

Can Cyrus Speak?
Cyrus the Great and his Reception
from Antiquity to the Modern Iranian
Nation-State.

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Summary

The Achaemenid Persian King Cyrus the Great has been remembered as a model ruler in comparison with later despotic Achaemenid kings and as the liberator of Jewish people. More recently, he has been celebrated as a human rights icon, supposedly initiating the first charter of human rights. This idolised view has been appropriated by nationalist agendas of the Iranian state, drawing on a selective reading of ancient classical, Biblical and Near Eastern texts stressing his exceptional leadership. The ongoing attraction to Cyrus is reflective of the appropriation of European colonial scholarship of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by Iranian nationalists. Utilising a post-structuralist lens, this thesis examines the ancient texts of Herodotus, Xenophon, the books of Ezra and Isaiah and the influential Cyrus Cylinder, investigating the circumstances molding Cyrus' reputation from antiquity to the post-colonial era. This thesis reflects on the complicated representations of Cyrus as part of a broader problem connected to the reconstruction of the Achaemenid Persian; Cyrus' benevolence is routinely polarised against the popular perception of Persian decadence dominating popular perceptions today. By tracing Cyrus' reconstruction from antiquity to the modern Iranian nation-state, this thesis highlights how Iran's pre-Islamic past remains the stage on which ideas about the nation are debated and critiques the outdated discourses inherited and appropriated from Iran's encounter with Europe.

Declaration

This work has not been previously submitted for a degree to any other university of institution. To the best of my knowledge, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Natasha Parnian
23rd of December, 2019

Acknowledgements

I first came to know the figure of Cyrus in my childhood. I was 6 years old when my father took our family to visit the statue commemorating Cyrus in Sydney's Bicentennial Park. I remember my father's proud face; I remember my grandfather's glittering eyes. I now understand this family affair was so much more than commemorating an ancient figure, it was a day of celebration that commemorated their loss but also their victory, however they might have defined those victories. Cyrus' name frequently appeared when my grandfather reminisced about his homeland. His eyes sparkling, he would repeat, "When I die, take me to my homeland. When I die, bury me in Hamedan, in Ecbatan, Cyrus' homeland!" Alas, we laid both my father and grandfather to rest in foreign soil, never to return, both forever living in the shadow of their once beloved homeland.

This thesis is dedicated to their memory, their love of their homeland, their loss, their struggle, but most of all, their triumph. For the sacrifices of my family, I am forever grateful.

To my mother, Nectar Babayan, who has robbed herself of many of life's joys to ensure my constant happiness, to ensure I am never without anything I may need. I am grateful for her critical eye in translating the Farsi texts for Chapter 3. The completion of this Chapter would be impossible without her translating skills. To my late father, Siamak Parnian, it was your love of learning, of literature, of knowledge which you gifted me to be my most prized possession. I wrote this thesis with your smile before me and your recitation of poetry in my ears. My beloved parents: it is the memory of your homeland that I am forever understanding, connecting with, debating, and reconstructing.

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Introduction

The last monarch of Iran, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, declared 1971 the year of Cyrus the Great, proceeding to celebrate the 2500th anniversary of the Achaemenid empire at the ruins of Persepolis. Pahlavi addressed his guests by paying homage to the designated founder of the empire as a benevolent ruler and human rights icon.¹ Cyrus was entrenched as the founding father of the Iranian dynasty and the model for Iran's modern nation-state. The popularisation of Cyrus by Iranian nationalists did not disappear with the Iranian revolution of 1979. In fact, the unofficial Cyrus Day continues to be celebrated in Iran and across the diaspora, commemorating Cyrus entering Babylon where he supposedly gave his famous decree of human rights.² In previous years, Iranians have utilised the event to showcase their pre-Islamic history and promote their inherited human rights values.³ Considering the current animosity between the US and Iran, the possibility that Cyrus will continue to be appropriated in this context, is significant.

The current attraction to Cyrus is reflective of the pervasive influence of Pahlavi era nationalists and their appropriation of nineteenth and twentieth century European colonial scholarship.⁴ Such scholarship was produced by those who held positions in French and British colonial governments. Scholars such as Rawlinson, Sayce, and Gobinaeu⁵ utilised

¹ *Rastakhiz* newspaper October 10, 1977.

² "Cyrus Day" refers to an unofficial holiday that takes place on the 29th of October/7th of Aban.

³ See the 2018 coverage of the Cyrus Day in Iran: Al Arabiya and Iran Human Rights Monitor:

Mahmoudi in *AlArabiya* 2018 "In Pictures: Marking Cyrus Day in Iran, Amid Popular Protest" <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/features/2018/10/30/IN-PICTURES-Marking-Cyrus-Day-in-Iran-amid-people-s-protest.html>, Unknown, Human Rights Monitor, 2018 "Iran Blocks Gathering at Tomb of Ancient Persian King Cyrus the Great." <https://iran-hrm.com/index.php/2018/10/29/iran-blocks-gathering-at-tomb-of-ancient-persian-king-cyrus-the-great/>

⁴ Zia Ebrahimi 2016: 19-40. The attraction to Cyrus' perceived tolerance and benevolence of the modern Iranian nationalist imagination is largely reflective of the consequence of Iran's engagement with European Orientalism. The European scholarship referred to here is Rawlinson 1862, Sayce 1885, Gobineau 1854. The works of these scholars are explored in Chapter 3. These texts were utilised by the founding father of Iranian nationalists particularly Akhundzadeh as well as Kermani and Pirnia, unleashing a new era of Iranian history. Textbooks of the Pahlavi era make regular reference to these European scholars and showcase Cyrus in the same light as portrayed in these texts.

⁵ Henry Rawlinson was the British East India Company officer and scholar of Oriental Studies.

Rev. Archibald Henry Sayce was Assyriologist at the University of Oxford and Artur de Gobineau was a French aristocrat, also the first secretary at legation in Tehran in 1885.

a racial lens in their approach to the study of Near Eastern cultures. Their approach reflects Orientalism, that is the perception of the comparative inferiority of non-European societies, alongside Aryan superiority over various Semitic ancient cultures.⁶ As Iranian nationalism largely developed in response to European colonialism, it did not simply imitate the ideologies of such European colonial scholarship, rather accepted and appropriated them for domestic use.

Whilst colonialism is traditionally defined as the domination by groups over the territory of other individuals or groups,⁷ as Iran was never formally colonised, it is more appropriate to define colonialism as domination involving a range of different practices including methods of cultural and political control.⁸ Thus, the Iranian state's engagement with European colonialism should not be overlooked as Iranian nationalism was formed largely by European intellectual tradition. This was subject to the widespread Orientalism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which favoured Iran's non-Islamic past.⁹ As such, European scholarship promoted the idea of Achaemenid decadence post-Cyrus in their engagement with ancient Greek and Biblical texts.¹⁰ As European Orientalist scholarship filtered back into Iran via Iranian intellectuals, it facilitated an exchange reimagining the nation-state through a European lens. Iranian nationalists found evidence in the ancient world about the successes of Cyrus, who European intellectuals had long praised. Here, they appropriated the view of the superiority of the Aryan race to connect themselves with Europe and trace the current problems of the Iranian state in racial terms.¹¹ By doing so, Cyrus was appropriated to introduce liberal political concepts – that

Gobineau famously championed the science of racism, arguing that the origins of the Aryan race and European civilisation could be traced to Persia.

⁶ Particularly popularised by Gobineau's theory of races in his essays ranging from 1853-1855.

⁷ Horvath 1972: 47, Kohn and Reddy 2017.

⁸ Young 2001: 17. For example, Mossadegh's struggle to nationalise Iran's oil reflected their endeavour to resist foreign control.

⁹ Such scholarship here refers to the works of Sayce 1885: 278, Gobineau 1854, Rawlinson 1862:431.

¹⁰ Sayce 1885: 278, Gobineau 1854, Rawlinson 1862: 431.

¹¹ The claim of belonging to an Aryan identity that was rooted in the ancient self-designation *ariya* is explored in European scholarship of Persia especially Malcolm 1829: 548, Sayce 1885: 278. See Vaziri 1993 for an overview of European scholarship and its influence on Iranian nationalism. Iranian nationalism championed this Aryan identity, claiming Iranians have remained ethnically and culturally autonomous from the rest of the region for a millennium. For the role of Aryan myth in Iranian nationalism see Zia-Ebrahimi 2011: 445-472 as well as Vaziri 1993: 100; also, Motadel 2014: 119-135 for an overview of the history of the use of the phrase in Iranian and European discourses.

seemingly existed in pre-Islamic Iran - for a modern Iranian audience.¹² As the Cyrus of Iranian politics cannot be separated from his colonial readings in the late 18th-19th century, we must examine the ancient texts at the core of Cyrus' pervasive narrative of tolerance and benevolence.

Sources

The idolised view of Cyrus¹³ appropriated by the nationalist agenda of the Iranian nation-state draws inspiration from a selective reading of ancient writings that stress his exceptional leadership. The classical Greek sources, Herodotus and Xenophon, emphasise Cyrus' benevolence and wisdom. Whilst presenting Cyrus positively, the fifth and fourth century Greek sources also depict Achaemenid Persia through the bias of wars fought between the Greeks and Persians from 499 to 449BCE, espousing binary themes of Persian decadence contrasted against democratic Greek freedom. Cyrus is routinely imagined as a just monarch, reconstructed to suit the authorial and political contexts of ancient and modern contexts. Hence, Cyrus' benevolence is repeatedly polarised against the popular perception of Persian decadence which continues to resurface today.¹⁴ Despite great progress in the past decades in the fields concerned with Persia,¹⁵ the post-9/11 context has fostered a new reading of Greek material to "explain" the perceived dichotomy of East and West. The narrative of the "decadent East" remains a favoured trope explaining the perceived 'clash of civilisations,' beginning from the Achaemenid empire's attempt to conquer the Greek city states.¹⁶ Such retellings of the Greco-Persian

¹²Adamiyyat 1978: 123. Akhundzadeh argues that the relationship between king and subject was so strong that the common people visited the king and communicated their problems personally. This is of course a metaphor for the problems with the Iranian state and the monarchy.

¹³Joneidi in *BBC News*, 2013 www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-21747567: Especially made popular in the British Museum's Forgotten Empire museum where Neil McGregor, praised Cyrus' exceptional religious tolerance, comparing the story of Persia to the story of the modern United States. Similar texts include: Masroori 1999; Holland 2005.

¹⁴ Such resurfacing includes the subsequent invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan which inspired an exploitation of the ancient world in order to support the argument that a clash of civilisations long existed, taking start between the Achaemenid Persian empire and the Greek city states. This is at the core of popular works such as: Lacey 2001, Strauss 2004, Holland 2005. Even academic texts such as Cartledge 2006 share in this sentiment.

¹⁵ Hall 1989 demonstrated that the polarization of Greek culture in relation to Persia is chronologically limited to the 5th century BCE. The pioneering research of Sancisi-Weerdenberg 1990, Briant 2002, Wiesehofer 2011, Kuhrt 2007 has placed Achaemenid Persia in the map of ancient disciplines.

¹⁶ Lacey 2001, Strauss 2004, Holland 2005, Cartledge 2006.

conflict are popular due to their mass market appeal,¹⁷ but more importantly because they indicate a greater phenomenon – the resurgence of perceiving the world in Orientalist terms.

Therefore, a contextual analysis of the ancient texts must be conducted to understand how Orientalist studies of Persia have dominated representations of Cyrus and resurfaced in the modern era.

Classical Sources

The main sources in the classical corpus are Herodotus and Xenophon. I discuss the long-lasting debate in modern scholarship on the authorial intentions of these authors. Herodotus is often charged with sensationalising the East,¹⁸ which is an interpretation imposed on the Herodotean text by Roman historians, reinforced in light of widespread colonial bias by early modern historians.¹⁹ Equally, Xenophon's characterisation of Cyrus in the *Cyropaedia* has had an enduring legacy in European cultural history.²⁰ The Cyrus constructed by these authors was later received by Roman historians who interpreted these sources through their own cultural lens.²¹ Throughout the centuries, these texts, especially Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, were read by those in positions of political and religious power. The figure of Cyrus thus became a model for those in positions of authority, looking to Xenophon's text as an exemplar of kingship.

Near Eastern Sources

¹⁷ See, for example, the best seller status of Holland's 2005 work.

¹⁸ As in the case of his reporting the outrageous custom of Babylonian prostitution (1.199): Munson 2009: 457.

¹⁹ Anagnostou-Laoutides, 2017: 2, also Spawforth 1994: 233-47. Varying interpretations of Herodotus have been made by writers such as Cicero, Seneca, Diodorus Siculus, Ammianus Marcellinus. These are discussed in Chapter 1.

²⁰ Grogan 2007: 65 traces the translation and readership of the text in the Renaissance. Martin 2013: 824.

²¹ Makhelaiuk 2015: 304 demonstrates that Roman authors needed historical knowledge about past Oriental monarchies which they found in Greek writings, transmitted to the Romans through the popular Greek education system. Hardie 2007 discusses authors such as Horace and Virgil who helped construct a new Roman identity that became a cultural requirement in the years following the end of the Republic. Racine 2016: 201 argues that Cicero's knowledge of Herodotus was based on the Greek works he had read. Also, Horace's engagement with the Greeks was based on Greek models. He makes multiple references to Persians as Medes, and Parthians in Hor. *Carm.* 1.2.22, 51; 1.21.15; 1.29.4; 2.1.31; 2.2.17. For discussions to allusions to Octavian's victory, see Hardie 2007: 140. Most relevant to these authors were the narratives of decadent Persian kings and so the continued development of the appropriation of Persia for political use took shape.

The long-lasting positive interpretation of Cyrus, especially in European colonial historiography, stems from the Biblical corpus. Both Ezra and Isaiah praise Cyrus for his reconstruction of the Temple of Solomon and for delivering Jews out of exile under king Nebuchadnezzar. Biblical authors constructed particular images of Cyrus for their own political purposes.²² With the discovery of the Cyrus Cylinder, the hero status of Cyrus was further cemented, reinforcing Biblical narratives with archaeological evidence. As such, scholars of Christianity discovered an archaeological Persia which was at the centre of two intellectual traditions of which European scholars were the self-declared heirs – the Greek and the Biblical. At the core of this model, Persia was the summit of civilisation *and* the antithesis to the rival civilizational ideal of Europe that has complicated the representation of Cyrus.²³

Nationalist Texts from the Pahlavi Era

The nationalist corpus refers to a selection of texts produced during the late Qajar to the end of the Pahlavi era. Here, the Iranian state self-consciously championed nationalism as state ideology, constructing national identity.²⁴ I have chosen to examine the founder of Iranian nationalism – Mirza Fath Ali Akhundzadeh, his heir, Mirza Agha Khan Kermani as well as the next generation of Iranian nationalists such as Hasan Pirnia and Hasan Taqizadeh, as these figures consumed much European scholarship through their education. Akhundzadeh and Kermani's texts have been preserved and disseminated through the biographer Adamiyat, who wrote the treatises of these thinkers.²⁵ I have sought my own translations of these texts due to the inaccessibility of these texts in English. I utilise a close reading of each text, tracing the extent to which these authors utilised ancient works in their constructions of Cyrus.

Theoretical Framework

Spivak's seminal essay "Can the Sub-Altern speak?" inspires the methodology of my research. Here, she criticises western thinkers for investing their arguments of the other with assumptions derived from their own social and intellectual context. The popular understanding of Persia has been dominated by an intellectual tradition that has made a

²² Wilson 2015: 330.

²³ Sommer 2017: 13, Dabashi 2015: 37-39 discusses the "production" of Persia as a European trope from classical and Biblical heritage.

²⁴ Marashi 2008: 7.

²⁵ Adamiyat was a social historian of modern Iran. Part of his popularity was largely due to the unavailability of the works of Akhundzadeh and Kermani to the general public when Adamiyat wrote his biographies. I am using Adamiyat's 1970 *Andishehay-e Mirza Fath Ali Akhundzadeh* (The Thoughts of Mirza Fath Ali Akhundzadeh) and the 1978 *Andishehay-e Mirza Agha Khan Kermani* (Thoughts of Mirza Agha Khan Kermani).

case for the superiority of European civilisation and its Greco-Roman ancestors.²⁶ The colonial scholarship of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries promoted the Greeks as the founders of ‘western civilisation.’ In addition, this reading ignores the nuances integral to the complex social and cultural contexts that have utilised the figure of Cyrus in their respective works. Furthermore, in reference to the modern Iranians’ appropriation of these ideas, Iranian nationalism has unwittingly replicated several of these biases in a desperate attempt to positively anchor themselves in history.

To avoid repeating such approaches, I utilise a post-structuralist methodology, examining how meaning has been created and its subsequent influence on the interpretations of the core texts. Post-structuralism challenges the premise that structures of meaning are universal,²⁷ fostering a stronger engagement with the cultural context in question.²⁸ Every text pertaining to Cyrus’ greatness is ‘contested terrain’ due to the differing authorial purposes and audiences.²⁹ Most of our texts come from Cyrus’ subjects or were ordered by Cyrus’ own imperial government. Considering the nature of these texts, post structuralism’s appreciation of cultural discourses achieves a clearer and more balanced understanding of the circumstances giving rise to these texts, as well as important moments of their subsequent reception(s).³⁰ Through such analysis, we can better understand how Persia has been appropriated as a *concept* and thus implicit in a long-term process of canonisation which has placed it at the core of perceptions of western civilisation.³¹

I reinforce my methodological focus with ideas from scholars such as Sancisi-Weerdenberg, Brosius, and Daryaei who have raised awareness regarding the Hellenocentrism of Greek texts.³² Any historian of ancient Persia must reconstruct the

²⁶ For a detailed analysis of this view, see Blaut 1993: 1-11.

²⁷ Harcourt 2007: 17, Butler 1990: 40.

²⁸ Thomas 1993: 3-27.

²⁹ Agger 1991: 112, Graebner 1995: 53-55.

³⁰ Richardson 1990.

³¹ Strootman and Versluys 2017: 9-16; Strootman and Versluys propose the associations revolving around Persia in specific contexts for socio cultural or political reasons as “Persianism.” They trace how the narrative of cultural forces can ultimately overcome the military might of a conquering power – here, the military power refers to Persia in the 5th century.

³² Brosius 2006: 76-78, Daryaei 2008: xii-xx, Sancisi-Weerdenberg 1987 and 1990. Such scholars have insisted on the significance of the close reading of the Greek material and insisted on the cosmopolitan aspects of the Ancient Near East to allow for a greater appreciation of the nuances of Persia and their interaction with the Greek city states.

narrative of the Achaemenids from the writings of their subjects and their enemies.³³ As such, I apply my methodological framework by revising our understanding of Herodotus and Xenophon by drawing attention to the numerous ‘orientalisms’ to which the texts have been subjected. Aware of the debates regarding the authorial purposes of these texts, I argue we must appreciate how the texts were read by Roman historians as well as by historians during the European colonial era.³⁴ The Biblical texts have been selectively read and interpreted by modern scholarship, especially until the early 20th century, producing an anachronistic and inaccurate reconstruction of Cyrus. Particularly, the Cyrus Cylinder’s persistent modern attraction requires an analysis of the text in its original context.

By examining the texts and their reception at the core of Cyrus’ legendary status, it becomes clear that the Iranian nationalists also appropriated the same texts for their own agendas. Both Reza Zia-Ebrahimi’s concept of “dislocative nationalism”³⁵ and Hamid Dabashi’s concept of “Persophilia,” that is, the fascination of all things Persian in European social and cultural history,³⁶ are especially valid when investigating Cyrus’ fortunes during the post-colonial era. My main argument here is when European scholarship spread back into Iran, it was rebranded to facilitate a new reimagination of the nation-state. The Iranian political and literary public sphere consumed such European scholarship to culturally distinguish themselves from Arab states in the region.³⁷ Even in the diaspora, when modern Iranians attempted to contest and reverse the Eurocentric interpretations of the Achaemenid empire, they clung to the image of Cyrus as an ideal leader, embracing his otherwise colonial construction.

Chapters Outline

Chapter 1

This chapter examines the representation of Cyrus in the works of Herodotus and Xenophon. Starting with Herodotus, I argue that he is critical of both Persian and Greek tyrants in his narrative. By tracing these examples, I demonstrate that Cyrus is but one of many rulers who Herodotus traces through his rise and fall pattern. During the reception

³³ Briant 2006: 7.

³⁴ Asheri 2007 and Bahrani 2001 discuss the use of Herodotus in 19th-century orientalist imagination and the scholarly legacy of this trend.

³⁵ Zia-Ebrahimi 2016: 6.

³⁶ Dabashi 2015: 4.

³⁷ See Vaziri 1993: 179-199; Zia-Ebrahimi 2016: 94-95 for a discussion of the influence of European historiography on Iranian intellectuals and nationalist purposes of the Pahlavi era.

of Herodotus by the Romans, Cyrus is constructed as a benevolent figure in contrast to the usual narratives of the time stressing Persian decadence. Cyrus' benevolent refiguring was also embraced by medieval and Renaissance writers for their own purposes and promoted as a model of benevolent kingship.

In the same chapter, I explore the representations of Cyrus in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*. I argue that Xenophon utilises the figure of Cyrus to critique contemporary Athenian society. Similar to Herodotus, Xenophon's text is full of similar binaries demonstrating both strong and weak leadership, which surpass the traditional notions of 'Greek' and 'Persian.'³⁸ By tracing the reception of Xenophon, I argue that the fascination of a benevolent despot is reflective of the authorial intentions of writers after Xenophon, captivated by the prototype of an ideal king. Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* was utilised as instructional handbooks for rulers by later Greek and Roman authors.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 examines the Biblical texts of Ezra and Isaiah, alongside the Cyrus Cylinder, by placing these texts in their original Near Eastern context. Cyrus bridges the gap between classical representations of the "Oriental Persians" and the saviour status of the Achaemenids in the Biblical texts. By the seventeenth century, Cyrus has been reimagined literarily as an exceptional ruler. Much like the Greek corpus, Cyrus is presented as a 'Persian' monarch, but is appropriated to reflect the discourse of Near Eastern, specifically Yehudite, kingship. I examine the Cyrus Cylinder, since it has been used to corroborate the Biblical narrative of the restoration of the temple, giving Cyrus his status of benevolence in European literary heritage.³⁹ By placing the Cylinder in its original Near-Eastern context, I demonstrate its similarities with other decrees by newly enthroned ancient Near Eastern rulers by arguing the narratives of return and restoration were consistent motifs used by conquerors, reflective of the rhetoric of kingship utilised for legitimisation.⁴⁰

Chapter 3

³⁸ Tamiolaki 2017: 175.

³⁹ Dabashi 2015: 30-41 traces the influence of classical and Biblical heritage on European scholarship.

⁴⁰ Kuhrt 1983: 83-97, Van Der Spek 2014: 235, Razmjou 2010: 117-125 in Finkel et al, Dabashi 2015: 48.

This chapter examines how the figure of Cyrus re-enters Iran and is appropriated for domestic nationalist endeavours. As “Persia” was well-known in European literary heritage, I argue that European colonial scholars found evidence from the Greek and Biblical texts to reinforce the canonised view of Cyrus’ benevolent leadership versus the barbarity of his successors. I examine the works of the founder of Iranian nationalism – Mirza Fath Ali Akhundzadeh and Mirza Agha Khan Kermani as well as Hasan Pirnia and Hasan Taqizadeh, tracing their use of European colonial scholarship. Here, I demonstrate another example of the reception of the Greek and Biblical texts pertaining to the benevolence of Cyrus for domestic political use. Importantly, I argue the Iranian nationalist and current fascination with Cyrus is not simply an act of post-colonial resistance, but rather the continuation of racialised approaches to Iranian history in order to maintain a connection *with* Europe.⁴¹ This notion is especially true of the Iranian diaspora’s appropriation of the Cyrus Cylinder. Here, I examine the modern Iranian fascination with the Cylinder, arguing that Iranians in Iran and the diaspora have ironically embraced colonial notions in their attempt to contest the Eurocentric interpretations of their nation.

