

## PLUTARCH AND THE PERSIANS

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**Abstract:** This paper deals with the image of Persia and the Persians in the works of Plutarch of Chaeronea (c. 45–c. 120 AD), in both his *Moralia* and *Lives*. It explores this theme under several headings: Plutarch as: (a) a Greek Imperial author, (b) an author dealing with historical subjects, (c) a biographer, (d) a moralist, and (e) a philosopher and an essayist concerned with religious themes.

**Keywords:** Plutarch, Persia/Persians, Second Sophistic, Aristides, Themistocles, Agesilaus, Ly-sander, Artaxerxes, Alexander the Great, Zoroastrianism, Magoi

Our image of the ancient western view of Persia is largely shaped by Greek Imperial texts (from roughly 50 BC to 250 AD), and in particular by the way earlier works (like Herodotus) were received in this age, which eclipsed the previous periods in terms of the volume of works that survived.<sup>1</sup> Among the authors and men of letters of this era, Plutarch of Chaeronea (c. 45–c. 120 AD) clearly stands out. Oftentimes, Plutarch provides us with information on Persia that we do not obtain elsewhere and which is derived from good but lost sources. Moreover, Plutarch is almost the only author who presents a relatively full account of the Persian Wars, from Themistocles and Aristides to Alexander, albeit in a biographical form and in a non-linear story, since the history is divided into separate works.

A large proportion of the writings of this prolific writer (cf. Suda, π 1793 Adler) survives, in particular his *Lives*. This fact, together with the awareness that Plutarch's interest in Persia is wide-ranging and encompasses many aspects of the eastern Empire (history, religion, ethics, biography), are among the major reasons why Plutarch merits an independent examination. Yet this has not previously been done extensively. The only

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<sup>1</sup> See Almagor 2017a, 327. It is surely no accident that we only have full accounts of Alexander's campaign in Persia from this period (Diodorus Siculus, book 17; Plutarch's *Alexander*; Justin, 11–12; Q. Curtius Rufus, *Historiae Alexandri Magni*; Arrian, *Anabasis Alexandrou*), while the earlier ones did not survive. Cf. Bowden 2013, 63.

study that explicitly addresses this issue is David C. Hood's unpublished dissertation from fifty years ago.<sup>2</sup> It is indeed an extensive topic, and this paper can only outline several points in such a scholarly study.

Plutarch's interest in Persia will be explored here under several headings, referring to his being a Greek Imperial writer, an author dealing with historical subjects, a biographer, a moralist, and finally, a philosopher and an essayist concerned with religious themes. The questions asked in this paper do not concern the historical truth of the fifth and fourth centuries BC, but rather Plutarch's image of Persia and the reality of his own age.

## 1. *A problematic nostalgia*

The Persian Empire was long since gone by the first and second centuries AD, the period in which Plutarch lived, wrote and worked. Yet it is undeniable that there was a great interest in Persia in his age. As is well known, the predominant contemporary Greek attitude was nostalgic.<sup>3</sup> One of the new media for negotiating Greek identity and the Greek past was through the practice of oratory, especially "epideictic," that is, oratory used in a public display and intended to amuse and please, rather than meant to be practical and to persuade in legal or political situations.<sup>4</sup> Renowned figures from Greek history or mythology were either addressed in this oratory or were the *personae* delivering these improvised speeches.<sup>5</sup> Events from the archaic or Classical periods were very popular as topics in oratorical presentations, as well as in the rhetorical schools.<sup>6</sup> Even the name later given by Philostratus (*VS* 481, 507) to the phenomenon, in which these orators or "sophists" delivered popular public speeches, was the "Second Sophistic," following the "First" Sophistic of the Classical period.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, this fascination with the past was evidently introduced to compensate for Greece's current political weakness under the political dominance of Rome. Men of letters longed for Greece's heyday, in which the barbarian Persian threat was repelled both politically and culturally.<sup>8</sup> This is the reason why topics from the period up to Alexander were mostly used, and the ensuing era was largely ignored.<sup>9</sup> Excessively popular in the oratorical presentations as well as in the rhetorical schools were themes and figures from the Persian Wars or even from Persia.<sup>10</sup> One of the numerous favourite stock *exempla*, which appeared in many contexts,<sup>11</sup> was the famous depiction

<sup>2</sup> Hood 1967.

<sup>3</sup> The problematic nature of Greek Imperial nostalgia was also present in Almagor 2017a, 327, 340. See Bowie 1970, 7, 14, 27; Anderson 1993, 56, 179; Swain 1996, 95–96; Whitmarsh 2011, 50–58.

<sup>4</sup> See Anderson 1989, 146–152; 1993, 16, 64–67; Swain 1996, 87–89.

<sup>5</sup> See Reardon 1971, 99–119; Russell 1983, 1–20, 106–128; Anderson 1993, 55–68; Swain 1996, 90–96.

<sup>6</sup> See Anderson 1993, 101–117; Goldhill 2001, 8; Preston 2001, 116; Whitmarsh 2005, 8, 66–73.

<sup>7</sup> See Anderson 1993, 13–18; Whitmarsh 2005, 4–5.

<sup>8</sup> On the importance of barbarians in the Second Sophistic period see, e.g., Anderson 1993, 101–133; Swain 1996, 68, 78, 87–89; Saïd 2001, 286–295; Schmidt 2011.

<sup>9</sup> See Bowie 1970, 14–15. For exceptions see: Aul. Gell. *NA* 17.21.3; Plut. *Philop.* 2.6. See Geiger 1995.

<sup>10</sup> See Almagor 2017a, 332–337. See Kohl 1915: Darius and Xerxes (nos. 28–47).

<sup>11</sup> Dio Chrys. *Or.* 3.29–31; Luc. *Rhet. Pr.* 18. Cf. Jos. *BJ* 2.358–359 and Juvenal, 10.174–188.

of Xerxes' attempt to navigate the land and tread the sea, by steering through the Athos Mountain and crossing the Hellespont on foot.<sup>12</sup> This nostalgic attitude was combined with a return to the Classical Panhellenic sentiment.<sup>13</sup> The orator Aeschines was seen as the first participant of this cultural phenomenon (Philostratus, *VS* 481, 507). It may be said that this choice of Aeschines, the staunch rival of Demosthenes, who was at times viewed as pro-Persian,<sup>14</sup> supposedly marked the "Second Sophistic," at least in the eyes of the next generations, as an endeavour that follows, as it were, the Greek effort against the eastern Empire – albeit, in the field of culture and rhetoric, not of military and political action.<sup>15</sup>

Broadly speaking, Plutarch was part of this cultural trend.<sup>16</sup> Eleven of his extant Greek *Lives* have the theme of the confrontation with Persia as an integral part of their plots, or were contemporary with the Persian Empire. These are the *Lives* of Themistocles, Aristides, Cimon, Pericles, Nicias, Alcibiades, Lysander, Pelopidas, Agesilaus, Alexander and Demosthenes. Taking account of the *Epaminondas* of the only lost pair would mean the majority of Greek *Lives* dealing with figures from the Persian Wars period.<sup>17</sup> Some of these themes overlap with the topics of the rhetorical schools.<sup>18</sup> Plutarch seemingly employs the Classical simple, mutually exclusive division of Greeks

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Aesch. *Pers.* 130–132; Hdt. 7.22, 37, 122 and 7.21, 25, 36.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Whitmarsh 2001, 23. Its climax was the establishment of the *Panhellenion* by Hadrian (131–132 AD): Dio Cass. 69.12.2. See Spawforth – Walker 1985, 1986; Romeo 2002.

<sup>14</sup> On Demosthenes as pro-Persian, see Aesch. 3.156, 173, 209, 239, 250, 259 (cf. 164); Philostr. *VS* 507.

<sup>15</sup> The modern approach to Philostratus' Second Sophistic misses the point when it omits consideration of this first participant (cf. Whitmarsh 2005, 5, who admittedly confines his book to the period of the early Roman Empire: "poor Aeschines does not feature here"). There is a certain ambiguity concerning Demosthenes in this period. Cf. Whitmarsh (2005: 68) on its impact on the representation of Alexander the Great. See below for popular rhetorical topics related to Demosthenes.

<sup>16</sup> See, however, Bowersock 1969, 110–112, at 112: "Dio and Plutarch flourished just on the eve of the most colourful period of the Second Sophistic; and although they were not a part of it, their lives adumbrated many of its most pronounced characteristics." Cf. Stanton 1973, 353, 364. See Anderson 1993, 9: "his whole thought-world has something Hellenistic, as well as antirhetorical about it. A few supposedly early works are 'sophistic' in some sense; but Plutarch's whole value-system has little time for sophists." Cf. Whitmarsh (2005, 78–79) on the *Lives* ("situate themselves far from the nascent world of the Second Sophistic"). Plutarch wrote against the Sophists of old (~ Isid. *Pel. Ep.* 2.42), as apparent from Philostratus' letter (*Ep.* 73) addressed to Julia Domna, in which she is asked to "persuade" (the deceased) Plutarch not to be angry at the sophists (especially Gorgias). See Anderson 1977; Penella 1979; Hemelrijk 1999, 305. Yet at the end, Philostratus insinuates that he chooses not to use a certain epithet for Plutarch, and this may be taken to present him as closer to the sophists (than a philosopher); Cf. Demoen – Praet 2012, 438–439: "writer of speeches" based on Plat. *Phaedr.* 278d. Plutarch is said to write a lost treatise against orators who do not philosophise (*Lamp. Cat.* 219) and attacks the focus on style by old orators (Isocrates: *De glor. Athen.* 350de), as well as the purist Atticism of his day (*De audit.* 42de). Yet Plutarch's works show the same rhetoric perfection and with the same themes: Anderson 1993, 114–116, 120–121, 135–136, 180, 185; Preston 2001, 117; Flinterman 2004, 363–364; Whitmarsh 2005, 68–70.

<sup>17</sup> To these biographies we should append the planned *Leonidas* (*De Herod. malign.* 866b), and, of course, the solitary extant *Life* of the Persian king Artaxerxes.

<sup>18</sup> See Kohl (1915): Miltiades, Aristides, Themistocles (nos. 48–71). Three out of Aelius Aristides' persons in the *Against Plato on the Four* (an answer to Plato's *Gorgias* 503c) appear as Plutarch's protagonists: Themistocles, Pericles, and Cimon (Miltiades is excluded). For Demosthenes-related topics, see Swain 1996, 96; Whitmarsh 2005, 67; cf. Philostr. *VS* 589, 626. For Leonidas at Thermopylae, see Seneca the Elder, *Suas.* 2; Menand. *Rhet. Epideictic Speeches* 1.364, 365; Spawforth 2012, 88–89, 125–126.

and barbarians,<sup>19</sup> in an era in which the ethnological scheme was problematised by the appearance of the Romans.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, anachronistic is his derogatory use of the term *barbaros* in the exceptional compound φιλοβάρβαρος, found in two places: once to label Herodotus for exonerating the Egyptian Busiris from the charge of sacrificing Heracles (*De Herod. malign.* 857a), and once characterising fate, set against Alexander in his war with the Persians (*De Alex. Magn. fort.* 344b). Plutarch also uses the archaic word “Medism” (Μηδισμός)<sup>21</sup> to designate the political collaboration<sup>22</sup> with the Persians at the time of the Persian Wars, which he terms “Medic Wars” (τὰ Μηδικά).<sup>23</sup> Plutarch denounces this practice (cf. *Arist.* 13.1 18.5–7),<sup>24</sup> and also anachronistically calls the Persians “Medes.”<sup>25</sup>

This rather simplistic contrast against the barbarian east fitted Rome’s political stance towards the Arsacid Parthians, with Roman commanders and leaders presenting themselves as continuing, if not imitating, the expedition of Alexander the Great.<sup>26</sup> With the Roman-Parthian opposition, the antagonism between east and west was indisputably discernible and seemingly revived. The interest of Greek men of letters in Persia and the east thus converged with that of their Roman counterparts. It reached its peak with the expeditions of Emperor Trajan (114–117 AD) and of co-Emperor Verus (161–165 AD).<sup>27</sup> One result of this tendency was to conflate allusions to the distant past with the present Roman-Parthian rivalry, as if they were two phases of the same conflict.<sup>28</sup> This is demonstrated, for instance, by the allure of Alexander, or allusions to Xenophon’s march up-country. Indeed, Lucian, while treating the historiography of the Parthian Wars, quotes *Anabasis* 1.1.1 (*Quom. hist. scrib.* 23). Plutarch does the same. In the *comparison* of *Nicias* and *Crassus* (4.4), the expedition of the Roman commander to Parthia is likened

<sup>19</sup> See *Themis.* 15.4; *Per.* 15.1, 17.1; *Alc.* 26.8; *Cim.* 18.6, 19.3; *Pelop.* 17.11; *Arist.* 19.4; *Lys.* 6.7; *Pyr.* 14.6; *Eum.* 16.6; *Ages.* 15.2; *Alex.* 74.2; *Phoc.* 17.7; *Demetr.* 8.2; *Art.* 16.2; *QC* 3.2. 649e. Cf. Schmidt 1999, 133–137, 236–237.

<sup>20</sup> On the Romans in the post-Hellenic ethnological schemes see Almagor 2005, 44–48.

<sup>21</sup> *Themis.* 21.7; *Per.* 24.4; *De Herod. malign.* 868d. Indeed, some Greek Imperial authors make use of the term “Persianise” (περσιζειν) instead of “medise” (μηδιζειν), see Arr. *Anab.* 7.6.3; Ael. *VH* 1.21.

<sup>22</sup> See *Themis.* 7.2; *Arist.* 16.2, 18.6–7; *Ages.* 23.2; *De Herod. malign.* 863f, 864a–e, 865c, 866d,e, 867b,c, 868a–e. See Graf 1984, 20. Cf. Tuplin 1997, 162–163; Rung 2013, 73.

<sup>23</sup> See *Themis.* 36.1; *Pelop.* 16.5; *Arist.* 1.6, 11.9; *Sull.* 9.2, 13.4, 16.3; *Cim.* 1.2, *Nic.* 13.5; *Alex.* 34.3; *Fort. Rom.* 320f; *De def. orac.* 411f, 412b; *De vitand.* 828d; *De Herod. malign.* 870d, 873a; *De Stoic. repug.* 1049c.

<sup>24</sup> Hood 1967, 10, 16, 18, 26. Cf. Schmidt (2002: 58) on Plutarch’s “nationalistic statements,” e.g. *De def. or.* 412A.

<sup>25</sup> See *Thes.* 35.8; *Numa* 9.6; *Per.* 28.6; *Arist.* 9.6, 10.6; *Themis.* 6.1, 20.3, 21.7; *Aem. Paul.* 25.2; *Apoph. Lac.* 230e, *QC* 7.4, 703f, 8.1, 717c; *De vitand.* 828e; *De Herod. malign.* 868f, 869c, 871b. A certain play on this archaic usage in the *Cimon* (5.2, 6.1, 18.3) is paralleled in the *Lucullus* with references to real contemporary Medes (26.4, 27.7); compare in particular *Cim.* 3.2 and *Luc.* 9.5, 14.8.

<sup>26</sup> See Seager (1980), Rosivach (1984), Spawforth (1994: 237–243), Hardie (1997). Cf. Dio Cass. 68.26.4, 28.29.1, 68.30.1; SHA, *Hadr.* 4.9.

<sup>27</sup> Among the works inspired by these political developments were Arrian’s *Parthica* (*FGrH* 156 F 30–53), treatises by anonymous writers (*FGrH* 203–206), by Antiochianus (*FGrH* 207), Crepereius Calpurnianus (*FGrH* 208), Demetrius of Sagalassus (*FGrH* 209) and Callimorphus (*FGrH* 210). This would of course be true if these historians and their works were real; cf. Anderson (1993: 1433–4), who claims they were not.

<sup>28</sup> Almagor 2011, 4–5.

to that of Alexander to Persia.<sup>29</sup> The Ten Thousand's campaign in Persia is referred to during Antony's Parthian expedition (*Ant.* 45.12).<sup>30</sup>

There was one point, however, in which Greek authors or orators diverged completely from Roman men of letters, and this was the description of Roman Imperial institutions in obsolescent terms used by classical authors to portray the Persian system.<sup>31</sup> Famously, Greeks apply the word "satraps" to refer to Roman provincial governors.<sup>32</sup> Plutarch himself uses the word "up" (ἄνω) to refer to travel to Rome (*Praec. ger. reip.* 814c), the exact same phrase used in classical Greece to refer to the way to the Persian political centre. There is also an interesting association of the Persian King Artaxerxes II and the Roman Emperor Trajan in the introduction to the compilation *Regum et Imperatorum Apophthegmata* (*The Sayings of Kings and Commanders*), 172b–e, attributed to Plutarch.<sup>33</sup> This portrayal depicts Rome as a successor state of Persia, in the great sequence of world powers.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, from a Hellenocentric viewpoint, the elusive association of the Persians and the Romans is acceptable, in that both groups are "barbarians."<sup>35</sup> The contemporary Greek association of Rome and Persia stemmed from a nostalgic application of archaic notions to contemporary imperial reality. At its basis was an awareness of the comparability of past and present empires. This notion of parallelism is present to some extent in Plutarch's entire project of parallel biographies of persons from different periods. Bearing in mind this parallelism, Greek authors like Plutarch can thus explicitly describe the old Persians, but discreetly allude to the Roman Imperial system when they do so.

Celebrating the Greek victories of old within the Roman world therefore has a potential subversive political meaning. Plutarch is mindful of this predicament, in that these examples of Greek history might stir up the Greek multitudes. This concern is spelled out in Plutarch's counsel to a local politician to avoid using the splendours of the Persian Wars (*Praec. ger. reip.* 814b–c):

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<sup>29</sup> οἱ δὲ τὴν μὲν τῆς Ἀλεξάνδρου στρατείας ὀρμὴν ἐπαινοῦντες, τὴν δὲ Κράσσου ψέγοντες, οὐκ εὖ τὰ πρῶτα κρίνουσιν ἀπὸ τῶν τελευταίων ("Those who have praise for Alexander's expedition, but blame for that of Crassus, unfairly judge of a beginning by its end"), trans. by Perrin in the LCL series.

<sup>30</sup> πολλακίς ἀναφθέγξασθαι τὸν Ἀντώνιον ἱστοροῦσιν "ὃ μύριοι", θαυμάζοντα τοὺς μετὰ Ξενοφῶντος, ὅτι καὶ πλείονα καταβαίνοντες ὁδὸν ἐκ τῆς Βαβυλωνίας καὶ πολλαπλασίοις μαχόμενοι πολεμίοις ἀπεσώθησαν ("Antony, as we are told, would often cry: 'O the Ten Thousand!' thereby expressing his admiration of Xenophon's army, which made an even longer march to the sea from Babylon, and fought with many times as many enemies, and yet came off safe").

<sup>31</sup> The Classical Greek association of the Trojans and the Persians (see Hall 1989, 21–25; Pelling 2007, 148) is a distant antecedent to this practice, given the Romans' imagined ancestry in Troy. See, however, Erskine 2001, 6–7, 225–253.

<sup>32</sup> Mason 1970, 157; Bowie 1970, 33 note 95; Swain 1996, 176, 321; Whitmarsh 2005, 66–67. Cf. Arr. *Diss. Epict.* 1.10.2; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 7.66, 7.93, 33.14, 47.9, 50.6; Philostratus *VS* 524.

<sup>33</sup> According to Beck (2002), this dedication is authentic. See Pelling (2002, 65–90) on this collection.

<sup>34</sup> The so-called *translatio imperii*, as it was termed later. From the Assyrian Empire onwards, this series included four or five items: Polyb. 38.22.1–3 (cf. Swain 1940); Dion. Hal. *AR* 1.2.2–4; Vell. Pat. 1.6.6 [Aemilius Sura]; Tac. *Hist.* 5.8; App. *Praef.* 9; Oros. 2. 1. 6; 7. 2. 4: Rome as successor of Assyria; cf. Aug. *De civ. Dei*, 18.2, 22, 27.

<sup>35</sup> That Romans are in fact barbarians is insinuated by Plutarch, but never explicitly stated in his own authorial voice: *Flam.* 2.5, 11.7: ἀλλόφυλοι; *Pyr.* 16.7 βαρβάρων. They are certainly closer to the barbarian savagery and unrestrained behaviour, but are also able to adopt the Greek *paideia* and set of values; see *Flam.* 20–21; *Marc.* 28.6 and Russell (1966, 145, note 1; 1973, 132); Swain (1990; 1996, 140–144).

