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Posidippus and Achaemenid royal propaganda*

Most scholars now agree that the collection of 112 epigrams from the Milan Papyrus, which was written toward the end of the 3rd century BC and published about a decade ago, is probably the work of Posidippus of Pella. A remarkable feature of the papyrus is the division of text into sequences: At the start of our papyrus, the final letters of a heading “κα” have been interpreted as λιθικά “stones”. Other headings are better preserved: We have οἰωνοσκοπικά “bird omens”, ἀναθηματικά “dedications”, ἀνδριαγτοποιικά “statues”, ἵππικά, “horse racing”, ναυαγικά “shipwrecks”, ἰαματικά “thanksgiving for cures”, τρόποι “characters”.¹ The subtitle of the third sequence, [ἐπιτύμβια] “epitaphs” has been completely restored. The headings testify to Posidippus’ debt to the traditional genres of inscriptional epigrams and to his interest in exploring the literary dimension of the inscribed text. By molding his collection after the form of inscriptional genres, such as dedicatory inscriptions and epitaphs, Posidippus invited readers to negotiate different levels and forms of epigrammatic contextualization.

The sequence of epigrams on stones—Lithika—comes at the head of the collection and is programmatic in many ways. As is often the case with Hellenistic poetry, poetological interpretations of the poems are prominent. Scholars have compared the epigrammatic genre with the stones Posidippus describes, and the fine art of the engravers (Posidippus mentioned several by name) with the subtle art of the epigrammatic poet. Astute observations have been made on the way Posidippus plays with the origins of the genre itself. Epigram, the first Greek literary genre, and one that originated as epi-gramma, “in-scription”, became so refined and sophisticated in the hands of Posidippus that it could be attached to precious rubies and glittering crystals. It was also versatile enough

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Posidippus’ text is quoted after: *New Poems Attributed to Posidippus: An Electronic Text-in-progress*, Revised and periodically updated by Benjamin Acosta-Hughes, Elizabeth Kosmetatou, Martine Cuypers, and Francesca Angiò, version 12.1 Newly revised and updated, August 2011. <http://chs.harvard.edu/wa/pageR?tn=ArticleWrapper&bdc=12&mn=3990> accessed on 5.2.2012.

1 On the papyrus, see Stephens/Obbink 2004.

to be imagined on both minuscule gems and gigantic rocks serving as divine weapons of mass destruction.

The Milan papyrus is a poetic book, with epigrams carefully arranged by the author himself, or by a later compiler.² Scholars have argued that the opening section, *Lithika*, highlights and announces the main motifs of the collection. The *Lithika* section not only cleverly hints at the material origins of the genre itself,³ it announces the sections which are to follow and highlights the leitmotifs of the entire collection: Ptolemaic rule and patronage, royal power and luxury, gifts and exchange, artistic craft, geopoetics.⁴ The *Lithika* also refer to the contexts of the early Greek epigram, such as dedications and grave inscriptions, and performance at symposia. Furthermore, they make references to chariots and horses, omens, and statues, and thus serve as a directory or table of contents of the entire collection.

It has been noted, most prominently by Peter Bing (2005), Ann Kuttner (2005), and Susan Stephens (2004a), that one of the basic themes of the *Lithika* is poetry in the service of the Ptolemies. As Peter Bing remarked, “The stones exemplify, in their geographical distribution and social construction, both the territorial and cultural/artistic aims of the Ptolemies and their poet, Posidippus ... the section on Stones explores and maps out a political landscape reflecting certain aspirations of sovereignty that set the tone for the whole work”.⁵

In this paper, I, too, will investigate the geopoetics of the *Lithika*. My aim is to explore and trace the origins of the specific way Posidippus represents a Ptolemaic political landscape. If there is indeed a higher unity of poetry and geography in the *Lithika*,⁶ and if the places mentioned in the poems are meant to provide a blueprint for the scope of Ptolemaic royal power, where can we seek the origins of this type of royal propaganda?

It has been noted that the vision of the Ptolemaic Empire that stretches from the East to the West, encompassing the entire known world, is not only prominent in Posidippus’ poetry, but is a recurring motif in Alexandrian court poetry. In his *Idyll* 17, Theocritus envisages the scope of Ptolemy Philadelphus’ reign as

² Höschele 2010, 152–156 with an overview of earlier scholarship.

³ Hunter 2004b.

⁴ Stephens 2004a; Bing 2005, 119–120.

⁵ Bing 2005, 119–120. See also Stephens 2004a, 170–171.

⁶ White 1992, 174 defined geopoetics as a “higher unity of poetry and geography”. In his *Gray Lectures on “Virgilian Geopoetics”* (delivered in Cambridge 2001), Alessandro Barchiesi introduced the term into classical studies. For a recent excellent discussion of geopoetics in Callimachus, see Asper 2011.

encompassing “*all the sea and the land and the crashing rivers*”.⁷ In a similar vein, Callimachus presents Ptolemy Philadelphus as the future ruler of “*both continents and the lands which are set in the sea, as far as where the end of the earth is and again whence his swift horses carry the sun*.”⁸

In his commentary on Theocritus 17, Richard Hunter noted that the striking claim to universal rule of Ptolemy Philadelphus emulates the image of Zeus in the *Iliad* (12.241–42) and Apollo in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (22–24). Closer to home—chronologically, genealogically and geographically—he sees it as an echo of the prophecy of the Siwa oracle to Alexander.⁹ Such claims were a commonplace of Hellenistic royal propaganda, and could also be found in Pharaonic Egyptian texts.¹⁰

However, Posidippus does not merely mention places which outline the territorial claims of the Ptolemies; he presents the riches and wonders of the world as moving from their places of origin towards Ptolemaic Egypt. His representation of the centre of the empire pulling its resources towards it, like a gigantic magnet, is more akin to a text which has not been discussed in this context: Herodas’ first Mime. In this poem, Herodas presents a conversation of two female characters, young and old, with the older trying to persuade the younger woman to renounce her lover, who has left for Egypt months ago, and to take a new one. In this poem, Alexandria is presented as so attractive that it irresistibly pulls resources and manpower from everywhere towards it. Alexandria is depicted as a paradise of luxury and a showpiece of conspicuous consumption, a city to satisfy all tastes and urges—intellectual, material, or sexual:

ἀλλ’ ὦ τέκνον, κόσον τιν’ ἤδη χηραίνεις
 χρόνον μόνη τρύχουσα τὴν μίαν κοίτην;
 ἔξ εὖ γὰρ εἰς Αἴγυπτον ἐστάλη Μάνδρις
 δέκ’ εἰσὶ μῆνες, κούδὲ γράμμα σοι πέμπει,
 ἀλλ’ ἐκλέλησται καὶ πέπωκεν ἐκ καινῆς. (25)

κεῖ δ’ ἐστὶν οἶκος τῆς θεοῦ· τὰ γὰρ πάντα,
 ὅσσοι ἔστι κου καὶ γίνετ’, ἔστω ἐν Αἰγύπτωι
 πλοῦτος, παλαίστρη, δύναμις, εὐδία, δόξα,
 θεαί, φιλόσοφοι, χρυσίον, νεηνίσκοι,
 θεῶν ἀδελφῶν τέμενος, ὁ βασιλεὺς χρηστός, (30)

7 Theocritus, *Idyll* 17.91–2, Translation: Hunter 2003. See on this motif Hunter 2003, 167–168 and Bing 2005, 120–121.

8 Callimachus, *Hymn to Delos* 168–170. Translation: Mair, Loeb 1921. See on this motif Bing 2005, 120–121.

9 According to Curtius Rufus 4.7.26, Siwa issued an oracle to Alexander foretelling that he will rule the entire inhabited world.

10 Hunter 2003, 167–168.

Μουσηϊον, οἶνος, ἀγαθὰ πάντ' ὄσ' ἂν χριζιζι,
 γυναῖκες, ὀκόσους οὐ μὰ τὴν Ἄιδεω Κούρην
 ἀστέρας ἐνεγκεῖν οὐραν[ό]ς κεκαύχηται.