⁴¹ Zia Ebrahimi 2016: 218.

Chapter 1 – Cyrus as constructed by the Greeks

The Greeks and the Barbarians during the time of Herodotus

A study of the legendary Persian king Cyrus should begin with Herodotus, who has been branded the fairest minded Greek source on Persia.⁴² As scholarship on the development of the ‘barbarian’ in Greek literature has evolved,⁴³ Herodotus’ representation of Cyrus and by extension, Persia, challenges and subverts this dichotomy of Greek and barbarian. Although earlier depictions cannot be ignored,⁴⁴ this theme pervades Greek literature from the 5th century onwards, especially in the aftermath of the Persian wars. The victory of the Greeks against the Persians forced the Greek city states to foster a collective identity in the years following the Persian wars, which saw the formation of the Delian League. As the leader of the League, Athens relied on the creation of an enemy extraneous to this collective identity of *Hellas* and the prolonged myth of the barbarian threat to foster allegiance. This dichotomy systematically explored by Athenian writers such as Aeschylus is thus inherently political, drawing a distinction between the Greek Athenians – presented as democratic and egalitarian - and their enemy, the Achaemenids, typically portrayed as tyrannical and decadent.⁴⁵ This conceptualisation was uniquely exemplified in Aeschylus’ the *Persians*, the only strictly historical drama ever written.⁴⁶ The play contributed to the canonisation of a decadent Persia that was in direct opposition to the cultural superiority of the Greeks. The stark contrast between Greeks and barbarians is achieved through physical differences, cast to anticipate different moral standards. The binaries are as follows: the Greeks are represented as freedom lovers, their men are

⁴² Munson 2009: 457. There are differing scholarly opinions regarding the authorial intentions of Herodotus, mostly focusing on whether he was a *philobarbaros* and the degree we can deduce his Greek bias. For a discussion of the conceptualization of the ‘barbarian’ after the Persian wars, see Hall 1989 and 1993, Miller 1997. For more specific discussion of the concept of the barbarian in Herodotus’ work, see Hartog 1988, Flower and Marincola 2002, Immerwahr 1986, (especially in relation to the rise and fall of rulers).

⁴³ Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1990, Hall 1989, Imanpour: 2014.

⁴⁴ Hall 1989: 3.

⁴⁵ Hall 1989: 3.

⁴⁶ Hall 1989: 70.

masculine and their leaders modest, whilst the Persians are depicted as lovers of excessive luxury, their men and kings are portrayed as effeminate and despotic.⁴⁷

Herodotus, a recipient of this fifth century culturally contested climate, also depicts such a binary in his writing. For example, the Persians have thinner skulls⁴⁸ and less intellect than the Greeks and indulge in excessive pleasures. Conversely, Greeks are modest and eat substantially less.⁴⁹ It is easy to suggest such a negative description was reflective of Herodotus' fifth century context, but this is contrasted with praise for various Persian customs and kings, including both Cyrus and Darius.⁵⁰ Herodotus' conceptualisation of the barbarian differs from Aeschylus', not only in his complex representation of the non-Greek world, but also in his distinct authorial purpose(s).⁵¹ Herodotus wished to make the non-Greek world accessible to his Greek audience.⁵² The Persians are not depicted as innately weak,⁵³ rather Herodotus critiques excessive power in both Greek and Persian leaders, criticising the Greek Miltiades, Periander, and Hippias alongside many Persian kings. Such representations show that Herodotus is able, to some degree, cast aside the dichotomy prevalent in his world. Cyrus is cast amongst a long list of rulers who are represented positively before they grow too proud, leading to their eventual 'fall.'

Herodotus' purpose to preserve the deeds of both Greeks and Persians,⁵⁴ enables him to closely scrutinise the dichotomy of his cultural heritage. Given that he perceives himself as a storyteller, Herodotus' purpose resembles the conventions of the epic.⁵⁵ He combines multiple genres of inquiry and synthesises it into a historical work.⁵⁶ As diverse as his

⁴⁷ Aeschylus lines 1-50 – The opening chorus describes Xerxes gold bedecked army, the Babylonians who are rich in gold and the Lydians who live in luxury. This is followed by the Queen mother Atossa who is too angry to leave her palace of gold ornaments to speak to the chorus (line 47). Greek and Persian governments are contrasted – Athenians are described as 'men who talk freely' whilst Atossa does not need the agreement of the people of Persia for her son, Xerxes, to rule.

⁴⁸ Hdt. 3.12: Describes at length, Persian and Egyptian skulls.

⁴⁹ Hdt 1.29.

⁵⁰ Hdt 1.139: The Ionian revolt is settled through Darius sending a governor to ensure it is settled in peaceful manner rather than through raids. Herodotus says the Persians do not boast as they consider lying to be the most disgraceful of all things.

⁵¹ The first four books cover narratives concerned with non-Greek peoples – Lydians, Persians, Babylonians, Egyptians, etc with the last five devoted to the Persian wars.

⁵² Flower 2006: 275, Evans 1991: 8.

⁵³ Flower 2006: 275.

⁵⁴ Hdt.1.1

⁵⁵ Evans 1991: 5, Lateiner 1989: 19-24, Pelling 2006: 76-77.

⁵⁶ Debates regarding the duality of Herodotus' work include: Thomas 2000:283-285 who demonstrates Herodotus' work as an ethnography, Fowler 1996: 86-87 who argues Herodotus' work reflects sophistic tendencies, Murray 1972: 204 shows Herodotus to be a 'historian' by demonstrating Herodotus' legacy is part of the Ionian tradition of historiography, Muller 1981:299-318 demonstrated Herodotus' empirical approach.

organisation of ethnographic, historical, and philosophical information is, Herodotus has a conscious method, purpose, and notably literary construction.⁵⁷ Taking the classic view of Jacoby, this method is evident in Herodotus' close attention to local histories,⁵⁸ customs and religious traditions, and in the recognition of what modern historians consider to be an important obligation: to record all opinions regardless of whether or not he believes them.⁵⁹ Importantly, his work follows a recognisable pattern in his attempts to depict the flaws of human nature. Filled with religious motifs, each character functions as an avatar to portray particular themes in his *logos*. Thus, the characterisation of Cyrus serves as an exemplar that invites the reader to bear their own interpretations about human nature.⁶⁰

There are minimal references to Cyrus in Herodotus' work in comparison to the extensive attention given to Darius and Xerxes. There are more 'negative' representations of Cyrus, specifically where Herodotus showcases his excessive power, than 'positive' representations, where he aligns with modern notions of Cyrus' just and wise behaviour. Such discrepancies in this representation beg the question as to why Cyrus has been remembered so positively across the historical tradition. In other words, Herodotus is not the sole source of Cyrus' overall positive reputation in the historical tradition, since he appears rather briefly, and his negative aspects are pronounced. As his work follows a recognisable pattern, his characters are more than historical agents and have metaphorical symbolism. Preserving the deeds of men meant his writing was largely preoccupied with putting alien traditions of the non-Greek world into terms the Greeks could understand.⁶¹ Thus, his characters are contextualised within a Greek world to grasp the moral functions of his series of *logoi*.

This contextualisation of the non-Greek world has been criticised and interpreted in a multitude of ways.⁶² Indeed, there are many Persians stereotyped as effeminate or cruel,

⁵⁷ Lateiner 1989: 1.

⁵⁸ Jacoby 1913: 281-352.

⁵⁹ Hdt. 7.152. There are differing interpretations regarding Herodotus' method, Chrimes: 1930:89-98.

⁶⁰ Baragwanath 2012: 2.

⁶¹ Evans 1991: 142.

⁶² Following Edward Said's seminal *Orientalism* where he critiqued the Greek representation of the Persian as the 'other,' Miller 1997, Strootman and Versluys 2007, Grosrichard 1979, who have reconceptualised such representations building on Said's work but demonstrated the representation of the Persians during the 5th century was not the Orientalism of the 'Saidian' sort. The form of Orientalism encountered in this period (especially in material culture, the subject of Miller's study) doesn't operate around the

but they are characterised in a broader methodological context. Greeks are also portrayed negatively, for example, the Ionians are the weakest *genos* (1.143-2) because of their refusal to emigrate. Each character is connected with the theme of individuals' changing fortunes, coming full circle in the final chapter as a warning to the next empire, the Athenians.⁶³ As Herodotus stood at the front line of the Greek engagement with the Other, it is better suited to interpret the text as connecting, rather than dividing, the multiple peoples and cultures of his time.

The Positive Representations of Cyrus:

1. Cyrus' birth and youth

Aligning with the epic genre, Herodotus provides mythological accounts of Cyrus' birth, lineage and youth. This account of the "founder's myth" resembles the extraordinary upbringing of numerous ancient heroes and demigods.⁶⁴ In these instances, the divine child narrowly escapes death and is brought up in a safe environment, where they demonstrate remarkable leadership qualities.⁶⁵ Herodotus explains he found four versions of the myth of Cyrus and chose the one that sought to glorify him less.⁶⁶ This explanation is reflective of Herodotus' method, as he consistently engages his readers by not only employing a conversational tone, but also permitting his readers to accept multiple viewpoints.⁶⁷ At the same time, he informs us that a number of stories about Cyrus were in circulation at the time and the majority of them blatantly flattered him. In addition, we

nexus of hegemony or dominance as per Said's thesis, rather, it developed to mask the real power structures. The fantasy of Oriental despotism is about the excesses of pleasure and obedience, rather than brute force, so to mask the Athenians' adaptation of similar imperial systems. See Strauss 2004, Holland 2005, Cartledge 2006 who popularised orientalist notions of the Greek- Persian wars and framed the battles as defining moments in history.

⁶³ Thomas 2002: 113-114. Other examples follow this pattern, the Lydians at the start of the *Histories* fall due to Croesus' war, Cyrus too, loses his empire due to his inability to take advice. Thus, ethnic identity is not fixed, and their qualities are as changeable as the fortunes of the cities, great or small.

⁶⁴ Immerwahr 1986: 162, Immerwahr builds on the work of Leipzig 1924, Liege 1944, Laager 1957, Kereyni and Jung in Hull 1949 who have analysed various founder myths across Near Eastern, Roman and Greek contexts.

⁶⁵ For example, Dionysus faced death soon after his birth by the orders of Zeus' jealous wife; and the legendary Sargon was born to the goddess Inanna and an unknown father. His mother put Sargon in a basket on the Euphrates River which carried him to a gardener called Akki before rising to become the legendary king of Akkad.

⁶⁶ Immerwahr 1986: 162 discusses the multiple translations of this sentence, especially the translation and meaning of the phrase 'to magnify' in relation to Cyrus' birth stories.

⁶⁷ Lateiner 1989: 30-31, Denniston 1934: 491.

also suspect the version chosen by Herodotus shared many details with mythopoeic archetypes with which the Greeks were familiar.⁶⁸

Cyrus' accession story begins at his birth, when the magi foreshadow Cyrus will replace the Median King Astyages.⁶⁹ Cyrus survives Astyages' plans as Harpagus chooses not to murder the child, giving Cyrus to a shepherd Mithradates to raise him. The motif resembles several other tales of extraordinary kings who were exposed as babies both in the Ancient Near East and Greece, such as Moses and Oedipus. Immerwahr suggests Cyrus is saved by 'his own fate' rather than divine intervention⁷⁰ as Herodotus specifically employs human motivation throughout his story, consistent with features of the founder myth, which reduces the actions of rulers to ordinary human events. However, whilst there is an emphasis on human elements, attributing Cyrus' survival to them ignores the broader metaphysical framework of Herodotus' characters. There is clearly a focus on divine intervention as the prophecy of the Magi has been fulfilled and Cyrus assumed kingship. The metaphysical framework utilised by Herodotus to demonstrate the legendary origins of Cyrus are typical of Near-Eastern myths where they exalt the memory of charismatic leaders.⁷¹ Cyrus' birth and upbringing contrasts that of the other Persian kings, who do not enjoy such elaborate narratives surrounding their births, reflecting his iconic status. Cyrus' birth and upbringing thus foreshadow his later success, as Herodotus refers to him as the Persian to whom no Persian ever compared.⁷² By the age of ten, Cyrus had established a royal court and was kingly and just by nature. In contrast, Darius acquired the throne by trickery,⁷³ starting a new lineage of kingship that did not directly descend from Cyrus, a possible binary for later authors to stress.

The first representation of Cyrus is one of the most detailed descriptions to contextualise his birth within a broader methodological pattern. Cyrus is positioned as the rightful ruler

⁶⁸ Evans 1991: 52. Herodotus treats Cyrus' ascension as a succession story enriched with several dramatic techniques such as those in Greek dramas, sharing many commonalities with the divine founder myths.

⁶⁹ Evans 1991: 52. Herodotus treats Cyrus' ascension as a succession story enriched with several dramatic techniques such as those in Greek dramas, sharing many commonalities with the divine founder myths, such as the accession story begins with his mother Mandane, who firstly dreams that she is inundating Astyages' city and secondly, dreams of vines growing from her genitals and overshadowing all of Asia.

⁷⁰ Immerwahr 1986: 164-165.

⁷¹ Briant 2006: 16 makes a comparison with the legend of Sargon king of Akkad. Herodotus account tells us that Cyrus possessed inherent leadership qualities. For example, by the age of ten his peers chose him to play the role of king in their games.

⁷² Hdt 3.160.

⁷³ Hdt 3.85-87.

who takes the throne even after attempts to dismantle his authority, and his belief in possessing more than human greatness is the reason for his downfall. For example, Cyrus repeatedly exclaims that he was “born under divine fortune” –falsely informed by his parents, “so that the Persians might think their son’s survival more divine,” thus inventing the story that Cyrus was suckled by a dog and survived Astyages plans (Hdt.1.123.3). Herodotus critically reflects on his material, downplaying miraculous elements in which his upbringing was already invested by his time. Thus, Herodotus reduces them to ordinary human elements⁷⁴ and showcases human flaws. Specifically, before the Messagetae campaign, Cyrus states the gods show him everything that comes to him (Hdt. 1.290.4). Considering the outcome of this campaign for Cyrus, it is clear Herodotus is highlighting the literary character of such devices whilst warning readers of the dangers of hubris. Cyrus is presented as having the ability to make wise leadership decisions, whilst slowly depicting hubristic qualities, conforming Cyrus’ representation within Herodotus’ methodological pattern. The exaggerated belief in Cyrus’ greatness leads to his destruction.⁷⁵

2. Cyrus as a wise ruler

Herodotus’ constructs Cyrus as a model ruler that follows recognisable patterns,⁷⁶ such as the repetition of Cyrus providing the Persians with freedom in each stage of the narration.⁷⁷ Darius reminds his empire during the constitutional debate that the Persians gained their freedom from one man, Cyrus.⁷⁸ Equally, when Cyrus moves towards disaster, Hystaspes tells Cyrus he made the Persians free men instead of slaves.⁷⁹ Secondly, Cyrus convinces the Persians to keep their land rather than abandon it and risk being subjected to others. Here, Cyrus is constructed as having an ethical dimension which could, in theory, protect him from the vices of power.

Thus far, Cyrus remains uncorrupted by the vices of kingship from first stage of Herodotus’ characterisation pattern.⁸⁰ Interestingly, other Persian kings, such as Darius,

⁷⁴ Immerwahr 1986: 164 makes a comparison with this element and the archaic features of the founders’ myth, one which explains the divine features of the myth by reducing them to ordinary human events.

⁷⁵ Immerwahr 1986: 165, Avery 1972: 536, Gammie 1986: 178-185.

⁷⁶ Immerwahr 1986: 76-78, Avery 1972: 529, Lateiner 1989: 153-162, Gammie 1986: 178-185.

⁷⁷ Hdt 1.126.

⁷⁸ Hdt. 3.82.5.

⁷⁹ Hdt 1.210.

⁸⁰ Immerwahr 1986: 76-77, the three patterns include: origin of the ruler, his early reign until he reaches the height of his power, and events that led to his decline.

are also characterised as wise, but are not cast in such exclusively positive terms, receiving the throne by trickery, obscuring many of his other positive traits. It is due to this representation that Cyrus is not the primary focus in debates regarding Persian decadence and hubris.⁸¹ In later Greek and ANE accounts of oriental despotism, it is always Darius and Xerxes who take centre stage.⁸² Such debates have ignored that Cyrus too, exhibits similar qualities to later Persian kings⁸³. For example, Cyrus becomes angry at the Gyndes River and punishes it by diverting it into 360 channels (Hdt 189, 2-3). We must remember that Herodotus was writing around 100 years after Cyrus' death and as such, living closer to the period of Darius and Xerxes, was less concerned with the life and politics of Cyrus.⁸⁴ It was thus easier to positively discuss a legendary king who lived a century ago rather than Xerxes and Darius, whose names connoted themes of barbarism and decadence due to their invasions of the Greek city states.⁸⁵ It would have served his purpose to imply there was a dramatic decline between Cyrus and his successors. It is against this backdrop of literary differences between Persian kings, as well as later debates regarding Persian decadence, that complicate the reconstruction of Cyrus.

The Negative Representations of Cyrus

1. Cyrus' behaviour

Herodotus casts Cyrus in a particular ethical structure, often weaving religious examples through his narrative to stress his metaphysical framework.⁸⁶ For example, when Cyrus defeats the Lydian king Croesus, he proposes to kill Croesus by burning, but later realises this is not a just act.⁸⁷ Here, Cyrus is characterised as a reflective ruler who understood he was subordinate to higher powers.⁸⁸ The religious motives are distinct; flames were only extinguished after Croesus' calls to Apollo; the sky rained and extinguished the fire,

⁸¹Gruen 2011: 74-80 who discuss discrepancies in Herodotus' characterisation of the Persian kings, modern representations of Persian decadence do not include Cyrus. Strauss 2004 and Holland 2005 represent Darius and especially Xerxes in discussions of hubris.

⁸²Particularly due to the popularity of ancient texts like Aeschylus' *Persians* and later scholarship such as Strauss 2004, Holland 2005, Cartledge 2006.

⁸³Wiesehofer 2010: 48. See pp. 42-55 for further discussion regarding the polarisation of the 'good' king Cyrus and the 'bad' king Xerxes.

⁸⁴Wiesehofer 2010: 48.

⁸⁵Bridges 2015: 8, see especially pp.11-45 where Bridges traces the images of Xerxes as the "great Panhellenic foe."

⁸⁶Harrison 2002: 69.

⁸⁷Hdt.1.86. Cyrus seems to 'test the gods' by placing Croesus on the pyre. Cyrus changes his mind after Croesus' assertion that "the same people do not enjoy good fortune forever."

⁸⁸Avery 1972: 537.

convincing Cyrus of Croesus' good character. This explains Herodotus' portrayal of Cyrus as a successful ruler due to his ability to recognise his place below the gods and stresses the importance of humility in leadership.⁸⁹ Conversely, Herodotus utilises both Croesus and Cyrus to critique excessive desire and power. Croesus is at the peak of his power before Cyrus' campaign, known for his wealth and hubris bringing about his downfall.⁹⁰ Herodotus is not warning his audience that a more just leader will take the throne, but rather, foreshadows Cyrus' excessive desire and thus his demise, rendering Cyrus another character in his depiction of the rise and fall of a ruler. The same conditions that give rise to greatness are also the conditions of downfall. Darius and Xerxes are also characterised in a similar vein, alongside other accounts of Egyptian, Greek and Spartan kings.⁹¹ However, there are discrepancies in the representation of this pattern across the Greeks and non-Greeks. It is suggested that Herodotus views 'Eastern' history as full of examples that give rise to an individual or a state's downfall, whilst Greek history falls in the opposing category, whereby such conditions can also operate to bring about greatness.⁹² This discrepancy must be read in the context of Herodotus' subject matter, as he was writing about one of the largest conflicts in his period and there was much to discuss about the rise and decline of the Persian kings in their conflicts with the Greeks. Herodotus employs a Greek narrative and Cyrus is but one of the four great Persians who fit together in the overall cycle of Persia's "growth and decay."⁹³ This narrative is not confined to Persia,⁹⁴ and by showing the positives alongside the corruption of power, Herodotus demonstrates that, albeit enemies, the Persians were regarded as a civilised people worthy of differentiated analysis.⁹⁵ As Gruen has rightfully argued, Herodotus presents a motley canvas of the Persians,⁹⁶ through which complex reconstructions of the character of Cyrus emerge.

2. Cyrus' fall from 'grace'

Cyrus' fall from grace occurs during the final stage of Herodotus' rise and fall of a ruler pattern. This stage begins after the monarch's full power is reached and showcases the

⁸⁹ Gammie 1989: 179.

⁹⁰ Hdt. 1.87.

⁹¹ Immerwahr 1986: 169-183, esp discussion of Darius and Xerxes.

⁹² Immerwahr 1986: 154.

⁹³ Immerwahr 1986: 184.

⁹⁴ Immerwahr 1986: 189.

⁹⁵ Sommer 2017: 348.

⁹⁶ Gruen 2011: 80.

further reign and their subsequent destruction or decline.⁹⁷ Cyrus' fall from grace' is understood as a critique of excessive power and to warn that even the legendary Cyrus, whom no Persian ever thought it right to compare (3.160), starts to develop increasing pride.

During the campaign against the Massagatae, Cyrus does not listen to the Queen Mother's advice to give up his desire to allow the Massagetae to rule their own land and subsequently dies in battle.⁹⁸ Herodotus states there were other versions of Cyrus' death, but places emphasis on this one, warning against the results of desire.⁹⁹ Cyrus' inability to take advice is comparable to Croesus, who misinterprets Solon and the oracle's advice, increasing his ambitions and leading to his downfall. The oracle thus acts as a key site over which claims of power are played out,¹⁰⁰ and as both Croesus and Cyrus failed to misinterpret significant information due to ambition, they begin to fall into the final stage of Herodotus' rise and fall category – their final reign leading to their destruction. At this stage, Cyrus becomes an instrument to discuss problems of his own time.¹⁰¹ Cyrus' anger towards the Gyndes River and subsequent diversion, making it "so weak that even a woman could easily cross it without getting her knees wet,"¹⁰² is comparable to Xerxes' anger at the Hellespont, which has become popular in later orientalist interpretations.¹⁰³ Such characterisation reflects Herodotus' main purpose of pointing to the dangers of excessive desire, seemingly widespread across Persian kings. Although, by the time of the Greek-Persian wars and Cyrus' death, the positive and negative elements of his legacy have lived on. As a result of the perpetuation of a Pan-Hellenic identity in the years following the Persian wars, the pronounced negative connotations of the Persians would have tainted any seemingly positive representation of Cyrus. Considering the influx of Greek literature during this period, the influence which encounters with the Persians exerted over the Greek imagination cannot be underestimated.¹⁰⁴ Cyrus' anger is a large

⁹⁷ Immerwahr 1986: 76. Immerwahr outlines the full pattern of the rise and fall of the ruler.

⁹⁸ This motif of 'desire' is repeated after Cyrus' partial victory in which Tomyris warns Cyrus to be content and leave the land of the Massagatae.

