

The Prince and the Pancratiast: Persian-Thessalian Relations in the Late Fifth Century B.C.

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NEAR THE END of the fifth century B.C. the famous Thessalian pancratiast Poulydamas of Skotoussa traveled to the Achaemenid court at the invitation of Darius II. Scholars have noted the visit as an instance of cultural interaction, but Persia's simultaneous involvement in the Peloponnesian War suggests the possibility of diplomatic overtones. A political purpose for Poulydamas' travel would be especially attractive given the subsequent cooperation between Darius' son, Cyrus the Younger, and a cabal of Thessalian guest-friends. These episodes may be linked as successive steps in the restoration of the old *xenia* between Xerxes and Thessalian leaders, dormant since 479. By examining what Persian and Thessalian elites stood to gain from renewing their old partnership, we can shed new light on an under-appreciated dimension of Graeco-Persian political relations.

The pancratiast's visit: Poulydamas, Darius II, and Cyrus

Poulydamas' victory at the Olympic games of 408 made him a living legend in Greece, a strongman comparable to Herakles (Paus. 6.5.1–9).¹ Plato's *Republic* testifies to his fame outside of Thessaly in the first half of the fourth century, citing him as the

¹ For the date see Luigi Moretti, *Olympionikai: i vincitori negli antichi agoni Olimpici* (Rome 1957), no. 348. For Poulydamas' emulation of Herakles, and similar associations for Milo and other Olympic victors see David Lunt, "The Heroic Athlete in Ancient Greece," *Journal of Sport History* 36 (2009) 380–383.

quintessential example of human bodily strength (338C), and by the time of Alexander's conquests, no less an artist than Lysippos sculpted his statue for a monument at Olympia. A fragment of Diodorus mentions him in the same breath as the great Milo of Croton (9.14–15), and Lucian alludes to cult honors at the Olympic site in the second century A.D. (*Deor.conc.* 12).

The surviving portion of the Olympic base relief (second half of the fourth century B.C.) celebrates Poulydamas' court visit as a demonstration of Greek might in the face of the Great King.² It mocks the solemnity of the Achaemenid royal audience: the enthroned Darius seizes his head and gesticulates wildly; the feet of a helpless Persian dangle in mid air; and Poulydamas turns his back to the King while preparing to throw his victim.³ Pausanias explains the scene:

Darius, the bastard son of Artaxerxes, who with the support of the Persian *demos* put down Sogdius, the legitimate son of Artaxerxes, and ascended the throne in his stead, learning when he was king of the exploits of Poulydamas, sent messengers with the promise of gifts and persuaded him to come before his eyes at Susa. There he challenged three of the Persians called Immortals to fight him—one against three—and killed them.⁴

² E. Curtius and F. Adler, *Olympia* III (Berlin 1894–1897) 209–212 and pl. LV.3. For the monument's date and a surviving epigraphic fragment see H. Taeuber, "Ein Inschriftenfragment der Pulydamas-Basis von Olympia," *Nikephoros* 10 (1997) 235–243 [*SEG* XLVIII 548]; H. Taeuber and P. Siwert, *Neue Inschriften von Olympia* (Vienna 2013) 78–79, no. 24.

³ See Hanns Gabelmann, *Antike Audienz- und Tribunalszenen* (Darmstadt 1984) 80–82; Dominique Lenfant, "Isménias et les ambassadeurs de Thèbes à la cour perse," *Klèma* 36 (2011) 344–345.

⁴ Paus. 6.5.7; transl. Jones, modified. For Darius' bastardy as a late Graeco-Roman label, contrasting with the King's emphasis on Achaemenid dynastic continuity, see D. M. Lewis, *Sparta and Persia* (Leiden 1977) 77 n.181; Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander* (Winona Lake 2002) 590. On Pausanias' reference to Immortals see Michael Charles, "Immortals and Apple Bearers: Towards a Better Understanding of Achaemenid Infantry Units," *CQ* 61 (2011) 125.