Come on, child, how long are you going to put up with the separation,
 Wearing out your solitary bed on your own?
 It's ten months since Mandris went off to Egypt,
 And he doesn't send you even a word,
 But has forgotten all about you and has drunk out of a new cup.
 The Goddess has her own house there. Everything
 You can find anywhere else is there in Egypt –
 Wealth, the wrestling-club, power, the peaceful life, reputation,
 Shows, philosophers, money, young lads,
 The temple of the brother and sister gods, the King is good
 There's the Museum, wine, all the good things he could want,
 Women, so many of them that the sky can't boast it's got as many stars.¹¹

In Herodas' poem, Ptolemy is not represented as merely ruling the entire *oecumene*, he is the centre of the world, a benevolent ruler who has created a metropolis to stimulate and satisfy all tastes and urges. Consumption plays an important role in this passage. The impression conveyed is that of luxury, plentitude, and conspicuous *truphe*. The seemingly disorderly sequence in a list: wealth, wrestling-club, power, peace, reputation, philosophers, show, money, young lads, Museum, wine—all the things one could want – creates an impression of irresistible pull, almost a yearning to drop everything and immediately rush to this fabulous place of plenty. Alexandria gathers and attracts everyone who is anyone—be it a beautiful woman, handsome lad, or a sage philosopher. It offers all kinds of attractions, from good wine to a rare book-roll. It is not simply the seat of the master of the empire, but presents a certain way of life, which enables its citizens to enjoy what the entire world has to offer without ever leaving their doorstep. All citizens have the opportunity to partake in the collective act of consumption. The world becomes a vast buffet, and the Alexandrians demonstrate their mastery over the world by tasting and experiencing all it has to offer.

What connects this passage with Posidippus' *Lithika* is the image of the centre of the empire pulling everything towards it, and nature's riches and wonders responding to the pull. Furthermore, in Posidippus' *Lithika*, the motif of consumption and utilization plays a prominent role. These stones are not gathering dust in a treasure-chest, they are used as jewelry, adorning the breasts and hands of sensuous women and handsome men, they are utilized as perfume-bottles, and carved into pieces of sympotic furniture and equipment. On the one hand, the

¹¹ Herodas, *Mime* 1.21–33. Text and translation: Zanker 2009.

stones are represented as a product of masterful *techne*, carved with astonishing skill, and, on the other hand, their owners are represented as using them with gusto, cherishing their value, since they are sophisticated and cultured people, worthy of such objects, and fully deserving them. Rather than presenting the king as conquering the *oecumene*, Posidippus paints a picture of an assembly of connoisseurs, fully equipped to rule, and of the countries of the world as willing subjects, eager to be valued and appreciated by the Alexandrian elite. Finally, the reader, too, partakes in the collective act of consumption, since (s)he is able to value and appreciate Posidippus' sophisticated poetry, which was also composed in order to be consumed at court. By reading the collection, the reader is invited to partake in the court culture, to catch a glimpse of a lavish symposium, to admire and desire the elegant ladies and cultured and powerful men. To Greek audiences, the collection must have conveyed a sense of empowerment. Not everyone could possess precious jewels, but surely objects such as rock crystal and Persian shells were more widely available and did circulate amongst the population more freely.¹² Finally, the sympotic setting, which features prominently in the *Lithika*, was a cultural space all Greeks could share and partake in.

Whereas the passages from Theocritus 17 and Callimachus' *Hymn to Delos* discussed above convey an image of one ruler subjecting many lands and areas, Herodas' first Mime and Posidippus' *Lithika* paint a picture of the universe willingly subjecting itself to the connoisseurship of the elite, rushing towards them, eager to place itself under their sway. From the readers' perspective, Posidippus and Herodas are far more inclusive than Theocritus and Callimachus, since the latter paint a picture of one man ruling the world, while the former focus on the collective act of consumption. This is not to say that the underlying ideology of *Lithika* is cosmopolitanism: on the contrary, the world exists in order to provide for the Greeks. Possession and utilization of the treasures of the world implies domination. What Herodas and Posidippus accomplish with their poems is an impression that the elite circles of Alexandria can be expanded to include all who feel and behave like Greeks. As in Herodas, so in Posidippus, too, consumption and *truphe* demonstrate cultural and political domination of the centre over the periphery. Where does this motif come from?

Susan Stephens (2004a, 170–173) was among the first to note that geographic movement is one of the main topics of Posidippus' collection. She posited (2004a, 170): "The roll opens with epigrams on gemstones that have been finely carved to

12 In Epigram 16, the virtues of the grey rock crystal are extolled and it is specifically mentioned that it is radiant and transparent, but not expensive, since the rock is not rare. On the circulation of shells as containers for perfume and cosmetics, Kuttner 2005, 140–150.

epigrams on larger, uncarved stones and ostraca to a vast boulder hurled up on the beach. The stones seem to migrate from their original locations on periphery of empire—India, Persia, the Caucasus—to their position as jewel, signet, or ostrakon moving ever closer to Ptolemaic Egypt. The first section concludes with a prayer for the well-being of the Ptolemies, while the second epigram in the *Oionoskopika* features a ship's journey embarking upon "The Egyptian sea".¹³ Figure 1 represents a schematic overview of the types of stones Posidippus mentions, with information about their provenance and movement, engraving or other special characteristic and the name of the engraver (when mentioned). This table should illustrate the importance and prominence of motion as a motif in the *Lithika*. Every stone is either moving itself, travelling by changing hands and settings, or at least it has the ability to move. Finally, some stones represent and thematize motion. I will first discuss the political implications of the motif of movement in the *Lithika*, and will then discuss the origins of this motif, tracing it back to Near Eastern royal ideology, as represented in the Achaemenid inscriptions and visual art.

The initial 16 poems thematize the journey of the stones from exotic, far-away places to the bracelets, necklaces, drinking cups and treasure chests of the Greeks. The first poem is in tatters, yet the word "Hydaspes" is legible, which immediately recalls the outer edge of Alexander's empire and the final point in his quest towards the East. The second poem tells the story of an Indian stone engraved by the famous Kronios, being used at a symposium in some way. The third is probably on a blazing ruby engraved with an image of a cup, presented at a symposium as a gift to a noble lady.

Ann Kuttner (2005), 151 compared poems four, five, six and seven to a *dak-tuliotheke*, the gem-jewelry museum. Poems four and five are placed in a Persian context: Poem four is on a Persian stone which was first set in Darius' ring, then into a bracelet, in order to be given to a woman named Mandane. Poem five is on a Persian gem, lapis lazuli, which was given to a Greek, Nikaea from Cos, in exchange for a kiss. If poem six really centres on a beryllion (the text is fragmentary) it is noteworthy that Pliny stated that this stone is very seldom found outside of India,¹⁴ which would make Nikonoe's pendant a travelling stone, too. Lucky Nikonoe is also the owner of the seventh stone. Movement is a prominent motif of this poem, too, as the stone is depicted as "rolling down Arabian mountains to the sea, swept by the storm-swollen river."¹⁵ Engraved by Kronios, the stone was set in gold and now sparkles on Nikonoe's breast.

¹³ See also Gutzwiller 2005b; Höschele 2010, 156–163.

¹⁴ *Nat. Hist.* 37.76–77.

¹⁵ I 30–31.

[Λιθική]

Stone	Origin of stone	Journey	Setting of the stone	Engraving or special characteristic	Engraver	Setting of the epigram
1 ?	Indian Hydraspes	The place of Alexander's battle against Porus evokes Alexander's victorious journey to the eastern edges of the world.	?	?	?	?
2 amethyst (?)	India (?)		A rhyton made of precious stone (Kosmetatou 2004b; Kuttner 2005) ora stone engraved with an image of a drinking horn (Kanthak forthcoming).	Kronios	sympotic (?) (Kanthak forthcoming)
3 ruby (?)	?	Given as a present to a noble lady / goddess (l 13: νότια).	Not specified	Engraved with an image of a drinking cup (phiale) with flowers with triple tendrils traced in gold.	?	sympotic (Kanthak forthcoming)
4 blue Persian stone	Persia	Previously set in a ring of Darius, then set in gold and given to Mandane to wear as a bracelet.	First a ring worn by a man, then set in gold to adorn a female arm.	Shines like the moon (l 16: ἀντιοἴληνον).	?	? Kuttner 2005: erotic (Kanthak forthcoming: sympotic erotic)
5 lapis lazuli	Persia	Carved as a gift for Demytilis, then given to Coan Nicaea in exchange for a kiss; demonstrative pronoun suggests nearness to the	Gift for a lady.	Sparkles like a star, (l 20: ἀκτερόεντα); flecked with gold pyrites (l 21: χρυσίτην); semi-precious stone (l 21: ἡμίλιθος).	Timanthes	