... there are many deeds of the ancient Greeks, which the statesman, by relating them, can shape and rectify the characters of our contemporaries... But Marathon, the Eurymedon, Plataea, and all the other examples which make the common folk vainly to swell with pride and kick up their heels should be left to the leisure of the sophists ...<sup>36</sup>

Plutarch would noticeably let the sophists or the declaimers mention these volatile examples, apparently because their displays are considered to be without any political implication.<sup>37</sup> Yet there is probably more to this attitude. Elsewhere (*De anim. Proc.* 1026ef), Plutarch seems to accommodate a depiction of cosmic cycles (found in Plato's *Politicus* 270d–274d) with his portrayal of dualistic opposition between the principles of unity and multiplicity as the two concurrent movements within the universe of order and irrational motion (see below).<sup>38</sup> Taken literally, this alternation between the two moments could be associated with a cyclical vision of history, known in antiquity, in which processes repeat themselves as natural processes do (i.e. with respective periods of growth and decay).<sup>39</sup> When applied to Plutarch's contemporary ruling power, this belief might display an ambiguous position towards the Roman Empire, as if like the Persian kingdom, the monarchy *par excellence* for the Greeks,<sup>40</sup> it arises, reaches its climax and would break down and end. Indeed, some of the Greeks entertained the thought that Rome's end at the hands of its eastern enemy was imminent.<sup>41</sup> Plutarch probably prefers that the Greeks conceal any serious manifestation of this belief and rather hand the memory of the Persian Wars to the rhetors, who are more concerned with the past than saying anything about the future.

## 2. Placing the Greco-Persian wars in history

In Greek literature, Persian history is never depicted in itself, but always from a Hellenic perspective, and in relation to Greek events (and figures). Plutarch's alertness to the subtle political insinuations of relating the Greco-Persian Wars in his own time is possibly the reason why he elected to introduce Greek past achievements against the Persians, apart from their inclusion in anecdotes and *exempla*, within a parallel structure with Roman history. The parallel arrangement of the biographies, joining one *Life* from Greek

<sup>36</sup> πολλά γὰρ ἔστιν ἄλλα τῶν πρότερον Ἑλλήνων διεξιόντα τοῖς νῦν ἠθοποιεῖν καὶ σωφρονίζειν... τὸν δὲ Μαραθῶνα καὶ τὸν Εὐρυμέδοντα καὶ τὰς Πλαταιάς, καὶ ὅσα τῶν παραδειγμάτων οἰδεῖν ποιεῖ καὶ φρυάττεσθαι διακενῆς τοὺς πολλοὺς, ἀπολιπόντας ἐν ταῖς σχολαῖς τῶν σοφιστῶν; Jones 1971, 113–114; Spawforth 1994, 245–246; Whitmarsh 2005, 66–70. Cf. Gascó 1990.

<sup>37</sup> For Plutarch's derogatory use of the epithet "sophist," see Jones 1971, 14; Stanton 1973, 352–353.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Chlup 2000, 139–140, 142–144, 149. In the treatise *De E.* (388e–389c), this alternation is allegorised by the rotation of Apollo and Dionysus in their presiding over Delphi, cf. *Ages.* 5.3.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. the approach suggested in Thuc. 1.22.4, 3.82; Plat. *Polit.* 269cd, *Rep.* 8.544e, 545d, 547c; *Leg.* 3.676bc–677b, 701c; Arist. *Polit.* 5.1301a–1316a25; Polyb. 6.2–10, 51, 57. Cf. Marchal 1925; Momigliano 1966; Starr 1966 and Trompf 1979. Cf. Spengler 1932, 1: 104–113, 424, 2: 35–37, 435; Toynbee 1954, 6: 320; 8: 525, 9: 630.

<sup>40</sup> The Achaemenid monarchy may thus be thought to reappear in the Hellenistic kingdoms, and again in the Roman principate, cf. Aalders 1982b, 23.

<sup>41</sup> Livy (9.18.6) calls these Greeks "light-headed" (*levissimi*). Cf. Justin, 41.1.7 (ultimately from the historian Timagenes?); Jos. *BJ* 2.388.

history with another from the Roman past, seemingly permits Plutarch to diminish the impact of allusions to Persian history, rather than emphasise them. This structure injects a clear detachment that removes the Persian Wars from the focus of the reader's perspective. The interpretation of the Romans as the new Persians is only implicitly and subtly displayed, through the use of what is termed "figured speech," namely, by means of allegory, irony and innuendo.<sup>42</sup> Some examples of Plutarch's technique will suffice here.

For instance, Plutarch places side by side the Greek victory over Persia (*Aristides* 5, 8–20) and the Roman triumph over the eastern, Hellenistic enemies of Rome (*Cato Maior*, 12–14). In this way, the victory of Rome over Antiochus III serves to offset the Greek achievement of old (or even reverse it, given the subtle parallelism of Persia and Imperial Rome mentioned above). The parallel structure thus allows Plutarch to inject subtlety and sophistication to the Persian allusions. Following the same example, it is not immediately obvious whether the Persians resemble the Seleucids or the Romans, and whether Antiochus III as a Macedonian-Greek ruler is a champion of Hellenic culture in its fight against barbarians or not. On the one hand, Antiochus is the Asian invader. In the *Synkrisis*, at the end of the pair (*Comp. Arist. Cat. Mai.* 2.2–3), Plutarch makes this allusion explicit:

Aristides was not the foremost man in any one of his victories, but Miltiades has the chief honour of Marathon, Themistocles of Salamis, and at Plataea, Herodotus<sup>43</sup> says it was Pausanias who won that fairest of all victories, while even for second honours (τῶν δευτερείων) Aristides has such rivals as Sophanes, Ameinias, Callimachus, and Cynaegirus, who displayed the greatest valour in those actions. Cato, on the other hand, was not only chief in the plans and actions of the Spanish war during his own consulate, but also at Thermopylae, when he was but a tribune in the army and another was consul, he got the glory of the victory, opening up great mountain passes for the Romans to rush through upon Antiochus... That victory was manifestly the work of Cato, and it not only drove Asia out of Greece (ἐξήλασε τῆς Ἑλλάδος τὴν Ἀσίαν), but made it afterwards accessible to Scipio (trans. Perrin, LCL series).

Cato the Elder wins the glory of driving Asia out of Greece, while Aristides allegedly receives no honour for this deed.<sup>44</sup> The phrase in the *Synkrisis* reflects the *Aristides* (5.1; cf. 14.8, 19.1, 20.3) and alludes to Herodotus' portrayal of Themistocles, who received only "second honours" for valour (8.123: τὸν δεύτερον) in the Battle of Salamis; Aristides thus fares worse than his avowed rival.<sup>45</sup> Ostensibly, Greek achievement against Persia is presentable only if Roman accomplishments appear to be grander.

On the other hand, Antiochus is defeated at Thermopylae, like the Greek defenders, not the Persian invaders. Plutarch mentions that Cato remembers this path which the Persians had used (*Cat. Mai.* 13.1). This presentation insinuates that the only way for Romans to succeed was to follow in the footsteps of the Persians, not the Greeks. The Romans, in turn, do not appear to recoil from any connotation with the Achaemenids. Conversely, Antiochus is forced to resemble Leonidas and the defenders: he retires to the narrow part (*Cat. Mai.* 13.1: τὰ περὶ Θερμοπύλας στενὰ; Hdt. 7.225: τὸ στενὸν),

<sup>42</sup> Mason 2005; Whitmarsh 2005, 63–65.

<sup>43</sup> Hdt. 9.64: "the most famous victory of all those about which we have knowledge was gained by Pausanias."

<sup>44</sup> Russo 2014, 309–310.

<sup>45</sup> On the *Aristides*, see also Marincola 2016.

protected by the defence of the wall (*Cat. Mai.* 13.1: διατειχίσματα; Hdt. 7.225, 233: ἔρμα τοῦ τείχεος).<sup>46</sup> The defenders' attempt to protect the Anopaeian path (Hdt. 7.212–7: ἀτραπόν) to Thermopylae is reflected in Cato's discovery of the same path (*Cat. Mai.* 13.3: ἐμβαλόντες εἰς ἀτραπόν). During the clash with the Romans, Antiochus is injured in the mouth (τὸ **στόμα λίθῳ** πληγείς). This depiction seemingly echoes that of the Persian Mardonius, whose head is crushed with a stone by a Spartan, as mentioned in Plutarch's *Aristides* (19.1–2: **λίθῳ** τὴν κεφαλὴν πατάξας), but not in Herodotus (9.64.2).<sup>47</sup> Yet the allusion may be more relevant to the stand of the Greek defenders, who were willing to fight with their hands and teeth (Hdt. 7.225: ἀλεξομένουσ... καὶ χερσὶ καὶ **στόμασι**). Again, in the *Synkrisis* to the pair, Plutarch claims (*Comp. Arist. Cat. Mai.* 5.1) that Antiochus does not merit the comparison with Xerxes (καὶ οὐκ ἄξιον δήπου παραβαλεῖν τῷ Ξέρξῃ τὸν Ἀντίοχον), ironically implying that it is really Cato who should be made to resemble the Persian king.

The fact that in the *Cimon–Lucullus*, Lucullus appears in both the beginning of the Greek *Life* (*Cimon* 1–3) and in his own biography (*Lucullus*) portrays Greece as embraced by Rome and eventually undermines Cimon's achievement of driving the Persians from the Aegean (*Cimon* 13.4). The subtle subversive connotations of this association are not hard to fathom. Briefly described, the first section (*Cimon* 1) relates the story of the orphan Greek boy Damon, who is the object of passion for a Roman commander of a cohort that was wintering in Chaeroneia. The Roman commander cannot win Damon over, and begins to use violence in his advances. Damon, therefore, sets out to kill the Roman commander; he enlists some companions (16 in all), falls upon him while he is sacrificing and leaves the city. The narrator tells us that Lucius Lucullus, the Roman general, appearing while passing through Chaeroneia, investigates the matter and finds that the city is not to be blamed for what happened, and moves away with his soldiers. Within a few chapters, Plutarch turns from the intrusion of Lucullus in the *Life* of Cimon to the Persian intervention in Greece (*Cimon* 5), insinuating a certain attitude towards the Roman presence in Greece. Indeed, because of his extravagance, Lucullus in his gardens is likened to the Persian king, who notoriously carved through hills and turned the sea into land (see above) – and thus is explicitly called “Xerxes in toga” (Ξέρξην... ἐκ τηβέννου: *Luc.* 39.3).<sup>48</sup> This pair thus associates Persian and Roman imperialism.

Despite the achievements of Agesilaus against Persia in Asia Minor, Plutarch's narrator is made to claim that the complete triumph over the Persians was left for Alexander (*Ages.* 15.4, cf. *Comp. Ages.–Pomp.* 2.3), thus belittling any of his achievements in the east.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, in the first half of the parallel *Life* of Pompey (*Pomp.* 2.2, 4.1, 34.5, 46.1), the Roman protagonist is sometimes shown (probably ironically) in a com-

<sup>46</sup> Antiochus' army was entrenched at the east gate of the pass, while the main Roman army under Glabrio was based within the pass at the middle gate; see Livy 36.15.3, 36.16.5; cf. Kraft *et al.* 1987, 194, note 6. Leonidas' camp, however, was in the middle gate: Hdt. 7.177.

<sup>47</sup> The latter merely says that this death was in revenge for the killing of Leonidas (9.64.1).

<sup>48</sup> This saying is attributed by Plutarch to the Stoic Tubero, but in Vell. Pat. 2.33.4 to Pompey. See Tröster 2008, 60–61, note 50; 63.

<sup>49</sup> Note the ironic remark (*Ages.* 15.5) concerning the end of the expedition because of the Corinthian War (see n. 58): “Agesilaus never performed a nobler or a greater deed than in returning home as he now did, nor was there ever a fairer example of righteous obedience to authority.” Cf. Xen. *Ages.* 1.36 (vs. *Hell.* 4.2.3) and Nepos, *Ages.* 4.3. See Shipley (1997: 206–208).

petition for glory, and as surpassing Alexander.<sup>50</sup> The combined effect of these passages tones down any accomplishment of the Greek Agesilaus in comparison with Pompey. When the Spartans agree to the terms of the King's Peace of 387/6 BC (*Ages.* 23.1) and recognise the right of Persian rule over the Greeks of Asia Minor, Agesilaus is the one who forces the Greeks to accept the settlement (*Ages.* 23.3). Admittedly, this is done because of his wish to weaken Thebes through the autonomy clause of the arrangement (cf. *Ages.* 28.1–3), but in fact Agesilaus increases the authority and power of the Great King. The fact that through his policy Agesilaus will in the long run benefit the Romans as well is shown through the parallel discussions of the title “Great” in the case of the Persian king (μέγας βασιλεύς: *Ages.* 23.5)<sup>51</sup> and Pompey *Magnus* (*Pomp.* 13.8–9: Μάγνος).

In Pompey's case, this appellation was presumably meant to echo Alexander. However, Pompey is no Alexander.<sup>52</sup> Plutarch displays this fact in the Parthian context against the background of allusions to the Macedonian. For example, Pompey cannot pursue the Parthian king further than Arbela (*Pomp.* 36.1–2), and is thus unlike Alexander, who fought Darius not far from this very spot (*Arr. Anab.* 3.8.7, cf. *Plut. Alex.* 31.6). Pompey refuses to address the Parthian monarch as the King of Kings (*Pomp.* 38.2). This is presented by the narrator as Pompey's effort to gratify twelve barbarian kings.<sup>53</sup> Far from controlling the east, therefore, it is the east that controls Pompey. Indeed, at the end of his *Life* (*Pomp.* 76.4–5) the desperate Pompey contemplates finding refuge among the Parthians in the east. It is one of his friends, Theophanes of Lesbos, who points out to Pompey that in reality the Roman commander would turn up as a slave to Arsaces (*Pomp.* 76.6: Ἀρσάκην δὲ ποιεῖσθαι κύριον ἑαυτοῦ). This presentation only enhances Agesilaus' acceptance of the King's Peace earlier, and presents his real historical importance in weakening Greece.

Similarly, Lysander achieves some successes against the Persians. Firstly, in Asia Minor he is able to stop the process of barbarisation in Ephesus (*Lys.* 3.2), due to its mixture of Persian customs (κινδυνεύουσιν ἐκβαρβαρωθῆναι τοῖς Περσικοῖς ἔθεσι διὰ τὰς ἐπιμιξίας) and its proximity to Lydia; Lysander evidently strengthens its Greek character.<sup>54</sup> Secondly, Lysander incites Agesilaus to make his great campaign into Asia (*Lys.* 23.1), and is able to persuade Spithridates the Persian to desert from Pharnabazus (*Lys.* 24.1).<sup>55</sup> In a way, this makes Lysander a proto-Alexander, in being able to bring Greece (culturally and militarily) into Persia.<sup>56</sup> These feats are hampered, however, by Lysander's policy and the internal disputes with Agesilaus (*Lys.* 23.2–9, 24.2). They are also overshadowed by the achievements of the Greeks during the Persian Wars and by Alexander.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. *Comp. Ages. Pomp.* 2.6. See Greenhalgh (1980) *passim*; esp. 6, 11, 104, 122, 126, 134, 137, 168–173; Nevin 2014, 60–67. See Almagor 2013: 163–165, on *Pomp.* 35 (Amazons).

<sup>51</sup> This is the common title of the king in Greek literature (e.g., *Hdt.* 1.188, 1.192, 5.49, 8.140; *Xen., Anab.*, 1.2.8; 1.7.2, 1.7.13; 17.16; 2.3.17; 2.4.3), and stems from the Persian royal practice (*xshâyathiya vazraka*; cf. *DB.1* and many other places). The title may go back to the Sumerian LUGAL GAL/Akkadian *šarru rabû*.

<sup>52</sup> Hillman 1994, 258–259; Harrison 1995, 100–102; Almagor 2013, 164–165; Nevin 2014, 61.

<sup>53</sup> βασιλέων δὲ δώδεκα βαρβάρων ἀφιγμένων πρὸς αὐτόν. ὅθεν οὐδὲ ἤξιωσε τὸν Πάρθον ἀντιγράφων, ὥσπερ οἱ λοιποὶ, βασιλέα βασιλέων προσαγορευῆσαι, τοῖς ἄλλοις χαριζόμενος.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Duff (1999: 185), who notices the probable allusion here to Isocrates' *Evagoras* (9.47–50).

<sup>55</sup> Cf. *Xen. Hell.* 3.4.10.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. the image of Alexander as bringing (Greek) civilisation to the east. The (somewhat ironic) *locus classicus* is *Plut. De Alex. Magn. fort.* 328e.

Yet Lysander's actions are also marred through the comparison with Sulla. When the Athenian delegates begin to recount former Greek heroism, also in the Persian Wars (τὰ Μηδικὰ σεμνολογουμένου), Sulla interrupts them by saying that he was sent to Athens not to learn history but to suppress the rebels (*Sull.* 13.4), thus showing the futility of celebrating the Greek past under Rome. This description implicitly entails the recognition that these heroic stories are useless since the Greeks eventually lost (to Rome) – a reading which is pertinent to the question of the association of Rome with Persia in the Greek mindset. The comparison with Sulla underscores the point that Lysander diminished the supremacy of Athens,<sup>57</sup> as much as Sulla sacked Athens (*Sull.* 14, cf. *Comp. Lys.–Sull.* 5.5), both following in the footsteps of the Persians. In this respect, they succeeded beyond what the eastern power was able to attain, and are not champions of Greece. In fact, the internal Greek war, the Boeotian (or Corinthian)<sup>58</sup> War, for which some hold Lysander responsible (*Lys.* 27.1), curtails the Spartan expedition, and forces Lysander to return to Greece and later die in battle against the Thebans (*Lys.* 28.5). This failure benefited the Great King. Lysander has to pull out of Asia Minor because of internal affairs in Greece, and this inevitability is enhanced by the parallelism with Sulla, who has to reach a settlement with Mithridates VI at Dardanus (*Sull.* 24.1–7), which he explains to his soldiers by necessity, given the advance of Fimbria and his inability to wage a war on two fronts (cf. *Sull.* 23.3–5).<sup>59</sup>

At another level, Lysander not only fails in bringing Greece to Persia, but eventually ends up by bringing Persia into Greece, because of his unfettered ambition for power (*Lys.* 2.4, 18.2, 19.1, 23.3).<sup>60</sup> Plutarch describes the financial assistance Cyrus the Younger hands to Sparta (*Lys.* 4.5–6, 6.1, 9.1–2) and implies that Lysander has corrupted Spartan morals by Persian money (*Lys.* 2.6, 16.2–4, 17.1–10, 19.7, *Comp. Lys.–Sull.* 3.7–8).<sup>61</sup> This point is stressed through the comparison of Lysander and Callicratidas, who briefly succeeds him as the naval commander (*Lys.* 5.5–6.4, cf. 7.5–6).<sup>62</sup> In particular, Callicratidas refuses to solicit the barbarians to fund the wars Greek wage against one another (*Lys.* 6.8). The corruption of Spartan traditions is also insinuated by the un-Spartan<sup>63</sup> kingly gestures Lysander adopts elsewhere (*Lys.* 19.1, cf. 22.1),<sup>64</sup> the divine honours he receives from Greek cities during his lifetime (*Lys.* 18.2–5),<sup>65</sup> as well his planned attempt to transform the regime in Sparta (*Lys.* 24.3–6, 30.3–5). Again, the connotations of Lysander's unfulfilled constitutional upheaval is made clearer by the comparison to Sulla, since,

<sup>57</sup> Note the list of portents in *Lys.* 12 with Duff (1999, 189).

<sup>58</sup> The designation “Boeotian War,” emphasising the responsibility of Thebes (Xen. *Hell.* 3.5.3), is also found in Diod. 14.81.3; cf. Hamilton 1979, 211. The name “Corinthian War” is found in Nep. *Ages.* 5.1; Paus. 3.9.12, 4.17.5; Polyae. 1.48.3, while that of “Hellenic War” is found in Andoc. *Hypothesis* 3 and elsewhere in Plutarch (*Ages.* 15.2; *Apoph. Lac.* 211a). It may be a condemning epithet; see Shipley 1997, 203–204.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Oros. 6.2.9–11. See Badian 1962.

<sup>60</sup> Duff 1999, 179. This is a trait common to Lysander and Sulla. See Stadter (1992), cf. *Sull.* 4.6, 7.2.

<sup>61</sup> Duff 1999, 183.

<sup>62</sup> See Xen. *Hell.* 1.6.6–7. Cf. Diod. 12.76.2 on Callicratidas; Hood 1967, 52–54; Pelling 1988a, 269–270; 272, note 32; Duff 1999, 168–169, 181.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. *Lys.* 2.4, 8.5, 20.8; Duff 1999, 164–165.

<sup>64</sup> Cartledge 1987, 90–94.