⁹⁹ Avery 1972: 540. Note that the repetition of desire is telling of Herodotus' purpose.

¹⁰⁰ Barker 2006: 10.

¹⁰¹ Harrison and Irwin 2018: 161.

¹⁰² Hdt.1.89, 2-3.

¹⁰³ Said 1979: 21, 56-57.

¹⁰⁴ Miller 1997: 243, Llewellyn-Jones 2017: 69. Llewellyn-Jones builds on the approach established by Miller 1997 and traces further Greek visual motifs in material culture to demonstrate the appropriation of Persian culture in specifically Athenian material remains.

contrast to his earlier positive representations, as his anger detracts from his success. Thus, Herodotus uses the device of anger to foreshadow Cyrus' downfall. It looks to Cyrus' defeat by Tomyris and reminds his audience of Croesus' assertion. Whilst Cyrus was ultimately successful at Babylon, he is not free from the negative traits that will contribute to his demise in the future.

The function of the oracle within the Croesus narrative and its role in the fate of Eastern kings has been considerably debated. It has been claimed that the inability of the Eastern tyrant to grasp the full significance of the oracle shows not only the difference between systems of government but also the superiority of the Greeks.¹⁰⁵ There is no doubt the representation of the Persians in Herodotus' narrative is full of contradictions.¹⁰⁶ However, Herodotus successfully placed alien traditions of the non-Greek, the Persians, into a language that was accessible to the Greeks. The purpose of such contradictions is much like those in his representations of Greek rulers – whilst many tyrannical characters are also depicted, there are equally positive stories.¹⁰⁷ One such example is the famous character of Miltiades, who despite his heroism at Marathon, was accused of tyrannical behaviour and betrayal of the Athenian people (Hdt 6.104.1).¹⁰⁸ Herodotus did not use the term to refer to Greek kings unless he believed the kings were truly tyrannical.¹⁰⁹ His depiction of both Greek and Persian tyrants is complex; in both cases, he does not depict such kings as inherently cruel men. Each tyrant, Persian or Greek, serves a broader purpose. Whilst Herodotus' purpose can never be fully attainable, assuming that he chose to direct his *Histories* not only to the past but also to his present, then Herodotus' characters, including Cyrus, serve as a means of inviting the reader to reflect on their own conceptions about human nature.¹¹⁰ Herodotus is thus warning the reader that Cyrus' successes are beginning to tarnish and so, whilst consuming such negative representations, must make their own interpretations about the binaries presented.

¹⁰⁵ Cartledge 2002: 76, Barker 2006: 4-5.

¹⁰⁶ Hdt.1.130-133 the contradictory lavish banquets of the Persians to the high esteem the Persians hold of the law and truthfulness.

¹⁰⁷ Immerwahr 1986: 189.

¹⁰⁸ Even though Miltiades devised strategies to help defeat the Persians at the Battle of Marathon, Herodotus does not paint him as a hero by ignoring his provocative behaviour. Other examples include Cypselus of Corinth who was disliked by his people and his son, Periander, and is described as the second tyrant of Corinth, who was also praised for building the city's wealth. Hippias was driven out of Athens but soon, the Spartans regretted their decision and proposed he be reinstated as the tyrant of Athens.

¹⁰⁹ Ferrill 1978: 392.

¹¹⁰ Baragwanath 2012: 2.

The Reception of Herodotus

The overt discrepancies conform to the diverse ethnographies and histories organised in Herodotus narrative. The purpose of such contradictions is not to portray the Persians as “minions of a despotic ruler, by contrast with Hellenic freedom fighters”¹¹¹ but rather, to showcase a multi-dimensional image of the Persians¹¹² and Greeks. However, these differences do not explain the clichéd themes of oriental decadence that have become synonymous with Persia and popular in modern scholarship.¹¹³ This is largely due to the overarching Eurocentric approach dominating the writing about the Achaemenids, largely from Orientalist scholarship of the seventeenth to early twentieth centuries.¹¹⁴ Such approaches derive much of their authority from (the perception of) an unbroken tradition inherited from the colonial period that has elevated Greek and Roman texts as the models that shaped the European civilisations.¹¹⁵ This unbroken tradition manifests as the myth of the barbaric Persian perpetuated firstly by Greek and later Roman authors, who, having read the Greek texts, recreated the Persians for their own political and cultural use. Since the Romans considered themselves an imperial power, increasingly more than the Greeks, their perpetuation of this discourse was critical and long standing.¹¹⁶ Whilst no definition of *imperium* survives from antiquity, it is loosely defined as the power to coerce obedience and expand power, which was fundamental to Roman government.¹¹⁷ Rome’s imperial dominance coincides with a reinvestment in the construction of the “Persian” through the use of binaries inherited by the Greeks to create a new Roman sense of self, especially during the years following the end of the republic.¹¹⁸ The Achaemenid kings fit neatly within this discourse, due to the easy manipulation of the Greek texts in creating a culturally and politically opposed ‘other’ when engaging with the new rival in the Roman eastern frontier, the Parthians and Sasanians.

¹¹¹ Gruen 2011: 74.

¹¹² Gruen 2011: 80, Sommer 2017: 348.

¹¹³ Earlier scholarship: Olmstead 1966, Cook 1983, Green 1998. For newer accounts, see: Strauss 2004, Holland 2005, Cartledge 2006.

¹¹⁴ For early European scholarship on Persia see: Olmstead 1966, Cook 1983.

¹¹⁵ Said 1979: 12-13 here Said discusses the perceived division of the world into the Occident and Orient. Whilst his analysis is generally based on French, British and American colonial scholarship and their engagement with Arab countries, he argues this division was first conceptualised by Aeschylus’ depiction of the Persians in his play. For an analysis of the influence of the influence of Greek and Roman texts to the perceptions of European tradition see Woolf 1982: 5, Hobson 2004: 8.

¹¹⁶ Makhluik 2015: 301.

¹¹⁷ Drogula 2007: 1, Erskine 2010: 5 traces its development over time, defining it from denoting power over the Roman people as well as power over territory, Richardson 2008 analyses *imperium* as Roman territorial entity, examining the history of the phrases *imperium* and *provincial*.

¹¹⁸ Hardie 2007: 128.

Manipulation across these periods is a result of the appropriation of the concept of the ‘Persian’ throughout time.¹¹⁹ As one of the first to record the history of the ‘barbarians,’ Herodotus was read by his contemporaries against the mythologised view of the ‘Persian’ established by the *persica* genre. There was an enduring legacy of Herodotus among later Greek and Latin authors, not necessarily because he was read,¹²⁰ but because authors displayed an awareness of Herodotean stories across the early republic and later imperial periods.¹²¹ As Bayard argues, there are differing methods to “reading knowledge”¹²² which is useful to examine the differing manner in which Herodotus was remembered across the reception of his *Histories*. Much was known about Herodotus’ stories without authors having read his work; this is a tradition stretching back to the Roman republic.¹²³ Cicero best demonstrates this phenomenon, regardless of his mixed opinions of Herodotus’ as the ‘father of history’ or the inventor of lies (2.56.116); Cicero proved a positive opinion of Herodotus’ prose.¹²⁴ Cicero aimed to give writers tools to further their rhetorical skills, as he asserts Herodotus had no idea of rhythm and yet composed such rhythmical prose.¹²⁵ Roman students encountered Herodotus during their education, taught in Greek.¹²⁶ Fragments of praise for Herodotus and other Greek writers exist in Cicero’s writing (Cic. *Hortens.* F15) demonstrating the high place of these writers in the

¹¹⁹Strootman and Versluys 2007: 9-32, Dabashi 2015: 37-39 discusses the “production of Persia as a European trope” from their Classical, Biblical heritages.

¹²⁰ Cicero gave to Herodotus the title “father of history” but later focused on his inaccuracies. For example, in *De Divinatione*, Cicero stated that Herodotus had invented his stories (2.56.116), including the tale about Croesus’ empire and his consultation of the oracle. Evans 1968: 15, has outlined that during the Renaissance, there were 44 editions and translations in Europe between 1450 and 1700 compared with 41 of Thucydides. In the later early modern period, Voltaire 1768: 247, viewed Herodotus as both a historian and a liar but favoured Herodotus’ version of the Persian wars because it represented the beginning of all history. To Voltaire and others who shared his view, regardless of how truthful Herodotus was, he was the “historian” of the Persian wars which symbolised the victory of liberty over the slavery of Asia, which meant he was appreciated as a model historian.

¹²¹Racine 2016: 195. Such an example of authors displaying an awareness of Herodotus’ stories includes the story about Arion of Methymna, which was retold by the Roman poet Ovid and the mythographer Hyginus (Fab 194).

¹²² Bayard 2007: 26-28. Bayard argues it is less of less significance to be aware of the books entire contents and intricacies than its relationship to other works. The books relationship to other works enables literary discussions. Writers of this period would have been aware of Herodotus’ legacy, his works’ relationship of other works.

¹²³ Racine 2016: 194.

¹²⁴ Cicero describes Herodotus’ prose as having ‘flowed like a tranquil river’ (Cic. *Orat.* 39).

¹²⁵ Racine 2016: 200.

¹²⁶ Cribiore 2001: 144, 235.

teaching of rhetoric in the Roman world. Each author is praised for their ability to construct eloquent prose: “Sweeter than Herodotus, more ponderous than Thucydides, plentiful as Xenophon” (Cic. *Hortens.* F15),¹²⁷ highlighting the survival of authors from the Greek tradition as literary authorities, irrespective of content matter.

The Romans were heirs to the Greek education, and as such their view of the ‘Persian’ was also shaped by this.¹²⁸ Cicero’s engagement with Herodotus and by extension, clichéd notions of the Persians, foreshadows the transmission of his reputation into Latin literature. Writing during the crumbling era of the republic, Cicero’s writing had an inherent political purpose in defending it.¹²⁹ Engaging with themes regarding corruption, virtue and leadership, Cicero’s interest in Herodotus’ writing, especially his familiarity with the story of Croesus,¹³⁰ is not surprising as it foreshadows the dangers of excessive power. Considering the extent of corruption among Roman generals of the late Republic, it was a fitting theme to appropriate in a Roman context. Cicero mentions Cyrus in *de Divinatione* and quotes Dinon, explaining that Cyrus became king when he was forty years old after being told by the magi that he would reign for thirty years, and indeed, this occurred (1.123.46). Arguably, this was a missed opportunity to exploit Cyrus to highlight the loss of virtue, a key theme he thought to be the cause of the Republic’s difficulties. This suggests two things: even though Cicero consumed Greek scholarship, Herodotus was minimally read.¹³¹ More importantly, that the memory of Cyrus was no longer relevant in furthering the myth of the decadent Persians in conflict with the civilised Greeks and Romans. Instead, the stories of Darius and especially Xerxes became significant when engaging with the theme of decadence, corruption and the ‘East.’ Much like the way Athenian orators realised Xerxes was an easily exploitable theme for rhetoric, Latin texts adapted this trend.¹³² This luxurious, decadent depiction is presented in Cicero’s description of Persian kings as having several wives, to whom they give cities so that each can dress the woman’s neck and waist (Ver.2.3.77). This *topos* is common across poets too, especially Horace, who contrasts Persian extravagance with Roman simplicity in *Odes* 1.38. Horace also refers to the Parthians as Medes and Persians,

¹²⁷ Racine 2016: 200, O’Sullivan 1997: 36.

¹²⁸ Rosivach 1984: 1, For an overview of the role of rhetoric in Roman education, see: Clark D.L 1957.

¹²⁹ Fantham 2004: 10.

¹³⁰ Racine 2016: 201.

¹³¹ Racine 2016: 201 argues Cicero did have a good working knowledge of Herodotus due to the Greek works he read. His knowledge of Herodotus’ story seems to be concentrated on book 1.

¹³² Bridges 2015: 158.

possibly alluding to Octavian's recent victory over the Parthians.¹³³ The memory of Cyrus is intertwined with the enemies of their political rivals in eastern frontier, as Horace explains that the Parthian king had been "restored to the throne of Cyrus" (Odes 2.2.17). Herodotus was consulted during the time of Horace and Dionysius of Halicarnassus as he was by now a classic.¹³⁴ Dionysius believes many of Herodotus' accounts and shows respect for his work.¹³⁵ Strabo makes multiple references to Cyrus, outlining his capital of Susa (3.21), his tomb and inscription (15.3.6). Cyrus is described positively, although his representations are minimal altogether. Similarly, Diodorus Siculus' description of Cyrus is also increasingly positive and similar to Herodotus,' indicating he consulted Herodotus' work in the construction of his book.¹³⁶ Whilst a much shorter description of Cyrus' youth, Diodorus Siculus outlines the same family lineage as Herodotus, praising Cyrus' father who had raised him in a kingly way with *arete*. In particular, the most popular trait of Cyrus, the humane treatment of his subjects, is also expressed by Diodorus. Similarly stressed by Herodotus, Diodorus Siculus writes that Cyrus' humane treatment granted him the title "father" from the Persians (Const.Exc.9.24.1). Cyrus' relationship with Croesus is described similarly, however, Cyrus is praised more than Croesus, indicating that Cyrus' positive reputation had outweighed the negative descriptions in Herodotus' work. However, Cyrus' ambition is also described, in such a way that reminds his audience of its danger. In his final description of Cyrus, Diodorus states that Cyrus thought there was no king who could withstand his might (Const.Exc.4:296). The narrative surrounding Cyrus' death has either been omitted or has not survived.¹³⁷ Considering this was one of Herodotus' more negative representations of Cyrus, it is speculated the omission of this story aided in the positive reception of Cyrus against the negative discourse associated with the Persians.

Herodotus' construction of the Persian wars was appropriated for a Roman audience,¹³⁸ especially considering the conflicts between the Romans and rival Parthians and

¹³³ Some references to the Persians as Medes, Parthians in Hor. 1.2.22, 51; 1.21.15; 1.29.4; 2.1.31; 2.2.17, For discussions to allusions to Octavian's victory see Hardie 2007: 140.

¹³⁴ Herodotus was a classic and his truthfulness was less important, of course this debate resurfaces in Roman and later early modern periods. Cicero argues that Herodotus invented many of his stories (2.56.116).

¹³⁵ Hornblower 2006: 315: specifically discusses the seriousness Dionysius shows toward Herodotus in the *Roman antiquities* (1.26-30).

¹³⁶ Stronk 2017: 57.

¹³⁷ Stronk 2017: 149.

¹³⁸ Spawforth 1994: 233-47, Hardie 2007: 128-144. Makhelaiuk 2015: 300.

Sasanians. To maintain the idea of Rome's rise to world dominance,¹³⁹ Roman authors needed historical knowledge about the great Oriental monarchies of the past which they found in the Greek writing, transmitted to the Romans through the Greek education system.¹⁴⁰ Thus, the Romans engaged with figures of Persian history, filtered through the biases of the Greek world. Their engagement with the Persian wars was significant, especially in defining themselves against the 'East.'¹⁴¹ The Romans did not have the same emotional recollection of the Persian wars as the Greeks,¹⁴² but the Athenian model was still attractive due to the increasing threat of the Parthians and Sasanians. The Romans used the memory of Greek heroic past for the sake of their own political aims.¹⁴³ This is why Parthia was regarded by the Romans as a reincarnation of the Achaemenids, as authors interchangeably call the Parthians, "Persae" and "Medes."¹⁴⁴ Xerxes was favoured in the appropriation of the Persians in this period. Valerius Maximus focuses on Xerxes' lust for pleasure and material gain which led to the downfall of his empire (Max.9.1,3). By this time, the "Persian" was the perfect trope to showcase the superiority of Roman political systems.¹⁴⁵ This manifested in the public sphere, as mock battles were staged in the Forum by Augustus at the temple of Mars Ultor in 2BCE and in 57-58AD, when Nero staged a similar mock battle between the "Persians" and "Athenians."¹⁴⁶ Such renditions alluded to the Parthian-Roman/Sasanian-Roman conflicts of this period, demonstrating the continued appropriation of Persia for political use; the myth of decadent Persia in conflict with the victorious west. The memory of the despotic Persian lived on, particularly through Xerxes, as he was remembered as an "arrogant barbarian" (Sen.Suas.2.7) debating the topic of whether the 300 Spartans defending Thermopylae should have fled like the other Greeks, or stayed and fought by Seneca the Elder (Sen.Suas 2.3; 2.5.) Roman poetry also appropriated this image, as Lucan claims that it

¹³⁹ Makhelaiuk 2015: 300, Spawforth 1994: 233-47.

¹⁴⁰ Makhelaiuk 2015: 304.

¹⁴¹ Hardie 2007: 137-141. Especially authors such as Horace and Virgil who helped construct a new Roman identity that became a cultural requirement in the years following end of the Republic. Whether the construction of a new barbarian *other* cohered with positive drive to equate values of *Romanitas* with the ideals and achievements of 5th century Athens.

¹⁴² Maklaiuk 2015: 305.

¹⁴³ Spawforth 1994: 233-47, Hardie 2007: 127, Makhelaiuk 2015: 299-324.

¹⁴⁴ Cicero Dom.60 calls the Persians *Persae*, Horace describes Parthian king being restored to the throne of Cyrus. 2.2.7. However, there is considerable debate surrounding the extent to which Roman authors viewed the Parthians as the same as the Achaemenids, as Pliny in Nat.6.41 distinguishes between the Persian kingdom with the Parthian one. See Shayegan 2001: 330-331, Fowler 2005: 125-55.

¹⁴⁵ Strootman and Versulys 2017: 11-16, Dabashi 2015: 37-39.

¹⁴⁶ Makhelaiuk 2015: 311.

was the inherent oriental nature of the “Arabs, Medes and Eastern nations, whom destiny has kept under tyrants” (*BC* 7.442-3). Roman authors considered Achaemenid kingship as paradigmatic Oriental despotism and tyranny.¹⁴⁷ For example, when Lucan discusses Cambyses invasion, he considers him crazy. These clichés were useful to Roman writers as they illustrated ethical points in the philosophical tradition that could be communicated to their audience.¹⁴⁸ Lucan provides the example of Xerxes when discussing Caesar’s attempt to block the Brundisium harbor to prevent Pompey’s flight.¹⁴⁹ The choice of this example emphasises the despotic intentions of Caesar who is the anti-hero of the poem,¹⁵⁰ demonstrating the appropriation of Persian themes to point out political Roman issues.

Even more explicit appropriations exist in the work of later writers. For example, this common view of earlier fifth and fourth century Greek writers is appropriated by Ammianus Marcellinus, who highlights the arrogance of the Persian kings that contributed to their demise (*Amm.Marc.* 23.6.7). This is reminiscent of Herodotus’ depiction of the hubris in the downfall of rulers and empires. For example, whilst writing before Ammianus, Roman historian Justin writes the building projects of Xerxes were reflective of his grandiose, overconfidence and his boasting (*Just. Epit.* 2.10.23-5). By the time of Ammianus Marcellinus, it is of no surprise he also describes the Persian kings as engaging in excessive luxury through wearing precious stones (23.6.84). Ammianus Marcellinus is well known for his lengthy digression on the Persians,¹⁵¹ but this is largely attributed to what he had read rather than what he had seen.¹⁵² Whilst the story of Cyrus was less of a focus in Roman literature, especially to highlight ‘just’ kingship, the representation of Cyrus slowly became bound in typical representations of the Persians and the two became synonymous. The extent to which Roman writers were familiar with Cyrus is questionable, but there are instances of direct adaptations of his birth. For example, Justin wrote that Cyrus was fed by a she-dog before a shepherd family rescued and raised him (*Just.Epit.* 1.4.14), which is similar to Herodotus’ story of Cyrus’ upbringing. This story is appropriated by the medieval writer Comestor who gives Cyrus

¹⁴⁷ Makhlaiuk 2015: 306.

¹⁴⁸ Makhlaiuk 2015: 316-318.

¹⁴⁹ Lucan’s *Bellum Civile* (2.262-7)

¹⁵⁰ Hardie 2007: 134.

¹⁵¹ Beginning roughly from 26.6 onwards.

¹⁵² Matthews 1989: 14.

a canine name when he is raised.¹⁵³ However, when Justin focuses on highlighting Persian decadence, he focuses on Xerxes, which by this time, was a favoured trope.¹⁵⁴

The ‘collective memory’ of Persia appropriated throughout antiquity contributed to the invention of a tradition, largely removed from the original imagined entity and constructed for the benefit of local and later interests.¹⁵⁵ This invented tradition of the barbaric Asiatic foe imagined especially by the Persian monarchs Darius and Xerxes has inspired much attention in modern political discourse to highlight examples of tyranny in contrast to perceived western freedom.¹⁵⁶ In the wake of 9/11, there was a new resurgence of critical and popular interest in the seemingly long history of ‘East-West’ relations. As such, the battles fought by the Persians against the Greeks were implicated in the origins of western liberty and extensive debate took form regarding which battle was more significant in preserving “western civilisation.”¹⁵⁷ Artistic representations of these battles already existed,¹⁵⁸ but the post-9/11 and subsequent ‘war on terror’ context generated an upsurge in re-reading the Greek material for this ‘clash of civilisation’ that originated in the fourth century conflict between the Achaemenid Persians and the Greeks. Cartledge’s

¹⁵³ Racine 2016: 194.

¹⁵⁴ Even by the period of Isidore Seville, Cyrus’ palace is described in typical luxury that is associated with the image of Oriental decadence. *Origines* 15.1.10.

¹⁵⁵ Van Der Spek 2015: 472.

¹⁵⁶ Euben 1986: 359-90 and See Levene 2001: 384-403 for his discussion of the widespread political idea of the idea of Greece as the home of western civilisation in political discourse. Especially his analysis of the US commemoration of the third anniversary of the Marshall Plan on the 3rd of April 1951, the US information services ‘campaign of truth’ was held on the site of Thermopylae as the “place where 2,500 years ago 300 Spartans died in defence of the then Western World against Asian invaders.” Whilst not a reference to the Greco-Persian battles, Peter Sellars’ 1993 adaptation of Aeschylus’ *The Persians* with a new back drop of the Gulf War, with Xerxes as Saddam Hussein is relevant in demonstrating the long reception of Xerxes and Persian monarchs as the antagonist to perceived Western values/civilisation. See Hall 2007: 169-199 and Hall 2004: 1-46 for a detailed discussion of the production.

¹⁵⁷ Euben 1986: 359-90, Bridges, Hall, Rhodes 2007: 5, Hanson 1999: 15-35,

¹⁵⁸ See the long history of the various adaptations of the Greek battles with the Persian empire: Wordsworth 1974: 229-30, Lord Byron’s comparison of Waterloo and Marathon, Griffith’s 1916 *Intolerance*, which highlights Cyrus as a destroyer of Babylon, rather than the traditional liberator and tolerant leader. Mate 1962: *The 300 Spartans*, Pressfield’s 1998: *Gates of Fire*.

The post 9/11 retellings of the barbarian threat as envisioned by Persia have successfully recycled earlier scholarship of the last decade with similar titles: Burn 1962: 24: begins with a lengthy quote of the book of Isaiah prefacing the arrival of “Cyrus the Great as a blessing and even liberation to Jews and other broken peoples.” Cyrus and the Achaemenids are presented as monarchs who genuinely believed in a mission of imposing peace and law but were unsuccessful in imposing this upon the “unbroken” Greece. Earlier scholarship includes: Olmstead 1948, Cook 1983, Burn 1962, Green 1998.”