Stone	Origin of stone	Journey	Setting of the stone	Engraving or special characteristic	Engraver	Setting of the epigram
6	beryllion (?) or "beryl projecting the image of a rainbow" (Gutzwiler 2003, Kuttner 2005)	speaker / reader (l. 21: τὸνδε) Admired by Heros (?); now adorns a female breast as a pendant. Demonstrative pronoun suggests nearness to the speaker / reader (l. 24: τῷδε).	First connected to a certain Heros, now set in a golden necklace, lies on Niconoe's breast.	Carved with an image of Iris.	? ("Kronios" restored by AB)	erotic
7	Arabia	Movement strongly suggested, l. 30–31: "rolling in the storm-swollen river from Arabian mountains to the sea", now in a necklace.	Set in a golden necklace, lies on Niconoe's breast.	Engraved; Like honey in colour (l. 32: τὸν μέλιτι χροίην), sparkles like honey (l. 35: κυκλάμει λευκῶι χρῶτι μέλιχρᾶ φάη)	Kronios	erotic
8	cornelian (τὸ κόρνιον) Sardes in Lydia	Movement first strongly denied (l. l. 36: οὐτ' αὐχρὴν ἐφόρησε); but then attributed to the very picture within it (ll. l. 38–39: Δαρείων φορέων ὁ καλῶς] λίθος ἄρμα δ' ὑπ' αὐτὸν/ γλυφθέν ἐπι στήθεσιν/ μήκεος ἐκτέταται); a chariot suggests movement.	? large-scale cameo (Kosmetatou 2003) / a royal pectoral necklace taken by Ptolemy after Alexander's victory over Darius (Kuttner 2005).	Carved with an image of Darius in a chariot, a span in length, and three spans around; illuminated from below. Brighter than Indian rubies. The stone is not discoloured.	x	?
9	Not specified. (Hdt. 3.41.1, Paus. 8.14.8 claim	Movement of the ring is not specified, but it is the point of the famous story: the	Not specified. Hdt. 3.41.1: emerald set in gold. Pliny NH	Lyre (?)	Not specified. According to Hdt. 3.41. 1 it	?

Stone	Origin of stone	Journey	Setting of the stone	Engraving or special characteristic	Engraver	Setting of the epigram
that Polycrates' ring bore an emerald, whereas Pliny <i>NH</i> 37.2: claims it was a sardonyx.)		ring is tossed into the sea and returns to Polycrates in the belly of a big fish. Direct address of Polycrates (ll 3) might imply some sort of proximity.	37.2: placed in a golden horn in the temple of Concordia at Rome. Polycrates used the ring as a seal (l. ll, 3: κορηγ[ῖτα]).		was engraved by Theodoros, Pliny, 37.4: <i>incta in-libataque</i> (!) Kuttner (2005) remarks that emeralds were almost impossible to carve.	
10 ?	?	"Nabataean ... king of Arabian cavalrymen" mentioned (ll. ll 15–16)	Cylinder (ll 7: κλύινδρον) is a typical Near Eastern form.	? Near Eastern seal cylinders were usually engraved with an image and/or text. (Klengel-Brandt 1997.)	?	?
11 No stone, but mother-of-pearl (ll 19: μαργαρίτε)	Persia	From the shores of the Persian sea (ll 17–19)	Kuttner 2005: perfume vessel	Representation of Aglaia with a wax film on the surface	? Kuttner 2005: erotic	
12 Sea-shell	Persia	From the sea	Perhaps set in gold and emerald? Kuttner 2005: perfume vessel	Some sort of engraving is mentioned (ll 28: γλύμμα)	? Kuttner 2005: erotic	
13 tricky stone ll 29: κίεραδιλή λίθος	Persia	Demonstrative pronoun suggests nearness to the speaker / reader (ll 29: ἦθε)		It looks different when oiled.	? Kuttner 2005: erotic	
14 jasper	?	Motion is the topic of the engraving: Bellerophon has		Stone is like the wind (ll 33 ἠερόεσσα) and	Name not mentioned, but	?

Stone	Origin of stone	Journey	Setting of the stone	Engraving or special characteristic	Engraver	Setting of the epigram
15	dracontias	fallen to Cilicia's Aleian Plain, Pegasus ascends in the air.		ethereal (II 38: αἰθερίω), with an engraving featuring Pegasus without a rider.	skill abundantly praised (II 33–34: εὖ ... / χεῖρά τε καὶ κατὰ νοῦν ἐγλυφ' ὁ χειροτέχνης Lynceus	?
16	grey rock crystal	"Not from a river, but from a bearded serpent's head." (II 39-III1)	Arabia	Minuscule chariot engraved in a stone which, according to Pliny, <i>NH</i> 37.54 was impossible to engrave.		?
17	magnet	Mysian Olympus.	"Torn from the Arabian mountains, washed by the torrent endlessly down to the beach" (III 8–10). "Torn from the roots of Mysian Olympus." (III 14). κικέψαι ... τόνδε λίθον (III 14–15) implies vicinity of the object. The stone itself possesses the agency to move objects towards it or away.	Radiant, but massive and thus not precious, since it is not rare. It attracts and repels .	x x	?

Stone	Origin of stone	Journey	Setting of the stone	Engraving or special characteristic	Engraver	Setting of the epigram
18 ?	?	Motion towards the object implied – it invites nine men to recline on it. δεῦρ' ἐπ' ἔμ', ἐνώεα φῶτεξ, ἀνακλίνθητε (Ill 20).	Bing_2009d : sympotic kline or table, AB: krater	Precise dimensions specified.	x	sympotic
19 – 20	Sea	Poseidon broke off a massive stone from the Ca-pherean main and tossed it towards the cities on the shore. Mentioning Polyphemus, Helike, Eleusis, Geraestus brings to mind the entire Western Mediterranean. At the end, the land of Ptolemy is focalised (νήξων μέτα τὴν Πτολεμαίου/ γάταιν ἀκινήτην ἴσχευε καὶ ἀγίαλοῦς.) Motion strongly implied – as a threat and source of destruction.	Destructive and formidable missile	Huge size (50 feet across) and destructive potential (<i>scarier than the door-bar of Polypmehus' cave</i>)	x	Hymn to Poseidon ending with a prayer.
stone	Origin of stone		Setting of the stone	Engraving or special characteristic	engraver	Setting of the epigram

Figure 1: Λιθικά

Thus ends the sequence of stones as gifts for the ladies. Men take centre stage now, two famous rulers, Darius (in poem eight) and Polycrates of Samos (in poem nine).

The central poem in the collection suitably mentions the most famous ring of the ancient world. According to a well-known story, the tyrant Polycrates was so fortunate that he was advised to part with his most prized possession, in order to avert the vengeance of the gods. He chose his signet ring and tossed it into the sea, only to find it again in the belly of a fish at a feast. Did Posidippus tell the story of the ring's journey? He didn't have to, for the journey is at the core of the legend anyway and the mere mention of the ring implies it.

The motion of the ring from the depths of the sea back to Polycrates can be interpreted as a symbol of his thalassocracy. The Ptolemies, too, commanded a great maritime empire, and it has been suggested that the mention of Polycrates in the *Lithika* was intended to link the two great maritime empires, and their rulers as famous patrons of the arts.¹⁶

Epigram ten is yet another kingly poem. "Nabataean ... king of Arabian cavalrymen" is legible in line 10 (II 15–16), but the context is tantalizingly fragmentary. The shape of the object (κῦλινδρον, II, 7), however, is highly significant. Cylinder was a distinctly Near Eastern form, and Near Eastern cylinder seals were usually engraved with an image and a text.¹⁷ These objects were small and portable, and the Greeks were familiar with them as dedications in sanctuaries or through cultural and economic contact with Eastern nations.

The three central poems in the collection (8, 9, 10) are frustratingly fragmentary. Any attempt at interpretations seems hazardous. Yet, I wonder if the sequence of previous great kings—Darius, the last ruler of Persia, who was defeated and succeeded by Alexander, and Polycrates, the famous Samian tyrant, who was perceived as the most powerful ruler of the seas of his time¹⁸ who had failed so spectacularly after fortune turned its back on him¹⁹—suggests the topic of transition of power. The thalassocracy of Polycrates is symbolized in his ring, one that miraculously returns from the depths of the sea to its master.²⁰

Darius in a chariot as a motif of poem eight could evoke the huge span of the Persian Empire, and the king's control over this vast land. The motif of size is

¹⁶ Fuqua 2008, 10.

¹⁷ Porada 1993; Klengel-Brandt 1997.