While skeptical of Poulydamas' Immortal-slaying heroics, scholars have taken the visit itself as fact, accepting that Darius II could have issued an invitation out of genuine interest in his exploits.⁵ Herodotus claims that stories of Milo of Croton impressed Darius I (3.137.5), and other anecdotes corroborate Persian curiosity regarding Greek celebrity athletes.⁶ Margaret Miller cites Poulydamas as evidence that "communication and cultural exchange were by no means limited to traders and their wares," and Pierre Briant suggests that the King patronized the pancratiast, just as he employed Greek artists and musicians, to contribute to the "festival" atmosphere of Achaemenid palace life.⁷

But gifts like those promised to Poulydamas were not only tokens of royal generosity—they also accompanied communication between Persian rulers and foreign ambassadors.⁸ Cultural and political interactions could go hand in hand, and it is useful to view Poulydamas' journey against the background of Graeco-Persian diplomacy, as Darius II funded Sparta against Athens in the waning years of the Peloponnesian War.

Poulydamas probably traveled to Susa sometime after the spring of 407, and Darius' death between fall 405 and spring

⁵ For the combat story as tall-tale with overtones of the Herakles myth see Lenfant, *Klèma* 36 (2011) 345; Lunt, *Journal of Sport History* 36 (2009) 381. For Darius' invitation and Poulydamas' journey as fact see J. Hofstetter, *Die Griechen in Persien: Prosopographie der Griechen im persischen Reich* (Berlin 1978) 154; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander* 294.

⁶ See Lenfant, *Klèma* 36 (2011) 345–346, categorizing Poulydamas among "sortes de monstres exotiques" who fascinated Persian hosts, comparable to Astyanax of Miletos, another Olympic pancratiast who allegedly amazed the satrap Ariobarzanes by devouring a banquet for nine and crushing bronze couch ornaments with his bare hands (Ath. 413A–B).

⁷ Margaret Miller, *Athens and Persia in the Fifth Century B.C.: A Study in Cultural Receptivity* (Cambridge 1997) 89; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander* 293–294.

⁸ Lynette Mitchell, *Greeks Bearing Gifts: The Public Use of Private Relationships in the Greek World* (Cambridge 1997) 111–114; Miller, *Athens and Persia* 127–130.

404 supplies a *terminus ante quem*.⁹ This makes it probable that he traveled through western Anatolia while Cyrus the Younger was its *karanos*, the general responsible for enforcing local order and supporting the Spartan war effort.¹⁰ Cyrus' jurisdiction included authorization of travel on the royal road, as shown when he stopped an Athenian embassy that the satrap Pharnabazos was escorting to court.¹¹ If the pancratiast traveled between spring 407 and spring 405, then Cyrus would have overseen the arrangements. Given his Philhellenic leanings and access to Greek information, it may have been the *karanos* who brought the Thessalian athlete to Darius' attention in the first place.

⁹ Cf. Lenfant, *Klèma* 36 (2011) 345 n.85; half a year seems the shortest feasible time for news of Poulydamas' Olympic victory to reach the King, a royal messenger to travel to Thessaly, and the athlete to complete the journey to Susa. Darius' last appearance in Babylonian documents dates to September 405, and the first reference to Artaxerxes II to April 404; see Matthew Stolper, "Mesopotamia, 482–330 B.C.," *CAH*² VI (1994) 238 n.13, and "Late Achaemenid Babylonian Chronology," *NABU* 1999.1 7–9, no. 6 (<http://sepoa.fr/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/1999-1.pdf>).