<sup>65</sup> On the cult instituted by the Samians to honour Lysander: Hamilton 1992. Cf. their “Lysandreia” festival (Ath. 15.696c); Shipley 1987: 133–134, note 27.

while Lysander's revolutionary vision ostensibly involves eradicating kingship in Sparta (*Lys.* 23.8–9),<sup>66</sup> that of Sulla appears to be aiming at instituting monarchy in Rome. Indeed, scholars envisage Lysander as a precursor of the Hellenistic kingship,<sup>67</sup> which can be seen as an imitation of the Persian one. The last section of the biography (after *Lys.* 12–18, his *acme*, 18.2: “at this time [he was] more powerful than any Greek before him had been”) sees the Persian Pharnabazus intervene in Spartan politics against Lysander (*Lys.* 19.4–20.4), as in the previous section Cyrus interferes in Lysander's favour (*Lys.* 7.2).<sup>68</sup> Lysander answers by organising Agesilaus' expedition, but fails. This failure only causes the Persian intervention to be repeated through pouring money into Greece. It is this interference, and the ensuing weakening of the Greek states, that paves the way for Rome's more aggressive involvement in Greece during Sulla's campaign. The defeat of Lysander at Haliartus (*Lys.* 28) and Sulla's victory near Chaeronea (*Sull.* 17–19) are not only spatially close, and not only contrast with each other,<sup>69</sup> but they are also related causally: Lysander's death ultimately benefited Rome, as it immediately profited Persia.

### 3. Two Persian stereotypes

From its inception, the genre later identified as history employed group stereotypes within the historical account. The Greek stereotypes of the Persians, as presented by Plutarch, reflect the two clichés of the barbarian in classical literature – the barbarian as excessively refined, or as exceptionally rough and uncultured. Aristotle's concise and renowned cataloguing of barbarians into two sorts (*Pol.* 7.1327b18–331) distinguishes these two standard pictures in keeping with geographical dwellings. The societies living in the chilly environment of Europe have courage, and hence persist to be unbound. However, without competence or the capacity to comprehend, and missing political institutes, they are incapable of controlling others. On the contrary, the inhabitants of Asia are wise but lacking spirit, and therefore are always in a condition of subjugation and servitude.<sup>70</sup> Plutarch would generally portray the western and northern groups as possessing courage, audaciousness (θρασύτης) and boldness (θυμός) which knows no limits. It is typically eastern groups that he illustrates as holding back because of their softness (μαλακία).<sup>71</sup>

Remarkably, Persians are portrayed in Classical literature in these two manners of barbarism. On the one hand, they are displayed as unrestrained, in particular the Great King. On the other, they are treated as obedient slaves.<sup>72</sup> Persian reticence appears as

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Xen. *Hell.* 3.4.7–10.

<sup>67</sup> Duff 1999, 189–190. See his personal “court” of poets at *Lys.* 18.7–8.

<sup>68</sup> Hood 1967, 51.

<sup>69</sup> Duff 1999, 201.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. *De aër. aqu. et loc.* 22.

<sup>71</sup> Θρασύτης and θυμός: *Mar.* 11.13, 16.5, 19.4.9, 23.3, 7; *Caes.* 18.1, 19.6–7, 24.5–7; *Cam.* 23.1, 36.3; *Crass.* 9.8, 25.8; *Sert.* 16.1–2, 9–11; Schmidt 1999, 69–104, 240–244. μαλακία: *Luc.* 11.7–8, 25.5, 28.5–6, 31.7–8, 36.7; *Cim.* 12.7; *Themis.* 16.6; *Arist.* 10.1, 16.4–5; *Alex.* 33.8, 63.4–5; Schmidt 1999, 212–219.

<sup>72</sup> The phrase that often appears (in Plutarch: *Alex. Magn. fort.* 326e) is δοῦλος τοῦ βασιλέως. This was probably a Greek translation of the Persian *ba[n]daka*, appearing with the possessive *mana* (“mine”) nine times in the Bisitun Inscription (DB 2.19–20, 29–30, 49–50, 82; 3.13, 31, 56, 84–85; 5.8) and referring to noble commanders. Presumably, the meaning of the term is someone “associated, attached” (from Proto-IE

verging on slavery. For instance, the people's superstition is implicitly portrayed as willing submission, in the belief that Cyrus' physical shape, especially his curved nose, suggests his internal traits (*Reg. et Imper. Apoph.* 172e, *Praec. ger. reip.* 821e). In another place, a subject only obeys orders if he is assured that the monarch issues them (*De superst.* 168e). When Plutarch asserts that the king's table supplies nourishment for everybody together with dogs, he hints at the fact that the Persians are disciplined by donations (*QC* 7.4. 703de).

Sometimes, Plutarch pictures the Persian kings themselves as slaves, the insinuation being that they are not kings at all. For example, they are dominated by their wives, or at least have no control over them (*Ad princ. inerud.* 780c). Persian monarchs are depicted as pawns used by eunuchs (*De Alex. Magn. fort.* 326f, 337e, 340b).<sup>73</sup> Plutarch ridicules Darius I's assumption of power (*De Alex. Magn. fort.* 340b) through the whinnying of his horse (~ Hdt. 3.84). The picture of Xerxes sitting and watching the Battle of Salamis (*Themis.* 13.1 ~ Hdt. 8.90)<sup>74</sup> is taken as an indication that the Great King himself does not enter combat, but rather allows himself extravagances (*Themis.* 16.2). There is mention of a slave who repeats to the kings' ears his responsibility towards the deity Ormazd (= Ahuramazda; *Ad princ. inerud.* 780bc), entailing the subtle awareness that the king's consciousness is slavish.

Yet usually the Persian kingship is described as uncontrolled, and this portrayal appears in a treatise (unjustly?) ascribed to Plutarch (*Monarch. Democ. Oligarch.* 826a–827a).<sup>75</sup> Persian recklessness is seen in royal brutal conduct: Xerxes infamously slays Pythius and splits his body (*Mul. Virt.* 263a–b ~ Hdt. 7.38–9), Amestris the queen mother buries twelve people alive (*De superst.* 171d).<sup>76</sup> In another passage, the monarch exalts the evil deity Ahreman (Ἀρειμάνιον) for bringing him Themistocles (*Themis.* 28.6).<sup>77</sup> He ignores divine signs, calculated to curb his behaviour (Darius' dream in *Alex.* 18.4–5).<sup>78</sup> The Persian kings also show sexual misbehaviour, in their extreme jealousy towards their wives (*Themis.* 26.3–4) or their concubines (*Art.* 27.1). When compared with Spartan simplicity (*Ages.* 14),<sup>79</sup> the Great King's image is not flattering. Plutarch applies this uncurbed demeanour on the Persians in general, who are all pictured as womanly, when it is the females who provoke the males to remain after Cyrus' initial loss in Persia (*Mul. Virt.* 246ab);<sup>80</sup> similarly, Plutarch maintains that pederasty among the Persians did not come from the Greeks (*De Herod. malign.* 857bc).<sup>81</sup>

\**Bhendh-* 'fasten'; see Missiou 1993. Yet the word may actually mean any subject of the king: see Aesch. *Pers.* 241–242, 584–590, 762–764; Hdt. 7.8.β.3, 7.8.γ.3, 7.39.1 (Pythius), 8.102.2, Letter of Gadatas (ML 12), Xen. *Oec.* 5.16. See Diod. 15.8.2–3, 10.2 on the peace terms with Evagoras. Cf. Arist. *Polit.* 3.1285a17–24.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Diod. 17.5.3–6; Ael. *VH* 6.8, 12.43; Strabo 15.3.24; Arr. *Anab.* 2.14.5.

<sup>74</sup> Conflated with Hdt. 7.212 (cf. 7.15), where Xerxes views the battle of Thermopylae. The picture was later elaborated: cf. Demosth. 24.129; Harpocration s.v. Ἀργυρόπους δῖσρος, A 226.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Hdt. 3.80–84. On the fragmentary treatise listed as *De unius in re publica dominatione, populari statu et paucorum imperio*, see Aalders (1982a) with references.

<sup>76</sup> A conflation of Hdt. 7.114 and 3.35.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. *De Is. et Osir.* 46.369e. Cf. Beck 1991, 520 and note 69.

<sup>78</sup> See the *motif* in Hdt. 7.134–135, 9.64.

<sup>79</sup> This contrast may go back to the *topos* of comparison between Persian and Spartan morals (cf. Hdt. 9.82; Xen. *Ages.* 9.1–5, 2.1, 7.6). See Engels 2016, 94.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Polyae. 7.45.2.

<sup>81</sup> *Contra* Hdt. 1.135.

These two incompatible stereotypes are used playfully by Plutarch. One case is Plutarch's portrayal of the Persian feast.<sup>82</sup> Plutarch presents it on one occasion as circumscribed by many practices. For instance, the wine drinking of the king is regulated, and the standard is to drink moderately.<sup>83</sup> The banquet contains queries for discussion (as in the Greek manner, *QC* 1.2.629d–630e).<sup>84</sup> Wives are barred from the feast, but the concubines are introduced (*QC* 1.1.613a). Plutarch, however, seems to appreciate the Persian habit of considering vital issues while inebriated (*QC* 7.9.714a, d),<sup>85</sup> i.e. functioning without proper restriction. These two stereotypes can co-exist in the Persian banquet. For one thing, it is not a restricted all-male gathering, since eunuchs also participate and there is no clear distinction between eating and drinking (*deipnon* and *symposium*).<sup>86</sup> Then again, forced restrictions are imposed on some of the members, but not on others; there is no social equality among the guests,<sup>87</sup> and no evidence of talk flowing freely. This confusing mixture of traits causes one participant in the feast described in the *Artaxerxes* (15) to misinterpret the circumstances, to lose self-control and to dare contradict the king – conduct that would immediately cost him his life.

Another example is Plutarch's variation of Herodotus' well-known depiction that amongst the Persians the vilest thing is lying (Hdt. 1.139) – that is, uncurbed demeanour – and the second worst is being in liability. Plutarch (*De vit. aer. alien.* 829c) completely inverts the significance of the original text, by rendering the condition of being in debt the vilest thing among the Persians, and falsehood as only the second worst. This arrangement might appear as tongue-in-cheek to the readership familiar with Herodotus' description: Plutarch's narrator is clearly *not* in obligation to Herodotus (as a source), and thus supposedly would not come across as ethically corrupt (in the Persians' eyes), although he is deceitful, in not conveying Herodotus' real text.

How could these two traits of the Persians co-exist? The Greeks seem to come up with a rhetorical or philosophical answer to accommodate the contradictory stereotypes of the Persians. The compromise was to insist on the decline and *decadence* of the Persian *mores*, or to stress the enslaving effects of unconstrained luxury. In the Greek imagination, the fourth century BC reigns of the last Persian kings were seen as a period of decay and degeneration in comparison with those of former sovereigns, especially Cyrus the Great and Darius I.<sup>88</sup> It was not a true picture, yet one that was very influential in antiquity.

This is where Plutarch's other interest in Persian history comes into play: the realm of private, petty stories (“*petite histoire*”). The petty stories of the royal Achaemenid oriental court allegedly display this decadence, with tales of the king's family and staff including eunuchs and women of the court, the debauched ways of the Achaemenid

<sup>82</sup> As opposed to Almagor (2009), the licentious part of the Persian banquet is not attributed here to Greek influence, but is rather part and parcel of the Persian stereotype itself.

<sup>83</sup> As Cyrus the Younger stresses in his bid to become king: *Reg. et imp. apophth.* 173e, 1.4.620c; *Art.* 6.3.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Xen. *Cyr.* 5.2.18, Arisot. *Polit.* 1128a27.

<sup>85</sup> Hdt. 1.133; Strabo, 15.3.20.

<sup>86</sup> Hug 1931, 1266–1267; Murray 1990, 6. Cf. Paul 1991, 158.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. the descriptions of the wreaths on the sympotic participants (cf. Thgn. 1001; Ar., *Ach.* 1091, 1145, *Ec.* 844; Menander, *Pseuderaclides*, Fr. 451.15 Kassel-Austin; Athen. 15.669c), highlighting equality.

<sup>88</sup> See in particular chapter 8.8 in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, the third book of Plato's *Laws* (693c–698a) and Isocrates' *Panegyricus* (150–152). See Briant 2002b.

political setting, royal brutality, sexual overindulgence, and court machinations or conspiracies among courtiers.

Plutarch makes use of the image of the Persians as the perpetual enemy engaged in a continuous conflict with the Greeks. In this picture, Greek morals are set as a sort of a limit to decadent Persian ambition and savagery, and the existence of Greek culture beyond the Persian Empire serves as a border to barbarian passion. It is a variation on the *metus hostilis* theme known in Rome.<sup>89</sup> When Artaxerxes II enforced his will on Greece with the “King’s Peace” settlement of 387/6 BC, he effectively lifted, as it were, the external barriers on Persia and extended Persian influence beyond that of his predecessors. In the *Artaxerxes*, Plutarch beautifully parallels this political achievement with the relaxing of restraints on the king’s own passions, leading to a grand display of depravity, evident in its turn in the decadence of the surrounding environment. For instance, immediately after the description of this settlement (*Art.* 21.5–6), Artaxerxes is shown in his unbridled sexual behaviour (*Art.* 23.5, 27.2) towards his own daughter, Attosa.<sup>90</sup> Greeks no longer provide a moral boundary to the demeanour of the Persians. Indeed, when Parysatis, the Persian queen mother, counsels the monarch, her son, to marry his own daughter, she claims that he should disregard Greek feelings and customs (23.5: ἐάσαντα δόξας Ἑλλήνων καὶ νόμους).

For these details, Plutarch consulted both Herodotus and works in the genre called *Persica* (“Things Persian”), of the fifth and fourth centuries BC, unique not only in terms of content, but also with respect to form, structure and presentation.<sup>91</sup> We are not certain as to the extent to which in these *Persica* volumes, as in Herodotus’ work, the petty stories were balanced by the inclusion of political narrative. These works included the depiction of exotic features – like outlandish animals, plants and practices (more akin to the *thomata* or paradoxographic literature), including luxury items (e.g. the royal golden egg-shaped cup or the royal golden footstool). The most cited and influential *Persica* author was Ctesias (*FGrH* 688), and to a lesser degree Deinon (*FGrH* 690) and Heracleides (*FGrH* 689). Plutarch uses all three in his *Artaxerxes*.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Sall. *Bell. Jug.* 41.2–3; *Hist.* 1.11–12: the disappearance of any external powerful foe (especially Carthage) eliminated restrictions or bridles over the Roman multitude. See Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 27.4: Scipio Nasica always ended his speech with the assertion: “I think that Carthage must be spared” (δοκεῖ μοι Καρχηδόνα εἶναι), because he wished that the fear of Carthage would curb the boldness of the multitude. Cf. Livy 2. 39. 7; Lintott 1972, 632–633. The belief is that complete victory caused the disappearance of virtue from the state.

<sup>90</sup> Or daughters, according to other sources, so Plutarch’s narrator tells us (*Art.* 23.6, 27.7–8). Yet the mention of Amestris, the second daughter, disrupts the storyline and contradicts the rest of the details in the plot; Smith 1881, 22–23. In fact, the structure of the second part of Chapter 23 in the biography evokes Herodotus’ report (3.31) of Cambyses’ behaviour and his excess in marrying two sisters recurs in Plutarch’s presentation of Artaxerxes in marrying two daughters. This is clearly Plutarch’s own organisation. Similarly, Amestris later disappears from the account, just as in Herodotus the other sister is killed (“it was the younger, who accompanied him [to Egypt] whom he killed,” τουτέων δῆτα τὴν νεωτέραν ἐπισπομένην οἱ ἐπ’ Αἴγυπτον κτείνει).

<sup>91</sup> Lenfant 2007, 2014.

<sup>92</sup> Almagor 2014, 278–279, 282–285.

#### 4. *Lives of the Persians*

The often quoted passage at the beginning of the biography of Alexander (*Alex.* 1.2), contains the narrator's assertion that he is writing a biography and not a history, and therefore should be pardoned by the reader. There is an interesting parallel in this introductory chapter between what Plutarch as a biographer does to historical reality and what Alexander does to the Persian Empire. Plutarch's narrator apologises for abbreviating the historical material, and defends his project by the sheer volume of the material and the requirements of his genre – the *bios*. In this genre, the narrator prefers to write on several aspects and discard others. He is aware that what he provides is not complete, but advances an artistic metaphor to describe his project: the narrator describes his work through the desire to create something new, almost like an artist.<sup>93</sup> As Alexander ends the Persian Empire and forms an ill-conceived creation out of the old kingdom, so too does Plutarch's narrator in his biographical writing on the Macedonian king create something new out of his material.

As the *Alexander* passage clearly states, Plutarch represents history through the story of a person's life, a *bios*. There is a sense in which the Persian *personae* lend themselves especially to the genre of biography. In his series of talks *The Development of Greek Biography*, Arnaldo Momigliano notices that in different parts of the Persian Empire, certain figures wrote biographies or autobiographies: Nehemiah and Ezra, Ion of Chios, Skylax (on his sea voyage), Hanno, who wrote in Phoenician on his own voyages, and Xanthus the Lydian on the life of Empedocles (Diog. Laert. 8.63). Momigliano assumes that there was no coincidence here.<sup>94</sup> It may be that there was indeed a Persian influence, in that the royal inscriptions, in particular Darius' Behistun inscription, inspired this genre of biographical records; we know that copies of it were spread throughout the Empire.<sup>95</sup> This inscription, which disseminated the genre of the Near Eastern royal inscriptions in the Greek-speaking world and popularised the first-person authorial kingly voice, may have also contributed to the stress on the individual, in a return to the variety of the accounts of the mythic heroes, albeit with a twist.

If this observation has historical significance, then it is surely no coincidence that the first almost complete work to survive from antiquity in the area of biography is the *Cyropaedia* of Xenophon, telling the story of the education and life of Cyrus the Great. It has everything we look for in a biography – beginning, education, rise, *acme*, and end. The only problem is that this account is entirely fictional, and not meant to be accurate or real.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>93</sup> ὥσπερ οὖν οἱ ζωγράφοι τὰς ὁμοιότητας ἀπὸ τοῦ προσώπου καὶ τῶν περὶ τὴν ὄψιν εἰδῶν οἷς ἐμφαίνεται τὸ ἦθος ἀναλαμβάνουσιν, ἐλάχιστα τῶν λοιπῶν μερῶν φροντίζοντες...

<sup>94</sup> Momigliano 1971, 36–37: “it is of historical significance that both Skylax and Xanthus, the first biographers in the Greek language known to us, were Persian subjects... Autobiography was in the air in the Persian Empire of the early fifth century, and both Jews and Greeks may have been stimulated by Persian and other oriental models to create something of their own.”

<sup>95</sup> See DB 4.91–92: the message was sent “to every province.” Copies were evidently made on clay and parchment; cf. the Aramaic translation (about 420 BC): Cowley 1923, 249–250. See Seidl (1976: 125–127, pls. 34–37; 1999) and von Voigtlander (1978, 63–66) for fragments on a Babylonian stele (BE 3627 = Berlin VA Bab. 1502, and Bab. 59328, 59245–6 and 41446). A Greek version may have been the source of Herodotus' account (3.61–79): Lewis 1997.

<sup>96</sup> Cic. *Ad Quint.* 1.1.23; Momigliano 1971, 55–56: “The *Cyropaedia* is indeed the most accomplished biography we have in classical Greek literature. It is a presentation of the life of a man from beginning to

If this is true, it would appear that the appearance of Persian figures as protagonists of *bioi* is explicable almost by definition.

Plutarch himself wrote a biography of a Persian king, Artaxerxes II. There may have been two main influences on this choice. The first is the biographies dedicated to barbarian heroes in the work of the Latin author Cornelius Nepos (c. 110–24 BC), namely Hamilcar, Hannibal and Datames.<sup>97</sup> The second is the Socratic tradition of presenting a Persian king as a model in ethical philosophy and as a figure to display principles for the right kingly demeanour.<sup>98</sup> The most important work in this tradition is the *Artaxerxes* of Demetrius of Phaleron (Diog. Laert. 5.81).<sup>99</sup> Readers of Plutarch would already know Artaxerxes as the successful king who was victorious against the seditious expedition of his brother, Cyrus the Younger (from Xenophon's *Anabasis*, book 1), and who was able to enforce his will on Greece (above). From a moral perspective, perhaps important are the words of Nepos in the short section entitled *De Regibus* (1.4) to the effect that the king dealt with his murderous mother with appropriate loving virtue (*cum matris suae scelere amisisset uxorem, tantum indulgit dolori, ut eum pietas vinceret*). It was probably the complexity in Artaxerxes' character that appealed to Plutarch.

The structure of the *Life*<sup>100</sup> seems to answer readers' expectations concerning this Persian monarch. Plutarch dwells on the war of the brothers (*Art.* 1–11), as was abbreviated by Xenophon from Ctesias.<sup>101</sup> The aftermath of the Battle of Cunaxa (401 BC) includes scenes of the Persian royal court (*Art.* 12–19) and gives sufficient background against which to appreciate Artaxerxes' surprisingly lenient attitude towards his mother; the material for this section mostly comes from Ctesias. The brief linking section (*Art.* 20–22) relates the *acme* of Artaxerxes' career as he succeeds in coercing the Greek states to accept his rule in Asia Minor and authority in Greek politics. The final portion (*Art.* 23–30) shows the political failures and moral faults of Artaxerxes, which link his reign with the image of Persian decadence and ultimate breakdown. It starts with his incestuous relationship with his daughter and ends with the execution of his rebellious son Darius, paving the way for the rise of Ochus (later Artaxerxes III) as heir.