¹⁸ Hdt. 3.39; Thuc. 1.13; Str. 14.1.16.

¹⁹ For Herodotus, Polycrates is an exemplary tyrant, famous for his lavish lifestyle and *truphe* and for his sudden and violent death (he was ambushed and crucified by the Persian governor Oroites: Hdt. 3.120–125).

²⁰ The legend is first attested in Herodotus (3.40–43).

prominent in the eighth poem, since the dimensions of the chariot (it is 22 cm long) and the stone itself (its perimeter measures 66 cm) are provided.

Both rulers evoke the power which the Ptolemies now claim and suggest the transition of power and a certain line of succession which ends—or perhaps culminates—in the reign of the Ptolemies.

Perhaps it is significant that both rulers were famous for their court and kingly lifestyle. For the Greeks, the kings of Persia were perceived as the embodiment of *truphe*. They were even credited as the first men in history to become notorious for *truphe* and luxury.²¹ Polycrates, too, was famous both as a patron of the arts and sciences and as a lover of luxury. In fact, Herodotus singles him out as famous for magnificence (*megaloprepreie*).²² Briant argues that Polycrates epitomized the characteristics the Greeks commonly attributed to oriental kings, and credits him with creating a genuine court at Samos, which even boasted a park populated with plants and animals from afar, modeled upon *paradeisoi* in the Persian capitals.²³ Following these similarities between the Persian king and the Greek tyrant, poems eight and nine (and perhaps also ten) highlight the motif of the royal court, which, as I shall argue, plays a prominent role in the ideology of Lithika.

The next two poems, eleven and twelve, depict vessels made of Persian shells. There is a strong emphasis on the provenance of the material in both poems. Poem thirteen probably also focuses on a Persian stone. The stone in poem fourteen, similarly to that in poem eight which features a representation of Darius in a chariot, is not described as moving itself, but depicts movement. It is a jasper stone engraved with an image of Pegasus, who ascends to Olympus. Poem fifteen is on a fabulous stone from a serpent's head whose engraving implies motion (a chariot); sixteen thematizes motion of the stone itself, as it features a massive grey rock crystal, which was "torn from the Arabian mountains, washed by the torrent endlessly down to the beach".²⁴ Poem seventeen is on a magnet with a power to both attract and repel. Here it is the stone itself which is invested with the power to move. This motif is taken up in poem eighteen: here, too, we encounter a massive stone (the dimensions are specified) that was carved into a piece of sympotic furniture. The stone invites the reader to approach it, so, like the magnet, the object has the power to attract.

Finally, poems nineteen and twenty feature a formidable stone which places all poems firmly in the context of Ptolemaic Egypt: It tells of the power of Pos-

²¹ Athenaeus 12.513f.

²² Hdt 3.125.

²³ Briant 2002, 83. On the Persian *paradeisoi*, Briant 2002, 442–444.

²⁴ III 8–10.

eidon to break off a massive rock from the raging sea with his trident and to destroy an entire island with it (yet another rock!), or an entire city, as he did in the case of Helike. Posidippus prays to the god to spare the lands of Ptolemy and keep its shores and lands unshaken. With this prayer, the deictics from all previous poems in the *Lithika* become firmly localized. The prayer to Poseidon at the end of *Lithika* places all stones previously mentioned right before the reader's eyes: in Egypt.

The urge of nature's riches to become a part of the Ptolemaic Empire corresponds to the royal propaganda of universal rule. The lands are represented through their symbols, the stones. They come from far and wide: mentioned are the Indian border, Lydia, Arabia, Persia, Mysia, but also the Greek islands and mainland. From the depths of the sea, evoked in poem eight on Polycrates' ring, to the uppermost ether (mentioned in poem fourteen), all levels of the world are represented as, and united in, belonging to the realm of the Ptolemies. The tiny precious gems, sea-shells, mother-of-pearl are joined by nature's wonders such as magnets, legendary dracontias and massive rock crystals; they travel from far-away mountains and rivers to find their place on the noble breast of a lady, on a drinking cup, or to be carved into a sympotic *kline*, to be used and treasured by the ruling elite in Alexandria.

The ideology of universal rule represented here, just like the empire that Ptolemies claimed, has a history. Before Alexander, Persia was the dominant empire in the Mediterranean and its emperor was the king of kings. Indeed, when Greek writers mention *basileus* in the time before Alexander, this is who they mean—the ruler of Persia. I propose that the ideology of universal rule, as presented in Callimachus, Theocritus, Herodas and Posidippus, can be traced as far back as Achaemenid royal propaganda. Achaemenid royal inscriptions and visual art provide numerous testimonies to the idea that the empire is represented by the materials that come together to form the space of the king, and the skill of the empire's craftsmen in shaping the material according to the king's wishes.

The Persian royal inscriptions are texts inscribed by order of the kings of the Achaemenid dynasty in two scripts and in three different languages: Old Persian, language of the empire's rulers; Elamite, already an ancient language in the time of the Achaemenids, once spoken in southwestern Iran; and Akkadian, the ancient language of Babylonia and Assyria. Old Persian used its own script, whereas Akkadian and Elamite used two versions of the same cuneiform script. A few Achaemenid inscriptions also provide versions in Egyptian. The great majority of these inscriptions were conspicuously displayed at the royal palaces and tombs at Pasargadae, Persepolis, Naqš-i Rostam, Susa, and Babylon. The texts are often prefaced by sentences like “the King declares” and rep-

resent instances of royal propaganda which are strikingly direct and powerful. They did not attempt to narrate historical events,²⁵ but were dedicated to exalting the king as a guarantee of order in the empire. They were often accompanied by reliefs which conveyed the written message visually. The texts usually reiterated their message in three or four languages of the empire, and were published multiple times and on a variety of materials at the same site. A striking example of Achaemenid royal propaganda is Darius' building inscription from Susa, the royal residence in Elam.

Susa, as one of the Achaemenid royal residences since the reign of Darius I (522–486 BC), boasted a magnificent royal palace. Its building inscription tells how Darius I had it constructed using materials and craftsmen from all over his empire. The text is preserved in many fragments (13 in Old Persian, 27 in Babylonian, and 12 in Elamite) of marble, clay, or glazed tiles. The fragments were discovered in the Apadana (audience palace), but also other places on the hill. There are parallel texts with the same or slightly abridged content in three languages of the empire: DSaa (in Babylonian), DSz (in Elamite) and DSf (in Old Persian). All are remarkably similar to the type of royal propaganda we have encountered in Posidippus' *Lithika*. The narrative regarding the building of the palace translated from Old Persian is the following:

7. This palace, which I built in Susa, its materials were brought from far away; downwards, the earth was dug, until I reached the rock in the earth. When it had been dug, and the rubble packed—on one side its depth was 40 cubits, on the other, its depth was 20 cubits, on this rubble, the palace was set.
8. And that the earth was dug downwards and the rubble packed and the bricks moulded, the Babylonian people did it.
9. The cedarwood was brought from a mountain called Lebanon; the Assyrian people brought it as far as Babylon; from Babylon, the Carians and Ionians brought it as far as Susa; the yaka-wood was brought from Gandara and Carmania.
10. The gold which was worked here was brought from Lydia (Sardis) and Bactria; the lapis lazuli and the carnelian which was worked here was brought from Sogdiana; the turquoise which was worked here was brought from Chorasmia.
11. The silver and the ebony were brought from Egypt; the decoration, with which the walls were ornamented, was brought from Ionia; the ivory which was worked here was brought from Nubia, India and Arachosia.
12. The stone columns which were worked here were brought from a village called Abiradu in Elam; the masons who crafted the stone were Ionians and Sardians.
13. The goldsmiths who worked the gold were Medes and Egyptians; the men who worked the wood were Sardians and Egyptians; the men who crafted the bricks were the Babylonians; the men who decorated the wall were Medes and Egyptians.

²⁵ One exception is the trilingual inscription, carved on the cliffs at Bisutun between 520 and 518 BC on the order of Darius I which describes the events preceding his accession to power.