¹⁰ Greek embassies occasionally traveled through Phoenicia instead of Anatolia, but the shorter route was much more common (Miller, *Athens and Persia* 116–117). For Cyrus' activities between 407 and spring 405, when he returned to court, see Lewis, *Sparta and Persia* 131–136; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander* 593–600; George Cawkwell, *The Greek Wars: The Failure of Persia* (Oxford 2005) 155–160. On the office of *karanos* (Aramaic *kmy*) see Thierry Petit, "Etude d'une fonction militaire sous la dynastie perse achéménide," *EtCl* 51 (1983) 35–45; Antony Keen, "Persian *Karanoi* and their Relationship to the Satrapal System," in T. W. Hillard et al. (eds.), *Ancient History in a Modern University* I (Grand Rapids 1998) 88–95; Briant 340; Eduard Rung, "Κάρωνος / Kārana in the Military and Administrative System of the Achaemenid Empire," in Eduard Rung and O. Gabelko (eds.), *Iran and the Classical World: Political, Cultural and Economic Contacts of Two Civilizations* (Kazan 2011) 19; John Hyland, "Vishtaspa *kmy*: An Achaemenid Military Official in 4th-century Bactria," *Arta* 2013.002, 1–7 (<http://www.achemenet.com/document/2013.002-Hyland.pdf>).

¹¹ Xen. *Hell.* 1.4.1–7. Note also Cyrus' attention to highway security through vigorous punishment of bandits (Xen. *An.* 1.9.13). For Achaemenid travel authorization see Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander* 364–369.

It is likely that a man of Poulydamas' stature traveled not only on his own behalf, but as a representative of his countrymen. Olympic victors had significant obligations as their poleis' foremost heroes, whose strength and skill showed their compatriots in the best possible light.¹² Many a champion believed, like Thucydides' Alcibiades, that his triumphs made his city seem "even greater than it really is" (6.16.2). For this reason, Greek cities often selected athletes for military command or diplomatic duty, and fourth-century embassies to Persia included victors like the pancratiast Antiokhos of Arkadia (Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.33, 38) and Dionysodoros of Thebes (Arr. *Anab.* 2.15.2–4).¹³ In this context, we might characterize Poulydamas at least as a cultural envoy, if not an official ambassador to Susa.

If Poulydamas visited Persia in a semi-public capacity, what constituents did he represent? His Olympic monument and Pausanias' narrative give his origin as Skotoussa, but also suggest that his fame made him a possession of the entire Thessalian *ethnos* (7.27.6), just as Pindar celebrates an earlier fifth-century victor from tiny Pelinna as the hero of "blessed Thessaly" (*Pyth.* 10.2). By the early fourth century, Skotoussa was allied with the greater poleis of Larissa, Pharsalos, and Krannon (Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.3), and both the pancratiast and his hometown shared links to the cult of Herakles as further common ground with Larissa's famous Aleuad family.¹⁴ It may not

¹² Cf. Nigel Crowther, "Athlete and State: Qualifying for the Olympic Games in Ancient Greece," *Journal of Sport History* 23 (1996) 34–35; on the frequency of athletes' elite origins see H. W. Pleket, "Games, Prizes, and Ideology: Some Aspects of the History of Sport in the Greco-Roman World," *Stadion* 1 (1975) 71–74.

¹³ Cf. Lenfant, *Ktèma* 36 (2011) 343–344.

¹⁴ For Poulydamas and Herakles see Paus. 6.5.1–9 with n.1 above. Herakles' importance at Skotoussa is demonstrated by the fifth-century dedication *SEG* XXV 661, and the city's early fourth-century coinage; see *BMC Thessaly to Aetolia* 49. Pind. *Pyth.* 10.2–3 reports the Aleuads' Heraklid ancestry, and the ode testifies to their patronage of athletes from neighboring communities; see Maria Stamatopoulou, "Thessalian Aristocracy

be a coincidence that these are the very Thessalian communities whose elites—Skopas of Krannon, Menon of Pharsalos, and Aristippos of Larissa—appear as Cyrus' *xenoi* soon thereafter, in the context of his plans for rebellion against Artaxerxes II.¹⁵

The preparations for Poulydamas' journey required outlays of hospitality on both sides of the Aegean. We would expect that prominent Thessalians lodged and fed the Persian royal envoys, displaying their wealth and favorable disposition to the King, while Persian accommodations for the traveling athlete showcased the royal family's generosity.¹⁶ Such exchanges were typical features of guest-friendship, and call to mind the formal relationship that once linked the Aleuads to Xerxes, as well as those between Thessalian elites and Cyrus.¹⁷

and Society in the Age of Epinikian," in S. Hornblower and C. Morgan (eds.), *Pindar's Poetry, Patrons and Festivals* (Oxford 2007) 309–341. It would be natural for Poulydamas to have connections with other Thessalian elites; for example, a family *xenia* might explain the homonymy of the Polydamas who was Pharsalos' leading citizen in 371 (Xen. *Hell.* 6.1.2).