Up to a certain point in the story, Plutarch's Persian hero never tortures anyone or sentences any person to death, contrary to what readers might expect after the description of his own father's cruelty (*Art.* 2.2) and against the background of Herodotus' Persian kings.<sup>102</sup> He is hesitant and kind-hearted (*Art.* 4.4). At first he sets Cyrus the Younger free, even though his brother was accused of having planned an assassination

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end... Nevertheless... The *Cyropaedia* was not, and probably never claimed to be, a true account of the life of a real person..." "...producing the first biography, which was no biography at all."

<sup>97</sup> Of particular note is the fact that Datames is a contemporary of Artaxerxes. For Nepos' influence on Plutarch: Geiger 1981, 95–96; 1985, 117–120.

<sup>98</sup> See Antisthenes, several books called *Cyrus*: Diog. Laert. 6.16, 18 (cf. Arr. *Disc. Epict.* 4.6.20; Marc. Aur. 7.36); Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* (4.16–25: Cyrus the Younger; 4.4: μή αἰσχυνθῶμεν τὸν Περσῶν βασιλέα μιμήσασθαι); *Anab.* 1.9 (Cyrus the Younger), the *Cyropaedia*, and Plato's *Menexenos* 239–240; *Leg.* 3.694–695 (Cyrus the Great).

<sup>99</sup> Probably Artaxerxes II Mnemon, set against Xenophon's Cyrus the Younger.

<sup>100</sup> The biographies are all structured differently. Cf. the criteria noted by Leo 1901, 145–192: *genos*, *paideia*, *ethos*, *physis* (physical form), *bios*, *logos*.

<sup>101</sup> Almagor 2012, 28–36.

<sup>102</sup> Almagor 2009, 138.

(*Art.* 3.5–6).<sup>103</sup> Artaxerxes ignores the impudent conduct of the courtier Tiribazus, who wears the king's royal robe, although ordered not to (*Art.* 5.4).<sup>104</sup> Whereas Euclidas the Spartan reproaches the king publicly, Artaxerxes' response is mild (*Art.* 5.2).<sup>105</sup> After the war, the king is tolerant towards turncoats (*Art.* 14.3–4) and does not execute them. A turning point is the cruel punishment of the soldier Mithridates (*Art.* 16.2–7), exposing Artaxerxes as a ruthless, tyrannical ruler. Later, the king is also pictured as executing many of his commanders out of concern for his standing (*Art.* 25.3). Eventually he puts his own son to death (*Art.* 29.11). Artaxerxes thus lets the dark side of his *psyche* take over. Plutarch depicts Artaxerxes' soul as being composed of two conflicting tendencies, one which is apparently restrained and mild, and another that is licentious and brutal – precisely reflecting the two stereotypes of the Persians, as we saw above. Bearing this duality in mind, it is no wonder that Plutarch's Artaxerxes was variously understood to portray a positive<sup>106</sup> or a negative figure.<sup>107</sup>

There may be three sources for this portrait of the split Persian soul. First, as we shall see below, the dichotomy is influenced by the perception of the Zoroastrian dualistic faith, between good and evil. Second, this dichotomy may also be related to a variation in the portrayal of the ruling group of the Empire, namely, between the Persians and Medes. This duality is presented in iconographic imagery and in several Persian and non-Persian texts.<sup>108</sup> It is apparently utilised by Plutarch, even implicitly, to hint at the twofold nature of the Persians, or at least at the two stereotypes associated with those mentioned above:

<sup>103</sup> According to Xenophon (*Anab.* 1.1.3) and Plutarch (*Art.* 3.6), Parysatis the queen mother pleaded for Cyrus, and had him sent back to his region. This detail comes from Ctesias (cf. *FGrH* 688 F 16.59; Almagor 2012, 30–31).

<sup>104</sup> Cf. Xen. *Cyr.* 8.3.13. Hdt. 9.108–113: wearing the King's clothes is forbidden and has mutinous overtones. It was allowed only by special permission: Hdt. 7.15–17; Esther 6:8–9.

<sup>105</sup> This Euclidas is not known; see Poralla 1913, 305; Fraser – Matthews 1997, 167. Niese (1907) believes he was “Gesandter bei Artaxerxes,” which may seem plausible; the *πολλὰ* surely indicates a long stay in Persia, and hence relates to the period after the King's Peace (387 BC).

<sup>106</sup> Manfredini – Orsi 1987, xxvii – xxviii.

<sup>107</sup> Hood 1967, 68–85. Or both: Schmidt 1999, 318–324.

<sup>108</sup> Persons in alternate Persian and Median garb (as two different functions or variant ethnicities?) appear in the reliefs at Persepolis: of guards on the eastern and western façades of the northern stairway of the Council Hall stairway (8 figures each) and in the four lower registers in the reliefs on the northern wall (eastern and western doorway) of the Throne Hall; of nobles in the middle and bottom registers on reliefs on the north and south wings of the *apadana*'s east stairway (64 figures, in a variety of different poses, directions of the heads and iconography); of servants in the inner faces of the parapets of the south stairs of the Council Hall (12 figures), on reliefs on the southern (six rows) and western staircase of Darius' Palace (four rows), on reliefs on the western stairway of Xerxes' Palace (160 figures), on jamb reliefs on the northern wall of Xerxes' Palace (4 figures), on a relief at the east end of the southern face of front wall of Palace H (5 figures), and on a relief on the eastern stairway of Palace H (4 figures); see Schmidt 1953, 83–84, 107, 141, 225, 228, 240, 243, 280, pls. 22, 53, 64–65, 85–86, 96–101, 134–135, 161, 163–165, 185c–d, 203a, 204a, 205; Roaf 1983, 29–30, 41, 83, 85, 103–114, 124, 140–141, 145, 149; cf. Root 1979, 282. Darius often associates Persians and Medes (*Pārsa utā Māda*: DB 1.41, 1.46–47, 2.18, 2.81–82, 3.29–30, 3.77), cf. Esther 1:3, 14, 1:13, and 10:2; Medes and Persians: Dan. 5:23, 6:8, 12, 15, 8:20. Greek sources point to the affinity of Persians and Medes, as in the case of Cyrus the Great, who is presented as the grandchild of Astyages, the last king of the Medes (Hdt. 1.107–108; Xen. *Cyr.* 1.2.1, perhaps also echoed in Aesch. *Pers.* 766–773); cf. Hdt. 1.55, 206. Xenophon continues the fiction by having Cyaxares, the fictional uncle of Cyrus, and son of Astyages (*Cyr.* 1.2.1, 1.4.7, 1.5.2), offering Cyrus his daughter as his future wife, and with her all of Media as dowry (*Cyr.* 8.5.18–20); Graf 1984, 25–29 and Tuplin 1994.

as under-civilised barbaric nomads and as over-refined decadent dwellers of civic centres. This schism appears as a paradoxical shift among the Persians, as witnessed by two conflicting pictures in Herodotus.<sup>109</sup> The image found in Greek authors from Herodotus (1.135, 6.112, 7.62) onward<sup>110</sup> is that the Persians apparently changed when they began to rule over the Medes, adopting Median customs (and costumes), in a variant of the ethnographic *topos*, made famous by Horace's *dictum*, that the conqueror is culturally conquered by the vanquished.<sup>111</sup> In this sense, the Persians became "Medised" (culturally) no less than some of the Greeks (politically) during the clash with Persia.

In Greek literature, the Medes were portrayed as stereotypically luxuriously soft,<sup>112</sup> and Plutarch associates the "Median" part of the Persians with luxury and decadent garb.<sup>113</sup> Sometimes this association is subtly displayed, as in the *Artaxerxes*. In his attempt to enlist Spartan warriors for his expedition against Artaxerxes, Cyrus the Younger censures the king's timidity and softness (*Art.* 6.4: ὑπὸ δειλίας καὶ μαλακίας). Later on, after he wins the battle with his brother, and contrary to a former depiction by the narrator,<sup>114</sup> Artaxerxes is seen to delight in penalties. One punishment in particular is given to a turncoat named Arbaces, who is singled out as a Mede. Artaxerxes punishes Arbaces in a display of this man's own timidity and softness (14.3: δειλίαν καὶ μαλακίαν), by ordering him to take a naked harlot on his neck and carry her about in the marketplace for a day. Artaxerxes thus overcomes his internal softness by externalising it in and attributing it to a Mede.

The third possible source for this dualism within the Persian *psyche* is Plato. Plutarch follows (*De virt. mor.* 441d–443d)<sup>115</sup> the Platonic threefold division of the soul (*Plat. Rep.* 4.439e–440d; 442a–c),<sup>116</sup> based on a threefold division of motives of actions. This classification differentiates between the rational function (λογιστικόν), which desires knowledge (*Plat. Rep.* 4.435e, 9.581b) and the Good,<sup>117</sup> and the passionate or irrational one. This, in turn, is split between the (a) spirited part (θυμοειδής), the one that arises through anger, and is concerned with honour, victory and reputation (*Plat. Rep.* 4.442bc,

<sup>109</sup> Compare the end of Herodotus (9.122), where Cyrus dissuades the Persians from changing their small and rugged land to a better one (because soft lands grow soft men, and rough countries grow men who are good in war) with the picture at the beginning of the work (1.126), where Cyrus convinces his men to begin their campaign for freedom from the Medes to enjoy the easy life of wine and feasting.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. Xen. *Cyr.* 8.8.15; Strabo 11.13.9.

<sup>111</sup> *Ep.* 2.1.156–157: *Graeca capta ferum uictorem cepit et artes intulit agresti Latio.*

<sup>112</sup> Cf. Ctesias' images of Median effeminate decadence, most notably of Sardanapalus: *FGrH* 688 F 1b.2.23.1–4. Sardanapalus exceeded everyone in luxury and sluggishness (τροφῆ καὶ ῥαθυμιά); he lived like a woman (βίον ἔζησε γυναικός), wearing a woman's robe (στολήν μὲν γυναικείαν ἐνεδεδύκει).

<sup>113</sup> See *Themis.* 6.4; *Alex.* 45.2; *Crass.* 24.1; *Ant.* 54.8; *Alex. Magn. fort.* 342a. The point is subtly introduced also with the person called Medius (*Alex.* 75.4, 76.2; *Quom. adulat.* 65c; *De tuend. sanit.* 124c; *Alex. Magn. fort.* 338d).

<sup>114</sup> *Art.* 4.4: Artaxerxes eliminates from his punishments the element of insult or malicious enjoyment (κολάσεως δὲ πάσης ἀφαιρῶν τὸ ἐφουβρίζον καὶ ἠδόμενον).

<sup>115</sup> Cf. Dillon 1977, 194; Duff 1999, 72–76. Although this should be qualified by certain Peripatetic influences, cf. Vander Waerdt 1985a, 295, note 31.

<sup>116</sup> See also *Plat. Rep.* 10.602c–606d; *Leg.* 1.644e–645c; *Tim.* 41e–44c, 69b–72d (with Robinson 1990); *Phaedr.* 246a–249d, 253c–254e, 255e–256d, and *Phaed.* 68c, 82c, *Symp.* 205d. See Saunders (1962) Cf. Stocks 1915; Miller 1998; Gerson 2003, 99–147; Lorenz 2006, 14–52; 2008; Ferrari 2007.

<sup>117</sup> Kahn 1987, 84, 86–91.

9.581ab) and (b) the appetitive (ἐπιθυμητικόν), which strives to satisfy bodily urges, that is, thirst, hunger and sexual desires (Plat. *Rep.* 4.435e–436a, 437de, 439d, cf. 436a, 440a) – and love of money (8.580e–581a).<sup>118</sup> The rational part aims to rule these irrational desires (Plat. *Rep.* 4.440a–441e, 442c) and by so doing, the soul becomes ordered and unified and the person becomes virtuous (Plat. *Rep.* 4.443c–444a, 444d, 431de, 422cd, cf. *Phaedr.* 284a–c); vice lies in disorder.<sup>119</sup>

In Plato's classification of four types of deviant souls, in which the rational function does not rule their souls, the one called the "oligarchic" person values only property, money and luxury (Plat. *Rep.* 8.553c). This person will set up the appetitive as the "Great King in himself (μέγαν βασιλέα ποιεῖν ἐν ἑαυτῷ), adorned with tiaras and collars of gold, and girt with the Persian sword" and will force the rational to bend "as a slave" (καταδουλωσάμενος). Regarding the discussion of the fourth deviant type, the "tyrannical" person, Plato treats the desires which belong to the appetitive part. Some of those, he claims, which are "lawless," are usually curbed by laws and the other part of the soul, but in sleep, when the rational function slumbers, they appear in dreams (Plat. *Rep.* 9.571cd). This "bestly and savage part" does not hesitate from attempting to have intercourse with a mother or with anyone else – man, god or animal; it is ready for murder and abstains from no food. It is interesting that this picture overlaps somewhat with the stereotypical image of Persians, in particular the element of incest with mothers.<sup>120</sup> In a certain sense, therefore, according to Plato, some types of the deviant soul fit in with the Greek stereotype of the Persians.

Working within this Platonic structure, Plutarch presents a certain contrast which is not strictly the Aristotelian bipartition of the soul into Reason and the Unreasonable.<sup>121</sup> Plato speaks of a duality within the person (*Rep.* 8.544d: οὐδὲ εἷς ἀλλὰ διπλοῦς τις). In Plato's exploration of the conflicts between these forces within the soul, the spirited function is allied to the rational in this internal "civil war" (δουῖν στασιαζόντων: cf. 4.440b, e; *Phaedr.* 237de) within the soul (Plat. *Rep.* 4.440a–e, 441a, 442a–443b, 433c–444a, 444d, 9.586e–587a, 589ab; cf. *Phaedr.* 246ab, 253c–255a, 255e–256a)<sup>122</sup> – the spirited as the appetitive are not devoid of cognitive aspects.<sup>123</sup> Yet there are instances where the resistance of the spirited to the appetitive is not done in relation to the rational function, but is rather a conflict between spirit and appetite (Plat. *Rep.* 4.439e–440a, 8.554de).<sup>124</sup>

<sup>118</sup> The theory may have originated with the Pythagoreans (Diog. Laert. 8.8 on the three types of people at the games: the competitors, the vendors and the spectators). Cf. Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 4.5.10 and Posidonius *ap. Galen, De piac.* 334.30–33. See Stocks 1915, 209, 220, but cf. Guthrie 1962, 164–165 and Vander Waerdt 1985b, 376–377, 387–388, 392–394. See Aristotle *EN* 2.1104b30 on the three motives of choice (or avoidance): the noble (the base), the expedient (the harmful), and the pleasant (the painful), and his threefold division of the desiderative part (*EN* 2.3.7.1104b30).

<sup>119</sup> *Sophist.* 227d–228e.

<sup>120</sup> See Diog. Laert. *Pref.* 7, and Curt. 8.2.19. Cf. Clem. *Paedag.* 1.7. Cases specifically of mothers and sons appear more often: Ctesias, *FGrH* 688 F 44; Philo, *De Spec. Leg.* 3.13; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 21.5; Tert. *Apol.* 9.16; cf. Catullus 90: *magus ex matre et gnato gignatur oportet* ("it is proper that a magos be born of a mother and her son").

<sup>121</sup> Arist. *EN* 1.13.9–20.1102ab. Cf. Plat. *Rep.* 4. 439de and Vander Waerdt 1985a, 299. Yet, see Plut. *De virt. mor.* 441ef, 442a; *Quom. adul.* 61d–62b.

<sup>122</sup> See the bipartite division of *Tim.* 41cd, 69cd, 90a–c; *Leg.* 1.644d–645c.

<sup>123</sup> Kahn 1987, 85–86, 98–101; cf. Stocks 1915, 217.

<sup>124</sup> Cooper 1984, 6–7; Kahn 1987, 88.

In these cases, the rational part is no longer in control or “on the throne” (Plat. *Rep.* 8.553cd), but rather some emotions prevail over others (Plat. *Rep.* 8.554de: ἐπιθυμίας ἐπιθυμιῶν... κρατούσας). Accordingly, Plutarch’s account appears to propose that the irrational desires of the Persian king are restricted by other irrational desires. Without the rationality which apparently comes from the Greek *paideia* or set of values, inevitable irrational desires arise in the barbarian soul, and the means to control them come from the irrational part itself.<sup>125</sup>

### 5. *The Persian from within and from without*

In his *Lives*, Plutarch provides his readers with figures who constitute good or bad examples for the readers to emulate or reject.<sup>126</sup> But the lessons are not straightforwardly given. Therefore, Plutarch’s moralism has been described as “exploratory” (descriptive) rather than “expository.”<sup>127</sup> It does not include an explicit command on how to conduct oneself. This means that Plutarch makes the reader play an active role, and basically think of the right way of conducting him- or herself. The reader assesses the heroes for their virtues and vices as well as their political and military successes or failures – for no protagonist is free of faults (cf. *Cim.* 2.3–5). Plutarch generally traces the successes and failures of rulers and states respectively to their moral excellence or shortcoming. This view spells an ethical reading of history, in which the moral lessons are the only significant interpretation that really matters. Plutarch explores the ability or inability of his heroes to let the rational part of their soul guide their emotions and not let them get out of control. Following the Platonic scheme outlined above, and also Aristotle’s doctrine that virtue (*arete*) consists of the attainment of the right “mean” between two immoderate passions,<sup>128</sup> Plutarch believes that a morally bad ἦθος (character) is moulded by the customary preference to behave in a specific way which abides by an extreme desire, or in the failure to find the proper “mean” between excesses (*De virt. mor.* 444c–445a, 451de).<sup>129</sup>

In this scheme, the historical confrontation between the Greeks and the Persians is portrayed in moralistic colours, whereby the Persians shed light on the character of the Greek protagonist. Serving as the foil against which to estimate the virtues and merits of the Greek hero, the Persians can correspond externally to the unreasonable, passionate part of the soul, which the Greeks have to overcome. In this sense, the Persians are

<sup>125</sup> In a previous article (Almagor 2011, 15) I mentioned the fire imagery to depict this Persian reality of passions used to curb passions, cf. *Artaxerxes* 28.1 and *Alexander* 35.14–15. Fire is used to fight fire but also to increase the flames. This imagery is influenced by Plat. *Leg.* 2.666a; cf. *Rep.* 4.569c.

<sup>126</sup> *Per.* 2.4; *Aem.* 1.4–6; *Dem.* 1.1–6. Cf. *Quom. quis suos in virt.* 84b–85b.

<sup>127</sup> Pelling 1995, 207; Duff 1999, 390; cf. 37–42, 68–71. See Stadter 2000, 493, 503–505; Verdegem 2010, 19–27; cf. Whitmarsh 2001, 54–56.

<sup>128</sup> Arist. *EN* 2.3.1.1104b3–8, 2.6.7.1106b6–2.7.2.1107a31, 2.7.9.1108b11–2.9.2.1109a23, 3.6.1.1115a26–3.11.8.1119b18, 4.5.1–2.1125b21–25; *EE* 2.3.1220b21–1221a12, 2.3–4.1222a22–b4, 3.1.1228a26–b38, 3.1.1229a11–b25, 3.1.1230b9–20, 3.2.1230b21–1231b2, 3.5.1233a16–30, 3.7.1234a34–b13. See Hardie 1964–1965; Urmson 1973; Losin 1987.

<sup>129</sup> Dillon 1977, 195–196. Plutarch’s terminology was also indebted to the Peripatetics: Dillon 1977, 186, 193.

like the inner “barbarian” side of the protagonist’s *psyche* – as we saw above in Plato’s portrayal. This depiction is even more forceful if the protagonist is partially barbarian in terms of race or culture.

For instance, in one memorable scene from the *Cimon* (18.2–3), just before the hero’s departure to what will be his final battle – indeed in his very final hours – he has a dream in which a she-dog barks at him, mixing baying with a human voice. According to Cimon’s diviner-friend, the dog signified the Medes, since the mixture of speech points to the composition of the Persian army, made up of Hellenes and barbarians.<sup>130</sup> Thus, barking represents barbarians and their elocution. We remember earlier that, according to Plato, sleep sets loose the irrational aspect. With this image of the Persian in Cimon’s soul, we realise that, as the hero loses restraint, his character displays features of the Persian, the very “other” against whom he was fighting, revealing the barbarian that was naturally lurking inside Cimon. Indeed, Cimon was half-Thracian on his mother’s side (*Cim.* 4.1).<sup>131</sup>

In another example, when Alexander takes hold of Darius’ harem, he is described as charitably abstaining from hurting or dishonouring the women. Alexander nevertheless jests that these Persian females are “sores to the eyes” (ἀλγηδόνες ὀμμάτων αἱ Περσίδες, *Alex.* 21.10). This expression, which clearly specifies the irrational emotions Alexander desires to suppress, suggests a Herodotean scene (5.17–19), in which Persian envoys to Macedonia protest at a symposium that the local women there sit too distantly from them, and are thus “anguishes for their eyes” (ἀλγηδόνας σφίσι ὀφθαλμῶν: *Hdt.* 5.18.4). Plutarch presents Alexander as having an internal clash: on the one hand he is unlike the Persians in avoiding exploiting the captive women.<sup>132</sup> In this he ostensibly demonstrates Greek self-control, as opposed to the barbarian debauchery induced by the Herodotean reference.<sup>133</sup> On the other hand, the fact that Alexander repeats Herodotus’ Persians suggests that the Persian attitude is not alien to him. In this way, Alexander reveals the Persian or barbarian within himself, thus anticipating his future adoption of Persian practices and his demand to be the legal heir of the Great King.<sup>134</sup>

Plutarch’s presentation requires the depiction of foils, individuals or collectives, against whom the protagonist’s character is explored. Each of the minor characters typically has a predominant feature, usually realised in speech and action. They thus con-

<sup>130</sup> Plato. *Rep.* 4.441b on Homer, *Od.* 20.14–18 (“as a bitch stands... so his heart growled within him”): the unreasoning anger is felt to be a distinct and different living thing within. Elsewhere, Plato claims that there is a beast inside the man that is usually kept chained up or tamed and trained to obedience: *Rep.* 9.589ab and also 4.439b, 4.440d.