14. King Darius proclaims: At Susa much that was excellent was commanded (to be done), much that was excellent was done. Me may Auramazda protect, and my father Hystaspes and my people.²⁶

DSf 7–14

The entire empire is represented by its products and riches, which come together in order to compose a palace for its living embodiment, Darius. The palace is the kingdom *en miniature*, just like scholars have argued for Posidippus' Lithika. Darius reiterates this point in Old Persian, Babylonian and Elamite, stating again and again that “*With the protection of Auramazda, the materials of the decoration of the palace were brought from far away.*”²⁷

Pierre Briant comments on this and other similar inscriptions, noting that it is the detail “from afar” that is key to the logic of the discourse.²⁸ He argues that these documents “eloquently attest to the royal desire to depict every country and every people of the Empire united in harmonious cooperation organized by and surrounding the king.”²⁹ The phrase “from afar” is also present in the royal titulature: Darius I is called “King in this great earth far and wide”.³⁰

The inscription from Susa has many visual and textual parallels from all over the Persian Empire.³¹ One striking example of image and text working together to convey the same idea is a statue of Darius, found near a monumental gate at Susa.³² The statue represents the king as a Persian, dressed in the Persian robe, but the posture (one foot advancing, the arm folded against the breast) and the stone (metamorphic sandstone from Wadi Hammamat near the Red Sea) are Egyptian. The base of the statue has the Egyptian symbol of the union of Upper and Lower Egypt on the front and the back. On the sides of the base, representations of the countries of the Empire are depicted: Each country is identified by a figure in national costume, and by a name inscribed in a cartouche.

The folds of Darius' dress are inscribed in three cuneiform languages of the empire and in hieroglyphics. This is the cuneiform version of the text (DSab 2):

This is the statue of stone, which Darius the king ordered to be made in Egypt, so that whoever sees it in time to come will know that the Persian man holds Egypt.

²⁶ All translations of Achaemenid royal inscriptions are from Kuhrt 2007.

²⁷ DSaa 5 (Babylonian); DSz 6 (Elamite).

²⁸ Briant 2002, 165–203.

²⁹ Briant 2002, 178.

³⁰ DNa.

³¹ For a list of all parallels, Briant 2002, 172–173.

³² On the statue, Razmjou 2002.

As is frequently the case with Persian royal art, visual representation is interpreted and explained in the inscription. The inscription tells us that the provenance of the stone and the local craftsmanship symbolize the king's dominion over Egypt. In this case, too, it is the origin of the stone and the specific, local *techne* that is placed at the king's disposal. The king demonstrates his sway over Egypt by using the material resources and skills of the region. Having entered and conquered Egypt, Darius commemorates this moment by infusing a symbolic representative of the Egyptian soil with his image, shaping it to the contours of his body. Darius impresses his royal iconography upon local material, and at the same time the king incorporates the material and its country of origin into his realm. The local material assumes the shape of Darius' body, so we can argue that Darius inhabits the local material. This is a gesture similar to the way his royal palace consists of materials from various localities. Individual regions form the place wherein the king dwells. Consumption is again used as an expression of dominance.

I find it particularly interesting that the inscription envisages its reception in very broad terms: Darius addresses a man from any land, from any point in the future, who is imagined as inspecting the form and the material of this extraordinary statue (this is one of the very rare examples of Achaemenid sculpture in the round), seeking an explanation of its meaning. Is it not tempting to presume that, when Alexander the Great captured Susa in mid-November 331BC, he, too, was drawn to the statue and had someone interpret the inscription? This very city was also the setting of the famous mass-marriage ceremony in April 324, when Alexander and his ninety *philo*i took prominent Persian brides. On this occasion, Alexander also distributed gifts to 10,000 soldiers who had taken wives from amongst Asian women. The wedding was a five-day spectacle, the event of the decade, described in many sources and attended by a veritable who's who of the ancient world.³³ It is plausible to assume that the gathered guests would take up the opportunity to see the royal city and admire its lavish decorations. The wedding was probably celebrated in the palace complex itself. The Greeks had a rich and prolific inscriptional culture, and Alexander was deeply interested in Persian royal propaganda and the Persian way of life.³⁴ He had numerous interpreters at his disposal. The monumental building inscription at Susa, as well as the statue of Darius which was probably placed at the gates to the palace, must have made an impression on the Greeks, and I would argue that they

33 Heckel/Yardley 2004, 182–184 provide an overview of sources. Chares provided a detailed description of the festivities (FGrH 125 F 4 = Athenaeus 12.538b-539a) and a catalogue of famous Greek and Barbarian artists who performed at the wedding.

34 Petrovic, forthcoming, with bibliography.

must have enlisted an interpreter to read the inscriptions to them. Among Alexander's generals, and present at Susa, was also Ptolemy, who on this occasion took Artacama, daughter of Artabazus for a wife.³⁵ He was later to found a ruling dynasty in Egypt and was also the author of one of the Histories of Alexander's conquest. The royal complex must have made an impression on this man, who later faced the task of erecting a court for his own needs in Alexandria. Other Greeks gathered in Susa in order to attend the wedding ceremony could have displayed interest in the royal inscriptions as well, and some could have committed them to writing. After all, the Greeks were so fascinated with Persian customs and the King's way of life that every generation had one or several writers of Persian history (*Persika*) since the beginning of the 5th century.³⁶

In the section below, I will address the question of the possible channels that conveyed Achaemenid royal ideology to the Greeks, but for now let it be said that in the case of Alexander and his generals, direct contact with Persian art and an interest in royal inscriptions, easily accessible via a translator, must be taken into account.

Another striking instance of Achaemenid royal propaganda is the building complex at Persepolis. There, the idea of material as a representation of the extent of royal power, the king's sway over the empire, is reiterated on a much grander scale. The city was founded by Darius I in 518 BC. It contained a sequence of ceremonial palaces, a residential quarter, treasury and a chain of fortifications. Darius' successors, Xerxes (486–466 BC) and Artaxerxes I (466–424 BC) each added to the complex. Alexander the Great reached the city early in February 330 and spent several months in the residence, before it was burned and looted. The booty from the city was enormous—according to Greek historians, Persepolis was “the richest city under the sun”.³⁷

While residing in Persepolis, Alexander held games in honor of his victories, entertained friends bountifully and performed sacrifices to the gods.³⁸ He probably also visited the tombs of Achaemenid kings nearby.³⁹ There are six finished

35 Arrian 7.4.6. According to Plutarch, *Eumenes* 1.3, Ptolemy's bride was named Apame.

36 See on this below, p. 299–302.

37 Diodorus Siculus 17.70.1. Diodorus 17.70–72 provides a detailed description of the city and the royal quarters derived from accounts of Alexander's historians.

38 DS 17.72.1.

39 Greek historians single out Alexander's visit and restoration of Cyrus' tomb in Pasargadae, and, following the report on this event, they also provide an abridged version of the inscription on Darius' tomb. (Plutarch, *Alexander* 69; Strabo 15.3.7; Arrian 6.29.9–11). See on this Bosworth 1988, 46–55; Schmitt 1988. Alexander must have been aware of the existence of Achaemenid royal tombs in Persepolis and Naqš-i Rostam nearby and probably saw them. At any rate, Greek

Achaemenid royal tombs: Four have been discovered at Naqš-i Rostam (5 km NW of Persepolis) and two at Persepolis. They all look the same since they are probably all copies of the tomb of Darius the Great: The relief on the upper part of the tomb shows the king sacrificing to the eternal, sacred fire and Auramazda. The king is standing on a platform that is carried by people wearing national dress, who each represent a territory of the Persian Empire. Such depictions of the people of the empire as the throne-bearers of the Great King are frequent in Persian art:⁴⁰ there are 30 known instances, all very similar, executed in high-relief. Peoples of the empire as throne-bearers adorn all royal tombs, several royal residences, Darius' statue at Susa and the stelae of the Suez Canal, dug by Darius. The reliefs are very impressive and executed on a grand scale—on the royal tombs, each throne-bearer is one meter tall. The inscriptions accompanying reliefs on the tomb of Darius I at Naqš-i Rostam and that of Artaxerxes I at Persepolis identify each figure as a representative of its land: “This is the Persian; This is the Mede”, etc. Similarly to the inscription on Darius' statue at Susa, the one on his grave provides instructions for the viewing of the visual representations:

2. I (am) Darius the great king, king of kings, king of countries containing all kinds of men, king on this great earth far and wide, son of Hystaspes, an Achaemenid, a Persian, son of a Persian, an Aryan, having Aryan lineage.
3. Darius the king proclaims: By the favour of Auramazda these are the countries which I seized outside Persia; I ruled over them; they bore me tribute; what was said to them by me, that they did; my law—that held them (firm): Media, Elam, Parthia, Areia, Bactria, Sogdiana, Chorasmia, Drangiana, Arachosia, Sattagydia, Gandara, India, Saca who drink hauma, Saca with pointed hats, Babylonia, Assyria, Arabia, Egypt, Armenia, Capadocia, Sardis, Ionia, Scythians who are across the sea, Thrace, petasos-wearing Ionians, Libya, Nubia, Caria.
4. Darius the king proclaims: Auramazda, when he saw this earth in commotion, thereafter bestowed it upon me, made me king; I am king. By the favour of Auramazda I put it in its proper place; what I said to them, that they did, as was my desire. If now you should think: “How many are the countries which King Darius held?”, look at the sculptures (of those) who bear the throne, then shall you know, then shall it become known to you: the spear of the Persian men has gone forth far; then shall it become known to you: the Persian man has delivered battle far indeed from Persia.