¹⁵ On Aristippos and Menon, allegedly lovers as well as political partners (Pl. *Meno* 70B) see H. D. Westlake, *Thessaly in the Fourth Century B.C.* (London 1935) 55–56; J. S. Morrison and H. T. Wade-Gery, "Meno of Pharsalos, Polycrates, and Ismenias," *CQ* 36 (1942) 57–78; Marta Sordi *La lega tessala fino ad Alessandro Magno* (Rome 1958) 146–149; Truesdell S. Brown, "Menon of Thessaly," *Historia* 35 (1986) 387–404; Slawomir Sprawski, *Jason of Pherae* (Krakow 1999) 37–41; Robin Lane Fox, *The Long March: Xenophon and the Ten Thousand* (New Haven 2004) 16–17. Cyrus' connection with Skopas is undated; Aelian (*VH* 12.1) reports that he sent Cyrus a necklace which the prince tried to pass on to his mistress Aspasia, but on her advice re-gifted to his doting mother Parysatis. Diogenes Laertius (2.5.25) claims that Socrates refused gifts from the same Skopas; see Bruno Helly, *L'état thessalien* (Lyon 1995) 111.

¹⁶ On traditions and perceptions of Thessalian hospitality see Emma Aston, "Friends in High Places: The Stereotype of Dangerous Thessalian Hospitality in the Later Classical Period," *Phoenix* 66 (2012) 247–271.

¹⁷ For Greek *xenia* see Gabriel Herman, *Ritualised Friendship and the Greek City* (Cambridge 1987); Mitchell, *Greeks Bearing Gifts*. Mitchell (131–133) argues for "cultural misunderstandings" in the majority of Persian-Greek *xenia* relationships, due to Persian perceptions of their Greek partners' unequal

Renewing Persian-Thessalian friendship

The sources say little on the origins of Cyrus' Thessalian connections: Xenophon states only that Aristippos "happened to be his *xenos*" (*An.* 1.1.10), and Plato mentions Menon's hereditary *xenia* with the Great King while critiquing his love of wealth (*Meno* 78D). Scholars have explained their relationship by reference to Thessaly's alliance with Xerxes, but the chronological gap between 479 and 401 requires further discussion.¹⁸

There was little reason for the Thessalians to maintain close ties with the Achaemenids in the decades after the great invasion's failure, even if no formal renunciation of *xenia* took place. Herodotus reports Persian fears that Thessalian allies would turn on them when they heard the news of Plataea (9.89.1–3), and Menon I of Pharsalos, the ancestor of Cyrus' friend, lent enthusiastic support to Athens' siege of Persian-held Eion (Dem. 23.199). By mid-century, Greek powers replaced Persia as patrons of contestants for local authority, and Athens exerted a significant political influence on the region, with periodic competition from Sparta.¹⁹ It is possible that some

status, in contrast to mutual assumptions of equal reciprocity between Greek guest-friends.

¹⁸ Mitchell, *Greeks Bearing Gifts* 119–120; Sprawski, *Jason of Pherae* 57; Aston, *Phoenix* 66 (2012) 265; cf. Herman, *Ritualised Friendship* 100–101. For Aleuad Medism see Hdt. 7.6, 7.172, 9.1. It is unclear whether many other Thessalian aristocrats shared the Aleuads' enthusiasm for the Persian cause; see Vojislav Sarakinski, "Notes on the Disarray in Thessaly," *ZAnt* 61 (2011) 73–77.