2006, “Thermopylae: The Battle that Changed the World” explained the events of 9/11 provide his work a renewed importance within the wider framework of East-West cultural encounter.¹⁵⁹ Thus, it is not surprising Cartledge’s account reflects stereotypical representations of Xerxes as the ‘Asiatic invader,’ contrasted with the success of Cyrus, who fails to conquer the civilised Greeks of the European world.¹⁶⁰ We are told the Achaemenid kings were “pretty tolerant rulers,” but the empire’s founder, Cyrus was more tolerant than others as he famously liberated the Jews from their Babylonian exile.¹⁶¹ Strauss also presents a similar reading of the conflict, albeit with a focus on Salamis. Here, Cyrus is not the focus, he is interwoven as a figure to which other Persian monarchs are compared, especially in regard to Cyrus’ exceptional warfare.¹⁶² Cyrus is at the core of the ‘defence of the west’ models, constructed against the barbarity of Darius and Xerxes. This is largely because Cyrus was not involved in the invasions of the Greek city states, but also, because other Persian monarchs do not feature so positively in the original Greek and Biblical texts. Thus, as the narrative of Persian decadence travels through Roman and subsequent medieval and Renaissance authors to be inherited by modern scholarship, Cyrus is left out and Xerxes is routinely utilised as a trope for decadence. There is a repeated myth of the superiority of Greek cultural and political tendencies inherent across these works which is reflective of the ideology that the Greek defeat of the Persian empire is at the centre of western imagination as the presumed centre of the world.¹⁶³ As a result, the narrative of the exceptionally tolerant Cyrus and the despot Xerxes are reimagined and appropriated for modern audiences. Perhaps one of the most extreme views echoing a distinct clash of civilisations discourse is perpetuated by Lacey, a popular military historian and embedded journalist for the American invasion of Iraq. He argues that the cultural fault line determined by the Persian wars is so significant that, “the growing rift between the West and the backward-looking forces in the Arab-Persian world means a future war between civilisations cannot be ruled out.”¹⁶⁴ Whilst an anachronistic and popular text, this reductive view is not a minority. Its narrative has developed over time and emerges in such retellings that claim to sell to an age-old tale – and there is no such tale in this collection older than that of the Greeks and the Persians.

¹⁵⁹ Cartledge 2006: xii.

¹⁶⁰ Xerxes is called this multiple times as is the Achaemenid empire referred to as the “Asiatic Achaemenids.” Greece also referred to as “Europe” repeatedly, see Cartledge 2006: xiv, 6, 13.

¹⁶¹ Cartledge 2006: 8.

¹⁶² Strauss 2004: 36, 41.

¹⁶³ Dabashi: 2015: 33.

¹⁶⁴ Lacey 2011: 148.

Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*

Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* is crucial for achieving an understanding of the broader perception(s) of Persia in the fourth BCE. The text is the primary repository of sentiment favourable to Persia in the Xenophonic corpus.¹⁶⁵ Xenophon's characterisation of Cyrus as a just ruler has remained integral to later writers, especially during the Middle Ages, when kingship was re-conceptualised with input from ancient models. The wide reception of the text throughout time has further solidified a positive view of Cyrus that is often inconsistent with the representation of other Persian kings. Xenophon's Cyrus differs significantly to the Persian kings that come after him; he is more just than Darius and in stark contrast to the standard representation of the despot imagined in Xerxes.

Xenophon's writings distinguished in two categories; those with a significant historical component and those which are predominately philosophical. The *Cyropaedia* has been placed into the first category although it is largely fictitious and pedagogical in nature.¹⁶⁶ However, there is consensus that it was never intended to be read as history and that the text is unique in its genre.¹⁶⁷ Much of the historical context regarding Cyrus' identity is corroborated with other ancient sources, primarily the Cyrus cylinder, indicating the memory of Cyrus lived on in Xenophon's world. In contrast, there are many 'errors' in the descriptions of Cyrus' conquests (e.g. Cyrus did not conquer Egypt as reported by Xenophon), his list of satrapies as well as the names of the Persian nobility. Xenophon shared with his contemporaries, like Plato, a deep concern for the structure and functioning of Greek city states. Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's in the *Politics* deconstructed the 'polis' and offered alternative versions of how it should be governed. In a similar manner, Cyrus offers a didactic model of a king who espouses leadership qualities with the aim to highlight the problems of the Greek city states. Xenophon's life saw rapid change across mainland Greece and the Aegean, especially the interplay of power between Athens and Sparta, both rising to hegemony and loosing gradual power.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ Hirsch 1985: 61.

¹⁶⁶ Danzig 2009: 243, Flower 2017: 302, Hirsch 1985: ix. The *Cyropaedia* has been placed into this category largely due to the view that the text is a valuable source for the study of ancient Iran. Of course, this view depends on the historian, for example, scholars specialising in Iranian studies have usually contested this – see Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1985, 2010, and others have argued for its use such as Hirsch 1985: preface, 61-97. For a broader discussion of this debate, see Momigliano 1975: 132-137, Gera 1993: 13-22, Gruen 2011: 53-65.

¹⁶⁷ Sancisi-Weerdenburg: 1985/2010, Tamiolaki 2017: 182 argues it was conceived to be read as a historiography.

¹⁶⁸ Lee 2017: 17.

Thus, Xenophon was interested in the paradigms of empire,¹⁶⁹ not necessarily in order to advocate the superiority of monarchy,¹⁷⁰ but to explore the patterns of good leadership. Such themes of virtue and justice are apparent in the *Cyropaedia* and the *Memorabilia* and the *Anabasis*.¹⁷¹

Xenophon's Cyrus – The prototype of the Ideal Monarch

We must ask the question as to what extent the memory of Cyrus lived on in Xenophon's era for him to have chosen a Persian monarch as the focal protagonist of his work. It has been suggested that Xenophon was familiar with the *Histories*.¹⁷² In the same way Herodotus claims to have consulted multiple version of events, Xenophon often had several versions of a story from which to choose.¹⁷³ Thus, with multiple versions of Cyrus and his achievements in circulation, Xenophon was able to choose which qualities best enabled him to illustrate the quintessential leader.¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, Xenophon's time saw many before and after him write specific works on the Persian world that depicted fourth century Persia in decline. Such diverse works from Aeschylus, Aristotle and Plato are consistent with this stereotypical representation of fourth century Persia. The *Cyropaedia's* epilogue gives a similar impression of Persia's decline after Cyrus as imagined by Plato and Aristotle. There is a long list of changes observed from the Persia of Cyrus' day to the Persia with which the text concludes. The tradition of fine horsemanship has disappeared (8.13), as has the values of learning justice, and they are now more luxurious than in the time of Cyrus (8.15).¹⁷⁵ All of these things, are consistently compared with the old Persia of Cyrus' day. Finally, this section ends with its darkest statement, that the Persian's are now less religious, less righteous and less

¹⁶⁹ Tamiolaki 2017: 175.

¹⁷⁰ Tamiolaki 2016: 3.

¹⁷¹ These texts are also centred around knowledge, virtue, justice and mastering the self, belonging to an agenda of topics that Socrates also discussed. Tamiolaki 2017: 181 has outlined The *Memorabilia* is centred upon two issues: an apologetic and defensive one as well as a political one. Xenophon both defends Socrates and promotes his own ideals, often blurring the two. For example, the first part of the text focuses on moral issues and is thus more in line with defensive readings, whilst later sections are increasingly political, articulating Xenophon's own political views, regardless of whether they are Socratic. See Tamiolaki 2016: 2 for an overview.

¹⁷² Hirsch 1985: 68, Tamiolaki 2017: 175. There are similarities between Herodotus' account of Cyrus' military conquests, especially his capture of Sardis and Babylon as well as Cyrus' relationship with Croesus.

¹⁷³ Hirsch 1985: 69, Carlier 1978: 133.

¹⁷⁴ Drews 1974: 387-393 has demonstrated that Cyrus had become a legendary figure in the Near Eastern tradition, and Hirsch 1985: 68 has suggested that Xenophon was exposed to such legends during his time as a soldier in the expedition of Cyrus the younger.

¹⁷⁵ The Persians are no longer content with soft sheets and rugs, they must have carpets laid under their beds, they have their body covered with warm sleeves and gloves and in the summer and have servants standing beside them to provide them shade (8.15-8.16).

valiant in war (8.27). Xenophon is so certain of his statement, that he instructs his readers to examine the actions of the new Persians to believe his truth. The Persians have been reduced to the Persians of Aeschylus and Plato, who also emphasize the Persians' excessive luxury as a precursor of their decline and degeneration.¹⁷⁶ Whilst the Persia of the fifth and fourth centuries was far from declining as presented by the Greek authors,¹⁷⁷ the pervasiveness of this view in the historical tradition and the scholarship that follows it¹⁷⁸ demonstrates the popularity of this social imaginary.

Xenophon, however, does not necessarily succumb to these views. There is long debate about the authenticity of the epilogue, largely due to its stark contrast with the praise of Cyrus throughout the rest of the *Cyropaedia*. Earlier scholarship has denied its authenticity,¹⁷⁹ suggesting that it is either the work of another writer, or Xenophon added it at a later time, due to public outrage at his praise of Persia.¹⁸⁰ More so, Renaissance translators had difficulty with this epilogue, often having to choose between merging it with the remainder of the text or translating it as a stand-alone chapter.¹⁸¹ Xenophon's travel to Persia, his acquaintance with Persians in Cyrus' camp and his anti-democratic tendencies enabled a fair-minded attitude towards Persians, or at least less blatantly bias than other representations of Persia during his time.¹⁸² But, the debate is of course much more nuanced than this. Xenophon's praise for Cyrus and his general positive tone about many Persian practices across many of his works revealed a stark contrast to the traditional genre of the *persica*. Similar to the way Hall has demonstrated that the use of tragedy was of central importance in the development of the 'barbarian' as an opposite to

¹⁷⁶ Aeschylus, *Persians* 1-50, Plato *Laws* 693c-698a.

¹⁷⁷ Briant 1996 monumental work has largely overturned this view of Persian decline. For instance, the opening chorus of Aeschylus' *Persians* 1-50 describes Xerxes' gold bedecked army, the Babylonians who are rich in gold and the Lydian's who live in luxury lines.

¹⁷⁸ Such texts that depicted Persia in decline include Olmstead 1966, Cook 1983. More recent texts include that have over relied on a specific reading of the Greek material and reinforced traditional stereotypical representations of the Achaemenids include: Billows 2011, Strauss 2004, Holland 2005, Cartledge 2006.

¹⁷⁹ Holden 1890: 196-97. For further debate regarding the authenticity, see Higgins 1977: 54-55, Hirsch 1985: 90-94, Delebecque 1957: 405-408.

¹⁸⁰ Hirsch 1985: 91 maintains the inauthenticity of the epilogue.

¹⁸¹ Grogan 2007: 65. Barker merged the two, also merging Cyrus' life with a recognisable 'fall' narrative that was common in Christian literature. The merging of the epilogue with the rest of the text became common among English Renaissance writers, as demonstrated by Philemon Holland. Such a pattern was conveniently Christianised for the English Christian audience, meaning it could be rationalised within a new context. This way, there was little conflict between the Cyrus of the full text and the Cyrus the epilogue describes.

¹⁸² Hirsch 1985: 12.

the ‘Greek,’ Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia* is full of similar binaries depicting strong and weak leadership, which surpass traditional notions of the ‘Greek’ and ‘Persian.’¹⁸³ By using the frame of an excellent leader of a powerful empire, Xenophon is highlighting multiple issues about Athenian corruption for his audience to comprehend. Praise for Cyrus showcases to his Athenian readers that even the barbarians of Aeschylus and Plato had better imperial rule than them.¹⁸⁴ This is successfully achieved through maintaining a synthesis between alien and assimilated representations of Persia. For example, the scenes of oriental luxury at the Median camp as they were relaxing and intoxicated in the absence of their masters (4.5.7, 8) was typical of fourth century imaginations of the Persians. This familiar representation is synthesised with other alien traditions, especially with the opening of the book reflecting on the democracies that have been overthrown (1.1.1). This introduction contextualises the narrative of a foreign barbarian king within an overall Greek framework, one of a Greek polis,¹⁸⁵ setting the scene for his Greek audience. Thus, the image of Cyrus is utilised for Xenophon’s authorial purposes in modelling kingship to his Greek audience.

Xenophon’s presentation of Cyrus and the Persians is diverse and filled with binaries due to his core subject matter of justice and kingship.¹⁸⁶ Here, Xenophon combines two opposing images, one of luxury and despotism of which the Greeks seemingly despised, and the other image of courage and helpfulness, valued in Greek war imagery. In other examples, the Persians are the polar opposites of Greeks, especially as the epilogue demonstrates; but by doing so, Xenophon is able to employ Persian alterity as a positive model for emulation by the Greek society that Xenophon critiques.¹⁸⁷ It was harder for Xenophon to utilise a Greek ruler for his analysis, considering the turbulent political

¹⁸³ Tamiolaki 2017: 175.

¹⁸⁴ The average Athenian would not have been perplexed by this and supporters of Socrates would have appreciated this entendre to the barbarity of the Athenians. Arruzza 2018: 19. Arruzza explains that anti-tyrannical literary tropes that helped establish an understanding of democracy and democratic life. Thus, by criticising and fearing tyranny, Athenians could by way of contrast, characterise a set of moral features to define themselves.

¹⁸⁵ Vlassopoulos 2017: 369.

¹⁸⁶ Such binaries are present across Xenophon’s works for example in the *Oeconomicus*, where the Persian king is presented as a model ruler (4.1-4.17) but in the *Agésilas* the Persian king is represented in contrast to the Spartan king, the Persian king is lazy and lives in luxury. Indeed, many of Xenophon’s other works are filled with similar binaries: in the *Anabasis*, the Persians help dislodge trapped wagons, whilst dressed in luxurious robes (*Anab.*1.5.8).

¹⁸⁷ Vlassopoulos 2017: 371. The Greek and Persian worlds were not as hostile to each other as imagined.

climate of his time, thus by using a Persian leader, Xenophon is showcasing strong and weak leadership, which surpass tradition notions of the Greek and Persian. Therefore, the epilogue does not detract from Xenophon's representation, instead it shows Xenophon's ability to synthesis seemingly alien worlds to be digestible for his audience. Xenophon represents Cyrus as an admirable figure who had the support of his people throughout the *Cyropaedia* which is resolved with contemporary Greek reactions to Persia whereby Cyrus' systems have been abandoned (8.8). Indeed, the analysis of the *Cyropaedia*'s epilogue is only confronting or out of place¹⁸⁸ if we view Xenophon's characterisation of Cyrus as an exceptional monarch who fails in his social revolution by the end of the text. Instead, Xenophon's epilogue shows the failings of a luxurious lifestyle, which were explored consistently throughout his work and are consistent with the failings of Cyrus, who, despite all of his virtues, did not have a succession plan to carry on the values and political changes for which he was praised.

The decadence that follows Persia after Cyrus is perhaps not so different to Aeschylus' construction of the Persians. For even Aeschylus characterises the ghost of Darius as praising Cyrus' benevolence (768-72). Xenophon acknowledges a similar representation of the Persians, in line with Aeschylus' during the later epilogue. Both representations depict a binary between the flawed barbarian kings (Darius, Xerxes) and the benevolent despot figure of Cyrus, who is consistently contrasted against his Persian counterparts. Of course, Xenophon's direct praise of Cyrus and the general favourable reception of the *Cyropaedia*¹⁸⁹ has meant that Xenophon's seemingly unwilling contribution to the typical representation of the Persians has gone unrecognised and instead, his construction of the just and wise Cyrus has remained integral to his image.

Cyrus' Education

Xenophon's description of Cyrus' education is one that forms a fundamental part of leadership qualities in his kingship. The Persian regime helped educate Cyrus (1.1.6), by teaching him to abide the law, speak the truth, and uphold the common good (1.2.2). This is similar to the description of Herodotus regarding the education of Persian nobility;¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ As explored by Vlassopoulos 2017, Due 1989, Tatum 1989: 215-39, Johnson 2005.

¹⁸⁹ Nadon 2001: 3 explains that *Cyropaedia* was widely read during the revival of classical literature in Europe; Rodd 2017: 435-448 has traced the varied positive interpretations of Xenophon from the eighteenth century onwards, Tuplin 2013: 73-74 has outlined the lack of Greek paradigms for leadership, thus his reliance on Cyrus.

¹⁹⁰ Hdt. 1.135.

Cyrus is taught to regulate his behaviour so not to harm the common good,¹⁹¹ his teachers encourage self-restraint from material items, especially food and drink (1.2.8). During his reign, Cyrus models the modest and humble behaviour taught during his youth as he spares the lives of those he captures.¹⁹² He further cultivates modesty by modelling such a virtue in his actions, so that men would see in him one who could not be dragged “from the pursuit of virtue by the pleasure of the moment.”¹⁹³ Thus, Cyrus models the fundamentals of the Persian education system through his leadership. By distinguishing between hubris and moderation in Cyrus’ education,¹⁹⁴ Xenophon can showcase his goal through the use of traditional Greek themes: that a just and benevolent ruler is possible.

Xenophon’s lengthy description of Cyrus’ education is part of a broader debate surrounding monarchy as a form of political rule in Greek thought.¹⁹⁵ Therefore, it is important to contextualise Xenophon’s view of monarchy and his subsequent construction of Cyrus, through an examination of his contemporaries, notably Plato, as both were post-Socratic thinkers engaged with the political problems of their time.¹⁹⁶ Plato praises Cyrus’ ability to initiate a social revolution whereby the relationship between ruler and ruled has transformed. (694a). The ‘slavery’ of Persia in this extract may be a direct reference to the old Persia, before Cyrus, and so Plato, much like Xenophon, emphasises the role that Cyrus plays in advancing his society. When Plato describes the changes that occurred in Persian society, “The King” fosters equality to strengthen the morale of the soldiers, resulting in “freedom and friendship and a common sharing in intelligence” (694b). Plato engages with the figure of a just leader in the form of a Persian

¹⁹¹ This is valued so highly by the Persian state that they are even taught that it would be shameful if children desired selfish interests that did not align with the common good. Xen. Cyr.1.2.2-6.

¹⁹² Xen. Cyr. 3.1.30-37, 7.2.9-29.

¹⁹³ Xen. Cyr. 8.1. 28-32.

¹⁹⁴ Whidden 2007: 544.

¹⁹⁵ Atack 2018: 511.

¹⁹⁶ Atack 2018: 511, See also the works of the following scholars for a discussion of the relationship between the works of Xenophon and Plato: Tuplin 2018, Ray 1992, Breebaart 1983, Skemp 1952. Whilst it is difficult to determine whether it is Plato who responds to Xenophon or the other way around, given that we are uncertain about the composition date of their works, the existence of a thematic relationship between the texts is beyond doubt. For example, Plato seems to be responding to Xenophon in the *Laws* when he criticises Cyrus’ education (694c). This does not necessarily imply that Plato read Xenophon (as there are other works attributed to the story of Cyrus too, e.g. Diogenes Laertius *Lives of Philosophers* 6.2-16) but it does indicate that he was familiar with the story of the ideal ruler projected through the figure of Cyrus. This notion is corroborated by the fact that there are inconsistencies in Plato’s account of Cyrus when compared to Xenophon’s account. Nevertheless, it is clear both Plato and Xenophon utilise the figure of Cyrus in their conceptualisations of monarchy.

monarch but, he is equally critical of the Persian regime (694c). This criticism is largely because Plato's conceptualisation of the ideal ruler takes exclusively the form of a philosopher king and clearly, in Xenophon's account, Cyrus' wisdom is a practical one.¹⁹⁷ For Plato, tyranny is democracy's natural deviation and he contextualises such tyranny in the Athenian democracy of the 5th century.¹⁹⁸ Cyrus is characterised in contrast to this image, both by Xenophon and Plato, weaving elements familiar to the Greek imaginary of the Persians with Greek concepts of just kingship, mainly deriving from Homer.¹⁹⁹ Plato criticises Cyrus more explicitly than Xenophon, stating that the Persians delighted more than was necessary in monarchy (693e) and later, that Cyrus' involvement with war prevented him from taking care of children's education in the empire (694d). Thus, the growth of the empire resulted in a loss of education which is stressed as the reason for the decline of Persia. In a similar manner, in the *Cyropaedia*, Persia declines rapidly after Cyrus (8.1), highlighting the failure of strong institutions to maintain the changes implemented by Cyrus. If the Persian empire had declined, it is not because of the inferiority of its people, but because of the improper system of government and education.²⁰⁰ When read together as part of a particular debate of fourth century Athens to which Xenophon and Plato contribute, we realise that by now the Persians are part of a dynamic tradition that the Greeks can grapple with. There exists, by now, a range of complex attitudes towards the Persians that bypass traditional fifth century perceptions. For Plato, the Persian king, like other Athenians, has been corrupted by power.²⁰¹ Plato is highlighting that a strong leader can indeed make a people great, but without the virtues of philosophy and strong institutions, this king cannot achieve the long-term prosperity of the state. This is consistent with the *Cyropaedia*. Whilst there is explicit praise of Cyrus, Xenophon forces his readers, who viewed the Persians as decadent barbarians,²⁰²

¹⁹⁷ However, to Plato he is still deserving of criticism because he is not a philosopher king. This is where Plato and Xenophon's engagement with political life and the problems of tyranny deviate – Xenophon's Cyrus demonstrates practical virtue and Plato's Cyrus does not. However, a practical model has been outlined in the *Laws*, contrasting to the theoretical ideal offered in the *Republic* such as: Morrow 1960.

¹⁹⁸ Aruzza 2018: 51. Plato's definition of a tyrant is a ruler who is lawless, greedy, violent and inherently angry. He lives in a society that has experienced the woes of the Peloponnesian war and the huge humiliation of the Athenians during the Sicilian expedition, which is largely blamed on the tyrannical disposition of men like Alcibiades (Thuc. 6.15.4; cf. Plut. *Alc.* 6.3).

¹⁹⁹ Starr 1992: 64-65.

²⁰⁰ Hirsch 1985: 145.

²⁰¹ Hirsch 1985: 145 uses *Laws* 697c-e to make this assessment.

²⁰² Tuplin 2018: 606. Argues that a Greek praising a Persian monarch as a model would have caught the attention of Athenian readers.

to reflect on their own practices through illuminating an example of a just, ideal king and the revolution of his society.

Cyrus' views on justice

There are many instances where Cyrus challenges the law and makes his own decisions. (1.4.6, 2.2.19-21). Cyrus' education informs his perceptions of justice and enables him to make decisions that will best serve his society. Considering the prevalence of the sophists in claiming to teach virtue, Cyrus' simple, just education also undermines the authority of the sophists and highlights Xenophon's distrust of them.²⁰³ Xenophon is demonstrating the importance of an omnipotent leader.²⁰⁴ Especially in Xenophon's Socratic context, a monarch blindly following the law would be problematic. However, Cyrus' extensive praise bears a possible ironic reading of his success.²⁰⁵ Such readings are based on the idea that Xenophon is demonstrating his concern over the behaviour and government of Cyrus. The most profound one that characterises the popular imagination of the Achaemenids, is the degeneration that follows the empire after Cyrus' rule. According to this reading, the decline is due to the insufficiencies of Cyrus' institutions and political vision.²⁰⁶ Thus, if the measure of a good ruler is the ability to create lasting institutions,²⁰⁷ Cyrus fails this test and his example serves as a critique of the Persian monarchy. However, this disregards Xenophon's Socratic context, as he did not believe that political institutions are a reliable source of good governance in the absence of a "living ruling intelligence."²⁰⁸ Of most significance, Dorion has posed the question that Socrates was never liable for his students' degeneration; so why should Cyrus be liable for the degeneration of Persia?²⁰⁹ Indeed, this profound question puts the legacy of Xenophon's Cyrus into perspective. Persia's degeneration after Cyrus, as expressed in the infamous epilogue of the *Cyropaedia*, is more reflective of Orientalism surrounding Persia that has plagued 4th and 5th century Greek writing, rather than Xenophon's inherent effort to showcase the backward nature of the Persian state. Xenophon was a critique of democracy and sceptical of a state without benevolent monarchs. Without the tenants of justice

²⁰³ Corey 2002: 190 identifies six reasons why the writings of Xenophon and Plato showcase why teaching virtue was regarded as shameful.