DNa 2–4

Here, too, we have an implied reader from the future, wishing to learn about Darius and the Persian Empire on the basis of the reliefs and texts displayed on the

historians are aware of their existence and describe the tombs and offer translations of the inscriptions in them (in abridged form).

⁴⁰ Briant 2002, 173–175.

tomb. (S)he is instructed to read the relief as a symbol of the Empire, and the act of bearing the throne as subordination. The lands are represented by a human figure in national dress, and they all come together in order to elevate the Persian king and bring him closer to the Eternal fire and Auramazda.

The royal residence in Persepolis also boasted a building inscription at its gates. In the inscription, Darius enumerates all countries which were subject to him and brought tribute as a sign of subordination.⁴¹ The diversity of Persia's imperial realm, represented in the materials and in the participation of imperial subjects in the building of the palace, is stressed in the inscription from the south side of the Persepolis terrace wall:

A great (god is) Auramazda, who is the greatest among all the gods, who created heaven and earth, created mankind, who gave all well-being to mankind who dwell therein, who made Darius king, and bestowed on Darius the king kingship over this wide earth, in which there are many lands: Persia, Media and the other lands of other tongues, of mountains and plains, from this side of the sea to that side of the sea, from this side of the desert to that side of the desert.

Darius the King speaks: With the protection of Auramazda, these (are) the lands, who did this, who gathered here: Persia, Media, the lands of other tongues, of mountains and plains, from this side of the sea to that side of the sea, from this side of the desert to that side of the desert, as I commanded them. All that I did, I did with the protection of Auramazda. May Auramazda, together with all the gods, protect me, me and all I love.⁴²

Darius' palace in Persepolis represents the vast realm of his empire, just like the palace in Susa. And there is more: On the magnificent relief that dominates the façade of the Apadana in Persepolis, 23 subject nations of the Persian king are represented as gift-bearing delegations, each in its own national dress. The "treasure reliefs" depict delegations that bring animals (cattle, horses, camels, lions, a giraffe, an antelope), vessels made of precious metals, clothes, armour, jewellery, and various raw materials (wool, leather etc.).

The Apadana at Persepolis was the largest and most imposing structure in the city. It could accommodate 10,000 guests. The tribute-bearing delegations are represented on its left wing. The right wing shows three superimposed registers of guards, staff-bearers and dignitaries. In the central part of the Apadana

⁴¹ DPe 2 (Old Persian): *King Darius proclaims: By the favour of Auramazda, these (are) the countries of which I took possession together with these Persian people; these feared me (and) brought me tribute: Elam, Media, Babylonia, Arabia, Assyria, Egypt, Armenia, Cappadocia, Lydia (Sardis), Ionians of the mainland and (those) by the sea, and the countries beyond the sea, Sagartia, Parthia, Drangiana, Areia, Bactria, Sogdiana, Chorasmia, Sattagydia, Arachosia, India, Gandara, Scythians (Saca), Maka.*

⁴² DPg (Babylonian).

façade, the enthroned king is represented as greeting the dignitaries and the tribute-bearing delegations. A rectangular area in the centre was covered with inscriptions of Xerxes in the three languages of the empire. The inscriptions stress the Persian king's claim to universal rule.⁴³

Specialists in Persian history have argued that this relief is a representation of a procession which really did take place annually and that the delegations symbolize their subordinate position by bringing products of their native land.⁴⁴ It has been suggested that the festival was organized as a celebration of the New Year in March. Significantly, numerous Greek writers from Herodotus onwards offer testimonies about the processions and sacrifices organized at Persepolis, and about the importance of gift-giving as a sign of subordination to the Persian King, whether he was residing in one of the capital cities or was passing through a specific region, with the whole court on the move.⁴⁵ Whether the occasion depicted was one particular festival, or simply a ritual which repeated itself whenever the King passed through his land or received delegations, symbolic gift-giving had a prominent role in Persian court ceremonial and was universally seen (also by the Greeks!) as a gesture of subordination.⁴⁶ It is significant for my argument to stress that the Greeks were well-acquainted with the importance and with the symbolic potential of gift-giving in the Persian Empire since the 5th century BC. Not only do numerous Greek writers describe the ritual, but it is also important to mention that Alexander the Great actually re-enacted this ceremony in Babylon in 324 BC. Diodorus provides an important account of this occasion, demonstrating that Alexander and those around him knew full well the meaning and symbolic potential of gift-giving as a sign of subordination.

From practically all the inhabited world came envoys on various missions, some congratulating Alexander on his victories, some bringing him crowns, others concluding treaties of friendship and alliance, many bringing handsome presents, and some prepared to defend themselves against accusations. Apart from the tribes and cities as well as the local rulers of Asia, many of their coun-

43 XPb.

44 Fundamental on the reliefs: Walser 1966, who provides a detailed discussion and parallels for tribute-bearing representations in other cultures of the ancient Orient. See also Briant 2002, 174–189 (with bibliography).

45 On gifts in Persian empire, Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1989. Briant 2002, 184–195 offers an overview and discussion of Greek sources.

46 Briant 2002, 194 suggest that, instead of trying to pinpoint a specific New Year celebration as a model for the friezes, we should rather see an idealized depiction of a festival exalting the imperial power.

terparts in Europe and Libya put in an appearance; from Libya, Carthaginians and Libyphoenicians and all those who inhabit the coast as far as the Pillars of Heracles; from Europe, the Greek cities and the Macedonians also sent embassies, as well as the Illyrians and most of those who dwell about the Adriatic Sea, the Thracian peoples and even those of their neighbours the Gauls, whose people become known then first in the Greek world.⁴⁷

Arrian provides an interpretation of the event:

It was then more than ever that both in his own estimation and in that of his entourage Alexander appeared to be master of every land and sea.⁴⁸

A display of power such as this may have influenced the Athenian festival in which the representatives of the cities united as the Delian league presented their revenues in a procession.⁴⁹ After Alexander, such processions became popular and are attested all over the Hellenistic world. The most direct influence is evident in the case of the grand procession of Ptolemy II, where the link between the territorial claims and tributes was clearly established.⁵⁰ According to Kallixenos' list of the participants in this procession, it included birds and animals from all over the world, tame and wild, examples of flowers and trees from everywhere, tribute-bearers from Ethiopia carrying vast quantities of tusks, ebony, gold, and silver; vast quantities of spices from all over the world,⁵¹ and even carts with scenes depicting "barbarian countries, and women from India and elsewhere sat on them dressed like war-captives"⁵². It is evident that Ptolemy II was well aware of the symbolic potential of royal festivals and processions, and had put this awareness to good use. Finally, through Hellenistic influence, this Persian custom influenced the Roman triumph, too.⁵³

Bringing the symbolic products of a region to the centre of the empire, in order to be given to the king, is a gesture which highlights the fact that all the empire belongs to the King, that he is the uniting factor of all its regions, far

47 Diodorus 17.113.1–2 (Translation: C. Bradford Welles, Loeb). See also Justin 12.13.1–2; Arrian 7.15. 4–6; 19.1–2; Cleitarchus FGrH 137 F 31.

48 Anabasis 7.15.5.

49 Briant 2002, 199.

50 Kallixenos of Rhodes (FGrH 627 F 2) described the procession, relying in part on official records; Athenaeus 5.196–203 offers lengthy excerpts. Rice 1983 discusses the political meanings of the processional imagery and Dunand 1981, 24–25 provides a link with Achaemenid festivals.