¹⁹ For Thessaly and Athens see Dem. 13.23, 23.199; Thuc. 1.102.4, 2.22.2–3, 8.92.8; for Spartan influence, Thuc. 1.107.7, 1.111.1, 4.78.1–2. See Westlake, *Thessaly* 31, 37–39; Sprawski, *Jason of Pherae* 25–31; Stamatopoulou, in *Pindar's Poetry* 338–339, 341; Maria Stamatopoulou, "Thessalians Abroad, the Case of Pharsalos," *MHR* 22 (2007) 213, 219–220; Stephen Tracy, "The Thessalians and Athenians from the Persian Wars to the Lamian War: The Literary and Epigraphical Evidence," in A. Tamis et al. (eds.), *Philathenaios: Studies in Honour of Michael J. Osborne* (Athens 2010) 25–27; Aston, *Phoenix* 66 (2012) 262–265.

economic and cultural contacts with Persia continued.²⁰ But the old guest-friendship lacked political value until Thessalian elites and the Persian royal family came to believe in the mutual advantage of a renewed partnership.

This situation came to fruition during the final decade of the fifth century. Aristippos' faction of Thessalian nobles needed assistance against Lykophron of Pherai, who attempted to seize regional hegemony and defeated Larissa and its allies in a great battle in 404.²¹ Athens, the ally of Thessaly's leaders for much of the century, was losing the Peloponnesian War, while Sparta was hostile because of Thessalian interference with its Herakleia Trakhinia colony, and came out in support of Lykophron by 395 if not before.²² The scarcity of Greek allies proved a

²⁰ A treatise by Kritias claims Thessalian imitation of Persian luxury, but attributes this motive to the Aleuad Medizers (Ath. 662F; *FGrHist* 338A F 8); it is unclear whether this reflects genuine exchange later in the century; cf. Aston, *Phoenix* 66 (2012) 255. The Aegean slave trade may have facilitated contact between Thessalian merchants and Persian subjects; cf. David Lewis, "Near Eastern Slaves in Classical Attica and the Slave Trade with Persian Territories," *CQ* 61 (2011) 99 n.32. Cf. Miller, *Athens and Persia*, on Athenian-Achaemenid interactions after the Persian Wars.

²¹ Xen. *Hell.* 2.3.4. Westlake, *Thessaly* 55–56, argues that Aristippos sought Cyrus' aid against internal rivals at Larissa, but most studies view Lykophron as Aristippos' principal opponent and the reason for his pursuit of Persian alliance: see Sordi, *Lega Tessala* 146–147; Brown, *Historia* 35 (1986) 402–403; Sprawski, *Jason of Pherae* 39–41. For detailed discussion of Thessaly's late-fifth-century crises see Westlake 48–64; Sordi 138–149; Brown 402–403; Sprawski 31–48; Simon Hornblower, *The Greek World 479–323 BC*³ (London 2002) 96–98; Lane Fox, *Long March* 16–17; Stamatopoulou, in *Pindar's Poetry* 338–339, and *MHR* 22 (2007) 220–221.

²² Diod. 14.82.5–6. For conflict between Thessalians, their dependents, and the Spartans over Herakleia see Thuc. 3.93.2, 5.51.1–2; Xen. *Hell.* 1.2.18; cf. Westlake, *Thessaly* 38–39; Morrison, *CQ* 36 (1942) 64–65; Sprawski, *Jason of Pherae* 41; Hornblower, *Greek World* 98; Stamatopoulou, *MHR* 22 (2007) 220. Morrison (74–75) argues for early Spartan aid to Lykophron. Sprawski (43) notes the lack of explicit evidence for Spartan-Pheraean cooperation in 394, but the attack on Lykophron by Larissa's Boiotian allies, and Agesilaos' battle with Pherai's Thessalian opponents, support the theory of a formal alliance.

strong incentive for Thesalians to seek renewed accommodation with Persia, as the empire took an active stance in Athens' overthrow. Although the Persians were aligned with Sparta, Aristippos and his friends may have hoped that a friendly Achaemenid regime could hold Sparta's Thessalian ambitions in check.²³