²⁰⁴ Gera 1993: 12, 22, 280.

²⁰⁵ Starting with Strauss 1998: 143-178, Gray 2011: 247-290 who analyses ironic 'dark' readings of Xenophon and straightforward readings, Nadon 2001: 164-78 who maintains an ironic reading of Cyrus to paint a negative portrait of Cyrus.

²⁰⁶ Carlier 1978: 160-162, Gera 1993: 286, Nadon 2001: 139-146.

²⁰⁷ Gera 1993: 297-298 who has argued the ability of a leader is measured by their ability to create long lasting institutions.

²⁰⁸ Weathers 1953: 317-319, Sage 1994: 164-174.

²⁰⁹ Dorion 2002: 87-117.

highlighted by Xenophon, there was no great man to lead to the masses. The darkness expressed in the epilogue are but examples of what can befall any state without the principles of justice espoused by Cyrus. The death of Persia's 'philosopher king' demonstrated the death of a just state, and not the death of the only great monarch of the Achaemenids, so commonly remembered in the historiographical tradition.

The Reception of Xenophon

The notion of the benevolent despot²¹⁰ has remained integral to the *Cyropaedia*'s reception, one whose ethnic origin or "Persian-ness" has been forgotten but remembered as a prototype of a powerful king. This representation is more reflective of the reception of Xenophon, the authorial intentions of writers after Xenophon and the many differing imaginations of Persia throughout time.²¹¹ Persia as a concept had been used to constitute the Oriental other in Greek perceptions of themselves.²¹² Works such as Aeschylus' *Persians*, set the tone for further appropriation of this construct. Against the backdrop of the imagined Persia of the 5th and 4th centuries, Xenophon's works have been received rather positively. For example, Dio Chrysostom writing in the 1st century is testimony to the impact of Xenophon's work. Dio was attracted to the didactic nature of Xenophon's work that stressed such a moral message.²¹³ This is perhaps why he praises Xenophon's ideas as "clear and simple and can be seen easily by everyone... carrying much conviction and exercising much impact so that his power seems not like cleverness but actually like magic."²¹⁴ It is strange that Dio does not make explicit reference to the *Cyropaedia*, but only the *Anabasis* and the *Memorabilia*, considering his admiration for the presentation of a just leader.²¹⁵

The virtues of a just leader have appealed to later generations in their engagement with the works of Xenophon and the figure of Cyrus. It is of no surprise that Xenophon's popular texts, namely the *Hiero*, *Oeconomicus* and the *Cyropaedia*, were read by those writing instructional handbooks for rulers,²¹⁶ due to the inherent philosophical nature of the text. The *Cyropaedia* was thus adapted to new contexts and appropriated accordingly.

²¹⁰ Gera 1993: 297.

²¹¹ Strootman and Versluys 2017: 9.

²¹² On the appropriation of Persia as a concept, see: Hall 1989, Miller 1997, Strootman and Versluys 2017.

²¹³ Bowie 2017: 405 attributes this to his Stoic tendencies – opens recommendations of Xenophon with *Memorabilia*. For people in imperial period, it was the representation of Socrates that would have sparked an interest in Xenophon.

²¹⁴ Dio. *Oration* 18.13-17.

²¹⁵ Bowie 2017: 406.

²¹⁶ Humble 2017: 416.

Considering Cicero's criticism of Herodotus' work on the grounds of its lack of historicity, it is interesting that he praised the *Cyropaedia*, arguing that whilst it was not a historical truth, it was still a representation of just rule.²¹⁷ Cicero's comments were remembered in later periods, as Platina makes references to the *Cyropaedia* as an essential text, stating that Cicero had stated Scipio was accustomed to keep the *Cyropaedia* close by.²¹⁸ In a similar trend, Cyrus was imagined as a model for praising emperors in Byzantine imperial panegyrics. Ioannes Kinnamos, the historian of the emperor Manuel I Komnenos, prefaced his work by stating the task of writing history enabled the ancients to gain honour, hence they were trained in the history of Hellenes, the training of Cyrus, from childhood into adulthood. (Ioannes Kinnamos *History* 1.1).²¹⁹

Additionally, Cyrus was celebrated as an exemplar of piety in the 1400s, best demonstrated in a letter to the Duke of Calabria. Here, Giovanni Pontano writes in "On the Prince" that Cyrus, "is thought to have been an example not only of justice, but of all the royal virtues." He then lists those who figures who illuminate such qualities, listing Cyrus, Camilius and Scipio Africanus in his comparison to Alfonso's grandfather's kingly and just qualities. However, Cyrus is highlighted, as the author urges Alfonso to imitate Cyrus' legacy, to be "generous... obtaining the goodwill of his followers through kindness, assisting them in their work and sharing their labors."²²⁰ In such texts, it is clear Xenophon was read as a *speculum principis*, popular in the medieval and Renaissance periods, and Cyrus was the exemplar to model appropriate, just behaviour. Beginning with Cicero's categorisation of the *Cyropaedia* as a *speculum principum*, similar writers marketed the text in a similar fashion,²²¹ and continue to do so.²²² William Barker's 1552 translation was circulated widely.²²³ This could be due to the text's Renaissance educational theory, that is, his liking for moral exempla that governed Barker's translation. Other translations circulated for differing uses; Barker's addressed the sons of aristocrats and Holland's was intended for the monarchy. The text was seemingly appealing to those in imperial rule, but also for those in any positions of power.

²¹⁷ Humble 2017: 417 *Letter to Quintus*, translated by Humble.

²¹⁸ Humble 2017: 422. Cicero is said to have worn out his copy from frequent reading because of the text's exemplified virtue, courage and glory

²¹⁹ Kaldellis 2015: 22-23.

²²⁰ Humble 2017: 422.

²²¹ Humble 2017: 419.

²²² Masroori 1999: 13-36 analyses Cyrus' rule for "religious toleration," Aghaei and Shirvani 2016: 4030-4036 analyse Cyrus for modern business leadership examples, Ebadi's 2003 Nobel Peace Prize address made multiple references to Cyrus as the first leader to value human rights. For more examples see: Field 2012, Joneidi 2013.

²²³ Grogan 2007: 65.

This is obvious in later Byzantium circles, where there is evidence that both Xenophon's works, the *Cyropaedia* and *Anabasis*, were to some degree, read. Leo VI possessed a manuscript of both the *Anabasis* and the *Cyropaedia*, as a copy of it survives.²²⁴ The manuscript is believed to have been presented to the emperor, highlighting the interest of the stories of Cyrus by those in positions of power.

Perhaps one of the *Cyropaedia*'s most prolific devotees was Machiavelli, as he made explicit references to Cyrus, but also because of the reception attributed to his adaptation of Cyrus.²²⁵ Machiavelli's seminal *The Prince* makes an explicit comparison of Scipio to Cyrus, stating his sexual restraint, humanity and generosity were due to his imitation of Cyrus' qualities.²²⁶ Still operating within a well-established genre, the *speculum principum*; Machiavelli's Cyrus is more ruthless than the popularised just monarch of Xenophon. For example, it has been suggested Machiavelli was bringing to light the necessity for force and deceit in successful rule, largely because Xenophon had not. It is difficult to determine the extent of Machiavelli's understanding of the text, but the original context of many ancient texts especially in such a genre, was irrelevant so far as the applicability of ideas was most pertinent.²²⁷ What has conveniently been omitted from such appropriations is any mention of Cyrus' negative qualities. On many occasions, Cyrus challenges the Persian education and makes his own decision, which is praised throughout the text (14.6, 2.2.19-21). Or, the degeneration that follows the empire, described in the epilogue, does not take much priority in the discussions in the reception of later perspectives of Cyrus. Especially for Machiavelli, writing about the necessity for the survival of those in power, such transgressions would not have mattered. Similar to Xenophon's period, a monarch blindly abiding by the law would have been problematic. Thus, for Machiavelli, Cyrus' disregard for particular political institutions to enact what is deemed right, fit the theme of achieving just aims, no matter the cost. By Machiavelli's context, it becomes easier to view Cyrus as the exceptional Persian ruler, which at the same time, strips him of his Persian origin and transforms him into the model ruler imagined by different European thinkers across time.

The idea of a model ruler imagined in Cyrus continued to prove relevant in other medieval contexts and began to adopt a religious framework. Xenophon's Socratic context was

²²⁴ Martin 2013: 824, Kaldellis 2015: 23.

²²⁵ These include: Nadon 2001: 6, Berlin 1972: 147-206.

²²⁶ Humble 2017: 420.

²²⁷ Rummel 1985: 118.

celebrated by the *Lempriere's Bibliothetica Classica*, who stated he “shewed a true discipline of Socrates... with the zeal and fervour of a Christian.”²²⁸ The appropriation of Xenophon’s didactic context seemed fitting for his newly Christian audience. Similarly, the *Cyropaedia* maintained a pedagogical function in the era of English humanism because it helped realise values of power and dominion through education, quite the contrary to the values espoused in the text. For example, Erasmus of Rotterdam, in his *Education of a Christian Prince*, dedicated to Charles V, stresses that whilst Herodotus and Xenophon were both pagans and depict problematic depictions of princes, the *Cyropaedia* does promote the education of the young.²²⁹ As the *Cyropaedia* became an exemplary text for those learning Greek, especially in reformed circles,²³⁰ the text gained increasing popularity alongside the figure of Cyrus. This meant those in positions of power, political and religious, were actively reading Xenophon’s text, perhaps under the guise that it was inherent to the pedagogical humanist ideals. Philip Melanchthon’s positive view of the *Cyropaedia* is depicted in his *Carion's Chronicle*, where he states that whilst there was much to learn about Cyrus in Biblical texts, Xenophon was still critical in understanding his virtues. Cyrus’ character is praised, specifically his treatment of those he conquers and his self-restraint. Both Erasmus and Melanchthon’s readings of the *Cyropaedia*, indicate its appropriation across contexts. Whilst pagan narratives were traditionally looked down upon, they could also promote moral lessons, so the image of Cyrus fit perfectly into this. The easy appropriation of Cyrus into such a religious context, saw Calvinists in charge of much of the editorial of Xenophon’s work during the sixteenth century. One such individual was Henri II Estienne, who compared James of Scotland to Cyrus. Alluding to Cyrus’ restoration of the Jewish temple and the freeing of captives, Estienne compares this to James’ restoration of Christianity.²³¹ This is testament to the popularity of Cyrus in European imagination, both in religious and diplomatic contexts. A clear change from the *Cyropaedia* as the exemplary text for kings, princes and the monarchy slowly evolved to become an educational text amongst Protestant circles. Thus, the figure of Cyrus as a just ruler, with a simple education quickly transformed in the memory of his reception and became entrenched as a model for those in positions of

²²⁸ Lempriere 1788: n.p in Rood 2017: 440.

²²⁹ Translated Cheshire and Heath 1986: 251.

²³⁰ Methuen 1994: 844 outlines a 1559 curriculum document “the great church organisation” which sets out church and educational regulations for the ducy of Wurttemberg. In this document, it is prescribed in the fifth year of study, when the students begin to study Greek, Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia* and Aesop’s Fables are listed as the texts of choice.

²³¹ Humble 2017: 429.

authority. Somewhat ironic to the very structures and values that Xenophon aimed to critique.

Subsequently, through the reception of Herodotus and Xenophon's texts, the figure of Cyrus is engrained in European literature as a symbol for leadership and successively appropriated for different contexts.

Chapter 2 – Cyrus in Near Eastern Context

Contrary to the Greco-Roman representations of the Persians, Biblical perspectives portray Cyrus and the Achaemenid kings in an overwhelmingly positive manner. The image of Cyrus is here too employed to serve the political agendas of their respective communities. The Greek corpus, especially Xenophon, emphasises Cyrus' military power and his benevolent status, through which he critiqued the Athenian democratic regime. In Yehudite discourse, Cyrus is also employed as an agent of negotiating political identity, shaping the memory of the relevant communities.²³² This identity strips Cyrus of his Achaemenid origin and reconstructs him to fit the character of Israelite kingship. At face value, he is represented as a 'Persian' monarch. But, after a closer analysis, we observe that this Persian king has been rebranded to reflect discourse surrounding Yehudite kingship, particularly through the figure of David.

Cyrus in Ezra

A heroic image of Cyrus dominates the Biblical texts of Ezra with an emphasis on his unprecedented 'tolerance,' delivering God's people out of the exile imposed on them by king Nebuchadnezzar. An exploration of this issue begins with an overview of the context of Cyrus' representation. Ezra is an important source on Jewish people during the Achaemenid period, filling considerable gaps in our knowledge,²³³ including the limited sources available on the exilic and Persian periods, which contrasts the abundance of sources up to the fall of Jerusalem, making reconstructions of the Jewish past in the Persian period challenging.²³⁴ There is a consistent narrative structure followed in Ezra;

²³² Klaus 2001: 223-25, Wilson 2015: 328.

²³³ Grabbe 1991: 30, Grabbe 2001: 84 discusses the limitations of studying the history of Jews in the Persian period.

²³⁴ Grabbe 2001: 83 – such issues of reconstruction include the reconstruction of the high priests in the Persian period citing Cross 1975: 4-18.

it begins with the return of the people from captivity, the building of the temple, followed by continued threats posed against outsiders.²³⁵ Ezra begins with an official royal commission (the Edict of Cyrus in Ezra 1), followed by success through divine favour (Ezra 6).²³⁶ Within the narrative's 'success' component, the Persian empire is positively depicted, since divine assistance toward the Persian regime is the key factor enabling Jewish success.²³⁷ Here, the Persian kings set the politico-religious action in motion with Yahweh supporting the imperial government. The imperial government shows an unconditional obedience toward Yahweh, whereas the subordinate authorities, such as the governors of Samaria, cause opposition for the Jews.²³⁸ Ezra begins with an imperial edict from Cyrus having been appointed by the Lord of the heavens to rebuild his house at Jerusalem (Ezra 1.2-4) after being destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.²³⁹ Cyrus is presented in an authoritative manner, ordering the Jewish people to help each other with various goods – silver, resources and livestock for the restoration of the temple (Ezra 1.2-4). Cyrus acknowledges 'the gods of the heaven' multiple times not only vis-à-vis his control of the empire, but also with regard to the divine order he received to rebuild the temple. For example, each imperial command – the appointment of Cyrus' control of the empire, the building of the temple (Ezra 1.2), the relocation of people to the temple (Ezra 1.3) and the resources provided to the exiles (Ezra 1.4) begins with a praise to Yahweh.

In the postexilic period, many of the Biblical texts reflect ongoing trauma related to central aspects of Israelite identity – the dismantling of land, temple and monarchy.²⁴⁰ Such trauma is also central to Ezra, as they reconfigure their identity. In this context, the role of Cyrus, is to open up the possibility of a life in the original homeland.²⁴¹ This life begins with the reconstruction of the temple, which the Persian kings oversee. There are multiple 'official' references to this decree, including 1:2-4, 4:11 as well as public reading of such documents (Ezra 4:18). In addition, the fact that it was published in Aramaic indicates the reconstruction of the temple was the official business of the empire and not just the Jewish minority.²⁴² The Persian kings were also responsible for ensuring the return of the Jewish people post-Babylonian exile: first, there is a list of vessels for the

²³⁵ Grabbe 1991: 84.

²³⁶ Eskenazi 1988: 641-656 provides a longer structural analysis of Ezra and Nehemiah outlining a threefold model with multiple sub-categories.

²³⁷ Grabbe 1998: 101.

²³⁸ Gerstenberger 2011: 11.

²³⁹ There is debate regarding the authenticity of this edict. Grabbe 1992: 34-35 highlights the various positions but argues that it is the creation of the Biblical author.

²⁴⁰ Knowles 2018: 277.

²⁴¹ Gerstenberger 2011: 9.

²⁴² Knowles 2018: 278.

temple (Ezra 1:9-11) which follows with a long list of names of inhabitants and families (Ezra 2.2-58). The restoration of religious objects visibly connected with Jewish identity highlights the attempt to maintain a continuity of their beliefs through the trauma of the present.²⁴³ Such continuity is maintained with the imperial support of the Achaemenids, especially Cyrus (Ezra 1:7-8).

Ezra's conceptualisation of a homeland is why the text uses the phrase "Israelite" for its people instead of the contextually expected Judeans or Jews.²⁴⁴ The extensive list of returnees and the description of their genealogy highlight Ezra's struggle to connect the people of Yehud and the communities in Mesopotamia with the concept of Israel.²⁴⁵ Whilst there is much debate surrounding the list of returnees,²⁴⁶ the chroniclers of Ezra-Nehemiah demonstrate the construction of the imagined national community through families and hometowns; their members distinguished by their functions as laypeople, priests and temple servants (Ezra 2.2b).²⁴⁷ Indeed, the "Israelite people" discussed as a homogenous people, did not exist as a unified society.²⁴⁸ After the fall of Jerusalem, the Babylonians created two Jewish communities: those who remained in Jerusalem and those taken into Babylonian captivity.²⁴⁹ These texts are constructed within the political memory and culture of the Persian period. As a result, this literature is concerned with glorifying and critiquing its monarchic past. This includes a preservation of information about the Jews who lived under Babylonian rule and were exiled, as well as the Israelite political leadership.²⁵⁰ Such narratives function as an intermediary between Jewish culture and Persian rule, promoting a symbiotic relationship.²⁵¹ For example, from Ezra 7 onwards, the text emphasises the role of other Persian kings in ongoing restoration efforts. This is made clear through Artaxerxes' reissuing of the Cyrus decree (7:13), as well as securing material resources for the rebuilding of the temple (7:15-17). The Persian kings are depicted as generous, maintaining an ongoing relationship by ensuring imperial support for the Jewish community. Cyrus is at the core of this reconstruction, posing as a vehicle for re-establishing the religious tradition after the disruption caused by the

²⁴³ Ackroyd 1972: 166.

²⁴⁴ Grabbe 2004: 167-171 discusses the usage of various phrases associated with Jewish identity in the Persian period.

²⁴⁵ Grabbe 2004: 171.

²⁴⁶ Jenner 1982: 283-284, Gunneweg 1979: 135-138.

²⁴⁷ Gerstenberger 2011: 9.

²⁴⁸ Berquist 1995: 27.

²⁴⁹ Farisani 2008: 73.

²⁵⁰ Wilson 2015: 329-333.

²⁵¹ Weitzmann 2005: 23.

Babylonian conquest.²⁵² The Biblical texts of Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles express the idea that most people in the region were deported. Now, it is believed that deportation affected only a minority.²⁵³ If exile only affected a small population, we must question its repetition across Biblical literature and its influence on Jewish social memory. The destruction of Jerusalem, Temple and Davidic monarchy also destroyed the community's spiritual life.²⁵⁴ Kings paints a bleak picture of destruction, while Ezra, Nehemiah and Isaiah depict the necessity of a return, echoing the narrative about the reconstruction of the temple as paramount in cultural identity. As Wittenberg points out, people believed God had chosen this temple as his eternal dwelling place, and its destruction threw Israel into the deepest spiritual crisis of its history.²⁵⁵ Thus, such social, cultural and spiritual contexts should be acknowledged. Ezra's narrative fosters the perception of Yahweh and Persia as allies serving each other's interests,²⁵⁶ and by doing so, constructs a social imaginary integral to the cultural survival of the Jewish people.²⁵⁷ If Yahweh cannot entrust the mission for their salvation and the rebuilding of his temple directly to his people, then he directs a plan guiding them indirectly through the Persians and their king.

Against this social imaginary, the portrait of Cyrus varies from the portrayal of other Near Eastern kings. His function is to re-establish the religious tradition after the disruption caused by the Babylonian conquest.²⁵⁸ Ezra first mentions Cyrus through the imperial edict attributed to him; although a short passage, its message is echoed throughout the text and other Biblical books (Ezra 1.1-4, Chronicles 36.22-23). The edict is repeated in Ezra 6,²⁵⁹ but this time, it has been rediscovered by Darius who issues an order to restart work at the temple. However, Darius does not have the same importance as that ascribed to Cyrus, described as a ruler who continues the imperial policy of his forefather, through whom the significance of Cyrus and his edict is reinstated. Ezra quotes multiple documents that purport to be official decrees by the Persian king or letters written by Persian government officials (Ezra 4.11-16, 5:7-15, 6:3-5, 6-12, 7:12-26). Most are

²⁵² Weitzmann 2005: 24.

²⁵³ Farisani 2008: 76, Albertz 1994: 371, Grabbe 1992: 120-121.

²⁵⁴ Farisani 2008: 81.

²⁵⁵ Wittenberg 1993: 99.

²⁵⁶ Weitzmann 2005: 24.

²⁵⁷ Weitzmann 2005: 24.

²⁵⁸ Weitzmann 2005: 25.

²⁵⁹ Bickermann 1946: 249 seems to maintain the authenticity of the Edict which helps shed light on ancient institutions. He also discusses early debate surrounding the authenticity of the second edict - Batten 1937: 185, Galling 1937: 31.

described in Aramaic,²⁶⁰ which implies a level of accuracy.²⁶¹ The authenticity of Cyrus' decree is more contentious,²⁶² but its impact on the construction of Cyrus as a model ruler in the popular imaginary of Persia cannot go unrecognised. Earlier Biblical scholarship has promoted the idea that the Achaemenids started a new policy regarding the treatment of subject people, where Cyrus reversed the Assyrian-Babylonian policy of repression. This was based on keeping the subject people happy so to remain subject,²⁶³ whereby Cyrus gave all deportees the opportunity to return to the original country.²⁶⁴ Similar rhetoric is maintained in modern scholarship, championing the view that Cyrus' empire was based on tolerance and respect for its people.²⁶⁵

There are many problems with this perception of Cyrus as a ruler espousing tolerance throughout his empire. The return of exiles and statues was not limited to Cyrus. In fact, the Assyrian kings did the same with Mesopotamian statues.²⁶⁶ Sargon II is said to have freed the inhabitants of Sippar, Nippur, Babylon and Borsippa, who had been imprisoned by Merodach-Baladan.²⁶⁷ Both Assyrian and Persian kings engaged in returning their subjects when necessary, but this does not mean they abandoned the policy of deportation.²⁶⁸ Also, whilst it seems that a return under Achaemenid rule took place, the historicity of whether this happened under Cyrus is disputed, and the incident is more aligned with policies under Darius and Artaxerxes' rule.²⁶⁹ The Persian empire was no more sincere to its subjects than were the administrations of its predecessors.²⁷⁰ For example, when the Persians captured Eretria they sacked the cities and enslaved the

²⁶⁰ Only one is in Hebrew, Ezra 1:2-4.

²⁶¹ Grabbe 1991: 125-127 summarises the various positions. Gunneweg 1985: 85-86. As most edicts are mentioned as written in Aramaic (only one is in Hebrew, Ezra 1:2-4) it has been argued that the author of Ezra either had access to Aramaic sources or used a document that contained the source.