51 Athenaeus 5.200e–201c.

52 Athenaeus 5.201a.

53 Köhler 1996.

and wide. The image of a procession on the walls of Apadana tells, in the language of the visual arts, the same story that the building inscriptions from Susa and Persepolis advertise to its readers: the empire comes together at its centre, and the king embodies it. The king's body, dress, food, drink, way of life, houses and palace-complex all represent the empire. Even the food he ate and his everyday pursuits had symbolic potential—one that was clear to the Greeks, too. For instance, the lavish table of the king was, in fact, also his kingdom on display:

They used to set on the king's table all the delicacies produced by the country over which the king ruled, the choice first-fruits of each. For Xerxes did not think that the princes should use any foreign food or drink, this is why a custom forbidding such use arose later.⁵⁴

The king used to relax in the royal paradises, hunting preserves populated by animals from all over his empire, and featuring plants from everywhere.⁵⁵ Even his sexual life was loaded with symbolic potential, since the harem of the Great King consisted of the most beautiful girls from the various regions of his empire!⁵⁶

The king is the uniting factor of the multi-national Persian Empire, and, since he is a true king, chosen by and supported by Auramazda, the lands subordinate themselves willingly. The lands, in the form of the material and craft employed to make his palaces; the symbolic gifts of food and drink; the plants and animals in his garden, and beautiful women and men; all are consumed, used by the king, or stored in his treasuries, united in his body and palace. What was previously disparate, separate and regional becomes a union in King's body and palace-complex. This type of propaganda, strikingly similar to Posidippus' *Lithika* or Herodas' first *Mime*, was understood well by the Greeks. Xenophon, who provides an image of an ideal ruler in the person of Cyrus, wrote:

People were so devoted to him, that those of every nation thought they did themselves injury if they did not send to Cyrus the most valuable productions of their own country, whether the fruits of the earth, or animals bred there, or manufacturers of their own arts, and every city did the same.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Dinon FGrH 690 F 12a = Athenaeus 14.652b – c. On the Persian royal table, Briant 2002, 200 – 201 (with bibliography)

⁵⁵ Briant 2002, 201–203, with important remarks on the way Greeks from Polycrates onwards adopted elements of the Persian royal lifestyle.

⁵⁶ Briant 2002, 203.

⁵⁷ *Cyropaedia* 8.6.23.

Here, too, we have the motif of a union of products and craftsmanship as representatives of each region sent to the king to enjoy.

Dinon even offers a sophisticated interpretation of the items stored in the King's treasury: "*The Persian king had water fetched from the Nile and the Danube, which they laid up in their treasuries as a sort of testimony of the greatness of their power and universal empire.*"⁵⁸

The final question that needs to be tackled is how Posidippus (and other Hellenistic writers) found out about Persian royal propaganda.

In the Ptolemaic kingdom, the eye-witness account of Ptolemy, who followed Alexander and wrote a history of his conquests, must have been of significant importance. Having seen the Persian royal capitals and tombs, having experienced the court ritual first-hand, Ptolemy must have adopted some models of behaviour and representation of majesty. After all, it is evident that he knew full well about the significance of the king's body, having snatched the corpse of Alexander in order to bury it in Alexandria. The famous Museum could also be seen as an attempt to encompass the entire Greek world through symbolic representatives: its literature. The Museum also gathered living scholars and scientists from all over the Greek world in an intellectual *paradeisos* of sorts. The political and propagandistic implications of this institution cannot be overlooked. Such measures could not have been lost on the poets living at the court. Equally, since Greeks in Asia were not only the subjects of the Persian king, but had collaborated in the major building projects, sending material and craftsmen to the Persian royal capitals, they, too must have been aware of Persian royal propaganda.

Another important source of Achaemenid royal propaganda were the Persian histories written in Greek. Starting with Dionysius of Miletus in the early fifth century BC,⁵⁹ each generation of Greeks had their own *Persika*, books dedicated to Persian history and the royal way of life.⁶⁰ Other known writers of *Persika* are Charon of Lampascus (second half of 5th century BC)⁶¹; Hellanicus of Lesbos (480–407 BC)⁶²; Ctesias of Cnidus (born ca. 441 BC)⁶³; Dinon (fl. approximately

58 Dinon FGrH 690 F 23b = Plutarch, *Alexander* 36.4.

59 Schmitt 1995; Lenfant 2007, 201.

60 On the genre, Drews 1973; Lenfant 2007; Llewellyn-Jones/Robson 2010, 45–55.

61 Schmitt 1991; Lenfant 2007, 201.

62 Drews 1973, 22–24; Wiesehöfer 2003a; Lenfant 2007, 201–2.

63 By far the most influential Greek historian of Persia, Ctesias was a doctor at court and offers numerous and often salacious details about the royal way of life. Apart from *Persika*, Ctesias also wrote a book "*On the tributes in Asia*". Quotes from this work in Athenaeus (2.67a and 10.442b) are lists of food products conveyed to the court from various places of the empire with ethno-

360–330 BC)⁶⁴; Heracleides of Cyme (mid-fourth century BC)⁶⁵; and in the Hellenistic period writers whom we know by name and title of work only: Diogenes, Diocles, Baton of Sinope, and Criton of Pieria.⁶⁶ To this list should be added the *Histories* of Herodotus, since books 1–5.27 offer a history of Persian expansion, and Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*. This book is admittedly a largely fictionalized biography of Cyrus the Great, but it does contain valuable information about life at court and the Persian Empire in general. Theopompus (late 4th century BC) wrote an epitome of Herodotus' *Histories* and used Ctesias as his source as well.⁶⁷ Ephorus (late 4th century BC) wrote a *Universal History* with books 8–9 dedicated to the history of Media, Lydia and Persia.⁶⁸

Of these authors, Ctesias claims to have used Persian official documents (he mentions “royal parchments” or “royal leather record books”)⁶⁹. Heracleides of Cumae⁷⁰ offers a description of the ceremony of the king's dinner which is universally accepted as credible, and, according to Lenfant 2007, 207 is “factual,

graphical details of regions mentioned. On Ctesias, Schmitt 1993, Lenfant 2007, 202–205, Llewellyn-Jones/Robson 2010, 1–87; Stronk 2010, 2–59.

64 Held in high esteem by Cornelius Nepos and considered more reliable than Ctesias by Plutarch, Dinon had a special interest in court hierarchy and royal majesty. On Dinon, Felix 1995, Lenfant 2007, 206.

65 Based on transmitted fragments, his *Persika* in five books offered the most exhaustive information about royal life and courtly ceremonial. Lenfant 2007, 207 credits him with “long and highly precise descriptions of the palace practices, especially the care of the king, his staff (concubines, guards, cooks, bedmakers, etc.) and court etiquette. (...) F 2, which described the king's dinner—its organization, the hierarchy among his guests, and the graded distribution of the dishes to them,—has especially interested modern historians as a valuable document on court institutions.” See also Lewis 1997; Wiesehöfer 2003b; Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1993.

66 FGrH 692, 693, and app. to 693.

67 Drews 1973, 121.

68 Drews 1973, 121–122.

69 Ctesias claimed that one of his main sources of information were the royal archives, which he refers to as “royal parchments” βασιλικά ἀναγραφαί (Diodorus 2.22.5) or “royal leather record books” (βασιλικά διφθέρα, Diodorus 2.32.4). It appears that Ctesias did not consult these records himself, for the facts in question are said to be “given in the royal records according to what the barbarians say” (ἐν ταῖς βασιλικαῖς ἀναγραφαῖς ιστορεῖσθαι φασιν οἱ βάρβαροι, Diodorus, 2.22.5). Scholars are still divided on the historicity of these claims. Drews 1973, 111 provides an overview of scholars who thought that Ctesias was credible on this matter, but he himself is sceptical. Recently, both Llewellyn-Jones/Robson 2010, 58–65 and Stronk 2004–5, 101–122 and 2010, 15–30 (with bibliographies and discussion of previous scholarship) deem Ctesias' claims credible. They both conclude that Ctesias drew on a variety of written and oral sources that came from inside Persia.