What did Persia stand to gain in return? Cyrus would use his Thessalian guest-friendships to build a private army, and perhaps he thought all along in terms of the coming succession struggle.²⁴ But Darius' interests need not have been limited to his son's schemes. At the outset of Spartan-Persian alliance in 412, a Spartan diplomat complained that an initial treaty draft implied Persian mastery over Thessaly, among other territories once held by the King (Thuc. 8.43.3). Subsequent revisions reassured the Spartans that Darius asserted no claim to direct ownership of Greek lands outside of Asia, but there is every reason to think that he welcomed the chance to reassert influence in Thessaly, through *philia* if not formal alliance.²⁵ His royal ancestors, Darius I and Xerxes, placed great value on demonstrating their might beyond the sea, a powerful conceptual boundary for the civilized world of the Ancient Near

²³ Some scholars have used Aristippos' friendship with Cyrus to cast doubt on Sparta's early alliance with Lykophron, questioning whether Cyrus and the Spartans could have backed opposing powers (Sordi, *Lega Tessala* 147 n.1; Brown, *Historia* 35 [1986] 403 n.52). For the counter-argument see Morrison, *CQ* 36 (1942) 67: "This does, I think, attribute too high a degree of loyalty to Cyrus, who would never have admired Sparta so much that he could pass over, for that reason, the excellent opportunity of furthering his own projects which Aristippus' petition offered." Cyrus' quarrel with Kallikratidas (Xen. *Hell.* 1.6.6–7), and his employment of the Spartan exile Klearkhos (Xen. *An.* 1.1.9, 2.6.2–4; Diod. 14.12.2–9) suggest the prince's capacity for occasional disregard of Spartan interests.

²⁴ Cf. Lewis, *Sparta and Persia* 134–135.

²⁵ For *philia* in Persian-Greek diplomacy see Matthew W. Waters, "Earth, Water, and Friendship with the King: Argos and Persia in the Mid-fifth Century," in Michael Kozuh et al. (eds.), *Extraction and Control: Studies in Honor of Matthew W. Stolper* (Chicago 2014) 331–336.

East.²⁶ Direct exertion of military force was the most impressive way to achieve this goal, but diplomatic friendships and aid to clients were effective, low-cost means of projecting power into distant regions.²⁷ Achaemenid rulers continued to number the Greek ‘Yauna’ among their subjects, and Greek visits to satrapal and royal centers advertised the truth of this claim.²⁸ From Susa’s perspective, Thessalian receptivity to Persian invitations, gifts to a Persian prince, and requests for Persian aid, displayed elements of the ideological deference that the King expected from the world’s peoples near and far (DB col. I §7; DNa §3; DSe §3; XPh §3).²⁹

²⁶ Johannes Haubold, “The Achaemenid Empire and the Sea,” *MHR* 27 (2012) 5–24; Robert Rollinger, “Dareios und Xerxes an den Rändern der Welt und die Inszenierung von Weltherrschaft. Altorientalisches bei Herodot,” in B. Dunsch and K. Ruffing (eds.), *Herodots Quellen – die Quellen Herodots* (Wiesbaden 2014) 95–116; cf. Amelie Kuhrt, ‘Greeks’ and ‘Greece’ in *Mesopotamian and Persian Perspectives* (Oxford 2002) 18–19.

²⁷ Rollinger, in *Herodots Quellen* 109, emphasizes that an ideological claim to world rule could be satisfied without direct control; for the importance of client states in Persia’s Greek relations see Antony G. Keen, “Persian Policy in the Aegean, 412–386 B.C.,” *JAC* 13 (1998) 108.