<sup>131</sup> *Hdt.* 6.39; cf. Davies 1971, 302. See Blamire 1989, 10.

<sup>132</sup> Stevenson 1997, 50, and compare similar Near Eastern practice: 2 Samuel 3:7, 12:8; 1 Kings 2: 22. Cf. the legend of Solomon and Ashmodai: Krappe 1933, 260. Cf. Curt. Ruf. 6.6.8 on Alexander and the Persian harem.

<sup>133</sup> Incidentally, this self-restraint was probably a deception, since we read in Plutarch and Justin (*Plut. Alex.* 30.1; cf. Curt. Ruf. 4.10.18–19; Justin, 11.12.6.) that Darius’ wife Stateira died in childbirth, almost two years after being taken prisoner by the Macedonians. This was probably the way Alexander presented himself – that is, part of his propaganda, intended, perhaps, to conceal the harsh reality that he behaved like a Persian. Cf. Carney 1996, 570: “In any event, whatever the real nature of the relationship, the theme of Alexander’s sexual restraint was clearly intended to cope with rumours that he had not exercised it with Darius’ wife...”

<sup>134</sup> Barbarian on his mother’s (*Plut. Alex.* 2.7–9) or father’s (*Demosth.* 9.31) side? See Whitmarsh 2002, 175, 186–187, 190.

tribute to the portrayal of the hero by highlighting a particular quality in him. Being thus composed of the traits of all the other characters in the biography makes the protagonist the only truly “round” character (i.e. a complex figure that develops in the course of the narrative), while the minor figures are all “flat” (i.e. constructed around a single idea and undeveloped through the story).<sup>135</sup>

This is the role some Persian minor figures fulfil in the biographies. Obviously, the negative features of the Persians call into relief the virtuous features of the Greek hero; sometimes, however, the Persians’ positive qualities, like courage in fighting, only validate the exceptional virtuous assets of the protagonist when he is capable of outdoing them.<sup>136</sup> Let us examine two famous scenes.

When Themistocles is led into the presence of Artaxerxes I, who has recently ascended the throne (465 BC), the depiction presents the Persian king as a basis for comparison with the Greek Themistocles (*Themis.* 28–29.5).<sup>137</sup> The scene elaborates and paraphrases what is found in Thucydides’ account (1.137–138),<sup>138</sup> with the notable difference that the historian describes a letter from Themistocles and Plutarch portrays an actual meeting.<sup>139</sup> Thus, in the choice given to Themistocles of whether to prostrate himself before the king or to employ messengers (*Themis.* 27.5),<sup>140</sup> Plutarch has him opting for the former.<sup>141</sup> The conversation thus makes language play a major role in the scene, as it does throughout the biography.<sup>142</sup> The Great King allows Themistocles to express himself as a characteristic Greek, having free speech (*Themis.* 28.2–5, 29.3–5: *παρρησιαζόμενον, παρρησία*), speaking with audacity (*φρόνημα καὶ τὴν τόλμαν*: *Themis.* 28.6) and utilising artful arguments in an artificial rhetoric (*Themis.* 28.2–4).

The Persians provide the setting for the display of Themistocles’ traits, like his cunning or his pursuit of honour.<sup>143</sup> Themistocles displays a very refined and perceptive argument before the king (*Themis.* 28.2–5). But at no point it is asserted that his speech is translated by an interpreter (an interpreter merely poses the question at 28.1), let alone understood. In this portrayal, it is Themistocles who is the “other,” speaking in an incoherent language. He is an outsider in the king’s court. Indeed, Themistocles is known to be the child of a foreign mother (*Themis.* 1.2).<sup>144</sup> Themistocles is correspondingly soon

<sup>135</sup> To use the classification of Forster 1963 [1927], 75. Alternatively, the comparisons with these minor characters may be seen as minor *synkriseis*, which reflect on the main pair, cf. Erbse 1956; Stadter 1975, 78; Pelling 1988b, 12–13, 19–26; Larmour 1992, 4159–4162; Duff 2010, 62–63.

<sup>136</sup> Negative traits: Schmidt 2002, 58; cf. Hood 1967, 14–15, 16, 18, 34, 87, 99, 136, 148. Positive features: Schmidt 1999, 144; Hood 1967, 30, 36.

<sup>137</sup> On this meeting, see Frost 1980, 213–217; Keaveney 2003, 49–55.

<sup>138</sup> Martin 1961, 328, note 9; 331, note 21. Not in Pelling 1992, 29–30; cf. 35, note 29 and 38, note 51.

<sup>139</sup> On the authenticity of the letter, see Keaveney 2003, 33–34. Cf. Gomme 1945, 435, 441.

<sup>140</sup> Keaveney (2003, 36; 147, note 298) does not see any contradiction between the reports, as Themistocles’ letter in Thucydides’ account is meant to prepare a meeting in the following year. On a similar choice, cf. *Nep. Con.* 3.2–4; *Just.* 6.2.12–14.

<sup>141</sup> *Diod.* 11.56.8. It was this presentation that remained in Greek memory, see Philostr. *Imag.* 2.31; McKechnie 2015, 136.

<sup>142</sup> Mayer 1997.

<sup>143</sup> Hood 1967, 18–19.

<sup>144</sup> She was presumably a Thracian named Abrotonon. We can assume this detail to be from Amphicrates the Athenian rhetor (*ap. Athen.* 13.576c), cf. *AP* 7.306; *Ael. VH* 12.43. The tradition that Themistocles’ mother was Thracian was perhaps old, if the reference of Hermippus the Old Comic poet to *κεβλήπορις*

absorbed in the Persian court (*Themis.* 29.3–7, 31.2), and quickly studies the Persian language.<sup>145</sup> In this sense, Themistocles speaks “Persian” before he receives a formal education in this tongue.<sup>146</sup>

The theme of blurred boundaries between being an outsider or an insider appears from the very beginning of the biography. For instance, Plutarch mentions (*Themis.* 1.3) Cynosarges, a place outside the gates of Athens, which contained a gymnasium dedicated to Heracles, in which *nothoi* (“illegitimates,” i.e. those born of foreign women), enrolled.<sup>147</sup> The narrator goes on to claim that Hercules was not a legitimate god, but rather foreign among the gods, as he was partially mortal (on his mother’s side). In two respects, therefore, the liminal existence is stressed, between gods and mortals and between (Greek) natives and aliens. Themistocles persuades certain well-born youths to exercise in Cynosarges with him. In this manner, he manages to obscure the difference between legitimates and *nothoi*. The place is also known as the location where the Athenians encamped after the victory over the Persian invaders at Marathon (Hdt. 6.116).<sup>148</sup>

In several respects, Artaxerxes I gives the impression of being a better and a more successful counterpart to Themistocles. Earlier in the biography, Themistocles tells his friends that he could not sleep because he is troubled with thinking about the trophy of Miltiades after his victory at Marathon (*Themis.* 3.4–5).<sup>149</sup> Themistocles is depicted as overly ambitious and passionate for glory (φιλοτιμία: *Themis.* 3.4, 5.3, 5.5, 6.3, 10.5, 18.1: φιλοτιμότητος), or desirous to be the first (*Themis.* 3.1: πρωτεύειν).<sup>150</sup> If he does receive honours for his feats at Salamis, this is depicted as merely accidental (*Themis.* 17.1–2 ~ Hdt. 8.124–125).<sup>151</sup> The portrayal of the excessively ambitious Themistocles, aiming to obtain honour to the point of obsession and sleepless nights, is reflected by the king’s behaviour. After the meeting with him, Artaxerxes is apparently excited to

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(“red-cap bird”) and Themistocles (preserved in *Schol. Aristoph. Av.* 304) was because the Athenian statesman was a red-haired son of a Thracian mother: Jacoby 1954, 1:87; 2:60 note 44); Dunbar 1995, 252–253.

<sup>145</sup> See Gera (2007, 452), who notes the irony involved in the description of Themistocles enjoying *par-rhesia*, when he learns Persian.

<sup>146</sup> This corresponds to a theme of the *Life* (cf. *Themis.* 2.4–6) which stresses the difference between Themistocles’ intelligence (*Themis.* 2.1: σύνεσις, from Thuc. 1.138.2) and practical training and true education, and between inborn nature and developed character, cf. Martin 1961, 326–331; Duff 2009, 153–154.

<sup>147</sup> See Humphreys 1974. It was located in the deme Diomeia, not far from the south-east corner of the city walls; cf. *Schol. on Aristoph. Ran.* 651; Diog. Laert. 6.13; Eust. *Commentary on Od.* 13.408, p. 1747,8; Travlos 1971, 340; Kyle 1987, 84–87. Strictly speaking, Themistocles was perhaps a *metroxenos* rather than a *nothos*: Ogden 1996, 55–57. Cf. Lib. *Dec.* 10.11.

<sup>148</sup> See Duff (2008, 168–173), who only addresses the significance of this theme to Themistocles’ internal policy: “This prefigures his later political radicalism” (171), but not to his later actions in Persia. This theme of marginal existence or a position at a juncture appears in conjunction with another theme of the biography, that of variation of content or significance through time and generations while the outer form of the item appears to remain intact. Thus, the gymnasium of Heracles changed its meaning because of Themistocles’ actions. Ironically, according to one version (attributed to Andocides. Cf. *Schol. on Aristoph. Eq.* 84), the Athenians took the remains of Themistocles from his tomb in Magnesia (Thuc. 1.138.5; Diod. 11.58.1; cf. Nepos, *Themis.* 10.3) and scattered them (ostensibly discarded by the narrator) – similar to the internal change within the statesman, his tomb no longer comprises his remains.

<sup>149</sup> Cf. Plut. *Thes.* 6.9; *Quom. quis suos in virt.* 84b–c; *De cap. ex inim.* 92c; *Reg. et imp. apophth.* 184f–185a; *Praec. ger. reip.* 800b; Cic. *Tusc.* 4.19.44; Val. Max. 8.14, ext. 1.

<sup>150</sup> Wardman 1974, 115–124; Larmour 1992, 4183–4184; Duff 2010, 46–47, 49, 52.

<sup>151</sup> Martin 1961, 331–334; Duff 2010, 54.

“have Themistoles the Athenian” as a sort of possession. By calling out this phrase in his sleep (*Themis*. 28.6: νύκτωρ ὑπὸ χαρᾶς διὰ μέσων τῶν ὕπνων ἐκβοῆσαι τρίς· “ἔχω Θεμιστοκλέα τὸν Ἀθηναῖον”), the king’s fulfilled ambition evokes Themistoles’ troubled sleep. Moreover, after the Battle of Salamis Themistocles is said to propose trapping Xerxes in Europe by sailing to the Hellespont and destroying his bridge. His suggestion is “to capture Asia in Europe” (*Arist.* 9.5 and *Themis*. 16.3–4: τὴν Ἀσίαν ἐν τῇ Εὐρώπῃ λάβωμεν).<sup>152</sup> Of course, Themistocles’ proposal does not materialise, and Asia is driven from Europe. Conversely, the equally ambitious Artaxerxes is able to capture Europe in Asia. Lastly, Themistocles wishes to be recognised as Great (μέγας), a theme which recurs in the *Life* (cf. *Themis*. 1.1, 2.1, 2.3, 2.7, 6.5, 11.1),<sup>153</sup> yet the Great King is truly called “Great” (*Themis*. 28.5).<sup>154</sup>

Unlike Themistocles, Artaxerxes’ ambition does not arouse envy (φθόνος)<sup>155</sup> or antagonism against himself, the causes of the Athenian statesman’s downfall.<sup>156</sup> For one thing, Artaxerxes is lenient towards his Greek captive, an attitude which highlights Themistocles’ previous brutality. Plutarch relates the story (from Phaenias’ work) of Themistocles’ sacrifice of Persian youths to Dionysus (*Themis*. 13.2; cf. *Plut. Arist.* 9.2, *Pelop.* 21.3), as persuaded by the seer Euphrantida and incited by the multitude.<sup>157</sup> In the narrator’s description,<sup>158</sup> Themistocles himself understands the seer’s words as a “great” terrible thing of evil (cf. μέγα... καὶ δεινόν).<sup>159</sup> In this he evokes the human sacrifice known in Persia from Herodotus (7.114). Furthermore, in the next chapter Artaxerxes is shown to appreciate a fellow speaker of a similar tongue when he gives Themistocles time to be taught Persian (*Themis*. 29.5). Again, Artaxerxes’ approach underscores Themistocles as a savage, for the Athenian previously (*Themis*. 6.2) kills someone who speaks in Greek for the sake of the enemy. Although the deed *seems* to be anti-Persian, Themistocles in fact restricts *parhhesia*, characteristic of the Persian king. With respect to money, Artaxerxes is liberal, not only in giving Themistocles the reward on his own head (*Themis*. 26.1, 29.3), but also in the gifts he offers him (*Themis*. 29.5, 29.11).<sup>160</sup> Themistocles seems to be concerned with obtaining money (*Themis*. 5.1, 25.3).<sup>161</sup> His acceptance of Persian gifts shows that the motivation for his motion to disfranchise Arthimius of Zeleia and his family, “because he brought the gold of the Medes and offered it

<sup>152</sup> See Pelling (2007, 152), who suggests that both passages allude to a phrase in Simonides (fr. 14 W<sup>2</sup> = POxy. 3965 fr. 21). Alternatively, Plutarch may allude to Choerilus *ap. Aristot. Rhet.* 3.14.1415a18: ἡγεὸ μοι λόγον ἄλλον, ὅπως Ἀσίας ἀπὸ γαίης / ἦλθεν ἐς Εὐρώπην πόλεμος μέγας (“Lead me with another story, how from the land of Asia came into Europe a great war”) – or it may be his own creation.

<sup>153</sup> Duff 2010, 165–166, note 26.

<sup>154</sup> τὸν ὁμόνυμον τοῦ θεοῦ βαδίζειν, συμφρονήσειε πρὸς ἐκεῖνον ἀναπέμπεσθαι· μεγάλους γὰρ ἀμφοτέρους εἶναι τε καὶ λέγεσθαι βασιλέας.

<sup>155</sup> Envy against Themistocles: *Themis*. 17.2, 22.1, 22.5, 23.4, 24.3, even in Persia: 29.5, 31.3

<sup>156</sup> *Themis*. 19.3, 20.4, 21.1, 22.1–2.

<sup>157</sup> Mikalson 2003, 78–79; 216, notes 259–260.

<sup>158</sup> Marincola 2015, 70–71.

<sup>159</sup> This picture of the incident on the island of Psyttaleia does not completely cohere with the story, in which the Persians are all killed during the battle of Salamis, and in which the deed is attributed to Aristides; see Aesch. *Pers.* 464; Hdt. 8.95; Paus. 1.36.2; Aristodemus, *FGrH* 104 F 1 = *Codex Parisinus suppl. Graecus* 607, fol. 83v–85r; 86v–87v (1.4); cf. Diod. 11.57.2–3; Bodin 1917; Frost 1980, 135; Sansone 1989, 187.

<sup>160</sup> Cf. Themistocles’ assertion that he did not “sell” himself or Greece to the enemy (*Themis*. 23.5).

<sup>161</sup> Larmour 1992, 4188–4189.

to the Greeks” (*Themis*. 6.4), appears now to be his desire that no one else will surpass him in obtaining it. He also uses money as bribes to further his ambition (*Themis*. 6.1–2; 7.5–6). Themistocles thus seems to value money for the sake of external goods, his passion for it unrestrained by reason – like Plato’s “oligarchic person” (above).<sup>162</sup> It is Themistocles who is portrayed as the stereotypical Great King of Plato, while the *real* Persian king Artaxerxes acts differently.

This comparison with Artaxerxes thus brings out the “barbarian” – or, more precisely, the “Persian” – in Themistocles.<sup>163</sup> His arrogance in his address to Artaxerxes evokes the boastfulness of the king in the royal inscriptions.<sup>164</sup> One should also note how the pairing with Camillus, and the comparison with the latter’s triumph against the Celts and his patriotism, also downplay, as it were, the achievements of Themistocles against the Persians.<sup>165</sup>

The second example deals with a Spartan rather than an Athenian, in a conference with a Persian satrap, rather than a king. It is the well-known meeting of Agesilaus and Pharnabazus already depicted by Xenophon (*Hell.* 4.1.29–38) and Theopompus of Chios (see Porphyry *ap. Eus. PE* 10.3.9–10 = *FGrH* 115 T 35, F 21).<sup>166</sup> The event occurs in the context of Agesilaus’ campaign in Asia Minor (396 BC, above). In a previous episode, Agesilaus is seen to be virtually bribed by Tithraustes, the new satrap of Sardis, into attacking the territory of Pharnabazus, the satrap of Hellespontine Phrygia (*Ages.* 10.6–7). Agesilaus refuses to take gifts from the enemies, but “desiring to gratify Tithraustes,” leads his army into Phrygia, taking thirty talents to pay the expenditures of the campaign. Xenophon is not consistent in his portrayal of this scene, and his two depictions (*Xen. Hell.* 3.4.25–6 vs. *Xen. Ages.* 1.35, 4.6) are cleverly set in a way that betrays a subtle divergence between the ideal and the real.<sup>167</sup> There also seem to be hints at this discrepancy at the conference scene of Agesilaus and Pharnabazus.

Plutarch preserves much of the original scene, order and content of Xenophon’s original (*Hell.* 4.1.29–38), yet his adaptation and modifications are important in the light they shed on the character of the protagonist. Xenophon makes Apollophanes of Cyzicus, the mutual friend of both, the main agent in securing a truce and arranging the meeting, and

<sup>162</sup> See Zadorojnyi (2006, 270–271, 273–277, 282–283, 285), who compares Themistocles to the Platonic “timocratic person.”

<sup>163</sup> In an aside, one should note Plutarch’s mention of Themistocles’ outstanding memory (*Themis.* 5.6; cf. Cic. *De senec.* 21; Val. Max. 8.7.15 and Quint. *Inst.* 11.2.50), one of the traits attributed to the Persian king (cf. *Xen. Cyr.* 5.3.46–50; cf. Hdt. 5.11, 5.105 and Esther 2:1).

<sup>164</sup> On his arrogance, see Duff 2010, 48, 55–56. Cf. *Themis.* 2.4, 5.3, 18.1–9, 22.2, 31.1. See Cawkwell (1970: 49) on Thucydides’ letter. Cf. Pausanias’ attitude: Thuc. 1.129.

<sup>165</sup> Themistocles eventually collaborates with the enemies of Greece. Moreover, Camillus pushes the Celts back and drives them from Rome (*Cam.* 23.3–7, 29, 34.3–5, 41 ~ Liv. 6.22–24, 6.42.8), while Themistocles is said to deliberately lead the Athenians out of the entire city (*Themis.* 10.4–5, 11.5), thus deserting it to the invaders. Camillus, on the other hand, obstructs the relocation to Veii (*Cam.* 7.2–5, 9; Liv. 5.49.8). See Larmour 1992, 4178, 4185, 4194–4196.

<sup>166</sup> Porphyry asserts that Theopompus has changed much of Xenophon (πολλὰ τοῦ Ξενοφῶντος αὐτὸν μετατιθέντα) and that his theft (κλοπήν) destroyed “the energy and vigour of Xenophon” (τὸ ἔμπυρον καὶ ἐνεργὸν τὸ Ξενοφῶντος διαφθείρων). See Flower 1994, 159–160.