²⁶² Grabbe 1991: 35.

²⁶³ Snaith 1949: 15.

²⁶⁴ Snaith 1949: 15. This analysis fails to account for the reasons why other subject peoples were never provided such an opportunity.

²⁶⁵ Young 1988: 42, Dandamaev and Lukonin 1989: 348, 367, Frye 1963: 78, 87, 120, Cameron 1966: 92-3. Masroori 1999: 13-36, Farrokh 2007:44. This view is especially maintained by Iranian scholarship writing in Iran and in the diaspora such as Masoud Ansari's 2001 provocative, "Cyrus the Great and Mohammed Ibn Abdullah."

²⁶⁶ Van Der Spek 2014: 257 discusses the proclamation of Esarhaddon to make a comparison with Cyrus' policies and Assyrian policies. He cites Cogan 1974: 35-41 to support his comparisons.

²⁶⁷ Van der Spek 2014: 258.

²⁶⁸ Van Der Spek 2014: 258.

²⁶⁹ Trotter 2001: 283 places the reconstruction of the temple in the reign of Darius, Berquist 1991 argues immigration and reconstruction occurred sporadically.

²⁷⁰ Berquist 1995: 25, Van Der Spek 2014: 259, Briant 2002: 505-507 all outline that the Persians did not abolish deportation.

inhabitants (Hdt 6.101). Whilst Cyrus is described in his infamous Cylinder as entering Babylon peacefully, he could only have achieved this after having defeated the Babylonian army and slaughtering their people.²⁷¹

Ezra's praise reflects its engagement with propaganda surrounding Cyrus. Edelman has argued that the author of Isaiah was aware of Cyrus' propaganda concerning the Esagila temple of Babylon, hence why the text expresses a similar sentiment for the temple of Jerusalem.²⁷² Restoring the Esagila temple was a common motif across the conquerors of Babylon, as expressed in the inscriptions of Sargon. Like Cyrus, Sargon boasts that he restored the gods who dwelled in Esagila and brought offerings to them.²⁷³ Ezra's admiration for Cyrus' order to return statues and people is not unusual within its Near Eastern context, especially in relation to the kingship of the Assyrian and Achaemenid dynasties.²⁷⁴ There was some patronage of non-Persian temples such as the temple of Bel,²⁷⁵ but the extent of similar support towards Judea is questionable. Such patronage is not extraordinary tolerance, rather an element of empire building. There was no concept of religious tolerance in the ancient world – there was recognition of foreign deities.²⁷⁶ However, what such recognition looked like in practice, is contested. In the royal inscriptions, the Persian kings write of their support for foreign cults and their strong piety to Ahuramazda.²⁷⁷ In practice, this recognition consisted of some 'tolerance,' as long as they did not threaten disobedience,²⁷⁸ and consisted of favours for cults for political reasons, such as specific cults in Egypt.²⁷⁹ As temples were taxed,²⁸⁰ it seems inconsistent that the Persian imperial system would have granted financial support to the Jewish communities and their temples. But it was possible to use one's own gods to intimidate

²⁷¹ Van Der Spek 2014: 255.

²⁷² Edelman 2005: 151-160.

²⁷³ Van de Spek 2014: 245 uses Fuchs' translation 1994: 154 in Luckenbill 1926. Similarly, Assurbanipal also tells us he made regular offerings to the Esagila and provided for its upkeep.²⁷³ Assurbanipal Cylinder L6: 10-12.

²⁷⁴ Cogan 1974: 35-41 has demonstrated that Assyrian kings also frequently enabled the return of statues and religious items. Van Der Spek 2014: 235 argues that the Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian and the Greco-Macedonian empires of Alexander, Diadochi, the Seleucids were based on similar principles of government and therefore remained essentially were not fundamentally different.

For a similar view that the Persians maintained and continued Near Eastern practices, see Briant 2002, Kuhrt 1983, Wiesehofer 2001.

²⁷⁵ Kuhrt 1983: 89-91, Briant 1996: 50-60.

²⁷⁶ Van Der Spek 2014: 239.

²⁷⁷ Kent 1937: 150-152.

²⁷⁸ Dandamaev and Lukonin 1989: 356-60.

²⁷⁹ Grabbe 2004: 15-16 outlines the Demotic Chronicle and Udjahorresnet to demonstrate special favours for various cults.

²⁸⁰ Tuplin 1987: 149-53, Dandamaev and Lukonin 1989: 362-66, Grabbe 2004: 215.

foreign deities or to build connections with them, as in a Near Eastern polytheistic worldview, all gods can send success and disaster.²⁸¹ So when Cyrus is presented as a liberator of the Jews who orders the temple to be rebuilt and items to be returned, it is reflective of this worldview. It mimics the narrative in the Cyrus Cylinder, where he announces his decision to send back the gods that had been captured by Nabonidus (lines 34-36). Support for the reconstruction of the temple was an expression of imperial policy – one that did not vary significantly to previous rule and maintained stability by connecting imperial rule with the local gods.²⁸² This stability was perhaps enough reason to look back to Cyrus with affection as recorded by the repeated praise in the Biblical texts.²⁸³

Cyrus in Isaiah

In a similar manner to Ezra, Isaiah also narrates a story of exile and return under Cyrus. It similarly begins with an official royal commission then describes the stages of success propelled by divine will. The narrative is one of struggle; the returnees experience unprecedented difficulties making a living (60:17, 62:8-9). This likely explains Isaiah's stronger, militaristic tone. The divine favour is clearly imperialistic - subduing of nations, Yahweh's victory over the strong nations and power, stripping kings of their armour, breaking gates of bronze (Isaiah 45:2), indicates a level of political engagement of Isaiah, concerned with the political elite of Babylon's Jews.²⁸⁴ Similarly, the social and religious locations also indicate the concerns of a religious elite. For example, the repeated references to Babylonian worship of Bel and Nebo (Isaiah 46:1), and the issue of idolatry (Isaiah 40:19-20, 44:9-20), reflect some concerns of the urban priests in Babylon.²⁸⁵ As the social context in Isaiah 40-55 reflects the concerns of this elite, it is not surprising the text focuses on a negative portrayal of Babylon and stresses the full support of Cyrus. Isaiah anticipates political gain for the Jewish audience of Cyrus, who succeeds in his battle against the Babylonian empire. Much of the book is interpreted as an attempt to cope with this situation.²⁸⁶ The text has been interpreted as reflecting divisions within the religious community, mainly because of interpretations of some passages as an attack on the priesthood in Jerusalem.²⁸⁷ Isaiah 60.1-22 has been interpreted as expressing

²⁸¹ Van Der Spek 2014: 247.

²⁸² Kuhrt 2007: 179.

²⁸³ Fowler 2017: 357.

²⁸⁴ Berquist 1995: 30.

²⁸⁵ Berquist 1995: 30.

²⁸⁶ Grabbe 2004: 91.

²⁸⁷ Grabbe 2004: 91-92 discusses Isaiah 57.3-13 and the difficulty dating, cites Westermann 1969: 321-25 and Isaiah 66.1-6.

opposition to rebuilding the temple,²⁸⁸ whilst others have read it as more eschatological.²⁸⁹ There were divisions within the post exilic community, resulting in a narrative that stresses such chaos. Against this narrative, the text continuously compares the devastation of Egypt before the Exodus. This disaster is repeated as an example of the power that will be used to overcome Babylon (Isaiah 48:20-21 - 50:2-3). Importantly, the goals connected to the return, such as idolatry, overlap with Cyrus' goals. The theme of idolatry frequently appears in Isaiah (40:18-20, 42:8, 44:9-20, 45:16, 20-21), and is largely concerned with prohibiting the use of idols associated with Babylonian religious practices. Many passages treat idolatry satirically, highlighting the irrationality behind the practice²⁹⁰ to enforce a loyalty to strictly Jewish practices that are not tied to Babylonian ones. Here, Isaiah stresses the superiority of Yahweh over idols and connects the imperial role of Cyrus to Yahweh's chosen plan of salvation (40:18-20, 42:8, 44:9). Isaiah explains that idols cannot predict the future, nor can they foretell salvation (Isaiah 46:7, 47:13), compared with the repetition of Yahweh's ability to do such things. The reconstruction of the temple is repeated, which is Cyrus' primary task as ordered by Yahweh. Those who carry Yahweh's vessels will be ones who return first.²⁹¹ This reinforces that only Yahweh can save the Jews, whereas the imperial might of Babylon had no ultimate power behind it.²⁹² Babylon is thus constructed as the political and religious enemy of the Jewish people in contrast to the anointed figure of Cyrus who would help achieve Yahweh's plans. Through the texts use of concerns relevant to its audience, such as idolatry, Isaiah offers support for Cyrus' plans by constructing him as a tool for the return and salvation of God's people. Isaiah is another example of how it's authorial purpose has constructed a particular image of Cyrus.

The significance of Cyrus' conquest of Babylon for the Jewish exiles is not only tied to the restoration of the temple but also with resettlement in Jerusalem. Isaiah 40 begins with a message of comfort by remembering Jerusalem (40:1-2) and commands the building of a highway in order for Yahweh to return to Zion (40:3-4). The text narrates the blessings that will follow after resettlement and explores purification and salvation awaiting the exiles upon return. The foreign nature of the exiles, being inhabitants of Yehud and Babylon, is overlooked in these passages. To highlight the importance of return, Isaiah utilises Exodus imagery to reassure the exiles that they will flee Babylon

²⁸⁸ Koch 1983: 153.

²⁸⁹ Westermann 1969: 357.

²⁹⁰ Jemielity 1992: 43.

²⁹¹ Fried 2002: 377.

²⁹² Berquist 1995: 33.

much like those who fled Egypt (Isaiah 48:20-21). The text combines earlier traditions to perpetuate an Israelite identity that surpasses geographical boundaries. The theme of salvation might be a new theme for the Babylonian context, but it is grounded in Jewish sociocultural literature, particularly the Exodus theme.²⁹³ Amidst this new context exists the ideology that Yahweh's will is aligned with Cyrus' imperial policy. Assuming Isaiah wrote in Babylon during Cyrus' conquest,²⁹⁴ Isaiah succumbed to the propaganda of Cyrus' rule – notably his well-known Cylinder, by aligning the Yehudite goals with those of imperial rule.

Importantly, Cyrus is referred to as “anointed” (Isaiah 45:1) and promises divine support for Cyrus' actions. This is a contrast to the description of Cyrus in Ezra. In Ezra, the God of the heavens instructs Cyrus to issue a command (Ezra 1.2) whereas in Isaiah, the role of the divine is much more pronounced – Cyrus is anointed and chosen to fulfil a divine duty. Such description is not without lengthy disputation – early scholarship has argued it should be removed and caution readers not to interpret more than what was intended.²⁹⁵ However, Isaiah only confirms the tradition of Cyrus in the Biblical canon, that Cyrus is central to the restoration of the Jewish faith. Much like the way later Greek and Roman writers invoked the memory of Cyrus for their own present condition, Biblical authors have constructed a particular image of Cyrus and generated a particular discourse surrounding him.²⁹⁶ This discourse blurs Cyrus' ‘otherness’ and re-shapes him to further the causes of relocation and reconstruction, which were at the core of Israelite identity. Thus, considering the suffering that is central to the narrative, Isaiah constructs Cyrus as the one who will impose justice and facilitate the repatriation of those deported (Isaiah 42:1-4, 42:7, 45:13.). The themes of victory and nations falling to the king that are associated with the Davidic monarchy are applied to Cyrus. As David was the ruler and founder of the Kingdom of Israel and Judah and praised in the collective memory of the Jewish people,²⁹⁷ the construction of Cyrus against this hero figure is highly significant. In particular, Deuteronomy outlines that Yahweh will choose a ruler from Israel who will be devoted to him (Deut 17:19). Thus, no foreigner may rule over Israelites.²⁹⁸ Set against

²⁹³ Berquist 1995: 41.

²⁹⁴ Berquist 1995: 42, Grabbe 2004: 91, Blenkinsopp 2000 and Sweeney 1996 have argued all of Isaiah was written in the Persian period. Few have argued for a Palestinian origin, especially for second Isaiah; see Barstad 1997. Third Isaiah 56-66 is debated.

²⁹⁵ Fried 2002: 374 gives an account of earlier scholarship on this matter, starting with Charles 1928 and North 1964.

²⁹⁶ Wilson 2015: 330.

²⁹⁷ Blenkinsopp 2013: 5.

²⁹⁸ Blenkinsopp 2013: 64-67, Wilson 2015: 328.

the backdrop of the Near Eastern Kings who have ruled the region, this specific instruction strips them of their influence. Therefore, it seems out of place that Ezra and Isaiah construct a non-Israelite, a Persian monarch, as the ideal king on par with David. For example, in Isaiah 41.2-4, the theme of victory, achieved through the imagery of swords turning to dust and trampling on rulers like mortar are achieved through Cyrus. The Davidic kingship functioned similarly to others in the Near East. The idea of the king as chief priest and holy warrior was maintained in the representation of David and other Davidic kings. For example, David and his descendants were divinely chosen and functioned as priests who worshipped and promoted the cult of Yahweh.²⁹⁹ Cyrus is referred to as Yahweh's shepherd (Isaiah 44.28) which was common in the Near East, and its association with David was significant in the social memory of Yehud.³⁰⁰

Similarly, In Isaiah 46:11, Cyrus is again constructed with the imagery associated with ancient Near Eastern kingship. He is described as a 'bird of prey'³⁰¹ which strengthened the king's image as a divine agent and warrior.³⁰² The pervasiveness of this image demonstrates a widespread Ancient Near Eastern royal convention.³⁰³ In particular, Israelite sources portray kings and soldiers with such imagery, including Jeremiah 48.40 that describes armies and soldiers as swift eagles. This builds on Near Eastern (especially Egyptian, Assyrian, etc) representations of kings as birds of prey, highlighting that Isaiah also functions within a similar framework. Isaiah thus continues in the vein of typical Near Eastern portrayals of authority by constructing Cyrus with the appropriate metaphor reserved for kingship.

This same theme of victory continues in Isaiah 45, where Cyrus fulfils Yahweh's purpose. Again, it is not the Davidic king, rather a foreign king Cyrus, who is responsible for actualising Yahweh's intentions. Here, Yahweh says he will "arouse Cyrus in righteousness, he shall rebuild my city and send out my exiles" (Isaiah 45:13). Thus, the language surrounding Cyrus – anointed, shepherd and beloved all construct Cyrus as the

²⁹⁹ Rooke 1998: 195-96.

³⁰⁰ Wilson 2015: 341 – discusses David as herder in sheep (1 Sam 17:15), Fried discusses the connotation of shepherd with the Davidic king. In this passage, Cyrus is loved and praised by Yahweh, and as shepherd, he is loved for his ability to fulfil the rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem (44.24-28).

³⁰¹ The description "birds of prey" has sparked debate regarding its intended meaning. Most commentary on this passage interprets the bird of prey to be Cyrus. Baltzer 2001: 263-64, Blenkinsopp 2000, Clifford 1984, Chan 2010.

³⁰² Chan 2010: 121-123 argues for a "pan ancient Near Eastern royal convention: king as bird of prey." Discusses the examples of Ashurnasirpal II to make this claim.

³⁰³ Chan 2010: 123.

new legitimate and rightful heir of David's line.³⁰⁴ Whilst Cyrus is the only monarch to be given this title, Darius is praised for decreeing that Jewish workers were to pay from the royal treasury (Ezra 6.1-12) and for ensuring the reconstruction of the temple continues. The Persian kings were seemingly constructed as Israelite kings or at least, praised and constructed as Kings of Judea.³⁰⁵ Such labels, especially "anointed," connotes more than a title, rather a theology referring to the legitimacy of a divinely installed, protected, Judean ruler.³⁰⁶ "Anointed" persuades the public that he will take over the succession to the Davidic dynasty, warranted through divine inspiration of Yahweh.³⁰⁷ Thus, the depiction of Cyrus as shepherd and Yahweh's "anointed" is significant due to its connection with divine and Davidic kingship.³⁰⁸ Whilst Cyrus is not depicted as the "king of Israel," the Yehudite readers would have perceived him as such due to his anointed construction.³⁰⁹

The Cyrus Cylinder

Since the Cylinder has been used to corroborate the Biblical narrative of Cyrus conquering the intolerant Babylonian regime, proclaiming the restoration of the Jewish temple and the return of its deportees,³¹⁰ it is important to place it in its original Near Eastern context. The text inscribed in Akkadian on a small clay cylinder offers Cyrus' official version of his conquest of Babylon in 559 BCE. It follows a clear narrative pattern outlining Cyrus' deeds. It begins with a historical overview and Marduk's role (lines 1-19), royal protocol and Cyrus' genealogy (20-22), Cyrus' behaviour in restoring peace (22-34), a prayer for Cyrus and his son, (34-35) a statement about peace in the empire (36-37) and finally, Cyrus' building works in Babylon (38-45).³¹¹ The text's focus is Babylon, as Cyrus was trying to legitimise his rule over his newly conquered peoples. This is also why the Cylinder does not refer to Persian gods, especially Ahuramazda, as it is intended for Babylon and thus reflected the local religious context. Lines 28-34 do discuss other nations: "Babylon to Assur, Susa, Akkad, Esnunna, Zamban..." (Cylinder 28-34) and there is no special dedication to Jewish people or Jerusalem. Importantly, there is no clear reference to a return of exiled communities in the way that modern

³⁰⁴ Fried 2002: 392.

³⁰⁵ Silverman 2015: 432.

³⁰⁶ Fried 2002: 380.

³⁰⁷ Blenkinsopp 2013: 66.

³⁰⁸ Wilson 2015: 342.

³⁰⁹ Wilson 2015: 343-349, Fried 2002: 374.

³¹⁰ Kuhrt 1983: 83 - acknowledges the use of the Biblical and Greek texts in perpetuating an image of Cyrus as a liberator. She especially discusses the misreading's of the Cylinder for the perception of Cyrus as "the world's greatest liberator and humanitarian."

³¹¹ Kuhrt 1983: 87.

interpretations often indicate.³¹² Lines 28-34 do not imply a full amnesty to all exiles listed, rather, it states sanctuaries that had been abandoned were returned. But, there is an emphasis on the images of gods from Babylon, whose deities were often already part of the Babylonian pantheon.³¹³ Lines 30-34 connect the returning of these deities to their own cities from Babylon. Thus, the emphasis here is on neglect and the re-establishment of cultic correctness.³¹⁴ This is a significant distinction compared to the narrative of return perpetuated in the Biblical texts of Ezra and Isaiah.

In its original Near Eastern context, the Cylinder bears striking similarities to numerous other decrees by newly enthroned Ancient Near Eastern rulers.³¹⁵ For example, the Cylinder describes Cyrus entering Babylon without violence, similar to the annals of Sargon,³¹⁶ who claims the same thing. The Cylinder also stresses Cyrus' building work, and both texts give praise to the patron god who acts as the chief protagonist in enabling the success for these actions. The role of the patron god is crucial in legitimising rule in both Cyrus and Sargon's proclamations, positioning the god of Babylon, Marduk, in opposition to the king Nabonidus who chose a new king, Cyrus, to rule (Cylinder 1-7). In a similar manner, the Cylinder of Marduk-apla-iddina II who took the throne by force – much like Cyrus, also legitimises his rule by explaining he had been chosen by the god Marduk (lines 12-13).³¹⁷ He proceeds to restore sacred shrines and performs the sacred rites. By showcasing his piety and aligning his rule with divinity, Marduk apla-iddina II's Cylinder draws from Mesopotamian tradition concerning kingship. Showcasing the proceeding ruler in opposition to the divine order was a standardised way in which Babylonians dealt with the problem they had faced repeatedly in the preceding two centuries, submitting to a series of usurpers.³¹⁸ Cyrus' Cylinder also maintains this tradition. It must be remembered that Cyrus, too, had no claim to the throne, but by presenting himself like his predecessor as well as aligning Marduk with his rule, he was able to legitimise himself as the rightful ruler of Babylon.³¹⁹ Thus, the text indicates a successful political attempt to establish Cyrus' kingship in the region.

³¹² Young 1988: 42, Farrokh 2007: 44, Masroori 1999: 13-26, Dandamaev and Lukonin 1989: 348, 367.

³¹³ Van Der Spek 2014: 257.

³¹⁴ Kuhrt 1983: 88.

³¹⁵ Kuhrt 1983: 83-85, Razmjou 2010: 117-125 in Finkel et al, Dabashi 2015: 48.

³¹⁶ Lie 1929: 55–57. The text shares its themes with the Cylinder, where work on sanctuaries was an important element of kingship that required consultation with the gods.

³¹⁷ Frame 2016: 137.

³¹⁸ Kuhrt 1987: 7.

³¹⁹ Kuhrt 1983: 88.

Restoration was a familiar motif across conquerors of Babylon, not a new established policy of Cyrus. It is possible Cyrus was aware of the economic and administrative implications for Babylon post-conquest, hence his ideological assertion assuring its people of Marduk's ongoing support. In the same way that restoration was a dominant feature of Near Eastern kingship, the policy of returning people was also a feature of Babylonian rule and reflective of their conception with the gods. For example, Esarhaddon states that he restored and repopulated Babylon, and Assurbanipal boasts that he returned the statue of Marduk from Nineveh to Babylon.³²⁰ Religion legitimised royal policy; all gods could send prosperity and calamities³²¹ and so, it was possible to utilise the gods to ensure safety and legitimacy. This is perhaps why the book of Ezra also offers prayers and sacrifices for Darius' life (Ezra 6:10), and praise for Cyrus. Cyrus' seemingly tolerant model of kingship owes much to the narrative of the Biblical texts that express the return of exiles. Indeed, much of Ezra reflects the Cylinder, but this does not mean it corroborates it. From Persia's side, the narrative of Ezra constituted a claim for Cyrus to be the legitimate successor from the Davidic line, thus a type of political propaganda. From the Jewish side, furthering of this propaganda to ensure propriety of Cyrus' actions.³²² Therefore, the Jewish claim for priority as reflected in the biblical texts and the Persian propaganda noted in the Cylinder reflect two constructions of kingship, both for differing purposes.

Through an examination of the Biblical texts of Ezra and Isaiah, the Greek texts and the renowned Cyrus Cylinder, by the seventeenth century, Cyrus is routinely imagined by different literature as an exceptional ruler. As such, he is ironically, stripped of his Persian origin. And whilst the reality of the early texts attests to his Persian status, this is irrelevant by the time Cyrus becomes an ideal king for European consumption. Cyrus bridges the gap between the Near Eastern and classical traditions, as the Cylinder seemingly corroborated much of the Biblical narratives, thus providing the historical foundation of classical and Biblical heritage for later European scholarship, to be examined in the subsequent chapter.

³²⁰ Streck 2002: 236–37; Lines: 8–11, Leichty 2011: 104: I 18b–33.

Landsberger 1965: 14–37. Has shown that Esarhaddon's claim of repopulating and rebuilding are exaggerated but shows necessary for Esarhaddon to showcase such an image of himself.

³²¹ Van Der Spek 2014: 247.

³²² Ackroyd 1990: 4.