²⁸ The collective label for Greeks appears in several royal subject lists from the fifth and fourth centuries, with occasional modification; see Kuhrt, ‘Greeks’ and ‘Greece’ 21–22; Margaret Cool Root, “Reading Persepolis in Greek: Gifts of the Yauna,” in C. Tuplin (ed.), *Persian Responses: Political and Cultural Interaction with(in) the Achaemenid Empire* (Swansea 2007) 178–179. Xerxes probably kept up the claim to rule ‘Greeks across the sea’ after 479 (XPh §3; Amelie Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire: A Corpus of Sources from the Achaemenid Period* [London 2007] 305 n.5); and the tomb relief of Artaxerxes II or III includes the same “shield-bearing(?)” Ionians, in addition to Ionians proper, who grace the tomb of Darius I at Naqsh-e Rostam (A?P; Kuhrt *Persian Empire* 483–484; on their controversial epithet see Robert Rollinger, “*Yaunā takabarā* und *maginnāta* tragende ‘Ionier’. Zum Problem der ‘griechischen’ Thronträger-Figuren in Naqsch-e Rostam und Persepolis,” in R. Rollinger and B. Truschnegg (eds.), *Altertum und Mittelmeerraum. Die antike Welt diesseits und jenseits der Levante* [Stuttgart 2006] 365–400).

²⁹ For texts see Kuhrt *Persian Empire* 141–157 (DB), 304–306 (XPh), 491–492 (DSe), 502–505 (DNa and DNb); on the theme of submission through gift-giving and obedience to royal commands see Briant, *From Cyrus to*

As Persia sought to acquire more Greek clients, Thessaly would have carried particular interest because of its historic connection with the Achaemenids. Renewed relations could satisfy the royal custom of rewarding descendants of men who had done good service in the past (DB col. IV §68–69; DNb §2c). Xenophon reports the gratification of Artaxerxes II when Theban ambassadors remembered their ancestors' loyalty to his great-grandfather (*Hell.* 7.1.34), and contact with Thessaly's elites allowed Darius II to demonstrate similar appreciation for the memory of Xerxes' Aleuad supporters.³⁰

Finally, Thessaly's domestic turmoil offered opportunities for pragmatic and ideological exploitation. If Persia's *xenoi* gained the upper hand, the wealth of the region and its aristocrats promised benefits from trade and exchange of luxury gifts like the jewelry that Skopas sent Cyrus.³¹ At the same time, a victory for Thessalian clients over their rivals would advertise Darius' protection of justice and restoration of order—in short, that the King lived up to the moral norms stressed in the major Achaemenid inscriptions (DSe §5; DNb §2a, 2c), underscoring his right to universal hegemony.³²

It is clear that both Persia and Thessaly could profit from renewed relations, but despite the *xenia* of eight decades before, it would take time to rebuild political familiarity.³³ Aristippos'

Alexander 177–178. The stress placed on deference from the King's distant peoples bears comparison with Roman imperial ideology, especially in dealings with peoples beyond Roman control but still included in the empire's claim to world hegemony; see Susan Mattern, *Rome and the Enemy: Imperial Strategy in the Principate* (Berkeley 1999), esp. 177–179.

³⁰ For Pelopidas' mission see Lenfant, *Klèma* 36 (2011) 232–233.

³¹ Sprawski, *Jason of Pherae* 47–48, emphasizes the continuity of Thessalian wealth despite the political troubles of the late fifth and early fourth centuries.

³² Cf. Thomas Harrison, *Writing Ancient Persia* (London 2011) 126, on the potential appeal of Persian ideological norms to Greek audiences.

³³ See Herman, *Ritualised Friendship* 69–70, on the necessity for formal renewal of a long-neglected *xenia*.

exchanges with Cyrus in 402 may be excessive for an initial contact. Xenophon reports that the lord of Larissa visited the Persian prince to request three months' pay for 2000 mercenaries, and Cyrus quadrupled the sum, on the condition that Aristippos did not make a separate peace with his Thessalian enemies, and the soldiers would return to Sardis when needed (*An.* 1.1.10).³⁴ This transaction would be more explicable in the context of an ongoing relationship, but unlike the Peloponnesians who flocked to Cyrus' forces (*An.* 1.1.6, 9; *Hell.* 3.1.1; *Diod.* 14.19.4–7), Aristippos and his friends had not built ties with the prince through shared action against Athens.