<sup>167</sup> See Shipley 1997, 162: “Plutarch’s adaptations reconcile the moral principle and the practice.” Cf. Hood 1967, 60: “Plutarch’s juxtaposition of noble sentiments and bribe-taking does not enhance Agesilaus’ character.” Cf. the accounts of Diod. 14.80.8; Isoc. *Paneg.* 153, who omit the bribe.

places the emphasis on Agesilaus' desire to establish friendly relations with the satrap (*Hell.* 4.1.29: εἰς λόγους περὶ φιλίας). This presentation is in line with Xenophon's interest and his purpose in displaying the political and persuasive abilities and talent of Agesilaus.<sup>168</sup> Plutarch portrays the meeting as convened at Pharnabazus' request, apparently to complain and seek justice. Significantly, Plutarch drops the words "concerning friendship" (*Ages.* 12.1: εἰς λόγους αὐτῶ). In both versions, Agesilaus and the Spartans arrive first, and sit on the ground in a grassy spot. When Pharnabazus arrives, he decides, although the stereotypical effeminate soft cushions and rugs are spread for his convenience, and despite his fine and costly clothes, to lay down on the ground. In both accounts, Pharnabazus is humbled. Xenophon has him feeling ashamed of his luxury, seeing Agesilaus' simplicity (*Hell.* 4.1.30: ἡσχύνθη ἐντροφῆσαι, ὄρων τοῦ Ἀγησιλάου τὴν φαυλότητα), while Plutarch depicts him as having regard for Agesilaus (*Ages.* 12.3: αἰδεσθεὶς τὸν Ἀγησίλαον).<sup>169</sup> In Xenophon's version, Pharnabazus begins first, because he is elder (*Hell.* 4.1.31: καὶ γὰρ ἦν πρεσβύτερος), while in Plutarch's variant, this is because he is the initiator of the meeting, and, we are led to believe, because his cause is just (*Ages.* 12.4: οὐκ ἠπόρει λόγων δικαίων).

According to both Xenophon and Plutarch, Pharnabazus voices his complaints of Spartan ungratefulness towards him,<sup>170</sup> yet Plutarch delivers it in an abridged form and indirect speech. Pharnabazus emphasises that in the past he benefited the Spartans in their war against the Athenians, but now he (i.e. his land) is ravaged by them.<sup>171</sup> Again, in both accounts, the Spartans are embarrassed to hear these accusations, but Plutarch elaborates by enhancing their shame (*Ages.* 12.5: ὑπ' αἰσχύνης ~ *Hell.* 4.1.34: ἐπισχύνθησαν) and their loss for words as an acknowledgement that Pharnabazus is indeed wronged (*Ages.* 12.5: διαποροῦντας ἀδικούμενον). Agesilaus is made to excuse his assaults on Pharnabazus' property. Both authors mention Agesilaus' argument that the state of war between Sparta and the Persian king necessitates treating all that belongs to him in a hostile manner (*Ages.* 12.6: ἐχρώμεθα τοῖς ἐκείνου πράγμασι... πολέμοι... πολεμικῶς ~ *Hell.* 4.1.34: ἡμεῖς οὖν νῦν βασιλεῖ τῷ ὑμετέρῳ πολεμοῦντες πάντα ἠναγκάσμεθα τὰ ἐκείνου πολέμια νομίζειν). Yet Plutarch includes the momentous addition that once the Spartans were friends of the king (*Ages.* 12.6: φίλοι πρότερον ὄντες βασιλέως). The emphasis placed upon this obvious fact, implicit in Xenophon's description, is to show the transient condition of Spartan friendship.

In the second part of his argument, Agesilaus attempts to bring the satrap to the Greek side against the Great King. In Plutarch's version, Agesilaus asks (*Ages.* 12.7) Pharnabazus to think of the day when he will deem himself worthy to be called a friend and ally (φίλον καὶ σύμμαχον) of the Greeks instead of a slave of the king (δοῦλον... βασιλέως ~ *Hell.* 4.1.36: ὁμοδούλους). This is an ironic description, since in Xenophon's account, Pharnabazus introduces his services to Sparta in the past in precisely these terms

<sup>168</sup> Gray 1981, 324–326.

<sup>169</sup> Shipley's (1997, 183) "'respect' for the moral stance of the Greek" is an interpretation.

<sup>170</sup> His complaint may be extended to the campaign of Dercylidas as well (cf. *Xen. Hell.* 3.1.9, 3.4.13–15, 26).

<sup>171</sup> One may note Plutarch's condensed presentation of Pharnabazus' argument, in this identification between the individual and the country. See Shipley (1997, 184) on his attempt to extend a personal bond to inter-state relations.

(*Hell.* 4.1.32: φίλος καὶ σύμμαχος). This presentation reveals Sparta's disregard of real friendly relations as suits her policy. Like Xenophon, Plutarch also refers to the connection between being free (*Ages.* 12.7: ἐλευθερίας ~ *Hell.* 4.1.35: ἐλεύθερον εἶναι), that is, from the Great King, and enjoyment of his own property, with the Spartans as guardians of it (*Ages.* 12.7: ἡμᾶς τῶν σῶν κτημάτων φύλακας ~ *Hell.* 4.1.35–6: ζῆν καρπούμενον τὰ σαυτοῦ... ἡμῖν συμμάχοις χρώμενον αὔξειν... τὴν σαυτοῦ ἀρχήν). The linkage between autonomy and the military assistance that Sparta would provide is more pronounced in Plutarch's account, and alludes to mercenary service.<sup>172</sup> Judged against the damage the Spartans do to Pharnabazus' property, the "protection" Agesilaus offers the satrap is more akin to a "protection racket" scheme. If this is true, then the words Xenophon puts in Agesilaus' mouth (*Hell.* 4.1.35), to the effect that he would not recommend that Pharnabazus merely exchange one master for another (ἀλλάξασθαί... δεσπότην βασιλέως ἡμᾶς δεσπότης), sound insincere, although clad in lofty ideals. Plutarch thus captures the reality which Xenophon is unwilling or unable to perceive.

To Agesilaus' suggestion, Pharnabazus declares that if the king appoints another general in his stead, he will side with the Greeks (*Ages.* 12.8: ἔσομαι μεθ' ὑμῶν), but if he entrusts him with the command, he will spare no efforts to fight them on his behalf. In Xenophon's variant, Pharnabazus connects this effort with his pursuit of glory (*Hell.* 4.1.37: τοιοῦτόν τι, ὡς ἔοικε, **φιλοτιμία** ἐστίν). Plutarch's version omits the intention of Pharnabazus as found in Xenophon (*Hell.* 4.1.37) to be "a friend and ally" (βουλήσομαι ὑμῖν καὶ φίλος καὶ σύμμαχος εἶναι). This omission creates the impression that in reality, Pharnabazus envisions no possibility that he could ever be the Spartans' friend again.<sup>173</sup> Tellingly, Agesilaus' wish at the end of the meeting, that Pharnabazus might be their friend (*Hell.* 4.1.38: Εἴθ'... τοιοῦτος ὢν φίλος ἡμῖν γένοιτο), is different in Plutarch's version, with the addition of "rather than an enemy" (μᾶλλον ἢ πολέμιος), which is the significant last word. Plutarch omits Agesilaus' promises to keep away from Pharnabazus' land now and in the future (*Hell.* 4.1.38), but has both individuals rising from the ground (*Ages.* 12.9: συνεξαναστάς), as if symbolising these pledges in gesture.

Agesilaus' argumentation involves two subtle points, which are spelled out in Xenophon's account, but are only insinuated in Plutarch's. The first is the claim that as the enemies of the king, the Spartans are compelled (*Hell.* 4.1.34: ἡναγκάσμεθα) to treat what belongs to him in a hostile way. The portrayal is presumably seen to be deceitful, as it clashes with the emphasis on freedom as the argument develops. Accordingly, Plutarch only emphasises the transformed circumstances (from peace to war) and places the stress on the Spartan arbitrary change of heart. That this point involves insincerity can be seen in the second element suppressed by Plutarch, which is Agesilaus' claim that Pharnabazus' land is not really his; this approach is soon abandoned by Agesilaus, when the land is considered the satrap's own possession which he can maintain (and enlarge) with his Spartan allies.<sup>174</sup>

<sup>172</sup> Shipley 1997, 186. Cf. Nevin 2014, 59.

<sup>173</sup> Gray (1981, 325) is correct to observe that Agesilaus is testing Pharnabazus to examine his loyalty: "a good test... is to consider how the man has treated his previous friends," but she does not see that Agesilaus has failed miserably in this very test, by being ungrateful to Pharnabazus and the king.

<sup>174</sup> Gray 1981, 325: "It seems that Agesilaus' previous terminology had been a lie, adopted in order to persuade Pharnabazus to join the Greeks."

In this respect, the description of the meeting as taking place when the main figures are sitting on the ground is of significance.<sup>175</sup> On balance, Pharnabazus' concern is with preserving his land and property (cf. *Ages.* 11.3). Agesilaus' choice to lie on the ground signals for Pharnabazus the way in which he has to conduct himself in order to obtain his land back. By emulating Agesilaus and sitting on the ground, Pharnabazus virtually competes with him, as if making a statement that it belongs to whoever holds it. Pharnabazus marks the great importance he attaches to it, even at the expense of his luxurious clothes. This is perhaps why Plutarch downplays the element of being ashamed of luxury on Pharnabazus' part and enhances the component of the earth (*Ages.* 12.5: *κύπτοντας εἰς τὴν γῆν*). Pharnabazus' readiness to sacrifice his clothes and comfort embodies his inclination to forsake his loyalty to the king, should the occasion arise. Indeed, when Pharnabazus is prepared to admit this possibility, Agesilaus "gives back" the land to the satrap.

Pharnabazus' loyalty thus appears to be provisional upon his share of honour and the preservation of his possessions. He goes a long way in his readiness to forsake established customs (protocol, loyalty to the king) in order to obtain these external goods. In this respect, Pharnabazus is made to resemble Agesilaus. The Spartan's notable trait is "love of honour" (*φιλοτιμία*).<sup>176</sup> Here Pharnabazus displays this feature by eagerly pursuing the war against his former friends; indeed, Xenophon depicts him as such. Remarkably, Pharnabazus thus adopts Agesilaus' "mercenary attitude." Appropriate here is Agesilaus' famous retort to someone who claims that the Spartans are "Medising" by saying that the Persians are rather "Laconising" (*Ages.* 23.4; cf. *Art.* 22.2; *Lac. Apoph.* 213b).<sup>177</sup> The scene brings out Agesilaus' bad qualities, as his treachery, betrayal of friends and hypocrisy (*Ages.* 13.5, 23.5–11, 37.4–11).<sup>178</sup> Contrary to what may be perceived in Xenophon's story, the meeting is demonstrated to be a failure; the last word *πολέμιος* signifies that Pharnabazus is after all not won over by Agesilaus' rhetoric.<sup>179</sup> That in this scene reality is veiled under deception is evident by the Platonic imagery of a shady place (*Ages.* 12.2: *ὑπὸ σκιᾷ τινι*), evoking Plato's Cave Parable (*Rep.* 7.515a–e),<sup>180</sup> and the verbal echo of another Platonic phrase (*Rep.* 8.586a), in which people who do not turn their eyes to the true upper region are likened to persons whose eyes are ever bent upon the earth and heads bowed down over their tables (*κάτω αἰεὶ βλέποντες καὶ κεκυφότες εἰς γῆν καὶ εἰς τραπέζας*). These people, says Plato, nourish like cattle feed (*βόσκονται χορταζόμενοι*). When we recall that in Xenophon's version, Pharnabazus complains that the Spartans made his condition resemble that of a wild beast scavenging for food (*Hell.* 4.1.33: *ὥσπερ τὰ θηρία*), the imagery triggered implies that Pharnabazus and Agesilaus are not different from each other; their shared love of external goods hinders their reason from pursuing the truth and good.

<sup>175</sup> Gray (1981, 326) is correct to see it as symbolic, but with a different meaning from the one she suggests.

<sup>176</sup> See *Ages.* 2.3, 3.2, 3, 5.5, 7.4, 8.5, 6, 11.5, 18.5, 20.9, 23.11, 33.2. Cf. the affiliated *φιλονεικία/φίλονικία* (love of strife/ victory): *Ages.* 2.2, 4.4, 5.5, 7, 7.4, 11.6, 18.4, 23.11, 26.6, 33.2, 34.2). Cf. Hillman 1994, 272–273; Harrison 1995, 102; Nevin 2014, 46.

<sup>177</sup> Shipley (1997: 186, 278). For this special sense of "Laconise" cf. Plut. *Alc.* 23.3.

<sup>178</sup> Hamilton 1992, 4207. Cf. Hood 1967, 62, 65.

<sup>179</sup> Shipley 1997, 180.

<sup>180</sup> Ignorance of truthful reality is compared to staring shades shaped by artificial light. Shadows are the objects of delusion or imageries (*εἰκόνες*) in the divided line simile (*Rep.* 6.510a).

Lastly, Plutarch also characterises his protagonist in this manner in the *Life* of the Persian king.<sup>181</sup> Thus, to deduce Artaxerxes' features, the reader need only observe the traits of the other *personae*. In other words, the hero is reflected in all the minor characters populating the biography – mostly Persians, but also Greeks, in an interesting reversal of this device. The contrast in Artaxerxes' soul is artistically presented by Plutarch in positing the Persian king between two persons who typify the extremes within his soul. At one end stands his grandfather Artaxerxes I with his generous and kind nature (*Art.* 1.1),<sup>182</sup> and at the other is Artaxerxes III with his savage and callous character (*Art.* 30.9).<sup>183</sup> As compared with his mother Parysatis (*Art.* 6.8, 14.9–10) and with his son Artaxerxes III, the king appears less cruel. Yet, as opposed to the hesitancy of the executioner (*Art.* 29.9), who has qualms about killing Darius the royal heir, Artaxerxes appears more ruthless.<sup>184</sup> The king's ambition is obscured in comparison with the figures of Cyrus the Younger (*Art.* 6.1), Ctesias (*Art.* 13.7) and Mithridates (*Art.* 15.1, 6), but eventually he surpasses all in pursuit of honour. Compared with Timagoras the Athenian (*Art.* 22.9–12), he appears less soft and insatiable, but soon he marries his own daughter (*Art.* 23.5, 27.2). Artaxerxes' duality is reflected in the figure of Tiribazus (*Art.* 24.4), who has two distinct features: vanity when he is held in honour and viciousness when he falls from favour.

## 6. Persian religious duality

Plutarch's period saw an interest in real or feigned views of the Persian Magoi.<sup>185</sup> His own interest is slightly different. At heart, Plutarch is a philosopher,<sup>186</sup> whose interest in history springs from a belief that past events have philosophical and moral significance. Correspondingly, his concern with cult and belief systems stems from his metaphysical and ethical precepts.

Plutarch apparently admires the teaching of Zoroaster on two principles at work in the world. He seems to follow the Hellenistic Academic tradition of attention to the Zoroastrian religion as displayed in the *Alcibiades I*, although the details of his predecessors' fascination with Persian religion are not entirely clear.

<sup>181</sup> Schmidt 1999, 318–324.

<sup>182</sup> Cf. *Reg. et imp. apophth.* 173d; *Quom. Adoles. Poet. aud.* 35e; *De sera* 565a.

<sup>183</sup> Diod. 17.5.3 (προσεφέρετο τοῖς ὑποτεταγμένοις ὡμῶς καὶ βιαίως). Cf. Val. Max. 9.2, ext. 7 (*cru-delitas*), describing how Ochus killed his mother/sister Atossa (by burying her alive), his uncle and more than a hundred sons and grandchildren. Cf. Curt. Ruf. 10.5.23 (*saevissimo regum*) and Justin 10.3.1 (*regiam caede et strage principum replet, nulla, non sanguinis, non sexus, non aetatis, misericordia permotus*; “he filled the palace with the murder and slaughter of princes, unmoved by any pity for blood, sex, age”). See Diod. 16.43.1–45.6; Justin *Prol.* 10 [Trogu]; Oros. 3.7.8 on the violent suppression of the revolt in Sidon, and Ael. *VH* 2.17 on the cruelty displayed in the Egyptian campaign. See Stevenson 1997, 33, 36, 38.

<sup>184</sup> Almagor 2016, 76: in one version of the story, the narrator tells us, the executioner would not kill Darius in order not to be a “king slayer” (αὐτόχειρ βασιλέως). In another version, Artaxerxes takes Darius' life himself, thus becoming a “king slayer.”

<sup>185</sup> Dio Chrys. *Or.* 36.39–54. Cf. Paus. 5.27.5.

<sup>186</sup> To quote Brenk 1977, 274. Cf. Froidefond 1987, 233. He was not seen as such at some point in antiquity, a view which caused “his more serious philosophical works... to perish, leaving only those which show him rather as a litterateur and antiquarian than as a serious philosopher”: Dillon 1977, 230.

The most important passage is in *On Isis and Osiris*, one of Plutarch's last works.<sup>187</sup> This is a philosophical treatise which deals with an Egyptian myth, attempting to discover the (Greek, i.e. Platonic) philosophical understanding of the divine underneath the barbaric cult and fantastic myth.<sup>188</sup> According to this myth (outlined in 12.355d–19.358e), the good god Osiris establishes order, but is somehow shut by his enemy the evil god Seth-Typhon (41.367d) inside a coffer and thrown into the Nile. Isis, Osiris' sister and wife, finds the body in the chest and conceals it (13.356b–18.357f), but Typhon finds it and tears it asunder (18.358a) into 14 parts (also 42.368a, cf. Diod. 1.21.2). Isis locates the pieces, puts them together, bringing Osiris back to train Horus, their son (19.358b–d, 40.367a). Horus fights Typhon, is victorious (19.358d, 40.367b), and leads his beaten enemy to Isis, who, however, sets him free (19.358d). Plutarch brings forth and discards several interpretive strategies to approach the myth: the atheistic Euhemeristic (22.359e–24.360d), the daimonological (25.360e–33.363b), which identifies these gods with *daimones*,<sup>189</sup> the simplistic allegorical one, or that which suggests identification with other entities (32.363d–40.367c), or celestial bodies (41.367d–44.368f), and the materialistic and monistic philosophical theories (45.369a–d).<sup>190</sup>

Plutarch proposes that the true interpretation is based on metaphysical dualism (45.369ab), visible among the Greeks and barbarians. The pertinent paragraphs are set in a digression on Zoroastrian dualism, which should be quoted in full:<sup>191</sup>

46. The great majority and the wisest of men... believe that there are two gods, rivals as it were, the one the craftsman of good<sup>192</sup> and the other of evil. There are also those who call the better one a god and the other a daimon, as, for example, Zoroaster the sage, who, they record, lived five thousand years before the time of the Trojan War. He called the one Oromazes and the other Areimanius; and he further declared that among all the things perceptible to the senses, Oromazes may best be compared to light, and Areimanius, conversely, to darkness and ignorance, and midway between the two is Mithra: for this reason the Persians give to Mithra the name of "Mediator." Zoroaster has also taught that men should make votive offerings and thank-offerings to Oromazes, and averting and mourning offerings to Areimanius. They pound up in a mortar a certain plant called omomi at the same time invoking Hades and Darkness; then they mix it with the blood of a wolf that has been sacrificed, and carry it out and cast it into a place where the sun never shines. In fact, they believe that some of the plants belong to the good god and others to the evil daimon; so also of the animals they think that dogs, fowls, and hedgehogs, for example, belong to the good god, but that water-rats belong to the evil one; therefore the man who has killed the most of these they hold to be fortunate.

47. However, they also tell many fabulous stories about their gods, such, for example, as the following: Oromazes, born from the purest light, and Areimanius, born from the darkness, are constantly at war with each other; and Oromazes created six gods, the first of Good Thought, the second of Truth, the third of Order, and, of the rest, one of Wisdom, one of Wealth, and one the Artificer of Pleasure in what is Honourable. But Areimanius created rivals, as it were, equal to these in number. Then Oromazes enlarged himself to thrice his former size, and removed himself as far distant from

<sup>187</sup> Jones 1966, 72: "c. 115 AD"; cf. Griffiths 1970, 16–18.

<sup>188</sup> *De Is. et Osir.* 2.351e, 3.352c, 9.354b, 11.355d, 67.377f–378a; Richter 2001, 198–200, 206–208; Petrucci 2016, 227–229. On the work, see Hopfner 1940; Griffiths 1970; Froidefond 1988.

<sup>189</sup> See the exposition in Brenk 1987, 296.

<sup>190</sup> Richter 2001, 202–205; Petrucci 2016, 230–232.

<sup>191</sup> Translation by Babbitt for the Loeb Classical Library Series, slightly amended.

<sup>192</sup> Cf. Agathias 2.24.

the Sun as the Sun is distant from the Earth, and adorned the heavens with stars. One star he set there before all others as a guardian and watchman, the Dog-star. Twenty-four other gods he created and placed in an egg. But those created by Areimanius, who were equal in number to the others, pierced through the egg and made their way inside; hence evils are now combined with good.

But a destined time shall come when it is decreed that Areimanius, engaged in bringing on pestilence and famine, shall by these be utterly annihilated and shall disappear; and then shall the earth become a level plain, and there shall be one manner of life and one form of government for a blessed people who shall all speak one tongue.

