (Garrison and Root 2001: 18; Garrison 1991: 11–12; 2002). Fifty-one percent of the seals published in the first volume of *Seals on the Persepolis Fortification Tablets* belong this style, and this preponderance is representative of the corpus as a whole (Fig. 6; Garrison and Root 2001: 495).[3] The heavily modeled carving of PFS 16* is much more distinctive than its inclusion in the Persepolitan Modeled Style, the second most frequently occurring style of carving at Persepolis, might indicate. But it also suggests that this seal was the work of a master carver who was the most accomplished exponent of a prevalent school of carving. The implication of these choices is that there was also some aspect of Parnakka's identity that associated him with the larger seal-using population at Persepolis, and he felt it appropriate to make this association manifest in some way. His selection of the heroic encounter motif for both seals also demonstrates similar connections. The heroic encounter is a frequent motif in early Achaemenid glyptic, yet there is enormous variety in its many iterations (Garrison and Root 2001; Garrison 2010: 165–68). Its popularity in this period may well have something to do with Darius' utilization of the motif on the royal name seals that bear trilingual inscriptions of his name. Garrison (forthcoming) argues that Darius presented these name seals as gifts to ranking Persepolis administrators without familial or political connections to him as a means of integrating them into the new regime. His use of the heroic encounter motif to accomplish this suggests that it had some significance as a symbol of unity or Persian group identity, perhaps in the same vein as Darius' representation of himself as an idealized "Persian man," and it resonated with many seal-users at Persepolis, including Parnakka himself.

Parnakka's seals permit us to reconstruct some of the social conditions at Persepolis in the years around 500 BCE. His seals feature distinctly Assyrianizing elements, Aramaic inscriptions, and elaborate carving that would have stood out to anyone who saw them. At the same time their carving style and motifs would have emphasized a degree of commonality and shared identity with most other seal users at Persepolis.

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3 This is the first volume of the catalogue of seals preserved on the 2087 Elamite tablets published in Hallock 1969; two further volumes of these seals are forthcoming. The seals preserved on the Aramaic and uninscribed tablets are also under study; see the preliminary discussions in Dusinberre 2008 and Garrison 2008.

CARVING STYLES IN PFS I

■ Number of seals

158
51
19 19 16 14 13 12 9 1

Fortification | Modeled | Broad-Flat | Diverse | Mixed I | Linear | Mixed II | Court | Plausibly Antique | Antique

Figure 6: Carving styles in Volume One of *Seals on the Persepolis Fortification Tablets*.

The selection of these features by Parnakka was the result of his belief that they were appropriate to his personality and high station, and the inclusion of features that created visual links with the seals of his subordinates provides a window onto the nature of society at Persepolis. Parnakka's seals also furnish a means of seeing how he viewed himself, and this is especially interesting in comparison with other imperial elites, such as Gobryas (PFS 857s; Gates 2002: 106) and Ašbazana (PFS 1567* and PTS 14*; Garrison 1998), whose seals indicate the different ways in which they conceived of themselves and their places in society and the empire. In this respect the seals of the Persepolis Fortification Archive are an invaluable source for understanding the social history of Persepolis in the time of Darius I.

Ptahhotep's Naophorous Statue

The final case study concerns Ptahhotep, a high-ranking official in Egypt during the fifth century BCE. He is known from an inscribed stela from the Serapeum at Saqqara, and from three unprovenanced items: a shabti figurine and the lid of his sarcophagus (both probably from Campbell's Tomb at Giza), and a statue now in the Brooklyn Museum (Fig. 7). The inscriptions on these objects preserve Ptahhotep's titles, including overseer of the treasury and *ḳppš*, a Persian title that was reserved for the most eminent officials and administrators (Posener 1986); they also indicate that he gained this prominence in the reign of Darius I (Vittmann 2011: 390–92). Ptahhotep, then, was one of the individuals who served as a nexus between the apparatus of Achaemenid imperialism and local Egyptian networks of power. His statue provides a good opportunity for studying Ptahhotep's own conception of his personal identity, since it is quite literally a deliberate construction of that identity, a distillation of the essential features of his person intended to represent him for all eternity. As such, it can also provide valuable evidence for the social conditions at the satrapal court in Memphis in the first half of the fifth century.

Figure 7: Statue of Ptahhotep. Reproduced courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum.

The under life-size schist statue (Brooklyn Museum 37.353; Cooney 1953; Bothmer 1960: no. 64; Fazzini *et al.* 1989: no. 75; see Jansen-Winkeln 1998: 163–68 for the inscription) depicts Ptahhotep holding a shrine. This statue type goes back to the beginning of the New Kingdom (c. 1550 BCE) and is reasonably common in the Late Period (664–332 BC). For those Egyptians wealthy enough to commission such a monument and influential enough to place it in a temple, this was a means of overcoming human mortality by residing in a god's house for all eternity in the guise of Shu, the god who looked after Atum's shrine and was thus the archetypal temple

priest (Klotz 2012). According to its inscription, Ptahhotep's statue was dedicated in the temple of Ptah in Memphis, a location appropriate to his career in government service at the provincial capital of Achaemenid Egypt and not too far removed from the site of his burial at Giza. The statue's significance and potency are rooted in the context of Egyptian cosmology and religion, and Ptahhotep's dedication of it demonstrates unequivocally his participation in Egyptian cultural and religious life.