Poulydamas' court visit offers a plausible missing link, a contact which could have reopened Persian-Thessalian dialogue and started to reestablish reciprocal trust. Cyrus' and Darius' largesse to Thessaly's most famous citizen set a precedent that must have been known to Aristippos just a few years later, and helps to explain his expectation of the prince's further generosity.

Conclusion

The connections between the Achaemenids, Poulydamas, and the Thessalian elites offer a valuable glimpse into Graeco-Persian relations at the end of the fifth century. They remind us that numerous poleis and individuals sought profit from Persian intervention, and Persian interest in Greek affairs extended beyond Athens and Sparta. Yet in this case, the relationship proved short-lived, because of the disastrous failure of Cyrus' rebellion. After the prince's death, his Thessalian general Menon tried to salvage alternative Persian partnerships, first with Cyrus' subordinate Ariaaios and then with his enemy Tissaphernes, to whom he was suspected of betraying

³⁴ Xenophon reports Cyrus' rate of pay for his own mercenaries as one daric per month (*An.* 1.3.21), and mentions 3000 darics as equivalent to 10 talents (1.7.18). If he paid Aristippos' men at the same rate, Cyrus' grant may be estimated at 4000 soldiers x 6 months = 24,000 darics = 80 talents. By comparison, he presented 10,000 darics (33.3 talents) to Klearkhos (1.1.9).

Klearkhos and the other Cyreian mercenary leaders.³⁵ Ctesias and Xenophon take hostile views of his character, but it is possible to view Menon more sympathetically, as a politician trying to regain Persian favor and extricate Thessaly's cause from the ruins of Cyrus' ambitions. In any case, his efforts saved neither his life nor his allies' fortune, and the remaining Thessalian *xenoi* of Cyrus were stranded without Achaemenid support.³⁶ Their opponents in Pherai and Agesilaos' Sparta denounced the Medizers and trumpeted their own opposition to the Great King. By the 370s, Lykophron's successor, Jason of Pherai, was posturing as a Panhellenist hero and would-be conqueror of Persia.³⁷

Alexander of Pherai destroyed Poulydamas' Skotoussa (Paus. 6.5.2), and over the course of the fourth century, the Olympic hero's connection to the Thessalian supporters of Cyrus faded from memory. It is hardly surprising that the Thessalians, who later refused to credit Poulydamas' defeat at the 404 Olympics (Paus. 7.27.6), tried to forget his association with such an ill-starred diplomatic initiative. Under the aegis of Macedonian imperialism, Larissa and Pharsalos rebranded themselves as proud opponents of Persia, contributing a prominent contingent to the army of Alexander the Great. In this context, Poulydamas' Olympic monument framed his visit to Susa as the triumph of a Greek champion over effeminate barbarians.³⁸ The relief acquires an unintended irony when con-

³⁵ Xen. *An.* 2.5.38–42, 2.6.28–29; Ctes. *FGrHist* F 27. Brown, *Historia* 35 (1986) 396–399, argues that the charges against Menon are slander, derived from Ctesias' flattering presentation of Klearkhos.

³⁶ Cf. Westlake, *Thessaly* 56; Sordi, *Lega Tessala* 149; Sprawski, *Jason of Pherae* 41.

³⁷ Brown, *Historia* 35 (1986) 402–403 n.50, suggests a response to Aristippos' appeals to Cyrus in the anti-barbarian rhetoric of Ps.-Herodes *Peri politeias* 34. For Jason see Xen. *Hell.* 6.1.12 and Isoc. 5.119–120, with Sprawski, *Jason of Pherae* 77–78, 127–130.

³⁸ Tauber, *Nikephoros* 10 (1997) 240–243; Tauber and Siewert, *Neue Inschriften* 78–79.

sidered alongside the original purpose of Poulydamas' journey, the renewal of Thessaly's friendship with the Achaemenid dynasty.³⁹

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