Theopompus says that, according to the sages, one god is to overpower, and the other to be overpowered, each in turn for the space of three thousand years, and afterward for another three thousand years they shall fight and war, and the one shall undo the works of the other, and finally Hades shall pass away; then shall the people be happy, and neither shall they need to have food nor shall they cast any shadow. And the god, who has contrived to bring about all these things, shall then have quiet and shall repose for a time, no long time indeed, but for the god as much as would be a moderate time for a man to sleep.<sup>193</sup>

The passages reflect some authentic Zoroastrian precepts as they appear in the Avesta and Pahlavi literature. The difference between good and evil in terms of the variance between light and darkness is not so pronounced in the Avesta, but rather in the Younger Avesta and Pahlavi books (e.g. *Greater Bundahišn* 1.1–5, cf. *Bundahišn* 1.44).<sup>194</sup> In some Pahlavi texts, the god Mithra is construed as a mediator or judge (*mayānjīg, dādwārīh*);<sup>195</sup> he is the one depicted as preserving the pact between the gods (*Zand-i Wahman Yasn* 7.31–2).<sup>196</sup> The division between good and bad animals is known from Zoroastrian sources,<sup>197</sup> and the dog is indeed among the good animals (*Vendidad* 12).<sup>198</sup> The six deities helping the good god are the *Ameša Spentas* (“the Bounteous Immortals”),<sup>199</sup> and in Zoroastrian literature they do parallel the same number of the evil spirits (*Greater Bundahišn* 5.1, cf. *Vendidad* 10.9–10, 19.43).<sup>200</sup> The portrayal of Ohrmaz as adorning heaven with stars is seen in the Avesta (*Yasna* 44.3). The preferred place of the Dog-star (Sirius) is also traceable in Zoroastrian literature (*Yasht* 8, esp. 8.44), where the Avestan

<sup>193</sup> On this text and its possible textual sources, see Hani 1976, 12–22; Griffiths 1970, 75–100. On the passage, see Bidez – Cumont 1938, II: 70–79; on Plutarch’s interpretation: Hani 1964; Philips 1969; Turcan 1975, 14–22.

<sup>194</sup> De Jong 1997, 169–171.

<sup>195</sup> Cf. *Menog-i Khrad*, 2.118; cf. *Yasht*. 10.29; De Jong 1997, 173; cf. Boyce – Grenet 1991, 478–479. The name of the Indo-Iranian deity \**Mitra* appears to indicate “a covenant, an agreement” (close to Skt *mantra*): Boyce 1975, 24–26. His concern seems to have been that contracts are fulfilled, and that order, Vedic *ṛtā-*, Avestan *aša-*, is kept. He struggles against those who breach contracts (*Yasht* 10.2, 82) and his name is invoked during the concluding of agreements (Boyce 1975, 28, note 41) or vows: Xen. *Oec.* 4.24; *Cyr.* 7.5.5; De Jong 1997, 287–288.

<sup>196</sup> Cf. *Zand i Xwardag Abestag* 25, 241. According to Benveniste (1929, 91–93), this role, assigned to Sraoša in *Yasht*. 11.14, was originally associated with Mithra, cf. Zaehner 1955, 101–102.

<sup>197</sup> The evil animals (*xrafstars* [from (*s*)*kerp-*, (*s*)*krep-* “to bite, sting”: Bailey 1970, 25–28, or “*fra-ptar-*,” “things that fly-creep”: Moazami 2005, 302]), were created by the maleficent spirit in order to impair the ordered world, as opposed to beneficial creatures formed by the beneficent spirit. See *Vendidad* 3.22; Boyce 1975, 299, note 26; De Jong 1997, 181–183 and 338–342.

<sup>198</sup> From Hdt. 1.140; De Jong 1997, 182–183.

<sup>199</sup> Boyce 1975, 192–228. See *Yasna* 1.2, 12.1, 39.3; *Bundahišn* 1.53, 3.1, 26.38, 125. See Strabo 11.8.4, 15.3.15 with De Jong 1997, 263–268 at 266.

<sup>200</sup> De Jong 1997, 185–188. Cf. *Mēnōg ī xrad* 43.2–3.

Tištrya is given this role of a guardian and watcher.<sup>201</sup> The eschatological defeat of Areimanius/Ahrmeman is often found<sup>202</sup> and the vision of the disappearance of mountains is also present in Pahlavi literature (*Greater Bundahišn* 34.33). Finally, also Zoroastrian is the eschatological image that men will stop eating (*Greater Bundahišn* 34.1–3).<sup>203</sup>

Plutarch's dualistic scheme dictates the understanding of the Egyptian myth. The most important point is the postulation of a third, intermediate, nature(s) between the opposite principles, exemplified in the figures of Isis and Horus.<sup>204</sup> Plutarch himself refers to Plato<sup>205</sup> and his cosmogonic metaphors in his interpretation of the Egyptian myth.<sup>206</sup> Similarly, Platonic and Plutarchan dualism obviously influenced the understanding of Zoroastrian religion in this work, if not entirely inspired by it.<sup>207</sup> It may even be the case that Greek Platonic philosophical notions as they appeared and were augmented in the pseudoepigraphical work(s) associated with Zoroaster influenced the presentation of these ideas both in their Hellenistic formulation (as evidenced in the details attributed to Theopompus) and in their later developments in the Zoroastrian Pahlavi literature itself, when the ideas were brought back to the east mingled with Greek perceptions.

It would seem that Plutarch's metaphysical ideas directed his attention to Zoroastrian beliefs.<sup>208</sup> Crucial here is Plutarch's metaphysical dualism.<sup>209</sup> Evidently, Plutarch takes Plato's dialogues to express a unity of thought, and he also interprets Plato's imagery in a literal manner,<sup>210</sup> especially with regard to the creation of the world by the demiurge (the divine craftsman) at a moment in time (*De anim. proc.* 1013de).<sup>211</sup> Plutarch presents

<sup>201</sup> Bidez – Cumont 1938, I: 124–125; Boyce 1975, 74–75; 1982: 204–206; De Jong 1997, 193–194, 297–299.

<sup>202</sup> Boyce – Grenet 1991, 394–395.

<sup>203</sup> De Jong 1997, 202.

<sup>204</sup> Petrucci 2016, 234, 238–240.

<sup>205</sup> Plutarch's philosophical affiliation is Platonic, in a broad understanding of the term: Jones 1916; Dillon 1977, 189–191; cf. Froidefond 1987; Donini 2003; however, cf. Dörrie 1971, 36–56; Brenk 1987, 262–273 at 265, noting a deviation or a break with Alexandrian Platonism. On Plutarch's relation to the Academy, see de Lacy 1953–1954; Dillon 1988. See *De E* 387f; *De def. or.* 431a; *De sera* 549e, *QC* 12.741c; *De fac.* 922f and the lost *On the Unity of the Academy since Plato* (Lamprias Catalogue, no. 63). For his eclecticism, cf. *Plut. De aud.* 41e–42a; cf. Ziegler 1951, 938–939; Dillon 1988, 364; Castelnérac 2007, 136; see Opsomer 2004, 137.

<sup>206</sup> *De Is. et Osir.* 53. 372e, 55–56. 373e–374a alluding to *Plat.* 49a, 51a; *Tim.* 49a, 50c–e, 51a; *Rep.* 7.546bc. Cf. Petrucci 2016, 241–242.

<sup>207</sup> Cf. Dillon 1977, 203: “Plutarch... seems to have been stimulated in his interpretation of Plato (as perhaps was Plato himself in making the suggestion) by a study of Persian religion”; cf. 218; Brenk 1987, 281. See, however, Griffiths (1970, 24), who finds Plutarch merely influenced by the topic at hand in this work. On Platonic dualism as derived from Zoroastrian sources, Dodds (1945, 21, 24–25) strongly asserts: “Not proven.”

<sup>208</sup> Cf. Dillon (1977, 191), who is convinced that such Persian influence and knowledge about Persian religion came to Plutarch primarily from his teacher Ammonius.

<sup>209</sup> Dualism is the belief that reality essentially consists of two entities, two kinds of things, independent of each other and irreducible to one another. On Plutarch's dualism: Dillon 1977, 202–208; Froidefond 1987, 215–217; Bianchi 1987; Alt 1993; Chlup 2000; Bos 2001.

<sup>210</sup> Helmer 1937, 66–70; Baltes 1976, 39–45; Dillon 1977, 7, 206–207; Hershbell 1987, 246; Opsomer 2004, 138.

<sup>211</sup> Cornford 1937, 26; Opsomer 2004, 146. Cf. Cherniss 1976, 147. Cf. *Arist. De cael.* 1.10.280a, 3.2.300b; *Phys.* 251b; *Met.* 1071b–1072a.

a cosmic contrast between two principles. One is god, source of rationality and goodness (*De def. or.* 423d),<sup>212</sup> eternal, unchanging, non-composite, called the One (*De E* 392b–e); the other is the Indefinite Dyad, that is, principle of multiplicity (*De def. or.* 428ef),<sup>213</sup> formlessness, disorder, and the absence of rhythm, bound or measure (cf. *De anim. proc.* 1014de, 1015d, 1024c). The dyadic principle is the source of the ineradicable element of disorder and irrationality in the world. While Plato did not explicitly mention it,<sup>214</sup> this principle may belong to the so-called “unwritten doctrines” of Plato.<sup>215</sup> The dyadic principle is conceived of as subordinated to the perfectly good supreme god and single principle. At one place (*De E* 393ab), Plutarch has his teacher Ammonius expound a dualistic system in which god, who is called Apollo (*Apollon* = “not many”), is transcendent, without any direct involvement in the diverse physical world, and another divinity, called Pluto or Hades (or Dionysus, *De E* 388e–389b) is in charge of the sublunary world of multiplicity, change, generation and death, (*De E* 393f–394a, cf. *De fac.* 942f, 943c). This dualism is sometimes explained away<sup>216</sup> or not presented as a dualistic thought at all.<sup>217</sup> Yet its unique character can be seen in Plutarch’s interpretation of Plato’s cosmogony.

The pre-cosmic elements (*De anim. proc.* 1014a–e) comprise the divine craftsman (the demiurge)<sup>218</sup> and an independent, primordial, amorphous, chaotic materiality (cf. Plat. *Tim.* 52d–53c. cf. *Polit.* 273bc). The source of change and motion was within this chaotic matter itself (cf. Plat. *Tim.* 37bc, 77c, 89a), and therefore it is to be perceived as an embodied soul.<sup>219</sup> This soul was thus the cause and principle of irregular and disorderly motion. When order was imposed upon it, the cosmos was created.

The intelligible being limits and gives shape to the chaotic matter and makes it receptive of the forms. The creation of the cosmos involves the creation of the World Soul. Although in the *Phaedrus* (245c–246a), Plato claims that the soul is ungenerated because it is self-moved, it is nevertheless “generated” in the sense that the demiurge introduces

<sup>212</sup> Cf. *Amator.* 764b–d.

<sup>213</sup> Dillon 1977, 199, 204.

<sup>214</sup> Although Plutarch claims (*De anim. proc.* 1014d–1015a) that it is comparable to Plato’s so-called innate desire, primeval nature (*Polit.* 272e, 273bc), the unlimitedness (*Phileb.* 16d, 23c, 24a–25a, 25cd), necessity (*Tim.* 48a, 56c, 68e), pre-cosmic becoming (*Tim.* 52d), and even the maleficent soul (*Leg.* 10.896d–898c); Dillon 1977, 207–208; Opsomer 2004, 148–154.

<sup>215</sup> Cf. Arist. *Met.* 1.6.987a. See Dillon (1977, 1–10), also on its Pythagorean origins.

<sup>216</sup> Brenk 1987, 281: “the thought here seems to be confined to this one passage, and is probably meant to be highly poetic and symbolic.”

<sup>217</sup> It is this subordination of the one principle to the other that led Dillon (2002, 234) to change his mind concerning the portrayal of Plutarch’s dualism, in that the supreme good deity is “not seriously troubled by opposing forces.” The indefinite dyadic principle only appears at a lower level as an irrational world-soul and is ordered by god through his Logos. The only manner Plutarch can be said to be a dualist thinker is that part of this Dyad is not brought to order and is still a disruptive force.

<sup>218</sup> A disembodied intellect? See Chlup 2000, 139–140; Opsomer 2004, 154–155; cf. Brenk 1987, 283. While Plato (*Phileb.* 30cd; *Tim.* 37c) would ostensibly seem to exclude this possibility, see *Tim.* 30b (the demiurge puts mind in the soul, cf. 41d, and soul in the body). See Plut. *De fac.* 943a; *De gen.* 591de (the intellect guides us like a *daemon*; cf. Plat. *Tim.* 90a). Concerning the demiurge: *De anim. proc.* 1016c; *Quaest. Plat.* 2, 1001bc; *De sera* 559d; Dillon 1977, 212–213. See Bos (2001) for the argument that this is an Aristotelian dualism.

<sup>219</sup> On the soul as principle of movement: Plat. *Phaedr.* 245c–246a; Plut. *De anim. proc.* 1015e; Cherniss 1976, 196–197, note d.

reason, order, form and concord to it (cf. *De anim. proc.* 1015f–1016c, 1017ab, 1024a, 1027a). According to Plutarch, these are in fact two stages of the same soul (*De anim. proc.* 1014e, 1016b, *Quaest. Plat.* 2.1001c, 4.1003a), once as pre-cosmic soul and once as the World Soul.<sup>220</sup> In order to create the soul, the demiurge integrates the indivisible and the divisible components into a substance, and at a second stage, mixes the principles of sameness (from the One) and difference (from the Dyad).<sup>221</sup>

The function of the World Soul is seen by some to resemble an efficient cause, like a “second demiurge.”<sup>222</sup> But under another reading, it is a mechanism which is part of creation of the cosmos, setting an orderly movement in matter as part of its imitation of the intelligible forms.<sup>223</sup> In this sense, the soul is prior and “older” than the world (*De anim. proc.* 1016ab and 1013ef citing *Plat. Tim.* 34b–35a and *Leg.* 10.896a5–c8, respectively).<sup>224</sup> Returning to the Egyptian myth, Isis is to be interpreted as the orderly matter (*De Is. et Osir.* 52.372ef), or rather the World Soul embodied in matter. The individual souls are both part of the World Soul and comparable to it in composition,<sup>225</sup> aiming to imitate it (*De virt. mor.* 441f). All souls thus have rational and irrational parts (*De virt. mor.* 452b), moving between order and disorder because of the irrational intermittent disorderly component. As we saw above, Platonic is the tenet that no emotion is devoid of cognitive aspects, and similarly, no motion of the mind is without desire or passion. The two capacities of the soul depend upon its two elements (sameness and difference).<sup>226</sup>

This dualism has a moral dimension. It would seem that for Plato evil arises where the soul is not entirely ordered by the mind.<sup>227</sup> Yet it appears that for Plutarch the pre-cosmic soul or the indefinite Dayd is the source of evil (*De anim. proc.* 1015a–e) inherent within the world (1027a, cf. 1026e).<sup>228</sup> Returning to the Egyptian myth, Typhon-Seth is the disorderly irrational element in the world and in the soul (*De Is. et Osir.* 49.371b). It cannot harm the soul of Osiris, but it can tear apart Osiris’ body, by this disruption (*De Is. et Osir.* 54.373a).<sup>229</sup>

<sup>220</sup> Cf. *Plat. Politic.* 272e–273c; Baltes 2000, 248–250; Opsomer 2004, 143, 149.

<sup>221</sup> Cf. *De anim. proc.* 1012de, 1024d. This is Plutarch’s interpretation of *Plat. Tim.* 35ab. See Opsomer 2004, 141–142, 144–145, 160.

<sup>222</sup> Cf. Dillon 1977, 204; Opsomer 2004, 144. In this scheme, god created in the imperfect entity of the pre-cosmic soul a dim prefiguration of the cosmos (cf. *Tim.* 52ef) in a sort of first creation, before the world is completely permeated by Logos. In the Egyptian myth at *De Is. et Osir.* 54.373c, Plutarch draws attention to the story of an elder Horus, born out of the union of Isis and Osiris already in the darkness of the womb before their own births (cf. 12.355f–356a).

<sup>223</sup> Cf. Mohr 1982.

<sup>224</sup> *Quest. Plat.* 4, 1002e.

<sup>225</sup> Albeit with a stronger “dyadic” element (*De anim. proc.* 1025d): Opsomer 2004, 144.

<sup>226</sup> Opsomer 2007, 380.

<sup>227</sup> Wood (2009, 381); cf. 349–350: “In a strict sense there is no metaphysical or divine evil in Plato, because evil metaphysically conceived reduces to pure negativity or indeterminacy, which as such lacks independent reality... It is only on an ethical level that evil acquires positive reality and there only by the conjunction of the negativity in human nature with the decision to submit to it.”

<sup>228</sup> Cf. Opsomer (2004, 144, 149–150; 2007, 383). It is not in itself evil, but only at the level of becoming, of corporeality. Correspondingly, *De Is. et Osir.* 45.369d: the evil principle is only powerful in the terrestrial portion of the cosmos, below the moon.

<sup>229</sup> For the interpretation of Osiris’ soul as Logos *qua* transcendent, the thoughts of God (cf. *De sera* 550d), and Osiris’ body as Logos *qua* immanent, the forms, see Dillon 1977, 200–201, 206, but cf. Brenk 1987, 298–299.

The specific dualistic reading leads Plutarch to deviate from Zoroastrian tenets.<sup>230</sup> He draws an artificial parallel between the two spirits,<sup>231</sup> and claims that the Persians give offerings to both and engage in rituals to both (apotropaic in the case of Areimanius/Ahremen).<sup>232</sup> His dualism leads to a schematic division between good and bad plants.<sup>233</sup> The number of periods during which each of the gods rules is not attested in Zoroastrian literature, and does not fit the cosmogonic picture of *Greater Bundahišn* 1–7.<sup>234</sup>

It has been said that Plutarch's claim that Ahura Mazda will sleep contradicts the explicit picture in the *Vendidad* (19.20) that he is sleepless.<sup>235</sup> But Plutarch is merely comparing god and man, in an admittedly garbled picture. This may refer to the description that Angra Manyu sleeps for 3,000 years, during the period of creation (*Greater Bundahišn* 1.30–32, 4.1). Plutarch's reading is influenced by Plato, alluding to the situation when rationality is asleep (above);<sup>236</sup> correspondingly, Plutarch claims (*De anim. proc.* 1026ef) that when the reflective power of the soul falls asleep, causing her to forget her proper role, the primeval element takes over and drag her away from good till the better element wakes up and directs it again towards its model. This sleepiness invokes a certain cyclic sequence of order and disorder in the world.<sup>237</sup> It may also refer to the cycle of rebirth (*Amator.* 766b). See the different image, in which the god Cronus is dreaming, "shackled by Zeus with the bonds of sleep" (*De fac.* 941f–942a; cf. *De def. or.* 420a).<sup>238</sup>

Of note in Plutarch's description of Zoroastrian dualism is his assertion of a (physical) middle point between the two deities. Indeed, the insistence on the existence of

<sup>230</sup> Under this particular Platonic reading of Zoroastrian doctrines, Plutarch occasionally injects new ideas into his description of Persian religion. For instance, Plutarch mentions Ahremen through negation, or deprivation, for instance his ignorance, yet to be precise, the Avesta attributes to this deity "evil knowledge" or "late knowledge" (*Vendidad* 11.10, 19.12; *Greater Bundahišn* 1.1–5); De Jong 1997, 171. Plutarch's reference to the "established/ordained time" in which Ahremen will be defeated is in fact a Platonic phrase (*Prot.* 320d, 321c; cf. *Phaed.* 113a; *Tim.* 41e). The reference to shadow may have to do with the souls in the afterlife coming out of the shadow (of the moon: *De fac.* 944b), or something to do with Platonic ideas, which was lost in transmission.

<sup>231</sup> For the Platonic concept of an equal status of the two souls, see Plat. *Leg.* 10.896d–897b. The Platonic symmetry would eventually lead Numenius to postulate two world souls, a good and an evil one (= matter). See Fr. 52, 64–74 Des Places; Dillon 1977, 373–378.

<sup>232</sup> De Jong 1997, 177: "[t]he information he gives on the ritual, however, is in sharp contrast with all that is known of Zoroastrianism in any period: offerings, of whatever nature, to the Evil spirit are strictly forbidden in all varieties of Zoroastrianism." The explanation that these practices come from polemical priestly sources and refer to the rituals of an imaginary sect of "others," the *daevā*-worshippers, is not exactly what Plutarch writes. Note that Plutarch may conflate a depiction of the slaughter of a wolf as offering with the known use of the plant Haoma (Avest. *Haoma*; Mper *Hōm*; Vedic Skt *Soma*), which is probably referred to by ὄμοι. On the Haoma see *Yasna* 9, 10, 11. On libations of Haoma and milk see *Yasht* 5.8, 9, 17, 63, 104.

<sup>233</sup> De Jong 1997, 180: "traces of this idea cannot be found in Zoroastrian texts." But this may also come from pseudoepigraphic "Zoroastrian" literature and the magical uses of plants, cf. Beck 1991, 533.

<sup>234</sup> De Jong 1997, 201: "A genuine correspondence with Theopompus' division of the cosmic history has so far not been found."

<sup>235</sup> De Jong 1997, 204; Vasunia 2007, 245.

<sup>236</sup> Yet, cf. Dillon 1977, 206.