But there are some features of this statue that attest to other aspects of Ptahhotep's identity, namely, the robe he wears (the so-called "Persian garment") and the torque around his neck. The Persian garment consists of a wraparound robe extending from the armpits to the ankles and secured with a distinctive fold at the front, and it often occurs (as in the case of Ptahhotep) with a v-neck sleeved jacket worn underneath it (Bothmer 1960: 75–76). There are two occurrences of it that clearly date to the preceding Saite dynasty (Bresciani 1967; Leahy 1984), which indicates that the garment, whatever its origin, was in use in Egypt prior to the advent of Achaemenid rule, but its (somewhat superficial) resemblance to Achaemenid court garb (Stronach 2011) is presumably what accounted for its popularity in personal monuments during the fifth century BCE.[4] The torque, with its caprid protomes, is more explicitly Achaemenid in form. The ibex has a long history of representation in ancient Iranian art (Root 2002: 184–92), and it was a frequent motif on Achaemenid torques and bracelets, as attested on the Apadana reliefs at Persepolis and in extant metal examples (see Rehm 1992: 31–38, 42–43, 65–69, 79–80, 86) (Fig. 8). The torque depicted on Ptahhotep's statue is clearly intended to be Achaemenid, and it may in fact be a reference to a royal gift from the Great King himself. The naophorous statue of Udjahorresnet, an older contemporary of Ptahhotep who served both Cambyses and Darius in various capacities, features a lion-headed bracelet of distinctly Achaemenid type, and the biographical inscription states that he received "ornaments of gold" from the king (Moyer 2006: 244–47). Whether or not Ptahhotep had in fact received the torque he is shown wearing as a similar mark of esteem from Darius, the adornment suggests this and creates a link with the Achaemenid rulers of Egypt.

Ptahhotep's statue neatly encapsulates the different components of the person he considered himself to be. His dedication of a naophorous statue, with an inscription asking for eternal sustenance from the living in the form of prayers and listing all his good and pious acts, is intelligible only in an Egyptian religious and cultural context. It shows not only a potentially very real concern for the afterlife but also Ptahhotep's cultivation of a relationship with a very important Egyptian institution, the temple of Ptah. At the same time he deliberately chose a statue in which he was represented with the clothing and ornaments of the elites who governed the Achaemenid Empire

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4 A discussion of the Persian garment will be presented in greater detail in my forthcoming University of Michigan doctoral dissertation, provisionally entitled "The Archaeology of Achaemenid Rule in Egypt."

Figure 8: Gold bracelet from the Oxus Treasure. Reproduced courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

and with whom he thus identified himself. The statue was intended to address concerns that went far beyond the political conditions in Egypt during Ptahhotep's lifetime, and it is telling that he regarded these worldly accoutrements as an integral part of his personal identity. This statue also demonstrates very nicely how art in the empire, even within a conservative local tradition, was in dialogue with the art of the empire.

Conclusion: Achaemenid Art as Achaemenid History

Achaemenid art provides a wealth of evidence for writing the social history of the Achaemenid Empire. Art of the empire was designed in order to communicate ideological messages, and as such it attests to both the Great King's ideological goals and his expectations regarding what images and forms would evoke the desired response. Art in the empire was created and selected by the people of the empire based on their own constructed identities and individual worldviews, and as such it attests to the different ways these people interacted with each other and with the empire. In both

cases quotations of various artistic traditions are key to understanding the historical conditions informing the creation of a given object.

But the possibilities for using Achaemenid art to write history do not end there. Art also offers an avenue for engaging with broader historical discourses, such as addressing postcolonial concerns in the study of ancient imperialism. This is a somewhat delicate proposition in respect to Achaemenid historiography, since such concerns need to be balanced carefully against the orientalist prejudices that have informed scholarship on the empire for so long (Colburn 2011: 98–102). As the preceding case studies have shown, Darius, Parnakka, and Ptahhotep all experienced Achaemenid imperialism in different ways, and as a result, all of them made different decisions in respect to the art that each employed. This is not at all surprising, as each occupied a different social and political position within the empire. But the variety of their experiences shows the potential value of the study of Achaemenid art, as laid out in this essay, to examine the discrepant experiences had by the inhabitants of the Achaemenid Empire. Art provides access to the decisions made by individuals in imperial situations, permitting us to avoid generalized categories of Persians and subject peoples or oppressors and oppressed. In doing so it provides a means not only of better understanding the nature of Achaemenid imperialism, but also of placing this imperialism in dialogue with the study of other empires. And this is just one example of the many ways in which Achaemenid art contributes to our understanding of the ancient world.

Acknowledgements

Additional Abbreviations

PFS = Seals preserved in the Persepolis Fortification Archive
PTS = Seals preserved in the Persepolis Treasury Archive

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