70 FGrH 689 F 2 = Athenaeus 4.145b-146a.

precise, and reasoned, (and) tallied with Near Eastern documents such as the Persepolis tablets ... and suggests that Heracleides was well informed.”⁷¹

The very existence of a genre such as *Persika* testifies to the lively interest of Greeks in the Persians’ history and way of life. Based on the transmitted fragments of *Persika*, one gains the impression that large portions of these books were dedicated to the depiction of royal lifestyle and court intrigues. Some writers of Persian histories claim access to the royal documents, some quote Persian inscriptions. Already Herodotus features several Persian inscriptions: the Bosphorus-Inscriptions of Darius I (4.87.1), an equestrian Statue of Darius I (3.88.3), and the Tearos-Stelae (4.91.1–2). Historians vary in their assessment of their historicity,⁷² but, genuine or not, Herodotus’ Persian (or “Persian”) inscriptions testify to the interest of Greek audiences in reading Persian inscriptions. If anything, Herodotus raised awareness of inscriptions as a possible source of information about the Persian way of life. It is thus not surprising to see that all historians of Alexander portray him as a careful reader of inscriptions.⁷³

Especially interesting is the episode related by Polyaeus: Alexander found the list of foodstuffs for the Persian king’s breakfast and dinner inscribed on a bronze pillar in the royal palace. Polyaeus provides the full list,⁷⁴ which, ac-

71 See also Lewis 1997.

72 Bibliography on Herodotus’ use of Persian material is vast. Rollinger 2003 provides an overview.

73 On Alexander and the tomb of Cyrus at Pasargadae: Plutarch, *Alexander* 69.2–3 who features Alexander reading the inscription and ordering it to be repeated in Greek letters; Aristobulos FGrH 139 F 51b = Strabo 15.3.8 has Alexander visit the tomb and offers a transcript of the inscription; Onesicritus FGrH 134 F 34 = Strabo 15. 3. 7 adds the (drastically abbreviated!) grave inscription of Darius to the episode; Aristos of Salamis (FGrH 143 F 1 = Strabo 15.3.8) adds that there was one Greek and one Persian inscription on Cyrus’ tomb.

74 Strat. 4.3.31–2. “Of fine wheat flour four hundred artabae (a Median artaba is an Attic bushel). Of second flour three hundred artabae, and of third flour the same: in the whole one thousand artabae of wheat flour for supper. Of the finest barley flour two hundred artabae, of the second four hundred, and four hundred of the third: in all one thousand artabae of barley flour. Of oatmeal two hundred artabae. Of paste mixed for pastry of different kinds ten artabae. Of cresses chopped small, and sifted, and formed into a kind of ptisan, ten artabae. Of mustard-seed the third of an artabae. Male sheep four hundred. Oxen a hundred. Horses thirty. Fat geese four hundred. Three hundred turtles. Small birds of different kinds six hundred. Lambs three hundred. Goslings a hundred. Thirty head of deer. Of new milk ten marises (a maris contains ten attic choas). Of milk whey sweetened ten marises. Of garlick a talent’s worth. Of strong onions half a talent’s worth. Of knot grass an artaba. Of the juice of benzoin two minae. Of cumin an artaba. Of benzoin a talent worth. Of rich cider the fourth of an artaba. Of millet seed three talents worth. Of anise flowers three minae. Of coriander seed the third of an artaba. Of melon seed two capises. Of parsnips ten artabae. Of sweet wine five marises. Of salted gongylis five marises. Of pickled capers five marises. Of salt ten artabae. Of Ethiopian [Aethiopian] cumin six capises (a capise is an attic chaenix). Of

cording to the current *communis opinio*, reflects Persian practices and is based on a genuine Persian document.⁷⁵

In the *Alexander Romance*, the king is also portrayed as inspecting and engaging with all sorts of barbarian documents.⁷⁶

I posit that Posidippus, as the first poet attested as ἐπιγραμματοποιός,⁷⁷ a professional who composed inscribed epigrams, and as a court poet, may have been interested in literature about the Persian court. He could even have consulted the Greek translations of the Persian royal inscriptions.

Even though neither the Ptolemies nor the Seleucids presented themselves as direct heirs of the Achaemenids—quite the contrary!—they were kings and had adopted the propaganda and the modes of representation of kingship from the Achaemenids. Excellent studies have been dedicated to the way Hellenistic rulers adopted the royal propaganda of Pharaonic Egypt,⁷⁸ but it is worth reflecting on the fact that Egypt was part of the Persian Empire when Alexander conquered it. This paper does not intend to shift the focus away from the study of Egyptian influence, but offers an additional perspective on the sources of royal propaganda in the Hellenistic period. The King of Persia had been, in the eyes of the Greeks, the king of kings for generations. There must have been some Achae-

dried anise thirty minae. Of parsley feed four capises. Oil of Sisamin ten marises. Cream five marises. Oil of cinnamon five marises. Oil of acanthus five marises. Oil of sweet almonds three marises. Of dried sweet almonds three artabae. Of wine five hundred marises. (And if he supped at Babylon or Susa, one half was palm wine, and the other half wine expressed from grapes). Two hundred load of dry wood, and one hundred load of green. Of fluid honey a hundred square palathae, containing the weight of about ten minae. When he was in Media, there were added—of bastard saffron feed three artabae: of saffron two minae. This was the appointment for dinner and supper. He also expended in largesses five hundred artabae of fine wheat flour. Of fine barely flour a thousand artabae: and of other kinds of flour a thousand artabae. Of rice five hundred artabae. Of corn five hundred marises. Of corn for the horses twenty thousand artabae. Of straw ten thousand load. Of vetches five thousand load. Of oil of Sisamin two hundred marises. Of vinegar a hundred marises. Of cresses chopped small thirty artabae. All, that is here enumerated, was distributed among the forces, that attended him. In dinner, and supper, and in largesses, the above was the king's daily expenditure." Translation obtained here: <http://www.attalus.org/translate/polyaenus4 A.html> (adapted from *Shepherd* (1793), accessed 15.2.2013).

75 Lewis 1997 thinks that the document is genuine and argues for Ctesias as possible source.

76 Monuments in the *Alexander Romance*: tomb of Cyrus (rec. α 2.18); tomb of Xerxes (rec. B, L 2.18, γ 2.17); Alexander and the statue of Nectanebo (rec. γ 2.27); Alexander and the statue of Sesonchosis (rec. γ 2.31). In a similar tradition is the epitaph of Sardanapalus (Arr. *Anab.* 2.5.3–4). Further inscriptions on the decadence of Sardanapalus: Plut. *De Alex. Fort.* 330F; 336C–d; Dio Chr. 4.135; Athen. 12.529d–530. On the monuments in the *Alexander Romance*, Stoneman 1995 and Zadorojnyi forthcoming.

77 IG IX 1² I, 17 A = T 3 AB, ca 263–2 BC. See also Bing 2009b, 183–5.

78 Stephens 2003 is a classic.

menid influence on the way Greeks imagined the Empire in the age of Alexander. One needn't assume that, in order to fashion their kingdoms after a Persian model, the Diadochs had to present themselves as the heirs of the Achaemenids. After all, propaganda travels well and can be adopted and adapted to individual needs. In taking a leaf from the Persian book, the Macedonian kings did the same thing the Persians had done for centuries before them. As Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones argues in his recent monograph on the king and court in Persia, "as the Persian Empire expanded its territory, the ruling dynasty came into contact with pre-existing court structures: Ancient Egyptian, Neo-Assyrian, Babylonian, Urartian, Levantine, and Anatolian courts all provided the Achaemenids with blueprints for constructing a courtly identity, and, as with all forms of art and architecture, the Persians readily took from these mature royal societies the elements which they found most appealing or meaningful."⁷⁹

For centuries, the Greeks were fascinated with the Great King of Persia, with luxury, expenditure, royal gifts and the Persian way of life. Greeks in Asia, as subjects of the Great King, knew first-hand about royal propaganda. Those who encountered the Persians in the course of Alexander's conquests were also fascinated with the royal palaces, ceremonial, harems and tombs. Greeks knew well about tribute and gifts as symbols of subordination, and they even provided symbolic interpretations of the things stored in the Persian treasuries. It is this type of royal propaganda that the Ptolemies adopted and adapted for their own purposes and which, directly or indirectly, found its way into Posidippus' epigrammatic collection.

If this assumption is correct, the central poems of the *Lithika* (8, 9, and 10) could be interpreted as programmatic in yet another way: These epigrams thematize a Greek engraved signet-ring (9), a Near Eastern cylinder (10) and a vast ornamental Persian stone (8) that Kuttner has identified as an Achaemenid royal pectoral necklace.⁸⁰ Three kings and three distinct—and kingly—forms of stones might represent Posidippus' merger of the Greek and Near-Eastern inscriptional traditions in forming a new one, fit for the rulers of the Ptolemaic kingdom.

⁷⁹ Llewellyn-Jones 2013, 8. For general remarks on the way all Hellenistic kingdoms adopted Achaemenid propaganda, Ma 2003a.

⁸⁰ Kuttner 2005, 153 and plate 14.