<sup>237</sup> Cf. *Polit.* 269c–e.

<sup>238</sup> Probably from Aristotle: Bos 1989, 2012; cf. Tert. *De anim.* 46.10. This may be an allegory to the embodied existence of the soul (cf. *EE* 2. 1219b19), in which the only way to "awaken" is to engage in theoretical activity.

a third nature between the good and bad entities (*De Is. et Osir.* 48.370f, based on a reading of Plat. *Leg.* 10.896d–e) forces Plutarch to seek a third one.<sup>239</sup> Here, Plutarch's source seems to have relied on texts other than Plato. Postulating the sun in the middle (of the seven planets, μέσον οἶδε τῶν πλανήτων) was also present in the pseudoepigraphic *On Nature*, as related by Proclus (*In Remp.* 2.109.25 Kroll) – and later in Mithraic beliefs<sup>240</sup> – contrary to Plato's position immediately above the moon (*Tim.* 38d).<sup>241</sup> Moreover, Lactantius Placidus (*fl.* c. 350–c. 400 AD), the commentator on Statius' *Thebaid*, claims that "Ostanes relates that the Persians call the sun 'Mithra'" (*Ad Theb.* 1.718), a statement presumably from another such work (or the same one).<sup>242</sup> It would appear, therefore, that some of the details found in the section attributed to Theopompus draw on these works.<sup>243</sup>

Plutarch objects to certain Persian religious practices, like the killing of water-mice<sup>244</sup> by the Magoi (*De Inv. et Od.* 3.537a; cf. *QC* 4.2.670d),<sup>245</sup> or the sacrilege committed by Cambyses (*De Is. et Osir.* 44. 368f)<sup>246</sup> and Ochus (*De Is. et Osir.* 11. 355c, 31. 363c)<sup>247</sup> in killing the Bull Apis. While the former case could be construed as a superstition (δεισιδαιμονία), in the latter incidents, the atrocity involves a termination of a practice which could in its turn be considered another superstition.<sup>248</sup> The Persians are also associated with the destruction of temples (*Themis.* 1.3; *Arist.* 20.4)<sup>249</sup> and with plundering of statues (*Themis.* 31.1).<sup>250</sup>

In his *On Superstition* (166a), Plutarch mentions some gestures which the Greeks learned from the barbarians. Among the acts he mentions are smearing with mud, wallowing in filth, casting oneself down with one's face to the ground and uncouth prostrations (ρίψεις ἐπὶ πρόσωπον... ἀλλοκότους προσκυνήσεις).<sup>251</sup> Presumably, it was the excessiveness of this action that marked it as typical of the barbarians, since *proskynesis*

<sup>239</sup> De Jong 1997, 176; cf. Turcan 1975, 14–22.

<sup>240</sup> Beck 1988, 1–11.

<sup>241</sup> Beck 1991, 530.

<sup>242</sup> Cf. Beck 1991, 557–558.

<sup>243</sup> Furthermore, the 24 gods Plutarch mentions may have something to do with astrological speculations (cf. *Diod.* 2.31.4), perhaps connected with the Zodiac (?). See Benveniste 1929, 104. The number does not reflect any Zoroastrian belief: De Jong 1997, 195.

<sup>244</sup> A tortoise (ἐμός)? Benveniste 1929, 75–76; Teodorsson 1990, 111; De Jong 1997, 183–184). Cf. *Plin. NH* 9.12.35; 9.39.76.

<sup>245</sup> *Hdt.* 1.140 and *Agath.* 2.24 for the ceremony.

<sup>246</sup> *Hdt.* 3.29.

<sup>247</sup> *Ael. VH* 4.8.

<sup>248</sup> For Egyptian superstition in deifying animals, cf. *Diog. Laert.* 1.10–11.

<sup>249</sup> Cf. *Diog. Laert.* 1.9, finding this plausible. Herodotus (1.31.1) claims that the Persians do not have temples, alongside the absence of statues and altars, cf. *Strabo* 15.3.13; Boyce 1982, 221–223; Boyce – Grenet 1991, 235–238. See, however, *Berosus, FGrH* 680 F 11; *Cic. De Leg.* 2.10.26; De Jong 1997, 92–94, 343–352. There is evidence for Persian open-air altars. The two isolated square stone structures in Pasargadae were probably not altars to the gods Ahura Mazda and Anaita: *Olmstead* 1948, 61; cf. *Schmidt* (1970, 11), but rather altars for the worship of fire (*Stronach* 1978, 138–145).

<sup>250</sup> Cf. *Hdt.* 1.183 (golden statue from Babylon); 8.53.2 (Athens); *Cic. Leg.* 2.10.26; *Paus.* 8.46.3; *Diod.* 1.46.4.

<sup>251</sup> *Theophrastus, Char.* 16.5 also notes the kneeling down as a mark of the superstitious ("When he passes one of the smooth stones set up at crossroads he anoints it with oil from his flask, and will not go his ways till he have knelt down and worshipped it." *Edmons Trans.*, Loeb Classical Library series).

was also usual among the Greeks. Originally it denoted an act of devotion to distant gods<sup>252</sup> or in averting the wrath of the goddess Nemesis;<sup>253</sup> Greeks would bring their hand to their mouth and blow a kiss to the sky or at the gods' statue.<sup>254</sup> The different case of the goddess Ge (Earth) involved kneeling and kissing the ground itself;<sup>255</sup> through a noted resemblance to ancient Near Eastern practice of bowing in reverence,<sup>256</sup> the word *proskynesis* was thus used of the barbarian (eastern) prostration.<sup>257</sup> It soon also designated the social gesture of an inferior before his superior among the Persians (cf. Hdt. 1.134)<sup>258</sup> and especially the practice fixed in the Achaemenid court protocol, of honour paid to the Great King.<sup>259</sup> Greeks found prostration before men humiliating and a mark of servility,<sup>260</sup> but mostly an impious gesture, with the connotation of showing reverence to man that should be given to god.<sup>261</sup>

Feelings of humiliation and abhorrence from blasphemy associated with *proskynesis* are noted in the two stories associated with Alexander's alleged attempt to install a new court protocol at Bactra (327 BC), which included prostration before him. One story (Arr. *Anab.* 4.10.5–12.2, Curt. Ruf. 8.5.5–22) is evidently a rather late rhetorical and fictional embellishment of a tradition stemming from the second,<sup>262</sup> in which there is a debate (at a symposium: Arrian) on the issue of introducing *proskynesis* among the Greeks and Macedonians. Callisthenes the court historian speaks vehemently against it; as a result, Alexander drops the thought of introducing this gesture.<sup>263</sup> The second story is found in Plutarch's biography, and ultimately came from Chares of Mitylene, Alexander's chamberlain (Plut. *Alex.* 54.2–3, Arr. *Anab.* 4.12.3–6).<sup>264</sup> In this story, taking place at a symposium, there is some reciprocal play between a gesture towards Alexander (prostration) from Greek and Macedonians attending and the bestowal of a kiss on Alexander's part.<sup>265</sup> Callisthenes is singled out in not performing this gesture; he consequently falls from

<sup>252</sup> The sun: Aristoph. *Plut.* 771, Soph. F 672 Nauck. See Soph. *Electr.* 1374, *Philoc.* 534, 657, 776. Cf. Plat. *Leg.* 10. 887e. Marti (1936: 276–7) on Arr. *Anab.* 4.11.3.

<sup>253</sup> Cf. [Aesch.], *PV* 937, Soph. *Phil.* 776, Plat. *Rep.* 451a, Demosth. 25.37, Chariton 3.8.6. Cf. Plin. *NH* 11.103.251. See Marti (1936: 275). Cf. Bowden (2013: 58: “bowing to necessity”).

<sup>254</sup> Balsdon (1950, 374–376) quoting the late evidence of Apul. *Met.* 4.28; Luc. *Dem. enc.* 49; *De saltat.* 17.

<sup>255</sup> See *Od.* 4.522, 5.463, 13.354; Aristoph. *Eq.* 156; Soph. *OC* 1654–5; *Phil.* 1408. Cf. Aristoph. *Plut.* 771. See Marti 1936, 277–282, also on the Latin *adorare*.

<sup>256</sup> Perhaps after Aesch. *Pers.* 499. On the eastern gesture, see Gruber 1980, 1: 169–171.

<sup>257</sup> See Eur. *Ores.* 1507; *Tro.* 1021; Aristoph. *Av.* 500–1; Xen. *Anab.* 3.2.9; *Cyr.* 2.4.19, 7.5.32; Demosth. 19.338; Arist. *Rhet.* 1361a36.

<sup>258</sup> It appears to be the blowing of a kiss on the part of the dignitary in front of the king in two reliefs on the façade of the staircase to the audience hall in Persepolis: Schmidt 1953, 162–169 at 164, pls. 119–123. Cf. Xen. *Anab.* 1.6.10, 1.8.21.

<sup>259</sup> Hdt. 3.86, 7.14.1, 7.136.1, 8.118.4; Xen. *Cyr.* 4.4.13, 5.3.18, 8.3.14; Demosth. 21.106; Nep. *Con.* 3.3 [*venerari*]; Plut. *Themis.* 27.4–5; *Artax.* 22.8; Ael. *VH* 1.21; Horst 1932, 22; von Sachsen-Meiningen 1960; Frye 1972, 102–103; Gabelmann 1984; Briant 2002a, 223.

<sup>260</sup> Aristoph. *Vesp.* 515–7. Cf. Esther 3:2 and Xen. *Ages.* 1.22, 1.34.

<sup>261</sup> Hdt. 7.136.1; Isoc. *Paneg.* 151; Xen. *Anab.* 3.2.13; Jos. *AJ* 11.6.8.230. But see Brown 1949, 241: “[it] implied servility rather than impiety”) and Bowden 2013, 60.

<sup>262</sup> Bosworth 1995, 77–90; Bowden 2013, 72–76.

<sup>263</sup> In Arrian's version, Leonnatus the Macedonian mocks the Persians for their performance of the *proskynesis* (*Anab.* 4.12.2). Plutarch mentions a similar story in Babylon involving Cassander (*Alex.* 74.2–3).

<sup>264</sup> Some consider it true in its core: Brown 1949, 241; Balsdon 1950, 379.

<sup>265</sup> See Fredricksmeier 2003, 156–157.

royal favour.<sup>266</sup> In the Greek stereotype, Persians worshipped their kings as deities,<sup>267</sup> and thus the request of *proskynesis* before Alexander would have been imagined as associated with his divine aspirations.<sup>268</sup> Since Callisthenes allegedly refused to perform it, he has been made into the champion of Hellenic freedom and culture in the face of barbaric notions and “medism.”<sup>269</sup> Yet, as Bowden (2013: 70–72) suggests, this feature may have been embellished later, since prostration would make no sense in an informal private playful banquet rather than in a formal public context, so the story may be rather part of the tales of inappropriate conduct of men during the symposium (cf. Athen. 10.434d on Callisthenes).<sup>270</sup> Plutarch’s version, like that of Arrian, may be more relevant to Greek attitudes under Roman rule (and to Greek response to Roman Imperial cult) than to the situation under Alexander.<sup>271</sup>

In other places as well (*Themis*. 27.4–7; *Alex*. 74.2; *Art*. 22.8), Plutarch includes Greek resentment of the practice of *proskynesis*, apparently as a gesture involving transgression of boundaries. This can be seen in the literary presentations of this sort of reverence among the Persians. By juxtaposing the gesture of Artaxerxes towards a deity (*Art*. 27.7: τῆ Ἡρᾶ προσκυνῆσαι) and that of Greek delegates towards the king (*Art*. 22.8), Plutarch ostensibly intimates that the Persians worship men as gods. This insinuation appears in another form in the portrayal of Artaxerxes as prostrating himself before the sun (*Art*. 29.12: τὸν Ἥλιον προσκυνῆσαι). We recall that in the Persian language “sun” is signified by the word “Cyrus” (*Art*. 1.3: Κύρον γὰρ καλεῖν Πέρσας τὸν ἥλιον), and that Cyrus the Younger himself receives this honour (*Art*. 11.4).<sup>272</sup> In between these passages, Plutarch inserts the reverence given to the entity called “the king’s *daimon*” (*Art*. 15.7: τὸν βασιλέως δαίμονα προσκυνούντες), which is as much a display of the monarch as it is an idiom indicating a certain deity. Its position between god and man symbolises the boundary between man and god transgressed by the Persian practice.<sup>273</sup>

<sup>266</sup> On the episode, see Bickerman 1963; Hamilton 1969, 150–152; Lane – Fox 1974, 321; Bosworth 1995, 68–77, 87–90; Rogers 2004, 175; Bowden 2013, 69–72.

<sup>267</sup> Almagor 2017b, 39. Cf. Aesch. *Pers*. 157–158; Gow 1928, 134–136. Cf. Curt. Ruf. 8.5.11; Couch 1931.

<sup>268</sup> See Val. Max. 9.5, ext. 1; Robinson 1943, 287; Heckel 1978; Worthington 2003, 309–310; Fredricks-meyer 2003, 274–278. Cf. Tam (1948: 1.79: for political reasons). Cf. Taylor 1927, 28). On Alexander’s divine aspirations, see Arr. *Anab*. 4.9.9, 7.2.3; Curt. Ruf. 8.5.5; Wilcken 1938, 302–305. See the explanation of Balsdon (1950, 374) and Bosworth (1980, 4–5) that this act was merely the assumption of Persian court protocol. Yet surely the connotations did not escape Alexander. This gesture was nevertheless later used in the framework of Hellenistic and Roman ruler cults, with religious connotations.

<sup>269</sup> It is of course ironic that Callisthenes, who did much to enhance Alexander’s image as affiliated to Zeus Ammon (Strabo 17.1.433; Plut. *Alex*. 27.3–4) and included such mythic depictions of the sea retiring (almost prostrating itself) before Alexander (Eust. *ad Il.* 13.29; cf. Polyb. 12.12b.2; Pearson, 1960, 22–49), would oppose the idea of respecting Alexander as a god. Noted by Richards (1934, 170) as “surprising.” See Bowden (2013, 68).

<sup>270</sup> Cf. Xen. *Cyr*. 1.4.27–8, *Ages*. 5.5 (possible inspirations for the story?).

<sup>271</sup> Cf. the reaction to Gaius’ similar attempt to introduce prostration (Philo, *Leg*. 116; Dio Cass. 59.27.1–2, 5–6) in Sen. *Ben*. 2.12.1–2, as noted by Bowden 2013, 76.

<sup>272</sup> Almagor 2016, 77.

<sup>273</sup> Moreover, as noted in Almagor 2010, 36–38, in the context of the symposium (*Art*. 15), Plutarch may also be implying Dionysus, referred to as *daimon* in Euripides’ *Bacchae* (e.g. vv. 219, 256, 272, 298, 378, 481, 498) and himself between the human and divine worlds.

In *On the Decline of Oracles* (*De defectu* 415b), Plutarch lets the character Cleombrotus speak of the assumption of *daimones* as occupying a place between gods and men (τὸ τῶν δαιμόνων γένος ἐν μέσῳ θεῶν καὶ ἀνθρώπων τρόπον). He commends the Magoi following Zoroaster (μάγων τῶν περὶ Ζωροάστρην), who came up with this solution, but also proposes that the idea could have been Thracian, Orphic, Egyptian or Phrygian. By the context, Plutarch cannot refer to the doctrine of the evil *daimon* Areimanius/Ahrmean, and must mean the six bountiful assisting spirits, the *Amešha Spentas* (above). Yet Plutarch can be interpreted as being ironic, in showing the problematic nature of an interim deity.<sup>274</sup> Plutarch's *daimones* can be good and evil (*De Is. et Osir.* 45.369bc, cf. *De def. or.* 419a),<sup>275</sup> corresponding to the division of the soul into rational and irrational parts.<sup>276</sup> These *daimones* are also able to move between the worlds of men and gods.<sup>277</sup> Plutarch's system is not entirely coherent, however, which may be the result of conflicting sources.<sup>278</sup> Again, contrary to his appreciation of the dualistic doctrine, elsewhere Plutarch denounces the belief in the power of an evil *daimon* (*De superst.* 168c) as essentially contradicting divine providence (*De Stoic. repug.* 1051c; cf. *Pelop.* 21.6).

One way to approach this great rupture between respectable religious principles and despicable religious practice would have been to assume a process of decadence and decline of morals, as introduced above. This appears to have been the logic for some of the Greek accounts of Persian religion, embedded in the last section of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* (8.8.3, 7, cf. 27).<sup>279</sup> The notion of a decline in Persian morals ironically applies a chronological framework – divided into good and bad eras – on the Persian religion itself.

When it comes to Persian religion, therefore, Plutarch is ambivalent. He respects Persian (Zoroastrian) religious precepts, although he derides Persian religious practices.<sup>280</sup> This ambivalence ironically fits a dualistic frame of mind, the very stamp of Zoroastrian religion.<sup>281</sup>

<sup>274</sup> Brenk (1987, 278, 291) notes that Cleombrotus is dramatically ridiculed for his gullibility and ignorance. This description is thus much more subtle and complex than in the interpretation of De Jong 1997, 166. Cf. Dillon 1977, 218.

<sup>275</sup> Cf. *De E* 21.394a; De Jong 1997, 166.

<sup>276</sup> On Plutarch's daimonology, see Soury 1942; Dillon 1977, 216–224; Babut 1983; Brenk 1987, 275–294. On the Platonic doctrine of *daimones* populating the sublunary world, as it originated with Xenocrates, see Dörrie 1967, 1524–1525; Dillon 1977, 31–32; Schibli 1993.

<sup>277</sup> Plut. *De def. or.* 416c; cf. Plat. *Symp.* 202e; Schibli 1993, 154–159.

<sup>278</sup> See Dillon 1977, 223: “It does seem as if there is an incoherence here in Plutarch's thought, resulting, perhaps, from a clash of Persian (and popular) influences with more purely Platonic ones.”

<sup>279</sup> A famous incident was construed as a historical watershed, representing the beginning of the loosening of Persian morals: Tissaphernes' perjury to the Greek generals (insinuated at Xen. *Cyr.* 8.8.2). Cf. Dio Chrys. *Or.* 74.14; Polyæn. 7.18.1.

<sup>280</sup> This ambivalence is not related to any development in Plutarch's thought; cf. Brenk 1987, 260–262). See Plutarch's hostility towards other barbarian religious practice in *Adv. Col.* 1127d; *De Pyth. or.* 407c; *QC* 4.4.5; *De superst.* 169c.

<sup>281</sup> See a similar discrepancy between Persian opinions and practice in Diog. Laert. 1.6–9.

## Conclusions

For the Greeks of the Roman period, the Persians were not just another alien group important at only one point in time. As Strabo puts it, the Persians were the most famous of the barbarians because they were the first of the powers in Asia to rule the Greeks (Strabo 15.3.23).<sup>282</sup> They maintained this renown and its symbolic import throughout Greek history. I hope that I have succeeded in showing the significance of Persia and the Persians for Plutarch. In his works, Persia appeared as a highly important political entity, resisted by the Greeks and successfully driven away from their cultural and political sphere. This image fitted the contemporary clash of Romans and Parthians. Yet by comparing Greek history with Roman history in his *Parallel Lives*, Plutarch seems to have deliberately downplayed the Greek achievement against Persia, and to implicitly insinuate (through irony, allusions and allegories) the resemblance between Persia and another foreign power threatening or controlling Greece, namely, Rome.

Persia for Plutarch is thus more than a mere historical political entity; it is a symbol. Firstly, it is an example of *monarchia* and kingship, allegedly opposed to the Greek ideal of freedom. Secondly, the Persians are perceived as embodying the stereotypes of the unrestrained barbarians (especially the Great King) on the one hand and the obedient slavish barbarians on the other. These two traits are conflicting, and Plutarch plays with this dichotomy. In the works of Greek authors from the classical period onward, the two traits were envisaged as existing in Persian history in a story of decadence and decline of morals, and Plutarch seems to be following this picture. Thirdly, Persia is a symbol of duality in several respects. One is the contrast of the two ethnic units ruling the Empire, that is, Persians and Medes. Another is the opposition between good and bad, typical of the Persian Zoroastrian faith, at least as Plutarch knew it. Fourthly, within the Platonic scheme, the Persians (and the Great King) are symbols of the deviant souls, in which no restraint is placed on passions. Consequently, Plutarch seemingly makes the Persians symbolise these very passions. Plutarch is unique among contemporary authors and rhetors in the breadth of his knowledge and in his artistic ingenuity. Yet the images he employs, the use he makes of them and the significance he gives them all bear witness to the concurrent Greek Imperial picture of Persia and the Persians.

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<sup>282</sup> Cf. Vasunia 2007, 238. It is perhaps a paraphrase of Hdt. 1.6 (Kroisos was the first of all the barbarians “of whom we have knowledge” who subdued some of the Hellenes, ὁ Κροῖσος βαρβάρων πρῶτος τῶν ἡμεῖς ἴδμεν τοὺς μὲν κατεστρέγατο Ἑλλήνων).

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