Chapter 3: Cyrus (re) enters Iran

The figure of the benevolent king as imagined through Cyrus is further appropriated for the modernisation efforts of the modern Iranian state.³²³ The attraction to Cyrus from the Qajar era to the Pahlavi period reflects the process of post-colonial nation-building influenced by the exchange of ideas regarding Iran's ancient heritage between Europe and Iran.³²⁴ Iranian nationalist ideologies wholeheartedly embraced European Orientalism – especially their methodologies and dislike of Islam.³²⁵ Iranian nationalism's adaptation of Orientalism was used as an ideological device to culturally differentiate Iranians from neighbouring peoples such as the Arabs and Turks.³²⁶ Iranian identity relied on perpetuating an ancient heritage that was unique to Iran. The Achaemenids and Cyrus became the nation-state's point of origin from which to trace and perpetuate national heritage. Subsequently, when modern Iranians in Iran and the diaspora attempted to contest Eurocentric interpretations of Iran, they clung to the image of Cyrus, and in doing so, ironically embraced colonial constructions.

³²³ Marashi 2008: 7, Iranian nationalism is traditionally understood to have thrived during Reza Shah Pahlavi's modernising efforts. Despite being the first to employ nationalism consciously, Reza Shah's rule continued and strengthened much of the nationalism associated with the nation-building of the Qajar period. For an overview of the complexity of Iranian nationalism, see Keddie and Matthews 2002.

³²⁴ Zia-Ebrahimi 2016: 18-19, Marashi 2008: 55. Ansari 2012: 3 - argue that Iranian nationalism was defined by a European intellectual tradition. Prior to these studies, Iranian nationalism was debated by Vaziri 1993, who argued the idea of an Iranian nation was adopted by Orientalists and adopted by nationalists.

³²⁵ European Orientalism here refers to the works by Rawlinson, Sayce and Gobineau. Specifically, whilst these scholars wrote about the superiority of pre-Islamic Iran and their Aryan race, they still constructed Iranians as backward. See Sayce 1885: 278: "The Persian empire contained within it from the first of the elements of decay, and the Persian character was one which could with difficulty be respected and never loved."

³²⁶ Zia-Ebrahimi 2011: 469.

Cyrus as imagined by European Colonial Scholarship

The European scholarly fascination with the Persian empire coincided with the colonial era, through which European scholars searched for an archaeological 'Persia' to support their narrative of world history. The most striking legacy of this encounter is the pervasive narrative of the Aryan myth in Iranian history. European scholars, especially those searching for common linguistic roots,³²⁷ sought to discover the historical foundation of the Greek and Biblical intellectual traditions, of which they were the self-declared heirs.³²⁸ Through engagement with Mesopotamia and Persia, European scholars found evidence supporting the many stories that were considered part of the Western foundation myth.³²⁹ Here, during the revival of this myth, Cyrus was constructed by Renaissance and Enlightenment thinkers to model ideal leadership, seemingly in contrast to the barbarity of other Near Eastern leaders.³³⁰ The discovery of the Cyrus Cylinder reinforced the Biblical narratives and cemented Cyrus' hero status. The revival of the Achaemenids was part of the Enlightenment construction of a European identity based upon Biblical and Greco-Roman heritage.³³¹ Thus, in Western imagination, Cyrus was not only the model ruler that Xenophon idolised and Machiavelli venerated, but he was also superior in claiming the title of the "Lords Anointed."

Importantly, texts by Montesquieu, Anquetil-Duperron and Hegel's applied a racialised lens to Persia.³³² These views were connected to the idea that Persians were not the Aryans described by Herodotus but had been diluted by repeated invasions.³³³ The writing of nineteenth century scholarship reflects long held, fixed notions of Iranian cultural and social history.³³⁴ By applying the old theological hostility towards Islam, European scholarship came to favour what was deemed non-Islamic Iran: it's Achaemenid past. Thus, whilst nineteenth century colonial scholarship promoted the idea of Persian

³²⁷ Mallory 1991: 9-23.

³²⁸ Ansari 2012: 13-14.

³²⁹ Ansari 2012: 16.

³³⁰ Ansari 2012: 167.

³³¹ Mozzafari 2014: 50.

³³² Mosher 2004: 429, Hegel 1956: 173-174.

³³³ Ansari 2012: 10.

³³⁴ Malcolm 1829: 548. Malcolm explains that Iranians were "well advanced in all the arts of civilised life, and they enjoyed the rule of some of their ancient kings, a happiness far beyond what they have ever since experienced." He further states, "As long as nations of Asia were under the sway of Islam, they could possibly not enjoy the progress and prosperity of the commonwealth of Europe." Rawlinson 1862: 325-326: also discusses the achievements of pre-Islamic Iranians' achievements. Notably, he presents Cyrus as an "earnest Zoroastrian" and equates the cult of Ahuramazda with the notion of Jehovah found in the Old Testament to explain the "favour of Persia's towards Jews and the fidelity of Jews towards Persians."

decadence – that is, Iranians became decadent after their pre-Islamic glory - they also perpetuated the idea that Iranians were racially related to Europeans. The establishment of this ‘Aryan model’ formulated a national tradition that championed continuity from the Achaemenids to the advent of Islam, resulting in a specific method of conceptualising the very complex histories of ancient Iran.³³⁵ Philological and archaeological finds were used to create a sense of ‘Iranism’ in contradistinction to the identities of neighbouring peoples.³³⁶ Rawlinson’s monumental “Five Great Monarchies of the Ancient Eastern World” not only paved the Aryan myth in European scholarship on Iran, but also legitimised the historical narratives inherited from Greek and Biblical authors.³³⁷ For example, Rawlinson compares Ahuramazda with the God of the Old Testament to explain the “favour of Persia towards Jews and the fidelity of Jews towards Persians.”³³⁸ Whilst Rawlinson praises Cyrus much less than other scholarship, he constructs Cyrus with the quintessential qualities of a successful leader. He presents him as an “earnest” Zoroastrian, employing typical Zoroastrian dualist themes to describe his conquest of Babylon.³³⁹ This is reflective of European colonial scholarships’ engagement with Zoroastrianism, that ironically was utilised to encourage secularism by showing the unoriginality of Christianity.³⁴⁰

The idea of the ‘decay’ following the Achaemenids and the perceived superiority of the Achaemenid Aryans who were synthesised against the Islamic Arabs³⁴¹ was stressed by

³³⁵ The claim of belonging to an ‘Aryan’ identity is rooted in the ancient self-designation *ariya* which is fundamental to modern notions of Iranian national identity due to the claim that modern Iranians have remained ethnically and culturally autonomous from the rest of the population in that region for a millennium. See Vaziri 1993: 100 and Motadel 2014: 119-135, both provide detailed accounts outlining the history of the use of *aryan* in Iranian and European discourse.

³³⁶ Vaziri 1993: 3.

³³⁷ These include Rawlinson 1862: 325-326 and Malcolm 1829: 520. Malcolm uses Iranian myths and legends: Pishdadians, Kiyanian, Ashkanian and Sasanian and synthesises these with historical period of the Achaemenids and Sasanians to construct the period. He also references the Biblical and Greek material especially Herodotus to corroborate narratives about Cyrus. He states the account of the Babylonian siege “is no different between Xenophon, Herodotus and the Bible.”

³³⁸ Rawlinson 1862: 325-326.

³³⁹ Rawlinson 1862: 431. “It is Cyrus’ faith which Cyrus would have viewed as a case of Ormazd against Ahriman.”

³⁴⁰ Ansari 2012: 15.

³⁴¹ Sayce 1885: 278, Gobineau 1963: 380: “The rise of Persia was a movement of a small number of men, the Aryans who were among a bulk of racially distinct masses (the Semitics) who created a nation and that the defeat of the Achaemenids was due to the mixture of the Persians with inferior Semitic peoples.”

Rawlinson and other European colonial scholars.³⁴² There are ancient recordings of the phrase *ariya* in the Achaemenid inscriptions, though these connote linguistic and geographical distinctions.³⁴³ Ironically, the first ancient recording is not that of Cyrus, rather an inscription from Darius, highlighting the extent to which the figure of Cyrus has been remodelled to suit the authorial intentions of the respective contexts. Rawlinson's translations of cuneiform legitimised the racial notions circling the nineteenth century and endorsed the idea that Iranians had been devoid of any historical consciousness of their pre-Islamic past until reminded of it by the Europeans.³⁴⁴ This myth of an Iranian 'dark ages' was one that the Qajar and Pahlavi nationalists perpetuated, needing an 'other' to attribute the failings of the Iranian state, which was imagined as the 'Arab'. Iranian nationalists found the historical, literary and archaeological evidence they needed in European colonial scholarship to validate their reimagination of the Achaemenids through the famous figure of Cyrus.

Colonial Cyrus in Modern Iran - The Making of a Nation-State.

Concepts of national identity did not exist in the Qajar era as we understand them today, largely due to the diverse ethnic identities present across the region.³⁴⁵ The Achaemenid site of Persepolis and the tomb of Cyrus became an emblem for definitions of an Iranian national identity.³⁴⁶ There was a shift from Sasanian to Achaemenid motifs as evident in the increased presence of Achaemenid stone reliefs, including panels of Achaemenid guards, in the grand houses owned by the Iranian elite.³⁴⁷ Even though Sasanian pictorial themes of *razm-o-bazm* "fighting and feasting," hunting and enthronement were prevalent

³⁴² Rawlinson 1876: 29 "Asiatic revolution of 226AD marks revival of the Iranic nationality from the depressed state into which it had sunk for more than 500 years." For other scholars who maintained this Aryan notion see, Arberry 1968, Browne 1956, 1983, Massingnon 1990,

Of course, it is unclear what continuity Rawlinson is championing when the Sasanians had very little memory of the Achaemenids. Daryaei 2006: 387 argues there is little conclusive evidence. Yarshater 1971: 519 has argued that the Sasanians remembered the Parthians more than the Achaemenids.

³⁴³ *Ariya* as a linguistic and geographical phrase is difficult to define, as this is a highly contested and complicated term due to philological complexities. For a detailed analysis see, Vaziri 1993: 75-81 who outlines the varied philological meanings behind the phrase in Old Persian, Avestan and Indian texts as well its reception by European scholarship. Motadel 2014: 119-143 provides an overview of European uses of the phrase.

³⁴⁴ Ansari 2012: 17.

³⁴⁵ Cole 1996: 37. Shift from Sasanian to Achaemenid motifs prompted by the desire to create a national identity.

³⁴⁶ Mozaffari 2014: 34.

³⁴⁷ Lerner 2017: 112-113, discusses in depth, the houses of Afifabad, Narengestane Qavam, Baghe Golestan in Shiraz.

in the art of the Islamic dynasties,³⁴⁸ it was the reliefs from Persepolis that were utilised to serve the construction of national identity in the twentieth century.³⁴⁹ This shift increased with the consumption of European colonial methodology and its Iranian imitation. This “self-orientalising”³⁵⁰ was not an acceptance of European scholarship, but a conscious recognition to embrace it to suit the authorial intentions of its new Iranian context.³⁵¹ The founding father of Iranian nationalism, Mirza Fath Ali Akhundzadeh, played a crucial role in compiling ideas about Iran’s past and organising a new corpus of discourse on nationalism, one that was heavily concerned with racial boundaries. Akhundzadeh was deeply affected by European imperialism,³⁵² thus his writings reflected a synthesis of opposition to local religious and cultural norms with European orientalism.³⁵³ By the early Pahlavi reign, the failures of Qajar reform and the constitutional movement of 1905, the nationalist narrative emerged stronger to synthesise state and society.³⁵⁴

Akhundzadeh lamented the current state of Iran and engaged with its past to find inspiration about its future. He argued an authentic culturally homogenous Iran existed. In their aim of unifying the imagined nation, Akhundzadeh needed to ignore the centuries during which Iran was ruled by ‘non-Persian’ empires and fixate on empires who located their capital *in* the Iranian plateau - such as the Achaemenids.³⁵⁵ This superiority was

³⁴⁸ Sims 2002: 7-9, Scarce 2006: 231-256, Lerner 2015: 158-177.

³⁴⁹ Utilising Cole’s approach who builds on Benedict Anderson’s 1983 “Imagined communities.” It must be noted that ethnic identity existed in premodern Iran as evidenced through the recitation of poetry and folklore such as Ferdowsi’s *Shahnameh*. However, these do not equate to Anderson’s view of the nation in the modern state. Large scale nationalism that connected the Iranian plateau was absent in the Qajar empire. For a further review of Iranian nationalism as an “Imagined community” see Dabashi 2015: 77-78, Zia-Ebrahimi 2016: 5-7.

³⁵⁰ Zia-Ebrahimi 2011: 446. Self-Orientalising refers to the claim of belonging to the Aryan race, which is in fact a twentieth century import from Europe. Zia-Ebrahimi demonstrates the extent to which Iranians refer to themselves as Aryan even in academic circles and disregard the use of the phrase in colonial endeavours largely. The phrase is so popular due to the role Aryanism plays in Iranian identity politics and the attempt to manage the trauma of the Iranian encounter with Europe.

³⁵¹ Zia-Ebrahimi 2011: 446.

³⁵² Zia-Ebrahimi 2016: 45: Akhundzadeh acquired his knowledge of Western ideologies through his engagement with Russian literature. Zia-Ebrahimi explains the certainties of Iranian elite had been shattered by confrontation with Russian and British imperialism in the 19th century, and his life in Caucasus under Russian rule influenced and shaped his views.

³⁵³ Marashi 2008: 56.

³⁵⁴ Marashi 2008: 56.

³⁵⁵ Cole 1996: 37-38 - outlines the key reformers in the development of Iranian nationalism in the Qajar era, specifically Akhundzadeh who privileges Pre-Islamic Iran

based on the glories of pre-Islamic Iran presented by European scholarship, which represented Islam as destroying antiquity.³⁵⁶ Akhundzadeh boasts that within this utopian ancient Iran, people did not know poverty, their kings were benevolent, Iranians were free and respected in foreign lands, “as Greek sources have testified.³⁵⁷” This reference to Greek historians validates why Iranian nationalists were attracted to the Achaemenids, as Europeans seemingly envied ancient Iran. Cyrus was at the centre of this, the figure upon which the nation-state was founded and from who all Iranians descend. Akhundzadeh reminds his readers that Iranians are descendants of Parsis, therefore of Aryans, and that the “naked and hungry Arabs” who plundered Iran’s civilisation made the inhabitants uncivilised and turned their kings into despots.³⁵⁸ As such, Akhundzadeh outlines the Arab invasion of Iran as the catalyst for the decline of Iranian civilisation and outlines the characteristics of pre-Islamic Iran – a land with principle and justice – lamenting that these traits should be returned to the nation.³⁵⁹ Akhundzadeh’s construction of Cyrus was used to introduce liberal political concepts for a modern Iranian audience, specifically by contrasting the problems of the Qajar state with the alleged regression of Persian society through the Arab conquest.³⁶⁰ The figure of Cyrus was carefully constructed to fit the project of modernisation by such nationalists, as national authenticity was derived from pre-Islamic periods.³⁶¹

Akhundzadeh’s vision of a utopian pre-Islamic Iran was intensified by other intellectuals and reformers of the Qajar period, such as the influential figures of Mirza Agha Khan Kermani and Hasan Taqizadeh, who laid the foundation for the later nationalistic struggle of Iran.³⁶² Kermani, who was well versed in Western enlightenment discourse, utilised Cyrus to symbolise the Iranian nations’ noble origins. The ideal government of Cyrus was “based on justice and equality.... His personality was so notable because he never

that is brought to an end by the invasion of the Arab Muslims in the construction of Iranian nationalism. Arguably, this privileging is still apparent, perhaps less in the Iranian political spectrum, but in socio-cultural constructions of cultural identity as well as cultural perceptions in the diaspora.

³⁵⁶ Zia-Ebrahimi 2011: 465.

³⁵⁷ Adamiyyat 1970: 119.

³⁵⁸ Adamiyyat 1970: 118-123.

³⁵⁹ Adamiyyat 1970: 118.

³⁶⁰ Adamiyyat 1970: 123 - Akhundzadeh argues that the relationship between king and subject was so strong that the common people visited the king and communicated their problems personally. This is of course a metaphor for the problems with the Iranian state and the monarchy.

³⁶¹ Marashi 2008: 55.

³⁶² Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani took this further and argued ancient Iranians even more advanced than Europe, see: Kermani 2007b: 267.

abused his power...”³⁶³ Here, Kermani uses specific political language that connects the Iranian people with the imagined nation by using phrases such as “vatan” for homeland instead of the Islamic phrase of “Ulama.” Kermani reconfigures the Iranian identity to one that is rooted in an ancient tradition, unrelated to that of Arab-Islamic tradition.³⁶⁴ This was largely the purpose of the nationalist movement and it successfully invented an antiquity that could juxtapose itself with the present and call its people to action.³⁶⁵ Such call to action is reflected in Kermani’s work when he directly speaks to the Iranian people:

“Oh Iranian people, know your ancient history, when Iran was the heart of the world, enlightening it as a candle. Wake up and commit yourselves to realising a new political government, to make a free and dignified Iran.”³⁶⁶

Akhundzadeh and Kermani’s approaches were simple ideological treatises that were appealing to Iranian society. As such, they needed to convey ideas about Iran’s past that addressed political and social issues, namely Iran’s perceived deficiencies vis-à-vis Europe.³⁶⁷ Kermani’s radicalised, racially based outlook ensured a transition to the next generation of ideologues, creating the standard of a new form of identity discourse, formally anchored into the Pahlavi state from 1925 onwards.³⁶⁸ Hassan Pirnia is arguably one of the most influential of this such new generation of nationalists. Pirnia’s three volume *Tarikhe Iran Qadim* (“History of Ancient Iran”) was the first history textbook published by the Pahlavi Ministry of Education. The book’s success was based on imitating the “Aryan theory,” popular in European colonial scholarship.³⁶⁹ He describes the “sciences of race” by outlining the Iranian Aryan race within the same category of Indo-Europeans, in contrast to Semitic peoples. The Iranians as Indo- Europeans, he argues, are morally superior to their Semitic neighbours, the Babylonians and Assyrians.³⁷⁰

³⁶³ Adamiyyat 1978: 165.

³⁶⁴ Kermani 1947: 577-578.

³⁶⁵ Marashi 2008: 55.

³⁶⁶ Adamiyyat 1970: 165.

³⁶⁷ Zia Ebrahimi 2016: 11.

³⁶⁸ Zia Ebrahimi 2016: 43.

³⁶⁹ Gobineau 1854, Especially his 1869: “History of the Persians.”

³⁷⁰ Pirnia 1928: 8.

Pirnia devotes a portion to showcasing the character of Cyrus, resembling the European fixation with Cyrus' perceived benevolence and just nature.³⁷¹ Pirnia tells us Cyrus' wisdom enabled his Babylonian conquest, and not his use of force.³⁷² Cyrus was not only respectful to the religion of Babylonians, but he immediately returned all of the treasure that was plundered and brought to Persia. In fact, the tolerance of Cyrus was so great that people believed he was sent by God. Pirnia supports this view by explaining that he was praised by the Jews as evidenced by the Torah that regarded Cyrus as God-sent.³⁷³ Much of Pirnia's description mimics the European imagination of Cyrus, largely from their engagement with the Greek and Biblical discourses. Pirnia's narrative resembles an uncritical reading of Xenophon's "benevolent monarch" popularised by Roman, medieval and Renaissance writers as an exemplary text for those in power. As Cyrus became entrenched as a model for those in positions of authority, so did he in Iranian nationalist circles. Remembering that many nationalists lamented the perceived backwardness of Iran and intended to modernise the state to be on par with Europe,³⁷⁴ the attraction to a figure that was revered in the European tradition helped construct a trope for such state-sponsored nationalism. By citing the Greek texts, Pirnia reminds Iranians that an *Iranian* king was honoured across the world and it is to such glory that the current Iranian state must return. The Pahlavi era textbooks duplicated Pirnia's views, reminding school children that all other people were non-Aryan invaders.³⁷⁵ It brought together a nationalist ideology for the first time, and administered it through the education system.³⁷⁶ Thus, this apparatus – sanctioned and supported by the state, demonstrates Iran's response to the Orientalist perceptions of Iran by internalising European rhetoric for the varied efforts of modernising the nation. Unlike other post-colonial nations; this nationalism was not intended to emancipate the state from colonial rule, but rather, to construct an Iranian nation equal to Europe.³⁷⁷

This desire to connect the state with Europe further glorified the constructions of Cyrus as a heroic king from which Iran could trace its racial and national identity. Hasan

³⁷¹ Pirnia 1928: 81-82. Similar to Rawlinson who dedicates chapters on characters of Oriental rulers. This attraction to the character of Cyrus dominates in the Iranian diaspora, especially after the Revolution, the subject of the next chapter.

³⁷² Pirnia 1928: 81. "*Dar mavorede moshkel be aghl bish az ghove motavasel mishod.*"

³⁷³ Pirnia 1928: 82. Pirnia probably means the books of Ezra and specifically, Isaiah: 44 but does not provide detail, instead he states: "*Peyghanbarane bani-Israel onra besiyar stoodand*" which translates to: "The Prophets of the Jews praised Cyrus."

³⁷⁴ Adamiyyat 1970: 119-120, Adamiyyat 1978: 165.

³⁷⁵ Zia Ebrahimi 2016: 158.

³⁷⁶ Marashi 2008: 89, Zia-Ebrahimi 2016: 157-158.

³⁷⁷ Zia-Ebrahimi 2016: 218.

Taqizadeh's construction of Iranian history is largely reflected in his connection to his mentor, Edward Browne.³⁷⁸ Taqizadeh worked with Browne to rally the British government for support for the constitutional revolution.³⁷⁹ Much of his approach to Iranian history reflects his engagement with European Orientalism. In his socio-political journal, Taqizadeh's defence of Orientalism reads:

“Some have argued that those who study the nations of Asia and Africa do so with the political motives of the European powers...Some of them have been the heroes of weak nations.... They have rescued objects by archaeology... manuscripts have been edited and published.... All of this has helped the nations of the East to regain their identity....They know more about our history and culture than we do...Iranians must become aware of their ancient culture and their thinkers, artists and kings so that they will be aware of their great nation in the past before Islam and of what race they derived from, how they reached their current condition and how to regain their original greatness as a nation...For this reason, we are suggesting the following books by European Iran scholars.”³⁸⁰

This striking justification of European Orientalism reveals firstly, that Taqizadeh was aware of the politics of knowledge that Orientalism represented and secondly, that he was able to somehow transcend it.³⁸¹ Europeans gave back *Iran* to Iranians. This Aryan Iran, enjoyed an ancient status in the European tradition, as perpetuated by the Orientalists Taqizadeh recommended. Orientalism was thus a cultural apparatus appropriated by Taqizadeh to reconstruct a national identity that was ready to participate in modernity. Taqizadeh championed such a movement in his socio-political journal *Kaveh*, named after a heroic figure in the *Shahnameh* - the famous Kaveh who overthrew a tyrannical regime.³⁸² By using the political myth of revolutionary Kaveh, Taqizadeh constructed a similar Cyrus that was another metaphor for the social and political revolution for which Taqizadeh was campaigning. Ancient Iran, when ruled by “the notable kings such as Cyrus and Darius” was “the most glorious... and was a contemporary of the great

³⁷⁸ Matin-Asgari 2012: 179.

³⁷⁹ Matin-Asgari 2012: 179, Marashi 2008: 88.

³⁸⁰ Marashi 2008: 81 quotes *Kaveh* February 15, 1918.

³⁸¹ Marashi 2008: 81.

³⁸² The *Shahnameh* was and continues to be revered as having saved the Iranian language from Arab conquest. For a discussion on this topic, see Vaziri 1993: 119-145, Iran's millennial celebration of Ferdowsi (the author of the *Shahnameh*) by Reza Shah in 1934: Marashi 2008: 124-132, Grigor 2004: 17-45.

democracies of Athens and Sparta.... And of the prophets Daniel and Ezra.”³⁸³ Such a Cyrus was proof to Taqizadeh’s readers of the positives of European Orientalism in preserving the knowledge of an Iranian king. Taqizadeh’s influence lasted well into the 70s, and by this time, Cyrus was routinely referenced as a model of a just ruler for the Iranian nation.

The Cyrus Cylinder and the Pahlavi monarchy

Iran’s fluctuating engagement with European Orientalism resuscitated its ancient history in the process of its post-colonial nation building. As the understanding of how Iranian culture was perceived in European circles trickled back into Iran, via Iranian intellectuals, it facilitated an exchange that reimagined the nation-state in a larger, global sphere.³⁸⁴ It is against this process that the use of the Achaemenids - especially the figure of Cyrus, is constructed to perpetuate an authentically Iranian narrative. A product of the generation of scholarship before it,³⁸⁵ the Iranian public sphere – especially those of the political and literary classes – already tended to see themselves as culturally distinct from the region they occupied.³⁸⁶ This is best reflected in Mohammed Reza Pahlavi’s address in 1973, “Yes we are Easterners, but we are Aryans... whose mentality and philosophy are close to that of the European states...”³⁸⁷ The Pahlavi regime saw the height of the popularisation of an Aryan identity with Cyrus at its core. It generated a national identity for the Iranian people and legitimacy to itself.³⁸⁸

In the Iranian nation-state’s self-reimagination under Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, the figure of Cyrus was employed to reconstruct the role of monarchy – the Shah was anxious to be seen as a democratic monarch, a fixation reflective of the post-Mossadegh period.³⁸⁹ The Shah further extended the Aryan myth in his reimagination of the Iranian state: by self-designating him as “Aryamehr” (light of the Aryans), he authenticated his rule with the founder of the Iranian nation, Cyrus. Thus, the celebration of the Iranian monarchy was held at the tomb of Cyrus, as it was where the Iranian nation was born, with the Shah being its embodiment.³⁹⁰ The Cyrus Cylinder was the perfect authority to showcase the

³⁸³ Abdolmohammadi 2014: 30.

³⁸⁴ Dabashi 2015: 4.

³⁸⁵ Abdi 2001: 55.

³⁸⁶ Ansari 2012: 165.

³⁸⁷ Zia-Ebrahimi 2011: 446, cites Kayhan International, 1973, quoted in Mangol Bayat-Philipp, “A Phoenix Too Frequent: Historical Continuity in Modern Iranian Thought,” *Asian and African Studies*, 12 1978: 211.

³⁸⁸ Vaziri 1993: 198.

³⁸⁹ Ansari 2001: 3.

³⁹⁰ Marashi 2008: 4.

authenticity and originality in Cyrus' *Iranianness*, but also his outstanding leadership qualities. Perhaps more so than the translation of Darius' inscription by Rawlinson, the Cylinder was the first time an authentic voice, not from the Greek or Biblical texts, that spoke to the Persians about themselves.³⁹¹ This rhetoric was adopted by the Prime Minister, who addressed Cyrus in his 1971 budget speech. Amir-Abbas Hoveida praised the Iranian nation for its "peace and humanity which were all apparent by studying the methods of the great kings such as Cyrus."³⁹² Cyrus emerged as a fundamental principle of government ideology introduced to a public audience.³⁹³

Such state sanctioned ideology reached its height when the Shah declared 1971 the Year of Cyrus, honouring him as the founder of the monarchy and of human rights. The official publication began by quoting the work of French scholar Groussett to support the "ideological basis for the celebration of the 2500th anniversary."³⁹⁴ We are told this basis is one of continuity, even into the Islamic period – a variation to typical discourse present by European colonial and Iranian nationalist perspectives. Iranian civilisation was so strong that it "assimilated the foreigners...Seljuks, Mongols and Turkomans had become as completely Iranian as the Scandinavians become French in our Normandy."³⁹⁵ The text further regurgitated what had by now become the standard representation of Cyrus, through the Biblical and Greek traditions. As political propaganda, the text is successful in supporting the nationalistic representation of pre-Islamic Iran – that Persia was the first in world history to distinguish itself from rulers of the Near East by its tolerance.³⁹⁶ This narrative according to Shafa, is supported by Xenophon, Herodotus, Diodorus Siculus, Plato and even Aeschylus,³⁹⁷ book of Isaiah before citing the Cyrus Cylinder as the first declaration of human rights. To do this, Shafa firstly draws from Assurbanipal's inscription, claiming it reflects the punitive nature of the conquerors pre-Cyrus.³⁹⁸ This is contrasted to the Cyrus Cylinder, where a new concept of government is provided and

³⁹¹ Lerner 2016: 116.

³⁹² Ansari 2014: 218 cites Hoveida's budget speech of 1971: BBC SWB ME/361/D/1 25 Jan 1971.

³⁹³ Ansari 2014: 218 cites Hoveida's budget speech of 1971: BBC SWB ME/361/D/1 25 Jan 1971.

³⁹⁴ Shafa 1971: 5. "Facts about the Celebration of the 2500th Anniversary of the founding of the Persian Empire by Cyrus the Great.

³⁹⁵ Shafa 1971: 6.

³⁹⁶ Shafa 1971: 7.

³⁹⁷ Shafa 1971: 11 Does briefly make reference briefly to Aeschylus' representations of the Persians but does not fixate on this. Instead, his focus is on showing that all Greeks, praised Cyrus.

³⁹⁸ Shafa 1971: 13.

Cyrus' actions – his tolerance to peoples of the empire, the return of Jewish exiles and the reconstruction of the temple - gave rise to the praises from the Greek and Biblical traditions. This official text, whilst largely polemical, was reflective of a broader Iranian consciousness regarding the revival of Iranian history, which lay at the core of the nationalist narrative. This revival now had archaeological evidence³⁹⁹ in the glorified form of the Cyrus Cylinder to justify monarchic rule, aligning the Shah as the natural heir of the Iranian throne, descending from Cyrus.

The Year of Cyrus mythologised the Cyrus Cylinder as a human rights' icon. Its significance as the first charter of human rights was such a profound part of the revival of Iranian history that a replica was presented to the Secretary General of the UN. It was the long history of an evolving, collective ideology of the nation-state that was reflected in the Shah's salutation to Cyrus at his commemoration. His words, embodying the remarks of the nationalists before him, affirmed the existence of an Iranian nation by reminding Iranians and their international guests that Cyrus was the founder "of the most ancient monarchy of the world, the great freedom giver."⁴⁰⁰ State rhetoric presented Cyrus' reign was the "beginning of liberalism in the history of mankind" and that his "public notice (the Cylinder) was the first Bill of Rights."⁴⁰¹ The Shah ended with a solemn reminder of the continuity that exists with the perceived founder of the empire and the Iranian nation state – "Cyrus, sleep in peace, for we are awake! And we always will be."⁴⁰² For the Pahlavi monarchy, Cyrus was a reminder of the glory inherited by Iran, and the Cylinder was the proof the Pahlavi monarchy needed to legitimise their rule. It was the Shah's embrace of the Cylinder as the first charter of human rights that has popularised this view of the text, a view that has remained mythologised in diasporic communities and to some extent, the literature concerned with it.

Cyrus in the Iranian Diaspora

Traditional definitions of diaspora, like Safran's, suggests a diasporic people have been dispersed from a specific centre and continue to hold a collective memory about the original homeland, a dream of returning, maintaining a troubled relationship with the

³⁹⁹ The literature in this period also helped the nationalist endeavours. This includes the official text of the Year of Cyrus by Shafa 1971, the Shah's response to the revolution – *Answer to History* Pahlavi, 1980, and Golestan's Film *Flames of Persia* produced by the Iranian National Cinema Board 1971. Such literature reminded the Iranian people and the world that Iranian monarchy and culture could not be separated, and that it was impossible to conceive of one without the other.

⁴⁰⁰ Zia Ebrahimi 2016: 204-205 cites *Rastakhiz* newspaper October 10, 1977.

⁴⁰¹ Ansari 2001: 219.

⁴⁰² Zia Ebrahimi 2016: 204-205 cites *Rastakhiz* newspaper October 10, 1977.

wider society and believing that they can never be fully accepted.⁴⁰³ More recent definitions argue it is a social and political formation, whose members regard themselves as of the same origin and who permanently reside as minorities in a host country.⁴⁰⁴ There are numerous problems with both definitions,⁴⁰⁵ but in the context of this section, a broader definition of diaspora is used that recognises the role of the connection to a ‘mythic’ homeland as well as the complex relationship with the wider society.⁴⁰⁶ Specifically, the Iranian diaspora is largely transnational and not tied together by one identity, more than it was in previous Iranian migrations and resettlements. Here, the diaspora in question are the communities who have left Iran, voluntarily and involuntarily, during the surrounding events of the revolution of 1979 and beyond. Recognising this is a large, generationally diverse community, it is the ideology of Iranian Aryanism common to this community that I explore. As Zia-Ebrahimi has outlined, the dislocative nationalism born in the works of Akhundzadeh and Kermani and perpetuated by the Pahlavi state has been transported outside of Iran, taking force outside the nation. Similar to the dislocative nationalism at work in the nation, it calls for the return of Iran to its Aryan roots.⁴⁰⁷ Adapting Safran’s conception of diaspora, namely his emphasis on return to a homeland, this drive of a return to an era of racial purity for dispersed Iranians is largely tied to reclaiming their Aryan roots. The virulence of such dislocative nationalism in the Iranian diaspora is especially evident through the revived dislike for Islam, the reappearance of pre-Islamic, especially the Achaemenid symbolism that adorns restaurants, shops, publishing houses and so on.⁴⁰⁸

The popularity of the Cylinder and the attraction to the figure of Cyrus is not an act of post-colonial resistance, rather, it is a continuation of an internalised notion of an Aryan, Iranian identity that takes precedent from the ancient world. Cyrus has been utilised in the Iranian diaspora, especially in scholarly circles to connect Iran’s past with Europe. As

⁴⁰³ Safran 1991: 83-84.

⁴⁰⁴ Sheffer 2003: 9.

⁴⁰⁵ especially as not all diasporic communities desire a return and there is often not one single homeland, and it is most problematic that in order to be diasporic, a community must remain conscious of itself as a minority

⁴⁰⁶ McGown 2007: 3. As Said has outlined, it is both a state of despair at having been uprooted and a productive space of the imagination.

⁴⁰⁷ Zia-Ebrahimi 2016: 6.

⁴⁰⁸ Zia Ebrahimi 2016: 211-212 provides a discussion of the rise in Achaemenid symbolism in the diaspora. Zia Ebrahimi 2011: 11-12, Asgari 2012: 171-173, provides a discussion of Iranian diaspora intellectuals and the influence of the “Aryan” ideology on academic constructions of Iranian identity. Alinejad 2011: 43-62 provides an analysis of Iranian diaspora bloggers.

such, Iranian identity been long debated in the diaspora. Khaleqi-Motlaq's philological study of the term "Ariya" and "Iran" concluded that these terms, whilst coming from differing contexts, should be synonymous in meaning.⁴⁰⁹ The rhetoric of world empire established by Cyrus proved the existence of an Iranian identity, grounded in Cyrus' inherent ability to rule. In a similar manner, the work of influential scholar of Iranian studies, Ehsan Yarshater argued for a shared and preserved Aryan identity, beginning with the Achaemenids.⁴¹⁰ He argued that Persian identity is asserted "in the inscription of Darius who as an Aryan and a Persian was fully conscious of his racial affiliation and proud of his national identity." Yarshater's view did recognise the revisionist approaches to the concept of Iran, especially the problematic nature of the "Aryan" racial categorisation.⁴¹¹ However, Yarshater's methodology reflected one inherited from European colonial scholarship. He insisted on the historical continuity of a distinct, Persian identity, "...in spite of 200 years of Arab rule...Persia did not lose its language, and its separate identity."⁴¹² In this paradigm, Iranian identity is largely unbroken throughout history, supported by the racial concept of Aryanism. The imaginary operation of dislocative nationalism takes shape in the form of such diasporic communities, as it is deeply concerned with reviving a particular pre-Islamic greatness. Such immigrant intellectuals feared a loss of Iranian identity in what was deemed a "second Arab invasion."⁴¹³ This is why the figure of Cyrus has been used by diaspora communities to navigate and promote cultural identity outside of Iran, as well as in response to the Eurocentrism that has shaped the history of the Achaemenids. For example, Ansari's polemical 2001 "Cyrus the Great and Mohammed Ibn Abdullah" made a comparison between the style of leadership of Cyrus with Mohammed, the prophet of Islam.⁴¹⁴ It regurgitated the racial views endorsed by European scholarship and referenced the Greek and Biblical texts to demonstrate Cyrus' outstanding leadership qualities.⁴¹⁵ It demonstrates the influence of competing Islamic and ancient pre-Islamic discourses of

⁴⁰⁹ Khaleqi-Motlaq and Matini 1992: 237-38: "*Ariyayi* should be translated not as Aryan, but Iranian, which is merely its newer form." The Quarterly Iranshenasi published a series of articles defending the continuity of Iranian identity as nationhood throughout history. Khaleqi-Motlaq argued for a distinct Iranianness that existed in antiquity. See: Khaleqi-Motlaq and Matini 1992: 233-68, Khaleqi-Motlaq 1993: 692-706, Khaleqi-Motlaq 1993: 307-23.

⁴¹⁰ Yarshater 1993: 141.

⁴¹¹ Shahbazi 2005: 100-101, recognises that Yarshater's approach differed to that of other scholars who rejected revisionism of Gnoli 1989: 83 and Fagner 1999 position of the idea of Iran.

⁴¹² Yarshater 2005 available at Iranica.com iran ii.Iranian History:Islamic period

⁴¹³ Meskoob 1982: 34, Asgari 2012: 175, provides a discussion of immigrant intellectuals.

⁴¹⁴ Not to be confused with the scholar Ali M Ansari of the University of St Andrews.

⁴¹⁵ Ansari 2001: 11.

national identity.⁴¹⁶ The period of Islamic rule in Iran was described as dark, one where the very foundation of Iranian society was overturned and lost.⁴¹⁷ It is of course, ironic, that the same notions of Iranian identity derived from European scholarship that have fostered the age-old divide East-West divide with Persia at its core, are now being used to challenge it. It is not surprising that amidst the popular and academic notions of ancient Iran popularised in the early 2000s,⁴¹⁸ notable Iranians such as Shirin Ebadi began circulating fake translations of the Cyrus Cylinder to support the anachronistic notion that the cylinder was the first ever charter of human rights and that Cyrus was indeed a tolerant ruler. The fake translation continues to be on display engraved on a plaque in the *House of Iran* Balboa Park in San Diego.⁴¹⁹

Cyrus' tolerance is a repeated trope in discussions surrounding the Achaemenid empire. Popularised examples are evident in the 2005 British Museum Exhibition, "Forgotten Empire" which showcased the core arguments of this ideology - that the Achaemenid empire was inherently tolerant and multicultural, and most famously, the Director of the British Museum stated that "the story of Persia is part of the story of the modern United States."⁴²⁰ Even the previous president of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, though highly conservative and inflammatory, appealed to the cult of the pre-Islamic Iran. When the Cyrus Cylinder was loaned to Tehran in 2010, Ahmadinejad presented Cyrus as "the King of the world" and praised Iran as a flag bearer of justice.⁴²¹ In a ceremony re-enacting Cyrus' deeds, Ahmadinejad presented the actor with a black and white keffiyeh,⁴²² a scarf worn in solidarity with the Palestinians, sparking outrage across the nation from both pro-regime and anti-regime protestors. The keffiyeh became symbolic of the loathed Arabs who have loomed as Iran's "other" since the popularisation of the rhetoric of the

⁴¹⁶ Mozaffari 2014: 2.

⁴¹⁷ Ansari 2001: 11 - "*Farhangi, mahnavi, ejtemayi, melli, siyasi, ziroro shod.*"

⁴¹⁸ Strauss 2004, Holland 2005, Cartledge 2006, popularised the perceived notion of a cultural divide starting from the Greek-Persian wars and continuing to the present day.

⁴¹⁹ Fake translation and the image of the replica of the Cyrus Cylinder displayed as a Declaration of Human Rights can be found at: <https://kavehfarrokh.com/iranica/achaemenid-era/a-new-translation-of-the-cyrus-cylinder-by-the-british-museum/>.

⁴²⁰ Curtis 13 Oct. 1971, www.nytimes.com/1971/10/13/archives/first-party-of-irans-2500year-celebration.html. Quoted by Ahmadinejad at the exhibition of the cylinder at the National Museum of Iran, reported by Mehr News Agency. <https://en.mehrnews.com/news/41962/MP-criticizes-Ahmadinejad-for-praising-Cyrus>

⁴²¹ Curtis Oct. 1971, www.nytimes.com/1971/10/13/archives/first-party-of-irans-2500year-celebration.html. Quoted by Ahmadinejad at the exhibition of the cylinder at the National Museum of Iran, reported by Mehr News Agency. <https://en.mehrnews.com/news/41962/MP-criticizes-Ahmadinejad-for-praising-Cyrus>

⁴²² Pro regime basij (militia) wear in solidarity with Palestinians.

nationalists of the previous generation.⁴²³ Importantly, this outrage demonstrates the extent to which Cyrus is imagined against Iran's pre-Islamic and Islamic past. It proves the success of the ideas that have travelled back to Iran from Europe, reproduced by nationalists for their own purposes of perpetuating an Iranian national identity. The two groups that dominate mainstream Iranians today – those that call themselves the devotees of Cyrus and those that call themselves the disciplines of Imam Hussein, albeit anachronistically, highlight the success of the dislocative nationalist endeavour which has resulted in further fracturing Iranian society. It is this fracture that attracts time and time again, a reactionary, reconstruction of Cyrus.

Conclusion

The preceding chapters have examined the ancient material at the core of the narrative surrounding Cyrus' benevolence and have traced the reception of these texts by later writers in Roman, Medieval and modern periods, all the way to nationalist endeavours undertaken by the modern Iranian nation-state. It is clear across the Greek, Biblical and Near Eastern accounts that Cyrus is presented according to the political contexts of the respective texts. In Herodotus' account, Cyrus is but one of many rulers in his pattern of the rise and fall of rulers' *logos*, and the negative traits in this pattern have been largely been ignored in the text's reception. Similar to Herodotus, Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* is full of binaries demonstrating strong and weak leadership surpassing traditional notions of Greek and Persia. Through an analysis of Cyrus' education and his principles of justice, Xenophon undermines the political institutions of democratic Athens. Cyrus is reimagined for Xenophon's Athenian, Greek audience. In the same way, the Biblical accounts reconstruct Cyrus to reflect the discourses surrounding Yehudite kingship. The prototype of an ideal ruler is at the core of Cyrus' narrative, inspiring the reconstructions of this figure, each to suit the values of their ancient and modern contexts. As such, Cyrus is routinely utilised as the figure of a model ruler in medieval European, Renaissance literature, and more recently, Iranian nationalist ideology.

⁴²³ Esfandiari and Radio Free Europe 2010. For other responses to Ahmadinejad's praise of Cyrus see: Tehran Times 2010: "Motahhari criticizes Ahmadinejad for Praising Cyrus."

By the seventeenth century, Cyrus was a well-known figure in European literary culture through the long reception of classical and Biblical texts. As European colonial scholars sought to discover the historical foundations within their classical literary and Biblical heritage, they discovered an archaeological Persia at the centre of the Western foundation myth.⁴²⁴ Cyrus was praised in both traditions, and the newly discovered Cyrus Cylinder confirmed the highly valued Biblical narratives. European scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth century colonial periods constructed Achaemenid Persia in decline, but also, racially superior to the neighbouring ancient cultures. This racialised outlook, taking form in the discourse surrounding “Aryanism,” was the perfect lens for Iranian nationalists to adopt in their nation building efforts. Cyrus was once more appropriated according to various political and cultural contexts. These nationalists, particularly Akhundzadeh, Kermani largely drew from the ancient texts, regurgitating European scholars’ fixation with Cyrus’ Aryan status to introduce political concepts to an Iranian audience.

The continued Iranian obsession with Cyrus and Aryanism is a reflection of not only the success of the nationalist ideology of Akhundzadeh and Kermani, but also of the consequences of Iran’s engagement with European Orientalism.⁴²⁵ Iranians continue to unofficially celebrate Cyrus Day, gathering at the tomb of Cyrus with racialised slogans to protest their government.⁴²⁶ Iranians in the diaspora have taken to social media to commemorate Cyrus Day, reminding the world it was *their* king who first invented the concept of human rights. Indeed, Cyrus remains synonymous with ‘tolerance,’ as evidenced by the monument of Cyrus erected at Sydney’s Bicentennial Park – to honour Australia’s apparent commitment to multiculturalism.⁴²⁷ This is another site at which Iranians will gather to celebrate the Cyrus Day. For many Iranians, Cyrus is the symbol of a glorified Iran, a symbol to help reimagine their homeland, one that surpasses the traumas of the 1979 revolution, an eight-year long war with Iraq, of uprootedness and new, often forced identities. Cyrus remains the most popular figure in the attempt to critique, and in many ways, understand, the failings of their current state.

⁴²⁴ Ansari 2012: 16.

⁴²⁵ Zia Ebrahimi 2016: 218-219.

⁴²⁶ Unofficial reports on social media and on Radio Farda (an anti-government, US funded Iranian branch of Radio Free Europe external broadcast service) have reported Iranian authorities have closed all roads leading to Cyrus’ tomb in Pasargadae, Shiraz. See: <https://en.radiofarda.com/a/iran-security-forces-blocking-roads-to-prevent-cyrus-day-gathering/30240139.html>

⁴²⁷ Unknown, *Fact Sheet Public Art* Sopa.nsw.gov.au 2014: As per the fact sheet, “The bas relief symbolises multiculturalism and celebrates the peaceful coexistence of people from different backgrounds and cultures in one land.”

Iran's pre-Islamic past remains the stage on which ideas about the nation are debated. One extreme end of the spectrum as demonstrated by Akhundzadeh and his heirs, viewed Cyrus as their key to unifying the state with Europe, and on the opposite end – the anti-imperialist and anti-monarchic sentiment of Khomeini - rejected this glorification of Iran's pre-Islamic past. This reactionary debate promotes narratives pertaining to a 'return' to a glorified period of Iranian history. It is the idea that by removing 'foreign' influence, be it European or Islamic, the Iranian nation will return to triumph over its shortcomings.⁴²⁸ This debate fosters a vicious circle of altering blame in an attempt to ensure internal cohesion. In reality, this discourse of blame is operating within the parameters established by a nationalism long inherited by European scholarship. It is within this discourse that Cyrus will continue to resurface and fuel the spectrum of Iranian nationalism, because it is this figure that has been long imagined by ancient and modern contexts, as a metaphor for justice, and other concepts we are still defining in contemporary political discourse. As long as the nationalism that believes itself to be detached from its empirical reality – one that seeks to view itself as an Aryan nation in opposition to its domestic and regional context – will continue to recycle age old discourses and prevent it from a more nuanced reading of the more pressing issues pertaining to the Iranian nation.

⁴²⁸ This view is apparent even from those opposing and reacting against traditional Iranian nationalism. For example, even the Shiite revolutionary intellectual, Ali Shariati claimed the Arabs had distorted Islam and Ahmadinejad praised Cyrus as an icon of justice.

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